From Transit to Transitoire: Omnibus and Modernity

Abstract:

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The Parisian omnibus, introduced in 1828, served as a powerful symbol of urban and social change throughout the nineteenth century. The new conveyance heralded a radical transformation of Paris into the "capital of modernity" in the 1850s and 1860s. This essay considers the ambivalent and often contradictory attitudes toward the omnibus in the nineteenth-century cultural imagination by exploring representations of the omnibus as a social space in Zola's Au Bonheur des dames (1883) and in Maupassant's "Le Père" (1883). In Au Bonheur des dames, the omnibus embodies anxieties and dangers of modernity. Maupassant's "Le Père" illustrates how the meeting of sexes in the erotically charged space of the omnibus engenders social disruption. (MB)

Keywords:
- omnibus
- maupassant
- urban transport
- Zola
- de père
- social tensions
- aubonheur des dames
- modernity

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Release Year: 2007