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THE NO. 1 PARISIAN DETECTIVE AGENCY: VIDOCQ AND THE "THIRD SPACE" OF THE PRIVATE POLICE

Abstract

Eugène-François Vidocq (1775-1857) has entered cultural legend mostly for his exploits in the criminal world and the unlikely fact of having risen from a hard-labor convict to the Chief of Police in Paris. After his years directing the Brigade de Sûreté – a new branch of police work dedicated to prevention and public safety – Vidocq opened the first private detective agency, in 1833. This article discusses his work with the police and then as a private detective, both historically and theoretically, and argues that Vidocq created essentially a new "third space of discourse" for nineteenth-century law-enforcement. Vidocq was on the side of neither the state police nor the criminals he was hired to track down, yet he was uncannily allied with both. He thus found himself at the head of a new kind of (textual and cultural) agency in which he was forced to redefine the work, both practical and ideological, of *dépistage* (following traces). Includes four images.

Key words: criminal world, convict/policeman/detective, textual and cultural redefiniton, „third space of discourse“

Eugène-François Vidocq, a thief/forgery and hard-labor convict later turned policeman and private detective, was the real-life inspiration for literary characters in the French, British and American traditions, including Honoré de Balzac's Vautrin (*Le Père Goriot*, *Illusions perdues*, *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*), Victor Hugo's Jean Valjean and Javert (*Les Misérables*), Alexandre Dumas père's Jackal (*Les Mohicans de Paris*), Charles Dickens's Jiggers and Bucket (*Bleak House*), Wilkie Collins's Count Fosco (*The*

Woman in White), Edgar Allen Poe's Dupin ("Murders in the Rue Morgue", "The Purloined Letter"), Emile Gaboriau's Lecoq (*L'Affaire Lerouge*), Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, and numerous characters (and some of the plotline) from Eugène Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris*. His story has also inspired at least two televised series ("Les Aventures de Vidocq" in 1967, "Les Nouvelles aventures de Vidocq" in 1973 – plus TF1's téléfilm "Vidocq: Le masque et la plume" which aired in May 2010), four movies (Jean Kemm's *Vidocq* in 1923, Jacques Daroy's *Vidocq* in 1938, Douglas Sirk's *A Scandal in Paris* in 1946, and Pitof's *Vidocq* in 2001, starring Gérard Depardieu), a handful of comic books, a board game, a 1952 radio show starring Charles Boyer, a techno-punk song by the band Zilverface, and even an "app" for the iPhone and iPod Touch. His life story holds a unique place in the European nineteenth-century tradition, engendering multiple narratives of trickery, double identities, redemption, and criminal fascination. Indeed, the story of his criminality and subsequent rise to success has become much more a thing of popular legend than his own writings or his other work (police work, factory ownership, private detective).

Alternately called "le Napoléon de la police" ('the Napoleon of the police'),¹ a force of nature, and "notre contemporain" ('our contemporary'),² Vidocq led a life worthy of picaresque narrative. According to Alphonse Boudard's brief biography accompanying the commentary on Vidocq's 1844 *Considérations sommaires*, Vidocq "a fait tous les métiers, ou Presque" ('held every occupation, or almost' – Boudard, 51): baker's son, thief, circus acrobat, transvestite, corporal (then deserter) in the Bourbon Infantry, forger, disguised nobility, and womanizer, all before the age of twenty. He was a "garçon audacieux, capable d'entreprendre n'importe quoi, n'importe quand et dans n'importe quel lieu" ('an audacious boy, capable of undertaking anything, at any time and in any place' – Boudard, 54). At twenty-one years of age, after being caught red-handed committing a forgery which helped a condemned man escape from prison, Vidocq was condemned to prison himself for the first time, to eight years of *travaux forcés*, or hard labor, from which he escaped. He was subsequently found and captured, and escaped again, a handful of times. Upon recognition and recapture in Lyon, in 1809 he met with the head of police there and

¹ Jean Savant, *Le Vrai Vidocq* (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1957), back cover notes. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted. Subsequent references in the text.

² Alphonse Boudard, "Vidocq, notre contemporain." In Eugène-François Vidocq, *Considérations sommaires sur les prisons, les bagnes et la peine de mort*. (Paris: Mille et une nuits, 1999)

suggested a deal. In exchange for his freedom, he would help the police by informing on his former partners in crime, agents of the criminal underworld. "Être neutre, vivre en paix lui étant interdit, il doit choisir: le bague ou la police" ('Remaining neutral and living in peace being forbidden to him, he must choose: the prison or the police' – Savant, 1957: 22). Though an unlucky criminal, Vidocq proved a brilliant informant and criminal spy. One biographer writes, "Il apparaît que Vidocq a le genie de la police. Il n'agit pas en mouchard, mais en detective" ('It becomes clear that Vidocq is a police genius. He acts not as a gangster, but as a detective' – Savant, 1957: 22). In 1810 he was appointed into the service of Dubois, Préfet de Police de la Seine, under the Minister of Police Fouché; and, after a few months, was granted independence and the right to create the Brigade de la Sûreté, a "preventive" rather than "repressive" police force (Savant, 1957: 23) that would act alongside the "political police" (Savant, 28) and improve crime control by revolutionizing police methods.

His trajectory from convict to Chef de la Brigade de Sûreté is celebrated in both history and literature. As head of the Sûreté, arguably the forerunner of most modern departments of criminal investigation, Vidocq insisted on his agents' (a) being former convicts themselves, arguing that their status as criminal insiders gave them privileged knowledge into the workings of criminal networks, and (b) working undercover, the more effectively to enter known criminal spaces and gather information. As such, Vidocq's Brigade de Sûreté (he headed the organization from 1812 to 1827, when political pressures forced him out of the office) became the precursor for the institutions of modern criminology and private detection. When reprisals and political turmoil in the years immediately before the revolution of 1830 forced Vidocq to leave the Sûreté, he retired briefly to Saint-Mandé (north-east of Paris), where he opened a paper factory; then, in 1832, he returned to the police for a short time before founding, in 1833, France's first private-detective agency. In each of these later pursuits, Vidocq maintained his philosophy from the Sûreté years and employed ex-convicts. My point in providing these details is not to recount Vidocq's already fabled biography,³ but rather to examine him within the contexts

³ Interested readers can consult James Morton, *The First Detective: The Life and Revolutionary Times of Vidocq, Criminal, Spy and Private Eye* (London: Ebury Press, 2004); Dominique Kalifa, *Crime et culture au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Editions Perrin, 2005); Jean Savant, *Le Vrai Vidocq* (cf note above); Samuel Edwards, *The Vidocq Dossier: The Story of the World's First Detective* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1977); and of course Eugène-François Vidocq, *Mémoires*, edited and with an introduction by Francis Lacassin (Paris: Editions Robert Laffont, 1998).

of both the early part of the nineteenth century and the development of a criminal culture and literary tradition that transcends the underworld where it is born, to inform – and ultimately, to infiltrate – the “overworld”, the world of dominant society.

Like many contemporaries,⁴ Vidocq showed himself preoccupied by the necessity of establishing classifications, mostly criminal. He began not with persons but with institutions. Held in the Bicêtre (Paris) for seven months before being conveyed with the other *forçats* to Brest, Vidocq “répertorie les catégories d’institutions pénitentiaires ... il les connaît par tous les bouts, comme il connaît la psychologie des délinquents, par expérience” (“[Vidocq] indexes categories of penitentiary institutions ... he knows them inside-out, like he knows the psychology of criminals, by experience” – Boudard, 54). From prison-types, Vidocq could extrapolate criminal types. At his trial, the convict noticed “le mélange des incarcérés dans un même local: voleurs, forçats en rupture de ban, détenus pour dettes, enfants ... ‘et même aliénés’” (“a mixture of incarcerated criminals in one place: thieves, parole-breakers, debtors, children ... “and even mad people” – 54).

Vidocq occupied his mind with separating people into categories, all of which he evaluated – those who give in to the “habitude de la pédérastie” (‘the habit of pederasty’), those whom the isolation of prison renders misanthropic, those it would be useful to have in his debt, those whom it would be better to deal with carefully. This work, begun during his own years within the prison population, would prove useful to him once he was integrated into the penal machine on the other side of the equation. Indeed, as Chef de Sûreté, Vidocq developed a system of anthropometrics, by which he measured and evaluated known criminals (memorizing and cataloguing their facial features), for the dual purpose of identifying those individuals and predicting (and therefore preventing) criminal behavior in individuals with similar features. This system – documented obliquely in Vidocq’s *Mémoires*, and still partially in use today by the French police

⁴ Early-nineteenth-century writers, including Balzac, Hugo and Sue, demonstrated a marked interest in the possibilities of applying research undertaken in zoological and botanical circles to human types as well. Thus, Balzac dedicated his 1835 novel *Le Père Goriot* to Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, the anatomist credited with recognizing an organized system of interconnected elements in all forms of animal life, which could be broken down into types and categories depending on the specific animal. Vidocq, like Hugo and Sue after him, will take this work of typology into the sociological realm and apply its principles to the criminal underworld.

– is a clear predecessor of later systems elaborated by, for example, Cesare Lombroso⁵ or Auguste Bertillon (1853-1914), who

realized that the methodology of measuring the outside of human bodies could be somewhat modified to suit the purposes of police departments. Since the police's interest lay precisely in individualizing the criminal, ... Bertillon devised techniques for relegating to the background that which is common to the group and highlighting instead that which is unique to the individual – the non-racial features that allow us to recognize someone walking down the street as Mr X.⁶

Before Bertillon began his work with the Préfecture de Police, though, Vidocq had already devised methods by which his detectives for the Sûreté could identify criminals, study ballistics, recognize and distinguish between shoe casts: all elements of paying attention to the clues criminals left behind in order to solve crimes. In many ways, Vidocq's pioneering work for the Sûreté in the first decades of the nineteenth century serves as an astonishing antecedent of the fin-de-siècle fictions about Sherlock Holmes, not to mention twenty-first-century crime dramas like CSI.

Just as clearly as he understood criminal types and typing, Vidocq evaluated the laws, the relative justice or injustice of the French penal system during his life. For example, "La peine de mort est une peine immorale" ('The death penalty is an immoral punishment' – Boudard, 55), Vidocq wrote in his *Mémoires*. We can note that this is not a de-classifying judgment: the death penalty is not amoral but immoral, that is, within the limits of understood morality but contradicting the acceptable. Syntactically, Vidocq participated in the nineteenth-century fascination with classification: his words were carefully chosen to delineate the specific placement of the death penalty within the appropriate echelon of morality. Chapter XLV of his *Mémoires* is concerned in part with classifications of thieves, and offers a succinct critique of the penal system in Restoration France. "Nos codes établissent des peines correctionnelles; et les pires de tous les coupables ne sont pas ceux qui les ont encourues, mais ceux

⁵ Lombroso's *L'uomo delinquente* ('The Criminal Man,' published in 1876) put forth the idea of criminal types as related to biological determinism, destined for criminal activity by their own physiognomy.

⁶ Mariana Valverde, *Law and Order: images, meanings, myths* (Piscataway, New Jersey: Rutgers U P, 2006), 73.

qui les ont subies. D'où vient que nous allons ainsi en sens inverse du but? C'est que maltraiter n'est pas corriger; c'est au contraire pervertir et corrompre de plus en plus la nature humaine" ("Our codes establish correctional punishments; and the worst of all the guilty are not those who have incurred them, but those who have suffered their existence. How has it happened that we thus move in the opposite direction from our goal? Mistreating is not correcting; on the contrary, it is perverting and corrupting human nature more and more." – Vidocq, 507-08).⁷ Once again, his philosophy of punishment practices is well before its time, a harbinger of both contemporary sociological texts (for example, Victor Hugo's 1829 social "fiction" against the penal system, *Le Dernier jour d'un condamné*, or H. A. Frégier's 1840 *Les Classes dangereuses*) and future work that would revise the penal code and prison structure (in France, this work began in 1832 and continued throughout the nineteenth century).

Michel Foucault examines a similar classificatory phenomenon in his *Discipline and Punish*. In his description of the last hard-labor chain gang, from 1836, Foucault focuses on the gang's departure from Paris and the festival atmosphere that accompanied its passage through every town on the way to its ultimate destination; he even calls the passage of the chain-gang "a saturnalia of punishment, a penalty turned into a privilege."⁸

It also had the dimension of a public spectacle; according to the *Gazette des tribunaux*, over 100,000 people watched the chain gang leave Paris on 19 July: ... Order and wealth come to watch from a distance the passing of the great nomadic tribe that had been put in chains, that other species, "the race apart that has the privilege of populating the convict-ships and prisons (Foucault 1977: 258, Further cited as: DP)".

The notion of the criminal population as a "race apart" echoes nineteenth-century anthropological and sociological studies that brought "new lifeforms" into the spotlight, as the military expanded in Africa and Asia and the French were confronted with human forms that challenged their preconceptions – Saint-Hilaire, mentioned above, studied the "Hottentot

⁷ Eugène-François Vidocq, *Mémoires and Les Voleurs*. (Paris: Editions Laffont, 1998)

⁸ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: Birth of the Prison*, translated by Alan Sheridan (New York: Random House, 1977), 261.

Venus”⁹; Maxime du Camp, Léon Heuzey and Arthur Rimbaud left France at different points for Middle Eastern and African destinations with the objective of sending back “curiosities.”¹⁰ These outward-looking explorations, in the name of Empire, found a contemporary echo in *inward*-looking anthropological studies that brought unknown populations from within the Hexagon itself into the light of critical scientific focus. The criminal type, then, began to be seen as a separate race or species, a different kind of lifeform that, like discoveries from Egyptian, Byzantine and Ethiopian soil, brought the metropolitan French face-to-face with difference. Many species go into composing this “race apart”, as Foucault goes on to delineate:

One sought to rediscover the face of the criminals who had had their glory; broadsheets recalled the crimes of those one saw pass; newspapers provided their names and recounted their lives; sometimes they provided a description of their persons and dress, so that their identity might not pass unnoticed: like programmes for spectators. People also came to examine different types of criminals, trying to decide, according to facial appearance or dress, the “profession” of the convict, whether he was a murderer or a thief: it was a game of masquerades and marionettes, which was also, for more educated eyes, something of an empirical ethnography of crime (*DP*: 259).

It was precisely this “criminal ethnography” that fascinated so many nineteenth-century writers, Vidocq included: at the time that biologists and sociologists were looking outside national boundaries to study and classify races and species, novelists and early psychiatrists looked *inward*,

⁹ For more information on the Hottentot Venus, a slave of the Khoisan tribe who arrived in France aboard a marine vessel in 1810, see Clifton Crais and Pamela Scully, *Sara Baartman and the Hottentot Venus: A Ghost Story and a Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); see also Sander L. Gilman’s “Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature” in Henry Gates’s edited volume, *Race, Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 223-261.

¹⁰ Maxime du Camp, writer and photographer, led an expedition to Egypt from 1849-51, along with his friend Gustave Flaubert; Léon Heuzey, head curator of the Louvre, led an archaeological mission in 1861 to the north-eastern regions of Greece and was instrumental in uncovering the lost tombs of Alexander the Great’s family; Arthur Rimbaud, poet and trader, left France in 1881 to spend the last decade of his life in the desert between Aden and Harare. The term “curiosities” comes from Rimbaud’s letter to his family of 6 May 1883, in which he promises to send home “des choses curieuses.”

into cityscapes, hospitals, prisons, and workhouses. Wilderness and wild behavior perceived in exotic locations were transposed onto the shadier activities of the urban theatre. Armand Lenoux, writing the introduction for Emile Gaboriau's *L'Affaire Lerouge*, explains that "Entre *Le Dernier des Mohicans* (1826) et *Les Mohicans de Paris*, d'Alexandre Dumas (1854), une des plus solides métaphores du XIXe siècle a eu le temps de fleurir et de fructifier: les bas-fonds des grandes cités sont les territoires de chasse des Indiens des villes et la loi de la Prairie règne sur ces Sioux, ces Apaches, ces Mahulots suburbains" ('Between *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826) and Alexandre Dumas's *The Mohicans of Paris* (1854), one of the strongest metaphors of the 19th century had the time to flourish and bear fruit: the slums of large cities as the hunting-ground for city Indians, the law of the Prairie reigning over these suburban Sioux, Apaches, and Mahulots' – 6).¹¹ Balzac used his "ethnographic" findings to populate his richly textured storylines with complex, and believably criminal, characters; Hugo, for purposes more along the lines of social policy; Vidocq, to explain, justify, illuminate, and exemplify his life. Many of the precepts about prison that Foucault brings to light in the twentieth century can already be found in Vidocq's work in the nineteenth. Foucault, for instance, asserts, "La détention provoque la récidive" ('detention causes recidivism' – *DP*: 265), in a list of criticisms about the institution of the prison; Vidocq embodied – and might as well have composed – this principle. Even after his eventual liberation from the prison system, he continued to associate himself with its population, on both sides of the bars – infiltrating the Parisian criminal underworld while maintaining professional contacts with the very judicial representatives who were once his jailers. As if to prove the duplicity of Vidocq's post-prison life, Foucault goes on to explain that "The prison makes possible, even encourages, the organization of a milieu for delinquents, loyal to one another, hierarchized, ready to aid and abet any future criminal act (*DP*: 267)". This precept can be seen also in Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris*, in which both inmates and un-incarcerated criminals operate a canny organization with a communications network, a system of leadership, and an almost Masonic secret knowledge of the workings of the city. Vidocq, of course, turned these "complicités futures" to his own advantage – first, by offering up his former comrades in crime to the state

¹¹ Armand Lanoux, preface to Emile Gaboriau, *L'Affaire Lerouge* (Paris: Librairie Générale française, 1961), 5-12.

police; then, later, by making them complicit in his post-Sûreté endeavors, the paper factory and then the private detective agency.

While working for the Brigade de la Sûreté – and therefore under the watchful eye of the official State police – Vidocq used contacts from his own days as a convict in order to infiltrate the criminal underworld of Paris and serve up criminals (some, former comrades) to the law. His reputation as a member of the criminal society preceded him, within both the Police and the criminal underworld: “J’avais été un voleur célèbre, il n’y avait sorte de crimes que je n’eusse commis: tels étaient les bruits qu’ils se plaisaient à accréditer” (‘I had been a famous thief, there was no sort of crime I had not committed: such were the rumors they [dissatisfied policemen, and thieves] took pleasure in believing’ – Vidocq: 306). Vidocq goes on to explain that, while his checkered past created enemies for him among the officers of the Police (who, he declares, were jealous of his successes in capturing outlaws in the city), it earned him the respect of the very criminals he captured:

Les voleurs du moins étaient persuadés que j’avais, comme eux, exercé le métier; en le disant ils étaient de bonne foi. Avant de tomber dans mes filets, il fallait bien qu’ils puissent supposer que j’étais un des leurs; une fois pris, ils me regardaient comme un faux frère; mais je n’en étais pas moins, à leurs yeux, *un grinche de la haute pègre* (voleur du grand genre); seulement je volais avec impunité, parce que la police avait besoin de moi.

The thieves at least were convinced that I had, like them, practiced this trade; in saying so they acted in good faith. Before they fell into my nets, they had to be allowed to think that I was one of their own; once taken, they considered me a traitor; but I was no less, in their eyes, a *thief of the highest grade*; only, they assumed, I must steal with impunity, because the police needed me (Vidocq: 306).

The calumny of envious officers within the Police system and the unavoidable celebrity of his position made Vidocq’s work as an infiltrator increasingly dangerous, yet his crime-fighting (or criminal-taking) zeal never flagged. “Les voleurs jurèrent de se défaire de moi: maintes fois je faillis tomber sous leurs coups” (‘The thieves swore they would be rid of me: countless times I was nearly taken down by their ruses,’ Vidocq: 307). Still, drawing on his own experiences within the penal system as well as

the knowledge of his own intelligence and resourcefulness, he preferred to give his prisoners the benefit of the doubt, a second chance, and to speak out against the inhuman treatment convicted prisoners received at the hands of guards (who more often than not, in Vidocq's observation, behaved more criminally than the criminals under their charge) and the penal system in general. In his "dictionnaire argotique" *Les Voleurs*, Vidocq speaks to the necessity of humane treatment: "On trouvera peut-être que je suis trop indulgent. Que m'importe, j'ai l'intime conviction qu'il vaut mieux pêcher par excès d'indulgence que par excès de sévérité" ('People find that perhaps I am too indulgent. What does this matter to me? I have the heartfelt conviction that it is better to sin through excess of leniency than through excess of severity' – Vidocq: 260).

In this belief Vidocq shows himself yet again a precursor of Foucault's theories, as we have seen above. Revolutionary in Vidocq's practices is the insistence on employing convicts for the purposes of law-enforcement, both within and outside of the official State-sponsored agencies created for this objective. If detention causes recidivism, then Vidocq would seem to operate on the assumption that liberty creates a new avenue for criminal energies, and channels them – like himself – into, if not law-abiding behavior, then law-enforcement. Vidocq's choice of employees struck doubly into Restoration anxieties and realities: on the one hand, Vidocq knew that, as the adage says, only a thief can catch a thief. He used convicts to legitimate the real, practical importance of criminal knowledge, and to emphasize this knowledge for the betterment of non-criminal society.

On the other hand, though, this very legitimization serves another purpose, one that has more to do with *maintaining* a criminal identity than with expelling it. Alexandre Dumas, in his 1849-50 novel *Le Collier de la reine*, exposed the complex system of encryption and decryption involved in courtly rituals and identity practices: similarly, though at the opposite end of the social spectrum, Vidocq insisted on the knowledge and praxis of underworld rituals. If class status can be read through symbols, gestures and signs, so can criminality; and, in fact, it is to society's advantage to make legible the criminal underworld and even the criminal body. But the very practices that made the criminal being legible for "honest people", in Balzac's phrase¹² – whether sociological treatises like Frégier's *Les Classes dangereuses*, texts like Balzac's *Code des gens honnêtes*, or real-world

¹² From the title of his early pseudonymous work, *Le Code des gens honnêtes* ('The Code of Honest People,' published in 1825).

“guidebooks” like Vidocq’s slang dictionary *Les Voleurs* – also instructed and privileged the criminal world, which then became increasingly adaptable. We might wonder whether Vidocq’s work was in fact geared toward law-enforcement, or rather toward protection of the very (under)class structures he was nominally exposing.

Vidocq’s *Mémoires* and his work with the Brigade de Sûreté form only part of his interest for my study here. A significant element of his post-police biography, and one which has received only scant critical attention, is his founding, in 1833, France’s first private-detective agency: the *Bureau des renseignements dans l’intérêt du Commerce* (Office of information in the interests of Commerce). Though this establishment revolutionized both the state police and independent criminology in the nineteenth century, I would argue that it operated nonetheless as an extension of Vidocq’s former work.

It is worthwhile to consider the institution of the police as a function of the state for a moment, before turning to the new institution of the “private police” which Vidocq and other enterprising agents developed in the mid-nineteenth century. The Parisian police dates back long before the days of Napoléon, as Philip John Stead has studied,¹³ but the institution underwent significant changes after the Revolution. For one thing, the post-revolutionary police were no longer strictly “the King’s men” (Stead 1957: 15); for another, the nineteenth century did away with the “royal police authority” under the medieval Prévôté system as well as its physical location, the now-destroyed Roman fortress of Châtelet (Stead 1957: 17). The “arbitrary power” of the police, Stead asserts, “came to symbolize the despotic character of the [ancien] régime itself; the police was one of the institutions the Revolution came into being to destroy (Stead 1957: 42)”. Unsurprisingly, destruction was sought not only because of the police’s power over the urban population (and its alliance with the royalty), but also because of the numerous abuses of that power under the *ancien régime* – “the police opened a peep-hole into the wicked privacies of the great city for a King and a Court who were imprisoned in the magic circle of Versailles (Stead 1957: 50)”, and “these scandalous items necessarily brought the police into alliance with the purveyors of vice – an alliance which, in any case, was already strong enough, for the police depended then as now on information supplied them by prostitutes and thieves (Stead 1957: 51)”. Much of the Revolution’s work against official institutions happened on an

¹³ Stead, Philip John. *The Police of Paris*. (London: Staples Press Limited, 1957)

ideological level, and the destruction of the police force was no exception: while the police itself as an institution did not disappear, and “the old tradition of law-enforcement, military and centralized, was reaffirming itself (Stead 1957: 70)”, after the Revolution it was submitted to a sea-change of title and structure. The primary police authority in Paris was no longer the office of Lieutenant-Général – a title linking the individual and function to a bygone system of royal military – but rather, under the Directoire and then Napoléon, the office of *Ministre*, an administrative state employee.

“The new Minister was to be responsible for ‘the execution of the laws relative to the police, security and general tranquility of the Republic; the regular Garde Nationale ... and the Gendarmerie, in all that related to the maintenance of public order, the policing of prisons, houses of arrest, justice and confinement, and the suppression of mendicancy and vagabondage’ (Stead 1957: 73). This is the office into which Joseph Fouché, apostate priest and legendary agent of the Terror,¹⁴ was appointed in 1799. Fouché made the Minister of Police a political, rather than administrative, office. He did however create a separate office for the city of Paris alone – the Consulat created the Préfecture de Police de Paris in 1800, and it was into this framework that Eugène-François Vidocq stepped, “first as a prison-spy, collecting information about robberies and murders, and then as an agent of the Prefecture (Stead 1957: 94)”. As we know, “Vidocq possessed the necessary knowledge of the underworld – first-hand knowledge unrivalled by any policeman before or since (Stead 1957: 94)”. And though Vidocq’s Sûreté (reborn under the Third Republic as the *Police judiciaire*, and still functioning today) remained in operation until 1827 and saw tremendous success in the capital’s crime-fighting efforts, the history of his office was nonetheless turbulent. “The regular police officers, especially the Officiers de Paix, bitterly resented the setting up of this unconventional department under an escaped convict who had not even been pardoned for his crime. The resentment was all the more acute because Vidocq picked his agents from the criminal class (Stead 1957: 95)”. Finally, whether through his work as Chef de la Sûreté or through his previous exposure to the criminal methods and milieu, Vidocq proved to possess “exact information of crimes past and

¹⁴ For more on Fouché’s role during the “Terreur”, please see David Andress, *The Terror: The Merciless War for Freedom in Revolutionary France* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005).

future, minute knowledge of the physiognomy of thousands of men with criminal records (and this in an age when criminals could rarely be identified from records – long before anthropometry and finger-printing), familiarity with criminal manners, customs and devices” (Stead 1957: 95), and he passed this information on to the men who worked under him, thus making of his small organization a most efficient crime-solving force, at a time when the criminal underworld was both “extensive” and “savage (Stead 1957: 95)”.

In 1827, intrigues and political turmoil multiplied as the Restoration regime came under popular attack. “Côté régime, c’est à la police qu’on s’en prend. Sous-entendu : à la police politique. Seulement, cette police n’a pas de chef, ou, du moins, son chef ne jouit d’aucune notoriété. A la recherche d’un nom qui impressionne les foules, on n’hésite pas à s’emparer de celui de Vidocq. Ainsi le chef de la Sûreté devient-il la cible commode” (‘On the regime side, people attacked the police. By which I mean: the political police. Only, this police force had no leader, or rather, its leader had no authority. So, when looking for a name to impress the crowd, no one hesitated to mention Vidocq. Thus the chief of the Sûreté became a convenient target’ – Savant 1957: 28). Savant’s assessment exposes the degree to which Vidocq, while at the center of a vital organization working for the good of the State, was nonetheless an outsider to State and public aims. The préfet de police, Delavau, was unnerved by Vidocq, whose Sûreté succeeded where the political police failed, and whose notoriety had made him legendary. In 1827 Vidocq took (temporary) retirement from police work and published his *Mémoires*, but was subsequently persuaded by Casimir Périer to return to the official work of city surveillance when the revolution of 1830 and its aftermath came to underscore the fragile stability of Parisian politics. Vidocq, who had once informed on thieves and murderers in the capital’s darkest corners, found himself once again Chef de Sûreté, charged with indicating to the government “les lieux où carlistes et républicains se réuniront, leurs démarches, leurs projets” (‘the places where royalists and republicans meet, their activities and their projects’ – Savant 1957: 31). Where once he sought criminals of the material order, this new incarnation required him to focus on criminals of the *ideological* order, channeling his energies from property- and blood-crimes toward political interdictions instead. If we are to believe Savant’s hagiographic account of Vidocq’s role in the events of the June insurrection, Vidocq was single-

handedly responsible for saving Louis-Philippe's reign, and his life, from a sure assassination plot (Savant 1957: 32).¹⁵

After this brief, fêted return, the Sûreté came under harsh media attack, however, most of all because Vidocq, "convinced that only criminals could catch criminals," insisted as ever on staffing the Sûreté with "men with criminal records ... paid from secret funds (Stead 1957: 105)". If this practice was (just barely) tolerated during the Empire and Restoration, because seen as working for the public good, such was not the case under the July Monarchy. King Louis-Philippe's reign, though benevolent in appearance at the outset, in reality veered more and more toward conservative polity and repressive measures: some of the freedoms gained under the Restoration kings were lost again, and the old fear of Republicanism revived.¹⁶ The new Prefect of Police, Henri Gisquet (a staunch conservative, well-connected to the new regime), determined to reform the Sûreté and "place this branch of his service above suspicion" (Stead 1957: 105) – which meant, by and large, getting rid of Vidocq and his company of renegade sleuths.

After leaving his police post again in 1832, definitively this time, the former convict struck out independently, and the following year founded his "Bureau des renseignements dans l'intérêt du Commerce", at number 12, rue Cloche-Perce, in Paris's 2nd arrondissement. Thus began the last incarnation of the man once nicknamed "vautrin" (Savant, 1957: 16), or "boar", by the childhood playmates he bullied.¹⁷

The information agency had many aims, but Vidocq – ever canny to the spirit of the times – pitched it as a resource meant to help protect the interests of the new moneyed class, the commercial vector of the bourgeoisie. His brochure announcing the new agency carefully and cleverly situated the aims of this venture as holding clear benefits for the official organisms of the State. "Cette époque est l'âge d'or des industriels"

¹⁵ Ironically, this detail of Vidocq's life would repeat in the winter of 1848, when he apparently stopped a political mob from making an attempt on the life of Victor Hugo. The details are reported in a letter from Vidocq to Hugo himself (BHVP Ms 1055, fol 133-34).

¹⁶ For more information on the July Monarchy's increasingly repressive policies, readers may want to consult Jo Burr Margadant's article "Gender, Vice, and the Political Imaginary in Postrevolutionary France: Reinterpreting the Failure of the July Monarchy, 1830-1848." In *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 104, No. 5 (Dec. 1999), pp 1461-1496. See also Fortescue, William. *France and 1848: The end of monarchy*. (London and New York: Routledge, 2005).

¹⁷ It is worth noting that Balzac, when he takes up the celebrated case of Vidocq in his 1835 novel *Le Père Goriot*, gives his Vidocq character the name "Vautrin."

(“This era is the golden age of industry’ – Savant 1957: 34), and yet the citizenry could not count on the police for protection, because – since Vidocq’s departure from the Sûreté – the police proved especially inept at infiltrating the criminal underworld. “[L]a police du règne de Louis-Philippe est bien la plus médiocre de celles connues. Elle ne prévoit rien, défend à peine le souverain, et laisse se développer une armée d’assassins, de voleurs et autres malfaiteurs” (“The police of Louis-Philippe’s reign was indeed the most mediocre known. It foresaw nothing, hardly defended the sovereign, and let develop an army of assassins, thieves and other criminals’ – Savant 1957: 34). If individuals, including the citizen-king, could not depend on police protection, the leaders of industry, still a new phenomenon and social class, had absolutely no structure for recourse or protection against the criminal acts – thefts, counterfeits, illegal resale, and fraud – which plagued the commercial community in this climate. “Lui, Vidocq, entreprend de leur faire la guerre, de protéger le commerce, en dépit de l’Etat. Il va se substituer à la police défaillante. Il crée sa propre police ...” (“Vidocq undertook to wage war on [these crimes against economy], to protect commerce, despite the State. He substituted himself for the weakening police. He created his *own* police’ – Savant 1957: 34).

The brochure he printed to announce the opening of his “Bureau des renseignements” opens with the following paragraph [See Figure 1]:

C’est une nécessité vivement et depuis long-temps sentie par le Commerce, que celle d’un établissement special ayant pour objet de lui procurer des renseignements sur les prétendus Négocians, c’est à dire les *escrocs* qui, à l’aide des qualifications de Banquiers, Négocians et Commissionnaires, usurpent la confiance publique et font journellement des dupes parmi les véritables commerçans.

Commerce has long and strongly felt the necessity for a special establishment whose objective would be the procurement of information on false Merchants, that is to say *swindlers* who, helped by the experience of Bankers, Merchants and Commissioners, play on public confidence and daily make dupes of true commercial agents.¹⁸

¹⁸ Vidocq, circular, “Bureau de Renseignemens dans l’intérêt du Commerce,” 1833. Reproduced in Eugène Le Senne, “Vidocq et son Bureau de renseignements commerciaux,” *Le Vieux papier*, t. 12, 1913, 291-297.

Vidocq continues the opening of his circular by laying out an estimate of how much these “false Merchants” cost true Commerce by the day (50,000 ff), month (1,500,000 ff) and year (18,000,000 ff), then stating baldly that even these elevated sums are most likely an underestimation, the real business loss coming somewhere nearer, “au plus bas, à 36 ou 40 millions ... annuellement” (“at the lowest, between 36 and 40 million [francs] annually” – Le Senne, 292).

The image shows a document titled "PROSPECTUS" with a handwritten number "108" in the top right corner. The main title is "BREVET d'Invention et de Perfectionnement DU PAPIER DE SURETÉ." Below this, it states "Sur lequel il est impossible de faire la plus légère tentative de falsification ou altération quelconque." The author is identified as "E. F. VIDOCQ, (Breveté.)" and the office is "BUREAU DE RENSEIGNEMENTS dans l'intérêt du Commerce." The address is "Rue Cloche - Perche, N° 12, à Paris." The document contains several paragraphs of text discussing the need for a special establishment to provide information on "Escrocs" (scammers) who undermine public confidence. It mentions that 20,000 individuals are involved, causing a loss of 18 million francs annually, and that this loss is often underestimated. A circular stamp from the "BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE" is visible on the right side of the page.

PROSPECTUS. 108

BREVET
d'Invention et de Perfectionnement
DU PAPIER DE SURETÉ.

Sur lequel il est impossible de faire la plus légère tentative de
falsification ou altération quelconque.

E. F. VIDOCQ, (Breveté.)

BUREAU DE RENSEIGNEMENTS
dans l'intérêt du Commerce.

Rue Cloche - Perche, N° 12, à Paris.

C'est une nécessité vivement et depuis long-temps sentie par le commerce, que celle d'un établissement spécial ayant pour objet de lui procurer des renseignements sur les prétendus négocians, c'est-à-dire sur les *Escrocs* qui à l'aide des qualifications de Banquiers, Négocians, et Commissionnaires, usurpent la confiance publique et font journellement des dupes parmi les véritables commerçans.

Les écrivains qui se sont spécialement occupés de recherches statistiques en ces matières, élèvent à 20,000 le chiffre des *Industriels* de ce genre. Je veux bien admettre qu'il y ait quelque exagération dans ce calcul; mais j'affirme que l'évaluation la plus modérée ne peut descendre au-dessous de cinq mille. Prenons pour base cette donnée.

Ces cinq mille individus absorbent au commerce une somme moyenne de 10 fr. par jour, c'est taxer au plus bas la dépense de ces *messieurs*, menant d'habitude joyeuse vie, et d'ordinaire enclins aux passions les plus dispendieuses.

Leur dépense commune s'élèvera donc :
par jour à 50 mille fr., par mois 1 million 500 mille fr., par an 18 millions.

Mais il faut bien observer que pour se procurer ces 18 millions de francs ces *Industriels* escroquent au commerce une somme au moins double, souvent triple, parce qu'ils achètent cher, revendent à vil prix, payent aux entrepreneurs de leurs sales affaires des commissions considérables.

Figure 1 – E. F. Vidocq, (Bréveté)
BHVP Ms 2928, dossier 12, fol. 108-109

Just as, knowing that the police required an inside infiltrator to solve crimes successfully, Vidocq the *ex-forçat* once turned his former criminal career to advantage, here we see Vidocq the *ex-chef de la Surêté* playing on the same perspicacity, as well as on his own experience with the underground networks of information that subtend Parisian society. The founder of this "bureau de renseignements" knows the anxiety of an urban population in the first years of the July Monarchy, following the Bourbon Restoration of 1815-1830 and the accompanying loss of rights gained after the Revolution. He knows also, first-hand, the difficulties this new merchant class faces as it struggles into financial solvability, and foresees the socio-economic changes that make the bourgeoisie into a modified aristocracy, the nobility of the mid-19th century. Commerce – with a capital C – has replaced Liberté as the motto of a social class on the rise, in the framework of a Republican monarchy ruled by the Citizen King in the Golden Age of France's Industrial Revolution. It should come as no surprise then that his first detective work was, or at least was publicized as, a work designed to protect the economic interests of the population during this period. A decade later, Vidocq would address larger questions of property and crime in a different way, changing his focus once again to mirror a prevailing zeitgeist concerned with socio-political and philosophical reforms. But at the dawn of his detective period, which coincides with the dawn of the July Monarchy, Vidocq concentrates on Commerce.

This focus is important for several reasons. First, at a time when novelists like Balzac, Hugo and Sue were concentrating on the potential damage that theft causes to individuals, Vidocq saw a much larger picture (and this, well in advance of Zola's 1883 novel *Au Bonheur des Dames* with its dual focus on commercial and individual losses). He thus positioned himself within the mechanisms of the post-revolutionary economy, and on the side of a class fast coming into power. Through this self-positioning, Vidocq managed to re-invent his reputation yet again. No longer the penniless petty criminal of adolescence, the new Vidocq stood firmly on the side of social right, fiscal conservation, legitimate industry and the development of a financial *patrimoine* (heritage), this important new image of the emergent State fast becoming the legacy of the 19th century. This repositioning echoes his writings from the years when he operated a paper factory in Saint-Mandé, and invented paper that would immediately show any attempt at alteration, as well as an indelible ink.¹⁹ [See Figure 2]

¹⁹ Vidocq's writings about his paper and ink inventions are archived in BHVP Ms 2928, fol 47-99.

Second, in the publicity brochure, Vidocq underlined the timeliness and social necessity of his new enterprise, with a formula that might be familiar to those who have read his *Voleurs*. The introduction to *Les Voleurs*, Vidocq's anecdotal and encyclopedic dictionary of thieves' argot, includes the following paragraph:

Je n'attache pas à cet ouvrage plus d'importance qu'il n'en mérite ; je ne veux même point, pour me conformer à l'usage général, répéter ce que disait le célèbre Clément Marot, que le besoin d'un livre semblable à celui-ci était depuis longtemps vivement et généralement senti ; mais lorsque l'on parle, sur le théâtre, le langage des prisons et des bagnes, lorsque les assassins publient leurs Mémoires, et les voleurs leurs pensées intimes, le moment est opportun pour publier un Dictionnaire argotique.

I do not attach to this work more importance than it deserves; I do not even wish to repeat, in conformity to general usage, what the famous Clément Marot said, that the need for a book such as this one had long been vividly and widely felt; but in a time when people speak, at the theater, the language of prisons and hard-labor camps, when assassins publish their memoirs and thieves their most intimate thoughts, the moment is ripe for a Dictionary of underworld slang (Vidocq 681).

Similarly, in circular to announce the opening of his "Bureau de renseignements", Vidocq played on this same allusion to Marot. "C'est une nécessité vivement et depuis longtemps sentie *par le Commerce*" ('It is a necessity long and vividly felt *by Commerce*,' emphasis mine), he wrote, specifying the particular application of his agency. At the same time, he subtly reinforced the popular perception of the police during the July Monarchy – an institution without focus, without contacts, unable to handle the explosion of crime in the capital after Vidocq's own resignation from the force. The police-chief-turned-private-detective here allied himself firmly *against* the state police, with a statement and an intention that would earn him retaliation in the years to come.

Vidocq the private detective stood therefore against crime and fraud, *and* against the official state-sponsored agency designated to combat crime and fraud. He suggests a Bhabhaesque "third space", a space of hybridization and biculturality,²⁰ in the evolving culture of information, and offers to the

²⁰ Cf Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

emerging quest for control of information (along with the knowledge of the power of information and the growing concern with a subject's right to control access to personal details) a voice from the intersections of social identity and power. His stance outside both the official police and criminal networks earned the man a formidable reputation as a crime-fighter, but it also earned him resentment that would cause considerable difficulty in the years of his private-detective endeavor. In fact, part of what made Vidocq's venture so unique was precisely its in-between nature. Neither "honest person" in the Balzacian sense nor "voleur" as the state police would define the term, neither outlaw nor official law-enforcer, Vidocq came to represent a new, third category: the (allegedly) honest detective. The term is oxymoronic – only an ex-convict could have access to the information channels and ways of understanding the criminal world that benefitted Vidocq's agency, yet he had to find a way to use that information that would neither reveal nor compromise the criminal networks that worked to his profit. His contacts were extensive: "Bientôt, [Vidocq] sera, à lui seul, toutes les polices de France. Il n'est plus auprès du gouvernement, mais il est au courant de tout. Il a des amis, des relations, des correspondants, des antennes dans les ministères, dans les banques, dans l'armée, dans la magistrature, à la cour, dans les grands hôtels particuliers, etc." ("Soon, he would fill, by himself alone, the functions of all the police in France. He was no longer with the government, but he had a hand in everything. He had friends, contacts, correspondents, antennae in the ministries, in the banks, in the army, in the magistrature, at the court, in the large private mansions, etc." – Savant 1957: 34).

Dominique Kalifa's research on Vidocq, concerning both his role in the developing structure of the 19th-century Parisian police system, and his departure from or resistance to this same system as he set up his own bureau of investigation,²¹ shows a Vidocq who unsurprisingly, even relentlessly, attached the same independence of spirit to his police work as to all his enterprises: criminal, cultural, literary and financial. He even came to rival the official police, who were seen as bumbling incompetents by authors and the public alike, while Vidocq was known for his "célérité et discrétion" ('speed and secrecy' – a phrase that would become the motto for private detection as an industry in the course of the 19th century). Both Kalifa and James Morton make reference to a manuscript collection at

²¹ See Kalifa, *Crime et culture au XIX^e siècle* (Paris: Perrin, 2005); and especially *Histoire des détectives privés en France (1832-1942)* (Paris: Nouveau Monde editions, 2007).

the Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris (BHVP), Ms 2928, which contains Vidocq's own records from the *Bureau de renseignements* – those records which escaped seizure by the police when they raided his offices in 1837 and 1843 (the seized records were kept in the archives of the *Police municipale*, which were largely destroyed in 1870). When I was researching Vidocq in Paris, however, over the summer of 2008, this manuscript (much to my chagrin and the confusion of the archival librarians at the BHVP) proved quite difficult to locate. Even the drawer of the BHVP's card catalogue containing manuscript listings from VIC to VIE had disappeared, in a curiously localized miniature Parisian mystery.

Since I could not research within the manuscript itself, I began to research *around* it, using the table of contents from an old hand-written catalogue to look up cases mentioned as part of Vidocq's detective work. Thus, for want of Vidocq's own notes, I turned to census records from the year listed for the "affaire" in question in Vidocq's table of contents, and searched for any information on the individuals named. This method was quickly disheartening: only a few of the names from the Table of Contents had any public traces or any records in the archives at all. For a researcher coming to the "case" a century and a half after the fact, this roundabout approach provided a real taste of the bitter difficulties of detection: for one thing, there was no guarantee that the information I found on a name or fragment of a name listed in a table of contents would actually yield a file on the same person who hired Vidocq to investigate an affair. The possibility for error and inaccuracy – especially since I (unlike Vidocq) came to this endeavor without an intimate knowledge of the inner workings of nineteenth-century criminal society, much less a team of ex-convicts at my disposal – loomed large. Even my scholarly sources were not one-hundred-percent reliable: Kalifa gave the Vidocq papers an erroneous manuscript number, and Morton attributed them to a different library collection.²² Moreover, working backwards to Vidocq's time involved confronting a distressing truth for a researcher: one major component of the basic interest in hiring a private detective was the guarantee of secrecy. Vidocq learned this lesson painfully and well, since his agency was raided

²² Kalifa, in *Naissance de la police privée*, alternately labels the Vidocq manuscript as BHVP 2928 and BHVP 2429. (BHVP 2429 consists of the records of a property-owner by the name of Vignier, including receipts for the installation of indoor plumbing in a building on the rue de Rivoli.) Morton says that the manuscript belongs to an entity called "ABVP," which does not exist in Paris.

by the police at least twice (as we will see a bit further on), his records seized. It was therefore in his interest (for reasons of both business and reputation) not to keep compromising records to begin with, which makes tracing his steps now, through the intricacies of private investigations, a very complex endeavor indeed. It is one of history's minor ironies that the man who invented paper on which writing would be permanent ultimately had to forego the use of permanent paper traces in his work. [See Figure 2] If my research on Vidocq was to advance at all, I needed to read his papers themselves, and not rely on secondary reports whose accuracy was questionable at best.

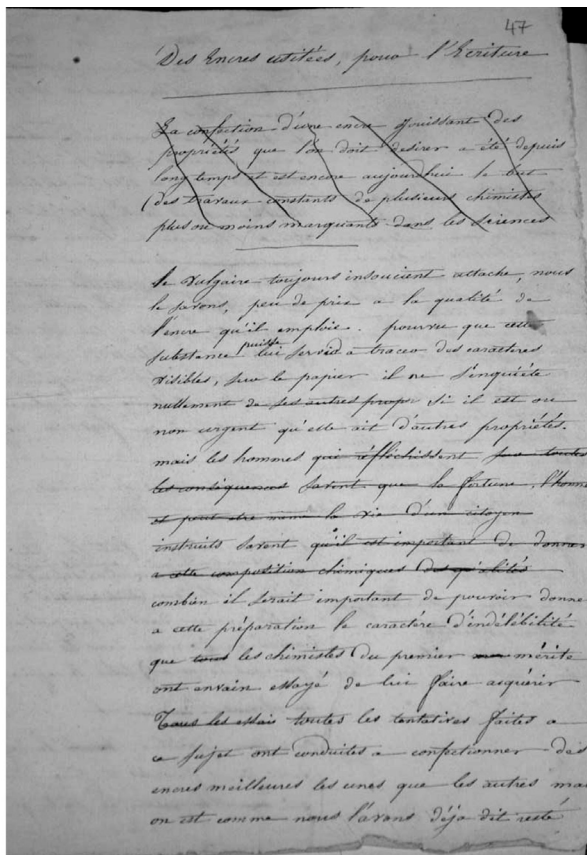


Figure 2 - E. F. Vidocq, "Des Encre usitées, pour l'écriture" BHVP Ms 2928, dossier "Autographes", fol 47

Fortunately, my research ordeal was relatively short-lived. After ten days of being told by various librarians that the manuscript was “introuvable” or “disparu” (‘unlocatable’ or ‘disappeared’) – and even one afternoon speculating about the possibility that it had been stolen –, the head curator phoned to say that he had located the papers. All was well that ended well – but the experience of detecting the detective’s traces brought home several important points about the work Vidocq did in his *Bureau des renseignements*. Mainly, the penumbra of mystery around both the man and his agency, and the process of self-mythologizing that served to keep him “afloat” during the difficult political years of the Empire (on the wrong side of the law), then the Restoration and July Monarchy (on the “right” side of the law, yet widely disliked and ultimately harassed and hunted by other law agents), seem to have perpetuated themselves in research conducted on the detective himself.

While trying to *dépister* (in Lacan’s term,²³ *follow the traces of*) Vidocq, I had found myself in a curious place, where research was more about the *process* of researching than about the topic. And it occurred to me that my experience tracing the disappearing detective matched, to a certain degree, the experience of *being* a private detective in the 19th century. Vidocq had to create networks outside the usual channels of information; had to tease answers out of reluctant sources; had to learn ways of bypassing the mechanisms of power and justice that did not involve actually contravening them and making himself guilty. As I wrote to scholars and librarians in search of concrete information about the vanished traces of a man(uscript), the image of the black-frocked sleuth with a bag of disguises and his extensive web of contacts in all vectors of urban life became a very vivid picture indeed. (Was the goose-chase trying to locate his papers yet another facet of his self-mythologizing? Another disguise, some hundred and fifty years after his death?) The difference, between Vidocq’s success as a detective and the researcher’s failure in tracing him, comes down to the lack of both primary sources and a certain quality that Balzac cites in his novella *Ferragus*, in which the police prove especially inept:

La police, mon cher enfant, est ce qu’il y a de plus inhabile au monde, et le pouvoir ce qu’il y a de plus faible dans les questions

²³ From Jacques Lacan, “Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter’,” translated by Jeffrey Mehlman. In Muller and Richardson, eds., *The Purloined Poe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U P, 1988), 28-55.

individuelles. Ni la police, ni le pouvoir ne savent lire au fond des cœurs.

The police, my dear child, is the most incapable force in the world, and official power is the weakest one when it comes to personal questions. Neither one knows how to read deep into the heart.²⁴

Here, in Balzac's quotation (and it is worth noting that Balzac made the acquaintance of and befriended Vidocq during the years he was composing his *Comédie humaine*), we see that the real failing of the official police, like any representation of official state power, lay in its inability to read subjects *subjectively*. That is, the very objectivity that informs a police investigation from the outside hinders it, because the officers are not familiar with the intricacies and histories of interaction between the individuals involved. This belief, which Balzac espouses whole-heartedly in his novels, stands in diametric opposition to certain standard tenets of police investigation before Vidocq, most especially the necessity of objective investigation that allows for clear vision. In contrast, Vidocq's work – and Balzac's fictional representations of it – suggests that the status of outside observer in fact *detracts* from the efficiency of a detective, who needs to get "inside" an investigation in order to understand and untangle its logical threads. The difficulty lies in that a true insider would not get the whole story behind a given mystery, and so would need extra information. Vidocq's own covered traces made "reading deep into [his] heart" a formidable challenge – a result that, I mused, would likely have pleased him, as he was known for a master of disguise. The best way to be both an insider (with a privileged subjective viewpoint) and an outsider (with access to all the filaments of information), Vidocq's work suggests, is to engage a source with criminal knowledge (in his case, an ex-convict; in mine, the detective himself) who can spin out Ariadne's thread to lead one through the labyrinth of contradictions and lacunae toward the mystery's resolution.

Both Kalifa and Morton quote liberally from Vidocq's manuscript, focusing mostly on the *règlements* and *fonctionnement* of the agency. Part of the work that Vidocq participated in founding, in 1833 but also in his previous incarnations as informer and prison-spy, was precisely the positioning of a "third space" of interpretation, a role that could exist simultaneously alongside and outside both official and underworld

²⁴ Balzac, *Ferragus, Chef des Dévorants* (Paris: Boucher, 2002), 36.

discourse. Unsurprisingly, Vidocq came up against the official, State, police of the July Monarchy in his endeavors, and was repeatedly questioned (and even imprisoned) by Gisquet's force. Morton cites the *Gazette des Tribunaux* at least half a dozen times in evoking these contentious encounters (23 juin, 23 novembre 1835; 3 février 1841; 29 avril 1843; 4, 5, 6, 11, 14 mai 1843; 23 juillet 1843; 19, 26 septembre 1843; 29 novembre 1843).²⁵

This proliferation of tribunal appearances indicates that Vidocq had, once again, rubbed the law the wrong way. Indeed, after the official police raids on his agency, Vidocq published a pamphlet that he “fit placarder sur les murs de Paris” (‘plastered over the walls of Paris’ – Vidocq, 673), entitled “Liberté de E.F. Vidocq!!” (‘Freedom for E.F. Vidocq!!’) in 1838 and “Résurrection ! Vidocq.” in 1843. [See Figure 2] These pamphlets spell out the detective's real indignation at the accusations against him, the arrests that needlessly interrupted his legitimate business, and the damage done to his agency, in both public opinion and the practical mechanisms of operation. Notably, Vidocq protests against “les perquisitions faites dans les bureaux de mon administration, la saisie de tous mes papiers, celle de trois mille cinq cents dossiers appartenant à des tiers” (‘the searches conducted in the offices of my agency, the seizure of all my papers and that of three thousand five hundred dossiers belonging to others’ – 673). It was not merely the inconvenience of having to re-create the paper trails of each case he had worked on, in his industry as a private detective, that led Vidocq to decry this unjust police treatment; but also the knowledge that the “dossiers appartenant à des tiers” represented sensitive material, the loss of which could portend awkward problems – and, potentially, loss of business – for the detective, whose clients would certainly not want their business or family affairs broadcast in society after the police seizures. Arrested and imprisoned on five trumped-up charges (“la quintuple accusation de tentative d'escroquerie, de corruption d'agents du gouvernement, d'usurpation de fonctions publiques, de détournement de pieces et d'usure” / ‘the quintuple accusation of attempted fraud, corrupting government agents, impersonation of civil servants, misappropriation of funds and usury’ – Vidocq 673), Vidocq spent three months fighting the false accusations from jail and struggling to prove his innocence. He published the first of his pamphlets when the case against him was dismissed, and promised the public that his agency “n'a pas été et ne sera pas fermée” (‘has not been and will not be closed’ – 674), despite these attempts by the

²⁵ All cited in Morton, pp 217-238.

official police to shut him down. His valiant words held him in good stead and with a steady clientele until 1843, when it all happened again.

Liberté !!!
De
Vidocq

Tous les journaux ont annoncé il y
a 3 mois, les Perquisitions faites
dans les Bureaux de mon adminis^{tion}
la saisie de tous mes papiers, celle
de 3500 Dossiers appartenant à des
tiers, puis la fin mon arrestation
ils se sont plus la Publiant dans des
articles peu charitables des faits contournés
ou faux a donner a Ce diverseur Mesure
de Police une importance Exagérée,
j'étais alors dans les Verrous je n'avais
me taire C'est Ce que j'ai fait
mais aujourd'hui que suis libre,
je dois lever la Voix afin de rectifier
le Public et détruire par un Exposé succinct
des faits ~~de~~ tels, les impressions
fausses qu'auraient pu produire sur son
Esprit les assertions absurdes et Calomnieuses
de Certains Journalistes.
je ne fais pas Convoitise pour le moment
le but que l'on s'estait attendue en me
menaçant la Catastrophe dont j'ai été
restauré

Figure 3 - E. F. Vidocq, "Liberté !" draft
BHVP Ms 2928, dossier 18, fol 20

The result, after the second raid, arrest and trial, was that Vidocq went “green” – or as near as possible. That is, he practically ceased to keep paper files on his clients and cases, so that there would be no incriminating files for the police to seize, should the police return and instigate a third raid on the agency. The detective, a watcher of both actions and manners, must remain *unwatched* himself, must escape official observation in order to accomplish his goal of seeing the truth behind or underneath the ruses employed by state and citizen to conceal it. As I mentioned above, then, BHVP manuscript 2928 contains documents from *before* the detective agency and *after* it, but the information about individual cases from the years when the Bureau des renseignements functioned remains scant: drafts of case reports are anticlimactic, correspondence with clients is limited, a list of employees only pseudonymous. The traces that remain from the cases he undertook to solve offer only the most cryptic clues, as we can see in a note he sent to a Monsieur Regnier on the Boulevard des Italiens [See Figure 4]: “Monsieur, avez-vous vu votre avocat, je vous préviens que la Personne qui fait l’affaire n’est plus à Paris que pour 4 à 5 jours. Hâtez-vous S.V.P. Votre Serviteur, Vidocq” (‘Monsieur, have you seen your lawyer, I forewarn you that the Person concerned in this affair will be in Paris for only 4 or 5 more days. Please make haste. Your Servant, Vidocq’). The deliberate omission of names (both Monsieur’s lawyer and the “Personne”), dates (the note is labeled “20 March” but with no year, and its envelope bears no postmark – it might have been hand-delivered) and the hasty writing style make this letter an object of some mystification for a later reader or researcher: it offers a generic clue to Vidocq’s procedural method as a detective, but no tangible facts about the case at hand. Significantly, also, this letter exists not in the collection of the Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris in the Vidocq manuscripts, but rather in the Archives de la Préfecture de Police – its provenance indicating it was donated by a private collector (a note at the bottom of the page reads “don de M. Hill, Boston”).

91 E A 90 16

Monsieur

avez vous vu notre avocat,
je vous prie de me dire que la
personne qui fait affaire
n'est plus à Paris que pour
4 ou 5 jours. hâtez vous
A. V. P.

Votre dévoué
Vidocq

Le 20 mars

John de G. Hill
Boston

Figure 4 - E. F. Vidocq, handwritten letter to "Monsieur"
Archives de la Préfecture de Police (Paris), Série E A/90 16, fol 91

In paperless-ing his agency, however, Vidocq did not put a stop to the work of detection; he merely took it to another realm, one that resided in a different kind of text, a different system of communication. Thus we can

read the title of his 1838 pamphlet, “Liberté !” in an ironic light, especially if we consider the double meaning of the Latin “liber.” Vidocq is free (*libre*) to reinstate himself in the work of detection, and he does so paradoxically in the textual realm (*liber* = book). But since the text no longer takes the form of a book, even a “book” in the loosest construction of the term (a collection of papers that contain parts of a narrative when taken together), perhaps we are meant to read both homophones at the same time and understand his freedom-to-detect as *detextion*: a textual freedom, a freedom from incriminating text. As Lacan formulates for Poe’s fictional detective Dupin, the work of researching Vidocq means we have to “track down (*dépistons*) his footprints there where they elude (*dépiste*) us” (Lacan 1988: 37). The real-life detective, in advance of the fictional one, forces his researchers to operate on both levels of the contronym *dépister* – all at once following traces (or: telling us to follow traces) and erasing them. After the permanent, inalterable paper of his pre-detective days and the impermanence of non-paper records, we therefore see Vidocq occupying yet another kind of “third” space, one that simultaneously denies and insists on textual traces. *Libre* and *Liber* would thus both be read at the same time, like layers of textual meaning underneath the defiant title that proclaims, at the same time, Vidocq’s freedom to return to text, and his impending disappearance from it.

Similarly to Vidocq’s own mythologizing propensities, and the very real (commercial, political) need to create a smoke-screen for any activities that could cause him legal trouble and result in economic failure and damage his reputation in the already difficult market of private investigation, perhaps his researchers also have fallen into the trap, consciously or otherwise, of “protecting” their sources by disguising them, covering their tracks, leaving (however unconsciously) *de fausses pistes*. The mysteriously (albeit temporarily) disappeared manuscript 2928 combined with the lack of tangible, textual evidence from Vidocq himself, means that the work of detection paradoxically involves a necessary separation from standard means of detection – just as Vidocq himself once had to invent new ways of identifying and understanding information collected (and new ways of collecting information) in the criminal milieu. Detecting the detective, that is, means adapting another kind of “third space” stance – recognizing the necessity of stepping outside the official channels of traditional procedure and tracing clues by different means. The work of the reader (researcher/detective) becomes the work of decoding the surface narrative in order to

read the real story underneath. It also means developing the sensibility to understand which narrative is the truly criminal one – surface or underlayer, or else one entirely outside, a narrative imposed on the subject through incrimination or false accusation. In this sense, the most successful strike Vidocq makes against the official police is to show them, textually, as authors of the real crime: removing the traces (*pistes*) that allow the detective to provide a coherent narrative about how to read both society and its underworld.

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Розмари Питерс

ПРВА ПАРИСКА ДЕТЕКТИВСКА АГЕНЦИЈА: ВИДОК И „ТРЕЋИ ПРОСТОР“
– ПРИВАТНА ПОЛИЦИЈА КАО НОВА КУЛТУРОЛОШКА СФЕРА

Сажетак

Јудин Франсуа Видок (Eugène-François Vidocq, 1775-1857) ушао је у легенду као истакнута фигура тадашњег француског друштва, с једне стране на основу младалачког искуства из подземља, а са друге, невероватне чињенице да се уздигао на друштвеној, културној и класној лествици од осуђеника до шефа полиције. Након година управљања полицијском бригадом – новим огранком полиције који је био задужен за превенцију и безбедност, Видок је отворио прву приватну детективску агенцију 1833. године. Овај есеј бави се теоријским и историјским контекстом Ви-

доковог рада у улози полицајца, а затим детектива и наглашава да је Видок створио „нови дискурзивни простор“ који је допринео употпуњавању слике о деветнаестовековном културном идеалу уређеног друштва. Видок није био нити на страни државне полиције, нити света подземља, чије представнике је прогонио, а био је везан за оба друштвена подручја. Тако се нашао на челу нове (како у уже језичком, тако и у шире културном смислу) службе у оквиру које је био принуђен да преиспита свој рад и начин потраге, како са практичне тако и са идеолошке тачке гледишта, што је нашло одјека у новом културном дискурсу који се у овим оквирима развио.

Кључне речи: друштво, култура, подземље, осуђеник/полицајац/детектив, редефинисање културног простора, стварање новог дискурзивног подручја

