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"THEY BELONG TO OURSELVES!": CRIMINAL PROXIMITY IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH NARRATIVE AND CULTURE

by

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ABSTRACT

“"They Belong to Ourselves!’: Criminal Proximity in Nineteenth-Century British Narrative and Culture

by

Ginny Crosthwait

This dissertation investigates the spatial proximity between the criminal and nineteenth-century British society and the concomitant desire to produce a separation between the two. It focuses on two central events in English penal history, the formation of the Metropolitan Police in 1829 and the phasing out of criminal transportation in the 1860s, in order to examine the interaction between criminal law, cultural attitudes about crime, and fictional representations of criminals and the police.

Chapter one explains the development of a unified police force as one of several efforts to organize the vast and confusing spaces that comprised London. It examines urban sketches by John Wight, Pierce Egan, and Charles Dickens and underscores each author’s attempt to provide a safe but accurate urban experience for his readers. Chapter two reads Newgate Novels alongside police manuals from the 1820s and 30s in order to demonstrate that the novels’ project is the same as the police’s: to read faces and bodies and identify criminals based on physical features.

Chapters three and four examine the interaction between the end of criminal transportation and mid-century narratives that feature returned convicts. As the reintegration of reformed prisoners becomes a social imperative, fictional texts explore the possibility of representing reform and reintegrating characters back into the homes from which they were previously expelled. Close readings of Tom Taylor’s stage

Chapter five examines two narratives about scandal: newspaper accounts of the 1877 Turf Frauds, in which four Scotland Yard detectives were indicted, and *Lady Audley’s Secret*, an 1862 sensation novel by Mary Elizabeth Braddon. By reading the two sensational narratives alongside Samuel Smiles’s *Self-Help*, the chapter details the very fine line between self-improvement and scandalous fraud. The chapter demonstrates that fraudulent behavior activated the production of perhaps equally fraudulent police figures that were perceived as solutions.
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Introduction

This dissertation investigates the relationship between the criminal and nineteenth-century British society in terms of their spatial proximity to one another, both within narrative and within culture. Implicit in such a study is a belief in texts as active participants, rather than passive reflections, of social and cultural change. Early Victorian concepts of London, for example, were established and continually shaped by textual representations of the city written for widely diverse audiences. Attitudes about the proximity of urban criminals are not only registered in George IV’s Metropolitan Improvements and in Parliamentary debates, but are also constructed by urban sketches and Newgate novels. Certainly, fictional texts often pave the way for social and political changes: novels that accommodate criminal characters, for example, develop ideological space for the criminal and facilitate the acceptance of laws that retain the criminal within society. Such narratives encourage a concept of criminals as already part of society, not those who should be expelled or separated from society. Other narratives express reactionary stances to penal developments and voice a desire to expunge the criminal. The relationship between fictional narratives, penal practices, and nineteenth-century society should, I believe, be understood in terms of a dialogue constantly in process. As texts and ideas circulate throughout culture, they continually interact with and speak to one another.

My chapters are situated in chronological order, according to the fictional texts and historical events discussed therein. However, such a structure is in no way meant to
suggest a linear narrative—of progress or devolution—in thinking about crime, narrating it, or attempting to manage the proximity of the criminal. Police corruption, for example, is prevalent in eighteenth-century culture and 1840s fiction, just as it is in newspaper accounts of the Turf Fraud Scandal in the 1870s. The distinction between respectable policeman and disreputable criminal is collapsed both when thief-catchers are recruited from the criminal population in eighteenth-century narratives and when the famous Scotland Yard detectives colluded with the criminals they pursued in the late nineteenth-century. Rather than positing a developmental narrative, the following chapters examine points in time when proximity with criminals causes intense anxieties that are confronted and rearticulated within fictional narratives.

The chapters discuss texts from a number of genres, including police manuals, newspaper articles, the writings of contemporary penal reformers, and fictional narratives. I have read volumes of police gazettes, as well as more mainstream newspapers from the 1820s onward, in order to discern how they represented crime and the police for their respective audiences. Police manuals also contain representations of crime, although aimed at a very particular audience, the police themselves. The manuals often appeared in the form of a small handbook that an officer might keep in his coat pocket for easy reference and constant reminders. Instructions to the Metropolitan Police found in these manuals, as well as in Parliamentary reports on the new force, explain in great detail what behaviors and other visible markers the officers were to look out for in order to accomplish their imperative of both punishing and preventing crime. These manuals also reveal the extent to which the new force provided a way to perceive the city
in spatial terms; diagrams of police beats and city districts that appear in them literally map the new force onto the city.

I have also examined the writings of mid-century penal reformers such as Mary Carpenter and James Devon, who envisioned the reformed criminal’s place in the midst of society rather than in a faraway penal colony. Mid-century fiction attempted to represent remarkably similar situations, reincorporating the criminal into the home or society from which he or she had been expelled. However, fictional narratives’ success with such reintegration is weak at best, due primarily to the constraints of genre. Even more progressive texts such as Tom Taylor’s melodrama calling for equity in the treatment of ticket-of-leave men expresses deep reservations about the possibility of reintegration.

The novels, illustrations, police manuals, and magazine fare examined in each chapter bear witness to the extent to which crime had become textualized in nineteenth-century England. The dramatic increase in crime early in the century probably owed at least as much to changes in record-keeping and criminal laws as to criminal acts. The crime rate may even have declined. However, writings about crime, particularly fictional narratives, became an important commodity. During the early part of the century, for instance, statistics about the sharp increase in urban crime provided a highly influential argument for the formation of a centralized police force. In this case, stories about crime and statistics served as political tools. The texts examined in each chapter exist both as commodities bought and sold in particular markets and as agents for shaping public opinion. They were makers of culture. Almost all of the texts originally appeared in serial form, the exception being The Ticket-of-Leave Man, which was a stage melodrama.
However, all the others were originally purchased and consumed piecemeal, whether in the newspaper market or in more respectable monthly publications. The production of these texts was also the production of particular perceptions of criminals, of the police, and of both of these groups’ relationships with the middle class.

Chapters one and two focus on the city of London and the proximity brought about by early-century urbanization. Chapter one explores the ways in which London was reorganized during the 1820s and depicts the creation of the Metropolitan Police as one attempt to organize a vast social space. It examines some of the architectural and spatial attempts to create and preserve clear boundaries between members of different economic classes in the city. While this effort was generally more specifically focused on class than crime, the police played an important role in the construction of an orderly, less anxiety-prone vision of London. Efforts to organize the city manifested themselves both architecturally and institutionally, through developments in city planning and penal policy, and in the formation of the Metropolitan Police.

The chapter also discusses different manners of viewing the city, both literally and figuratively. Panoramic perspectives, presenting comprehensive views of the city, portray a successful separation of the classes, since they overlook problematic intermingling and provide only a sketchy view of the city’s organization. On the other hand, episodic viewpoints, which confront the city from within its streets, recount and provide encounters with the very disreputable population that the panoramic point of view occludes. The tension embodied in these two perspectives also appears in popular writing of the period, particularly in urban sketches written by John Wight, Pierce Egan, and Charles Dickens, as well as in illustrations to the sketches. Wight’s and Egan’s
sketches enable their readers to cross the divide and view lower-class and criminal London. Although these narratives are generally interpreted as harmless entertainment, my reading locates the emergence of an anxiety about urban life in each of their texts. That is, the city is a site of tantalizing amusement, but it also exposes one to grave danger. Dickens, on the other hand, writes after the formation of the new police, and this is critical to his narrative project. Boz is able to narrate the streets of London without the threat of transferring its danger onto his readers. His is the most participatory text; it encourages readers to interact with the material more than either Wight’s or Egan’s does. The presence of the police, both in reality and in his narratives, enables his readership to relate to the texts through sympathy and laughter but protects them from harm.

Chapter two investigates a particular genre of criminal literature, the Newgate novel, in order to establish the ways in which criminal nature is identified and represented in the early part of the century, when the Metropolitan Police force was being formed. Like the new police, the Newgate novel is concerned with reading the signs of criminal identity and criminal potential. In spatial terms, this literature is invested in locating and separating the criminal from the rest of society. Each of the novels examined in this chapter performs a different type of separation: *Jack Sheppard* hangs its title character, *Paul Clifford* transports its hero, and *Oliver Twist* declares its potential criminal innocent. Oliver moves into polite society, a spatial solution to the problem of his not belonging to the criminal world into which he had fallen. The police occupy an interesting space in Newgate novels, primarily associated with, rather than opposed to, the criminals they pursue. In their attempts to identify the signs of criminal identity, the novels belie the inadequacy of visual markers and thus question the new police’s project.
My focus then moves from the city streets into the home, from the urban to the suburban, and from the Metropolitan Police to the phasing out of criminal transportation. Chapter three discusses two mid-century texts that address the end of transportation. The penal system’s shift toward penitentiary reform within England produces a shift in Victorians’ spatial relationships with the criminal population. As reformed convicts are released back into England, another anxiety about proximity emerges. Fictional texts seek ways to reintegrate their own criminal characters and express reactionary attitudes to these new laws, attitudes that were pervasive throughout the culture. Curiously, however, the narratives that attempt to reintegrate their criminals foil their own attempts before they even begin. In order to activate the discourse of reform, they perform the reintegration of emphatically non-criminal characters. Tom Taylor’s popular stage melodrama, *The Ticket-of-Leave Man*, follows not the story of a typical returned convict’s release back into London society, but the story of a naïve young man wrongfully convicted. Even so, the narrative makes a great deal of his reform, insisting on its authenticity. Melodrama draws sharp distinctions between good and evil, and as a result, this narrative is not about reform, which involves crossing between the categories. Instead, it is a narrative about a spatial problem: Robert Brierly, the ticket-of-leave man, simply does not belong where he has been placed. He is innocent of the crime for which he has been arrested. In the end, the text’s claim that even a ticket-of-leave man may make a positive contribution to society is undermined by the fact that Brierly never should have been a ticket-of-leave man in the first place.

As a sensation novel, *East Lynne* locates the criminal within the domestic. Yet because it depends upon this arrangement for its sensationalism, the novel can never
locate a place within the domestic for its returned offenders. The interweaving of several narrative strands provides a structure through which the novel compares and contrasts different relationships between the criminal and the family. Only one of the characters in the novel is actually criminal, and he is transported for life after his conviction. The new discourse of penitentiary reform within the domestic is only performed on non-criminal characters. Perhaps in order to justify this arrangement, the narrative itself performs the criminalization of its principal character, Isabel Vane. Even while it expresses the logic of her decisions, it condemns her both for leaving her family and for returning to it. The novel expresses a profound ambivalence about her invasion of the domestic, a site from which it derives both the punishment she deserves and a dis-ease that only her death can end.

Chapter four argues that Great Expectations is Charles Dickens's expression of disapproval about recent changes in criminal law. The progressions of Magwitch and Pip provide a contrast between the old penal system, which transported convicts to separate spaces, and the new system, which reintroduces them into England. Pip's efforts at self-improvement bear an uncanny resemblance to Magwitch's experience in the penal system. The stark contrast between their experiences in the novel's final stages echoes the radical change in Victorian penal policy. Keeping criminals at home, Dickens is pointing out, encourages not reform but performance. The inability to identify the successfully reformed within a society of performers creates new problems for those invested in the reform of criminals as well as for members of the society into which the returned convict is reintroduced.
Chapter five reads newspaper reports of the 1877 Turf Fraud Scandal alongside police manuals, a self-help manual, and a sensation novel. This chapter situates anxieties about nearby criminals in the context of a more general anxiety about class climbing and social instability. *Lady Audley's Secret*, for instance, represents the dangers of a lower-class character’s self-transformation and entry into polite society by making her also the novel’s criminal. Yet the discourse of self-improvement found in Samuel Smiles’s *Self-Help* presents character change as a Victorian obligation. In the case of the Turf Frauds, the police occupy an ambivalent space; they embody both the imperative of self-improvement and the anxieties associated with it. *Lady Audley’s Secret* and narratives of the Turf Fraud Scandal use one act of self-improvement to smooth over the problems created by another. Lucy Audley’s threatening self-transformation, for instance, is exposed and rectified by that of Robert Audley’s transformation into middle-class lawyer and police figure. In the Turf Fraud Scandal, the exposure of the detectives as criminal is cast as sensational. This presentation both reinforces the stark ideological distinction between the police and criminal and diverts attention away from the fact that the police were primarily re-formed lower-class young men to begin with. The space between criminal and respectable middle-class citizen is negligible in both *Lady Audley’s Secret* and in the Turf Fraud scandal; the distance between those seemingly opposing elements is collapsed, contained within a single body.

Each chapter contains texts from specific genres. The chapters thus deal implicitly with the ways in which the constraints of genre affect the ability to imagine separation between the criminal and society and the ability to imagine reform. The urban sketches of John Wight and Pierce Egan discussed in chapter one present London and its
criminal types through protective lenses. Their readers are promised the ability to witness the reality of lower-class life and crime without the risks associated with the spaces of London that those subjects occupy. Dickens, however, omits the protective narrative device and instead provides stability and protection by including the metropolitan police in his sketches. Where Wight and Egan imagined a more distant relationship between their readers and their subjects, Dickens insists upon a connection, and he invites his readers to mingle with the characters he depicts. The Newgate Novel, discussed in chapter two, collapses distinctions between the criminal and society. This genre, whose project is to feature and identify the criminal, finally questions the ability to distinguish the criminal from the respectable. Dickens is again an exception, however, depicting in *Oliver Twist* a firm distinction between Oliver and the criminal world. It is significant that Nancy, the character in the novel who most embodies ambiguity, must be eliminated from the narrative in order to restore the appropriate distance between opposing elements. *Great Expectations*, the focus of chapter four, is a bildungsroman and as such, is a narrative of progress. Yet Dickens, ever the exception, disrupts our expectations for Pip’s development or reform by ultimately focusing on the indeterminacy of performed identities. This novel suggests that although possible, reform cannot be guaranteed, a fact that is compounded by the novel’s multiple endings. Sensation fiction presents a situation where the space, and thus the distinction, between the criminal and the respectable is doomed to failure. As a genre, it depends on the semblance of difference, yet the unity, of those opposing elements. Lady Audley, for example, is the embodiment of both beauty and deviance. Even melodrama, which assumes a stark distinction between good and evil, is unable to sustain the distinction
between criminal identity and innocence. Robert Brierly is repeatedly criminalized in the play, most notably by the letters that circulate throughout it and contain textual information about his criminal past.

My project owes much to the work of previous scholars. *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault's seminal work on the nineteenth-century penitentiary project, and D. A. Miller's *The Novel and the Police*, itself indebted to Foucault, are perhaps the most influential. Foucault’s description of the penitentiary’s shift in focus onto the soul or will of the prisoner and away from the body, however, leads one to neglect the critical ways in which the body manifested penitentiary reform. While his treatment of the disciplinary surveillance spread throughout nineteenth-century society is compelling, I would suggest that the focus be not averted from the body, but extended from it. The strong emphasis in early-century police guidebooks on the observation of physical traits, as well as phrenologically-based penal theories developed later in the century, suggest that the body and the features and marks it displayed were not simply confined to the descriptive passages in fiction.

I differ from Miller in terms of my interest. Miller is interested not in the police as an institution exercising disciplinary power, but in "less visible, less visibly violent modes of 'social control.'"1 Although his work examines the role of the police in several novels, it is more generally invested in demonstrating the disciplinary workings of the novel itself, particularly when the reader perceives him/herself as a "liberal subject.” Thus, Miller speaks of “Discipline in Different Voices,” a nod to T. S. Eliot’s original title for *The Waste Land*, itself a reference Charles Dickens’s *Our Mutual Friend*. I

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share his interest in the ways in which literary texts and the project of policing intersect, but I am more interested in the patently visible modes of social control, such as the uniformed and ubiquitous Metropolitan Police, and in the voices of the police themselves. My dissertation focuses not on discovering discipline and surveillance in seemingly liberal spaces, but on blatant surveillance and overtly punitive acts.

This project does not distinguish between different types of crime, nor does it explore crime as a gendered phenomenon. In order to narrow the scope of the project, I have approached the broad category of “crime” as would the Metropolitan Police: as the visible commission of any illegal act. The experiences of female criminals have already been explored by scholars such as Lucia Zedner, Judith Knelman, Mary S. Hartman, and Anthea Trodd, and Deborah Epstein Nord has written about the possibility of the female subject in London during the early part of the century. Certainly, a chapter on crime that is specifically gendered as female and the reintegration of female criminals would be a welcome addition to this study. The papers of the Discharged Prisoners’ Aid Society would be highly useful, as they offered separate services for men and women. However, I have chosen to emphasize the class divisions perceived and enacted in Victorian society and the impulse for members of the middle class to separate oneself from that which is lower class or criminal. This decision is based on my own interest in class as a dividing marker that, although often subtly perceived and embodied, is a highly effective exclusionary device able to produce vast ideological, and often physical, space between people.
Chapter One

Urban Disorder, Representations of London, and the Metropolitan Police

In a 1785 poem, William Cowper captured the vastly contradictory nature of what was arguably the largest city in the world: "London is, by taste and wealth proclaim'd / The fairest capital of all the world, / By riot and incontinence the worst."\(^1\) For years, London had routinely been described as a fascinating wonder, but also as a malignant growth, a monster, or a parasite. Writers of the nineteenth century continued in the tradition. Even James Elmes, who in 1827 boasted of London as the "ROME of modern history," acknowledged its "monstrous thrldom."\(^2\) In his 1802 sonnet, William Wordsworth’s speaker observed London from Westminster Bridge and declared, "Earth has not anything to show more fair." The city is, in this speaker’s eyes, a single entity "asleep" and "lying still," and the speaker internalizes the serenity he surveys: "Ne’er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!" However, portions of Wordsworth’s Prelude speak of London in dramatically different terms. Book VII of The Prelude labels London a "huge fermenting mass of human-kind" and as a city consisting of "foolishness and madness in parade."\(^3\) Walking through the streets of London elicits the following response from The Prelude’s speaker:

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\(^2\) Elmes 6.
\(^3\) All quotations to Wordsworth’s Prelude are from the 1850 edition edited by Jonathan Wordsworth, M.H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill (The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850 [New York: Norton, 1979] 621, 594) and are indicated parenthetically within the text by line number.
How oft, amid those overflowing streets,
Have I gone forward with the crowd, and said
Unto myself, “The face of every one
That passes by me is a mystery!” (626-9)

The perspective in *The Prelude* is from within the streets, not from afar or above, as in the sonnet. Not only are its streets overcrowded and its crowds unfathomable, but London causes individuals to lose their individuality. Understanding people en masse proves difficult; the speaker continues in a state of confusion, “oppressed / By thoughts of what and whither, when and how, / Until the Shapes before my eyes became / A second-sight procession” (630-3). His confusion ends only when he encounters an individual without the sight that renders the city so bewildering: a blind beggar. It is important that the blind beggar wears around his neck a written account of his experience:

lost
Amid the moving pageant, I was smitten
Abruptly, with the view (a sight not rare)
Of a blind Beggar, who, with upright face,
Stood, propped against a wall, upon his chest
Wearing a written paper, to explain
His story, whence he came, and who he was. (636-42)

The narrative around the neck of the beggar differentiates him from the rest of the city, and from the rest of the beggars, who were “a sight not rare.” The *Prelude’s* speaker links this narrative to the act of understanding oneself and one’s environment simultaneously: “This label seemed of the utmost we can know, / Both of ourselves and of the universe” (645-6). The beggar’s narrative is contrasted with the environment of the crowd and city streets, which the speaker characterizes as

blank confusion! true epitome
Of what the mighty City is herself
To thousands upon thousands of her sons,
Living amid the same perpetual whirl
Of trivial objects, melted and reduced
To one identity, by differences
That have no law, no meaning, and no end. (722-8)

Whereas the teeming confusion of the city is “blank,” the beggar possesses a narrative explaining his “story, whence he came, and who he was” (642). The reduction of other, undifferentiated people to “one identity” in this passage is unsettling. Crowds, people, and selves become indistinguishable and incomprehensible.

The ambivalence toward the London expressed in Wordsworth’s sonnet and *Prelude* is routinely registered in writing about the city during the first part of the nineteenth century. Anxieties about urban life stemmed from the city’s incomprehensibility, filth, overcrowding, and rapidly changing constituency and physical structure. The two perspectives represented in Wordsworth’s sonnet and *Prelude*—from above and from within—express the observer’s reaction to his surroundings as well as the related desire to master or understand the city. *The Prelude* itself suggests a problem with viewing the city in one manner only; the “blank confusion” embodied in the “perpetual whirl / Of trivial objects” and “thousands” of inhabitants may “weary out the eye” (731). Yet though the city constitutes an “unmanageable sight” to some,

It is not wholly so to him who looks
In steadiness, who hath among least things
An under-sense of greatest; sees the parts
As parts, but with a feeling of the whole. (733-6)
In *The Prelude*, observing the city from both viewpoints simultaneously is a necessary prerequisite to truly understanding it.⁴

Although in combination they produce a more adequate understanding, the two perspectives express a tension embodied in the city. Panoramic views of London, which survey the city from above, tend to boast England’s grandeur and power, while episodic views of the city, which confront the city from within, generally reveal much less confidence. When episodic viewpoints present encounters with members of the lower classes, they usually do so in order to dismiss those individuals, providing relief for urban anxieties only through the removal of problematic characters. The panorama’s presentation of the complex and diverse city within a single viewpoint lent the city an apparent orderliness that was easily questioned from the perspective of the streets.

Panoramic views of the city were similar to the view from the central tower of Jeremy Bentham’s panopticon, discussed by Michel Foucault in his seminal work on the nineteenth-century prison.⁵ The panorama enabled the observer to read the patterns of the streets and the logic of the new city planning, and to view neighborhoods or city blocks as single entities. The consolidation of vastly diverse social spaces into a single, viewable, perspective was one manner in which a unified concept of the city was constructed. As in Bentham’s panopticon, the viewer of a panorama stood at a powerful

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observation point, seeing but never seen, and most importantly, never touched. Set apart from the scene being observed, the panorama provided a distinctly separate space through which to experience and understand the city. The vision of the city in the metropolitan improvements, particularly the bird’s-eye view made possible by the view from St. Paul’s and by the panorama in the Colosseum in Regent’s Park, obscured the poverty, pollution, and confusion of the city, as well as the proximity of members of different classes. Thus, panoramic views assuaged urban anxieties, but at the expense of “overlooking” a central dynamic of city life: the commingling of classes.

During the 1820s, King George IV implemented a series of architectural changes that were intended to give London the air of a world-class city on a grand scale and to enhance its reputation as a center of civilization. They also represented part of a deliberate effort to facilitate quick transportation across the city, to create a more unified concept of London, and to establish more effective—if more subtly effected—physical boundaries between members of different classes. Plans for the metropolitan improvements were quite extensive and were only partially carried out. The changes that were actually implemented focused on the West End and included ideas from architects John Nash, John Soane, and Robert Smirke. They redesigned Regent’s Park and St. James’s Park and extended Regent Street to connect the two. They also constructed Trafalgar Square with its monuments, renovated Buckingham House (which became known as Buckingham Palace), and built the Hyde Park screen and arch.⁶

Although these metropolitan improvements were sometimes criticized along with the king’s lavish personal lifestyle, they were also lauded for giving London visible architectural order and were invoked in opposition to the urban problems of filth, crime, and incomprehensibility. For example, James Elmes wrote that these “wonderful alterations” were responsible for “the conversion of dirty alleys, dingy courts and squalid dens of misery and crime, almost under the walls of our royal palaces, into ‘stately streets,’ to ‘squares that court the breeze’” and for “forming healthy streets and elegant buildings, instead of pestilential alleys and squalid hovels.” London’s labyrinthine streets had been the result of rapid rebuilding after the great fire, and consequently “the city became one, whose streets [were] lanes, and whose lanes [were] alleys.”

Elmes’s reference to the proximity of the squalid dens and royal palaces is particularly important, since it was the contiguity of these disparate elements that created the middle- and upper-class perception of the threat of disorder and crime in the city. The early metropolitan improvements re-oriented much of the focus on the city by placing visible landmarks of the city in the West End. They also played an integral and ideological role in changing London from a conglomeration of disjointed medieval streets into a planned, orderly city. Two new axes, called New Street and the New Road (later called Regent Street and Marylebone Road) transversed the city north-to-south and east-to-west, respectively. These thoroughfares changed the experience of the city by making it more navigable (and thus more legible) and by reconfiguring circulation throughout it. For example, Regent Street connected residential neighborhoods with a commercial area. The development of elite shopping districts separate from, yet easily accessible from,
residential neighborhoods, emphasized the distinction between the home and the commercial sphere, and yet simultaneously forged a strong connection between the two realms.

Figure 1 George Cooke, “Demolition of Swallow Street, Taken in the Autumn of 1821,” Views in London and Its Vicinity

The metropolitan improvements had another effect: they eradicated the poor from certain areas of town. Particularly with the construction of Regent Street after 1814, many dilapidated buildings were torn down. Swallow Street, for example, was demolished in order to construct Regent Street. Comparing Figures 1 and 2, one can see
the area’s conversion from sprawling, lower-class neighborhood into stately middle- to upper-class avenue. Figure 1 depicts lower-class workers, a crippled youngster, a dog, and a filthy street. Figure 2, on the other hand, focuses on elegant architecture and affluent men and women. The only worker in the picture is situated both literally and figuratively at the margin of polite society; stepping into the street on the picture’s right hand side. Nash, the architect in charge of this project, stated that “the whole Communication from Charing Cross to Oxford Street will be a boundary and complete separation between the Streets and Squares occupied by the Nobility and Gentry, and the narrow Streets and meaner Houses occupied by mechanics and the trading part of the community.”

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9 PP 1812, First Report, His Majesty’s Commissioner of Woods, 89. See also H. J. Dyos (“The Objects of Street Improvement in Regency and Early Victorian London,” Exploring the Past: Essays in Urban History, ed. David Cannadine and David Reeder [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1982]: 81-6) for a discussion of the same issues during the early Victorian period.
Another aspect of the city’s new architectural order was the development of sections of town for specific classes. This was accomplished partially by means of the Building Acts that had been in effect since 1774. The Building Acts created a rating system based on the size of the building or house and the quality of the materials from which it was constructed. Buildings categorized as “first rate” could be rented or bought for more money and could attract occupants of a higher class. Zoning became possible, since landlords and builders could control the quality of the edifices being built. The

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10 See Arnold (45-51) and M. J. Daunton (House and Home in the Victorian City: Working-Class Housing, 1850-1914 [London and Baltimore: E. Arnold, 1983]) for discussions of the ways in which the metropolitan improvements and the 1774 Building Acts helped to create a class-inflected national identity.
construction of the new streets not only required the demolition of sections of dilapidated buildings, thus eliminating Elmes’s “squalid dens” from the vicinity of the “royal palaces,” but it also provided a physical barrier to prevent subsequent encroachment of the lower classes into well-to-do areas of the city. These measures were seen as solutions to distinctively urban problems: lack of planning was associated with chaos and crime, and structure and planning were considered the solutions.

That the affluent classes perceived such a pressing need to separate themselves from the lower classes can be partially attributed to shifts in the use of domestic and public spaces during the period. Neighborhood structures, particularly in working-class areas, had once enabled several families to share the spaces between their dwellings as well as other facilities. Even until mid-century, working-class housing was characterized by enclosed courts and alleys, which the surrounding families shared. But the nineteenth-century brought a more distinct separation of domestic and public spaces, and the middle classes were invested in a more private form of domestic life. The old, self-contained neighborhood communities were absorbed into the larger urban community, and public spaces were no longer semi-private spaces trodden by locals, but spaces accessible to Londoners in general. Throughout the century, activities that had once been performed in courtyards or open spaces moved into the home, and urban space came to be used primarily for travel. Public space “was to be traversed rather than used,” and by the Victorian era, the city was to be open and therefore regulated.\textsuperscript{11}

\textsuperscript{11} Daunton 12.
Yet early in the century, this openness, although generally achievable, did not seem manageable or even entirely desirable. As semi-private neighborhood spaces were converted into more open ones, and as formerly secluded alleyways gained more access paths, public spaces of all kinds—and areas from all classes—were connected with one another. Robert Southey, noting the wide variety of Londoners in different parts of the city, remarked that “all these are united together by continuous streets.” That connection posed its own problems. The opening up of lower-class urban space rendered such areas governable, but it also forged a bond between the lower classes and those who wished to maintain a safe distance.

The West End provided one such safe space for affluent Londoners. Its development in the eighteenth century as a pricey residential and shopping district facilitated the segregation of classes and heightened perceptions linking the lower classes with disorder. Whereas the eastern sections of London had rambling streets and unplanned neighborhoods, West End streets were amazingly wide by contemporary standards. West End houses and shops boasted the straight architectural lines of the metropolitan improvements and were therefore associated with order. Although some of eastern London’s streets had been widened after the Great Fire, the area’s medieval street plan had been retained, and it seemed disorderly in comparison with the West End. The availability of land east of the city had encouraged building there. Although laid out in an orderly fashion, the area was nonetheless perceived in dramatic contrast to the

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architecture of the West End. The division between the East End and West End was fixed in the public imagination. London was “remarkable,” Southey wrote, for the “imaginary line of demarkation which divides [Londoners] from each other. A nobleman would not be found by any accident to live in that part which is properly called the City . . . whenever a person says that he lives at the West End of the Town, there is some degree of consequence connected with the situation.”

Yet despite the east-west division, there was a remarkable intermingling of classes. Georgian London gave rise to a “culture of sociability” in which male Londoners spent considerable time in public spaces, deriving entertainment not only from specialized facilities such as taverns, theaters, and gardens, but also from the streets themselves. The exploration of urban space was a hobby of wealthy young men, who sometimes masqueraded as lower-class types in order to experience how the other half lived. Although they indulged in lower class entertainment, language, and behavior, privileged young men from the west could afterwards retreat to the west. Easterners were expected to stay on their own side of town.

The West End was deemed orderly and respectable in part because of its carefully designed architecture; similarly, older regions of London were considered chaotic because of their haphazard physical features. As early as 1751 Henry Fielding, who served as principal magistrate at the Bow Street office, had noted a connection between older London’s irregular, unplanned architecture and criminal activity:

> Whoever indeed considers the Cities of London and Westminster, with the late vast Addition of their Suburbs; the great Irregularity

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13 Southey 69.
14 Porter 168.
15 See Jane Rendell chapter two for an explanation of some of the common upper and lower class masculine identities (The Pursuit of Pleasure: Gender, Space, and Architecture in Regency London [New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2002]).
of their Buildings, the immense Number of Lanes, Alleys, Courts and Bye-places; must think, that, had they been intended for the very Purposes of Concealment, they could scarce have been better contrived. Upon such a View, the whole appears a vast Wood or Forest, in which a Thief may harbour with as great Security, as wild Beasts do in the Desarts of Africa or Arabia. For by wandering from one Part to another, and often shifting his quarters, he may almost avoid the Possibility of being discovered.¹⁶

Fielding’s description of the city indicates several concerns: London was random, unpredictable, and therefore difficult to know or comprehend. This perceptual confusion was embodied in the labyrinthine nature of the sprawling streets and by “the great Irregularity of their Buildings.” From Fielding’s perspective, the streets’ layout is threatening because it facilitates crime, notably by enabling secrecy; one might think they were intended “for the very Purposes of Concealment.” The city’s layout should, unlike an uncivilized place such as a “Wood” or “Forest,” render the criminal visible, rather than preventing the “[p]ossibility of being discovered.” Visibility, then, was key to establishing and maintaining order in the city, as were comprehensibility and uniformity. The city should not, by the disjointed nature of its neighborhoods, allow the escape of criminals; instead, a uniformity of legal structure and physical layout should encourage their apprehension. Fielding’s “View” of London is both literal and conceptual; the person who “views” the city according to Fielding’s description “considers” it to be facilitating criminal activity. Viewing the city in a panoptic fashion, he is unable to detect criminal elements, which remain hidden in the “forests” of the London streets.

A recognized need for city planning and architectural improvements and a growing awareness of the incomprehensibility of the urban landscape increasingly inform

descriptions of the city from the 1830s onward. These changes parallel an etymological change in the connotation of the word “urban.” Whereas early in the nineteenth century, the word was closely associated with “urbane,” it later came to be associated with corruption, degeneracy, and moral and political instability. In 1835, radical reformer Francis Place described the changes in the Charing Cross area as metonymic for changes throughout the entire city: “The state of London may be somewhat guessed at by a short description of the fine open street from the statue at Charing Cross to the commencement of Parliament Street.”

In earlier years, this area, which consisted of crowded, tangled rookeries, had seemed to defy policing. Place’s description of the area associates physical filth with poor moral behavior and crude language: “It seems almost incredible that such a street could be in the condition described, but so it was -- people were not then offended with the grossness -- dirtiness -- vulgarity -- obscenity -- and atrocious language.”

However, after the addition of military barracks to the area (1825) and the demolition of several dilapidated buildings as part of the metropolitan improvements, Place finds it practically unnecessary to characterize the area as reputable: “I need hardly notice how highly respectable the street is now.” The metropolitan improvements had not only an aesthetic influence on the city, but a class-inflected moral one as well.

By the end of the 1820s, the effort to impose order on the city was manifested in another project: the establishment of a metropolitan police force. The idea of radically altering the police force was not new; there had been parliamentary commissions to

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17 Raymond Williams, The Country and the City (London: Chatto and Windus, 1973) 144. See also the OED’s list of problems specifically associated with urban life in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.
19 Place 229-30.
20 Place 230.
investigate the police since 1770. The new police force was introduced in 1828 and established in 1829 under Robert Peel, who had become Home Secretary in 1822. It was not only a new force, but also a unified force, replacing the hodgepodge system of parish watchmen. After the formation of the new police, many of the roughest areas of the city were penetrated and patrolled for the first time. The new police force’s “strength,” *Bell’s Weekly Messenger* explained, “is as follows:--Five divisions or companies, each consisting of 1 superintendent, 4 inspectors, 16 serjeants, 144 police constables--forming a body in each division of 163 effectives, and a total force for that portion of the metropolis which is first to be comprised within Mr. Peel’s project, of 825 officers and men.”

The force was organized with the intent of unifying the city at the same time that it dissected it, dividing it into districts and fifteen-minute beats. The new police force gave the city consistency in the form of a mapping of districts and beats. Like the Metropolitan Improvements, the Metropolitan Police provided a structure through which to understand the city and an architecture through which to observe it. Even a century later, the initial impulse to map the police onto the city survived. The map and key in Figures 3 and 4, which appeared in a 1929 Scotland Yard police manual, provide excellent examples of the way in which the police force provided an organizational structure for the city. In the map, letters indicate divisions of the Metropolitan Police as well as regions of London, and the numbers within these divisions indicate specific police beats. The police force is literally mapped onto the city, both dividing it and unifying it.

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22 *Bell’s Weekly Messenger*, 4 October 1829.
Figure 3 Police Divisions and Beats, “Map of Metropolitan Police District,” J. F. Moylan, *Scotland Yard and the Metropolitan Police*, 1929
Figure 4 Key to the “Map of Police Divisions and Beats,” J. F. Moylan, *Scotland Yard and the Metropolitan Police, 1929*
During the 1828 Parliamentary debates, it was noted that the crime rate in the city was a result of "the defective state of the streets of the metropolis."23 That same year, J. Hardwick wrote in the *Quarterly Review* that it

is absolutely necessary to incorporate the present discordant, coarse, and corrupt elements, called, or miscalled watchmen, patroles, petty constables, headboroughs, streetkeepers, &c. &c., into one vigorous and well-organized whole -- a regular police force -- characterized in its movements by activity and unity, its members by respectability, and its superintendence by unceasing vigilance: this body, too, should be placed exclusively under the control of a ministerial, not a judicial officer, of suitable consideration, nominated by the Home Secretary, and independent of all other interference.24

Giving order to the police force would lend order to London.25

While the concept of an organized police force as a solution to the urban ills was beginning to be discussed in Parliament, the old police were not depicted as a potential solution in most fictional narratives. Instead, fiction about the city often made light of chaos and disorder and dismissed urban problems. In such narratives, the police—the old system of parish watchmen—serve as sources of entertainment and humor, much like lawbreakers. John Wight's *Mornings at Bow Street* and Pierce Egan's *Life in London* are two excellent examples. Literary critics often describe urban sketches of the 1820s as depicting the city as merely a playground for the wealthy. For example, Rick Allen juxtaposes the "ideas of role-playing and theatrical performance" characteristic of "early nineteenth-century evocations of the urban scene" with a distinct mid-century period

23 PP (1829) *Metropolis Police Improvement Bill*, 881.
during which representations of the city were much more ambiguous. Donald J. Olsen characterizes the 1820s as “a period of self-satisfied urban pride” (21), while Nord explains that Egan’s and Charles Lamb’s versions of the city are ones “in which pleasures and entertainments abound, all laid on for the consumption of the nocturnal male rambler.” However, I would like to complicate such interpretations: amidst these two texts’ largely lighthearted visions of London, an anxiety about the urban environment emerges. The encroachment of urban problems into these narratives, however marginal, signals an anxiety about the proximity of classes in the city.

Wight’s sketches, first published in volume form in 1824, consist of Bow Street Reports that he originally wrote for London’s Morning Herald. Each sketch presents a different case that occurred in the Bow Street police office, and yet “[t]he chief quality of these little narratives,” Wight informs the reader in his prefatory Advertisement, “is certainly ‘pour faire rire.’” Crimes, disagreements, and assaults are represented in this volume not to demonstrate London’s disturbing social disorder; instead, within the chaos and crime one finds “specimens of our national humour which is perhaps to be found genuine only among the uncultivated classes of society” (iv). Rather than demonstrating the desperate need for the prevention of crime, Wight’s “chief aim has been to preserve the character and spirit of his originals” (iv)—that is, to make his readers laugh. The majority of the anecdotes feature cases involving drunkenness or assault; the tone is humorous and derives entertainment from the outlandish behavior of the lower classes,

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28 John Wight, Mornings at Bow Street: A Selection of the Most Humorous and Entertaining Reports which Have Appeared in the Morning Herald (London: Wheatley and Adlard, 1825) iv. Subsequent references will be indicated parenthetically within the text.
thus reinforcing the gentility's perceived class difference between themselves and the
"uncultivated classes of society."

Wight's sketches attempt not to reshape or resolve the social aberrations they
depict, but to "preserve" them for his readers to experience. To ensure that they entertain
rather than threaten their readers, the sketches assume a separation of classes:

The reader is placed, without personal sacrifice, amidst the various and
somewhat repulsive groups of a police office, and made acquainted with
the states and conditions of human nature, with which, from the sympathy
due to the more unfortunate part of the species, he should not be entirely
ignorant; it is by such means alone that the prosperous and orderly
portion of society can know what passes among the destitute and
disorderly portion of it; that they can rightly appreciate the advantages of
these particular institutions of their country. (iv-v, italics mine)

Wight's reader is not a member of the "more unfortunate" portion of society, but is well-
to-do. The reference to "personal sacrifice" signals an anxiety about the proximity of the
unruly lower classes in an urban environment. The very need for such an introduction to
this volume indicates considerable discomfort with the presence of the lower classes;
these sketches provide a safe means—the only safe means—through which the
respectable reader might encounter the city and the lower classes. Wight's "originals"
may be preserved and encountered on paper but would pose a threat to one's person were
they experienced first-hand. Arrested in text and pictures, the lower classes may be
studied without harm.

In Wight's sketches, the policemen are viewed from the same vantage point as are
the lawbreakers. Policemen are routinely associated, through their language and
behavior, with the lower-class offenders they apprehend. In one sketch, a watchman
arrests two young men and a prostitute. The watchman informs the magistrate that the
boys treated him disrespectfully, "laughing at, and using bad words to" him (57). The
policeman's statements comprise a large portion of this sketch, whose humor is derived not from the disorderly lawbreakers, but from the watchman's misuse of the English language.

The watchman's most serious accusation against the two boys is that they were "inching it backert" (58). The magistrate, the voice of authority in the sketch, must ask for an explanation of this phrase, and the watchman illustrates it by "shuffling his feet backwards, inch by inch" (58). The magistrate pokes fun at "the verb 'inching'" and humorously asks whether it is declined "I inch—thou inchest—he inches" (58). In this case, the watchman provides only comedy; a discussion and explanation of the case must come from the narrator. The watchman's language is peppered with phonetically spelled cant language that is also italicized. In this manner, the language of different classes is visually distinguishable in the text. The class distinction between the magistrate and Wight's readers on the one hand, and the watchman and lawbreakers on the other, is solidified when the magistrate declines the watchman's verb. Mapping Latin grammar onto the watchman's slang not only points to the disparity in their educational backgrounds, but to the different regions of the city which they belong.

In another sketch, "A Watchman's Waltz," a watchman brings before the magistrate two men he has arrested; yet the watchman provides at least as much of the comedy as the two men he has arrested for bothering him "on his bate" (21). When the two men, as he explains, "came rambling up to him intosticatedly, and ax'd him" a question, he warns them to go home (21). Yet before he knew it, "they got hould of me, and twirled me about and about for a bit of a waultz, as they called it" (22). His performance as a peace officer becomes part of the waltzing. Just as the two men twirled him, so he "twirled [his] rattle, and they twirled me, and more watchmen came twirling
into it—that’s the waltz: and we twirled and twirled, all in a bunch together, till at last we managed to twirl them into the door of the watchhouse; and here they are, your honour, to answer for that same” (22). Arrest and ensuring public order is, in this sketch, figured as dance—as is public disorder. During their defense, one of the men explains that they “thought to have a bit of fun with the watchman” (23), blurring the boundaries between watchman and offender.

In Wight’s sketches, the act of policing is generally depicted as the discovery of antics, perhaps even as the production of entertainment. This is evident in the illustration to a sketch entitled “The Loves of McGillies and Julia Cob.” The officers, after receiving a complaint from McGillies’ lover revealing her fear of being killed by him, locate him smoking a pipe in bed. The illustration for this sketch presents the officers looking on in an amused manner, pointing and smiling, as any audience member might.
Figure 5 George Cruikshank, “Mr. Robert McGillies,” John Wight, *Mornings at Bow Street*

Yet the man providing this humor has been accused more than once of domestic abuse, and in this instance he was reported because he came close to murder. Even so, the watchmen point at him not to accuse him, but to laugh. The sketch’s combination of humor and violence is unsettling and is only diffused by Wight’s lengthy introduction, which emphasizes the distance between the reader and situations such as the one in the sketch.

Also published in serial form, *Life in London* leads the reader through the streets of London, following Corinthian Tom, his cousin Jerry Hawthorn, and his friend Bob Logic, who are gentlemen of the respectable classes.\(^{29}\) Their object is to experience the

\(^{29}\) *Life in London* was serialized in monthly parts from October 1820 to June 1821, after which it was issued in volume form.
city first-hand, “to peruse with the most marked attention that grand living BOOK of BOOKS—MAN!!!”

Tom leads Jerry through the city in order to expose him to new situations, to educate him, and to turn him from a naïve young man into a “swell.” As in Wight’s narrative, London is presented as a city offering fun and excitement, but little danger. The experiences of these young men are, notably, referred to as “rambles and sprees” even though they include encounters with the watchmen and a visit to Newgate prison. Only in the text’s final chapter is the possibility of contamination by one’s experience in the city broached. Jerry not only becomes a swell, but he also becomes ill.

A sequel to Life in London appeared in 1828 in which the trio’s experience in the city was radically altered. The Finish to the Adventures of Tom, Jerry, and Logic in their Pursuits through Life in and out of London presents not the thrill and humor, but the perils of city life. Robert Cruikshank’s illustrations to this volume depict “lamentable examples of dissipated LIFE IN LONDON” and “afflicting Occurrences,” while Egan’s text focuses on debt, catastrophe, and disease. By the end of the sequel, Tom and Logic have both succumbed to the noxious influences of the city. The only surviving member of the original carefree threesome, Jerry weds and moves to the country. Certainly, the sequel demonstrates “a change in attitude about city life,” as Jane Rendell demonstrates. However, Egan’s sequel is not quite as radical a departure as Rendell indicates; the final chapter of the original volume both foreshadows and depicts the harmful effects of city life.

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30 Pierce Egan, Life in London: Or, The Day and Night Scenes of Jerry Hawthorn, Esq. and His Elegant Friend Corinthian Tom, Accompanied by Bob Logic, the Oxonian, in Their Rambles and Spree through the Metropolis (London: Sherwood, Neely, and Jones, 1821) 141. Subsequent references are to this edition and will be indicated parenthetically within the text.

31 Rendell reads Tom and Jerry’s rambles as one method of creating masculine urban space and establishing the objectivity of the urban female, whose activity and mobility became increasingly restricted (140).
Crime at first poses no threat to Tom and Jerry, primarily because of their class status, which provides them with the means of moving throughout the city and observing it from a variety of perspectives. The first chapter emphasizes the “advantages resulting from a knowledge of the numerous classes of society” (1). Jerry has come to the city to “see life” and to gain “sophistry”; “his highest object was IMPROVEMENT” (127). Jerry will learn about diverse types of people, but will not “agree with every disposition, and conform with every species of behaviour totally inconsistent with the tenets of reason, prudence, and good manners” (127). He will not “mimic” the lower classes, nor will he “be loose in morals, wanton in debauchery, and horrid in imprecations” (127). In short, his experience in the city will not render him “more like a beast than a rational intelligent human being” (129).\footnote{The distinction between mingling with the lower classes and being influenced by them is characterized as the difference between “knowing the world” and “seeing life” and is explicated at the beginning of Egan’s second chapter.}

Tom and Jerry are also impervious to the influence of the city because of the narrative device through which the city is presented. Life in London functions by means of a double move that foregrounds and dismisses class difference. The distinction between seeing life and becoming tainted by it is maintained in part by means of the elaborate metaphor set up in chapter two: touring the city is equated to viewing an image in a camera obscura. The title of chapter two indicates that Egan is presenting “A Camera Obscura View of the Metropolis, with the Light and Shade attached to ‘seeing Life’” (18). The camera obscura was a device that had been in use for centuries and was the precursor to the modern camera. By at least the seventeenth century, it was being used as an artist’s
tool. It consisted of a dark box or room with a single hole through which light entered. Onto the opposite wall of the box, the light projected (although upside down) the scene from the outside. Artists often used the camera obscura to trace scenes onto paper attached to one of the inner walls. It enabled them to quickly produce representations that were remarkably similar to the original objects.33

Egan chooses the metaphor of the camera obscura not only because it implies that his narrative is an accurate representation of the city, but also because it protects the viewer-readers from the scenes being presented. He notes that “safety, at all times, should be the primary object of the traveller” (18). The camera obscura was itself a mechanism that ensured the safe observation of solar eclipses; viewers could look at the projected image of an eclipse for an extended period of time without the risk of harming their eyes. In Egan’s narrative, the camera obscura enables one to see life without detriment to one’s class status. In Roy Porter’s words, “the contrasts between high and low life” were “evidently so secure that they could be temporarily transgressed with amusement.”34

Egan’s use of the camera obscura is an interesting one, since a new invention, the camera lucida, was in vogue when he was writing. The camera lucida used a prism to reflect the image, and its chief advantages were its small size and portability. Enabling artists to quickly sketch their surroundings while outdoors, it became highly popular with landscape artists. The camera lucida’s chief advantage, in other words, was that it

33 For an interesting discussion on the history of the use of optical devices in artistic representation, see David Hockney, Secret Knowledge: Rediscovering the Lost Techniques of the Old Masters (New York: Viking Studio, 2001).
34 Porter 180.
allowed scenes to be depicted from within. In contrast, the camera obscura insisted upon a separation between the subject and the artist and viewers.

Egan’s metaphorical camera obscura serves as a panoptic vantage point from which the reader may safely observe the city. Like the panoramic vantage point, the camera obscura “possess[es] the invaluable advantages of SEEING and not being seen” (18). Looking into it, the reader views many characteristics of the city: talent, ability, learning, independence, and intellect. But this panoptic vision elides many of the differences within its view. For instance, the wealthy are “neutralized by one another” (21). That is, the abundance of affluent people renders their wealth ordinary and their differences inconsequential. Seen everywhere, the upper class becomes common, and the commoners are no longer seen at all. The narrator praises the camera obscura for enabling this view of the city: “E’en the lone dwelling of the poor / And suffering are at least obscure” (21). The lower classes pose no risk to the viewer because they are eclipsed in this projected representation of the city. The problems of the poor “[h]ere, hidd’n, elude the searching eye / Of callous CURIOSITY!” (22). This perspective enables the reader to look over the city and to overlook problematic elements. Such a manner of viewing London is coincident with George IV’s improvements; it focuses on majesty and beauty and moves poverty out of sight.

Critics often read Life in London as a prophylactic representation of the city. Nord, for instance, finds that the text “offers to protect [Tom and Jerry and their readers] from the dangers of the urban experience.”

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35 Nord 32.
subtext of “poverty and human degradation,” she reads it as neatly separated from the primary narrative. However, I want to suggest that the text represents not the separation of these elements, but an anxiety about their proximity. Robert Patten observes that the text, with its emphasis on the behavior and language of the lower classes, functions to satisfy the upper classes’ “curiosity about how the other half lives.”

Throughout their adventures, Tom and Jerry ostensibly experience the city as something to consume and enjoy, not something that might possibly have a negative effect on their personhood. However, despite the protective device through which they are presented, their experiences intersect with those of the lower classes in ways that suggest overlap or exchange between the classes.

As Nord suggests, the text is sometimes structured in ways that suggest a separation of classes. For example, in a short section discussing Tom’s inability to understand the dealings that take place in pawn shops, there is a long footnote addressing the plight of the poor in London. It points out that in “this Metropolis there are upwards of two hundred and thirty pawnbrokers—in whose hands, at a very moderate estimate, there is generally property to the amount of seven hundred thousand pounds sterling, belonging to the poorest and most distressed part of the community!” (66). Such exclamations are located throughout the text, albeit in inconspicuous places such as footnotes or tangential episodes. However, the presence of these passages is significant, given the vantage point of the camera obscura, which typically fails to notice problematic aspects of the city. The footnote focuses on the activity of exchange that takes place in pawn shops, suggesting not separation, but connection between classes, particularly when “servants pledge their masters’ property” in the shops (67). Although Tom is separated

from this activity by class, the narrator nonetheless refers to the poverty-stricken patrons of the pawn shops as "part of the community." This episode functions to elicit sympathy in a manner that other passages where the lower classes appear do not.

There are also passages within the text itself that elicit a similar sympathy, if not from Tom and Jerry, from the reader. While in the Bow Street office, Tom and Jerry hear the tragic story of a woman seduced by a wealthy man and left to wander the streets. Her story, filled with misfortune, elicits tears from Tom and Jerry and, most likely, a similar response from the reader. Destitute and homeless, the woman takes a coach to the houses of several friends to solicit help but is unable to obtain any. She is also unable to pay the coachman his full fare, and it is this offence that lands her in the Bow Street office. Her story cultivates sympathy from the magistrate and coachman—and no doubt Egan’s readers—in a manner that many other passages about the poor do not. The magistrate, after hearing her story, "was overcome," paid for her fare, and gave her additional money (187). The exchange between the girl and the magistrate "touched every one present" (188). The stirring nature of this story is made more significant by the narrator's statement that it is unrepresentable: "Description, either from the pencil or the pen, must fall short in communicating it" (188). Tom, unable to catch the coachman, states, "I trust . . . that so generous and feeling a fellow will never be OUT OF SIGHT of the liberal and good-hearted of mankind!" (188). The woman, however, has already dropped out of sight. A central focus of this anecdote is the futility of giving the woman money in order to improve her life. The magistrate, giving her a three shilling piece, hopes that she will "[r]epent of what is past" and "become, by [her] future conduct, an useful and a good member of society" (187). Yet this woman disappears from the text as suddenly as she appeared, and the hopelessness of her situation remains unnoticed by
Tom and Jerry. Largely unconcerned with her, they follow not the woman, but the coachman.

During another episode, which depicts the young men walking by a prison wall in Fleet Market, Logic asks Jerry to promise that he will visit should Logic ever land in debtor’s prison. The conversation emphasizes their distance from those inside the walls. At the same time, however, it recognizes that all that is needed to land Jerry in prison is a reversal of fortune—not a degenerate character or the commission of a crime (218). Tom makes light of Logic’s comment, suggesting that it was “spoken in jest” (219). However, a small illustration interjected in the middle of this paragraph suggests a more serious and sympathetic interpretation. The illustration depicts the prison wall with a barred window in the center. At the top of the window is carved the phrase, “Pray remember the poor debtors having no allowance.” A young boy stands outside the window with his stick and hoop, suggesting that—at least for him—the streets outside the prison are a playground. From behind the prison window, a prisoner peeks through the bars to observe the scene outside. This prisoner’s point of view is similar to that of the reader: the prisoner views a scene from a dark chamber, much like the reader’s use of the camera obscura. This illustration, then, depicts not the difference between the debtor and the free citizen, but the similarities.

One of the highlights of the story—in both its written and staged versions—is the episode in which Tom and Jerry tip the watchman’s stall. In fact, George and Robert Cruikshank’s illustration of this incident was the most popular image from Life in London. It appeared on the cover of a reprinted version of the book as well as on handkerchiefs, snuff boxes, and other trinkets, and it was adapted and referred to in other
illustrations throughout the century. The incident is largely harmless and humorous, and it occurs when Tom and Jerry decide to retaliate for being brought into the Bow Street office. By tipping the stall onto its door, they trap—the watchman in his stall. Tom and Jerry have an advantage over the watchman: they are able to leave the magistrate’s office both that night and the next day. The watchman, on the other hand, cannot leave his stall once it is tipped. Tom observes that “it is totally impossible, under such circumstances, for a Charley to extricate himself, without the assistance of some of his brother ‘guardians of the night’” (233). Tom and Jerry escape without being apprehended this time.

Although the episode is often read as a reminder that Tom and Jerry are impervious to the law, protected from harm by their class status, we might do well to remember that they are prompted to tip the watchman’s stall by a song they hear at a dustman’s wedding. The song is among the many “low peculiarities belonging to that class of society” (231) to which they are exposed on their spree. The song reminds Tom to include this activity in their rambles for the evening and suggests that the boundary between upper and lower classes is permeable, due in part to the ineffectiveness of the old police organization.

Perhaps the most blatant suggestion that the city enables connections despite all attempts at separation appears in the text’s final chapter, when Jerry becomes ill. He is unable to leave his room for several days, due to the severity of a cold he caught while on a spree. Doctor Pleas’em, who comes to administer medicine to Jerry, acknowledges that “LIFE IN LONDON is DEATH” (362). However, Jerry “will be as alive and leaping as ever on [his] return to the country” if he recalls his experiences in the city (362). This

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37 Patten 228.
chapter at first seems to polarize country and city and to suggest that the country serves as the panacea for urban ills. Yet the doctor’s description of recalling experiences itself recalls the Wordsworthian belief in the power of recollection. The urban center serves the same purpose in Egan’s book that the natural landscape did in Wordsworth’s poetry.\textsuperscript{38} The city, then, provides the solutions to its own problems, at least in this narrative, which presents a fantasy of experiencing London without severe consequences. High class status enables Jerry to withdraw from the city and return to his country estate. In the same way, Tom may retreat into Corinthian House to separate himself from the problems on the city streets.

The new Metropolitan Police had been patrolling the city for four years when the first of Charles Dickens’s \textit{Sketches by Boz} appeared in 1833.\textsuperscript{39} In these \textit{Sketches}, Boz serves not only as narrator, but also as tour guide, leading his readers through the city in a manner similar to that of Egan’s narrator. However, Boz reveals a more overtly ambivalent attitude toward the city than his predecessors. His sketches both insist emphatically on the connections that urban proximity creates and seek ways of maintaining a safe distance from urban problems.\textsuperscript{40} Dickens’s sketches differ from Egan’s because of their decisive focus on poverty and other urban problems; they differ from Wight’s because they consider such problems reason for sympathy rather than laughter. I want to suggest that the presence of the police makes a crucial difference in Boz’s experience in the city, as well as in his representation of it. Although the police do

\textsuperscript{38} See particularly “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud,” and the “Preface” to \textit{Lyrical Ballads’} reference to “emotion recollected in tranquility.”

\textsuperscript{39} The sketches began to appear serially in December of 1833 and first appeared in volume form in February 1836. The serial \textit{Sketches} were published in different periodicals, including the \textit{Morning Chronicle} and \textit{Evening Chronicle}, \textit{Bell’s Life in London}, and others.

\textsuperscript{40} Nord finds that “Boz sought to create a city recognizable and knowable to his middle-class readers. If he meant to hint at other links and class connections, it was with hesitation and by indirection” (79).
not prevent crime entirely, they do provide considerable resolution to the conflicts presented in the *Sketches*. In addition, their ubiquity on the city streets provides stability and continuity. Boz’s ability to interpret the city is due, at least in part, to the presence of the police, who confronted the city both from within and above. While individual officers encountered the city from within, the new force constructed a type of panoramic perspective on the city, with the Home Secretary in the most powerful vantage point.

Critics have already demonstrated that Dickens both works within and transforms the genre of the urban sketch. Nord states that Boz “reinvented the urban sketch” by writing about and for the middle class. Although he followed some established patterns within the genre, he “created a new audience, introduced a new cast of characters, and forged a new vision of the city.” Grillo finds that Dickens requires a greater degree of involvement from his readership than do his contemporaries. He explains that Dickens “enlists his readers’ participation in a shared affirmative vision” of his subject matter. Boz’s use of the underlying assumptions of reader inclusion is one source of connectedness with the urban areas explored in the *Sketches*. It not only insists on the nearby presence of urban problems like crime and poverty, but it also demands that the readers relate themselves to those problems, through sympathy, pity, or awareness.

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42 Nord 49.

43 Grillo 70.

44 In Boz, Nord finds “the continuing sense of distance from the ‘lower orders,’ now juxtaposed with a new awareness of possibilities for sympathizing, if not identifying, with the poor” (50).
Figure 6 George Cruikshank's Cover Illustration for Dickens's *Sketches by Boz*

A close connection with things urban is enabled by the *Sketches*' lack of a protective preface. Despite the detached or panoramic perspective suggested by Cruikshank's illustration when the *Sketches* appeared in volume form, the texts of the
sketches omit the type of structural safety device ensuring a protected journey through the city that Wight and Egan offered their readers. Instead, Boz places his readers in the thick of things. For instance, in a sketch about Greenwich Fair, he directs his readers to

Imagine yourselves in an extremely dense crowd, which swings you to and fro, and in and out, and every way but the right one; add to this the screams of women, the shouts of boys, the clanging of gongs, the firing of pistols, the ringing of bells, the bellowings of speaking-trumpets, the squeaking of penny dittos, the noise of a dozen bands, with three drums in each, all playing different tunes at the same time, the hallooing of showmen, and an occasional roar from the wild-beast shows; and you are in the very centre and heart of the fair.\footnote{Charles Dickens, \textit{Sketches by Boz}, ed. Dennis Walder (London and New York: Penguin, 1995) 140, italics mine. Subsequent references are to this edition and are indicated parenthetically in the text.} 

Boz mingles with the characters he writes about, a crucial difference from his literary predecessors: he is among them, not separated by a representational strategy. He looks not from a separate space, as does Egan’s narrator with his camera obscura, but from within, as if using a camera lucida. Even so, he is still able to exercise the explanatory function associated with a panoramic view of the city. Given the two primary methods of viewing the city, Boz’s approach does most to reconcile the two views. Boz possesses the ability to read urban texts and explain, or relate, them to his readership. Whereas relating the urban environment to his readership connects them with the problematic elements of the city, Boz’s awareness of the new police ensures a safe encounter with the city.
Dickens was well aware of the difference that the new police force made on the city streets, and his personal interest in the new force found its way into the sketches. In one 1836 sketch, Boz tells a story set in the past. He directly describes the changes brought about by the new police and by urban improvements:

The police of London were a very different body in that day to what they are now: the isolated position of the suburbs, when the rage for building and the progress of improvement had not yet begun to connect them with the main body of the city and its environs, rendered many of them (and this in particular) a place of resort for the worst and most depraved characters. Even the streets
of the gayest parts of London were imperfectly lighted at that time, and such places as these were left entirely to the mercy of the moon and stars. (433)

As if recalling Fielding’s comments on the visibility of criminals, Boz continues: “The chances of detecting desperate characters, or of tracing them to their haunts, were thus rendered very few, and their offences naturally increased in boldness, as the consciousness of comparative security became the more impressed upon them by daily experience” (433). The new police provide a more predictable environment, and initiatives such as improved street lighting help to ensure that one’s view of the city is optimal.

In a paired set of sketches describing the city streets, the policeman serves as part of the environment in which city life occurs, rather than one who experiences life like Wight’s amused watchmen. In “The Streets – Morning,” Boz describes the activity on a city street from before daybreak through noon. The primary focus of the piece is change. The sketch’s paragraphs are structured according to the hours that pass and the activity that begins in and passes along the streets. The policeman is the exception; even after the “last drunken man . . . has just staggered heavily along” (69), the policeman still mans his post. The sketch begins an hour before sunrise, at a liminal moment between activities. The narrator describes the “air of cold, solitary desolation about the noiseless streets . . . The drunken, the dissipated, and the wretched have disappeared; the more sober and orderly part of the population have not yet awakened to the labours of the day, and the stillness of death is over the streets” (69). Yet even when the “night-houses are closed; and the chosen promenades of profligate misery are empty,” the policeman “may be seen at the street-corners” (69).

George Cruikshank’s illustration also focuses on the policeman as a central
fixture in the city streets. The policeman appears as a dark figure, easily recognizable against the light cobblestones of the streets, very near the vanishing point established by the street meandering up into the picture’s background. Moreover, the policeman-asfixture is underscored by the architectural elements echoed in the picture. Strong vertical lines are formed by the buildings that line the streets, by a church steeple, and by the street lamps. The policeman is the only figure in the picture that forms an additional vertical line; the three figures in the foreground complete or blend into the vertical lines of the buildings they stand near. The woman near the center of the picture becomes part of the street lamp, for instance; its dark lines draw attention away from her lighter, sketchier appearance. Two figures to her left are encompassed by the wall behind them. These three figures, along with the street lamp and a sign labeled “The Rising Sun,” form a circular pattern on the left side of the picture. The policeman, steeple, and the same lamp form a complementary circular formation on the right hand side. This juxtaposition of urban characters and urban architecture groups the policeman with the city’s structure, not those who inhabit it.
The companion sketch, “The Streets – Night,” presents a complementary picture. Whereas the previous sketch presented the desolate morning streets during summer, this sketch portrays them “on a dark, dull, murky winter’s night” (74). People in all areas of the city, from “the larger and better kind of streets” to “the suburbs,” discuss “the wretchedness of the weather” and attempt to escape it. By eleven o’clock, “the cold thin
rain which has been drizzling so long, is beginning to pour down in good earnest; the baked-potato man has departed – the kidney-pie man has just walked away with his warehouse on his arm – the cheesemonger has drawn in his blind, and the boys have dispersed” (77). Although these workmen are deserting the street, “the policeman, with his oilskin cape buttoned closely round him, seems as he holds his hat on his head, and turns round to avoid the gust of wind and rain which drives against him at the street-corner, to be very far from congratulating himself on the prospect before him” (77). In this set of sketches, the policeman serves as part of the structure around which the sketch’s action takes place. Despite the passage of time and the changes in weather, he remains a constant feature of the city streets.

An 1835 sketch describes one of the most bewildering areas of London: Seven Dials. The trajectory of the sketch is important, since it follows the logic of the period’s urban planning and Peel’s proposed solution. The sketch opens with a call to examine the tangled streets of the area; Boz directs his readers to “[l]ook at the construction of the place. The gordian knot was all very well in its way: so was the maze of Hampton Court . . . But what involutions can compare with those of Seven Dials? Where is there such another maze of streets, courts, lanes, and alleys?” (90-92). Boz lingers in this “irregular square,” whose streets and courts dart in all directions, until they are lost in the unwholesome vapour which hangs over the house-tops, and renders the dirty perspective uncertain and confined; and lounging at every corner, as if they came there to take a few gasps of such fresh air as has found its way so far, but is too much exhausted already, to be enabled in force itself into the narrow alleys around, are groups of people, whose appearance and dwellings would fill any mind but a regular Londoner’s with astonishment. (92)

This passage focuses on the winding streets that were intact even after the metropolitan
improvements; Boz underscores the very aspects of the city that the panorama rendered invisible.

The Seven Dials area is, Boz notes, a “complicated part of London,” and its inhabitants are as disorderly as the streets (92). In the midst of the “irregular square” with its “obscure passages,” “unwholesome vapour,” and “dirty perspective,” two women decide to settle a disagreement “by an appeal to blows” (92). The disorder increases, until everyone in the area has been drawn into the fray. The fight finally ends with the arrival of a policeman. Boz’s eye then moves on, observing groups of people in the streets and shops. He notes that even though the “Diallers” at times look peaceful, violence is a staple of life in this part of London: “the man in the shop illtreats his family; the carpet-beater extends his professional pursuits to his wife . . . the Irishman comes home drunk every other night, and attacks every body” (95). The description imitates the previous fight, and more and more people join in; as Boz puts it, “the quarrel becomes general” (96). This second fight (and the sketch) ends with a policeman establishing stability. “Animosities spring up” between people, and the dispute grows and encompasses more family members, until “an assault is the consequence, and a police-officer the result” (96).

That the police are associated with a new way of experiencing the city is evident in Boz’s description of people who walk through the streets. He directly contrasts the view of the city as theater, which Wight and Egan depicted, with the view that the policeman sees. Two types of people walk through Boz’s streets: those who derive “amusement . . . from [their] perambulation,” and those who “linger listlessly past, looking as happy and animated as a policeman on duty. Nothing seems to make an impression on their minds: nothing short of being knocked down by a porter, or run over
by a cab, will disturb their equanimity” (80). Boz’s own viewpoint assimilates the two. Never influenced by the streets he strolls through, he recognizes entertainment throughout them. Boz revises earlier sketches’ vantage points. Rather than a spectacle to be seen from afar, Boz’s city is immediate, contingent, influential, and participatory. Such an experience is only possible with the presence of the new police, who in Boz’s sketches assume the function of the protective prefaces in Wight and Egan.

By the end of the century, policemen were commonly considered part of the social fabric of London and were integrated into the social experience and rhythm of the city. No longer viewed as a threat to personal freedom, they were considered protectors from a potentially detrimental environment. In 1890, former Police Commissioner J. Munro wrote in the *North American Review* about

> the relations which exist between the police and the public, and by the thorough recognition on the part of the citizens at large of the police as their friends and protectors. The police touch all the classes of the public at many points beyond the performance of the stern duties as representatives of the law, and they touch them in a friendly way. Few crossings in crowded thoroughfares can be got over by the nervous and timid without an appeal to the courteous help of the policeman.⁴⁶

The police regularly traversed the city, and they “touch[ed] all the classes of the public,” from the wealthy West End to the disreputable East End. They unified the city, but they also provided a critical filter, mediating between the classes they also connected. Munro continues,

> no marriage party in the West End is complete without the attendance of Scotland Yard to quietly look after the safety of costly wedding gifts; . . . the police bands often cheer the spirits of unfashionable audiences in the East End, and the police minstrels are cordially welcomed at concerts for charitable purposes.

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The active presence of the new police force reshaped ways of experiencing the city and reshaped its landscape in ways comparable to the metropolitan improvements. Whereas the improvements cleaned up neighborhoods, straightened streets, facilitated movement through the city, the police served an essential role in Londoners’ relationships with one another and with the city itself:

the laborer in Whitechapel depends upon the early call of the man on the beat to rouse him for his work... Many a homeless wanderer has to thank the watchful patrol for guiding her to a “refuge” for the night, and it is no uncommon sight to see a little child, lost in the streets, trotting contentedly by the side of a burly guardian of the peace in a custody as kindly as it is secure.

It was not only police commissioners who depicted the Bobby in an affectionate manner, however. Despite its sometimes harsh criticism of the new police and a satirical tone, in 1851 *Punch* insists that

the police are beginning to take that place in the affections of the people—we don’t mean the cooks and housemaids only, but the people at large—that the soldiers and sailors used to occupy. In the old war-time there was a sort of enthusiasm for the ‘blue jackets,’ the defenders of the country; but in these happier days of peace, the blue coats—the defenders of order—are becoming the national favourites... Every one has been charmed during the Great Exhibition by the mode in which this truly civil power has been rendered effective; and if England expected, she has not been disappointed in the expectation, that every policeman should be every day on duty.47

Even the satirical manner in which *Punch* portrays the force asserts its centrality to life in the city. The article mocks the police’s “truly civil power,” while affirming the importance of the Metropolitan Police and its usurpation of the military as a symbol of the nation’s strength:

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47 *Punch* (July-Dec. 1851): 173.
Veterans, whose boast it used to be to have distinguished themselves at the lines of Torres Vedras, find their glories eclipsed by those whose pride it is to have been present and to have performed good service at the lines of omnibuses and cabs going to and from the Crystal Palace... Military engineering has been nothing to the engineering difficulties that have been surmounted by our police force in effecting the passage of the crossings, and carrying elderly ladies with their stores and baggage from one side of the way to the other.

Supporters and detractors alike indicate the police’s status as an essential prerequisite to movement throughout the city and depict the police in relation to essentially every type of citizen—rich, poor, female, male, adult and child. Munro’s statement about the “crossings in crowded thoroughfares” and Punch’s reference to the police “effecting the passage of the crossings” point not only to the police’s function in city organization, but also to the way in which they mediated the interaction between classes. The police had become, both ideologically and materially, guarantors of safety in a threatening urban environment.
Chapter Two

Newgate Fiction and the New Police: Reading and Misreading Criminal Identity

On October 28, 1828, the following article appeared on the front page of the

*Police Gazette; Or, Hue and Cry:*

**MURDER.**
William Mosey, late of Wakefield, in the West Riding of the County of York, Labourer, stands charged, on the Coroner’s Inquest, with the Wilful Murder, at Snydale, near Pontefract, of William Longthorne, of Barnaby Moor, near Pocklington, by cutting his throat with a razor. The said William Mosey is about twenty years of age, five feet one inch in height, lad-like in appearance, but broad set, of dark complexion, dark eyes and hair, with strong features. When last seen, he had on a short blue striped smock, soiled duck trousers, and a round cap. Whoever will give such information to Mr. Joshua Ellis, Police Officer, Wakefield, as will lead to the apprehension of the said William Mosey, shall receive a Reward of Fifty Pounds. N.B. William Mosey is supposed to have wounded himself in one hand, and his trousers are very bloody, unless they have been recently washed.¹

The *Police Gazette* was four pages in length. Its two inner pages contained a large table listing and describing recent military deserters. The table includes descriptions of about fifty-five men, arranged into the following categories, to ensure a thorough description of each deserter: Name, Corps, Parish, County, Trade, Age, Size [height], Person, Head, Face, Eyes, Eyebrows, Nose, Neck, Hair, Shoulders, Arms, Hands, Legs, Feet, Mouth, and Marks and Remarks, Time, Place, Coat, Waistcoat, Trowsers. The entries read, for example, Person: slender. Person: slight. Head: common. Head: oval. Eyebrows: light. Neck: thick. Waistcoat: striped. Shoulders: square.

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These newspaper articles both describe and perform the act of reading lawbreakers. They provide detailed readings of certain criminals’ physical appearances, and they invite their readers to perform similar acts of reading. The “hue and cry” of the paper’s title was the traditional call that a policeman or citizen was expected to give when witnessing a crime on the London streets; the well known cry, “Stop thief!” is but one example. Once the hue and cry was issued, bystanders were expected to chase the lawbreaker and to help the watchman or policeman arrest him or her. In much the same way, this textual hue and cry was issued weekly, with the intent of capturing lawbreakers and recovering stolen property. The first excerpt is aimed at providing a description of the accused in the hopes that a reader will be able to recognize him; that is, that a newspaper reader will already have “read” this criminal on the London streets and will be able to report his whereabouts to the authorities. The murderer can be identified by his physical appearance, most notably his “very bloody” trousers (“unless they have been recently washed.”) This information is presented in keeping with the newspaper’s intention to provide every “particular which may lead to their Apprehension” (masthead). Articles such as the ones mentioned above provide textual evidence of a collective act of reading, a collective responsibility to keep watch and to alert the authorities when

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2 The *Police Gazette* was generally issued weekly but was at times issued twice a week (Anthony Babington, *A House in Bow Street: Crime and the Magistracy, 1740-1881* [London: Macdonald, 1971] 147-8, 169).

3 The paper was founded in 1786 by Sir Sampson Wright, a Bow Street magistrate, and was called *The Public Hue and Cry*. It was based on the concept of Sir John Fielding’s *Weekly or Extraordinary Pursuit*, started in 1772, which Fielding distributed to county justices in an effort to aid the Bow Street magistrates solve crimes. Wight’s paper contained more detailed information and descriptions than Fielding’s paper had. The paper’s title was later changed to *The Weekly Hue and Cry*, and in 1829 the title changed from *The Hue and Cry and Police Gazette* to *The Police Gazette*; or, *Hue and Cry*. On March 30, 1839, the paper became known as simply *The Police Gazette*. See David Paroissien, *The Companion to Oliver Twist* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1992) 146; and Babington 147-8, 169.
deviance is read or recognized, as well as a collective effort to “Trac[e] and Recov[er]” property (1).

The year this newspaper was published, 1828, was the year before the Metropolitan Police was established. It was also a year of heated debates in Parliament about the necessity of a new police force, as I have discussed in chapter one. Within this historical and geographical context, I believe, one can locate a relationship between anxieties about the ability to recognize criminal character and behavior, contemporary changes in criminology and penology, and the period’s surge in fictional narratives that focus on establishing identity.4 The ability to interpret identity from visual signs was exceedingly important during the early decades of the nineteenth century, and it was a critical aspect of urban life. As part of the effort to clean up the London streets, officials had to be able to identify those elements (including people) to be contained, expelled, excluded, and the like, from specific areas of the city. In addition, rapid urbanization and the sheer movement of the city meant that one’s neighbors were often strangers, a fact that Robert Southey commented on in his 1807 Letters from England. Southey found himself “dismayed at the sight of [London’s] prodigious extent . . . It is impossible ever to become thoroughly acquainted with such an endless labyrinth of streets; and, as you may well suppose, they who live at one end know little or nothing of the other.”5 The streets of the city were sometimes depicted as a text whose occupants were also in need of being read. Those texts (and texts within texts) were unfamiliar, constantly in motion,

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4 Richard L. Stein relates the increase in texts focusing on identity during 1837 with a tenuous national identity and the coronation of the new queen (Victoria’s Year: English Literature and Culture, 1837-1838 [Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1987]). See particularly chapter four, “The Stolen Child” (135-76), in which he claims, “The need to observe clearly, to interpret visual evidence, is one of the most recurrent motifs in [Oliver Twist], from Oliver’s increasingly well-informed appraisals of Fagin and the gang to Bill’s final desperate fall from the rooftops while attempting to escape ‘the eyes’ of the crowd, his dog, and a remembered Nancy” (138-9).

ever changing, and thus difficult to read. The city represented possibility precisely because identity could be changed, as demonstrated by the number of young men from the lower classes who moved to London to seek their fortunes. However, the very possibility of change also underscored the need to establish methods of recognizing and reading identity. Navigation and literacy were essential skills for the city dweller, and the abundance of guidebooks and maps of London published during this period attest to both the necessity and the difficulty of reading the city.6

Bringing order to London meant providing a police force that not only captured criminals but also prevented crime. The Metropolitan Police force established in 1829 performed this duty in part by itself being read, by being easily recognizable and omnipresent. But the new force also represented an effort to recognize crime before it occurred, to predict the potential for criminal behavior and to prevent it.7 Officers thus attended to the signs of criminal potential, and not simply to the commission of crimes. The goal of the new police, to punish and to prevent crime, was also essentially a shift in reading within the city. Recognizing criminal traits and potential within a stranger meant not watching the spectacular punishment at the gallows, but attempting to read the unfamiliar faces in the city and attending to the moments prior to crime, so that prevention was possible. The new police represented a shift in focus, away from Tyburn and toward the crowd on the London streets, where the crimes often occurred.

6 See Stein chapters 1 and 4.
7 In police handbooks, the prevention of crime was often emphasized more than the apprehension of the offender. Instructions to the New Police, published in 1829, states that "the principal object to be attained is 'the Prevention of Crime.'" To this great end every effort of the police is to be directed. The security of person and property, the preservation of public tranquility, and all other objects of a police establishment, will thus be better effected than by the detection and punishment of the offender, after he has succeeded in committing the crime" (3).
Reading the city streets and their occupants was an indispensable skill of the new policeman, whose duty it was to walk his beat and maintain order, based on his "vigilance and discretion."\(^8\) Vigilance was paramount, for, as James Shaw explains in the *Constable’s Pocket Companion and Guide*, a policeman “has no authority to arrest a party for an affray, assault, or battery, committed out of his view” (13).\(^9\) Another police handbook stresses the importance of constant watchfulness on the beat. By moving through the city, the policeman “should be able to see every part of his beat at least once in ten minutes or a quarter of an hour” (*Instructions* 22).

The guidebook notes, however, that certain visual signs may compensate for failure to witness the crime during its commission. The police constable may also arrest those suspected of wrongdoing, such as “persons suspected of conveying away stolen goods by night” or “persons reasonably suspected of being deserters” (15). After an extensive catalogue of offenses that an officer may actually observe, the guide provides a careful list of evidence that may be substituted for witnessing an actual crime: “The following circumstances have been held sufficient cause of suspicion: A person’s being idle and disorderly, living a vagrant life, without any visible means of support;--being in company with one known to be an offender, about the time when the offence was committed; . . . such behaviour as seems to betray a consciousness of guilt, as remaining silent when charged with felony . . . and other similar indicia of guilt” (30). That is, when an officer fails to observe the crime, other visible signs may stand in for that crime.

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\(^9\) In addition, the policeman was expected to be able to recognize the neighborhood’s inhabitants by sight. Such knowledge of the residents “of each house” would “prevent mistakes, and enable himself to render assistance to the inhabitants when called for” (*Instructions to the New Police* [London: Marsh and Miller, 1829] 21).
Instructions to the New Police provides a similar list of suspicious behavior: for example, possession of a “pick-lock key, crow, jack, bit, or other implement, with intent feloniously to break into any dwelling-house, warehouse, coach-house, stable, or outbuilding” (27). However, it is the policeman’s duty to make the interpretive leap from possession of an implement to felonious intent: “in case the intention is not clear,” the officer should “content himself with watching closely the suspected party, that he may discover his design” (27). By observing the suspect, the policeman may determine whether the suspect is innocent or guilty. The Instructions indicate that visual data will provide this information: “the appearance and manner of the party, his account of himself, and the like” will indicate whether the suspect is criminal (28).

The Newgate novel, which focused on reading the visual signs of identity, particularly criminal identity, was enormously popular during the 1830s and 40s. The genre is often defined by its use of a criminal as a major character, as well as by its focus on crime and punishment, typically public execution on the gallows at Tyburn.10 “Newgate” was a reference both to the famous London prison that had been rebuilt after being burned down in the Gordon Riots of 1780, and to the popular Newgate Calendar; or, The Malefactors’ Bloody Register, a collection of criminal biographies first published in 1773.11 Several subsequent editions of the Calendar appeared in the early nineteenth century and were a staple in popular entertainment. Paul Clifford (1830) is usually recognized as the first Newgate novel, but the originally derogatory term includes

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11 Altick 43-4.
Edward Bulwer Lytton’s *Eugene Aram* (1832) and *Lucretia* (1846), Harrison Ainsworth’s *Rookwood* (1834) and *Jack Sheppard* (1839-40), and Charles Dickens’s *Oliver Twist* (serialized February 1837 to April 1839).

However it is defined, “Newgate novel” is a loose term referring as much to a historical phenomenon as to a novelistic form. The novels may as easily, and perhaps more meaningfully, be grouped according to the reaction they elicited from literary critics and their readership as by their subject matter. Newgate novels were sensationally popular, and sensationally derided. This criticism stemmed from, among other things, an anxiety about the novels’ (and their criminal heroes’) popularity among the increasingly literate lower classes, at a time when the French Revolution was still fresh in the public mind.\(^\text{12}\) Keith Hollingsworth notes that “a book was not likely to be damned with the accusing name unless it seemed to arouse an unfitting sympathy for the criminal.”\(^\text{13}\) Such sympathy posed a threat to social stability. The genre, when defined by the reaction it elicited, is based on an inappropriate desire and the crossing of a boundary—the love of the criminal. The question posed in these novels, then, is not how to treat the criminal that is transported or hanged, but how to manage the criminal element that is not cordoned off, the criminal that one “relates” to, even in a domestic or familial sense.

Newgate novels represent a tension in contemporary criminology: the concept of character necessitated by the new preventative system of policing clashed with that required by the ideology of penitentiary reform. That is, preventative policing was largely a matter of legibility and depended on being able to read criminal identity through


\(^{13}\) Hollingsworth 14-15.
a set of physical signs; reform, on the other hand, conceived of criminal identity as a malleable and fluid concept, and though legible, not stable. These novels, which rely heavily on physical description to communicate character, pose questions rooted in contemporary criminology: Are visible signs sufficient indicators of criminality? Is crime imprinted on the body or the mind? And perhaps most importantly, how does one recognize the criminal? Newgate novels address these questions through a series of character representations that require the readers and other characters to perform the exercise of reading the criminal character.

In *Oliver Twist*, Oliver travels miles on foot from the house where he was apprenticed to the undertaker Sowerberry to the outskirts of London. Oliver had heard during his time in the workhouse that London offered opportunity. His journey to the city may be a representation of the larger English population, which had already begun its migration to urban areas during the early decades of the nineteenth century. Interestingly, Oliver makes his first urban acquaintance by taking part in an act of mutual reading. Oliver, resting on a doorstep, “was roused by observing that a boy, who had passed him carelessly some minutes before, had returned, and was surveying him most earnestly from the opposite side of the way.”14 The boy is, of course, the Artful Dodger. It is critical that Oliver, who is asleep or otherwise unconscious throughout much of this novel, was “roused by observing.” The mutual scrutiny that occurs in this scene attests to the importance of reading identity in the city.

The passage continues: “[Oliver] took little heed of this at first; but the boy remained in the same attitude of close observation so long, that Oliver raised his head,

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14 Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, ed. Peter Fairclough (London and New York: Penguin, 1985) 100. Subsequent references are to this edition and will be indicated parenthetically within the text.
and returned his steady look” (100). Later, Oliver will be asked to imitate the boys’ pickpocketing, but he begins to imitate during this first act of observation. As the scene continues, it becomes clear that although Oliver sees Dodger’s body, clothes, and posture, he does not yet have the experience to interpret them. Dodger

was about his own age, but one of the queerest-looking boys that Oliver had ever seen. He was a snub-nosed, flat-browed, common-faced boy enough; and as dirty a juvenile as one would wish to see; but he had about him all the airs and manners of a man. He was short of his age, with rather bow-legs, and little, sharp, ugly eyes. His hat was stuck on the top of his head so lightly, that it threatened to fall off every moment—and would have done so, very often, if the wearer had not had a knack of every now and then giving his head a sudden twitch, which brought it back to its old place again. He wore a man’s coat, which reached nearly to his heels. He had turned the cuffs back, half-way up his arm, to get his hands out of the sleeves: apparently with the ultimate view of thrusting them into the pockets of his corduroy trousers; for there he kept them. He was, altogether, as roistering and swaggering a young gentleman as ever stood four feet six, or something less, in his bluchers. (100)

In fact, the description of Dodger is related by the omniscient narrator, and although the passage suggests that these are also Oliver’s observations, the slippage to narrator indicates that a voice besides Oliver’s is required in order to deliver this information to the readers. The description of Dodger might read like the table in the

Hue and Cry: Nose: snub. Head: flat-browed.15 Face: common. Legs: bowed. Coat: oversized. However, after observing all these things, Oliver still does not know how to interpret them.16 Dodger, a practiced reader of the outward signs of identity, immediately discerns that Oliver is “green,” itself a metaphorical code word for “inexperienced.”

15 A flat brow was in fact associated with criminal tendencies. See, for example, Havelock Ellis’s The Criminal (London: Walter Scott; New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1890). Although published much later than the Newgate novels, Ellis’s book still asserts a strong correspondence between “cerebral characteristics” and criminal tendencies. See especially sections of chapter three, “Criminal Anthropology (Physical)” and “The Face,” pp. 49-72.
16 At this point in the story, Oliver is illiterate, since he learns to read after meeting Mr. Brownlow.
The Dodger leads Oliver into the city, where the contrast between their abilities to read is once more underscored. While Dodger “scudded at a rapid pace” through the labyrinthine streets (103), Oliver is overwhelmed by the city: “Although Oliver had enough to occupy his attention in keeping sight of his leader, he could not help bestowing a few hasty glances on either side of the way, as he passed along. A dirtier or more wretched place he had never seen. The street was very narrow and muddy, and the air was impregnated with filthy odours” (103). Oliver’s entrance into the city is marked as a textual event: Dodger, after leading him to Fagin’s house, “pushed open the door . . . and, drawing him into the passage, closed it behind them” (103, italics mine). Entering the city is tantamount to entering a text.

*Paul Clifford*, too, is concerned with the difficulties of reading the city. Its opening scene presents “a dark and stormy night; the rain fell in torrents—except at occasional intervals, when it was checked by a violent gust of wind which swept up the streets (for it is in London that our scene lies), rattling along the housetops, and fiercely agitating the scanty flame of the lamps that struggled against the darkness” (1). The setting is “one of the obscurest quarters of London,” and the narrator leads the readers “among haunts little loved by the gentlemen of the police” (1). Amid this atmosphere, in which everything is difficult to read, a lone figure walks. He is “a man evidently of the lowest orders” (1). The text’s use of the word “evidently” points to the reliance on visible markers, as well as to the tenuous nature of those markers, particularly when one cannot see or interpret signs well. The man is Dummie Dumnaker, and he travels from house to house searching for a bible to carry to Paul’s mother on her deathbed. His inability to find a bible is appropriate, as is his eventual substitution of a book of
theatrical plays for the bible. The butcher had reported to Dummie that he had a book of plays “bound for all the world just like [a bible], and mayhap the poor cretur mayn’t see the difference” (2).

*Jack Sheppard* also opens in a setting that is difficult to read. It is night, “in an obscure quarter of the Borough of Southwark” (1). Mrs. Sheppard’s tumble-down house “had a sordid and miserable look. Rotten, and covered with a thick coat of dirt, the boards of the floor presented a very insecure footing” (2). The house lacks both a solid floor and roof: its “ceiling had in many places given way; the laths had been removed; and, where any plaster remained, it was either mapped and blistered with damps, or festooned with dusty cobwebs. Over an old crazy bedstead was thrown a squalid, patchwork counterpane” (2-3). Ainsworth’s choice of the word “mapped” alludes to the disorderly streets outside, and the patchwork counterpane might refer both to the chaotic streets and dilapidated house. Mrs. Sheppard acknowledges that her house is “wretched enough,” but she also claims that “poor as it is, it’s better than the cold stones and open streets” (3). Despite the contrast she sets up, the streets and her house bear a strong resemblance. The Sheppard house “terminated a row of old ruinous buildings, called Wheeler’s Rents” and was situated along “a dirty thoroughfare, part street and part lane, running from Mint Street, through a variety of turnings, and along the brink of a deep kennel” (10).

A description of the papers posted above the fireplace establishes a connection between the disorderly environment and difficulties with reading. The handbill allegedly containing the final statement Jack’s father made just prior to his execution is pasted here. Like the house and streets outside, the page has been clumsily patched: “On one
side of the handbill a print of the reigning sovereign, Anne, had been pinned over the portrait of William the Third, whose aquiline nose, keen eyes, and luxuriant wig, were just visible above the diadem of the queen” (3). One wall even features words spelled out using nails:

a cluster of hobnails, driven into the wall, formed certain letters, which, if properly deciphered, produced the words, ‘Paul Groves, cobbler;’ and under the name, traced in charcoal, appeared the following record of the poor fellow’s fate, ‘Hung himsel in this rum for luv off licker;’ accompanied by a graphic sketch of the unhappy suicide dangling from a beam. A farthing candle, stuck in a bottle-neck, shed its feeble light upon the table. (3)

The story of Paul Groves needs a “graphic sketch” to explain it; it is uncertain whether the letters would be “properly deciphered.”

An exception in his environment, Jack’s face was an easy read: a famous fortuneteller had predicted Jack’s fate at Tyburn by observing “a black mole under the child’s right ear, shaped like a coffin, which is a bad sign; and a deep line just above the middle of the left thumb, meeting round about in the form of a noose, which is worse,” as Mrs. Sheppard explains (5). She notes that “it’s not surprising the poor little thing should be so marked,” since Jack was born prematurely on the day of his father’s execution (5).

It is appropriate that Oliver enters his text, the city, soon after the reader has begun the text that is Oliver Twist, for this novel, like the other Newgate novels examined in this chapter, is almost obsessed with the following question: who is this boy, and who will he become? It is curious that so much of this genre’s attention is devoted to establishing the identity of its central, generally criminal, characters. The true identity of Jack Sheppard, for instance, should be a non-issue: he was a well-known and widely
celebrated jail breaker. Yet questions of parentage and criminal identity are the driving forces behind all three of the novels examined in this chapter.

Oliver, along with Jack Sheppard and Paul Clifford, hears repeated predictions that his own death will take place at the gallows, and the possibility of becoming a criminal threatens all three boys. The first installment of Oliver Twist ends with not one, but three pronouncements that “that boy will be hung,” and the narrator is loathe to reveal “whether the life of Oliver Twist had this violent termination or no” (58). Similarly, Ainsworth’s text suggests that an overdetermined predisposition toward crime hangs over Paul Clifford. Paul bears the name of a man sentenced to death multiple times. Peggy Lob named Paul after his adopted grandfather, “who had been three times transported, and twice hanged, (at the first occurrence of the latter description, he had been restored by the surgeons, much to the chagrin of a young anatomist who was to have had the honour of cutting him up.)”17 Although Paul does not at first seem bound to follow in his adopted grandfather’s footsteps, his penchant for tales of the highwayman Dick Turpin convinces others that he is destined for the gallows, to “ride a oss foaled by a hacorn” (12). When Paul’s adopted mother visits him in prison, she believes that he is traveling the “road to the scragging post” and tells him, “you’ll live to be hanged in spite of all my care and ’tention to you, though I hedicated you as a scholard, and always hoped as how you would grow up to be an honour” (80). Jack Sheppard is born under similarly auspicious circumstances. Jack was born, we learn, the very day his father was executed, as if to serve as his replacement, and is “the very image of his father” (4). In an attempt to convince Jack’s mother that Jack’s likeness to his father does not necessarily foretell

17 Edward Bulwer Lytton, Paul Clifford, ed. Juliet John (London and New York: Routledge, 1998) 8-9. Subsequent references are to this edition and will be indicated parenthetically within the text.
execution at Tyburn, Mr. Wood remarks that “[m]arriage and hanging go by destiny” (4). His statement, meant to console Jack’s mother, instead seems to reinforce her assessment of Jack’s fate and suggests a link between parentage and criminality.

All three of these protagonists are predicted to suffer execution by hanging, yet all three experience different outcomes. Paul is transported, Oliver is confirmed as innocent, and Jack is hanged at Tyburn. The issue of guilt (or innocence) is not what ties these novels together; their common elements are a young male orphan who is expected to become a criminal and the persistent question of his family identity. The genre’s use of child or young adult protagonists is important, since it raises the question of their future identity. Children are in process; they are *becoming*. The use of orphan children in all three cases accentuates the question of their family identities or origins.

In conjunction with posing questions about identity, Newgate novels are largely concerned with the ability to read character and recognize the criminal. Accordingly, the novels rely heavily on descriptions of their characters, and they encourage their readers’ careful attention to the details of physical description, in order to interpret identity and to determine whether various characters bear physiognomical evidence of a criminal nature, or “the Old Bailey cut of countenance” (*Paul Clifford* 74). *Jack Sheppard*, for instance, opens with exceedingly detailed descriptions of two characters. The first

person, whose age might be about forty, was attired in a brown double-breasted frieze coat, with very wide skirts, and a very narrow collar; a light drugget waistcoat, with pockets reaching to the knees; black plush breeches; grey worsted hose; and shoes with round toes, wooden heels, and high quarters, fastened by small silver buckles. He wore a three-cornered hat, a sandy-coloured scratch wig, and had a thick woollen wrapper folded round his throat. His clothes had evidently seen some service, and were plentifully begrimed with the dust of the workshop. Still he had a decent look, and decidedly the air of one well-to-do in the world.
In stature, he was short and stumpy; in person, corpulent; and in countenance, sleek, snub-nosed, and demure.\textsuperscript{18}

This description of Mr. Wood, to whom Jack becomes apprenticed, seems at first to portray his identity and character through his appearance. The detailed description of his clothing conveys his social standing and is indicative of his industrious nature. The passage mentions the width of his coat’s skirts, the narrowness of his collar, and the rounded shape of his shoes’ toes. Yet his clothes are not enough to convey his character. They “had evidently seen some service, and were plentifully begrimed,” yet the narrator states that “[s]till he had a decent look” (italics mine). This passage at once suggests that Mr. Wood may be read by his “decent look” and that his outward appearance is misleading.

Mrs. Sheppard, on the other hand, was a “pale, poverty stricken woman, whose forlorn aspect contrasted strongly with his plump and comfortable physiognomy” (1), and her clothes reinforce their differences in morality and social standing. Described as “tattered” and “discoloured by various stains,” her clothing correlates with the “repulsive freshness of lip denoting the habitual dram-drinker” (1). Yet she also possesses “something of a pleasing expression” and “a freshness . . . rendered the more shocking from the almost livid hue of the rest of her complexion” (1-2). Her appearance presents opposing elements: “freshness” and “an ominous cough” (2), emaciation and a hint of beauty.

Mrs. Sheppard, an ambiguous character in the novel’s opening scene, changes into “the very reverse” (129) by mid-novel. The dress and person that had indicated a double nature is now more representative of the “true” nature of Mrs. Sheppard; her

\textsuperscript{18} Harrison Ainsworth, \textit{Jack Sheppard}, ed. Juliet John (London and New York: Routledge, 1998) 1. Subsequent references are to this edition and will be indicated parenthetically within the text.
clothing is made of "the plainest and most unpretending material" (129). Moreover, her
clothes represent not just her character, but the very abstract ideals themselves: "Her
dress . . . was neatness and simplicity itself" (129). The language used to describe Jack's
mother takes a decidedly moral tone, so that her physiognomy conveys a "pure and
wholesome" and "chastened" woman. Her lips, far from indicating her status as a
drunkard, "evince[d] a total change of habits" in their "pure and wholesome bloom." The
passage suggests the existence of a "true" identity, one that was partially visible before,
but is now more patently visible. Perhaps the most pointed reference to the ability to read
identity through physiognomy is the reference to Mrs. Sheppard's "countenance," which
"had an air of refinement about it, of which it was utterly destitute before, and which
seemed to intimate that her true position in society was far above that wherein accident
had placed her" (129-30).

In these novels, then, visual signs function both to convey character and to
misrepresent it. In *Paul Clifford*, verbal information functions in the same ways. Lucy's
father, Squire Brandon, has a "parenthetical habit of speech, by which he very often
appeared to those who did not profit by long experience, or close observation, to say
exactly, and somewhat ludicrously, that which he did not mean to convey" (121). This
idiosyncrasy is first revealed during a conversation about a murder story in the newspaper
and consists of false statements about others' identities. He mistakes the neighbors for
potential rioters, unintentionally labels Lord Mauleverer "abominable" (124), and equates
ministers with villains (154). Although it is a verbal trait, it requires visual evaluation for
a full understanding. For example, Mr. Brandon, while reading the newspaper, remarks
to Lucy, "I say, corn has fallen—think of that girl, think of that. These times, in my
opinion (ay, and in the opinion of wiser heads than mine, though I do not mean to say that I have not some experience in these matters, which is more than can be said of all our neighbors,) are very curious, and even dangerous” (121). The joke is, of course, that the neighbors are very curious and dangerous, instead of the times during which these characters live. Yet this verbal slip is both incorrect and correct, particularly in a novel about criminality in the city. Moreover, the typeface used in many of these passages makes both phrases possible: one meaning is encapsulated in parentheses, and the other is joined by means of italicized print. In numerous cases, italics is used to bridge the barrier set up by the parenthesis mark. Squire Brandon’s miscommunication to Lord Mauleverer turns out to be quite an accurate statement. Referring to Mauleverer’s stance on highway robbery, the Squire asks how “your lordship [could] think me—(for though I am none of your saints, I am, I hope, a good Christian; an excellent one judging from your words, your lordship must be!) so partial to crime!” (154).

Reading is a well-established theme in the novel; Paul’s adopted mother ensures that he attains this “key of knowledge (the art of reading)” under the tutelage of Mr. MacGrawler. Paul, as he begins his lessons, reads “the life and adventures of the celebrated Richard Turpin” (10). Although he is acute and learns quickly, Paul had in fact already been taught to read by Ranting Rob, a criminal later transported for burglary (18). Learning to read is thus linked with criminal behavior. However, Paul only becomes genuinely interested in reading after he meets Augustus Tomlinson. Tomlinson, a writer for seedy, disreputable newspapers, “spouted the Latin with remarkable grace!” (24), and Paul is captivated by his dress, lodgings, and upper-class mannerisms. Tomlinson represents the limits of legibility: though he projects upper class behavior and
demeanor, he is a swindler. His appearance does not convey his true identity. Moreover, he writes false news (26), suggesting that even though signs may be legible, they may be false. Tomlinson disappears, and Paul later finds him in prison for impersonating his employer. He explains that he did not steal the man’s watch or coat, but “his private character!” (89). Changing identity is, for Tomlinson, as easy as changing clothes and carriages.

Crime and reading are linked in another manner in the novel: Tomlinson explains to Paul that criminality is largely a matter of semantics. Judgments (or readings) of virtue and criminal nature depend upon one’s point of view and the language in which it is expressed. One man’s courageous heroism is another man’s criminal violence. Legal authority is founded on just such a semantic difference:

It is so self-evident, that it is the way all governments are carried on. If you want to rectify an abuse, those in power call you disaffected. Oppression is ‘order,’ extortion is ‘religions establishment,’ and taxes are the blessed Constitution.’ Wherefore, my good Paul, we only do what all other legislators do. We are never rogue so long as we call ourselves honest fellows, and we never commit a crime so long as we can term it a virtue! (103)

Oliver Twist, in contrast to Paul Clifford and Jack Sheppard, is more accurately described as an absence or lack than as a presence, and the difficulties of reading his identity lie therein. Oliver is also a counterpart to Paul Clifford and Jack Sheppard in another sense: Dickens intended for him to be “the principle of Good” (33). We as readers know that Oliver is small, pale, and thin—that is, not very substantial—but the text does not provide a detailed description of him. Of his face, we know little except that “there was truth in every one of its thin and sharpened lineaments” (130).

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19 Angus Wilson labels Oliver a “complete cipher” in his introduction to the Penguin edition of Oliver Twist. Wilson finds fault with the depiction of Oliver, noting that “[i]t is usually said that this vacuum at the centre of the novel is a major defect of the work. Certainly it is a great artistic failure” (26).
resembles his mother’s portrait, a fact that underscores his status as more abstract quality than substance. The portrait is referred to as “a likeness,” and Oliver is its “living copy” (132). He is thus a copy of a likeness, doubly or triply removed from the substantial being that the portrait represents. Oliver’s likeness to his mother feminizes him and distinguishes him from guilty characters such as Jack Sheppard and Paul Clifford, who resemble their father and grandfather.

Dickens’s novel focuses on reading criminal nature much more intensely than reading goodness, which it associates with lack. The polarization of Oliver and Monks is one site at which this distinction is apparent. Oliver is hardly a physical being at all; Monks, on the other hand, is recognizable by his physical traits. His scar and epileptic fits enable other characters—and the novel’s readers—to identify him. He is “a dark figure” who in one scene “emerged from . . . deep in shadow, and . . . glided up to Fagin” (242). The will left by Monks and Oliver’s father corresponds with this ability to read criminal behavior, as well as with the concept of goodness as merely the absence of crime. The will stipulates that Oliver will inherit money only if “in his minority he should never have stained his name with any public act of dishonour, meanness, cowardice, or wrong” (458). Rather than defining goodness in terms of evidence of positive characteristics, the will defines it in terms of a lack of “dishonour, meanness, cowardice, or wrong.”

Each of these novels represent the limits of legibility, partially through an awareness of the ability to manipulate the signs of identity and to produce incorrect readings. Misreadings are a concern of the police administration of the time, as well. One police guide specifies the penalty for impersonating a police officer:
every person, not being a constable of the metropolitan police force, who shall have in his possession any article being part of the clothing, accoutrements, or appointments supplied to any such constable, . . . or who shall put on the dress or take the name, designation, or character of any person appointed as such constable . . . shall, in addition to any other punishment to which he may be liable for such offence, be liable to a penalty not more than ten pounds.20

Impersonating a police officer was no difficult task; the signs by which they were commonly known—their garb and gear—were easily obtained. Yet concern about the potential for fraud, if not actual fraud itself, was a widespread cultural phenomenon. In 1839, a volume was published entitled The Hand-Book of Swindling. Supposedly written by Captain Barabbas Whitefeather, the book facetiously details the “illustrious and dignified profession” (43) of swindling, including impersonation. The book’s aim is to render the reader armed for the contest of life—to prepare him for the cutting and thrusting, and picking and stealing of this eventful passage. It is [the author’s] purpose to make known a few golden rules—the result of a long and various experience—by which the attentive and quick-witted student may learn to play with men as he would play with pieces of chess, by which every move on the board of life may be his own. (23)

The swindler, the book suggests, is able to see in a particular manner: from above, as if looking at a chessboard. The ability to swindle depends upon the ability to manipulate one’s own physical appearance. An entire chapter is devoted to “The Face Necessary to a Swindler . . . and of the Use and Abuse of Mustachios” (38-56). Yet even the handbook admits that it would be a mistake to focus solely on physical appearance. Shrewdness, ingenuity, and determination are the keys to successful swindling. As the author notes, “we work by wit and not by whiskers” (38).

Not only must the swindler be adept at manipulating signs; his readers must lack the ability to decode them. Many businessmen fall prey to swindlers, the book explains, due to their lack of experience reading: "The truth is, the unsuspecting men accustomed to pore over day-books and ledgers, have not had sufficient time to learn to read human faces" (39). Such people cannot distinguish the "base-metal voice" from the sincere one. Indeed, "Tradesmen can read anything but customers' faces" (41).

In the Newgate novel, however, a clear distinction between the "base-metal voice" and the sincere one may not even exist. Contrasts such as outer form and inner substance, physical appearance and moral status, and public streets and domestic space are established in these novels precisely to be questioned and collapsed. This formal strategy also questions the effectiveness and logic of the new police system, which relied heavily on reading outer signs of criminal nature or behavior in order to punish and prevent crime.

Whereas contemporary criminology and ideology posited the categories of family and criminal as separate, only *Oliver Twist* maintains the distinction. 21 *Jack Sheppard* and *Paul Clifford* hold the two categories in suspension and allow movement between them. For example, Ainsworth's novel devotes considerable time to establishing Jack as the polar opposite of his cousin Thames Darrell, and then dissolving the differences between them. Thames "has honesty written in his handsome phiz; but as to his companion, Jack Sheppard... he's a born and bred thief" (135). 22 Terrence notes that a

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21 D.A. Miller's reading of *Oliver Twist* demonstrates how the text maintains clear boundaries between domestic and criminal categories and spaces. However, Miller's opposition, the respectable middle-class family versus the police and criminals, does not accommodate texts such as *Jack Sheppard* and *Paul Clifford*, where the family structure appears within the criminal realm.

22 In his discussion of Cruikshank's illustration of Jack titled, "The name on the beam," Robert L. Patten refers to the depiction of character through physical signs as "physiological psychology" (George Cruikshank's *Life, Times, and Art* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1996) 2: 109).
look suffices to read their respective personalities and moralities: “I seed he was one [a thief]—and a sharp un, too—at a glance” (135). Sufficient descriptive information is given that the reader may also distinguish through a literary glance:

Though a few months younger than his companion, Jack Sheppard, [Thames Darrell] was half a head taller, and much more robustly formed. The two friends contrasted strikingly with each other. In Darrell’s open features, frankness and honour were written in legible characters; while, in Jack’s physiognomy, cunning and knavery were as strongly imprinted. In all other respects they differed as materially. Jack could hardly be accounted good-looking; Thames, on the contrary, was one of the handsomest boys possible. Jack’s complexion was that of a gipsy; Darrell’s as fresh and bright as a rose. Jack’s mouth was coarse and large; Darrell’s small and exquisitely carved, with the short proud upper lip which belongs to the highest order of beauty. Jack’s nose was broad and flat; Darrell’s straight and fine as that of Antinous. The expression pervading the countenance of the one was vulgarity; of the other, that which is rarely found, except in persons of high birth. Darrell’s eyes were of that clear grey which it is difficult to distinguish from blue by day and black at night; and his rich brown hair, which he could not consent to part with, even on the promise of a new and modish peruke from his adopted father, fell in thick glossy ringlets upon his shoulders; whereas Jack’s close black crop imparted the peculiar bullet-shape we have noticed to his head. (59-60)

The contrast between Jack and Thames is imprinted on their faces. One might read the distinction between them through the writing on their faces, and yet the remainder of the novel forces the reader to constantly reevaluate this reading. For instance, Jack’s unceasing devotion to his mother prevents us from characterizing him as entirely criminal or lacking respect for authority. The distinction between Jack and Thames finally collapses when the babies who were interchangeable in the novel’s first scene are finally revealed to be related by blood: the boys’ mothers are sisters. Although they are contrasted early in the novel, the remainder of the text works to uncover the biological link between Jack and Thames.
All three novels’ preoccupation with families of origin posits criminal identity in relation to family identity, not against it or despite it. Paul Clifford’s family contains both criminality and respectability and thus consolidates those disparate elements under the single rubric of “family.” Jack Sheppard does follow in his father’s footsteps—straight to Tyburn. Even Oliver Twist’s criminal status, his innocence, is bound up with his class (read: family) status. Moreover, the themes of kidnapping and adoption in all three novels suggest that identity is much more fluid than is suggested by biological or legal evidence alone.

Although the novels challenge the ideology of clear boundaries and easily-identifiable criminal nature, they also rely on these ideologies for producing narrative resolution. In each case, the criminal nature of the protagonist (or lack thereof) is clearly established, and the protagonist is firmly situated on one side of an emphatic spatial divide, where he will no longer pose a threat or question the distinction. Hanging and transportation provide this resolution in Jack Sheppard and Paul Clifford, as Paul is literally transported across a great divide, the Atlantic Ocean. These are spatial (re)solutions, in which the problematic element is removed from the text. Oliver’s parentage, in addition to his passivity, situates him as innocent, just as Monks’s parentage is the source of his evil nature. Oliver is finally located by chance in the Maylie household, a domestic space in which he has belonged all along.
Chapter Three

“They Belong to Ourselves!”: The Return of the Discharged Convict

By the 1850s and 60s, public execution and public punishment had fallen out of favor in England. Such theatrical demonstrations of penal law were replaced by punishments within a private realm: sentences of imprisonment became the norm.⁠¹⁰⁴⁷¹ New penal codes aimed to combine the deterrence of crime with the reform of the criminal.⁠¹⁰⁴⁷² Critics of public hanging had emphasized its negative psychological effect on the general population, as well as the ample opportunity for theft and rioting provided by the massive crowds that gathered to witness the hangings. William Makepeace Thackeray had written in 1840 about the “extraordinary feeling of terror” he felt upon witnessing the public hanging of murderer François Courvoisier.⁠¹⁰⁴⁷³ However, despite his own feelings of fear and shame about the criminal and the crime, Thackeray seemed most troubled by the crowd that gathered to watch the execution:

Forty thousand persons (say the Sheriffs), of all ranks and degrees — mechanics, gentlemen, pickpockets, members of both houses of Parliament, street-walkers, newspaper-writers, gather together before

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² See R. F. Quinton, *Crime and Criminals, 1876-1910* [1910] Crime and Punishment in England, 1850-1922, ed. Martin J. Wiener (New York and London: Garland, 1984) ix: “Any system of imprisonment, therefore, which is entirely lacking in a deterrent principle would appear to be a futile instrument for the repression of crime. It is equally true, on the other hand, that no system which does not contain a reformatory principle is at all likely to produce satisfactory results. It is the aim of prison administrators to combine these principles in their due proportions.”
Newgate at a very early hour; the most part of them give up their natural quiet night’s rest, in order to partake of this hideous debauchery, which is more exciting than sleep, or than wine, or the last new ballet, or any other amusement they can have. Pickpocket and Peer each is tickled by the sight alike, and has that hidden lust after blood which influences our race.\(^4\)

Thackeray’s list of the types of people gathered to watch the execution is telling. It oscillates between respectable and lower-class types; “gentlemen,” for instance, is sandwiched between “mechanics” and “pickpockets”; “members of Parliament” falls between “pickpockets” and “street-walkers.” Charles Dickens, too, noted the “wickedness and levity of the immense crowd collected” to view the execution of Maria Manning in 1849.\(^5\) In a letter to The Times, Dickens railed against the practice of public executions, and like Thackeray seems most offended by the raucous audience, composed of “thousands upon thousands of upturned faces, so inexpressibly odious in their brutal mirth or callousness, that a man had cause to feel ashamed of the shape he wore, and to shrink from himself, as fashioned in the image of the Devil.” The editors of The Times maintain the necessity of the hangings but agree with Dickens that the “scene is doubtless the most horrid, and apparently the most hardening, that can be imagined.” While these descriptions belie a concern with the live viewing of a criminal execution, they seem at least as preoccupied with a respectable person’s proximity to the criminals within the crowd. This concern echoes those of writers in the 1820s, who viewed the potential for the intermingling of classes in the city as threatening. The concern with proximity

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\(^4\) Thackeray 107.

\(^5\) The Times, 14 November 1849.
assumed a new nuance in mid-century, however, with the decline and end of transportation of convicted criminals.

Since the late eighteenth century, the focus of English criminal law had changed considerably. While shipping convicts off to one of the colonies had served England well for over a century, colonies gradually began to refuse convicts, as they became more and more populated. As a result, the first Penal Servitude Act (1853) established hard labor at home as the replacement for penal servitude abroad. By the 1850s, Victorian penology rested on the promise of penitentiary reform, and where necessary, capital punishment was performed within the walls of the prison. In addition, mid-century Britain saw a decrease—and finally an end altogether—in the transportation of criminals, which, according to penal historian Hepworth Dixon, had been a “thoroughly English” manner of dealing with criminals.\(^6\) The first Penal Servitude Act contained a clause, however, which enabled the judge to declare that the convict’s penal servitude should take place in the colonies, so that about 6,000 prisoners were transported to Western Australia even after transportation was officially abolished.\(^7\) The slow decline in the process of transportation kept the issue in the public mind for years.

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\(^7\) William Forsythe, *The Reform of Prisoners, 1830-1900* (Beckenham UK: Croom Helm, 1987), particularly 71-4.
Crime fiction of the mid-nineteenth century voices a concern with the resulting proximity to the criminal: when the reformed criminal was successfully reintegrated into society, were there still signs by which one might identify him/her? What were those signs? And conversely, how did the criminal work to de-emphasize or erase those signs in an attempt to successfully re-enter society? Sensation novels were one vehicle for representing anxieties about proximity with criminals; by situating the criminal within the domestic, they explored the effects of the return of the criminal necessitated by the phasing out of transportation. Yet precisely because they define crime within the domestic as sensational, sensation novels find the complete reintegration of the criminal impossible. Melodrama, too, is unsuccessful at representing the reintegration of the convict, even when it insists on the innocence of that person. If fictional texts are exploring acceptable—even desirable—methods of reabsorbing reformed criminals, they are still unable, during the early 1860s, to accomplish the task. Although fiction sometimes depicts reform, its characters more often are emphatically not criminal to begin with; where there are criminals, they exhibit no remorse and refuse to reform.

Often, mid-century literature explores the ways in which the body may be used to signify reform or lack of reform, whether the reform be penal or a more general type of character reform. At the same time, these narratives express the possible inaccuracy of attempts to read the bodily signs of reform. This double emphasis suggests a reevaluation of Michel Foucault’s seminal account of the changes in penology and punishment in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Foucault underscores a shift from physical
punishment marking the body to disciplinary reform imprinting new behaviors on the mind. However, the penal styles that Foucault contrasts in the first few pages of *Discipline and Punish*, the public execution and the time-table, may have more in common than is apparent from his account. Mid-century texts suggest that imprisonment within the penitentiary, the new “[p]unishment of a less immediately physical kind,” still retains a decisive focus on the body. However, a focus on the body, if we read these texts closely, does not disappear, but is deferred until the criminal returns from the penitentiary experience. Foucault is right to state that “[p]unishment had gradually ceased to be a spectacle” (9). However, his next statement, that “whatever theatrical elements [punishment] retained were now downgraded,” should be modified. Theatricality did not disappear from the penal process; on the contrary, “punishment” was experienced long after a convict’s release from the penitentiary, well into the reintegration process.

Foucault concedes that

the hold on the body did not entirely disappear in the mid-nineteenth century. Punishment had no doubt ceased to be centred on torture as a technique of pain; it assumed as its principal object loss of wealth or rights. But a punishment like forced labour or even imprisonment—mere loss of liberty—has never functioned without a certain additional element of punishment that certainly concerns the body itself. . . . There remains, therefore, a trace of ‘torture’ in the modern mechanisms of criminal justice—a trace that has not been entirely overcome, but which is enveloped, increasingly, by the non-corporal nature of the penal system. (15-16)

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Foucault accurately notes the shift in emphasis from the body to the soul in the punishment phase of the penal process (16-24). However, the body’s importance in that process, particularly in the post-penitentiary phase, remains overlooked.

Literature of the period suggests that even after theatrical physical punishment had fallen out of practice, the criminal’s body and physical appearance were no less important a means of signifying reform. On the contrary, the body became a primary medium for exhibiting penitence and/or reform. The body of the returned convict, like all bodies, is “directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs” (25). This political field extends far beyond the penitentiary and into the society into which the reformed convict is reintegrated. The fictional texts examined in this chapter suggest that the manipulation of physical appearance was not only helpful to the convict, but was a vital part of the reintegration process.

Newgate novels, where they depicted a life after prison, had represented it far from England. They had generally derived narrative resolution from the criminal’s expulsion by means of transportation to a faraway place, thus sanitizing the novel’s setting. For example, Paul Clifford’s final chapter places Paul and Lucy in America. Paul, a former highwayman, has been both transported and transformed: at the end of the

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9 For an interesting reading of the surveillance exerted by the servants in East Lynne, see Brian W. McCuskey, who characterizes such surveillance as “a leveling gesture” within the middle class (“The Kitchen Police: Servant Surveillance and Middle-Class Transgression,” Victorian Literature and Culture 28, 2 [2000]: 359-75).
novel, he is “held in high and universal respect, not only for the rectitude of his conduct, but for the energies of his mind, and the purposes to which they were directed” (467). He is esteemed in his community for being a “useful citizen” (468) and diligent worker and through these traits has secured economic success. In fact, he proves himself more than once, gaining, then losing, and finally regaining his high economic status. Relocation to America provides the means for Paul and Lucy to begin a new life.

However, their bodies bear the marks of this transformation: a “trace of the trials they had passed through was discernible in each; those trials had stolen the rose from the wife’s cheek, and had sown untimely wrinkles in the broad brow of Clifford” (468). Despite bearing the marks of Paul’s criminal past, however, he and Lucy are enabled to start a new life in a new land. None of their new acquaintances know of their criminal past: “their present neighbours were unacquainted with the events of their earlier life, previous to their settlement at ------” (468). The novel’s omission of their exact location is strategic; it alleviates anxiety associated with proximity to the criminal. By the novel’s end, the reformed criminal and his wife are, quite simply, far from England.

With the decline of transportation as a viable option in the middle of the century, fictional texts often began rather than ended with conviction and transportation and focused instead on the reintegration of the criminal into society after reformation in the penitentiary. Authors of both fiction and nonfiction wrote about proximity to the criminal in terms both spatial and familial: how does one relate to the criminal? It is no coincidence, I believe, that this political and penitentiary climate gave rise to the
sensation novel and its preoccupation with the criminal within the family. *East Lynne* (1861) and *The Ticket-of-Leave Man* (1863) depict the criminal’s return and reintegration into society, and more specifically, into the family and the workplace.\(^{10}\) Both texts voice an anxiety about the difficulty of reading criminal identity and in response, each text produces a panoramic viewpoint from which its audience may accumulate accurate information about the characters’ identities.\(^{11}\) This arrangement, in which audience members discern much more than characters in the texts, enacts the cultural fantasy of detecting the criminal in one’s midst.

*The Ticket-of-Leave Man* dramatizes the re-entry of Robert Brierly into London society after his arrest and three years of penal servitude at Portland prison in Australia. Act one depicts Brierly’s kindness to a poor singer named May, thus establishing his good disposition and behavior prior to his arrest. Acts two, three, and four recount the difficulties of life after prison when Brierly returns to London. The play’s purpose is to demonstrate “all that stands between a poor fellow who has been in trouble and an honest

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\(^{10}\) *East Lynne* was serialized in the *New Monthly Magazine* beginning in January 1861, and *The Ticket-of-Leave Man* was first performed at London’s Olympic Theatre on May 27, 1863.\(^{11}\) I use “panoramic viewpoint” rather than referring to an omniscient point of view because of these two texts’ emphasis on their audience’s determination of the central characters’ guilt or innocence. *The Ticket-of-Leave Man*’s format as a play de-emphasizes its narrator, and *East Lynne*’s constant pleadings with its reader emphasize the importance of audience perception in the two texts.
life."\textsuperscript{12} Like the writing of many social activists of the period, the play underscores the fact that the penitentiary process continues well after the convict’s release into society, and it calls for the need for tolerance and aid in reintegrating the former prisoner into society.

However, in order to make a case for the kindness toward reformed criminals, the play first establishes its criminal’s innocence. Notably, Robert Brierly is no criminal at all; he is imprisoned for a crime he did not commit. In addition, Brierly exhibits remorse before he is even arrested and sent to prison. After remarking that he “can’t abear [his] own company,” Brierly sobs to himself: “If I could only sleep without dreaming! I never close my eyes but I’m back at Glossop wi’ the old folks at home—’t mother fettlin’ about me, as she used when I was a brat, and father stroking my head, and callin’ me his bonny boy—noa, noa—I mustn’t think o’them—not here—or I shall go mad” (I.i). Brierly is associated with compassion and kindness from the beginning, perhaps to establish a contrast between him and the characters who would later show him no compassion. After she is criticized and shunned by several parties, May, a singer in the

\textsuperscript{12} Prison reformers addressed this issue, arguing that “It will be to no purpose that we build model prisons . . . unless we find out more effectually what to do with our offenders after punishment” (Hepworth Dixon 25). See also Mary Carpenter, esp. chapter 5 of volume 1. Carpenter states that the reason society does not accept the reformed criminal is that society does not have faith in the system of reform. She advocates the adoption of a new system, under which “there will be no difficulty in the disposal of our criminals, for society will receive them,--they will be absorbed into it, and they will no longer be marked out as ‘Convicts’” (174). Tom Taylor, The Ticket-of-Leave Man: A Drama, in Four Acts, in English Plays of the Nineteenth Century, vol. 2, ed. Michael R. Booth (Oxford and New York: Clarendon, 1969) 77-163, II.i. Subsequent references will be indicated parenthetically within the text by act and scene number.
Bellevue Tea Gardens, is pitied by Brierly. Noticing that May is upset and in ill health, Brierly feeds her biscuits and wine and gives her money.

In the process of establishing the impeccable character of its “criminal,” scene one also establishes an opposing theme: multiple—usually double—identities and performance abound. Detective Hawkshaw later explains the difficulties of ascertaining the identity of criminals such as Dalton: “He has as many outsiders as he has aliases. You may identify him for a felon today, and pull your hat off to him a parson tomorrow” (III.i). In fact, Hawkshaw might as well be addressing the parson; he is speaking directly to Dalton at this time. The only character to recognize Dalton in this disguise is fellow criminal Moss. The difficulty of reading Dalton’s costumes is also established in the first scene; when Dalton enters, the stage directions indicate, he is “dressed as a respectable elderly commercial man, in as complete contrast as possible with his appearance in [the] first Act” (III.i). None of the other characters read through his disguise. The audience, however, privy to multiple perspectives and conversations and viewing the play in a “panoramic” fashion, is aware of this man’s true identity.

Criminals and detectives alike are introduced to the audience in double costumes, simultaneously revealing and concealing their imposture. The criminal Dalton, upon entering the tea gardens, is unrecognized by his partner and asks, “What, don’t twig me? Then it is a good get up” (I.i). He introduces himself as John Downy, at once explaining to his partner and to the audience the false identity he will be assuming for this particular misdeed, as well as revealing another of his aliases, “Tiger”: “There’s no Tigers here.
My name’s Downy; you mind that, John Downy, from Rotherham, jobber, and general dealer’’ (I.i).

It becomes almost useless to attempt to keep track of all the characters’ multiple identities, yet the play is also concerned with reducing those multiple identities to a single, more essential one. Dalton, with his various names, his costumes, and his assumed country dialect indicated in the stage directions, is exposed by the end of Act One, when his “hat and wig are knocked off” (I.i). The formation of a tableau on stage at precisely this point reinforces his reduction to a single identity, freezing it on stage for several seconds. As the unmasked Dalton escapes, Brierly is handcuffed, and these events remain frozen while the stage curtain closes. Thus, at the same time that the play reduces Dalton’s identity to that of Dalton-the-forger, it creates additional identities for Brierly: those of convict and of an honest, naïve young man in the city. The creation of Brierly’s identity as criminal is a misreading: his honesty and kindness have been clearly demonstrated to the audience, as has his unwitting participation in the scheme devised by Dalton. He is not genuinely criminal, and the production of his criminal identity implicates the police and legal system in the production of false identities. However, the structure of the play ensures that the audience does not produce a similar misreading. Instead, able to view scenes, hear conversations and asides that even the detectives cannot have access to, the audience members are the most knowledgeable and incisive in this scenario.
The Ticket-of-Leave Man alludes to Pierce Egan’s famous characters, Tom and Jerry, in the first act. It is a revision of the narrative of the young man’s experiences in the city, and Brierly is a less fortunate version of Jerry. During the first act, Dalton and Moss discuss their plan to ruin Brierly. Brierly is, as Dalton explains, a “Lancashire lad; an only son, he tells me. The old folks spoiled him as long as they lived, left him a few hundreds, and now he’s got the collar over his head, and is kicking ’em down, seeing life” (I.i, italics mine). Dalton’s description of Brierly alludes to Egan’s presentation of a “Camera Obscura View of the Metropolis, with the Light and Shade attached to ‘seeing Life.’”¹³ Brierly is much like Pierce Egan’s Jerry, new to the city and learning the ropes. The allusion to the enormously popular stage version of Egan’s text appears in a pun: Dalton jokes that “life in London ain’t to be seen without paying at the doors” (I.i). However, this drama’s depiction of a young man’s adventures in London is decidedly different from Egan’s more lighthearted fare. Dalton himself makes sure that Brierly “pay[s] at the doors” by “putting him up to a thing or two—cards, skittles, billiards, sporting houses, sparring houses, night houses, casinos—every short cut to the devil and the bottom of a flat’s purse” (I.i). Where Tom and Jerry were not likely to be permanently damaged by their experiences in the city, Robert Brierly is convicted and transported for the adventures in which he takes part. Moreover, Brierly is aware of the detrimental effect these adventures are having upon him. After Dalton suggestively lights his own cigar with Brierly’s, he notices that Brierly’s hands bear the marks of the city.

¹³ Egan 18.
Stage directions indicate that "the shaking of Brierly's hand becomes more apparent" at this point, and Dalton verbally calls attention to the tremors. Brierly explains his trembling hands to Dalton: "I used to sleep like a top down at Glossop. But in this great big place, since I've been enjoying myself seeing life—I don't know—[Passing his hands across his eyes] I don't know how it is—I get no rest—and when I do, it's worse than none—there's great black crawling things about me. [Gulps down a glass of wine.] I say, Downy; do you know how a chap feels when he's going mad"? Dalton diagnoses his delirium tremens as the result of exposure to the city: "The horrors! ah, he's seen too much of life lately" (I.i).

Even though Brierly is patently kind and is more gullible than criminal, the play registers an anxiety about the vestigial traces of criminality that he may bring with him back into society. After he is discharged with a ticket-of-leave, people often "dr[aw] back from [him]; there was the convict's taint about [him]—you can't fling that off with the convict's jacket" (II.i). If acting as a criminal involved imposture, becoming an honest member of society necessitates it just as much. Brierly assumes an alias not in order to commit crimes, but to lead an honest life. Upon his return, he assumes the identity of a soldier who has recently served in the military and pretends to be May's brother.

Essentialist and performative notions of identity coexist in the play. This melodrama seems invested in enabling the audience to read through imposture and to discern a "true" identity. The audience's knowledge of Brierly's "true" identity points to an essentialist notion of identity, despite his arrest and imprisonment. Mr. Gibson, his
new employer, states that an “honest face is the best testimonial after all,” suggesting that identity is visible on the body, and Dalton “can see traces of the prison crop” on Brierly (III.i). The play makes a distinction between the truly repentant man and the one who only seems to have repented. Green Jones, for instance, vows to be “an altered man” upon his entrance in Act Three. He swears to Brierly “to devote myself to the virtuous pursuit of money-making. I’m worth five hundred pounds, I’ve fifteen hundred more coming in. Not one farthing of the money shall go in foolish extravagance” (III.i). While he delivers these lines, however, he sports a beautiful new suit and is unloading parcels containing new bonnets, perfume, and gloves for his wife Emily. Neither Green Jones nor Robert Brierly has changed; their characters remain constant. However, such essentialist versions of identity do not dovetail with the concept of character as malleable, which was key to the project of reforming convicts within the penitentiary. The notion of reform rested on the sometimes unsettling idea that identity was mutable, unstable, and performed.

At times, though, different identities are donned and shed as easily as costumes. Two of Hawkshaw’s crucial tactics as a detective are assuming costumes and role-playing. In Act Four, Hawkshaw pretends to be drunk and exonerates Brierly by delivering his letter to Mr. Gibson. Green Jones easily assumes a new identity as St.
Evremond by a change of clothes and a declaration of his new name. His wife Emily claims that when “people have come down in circumstances, the best way that can do is to keep up their names . . . and I dress my hair a la Française, to keep up the effect” (II.i). Emily and Green Jones are entertainers on the stage; the various roles they play as stage performers attests to the layers of identity that the audience learns to read.

Part of Detective Hawkshaw’s function in the play is to elicit information about Brierly and to establish his upright character with the other characters in the play and with the audience. When Hawkshaw asks Mr. Gibson about Brierly, Mr. Gibson states that he’s “[n]ever had a steadier, soberer, better-behaved lad in the office” (III.i). This information, added to Brierly’s account of his own industry and humility while at Portland and his instruction to young Sam Willoughby, establish his good character; he is without a doubt “on the square,” as Dalton informs his fellow criminals (IV.i). Hawkshaw, while pretending to be intoxicated in a pub, overhears Dalton’s plan to rob Gibson’s office, as well as Brierly’s plan to alert Mr. Gibson (IV.ii). After several unknowing demonstrations of his good character, Brierly prompts Hawkshaw to admit, “that lad’s true blue after all” (IV.ii). And Hawkshaw is, after all, the “cutest detective” on the force.

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14 The name may be a reference to a central character in A Tale of Two Cities, which had appeared only a few years earlier, in 1859. The Marquis de St. Evremonde in Dickens’s novel was the representative of the aristocracy against which the hero Charles Darnay defines himself. I am grateful to Robert Patten for this observation.
This drama demonstrates that much of the process of rebuilding character takes place after the prisoner re-enters society. Brierly explains to his future wife that he must work through a series of stages, in order to finally arrive at a socially acceptable position: “I must begin lower down, and when I’ve got a character, then I may reach a step higher, and so creep back little by little to the level of honest men” (II.i). The concept of progressive levels was one that was incorporated into the penitentiary; in the prison, Brierly had worked “in the quarry-gang first, and in the office afterwards” (II.i).\(^{15}\) His life after prison is a reversal of this process, as he is forced to accept work of increasingly lower status, until, as he phrases it, “there’s no working clear again . . . the quicksands are under your foot—and you sink down, down, till they close over your head” (IV.i). Brierly explains to May that “It’s hard for a poor chap that’s fought clear of the mud, to let go the rope he’s holding to and slide back again” (III.i).

Although he suffers the fate of the returned convict, Brierly was never truly “criminal” in the first place. In fact, Brierly’s innocence may be a prerequisite for the text’s ability to represent reform. Paradoxically, in order to represent reform, the narrative first forecloses the possibility of reform. The text works very hard to exonerate this “criminal,” whose innocence it had taken great care to establish. The Ticket-of-Leave Man, then, is a play about penal reform in the sense of the law correcting itself rather than criminals. The hardships faced by the ticket-of-leave man become, for the audience, problems with the unfair treatment of a innocent man. As a result, resolution will be

\(^{15}\) I discuss the progressive levels of life in the penitentiary more extensively in chapter four.
achieved not with the exoneration of the ticket-of-leave man, who was never guilty anyway, but with the repeal of the criminal label it earlier dealt Brierly.

Although the play is sympathetic toward the ex-convict and has established his innocence, it betrays an anxiety about his re-entry into society. Brierly has difficulties securing work and participating in an economy; once Mr. Gibson learns that he is a returned convict, he loses his position at the bill-broking office. His former partner in crime, Dalton, follows Brierly and reveals his secret past to his successive employers, each of whom refuses to retain him. Joining a group of sailors, Brierly explains in act four, is his “last chance—I've tried every road to an honest livelihood, and one after another they are barred in my face. Everywhere that dreadful word, jail-bird, seems to be breathed in the air about me—sometimes in a letter, sometimes in a hint, sometimes a copy of the newspaper with my trial, and then it is the same story—sorry to part with me—no complaint to make—but can’t keep a ticket-of-leave man” (IV.i). Brierly is exposed as a ticket-of-leave man and dismissed from Mr. Gibson’s employ the morning of his intended wedding. Young May, possessing the “courage to face what’s before” them, marries him despite the discovery. Although young Sam compares marriage and imprisonment in a comic moment, the play seems more interested in questioning the former criminal’s appropriateness in work and marriage, both institutions of reproduction.

By the end of the play both Brierly and Detective Hawkshaw have had an opportunity to redeem themselves. Hawkshaw, having formerly arrested an innocent man, now uses his skills of detection to prove Brierly innocent. Posing as a drunk sailor,
Hawkshaw overhears Brierly's plan to inform Mr. Gibson of the impending robbery at his business. He arrives at Mr. Gibson's office in time to prevent the theft and arrest the thieves. This arrest corrects at least two mistakes: Hawkshaw has now nabbed the real thieves, whereas in the first scene, he arrested Brierly for their crime. In addition, Hawkshaw and Mr. Gibson now recognize Brierly's integrity. As Brierly, exonerated at last, delivers the final line of the play, he instructs Mr. Gibson, "You see, there may be some good left in a TICKET-OF-LEAVE MAN after all" (IV.iii). The play's final line echoes one penal reformer's argument that "[s]ociety will always be ready to forgive criminals if it has reliable evidence of true repentance."16 In addition to exhibiting his repentance, Brierly serves a function that was previously served by public punishment: he expresses, in a theatrical manner, the importance of adhering to socially acceptable behavior. In addition, he serves as a warning to young Sam Willoughby, who has taken to gambling: "Oh, my lad, take my advice, do! Be steady—stick to work and home. It's an awful look out for a young chap adrift in this place, without them sheet anchors" (III.i).

Brierly's admonition to "stick to work and home" gestures toward the two arenas in which the returned criminal was most problematic. Yet advocates of penitentiary reform often insisted on a strong link between criminal, domestic, and economic realms. James Devon, writing in 1912, examines the criminal in relation to the social and depicts the family as a metonym for the larger social order into which the criminal is reintegrated. He finds that the family models some of the ideal conditions under which criminals may

16 Carpenter 169-70.
be reformed successfully: “One great mistake made by those who consider social
problems is that they either regard man apart from his surroundings or as one of a mass,
instead of as a member of a family or group. Family life is the common form of social
life, and whatever its defects, it is the form that is likely to persist without very great
modification.”\(^{17}\) Modification—namely, modification of the criminal—is of great
concern for the family to whom a convict has returned, as is an anxiety about the
possibility of the returned convict modifying the family in undesirable ways.

Explaining the family as a metonym for society, however, Devon remarks that the
family is not solely based on blood lines, but is more accurately described as a group of
people bound by “a sense of mutual obligation and . . . knowledge of their
interdependence” (304). Family ties form the basis of criminal reform, since “[t]he State
is not an aggregation of men, but an aggregation of families,” and since “[i]ndividuals are
supervised in certain circumstances outside, but they are best supervised in conjunction
and in co-operation with the members of the family of which for a time they form a part”
(306). The family provides an environment in which “sympathetic contact” will
courage reform (307). Indeed, Devon claims that “[t]here is only one method by which
a prisoner is reformed, and that is through the sympathetic guidance and assistance of
some person or persons between whom and him there is a common interest” (310).

Society, like the family, is a group of people bound by a common goal: to rehabilitate fellow members.

However, even while advocating such reintegration, proponents of criminal reform also voice the inappropriateness of the criminal within the domestic. Mary Carpenter, an active member of the Reformatory Movement, argued in 1864 that the convict’s proper place was within England, not in a convict settlement in the colonies:

We might desire to rid ourselves of them by sending them off to some remote region, where Nature herself should guard them with her impregnable walls of ice, scantily yielding them bare subsistence from a barren, grudging soil;--or to some spot where they should be cut off from the civilized world by the mighty ocean,--and where their fiend-like passions should be vented upon each other, not on peaceable and harmless members of society. Many would fain thus separate themselves from Convicts; would gladly thus rid themselves of the awful responsibility which lies in the words--“Our Convicts.” (2)

Carpenter depicts the desire to rid oneself of the criminal as that which connects one so closely with the criminal element: “this very legal sentence which makes us wish to separate them entirely from ourselves, only binds them closer to us” (2). Under the new penal codes, “we subjugate their will, we confine them in our own country, and put them under such treatment as we consider best for them and for society. We therefore have doubly bound them to us, and ourselves to them. They are ours, and we cannot, if we would, shake off the responsibility arising from this relationship, however painful it is” (2). The inability to separate oneself from the criminal becomes almost sensational when Carpenter insists that convicts “are a part of our society! They belong to ourselves!” (1). Her statement might well be a startling discovery, much like Thackeray’s description of
the crowd gathered before the gallows, in which street-walkers rub elbows with members of Parliament. Carpenter, like the sensation novelists, locates the criminal already lurking within society.

Relationships with criminals and their attendant responsibilities assume an interesting cast in sensation fiction, which focuses largely on familial relationships. *East Lynne* situates crime and penitentiary reform within a decidedly domestic environment.\(^{18}\) The novel, as Lyn Pykett asserts, "explores the family as the site for the construction and legitimation of social and sexual identities,"\(^{19}\) but it also, I would add, explores the family’s potential as a recuperative site for the returned and reformed criminal. Although the murderer in the novel is eventually sentenced to be transported for life, most of the novel in fact represents domestic penitentiary reform, the penal strategy that was quickly


becoming the alternative to transportation. Whereas “The Ticket-of-Leave Man” enacts a hopeful reintegration of the ex-convict despite the skepticism with which he is met, East Lynne is reluctant to allow the criminal’s re-entry into the family, and by extension, society. East Lynne’s “criminals” are permitted to return to the family only after severe disfigurement and the adoption of newly developed identities. Ultimately, these characters cause substantial and irreversible damage to their respective families and suggest that penal systems based on reform and reintegration will create grave problems for society.

Two main narratives are juxtaposed in this novel. The first concerns Isabel, her misinterpretation of the meetings between her husband and the beautiful, young Barbara Hare, and her abandonment of her children and subsequent return as governess. It runs parallel to another narrative about criminal identity: the murder of Afy Hallijohn’s father, the accusation of Richard Hare, the concern of Barbara Hare on her brother’s behalf, and the identification of the true criminal, a gentleman named Thorn. East Lynne’s dual narratives, in fact, juxtapose mid-century penal theories with previous ones. One of the central narratives, eventually resolved with the conviction and transportation of Thorn, follows the old penal process. The other narrative focuses heavily on the reintegration of

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20 Helena Michie describes the dual plot lines as part of East Lynne’s “anxieties about doubleness” and duplicity: “Structurally, the novel depends on two crucial mirrorings: Carlyle’s two marriages—first to Isabel and then, when Isabel is presumed dead after the train wreck, to her rival, Barbara Hare—and the close relation between the marriage and detective plots, with Francis Levison turning out to be the villain of both” (Sororophobia: Differences among Women in Literature and Culture [Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1992] 72).
the wrongdoer (Isabel or Richard) into the family and the difficulties associated with that process.

The oscillation between the two plot lines draws strong parallels between Richard and Isabel. Both characters travel in disguise, and both make secret visits to their families. Isabel’s experience is frequently likened to Richard’s in this novel, but with one crucial difference: Richard’s innocence is firmly established early in the novel, but Isabel is undoubtedly guilty of abandoning her post as mother and wife. Isabel “had sacrificed husband, children, reputation, home, all that makes life of value to woman: she had forfeited her duty to God, had deliberately broken His commandments, for the one poor miserable sake of flying with Francis Levison.”21 Certainly, her status as criminal is questionable; adultery is not a crime, but a violation of cultural norms. However, the narrative collapses penal codes and cultural conventions and pronounces her actions criminal: abandonment is “the crime [she has] committed against” her family (326). If she had violated Victorian domestic ideology by deserting the home, she does so again upon entering that domestic space as governess. When she returns to East Lynne as the governess Madame Vine, the narrative labels Isabel “a criminal woman who had thrust herself into the house” (441).

Having established a parallel between Isabel and Richard, the novel sentences each character to a symbolic transportation. In a move reminiscent of the transportation

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of criminals to foreign lands, Isabel leaves England after committing her crime. During her subsequent period of penitence, Isabel assumes the identity of a foreigner, a Frenchwoman named Madame Vine. During her time away from England, Isabel develops an entirely new persona, so that when she later returns to East Lynne, “she had her role to play” (414). Richard is transported to London, where he seeks anonymity and performs arduous physical labor as a stable boy. Although he returns home periodically, his visits are presented as a threat both to his own safety and that of his family.

In fact, Richard can return home only with the protection of a disguise, a “smock-frock, his straw-wisped hat and his false whiskers” (31). In a chapter entitled “Change and Change,” Isabel’s disguise is overtly compared with Richard’s. When she first returns to East Lynne, Isabel fears recognition by a domestic servant named Joyce. Joyce leaves the room, “and Lady Isabel had taken her bonnet off, when the door opened again. She hastily thrust it on—somewhat after the fashion of Richard Hare’s rushing on his hat and his false whiskers” (410).

Both Isabel and Richard’s physical appearances are altered dramatically while they are away from England. The changes later serve as indices of their remorse and reform. After many months of hiding in London, Richard’s face “was white, thin, and full of care; and his hair . . . was turning grey” (265). His physical condition reflects his legal situation; in his own words, he is “[a]iling and wretched” (268). Isabel, too, has become gaunt, pallid and marked by regret. Perhaps most traumatically marked by train wreck, Isabel spends three months “fluctuating between life and death” (327). The
dramatic change "that had passed over her in those three months was little less than death itself: no one could have recognized in the pale, thin, shattered, crippled invalid, she who had been known as Lady Isabel Vane" (327). Her appearance is radically altered by the train wreck, and she amplifies those differences by means of a disguise. The change in her appearance is so great that the narrator calls even the reader's attention to the identity of the governess in a lengthy description in Part Three of the novel:

Look at the governess, reader, and see whether you know her. You will say no. But you do, for it is Lady Isabel Vane. But how strangely she is altered! Yes; the railway accident did that for her; and what the accident left undone, grief and remorse accomplished. She limps slightly as she walks, and stoops, which takes from her former height. A scar extends from her chin above her mouth, completely changing the character of the lower part of her face; some of her teeth are missing, so that she speaks with a lisp, and the sober bands of her grey hair—it is nearly silver—are confined under a large and close cap. She herself tries to make the change greater, that the chance of being recognized may be at an end, for which reason she wears disfiguring green spectacles, or, as they are called, preservers, going round the eyes, and a broad band of grey velvet coming down low on her forehead. Her dress, too, is equally disfiguring. Never is she seen in one that fits her person, but in those frightful 'loose jackets' which must surely have been invented by someone envious of a pretty shape. As to her bonnet, it would put to shame those masquerading things tilted on the back of the head, for it actually shaded her face; and she was never seen out of doors without a thick veil. She was pretty easy upon the score of being recognized now; for Mrs Ducie and her daughters had been sojourning at Stalkenberg, and they did not know her in the least. Who could know her? What resemblance was there between that grey, broken-down woman, with her disfiguring marks, and the once lovely Lady Isabel, with her bright colour, her beauty, her dark flowing curls, and her agile figure? (396-7)
Indeed, Isabel’s status as penitent manifests itself on her mind and body simultaneously: “the longing had become intense. It was indeed a very fever: and a fever of the worst kind, for it attacked both mind and body” (398). Her “state of mind” was characterized by “the vain yearning, the inward fever, the restless longing for what might not be. Longing for what? For her children” (397-8). The remarkable transformation in Isabel’s body is her reform incarnate. Helena Michie has demonstrated how “Isabel’s punishment is made manifest in the disfigurement, crippling, and scarring which make her painfully unrecognizable in her own home.”22 Yet the drastic physical changes brought about during her “transportation” are also indicative of her criminal past.

In order to facilitate Isabel’s return to the domestic, the novel must assert her remorse explicitly and establish a distinct division between the new Madame Vine and the former Isabel Vane. Passages such as the lengthy description cited above pepper the text, constantly emphasizing the changes in the Isabel that has returned to East Lynne. Isabel has even altered her handwriting, a feature often used as a symbol of identity during the Victorian period: “She had been striving for two years to change the character of her handwriting, and had so far succeeded that none would now take it for Lady Isabel Vane’s” (407). These alterations emphasize a central paradox of returning to the

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22 Michie 72.
domestic: Isabel alters herself in order to return to a previous space and status, one to which, because of those alterations, she can never truly return.

As with Robert Brierly in Taylor’s drama, much of Isabel’s penitentiary experience takes place after she re-enters the society whose conventions she had violated. Isabel endures a rather painful process of adapting to her new role. Displaced by Barbara’s role as the children’s mother and Archibald’s new wife, Isabel has been demoted to governess. Adjusting to her new situation, hearing her children call another woman “mother” and seeing her husband lavish affection on his new wife, “[n]ever had Lady Isabel felt her position more keenly; never had it so galled and fretted her spirit: but she bowed in meek obedience. A hundred times that day did she yearn to hold the children to her heart, and a hundred times she had to repress the longing” (427). Her days were now “made up of remorse, grief, rebellion, and bitter repentance: repentance of the wretched past” (434). Isabel’s experience becomes an extended demonstration of her true repentance and reform, as well as an extension of the reformatory process. Difficult as it might be, Isabel now must “take up her cross daily . . . and bear it as she best might: she had fully earned all its weight and its sharp pain, and must not shrink from her burden” (303). Her constant adaptations may be read as disciplinary; at times, the narrator even serves as the disciplinary agent, chastizing Isabel: “Gently, Lady Isabel! This is not bearing your cross” (483). Even so, the narrator wonders whether Isabel’s “future days, spent in repentance, could . . . atone for the past” (303).

As we have seen, Isabel is only partially able to re-enter the family. She must
assume a liminal position as governess and disguise herself from her family; that is, she cannot return as Isabel Vane, but in modified form, as Madame Vine. Richard, on the other hand, is able to return to his nuclear family, but that family is irrevocably changed. Just as Richard’s trial ends and he is declared innocent, his father embraces him and at the same time, suffers a paralytic stroke. Although his father has become “[t]ractable almost as a little child,” Richard does not assume the role of patriarch (617). On the contrary, his return seems to emasculate him. In an endogamous—almost incestuous—gesture, Richard assures his mother that he will not marry, despite what the townspeople predict: “Mother mine, I am going to belong to you in future, and to no one else. West Lynne is already busy for me, I understand, pleasantly carving out my destiny. One, marvels whether I shall lose myself again with Miss Afy; another, that I shall set on, off-hand, and pay court to Louisa Dobede. They are all wrong: my place will be with my darling mother — at least, for several years to come” (618-19.) Thus, for both Isabel and Richard, re-entry into the family is only partially possible and carries serious consequences. In Richard’s case, the resumption of the family role (as son) not only prevents him from marrying and reproducing but also cripples his father. Isabel performs the maternal function without being able to assume the maternal role; Barbara Hare has assumed the reproductive role in East Lynne.

There is a third criminal in the novel, however: Francis Levison, also known as Thorn. Levison, who murdered Mr. Hallijohn, is the one character in the novel who has actually violated the law. He is also unquestionably aristocratic. These two aspects of his
identity become inextricably linked as the novel progresses, finally converging in his penal sentence. Levison is marked as an aristocrat by the “positively dazzling” diamond ring he wears on the fingers of his white hand (188). Throughout the novel, adjectives such as “brilliant,” “glittering,” “gleaming” (485) and “dazzling” (188) mark him as a “confounded dandy” (549). He has a reputation for “deck[ing] himself out in diamond pins, studs and rings” (57). Whereas Isabel and Richard successfully assume disguises and for the most part avoid recognition, Levison’s gesture of hair-tossing, along with his dazzling jewelry, constantly reveal his true identity. Richard identifies him as the murderer by the gesture alone (277-8; 322; 370). His identity as aristocrat is one that he cannot disguise; his “dress, his manners, his tone, all proclaimed it” (549). Eventually, his hair-tossing and diamond ring become signs of his guilt, since they are the characteristics by which he is identified as the murderer. As he is declared guilty in his trial, his aristocratic qualities become even more exaggerated: “his diamond ring shone conspicuous still on his white hand, now whiter than ever” (577). His aristocratic status finally becomes his sentence; the prospect of criminal transportation “shone out all too plainly, dazzling his brain” (620).

East Lynne has, over the course of many pages (and many weeks, in the original serial publication) explored the return to the family of the reformed criminal but is, in the end, unable to sustain that reintegration. Instead, the novel resorts to strategies of resolution that we have seen in the Newgate novels and obliterates Isabel Vane (like Jack Sheppard), exonerates Richard Hare (like Oliver Twist), and transports Francis Levison
(like Paul Clifford). Levison’s inability to assume a disguise ultimately amounts to an inability to reform. In this novel, reform, along with disguise and performance, is a middle-class phenomenon. It is also, notably, not quite a legal issue. Richard is falsely accused, and Isabel, although guilty, violates convention, not the law. In fact, the narrative must perform the criminalization; it labels Isabel criminal, and it blames Richard for the problems his false accusation causes, such as his father’s stroke. Levison, however, is undoubtedly guilty of murder; that he is also fundamentally aristocratic enables the novel to attach criminal behavior to an unalterable identity category. The aristocracy in the novel is associated with passé hierarchies, loss of power, and out-of-date penal policies. As members of an ascendant class, middle-class characters are associated with change—reform—in the novel; they are the characters through which the discourse of reform is activated. Paradoxically, in East Lynne, the project of reform is accomplished through characters who are never guilty.
Chapter Four

Great Expectations, Criminal Transportation, and the Performance of Reform

To claim that Great Expectations is concerned with crime and punishment is virtually to state the obvious. A great deal of literary criticism examines the prison as a metaphor in this novel, along with Charles Dickens’s other work. F. R. and Q. D. Leavis, for instance, label Great Expectations a novel about “Newgate London.”¹ Foucauldian critic Jeremy Tambling also reads Great Expectations as a novel about a disciplinary society shaped by an ideology of punishment. However, the extent to which Pip’s progression up the social ladder replicates the penitentiary experience of his criminal benefactor remains unexamined. Pip’s close relationship with Magwitch extends beyond details such as Magwitch’s physical return to Pip’s home and symbolic adoption of him. Where reformer Mary Carpenter had argued passionately that “Our Convicts! . . . belong to ourselves!,” Pip’s progression through his own metaphorical penitentiary might be said to demonstrate that our convicts are ourselves. This chapter reads Magwitch and Pip as representatives of England’s old and new penal systems, respectively, and demonstrates how this structure provides a means for Dickens to voice his disapproval of the new system.

Pip’s movement up the social ladder takes him into London, and this movement away from the home he has known is remarkably similar to the trajectory of criminal

transportation. Like the transports who cannot return home to England, Pip finds it difficult, though for emotional and psychological rather than legal reasons, to return to his former home at the forge. Pip’s migration to the area known as “Little Britain” recalls the names of colonies that refer to their founders’ homelands: New England and New South Wales are just two. Even within London, Pip receives a written warning from a lawyer’s clerk, Wemmick, that states the matter bluntly: “DON’T GO HOME.”

Perhaps the most overwhelming evidence linking Pip’s social ascent with the penal practices of the 1860s, when the novel was written, is the division of the novel into “stages.” That the novel is presented in three sections is no anomaly in the era of the three-decker. Dickens apparently planned for the book to be issued in three volumes after its serial publication, and the three stages of Pip’s expectations correspond with the three volumes of the novel’s first complete edition. What is significant, however, is Dickens’s use of the word “stages” to refer to these sections, even in the serial publication. The term “stages” at once connotes the metaphor of travel central to both the bildungsroman and to criminal transportation, to the stages that comprised the penal practice of the 1860s, and to the theatrical performances necessitated by life both inside and outside the penitentiary.

Mid-century prisons usually aimed at reforming their inmates, although their methods of doing so varied widely. Penal servitude was neither governed by a centralized plan nor uniformly administered until quite late in the century. Until then, a

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2 Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*, ed. Angus Calder (New York: Penguin, 1985) 379. Subsequent references are to this edition and will be indicated parenthetically within the text.

3 Since only three pages of the working notes from *Great Expectations* are extant, and all three are notes for the third stage, there is no evidence that Dickens saw stages as volumes during the writing of the serial. However, Dickens’s care to renumber the chapters in the three-volume edition (so that volumes coincide with stages) indicates his intention to present them as one and the same (Charles Dickens, *Dickens’s Working Notes for His Novels*, ed. Harry Stone [Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987] 317-18).
variety of systems were in place at the prisons throughout England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland, and there was not even agreement about the primary function of these institutions: deterrence, reform, or retribution for the crimes committed. Many prisons, in an effort to encourage reform, implemented a series of progressive stages through which their inmates proceeded. Completion of all stages indicated that a convict was ready to participate in society once again.4

The sentence of transportation also incorporated the concept of stages. Beginning after the publication of the Molesworth Report in 1837, there were two different but concurrent progressive stage systems defined for prisoners sentenced to transportation. The first system involved two years on a probationary gang, three stages of "probationary pass," and finally, a ticket-of-leave.5 The second system involved an eighteen-month term at Pentonville under the separate system, transportation, and issuance of a ticket-of-leave upon arrival in the colonies. By the 1850s, primarily because the colonies began to refuse additional convicts, there was a growing emphasis on penal servitude within the penitentiary in England. Prisoners were no longer transported until they had served twelve months under the separate system and one to three years in associated labor at a public works prison. Once the third stage was reached, the prisoner was transported and received a ticket-of-leave upon arrival in the colonies.

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4 Because there were numerous penal experiments and theorists, the Victorian penitentiary housed a broad range of practices. It must be noted that there were alternative systems, and they were implemented to varying degrees, so that the names of the systems refer to a range of practices that were adapted in many ways, depending on local politics, prison architecture, the discretion of governors, and other factors.

The first third of the novel, which is the first stage of Pip’s expectations, corresponds with the first stage of criminal transportation: confinement within the penitentiary’s separate system. The separate system, also called the cellular system, was characterized by solitary confinement and an emphasis on spiritual reform. It was first implemented in Philadelphia in 1829 but was quickly adopted in England. William Crawford’s 1834 reports describe the system in detail, and Crawford and Whitworth Russell studied the system more extensively in the next few years (1836-8). Prisoners left to reflect in solitude, it was believed, would be filled with remorse for the crimes they had committed, and the monotony of solitary confinement would create in the prisoners a desire to work and to participate in their own reform. Their progress was carefully observed and guided by the prison governor and chaplain, who visited the inmates frequently.

Pip is, as we see in the first chapter, quite alone in the world. He is introduced to us in the marshes, near the graveyard where his parents and siblings are buried. He situates himself among the tombstones, including the five little lozenge-shaped markers that represent his brothers, noting that “the dark flat wilderness beyond the churchyard, intersected with dykes and mounds and gates, with scattered cattle feeding on it, was the marshes; and the low leaden line beyond, was the river; and that the distant savage lair from which the wind was rushing, was the sea; and that the small bundle of shivers growing afraid of it all and beginning to cry, was Pip” (35-6; italics mine). It is on this landscape, enclosed by the wilderness, the leaden line, and the savage lair, that Pip confronts criminality in the form of an escaped convict.

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6 Forsythe 25.
Pip's description of the landscape in this opening scene is a penitentiary one. He is closed in, bounded, by the low line and the gridwork of his surroundings. The sea represents a particularly formidable part of that landscape, as it would for prisoners destined for transportation across it. Near this spot on the marshes are the Hulks, which operated as holding tanks for prisoners prior to transportation. The landscape Pip describes is reminiscent of prison bars: the two horizontal lines formed by the marshes and river are crossed by the perpendicular figures of the sailors' beacon and the gibbet (39). As Pip watches Magwitch taken aboard the ship, it looks to him "like a wicked Noah's ark. Cribbed and barred and moored by massive rusty chains, the prison-ship seemed in my young eyes to be ironed like the prisoners" (71).

During his time at the forge, Pip learns to read and begins to work for Miss Havisham. Education and instruction in a trade were central focuses of prison life during the first stage of transportation. According to W. L. Clay, a minister and advocate of prison reform, education and work were highly suitable counterparts to the isolation of the separate system. He explained that the prisoner, once the initial shock of imprisonment subsided, "instinctively turns for relief to his books and his works; and in his attendance at school and chapel, he finds a pleasant stimulus." In fact, it was expected that once prisoners had adjusted to their new situations, they would beg for work. The prison inspectors that reported to Parliament in 1837 agreed that "employment should be offered to the prisoner, and regarded by him as an alleviation of punishment,

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7 Most critics date this scene in the 1807 to 1810 range, when the Hulks were still in operation. By the time Dickens wrote the novel, however, transportation had incorporated a system of stages, and time in the penitentiary had replaced time spent in the Hulks.
8 Dickens did not include the religious aspect of the separate system in Pip’s experience. This narrative is emphatically secular, despite Pip’s guilt.
9 Clay 43.
not superadded to aggravate it.”\textsuperscript{10} That is, work should be welcomed as something more akin to leisure.

Miss Havisham’s house, Pip’s worksite, is composed of bricks, walls, and iron bars. Pip and Pumblechook must wait at the gate until a turnkey in the form of Estella arrives with the keys to admit them. Useless, pointless work such as treadmill walking or oakum picking was commonly performed at many prisons. Prisoners at Mountjoy Prison in Ireland, for instance, were required to pick oakum, whereas those at Pentonville learned skilled trades during the first stage.\textsuperscript{11} Pip’s work for Miss Havisham recalls the circular motion of the treadmill, as well as the repetitive nature of such work. He pushes her in a garden chair “round her own room, and across the landing, and round the other room. Over and over and over again, we would make these journeys, and sometimes they would last as long as three hours at a stretch” (122-3).

A system of “classes” within the penitentiary encouraged prisoners to work diligently, in order to advance to the second stage of transportation and to improve their status once there. Prisoners wore badges that indicated their classes and their progression through each class. Pip’s badges are his “coarse hands” and “thick boots,” since they are visible markers of his class (90). The class differences between Pip and Estella are firmly established during his first visit, as she declares him a “stupid, clumsy labouring boy” (90). Pip is, however, determined to surmount this lowly label.

Dickens was a heated opponent of the separate system, although it was generally the system preferred by progressive penologists of the time. He had decried the system in an article published in *Household Words* in April 1850. “Pet Prisoners” expressed

\textsuperscript{11}Clay 45-6.
Dickens’s “grave objections” to the separate system as it was implemented at Pentonville Prison. He believed that the separate system was “calculated to pet and pamper the mind of the prisoner and swell his sense of his own importance” and did not effectively produce “a real, trustworthy, practically repentant state of mind.” This viewpoint finds its way into David Copperfield, in a serial installment written about the same time as the article in Household Words. While touring a prison near the end of the novel, David witnesses “the supreme comfort of prisoners, at any expense” and points out the “striking contrast between these plentiful repasts of choice quality, and the dinners, not to say of paupers, but of soldiers, sailors, labourers, the great bulk of the honest, working community; of whom not one man in five hundred ever dined half so well.” Viewing the prison cells and the passageways that led to the chapel and schoolroom, David reasons that even within the separate system, “there was a strong probability of the prisoners knowing a good deal about each other, and of their carrying on a pretty complete system of intercourse.” The ambition of creating the “perfect isolation of prisoners—so that no one man in confinement there, knew anything about another; and the reduction of prisoners to a wholesome state of mind, leading to sincere contrition and repentance” is effectively satirized in the scene.

The system Dickens preferred was called the silent system, although it does not seem to be the system he portrays in Great Expectations, given Pip’s verbose narration. This system was also developed in America, at Sing Sing and Auburn penitentiaries in New York. The silent system prohibited all communication, verbal and nonverbal,
between prisoners. In England, it was exemplified at Coldbath Fields, and it advocated hard labor and the treadmill. Those who broke the silence were punished physically, often harshly. It was a reformatory system, but it was rigorous and was also designed to deter crime and recidivism. In the silent system, prisoners were classified according to the severity of the crimes they had committed. Dickens considered the silent system more humane than the separate system, which tended to obliterate the prisoners’ senses of individuality.

The separate system was intended to cause prisoners to identify and come to terms with their previous unacceptable behavior and current status as inmates. Clay noted that the goal of stage one separation was “to make the treatment as penal as possible, consistently with moral improvement, in order to give the prisoner an impulse towards exertion.”16 As a result of Estella’s disdain, Pip realizes his lowly state: he “began to consider [his hands] a very indifferent pair. Her contempt for me was so strong, that it became infectious, and I caught it” (90). Pip eventually decides that his “coarse hands and common boots” are “vulgar appendages” (91-2). During the first stage of criminal transportation, it was hoped that the prisoner would adopt some of the exemplary behavior and polite speech modeled by the chaplain, governor, and instructors. Hence, Pip learns that certain cards should be called “knaves” and not “Jacks.” Pip contemplates, “What could I become with these surroundings? How could my character fail to be influenced by them?” (124). As Pip returns to the forge, he reflects on the fact that he “was a common labouring-boy; that my hands were coarse; that my boots were thick; that I had fallen into a despicable habit of calling knaves Jacks; that I was much

16 Clay 45.
more ignorant than I had considered myself last night, and generally that I was in a low-lived bad way” (94).

During Pip’s first stage, he is apprenticed to Joe, or “bound” (133). Uncle Pumblechook, who keeps seeds in “tied-up brown paper packets” in the “jails” of his shop drawers (83), presses Pip to go to the town hall to have his indentures signed. The language Pip uses to describe the event stresses not his opportunity to learn a trade, but oppression and punishment: “I say, we went over, but I was pushed over by Pumblechook, exactly as if I had that moment picked a pocket or fired a rick; indeed, it was the general impression in Court that I had been taken red-handed” (132). One of the bystanders hands Pip a pamphlet intended, as its title indicates, “TO BE READ IN MY CELL” (132). Pip speaks of being bound as Joe’s apprentice as if it were one step of a journey to execution. He is carried along by Pumblechook, he explains, “as if we had looked in on our way to the scaffold, to have those little preliminaries disposed of” (133). However, if being bound were Pip’s death sentence, his sentence is commuted to transportation once he receives word of his expectations.

At the end of the first stage, the prisoner was moved to a different prison, where he would perform labor on the public works during stage two. Pip is, at the end of his first stage, leaving for London. He has just received notice of his expectations, and he is aware that his move to London means a step upward in class. He even points out that he will leave the small space in which he has lived, the “mean little room that I should soon be parted from and raised above, for ever” (172).

Near the end of the first stage, Pip demonstrates that he is ready to proceed to the second stage: he cries. He admits that “Heaven knows we need never be ashamed of our
tears, for they are rain upon the blinding dust of earth, overlying our hard hearts. I was better after I had cried, than before—more sorry, more aware of my own ingratitude, more gentle” (186). Pip’s tears not only reveal his sadness at leaving Jo behind, but they also indicate a change in his character, a change that was crucial to the penitentiary project of reforming the inmates. Pip’s tears are evidence that he has become more “gentle,” a word referring to his more docile nature, his readiness to move to the next phase, and to the class system involved in transportation.

Crying was a typical reaction of convicts to this stage. According to Clay, the long period of isolation leads to “the lowering of the vital energies, the brain becomes more feeble, and, therefore, more susceptible. The chaplain can then make the brawny navvy in the cell cry like a child; he can work on his feelings in almost any way he pleases; he can, so to speak, photograph his own thoughts, wishes, and opinions, on his patient’s mind, and fill his mouth with his own phrases and language.”17 Pip has cried twice before: at Miss Havisham’s, upon realizing the disparity between his station and Estella’s, and in the novel’s opening scene, when he describes himself in the marsh’s penitentiary surroundings (92; 36).

During stage two of transportation, prisoners were no longer kept in solitude, but performed work in prison gangs. Accordingly, Pip’s second stage finds him moving from the isolation of the forge into the more populous city of London. His first stop is Jaggers’ legal office in Little Britain. Little Britain symbolizes the small social realm that the prison gang provided for the convict. Jaggers serves as a point of intersection (a “dangerous bridge,” as one critic phrases it) between the public and private arenas of life

17 Clay 44.
in the novel, particularly those two aspects of both Pip and Estella’s lives. An ambiguous figure, he is the liaison between Magwitch and Pip and serves as the conduit through which the expectations pass from the convict to the young gentleman. During this more social phase, Pip lives with Herbert Pocket in London, and he later forms part of a group called The Finches of the Grove (292). Referring to his mounting debt while running with The Finches, Pip labels this phase as a “period of repentance” (294).

A central focus of the second stage was progress through a series of classes within the public works prison. During stage two, Clay explains, a convict “brings with him to the public works the character that he earned at Pentonville or Millbank, and, according to this character, is placed either in the first, second, or third class, receiving a stripe or two on his sleeve to mark his class. Higher gratuities are the chief advantages which the upper classes confer, the first sixpence, the second fourpence a week.”

Prison guards observed and graded the convicts’ labor, issuing monetary rewards for marks of “good” and “very good.” Moreover, a convict received badges indicating both his class and his progress through it, so that hierarchical class status was readily visible on his clothing, even within a single class. The classes in the public works prisons mimicked those in English society through the monetary value, diet, and dress associated with each class. Prisoners of higher classes were given the opportunity to earn more money than those in the lower classes. In the second class, for instance, a prisoner could earn visitation rights and an additional sixpence per week, which would be paid upon his

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19 Clay 21-3.
20 Clay 57.
discharge. High class status entitled a prisoner to tea, beer, or a bit of variety in his diet, and he might also be permitted to dress more like an ordinary citizen.21

Whereas Pip realized his lowly class status during the first stage of his expectations, in stage two, he actually begins to change his status visibly. Pip has obtained new clothing for his new situation in London. His visit to Mr. Trabb the tailor is his “first decided experience of the stupendous power of money” (178), since Trabb dotes on Pip, thus confirming his rise in class status, and in contrast, knocks his apprentice, a boy of Pip’s age, onto the ground. In addition, Pip begins to change his behavior. During their first meal together, Pip tells Herbert Pocket that he “would take it as a great kindness in him if he would give [him] a hint whenever he saw [him] at a loss or going wrong” (201). Pip has passed into the second stage because he desires reform and solicits it. As a result of his desire to progress upward in class, he learns that Londoners do not put their knives in their mouths, that they hold their spoons over-hand, that they do not completely invert their glasses when drinking, and that “a dinner-napkin will not go into a tumbler” (204).

Pip begins to change his behavior, but he does not begin to work. Certainly, this is a key difference between the second stage of transportation and the second stage of the novel. In fact, Pip’s lack of a profession is a highlight of this section of the novel. Jaggers explains that Pip was “not designed for any profession, and that [he] should be well enough educated for [his] destiny if [he] could ‘hold [his] own’ with the average young man in prosperous circumstances” (220). Indeed, Pip is not learning a trade; removed from a situation in which he was apprenticed as a blacksmith, he is now in training to be a gentleman. Since at least the late sixteenth century, one key trait of a

21 Clay 35-6.
gentleman was the absence of manual labor from his life. Although the category of the “gentleman” was being redefined during the Victorian era and began to include government professionals, members of Parliament, and the very highest strata of merchants, a gentleman was still defined as a man who had no need to pay attention to business matters. The mid-century idea of the gentleman was based on the following paradox: one needed money in order to sustain one’s position in society, but disinterest in earning money was the mark of the gentleman. Interestingly, Pip’s training to live a life without profession provides his opportunity for class climbing. Adopting the rank of gentleman was a viable means of acquiring higher social status, because it was a position based both on aristocratic rank and on moral behavior.

Penologists and other prison philosophers feared that the experience of working with a group of other convicts would neutralize the reform that had been accomplished during stage one. As a result, prisoners were watched quite closely during stage two. Their behavior was scrutinized, and industrious behavior could shorten one’s sentence, while misconduct would lengthen this phase. Pip’s gang is a group of young men called The Finches of the Grove, who dine at fine restaurants and “spen[d] their money foolishly” (292). Although Pip develops good table manners as a result of his exposure to Herbert, during his time with the Finches, he and Herbert Pocket amass considerable debt, undoubtedly influenced by the other members’ spending habits. Jaggers has warned him against such behavior and classifies it as criminal by referring to it as “outrunning the constable” (194).

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22 Gilmour 5-6.
Pip is not only influenced by his peers, however. The very environment in which he conducts his social ascent also has adverse effects on his physical body and by extension, on his character. While leaving Jaggers' office, for instance, he consumed the whole time in thinking how strange it was that I should be encompassed by all this taint and crime; that, it should in this new way pervade my fortune and advancement . . . I wished that . . . I might not have had Newgate in my breath and on my clothes. I beat the prison dust off my feet as I sauntered to and fro, and I shook it out of my dress, and I exhaled its air from my lungs. (284)

Despite his desire to behave as a gentleman, Pip's sense of his criminality is reinforced by his surroundings.

Pip's environment marks him as criminal, and this section of the novel voices little faith in efforts to act above one's place. In a central chapter of the novel (chapter 31 of 59), Pip and Herbert Pocket attend Wopsle's performance in Hamlet. The ridiculous nature of the performance results in one of the funniest passages in the entire novel, yet it also asserts the futility of performance, as each costume and gesture is recognized as false and each actor is mocked. The incongruity of the ragged actors and the royalty they impersonate is recounted at the opening of the chapter: "The whole of the Danish nobility were in attendance; consisting of a noble boy in the wash-leather boots of a gigantic ancestor, a venerable Peer with a dirty face who seemed to have risen from the people late in life, and the Danish chivalry with a comb in its hair and a pair of white silk legs, and presenting on the whole a feminine appearance" (273-4, italics mine). The audience easily reads the discrepancy, as Pip's use of the word "appearance" indicates. The difficulty of maintaining one's performed character is demonstrated by the "noble boy in the ancestral boots," who "was inconsistent; representing himself, as if it were in one breath, as an able seaman, a strolling actor, a grave-digger, a clergyman, and a person
of the utmost importance at a Court fencing-match” (274). The scene seems to be foreshadowing Pip’s eventual fall from gentle life. Although the “noble boy” performs a wide variety of roles, he is successful at none of them.

Wopsle, who plays the part of Hamlet, falls victim to an audience unwilling to pretend: “Whenever that undecided Prince had to ask a question or state a doubt, the public helped him out with it. As for example; on the question whether ’twas nobler in the mind to suffer, some roared yes, and some no, and some inclining to both opinions said ‘toss up for it;’ and quite a Debating society arose” (275). The audience commandeers the play, adding their own dialogue and even placing action from the play in entirely different contexts: “Mr. Wopsle could not possibly have returned the skull, after moralizing over it, without dusting his fingers on a white napkin taken from his breast; but even that innocent and indispensable action did not pass without the comment ‘Wai-ter!’” (275).

It is indeed a poor performance, one that questions Pip’s ability to surmount the role for which he has been prepared at the forge. The central character in the play has been read as a hack in prince’s clothing. This scene, in which performance is so dreadful and so easily identified as performance, may also be foreshadowing another attempt at performance in the novel: the unsuccessful attempt for the ex-convict to appear inconspicuous in London. In Dickens’s personal opinion and in the novel, penal reform and class climbing both culminate in performance. Rather than genuine change or reform, which is impossible to discern, the two processes ultimately only encourage attention to surfaces and semblances.
The third stage of the novel fixes Pip in London and presents the return of Magwitch. Whereas Magwitch had been transported for life under the old penal system in effect when the story is set, Pip serves stage three of his “sentence” within England, following new penal laws in effect when the novel was written. Ultimately, this stage performs a binding together of transport and Englishman, rather than a separation. If Pip is transported at all, it is down the social ladder, as his expectations go to the crown and he finds himself unable to live the life of a gentleman. Historically, the homeland and her criminal refuse were also being forced to interact. During the 1840s and 50s, there was pressure to drastically reduce, if not completely discontinue, the transportation of criminals. Penal theory had come to prefer the promise of reform to the exile of criminals, and colonists had voiced disapproval with the practice of transportation, despite their need for convict labor. Still, English penitentiaries could not accommodate all of England’s convicts, so prisoners continued to be transported abroad. Despite many reformers’ and colonists’ desire to put an end to transportation altogether, the Penal Servitude Act of 1853 had retained it as part of the penal system. However, the act also detailed the specifics of a system of penal servitude equivalents, and its authors assumed that penitentiary sentences would eventually replace transportation.\textsuperscript{23} As part of the act, a ticket-of-leave system was introduced.\textsuperscript{24} Tickets-of-leave were not a completely new concept; they had been in use in Australia for years. Prior to 1853, transported prisoners could obtain tickets-of-leave in the colonies for commendable work or good behavior. They were effective for one year and had to be renewed, so that convicts would be forced to report annually to government offices. However, the decrease in transportation as a

\textsuperscript{23} Bailey 131.
\textsuperscript{24} Bailey 153; Hughes 307-11.
viable option changed the situation dramatically, because a ticket-of-leave would soon come to mean release back into England itself. There was no parole system in place as of yet, and there was, as might be expected, a great deal of resistance to the idea of convicts being released back into English society before they had served their sentences in full.

Lord Palmerston, deeming it too generous, was one opponent of the idea. He disapproved of its universal application and thought that the severity of the crimes for which the criminals were imprisoned should be taken into account before tickets-of-leave were granted. An article in *The Times* in October 1855 voiced a “protest, in the name of the British public, against the system of turning out criminals upon society, under the name of ‘ticket-of-leave men’, to rob us in the public streets by day, to break into our houses at night, to assault and throttle unoffending persons—in a word, to keep the country in a state of constant alarm.”²⁵ Resistance to the new system was usually based on a perceived correlation between ticket-of-leave releases and an increase in violent crime. However, there is some evidence to suggest that the press inflated the fear of such occurrences, based on only a modicum of actual cases.²⁶ Still, public opposition was so strong that the future of the system was jeopardized. Clay described the situation in a colorful manner: “The refusal of Australia to keep an open cesspool for the criminal sewage of England, however deodorized, stirred up no little British bluster at home.”²⁷

Dissatisfaction with the proposed changes came also from within the prison walls. Joshua Jebb, Chairman of the Directors of Convict Prisons, had noted the spreading discontent among prisoners at the possibility that their early releases would be canceled if transportation were discontinued altogether. He proposed that they be released into

²⁵ *The Times*, 11 October 1855.
²⁶ Bailey 158.
²⁷ Clay 29.
English society, instead of transported to the colonies. After negotiations, Jebb's plan was approved as part of the Penal Servitude Act of 1853. The revised version of the plan granted tickets-of-leave within England to prisoners who had proven themselves to be hardworking and disciplined. Serious offenders, however, were still subject to transportation.

In reality, this procedure had already been in practice. Prior to 1853, many of those sentenced to transportation never reached the colonies. Between 1834 and 1847, 3,450 convicts who had been sentenced to transportation were actually released within England.\textsuperscript{28} Between 1848 and 1852, of over sixteen thousand convicts sentenced, only about eleven thousand were actually transported.\textsuperscript{29} Nonetheless, the establishment of an official ticket-of-leave system within Britain incited strong public opposition.\textsuperscript{30}

Despite vociferous disapproval of the system throughout 1855 and 1856 in particular, the Penal Servitude Amendment Act of 1857 made very few changes to the system. The committee ruled that the ticket-of-leave system had not been in effect long enough to adequately determine its effectiveness.\textsuperscript{31} The 1857 Act did, however, equate sentences of penal servitude with those of transportation. That is, whereas prior to the Act, a sentence of seven years' transportation was deemed the equivalent of four years of penal servitude, after the Act, the ratio was seven years to seven years. This answered public outcry in part by lengthening sentences and delaying convicts' return into society.

\textsuperscript{28} Bailey 155.
\textsuperscript{29} Select Committee on Transportation, House of Commons PP 1856, XVII, Appendix 1, p. 179. See also Return of the Number of Persons Sentenced to Transportation, and those Transported for the Last 20 Years, PP 1847, XX.
\textsuperscript{30} Bailey 155.
\textsuperscript{31} Bailey 165.
Although his early work often points to unfair or harsh social conditions as the sources of crime, Dickens became more conservative in his opinions about penology and punishment during the 1850s.\textsuperscript{32} Victorian culture in general was displaying a reactionary stance toward the possibility of reform by the 1860s, and Dickens’s attitude toward reform and punishment generally tended to coincide with public opinion.\textsuperscript{33} Philip Collins notes that “[i]t is impossible, I think, to discover a consistent attitude, or a clear development, in Dickens’s various pronouncements on penal discipline. The most that one can say is that, throughout his career, he approved of severe penal measures, and inclined more towards a deterrent than a curative policy, and that the inclination became stronger, and was more vehemently expressed, the older he grew.”\textsuperscript{34} Whereas early novels present characters with which readers could sympathize, such as \textit{Oliver Twist}’s Nancy, by October 1868, seven years after \textit{Great Expectations} appeared in full, Dickens published an article called “The Ruffian” in \textit{All the Year Round} in which he called for more stringent penalties for released convicts with questionable reformation and for stricter penalties for petty criminals.\textsuperscript{35} Moreover, throughout the 1850s and ’60s, numerous articles in \textit{Household Words} and \textit{All the Year Round} voiced misgivings about the ticket-of-leave system. Although most of these articles were written by Dickens’s colleagues, not by Dickens himself, they were published under his editorship, and it is well known that he did not publish viewpoints contrary to those of his own. By the 1860s, it seems, Dickens thought the expectations for reform were too great, partially because reform—indeed, criminal nature—was so difficult to read.

\textsuperscript{33} Collins 172.
\textsuperscript{34} Collins 170.
\textsuperscript{35} Collins 173.
In the essay "Pet Prisoners," Dickens had attempted to develop "some means of judging" whether the separate system was capable of "producing a real, trustworthy, practically repentant state of mind" in prisoners. He determined that it was not possible to discern whether a prisoner was reformed, but there were many reasons to suspect that he was not. Because of the system of stages and classes within the penitentiary, prisoners had every possible inducement, either to feign contrition, or to set up an unreliable semblance of it. If I, John Styles, the prisoner, don't do my work, and outwardly conform to the rules of the prison, I am a mere fool. There is nothing here to tempt me to do anything else, and everything to tempt me to do that. The capital dietary (and every meal is a great event in this lonely life) depends upon it; the alternative is a pound of bread a day. I should be weary of myself without occupation. (401)

The occupation Dickens refers to is performing the role of the penitent; Pip's occupation as gentleman is not much different. He is occupied with maintaining the semblance of gentility. Dickens's description of the pet prisoner is inflected with the language of the class systems within and without the penitentiary. The fictitious John Styles, as his name suggests, behaves in the manner demanded by his environment. He considers, "I should be much more dull if I didn't hold these dialogues with the gentlemen who are so anxious about me. I shouldn't be half the object of interest I am, if I didn't make the professions I do" (401). The dialogues he holds with the prison chaplain are no doubt theatrical, as are his "professions." Ultimately, the issue of reform is secondary to that of performance: "Therefore, I John Styles go in for what is popular here, and I may mean it, or I may not" (401).

Dickens wrote another article in which he discusses the difficulties of reconciling the visible behavior and appearance of a convict with the state of his mind. "The

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36 Dickens, "Pet Prisoners" 396. Subsequent references will be indicated parenthetically in the text.
Demeanor of Murderers” was published in *Household Words* in June 1856, and it was intended to explain the discrepancy between “a very wicked murderer” recently on trial at the Old Bailey and “his complete self-possession, . . . his constant coolness, . . . his profound composure, . . . his perfect equanimity” (477). Dickens explains that, rather than a case of artifice, the “physiognomy and conformation of the Prisoner whose trial occasions these remarks, were exactly in accordance with his deeds; and every guilty consciousness he had gone on storing up in his mind, had set its mark upon him” (477). Such an countenance, the murderer states, “is the natural companion of my crimes” (478-9). His appearance is not inconsistent with his behavior as a murderer, but is the sign of the “cruelty and insensitivity” that failed to prevent his criminal behavior in the first place (481).

During the middle of the article, however, Dickens points out that accounts of the prisoner’s calm demeanor were not entirely accurate. A more perceptive observer would have noticed that the murderer was

*not* quite composed. Distinctly *not* quite composed, but on the contrary, very restless. At one time, he was incessantly pulling on and pulling off his glove; at another time, his hand was constantly passing over and over his face; and the thing most instanced in proof of his composure, the perpetual writing and scattering about of little notes, which, as the verdict drew nearer and nearer, thickened from a sprinkling to a heavy shower, is in itself a proof of miserable restlessness. (478)

However, this image of the uneasy prisoner is abandoned in order to establish the association of his coolness with his insensitivity. Just as the perceptive observer would have noticed the nervous behavior of the prisoner at the bar, a careful reader of the article notices the ways in which this information destabilizes the conviction of the remainder of the article. Placing words in the mouth of the prisoner, Dickens remarks, “Why man, my
demeanour at this bar is the natural companion of my crimes, and, if it were a tittle different from what it is, you might even begin reasonably to doubt whether I had ever committed them!” (478-9). In fact, Dickens himself has included evidence that the prisoner’s behavior is more than “a tittle different,” and has thus established doubt, in the midst of what is otherwise presented with utter certainty. Despite the conviction with which the article is narrated, the difficulty of establishing a clear correlation between criminal identity and criminal behavior remains.

Early in *Great Expectations*, a group of characters gathered around a fireplace at a local pub, listening to Mr. Wopsle’s colorful reading of a crime report from a newspaper. Wopsle not only read the story, but he also acted it out: “He gloated over every abhorrent adjective in the description, and identified himself with every witness at the Inquest. He faintly moaned, ‘I am done for,’ as the victim, and he barbarously bellowed, ‘I’ll serve you out,’ as the murderer” (160). In short, by means of reading, Wopsle “was imbrued in blood to the eyebrows” (160).

Just as Wopsle brings his audience to the “verdict Wilful Murder,” a stranger in the pub (who is later revealed to be the lawyer Jaggers) objects to the procedure. Jaggers not only questions the verdict Wopsle has convinced his audience about, but he also questions the assumptions Wopsle’s reading is based upon. The legal system requires that all witnesses be cross-examined, for instance, and that all those accused be considered innocent until proven guilty. Wopsle’s performance is exposed as exactly that: a performance, as Jaggers notes the points at which Wopsle has made interpretive leaps. The listeners “began to think Mr. Wopsle full of subterfuge” and “began to
suspect that Mr. Wopsle was not the man we had thought him, and that he was beginning to be found out” (162).

In this scene, Wopsle first imitates the various roles in the criminal case and is then established as the criminal. Jaggers’ questioning contains all the markings of a cross-examination, and he makes use of his own set of theatrics in order to discredit Wopsle. Wopsle’s reading blends the realms of law and entertainment, but so does Jaggers’ questioning. The level of detail with which Pip describes the scene is evidence of this. Jaggers puts on a show as he speaks, “looking round at the rest of the company with his right hand extended towards the witness, Wopsle” (162). As a result, the listeners “were all deeply persuaded that the unfortunate Wopsle had gone too far, and had better stop in his reckless career while there was yet time” (162-3). The language Pip uses to narrate this event links Wopsle with characters from the Newgate novel, or with the accused murderer in the newspaper story. Tales of the “reckless career[s]” of famous criminals (and this was a “highly popular murder,” Pip points out) were standard Newgate and newspaper fare. Wopsle is finally judged as criminal because he has performed the role and has been exposed; acting criminal makes him so.

Jaggers’ speculation that the juryman might return “to the bosom of his family” is significant, and it is metonymic for what is happening in this scene. Wopsle’s reading, which had been conducted for entertainment, is turned into a trial itself, when Jaggers cross-examines Wopsle about his reading. The crowd gathered around the fire becomes the jury for the accused Wopsle, who, Jaggers notes, might declare a fellow citizen guilty without allowing him the assumption of innocence required by law. Such a person “might be summoned as a juryman upon this very trial, and, having thus deeply
committed himself, might return to the bosom of his family and lay his head upon his pillow, after deliberately swearing that he would well and truly try the issue joined between Our Sovereign Lord the King and the prisoner at the bar” (162). The puns in Jaggers’ theatrical speech were not lost on Dickens’ readers. The “issue” at stake might very well be the weekly installment of *Great Expectations*, and “the prisoner at the bar” is not only the accused man in the newspaper account, but Wopsle at the pub. Moreover, a member of the jury has “deeply committed himself,” thus linking the language of sin (the commission of sin), the penal system (being committed to trial, committing a crime) and determination to uphold the law (commitment to the laws of England). Jaggers’ assertion that the juryman might “return to the bosom of his family” suggests that the domestic and the crimino-juridical arenas are not distinct, but interrelated. The third stage of the novel insists on the interdependence of these two realms. England’s criminal population is, this passage points out, not distinct from the rest of the population, even by legal standards, and Jaggers embodies the connection between these two in the novel. Upon Magwitch’s return, Pip becomes aware of what he “was chained to, and how heavily” (346). In fact, Pip has been chained to this convict since the episode on the marsh, despite his efforts to break free.

Although there was debate about whether actual ticket-of-leave men should be required to divulge their criminal pasts to potential employers, Magwitch’s past is readily visible. Pip laments that “there was something in him that made it hopeless to attempt to disguise him. The more I dressed him and the better I dressed him, the more he looked like the slouching figure on the marshes . . . from head to foot there was Convict in the very grain of the man” (352). For Magwitch, disguise is impossible, and the question of
reform seems moot. Magwitch bore “a savage air that no dress could tame,” and although he promises to “wear a gen-teel muzzle,” his criminal identity cannot be covered by the powder on his face, which is but a “thin layer of pretence” (352, 355, 353).

The fact that the narrative of Magwitch’s return and unsuccessful reintegration—unsuccessful because it leads to his death and to the demise of his dream of creating a gentleman—runs parallel to Pip’s class-climbing narrative is important. Both narratives require the erasure of an old identity and the adoption of a new one and thus insist upon identity as malleable rather than fixed. This theme is also prevalent in Pip’s emphatic lack of a paternal inheritance, where adoption of a new identity, and of children, figure prominently. The narrative’s establishment of Magwitch as a surrogate father (Magwitch insists, “I’m your second father. You’re my son” [337]) and the subsequent death of this father serve as gestures of distancing oneself from one’s criminal heritage, during a time when proximity with criminals is forced upon English society. When the convict returns to Pip, he is unable to conceive of himself as a gentleman any longer: “[a]ll the truth of my position came flashing on me; and its disappointments, dangers, disgraces, consequences of all kinds, rushed in in such a multitude that I was borne down by them and had to struggle for every breath I drew” (336). Pip is unable to speak and feels as if he is suffocating; his behavior is described in this passage as “wild” more than once (336; 337). The difficulty with which Pip questionably maintains his gentlemanly behavior finally ends when “the room began to surge and turn” and Pip faints (337).

If Magwitch is an unsuccessful actor and Pip struggles with performance, there are highly successful actors in the novel, as Magwitch reveals in his narration of his and
Compeyson’s trials. The emphasis of his narrative is on Compeyson’s disingenuousness and on the resulting success of his performance. Magwitch underscores “what a gentleman Compeyson looked, wi’ his curly hair and his black clothes and his white pocket-handkerchief, and what a common sort of wretch I looked” (364-5).

Compeyson’s costume and language establish him as a gentleman, while Magwitch’s appearance and speech place him securely within the criminal class. In fact, both men have participated in the same crime, but their performances before the jury situate them in very different social—and criminal—strata. Compeyson’s lawyer capitalizes on the costume, pleading to the jury, “My lord and gentlemen, here you has afore you, side by side, two persons as your eyes can separate wide; one, the younger, well brought up, who will be spoke to as such; one, the elder, ill brought up, who will be spoke to as such” (365, italics mine). In the courtroom, dress determines guilt and innocence: “Can you doubt,” the lawyer asks, “if there is but one in it [the crime], which is the one, and, if there is two in it, which is much the worst one?” (365). The jury reads each man’s character according to his appearance, unlike the audience members who read appearance as appearance in *Hamlet*.

Compeyson proves to be a more successful actor than is Wopsle. Compeyson, who has been educated and socialized with gentlemen, speaks to the jury “wi’ his face dropping every now and then into his white pocket-handkercher—ah! And wi’ verses in his speech, too,” while Magwitch, brought up as an orphan, can “only say, ‘Gentlemen, this man at my side is a most precious rascal’” (365). Even though Magwitch correctly labels Compeyson, his identification of Compeyson as criminal is disregarded by the jury, who recommend mercy for Compeyson but punishment for Magwitch. Magwitch
explains that their respective sentences reflect the ways in which they are perceived:

“ain’t it him as gets seven year, and me fourteen, and ain’t it him as the Judge is sorry for, because he might a done so well, and ain’t it me as the Judge perceives to be a old offender of violent passion, likely to come to worse?” (365, italics mine). Magwitch classifies Compeyson not as a gentleman, but as a person who “was a dab at the ways of gentlefolks” (361). That is, for Magwitch, Compeyson’s behavior does not reveal his character, but his skill at manipulation, sleight, and acting. Moreover, Compeyson’s behavior in the courtroom re-enacts his crime; his “business was the swindling, handwriting forging, stolen bank-note passing, and such-like” (362). Since his performance is successful before the jury, his repetition of the criminal behavior for which he has been arrested serves to lessen his sentence.

The chapter in which Magwitch narrates the Compeyson trial appears immediately after one in which Pip has voiced the futility of costume in disguising identity. Pip, dwelling on Magwitch’s “savage air that no dress could tame,” rattles off a list of behavior that denotes his benefactor as criminal:

   In all his ways of sitting and standing, and eating and drinking—of brooding about, in a high-shouldered reluctant style—of taking out his great horn-handled jack-knife and wiping it on his legs and cutting his food—of lifting light glasses and cups to his lips, as if they were clumsy pannikins—of chopping a wedge off his bread, and soaking up with it the last fragments of gravy round and round his plate, as if to make the most of an allowance, and then drying his finger-ends on it, and then swallowing it—in these ways and a thousand other small nameless instances arising every minute in the day, there was Prisoner, Felon, Bondsman, plain as plain could be. (352-3)

Pip’s obsession with Magwitch’s table manners may very well be related to his own lack of table manners when he joined Herbert Pocket in London. Magwitch reminds Pip of
his own humble beginnings and threatens his desire to appear as a gentleman. The two have attempted in quite similar ways to develop new behaviors and identities.

Whereas stages one and two of the novel presented a generalized disciplinary society, stage three presents a generalized theatrical society. The result of discipline, Dickens is pointing out, is not reform, but performance. Wopsle’s third performance is presented in this section of the novel, when Pip attends the Christmas play. During the performance, the dynamics of seeing and being seen are not unidirectional, but are reciprocal. Pip “observed with great surprise, that [Wopsle] devoted [his time on stage] to staring in my direction as if he were lost in amazement. There was something so remarkable in the increasing glare of Mr. Wopsle’s eye, and he seemed to be turning so many things over in his mind and to grow so confused, that I could not make it out” (397). As Pip watches the play, in which Wopsle might well be playing Magwitch, the enchanter “coming up from the Antipodes” (397), he is also being watched. From the stage, Wopsle can see that someone in the audience has followed Pip and is lingering nearby, “like a ghost” (398). The ghost in this scene recalls the ghost in the last performance that Pip attended: Wopsle’s performance of Hamlet. It also evokes the ghostly figure of Magwitch who appeared in the novel’s opening scene amidst Pip’s family’s graves. The ghost watching Pip in the theater, however, is the nemesis of the ghost in the opening scene, and he is also quite a skilled performer.

What ultimately has much more influence on the situation of the characters in the novel is performance. The point is not so much that Magwitch, in his criminal past, has acted badly, but that he’s a bad actor. Although his behavior has changed since his conviction, he can perform no more skillfully now than he did at his trial. At the trial,
one might argue, he didn’t act at all, and the result was a lengthy prison sentence. Ultimately, Pip does behave in the manner of a gentleman, paying off his debts and becoming a partner in Clarriker’s firm. Although the narrative’s returned convict is conveniently killed off, Pip has come to terms with his past. He has reconciled his differences with Joe and has been humbled by Biddy’s marriage to Joe rather than to himself. That Pip is thwarted from becoming a gentleman in terms of wealth is far less important than that he master the art of acting appropriately.
Chapter Five

Scandal, Self-Help, and Sensation Fiction

By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the Metropolitan Police had overcome a great deal of resistance and, although they were still often criticized, they were at least as often regarded with respect. London’s police had become a symbol of the city’s greatness. One observer from New York found “the commanding figure of the London policeman, standing serene, potent, and dignified amidst the crush in the congested thoroughfares” to be a symbol of “the majesty of the law.” The policeman had become, by the turn of the century, a “worthy representative of a free people.”¹

Yet in 1877, a notorious scandal rocked Scotland Yard: three of its Chief Inspectors, the highest echelon of officers, were arrested, tried, and convicted for their role in a horseracing scheme.² This case, known as the Turf Fraud Scandal, had a lasting impact on the shape of the police: as a result of the case, the detective force from Scotland Yard was restructured in order to provide more lateral surveillance between officers and to increase their accountability to one another. There were actually two trials associated with the frauds: one in which a group of confidence men were convicted for

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the turf frauds, and a second in which the detectives were indicted for their role in the frauds. The convicts, William Kurr, his brother Frederic, Henry Benson, and Charles Bale, were convicted of forgery in April 1877, and a man named Edwin Murray was found guilty as an accessory after the fact. In short, they had attained money from several people, claiming to invest it at the racetrack. A French woman named Madame de Goncourt had given them a little over £10,000, but the amount they had obtained from all sources exceeded £100,000. Her solicitor, Mr. Abraham, became suspicious and insisted that she report the matter.

Interestingly, the fraud the men had committed depended largely on textual representations of themselves. In order to attract potential investors, they had printed a fake newspaper, the “Sport,” and had used it to legitimize their scheme. It contained racing news and statistics as well as information about themselves and their “company.” They had also written false notes from a nonexistent bank and signed them with a fictitious name, George Simpson. After Madame de Goncourt filed a report, Scotland Yard took up the case, and the fraudsters were arrested at Rotterdam, where they had absconded in an effort to escape the law. William Kurr and Benson were each sentenced to fifteen years imprisonment at the Old Bailey. In order to reduce their sentences, they revealed that Chief Inspectors John Meiklejohn, William Palmer, and Nathaniel Druscovitch had played a role in the crimes.
Whereas Kurr, Benson, and company were convicted of forgery with intent to defraud, the detectives were charged with conspiracy to prevent the due course of law. Inspector Meiklejohn had long been accepting bribes in return for alerting the con artists of any police activity regarding their scheme. After the investigation of the confidence men had become more intense, Meiklejohn had suggested that Druscovitch and Palmer should also be bribed. Superintendent Adolphus Williamson most likely began to suspect corruption in his department when the arrest in Rotterdam was not accomplished straightforwardly. Druscovitch had hesitated an inordinate amount of time in the city, allowing the criminals time to escape. The inspectors' solicitor Edward Froggatt had sent a false telegram ordering the release of Benson and companions upon their arrest in Rotterdam, claiming that they were not the men Scotland Yard was looking for. Although clever, his telegram failed. The men were not released, but were brought to London to stand trial beginning in April 1877.

The detectives' involvement in the frauds bore a strong class inflection. Druscovitch borrowed money from Kurr to help pay back a debt his brother had incurred. The bribes Meiklejohn had received included one installment of £500, a substantial amount of cash in comparison with his modest annual salary. The Police Guardian noted the connection between low pay and temptation to collaborate in crime:

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3 Froggatt was also declared guilty for dictating a false telegram as well as tampering with witnesses at the trial of Kurr, Benson, and the others. Chief Inspector Clarke had also been arrested but was later acquitted.  
4 The Times, 3 August 1877, 11.  
5 The Guardian, 21 November 1877, 1607.
“It is as evident as anything can be, that the men accused were, when the nature of the responsibility imposed upon them is taken into account, miserably paid.”\(^6\) Again, in November, the same paper remarked that although no lenience should have been given to the accused detectives, “it is impossible not to see that five hundred pounds is a very serious inducement to a man with a large family which he is endeavouring to bring up not so much in a respectable as in a superior manner, and whose salary actually does not reach three hundred pounds a year.”\(^7\) Interestingly, immediately below this article is the announcement that a new version of the police manual was ready for distribution, as if reminding its readers, who were primarily policemen, of the regulations they had pledged to follow.

The Turf Fraud Scandal was not only a legal matter; it was also a noteworthy source of entertainment at the time. The trial was announced in the papers as “notorious,” “extraordinary,” and “ingenious” and was dubbed the “‘big thing’ of the sessions” of 1877.\(^8\) Newspapers featured lengthy transcripts of the trial’s proceedings, many of which are punctuated with parenthetical indications of laughter in the courtroom. Tickets were sold to help manage the crowds that were expected to attend the trial.\(^9\) Even a highbrow

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\(^6\) The Police Guardian, 12 October 1877, 2.
\(^7\) The Police Guardian 23 November 1877, 2.
\(^8\) Graphic 27 October 1877.
\(^9\) Police Guardian 26 October 1877, 3. Although not as many people were in attendance as was at first expected, the author of this article feels that “[public interest] will doubtless revive during the three weeks the trial is expected to last.”
paper such as the *Times* noted that the Turf Fraud Scandal “was a romantic case, and had excited great public attention.”

The trial was most definitely a sensational event in Victorian culture, and the press represented it in a manner that capitalized on its sensational aspects. Newspapers thrived on the sensation derived from the possibility that beneath the respectable veneer of detective was a more true criminal identity. At first, and for quite some time, reports of the case were able to operate according to the mechanics of sensation. Sensational events, Ann Cvetkovich explains, “often turn on the rendering visible of what remains hidden or mysterious, and their affecting power arises from the satisfaction or thrill of seeing.” The inspectors’ uniforms had not signaled their identity, but had masked it. The exposure of criminal identity beneath tenuous police respectability was an event that Victorians bought tickets to witness.

However, by July this “extraordinary” and “ingenious” case had become a very tiresome and “very painful one.” The trial “dragged on,” as the papers noted, and the sometimes dull narrative constituted by the trial seemed at times to be at odds with the serial format in which it was being presented to the public. Papers that had once reported that the “case . . . continues to excite great interest” now noted that the trial “drags on its weary length.” The police’s status as criminal was no longer a scandal, but was a given.

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10 *Times*, 20 April 1877.
12 *Times*, 20 July 1877.
13 *Graphic*, 11 August 1877; *Graphic*, 22 September 1877.
The papers turn instead to a strategy of claiming prior knowledge, and depicting what was previously considered scandalous as easily guessed, predictable, completely ordinary, and overdetermined. For instance, the Observer noted that the "facts . . . [of the case] are such as we ventured to anticipate they would be" and that the events that "followed can easily be guessed." In this case, what seems to be on trial is the instability of identity, the tenuous nature of the category of "policeman," and the concomitant anxiety of the public's inability to read the outer signs of identity. Once revealed as criminal, the newspapers concede that "inspector" was but a veneer covering a more suspect, more true, identity.

The close connection between the categories of police and criminal was a fundamental assumption of the police force: the police operated under the assumption that identity categories can be crossed, that identity is unstable and that criminals can be reformed. Yet the police and its commissioners were constantly asserting their differences from the lower classes. In the trial for the Turf Frauds, concern about the police mingling with criminals was addressed by the testimony of one Inspector Shore, who was a witness for the defense. Shore noted that "he had often found it necessary to receive information, even from thieves themselves." In addition, Meiklejohn's lawyer admitted that "[n]o doubt he had mixed himself up too much with bad characters."
Ultimately, the newspaper reports attempted to fix identity. The papers’ static materiality, including snapshot-like graphics that freeze events in time, encouraged readers to observe as if identity were not fluid, as if identity categories belonged on people like headlines on an illustration. The Turf Fraud narrative ultimately attempted to channel the exposed police identities into a legal matter, so that they might be stabilized. Once the detective officers were on trial, the majority of their defense was based on character witnesses. Importantly, these character testimonies often emphasized adherence to the rules of the police guidebooks, and they ran directly counter to accusations of inappropriate lower-class behavior by the police. For instance, Detective Clarke's lawyer made the following defense: “Against the really unsupported testimony of the convicts, he [the lawyer] could, he said, set Clarke's high character, and the confidence and esteem of his employers by whom he had been frequently rewarded.”¹⁷ Concern for the character of the police is voiced by an article entitled “The Convicted Detectives,” in the Graphic: “The matter is understood to be under the consideration of the Home Secretary, and an official inquiry will in all probability be ordered. Confidence in the force has been so rudely shaken that nothing but a most searching public investigation can possibly re-establish it.”¹⁸ And in the end, both Druscovich and Palmer were recommended to mercy by the jury, on account of “previous good character.”¹⁹

¹⁷ Guardian, 26 September 1877, 1311.
¹⁸ Graphic, 1 December 1877, 523.
¹⁹ Guardian, 21 November 1877, 1607.
Yet while the news situated the turf frauds as a scandal, Victorian culture endorsed some strikingly similar efforts at constructing and re-making identities. The amount of energy focused on reassuring the public about the character of these policemen echoed a larger effort on the part of the force to associate police identity with middle-class behavior. Class identity was important for the police, because their authority was constantly being questioned, largely on the basis that they were corruptible because they were recruited from the lower classes. What the trial concealed or omitted was the fact that the policeman was an identity that had only very recently been constructed and was still being consolidated. The average policeman’s salary was quite low, and policing was far from a gentleman’s profession. The police were thought to be vulnerable to corruption not only because they were recruited from the lower classes, but also because they were constantly exposed to urban problems. During this time, historians have demonstrated, environment was increasingly coming to be understood as having an influence on one’s character. Criminality was becoming viewed less and less as a moral matter, and more and more as a function of environmental conditions.\textsuperscript{20} The formation of the metropolitan police involved strategic class positioning on the parts of the commissioners. The force was publicized as respectable and as quintessentially middle class, yet it experienced incessant contact with potentially corrupting influences of criminals and the city.

In an article for a popular weekly magazine, Harriet Martineau pointed out that police work gave one “a degree of personal distinction” and enabled social mobility for many young men. Membership in the force enabled one to “pass along the street somewhat more proudly, and under more notice than the artisan in his apron and paper cap, or the labourer in fustian, or bearing the porter’s knot.”21 Although police work was often harsh and the pay was low, it did offer the promise of respectability to many young men from the working classes or from rural areas.22

This respectability was carefully manufactured, however, through selective hiring practices and a training program designed to fashion the new recruits into embodiments of the ideal policeman and exemplars of middle class values. From the beginning, the recruits were hired because they displayed certain characteristics thought to be possessed by the ideal policeman. The selection criteria were based primarily on the physical requirements for the job and on the character of the applicant. Police work required physical strength, stamina, a steady temperament, and courage. Men between the ages of 18 and 35 were considered for employment when the new force was organized; by the end of the century, the age range had narrowed to 20 to 27.23 Police Commissioners

Charles Rowan and Richard Mayne agreed before a parliamentary committee that policemen must "be men of considerable bodily strength and of robust constitutions."  

Harriet Martineau wrote that during the applicants' physical examination, the police surgeons "will choose the men who have the broadest chests, the best built spine and trunk, the most healthy limbs, vigorous heart, clear brain, and acute senses" (523). The hiring committees sought men with height, strength, good health, and good hygiene.  

The policeman's body was of a vital symbol of the force's authority and propriety, and it came to signify public safety and civic order. Height, in addition to his uniform, made an officer conspicuous. This visibility facilitated the aims of preventing crime and the policeman's role as public servant: citizens, as well as superior officers, could readily spot a police constable. In 1829, the height requirement was five feet seven inches, which was taller than the average Englishman; this increased by two inches by the end of the century.  

As interesting as the physical requirements for applicants are some of the reasons for rejection. Health issues such as flat feet, which would prohibit one from walking one's beat, and poor vision, which would prevent an officer from careful scrutiny of his surroundings, were of course reasons for rejection. But ailments such as

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24 PP 1834, vol. 16, Metropolitan Police, 4. Rowan and Mayne were the first commissioners for the new police, and they served lengthy terms (ending in 1850 and 1868, respectively).
26 Miller 26; "The Policeman's Diary," All the Year Round Ser. 3.1 (5 Jan. 1889): 6-11, 7-8.
27 Martineau depicts a typical surgeon "dismissing many who never imagined they had a flabby heart, or muscles which would not bear a strain, or legs which would soon become diseased from eight hours a day spent on foot" (523).
venereal disease and facial deformities also appear in police records as reasons for rejection. Rejection on the basis of a sexually transmitted disease may have been due in part to the desire to maintain a low overturn rate, but the resistance to an officer with facial deformities was almost certainly due to the desire to hire men of certain physiques and physical features. Applicants with poor hygiene were also rejected; the police were to be young, strong, healthy, and clean.

Although physical qualifications were strictly adhered to, “moral character [was] of even more essential importance.” Applicants were required to provide character recommendations from respectable people, else they were weeded out. The commissioners wanted candidates who were “even-tempered and reserved, middle-class qualities not often found among the Victorian working classes.” The police were described by one journalist as a class that “has been cultivated successfully into the possession of rare virtues and abilities.” Qualities considered apt for detective work included “dogged pertinacity in watching, thoroughness of purpose, an absence of imagination, and downright sterling honesty.” Because constables were hired only to fill jobs at the lowest ranks and were expected to work their way up, the job also required

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28 Interestingly, there was no official guideline for race; the only requirement, aside from the physical ones mentioned, was that recruits be male and British subjects.
30 Innes Shand 601.
32 “The Police: Their Work...” 293.
33 Warren 587.
During training, “the first virtues inculcated upon [a recruit] are patience, perseverance, and vigilance. At his best, he should be the model of intelligent routine.” The policeman “is told that his first duty is absolute obedience, and he is reminded that perfect control of the temper is indispensable.” In addition, one writer noted that “what strikes us most, perhaps, is the amount of principle and self-control exacted of each individual for a very moderate wage.”

That new recruits were molded to official standards of the ideal policeman is evident in the police commissioners’ preference for rural recruits. Recruits from rural areas were sought over those from urban areas precisely because they were so malleable. Whether or not agricultural applicants actually made better policemen than their urban counterparts, the figure of the “ploughman turned policeman” was quite a popular image in Victorian culture. The best recruit, one journalist wrote, was an “agriculturist”: “He comes up to town to all intents and purposes a lump of raw material. As a rule, you can mould him like wax, and make him do and learn just what is required. There is no obstinacy in him.”

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34 There was an exception to this rule: the highest ranking officers, those above superintendent were hired from the upper-middle and upper strata of society and had thus not experienced working as constables. By 1879, a new office of chief constable was established, which was to be filled by “gentlemen of good social standing” (Clarkson and Richardson 82).
35 Innes Shand 598.
36 Innes Shand 606.
37 Innes Shand 599-600.
39 Emsley, The English Police, 191-3; Taylor 47.
40 Police Review and Parade Gossip, 21 August 1893, 399.
because he was “too volatile and conceited to submit himself to discipline”; “They think they know more when they join the Force than the oldest Officers in the service.”\textsuperscript{41} The preference for rural applicants coincided with the polarization of country and city in the Victorian mind, and with nostalgia for the countryside.\textsuperscript{42} Rowan and Mayne noted that rural men had “not so much to unlearn” as those from urban areas.\textsuperscript{43} It is ironic that men from London were considered less qualified to be icons of the city, a fact that makes the deliberate effort to hand pick and mold the representative of public order all the more apparent.

Urban knowledge was even considered a liability: “Intelligence of a certain kind, however, may be carried too far; your sharp Londoner makes a very bad policeman.”\textsuperscript{44} In fact, men from provincial towns seem to have been preferred to those from the countryside, because they were

both quicker and more ‘plucky’ than the mere country-man fresh from the village—a singular fact, which proves that manly vigour, both physical and mental, is to be found in populations neither too aggregated nor entirely isolated . . . The genuine Londoner, moreover, is no fighter; he will ‘slang’ and ‘chaff’ Wittily with his tongue, but he will not come to blows. Those who have any experience in the gamins of the great towns in England must have observed the vast difference between the want of pugnacity in the cockney-bred boy, and the love of fisticuffs among the youths of Bristol, Birmingham, or Manchester,


\textsuperscript{44} Wynter 170.
which are the nurseries of prize-fighters. The great town has sharpened the brain of the Londoner, but unstrung his sinews and cowed his courage, and he is a pigmy in the hands of the vigorous provincials.\(^{45}\)

The officers controlled the impressionable nature of the young recruits. Single recruits were assigned quarters in small barracks called “section houses” so that their superior officers could monitor their behavior off duty as well as on duty. Usually, nine men and one sergeant lived in one section house. Rowan and Mayne had designed the system this way so that bachelors would be less likely to be “associating with others that might be mischievous.”\(^{46}\) Otherwise, “they might perhaps cohabit with women of the town and act in various ways . . . injurious” to the image of the police.\(^ {47}\) The fact that these recruits were rural meant that they had to be transformed, in order to become effective urban dwellers and observers.

In addition to malleable character, rural recruits were believed to possess the physique necessary to perform the work. Clarkson and Richardson note that “recruits come from all parts of England, except the extreme north” and that the candidates include “a fair proportion of Londoners, who generally are of not such fine physique.”\(^ {48}\) Candidates from London “rarely possess the requisite physique.”\(^ {49}\) Rural workers were perceived as having patience and as working steadily.\(^ {50}\) Overall, though, “the

\(^{45}\) Wynter 170.
\(^{46}\) PP 1834, vol. 16, Metropolitan Police, 52-3.
\(^{47}\) PP 1834, vol. 16, Metropolitan Police, 53.
\(^{48}\) Clarkson and Richardson 88.
\(^{49}\) “The Policeman’s Diary” 7.
indispensable condition is that he should be of absolutely sound constitution—a whole man, with a good chest development and vigorous limbs.”

Although training was not a primary influence, since at mid-century it lasted only two weeks, it was another method in which specific behaviors and values were instilled in the recruits. Training constituted primarily of drilling, which was useful for riot duty, and verbal examination on rules and regulations. During the 1850s, each aspect of training became more elaborate, and new recruits were also required to attend the police courts to learn how to properly present evidence—and themselves. Since court transcripts and summaries of sessions often appeared in the press, there was a concern with the behavior of the constable in the courtroom. Rowan and Mayne specified that the policemen should “stand in an upright and respectful manner and not lean over the bar in a lazy and slovenly way,” should never “use any low or cant language when speaking of the occupation of any person” and should not refer to a fellow officer as his “mate.” Mayne was disappointed that policemen in court “shew by their conversation that they are conversant with the ‘vulgar tongue’ and unobservant of the Third Commandment. It would be well if they left out of their vocabulary an offensive word commencing with the letter B------ which the mind of a proper thinking person induces him to believe the utterer to be a blackguard.” Mayne’s concern with the language of policemen recalls the watchman from Mornings at Bow Street who arrested a man for “inching it backer!”

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51 "The Policeman’s Diary" 7.
52 Police Orders, Metropolitan Police Records, Public Record Office, London; qtd Miller 86.
The police commissioners were now taking great pains to dissociate the police from previously widespread images such as Wight’s.

Rowan and Mayne wanted the police to be models of politeness and self-control. Their orders in the Parliamentary Papers stress the “necessary temper and moderation,” “good temper and discretion,” and “most perfect civility” involved in police work. The orders remind the policemen of their charge to act “with the utmost temper and forbearance towards all persons” and with “every possible moderation and forbearance” and that “the people should be treated with good humour and civility, and no severity used, except in cases of the utmost necessity.” Behavior was monitored closely. An inspector was expected to “acquaint himself with the talents and general moral character” of his men, and a sergeant was to be “responsible for the proper conduct of his men, and, to satisfy himself that they are doing their duty properly, he is constantly patrolling the section. As a check upon the sergeant and the men working under him, the inspector visits the sub-division at different points during the day and night, the superintendent keeping a vigilant eye upon the working of the division.” A sergeant was accountable to his superiors, who “particularly desired that he should be civil and obliging to everybody.” The consequences for acting out of order included reprimand, demotion,

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54 PP 1830-31, vol. 8, Metropolitan Police, 18, 19.
56 PP 1830, vol. 23, Metropolitan Police, 8.
57 “The Police of London,,” 100.
lack of promotion, or firing. The police were also under the watchful eye of the public, as Rowan and Mayne were remarkably open to civilian complaints.

While these concerns reveal a desire to keep up appearances and establish a positive, middle-class public image for the new police force, they also reveal the amount of effort that went into shaping each particular recruit. One journalist testified before Parliament that the “police, like soldiers, when they know they are strictly watched by their officers, will acquire good conduct and regularity; they are at first raw, like soldiers, but by drilling them, and acquainting them with the manner in which they are to perform their duty, and having intelligent men to instruct them, the effect on the body generally will be highly beneficial.” The police were also closely watched by the media and by extension, by the public. An 1870 article in the Quarterly Review stated that the “whole population of the metropolis are reporters for the newspapers; and where an act of undue interference on the part of the police occurs on the one hand, or flagrant neglect of duty on the other, there is always some correspondent at hand ready to give it publicity in the columns of the press.” Rowan and Mayne’s orders in both the 1830 and 1830-31 Parliamentary Papers attest to the constant maintenance of the force’s image. In addition to being constantly scrutinized by their sergeants, inspectors, and commissioners, the constables were continually reminded of behaviors to exhibit and behaviors to avoid. The orders consist of a lengthy list of reprimands and the reassertion of regulations,

58 PP 1834, vol. 16, Metropolitan Police, 258.
accompanied in the margin by the date on which they were ordered or recorded. For instance, the entry for October 3, 1829, indicates that the “Police Constables on duty are strictly cautioned not to stop or talk together when they meet on their beats, but merely to exchange a word and pass on; any deviation from this order will insure punishment or dismissal.” Many of the entries address the attitude with which the constable was expected to perform his duties, and the commissioners note that they “will feel themselves compelled hereafter to punish with the utmost severity any disobedience or neglect” of their orders.61

Yet while nineteenth-century newspapers were filled with stories of police work and criticism and praise of the force, and illustrations of police and the criminals they pursued, Clarkson and Richardson noted in 1889 that

[t]here is a good deal of unnecessary mystery about the police . . . Official reticence has been fostered by successive Home Secretaries . . . For example, the police have had no historian. There is not an officer in the metropolitan force, at all events, who dares place on record a faithful account of the service to which he belongs. Consequently the public are dependent for their information upon incomplete intelligence in the daily press, supplemented by casual magazine articles and spasmodic ‘revelations,’ all more or less garnished with fiction.62

One police history published in 1901 remarked on the “scanty sources of information on the subject.”63 The Victorian public was familiar not with official pronouncements about the police, but with the images the officers projected and the media represented.

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60 PP 1830, vol. 23, Metropolitan Police, 15.
61 PP 1830, vol. 23, Metropolitan Police, 15.
62 Clarkson and Richardson v.
63 Lee 409.
One ideology the police force represented was that of social advancement based on hard work. The figure of the plowman turned policeman, however exaggerated, was fixed in the public mind, and the police were thus associated with class climbing. While becoming a policeman involved shaping oneself to middle-class standards, promotion in the force also mimicked class climbing in the larger social order. Once selected for a job as a constable, a recruit might "hope to rise by activity, intelligence and good conduct to the superior stations."\(^{64}\) Class climbing was thus contingent upon adherence to social norms, particularly industrious behavior. At the same time, however, traditional class hierarchies were not completely abandoned for a hierarchy based on industrious behavior alone. Policemen were hired according to two sets of guidelines: the rank and file were hired primarily from the working classes, while the upper echelons of the force were recruited from more elite classes.

The social imperative that compelled the farm boy to search out police work was a prevalent ideology, but it was not without limits. Escalation up the social ladder was both condoned and condemned in Victorian society. Epitomized in Samuel Smiles's popular *Self-Help*, the ideology of self-improvement was at heart paradoxical. Like the rhetoric of criminal reform I have discussed in chapter three, that of self-help wanted both to facilitate self-transformation and yet also to monitor the ties between the old and new selves. Yet if the newly constructed exterior no longer reflected one's origins, how might one's identity be recognized? This question was particularly vexed when it involved a

\(^{64}\) PP 1830, vol. 23, Metropolitan Police, 10.
lower-class citizen infiltrating the ranks of respectable society. Patrick Joyce notes that the Smilesean myth only rarely influenced working-class culture because the contrast between Smiles’s vision and working-class reality was simply too great. Yet police work was one area in which the two did intersect, as Martineau’s article indicates.

Smiles’s idea of self-improvement, which was prevalent in the second half of the century, was the emulation of middle-class values until such behavior became automatic. Traits such as diligence, patience, energy, attentiveness, and discipline were necessary for the middle-class worker, and one could attain these traits, along with social ascendance, through careful and persistent practice. According to Smiles, “a great point to be aimed at is to get the working quality well trained. When that is done, the race will be found comparatively easy. We must repeat and again repeat; facility will come with labour.” Indeed, the repetition of specific behaviors was what constituted character for Smiles: “It is the repetition of little acts which constitute not only the sum of human character, but which determine the character of nations” (226). Smiles envisioned English citizens improving themselves through hard work, and it was work as a police constable that enabled the lower class rural man to move up the social ladder.

Yet Smiles’s text warned against too radical a transformation, as drastic changes were probably inauthentic. Even though a certain amount of dishonesty was necessary in

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self-transformation, one should seek to ensure that it was done with the proper motive.

One’s character, even one’s identity, was rendered visible through behavior, for

[there is a truthfulness in action as well as in words, which is essential to
uprightness of character. A man must really be what he seems or purposes
to be. When an American gentleman wrote to Granville Sharp, that from
respect for his great virtues he had named one of his sons after him, Sharp
replied: ‘I must request you to teach him a favourite maxim of the family
whose name you have given him—Always endeavour to be really what
you would wish to appear. (318)

However, even as Smiles’ text professes the importance of being what one seems, it
expresses the difficulty of reading that semblance: “There are many counterfeits of
character, but the genuine article is difficult to be mistaken” (317).

The fraudulent article, on the other hand, was often more difficult to identify, as
the detectives involved in the Turf Fraud Scandal demonstrated. One should “really be”
what one seemed to be, and a scandal arose when one “wish[ed] to appear” something
one was not. The Turf Fraud Scandal exposes a limit of the Victorian ideal of self-
improvement: the rhetoric of self-help and class climbing quickly became a story of
fraud. The inability to read the outer signs of identity is a staple, perhaps the cornerstone,
of sensation fiction. Narratives of the Turf Fraud Scandal fixed crime within the
crimefighter himself. In a similar manner, a typical sensation novel fixes the criminal
element beneath a seemingly gentle or beautiful veneer, often within the home. Mary
Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* (1862) is one sensation novel that explores
class climbing, manipulating the outward signs of identity, and the difficulties of
detecting fraudulent identities.
From the beginning, Braddon’s novel both relies on and exposes as inadequate attempts to convey character through visual description, for the existence of horrors beneath the semblance of peace is the essence of the sensation novel. A depiction of the countryside around Audley Court provokes the narrator to comment directly to the reader: “We hear every day of murders committed in the country. Brutal and treacherous murders; slow, protracted agonies from poisons administered by some kindred hand; sudden and violent deaths by cruel blows, inflicted with a stake cut from some spreading oak, whose every shadow promised—peace.” In this passage, the pastoral landscape is not only a sham, but it also provides the weapon with which brutal violence is committed. It both masks and is the source of crime. The narrator explains that in this region, there is a meadow in which, on a quiet summer Sunday evening, a young farmer murdered the girl who had loved and trusted him; and yet, even now, with the stain of that foul deed upon it, the aspect of the spot is—peace. No species of crime has ever been committed in the worst rookeries about Seven Dials that has not been also done in the face of that rustic calm which still, in spite of all, we look on with a tender, half-mournful yearning, and associate with—peace. (36)

The meadow that witnessed the farmer’s murder is an interesting addition to the landscape; even after the “stain of that foul deed” is pointed out, it still projects an image of serenity. It is able to accommodate both pastoral and criminal elements, never truly seeming, in Smiles’s terminology, what it really is. The reference to Seven Dials functions to question the stark distinction between the country and the city that had held

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67 Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Lady Audley’s Secret* [1862] (New York: Dover, 1974) 36. Subsequent references are to this edition and will be indicated parenthetically within the text.
so much sway in the Victorian mind. In this novel, the countryside’s “face of rustic calm” signifies peace, yet obscures a great deal of crime, and the personification of that “rustic calm” suggests that people, too, may have a great deal to hide.

Signs are difficult if not impossible to read in this context. In fact, the novel begins with a pronoun whose antecedent is ambiguous. The opening passage is as follows: “It lay down in a hollow, rich with fine old timber and luxurious pastures; and you came upon it through an avenue of limes, bordered on either side by meadows, over the high hedges of which the cattle looked inquisitively at you as you passed, wondering, perhaps, what you wanted; for there was no thoroughfare, and unless you were going to the Court you had no business there at all” (1). The “it” referred to by the novel’s first word might be Audley Court, finally named at the end of the second paragraph. However, “it” might just as likely refer to the title of chapter one, “Lucy,” or more likely still, to the title of the book, “Lady Audley’s Secret,” both phrases that precede the first paragraph on the page. Just as the pronoun with which the text begins has several possible referents, so does the secret to which the novel’s title alludes. The secret may be Lucy Audley’s status as bigamist, mother, or class climber. The inheritable madness that is revealed near the novel’s close seems a more likely referent, yet Lucy Audley’s status as mad is highly questionable and is never truly established. Even the doctor who examines her at Robert Audley’s request finds it difficult to deem her mad and instead labels her past behavior highly rational: “there is no evidence of madness in anything she has done. She ran away from her home, because her home was not a pleasant one, and
she left in the hope of finding a better. There is no madness in that. She committed the crime of bigamy, because by that crime she obtained fortune and position. There is no madness there” (248). Lady Audley’s transformation from lower-class girl to wealthy peer makes her not insane, but, as the doctor finally pronounces, “dangerous!” (249).

In both the fictional case of Lady Audley and the historical Turf Fraud Scandal, the remaking of the criminal masks, even legitimizes, another act of self-transformation: the construction of the police figure. Robert Audley’s conversion from idle man of leisure into dogged pursuer of the answers to a mystery is akin to the reshaping of farmboys into metropolitan policemen. Robert Audley is introduced to the readers as a “man who would never get on in the world” due to his “listless, dawdling, indifferent, irresolute manner” (22). At the beginning of the novel, he is a lawyer in name only; his law office would more appropriately be described as a dog-kennel. However, once he pursues the answer to the disappearance of George Talboys, he begins to behave more like a middle-class lawyer. Having taken note of several clues to the case, he composes a “Journal of Facts connected with the Disappearance of George Talboys, inclusive of Facts which have no apparent Relation to that Circumstance” (67). The journal is logical and orderly, and Robert “was rather inclined to be proud of the official appearance” of the title (67). It might well be his first legal document. He admits, “I have never practiced as a barrister. I have enrolled myself in the ranks of a profession, the members of which hold solemn responsibilities and have sacred duties to perform; and I have shrunk from those responsibilities and duties” (80-1). This, indeed, is one of the novel’s problems: he
is not the lawyer he appears to be. The novel introduces him as someone who is not what he seems:

Robert Audley was supposed to be a barrister. As a barrister was his name inscribed in the law-list; as a barrister he had chambers in Figtree Court, Temple; as a barrister he had eaten the allotted number of dinners, which form the sublime ordeal through which the forensic aspirant wades on to fame and fortune. If these things can make a man a barrister, Robert Audley decidedly was one. But he had never either had a brief, or tried to get a brief, or even wished to have a brief in all those five years, during which his name had been painted upon one of the doors in Figtree Court. (21)

One of the projects of this novel is to resolve the discrepancy between what Robert Audley seems and what he is.

Robert Audley’s transformation is prefigured by and contrasted with the self-transformation of the novel’s other male character, George Talboys. George’s ambition and self-improvement form the backdrop against which the behavior of both Robert Audley and Lady Audley is read. George leaves his family to pursue success in the Australian gold rush, and the similarity between his actions and those of his wife is striking. Although the term “gold digger” was not used specifically to refer to a woman seeking a wealthy husband until the 1920s, Braddon draws a strong parallel between George’s attempt at self-promotion through the pursuit of Australian gold and Lucy Audley’s pursuit of higher class status through marriage.

The parallel is not without a strong contrast, however. Whereas Lucy Audley focuses on perfecting her appearance, George performs the kind of self-help that Smiles advocated. He succeeds, he explains, only after “poverty and I had become such old
companions and bed-fellows, that looking back at my past life, I wondered whether that
dashing, reckless, extravagant, luxurious, champagne-drinking dragoon could have really
been the same man who sat on the damp ground gnawing a moldy crust in the wilds of
the new world” (14-15). He makes a stark transformation, yet it is convincing: “Thin
and gaunt, the half-starved shadow of what I had once been, I saw myself one day in a
broken bit of looking-glass, and was frightened by my own face” (15). His change in
character is readily visible on his face and body; in fact, because of the hardships he has
endured, his old friend Robert Audley fails to recognize him. He managed, however, to
work—literally—through all the changes, and the simultaneous transformation of his
physical features serves as evidence. Indeed, his ambition and persistent hard work are
responsible for his upward mobility and ensure that his transformation is genuine: “I
toiled on through all; through disappointment and despair, rheumatism, fever, starvation;
at the very gates of death, I toiled on steadily to the end; and in the end I conquered” (15).

While George Talboys exemplifies the Smilesian ideal of social advancement
through self-help, hard work and diligence, Lucy Audley embodies the potential threat
posed by class mobility. Not only does she misrepresent herself as a single woman and
obscure her previous marriage to George Talboys, but her marriage to Michael Audley
threatens to taint the bloodline of his prominent family. Her beauty cannot be read as a
sign of good character; on the contrary, she is the heroine of a sensation novel precisely
because her physical features dupe everyone around her. Whereas George Talboys’ body
bespeaks industriousness, Lucy Audley is not who she seems. Her character is not legible
on her body, but in the portrait hidden in her bedchamber, which betrays the deviance beneath her beauty. The portrait “exaggerated every attribute of that delicate face as to give a lurid brightness to the blonde complexion, and a strange, sinister light to the deep blue eyes. No one but a pre-Raphaelite could have given to that pretty pouting mouth the hard and almost wicked look it had in the portrait” (47). The portrait depicts not an innocent beauty, but a “beautiful fiend” (47). The ambiguity in the portrait’s representation is key to the genre; sensation lies in the location of crime or evil within the beautiful and domestic. Whereas elsewhere in the novel, beauty signifies innocence or good will, in the portrait, it is inseparable from the sinister.

The novel, then, presents three cases of self-transformation, which are distinguishable by class and gender. Robert Audley, possessing high class status from the beginning, learns to practice middle-class ideals of diligence and industriousness, but his outer appearance does not change, nor does it need to. George Talboys’ transformation, on the other hand, is readily visible. Although he is misrecognized by his old friend, he is not defined by the novel as deviant or dangerous. Instead, he is desirable, even by Robert Audley, who marries his lookalike sister. Lucy Audley, however, is doubly suspect: she is a member of the lower classes and of the female sex. The novel defines female self-transformation as dangerous because it is linked with reproduction; Lucy Audley threatens to taint the Audley bloodline with her latent, inheritable madness. Male self-transformation, though, is admirable and appropriate because it is aligned with hard work.
Smilesean self-help bears a class inflection, Joyce has pointed out, but it is even more emphatically gendered. Perhaps more threatening than the female’s self-transformation is her self-definition in the first place, as a social agent distinct from her husband and his status.

To resolve the “problem” of female self-transformation it has constructed, the novel uses the characters that have performed male self-transformation. The exposure of Lucy Audley’s self-improvement requires, legitimates, and diverts attention away from the self-improvement of Robert Audley and George Talboys. Lucy’s self-improvement through marriage is the novel’s central problem. Not only does she obscure her past name and class status, but she also hides her previous marriage. In the novel, marriage fails to contain this female and is instead a means by which she may perform and spread criminality.

However, marriage does provide narrative resolution for Robert Audley and establishes his status as industrious, middle-class lawyer. As their courtship progresses, Robert Audley finds increasing satisfaction in Clara Talboys “lecturing him on the purposeless life he had led so long, and the little use he had made of the talents and opportunities that had been given to him” (280). Robert’s desire for Clara is bound up with her goading him toward self-improvement and industrious behavior: “How pleasant it was to be lectured by the woman he loved! . . . It was a hard, dry sort of existence, perhaps, which she recommended; a life of serious work and application, in which he

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68 Joyce xvii-xviii.
should strive to be useful to his fellow-creatures, and win a reputation for himself” (280-1). Robert Audley’s marriage to Clara is not narrated with the anxiety associated with Lucy Audley’s marriage to Michael Audley, because Robert marries, in essence, George Talboys. The day he meets Clara, Robert notices “that she was very handsome. She had brown eyes, like George’s” (129). Robert finds Clara “different to all other women that he had ever seen” probably because “she was like George Talboys” (133, 123).

Robert’s desire for Clara is equated with his longing for her brother, who was “always a bond of union between them” (282). Robert at times seems to confuse his desire for Clara with his desire to locate George; pursuing George Talboys is tantamount to “pursuing” Clara Talboys. After George has been missing for several days, Robert wonders “that it is possible to care so much for a fellow!?” but declares that, in order to find his friend, he will “go to the very end of the world” (60). Traveling to the antipodes is a task he later promises to perform for Clara, during their courtship. Imagining himself speaking to Clara, Robert marvels, “I love you as earnestly and truly as I have mourned for your brother’s fate—that the new strength and purpose of my life, which has grown out of my friendship for the murdered man, grows even stronger as it turns to you, and changes me until I wonder at myself” (263). That Robert marries George’s sister differentiates his marriage from Lucy Audley’s; Clara is invested not in her own access to higher classes, but in Robert Audley’s dedication to his work.

In Lady Audley’s Secret, the sensation created by the unrecognizable, nearby criminal is resolved only by another identity transformation. That is, if self-
transformation is the novel’s problem, it is also the solution. The sensation created by the novel’s beautiful fiend is akin to the scandal caused by the Turf Fraud’s criminal detectives. The use of respectability—particularly that of a higher class—to mask one’s deviance not only violates the Victorian convention of self-improvement, but it also exposes the potential for social destruction that the doctrine of self-improvement had set in place.
Conclusion

Each of the preceding chapters has dealt, in one way or another, with the issue of interpreting visual information. The ability to perform such metaphorical acts of reading was the central function of the Metropolitan Police. Where crime was hidden, whether in the city streets or within the home, it was to be rendered visible so that it might be isolated and either destroyed, expunged, or contained. Each of the chapters has examined a specific space and the historical and narrative attempts to deal with crime in that particular space. Early century representations of the city of London as a disorderly space necessitated the new police force’s structure and surveillance. Chapter one’s urban sketches provide views of the city that claim to be both accurate and protective. The new police themselves provide stability and protection in Boz’s sketches.

However, the project of surveillance of which the Metropolitan Police were the epitome was itself scrutinized in Newgate Novels, which present the exercise of reading criminal nature as both a possibility and as a futility. Their use of well-known criminals as the objects of this exercise underscores the point, as they ultimately question their earlier representations of criminal characters. The problem these literary texts confront is not only how to interpret criminal nature based on visual signs, but also how to represent the misreading of criminality.

The likelihood of misreading increases after the penal system places more emphasis on reforming criminals rather than executing or transporting them. Mid-century narratives represent the penitentiary’s system of reform not as a means of eradicating criminal nature or identity from society, but as ultimately producing
additional identities and thus multiplying the possibility of misreading. The difficulties of representing reform become apparent when texts such as Taylor’s *The Ticket-of-Leave Man* and Wood’s *East Lynne* portray criminal reform using decidedly non-criminal characters. These texts contain misreadings of criminality, but also misinterpretations of situations and of criminal potential. Even so, their innocent “criminals” represent the project of reform and the returned convict’s assumption of a new identity. Disguises and performance aid in the process of reintegration, yet they also equip the returned convict with a means of hiding his or her criminal past.

With the issue of performance at the forefront, the possibility of recognizing true reform seems hopeless. The contrast that Dickens provides between Magwitch and Pip addresses this issue. Magwitch’s reform is readily apparent precisely because he is unskilled at performance. Yet the development of a panoptic society encourages the presentation of carefully constructed surfaces, and Pip’s development throughout the novel has much to do with making himself presentable. Similarly, self-presentation was a central project of the Metropolitan Police, as they worked to garner public support and respect. Yet the production of carefully constructed visible identities was problematic when it obscured traces of prior identity. The distinction between readily visible self-transformation and dangerous, hidden self-transformation is exemplified by George Talboys and Lucy Audley, respectively. A society of surveillance required not only visibility, but also the preservation of the signs or evidence of transformation. Lady Audley conceals her past, and in doing so, she embodies both contamination and beauty, a dangerous combination.
I have examined the relationship of criminal and society at several sites: within the nation, within the city, within the family, and even at the level of the individual. Yet another site that has been important in these chapters is the point at which criminal reform and performance intersect. Reform rested on an assumption that character and behavior were mutable and that if such a thing as criminal nature existed, a socially acceptable nature might be constructed over it. Yet the very idea that identity is unstable is also potentially threatening. Reform and other types of transformation demanded careful surveillance to prevent those with evil intentions and influences from infiltrating polite society. Yet post-transportation novels, like Newgate Novels, cannot sustain the oppositions they posit. Where Newgate Novels questioned distinctions between criminality and respectability based on family relationships, post-transportation novels embody disparate elements such as innocence and criminality within a single character. Rather than the transformation of characters, such narratives of reform depict the discovery of ambiguous identity. Their representations of the penitentiary’s new reformatory methods of managing criminal behavior are thus perhaps more unsettling than reassuring.
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