Subject: English Language – 19th-century non-fiction texts

Theme: Crime and Punishment

Rationale

The 19th century witnessed the rise of crime fiction, shaped from the sensationalism surrounding theft, murder and violence found in newspaper articles, pamphlets and posters. This thematic collection (drawn from Discovering Literature: Romantics and Victorians) will allow students to read and understand 19th-century non-fiction texts, and support them in identifying key features for a range of genres, audiences and purposes.

Each source is accompanied by original images (follow the links to download higher resolution versions) plus a transcript.

Content

Non-fiction sources from the site:

1. Broadside advertisement for a lecture on transportation
2. Anonymous letter to City of London Police about Jack the Ripper
3. Letter from Charles Dickens about the execution of the Mannings
4. Extract from the diary of Francis Place describing the pillory, 1829
5. Broadside about a 12 year old boy sentenced to death
6. ‘Blood’ from Punch
7. Children in Prison by Oscar Wilde
8. A Letter on the Nature and Effects of the Tread-Wheel
9. The Early Life of Thomas Hardy
10. The Stranger’s Guide, or Frauds of London Detected

Key questions

Closely read one or more text extracts. Next, work through the following activities and questions:

1. List up to 5 ideas or pieces of information conveyed by the writer about their chosen subject.
2. How does the writer use language and tone for effect and to influence you as a reader?
3. How has the writer structured the text for effect and to influence you as a reader?
4. Compare and contrast ideas, audience and purpose across two or more texts.
5. How does the text’s title and format appeal to its audience?

Recommended further reading:

Juvenile crime in the 19th century by Matthew White
Murder as entertainment by Judith Flanders
Jack the Ripper by Judith Flanders
The creation of the police and the rise of detective fiction by Judith Flanders
Victorian prisons and punishments by Liza Picard
This is a publicity notice for a lecture by John Brocksopp, a former convict from York who had returned to Britain after 14 years in a penal colony in Australia.

‘Transportation’ was the practice of sending criminals out of the country. It was almost a century old at the time of this lecture, and had always been controversial.
By Request of the respectable Inhabitants Of Wolverhampton; The Lecture On TRANSPORTATION Will be again delivered in The Athenaeum, Queen-Street, On Thursday Evening, February 8th 1849

Illustrated by Four Views, viz: I—Hobart Town, II – The Harbour of Sydney, III - Government Barrack Yard, and punishment of a Convict at the Triangles; IV.--The View of Norfolk Island.

And Execution of 13 Convicts for Conspiracy.

The Lecturer will appear in the Character of a NORFOLK ISLAND CONVICT, in full costume, wearing the CONVICTS' DRESS, IN DOUBLE CHAINS.

OPINIONS OF THE PRESS

DARLINGTON – A most interesting and instructive Lecture was delivered on the Evening of Monday, August 21st, in the Trinity National School-Room, by a returned convict, on the Horrors of Transportation; being the result of his experience during a period of 15 years in the convict settlements of Great Britain. The lecturer was transported from the City of York, for harbouring certain men from pursuit of justice; he appeared in a convict's dress, and was assisted by sketches of places and scenes witnessed in the settlements. He gave an eloquent and lucid address, which evidently made a powerful impression upon the scholars, a great number of whom attended. – The Yorkshireman, 21st August.

LINCOLN. – On Tuesday Evening last, a lecture on transportation was delivered in the room of the Lincoln Mechanics' Institute, by John Brocksopp, who was transported from York in 1830. The room was crowded, and the details given were listened to with great interest.

Brocksopp’s object was to dissipate the impression on the minds of the ignorant that transportation is a light matter; & truly the harrowing description given showed that transportation really is what Lord Stanley pronounced should be a punishment worse than death; it is slavery of the most dreadful kind. Brocksopp though not an educated man, seems to be well informed, gifted with keen perceptive powers and very accurate judgment. His untutored addresses are calculated to to effect much good – as, having been an actual sufferer, he can better reach the conviction of persons whom it is desired to influence, and he should by all means be encouraged to diffuse his experience as widely as possible. – If Dr. Ullathorne’s pamphlet with respect to the horrors of the penal settlement in Norfolk Island was also extensively circulated, it would aid in the correction of a very erroneous idea, and in all probability deter many nom continuing in a career of crime. = Lincoln and Samford Mercury, 1st June.

Front Seats 6d. Back Seats 3d. Doors opened at half-past 7 and the Lecture to commence at Eight o’clock.
Anonymous letter to City of London Police about Jack the Ripper

Created: 5 October 1888
Format: Manuscript / Letter / Ephemera
Creator: anonymous
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In autumn 1888, five women in east London’s slums died at the hands of an unknown man. The murderer became known as ‘Jack the Ripper’, a now legendary name that still haunts London’s streets.

On 5 October 1888 this letter was sent anonymously to the City of London Police accusing the actor Richard Mansfield of perpetrating the murders. Mansfield was at this time playing the dual role of the fictional Jekyll and Hyde on the London stage.
No. 9: M. B. (6th Feb.)

Mr. S. and myself have been looking over the Mirfield Remains. We found it interesting to see the remains of the ancient buildings and the old-fashioned farmhouses. It was a cold, wintry day, and the countryside was blanketed in snow.

Mr. S. suggested that we should visit the nearby village of Mirfield. We walked through the village, admiring the old stone cottages and the quaint shops. Mr. S. pointed out the local history, including the story of the famous Mirfield Miner, who lost his life in a mining accident.

After a pleasant walk, we returned to the car and drove back to Mirfield. The drive was silent, with only the sound of the car's engine breaking the quiet of the evening. We arrived back at our hotel and settled in for the night, content with our day's adventure.

The next morning, we woke early, ready to begin our exploration of the Mirfield Remains once again. We had a delicious breakfast at the hotel, with the hotel staff kindly providing us with recommendations for the best places to visit in the area.

Our day was filled with visits to various local sites, including the old church and the castle ruins. We walked through the village, admiring the old stone cottages and the quaint shops. Mr. S. pointed out the local history, including the story of the famous Mirfield Miner, who lost his life in a mining accident.

After a pleasant walk, we returned to the car and drove back to Mirfield. The drive was silent, with only the sound of the car's engine breaking the quiet of the evening. We arrived back at our hotel and settled in for the night, content with our day's adventure.
October 5th 1888

Dear Sir,

Now that these horrible murders are being committed I think it the duty of every one to let the Police know if they suspect anyone. What I am going to say seems Allmost imposable but still strange things have happened at times, I have a great liking for Actors So that I should be the last to think because a man take a dreadfull part his is therefore bad but when I went to see Mr Mansfield take the part of Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde I felt at once that he was the man wanted & I have not been able to get this feeling out of my head. I have no rest of A night or day I though the driffull manor he works himself up so that he would do it in Reality I do not think there is a A man Living So well able to disguise Himself in A moment as he does in front of the Public. Who so well able to baffle the Police, or public he could be A dark man. Fair man. Short man of tall in a five seconds if he carried A fine Faulse Wiskers & in a bag.

I though it strange this play should have commenced before the Murders for it is really something after the same style. The murders take place on Saturday nights. Mr M never has a performance on Saturday. The murders once took place on a Friday & once Mr M was too ill to perform at the Saturday morning performance. But weather it was at this time I do not know. I thought it funny when the safe was robbed of £200 & no one knew by whome it looks as if there was A bad person about.

I read in the Globe the other night that the same dredfull murders took place in American & were never discovered Mr M is I think an American but weather he came from there I dont know.

As it has worried me so I thought it best to let you know for you could let a man watch him without causing any bother. For I think you ought to know where he lodges & what sort of a man he is. I don’t know what put this into my head I can assure you it is not because I see him Take such a dredfull part for I have had friends on the Stage take bad parts but did not think they were bad in Conscience

Yours one who prays for the murderer to be Caught. M. P.
Executions were still held in public in the Victorian period. A source of entertainment for many people, they often attracted thousands of spectators.

In 1849, Charles Dickens, along with 30,000 other spectators, watched the hanging of the Mannings, a notorious pair of murderers. In response, he wrote this letter to The Times newspaper.
MR. CHARLES DICKENS AND THE EXECUTION OF THE MANNINGS.

Mr Editor – I was a witness of the execution at Horsemonger-lane. I went there with the intention of observing the crowd gathered to behold it, and I had excellent opportunities of doing so, at intervals all through the night, and continuously from daybreak until after the spectacle was over. I do not address you on the subject with any intention of discussing the abstract question of capital punishment, or any of the arguments of its opponents or advocates. I simply wish to turn this dreadful experience to some account for the general good, by taking the readiest and most public means of adverting to an intimation given by Sir G. Grey in the last Session of Parliament, that the Government might be induced to give its support to a measure making the infliction of capital punishment a private solemnity within the prison walls (with such guarantees for the last sentence of the law being inexorably and surely administered as should be satisfactory to the public at large), and of most earnestly beseeching Sir G. Grey, as a solemn duty which he owes to society, and a responsibility which he cannot for ever put away, to originate such a legislative change himself.

I believe that a sight so inconceivably awful as the wickedness and levity of the immense crowd collected at that execution 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 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. As the night went on, screeching and laughing, and yelling in strong chorus of parodies on negro melodies, with substitutions of ‘Mrs. Manning’ for ‘Susannah’, and the like, were added to these. When the day dawned, thieves, low prostitutes, ruffians and vagabonds of every kind, flocked on to the ground, with every variety of offensive and foul behaviour. Fightings, faintings, whistlings, imitations of Punch, brutal jokes, tumultuous demonstrations of indecent delight when swooning women were dragged out of the crowd by the police with their dresses disordered, gave a new zest to the general entertainment. When the sun rose brightly – as it did – it gilded thousands upon thousands of upturned faces, so inexpressibly odious in their brutal mirth or callousness, that a man had cause to feel ashamed of the shape he wore, and to shrink from himself, as fashioned in the image of the Devil. When the two miserable creatures who attracted all this ghastly sight about them were turned quivering into the air, there was 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. I have seen, habitually, some of the worst sources of general contamination and corruption in this country, and I think there are not many phases of London life that could surprise me. I am solemnly convinced that nothing that ingenuity could devise to be done in this city, in the same compass of time, could work such ruin as one public execution, and I stand astounded and appalled by the wickedness it exhibits, I do not believe that any community can prosper where such a scene of horror and demoralization as
Transcript of Letter from Charles Dickens about the execution of the Mannings

was enacted outside Horsemonger-lane Jail is presented at the very doors of good citizens, and is passed by, unknown or forgotten. And when, in our prayers and thanksgivings for the season we are humbly expressing before God our desire to remove the more evils of the land, I would ask your readers to consider whether it is not a time to think of this one, and to root it out.

I am, Sir, your faithful servant, CHARLES DICKENS. Devonshire-terrace, Tuesday, Nov. 13.
Pillory punishments were an every-day feature of life in Georgian Britain, employed by the magistracy to punish a variety of crimes deemed worthy of public criticism: forgery and arson, for example.

In this extract from Francis Place’s memoirs we see in detail just how raucous the punishments could be. Convicted criminals were placed in an upright position with their head and hands locked into a wooden board, and for an hour were pelted by the surrounding crowds with all manner of filth and rubbish: dead animals, horse manure and rotten vegetables.
The Pillory

This barbarous punishment, this disgrace to the laws to the nation, may be said to exist no longer.

So atrocious was the conduct of the mob when a man was “pilloried”, so debased and cruel were they, that those who are now children, will scarcely be able, when grown up, to conceive the existence of such enormities, much less to believe they were permitted and encouraged by lawyers, juries and what are usually termed respectable people. Even the very populace better taught and more humane than their parents will hear with incredulity the tales which may perchance be told of the pillory.

The time for standing, or rather walking round, on and in the Pillory, was one hour usually, from 12 to 1 O Clock at noon, the common dining hour of all sorts of persons who earn their livings by the labour of their hands, and consequently the time when the streets were crowded by such people.

Formerly every one who was put in the pillory was pelted, the populace would not forgo the “fun”. A human being was stuck up to be “shied at”, and the blackguard John Bull would “have his shy”. There were always on these occasions a sufficiently large number to help one another in countenance and encourage the more debased, to “help up the game”, there was never any want of low lived men and women, boys and girls, thieves and miscreants of every description, and to increased the misery of the wretch put up for their amusement, and to enjoy themselves in the exercise of their villainous propensities. …
The publication describes the life of a 12-year-old boy who was drawn into crime, and who was regularly caught stealing from his masters since the age of 7. Later the boy joins a gang of thieves who send him down a chimney as part of an elaborate plan to rob a jeweller’s shop.

Broadsides were cheap, mass-produced sheets, often sold in the streets and read out loud. They were a quick and easy way of circulating news and information in the 19th century.
Transcript of Broadside about a 12 year old boy sentenced to death

THE DREADFUL LIFE AND CONFESSION OF

THOMAS MITCHEL,

A Boy 12 years of age, who was tried on five different Indictments, and condemned to die at the Old Bailey, last Sessions.

With horror we attempt to relate the progress of evil, generally prevailing among children through the corrupt examples of wicked parents; though we are constrained to admit that many children through bad company, wickedly follow the dictates of their own will, and often bring the hoary heads of honest parents with sorrow to the grave. The horrors of a guilty conscience must be experienced, while their children’s crimes cry to heaven for vengeance against such wretched parents as those which belonged to Thomas Mitchel. After eloping from their native place, they took obscure lodgings in East Smithfield, where they harboured the vilest characters, and wickedly encouraged Thomas, their only son, in lying, stealing and every thing that was wicked.

At the age of seven, the parish humanely bound him apprentice, but his wickedness soon caused his master to discharge him; he was next put to a chimney-sweeper in Borough, who soon repented having taken him, for he plundered every place he was sent to work at, for which correction and imprisonment ensued. His master being an honest man brought him back with some property he had stolen, which obtained his pardon, and saved him from transportation. Lastly his parents made him desert his master, and bound him down to a gang of thieves who sent him down a jeweller’s chimney, in Swallow-street, where he artfully unbolted the shop window, out of which his companions cut a pane of glass and he handed a considerable quantity of articles to them, but the noise he made alarmed the family, and he was taken into custody, but the others escaped.

He was tried at the Old Bailey Sessions, found guilty and sentenced to die, in the 12th year of his age. After his sentence, the confession he made struck those around him with horror, stating the particulars of several murders and robberies. We hope the dreadful example of this youth may prove a lasting warning to the world.

A COPY OF VERSES

Give ear ye tender mothers dear,
And when this tale you read,
of a little boy but twelve years old,
Twill make your hearts to bleed.
Condemned of late for shocking crime,
Through his parents’ deeds you see,
You’d weep and cry to see him die,
Upon the gallows tree.
Transcript of Broadside about a 12 year old boy sentenced to death

When he was sentenced at the bar,
   The court was drown’d in tears,
To see a child so soon cut off,
   All in his infant years.
His mother mad with piercing cries,
   Tearing her hair she went,
In bedlam’s chains she now remains,
   And his father to prison is sent.
The heardest heart would melt with grief,
   To hear this boy’s sad moan,
At the bar he begg’d and prayed for life,
   When his sentence was made known
To pick pockets at fairs, he then declared,
   His father made him comply,
To join a cruel mob, to murder and rob,
   For which he is forced to die.
What must such wretched parents think,
   Who train their children so,
Who lead their offspring to the brink,
   Of everlasting woe.
Their hearts must be as hard as steel,
   And deaf to nature’s cries
Be warn’d my little children dear
   By the poor boy’s downfall,
Keep from dishonest courses clear,
   And God will bless you all.
O think on this poor little boy,
   Lament this woeful state,
Condemned to die on gallows high,
   How Dreadful is his fate.

Horsen, Printer, London.
The 19th century saw an increase in urban crime – as well as an explosion in journalism.

The new daily and weekly newspapers were able to publish cheaply and in large volume for the first time in history. They picked up on the public’s mingled fear and fascination at urban crime, filling their pages with detailed, sensational accounts drawn from initially dry court reports. This article comments on this phenomenon.
BLOOD.

For all the short cuts to notoriety in England, murder is the shortest. Let a man shed blood, let him commit some ruthless act of homicide, and he instantly becomes a most interesting object of art. His portrait is taken, and offered by benevolent and refining press as a household thing—“excellent for families.” From the moment that the man sinks into the monster, his pettiest acts are registered with all the fidelity and amplitude of the old chroniclers. “The king drinks;” and immediately

“—the kettle to the trumpet speaks,  
The trumpet to the cannoneer without,  
The cannons to the heavens, the heaven  
to earth”—
declare and dignify the potation. The murderer takes coffee! On the instant, a hundred goose-quills register the fact. The assassin eats one—two—three slices of bread-and-butter; and one—two—three slices are faithfully registered by the historians of blood. The murderer smiles—and the ever-watchful public instructor makes inventory of the homicidal dimple. The man-queller “talks unconcernedly,” and the light chit-chat of the ensanguined wretch is served up for families at Sunday tables. The miscreant sleeps, but is he left in solitude? Oh, no! for the Press—a harridan gossip—sits at the pallet of the man of blood, and counts his throes, his groans; marks his convulsed limbs, and the swear of agony upon his Cain-branded-brow—and straightaway vends her babble to all buyers.

Is this an exaggerated picture, limned by spleen! Is it so, ye ogres* of the press, who, when murder has done its work, straightway

“—lean your hungry nostrils down,”

And snuff sweet “profit steaming from the blood – who dress and prank up an assassination with all the hackneyed verbiage of slaughter, with all your best and boldest (the boldest still the best) variety of type!

A deed is done, enough to numb and palsy the national heart; a deed, at which humanity stands aghast, and they who think at all, think shudderingly upon the human mystery. A people is awe-stricken, as though some fiend had risen from the eternal pit to appal and terrify poor human nature with an act of fiend-like power. Man looks almost distrustingly in his fellow’s face, as he thinks of the enormity. Horror broods over the land; whilst Justice, leaning on her sword, in solemn stillness waits the fitting hour to doom the malefactor.

Oh, no! We are a trading community—a commercial people. Murder is, doubtless, a very shocking offence; nevertheless, as what is done is not to be undone, let us make our money of it. Hereupon, we turn a murderer into a commodity, and open an account with homicide. Our marketable hero is caught, and his progress to London is narrated stage by stage with a scrupulous verbosity worthy of the cause of Mammon. His every gesture becomes a thing of price—his every word a piece of money dropt into our hungry pocket. His...
beverage—his food is a matter to dwell upon, and thus we take toll from the murderer's coffee and the
murderer's bread-and-butter. The offender is brought to the bar; nobles grace the bench, and an artist (one
"Alexander Driscoll" +) is favoured with a magisterial ticket for the express purpose of investing with graphic
immortality the aristocracy on the seat of justice, in goodly company with the blood-shedder under question.

It has been the custom—and may it continue—to give a fitting place to the historical painter on the occurrence
of any national solemnity, that the artist may transmit to posterity a faithful copy of the scene;--but, until a
late examination, we never heard of the historical painter to Newgate—of an accredited R.A. to the gallows.
However, Mr. Hall doubtless, signed the ticket of admission for Mr. ALEXANDER DRISCOLL; hence, by the
painter's labours, we, and let us hope posterity too, may learn how a murderer looked at lords, and how lords
looked at him. Possibly, we may be suffered to inquire, if the picture is to be considered national property, or if
Mr. Driscoll was merely employed by the enterprise of private speculation? Anyway, a great object is obtained.
If the picture be ordered by Government, we shall, of course, have it in the National Gallery; if, on the
contrary, it emanate from the munificence of private patronage, it will doubtless be disseminated in tens of
thousands of copies throughout the kingdom, with a cum privilegio of the magistrate, for the especial profit of
the risen and the rising generation. Who, after this, shall say that the Government does not patronise the fine
arts?

A less refined, less civilised people than ourselves, would start with vulgar horror from a murderer; would do
justice on the malefactor with due, yet brief, solemnity. We are wiser. We show a murderer, "as men show an
ape." We rake together all the outlying incidents of his life—we retail his conversation—we give his picture in
little—we record with tenacious fidelity his "most domestic" movements—we lie in wait near his prison-bars—
become Newgate eaves-droppers—we fee turnkeys—get hangman's patronage—leave no vile task undone—
no loathsome path untrod to feed the appetite we create—a morbid, wolfish craving for all that's foul and
hideous in humanity. We familiarise the social mind with the blood-shedder—we make him so much a part of
the daily concerns of life for the time being, that we insensibly merge our horror in our curiosity. The iniquity
of the assassin is almost neutralised by the small-talk that is lisped about him.

A foolish respect for social decency discontinued the good old custom of hanging the murderer in chains, as a
warning against homicide. It was proved that the neighbourhood grew at last as familiar with the intended
horror as the ravens that fed upon it. We, however, have improved upon the practice. We gibbet in
newspapers. We send to the furthermost parts of the empire the true likeness of the murderer – the equally
vera effigies of his victim—with all the wounds—the place of the scene of bloodshed, with every particular, so
kindly, so elaborately recommended to the senses, that even babes and sucklings may read, and gaze, and be
instructed!

Next—nine times out of ten—comes the crowning glory. Good men visit the doomed wretch; and in due
season, the heart of the murderer—we are assured of the fact on the best authority—is turned into a ball of
honey. Day by day, he becomes “more comfortable.” He has, in his own credit, and in the belief of many of his well-wishers, sloughed the rotten part of his nature, already

“Wings at his shoulders seem to play,”—

and having, on the word of the prison chaplain, been promised instant immortality, the miscreant dies, with a “beautiful camellia” pinned over his heart (we had such a touching exhibition a few weeks since), the gift of a pious lady, one who visited the repentant murderer and assisted at his new birth. And thus the excitement mainly caused, and certainly continued by cupidity, ends—a fit ending—in cant!

To take human life is terrible; but is there no guilt in moral murder? Is there no crime in systematically killing the finest sensibilities of our nature by daily and hourly familiarising them with the atrocities of monsters? Look at the placards exhibited throughout London for these past three weeks! We read nothing but “Blood!” The very walls cry, “Blood!”

Q.

—

A FRAGMENT.

His eye was stern and wild,—his cheek was pale and cold as clay;
Upon his tighten’d lip a smile of fearful meaning lay;
He mused awhile—but not in doubt—no trace of doubt was there;
It was the steady solemn pause of resolute despair.

Once more he look’d upon the scroll—once more its words he read—
Then calmly, with unflinching hand, its folds before him spread.
I saw him bare his throat, and seize the blue cold-gleaming steel,
And grimly try the temper’d edge he was so soon to feel!

A sickness crept upon my heart, and dizzy swam my head,—
I could not stir—I could not cry—I felt benumb’d and dead;
Black icy horrors struck me dumb, and froze my senses o’er;
I closed my eyes in utter fear, and strove to think no more.

*                          *                          *

Again I looked, --a fearful change across his face had pass’d—
He seem’d to rave,—on cheek and lip a flaky foam was cast;

He raised on high the glittering blade,—then first I found a tongue—
Transcript of ‘Blood’ from *Punch*

“Hold, madman! stay the frantic deed!” I cried, and forth I sprung;

He heard me, but he heeded not; one glance around he gave;

And ere I could arrest his hand, he had begun to shave! ...

* Be it understood, we speak to the Sawney Beans only.

+ Vide Globe.
Children in Prison by Oscar Wilde

Full title: Children in Prison and Other Cruelties of Prison Life

Published: 1897, London

Format: Pamphlet

Creator: Oscar Wilde

Held by: British Library

Shelfmark: Eccles 37.

Children in Prison was published by novelist and poet Oscar Wilde as an attempt to uncover what he deemed to be the scandal of child prisoners incarcerated in British jails.

People nowadays do not understand what cruelty is. They regard it as a sort of terrible medieval passion, and connect it with the race of men like Escobar da Romano, and others, to whom the deliberate infliction of pain gave a real mindedness of pleasure. But men of the stamp of Escobar are merely abnormal types of perverted individualism. Ordinary cruelty is simply stupidity. It comes from the entire want of imagination. It is the result of our days of stereotyped systems, of hard-and-fast rules, of centralisation, of officialism, and of irresponsible authority. Wherever there is centralisation there is stupidity. What is inhuman in modern life is officialism. Authority is as destructive to those who exercise it as it is to those on whom it is exercised. It is the Prison Board, with the system that it carries out, that is the primary source of the cruelty that is exercised on a child in prison. The people who uphold the system have excellent intentions. Those who carry it out are humane in intention also. Responsibility is shifted on to the disciplinary regulations. It is supposed that because a thing is the rule it is right.

The present treatment of children is terrible, primarily from not understanding the peculiar psychology of a child's nature. A child can understand a punishment inflicted by an individual, such as a parent or guardian, and bear it with a certain amount of acquiescence. What it cannot understand is a punishment inflicted by Society. It cannot realise what Society is. With grown people it is, of course, the reverse. Those of us who are either in prison or have been sent there, can understand, and do understand, what that collective force called Society means, and whatever we may think of its methods or claims, we can force ourselves to accept it. Punishment inflicted on us by an individual, on the other hand, is a thing that no grown person endures or is expected to endure.

The child consequently, being taken away from its parents by people whom it has never seen, and of whom it knows nothing, and finding itself in a lonely and unfamiliar cell, waited on by strange faces, and ordered about and punished by the representatives of a system that it cannot understand, becomes an immediate prey to the first and most prominent emotion produced by modern prison life—the emotion of terror. The terror of a child in prison is quite limitless. I remember once in Reading, as I was going out to exercise, seeing in the dimly-lit cell, right opposite my own, a small boy. Two warders, not unkindly men, were talking to him, with some sternness apparently, or perhaps giving him some useful advice about his conduct. One was in the cell with him, the other was standing outside. The child's face was like a white wedge of sheer terror. There was in his eyes the mute appeal of a hunted animal. The next morning I heard him at breakfast-time crying, and calling to be let out. His cry was for his parents. From time to time I could hear the deep voice of the warden on duty warning him to keep quiet. Yet he was not even convicted of whatever little offence he had been charged with. He was simply on remand. That I knew from his wearing his own clothes, which seemed next enough. He was, however, wearing prison socks and shoes. This showed that he was a very poor boy, whose own shoes, if he had any, were in a bad state. Justices and magistrates, an entirely ignorant class as a rule, often remand children for a week, and then perhaps remit whatever sentence they are entitled to pass. They call this "not sending a child to prison." It is, of course, a stupid view on their part. To a little child, whether he is in prison on remand or after conviction, as a subtlety of social position he cannot comprehend. To him the terrible thing is to be there at all. In the eyes of humanity it should be a horrible thing for him to be there at all.
Transcript of *Children in Prison* by Oscar Wilde

People nowadays do not understand what cruelty is. They regard it as a sort of terrible mediaeval passion, and connect it with the race of men like Eccelin da Romano, and others, to whom the deliberate infliction of pain gave a real madness of pleasure. But men of the stamp of Eccelin are merely abnormal types of perverted individualism. Ordinary cruelty is simply stupidity. It comes from the entire want of imagination. It is the result in our days of stereotyped systems, of hard-and-fast rules, of centralisation, of officialism, and of irresponsible authority. Wherever there is centralisation there is stupidity. What is inhuman in modern life is officialism. Authority is as destructive to those who exercise it as it is to those on whom it is exercised. It is the Prison Board, with the system that it carries out, that is the primary source of the cruelty that is exercised on a child in prison. The people who uphold the system have excellent intentions. Those who carry it out are humane in intention also. Responsibility is shifted on to the disciplinary regulations. It is supposed that because a thing is the rule it is right.

The present treatment of children is terrible, primarily from people not understanding the peculiar psychology of a child’s nature. A child can understand a punishment inflicted by an individual, such as a parent or guardian, and bear it with a certain amount of acquiescence. What it cannot understand is a punishment inflicted by Society. It cannot realise what Society is. With grown people it is, of course, the reverse. Those of us who are either in prison or have been sent there, can understand, and do understand, what that collective force called Society means, and whatever we may think of its methods or claims, we can force ourselves to accept it. Punishment inflicted on us by an individual, on the other hand, is a thing that no grown person endures or is expected to endure.

The child consequently, being taken away from its parents by people whom it has never seen, and of whom it knows nothing, and finding itself in a lonely and unfamiliar cell, waited on by strange faces, and ordered about and punished by the representatives of a system that it cannot understand, becomes an immediate prey to the first and most prominent emotion produced by modern prison life – the emotion of terror. The terror of a child in prison is quite limitless, I remember once in Reading, as I was going out to exercise, seeing in the dimly-lit cell, right opposite my own, a small boy. Two warders, not unkindly men, were talking to him, with some sternness apparently, or perhaps giving him some useful advice about his conduct. One was in the cell with him, the other was standing outside. The child’s face was like a white wedge of sheer terror. There was in his eyes the mute appeal of a hunted animal. The next morning I heard him at breakfast-time crying, and calling to be let out. His cry was for his parents. From time to time I could hear the deep voice of the warder on duty warning him to keep quiet. Yet he was not even convicted of whatever little offence he had been charged with. He was simply on remand. That I knew by his wearing his own clothes, which seemed neat enough. He was, however, wearing prison socks and shoes. This showed that he was a very poor boy, whose own shoes, if he had any, were in a bad state. Justices and magistrates, an entirely ignorant class as a rule, often remand children for a week, and then perhaps remit whatever sentence they are entitled to pass. They call this “not sending a child to prison.” It is, of course, a stupid view on their part. To a little child, whether he is in prison...
Transcript of *Children in Prison* by Oscar Wilde

on remand or after conviction, is a subtlety of social position he cannot comprehend. To him the horrible thing is to be there at all. In the eyes of humanity it should be a horrible thing for him to be there at all.

This terror that seizes and dominates the child, as it seizes the grown man also, is of course intensified beyond power of expression by the solitary cellular…
In 1818 the treadmill, or treadwheel, was devised by British engineer William Cubitt as a device for prisons to employ – or, more often than not, punish – convicts.

*A Letter on the Nature and Effects of the Tread-Wheel* comments on the use and impact of the treadmill. It was supplemented with a long appendix containing prisoner’s testimonies.
Transcript of A Letter on the Nature and Effects of the Tread-Wheel

I proceed to explain more minutely on what grounds my present objections have been formed.

It cannot, I think, fail to strike every spectator who attentively contemplates a Tread-wheel in motion, that the prisoner upon it is placed in an unnatural*, and perilous position. The whole weight of his body rests on the fore-part of his foot – this alone coming into contact with the treadles; whilst his hands and arms, which were designed to be the active instruments of labour, hang, or press passively on a rail. The feet are thus made to usurp the customary office of the hands; and, whilst the joints and tendons of the legs are brought into a forced and tortuous action, and the muscles of the abdomen, and the loins are unduly exerted and strained, those of the arms gradually become rigid, and lose their power. Hence ensues a liability to rupture, to complaints in the kidneys and loins, and to varicose veins in the legs; accompanied by an emaciation of flesh, loss of tone in the arms, and an increasing debility of the whole frame.

The labour is not only unnatural, but unvaried; and from this cause arises an additional degree of injury.

* Appendix, C. Particular attention is requested to this note. Indeed, all the notes are important to those who are desirous of forming a careful and dispassionate opinion upon the question.

Cross Section of

Design for Prison Mill

Shewing the elevation of the Tread Wheels & method of Working

As given by the Committee of the Society for the Improvement of Prison Discipline

[Embedded illustration of two men on the treadmill]

In carrying the Design into execution the hand-rail often varies in a different degree of elevation or …

from a perpendicular line from what is here represented,

and the degree of … of the body varies accordingly.
Account of Thomas Hardy witnessing an execution

Full title: The Early Life of Thomas Hardy, 1840-1891. Compiled largely from contemporary notes, letters, diaries and biographical memoranda, as well as from oral information in conversations, etc.

Published: 1928, London
Format: Pamphlet
Creator: Florence Dugdale, afterwards Hardy
Held by: British Library

Martha Brown, a servant, married a man 20 years her junior. When she found him with another woman, they quarrelled and fought, and she killed him. During her trial she maintained that her husband had been killed by a horse. Her repeated refusal to accept any responsibility for the act cost her any possibility of a reprieve and in August 1856 she was hanged in public. Novelist Thomas Hardy was a close witness at the execution. This account was written by Hardy’s second wife, Florence Dugdale.
Transcript of the account of Thomas Hardy witnessing an execution

An unusual incident occurred during his pupillage at Hicks's which, though it had nothing to do with his own life, was dramatic enough to have mention. One summer morning at Bockhampton, just before he sat down to breakfast, he remembered that a man was to be hanged at eight o'clock at Dorchester. He took up the big brass telescope that had been handed on in the family, and hastened to a hill on the heath a quarter of a mile from the house, whence he looked towards the town. The sun behind his back shone straight on the white stone façade of the gaol, the gallows upon it, and the form of the murderer in white fustian, the executioner and officials in dark clothing and the crowd below being invisible at this distance of nearly three miles. At the moment of his placing the glass to his eye the white figure dropped downwards, and the faint note of the town clock struck eight.

The whole thing had been so sudden that the glass nearly fell from Hardy's hands. He seemed alone on the heath with the hanged man, and crept homeward wishing he had not been so curious. It was the second and last execution he witnessed, the first having been that of a woman two or three years earlier, when he stood close to the gallows. …
This pocketbook aims to teach the unwary traveller the means and methods used by London thieves and con-men to trick the unwary out of cash or valuables. It also allowed the genteel metropolitan reader to pretend to be more familiar with criminal customs than perhaps he or she actually was.
PICKPOCKETS.

THERE are more Pickpockets in and about London than in all Europe beside, that make a trade, and what they call a good living, by their employment. The opera, playhouses, capital auctions, public gardens, &c., swarm with them; and, of late years, they have introduced themselves into our very churches, and more particularly Methodist meetings.

To set forth the different ways by which they succeed in their nefarious practices is beyond my ability; therefore I advise my readers to peruse with attention the history of J. Sheppard, J. B. Couteau, and Bill Bradshaw, 6d. each; and shall only observe, that two go together, one before, the other behind, the person whose pocket is to be picked; the former of which stops the person, either in a crowd, or by a pretended accident, while the other effects the business. Therefore, it would be prudent, when in crowds, to keep one hand on your money and the other on your watch, when you find any one push against you; but, should you be robbed for want of taking proper care to prevent the same, take no notice till you see some person near you stealing away, when you are to secure him or her, and ten to one you fix on the right person; you must however, be careful to lay hold of their hands, for fear of their conveying your property to an accomplice, who is always ready to receive the same, and set off with it.

Some Pickpockets are very dexterous in this way, by introducing their hands, without being perceived, into the very bottom of the breeches pocket, and taking out the money (none more so, than the celebrated Miss Jones;) others in introducing their hands up ladies petticoats, taking hold of the pocket, and making an incision with a knife or scissors, and letting out the contents into their hands with out discovery, which they immediately deliver to their associates without stirring from the place, the better to prevent detection.

Pickpockets do not confine themselves to London, but travel all over the country, to fairs and races, and are to be met with on the stands, and in the booths, to the cost of many gentlemen and others, who have lost their purses, watches, rings, and pocket-books, of which they never after received any account. Pocket-books are only secure in the inside pockets and the coat buttoned; watch-chains should be run through a small loop, contrived for the purpose of securing the watch in the fob, of which have I have seen many. But at these public places it is necessary for all persons to be upon their guard, as they cannot be ignorant of the gentry they have among them, from many losses and complaints made of and sustained by them.

QUACKS

These are a set of vile wretches who pretend to be versed in physic and surgery, without education or even the knowledge common recipe. Many of them having spent some years in an apothecary’s shop, and having been used to carry out medicines, set up and pretend to cure a certain disorder, by which the ruin the health and constitution of those unhappy countrymen and others that fall in their clutches, If they think the patients are able to pay handsomely, they make them believe their case is desperate; and by continuing them under
their care longer than necessary, generally turn them out much worse than they took them in; or, at best; but patch them up for a while; and every body of experience must know that such a pretended cure is more pernicious than the disorder itself, as it is the means of bringing on a worse and more fatal one.

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