

Ideas of Justice and Punishment in Frank C. Johnson's Famous Detective Stories

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Abstract

In 1939, after many decades of debate around the value of different types of reading, Australia imposed import restrictions – the main target of these restrictions being ‘pulp’ fiction – that lasted twenty years. In response to this regulatory action a number of publishing houses emerged, almost overnight, to fill the void and supply Australian readers with pulp stories of every kind. One of these publishers was Frank C. Johnson. Johnson’s success ran parallel to efforts to ban the importation of cheap storytelling: when restrictions were lifted in 1959, Johnson could not compete and his enterprise eventually collapsed. The State Library of New South Wales acquired Johnson’s Archive in 1965. The materials within this extraordinary archive include correspondence, original artworks and examples of various pulp materials such as crime fiction, true crime, comics and westerns. This paper will argue one of the more significant elements within this collection is the true crime series: *Famous Detective Stories*. This monthly publication, which was Johnson’s longest-running and most successful title, ran from 1946 to 1954. *Famous Detective Stories* featured the re-packaging of true crime cases from newspaper clippings libraries. Interestingly, the writers for this true crime magazine would superimpose contemporary views upon the stories being re-told. This paper offers a review of the themes of justice within this publication with particular attention paid to the punishment of wrongdoers. In this way this paper unpacks ideas of justice and punishment, particularly capital punishment, as presented in a pulp publication of the mid-twentieth century.

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Introduction

Australia offers rich histories of people and place. Running parallel to well-known histories of colonisation, federation and military engagements are a wide range of lesser-known histories including the under-researched area of the history of reading.

Reading, in Australia has occupied a highly contested space. There have been multiple claims for a national program of reading, one founded on the belief that, “the greatest obstacle to human progress was ignorance [and that] this could be combated by the cultivation of the habit of reading” (Tate, 1935, p. 9). The debate about reading for education, rather than for entertainment, dominated many conversations around reading; despite demands that libraries should select works for “both study and for recreation” (Tate, 1935, p. 17). A broad-based desire for a moral framework around reading became increasingly obvious through the early decades of the twentieth century (Franks, 2015). As Frank Tate advocated a reading program for all Australians, an extensive campaign was underway designed to restrict this habit of reading through an increased control of imports. As reported in *The Canberra Times* on 15 November 1934, this control was aiming for:

[T]he complete elimination of undesirable crime literature, the majority of which came from America. [This system of control] is being [implemented] by business interests in co-operation with the Commonwealth Government for the effective control of distribution in Australia. [...] Books and magazines known as ‘thrillers,’ which include detective and fiction stories, are not regarded seriously by the Customs authorities, and they will be permitted to enter Australia to the same extent as in the past. (Anon, 1934, p. 2)

Shortly after this news item appeared the Cultural Defence Committee of Sydney published *Mental Rubbish from Overseas: A Public Protest* (1935), a short argument for ‘quality’ reading materials. The Committee was ostensibly fighting ‘for Australia’ (as claimed on the cover of their 1935 pamphlet) and working to eradicate all ‘low’ forms of publishing. Moreover, the Committee was situating itself as a moral judge on what Australians should and should not read. Peter Doyle’s examination of the Committee’s work reveals a primary concern about “the puerile silliness and senseless exoticisms of US pulps and mass culture in general” (2015, p. 9).

Restrictions on “silliness” were eventually imposed and lasted two decades. Such policies are rarely delivered upon a single motivating factor and, while many constituents were satisfied the regulation of imports was designed to control the reading habits of Australians, changes to imports also coincided with the outbreak of World War II and so “restrictions on the importation of non-essential goods” (Bode, 2012, p. 66) is also a valid rationale for this action, while others claim the imposition of restrictions was decided not on published content but on a publisher’s status as being from “non-sterling currency areas [and so aimed] to preserve currency reserves” (Bode, 2012, p. 66). Regardless of the true cause of increased regulations around importation of printed material, “on the surface the moral crusaders had achieved an early victory – of sorts, as there were soon attempts to compensate for import bans through the generation of local content” (Franks, 2015, p. 19).

In response to this regulatory action a number of publishing houses emerged to fill the void and supply Australian readers with pulp stories of every kind. One of these publishers was Frank C. Johnson. Johnson's success ran parallel to efforts to ban the importation of cheap storytelling. When restrictions were lifted in 1959, Johnson was unable to compete with the influx of printed material from overseas. This, coupled with the introduction of television in Australia in 1956, led to the collapse of Johnson's remarkable enterprise. Much of what Johnson produced survived the publishing house's demise with the State Library of New South Wales acquiring Johnson's Archive in 1965. The materials within this extraordinary collection include correspondence, original artworks and examples of various pulp materials such as crime fiction, true crime, comics and westerns.

This paper argues one of the more significant elements within this collection is the true crime series: *Famous Detective Stories*. This monthly publication featured the re-packaging of true crime cases from old sets of newspaper clippings held in libraries. Of particular interest, the writers for this true crime magazine would superimpose contemporary views upon the stories being re-told. This paper offers a review of the themes of justice within this publication with particular attention paid to the punishment of wrongdoers. In this way this paper explores ideas of justice and punishment, particularly capital punishment, as presented in a pulp publication of the mid-twentieth century.

Famous Detective Stories (1946–1954)

Famous Detective Stories was Johnson's longest-running title, true crime tales pouring forth from Johnson Publications between December 1946 and January 1954. *Famous Detective Stories* concentrated on the re-packaging of true crime cases from newspaper clippings libraries. In this way establishing a publication that was economical to produce and capitalised on what was known to have already proven popular with Australian readers. Presenting some of true crime's better-known victims and villains supported an Australian reading public's desire to know about crime – from robbery to murder – and so made perfect business sense.

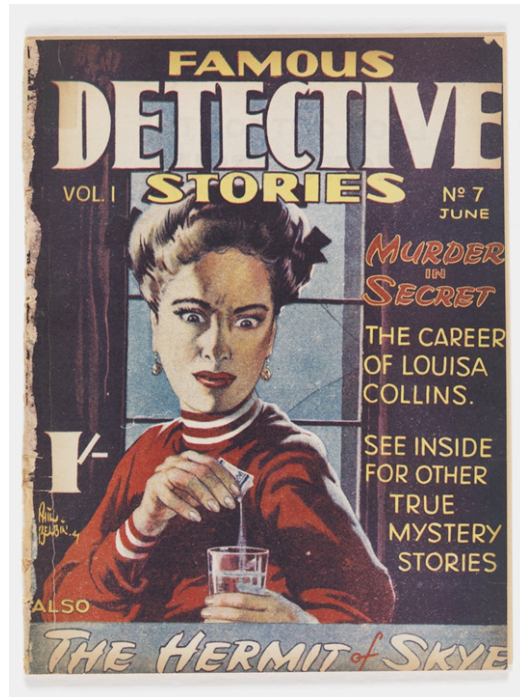


Figure 1. Cover, *Famous Detective Stories*. 1 (7): June 1947
 Sydney: Frank Johnson
 Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales

Johnson's acumen was rewarded, his success reflected in the ongoing demand for his exploitation of Australia's criminal histories. This was achieved despite several changes implemented across the volumes including a reduction in the number of illustrations, a trend towards shorter articles and the adoption of plain covers with simplified headings in lieu of the richly depicted characters who had been visually, as well as textually, sensationalised to sell a story (as seen in Figure 1).

Johnson's efforts did not automatically realise an elevation in how the content he was producing was perceived. Frank C. Johnson Publishing was still regarded as 'pulp'. Brash covers. Sensational stories. Quickly produced. Crime. Sport. Westerns. Tough guys. Long-legged dames. Some sex. A little bit of violence. Yet, we argue here, that some of Johnson's offerings were openly positioned as a premium product. This can be seen in a comparison of price points for a variety of publications available, in Australia, in 1946. Utilising the Reserve Bank of Australia's pre-decimal currency inflation calculator, we have looked at how the price of the inaugural issue of *Famous Detective Stories* translates to today's terms: one shilling being approximately AU\$3.31. Placed in the context of other publications – from a daily newspaper, to popular periodicals, to a paperback novel – available at the time of the release of *Famous Detective Stories*, Volume 1, Number 1, it is revealed that pulp publishing was not the cheap consumable it is commonly assumed to be.

Publication	Cover Price in 1946 (Imperial Currency)	Cost in Today's Terms (Decimal Currency)
<i>The Sydney Morning Herald</i> A daily newspaper	2d (Twopence)	55 cents
<i>Australian Women's Weekly</i> A weekly magazine	3d (Threepence)	83 cents
<i>Australian Home Journal</i> A monthly magazine	6d (Sixpence)	\$1.65
<i>Famous Detective Stories</i> A monthly magazine	1/ (One Shilling)	\$3.31
A Penguin Paperback Known today as a 'Popular Penguin'	1/ (One Shilling)	\$3.31

Table 1. The Cost of *Famous Detective Stories* in Context

Johnson was operating within a crowded market. Figure 2 gives an indication of just how much reading material was available with this newsstand in Martin Place, Sydney (now the site of a busy railway station, luxury hotel and high-end retail) offering daily papers as well as weekly and monthly magazines. A copy of *Famous Detective Stories*, Volume 2, Number 11, can be seen at the very top of the newsstand's display, second from the right.



Figure 2. Photonegative, *Newsstand and Vendor*. Martin Place, Sydney, 1947
Sydney: ACP Magazines Ltd, Photographic Archive,
Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales

One of the more distinctive features of this periodical, and many of Johnson's other efforts, is the setting. In a sharp contrast to much of the reading material available to Australians at the time, Johnson deliberately selected local environments for many of his stories. Some genres, such as the western, retained their traditional settings. For true crime tales Australian people and places – from major cities to regional areas – dominated. Through this decision, to focus on the local, he taught, or merely reinforced, the idea that crime was close to home. Thus adding intensity to a type of storytelling in which there was already “drama galore” (Mycroft, 1946, p. 9).

Interestingly, the writers for this true crime magazine would superimpose contemporary views upon the stories being re-told. This paper offers a review of the themes of justice within this publication with particular attention paid to the punishment of wrongdoers. In this way this paper unpacks ideas of justice and punishment, particularly capital punishment, as presented in a pulp publication of the mid-twentieth century. These points are explored, briefly, below.

Ideas of Justice

This paper offers a review of the themes of justice within this *Famous Detective Stories*, with particular attention paid to the punishment of wrongdoers. A popular pre-occupation with true crime (and, indeed, crime fiction) in Australia is easily positioned within a context of the nation's modern history. The year 1788, and with it the development of Australia's penal colony, saw the first implementation of capital punishment reflective of the English criminal law on Australian shores. A Charter of Justice was issued to the new colony. Likewise, the colony established a Court of Criminal Jurisdiction, an institution designated to ensure that more seriously punishable offences were dealt with in what was, for the settlers, a traditional manner and in accordance with existing English law.

As the colony progressed from convict settlement through to federation in 1901, it was evident that English laws remained enforceable. Various legislative instruments were implemented to balance competing interests, these interests included the protection of public safety, individual freedoms and the equitable, as well as suitable, application of justice and punishment. By the early twentieth century, capital punishment was mandatory for crimes such as murder, sexual assault, forgery and burglary amongst other, pettier, crimes of stealing sheep and stealing food.

The law was however somewhat fallible and became a retributive system based upon the concept of ‘an eye for an eye’. Eventually the legal system of the time brutalised itself, whilst directly contributing to the violence that it set out to deter. Australian society had come to believe outcomes of capital punishment contributed to justice, the idea of the execution was demanded, debated and ultimately sensationalised.

Gendered agendas and representations within *Famous Detective Stories* were researched through a review of one hundred articles. The stories provided twice as many male victims as female victims. The same is seen with villains, the villain heavily skewed toward representation of the male. The few female villains that are profiled are featured in intriguing ways, a sharp contrast to their male counterparts who are simplified and stereotyped. The female villains are heavily sexualised, illustrations over-emphasise female physicality, consistently portraying women as

vampy, red-lipped murderesses who made a ‘career’ of their criminal predilections.

The case of Louisa Collins provides an excellent example of the sensationalism of the female villain and capital punishment and the idea of the female victim as an abhorrent anomaly. The case also provides insights into nineteenth-century gender politics, colonial values and the potential misuse of the legal privilege. This case for murder was heard (an unparalleled) four times until the ‘right’ outcome was found. It was rare for a woman to commit murder, let alone hang for this crime. This canvases the problematic nature of the trial and the influence that third parties, particularly the media, may have had on the outcome in the case of Louisa Collins. The media provided a paucity of assistance to her cause, rather they sensationalised her supposed misdemeanours, as well as the events leading up to, throughout and following her botched and ill-fated end. *The Maitland Weekly Mercury* reported on the hangman Robert Rice Howard, otherwise known as ‘Nosey Bob’ (after a horse kicked his nose off), taunting Louisa Collins as she walked out for her execution:

*My pretty Louise
Step on the trapeze
And I'll let you down
With the greatest of ease.* (Anon, 1899, p. 14)



Figure 3. Illustration,
‘Murder in Secret’ *Famous Detective
Stories*. 1 (7): June 1947
Sydney: Frank Johnson
Mitchell Library,
State Library of New South Wales



Figure 4. Photograph,
*Portrait for Prison Record Card of
Louisa Collins*. July 1888
Sydney: Darlinghurst Gaol
State Records of New South Wales

The hanging was, in fact, botched. The article in *Famous Detective Stories* describing:

The actual hanging was bungled, for the machinery had not been properly checked beforehand, and a mallet was needed to hammer out the bolt, before the handle could be released. The ‘Herald’ had a bitter leader in its columns the next morning about inexcusable neglect. (V.F., 1947, p. 51)

Such sensationalism was further highlighted through the lens of the law. The recently appointed Chief Justice Darley (Chief Justice of New South Wales, 29 November 1886–4 January 1910) provided an unusually emotive and seemingly unbalanced judgement at the time.



Figure 5. Scott Family: Collection of Studio Portrait Photographs, circa 1865–1921
Portrait of Sir Frederick Matthew Darley, Chief Justice.
Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales

The *Moreton Bay Courier*, reporting from the court, provided that His Honor in addressing the prisoner, said:

Louisa Collins, after a most careful trial, after being defended with much skill and ability, you have been found guilty of the murder of your husband, Michael Peter Collins. No one who has heard this case throughout can have any doubt that this verdict which has been given is a true and honest verdict. In fact, no other verdict could be arrived at by a body of intelligent men such as those who have so carefully attended to this case throughout. The murder you have committed is one of peculiar atrocity [...].

I hold out no hope of mercy to you on earth. It would be wicked of me to do so; but I implore of you to seek forgiveness where it will assuredly be found [...]. Your days are surely numbered, and it now remains for me only to pass the last dread sentence of the law upon you. The sentence of the Court is that you be taken to the place from whence you came, and on a day hereafter to be named by the Governor in Council, that you be taken to the place of execution, and there be hanged by the neck until you are dead ; and may the Lord have mercy on your soul. (in Division of Law, Macquarie University, online)

Such a forceful judgement portrays His Honor as the antagonist for something far more deeply founded than the life or death of Louisa Collins alone.

Capital punishment was prevalent throughout the nineteenth century, with statistics revealing approximately eighty judicial executions a year (Potas and Walker, 1987, p. 1). The views of those in governance however, were slowly changing and social views on capital punishment began to develop and divide. Society began to unpack and question the underpinnings of what justice, parallel to legislation interpretation, really meant. Nearly six decades after Collins' death, the story, at least in pulp format, remained sensationalised. *Famous Detective Stories* portrays the case in a very different manner to the media of the time. At the time of Johnson's publication Justice Darley had been out of office for a mere seven years (Supreme Court of New South Wales, 2015, online), yet the balance, or imbalance of justice at the time of Louisa Collins is questioned in the context of the mid-1940s. *Famous Detective Stories* considers the lack of investigation into manslaughter, and the mental health of Louisa Collins when the alleged murders took place.

The *Famous Detective Stories* cover provides a very traditional pulp image of Collins, offering her to readers as an alluring, young, vixen-like character. The author of the article delivers the story anonymously under the pseudonym 'V.F'. The content of the article portrays Collins as a woman and mother, mistrialed. The contributor clearly suggesting Collins was punished because of her disobedience to pre-established norms of womanhood in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, providing quotes from contemporaneous coverage in *The Sydney Morning Herald*:

Women who commit such enormity as this unsex themselves as far as chivalric feeling or sentiment is concerned. [...] Why not a woman as well as a man reap the results of her own act? [...] I say such a woman is a disgrace to the very name of woman. (in V.F., 1947, p. 50)

The article concludes by detailing the unethical nature of the trials, the underlying political statements and the social values of the time. Specifically, the article reiterates whereby female inhabitants of Sydney had drawn up public petitions for the Governor, providing:

It is abhorrent to every feeling of humanity and a shock to the sentiments in this nineteenth century that, both here and in other English speaking communities that a woman should suffer death at the hands of a hangman, and at the hands of the opposite sex, so long as imprisonment can be substituted [...].

[...] that three, really four trials for the same offence, was contrary to the practice of the mother country; that the evidence was only circumstantial, that three juries of thirty-six intelligent men had been unable to reach the verdict; that innocent people had at time been executed; that recently mercy had been extended to two murderesses at West Maitland; and that no woman had been executed in New South Wales for twenty-eight years. (V.F., 1947, p. 51)

It must be remembered that as a publication, *Famous Detective Stories* re-enacts past crimes, and in doing so continuously provokes enquiry in the current context, whilst questioning themes of authority, morality and justice time and time again.

Debating Capital Punishment

Questioning and debating capital punishment is a core theme throughout Johnson's *Famous Detective Stories* series. Each issue takes traditional true crime storytelling one step further, by drawing directly upon existing media reports, whilst applying contemporary commentary.

Johnson's publication allowed the audience to engage with alternative perspectives, opinions and themes including capital punishment or provocation, as right and wrong. The contributors, in writing anonymously, were able to provide uncensored personal opinion and interpretations of what took place. A murder reported upon in *The Sydney Morning Herald* in the 1880s may be retold in *Famous Detective Stories* with more detail, and potentially by an author that was close to the crime (such as a detective). Additional information allowing readers to re-contemplate cases with which they may already be familiar, positioning pulp content as a means to facilitate engaging and thoughtful consideration of a criminal case.

Early Australian capital punishment statistics suggest it may have been easier to believe the accused guilty if the accused was punished by hanging. As the nineteenth century progressed so too did the dialogue between the law, capital punishment and social ideas of justice. The legislative frameworks began to reconsider capital punishment and acknowledged this process had been "administered capriciously, and that there is always a possibility that an innocent person may be executed" (Potas and Walker, 1987, p. 5). Towards the later end of the twenty-first century it was found the "evidence to date has failed to establish that the death penalty is any more effective than imprisonment in deterring crime" (Potas and Walker, 1987, p. 4).

Unlike other publications of the time, Johnson's series did not fail to overlook or censor the exercise of the death penalty in respect to female offenders. Instead *Famous Detective Stories* included a series of contributions on this controversial practice within several of its issues. As previously discussed, Johnson's publications frame these women as having criminal 'careers', yet these articles also provide overviews of ideas surrounding the treatment of female criminals by society, notions of mercy and the treatment of female offenders by authorities.

As in Johnson's publications, the capital punishment debate continues in practice today. The debate around Collins remains evident through recent publications detailing her life and her death. Caroline Overington's work *Last Woman Hanged: The Terrible, True Story of Louisa Collins* (2014) debates rights and frames Collins as a woman mistreated for the purpose of social discourse. Overington argues that Collins was tried in 1888, "a time when women in New South Wales were were arguing for more human rights, particularly the right to vote and the right to sit on juries, and so it became a confluence of events" (Booktopia, 2014, online). Drawing largely on the same information used within Overington's work, more recently albeit more remarkably, Carol Baxter's text *Black Widow: The True Story of Australia's First Serial Killer* (2015) portrays Collins as a woman of tainted character, serving judicial process, which eventuated in her execution. These volumes demonstrate, as did Johnson's periodical over half a century before them, themes of justice and how the debate surrounding capital punishment continues to divide and to entertain.

Language of the Law

Many articles from Johnson's *Famous Detective Stories* serve to offer commentaries on old criminal cases while simultaneously providing insights into the language, of the day, surrounding crime. An analysis of various language patterns, in relation to descriptions of crime, increases our understanding of Australia's social attitudes during the 1940s and the 1950s. To off historical and social contexts, to a discussion of language, the table below sets out some of the significant points on the Australian historical timeline reflected within *Famous Detective Stories* and the Frank C. Johnson Archive.

Year	Event	Legislation
1888	Louisa Collins convicted of one count of murder. Chief Justice Darley sentences Louisa Collins to death by hanging in accordance with English law.	Australian criminal law was originally received from the English common law which then evolved in Australian courts.
1889	Louisa Collins executed, becoming the last woman hanged in New South Wales.	
1900	New South Wales Crimes Act 1900 is passed.	Crimes Act 1900 (NSW)
1901	The Commonwealth Constitution comes into force on 1 January. Criminal law matters were generally left to the States except for matters coming under Commonwealth jurisdiction.	Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act 1900
1914	The Commonwealth Crimes Act is passed, containing the most serious offences against the Commonwealth (such as treason) which carried the death penalty. This Act has been gradually superseded by the Criminal Code Act 1995.	
1926	Amendments to the Crimes Act 1914 bans unlawful revolutionary associations.	
1939	Restrictions on imported published materials into Australia enforced.	
1941	Frank C. Johnson, who had made several efforts at publishing, turns to the production of pulp.	
1946	Frank C. Johnson publishes the first issue of <i>Famous Detective Stories</i> .	
1954	Frank C. Johnson, struggling, publishes the last issue of <i>Famous Detective Stories</i> .	
1956	The introduction of television in Australia.	
1959	Restrictions on imported published materials into Australia lifted.	

1960	Major amendments are made to the Crimes Act 1914 focusing on matters such as defacing coinage, sentencing, conspiracy, espionage, official secrets and treason.	Crimes Act 1960
1973	The death penalty abolished for Commonwealth offences. States and Territories had already abolished capital punishment between 1922 and 1985.	Death Penalty Abolition Act 1973. See also Crimes Legislation Amendment (Torture Prohibition and Death Penalty Abolition) Act 2010
1995	The Criminal Code Act 1995 supersedes the Crimes Act 1914.	Criminal Code Act 1995
2003	Australia implements the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.	Criminal Code Amendment (Terrorism) Act 2003. See also International Criminal Court Act 2002
2010	The Commonwealth legislates to prohibit States from reintroducing the death penalty, and to implement the United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment 1984	Crimes Legislation Amendment (Torture Prohibition and Death Penalty Abolition) Act 2010

Table 2. Chronology of Key Events (adapted from Parliament of Australia, online)

During the 1940s and 1950s (and, it could be argued, today) crimes were sensationalised within the media. The media, primarily by way of newspaper articles, provided headlines and reports containing language that implied scandal, drama and darkness. Judicial decisions of the crimes were also interpreted and presented in a heavily biased, and often skewed manner, potentially in a bid to sell more copies. As such, this added to the great gap between perceptions and measurable reality for the society of the time.

During the nineteenth and twentieth century criminal legislation regarding capital punishment was enacted in most of the Australian States and Territories. The national Crimes Act 1914 (Cth) was, and remains, a central pillar of the Australian legal system. It is this legislation that provides the parameters for some of the most significant judicial interpretation, social relationships and, in turn, human rights between the State and the individual. Capital punishment was abolished for States and Territories between 1922 and 1985. The later Federal legislative measures of the Death Penalty Abolition Act 1973 (Cth) and Crimes Legislation Amendment (Torture Prohibition and Death Penalty Abolition) Act 2010 (Cth) ensured capital punishment within Australia was finally redressed, substituted for life imprisonment (Section 5).

The changing language of the law has provided for many of Australia's most remarkable legislative decisions, challenges and reforms. The interpretation of the changes to this legislation, circa 1850–1930, particularly in relation to crimes and capital punishment, is a complex process. State and Territory records provide that much information was omitted or was classified content and therefore not available to the public. Such restricted access to key details evidently left authors of pulp with two options: to follow interpretation by way of existing media, or to facilitate a literary

imagination.

The language of the law, through the eyes of the media, often reflected the language and the opinions provided by the authorities of the time. From a publishing perspective, this method of storytelling sketched out a level of secretiveness, an illusion of intimacy and sensationalised the crime, whilst reinforcing the line between true crime and crime fiction. Though the line between fact and fiction is often blurred. Moreover, hanging was fodder for the media. Views on justice and punishment were superimposed upon every aspect of a case, trial and the aftermath of both. An example of this can be seen in the reporting of the demeanour of Louisa Collins with one newspaper noting: "The woman was sentenced to death, the judge holding out no hope of a reprieve. After the sentence Collins walked with great firmness from the dock and did not seem to be very much affected" (Anon, 1889a, p. 8). This text implying a woman who was calm and, perhaps, cold; one who was committed to her crimes and resigned to the noose that awaited her. Another newspaper presented Collins as calm but presented her as stoic, quoting her chaplain, Canon Rich:

[W]ho had attended the prisoner daily since her condemnation, states that she fully recognised her awful position and always expressed her preparedness for a resignation to her fate. When asked if she had made any confession, the chaplain replied, 'She has confessed her sins to Almighty God, and has supplicated for forgiveness. Throughout the last few days she has shown great courage, which did not desert her in her last hour. (Anon, 1889b, p. 86)

These commentaries contributed to the normalcy of judicial execution in Australia. Of particular note is that language, around this and other cases where verdicts incorporated death by hanging, continues to posit such punishment as controversial. Ultimately, for Louisa Collins, the language within the debates that surrounded her later life and her death made little difference. The abhorrent abnormality of the female killer was victim to a male dominated press gallery and a legal system that was also a world of male privilege. Even the jury of her peers were all men; women, in New South Wales, were not considered for jury duty until the Jury (Amendment) Act 1947 (Johns, 2005, p. 5).

The language of the law in *Famous Detective Stories* was largely underpinned by the use and reinterpretation of newspaper clippings. Johnson's contributors explored many of the crimes in a reflective manner, though often greater detail was provided about the crime, and the outcomes rather than prospects for the villains and victims. The interpretation and inclusion of otherwise existing omissions, particularly through positioning the reader at arm's length from the crimes (through the inclusion of quasi-autobiographical encounters of Detective Burvett, as retold by C.K. Thompson), strengthened the 'facts', the inclusive connection to the case and a perception, held by the reader, of gaining access to insider knowledge.

The practice of varying, or adding, details from original judicial findings also provided for new interpretations of cases. As Louisa Collins was presumed guilty, so too, was Colin Campbell Ross. Such is the notoriety of what is known as the Gun Alley murder, this crime was selected to appear as the first article in the first issue of the first volume of *Famous Detective Stories*. The case surrounded the rape and murder of twelve-year-old schoolgirl Alma Tirtschke in Melbourne in 1921. The young girl had last been seen alive close to a drinking establishment, in a laneway

known as Gun Alley, the Australian Wine Saloon (Mycroft, 1946, pp. 4-9). More recently the case has become well known as a miscarriage of justice with a review of forensic evidence revealing that the wrong man was hanged for murder (Morgan, 2012). Colin Campbell Ross has since become the first person to be pardoned, in Australia, after his judicial execution (Morgan, 2012, p. 398).

It is important to note that the levels of accuracy, which were claimed by authors, were subject to forfeiture. In many instances, given the level of availability and content restrictions surrounding criminal cases at the time, a literary licence must have been taken to supplement material for at least some of the stories told. Contributors to Johnson's *Famous Detective Stories* used varying styles of language to offer ambiguity to the original newspaper clippings, enhancing and reframing the perspectives on, and outcomes of, the crime. Contributors were paid by the word not for the overall work, and so colourful expressions would aid authors in paying the bills. The use of pseudonyms provided the opportunity for the male author, who so often pervaded pulp fiction, to remain anonymous and female contributors to be disguised from the public eye.

Certain words and tones also allowed language to aid contributors in framing specific ideas of justice, whilst challenging the dominant perspectives of the time. The recurring use of terms such as 'alleged' directly reflected the legalese of judgments and media reports. So too, did the language used in relation to female 'murderesses', who rather than using knives or committing brutal murders as men would do, were conveyed as underhanded, sly and mischievous villains who killed their unsuspecting victims through the guise of passion. Through the incorporation of such language, contributors were able to conjure a case, whilst reaffirming to the reader the seemingly factual nature of the somewhat fictional article. The term 'career' applied to female killers provides a simple yet powerful illustration of this unresolved problem posed throughout the series. The articles repeatedly portray and dramatise the contradictory positioning of female villains as career killers, and male villains as murderers. Tracing this twin development throughout the series is a simple task, as evident in the aforementioned cases of 'Murder in Secret' and the 'Gun Alley Murder'. The language used in the two articles contextualises the popular representations of female and male criminals of the time.

Conclusion

In 1939, after many decades of debate around the value of different types of reading, Australia imposed import restrictions – the main target of these restrictions being 'pulp' fiction – that lasted twenty years. A number of local publishing houses would emerge to fill the void and satiate the demand of Australian readers for pulps. One of these publishers was Frank C. Johnson. Johnson's success ran parallel to efforts to ban the importation of cheap storytelling: when restrictions were lifted in 1959, Johnson could not compete and his enterprise eventually collapsed. The State Library of New South Wales acquired Johnson's Archive in 1965. The materials within this extraordinary archive include correspondence, original artworks and examples of various pulp materials such as crime fiction, true crime, comics and westerns. This paper has argued one of the more significant elements within this collection is the true crime series: *Famous Detective Stories*. This monthly publication, 1946 to 1954 featured the re-packaging of a wide range of Australian true crime cases – from train

robberies to gruesome murders – from newspaper clippings libraries. Interestingly, the writers for this true crime magazine would superimpose contemporary views upon the stories being re-told.

This paper has offered a brief review of the themes of justice within this publication with particular attention paid to the punishment of wrongdoers. This review has focused on gendered narratives of crime and popular debates around punishment, revealing some of the darker stories about Australian crime, Australian readers of true crime and, by extension, we argue, Australian society. In this way this paper has unpacked some of the ideas of justice and punishment, particularly capital punishment, as presented in a pulp publication of the mid-twentieth century.

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