

Notes on
I wear the black hat
Author of book: Chuck Klosterman
Author of Notes: William Gasarch

Preface This book is about villains: how to you define them, how come some people who should be villains aren't, and vice versa. The book kind of rambles so its not that easy to pin down; however, I liked many of the tidbits.

1 What You Say About his Company Is What You Say About The Society

What is the most villainous move on the market?

Chuck says its tying a girl to a railroad track.

Has this ever happened? How did it get to be a cliche?

Someone who does it NOW just wants to be a villainous cliche.

1.1 Damsel Tied to a Railroad Track in Reality and in Fiction

So has it ever happened?

Cecil Adams *The Straight Dope* Column:

<https://www.straightdope.com/21343402/did-anyone-really-ever-get-tied-to-railroad>

The website *Today I found out* had an article on this:

<https://todayifoundout.com/index.php/2019/01/has-anyone-ever-actually-tied-a-damsel-in-a-dress/>

The website *Atlas Obscura*

<https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/rethinking-the-origins-of-the-damsel-on-a-railroad>

I summarize some of this below:

These really happened

1. 1874: A Frenchman named Gardner was robbed and tied to a railroad. He managed to loosen all the ropes except the one that held his left foot. He died soon after from his injuries. Tying a *man* to a railroad track somehow does not seem as evil as tying a *women* to a railroad track. Source is Cecil Adams *The Straight Dope*
2. 1881: A kidnapped 13 year old boy.

3. A 40 year old mechanic (no year given)
4. 1905: A college freshman as part of a frat initiation. He died
5. 1906: A 10 year old boy
6. 1907: A 19 year old man. (This one and the prior two might have been copycat crimes.)

More recent cases:

1. 2008: Niparat Tawonporn was tied to a railroad track about 500 miles south of Bangkok and cut in half by the train. She was 27. Chuck claims that the rumors were that it was caused by an *unexplained disagreement*.

In my (Bill) search for more details I found NO other reference to this story. When I googled *Niparat Tawonporn* I only gets 5 links and all of them refer to the book *I wear the black hat*. Hence I do not know if this story is true.

2. 2017: (This one is not from the book. Its from the second link.) A Frenchman Guillaume Gremy was severely depressed. When his efforts to get back with his estranged wife Emilie Hallouin failed he bound her to a train tracks. He jumped in front of the tracks and both were killed. He was 37. It was her 34th birthday.

Of the 7 cases above (I count the one that's questionable) 5 are *males* being tied to the railroad track. More important is that there are so few cases.

These are Fictional

1. 1863 Stage Play *The Engineer* has a male tied to a railroad track and saved by a women. NOT THE STANDARD TROPE.
2. 1867 Short Story *Captain Tom's fright*, which ran in the March 13, 1867 issue of *Galaxy Magazine*, has a scene where a man is tied to a railroad track but is saved when the train takes a different path. NOT THE STANDARD TROPE.

3. 1867 Stage Play *Under the Gaslight* has the a man, Snorkey, tied to the tracks and a women, Laura, rescuing him. This play was *not* the first to have someone tied to a railroad track but it popularized the notion.
NOT THE STANDARD TROPE.

This play was written by Augustin Daley who saw many other plays using the trope and tried to sue. He won even though there were earlier works with a similar scene (see the two above). This was a landmark in copyright law: *It was specifically ruled that copying the essence of a scene closely in other plays did indeed infringe on intellectual property rights, even if not words were copied and it wasn't literally the exact same scene.* Theatre promoters ignored this.

4. 1868 Stage Play *After Dark*. This had its own railroad scene. The person tied to the tracks is Captain Gordon Chumley, a man, and he is rescued by Old tom, a man.

Daly's lawsuit was against him.

NOT THE STANDARD TROPE

5. 1868 According to Nicholas Daly's (no relation to Augstin Daly) book *Blood on the Tracks: Sensation Drama, The Railway, and the Dark Face of Modernity* says *In October 1868 the railroad scene could be witnessed in five different plays at five different London Theaters.*

I WOULD WANT TO KNOW HOW MANY OF THEM WERE THE STANDARD TROPE

6. 1905 Film *The Train Wreckers* is a 12-minute silent film that I found out about by asking ChatGPT *List all silent films that have a scene where a women is tied to a railroad track and rescued.* This film is the *only one* that it found. Here is the response

*It turns out this specific “woman tied to railroad tracks” image that most people associate with silent-era melodrama is mostly a myth—and in the actual silent films that survive, it was far more often used as parody or comedy than played completely straight. Most of the classic trope examples (e.g., *Barney Oldfield’s Race for a Life* or *Teddy at the Throttle*) are explicitly comic spoofs.*

Below are the known silent films from the era that include a scene where a woman is placed in peril on a railroad line or tied near tracks in a

dramatic (non-satirical) context:

Silent Films with (Non-Comedic) Railroad Peril Scenes

1. *The Train Wreckers* (1905) A 12-minute silent drama directed by Edwin S. Porter.

The villainous outlaws leave the switchman's daughter unconscious and lying on the railroad tracks with a train approaching. She is rescued at the last moment by the locomotive engineer.

This is not presented humorously and is closer to genuine melodrama than the later parodied versions of the trope.

[BILL- this is the complete list. Only one movie.]

7. 1906 Stage Play *Nellie the Beautiful Cloak Model*. This one followed trope: Beautiful women tied to the tracks and rescued by a man.
8. 1913 film *Barney Oldfield's Race for a Life*. This has the stereotype: mustached villain wearing a fetching hat, a beautiful girl tied to the tracks, rescued at the last moment by a handsome hero. However, this was a comedy making fun of this trope.

MAKES FUN OF THE STANDARD TROPE

9. 1914-1917. Film Series *The Hazards of Helen*. This is a series of 119 12-minute films released between 1914 and 1917. The theme is that Helen faces all kinds of dangers. In one of them she is tied to a railroad track but she probably rescues herself. Very little documentation is left for this film series; however, the general theme was that she gets herself out of trouble.

DIDN'T HAVE THE TROPE

10. 1917 Film *Teddy at the Throttle*. Gloria Swanson humorously plays the girl. She rescues herself since the hero arrives to late. So this is making fun of the trope.

MAKES FUN OF THE STANDARD TROPE

11. 1917 Film *The Fatal Ring*. The movie poster has a women tied to (or at least on) a railroad track; however, Google-AI says there is no such scene in the movie.

DIDN'T HAVE THE TROPE

12. 1947 Film *The Perils of Pauline*. This is a movie *about* the Silent movie era. In the movie they make a silent movie where a women is tied to a railroad track and rescued by a handsome man. The real movie is nostalgia for an era that never was—there were very few (perhaps none) movies from the silent film era that had that kind of scene in a non-comic way.

ASSUME THAT THE TROPE WAS COMMON IN SILENT MOVIES AND RE-ENACTS THEM.

13. 1959 cartoon segment *Dudley Do-right*. This was a segment of *The adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle and Friends* and later had its own show. This has the standard beautiful women (Nell Fenwick) tied to the tracks by a villain with a mustache and a hat (Snidely Whiplash) and is rescued by a handsome(?) man (Dudley Do-right). Much like *The Perils of Pauline* this was a homage/satire of a genre that never was. Two other notes: (1) Nell loves Dudley's horse but not Dudley, (2) The Wikipedia entry claims that the plot of the Dudley Do-right segments were a similar plot as the silent movie *O'Malley of the Mounted* but google-AI says that that movie does not have anyone tied to a railroad track.

MAKES FUN OF THE STANDARD TROPE

The above is WAY MORE than what is in the book but reaches an interesting point:

The Trope RARELY happened.

Reminds me of the trope *The Butler Did it*.

Chuck does note that this scenario is often satirical.

1.2 What The Book Says About This Crime

The books point is that the scenario is so absurd and complicated that *of course* its mostly presented satirically.

Sydney Whiplash has not external motivation. He just likes to tie women (or at least Nell) to railroad tracks. It what he does. This makes him truly villainous. I think Chuck would think he was *less* villainous if he did it for a reason. However, its hard to imagine a good reason to kill someone in this way.

1.3 Machiavelli