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ABSTRACT

In *Jailbreakers, Villains, and Vampires: Representations of Criminality in Early-Victorian Popular Texts*, I analyze moments of discursive dissonance that emerge through the juxtaposition of early-Victorian theories of criminality and representations of criminals in popular culture. In the 1830s and 1840s in England, methods for managing criminals underwent a series of revisions that corresponded to shifts in prevailing theories about the nature and course of criminal behavior. Assumptions that criminality was volitional, or that it originated in an individual's deficient self-discipline, gradually shifted into perceptions that criminality was pathological, and that malefactors were naturally brutish and incorrigible. Predominant conceptions of criminality as stemming from character flaws or biological predispositions influenced depictions of criminals in a variety of Victorian popular texts including novels, plays, and, importantly, "penny bloods," which were cheap publications marketed to lower-class readers. Such popular lower-class texts are rife with criminals and crimes yet their representations of criminality remain understudied. This penny literature often reproduces prevailing middle-class discourses about criminality, but these texts do so in ways that simultaneously disrupt those discourses. Specifically, popular culture tends to locate the origins of crime not in criminals but in the very institutions and social structures designed to regulate them. Analyzing popular representations of criminals in lower-class texts at a transitional moment in penal history demonstrates how conflicts between legitimate and subordinate cultures activated antidisiplinary potentialities.

While historical and literary scholarship on middle-class crime fiction has flourished, crime literature popular with the lower classes has been largely neglected. Understanding how both dominant and subordinate literatures responded to and portrayed significant shifts in

cultural theories and practices is, however, necessary to gain a fuller, more nuanced understanding of Victorian literature and culture. There is plenty of evidence available that suggests ways in which middle-class commentators interpreted the beliefs of the lower-classes, but much less is known about the views and narratives that were attractive to and so consumed – via this literature – by these audiences. Studying literature read by the lower-classes, especially those texts that were tremendously popular, is one step toward gaining insight into the possible interpretations of a largely inaccessible audience.

JAILBREAKERS, VILLAINS, AND VAMPIRES:
REPRESENTATIONS OF CRIMINALITY IN EARLY-VICTORIAN POPULAR TEXTS

by

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Dissertation
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in English.

Syracuse University
May 2013

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A number of institutions and individuals have helped bring this dissertation to fruition. I am grateful to the Syracuse University Department of English for the financial support during my graduate program. The Syracuse interlibrary loan department, Cambridge University Library, and Georgetown Law Library each facilitated access to essential texts that would otherwise have been impossible to acquire. Allen Hubin and Bill Contento graciously provided me with necessary sections of the *Crime Fiction* bibliography.

I would have been hard pressed to arrange a better group of professors to work with on my dissertation committee. Erin Mackie, Mike Goode, Kevin Morrison, Claudia Klaver, and Susan Edmunds have each given me intellectual and emotional support throughout my tenure at Syracuse. I very much appreciate the unique relationships I have with each of them. Erin Mackie must be singled out for her untiring patience through multiple, often very rough, drafts. I thank her also for her guidance as I navigated the final stages of my graduate career.

Many colleagues, friends, and family have offered encouragement, love, and advice. CJ Dosch, Rinku Chatterjee, and Melissa Welshans all took the time to comment on drafts and have made grad school more fun. I am fortunate to have parents and a brother who have always told me “you can do it!” and I am also fortunate to have a wonderful family of equally supportive in-laws willing to put up with my moodiness after spending too much time in the “dissertation cave.” Thanks to Samantha and Lucas Stearns for the Settlers of Catan tourneys, impromptu dance parties, and wild laughter that provided much needed relief.

Without Jared Stearns, my partner and best friend, the successful completion of this dissertation would not have been possible, despite what he might say to the contrary.

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CHAPTER ONE

“His exploits will, henceforth, want the colouring of romance”:
Changing Criminals in Early-Victorian Literature

“Remember particularly that you cannot be a judge of any one. For no one can judge a criminal, until he recognises that he is just such a criminal as the man standing before him, and that he perhaps is more than all men to blame for that crime...Though that sounds absurd, it is true. If I had been righteous myself, perhaps there would have been no criminal standing before me.” (Dostoyevsky 341)

“It is well for our own vanity that we slay the criminal, for if we suffered him to live he might show us what we had gained by his crime.” (Wilde 145)

In season 11 of *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, investigator Raymond Langston testifies against Nate Haskell, the serial killer who stabbed him in the final episode of the previous season. During the trial, Haskell argues that he is not responsible for his violent behavior because he carries “the warrior gene,” also known as the MAOA gene, and was abused as a child.¹ Langston counters Haskell’s testimony by revealing that he too is a carrier of the warrior gene and experienced mistreatment during his childhood, but instead of becoming a criminal, he pursues criminals and attempts to bring them to justice. “DNA isn’t destiny. We’re all responsible for our own actions,” Langston claims, emphasizing that committing a crime is a conscious decision regardless of genes or environmental circumstances. This argument convinces the jury that genetic predisposition is not a sufficient reason to mitigate Haskell’s sentence; he is found guilty of attempted murder and sentenced to prison (“Targets of Obsession”).

Specific connections between the warrior gene and crime, aggression, and violence began appearing frequently in popular culture after the MAOA gene featured in a 2009 study of behavioral aggression.² MAOA, or monoamine oxidase A, helps regulate levels of neurotransmitters like dopamine and serotonin in the human brain. According to the conclusions

of the 2009 experiment, individuals who have the low activity variant of the gene (MAOA-L) are more likely to exhibit aggressive behavior when provoked. In the experiment, subjects earned money by correctly answering questions on a vocabulary test. Subjects were then told that an anonymous opponent was stealing their earnings, and that they could choose to make the opponent eat painfully spicy sauce as a punishment.³ The researchers found that carriers of the warrior gene were more likely to dispense sauce to their opponents, supporting their hypothesis that those with the gene would exhibit more aggressive behavior in certain conditions (McDermott et al). The results of this experiment “support previous research suggesting that MAOA influences aggressive behavior, with potentially important implications for interpersonal aggression, violence, political decision-making, and crime” (Brown University). This study is only one of several used in ongoing debates in fields such as criminology, sociology, and psychology about whether or not the presence of a gene can predict that an individual will behave criminally.

CSI is not the only crime series on television in recent years to feature criminal characters that carry the warrior gene. In the second episode of *Law and Order UK* (2010), a defense attorney testifies that a young boy guilty of kicking another boy to death is a carrier of the MAOA gene variant (“Unloved”).⁴ In a 2011 episode of *The Dr. Phil Show*, Dr. Phil McGraw interviewed individuals who had difficulty controlling their aggression and then did genetic testing on them to determine if they were carriers of the gene (“Born to Rage?”), and *National Geographic Explorer* also featured the warrior gene and its relationship to aggression in a 2010 episode titled “Born to Rage.” Debates and opinions about whether the warrior gene can or should be a factor in punishing criminal behavior are easily found on the internet, and home-DNA-testing kits will determine whether one carries the gene.⁵

The employment of genetic testing in the service of criminal justice is only the most recent strategy in the ongoing, centuries-old attempt to develop a reliable and objective framework for assessing criminal propensities. Despite being far more advanced in technological and scientific sophistication than popular nineteenth-century pseudosciences such as physiognomy and phrenology, however, the promise of genetic testing, to penetrate beneath the surface and understand the essential nature of the individual, is essentially the same. The proponents of physiognomy and phrenology claimed that personality and character could be analyzed by examining physical attributes such as appearance (physiognomy) or the shape of the skull (phrenology).⁶ One alluring aspect of physiognomy and phrenology was the promise of objectivity in the evaluation of individual subjects – if a standard of interpretation could be established, then these sciences, it was argued, held significant potential for unbiased evaluations of character and could better ensure justice in criminal cases (Hutchings 137).

Because these physiognomical and phrenological ways of knowing were based on external factors, the ability of individuals, and especially criminals, to disguise themselves created significant anxiety about identity and identification (Hutchings 138).⁷ Genetic testing, however, penetrates to the core of physicality, nullifying efforts at disguise – it is up to writers of science fiction to imagine a future in which individuals baffle genetic detectives by altering their DNA sequencing. In its current stage of development, however, genetic testing, like physiognomy and phrenology, can only indicate propensity – no definite correlation between the presence of biological markers, such as gene variations, and the predictability of individual behavior has ever been established. Despite the ability of DNA technology to provide objective insight into the facts of our most elemental biology, the analysis of that biology is complicated by having to take into account confounding factors such as environment (Viding and Frith

6085).⁸ There is evidence to suggest that genetic information can influence how criminals are judged and sentenced, but one wonders how this legal strategy will be employed in the future, and whether it will be more useful than Victorian-era pseudoscience in satisfying the ongoing societal desire to “recognize” criminals.⁹

The correspondence between the appearance of the 2009 study of the MAOA gene and frequent references to the warrior gene in popular culture suggests the influence of scientific and criminological theories on how criminals are represented in contemporary media. Recent scholarship on popular culture is concerned with how intersections between criminological theory, science, and legal procedure influence representations of crime and criminals. In their book *Criminology Goes to the Movies*, Nicole Rafter and Michelle Brown identify this recent overlap between popular culture and criminology as “popular (or cultural) criminology, a relatively new discourse in the criminological world that takes its place alongside discussions of...other strands of academic criminology” (184). Rafter and Brown locate contemporary criminological discourses such as rational choice theory, biological theories and social disorganization theories in the films they analyze, arguing that these theories “constitute a subtext” in the films’ representations of criminality (2).

Criminology Goes to the Movies is one example of several recent popular criminological studies that discuss the interplay between prevalent perceptions of crime, criminology, and popular culture. Current scholars are also interested in representations of criminal institutions such as prisons in popular culture, the influence of the mass media on crime, and the relationship between law and both popular culture and literature.¹⁰ While the majority of this work concentrates on recent examples of popular culture, establishing the history of cultural representations of criminals, crimes, and punishments will be essential for helping scholars

contextualize current relationships between crime and the media. The early-Victorian era is an especially fruitful period in which to study these relationships, as it witnessed significant changes in how criminals were understood and perceived, and also, as some critics have argued, was situated at the beginning of the development of mass culture.¹¹ This dissertation analyzes early-Victorian literature and the ways in which it was influenced by contemporary legal and penal changes and theories about the origins of criminality. I focus on how representations of criminals in literature and culture changed during the 1830s and 1840s in England, and my study not only helps to fill current gaps in our historical and literary knowledge of the period, but also offers historical context for scholars of popular criminology who are interested in contemporary relationships between crime and culture.

By examining closely how criminals were depicted in literature during the early-Victorian period, we discover, first, that texts published for different classes of audiences contrasted starkly in how they represented criminals. While crime had been a popular subject in middle-class literature in the 1830s, in the following decade there were very few examples of middle-class literature focused on criminal themes, and even fewer featuring criminal protagonists. Though the criminal may have been marginalized in middle-class literature, however, discussions of criminality remained prevalent in primarily non-fictional sources such as newspapers, medical treatises, and criminological studies. Crime did not altogether disappear as a key topic in literature, either; criminal characters and subjects remained extremely popular in texts published for lower-class audiences. While much scholarship has traced middle-class discourses of crime in non-fictional texts, no studies consider closely how and why the criminal was taken up so enthusiastically by texts published for the lower-classes. In order to understand how the representation of criminality changed in literature during this significant historical

period, however, one must follow the figure of the criminal in its progression from being a staple of middle-class fiction to a staple of lower-class popular fiction.¹²

I argue that crime and criminals featured prominently, and were so popular, in penny literature because these subjects were very relevant to lower-class experiences during the 1840s. Many of the historical changes in legal and penal policies that I outline below affected significantly how lower-class individuals lived, worked, and spent their leisure time. This historical context made criminal themes resonate for readers of popular fiction. Significantly, the literature I examine reinforced contemporary perspectives of criminality in which criminals were increasingly assumed to be inherently corrupt, but at the same time disrupted these views by demonstrating that social injustice and an ineffectual penal system were more culpable in the propagation of criminality. These popular texts are disciplinary because they reinforce hegemonic stereotypes of criminals, but they are simultaneously antidisiplinary, because they ultimately shift the responsibility for criminal behavior from the criminal to the state.

Recognizing that these popular texts have both disciplinary and antidisiplinary potential highlights their participation in ideological struggle. Representations of criminals in early-Victorian popular literature were not merely reflections of the contemporary “tensions” surrounding these figures, but were actually “engage[ed] in the working out of the relations” between competing cultural perspectives on criminality (Rawlings 16). These conflicting potentialities and their significance in popular texts have typically been ignored, much to the detriment of our knowledge and understanding of the period.

Early-Victorian popular literature has often been criticized for its sensationalism, and has been accused of offering readers entertainment without substance. For instance, Virginia Berridge claims that the sensational themes in popular fiction distracted readers from “the real

roots of social and economic distress” (256).¹³ Peter Mountjoy argues that publishers wishing to hold sway over lower-class readers realized the necessity of imitating “the entertainment press”: “the working classes became adept at taking whatever amusement was offered and rejecting the calls for commitment, anxiety or effort” (268). Louis James, in his early, close study of the popular literature of the 1830s and 1840s identifies this fiction as being of “the lowest taste” (*Fiction* 25-26). As a final example, Juliet John is dismissive of lower-class popular literature in her introduction to *Cult Criminals* when she writes, “The ‘penny dreadfuls’, of course, were available for the poorer reader addicted to sensation” (xiii-xiv). These assessments suggest that the popular fiction of the period was void of significance beyond its sensationalism, and potentially lulled its readers into political complacency.

Edward Jacobs disagrees with these narrow perspectives of early-Victorian popular literature, however, and demonstrates that these texts consistently made it their business to mock disciplinary mechanisms such as the time and work regulations of the factory and educational systems (323). Popular literature, as well as cheap, ephemeral theatrical productions known as “penny gaffs” capitalized on the “festive mockery of industrial literacy...[which] constituted one of the major moral threats to the hegemony of the literate, christian, middle-class values that have come to typify Victorian culture” (323).¹⁴ Readers demanded this mockery of disciplinary institutions from their popular texts, Jacobs claims, and though some writers of penny fiction may have disdained this literature and its audience, they continued to write according to readers’ tastes (338).

Jacobs revises the standard literary history of this period that positions “street literature and culture,” such as gaffs and penny fiction, as the progenitors of the “mass culture” that became predominate from the 1850s to the end of the century (324-325).¹⁵ Instead, according to

Jacobs, popular literature was actively destroyed through a confluence of police harassment and the rise of entrepreneurs who could afford new printing technologies as well as curry the favor of advertisers (325, 341). This distinction between early-Victorian popular culture and the mass culture that was established in “the market vacuum created by the British government’s systematic destruction of...street culture” is important because it affects how the popular literature that is the primary focus of this dissertation is categorized and defined (341).

In this early-Victorian context, the term “popular literature” or “popular fiction” refers to texts priced at a penny or less that were written with the tastes of a lower-class audience in mind. As Louis James points out, there “is no neat definition” of who the audience for popular literature was, but one way of characterizing this audience is by its poverty: “the price of literature largely determined the class of the reader, the poor buying the penny part, the middle classes feeling cheap literature had a social stigma. We are therefore reasonably safe to take as ‘lower class’, literature published at a penny, and some at three half-pence” (*Fiction xvii*).¹⁶ In many cases popular literature was written by lower-class authors, and produced and hawked by lower-class individuals involved in one of the “astounding variety of careers centered around the production and distribution of vernacular literature” (Jacobs 329).¹⁷

The term “popular,” also serves to distinguish popular literature from the mass literature that supplanted it in the 1850s (Jacobs 341-342).¹⁸ While popular culture reflected and responded to the tastes of readers, the producers of mass culture tried to create these preferences, and were assisted by the destruction of popular culture.¹⁹ Because it was so closely aligned with the experiences of lower-class readers and, as Jacobs argues, “*challenged* the people, institutions, and technologies...[that helped create] a mass literature almost wholly monopolized by middle-class moralists and capitalists,” early-Victorian popular literature warrants close analysis (342).²⁰

Casting aside this fiction as merely sensationalist trash is no longer a valid approach; by taking it seriously, we can benefit from a more complete understanding of literary history while still valuing this literature for the entertainment it offered contemporary readers. My project situates early-Victorian popular literature in the context of contemporary changes in the definitions, perceptions, and treatment of criminals, and analyzes the tensions in this literature between competing disciplinary and antidisiplinary potentialities.

The following overview of the legal, penal, and literary changes taking place during the 1830s and 1840s will help contextualize the analyses offered in this dissertation. After establishing the pertinent histories of this period, I situate the representation of Dick Turpin, a famous highwayman from William Harrison Ainsworth's *Rookwood* (1834), as a standard against which to compare the changing representations of criminals in the other texts I examine. Dick Turpin was, I argue, the last heroic criminal character of the century who was popular with a middle-class audience and who simultaneously enjoyed critical approbation.²¹ While Ainsworth's next work, *Jack Sheppard* (1839-1840), was similar in many ways to *Rookwood*, and also featured a romanticized and sympathetic criminal protagonist, the novel was reviled by critics who were convinced that it turned some readers into thieves and murderers. The legal changes that took place in the five years separating the publications of these two novels contributed to the disappearance of the criminal protagonist from middle-class fiction and the saturation of popular literature with criminal themes and characters. However, many of these criminal characters were very different from the noble and adventurous Dick Turpin. Instead of romanticizing criminals, literature of the 1840s represented criminals as degenerate and despised individuals involved in the most sordid crimes – they were no longer the heroes they had been only a few years earlier.

Contexts

Beginning in 1837, a series of legal changes fundamentally altered how criminals were managed by the judicial system and perceived by the general public. The first of these changes, a significant reduction in the number of crimes punishable by death, occurred in 1837 after a long-fought battle by reformers to repeal the capital code. For over a century English criminal law authorized the punishment of a broad spectrum of crimes, ranging from petty theft to murder, with hanging; while some capital statutes had been dropped in the years before 1837, many reformers were not satisfied and continued advocating for total repeal.²² These reformers were successful in accomplishing the abolition of hanging for all crimes except for those considered the most heinous, including murder, rape, and high treason.²³ This change was welcomed by many who viewed capital punishment, especially for minor property crimes, as barbaric, but it is important to note that the move away from capital punishment was also encouraged by the anxiety that inconsistency in punishment destabilized the authority of the law in the eyes of the populace.

Before the near elimination of almost all capital punishment, there was little uniformity in decisions regarding who would and would not hang for a capital crime. Juries were often reluctant to convict criminals for relatively harmless crimes, and other loopholes, such as transportation, also made it difficult to predict which criminals would and would not receive the death penalty. This inconsistency in punishment caused some critics to fear that the law might appear arbitrary and thus undermine part of its authority, especially in the eyes of those who already considered some laws to be illegitimate.²⁴ Though partially repealing capital punishment helped streamline the law and resulted in a more consistent treatment of criminals, the repeal likely exacerbated, at least temporarily, an awareness of the inconsistency of the criminal law;

after all, a crime punishable by death one day was not so the next, and people would have no doubt recognized that a criminal hanged only months earlier would have been spared if only he or she had been sentenced at a later date.²⁵

Only two years after the decision was made to partially abolish capital punishment, the Metropolitan police, an organization only ten years old in 1839, was granted extended powers enabling it to exert more control over the lives of those in the lower classes. The laws that were passed in the New Metropolitan Police Bill (1839) included additional regulations on many of the work and leisure habits of lower-class people. For example, a person could be arrested for displaying or selling animals on the street, or for participating in activities like kite flying or sliding on ice in a public thoroughfare.²⁶ Just as the elimination of many capital statutes exposed the changeability of the law, the new police bill did the same by criminalizing activities that had been legal only the day before it went into effect. As I argue in chapter 2, the extension of police power and the softening of the capital code combined to produce a “crisis of legitimacy” for the criminal law, in which the non-essential nature of the law was more acutely apparent. These historical changes affected how criminals were represented and, no doubt, perceived.

The third significant change during the 1830s and 1840s with which I am concerned was that a new reliance was placed on prisons to punish and, especially, reform criminals. A new faith in the power of prisons to reform culminated in the construction of Pentonville Prison, an institution that began receiving prisoners in 1843. Prison reformers hoped that the prison, as a standardized method of punishment, would help “restore the legitimacy of a legal system that they feared was jeopardized by the excessive severities and gratuitous abuses of the bloody code” (Ignatieff 79).²⁷ Prisoners at Pentonville were treated according to the guidelines of what was known as the “separate system,” a regimen that called for prisoners to remain silent and

completely separate from one another throughout their imprisonment. Prison administrators believed that in complete solitude, broken only by visits from the prison chaplain and administrators, prisoners would come to realize that they were responsible for their crimes, experience spiritual renewal, and commit to living a reformed life.²⁸ There was so much enthusiasm for this project that the Pentonville model influenced at least 50 prisons over the rest of the decade (Harding 153). Unfortunately, the rigorous solitude of Pentonville drove many prisoners insane and there was actually little evidence that prisoners were genuinely reformed by the system. Many prisoners also became trapped in a cycle of prison recidivism. Upon release, ex-convicts often had difficulty finding work because the prison stigma prejudiced employers against them. Unable to support themselves or their families honestly, many ex-prisoners committed new crimes that were punished by another prison term.²⁹

During this transitional period in the laws governing how criminals were defined and punished, the general view of criminals was also changing. Earlier in the nineteenth century, criminals were perceived primarily as being motivated by will, an assumption based on the belief that individuals were rational and had control over their behavior. Those who participated in illegal activities, according to this way of thinking, did so by choice (Wiener 54-55).³⁰ In the 1840s and 1850s, however, confidence in the ability of an individual to control him or herself regardless of circumstances was beginning to wane. As historian Martin Wiener explains in *Reconstructing the Criminal*, “new scientific theories [in the 1850s] were making it harder to imagine the human world as exempt from the sway of natural law. Individuals, however free and effective they might feel themselves, were seen to be dependent upon the operation of forces and the constitution of structures beyond the control of their will” (160). Significantly, though, rather than viewing criminals as victims of their environments, which would implicate societal

structures in the creation of crime, criminals were generally assumed to be naturally degenerate (McGowan “Getting” 38). We see evidence of this view of criminals in criminological theories based on biological predisposition. Sciences that attempted to establish relationships between the physical and the criminal, such as phrenology and Cesare Lombroso’s criminal anthropology, seemed to support the hypothesis that criminals were born corrupt and degenerate, and that little could be done to reform them. While criminal behavior was viewed primarily as voluntary earlier in the nineteenth century, by mid-century many believed that criminal nature was pre-determined (Wiener 43). This perception paved the way for the idea of the “criminal class,” a group of degenerate, and irreclaimable, reprobates.³¹

Coincident with these shifts in how criminals were managed and perceived, literature was also in a period of transition, the arc of which is essential for understanding both how and why representations of the criminal changed. *Rookwood* and *Jack Sheppard* are two examples of “Newgate novels,” a term identifying a group of texts published for middle-class audiences between 1830 and 1847 that featured criminals as main characters. Keith Hollingsworth, author of the seminal study on the Newgate novels, explains that this group of texts did not cohere internally – there was no pattern shared by the Newgate novels except for their focus on criminal characters (14). Rather, the term was imposed on these texts by critics, and was used to classify and, sometimes, disparage the Newgate novels for sympathizing with or romanticizing criminal characters in ways deemed inappropriate (John v-vi).³²

The three Newgate novels published before the initiation of the legal changes outlined earlier were *Rookwood*, by Ainsworth, *Paul Clifford* (1830) and *Eugene Aram* (1832), both of which were authored by Edward Bulwer-Lytton.³³ All three of these novels were popular with readers and many critics, though Bulwer-Lytton’s novels were reviewed less favorably than

Ainsworth's. The criticism leveled against *Paul Clifford* and *Eugene Aram*, however, was not necessarily based on any demerits of the novels – Bulwer-Lytton was embroiled in a feud with William Maginn, the editor of *Fraser's Magazine*, and this dispute no doubt predisposed reviewers for that publication to be harsher in their criticism of Bulwer-Lytton than they may otherwise have been.³⁴ These novels were written primarily for middle-class audiences. Lower-class audiences enjoyed these stories at theaters that capitalized on the popularity of the novels, but would have been less able to afford the original volumes (John xiv).

Though the criminal characters in these early Newgate novels differ from one another, they are all represented as heroic figures. Bulwer-Lytton's first Newgate novel tells the story of the young, apparently parentless Paul Clifford, who grows up under the care of the proprietress of a low tavern. As a child, Clifford reads stories of Dick Turpin and other criminals and, though he tries to make a relatively honest start in life as a reviewer for magazines, eventually falls into bad company. While imprisoned for a false charge of picking pockets, Clifford is tutored by a more experienced criminal in the philosophical justifications for committing crimes. After escaping from the house of correction, Clifford falls in with a gang of highwaymen, eventually becoming their leader. Clifford is captured and sentenced to hang, but this conviction is commuted to transportation, and Clifford ultimately escapes from an Australian penal colony to America, where he lives happily with the woman he loves.

Eugene Aram, Bulwer-Lytton's second Newgate novel, is a fictionalization of the life of a real criminal who was executed for murder in 1759. In the novel, Aram is a scholar who, in concert with another, murders a man to gain the economic independence necessary to complete groundbreaking research. After fourteen years the crime is discovered and Aram is hanged. Bulwer-Lytton depicts Aram as a noble, brooding Byronic hero, and the novel examines the

psychology behind Aram's motivations for the crime, and whether or not his punishment was justified (Hollingsworth 87, 89-92).

A detailed summary and analysis of *Rookwood* is provided later in this chapter. What is important to understand in this brief overview of 1830s and 1840s literary history is that these early Newgate novels, each representing sympathetic, if not heroic and exciting, criminal characters, were received on the whole very differently than novels featuring criminals published after the legal and penal changes discussed earlier. Whereas *Paul Clifford*, *Eugene Aram*, and *Rookwood* were generally favored by critics, *Jack Sheppard* was raked over the coals and accused of inciting readers to violence and theft.³⁵ During the first half of the 1830s, one might write a novel with a criminal hero and expect not to compromise the respectability of the work or one's reputation, but attempting to do so in the decade following the publication of *Jack Sheppard* would have been, I argue, very difficult if not impossible.³⁶ This is not to say that there are no criminal characters in middle-class fiction of the 1840s and 1850s – almost all of Dickens's novels published during this period, for example, incorporate criminal themes – but there are only a few publications that feature criminals, and the representation of these criminals is a far cry from the romanticized portrayal of criminal characters in the earlier Newgate novels.³⁷

As the literary criminal hero was becoming taboo in middle-class literature, two other related shifts were occurring. First, as the acceptability of the romanticized criminal was waning, interest in novels emphasizing policing, detection, and the apprehension of criminals was on the rise. Second, the focus on criminal characters in literature did not disappear from the literary landscape. Rather, it shifted into popular literature and flourished with readers who were for

many reasons, I argue, more directly affected by the contemporary changes taking place in the perception and management of criminals.

Police and detective characters had been very popular in the middle-class literature of the 1820s, but they were overshadowed by criminal characters in the 1830s and were not really revived until the early 1840s, when they began gaining the popularity they still retain. For example, the *Mémoires of Vidocq* (1828-1829), which purported to record the cases and adventures of the criminal-turned-police-chief Eugène François Vidocq, became very popular when translated into English and helped shape future detective fiction (Worthington, “Newgate” 125-126).³⁸ This type of literature was reinvigorated when the new detective branch of the police force was created in 1842 (Pykett 34).³⁹

Lauren Gillingham identifies the “police casebook” as the specific genre that took up “the cultural fascination with crime and the performative energies of the criminal” from the Newgate novels in the 1840s, and carried police and detective characters through to the sensation fiction of the late 1850s and 1860s (101). The “criminal’s transgressive energies, as well as the public’s taste for crime, [were] redirected” in the police casebook, “a historical fact that speaks to the reformulation of both readers’ tastes and the discursive construction of criminals and policing” (102). The popularity of these texts demonstrates the growing fascination with the institutional force responsible for harnessing destructive, criminal energies and protecting the property and freedom of the populace.

Gillingham explains that “in the wake of the Newgate school, the detective tends to be the principal repository of narrative enterprise, using his ingenuity not to subvert the social order, but to reinforce its bulwarks against those who would challenge its authority” (104). In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault discusses the close relationship between the police and

the criminal necessary to maintain a system of “delinquency,” or a species of low-level criminality that locks perpetrators into a cycle of crime, prosecution, imprisonment, and release, preventing their engagement in mischief of more consequence (278-280, 282).⁴⁰ Delinquency, as Foucault characterizes it, “constitutes a means of perpetual surveillance of the population: an apparatus that makes it possible to supervise, through the delinquents themselves, the whole social field” (281). In France, according to Foucault, criminal news reporting (criminal *faits divers*) “[made] acceptable the system of judicial and police supervisions that partition society” and the “crime novel...[functioned to] show that the delinquent belonged to an entirely different world, unrelated to familiar, everyday life” (286). Newspapers and crime fiction represented and continue to represent delinquency as “both everyday and exotic,” an inevitable part of life but simultaneously anomalous and shocking (286).

Significantly, as crime and criminals were being pushed to the margins, and certainly being eliminated from literature as subjects appropriate for heroization, middle-class crime fiction published in England in the 1840s featuring “the intrepid detective” separated this figure from “the haunts, habits, and occupations of criminals” (Gillingham 103). This detective was very different from a figure like Vidocq, who had been an actual criminal before working for the police. Worthington explains that in “Recollections of a Police Officer” (1849), for example, the detective “Waters” (pseudonym of William Russell) is “a respectable man of good birth who in his youth is the victim, not the perpetrator, of crime,” and is “a character with which the middle-class reader and his family could identify themselves” (*Rise* 140, 144). Another “domestic” detective character that comes to mind is Inspector Bucket from Dickens’s *Bleak House* (1852-1853) who, despite his autonomy throughout the novel, is assisted in the detection of Mr. Tulkinghorn’s murderess by his clever and watchful wife (ch. 54).⁴¹ It is significant that, as the

figure of the criminal was being marginalized in middle-class culture, police and detective characters were being normalized. The literary detective was “an ideological construct...contrasted against the disorder and deviance of...criminality” (Worthington, *Rise* 145). This character was completely at odds with any vision of romanticized criminality.

Change in how middle-class fiction treated criminal characters is only one strand of inquiry with which this dissertation is concerned. The other is the treatment of the criminal in lower-class popular fiction, a topic that is only beginning to receive focused attention from scholars. While the texts I examine in chapters 3 and 4 are two of the more popular examples of this type of literature, criminals and criminal themes permeated a large proportion of penny literature published during the 1840s and 1850s. In order to understand thoroughly how representations of criminal characters changed during this period when crime and criminals were such contentious subjects, one must turn to popular literature.

I argue that there existed a close relationship between the themes of popular literature, such as that which I examine later in this dissertation, and the experiences of the lower-classes generally. While we lack sufficient records to know how lower-class individuals may have interpreted their world and the contexts in which they lived, we do have historical and literary records that provide insight into the relationship between the lower-classes and what they read.⁴² As I mentioned earlier, for example, legal changes such as those that followed the passage of the 1839 police bill could significantly impact the lives of lower-class individuals, making it more difficult for them to work and enjoy their leisure time. There was a close correspondence between the social context of lower-class audiences and the themes of the literature published for them.

Evidence for this affinity between taste and subject matter in these popular texts is found in the close relationship between popularity, profit, and the extended serializations of texts that successfully sustained the interest of their audience. Publishers of popular literature had no qualms about abruptly stopping a narrative mid-story or unceremoniously concluding serials that were selling poorly so that they could invest their time and resources in better-selling texts (Bleiler, "Introduction" viii). This publication strategy suggests that the producers of these texts had to be finely attuned to the preferences of their primary audiences. As Louis James notes in *Fiction for the Working Man*, "The urban working-class reading public of the early nineteenth century was not only a new market for literature, it had its own tastes. Publishers felt their way into the field by trial and error, or sometimes with primitive forms of market research" (51). A manager for Edward Lloyd, a popular publisher of penny-issue fiction, told an aspiring penny writer that their "publications circulate among a class so different in education and social position from the readers of three-volume novels, that we sometimes distrust our judgement and place the manuscript in the hands of an illiterate person – a servant, or machine boy, for instance. If they pronounce favourably upon it, we think it will do" (T. Frost 90).

James Rymer, the author of *Varney the Vampyre* (1845-1847), the penny blood I analyze in chapter 3, edited a short-lived middle-class publication, *The Queen's Magazine*, that included an article titled "Popular Literature." In this essay, Rymer derides the very type of sensational writing at which he was so adept.⁴³ Rymer wrote:

If an author...wishes to become popular...that is, to be read by the majority...he should, ere he begins to write, study well the animals for whom he is about to cater...a popular author...[must] take care that he writes to the capacities of his readers, or they will have their revenge by condemning all that they don't understand. (Rymer, "Popular" 101)

Although Rymer may have lamented having to “study well the animals” for whom he wrote, his statement indicates the necessity of maintaining an intimate knowledge of the tastes of lower-class audiences and tailoring publications to those tastes.

It is instructive to compare this early relationship between producer, popular text, and consumer with that near the end of the century. Peter Bailey offers a sense of how popular culture at the fin de siècle was less attuned to the specific tastes and social contexts of consumers:

by the 1890s we had moved into a new era of a mass or common culture whose artefacts were designed by a new breed of entrepreneurs to appeal to the widest possible audience irrespective of class or other divisive market variables...culture was now the product of an industry rather than the product of experience and its content was defined by the lowest common denominators of popular taste rather than the particularized expressive needs of a diversity of culture. (49)

It is clear, then, that there was a greater intimacy in the early-Victorian era between producer and consumer than that which existed, and exists, in later mass culture industries.⁴⁴ The popular literature of the 1840s was part of the first wave of cultural productions with the potential to reach larger audiences than ever before; competition demanded that more tailored textual products be offered for consumption.

My readings of *Varney the Vampyre; or the Feast of Blood* and *The Mysteries of London* (1844-1846) in chapters 3 and 4 suggest how popular literature tapped into the contemporary concerns of readers. Both of these texts represent criminal characters according to the biologically deterministic perspectives that were becoming prominent at the time, even though these perspectives were located primarily in middle-class discourses. However, these popular

texts simultaneously challenge the idea of innate criminality by implicating the social and legal systems in the creation of criminals. In my analyses of popular literature, I am concerned with both the disciplinary and antidisiplinary potential of each text.

In addition to being a figure in which disciplinary forces were both literally and symbolically concentrated, the criminal was also a space of antidisiplinary potentialities.⁴⁵ For example, when a criminal was to be executed he or she became a text on which could be inscribed competing narratives. The state sought to render the criminal a repentant and remorseful figure so that he could be held up as an example to deter others from crime and to legitimate state power. However, the condemned criminal could quickly be transformed into a defiant and heroic figure depending on the behavior exhibited before capture, during the trial and imprisonment, and at the execution.⁴⁶ Popular crime literature, including broadsheets, pamphlets, biographies, and lengthy serializations of the type examined in this dissertation, memorialized famous depredators in print and carved out cultural spaces in which competing narratives continued to conflict long after the actual criminal had been executed.⁴⁷ This literature, as Foucault characterizes it, was “a locus in which two investments of penal practice met – a sort of battleground around the crime, its punishment and its memory” (Foucault 67).⁴⁸ Foucault deems it inappropriate to pigeon-hole crime literature as either “a spontaneous form of ‘popular expression’” or “a concerted programme of propaganda and moralization from above,” and instead emphasizes the dynamic interplay between the disciplinary and antidisiplinary forces in these texts (Foucault 67). My close readings of early-Victorian popular literature showcase this interplay.

My argument that competing forces are at work in these popular texts is to claim for them a complexity that critics have already acknowledged exists in commonly read Victorian

literature.⁴⁹ There are also unique aspects of these popular texts that set them apart for special consideration and suggest the analytical power of their disciplinary/antidisciplinary tension. In his discussion of *Oliver Twist* in the introductory chapter of *The Novel and the Police*, D.A. Miller explains that the cycle of criminality in which many of the characters are trapped is intended to generate in middle-class readers outrage and an “appreciation of the miseries of delinquency” (6). However, Miller argues that middle-class readers also experience relief that they are set apart from the criminal world and feel grateful for the orderly, controlled conditions of privileged middle-class life, which is a type of discipline enacted by the novel itself (6). I argue that this engagement between reader and text proceeds differently in the penny literature I analyze in the following chapters. Certainly lower-class readers encounter a similar cycle of criminality in the pages of the popular texts, but it is not so evident that this recognition elicits a response of contentment with or appreciation of their own social positions. In chapter 4, for example, I describe a scene from *The Mysteries of London* in which lower-class characters (and perhaps the reader along with them) become “aware” of the plights of others in their *own* class after listening to autobiographical narratives from individuals who became criminals because of prejudicial social circumstances. These problems remained unresolved and were potentially close to home for lower-class readers who, unlike many of Dickens’s middle-class readers, may not have enjoyed much structure and orderliness in their lives.

This antidisciplinary potential of popular texts was heightened by the conditions in which popular texts were frequently “read.” Often a literate individual would read to a group of listeners who immediately vocalized their responses to the text. When Henry Mayhew spoke to an individual who read frequently to groups of costermongers (street-sellers), the interviewee recalled some of the responses to Reynolds’s *The Mysteries of the Court of London* (1848-1856).

In one scene, a character sits upon a seemingly innocuous chair that suddenly captures her wrists with hidden manacles: “‘Here all my audience,’ said the man to me [Mayhew], ‘broke out with—‘Aye! that’s the way the harristocrats [aristocrats] hooks it. There’s nothing o’ that sort among us; the rich has all that barrikin to themselves.’ ‘Yes, that’s the b—— way the taxes goes in,’ shouted a woman’” (Mayhew I.25).⁵⁰ In Edward Jacobs’s analysis of this passage, he points out that “these costers identified with Reynolds’s text at the specific point when it caricatures upper-class culture as a mechanized entrapment” (333). Mayhew’s interviewee also discussed the responses of costermongers to representations of the police force:

Anything about the police sets them a talking at once. [The man then read a passage to Mayhew that describes policemen breaking up a brawl using their “bull’s-eyes” (lanterns) and “truncheons.” The costermongers responded:] “The blessed crushers is everywhere,” shouted one. “I wish I’d been there to have had a shy at the eslops,” said another. And then a man sung out: “O, don’t I like the Bobbys?” (Mayhew I.25)⁵¹

These comments were no doubt typical of responses to other examples of popular literature and suggest that these reactions did not remain confined in readers’ minds but manifested in public responses that might have political effect.

I do not mean to claim greater antidisciplinary “power” for these texts than is warranted. As Jacobs makes clear, however, these popular texts, which were popular in part because they mocked disciplinary procedures, were deemed sufficiently problematic to be actively eradicated and replaced by mass cultural texts that attempted to align the interests of the lower-classes with those of the middle-classes (341-342).⁵² The antidisciplinary elements of popular texts had the potential to throw disciplinary strategies into sharper relief and make these strategies open to criticism, as the passages from Mayhew demonstrate. The responses of the costermongers

support Foucault's assertion that the "literature of crime" was "a sort of battleground," and demonstrates that this conflict was not confined to the minds of readers (67).⁵³ Recognizing that these popular texts had both disciplinary and antidisiplinary potential acknowledges the complexity of this literature, but more than this, these tensions help us understand popular literature as a site of negotiation of competing discourses that influenced how cultural problems such as criminality were perceived and represented.

I demonstrate at least two ways that popular texts created the conditions for the emergence of alternative narratives to those insisting that criminals were naturally flawed and irredeemable. The first way, mentioned earlier, is that these texts attribute the etiology of criminality to both oppressive societal conditions and the very penal institutions charged with reforming criminals. Brian Reynolds's "transversal theory," outlined in *Becoming Criminal*, his study of early-modern criminality in England, provides another way of understanding how these lower-class texts are potential sites of antidisiplinaryity. In Reynolds's view, state power is maintained, in part, through its influence on "subjective territories," by which he means "the scope of personal experience and perception of the populace's members" (10). In other words, these subjective territories are individual identity spaces, into which each person is born, that the state seeks to "imbue [with]...a common state-serving subjectivity...a shared ideology, that would at the same time give this social body the assurance of homogeneity and universality" (B. Reynolds 10).

One example from the nineteenth century of an attempt by the state to consolidate power across citizens' subjective territories occurred when capital punishment was eliminated for all but certain extreme or violent crimes, such as murder. As I discussed earlier in this chapter, while the reformers of capital punishment were dedicated to abolishing what they considered to

be a barbaric penal practice compromising the health of the nation, part of their motivation stemmed from the necessity of eliminating the confusion and inconsistency surrounding executions. Hangings often drew crowds that treated the execution spectacle as a festivity instead of a solemn, didactic display of state power. This inability of the state to dictate the meaning of hangings for the populace, or to put it in Reynolds's terms, consolidate its will within their subjective territories, contributed to the partial abolition of this punishment. It is significant, however, that murderers continued to be hanged publicly. As V.A.C. Gatrell notes in *The Hanging Tree*, the state *and* the populace were usually in agreement about executing murderers (59). This particular display of state power was not so slippery, and made it that much easier to justify and align this power with the individual subjectivities in the scaffold crowd.

In Reynolds's transversal theory, he argues that individuals may subvert hegemonic, "official" culture by crossing into "transversal territories" (B. Reynolds 18). Transversal territories are cultural and imaginative spaces that provide an opportunity for individuals to inhabit the subjective territories of others, thereby enabling alternative experiences that make it more difficult for the state to homogenize the populace and consolidate its influence (18-19). Transgressing the boundaries separating individuals from one another generates "transversal power," which, ultimately, facilitates the "transcend[ence], fractur[ing], or displace[ment of] the constantly affirmed world of subjective territory" (19). One key way that transversal territories are entered is via empathy, and this is precisely what we see in the early-Victorian popular literature in this study (18).⁵⁴ In *Varney the Vampyre* and *The Mysteries of London*, for example, readers are given opportunities to identify with suffering criminal characters and, by extension, real individuals who are in similar circumstances. This opportunity to "becom[e]-other-social-identities...undermines the supposedly fixed terms, binary distributions, and dialectics that are

culturally and historically widespread, as in the constructs male and female, good and evil, normal and abnormal,” and, I would add, criminal and non-criminal (B. Reynolds 21).⁵⁵ These popular texts are antidisciplinary in at least two ways, then: they challenge dominant narratives about how criminality is fostered and create the conditions for empathic feelings in readers for criminal characters at a time when middle-class society was moving decidedly away from sympathizing with the criminal.

The changes in both middle-class and popular literature were aligned with concomitant changes in English legal and penal structures. Because of the ongoing debates about the causes of crime and what should be done about it, representations of criminals were particularly loaded with contemporary significance and are ideal loci for examining how discourses of crime and punishment were interrelated with contemporary institutional and discursive disciplinary mechanisms. Peter Hutchings explains in his introduction to *The Criminal Spectre* how concern with criminal agency permeated into seemingly unrelated areas of society:

The development of concepts of the individual, expressed in legal concepts of volition and equity, climaxed in the nineteenth century. The very success of the concept of individualized subjectivity brought about its own crisis...bourgeois individuality came to require an elaborate discursive and legal network of regulation to enable its untroubled functioning...The criminal – legally formed as a volitional individual – became an increasing focus of attention, in both legislation and literature, and practices aimed at the regulation of this subject spread into other discourses and practices, from urban planning to photography. (2)

Hutchings's observations demonstrate that the criminal subject was at the heart of a disparate but intertwined collection of social concerns, practices, and institutions. Literature, then, was only one area of Victorian culture negotiating changing representations of the criminal.

In the final section of this introduction, I situate the representation of Dick Turpin in *Rookwood* on the cusp of the historical and literary changes that would alter the depiction of criminals in fiction. I position Turpin as the last romanticized criminal character to escape critical censure. While the character Jack Sheppard in Ainsworth's second novel was romanticized and made into a hero, the very different reception given to this character stands in stark contrast to the pleasurable impression made on critics by *Rookwood*. While the subsequent chapters of this dissertation consider how the representation of the criminal changed in literature, my analysis of *Rookwood* and the novel's reception establishes the standard from which they all deviated. To understand how literary criminals transformed during the 1830s and 1840s in England, we must begin with Dick Turpin.

Dick Turpin: "ultimus Romanorum"

The highwayman Dick Turpin, the most famous character from Ainsworth's *Rookwood*, was the last romanticized fictional criminal in nineteenth-century middle-class literature to escape widespread critical censure. This was so, I argue, because *Rookwood* was published before subsequent legal and penal changes fundamentally altered the way that the criminal was perceived and imagined. The following summary of *Rookwood* situates Dick Turpin within the action of the novel, and illustrates the good will between the middle-classes and literary criminal before this relationship soured during the serialization of *Jack Sheppard*.⁵⁶

The novel opens in the Rookwood family vault, where Peter Bradley, a sexton, hints to his grandson Luke that Luke's mother, whom many believe to have been only the mistress of his

father, Sir Piers Rookwood, was in fact married to him, making Luke the rightful heir to the Rookwood estates. Sir Piers Rookwood has just died, and Luke determines to take his rightful place at the head of the family and purge the taint from his mother's name. Several barriers stand in Luke's way, however: he does not have his parents' marriage certificate, and is unsure whether or not it even exists, he has been mistaken for a poacher and is being sought for punishment, and, most formidably, the current Lady Rookwood seeks to destroy him in order to maintain her power and ensure that her son Ranulph, Luke's younger half-brother, retains his position as legitimate heir. Unfortunately for Luke, Lady Rookwood also has the marriage certificate.

Luke is not without assistance, however. His grandfather, Bradley, is actually Alan Rookwood, a member of the family who was presumed dead, but who has returned disguised to take vengeance on the branch of the family that wronged him many years before.⁵⁷ Luke's other ally is Dick Turpin, who is first introduced in the novel as Jack Palmer.⁵⁸ Sir Piers had invited Turpin to stop a while at the Rookwood estate after being impressed by Turpin's equestrian prowess. During his stay, the expensive objects in the mansion certainly tempt the highwayman, but his code of honor and appreciation of Sir Pier's hospitality prevent him from burgling the house – until Sir Piers's death, that is. Later, as he is robbing the mansion, Turpin steals from Lady Rookwood the marriage certificate proving Luke's legitimacy and plans to sell it to the highest bidder. Turpin subsequently takes up Luke's cause as the rightful heir, and promises to help him reclaim his own. One of the most exciting incidents in the novel occurs when Turpin undertakes to ride from London to York in a single day to return the marriage certificate to Luke.⁵⁹ Ultimately, though, the story ends badly for Luke who, despite being acknowledged as Sir Luke Rookwood, is killed by a poisoned lock of hair sent to him by a vengeful gypsy.⁶⁰ His

half-brother Ranulph succeeds to the title and marries his cousin, Eleanor, who proves to be the real heiress to the Rookwood lands and fortune.

Ainsworth entertained readers with this romantic plot, but Turpin's character was, and perhaps continues to be, the main source of pleasure in the text. Richard Turpin, whom Ainsworth describes in his preface to *Rookwood* as his childhood hero, was a real criminal who was hanged in 1739 for horse-stealing (xxxvii).⁶¹ James Sharpe, author of the most recent book-length discussion of Turpin's life and significance, emphasizes that Turpin was in reality a rather brutal criminal with a volatile temper who frequently committed violent crimes, some of which were tinged with cruelty (137).⁶² Furthermore, he never undertook to ride from London to York in a day, the apocryphal feat he is best known for, and, alas, apparently didn't even own a horse named Black Bess (Sharpe 138).⁶³ Despite these facts, Turpin had during his criminal career managed to capture the attention of newspapers and the popular imagination, and there is evidence that Turpin bolstered his own legend.⁶⁴ After his apprehension and sequestration in 1738 at a prison called York Castle, he attracted many curiosity-seekers who kept him in company and in liquor. Ash and Day note that Turpin's popularity likely inspired many of "the common people" to meditate on how they might help Turpin escape (102).⁶⁵ Aware of his popularity, however, the authorities responsible for guarding Turpin made sure to keep him securely under lock and key. After his death, ballads, last-dying-speeches, and criminal biographies helped propagate the romanticized image of Turpin as a dashing, jaunty, and admirable criminal that was stripped of any ugly depravity, and shaped him into someone with whom readers could identify and sympathize (Ash and Day 128-136).

Turpin, then, was already a legend; Ainsworth did not rescue Turpin from obscurity when he featured him as a character in *Rookwood*. What Ainsworth *did* do for Turpin was insert him

into a genre that was new for the criminal. Whereas Turpin's story had been transmitted in ephemeral texts, such as those mentioned above, and in oral culture, *Rookwood* placed him in a historical romance, a respected genre made famous by Sir Walter Scott.

It is important to note the debt of Ainsworth to Romantic writers such as Ann Radcliffe and Scott.⁶⁶ Radcliffe's influence, and that of other writers of gothic literature, is clearly seen in the gloom, gypsy caves, and extravagant violence in the novel. Ainsworth explained that in writing *Rookwood* he had intended "to attempt a story in the bygone style of Mrs. Radcliffe; substituting an old English squire, an old manorial residence, and an old English highwayman for the Italian marchese, the castle, and the brigand of that great mistress of romance" (qtd. in Ellis I.231). So completely did Ainsworth saturate *Rookwood* with Radcliffian homage that Keith Hollingsworth speculates, "There is probably no single item of originality in all the profusion of Gothic elements" (99).

The influence of the historical novel, made popular by Walter Scott upon the publication of *Waverley; Or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since* (1814), is seen partly in the confluence of history and romance in Turpin's character; critics have also noted similarities between elements in *Rookwood* and *Waverley*, *Rob Roy* (1817), and the *Bride of Lammermoor* (1819).⁶⁷ More important, though, is how Ainsworth, taking another page from Scott, cements Turpin in the mythic English past.⁶⁸ Erin Mackie notes how Turpin landmarks, such as inns in which he was supposed to have slept, and even an oak tree that purportedly sheltered Turpin from pursuers, became (and still are) integrated into the imaginary landscape of the English countryside (Mackie 108).⁶⁹

As Ian Duncan argues in *Modern Romance and the Transformation of the Novel*, one of Scott's most important literary accomplishments was the fabrication of a national past from "the

scattered relics of an ancestral culture that was disintegrating under the pressure of modernization” (4). “The formal version of romance established by Scott,” according to Duncan, was “romance as modern culture’s construction of a symbolic form prior to itself” (10-11). Patrick Kelly also notes this impulse in Ainsworth who, “Like Tennyson and Arnold...shares the Victorian preoccupation with finding in the past some clarification of a bewildering present.” As I discuss in more detail below, Turpin represents a romantic past that Ainsworth laments as irretrievable. The novel implies that it is the loss of this type of hero and what he embodies that makes the present England less glorious than the England of the past. As one character says over the body of Black Bess, “[Turpin’s] exploits will, henceforth, want the colouring of romance,” which is not only an elegy on Bess’s loyalty and equestrian perfection, but speaks to the very romanticization of Turpin taking place at that moment in the novel (Ainsworth, *Rook* 297).

Before discussing Turpin’s depiction in *Rookwood* and his importance for understanding how literary representations of criminality changed in the early-Victorian era, it is necessary to outline the critical frame in which I am situating his character. In chapter 4 of *The Reading Lesson*, Patrick Brantlinger explains that criminals were primarily romanticized in pre-Victorian literature, while in Victorian literature criminal characters were pathologized. The pre-Victorian criminal was depicted as “a figure of freedom...supercharged with the charisma of adventure, banditry, [and] rebellion...[but] by the 1830s various forms of surveillance, mapping, and scientific explanation were making the literary criminal look less like a political rebel than like an object to capture, catalogue, diagnose, and hopefully tame or reform” (Brantlinger 76). The beginning of this transition is evident in the literature of the 1830s and critical reactions to it, and throws into sharper relief the significance of Dick Turpin as the last romanticized criminal deemed generally acceptable by middle-class critics.

One of Turpin's most prominent characteristics is willfulness, and this attribute is at the core of how criminals were perceived and represented over the next decade. As Brantlinger explains, because the romanticized, willful criminal "threatens to be *more* free than the respectable, bourgeois citizen, bound to the ball and chain of law and order," the criminal is recast as an unglamorous, pathologized outcast whose criminality is attributable to moral or biological degeneracy (76). Michel Foucault explains how the criminal's delinquency, or pathologization, recuperates the bourgeois will, first by maintaining petty criminals in a holding pattern of minimally-threatening "illegalities," which restricts their ability to participate in greater criminal enterprises, and second by rendering the criminal as an unattractive figure to be shunned by the respectable, who can rest content in their moral superiority and the confidence that they, in opposition to the criminal, have free agency.⁷⁰ *Rookwood*, however, was published at a moment when the willful and charismatic criminal was not only tolerated but celebrated, and this is nowhere more evident than in the character Dick Turpin.

While Turpin is represented in *Rookwood* as being the apotheosis of the idealized highwayman, the narrator emphasizes that all highwaymen enjoy independent and willful lives. In one instance the narrator quotes from "'the right villainous' Jack Hall, a celebrated tobyman [highwayman] of his day" who claimed that "[the highwayman's] life has, generally, the most mirth and the least care in it of any man's breathing" (Ainsworth, *Rook* 164). In addition to its carefree nature, what is perhaps most alluring about the highwayman lifestyle is that one is able to acquire the worldly luxuries that are normally only attainable through sacrifice and persistent work, and that necessarily prevent one from living without "care." Tom King, another highwayman and friend of Turpin, is described in *Rookwood* as having the means to "[maintain] three mistresses, his valet, his groom... 'and many changes of clothes besides... with which he

appeared more like a lord than a highwayman.’ And what more, we should like to know, would a lord wish to have?” (246).⁷¹ Even Newgate prison is reimagined as a “country-house, where [the highwayman] frequently lives so many months in the year” (165). In these descriptions, the freedom and wealth of the highwayman are compared favorably with the freedom and wealth of an aristocrat or a wealthy member of the upper classes – the highwayman’s life is just as enjoyable and, perhaps, less encumbered than the lord’s since the former can “[pay] his debts...he takes no more than he has occasion for...[and] he craves no more while that lasts” (164-165). The highwayman, then, is enabled to participate in and have all the best parts of an upper-class lifestyle while simultaneously maintaining the absolute freedom to do as he will and avoiding the unpleasantness of work. While the highwayman may be said to labor for his living by robbing coaches, he bypasses the toil that would be necessary for a law-abiding middle-class individual to accumulate wealth and obtain a higher class status.

Turpin’s superiority to the aristocrat and the rising bourgeoisie in this passage idealizes Turpin’s masculinity as well as his individual agency. Before the events surrounding the Glorious Revolution of 1689, masculine honor and value was strongly associated with inherited nobility, which privileged those born to the aristocracy. Michael McKeon summarizes this “aristocratic ideology” as “the set of related beliefs that birth makes worth, that the interests of the family are identified with those of its head, and that among the gentry, honor and property are to be transmitted patrimonially and primogeniturally, through the male line” (“Historicizing” 297). However, as Erin Mackie explains, in the wake of the events of 1689 this naturalistic aristocratic ideology was “eclipse[d]” and replaced by socially contingent class distinctions (6). Masculine worth became valued according to a different set of standards that depended on how well a man performed as a “gentleman,” and how closely he fulfilled expectations of politeness

while at the same time exercising his authority at the head of his family and establishing his position in society through his own labor and intelligence. According to Michèle Cohen, “Politeness...required self-control and discipline of both body and tongue. The ‘ease’ of politeness was not relaxing, but the effect of artful mastery over one’s manners and conduct, in line with the classical legacy of moderation and stoicism on which notions of politeness were ultimately founded” (313). These standards of gentlemanly masculinity required cultivating politeness, but not being *too* polite, since to be the latter might result in an identification as effeminate or unmanly (Cohen 313). These social restrictions and paradoxes defining proper masculinity were one reason, no doubt, that the free-wheeling highwayman, answerable to no-one, was an attractive, though criminal, figure.

Privileging the highwayman over the aristocrat in the above passage also establishes the highwayman’s masculinity in opposition to the stereotypical effeminacy of the aristocrat that developed during the eighteenth century (McKeon, “Historicizing” 308-315). In the novel, Turpin’s masculinity is superior to that of the other male characters in *Rookwood*, who are represented in the novel as criminal reprobates in a degenerated aristocratic succession (Mackie 110). As Mackie points out, this “cris[is] of patriarchy” in the novel came part and parcel with its gothic conventions (110). Turpin, however, stands apart from “patriarchy’s contaminants, conflicts, and crimes”: “He partakes of patriarchy’s masculinist priorities and prestige...yet he is never dependent on them. That, at least, is the fantasy offered by Turpin’s particular brand of prestigious criminal masculinity” (Mackie 111). The depiction, or rather non-depiction, of Turpin’s death on the gallows is one way that Ainsworth preserves Turpin’s masculinity despite his ignominious death. Turpin’s execution takes place “off-stage,” so to speak, and is only casually reported by the narrator:

Turpin (why disguise it?) was hanged at York in 1739. His firmness deserted him not at the last. When he mounted the fatal tree his left leg trembled; he stamped it impatiently down, and after a brief chat with the hangman, threw himself suddenly and resolutely from the ladder. His sufferings would appear to have been slight. (Ainsworth, *Rook* 337)

It is important that the reader not actually witness Turpin's death, as, according to Emma Liggins, "Execution scenes, in both novels and factual accounts, had a propensity to emphasize the hero's emasculation" (65). Turpin meets his death manfully, which, according to the novel, is really the only way that he could have done so.⁷²

Turpin's supreme agency and masculine prowess are best exemplified in his decision to undertake the famous ride from London to York. At the beginning of book 4 in *Rookwood*, Turpin, Tom King, and a group of fellow criminals are enjoying drink and song before Turpin leaves for York to gift the marriage certificate to Luke, when they are surprised by a would-be thief-taker named Coates and the chief of the local constabulary. In the ensuing skirmish, Turpin accidentally shoots and kills King and then gallops off, with his pursuers hot on his heels.⁷³ Turpin's superior horsemanship and the agility of Black Bess enable him to put enough distance between himself and his antagonists so that he can pause and consider what to do. At this point, Turpin might attend to his own safety and take whatever steps necessary to lose his pursuers but instead, "the thoughts of executing his extraordinary ride to York... flashed across him; his bosom throbbed high with rapture, and he involuntarily exclaimed aloud, 'By God! I will do it!'" (Ainsworth, *Rook* 266). Turpin decides to undertake the challenge of riding from London to York in a single day simply because he wants to, and he is clearly undaunted by thoughts of personal danger. A short time later in the chase, the narrator explains that "it was not Dick's object to *ride away* from his pursuers – he could have done that at any moment. He liked the fun

of the chase, and would have been sorry to put a period to his own excitement” (269). In a further reinforcement of Turpin’s carefree attitude toward what, to others, might be considered rather serious circumstances, his pursuers are shocked to see him casually light his pipe, all the while easily maintaining his distance from them (269).

It is important to note that Turpin is portrayed in the novel as being a criminal completely by choice.⁷⁴ The final chapters of this dissertation explain how conceptions of criminality were beginning to change in the late 1830s and the 1840s from the idea that criminals actively and freely chose to commit crimes (a model that places the potential for rational self-command fully in the hands of each individual) to the view that crime was caused by some flaw in the criminal’s moral, or, later, biological composition (a model that assumes the individual has little control over his or her actions).⁷⁵ By repeatedly emphasizing the contemporary notion that individuals are completely in charge of, and responsible for, their own actions, the narrator of *Rookwood* indirectly confirms that Turpin’s decisions to commit crimes are acts of willfulness, rather than any corruption in his basic nature. When praising the perfection of Black Bess’s pedigree as the reason for her equine superiority, for example, the narrator adds that “in the horse, unlike the human species, nature has strongly impressed the noble or ignoble cast” (Ainsworth, *Rook* 272). A few pages later, the narrator explains the susceptibility of horses to subtle changes of mood in their riders and comments, “A gift of the gods is the gallant steed, which, like any other faculty we possess, to use or to abuse—to command or to neglect—rests with ourselves: he is the best general test of our own self-government” (276). These passages affirm the control that each individual has over his or her own behavior and, as implied in the second passage, the immediate environment. This confidence in human self-command contrasts starkly with the conceptions of the criminal will presented in the following chapters. Whereas *Rookwood* depicted Turpin as

having complete control over his own crimes, the criminality of subsequent literary characters was represented as being largely out of their control.

What is perhaps most significant about Turpin's willfulness and self-command is that he is simultaneously idealized by the narrator – even to the point that the narrator suggests, perhaps only partially in jest, that Turpin is a figure to both admire and emulate. The narrator eulogizes Turpin as “the *ultimus Romanorum*, the last of a race” of highwaymen that unfortunately has disappeared from England, and then poses a question asking why, when there are “so many half-pay captains...poor curates...[lieutenants] without hope of promotion...penny-a-liners...detrimental brothers and younger sons,” and, simultaneously, “horses to be hired; pistols to be borrowed, purses to be taken, and mails are as plentiful as partridges,” a “new race of highwaymen” hasn't sprung up (Ainsworth, *Rook* 163-164). The narrator laments, “with the best material imaginable for a new race of highwaymen, we have none, not even an amateur” (164). Based on the material advantages outlined earlier, the highwayman's life would likely seem enticing, especially to those who, on account of social or class circumstances that they cannot help, are condemned, as the narrator implies, to lives of mediocrity and dissatisfaction.

Erin Mackie notes in her chapter on the gentlemanly highwayman in *Rakes, Highwaymen, and Pirates* that Ainsworth's Turpin incites nostalgia for a mythic “merry old England” (101). This longing for past national glories surfaces repeatedly in *Rookwood*; in one instance, the narrator comments on the garden of Rookwood manor, noticing that it was “formal, precise, old-fashioned, artificial, yet exquisite!—(for commend to us the bygone, beautiful English garden—*really a garden*—not that mixture of park, meadow, and wilderness, brought up to one's windows...[which] has obtained so largely” (Ainsworth, *Rook* 27). Like the gardens,

contemporary criminals have degenerated, from “the grand tobyman to the cracksman and the sneak, about whom there are no redeeming features” (165).

This nostalgia for the highwayman is derived, in part, from the association between the highwayman and the aristocrat that I touched on earlier, and helps clarify why the figure of the highwayman could be at once marginalized as a criminal, but simultaneously “appropriated into official culture through gestures of disavowal” (Mackie 12). Drawing from the work of Michael McKeon, Mackie explains that the “absolute license” of the highwayman was situated on the sovereignty of the individual, which had “devolved” from the previous absolutism bound up with monarchical and aristocratic authority (11-12).⁷⁶ This individual sovereignty still carried with it traces of the “discountenanced, indeed criminalized, aristocratic ethos,” but the disavowal of both aristocrat and criminal relegated these figures to the past (Mackie 12). According to Mackie, “Such distancing draws ethical, temporal, and sociocultural distinctions that, on the one hand, cordon off the criminal as a misfit ‘other’ and, on the other hand, thus safely labeled, allow him back into cultural circulation in heavily stylized and reified forms” (12). One is left with a glamorous, independent highwayman whose “commitment to the exercise of personal will self-licensed as absolute authority...serve[s] masculinist fantasies of unchecked self-assertion permissible because romanticized” (12-13). In other words, it is precisely the temporal and romantic distance from the criminal that authorizes the celebration of his unabated individualism, though this characteristic flies in the face of contemporary expectations for proper middle-class masculinity. Criminals such as Dick Turpin “are all successfully quarantined within a romantic, nostalgic past, safely removed from the realities of the present and its grubby everyday criminals” (Mackie 101). In *Rookwood*, “The line between ‘then’ and ‘now’...is a heavy one that

so surely sequesters the past from the present that political and personal crimes can be safely reclaimed into a national mythology” (Mackie 103).

This sequestration was part of the reason *Rookwood* and the novel’s representation of Dick Turpin were so successful, and raises questions about why, in contrast, the reception of *Jack Sheppard* was such a fiasco. Though Sheppard, like Turpin, was a figure from the far-distant past and was presented to the Victorian public in much the same manner as his criminal brother, the popularity of *Jack Sheppard* with the lower-classes and the apparent desire of some of those readers to emulate “grubby criminals” demolished the temporal buffer that authorized the romanticization of Turpin. Though a century had also passed between the death of the original Jack Sheppard and Ainsworth’s fictionalization of his story in 1839, this gap in time did not neutralize the danger posed by Sheppard in the eyes of middle-class critics. On the contrary, the danger was very, uncomfortably, present.

Rookwood, as well as *Paul Clifford* and *Eugene Aram*, generated no significant critical alarm over their romanticization of criminal characters. Criticism of these novels focused primarily on flaws in their composition and, while a few commentators noted their displeasure at an “awakening sympathy with interesting criminals,” this critical response reached nowhere near the same level of disparagement that was, as we will see in chapter 2, heaped onto *Jack Sheppard* (Maginn 112). For example, some critics expressed disapproval of the use in *Paul Clifford* and *Rookwood* of flash, or criminal slang, arguing that it was too vulgar.⁷⁷ The “message” of Bulwer-Lytton’s novels also inspired some of the critical disparagement he suffered.

The publication of *Paul Clifford* added Bulwer-Lytton’s voice to current debates about the reform of the capital code. During the 1820s, Sir Samuel Romilly did his utmost to pass

reform measures that would eliminate capital punishment in cases of minor property crime and he had met with some success.⁷⁸ Romilly faced significant opposition from the House of Lords, however, and particularly from powerful advocates of capital punishment such as Lord Chancellor Eldon who were backed by men like Archdeacon William Paley, author of a treatise that famously argued that if an innocent man was executed, “he should be considered as falling for his country, since the general effect was to uphold the welfare of the community” (Block and Hostettler 26).⁷⁹ The House of Lords, for example, blocked a bill six times that eliminated hanging as a punishment for shoplifting goods up to the value of five shillings, though the measure was finally passed in 1832, after Romilly’s death (44).

Debates about whether or not to partially or totally repeal capital punishment continued into the 1830s under the leadership of Sir Robert Peel and other reformers. While Peel was sometimes hesitant about attempting to push through too much reform too soon, for fear of a backlash from the populace, he was responsible for the creation of the Metropolitan Police in 1829 and succeeded in gaining enough support to repeal capital punishment for several statutes, including the infamous Waltham Black Act that had been in place since 1723.⁸⁰ Periodic repeals of capital punishment that took place throughout the 1830s culminated in 1837 when the death penalty was eliminated for 21 of 37 capital offenses and more stringent guidelines were put in place for the use of those that remained (Block and Hostettler 54).⁸¹

Paul Clifford was published in 1830, at the beginning of this important decade in the history of capital punishment, and, as Bulwer-Lytton would explain in the preface of the 1840 edition, his goal in writing the novel was to “draw attention to two errors in our penal institutions, viz., a vicious Prison-discipline, and a sanguinary Criminal Code—the habit of corrupting the boy by the very punishment that ought to redeem him, and then hanging the man,

at the first occasion, as the easiest way of getting rid of our own blunders” (Bulwer-Lytton vii). For this reason, *Paul Clifford* has been referred to as the first “social novel,” and “was the first English novel to make such a direct attack in twenty years of repeated parliamentary agitation for reform of the criminal law” (Hollingsworth, 65, 66).

Bulwer-Lytton indicted the ruling classes for perpetuating a sanguinary criminal code designed to protect their own interests and failing to sufficiently relieve social conditions, like poverty, that Bulwer-Lytton argued was the real source of criminality. In one well-known and pointed attack, Bulwer-Lytton satirizes government figures by caricaturing them as members in the gang of highwaymen that Clifford joins. For example, “Gentleman George,” the proprietor of the “Jolly Angler,” the public-house where the thieves congregate, is a thinly veiled representation of George IV; “Old Bags,” corresponds to Lord Eldon; and “Long Ned,” mentioned by Thackeray in a quote that appears later in this chapter, is the literary doppelganger of Lord Ellenborough, another proponent of capital punishment who, like Lord Eldon, was influenced by William Paley (Hollingsworth 74). The affinities between these public figures and their characters was no secret – some editions of the novel included a key (John xx). Hollingsworth points out that Bulwer-Lytton’s band of highwayman “omits Sir Robert Peel, whose modern intelligence would represent the best tradition of Tory government; it includes instead the opposite, the old-Toryism of Lords Eldon and Ellenborough” (74). Peel was one of the leaders in favor of repealing capital punishment, and this no doubt helped save him from making an appearance in Bulwer-Lytton’s novel.

Bulwer-Lytton also forwards his reform agenda through the experiences of his main character. During his climactic trial, for example, Paul Clifford gives a speech in his defense, in

which he tells the court that the legal system itself is responsible for his criminality. Referring to his first incarceration for a false charge of theft, he tells the judge:

Your laws are but of two classes; the one makes criminals, the other punishes them. I have suffered by one—I am about to perish by the other... You had first wronged me by a punishment which I did not deserve—you wronged me more deeply, when... I was sentenced to herd with hardened offenders... The laws themselves caused me to break the laws... your legislation made me what I am! (Bulwer-Lytton 433-434)

Moments like this compounded the criminal elements in *Paul Clifford* and “raised some critical eyebrows [at] its tendency to linger ‘too long in the haunts of vice,’ and its supposedly misguided attempt to put the blame for crime on society rather than the criminal” (Pykett 24).

That some critics took issue with the novel’s accusations that the legal system corrupted Clifford reinforces the contemporary perspective that criminality was primarily an individual’s fault. One wonders if the protests regarding this issue might have been louder if the ending of the novel had not mitigated the consequences of Clifford’s unjust treatment. Though the novel indicts the justice system for Clifford’s crimes, Clifford ends up relatively happy and prosperous, and this resolution suggests inadvertently that the situation is not as dire as it had been represented.⁸²

Bulwer-Lytton may have been concerned with promoting legal reform in *Paul Clifford*, but in *Rookwood* Ainsworth was primarily interested in telling a rollicking good story, and the publication of five editions in three years suggests the story’s popularity with readers (Worthington, “Newgate” 129).⁸³ The critics favored the novel as well. After the third edition of *Rookwood* was published, for example, an article in *Fraser’s* in 1836 boasted that the magazine was, “among the first to predict the rapid and successful career of Mr. Ainsworth as a novelist; when Turpin first did ride abroad, we were there to see, to admire, and to applaud; at this stage of

his popularity...our encouraging cheer is drowned in the general shout of acclamation” (“Another Caw” 488). In a retrospective article about Ainsworth published in *Hunt’s London Journal* in 1844, the author remembers that on *Rookwood’s* début, “The papers abounded in quotations, critics in encomiums, and circulating libraries were besieged” (“Literary ‘Lions’” 56). Those who found fault with the novel criticized elements such as the incorporation of flash language, as mentioned above, or were displeased by the gothic elements and exaggerated plot.

In addition to much of the action in the novel taking place in crypts and gypsy caves, many other gothic elements are peppered throughout the text. At the beginning of the novel, for example, Luke accidentally upsets his mother’s coffin, but when the body falls out, to Luke and his grandfather’s amazement, the body has not deteriorated. Luke, however, accidentally snaps off his dead mother’s hand and then carries it around with him throughout the first portion of the narrative. At the end of the novel, Lady Rookwood and Alan Rookwood accidentally meet in the family crypt. Lady Rookwood is entombed alive in a sarcophagus, and Alan Rookwood, being unable to open a door that is locked from the outside, gradually perishes from starvation, cursing his brother’s memory to the last. Based on these and other gothic elements, the *Literary Gazette* complained that the book had “too many murders, skeletons, and omens...exaggeration is carried to its last excess of deaths’ heads and cross-bones” (“Review” 289). The reviewer for the *Court Magazine* lost all patience with *Rookwood’s* “unnatural, revolting, and very extraordinary story” and eventually “shut up the book in despair” (“Literature of the Month” 242).

Heather Worthington explains that in critiques of *Rookwood* “it was the absence of realism that was condemned, reflecting a growing critical insistence on the need for the novel to move away from romance” (“Newgate” 130). I will discuss this tension between literary realism and romance in more detail in chapter 4, but here it is important to note that these various

complaints about the novel did not focus on the criminal elements, as criticism of *Jack Sheppard* would only a few years later. In fact, many critics found the character Dick Turpin and his ride from London to York the most compelling elements in the story. In the same review mentioned above from the *Literary Gazette*, the critic was delighted with the representation of Turpin and his criminal exploits, noting that “There is a good housebreaking scene, and some lively sketches of celebrated highwaymen...but commend us to the ride to York. We do not hesitate to pronounce it one of the boldest, most original, and effective sketches that we know in any modern novel” (“Review” 289). The *Monthly Magazine* included a tongue-in-cheek prediction that reading *Rookwood* would, as the narrator in the novel hopes, tempt men and boys to take to the road:

highwaymen yet unfledged will breathe into the [Ordinary of Newgate’s] ears that it was the perusal of the inflammatory pages of “*Rookwood*” which led them into the commission of their heinous offences. We are the more inclined to believe this from hearing that a few days ago it was gravely proposed, by certain officers of a mess, at a certain barrack not twenty miles from town, and in a locality not uncongenial to such an undertaking, after a discussion of the deeds of Turpin in “*Rookwood*,” that they should order their horses – call for coffee and pistols – mount – sally forth, and take a midnight scour over the heath after the good old fashion of the knights of the road! – Could stronger proof be wanting of the deleterious tendency of the work than this? Mr. Ainsworth must abide by the consequences. (“Dick Turpin” 668)⁸⁴

While these remarks are meant in jest, this precise criticism would be leveled, with complete seriousness, at *Jack Sheppard*’s apparent tendency to corrupt young readers.

In *Jack Sheppard*, Ainsworth attempted to repeat the same formula that had served him so well in *Rookwood* in 1834, but did not realize “how fast the times had changed” (Hollingsworth 138).⁸⁵ Jack Sheppard, a famous eighteenth-century thief and jailbreaker hanged in 1724, was portrayed in Ainsworth’s second novel as a witty, daring, and noble criminal. The procession to the gallows at the end of the novel is almost triumphant, and is full of celebration of and sympathy for Sheppard. In the first few months of its serialization in *Bentley’s Miscellany*, middle-class critics reviewed *Jack Sheppard* as another benign romance, but this attitude changed, in part, because of the immense popularity of the story with a lower-class audience. As a contemporary journalist observed, Jack Sheppard’s “popularity became all at once an offence...because low people began to run after him at the theatres” (Blanchard xii). Young thieves, and even a valet who murdered his master, mentioned the influence of Sheppard’s story on their decisions to commit crimes, and ultimately critics labeled Ainsworth’s novel as a “bad” book (“Literary Examiner”).⁸⁶ *Jack Sheppard* began publication only five years after *Rookwood* first appeared, and the disparity between their receptions, despite the very similar representations of their main criminal characters, highlights how contemporary events and changing perceptions affected literary criminals. I see *Jack Sheppard* as a transitional text between *Rookwood* and the representations of criminals in popular literature analyzed in the final two chapters of this dissertation. The reception of *Jack Sheppard* demonstrates that romanticization was no longer a viable way of representing criminal characters – perceptions of the criminal had fundamentally changed.

Heather Worthington also points to the historic changes occurring between the publication of *Rookwood* and *Jack Sheppard* as important influences on the novels’ different receptions. She concludes that “the real-life criminal was losing his or her interest as a fictional

subject or vehicle for social comment” (Worthington, “Newgate” 131). I contend that the reasons behind the differences in the novels’ receptions are more complex than simply a loss of interest in these characters, and have to do with the shift that Brantlinger observes in *The Reading Lesson* about how the middle-classes were beginning to distance themselves from the criminal. I do not think that the figure of the criminal became less interesting to middle-class readers; despite the condemnation of *Jack Sheppard* by critics, the novel had significant cross-class appeal, and there is little reason to expect that the excitement of a novel focused on a witty and interesting criminal would wane on its own.⁸⁷ I do think, as Brantlinger suggests, that the middle-class reader’s stake in criminal characters was changing. To repeat briefly a line quoted earlier, Brantlinger argues that “In unconscious ‘underworld’ ways, crime threatens to *out*-produce and the criminal threatens to be *more* free than the respectable, bourgeois citizen, bound to the ball and chain of law and order” (76).⁸⁸ Celebrating a romanticized criminal character that embodies all the ways in which one is not free would potentially inspire dissatisfaction with the “ball and chain” self-imposed through a dedication to “law and order” and working diligently for social advancement.

Middle-class literature abandoned the heroic criminal character because the perception of the criminal changed. Instead of being perceived and represented as a free-willed, honorable character, criminals came to be seen as inherently corrupt and degraded. What Brantlinger identifies as the threat of the willful criminal contributed to this perceptual change and, once the criminal was pathologized, this further reinforced the need to separate the criminal, fictional or otherwise, from respectable society. A Dick Turpin forced by social circumstances to commit low crimes would be a very different figure; he would perhaps be more similar to a character like the Resurrection Man, a villainous body-snatcher in *The Mysteries of London* that I discuss in chapter 4. The very willfulness that made the criminal admirable simultaneously made the

criminal dangerous, and once agency was stripped from the criminal and criminality was perceived to be the result of inherent, natural deviancy, he became a figure to be shunned rather than glorified.

An additional way that the relationship between the middle-classes and the romanticized literary criminal was changing is evident in the apparent consequences of this type of representation for public order. Hollingsworth notes that “Although some criticized [*Rookwood*] for including a low element,” as we have seen, “no one expressed fear that the novel would lead young men into a life of crime” (109). After *Jack Sheppard*, however, novels featuring criminals would not seem so benign. The figure of Jack Sheppard seemed to have the real and dangerous potential to corrupt lower-class readers who were thought to be more ill-equipped both morally and educationally to resist the allure of a life of crime romanticized by a novel. To approve of this type of publication would mean risking having one’s literary tastes deemed unrespectable.

As Thackeray wrote in an article for *Fraser’s* in April 1839, just four months after the serialization of *Jack Sheppard* commenced in *Bentley’s Miscellany*, “Mr. Paul Clifford, Mr. William Sykes, Mr. Fagin, Mr. John Sheppard...and Mr. Richard Turpin...are gentlemen whom we must all admire. We could ‘hug the rogues and love them,’ and do – *in private*. In public it is, however, quite wrong to avow such likings, and to be seen in such company” (408). Thackeray’s observation is mildly facetious, but his comments highlight that, while the “respectability” of the attractive criminal character was waning, the same could not necessarily be said about middle-class interest or pleasure in the fictional criminal.

In addition to other criticism of the Newgate novel published in journal and magazine articles, Thackeray also wrote his own “anti-Newgate” novel, *Catherine* (1839-1840), “his most sustained piece of propaganda,” in an effort to prove that one could write a novel featuring a

criminal character without actually sympathizing with the criminal (Hollingsworth 149; 152-153).⁸⁹ To this end, Thackeray sought in the *Newgate Calendar* “a case bleaker than most in its lack of meaningful passions and grimmer than most in its physical horror,” and found the story of Catherine Hayes, who engaged two men to murder her husband, and who was ultimately burned at the stake for her crime in 1726 (152-153). Thackeray directed satire and polemic against the *Newgate* novel, arguing that “virtue and vice must not be confused; since not to be confused, they must not be mingled in the same character, and vice must not even be made interesting” (156). Ultimately, however, the novel was not very popular, though Thomas Carlyle appreciated it, and in a letter to his mother, Thackeray acknowledged that his experiment had been largely a failure: “[*Catherine*] was not made disgusting enough...the triumph of it would have been to make readers so horribly horrified as to cause them to give up or rather throw up the book and all of it’s [sic] kind, whereas you see the author had a sneaking kindness for his heroine, and did not like to make her utterly worthless” (165). There were, then, a variety of contributing factors influencing the abandonment of the heroic, morally ambiguous criminal by middle-class authors. The disappearance of the criminal from these texts resulted from a combination of critical remonstrance, of the type generated by Thackeray and other vociferous detractors of *Jack Sheppard*, and the increasing pathologization of the criminal.

Importantly, while the original reception of Turpin in the mid-1830s was not so troubling, Turpin would later be lumped together frequently with Jack Sheppard as a corrupter of lower-class youth after the uproar surrounding the publication of the novel *Jack Sheppard*. There was some precedent for the idea that reading stories about Turpin could turn a young person toward crime. As has already been mentioned, Paul Clifford reads stories about “the life and adventures of the celebrated Richard Turpin” (Bulwer-Lytton 21), and in 1832, two years before the

publication of *Rookwood*, a police report noted that when two young pickpockets were apprehended and searched, one had a copy of “The Life and Adventures of the Noted Dick Turpin,” and the other, “a song in praise of...Turpin” (“Police.” *Examiner* 668). After the publication of *Jack Sheppard*, however, both Sheppard and Turpin would often be mentioned in the same sentence by those criticizing their influence on impressionable youths. For example, a police report published in the *Times* in 1840 mentioned that “a lad named William Clarke” stole some cigars from his master and, when his trunk was searched, the authorities discovered “penknives, a small quantity of type which had been stolen from a printer’s shop in the neighbourhood ...and the two precious books ‘Jack Sheppard’ and ‘Dick Turpin,’ embellished with a great variety of woodcuts, representing the gallant adventures of the first-rate thieves of that day” (“Police.” *Times* 7).⁹⁰ In the record of his experiences interacting with London youth in *London Labour and the London Poor*, Henry Mayhew speculated:

Had Mr. Ainsworth been with me, and seen how he had vitiated the thoughts and pursuits of hundreds of mere boys—had he heard the names of the creatures of his morbid fancy given to youths at an age when they needed the best and truest counsellors—had he seen these poor little wretches...grin with delight at receiving the degrading titles of ‘Dick Turpin,’ and ‘Jack Sheppard,’ he would, I am sure, ever rue the day which led him to paint the most degraded and abandoned of our race as the most noble of human beings.
(3:370)

Mayhew’s comment, written near the end of the 1840s, highlights how drastically opinions toward literary criminals had changed. Though Dick Turpin was initially accepted as an idealized and entertaining figure, a decade and a half later he was a “degraded” criminal, shunned by the respectable (at least in public, as Thackeray said), with the potential to corrupt those who read

about his exploits. After *Rookwood*, heroic literary criminals would be condemned and disappear from their once prominent place in middle-class fiction.

Conclusion

In the next chapter, I explore the extreme popularity of the character Jack Sheppard with a lower-class audience. Soon after *Jack Sheppard* began serialization in *Bentley's Miscellany* it was disseminated in cultural forms more affordable by lower-class audiences, including ballads, plagiarisms, and cheap engravings. Critics feared that lower-class readers would be corrupted by Sheppard's example and be inspired by the story to commit crimes; they assumed that lower-class readers were only passive consumers of texts and did not have the educational or moral training to read with discrimination and discernment. I demonstrate, however, that readers were actively responding to the lower-class Jack Sheppard texts because they resonated with the contemporary historical changes that were impacting readers' lives. Comparing the receptions of Ainsworth's second novel with his first showcases the development of concerns and anxieties surrounding the romanticized criminal.

In my third chapter I examine a penny publication titled *Varney the Vampyre; or the Feast of Blood* (1845-1847). This serialized story was a long-running account of the exploits of a vampire, Varney, and his schemes to attain wealth and satisfy his blood-lust. One of the key features of Varney's characterization, and vampire curse, is that it is almost impossible to kill him permanently. Each time he dies, either by being killed by other characters, starving to death, or, once, a failed suicide attempt, his body is resurrected after being exposed to moonbeams. Each time Varney resurrects, he grows more and more depressed and frustrated with his life. While he must attack women and drink their blood to survive, he loathes himself for doing so. Finally, out of desperation, Varney jumps into Mount Vesuvius in order to destroy his body and

stop the cycle of resurrection and despair. I read Varney's resurrection cycle as an approximation of the cycle of prison recidivism in which many convicts and ex-convicts suffered. As was mentioned at the beginning of this introduction, after being imprisoned and released, ex-criminals were stigmatized and had a difficult time finding sufficient work to support themselves and their families. In many instances, these individuals would again take to crime out of necessity and wind up back in prison, only to repeat the process over again. The text implies that Varney's ongoing delinquency is the fault of the system in which he is caught; Varney is a victim of the institutionalized cycle of crime and punishment.

Much of *Varney the Vampyre* is written in a way that recalls the romanticization of criminals in eighteenth-century criminal biography. However, because Varney approximates a prisoner caught in a cycle of prison recidivism (a position that was decidedly *unheroic*), his characterization creates generic dissonance in the text. Varney, as a representative of contemporary nineteenth-century criminality, cannot be romanticized as past criminals, such as Dick Turpin, were.

In the final chapter, I turn to a publication that ran concurrently with *Varney the Vampyre*. G.W.M. Reynolds's *The Mysteries of London* (1844-1846) was an enormously popular serial that more overtly implicates social inequality and injustice in the perpetuation of criminal behavior. While the text showcases vice and depravity from both low and high society, it takes pains to justify the crimes of the former while condemning those of the latter. The text first represents lower-class criminal characters as inherently corrupt. I demonstrate how the text invokes contemporary conventions from stage melodrama in order to make these criminal characters appear to be "villains" who are simply bad without cause. However, the narrative complicates its own representation of these characters by giving criminals opportunities to

explain how and why they turned to crime. In these explanations, the reader learns, along with other characters in the story, how social disadvantages propelled these characters toward crime, despite their best efforts to resist it. This text also situates characters within a broad spectrum of criminality, demonstrating, against the tendency of the time, that all criminals cannot be lumped together as a homogeneous criminal “class” that is inherently corrupted.

The Mysteries of London participates in contemporary debates taking place in middle-class literature about the place of romance and realism in literature. While the main storyline follows the rise of the heroic main character from social disgrace to a position in a royal family, the text simultaneously undermines this romance by emphasizing that it can really only take place in fiction. The text warns that viewing reality through the lens of literary romance might cripple social progress and slow the alleviation of the conditions that plague society with criminals.

This study of early-Victorian representations of criminality demonstrates the importance of popular texts in literary history. Without understanding that popular literature was also in dialogue with the contemporary historical and literary landscape, scholars risk misunderstanding the trajectory of themes and issues, like criminality, and how they were represented in literature. The criminal did not vanish after the Newgate novel, only to reappear in sensation fiction in the 1860s. This figure was still prevalent in a different literary context that is, I argue, just as important for understanding Victorian literature as middle-class texts, which have received the lion’s share of critical attention. As the following chapters demonstrate, Victorian popular literature is a challenging and exciting area of underexplored culture and history.

CHAPTER TWO

A “Darling of the Mob”: The Antidisciplinarity of the Jack Sheppard Texts

*“Listen to me, all good people,
 Who’s not of highwaymen afraid;
 While I tell the doleful story
 Of a merry roaring blade
 Ri tol, &c.*

*Years ago, at least a hundred,
 Jack Sheppard lived, the bold and free,
 No braver man e’er cracked a crib, sirs,
 Or swung upon the Tyburn tree.”
 (“Life of Jack Sheppard”)*

On 16 November 1724, a man named Jack Sheppard was hanged for stealing 108 yards of woolen cloth. Normally a hanging like this would be viewed as relatively unexceptional, since people were often executed for similar and lesser crimes. As was the case with many exhibitions of capital punishment, people also gathered around the gallows to watch the spectacle of Sheppard’s death. But Jack Sheppard’s hanging was unique in several ways. Sheppard had already been twice sentenced to die and had twice eluded his executioners by escaping from Newgate prison. His second escape was especially astonishing because of the obstacles Sheppard overcame, including “twisting and breaking asunder [sic] by the strength of his Hands a small Iron Chain, which together with a great Horse Padlock” held him to the floor, breaking through doors “as strong as Art could make them” and descending from the prison using a blanket attached to an iron spike he had jammed into a wall (Rawlings 64-65). The damage done to the prison was estimated to be worth at least sixty pounds, and many conjectured that “the Devil came in Person and assisted” Sheppard in escaping (64-65).

When Sheppard was finally on his way to the gallows, the number of people lining the road and standing at Tyburn waiting to see him hanged is estimated to have been in the hundreds

of thousands (Ross 85). The *Daily Journal* reported there was “never...such a Concourse of People ever seen in Holborn, and the Places leading to Tyburn,” a testament to how interested in Sheppard was the populace (“London, Nov. 17”). After he was hanged, individuals from the crowd commandeered Sheppard’s body, ensuring its eventual burial and preventing it from being anatomized by surgeons.¹ The size and reaction of the crowd alone attests to Sheppard’s fame and popularity, though this was also evident in the number of publications about Sheppard’s exploits that appeared before and after his death.

Ostensibly, Sheppard’s escapes and his well-known wit account for some of his popularity, and Phillip Rawlings points out that because there were few other newsworthy events at the time, writers attempted to wring as much copy as possible out of Sheppard’s escapes and recaptures (39).² Unlike other famous, or infamous, criminals who drew large crowds at Tyburn, however, there was a significant textual response to Sheppard’s story. *The History of the Remarkable Life of John Sheppard* (1724), one of the biographies written at the height of Sheppard’s fame, records the popular reaction to his recapture after his first escape from Newgate:

[The news] made such a Noise in the town, that it was thought all the common People would have gone Mad about him; there being not a *Porter* to be had for Love nor Money, nor getting into an Ale-house, for *Butchers*, *Shoemakers*, and *Barbers*, all engag’d in Controversies, and Wagers, about *Sheppard*. (Rawlings 58-59)

The occupations of those excited by Sheppard’s exploits suggest that Sheppard resonated most strongly with individuals from the working classes. This resonance encouraged publishers to capitalize on Sheppard’s story in texts notable for their number and variety. In addition to the several biographies (and one purported autobiography) written about his life, Sheppard was

mythologized in prints, stage plays, songs, verses, sermons, fictitious dying speeches, a conversation with Julius Casesar, a pamphlet titled *Sheppard in Aegypt* (a “letter” from Sheppard to “Frisky Moll” and his executor recounting his “Arrival and Reception at Styx”), and was likely part of the inspiration for William Hogarth’s didactic series *Industry and Idleness*.³ John Gay’s *A Beggar’s Opera* (1728) capitalized on the current interest in prison scenes, prostitutes and thieves, and Sheppard continued appearing occasionally in popular contexts through the remainder of the century.⁴ Interest in Sheppard was renewed on an even larger scale in 1839 when William Harrison Ainsworth began serializing *Jack Sheppard: A Romance* in *Bentley’s Miscellany*.

One other explanation for Sheppard’s resonance with the eighteenth-century working-class audience is the intersection of his story with the passing of the Waltham Black Act in 1723, the year before Sheppard was hanged. The Waltham Black Act was the culmination of a series of legislative policies designed to protect property and regulate the lives and criminality of the laboring poor (Linebaugh, *London* 16-18). While the Black Act was initially created to deal with fifty specific offenses related to the destruction of game and property, as E.P. Thompson explains, “[a]n even stricter but more legalistic multiplication, which takes into account the different categories of persons committing each offence (whether armed or disguised, whether principals in the first or second degrees, accessories, etc.) gives a total of between 200 and 250” (*Whigs* 23). What is more, “the Act was so loosely drafted that it became a spawning-ground for ever-extending legal judgements” (23). Leon Radzinowicz, author of a seminal study on the history of English criminal law, says of the Waltham Black Act: “no other single statute passed during the eighteenth century equalled [the Black Act] in severity, and none appointed the punishment of death in so many cases (51). There was “hardly a criminal act which did not come

within the provisions of the Black Act” (77).⁵ The Black Act played a significant role in cementing English penal law as a one-punishment-fits-all system and resulted in the frequent and spectacular exercise of state power on the bodies of the condemned at the gallows.

The coincidence of Sheppard’s execution occurring a year after the Black Act was passed suggests one possible reason why Sheppard’s story resonated so strongly with lower-class audiences. Playwrights and authors tried to capitalize on Sheppard’s popularity by reinforcing the mockery of justice implicit in Sheppard’s repeated prison escapes. For example, in John Thurmond’s *Harlequin Jack Sheppard, or, a Night Scene with Grotesque Characters* (1724), a play performed only twelve days after Sheppard’s execution, prisoners in Newgate sing the following lines:

Knaves of Old to hide Guilt, by their cunning Inventions,
 Call’d Briberies Grants, and plain Robberies Pensions:
 Physicians and Lawyers (who took their Degrees,
 To be learned Rogues) call’d their Pilfering, Fees...⁶
 ...Some cheat in the Customs, some rob the Excise,
 But he who robs both is esteemed most Wise;
 Church-Wardens, who always have dreaded the Halter,
 As yet, only venture to steal from the Altar...
 ...Some, by Publick Revenues, which pass’d thro’ their Hands,
 Have purchas’d clean Houses, and bought dirty Lands:
 Some to steal from a Charity think it no Sin,
 Which, at home (says the Proverb) does always begin;
 But if ever you be

Assign'd a Trustee,
 Treat not Orphans like Masters of the Ch----ry,
 But take the High-way, and more honestly seize,
 For every Man round me, may Rob, if they please. (Thurmond 17)⁷

This song calls attention to the fine line between “pilfering” and collecting “fees” that was drawn according to class and the prejudice of the law. Emphasizing the relativity of how crime is defined discredits a justice system that singles out the poor for punishment while “physicians,” “lawyers,” “church-wardens,” and those who steal from charity escape punishment and grow rich besides. This apparent unfairness in the law may have echoed for some audience members the consequences of the year-old Black Act that singled out for capital punishment many actions, such as poaching, by which the poor survived.

Certainly *Harlequin Jack Sheppard* is not the only eighteenth-century production to criticize the law by suggesting its partiality to the rich, but the excerpt above demonstrates that Sheppard, who was already a “darling of the mob” by the time of his execution, was a figure that audiences found significant in the context of an increased criminalization of lower-class life (*History of the Lives* xii). Significantly, the Jack Sheppard phenomenon recurred in a similar context in the early nineteenth century when the publication of Ainsworth’s *Jack Sheppard* coincided with far-reaching changes in the criminal law. Between 1837 and 1839, a span of only two years, capital punishment was nearly abolished and the new police force was given expanded jurisdiction that carried with it legislation criminalizing activities participated in by the lower-classes for work and pleasure. These changes bookended the implementation of the Black Act and were a significant step in the evolution of the legal system from its reliance on spectacle to its emphasis on surveillance and prison discipline. In the nineteenth century, Sheppard’s story

was widely disseminated in publications for lower-class readers and by cheap theater performances, creating a moral panic for middle-class critics who were concerned with the implications of lower-class reading. Even though Ainsworth's novel was initially received by the middle-class press as a harmless and pleasant romance, it soon became reviled as a source of inspiration for would-be Jack Sheppards.

Though Jack Sheppard became a fixture in English history, his popularity was not sustained at so high a level as that seen during the end of his life and immediately following his execution. Rather significantly, Sheppard's popularity spiked at moments in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when legislative shifts created the conditions for what Douglas Hay refers to as "a crisis of legitimacy for the English criminal law" (Hay, "Crime" 45). As Hay demonstrates, a restructuring of the boundaries demarcating what was and was not "criminal" in the eighteenth century resulted in class frictions when newly criminalized behaviors were still regarded as "perfectly legitimate activities by almost the entire population...or by particular communities" ("Crime" 72). In similar contexts in both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, lower-class individuals who experienced most acutely the effects of what they perceived to be illegitimate legal restrictions may have felt a sense of camaraderie with Jack Sheppard, a working-class figure who exhibited little regard for the law. Such an audience may have enjoyed participating, if only imaginatively, in Sheppard's evasions of justice.

This chapter draws on Tony Bennett's theory of reading formations to position "culturally activated" popular texts – a ballad, plays, and a penny-an-issue plagiarism – about Sheppard into conversation with "culturally activated" readers who were affected significantly by new shifts in the criminal law (12). By identifying and analyzing possible moments of resonance between these texts and readers, this chapter argues that lower-class readers were

actively interpreting texts that have often been accused of being popular for their sensationalism alone. That is, instead of only taking pleasure in the melodrama and action of Sheppard's career and passively absorbing the ostensibly moral lesson that his story was intended to impart, readers "actively" read the text and made meanings that were rooted in their individual experiences. This argument has wider implications for examining the tensions between middle-class dominant culture and lower-class popular culture, especially regarding how critics understood lower-class responses to Jack Sheppard.

Michel de Certeau's chapter "Reading as Poaching" provides a framework for understanding why Victorian middle-class commentators remained convinced that lower-class responses to *Jack Sheppard* were the fault of the inherent immorality of the novel.⁸ According to de Certeau, cultural authorities, such as the critics of *Jack Sheppard*, assume incorrectly that non-elite, often lower-class, readers passively consume and reproduce what they read. Because these readers are misunderstood as having no interpretive agency, unauthorized readings are blamed on perceived ideological flaws in offending texts. In other words, Victorian middle-class critics failed to recognize that lower-class readers were actively interpreting the Jack Sheppard story in accordance with their perception that the legal changes newly criminalizing aspects of their lives were illegitimate. The figure of Jack Sheppard was for lower-class readers a space of "antidiscipline," to borrow de Certeau's phrase, at the intersection of lower-class literacy, popular texts, and the law (xv). The analysis of the texts in this chapter suggests ways in which the Sheppard story resonated with contemporary readers and contributes to a fuller understanding of nineteenth-century popular literature and culture.

“*Reading Merely*”

Ainsworth’s *Jack Sheppard: A Romance*, was serialized in *Bentley’s Miscellany* from January 1839 to February 1840.⁹ The novel weaves two plotlines: the first, the path of the historical Jack Sheppard, and the second, that of the entirely fictional Thames Darrell, Sheppard’s fellow apprentice, who maintains virtue through many trials and is ultimately rewarded with a French peerage and marriage to the woman whom Sheppard loves.¹⁰ These interwoven storylines, in which virtue is finally rewarded and vice, despite how attractively it may be rendered, is punished, was common fare for the middle-class audience of *Bentley’s Miscellany*. A middle-class publication both in content and in price, *Bentley’s Miscellany* was, at 2s.6d., too costly for most lower-class readers. *Jack Sheppard* remained expensive when issued in fifteen monthly parts at a shilling each, and even more so when sold in three volumes at £1.5s.

When first published in formats aimed at a primarily middle-class audience, *Jack Sheppard* received either modest critical acclaim or was glanced over as a pleasant and innocuous romance similar to Ainsworth’s previously successful *Rookwood* (1834), in which he fictionalized the life of another popular eighteenth-century criminal, Dick Turpin.¹¹ Within the first nine months of publication, *Jack Sheppard* was described as “display[ing] much graphic truth and beautiful sentiment” (“Public Journals”) and as having “infused new promise into *Bentley’s Miscellany*” (“Bentley’s”).¹² In an article for *Fraser’s Magazine*, William Thackeray wrote “we have the strongest curiosity and admiration for Mr. Ainsworth’s new work, *Jack Sheppard*” and then elaborated on his and his readers’ affinity for other literary rogues: “Mr. Long Ned, Mr. Paul Clifford, Mr. William Sykes, Mr. Fagin...and Mr. Richard Turpin...are gentlemen whom we must all admire. We could ‘hug the rogues and love them,’ and do – *in private*. In public it is, however, quite wrong to avow such likings, and to be seen in such

company” (408). Laman Blanchard echoed Thackeray in his 1842 memoir, observing that, “Critics...were in raptures with the old established brigand...could hug *Robin Hood* as fondly as ever, and dwell with unhurt morals on the little peccadilloes of *Rob Roy*...[and] had no objection to ride behind *Turpin* to York any day” (xii). Thackeray’s “curiosity and admiration” was typical of the initial public reaction to *Jack Sheppard*, but the novel sparked the interest of the lower classes, leading critics to believe “that housebreakers are disreputable characters” (Blanchard xii).

Thackeray’s and Blanchard’s comments delineate the class division in (un)authorized textual pleasure, and the distrust with which middle-class critics viewed lower-class narrative consumption. Based on their comments, middle-class readers (Thackeray’s “we”) may indulge in the illicit pleasures of morally questionable reading with less fear of contamination precisely because their educational training enables them to separate fiction from reality, and their bourgeois morality and class-position predispose them to curb any desires to emulate the criminal heroes. This kind of (middle-class) reading is a sort of textual slumming, in which participants may dabble in questionable narrative environments and then leave them behind, having enjoyed the titillation but being none the worse for it. This was not thought to be the case for lower-class readers, however. As Blanchard points out, “the prison-breaker’s popularity became all at once an offence...because low people began to run after him at the theatres” (xii). The problem, as we shall see, was that some lower-class readers began “playing” Jack Sheppard in real life, which seemed to confirm middle-class critics’ suspicions that these readers were unable to distinguish between fiction and reality.

Criticism of Ainsworth’s novel did not begin in earnest until it was reproduced in forms more affordable to lower-class audiences. Soon after *Bentley’s Miscellany* began serializing *Jack*

Sheppard, playwrights and publishers recognized that significant profit could be made by reproducing the Sheppard story in forms affordable to the lower classes such as ballads, penny serializations, barely altered plagiarisms, and cheap theatrical adaptations performed at “gaff” theaters.¹³ The theatrical portrayals of the Sheppard story caused the most stir because the theatricalizations were perceived as glamorizing Sheppard, rendering his actions appealing to susceptible lower-class audiences. John Springhall, in his study of the “moral panic” generated by the gaffs, explains that the popularity of plays featuring characters like Jack Sheppard “with young audiences was seen as symptomatic of rising juvenile crime and as an index of the danger to society in general from the new urban working classes” (166). The very environment of the gaffs, not to mention the content of the plays performed, was perceived as being likely to turn young patrons criminal.¹⁴ In one case a shoemaker’s son was accused of robbery and his father testified of his conviction that a local gaff (featuring “a new version of the adventures of Jack Sheppard”) had been responsible for his son’s corruption; for it was there that his son had met a “notorious thief” who had urged him to steal (“Thames”). Charles Mackay commented on the subject matter at these theaters in his book *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds* (1852):

tales of thieves and murderers are more admired, and draw more crowded audiences, than any other species of representation. There the foot-pad, the burglar, and the highwayman, are portrayed in their natural colours...whenever a crime of unusual atrocity is committed, it is...copied from the life, for the amusement of those who will one day become its imitators. (260)

Mackay’s quote touches on the failure of lower-class readers and audience members to distance themselves sufficiently from the action in the narrative; the text copies elements from real life,

but instead of the replication ceasing when the curtain falls, the reader then copies the text, and perhaps even encourages others to do so. Whereas middle-class readers perhaps indulged in fantasies about living the exciting life of crime and escape represented in Ainsworth's *Jack Sheppard*, all the while recognizing that this lifestyle was only meant to be experienced within the bounds of the text, lower-class readers, it was feared, would simply absorb what they read and act out on their desires to live like Sheppard. Unlike Thackeray, who knew that he was supposed to keep his appreciation of Sheppard "private," and also knew how to do so, lower-class readers might take their enjoyment of the text public, and there was plenty of evidence seeming to confirm that they did.

A crime reported in the *Morning Chronicle* article titled, "Re-Performance of Jack Sheppard" (1841) is a particularly pointed instance of the blurring of fact and fiction and also demonstrates that fears of contagion were embedded in complaints about performances featuring Sheppard. The article reports that two youths were charged with stealing a £5 snuff box from Paul Bedford, the actor famous for his portrayal of Sheppard's criminal sidekick Blueskin in J.B. Buckstone's adaptation of *Jack Sheppard* for the Adelphi theater. During the proceedings Bedford *also* received a reprimand, being told:

that [he] might, to some extent, thank himself for what had happened, the very able manner in which he personated a thief on the stage had induced many a poor wretch who witnessed his performance from the gallery to try his hand at something of the kind in real life – a result which might have been anticipated from the performance of such a demoralizing piece as *Jack Sheppard*. ("Re-Performance")

The remarks of the defense suggest that merely seeing an actor portray a thief on stage is enough to induce the “poor wretches” in the lower-class gallery to commit crimes. Bedford is accused of helping to spread what was frequently described as a Sheppard contagion.

As another example of this language of disease used in relation to Sheppard, an article published in *Chamber's Edinburgh Journal*, fittingly titled “Moral Epidemics,” included the opinion that “it is scarcely possible for the life of Jack Sheppard to be read all at once by thousands, and acted night after night at once in five London theatres, without causing the idea of burglary to be dwelt upon for the time with some degree of fervor” (90). Sheppard’s criminality was figured as a disease that could be carried and transmitted by gaffs or other forms of lower-class cultural texts to unsuspecting, but very susceptible, audience members or readers who would then spread the contagion to others. Young men were thought to be especially prone to the Sheppard infection, since the guilty parties in the crimes reported often shared characteristics with Sheppard such as being an apprentice, having a proclivity for spending time in low haunts, behaving particularly unrepentant when charged with a crime, or simply being young and male. Articles written about crimes thought to be inspired by these plays suggest the “communicability” of this criminality in their titles: “A Young Jack Sheppard,” “Again Jack Sheppard,” “Another Jack Sheppard,” and “Re-Performance of Jack Sheppard.” These articles imply that one could catch a “case” of “Jack Sheppard,” the symptoms of which would manifest in new acts of juvenile delinquency.

Arguments concerning the deleterious effects of the plays on audience members were not without some foundation, since many young culprits *did* claim to have found inspiration for their crimes by either watching Sheppard on stage at the penny gaffs, or hearing and reading about his legend in other street literature. In one instance, an inspector found on the person of a 22-year

old apprehended for loitering with felonious intent some verses replicating the style of the popular song from the Jack Sheppard plays, “Nix my Dolly, Pals, Fake Away!” These verses included altered lines such as:

Tom William Baker is my name,

And I seek a robber’s fame. Fake away.

Nix my dolly pals, fake away...

...To live a life of jollity

A second Sheppard I will be. Fake away.

Nix my dolly, &c¹⁵

Apparently Baker had been thwarted in love and, like the character of Sheppard in the novel, offered this as an excuse for trading virtue for a life of crime (“Another Jack Sheppard”).¹⁶ One 20 year-old watch-maker’s apprentice who had stolen “seventeen watches altogether” testified that “Jack Sheppard had a very bad effect on my mind” (“Preston House”). Henry Mayhew describes having seen “poor little wretches...grin with delight at receiving the degrading titles of ‘Blueskin,’ ‘Dick Turpin,’ and ‘Jack Sheppard’” (3:370). The report of a chaplain at a house of correction expressed consternation that in the case of at least three boys who came from “a respectable condition of life, far removed from want, residing with their parents or masters,” the “sole motive for their committing the numerous robberies traced to them, appear[ed] to have been to emulate the exploits of Jack Sheppard” (“Felon Literature” 373). Excerpts from the boys’ own testimonies confirm this claim.

The most famous criminal case associated with the Sheppard craze was the conviction and execution of François Benjamin Courvoisier, a valet who murdered his master Lord William Russell on 5 May 1840. In his confession, Courvoisier declared that he wished “to let it be

known to the world, that the idea of committing the crime was first suggested to him by reading and seeing the performance of *Jack Sheppard*. The book...had been lent to him by one of the servants of the Duke of Bedford, and he lamented that he had ever seen it” (“Confessions”). As may be expected, this claim by Courvoisier added significant fuel to the critical fire engulfing *Jack Sheppard* and was accepted as the primary motivation for the crime.¹⁷

After the *Morning Chronicle* printed Courvoisier’s confession, Ainsworth wrote the paper a letter stating that he had personally followed up on the veracity of Courvoisier’s claim regarding *Jack Sheppard* and had found it “utterly without foundation” since the “wretched man declared he had never read the work in question, nor made any such statement” (“Courvoisier”).¹⁸ Ainsworth explained that even though Courvoisier had read “[a] collection of lives of noted malefactors (probably the *Newgate Calendar*)...the account of [Jack Sheppard]...had not particularly attracted his attention” (“Courvoisier”). The man to whom Courvoisier confessed, however, responded to Ainsworth in a letter to *The Times* reconfirming that Courvoisier had told him *Jack Sheppard* was the inspiration for his crime. Significantly, the editors of the *Morning Chronicle* summed up their opinion on this correspondence with the assertion that, “If the statement of Mr. Ainsworth had remained uncontradicted, it would not have altered our opinion of the character and tendencies of *Jack Sheppard*” (“Courvoisier”). It was the opinion of these editors that Courvoisier’s crime was symptomatic of the wider contamination caused by the circulation of *Jack Sheppard*.

Critics continued to amass blame on Ainsworth’s novel whenever there was any hint of an association between a crime and Sheppard’s story. A writer for the *Monthly Magazine* chalked up the Courvoisier crime, a recent assassination attempt on Queen Victoria’s life, and another murder in which the “murderer’s proceeding[s]...were copied from Mr. Ainsworth’s

romance,” to the “Jack Sheppardism of the age” (“Few Brief” 105). While this writer may not have meant to suggest explicitly that *Jack Sheppard* was responsible for all of these crimes (such as the assassination attempt), the novel instigated an ongoing cultural phenomenon that was held responsible for spreading criminality through the susceptible masses. *Jack Sheppard* was, after all, only one of a series of popular “Newgate Novels” that displeased critics, though its infamy succeeded in further sullyng the reputation of the genre and implicating Sheppard’s story in the genesis of criminal acts both minor and outrageous.¹⁹

There did appear, then, to be some substance to the accusations against Ainsworth’s novel and its apparently nefarious influence on impressionable youths.²⁰ While the anxieties of Victorian critics most often focused on the effects of the Sheppard story on male juveniles, many feared the wider corruption of adult lower-class readers. Many of these readers, regardless of age, had in common one important thing: a burgeoning literacy. Teaching the lower-classes how to read was viewed by some as an important aspect of improving their lives and, by extension, society, but if new readers only learned how to read without a supplemental education regarding what to read, and what not to read, literacy became only another avenue to corruption (“Remarks” 207). Popular texts about figures such as Jack Sheppard were read eagerly and frequently, which only increased middle-class anxieties about the implications of mass literacy.

In this period a perception existed that the lower classes were predisposed to corruption because they had received little to no moral education. This predisposition was viewed as especially problematic due to the popular reading material that was made affordable to the lower classes. The lower-class press was viewed with skepticism and was the subject of many debates between its supporters and detractors over whether the press really afforded its readers an opportunity to educate and refine themselves. This point became especially contentious when it

was discovered that people most often shunned educational or moralistic literature in favor of sensational and demoralizing fiction. Much of the evidence presented by Edward Jacobs in his study of the tensions surrounding early-nineteenth-century gaffs and street literature suggests that “lower-class people would rather give a penny for the bloods and criminal biographies that articulated their own culture than read even *free* literature that came complete with ‘moral perception’” (323). Some commentators questioned the prudence of educating people in literacy without also ensuring that they had been equipped with the moral compass to guide them in choosing proper reading material.

Writers and publishers of objectionable material denied their culpability in corrupting readers, arguing that “they merely [fell] in with a disposition, which they [found] existing among their readers...the stock was to be found in the original depravity and weakness of our nature” (“Progress” 231). The “original depravity and weakness” that made one susceptible to immoral influence was actually viewed as being innate in every human being, and caused by “the inherent corruption of our nature; and of the fatal truth, that the human mind, when left to itself, will take to wickedness” (Alison 27). People in the lower classes, then, were not naturally more corrupt than people in the higher classes. The logic followed that because the lower classes lived in environments and participated in reading and other activities that exposed them frequently to immorality, they were particularly vulnerable to these influences because they had not received sufficient instruction in resisting worldly temptations. As Henry Mayhew characterized it, “[w]e teach a lad reading, writing, and arithmetic, and believe that in doing so we are developing the moral functions of his nature; whereas it is often this ability to *read merely* – that is to say, to read without the least moral perception – which becomes the instrument of the youth’s moral depravity” (3:370). “Reading merely” suggests a manner of reading in which the subject matter

is simply absorbed by the reader without the aid of any moral filter that can separate those aspects of texts to be simply enjoyed (as Thackeray did, in private), and those worthy of emulation in one's life.

An article from the *Examiner* emphasizes Mayhew's point as it relates to viewing and interpreting productions of *Jack Sheppard* in the established theaters: "In every one of these places the worst passages of [the] book...are served up in the most attractive form to all the candidates for the hulks or rope – *and especially the youthful ones* – that infest this vast city. All the original insignificance of the thing is lost" ("Literary"). In a seeming paradox, "reading merely" ensures that the reader will actually read too much into the story and ascribe significance to an otherwise pleasant but forgettable text. *Jack Sheppard* becomes dangerous when it is taken too seriously. In an attack on "the 'Jack Sheppard' of Mr. Ainsworth," Mayhew explains the process by which Sheppard is made to seem more important than he is:

[the story] is read aloud in the low lodging-houses in the evening by those who have a little education, to their companions who have none; and because the thief is there furbished up into the hero – because the author has tricked him out with a sort of brute insensibility to danger, made "noble blood flow in his veins," and tinselled him over with all kinds of showy sentimentality – the poor boys who listen, unable to see through the trumpery deception, are led to look up to the paltry thief as an object of admiration, and to make his conduct the *beau idéal* of their lives. (3:370)

Jack Sheppard is presented as a hero but, unlike other heroes, isn't supposed to be imitated. The problem here, as Mayhew sees it, is a failure of judgment rooted in knowing the basic mechanics of reading while remaining ignorant of what to read and how to read it properly. This ignorance

enables “a paltry thief” to become a great romantic hero in the eyes of readers who cannot recognize what is real and what is, and should remain, fiction.

Those fortunate enough to receive a middle- or upper-class education were thought to be better protected from succumbing to the innate sinfulness of human nature. A writer for *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* (1834) stated the case succinctly:

What protects the higher ranks, and most persons of real education...is the formation of the habits, and the purifying of the taste, during the ten years of school and college education...and, above all, the constant efforts made to impress them with religious feelings...can we wonder if the whole of the lower orders, who never have received such safeguards, and are debarred by their poverty from ever obtaining it, are carried down the stream, and use the power they have acquired only to promote the worst passions of the human heart? (“Progress” 231)

Without the advantages of educational “safeguards,” the lower classes, many of whom were subjected to daily scenes of corruption, would succumb early to sin and be led by unsavory stories into crime and debauchery. An archbishop is also quoted in the *Blackwood’s* article above, pointing out that, “Our corrupt hearts, when they are once set in motion, are like the raging sea, to which we can set no bounds...As there is a connexion of one virtue with another, so vices are linked together, and one sin draws many after it” (“Progress” 229). Walking a virtuous path seemed almost impossible if one’s education (or lack of education) did nothing to remedy the immoral effects of one’s environment.

In this context, it is easier to understand why *Jack Sheppard* was accused of corrupting the lower classes, especially when there seemed to be direct evidence of its criminal influence. By drawing direct connections between the book, its popular reproductions, and the corruption of

its audience, John Forster's critique of *Jack Sheppard* in the *Examiner* clearly reflects the contemporary view of how immorality was spread:

[*Jack Sheppard* is] in every sense of the word [bad]...Poisonous work is done by means of more cunning doses [sic], nor are the ways of licentiousness, for those classes into whose hands such a book was in that case likely to fall, paved with such broad stones. The danger is in the resources that have been called in aid; in the paragraphs [of the puffs for *Jack Sheppard*] that with such nauseous repetition have drugged every town and country paper; and in the adaptations of the "romance" that are alike rife in the low smoking-rooms, the common barbers' shops, the cheap reading places, the private booksellers', and the minor theatres...public morality and public decency have rarely been *more* endangered by the trumpeted exploits of Jack Sheppard. ("Literary")²¹

Here the Sheppard threat is emphasized in language like "poisonous" and "drugged," as if *Jack Sheppard* is the source of some miasma capable of seeping into the nooks and crannies of culture, tainting all who come into contact with it or, as in the case of the gaff theaters, tainting those found in its vicinity. Forster emphasizes that *Jack Sheppard* threatens "public" morality and decency through the corruption of individual readers.

Embedded in the anxiety surrounding Jack Sheppard, then, was a deeper concern over the moral consequences of encouraging literacy among the poor. Edward Jacobs argues that because education had been anticipated as a way of "controlling 'the lower orders,'" middle-class reformers were especially distraught by the "misuse" of this education by lower-class readers for consuming texts that "articulated their own culture" (323). Jacobs suggests that the "historical coincidence in England between industrialism and 'popular education'...motivated many English poor people to perceive popular education and industrialism as related disciplines,²² and

thus motivated them to develop a literacy of their own, outside of hegemonic, disciplinary institutions” (323). This motivation is evident in the variety and volume of *Jack Sheppard* adaptations and plagiarisms. As the wellspring of these imitations and adaptations, *Jack Sheppard* was demonized as one of, if not the worst of, the “bad” books.

Legal Changes

Jack Sheppard's serialization and the subsequent profusion of popular versions of Sheppard's story would have perhaps been troubling to some at any historical moment, but it was especially so in 1839 due to its coincidence with a significant juncture in English penal history. In 1837, only two years before *Jack Sheppard* began appearing in *Bentley's Miscellany*, capital punishment was repealed for all but the most serious crimes. Then in 1839, the same year *Jack Sheppard* began causing such a sensation, more extensive powers were granted to the new police force and a wider range of lower-class work and cultural practices were criminalized. Like the eighteenth-century Sheppard phenomenon that followed on the heels of the passage of the severe Black Act, Sheppard resonated most strongly with lower-class audiences in the nineteenth century when significant legislative shifts induced a crisis of legitimacy for the criminal law. I argue that this crisis of legitimacy in the nineteenth century informed the themes highlighted in the lower-class Jack Sheppard texts I analyze below and the responses to the Sheppard phenomenon from readers and critics. Discussing this particular legal context is not intended to exclude other contemporary influences shaping the texts or their receptions, but I do want to suggest that the legislative shift and the ensuing crisis of legitimacy in the criminal law is a key context for understanding the significance of Jack Sheppard in the early nineteenth century.

The partial repeal of capital punishment came after decades of debate and many small victories for reformers. Advocates for the retention of hanging as the primary punishment for

most crimes argued that the best means of social control was terror. Proponents of capital punishment like William Paley, an eighteenth-century utilitarian philosopher, were convinced of the efficacy of fear in deterring crime, regardless of any inconsistencies in actually dispensing punishment (Block and Hostletter 25-26). At this time, however, there were several ways, such as transportation to the Australian colonies, by which the execution of a capital sentence could be avoided or circumvented. Juries unwilling to sentence a person to death for a property crime frequently undervalued stolen or damaged property to avoid a felony conviction. In the *Monthly Magazine*, an article titled "Capital Punishments" (1836) records that prosecutors and juries "shuddered at the thought of being instrumental in hurrying a human being into eternity for some comparatively trifling offence" (543). It was never quite clear who would and would not hang after receiving the death penalty.

Reformers argued that inconsistency in punishment, regardless of the reason, undermined the effectiveness of the punishment for preventing crime. Sir Samuel Romilly, a key figure in the movement to repeal capital punishment, was especially adamant that the appearance of caprice in punishment was one of the greatest failures of the system. Romilly's solution to this was abolishing capital punishment altogether and exploring more humane alternatives that could be implemented consistently.²³ This solution echoed the opinions established by Cesare Beccaria, author of *Of Crimes and Punishments* (1764), who argued that small, consistent punishments were more effective than inconsistent severe punishments (Block and Hostletter 23-24).²⁴

Before the partial repeal of capital punishment in 1837, the instability of the penal code was a source of anxiety for both proponents and detractors of the death penalty. Most crucial was the concern that inconsistent punishment suggested that the law was arbitrary, and therefore encouraged the perpetration of crimes already found by the lower classes to be illegitimate based

on communal perceptions of justice (Hay, “Crime” 72). Prior to 1837 the public witnessed executions frequently throughout the year, and it was often the case that more than one criminal would be executed at a time. Executions could draw crowds as large as 100,000 and were usually day-long events. With the change in the criminal law, far fewer people were sentenced to death and the number of executions decreased dramatically; this decrease was perhaps the most visible contributor to the crisis of legitimacy for the criminal law. According to V.A.C. Gatrell, in the 1820s London itself averaged 23 hangings a year, but in 1838, the year after the abolition of almost all capital punishments, only six people were executed in the entire country (9).²⁵ Since this change in criminal law, says Gatrell, “There has been no greater nor more sudden revolution in English penal history” (10).

The decrease in the number of executions resulting from the partial repeal of capital punishment was the most obvious demonstration of inconsistency in the criminal law because it essentially meant that a crime that was punishable by death one day would be punished much less severely the next. Because some of the laws for which people were executed were already viewed by the lower classes as unjust, a change in the consistency with which certain crimes were punished (even if it meant that fewer lives were lost and that people felt less threatened by death) suggested that punishments that had *already* been meted out had been unnecessary – there was no essential right or wrong to them beyond what motivated lawmakers to impose them. In many ways, this particularly acute exposure of the inessentiality of the law only reinforced what many in the lower classes had always recognized. Hay explains that in the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries “a wide range of...crime enjoyed broad community sanction...poachers, smugglers, pillagers of wrecked ships, and makers of counterfeit coin all worked collectively within communal definitions that legitimized their crimes” (“Crime” 61). The de facto

legitimization of certain crimes by lower-class communities implies a simultaneous communal delegitimization of the laws defining and punishing these crimes: “the disjunction between [the lower classes’] experience and the interpretations [of crime by] the judiciary and police is the root of the legitimacy that the law has, or does not have” (Hay, “Crime” 67). That middle-class commentators were anxious about the potential delegitimization of the criminal law in the eyes of the lower classes is evident in the consistency of opinions in the press advocating for the repeal of the capital code.

Contemporary articles warned of the potential consequences of the lower classes believing that criminal laws were artificially and unjustly imposed. In an 1836 article for the *Gentleman’s Magazine* the writer admitted, “we can conceive nothing so tending to demoralize and brutalize the character of the lower orders, than laws which they consider to be cruel, unjust, and capricious, or irregular in their action” (“Punishment” 293). In this quote, the writer highlights the importance of the “lower orders” agreeing that the criminal laws are just, and implies that laws interpreted as illegitimate (because unjust or inconsistent) tend to encourage the rejection of the laws and the further commission of crimes. This sentiment is echoed in two different articles in the *Examiner*, written three years apart. In the first article, written in 1835 on the inconsistency of punishment and the arbitrary extension of mercy in a case of assault, the author wrote, “We are well known to be no advocates of the punishment of death; all that we contend is, that if it was too severe a sentence in the instance in question, it should be abrogated in all offences of the sort...a nominal capital punishment we regard as a great mischief” (“Caprices”). In 1838, about a year after the partial repeal of the death penalty, the *Examiner* reiterates its previous concern that having no rhyme or reason in the punishment of crime sends the wrong message to would-be criminals:

her Majesty's advisers...are bound, we contend, to make that law which they make practice, or the worst evils will proceed from the apparent mockery of justice. It will either seem that there is partiality or extraordinary uncertainty in the administration of the laws, and either notion is an evil. Let it always be borne in mind that the awe of the law belongs more to the certainty than the intensity of its punishments, and that every remission of a punishment too severe diminishes the salutary impression of certainty, and encourages the too ready notion, that the chances of escaping justice are many.

("Capital")

The *Monthly Magazine* expressed the opinion that "Only from a clearly defined and obvious application of the law can the subject and his property derive that certain freedom and protection which the law professes to provide, and should in all cases afford" ("Guarantees" 405). In all of these excerpts is a common theme: inconsistently applied laws result in an uncertainty of punishment that encourages defiance of the law. As Hay suggests, if the lower-class community deemed certain laws illegitimate, then they would likely defy them or express their contempt for the law in some other form of rebellion. Critics feared that capricious punishment could only exacerbate the rejection of certain laws by the lower classes because there was no effective deterrent. In the case of the capital code, many reformers saw punishment by death as brutalizing and uncivilized and wanted to abolish it on that basis alone, but along with this progressive reason for repeal, as has been shown, was the anxiety that an unstable law would only make crime worse. It is no wonder that these tensions made a book about an attractive and defiant criminal seem dangerous to public order.

The final elimination of capital punishment was the ultimate objective for most reformers, though some, like Sir Robert Peel, hesitated to push too strongly for complete

abolition for fear that the general public would not accept such extreme changes, and that the more general cause would suffer setbacks (Block and Hostletter 48-49). In one discussion on the abolition of all capital punishment except in the case of murder, members of the House of Commons voiced particular concerns regarding the state of the “public mind,” and debated whether or not the public would benefit from, or even sanction, the partial repeal of capital punishment.²⁶ However, the “public mind,” at least as it is represented in many articles in the years leading up to 1837, was generally in favor of eliminating the death penalty. In the same article from *The Gentleman’s Magazine* mentioned above, the author summarizes the commonly shared opinion: “The great argument which we should bring to support the justice of this change in our [criminal] code is, that the very act of harmonizing and softening the cruel severity of the law, will itself tend to diminish the enormity of crime, by humanizing and softening the character of the delinquent. Cruel laws make cruel subjects” (“Punishment” 293). The reduction of capital felonies in 1837 to only the most serious crimes such as murder, rape, and treason overturned a system of law and punishment that had been in place for centuries. Though some reformers were still keen to abolish capital punishment entirely, the 1837 reform was the last major change in the criminal law until 1868, when executions were moved inside the walls of prisons.

One must appreciate the good intentions of the reformers; they wanted not only to institute a more effective criminal justice system but were also concerned with how the frequent spectacle of hanging, especially for insignificant property crimes, brutalized and demoralized the public.²⁷ These reformers risked the potential consequences that came with portraying the law as artificially constructed and inconsistent in order to correct an unequal dispensation of justice. This necessary move by reformers was something of a double-edged sword, however, since it simultaneously advanced their goal of repealing capital punishment while highlighting the

inessentiality of the law that, some feared, might encourage the rejection of other legal imperatives. The texts analyzed later in this chapter share common themes that emphasize injustice and inconsistencies in the criminal law; they suggest that one important way representations of Jack Sheppard resonated with readers was in his mockery and dismissal of legal authority. In order to correct the greatest failings of the capital code and create some consistency in punishment that would hopefully encourage rather than discourage adherence to the law, an alternative to capital punishment was required. This alternative lay in granting extended powers to the Metropolitan Police and exerting more precise and consistent control over the lives of the lower classes.

Britain had long resisted the establishment of a unified police force and had relied almost completely on the threat of death for the prevention of crime. As Douglas Hay characterizes it, “the gentry would not tolerate even the idea of [a police force]. They remembered the pretensions of the Stuarts and the days of the Commonwealth, and they saw close at hand how the French monarchy controlled its subjects with spies and informers” (“Property” 18). E.P. Thompson, in *The Making of the English Working Class*, confirms this: “any centralised force with larger powers [than guards and watchmen] was seen as: ‘a system of tyranny; an organized army of spies and informers, for the destruction of all public liberty, and the disturbance of all private happiness’” (81). Despite these long-standing aversions to the police, the creation and strengthening of an organization that could improve the consistency of law enforcement became necessary as more and more capital statutes were eliminated and theories of punishment began shifting from deterrence to discipline and reform. As a partial repeal of capital punishment became more likely, commentators were very concerned, as has been shown, that there be uniformity in the prosecution and punishment of crime. For a more lenient system of punishment

to be effective in deterring crime there must be little hope of escaping the law. State power, therefore, instead of being focused into a single event or display (such as a hanging), was dispersed into a mobile and visible police force. As Foucault explains in *Discipline and Punish*, for the law to be effective, “Above all no crime committed must escape the gaze of those whose task it is to dispense justice...Hence the idea that the machinery of justice must be duplicated by an organ of surveillance that would work side by side with it, and which would make it possible either to prevent crimes, or, if committed, to arrest their authors” (96). A writer for *Fraser’s Magazine for Town and Country* (1837) expresses this same idea in an assessment of the purpose of the police: their “great ambition ought to be to prevent crimes, and, by vigilance, produce a conviction that criminality cannot exist without danger of detection” (“Principles” 171). The police would be a necessary evil if the gallows were abandoned.²⁸

In 1829 Robert Peel led the way in establishing the Metropolitan Police. Peel responded to anxieties about the new police force presaging a loss of liberty saying, “I want to teach people that liberty does not consist in having your house robbed by organized gangs of thieves, and in leaving the principal streets of London in the nightly possession of drunken women and vagabonds” (qtd. in Tobias 77). Before the advent of the Metropolitan Police, there was no centralized authority organizing the movements and strategies of a united force, and the result was an ineffective response to crime. The new force eliminated or absorbed the disparate bodies that had formerly attempted to protect citizens (Tobias 74-76). On 29 September 1829, the “place [of the parish watchmen] was taken by the constables of the Metropolitan Police, clad in blue uniform, walking round a short beat at a regulation slow pace, keeping a quiet eye on all that went on” (Tobias 85). This shift was quite visible and certainly emphasized the new reality of surveillance.

The New Police were created in 1829, and in 1839 their powers and jurisdiction were expanded. A survey of the list of new regulations outlined in the 1839 “Bill for further improving the Police in and near the Metropolis” demonstrates that many of the new laws pertained specifically to regulating the livelihoods and amusements of the lower classes. In article 42, no specific crimes are mentioned, but the emphasis on surveillance for the prevention of crime is explicit:

any Superintendent or Inspector belonging to the Metropolitan Police Force shall have power...to enter at all times...by night as by day, into and upon every ship, boat or other vessel... or in any dock or docks thereto adjacent, and into every part of such vessel, for the purpose...of inspecting and observing the conduct of all other persons who shall be employed on board of any such vessel...for the purpose of taking all such measures as may be necessary for providing against fire and other accidents, and preserving the peace and good order on board of any such vessel, and for the effectual prevention or detection of any felonies or misdemeanours. (Great Britain 14)²⁹

A person could be taken into custody for showing or selling animals on the streets (including caravans intended for public amusement), “roll[ing] or carry[ing] any cask, tub, hoop...showboard or placard upon any footway,” being drunk in public, “blow[ing] any horn or us[ing] any other noisy instrument [or making] loud shouts and cries, for the purpose of calling persons together, or of announcing any show or entertainment, or for the purpose of hawking, selling, distributing or collecting any article whatsoever,” “ringing any doorbell or knocking at any door without lawful excuse,” or even “fly[ing] any kite, or play[ing] at any game...or us[ing] any slide upon ice or snow in any street or other thoroughfare” (Great Britain 22-24). Any of these previous infractions might incur a penalty up to forty shillings.

One article related specifically to gaff theaters at which versions of Jack Sheppard might have appeared. Under article 56, police could enter any dwelling being used as an unlicensed theater and arrest the performers, those who had allowed the location to be used for the performance, and everyone in the audience (Great Britain 18-19). It is important to remember that much of lower-class life happened out of doors in public spaces. Since many homes were too uncomfortable or crowded for play or leisure, and many occupations depended on hawking wares in the streets, laws regulating public spaces could greatly impinge on the mobility of lower-class people and their freedom to work and play. Many of the statutes in the new bill are aimed specifically at reducing public “nuisance,” though definitions of what constituted “nuisances” could be quite slippery and were likely to work in the favor of those who claimed to be annoyed.³⁰

The swiftness and effectiveness of the new enforcements were lauded in a newspaper report titled “First Fruits of the New Police Act.” This article noted that “the gin-palace neighbourhoods of Clare-market, the Seven Dials, St Giles’s, the New-Cut, Lambeth, and the Broadway in Westminster... were on Sunday morning mournfully silent, and while their wonted occupants lingered about them with a fidgety sort of patience, the observer could not fail to notice the contrast... which last Sunday presented from many previous Sabbaths.” This comment was responding to the changes enacted by article 52 in the new police bill that stipulated that shops could not sell alcohol on Sundays between 8 a.m. and 1 p.m. (Great Britain 18). This article lists several other examples of the success of the new act: a prostitute was imprisoned for three days “for annoying a gentleman by her solicitations”; a man received “15 days’ hard labour, for furiously knocking and ringing at the door [of an M.P.]”; a “decently-attired female” was “charged... with being intoxicated, and making use of bad language” (“First Fruits”).³¹ The

woman in the last example was fined 20s. and was to be imprisoned for seven days if she could not pay. The new police bill, then, quickly had a significant impact on the lower classes as they discovered new prohibitions on many activities on which they depended for their livelihood and in which they took pleasure. Hay suggests how the lower classes may have reacted to the new police power and laws:

[As] middle-class fears of police tyranny evaporated...working-class hostility was largely reinforced. For the new police were frequently the agents of a middle-class assault on popular mores, not just crime or riot, and they introduced constant surveillance into working-class communities which had long since escaped the knowledge of squire and parson. (Hay "Property" 58)

It is not difficult to imagine that many of the newly criminalized behaviors mentioned above would still have been viewed as acceptable by lower-class communities. If so, punishments for these "crimes," as Hay suggests, would have been held by the lower classes as illegitimate. The consequences of this delegitimization may have included a simple disregard for the law, or it may have resulted in the creation "of solidarities where none had existed before," manifesting in communal action like riots (Hay, "Crime" 74, 59-61).

The effects of these changes in police organization and the criminal law can be thought of as the inverse of the 1837 near-total repeal of the "bloody code." Whereas one day a person could be apprehended, prosecuted, and potentially hanged for an offense, and the following day they could not, the new police bill meant that a person *could* do something legally one day but not the next. The intersection of these two legal changes contributed to the delegitimization of aspects of the criminal law in the eyes of the lower classes and influenced how Sheppard's narrative resonated for them. The potential criticism of the law by the lower classes was

especially problematic in light of the mounting agitations of the Chartist movement. The moment in which a substantial portion of the lower classes were agitating for reform and broader voting rights was not a convenient time for a concurrent weakening of the authority that held traditional hierarchies in place, and part of the middle-class anxiety over Jack Sheppard was rooted in this context.

The Sheppard literature (including the novel and the popular versions of the narrative analyzed below) reinforced themes that highlighted the illegitimacy of legal authority and that seemed to celebrate the defiance of the law implicit in criminal acts. Middle-class critics found these texts particularly problematic because it appeared that they infected readers with a desire to thwart authority and disregard the threat of punishment. That lower-class readers imitated Sheppard's criminality, or expressed the desire to do so, seemed to confirm the belief that lower-class readers were incapable of separating fantasy from reality. Critics viewed lower-class reading as passive, and failed to recognize that lower-class readers were actively interpreting Sheppard's story based on the texts' relevance to their own historical moment.

Biographies, Ballads, Plays, and Plagiarisms

The Sheppard phenomenon of the nineteenth-century mirrored on a much larger scale Sheppard's popularity in the eighteenth century. As was mentioned briefly in the introduction to this chapter, fictional stories and narratives that claimed to be authentic accounts of Sheppard's life flourished in eighteenth-century popular culture. The medium that primarily sustained Sheppard's legend from his death to his revitalization in Ainsworth's novel, however, was the criminal biography. The eighteenth-century criminal biography is an important literary predecessor for all of the texts analyzed in this dissertation and, while I also discuss this genre in the next chapter, I want to touch briefly here on its history and significance, especially since it

informs my analysis of the popular texts about Sheppard that were published in the nineteenth century.

Criminal biographies, which “became firmly established in the eighteenth century,” were transmitted in many forms including broadsides, pamphlets, and multi-volume collections (Rawlings 1). The length of the publication determined how much information about a criminal’s life was detailed, but all biographies included some combination of the criminal’s personal history, crime(s), capture, trial, confession and execution. Scholars of eighteenth-century criminal biographies emphasize that these texts tended to follow established, profitable patterns.³² Jonathan Grossman, referring to stand-alone accounts of criminal lives published in pamphlets, explains that these biographies fall into two general categories based on how they “[get to] the gallows”:

A criminal biography turns out to be either a teleological picaresque story that relates the graphic movement of a transgressive body up until its final ‘lamentable’ dead stop or a homily that rewrites the criminal’s life as a series of archetypal stepping stones of sin progressing to a heinous moral collapse that is, usually, followed by a scripted recitation of repentance. (35)

The common element in these two patterns is the gallows itself; criminal biographies flourished around executions. When, in the nineteenth century, executions were fewer and further between, the populace became that much more interested in the lives of malefactors, and there was an even greater volume of literary production around hangings. V.A.C. Gatrell records that famous crimes in the 1820s, 30s, and 40s, generated sales of broadsheets ranging from 1.6 to 2.5 million (159).

When multiple criminal biographies were published together in volume form, the compilation was referred to generally as a “Newgate calendar,” though individual texts bore a variety of names. The first recorded publication actually titled *The Newgate Calendar* appeared in 5 volumes in 1773.³³ Jack Sheppard’s biography appeared in the eighteenth-century versions of the *Newgate Calendar*, in Andrew Knapp and William Baldwin’s popular 4-volume republication (1824-1826), and in *The Annals of Crime and New Newgate Calendar* (1833-?), a penny-magazine that included one or two criminal “lives” in each issue.³⁴

There is critical disagreement about how to understand the significance of the criminal biographies. The basic conflict is, as Erin Mackie explains, between the description of the criminal’s crimes and the authority of the narrative that justifies punishing those crimes: “The contrast between the everyday deeds of the criminal and their containment by the narrative could not be stronger, for it is a contrast between absolute transgression and absolute suppression” (75). Even though the biographies end with the execution of the criminal, recounting a life of crime is risky because doing so potentially, even if only momentarily, reinforces the defiant agency of the individual malefactor.

A helpful illustration of this problem may be found in Jack Sheppard’s own criminal biographies. To take as an example the biography included in the penny *Annals of Crime*, the account of Sheppard’s death is limited to a single paragraph at the end of 4 ½ pages. The reader is encouraged to regard Sheppard sympathetically since, as the biography records, “He died with difficulty, and was much pitied by the surrounding multitude,” and it also seems that readers would be far more likely to dwell on the excitement of reading about Sheppard’s escapes from Newgate than the brief mention of his death (“Life, Trial” 62).³⁵ The tension that Mackie identifies in the criminal biographies was also complicated by the fact that the publications were

intended to be simultaneously didactic and entertaining, though perhaps the latter aim often took precedence, as it promised to be the most remunerative (Sharpe 62-63).

Several critics claim that the criminal biographies primarily reinforced the ideological status quo. Grossman, for example, argues that the broadsheets containing criminal biographies “were undoubtedly indoctrinating docility...Although broadsheets may have spawned fascination with the figure and adventurous life of the criminal, they ultimately attempted to brainwash their readers into unprotesting acceptance of the offender’s condemnation” (29). John Richetti explains that while the “[criminal’s] career evokes the desire for secular freedom and economic self-determination...this latent social aggression is, at the same time, a source of guilt and anxiety which must be severely and decisively punished” (34-35). The “freedom [of the criminal] is necessarily desperate,” since implicit in this freedom is “the fear that divine surveillance and mysterious retribution are inescapable” (Richetti 35). Finally, Lincoln Faller asserts that the biographies “sought to limit the damage that crime...could do not only to people’s sense of themselves and their God but to their sense of what it was that held (or might hold) society together” (4). In each of these arguments, the biographies, pleasurable or not, are on the side of authority.

Others have disagreed with these assessments, suggesting instead that the criminal biographies created opportunities for resisting the authority of the criminal law. Hal Gladfelder argues:

The pleasure of [criminal biographies]...does not derive from their endlessly reiterated endorsement of the prevailing social and political orders, for this is an obligatory gesture, but from their smuggling of vividly concrete and sometimes problematic material into the

traditional patterns and their consequent stirring up of the very subversive possibilities, the threats of disorder, they (presumably) set out to contain. (77)

In her study of highwaymen biographies, Andrea McKenzie concludes that “such literature tended to be ambiguous and unstable, in ways that resisted normative readings or at least opened up a space for appropriation on the part of both readers and subjects” (594). I agree with Gladfelder and McKenzie that the criminal biographies, as well as the other texts that I analyze in this dissertation, hold in tension both disciplinary and antidisiplinary potentialities. It is clear from the following readings of Victorian cultural texts about Jack Sheppard that there were sufficient gaps to allow readers to insert their own interpretations, which, as the adulation and sometimes imitation of Jack Sheppard suggests, were not always aligned with contemporary structures of authority.

In many nineteenth-century popular texts, the Jack Sheppard character mocks and thwarts figures of authority such as his master, Mr. Wood, the villainous thief-taker Jonathan Wild and, of course, the guardians who attempt and twice fail to restrain him at Newgate. Audiences may have realized that if Jack Sheppard had been thieving in 1839, he most certainly would *not* have been executed as he was in 1724, and this discrepancy would only remind people of the inconsistency of the law. In the novel, Ainsworth’s decision to make Sheppard an accessory to the murder of his master’s wife may have been intended to justify Sheppard’s punishment for a nineteenth-century audience.³⁶ At the time of the nineteenth-century Jack Sheppard mania, murder was one of the only crimes punishable by death. Traditionally, gallows crowds would support criminals about to be hanged when their crimes were trivial or their sentences perceived as unjust, but “[t]he hanging of murderers was usually approved” (Gatrell 59). Ainsworth’s implication of Sheppard as an accessory to a murder would have made his hanging more

as an apprentice, his primary needs are cared for and, being very skilled, he shows much promise for enjoying future success and prosperity.

The ballad, however, cites Sheppard's poverty as the reason he robs his master.³⁸ Giving this reason for Sheppard's turn to crime would likely have garnered sympathy with impoverished audience members, and facilitated a stronger identification with the ballad's hero. Two of the last stanzas of this ballad are equally significant:

They took him three times more to prison,

 'Cause three times more he got away;

Till he was tired of escaping,

 And let them hang him up one day.

 Ri tol, &c.

Now he lives renowned in story,

 In three volumes is his life;

Ainsworth shares Jack Sheppard's glory,

 Who murder makes with morals rife.

 Ri tol, &c. ("Life of Jack Sheppard")³⁹

According to this ballad, Jack Sheppard *allowed* himself to be hanged because, simply stated, he was "tired of escaping." Implicit in the idea that Sheppard "*let them* hang him up" is a powerful agency, fearless of death and the authorities, in which the reader is invited to share. This ballad also very intentionally glamorizes Sheppard. Sheppard, having grown "tired of escaping...lives renowned in story" and has "three volumes" dedicated to *his* life alone – Thames Darrell and his bourgeois morality have no place within this ballad.

Perhaps the most telling lines of the ballad are the last two. An initial reading simply seems to allude to the murder of Mrs. Wood and suggests that Ainsworth was attempting to provide the reader with a moral lesson. Any lesson that Ainsworth was attempting to impart, however, is completely undercut by the ballad because it suggests both that Sheppard was only drawn to crime because of poverty, and that Sheppard allows himself to be executed. In the first instance, Sheppard is absolved from blame because he steals out of necessity, which delegitimizes and renders unjust the law that requires Sheppard's capture and punishment. The ballad then completely strips the law of its own agency by enabling Sheppard to be the arbiter of his own destruction. The law is represented as being completely impotent, which also empties the story of any moral didacticism. If Sheppard cannot be punished against his will and only submits to punishment because he wants to, then he has definitely *not* learned his lesson.

These lines also emphasize the disjunction between the historical and contemporary criminal law. Implicit in the phrase "Who murder makes with morals rife," is an acknowledgement that Ainsworth fabricates his account of Mrs. Wood's murder. To acknowledge that Ainsworth fabricated the murder to make his tale "with morals rife," when there was no historical basis for this event, means that for the writer and the readers of the ballad, the murder fails to legitimize Sheppard's execution. Ainsworth hanged Sheppard for the sake of historical accuracy but needed an appropriately serious crime to warrant this extreme punishment. Sheppard was never anything but a thief and jail-breaker, and people may have recognized that Sheppard's *real* crimes would *not* have resulted in his hanging in 1839. The final lines in the ballad imply that without the murder, Ainsworth's story offers no moral except, perhaps, that Sheppard was hanged by an unjust law in 1724 that would have spared his life in

1839. The ballad also questions the justification for any punishment by highlighting that the real lesson to be learned from Sheppard's story is that the law is mutable.

There is a more explicit "moral" in the ballad that recalls Gladfelder's mention of the "very subversive possibilities" and "threats of disorder" regarding criminal biographical literature. The ultimate stanza of the ballad is: "Moral. Know all ye youths, who would be famous,/Don't be left here in the lurch,/But take a lesson from my ditty,/Your master stab, or rob your church" ("Life of Jack Sheppard"). No doubt this apparently direct encouragement to young readers to murder and steal highlights the latent aggression and scorn of authority that middle-class critics found so troubling in popular texts glorifying Jack Sheppard.

At least seven different versions of *Jack Sheppard* were performed concurrently at London theaters in October of 1839, and the majority of these plays opened in the same week. The adaptations portray various elements of Sheppard's life, but some vary significantly in their explanations of what motivates Sheppard's turn to crime and in their depictions of Sheppard's ultimate fate. Although plays circulated among different playhouses throughout London, examining where the plays opened and how they differ in their treatment of Sheppard's hanging suggests how each of the plays may have been shaped to appeal to particular audiences.⁴⁰

First establishing the geographical and demographic contexts in which three of the Jack Sheppard plays appeared will better situate an analysis of the plays' endings in relation to their likely audiences. The transpontine Surrey Theatre, which debuted Thomas Haines's *Jack Sheppard: A Domestic Drama in Three Acts*, attracted an economically diverse audience. In the immediate neighborhood lived working-class men and women who were carpenters, engineers, tailors, shoemakers, printers, cabmen, and needlewomen, and these skilled artisans comprised what many critics considered more respectable audiences (Davis and Emeljanow 16-17). The

Surrey was also patronized by audience members from the West End who travelled across the Thames using well-established transportation lines (Davis and Emeljanow 14).

George White's play, *Jack Sheppard! A Domestic Drama in Three Acts*, premiered in the northern part of the West End at the Queen's Theatre. This theater initially boasted prices double those of the Surrey, reflecting the expectation of a more fashionable clientele. These high prices were not filling seats, however, and they were soon lowered due to "the general depression of the times, and in order to afford the inhabitants of the West End of the town an opportunity of witnessing Theatrical Representations, upon the same scale of *economy* as other Minor Theatres" (Davis and Emeljanow 139). The Queen's audience may never have been as consistently fashionable as its management hoped, but as we shall see, its production of *Jack Sheppard* indicates that the theater continually strove toward attracting an audience ideologically situated with a middle and higher class.

The East End was home to the City of London Theater, at which was performed *Jack Sheppard. A Drama in Three Acts, as Performed at the City of London Theatre*. The East End was an area populated by unskilled laborers who worked cheaply and, because they often relied on seasonal or temporary employment, were subject to the vicissitudes of the market, which could leave some absolutely destitute. Since "East End [theater] audiences were arguably neighborhood audiences," we can characterize attendees at the City of London as being generally from the working and lower classes (Davis and Emeljanow 47).

Each of these theaters capitalized on the Jack Sheppard craze and adapted Ainsworth's story to appeal to their primary audiences. It is important to remember that all three of these plays opened 21 October 1839, though the serialization of the novel would not be finished until February 1840. The playwrights, then, took creative license with their theatrical adaptations, and,

unless they were concerned with adhering to the historical circumstances of Sheppard's life, could end their plays according to considerations of audience. Haines's play at the Surrey was the only performance endorsed by Ainsworth. In a letter to the theater manager, Ainsworth wrote, "Having...witnessed your Rehearsal, and perused the Drama founded on 'Jack Sheppard,' in preparation at the Surrey Theatre, I am satisfied it will furnish a complete representation...and have, therefore, no hesitation in giving my entire sanction to the performance" (Haines, *Jack* x).⁴¹ White's play ends similarly to Haines's, since in both plays Sheppard is shot and killed. The plays deviate from one another most acutely in their depiction of what happens to Sheppard's body after he dies.⁴²

The final scene of White's play begins when Blueskin calls out, "Now, then, my lads, to the rescue!" and his plan to save Sheppard is put into action (White 50). Sheppard and Blueskin are both shot; Sheppard is killed instantly but Blueskin stumbles toward Wild, grabbing him by the throat before falling away dead. Thames Darrell attempts to assist the mob in taking Sheppard offstage but "A severe struggle ensues between the Soldiers and the Mob, in which the latter are overpowered. Tableau. Curtain descends." (White 50). This ending leaves no question as to who possesses Sheppard's body. The crowd is decisively overpowered and White's play freezes the defeat of the mob by the soldiers for a final moment before ending the scene.

Sheppard's significance *and* his supporters remain in the power of the state.

Haines's play ends with a series of tableaux depicting successive illustrations from the novel. As soon as the executioner prepares the rope to hang Sheppard, Blueskin attempts his rescue and, as in the novel, both are shot by Wild and the soldiers. Blueskin falls down on stage while "the mob rescue[s] the body of Jack, and bear[s] it off" (Haines, *Jack* 70). As the mob

attempts to remove Sheppard's body off-stage, however, the soldiers "present at the mob" and the play ends with "the whole in great confusion as the curtain falls" (70).

That the soldiers might prevent the "mob" from saving the body is significant because it implies that both Sheppard's physical body, and what Sheppard symbolically *embodies*, is not wholly in the possession of the mob. The legacy of Jack Sheppard is arrested and it is unclear whether the people or the state will claim his significance. If, as in White's play, the state does, then the moral lesson is enforced and the criminal hero is reduced to a "paltry thief" who suffers a just punishment (Mayhew 3:370). If the people win out, then the legacy of Sheppard, as one who mocks authority and thwarts the law, is allowed to carry on, and his body (and larger significance) continues to circulate off the stage. Though the final outcome of the confrontation in Haines's play is indeterminate, the soldiers' possession of weapons suggests that they will finally claim Sheppard's body. This ending, with the "whole in great confusion," parallels the critical disagreements circulating in the press about the significance of the novel, the plays, and the meaning of Jack Sheppard, with both supporters and detractors of the plays vying to have the last word. Though Haines's play ends more ambiguously than White's, both plays reinforce values that may have been favored by those in the Surrey and Queen's audiences who were less sympathetic to "the mob." The endings of these plays contrast starkly the ending of the Sheppard adaptation performed at the City of London.

In the concluding scene of the City of London play, Sheppard's final words before being led off to Tyburn are, "I feel light at heart. [to Wild] Monster! you cannot know my feeling. I seem as though my last sad act of duty to my poor mother had given me hope of mercy – there, come on – I'm ready. Farewell to all!" (8).⁴³ At the end of this play, the procession arrives at Tyburn and the final directions are "Blueskin's Rescue – Wild is shot – Tableau as the curtain

falls” (8). This play also ends with a tableau, but it is of Sheppard and Blueskin’s triumph over Wild. Sheppard is rescued and escapes suffering for his crimes and justice is served instead by Wild’s death (4). As in White’s play, there is no moral ambiguity in this ending, but this time Jack Sheppard wins. This conclusion provides a different version of justice than the other two plays. It cannot be said that crime is rewarded, but Sheppard is given another chance and allowed to live on, his future unclear. It is my contention that Sheppard’s survival in the *City of London* play anticipated the potential tastes of the lower-class East End audiences who may have more strongly identified with Sheppard and applauded his success.

Despite their differences, all three theatrical adaptations of the Sheppard story had the potential to remind audiences of the fact that Sheppard would not have been sentenced to hang for petty theft in 1839. Each theatrical version of Sheppard’s story capitalizes on the tensions surrounding Sheppard’s execution and plays into the crisis of legitimacy perpetuated by Jack Sheppard by preparing to hang and rehang Sheppard every night during a run. The plays presented constant evidence of the disparity between the historical and fictional sentencing of Jack Sheppard while simultaneously suggesting the illegitimacy of the law responsible for his death.

The *City of London* play is not the only text that rewrites Sheppard’s fictional and historical ending, however. At the end of a plagiarism titled *Jack Shepperd* [sic], written by “Obediah Throttle,” Skyblue (Blueskin) rescues Shepperd “in spite of every obstacle” and is able to convey away the body for resuscitation (233).⁴⁴ In the final paragraphs, the reader is told that residing with Escape Darwell (Thames Darrell) and his wife Barbara is “a relative of the marquis, a quiet elderly man...ever gentle and kind...beloved by all” who dies peacefully, followed by “his attendant” (Throttle 236). The elderly man and his attendant are, of course,

Shepperd and Skyblue. This plagiarism was put out in serial parts costing only a penny, which would have been far more affordable to readers who may have wanted a happy ending for Sheppard.

Suggesting that the ending of George White's play reinforces values that see justice in the punishment of criminal actions does not necessarily imply that Sheppard's survival in the City of London play and in Throttle's *Jack Shepperd* reinforces values that deny that any crime deserves punishment. What is really at stake here is the legitimacy of Sheppard's punishment and the legitimacy of the law in the perceptions of readers and audiences. The texts that conclude with Sheppard's ultimate escape imply that his punishment is unjustifiable and present a different version of justice that punishes Wild, a symbol of illegitimate authority. The endings of these texts suggest that the authors assumed readers and audience members would be in favor of letting Jack Sheppard live, and playing to readers' sympathies for Sheppard would be a likelier way of capitalizing on the story. The multiple endings suggest that the issue of Sheppard's crimes and punishment was a point of resonance with audience members and with which some readers identified. Critics vilified Ainsworth's novel as the primary source of these texts and feared their potential influence on lower-class readers. What these commentators failed to realize was that these readers were not passively replicating these texts, but were actively responding to the themes in these texts that they found relevant to their own cultural experiences.

Active Reading and Antidiscipline

In "Reading as Poaching," Michel de Certeau explains that non-elite reading (by "the masses") is typically viewed by cultural authorities as passive because readers are seen "becoming similar to' what [they] absorb" rather than, as de Certeau argues, "'making something similar' to what [they are], making it [their] own, appropriating or reappropriating it"

(166). The perception that consumers passively “absorb” texts likens them to the children in Gradgrind’s and M’Choakumchild’s school in Dickens’s *Hard Times*, who are characterized as “pitchers” waiting to be filled up with facts (42). These readers are consumers in a system that privileges the producers of texts and gives primacy to interpretations by “privileged readers” (de Certeau 171). Cultural authorities insist that texts have “literal meanings” that can only be accessed by “*socially* authorized professionals and intellectuals” who possess the proper “passport,” or legitimate knowledge with which to interpret texts. Alternative readings are “either heretical (not ‘in conformity’ with the meaning of the text) or insignificant (to be forgotten)” (171). The danger comes, as middle-class critics of *Jack Sheppard* feared, when common readers passively absorb a text (which they cannot help but do) in ways that are opposed to authorized interpretations. It follows that non-elite readers should *only* read texts that will not lead them astray. Because, as de Certeau says, a text is “[b]y its very nature available to a plural reading, the text becomes a cultural weapon,” and it has the potential to serve as a mechanism of domination if culturally subordinate readers can only be got to read texts that maintain the hierarchical status quo (171, 166). As de Certeau cautions, however, “it is always good to remind ourselves that people mustn’t be taken for fools” (176).

In the early-nineteenth century, the popularity of *Jack Sheppard* with the lower classes challenged the widely accepted idea that lower-class readers were passive in their consumption of texts. Lower-class readings of *Jack Sheppard* are examples of what de Certeau describes as “an antidiscipline,” or a way in which “popular procedures [such as education]...manipulate the mechanisms of discipline and conform to them only in order to evade them” (xiv-xv). Critics assumed that lower-class readers were passive and were in danger of being corrupted by immoral or degrading texts. This hypothesis that the lower classes were more corruptible was predicated

on the notion that lower-class readers were more likely than middle- and upper-class readers to “become similar” to what they read because they read “merely,” without differentiating between fiction and reality. The moral panic that erupted around the lower-class reproductions of the Sheppard story is evidence of these assumptions. Because contemporary critics of lower-class texts believed that lower-class readers were only capable of passive interpretation, criticism was directed toward *Jack Sheppard* as a source of corruption. *Jack Sheppard* was labeled a “bad book” since “bad” reading (and, in consequence, automatically reproducing the text) was something that lower-class readers could not avoid. Readers who had only learned to “read merely” could perhaps be criticized for making “bad” texts popular, but the problem was still situated in the texts. Critics did not realize that the real “problem” was active interpretation of Sheppard’s story on the part of lower-class readers who were responding to the text based on their own experiences.

Texts like *Jack Sheppard* demonstrate especially well what Tony Bennett refers to as sites that are “productively activated” due to the “interaction” between “the *culturally activated* text and the *culturally activated* reader, an interaction structured by the material, social, ideological, and institutional relationships in which *both* text and readers are inescapably inscribed” (3, 12.). Bennett’s characterization of the interpretive process emphasizes the importance of understanding the historical contexts in which both texts and their readers are situated if one is to attempt to argue for ways in which those texts may have been read. In the case of the middle-class readings of both the *Jack Sheppard* novel and its popular versions, magazine and newspaper articles demonstrate the variety and types of readings those readers “activated.” Lesser known are the variety and types of interpretations “activated” by lower-class readers. Unfortunately there are no stock-piles of documents that record first-person

interpretations by lower-class readers of the Sheppard plays and other adaptations. Middle-class publications record some lower-class interpretations, as has been seen, in the service of connecting the Sheppard story with the perpetration of crimes, but aside from the suggestion that Jack Sheppard was “glamorized” by the theatrical adaptations, there is no clear explanation as to why Sheppard and Sheppard’s story were so popular with the lower classes. This chapter has attempted to articulate and understand the power the Sheppard texts held for the lower classes by examining how the texts written for or favored by this audience were in dialogue with historical changes taking place at the time that significantly impacted the lives of those in the lower classes. By reflecting on how and why Sheppard resonated with the lower classes, we are able to adumbrate, in a roundabout way, a possible reception history. Additionally, the process of excavating this heretofore unexamined history can provide a useful model for hypothesizing similar textual receptions.

Conclusion

Critical reactions to lower-class readings of *Jack Sheppard* suggest the accuracy of de Certeau’s characterization of texts as “cultural weapons” (171). When the unauthorized passive (though really “active”) reading of a text is perceived as dangerous to the well-being of society, critical reaction is displaced from the readers onto the text itself, and efforts are made to restrict or inhibit the circulation of the text. Not only must the rest of society be protected from the influence of the text on lower-class consumers, but lower-class consumers must be saved from themselves and their inability to resist the corrupting influence of “bad” books. After the Courvoisier scandal, for example, the Lord Chamberlain prohibited the production of any new Jack Sheppard plays.⁴⁵ Also, though this was not necessarily caused by the reaction to Jack Sheppard (but could certainly affect the distribution of literature about him), the new police bill

included an article that prevented the “sale or distribution,” “sing[ing],” “writ[ing] or draw[ing]” of “any profane, indecent or obscene print...song or ballad...figure or representation” (Great Britain 23).

The conflict over *Jack Sheppard* also hints at another motivation for continuing to perceive cultural subordinates as passive readers. Acknowledging that the “masses” engage actively in their own production of textual significance challenges the ideological system that hierarchizes culture and values texts and practices that reinforce dominant culture over texts and practices that do not. If it is the case that the “masses” can actively produce meanings from cultural texts favoring their own experiences and rejecting dominant interpretations, it exposes the boundaries and practices that delineate legitimate and illegitimate culture as artificial and repressive. If the capability for producing meaning is recognized as universal – not restricted to one group or class – then a distinct challenge is made to justifications for disparaging popular texts, popular readings, *and* popular readers.

The struggle over the Sheppard texts was partly the result of the inability of middle-class critics to regulate the interpretation and meaning of Sheppard for the lower classes. Subversive interpretations of the Sheppard text were especially problematic as Victorian society moved from a system of punishment based on the spectacle of hanging to a system based on surveillance and self-discipline. A person could not strive to be Jack Sheppard while simultaneously attending to self-discipline, and law and order could not, it was feared, remain stable if such a popular text encouraged resistance to authority. This struggle over interpretation can also be understood as a struggle of ownership. At Sheppard’s execution in 1742, there was a contest between the authorities and the crowd over control of Sheppard’s physical body.⁴⁶ In the nineteenth century this struggle was repeated, but this time the contest was for Sheppard’s *textual* body. In both

cases, what was really at stake was the power to make Sheppard signify. The stakes would not have been so high had it not been so evident that the lower classes, having been made literate, not only could read, but *did*.

As Ainsworth discovered, the general acceptability of literature that glorified criminals was waning in the early 1840s. The critical disparagement of *Jack Sheppard* helped ensure that criminals were not again featured as main characters in middle-class fiction throughout the rest of the century. However, as the next two chapters demonstrate, criminal characters remained the focus of some popular texts read primarily by lower-class audiences. We can understand *Jack Sheppard* as a transitional text between ways of representing criminality in early-Victorian literature. The novel was similar to *Rookwood* in how it represented the criminal, but it also demonstrated the potential resonance of criminal characters with lower-class audiences. While they did not vanish from popular literature, criminal characters in these texts did change according to shifting perspectives of criminality and how criminals were managed institutionally. My analysis of *Varney the Vampyre* in chapter 3 shows that criminal characters became fraught with competing criminological discourses, making them unfit for representation using traditional narrative patterns.

CHAPTER THREE

“An old mop as nobody can use”: Rewriting the Criminal in *Varney the Vampyre*

“If he is not a vampyre, he’s some other out-of-the-way sort of fish, you may depend.”
(*Rymer, VV 114*)

In the second of a series of letters titled “The Present State of Cheap Literature” published in the *Liverpool Mercury* in 1847, the writer describes a scene he witnessed in a newsvendor’s shop, when “a little ragged urchin came to the counter, stammering, — ‘Mother’s sent me for a penny number, the ‘Feast of Blood’.” After acquiring the desired number, the little ragged urchin left but immediately returned, “saying that he wanted a penny book, *Jack Sheppard*,” that his mother also told him to buy (“Present”). The little ragged urchin walked away with two criminal biographies – one, a single example of the many versions of the life and exploits of Jack Sheppard, and the other, part of the fictional life of Varney, the eponymous hero of *Varney the Vampyre; or the Feast of Blood* (1845-1847). Though both of these texts are stories about criminals, their representations of criminality differ entirely. Sheppard is romanticized and rendered as a hero, while Varney is a figure who is to be reviled or pitied. The differences in the characterizations of these two criminals were not merely coincidental or the result of two styles of storytelling, but signaled that changes were taking place in how criminality was represented in Victorian literature and culture.

These changes were the consequence, in part, of two shifts taking place in the treatment and perception of criminality during the 1840s. The first shift increased dependence on prisons as institutions for managing, punishing, and reforming criminals; the second shift was in the debate over the degree to which a criminal could be held responsible for his or her actions. The rise in prominence of the prison coincided with two major developments in the British legal and penal systems: the elimination of hanging as a punishment for all but the most serious crimes,

and the extension of police power.¹ The prison served a practical function – the management of prisoners – but also served an ideological function for the criminal law by standardizing incarceration as the primary punishment for crime. When the gallows was exchanged for the prison, regularity in punishment displaced infrequent spectacle, providing legal authorities with a more consistent way of controlling the populace (Harding 121).

Popular perceptions of the causes of criminality were changing alongside prison construction and renovation. As Martin Wiener outlines in *Reconstructing the Criminal*, theories of criminality that had previously faulted wayward individual volition as the ultimate source of crime were giving way to evidence suggesting that biology, or an individual's essential character, was far more influential.² In the early part of the nineteenth century, Victorian authorities generally viewed crime as resulting from a natural propensity, stronger in some individuals than in others, for giving in to temptations and impulses: "There was an instinct-driven 'natural man' lying in wait within even ostensibly civilized persons" (Wiener 26-27). Active self-discipline and the ability to rationally assess a situation and weigh potential consequences against the allure of short-term gain or pleasure were necessary for controlling one's impulses or instincts. Mastering these skills came with their habitual employment; the strength of personal defenses against temptation depended on the consistency with which they were put into practice.

Paradoxically in this understanding of criminality, while training and education were acknowledged as being essential to the development of proper habits, the absence of these advantages, especially evident in poorer populations, was not considered to be a legitimate excuse for succumbing to temptations. In other words, poverty and other social disadvantages did not justify having poor self-control. According to Wiener, "Although want and mistreatment

were acknowledged as contributing factors, crime was essentially seen as the expression of a fundamental character defect stemming from a refusal or an inability to deny wayward impulses or to make proper calculations of long-run self-interest” (46). Individual responsibility was believed to have a far greater influence over criminal behavior than environmental or biological determinism.

When placed in positions of want and deprivation, one might ask, how could those who had received no training in suppressing impulses be expected to maintain control over themselves? This paradox was maintained on the assumption that criminals, “chose to commit crimes [but] could have, and might have, chosen otherwise...[the] capacity to stand back from impulse and take a longer view of one’s own interest...while sometimes [sic] undeveloped, sometimes damaged...was there to be called upon and encouraged” (Wiener 48). So, while criminals might have certain disadvantages, they were thought to also possess a “natural” rationality that could enable them to make proper choices. If an individual committed a crime, it was ultimately because he or she made “a conscious, positive and immoral decision” to do so (Emsley 82). These incompatible arguments suggest a firm confidence in the ultimate superiority of the will over environment and circumstances. Ainsworth expresses this sentiment in *Rookwood* when he argues that the choice “to use or abuse—to command or to neglect” our faculties “rests with ourselves” (276).

The rise of the prison in the 1840s was founded partly on the belief that prisoners were capable of being reformed. While a criminal may have violated the law because of a weak will or lack of self-discipline, he or she could perhaps be recalled and transformed into a useful citizen through spiritual guidance in prison. Spiritual reclamation was thought possible if the prisoner could be completely isolated while incarcerated, and many prisons throughout the 1840s were

modeled on the “separate system,” so-called because prisoners were kept apart from one another at all times, and silence was strictly enforced.³ The separate system was implemented fully in 1843 at Pentonville prison, and this institution served as a model for the construction and renovation of many prisons over the next decade (Harding 153).⁴ While at first there was some evidence that the system was working, it was finally considered to be a failure and, upon the deaths of its most influential proponents, was largely abandoned (McGowen, “Well-Ordered” 100).⁵

According to Randall McGowen, many Victorians became convinced that “the prison [modeled on the separate system] failed not because it did not reform prisoners but because it tried to reform people who could not be changed” (“Well-Ordered” 104). At the end of the 1840s, and continuing through the 1850s and 1860s, the idea of a distinct “criminal class” gained credence.⁶ Victorians came to believe that prison reform had failed because most criminals were simply incapable of being reformed; that, in reality, they were “a sub-species...of defective, barely human beings” (Harding 178). This idea of criminals as a separate biological “species” was emphasized by Thomas Plint in *Crime in England* (1851) when he argued that “a large majority of the [criminal] class is so by descent, and stands...completely isolated from the other classes” (153). The argument that criminals were inherently, irredeemably flawed negated earlier arguments that crime was caused by a faulty will. After all, many working-class individuals did not commit crimes, suggesting that there was a unique corrupted quality in criminals that set them apart (Harding 177-178).

Those in the criminal class were believed to have brutish, animalistic features by which they could be recognized on sight.⁷ In Hepworth Dixon’s report on inmates at the Coldbath-Fields Prison (1850), for example, he characterizes criminals as creatures that are part-human,

part-animal: “[In a great prison] one sees only demons...the vast mass of heads and faces seem made and stamped by nature for criminal acts. Such low, misshapen brows; such animal and sensual mouths and jaw; such cunning, reckless, or stupid looks...hardly seem to belong to anything that can by courtesy be called human” (244-245). Thomas Carlyle described the prisoners he saw at Millbank penitentiary in 1850 as, “Miserable distorted blockheads, the generality: ape-faces, imp-faces, angry dog-faces, heavy sullen ox-faces; degraded under-foot perverse creatures, sons of *indocility*, greedy mutinous darkness, and in one word, of stupidity, which is the general mother of such” (67). Dixon’s and Carlyle’s characterizations of criminals as predisposed (“stamped by nature”) to cunning, violence, and idiocy is a far cry from the argument that criminals were only willful or insufficiently self-disciplined individuals who actively chose to commit illegal acts. Individuals categorized in the “criminal class” were considered incapable of being reformed, and could only be managed through periods of extended imprisonment (McGowen, “Getting” 48).

This growing belief in a class of individuals that were unreformable because of their innate criminality correlated with a “growing uncertainty about [individual] autonomy” that was exacerbated in the 1850s and 1860s. A climax of “uncertainty” about the human will was reached upon the publication of Darwin’s *Origin of Species*, when many abandoned belief in the possibility of absolutely controlling one’s environment, or one’s behavior in that environment (Wiener 160-161). Importantly, for many Victorians the existence of biological or inherent criminality largely absolved society from taking responsibility for the conditions that may have contributed to the degradation of criminals. “Crime was not to be accounted the fault of society,” because “[t]he sources of crime lay in the moral and physical character of these offenders”

(McGowen, "Getting" 37-38). These views placed the responsibility for crime primarily on the shoulders of individual criminals.

Patrick Brantlinger has remarked on the shift during this period in the portrayal of criminality, noting, "Before the Victorian era, the criminal was often represented as a figure of freedom, strong enough to break through social restraints, to bend the law to his or sometimes her will, supercharged with the charisma of adventure, banditry, and rebellion," but that "by the 1830s various forms of surveillance, mapping, and scientific explanation were making the literary criminal look less like a political rebel than like an object to capture, catalogue, diagnose, and hopefully tame or reform" (76). Brantlinger's assessment of this perceptual shift from a volitional to a pathologized criminality is essential for understanding the connection between the changing penal milieu and evolving representations of criminals in literature. Glorified accounts of criminals like Jack Sheppard or Dick Turpin depicted their criminal characters as "supercharged with the charisma of adventure, banditry, and rebellion," but this type of representation waned as the prison gained ascendancy.⁸

In this chapter I analyze the criminal protagonist in *Varney the Vampyre* and discuss ways that the turn to the prison altered literary methods of representing criminality. The first section outlines the ways that *Varney the Vampyre* struggles to frame its main character using established generic tropes of popular criminal biographies; the second section identifies parallels between the contradictions and anxieties in Varney's characterization and those in contemporary discourses on criminality. In the final section I highlight the antidisciplinary potential of Varney's suicide. Varney is ultimately unfit for his own criminal biography and his narrative emphasizes the tensions inherent in representing criminality in the 1840s.

Introducing Varney, the Vampire

The 1840s was a transitional period between the idea that criminality was an active choice by a criminal to commit crime and the later view that criminality was an inborn defect. It is convenient to discuss these perceptual stages as if they were distinct and easily delineated, but in reality, newly ascendant views of criminality retained traces of previous criminological discourses. As the prison system was achieving cultural prominence, competing views of criminality swirled around the figure of the imprisoned criminal, both challenging assumptions about the causes of crime, and complicating ideas about how criminals should be managed institutionally.

Varney the Vampyre was published in the middle of this transitional period, and the text reflects contemporary, and sometimes contradictory, discourses on the causes of crime. The narrative is an extended criminal biography of the main character, Varney, and tells the story of his life, criminal career, and death. However, the common elements from criminal biographies that structure the text become disordered over the course of the narrative because they cannot accommodate new definitions and perceptions of criminality. The persistent tension in the text between Varney's ability to choose to commit crimes and his helpless submission to his vampire instincts ultimately disrupts the conventions of criminal biography. This conflict, which is most evident in Varney's insatiable thirst for blood and the corresponding guilt he feels when he attacks women to obtain it, parallels debates over whether or not criminals could control their impulses. This controversy infiltrates the text, creating structural dissonance and contradiction in Varney's characterization. For example, the majority of eighteenth-century criminal biographies are stories about free-willed criminals that follow a relatively simple narrative arc. However, because Varney is not always in control of his actions, the structure of the criminal biography is

destabilized, manifesting in chronological inconsistency and confusion regarding the basic facts of Varney's life.

The objections of critics who have interpreted the rambling, inconsistent style of *Varney the Vampyre* as a natural consequence of "hack" authors writing for semi-literate readers with low standards fail to account for the significant material and cultural contexts in which the text first appeared. Brian Frost, for example, calls *Varney the Vampyre* "a dreary, rambling narrative written in the debased pseudo-Gothic style employed by the hack-writers of the 'penny dreadfuls'" (42). Leonard Wolf describes the text as "Grand Guignol writing at its childlike best...[the title] sounds, immediately, every conceivable note of flatulence the hundreds of pages that follow will play on" (169). In his study of the vampire in romantic literature, James Twitchell claims, less critically, "There is [in the text] no pretence, no purpose, no art; just a rollicking story" (124). And finally, Carol Senf characterizes *Varney the Vampyre* as having been "written at breakneck speed for an unsophisticated literary audience that was apparently more interested in fast pace and galloping suspense than in coherence or subtle character development" (42).⁹

These critics have committed an error similar to that of Victorian commentators who were convinced that lower-class readers of *Jack Sheppard* were only capable of passively engaging with popular culture and simply absorbed whatever they read. Scholars who have opinions similar to those quoted above do not recognize the potential for complex meanings in a text like *Varney the Vampyre* and, unfortunately, allow their perspectives to influence their opinions of *Varney's* readers as well. These views also reveal a misunderstanding of the methods by which penny bloods and other popular texts were created at the time because they do not account for the correlation between the interests and tastes of readers and the content of the texts

produced for them.¹⁰ As the analysis in this chapter demonstrates, however, there are a variety of ways that *Varney the Vampyre* may have resonated with its readers and their historical and cultural situation. There is sufficient evidence to indicate that much more was at work in *Varney* than the vapid sensationalism of which it has been accused.

The material conditions of the publication of *Varney the Vampyre* no doubt significantly affected its final coherence and structure. As a “penny blood,” a term used to refer to cheap, serialized sensational fiction popular among the lower-classes in the early part of the nineteenth century, *Varney the Vampyre* was published primarily for the financial gain of the publisher and author. When such a publication failed to sell, it was unceremoniously concluded, or simply discontinued mid-story. As a consequence of this material reality, a writer, or writers (since in some cases multiple hands contributed to a publication) would have little idea of how long a narrative would remain popular, and were often required to quickly invent new scenarios to extend the length of a series according to demand. Taking into account these likely publishing conditions, it is no wonder that the style of *Varney the Vampyre* appears disjointed. It is quite possible that the author, James Malcolm Rymer, forgot earlier facts of the story, intentionally doubled- or tripled-up on plots, and took long, meandering detours to extend the tale before concluding it.¹¹

Popular penny bloods could stretch on and on, sometimes even longer than *Varney the Vampyre*'s impressive 874 double-columned pages.¹² However, *Varney the Vampyre*'s popularity is confirmed not only by the length of its serialization, but by its subsequent republications. After its serialization from 1845-1847, *Varney the Vampyre* was reissued as a single volume in 1847, re-serialized in 1853, and again novelized in 1854. The republication of

1854 is a significantly abridged version that omits the middle section of the narrative, skipping with a brief transition from the first to the last major storylines.¹³

The complicated structure and episodic nature of the text is evident in a brief summary of the narrative. The first storyline in *Varney the Vampyre* is the lengthiest, spanning the first 500-odd pages of the narrative.¹⁴ This initial story focuses on the attempt by Varney to gain access to the ancestral home of the formerly well-to-do Bannerworth family and locate a large amount of money he believes is hidden in the house. Varney's strategy for obtaining this fortune is to convince the Bannerworths that they are haunted by a vampire so that they will vacate their mansion, leaving Varney to search as he pleases. To this end, Varney repeatedly attacks Flora Bannerworth, the young and beautiful heroine, and makes himself a general nuisance to Flora's brother Henry and other members of the family.¹⁵ Varney is all the while poorly disguised as "Sir Francis Varney," a respectable gentleman who has recently taken up residence in the neighborhood, and the Bannerworths soon realize that he is the vampire menacing them. As the story progresses, however, Varney proves to be far less diabolical than he wishes to appear, and the Bannerworths cease fearing him. The unexpected goodwill that develops between Varney and the Bannerworths is evident when the family shelters him from both a local mob seeking to eradicate the vampire threat and from Bow-Street Runners who are on Varney's trail for eluding the gallows in another episode of his life. In the end Varney obtains the money and sneaks away, promising never to harass the family again.¹⁶

In this first section of the text, the reader discovers along with the Bannerworth family that Varney is very difficult to kill. Each time he dies he is resurrected when moonbeams touch his body. This key feature of Varney's character is highly convenient for a narrative form dependent on ever-extending storylines. Any time Varney is killed, the story may continue on by

simply resurrecting Varney and then detailing his ensuing adventures. Varney dies and is resurrected at least seven times over the course of the narrative; he is killed by other characters, dies accidentally, starves to death, and even commits suicide, but each time moonbeams restore him. In many cases, Varney's resurrections are followed by changes in scene and character, and Varney emerges each time with a new identity in a new location. Varney appears under different pseudonyms and in various disguises throughout the story including a baron, a colonel, a monk, and a landed gentleman. Under these assumed identities, Varney makes multiple attempts to marry the daughters of unsuspecting families so that he may feed on them, though the text never clarifies why matrimony is requisite.¹⁷ Fortunately for his intended victims, Varney's plots are always foiled before the marriages take place.

As the narrative progresses, Varney becomes exceedingly frustrated with his unending life because he is torn between his vampire instincts that force him to seek blood and his human conscience that torments him for committing acts of violence. The reader eventually learns that Varney has been transformed into a vampire for murdering a family member, but the text then proceeds to muddy the history with conflicting accounts of the murder, one involving Varney's wife, and the other involving his son. Varney's inability to be reconciled to his life leads to his decision to commit suicide by drowning. Varney succeeds, but in yet another unfortunate twist of fate, his body is recovered by two well-meaning brothers, Charles and Edward Crofton, and Varney is again resurrected by moonbeams.¹⁸ Enraged at finding himself alive once more, Varney vows to revenge himself on the brothers for their part in his recovery, and proceeds to murder their sister, Clara, and then transform her into a vampire. Clara subsequently attacks a young child and is finally staked by a vengeful mob.¹⁹ Overcome with remorse for his role in

Clara's murder, Varney once more determines to destroy himself and this time succeeds by leaping into Mt. Vesuvius.

Even this very brief summary makes apparent those elements of the text appealing to readers interested in affordable sensational fiction containing healthy amounts of gore and intrigue. In each new scenario, readers were presented with new plot twists, new settings, and new characters, one among which was their favorite vampire antihero in disguise. The episodic, disjointed nature of the text, though jarring to many present-day readers and critics, would likely not have bothered contemporary readers because *Varney the Vampyre* was published at a time when what Jane Moody refers to as a "piecemeal aesthetic" was popularized by melodramas performed at illegitimate theaters. According to Moody, this aesthetic could unsettle audiences in a variety of ways:

The *pasticchio* effects characteristic of [illegitimate theater] often presented audiences with irreconcilable clashes and unresolved dissonances...[t]he ambivalent effects which such incongruous juxtapositions produce may account for that dangerous moral agnosticism for which critics obliquely condemned melodrama. (82)

It is possible that critics, already upset by what they viewed as sensationalism and tastelessness in the penny bloods, also recognized this "moral agnosticism" in the bloods' disjointed, piecemeal narratives.²⁰

While a resurrect-able vampire may have been a perfect character for a genre that capitalized on expandable storylines, this conceit also contributed to the disjointed and "piecemeal" qualities of the text. For example, after Varney is chased away when he attempts to marry the daughter of a family he meets while traveling to Bath, the reader next encounters him in the guise of a monk in Naples, then a shipwreck victim on an unnamed coast, and next as a

pedestrian walking down the Rialto in Venice, where he rescues a man named Count Pollidori from assassins.²¹ Edward Jacobs and Manuela Mourão point out that Moody's "piecemeal aesthetic" featured prominently in well-known literature such as *Jack Sheppard* and *Oliver Twist* (Ainsworth, *Jack Sheppard* 31-37). The wide cultural acceptance of this narrative style helps explain why any literary shortcomings of *Varney the Vampyre* did not deter readers: its disjointed nature was comfortably familiar.²²

The material realities of penny blood publication and the cultural prevalence of the piecemeal aesthetic complicate *Varney the Vampyre* as a site of discursive struggle. Layered onto the text's predisposition to instability is the historical coincidence of the publication of *Varney the Vampyre* and the rise of the prison, an institution that was influenced by, and that helped to shape, evolving conceptions of how best to understand criminality. Competing cultural and generic discourses about criminality are in play at moments when the representation of Varney disrupts textual elements of criminal biography, the primary genre framing Varney's story. Varney's vampirism, specifically his repeated deaths and resurrections, metaphorically enact the cycle of prison recidivism in which many prisoners and ex-convicts at the time were caught. This recidivism sobered idealistic visions of prison reform and bolstered increasingly popular arguments that criminals were so by nature rather than by choice.

The text struggles to depict Varney using the popular form of the eighteenth-century criminal biography. This genre emphasizes the free-volition and defiance of criminals, and early-Victorian novels, such as *Jack Sheppard*, used it to represent criminal characters as romantic and heroic figures. Varney's characterization is so confused because his story defies traditional narrative patterns, and because the prison criminality Varney embodies is not, and cannot be, romanticized or rendered heroic. An analysis of these diverse influences in *Varney the Vampyre*

provides insight into the historical and cultural changes that were fundamentally altering the ways criminals were represented in fiction.

Varney the Vampyre and the Criminal Biography

In chapter 2 I discussed the criminal biography in relation to the popular Jack Sheppard texts, and here want to focus on the relationship between the biographies and *Varney the Vampyre*. While the text integrates elements from a variety of criminal biographies that were popular in the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, the generic features most explicitly activated in *Varney the Vampyre* are derived from compilations of highwaymen biographies including Alexander Smith's *The History of the Lives of the Most Noted Highway-men* (1714) and Charles Johnson's *A General History of the Lives and Adventures of the Most Famous Highwaymen* (1734). *The Newgate Calendar* and *The Ordinary of Newgate's Accounts* are also key texts in *Varney the Vampyre's* literary genealogy.²³

Smith's and Johnson's texts are collections of tales recounting the life histories of various criminals, and are unique because a large portion of their accounts focus specifically on highwaymen. Some of the stories, about James Hind, William Davis, and Claude Duval, for example, contained the seeds that would grow, over the course of the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, into the daring, gallant, and mythic highwayman.²⁴ Certainly, not all highwaymen were worthy of being glamorized – many were merely brutal rogues who committed ugly crimes. According to James Sharpe, “most highwaymen, particularly those based in the London area, were firmly locked into the unglamorous world of pickpocketing, street robbery, burglary, prostitution, and the fencing of stolen goods,” rather than being the dashing, witty lady-killers they would become in legend (Sharpe 49).²⁵ Many accounts of highwaymen represented them as being favored by the general populace, sometimes for their commitment to

only robbing the rich, or those who supposedly deserved it because of their political affiliations, and sometimes just because they were so handsome and refined.²⁶ Some highwaymen maintained a dashing image up to the moment of their deaths by attending their executions elaborately dressed, and showing off their wit and defiance of the law to a sympathetic crowd until the final drop. Dick Turpin certainly “died game”: appropriately dressed, with “undaunted courage” until the end.²⁷

A few individuals developed reputations that contributed to the legend and myth of the highwayman that would be first consolidated in the character of Macheath in *The Beggar’s Opera* (1728), and eventually coalesce in the character of Turpin in *Rookwood* (1834).²⁸ The characterization of Dick Turpin in *Rookwood* was the apotheosis of the romanticized highwayman, and set the standard for all subsequent representations. As James Sharpe explains, Ainsworth’s Turpin signaled that the highwayman had reached mythic status in English culture.²⁹ Whether highwaymen were dashing or nasty, their biographies chronicled why they determined to pursue a life of crime, the course of their criminal career, their capture, and execution. This was an established narrative pattern for almost all criminal biographies, regardless of whether the stories were about highwaymen, petty thieves, murderers, or pirates.³⁰

The Newgate Calendar was a title ascribed to individual texts, but there were many “Newgate calendars” published under different titles.³¹ These popular texts were, like Johnson’s and Smith’s, compilations of stories of malefactors’ lives, collected from various sources such as the broadsheets and pamphlets published when a criminal was executed. The stories of criminals included in these volumes followed the pattern of Smith’s and Johnson’s narratives, though highwaymen featured far less prominently in these publications (Sharpe 71).

Another type of criminal biography, the *Ordinary of Newgate's Account*, was unique because the stories were organized and narrated by the current Ordinary of Newgate prison. The Ordinary was the spiritual counselor to prisoners condemned to be executed, and was charged with encouraging their confessions and repentance, and preparing their souls for the afterlife. Unlike the *Newgate Calendar*, which was a compilation of previous publications, the *Ordinary of Newgate's Account* comprised histories that condemned criminals would either dictate to the ordinaries or write themselves. The ordinaries' accounts typically described the trial of the prisoner, the specific religious counsel offered by the ordinary, the prisoner's life history, and an account of the execution.³² The life histories in these accounts followed a pattern similar to the one established in other secular criminal biographies, but typically ended with the criminal's repentance and resignation to his fate. Because the ordinaries sold their *Accounts*, and could earn a significant profit from the sales, critics often accused the ordinaries' spiritual counseling and engagement with prisoners of being tinged with mercenary motivations. As Michael Harris characterizes it, "In the period between conviction and execution the condemned prisoners became a very hot literary property [and]...the ordinary was in an excellent position to exploit a range of terminal contacts" (15). Some of the criticism leveled at the ordinaries included the charge that they sometimes wrested confessions from prisoners by threatening them with damnation if they did not comply (Linebaugh, "Ordinary" 225).³³

Criminal biographies capitalized on the conflict between the authority of the state and the will of the pursued criminal. According to Erin Mackie, all criminal biographies: "comprise two major trajectories of energy and intent: one generated from the individual's deeds, and the other from the orderly containment of those deeds within an authoritative narrative...[this] is a contrast between absolute transgression and absolute suppression" (75). It was necessary for the

biographies to represent the criminality of their subjects as “absolute transgression,” as an active choice, made freely, to defy the law. A contest between a willful criminal and the state, while perhaps ultimately unequal, pitted the intelligence and resources of each against the other. If criminals had been represented in the biographies as unequal to the contest, as being subject to external influences beyond their control, for example, then their termination by the state could only be rendered as excessive, irrational cruelty rather than any warranted dispensation of justice. In order for criminal biographies to claim to be, or function as, didactic publications, it was necessary for them to represent their criminal subjects committing crimes willfully.³⁴

Criminal biographies also represented as uniform the authority that condemned and punished those who offended against the law. Michael McKeon explains in *The Origins of the English Novel* that:

“Authority” in the criminal biography... is an ambiguous conflation of divine and positive law, so that the unarguable will of God is burdened with the weight of what in other contexts might well be recognized as its antithesis, its deforming secularization. It would not be surprising if readers of narratives and spectators at executions alike were distracted at least momentarily by the complacency of an identification – between God and the magistrate, divine decree and its human accommodation. (98)

“Absolute suppression,” by secular authorities is more justifiable if conflated with divine prerogative. Laws and punishments were far more credible if God was viewed as the true dispenser of justice, and penal institutions merely the chosen executors of divine moral guidelines. The criminal biographies, then, represented both the criminal and the law as cohesive, “absolute” entities with antithetical purposes.

Many of the structural and thematic elements common to criminal biographies feature prominently in *Varney the Vampyre*. It is unsurprising that the text, which is itself a biography of a criminal, would draw so heavily from these publications, since many of the aforementioned biographies were reissued during the early-nineteenth century and were, as a whole, a familiar part of lower-class popular culture.³⁵ *Varney the Vampyre* invokes these traditional criminal biographies quite explicitly throughout the text, and most particularly those featuring highwaymen and accounts by the ordinaries of Newgate. However, these genres are ultimately compromised in the text because they cannot adequately represent contemporary criminality.

Varney the Vampyre attempts to align Varney with famous highwaymen by activating common elements from highwaymen biographies. For example, after committing a robbery and murder with Marmaduke Bannerworth, Henry and Flora's father, Varney goes to London,³⁶ where he becomes a notorious criminal who, like the original Dick Turpin, operates in a gang.³⁷ Varney recounts his criminal exploits in London as follows:

I plunged into the vortex of London life, and proceeded, heedless of the criminality of what I was about, to cater for myself by robbery, or, indeed, in any manner which presented a prospect of success. It was during this career of mine, that I became associated with some of the most desperate characters of the time; and the offences we committed were of that daring [sic] character that it could not be wondered at eventually so formidable a gang of desperadoes must be by force broken up. (Rymer, *VI*.389)

In this account, Varney describes himself as “heedless” of his criminality, suggesting that he was aware of but unconcerned about the immorality of his actions, and consciously chose to continue his criminal career. What's more, the crimes he committed were “daring,” on a scale that demanded he and his gang be stopped, which separates him from ordinary, forgettable thieves.

Varney is eventually apprehended and convicted of committing “highway robbery of a most aggravated character,” and at his trial, in defiant highwayman fashion, he “hear[s] his sentence [of death]...unmoved” with “an expression of much haughty resolution depicted upon it” (I.328).³⁸

The text further implies that the crowd at the gallows sympathizes to some degree with Varney, despite, or perhaps because of, his gang’s “depredations [having] created such a sensation...[that] the legislature...had made it a matter of importance that [they] should be suppressed, and...that the severest penalties of the law should be inflicted upon [them]” (Rymer, *VV* I.389). As he walks onto the platform of the gallows, Varney does not at first understand what the “loud roar of execration burst[ing] from the multitude” means. He remembers, “it did, indeed, seem to me a brutal thing thus to roar and shout at a man who was brought out to die. I soon, however, found that...it was at the hangman, who had suddenly made his appearance on the scaffold, at whom [the mob] raised that fearful yell” (I.389). Varney is hanged and dies, though he is later revived by Dr. Chillingworth who, like Shelley’s Dr. Frankenstein, manages to acquire his still-warm body and then eagerly carry out “galvanic” experiments that bring Varney back to life.³⁹

Varney shares other characteristics with highwaymen as well. For example, he engages in repartee with members of the Bannerworth family; is described as “bold” and “audacious” (Rymer, *VV* II.538); and purports to be a gentleman.⁴⁰ Varney also suggests that one of his motivations for committing crimes (in addition to those crimes related to his need for blood) is revenge, as was the case with other famous highwaymen.⁴¹

In addition to parallels with highwaymen biographies, prominent elements from the *Ordinary of Newgate’s Account* are incorporated into *Varney the Vampyre*. After Clara Crofton,

the young woman Varney transforms into a vampire, is murdered by the mob, Varney feels extreme remorse over his critical part in the woman's death, and in his grief is approached by Mr. Bevan, a clergyman, who offers him asylum in his home (Rymer, *IV* II.845). Mr. Bevan attempts to turn Varney's thoughts toward God in spiritual counseling sessions reminiscent of the interactions between the ordinaries and condemned prisoners. When Varney tells Bevan that it is his curse to live forever as a vampire, Bevan asks him, "Have you tried prayer[?]" Varney responds, "I pray? What for should I pray but for that death which whenever it seems to be in my grasp has then flitted from me in mockery" (II.845). Bevan later suggests that Varney's continued survival as a vampire is "Perhaps not an accident," asking, "do you not think there is a pure spirit that will yet live, independent of the grovelling earth?" These efforts to turn Varney's thoughts toward a potential afterlife are fruitless, however, and Varney rejects Bevan's counsel, calling the soul's continuation into the afterlife a "fable" (II.847). This conversation is the reverse of the typical interaction between ordinaries and condemned prisoners: instead of encouraging Varney to accept and prepare for death, Bevan encourages Varney to accept his life and search for meaning in it. Bevan's efforts to reform Varney's spiritual outlook also links their relationship to that of the chaplain and prisoner in the 1840s. Since a prisoner would in most cases be released back into society, it was imperative that he or she experience a spiritual transformation that would pave the way for a future life of honesty. Like Varney, most prisoners were prepared to face life rather than death.⁴²

Varney also gives the authentic account of his life to Bevan, just as many other condemned criminals delivered their life histories to the ordinaries of Newgate before dying on the gallows. Bevan reminds Varney, "You have promised me some details of your extraordinary existence, and as a divine, and I hope in some degree as a philosopher, I look for them with some

degree of anxiety” (Rymer, *VV* II.847). Bevan’s desire to obtain Varney’s story is reminiscent of attempts by the ordinaries of Newgate to acquire the life histories of the condemned for personal motivations (Linebaugh, “Ordinary” 250). This historical connection potentially colors Bevan’s interest in Varney as being motivated at least partly by self-interest; even if Bevan cannot save Varney’s soul, or reconcile him to his life, he can still acquire a sensational case-study on which he can muse. Bevan never condemns Varney for his role in the murder of Clara Crofton, but instead seems far more interested in psychologizing Varney and gaining insight, through his life story, of how and why Varney came to be the vampire and criminal that he is.

When Bevan finds the stack of papers Varney leaves behind, “he with eager steps went into his study, and eagerly seized upon the packet that was left to him by the vampyre...[and] with eagerness he tore open the envelope” (Rymer, *VV* II.853). Though Bevan is perhaps concerned for Varney’s safety, since Varney has left a note indicating that he is going to throw himself into a volcano in Naples, Bevan’s curiosity and desire to possess the truth about Varney overwhelms his concerns. Instead of immediately pursuing Varney, Bevan decides to first read the story, “hoping and expecting that there he should find something that would better qualify him to come to an accurate conclusion” about what he should do (II.854). Once Bevan finishes the story, however, he finds himself “more perplexed than ever to come to any opinion concerning the truth of the narration which had now concluded” (II.868). Bevan has hoped to locate the “truth” of Varney’s vampirism in Varney himself, just as many contemporary Victorians sought the source of criminality within the individual criminal, but this effort is frustrated because Varney’s story does not provide easy answers. Significantly, Bevan’s concern for Varney himself has clearly dissipated, calling into question the original sincerity of his motivations.

In the account of his life that he leaves with Bevan, Varney describes himself as “a well-paid agent in some of the political movements which graced and disgraced” the period of the English Civil Wars and the rise of Oliver Cromwell (Rymer, *IV* II.854).⁴³ Varney “became a thriving man” by helping royalists escape to Holland, but he was not committed to either the royalist or republican causes. Varney (whose name at the time was “Mortimer”) attracted the attention of Cromwell, who asked him to betray an individual whom Varney was being paid to protect (II.854). Varney, aware of the danger in denying Cromwell, and enticed by the large sum he was promised for his “good service to the Commonwealth,” agreed to trick the fugitive and lead him into Cromwell’s snares (II.856). Upon returning from his meeting with Cromwell, however, Varney discovered that his son, unaware of Varney’s new commitment to the Protector, already assisted the royalist fugitive in escaping. Varney confesses, “I was so angered at the moment, that heedless of what I did, and passion getting the mastery over me, I with clenched fist struck [my son] to the earth. His head fell upon one of the hard round stones with which the street was paved, and he never spoke again. I had murdered him” (II.856). Cromwell’s agents then killed Varney, and he next awoke beside his own grave to an unidentified voice delivering the following speech:

Mortimer, in life you did one deed which at once cast you out from all hope that anything in that life would be remembered in the world to come to your advantage. You poisoned the pure font of mercy, and not upon such as you can the downy freshness of Heaven’s bounty fall. Murderer, murderer of that being sacredly presented to your care by the great Creator of all things, live henceforth a being accursed. Be to yourself a desolation and a blight, shunned by all that is good and virtuous, armed against all men, and all men armed against thee, Varney the Vampyre. (II.857)

Who this mysterious being was, and whether this figure transformed Varney, or was merely explaining that he was now a vampire, remains unclear. This figure may have been a divine messenger, God, or even another vampire.⁴⁴

The inclusion of several key features of criminal biographies in *Varney the Vampyre* suggests that the text was drawing from sources that were both familiar to and popular with readers. Doing so would allow the text to use those features to frame Varney and other aspects of the narrative in ways with which readers were familiar. Therefore, it is important to note how Varney and the text deviate from their generic forbears. For example, Varney shares characteristics with the mythic highwaymen, such as the “daring” character of his exploits, but there is little evidence that Varney is a romantic or heroic figure, as contemporary representations of the highwayman, like Ainsworth’s Turpin, licensed him to be. Varney seems caught in the “unglamorous” underworld described by Sharpe, and this representation potentially clashes with the image of the highwayman that may have been freshest in readers’ minds from texts like *Rookwood* and penny blood versions of Turpin’s life.⁴⁵

Both Varney and Bevan fail to fulfill the roles prescribed by the *Ordinary of Newgate’s Accounts*. Bevan, for example, makes minimal effort toward reconciling Varney to his life as a vampire, and is ultimately unsuccessful. Varney remains unrepentant for the murder of Clara Crofton, and excuses his actions by saying that he couldn’t help doing it, an explanation that Bevan seems to accept since he offers no word of condemnation, or even mild reprimand, for Varney’s behavior. Varney is also adept at countering the counseling that Bevan offers, in part because Bevan’s recommendations to “pray,” and to think on the immortal soul are poorly tailored to Varney’s situation. Bevan is more interested in understanding the origins of Varney’s criminality, and enjoying a good story, than in pursuing a criminal on his way to self-destruction.

Bevan's actions finally seem to be only empty gestures, as if his role as a clergyman obligates him to speak to Varney about spiritual matters, when all he really cares for is learning Varney's unique history.

Finally, by the time this story of Varney's origin is revealed in the manuscript he leaves Bevan, the reader has already encountered several others throughout the course of the narrative. Earlier in the text, for example, the reader is led to believe that Varney was turned into a vampire for murdering his *wife* because he suspected her of adultery. This original story, which is never clarified or validated, occurs right before Varney attempts to commit suicide by drowning. Perhaps the earlier origin story provides a clue to the publishing history of *Varney the Vampyre* – it is possible that Rymer expected to end the story by drowning Varney after revealing the origin story about his wife, but then something required that the story be continued and so the more complex origin story, and additional suicide, were conceived. The differences in the motivations behind the two crimes are significant. In the first instance, Varney makes a conscious decision to murder his wife because he is jealous. In the second story, Varney does not intend to kill his son and is turned into a vampire for an accidental crime.⁴⁶

These conflicting origin stories, and other contradictions in the text, further complicate the representation of Varney's life story as a cohesively-narrated criminal biography. The biographies that featured in Smith's and Johnson's compilations, *The Newgate Calendar*, and the ordinaries' *Accounts* all utilized a single, definitive story arc, beginning just before, or with, a criminal's first foray into crime, and ending decisively with the criminal's execution. Each time Varney is resurrected by moonbeams, he slips past this narrative arc. The cyclical, contradictory nature of Varney's story cannot be accommodated by any single style of criminal biography, and the narrative must cobble together elements from different sources. Traditional criminal

biography is unsuitable for narrating a life that stretches on through cycles of death and resurrection as Varney's does.

After legislation in 1837 restricted the use of hanging as punishment to only the most grievous offenses, criminal biography, a genre that had capitalized so profitably off of executions, became less relevant for representing contemporary criminality because the relationship between criminals and the law was changing. With the new emphasis on prisons, and the transition away from seeing criminality as the result of a defiant will, the black-and-white dichotomy of "absolute transgression and absolute suppression" was no longer as useful. Categories of criminality were becoming grey areas, which fundamentally changed the way criminals were represented in literature. The next section of this chapter demonstrates how contemporary discourses about criminality are mapped onto Varney.

Varney and Nineteenth-Century Criminality

Patrick Brantlinger argues that, upon being pathologized, crime could "no longer [be] seen as the deeds of freely choosing, unequivocally responsible – as opposed to merely guilty – moral agents" (76). The image of the criminal as a "figure of freedom," who could "bend the law to his or sometimes her will," was complicated by developing views that criminals were subject to biological predispositions that dictated their behavior. This transition did not take place quickly. Competing perspectives on criminality vied for ascendancy and predominant views affected how criminals were treated institutionally.

Varney the Vampyre struggles to reconcile the still-popular image of the willful criminal with contemporary discourses that recast the criminal as inherently deviant. This contemporary tension is mapped onto Varney's character and is most explicit in vampiric qualities such as his relationship with blood and his cycle of death and resurrection. Both "old" and "new" discourses

about criminality are at work in Varney's characterization but cannot be reconciled. Varney, tormented by this constant friction, can only find relief by removing himself completely from the text.

Robert Mighall's examination of the associations between nineteenth-century vampirism and discourses surrounding onanism, or masturbation, provides an analytical model for my exploration of the connections between *Varney the Vampyre* and contemporary criminological discourses. Mighall argues that the characterizations of vampires in nineteenth-century texts such as *Varney the Vampyre*, *Carmilla* (1872), and *Dracula* (1897) were influenced by the supposed symptoms of auto-eroticism, as depicted in (largely) illegitimate medical texts.⁴⁷ Mighall compares vampirism and onanism rhetorically and identifies where discourses on each "condition" intersected. These intersections are not meant to suggest that vampirism and masturbation are "symbolic equivalents," but rather that they operated within similarly structured discourses (Mighall 121). According to Mighall, "Fictional vampirism does not so much 'symbolise' masturbation; rather, it approximated the way it was represented at the time" (117). In much the same way, Varney's vampirism and the paradoxes of his character "approximate" contemporary definitions, diagnoses, and discourses of criminality.⁴⁸

The text vacillates about whether or not Varney can help attacking women, but ultimately attributes his crimes to instinct and influences beyond his control.⁴⁹ Put simply, Varney attacks because he needs nourishment, and blood is the only food that can sustain him.⁵⁰ As he explains to Flora Bannerworth, "as the period approaches when the exhausted energies of life require a new support from the warm, gushing fountain of another's veins...in a paroxysm of wild insanity, which will recognize no obstacles, human or divine, we [vampires] seek a victim" (Rymer, *VI*.157). Varney cannot resist the "dreadful appetite that goads [him] on" (II.732), but

has a difficult time reconciling himself to his need for blood. Sometimes Varney embraces his vampire nature, at one point vowing to “revel in [blood],” but otherwise he revolts from inflicting pain on others (II.787). Varney laments that after “the wasted energies of a strange kind of vitality are restored to us [after consuming blood], we [vampires] become calm again, but with that calmness comes all the horror, all the agony of reflection, and we suffer far more than tongue can tell” (I.157). Varney’s constant need for blood is problematic because of the inherent dualism of his character – he is pulled between an instinctual, animalistic drive to feed, and rational, human feelings that generate guilt.

The representation of Varney’s vampirism also approximates the contemporary animalization of criminals mentioned at the beginning of the chapter. Varney’s display of animalistic behavior calls into question whether his criminality is caused by instinct or by choice, and puts these qualities of his character in direct tension with his human attributes.⁵¹ At the very beginning of the narrative, for example, Varney simultaneously “laughs and howls” when he is caught attacking Flora Bannerworth (Rymer, *VV* I.6). He has the “glance of a serpent” (I.3) and “tusk-like teeth” (I.43). Characters are often confused about what kind of creature Varney really is. In one instance, Henry Bannerworth says of Varney, “This *man*...is a *vampire*” (I.64; emphasis added). Later, another character states that “Sir Francis Varney is a vampire – a blood-sucker – a human blood-sucker,” suggesting that Varney is either, or simultaneously, a creature that sucks human blood, or a human that sucks blood (I.234). Varney exists in a liminal space between humanity and animality similar to that inhabited by the criminals described in Hepworth’s Dixon’s survey of Coldbath-Fields prison mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.

Despite these occasional vacillations about what Varney is, the text privileges a perspective of Varney as a victim of his instincts. As Admiral Bell, a close family friend of the Bannerworths puts it, Varney “can’t help [his actions]; it’s in the nature of the beast, and that’s all you can say about it” (Rymer, *IV* I.413). Bell later reiterates this opinion, arguing “what is bred in the bone... will never be out of the flesh; and this vampire fellow could not possibly be quiet, you see, for long, but he must be at his old tricks” (II.451). Bell’s observations attribute Varney’s criminal behavior to his “nature” and what is “bred in the bone,” undermining any arguments that might suggest Varney is capable of exercising self-discipline and willing himself to resist his urges to feed or, perhaps, commit other crimes. Bell’s comments are in line with views of criminality as a biological predisposition.

By characterizing Varney as a victim of his own nature, the narrator suggests that Varney is more worthy of sympathy than condemnation, more victim than willful perpetrator. The narrator avoids chastising Varney for his actions and instead attempts to elicit sympathy from readers by offering insight into Varney’s internal struggle and positive qualities: “It was not the least singular fact in the character of that mysterious being [Varney], to notice how he always endeavoured to make some sort of amends or reparation to those whom he had so much terrified by his visitations” (Rymer, *IV* II.766).⁵² The narrator describes Varney as being ultimately “respectable” even if he has done and will continue doing things that are reprehensible. By emphasizing Varney’s struggle with his dual nature and cultivating sympathy for him, the narrator also encourages the reader to psychologize Varney, to understand and make allowance for the complex conditions that make him what he is.

By asking readers to consider how Varney must feel as a vampire, the narrator fosters a deeper sense of identification between Varney and his audience. The narrator observes:

Surely to [Varney] there must have been periods of acute suffering, of intense misery, such as would have sufficed to drive any ordinary mind to distraction, and yet he lived, although one cannot, upon reviewing his career, and considering what he was, consider that death would have been other than a grateful release to him from intense suffering.

(Rymer, *W* II.770)

In this passage, the reader is asked to consider how he or she would behave if placed in Varney's position, and the narrator suggests that anyone might behave as badly as Varney does under the same pressures. Instead of viewing Varney as a villain worthy of punishment and the reader's loathing, the reader is instead encouraged to wish that Varney may die, which is really the only way of wishing Varney well. This approach to criminality is far different than that in most criminal biographies, in which emphasis is placed on identifying the simple motivations behind crimes, rather than investigating the myriad pressures moulding individuals into criminals.

Narrative pathos reaches a climax just before Varney's first suicide attempt by drowning, as readers are offered insight into Varney's tortured musings. This is worth quoting at length:

Now and then he would strike his breast, and utter a dull groan as if some sudden recollection of the dreadful past had come over him, with such a full tide of horror that it could not be resisted...

"No, no," [Varney] said, "no peace for me; and I cannot sleep, I have never slept what mortals call sleep, the sleep of rest and freedom from care, or [sic] many a long year. When I do seen [sic] to repose, then what dreadful images awake to my senses. Better, far better that my glaring eyeballs should crack with weariness, than that I should taste of such repose."

The sympathetic shudder with which he uttered these words was quite proof sufficient of his deep and earnest sincerity. He must indeed have suffered much before he could have give [sic] such a sentiment such an utterance. We pity thee, Varney! (Rymer, *VV* II.771)

Here, when Varney is at his most pathetic and vulnerable, the narrator takes the opportunity to posit an alliance of feeling between Varney, the narrator, and the reader. The narrator's use of the pronoun "we" assumes the reader will identify with and pity Varney, rather than condemn him.

In the introductory chapter I used Brian Reynolds's "transversal theory" to explain the significance of empathy in popular texts like *Varney the Vampyre*. I argued that Reynolds's idea of transversal territories is implicitly antidisciplinary because imaginatively sharing the emotional and experiential space of others destabilizes attempts by the state to homogenize the populace (B. Reynolds 18-19).⁵³ In the case of *Varney the Vampyre*, empathizing with Varney, who for many reasons deserves condemnation, may cause a reader to judge Varney less harshly. Readers may be more apt to take into account the extenuating circumstances that have shaped Varney into the creature he is and by doing so may question the justice of Varney's interminable punishment. Unfortunately, we have no records of how contemporary readers interpreted the text, but clearly this potential empathy for Varney complicates how readers may have understood his criminality.

Asking the reader to identify with the criminal (Varney) encourages a sympathy that is exactly the opposite of how readers were "supposed" to respond to criminals represented in biographies. The ostensible purpose of the biographies was to teach readers to reject criminal behavior, and thereby avoid committing the crimes that led to the gallows. Of course, as we saw

in chapter 2, while readers may have been expected to shun criminals in biographies, readers did not always consume texts as cultural authorities hoped they would.

Varney is most significantly and tellingly aligned with contemporary ideas of criminality by being a figure “imprisoned” in a cycle of recidivism marked by repeated crimes, deaths, and resurrections. Varney’s recidivist cycle closely approximates the contemporary struggles faced by criminals sentenced to prison and then forced upon release back into crime because they could not otherwise survive. Just as Varney, when resurrected or “released” from death, must find blood to remain alive, ex-convicts were also challenged to find work and food to support themselves and any family. An article published in the *London Saturday Journal* (1840) refers to the difficulties faced by released prisoners:

The governor of the Giltspur-street Compter can bear witness how many prisoners have, even previous to their discharge, earnestly implored him to give them some employment on leaving the prison to prevent their falling into crime to obtain their food. A well-known pickpocket in the city, on being asked what he should do with his liberation, very frankly said, “Thieve rather than starve; for no one will employ me, and a silk handkerchief will get me a meal.” (“Destitution” 203)

The pickpocket’s comments suggest that hunger was one of the most common causes of recidivism, an observation further supported by an article in *Blackwood’s* that describes how the ex-convict, “Goaded by despair, or stimulated by hunger...yields to the first temptation, and commits a crime which places him again within prison walls” (“Law” 723). As with Varney’s insatiable thirst, the ex-convict’s hunger is represented as an irresistible force, “goaded” him to commit crimes to procure sustenance.

Critics at the time viewed recidivism as one of the worst problems of the prison system. Because of the stigma associated with having been incarcerated, many ex-convicts found it exceedingly difficult to obtain honest work, and were therefore forced to commit new crimes to survive. An article published in the *Athenaeum* argued that “The man whom misfortune, more than crime, may have once made the inmate of a gaol, comes out thenceforth wearing its livery, to distinguish him from the rest of his fellows. As the dog called mad is hunted into madness, so the escaped prisoner is hunted back to prison” (“Crime and its Remedies” 293). This comment once more associates criminals with animals, and also suggests that the criminal suffers doubly – by having been forced through “misfortune” into crime in the first place, and then being caught in a cycle of pursuit, imprisonment, and release.

An article from *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine* (1847) argued that, upon leaving a prison, “Society stamps its iron on [the criminal’s] brow, and bids him ‘sin or die’” (“Cause” 204). The article describes how a reputation of having been incarcerated could damage an ex-convict’s future prospects:

A man who had lived out his days of punishment...was turned into the world...[S]ensible that he would seek work and confidence vainly in his former neighbourhood, he wandered far, and found employment. For several months his conduct was irreproachable; but, ultimately, some “busybody” discovered his asylum, and disclosed his secret. He was then obliged to abandon his employment, and commence the weary search, “without a character,” for a new home. (“Cause” 205)

Like these ex-convicts, Varney is forever “marked” by his vampirism and will never escape the stigma. Forced, therefore, by his vampirism to commit crimes, Varney is repeatedly hunted and must escape to different countries and take on new identities to avoid capture. Even when

Varney relocates and assumes a new disguise, however, other characters sense that something about him is wrong, and out of mistrust keep their distance and a close eye out for hints of suspicious behavior. In a telling reinforcement of the criminal's fate, even the reader, while encouraged to sympathize with Varney, is placed in a position of surveillance and encouraged to be a "busybody." In each new episode of *Varney the Vampyre*, the reader must hunt out Varney and discover under which identity he is hiding. When other characters, and the reader, inevitably ferret out the vampire, Varney must move on.

The approximation of vampirism with criminality, far from being unique to Varney, featured in contemporary non-fictional mediums like newspapers. An article discussing reasons for a perceived increase in crime in the *Mirror Monthly Magazine* (1849) demonstrates how vampirism and crime, specifically highway robbery, could be conflated:

The miserable outcast of society, hardened by want, ignorance, and suffering, is apt to reason imperfectly if he reasons at all, and to sophisticate himself into the conviction that, as his own life is made of so little account by the rest of the community, he has the right to avenge himself on that community. And how does he do it? Arguing that his own existence is as sweet and valuable as that of any other man, he betakes himself to the dark highway, to the sleeping-chamber of the defenceless and unguarded, and destroys a life that his own may be prolonged. ("Increase" 397)⁵⁴

The conflicting discourses that inform the representation of Varney in the text also inform the representation of the criminal in this passage. First, the writer questions the soundness of the criminal's intellect and the ability for his mind to control his impulses, thereby suggesting that the criminal is only capable of faulty reasoning. Next, there is doubt as to whether the criminal "reasons at all," suggesting that he is a brute operating on instinct. Paradoxically, the criminal is

also represented as actively choosing to become a highwayman and murderer, in this case out of revenge for perceived wrongs. This alleged, “choice,” however, is simultaneously undermined by the doubt cast on the criminal’s degree of control.

This passage also establishes continuity between the criminal and vampire by folding their characteristics into a single figure who “feeds” on society. Like a vampire, this criminal is a “parasite” that, it follows, can potentially spread the “disease” of criminality to others, just as Varney transforms the innocent Clara Crofton into a vampire who then begins a short-lived criminal career of her own. When first-time criminal offenders were sent to prison, it was feared that they would be corrupted, or “infected” by those with more experience, and emerge from prison more committed to the criminal life: “there does exist a fatal influence amongst associations of bad people; it is not those least culpable that have any influence, but it is the most depraved felons who take the lead, and gain a destructive ascendancy” (“Prison Discipline,” *Monthly* 393).⁵⁵ This supposition contributed to the prison stigma that was so disabling to those striving to live honestly and break out of the cycle of recidivism. For those who did fall back into crime, prison functioned as a symbolic death, whereupon release, or in vampiric terms “resurrection,” they would again be forced to commit crimes, or prey on society, in order to survive.

In this respect, the vampire was an ideal figure on which to map contemporary concerns and debates about prisoners and criminality. Varney’s death and resurrection cycle mimics the cycle of prison recidivism, and epitomizes the struggle between needing to commit crimes to survive and desiring to live morally. Varney’s vampirism is itself a sort of imprisonment. The “human” part of Varney wants to resist committing crimes, but he is trapped in a vampire’s body and cannot resist its urges. Even if he starves to death, as he does at one point in the narrative,

when he resurrects he is even hungrier than before.⁵⁶ In these ways, the text implicitly complicates both volitional and deterministic characterizations of criminality by urging a critique of the prison system as an institution that propagates crime even as it purports to reform criminals.

Varney seems especially aligned with instinctual or “natural” criminality because of his drive to acquire blood. However, his seemingly innate propensity for committing crimes is ultimately the result of environmental determinism – it may be surmised that, had he never been punished with vampirism in the first place, his criminal career, and his entrapment in a metaphorical cycle of prison recidivism, would never have commenced. *Varney the Vampyre*, then, maps predominant discourses about inherent or willful criminality onto Varney’s character, but simultaneously resists these discourses by framing Varney as a victim who is trapped by external forces in a cycle from which he cannot escape. As a character that embodies competing theories of criminal causation, it is no coincidence that Varney became popular during decades so focused on criminality and imprisonment.

Varney’s approximation of prison criminality contributes to the disruption of the elements and discourses of criminal biography used in framing the narrative; his story complicates the most basic themes shared by the highwaymen biographies, *Newgate Calendar* and ordinaries’ *Accounts*. Varney’s crimes cannot be cast as acts of “absolute transgression,” because he attacks women out of necessity. For this reason, Varney cannot be adequately represented by a genre that represents criminals pitting their wills against the power of law. Varney is associated in many important ways with prison criminality, which the criminal biographies, centering as they did on the gallows, did not attempt to represent.

Because of this approximation of prison criminality, Varney cannot be rendered a romantic criminal like Dick Turpin or Jack Sheppard before him. The new emphasis on imprisonment diluted the potential for narratives to romanticize contemporary criminals. Once imprisoned, would-be Jack Sheppards, Dick Turpins, and Claude Duvals were absorbed by the prison system and became anonymous convicts. Prison was not a glorious punishment, and because prison effectively homogenized criminality, individual criminals had little chance of distinguishing themselves after being apprehended and sentenced.⁵⁷ Gone were the defiant speeches from the gallows as well-dressed depredators prepared to “die game.” Murderers continued to receive some level of notoriety by dying on the gallows, but they were almost unanimously reviled rather than idolized. As noted in chapter 2, the repugnance with which murderers were greeted on the scaffold was one of the few points on which the state and the crowd were in harmony; murderers could be infamous, but not romanticized.⁵⁸

Franco Moretti’s comments on genre in *Graphs, Maps, and Trees* help clarify why Varney’s characterization disrupts the elements of criminal biography in *Varney the Vampyre*. Moretti explains that a genre maintains its hegemony only as long as it “has not lost its artistic usefulness” (14): “A genre exhausts its potentialities...when its inner form is no longer capable of representing the most significant aspects of contemporary reality” (*Graphs* 17, n.7).⁵⁹ Historical and cultural changes can exert pressures that force narrative patterns to evolve in order to accommodate new ideological emphases, or disappear to make room for more relevant genres (*Graphs* 56-61; 14). Moretti’s observations help explain why it is so difficult for Varney to function within the framework of the criminal biography; Varney represents, not a new type of criminality, as prisoners had always existed, but a newly predominant criminality. With the consignment of the gallows to an infrequent punishment reserved almost exclusively for

murderers, the prison was the new reality that called for a different way of representing criminality. The challenges of portraying this new type of criminality in literature are evident in the conflict between old and new discourses about criminality in *Varney the Vampyre*.

The End of Varney

Varney the Vampyre finds it impossible to resolve the contradictions of contemporary criminality mapped onto Varney's character and resorts to suicide as the final solution. In an inverse of reactions to criminals like Jack Sheppard, whom readers wanted to survive, *Varney the Vampyre's* readers are supposed to hope that Varney dies. Unlike the highwayman in the traditional criminal biography, who may garner sympathy because he defies the state that wants to kill him, Varney's story elicits pity because he is caught in an interminable purgatory of death and resurrection without apotheosis. Varney's vampirism is ultimately a punishment for killing his son, and justice, as decreed by the mysterious being that presides over Varney's first resurrection, confines Varney to a cycle of imprisonment instead of giving him the release of death. Varney instead must eventually "hang" himself, or commit suicide to achieve the peace he seeks, defying his sentence in order to end his torturous ordeal. While criminals in the biographies often defied the law for a period of time before their capture and executions simply by continuing to live and commit crimes, Varney's life is neither a triumph over authority, nor a defiance of the law, but is rather a representation of the living hell that is the criminal cycle of imprisonment, release, and recidivism. While the romanticized criminal defies state justice by insisting on living, Varney defies state justice by insisting that he die.

When Varney accidentally murders his son, he is punished by having stripped from him his ability to exercise individual volition. He is assigned a name and identity and is for the rest of his life doomed to commit actions he loathes with no chance of reprieve. Who, exactly,

condemns Varney to this tortuous existence is never confirmed, but the identity seems to be some combination of divine and legal authority, as suggested earlier by McKeon's observation of how secular and divine "Authority" were conflated in criminal biographies. Despite the differences I've highlighted in this chapter between criminal biographies and *Varney the Vampyre*, the tension between the criminal and the authorities with the power to punish is key to understanding the significance of Varney's suicide.

Varney finally succeeds in killing himself by leaping into a volcano. A week after Mr. Bevan finishes Varney's short autobiography, he reads a newspaper account of a "tall and melancholy-looking stranger" who arrived in Naples and, with a guide, journeyed up Mt. Vesuvius. At the edge of the crater, the stranger threw the guide a bag of money, and delivered the following instructions:

You will make what haste you can...from the mountain...and when you reach the city you will cause to be published an account of my proceedings, and what I say. You will say that you accompanied Varney the Vampyre to the crater of Mount Vesuvius, and that, tired and disgusted with a life of horror, he flung himself in to prevent the possibility of a reanimation of his remains. (Rymer, *IV* II.868)

Before the guide could react, "Varney took one tremendous leap, and disappeared into the burning mouth of the mountain" (II.868).

Varney doesn't throw himself into just any volcano; he throws himself into Mt. Vesuvius, a culturally significant landmark that had particular resonances for nineteenth-century readers. In his article, "The Volcano Disaster Narrative," Nicholas Daly traces the uses of volcanoes in various entertainments from the early modern period to the early nineteenth century, and demonstrates how the volcano signified in different contexts. Daly explains that it was common

for monsters to jump into a volcano at the end of plays. For example, in an 1826 theatrical production of *Frankenstein; Or, the Man and the Monster*, the monster, “surrounded by soldiers and armed peasants, and pursued by his own maker” jumps into the crater of Mt. Vesuvius (Daly 266). A key difference between this theatrical monster and Varney is that the former is pursued up the volcano as the populace attempts to eradicate the threat the monster poses, while the latter arrives of his own volition. No one harasses Varney up and into Mt. Vesuvius and, as further evidence of his insignificance, Varney must even publicize the account of his own death through the medium of his guide. There is a melancholy sense throughout the last section that, like any newspaper story, Varney’s suicide will only be of passing interest to readers, and will certainly not carry the degree of notoriety of the deaths of his generic predecessors. The vampire, in this sense, is utterly de-fanged.

This is an important distinction because it signals that, despite his potentially dangerous capabilities as a “monster,” Varney is not really viewed as a threat, but rather as a pitiable depressive. This fact is evident in the absence of any pursuit of Varney after the Clara Crofton affair. Bevan might have tricked Varney into his home and then trapped him there for capture, or at least alerted the townspeople to Varney’s whereabouts. Significantly, however, he doesn’t even chastise Varney for his actions, demonstrating the important hold pathologizing discourses had at the time. Bevan is more concerned with understanding Varney’s motivations and with his reformation than with punishment. Early in the narrative, Admiral Bell emphasizes Varney’s harmlessness and overall pitiable state by comparing Varney unflatteringly to “an old mop as nobody can use” (Rymer, *IV* II.677). The same sentiment, interestingly, might also have been applied to the out-moded criminal biographies that still existed at the time, as they were no longer useful in characterizing present criminal conditions.

Varney's decisive failure to inspire fear, admiration, or any other significant emotion but general pity suggests that Varney, as a threat, has been effectively neutralized. Michel Foucault argues that despite their failure to prevent crime or consistently reform criminals, prisons continue to be used because they produce "delinquency" (277). Like Varney's cycle of death and resurrection, which is aligned with incarceration and release, "The circuit of delinquency," as Foucault terms it, is "the direct effect of a penalty which, in order to control illegal practices, seems to invest certain of them in a mechanism of 'punishment-reproduction', of which imprisonment is one of the main parts" (278). The "circuit of delinquency" assists in controlling the criminal by keeping him or her in a holding-pattern of minor crime and, through the constant return to and release from prison, "prevents them from leading to broader, more obvious forms [of crime], rather as though the exemplary effect once expected of the spectacle of the scaffold was now sought not so much in the rigour of the punishments, as in the visible, branded existence of delinquency itself" (Foucault 279). Foucault's explanation further illuminates Varney's connection to prison recidivism, and explains, in part, why he is considered only mildly threatening. Though Varney commits many crimes, most of them are comparatively petty, and Varney is repeatedly prevented from concocting more devious schemes precisely because he keeps dying, resurrecting, and then becoming distracted by the need to satiate himself with blood. Each time Varney dies, or, per Foucault, each time a criminal returns to prison, any plans in which he was engaged are voided. While Varney's imprisonment in his vampirism is the force behind his criminality, it simultaneously restricts his criminal potential.

Varney's final plunge into the volcano out of exhaustion and disgust with his life of "horror" seems at first a clear defeat. This perspective is in keeping with contemporary views that interpreted suicide as "the sad culmination...of the individual's sin or cowardice" (Anderson

213). Similar to debates about the causes of criminality, the strength of the will was also the crux of discourses on suicide. In Barbara Gates's discussion of Victorian suicide, she explains:

The Victorians imagined the self as something like a fortified castle and prepared themselves to endure a siege. The chains the romantics wished to break became the necessary walls of a well-protected self, safeguards to be tended, kept up, and repaired. In this stalwart frame of mind, suicide looked less like release than defeat. (27)

In Gates's description, there are clear connections between discussions of suicide and discussions of crime. Though Gates's analysis suggests that Varney's suicide might be read as the result of weakness and his inability to resist despair, an alternative perspective of suicide suggests that Varney's death is the ultimate volitional act.

Gates explains that the "suicides of history, especially ancient history, had long interested educated Britons (82).⁶⁰ In Gates's analysis of Matthew Arnold's "Empedocles on Etna," a long poem about the final hours before the philosopher Empedocles leaps into a volcano, Empedocles is, like Varney, in a state "in which the suffering finds no vent in action; in which a continuous state of mental distress is prolonged, unrelieved by incident, hope, or resistance; in which there is everything to be endured, nothing to be done" (qtd. in Gates 86). Gates argues that, "Through Empedocles Arnold... offered willed death as a final confirmation of personhood in times when society threatens to dissolve personal identity... Mind is now under the control of will, and doubt and paralysis are under the control of action" (88).⁶¹ A similar argument can be made for reading Varney's suicide as a triumph, rather than a failure, of the will, and as a way Varney reclaims control over the agency he lost upon turning into a vampire. Varney climbs the volcano in despair, but by doing so he defies the "Authority" that imprisoned him in his vampirism.

Committing suicide is for Varney the ultimate act of self-discipline and a symbolic victory over the (in)justice that sentenced him to life as a vampire for the accidental murder of his son.

Varney's suicide may also be characterized as a victory because he struggles mightily to accomplish it. Part of Varney's curse as a vampire is his inability to die and end his torment. After Varney kills Clara Crofton, the narrator laments, "We shall soon see in his now very short career whether he is most to suffer or to inflict suffering...It was sad—very sad, indeed, that such a being could not die when he chose, the poor privilege of all" (Rymer, *IV* II.806). Varney's inability to choose death, which is here characterized by the narrator as being the most basic act of individual will, becomes the key point of conflict between Varney and the multi-valent authority that has cursed him. Varney is punished as long as he lives.

In criminal biographies, according to John Richetti, "the criminal's sin is individualism": "[his] crucial act is to...insist on his right to what Providence has denied him" (31, 34). Providence has denied Varney death, "the poor privilege of all." Since death is the one thing Varney is not permitted to have, successfully killing himself is the ultimate act of defiance. By the end of the narrative, Varney's punishment may seem disproportionate to his crime, especially because killing his son was an accident. Richetti also explains that the criminal is redeemed by "recognize[ing] the necessity and wisdom of submission to control from above" (31). Though Varney repents his actions and laments that he committed the crime that led to his cursed life, Varney never acknowledges that his punishment was just or that he has deserved his life as a vampire. Varney never justifies the actions of "Providence" to anyone, suggesting that he is only sorry for his actions because of the pain they cause him.⁶²

Varney's suicide represents a personal victory and a way of ending his torment, but it is also a comment on the plight of contemporary prison criminals who, like Varney, are stuck in a

recidivist loop. Many strands of competing discourses are interwoven into the text, but they remain unresolved. Varney is a difficult character to understand because he approximates contemporary criminality while also being laden with contradictory discourses about that criminality. Varney has no alternative to death – he is miserable while he lives, perpetually unable to become reconciled to the life of a vampire, just as contemporary ex-convicts wanting to conduct honest lives after release may have unwillingly found themselves in positions of having to commit crimes to survive. Unless ex-convicts were lucky enough to escape the scrutiny of “busybodies” and find honest work, recidivism was a likely fate.

Varney’s suicide points to the futility of the ex-convict’s struggle to stay out of prison. His death is no real solution, though it is his only option. For a creature whose punishment consists in having his volition stripped from him, it is significant that his final action is an exertion of the will, and recalls, for just a moment, the willful criminals of the past. However, Varney can never be glorified for this defiance as legendary criminals like Sheppard and Turpin once were. Varney’s character is too fraught with the contradictions and complications of contemporary criminality, and too unstable to be a model worth emulating.

Conclusion

The “little ragged urchin” mentioned at the beginning of this chapter carried home two texts representing very different types of criminality. The differences between *Varney the Vampyre* and the Sheppard texts encapsulate the struggle and shift taking place in representations and perceptions of criminality that occurred alongside events such as the near-total repeal of capital punishment and the rise of the prison. These historical changes and the transition to viewing criminality as an inherent biological trait fundamentally changed the way criminality was represented in contemporary literature.

Whereas Jack Sheppard was romanticized and celebrated more than one hundred years after his death, lonely Varney makes his way into the maw of a volcano, with only a self-authored account in a newspaper to mark his unceremonious end. Varney has been neutralized and pathologized into fatalism by forces beyond his control, including the force that has condemned him to a cycle of recidivism from which he cannot hope to escape. On the one hand is the romantic heroism of Jack Sheppard, and on the other is a downtrodden, suicidal vampire-criminal living in a cycle of cosmic prison recidivism. It is unlikely that readers would want to *be* Varney in the same way many desired to live like Jack Sheppard, and this distinction offers important insight into how criminality was imagined and represented in the 1840s.

So far in this dissertation I have traced related changes in representations of and attitudes toward literary criminals. In *Rookwood*, Dick Turpin has complete agency and readers are encouraged to celebrate this attribute of his character. Turpin signifies the best parts of a past England and may be safely admired because his peccadilloes are quarantined in legend. When Ainsworth attempted to repeat his success with *Rookwood* by using Turpin as a model for Sheppard, he discovered, much to his chagrin as we saw in chapter 2, that the same characteristics took on new, uncomfortable significance in the changing legal and penal milieu. *Jack Sheppard* demonstrated that criminal heroes were no longer viable for respectable middle-class publications, and that this type of criminal protagonist was incongruous with new perspectives on criminality.

Varney the Vampyre highlights the tensions inherent in representations of criminals during the period in which criminality was coming to be seen more and more as an inherent flaw. While Varney reinforces many contemporary perspectives of criminality, there are also antidisciplinary tendencies that manifest in attempts to complicate Varney's character by

garnering sympathy for him. A similar effort is made in the penny blood I analyze in the final chapter of this dissertation. In George W.M. Reynolds's *The Mysteries of London* (1844-1846), criminal characters seem at first to be naturally corrupt, but many are granted opportunities to tell the story of their lives and explain that social or environmental circumstances out of their control are most to blame for their turn to crime. Like *Varney the Vampyre*, *The Mysteries of London* suggests that criminals may not necessarily be as villainous as they first appear.

CHAPTER FOUR

“Villain, that you are”: Melodramatic Criminality in *The Mysteries of London*

“We cannot have heroes to dine with us. There are none. And were these heroes to be had, we should not like them. But neither are our friends villains,—whose every aspiration is for evil, and whose every moment is a struggle for some achievement worthy of the devil.” (Trollope 260)

George W.M. Reynolds’s *The Mysteries of London* was serialized from 1844-1846, overlapping the publication of *Varney the Vampyre* (1845-1847) for more than a year. Like the other texts analyzed in this dissertation, *The Mysteries of London* was immensely popular, in part because it could be acquired for only a penny per issue.¹ Whereas *Jack Sheppard* was originally published in *Bentley’s Miscellany* for a middle class audience, and while readers wanting to appear respectable wouldn’t be caught dead holding an issue of *Varney the Vampyre*, scholars have suggested that Reynolds’s text was intended for a broader, mixed-class audience.² Louis James’s comment on the readership of *The Mysteries of London* cautions us to avoid overstating the text’s cross-class appeal, however: “Although Reynolds’s readers would have included many from the middle classes...his name was taboo for middle-class readers who associated him with dangerous Radicalism and pornographic interest...‘respectable’ Victorian England conspired to airbrush Reynolds and his writing out of the national literary scene” (“From Egan” 101).³ It is clear, however, that *The Mysteries of London* was immensely popular, especially with the lower-classes, and enjoyed a publication of between 30,000 and 40,000 issues a week.⁴

The Mysteries of London tells the story of Richard and Eugene Markham, two brothers who choose morally opposed paths in life. After an altercation with his father over some gambling debts, Eugene decides to leave home, determining to make his own way in life without relying on his family’s substantial resources. Richard opts to remain at home and the brothers agree to meet after twelve years to compare the relative success of their lives and decide who chose the wisest path. Richard Markham, the hero of *The Mysteries of London*, suffers a number

of misfortunes, including the ignominy of serving a prison sentence after being framed for forgery, but he preserves his morality and soldiers on, triumphing ultimately by becoming the son-in-law of the ruler of an Italian state. Eugene, on the other hand, swindles and connives his way through investment schemes and banking frauds, worms his way into parliament, and indulges in general debauchery. When the brothers reunite after twelve years, Eugene, in poverty and disgrace, dies in the arms of his princely brother after being shot by his own valet.

The binary structure of this main narrative demarcates clearly between the “good” and “bad” character. Like Thames Darrell and Jack Sheppard in Ainsworth’s novel, Richard and Eugene Markham are cast as William Hogarth’s morally opposed industrious and idle apprentices, and each is rewarded or punished for his decisions in the proper extreme.⁵ Moral opposition between characters was not new in fictional narratives, and this conflict was at the time played out nightly on melodramatic stages across London. Elements from stage melodrama pervade *The Mysteries of London*, linking the text specifically with this theatrical genre.⁶ In this chapter I discuss particularly how the melodramatic, as well as romantic, qualities of *The Mysteries of London* influence the text’s representation of criminality.

Richard and Eugene are only two of many characters in the story that are touched by or participate in crime. The most important character in the text besides the two brothers is Anthony Tidkins, or the Resurrection Man, so named because he unearths, or “resurrects,” buried bodies to sell to anatomists.⁷ Despite the initial opposition established in the text between Richard and Eugene, the Resurrection Man is Richard’s true enemy, and these two characters are pitted against each other much like the hero and the villain in a theatrical melodrama. As I detail in this chapter, the Resurrection Man and other criminal characters in *The Mysteries of London* are first

represented as out and out villains. Like the dastardly antagonist of melodrama, these criminals appear to have no specific motivation for their crimes and seem naturally depraved.

By initially characterizing its criminal characters as villains, *The Mysteries of London* both reflects and reinforces a belief that was strengthening over the 1840s that criminality generated from a homogeneous source – the innate moral corruption of the individual criminal. The prison system, which was significantly augmented in the 1840s, crafted its primary program of reform in accordance with the idea that the source of each criminal’s malfeasance was the same.⁸ As I explained in the previous chapter, ideas about criminality were shifting during the early-Victorian era, and criminals were coming to be viewed as pathological and biologically determined rather than as free-willed individuals actively choosing to commit crimes.⁹ The assumption underlying prison reform was that a similar disease of criminality was at the root of all crimes. While there was much hope that this “disease” could be cured, or at least controlled, the general failure of the prisons to reform criminals finally convinced many that criminals were simply incapable of being reformed.¹⁰

In chapter 3 I demonstrated that *Varney the Vampyre* attempts to align its main character with (in)famous criminals whose stories were perpetuated by eighteenth-century criminal biographies. I argued that this genre could no longer accommodate the type of prison criminality that *Varney* represented because the basic conflict of criminal biography depended on the ever-present threat of the gallows, which was significantly reduced in the 1840s. In this chapter I consider how *The Mysteries of London* manipulates the contemporary genre of the prison autobiography.¹¹ Though collections of criminal biographies such as the *Newgate Calendar* continued to be read, and pamphlets and broadsheets containing narratives of the lives of criminals continued to flourish when there *was* a hanging, the genre became less popular because

it was less relevant to the contemporary realities of criminality. In its stead, as W.B. Carnochan argues, the prison autobiography “helped fill the gap left when the straightforward genre of criminal biography...was in a measure eclipsed by...evolving penal customs” (155).¹² The prison autobiography was a genre tailored to narrating the stories of incarcerated criminals.

Some examples of prison autobiographies, such as Reverend John Field’s *Prison Discipline* (1848), were integrated into treatises that explicitly supported the separate system; other autobiographies, like those collected in *Memoirs of Convicted Prisoners* (1853) and the single account in *The Prisoner Set Free* (1846), were published as separate books and pamphlets. While there did exist some doubt as to the absolute sincerity of the prisoners who supplied their narratives, the autobiographies invariably represented their subjects as being completely repentant and utterly accepting of the virtues of religious and penal reformation. It is unlikely that prison autobiographies were popular with lower-class readers as eighteenth-century criminal biographies were. The primary purpose of the autobiographies was to reinforce the authority and wisdom of the prison system, and prisoners had no opportunity to incorporate defiance into their narratives and then make them public.¹³ If authorities did not like what a prisoner had to say, then they simply did not publish an account of it.

Like the practices of the prison system itself, the prison autobiographies effectively homogenized the criminality they represented. Claims made by prisoners in their autobiographies, particularly those that confirmed the success of religious instruction and penal discipline in personal reformation, suggested that criminality generated from the same source of inherent corruption – like stage villains, the prisoner’s criminality was represented as being natural. Significantly, the idea that criminals were born villains absolved society from taking

responsibility for any role it might have had in the creation and perpetuation of criminality (McGowen “Getting” 37-38).

The Mysteries of London appropriates the contemporary prison autobiography by giving several criminal characters the opportunity to narrate their own autobiographies. These stories are not told in actual prisons or under the eye of prison authorities, but the narratives do follow the outline of typical prison autobiographies, explaining how the characters first became involved in crime and, in many cases, the experiences of characters as inmates in the prison system. However, in contrast to the “official” prison autobiographies, in which prisoners invariably acknowledge personal culpability and confirm the justice of their punishment, the stories of the criminals presented in *The Mysteries of London* place the blame for the creation of criminality on society, arguing that the true source of criminality lies not in the criminals themselves but in an unjust and oppressive legal system.

The criminal autobiographies first challenge the initial depiction of criminals in the text as homogeneous villains by making known the criminals’ personal histories. Normally audiences were not given insight into why a melodramatic villain was “bad” – it was only important to establish this badness so that it could be effectively pitted against the goodness of the hero and heroine. The autobiographies challenge the homogenization of criminals by exhibiting a broad spectrum of criminality and demonstrating that there are many types and degrees of criminality that cannot be traced to a single cause. The narrator also attacks the melodramatic foundation on which *The Mysteries of London* is built and weakens the criminal-villain connection.

Melodramatic romance, while acknowledged as useful for entertaining readers, is exposed as an invalid approach to the troubles of both the fictional and real London.

I conclude this chapter by situating the tension between realism and romance in *The Mysteries of London* within contemporary literary history more broadly. In the 1840s, authors such as William Thackeray and Charlotte Brontë explored how to create realistic fiction while being conscious that their work would always be one step removed from reality.¹⁴ *The Mysteries of London* demonstrates that, like the novels written for the middle and upper classes, texts written for lower-class audiences were also grappling with how to represent “reality” in a fictional form. That popular literature was engaged with the same struggles as dominant texts suggests a complexity that has been rarely attributed to them.

Prisons and Prisoners in the 1840s

In the 1840s many prisons were constructed or renovated in response to an increasing dependence on these institutions for managing, punishing, and reforming criminals.¹⁵ Prisons were especially important as an alternative punishment to hangings, the frequency of which was drastically reduced at the end of the preceding decade.¹⁶ Michael Ignatieff explains that the idea of the penitentiary became more popular to mid-century Victorians because, “[it] promised, above all, to restore the legitimacy of a legal system that they feared was jeopardized by the excessive severities and gratuitous abuses of the Bloody Code” (79). A standardized prison system, combined with a more formidable police force, was expected to act as “a regular means of social control” and to define more clearly the consequential relationship between crime and punishment (Harding 121).

An *Athneaeum* article (1840) outlined the main objectives and considerations in the ongoing conversation about punishment and prison reform: “the terror of evil doers – the reformation of offenders – the mode of disposing of the incorrigible – the danger of contamination – the difficulty of providing employment – the expense to the public – the

proportion between crimes and their punishments – and numerous other difficulties” (“Prison Discipline” 915). However, the “most difficult problem of legislation,” according to an essay in *Blackwood’s* (1845), was “How to punish crime, and in so doing reform the criminal; how to uphold the man as a terror to evildoers, and yet at the same time be implanting in him the seeds of a future more happy and prosperous life” (“On Punishment” 129). While the priority of prisons was reforming the criminal, determining the best way to accomplish this reform remained a point of contention throughout the 1840s.

In 1843 Pentonville prison opened and began receiving inmates. This new prison was clean and sanitary and it operated on the latest theories about the most effective ways to punish and reform criminals. Historically, prisons were used primarily as holding cells for individuals awaiting trial or the gallows and were not responsible for reforming criminals. In these prisons, inmates mingled freely with one another, warders, and visitors, and even organized self-governing bodies (Ignatieff 29-31). The relative freedom of these earlier prisoners stood in sharp contrast to the experiences of prisoners at Pentonville.

Pentonville was designed to operate in accordance with the “separate system,” a prison model borrowed from the Philadelphia penitentiary.¹⁷ The key features of the separate system were the complete isolation and silence of prisoners during all parts of the day.¹⁸ When activities, such as exercise, required that prisoners be in physical proximity, each wore a mask called “the beak” that ensured anonymity (Mayhew and Binny 141).¹⁹ It was intended that the psychological stress induced by complete isolation would make inmates more pliable and receptive to reforming influences such as religious instruction: “Thrown into solitude, the criminal begins to reflect; alone, with his crimes staring him in the face, he soon feels a loathing of them...it is in solitude that he will be assailed by remorse” (“Prison Discipline,” *Monthly* 393). Chaplains

played a key role in this process of spiritual reform; it was their responsibility “to use the raw material which the prison had produced – the softened, impressionable human being – and from that create a Christian citizen” (Harding 152). As I discuss in more detail later in this chapter, chaplains also encouraged their wards to compose, or dictate, autobiographies outlining their criminal histories and the beneficial and positive effects of prison reform on their lives.

In addition to separation and religious instruction, work was an important component of the Pentonville system. On the one hand, work was the only available stimulation in an otherwise monotonous day, and reformers thought that “it would come to be regarded by the prisoners as a privilege and a pleasure, and inevitably it would become an internalized part of the convict’s values” (Harding 148). On the other hand, much of the work prisoners performed was useless and unproductive, intended only to punish. Prisoners were forced to walk on a treadmill for a certain number of hours per day, for example, or to turn a hand crank a specified number of times.²⁰ The strategies that were meant to make Pentonville successful ultimately contributed to the failure of the institution. Prisoners frequently went insane under the stresses of isolation, and there was no clear evidence that the separate system effectively reformed criminals. Additionally, the stigma of having been a prisoner made finding gainful employment upon release very difficult, forcing many “reformed” criminals back into old illegal habits for survival (“On Punishment” 130).²¹

Much of what the public knew about the prison system came from accounts and debates in the press about how well or how poorly the prison system was thought to be functioning. Randall McGowan explains that these accounts of prisons homogenized criminality in the public mind:

The prison was supposed to individualize treatment, to produce a “new man.” But the public...regarded the prison as discovering the true identity of those who passed through its gate. Thus the prison, far from curing crime, created a uniform criminality whose taint clung to anyone who had been confined. (“Well-Ordered” 108)

New prisoners arriving at Pentonville were made anonymous and identical: personal possessions were confiscated, prisoners were bathed and then dressed in identical uniforms before receiving a medical examination and a hair cut, and were then assigned a number in place of a name (Priestly 18-24). When Pentonville first opened, all prisoners, regardless of their crimes, received the same eighteen-month sentences.²² This similarity in treatment reinforced the idea that prisoners were the same at their core, that they had a “true identity” in common.

In chapter 3, I discussed the commonly-held view that criminality was ultimately caused by a faulty will and poor self-discipline. Being deficient in self-discipline was thought to predispose lower-class individuals, who lacked the training and education necessary to develop a strong will, to commit crimes. As Martin Wiener explains, “Although want and mistreatment were acknowledged as contributing factors, crime was essentially seen as the expression of a fundamental character defect stemming from a refusal or an inability to deny wayward impulses or to make proper calculations of long-run self-interest” (46). True reform, it followed, would successfully instill the self-discipline necessary to resist impulses and make correct decisions after considering future consequences, and this behavioral change was precisely what the separate system of Pentonville aimed to accomplish.

The treatment of inmates at Pentonville and other prisons operating on the separate system reinforced the idea of homogeneous criminality.²³ This is not to suggest that there was no distinction drawn between petty and more serious crime, but that the source of crime was

considered to be essentially the same. A writer for *Blackwood's* (1846) observed that “The law is not vindictive, and does not pretend to inflict suffering beyond what is necessary for the security of society. The thief and the homicide cannot be allowed to go at large. They must either be sent out of the country, or shut up within it... they must be deprived of the power of inflicting further injury upon their fellow-creatures” (“Law” 727). This passage effectively equates “the thief and the homicide” because it draws no distinction between their crimes, the relative harm they cause or the types of punishment merited by each. Because these crimes both injure society, it follows that individuals who commit them must be removed from society. Wiener points out that there was also little or no distinction made between degrees of similar crimes; it didn't matter whether a person harmed another intentionally or inadvertently through recklessness since in both cases the offender risked exposing others to danger (64).

It must be remembered that the 1840s was a period of transition in how criminals were perceived, and that a variety of perspectives on this subject coexisted. While the general view of criminality was moving toward determinism, it was not yet pervasive, and it was still hoped that criminality, though perhaps an innate character flaw, could be “cured” by the prison system. In this way crime was characterized as a disease, and this comparison contributed further to the homogenization of criminality because it suggested that crime generated from the same source. Criminality was also, like certain diseases, considered to be communicable, and the separate system was intended in the first place to prevent greener criminals from being contaminated by those who were hardened and more experienced.²⁴ An article published in the *Monthly Magazine* (1841) included the opinion that, “there cannot exist a good system of penitentiary discipline, without a complete separation of the convicts...however different in guilt, there does exist a fatal influence amongst associations of bad people” (“Prison Discipline” 393). This statement implies

that criminality is infectious and also demonstrates that different crimes were perceived as generating from the same underlying cause regardless of their degree of seriousness.

Whether infected at birth or by other criminals, a prisoner was essentially viewed as the carrier of a disease that had the potential to contaminate those newer to crime or unsuspecting innocents. Even if a prisoner served his or her full term and was “reformed,” society would remain suspicious of and likely ostracize the released convict. For example, in an article for *Blackwood's* (1846) the writer observed, “It is deemed a thing incredible, that a man can issue from a hot-bed of corruption and not be himself corrupt. To have undergone a term of imprisonment, is very generally thought to be equivalent to taking a degree in infamy” (“Law” 724). Popular thought held that even if the criminal’s “disease” was in remission, he might relapse again at any time.

The diseased character that prisons sought to reform was linked prejudicially in the public mind with those living in poverty because their environments supposedly made them more vulnerable to physical and moral contamination: “Filth and disease were as natural to the poor...as cleanliness and health were to the virtuous and industrious...[the poor] were susceptible to disease because they were susceptible to vice” (Ignatieff 60). Similar to the way that individuals were held responsible for controlling their impulses and resisting temptations, a person was also considered responsible for maintaining the health of his or her body. This association between environment and criminality reveals something of a paradox in the characterization of criminality as a disease. If “natural” to the individual criminal, how could the disease spread by proximity? If environmental influences created vice, how was the individual to be simultaneously held accountable for his or her own behavior and self-discipline? As I discussed in chapter 3, this conflict between acknowledging potentially damaging environmental

influences and expecting that the disadvantaged would remain morally stalwart in the face of these influences was an inherent contradiction in discussions of criminality during this period.

An article in *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal* (1842) discussing social reformer Edwin Chadwick's recent *Report on the Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population of Great Britain* (1842) drew the conclusion that, "physical seems inseparable from moral deterioration" ("Sanatory" 258). Throughout the *Report*, Chadwick and his colleagues emphasize the association between physical degradation and immorality. Near the beginning of the sanitary treatise, the authors wrote, "[We] wish...to observe that the state of the dwellings occupied by the laboring classes exercises an important influence upon their health, and the nature and frequency of the diseases to which they are subject, as well as indirectly upon the moral state of themselves and their families" (*Report* appendix xii). As Wiener explains, health crusaders like Chadwick expected that a public health system would have salutary effects on personal character, which would also help alleviate ill health, poverty, and crime (45). Eliminating both bodily and moral diseases depended on maintaining mastery over one's actions and habits, especially since others could be so easily harmed by individual laxity.

Though contemporary ideas on disease and criminality considered each in broad terms, there were far fewer distinctions drawn between different types of criminal or moral "diseases" than among physical ailments. Whereas a doctor might apply tailored remedies to cure different illnesses, the disease of criminality was treated as if it generated from a single source, and therefore required only one remedy. Rather than creating distinctions between a "disease" causing one to steal and a different "disease" causing one to murder, every crime was evidence of an inherently flawed character.

Patrick Brantlinger's discussion of the pathologization of crime in this period elucidates another function of the discursive association between crime and disease. Drawing from Foucault's insights into how prisons produce "delinquency," a relatively unthreatening form of criminality, Brantlinger argues that by rendering criminality as a disease, criminals are literally and discursively ostracized from both the honest poor and respectable bourgeois society. Victorian criminal discourse could not acknowledge "the productivity of crime [or] the freedom and free will of the criminal" because doing so would suggest that the criminal was more productive and more free than the bourgeoisie, who were "bound to the ball and chain of law and order" (Brantlinger 76). By pathologizing crime, criminals were represented as unable to resist committing illegal actions; by denying the criminal choice, his or her unsettling volition was annulled (76). As we saw in chapter 3, the pathologized criminal cannot be simultaneously a romantic hero; instead he is represented as defective and faulty, both neutralized and homogenized by the prison system.

I argue that the homogenization of criminality laid the foundation for an association between criminality and "villainy" of the type prevalent in melodramatic theater. Melodramas exploited the artificial moral binary of "good" and "evil," and represented static characters belonging unambiguously to one category or the other. Melodramatic plots were often romanticized, and audiences watched extreme instances of morally upright heroes triumphing while morally bankrupt villains were punished for their crimes and immorality.²⁵ I will examine closely the interplay between representations of "criminality" and "villainy" in *The Mysteries of London*, but first want to establish the contemporary prevalence and popularity of melodrama as a fictional form, and how the moral binarism so prevalent in melodrama had the potential to conflate real criminals with fictional villains.

Melodrama in the 1840s

I will focus most on the generic similarities between stage melodrama and the story and characters in *The Mysteries of London*, but my argument that there was a perceptual overlap between criminals and melodramatic “villainy” turns on the pervasiveness of melodrama and theater during the 1840s. In their studies on the relationships between theater and Victorian society, Elaine Hadley and Deborah Vlock both confirm that the prevalence of theater shaped how Victorians perceived their world. Hadley characterizes the ubiquity of melodramatic theatricality as a “melodramatic mode,” and describes how the essential features of melodrama, such as “familial narratives of dispersal and reunion... emphatically visual renderings of bodily torture and criminal conduct... atmospheric menace and providential plotting... highly charged emotion, and [the] tendency to personify absolutes like good and evil,” influenced “a wide variety of [non-theatrical] social settings” (3). The melodramatic mode was “a reactionary rejoinder to social change,” and was employed in efforts to resist the classificatory system supplanting older social relations that had been governed by deference and paternalism (Hadley 3). The rhetorical gestures and expressions of melodrama structured the relationships between groups and individuals and were a part of the fabric of basic social exchange (Hadley 7).

Deborah Vlock’s study of the close affinity between the novels of Dickens and contemporary theater also stresses the fluidity between the action and characters on stage and the perception and interpretation of everyday Victorian life. This fluidity was made possible because of the pervasiveness of standard theatrical codes that circulated in the collective imagination in and out of the theater. Vlock describes these “circulating voices” as part of an “imaginary text” that permeated social and cultural spaces:

when [Victorian novel readers] picked up any contemporary narrative they entered a sort of hybrid novelistic-theatrical genre...a living, theatrical dialogue between complex and stereotyped voices, between ‘realist’ and transparently conventional stories. In other words, both they and their novels were born into an agreement about certain types of character and story, an agreement habitually dramatized – and thus in a practical sense formed – upon the English stage. (19)

In this passage Vlock highlights the influence of the theater on other areas of culture. Though here she refers mainly to the influence of the theater on novel reading, later in the same chapter she emphasizes that a reality influenced by theatricality was integral to how Victorians “lived life” (Vlock 23). According to Vlock, “theatrical signs were received as genuine and normative – fully legitimate and operative in the social world” (26).

Hadley’s and Vlock’s arguments make more plausible the affinity between criminality and villainy that I am positing existed in the public mind during the 1840s. The homogenization of criminality by the separate system and in prison autobiographies created the potential for an easy association between criminals in prisons and the villains portrayed nightly on the stage. Martin Wiener affirms that, in addition to the exchange between theatrical melodrama and novels, “even nonfictional representations of crime tended to follow the lines of melodrama, drawing sharp lines between good and evil characters,” (21). Based on the assumed familiarity of readers’ with melodramatic conventions, *The Mysteries of London* structures its major storyline and fashions its main characters in accordance with elements from theatrical melodrama including, especially, the conflict between “good” and “evil” that is embodied by Richard Markham and the Resurrection Man. In this way the text exploits the contemporary popularity of

melodrama to heighten reader interest while simultaneously preparing to critique the pervasive influence of melodramatic romance on perceptions of “reality.”

The opening pages of *The Mysteries of London* immediately arrange society according to a series of binaries. For example, the narrator explains that “There are but two words known in the moral alphabet of this great city; for all virtues are summed up in the one, and all vices in the other: and those words are WEALTH | POVERTY” (G. Reynolds I.2). London is divided into the virtuous and vicious, the rich and the poor, and there is an interesting correlation between the four categories. The arrangement of words in the text seem to align “wealth” with “virtue,” and “vice” with “poverty,” but the next sentence complicates these reductive parallels: “Crimes borrow their comparative shade of enormity from the people who perpetrate them: thus it is that the wealthy may commit all social offences with impunity; while the poor are cast into dungeons and coerced with chains, for only following at a humble distance in the pathway of their lordly precedents” (I.2). This passage suggests that a person’s social status influences whether or not his or her actions are defined as crimes; those in a higher class are excused for their behavior while the poor are punished. This assertion implies that the previous correlations between wealth/virtue and poverty/vice are merely perceptions rather than truths.

The above passages encapsulate several of the arguments forwarded by *The Mysteries of London*. First, the text emphasizes that associations of wealth with virtue and poverty with vice are constructs contrived by those with power and influence. Second, that criminality exhibited by the poor stems partly from the criminality of the upper classes who, through example or mistreatment, contribute to the corruption of those lower on the social ladder. Finally, that social and judicial inequality facilitates the disparate treatment of poor and wealthy criminals. There is also a tension throughout the text between a reductive melodramatic worldview that idealistically

expects “good” to always triumph over “evil,” and a worldview that rejects this binary division and insists that reality is nuanced, complicated, and predominantly unjust.

Critics have acknowledged the melodramatic framework of *The Mysteries of London* but have not extensively analyzed how particular conventions of contemporary melodrama inform the text.²⁶ It is reasonable to expect that the melodramatic elements of *The Mysteries of London* resonated with lower-class readers and predisposed them to read the characters and situations in the text through the lens of the theatrical melodramas they witnessed on stage. Because “melodrama...*was* the Victorian working-class theatre, many lower-class readers of *The Mysteries of London* would have been familiar with melodramatic conventions (Booth, “Melodrama” 100).²⁷ Although the melodramas performed for lower-class audiences varied widely in style and subject, the basic themes of melodrama remained consistent (100). The melodramas of the 1830s and 1840s “forever fixed” the key feature of melodrama, a “melodramatic world...sharply divided into good and evil, oppressor and oppressed, the heroic and the villainous, the ideal and the base” (101).

In melodramas heroes and villains continuously acted out the conflict between good and evil, and acquired easily recognizable features that were intended to invoke specific reactions in audience members. Audiences could determine quickly which character in a melodrama was the hero, anticipate how a heroine would behave, and expect dastardly deeds from the villain based on characters’ appearances, speech, or gestures. For example, Michael Booth points out that when villains “commit acts of evil, they commit them suitably dressed, with an appropriate manner, in an appropriate setting” (*English* 22). There was a close correlation in representations of melodramatic characters between their appearances, actions and essential morality.

The characters in *The Mysteries of London* are described as displaying exaggerated gestures and heightened emotions, which are perhaps two of the most recognizable conventions of melodrama. In *Illegitimate Theater*, Jane Moody describes the importance of gesture to the communication of emotion on stage:

Treatises on chironomia, or the art of gesture...defined theatrical performance as the laboratory of gestural expression...The idea of a wordless language of signs which might constitute ‘the exterior and visible signs of our bodies’ thus underpinned contemporary definitions about the art of modern eloquence. (83)

So that audiences could understand this “wordless language” in different plays, actors studied manuals that standardized the physical postures and gestures for conveying emotions.²⁸ Some examples mentioned by Moody include: “Grief...[which] ‘expresses itself by beating the head or forehead, tearing the hair, and catching the breath, as if choking...vexation [which] ‘agitates the whole frame’ and malice [which] ‘sets the jaws, or gnashes the teeth’” (84). Strong emotions displayed by characters in *The Mysteries of London* are described using similar language to that which Moody cites, and could practically serve as stage directions. For example, while imprisoned for murder, the lecherous pastor Reginald Tracy “rolled upon his bed in convulsions of rage: he gnashed his teeth – he beat his brow – he tore his hair – he clenched his fists with the fury of a demon” (G. Reynolds II.63). In another instance, Richard Markham “clenched his fists and struck them against his forehead in an access of despair” and “extended his arms, with his hands clasped together, in the ardour of [his] appeal” (I.128). In one scene Greenwood (a.k.a. Eugene Markham) “ground his teeth with rage as he uttered...horrible maledictions” and “laughed wildly” (II.156, 158). Henry Holford, frustrated after realizing the contrast between his impoverishment and the wealth of others, “clenched his fists and ground his teeth together with a

ferocious bitterness, which indicated the fearfully morbid condition of his mind” (II.246). As a final example, at the beginning of the narrative when the brothers are discussing Eugene’s decision to leave home, Eugene “from time to time...clenched his fists, and knit his brows, and gave other silent but expressive indications of the angry passions which were concentrated in his breast;” Richard “followed him with downcast eyes, and with a countenance denoting the deep anguish that oppressed him” (I.7). All of these descriptions replicate the language of theatrical gesture and posture and directly invoke familiar elements from theatrical melodrama, adding depth and clarity to characters’ emotions and aiding readers’ visualization of the action in the text.

Conventional characters such as the hero, villain, heroine, comic man or woman, and the good old man, were perhaps the most recognizable elements of Victorian melodrama.²⁹ Martha Vicinus claims that, “character development is irrelevant to melodrama,” suggesting that in most melodramas the stock characters are static and behave according to well-established expectations (“Helpless” 134). In *The Mysteries of London*, Richard Markham is clearly the hero.³⁰ According to Booth’s description of the melodramatic hero in *English Melodrama*, Markham fits almost all of the requirements of heroism: “The hero is a handsome young man of action and courage, eternally devoted to sweetheart or wife...he can spend most of the play entangled in the wiles of the villain, who commonly...outwits him with the greatest ease” (16-17).³¹ Unlike most melodramatic heroes who are “really rather stupid,” Richard is quite intelligent, but he fits the character type in all of the other ways described above (Booth, *English* 17).

If Richard is the hero of *The Mysteries of London*, then, according to the conventions of melodrama, identifying the villain should be a simple task. Eugene seems the obvious candidate for this title since he is from the outset of the narrative placed in direct opposition to his morally

upright brother and is responsible for Richard's most significant reversal of fortune.³² However, the text emphasizes that Eugene cheats Richard unknowingly, and throughout the rest of the story Eugene strives to avoid harming his brother.

Though Richard and Eugene each embody one half of the virtue/vice binary this simplistic division is disrupted by the characterization of the Resurrection Man. According to the melodramatic and Hogarthian framework established at the beginning of the narrative, Eugene should be the villain. In the end, however, Eugene is represented merely as the prodigal brother who ultimately repents and is reconciled with his family.³³ The Resurrection Man, on the other hand, actively seeks to destroy Richard Markham after only the slightest provocation. The Resurrection Man's villainy is far more extreme than Eugene's immoral behavior, though as we will see, his autobiography undermines even his melodramatic label. This confused and doubled villainy destabilizes the melodramatic framework by disrupting the neat moral division established early on between the two brothers.

The Resurrection Man's hatred for Richard Markham seems inexplicable in light of what little Richard did initially to offend him. The characters first meet in prison, when the Resurrection Man tells Richard that he is smuggling food into the prison under Richard's name, since as a non-paying prisoner the Resurrection Man is not allowed outside food (G. Reynolds I.71). After they are both released, the Resurrection Man seeks out Richard and attempts to extort money from him by threatening to reveal to the family of Isabella Alteroni (the darling of Richard's affections) that Richard is an ex-convict. Richard ultimately refuses to be blackmailed, and this altercation permanently entangles Richard with the Resurrection Man. Similar to the relationship between the villain and hero in melodrama, the Resurrection Man becomes

Richard's "mortal enemy – his inveterate foe," and each character attempts to destroy the other throughout the rest of the narrative (G. Reynolds I.277).

The Resurrection Man's physical appearance reinforces his villainy. He is "a very short, thin, cadaverous-looking man, with coal-black hair and whiskers, and dark piercing eyes half concealed beneath shaggy brows of the deepest jet...He [wears] a seedy suit of black, and...an oil-skin cap with a large shade" (G. Reynolds I.70).³⁴ This description is sufficient to identify the Resurrection Man as the villain, but the text reinforces this designation in other ways as well. For example, he keeps a dungeon where he imprisons people for coercion and other schemes (I.342-346; II.267-269).³⁵ These attributes make the Resurrection Man appear inherently villainous, a perception compounded by an initial absence of any explanation for why he is so evil.

Melodramatically-inflected perspectives of criminality converged with the theories underlying prison reform to bolster the idea that criminals committed crimes because of inherent and homogeneous flaws. Because the "influence of the prison [shaped] the experience of crime for the wider public," the idea of homogeneous criminality continued to grow in the public mind (McGowen "Well-Ordered" 103).³⁶ The perception of a homogeneous criminality might be conflated with the one-sided immorality of the villains depicted on stage every night during melodramatic performances. As Vlock argues, audiences brought "readings of the social world" to the theater, and the theater in turn influenced interpretations of Victorian culture – people read reality "through the lens of popular performance" (Vlock 23, 3). Contemporary perceptions of criminality were likely colored by the prominent features of melodrama, including a worldview framed by binary divisions of good and evil, heroes and villains.

By disrupting the melodramatic binary of vice and virtue, however, *The Mysteries of London* implicitly challenges perceptions that criminality is either homogeneous or natural. The

text emphasizes that its own prevalent melodramatic themes and conventions are inappropriate lenses through which to view the “real” world. Particularly problematic is the static view of human nature forwarded by melodrama. The idea of an inherent villainy in criminals is complicated by the representation in the text of a broad spectrum of criminality, and by the repeated assertion that criminality is a consequence of external circumstances and the pervasive corruption and inequality that taints the justice system. The disruption of a melodramatic worldview is effected primarily through the presence of criminal autobiographies in the text – moments in the text in which the “villains” have opportunities to account for how they became so. By telling their own histories, the criminals in *The Mysteries of London* counter the “villainous” identities imposed on them by Richard Markham and other privileged characters. The disruption of a homogeneous perception of criminality does not deny that the criminals in the narrative are actually criminals. The very definition of criminality, however, is revealed to be a relativistic construction by those with political and economic power rather than an essential truth about human nature.

Prison Autobiographies

Despite the fitness of the romanticized criminal biography for representing the experiences of criminals condemned to die on the gallows, a different type of narrative was needed to portray the experiences of prisoners.³⁷ Like criminal biographies, prison autobiographies were accounts of why criminals began committing crimes, and how they came to be apprehended and punished. While intended to “check evil” and serve as an example and warning to individuals who were tempted to indulge their criminal impulses, the prison autobiography was also intended to validate the separate system utilized in prisons like Pentonville (Joseph viii).³⁸ The separate system needed defending because it was frequently

criticized not only for failing to reform criminals but also for harming them in the attempt; supporters and detractors wrote books, essays, and pamphlets for or against the system.

The prison autobiographies were dictated to or written down by a prison chaplain who was responsible for caring for the souls of deprecators. The chaplains preached and ministered to prisoners individually in their cells and had significant influence over their wards because they were some of the few people seen by prisoners during their tenure under the separate system. In addition to giving prisoners passages of scripture and praying with them, chaplains often requested that prisoners share their life histories. This was ostensibly done so that the chaplains' counsel could be tailored to the individual vices of prisoners – drunkards “could be discovered and warned against the evils of ale and spirits; the thief could be drilled in the importance of the Eighth Commandment” (Grass 31). As McGowen notes, however, while the reformatory aspects of the separate system were “intended” to individualize treatment, the “regime...did its best to erase any trace of individuality” (“Well-Ordered” 101). Regardless of any individualized attention prisoners may have received from the chaplains, the autobiographies that record their lives, crimes, and punishment reinforce the perception of homogeneous criminality. These texts represent their subjects as becoming criminal due to innate wickedness and a rejection of moral principles. Ultimately the authors of the autobiographies praise the prison for its role in turning their thoughts toward God and saving them from lives of sin.

Anna Schur suggests that chaplains and prison administrators encouraged the composition of prison autobiographies because these texts validated the separate system and justified its continued implementation. Because the best evidence of reform was an “absence of recidivism,” determining whether or not a criminal was truly rehabilitated could be difficult

(Schur 138). However, the stories recorded in the prison autobiographies provided a more readily available and consistent proof of the success of the separate system.

Schur emphasizes the pattern apparent in the structure of the autobiographies; each is basically the same narrative of crime, punishment, and reformation. Because “reformed subjectivity could indeed be recognized only through the story one told about one’s reformation,” Schur explains, “this genre, just like the process of reformation itself, called for strict routinization. It...allowed no infractions to its narrative discipline...[a] violation of this genre’s conventions threatened a rhetorical failure” (142-143). The typical pattern of the autobiographies is summarized by Reverend John Field, chaplain at the county gaol at Reading, in *Prison Discipline; and the Advantages of the Separate System of Imprisonment*:

the self-condemning convict...call[s] to mind...the first open transgression whence he dates his departure from the paths of peace, and traces his succeeding course of wretchedness and vice. The reproof of friends, the struggles with his own conscience, his past thoughtlessness and folly, with the conviction that present punishment is deserved...crowd upon his recollection, and no diversion or indulgence can longer prevent self-reproach. (349)

These features – identifying the initial sin or crime, dismissing friendly or religious advice, and finally acknowledging the positive effects of apprehension and punishment – are standard elements of prison autobiographies. The narratives typically culminate in a remorseful acceptance of responsibility for past wrongs, and their narrators inevitably claim to have been reformed by religious teaching and the grace of God. The conformity of the prison autobiographies raised suspicions in some critics, like Charles Dickens, about the degree of objectivity and the amount of involvement on the part of chaplains in the composition of

prisoners' narratives.³⁹ It seemed possible that prisoners were only telling their listeners and amanuenses what they wanted to hear.

Reverend John Clay, known nationally as an advocate of the separate system, collected more than 300 pages of hand-written or dictated accounts of prisoners during his time as prison chaplain (W. Clay 274).⁴⁰ One of these narratives is about the life of a prisoner named "J.G.," and is a representative example of the genre. "The first thing wrong" J.G. did, he explains, was lie, a skill learned from his mother (J. Clay 5). After serving an apprenticeship with a wood and metal turner for 7 years, J.G., lured by the stories of older workmen about worldly pleasures, wandered for five years. He occasionally worked, and sometimes obtained money by tricking women into thinking that he planned to marry them (7). As J.G. put it, "[he was] guilty of crimes of every sort except murder" (7).

J.G. became a drunkard and corrupted his children and wife by encouraging them to drink as well. Finally, he was caught selling stolen wool and sentenced to the Preston prison in Lancashire. Though he entered prison with a hardened heart, "full of vengeance and spite against every body [sic]...and [doing] every thing [sic]...with a bad, wicked, heart," the chaplain's sermons began to soften him (J. Clay 10). A sermon about Paul's conversion caused him to reflect seriously on his past life, and he began to turn his thoughts toward God. He recorded thinking, "*I am certainly very wicked, and I am going the wrong road; and if I don't repent before I grow too old, perhaps I shall not get a chance then*" (11).

Finally, after being frightened by another sermon cautioning prisoners to repent immediately, lest they die spiritually unclean, he prayed for several days, and this time his heart was permanently changed. After elaborating on the changes brought about by this conversion, including a new outlook on life, J.G. concluded his narrative saying, "I shall not go out of this

building with the same heart that I brought in with me... I *do* know, that there cannot be a better place built than this [the prison] in all the world for bringing a man to his sense...It has done me good, and I thank God for it!" (J. Clay 13-14).

Though prisoner autobiographies do mention "environmental" influences contributing to their descent into criminality (a mother who teaches one to lie, or drunkenness, for example), these externalities are never cited as the ultimate causes of degradation. Rather, a sinful, corrupted nature is given as the reason behind the prisoners' turn to crime, which only time in prison, removed from the influences of immoral friends, and forced into a disciplinary routine, could have cured. The message in these accounts is that the discipline of the prison and the religious instruction received under the guidance of the chaplain permanently changed their lives. In a letter to Reverend H.S. Joseph, chaplain at Chester Castle prison in Cheshire, for example, "W.C.," convicted for six months for stealing coal, wrote, "I thank God that I have had the truth preached to me in this prison – yes, the truth as it is in Jesus. I shall ever look upon this gaol as a school, for having brought me to Christ" (Joseph 78).⁴¹ Another prisoner, "J.L.," had in his youth been religiously devout, but had strayed from the path and "made [a] shipwreck of faith and a good conscience" (Joseph 110). He wrote to Rev. Joseph that "It was not until I was immured in a prison, and confined within the walls of Chester Castle, that I again thought of my ways and began to reflect on the course I had been pursuing" (111). In all of these accounts, responsibility for crime is located in the individual criminal.

Throughout *The Mysteries of London*, criminal characters narrate their life histories according to the pattern of contemporary prison autobiographies found in accounts like J.G.'s. Characters describe how they became involved in crime, and those who were imprisoned explain how incarceration negatively affected their lives. It is important to note that the criminals in *The*

Mysteries of London tell their stories in spaces that are not bound by prison walls, and where they are not pressured to please auditors who hold authority over their lives. Since they are free to be honest about their experiences, instead of accepting any responsibility for their actions, or attributing their behavior to an inherently sinful nature, as real prisoners often did, these characters all claim that external influences left them little choice but to become criminals. Rather than praising the prison system for its positive influence, each criminal decries the prison system as the very cause of his or her initial demoralization and continued misconduct. The autobiographical accounts in *The Mysteries of London* invert conventional prison autobiography and portray the prison system, along with legal injustices, poverty, and an uncaring society, as being the major causes of criminality.⁴²

The criminal characters in *The Mysteries of London* that tell their stories include the Resurrection Man, a nameless prostitute, a coal-heaver turned thief, a criminal named the Buffer (so named because he robs victims of their money *and* clothes, leaving them in “the buff”), the Rattlesnake (a woman in the Resurrection Man’s circle), and Jim Cuffin, or Crankey Jem, an escaped transport.⁴³ Importantly, their stories generate sympathy for the criminal narrators in other characters and, potentially, readers. Sympathizing with the criminal characters and their plight both humanizes them and encourages the condemnation of the system that authors criminality. The Resurrection Man’s story best typifies how the criminal narratives in *The Mysteries of London* appropriate the prison autobiography’s generic structure and objective.

The Resurrection Man explains that he grew up in a seaside village where his parents made their living selling goods obtained through smuggling and, occasionally, body-snatching. His father was eventually caught smuggling, and the community, including those who frequently purchased the smuggled goods, shunned the Resurrection Man’s family. Even the parson, who

facilitated the education of the Resurrection Man and lent him his own books, refused to let the Resurrection Man attend Sunday school, “declaring that [he] was only calculated to pollute honest and good boys” (G. Reynolds I.191). At this point in his life, the Resurrection Man claims, he *was* honest and had no inclinations toward crime – in fact, he attended church every Sunday and began and ended each day in prayer – but the hypocritical manner in which his father’s former customers treated him gave him “a very strange idea of human nature, and set [him] a-thinking upon the state of society” (I.191-192).

Soon after his father was arrested, a local baronet was discovered to have been running a much larger and more lucrative smuggling operation, and had “defrauded the revenue to an immense amount” (G. Reynolds I.192). The baronet’s children, instead of being ostracized like the young Resurrection Man, were succored by the community: “[s]ubscriptions were got up for them...never was seen so much weeping, and consoling, and compassion before!” (I.192). The disparity in the community’s treatment of his father and of the wealthy baronet led the Resurrection Man to an important realization about the world and human nature:

I began to comprehend that birth and station made an immense difference in the views that the world adopted of men’s actions. My father, who had only higgled and fiddled with smuggling affairs...was set down as the most atrocious monster unhung, because he was one of the common herd; but the baronet...was looked upon as a martyr to tyrannical laws, because he was one of the upper classes and possessed a title. So my disposition was soured by these proofs of human injustice, at my very entrance upon life. (I.192)

Though the treatment of his father “soured” the Resurrection Man’s view of justice and caused him to cease caring about religion, he explains “I was still inclined to labour to obtain an honest livelihood” (I.192). The Resurrection Man tried to find honest employment but was turned away

again and again by his father's old customers. After the parson and his wife refused him help, the Resurrection Man was left with no other choice but to assist his father, who had been released, with smuggling and body snatching.

The Resurrection Man's personal conflict with the law was initiated by an altercation with the baronet, who had escaped punishment by leaving the country for a time. After the Resurrection Man refused to open a gate for the baronet and his horse, the baronet struck him on the face with his riding whip. In retaliation, the Resurrection Man knocked the baronet off his horse and thrashed him, and for this assault was arrested and spent three months awaiting his trial in prison. Importantly, this stint in prison did not corrupt the Resurrection Man, who explains, "I was not...completely hardened yet; [I did not] associate with those who drank, and sang, and swore. I detested vice in all its shapes; and I longed for an opportunity to be good" (G. Reynolds I.195).

The Resurrection Man was sentenced to spend two years in the hulks for striking the baronet but, still, during this imprisonment "[he] did not grow so corrupted, but that [he] sought for work the moment [he] was at liberty" (G. Reynolds I.195).⁴⁴ Unable to find any way to earn money, the Resurrection Man stole a few turnips when starving and was committed "*as a rogue and vagabond*" to spend one month on the treadmill (I.195).⁴⁵ The Resurrection Man tells his listeners that this punishment finally ruined him:

this one month's imprisonment and spell at the treadmill...hardened me completely!...I now laughed the idea [of living an honorable life] to scorn; and I swore within myself that whenever I *did* commence a course of crime, I would be an unsparing demon at my work. Oh! how I then detested the very name of virtue. [I reasoned,] '[t]he rich look upon the poor as degraded reptiles that are born in infamy and that cannot possibly possess a

good instinct... The legislature thinks that if it does not make the most grinding laws to keep down the poor, the poor will rise up and commit the most unheard-of atrocities... It was thus that I reasoned; and I looked forward to the day of my release with a burning—maddening—drunken joy! (I.195-196)

The Resurrection Man stayed true to his word. He recalls upon his release having “no money – no conscience – no fear – no hope – no love – no friendship – no sympathy – no kindly feelings of any sort. My soul had turned to the blackness of hell!” (I.196). After breaking into the house of the justice who committed him to the treadmill for stealing turnips, the Resurrection man set his barn on fire, inadvertently killing the magistrate’s nineteen-year-old daughter. In a final act of revenge, the Resurrection Man set fire to the baronet’s largest barn before making his way to London.⁴⁶

Unlike the real prison autobiographies, in which many criminals portray themselves as naturally inclined to sin and vice, the Resurrection Man’s narrative suggests that he was originally predisposed to honesty and industry. In contrast to the commonly-held view that criminals were individuals with malformed wills, the Resurrection Man had sufficient integrity to emerge from two prison tenures morally unscathed. While many believed in the inevitable spread of moral contamination among prisoners, the Resurrection Man’s corruption results from the injustice and brutality of the system itself. Rather than inspiring the Resurrection Man with feelings of humility and moral culpability, the prison system creates a terrible criminal who is careless of the religious and legal checks designed to deter him from a life of immorality.

Whereas the real prison autobiographies portray criminals who claim to look forward to the day of their release so that they can commence lives of honesty and virtue, the Resurrection Man

anticipates with “drunken joy” the beginning of his remorseless pursuit of crime. This sentiment was, of course, precisely opposite to the feeling that prisons were supposed to inspire.

The autobiographies of other lower-class criminal characters in *The Mysteries of London* bolster the Resurrection Man’s argument that the law is unjust. After serving his sentence on the treadmill, the Resurrection Man was released with no resources and with the “brand” of “rogue” and “vagabond upon [his] forehead,” suggesting that even if he had still been inclined to labor honestly, his circumstances would almost ensure a return to crime as it did for many real criminals (G. Reynolds I.196).⁴⁷ Several characters tell similar stories about the difficulties of surviving after being released from prison. A prostitute who was forced into her trade by poverty and the threats of her father recounts how on one occasion, as she was being sentenced to serve time in prison, the justice “read me a long lecture about the error of my ways, and advised me to enter upon a new course of life; but he did not offer to give me a character, nor did he tell me how I was to obtain honest employment without one” (I.204). A person listening to her story says, “they can talk for an hour; but supposing you’d said... ‘*My Lord, will your wife take me into her service as scullery-girl?*’ he would have stared in astonishment at your imperance” (I.204). The prostitute’s story and her listener’s comments suggest that the legal system fails to reform criminals because it marks them with a moral stain that causes “respectable” people to shun them and offers no assistance in rebuilding their lives.

In another autobiography condemning the prison, the Buffer, a companion of the Resurrection Man, explains that while he was imprisoned at Newgate, he wished to turn from his path of crime but could see no feasible way of doing so. He explains to his listeners that he did not expect to be provided with assistance upon leaving prison:

I knew that I should be turned adrift without a penny in my pocket...I used to say to [the chaplain], ‘*Show me...how I am to obtain an honest living when I leave these walls, and I never shall sin again.*’ But he always gave an evasive reply...what use, then, is it for these gaol chaplains to preach penitence and reformation, when by their very actions they say, ‘*We do not believe that you can possibly change for the better?*’ Virtue must be fed; but Virtue, upon leaving the walls of a criminal prison, can obtain no food. Must Virtue, then[,] die of starvation?...Virtue in this case has no option but to become vice. (G. Reynolds I.308)

This account suggests that the emphasis placed on religious conversion in prisons only pays lip-service to reform. These autobiographies highlight how criminals emerge from prison often worse than when they went in, and still relying on crime for survival.

What these criminals do learn while in prison, and the truth they share with their audiences, is that the system is unjust. Frequently within the text, as an ex-convict is recounting his or her tale, other characters in the scene respond in ways that mimic audience reactions in the theater. For example, upon hearing of the injustice of the legal system, a character will exclaim, “What a shame to treat people so” and “Well – I never knowed all this before!” (G. Reynolds I.203). After the Resurrection Man and Tom the Cracksman listen to a story about the injustices suffered by “coal-whippers” who are forced by a corrupted hiring system to spend their earnings on ruinous drink and inevitably turn criminal, the Cracksman says, “The laws – the laws, you see, Tony.”⁴⁸ The Resurrection Man replies, “Of course. Here we are, in this room, upwards of twenty thieves and prostitutes: I’ll be bound to say that the laws and the state of society made eighteen of them what they are” (I.203). These comments suggest that those listening to the

criminals' autobiographies are realizing, seemingly for the first time, that others in their class experience unfair treatment.

Comments made by anonymous characters (“Well – I never knowed all this before!”), imply that anyone, including a reader, could be gaining a new understanding of these injustices. These epiphanies happen in locations that were perhaps familiar to readers, like public-houses, where listeners are not bound by authorities. Locating these conversations in such spaces potentially establishes an identification between characters and readers that is rendered more significant by arguments that social injustices are perpetuated because of the disconnection between people who have common experiences. The coal-whipper argues that legal oppression is perpetuated so easily because “there’s a deal of misery of each kind in London that is n’t [sic] known to them as dwells in the other kinds of wretchedness” (G. Reynolds I.203). Like the prison autobiographies told by real criminals, these fictional autobiographies are sources of education and warning, but they expose the weaknesses of the legal system and its perpetuation of maltreatment and inequality, rather than representing the system as an institution to be respected.

The fictional autobiographies in *The Mysteries of London* also counteract the homogenization of criminality in the real prison autobiographies. According to Schur, “uniformity” in the prisoners’ narrative was essential because it constructed a stable, “easily assessable bureaucratic text” (148). An appearance of consistent, successful reformation was necessary, in part, because the reform of prisoners was difficult to demonstrate without confirmation on the parts of the inmates themselves. The autobiographies helped prisons meet the challenge of demonstrating that the reform was effective for all types of criminals, despite the heterogeneity of the crimes that landed them in prison (Schur 149). The ability of a single cure to

reform so many criminals, however, implied that they shared the same disease – that different types of criminality shared a common source.

The autobiographies in *The Mysteries of London* disrupt this chain of logic in several ways. For example, the autobiographies showcase a wide range of criminality. Many criminal characters, like the Resurrection Man or the prostitute, turn to crime under the intense pressure of external influences while others, such as the Buffer, admit that they had an early predilection for misconduct. These examples supplement other representations of varied criminality throughout the text. Richard Markham, for example, is sentenced to prison for forgery, though he later turns out to have been falsely accused. At the opposite extreme is the wife of the criminal Bill Bolter, whose criminality is presented as inexplicably debased: she plans to trap beetles in walnut shells over the eyes of one of her children so that the child will be blinded and become a more pitiful and successful beggar (G. Reynolds I.45). Even Bolter, a murderer, is shocked by his wife's intention, and her depravity is not explained by any autobiographical account. These stories do not simply argue that all criminality stems from external, as opposed to internal, influences. Rather, the point is that there exists a broad spectrum of criminality ranging from Richard Markham to Bolter's wife, with the Resurrection Man, the coal-whipper, and the Buffer at various points in between. These diverse narratives in *The Mysteries of London*, especially the autobiographies, reveal that the causes of criminality vary with each individual and cannot be reduced to a single homogeneous source. The unknown source of criminality in a character like Bolter's wife implies that some crime may not be eradicable even in ideal social and economic conditions. While social reform is presented as being the best way to uproot the causes of most crime, the text does not necessarily suggest that society can ever be completely free of crime. *The Mysteries of London* does not aim to merely replace one idealistic system with another, but

instead seeks an accurate representation of society's problems, and realistic expectations for the solutions.

Instead of cohering in support of the legal and prison systems, the criminal autobiographies in *The Mysteries of London* draw attention to the negative effects these institutions have on the individuals they incarcerate and homogenize. In fact, every character who experiences prison comes out more entrenched in criminality, regardless of their circumstances upon entering, except Richard Markham. As the Resurrection Man tells the Cracksman, "We ain't born bad; something then must have made us bad...*in nine cases out of ten the laws themselves make us take to bad ways, and then punish us for acting under their influence* (G. Reynolds I.191). According to this explanation, criminality *does*, in fact, stem from a homogeneous source, though the source is not the debased moral fiber and uncontrollable will of the criminal, but the prison system itself, from which individuals emerge "synchronized" in criminality rather than virtue.

By undermining a homogeneous characterization of criminality, the autobiographies in the text also challenge any sweeping identification of criminals as "villains" in a melodramatic sense, though they are often designated as such throughout *The Mysteries of London*. Though the text seems initially to encourage an association of criminality with villainy, it actually subverts this association through a dispersal of the term "villain." Though the Resurrection Man is the most dastardly villain in the text, the word is applied to many of the other criminal (and simply immoral) characters in the story. For example, Eliza Sydney, the self-sufficient heroine of *The Mysteries of London*, calls George Montague (Eugene Markham) a "villain" for trying to take advantage of her while she sleeps (G. Reynolds I.55); Bill Bolter, Tom the Cracksman, and Chichester, a schemer who helps frame Richard for forgery are also denominated "villains" (I.45,

I.63, I.149); Lydia Hutchinson tells Lord Dunstable, an aristocrat who seduces her, “Villain that you are, you make light of your crimes” (II.164).⁴⁹

By characterizing such a variety of criminality and immorality as villainous, the text weakens the meaning of the word. An overuse of the term “villain” seems, at first, to homogenize those to whom the label is applied – criminal/villain X is just as bad as criminal/villain Y, who is, in turn, just as bad as the Resurrection Man. However, the text’s homogenization of “villainy” effectively dilutes the term; characterizing every bad character as a villain renders the term useless. The text also refuses to confine “villainy” to the lower-classes and emphasizes that criminality is not related meaningfully to class. This dilution of the notion of villainy is one particularly powerful way that the text dismantles the melodramatic binary between good and evil in which it seems initially to be so invested. By emphasizing that criminality is nuanced, complicated, and irreducible to a common cause or set of features, the text precludes any easy divisions between who is “good” and who is “evil.”

One other way the text accomplishes the breakdown of the melodramatic binary is by repeatedly exposing the legal system as an institution biased in favor of the wealthy. As with the baronet who, with the exception of having his barn burned down by the Resurrection Man, escapes punishment for smuggling, the narrator argues that the privileged are able to escape punishment despite committing far greater atrocities than the poor because the “law” is enforced inconsistently and molded to accommodate the powerful. Any relationship between the law and justice is exposed as a false construct. MacChizzle, a rascally lawyer whose knowledge of the legal system enables him to manipulate it, explains the subtleties of the law to Richard’s butler Wittingham:

Law is a human invention: justice is a divine inspiration. What is law to-day, is not law to-morrow; and yet everything is still denominated *justice*...*Law* is more powerful than even *Justice* and *Religion*; and...it exercises the same predominating influence over *Morality* also. For instance, Law, and not Conscience, defines virtues and vices. If I murder you, I commit a crime; but the executioner who puts me to death for the action, does *not* commit a crime. Neither does the soldier who kills his fellow-creature in battle. Thus, murder is only a crime when it is not legalized by human statutes,—or, in plain terms, when it is not according to law. (G. Reynolds I.161)

MacChizzle's explanation exposes the social construction of crime and the artificiality of the virtue-vice binary. If the law can be molded to favor the rich, then criminality is not an inherent trait at all, nor is it based on the natural or essential qualities of virtue or vice as represented in melodrama. Other distinctions, such as those of character ("villains" and "heroes"), that are rooted in the melodramatic binary of vice and virtue also disintegrate when the foundation is shown to be artificially constructed.

In the next section I demonstrate how the text further attacks the moral binary at the heart of both melodrama and the villainization of the criminal by critiquing melodrama as a framework through which to view the world. Characters are criticized for believing that life operates as a melodramatic "romance" that is governed by easy moral distinctions, sanctioned emotional excesses, and the ultimate triumph of justice. This faulty worldview is epitomized in the character of Richard Markham, who, while quite clearly the "hero" of the text, proves to be an ultimately impotent hero because of his inability to resolve the complicated and dire struggles that are so prevalent throughout *The Mysteries of London*. Markham may be able to help himself and those in his immediate circle of family and friends, but he is largely unable to assuage the

suffering of oppressed Londoners. In these ways, *The Mysteries of London* exposes the insufficiency of melodrama as a way of representing, perceiving, or living life, and instead privileges realism as a superior mode through which to examine and reveal actual social and cultural problems. I argue that this emphasis on realism is one early example in lower-class literature of a larger shift taking place across Victorian literature.⁵⁰

The Problems with Romance

The Mysteries of London frequently criticizes romance, and those who wishfully adhere to a romantic worldview, by emphasizing its impracticality as an approach to life and privileging perspectives grounded in reality. By doing so, the text implicitly rejects its own melodramatic frame narrative featuring Richard Markham. Richard's storyline is exploited for its entertainment value while the text emphasizes that Richard's story is merely fantasy. The text frequently reminds readers that Richard's story, and stories like it, are only feasible in the realm of fiction.

One early instance of the text's criticism of romance begins when Eliza Sydney catches Eugene Markham creeping toward her bed while she is sleeping and chastises him out of her room. This scene is couched squarely within melodramatic conventions such as heightened emotion and stock characters.⁵¹ For example, Eugene decides to enter Sydney's bedroom in the first place because his passion for her has intensified to the point of becoming "a delirium:—he would have plunged into the crater of Vesuvius, or thrown himself from the ridge of the Alpine mountain into the boiling torrent beneath, had she gone before him" (G. Reynolds I.54).⁵² The irrationality of his thoughts and behavior is evident in his outlandish claims and melodramatic excess of emotion. In this scene Eugene and Sydney are cast in overtly melodramatic roles. Sydney, intent on protecting her virtue, is referred to as the "heroine of the villa," and Eugene is clearly the villain: when Sydney awakens and sees Eugene approaching, she warns, "Villain, that

you are—approach this bed, and, without a moment’s hesitation, I will plunge this dagger into your heart!” (I.55).

The next morning, Eugene quarrels with Sydney and tries to manipulate her by claiming that if she truly loved him as she once professed, then she would forgive him his “false step” (G. Reynolds I.56). “True love,” as Eugene says, “will make a woman follow her lover or her husband through all the most hideous paths of crime even to the scaffold” (I.56). Sydney, however, rejects Eugene’s arguments as absurd and tells him, “I am not acting according to the prescribed notions of romances or a false sentimentality...I am not the heroine of a novel in her teens – I am a woman of a certain age, and can reflect calmly in order to act decidedly” (I.56). Sydney’s rejection of romance and her refusal to perform a role prescribed by Eugene’s notions of “true love,” are in direct tension with the melodramatization of the previous night’s bedroom scene. By aligning “romance” with “false sentimentality,” she emphasizes the impracticality of living life as a melodramatic heroine.⁵³

The text continues to critique romance as a valid approach to life’s problems when Eliza Sydney’s sentiments in the above scene are later echoed by Eugene Markham himself. In a conversation with Lady Cecilia Harborough, Eugene’s soon-to-be-mistress, she tells him that to gain enough money to repay her debts and save herself from ruin she “could even sell myself to the Evil One, like Dr. Faustus – I am so bewildered – so truly wretched!” (G. Reynolds I.145). Lady Harborough’s desperation recalls Eugene’s earlier willingness to “[sign] a bond, yielding up all hopes of eternal salvation to the Evil One, for a single hour of love in the arms of [Eliza Sydney]” (I.54). Apparently, though, Eugene has tempered his passions and, before offering to make Harborough his mistress, characterizes her outburst as, “verg[ing] into the regions of romance, and mention[ing] improbabilities, or impossibilities” (I.145). Once again, a

melodramatic exchange is checked by an injection of reality, and extreme emotions are tempered by a consciousness of their impracticality and falsity. Eugene acts his part with Harborough, promising to love her “forever” (I.146), but his previous remarks render the scene more farcical than romantic.

In contrast to the rejections by Eliza Sydney and Eugene Markham of melodramatic romance, there are a few characters in *The Mysteries of London* who maintain that, ultimately, virtue will be rewarded and vice will be punished. Significantly, such characters are all closely associated with Richard Markham and they inhabit the same melodramatic world of their hero. In one instance, Isabella and her parents, Count and Countess Alteroni, lament the successful bid by the villainous Greenwood (a.k.a. Eugene Markham) for a seat in the House of Commons. Isabella soothes her parents by assuring them that “vice [only] prospers for a time...and virtue becomes triumphant at last” (G. Reynolds I.233). Count Alteroni begins to disabuse her of her idealism but then reverses his position:

I am afraid...that the moral you have just advanced, Bella, is rather that of the stage and the romancist than of real life. And yet...to entertain such an idea as mine is to question the goodness and the justice of Providence. Yes – I must believe in earthly rewards and punishments. You are right, my child – you are right: the wicked man will not ever triumph in his turpitude; nor may the virtuous one be oppressed until the end. (I.234)

What stands out in this passage is the sudden reversal in the Count’s worldview from cynicism to idealism. Though he initially claims that Isabella’s perception of reality is only valid in the illusory world of the “stage,” Alteroni talks himself into believing that people are actually divided up into the virtuous and the villainous, and that Providence will not allow the former to suffer interminably.⁵⁴ By admitting that he “must” believe what Isabella tells him, the Count

suggests that the alternative – believing that there is no transcendent justice guiding the world – is too unsettling.

Characters like the Count and his family faithfully adhere to a romantic worldview, but they can do so without consequence because they are “living” the romance of the text. The family’s belief in providential justice is validated because Isabella eventually marries her prince and the Count is finally restored by Richard to his rightful seat as ruler of the Italian state Castelcicala. In their experience, virtue *is* always rewarded. However, the Alteroni family’s success only reemphasizes the unalleviated injustices suffered by less fortunate characters in the rest of *The Mysteries of London*.

The Mysteries of London also criticizes sentimental readers who expect life to imitate the fantasies they read. John Smithers, nicknamed “Gibbet” by his father, the London hangman, is a young man disfigured by kyphosis who is in love with his kind and beautiful cousin Katherine. The narrator predicts that Gibbet’s love for Katherine will be:

offensive to the delicate admirer of a maudlin romance, in which only handsome boys and pretty girls are supposed to be capable of playing at the game of Love...But the reader who truly knows the world,—not the world of the sentimental novel, but the world as it really is,—will not start when we inform him that this being whom nature had formed in her most uncouth mould...this living thing that appeared to be but one remove above a monster, cherished a profound love for that young girl. (G. Reynolds II.20)

In this passage, the narrator implicitly contrasts the reader who might take offense to Gibbet’s love for Katherine because he is not a properly “handsome boy” with the savvy reader who understands that life is not a series of idealized sentimental adventures. The characterization of

the first type of reader as “delicate” implies that he or she is ill-equipped to understand or encounter the realities and hardships of life, or, perhaps, is privileged enough to avoid them.

While a fairy tale might end happily for Gibbet (perhaps he could become an appropriately handsome boy worthy of Katherine’s love through some magical transformation), in *The Mysteries of London*, Gibbet’s “passion was unsuspected by [Katherine]” and, the narrator adds, “Of course it was not reciprocated:—how could it be?” (G. Reynolds II.20). Gibbet ultimately suffers disappointment despite patiently enduring the abuses of his father and virtuously resisting involvement in his father’s profession. Near the end of *The Mysteries of London* Gibbet departs for America, “where [he] may commune with [his] own heart in the solitude of some forest on the verge of civilization,” after confessing his love for Katherine to Richard Markham, who is, as it turns out, Katherine’s half-brother (II.411). This somewhat romantic resolution is tempered by the reality of Gibbet’s unhappiness. Though he departs from England on good terms with Richard’s family, ultimately it is best for everyone, especially any admirers of maudlin romances, if Gibbet exits the story for good.

While the passages analyzed in this section are telling examples of the text’s rejection of romance in favor of realism, no other character illustrates this tension quite as well as Richard Markham. While it is pleasant to read about Richard’s virtuous struggles and dramatic triumph, the unresolved problems of oppression and injustice in the text create a lingering discontent that tempers Richard’s success. Reynolds no doubt sold many copies of *The Mysteries of London* to readers eager to know what would happen to Richard, but ultimately this storyline is a platform from which to launch a social critique and explorations of legal and class inequality. The romance of Richard’s story drives the action and entertains, but his life is shown to be appropriate only to fiction, and contrasts starkly with the experiences of most other characters.

Richard may be a “hero,” but he fails to enact any lasting social change where it is most needed. Richard ostensibly leaves England for Italy to rule alongside his father-in-law, but really Richard must leave England because, like Gibbet, the world of the text no longer has any use for him.

The Problems with Richard

Richard Markham not only marries an actual princess, he almost single-handedly, and without any prior military experience, leads an army that deposes the dictator of Castelcicala and restores Isabella’s father as its rightful ruler. Like Thames Darrel in *Jack Sheppard*, Richard is amply rewarded for remaining virtuous and striving only to do what is “right.” After his marriage, he remains briefly in England to reunite with his brother Eugene, and then promptly moves to Castelcicala to live and, eventually, rule. However, Richard is really only the hero of his inner circle. With few exceptions, Richard does nothing with his advantages and resources to combat injustice or “villainy” on a larger scale.⁵⁵ Once Richard attains happiness, he simply leaves behind the problems in England.

Richard lives in his own melodramatic bubble of heroes and villains, where virtue always triumphs over vice. This world, however, is quite obviously separate from the realistic London the majority of the other characters in the text inhabit. Richard’s apotheosis does nothing to overturn the more deeply rooted injustice and oppression in *The Mysteries of London*. The corrupt wealthy – even those who are not main characters in the text but comprise part of the backdrop for the narrator’s social commentary – remain successful and powerful even as Richard is resting on his laurels. For example, when Eugene Markham ultimately fails financially (which, being an “idle apprentice,” he cannot help but do), he visits the firms of three previous business partners who participated with him in various schemes and frauds. At each he is refused an advance of money for a comeback speculation (G. Reynolds II.403-407). Though Eugene fails,

these episodes emphasize that Eugene's fellow swindling speculators remain prosperous and active in their schemes. Even the Resurrection Man's death has no significant impact on the text. His "villainy" was only a single example of the more deeply rooted problems that the text exposes.⁵⁶ In the broadest sense, then, vice remains prosperous and virtue is starved to the point that, as the Buffer says, it "has no option but to become vice" (I.308). These realities undermine Richard's wild success by emphasizing that it is only possible in fiction. While his story may have escapist value, this is carefully tempered by the dire reality Richard abandons.

Richard must ultimately retreat to Italy to live his romance – England, in its current state, cannot be the romantic fantasy world in which a melodramatic hero, such as Richard, can exist. Richard can only triumph over fantastical problems in a fantastical land outside of England, as when he leaves the country to win his accolades and prove himself worthy of Isabella. Richard escapes to Italy, which in *The Mysteries of London* functions as a Shakespearean "green world," a "symbolic site of regeneration in which the social conflicts experienced by the characters in the world from which they have fled are...quasimagically resolved" (Sullivan 184). However, while Shakespeare's comic characters normally return from this "green world" to reconciliation in their own, Richard stays in Italy with his princess, enjoying the personal utopia he has forged.

On the last page of *The Mysteries of London*, the narrator describes Richard's happiness as complete: "the world has seen no felicity more perfect...Richard Markham knows not a single care" (G. Reynolds II.424). Sara Hackenberg argues that Richard's pleasure in his own success colors his achievements and makes him appear self-absorbed. According to Hackenberg, "[Richard's] undisguised delight in his aristocratic elevation...work[s] to shade Richard's heroic identity as honorable, disinterested, and generous with the failings, or vices of unruly desire and self-interest" (72). Richard "imagines himself as an adored, uncommon superstar" (Hackenberg

72), and relishes being “almost worshipped by a grateful nation [Castelcicala] whom his prowess redeemed from slavery” (G. Reynolds II.424). Unfortunately, Richard’s success fails to improve the lives of those who slave and starve in London. Richard’s blindness to the suffering in England renders his heroism shallow and self-serving; while his own melodrama ends happily, the text shows that his story is an anomaly that is only possible when one has the means to live in a fantasy world.⁵⁷

Shifting Genres

By discrediting a romanticized, melodramatic worldview, *The Mysteries of London* undermines implicit associations between criminality and villainy in both the text and in contemporary discourses about crime. By incorporating criminal autobiographies in which characters such as the Resurrection Man and the coal-whipper are allowed to describe the unique circumstances that led them to a criminal life, the text complicates simplistic notions that crime is an inherent fault of individual criminals. Instead, the text argues that complex environmental circumstances are primarily at fault for creating criminals.

The Mysteries of London approaches this argument about criminality in another way as well. Asserting the impracticality and inherent faultiness of melodrama, the text implicitly discredits any system that functions on a binary framework. The prison was one such system because its homogeneous approach to treating criminals suggested that criminality generated from the same, inherent source. Prison administrators believed that individuals who shared this “internal” cause of criminality could be reformed through identical treatment. This approach relied on the assumption that individuals either were or were not criminal, or, in melodramatic terms, were villainous or virtuous. However, by undermining its own internal logic and framing

narrative, *The Mysteries of London* asserts that this simplification of criminals is, like melodrama, unrealistic.

Like *Varney the Vampyre*, in which the genre of criminal biography proves incompatible with Varney's specific brand of prison recidivist criminality, melodrama in *The Mysteries of London* is also shown to be an inadequate framework through which to understand criminals. The argument in both of these texts, that criminality is not an inherent flaw in individual criminals, is generically disruptive. Franco Moretti clarifies two ways that genre may become dysfunctional when ideological, historical, or cultural realities shift:

a genre exhausts its potentialities...when its inner form is no longer capable of representing the most significant aspects of contemporary reality. At which point, either the genre loses its form under the impact of reality, thereby disintegrating, or it turns its back to reality in the name of form, becoming a "dull epigone" indeed. (*Graphs* 17, n.7)

While in *Varney the Vampyre* the genre of criminal biography began "disintegrating" when it could no longer adequately represent contemporary prison criminality, *The Mysteries of London* maintains the form of melodramatic romance to the conclusion but shows its framework to be a mere shell, lacking the cohesiveness of its generic contemporaries. Problematizations of genre in both of these texts signal ideological tensions between their representations of criminals and the representations of criminals in dominant social discourses.

In contrast to Varney's failure as a heroic criminal and his consequent suicide, Richard Markham achieves his romantic fantasy. I suggest that this is largely because of the pleasure and entertainment value invested in Richard's story. In the final paragraphs of *The Mysteries of London*, the narrator reiterates how the text has fulfilled its promise to detail the high and low in

London, and invokes its melodramatic framework as a convenient defense against accusations of immorality:

if...we have raked amidst the filth and loathsomeness,—have we not...devoted adequate attention to its bright and glorious phases?

In exposing the hideous deformity of vice, have we not studied to develop the witching beauty of virtue?

...If, then, the preceding pages be calculated to engender one useful thought – awaken one beneficial sentiment,—the work is not without its value.

...And if, in addition to considerations of this nature, we may presume that so long as we are able to afford entertainment, our labours will be rewarded by the approval of the immense audience to whom we address ourselves,—we may with confidence invite attention to a SECOND SERIES OF ‘THE MYSTERIES OF LONDON.’ (G. Reynolds II.424)

At first this passage may seem to belie my argument that the text’s true investment is in the realistic representation of social injustice, but I would argue that this passage is really a tongue-in-cheek placation of reviewers and potential critics of the text. Considering the biting criticism throughout the text, this conclusion seems odd since it ends without any final attempts to remind readers of the terrible things they’ve read about. Trefor Thomas also recognizes the tension between the innocuous ending and the rest of the text: “it seems that the moralized closure and commentary...is little more than a kind of textual play or game, offered to the reader with a knowing, mocking wink. The ideal implied reader...who seeks and finds in the tales enlightenment and moral lessons, is implicitly a figure of fun, almost consciously mocked within the sub-text” (“Rereading” 64). In the concluding passage of *The Mysteries of London*, the

narrator says the text is valuable if it has produced “useful” and “beneficial” thoughts and sentiments. Since the text has argued repeatedly that melodrama is not “useful,” this passage implies that the narrator hopes readers have seen through the melodramatic fluff and recognized instead the importance of understanding the real problems troubling society.

This final passage of *The Mysteries of London* also suggests that its romanticized morality has been primarily employed to sell copies by sweetening bitter truths to make them more palatable. The melodramatic frame narrative is, then, for entertainment purposes only, and is merely a vehicle for Reynolds to deliver his social critiques. By self-consciously acknowledging its own value as a commodity, the text calls attention to the strategies it employs to sell itself.

Realism and Romance

The tension in *The Mysteries of London* between melodramatic romance and realism was not unique to Reynolds’s text alone. Throughout the Victorian era, but particularly during the period on which I have focused, many authors struggled with how to represent “reality” in the novel, a form that was always already fictional. No matter how realistically an author such as George Eliot could depict life, an awareness that the final text would be a mediation of reality remained. George Levine, in *The Realistic Imagination*, describes realism not as a genre but as an “impulse...most precisely located in the historical context of a secularizing movement directed against the falsehood of earlier imaginations of reality” (11). These “earlier imaginations of reality” may be characterized generally as romance. As Levine argues, “Realism in England belongs...to a moderate tradition, focusing not on the dregs of society, nor on the degradations and degenerations of humans in bondage to a social and cosmic determinism...[It] defines itself against the excesses, both stylistic and narrative, of various kinds of romantic,

exotic, or sensational literatures” (5). Levine’s study of realism focuses on middle-class literature, and he draws his definition of realism from texts by authors such as Thackeray, Trollope, Hardy, and Eliot. Other related studies, such as Alison Byerly’s *Realism, Representation, and the Arts in the Nineteenth-Century Literature*, also focus on how realism enters the texts of authors including Thackeray and Brontë. While Reynolds’s incorporation of realism into *The Mysteries of London* follows some of the patterns identified by critics such as Levine and Byerly, insofar as the text defines realism against romance, it is worth examining unique ways realism enters this popular text.

As noted in Levine’s definition above, realism in middle-class texts is not focused extensively on the “dregs of society,” but this is of course one of the primary emphases of *The Mysteries of London*. Chapter 17, for example, gives minute particularities of the desperate and wretched state of life experienced by many London inhabitants. The narrator details how, for example, the child of a destitute widow died and, while the mother went to arrange a burial, a pig wandered in and “feasted upon the dead child’s face!” (G. Reynolds I.43). Other “horrors” are then chronicled by the narrator, including abominable living conditions, the spread of disease, and incest caused by families being forced to live and sleep so closely together (I.43). These details, of which there are many, many more in *The Mysteries of London*, emphasizes the discrepancies between the “realities” of impoverished London life and the fantasy lived and enjoyed by Richard Markham and his circle. As Levine points out, the inclusion of minute detail was one way that authors, such as Thackeray, “[implied] a multitudinous external world that stands as a permanent irony at the expense of all dreams and wishes...the forms of romance...[appear to be] merely absurd and artificial constructs” (153). Descriptive particularities that “make us see that who characters are is contingent upon the facts of their

physical and social world” are important in a text that seeks to demonstrate how characters and, by extension, real individuals, are shaped by their environments (Levine 156). In melodramatic romance, characters fulfill static roles that correlate with particular fates. Despite any suspense created during a hero’s journey, no one is actually surprised when the hero triumphs, or when the villain is finally exterminated or neutralized. In *The Mysteries of London* it at first seems that all criminal characters are, like villains in melodrama, naturally bad, but the criminal autobiographies show that this is only an effect of their impoverished and oppressive environments.

Byerly’s study analyzes how Victorian novelists make their own fictions seem more credible by revealing the deficiencies of other kinds of art, such as music, painting, and theater, in representing reality. Because literature is a type of art, it may seem that novelists inadvertently risk reinforcing their own falseness by drawing attention to other representational forms.

According to Byerly, however:

this admission of art’s failures does not render the novelist’s own art more suspect: like the informant who fingers a fellow criminal, the novelist accommodates our sophisticated doubts about representation by forcing someone else to take the fall. The novel, witness to the potential dangers of our attempts to represent and manipulate reality, gets off scot-free. (7)

The Mysteries of London also invokes different kinds of representative texts, but instead of comparing itself to “false” forms of art, it aligns itself with other “realistic” forms of writing, such as journalism and government reports.

At the beginning of chapter 29, the narrator states, “It will be our task to guide those who choose to accompany us, to scenes and places whose very existence may appear to belong to the

regions of romance rather than to a city in the midst of civilisation, and whose characteristic features are as yet unknown to even those that are best acquainted with the realities of life” (75). This passage introduces the first of several chapters in *The Mysteries of London* that focus on “The Black Chamber,” a secret location where government officials open and read letters that have been sent through the post office. It was hardly necessary for the narrator to emphasize that this was based on reality, since in 1844 it was discovered that some letters really were being opened and read. One later account of this discovery was given by the *London Journal* in 1845. While the article does not condemn the government for opening letters (“With the propriety of that proceeding we have nothing to do”), it does detail the proceedings of the Secret Chamber by, interestingly enough, quoting from chapter 29 of *The Mysteries of London*, and justifies doing so by claiming “we have ascertained [the description of the letter opening process] to be correct to the very letter” (“Secret” 33). Reynolds may have been capitalizing (and perhaps sensationalizing to some extent) on the current intrigue, but his inclusion of this episode in *The Mysteries of London* is one example of how the text incorporates realistic events. The subsequent appearance of the excerpt about the post office in a journal in place of “fact,” only confirms the realism of the episode.⁵⁸

In addition to insisting that the text represents true events, the narrator periodically cites actual reports or journalistic accounts to support what may seem exaggerated. Most of these references appear as footnotes in the text. To name a few: Reynolds cites a report enumerating some “causes which produce prostitution” (I.205), a description from *The Parliamentary Companion* describing the “process of parliamentary reporting” (I.219-220), a chart from “The Dietary Table of Clerkenwell New Prison” that supports the Buffer’s narrative (I.309), an invitation for readers who may doubt the accuracy of the depiction of child labor in coal-mines to

read the “Report and Appendix to the Report, of the Children’s Employment Commission” of 1842 (I.353), a claim that “the newspapers of 1840, or 1841” will confirm that a story about Crankey Jem’s father is “founded on fact” (II.178), a confirmation that the *Morning Post* published “a disgustingly fulsome, and really atrocious paragraph...three or four years ago” about how the Queen’s subjects would “joyfully throw themselves beneath the wheels of [her] state-carriage, even as the Indians cast themselves under the car of Juggernaut” (II.199), and so on. The text places this last quote in the mouth of Queen Victoria herself to suggest the monarch’s naivety of the true plight of her subjects. In addition to Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, other members of the English court and well-known politicians (Sir Robert Peel among them) appear in the text.⁵⁹ The representation of living individuals lends an air of authenticity to the scenes in which they appear, and suggests that the portraits of some of the fictional characters are accurate as well.

A more extensive study would be necessary to determine the myriad ways that other authors of texts for the lower-classes were grappling with the widespread literary shift to realism, but the examples I’ve highlighted suggest how the text aligns itself as closely as possible with non-literary genres that, at the time, seemed credible and truthful. Combined with the attacks on romance throughout the text, these examples demonstrate how *The Mysteries of London* disassociates from its own melodrama. While the main storyline concerning Richard Markham may be a pleasing romance, it also exposes the uselessness of a romanticized worldview for intervening in real social problems. In order to enact social change, the text argues, one must first understand and believe the realities of London life, regardless of how extreme flesh-eating pigs may at first seem.

Conclusion

While the arguments forwarded in *The Mysteries of London* may have raised some readers' awareness about the social injustices exacerbating the plight of the poor and contributing to the development of criminality, it is difficult to speculate on other impact the text may have had. It is clear that the homogeneous perspective of criminality that *The Mysteries of London* resists hardened over the course of the 1840s into a belief in a criminal class that was composed of individuals "who returned time and again to jail," and who were viewed as being incapable of reformation (McGowen "Well-Ordered" 103). The reforming mission of the prison was largely abandoned and the institution became more exclusively punitive. This was not a "solution" to the criminal problem, and suggested rather that there was no solution – what could society be expected to do with incorrigible reprobates but segregate them from lawful society?

The proposal in *The Mysteries of London* that criminality is heterogeneous presents no workable alternative to the current system and, if anything, only complicates the search for a solution. What's more, by representing criminal characters as subject to environmental and social influences, the text potentially strips the agency from these characters. On the one hand, the text argues that characters like the coal-whipper or the Resurrection Man are given no choice but to turn criminal, and blames this state of things on social injustice. On the other hand, this argument also suggests that the criminal characters have no power to affect their own destinies, which is potentially an admission that criminal (or poor) individuals have no real agency. As I pointed out earlier, the Resurrection Man chooses consciously to embrace a criminal lifestyle, and this decision seems to be an act of volition. However, if one accepts Foucault's argument about criminal delinquency, the Resurrection Man has really only accepted the criminal role intended for him by the state.⁶⁰ Though initially he seems set apart from other criminal characters as an

arch-villain, he is really only one of thousands of criminals in London that help perpetuate the prison system and, as Marx described, oil the legal machine.⁶¹

Our exploration of the representation of criminals in literary texts during the late 1830s and 1840s began and has ended at opposite ends of a spectrum. Varney the vampire and the Resurrection Man, with their dubious criminal agency, are a far cry from free-willed Dick Turpin and Jack Sheppard. It is clear from my study that these criminals evolved according to contemporary changes in theories about criminality, shifting laws and strategies for managing criminals, and the relationship between criminals and society. These early-Victorian popular texts engaged with these issues in their own cultural and historical moment, reflecting and shaping the perceptions of the readers who engaged with them.

NOTES

Chapter One

¹ Research indicates that individuals who have the low-activity allele of the MAOA gene (MAOA-L) and are exposed to abuse or trauma as children are more likely to behave aggressively as adults. See, for example, Frazzetto, et al.

² The original study was published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America (PNAS)*. See McDermott et al. This is not the first study to link the MAOA gene to aggressive behavior. In 1993, scientist H.G. Brunner studied a particularly violent Dutch family, the male members of which had a defect in their MAOA genes and engaged in extreme violent behavior such as assault, rape, arson, and attempted murder (Spiegel). See Brunner.

³ The “opponent,” unbeknownst to the subjects, was a computer that selected a percentage of the subjects’ earnings to “steal.” Subjects had to pay a small amount of their earnings each time they dispensed the hot sauce (McDermott et al.).

⁴ This episode of *Law and Order UK* is a remake of a 1993 episode titled “Born to Be Bad” from *Law and Order*. In the older episode the genetic focus is on individuals who carry an extra Y chromosome, said to cause more aggressive behavior in males.

⁵ For \$99, you can determine whether or not you carry the warrior gene.
<www.thewarriorgene.com>

⁶ See T.M. Parssinen’s article on phrenology and Sharrona Pearl’s monograph on physiognomy for more information on these pseudosciences. Pearl explains that physiognomy “achieved almost universal penetration into the Victorian consciousness” (2). The two pseudosciences vied for ascendancy throughout the nineteenth century (see Pearl, ch. 6).

⁷ In chapter 5 of Peter Hutchings's *The Criminal Spectre in Law, Literature and Aesthetics*, he examines how anxieties about "knowing" and recognizing individuals, especially criminals, encouraged new innovations in nineteenth-century forensics.

⁸ According to Viding and Frith, "research suggests that genetic vulnerability to violence conferred by the low-activity allele of *MAOA-L* variant may become evident only in the presence of an environmental trigger of maltreatment...[N]ature-nurture interaction leads one to expect that genetic predisposition alone may be of little consequence for behavior in favorable conditions" (6085).

⁹ In a study by Aspinwall et al., 181 judges were given a case study in which a murderer carried the MAOA gene. On average the judges reduced the criminal's sentence by approximately a year, a "significant reduction" according to Aspinwall (Spiegel).

¹⁰ In *Crime, Culture and the Media* (2008), Eamonn Carrabine analyzes the effects of the media on crime and responses to crime, as well as how crime is represented in popular culture. Christiana Gregoriou's collection, *Constructing Crime* (2012), and *Transgressive Imaginations* (2012), by Maggie O'Neill and Lizzie Seal, discuss representations of crime and criminals in popular culture and other areas of society. Peter Hutchings's book *The Criminal Spectre* (2001) traces how criminals were represented in the scientific and cultural discourses of the nineteenth century. Martin Parker studies representations of individual and collective outlaws in *Alternative Business* (2012). The authors in Paul Mason's *Captured by the Media* (2006) examine how prisons and punishments are represented by both contemporary and historical popular media. This is a sample of the recent work being done in this new field of popular criminology and related areas.

¹¹ See John (xiv), and Pykett (36).

¹² In company with scholars such as Edward Jacobs and Louis James, I use the term “popular fiction” or “popular literature” to refer to texts that were primarily read and favored by lower-class audiences. Other terms I use to refer to this body of literature include “cheap” or “penny literature,” and “cheap” or “penny fiction”. The serialized texts that I discuss in chapters 3 and 4 are typically denominated “penny bloods”. This term refers to cheap, sensational publications aimed at lower-class adult readers. After about 1860 these texts were intended for juvenile audiences and are distinguished by the name “penny dreadfuls” (H. Smith 5).

¹³ Berridge argues that the mass-circulation newspapers published on Sundays co-opted the sensationalism and radicalism from earlier lower-class publications and, after diluting the radicalism, combined these features in a formula meant to only generate profit (256). This combination made these papers “the effective means of social control which the establishment had always hoped the popular press might be” (256).

¹⁴ For more information on penny gaffs, see Jacobs (324, 333-336). See also Springhall (ch. 1), and Grant.

¹⁵ An example of “mass culture” that replaced the penny bloods were Sunday family magazines such as the *Family Herald* (1843-1940), the *London Journal* (1845-1928), and *Reynolds’s Miscellany* (1846-1869). These papers attempted to cater to both middle- and lower-class audiences, promising to include nothing unrespectable – the motto of the *Family Herald* was “Interesting to All – Offensive to None.” These publications included a mix of “romantic stories...recipes, handy hints, short informative articles and letters from correspondents” (Dalziel 24, 23). The fiction that appeared in these pages was quite different from that which had appeared in the penny bloods, especially regarding how crime and criminals were represented. Dalziel explains that “Highwaymen, robbers, members of the criminal classes [were] replaced by

bandits, brigands, sinister Italian counts and broken down French aristocrats...Burglars and criminals came too close to the reader's ordinary experience" (31). The criminals in the Sundays were innately villainous, exotic, and ultimately less threatening to readers than criminal characters one might encounter in the streets of London.

¹⁶ Victor Neuburg also touches on this question of who was reading cheap popular fiction. He writes, "it was in the main to members of the working class, artisans or clerks, that the great entrepreneurs of popular publishing addressed their wares, and fiction of the sensational or romantic kind did, of course, offer a ready escape from the harsh realities of a daily existence which was bounded by work, crowded conditions and poverty. Such stories could be read at odd moments – ten minutes snatched on the journey to work, or during meal breaks" (187-188).

¹⁷ For a more detailed discussion of the variety of employments related to street literature, see Mayhew, I.213-323. Jacobs argues, "Given that paper-working in London constituted such a thriving, variegated, and traditional way for poor people to subsist outside of industrial disciplines, it is only logical that when industrialism, popular education, labor politics, and radicalism transformed manufacturing work into a juggernaut of discipline, those who could not or would not tolerate such a lifestyle took refuge in London's festive street culture" (329).

¹⁸ See Berridge, and Dalziel (chs. 2 and 3).

¹⁹ Jacobs offers this example, drawn from "historians of popular culture and leisure": "gaffs as institutions did not turn into music halls; rather music halls began to service some of the people who used to attend and perform gaff theatricals *after* state persecution made gaffs legally, economically, and culturally unviable" (341).

²⁰ There is growing interest in these texts by scholars who recognize the significance of

early-Victorian popular fiction. See, for example, Hackenberg, Joyce, and Powell. Several earlier works helped lay the foundation for studying these texts. See Neuberger, Dalziel, Vicinus (*Industrial*) and James (*Fiction*). These studies are primarily surveys and, generally speaking, do not engage in in-depth analysis.

²¹ That is, I have yet to find an instance of a criminal character in later nineteenth-century literature who meets all of these criteria. Some criminals, like Count Fosco from Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*, was popular with readers and critics. See, for example, Margaret Oliphant's review of the novel (Collins 640-644). Fosco, though good-natured and popular, was not a romanticized or heroic criminal in the Turpin vein.

²² See Radzinowicz for the origins of what came to be called England's "bloody code," a list of over 200 capital crimes. See also Block and Hostettler for a more detailed description of the repeal debates.

²³ The crimes for which capital punishment remained the penalty after 1837 were "high treason; murder and attempted murder resulting in dangerous injury; rape, carnal abuse of girls under ten, and buggery; arson, piracy and certain other acts, when life was endangered; riot, riotous destruction, and destruction of ships and stores of war; and embezzlement by employees of the Bank of England" (Hollingsworth 26).

²⁴ See Hay "Crime and Justice".

²⁵ See my more extensive discussion of the effects of the partial repeal of capital punishment in chapter 2, pp. 72-83.

²⁶ See Great Britain, "Metropolitan Police." See also chapter 2 of this dissertation, pp. 79-82.

²⁷ See Harding (121).

²⁸ Chapter 6 in Harding provides a comprehensive summary of the separate system, the rationale behind it, and its effects on individuals who were subjected to it.

²⁹ See chapter 3 of this dissertation, pp. 132-134.

³⁰ My understanding of how perceptions of criminality changed during this period relies on parts 2, 3 and 4 of Wiener's *Reconstructing the Criminal*.

³¹ For more on the criminal class, see Emsley, chapter 7, and McGowan, "Getting to Know the Criminal Class."

³² The term "Newgate" in the context of these novels refers primarily to the *Newgate Calendar*, a compilation of criminal biographies that remained popular for centuries (Worthington, "Newgate" 123).

³³ The other texts identified by Hollingsworth as "Newgate novels" include Ainsworth's *Jack Sheppard*, Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (1838-1839) and *Barnaby Rudge* (1841), Bulwer-Lytton's *Night and Morning* (1841) and *Lucretia* (1846), and William Thackeray's "anti-Newgate" novel *Catherine* (1839-1840). Hollingsworth also discusses Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1847-1848) in the context of the Newgate novels, as a text that, in a way similar to *Catherine*, "assault[ed]...popular conventions of fiction" and helped nudge Victorian novels toward realism (204). See chapter 4 of this dissertation for a short discussion of the ongoing tension between realism and "romance" in early-Victorian fiction, pp. 194-198.

³⁴ *Paul Clifford* features a rather obvious and unflattering caricature of Maginn. The magazine punished Bulwer-Lytton throughout his literary career, and was merciless in its reception of his Newgate novels. See Hollingsworth (78-81), for more on this literary spat.

³⁵ *Oliver Twist*, serialized between 1837 and 1839, was also embroiled in the Newgate

controversy, but to a lesser extent than *Jack Sheppard*. Most of the criticism against *Oliver Twist* focused on the unrealistic portrayal of his criminal characters, an accusation that he denied stoutly in later prefaces to the novel. See Tillotson (446-450).

³⁶ After *Jack Sheppard*, only Bulwer-Lytton ventured to publish novels that included criminals as main characters. These novels were *Night and Morning* and *Lucretia*. *Night and Morning* includes a secondary character who is a criminal, but this novel was generally ignored by reviewers. One plausible explanation is offered by Hollingsworth: “After the great *Jack Sheppard* hysteria, the dangers of *Night and Morning* did not excite much concern” (174). *Lucretia*, however, was reviled by critics, though it includes “none of the romanticizing and myth-making of *Eugene Aram*” (John xiv). The critical reception of *Lucretia* stilled any desire in Bulwer-Lytton to publish more novels about crime and effectively killed the Newgate novel (Hollingsworth 192).

³⁷ A survey of Allen J. Hubin’s *Crime Fiction IV: A Comprehensive Bibliography, 1749-2000* confirms the dearth of middle-class fiction focusing on crime in the 1840s and 1850s. I am grateful to Mr. Hubin and his publisher, William Contento, for facilitating convenient access to this portion of the bibliography. Some middle-class novels published during this period include criminal elements (there is a murder in Gaskell’s *Mary Barton* (1848), for example), but they are subordinate to other themes.

³⁸ In her discussion of the *Mémoires of Vidocq*, Heather Worthington notes that Vidocq was assisted in publishing his stories by ghost writers. Apparently, these assistants had a penchant for privileging “fancy” over the truths of Vidocq’s cases, and he “disavowed the fourth volume of the *Mémoires*” (Worthington, “Newgate” 125).

³⁹ See also Worthington “Newgate” (133) and Hollingsworth (56-58).

⁴⁰ See my more extensive discussion of delinquency in the context of popular literature in chapter 3.

⁴¹ Inspector Bucket was a favorite character from the novel. See, for example, “Bleak House.”

⁴² Perhaps the most comprehensive study of first-person accounts of nineteenth-century working-class reading and learning is Jonathan Rose’s *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*. Richard Altick’s *The English Common Reader* is also essential reading on this topic.

⁴³ According to E.F. Bleiler, “Rymer was a very prolific author, often working on a dozen novels at once, writing something like sixty or seventy thousand words a week” (“Introduction” xi).

⁴⁴ Victor Neuberg discusses how early-Victorian ballads “reflected...the developing tastes of their working-class readers” rather than trying to shape them (142). His argument that “Through street literature we are able to penetrate, however vicariously, the world of feeling of the urban poor” is similar to my own argument regarding the significance of the penny bloods (143). See Neuberg’s longer discussion (141-143).

⁴⁵ The term “antidiscipline” is borrowed from Michel de Certeau’s introduction to *The Practice of Everyday Life* (xv). De Certeau is concerned in this text with how cultural objects and practices negotiate and hold in tension both disciplinary and antidisciplinary forces (xiv). I discuss the dynamic between discipline and antidiscipline in popular literature more thoroughly in chapter 2.

⁴⁶ See chapter 3, note 38.

⁴⁷ For more discussion of other ephemera written on the subjects of criminals and

executions, see Gatrell, *The Hanging Tree* (chs. 4 and 5), and Rawlings's introduction to *Drunks, Whores, and Idle Apprentices*. More recent discussions may be found in Judith Flanders's *The Invention of Murder* and Rosalind Crone's *Violent Victorians*.

⁴⁸ In this passage, Foucault is mainly referring to the broadsheets that flourished around executions, but his observations are applicable to the type of literature in which we are interested here. The texts I examine maintain a primary focus on the criminal, who is either a sort of hero or anti-hero, the criminal's life, and ultimate punishment. Foucault distinguishes these broadsheets from a later type of crime literature that shifted focus from "the life and misdeeds of the criminal" to "the slow process of discovery" and the confrontation between the criminal and the detective (69). The shift in focus from the criminal's exploits to the detective's apprehension of the criminal fundamentally changed the dynamics of power in the text – see Worthington, *The Rise of the Detective*.

⁴⁹ See, for example, Brigid Lowe's introduction to *Victorian Fiction and the Insights of Sympathy*, in which she outlines different trends in Victorian studies that have tended to either see this literature as "destabilizing" or as "a vehicle for ideological control" (1). One of Lowe's objectives is "to show that is possible to argue with all the rigour and novelty to which theory aspires that the novel as a genre is quite as capable of incisive political and ethical critique as it is of ideological consolidation" (14).

⁵⁰ I could not determine precisely what "hooks" means in this context. It might simply mean "catches," since that is the action actually taking place in the passage, but "hooks" also has connotations of stealing – the sixth sense of the verb "hook" in the *OED* is "To snatch with a hook; to seize by stealth; to steal, pilfer;" a "hook" can be slang for "A thief, a pickpocket." "Barrikin" is an alternative pronunciation and spelling of "baragouin," which, according to the

OED, means “Language so altered in sound or sense as to become generally unintelligible; jargon.” In this passage it seems to mean “stuff and nonsense.”

⁵¹ “Crushers,” “Bobbys” and “eslops” are slang terms for the police. The latter word is either an alternative or incorrect spelling of “esclops,” which Mayhew explains means “police” in coster-language. Costermongers communicated with one another in an invented language in which words were often spoken spelled backwards. For example, “yenep” was slang for a penny. “Cool the esclop” meant “Look at the police;” “Cool the namesclop” – “Look at the policeman” (Mayhew I.23). Next time you’re at a pub, you can ask for a “Top o’ reeb.” See Jacobs’s discussion of how the costermongers’ “slang submits industrial literacy to festive misrule” (330-331).

⁵² See Dalziel, chapter 3.

⁵³ These popular texts showcase what Joseph Rouse refers to as Foucault’s “dynamics of power,” an ongoing struggle between power and resistance (96). See Rouse 108-116 for a helpful discussion of these “dynamics” and their significance.

⁵⁴ Empathy is only one way of entering transversal territories. According to Reynolds, “Transveral territory is entered through departures from and subversive intersections with subjective territory. It is where someone goes conceptually and emotionally when they venture, through what I call ‘transversal movements,’ beyond the boundaries of their own subjective territory and experience alternative sensations, thoughts, and feelings” (*Becoming* 18).

⁵⁵ Reynolds notion of “becoming” is borrowed from Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. As Reynolds characterizes it, “Becoming is a desiring process by which all things (energies, ideas, people, societies) change into something different from what they are. If the things had been identified and normalized by some dominant force,

such as state law, religious credo, or official language, then any change in them is, in fact, becomings-other. The metamorphosis of becoming-other-social-identities confounds such concepts as the essential, the normal, the unified, and the universal, which are fundamental to subjective territory” (*Becoming* 20-21).

⁵⁶ In my analysis I use the 1857 edition of *Rookwood* that has been reprinted by the British Library. This reprint is, however, incorrectly titled. On the cover it claims to be the fourth edition with illustrations by George Cruikshank but is actually a later edition with illustrations by John Gilbert. The reprinted title page in this edition contains the correct information.

⁵⁷ Alan Rookwood is bent on harming Sir Piers’s family. Sir Piers was the son of Reginald Rookwood, Alan’s brother, who seduced Alan’s wife many years before.

⁵⁸ John, or Jack, Palmer was the alias of the historical Dick Turpin (Sharpe 10). Palmer was Turpin’s mother’s maiden name (Ash and Day 12).

⁵⁹ Though the marriage certificate will enable Luke to claim his rightful name, it will not, after all, win him the estates and the Rookwood fortune. Sir Reginald, it is revealed, bequeathed all the property to his granddaughter Eleanor Mowbray. Eleanor is Luke and Ranulph’s cousin, and loves Ranulph. There is a hurried attempt to marry Eleanor to Luke, but the bride is switched at the last moment (the marriage takes place in a gypsy cave in the dark), and Luke accidentally marries Sybil, a gypsy, whom he had once loved but had forsaken for the chance to marry Eleanor. Turpin planned to ransom the certificate to Luke when it was expected that Luke’s legitimacy would make him rich, but upon learning that Luke would in fact remain penniless, he sympathizes with his plight and determines to give Luke the proof of his legitimacy for free (Ainsworth, *Rook* 250-251).

⁶⁰ Barbara Lovell, queen of the gypsies, kills Luke for his mistreatment of her

granddaughter Sybil (see note 59). Spurned by Luke, Sybil kills herself to make way for Luke to marry Eleanor Mowbray.

⁶¹ I am drawing historical information about the real Richard Turpin from Ash and Day's *Immortal Turpin* and James Sharpe's *Dick Turpin: the Myth of the English Highwayman*.

⁶² Turpin also frequently participated in the crimes of the "Essex gang," a group of deer-stealers turned house-breakers. Ash and Day include a report of one particularly dastardly crime that was published in the *London Evening Post* in 1735. The gang broke into the home of an elderly widow and threatened to lay her across a fire if she did not reveal where her money was hidden. Fortunately the widow's son disclosed the location of the money and other valuables, and the woman was spared (Ash and Day 25). After recounting this same incident, Sharpe concludes that this gang was not "a group of potential folk heroes...[but were] vicious criminals, with no respect for property or for the right of people to enjoy the safety of their own homes, who had no reservations about using violence, even potentially fatal violence, and who showed considerable brutality towards the elderly" (113). This portrait of Turpin and the gang in which he was involved stands in remarkable contrast to his romanticization in *Rookwood* and his popularity in common lore.

⁶³ See Ash and Day (137-139), and Sharpe (158-159), for the likely origins of both Black Bess and the famous ride.

⁶⁴ One instance of this active effort on Turpin's part to enhance his own notoriety occurred at Marylebone Gardens. A "noted beauty" was "taking the air" with her friends when "a well-dressed stranger strolled up to her, took her in his arms and kissed her on the lips. The lady struggled and screamed, the stranger raised his hat and said 'be not alarmed Madam, you can now boast you have been kissed by Dick Turpin, Good Day'" (qtd. in Ash and Day 46-47). As

Ash and Day note, “It only requires a few of such happenings for the public to weave an atmosphere of romance around the principals concerned, and it is to the tales of this type that Turpin owes much of his popularity of to-day” (47).

⁶⁵ The best evidence of Turpin’s popularity is that his body was protected from being anatomized by surgeons after his death. Turpin’s body was taken to a surgeon but “the populace...took the body, laid it on a board, covered it with straw, and having carried it through the streets in a kind of triumphal manner, then filled the coffin with unslacked lime, and buried it in the grave” (qtd. in Ash and Day 133-135). Jack Sheppard’s sympathizers had rescued his body from the surgeons in 1724. See chapter 2, note 46.

⁶⁶ Sharpe briefly discusses Ainsworth’s reliance on these two authors, see pp. 146-148.

⁶⁷ See Hollingsworth (99), and Mackie (102, and 212, no.70). Ainsworth wrote several historical novels that “testify to the influence of Scott on almost every page,” including *The Tower of London* (1840), *Guy Fawkes* (1841), and *Old Saint Paul’s* (1841) (Kelly). In addition to being “one of the imitators of Scott,” Ainsworth was also Scott’s personal friend (Hollingsworth 98). S.M. Ellis records that after Scott read Ainsworth’s *Sir John Chiverton* (1826), Ainsworth was invited to meet “his favourite author – the romance writer who most strongly influenced his own literary work. This interview...proved one of the most memorable and enjoyable incidents of [Ainsworth’s] life” (Ellis I.169).

⁶⁸ James Sharpe writes that “in *Rookwood* Ainsworth not only created a fictionalised image of Dick Turpin, but also re-created the highwayman as an heroic figure, a gentleman of the road, courageous, brave, an embodiment of English virtues as perceived in the 1830s, an entity whose passing was to be regretted. Our idea of Turpin as a romantic hero, and our broader romantic notions about highwaymen, owe almost everything to *Rookwood*” (153).

⁶⁹ See also Ash and Day, chs. 18 and 19 for an extensive list of locations associated with Turpin. The authors write, “Although Good Queen Bess may hold the record for having slept in more beds throughout the country than any other historic personage, she certainly takes second place to Turpin in the number of inns visited, for the highways and byways in and around London and the hundreds of Essex and the main coach roads to the East and West Coasts, the Midlands, and the North are dotted with hostelries and beerhouses that brag boastfully of Turpin’s past visits” (74).

⁷⁰ See Foucault (257-292). Brantlinger’s and Foucault’s arguments are critical to my later chapters where I demonstrate specifically how criminal characters are pathologized. I will reintroduce their work in those places.

⁷¹ Ash and Day note that “Tom” King’s actual name was Robert, or Bob, and has been misremembered in histories and novels about Turpin (41).

⁷² The real Turpin’s courage at his execution is documented by Ash and Day, who tell a similar story to that recorded in *Rookwood*. The authors comment, “It was at this crucial moment that the real Turpin was revealed, and he lived up to the reputation he had gained throughout his career, for he died gamely and he chose the moment of his own end. Without waiting for the cart to be drawn away, he flung himself from the ladder in the most resolute fashion and expired instantly as an alternative to being slowly hanged as the rope took his weight. The manner in which he met his death strengthened his hold on the imagination of the public, for at least he proved himself no coward” (127).

⁷³ This is another fabrication by Ainsworth. Matthew King, Robert (Tom) King’s

criminal brother, betrayed Robert and Turpin to the authorities. Robert King was wounded in the capture attempt, but not by Turpin. Turpin accidentally shot Matthew King in the thigh before escaping (Ash and Day 55). Robert King would later die of his wound while in prison (62).

⁷⁴ The real Dick Turpin took his first step in crime when he began stealing cattle to supplement the stock for his butchering business. The punishment for stealing cattle was hanging, so after Turpin was detected, he had to flee his home and had fewer options for supporting himself. Each subsequent infraction made it less and less possible for Turpin to “choose” to live honestly – he was known and would be executed if apprehended. According to Ash and Day, Turpin was “driven by circumstance rather than inclination to prey upon society” (10). See also Ash and Day, pp. 11-16.

⁷⁵ See Wiener, parts 2-4.

⁷⁶ See McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity* (3-48).

⁷⁷ In the *Quarterly Review*, for example, the writer complained that “[t]he odious *slang* with which he [Ainsworth] has interspersed his third volume is as false as base: and his energetic and animating picture of Turpin’s ride to York needed not the setting off of such vulgar and affected ornaments” (“Art. X” 483).

⁷⁸ Romilly had been actively working to repeal the capital code since 1808; between 1808 and 1812, he was “successful in having the death penalty repealed for the offences of picking pockets, theft from the premises of calico printers and vagrancy by a soldier or sailor” (Block and Hostettler 42).

⁷⁹ Paley’s book was titled *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* (1785).

⁸⁰ The Black Act (1723) made punishable by death 50 offenses related primarily to

poaching. The way the act was written, however, made it applicable to between 200 and 250 crimes. See chapter 2, pp. 55-56.

⁸¹ See John (ix) for a list of the repeals that took place throughout the 1830s.

⁸² According to Hollingsworth, Bulwer-Lytton also had an agenda in *Eugene Aram*: “[he] wished...to demonstrate, in Aram’s reasoning [about why he should commit murder], the practical fallacy in Utilitarian ethics...Disregarding any moral absolute, he balances one choice against another, considering the greatest good of the greatest number, and self-interest betrays him” (87).

⁸³ Near the end of his preface, Ainsworth wrote “If the design of Romance be, what it has been held, the exposition of a useful truth by means of an interesting story, I fear I have but imperfectly fulfilled the office imposed upon me; having, as I will freely confess, had, throughout, an eye rather to the reader’s amusement than his edification” (xxxvii-xxxviii).

⁸⁴ Lest it should be thought that I have misinterpreted the jesting tone of this passage, the article is wholly laudatory of the book and Turpin, and concludes, “We envy [our readers who have not yet read *Rookwood*] with all our hearts, and would give five pounds that we could forget the work to have the pleasure of a fresh perusal...if [Mr. Ainsworth] will but pay a little more attention to the management of his plot, and not suffer himself to be led away by the exuberance of his fancy, or by the maudlin advice of cat-witted critics, we prophesy that he will ere long attain a high place – if not the highest – among the writers of fiction of the present day. Again we say, let him go on and fear not” (“Dick Turpin” 675).

⁸⁵ Ainsworth was contemplating a third novel, in addition to *Rookwood* and *Jack Sheppard*, that would “[complete] the portrait of the robber” (Ellis I.285). This novel, which was to feature the highwayman Claude du Val, was never realized due to the criticism Ainsworth

suffered because of *Jack Sheppard*. After *Jack Sheppard*, it seems that Ainsworth finally realized that the times and middle-class tastes for literary criminals had changed, since “he never again made an ordinary criminal the central figure in a novel” (Hollingsworth 147).

⁸⁶ See my more extensive discussion of *Jack Sheppard* and its purported negative influence in chapter 2, pp. 60-72.

⁸⁷ The cross-class appeal is noted by Sir Theodore Martin, who wrote that a popular song from the Jack Sheppard plays called “Nix my dolly, pals, fake away,” (which originally appeared in *Rookwood*) “was whistled by every guttersnipe, and chanted in drawing rooms by fair lips, little knowing the meaning of the words they sang” (qtd. in Bleackley and Ellis 99).

⁸⁸ Brantlinger’s reference to the criminal “out-producing” the bourgeois citizen is drawn from Marx’s “wonderfully sarcastic account of the productivity of crime” (76). Marx writes: “A philosopher produces ideas, a poet poems, a clergyman sermons, a professor compendia and so on. A criminal produces crimes... The criminal moreover produces the whole of the police and of criminal justice, constables, judges, hangmen, juries, etc.; and all these different lines of business... develop different capacities of the human spirit, create new needs and new ways of satisfying them” (qtd. in Brantlinger 76).

⁸⁹ *Catherine* began serialization in *Fraser’s* in May 1839, only four months after *Jack Sheppard* began appearing in *Bentley’s Miscellany*. The serial concluded in February 1840. See Hollingsworth (148-165).

⁹⁰ Many young and lower-class readers accessed these stories and their main characters through the theaters or the many cheap publications featuring these criminal heroes. Titles included *Dick Turpin’s Celebrated Ride to York* (1839) and *Dick Turpin*, by Henry Downes Miles (1839, 1845). Copies of these texts are accessible via the Barry Ono collection at the

British Library, which has been digitized in *Nineteenth-Century Collections Online*. Boys' fiction would continue incorporating Turpin as a character throughout the century.

Chapter 2

¹ It was common to deliver the unclaimed bodies of executed criminals over to medical schools for anatomical study and surgical practice. If they could get hold of the body first, family and friends of the deceased would do whatever they could to prevent the body from going to the anatomists. Strategies included apprehending the body and then covering it with quick-lime, thereby ruining the corpse for the purposes of the dissection table.

² One well-known quip attributed to Sheppard: "I am the Sheppard, and all the Goalers in the Town are my Flock, and I cannot stir into the Country, but they are all at my Heels Baughing, after me" (Rawlings 60). A letter purportedly written by Sheppard recounting his activity following his second escape is full of wit. For example, "*When I'm able, I may, or may not discharge my Fees [paid by prisoners to jailers upon their release], 'tis a Fee-simple, for a Man in my Condition to acknowledge; and tho' I'm safe out of Newgate, I must yet have, or at least, affect, a New Gate by Limping, or Turning my toes in by making a right Hand of my Feet. Not to be long, for I hate Prolixity in all Business: In short, after filing, Defileing, Sawing, when no Body Saw, Climbing (this Clime in) it prov'd a good Turner of my Affairs, thro' the House of a Turner*" (67). Whether or not Sheppard really made these statements, they are examples of the humor (often in defiance or mockery of the law) with which his name was associated.

³ See Ross (chs. 1 and 2), and Bleakley and Ellis (64-198) for more information on these texts.

⁴ For the connections between Sheppard's story and *A Beggar's Opera*, see Bleackley and Ellis (73-74).

⁵ For a detailed discussion of the Black Act, see Radzinowicz (49-79).

⁶ The sentiment of this song was not unique to *Harlequin Jack Sheppard*. Only a few years later, for example, *The Beggar's Opera* (1728) included similar phrasing. Jenny Diver sings, "The gamesters and lawyers are jugglers alike,/If they meddle, your all is in danger./Like gypsies, if once they can finger a souse,/Your pockets they pick, and they pilfer your house./And give your estate to a stranger" (Gay 54).

⁷ Bleackley and Ellis record that *Harlequin Jack Sheppard* was not a success at the theater, being "so ill written," that, according to a contemporary review, it "was dismissed with a universal hiss" (73). Contrarily, Charles Mackay, in *Memoirs of Extraordinary Popular Delusions* (1852) wrote that *Harlequin Jack Sheppard* was "brought out with considerable success" (252). In this instance, determining the success or failure of the pantomime is less important than noticing the themes that the author thought would attract an audience.

⁸ When I refer to "middle-class critics" and "middle-class commentators," I mean writers who accused lower-class popular texts of corrupting readers with sensational and immoral content. Some of the critics, such as Thackeray, we are familiar with. Others remain anonymous, but each contributed to the general antagonism against lower-class entertainments that were perceived as being poisonous to the minds of their audiences. In his discussion of the antagonism between dominant and popular culture, Edward Jacobs names Charles Knight, Henry Mayhew, James Grant, James Greenwood, and Hepworth Dixon as individuals who "emphasized that street culture was turning into an autonomous counterculture that...interfere[ed] with 'paternalistic' institutions...and 'popular education,' which had been trying for decades to incorporate the lower classes into the hegemony of literate, christian, middle-class culture"

(321). Jacobs argues that middle-class culture, in a concerted effort with the police, effectively eradicated popular culture and replaced it with a mass culture industry (341-342).

⁹ The novel was originally to be called *Thames Darrell*. Ellis provides excerpts from Ainsworth's letters that give some idea of when, but not why, the change was made (I.344-345).

¹⁰ From this description one can see why Ainsworth called *Jack Sheppard* his "Hogarthian novel," since the plotlines are similar to those depicted in Hogarth's *Industry and Idleness* series. Darrell, the "good apprentice," was the purported hero of the novel but was outshined by Sheppard (Ellis I.328).

¹¹ *Rookwood* made legendary Turpin's single-day ride from London to York on his horse, Black Bess. For two examples of the association of *Jack Sheppard* with *Rookwood* see "Literature and Art" and "Monthly Critic."

¹² *The Mirror of Literature, Amusement and Instruction*, in which the first quotation appeared, cannot be strictly categorized as a middle-class publication, costing only two-pence, but it has been characterized as reinforcing "'be content with your lot'...propaganda on behalf of the ruling classes" ("Mirror"). The paper's content "stressed education, piety, and industriousness" ("Mirror"). This publication is, however, an example of a periodical supporting middle-class values that first praised *Jack Sheppard* and then condemned the story after it became popular with the lower classes (see "New Books").

¹³ Gaffs were makeshift theaters set up in shops and backrooms and provided cheap entertainment to audiences made up mostly of children and young adults.

¹⁴ Two significant studies focusing on the influence of Jack Sheppard on "penny gaff" audiences are John Springhall, *Youth, Popular Culture and Moral Panics: Penny Gaffs to Gangsta-Rap, 1830-1996* and Edward Jacobs, "Bloods in the Street: London Street Culture,

‘Industrial Literacy,’ and the Emergence of Mass Culture in Victorian England.” This latter text includes a more detailed description of some of the Jack Sheppard gaff productions (334-335).

For a discussion of the police closure of the gaffs, see Stephens.

¹⁵ “Nix my Dolly, Pals, Fake Away!” appeared originally in *Rookwood* but was set to music by George H. Rodwell and included in the theatrical adaptations of *Jack Sheppard*.

According to Bleackley and Ellis, “This was the popular song of the day, sung and whistled by everyone, while ‘Fake Away’ was a catchword among all classes” (99).

¹⁶ In the novel, Sheppard tells Winifred, “I should never have been what I am, but for you...I loved you...as a boy, *hopelessly*, and it made me desperate...” (Ainsworth, *Jack* 310).

¹⁷ Courvoisier actually made three “official” confessions, with varying details in each. For a summary of these confessions see “Confessions of Courvoisier.”

¹⁸ The original letter appeared in *The Morning Chronicle* on 6 July 1840 (“Jack Sheppard”).

¹⁹ See my more extensive discussion of the Newgate Novels in chapter 1, pp. 13-15.

²⁰ This subgroup of readers was perhaps targeted as the most impressionable group, but it would be a mistake to presume that *Jack Sheppard* was perceived as being a problem confined only to the young.

²¹ S.M. Ellis suggests that Forster wrote with such vitriol because, as Dickens’s close friend, he was upset by the greater success of *Jack Sheppard* over *Oliver Twist* (I.358-359).

²² For example, people likely associated the “imposed time- and behavioral-discipline upon workers [in factories]” with the “‘monitorial’ regime of popular education that constructed literacy as a mechanical discipline very much like factory production” (Jacobs 328).

²³ Martin Madan, a barrister very much in favor of the death penalty, also wanted to

eliminate the arbitrary dispensation of justice. His solution, however, was to be more relentless and carry out death sentences “without any relaxation” (Block and Hostletter 25). According to Block and Hostletter, a book by Madan calling for more stringency in executions “produced a temporary bloodbath until [it was] countered by Samuel Romilly” (25).

²⁴ Beccaria's text, originally *Dei Delittie e delle Pene*, was the text that “gave birth to the crusade against capital punishment” (Block and Hostletter 23). See Bellamy.

²⁵ The total number of executions in England and Wales during the 1820s was 672 (Gatrell 9).

²⁶ See “House of Commons” (328) for a succinct account of the May 19 debate. The minutes of the discussion are available through the website <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com>

²⁷ The decision was based on humanitarian motivations *and* on evidence that the present system of punishment was ineffective at reducing crime. Many statistics actually showed a correlation between a reduction in the severity of the law and *decrease* in crime. See “Capital Punishments” in the June 1836 *Monthly Magazine* for a discussion of several instances in which the commission of particular crimes decreased after the death penalty for that crime had been eliminated.

²⁸ The change in capital punishment was not the only reason for the strengthening of a police force. As a writer for *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* (1839) described it, “It is not the increase of thieves and vagrants, and of fraudulent crimes, which renders this great change [the police] desirable...but the increase of an unruly population in the manufacturing districts, and the necessity of restraining or forcibly putting down the expression of discontent” (“Report” 417).

²⁹ This bill was published separately from the volume in which it currently appears. The

page numbers in my citations correspond to the original pagination. See the works cited entry for the page numbers on which the bill appears in the volume.

³⁰ See, for example, articles 56, 57, 66.13, 68.5 in Great Britain, pp. 18-19, 23-24, 26.

³¹ These infractions are mentioned in articles 66.12, 66.18, 66.14, and 66.15 in the new police bill. See Great Britain, pp. 23-24.

³² Faller identifies different patterns in biographies about highwaymen and biographies about thieves (126).

³³ Collections of highwaymen's lives had been published since 1713. Two early examples are Alexander Smith's *The History of the Lives of the Most Noted Highway-men* (1713) and Charles Johnson's *A General History of the Lives and Adventures of the Most Famous Highwaymen* (1734). Another early collection of accounts of prisoners recorded by the ordinaries, or chaplains, of Newgate appeared in 1718. I discuss these particular publications in more detail in the next chapter. See Faller (286-327) for a chronological bibliography of criminal biographies published from 1592-1811.

³⁴ See, respectively, *The Malefactor's Register* (I.392-410); Knapp and Baldwin (I.209-218); and "The Life, Trial, and Execution, of John Sheppard, for Burglary" (58-62).

³⁵ This sympathetic tone was not exclusive to the penny biography. This account of Sheppard's execution is almost verbatim that found in *The Malefactor's Register* from 1779 (407). After recording Sheppard's death, this latter publication details the subsequent media event, and includes a very interesting section from a sermon inspired by Sheppard's second escape. The preacher bids his listeners to be like Jack Sheppard in a "spiritual sense" and to "open the *locks* of your *hearts* with the *nail* of *repentance*; burst asunder the *fetters* of your *beloved lusts*; mount the *chimney* of *hope*, take from hence the *bar* of *good resolution*, break

through the *stone wall of despair*, and all the *strong holds* in the *dark entry* of the *valley of the shadow of death*" (*Malefactor's* 410). The allusions in this sermon correspond to actual obstacles Sheppard overcame in his daring escape such as breaking his fetters and climbing up a chimney.

³⁶ How the audience may have responded to the association of Sheppard with the murder is unclear since Sheppard neither commits the murder (Blueskin does) nor sanctions it.

³⁷ Ainsworth never takes a decisive stance on why Jack Sheppard becomes a criminal, and vacillates between Sheppard's end being the result of choice or fate.

³⁸ The ballad says that Sheppard robs his "late" employers, indicating that Sheppard was no longer an apprentice when he committed this crime. This is accurate according to the novel and one of the early biographies. See *The Life of John Sheppard* in Rawlings (50).

³⁹ I am grateful to Helen Hills at the Cambridge University Library for facilitating my access to these ballads. These ballads are available through the Madden Ballad collection.

⁴⁰ My primary objective is to highlight the variety and nuances of the adaptations and to suggest how plays presenting versions of *Jack Sheppard* in which Sheppard escapes his doom did so in order to appeal to particular readers who may have found satisfaction in this kind of ending. Statistics can indicate the typical occupations of persons living around specific playhouses but, due to widespread mobility and the tendency of individuals to travel outside of their "home" theater zones and attend plays in other parts of the London, only general statements can be made about who might have been in a particular theater during a performance.

⁴¹ In *William Harrison Ainsworth and His Friends*, S.M. Ellis records that the Surrey was the only theater to offer Ainsworth financial remuneration for adapting his novel, but does not speculate whether the £20 had any bearing on Ainsworth's endorsement (362).

⁴² At the end of the novel, Sheppard is driven from Newgate to Tyburn in a procession

accompanied by thousands and, though Blueskin cuts him down the moment after he is hanged, Sheppard is shot several times by the attending guard. After Blueskin is also shot, the crowd in attendance catches Sheppard's body and carries it to Thames Darrell, who whisks it off in the hopes of yet saving Sheppard's life, only to discover that a bullet has pierced Sheppard's heart. Wild is attacked by the crowd but is rescued, only to be hanged for his crimes seven months later (Ainsworth, *Jack* 479-480).

⁴³ This "act of duty" to his mother was breaking out of Newgate in order to attend her funeral.

⁴⁴ Here the mob plays a significant role in helping Skyblue save Jack: "The military made desperate exertions to follow the men who had galloped off with the body but a thousand man (sic) prevented them, and at last they were obliged themselves to fly" (233). In receiving his comeuppance, Jonathan Wild is "launched into eternity" (the very language used to describe Sheppard's death in Ainsworth's novel) "amidst yells and hootings, a cloud of stones, brickbats, mud, and filth" (236).

⁴⁵ The Lord Chamberlain did not, however, prohibit the performance of plays already licensed and, as Keith Hollingsworth notes, "managers later found they could evade the prohibition by giving a different title to a play about Sheppard" (147).

⁴⁶ The actions taken by the mob on Sheppard's account may have actually prevented some of Sheppard's friends from taking his body to be resuscitated. This well-meaning crowd also accidentally delivered the body over to a bailiff with "sinister" plans (to sell Sheppard to the anatomists, no doubt) and later had to re-take Sheppard's body in order to see it satisfactorily buried. See Bleackley and Ellis (53); an original source for the account about the bailiff is *The Daily Journal* ("London, November 18").

Chapter 3

¹ See chapter 1 of this dissertation.

² See Wiener chapters 2 and 4.

³ This method of treating prisoners was an alternative to the silent system, a model in which prisoners were silent at all times but allowed to be in proximity to one another during periods of work, exercise and chapel. See chapter 3 of this dissertation. The idea that the perpetual isolation of prisoners would facilitate their spiritual conversion had its roots in Quakerism. According to Harding, et al, “The Quakers regarded prisoners merely as people who had never listened to the Inner Light [the spark of divine presence in every individual]. The solution seemed obvious: lock criminals up in separate cells and they could not ignore the Inner Light. They would then recognise past sins” (147). This perspective was the foundation of the separate system employed at the Philadelphia prison, on which was based the British separate system. The separate system was thought to be effective in part because it “softened” prisoners and made them more psychologically malleable to the influences of chaplains and religious instruction. Reverend John Clay, a chaplain at Preston Gaol who advocated for the separate system, reported that, “as a general rule, a few months in the separate cell renders a prisoner strangely impressible. The chaplain can then make the brawny navvy cry like a child...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” (W. Clay 387).

⁴ I discuss Pentonville and the separate system at more length in chapter 3.

⁵ William Crawford and Whitworth Russell, both members of the first prison inspectorate (formed by the Prisons Act of 1835), used their influence to ensure that Pentonville prison was constructed and run on the separate system (Emsley 285). After the deaths of

Crawford and Russell in 1847, the separate system was gradually phased out to make way for approaches to prison discipline that focused more on punishment than reformation (Emsley 288). Some elements of the separate system, such as individual cells for prisoners, remained in use.

The separate system failed for several reasons. For example, it occasionally resulted in the psychological damage of prisoners who succumbed to the unending solitude (Ignatieff 199). Also, as McGowen explains, “Public opinion in the 1850s, alarmed in part by the impending end of the system of transportation, was turning away from sympathy with convicts,” and calling for punishment and deterrence instead of reform (103). Though the separate system did seem to be reforming some prisoners, ultimately these gains were not significant enough to balance out the apparent ill effects of the regimen (Grass 43-44). Prison chaplains held up prison autobiographies, narratives dictated or written down by prisoners who had experienced spiritual transformations and been “reformed,” as evidence that the system worked. Many critics, including Dickens, doubted the veracity of these accounts, and suspected that many prisoners might only have been saying what their governors wanted to hear. See Schur, and my discussion of prison autobiographies in chapter 4 of this dissertation.

⁶ The formation of the criminal class has been dated differently by scholars. In *Crime and Industrial Society in the Nineteenth Century*, J.J. Tobias argues that the idea of a criminal class began developing as early as 1815 and was fully formed by the 1830s (see Tobias chapter 4). Clive Emsley acknowledges that “the idea of a criminal class and of professional criminals living, at least partly, by the proceeds of criminal behavior was popular throughout the period,” but cites the term “criminal class” as being “most common during the 1860s” (177). In his interesting article “Getting to Know the Criminal Class in Nineteenth-Century England,” Randall McGowen explains that the criminal class had long been a concept, but was “reintroduced” as

new in the 1850s and 1860s. What had changed “was the place of the criminal class in the debates over crime” (McGowen, “Getting” 34). I am basing some of my conclusions on McGowen’s argument that the criminal class was not distinguished as a recognizable group until the late-1840s and early-1850s, when the reformatory efforts of prisons were viewed as failing due to the incorrigibility of criminals.

⁷ According to McGowen, the idea of the criminal class gained credence through many writings that detailed how to recognize criminals at a glance. Because “invisibility” was the criminal class’s “most threatening weapon,” it was imperative that its members’ distinguishing features be enumerated and made known (McGowen, “Getting” 43). This knowledge, however, rather than merely revealing something that already existed, “established the reality of a particular construction of the problem of crime” (48). The idea that criminals were distinguishable from other respectable members of society provided a sense of security and reassurance: “Sight operated as the privileged form of knowing [the criminals’] character” (49). By exposing the criminal class, there was a better chance of controlling or eliminating it.

⁸ James Sharpe’s *Dick Turpin: The Myth of the English Highwayman* is an informative and easily digested account of how the “myth” of the highwayman was crystallized in Ainsworth’s *Dick Turpin*. As Sharpe demonstrates, the Turpin best remembered for his ride from London to York on his trusty steed Black Bess is only a figment, the real Turpin having been an ugly, brutal, and decidedly un-heroic rogue. See especially chapters 2 and 5 in Sharpe to understand how Ainsworth’s Turpin (and the myth of the heroic highwayman) is a compilation of over a century’s worth of real and fictional criminal biographies.

⁹ Fortunately, *Varney the Vampyre* has begun receiving more serious critical attention – see Jacobs and Hackenberg.

¹⁰ See chapter 1, pp. 18-20.

¹¹ See, especially, Bleiler's "Introduction" to the Dover edition of *Varney the Vampyre* for a discussion of the conditions under which writers of penny bloods worked; see also Roberts (3), for mention of the possible multiple authorship of *Varney*. Louis James's *Fiction for the Working Man*, chs. 3-5 provides a more detailed history of this genre. The terms "penny blood" and "penny dreadful" are often used interchangeably to refer to this type of literature. However, the former term is becoming more frequently used to distinguish cheap, sensational fiction published before 1860 for adults, and the latter for post-1860s texts aimed primarily at children. See H. Smith 5.

There has been a long-standing debate about the authorship of *Varney the Vampyre*. In E.F. Bleiler's analysis of the prose style of texts known to be written by Rymer, and other texts known to be written by Thomas Prest, the other contender for the authorship of *Varney*, he concludes that *Varney* was written in Rymer's style ("A Note on Authorship"). More recently, Helen Smith has confirmed Rymer's authorship through analyzing several advertisements in newspapers, and very rare wrapper-covers (19-20).

¹² Most critics incorrectly number the pages of *Varney the Vampyre* as 868. The number on the last page of the narrative is 868, but as mentioned on the copyright page of the Dover edition, the original full length publication of *Varney the Vampyre* in 1847 repeated pages 577-584, making the actual total 874. I keep the pagination as it appears in the Dover edition, but specify if a quotation comes from the incorrectly numbered section.

¹³ While at least two sources have mentioned that *Varney the Vampyre* was serialized a second time in 1853, I have been unable to locate the exact dates of the run (see the copyright page in the Dover edition of *Varney the Vampyre* and Summers 193). Montague Summers claims

that *Varney* was reissued in penny parts in 1853 due to its initial “unprecedented success” (293). I have not been able to determine if this reissue was of the full run or the abridgement, but I suspect it was the latter.

¹⁴ Each storyline in *Varney the Vampyre* varies in length, and none comes close to equaling the duration of the Bannerworth portion of the narrative. Every issue of *Varney the Vampyre*, excepting two, contained eight pages. The story began and ended haphazardly in each number, often in the middle of chapters or even sentences. The exceptions to the standard length include the very first number, which combined numbers one through four (32 pages – a real bargain at a penny), and the concluding number, which contained twelve pages. A single-number would usually contain a large illustration on the first page and sometimes an additional, smaller illustration on a subsequent page. I have not been able to determine if title-pages or covers prefaced each number. This seems likely, since no identification appears anywhere in the text itself and it is certain that the first issue had a separate title-page. However, an additional page, or cover, would also have made the publication of the story more expensive.

¹⁵ Other members of the Bannerworth family include Henry and Flora’s brother George (who only appears early in the text), and their mother, Mrs. Bannerworth. Charles Holland (Flora’s fiancée), Admiral Bell (Charles’s uncle), Jack Pringle (Bell’s seaman and sidekick), and Dr. Chillingworth (a local doctor and family friend) are also prominent characters in the story.

¹⁶ It turns out that the money was hidden in a portrait. Varney steals the portrait while Dr. Chillingworth is transporting it from the Hall to the Bannerworths’ temporary residence.

¹⁷ In John Polidori’s *The Vampyre* (1820), the first extended English vampire narrative, Lord Ruthven (the vampire) marries the hero’s sister and then murders her on the wedding night, but in this narrative marriage is not a requirement before feeding. The marriage plots in *Varney*

the Vampyre likely came from two English plays that appeared soon after Polidori's story was published: James Planché's *The Vampire, or the Bride of the Isles* (1820) and W.T. Moncrieff's *The Vampyre: a Drama in Three Acts* (1820). In these plays, the vampire must marry his victim and then attack her before a specific time each year. Moncrieff's play was an adaptation of Planché's play, which was an English adaptation of Charles Nodier's *Le Vampire, mélodrame en trois actes* (1820), which first premiered in Paris. The vampire character in these plays is directly modeled on Polidori's Lord Ruthven – Planché's vampire character retains the original name and Moncrieff changes his to "Ruthwold."

The plots of each play are similar and I will briefly summarize Planché's version. A young woman agrees to be married to the friend of her father. Unfortunately, the suitor, Lord Ruthven, is actually a vampire who, under the stipulations of a curse, must first marry before feeding on his bride. If the vampire fails to do this once each year, then the vampire will vanish from the earth (reappearing, we assume, in Hell). Lord Ruthven laments that he must murder his friend's daughter and decides to try to marry a peasant girl instead. The peasant girl refuses and the vampire is thought to have perished in an altercation during her rescue. However, the wily vampire sneaks back to the first bride and almost succeeds in marrying her, but is found out at the last second. Since the marriage and the "consummation" do not take place in time, the vampire expires and the maiden is saved.

For the conclusion of Planché's play, in which the vampire vanishes in a bolt of lightning, a special trap door was invented and named, appropriately, the "vampire trap" (Stuart 65). Varney's pursuit of his various brides-to-be was in keeping with recent theatrical tradition but is an inconsistent adaptation – like Polidori's Lord Ruthven, Varney frequently feeds on women to whom he is not married. Bette Roberts notes that his pursuit of these women has to do

either with “possibly being freed from his vampirism if he can get a consenting young woman to love him...[or] to his needing virginal blood for survival” (3), but the text is contradictory on these points.

¹⁸ The brothers place his remains in a charnel house, wherein he is resuscitated by moonbeams entering through a window. An avaricious sexton goes into the charnel house to investigate a rumor that gold and diamond rings have been left on Varney’s body. Once inside, his lantern goes out and he opens a window that lets in the offending moonbeams (Rymer, *W* II.773-782).

¹⁹ The mob plans to burn Clara’s body, which they have confiscated while still in its coffin, but a rainstorm prevents them from doing so. Instead, they carry the body to a crossroads, dig a ditch, and stake the body in it (Rymer, *W* II.842-843). According to folklore, staking and burying a suspected vampire at a crossroads would permanently incapacitate the creature. Montague Summers explains that vampire corpses were treated similarly to those of suicides, which, because they could not be given the funeral rites that would put their souls to rest, had to be staked at crossroads to prevent their ghosts from wandering about. Summers elaborates:

The reason for the selected spot of the suicide’s grave being a cross-road is further explained by the belief that when the ghost or the body issues from the grave and finds there are four paths stretching in as many directions he will be puzzled to know which way to take and will stand debating until dawn compels him to return to the earth, but woe betide the unhappy being who happens to pass by when [the ghost] is lingering there perplexed and confused. (154-155)

There are echoes of Clara in Lucy Westenra when she begins feeding on children after being turned into a vampire by Dracula. See Frayling 40-41 for more connections between *Dracula* and *Varney the Vampyre*.

²⁰ Illegitimate theater “pieced” together elements from a variety of cultural texts, including other plays, popular novels, art and music. This was potentially problematic because new, perhaps unauthorized, meanings could emerge from these unique juxtapositions. In 1842, the *Monthly Magazine* complained that this type of “entertainment...has no faith of any kind. It aims to inculcate no truth” (qtd. in Moody 82). See pp. 81-82 of Moody’s book for a more detailed discussion.

²¹ See Rymer, *IV* II.628-677, II.628-697, II.698-709, and II.710-712 respectively. The character named “Count Pollidori” is, no doubt, an homage to John Polidori. This connection also suggests that Rymer was familiar with *The Vampyre*, though his knowledge of it is also evident from other parallel plot points.

²² The abrupt cessation and commencement of a story from issue to issue was a familiar feature of penny literature and contributed to its piecemeal qualities. *The Mysteries of London* (1844-1846), a far more orderly narrative than *Varney the Vampyre*, follows the same publication model of eight pages per issue, never mind the neat transitions.

²³ As I mentioned in chapter 2, there were many “versions” of *The Newgate Calendar* before it was first published under this title in five volumes in 1773. The calendars were collections of criminal accounts from various sources, including broadsheets and chapbooks. By this definition, Charles Johnson’s collection of highwaymen stories counts as a sort of *Newgate Calendar*, but I am treating it separately because of its focus on highwaymen. According to James Sharpe, highwaymen featured less prominently in the criminal calendars over the

eighteenth-century, making text's like Johnson's unique in this way (71). Alexander Smith published another compilation of highwayman narratives titled *A Compleat History of the Lives and Robberies of the Most Notorious Highwaymen* (1713). See Linebaugh for an extended discussion of the *Ordinary's* accounts ("Ordinary"). According to the "Ordinary of Newgate's Accounts" page at www.oldbaileyonline.org, the exact publication dates of the accounts were 1676-1772. (See Emsley, Hitchcock and Shoemaker).

²⁴ See Johnson for the biographies of Hind (86-90); Duval (91-96); and Davis (106-108). See Sharpe, chapter 2, for more discussion of these figures.

²⁵ See chapter 2 in Sharpe, and see Erin Mackie's discussion of gentlemen highwaymen in chapter 3 of *Rakes, Highwaymen, and Pirates*.

²⁶ This was the case with Hind and Du Val, respectively (Sharpe 54, 57).

²⁷ See Sharpe (1-3) for a full account of Turpin's hanging.

²⁸ Of the influence of iconic highwaymen on perceptions of highwaymen in general, Erin Mackie observes: "Our notions informed by Gay's Macheath and Ainsworth's Dick Turpin, we might be tempted to look retrospectively in early criminal biography for the kind of reckless, glamorous lady's man at the center of [*The Beggar's Opera*] or for the rollicking boys' adventure hero in [*Rookwood*]. Faced with the substantially more ambivalent, often monotonous, usually less sophisticated criminal biographies of the highwayman's earlier incarnation, we might find ourselves disappointed and perplexed" (72).

²⁹ See Sharpe, chapter 2, especially pp. 47-49.

³⁰ The criminals featured in these biographies were not always executed. See, for example, the biography of Moll Cutpurse in Johnson (192-194).

³¹ For example, *The Tyburn Calendar, or Malefactors Bloody Register* (1705), *Lives of*

the Most Remarkable Criminals Condemned and Executed for Murder, Highway Robberies, Housebreaking, Street Robberies and Other Offences (1735), and *The Criminal Recorder; or Biographical Sketches of Notorious Public Characters* (1804).

³² See Linebaugh (250-251) for more details regarding the specific duties of the ordinaries. The typical structure of the Ordinary's *Accounts* is provided on page 248 in Linebaugh ("Ordinary").

³³ There were other accusations against the ordinaries, including that they extorted money from prisoners on the pretense of obtaining pardons for them. See Linebaugh ("Ordinary" 254-257).

³⁴ The biographies may have paid lip-service to didacticism, but they were really profiting from their entertaining qualities (Sharpe 62-63).

³⁵ Johnson's *The History of the Lives and Actions of the Most Famous Highwaymen* was republished in 1839, though apparently this version was bowdlerized (Tedder 6). Andrew Knapp and William Baldwin republished *The Newgate Calendar* between 1824 and 1826 in four volumes. *The Annals of Crime* (1833-?) and *Martin's Annals of Crime, or the New Newgate Calendar* (1836-1838) were penny serial versions. In 1841, Camden Pelham published *The Chronicles of Crime, or the New Newgate Calendar*. Of course, different compilations of *The Newgate Calendar* are still being published!

³⁶ Varney's account of his life as a highwayman begins when he and his compatriot resolve on robbing a fellow gambler who has bested them at the table. The gambler is killed during the robbery, and Varney and Bannerworth part ways, agreeing to meet again to divide their spoils (Rymer, *VVI*.350-354; 387). Bannerworth, however, overwhelmed by guilt for his crime, commits suicide after hiding the money somewhere in the mansion (Rymer, *VVI*.389).

Unable to recover the stolen money, which “would have been sufficient to have enabled [him] to live for the future in affluence,” Varney goes to London to find a means of survival.

³⁷ See Sharpe, chapter 4.

³⁸ According to V.A.C. Gatrell, defiance at sentencing and hangings was frequently exhibited by criminals (109-111). For example, one criminal, upon being sentenced to die, “took up a tobacco pipe...with an apparent carelessness” (Gatrell 110). Haughtiness at sentencing, and “dying game,” or without showing fear, was one of the only forms of resistance available to the condemned: “Shame and grief could not be admitted when inflicted by systems of authority beyond challenge or comprehension...The only way to cope with the pain and shame of scaffold death was to display your contempt for it” (Gatrell 110-111). The real Dick Turpin, for example, dressed in fine new clothes for his execution, and was reported to have gone “off this stage [died] with as much intrepidity and unconcern, as if he had been taking horse to go on a journey” (Sharpe 1, 3).

³⁹ Based on this experience, Chillingworth is convinced that he was responsible for bringing Varney back to life, but Varney explains that he would have come back to life anyway (Rymer, *IV* I.354). Chillingworth refuses throughout most of the narrative to believe that Varney is really a vampire, but the reader learns later that he finally relented (Rymer, *IV* II.797).

⁴⁰ Several highwayman and some criminals, such as Jack Sheppard, were said to be witty or clever. For Sheppard, see chapter 2, note 2. Philip Stafford, another royalist highwayman, used his “verbal prowess” to “convincingly [mimic] the religious cant of his enemies” and to seduce chaste women (Mackie 79).

⁴¹ Varney says at one point, “I will have...revenge!...against society, that has made me

what I am; and the time shall yet come when my name shall be a greater terror than it is” (Rymer, *IV* II.504). Captain Zachary Howard is one example of a highwayman who turned to crime out of a desire for revenge. Howard was a royalist who, after mortgaging his estates to raise and command an army for Charles I, was forced into exile upon the defeat of the cause. Howard took to the road, swearing “he would be revenged, as far as lay in his power, on all persons who were against the interest of his Royal master...he attacked all whom he met and knew to be of that party” (Johnson 158). Perhaps the most memorable example of Howard’s revenge recorded in the biographies is when he meets Oliver Cromwell on the road and befriends him in order to attack and rob him. After stopping at an inn, Howard “gagged [Cromwell]...bound him...and then taking the Pan out of the Close-stool that stood in the Room, which happened to be pretty well filled, he clapped it on the Head of the Rebel, crowning him in such a Manner as he deserved” (Johnson 159). Clearly the narrator had royalist sympathies as well.

⁴² See chapter 4.

⁴³ The historical setting for the formative events in Varney’s life is significant because it brings into direct conflict definitions of individuality, criminality, and authority. In her discussion of criminal biography in *Rakes, Highwaymen, and Pirates*, Erin Mackie suggests the deeper significance of the Interregnum in accounts of highwaymen’s “lives”:

[Early] [c]riminal biography...might be seen to encapsulate and recapitulate a central issue of England’s “recent history” itself. The decisive event and enduring emblem of this issue is the conviction for treason of Charles I. This event produced the ultimate identification of authority and criminality. From a radical Republican perspective, the criminality adheres to the sovereign who so traduced his authority; from a royalist

perspective, to the regicides whose sham ‘authority’ sentenced the king to death...The set of political and ethical upheavals that the execution of the king epitomized are witnessed in a number of highwaymen’s lives. (76-77)

The turmoil of the English civil wars is an ideal origination point for a story that dwells so frequently on the struggle between the individual, embodied by Varney himself, and authority, represented by the mysterious and possibly divine force that condemns Varney to a life of vampirism and suffering.

⁴⁴ Earlier in the narrative, Varney and other vampires gather to raise one of their own for the first time (Rymer, *VV* II.753).

⁴⁵ In addition to Ainsworth’s original text, there were also penny bloods featuring Dick Turpin published during or just before the serialization of *Varney the Vampyre*. For example, *Dick Turpin*, published by William Mark Clark in 1845, was serialized for 49 numbers. Earlier, *The Life of Richard Palmer; better known as Dick Turpin; the notorious highwayman* was issued in 1839 and 1841, each time in 41 parts. See <<http://www.english.cam.ac.uk/pop>>.

⁴⁶ The origin story about Varney’s wife is not in the 1854 abridged edition of *Varney*.

⁴⁷ Supposed symptoms of “self-abuse” that featured in descriptions of vampires included paleness (Mighall 116), wasting away (114-115), attacks occurring at night, and the tendency of the “epidemic” to spread (111). The onanist was even characterized, like a vampire, as becoming, “an outcast on earth...[bidding] adieu to the circle of mankind” (qtd. in Mighall 112).

⁴⁸ Mighall suggests that authors may have included aspects of contemporary discourses

on onanism in their fiction to exploit the connections between the two (117-121). It is possible that Rymer, aware of cultural conversations about criminality, incorporated them into his representation of Varney for similar reasons.

⁴⁹ Whether or not Varney can resist blood is really only questioned when there is lingering doubt, near the beginning of the text, as to whether or not Varney is really a vampire.

⁵⁰ While Varney is capable of consuming other food and drink, it cannot satisfy his hunger and doesn't agree with him (Rymer, *VV* II.847).

⁵¹ Varney's humanity was only a recent feature of vampire lore, and the unceasing negotiation between his human and vampire selves was a literary first. Varney's predecessor, John Polidori's Lord Ruthven in *The Vampyre*, was the first humanistic vampire, and the first with the ability to blend into aristocratic society. Unlike Varney, however, Ruthven exhibits no qualms about blood-sucking. The Romantic period saw the beginnings of the human-like vampire in Southey's *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1799), John Stagg's "The Vampire" (1810), Byron's "The Giaour" (1813), and Keats's "Lamia" (1820) but unlike Varney, there is little equivocation about the humanity of these creatures.

Historically, vampires were ambiguous creatures who lacked human qualities, though they came back from the dead in human form. Before Ruthven and Varney, vampires were filthy creatures with exceptionally poor oral hygiene, cursed to prey first on loved ones before moving on to destroy the rest of a community. Summers's list of common vampire features include being "gaunt and lean," except when full of blood, when the vampire's "body become[s] horribly puffed and bloated." The vampire's "palms...are downy with hair...His breath is unbearably fetid and rank with corruption," etc. (Summers 179). Traces of these creatures are evident in Varney but merged with more human qualities. Varney purports to be an aristocrat but still

retains, among other features, the “pestiferous breath” of his ancestors (Rymer, *VV* I.16). In 1732 it was reported that a Hungarian named Arnold Paole had become a vampire and caused a vampire epidemic; Paole exhibited no signs of humanity in his altered state. The stories about Paole introduced the word “vampire” into English newspapers (see “Foreign News” 303 and “Foreign Advices” 681).

⁵² In the scenario that develops after this passage, Varney does in fact do something “good” by helping restore a young woman to her fortune and the man who loves her (Rymer, *VV* II.734-770).

⁵³ See chapter 1 of this dissertation, pp. 24-26.

⁵⁴ There were other associations between murderers and vampires as well. In Judith Flanders’s study of Victorian murder, she mentions de Quincey’s *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts*, in which “de Quincey imagines [a recent murderer as] a dandified being, dressing for an evening’s slaughter in black silk stockings and pumps and with a long blue coat of ‘the very finest cloth’. The murderer is now more vampire than cash-strapped sailor” (18). Even later in the century, Jack the Ripper would be imagined as a “ghoul-like creature who stalks through the streets of London... simply drunk with blood, and he will have more” (Flanders 427).

⁵⁵ McGowen observes that “It was the belief in the contagious nature of crime that spawned the investment of time and money in prison construction” (“Well-Ordered” 91).

⁵⁶ At one point grave-robbers open a coffin containing Varney’s body, exposing him to moonbeams that initiate another resurrection (Rymer, *VV* II.620-621). Varney is unable to find a victim and dies in a hotel (II.627).

⁵⁷ See chapter 4 for a fuller discussion of the homogenization of criminality by prisons.

⁵⁸ Murderers whom the populace believed to be unjustly accused, like Eliza Fenning, might receive sympathy (Flanders 183-200). The only example I am aware of in which a murderer who was clearly thought to have done the deed was somewhat romanticized was the case of John Thurtell who, along with Joseph Hunt, murdered William Weare in 1823. Flanders records that, “after the verdict was handed down, strangely, Thurtell the monster...the drinker of blood, began to disappear, to be replaced by Thurtell the gallant, Thurtell the debonair” (40). This example is interesting but outside the chronological scope of this chapter. Flanders’s book, a detailed compendium of famous murders throughout the nineteenth-century, gives no other examples of murderers who were glorified.

⁵⁹ Moretti is not, of course, the first critic to articulate this relationship between genre, history, and ideology. For two detailed discussions see “Historical Novel and Historical Drama” in Georg Lukács’s seminal *The Historical Novel* and chapters 2 and 4 in Fredric Jameson’s *The Political Unconscious*. Essential to these texts is a dialectical model of genre. Rather than viewing genre as an essential modality or unique grouping of formal features, (the “semantic” and “syntactic” in Jameson, 107), genres are intimately linked to specific moments of history: the “source” of genres is “in life itself” (Lukács 90). A genre’s lifespan is contingent on its historical and ideological relevance – when the moment that brings a genre into being passes, or when a genre ceases to reconcile ideological paradoxes, for example, a new more relevant or useful genre replaces or modifies the old. I have used Moretti’s discussion of genre in this and the next chapter not because of his originality but because I find his characterization of generic and historico-cultural dynamics conveniently precise.

⁶⁰ According to Gates, “Cato in particular had captured [the Victorian] imagination”

(82). Cato was a Roman stoic philosopher and statesman whose suicide became “the solemnly revered and much-imitated model of heroic Stoic suicide” (Griffin, “Philosophy II” 194).

According to Miriam Griffin, “Stoicism...is normally given the credit for making the practice of suicide acceptable, not only to members of the school but to society at large” (“Philosophy I” 67).

⁶¹ Arnold was made uneasy by the notion that suicide was “the ultimate use of willpower,” and the suicide of his character Empedocles “put a desperate end to what Arnold felt were desperately unresolvable dilemmas” (Gates 86). Arnold does not condone the suicide of his character, but it is a way of reconciling the tensions between mind and will that Arnold explores in the poem (88). Gates explains, “By putting his death under his own power, Empedocles has finally conquered those haunting self-doubts that tortured him throughout most of Act II, and the tension of Arnold’s dramatic poem is fully resolved...But [Arnold] was repelled by his poem’s fitting resolution” (88).

⁶² Before his first attempt at suicide, Varney once mentions hoping to receive God’s mercy and a release from his suffering: “as the Almighty Master of all things is all merciful, as he is all powerful, the period of my redemption will surely come at last” (Rymer, *VV* II.770). The narrator notes this is “the most consolat [sic] thought that Varney could have,” and that it proves “even yet there was a something akin to humanity lingering at his hears [sic]” (Rymer, *VV* II.770). This “mercy” is never granted to Varney, unless one considers that God does not prevent Varney from leaping into the volcano.

Chapter 4

¹ *The Mysteries of London* was published in weekly issues priced at 1 penny, monthly

parts priced at 6 pennies, and two 52-number volumes at 6s.6d. each (13s. for the pair). See Humpherys and James, “Editors’ Note” (xvii) and Himmelfarb (437). *The Mysteries of London* was also adapted for the stage. Gertrude Himmelfarb mentions that three theatricalizations of *The Mysteries of London* were performed in 1846 (436), and according to Rohan McWilliam, songs from the text were likely performed for theater audiences (186).

² See, for example, Thomas, “Rereading,” (61-62), Humpherys, “G. W. M.” (87). In his introduction to a much abridged version of *The Mysteries of London*, Trefor Thomas explains that “Some surviving sets of the novels have original inscriptions which indicate a respectable middle-class, or even aristocratic, ownership of the volumes” (Introduction xvii). Also, some of the “more lurid and salacious illustrations” were tamed down for the reissue of *The Mysteries of London* in volumes. According to Thomas, “The differences between these illustrations may indicate that [John] Dicks [Reynolds’s publisher] and Reynolds recognized that the social groups able to purchase the text in volume form were likely to be more concerned with taste and respectability than purchasers of the weekly penny numbers” (Introduction xvii).

³ Politically, Reynolds was a Chartist sympathizer and took something of a leadership role in the movement, though apparently many leading Chartists doubted his sincerity and viewed him as an opportunist. In their introduction to *G.W.M. Reynolds: Nineteenth-Century Fiction, Politics, and the Press*, Anne Humpherys and Louis James characterize Reynolds’s involvement in the Chartist movement as “marginal” (5), but Ian Haywood argues that Reynolds was a “vigorous Chartist campaigner for almost four years” (124). Henry Mayhew records that Reynolds’s politics were approved by at least some lower-class individuals. In one interview, a man explained that he was “satisfied that, of all London, Reynolds is the most popular man among [the costermongers]... They all say he’s ‘a trump,’ and Feargus O’Connor [a Chartist

leader] [is] another trump with them” (I.25). For additional views on Reynolds’s role in Chartist politics see Thomas, (Introduction xii), and McWilliam (192).

⁴ Advertisements in *Reynolds’s Miscellany* provide the estimate of 30,000, and Louis James suggests that *Mysteries* was selling nearly 40,000 copies per week (Thomas “Introduction” xv; James *Fiction* 46). Himmelfarb elaborates that the estimate of 40,000 copies does not include back issues, the volumes, translated editions published abroad, or “the usual pirated editions, imitations, adaptations, and plain plagiarisms” (436).

⁵ The final lines of the prologue of *The Mysteries of London* clearly invoke Hogarth’s *Industry and Idleness*: “Along those roads [of vice and virtue] two youths are journeying. They have started from the same point; but one pursues the former path, and the other the latter...to what destinies do those separate roads conduct them?” (G. Reynolds I.2).

⁶ Other scholars have also commented on the melodramatic qualities in *The Mysteries of London*. For example, Rohan McWilliam points out that “[*The Mysteries of London*] is framed by the conventions of melodrama [to indict] modern society with its twin evils of wealth and poverty” (186). For other discussions of *The Mysteries of London* and melodrama, see Grose, Burt, Humpherys (“An Introduction”), and Thomas (Introduction).

The Mysteries of London is an example of the “mysteries novel” genre, the progenitor of which was Eugène Sue’s *Les Mystères de Paris* (1842-1843). This genre was positioned chronologically between the Newgate and Sensation novel, and is essentially melodramatic in its focus on extreme oppositions in society. See Himmelfarb (437), James (“View” 97) and Maxwell (“G.M. Reynolds” 189). In addition to *The Mysteries of London* and *Les Mystères de Paris*, other examples of “mysteries” literature included a second *The Mysteries of London* (1844) by Paul Féval, *The Mysteries of Berlin* (1845), and *The Mysteries and Miseries of New*

York (1848). Ainsworth also began a “mysteries” serial titled *Revelations of London* (Himmelfarb 437, 580 n.8). Hugh Blunt notes that Paul Féval wrote the *Mystères des Londres* (1844) before ever having visited the city. Also, “[t]o give the book *vraisemblance*,” the publishers “put down [the author] as one ‘Sir Francis Trollope’” (Blunt 105). The European *Mysteries of...* novels were so popular that they inspired at least thirteen American mysteries novels (set mostly in Massachusetts) in 1844 (see Zboray and Zboray).

⁷ As part of the effort to curb the trade of body-snatchers like the Resurrection Man, the Anatomy Act of 1832 enabled licensed anatomists to legally obtain unclaimed bodies for dissection. Previously, available bodies were often those of executed criminals – remember that Dr. Chillingworth made a deal with the hangman to obtain Varney’s body for his galvanic experiments just after Varney was hanged – and poor individuals who had not provided financially for their own burials. Resurrectionists were figures of fear; Reynolds’s readers would likely have been familiar with Burke and Hare, two body-snatchers who in the late 1820s murdered victims and profited from selling their bodies. For an extended discussion of these legendary body-snatchers and their impact on popular culture, see Flanders (62-74).

⁸ Later in this chapter I discuss the experiences of prisoners under the discipline of what was known as the “separate system.” See also Philip Priestly’s *Victorian Prison Lives*, Michael Ignatieff’s *A Just Measure of Pain*, and Mayhew and Binny’s *The Criminal Prisons of London*. The latter offers the most in-depth contemporary exploration of the various institutions for managing and reforming criminals.

⁹ See Wiener, parts 2-4.

¹⁰ See chapter 3, page 105, note 6.

¹¹ The prisoner autobiographies analyzed in this chapter are found in Reverend John

Field's treatise, *Prison Discipline; and the Advantages of the Separate System of Imprisonment* (1848), a memoir of Reverend John Clay titled *The Prison Chaplain* (1861) that was compiled by his son, Walter Clay, Reverend H.S. Joseph's *Memoirs of Convicted Prisoners* (1853), and a pamphlet titled *The Prisoner Set Free* (1846), published with comments by Rev. John Clay. The first two texts are on the broader topics of the separate system and the life of a prison chaplain, and the latter two focus solely on prison autobiographies written or dictated by prisoners. Joseph's text also includes letters sent to him by prisoners.

A three-volume work by Rev. Erskine Neale, titled *Experiences of a Gaol Chaplain* (1847), appears at first to be a text similar to Joseph's *Memoirs of Convicted Prisoners*, but, while "deal[ing] seriously with prison reform," it is "entirely fictitious" (Colloms). Despite their suspicions about the veracity of Neale's work, reviewers still found the "accounts" entertaining. See, for example, the 1847 review in *The Critic* ("Experiences"). I suggest that Neale drew some of his material from famous crimes. In the account of "Reza Gray" in *Experiences of a Gaol Chaplain*, Gray is accused of poisoning the family for whom she is housekeeper by feeding them arsenic-laced dumplings (I.102-164). This story shares several details with the real case of Eliza Fenning, a servant executed in 1815 for attempted murder – also by poisoning the dinner dumplings. For Fenning's story, see Flanders (183-200).

¹² Carnochan also discusses other examples of prison reform literature including tracts and longer works such as Mayhew and Binny's *Criminal Prisons of London and Scenes of Prison Life* (1862) and Dixon's *The London Prisons* (1850).

¹³ I have not found any studies comparing the receptions of the prison autobiographies and the criminal biographies, so my assertion about the relative lack of popularity of the prison autobiographies with lower-class readers is a hypothesis. However, I have also found no mention

that they *were* popular. The audience seems rather to have been middle-class readers whom the compilers and publishers of the autobiographies were trying to convince of the benefits of the separate system.

¹⁴ See Levine and Byerly. I will discuss these studies in more detail in the final section of this chapter.

¹⁵ The number of constructed or renovated prisons during this period was between 20 (Ignatieff 197) and 50 (Priestly 37; Harding 153).

¹⁶ See my discussion in chapter 2.

¹⁷ The separate system was being tested almost a decade before Pentonville at Millbank prison. In 1839 Parliament established separation as the basic penal framework in prisons (See Grass 29-31). The main alternative to the separate system was the silent system, the model for which was the Auburn, NY penitentiary. Under the silent system inmates were allowed silent association – being in proximity to one another without speaking – during times of work, chapel and exercise.

¹⁸ The only society allowed a prisoner was that of the governor, chaplain, and other prison officers (Mayhew and Binny 102).

¹⁹ Even the chapel, “the brain of the penitentiary machine,” was designed so that inmates remained separate during religious services. Michael Ignatieff records the chapel routine: “The file of men halted at the chapel door. A duty warder went to a number machine and began to crank. When the convict’s number appeared on the board, he stepped out of file and moved along the rows until he reached his box and closed the door behind him” (5). Efficiency was sacrificed for adherence to principle – moving prisoners in and out of the chapel required an hour (McGowen, “Well-Ordered” 105).

²⁰ According to Sean Grass, these repetitive activities were sometimes “arranged so that they performed productive labor like grinding flour or corn. More frequently, they were simply used to punish, and to ensure that prisoners grew accustomed to working for their bread” (243-244, n. 43).

²¹ See my discussion of the consequences of the prison stigma in chapter 3, pp. 133-134.

²² This sentence was served *before* being transported. Pentonville first opened as “a portal to a penal colony,” meaning that prisoners endured a full eighteen months of isolation before being transported, usually to Tasmania (Mayhew and Binny 114). This sentence was reduced to twelve, and then nine, months in an effort to reduce the frequency of prisoner insanity.

²³ Pentonville was “a monument to faith in an ideal” that prisoners could be reformed through the separate system, but it was not the first nor last prison to incorporate methods of solitude and silence into its penal regime (McGowen, “Well-Ordered” 101). In the late 1700s, for example, the bridewell prison at Petworth implemented separate cells and chapel stalls, and Jonas Hanway wrote a treatise in 1776 that described the positive effects of solitude on the reformation of prisoners (McGowen, “Well-Ordered” 86, 91). In the early 1840s, Millbank Prison, Preston Gaol, and Brixton House of Correction were moving toward or had adopted the separate system.

The separate system was most enthusiastically supported and implemented between 1835 and 1850. According to Sean Grass, “On an average day at mid-century, England’s new separate penitentiaries held more than one-fourth of all prisoners in England and Wales, and a much higher proportion of those who had already been convicted and sentenced...[by the early 1860s] nearly 15,000 cells [had been] designed for the separate confinement of criminal inmates” (37-

38). That so many prisons operated on the separate system suggests that a perception of a homogeneous criminality would have been firmly established in many minds.

²⁴ Ignatieff explains that concerns with disease and imprisonment, both real and figurative, date back at least to the early 1600s (25). There was a legitimate precedent for the connection between prisoners and disease, and this association “had almost attained the status of a proverb in the eighteenth century” (Ignatieff 52). One notable example of the ability of prisoners to spread real disease occurred in 1750. A prisoner with “gaol fever” (typhus) was brought to trial at the Old Bailey and mortally infected about 50 people in the court, including the Lord Mayor (Howard 18-19).

²⁵ See, for example, Pitt’s *Susan Hopley* and Haines’s *My Poll and My Partner Joe*. In both plays, the clearly delineated virtuous and wicked characters receive their just deserts.

²⁶ See for example Humpherys “Geometry,” Thomas (Introduction), Burt and McWilliam.

²⁷ According to Booth, at least half of all theater seats in London were in lower-class areas, and “the staple dramatic fare in all these theaters was melodrama” (“Melodrama” 98).

²⁸ One well-known acting manual was Henry Siddons’s *Practical Illustrations of Rhetorical Gesture and Action*. This text contains descriptions and illustrations of the physical appearance of many emotions. See Vlock (20-26) for more on the pervasiveness of theatrical gesture, posture, and speech in real life.

²⁹ See chapter 1 of Booth’s *English Melodrama* for a detailed description of each of these character types.

³⁰ Indeed, the narrator repeatedly designates him as such. See, for example, G. Reynolds I.104 and II.47.

³¹ In the melodrama *My Poll and My Partner Joe* (1835), Harry Halliyard is one such hero, though he ultimately proves to be quite capable. After being pressed back into the navy by the wiles of the villainous slaver Black Brandon and separated from his beloved Mary (nicknamed Pretty Poll of Putney), he plays a key role in defeating Brandon in a sea-battle and destroying a fort that supplies slaves. See Haines, *My Poll*. The version of *My Poll and My Partner Joe* that I consulted for this chapter was copied from an 1835 performance at the Surrey Theatre.

³² Upon being released from prison after serving two years for a forgery he did not commit, Richard Markham finds that his family's financial advisor has lost almost all of Richard's inheritance in an investment scheme concocted by a Mr. Allen (Eugene). Eugene was not aware that his brother's financial well-being would suffer from this cheat (G. Reynolds I.104-105).

³³ Eugene *does* do much harm to many other characters but, unlike the Resurrection Man, he is not depicted as inherently evil.

³⁴ Michael Booth confirms that black is "the villain's colour" (*English* 20). Black is certainly the color of "Black Brandon," the villain in *My Poll and My Partner Joe*, who captains a ship with a black hull called "Black Bet," and who is once referred to as a "black-looking piratical robber!" (Haines 32).

³⁵ There are also interesting parallels between the Resurrection Man and vampires. The Resurrection Man appears "cadaverous," a common vampire trait, and, more significantly, he is seemingly indestructible, and menaces Richard Markham after surviving an explosion (G. Reynolds I.207, 277), a stab wound (I.413, II.74), and catching the plague on an infected ship during a robbery (II.90, II.142). As one character puts it, "that feller has as many lives as a cat"

(II.142). When Tidkins reappears after surviving the plague-ship, “his whole appearance denoted poverty and privation. He was thin and emaciated; his eyes were sunken; his cheeks hollow; and his entire countenance more cadaverous and ghastly than ever” (II.142). The Resurrection Man tells his companion how he recovered from the plague: “I fell back insensible. When I awoke, the broad daylight was shining overhead...I rose with great difficulty; but I was much refreshed with the long sleep I had enjoyed” (II.143). The description of the Resurrection Man’s appearance recalls Varney the vampire’s countenance when he has gone too long without blood; his awaking refreshed after a “long sleep” suggests coming back from the dead – all that is lacking are the moonbeams.

³⁶ McGowen elaborates that this homogeneous view of criminality contributed to the pervasive idea of a “criminal class” (“Well-Ordered” 103). See chapter 7 in Emsley’s *Crime and Society in England*, chapter 4 in Tobias’s *Crime and Industrial Society*, and McGowen’s “Getting to Know the Criminal Class.”

³⁷ See Brantlinger and my discussion in chapter 3 about the gradual obsolescence of the criminal biography brought about by the new prevalence of prisons.

³⁸ In *Memoirs of Convicted Prisoners*, Reverend H.S. Joseph identifies his audience as comprising “the parent, the clergyman, the teacher, the master – aye, and even the discharged prisoner himself” (viii).

³⁹ According to Anna Schur, Charles Dickens was particularly suspicious of the authenticity of the “repentance” expressed in many of the prison autobiographies. See Schur, especially pp. 142-144.

⁴⁰ I have not located this volume, if indeed it was every published. For more details about

Rev. John Clay and Preston Prison, see Margaret DeLacy's "Toward the Future: John Clay and the Separate System" in *Prison Reform in Lancashire* (205-224) and Bill Forsythe's entry on Clay in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

⁴¹ W.C.'s short autobiography is found on page 65 of Joseph's *Memoirs of Convicted Prisoners*.

⁴² For Victorian criticism of the separate system, specifically, see Ignatieff (196-200).

⁴³ As follows are the page numbers in *The Mysteries of London* on which these stories begin: the Buffer, I.304; the Rattlesnake, I.353; Crankey Jem, II.176; and the Resurrection Man, I.191. The only article-length analysis of any of these narratives I have found is by Grose. There are other autobiographies told in the text, though the narrators are not precisely criminals. These autobiographies are told by a fallen woman named Lydia Hutchinson (II. 115), Smithers, the public executioner (II.75), and Major Anderson, a ruined ex-gamster (II.306).

⁴⁴ The hulks were decommissioned naval ships that had been turned into prisons. For more information see, for example, Emsley (277-278).

⁴⁵ The treadmill was a very severe form of unproductive punishment. In the *Bentley's Miscellany* series "The Gaol Chaplain," a man imprisoned for poaching tells the chaplain that the treadmill "made me irritable, quarrelsome, sullen, savage!...It merged my thoughts in bodily fatigue and exhaustion. Instead of encouraging me by cheerful employment in prison to seek labour as the means of honest subsistence when I left it, it confirmed me in my hatred to labour by compelling me to submit to it in its most painful, irksome, and exhausting form" ("Gaol Chaplain" 517). See Grass (43-46), for more detail on the physical and psychological ramifications of Victorian prison punishments.

⁴⁶ There are important political overtones in the Resurrection Man's story and

enthusiasm for arson. During his narration of how he set fire to the properties of those who had wronged him, he points out, “the upper classes wonder that there are so many incendiary fires: my only surprise is, that there are so few! Ah! the Lucifer-match is a fearful weapon in the hands of the man whom the laws, the aristocracy, and the present state of society have ground down to the very dust” (G. Reynolds I.196). The Resurrection Man recalls a song he composed as he watched the baronet’s barn burn, which included the lines “The proud may oppress and the rich distress,/And drive us from their door;—/But they cannot snatch the Lucifer-match/From the hand of the desperate poor!” (I.196). The lucifer-match would again become an important symbol in class struggle in the match-girls’ strike at the Bryant and May factory in July 1888.

⁴⁷ Even Richard Markham suffers from the stigma of having been in prison. Upon his release, “he could not shake off the idea that his very countenance proclaimed him to be a *Freed Convict*” (G. Reynolds I.103).

⁴⁸ Coal-whippers were men who hauled coal off of ships. This coal-whipper, who is named Joe, explains that the whippers’ employment comes through landlords of public houses, who act as middle-men between the colliers and the men who are hired to unload the ships. The coal-whippers must go through the landlords for work, and if a whipper does not patronize a landlord by buying sufficient quantities of alcohol then he risks being denied employment (G. Reynolds I.203).

⁴⁹ In the melodramas I examined while researching this chapter, the term “villain” is reserved only for the primary antagonist(s). See Moncrieff (*Scamps*), Haines (*My Poll*), Pitt, and Jerrold.

⁵⁰ Traditionally, realism and romanticism has been discussed in regard to canonical texts. See, for example, Levine, Byerly, and McKeon (*Origins*).

⁵¹ At this point in the text, Eugene is operating under the alias George Montague. He next changes his name to Montague Greenwood.

⁵² There are hints of vampirism in the scene between Eugene and Sydney. In addition to the reference to Vesuvius that we recognize from *Varney the Vampyre*, when Sydney awakes, her eyes “fell upon a figure to whom her imagination, thus suddenly surprised, and the flickering light of the fire, gave a giant stature” (G. Reynolds I. 55). One is reminded of how the “red glare of the fire” in Flora Bannerworth’s bedroom “throws up the tall, gaunt figure [of Varney] into hideous relief against the long window” (Rymer, *VV* I.3).

⁵³ A lesson also learned by Catherine Morland in Austen’s *Northanger Abbey*.

⁵⁴ Many virtuous characters in theatrical melodrama believe that Providence will aid the moral cause. In *The Scamps of London*, for example, the hero tells his friend, “heaven will nerve the arm of Frank Danvers to fight in the cause of Innocence, and punish the guilty as their crimes deserved [sic]” (Moncrieff 42). In Pitt’s *Susan Hopley*, the villain Gaveston realizes “The hand of Providence is armed against me!” when his plot is discovered (50).

⁵⁵ In one such exception, Richard assists Major Anderson, a ruined ex-gambler, in getting back on his feet (G. Reynolds II.359-372). Later in the narrative, Richard prevents Albert Egerton, a young “flat,” or easy dupe, from being taken in completely by the men who once framed Richard for forgery (II.372, 391-397). Richard does a few other good deeds throughout the text, perhaps as evidence of his virtuousness, but it is somewhat surprising that he does so little after he has the ample means of enacting real change. Markham is very different from later-century characters like Angela Messenger, the brewery heiress in Walter Besant’s *All Sorts and Conditions of Men* (1882), who builds an entire palace of pleasure for the lower-classes in the East End.

⁵⁶ While heroes typically defeat villains, Richard repeatedly fails to secure and conquer his arch-nemesis, the Resurrection Man. That it is Crankey Jem, a pardoned criminal, who finally succeeds in capturing and killing the Resurrection Man suggests that Richard, who has the help of the police and a resourceful Gypsy named Morcar, is so ineffectual that he cannot even bring one London criminal to justice. Jem was transported for housebreaking, but returns illegally to England before his sentence is complete. Once in England, he lives a quiet life and befriends a younger man who later attempts to assassinate Queen Victoria. Jem is instrumental in averting this disaster and is pardoned as a reward for his service to the Crown. The Resurrection Man was responsible for Jem's transportation in the first place, and Jem entraps him out of revenge. The Resurrection Man is dispatched spectacularly: he is imprisoned in a cell of his own construction by Crankey Jem, blinded when he tries to blow open the cell and escape, and then starved to death while Crankey Jem looks on in vengeful satisfaction (G. Reynolds II.416-419). Significantly, it is a criminal who fills the traditional role of the hero and defeats the primary villain of *The Mysteries of London*.

⁵⁷ Ignorance is not an excuse for Richard's lack of engagement with social injustices. Early in *The Mysteries of London*, Richard witnesses a scene at a police station in which individuals are brought in for petty infractions resulting from their poverty and misfortunes. Three people are arrested: a young man as a "rogue and a vagabond" for begging, an elderly man for selling fruit on the street to support his wife and seven children (his "crime" is "obstruct[ing] the way and creat[ing] a nuisance"), and a woman and her three children for creating a disruption at a workhouse when the administrators tried to separate them (G. Reynolds I.36). Though they are eventually released the next day because no one appears against them, the police initially predict that the boy and the old man will receive three months on the treadmill and one month in

prison, respectively. After they are released, Richard gives each of them money (G. Reynolds I.36-39).

⁵⁸ Another example of a contemporary event incorporated into the text is an assassination attempt on Queen Victoria's life. In *The Mysteries of London*, Henry Holford shoots at the Queen (II.250); Edward Oxford had made an attempt in 1840, followed in 1842 by John Francis and John William Bean.

⁵⁹ See G. Reynolds I.182, I.83, and I.220.

⁶⁰ See chapter 3, pp. 141

⁶¹ See chapter 1, note 88

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