

Criminal Papers

Criminal Papers:
Reading Crime in the French Nineteenth Century

Edited by

Rosemary A. Peters

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P U B L I S H I N G

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Reading Crime in the French Nineteenth Century,
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We dedicate this volume to the memory of Lawrence Schehr, generous scholar and peerless critic, whose absence in nineteenth-century French studies is vividly felt.

*Quel dieu, quel moissonneur de l'éternel été,
Avait, en s'en allant, négligemment jeté
Cette faucille d'or dans le champ des étoiles*

INTRODUCTION

READING CRIME, READING CRIMINAL

ROSEMARY A. PETERS

The idea for this volume of essays originated in a doctoral seminar in nineteenth-century French literature which I taught at Louisiana State University and Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. The course included major works by Balzac, Hugo, Dumas, Sue, and Zola, along with secondary readings from Rousseau, Vidocq, and Féval. The students and I adventured through the nineteenth century via a broad gamut of topics, from the steamy sexual politics behind the French Revolution to Napoleonic vampirism, the advent of Haussmannian changes effected on the cityscape, and the development of a police force with increasingly scientific techniques of detection. As the students gave their end-of-semester research presentations in Spring 2010, one topic flowed seamlessly into the next, and I realized what a rare and wonderful opportunity lay before us all. Thus, this collection, which represents at least two years of research and several milestones of intellectual inquiry and dialogue. This introduction will provide, first, general background about our topic and our approach to it, and specific information about the various texts discussed in our four chapters.

Literature and Law: from Repression to Representation

Any work on criminality requires defining crime—its acts, its agents, and its adversaries—as a first step. Since crime is largely contextual, the act of defining it also necessarily includes engagement with the social, moral, and legal ideologies at work in a specific historical period. Nineteenth-century France offers a particularly rich fabric of definitions, self-definitions, and re-definitions for consideration. Romantics reimagine the intersections of Art and Nature. Realists redefine the objective of the novel. Symbolists reshape the possibilities of poetry. Naturalists reconstruct the way a society orders and understands itself and its traditions.

At the same time, throughout the century, alongside the genre-setting innovations of aesthetic luminaries, shadier characters appear in writings from one end of the literary spectrum to another. While Paris gleams through the night for a Rastignac making his way through society, the City of Lights has a darker underside with its own infrastructure, its own rules and traditions—and its own literature. (Rastignac himself unveils much of this underside as he moves from the glittering salons of Restoration aristocrats to the dingy garret of his own boarding house, while surreptitious affairs occur on stairways in all parts of town.) Like Hugo's fateful epigram "ANANKH," crime is inscribed into the city, a secondary or subtext for all other ways of reading, the faultline along which nineteenth-century French society, politics, culture, and religion crack and crumble. In the shadows of the capital, thieves, murderers, addicts, shoplifters, and smugglers carry out their nefarious acts, pursued by the detectives (police and private) who seek to apprehend and analyze them. The constant tension between these two forces—the outlaws who trouble the State's official order, and the representatives of the State (themselves not always so clearly law-abiding)—creates some of the most unique, complex, and fascinating fiction of the nineteenth century, fiction that distinctly echoes real-life social preoccupations and legal developments of the time. High literature intersects in sometimes surprising ways with the pop-culture fascination with crime and crime fiction; and the century shows significant changes in how crime is conceived and conceptualized by criminals, legal agents, and the reading public.

One first step for a twenty-first-century reader is to consult the history of French law, starting from the Revolution and moving through the turn of the twentieth century. The *Code pénal*, rewritten and reconstructed under Napoléon I^{er}, defines both *crimes* and *délits* in a series of articles that discuss how specific acts against the social, moral, or economic order are to be punished.¹ Beside the punishment, which tells us much about the legal mentality as France evolved from a state of torture to one of imprisonment,² the *Code* provides useful insights about how various crimes were understood by nineteenth-century society—which has much to tell us in turn about how nineteenth-century society understands and constructs itself. When the reading public of nineteenth-century France

¹ It is important to note that *crime* refers to a violent act, while crimes against property, for example, are considered *délits* (offenses). In the interest of simplifying an already historically complex discussion, I use "crime" in reference to both types of act.

² See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.

devours Balzac, Sue, Zola, and company, these understandings play out in the background, informing readers' reactions to fictions of criminal activity. Let's take one example as a starting point.

With Revolution and the creation of a Republic comes an idealized recasting of laws, resulting in far-reaching effects on both crime and punishment. The last of these, the universalization of property rights, makes every citizen a potential owner,³ while simultaneously changing both the status of ownership and the nature of "property." With the right to own property no longer limited to the nobility and the Church, what is available for ownership is no longer the same kind of property, either: hereditary lands and buildings give way to class-identifying objects, *bibelots* as Janell Watson has studied,⁴ trinkets that come into visibility through both the industrial novelty of their mass production and their proliferation in literary manifestations as they become indicators of social ascendancy. These suddenly available objects are in turn prime targets for thieves, who use the fruits of their criminal activity as currency within the criminal underworld or for the purposes of their own mobility through dominant society. Jeanne de la Motte-Valois, for instance, Dumas's reimagined revolutionary antagonist from his 1849 *Le Collier de la reine*, steals not just the queen's necklace but a whole series of encrypted points of social access that allow her to move from a station of poverty to one of power, however briefly. The necklace, which disappears from Dumas's text before the novel's halfway point, is reduced from royal signifier to mere object; and indeed, through its association with Jeanne, it actually loses value, metaphorically allied with base elements instead of the fine ones of its original destination.

The new fluidity of class-identity markers—represented by the democratized right to own property—engenders a following anxiety about the precarious and porous nature of status itself—as we can see in Balzac's *Ferragus* and *Le Père Goriot*, Sand's *Indiana*, Vidocq's *Mémoires*, Gaboriau's *L'Affaire Lerouge*, Hugo's *Notre-Dame de Paris*, Flaubert's

³ Article 17 of the 1789 *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen* reads, "La propriété étant un droit inviolable et sacré, nul ne peut en être privé, si ce n'est lorsque la nécessité publique, légalement constatée, l'exige évidemment, et sous la condition d'une juste et préalable indemnité" (Property being an inviolable and sacred right, no man may be deprived of it, unless public necessity, having been legally established, and on the condition of a just and prior indemnity, explicitly requires it) (translations are my own unless otherwise noted).

⁴ Janell Watson, *Literature and Material Culture from Balzac to Proust: the Collection and Consumption of Curiosities*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge U P, 2004.

Madame Bovary, and Zola's *Au Bonheur des Dames*, along with Dumas's novel, to cite just a few of the numerous nineteenth-century works that treat social-climbing as transgressive (and the social-climbing tendencies of criminals, in specific). The example of thievery, with its rippling effects out into bourgeois anxieties about gender, class, and political standing, offers just one point of entry into the complex fabric woven in French nineteenth-century narratives that showcase crime.

Another point of entry lies through a study of the newly re-formed (and periodically, throughout the nineteenth century, reformed) police and the ways this body perceives—or, more frequently, fails to perceive—criminal activity; its unsettled relationship with both the underworld it is meant to repress and the state whose interests (the legal, economic, and social order) it is meant to represent. Through stories of the police readers get a glimpse of the Parisian underworld, an otherwise invisible terrain, rich in the social imaginary and as titillating as it is terrifying. Fiction, in the nineteenth century as today, mines the real-world police for three main purposes: *story*, *ideology*, and *method*.

The exploits of (in)famous real-life examples like Eugène-François Vidocq, *forçat*⁵ turned Chief of the *Sûreté*,⁶ offer rich and plentiful fodder for writers who wish to examine the underbelly of society. Vidocq's acquaintance with many novelists of the early part of the nineteenth century is legendary;⁷ so, too, are his accomplishments and his peccadilloes,

⁵ The term *forçat* refers to a criminal who has been condemned to *travaux forcés*, or hard labor; the punishment, practiced widely throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, usually in association with deportation, was made unlawful in 1960 (See "Chronologie relative aux peines et aux prisons" on "Criminocorpus", <http://criminocorpus.cnrs.fr>).

⁶ Vidocq, having made a deal to turn police informant in 1809, dedicated the rest of his official career in law enforcement to infiltrating criminal circles in order to expose them. He witnessed the inefficacy and ineptness of the Parisian police firsthand and developed his own branch of the police, the *Brigade de la Sûreté*, which specialized in plainclothes detection of crimes that the regular police could not solve (mainly, cases of theft and fraud). Among Vidocq's particularities—which earned him both the respect and the resentment of the official police force—were his unusually innovative methods, including forensic analysis of handwriting and footprints, anthropometry that let him build a catalogue of identifiable criminals, and the fact that he employed only fellow ex-convicts in the *Sûreté*, which he directed from 1811 to 1827.

⁷ James Morton, Dominique Kalifa, and Philip Stead have all written extensively on Vidocq's legacy and legend. In addition, see Graham Robb's "Walking Through Walls," a review of Vidocq's 1828 *Memoirs* (reissued, in their abridged

such that he becomes a familiar thread in the fabric of popular literature's representations of both criminal activity and police work in nineteenth-century France. The life-story of Vidocq provides fuel for Balzac (the criminally branded Collin/Vautrin in *Le Père Goriot*, who returns in *Illusions perdues* and *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*; but also the police chief Bibi-Lupin, who goes by Gondureau), Hugo (the disguised ex-convict/mayor Jean Valjean and the ruthless Inspector Javert both, from *Les Misérables*), Gaboriau (the comic interplay between the insightful retiree Tabaret/"Tirauclair" and the impatient police agent Lecoq stems in part from their both representing facets of the real-life model Vidocq has furnished), and countless other authors in the French and British traditions, and beyond. Vidocq, and the police who worked with and under him, inspire amazing twists of plotline as criminal identities are revealed, conspiracies unraveled, and deeply buried crimes brought to light and given meaning.

All the while, the (sometimes-conflicting) ideologies of state, citizen, and criminal come into sharp focus and inform the readership in both the necessity of proper detection and the dangers entailed in means of seeking the truth. Significantly, of the writers who model characters on Vidocq, a majority divide him over two fictional people: one law-abiding, one outside the law. This division reflects Vidocq's multi-faceted biography, of course, but it also represents a deep-seated conflict in nineteenth-century ideology, as individuals struggle to comprehend their place in a state system under near-constant redefinition, and in which the rules always seem to be changing. Nowhere is this tension clearer than in fictional representations of the police. Sent to re-establish order in a world unsettled by criminal transgressions, the police actually serve to disrupt it further, whether because they prove incapable of reading the signs they are meant to interpret (here we might think of the luckless Monsieur G-- of Poe's "Purloined Letter"), or because they serve a more sinister agenda (as does *Le Père Goriot*'s Gondureau, who will kill his criminal prey if doing so will be economically advantageous for the police force). As Lawrence Schehr has remarked,

Gondureau's words ensure the act of violence to come[:]; they certify the official branding of the prisoner that has occurred at some previous date in the world outside the narrative, a world where official violence occurs without mediation, where the body is the property of the state ... (Schehr 1997, 97-98)

Ideologically speaking, the criminal fictions of nineteenth-century France evince the deep fissures of a country seeking to define itself. Schehr recognizes in Vautrin “the metonym for the changing public space in which and on which narrative occurs” (1997, 93); and notes that Balzac’s language is “the medium or mediator” between the reader and “the brutality of force” (Schehr 1997, 98). The police treatment of Vautrin, “the most heinous and powerful criminal in all of Paris” (Schehr 1997, 93), exposes Balzac’s double ideology for the reader: criminals deserve condemnation, for sure, but state-sanctioned abuses of power and force deserve condemnation as well. The coexistence of these two ideologies—which we might think of as a culture’s epistemological self-identification, its way of thinking about itself—helps to craft many nineteenth-century detective narratives, demonstrating the real ambiguity of truth, both within and outside the law.

If the story of Vidocq and his Sûreté weaves through criminal fictions of the nineteenth century, so too do the methods of detection he developed, and which change the face of police work from the amusing bumbling of *Ferragus* to the crushing psychological insights of *L’Affaire Lerouge*. With Vidocq the nineteenth century sees a new approach to crime, through a meticulous process of evaluating crime scenes. Vidocq understood, and his work communicated to fiction-writers, that space itself has a history, on which individual acts leave traces. When Gaboriau, for instance, shows us an inexplicably prostrate Tabaret, ear to the ground, chest flattened into mud at the side of the road, and calling for plaster, he introduces into literature knowledge that Vidocq developed: that is, the possibility of recovering clues from the place in which a crime has been discovered, even in the absence of a criminal. Gaboriau’s detective captures a boot print from the muddy street, and is thus able to begin a process of identifying the criminal’s apparel—which consequently reveals to him the criminal’s likely activity on the evening of the murder, his class, and even his motive. The deductive reasoning that leads Tabaret to knowledge of, if not specifically who the murderer is, at least what manner of person he must be, can seem farfetched; but its importance lies in Gaboriau’s awareness of police methods at work in tracking crimes and criminals, specifically the importance and nature of physical evidence and the use of space itself as a clue. These are hallmarks of what becomes the modern detective novel (to say nothing of the post-modern detective TV series), and they begin with the revamped police of Vidocq’s time. Through the processes of evidence-gathering and logical reasoning based on the specificity of clues left behind—a kind of work, it is worth mentioning, that

the hapless police of *Ferragus* and earlier novels do not do—criminal fictions show us how, alongside incriminating documents (letters in *Ferragus*, an erroneous signature in *Le Collier de la reine*) and physical attributes (Vautrin’s brand in *Le Père Goriot*), crime is a text to be read and deciphered. This is perhaps the most important criminal definition of all.

Law and Literature: from Genesis to Genre

Just like crime, work on criminal literature requires definitions. Novels that feature impostors, outlaws, and (more or less incapable) police agents in the first half of the nineteenth century mark a shift in popular reading trends, narrative progress, and legal developments alike. These early examples of authors’ studying criminal minds, methodologies, and mores pave the way for an emerging genre, the detective novel or *roman polar*, which gains ever-increasing popularity as the nineteenth century moves toward its close and the twentieth dawns with innovations in literature and other arts. As Isabelle Casta and Vincent van der Linden discuss, the *roman polar* has origins in both the *roman feuilleton* and the melodrama (Casta and van der Linden 2007, 14). The very format of many of the popular novels of the French nineteenth century—the *roman feuilleton*, a serially-published narrative that appears in the daily newspaper—lends itself technically to the development of the detective story as we know it today. The work of a *polar* narrative is to “hook” its readership: to entice, thrill, and tease, and thereby sustain interest over the weeks or months of publication. With the revelation of a crime, through either suspicion or consequences, the narrative progressively recreates both the act of the crime and the process of detecting it—what Armand Lanoux calls “a clock running backward” (Lanoux 1961, 10). Knowledge is gained little by little, through clues and traces that indicate motive and opportunity, along with the psychology and, eventually, identity of the villain.

When I assign my students nineteenth-century French novels in which a crime takes center stage, we begin with the question “is this a crime novel?” The question, simple at its outset, gains complexity when students consider the example of *Le Père Goriot*, possibly the best-known *bildungsroman* from the Realist period. It is difficult to make a case for Balzac as a crime-novelist, or for *Le Père Goriot* as crime writing: we never witness Vautrin commit a crime, for all of Balzac’s shady insinuations; the only “detection” as such is conducted by a paid spy (Mlle Michonneau) who lives in the same boarding-house as the suspected

criminal; mysteries set in motion in the early part of the novel remain mysterious even after the cathartic event, Vautrin's arrest, meant to offer closure for them. In fact, the most important transgressions happen against the *moral* order, rather than the social or economic one. Rastignac deplores the Goriot daughters' shabby treatment of their dying father. Mme de Beauséant and the Duchesse de Langeais decry the villainy of *gendres* (sons-in-law) who steal daughters away from their loving parents and change the shape of the family. Even detection happens differently: before Michonneau ever accepts Gondureau's payoff, Rastignac moves from one society house to another, in order to gain information about Goriot's past. "Evidence" occurs as hearsay, and—as Schehr has discussed—the text's language about official institutions of crime and punishment betrays the author's ambivalence about these categories.

We then discuss the terminology I use above, "criminal fiction," and explore the ways in which novels that portray crimes and crime-solving are themselves transgressive objects. We encounter novels that challenge the dominant notions of socio-economic hierarchy; texts that turn gender and power constructs upside-down; fictions that suggest political leanings out of alignment with state ideology. And then we look at the novels formally, at how the narrative works. These readings enable us to build bridges between even Balzac's loosest ends and the creation of a new kind of narrative in the *roman polar*. The *polar* genre begins to manifest in nineteenth-century novels in several ways, from deceptive (forged, encrypted) letters in *Ferragus* and *Le Collier de la reine* to evidentiary processes at work in *Le Père Goriot* and *L'Affaire Lerouge*; surveillance techniques in *Au Bonheur des Dames*; graphology in Zola's *La Bête humaine* and Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*; and the insistent focus on a world beyond the realm of polite society, a parallel criminal space with its own laws and rulers, in *Notre-Dame de Paris*, *Ferragus*, Eugène Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris*, even *Au Bonheur des Dames*. Through a close study of "high" literature of the nineteenth century and its gradual evolution through criminal narrative processes, we can understand in context the burgeoning development of detective literature as a genre in its own right and with its own history. Balzac, Hugo, Dumas, Sue, Gaboriau, and Zola advance mainstream counterparts to *fin-de-siècle* and early-twentieth-century offerings like Maurice Leblanc's *Arsène Lupin*, Gaston Leroux's *Mystère de la chambre jaune* or *Le Fantôme de l'Opéra*, or Allain and Souvestre's *Fantômas* series.

Stories of crime are innovative by nature, a departure from the straightforward linear narrative of classical literary modes; and they lend themselves aptly to further innovations, both apertures (to borrow Barthes's

term) and departures. In addition, the detective stories of the nineteenth century contribute to the creation of a new genre in the twentieth: they are part and parcel of the work of film, especially film noir. The new techniques of seeing reflect these novels' techniques of framing, and show linear chronology as limited, human memory as flawed and partial. The optical dimensions of the *roman polar* as it develops in nineteenth-century France offer a flash-forward to twentieth-century technologies of vision, themselves part of an evolving comprehension of the cartography of the individual psyche, both criminal and detective.

Criminal Papers: Reading Crime in the French Nineteenth Century

The twelve essays in this volume consider literature that sheds light on the criminal underworld and its interactions with society, in the city and the popular imagination. We do not focus on explicitly detective novels as defined by the *roman polar* genre, but rather on the ways in which canonical literature reflects the reading public's fascination with stories of crime and detection—deeds and underworlds beyond the bourgeois circle. These articles examine the intersections between law and literature in the nineteenth century, from the newly adjusted property laws after the Revolution of 1789 through the scientific discourse around kleptomania in the fin-de-siècle. They study “criminal fictions” from both sides of the terminology, reading criminals in fiction and fictions construed as crime.

While most of the texts under discussion here will be familiar to international audiences, several of the essays bring lesser-known French texts to the attention of an Anglophone readership. Hugo's tale of the doomed and amorous hunchback rings a bell for nearly everyone; but Dumas's Marie-Antoinette romances, Ponson du Terrail's *romans feuilletons*, and Vidocq's writings remain largely overlooked. The same holds true for Sirk's post-war films. From a noir outlaw-police chief to a Caribbean Heathcliff, this volume opens up diverse readings for diverse kinds of readers, offering access to French texts, both canonical and critically understudied—texts that lie at the very genesis of the detective story, or that carry it forward as an international tradition and genre.

Several questions come to the forefront of these textual examinations: questions of what makes a character criminal, and how real-life criminals are translated into literary ones; of how crimes represented in novels reflect and/or produce social tensions and preoccupations around issues of gender, education, and class; of authors' positions on the legal system over the course of the nineteenth century; and, perhaps most importantly, of

what it means to be the “author of a crime.” The vocabulary of *polar* writing in both French and English exposes narration as an act of complex motives itself, enacting crime by perpetrating language that inscribes transgression, narrative transgressivity, onto characters who stand outside the margins of familiar society. The essays in this volume query a literary canon that, while presenting “revolutionary” novels (in terms of their place in the spectrum of social commentary, their participation in revising national and local legislation, or their artistic departure from modes of writing from the past), takes much of what these novels do for granted, or else leaves it unspoken. Finally, these essays question how texts, both canonical and “paraliterary,” are inscribed into the social, political, economic and artistic dialogues of the period.

Crime States: Policing and its Others

We begin with the official side of things. The institution of the police having been completely reconfigured after the Revolution of 1789, the nineteenth-century State finds itself in possession of consolidated power over crime and criminals which it cannot always manage. Over the course of the century, we see a continuum of tension between official crime-fighting means and those that, while often more effective, frustrate the official discourse by adapting the language of criminals in order to combat crime. To begin, Lauren Pendas provides a critical reading of the *Mémoires* of Eugène-François Vidocq, while establishing a system of types for reading criminal literature. Pendas explores the possibilities of layers of identity adapted by criminals and official authorities alike, which facilitate an individual’s ability to move through society unperturbed in either villainous or legal activity. Continuing the focus on dubiously legal authorities, Megan Lawrence focuses on a little-known text, *Les Mémoires d’un gendarme*, by Ponson du Terrail. She shows how this *roman feuilleton* plays into the popular apprehension of both criminals and those who seek to end their underworld activity. Then, Adam Babin addresses the uses of physiognomy in texts by Balzac, Dumas, and Hugo, discussing the literary applications of this criminal science in Honoré de Balzac’s *Le Père Goriot*, Alexandre Dumas père’s *Le Collier de la reine*, and Victor Hugo’s *Notre-Dame de Paris*.

Reading Weird: Criminal Literature and its Other(world)s

This second section moves to a set of analyses that address the unusual nature(s) of criminal literature. Alongside the official discourse of the State institutions of police and legislation, we find alternate, “unauthorized” discourses that resituate the issues of criminal behavior within popular culture, its foibles and its folklore. Helana Brigman uses mesmerism as a historical and theoretical setting for understanding criminal literature, in a detailed reading of Dumas’s *Le Collier de la reine*. Brigman examines Dumas’s recounting and appropriating late eighteenth-century mesmeric trends in the court and how these trends “affected” women’s bodies and the cultural reading of them. Tara Smithson examines criminal novels as economic fables that play out a new writing of the fairy tale in the nineteenth century. She shows how *Le Collier de la reine*, Balzac’s *Le Père Goriot*, and Émile Zola’s *Au Bonheur des Dames* use the Cinderella story as a template to comment on class tensions and trace the transitions from one class model to another. Jessica Hutchins studies issues of property in nineteenth-century texts through the lens of Rousseau’s second discourse, and considers especially the role of women as property in criminal novels. Hutchins then extends her argument to a more recent counterpart, Maryse Condé’s 1995 *La Migration des coeurs*. Through the inclusion of Condé’s recasting of *Wuthering Heights*, Hutchins addresses the very concept of tradition (Anglophone, Francophone, criminal) in a unique and innovative way.

Worlds in the Balance: The Spaces of Literature and Law

From the systematization of Paris’s sewer system in 1810 through the demolitions and reconfigurations of Baron Haussmann’s urbanization project during the Second Empire, the question of space becomes an integral element of Parisian identity in the nineteenth century. This question applies as much to the milieus of official infrastructures (court, church, salon) as to the spaces of criminal endeavors (cafés, alleyways, docks). Jessica Bombard opens this section with a close reading of *Notre-Dame de Paris* and the parallel structures of legality between the Cour des Miracles and the official State court. Bombard reads three subjects on trial over the course of Hugo’s novel—Quasimodo, Gringoire, and Esmeralda—and shows how the underworld and the “overworld,” its officially sanctioned counterpart, are mirror images. Carrie O’Connor discusses spaces of crime, using the dawning science of optics as an aesthetic metaphor for the sciences of detection. Beginning with *Le Père Goriot*’s

dialogue in *-rama* that anchors Balzac's text in optical inventions that fascinated the Restoration, she reads Zola's *La Bête humaine* and *Au Bonheur des Dames* through the lens of visual technologies that alter criminal behaviors while they enhance readerly ones. Then, Andrew Hill offers a unique reading of *Au Bonheur des Dames*. Through Zola's own notes on the manuscript, Hill demonstrates how the narrative—built ostensibly around the utopian possibilities of the department store—actually portrays this new commercial adventure as a force and a space of imprisonment: for shoppers, workers, and owner alike.

“Letters” of the Law: Criminal Papers

Our final section develops the question(s) of criminal documents in literature of the French nineteenth century and beyond, through theoretical and ideological as well as textual interpretations. Mary Cashell examines how letters, a simple means of communication in daily life, become sinister conduits in criminal narratives. Letters in Cashell's study come to represent, if they do not themselves become, crimes and criminals in Balzac's *Ferragus* and Zola's *La Bête humaine*. Rosemary Peters studies Edgar Allan Poe's story “The Purloined Letter” and Baudelaire's translation of it into French. Her essay, considering unauthorized literary “imports,” focuses on the tricky history around international copyright as a legal lack that both criminalizes and victimizes the institution of authorship. Finally, Kris Mecholsky closes the volume with a look at Douglas Sirk's post-war film *A Scandal in Paris*, a fictionalized account of Vidocq's life and part of a series of crime films Sirk directed upon emigrating to America. Mecholsky studies the ways Sirk's depiction of Vidocq simultaneously critiques contemporary Europe and its received ideological traditions from the nineteenth century, an adaptation that demonstrates the complex, historical uses of criminal texts and their often alternating functions as culturally deviant and ideologically traditional.

Readerly Crimes, Writerly Fictions

Studies of nineteenth-century crime, in fiction and culture, have been on the rise since the 1990s, on both sides of the Atlantic. Dominique Kalifa, for instance, has contributed *L'Encre et le Sang. Récits de crimes et société à la Belle Époque* (1995); *Naissance de la police privée* (2000); and *Crime et culture au XIXe siècle* (2005), changing forever the way we contextualize crime in history and interpret its appearance in literature. Simone Delattre offered her encyclopedic *Les Douze heures noires: La*

nuît à Paris au XIX^e siècle, about night as a vehicle for literary crime, in 2001. Andrea Goulet's *Optiques: The Science of the Eye and the Birth of Modern French Fiction* (2006) explores the ways in which genre fictions, including detective novels, use the "nineteenth-century scientific and philosophical discourse about the nature of sight."⁸ In 2007, Isabella Casta and Vincent van der Linden published their *Etude sur Le Mystère de la chambre jaune et Le Parfum de la dame en noir*, Gaston Leroux's seminal detective fictions that laid the groundwork for much of the genre to come. And, in 2011, appeared Rédouane Abouddahab and Josiane Paccaud-Huguet's *Fiction, Crime, and the Feminine*, an interdisciplinary examination of Victorian mysteries that challenges modes of criminality, writing, and detection itself.

At the same time, the contemporary popular-literature scene positively explodes with detective novels, stories that challenge the traditional boundaries of the crime genre and that offer new paths to the process of detection and the very meaning of (re)solving a crime. French historian and mystery novelist Fred Vargas has expanded the possibilities of the detective narrative, showing a contemporary mystery as shaped by forces from the ancient past to urban legend to, indeed, the detective's own biography. The Spaniard Arturo Pérez-Reverte builds narratives around artifacts from modern history (an eighteenth-century nautical chart; an Alexandre Dumas manuscript) and shows a continuum between detective resolutions in the present and mysteries planted in the past. In the U.S.A., Matthew Pearl has seen success within the mini-genre of literary detective fiction—his novels (*The Poe Shadow*, *The Last Dickens*) are set within the cadre of the literary canon, and even within the historical context of a real-life author's own writing process. And Stieg Larsson's *Millennium* trilogy, and the controversies around its publication and editing, has changed the landscape of Scandinavian literature—not to mention Hollywood's acceptance of a narrative set in an obscure Swedish town.

Just as the *polar* changed the way we read fiction, in the post-modern era the way we read detective fiction is changing; in a globalized literary market, readers have access to texts and contexts that rewrite the way the genre conceives itself. In this market, things we take for granted as part of modern criminal science (footprint casting, fingerprinting, graphology, even racial profiling) are often revealed to have their origins in the 1800s. In the meantime, televised crime dramas from *CSI* to *Bones* feature scientific methods and approaches developed in the nineteenth century.

⁸ Notes from the University of Pennsylvania Press abstract for the book.
<http://www.upenn.edu/pennpress/book/14232.html>.

The dawning twentieth century may have seen film as a “ceci tuera cela” for literature, but when it comes to the *roman polar* the genre is actually enhanced by (and enhances, narratologically, in its turn) the seventh art; each form interpenetrates the other with technologies of storytelling and ways of seeing that innovate both the act(s) of narration and the process(es) of interpretation. The culture of crime—its commission, representation, detection, and narration—brings to the forefront of literature and society alike the critical importance of the ways in which law, art, and science collaborate in the nineteenth century.

Each article in the present collection offers a new reading of nineteenth-century French fictions, using the lens of criminal legibility to address the intertwined roles of text, author, reader, and crime. These essays go beyond a narrow definition of crime fiction to explore the criminal aspects of writing itself in the nineteenth century. The collection thus offers both diversity and focus: diversity, in the breadth of texts covered and the variety of approaches to reading nineteenth-century criminality; and focus, in the concentration on fiction as, itself, a force of criminal interpretation—from both readerly and writerly points of view.

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**CRIME STATES:
POLICING AND ITS OTHERS**

THE PROTEAN NATURE OF CRIME AND PUNISHMENT IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY PARIS

LAUREN PENDAS

The ability to *become* someone else constituted the criminal mastermind's¹ most powerful protection from arrest at the beginning of the nineteenth century in Paris—a time when police identified potential criminals primarily by outstanding qualities like their profession (or lack of profession), the company that they kept, the quarter in which they lived, their clothes, etc. Criminals who could disguise themselves as members of a higher class could maintain prolonged criminal careers without capture. The division between criminal masterminds and police in this period was thus primarily a mental one; not only did police typify possible suspects, but popular opinion often asserted that criminals belonged to a different race from honest people. The criminal's mental defense of creating masks by manipulating appearances thus effectively diverts police suspicion from people who can appear upstanding.

However, the police's mindset evolved after Eugène-François Vidocq, an ex-convict, offered himself as a police informant in 1809; created the *Brigade de la Sûreté* in 1811; and became the director of the newly created criminal investigative bureau, *la Sûreté Nationale*, in 1813. By sharing his personal experience with the police and teaching detectives how to go undercover in convincing disguises, Vidocq helped the police to capture many elusive criminals and to uncover many political and criminal plots. Scott Carpenter explains, "he is credited with nothing less than saving the government during the insurrection of 1832" (Carpenter 2009, 114). But most of all, he provided the police with the mental mindset necessary to capture criminal masterminds. He bridged the gap of difference that police

¹ Petty criminals and criminal masterminds differ here: a petty criminal operates on a small scale without much planning; however, since criminal masterminds wish to penetrate or manipulate the upper levels of society, they must necessarily have an identity that allows them to do so.

perceived between themselves and criminals so that they could effectively gain criminals' trust and gather the greatest amount of information possible.

As Carpenter notes in *Aesthetics of Fraudulence in Nineteenth-Century France*, Vidocq's already complicated status as both lawbreaker and law-enforcer became even more complex when he published his immensely popular memoirs starting in 1827, shortly after leaving police employment for the first time.² His memoirs did for the public what his time as a detective had done for the police: they unveiled the underworld for all to see and detailed the inventive methods he used while a detective. Balzac bought these memoirs in 1830, dined with Vidocq in 1834 and remained friends with the detective (Wright 1983, 62). Balzac published *Ferragus* and *Le Père Goriot* respectively in 1833 and 1835 (though both are set in Restoration Paris around 1820), and criminal masterminds and police serve as central characters in these novels. Considering that much of his inspiration for these characters must have come from reading Vidocq's memoirs and conversing with the man himself, we cannot say how closely these characters mirror real criminals or policemen of nineteenth-century Paris. Carpenter points out that the memoirs' accuracy is questionable not only because of its membership in the memoirs genre—"whose relation to truth and fiction has always been unsettled" (Carpenter 2009, 118)—but also because Vidocq hired a ghost writer to clean up his prose in the first volume and admits in the fourth and last volume that the man took considerable liberties while editing the work (Carpenter 2009, 120). But perhaps most importantly, "Vidocq seems ideally suited to all the roles he assumes—so well suited, in fact, that it is impossible to tell when he is playing a role and when he is not" (Carpenter 2009, 122). Vidocq inscribes his life and writing with so many dizzying layers of meaning that one can never truly know his intentions. Even if Balzac's novels exaggerate the amount of power possessed by leaders of the underworld or the deviousness of the Parisian police, he captures both the criminal and investigative sides of Vidocq's enigmatic character in his representation—which is the focus of this text. My article explores what Balzac's novels lay out as the necessary steps for a criminal to construct an impenetrable protective mask, and the way that police reflect this practice thanks to Vidocq's influence.

To understand how the criminal could manipulate the upper world, one must first understand the public perception of criminals in Paris at this time. During the first half of the nineteenth century, the rate of crime grew;

² Vidocq was employed by the police from 1809-1827. He resigned because of "political pressures." (Carpenter 2009, 114-15)