

= La Couchette =

" La Couchette " is the first episode of the second series of British dark comedy anthology Inside No. 9 . Written by Steve Pemberton and Reece Shearsmith and directed by Guillem Morales , the episode is set in a sleeper carriage on a French train . English doctor Maxwell , who is traveling to an important job interview , climbs into bed . He is disturbed first by drunk , flatulent German Jorg , and then by English couple Kath and Les . Later , while the others sleep , Australian backpacker Shona brings posh English backpacker Hugo back to the cabin , but the pair make a surprising discovery . The episode stars Pemberton , Shearsmith , Julie Hesmondhalgh , Mark Benton , Jessica Gunning , Jack Whitehall and George Graves .

The story was inspired by the intimacy of sleeper carriages , in which people aim to sleep in close proximity to strangers . " La Couchette " draws upon the literary tropes associated with stories , such as Murder on the Orient Express and Strangers on a Train , following characters unknown to one another while traveling . The various characters ? played by actors somewhat typecast ? correspond to British comedy archetypes , and much of the episode 's story and humour derives from the characters ' unlikability . Critics responded positively to " La Couchette " , commending the cast and script , but noted that Inside No. 9 is something of an acquired taste . On its first showing , the episode was watched by 1 @. @ 1 million viewers (6 @. @ 1 % of the audience) .

= = Production and development = =

The second series of Inside No. 9 was written in 2014 , and then filmed from the end of 2014 into early 2015 . As each episode features new characters , the writers were able to attract actors who might have been unwilling to commit to an entire series . Jack Whitehall , who was a fan of the show , says that he " may or may not have nagged Reece and Steve to find a Jack Whitehall @-@ shaped hole in the second series " , and was " very thankful " when they did . In addition to Pemberton , Shearsmith and Whitehall , " La Couchette " stars Julie Hesmondhalgh , Mark Benton , Jessica Gunning and George Graves . Hesmondhalgh commended the cast , saying that , for her , it was a " no brainer " to appear in the episode . For Whitehall , working with Hesmondhalgh was " very exciting , but also quite weird " , given the recent suicide of Hesmondhalgh 's Coronation Street character , Hayley Cropper . Whitehall called Benton and Hesmondhalgh " an amazing little double act " . The pair had previously played a husband and wife on the radio .

" La Couchette " follows six characters on a sleeper carriage travelling from Paris to Bourg St. Maurice . Shearsmith said that the writers aimed to exploit the intimacy of the setting ; the unusual situation which is created by trying to sleep in what is potentially a room full of strangers . This was , for Shearsmith , an " odd frisson " to play with . Discussing the filming , Whitehall said that the set was " definitely the most intimate location I have ever been on ... It 's all on springs so it moves around like a train carriage ? and I suffer from very bad motion sickness so on the first day I threw up . I had to literally run off the set half way through a scene and throw up in the loo . So it was quite an auspicious start . " Hesmondhalgh also commented on the intimacy of the filming , saying that it was the tightest location used for Inside No. 9 since " Sardines " , the first episode of the first series . Nonetheless , she had " such a fun week " filming the episode , noting that , despite the limited space on @-@ set , it is " amazing how quickly you become institutionalised " . Similarly , Pemberton noted that the filming resulted in " a tough week " , but that it was " really fun , because it 's a very fun episode " .

Prior to filming , director Guillem Morales worked hard on a story board . For Shearsmith , the small space added to the need to meticulously plan the production process ; he explained that every shot was worked out in advance . The set , which was situated in Twickenham Studios for the filming , was shaken manually by an assistant director to create the effect of motion ; something which surprised Hesmondhalgh . The production crew filmed the episode by removing walls from the " carriage " one at a time , and shooting from the various angles , meaning that they had to effectively dismantle and reassemble the set five times . Benton noted that the tight space created a challenge for the camera crews , but , for the actors , it was " great " .

= = Plot = =

English doctor Maxwell (Shearsmith) settles into bunk 9E while traveling from Paris to Bourg @-@ Saint @-@ Maurice . Maxwell is disturbed first by Jorg (Pemberton) , a drunk , flatulent German who climbs into bunk 9D , then by Kath (Hesmondhalgh) and Les (Benton) , a couple traveling to their daughter 's wedding . Jorg is in Les 's bed , but the couple climb into 9A . Australian backpacker Shona (Gunning) enters ; she places her bag on bunk 9C then leaves , and Maxwell closes the door . Kath and Les , laughing at Maxwell , begin to undress on the bed . Les wakes Jorg , but understanding is limited until Maxwell translates . Jorg switches to 9F and Les climbs into 9D .

Hours later , Shona re @-@ enters the room with English trustafarian Hugo (Whitehall) . The pair sit on 9C and share a can of Carling while swapping travel stories . Hugo says he would rather stay in this carriage than in first class , and the pair begin foreplay . A face appears from 9B , and a man (Graves) falls to the floor . The carriage 's inhabitants wake ; Maxwell confirms that the man is dead , then leaves to look for a guard . Jorg finds a family photo in the man 's pocket . Maxwell returns alone , and Jorg suggests they use the emergency stop button ; Les prepares to smash the glass . Hugo stops him , confessing he is ticketless , Maxwell says he has an interview with the WHO in the morning , and Les , to Kath 's annoyance , confesses that he does not want to risk missing the wedding . Maxwell explains the situation to Jorg , Les and Kath argue , and Shona refuses to let Hugo back into her bunk . Maxwell gives Jorg some tablets for his constipation , after which Shona offers a eulogy . The body is placed into 9B , and Hugo climbs into the same bunk . The passengers settle , but Kath lies sleepless .

After dawn , Les accidentally wakes Maxwell , but sees that Kath is absent . The train brakes , waking everyone , and Hugo and the corpse fall to the floor . Maxwell guesses that Kath has stopped the train as Jorg stands , dropping his trousers . Maxwell next guesses that Kath has jumped in front of the train , and Les repeatedly hits him with a pillow as Jorg defecates into Kath 's shoebox , which is held by Hugo . Shona sees that the train has hit a deer , and Kath re @-@ enters .

Later , Maxwell is dressed , and Hugo enters , wearing one of Shona 's T @-@ shirts . He says that Jorg is cleaning himself . Kath and Les talk ; the former feels remorse , and insists they attend the dead man 's funeral . Shona and Hugo leave the carriage ; they intend to go " exploring " . Maxwell says his goodbyes to Kath and Les , then , alone , receives a call from his driver , who is waiting for him and Dr. Meier . Maxwell turns to the body and says he is " terribly sorry " , but there can only be " one candidate " . As he says Meier 's name , Jorg , now smartly dressed , answers . Jorg explains that he is Dr. Meier , and that he is traveling to an interview . As Jorg leaves the carriage , Maxwell looks at the corpse in silence .

= = Analysis = =

" La Couchette " , like " Sardines " ? the first episode of the previous series ? introduces characters gradually , and explores " man 's capacity to behave idiotically within a confined space to creepy and comic effect " . The sleeper carriage setting is , like the wardrobe of " Sardines " , a claustrophobic environment into which the various characters are forced . For comedy critic Bruce Dessau , though the setup was similar , " La Couchette " was " maybe more comic , less sinister , but the denouement is no less nightmare @-@ inducing " .

The sleeper carriage setting gave Shearsmith and Pemberton a number of " traumatic " elements to exploit , such as claustrophobia , proximity to strangers , motion , and the various elements associated with settling down to sleep , such as flatulence and getting undressed . These characteristics led to elements typical of Pemberton and Shearsmith 's work ? characteristics of what The Guardian critic Sam Wollaston calls " Shearsmith 'n'Pembertonism " ? including " macabre horror , stiff @-@ handling , cadaver spooning " and multiple twists . Commentators stressed how the characters are generally not particularly likable people , and one critic observed that the actors are somewhat typecast ; " Hesmondhalgh was frumpy but compassionate , while Whitehall played

yet another clueless , posh student " . The characters are mostly archetypes of British comedy ? such as " the rude German traveller " and " the British snob " ? and the norms of these archetypes are used for both humour and to advance the plot . The archetypes are gradually unspun ; for instance , the apparently well @-@ meaning Les is revealed as somewhat xenophobic . The discovery of the body reveals the humanity of the various characters . For instance , Jorg is revealed to be more ill than vulgar , and Hugo is shown to be poor . Maxwell 's character , by contrast , is not subverted .

Maxwell , as a character , " controls the action " . He is the protagonist , and traps the viewer into the coach in the opening seconds of the episode by closing the curtains . This is a reversal of the way that , in the theatre , the opening of curtains brings the viewer into the story . As the translator , he acts as the only link between Jorg and the other characters ; furthermore , as the episode does not have subtitles , he acts as the link between Jorg and Anglophone viewers . Revelations about the character are seeded in a different way to other characters . His profession and supply of medication bring to mind " upper @-@ class gentleman serial killers " or " cut @-@ glass accented British actors brought in to play cold killers in Hollywood cinema " . The revelation that Maxwell is a murderer is " a satisfying payoff for those who 've figured it out " , but in the final twist ? Jorg 's identity ? control is taken from Maxwell and , therefore , the audience .

Euan Ferguson identified Roald Dahl and Hitchcock as clear influences , and Ellen E Jones , writing in The Independent , saw a Hitchcockian element in addition to Inside No. 9 's usual gothic horror influences . Wollaston described the episode as a mix of Dahl 's Tales of the Unexpected , Agatha Christie 's Murder on the Orient Express and Chris Donald 's Viz . Dessau compared the episode 's scenario to " one of those old Peter Cushing portmanteau horror yarns " . Phoebe Jane @-@ Boyd , writing for entertainment website Den of Geek , identified Murder on the Orient Express , Hitchcock 's Strangers on a Train and John Hughes 's Planes , Trains and Automobiles as plot influences . The writers , she claimed , were able to utilise and subvert viewer expectations of the " strangers on a train " plot tropes , including bad manners , suspense and potential murder .

Christopher Stevens , who reviewed " La Couchette " alongside Cameron & Miliband : The Battle for Number 10 in the Daily Mail , speculated that there may have been a degree of political satire in episode . He noted that Inside No. 9 storylines " were never meant to be topical satires , but we 're so steeped in electioneering that everything is starting to look like political comment now " . He compared the character of Hugo , a " public school chancer ... with a breezy nonchalance and an answer for everything " , to David Cameron , and the character of Maxwell , " the uptight little man with the funny voice ... who had committed murder to win his comfy berth and was now beginning to wonder if he ? d made a mistake " , to Ed Miliband . Stevens claimed that Inside No. 9 " is bizarre enough for any interpretation " .

= = Reception = =

" La Couchette " was well received by television critics , and was awarded four out of five stars by Gabriel Tate (The Daily Telegraph) , Andrew Billen (The Times) and Christopher Stevens (Daily Mail) . It was described as " beautifully , beautifully dark , and guiltily funny " by Euan Ferguson , writing in The Guardian , as " a delight " by Billen and as " a tightly worked farce " by Gerard Gilbert of The Independent . For Paddy Shennan of the Liverpool Echo , the episode was " typically inventive and inspired " . Boyd felt that the episode was " a really clever opening to the series , and a solid start to another run of surprises from Inside No. 9 " .

Jonathan Wright , writing in The Guardian , commended the script of " La Couchette " , calling it " a delight , with one line delivered by Jack Whitehall quite possibly the most gloriously tasteless you 'll hear on television all year " . Ferguson offered a similar view , saying that Whitehall delivered " seriously undeliverable lines with entirely believable gusto " . Tate said that though he found the revelation at the end of the episode fairly predictable , the " writing and performances were so engaging that it hardly mattered " . The episode was , for him , " inventive " and " deliciously wicked " . Similarly , though Billen considered the setting fairly unoriginal and the characters stereotypical , he said that the writers " scored a laugh every few seconds and then a home run with a savage

resolution ". Patrick Mulkern , writing for Radio Times , described " La Couchette " as " hilarious " and " sharply observed " . He commended the cast , saying that Pemberton and Shearsmith " give a mini @-@ masterclass " in their performances . Jones called the episode " toilet humour with a twist " , saying that " It was Jorg 's grunting and squatting that produced the episode 's impressively grotesque climax , but it was Whitehall as Hugo who followed up with the instantly quotable line : ' We 're going to need a bigger box ! ' " Billen commended the cast , and Christine Brandel , writing for entertainment website PopMatters , described Gunning as one of the stand @-@ out guest stars of the second series .

In the course of his review of " La Couchette " , Stevens suggested that Inside No. 9 is something of an acquired taste . He noted , though , that " even if they don ? t make you laugh , you have to concede this duo are the most febrilely inventive writers on TV . " Wollaston , who reviewed the episode for The Guardian , observed that humour generally is extremely personal , and said that he " never really got Shearsmith and Pemberton 's stuff " . He said he could appreciate the narrative and artistry of " La Couchette " , and could understand why others found it funny , but that he does not love Inside No. 9 , and that , when watching , he is " just not laughing " . A viewer unimpressed with the episode wrote to The Times . Disagreeing with Billen 's review , the reader claimed that the episode 's " puerile humour [was as] flatulent as its one @-@ dimensional figures " .

" La Couchette " was watched by 1 @.@ 1 million viewers , which was 6 @.@ 1 % of the audience . This was slightly higher than " Sardines " , the first episode of the first series , which was watched by 1 @.@ 05 million (5 @.@ 7 % of the audience) .