

Special Issue

Victorian Realism and Crime

Message from the Guest Editors

The definition of literary realism and the key features of Victorian realist novels have long been the subject of debate. However, most would agree that Victorian realist texts have traditionally focused on the lived experience of everyday people, representing the observable world and embracing literal representation of it, and using it to present social commentary prescient to the real world it is designed to reflect. Victorian and Golden Age crime fiction, meanwhile, has historically been tied to the sensational, the allegorical, the formulaic, and (in broader terms) the willing suspension of disbelief. Readers accept, and in some ways are almost expected to predict, the formula and conclusion to the story, and are content in the knowledge that the story will reach a predictable conclusion. However, crime is in and of itself a reality of life, and any tale that purports to be realist should accept this premise; indeed, many canonical realist texts in the Victorian period involve crimes that rival those of sensation fiction in terms of their depiction and narrative impact in spite of the very different critical responses to the genres.

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