

BLOOD

An International Guide to Fact-Based Crime Literature



& INK

Albert
Borowitz

Blood & Ink

To view this image, please refer to the
print edition of this book

William Probert. This original drawing from life, made before his 1825 execution for stealing a mare, was given to the Reverend Mr. Cotton, the Ordinary, Newgate prison. *Borowitz True Crime Collection, Kent State University Libraries*. See B.29.

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An International Guide to Fact-Based Crime Literature

Albert Borowitz

Note by Jacques Barzun

Foreword by Jonathan Goodman

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Facts! Facts! Dear sir, facts are as we receive them; and then, in the mind, they are no longer facts, but *life*, which appears in one light or in another. Facts become the past when the mind yields them up . . . and life abandons them. Therefore I do not believe in facts.

—Novelist Lodovico Nota, in Pirandello's *To Dress the Naked*, Act III

Where am I? alone! Where's Abel? where
Cain? Can it be that I am he? My brother,
Awake! —why liest thou so on the green earth?
'Tis not the hour of slumber; why so pale?
What has thou!—thou wert full of life this morn!
Abel! I pray thee, mock me not! I smote
Too fiercely, but not fatally. Ah, why
Wouldst thou oppose me? This is mockery,
And only done to daunt me;—'twas a blow—
And but a blow.

—Cain, in Lord Byron's *Cain: A Mystery*, Act III

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With love and thanks, to my wife, Helen,
who has put up with this long project and has contributed entries
regarding what is no longer a “singular anomaly,”
the female crime novelist

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Contents

Acknowledgments xi

Note: The Place and Point of “True Crime”

BY JACQUES BARZUN xiii

Foreword: Some Prescriptions and Proscriptions for “True Crime”

BY JONATHAN GOODMAN xv

Introduction 1

Guide to Fact-Based Crime Literature 41

Resources 461

Index 463

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Acknowledgments

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I am touched by the kindness of Professor Jacques Barzun and Jonathan Goodman, who have contributed the elegant Note and Foreword that grace the book and made valuable proposals regarding the selection of works included in the bibliographical entries. Mr. Goodman, together with another friend and colleague, Wilfred Gregg, participated with me in the conceptual thinking and interchange that shaped *Blood and Ink*.

My researches on this project were greatly advanced by antiquarian booksellers on the Internet. In addition, I have received significant documentation regarding the "thieving magpie" and the related "magpie mass" from Willem de Graeve, Public Relations, Centre Belge de la Bande Dessinée; and Jacques Grosbois, Conseiller Municipal Délégué, Membre de la Société Historique; and Martine Bourron, Le Premier Adjoint, Déléguée à la Culture et aux Festivals, of Palaiseau, France.

As my dedication reveals, a secret weapon in accomplishing this undertaking was the help and literary insight of my wife, the distinguished art historian Helen Osterman Borowitz. Helen wrote many of the entries relating to works of women authors and reviewed countless others. Of equal importance was the understanding she showed for my obsession with *Blood and Ink*, and the wrongdoers it memorializes, over a period of more than five years.

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NOTE

The Place and Point of “True Crime”

JACQUES BARZUN

The name of the literature superbly inventoried in this book gives a clue to the kind of readers who enjoy it. True crime is the match of crime *fiction*, the detective story, commonly called mystery. It has been said that a seasoned reader of crime fiction graduates to true crime. But such a graduate does not leave the campus and its reading list; he or she only adds a new source of pleasure to the one they have been cultivating.

It should not be supposed that those who read about either sort of crime do so because of a taste for mayhem and gore. To think so is to miss the point. In good crime fiction, the victim is disposed of quickly with a minimum of physical detail. In true crime the detail may indeed form part of the recital, because the body has been found in shocking condition—in a trunk or buried in a cellar. But the evidence is soon left behind in the quest for motive and circumstance. In both genres, the deep interest lies not in whodunit but in how this is ascertained by a close examination of time and means and other probabilities.

I say “the interest,” meaning the suspense that must grace any sort of writing from riddles to theology. The *pleasure* is something else again. In both the crime offerings, true and fictional, the pleasure is literary.

This may surprise the addicts themselves, who often think their taste well beneath that of people who read high-brow novels. The truth is that great novels are often inartistic compared with the great works that retell great crimes. The qualities, besides lucid prose, that distinguish true crime are narrative skill, the right order of topics (equivalent to plot), the writer’s grasp of character and knowledge of life, wit, and judicial detachment coupled with sympathy.

To bring these talents to bear on the details of an actual crime calls for great powers, greater perhaps than are needed when the writer invents his facts; for the crimes worth writing about are those that present a murky tangle in which essential points may remain forever doubtful. Thus the famous Wallace case of the 1930s in Liverpool bewildered all true-crime fanciers for years, until the genius of Jonathan Goodman solved it by a combination of wide research and brilliant analysis. Before then, an aficionado such as the theater critic James Agate would call up a friend and say, “Come over and we’ll talk about the Wallace case.”

The exposition of notable crimes, with or without solutions, has a long history; it begins with the earliest pleadings at the bar. Cicero in 66 B.C. gave a splendid example in his defense of Aulus Cluentius; and before him the Athenians heard Socrates pull apart the charges of

his accusers. In eighteenth-century London there was the Newgate Calendar and street-vendors' broadsides—cheap and crude tales of recent crimes; in the nineteenth it was that fine critic De Quincey, who after a notorious murder wrote a long analysis for the literary public: "On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts." But it mainly sang the praises of the killers.

The modern genre, more law-abiding, usually begins with excerpts from the transcript of the trial, where each side gives a version of what happened. How these slanted stories are dealt with by the later critic shows the degree of his art and judgment. Henry James took delight in the accounts by William Roughead of cases that others have written up with dissenting conclusions. In our time, Edward Radin showed that Lizzie Borden was very probably innocent of her parents' murder, which contradicts the accepted view put forth by Edmund Pearson, Mrs. Lowndes, and Victoria Lincoln.

There is no end to the speculative opportunities that an interest in true crime bestows on the devotee. Did Crippen kill his wife by accident, mistaking the right dosage of the sedative hyoscine? Was Steinie Morrison innocent after all, like Oscar Slater, who owed his release from prison to the tireless efforts of Conan Doyle? And then, as Mr. Goodman remarks on a later page, there is the perennial question: Who was Jack the Ripper?

A wag suggested Matthew Arnold, the advocate of "sweetness and light." Unfortunately, Arnold had been dead six months when the killings began. Looking up this little fact shows the attention to detail that is characteristic of the . . . the What *shall* we call the connoisseur of true crime, that capacious scholarlike mind, attentive to scientific truth and wedded to legal logic? May I venture to suggest a name? As usual, the ancient Greeks had a word for "the actual murderer"; it was *authentēs*. Why not adopt *philauthentist* as our proud designation, on a par with *philatelist* and indeed with *philosopher*?

FOREWORD

Some Prescriptions and Proscriptions for “True Crime”

JONATHAN GOODMAN

The question “What makes a *classic* murder?” is posed almost as often as that other one—“What makes a *perfect* murder?”

The answer to the latter question is short but comprehensive: a murder is only surely perfect if it is not recognized as murder. Some, perhaps many, murders go quite unnoticed: they are tucked away within what the late, great Professor Sir Leon Radzinowicz called “the dark figure of crime.” They—with oh so many other unnoticed or unreported or reported but uninvestigated crimes—make crime statistics look far less worrying than the reality.

Perhaps the clearest indication that there is less to *murder* statistics than meets the eye is the fact that, according to breakdowns of the figures (I speak of British ones, but no doubt American equivalents are as unreliable), murder by poisoning is a dying, near-dead, art. Nonsense, of course, given that countless bathroom cabinets and medicine chests contain leftover prescription drugs and the like, which are toxic to some people or, overdosed, to all, and which are more complex, more difficult to detect after ingestion than the undoubted and undoubtable poisons used by murderers in the past.

With an insufficiency of forensic experts, meaning that those in practice are overloaded with work, many deaths that are considered only a mite suspicious either aren’t forensically examined or are examined inadequately. There is a maxim of the forensic sciences (though not confined to them) to the effect that if you are not searching for *something*, you don’t stand much chance of finding *anything*. And so—distressingly additional to the too many guilty parties acquitted by peculiar juries, whose peculiarities increase as the selection standards of responsibility, language comprehension, and impartiality are eroded for unsound but politically correct reasons, or who take advantage of quaint constraints on the police to evade the become-even-quainter notion of Justice—too many people are getting away with murder. (In a metaphorical sense, so are too many people who write about crime; I’ll come to some of them in a minute.)

First, however, I must tackle the former question. There is no cut-and-dried answer to that one. Considering the lots of foreign-language entries in Albert Borowitz’s book, I may as well depart from my usual English-only style, albeit briefly, just to say *à chacun son goût*. So far as the classic murder question is concerned, one man’s meat axe is another man’s

poison. I can only tell you what, in my opinion, *may be some* of the ingredients of a classic murder and what is perhaps the single factor that definitely makes a murder *unclassic*.

I go along to quite an extent—not all the way—with Alfred Hitchcock’s comment that the factual murders that most appealed to him were “like blood on a daisy”: a shocking contrast between a killing and its compass. Yes, that quite often puts a murder into, or somewhere near, the classic category: the Borden case, for instance (of the “murder behind lace curtains” kind), or the Theodore Durrant case (murder in a place of worship).

And, instantly arguing with myself (for Durrant murdered twice), I feel that, aesthetically speaking, murder should be as special an event to the murderer as it is to his victim. Serial killers are not my cup of tea. They bore me, not merely through the repetitiousness and the sameness of their crimes, but because they themselves are so deadly boring. A sweeping statement, I know, but I am not going to water down my conviction that it is their boredom with their own dreary existences that turns them into serial killers, seeking cheap thrills at a terminal cost to others, enjoying some feeling of power that they are incapable of experiencing in any normal way, but still staying stuck in a one-killing-after-another rut. (Is it simplistic to wonder along the following lines: since bored people are usually uncreative, and therefore bored psychopaths turning to crime are inclined to commit copy-cat offenses, might there have been fewer serial killers if the gutter media had spread fewer slobber stories about serial killings?)

When I have to read—or, rather, skip through—some account of serial killings, I tend to recall the ticky-tacky tailor’s sales talk, pleading with the customer not to be critical of a roll of shoddy material: “Never mind the quality. Feel the width.”

The so-called offender-profilers—who get themselves, puffed up like pouter pigeons, onto all the news program when one of their lists of traits proves to be somewhere near the mark, but who are suspiciously tight-lipped when asked about the ratio between their partial successes and their near-complete failures—would surely be well advised to write “boring” at the top of all their lists, ahead of the presently ever-present descriptive item of “loner.”

I don’t know whether the term “serial killer” was originally applied only to repetitious murderers who kill for, among other pleasures, a sexual one, but that is how it seems to be applied nowadays. I certainly draw a clear distinction between those perverts and the persons (“multicides” used to be the catch-all term for them) who murder more than once for quite reasonable reasons. Once again, I spot classic exceptions to the one-murder-per-murderer criterion: Dr. William Palmer of Rugeley, Staffordshire, whose umpteen poisonings were occasioned by financial scrapes; and that man of several brides, and even more aliases (the cheekiest of which was “Love”), who is so wonderfully summed up in the first stanza of Ogden Nash’s altogether perfect “They Don’t Read De Quincey in Philly or Cincinnati”:

Consider, friends, George Joseph Smith,
A Briton not to trifle with;
When wives aroused his greed or wrath,
He led them firmly to the bath.
Instead of guzzling in the pub,
He drowned his troubles in the tub.

It may help to make a case a classic if there is a riddle of some kind: whodunit or, questioning whether it was a *criminal* case, whatwasit. (There are also whydidthedoit riddles, but as these are no help at all toward classic status, and as the suggested solutions to motivational mysteries are armchair-psychiatric as opposed to sensible, are no more than jargon-infested guesswork, they can be ignored.)

Whatwasits—cases (perhaps “perfect murders”) in which there is uncertainty as to whether death was caused by accident, suicide, or murder—are, I think, my favorites. At least a couple of them are classics: the burning of Evelyn Foster on the Northumberland moors on Twelfth Night 1931; and, in the same year (1931 was a red-letter year for classic cases), the passing of Starr Faithfull, whose body was found on the sands of Long Beach, Long Island, giving rise to legal and journalistic ferretings among her antecedents (and giving John O’Hara the idea for his novel *Butterfield 8*).

Speaking of cases in which someone has been found guilty of murder, there are not many *real* whodunits, ones with the verdict being open to question. In recent years, though, they have become vastly outnumbered by *retrospective* whodunits, concocted by persons, usually conspiracy theorists, determined to make readers believe (which is not at all the same as *proving*) that someone found guilty of murder was perfectly innocent, the framed victim of a miscarriage of justice. Most of these “truth-seekers” are quite content to tell whopping great lies in what they consider to be a good cause (the clearing of a name, I mean; not, perish the thought, the improved chance of selling film rights).

Probably the largest portion of the mob of revisionists comprises the Kennedy assassination confidence-tricksters, who were called to account (though none of them seems to have been listening) by Louis Nizer, the brilliant lawyer who, in retirement, wrote the excellent *My Life in Court* and subsequent books that were less good. Having coined the term “analytical syndrome,” he explained its meaning:

It is possible to take the record of any trial and by minute dissection and post-facto reasoning demonstrate that witnesses for either side made egregious errors or lied. Then, by ascribing critical weight to the exposed facts, the conclusion is reached that the verdict was fraudulently obtained. This was the process by which the Warren Commission Report [on the assassination of President Kennedy] was challenged in a spate of books. To cite just one illustration, a constable deputy sheriff described the rifle which had been found on the sixth floor of the Book Depository Building, Dallas, as a Mauser, instead of a Mannlicher-Carcano, which it was. Out of this innocent error, due to ignorance or excitement, sprouted the theory that the real assassin’s rifle had been spirited away and Lee Harvey Oswald’s rifle planted on the scene to involve him. Multiply this incident by many others, such as someone’s testimony that shots were heard coming from the mall, and the “hiding” of the death x-rays of the President (since revealed), and you have a gigantic conspiracy by foreign agents, or government officials, or New Orleans homosexuals, or lord knows what, to fix the blame on an innocent man, Oswald. Of course, all this was nonsense, and subsequent events have confirmed the accuracy of the Report.

The analytical syndrome can be used to discredit any verdict, from the commonest automobile negligence case to the most involved anti-trust or proxy contest.

Much the same chestnut-tree-sprouting-from-an-acorn methods are used by most writers on the Whitechapel murders of 1888, who have turned an interesting story into a sort of parlor game: “*Hunt the Ripper*”—undoubtedly a Trivial Pursuit.

Some years ago, intending to poke fun at the already excessive number of named Ripper candidates, I included an entry for Peter J. Harpick, complete with a spoof potted biography, in an unserious reference book. I was confident that everyone who saw it would cotton on to the fact that the name was an anagram of Jack the Ripper, especially as I as much as said that it was in the biography, which I was equally confident would be recognized as a spoof, for it was crammed with twaddle. Shortly after the book’s publication, I started to get letters, usually written in green ink, from Ripperologists, asking for further information about Peter J. Harpick. Even now, I still get the occasional letter of that sort from people who have come across the entry belatedly. Which goes to show that as I, not intending to deceive, have done so, any intending deceiver can, if he likes, name the Queen of Romania as Jill the Ripper, in the sure knowledge that too many people will be taken in.

The writers that I have referred to in the past few paragraphs, and others like them, are to *true* true-crime writing what acne is to skin. And they don’t appear (well, hardly at all) in this book; and so, of course, I am as pleased with what *isn’t* in the following pages as with what is.

I had better admit (*boast* is what I really mean) that Albert Borowitz and I are friends; if I don’t, some conspiracy theorist will surely assume that the favorable comments I am about to make about his book are insincere, obvious indications of a furtive Old Pals Act. But if I didn’t know him so well, I should not be able to *state*, rather than voice the opinion, that no one but he could have composed this book. His qualifications, all in all, are unique.

Whereas with a good many bibliographies at the back of books, one is suspicious that an author, aiming to impress with the ostensible depth of his desk research, has included titles that he has never seen, let alone glanced at, I *know* that Albert Borowitz has read (and nine times out of ten, *reread*) every single work that he has chosen to include. The fact that he, being multilingual, has been able to read every single one of the works, also the many that he has decided to leave out, greatly reduces the number of people who could have even considered taking on the task. And that number is reduced still more—to a solitary one: Albert Borowitz—by the necessity of conversance with the practicalities of crime writing. He is, by far, the best of American crime historians.

As if the talents I have mentioned weren’t enough to make him the uniquely qualified composer of this book, he has a fund of knowledge about several arts, particularly the performing ones, and for longer than I have known him has delighted in finding connections between art and crime, artists and criminals.

We—meaning many people as well as true-crime devotees—should be grateful that Albert Borowitz, the only person more than capable of composing this book, was prepared to accept the immense challenge of doing so.

Blood & Ink

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Introduction

This guide and its annotated bibliography document the interrelations between crime history and literature. When juxtaposing fact and fiction in this area of study, it may be misleading to pose the familiar question of whether art imitates nature or nature imitates art. Both the criminal act and the creative impulse have their origin in the human psyche, and it may be pure accident whether a germinative concept is first translated into conduct or formulated as narrative.

To illustrate this point, two examples of surprising interplay between crime fact and fiction may be cited from the field of biblical literature. In the first case, a seventeenth-century French poisoning scandal required the “re-editing” of the Old Testament. Marc-Antoine Charpentier, in composing his 1688 opera *David and Jonathan* for the theater of the Jesuits in Paris, utilized a libretto of Père Bretonneau, who felt compelled to doctor the scene of King Saul’s visit to the Witch of Endor. The contemporary “Affair of the Poisons,” in which wholesale arsenic poisonings had been linked to witchcraft, made stage presentations of conjuration (even of scriptural origin) a risky enterprise. Therefore, in Bretonneau’s version, King Saul does not ask the Witch to call forth the spirit of Samuel. Instead, the so-called Prophetess (*pythonisse*) acts voluntarily in summoning a “shade” whose name is never pronounced in the text of the opera. Thus the Bible, despite its accepted divine inspiration, was not immune, at least in public theatrical presentation, to the influence of current crime reports.

If the Charpentier opera shows in its most compelling form the reinterpretation of literature in the light of subsequent criminal conduct, the Book of Tobit in the Apocrypha provides an instance in which religious literature anticipated by two millennia a bizarre category of crimes that we would be likely to regard as an innovation of our own bloody era. Jack the Ripper owes his unending fascination largely to his perpetration of a series of grisly murders in conformity with established patterns regarding the means of killing and choice of victims; he slashed the throats of prostitutes in London’s East End and disemboweled them when he had the time. In the Book of Tobit, a serial killer claims seven lives in Ecbatane, a city of Media, pursuant to an even more rigorous design. Ultimately revealed to be a demon named Asmodeus, the murderer falls in love with Sara and strangles her successive bridegrooms in her bedchamber on the wedding night. More effective than the Metropolitan Police of Victorian London, the archangel Raphael expels Asmodeus by instructing the eighth bridegroom, Tobias, to place the heart and liver of a miraculous fish

on a fire in Sara's room. Overcome by the offensive fumes, Asmodeus "fled into the utmost parts of Egypt and the angel bound him."

In the remarkable mass family slaying by Pierre Rivière, studied by Michel Foucault and his disciples (see Bibliography Item F.23), it is not even possible to determine whether the idea of the crime first originated as a literary design or as a plan of action. In Foucault's words, the young semi-literate farmer initially intended to "surround" the murder with his memoirs. He planned to begin by writing the narrative that would announce at the outset the crime that was to follow; then he would detail his parents' quarrelsome marriage and his reasons for his plan to defend his father's interests by eliminating his mother. At this point, the murder was to have been committed, and then Rivière's self-incriminating memoirs were to be completed and mailed to the authorities. Foucault refers to Rivière as a "double *auteur*," simultaneous inventor of the crime and the related narrative.

The above examples should caution against making easy assumptions about the direction of currents flowing between crime history and literature. Still, in defining the subject of this guide as "fact-based crime literature," I intend to include two principal groups of works that, despite frequent overlaps and questionable classifications (for example, the "nonfiction novels" of which I will have more to say later), are generally recognizable as distinct genres: (1) nonfictional accounts of crimes and criminal trials, including essays, monographs, journalism, editions of court transcripts, prison histories, and criminal and police biographies and memoirs, as well as autobiographies of victims' relatives, such as novelist Martin Amis's *Experience* (New York: Talk Miramax, 2000), reflecting the disappearance of the author's cousin, Lucy Partington, and her murder by a notorious serial killer, Frederick West; and (2) works of imaginative literature, such as novels, stories, or stage works, based on, or inspired by, actual crimes or criminals. In making a selection of works for inclusion in the bibliography, I have generally emphasized the literary and/or historical achievement of the author or editor rather than the fame of the individual crimes described; this stress on the work rather than on the criminal case is reflected by the organization of the bibliography, which is, with the exception of anonymous, collective, or serial works, arranged alphabetically by author. Yet, because the great writers of fact-based crime have chosen their subjects with a discriminating eye, the bibliography necessarily provides, through comment on significant literature, a survey of many of the most intriguing criminal cases of the last four centuries.

What crimes are included? Here again I have followed the lead of the writers included in the bibliography. Murder has certainly been favored by true-crime authors, as it has been by popular thriller writers, but I have not neglected other categories of wrongdoing that have had a conspicuous place in crime history and related literature since their inception: fraud, piracy, imposture, historical mysteries, treason, conspiracy, and a wide variety of crimes against property, such as theft, burglary and arson. The emphasis is on the study of specific cases in any of these categories rather than on general theories of criminality, although some criminological studies are included when they take as their point of departure the analysis of a single crime or trial record (for example, Foucault's study of Pierre Rivière, mentioned above). Occasionally, the bibliography strays into areas of aberrant or scandalous behavior that are not subject to criminal sanction. In general, I have excluded Wild West literature,

which is the subject of critical bibliographies by Ramon Adams; and I have deemphasized books on organized crime, because of my preference for studies of conduct driven by complex or elusive motives. My entries tend to become sparser with respect to publications after 1980; I believe the value of a crime work can only be judged fairly when it has aged a bit on my shelves.

One narrowing of scope is due to an embarrassment of riches. Only a few annotations have been made regarding works on Jack the Ripper, whose crimes (now seemingly modest in scope when compared to the mass and serial killings of our day) have spawned a literary industry perhaps rivaled only by the exploitation of President Kennedy's assassination. Ripperologists will perhaps forgive my neglect, since, at this writing, Richard Whittington-Egan's definitive Ripper history and bibliography is scheduled to be published soon by Patterson Smith.

The works on which I have commented are, with very rare exceptions, to be found in the Borowitz True Crime Collection, which my wife, Helen, and I have established in the Special Collections Department of the Kent State University Libraries, Kent, Ohio. In some instances, I comment on special features of the Borowitz Collection's holdings, such as important provenance or tipped-in letters or ephemera. Although the Borowitz True Crime Collection has sufficient size and breadth to be representative of the field of fact-based crime literature, it necessarily reflects my personal tastes and cannot be regarded as complete; nor could such a claim be made for any other harvest in so vast a literary field. In one respect, however, this bibliography may be wider ranging than other publications addressed to English-speaking audiences. I have collected, and include in this bibliography, not only works in English but those in many other languages, including the Romance languages, Latin, German, Swedish, and Russian; where, however, an English translation exists, I have generally preferred it to the foreign original, unless there are significant differences between the two editions. The international character of this book is not a personal whim. Although the Anglo-American tradition is one of the chief glories of fact-based crime writing, it is rivaled in scope and achievement by works of French authors and compilers, who can fairly be regarded as having invented the notion of publishing collections of trial narratives (to which they gave the generic title, *causes célèbres*). Other important fact-based crime literature has been produced in German-speaking countries and throughout the world, except where and when totalitarian governments decree for their own doctrinal purposes that crime does not exist.

To summarize the development of fact-based crime literature in various languages, the balance of this introduction will address separately the Anglo-American tradition, French works, and literature in other languages.

THE ANGLO-AMERICAN TRADITION

The strong British interest in true crime has been noted with amazement, even by the French, whose own attraction to this subject must strike an outside observer as equally powerful. I have never been totally satisfied by the common explanation that dismisses

reading and writing about violence as a relatively harmless channel through which the well-behaved British vent their suppressed hostility. Without rejecting this thesis out of hand, I have suggested, in *The Woman Who Murdered Black Satin*, that the fascination of the Scots and English with their crimes also has a significant relationship to their genius for narrative expression: “The devotion of the British to their crimes must remain as great a mystery as many of the cases they treasure. It is possible, though, that this national trait . . . is related to other more significant aspects of British culture. The appeal of murder cases draws to some extent on violent instincts, but certainly it also responds to the love of drama and exciting and suspenseful narrative. Fascination with murder cases may proceed from the same facet of the British genius that created the Elizabethan drama and gave birth to the eighteenth-century novel of adventure” (81).

Another principal source of the passion for true crime, in Britain as elsewhere, is the abundance of psychological revelations that can be mined from criminal trial reports. The value of crime narratives in elucidating human motives is eloquently appraised by Friedrich Schiller in his introduction to a German edition of criminal cases published in 1792:

We catch sight here of people in the most complicated situations, which keep us in total suspense and whose denouements provide pleasant employment for the reader’s ability to predict the outcome. The secret play of passion unfolds before our eyes, and many a ray of truth is cast over the hidden paths of intrigue. The springs of conduct, which in everyday life are concealed from the eye of the observer, stand out more clearly in motives where life, freedom and property are at stake, and therefore the criminal judge is in a position to have deeper insights into the human heart.¹

Critic Jacques Barzun, in his preface to Jonathan Goodman’s *The Stabbing of George Harry Storrs*, makes a similar assessment of the allure of “true crime”:

The appeal of this last-named species of composition is manifold. It presents ordinary human beings under stress: not just the principals, but a hitherto unconnected score of persons suddenly caught in the searchlight of a police investigation. They are buffeted and bruised by newspaper reports and repeated grilling in and out of court; their earlier doings, their secrets, their abilities and pretensions, are made into a public show. It is a grim novel in action, a novel in the mode of Dickens and Dostoevsky, who in fact drew upon just such live materials for their most renowned effects.

Another advantage of the study of criminal cases by historian or novelist is the wealth of detail court testimony gives us about the way people lived in other places and other times. In the preface to *Innocence and Arsenic*, I observed that “nothing tells us more about the way

1. Introduction to *Merkwürdige Rechtsfälle als ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Menschheit. Nach dem Französischen Werk des Pitaval* [Notable Cases as a Contribution to the Human History. After the French Work of Pitaval], 4 vols. (Jena, 1792–95). Translated by the author.

people live than the strange ways in which they are sometimes done to death.” An example drawn from the dining room will illustrate the point. If asked what they had for dinner last Thursday, most people would have trouble recalling. No student of crime, however, will forget the predilection of Charles Bravo for burgundy or the gradually deteriorating mutton and broth that were served up to Lizzie Borden’s family in the sultry week that preceded the double axe-murders—a menu that was in itself an adequate motive for the crimes. To stay with this culinary theme, who among crime aficionados will fail to cherish the memory of the maid who served dinner to the murderers Thurtell and Hunt after their murder of Mr. Weare near Elstree in 1823? It had been a busy evening for the murderers, what with the disposal of their victim’s body and the rest of their chores, but there had still been a social hour before dinner, and Hunt, who was no mean tenor, obliged his hostess Mrs. Probert with a song. At the trial, the maid, who must have been a spiritual ancestress of Chico Marx, was asked whether the dinner was postponed. She replied, “No, it was pork chops.”

In England, nonfictional crime literature had its origins in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries with the appearance of crime and underworld chapbooks and single-sheet “broadsides,” in prose or doggerel verse, devoted to primitive accounts of murders, trials, executions, and confessions. From the beginning there was a large measure of fiction in what passed for crime reportage. Many of the broadsides (as I have learned on many occasions to my scholarly embarrassment) are completely bogus and indeed were known to the street vendors as “cocks” (perhaps an abbreviation of cock and bull). One of the most spectacular successes in the marketing of crime fiction in the trappings of fact dates from the early seventeenth century. In 1621 an Exeter merchant named John Reynolds published one of the earliest bestsellers in crime reporting, giving his collection of narratives the portentous title *The Triumphs of God’s Revenge Against the Crying and Execrable Sin of Wilful and Premeditated Murder*. Although the author stoutly insisted that his work was a faithful English adaptation of criminal records that had come to his attention while he was traveling on business in Europe, the entire book appears to be a fabrication. There is no indication that the cases of crime and punishment in *The Triumphs of God’s Revenge* were anything but Reynolds’s own invention. (One story inspired Middleton and Rowley’s murder drama *The Changeling*, so that fiction masquerading as fact became melodrama believed by its authors to be grounded in fact.) Moreover, the author’s proclaimed horror of the crimes he describes and the religious lesson he draws from providential discovery and punishment of the guilty apply a thin veneer to what is sensationalism pure and simple. However fraudulent and sanctimonious it may have been, Reynold’s work certainly found a wide readership. By 1670 it had gone into a fifth edition (the first to be profusely illustrated with woodcuts), and new editions were still appearing a century later. The curious work had not exhausted its appeal by the end of the eighteenth century when the English novel began to reflect social and political didacticism. William Godwin acknowledged Reynolds’s “tremendous compilation” as a source of inspiration for his own 1794 novel of murder and repentance, *Caleb Williams*.

In the eighteenth century, successive compilations of reports of authentic criminal cases gave rise to such famous collections as the Newgate Calendar and the State Trials. Gradually, writers in the mainstream of English literature began to take an interest in their nation’s eminent malefactors.

Capitalizing on the public craving for narratives of criminal exploits, Daniel Defoe, in addition to his *General History of the Pyrates* (1724), wrote short biographies of the housebreaker and escape artist Jack Sheppard and the archgangster of early eighteenth-century London, Jonathan Wild; it was Defoe's remarkable publicity stunt to arrange for criminals to deliver to him in their cells or at the scaffold manuscripts that he had previously furnished to them and that he was to publish immediately as their "authentic" lives.

A hundred years later, England's modern literary tradition of true crime had its birth in the essays of Thomas De Quincey. De Quincey left two distinct legacies to his successors in the genre: black humor and the highly dramatic reconstruction of murder scenes. The first strand in his crime writing is represented by the celebrated two-part essay "On Murder, Considered as One of the Fine Arts" (1827, 1839), an exercise in irony (perhaps influenced by Jonathan Swift's manner in "A Modest Proposal"), in which an imaginary connoisseur of crime lays down mock-aesthetic standards for the evaluation of the "fine murder": "People begin to see that something more goes to the composition of a fine murder than two blockheads to kill and be killed—a knife—a purse—and a dark lane. Design, gentlemen, grouping, light and shade, poetry, sentiment, are now deemed indispensable to attempts of this nature." In 1984 I was delighted to learn that this essay had, at least to a small degree, made its mark on American popular culture. That year I received from a friend a book bag with an imprint of a bloody hand and the following quotation from De Quincey: "If once a man indulges himself in murder, very soon he comes to think little of robbing; and from robbing he comes next to drinking and Sabbath-breaking, and from that to incivility and procrastination. Once begun upon this downward path, you never know where to stop. Many a man has dated his ruin from some murder or other that perhaps he thought little of at the time."

Some readers of De Quincey in his own time and after have been troubled about the linking of humor with crime. In espousing the view that humor, if well targeted and kept within reasonable bounds, may have a place in true-crime writing, I regard myself as a follower and defender of De Quincey. Certainly, violence and personal loss are not in themselves appropriate subjects for relentless facetiousness. However, there is no reason to spare from satire the callousness of criminals, their lack of foresight, or the ludicrous explanations they give for outrageous conduct. Even in the humor of popular crime doggerel, where good taste is not king, the target is often inhumanity rather than the murder itself. To cite the most famous American example, where the joke is at the expense of the murderer's failure to feel an expected remorse:

Lizzie Borden took an axe
 And gave her mother forty whacks
 When she saw what she had done
 She gave her father forty-one.

In quite a different vein from his essay "On Murder" is De Quincey's postscript of 1854, "Three Memorable Murders," in which he includes a terrifying account of the massacres thought to have been committed by John Williams, the so-called Ratcliffe Highway murderer.

It is impossible to forget the scene of Williams stalking the servant Mary in the house of the slaughtered Marr family. This passage, which imaginatively re-creates the horror cumulating within Mary's mind, demonstrates that De Quincey wrote a "nonfiction novel" well over a century before Truman Capote coined the term. To quote De Quincey:

Still as death she was; and during that dreadful stillness, when she hushed her breath that she might listen, occurred an incident of killing fear . . . She, Mary, the poor trembling girl, checking and overruling herself by a final effort, that she might leave full opening for her dear young mistress's answer to her own last frantic appeal, heard at last and most distinctly a sound within the house. Yes, now beyond a doubt there is coming an answer to her summons. What was it?

On the stairs, not the stairs that led downwards to the kitchen, but the stairs that led upwards to the single story of bed-chambers above, was heard a creaking sound. Next was heard most distinctly a footfall: one, two, three, four, five stairs were slowly and distinctly descended. Then the dreadful footsteps were heard advancing along the little narrow passage to the door. The steps—oh heavens! whose steps?—have paused at the door. The very breathing can be heard of that dreadful being who has silenced all breathing except his own in the house. There is but a door between him and Mary. What is he doing on the other side of the door? A cautious step, a stealthy step it was that came down the stairs, then paced along the little narrow passage—narrow as a coffin—till at last the step pauses at the door. How hard the fellow breathes! He, the solitary murderer, is on the one side of the door; Mary is on the other side.

Now, suppose that he should suddenly open the door, and that incautiously in the dark Mary should rush in, and find herself in the arms of the murderer. . . . But now Mary is upon her guard. The unknown murderer and she have both their lips upon the door, listening, breathing hard; but luckily they are on different sides of the door; and upon the least indication of unlocking or unlatching, she would have recoiled into the asylum of general darkness.

What was the murderer's meaning in coming along the passage to the front door? The meaning was this: separately, as an individual, Mary was worth nothing at all to him. But, considered as a member of a household, she had this value . . . that she, if caught and murdered, perfected and rounded the desolation of the house.²

Many distinguished English and Scottish writers followed the path De Quincey had blazed in "Three Memorable Murders." His disciples included the versatile scholar and essayist Andrew Lang; H. B. Irving, the son of famed Shakespearean actor Sir Henry Irving and himself an actor-manager; the barrister J. B. Atlay; Sir John Hall; and the novelist F. Tennyson Jesse, author of the valuable *Murder and Its Motives*. However, the unquestioned master of this true-crime literary school in the first half of the twentieth century is the nonpracticing Edinburgh solicitor William Roughead, whose biography by Richard Whittington-Egan

2. Thomas De Quincey, *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts* (London: Philip Allan, 1925), 106–8.

appeared in 1991. To De Quincey's humor and flair for drama, Roughead added impeccable crime scholarship, legal acumen, a deep knowledge of Scottish and English literature, and a keen eye for colorful topographical detail. His work has mesmerized generations of crime aficionados, including his good friend Henry James, who, after reading one of Roughead's witch stories, implored him "to go back to the dear old human and sociable murders and adulteries and forgeries in which we are so agreeably at home."

Roughead's inimitable charm is well exemplified by his comments on the triviality of motives for many famous murders:

Thomas Griffiths Wainewright, the prince of poisoners, excused the murder of his young sister-in-law on the ground "that she had such thick ankles." But this purely aesthetic motive was doubtless alloyed by the fact that he had insured her life for £18,000. A case where the motive was startlingly inadequate is that of John Watson Laurie, the Arran murderer, with which some of my readers may be acquainted. All he got was a silver watch (which he threw away on the spot), a half-return ticket to London (which he didn't use), and a poor pound or two—if that. Yet he stoned his friend to death, like St. Stephen, upon a mountain, and spent many hours in raising an elaborate cairn to his memory—the body, incidentally, forming the foundation.³

Roughead, like Lang, Irving, Atlay, Hall, and Jesse, wrote introductions and served as editor for volumes in the brilliant series of *Notable British Trials* published by William Hodge of Edinburgh beginning in 1905. Among Roughead's ten contributions, one of the strongest is his introduction to the *Trial of Captain Porteous*. John Porteous, captain of the Edinburgh City Guard, was convicted in 1736 of unlawfully commanding guardsmen to fire on a crowd assembled at a public hanging. Porteous's defense that he had acted on prior instructions of superiors was unavailing. (Roughead's extensive account of the case will serve as an effective antidote for moviegoers seduced by the pictorial beauty of the Australian film *Breaker Morant* to accept the dangerous credo that a military commander is entitled to rely on illegal orders as an excuse for murder.)

The second half of the twentieth century has given rise to new generations of true-crime writers, of whom Edgar Lustgarten and Jonathan Goodman are two of the most important. Lustgarten, a barrister, is at his best in recreating famous trials, speculating about disputed verdicts, and analyzing successful defense strategies. The prolific Goodman brings to his oeuvre a broader array of talents, including a gift for detection (witness his famous solution of the murder of Julia Wallace) and a keen sense of times and scenes past.

Although nonfictional crime literature came to full flower in Britain only in the nineteenth century, dramatic works inspired by actual cases had been produced as early as Elizabethan times. Decades ago a theatrical joke used to run around London: "Everyone here has seen *The Mousetrap*, except the Queen, and she thinks she's seen it." There is no need, however, to guess about the taste of the Elizabethan court for crime plays of the

3. William Roughead, "Enjoyment of Murder," in *Neck or Nothing* (London: Cassell, 1939), 10–11.

sixteenth century. It is recorded that in the season of 1578 there was played at court before Queen Elizabeth I a thriller with a title worthy of Agatha Christie, *Murderous Michael*. The novelty of *Murderous Michael* was that it did not deal in the rivalries of noblemen or the assassinations of kings but with a domestic murder of no political or social significance that was based on the facts of an actual criminal case of 1550, the slaying of Thomas Arden by his wife, Alice, and her lover. The text of *Murderous Michael* has been lost, but in 1590 a new play on the same subject, *Arden of Faversham*, was first performed. This drama is one of the earliest surviving examples of a work of imaginative English literature based on a true-crime source. Adhering faithfully to the record of the Arden trial, the play chronicles the blundering efforts of a wife and her lover to dispose of her inconvenient spouse; their victim's luck runs out only in scene 14, a truly remarkable endurance record by Elizabethan standards. It was a sign of things to come that *Arden* chronicled a family murder that had no public importance whatsoever. The appearance of the play foretold the singular British passion for lurid crime narrative that became more pronounced over the succeeding centuries. A generation after *Arden*, John Webster wrote his two classic murder plays, *The White Devil* (1612) and *The Duchess of Malfi* (1623). *The White Devil* was the dramatization of actual events that had occurred nearly thirty years before and featured as its protagonist a famous Venetian courtesan Vittoria Accoramboni; *The Duchess of Malfi* was in large part a reworking of Vittoria's fate.

George Lillo, an eighteenth-century playwright who revised the text of *Arden of Faversham*, wrote a crime drama of his own in prose that eclipsed *Arden* in public favor. Lillo's *The London Merchant*, which opened at the Theatre-Royal in Drury Lane in 1731, retold the murder case of George Barnwell, which was the subject of street ballads as early as the late sixteenth century. Apprentice Barnwell was led by the exactions of a "lady of pleasure," Sarah Millwood, to embezzle his master's funds and then to murder his wealthy uncle. Intended as a sermon for apprentices, it also featured an attractive femme fatale, ultimately played by Sarah Siddons; *The London Merchant* racked up 179 performances between 1731 and 1776, oddly becoming the traditional offering for the Christmas and Easter holidays. Theophilus Cibber, who managed the Drury Lane and created the role of George Barnwell, referred to the play as "almost a new species of tragedy, wrote on a very uncommon subject."

Although overshadowed by purely fictional melodramas and thrillers, English dramas based on true-crime characters and material have attracted enthusiastic audiences in subsequent periods. *The Gamblers*, a play based on the Thurtell-Hunt murder of 1823, opened at London's Surrey Theatre before the case was brought to trial and featured the horse and gig allegedly used in the crime; further performances were blocked by court order. H. Chance Newton⁴ recalls the production of Sydney Grundy's play, *A Fool's Paradise*, in which the role of poisoning victim James Maybrick was acted by H. B. Irving, later to become one of England's leading crime essayists. In a classic display of failed prognostication, Newton had advised Grundy to change the drama's original name, *The Mouse Trap*, to one "more understandable by the general public." Twentieth-century British masters of fact-based crime drama include Emyln Williams (*Night Must*

4. *Crime and the Drama* (London: Stanley Paul, 1927), 29.

Fall, Someone Waiting, etc.), Terence Rattigan (*The Winslow Boy, Cause Celebre*), James Bridie (*The Anatomist*), and Rodney Ackland (*A Dead Secret*).

Eighteenth-century English writers also introduced criminals into opera and fiction. In 1728 John Gay scandalized Handelian oratorio fans with his underworld satire *The Beggar's Opera*, starring the highwayman Captain MacHeath and his dangerous company. Gay may have named MacHeath's mistress after a London pickpocket subsequently hanged in 1740 for assiduous devotion to her craft. Born Jane Webb, this light-fingered practitioner won her famous nickname "Jenny Diver" because of great dexterity in raiding her victims' pockets. Jenny's underworld colleague Jonathan Wild was immortalized by Henry Fielding's 1743 novel in which the "thief-taker"'s elaborate system of organized crime was compared to the reputed unscrupulousness of Prime Minister Sir Robert Walpole.

It is to the nineteenth century that we owe one of the supreme masterpieces of imaginative literature inspired by true crime, Robert Browning's *The Ring and the Book* (1868–69). Browning based his long narrative poem on a parchment-covered book he found by chance in a flea market in the Piazza San Lorenzo in Florence; the volume was a collection of documents relating to an obscure triple murder committed by Count Guido Franceschini and his henchmen in Rome in 1698. In his work, Browning displays a virtuosic skill in rendering the ambiguity of courtroom testimony. With the poet as his eloquent spokesman, even the villain Guido finds much to say in the defense of a heinous crime. Another more notorious murder case of a century earlier, the murder of Count Francesco Cenci by his daughter Beatrice and her brothers, inspired Shelley to write another of the great nineteenth-century works of crime literature, the poetic drama *The Cenci* (1819), in which Beatrice is converted into a symbolic rebel against institutional repression. Historical criminal cases and personages also figure prominently in many nineteenth-century novels, including the so-called Newgate fiction of William Harrison Ainsworth and Bulwer Lytton, and, of course, the works of Scott, Stevenson, and Wilkie Collins.

Many of the leading British fact-based crime novelists of the twentieth century are women. One is Gabrielle Margaret Vere Campbell Long (1886–1952), whose early historical fiction under the pen-name Marjorie Bowen was much admired by Henry James. Long also wrote a large number of popular novels freely based on criminal cases under the pre-women's liberation name of "Joseph Shearing." A major rival of an earlier generation is Marie Belloc Lowndes (1868–1947), whose most famous novel, *The Lodger* (1913), was the source of the classic silent movie by Alfred Hitchcock and several remakes in the sound era. The Belloc Lowndes novel illustrates brilliantly how a narrative based on criminal history can serve as a touchstone for appraising social responses to deviant conduct and disaster. The "Lodger" himself is obviously a fictional reincarnation of Jack the Ripper; but in Belloc Lowndes's polite post-Victorian version he becomes a fundamentalist teetotaler who murders tiptling women and pins notes to their dresses signed with a flourish "The Avenger." The principal focus of the novel, however, is not on the mad prohibitionist but on the reactions of Mr. and Mrs. Bunting, the poverty-stricken householders who give him lodging. As the Lodger's conduct grows stranger and as his unaccountable absences from the house correspond again and again with the times of the Avenger's killings, both of the Buntings are gradually convinced in their

hearts that they are harboring the dreaded murderer. However, because of their common realization that the Lodger's rent is all that keeps the wolf from their door, they keep their suspicions from each other until very late in the game. From Belloc Lowndes's devastating portrait of the willingness of onlookers to temporize with evil for selfish considerations, it is not a very long literary step to Friedrich Dürrenmatt's devastating play *The Visit*.

Many modern detective story writers have drawn freely on themes and personalities of crime history without closely following the facts of criminal cases. Having written a book about the trial of the Mannings that inspired *Bleak House* (1852–53), I must give the place of honor to Charles Dickens. No other English novelist has left a richer or more complex body of work on crime and punishment. A firm believer in the existence of the principle of Evil, Dickens imprinted his hatred of the criminal soul on such unrelieved villains as Rigaud in *Little Dorrit* (1855–57) and Mlle. Hortense in *Bleak House*. However, at the same time that he abhorred violence, Dickens felt a strange empathy for criminals, whose impulses seemed to raise an echo from some of the darker recesses of his own personality. His favorite reading on his lecture tours was the murder of Nancy by Bill Sikes, and he persisted in its performance in the face of the advice of his tour manager, Dolby, that the strain of the scene was tearing him to pieces. Dickens displayed a similar ambivalence in his attitude toward hangings. An absolute opponent of capital punishment, at least in his early days, Dickens was nevertheless drawn by what he called the "attraction of repulsion" to attend several executions. In this respect he proved to have a stronger stomach than his less ideological contemporary Thackeray. After attending the hanging of Courvoisier and finding he could not bear to look, Thackeray turned down an invitation to another public execution in the course of travel abroad. He explained his refusal with the comment, "J'y ai été [I've been there already], as the Frenchman said of hunting."

Many of Dickens's characters are based on historical criminals. The hangman Ned Dennis appears *in propria persona* in *Barnaby Rudge* (1841). The portrait of the rascally Fagin may have been modeled after an authentic receiver of stolen goods, Ikey Solomons. In *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843–44), the ambush of Montague Tigg by Jonas Chuzzlewit was strongly influenced by the Thurtell-Hunt murder case of 1823, and, as noted in my book on the Mannings, *The Woman Who Murdered Black Satin*, Mlle. Hortense is the very image of Maria Manning.

Dickens also wrote a number of insightful newspaper and magazine articles dealing with crime and punishment. These pieces include letters to the *Daily News* and the *Times* against the death penalty and public hanging; his three articles for *Household Words* on the detectives of Scotland Yard; and his perceptive essay on the courtroom demeanor of murderers.

Dickens's voice is instantly recognizable whether he writes of crime and violence in fiction or nonfiction. Compare, for example, his treatment in these two literary modes, of the theme of the "mob," a dominant image in the mind of Dickens, who had strong fears of the loss of social controls. A passage from his early novel *Barnaby Rudge* describes the storming of Newgate Prison by the Gordon Rioters:

Now, now, the door was down. Now they came rushing through the gaol, calling to each other in the vaulted passages; clashing the iron gates dividing yard from yard; beating at

the doors of cells and wards; wrenching off bolts and locks and bars; tearing down the door-posts to get men out; endeavouring to drag them by main force through gaps and windows where a child could scarcely pass; whooping and yelling without a moment's rest; and running through the heat and flames as if they were encased in metal. By their legs, their arms, the hair upon their heads, they dragged the prisoners out.

And now another mob, the mob at Horsemonger Lane on November 13, 1849, that had come to see the hanging of Frederick and Maria Manning (described in *The Woman Who Murdered Black Satin*). Dickens, who viewed the scene with friends from a rented rooftop, recorded the scene below:

I believe that a sight so inconceivably awful as the wickedness and levity of the immense crowd collected at that execution this morning could be imagined by no man, and could be presented in no heathen land under the sun. The horrors of the gibbet and of the crime which brought the wretched murderers to it faded in my mind before the atrocious bearing, looks and language of the assembled spectators. When I came upon the scene at midnight, the shrillness of the cries and howls that were raised from time to time, denoting that they came from a concourse of boys and girls already assembled in the best places, made my blood run cold.

. . . When the two miserable creatures who attracted all this ghastly sight about them were turned quivering into the air, there were no more emotion, no more pity, no more thought that two immortal souls had gone to judgment, no more restraint in any of the previous obscenities, than if the name of Christ had never been heard in this world, and there were no belief among men but that they perished like the beasts.⁵

Another juxtaposition of Dickens's crime journalism and fiction will demonstrate how he turned a real figure into what we all fondly call a "Dickens character." Dickens was an ardent admirer of the London police and especially of the detectives of Scotland Yard. One of the detectives with whom he was particularly friendly was Inspector Charles Field, whose methodical performance of duty and encyclopedic knowledge of the underworld Dickens described in an account of an evening that he spent accompanying Field on his nocturnal rounds:

Inspector Field is, to-night, the guardian genius of the British Museum. He is bringing his shrewd eye to bear on every corner of its solitary galleries, before he reports "all right." Suspicious of the Elgin marbles, and not to be done by cat-faced Egyptian giants with their hands upon their knees, Inspector Field, sagacious, vigilant, lamp in hand, throwing monstrous shadows on the walls and ceilings, passes through the spacious rooms. If a mummy trembled in an atom of its dusty covering, Inspector Field would say, "Come out of that, Tom Green. I know you."⁶

5. Letter to the London *Times*, Nov. 14, 1849.

6. "On Duty with Inspector Field," *Reprinted Pieces*, in *The Works of Charles Dickens*, vol. 8 (London: Chapman & Hall, 1881), 357–58.

In the pages of *Bleak House*, Field is deftly transformed into an equally formidable guardian of public order:

Otherwise mildly studious in his observation of human nature, on the whole a benignant philosopher not disposed to be severe upon the follies of mankind, Mr. Bucket pervades a vast number of houses, and strolls about an infinity of streets: to outward appearances rather languishing for want of an object. He is in the friendliest condition towards his species, and will drink with most of them. . . . Time and place cannot bind Mr. Bucket. Like man in the abstract, he is here to-day and gone to-morrow—but, very unlike man indeed, he is here again the next day.⁷

In this passage, by a Dickensian miracle, Inspector Charles Field of Scotland Yard has been changed into Inspector Bucket, the first police detective in English fiction.

Other nations of the British Commonwealth have made important contributions to fact-based crime literature. Among the finest of Canada's true-crime writers are essayist W. Stewart Wallace (*Murders and Mysteries: A Canadian Series* [Toronto: Macmillan, 1931]); Marjorie Freeman Campbell, who is equally adept in short studies (*A Century of Crime: The Development of Crime Detection Methods in Canada* [Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970]) and in the book-length crime narrative (*Torso: The Evelyn Dick Case* [Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1974]). Toronto lawyer Martin Friedland has produced admirable monographs on English and American murder cases. In Quebec, true-crime reports and studies have appeared since the nineteenth century; an excellent collection is Montreal trial judge Dollard Dansereau's *Causes célèbres du Québec* (Ottawa: Leméac, 1974).

A recent masterwork in Canadian fact-based fiction is Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace* (1996), in which the novelist brings psychological acuity and understanding of Victorian-era household relationships to bear on the enigmatic murder case of servant Grace Marks, convicted in 1843 of helping her fellow servant James McDermott murder their master, Thomas Kinnear, and his housekeeper and mistress, Nancy Montgomery, in the Canadian town of Richmond Hill. Among Canadian murder cases, the nocturnal attack in 1880 on the Donnelly farms in Ontario has been by far the most productive of historical studies, fiction, plays, and folklore. In the raid, which was the culmination of a feud among Irish immigrants, forty disguised men murdered James Donnelly Sr., his wife, two sons, and a niece. At a second trial, the defendants were acquitted. In Australia an equally rich literary heritage stems from the exploits of its cherished armor-clad bushranger Ned Kelly, who also figures in a series of paintings and drawings by Sidney Nolan.

American colonial murder came over on the *Mayflower*: John Billington, who was one of the signatories of the Mayflower Compact, shot a later Plymouth arrival, John Newcomin, in 1630 after the two men quarreled. Governor William Bradford penned the first page of American crime history when he tersely related Billington's case in *The History of Plymouth Colony* (1630–50):

7. *Bleak House*, chap. 53.

This year Billington the elder, one of those who came over first, was arraigned, and both by grand and petty jury found guilty of willful murder by plain and notorious evidence, and was accordingly executed.

This, the first execution among them, was a great sadness to them. They took all possible pains in the trial, and consulted Mr. Winthrop, and the other leading men at the Bay of Massachusetts recently arrived, who concurred with them that he ought to die, and the land be purged of blood. He and some of his relatives had often been punished for misconduct before, being one of the profanest families among them. They came from London, and I know not by what influence they were shuffled into the first body of settlers. The charge against him was that he waylaid a young man, one John Newcomin, about a former quarrel, and shot him with a gun, whereof he died.⁸

From this obscure beginning American true crime narratives followed much the same course marked out in England. A retired FBI agent, Thomas McDade, in his indispensable work *The Annals of Murder: A Bibliography of Books and Pamphlets on American Murders from Colonial Times to 1900* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1961), lists 1,126 trial reports, chapbooks, criminal biographies, broadsides, confessions, ballads, and sermons devoted exclusively to murder cases in the first three American centuries.⁹ One of the first gallows sermons to be published was delivered by Increase Mather to currier James Morgan, who was convicted in Boston in 1685 of murdering butcher Joseph Johnson with an iron spit when Johnson intervened to defend Morgan's wife from his drunken abuse. Cotton Mather followed in his father's literary path, publishing a series of cautionary sermons including *Pillars of Salt* (1699), inspired by the conviction of Bostonian Sarah Threeneedles for the murder of her illegitimate infant. Mather used this occasion for the ambitious purpose of creating New England's first criminal calendar; he appended to the Threeneedles sermon "An History of some Criminals Executed in this Land, for Capital Crimes," together with "some of their Dying Speeches; Collected and Published, For the Warning of such as Live in Destructive Courses of Ungodliness."

The criminal chapbook or pamphlet was an important strand in the development of American popular literature. Examples of some of the most picturesque items in this genre are cited by Edmund Pearson in the first section of his two-part article "From Sudden Death," included in his *Queer Books* (Garden City: Doubleday, Doran, 1928). Pearson notes that one of the most prolific true-crime pamphleteers of the early nineteenth century was none other than the mythifier of George Washington's cherry tree, Parson Mason Locke

8. Billington and his mother, fictitiously named Joan and added to the roster of the Plymouth settlers, figure prominently in Stephen Vincent Benét's posthumously published first volume of a projected narrative poem of American pioneers entitled *Western Star* (1943). Toward the end of Book One, a colonist meets Joan Billington at the foot of her son's gallows and joins her in mourning the murderer as "a man who came with the first and should have thriven."

9. In seventeenth-century New England, of course, true-crime writing by more "serious" writers, such as divines and government functionaries, were more likely to address their witchcraft obsession than murder or other common-law offenses. See, for example, *Narratives of the Witchcraft Cases 1648–1706*, ed. George Lincoln Burr (New York: Scribner's, 1914).

Weems. One of Weems's works, titled *God's Revenge Against Murder* (1808), purports to describe Ned Findley's murder of his wife Mary in South Carolina, a crime that McDade believes "could be another of the Parson's whimses."

An early nineteenth-century case that spawned ten pamphlet entries in McDade's bibliography is the trial and hanging of Jereboam O. Beauchamp (the "Kentucky Tragedy"). Colonel Solomon P. Sharp had seduced and abandoned Ann Cooke, to whom Beauchamp subsequently paid court. Cooke agreed to marry him only if he avenged her honor; after Sharp refused a duel, Beauchamp donned a mask and stabbed him to death. The Beauchamp case is one of the earliest American murders to have inspired a rich store of imaginative literature: Edgar Allan Poe's fragmentary drama "Politian," William Gilmore Simms's *Charlemont* (1856) and *Beauchampe* (1842), and Robert Penn Warren's *World Enough and Time* (1950). Another early true-crime curiosity arose from the 1801 stabbing murder of Elizabeth Fales by her frustrated suitor Jason Fairbanks in a birch grove in Dedham, Massachusetts; a sympathetic "life and character" of the executed killer has been attributed to Sarah Wentworth Morton, described by historian Daniel A. Cohen as "a beautiful Boston socialite and frequent contributor to local literary magazines whose poetical effusions had at one time earned her considerable renown as 'the American Sappho.'"¹⁰ Another literary fruit of the Dedham murder was *Life of Jason Fairbanks: A Novel Founded on Fact*, which Professor Cohen regards as "evidently one of the earliest novels based on an actual murder case." (Unfortunately no copy survives.) The early nineteenth century also marked the appearance of an extensive ghost-written criminal "autobiography" (1807) of the appealing New England crook Henry Tufts, reprieved from hanging for the theft of six silver spoons.

American writers of the nineteenth century, like their British forerunners, began to compile books of trials, but they generally favored English or French cases. John Dunphy's *Remarkable Trials of All Countries* (1867) includes only two American murders. As the century progressed, however, worthier studies of American cases were produced by authors familiar with the local or regional settings in which the crimes occurred. A pioneer in this genre was the New Hampshire poet Celia Thaxter (1835–1894), whose essay on Louis Wagner's murder of Anethe and Karen Christensen on Smutty Nose Island in the Isles of Shoals appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1875, only two years after the atrocity. Not only Thaxter's title but her imaginative re-creation of emotions declares an allegiance to De Quincey: "He returns to Anethe standing shuddering there. It is no matter that she is beautiful, young, and helpless to resist, that she has been kind to him, that she never did a human creature harm, that she stretches her gentle hands out to him in agonized entreaty, crying piteously, 'Oh, Louis, Louis, Louis!' He raises the ax and brings it down on her bright head in one tremendous blow, and she sinks without a sound and lies in a heap, with her warm blood reddening the snow."

New Orleans novelist George Washington Cable took pains to lend authenticity to the cases retold in a fictional manner in his *Strange True Stories of Louisiana* (1889). Among the

10. Daniel A. Cohen, *Pillars of Salt, Monuments of Grace: New England Crime Literature and the Origins of American Popular Culture, 1674–1860* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993), 188.

illustrations to his book he included some of the manuscripts and court papers on which he relied. The most famous malefactor restored to life in Cable's colorful prose is Delphine Lalaurie, who tortured and mistreated slaves in the "haunted house" of Royal Street, New Orleans. Ohio regionalism combines with the horror of the death penalty in "Gibbeted," Lafcadio Hearn's account of the 1876 Dayton execution of nineteen-year-old James Murphy, who murdered Colonel William Dawson, a plow works superintendent, "apparently for no other reason than that he refused a drunken party permission to intrude upon the quiet enjoyments of a private wedding party." After "a hundred days of mental torture," Murphy faced "a hideous death" on the scaffold built in a prison corridor; after the first rope broke, a double noose took the young Murphy's life away. See *The Selected Writings of Lafcadio Hearn*, ed. Henry Goodman, intro. Malcolm Cowley (New York: Carol Publishing Co., 1991), 203–15. In 1874 Hearn also luridly reported the murder and cremation of Herman Schilling in a Cincinnati tannery; crime sketches were drawn by artist Frank Duveneck.

Cleveland-born short-story writer and magazine editor Alfred Henry Lewis (ca. 1858–1914) similarly applied fictive talent to the re-creation of criminal cases in his late work, *Nation-Famous New York Murders* (1914). Dedicated to William W. McLaughlin, retired chief inspector of the New York City Police, this collection of previously published articles includes highlights of the metropolis's criminal annals: the murder of prostitute Helen Jewett; the Draft Riots; the killing of journalist Albert Richardson in the offices of the *New York Tribune*; and the Astor Place Riot. Lewis's fiction-magazine style is exemplified by his summary of Helen Jewett's views on love and marriage: "The unlovely Scroggs was rich, and owned a bank. He went wild with love for Helen, and would have married her. She refused. What said her philosophy? For her no wedding bells should ring, no bridal veils be woven."

The American true-crime essay came into maturity with the publication in 1924 of *Studies in Murder* by Edmund Lester Pearson (1880–1937). Formerly editor of publications at the New York Public Library and a columnist and author on subjects relating to books, libraries, and book collecting, Pearson exclusively devoted the last twelve years of his life to pursuing his interest in murder cases. Strongly influenced by the work of Scottish crime essayist William Roughead, with whom he developed a friendship mainly by correspondence, Pearson brought to his crime studies a wit, stylishness, and brevity of exposition that are still unsurpassed. By his continued literary attention to Lizzie Borden, he contributed to establishing the preeminence of her case in American history and folklore. Pearson must also be credited with introducing American readers to famous French murder cases.

A near-contemporary of Pearson, Herbert Asbury (1891–1963) also blended humor and antiquarian interests in his volumes of short studies drawn from the underworld histories of American cities, including New York, San Francisco, New Orleans, and Chicago. So deeply engaged was Asbury's mind with crimes of the nineteenth century that he viewed the gangster phenomenon as having disappeared from New York City; in his introduction to *The Gangs of New York* (1928), he maintained that, happily, the gangster "has now passed from the metropolitan scene, and for nearly half a score of years has existed mainly in the lively imaginations of industrious journalists, among whom the tradition of the gangster has more lives than the proverbial cat."

Since World War II, highly accomplished book-length studies of individual criminal cases have been published with increasing frequency by America's trade and scholarly presses. Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* (1966) is an emotionally committed relation of the murder of the Clutter family by Richard Hickock and Perry Smith and of the hangings of the criminals. The work follows the pattern of such nineteenth-century crime essayists as Thomas De Quincey and Celia Thaxter in its fictive reconstruction of the victims' feelings and in a strong evocation of settings. Because of the work of such forerunners, and of more recent imaginative journalism that Capote himself cited in interviews (such as Lillian Ross's *Picture*), there is reason to dispute his claim to have invented a new literary genre, the "nonfiction novel." Still, it would be difficult to point to a book-length crime reportage before Capote's in which the author, to borrow his words, "employed all the techniques of fictional art."

Norman Mailer's mammoth rendering of Gary Gilmore's murders and his welcomed death before a Utah firing squad, *The Executioner's Song* (1977), won a Pulitzer Prize, a recognition that had been denied *In Cold Blood*. Mailer's publisher had apparently intended to signal Capote's work as a precedent by describing *The Executioner's Song* on its dust jacket as "a true life novel." Yet Mailer, unlike Capote, took great pains to conceal his novelist's art, and his distinctive literary voice does not appear in the Gilmore narrative. Instead, the story is told in a flat, unobtrusive style. Novelist Joan Didion praised its "meticulously limited vocabulary and its voice as flat as the horizon . . . the authentic Western voice."

In addition to the works of Capote and Mailer that bestride the conventional lines between fact and imaginative literature, recent decades have been favored by outstanding examples of crime-history monographs presented in more traditional scholarly modes. Many of the works of this class have been published by university presses and tend therefore to deal with criminal cases that illuminate significant episodes or issues in American history. Among the best are Dan T. Carter's *Scottsboro: A Tragedy of the American South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1979), a study of the race-angled rape prosecution and ultimate vindication of the "Scottsboro boys"; and Charles E. Rosenberg's *The Trial of the Assassin Guiteau: Psychiatry and Law in the Gilded Age* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1968), an analysis of the conflict between law and psychiatry in the prosecution of President James Garfield's assassin, Charles Guiteau. With the reawakened examination of Thomas Jefferson's relationship to America's racial nightmares, an abiding interest is attached to Boynton Merrill Jr.'s *Jefferson's Nephews: A Frontier Tragedy* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1976), studying a case in which two nephews of Jefferson, Lilburne and Isham Lewis, were charged with the murder of a slave. The crime had previously inspired Robert Penn Warren's "tale in verse and voices," *Brother to Dragons* (New York: Random House, 1953).

Worthy of a place among these esteemed crime historians is journalist J. Anthony Lukas, whose *Big Trouble* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997) was published shortly after the author's tragic suicide. Lukas's book, bearing the grandiloquent subtitle "A Murder in a Small Western Town Sets Off a Struggle for the Soul of America," focuses on the trial of Western miners' union leader William (Big Bill) Haywood's trial for the 1907 Idaho bombing murder of banker Frank R. Steunenberg, who as governor has obtained the assistance of federal troops in suppressing labor violence in the Coeur d'Alene mining district. Lukas's principal

purpose was to “examine that moment in our national experience when we came closest to [class] warfare.” In pursuit of that goal, he paints on a historical canvas incomparably vaster than that of *Ragtime*, introducing a cast of characters including Haywood’s successful defender Clarence Darrow, President Theodore Roosevelt, railroad magnate E. H. Harriman, actress Ethel Barrymore, and pitching legend Walter Johnson.

Crime histories of this caliber will likely fight a losing battle against “quickie” hackwork for space on the shelves and display counters of American superstores; but they will continue to instruct and entertain many generations. It is a pity, therefore, that the achievements of crime scholars went unmentioned in Alex Ross’s dismissive survey (*New Yorker*, August 19, 1996) of true crime’s “current traits and tics, virtues and sins, absurdities and accidental truths.”

We are indebted to Edgar Allan Poe for the introduction of true-crime elements into significant American fiction. Poe’s French sleuth Auguste Dupin is plainly modeled on the detective chief of Paris, Eugène-François Vidocq, despite Dupin’s faint praise for his real-life predecessor: “Vidocq . . . was a good guesser, and a persevering man. But, without educated thought, he erred continually by the very intensity of his investigations. He impaired his vision by holding the object too close. He might see, perhaps, one or two points with unusual clearness, but in so doing he, necessarily, lost sight of the matter as a whole. Thus, there is such a thing as being too profound.” In Poe’s story “The Mystery of Marie Roget,” the title character bears, in Gallicized form, the name of Wall Street tobacconist saleswoman Mary Cecilia Rogers, whose dead body was found floating in the Hudson in 1842. Setting his tale in Paris, Poe closely followed the main facts of the unsolved Rogers case and proposed his own solution. Rejecting the theory that the crime had been perpetrated by a gang of ruffians, Poe surmised, through the reasoning of his detective Dupin, that Rogers had run off with a sailor with whom she had eloped before. After the story’s first periodical appearance, Dupin’s conclusions were slightly altered by his creator to conform to newer investigative findings suggesting that Rogers might have been the victim of a botched abortion.

One of the permanent values of the Poe tale was in Dupin’s attack on irresponsible crime journalism. In Dupin’s view, “it is the object of our newspapers rather to create a sensation—to make a point—than to further the cause of truth. . . . In ratiocination, not less than in literature, it is the *epigram* which is the most immediately and the most universally appreciated. In both, it is of the lowest order of merit.” (What Poe meant by an “epigram” we now term a “sound bite.”) In Poe’s wake, many of America’s most honored novelists have utilized true-crime sources. Images of historical murderesses are reflected by the two principal female characters, Hilda and Miriam, in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Marble Faun* (1860). The pure Hilda feels empathy with Guido Reni’s supposed portrait of the parricide Beatrice Cenci, with whose fate Miriam, a painter of scenes of violence by women, also identifies her own impulse to murder her male oppressor. Hawthorne also suggests that Miriam was innocently involved in a scandalous criminal case of the recent past; literary scholarship has shown that the historical figure whom Hawthorne had in mind was Henriette Deluzy, a governess unjustly accused of complicity in the Praslin murder in Paris.

Family and maritime history fuses in Herman Melville’s *White-Jacket*. The title character, a seaman on the *Neversink*, refers explicitly to the controversy surrounding the summary

hanging of three sailors aboard the *USS Somers* in 1842. The men had been sentenced to death for mutiny, despite the absence of overt acts of rebellion, by an informal officers' court presided over by Melville's cousin, Lieutenant Guert Gansevoort, who had reported the supposed mutinous conspiracy to Captain Alexander Mackenzie. White-Jacket comments, "The well-known case of a United States brig furnishes a memorable example, which at any moment may be repeated. Three men, in a time of peace, were then hung at the yard-arm, merely because, in the captain's judgment, it became necessary to hang them. To this day the question of their complete guilt is socially discussed."¹¹ Professor Michael Paul Rogan has shown how Melville returned to the theme of the *Somers* mutiny in *Billy Budd*, written in the last years preceding his death in 1891.¹² In this novella, according to Rogan's analysis, Melville absolved both the condemned Billy and his executioner, Captain Vere, of bad motives. Instead, he argues, the death sentence reflected a rigid, formalistic devotion to the state that was divorced from human feeling and, paradoxically, left uncontaminated the love that Vere and Billy felt for each other.

Frank Norris's Zolaesque novel *McTeague* (1899) based its title character on an unemployed ironworker, Patrick Collins, who murdered his wife, Sarah, in San Francisco in 1893. At the time of the novel's composition, both Norris and the reporter covering the Collins case reflected the influence of Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso, who believed in the inheritance of antisocial tendencies from parents who themselves either were criminals or had suffered a degeneration of the nervous system due to alcoholism. *McTeague's* wife, Trina, also appears to be a victim of her genes, owing her miserliness to tightfisted ancestors.

At least from 1914 on, Theodore Dreiser looked into a number of murder cases as possible subjects for a novel, believing that these crimes were often impelled by a drive to rise in a society dominated by materialism. Among the murders he considered were three poisoning trials: the case of Roland Molineux; the 1891 murder of Helen Potts by her lover, a young medical student named Carlyle Harris, who found their socially ill-assorted match an obstacle to his professional aspirations; and Reverend Clarence Richeson's 1911 killing of a young parishioner, Avis Linnell, whose pregnancy threatened his plans to marry a wealthy woman. After writing six chapters based on the Richeson-Linnell case, Dreiser abandoned the project in favor of the Gillette-Brown case of 1906. In that year Chester Gillette, a supervisor in his uncle's skirt factory, drowned his pregnant sweetheart, a fellow factory employee named Grace Brown, in Big Moose Lake in the Adirondacks. In preparation of the sprawling realist novel that, in support of its author's attack on materialistic standards of the good life, was to be titled *An American Tragedy*, Dreiser visited the murder scene and Sing Sing prison. To provide authenticity to the courtroom scenes in the powerful second volume of his work, Dreiser, according to his biographer W. A. Swanberg, "clung to fact when he could, lifting some 30 pages verbatim from old New York newspaper accounts of the court proceedings and the letters between the ill-fated lovers."

11. *White-Jacket*, chap. 72.

12. "The *Somers* Mutiny and *Billy Budd*: Melville in the Penal Colony," *Subversive Genealogy: The Politics and Art of Herman Melville* (New York: Knopf, 1983), 288–316.

Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940), depicting the murders and execution of a black youth, Bigger Thomas, shows the influence of Dreiser, whom Wright ardently admired. Originally undertaking the work as a study of life in the black slums of Chicago's South Side, Wright incorporated into his draft elements of Robert Nixon's contemporary burglary-murder trial, which the Chicago press covered with a display of undisguised racism. Bigger Thomas, though, is a personality far more complex than the Robert Nixon who emerges from the court record; although Bigger is prone to a violence that is a product of his own fear as an outcast, his first crime, the suffocation of his white "liberal" employer's daughter, is actuated on the unmarked border between accident and malice.

Although of literary merit considerably below the peaks of fact-based crime fiction, many estimable American bestsellers have continued the tradition of borrowing narrative material from famous murder cases. Three leading examples are Meyer Levin's *Compulsion* (1956), a version of the Leopold-Loeb case somewhat marred by psychobabble; Bernard Malamud's *The Fixer* (1966), based on Mendel Beiliss's blood-libel trial in nineteenth-century Ukraine (in which the defendant was charged with having murdered a Christian boy in order to use his blood to make Passover matzos); and E. L. Doctorow's *Ragtime* (1975), in which "Younger Brother" falls in love with Evelyn Nesbit Thaw, the wife of architect Stanford White's demented killer.

In 1798 William Dunlap, America's first professional playwright, staged *André*, a drama about British spy Major John André. However, American drama based on true-crime sources attained its full powers only in the twentieth century. Prior generations of theater audiences in the United States greatly preferred unabashedly fictional melodrama to entertainments drawn from crime history, but occasionally real criminals, victims, or policemen took brief turns on the stage. The kidnapping of Charley Ross, for example, influenced the last two acts of Augustin Daly's popular 1875 play *Pique*. David Belasco dramatized a current bank scandal in his *Men and Women* (1890), his final collaboration with Henry C. De Mille; earlier Belasco had introduced Napoleon III's police chief, Monsieur Claude, to New Yorkers in his adaptation of a French thriller, *The Stranglers of Paris* (1883). The opening of William R. Wilson's *The Inspector* (1890) was delayed for several nights apparently because the police believed that the play caricatured New City's police inspector Thomas Byrnes.

Other true-crime figures to appear on New York stages in the nineteenth century include Britain's Eugene Aram (in 1885), Deacon Brodie (in 1888), and Jack Sheppard (as early as 1871). As the twentieth century was born, current American murder cases were featured in dramatic productions. Victor C. Calvert's *The Great Poison Mystery* (1902) absolved Roland Molineux of the famous Bromo-Seltzer poisoning at New York's Knickerbocker Athletic Club, but the play never reached New York, possibly because the author plainly attributed the crime to Harry Cornish. According to theater chronicler Gerald Bordman, Molineux, a few years later, became "the first American convicted of murder¹³ to have a play of his own given a major New York mounting"; in this comment, Bordman made reference to Molineux's play *The Man Inside* (1913), which David Belasco produced unsuccessfully after subjecting the chaotic manuscript

13. The conviction was later reversed, and Molineux was acquitted upon retrial.

to substantial revisions. Another American murder case, the killing of Mr. Burdick by his wife's lover at her behest, was reflected accurately in Lawrence Russell's *The Buffalo Mystery* (1903).

From the 1920s on, increasing use has been made of true crime and scandal in the fundamental plot structures of American drama. December 1926 marked the New York City premiere of the comedy *Chicago*, later filmed as *Roxie Hart* with Ginger Rogers and adapted as a musical comedy under its original name with music by John Kander and lyrics by Fred Ebb. The author of the 1926 stage work, Maurine Watkins, based the characters of Roxie Hart and Velma on her own *Chicago Tribune* coverage of the trials and acquittals of Belva Gaertner and Beulah Annan for the murders of their lovers. Two years later, Sophie Treadwell's *Machinal*, employing techniques similar to those previously used by Elmer Rice in *The Adding Machine*, played free variations on the Ruth Snyder–Judd Gray murder case in powerful expressionist scenes showing the doomed killers in the grip of mechanistic fate. In the following decade, Lillian Hellman, in *The Children's Hour* (first produced in 1934), reversed Edgar Allan Poe's feat of turning a New Yorker into the Frenchwoman "Marie Roget"; she seamlessly Americanized and updated an Edinburgh scandal of 1810 in which a girl student accused her schoolmistresses of lesbianism.

In the latter part of the twentieth century, crime dramas that are fact-based but not necessarily bound to chronological storytelling have flourished on and, more often, far off Broadway. The playwrights, addressing audiences much smaller than the readership that hankers after ephemeral crime journalism, achieve greater freedom in developing themes imbedded deeply in real-life tragedies. It is often small-scale works that have left the strongest impressions. Neal Bell's *Two Small Bodies* (1977), later filmed, is a dark two-character fantasy on the troubling Alice Crimmins murder case, in which an increasingly pathological relationship develops between the Crimmins-like suspect and the detective investigating the disappearance of her two children. *Gross Indecency* dexterously interlaces testimony from the trials of Oscar Wilde with comments of his contemporaries and an amusing interview with a modern literary scholar to shed new light on Wilde's deceptions and self-deceptions about the gap between art and conduct. Thulani Davis's play *Everybody's Ruby*, produced at New York City's Public Theatre in 1999, revisits Ruby McCollum's 1952 murder of her white lover, Dr. Clifford LeRoy Adams. Davis juxtaposes two powerful images of rejected African women: McCollum, denied justice by a racist Florida community, and Zora Neale Hurston (a reporter at McCollum's trial), compelled by lack of a receptive public to abandon her literary career.

FRENCH WORKS

Like cuisine, each country's fact-based crime literature tends to have its own flavor and characteristic modes of preparation. The French, innovators in true-crime literature as in so many of the arts, were among the first to find value in collecting narratives of criminal trials and other legal proceedings in series to which they gave the name "causes célèbres." Gayot de Pitaval, an eighteenth-century lawyer whose work was influential in launching this literary genre, explained in a preface to his *causes célèbres* why he believed trial accounts to be instructive:

The strange and surprising facts in the agreeable stories that are works of the imagination cause us a poisoned pleasure, so to speak, because of the falsity of the events. This feigned beauty is not a true beauty; it astonishes us at first, but the illusion dissipates, and the natural repugnance that we feel for the false revolts us, at the bottom of our heart, against the most beautiful of fictions.

But when the true combines with the wonderful, and when nature offers them to us in a fabric of facts, where it seems to have borrowed from a happy genius for embellishment, then our mind and our heart enjoy a pleasure that is pure and exquisite.

Following Gayot de Pitaval's lead, other authors produced series of causes célèbres without interruption until the eve of World War II. During the nineteenth century, the work of Armand Fouquier was particularly popular, appearing in a Spanish translation and providing the principal source for American Edmund Pearson's essays on French crime. The more modern compilers of French causes célèbres, such as Albert Bataille (who published between 1880 and 1898) and Geo London (who covered trials between 1927 and 1938) based their trial summaries on their own courtroom notes. Unfortunately, only a small portion of French causes célèbres are available in English: two volumes of selections from Albert Bataille's trial reports and Alexandre Dumas *père's* engaging but highly fictionalized set of *Celebrated Crimes*.

The trial summaries of Gayot de Pitaval and his followers had their antecedents in popular fact-based crime literature that began to appear in France as early as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.¹⁴ A principal source of such publications was the Blue Library (Bibliothèque bleue), consisting of chapbooks published between the late sixteenth century and the end of the nineteenth century. First developed in the printing shops of Troyes en Champagne, these booklets, which owed their generic name to their characteristic blue-gray paper covers, constituted for the majority of the population during the three centuries of their production "the most common means of access to written culture."¹⁵ Sold at cheap prices in tens of millions of copies and offering 1,200 titles on subjects as diverse as beggars and the weather, the Blue Library included narratives and ballads celebrating the crimes and executions of such famous murderers as Madame Lescombat and the poisoner Desrues. Among the bestsellers were chapbooks devoted to the smuggler Mandrin and Parisian gangster Cartouche, who were often portrayed as "social bandits" championing the oppressed.

Although French literary interest in true crime had roots in reportage of criminal trials, factual crime writing did not remain a private preserve of lawyers or crime journalists. The French are inclined to examine their crimes as an integral part of a historical or social milieu, and historians of a particular era are as likely to concern themselves with crimes and mysteries of their period of specialization as with its wars or paintings. For example,

14. An early true-crime volume in the Borowitz Collection is François de Calvi's *Histoire générale des larrons* [General History of Thieves] (Rouen: Jacques Caillové, 1636).

15. *Histoires curieuses et véritables de Cartouche et de Mandrin*, texts presented by H. J. Lüsebrink (Paris: Arthaud-Montalba, 1984), 3.

Georges Mongrédien, best known for his cultural studies of seventeenth-century France, has also written valuable monographs on the trial of Louis XIV's finance minister, Nicolas Fouquet, for maladministration of public funds and on the Man in the Iron Mask.

Prominent among historical mysteries that are perennially fascinating to French scholars and their readership are identity disputes and impostures. Among the most persistent conundra are the identity of the Man in the Iron Mask and the respective claims of a series of "false Dauphins" to be Louis XVII, escaped (so they asserted) from the Temple Prison during the French Revolution.¹⁶ A modern film and stage musical have given wider fame to the seventeenth-century impostor who claimed to be Martin Guerre, a case that opens the first volume of Gayot de Pitaval's *causes célèbres*. Another entrant into the charmed literary circle of French impostors is the "woman without a name," who asserted after the Revolution that she was the Marquise Marie de Douhault, regarded as long dead and buried but in fact (she asserted) long imprisoned in revolutionary oubliettes. Her avowed ordeal inspired Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*.

An admirable tradition of French writers through the ages has been to take up their pens in favor of compatriots whom they have deemed unjustly accused or condemned. Sometimes these literary interventions have entailed considerable personal risks. The most famous example, of course, is Emile Zola's celebrated advocacy of the cause of Alfred Dreyfus, which led to the novelist's conviction of criminal defamation. Zola's action followed a seventeenth-century precedent; Paul Pellisson, secretary to Fouquet, composed eloquent memorials to Louis XIV in defense of the fallen minister, only to receive five years in the Bastille for his pains. An equal show of courage was made by Voltaire in his successful rehabilitation of the reputation of Jean Calas, erroneously condemned and executed for the murder of his son as the result of anti-Protestant prejudice. Novelist Benjamin Constant's campaign in behalf of farmers' advocate Wilfred Regnault, wrongly convicted of murder in 1817, proved to be more timely; Regnault's death sentence was commuted to imprisonment. Other literary intercessions appear to have been quixotic. Balzac's defense of his former journalistic colleague Sébastien Peytel could not shake the strong murder case against him. Before World War II a group of surrealist writers and artists collaborated on a pamphlet in support of Violette Nozières (or Nozière), who faced trial for poisoning her parents; although the surrealists could not suggest a credible defense to the criminal charges, they sought to portray her as a symbol of youth abused by age. As the Peytel and Nozières cases demonstrate, French writers have not necessarily been on the right side of every issue of criminal law, but each of these instances of literary intervention has given rise to significant fact-based crime writings.

Other important categories of French crime nonfiction are police and detective memoirs, the most notable of which are those of Vidocq (who will be discussed further), Goron, and Napoleon III's police chief Monsieur Claude. Another law-and-order bestseller was the ghost-written memoirs of the Sansons, France's hereditary executioners. Beginning in the nineteenth century, descriptions of France's prisons and prison camps abound; many are the works of reformers, culminating in journalist Albert Londres's *Au bagne* [In the Prison

16. A recent DNA test has confirmed that the Dauphin died in prison.

Camp] (1923), which is credited with contributing to the abolition of France's overseas prison colonies. Prison escape literature, exemplified in our time by Henri Charrière's *Papillon* (1969), has also been highly favored by French readers. Among criminal autobiographies, the memoirs written by the "poet-murderer" Pierre-François Lacenaire before his execution in 1836 show a vein of genuine literary talent unhappily absent from his verse. However, the memoirs of Clarisse Manson (1818), ghost-written by Balzac's mentor Henri de Latouche for the duplicitous star witness in the Fualdès murder trials, are primarily a hoax that offended Madame Manson but won a large public in many countries.

As in England, the French nonfictional literature of crime burgeoned as the twentieth century was ushered in. Alexandre Lacassagne, professor of forensic medicine at the University of Lyon, in addition to his scientific texts such as *Précis de médecine légale* (Paris: Masson, 1909), wrote a study of Joseph Vacher, large-scale serial killer of animal herders; Lacassagne had confirmed Vacher's sanity to the trial court. In his book, titled *Vacher the Ripper and Sadistic Crimes* (Lyon: Storck, 1899), Lacassagne compared Vacher to other sadistic killers, including Gilles de Rais and Jack the Ripper. In the first half of the twentieth century, another great forensic scientist made his mark in Lyon: criminalist Dr. Edmond Locard, who became known as the "Sherlock Holmes of France." The author of important treatises on scientific crime detection, Locard also wrote and edited many popular studies of criminal cases. Another physician, Dr. [Augustin] Cabanès wrote greatly admired series of antiquarian works on wide-ranging subjects, including many that investigated the medical aspects of historical mysteries.

Focusing on personal tragedies that were overshadowed by cataclysmic public events, Théodore Gosselin, adopting the pseudonym of G. Lenotre, created a large body of work that focused primarily on the era of the French Revolution. To his studies of private disaster he applied the term "little history" (*petite histoire*). Although his themes were often modest, Lenotre was unsparing in archival documentation. Paul Reboux and Charles Muller, parodying Lenotre's account of the flight of the royal couple to Varennes, supply a footnote furnishing the names of the six horses that drew the carriage. The warmhearted Lenotre formed a distinguished literary circle, including crime historians Ernest d'Hauterive (son-in-law of Alexandre Dumas *fils*) and J. Lucas-Dubreton.

Until about 1925, when one of its leading spirits, Pierre Figerou, died, one of the principal animators of French crime history research was a group of aficionados who called themselves the Dinner Club of the Eleven (*Dîner des Onze*). The members, "attentive to accuracy and method, decided to gather periodically to chat, over their cups, about their bibliophilic finds, to recall curious cases and to call new ones to each other's attention, and to exchange information and recollections."¹⁷ The eleven clubmen were the former president of the Paris bar, Henri-Robert; the preeminent forensic scientist of the period, dandyish Dr. Charles Paul, who sported white gaiters; Judge Maurice Gilbert, who presided over the Landru murder trial; Robert Godefroy, associate justice of France's Supreme Court; crime annalists Gaston Delayen and Georges Claretie; crime historian Pierre Figerou; appellate lawyer and

17. Pierre de Pressac, Preface to Pierre Figerou, *La belle Madame Lescombat, son amant et son mari* (Paris: Perrin, 1927).

journalist Henri Vonoven; Maurice Reclus, member of France's highest administrative court (Conseil d'État); historian Pierre de Pressac; and Paul Dollfus, journalist on the staff of *Gil Blas*. Many of the club members authored distinguished monographs on crimes of the past, including volumes in the series published by Perrin under the general title *Judicial Puzzles and Dramas of the Past* (Énigmes et drames judiciaires d'autrefois). The Dinner Club of the Eleven appears to set the pattern for the Parisian "Crimes Club" that furnishes the title of William Le Queux's 1927 collection of short stories. The still-vigorous English counterpart of the Eleven is Our Society, of which Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was an early member.

In terms of the quality and volume of his work, Pierre Bouchardon (1870–1950) has a strong claim to first place among France's crime historians. A magistrate by profession, Bouchardon gained initial prominence as an investigator for the Council of War inquiry into the espionage of Mata Hari and after World War II was called on to consider evidence regarding the charges against Marshal Pétain. Despite his busy judicial career, Bouchardon wrote over thirty books (including monographs and collections of essays) devoted to French crimes, generally preferring to deal with "common-law" cases, in which criminal conduct is actuated by personal motives rather than political antagonisms. An idolator of Balzac, from whose work he often culled quotations to serve as epigraphs, Bouchardon is the most literary of the France's leading crime historians. Given to pungent aphorisms, he compares his favorite poisoner Marie Lafarge to Emma Bovary by remarking, "A woman pardons her husband for the loss of her fortune; she does not pardon him for the violation of her modesty or the ruin of her illusions."

A rich harvest of fact-based crime fiction began in the early nineteenth century. An anonymous 1813 novel based on the persecution and murder of the Marquise de Gange (or Ganges) by her husband and her brothers has been attributed to the Marquis de Sade, who uncharacteristically sympathizes with his virtuous heroine. It is, however, Stendhal's *The Red and Black* (1830) that must be regarded as the fountainhead of French romantic fiction based on fact-crime sources. The calculating heart of Stendhal's antihero Julien Sorel, a fictionalized portrait of Antoine Berthet (who attempted to murder Mme. Michoud de la Tour during a church service at Brangues in 1827), is intended to persuade us that, in nineteenth-century France, it was not murder but seduction that was undertaken "in cold blood." Alexandre Dumas père drew many of his characters and plots from real life, often preserving the names of historical figures who rubbed shoulders with others who were pure inventions. Among the most successful of his novels based on crime history are *The Man in the Iron Mask*, *The Queen's Necklace*, and *Le chevalier de Maison-Rouge*, based on the rash adventurer who tried to free Marie Antoinette from prison in the "carnation plot."

A seminal figure in the development of fact-based crime fiction, by virtue both of his own writings and his international influence on other authors, is Eugène-François Vidocq (1775–1857). A brawler in his early life, Vidocq was repeatedly imprisoned for minor offenses and after the last of many daring escapes was pursued relentlessly by the police. Tiring of life on the run, Vidocq made his peace with the law, becoming successively a police spy, head of the Paris Sûreté, and organizer of a private detective agency. In 1828 his memoirs (heavily adulterated by unscrupulous editors) were published and immediately translated

into English; they became an international exemplar for police memoirs, in which reality and sensation kept uneasy company. Between 1836 and 1846 Vidocq published three works of mingled fact and fiction based on his knowledge of crime: *The Thieves* (1836), *The True Mysteries of Paris* (1844), and *The "Chauffeurs" of the North* (1845–46), the last title referring not to taxi drivers but to a gang of ruffians who held householders' feet to the fire in order to force them to reveal the hiding places of their valuables. Vidocq's melodramatic career, charismatic personality, and familiarity with the ways of the underworld influenced the work of romantic novelists, including Balzac and Hugo. Balzac admitted that he based on Vidocq the criminal genius and subsequently police chief Vautrin, who haunts the pages of *La comédie humaine*, making his first appearance in *Le père Goriot*. When Hippolyte Castille objected that Vautrin was superhuman, Balzac responded: "I can assure you that the model exists, that he is a person of appalling greatness and that he has found his place in the world of our time."¹⁸ Vidocq was a friend of Victor Hugo and rendered him valuable services as a private detective at two important junctures in the author's complicated love life. Jean Valjean shared many experiences with Vidocq, including his famed rescue of an injured carter as well as the unflagging pursuit by the police long after Valjean had acquitted his debt to society. Vidocq also exercised a decisive influence on the development of the detective story; his features can be recognized in the detectives of Poe and Gaboriau and in Sherlock Holmes.

Among later works of French fiction based on crime history are Alphonse Daudet's charming spoof of the French Academy, *The Immortal* (1888), which draws on the outrageous literary forgeries of Vrain-Lucas, and André Gide's *The Counterfeiters* (1925), which ends with the death of young Boris in a compelled schoolroom suicide drawn from a 1909 tragedy to which the Littleton, Colorado, massacre of 1999 has been compared.

French stage works based on actual crimes were written as early as 1599, when twenty-five-year-old jurist Pierre Matthieu wrote *La Guisade*, a five-act tragedy lamenting King Henry III's ordered assassination of his political rival, Henri, Duc de Guise, the leader of the hard-line Catholic faction. Matthieu turned reality into drama with blinding speed, rushing his work into print only six months after Guise was murdered by Henri's cutthroats in the Blois Chateau.

Nonpolitical crimes found their way onto the French stage by the seventeenth century. It is assumed, for example, that Molière, in creating Harpagon, the title character in *The Miser*, must have had in mind the lives and sudden deaths of seventeenth-century Paris's renowned miser, Lieutenant-Criminel (police chief) Jean Tardieu and his wife, Marie, who were murdered by a pair of housebreakers in 1665. The beloved Parisian gang leader Cartouche took a bow in a 1721 prose comedy by M. le Grand, *Cartouche, ou les Voleurs* [Cartouche, or The Thieves]. In August 1793 the staging of *The Friend of the People: or The Death of Marat* by Gaussier Saint-Armand inaugurated the long succession of plays in France and elsewhere depicting the murder of Marat by Charlotte Corday.

One of the most famous French fact-based melodramas of the nineteenth century was *Le Courrier de Lyon* (The Lyons Mail) of 1850 by Moreau, Siraudin, and Delacour; English stag-

18. Quoted in Philip John Stead, *Vidocq: A Biography* (London: Staples Press, 1953), 147.

ings of adaptations successively featured Henry Irving and his son H. B. Irving in the dual role of Joseph Lesurques and the Lyons mail murderer Dubosc, for whose crime Lesurques (who closely resembled Dubosc) may have been unjustly guillotined. The French stage has also favored plays featuring swindlers and wheeler-dealers. In 1893 echoes of John Law's "Mississippi Bubble" were heard in Léon Hennique's *L'Argent d'autrui* [Other People's Money], where the plot focuses on an anti-Jewish swindle launched by the speculator Lafontas, a great admirer of Law. The tradition of French true-crime drama is continued by Jean Genet's *The Maids* (1947), inspired by the murderous housemaids of Le Mans, Christine and Léa Papin.

French murder cases have been adapted for many memorable films. Pierre-François Lacenaire, the sociopathic "poet-murderer" of France's Romantic Age, makes a menacing appearance in the classic film *Les enfants du paradis* [Children of Paradise] (1945), written by Jacques Prévert and directed by Marcel Carné. *L'Auberge Rouge* [The Red Inn] (1951), Fernandel's hilarious send-up of France's bloodthirstiest innkeepers, had the distinction of upsetting Boston's censors. Claude Chabrol's *Bluebeard* (1962), with a script on which he collaborated with Françoise Sagan, brought before the cameras serial killer Henri-Désiré Landru, who had previously inspired Charlie Chaplin's *Monsieur Verdoux*. Other notable French films have been based on the murder cases of Pauline Dubuisson (*The Truth* [1960], starring Brigitte Bardot); Violette Nozières (Chabrol's *Violette* [1978]); and France's incomparably bloodier rival of Jack the Ripper, Joseph Vacher (Bertrand Tavernier's *The Judge and the Assassin* [1975]).

WRITINGS IN OTHER LANGUAGES

Ancient Greece and Rome

Criminal trials of Greek and Roman antiquity are documented by a small but instructive body of legal orations. Four Athenian murder trials featuring legal arguments by Lysias and Antiphon are included in Kathleen Freeman's *The Murder of Herodes, and Other Trials from the Athenian Law Courts* (London: Macdonald, 1946). Athenian procedure did not permit lawyers to appear in court, and it became customary for experts in rhetoric and legal principles to draft courtroom speeches for the private parties who appeared as prosecutor or defendant. The gem of Freeman's collection is Antiphon's brilliant argument in defense of Helos, a young man from Mytilene on the island of Lesbos who was charged with the murder of Herodes, a fellow passenger on a ship bound for the Thracian coast. The facts are murky, for Herodes had disappeared mysteriously at night in a port where the two travelers had been forced to change ships due to a storm. A tantalizing mystery clings to all these ancient cases, since the orations were published without any indication of the jury verdict.

Cicero, dreaded by generations of Latin students for his thundering tirades against political conspiracy and administrative corruption, was also one of the great criminal advocates of his day. Of particular interest is his defense of Aulus Cluentius Habitus against the charge of having bribed a jury to convict his stepfather, Appianicus, of attempting to

poison him.¹⁹ In this case we have reason to believe that Cicero's defense was successful, since Quintilian, a considerable lawyer and rhetorician in his own right, quotes Cicero as boasting that he had poured darkness in the eyes of the jury that tried Cluentius. The most intriguing case in Quintilian's career as criminal advocate was his defense of Naevius Arpinianus. The published oration does not survive, but Quintilian remarks in one of his other writings that "the sole question in the case of Naevius of Arpinum was whether he threw his wife out of the window or she threw herself."²⁰

Germany

The development of indigenous fact-based crime literature in most of modern Europe was strongly favored at the outset by interest in French criminal cases and trial reports. A German translation of Gayot de Pitaval's *Causes célèbres* was published between 1792 and 1795, with a preface by Schiller (quoted above) that extolled the merit of studying criminal cases. Selections from nineteenth-century sets of French causes célèbres appeared in a Spanish-language version in 1835. In Italy, a translated report of France's internationally renowned Fualdès murder trial appeared in 1818.²¹ Swedish novelist C. J. L. Almqvist reported from France on the 1840 poisoning trial of Madame Marie Lafarge, and in Czarist Russia, young opera-composer-to-be Modest Musorgsky kept body and soul together by translating French and German criminal cases.

Of all the countries of continental Europe other than France, Germany has created the most voluminous literature of its own causes célèbres. Many German-language translations of Gayot de Pitaval's French causes célèbres were published, including editions by Friedrich Schiller (1792–95) and Hermann Hesse (1922). Between 1842 and 1890 a sixty-volume series entitled *The New Pitaval*, named after Gayot de Pitaval and compiled initially by Julius Hitzig and Wilhelm Häring (also noted for fiction written under his pseudonym, Willibald Alexis), was published in Leipzig. Although the cases chosen were predominantly German, foreign cases, such as the murder trial of the Mannings in England and Galileo's miseries at the hands of the Inquisition, were interspersed. Between 1903 and 1913 the publication of German trials of current vintage was resumed in a seven-volume series entitled *The Pitaval of the Present Day*. More recent so-called "Pitavals," grouping German cases by region or period, have been created by authors including journalist Egon Erwin Kisch and lawyer Friedrich Kaul.

In 1910 court reporter Hugo Friedländer became the first German writer to undertake the singlehanded composition of a set of trial narratives. In his twelve-volume *Interesting Criminal Trials of Significance in Cultural History*, Friedländer represented that the accounts

19. See Albert Borowitz, "M. Tullius Cicero for the Defense," *Innocence and Arsenic: Studies in Crime and Literature* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 100–115.

20. Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, with an English translation by H. E. Butler, 4 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, Loeb Library, 1921) 3:61.

21. A copy of this translation from the library of federal judge Harold Medina is in the Borowitz Collection.

were drawn from his own experiences in reporting courtroom proceedings. One of the most famous trials included in the set is the 1906 prosecution of the impostor Wilhelm Voigt, the “Captain from Köpenick,” who, after donning a Prussian captain’s uniform, arrested Köpenick’s mayor and looted the town treasury. A celebrated 1931 stage comedy based on this incident was written by Carl Zuckmayer, and two filmed adaptations followed.

Another important author of true-crime studies was the Bavarian judge and criminal law reformer Anselm Ritter von Feuerbach, who in 1808 and 1811 published two volumes of *Notable Criminal Cases*, including a chapter on the serial poisoner Anna Maria Zwanziger. Another Feuerbach work is the famous account of his investigations regarding the enigmatic “wild child” Kaspar Hauser, of whom he became a friend and supporter. The mystery surrounding Kaspar Hauser’s claim to have been imprisoned in childhood and his violent death remains Germany’s favorite historical conundrum and has inspired literary works by Rainer Maria Rilke, Jakob Wassermann, and Peter Handke (author of the 1968 play *Kaspar*). See *Der Findling: Kaspar Hauser in der Literatur* [The Foundling: Kaspar Hauser in Literature], ed. Ulrich Struve (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1992). Some modern researchers have devised elaborate conspiracy theories of vast proportions, and the publisher Kaspar Hauser Verlag specializes in the case.

In the years before the Nazi takeover in 1933, significant crime nonfiction was written by authors famed in other literary fields. In 1923 journalist Maximilian Harden (born Felix Ernst Witkowski) published a volume of essays devoted to criminal trials, including chapters about his controversial attack on alleged homosexual activity of Wilhelm II’s close friend and adviser Prince Eulenberg and Berlin commandant Count Kuno von Moltke. A year later novelist Alfred Döblin contributed the first book-length crime study in *Society’s Outsiders: Crimes of the Present Day*, a multivolume set edited by expressionist Rudolf Leonhard; Döblin’s book, *Two Girl Friends and their Poisoning-Murder*, is a fascinating study of *folie à deux* driving a pair of women to murder the husband of one of them.

The Nazi regime, which refused to acknowledge publicly that murder continued as a social ill in the Third Reich, buried the case of serial killer Bruno Lüdke arrested in 1943 and, after consolidating its power, generally did not permit publications about current crimes.²² After World War II, however, interest in the crime field strongly rebounded in both Germany and Austria. Significant German nonfiction of the postwar era includes a 1974 documentary study of serial child-killer Peter Kürten, edited by Elisabeth Lenk and Roswitha Kaefer (1974), and *Der Spiegel* journalist Gerhard Mauz’s collection of articles on crimes in West Germany, *The Righteous and the Condemned* (1968). Many world-famous murder cases are skillfully related in the course of Jürgen Thorwald’s two-volume history of scientific detection translated into English as *The Century of the Detective* (1965) and *Crime and Science* (1967). In Austria, there has been a profusion of books (dominated by the studies of Brigitte Hamann) examining

22. At least two books in the Borowitz Collection include German criminal trials ended after the legislative confirmation of the Nazi dictatorship in March 1933: Paul Wieglers, *Schicksale und Verbrechen: Die grossen Prozesse der letzten hundert Jahre* [Misfortunes and Crimes: The Great Trials of the Last 100 Years] (Berlin: Ullstein, 1935); and E. Liebermann von Sonnenberg and O. Trettin, *Kriminal-Fälle* [Criminal Cases] (Berlin: Universitas, 1934).

the 1889 love suicides of Crown Prince Rudolf and Maria Vetsera at Mayerling. Austrian writers have also explored recent cases in books such as prosecutor Werner Olscher's 1972 study of famous murder trials in Austria since World War II.

Early-nineteenth-century German drama and fiction, responding to the era's attraction to turbulent events and characters, often utilized crime history material. The salient works of this character include Schiller's youthful play *Die Räuber* [The Robbers] (1788); Heinrich von Kleist's novella "Michael Kohlhaas" (1808), recording the career of a sixteenth-century horse dealer, Hans Kohlhaase, who turned to robbery and murder when he could not obtain legal redress from a nobleman who had wronged him; and Georg Büchner's fragmentary drama *Woyzeck*, written between 1835 and 1837 as a result of the author's interest in the German murder cases of defendants Johann Christian Woyzeck, Daniel Schmolling, and Johann Diess, in which insanity defenses had been raised. Although these authors and their contemporary E. T. A. Hoffmann (whose work also reflects a fascination with crime and obsession) often seem to give expression to extravagant imaginings, it is remarkable that in fact they all had professional or academic qualifications in law, medicine, science, or psychology. As is well known, *Pandora's Box* (1904), the second of Frank Wedekind's expressionistic Lulu plays, ends with Jack the Ripper's murder of the heroine. Film director Fritz Lang told film historian Sigmund Kracauer that the child murderer portrayed by Peter Lorre in *M* was inspired by the "Vampire of Düsseldorf," Peter Kürten.

One of the most important twentieth-century German authors of fact-based crime novels is Jakob Wassermann. His principal works in this genre are *Caspar Hauser* (1908) and *The Maurizius Case* (1928), drawn from a murder perpetrated by Karl Hau in Baden-Baden. The period since the end of World War II has produced many successful German fictional works based on true crime. The well-regarded psychological novelist Joachim Maass, in *The Gouffé Case* (1952), re-created a nineteenth-century French trunk murder. Erich Kuby's *Rosemarie* (1958), a wry look at the unlovely underside of the German "economic miracle" as revealed by the unsolved murder of prostitute Rosemarie Nitribitt, was a smash hit as a novel and a film in 1958. Journalist Hans Habe (born Hans Bekessy in Budapest), in addition to a collection of true-crime articles, wrote a 1962 novel based on Russian countess Marie Tarnowska, convicted in Italy of having procured the death of a count whose life she had persuaded him to insure for her benefit.

Italy

Italian writers have been more interested in organized crime, brigandage, and trials reflecting political corruption and antagonism than in criminal cases based on private misconduct. The preface to *Cronache Criminali Italiane* [Italian Criminal Chronicles] (1896), co-authored by Guglielmo Ferrero, son-in-law of biological determinist Cesare Lombroso, explains the origin of this literary preference for crimes against the public. Following Lombroso's teaching, the collaborators argue that "a night of love after an evening of gluttony or drunkenness explains the birth of a criminal degenerate," whereas brigandage is

“a phenomenon for which the entire people, from the government down to the citizens, is directly responsible.”

It cannot be concluded, however, that Italian literature scants the examination of aberrant individual behavior. Alessandro Manzoni's epic novel *The Betrothed* reflects both private and public misconduct from remote times: the scandalous life of the Nun of Monza, immured because of an illicit love affair with Gian Paolo Osio, a murderous neighbor of her convent; and the mass hysteria resulting from the Milanese plague of 1630. Manzoni later added a nonfictional pendant to the novel's treatment of the latter subject, *The History of the Column of Infamy*, which analyzes the unjust prosecution of “anointers” for intentionally spreading the plague germs.

One of the most famous Italian criminal biographies is Corrado Ricci's 1925 study of sixteenth-century parricide Beatrice Cenci. Ricci explodes two of the principal myths of the case, demonstrating that the incest defense was invented by Beatrice Cenci's lawyer and that Guido Reni's portrait of a sweet turbaned girl is not a death-cell painting of Beatrice. In 1999, however, documentation of an exhibition at Rome's Palazzo Barberini on Caravaggio and his followers suggested that his 1600 painting, *Judith and Holofernes* (Fig. 2), may have been inspired by the parricide for which Beatrice Cenci was executed the year before.²³ The Cenci case also inspired an 1851 novel by Francesco Domenico Guerrazzi, a patriot of the Risorgimento and enemy of the papal government of Rome. Guerrazzi converts Beatrice into a militant saint who continually exhorts her father to repent.

Many excellent crime biographies have appeared in Italy since World War II, including Mario Mazzucchelli's *The Nun of Monza* (1963) and journalist Giuseppe dall'Ongaro's well-documented biography of Italy's cherished outlaw Fra' Diavolo (Michele Pezza). Italians also continue to relish, as did their Roman forebears, collections of forensic speeches by eminent criminal advocates.

Modern Italian masters have used true-crime subject matter in a variety of literary modes. Novelist Alberto Moravia wrote the play *Beatrice Cenci* (1958), in which the parricide explains her revenge by a childhood “loss of innocence” caused by witnessing an amorous passage of her father. Moravia's novel *The Conformist* (1951), beautifully filmed by Bernardo Bertolucci, is based on the murder of Moravia's cousin, antifascist Carlo Rosselli, by French right-wing thugs hired by Mussolini. Sicilian novelist, historian, and commentator Leonardo Sciascia has often chosen the Mafia of his native island as his theme (for example, in the novel, *Mafia Vendetta* [1964]). In addition, his books deal with such diverse subjects as the Red Brigade's assassination and execution of Aldo Moro, the mysterious disappearance of Sicilian physicist Ettore Majorana in 1938, and an incident in the mob hysteria stemming from the Milanese plague of 1930 (a subject suggested by a passage in Manzoni's *The Betrothed*).

The 1997 Nobel Prize winner Dario Fo's hilarious comedy *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* is based on analogous incidents in the crime histories of the United States, drawing its plot from the mysterious fall of anarchist Andrea Salsedo from a window of New York City

23. See, to the same effect, Margarita Stocker, *Judith, Sexual Warrior: Women and Power in Western Culture* (New Haven: Yale, 1998), 110, citing M. Merini, *Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio* (1987), 418.

police headquarters in 1920 at the height of the Red Scare and the similar death of another anarchist, Pino Pinelli, in Milan in 1969.²⁴

A highlight of Italian crime history is the still-controversial trial that followed the butchery of Count Francesco Bonmartini by his brother-in-law, lawyer Tullio Murri, in the count's Bologna apartment on September 2, 1902, apparently inspired by his mistreatment of his wife, Linda. As the case proceeded (resulting in a bizarre majority verdict convicting Linda of unpremeditated and nonessential "participation" in the crime), partisan journalists were swayed by the political allegiances of the tragedy's protagonists rather than by the evidence disclosed in the investigation; in right-wing columns Bonmartini's conservative views blotting out hints of sexual depravity, and Linda's brother Tullio and her father, an esteemed medical professor, Augusto Murri, were respectively attacked as socialist and freethinker. These ideological passions that may have distracted authorities in the pursuit of justice for Linda Murri are mirrored in Mauro Bolognini's memorable 1974 film *La grand bourgeoisie*, starring Catherine Deneuve.

In a nonfictional study, *Isolina* (London: Peter Owen, 1993), Italian novelist Dacia Maraini reports another murder case from the dawn of the twentieth century in which she believes that the prosecution was frustrated by partiality to the military caste. In January 1900 pieces of the decapitated body of a pregnant woman were fished from Verona's River Adige, and her head turned up a year later, completing her identification as nineteen-year-old working-class woman Isolina Canuti. On the basis of personal investigations on the scene, Maraini concludes that the likely cause of death was a botched abortion. She shows how Isolina's lover, Lieutenant Carlo Trivulzio, and his comrades escaped persecution as the Verona community rallied around its military garrison. In a libel case that followed against socialist deputy Mario Todeschini, who had advocated Isolina's cause, the murdered woman was tarred as promiscuous. Trivulzio interrupted the proceedings by shouting: "But everybody had her. It's been proved."

Spain and Portugal

The criminal underbelly of Spain's Golden Age is exposed in the great picaresque or rogue novels that were a Spanish literary invention. Although this fiction is not based on the lives of identifiable criminals, Gerald Brenan observes that "the picaresque form had its root in social conditions."²⁵ He explains: "The ruin of the middle-income classes by inflation, the need so many people had of living by their wits, the hardships of the writer's life which threw him into low company were the things that prompted it. . . . These novels depict as

24. See Carlo Ginzburg, *The Judge and the Historian: Marginal Notes on a Late-Twentieth Century Miscarriage of Justice*, trans. Anthony Shugar (London: Verso, 1999).

25. Alexander A. Parker, however, has noted that sixteenth-century Spain was not demonstrably richer in rogues than other European countries. *Literature and the Delinquent: The Picaresque Novel in Spain and Europe 1599–1753* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 1967), 10.

a rule a child growing up under sordid conditions and making his way through the world where everything is hostile and dangerous. He has no arms but his mother wit: by using it he becomes a criminal, but essentially he is innocent and well-intentioned and it is the wickedness of the world that corrupts him.”²⁶ The leading examples of the picaresque genre are *The Life of Lazarillo de Tormes*, published anonymously in 1554; *Guzmán de Alfarache* (1599), written by Mateo Alemán, son of a prison doctor of Seville, and translated into English as *The Rogue* (1622) by James Mabbe; and Francisco de Quevedo’s *La Vida del Buscón* [The Life of a Sharper], which was written between 1603 and 1608 and first appeared in 1626.

Scenes characteristic of picaresque fiction appear in Cervantes’s *Don Quixote*. The Don, for example, is introduced to the reality of penal servitude when he encounters a dozen chained convicts on the road. Told that they have been condemned for their crimes to serve the king in his galleys, Don Quixote comments on their fate with surprising insight: “In short, however you put it, although these men are being led, they are going by force and not of their own free will.” Cervantes’s *Exemplary Novels* also reflect crime reality, including the organization of the thieves of Seville along the lines of a medieval guild; and the escapades of two well-born youths turned rogues (of whom a university record survives).

In 1837, the same Barcelona publisher that had issued a set of French trials in Spanish also released a similar series devoted to criminal cases of Spain, mingling public matters (for example, the death sentence of Don Carlos) with the intensely personal (such as a recent case of infanticide). The publication of crime collections has not always continued to be a feature of the Spanish literary scene, particularly during the Franco era when, true to totalitarian principles, the regime converted criminals into nonpersons. In his *Tribunal de muerte* [Death Court], originally released in 1963, novelist Carlos de Arce briefly reviews twenty-seven cases, from a counterfeiting of Spanish currency in 1331 to a murder case in 1928. It is de Arce’s view that the typical “Iberian” murderer is more likely to kill on sudden impulse than to resemble the sadistic or split-personality killers found in other countries. A more interesting work is novelist Juan Madrid’s *Malos tiempos* [Bad Times], which winds its way between fact and fiction in recounting contemporary Spanish cases, including the 1980 murder of the Marqués and Marquesa de Urquijo, one of Spain’s great banking families.

Like their Italian counterparts, crime writers in Spain favor the lives of their brigands, of whom the most celebrated is Madrid’s bandit Luis Candela. In 1927 journalist, biographer, and novelist Antonio Espina y García (born in Madrid in 1894) wrote a biography of Candela in which the author displays his gifts for humor, irony, and word play. A two-volume collection of the lives of famous Spanish bandits by biographer F. Hernandez Girbal appeared in 1963 and 1973. Spanish authors have also produced works on crimes and acts of violence that were key events in their nation’s history. A few examples are Antonio Pedrol Rius’s clarification of the 1870 murder of General Juan Prim y Prats, who was struck down while attempting to introduce a new constitutional monarch; Leon-Ignacio’s account of the 1640 reapers’ uprising, “Corpus de Sangre,” in Barcelona that triggered the disintegration of Spain; and Professor Juan Cantavella’s study of nineteenth-century assassination plots against Spanish royalty.

26. Gerald Brenan, *The Literature of the Spanish People* (New York: Meridian, 1957), 174.

Latin America has also made significant contributions to fact-based crime literature. Among the outstanding works are Gabriel García Márquez's *News of a Kidnapping* (1997), a reportage of the 1990 kidnappings of ten Colombians (all but one of whom were journalists) by Medellín drug boss Pablo Escobar, and his novel *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, based on the murder of a childhood friend of his in Sucre; Elena Poniatowski's *Massacre in Mexico* (1992), a collage of voices recalling the bloody repression of the peaceful protest by students in Mexico City in 1968; and Carlos Fuentes's novel *The Old Gringo*, retelling from the Mexican point of view the mysterious disappearance of American writer Ambrose Bierce in 1914.

An ambitious series of volumes, *A Gallery of Famous Criminals in Portugal* (1896–1908), originally edited by Antonio Palhares, chronicles Portuguese crimes “from the time when police services in our country were organized.” Some of the more sensational cases in the collection, such as that of chloroform wife-murderer José Cardoso Vieira de Castro (1870), and Dr. Urbino de Freitas, who in 1890 mailed poisoned candy that took the life of his eleven-year-old relative Mario Sampaio, are the subject of contemporary pamphlets. Similar crime pamphlets appeared in the 1920s to document crimes that caught the public fancy, including the so-called crime of Serrazes tried in 1922: the two murderers José de Bettencourt and Fernando Novaes had unsuccessfully tried to defend themselves by claiming that they had acted to punish their victim Augusto Malafaia's attempts to rape a young woman who was the fiancée of one killer and sister of the other.²⁷ Another chronicler of historical crimes of Portugal is novelist Sousa Costa, whose works include *Great Crime Dramas (Portuguese Courts)* (1944).

Romania and Hungary

Fact-based crime literature in both Romania and Hungary is haunted by a serial killer from the distant past. Romania's favorite criminal is Vlad Tepes, the fifteenth-century Walachian prince who inspired Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. Modern nonfictional accounts of the prince sometimes view him as a patriot (for example, in Nicolae Stoicescu's *Vlad Tepes Prince of Walachia* [1978]) or as the proprietor of an exotic Transylvanian tourist attraction, Castle Dracula (in Radu Florescu's co-authored *In Search of Dracula* [1972]). Hungary's archcriminal, the early-sixteenth-century “bloody countess” Elisabeth Bathory, is often characterized as a female Dracula. A long succession of Hungarian biographies of the countess, who has also inspired novels and plays internationally, began in 1744. Elisabeth Bathory, however, by no means monopolizes her modern compatriots' interest in crime history. Marxist playwright Julius Hay, while in prison, wrote a drama (produced by Joan Littlewood in England in 1954 under the title *Have*) about the custom of early-twentieth-century peasant women poisoning their husbands to gain control of small landholdings. The false charges of Jewish ritual murder in the death of fourteen-year-old servant girl Eszter Solymosi in 1882 (the subject

27. Possibly the most famous of all Portuguese criminals, however, is not one of its murderers but the banknote counterfeiter Artur Virgilio Alves Reis.