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# Popular representations of crime: the crime broadside – a subculture of violence in Victorian Britain?<sup>1</sup>

Philippe Chassaing<sup>2</sup>

*The aim of this article is to put popular crime literature in general, and crime broadsides in particular, into a new perspective. This genre, which had its heydays during the first three quarters of the 19<sup>th</sup> century before fading into oblivion because of the rise of the mass newspapers, interestingly reflects what contemporaries thought and felt about violence. The fifty-five broadsides under study seem indeed to present repeatedly the same affair – which to some extent they were, since they tended increasingly to privilege a particular type of crime, the crime passionnel, and to adopt a standardized narrative style –, yet they offered their readers more facts than fiction. Not a pure exercise of imagination, they were not mere propaganda or social control agent. More importantly, crime broadsides performed most of the functions of a mass media: they entertained and informed their readers, they conveyed a subculture where violence played a prominent part. Ultimately, they brought people closer together by getting them to share common sensations or participate to opinion-making processes, far beyond their «basic» moralizing and edifying purpose.*

*Les crime broadsides – sorte de «canards», relatant des crimes ou des exécutions célèbres, et qui ont connu en tant que genre littéraire leur apogée au cours des trois premiers quarts du XIX<sup>ème</sup> siècle – constituent une source jusqu'ici négligée pour approcher les mentalités et les représentations des Victoriens face à la violence interpersonnelle. Cette étude, qui porte sur un échantillon d'une cinquantaine de broadsides, vise à démontrer comment, au delà d'un style de plus en plus standardisé, ces textes n'étaient pas de simples œuvres d'imagination, encore moins de simples agents d'un quelconque «contrôle social». Ils faisaient en revanche office de véritable mass media, ayant continué jusqu'à la fin des années 1870 de rivaliser avec la presse «à un sou» et remplissant une véritable fonction sociale – ce qui explique*

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*d'ailleurs leur succès auprès d'un lectorat peut-être d'ailleurs pas exclusivement issu des milieux populaires. Informatifs et distrayants, ils étaient le vecteur d'une culture populaire où la violence tenait une part importante.*

Popular literature dealing with crime has been relatively less studied for itself than as an agent of «social control» (broadly speaking) and a means of keeping the working classes in their subordinate position in society. It is only recently that academic attention has focused on what this kind of literature actually had to say<sup>3</sup>, and considered it as history. This is going to be our point of view, and more especially that of a historian of mentalities interested in the representations of violence and their evolution throughout the nineteenth century. Yet it is well-established fact that, interesting as it is, such a source cannot be studied without bearing in mind some important caveats. The corpus under study consists of three sets of crime broadsides, amounting to a total of fifty-five: eleven are from Glasgow and were published between 1796 and 1822; seventeen from Birmingham, published 1813-1877; the last twenty seven, taken from the Crampon Collection, were printed in London in the 1860s-1870s<sup>4</sup>. On a literary level, this material belongs to the broader *genre* of criminal biographies that originated in the late years of the sixteenth century and developed throughout the early modern period, and has its place alongside such other kinds of narratives as the *Accounts of the Ordinary of Newgate* or the *Newgate Calendar*<sup>5</sup>. This *genre* reached its apogee during the first half of the nineteenth century before giving way to the popular press whose success story after 1855 and the abolition of the stamp duty on newspapers is well-known. Yet crime broadsides were still being printed and sold well into the 1870s and did not become extinct before the last decades of the century. Stylistically, these crime broadsides were written within fixed constraints: whatever its date of origin, a typical broadside will at least feature a descriptive title, a narrative in prose and a ballad in verse (their respective importance will be dealt with later). It would very likely be decorated with a woodcut depicting a crime or an execution – the mere relevance of the vignette to the actual story being of rather secondary importance, to say the least (these woodcuts came from a stock that had altered very little over time, so that seventeenth-century-clad soldiers could sometimes illustrate nineteenth-century execution scenes). The questions of the identity of their authors, or the readership they intended to reach, are, and very probably will remain, unknown: virtually all the texts are written anonymously, and we have, because of their very ephemeral nature, no definitive indication of who purchased them. Printed in answer to the interest of the public for

<sup>3</sup> See in contrast Shepard (1962), Vicinus (1974) and Neuburg (1977); Perrot (1983), Anderson (1991), Gatrell (1994) and Kalifa (1995).

<sup>4</sup> Broadside collection, Mitchell Library, Glasgow. *Collection of Miscellaneous Broadside, Chiefly Relating To Birmingham*, Birmingham Central Library. *A Collection of Ballads Printed In London, Formed By Thomas Crampton*, British Library, London.

<sup>5</sup> The former were biographies of criminals awaiting capital execution in the London prison of Newgate (on the roof of which the hangings took place); presented as «confessions» or «complaints», they were published in a more or less romanticized or sensationalized fashion by the chaplain, or «Ordinary», on the day after the execution. The latter narrated the most famous trials held at the London Central Criminal Court (they were also known as *The Malefactors' Register*); published from 1774 onwards – and regularly brought up-to-date until the beginning of the twentieth century –, it soon superseded the *Accounts* in fame and fortune. See Faller (1987) and Rawlings (1992).

a particular event, they were sold in mass and then very likely disposed of as rapidly as the interest of the public faded away. Yet a consensus seems to emerge among the various scholars who addressed these themes<sup>6</sup>: the writers were probably of a similar social background as the printers who hired them – i. e., people with the minimum amount of literacy required to master the rhetorical rules commanding such a production<sup>7</sup>, and who, by belonging to the lower middle stratum of society, were pitched at just the right level between «high» and «low» culture to be able to write for rather differentiated audiences. Indeed, it now seems highly probable that they aimed at a broader audience than just the «popular» (labouring) classes, as can be derived from the variety of styles and semantic fields used in their writings. This will of course be of some importance since we aim at studying the representations of criminal violence found in these nineteenth-century broadsides – representations that were biased by the authors' preconceptions of violence and of what the public's expectations were. These intentionalities can only be guessed from the study of the content of the broadsides and will be dealt with later, but it seems fair to assume that the traditional approach, emphasising their *clichéed* and crudely moralizing nature<sup>8</sup>, disregards somewhat too rapidly the content of these narratives. If, after all, they found a reading – and buying – public well into the second half of the century, it is a sign that they answered their readers' expectations and it is a little too simplistic to present them as passively manipulated or culturally alienated. Thus, although a literary *genre*, crime broadsides are history indeed as they offer a valuable insight into the people's perceptions of, and reactions to, crime and justice. We will successively study how crime broadsides became more and more exclusively concerned with murders, reflecting both changes in the penal code and continuity in the public's expectations; how this literature was actually elaborated and criminal affairs presented to the reading public; and, lastly, what laid beyond the broadsides' obvious moralizing purpose.

## I. – FROM THE EXECUTION LITERATURE TO THE MURDER SHEET

To an English mind, «crime» is more often than not synonymous with «murder». Yet early nineteenth-century crime broadsides did not deal exclusively with murders. One sheet from the Glasgow collection plainly refers to the «various crimes» perpetrated by «unfortunate men... who are to be executed»<sup>9</sup>, and among the seventeen from Birmingham, five deal with other offences than murders: two cases of forgery<sup>10</sup>, one burglary<sup>11</sup>, one highway robbery<sup>12</sup>, and one 'political

<sup>6</sup> See mainly Faller (1987), Rawlings (1992, p. 3-7), Gatrell (1994, p. 156-160, 168-175).

<sup>7</sup> E. g. Jemmy Catnach, who was the most successful London-based broadside printer of the first half of the nineteenth-century, used to write parts of his production himself if the case was needed (Gatrell, 1994, p. 160).

<sup>8</sup> Especially when compared to the more openly disrespectful «flash ballads» of the eighteenth century: see, notably, Gatrell (1994, 109 sqq.).

<sup>9</sup> *Address, Or Warning To The Young, By The Unfortunate Men, Now Under Sentence Of Death, Who Are To Be Executed On Wednesday The 3d Of November Next, For Various Crimes, Published As A Warning To The Rising Generation, To Beware Of The First Beginnings Of Evil* ("printed for the Book Cryers", not dated).

<sup>10</sup> *A Copy Of Verses On Those Three Unfortunate Men, J. Bingley, 31, William Dutton, 36, & William Batkin, 40, Who Were Executed At Warwick, On Friday, May 25, 1821, For Forgery* (Wright,

crime<sup>13</sup>. Of course these prints date from the early decades of the century, at the time of the Bloody Code, when such offences came under capital statute. The common point appears to be the outcome of all these crimes: a public execution, lavishly emphasized in both words and pictures. The very word «execution» is featured in eleven titles and the hanging narrated in great detail, from the behaviour of the criminals to their last words, or considerations about the concourse of people who witnessed the scene. In eight broadsides, a vignette depicts the hanging<sup>14</sup>, or rather a hanging since, as we mentioned earlier, they came from stock and some are used repeatedly with little or no alteration – which is here of little relevance to our point.

The more recent broadsides from the Crampton Collection present a somewhat different picture. First, they deal exclusively with murders, which is of course due to the reforms that took place in the penal system in the preceding decades, restricting in practice capital punishment to this crime. Second, they no longer refer to the execution, but solely to the crime itself: executions stopped being performed in public after 1868, and with the thrill of the scaffold fading away in the public's mind, so did the prospects for the execution literature. Third, the crime is no longer narrated in a straightforward way, but reconstituted with quotations from the evidence witnesses gave during the coroner's inquest<sup>15</sup>. The attention was apparently shifting from the crime *per se* to the inquest, and the coroner who was never mentioned in early nineteenth-century broadsides becomes a recurrent character in later productions. We

printer); *Life, Trial & Execution Of Mr. Fauntleroy. Who Suffered On Tuesday, November 30, 1824, At The Old Bailey, London, For Forgery* (Heppel, printer).

- <sup>11</sup> *Lives, Trial, And Execution Of Joseph Higgs, Aged 23, Edward Taylor, 19, And Edward Hines, 28, Who Suffered At Warwick, August 11, 1826, For Burglary* (Heppel, printer).
- <sup>12</sup> *A True Account Of The Life, Trial, And (sic) Execution, With His Dying Confession Of Huffam White & Robert Kendall, Who Were Executed At Northampton, On Friday, August 1th, 1813, For Robbing The Leeds Mail Coach* (Wood, printer).
- <sup>13</sup> *The Life And Political Execution Of Richard Magpie, Who Was Executed At The New Drop, Opposite The Church Yard, In Temple Row, Last Night, With His Full Confession To The Mob Underneath* (Vale, printer, not dated).
- <sup>14</sup> Nine in fact, since the broadside *Affecting Copy of Verses On the Diabolical Murder Committed By Richard Andrews Who Burnt His Child ALIVE! In Vale-street, Birmigham* (H. Barber, printer, not dated) features a woodcut of a jail, complete with its grid and crenellated towers, as a grim allusion to the place where the execution was bound to take place.
- <sup>15</sup> See, for instance, the difference in the narrative structures of these two broadsides: «The execution of the unfortunate boy, who expiated his enormous guilt on the scaffold before he had completed his fourteenth year, took place in front of our county gaol this monday, having been found guilty of the murder of a youth named Taylor, in a wood near Rochester, in March last. Taylor, the father of the deceased, being very ill, received 9 s. per week from the parish of Aylesford, which his lad (*sic*) used to fetch every week; this being known to Bell, he and his two sons way-laid him on his return home and murdered him. Old Bell was sentenced to be banished life, the other admitted evidence, and John to be executed» *The Life, Trial and Awful Execution of John Any Bird Bell, Only Thirteen Years of Age* (Birmingham, R. Heppel, printer, 1831). And: «On Tuesday last, Mr. Humphreys, coroner, held an inquest at the Ranelagh Arms, Wood Green, relative to the death of Mr. William D. Boyd, aged 35, and Maria Death aged 26. Thomas Hinson, a carpenter, deposed – My son, Frederick Hinson, lived with the young woman, Maria Death, for seven years' past. He had two or three children by her, one of whom is now living. He was married, but his wife left him eight years ago. (...) Isabella Heppel housekeeper to Boyd, deposed to the prisoner, Hinson, throwing her master backwards out of the stable, then put his foot on his chest, and then struck his head four times in succession with a gun barrel. My master was killed instantly». *Frightful Murder Of A Woman And Her Paramour* (London, Disley, printer, not dated, but the case was tried in 1869; Public Record Office – hereafter PRO – Criminal records, Crim. 10/59).

can think of various explanations. First, quoting evidence more or less *verbatim* was a means of giving the reading public the reliable and first-hand information it wanted. It was also a safe rhetorical device to take the reader into the action: this is unmistakably *effet de réel* in its most classic form, but the reader was not addressed as a direct witness to the crime. Rather, he was a member of the audience who listened to the witnesses giving evidence. Consequently, and in a period of increasing sensitivity to violence, gory details were not to be watered down – they were part and parcel of the fun –, but they were ‘mediated’ by their inclusion in someone else’s discourse. It also emphasizes the important part which the coroner’s inquest played in the judicial procedure: the evidence collected was presented to a Grand Jury, who would subsequently return a verdict on whether or not proceed with an indictment. It is a well-known fact that a substantial minority of homicide cases – about 30 per cent – never ended up in court, since a lot of the suspects arrested by the police were eventually discharged<sup>16</sup>. It can be interpreted as the sign of a growing acculturation to the judicial system (see *infra*)<sup>17</sup>.

Finally, and from a completely different point of view, it can be seen for broadside printers as a means of retaliation against their staunchest competitors: the penny press. The 1870s saw the decline of the broadside, technically unable to be as visually attractive as the cheap illustrated newspapers that flourished after the repeal of the stamp duty in 1855<sup>18</sup>. Yet decline did not mean downright extinction, and printers could try to survive by adapting their production to a changing market. While in our sample the Glasgow and Birmingham broadsides feature more prose than verses, those of the Crampton Collection are exactly the opposite: prose is restricted to the bare essentials of the case, given in a form not dissimilar to reports from a press agency covering the coroner’s inquest<sup>19</sup>, while complaints, confessions, etc., in verse get the largest printed surface. Confronted with a multitude of papers and magazines, it was useless for broadsides printers to try to be competitive as far as news coverage was concerned – hence, they concerned themselves with the hows and whens, presented as if gleaned from the most direct source possible. Conversely, verses were given a full treatment as a way to attract the public, when they were not

<sup>16</sup> See detailed figures in Gatrell (1980).

<sup>17</sup> And occasionally to its tensions: in the broadside *Barbarous Murder Of A Child By A Schoolmistress* (Disley, printer, not dated), most of the prose text relates the coroner’s inquest, when the coroner and the jury disagreed over the verdict: «At the coroner’s inquest it was given evidence that the child had been beaten on the head with a heavy flint stones (*sic*) and its tongue cut completely out at the root. It was found wrapped up in another part of the drawer where the body was discovered. The inquiry lasted four hours and a-half, and resulted, in the first instance, in a verdict, ‘That the child was born alive and murdered by some one’. The Coroner pointed out that the evidence was conclusive against Emma Pitt, the national schoolmistress, who was the mother of the child, and he expressed his surprise that such a verdict should have been returned. The jury after reconsidering their previous finding, returned a verdict of ‘Wilful murder against Emma Pitt’».

<sup>18</sup> For the importance of the printed image in the success of this kind of publication, see Anderson (1991, chap. 4-6).

<sup>19</sup> «John Andrews, blocker, of New Town street, was charged with killing and slaying (*sic*) Hannah Andrews, his wife, at Luton, on the 10th of February». (*Shocking Murder Of A Wife, At Luton*, Disley, printer, not dated); «A most atrocious murder was committed on Monday night at Todmorden by a weaver of checks, named Miles Wheatherhill» (*Conviction & Lamentation Miles Weatherhill For The Murder At Todmorden*, idem); «On Monday morning last, a terrible tragedy took place in Hosier-lane, City, in which a man named Duggin, his wife, and six children were found poisoned» (*Shocking Murder Of A Wife And Six Children*, idem), etc.

the very *raison d'être* of sheets devoid of any text in prose; they did not provide facts but alluded to them and supplied plenty of commentaries and «moralizing» sentences (see *infra*) in the good old-fashioned way the public relished. This was really what differentiated broadsides from their competitors and could give them the advantage. Similarly, the iconography was virtually absent, and when there was any, it did not seek to be a masterpiece. These crude vignettes taken from stock looked outdated in the 1870s and lacked the artistic qualities sometimes displayed in more ancient artwork. But, as Vic Gatrell has convincingly argued, they acted first and foremost as a totemic image, «however rough, which might stand for the sensations which the executions released»<sup>20</sup>, instead of offering a realistic, almost photographic, account of reality. Here again, we see a clear case of maximising one's comparative advantage: broadside woodcuts were unable to compete on a technical and artistic level with the engravings printed in the newspapers, but they were unbeatable at hitting a nerve in the public's collective imagery.

## II. BROADSIDES AND CRIMES: WHO? WHEN? HOW? WHAT FOR?

Crime broadsides aimed first and foremost at narrating crimes. But which crimes were selected and how were they presented to the reading public? Saying that broadsides were a «tissue of fact and fiction»<sup>21</sup> has become commonplace, but we can wonder whether it has not been taken too readily for granted. Just like today most of the gutter press scandals eventually prove to be true, crime broadsides might have been closer to the truth than first expected. This can be studied both at a general level – did the picture of criminality they offered coincide with what actually took place? – and, at a more detailed level by comparing a broadside with the relevant criminal case.

Taken as a whole, crime broadsides dealt with murders. Homicides amount to 85 per cent of the fifty-five broadsides under study, which was of course totally unrepresentative of nineteenth-century criminal trends, when homicides were only a tiny fraction of criminality<sup>22</sup>. Nevertheless, homicide coincided with the deepest fears of the Victorians<sup>23</sup> and it sold to the reading public. While infanticides – i.e. homicides of infants aged 1 year or under – amounted to an average of 40 per cent of murders recorded by the police, they are under-represented in our selection of broadsides with only six occurrences (11 per cent); instead of hitting a nerve with something that was increasingly perceived as a social evil, broadside printers apparently preferred to play it safe and present the public with more «classic» stories.

Where did they take place? Broadside are known to be topical, but their topic did not necessarily bear a local character. This was the case of four of the eleven Glaswegian broadsides<sup>24</sup>. The Birmingham ones were of a more local character

<sup>20</sup> Gatrell (1994, p. 177).

<sup>21</sup> Neuburg (1973, p. 199).

<sup>22</sup> The homicide rate for England and Wales hovered between 1 and 1.5 per 100,000 for most of the 19th century; see Gatrell (1980), and Emsley (1996).

<sup>23</sup> Sindall (1993).

<sup>24</sup> Location of crimes referred to in Glasgow broadsides: Scotland (4), London (4), rest of England (2), abroad (1).

(twelve out of seventeen)<sup>25</sup>, as were those taken from the Crampton Collection – though to a slightly lesser degree<sup>26</sup>. In fact, London and the surrounding area stand out as the hotbed of crime, where twenty five out of fifty five affairs (45 per cent) took place. It is true that most of the sensational affairs deserving nationwide coverage happened to be London-based: the Glasgow collection includes a broadside on the famous 1811 Ratcliffe Highway murders<sup>27</sup>, and on the execution of John Bellingham for the murder of Prime Minister Spencer Perceval (1812)<sup>28</sup>. It is the same for the Birmingham collection: though focusing almost exclusively on local crimes – something perfectly understandable on a commercial point of view since locals are likely to be more interested by a local case –, we find an account of the execution of famous forger Henry Fauntleroy, who was hanged in 1824 for having embezzled some £ 170,000 to support his ailing banking business<sup>29</sup>. The case raised considerable attention at the time: a nationwide campaign of appeals for his mercy was organized and Fauntleroy became « the most celebrated metropolitan criminal of the 1820s »<sup>30</sup>. We also find accounts of less famous executions, such as these of Esther Hibner for murder in London in 1829<sup>31</sup> and John Bell, for wilful murder, in Maidstone (Kent) in 1831<sup>32</sup>.

The crimes presented are to a large extent domestic ones, that is to say that criminal and victim were closely related. These tales of ordinary violence are rather repetitive. The typical affair is that of a murder perpetrated by a man (lover/fiancé/husband) upon a woman (fiancée/wife/acquaintance) out of jealousy or personal resentment of any kind. Indeed, when identified<sup>33</sup>, the criminal was a man in 80 per cent of the cases, while women amount to 40 per cent of victims.

<sup>25</sup> Location of crimes referred to in Birmingham broadsides: Birmingham and rest of Warwickshire (12), Northamptonshire (1), London and SE England (3), abroad (1).

<sup>26</sup> Location of crimes referred to in London broadsides: London (9), London area (9), Midlands (3), Northern England (4), Western England (2).

<sup>27</sup> It refers actually to the first murders, of the four members of the Marr household, on the night of the 7-8 December 1811; a second family, the Williamsons, was murdered on the night of the 19 December. *An Account Of The Dreadful Murder of Mr. Timothy Marr, His Wife, An Infant About Three Months Old, And An Apprentice Boy, About Fourteen Years Of Age, On Sunday Morning Last, The 8th Of December, 1811, In Their Dwelling-House, Ratcliffe High-Way, London* (Edinburgh, Thomas Duncan, printer).

<sup>28</sup> Trader John Bellingham had shot Spencer Perceval in the House of Commons. *An Account Of The Execution, Dying Declaration, And Particular Behaviour Of John Bellingham, Who Was Hanged, At London, On Monday The 18th Of May 1812, Pursuant To His Sentence, For The Horrid And Inhuman Murder Of The Honourable Mr. Perceval* (Thomas Duncan, printer). Bellingham's fame is highlighted in Gatrell (1994, notably p. 103).

<sup>29</sup> *Life, Trial And Execution of Mr. Fountleroy (op. cit.)*.

<sup>30</sup> Gatrell (1994, p. 387).

<sup>31</sup> Esther Hibner was tried for having ill-treated to death her 10-year-old female apprentice. *Trial And Execution of Esther Hebner (sic), Hanged at Newgate, On Monday, April 13th, 1829, For The Murder Of her Female Apprentice* (Heppel, printer).

<sup>32</sup> *The Life, Trial, And Execution of John Any Bird Bell (op. cit.)*.

<sup>33</sup> The culprit is identified with certainty in all the broadsides but two; in one case, the narrative alludes to suspects being « apprehended on the charge » (*Horrid Outrage And Murder Of A Female, At Cleveland*).



Table 1: Distribution of victims (there are sometimes more than one victim)

	Glasgow	Birmingham	London	Total
Male	6	3	13	22 (27,5%)
Female	5	7	19	31 (38,8%)
Child	5	5	17	27 (33,7%)
Total	16 (20%)	15 (18,8%)	49 (61,2%)	80 (100%)

In the second half of the nineteenth-century, anything approaching a *crime passionnel* became the staple diet of broadsides readers. This was, again, the result of a specialization process: the earlier broadsides (the Glasgow ones) do not always clearly state the motivations of the criminals, most notably one of them does not even say explicitly what were the «various crimes» the «unfortunate Men, now under a Sentence of Death» (their very number remains unspecified as well) are bound to expiate<sup>34</sup>. It was clearly more important to describe what had been done than to explain it. Conversely, later production, such as the Birmingham broadsides and that of the Crampton Collection, make some attempt at explaining the motivations of the murderer.

Yet every sheet did not deal with a *crime passionnel*. Everyday experience of violence was more diverse, and this was in turn reflected in this literature (see Table 2). Cases of cruelty to children were a common occurrence, and the narrative of the *Trial And Execution of Esther Hebner (sic)*<sup>35</sup>, complete with details of how the Hibners, a family of lace-makers, ill-treated their 10-year-old apprentice<sup>36</sup> certainly rang a bell with the reading public of an industrial city like Birmingham. Some 40 years later (1870), the infamous Margaret Waters – the Brixton baby farmer – case was the occasion for the broadside *Baby Farming. Mothers Beware* to be published<sup>37</sup>. Arguments or pub fights that ended tragically were an everyday experience too in the Victorian city<sup>38</sup>, yet they are virtually absent from the murder street literature, probably because of their lack of sensationalism. Equally rare are reports of money-motivated murders<sup>39</sup>.

<sup>34</sup> *Address, Or Warning To The Young (op. cit.)*.

<sup>35</sup> *Op. cit.*

<sup>36</sup> «The younger Hibner had taken the deceased from the frame, and knocked her down again; when the elder prisoner was told that the deceased was lying in the room ill, she replied 'let her lie there'. The deceased, when in that state that she could scarcely crawl about the house, was told by the younger Hibner to clean the stairs; she attempted to do it, but fell exhausted; the younger Hibner, then took her upstairs and flogged her, and afterwards sent her down to finish the stairs (...) The medical gentlemen proved that the feet and toes of the deceased were mortifying and falling from the ill treatment she had experienced, and for want of proper nourishment».

<sup>37</sup> See Appendix 4.

<sup>38</sup> In England and Wales as a whole, they amounted in 1860 to 11 per cent of murders (Emsley, 1996), and, in London, to 27 per cent of homicides put to trial in 1860-1900 (Chassaigne, 1993).

<sup>39</sup> One interesting exception – but the one that proves the rule – is a curious tract from the Crampton collection entitled *Wholesale Poisoning Case In The County Of Durham. Alleged Murder of Twenty Persons*. The murderer, a Mary Cotton, is accused of having done it for the money: «In the different places she lived the deaths have been numerous with those about her [it happens that there were in fact seven victims, not 20], and small sums in most cases were obtained from burial societies». If the murders are «alleged», the case is perfectly plausible: such practices were rather common, especially when the life of infants was insured (Rose, 1986).

Table 2: Motivations of the crimes narrated in the selection of 55 broadsides

	Glasgow	Birmingham	London	Total
<i>Crime passionnel</i> and domestic fights	3	6	12	21
Money motivated	1	–	2	3
Infanticide	2	1	3	6
Cruelty to children	–	2	4	6
Tragic fight (non domestic)	–	2	–	2
'wholesome' murder (i.e. collective)	–	–	3	3
Offences against Property	–	5	1	6
Doubtful, unspecified	5	1	2	8
Total	11	17	27	55

Most of the protagonists come from a popular background (see Table 3), and these social origins can account for the rudimentary techniques used in the accomplishment of the crime. The murder weapon was first and foremost a knife or a razor, both of them the working man's inseparable companion. More generally we find a profusion of instruments, sharp or blunt (hatchet, axe, stake, chopper, poker, bat, stones), while poison, that all-time favourite of detective novels, was used in six cases only. Late nineteenth-century broadsides both in Birmingham and London present hints of modernity with four cases featuring guns.

Table 3: Occupations of criminals (not regularly mentioned)

	Glasgow	Birmingham	London	Total
Learned professions	1	1	4	6
Domesticity	1	–	4	5
Artisans	2	3	2	7
Industrial workers	–	1	3	4
General labourers	1	–	2	3
Other	3	1	–	4
No occupation	1	–	1	2
Total	9	6	16	31

Rudimentary in its technique, the typical broadside murder was also savage and brutal in its accomplishment; here is just a pick of what can be found in this literature:

« his wife went to the room, and beheld with astonishment the said James Buchanan with his throat cut across from ear to ear, and the room all running with blood »<sup>40</sup>;  
 « he longed (*sic*) into the field and saw a large quantity of blood, which led him to believe that there had been foul play, and he informed the police. The appearance of the place shewed (*sic*) that a severe struggle had taken place. Footmarks were traced to another field to the mouth of one of the pits belonging to the Lofthouse Ironstone Company. At the bottom of the shaft was found the body of the deceased, who is believed to be about thirty years of age, in a horrible condition. Her skull was broken, and her brains scattered, her neck, both legs, and her jaws were broken, and face severely cut, while other marks of violence were upon her »<sup>41</sup>;  
 « Mr. Kerr, surgeon, proved that the death was caused through the insertion of stones into the body. He produced a large piece brick and sixteen pieces of iron cinder, all of which were found imbedded in the corpse, at the time of the post-mortem examination »<sup>42</sup>, etc.

Although a sample of fifty-five broadsides is too narrow a base for any significant quantitative approach, anyone who is familiar with nineteenth-century crime will have noticed that what they reported coincided broadly with contemporary criminal patterns. Everything is here: the predominance of domestic crime, the under-representation of women in the ranks of the criminals, the popular origin of many protagonists, the crudeness and savagery of most affairs<sup>43</sup>. Therefore we can consider most of the stories narrated by these broadsides as *plausible*<sup>44</sup>, and this was a key to their success: they offered their reader things that were part of their everyday experience. The archives show that most crimes were not perpetrated behind closed doors but, due in part to overcrowding, literally in open places and in front of many witnesses<sup>45</sup>. Yet this is not enough, since it would be easy to object that they had been « made sound plausible... by a practised patterer »<sup>46</sup>.

To be true, literary *clichés* can be found in profusion: the victim is more often than not « lying in his/her gore » (with the alternative versions of « weltering » and « bathing »), a throat is always « cut from ear to ear » and the head consequently « nearly/almost severed from the body », brains – when mentioned – are « pro-

<sup>40</sup> *An Account Of A Horrid And Bloody Murder, Committed On The Body Of James Buchanan, Carrier Between Lanark and Glasgow, In The House Of James M'Kean Shoemaker, High-Street Glasgow, On Friday Night The 7th Of October 1796* (8th October 1796, no printer).

<sup>41</sup> *Horrid Outrage And Murder Of A Female* (London, Disley, printer, *op. cit.*).

<sup>42</sup> *Horrible And Atrocious Murder Of A Woman At Wednesbury, And Committal Of William Hall, For The Murder* (London, Disley, printer, not dated).

<sup>43</sup> This last aspect has been especially highlighted in Tomes (1978).

<sup>44</sup> Only two sound as complete hoaxes right from the start and can be regarded as survivors from the early modern “cocks” – i.e. entirely invented stories: *Account Of One Of The Most Horrid Murder Committed By A Beggar Man Ever Recorded*, which was printed in Glasgow by W. Carse probably in the early 1820s, narrates a complicated and unbelievable third-hand story, reprinted from the *Literary Melange*, and said to have taken place in Smolensk. The second is from the Birmingham collection: *Awful Execution Of Jno. Meux. A Most Horrid Monster!* (Heppel, printer, late 1824-early 1825) is a report of a French case of a beggar (?) who, on November 5, 1824, raped and murdered a Laura Vipont near Nîmes – then drank her blood and ate a piece of her body! But the murderer is condemned to be “strangled and afterwards hung in chains”, a form of punishment that had disappeared since the French Revolution...

<sup>45</sup> Chassaigne (1993).

<sup>46</sup> I quote directly from Neuburg (1973, p. 194).

truding» or «scattered». Blood is a ubiquitous element, and is referred to in a crude way, in sparse and poor metaphors: the «crimson gore» or «crimson dye», which comes in «pools». Another favoured metaphor – with its obvious biblical overtones – is that of «clay»: corpses are compared to it, or lying on it (when found outdoors) or, ultimately, resting *in* it. Late nineteenth-century broadsides seem to be increasingly poor in style, mainly because of their titles being systematically written in telegraphic style, in the pure penny newspapers' tradition<sup>47</sup>.

We have already mentioned that the broadsides taken from the Crampton Collection featured more verses than prose. In earlier productions, verses were most of the time limited to the murderer's lamentation and accordingly written from his point of view and in the first person. In some exceptional cases, they would borrow from the current Gothic and Romantic literature to give a sordid tale an eerie atmosphere<sup>48</sup>. In the Crampton Collection, the verses seem first and foremost destined to repeat the details of the case rather than give the reader more information about what had happened. In some cases they reproduce *verbatim* large tracts of the prose section, but more often develop the ghoulish aspect of the scene:

Prose	verses <sup>49</sup>
...the child had been beaten on the head with a heavy flint stones and its tongue cut completely out at the root. It was found wrapped up in another part of a drawer where the body was discovered.	With a large flint stone she beat its head When such cruelty she'd done From the tender roof of the infant's mouth She cut away its tongue; Sad and wicked, cruel wretch, Hard was her flinty heart, The infant's tongue from the body was Wrapped in another part.

<sup>47</sup> «*Shocking Murder Of 7 Persons At Denham, Near Uxbridge*», «*Committal Of A. Norman, A Girl, Aged 15 Years, Charged With Murdering 4 Children & Attempt On Another*», «*Wholesale Poisoning Case In The County Of Durham. Alleged Murder Of Twenty Persons*», etc.

<sup>48</sup> As, for instance, in *Verses On The Four Murdered Children!* (Birmingham, Wright, printer, 1847):

«The sharpen'd razor, one by one, / The fatal aim she drew,  
 Until the horrid work was done/ She no compassion knew,  
 Those lips that sweetly said 'Good Night'/ But a few hours before,  
 Now prest, and bleached deadly white,/ Will never whisper more!

The flickering candle cast a light/ More horrid than the gloom,  
 Which did reveal the fearful sight/ That filled the blood-stained room.  
 Then stung with madness at the thought/ She crouched on the ground  
 She placed a razor to her throat/ And made a fatal wound.  
 (...)

The Mother and the Murderess! – / (How awful is the sound!)  
 No pious priest her clay will bless/ Nor place in sacred ground!  
 The night-winds groan around her grave,/ And screech-owls are her knell  
 Rank weeds above her grave will wave,/ And scorn her history tell».

<sup>49</sup> *Barbarous Murder Of A Child...* (op. cit.).

It may be interesting to compare two broadsides dealing with the same case in order to gauge the role prose and verses were expected to play. The murder of 9-year-old Thomas Newbury at Haversham (Buckinghamshire) was evoked in two sheets in both prose and verse<sup>50</sup>. The first broadside deals with the crime itself: it was obviously printed in the days immediately following the discovery of the crime, since there is no precise date and events are referred to as having taken place «on Monday» and «on Thursday». The prose narrative relates the coroner's inquest and quotes evidence from three witnesses: the person who discovered the corpse, the police inspector who arrested the suspect, and the surgeon who made the post-mortem examination. It ends with the verdict of wilful murder being returned against the suspect. The violence perpetrated upon the body of the child is described in two steps: the first witness insists on the great quantity of blood that attracted his attention; then the surgeon «describe(s) the nature of the wounds, which severed the main arteries and the windpipe» – a somewhat watered down account, by other ballads' standards. The second broadside, published by the same printer (Disley) and possibly written by the same author, was issued after the Assizes trial and gives some more details about the accused (name, occupation, and age). Yet the rest of the prose text is the exact reprint from the first broadside, excepted for the verdict of the jury and the sentence of death passed by the judge, which stand out as the only new elements.

There are more differences noticeable between the two complaints in verses, in itself a sign that they were really intended as the broadside's *pièce de résistance*. The first is written in an impersonal style, the second is in the purest tradition of the prisoner's lamentation in his cell. The structure of the first complaint is linear: the first stanza sets the scene (nature of the crime – victim – murderer – location), while the following chorus gives the tone of most of the ballad: «Oh, what could tempt the monster,/ To murder and destroy,/ Without a cause, a pretty little/ Smiling innocent boy?» – the question of the murderer's motivation is raised three times in the ballad but remains unanswered. The five following stanzas narrate the discovery of Thomas Newbury's corpse, the emotion the crime caused in the area, William Mobbs's arrest and his commitment to trial. The reader is overwhelmed with pathos as the anonymous author insists with heavy *clichés* on the tender age of the victim: he is «little» (7 times), «innocent» (3 times), «poor» (twice), «pretty», «smiling», «respected», and he died a lonely death. The murderer is consequently vilified: «monster» (twice), «cruel», «base», «wicked», «wretched». The second ballad is presented as the murderer's lamentation before his execution. It is a discursive introspective number, written in the first person, which first and foremost highlights Mobbs's responsibility in the murder. The personal pronoun «I» is repeated 29 times and sentences abound where the murderer acknowledges his deed: «My crime I own it, to my shame,/ That poor child Newbury, I did slay/ It was I who took his life away», «It was I who drew the fatal knife/ That robbed poor Newbury of his life / From his throat I caus'd the blood to flow/ To my sad disgrace I tell you now», «But I am guilty found, and doom'd to die», etc. If the tone differs distinctively from the first broadside, there is little substance that is new. In particular, the central question – the reason that drove Mobbs to crime – remains unanswered: «I had no

<sup>50</sup> *Dreadful Murder Of A Boy At Haversham, In Buckinghamshire, and Trial And Sentence Of William Mobbs, For The Murder Of J. Newbury At Haversham, In Buckinghamshire* (London, Disley, printer, not dated); see Appendix 1.

thoughts him to destroy,/ I loved him dear, poor harmless boy,/ It must have been Satan at that time,/ That led me to commit the crime». Yet this could have been the perfect occasion for a patterer to let his imagination run wild and entirely make a story up. It is somewhat disappointing to see how limited the re-creation process is in this case.

A further step would be to compare a broadside with the corresponding criminal affair. We will take three cases: a Glaswegian broadside narrating the first Ratcliffe Highway murders (1811), a Birmingham sheet dealing with the John Bell case (1831) and two examples from the Crampton Collection, dating from 1871 and referring to a famous affair of the time, the murder perpetrated by Reverend John Selby Watson upon his wife<sup>51</sup>. Broadly speaking, the broadsides stick to the facts. The lengthy narrative of the «Dreadful Murder Of Timothy Marr» is remarkably exact in its detailed account of how the Marrs' young female servant went out to get some food, returned to her master's house to find it shut up and aroused the neighbours who then discovered the Marr family horribly murdered. The only inaccuracy is in the name of the Marrs' other servant, «Biggs» instead of «Gowen». Of course, an affair that shocked the whole country was likely to be known, and reported, in great detail, and details were grisly enough to provide any patterer with enough material for good copy.

The second broadside is a more revealing example: John Bell was just one of the 100 or so under-fourteens sentenced to death by the London Central Criminal Court between 1801 and 1836. He was, however, the only one to be executed, for a murder perpetrated in early 1831 on another teenager named Robert Taylor. Bell and his younger brother came from a very poor background<sup>52</sup>. They killed Taylor in the woods near Rochester (Kent) and stole the 9 shillings that Taylor's pauper father received as parish relief. Bell hid the body in the bushes and the crime was not discovered for ten weeks. The murder weapon – a knife – was traced back to the Bells. Taylor's grave was then re-opened and the younger Bell was forced to search it in order to bring him to confess to the crime – which he eventually did along with his brother. At the end of his trial, John Bell was sentenced to death although the jury strongly recommended him to mercy on account of his age and his poor upbringing; yet the judge was adamant and passed the death sentence because he had «never before tried so atrocious a crime». The execution took place in front of a large crowd who, according to one commentator<sup>53</sup>, let its dissatisfaction be known by repeatedly shouting «Poor lamb!», «Shame!» «Murder!». The case was quickly forgotten, and it had been assumed that only one broadside about it had printed for the London market.

In fact, however, at least one other was printed in Birmingham<sup>54</sup>, a sign that this affair stirred more attention than has hitherto been suspected. If its version of the

<sup>51</sup> *An Account Of The Dreadful Murder Of Mr. Timothy Marr* (op. cit.); records dealing with the Ratcliffe highway murders are available at PRO, Home Office records, H.O. 42/118-120; see also James and Critchley (1971). *The Life, Trial, and Awful Execution of John Any Bird Bell...* (op. cit.); the case is related in Gatrell (1994). *Horrible Murder By A Clergyman At Stockwell And Confession Of The Murderer, and Trial And Sentence Of The Rev. John S. Watson, For The Murder Of His Wife* (London, Disley, printer), not dated, but the case was tried at London Central Criminal Court in December 1871; PRO, Crim. 10/61.

<sup>52</sup> We follow the particulars of the case as presented in Gatrell (1994, p. 1-5).

<sup>53</sup> E.G. Wakefield, *The Hangman and the Judge, or A Letter from Jack Ketch to Mr. Justice Alderson*, London, 1933, quoted in Gatrell (1994).

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Appendix 2.

case somewhat differed from what actually happened, yet very little was actually made up. The woodcut that adorns the top of the broadside is that of an execution bearing no relation whatsoever with the actual hanging of John Bell, it was from a seventeenth-century scene. This vignette, then, was taken from stock at random and included here simply because of its rough relevance. In contrast the illustration that accompanied the London printed broadside<sup>55</sup> had been produced expressly for the occasion since it referred directly to a particular of the case: Bell hiding Taylor's corpse under a bush. We can therefore assume there had been no connection between the printers of these two sheets and that the anonymous author of the second one<sup>56</sup> produced his own vision of the case. Most of the lengthy broadside is in prose, with only five stanzas presented as «A New Copy Of The Verses» printed at the end. The text begins rather abruptly with a short narrative of the crime, the trial and the verdict – all summed up in two sentences. The reader is informed that the murder was for gain and that the three Bells, father and sons, took active part in it<sup>57</sup>. Nothing is said of the body being hidden for ten weeks – this detail only pops up in the last stanza at the very end of the broadside –, nor of the grisly method used to force the younger Bell to confess to the crime. How John Bell was found to be the only guilty party is not stated either. Most of the sheet deals with the execution: yet, while it stresses the great concourse of people («at least ten thousand») and how long they had to wait before the execution, it is silent about the crowd airing its sympathy towards John Bell. To prevent the reader from pitying him too much, Bell is presented as a hardened youth – although his actual age is never expressly mentioned in the narrative itself – who showed no mercy at the time of the crime<sup>58</sup>. The general feeling one retains is that of a deserved punishment, a feeling that the «Copy Of The Verses» only strengthens, with a further pathetic reference to the imploring victim and young John Bell (his age now duly mentioned) claiming full responsibility for his act and professing his guilt<sup>59</sup>.

The murder that John Selby Watson, a Reverend and former Headmaster of Stockwell Grammar School, perpetrated upon his wife on 8 October 1871 and the following trial, caused much more attention. The act appeared to have been carefully accomplished if not premeditated. In order not to alarm their servant, J.S. Watson told her that his wife had gone away for a few days and forbade her to enter her mistress's room. Three days later, he tried to commit suicide by swallowing prussic acid, but the servant found him groaning and called for a doctor. The body of his

<sup>55</sup> The vignette is reproduced in Gatrell (1994, p. 5).

<sup>56</sup> Who was not Birmingham-based: the opening line says the execution «took place in front of our county gaol»; the broadside was then a reprint of a text written in Kent. This lifts a veil on a little-known aspect of the broadsides business, their commercial circuit.

<sup>57</sup> «... he and his two sons way-laid him on his return home and murdered him». Grammar is useless in finding out who actually killed the victim.

<sup>58</sup> «... the hardihood which he had hitherto manifested...»; «He said that when he sprung upon Taylor with the knife in his hand, the poor boy, aware of his murderous intention, fell upon his knees before him (...). But the only answer this precocious assassin gave to this touching appeal was by plunging the knife into his victim's throat!».

<sup>59</sup> «In vain the victim of my rage implor'd my hand to stay,/ He knelt in deep distress to me, my anger to allay,/ I'll give you all my victim cried, if you spare my life»; «But nothing would my feelings touch his cries availed nought,/ For out my sharpen'd knife I took and plunge into his throat», «The voice of blood at length was heard & I am doom'd to die,/ For mercy which I have denied, to thee, O God! I cry».

wife was found in her bedroom, killed by a savage and brutal assault: the head had been repeatedly beaten, the skull fractured, and blood was all over the place. Watson had left a lengthy letter in which he confessed to the crime and explained it by

«...a fit of rage she provoked me; often, often has she provoked me before, but I never lost restraint over myself with her until the present occasion, when I allowed fury to carry me away».

The particulars of the case, the character, and social position of the criminal easily explain the sensation it caused. Two broadsides have been kept in the Crampton Collection; the first relates the disclosure of the murder (*Horrible Murder By A Clergyman*), and was obviously published shortly after, while the other (*Trial And Sentence Of The Rev. John S. Watson*) was printed after the trial and the passing of the death sentence. The most interesting aspect of these two sheets is not what is printed: the nine tenths of the second broadside (both prose and verses) are a mere reprint of the first, with a minimum amount of new additions – i.e. the passing of the sentence. But this case could have provided the author with a lot of material for good copy, which remained entirely unexploited. The content of the written confession is entirely ignored; and this trial was also important because of the many experts who discussed at length the possible insanity of Reverend Watson. This was the line adopted by the defence and the prosecution summoned four experts to counter it. The defence in turn insisted on the mental trouble he was supposed to have suffered after his brutal dismissal from Stockwell Grammar School the year before. All this turmoil is alluded to in a rather vague way: «Great exertions were made by the medical men to prove him to be insane at the time he committed the murder». This lack of interest can easily be understood by the specificity and the complicated aspect of these debates, too complicated for sure for the typical broadside reader. Yet this, together with our earlier conclusions, also suggests that broadside authors were less interested in forging up «cocks»<sup>60</sup> than is usually assumed. If these narratives have been of greater intrinsic value, they may also have had a broader social value than suspected.

### III. – THE CRIME BROADSIDE: VALUE, PURPOSE, UTILITY

The most obvious point relating to the crime broadside is its moralizing aspect. This was its primary value – i.e. the person who was reading it could but be aware of the moral message it conveyed. Such was also its purpose; the fact that street literature as a whole was meant as imposing «bourgeois» moral values on a «popular» readership is the most thoroughly explored theme<sup>61</sup>. Our fifty-five broadsides prove to be amply moralizing as well, and quite purposely so: they are intended as «warning(s)» – the very word being found twenty-five times – against virtually everything, from «bad company» and «unjust and dishonest ways»<sup>62</sup> to leading immoral lives<sup>63</sup> and

<sup>60</sup> See note 44 above.

<sup>61</sup> «Bourgeois» and «popular» are taken here in their most general sense. See a recent epitome of the question in Anderson (1991).

<sup>62</sup> *Address, Or Warning To The Young* (op. cit.).

<sup>63</sup> «May the young and old a warning take, / And think of my unhappy fate, / You married women who see me die, / Unto the Lord I would have you cry, / To make you chaste and loving wives, / Then you'll



jealousy<sup>64</sup>, through, of course, innumerable admonitions against the «Demon Drink»<sup>65</sup>. The repetitive example of repentant criminals trying to make their peace before the execution fostered deference to religion – yet religious evocations are carefully undenominational so as not to alienate any readership, and stick to the fear of God and appeals to His mercy. Preaching self-control, moderation, and understanding in everyday life contributed to the «civilizing process»<sup>66</sup>, just as avoiding images of the scaffold in 1860s broadsides reflected increasing sensitivity to violence<sup>67</sup>. When state-inflicted, violence could be alluded to<sup>68</sup> but not openly displayed, while unlawful violence had to be shown in its crudest reality to deter people from it. Any other attitude would have been counter-productive.

Occasionally broadsides refer to more specific topics, directly in touch with the fears of the contemporaries. For example, a few early broadsides deal with the upbringing of children: two different characters, John Bell and abortionist Margaret Sinclair<sup>69</sup>, are presented as the product of a bad education, i.e. parents giving in to their children's every desire and depriving them of any moral sense<sup>70</sup>. Since this preoccupation is absent from later publications, it could be interpreted as the expression of a worry looming large in a period of high fertility – some kind of echo to the Malthusian warnings against overpopulation. Another Birmingham broadside relating the execution of three burglars in August 1826<sup>71</sup> opens with a lengthy consideration of the increase in crime and concludes with an attack against urbanization as a breeding ground for the corruption of souls<sup>72</sup>; it is a well-known fact that the per-

enjoy sweet happy lives» in *The Confession And Sorrowful Lamentation Of John Lomas* (Edinburgh, 1814). But men are also addressed to: «It is declared by the Almighty God in the volume of inspired, that whoremongers and adulteries he will judge, and sad and a full is the sentence such are without the gates of the kingdom of heaven» in *Murder. A Full And Particular Account Of The Murder Of George Stirling* (Glasgow, not dated).

<sup>64</sup> «And mind what I say, married women don't stray/ Like this ill-fated pair at Woodgreen;/ And husbands also, I'd have you to know,/ That our duty is to forgive,/ And try in this life to avoid bloodshed and strife» in *Frightful Murder Of A Woman And Her Paramour* (op. cit.).

<sup>65</sup> «Poor creature, she gave way to drink,/ Which caused her ultimate fate,/ And she did not see her folly,/ Until it was too late» in *Horrible And Atrocious Murder Of A Woman At Wednesbury* (op. cit.), or «Cruel Drink, has made unhappy,/ many, many happy homes» in *Lines Written On The Condemnation Of Jeremiah Corkery* (Birmingham, Sansom, printer, 1875) among many others.

<sup>66</sup> Elias (1978).

<sup>67</sup> Spierenburg (1984).

<sup>68</sup> With a constant use of understatement: «And if guilty found, he'll die for the deed», «He's not a man he is a demon,/ And deserves a murderer's fate», «This sad and atrocious murderer/ Will meet his downfall», etc. Some criminals themselves were less cautious, and when the judicial archives have kept their declarations, some of them profess not to be afraid of «swinging» for their deed.

<sup>69</sup> *Last Speech, Confession, And Dying Word Of Margaret Sinclair, Midwife, Who Was Executed At Durham, On Thursday The 24th Of August, For The Murder Of Jane Parkinson, And Her Child, In Her Delivery* (Glasgow, Johnson, printer).

<sup>70</sup> «I, Margaret Sinclair, was born at Auckland of very honest and creditable parents (...) but I soon forgot the precepts they laid down for me, and gave way to vice (...) through too much indulgence of my parents, in every thing I wanted» in *Last Speech* (op. cit.). «He reproached her with 'bringing him to his present scrape' by encouraging him in every species of vice, and neglecting to mature his mind» in *The Life, Trial And Confession of John Any Bird Bell* (op. cit.).

<sup>71</sup> *Lives, Trial And Execution Of Joseph Higgs, Aged 23, Edward Taylor, 19, And Edward Hines, 28, Who Suffered At Warwick, August 11, 1826, For Burglary* (Birmingham, Heppel, printer).

<sup>72</sup> «...Yet the gaoles of these adjoining counties [Staffordshire and Warwickshire] are as rapidly filling as ever – murder and plunder are populating their cells, and the dreadful engine of law will but have

iod was one of increasing concern about the rise of crime, a concern fuelled by the publication of the very first judicial statistics as well as by the rapid socio-economic changes that were taking place<sup>73</sup>.

Representing people in their proper social role was part and parcel of this moralizing process, and especially when it came to gender. The broadsides depict relatively few female criminals, as we have seen, and the crimes they perpetrated were of two kinds only, the murder of their husband or the murder of a child (in most cases, their own): the figure of the female criminal does not depart from the expected social role of the woman as wife and mother. This is not entirely representative of what female criminality was. Criminal records show a significant proportion of women tried for homicides perpetrated outside the domestic circle (in fights and brawls, for instance)<sup>74</sup>. But giving an accurate representation of reality was here less important than describing to the female readers how they were expected to behave socially. Moral exhortations were always expressed with greater strength and clarity when addressed to women: the *Confession And Sorrowful Lamentation* of John Lomas and Edith Morrey, guilty of murdering Edith Morrey's husband at Hanklow (Cheshire) in February 1814 is a particularly explicit piece<sup>75</sup>. Edith Morray had fallen in love with Lomas, the couple's servant, and eventually persuaded him to kill her husband, which he did. Once arrested, he gave evidence against her and both were sentenced to death, Morray being in addition condemned to be quartered. The sheet displays the two lamentations in parallel. Lomas is presented as the victim of his mistress's persuading skills and most of the blame is put on her. As a lusty, adulterous, manipulating and treacherous woman (she expresses indignation at Lomas testifying against her), she embodies some of the most traditional moral flaws of her sex. The « warning » was directly and repeatedly addressed to married women not to follow in her footsteps, i.e. to refrain from extra-marital affairs – something which happens to be the more frequent advice given in all the broadsides dealing with female crime<sup>76</sup>.

If moralizing was the first intention of the authors of such literature, it can be wondered whether it was not their one and only purpose. The once fashionable idea of « popular classes » passively manipulated and culturally alienated by such street literature has been extensively revised, as discarding the reader's ability to distance himself from what he reads, or assuming a greater level of homogeneity on both the supply and demand side of such literature. Moreover it denies these texts any intrinsic value or, could we say, utility, – *this time from the point of view of the readers*, who otherwise would have stopped reading them<sup>77</sup>. Of course, crime broadsides

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a few months respite, before it is again drawn forth to libel civilization, and terminate the career of some flagrant offender»; «All these unfortunate men are natives of Birmingham; here they were early initiated into these vices which have led hem progressively step by step to the ignominious death they have suffered».

<sup>73</sup> The number of people committed for trial in England and Wales rose (in round figures) from 6,000 in 1815 to 15,000 in 1825 (Emsley, 1996); see also Radzinowicz and Hood (1990).

<sup>74</sup> See Chassaigne (1993).

<sup>75</sup> *The Confession And Sorrowful Lamentation Of John Lomas (op. cit.)*.

<sup>76</sup> It is also of some significance that the only case when a coroner presses a Grand Jury to reconsider its verdict to render a more severe one happens at the indictment of a schoolmistress accused of the murder of her child (*Barbarous Murder Of A Child By A Schoolmistress, op. cit.*).

<sup>77</sup> Hoggart (1970), Swingewood (1979), Bailey (1987), Anderson (1991).

provided entertainment, and this was the first of their socializing duties. We understand here «socializing» not as vaguely synonymous with «moralizing», but as bringing together members of a same social group and giving them a sense of belonging. It is not necessary to insist at length on the fragmented nature of social relations within nineteenth-century fast-expanding towns. Feelings such as repulsion, horror, compassion, etc., were to be collectively experienced – and this may have been as much a reason for lengthy descriptions of attacks and bloodshed as titillating the public's base taste for the morbid. It must be remembered that these sheets were sold in the streets and loudly advertised by their sellers<sup>78</sup> and the habitual opening lines of broadsides' complaints, inviting people to gather and join in the evocation of a crime<sup>79</sup> should be taken in a stricter sense than is usually done. This is another possible explanation for the inclusion of excerpts from the coroner's inquest in the narratives of late nineteenth-century broadsides: it was also the one and only moment when the whole community could unite against the criminal, since witnesses who gave evidence and helped reconstruct the crime were in a much more secure position than they would be during the trial – a less formal atmosphere, no cross examination, and the community making its comforting presence felt with more liberty than in the court room. Here again, it was giving the public a sense of belonging.

From this point of view crime broadsides constituted and propagated a subculture where violence played a prominent part. But any culture (or subculture) also aims at giving a minimal amount of education, in the most practical sense. Broad-sides can be seen as a means of acculturation into the judicial system at large: if capital executions were – before 1868, in what happened to be the golden age of such literature – part of everyone's common experience, the preceding stages of the judicial procedure were less public and attracted less attention. Providing the populace with lively examples of a coroner's inquest or a trial, however rudimentary, filled a real gap at a time of a continuously expanding judicial sphere<sup>80</sup>. *Baby Farmers. Mothers Beware* is another example of a broadside playing this «educational» role. Printed in London in 1870, it directly refers to the famous Margaret Waters and Sarah Ellis case, the «South London baby farmers»<sup>81</sup>. These two sisters were arrested in July 1870 for having deliberately starved to death at least one – and ill-treated the others – of the infants they had «adopted» from unmarried mothers. Waters was

<sup>78</sup> See of course the famous description of the 'Sellers of street literature' given by Henry Mayhew (1861-2, vol.1, p. 221-230).

<sup>79</sup> «Good people all I pray draw near,/ Of a wholesale murder you shall hear», «Draw near all you married and single men too./ This deed I so dreadful will tell», «Good Christians who around do dwell,/ Lend an attentive ear», etc.

<sup>80</sup> This was the time of «the rise of the policeman state» (Gatrell, 1990). The broadside *Life, Trial, And Execution of John Higgs* (op. cit.) is an extreme illustration of it: it is a long narrative of the trial from beginning to end, and includes a lively but rather technical passage about the prisoners' defence: «The prisoners persisted to the last that no pistol was fired, and say the mark on a cannister, was produced by them throwing a crow-bar, and not the indentation of a bullet. The High Sheriff, with praise-worthy assiduity, humanely exerted all his influence to save the lives of the unfortunate men, conceiving that the noise made by the bar striking the cannister, might have been taken for the report of a pistol. He caused the cannister to be fired at; but in each case it has failed to produce a mark like the one that is the ground of so much dispute». The reader is really transported in the court room, and understands that the life of the three burglars depends on a pistol being shot, i.e. their intention to take any opponent's life to perpetrate their deed. But its dramatic interest is null; and then 'educating' was probably its real purpose.

<sup>81</sup> Their trial was held in September 1870 at the London Central Criminal Court; PRO, Crim. 10/59.

found guilty, sentenced to death and executed, while her sister, held for a mere accessory, was imprisoned for eighteen months. Baby farming itself was not an illegal practice: adoption had no legal significance in Britain until the 1926 Adoption Act, and any mother who desired not to keep her baby could bring it to a «baby farmer» who would accept it along with a few pounds destined to meet the costs, and «bring it up like her own» (as the phrase went). It is easy to understand how unscrupulous characters used it as an easy way of getting money and got rid of the babies as soon as possible. Margaret Waters was one of these and she had little difficulty in finding customers since her home was also used as a «lying-in house» where pregnant women could deliver in all discretion. Nor was Waters alone in this. South London was notorious for the impressive quantities of dead infant bodies that could be found in parks or streets, yet the whole thing drew very little attention, even from the police<sup>82</sup>.

This was the first affair to expose baby farming to the full glare of publicity, and the topic is developed in the verse broadside that was subsequently published<sup>83</sup>. The case is summarized concisely, but the most interesting part is to be found in the second stanza with a plain definition of baby-farming: «What is baby farming, some mothers may say/ 'Tis a practice that takes the poor infant away/ From the care of its mother by a stranger instead/ The poor little creature is fostered and bred./ It encourages vice, and one I won't name,/ 'Tis a means to get rid of the offspring of shame». It may be argued that information about it was scanty before this case and that this broadside participated in an opinion-making and conscience-raising process. Let us add that moralizing aspects were not forgotten, since the blame is essentially laid on the woman who, having «been led astray,/ sends the child of her guilt to be sent out of the way», and the ballad ends with a gloomy evocation of these fallen women: «What proofs of affection animals show./ Yet mothers alas their children will slay,/ Or else pay another to put it away». These lines echo some of the remarks printed in contemporary papers that Waters was simply the supply side of a market with a large demand<sup>84</sup>.

Lastly broadsides occasionally allowed dissenting voices to be heard, a fact that seriously diminishes their importance as supposed means of social control. For instance the broadside relating the execution of John Bellingham in 1812<sup>85</sup> presents an unusual picture of the murderer: it insists on his calm and courageous attitude in front of death and includes a passage where Bellingham discusses with the sheriff, justifies his act and ponders over it with even a brush of religion<sup>86</sup>. It is hardly neces-

<sup>82</sup> Margaret Waters was arrested because she was under suspicion of practicing abortions in her lying-in house. She was charged with murder after her most recent 'acquisition', a 4-week-old baby boy, died two weeks after her arrest.

<sup>83</sup> See Appendix 4.

<sup>84</sup> The case is fully exposed in Rose (1986).

<sup>85</sup> *An Account Of The Execution... Of John Bellingham (op. cit.)*.

<sup>86</sup> «Sheriff Heygate – 'Then it was your own affair – it was from personal resentment' – Bellingham appeared hurt at the latter expression, and after repeating the words – 'personal resentment,' with an indignant, or rather dignified tone, said, 'I bore no resentment to Mr. Perceval as a man – and, as a man, I am sorry for his fate. I was referred from Minister to Minister, from Office to Office and at length refused to redress for my grievances. It was my own sufferings that caused the melancholy event; and I hope it will be a warning to future Ministers who attend to the supplications and prayers of those who suffer by oppression. And my petition been brought into Parliament this catastrophe would not have happened. I am sorry for the sufferings I have caused to Mr. Perceval's family and

sary to compare this polite and intellectual exchange with descriptions of a capital execution by direct witnesses to realize the unlikeliness of the episode – but its overtones of political protest are clear enough for the message to get across easily. Moreover the sheet refers to the sympathetic feelings of the crowd («A great buzz, accompanied by some partial cries of ‘God bless you! God bless you!’ ran through the populace»). Bellingham’s fame was such that his name pops up in another broadside reporting a *crime passionnel* perpetrated in London six years later: «On his way to the (police) Office, a person remarked he resembled Bellingham, when he replied ‘I wish I may possess his fortitude’.»<sup>87</sup> This is the only example we met of an ‘intertextual’ approach – when crimes are endlessly compared to one another in an evocation of a true ‘subculture of crime’ – that can be found in late nineteenth-century newspaper articles<sup>88</sup>.

The execution of forger Henry Fauntleroy in 1824 was the occasion for an indirect criticism of the Bloody Code<sup>89</sup>. Fauntleroy’s character is depicted in the most positive manner, calm, «attentive, humble, and devout», all the more that

«no sooner did misfortunes overtake him, than slander represented him as a monster in human shape – as a drunkard, debauchee, and gambler; but we cannot give a refutation to these calumnies better than in his own words» (here is included an extract from Fauntleroy’s speech for his defence).

His familial virtues are underlined – even if they applied to «Mrs Forbes (the lady who lived with, and had two children by, the prisoner)», in fact the mistress he happily spent his time with in Brighton. The numerous petitions sent to the Home Secretary Robert Peel for his reprieve – his condemnation sent waves of shock throughout the country and a large body of opinion mobilized in his favour – are also duly alluded to<sup>90</sup>. His fortitude, his calm acceptance of the verdict, and the atmosphere of devotion surrounding his last moments<sup>91</sup> contrast sharply with the severity of the sentence.

Another broadside we found with a dash of social criticism is a later sheet from the Crampton Collection referring to the murder of a forester by two poachers in a

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friends.’ (...) Sheriff Heygate – ‘I hope you feel deep contrition for the deed.’ Upon which the prisoner (assuming an attitude of considerable dignity) said – ‘I hope, Sir, I feel as a man ought to do.’ Sheriff Heygate – ‘You know, that to take away the life of a man unlawfully is a heinous crime.’ Bellingham – ‘The Scriptures, you know, Sir, say that’».

<sup>87</sup> *An Account Of That Cruel And Barbarous Murder Which Was Committed On The Body Of Mary Minton, Aged 19 In The Entry Leading To Her Father’s House, N° 24, Union-Street, London, On Saturday The 14th Of February, By William Hatch* (Glasgow, printer?).

<sup>88</sup> See Kalifa (1995).

<sup>89</sup> *Life, Trial And Execution Of Mr. Fauntleroy* (*op. cit.*).

<sup>90</sup> See Gatrell (1994, p. 409). This broadside is undoubtedly a by-product of this campaign, itself part of a wider one that Quaker reformers orchestrated against capital punishment; Gatrell argues that the campaign in favour of Fauntleroy was rather artificial and gathered impetus only «when it was sure that he would die» (*op. cit.*, p. 409), but it does not diminish the intrinsic value of the broadside.

<sup>91</sup> «During the last night, he slept about an hour, and was visited at intervals by the Rev. Dr. Cotton, and Mr Baker. He expressed his belief in Christ’s atonement – he seemed anxious for the final hour to arrive, and when he received the Sacrament, his heart overflowed with gratitude, and the tears ran incessantly down his face. A little before 8, the Officers demanded his body – he cheerfully said ‘I am quite ready!’ and taking the arm of the chaplain, proceeded towards the place of execution».

«plantation» belonging to a Maharajah (!)<sup>92</sup>. This last detail sounds a little bit too exotic for the story to be taken at face value, it is however obviously related to the passing of the 1862 Poaching Prevention Act, which empowered police to arrest and search suspects. It was thirty years since poaching had lost its capital statute, but game laws were still extremely unpopular<sup>93</sup>, as shown by the broadside's very last verses: «Now these two men do lay in gaol/ (...) But those cursed Game Laws,/ Has been the cause,/ Of many a life's blood to be shed,/ And a warning voice comes from the dead;/ Saying, repeal the law, or live in dread,/ Of the great Judgement Day». A unusually sharp statement, for a change, reminiscent of the bolder statements to be found in the eighteenth-century «flash ballads» or epics which celebrated at length the life and times of famous highwaymen such as Dick Turpin or Jack Sheppard.

Saying that crime broadsides need rehabilitation might sound a little excessive, but they deserve to be studied from a closer perspective. Of course they seemed to present, repetitively, the same affair – and to some extent they were, since they tended increasingly to privilege a particular type of crime, the *crime passionnel*, and to adopt a standardized narrative style. Yet they stuck to what contemporary violence was and offered their readers more facts than fiction. They were no pure exercise of imagination and deserve not to be dismissed as meaningless, propaganda or mere social control. Admittedly, they remained unconcerned by the «reconstruction» process that drastically affected the image of the criminal<sup>94</sup>, but a nuanced approach reveals more variety than first expected and, more importantly, these crime broadsides performed most of the functions of a mass media: to entertain, inform, bring people closer together by sharing common sensations, participate to opinion-making processes, express various points of view (to a certain degree), all this in addition to their «basic» moralizing and edifying purpose. It would be interesting to put in perspective crime broadsides and penny magazines articles dealing with the same subject, and, perhaps, broadsides would not pale too much in comparison.

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<sup>92</sup> *Dreadful Murder At Eriswell. Confession Of One Of The Prisoners* (London, Disley, printer, not dated).

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## APPENDIX 1

Two broadsides on the murder of Thomas Newbury (1870s).

**DREADFUL MURDER OF A BOY  
At Haversham, in Buckinghamshire**

On Monday an inquest was held at the National school, Haversham, before Mr. Worley, coroner to inquire into the cause of the death of Thos. Newbury, a boy who was found dead with his throat cut in a pea-field, near Haversham. J. Staunton, proved finding the body of the deceased boy, as he was going home from his work, a little before six o'clock on Thursday evening; it was in the pea-field, by the side of a thick hedge, and there was a pool of blood under it, as well as another pool in a place about 10 yards off from where the body had evidently been dragged. Charles Hall, inspector of police, proved apprehending the prisoner when in bed at his father's house at Newport Pagnell. He found a slop, a shirt, a pair of trowsers, a pair of boots, a belt, and a pair of braces, all of which had marks of blood upon them, the front of the slop, and shirt-sleeves being covered with blood. The stains of blood upon his shirt-sleeves he accounted for by saying that his nose had been bleeding. Several witnesses were called who positively identified the knife, which was found within 20 yards of the murdered boy covered with blood, and who saw the prisoner on the day of the murder wearing the clothes which Inspector Hall found in his bedroom covered with blood. Mr. Rogers, surgeon, described the nature of the wounds, which severed the main arteries and the windpipe. He also stated that the stains on the knife and clothes, which had been sworn to as belonging to the prisoner, were those of human blood. The jury, after a hearing of upwards of four hours, returned a verdict of Wilful murder against William Mobbs. The prisoner has been removed to Aylesbury Jail to await his trial.

A sad, a cruel dreadful deed,  
To you I will unfold,  
The murder of a little boy,  
As base as e'er was told;  
Murdered by a cruel man,  
At Haversham we hear,  
Near the town of Newport Pagnell,  
In the county of Buckinghamshire.  
Oh, what could tempt the monster,  
To murder and destroy,  
Without a cause, a pretty little  
Smiling innocent boy?

Poor little Thomas Newbury  
Was in a pea-field found,  
He was found by a neighbour labourer,  
With his throat cut on the ground –  
Near Haversham in Buckinghamshire,  
His bleeding corse did lie,  
And no one round to hear his groans,  
His sufferings or his cries.



What motive had the murderer,  
 To take his life away,  
 What could possess the monster  
 The little boy to slay ;  
 The wretched murderer, William Mobbs  
 In sorrow may bewail,  
 And ponder o'er his wicked deeds,  
 Inside a gloomy gaol.

When little Thomas in the field,  
 Mangled and dead was found,  
 Upon that Thursday evening,  
 The news spread far around ;  
 Fathers wept, and mothers grieved,  
 Saying, who could dare destroy,  
 Poor little Thomas Newbury –  
 A respected innocent boy.

Suspicion fell on the monster Mobbs –  
 The murderer silent stood,  
 His slop, his shirt, his trousers,  
 Were covered with human blood ;  
 He to Justice said, His nose had bled.  
 But they found the fatal knife,  
 With which the wicked murderer Mobbs  
 Deprived the boy of life.

Mobbs, committed is for trial,  
 And he at the bar must stand,  
 To answer for that dreadful crime,  
 By the laws of God and man ;  
 To slay a little innocent boy,  
 Whate'er could him possess,  
 And cause such agony and grief,  
 Such anguish and distress.

**TRIAL AND SENTENCE  
 OF WILLIAM MOBBS,  
 For the Murder of J. Newbury  
 At Haversham, in Buckinghamshire**

At the Aylesbury assizes, William Mobbs, a farm labourer, aged 20, was charged with the wilful murder of Thomas James Newbury, also a farm labourer, aged nine, near Wolverton, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of July last.

J. Staunton, proved finding the body of the deceased boy, as he was going home from his work, a little before 6 o'clock on Thursday evening ; it was in the pea-field, by the side of a thick hedge, and there was a pool of blood under it, as well as another pool in a place about 10 yards off from where the body had evidently been dragged.

Charles Hall, inspector of police, proved apprehending the prisoner when in bed at his father's house at Newport Pagnell. He found a slop, a shirt, a pair of trousers, a pair of boots, a belt, and a pair of braces, all of which had marks of blood upon them, the front of the slop and shirt-sleeves being covered with blood. The stains of blood upon his shirt-sleeves he accounted for by saying that his nose had been bleeding. Several witnesses were called who positively identified the knife, which was found within 20 yards of the murdered boy covered with blood, and who saw the prisoner on the day of the murder wearing the clothes which were found in his bedroom covered with blood. The Jury returned a verdict of Guilty, and the Judge then passed the sentence of death in the usual form.

Good Christians all of each degree,  
In pity list awhile to me,  
While I my mournful tale will tell,  
Though confined within a gloomy cell.

In Aylesbury's dreary cell I lie,  
And for murder I am condemned to die.

William Moobs it is my name,  
My crime I own it, to my shame,  
That poor child Newbury, I did slay,  
It was I who took his life away.

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of July last,  
Oh, would I could recall the past,  
We together in the fields did stray,  
At Haversham, mark what I say.

I had no thoughts him to destroy,  
I loved him dear, poor harmless boy,  
It must have been Satan at that time,  
That led me to commit the crime.

It was I who drew the fatal knife,  
That robbed poor Newbury of his life,  
From his throat I caus'd the blood to flow  
To my sad disgrace I tell you now.

His looks of anguish I shall ne'er forget  
Before my eyes I see them yet,  
But I trust his soul is now in Heaven,  
And all his sins they are forgiven.

When I saw the deed that I had done,  
My bewildered senses to me did come.  
His lifeless form dragg'd o'er the ground  
Unto the spot where it was found.

How I worked that day I cannot tell,  
Each sound it seemed like a death bell,  
At night I hastened home to bed,  
And sought to hide my guilty head.

But I am guilty found, and doom'd to die  
Within a prison cell I lie,  
May God forgive the deed I've done,  
And save me through his blessed son.

I hope that none will e'er upbraid  
My parents, when I'm in the grave,  
Farewell to all, I've told the truth,  
I am a guilty and misguided youth.

A warning take, young men, by me,  
For crime it ends in misery ;  
Once more a long farewell to all,  
For mercy to my God I call.

## APPENDIX 2

**The Life, Trial, And Awful Execution Of John Any Bird Bell, Only Thirteen Years Of Age, Who Suffered An Awful Penalty At Maidstone, On Monday, August 1, 1831, For The Wilful Murder Of A Lad Named Robert Taylor<sup>95</sup>.**

The example of the unfortunate boy, who expiated his enormous guilt on the scaffold before he had completed his fourteenth year, took place in front of our county gaol this morning, having been found guilty of the murder of a youth named Taylor, in a wood near Rochester, in March last. Taylor, the father of the deceased, being very ill, received 9 s. per week from the parish of Aylesford, which the lad used to fetch every week; this being known to Bell, he and his two sons way-laid him on his return home and murdered him. Old Bell was sentenced to be banished life, the other admitted evidence and John to be executed. The interest which was excited on the occasion is almost incredible; the town was crammed with spectators from all parts of the country. A report being prevalent that the execution would take place at eight o'clock, every station from where a view of the platform could be obtained was occupied even at daybreak; and when it was announced that the sheriff would not attend until the customary hour (11 o'clock), although some disappointment was manifested, hundreds retained their stations, many of them under painful circumstances. We must now turn to the miserable object of this intense anxiety, who was engaged at his late devotions; the hardihood he had hitherto manifested, now entirely forsook him; and the callous youth who could affect a smile at his aged father when he twice fainted on hearing sentence pronounced on his child, was prostrate in tears at the throne of mercy. His case presents an awful warning to parents, who [?] passions and perverse dispositions of their children, such were the parents of this unhappy lad and during his last interview with his mother, with his parting breath, he reproached her with «bringing him to his present scrape», by encouraging him in every species of vice, and neglecting to instruct his mind. After the Condemned Sermon which was preached on Sunday evening from these suitable words, «The wicked shall not live out half their days» he made a full confession of his guilt. He said that when he sprung upon Taylor with the knife in his hand, the poor boy, aware of his murderous intention, fell upon his knees before him – offered him all the littel that he had – his knife – his cap – and whatever else he liked! said he would love him during the whole of his life – would never tell what happened – & actually kissed the hand just raised to shed his blood!!! But the only answer this precocious assassin gave to this touching appeal was by plunging the knife into his victim's throat! On passing a pool while in custody of an officer, he pointed to it and said – «In that pool I washed my hands after the job!».

The officer having arrived, and the culprit being pinioned, the mournful procession steadily ascended the platform, accompanied by the Chaplain and other functionaries. When he appeared on the scaffold, he gazed on the [crowd] before him but without any apparent emotion. W[?] was then adjusted, he [?] exclaimed: «Lord [?] upon us! Pray Lord have mercy on me!» With this prayer this unhappy youth continue to supplicate Divine Mercy until the bolt was drawn, which launched him into eternity, amidst at least ten thousand spectators! After hanging the usual time, his body was given to the surgeon of Rochester for dissection.

<sup>95</sup> (Transcript from original in bad condition).

### A NEW COPY OF THE VERSES

Oh ! every one both far and nigh your serious thoughts engage  
 On one so soon condemned to die not 14 years of age,  
 Cut off just in the dawn of life by the laws of man & God  
 For oh ! my hands are stain'd of fellow creature's blood !

R. Taylor was my victim's name, his father ill & weak,  
 had sent the lad to Aylesford some money for to seek,  
 My father and my brother too did join me on that day,  
 To [?] the lad within the wood through which his road did lay.

In vain the victim of my rage implor'd my hand to stay,  
 He knelt in deepest distress to me, my anger to allay,  
 I'll give you all, my victim cried, if you spare my life,  
 My prayers shall never be denied, my money – cap – and knife.

But nothing would my feelings touch, his cries availed nought,  
 For out my sharpened knife I took, and plung'd in his throat,  
 I saw his life blood ebbing cool as ever the lad had stood,  
 Then hastened to a neighbouring pool and washed me from his blood.

Ten weeks the murder lay conceal'd, in vain the lad was sought,  
 We thought 'twould never be revealed and unto [?] brought  
 The voice of blood at length was heard & I am doom'd to die  
 For mercy, which I once denied, to thee, o' God ! I cry.

(W. Heppel, printer, Birmingham)

## APPENDIX 3

**BABY  
FARMING.  
MOTHERS BEWARE  
(London, 1871)**

Oh, mothers, fond mothers your attention  
I pray.  
And listen awhile to a pitiful lay.  
It's a out baby farming, a scandalous trade,  
And shocking disclosures have lately been made,  
Near Brixton, in Surrey, this system so base,  
Has at last ! been discovered, a social disgrace.

## CHORUS.

Then mothers, fond mothers, of your children take care,  
And against baby farming I pray you beware.

What is baby farming, some mothers may say  
Tis a practice that takes a poor infant away  
From the care of it's mother by a stranger instead,  
The poor little creature is foster'd and bred.  
It encourages vice and [?] I won't name,  
Tis a means to get rid of the offspring o'shame.

Sometimes a young woman has been led astray,  
Sends the child of her guilt to be out of the way.  
She pays a few pounds, tis a bargain, and then  
She gives it up never to see it again,  
While the indolent wife in luxury fed,  
Pays a stranger to suckle her offspring instead

In a Terrace, at Brixton, two sisters did dwell  
And of their sad doings the newspapers tell.  
How they tempted poor mothers their offspring to leave,  
To their tender care, but alas to deceive.  
They starved them to death, for of late has been found.  
The bodies of infants in the fields there around.

Poor children half-naked, their state we deplore,  
Too weak for to stand, they laid on the floor  
Unwashed and neglected by night and by day,  
Till their dear little souls from life pass away  
And what cared the nurse for the dead ones, [?]  
The [?] of a child, why a saving would be.

Will the hen drive the chicken from under under her wing,  
 And leave it to perish, the poor little thing,  
 Or will dumb brutes desert their offspring, ah ! no,  
 What proofs of affection animals show.  
 Yes mothers alas their children will slay,  
 Or else pay another to put it away.

**HORRIBLE  
 MURDER BY A CLERGYMAN  
 At Stockwell, and Confession of the Murderer**

On Wednesday afternoon a murder, attended by frightful circumstances, was discovered to have been perpetrated at St. Martin's-road, Stockwell, the murderer being the Rev. Mr. Selby Watson, M.A., a clergyman and who has been upwards of 25 years master of the Stockwell Grammar School. The victim is the wife of the rev. gentleman, a lady of about 63 years, and her body has lain concealed in the house ever since Sunday night, when it will be seen that the must have been committed.

It appears that the prisoner on Sunday evening, told the servant when she came home, that her mistress had gone into the country for a few days. On Wednesday morning the servant heard groans in Mr. Watson's bed room, she immediately went in, and found the gentleman senseless in bed; she at once fetched Dr. Rugg, who found a letter on the table adressed to himself, which that prisoner had murdered his wife and poisoned himself. Prompt measures was immediately taken and the prisoner recovered, when he was handed over to the police. In the chamber indicated in the letter, was found the body of the lady huddled up, her clothes saturated with blood. Her head was smashed in, and in places amost beaten to a jelly. Prisoner left a full written confession.

Once more the dreadful crime of murder,  
 Spreads dismay and grief around,  
 Men turn pale and woman tremble,  
 At the news, this dreadful sound.  
 A Clegyman well known and famous,  
 One who led a pious life,  
 In a dreadful fit of passion,  
 Kill'd poor Anne his darling wife.

A parson by the name of Watson,  
 A man of learning and great fame,  
 Has done a deed he now confesses,  
 Fill's his soul with greif and shame.

St. Martin's Road near Stockwell Crescent  
 There liv'd the parson and his wife,  
 A servant girl whose name was Ellen,  
 Say's they liv'd a quiet life.

On Sunday night she missed her mistress,  
 When she enquired her master said,  
 Your lady she's gone on a journey,  
 While wretched man his wife lay dead.

His guilty soul the dreadful secret,  
 Fear'd the shocking truth to tell,  
 And in despair he then determined,  
 To end his wretched life as well.

Away he went to buy some poison,  
 And some refused to sell the stuff.  
 At last he brought it – prussic acid,  
 Which he swallow'd not enough.

The servant heard her master moaning,  
 And for a doctor she did run,  
 He came, and read upon the table,  
 How the dreadful crime was done.

The police they came and search'd the dwelling,  
 And in the library on the floor,  
 Alas they found poor Mrs. Watson.  
 Dead, and lying in her gore.

The wretched man has made confession,  
 That he took away her life,  
 But why he did it – he is silent,  
 That poor old soul his aged wife,

A Clegyman in his position,  
 Makes the crime a blacker dye  
 Prepare to die and look for mercy  
 Only to your judge on high.

**TRIAL AND SENTENCE  
 OF  
 The Rev. John S. Watson,  
 For the Murder of his Wife**

On Wednesday, the Rev. John S. Watson was put on his trial at the Old Bailey, before Mr. Justice Byles, for the will ful murder of his wife. The prisoner exhibited a most careworn and dejected appearance, pleaded «Not Guilty».

Following is the incidents of the case: – On Sunday evening, he told the servant when she came home, that her mistress had gone into the country for a few days. On Wednesday the servant heard groans in Mr. Watson's bed room, she immediately went in, and found the gentleman senseless in bed; she at once fetched Dr. Rugg, who found a letter on the table addressed to himself, which that prisoner had murdered his



wife and poisoned himself. Prompt measures was immediately taken and the prisoner recovered, when he was handed over to the police. In the chamber indicated in the letter, was found the body of the lady huddled up, her clothes saturated with blood. Her head was smashed in, and in places almost beaten to a jelly. Great exertions were made by the medical men to prove him to be insane at the time he committed the murder, but the Jury found him Guilty, but recommended him strongly to mercy. The Judge having assumed the black cap, passed the sentence of Death in the penal form.

Once more the dreadful crime of murder,  
 Spreads dismay and grief around,  
 Men turn pale and woman tremble,  
 At the news, this dreadful sound.  
 A Clegyman well known and famous,  
 One who led a pious life,  
 Is condemned on the gallows to die,  
 For murdering his darling wife.

A parson by the name of Watson,  
 A man of learning and great fame,  
 Has done a deed he now confesses,  
 Fill's his soul with greif and shame.

St. Martin's Road near Stockwell Crescent  
 There liv'd the parson and his wife,  
 A servant girl whose name was Ellen,  
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