



## **“I was again passing along Leicester Square ... with all my eyes about me”: Mapping Popular “Police Memoir” Detective Fiction**

**Samuel Saunders**

### **Abstract**

This article explores the use of the police officer in both periodical journalism and cheap, mass-produced “police memoir” fiction from the mid-nineteenth century. It highlights how police officers were inserted into writing that was concerned with urban growth and urban criminality and argues that they helped journalists, authors and readers to map, experience, understand and criticise the growth of the metropolis. The police officer was originally seen to be a protective figure for journalists delving into spaces deemed criminal, and writing about crime for readers’ interest. Across the early-to-mid nineteenth century, social exploration articles appeared frequently in periodicals. The authors were reliant on the police for access to a multitude of criminal spaces that emerged as the city grew. Thus, the police officer’s rise was connected to the city, and the police themselves formed a part of the urban environment, with the power to observe, explore and influence it. The presence of the police officer in journalism led to developments in other kinds of writing, including fiction. The power of the police to reveal hidden or latent criminality in the urban space was actively used in a variety of ways to create new, cheap and popular forms of fiction.

### **Keywords**

police memoir; detective; Victorian; city; crime; policing; journalism; periodicals; fiction; mapping.

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## **“I was again passing along Leicester Square ... with all my eyes about me”: Mapping Popular “Police Memoir” Detective Fiction**

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### **Introduction**

The fictional police memoir was a popular genre of writing from around 1845 to 1875. These were cheaply produced and cheaply sold sensational texts, centred on the city and told from the first-person perspective of imaginary detectives or police officers who had been somehow liberated from the secrecy of police work.<sup>1</sup> The novels utilised a serial short-story format, through which the fictional officers recounted their experiences with different crimes and criminals across their career. Numerous examples of this genre survive in both physical and/or digital formats; initial explorations reveal as many as 70 texts published either in periodicals or as standalone novels in pictorial boards, typically priced 18d. or 2s. However, the genre has been largely forgotten in critical discourse, and is often dismissed as unworthy of attention in terms of its literary value, in connection with other kinds of writing such as social exploration journalism, or as a precursor to detective fiction (Saunders 2018: 77). Ian Ousby, for example, dismisses the genre as “a flood of books presented as the reminiscences of real policemen but [which were] actually fiction written by hacks” (Ousby 1997: 34). Charles Rzepka is also suspicious of the genre’s position as detective fiction, suggesting that detective writing “remained largely submerged in other types of Victorian literature” across the mid-nineteenth century and allowing only that police memoir fiction is a “possible exception” (Rzepka 2005: 99). Stephen Knight, in *Crime Fiction 1800–2000* (2004), performs a brief analysis of several titles and draws a distinction between police memoirs and the memoirs of other professionals.<sup>2</sup> However, like Rzepka, Knight is unconvinced of the police memoir’s codification as detective fiction, as he sees the genre’s procedural nature as a barrier to detection (Knight 2004: 30–3). Instead, Knight argues that other texts, depicting amateur sleuths, might better serve as detective fiction (2004: 32).

Only a few critics recognise the police memoir genre as a legitimate moment. Heather Worthington, for example, argues that the genre was the first moment when a police officer or detective took centre stage (Worthington 2004: 4), while Haia Shpayer-Makov’s book-chapter “Explaining the Rise and Success of Detective Memoirs in Britain” focuses on real police officers and their accounts, as opposed to fictional memoirs. Shpayer-Makov concludes that the fictional genre’s popularity owed a great deal to pervading interest in real officers’ memoirs, which themselves appeared due to the detective department’s creation in 1842:

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<sup>1</sup> In the opening issue of “Experiences of a Real Detective” (*Sixpenny Magazine*, 1862: 325), the author suggests that he is prohibited from revealing his identity, while in the short story “My Last Detective Case” (*Chambers’s Edinburgh Journal*, 1881: 713) the author describes how he was prohibited from relating his experiences while still serving as an officer, but as he has recently retired, he can now do so.

<sup>2</sup> See the distinction between the 1849 texts “Recollections of a Police Officer” and “The Experiences of a Barrister,” both published in *Chambers’s Edinburgh Journal*.

So obvious was the attraction of detectives' life stories to certain perceptive writers ... that although they themselves had no detective experience, they nonetheless wrote fictional recollections in growing numbers as if written by real-life detectives. ... No doubt, the establishment of the detective unit at Scotland Yard in 1842 inspired these writers' efforts.

(Shpayer-Makov 2006: 109)

Shpayer-Makov concludes that the genre owed its existence to the creation of the detective department. However, her subsequent monograph, *The Ascent of the Detective* (2011), provides a far more satisfactory, if still brief, analysis, suggesting that the police memoir was important for raising awareness of detectives in literature (Shpayer-Makov 2011: 232–3, 238).

In this article, I argue that the police memoir genre merits closer critical attention as a transitional literary form between social exploration journalism and detective fiction. Its critical obscurity has stemmed, at least partly, from the fact that much of this material appeared in periodicals and magazines, making it difficult to locate, access and organise. However, the genre has tangible connections to both contemporarily published and later iterations of crime fiction that are today considered generic cornerstones. Indeed, the police memoir even has a recognisable format, as narratives were often presented as collections of short stories loosely connected by various threads, such as inter-story plot devices or the constant presence of the same detective in each tale, which allowed each story to be read either in isolation or as part of a sequence.<sup>3</sup> This format predates by decades the Sherlock Holmes stories, and yet critics such as Mike Ashley have erroneously claimed that it was Arthur Conan Doyle who “essentially invented” this kind of “series short story” (Ashley 2006: 11). Indeed, in a 1927 interview, Doyle himself stated that his transition from short novels such as *A Study in Scarlet* (1887) to the short, loosely connected stories published monthly in the *Strand Magazine* from 1891 was “something ... new” within detective fiction (Fox 1927). However, both fail to acknowledge the potential influence of other kinds of writing that appeared between 1845 and 1891.

This article examines the police memoir genre specifically through the connections it makes between the police officer and the mid-Victorian city. While the figure of the criminal has, historically, been viewed as tied to the city, it is perhaps less recognised that the police officer “attained parity with the criminal” as a figure entrenched in urban life over the course of the century (Von Rothkirch 2013: 1042). I argue that the police officer is an urban figure in much the same way as the criminal or indeed the detective, and acts as a conduit through which readers could themselves navigate and better understand the mid-Victorian cityscape (usually London). I use the fictional police memoir genre as a lens to explore this idea, and argue that the genre can help us better to understand how the Victorians used detectives to explore, demarcate and comprehend the rapidly growing metropolis.

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<sup>3</sup> There are far too many examples to enumerate here, but to name just a few, publications such as *Recollections of a Detective Police Officer* (1856), the 1860 novel *Diary of an Ex-Detective*, the 1863 novel *Autobiography of an English Detective*, the 1864 text *Secret Service, or, Recollections of a City Detective*, and the famous 1864 novels *The Female Detective* and *Revelations of a Lady Detective* are all organised into collections of short stories that are loosely tied together so that they can be read either as one volume or as individual short stories. For a story that directly references a preceding tale, complete with a footnote stating where to find it, see “Guilty or Not Guilty” in “Recollections of a Police Officer,” published in *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal* in 1849.

## Navigating the Cityscape: Social Exploration Journalism

Crime fiction has extensive roots in other forms of writing, particularly journalism, and this has been quite widely documented. Ousby contends that the genre sought to capitalise on the press coverage the police attracted (Ousby 2004: 34), while Knight suggests that the growing press, improvements in printing technology and the corresponding increased literacy of the general public “constructed an audience” for this kind of writing (Ousby 2004: 31). Shpayer-Makov makes a similar point:

With the growing production of printed material generally, the demand for such texts accelerated. In the latter decades of the seventeenth century, and increasingly during the eighteenth century, genres such as the crime report, the anatomy of roguery, providence books, the criminal biography, gallows speeches, and trial reports gained a position of cultural centrality. In the course of the nineteenth century ... criminality became steadily more topical both in the press and in literature.

(Shpayer-Makov 2006: 105)

However, more specific connections between police memoirs and individual forms of journalism can be made. Social exploration journalism, for example, was a popular form of early-to-mid-nineteenth-century writing, in which journalists accompanied police officers to explore and describe usually inaccessible environments that readers were assumed to avoid. Crime was an attractive subject for this kind of writing, and helped lay the foundations for later forms of detective fiction. Commentators such as Pierce Egan, G. W. M. Reynolds, Henry Mayhew, William Makepeace Thackeray and a young Charles Dickens all produced writing dedicated to exploring criminal spaces such as court-rooms or prisons, including Egan’s and Dickens’s forays into Newgate in *Life in London* (1821) and *Sketches by Boz* (1830); “Going to See a Man Hanged,” Thackeray’s account of the execution of Francois Courvoisier, which appeared in *Fraser’s Magazine* in 1840; Reynolds’s infamous *The Mysteries of London* (1844–5) (particularly the chapter on Coldbath Fields Prison); and Mayhew’s extensive and widely-cited *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851). As Philip Collins points out, Dickens wanted to produce a series of articles exploring various prisons, although this never materialised (Collins [1962] 1965: 52–3).

As the nineteenth century progressed, the urban space grew rapidly due to advances in industry and a corresponding necessity for housing and suburban transportation. In 1806, the western border of London lay at the intersection between Oxford Street and Park Lane, yet by 1862, the entirety of Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens had been enveloped by the metropolis.<sup>4</sup> A number of changes simultaneously took place within popular journalism, as the “march of intellect” and “war of the unstamped” progressed across the 1830s and 1840s and the “taxes on knowledge” were repealed in the 1850s and early 1860s, triggering an explosion in periodical publishing (Drew 2011: 110). Social exploration journalism reflected this shift from static to chaotic, moving from fixed locations such as courtrooms or prisons out onto the streets, exploring slums and backwater alleys of the metropolis where, it was assumed, the worst criminals lived (Pittard 2007: 4). Some examples of articles which exemplify this trend, taken from a variety of periodicals, include (but are not limited to) J. C. Parkinson’s “On Duty with the Inspector” (*Temple Bar*, June 1865); John Burns’s “A Wild Night” (*Good Words*, December 1874); the anonymously written “The Low Haunts of London” and “Haunts of Crime,” both published in the *Ragged School Union Magazine* (1851 and 1869 respectively); “A Visit to Low Haunts” (*London Review*, January 1864); and

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<sup>4</sup> This is drawn from a comparison between two contemporary maps of London: Edward Mogg’s *London in Miniature* (1806) and *Reynolds’s Map of Modern London* (1862) by James Reynolds.

Dickens's widely known articles "On Duty with Inspector Field," "A Detective Police Party" and "Three Detective Anecdotes" (*Household Words*, 1850–1).

Again, the position of the police is particularly noteworthy. As I have argued elsewhere, the police officer became an obligatory figure in this kind of writing (Saunders 2019), and in all of these articles a police officer is present to protect journalists, both physically and socially, from being exposed to criminality in an area of the city that, under normal circumstances, they likely would have avoided. The police thus distanced the public from crime, and occupied a liminal space between the respectable and the criminal.

## Police Memoirs as Social Exploration

The rise of the fictional police memoir was a natural development of the popularity of social exploration journalism. As Shpayer-Makov argues, authors sought to capitalise on the popularity of the experiences of real police officers (Shpayer-Makov 2006: 109). However, the act of accompanying the police on patrols could be either very dangerous or, conversely, rather tedious. With empty streets and sleeping residents, officers likely saw little on most nights, and exciting episodes with criminals were probably infrequent. Indeed, an early moment in "On Duty with Inspector Field" reads: "Anything doing here to-night? Not much. We are very quiet" (Dickens 1851: 263). Producing fiction was, therefore, safer, creatively freer, and more lucrative. Additionally, as Jessica Valdez suggests, fiction also allowed authors to comment on contemporary issues more effectively, as it was no longer necessary to present at least an illusion of truth (Valdez 2011: 378). Dickens's progression from his social exploration articles in *Household Words* to creating characters such as Inspector Bucket in *Bleak House* (1853, famously based on Inspector Charles Field), mirrors this shift away from non-fiction social exploration towards more creative engagement with the same concepts of crime, poverty and social justice. Police memoir fiction thus marked a movement away from non-fictional journalism, and towards creative and socially engaged fiction, which was also designed to entertain readers and make money.

Due to its historic roots, the police memoir genre is embedded in the urban space. The 1860 novel *Diary of an Ex-Detective*, attributed to "Charles Martel," a pseudonym for the similarly obscure Thomas Delf (Ousby 2004: 34), recounts the adventures of a detective named "F," later referred to as John, who moves around the city and interacts with its inhabitants, gesturing towards the idea that the police officer provides a privileged view of criminality. F's detailed accounts describe precisely which streets are navigated and which modes of transport used. "The Confidential Clerk" provides a characteristic example:

I ... took my stand at the corner of Wood Street and Cheapside. ... Soon a couple came along together ... I followed them to a coffee-shop in St. Martin's-le-Grand, and waited ... Upon coming out they turned into St. Paul's Churchyard, and proceeded up Fleet Street to the Strand. ... They walked together till they reached the corner of Arundel Street, where they parted, one proceeding up the Strand, the other down Arundel Street, where I concluded he lodged. ... Next evening the same young gentlemen were favoured with my special attentions. This time they went to the Olympic theatre ... Upon quitting the house they proceeded to a public-house, and after partaking of some ale they parted, and proceeded on their respective ways as before. I took a fancy to see where the one who went up the Strand lodged. He led me a long dance down to Pimlico. Arrived at a door in Charlwood Street, he applied a latch-key.

(Martel 1860a: 19–20)

F's knowledge of London's streets helps characterise the police memoir as rooted in the urban, and it also helps to highlight the police officer's position as ingrained into the city's

social fabric. F displays not only knowledge of the city and its layout, but also the ability to remember it after the fact. The reader, meanwhile, accompanies F as he tails the suspects through the streets and is reliant on his guidance. The experience therefore has two potential outcomes for the reader: it either imparts new knowledge of the city or depicts locations that the reader would recognise from a previously unseen perspective.

Police memoirs therefore represent the city as the location where the activities of the police and criminals collide. Indeed, the criminals' knowledge of the labyrinth is often depicted as comparable, if not equal, to that of the police. For example, in August 1849, *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal* published a story titled "Guilty or Not Guilty," part of a series of tales collectively titled "Recollections of a Police Officer" by the journalist William Russell, who was perhaps the most prolific author of police memoir fiction across the 1850s and 1860s. In this story, a falsely accused gentleman recounts how he was framed for a crime he did not commit by a criminal who impersonates a police officer to lure him out onto the streets, while the crime itself is committed elsewhere:

I was informed that a gentleman desired to see me instantly on important business. He was shown up, and announced himself to be a detective police-officer: the robbery I had sustained had been revealed by an accomplice, and it was necessary I should immediately accompany him. We left the hotel together; and after consuming the entire day in perambulating all sorts of by-streets, and calling at several suspicious-looking places, my officious friend all at once discovered that the thieves had left town for the west of England.

(Russell 1849: 118)

By impersonating an officer, the criminal confirms and capitalises on the reputation of the police as knowledgeable. However, the criminal's urban proficiency matches the officer's and includes the ability to impersonate a policeman effectively. The criminal also exploits the victim's trust in the police and, more importantly, his blindness to the city in which he lives – a blindness that mirrors the reader's.

This idea of the victim's blindness to the city recalls Michel de Certeau's argument in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984). De Certeau suggests that there is a distinction between the elevated viewer of the city atop a high vantage point, who views the city as a homogenous whole, and street-level pedestrians who live "below the thresholds at which visibility begins" (de Certeau 1984: 93). De Certeau posits a hierarchy of visibilities: the visibility of the entire city as opposed to the invisibility of chaotic street-level. In police memoir fiction, a similar hierarchy is revealed contained specifically within the street-level view. As de Certeau argues, the pedestrian's street-level view of the city is "as blind as that of lovers in each other's arms"; in other words, the pedestrian is aware of the city, yet is unable truly to perceive it (de Certeau 1984: 93). The victim in "Guilty or Not Guilty" manifests this idea, when he complains that his fraudulent guide led him around "all sorts of by-streets," of which he was aware, but of which he has no knowledge (Russell 1849: 118). Beneath this layer of blindness, however, lies the knowledge which is possessed by the police and the criminal, who manifest what could be termed the "knowledgeable pedestrian." This ties both figures together, and allows them to transcend the blind traversal of the urban space experienced by pedestrians and to exist in a parallel, subterranean version of the city to which the public are oblivious.

Police memoir fiction foregrounds this equal knowledge of the city between the police and the criminal. The November 1850 issue of "Recollections of a Police Officer," a story titled "The Revenge," for example, depicts a meeting between a police officer, named Waters, and a criminal named Madame Jaubert on neutral ground in Leicester Square. The criminal world is shown to coexist with that of the police:

I was again passing along Leicester Square ... with all my eyes about me. ... Except myself, and a tallish, snow-wreathed figure ... not a living being was to be seen. This figure, which was standing still at the further side of the square, appeared to be awaiting me, and as I drew near it, threw back the hood of a cloak, and to my great surprise disclosed the features of a Madame Jaubert. ...

“Madame Jaubert!” I exclaimed ..., “why, what on earth can you be waiting here for on a night such as this?”

“To see you.”

(Russell 1850: 294–5)

Waters accompanies Madame Jaubert into St Giles-in-the-Fields to capture a criminal.<sup>5</sup> In this peculiar scene, criminal and officer nervously go together through the labyrinth as tentative equals “to the most crowded quarter of St. Giles’s,” where, at “the entrance of a dark blind alley, called Hine’s Court,” Jaubert invites Waters “to follow” (Russell 1850: 295). As he is equally knowledgeable about the dangers of the city, Waters immediately suspects a trap:

“Nay, nay, Madame Jaubert,” I exclaimed, “that wont [*sic*] do. You mean fairly, I daresay; but I don’t enter that respectable alley alone at this time of night.” ...

“What is to be done, then?” she added after a few moments’ consideration. “He is alone, I assure you.”

“That is possible; still I do not enter that *cul-de-sac* to-night, unaccompanied save by you.”

(Russell 1850: 295)

Waters and Jaubert are simultaneously aware of multiple unspoken urban rules: where they should and should not go, who they should and should not trust, and, most interestingly, that under no circumstances should they trust one another. However, an uninitiated passer-by would perhaps view this scene simply as two people walking and talking together, tying criminal and police officer together.

This raises a further question, however: where does the specialised knowledge possessed by the police and criminals come from? I argue that it stems from their active observation of humanity, a concept central to police memoir fiction and its depiction of the city. For example, as *Diary of an Ex-Detective*’s sleuth, F, moves through the metropolis, he observes people and marks characters who pique his interest – and who the reader, acting as the public, would likely not have noticed. The opening paragraph of the story “The Beggar’s Ring,” for example, describes how the police officer’s street-perspective lends itself well to spotting criminality hidden in plain sight:

I have observed the world from many different points of view, but think none so amusing or instructive as that which is taken from under a lamp-post. ... My favourite stations are at Charing Cross, close by Northumberland House, and at Regent Circus, Piccadilly and Oxford Street. These are busy corners, where the omnibuses stop to set down and take up passengers. If you happen to be looking for anybody in particular, ten chances to one but he will come along if you plant yourself in readiness to meet him.

(Martel 1860b: 175)

F’s reference to “observation” points towards Michel Foucault’s arguments concerning panopticism in his 1975 work *Discipline and Punish*, translated into English in 1977. For Foucault, observation brings knowledge, which brings power (Foucault 1977: 195–9).

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<sup>5</sup> This is a curious throwback to Dickens’s forays into the same area of London alongside Inspector Field. This may simply be a coincidence, but is nevertheless interesting.

Through his analysis of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon, a theorised prison in which inmates are constantly observed from a central watchtower, Foucault argues that to be constantly seen is a more effective cage than a dungeon (Foucault 1977: 200). Consequently, to observe is to be empowered, and this rings true for F, who observes the city's inhabitants from underneath a lamp-post, which is both an emblematic symbol of the street-perspective and an object designed to illuminate the street and aid visibility.

It is important to note, however, that it is not simply the act of observation that empowers F, but the concept of one-sided observation. Indeed, Foucault also argues that "[the prisoner] is seen, but does not see," and is unable to communicate with the other inmates or know when (or if) they are being observed (Foucault 1977: 200). The prisoners are thus laterally invisible, simultaneously part of a group yet isolated. This can also be applied to the city, filled with inhabitants who pass each other by yet rarely interact. F stands in the centre of this mass of disjointed pedestrians, and is therefore the one individual who observes the oblivious many.

From this perspective, it is tempting to read the city *as* Panopticon, a space where efforts were made to render everything visible through either illumination or the introduction of various forms of social control. However, it is impossible for F to observe the entire city the entire time. As Chris Otter observes, the Panopticon was a failure due to the necessity for at least some unobserved spaces even within a space constructed for the purpose of constant surveillance (Otter 2008: 4). Otter applies this to the wider city to suggest that, despite efforts to install networks of control, "perfect, transparent vision of society remained, and remains, elusive, undesirable, impossible, and probably meaningless" (Otter 2008: 5). The city necessarily contained elements of both the visible and the invisible, and the police officer in police memoir fiction functions not as an omniscient watchtower overlooking the city but rather as a street-level bull's-eye lantern moving within the urban world.

The police officer's mobility suggests, however, that the relationship between observer and observed is not limited to street-level interactions between, as de Certeau puts it, "walkers" (de Certeau 1984: 93). Public transport, for example, is frequently present in police memoir fiction. In "The Confidential Clerk," F observes "a lady dressed in the most expensive and fashionable style," who boards an omnibus "[o]pposite the end of Bond Street"; F immediately marks "The richness of her toilette, and the abundance of jewellery on her person [which] would have attracted my attention under any circumstances," and comments, "I thought them singularly out of place in an omnibus" (Martel 1860a: 23). The omnibus becomes its own space with its own hierarchies of visibility, highlighting the city as a network of spaces that interact, all of which the police officer is required to understand. F's observation of incongruities within these multifarious localised spaces positions the police officer as both a preserver of the socio-political status quo and as a barrier between the general public and criminality, of which the public were often only aware through the act of reading about crime in newspapers and magazines. This is visible in an Inspector F story titled "Robbing the Bank," in which the officer takes advantage of oblivious passers-by to tail a suspect:

I promised to keep the appointment, and we parted; but I had not proceeded many steps before it occurred to me that I should like to know something of the whereabouts of my arch-conspirator; so I turned cautiously round, and taking advantage of the screen afforded by a man and woman in advance, I followed, and soon came in sight of "mein freund".

I cautiously kept him in view, and followed him to a dark lane somewhere in Shoreditch, and could on account of the darkness, follow very closely on his heels unobserved.

(Martel 1860c: 165)

In this scene, the “man and a woman in advance” represent the public – and indeed the potential reader – who stroll through the scene, oblivious to the criminal activity unfolding in their presence. Thus, through the act of reading the police memoir, readers are able vicariously to accompany the police officer into the secret world of urban criminality which they would normally not be able to see and, perhaps, gain a cheap thrill at the thought that such activities were taking place around them when they were *not* reading. Indeed, in 1863, the *Quarterly Review* directly referenced the popularity of this notion in an article on sensation fiction:

[A] tale which aims at electrifying the nerves of the reader is never thoroughly effective unless the scene be laid in our own days and among the people we are in the habit of meeting. ... we are thrilled with horror [...] by the thought that such things may be going on around us and among us.

([Mansel] 1863: 488–9)

The company of the police officer offers a protective, privileged space, as a story titled “The Pawned Jewels” demonstrates. It details the tale of Valerie De Vere, an innocent girl who falls into destitution after her father is swindled out of his fortune. De Vere pawns jewellery to keep up appearances and to feed her family. She is first seen in a pawnbroker’s, and it is clear that she is out of place:

There was evidently a nervous flush upon her cheeks, and an unnatural brilliancy in her eyes, that assured me that every motion, look, and gesture was prompted by the feeling that she was undergoing a torture of the feelings. Certainly a pawnbroker’s shop was not the proper sphere for so elegant and refined a person.

(Martel 1860d: 33–4)

Tragically, De Vere falls so far into poverty that she abandons her house in middle-class Craven Hill and takes to the streets to prostitute herself, and the change in scene highlights her descent into the urban criminal underworld:

I was propping up a lamp-post at the corner of St. James’s Street and Pall Mall, I saw a tall woman, closely veiled, coming towards me at a rapid pace. ... The woman ... went up to a gentleman and accosted him ... after a very brief conversation the gentleman turned away with a coarse laugh, while the female dashed on. ... I passed on rapidly in the hope of overtaking the stranger. ... in a few moments I saw her coming back at the same racehorse speed, accosting such gentlemen as she thought might serve her purpose. At length she reached me, and I threw myself purposely in her way, expecting she would accost me, and in this I was not disappointed ... She slowly lifted her veil ... and disclosed the features of Valerie De Vere!

(Martel 1860d: 42–4)

While F is, again, standing underneath a lamp-post, which illuminates the street and empowers the officer, the uninitiated De Vere, now a part of the criminal world, uncomfortably moves within the darkness. F becomes De Vere’s guide through the streets she had wandered alone, placing himself between De Vere and criminality in much the same way as he is placed between criminality and the reader. F’s position as a barrier manifests itself through his knowledge of the city, which is juxtaposed with De Vere’s ignorance:

[W]e ... were now by the Duke of York’s steps. I turned towards the Horse Guards, intending to cross over to Great Scotland Yard, but upon reflection I thought it best not to do so for my companion’s sake; so I turned into a coffee-house by Charing Cross, and took possession of a little quiet room, intimating that I did not wish to be disturbed. I asked my companion to take a seat in the chair I had placed for her on one side of the table, and she fairly sank into it

(Martel 1860d: 46)

The idea that the journalist accompanied the police officer for protection when performing social exploration is replicated here, where the protective presence of the police shields an external party from the dangers of the subterranean city. De Vere combines characteristics of both journalist and the public, hidden behind the presence of the police and lifted out of criminality and back into a place of respectability – indeed, F’s choice not to take De Vere to Scotland Yard is significant, as he does not wish to codify her as a criminal. However, the police officer also retains some characteristics of the journalist, most notably in his supposedly trustworthy first-person account of the events and in his uneasy position as a barrier between dangerous criminality and citizens in need of protection. The police officer, I therefore suggest, occupies an intangible space between criminality and the rest of society in police memoir fiction.

## Conclusions

The fictional police memoir was a genre that allowed authors to create popular, sensational and lucrative fiction while simultaneously producing complex urban social criticism. However, by the 1880s, the genre had begun to give way to other types of crime fiction, particularly after public trust in the police force had been destabilised by events such as the 1867 Clerkenwell Prison bombing and Hyde Park Riots, the wider actions of the Reform League in 1866–7, the Irish Republican Brotherhood bombing campaign of the early 1880s, the 1877 “Great Detective Case,” the 1887–9 Thames Torso Murders and the 1888 Whitechapel murders. These events led to a revised interest in private or amateur detectives towards the end of the nineteenth century, accelerated by the private or amateur sleuth’s ability to navigate the city free of the constraints of official procedure or rank. However, this is not to suggest that the earlier incarnation of detective fiction was lost. Some elements of the police memoir survived into the late-Victorian era, particularly the serial short story format, the position of the detective as observer and, most notably, the role of the city itself. A combination of these factors ultimately laid the foundations for the appearance of Sherlock Holmes in 1887.

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