



2020

Criminality in French Literature: An Examination of Acceptance and Rejection of Rehabilitation in the Works of Jean Genet and Eugène Vidocq

Daniel Elijah Trovato

University of Maryland College Park, danieltrovato98@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://www.mackseyjournal.org/publications>

Recommended Citation

Trovato, Daniel Elijah (2020) "Criminality in French Literature: An Examination of Acceptance and Rejection of Rehabilitation in the Works of Jean Genet and Eugène Vidocq," *The Macksey Journal*: Vol. 1 , Article 152.

Available at: <https://www.mackseyjournal.org/publications/vol1/iss1/152>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by The Johns Hopkins University Macksey Journal. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Macksey Journal by an authorized editor of The Johns Hopkins University Macksey Journal.

Criminality in French Literature: An Examination of Acceptance and Rejection of Rehabilitation in the Works of Jean Genet and Eugène Vidocq

Cover Page Footnote

Acknowledgments: I would like to thank Dr. Kat Haklin for helpful comments in this project, guidance in the research process, and for transcribing handwritten French texts from the eighteenth century. It was certainly invaluable to my work. I would also like to thank Dr. Wade Jacobsen for his guidance with the criminology aspect of this research. I thank Johns Hopkins University and Dr. Natalie Strobach as well for giving me the opportunity to conduct research in the summer of 2018. This opportunity provided the foundation for my current work. Lastly, I would like to sincerely thank Professor Annmarie Chiarini for the guidance she provided me during the writing and editing process.

Criminality in French Literature: An Examination of Acceptance and Rejection of Rehabilitation in the Works of Jean Genet and Eugène Vidocq

Daniel E. Trovato

University of Maryland College Park

Abstract

This project will investigate the criminality of Eugène Vidocq, who after years of being on the margins of society as a criminal, decided to accept rehabilitation. This project also reexamines prior research done on criminality in the life of Jean Genet—specifically the concept of his rejection of rehabilitation. Genet who is unlike Vidocq embraces the role of the outcast through his full acceptance of the criminal. The abandoned child of a prostitute, Genet grew up in the streets, but he moved from crimes of necessity to a passion for crime. In his work *The Thief's Journal*, which is semi-autobiographical, he relishes his life of crime and his experiences with imprisonment. Through crime, he was able to rebel against the failings of French society. His rejection of rehabilitation was due to his identity as a perfect outcast from society and his love for treachery, thievery, and homosexuality—all methods to him of breaking from societal oppression and hypocrisy. Eugène Vidocq was a hardened criminal turned detective and author through experiencing turning points in his life structure and identity. Regarding Vidocq this project conducts an analysis of his life of crime from his written works in the *Memoirs of Vidocq* to conceptualize his acceptance of rehabilitation which culminated in the desistance of criminal

activity. Finally, contemporary criminological theories of criminality will be used on these two authors to contrast the reasons behind Genet's rejection of rehabilitation and Vidocq's acceptance of rehabilitation.

Keywords: French Literature, Criminology, Desistance, Social Bonds, Differential Association, Life-course

Introduction

Jean Genet was a French author, poet, playwright, and criminal. He lived a life of disenfranchisement due to his status as a criminal, orphan, and homosexual. In his writings, he has an opposite view of the morals of society. Since he is a criminal, he sees the morals of society and the goals as something that is not for him, thus he feels like an outcast. Previous research, done at Johns Hopkins University sought to answer why Genet rejected rehabilitation and continued in criminal activity. The project focused on Genet's life of crime and used criminological elements; however, it also involved philosophical elements from the humanities, such as his view on existentialism and social morals, as a method to explain his rejection of rehabilitation.

In this current study, I investigate an author by the name of Eugène François Vidocq as well as compare and contrast him with prior research on Jean Genet. Vidocq was a French criminal turned police detective. He was a confidential informant for the police and had his own secret crime-fighting brigade made up of former criminals. He made a complete turnaround in his life. Vidocq was one of the first private detectives and one of the first to make developments in forensic technology. My first goal in this research is to conceptualize why Vidocq accepted

rehabilitation. Accepting rehabilitation would mean to turn away from criminal activity and rejecting rehabilitation would mean to perpetuate in offending. Contemporary criminological theories, such as Moffitt's life course theory, Sutherland's differential association, and Hirschi's theory of social bonds, will be used to assess Vidocq's criminal origins. I will also use research from Sampson and Laub on desistance, which is the turning away from criminal activity, to take these three theories and explain why Vidocq accepted rehabilitation. As a second goal, I seek to use prior research on Genet to compare and contrast with Vidocq. This will be beneficial to understand why one author rejected rehabilitation and the other accepted. Vidocq shares many similarities with Genet, however, he decided to desist from criminal activity and accepted rehabilitation. Learning the key differences regarding rehabilitation between these authors would be monumental to understanding the positive and negative impacts people experience with rehabilitation. This second goal will be answered by looking at the same criminological theories used for Vidocq as well as looking at their identities, turning points, and willingness to change.

Background Information and Prior Research on Genet

Background Information

Jean Genet lived from December 19th, 1910 to April 15th, 1986. He was born in the provincial town of Alligny-en-Morvan in the Nièvre department of central France (Bradby et al., 5). Genet was the child of a prostitute and was abandoned as an infant when he was seven months old. He was kicked out of the orphanage at age six and left homeless. He was, however, eventually adopted, but he continuously ran from home and was homeless. When he was eight years old the first world war just ended leaving the land and the economy crippled. A year later, Genet would experience the Spanish Influenza pandemic (Bradby et al., 5). According to

Edmund White's biography, his adoptive parents were loving and attentive for the time that he lived with them. While he received excellent grades in school, his childhood involved a series of attempts at running away and incidents of petty theft (7). He committed his first crime at the age of ten and was publicly labeled as a criminal in his town. When this occurred, his adoptive parents began to treat him differently—as if he were a delinquent. This separated him from the other children (Savona 8). He committed petty theft and was imprisoned for three years in France at the age of fifteen. He writes extensively about this experience in his second book titled *Miracle de la Rose*. At age twenty *The Thief's Journal* starts, however, Genet does provide backstory to allow readers to fully understand his life leading up to that point (Genet 8). In this book, he stole for his own survival and committed utilitarian crimes in the beginning, which are crimes with an emphasis on money. He later switched to harsher crime such as assault, smuggling narcotics, and forgery. He was imprisoned dozens of times but continually escaped.

Prior Research on Genet

In prior research on the topic of French literature and criminality, I conducted an unobtrusive content analysis of the life work of Jean Genet. I studied why he rejected what rehabilitation meant at that time in history. *The Thief's Journal* written by Genet as was my primary source. In this semi-autobiographical novel, he explains the origins of his criminal exploits and his livelihood living as a vagrant in Europe in the 1930s.

Genet, as an author, questioned the extent of our own self-identity, the morals of society, and our individualism. Due to this, he sees himself as an outcast from society and an outsider among other thieves. This is the way he expresses himself. He does not want to be locked into

the parameters of conventional society because he wants to be separate. He thinks that having this role sets him apart and allows him to be an individual.

Many people have done research and written critical accounts on Genet's writings and the extent to which he questions self-identity. Since many of his works are biographical and concern his criminal exploits, some say that his writings contain much fiction rather than fact. However, it has been stated that he only added fictitious elements to sway the police, since he was writing while he was engaging in criminal activity (White 243). Other authors such as Sartre claim that Genet uses moments in his life and expounds on them because he wants his audience to question their sense of identity and morality. He does not answer these questions; he allows us to answer them (546). In the end, there are criticisms going both ways, however, since he is a writer the focus is on his core message and what he is trying to convey to the world, which is utterly apparent given his topics as a writer.

As a writer, his topics include criminality, homosexuality, sadomasochism, and existentialism. He also enjoyed the subtopics of betrayal, theft, and promiscuity along with an overlapping umbrella-term of violence. A key element to his book *The Thief's Journal* is the inverse of morals. He claims that certain acts such as betrayal are the ultimate form of devotion and delinquency is a form of heroism (Genet 68). This inverse of morals is Genet's desire to contrast the conventional worldview in society. He feels that being free from the vines that society entangles around us is the pinnacle form of being human. In essence, breaking from social norms is a way of exercising human agency.

Jean-Paul Sartre arguably did the most thorough investigation into the mind of Genet and his view on morals. He published a 600-page book titled *Saint Genet, Actor, and Martyr*. In this

book, Sartre dives into the mind of Genet and helps explain the fundamentals of his character as well as conceptualize his message. Genet explains that his first crime was theft so that he could eat. However, according to Sartre, he claims that his status as a destitute and an orphan made him feel anguish and resentment because his surrounding community was built on wealth, land ownership, and legal inheritance (15). This is something that first made him an outcast and question the morals of society.

Genet, as an orphan, committed crimes as a reaction to a system that was not built to be beneficial for him as claimed by Sartre (15). Therefore, his crimes in this new light are a social reaction rather than utilitarian. Genet reacts against society to exercise his own human agency. According to Savona, he gradually turned towards crime and evil with the same devotion a saint turns towards good and sanctity (3).

Genet's view on morals also impacted his identity. To expand upon these ideas, Henry Yeager has done research on Jean Genet. He compares Genet to other writers with similar topics such as Sade, Rousseau, Gide, and Jouhandeau (214). However, he claims that those writers are apologists of evil because they attempt to justify their ideas and conduct by fitting them into conventional morality. They rationalize their behavior and are apologetic. Therefore, this makes them a part of humanity. Yeager states, "Genet's aim is exactly the opposite. He tries to separate himself completely from his fellow men. His dominant motivation is to establish himself as the perfect outcast" (214). This is similar to Sartre's description of Genet as a disenfranchised outcast. This is Genet's worldview and his identity.

Furthermore, he is not only an outcast from conventional society but also from other thieves. He explains this through his topics of treachery, thievery, and homosexuality. He claims,

“treachery, theft, and homosexuality are the basic subjects of this book. There is a relationship among them which, though not always apparent, at least, so it seems to me, recognizes a kind of vascular exchange between my taste for betrayal and theft and my loves (77). These topics are the key mechanisms by which he establishes himself as an outcast in society as well as the subculture of thievery. He would steal and betray those around him. He would develop relationships with men and betray them. This further bolstered his identity as an individual. He was an outcast among the outcasts.

Genet rejecting rehabilitation reflects his refusal to be marginalized or put into the parameters of conventional society. Being rehabilitated would mean being put back into this society he so adamantly disdains because there is no self-identity, the morals are unjust, and people are put in cages that tamper with their individuality. He wants to step outside of himself and away from conventional society in order to exercise his agency, which would make him an individual. His rejection of rehabilitation was a refusal of being marginalized. His role is that of a perfect outcast, which is essential to his individuality.

Background Information and Prior Research on Vidocq

Background Information on Vidocq

Eugène Vidocq lived from July 24, 1775, to May 11, 1857. He was born in 222 rue du Miroir-de-Venise in Arras, France. He was the third child of Henriette and Nicolas Vidocq, who were the town bakers (Morton 2). When he was thirteen in 1870, he started his life of crime. He stole his parent’s bread and silverware and then proceeded to spend the money over the next day. His father called the police to scare him straight, and Vidocq spent a few days in jail. He ended up developing friendships with the hardened individuals around him. After he was let out of

prison, he spent much of his time in local armories where he was a fierce fencer (Morton 3). He would challenge men and often kill them in the duels. Sometimes the duels were centered on his own ego, and other times they concerned women.

Not much later in 1870 when he was thirteen, he stole his parent's fortune after he was inspired by a rogue (Morton 4). This rogue gave him the idea for the crime, the instrumentality, and even created the opportunity for the crime to occur by distracting his parents. Vidocq fled his home, lost the money, and joined the circus where he was abused and treated like an animal (Vidocq 6). They put him on an exhibit as a child cannibal and he was locked in a cage and forced to eat raw meat. Consequently, he escaped and went back home to his parents.

He always had a strong home structure to return to after events in his life did not go as planned or when his criminal exploits failed. He spent the next decade of his life escaping prisons (Vidocq 34). He then joined the military under the bourbon regiment but had an issue with authority (Vidocq 18). He left and rejoined the military under different aliases. Vidocq eventually left the military after he assaulted a superior officer who rejected his challenge to duel. He then became more enveloped in this life of crime and perpetual escaping from the law.

He escaped many prisons due to the crimes he committed; however, he saw one crime as unjust. He claimed that he was falsely accused of forging documents for a prisoner's release by a man named Cesare Herbaux (Vidocq 52). Vidocq was sentenced under the forty-fourth article of the second section of the French penal code to serve eight years. Some of the years would be in prison and others would be in naval galleys (Vidocq 53). After perpetually escaping prison for years, well into his thirties, he experienced a change in his life that culminated in himself desisting from crime. This paper attempts to conceptualize why that happened.

In the end, he was a criminal turned detective whose story inspired several writers, including Victor Hugo, Edgar Allan Poe, and Honoré de Balzac (François Vidocq). In Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, both main characters, the reformed criminal Jean Valjean and police inspector Javert were modeled after Vidocq (François Vidocq). Additionally, it is believed that Edgar Allan Poe was prompted by a story about Vidocq to create the fiction of C. Auguste Dupin who appeared in the short story, “*The Murders in the Rue Morgue*”, which is considered the first detective story (Welton). Additionally, this story written by Edgar Allen Poe was one of the inspirations for the character of Sherlock Holmes written by the British author Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (Eschner).

Prior Research on Vidocq

Much of the research around his name focuses on his discoveries. He is the first private detective. Vidocq has been called the father of the French Police department (Morton). He even led a brigade of criminals to fight crime that quoted the motto, “To catch a thief you must be one” (Sueann). He dabbled with fingerprints, invented paper that was resistant to forgery, and used ballistics analysis on dead bodies, which was seen as defilement at the time (Vidocq, Eugène-François; Morton). He also used the idea of confidential informants (François Vidocq).

His name is not given much credit for crime-fighting due to a disagreement with the French police department. There was increasing animosity with the police due to Vidocq’s prior status as a thief and his success at lowering crime using ex-criminals (Vidocq 229). They did not look fondly at him or approve of his methods. Vidocq would only hire other criminals since he believed that criminals could turn their lives around and make good detectives. The department did not like this idea of using criminals and eventually, Vidocq had to resign, hence why he is

not given much credit (Sueann). For years, the department refused to acknowledge that Vidocq even had a secret brigade or give him credit for successfully lowering crime in Paris.

Historical Background of the Authors and the French Justice System

Both authors were distant in time, but they grew up with multiple similarities. Vidocq grew up during the French revolution and the formulation of the first French republic from 1789-1799. Mobs were going around France beheading anyone who was deemed a traitor, such as Louis XVI, who was beheaded along with many other aristocrats (Doyle 83). These mobs extended to where Vidocq lived. In Arras, women were accused of being traitors, and Vidocq intervened and was imprisoned for impeding justice. Genet grew up during the first world war. He was eight years old when the war ended, therefore, he mainly saw the aftermath of his crippled country. Widespread poverty and decimation were found throughout the land in addition to the Spanish influenza. In the end, both authors grew up in times that were destructive, where prosocial values, which are values that are non-conducive to crime, were uncommon. Both authors were lifelong criminals despite being imprisoned several times throughout their lives.

The French justice system was founded in 1790 by king Louis XVI during the French revolution in the Tribunal de cassation (Histoire Du Ministère). The ministry was quickly formed around two pivots: the civil division and the criminal division (Histoire Du Ministère). In both periods in history, the criminal justice system was informed by the classical tradition in criminological theory. Cesare Beccaria lived during the French revolution and was one of the main writers concerning classical criminology, deterrence, and crime and punishment. He explains that humans are rational beings and are hedonistic. He suggests that crime occurs when the benefits, such as getting money, outweigh the costs, such as being incarcerated (Beccaria 2).

Therefore, if we increase the penalties for criminal activities, then crime should lower. This is the concept of deterrence that is based on punishment, and this is what the French believed at that time. Matter of fact, Beccaria's ideas took hold especially in France and many of them were incorporated in the French Code of 1791 (Clear et al. 40).

This model focuses on the principle of punishment as a means to deter crime and varies with regard to severity, the harshness of the punishment; certainty, the likelihood of the person getting caught; and celerity, the swiftness of the punishment after a crime occurs (Nagin 201). This model of deterrence can be specific or general. Specific deterrence is the idea that when an individual is punished, the punishment only affects that person concerning negative attitudes towards future offending (Nagin 200). In general deterrence, the effects of punishment are broader. In this model, it influences the general public. It is about people seeing other people be punished, which causes deterrence. Essentially, people do not engage in crime when they see others who were sanctioned (Nagin 200). This was what rehabilitation meant in France at this period in history as well as in many other places in the world. It was a deterrence model based on the punishment of the individual or group to enhance the costs associated with crime, which would then deter people. Both authors were in periods of history when this was the model of the justice system in France. Punishment was the way to rehabilitate someone to not reoffend, therefore in this historical context, accepting rehabilitation would mean accepting the punishment and turning away from crime.

Current Research

A conceptualization of Eugène Vidocq's acceptance of rehabilitation

The primary source for this research was the *Memoirs of Vidocq*, which was originally published in 1828. It is a biography concerning his life, criminal exploits, adventures, and his turnaround from criminal activity. I argue that Vidocq accepted rehabilitation due to turning points experienced in his life. This is the first goal of this project—to conceptualize why Vidocq accepted rehabilitation.

Once again, criminological theories of crime will be the methodology used to understand his criminal history, since the focus is on the origins of crime. It is important to comprehend how he got involved in crime to understand why he desisted since they are connected. Knowing the potential causes of crime could help to determine the change in his life leading to his turnaround. Vidocq's acceptance of rehabilitation can be understood by investigating Moffitt's life course theory, Sutherland's theory of differential association theory, and Hirschi's social bond theory to understand his development in crime. Research in desistance done by Sampson and Laub will combine all the theories and explain why he accepted rehabilitation. Lastly, the second goal is to compare him with Genet using the same theories as well as examining their turning points, willingness to change, and their identities to better comprehend why one author rejected rehabilitation and the other accepted

Dr. Terrie Moffitt is a criminologist who follows children from when they first commit crimes until they stop or perpetuate in offending. She follows individuals longitudinally throughout their lives and finds patterns in her data to explain the crime of the individuals. She explains in her study that there are two kinds of criminals. There are adolescent-limited and life-course-persistent (Moffitt 674). The vast numbers are adolescent-limited, and they mimic the behavior of the life-course-persistent. The adolescent-limited wants to be accepted, mature, strong, and respected. Their behavior is reinforced by the life-course-persistent due to their own

need to be accepted (Moffitt 686). However, in the end, their deviance tapers off once they reach adulthood. On the contrary, life-course persistent-offenders continue their criminal acts throughout their life. It starts with petty crimes in childhood, auto theft in adolescence, and abuse of their children in later life (Moffitt 679). Both Genet and Vidocq are life-course-persistent offenders.

Dr. Moffitt suggests two key predictors for the origins of life-course-persistent offenders. The first is biological characteristics, such as neuropsychological problems or neurodevelopmental issues. The second is a negative or disadvantaged environment that does not help to ameliorate the risks associated with the biological characteristics (Moffitt 679-684). Life-course offenders typically have very rough childhoods with no pro-social values being instilled (Moffitt 679). Genet and Vidocq were life-course-persistent offenders. They grew up in terrible environments crippled with poverty, starvation, and unhealthy living conditions inside of prison and outside of prison, which can culminate in biological and psychological abnormalities (Moffitt 680). However, Vidocq desisted from crime and accepted rehabilitation, which is uncharacteristic for these kinds of offenders. Genet continually rejected rehabilitation. He continued to steal after he was famous. Genet had to be presidentially pardoned near the end of his life to get out of prison.

This could explain the beginning of Vidocq's criminal history on a macro level using Moffitt's life course theory; however, we can also look at differential association theory to explain his criminal history in a new way. Using more than one criminological theory can help better understand his criminality. According to Dr. Edward Sutherland's theory of differential association, he assumes that delinquent behavior is due to social learning, which is the exchange of symbols and definitions—the attitude and behaviors, and it is learned in interaction with

others (Sutherland et al., 88). Additionally, the learning can include techniques, such as teaching someone how to pick a lock or giving someone the instrument for the crime, and directions of motives and drives (Sutherland et al., 89). The principal part of this learning occurs within intimate groups. The more personal or attached you are to the person, the greater the effect of the stimuli (Sutherland et al., 88-89). In the end, Sutherland claims crime is something that is learned through interactions with others.

This theory of differential association is apparent in Vidocq's life and criminal exploits. Vidocq learned from the rogue how to steal his parent's fortune (Vidocq 3). The rogue taught him how to commit the crime; gave him the instrument, which was a crowbar; and even made the opportunity happen by distracting the parents. Later in his life, Vidocq learned from other prisoners as well. He learned the martial art savate, which is a form of French boxing. He claimed it was very beneficial in his life when apprehending individuals (Morton 52).

Differential association theory is a valid claim of why Vidocq started a life of crime. The reasons for his behavior are not limited to being biological or structural variables as proposed by Moffitt. His behavior was impacted by the associations he had that were conducive to social learning and crime.

Lastly, Dr. Travis Hirschi's theory of social bonds is the final way to describe Vidocq's criminal origins. It is a control theory. In criminology, control theories focus on the idea that pro-social institutions such as family, church, and community instill norms, which impede people from committing crimes. Therefore, these pro-social institutions can control behavior. They tie or bond people to society as proposed by Dr. Travis Hirschi. When people are properly bonded to these pro-social norms, they do not want to break them and engage in crime, since crime is

seen as unfavorable in these institutions. Therefore, criminal acts occur when people are poorly bonded to their society (Hirschi 289).

Dr. Travis Hirschi describes four ways that people are bonded to these social institutions, such as attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief. Firstly, attachment is the bond between people. This is what links people together, such as a parent-child relationship (Hirschi 290). Commitment is the effort invested in these relationships or even goals (Hirschi 297). Involvement is the actual activity, the time that people put into their relationships or goals. Essentially, these bonds of involvement fill up your daily activities. Lastly, belief is a person's viewpoint on the conventional goals of society. If people believe in the conventional rules, they will not break them. These bonds are very important in controlling people's behaviors. For example, when a person has goals, they spend most of their time trying to reach those aspirations. Crime is seen as a negative aspect of achieving these goals and would only distract from them. Therefore, these positive bonds fill up a person's time and disallow them to engage in criminal activity, since the person is so caught up in achieving conventional goals (Hirschi 297). As Hirschi said, "the idle hands are the devil's workshop" (293).

We can look at Vidocq in Hirschi's theory regarding family and community. Vidocq was attached to his family. This is a key difference between Genet and Vidocq. Genet never had a family to keep him grounded and instill pro-social norms in him, which could have impeded him from committing crimes. When Vidocq did not have any money, he returned home, and his mother would welcome him with open arms. He had loving parents who wanted the best for him. He invested time into his mother and believed she was a saint. Family was a control in his life. We see that later in his life when he was living with his mother he started to desist from crime.

Regarding Vidocq's community, there was chaos due to the formation of the first French Republic. This was the period of the reign of terror, and there were not many pro-social controls being established in his town (Doyle 213). There were mobs going around in France beheading anyone that was deemed a traitor or counterrevolutionary. There were gangs and lynch mobs across the country (Doyle 293). In his hometown of Arras, Vidocq was imprisoned for hindering justice because he tried to stop a mob. Thus, his hometown was not an environment that was beneficial to him. He was not attached, committed, involved, and he did not hold the same beliefs. He moved around much throughout his life. He spent a lot of time in Brussels where some of the worst thieves lingered at that time. Additionally, he was at the Brest Prison where he was not only in an environment that had no pro-social values but was also in an environment that was conducive to social learning and crime (Vidocq 71). These places were where his social norms were being instilled. He was not in a productive community no matter where he went. These social institutions did not develop positive norms in Vidocq. Therefore, there was nothing to control his behavior or link him to his community. Since he was not bonded to his community, there was nothing preventing him from committing crimes.

This is a conceptual understanding from a criminological perspective using life course theory, differential association theory, and social bond theory to explore why Vidocq first participated in crime. The key factors include how he grew up, his environment, his association with others, and his lack of social controls around him. In the end, these theories explain his criminal behavior to an extent, yet how can we explain why he accepted rehabilitation?

Dr. Moffitt's life course theory does not answer one specific question: why do life-course-persistent offenders stop committing crime? Research done by Dr. Sampson and Dr. Laub has investigated this question. In their journal titled *A Theory of Persistent Offending and*

Desistance from Crime, they argue that any kind of offender can desist from criminal activity (Laub et al., 548). They further theorize that people go through turning points in their lives that cause them to desist from crime. They define turning points as changes in situational and structural life circumstances like a good marriage or a stable job (Laub et al., 548). They gave an example of a college male who binge drinks, smokes, excessively stays out late every night, and has no investment in his schoolwork. They describe this person finding a significant other that encourages him to take classes with her, study together, and exercise together. This person eventually takes him away from his old group of friends. As the days go on his days are filled with new routines and people. He eventually starts to lose his old friends and develop a new way of life that is conducive to a healthy lifestyle (Laub et al., 545). This experience that they described is a turning point. There are countless examples of turning points but this one was interpersonal, which is the kind of example seen in Vidocq.

Vidocq experienced a turning point regarding structural conditions. First, he met a woman with whom he fell in love. This woman was originally a negative feature to his life but later she turned into a model as his life progressed. Later he invited his mother, who was always a motivator of the good in him, to move into his house with him. He eventually joined the police and was offered a stable job. If we were to think of social bond theory again, more social controls are being instilled in him by this woman, his mother, and his job. Not only that but he had the key elements proposed by Sampson and Laub concerning desistance—turning points such as marital status and job stability - to further support his desistance from crime. Vidocq also experienced turning points concerning identity which is not exactly what Sampson and Laub propose since they are more focused on structural variables. However, research has been done that looks at cognitive transformations as the key variables leading to desistance (Giordano et al.,

992). Since research done by Sampson and Laub only accounted for white males in the 1950s, Giordano et al., attempted a more thorough investigation into desistance and their findings were significant (991). Vidocq's cognitive changes led to changes in his identity which should be considered as additional factors for his desistance from crime.

We can see these changes in Vidocq later in his life when he saw the man who falsely accused him executed. He stated, "although, in fact, Herbaux's execution could not have any direct influence over my situation, yet it alarmed me, and I was horror-struck at feeling that I had ever been in contact with such Brigands, destined to the executioner's arm" (Vidocq 169). This moment spurred intense self-reflection; Vidocq wanted to be a changed man. He said at this same moment, "the persuasion that I was interdicted from becoming an honest man drove me to despair; I was silent, morose, and disheartened" (Vidocq 169). He thought that seeing the execution of this man would bring him joy, however, it made him question his future. Since the man was just as much of a criminal as himself, he said "I saw myself on the point being ensnared like a deer" (Vidocq 169). He was scared and thought about the kind of man he wanted to be—an honest man. This moment caused Vidocq to introspectively examine his identity. Thus, this moment was a turning point in his life with regard to his identity.

After experiencing these turning points and changes in structure and identity, his criminal life began to dissolve as well as his life as an escapist. Vidocq was locked in prison but did not escape. Other prisoners tried to convince him to help them escape—given the fact that he has escaped from the harshest of French prisons, but he refused (Vidocq 183). He stated, "I began to grow wearied of escapes; and that sort of liberty they procured for me" (Vidocq 183). He chose to stay in prison and accepted what rehabilitation was at that time. Vidocq finally accepted the punishment. This is the symbol of the changed man he has become. He was a new man and no

longer a criminal. Vidocq eventually started working for the French police department as an informant. Shortly thereafter, he was put in charge of the Brigade de la Sûreté or the secret brigade (Vidocq 233). Vidocq was a changed man.

Vidocq started in a life of crime that can be explained and conceptualized by Moffitt's life course theory, Sutherland's differential association, and Hirschi's social bond theory. His desistance can be explained by Dr. Sampson and Laub and their research into desistance on persistent offending. Additionally, Giordano did research into desistance that expanded Sampson and Laub by referring to cognitive transformations of identity, which could also explain Vidocq turning away from crime.

Comparing and contrasting Jean Genet with Eugène Vidocq.

I now seek to use prior research on Genet to compare and contrast with Vidocq to better understand why one author rejected rehabilitation and the other accepted. which is the second goal of this project. This second goal will be answered by examining the same criminological theories used for Vidocq, their turning points, willingness to change, and their identities.

As has been stated, both men were life-course-persistent offenders in response to their family structures, their environments, and how they continued to engage in criminal behavior. They also both learned from other criminals due to differential association; Genet had many lovers in prison who would often teach him skills valuable to crime. He joined these men in criminal exploits and learned from them in close personal relationships. Sutherland's differential association theory certainly applies to both Genet and Vidocq. However, there are differences (as well as a few similarities) between the two authors when applying Hirschi's social bond theory.

Hirschi's theory talks of attachment, such as how bonded people are to their communities. Neither author was bonded to their community since both lived in times of civil unrest and violence. Therefore, the surrounding community was not beneficial for either author in establishing proper social control. Concerning family, Vidocq had a family and a loving mother who would always welcome him. This mother also helped Vidocq later in his life while he was going through his change in identity. On the other hand, Genet was abandoned by his mother when he was just a baby. He did, however, have adoptive parents, but he ran away from home, thus never building a stable foundation (White 7). Additionally, most of Genet's lovers were criminals (Genet 9). He had almost no positive relationships with him. There is a significant difference in the number of social controls in both authors.

There is also a difference in the authors regarding turning points in their lives. Genet never had those turning points, which are critical to positive change, as described by Dr. Sampson and Dr. Laub. Genet had to be presidentially pardoned to get out of prison. This is a clear contrast to Vidocq and the turning points - inviting his mother and then romantic partner to live with him - that caused his structural and identity changes Genet didn't have those turning points, perhaps because he didn't have a willingness to change.

It is this willingness to change that marks the most significant between these two authors. Genet accepted this identity as a criminal while Vidocq eventually rejected it and adopted his own identity as an honorable man. Genet was an outsider and considered a pariah. It was something that made him unique and special. Crime gave him individuality and an identity. However, Vidocq had a different viewpoint; he tried to help society by joining the police force and helping ex-criminals. He believed in second chances and had an optimistic view of the world. Genet believed that society failed him, therefore, he wrote critically of society. He looked

negatively at French society and had no willingness to change while Vidocq saw an opportunity to better his life and took it.

Another contrast between the authors is their identities. Genet wanted to be the perfect outcast from society (Yeager 214). It was something that set him apart, made him human, and gave him agency. It is important to quickly note from prior research how this identity may have been established. Genet was publicly labeled as a criminal at age ten and from henceforth was treated differently in his community and by his parents (Savona 3). Genet later said that “I decided to be what crime made me (qtd. in Sartre 49). This leads to a belief that he thought crime was a part of him. The label of being a criminal impacted him on a personal level to the point where his identity was shifted. Vidocq was different. He thought highly of himself and had an ego. He knew he was a criminal but that never fully encapsulated his identity. He believed he could be different and allowed himself to become a better man.

Conclusion

There has been much research on both Vidocq and Genet but there has never been an attempt to conceptualize their acceptance or rejection of rehabilitation using a criminological perspective. It is important to note that rehabilitation in this context and moment in history had been defined on a deterrence model. The prevailing version of rehabilitation was entirely a model of punishment which was supposed to equate in desistance of criminal activity.

The first goal of this project was to conceptualize why Vidocq accepted rehabilitation. He experienced turning points that ended in desistance. He experienced structural changes and changes in identity. With regard to structural changes, he experiences an increase in pro-social controls from his significant other and his mother. The changes in identity occurred when he saw

the person who accused him of a crime publicly executed. This caused him to reconsider his life, his identity, and the kind of man he wanted to become. After experiencing these turning points, Vidocq stopped escaping from prison and started to help the police department as well as other ex-criminals. He accepted what rehabilitation was at that time.

My second goal was to use prior research on Genet to compare and contrast with Vidocq to better understand why Genet rejected rehabilitation and Vidocq accepted. Both authors were criminals and escapist. Genet chose to reject rehabilitation and continue his perpetual criminal activity by escaping prison and remaining a criminal, which is essential to his identity. I compared and contrasted both authors using criminological theories as well as examined their turning points, willingness to change, and their identities,

Both authors lived in a period of chaos in France and were life-course-persistent offenders according to Moffitt. They both learned criminal traits through interactions with others as explained by Sutherland. Lastly, they have similarities and dissimilarities with regard to social bond theory. Both had terrible community attachment and commitment. However, regarding the social institution of family, Genet had a family in his adoptive parents, but they lived in poverty and he ran away to live on the streets, whereas Vidocq relied heavily on his mother, who also provided financial stability. This was critical to Vidocq's significant changes.

Additionally, there was a willingness to change with Vidocq. Vidocq wanted to become an honest man, and when that seemed to be slipping away from him, he responded emotionally; He had the desire to change for the better, and he did. However, Genet was very obstinate in his ability to change. Genet said he longed to be a perfect outcast. He wanted to be on the parameters

of society. He was not willing to change. To change would mean to eradicate his who he was and what he stood for in this world. He would be placed back into society if he was rehabilitated.

Concerning identity, Genet was very critical of society and felt that being a criminal excluded him from this society. He wrapped his entire identity on being an outcast. His topics of treachery, thievery, and homosexuality were ways that he became this outcast from society. He refused to be marginalized and put into this world that he felt he did not belong. Therefore, he identified as a thief, rejected rehabilitation, and perpetuated in criminal activity to bolster his role as an outcast which was essential to his identity. Vidocq had a more optimistic view of the world. He was disheartened when he thought that he was unable to become an honest man. He saw what needed to change and that was his life of crime.

In the end, this project was interdisciplinary between criminology and the humanities on the works of Jean Genet and Eugène François Vidocq. It is beneficial to have a qualitative understanding of why individuals desist from criminal activity in literature. With this new understanding of the authors, this knowledge can be applied to other written works and, potentially, the current prison system. Understanding the differential effects of rehabilitation on individuals can have numerous positive effects on the way we conduct rehabilitation. There has to be much consideration on the mindset of people's mindsets going into prison and rehabilitative programs--since we now have these programs instead of a pure model of deterrence. Furthermore, a limitation of this study would be the written works themselves. Some of the autobiographical information on these authors are questioned with regard to their validity. Since they were both criminals, it is apparent they had to hide aspects of their lives, therefore, these written works may have some fictitious elements. However, by conceptualizing their core

messages, we can gain a better understanding of their characters, which provides a conceptual understanding of Vidocq's acceptance of rehabilitation and Genet's rejection of rehabilitation.

Works Cited

Beccaria, Cesare. "On crimes and punishments." *Criminology Theory: Selected Classic Readings* (1764): 367.

Bradby, David, and Claire Finburgh. *Jean Genet*. Routledge, 2012.

Clear, Todd R., et al. *American Corrections*. Cengage, 2019.

Doyle, William. *The Oxford history of the French revolution*. Oxford University Press, 2018.

Eschner, Kat. "Without Edgar Allan Poe, We Wouldn't Have Sherlock Holmes."

Smithsonian.com, Smithsonian Institution, 20 Apr. 2017,

[www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/edgar-allan-poe-invented-detective-story-](http://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/edgar-allan-poe-invented-detective-story-180962914/)

180962914/.

"François Vidocq." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 7 May 2020,

www.britannica.com/biography/Francois-Eugene-Vidocq.

Genet, Jean, and Jean-Paul Sartre. *The thief's journal*. Bantam Books, 1965.

Giordano, Peggy C., Stephen A. Cernkovich, and Jennifer L. Rudolph. "Gender, crime, and desistance: Toward a theory of cognitive transformation." *American journal of sociology* 107.4 (2002): 990-1064.

Hirschi, Travis. "A control theory of delinquency." *Criminology theory: Selected classic readings 1969* (1969): 289-305.

“Histoire Du Ministère.” Justice / Portail / Histoire Et Patrimoine, 30 June 2011,
www.justice.gouv.fr/histoire-et-patrimoine-10050/.

Laub, John H., and Robert J. Sampson. "A theory of persistent offending and desistance from crime." *Criminological Theory: Past to Present—Essential Readings* (2014): 545-51.

Moffitt, Terrie E. "Adolescence-limited and life-course-persistent antisocial behavior: a developmental taxonomy." *Psychological review* 100.4 (1993): 674-691

Morton, James. *The first detective: The life and revolutionary times of Vidocq*. Random House, 2013.

Nagin, Daniel S. "Deterrence in the twenty-first century." *Crime and justice* 42.1 (2013): 199-263.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Saint Genet: actor and martyr*. U of Minnesota Press, 2012.

Savona, Jeannette Laillou. *Jean Genet*. Macmillan International Higher Education, 2016.

Sueann, Fincke, David, Ackroyd, History Channel, n.d.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7nrDfKuHuTQ>

Sutherland, Edwin H., Donald R. Cressey, and David F. Luckenbill. *Principles of criminology*. Altamira Press, (1992):

Vidocq, Eugène F. *Memoirs of Vidocq*. New York: Arno Press, 1976. Internet resource.

“Vidocq, Eugène-François.” World of Forensic Science, Encyclopedia.com, 23 May 2020,

[www.encyclopedia.com/science/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/vidocq-](http://www.encyclopedia.com/science/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/vidocq-eugene-francois)

[eugene-francois.](http://www.encyclopedia.com/science/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/vidocq-eugene-francois)

Welton, Benjamin. “The Real-Life Inspiration of Edgar Allan Poe's First Detective Story.” The

Airship, The Airship, 18 Apr. 2014, [airshipdaily.com/blog/04182014-edgar-allan-poe-](http://airshipdaily.com/blog/04182014-edgar-allan-poe-murders-rue-morgue-eugene-vidocq)

[murders-rue-morgue-eugene-vidocq](http://airshipdaily.com/blog/04182014-edgar-allan-poe-murders-rue-morgue-eugene-vidocq)

White, Edmund. Genet: A biography. Vintage, 1994.

Yeager, Henry J. “The Uncompromising Morality of Jean Genet.” The French Review, vol. 39,

no. 2, 1965, pp. 214–219. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/384807. Accessed 28 May 2020.