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**‘TO PRY UNNECESSARILY INTO OTHER MEN’S SECRETS’:  
CRIME WRITING, PRIVATE SPACES  
AND THE MID-VICTORIAN POLICE MEMOIR**

***Samuel Saunders***<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract**

This article explores connections between eighteenth/early nineteenth century forms of crime writing and police memoir-fiction – a genre that deserves greater recognition for its contribution to the development of the detective genre. It does this through examining how eighteenth/early nineteenth century crime-writing and mid-Victorian police memoirs were connected through their interest in examining private spaces associated with criminality and rendering them public, yet which remained distinct from each other through their different representations of police officers and detectives.

**Keywords:** crime, police, detective, memoir, Victorian, eighteenth century, journalism, fiction, detective fiction, genre development.

**Introduction**

This article explores various connections between eighteenth and early nineteenth century crime writing and mid-Victorian police memoir-fiction. It performs this analysis for two reasons: firstly, to highlight how it came to be considered as a legitimate form of ‘detective fiction’ in the mid-nineteenth century through the contemporary label of the genre as ‘detective literature’. Secondly, it cements how the police-memoir became firmly entrenched into the generic development of crime-fiction overall. It does this through examining a major theme within eighteenth and nineteenth century crime writing – that of publicising private criminal spaces such as the moment of execution, or the scenes inside courtrooms, prison cells or the domestic spaces of the criminals. It then explores the rise of the memoir genre throughout the early nineteenth century, before shifting focus onto how the memoir genre became concerned with law-enforcement, as it was able to perform a similar task to crime-journalism – that of revealing private criminal spaces. However, whilst crime writing was interested in revealing private *criminal* spaces, police-memoirs were concerned with private spaces associated with *policing*.

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## 1 Rationale

The memoir-genre needs further study within academic scholarship on the development of detective fiction. The years between c.1845 to 1870 saw a huge increase in the popularity of police-memoirs, which were published both in popular (and affordable) periodicals and also as standalone novels. Sadly, this influx of cheap fiction is today often overlooked. Scholars working on chronologies of crime fiction often cursorily glance towards mid-Victorian police-memoirs, but scholarly attention tends to progress away from it quickly. Indeed, Ian Ousby dismisses it as merely part of a wider influx of cheap mid-Victorian literature,<sup>2</sup> Charles Rzepka briefly acknowledges the police-memoir, however prefers to focus on the work of Emile Gaboriau,<sup>3</sup> and Stephen Knight mentions several memoir authors but instead examines the development of detection as a literary technique.<sup>4</sup>

However, there is some recognition that police memoir-fiction had an impact on the development of the detective genre. Martin Kayman provides one of the very few standalone chronologies of the memoir genre, and argues that a 'flood' of memoirs emerged in the mid-Victorian era, building on the success of one of the genre's most popular authors – William Russell.<sup>5</sup> Heather Worthington argues that the police-memoir is the first genre where the police-officer or detective takes centre stage,<sup>6</sup> and Haia Shpayer-Makov concurs:

An important exception to the delineation of detective figures in various literary modes was the pseudo-memoirs of detectives. ... This narrative strategy not only expanded the presence of the official detective figure in literature significantly, but also accorded him a central role in the plot.<sup>7</sup>

Consequently, this article seeks to readdress the memoir-genre's presence within the development of the detective novel by situating it alongside other forms of crime writing, and thematically connecting it through the revelation of private criminal spaces.

## 2 Crime Writing and Private Space

Throughout the eighteenth century, various forms of 'crime-writing' became extremely popular. These included various different genres, such as execution broadsides, the

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<sup>2</sup> Ian Ousby, *The Crime and Mystery Book: A Readers Companion*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997), p. 34.

<sup>3</sup> Rzepka, *Detective Fiction*, (Polity, 2005), pp. 90-92.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Knight, *Crime Fiction 1800-2000: Detection, Death, Diversity*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 30-33.

<sup>5</sup> Martin Kayman, *From Bow Street to Baker Street: Mystery, Detection and Narrative*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), p. 122.

<sup>6</sup> Heather Worthington, *The Rise of the Detective in Early Nineteenth Century Popular Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> Haia Shpayer-Makov, *The Ascent of the Detective: Police Sleuths in Victorian and Edwardian England*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 232-233.

*Accounts of the Ordinaries of Newgate*, various criminal biographies and the *Newgate Calendars*, which all directly influenced nineteenth-century periodical and newspaper 'crime-reporting' and which all focused on the criminal, their life and their crimes.<sup>8</sup> Cheaply produced execution broadsides were some of the earliest popular forms of 'crime writing', and boomed in popularity throughout the mid-eighteenth century and into the nineteenth.<sup>9</sup> Sold by peddlers in the crowd at executions, these were single-sheet, sensationalised accounts of criminals and crimes, which contained descriptions of executions, usually accompanied by a crude woodcut-image. They demonstrated 'sovereign or state power ... encapsulated in pictures and prose and [consequently] the spectacle of execution reached a wider audience than would have been possible in reality'.<sup>10</sup> They also provided entertainment and pseudo-moral/religious instruction.<sup>11</sup> However, execution broadsides also contextualised proceedings, and revealed valuable (if sensationalised) information on the criminal through description and 'penitent' verse. Worthington also suggests that public executions were a 'pornographic invasion of the integrity of the body', and helped publicise a usually private moment – the precise moment of death.<sup>12</sup> Broadside thus allowed readers to 'vicariously participate' in both crime and execution, and were therefore windows into various criminal spaces.<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps in response to broadsides' popularity, the Ordinaries of Newgate began to publish records of their experiences. These were titled the *Accounts of the Ordinaries of Newgate* and were less sensationalised and more expensive. In 1770 a copy cost 6d, whereas broadsides were sold for as little as 2d to 2½d for a dozen copies.<sup>14</sup> In a similar fashion to broadsides, the *Accounts* publicised private spaces of the criminal world through contextualisation. They had an edge, however, as the Ordinary had direct access to the condemned and could obtain insider-information about which street-sellers could only speculate.<sup>15</sup> The private moments rendered public by the *Accounts* therefore often surrounded heartfelt scenes of confession, penitence and farewell from inside the prison, for example this scene from the execution of Elizabeth Brownrigg in 1767:

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<sup>8</sup> Heather Worthington, *Key Concepts in Crime Fiction*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. xi.

<sup>9</sup> Vic Gatrell, *The Hanging Tree: Execution and the English People, 1770-1868*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) p. 157; Judith Rowbotham, Kim Stevenson and Samantha Pegg, *Crime News in Modern Britain: Press Reporting and Responsibility 1850-2010* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) ch.1.

<sup>10</sup> Worthington, *The Rise of the Detective*, p. 7.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 6-8.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, p. 20.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, p. 7.

<sup>14</sup> Vic Gatrell, *The Hanging Tree*, p. 159.

<sup>15</sup> Gatrell, *The Hanging Tree*, p. 7.

She seemed quite composed and resigned, and continued in prayer with her husband and son upwards of two hours, when she took leave of them, which exhibited a scene too affecting for words to describe, and which drew tears from all present.<sup>16</sup>

The *Newgate Calendar(s)*, collections of tales that had previously appeared as both broadsides and *Accounts* is perhaps the best known and an extremely popular form of crime-writing of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.<sup>17</sup> The first issue under this name emerged in 1773,<sup>18</sup> and subsequent editions remained clearly connected with earlier crime writing. The same farewell-scene in the Brownrigg case was described in the *Calendar* of 1825, almost replicated almost verbatim and which also mentions the presence of the Ordinary himself:

The parting between her and her husband and son, on the morning of her execution, was affecting beyond description. The son falling on his knees, she bent herself over him and embraced him; while the husband was kneeling on the other side. ... Before her exit, she joined in prayer with the Ordinary of Newgate, whom she desired to declare to the multitude that she confessed her guilt, and acknowledged the justice of her sentence.<sup>19</sup>

*Newgate Calendars* allowed readers to feel that which Charles Rzepka dubs, 'smug condemnation of ... despicable villains'<sup>20</sup> and, naturally building on earlier voyeuristic interests, depicted various private spaces and moments. However there was reduced focus on punishment and more interest in the criminals' lives and crimes. Consequently, *Newgate Calendars* often depicted domestic scenes and the moments of crimes, rather than prison or gallows scenes:

On a particular night Hallam came home very much in liquor, and went to bed, desiring his wife to undress herself, and come to bed likewise. She sat, partly undressed, on the side of the bed, as if afraid to go in; while he became quite enraged at her paying no regard to what he said. At length she ran down stairs, and he followed her, and locked the street-door to prevent her going out. On this she ran up into the dining-room, whither he likewise followed her, and struck her several times. He then went into another room for his cane, and she locked him in. [...] Enraged at this, he broke open the door, and, seizing her in his arms, threw her out of the window, with her head foremost, and her back to the ground, so that, on her falling, her back was broken, her skull fractured, and she instantly expired.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> *Ordinary's Account (Elizabeth Brownrigg)*, 14<sup>th</sup> September 1767, Old Bailey Online, online resource available at <https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?div=OA17670914>, [accessed 2 February 2017], (1767).

<sup>17</sup> Worthington, *Key Concepts in Crime Fiction*, p. 9.

<sup>18</sup> Stephen Knight, *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction*, (Macmillan, 1980), p. 9.

<sup>19</sup> Andrew Knapp (ed.), 'Elizabeth Brownrigg: Executed for Torturing her Female Apprentices to Death', in *The Newgate Calendar*, 5 Vols. (J. Robins and Co, 1825), 2: 369-374.

<sup>20</sup> Charles Rzepka, *Detective Fiction*, p. 52.

<sup>21</sup> Knapp, *The Newgate Calendar*, 2: 311-312.

It is important to note that crime writing became formulaic as these crime narratives evolved. They recounted the lives of criminals and the moment of the crime, before retelling their capture, imprisonment, trial and punishment. As the cheap press expanded across the early-nineteenth century, various publications began including formulaically similar crime 'round up' features, including *John Bull*, the *Sixpenny Magazine*, *Bell's Life in London*, the *Lady's Magazine*, the *Leader*, the *London Review*, *Once a Week*, the *Examiner* and the *Spectator*. As the 'life, trial and execution' formula was transposed from early crime writing into these periodicals, the desire to publicise private criminal spaces was too. Periodical crime-narratives also publicised details surrounding the murder, and also 'revealed' a multitude of private spaces by depicting intimate, domestic relationships between people. An example of this is taken from the *Leader*, in 1858:

At daybreak, his brother, who slept in the same room, observed blood on his shirt, and asked the cause. Atkinson replied that he had murdered Mary Jane Scaife on the previous night; on which the brother roused the family, and told them the dismal news. ... On Wednesday, Atkinson was examined before the county magistrates at Knaresborough, and he then made a verbal confession of his guilt. The girl had refused to marry him ... He then threatened to murder her ... [he] soon pulled out a knife, and showed it her. "She cried out, 'let's go home, Jim – let's go home, Jim!' Then I seized her and cut her throat..."<sup>22</sup>

In periodicals, the use of a character that was 'close' to the crime became a common trope used to publicise private spaces. In the above example, the murderer himself provided testimony, which naturally legitimised the details. In another example from 1858, the *Leader* recounted a murder which occurred in Manchester:

On Thursday morning early a young woman went to her sister's house in Little-Lever-street. She knew that her sister and her husband had not been living comfortably together, and was taking her some bread and butter. She looked through the kitchen window before opening the door, and saw her sister lying with her head on the floor...<sup>23</sup>

The fact that a relative of the victim discovered the body legitimised the information as both true and confidential, and the circumstances which led to the murder followed using a neighbour's testimony:

At the inquest a neighbour said that the deceased and her husband were drinking and fighting every night. About three o'clock that morning witness was awoke by a great noise in the prisoner's house. She heard three successive heavy falls down the stairs, and then a female cried out.<sup>24</sup>

In 1866 the *London Review* published 'The Cannon Street Murder', which used the testimony of a neighbouring housekeeper to produce 'insider information'. However, this time

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<sup>22</sup> 'Criminal Record', *Leader*, 7 August 1858, p. 767.

<sup>23</sup> 'Criminal Record', *Leader*, 2 October 1858, pp. 1021-1022.

<sup>24</sup> 'Criminal Record', *Leader*, 2 October 1858, p. 1022.

the magazine expressed disappointment with the testimony, as her relationship to the crime was clearly not close enough:

The testimony of Mrs. Robbins, the housekeeper at a neighbouring warehouse in Cannon-street, was most unsatisfactory. She said that on the night of the murder she heard Messrs. Bevington's door shut violently at about ten minutes past ten, and saw a man come from the door whom she subsequently recognised at the station-house in the person of the prisoner ... But it appears that on the previous day [the prisoner] was taken past the house by the police, and that Mrs. Robbins, though told beforehand what was going to be done, could not recognise the man.<sup>25</sup>

### 3 Early Nineteenth Century Police-Memoirs

As I have suggested, 'crime-writing' was largely interested in providing readers with insights into private criminal spaces, including prison cells, executions, court-rooms, domestic spaces, and the moment of the crime. As the police slowly emerged as a nationwide system of law-enforcement across the early-to-mid nineteenth century, some authors also became interested in also depicting their private spaces and operations in much the same way. However the police remained absent from newspaper/periodical crime writing. The only mention of police officers or detectives in mid-century narratives of crime was usually one line at most, mentioning an unnamed police officer or detective who was present only to validate the criminal's identity and make the arrest. For example, the magazine *John Bull* wrote in 1862 that, 'holding told this to the Blackburn police on Saturday, and on Sunday the men were apprehended'.<sup>26</sup> In this, the police were shown to have worked outside the scope of the article's description, as it was not in its remit to publicise the world of the police. The 'life, trial and execution' formula, well established by earlier forms of crime-writing, had little need for a police-detective, as the criminal's guilt was established prior to the narrative's printing, and was in most cases the *reason* for its printing.<sup>27</sup>

Consequently, a different genre was used to publicise the private world of policing: memoir-fiction. This became popular at mid-century, but was not a Victorian invention and did not emerge as the result of a specific desire to publicise the police. A list of titles highlights an eclectic mixture of subjects that the memoir-genre was used to explore, including 'Memoirs of a Missionary' published in *The Satirist* (1810), 'Memoirs of a Recluse' in *The European Magazine* (1816), 'Recollections of a Metropolitan Curate' in *The European Magazine* (1819), 'Memoirs of a Misanthrope' in *The London Magazine* (1822), 'The Memoir of a Hypochondriac' in *The London Magazine* (1822), 'Real Scene in the Life of an Actress' in

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<sup>25</sup> 'The Cannon Street Murder', *London Review*, 16 June 1866, p. 66.

<sup>26</sup> 'Law and Police', *John Bull*, 6 December 1862, p. 781.

<sup>27</sup> Knight, *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction*, p. 12.

*The Weekly Entertainer* (1823), 'The Recollections of a Student' in *The New Monthly Magazine* (1823), and 'Recollections of a Tour in France' in *The Weekly Entertainer* (1824).

Memoir-fiction both brought the author's experiences closer to readers and, as Worthington suggests, it made 'public what had been private'.<sup>28</sup> This connected the memoir genre with crime writing thematically and was ideal to publicise the world of law enforcement. The memoir-genre became earnestly concerned with policing around the mid-nineteenth century, however there were some isolated proto-examples. These included 'Diary of a Barrister during the Last Wexford Assizes', published in the *New Monthly Magazine* in 1826 and which told the story of the rotating courts of assize as if it was constructed from the recollections of a barrister's private, unpublished notebook. Additionally, *Richmond, or, Scenes in the Life of a Bow Street Runner* (1827) also publicised the world of law-enforcement, by relating first-hand the experiences of a Bow Street Runner, and worked hard to 'reveal' the worlds of criminal and under-classes such as gypsies and circus performers. It also publicised the physical operations and methodologies of the Runners, and bridged a gap between crime writing interested in publicising private spaces of criminality and later police memoir-fiction interested in publicising private spaces of law enforcement. Today, *Richmond* remains largely forgotten, though it is known among more specialised academic circles. Heather Worthington provides a rare detailed analysis, where she suggests that *Richmond* was 'teenage', between the 'infancy of policing' and its 'coming of age as the New Metropolitan Police',<sup>29</sup> and she also suggests that it is isolated from earlier crime-genres as it does not contain the 'spectacle of sovereign power'.<sup>30</sup>

The satirical *Life of a Policeman by an Ex-Constable* appeared in the *Penny Satirist* in 1843, and is another proto-example of police memoir-fiction. It was apparently genuinely authored by a police constable employed by the Liverpool Constabulary in the late 1830s, and provided readers with a satirical, half-fictional, half-truthful<sup>31</sup> view into the 'daily drudgery of the lowly police-constable on the beat'.<sup>32</sup> Its position as a satire of the police, coupled with its description of constables sneaking off to drink or avoiding the inspectors, who attempted to ensure that the constables were constantly working constantly,<sup>33</sup> separates it from later

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<sup>28</sup> Worthington, *The Rise of the Detective*, p. .

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, p. 105.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>31</sup> Nick Foggo, 'The Life of a Liverpool Policeman, or, Fact and Fictionalisation in the Early Years of the Liverpool Constabulary Force', *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, TBC (2018), p. 3 (*This article is in a draft stage and has been accepted but not yet been published by the journal. However, I am grateful to Dr. Foggo for providing me with a draft copy.*).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, p. 1.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, p. 6.



examples of police memoir-fiction, which often presented the police as incorruptible, professionalised members of a structured system.

Finally, Charles Dickens's famous exploits alongside Inspectors Field and Whicher appeared in *Household Words* in 1850-51, and Field famously became the inspiration for Inspector Bucket in *Bleak House* (1853).<sup>34</sup> Dickens published accounts of his experiences in *Household Words*, including, 'A Detective Police Party' (1850), 'Three Detective Anecdotes' (1850) and 'On Duty with Inspector Field' (1851).<sup>35</sup> 'These provided an 'internal' view into the world of the police, as Dickens was a direct observer and privy to sensitive information. Dickens narrated conversations between the police officers as if he was not there, and also provided descriptions of inside the police-station:

Anything doing here to-night? Not much. We are very quiet. A lost boy, extremely calm and small, sitting by the fire, whom we now confide to a constable to take home, for the child says that if you show him Newgate Street, he can show you where he lives – a raving drunk woman in the cells, who has screeched her voice away, and has hardly power enough left to declare, even with the passionate help of her feet and arms, that she is the daughter of a British officer, and, strike her blind and dead, but she'll write a letter to the Queen! but who is soothed with a drink of water – in another cell, a quiet woman with a child at her breast, for begging – in another, her husband in a smock-frock, with a basket of watercresses – in another, a meek tremulous old pauper man who has been out for a holiday "and has took but a little drop, but it has overcome him arter [sic] so many months in the house" – and that's all, as yet.<sup>36</sup>

#### 4 Mid-to-Late Victorian Police Memoir-Fiction

However, Dickens' presence precludes his nightly exploits from being labelled as police memoir-fiction proper. These were not a police officer's memoirs, nor were they entirely fictional. The most common form of 'police-memoir fiction' emerged during the mid-nineteenth century. Many examples of fictional 'memoirs' marketed as the true accounts of police officers were published between c.1850 and c.1880.<sup>37</sup> William Russell was perhaps the most prolific author of police-memoirs of the 1850s and 1860s. Born in Southampton in around 1805, by the late 1840s Russell was a writer living in London. He was an unsettled figure, having had nine addresses between 1845 and 1856, centred on Stoke-Newington. However, on the 1851 census his occupation is listed as 'Author Writer for Chief Periodicals', implying that his income was substantial enough for him to make a living from writing

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<sup>34</sup> Rzepka, *Detective Fiction*, p. 90.

<sup>35</sup> Worthington, *The Rise of the Detective in Early Nineteenth Century Popular Fiction*, p. 164.

<sup>36</sup> 'On Duty with Inspector Field', *Household Words*, 14 June 1851, p. 64.

<sup>37</sup> 'Victorian Detective Fiction: An Introduction', <http://crimeculture.com/Contents/VictorianCrime.html>, [Accessed 9 September 2016].

alone.<sup>38</sup> Today, within scholarship, Russell is often perceived as either a hack,<sup>39</sup> or a small moment in the generic development only. His anonymous identity, coupled with the cheap nature of the writing, has led to scholarly 'glossing' by critics such as Charles Rzepka and Stephen Knight, who briefly mention Russell's success but only in relation to *other* literary advances in the detective genre.<sup>40</sup> Despite this, Russell was part of a significant mid-century literary movement. It is premature to suggest that these are of little historic or academic value, as Russell made use of an 'innovative and popular form'.<sup>41</sup> The genre was designed to take the private spaces, operations and methodologies of the police force, and publicise them for the reader, and Russell himself explained that his memoir writing was designed to present an inside view into policing for readers. In 1856 Russell argued:

I, therefore, offer no apology, for placing these rough sketches of the police experience before the reader. They describe incidents more or less interesting and instructive of the domestic warfare constantly waging between the agents and the breakers of the law...<sup>42</sup>

It is also interesting that Russell had an awareness of detective fiction as an emerging literary genre, and connected it to his police memoirs. In 1862 Russell wrote:

"Detective" literature ... appears to have acquired a wide popularity, chiefly, I suppose, because the stories are believed to be, in the main, faithfully-told, truthful narratives. I have read them all, and need hardly say have discovered mistakes that proved to me that the best, most popular of them were the handiwork of a literary man, not the records of an actual experience. I have frequently made remarks in this sense to my friends, several of whom thereupon suggested that I should publish my own real experiences.<sup>43</sup>

Russell directly suggested that 'detective literature' was the 'police-memoir'. This pointed to the fact that the fundamental idea of 'detective literature' was to relate the experiences of police officers and that it was this which characterised the genre. For all intents and purposes therefore, in the 1860s 'detective fiction' was 'police-memoir fiction'. An article from the *Dublin Review* published in May 1861 agreed:

Just now books of narratives of detectives and ex-detectives are all the fashion. Diaries, note-books, and confessions issue from the press in shoals, and one would naturally expect to find amongst them a complete disclosure of an ingenious and successful system.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> 1851 UK Census, Ecclesiastical District of: West Hackney, Borough of: Tower Hamlets, entry 255: 9 Southgate Place. Resource accessed through <http://www.ancestry.co.uk> [Accessed 24 November 2016].

<sup>39</sup> Ousby, *The Crime and Mystery Book*, p. 34.

<sup>40</sup> Rzepka, *Detective Fiction*, pp. 90-92.

<sup>41</sup> Shpayer-Makov, *The Ascent of the Detective*, p. 234.

<sup>42</sup> William Russell, *Recollections of a Detective Police-Officer*, (J&C Brown and Co., 1856), p. vi.

<sup>43</sup> 'Experiences of a Real Detective', *Sixpenny Magazine*, March 1862, p. 325.

<sup>44</sup> 'Recollections of a Detective Police Officer, by "Waters"' (Review), *The Dublin Review*, May 1861, p. 153.

Similarly, other authors also picked up on this point. In 1864 'An Australian Detective's Story' appeared in *Once a Week*, which also commented on the contemporary popularity of police-memoirs:

On the occasion of a recent sojourn at H., I heard the story I am about to tell; it has never yet been given to the public, and yet it well deserves a place among those detective notabilia which of late years have furnished such curious illustrations of the science of crime-discovery. I give it in the words of my informant, at least so far as substantial verity is concerned:-

"I am a detective in the Victoria police, and have been one for some years; I was formerly one in Paris, and I was employed as such in the Hyde Park Exhibition of 1851..."<sup>45</sup>

The suggestion here was that 'detective literature' was designed to illustrate both the closed world of the police and the 'science of crime discovery', or in other words, 'detection'. The police-memoir was, again, considered to be a concrete form of 'detective fiction'.

Russell's police-memoirs included 'Experiences of a Barrister' (1849) and 'Recollections of a Police Officer' (1849), both published in *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal*. 'Recollections of a Police Officer' was novelised in 1856, retitled *Recollections of a Detective Police Officer*, and a 'second series' of stories from *Recollections* appeared in 1859.<sup>46</sup> The popularity of *Recollections of a Detective Police Officer* directly spawned *Leaves from the Diary of a Law Clerk* (1857), marketed as a new set of stories from the same author.<sup>47</sup> This was followed up by *The Experiences of a French Detective Officer* (1861) and 'Experiences of a Real Detective' (1862), published in the *Sixpenny Magazine*. Finally, *Autobiography of an English Detective* was published in two volumes in 1863.

*Recollections of a Police Officer* was serialised between 1849 and 1853. Each issue contained a short story, which followed the career of an officer named 'Waters', and which publicised the private spaces of the police, including both physical spaces and also their detective-methodologies and relationships between officers. For example, a story titled 'Mary Kingsford' (1851) depicted Waters being forced off of a train and into a waiting room alongside other passengers. Immediately, the reader was provided with a demonstration of Waters's skill at 'reading' people:

Two persons had travelled in the same compartment with me from Birmingham, whose exterior, as disclosed by the dim light of the railway carriage, created some surprise that such finely-attired, fashionable gentlemen should stoop to journey by the plebeian, penny-a-mile train. I could now observe them in a clearer light, and

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<sup>45</sup> 'An Australian Detective's Story', *Once a Week*, 24 December 1864, p. 25.

<sup>46</sup> 'Recollections of a Detective Police Officer, by "Waters"' (Review), *The Dublin Review*, May 1861, p. 150.

<sup>47</sup> William Russell, *Leaves from the Diary of a Law Clerk*, (J & C Brown and Co., 1857), p. 3.

surprise at their apparent condescension vanished at once. To an eye less experienced than mine in the artifices and expedients familiar to a certain class of 'swells,' they might have passed muster for what they assumed to be ... but their copper finery could not for a moment impose upon me. The watch-chains were, I saw, mosaic; the watches, so frequently displayed, gilt; eye-glasses the same; the coats, fur-collared and cuffed, were ill-fitting and second hand; ditto of the varnished boots and renovated velvet waist-coats; while the luxuriant moustaches and whiskers, and flowing wigs, were unmistakeably *pieces d'occasion* – assumed and diversified at pleasure.<sup>48</sup>

Russell also publicised the wider police force's physical operations and structures. Several tales, including 'Mary Kingsford' and 'The Widow' from 1850, and 'Flint Jackson' from 1851, begin with Waters describing how he was 'despatched' or 'ordered' by his superiors to a town or area to investigate crime, often far from London, including Liverpool and Guernsey. Waters interacted with officers working on the same case, who often inform him of specific and important details. For example, in 'The Twins' (1850), Waters is summoned and provided with the details of a potentially useful source of information:

My services, the superintendent late one afternoon informed me, were required in a perplexed and entangled affair, which would probably occupy me for some time ... 'There,' he added, 'is a Mr. Repton, a highly-respectable country solicitor's card. He is from Lancashire and staying at the Webb's Hotel, Piccadilly. You are to see him at once, he will put you in possession of all the facts ... and you will then use all possible diligence to ascertain first if the alleged crime has been really committed, and if so, of course to bring the criminal or criminals to justice.'<sup>49</sup>

These connections with the wider police provided insights into how the organisation was structured and directed, and highlighted organisational relationships between officers, and were often marketed as 'sensitive information'.

This kind of police-memoir became common, as many authors sought to capitalise on their popularity. Some really were truthful recollections, such as *Autobiography of a French Detective* (1862) by Monsieur Louis Canler, however these were rare. As the genre grew, some writers gave their work unique twists that distinguished their work. Charles Martel's *Diary of an Ex-Detective* (1860) followed a loquacious detective-character (known as 'F-') in his campaigns, and the protagonist received orders only via letter which suggested that he operated more secretly than 'Waters', as he had a specific identity as a 'detective' rather than a fluid identity that fluctuated between 'police-officer' and 'detective'.<sup>50</sup> 'F-' also worked on a long-term basis by embedding himself among different groups, in disguise. This helped

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<sup>48</sup> 'Recollections of a Police-Officer', *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal*, 3 May 1851, p. 274.

<sup>49</sup> 'Recollections of a Police-Officer', *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal*, 22 June 1850, p. 387.

<sup>50</sup> Charles Martel (ed.), *Diary of an Ex-Detective*, (Ward, Lock and Tyler 1860), pp. 1-3.

to reveal both a multitude of private, inaccessible physical spaces and also detectives' methodologies:

I was in the habit of visiting a certain public-house in Lower Thames Street, where I was in the hopes of meeting as sea-captain, who was 'wanted' for trying to sink his ship and defraud the underwriters. I made-up as a working-man, and used to spend the evening in blowing a cloud....<sup>51</sup>

The fluid nature of *detectives'* identities thus allowed them to infiltrate closed, private spaces and publicise them for readers more efficiently than a uniformed police officer, and this also helped to cement the idea that anyone could actually be a detective in disguise.

Some authors opted for alternative locations to distinguish their work and to create new spaces to publicise. *Recollections of a New York Detective*, published in *Twice a Week* in 1862, set itself in the United States, and publicised a different environment through the policeman. It suggested that rural areas of America were isolated, lawless and dangerous, yet the presence of a detective allowed readers to explore them:

...rumours reached New York that a small town in the extreme western portion of the State was the theatre of crimes. Several atrocious murders and robberies had been committed there, and not the slightest clue had been found as to the perpetrators of these deeds. There was no telegraphy or railroad to the town in question, therefore the reports that reached the metropolis were, in the first instance, vague and contradictory...<sup>52</sup>

Additionally, this also publicised the relationships between officers, suggesting that there was a fraternal bond between them, and that there was a system of professional support in place.<sup>53</sup>

Two further police-memoirs, Andrew Forrester's *The Female Detective* and William Stephen's Hayward's *Revelations of a Lady Detective*, appeared in 1864 and were 'unique' in that they used female detective protagonists, and scholarly attention has focused on the fact that the detectives are women. Kestner argues that they diversified a male-dominated literary genre, but they were threats to male power-centres and thus crushed,<sup>54</sup> and Kathleen Klein suggests that both were merely 'anomalies'.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Martel (ed.), *Diary of an Ex-Detective*, p. 158.

<sup>52</sup> 'Recollections of a New York Detective', *Twice a Week*, September 1862, p. 307

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Joseph Kestner, *Sherlock's Sisters: The British Female Detective 1864 – 1913*, (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2003), pp. 229-230.

<sup>55</sup> Kathleen Klein, *The Woman Detective: Gender and Genre*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), p. 29.

However, they were not 'anomalies', as Klein puts it, as they can instead be historicised alongside other *police-memoirs* (of which there were many), rather than other female detectives. Within this context, I suggest that they were written with the purpose of distinguishing them from their contemporaries by using female detectives as a literary technique. Both authors argued that ladies were perfect for undercover detection. They aroused less suspicion than their male counterparts and were able to infiltrate and reveal private spaces for the reader effectively. In *The Female Detective*, the protagonist Mrs. Gladden argued that 'the woman detective has far greater opportunities than a man of intimate watching and of keeping her eyes upon matters near'.<sup>56</sup> Similarly, in *Revelations of a Lady Detective*, the detective Ms. Paschal argued a similar point, suggesting that the practice of employing women as detectives was more widespread than was known, suggesting that they hid in plain sight:

Fouché, the great Frenchman, was constantly in the habit of employing women to assist him in discovering the various political intrigues which disturbed the peace of the first empire. His petticoated police were as successful as the most sanguine innovator could wish...<sup>57</sup>

Both *The Female Detective* and *Revelations of a Lady Detective* gave unique qualities to other police-memoirs and created additional private spaces, relationships and organisational structures for readers to witness and experience. The fact that these characters were women allowed them to enter (and thus render public) private spaces that even male detectives would be excluded from. This is perhaps most prominently exemplified in the case of 'The Nun, the Will and the Abbess', where Mrs. Paschal's is required to infiltrate a convent, due to it being 'just the case for a Lady Detective', as this was clearly a place where a male detective would have struggled to penetrate.<sup>58</sup>

Eventually, some authors abandoned the pretence that the pieces were written by real detectives, in order to portray how detectives were perceived to the public. In 1886, *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal* published 'My Detective Experiences', which was distinct in that it viewed the police through the eyes of an external party:

On a certain evening, I found, to my dismay, that the entrance-hall of my house had been practically cleared of its contents ... I gave information at the nearest police station, and was informed that a police-officer would wait upon me. On the following day, the servant announded that a man wanted to speak to me at the street-door. I found an herculean individual in the garb of a navvy, with large sandy whiskers and red hair, who informed me that he was a detective. [...] At this moment I was again summoned to the door, where I beheld a somewhat diminutive individual attired as a

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<sup>56</sup> Andrew Forrester, *The Female Detective* (London: Ward, Lock and Tyler, 1864), p. 4.

<sup>57</sup> William Stephens Hayward, *Revelations of a Lady Detective*: (London: George Vickers, 1864), p. 18.

<sup>58</sup> Hayward, *Revelations of a Lady Detective*, p. 143.

clergyman. He was an elderly gentleman, with silver hair ... His 'get-up' to the smallest detail was faultless, even to the gold-rimmed double eyeglass. 'You have a detective here?'

'Yes.'

'I am a sergeant of the E division; can I speak to him?'<sup>59</sup>

This also hearkened to other police-memoirs by depicting the detective as 'revealing' his methodologies and experiences, as well as the relationships and organisational structures of the police force:

In a few minutes, the 'clergyman' left the house, expressing a hope that I should obtain some tidings of my lost property. The 'navvy' remained for about half an hour, relating some of his experiences. 'You see, sir, we have different tools for different jobs. If there is to be any rough-and-tumble business, any work requiring physical strength and muscle, anything dangerous, they employ a man like me.' The speaker stretched his powerful limbs as he spoke with some natural pride. 'Our sergeant would be of no use at all in such work. He does the delicate work, the organising part of the affair – same as a general.'<sup>60</sup>

The late Victorian era saw the relationship between public and police begin to destabilise, and this change in public attitude was reflected in police memoir-fiction. In 1872 the *Argosy* published 'From a Detective's Note-Book', which related the experiences of a private detective. The unstable relationship between official police detectives and private detectives is discussed immediately, as the anonymous detective in this story receives a request from Scotland Yard for his assistance:

It was not the first time that I, a private detective, had been summoned by the authorities at Scotland Yard to inquire into matters they had not themselves succeeded in unravelling. An appeal to me was always a last resource with them. They did not like doing it; it was a confession of weakness that galled and irritated them.<sup>61</sup>

The fact that this text's protagonist worked privately is significant. As a result of the scandal that engulfed the detective department of the Metropolitan Police in 1877 (which was widely reported in the mass-media<sup>62</sup> and led to its very public restructure into CID),<sup>63</sup> the public began to lose confidence in the police and detective system, and began to better understand the distinctions between police officer and detective. Consequently, fictional detectives began to be depicted as working privately, rather than officially. Distrust of detectives became a much more common theme in later examples of the now-diversifying 'detective'

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<sup>59</sup> 'My Detective Experiences', *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal*, 3 April 1886, p. 221.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> 'From a Detective's Note-Book', *The Argosy*, February 1872, p. 116.

<sup>62</sup> For an example of a lengthy media reports on this case, see 'The Charge Against Detectives', *John Bull*, Nov 24 1877. This was merely one of many reports in periodicals and magazines of this case.

<sup>63</sup> 'The Detective System', *Saturday Review*, December 1 1877, p. 681

genre. A final, scathing example of a police-memoir is taken from *Judy* in 1881 demonstrates this attitude of the ‘incompetent detective’:

*‘Little Puddleton, Slopshire, principle hotel – sign of ‘Goat and Gaiters.’ Monday morning, about 9a.m. – Just awake. Refreshed by slumber. ... Came down to breakfast in another disguise ... Mem. – Waiter who brought in grilled kidneys and washing-basket of telegrams has suspicious look. Mem. Again – arrest him after breakfast. ... Later on .... Wonderful energy of British detective when following up clue. Waiter has murderous look, especially when cleaning knives ... Mem. not to arrest him until he has put them away!’<sup>64</sup>*

## Conclusion

The influx of police memoir-fiction, so strongly influenced by the voyeuristic interests of earlier crime writing like the cheap execution broadsides, *Ordinary of Newgate’s Accounts* and *Newgate Calendars*, has been overlooked in the development of the ‘detective genre’. Whilst some cursorily glance towards the genre when performing an analysis of the chronology of the genre, there has been no in-depth or comprehensive exploration of the police memoir as a legitimate moment in the evolution of Victorian detective fiction. Yet this is problematic, as contemporary commentators and authors labelled the genre as ‘detective literature’, and the popularity of the crime-genre, coupled with the rise of the police force across the mid-nineteenth century, caused authors and readers to become interested in how the police operated. However, there was no way that the police could be inserted into the formulaic ‘narrative of crime’, which led to their insertion in the pages of cheap police-memoirs, which effectively allowed authors to explore the internal world of the police just as effectively as the crime-narrative could explore the internal world of the prison and the execution. The presence of a genre designed to open up the closed world of the police force throughout the mid-century suggests a strong, underlying and hitherto unexplored public interest in the methodologies and activities of the police and detectives, and the structure and style of the narratives suggests that the genre had a strong influence on later forms of detective-fiction.

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<sup>64</sup> ‘Scraps from the Diary of a Detective’, *Judy, or, the London Serio-Comic Journal*, 13 July 1881, p. 3.