

Eugène François Vidocq

Eugène François Vidocq (French pronunciation: [øʒɛn fʁɑ̃swa vi'dɔk]; July, 24 1775 – May 11, 1857) was a French criminal and criminalist whose life story inspired several writers, including Victor Hugo and Honoré de Balzac. A former crook who subsequently became the founder and first director of the crime-detection Sûreté Nationale as well as the head of the first known private detective agency, he is considered to be the father of modern criminology^{[1][2]} and of the French police department.^[3] He is also regarded as the first private detective.^[4]

Biography

Eugène François Vidocq was born during the night of 23 to 24 July 1775 as the third child of the baker Nicolas Joseph François Vidocq (1744–1799) and his wife Henriette Françoise Vidocq (1744–1824, née Dion) in Arras in the Rue du Miroir-de-Venise.^[5]



Eugène François Vidocq – portrait by Achille Devéria

Childhood and youth (1775–1794)

Little is known about his childhood; most of it is based on his ghost-written autobiography and a few documents in French archives. His father was well educated and, for those days, very wealthy, since he was also a corn dealer. Vidocq had six siblings: two older brothers (one of whom had died before he was born), two younger brothers and two younger sisters.

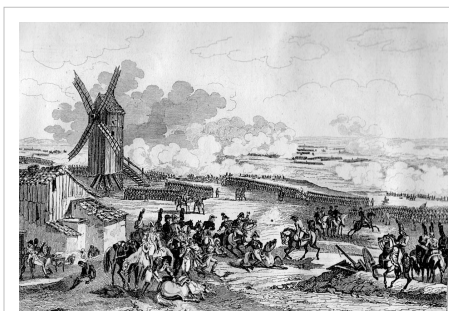
Vidocq's teenage years were a turbulent time period. He is described as being fearless, rowdy and cunning, very talented, but also very lazy. He spent much time in the armories (fighting halls) of Arras and acquired a reputation as a formidable fencer and the nickname *le Vautrin* ("wild boar"^[6]). By stealing, he provided himself with some level of comfort.

When Vidocq was thirteen years old, he stole his parent's silver plates and spent the proceeds from them within a day. Three days after the theft, he was arrested and brought to the local jail, *Baudets*.^[7] Only ten days later, he learned that his father had arranged his arrest to teach him a lesson. After a total of fourteen days, he was released from prison, but even this did not tame him.

By age fourteen, he had stolen a large amount of money from the cash box of his parent's bakery and left for Ostend, where he tried to embark to the Americas; but he was defrauded one night and found himself suddenly penniless. To survive, he worked for a group of traveling entertainers. Despite regular beatings, he worked hard enough to get promoted from stable boy to playing a Caribbean cannibal who eats raw meat. He could not stomach this for very long, so he switched to a group of puppeteers. However, he was banished from them because he flirted with the young wife of his employer. He then worked some time as an assistant of a peddler, but as soon as he neared Arras, he returned to his parents seeking forgiveness. He was welcomed by his mother with open arms.

On 10 March 1791, he enlisted in the Bourbon Regiment, where his reputation as an expert fencer was confirmed. According to Vidocq, within six months, he challenged fifteen people to a duel and killed two. Despite not being a model soldier and causing difficulties, he spent only a total of fourteen days in jail. During those two weeks, Vidocq helped a fellow inmate successfully escape.

When France declared war against Austria on 20 April 1792, Vidocq participated in the battles of the First Coalition, including the Battle of Valmy in September 1792. On 1 November 1792, he was promoted to corporal of grenadiers, but during his promotion ceremony, he challenged a fellow non-commissioned officer to a duel. This sergeant major refused the duel, so Vidocq hit him. Striking a superior officer could have led to a death sentence, so he deserted and enlisted in the 11th Chasseurs, concealing his history. On 6 November 1792, he fought under General Dumouriez in the Battle of Jemappes.



Battle of Valmy

In April 1793, Vidocq was identified as a deserter. He followed a general, who was fleeing after a failed martial coup, into the enemy camp. After a few weeks, Vidocq returned to the French camp. A chasseur-captain friend interceded for him, so he was allowed to rejoin the chasseurs. Finally, he resigned from the army because he was no longer welcome.

He was eighteen years old when he returned to Arras. He soon gained a reputation as a womanizer. Since his seductions often ended in duels, he was imprisoned in *Baudets* from 9 January 1794 to 21 January 1795.

On 8 August 1794, when he was barely nineteen, Vidocq married Anne Marie Louise Chevalier, who was five days his senior, after she had feigned pregnancy. The marriage was not happy from the start, and when Vidocq learned that his wife had cheated on him with the adjutant, Pierre Laurent Vallain, he left again for the army. He did not see his wife again until their divorce in 1805.

Years of wandering and prison (1795–1800)

Vidocq did not stay long in the army. In autumn 1794, he spent most of his time in Brussels, which was then a hideout for crooks of all kinds. There, he supported himself by small frauds. One day, he was apprehended by the police, and as a deserter, he had no valid papers. When asked for his identity, he described himself as Monsieur Rousseau from Lille and escaped while the police tried to confirm his statement.

In 1795, he joined – still under the alias of Rousseau – the *armée roulante* ("flying army"). This army consisted of "officers" who in reality had neither commissions nor regiments. They were raiders, forging routes, ranks and uniforms but staying away from the battlefields. Vidocq began as a lieutenant of chasseurs but soon promoted himself to a hussar captain. In this role, he met a rich widow in Brussels^[8] who became enamored of him. A co-conspirator of Vidocq's convinced her that Vidocq was a young nobleman on the run because of the French Revolution. Shortly before their wedding, Vidocq confessed to her. Then he left the city, but not without a generous cash gift from her.

In March 1795, Vidocq moved to Paris, where he squandered all his money on loose women. He went back north and joined a group of Bohemian gypsies, which he later left for a woman he had fallen in love with, Francine Longuet. When Francine cheated on him with a soldier, he beat both of them. The soldier sued him, and in September 1795, Vidocq was sentenced to three months in the prison *Tour Saint-Pierre* in Lille.

Vidocq was twenty and quickly adapted to life in prison. He befriended a group of men, among them Sebastien Boitel, who had been sentenced to six years for stealing. Then Boitel suddenly was released, but the next day, the local inspector noticed that the pardon was forged. Here begins the biggest controversy around Vidocq: Vidocq always claimed that he was completely innocent in the forgery. Vidocq claimed two fellow inmates, Grouard and Herbaux, had asked to use his cell (as a soldier, Vidocq had a cell all to himself) to write something of an unknown nature because the common room was too noisy. Both inmates claimed, however, that he helped in the fabrication and that the whole thing had been his idea. Thus, Vidocq was not released after the three months.

In the following weeks, Vidocq escaped several times with the help of Francine, but was always captured soon again. After one of his escapes, Francine caught him with another woman. He hid from her, and when he finally was picked

up again by police, he learned that Francine had been found with multiple knife wounds. Suddenly, he was not only accused of forgery but also attempted murder. It took some time before Francine conceded that the wounds were self-inflicted and the charge was dropped. Vidocq's contact with Francine stopped when she was convicted and sentenced to six months in prison for aiding the escapes.

After a long delay, his trial for document forgery began. On 27 December 1796, Vidocq and a second accused, César Herbaux, were found guilty and sentenced to eight years at hard labour.

Worn out by the bad treatment of every species which I experienced in the prison of Douai, tormented by a watchfulness redoubled after my sentence, I took care not to make an appeal, which would keep me there some months. What confirmed my resolution was the information that the prisoners were to be sent forthwith to the Bicêtre, and there, making one chain, to be sent on to the Bagne at Brest. It is unnecessary to say that I was relying on escaping en route.

—Eugène François Vidocq, *Memoirs of Vidocq*, p. 54 ^[9]

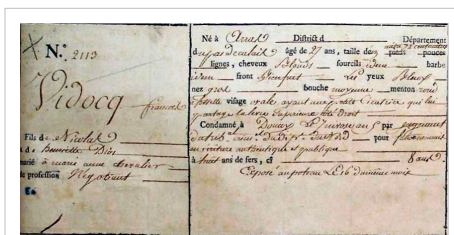
In the prison of Bicêtre, Vidocq was to wait several months for the transfer to the Bagne in Brest to toil in the galleys. A fellow inmate taught him the martial art of savate, which, later, was to prove often useful to him. An escape attempt on 3 October 1797 failed and precipitated his placement in a dungeon for eight days.

Finally, on 21 November, he was sent to Brest. As soon as he arrived, he had a stroke of luck. On 28 February 1798, he escaped dressed as a sailor. Only a few days later, he was apprehended due to a lack of papers, but the police did not recognize him as an escaped convict. He claimed to be Auguste Duval, and while officials checked this claim, he was put into a prison hospital. There he stole a nun's habit and escaped in disguise. In Cholet, he found a job as a cattle drover and, in this capacity, passed through Paris, Arras, Brussels, Ancer and finally Rotterdam, where he was shanghaied by the Dutch. After a short career as a privateer, he was arrested again and taken to Douai, where he was identified as Vidocq. He was transferred to the Bagne in Toulon, arriving on 29 August 1799. After one failed escape attempt, he escaped again on 6 March 1800 with the help of a prostitute.

The turnaround (1800–1811)

Vidocq returned to Arras in 1800. His father had died in 1799, so he hid at his mother's home for almost half a year before he was recognized and had to flee again. He assumed the identity of an Austrian and spent some time in a relationship with a widow, with whom he moved to Rouen in 1802. Vidocq built up for himself a reputation as a businessman and finally felt secure enough to let his mother come live with him and the widow; but finally, his past caught up with him. He was arrested and brought to Louvres. There, he learned that he had been sentenced to death in absentia. With the help of the local procurator-general, Ransom, he filed an appeal and spent the following five months in prison waiting for a retrial. During this time, Louise Chevalier contacted him to inform him of their divorce. When it seemed that there would be no decision concerning his sentence, he decided to flee again. On 28 November 1805, while unattended for a moment, he jumped out of a window into the adjacent river Scarpe. For the next four years, he once again was a man on the run.

He spent some time in Paris, where he witnessed the execution of César Herbaux, the man with whom his life had started a downward spiral. This event triggered a process of re-evaluation in Vidocq. With his mother and a woman



The sentence



Le Malheureux Cloquemins Sous les Verroux, 1830, shows a typical chain transport from Bicêtre to the Bagne.

he called Annette in his memoirs, he moved several times in the following years; but again and again, people from his past recognized him. He again tried to become a legitimate merchant, but his former wife found him in Paris and blackmailed him for money, and a couple of former fellow convicts forced him to fence for them.

On 1 July 1809, only a few days before his 34th birthday, Vidocq was arrested again. He decided to stop living on the fringes of society and offered his services as an informant to the police. His offer was accepted, and on 20 July, he was jailed in Bicêtre, where he started his work as a spy. On 28 October, he continued his work in La Force Prison. He sounded out his inmates and forwarded his information about forged identities and unsolved crimes through Annette to the police chief of Paris, Jean Henry.

I believe I might have become a perpetual spy, so far was every one from supposing that any connivance existed between the agents of the public authority and myself. Even the porters and keepers were in ignorance of my mission with which I was entrusted. Adored by the thieves, esteemed by the most determined bandits (for even these hardened wretches have a sentiment which they call esteem), I could always rely on their devotion to me.

—Eugène François Vidocq, *Memoirs of Vidocq*, p. 190 ^[9]

After 21 months of spying, Vidocq was released from jail on the recommendation of Henry. So as not to raise suspicions among the other inmates, the release (which took place on 25 March 1811) was arranged to look like an escape. Still, Vidocq was not really free, because now he was obliged to Henry. Therefore, he continued to work as a secret agent for the Paris police. He used his contacts and his reputation in the criminal underworld to gain trust. He disguised himself as an escaped convict and immersed himself in the criminal scene to learn about planned and committed crimes. He even took part in felonies in order to suddenly turn on his partners and arrest them. When criminals eventually began to suspect him, he used disguises and assumed other identities to continue his work and throw off suspicion.

The Sûreté (1811–1832)

At the end of 1811, Vidocq informally organized a plainclothes unit, the *Brigade de la Sûreté* ("Security Brigade"). The police department recognized the value of these civil agents, and in October 1812, the experiment was officially converted to a security police unit under the Prefecture of Police. Vidocq was appointed its leader. On 17 December 1813, Napoleon Bonaparte signed a decree that made the brigade a state security police force. From this day on, it was called the *Sûreté Nationale*.

The Sûreté initially had eight, then twelve, and, in 1823, twenty employees. One year later, it expanded again, to 28 secret agents. In addition, there were eight people who worked secretly for the Sûreté, but instead of a salary, they received licences for gambling halls. A major portion of Vidocq's subordinates were ex-criminals like himself. He even hired them fresh from the prisons; for example, Coco Lacour, who would later become Vidocq's successor at the Sûreté. Vidocq described his work from this period:

It was with a troop so small as this that I had to watch over more than twelve hundred pardoned convicts, freed, some from public prisons, others from solitary confinement: to put in execution, annually, from four to five hundred warrants, as well from the préfet as the judicial authorities; to procure information, to undertake searches, and to obtain particulars of every description; to make nightly rounds, so perpetual and arduous during the winter season; to assist the commissaries of police in their searches, or in the execution of search warrants; to explore the various rendezvous in every part; to go to the theatres, the boulevards, the barriers,



PRISON DE LA FORCE, RUE SAINT-ANTOINE.

La Force prison in Paris

and all other public places, the haunts of thieves and pickpockets.

—Eugène François Vidocq, *Memoirs of Vidocq*, p. 233 ^[9]

Vidocq personally trained his agents, for example, in selecting the correct disguise based on the kind of job. He himself still went out hunting for criminals too. His memoirs are full of stories about how he outsmarted crooks by pretending to be a beggar or an old cuckold. At one point, he even simulated his own death.

During 1814, at the beginning of the French Restoration, Vidocq and the Sûreté tried to contain the situation in Paris. He also arrested those who tried to exploit the post-revolutionary situation by claiming to have been aristocrats. During 1817, he was involved in 811 arrests, including those of 15 assassins and 38 fences. By 1820, his activities had reduced crime in Paris substantially. His annual income was 5,000 francs, but he also worked as a private investigator for fees. Rumors at the time claimed that Vidocq set criminals up, organizing break-ins and robberies and having his agents wait to collect the offenders. Even though some of Vidocq's techniques might have been questionable, there seems to be no truth to this.

Despite his position as chief of a police authority, Vidocq remained a wanted criminal. His forgery conviction had never been fully dismissed, so alongside complaints and denunciations, his superiors repeatedly received requests from the prison director of Douai, which they ignored. Finally, the Comte Jules Anglès, prefect of the Paris police, responded to a petition from Vidocq and requested an official pardon, which he received on 26 March 1817 from King Louis XVIII.

In November 1820, Vidocq married again, this time the destitute Jeanne-Victoire Guérin, whose origin is unknown, which at that time led to speculation. She came to live in the household at 111 Rue de l'Hirondelle, where Vidocq's mother and a niece of hers, the 27-year-old Fleuride Albertine Maniez (born March 22, 1793), also lived. In 1822, Vidocq befriended the author Honoré de Balzac, who began to use him as a model for several figures in his books. Vidocq's wife, who was ailing throughout their marriage, died in June 1824 in a hospital. Six weeks later, on 30 July 1824, Vidocq's mother died at age 83. She was buried with honours, and her requiem was performed in Notre Dame Cathedral.

Events of the 1820s had an impact on the police apparatus. After the assassination of the Duc de Berry in February 1820, Police Prefect Anglès had to resign and was replaced by the Jesuit Guy Delavau, who set a high value on religiousness among his subordinates. In 1824, Louis XVIII died. His successor was the ultra-reactionary Charles X, during whose oppressive reign police agents were regularly withdrawn from their original activities. Finally, Vidocq's immediate superior, police chief Henry, retired and was succeeded by Parisot, who quickly was superseded by the ambitious but also very formal Marc Duplessis. The antipathy between Vidocq and Duplessis was great. Time and time again, Duplessis complained about trivial matters, for example, that Vidocq's agents spent time in brothels and bars of ill repute. Vidocq's explanation that they had to do this to establish contacts and gather information was ignored. When Vidocq received two official warnings within a short time, he had had enough. On 20 June 1827, the 52-year-old handed in his resignation:

Depuis dix-huit ans, je sers la police avec distinction. Je n'ai jamais reçu un seul reproche de vos prédécesseurs. Je dois donc penser n'en avoir pas mérité. Depuis votre nomination à la deuxième division, voilà la deuxième fois que vous me faites l'honneur de m'en adresser en vous plaignant des agents. Suis-je le maître de les contenir hors du bureau? Non. Pour vous éviter, monsieur, la peine de m'en adresser de semblables à l'avenir, et à moi le désagrément de les recevoir, j'ai l'honneur de vous prier de vouloir bien



Honoré de Balzac

recevoir ma démission.

Translation: "For eighteen years I served the police with distinction. I've never received any criticism from your predecessors. I must think therefore that I never earned one. Since your appointment to the Second Division, this is the second time you did me the honor to address me by complaining about my agents. Am I their master in the time they spend out of office? No. To save you, sir, the trouble of sending me further similar complaints in the future, and me the inconvenience of receiving them, I have the honor to solicit you for accepting my resignation."

—resignation of Eugène François Vidocq

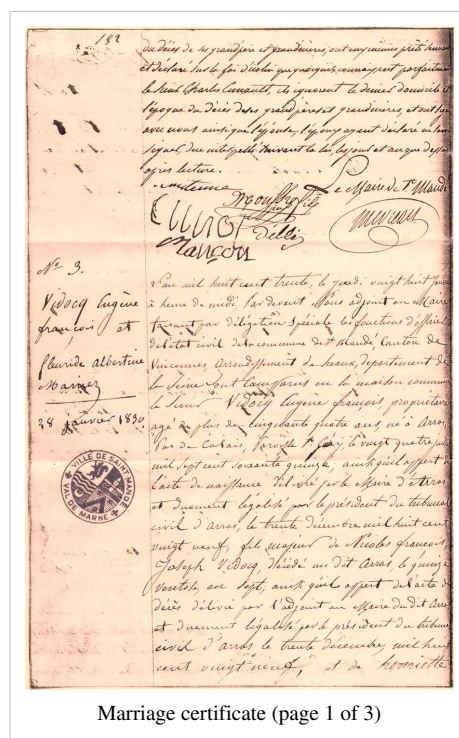
He then wrote his memoirs with the help of a ghostwriter.

Vidocq, who was a rich man after his resignation, became an entrepreneur. In Saint-Mandé, a small town east of Paris where he married his cousin Fleuride Maniez on 28 January 1830, he founded a paper factory. He mainly employed released convicts – both men and women. This caused an outrageous scandal in society and led to disputes. In addition, the machines cost money, the semi-skilled workers needed food and clothing, and the customers refused to pay marked prices with the argument that he had a seemingly cheaper workforce. The company did not last long; Vidocq went bankrupt in 1831. In the short time while he was away from Paris, both Delavau and Duplessis had to resign their posts, and the July Revolution of 1830 forced Charles X to abdicate. When Vidocq delivered a few useful tips that helped to solve a burglary in Fontainebleau and led to the arrest of eight people, the new police prefect, Henri Gisquet, appointed him again chief of the Sûreté.^{[10][11]}

The criticism of Vidocq and his organization grew. The July Monarchy caused insecurities in society, and there was a cholera outbreak in 1832. One of its victims was General Jean Maximilien Lamarque. During his funeral on 5 June 1832, a revolt erupted and the throne of "Citizen King" Louis-Philippe I was in danger. Allegedly Vidocq's group cracked down on the rioters with great severity. Not all of the police approved of his methods, and rivalries developed. A rumour arose that Vidocq had initiated the theft that led to his reinstatement himself to show his indispensability. One of his agents had to go to prison for two years because of that affair, but Vidocq's involvement could not be proved. More and more defenders claimed that Vidocq and his agents were not credible as eyewitnesses, since most of them had criminal pasts themselves. Vidocq's position was untenable, and on 15 November 1832, he once again resigned, using the pretext of his wife being ill.

J'ai l'honneur de vous informer que l'état malade de mon épouse m'oblige de rester à Saint-Mandé pour surveiller moi-même mon établissement. Cette circonstance impérieuse m'empêchera de pouvoir à l'avenir diriger les opérations de la brigade de sûreté. Je viens vous prier de vouloir bien recevoir ma démission, et recevoir mes sincères remerciements pour toutes les marques de bonté dont vous avez daigné me combler. Si, dans une circonstance quelconque, j'étais assez heureux pour vous servir, vous pouvez compter sur ma fidélité et mon dévouement à toute épreuve.

Translation: "I have the honor to inform you that the ill health of my wife is forcing me to stay in Saint-Mandé to monitor my establishment. This urgent circumstance will preclude my ability to steer the future operations of the security brigade. Please accept my resignation and my sincere thanks for all the marks of kindness with which you deigned to grace me. While, under any circumstances, I was happy to serve you, you can count on my loyalty and devotion by any means."



Marriage certificate (page 1 of 3)

—Vidocq in his resignation from 15 November 1832

On the same day, the Sûreté was dissolved, then re-established without agents with criminal records, no matter how minor their offenses. Vidocq's successor was Pierre Allard.

Le bureau des renseignements (1833–1848)

In 1833, Vidocq founded *Le bureau des renseignements* ("Office of Information"), a company that was a mixture of detective agency and private police. It is considered to be the first known detective agency.^[11] Once again, he predominantly hired ex-convicts.

His squad, which initially consisted of eleven detectives, two clerks and one secretary, pitted itself on behalf of businesspeople and private citizens against *Faiseurs* (crooks, fraudsters, bankruptcy artists), occasionally using illegal means. From 1837, Vidocq quarreled constantly with the official police because of his activities and his questionable relations with various government agencies such as the War Department. On 28 November 1837, the police executed a search and seizure and confiscated over 3,500 files and documents. A few days later, Vidocq was arrested and spent Christmas and New Year in jail. He was charged with three crimes, namely the acquisition of money by deception, corruption of civil servants, and the pretension of public functions. In February 1838, after numerous witnesses had testified, the judge dismissed all three charges. Vidocq was free again.

Vidocq increasingly became the subject of literature and public discussions. Balzac wrote several novels and plays that contained characters modeled after Vidocq.

The agency flourished, but Vidocq continued to make enemies, some of them powerful. On 17 August 1842, on behalf of Police Prefect Gabriel Delessert, 75 police officers stormed his office building and arrested him and one of his agents. This time, the case seemed to be clear. In an investigation of defalcation, he had made an illegal arrest and had demanded a bill of exchange for the embezzled money from the arrested fraudster. For the next few months, 67-year-old Vidocq was remanded into custody in the Conciergerie. On 3 May 1843, the first hearings finally took place before judge Michel Barbou, a close friend of Delessert. During the trial, Vidocq had to give testimony about many other cases, among them, the kidnappings of several women who he had allegedly delivered to monasteries against their will at the behest of their families. Also, his activities as a money lender and the possible benefits from it were examined. Finally, he was sentenced to five years imprisonment and a fine of 3,000 francs. Vidocq immediately appealed, and through the intervention of political friends like Count Gabriel de Berny and the attorney general, Franck-Carré, he quickly got a new trial, this time with the chief judge of the *court royale*. The hearing on 22 July 1843 took a matter of minutes, and after eleven months in the Conciergerie, Vidocq once again was free.



The Conciergerie

The harm was done, however. The lawsuit had been very expensive, and his reputation was damaged. Business at the agency suffered. Moreover, Delessert tried to get him expelled from the city for being a former criminal. Although the attempt failed, Vidocq increasingly considered selling his agency, but he could not find a qualified and reputable buyer.

In the following years, Vidocq published several small books in which he depicted his life to refute directly the rumours that were being circulated about him. In 1844, he presented an essay on prisons, penitentiaries, and the death penalty. On the morning of 22 September 1847, his third wife, Fleuride, died after 17 years of marriage. Vidocq did not marry again, but until his death, he had several intimate partners.

In 1848, the February revolution caused the abdication of "Citizen King" Louis-Philippe. The Second Republic was proclaimed, with Alphonse de Lamartine as the head of a transitional government. Although Vidocq always had

been proud of his reception at the king's court and had boasted about his access to Louis-Philippe, he offered his services to the new government. His task was the surveillance of political opponents such as Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte, the nephew of Napoleon I. Meanwhile, the new government sank into chaos and violence. In the presidential election of 10 December 1848, Lamartine received less than 8,000 votes. Vidocq presented himself as a candidate in the 2nd Arrondissement but received only one vote. The clear winner, and thus president of the Second Republic, was Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte, who did not respond to Vidocq's offer to work for him.

His last years (1849–1857)

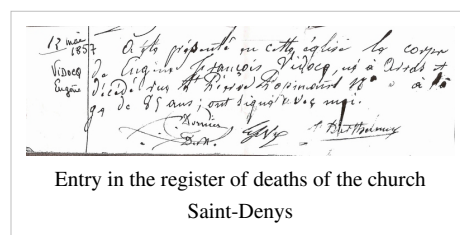
In 1849, Vidocq briefly had to go to prison one last time, on a charge of fraud. In the end, however, the case was dropped. He withdrew more and more into private life and accepted only small cases every now and then. In the last years of his life, he suffered great pain in his right arm, which had been broken and had never healed properly. Also, unwise investments had cost him a large portion of his assets, so he had to curb his living standard and live in rented accommodations. In August 1854, despite a pessimistic prognosis by his doctor, he survived a bout of cholera. Only in April 1857 did his condition deteriorate to the point he could no longer stand up. On 11 May 1857, Vidocq died at the age of 82 years in his home in Paris in the presence of his doctor, his lawyer and a priest.

Je l'aimais, je l'estimais... Je ne l'oublierai jamais, et je dirai hautement que c'était un honnête homme!

Translation: "I liked him, I appreciated him... I will never forget him, and I can just say he was an honest man!"

—Alphonse de Lamartine^[12]

His body was brought to the church of Saint-Denys du Saint-Sacrement, where the funeral service was held. It is not known where Vidocq is buried, though there are some rumours as to the location. One of them, mentioned in the biography of John Philip Stead, claims that his grave is at the cemetery in Saint Mandé.^[13] There is a gravestone with the inscription "Vidocq 18". According to information from city officials, however, this grave is registered to Vidocq's last wife, Fleuride-Albertine Maniez.



In the end, his assets consisted of 2,907.50 francs from the sale of his goods and a pension of 867.50 francs.^[11] A total of eleven women came forward as owners of his testament, a document which they had received for their favours instead of presents. His remaining assets went to Anne-Heloïse Lefèvre, at whose house he had lived at the end. Vidocq had no children, at least none that are known. Emile-Adolphe Vidocq, the son of his first wife, tried to get recognized as his son (even changing his last name for this purpose), but failed. Vidocq had left evidence which ruled out his paternity. At the time of Emile-Adolphe Vidocq's conception, Vidocq had been in prison.

Criminology legacy

Vidocq is considered by historians as the "father" of modern criminology.^{[1][2]} His approaches were new and unique for that time. He is credited with the introduction of undercover work, ballistics, criminology and a record keeping system to criminal investigation. He made the first plaster cast impressions of shoe prints. He created indelible ink and unalterable bond paper with his printing company. His form of anthropometrics is still partially used by French police. He is also credited with philanthropic pursuits – he claimed he never informed on anyone who had stolen out of real need. At the same time, his work was not acknowledged in France for a long time because of his criminal past. In September 1905, the Sûreté Nationale exhibited a painting series with its former heads. However, the first painting of the series showed Pierre Allard, Vidocq's successor. The newspaper *L'Exclusive* reported on 17 September 1905 that on obtaining information concerning the omission, they had gotten the answer that Vidocq never had been head of the Sûreté.

Remodelling of the police force

When Vidocq gave his allegiance to the police around 1810, there were two police organizations in France: on the one side, there was the *police politique*, an intelligence agency whose agents were responsible for the detection of conspiracies and intrigues; on the other, the normal police, who investigated common crimes such as theft, fraud, prostitution, and murder. Since the Middle Ages, those constables wore identification insignia that, over time, had developed to full uniforms. Unlike the often covertly operating political police, they were easy to spot. For fear of attack, they did not dare to enter some Parisian districts, limiting their efforts at crime prevention.

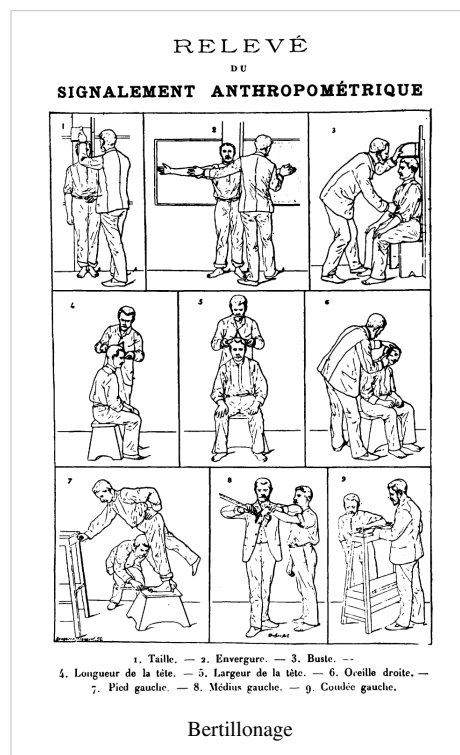
Vidocq persuaded his superiors to allow his agents, who also included women, to wear plain clothes and disguises depending on the situation. Thus, they did not attract attention and, as former criminals, also knew the hiding places and methods of criminals. Through their contacts, they often learned of planned crimes and were able to catch the guilty red-handed. Vidocq also had a different approach to interrogation. In his memoirs, he mentions several times that he did not take those arrested to prison immediately, but invited them to dinner, where he chatted with them. In addition to information about other crimes, he often obtained confessions in this non-violent way and recruited future informants and even agents.

August Vollmer, the first police chief of Berkeley, California, and a leading figure in the development of criminal justice in the United States,^[14] studied the works of Vidocq and the Austrian criminal jurist Hans Gross for his reform of the Berkeley police force.^[15] His reform ideas were adopted by the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) and, as a result, also affected J. Edgar Hoover and the FBI.^[16] After Robert Peel established Scotland Yard in 1829, he sent a committee to Paris in 1832 to confer with Vidocq for several days. In 1843, two commissars of Scotland Yard traveled to Paris for further training. They spent only two days with Pierre Allard, who was head of the Sûreté by then. Then they went to Vidocq and, for one week, accompanied him and his agents in their work.

Identification of criminals

Jürgen Thorwald stated in his book *Das Jahrhundert der Detektive* (1964) that Vidocq had a photographic memory that allowed him to recognize previously convicted criminals, even in disguise. Biographer Samuel Edwards reported in *The Vidocq Dossier* about a trial against the fraudster and forger Lambert, in which Vidocq referred to his memory of the accused. Vidocq regularly visited the prisons to memorise the faces of the inmates and made his agents do the same. The English police adopted this method. Until the late 1980s, British investigators attended court hearings to observe the spectators in the public galleries and become aware of possible accomplices.

As Vidocq said at Lambert's trial, while his memory was phenomenal, he could not require the same of his agents. Therefore, for each arrested person, he carefully set up an index card with a personal description, aliases, previous convictions, *modus operandi*, and other information. The card of forger Lambert contained, among other things, a handwriting sample. The index card system was retained not only by the French police, but also by police units in other countries. However, it soon revealed its weaknesses. By the time Alphonse Bertillon came to the Sûreté as clerk in 1879, the descriptions on the cards were not detailed enough anymore to really identify suspects. This caused Bertillon to develop an anthropometric system for personal identification called the bertillonage. The sorting of the card boxes, which by



then already filled several rooms, was converted to body dimensions, the first of many attempts to improve the structure of the sorting. With the advent of the information age, the cards were digitised, and the card boxes were replaced by databases.

Scientific experiments

Forensic science did not yet exist during Vidocq's time. Despite numerous scientific papers, the police did not recognize its practical benefits, and this could not be changed by Vidocq. Nevertheless, he was not so averse to experiments as his superiors and usually had a small laboratory set up in his office building. In the archives of the Parisian police are reports of cases that he solved by applying forensic methods decades before they were recognized as such.

Chemical compounds

In the France of Vidocq's time, there already existed cheques and promissory notes. Counterfeiters purchased those cheques and altered them to their advantage. In 1817, Vidocq addressed this problem by commissioning two chemists to develop a tamper-proof paper. This paper, for which Vidocq filed a patent, was treated with chemicals that would smear the ink if later amended and thus make the forgeries identifiable. According to the biographer Edwards, Vidocq used his connections extensively, recommending his paper to those who had been deceived, mainly bankers who hired him. Thereby, the paper came to be widely used. Vidocq also used it for the cards of his index card system to emphasize their reliability in court. He also commissioned the creation of indelible ink. This ink has been used, among other things, by the French government for the printing of banknotes from the mid-1860s.

Crime scene investigation

Louis Mathurin Moreau-Christophe, contemporary general director of French prisons, described in his book *Le monde des coquins* (*The World of Scoundrels*) how Vidocq used clues from the crime scene to determine the perpetrator based on his knowledge of specific criminals and their modus operandi. As a concrete example, Moreau named a burglary in the Bibliothèque nationale de France in 1831, where he himself had been present at the investigation. Vidocq inspected a door panel that had been damaged by the offender and said that, due to the method employed and the perfection with which it had been executed, he knew of only one perpetrator who could have done it. He suggested the thief Fossard but mentioned that he could not be the culprit, since he was still in prison. Thereupon, the police chief, Lecrosnier, who was also present, told them that Fossard had escaped eight days before. Two days later, Vidocq was able to arrest the thief, who had in fact committed the burglary.

Ballistics

Alexandre Dumas left records that describe a murder case from 1822. The Comtesse Isabelle d'Arcy, a woman much younger than her husband on whom she had cheated, was shot dead, whereupon the police arrested the Comte d'Arcy. Vidocq talked with him and was of the opinion that the "old gentleman" did not have the personality of a murderer. He examined his dueling pistols and found that they either had not been fired or had been cleaned since then. Then he persuaded a doctor to remove the bullet from the head of the noblewoman secretly. A simple comparison showed that the bullet was too big to come from the guns of the Comte. Vidocq then searched the apartment of the woman's lover and found not only numerous pieces of jewellery, but also a large pistol whose size fitted the bullet. The Comte identified the jewels as those of his wife and Vidocq also found a fence to whom the lover had already sold a ring. Confronted with the evidence, the lover confessed the murder.

The first real comparison between a gun and a bullet took place in 1835 by the Bow Street Runner Henry Goddard. On 21 December 1860, *The Times* reported on a court ruling in which a murderer in Lincoln named Thomas Richardson had been sentenced to death with the help of ballistics for the first time.

The Vidocq Society

In 1990, the *Vidocq Society* was founded in Philadelphia by forensic artist/sculptor Frank Bender (obit. 2011). Its members are forensic experts, FBI profilers, homicide investigators, scientists, psychologists, coroners, and any other competent professionals. At their monthly meetings, they try to solve cold cases from around the world, free of charge and in accordance with their motto *Veritas veritatum* ("Truth generates truth"). The rolls of membership are closed, but the number of members is low, as it formally never exceeds the number of years of Vidocq's life.

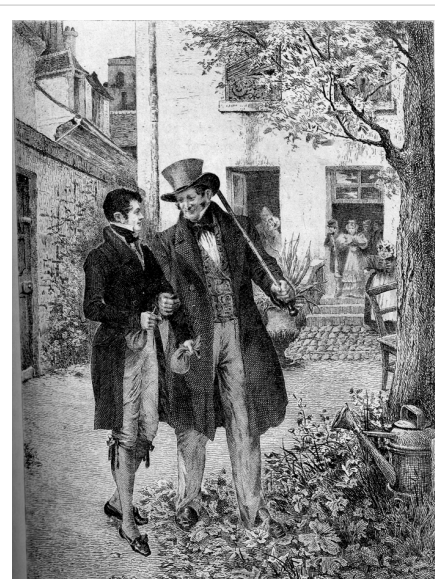
Literature

Around 1827, Vidocq wrote an autobiography, which he planned to have published in summer 1828 by the bookseller Emile Morice; but authors Honoré de Balzac, Victor Hugo and Alexandre Dumas were of the opinion that the story was too short, so Vidocq looked for a new publisher, which he found in Louis François L'Héritier. In December of the same year, L'Héritier published the memoirs, which had increased to four volumes through the help of some ghostwriters. The work became a bestseller and sold over 50,000 copies in the first year, according to biographer Samuel Edwards. The success inspired imitators. In 1829, two journalists under the pseudonym of a criminal named Margaret published the book *Mémoires d'un forçat ou Vidocq dévoilé* to expose criminal activities Vidocq allegedly had committed. Other police officers followed Vidocq's example and published their own autobiographies in the following years, among them the prefect of police, Henri Gisquet.

Vidocq's life story inspired many contemporary writers, many of them his closest friends. In Balzac's writings, he was regularly the model of literary figures: his experiences as a failed entrepreneur were used in the third part of *Illusions perdues*, "Les Souffrances de l'inventeur"; in *Gobseck*, Balzac introduced the policeman Corentin; but most clearly, the connection to Vidocq can be found in the figure of Vautrin. This character first appears in the novel *Le Père Goriot*, then in *Illusions perdues*, *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes* (as the main character), *La Cousine Bette*, *Le Contrat de mariage*, and finally as the main character in the 1840 theatre play *Vautrin*. Not only Vidocq as a person but also his methods and disguises inspired Balzac in his work.

In Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* (1862), both main characters, the reformed criminal Jean Valjean and his pursuer, Police Inspector Javert, were modelled after Vidocq; the same is true of the policemen Monsieur Jackal in *Les Mohicans de Paris* (1854–1855) by Alexandre Dumas. He also was the basis for *Rodolphe de Gerolstein*, who secured justice in the serial newspaper novel *The Mysteries of Paris* of Eugène Sue in the weekly newspaper *Journal des débats*; and he was the inspiration of Émile Gaboriau for *Monsieur Lecoq*, one of the first scientific and methodical investigators who played the lead role in many adventures, who in turn was a major influence for the creation of Sherlock Holmes. It is also believed that Edgar Allan Poe was prompted by a story about Vidocq to create the first detective in fiction, C. Auguste Dupin,^[17] who appeared, for example, in the short story "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", which is considered the first detective story.^{[18][19][20]} Vidocq is also mentioned in *Moby Dick* and *White Jacket* ("Chapter VI: The Quarterdeck Officers, etc.") of Herman Melville^[21] and *Great Expectations* of Charles Dickens.

Vidocq also inspired Maurice Leblanc, who, in the novel 813 had his hero, gentleman-burglar Arsène Lupin, become head of the Sûreté.



Rastignac and Vautrin on the cover of *Le Père Goriot*

In James Joyce's story "Araby", the protagonist – an adolescent boy in Dublin at the turn of the 20th century – finds among old papers a yellowed copy of *The Memoirs of Vidocq*.

In the 2009 novel *Sandman Slim* by Richard Kadrey, François Eugène Vidocq is an immortal thief and alchemist who searches for a cure for his immortality. He also appears in the sequels, *Kill the Dead* and *Aloha From Hell*.

Theatre

Vidocq was – probably obvious considering his penchant for disguises – a friend of the theater. During his lifetime, the *Boulevard du Crime*, a road with several theatres that regularly presented crime stories in form of melodramas, was quite popular. One of these theatres was the Théâtre de l'Ambigu-Comique, which was sponsored by Vidocq to a great extent. According to the biographer James Morton, Vidocq also submitted a play, but it never was produced. He also had plans to dabble in play acting but never carried them out.

Not only were many of Vidocq's paramours actresses, but many of his friends and acquaintances were also from the theatre scene. Among them was the famous actor Frédérick Lemaître, who *inter alia* played the main role in Balzac's *Vautrin*, a play which debuted on 14 March 1840 at Théâtre de la Porte Saint-Martin after numerous problems with the censorship. Lemaître tried to adapt his appearance to that of Vidocq, on whom the character Vautrin was based. At the premiere, there were commotions because the wig Lemaître had used was also similar to the one of King Louis-Philippe. The play was banned by the French interior minister after that and not performed again.

It was not only plays inspired by Vidocq that were shown in the theatre. His one life story also made it on stage several times, usually with his memoirs as literary template. Especially in England, the enthusiasm was great for Vidocq. The memoirs had been rapidly translated into English, and a few months later, on 6 July 1829, the premiere of *Vidocq! The French Police Spy* was held at Surrey Theatre in the London Borough of Lambeth. The melodrama in two acts, produced by Robert William Elliston, was penned by Douglas William Jerrold, and the main character was played by TP Cooke. Although the critics, among them one from *The Times*, were quite positive, the play was performed only nine times in the first month and then dropped.

In December 1860, some years after Vidocq's death, another play about him, written by F. Marchant, was presented in Britannia Theatre in Hoxton under the title *Vidocq or The French Jonathan Wild*. It was included in the theatre program for only one week.

In 1909, Émile Bergerat wrote the melodrama *Vidocq, empereur des policiers* in five acts and seven scenes. The producers Hertz and Coquelin rejected it, but Bergerat sued them successfully for 8,000 francs in damages. The play debuted in 1910 in Théâtre Sarah Bernhardt. Jean Kemm, who years later would also participate in a movie about Vidocq, took over the lead role.



Melodrama at the Parisian Boulevard du Crime,
Honoré Daumier

Film adaptations

Based on his memoirs, the first film about Vidocq was released in France on 13 August 1909: the short black-and-white silent film *La Jeunesse de Vidocq ou Comment on devient policier*.^[22] Vidocq was played by Harry Baur, who also portrayed him in the two sequels, *L'Évasion de Vidocq* (1910^[23]) and *Vidocq* (1911^[24])

Under the direction of Jean Kemm, the silent movie *Vidocq* was next, in 1922.^[25] The screenplay was written by Arthur Bernède, based again on Vidocq's memoirs. The main role was played by René Navarre.

The first sound film, albeit still in black and white, was published in 1938. Jacques Daroy shot the film, which once again was named *Vidocq* after the main character, with actor André Brulé. The film mostly displayed Vidocq's criminal career. Compared to other contemporary crime films, it was rather unglamorous, but still played in some movie theatres outside of France.

On 19 July 1946, the first American film about Vidocq appeared – *A Scandal in Paris*, still in black and white. George Sanders portrayed Vidocq in the highly fictionalized biopic by Douglas Sirk, which showed the rise of a rogue in society, coupled with a love story. It was followed in April 1948 by the next French version of Vidocq's life story. *Le Cavalier de Croix-Mort* was shot by Lucien Ganier-Raymond with Henri Nassiet in the leading role.^[26]

On 7 January 1967, the French television station ORTF showed the first of two television series, each with thirteen episodes. *Vidocq*,^[27] with Bernard Noël, was still in black and white. This changed with the second series, *Les Nouvelles Aventures de Vidocq*,^[28] which premiered on 5 January 1971. Claude Brasseur was the first to portray Vidocq in colour.

In 2001, under the direction of Pitof, Gérard Depardieu played Vidocq in the French science fiction film *Vidocq*.

In 1989, the pilot episode "Trail" was devoted to Eugène Vidocq. The series was called *Adventure of Criminalistics* and was filmed in Czechoslovakian-German co-production.

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- [5] 1856 renamed to Rue des Trois Visages
- [6] Today's French name is *sanglier*. *Vautrin* was a slang word for *wild boar* in northern France (Artois and Picardy) and was probably derived from the reflexive verb *se vautrer* ("to wallow in")
- [7] Destroyed in 1944.
- [8] The biographer Bruno Roy-Henry suspects it was the Baroness d'Ixelles.
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- [23] *L'Évasion de Vidocq* (1910) at IMDb (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0448873/>)
- [24] *Vidocq* (1911) at IMDb (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0448841/>)
- [25] *Vidocq* (1922) at IMDb (<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0622772/>)
- [26] *Le Cavalier de Croix-Mort* (1947) at IMDb (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0242352/>)
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