

Crime as Urban Nexus: G.W.M. Reynolds and "The Mysteries of London".

This paper will place the global genre of urban *Mysteries*, that began in France and England in the eighteen-forties, into its original context. Contemporary poststructuralist readings have interpreted this as a stylistic 'metafiction' of city life, (Richard Maxwell); a literary format that 'refers linguistically to the fragmented and hence incoherent experience of the modern city' (Anne Humpherys). Such interpretations risk a radical misunderstanding of the genesis of the genre.

As early as 1794, Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* marked the subversion of the traditional Gothic tale. By giving the story's horrors a rational explanation, the import of the 'mystery' shifted, from the supernatural, to the subjective mind of the observer. Popular fiction moved from the Gothic tale of terror to the detective story. In the *Mysteries* of Sue and Reynolds, however bizarre the events appear to the modern reader, both writers started with socialistic ideals, not to create 'stylistic meta-fictions' embodying the incoherence of city life, but, however theatrically, to clarify its basic structures.

The spark behind the *Mysteries* genre was not, as Maxwell affirms, Victor Hugo's historical *Notre Dame de Paris 1482* (1831), but Pierce Egan Sr.'s semi-journalistic *Life in London* (1821). My paper will illustrate the curious web of development between the serials of Egan, Sue and Reynolds in order to explore how crime and the criminal classes moved to the centre of Reynolds's critique of city life.

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