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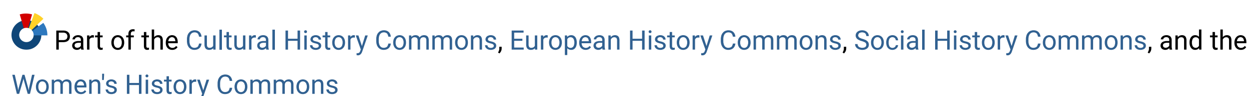
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Skirting the Law: Sensationalism and Spectacle of British Murderesses from the 1830s to the 1860s

Sarah Offutt

Thesis submitted to the Eberly College of Arts and Sciences at West Virginia University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in History

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ABSTRACT

Skirting the Law: Sensationalism and Spectacle of British Murderesses from the 1830s to the 1860s

Sarah Offutt

"Skirting the Law: Sensationalism and Spectacle of British Murderesses from the 1830s to the 1860s" concentrates on women who committed the crime of murder during a time where print culture rose in popularity, gendered spheres of influence dictated lives, and class consciousness governed society. Due to their rarity and uniqueness, murderesses became a fascination among the public as they defined societal expectations. While some women inspired sympathy for their plight that led to their actions, others were viewed as wicked and abominations of nature. When observing how infrequently women were convicted in comparison to men, the thesis argues that their gender and perception aided women in escaping guilty verdicts. Previous scholars have only examined the topic from a literary or historical perspective, but this analysis forms a bridge between the two while focusing primarily on women. The main point of the argument is not to answer the question why women killed, instead, to understand why female murderers were portrayed to the public in a particular light. By examining court records, newspapers, broadsides, and literary works, "Skirting the Law" argues that women who committed murder faced two trials: one of conviction and more importantly one in the court of public opinion waged in the press and literature. Emphasizing ideals of femininity and desperation were essential for murderesses and those who portrayed them in popular culture to appeal for sympathy. Establishing sympathy allowed for women to receive fewer convictions and lesser punishments while calling on the public to question the moral nature of their Victorian views through the context of murder.

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Introduction

From the 1830s to 1860s, Victorian Britain was built upon the ideas of dichotomies and hierarchies. Men and women, rich and poor, urban and rural, all were markers of identity within society but also distinguished superiority on various levels. Boundaries and distinctions required constant reinforcement to allow Victorian values to be upheld and maintained, thus preserving the status quo. The primary enforcers of these boundaries were the middle class.

With industrialization, rural working-class members flooded into urban areas where they sought jobs to provide a steady income. Industrialized towns could not accommodate the abrupt increase in population causing a housing crisis and a rise in poverty in highly populated areas. During the early 1840s, referred to later as the "hungry forties," Britain experienced an economic depression after a decline in trade in 1839, an increase in unemployment, and a bad harvest.[1] To survive, many members of the lower class turned to less than savory methods to earn money such as thievery and prostitution while others sought the aid of parishes. Turning to or associating with criminals was viewed as immoral among the middle class who sought to create social reforms that would allow them to uphold their moral obligations but also enforce their ideology onto the working-class.

During this time, the middle class sought to establish themselves as separate from the working-class and found their signifier through establishment of class consciousness. The middle class created a domestic ideology of sharp division between the public and private sector along gendered lines. While the aristocracy was irresponsible and the poor incompetent, the middle class fashioned themselves to be the moral and to have cultural authority especially within cities. They argued that the middle class had a responsibility to cultivate a civil society and provide a model

[1] Peter Dunkley, "The 'Hungry Forties' and the New Poor Law: A Case Study," *The Historical Journal* 17, no. 2 (1974), 332.

for others to follow. With stable finances, the middle class were looked to not only as political reformers but also capable to implementing societal change both with volunteer work and investment.[2] The middle class not only published but read their own class's ideologies within novels, pamphlets, manuals, and magazines about the double standard that separated men from women within the family, public space, and sexually.[3] The middle class crafted an image of a woman as a domestic, virtuous, emotional, dependent, pure woman which was hailed as the epitome of femininity while men were to be the public breadwinners that supported their dependents. The middle class tried to pass these ideals down to the lower and working classes. Members of the middle class viewed themselves as self-righteous with a moral obligation to help those who did not exist on their class level.

The New Poor Laws, or the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, was the middle class's solution to combat the cost of looking after the poor that had become more expansive. The Poor Laws intended to reduce the cost by encouraging the poor to work to support themselves whilst taking beggars off the street. Parishes were required to come together to build a workhouse that would provide shelter for the poor as well as jobs. However, the law made it impossible, except in special circumstances, for anyone to receive aid unless they left their homes and entered the workhouse. Workhouse conditions were harsh, therefore, only the most desperate entered where inmates participated in physically difficult and strenuous jobs such as stone breaking while children were hired out to factories.[4] Overcrowding existed in the workhouses as well resulting in the spread of disease, poor ventilation, and lack of food. Though restrictions were placed on the

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[2] Simon Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class: Ritual and Authority and the English Industrial City, 1840-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 6; 15.
[3] Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 149.
[4] Derek Fraser, *The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century*, (London: MacMillan, 1974), 20.

workhouses and inspections were soon required, the inmates were left to the mercy of masters or matrons who abused the system and rules. The threat of the workhouse loomed over the working-class especially those who fell ill or became unemployed. The New Poor Laws were not received favorably by all as many viewed workhouses as punishment for the poor.

Crime was believed to be on the rise during the first half of the Victorian era as the Metropolitan Police were formed causing arrest rates to increase. One crime that was particularly visible was homicide. Murder in Britain from the 1830s to the 1860s, despite becoming prominent in popular culture, was still considered a rare event mostly accredited to men. Due to their rarity and uniqueness, female murderers became a fascination among the public. While some women inspired sympathy, others were viewed as wicked and abominations of nature. When observing how infrequently women were convicted in comparison to men, it can be argued that their gender and perception aided them in escaping guilty verdicts or harsher punishments. This thesis argues that women who committed murder faced two trials: one of conviction and more importantly one in the court of public opinion waged in the press and literature. Emphasizing ideals of femininity and desperation were essential for murderesses and those who portrayed them in popular culture to appeal for sympathy. Establishing sympathy allowed for women to receive fewer convictions and lesser punishments while calling on the public to question the moral nature of their Victorian views through the context of murder.

For my thesis, I address the question: why were female murderesses of Victorian England depicted and received differently from their male counterparts by the public and in popular culture? This inquiry also raises the question of impact. Did the depictions and receptions contribute to why so few women were convicted compared to men? While male murderers were typically viewed as overly aggressive and hyper-masculine, female murderesses fell into multiple

categories. While some are viewed as desperate, others were considered cold-hearted. Some were immortalized as exuding femininity yet others were viewed as dangers to society due to their masculine qualities and actions. This wide variety makes it impossible for one image to be created to define a female murderer. The diversity of the female criminal created a spectrum of sympathy and provided a complexity to criminal cases that influence fiction. The main point of the argument is not to answer the question why women killed as there were many different reasons, instead, to question why female murderers were portrayed to the public in a particular light. These women struggled to be accurately portrayed by their contemporaries as they existed at an intersection of identity where they were neither fully criminal nor feminine. This thesis examines how these women became categorized by the public and what designated a woman as a villain or a victim of circumstance.

Previous authors who have discussed this topic have either focused solely on the history of female murderesses or fictional depictions. This research bridges the subjects while providing commentary through a historical lens. To fully articulate how women differed in comparison to men when accused of murder, court cases as well as depictions in the press will be examined. While those who study literature discuss fictional works, historians apply more contextualization to sources but do not often incorporate fictional stories in their research. Fictional works, though originally intended for entertainment, provide historical value as they capture the intellectual history and morals of the author as well as the audience. With many novels, especially sensational novels, relying heavily upon recognizable settings and characters; novels recreate a worldview of the Victorian age through the eyes of those who experienced it firsthand. I claim that the fusion of nonfictional and fictional depictions of female criminals provides an insight into how women were regarded differently from men. Though both genders faced the

deliberation of guilt, women also encountered debate over their identity and demeanor based upon societal expectations of femininity. Fiction is a manifestation of social thought formed into words preserving intellectual thought and customs. The fictional works needed to uphold the social norms of the era to appeal to the audience and sell.

One of the earliest studies on this topic was Richard Altick's 1970 book *Victorian Studies in Scarlet*. Within his influential work, Altick dissects various cases that caught popular interest from the 1840s to the early 1900s. He describes his work as offering "a realistic treatment" of the era by focusing on court transcripts and records while being adamant to avoid contemporary newspapers and books that he believed to be inherently unreliable.[5] His work is fundamental in Victorian literary history, yet he is critical of sensationalism claiming "art was not then, any more than at any other time, a slavish imitation of life."[6] Despite Altick's claims, one of the most recent researchers, Rosalind Crone, has expanded the importance in understanding violence in Victorian popular culture. Crone's work from 2012, *Violent Victorians: Popular Entertainment in Nineteenth-Century London,* stressed the importance of entertainment when discussing the attitudes and mindsets of Victorians. She seeks to revise the popular "civilizing process" theory which states that industrialization and the rise of the middle class resulted in Victorians becoming more civil and less violent. Crone examines street performances of Mr. Punch, penny dreadfuls, and melodramas through social and economic contexts. She states, "the Victorian popular imagination was bloodier, much more explicit, and more angry and turbulent than historians have thus far been prepared to acknowledge."[7] Unlike Altick, Crone views popular entertainment as quintessential when addressing violence in the Victorian era. Though Crone

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[5] Richard Altick, *Victorian Studies in Scarlet* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1970), 10-11.
[6] Ibid., 308.
[7] Rosalind Crone, *Violent Victorians: Popular Entertainment in Nineteenth-Century London* (Manchester University Press, 2012), 7.

agrees with other historians that Victorians became less violent in practice, she asserts that they continued to be drawn to violence through their consumption of popular culture.

The historian Victor Gatrell centers his book, *The Hanging Tree: Execution and the English People 1770-1868,* on a discussion of the role of the rising middle class and the civilizing process. Within his book, Gatrell claims that examining the history of public hangings in Britain can only be accomplished if alternative techniques are used. He claims, "only rash historians would privilege material, or political, or cultural causes without interrelating all three."[8] Despite this statement, Gatrell does not offer a gendered perspective nor does he include the role of literary works outside news articles and broadsides. His work provides a large overview of the history of criminal punishment through laws, proclamations, and court rulings. Gatrell's work is important due to his discussion of the English justice system and law. While Gatrell uses a political and social approach, J.J. Tobias focuses on class, increased population, and the reformation of prisons and policing in *Crime and Industrial Society in the 19th Century.* Tobias's book, written in 1967, connects crime to industrialization as more young people relocated to the urban space for work. Crime increased as police could not monitor highly populated, poorer areas effectively. Though an older work, Tobias's book is the foundation for more recent works that discuss crime by addressing class and social change.

The compilation of essays found within *Victorian Crime, Madness, and Sensation* offers a literary perspective on crime from multiple authors. By charting the progression of crime throughout the nineteenth century, the essays demonstrate how "a shift in the boundaries of criminality and the growth of mass readership completely re-defined the crime story genre […]

[8] Victor Gatrell. *The Hanging Tree : Execution and the English People, 1770-1868* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 25.

each essay sheds light on nineteenth-century moral and social values, the construction and perpetration of new forms of crime, and the developing sciences of criminology and detection."[9] While the book examines mostly popular fiction, different forms of crime are discussed such as infanticide, child abduction, sex crimes, crimes of property, and murder. The discussion of sensationalism is not limited to novels but also discusses other formats such as journalism, penny dreadfuls, and poetry. Many authors within the collection, such as June Sturrock, Barbara Onslow, and Leslie Ann Minot, discuss the roles of women both in depiction and writing about crime. The addition of this secondary source, though not written by historians, does contain valid insight into the societal values and expectations of the Victorians. Though this work does align with my research's literary and gender discussions, it does not fully address real-life crime occurring in Britain as thoroughly as other works.

The most recent debate surrounding this topic has revolved around the debate of "the woman question." With a background in criminal justice, Virginia Morris addresses this debate by claiming "most novelists were doing more than mirroring the world they lived in. Some whether they intended to or not, perpetuated the stereotype of the woman killer as oversexed and over emotional. Others increasingly provoked their readers to reassess their perceptions of women criminals, and in doing so helped to transform the image of women's nature from passivity to active involvement."[10] Her 1990 book, *Double Jeopardy: Women Who Kill in Victorian Fiction*, examines the role of the domestic sphere to address how criminal women's depiction had more importance than originally perceived. By discussing the role of gender and spheres of influence, Morris invites more debate over "the woman question" as she asks what the

[9] Grace Moore. "Introduction" in *Victorian Crime, Madness and Sensation*, edited by Andrew Maunder. (Aldershot, Hants, England: Ashgate, 2004), 11.
[10] Virginia Morris, *Double Jeopardy: Women Who Kill in Victorian Fiction* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1990), 7.

true role of women was meant to be. She examines many of the same fictional works as I use but also addresses how authors varied in depicting murderous women. Morris claims that a double standard existed for women as they not only struggled with their criminal actions but also how to exist within a gendered society.

Other writers, such as Kathy Callahan, also discuss the woman's question and the domestic sphere when describing female murderers especially among the lower class. Callahan's "Women Who Kill: An Analysis of Cases in Late Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth Century London" from the *Journal of Social History* discusses how gender impacted the criminal justice system. She uses many tables to help illustrate the ratios of violence and how they differed from men. Callahan states that men were arrested for more violent crimes than women especially homicide. Typically, women killed individuals that they knew using weapons of convenience.[11] Spousal abuse and alcoholism were common during these trials which could be found on both sides of the marriage. Women were more likely to be found innocent and if not received reduced charges with few declaring self-defense in court. Many cases were the result of arguments that led to mortal wounds both in public and private settings.[12] This article uses murder to discuss women's role in society and how they were viewed during this time. The methods of the murder demonstrate that women were not fixtures of the household, but public individuals who engaged in labor. The trials indicate that women were severely confined to gender roles by men and those that did not fit the mold were condemned in court and by society. It is an extreme example, but Callahan's argument does articulate how the lives and expectations of women varied differently from men.

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[11] Kathy Callahan, "Women Who Kill: An Analysis of Cases in Late-Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth Century London," *Journal of Social History*, vol.46, no. 4 (Oxford University Press, Summer 2013),1022.
[12] Ibid., 1021.

The idea of "traditional female crimes" is mentioned by Callahan but the topic is elaborated on further by Ginger Frost by discussing the role of infanticide. Frost admits high numbers of unwed mothers killed their own children out of desperation to avoid living in a workhouse. For these women, death was considered merciful compared to a life as a poor, illegitimate child.[13] Women were viewed as the caretakers of children, yet the act of harming a child to save it from a life of cruelty opens the debate of whether this action was appropriate by social standards. The most common form of homicide during 1850s, and second most common during the 1860s, involved children, namely infants.[14] As this form of murder was considered a "woman's crime" that went against the basic Victorian belief in femininity and domesticity, observing how infanticide received different reactions demonstrates how central gender was within Victorian thought. This angle of defining different forms of murder along gender lines allows women to be separated from men due to their motives, victims, consequences, and reactions.

For my research project, I will be engaging with the debate surrounding "the woman's question." It is important to not only tell how these women were viewed but also what made them be seen in this way. Discussing "the woman's question" will allow me to determine what qualities women were supposedly lacking that led them into their situation. To fully understand sensationalism, it is vital to understand the individuals who experienced sensationalism as a form of entertainment. The spectacle of a trial or hanging is a public affair yet those who read the fictionalizations did so privately and sought out the sources to receive their entertainment. Homicide is a grim topic, yet individuals chose to engage with this violent material.

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[13] Ginger Frost, *The Victorian World: Facts and Fictions* (Santa Barbara CA: ABC-CLIO, 2018), 95.
[14] Clive Emsley, *Crime and Society in England 1750-1900,* 2nd ed. Themes in British Social History (London: Longman, 1996), 43.

I chose to focus my attention on homicide due to its prominence and high visibility. Other crimes considered lower offenses did not have the same weight of punishment nor intrigue for sensationalism to be warranted. To address the question of depiction and reception, the thesis focuses primarily on the sensationalism surrounding various cases though not the actual crimes themselves. Examining the actual cases and trials alongside the reporting in the media allows a correlation to be addressed of how these women were depicted and viewed. My thesis is less interested in the act of murder itself than the sensationalism and entertainment it inspired and cultivated. Though some cases such as the murders of Patrick O'Conner and Francis Saville Kent are discussed, their inclusion centers around how Maria Manning and Constance Kent differed according to public perception.

My research ranges between the 1830s to the 1860s. This period of time covers the first half of the Victorian period prior to the end of public executions in 1868. As guilty verdicts and capital punishment are direct consequences of perceptions regarding cases, the potential sentence influenced the outcomes of these cases. To understand the proceedings of some of the trials that are discussed, the digitized proceedings of the Old Bailey are instrumental to address how criminal women were viewed before the court of law. Other sources related to the cases discussed include broadsides, woodcuts, newspapers, and witness accounts. These forms of media provided outlets for expression and personal opinions to be shared which influenced the readers. The magazines were also a preferred format for serial novels. Fictional works will also be included, thus literary analysis is presented alongside historical discussion. It is important to discuss these fictional works as some were inspired by real cases and people while others were written specifically to address prevalent stereotypes associated with women, murderous or not. Regardless of real or fictional origin, investigating the popular cultural depictions of murderous

women reveals the attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of Victorian public who sought out or contributed to sensationalism and violent entertainment.

The thesis has been broken into three categories: true crimes and their depictions, the impact of fictional stories, and receptions of sensationalism. The first chapter, "Gendering Crime," compares men and women in the context of crime during the Victorian era. This chapter discusses the history of crime in Britain to provide background demonstrating the gender differential in crime. The majority of the chapter centers around working-class women and how different forms were classified as more deserving of mercy than others. Cases of infanticide, abuse, and passion are examined to identify different extremes of desperation and levels of sympathy directed toward the murderous women. "Fictional Villain or Victim," the second chapter, focuses on the connection between crime and violence to fictional depictions. This chapter centers around how diverse the depictions and attitudes toward criminal women were through an examination of sensational literature primarily read by middle class women. The final chapter centers around the reception of the public to cases of homicide. The chapter, "A Spectacle of Murderous Proportions," combines discussions from the previous chapters to address how crime influenced popular culture and entertainment for the public. This section looks at the spectacle and reception of crime and punishment as a form of entertainment for the general population.

From the 1830s to the 1860s, female murderers did not occupy a specific identity as their actions were a denial of traits attributed to femininity by the middle class. By justifying their murder as alternative form of femininity, these women gained personal agency that could be sanctified by society. While reforms pushed for civilizing the population, the intrigue surrounding murderesses invited further investment in the immoral. Women attending trials,

purchasing broadsides, viewing executions, and reading sensational novels demonstrate that the middle class's moral authority did not fully dominate Victorian society. Female murderers, to avoid their own death, needed to present themselves in a manner that reflected the ideals of femininity despite their actions proving to be otherwise. Though some women were condemned, the fact that most women received mercy demonstrated that the rigid boundaries of the early nineteenth century set by the middle class were crumbling.

Chapter One: Gendering Crime

During the nineteenth century, violent crime in Britain was depicted by the media as being on the rise when in actuality there was a decrease. With the circulation of stories in newspapers and the rise of literacy rates, the idea of criminality was sold to the masses to increase profits by inciting panic among readers. Despite scandalous headlines, murder was not the dominant crime. Violent offenses and murder rates were relatively low in Britain and were declining steadily. Victorian England's homicide rate reached two per 100,000 only in 1865 but generally hovered around one and a half per 100,000 to less than one per 100,000 in the 1880s and declined further in the 1900s.[15] Murder was the most visible and reported crime as well as the most eye-catching. Cases involving the ultimate crime of murder brought publicity and pressure onto the police force to identify the killer and bring the culprit to justice. If found guilty, penalties ranged from prison time, penal servitude, fines, or in severe cases hanging. On the whole, men were more likely to be found guilty and be sentenced to death than women but the amount of women accused of murder remained high. According to William Guy, between 1855 to 1874, 522 women were committed to trial for murder while 795 men were charged during the same period across England and Wales. Most cases ended in acquittal or detainment due to insanity. Of 440 individuals found guilty and sentenced to death, only twelve women and 230 men were executed, two percent and twenty-nine percent respectively.[16] What caused this great disparity in executions between the genders? Why were so few women sentenced to face capital punishment compared to men? Answers to both of

[15] Clive Emsley, *Crime and Society in England 1750-1900,* 2nd ed. Themes in British Social History (London: Longman, 1996), 42.
[16] William A. Guy, "On the Executions for Murder That Haven Taken Place in England and Wales During the Last Seventy Years," *Journal of the Statistical Society* 38 (1875), 480; Patrick Wilson, *Murderess*: *A Study of Women Executed in Britain Since 1843* (London: Michael Joseph, 1971), 315.

these questions tie back to the concepts of gender and emotion both on an individual and societal levels.

From the 1790s to the 1840s a rise in crime was linked to a combination of changes in social and economic life in Britain such as population growth, rural dislocation, urbanization, loosening of traditional social controls, economic depression, and high unemployment. Carrabine and other contributors to *Crime in Modern Britain* also cite changes in public order as the government created new criminal offenses while the reorganization of courts encouraged more cases and justification to begin viewing crime as a "social issue."[17] Reforms to the laws and the courts in the 1820s changed the justice system as they shifted to value evidence rather than hearsay.

The home secretary, Robert Peel founded The Metropolitan Police in 1829 to create a unified and professional police force entirely dedicated to crime prevention in London with other cities establishing their own police forces in the following decades. After failing to identify a murder suspect for 10 days, the government opened an eight men detective department that would investigate past crimes in 1842. Eventually this department's name would take on the name of the police headquarters, Scotland Yard. Law enforcement detectives were committed to the tracking, capturing, and cataloguing of criminals. Ginger Frost notes that "after the police began investigations, arrests rose in number, even if the number of crimes committed was not different, because the police got better at finding, charging, and convicting those responsible. For instance, according to statistics, felony prosecutions in London increased from 4,605 in 1805 to 29,359 in 1854."[18] With more investigation, more crimes were discovered and made visible to the Victorians. The rising number of arrests also coincided with cities becoming overcrowded with individuals seeking work in factories and as domestic servants. Areas without adequate housing to

[17] Eamonn Carrabine, *Crime in Modern Britain*, Oxford Modern Britain (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2002, 7.
[18] Ginger Frost, *The Victorian World: Facts and Fictions* (Santa Barbara CA: ABC-CLIO, 2018), 94.

accommodate the influx of residents contained members of the working class. The 'Hungry Forties' forced families to flee to urban areas seeking work both for men and women as people struggled to survive unemployment and a bad harvest.[19] Individuals and families crammed together in squalor in order to avoid the horrors of the workhouse which were established by the New Poor Laws of 1834 by middle class reformers. Only the most desperate turned to the workhouse as a source of relief and shelter as occupants endured deplorable living conditions and monotonous, physical labor.[20] Respectable members of society associated the working class with crime fearing property damage and violence. Moral panics among the middle and upper classes were set off by newspapers who warned of the "criminal classes" as a danger to society. The Victorian middle class feared being murdered by a burglar or ferocious member of the "dangerous class," but most victims knew their assailant often being related with the most common being women killing their children or husbands killing their wives.[21]

The assumed profile of the criminal was a young, urban, poor male. With many criminal acts such as theft being tied to the urban areas, it was assumed the lower classes were more frequently the perpetrators. Men were thieves while women were considered prostitutes. While prostitution was not a criminal offense, it was considered immoral and led to consorting with thieves.[22] Prostitution and other methods by women to earn their own money were viewed as a method to "render themselves independent of men for their subsistence." Luke Owen Pike, a barrister at-law and historical researcher for the United Kingdom's Public Records Office, assumed that urban life provided opportunities for women to engage in more crime whilst earning an income

[19] "Hungry Forties" refers to the Britain's struggle after trade declined in 1839 resulting in unemployment and lower class members moving to urban areas in search of jobs. Peter Dunkley, "The 'Hungry Forties' and the New Poor Law: A Case Study," *The Historical Journal* 17, no. 2 (1974), 332.
[20] Derek Fraser, *The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century*, (London: MacMillan, 1976), 20.
[21] Emsley, 44.
[22] Emsley, 80.

as they had more interactions with habitual criminals of the opposite sex. He concluded in *A History of Crime in England*, "so far as crime is determined by external circumstances, every step made by woman towards her independence is a step towards that precipice at the bottom of which lies a prison."[23] Gender was a quintessential definer in society as it dictated every aspect of the individual. Those who did not conform to fit the standardized image of their gender were viewed as threats to society. With more women entering the work force, they were viewed as increasing their own independence thereby becoming more masculine. Women engaged in wage-earning went against the fundamental Victorian principles of femininity as it meant a woman was in public not at home tending to the children or her husband's needs. For those like Pike who subscribed to this view, it was easier to image women as criminals as they took on masculine traits rather than admitting that women were just as capable as men of committing crimes.

Men were often criminalized due to the stereotyping of gender roles. Men in Victorian Britain had public access, economic resources, and allowed sexual freedoms that were denied to women but also viewed as the rasher of the two genders. While men had power, they had also had disadvantages. Due to their role as head of the household, men were expected to earn for themselves and their dependents whilst behaving chivalrously. Men were also restricted from showing their emotions openly therefore expected to repress their feelings. Women's outbursts of emotion and inconsistency were accepted as 'natural' for their gender as was seeking the support of men. Since a woman's heart was tender, damages for a woman's wounded feelings were high while men were seldom compensated if their feelings were hurt.[24] It is for these reasons that men

[23] Luke Owen Pike, *A History of Crime in England,* vol. 2 (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1879), 527.
[24] Ginger Frost, *Promises Broken: Courtship, Class, and Gender in Victorian England* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 101.

were considered the members of the criminal class. Their "natural" aggressiveness and dominance, if unrestrained, could cause harm to the most vulnerable.

Women, when accused, were looked at with some skepticism as their maternal and caring instincts made them less disposed to crime but more suited for domestic roles. Luke Owen Pike asserted within *A History of Crime in England* that "the sex which is physically weaker is less prone to all those actions which are now styled criminal than the sex which is physically stronger."[25] Unlike their counterparts, women were viewed as domestic figures confined to the home completely dependent on male figures. The middle-class ideal of femininity revolved around the image of the "Angel in the House." This imagery depicted women as figures of virtue whose domain of control is restricted to the household as a wife and mother. The Angel was the epitome of femininity and domesticity. While a man was a public figure supporting the woman, she devoted her life to the home where her natural maternal and caring instincts flourished.[26] These middle class values and ideals were imposed upon society, but did not match the reality of working class people and practice. This ideal was only feasible for those in the middle and upper classes as working class women needed to work to support the household.

For the Victorians, dichotomies and constructions of difference were important as, in theory, everyone had a designated place and role assigned. If an individual was not one, they were automatically the other. For the middle class, maintaining these boundaries further promoted their ideals but also protected their own status and placement within societal hierarchy. When individuals crossed the boundaries, middle class ideals could be seen as impractical and therefore questioned. To avoid questioning the middle class ideals of femininity, a new category was created

[25] Pike, 526.
[26] Shani D'Cruze and Louise A. Jackson, *Women, Crime and Justice in England since 1660* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 45.

to accommodate women who did not fit the stereotypes assigned to their gender. The opposite of the "Angel," and the only other option for women, was the "Fallen Woman." While the Angel represented purity, virtue, domesticity, subservience, and dependence, the Fallen Woman was the antithesis. Impure, corrupted, public, outspoken, and independent were traits associated with women who were considered to have fallen from their previous elevation by rejecting their role. Women who were identified as Fallen were considered ruined most notably through the compromise of her virtue in sexual relationships. As Andrew Maunder describes in *Victorian Crime, Madness and Sensation*, "sexual 'depravity' among women in particular – including any sexual interest outside of marriage – was regarded as a sign of nymphomania or lunacy, but also as regression or degeneration: a horrible fall from woman's place near the top off the evolutionary, moral and social trees."[27] Though Fallen Women were commonly associated with prostitutes; any women could fall if her purity was called into question. The damage to one's reputation could not be undone once a woman was deemed ruined. For young, unmarried women who fell pregnant, they had no protection from societal scrutiny leading to them being shunned by their family and unable to attain respectable jobs. Lacking lodging or work, these women would be forced to enter the workhouses where they would face harsh labor and terrible living conditions.

Desperation was a common theme among women who lacked control of their lives. The threat of a destroyed reputation, life in the workhouse, and abandonment triggered these women enough to provoke them to murder, fall to insanity, or possibly both. To escape their fate, these women committed the ultimate crime in attempt to save themselves. While some can be viewed as more sympathetic than others, varying emotions can be tied to each of these cases both in action

[27] Andrew Maunder, "'Stepchildren of Nature': East Cunne and the Spectre of Female Degeneracy, 1860-1861," in *Victorian Crime, Madness and Sensation*, edited by Andrew Maunder and Grace Moore (Aldershot, Hants, England: Ashgate, 2004), 63.

and consequence. To fully understand the range of outcomes, it is important to look at three different examples: Eliza Higgins, Mary Furley, and Sarah Dickinson.

On May 11, 1857, 21 year-old Eliza Higgins stood before a jury accused of murdering her month old daughter who bore the same name. Previously a domestic servant, Higgins entered the workhouse for the duration of her confinement when the pregnancy was discovered. One witness, Harriet Hall, recalled telling Higgins, "it was a good thing [the child] was dead, as she had to go out to get her living."[28] Domestic service of all types was the largest occupation sector for women as it fit within the parameters of their sphere of influence. Women who found themselves pregnant faced potential unemployment, like Higgins. If removed from service, domestic servants lost not only their source of income but also their housing. If the pregnancy was discovered, "often pregnant single servants were dismissed 'without a character,' making further employment difficult to obtain even if they could make arrangements for the care of their babies."[29] Most young women kept their pregnancies secret or even ignored their body's changes. For Higgins, her pregnancy was discovered therefore she was dismissed and forced to find new accommodation at the workhouse. Knowledge of her pregnancy made it impossible for her to hide her condition until after the child was born thus the workhouse would be an interregnum. However, her child would then be born and rely upon her.

On March 25th , Higgins' daughter was found suffering from a head wound after allegedly falling out of a window onto the brickwork below. Police sergeant, Robert Wright, arrested Higgins for deserting her child describing her as a "poor creature in a fit, and raving, and calling out for a razor to cut her throat." The surgeon noted the child had bruising and fractures on the right side

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[28] "Trial of Eliza Higgins," *Old Bailey Proceedings Online,* t18570511-597 (May 11,1857), https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?id=def1-597-18570511&div=t18570511-597#highlight.
[29] D'Cruze and Jackson, 77.

and back of the head leading to his conclusion that she died of compression of the brain days later. Neither of these men could be certain to Higgins' role in the death of the child but the postmortem report suggested nefarious intent. Two skull fractures as well as engorged vessels in the right backside of the brain led the coroner to rule extreme force was used as the cranial bones of infants are soft and difficult to break. The doctor favored the opinion that great violence had been the cause of death rather than a fall.

The trial faced complication during the sentencing phase as new legislation caused concern among the jury. Infanticide, or new-born child murder, was defined as the killing of a child under the age of 12 months old who had survived birth. The 1803 Act Against Wounding and Maiming created the new offense of concealment of birth as an alternative ruling to infanticide cases restricted only to single mothers and illegitimate children. The new offense was punishable by up to two years in prison covering cases where evidence that proved intentional death was not strong enough for conviction. Concealment charges, being a lesser offense and with milder sentences, were used in the majority of cases than those of infanticide. This act was slightly revised in 1828 when concealment became its own offense no longer needed the defendant to prove the death. The 1828 Act also extended concealment to be applicable to all women. Despite these acts granting mercy to women who murdered their children, the New Poor Law punished unwed mothers harshly. The New Poor Law of 1834 ended parish relief for unmarried mothers and allowed fathers of illegitimate children to avoid paying child support.[30] The New Poor Law expected mothers to bear the full moral and financial burden of illegitimates causing pressure on women which encouraged infanticide. The law deprived of their femininity as it forced them to embrace their status as Fallen, take on masculine traits by earning a wage to support themselves and a child, or

[30] "Trial of Eliza Higgins," *OBPO*.

risk prison and hanging by killing the child. Britain saw a rise in infanticide causes following this law as unmarried women lost what little assistance they could receive. Without options, many like Higgins turned to the workhouse and murder to relieve them of their problems. It was this law that caused the jury to recommend mercy with the court records declaring they "expressed their opinion that the bastardy laws had a strong tendency to increase this class of crime."[31] Eliza Higgins was able to receive a lesser offense of manslaughter rather than willful murder, therefore a ruling that allowed her to escape the possibility of death. Without a conclusive understanding as to how the child died, Higgins was given a lesser verdict which resulted in six years of penal servitude rather than potential hanging.

Women who committed infanticide were often more pitied by judges, juries, and the public. Concealment enabled juries to evade convicting mothers by offering an alternative lesser conviction. Women were overwhelmingly held responsible in cases of infanticide as their primary duty was to the children and often the child in question died soon after its birth when only the mother would be present. Anne-Marie Kilday found in her investigation that all infanticidal women provided one of five explanations: poverty, shame, isolation, insanity, and pragmatism.[32] This particular form of murder was associated with women as many cases were committed within a day of the child's birth. Unwanted pregnancies for those in inconvenient positions cause fear and panic within the expectant mothers. Those who were unwed faced not only the struggle of rising children, but also the threat of abandonment and poverty once their reputation was ruined. To avoid ruin, some women chose to conceal their pregnancies and subsequent births. Others went further opting to kill the physical embodiment of their woes: the child. Despite the horrific nature of killing a

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[31] Justitia, "Infanticide Under the New Poor Law," *The Times*, (London), Aug. 8, 1842: 6. *The Times Digital Archive*. link-gale-com.wvu.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/CS101479176/GDCS?u=morg77564&sid=bookmark-GDCS&xid=ea26b59e.

[32] Anne-Marie Kilday,*A History of Infanticide in Britain* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 144.

child and going against natural maternal instincts, women often received judicial sympathy and the benefit of the doubt. For example, Mary Milnes was indicted for the murder of her newborn son who was found in her arms with his head nearly severed from his body. Though Mary openly admitted her guilt to doctor, she appeared remorseful in court. Ultimately the judge and jury gave her leniency convicting her of the concealment rather than murder.[33]

Infanticide was considered to be a mar on society by moralists and reformers. "The discovery of a murdered infant came to be regarded as evidence of moral degradation. The fears over infanticide seem to be less to do with the value of infant life and more to do with the actions and behaviors of mothers."[34] Women were considered to be the virtuous members of Victorian society, yet infanticide went against all natural tendencies associated with motherhood. Rather than care and protect a child, infanticidal mothers brought harm to them, Despite going against Victorian morals, sympathy and mercy was often shown to these women citing circumstances being more at fault than a woman herself. With illegitimate children being the most frequent victim. religious reformers also pointed to sexual promiscuity being an issue. Unwed mothers received blame for unwanted pregnancies as they were incapable of protecting their virtue and falling the seductions of men. Religious and moralists pointed to infanticide as way to measure the corruption of women as pregnancies were evidence to a woman's fall. While the public judged this women for their actions, they continued to sympathize with their plight if the woman presented herself as remorseful, demure, and exuding the femininity that had been repressed by actions.

Courtrooms were not the only location where a woman stood trial as newspapers recounted the gruesome details to the public hoping to influence their perception of the female criminal. Richard Altick, author of *Victorian Studies in Scarlet*, claimed, "in general, newspapers felt

[33] "Nottingham Assizes," *The Sheffield and Rotherham Independent* (Yorkshire, England), July 30, 1842, 5.
[34] Kilday, 120.

themselves free to speculate, theorize, admonish; if they did not accuse outright, they came as close to it as need be. And in their descriptions of the characters involved in the drama the reporters used abundant colorful- and prejudicial- detail. What with their appropriating the functions of the police, overseeing and commenting on those of the court, and employment of slanted language some portions of the Victorian press exemplified in its fullest meaning the term 'trial by newspaper.'"[35] For those on trial, it was just as important to be perceived as penitent for the sake of the case as it was for their public image. Those who received criticism in the press would find it difficult to receive mercy within the courtroom. With newspapers acting as a secondary trial and possible executioner, the publicity surrounding the case could influence rulings. In Mary Furley's case, trial by newspaper centered around sentencing.

Mary Furley was indicted for the "willful murder" of George Furley, her almost two-year-old son, on April 8, 1844 at the age of 36. Mary, George, and her older son, Charles, were inmates of the workhouse where Furley claimed she was triggered to end her youngest child's suffering. George's cause of death was ruled as a drowning with two women both claiming Furley had previously made comments to them hinting at George's fate. Mary Ann Buck claimed Furley had told her, "she should drown the child and herself -She said she should drown both the children […] I do not remember that she said anything else particularly about the child – she beat it once." Another women, Emma Weaver, said Furley mentioned to her "it would be her fate and her infant's to have a watery grave." On the night in question, Thomas Gardner, the lighterman who found Mary and the deceased George in the Regent's Canal, described Furley as appearing "'great distress of mind, and complained of the ill usage of the workhouse, and said she would rather die than go back."

[35] Altick, 63.

The judge inquired about the state of the Bethnal-green workhouse and received conflicting accounts. Three women attested that George had been in good health due to the meat, bread, butter, and milk provided everyday by the workhouse. They claimed their own children and George had been well cared for except for a few spots found on their bodies caused by an outbreak. Furley's defender, however, claimed George was not subject to the same treatment as other children as he was declared to have a "bad head."[36] Furley's defense claimed the workhouse's doctor had neglected George thus his health suffered and that the doctor's lack of care had led to his lose of sight, numerous cuts caused by shaving, and untreated sores from breakouts all over his body. Furley's position on killing for mercy was not unique as "most parents who killed their children felt themselves in an impossibly constrained social and material situation, and explain their actions as saving their children from the continued pains of living."[37]

By using the term "willful" implies that this trial centered on whether it be a cause of premeditation or accidental death. In order to determine this, the judge asked each witness whether Furley was "sober" each of which said "yes" making it less likely for a temporary insanity to be used as a plea. By the end of the trial, Furley was unable to convince the jury of the terrible conditions placed upon her and George. She was found guilty and sentenced to death.[38] However, Queen Victoria intervened and respited her sentence from death to being transported to Australia for seven years. News media like *Punch* strongly criticized the government for showing mercy toward Furley: "In the name of outraged humanity, in the name of a most miserable woman, scourged to agony and madness by the cruelty of unmerited ill-fortune, we ask [the Home Secretary] wherefore this atrocity was committed? Did he not know the wretchedness, more

[36] "Trial of Mary Furley," *OBPO*, t18440408-1279 (April 8, 1844), https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?id=def1-1279-18440408&div=t18440408-1279#highlight.
[37] D'Cruze and Jackson, 78.
[38] "Trial of Mary Furley," OBPO.

complete in its horror than any labored tale of fiction, that step by step had scourged the woman from the workhouse to the river's brink?"[39] Despite *Punch* and other outlets criticizing the respite, others believed mercy should have been the original outcome for such an intricate case. *The Taunton Courier* reprinted quotes from *The Times* demonstrating they held a similar belief outside the metropolitan area:

> "We rejoice not so much for the sake of the poor woman herself, as for the character and dignity of the law which it is likely to vindicate. Delay will necessarily enforce an inquiry into the merits of the case; inquiry must as certainly produce a mitigation of punishment; and thus, not only will a wretched woman be saved from an ignominious death, but the law itself will escape the opprobrium of having visited the unconscious violence of madness with the extreme penalties of deliberate crime."[40]

This question surrounding the case was the motivation. For newspapers such as *The Times* and the *Taunton Chronicle*, there was no evidence of premeditation or long harbored hatred directed to the boy. Yes, she was a wretched woman, but also drowning in her own despair and destitution that she refused to have her child suffer her fate. The sympathetic press argued "there is no evidence that this wretched woman harboured such a feeling of hatred to her child as would induce her to become its murderer […] Here the act was reconcilable with the deepest affection; it was the frantic impulse of a woman reduced to the abyss of want, and having no friend to rescue her or her child from the horrors of lingering starvation."[41] Mary Furley, through the words of the press, had evolved from wretched child killer, to desperate mother. Forgiveness was never the intention of this perspective only an articulation on the complex motivations that surrounded the murder.

[39] "The Case of Mary Furley," in *Punch's Almanac* 6 (London: Punch Publications) 1844, 223.
[40] "Respite of Mary Furley," *Taunton Courier and Western Advertiser* (Somerset England), May 1, 1844, 6, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000348/18440501/022/0007.
[41] Ibid.

Mary Furley's case also led to a wider discussion on the role of class. Newspapers who supported the respite went further in their reasonings by claiming the rich could not empathize with the poor and therefore could not judge their decisions as harshly:

> "They [readers] cannot realize to themselves the feelings with which a helpless mother regards the child of her love, whose cries for food she can only answer by unavailing sobs, and whose puny body her own emaciated arms can scarcely bear. But it is in that moment of utter, hopeless, helpless desertion, when she sees that she is abandoned by all the world- that madness takes possession of the brain, and the purest affection which a mother's breast can know turns to desperation. No; the rich, the respectable, the comfortable members of society cannot imagine, cannot picture to themselves, a condition so deplorably miserable as to prompt a woman to infanticide. Let them be thankful that they cannot; but let them show their humility and their gratitude by judging lightly of a fellow-creature."[42]

By calling out how only other poor, desperate mothers could understand the helplessness and madness of Miss Furley, the article speaks to the difference between the public and the jury. While the jury consisted of all men, the public awareness allowed for women, especially those from the lower classes, to imagine the horrors Furley had suffered that drove her to murder a child out of desperation and mercy. A jury of gentlemen would not be able to sympathize with the motherly instincts to protect a child nor the miserable conditions that threatened the quality and expectancy of those living in the workhouse. Those of the upper-class were unable to accurate understand the struggles of the poor as they had no experience of their own to compare to. Empathy would be difficult to achieve in a courtroom, yet the press offered a platform by which to obtain a new version of the story, one more available and recognizable to society at large.

Another plea female defendants often entered was not guilty through *non compus mentis*, or temporary insanity. Insanity was an accepted reason by the public as it "reinforced contemporary perceptions regarding the intrinsic weakness of women and provided an explanation for female

[42] Ibid.

criminality that stepped outside the boundaries of 'acceptable' behavior."[43] Contemporaries agreed that no sane woman had a desire to kill her child, thus the presence of abnormal emotions could explain the of infanticide. Linking mental illness with new-born child murder allowed for pity to placed upon a women by society. Stereotypical labels of femininity that were essential to the concepts of domesticity and patriarchy were retained by this ruling as women were marginalized and patronized further as creatures of unpredictable emotions and sensibilities that needed to be controlled. Declaring a woman to be insane preserved the status quo of Victorian society as it relegated women to a position of weakness rather than admit to the criminality of women. Madness was a break from rationality, but combined with the concept that women were emotional, the plea of temporary insanity was easy to believe for jury that consisted of all gentlemen who could not relate to the circumstances women faced as mothers. In the case of Sarah Dickinson, the jury of all gentlemen agreed to this plea find her not guilty.

With a history of puerperal history stretching back to the birth of her first child, Sarah Dickinson was regarded by neighbors and family members as constantly in the "deepest state of agony and distress of mind," "of despondent character," and suffering from constant pains in her head. During this time postpartum depression was strongly linked to infanticide as the weakening of the human body from labor was believed to have weakened the female mind causing a dissociative personality as well as depression, disorientation, and violence. On the night in question, Mrs. Dickinson was found within her home after slashing the throats of her son, daughter, husband, and herself. Her own sisters claimed a history of insanity was present in their family with Sarah exhibiting the same symptoms as their aunt. Though she did not have a temper, Jane March recounted before the court how her sister preferred seclusion and suffered from sleep walking.

[43] Kilday, 172.

Medical professionals corroborated Jane's statements believing Sarah had been suffering from brain fever which had caused her pain regularly and resulted in personality changes and moments where she existed in a dreamlike state unaware of her own actions.[44] For Dickinson, the insanity plea was easy to sell to the jury and judge as family history, previous accounts of her personality, and her attempt to end her own life all pointed to a woman deeply unwell.

Another woman who could have entered a plea of temporary insanity was Constance Kent. On the morning of June 30th, 1860, Britain awoke to the news that four-year-old Francis Kent had been maliciously slain overnight in his home known as Road Hill. Immediately attention turned to his half-sister, sixteen-year-old Constance Kent. Though some were quick to point to the young woman as guilty, she was released from police custody owing to a lack of evidence. Though her guilt was questioned at the time, Kent would confess five years later to killing the boy. The case itself was regarded as "The Great Crime of 1860," however, the most intriguing element is how the female murderess was perceived, depicted, and sympathized by the public throughout the case. The Road Hill Murder was widely publicized and eventually influenced fictional murder stories, yet what made the case so prominent and intriguing was not the murder but the character that was Constance Kent. Kent was originally arrested but released for lack of evidence. She would confess to the crime five years later and stand trial where she would be found guilty and sentenced to death. Kent, like Dickinson, had a family history of mental illness as knowledge of her mother's madness was well known and caused her to wither and die years prior.[45] Most newspapers were sympathetic to Kent suggesting she was insane and expressed relief when it was announced she would no longer be hanged.

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[44] "The Trial of Sarah Dickinson," *OBPO*, t18440304-1013 (March 4, 1844), https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?id=def1-1013-18440304&div=t18440304-1013#highlight.
[45] Mary S. Hartman, *Victorian Murderesses: A True History of Thirteen Respectable French and English Women Accused of Unspeakable Crimes* (London: Robson Books, 1985), 122.

Kent's socio-economic background also made her an outlier among female killers. Having committed the crime at the age of sixteen on her brother, Kent did not fit the model of the unmarried mother. The Kents were also a well-off middle-class family making desperation due to class and financial struggles not applicable in this case. Shani d'Cruze and Louise Jackson discuss the case in their book also highlighting why Constance Kent was an outlier among murderess:

> "The sympathy that was evinced towards Kent (she was reprieved from execution and left England for Australia in 1885 after serving a 20-year prison sentence) is understandable in terms of the Victorian normalization of genteel female passivity which meant that the criminality of otherwise 'innocent' middle-class women could only be explained through in the language of 'madness.' Some newspapers were quick to condemn Kent; but there was also considerable speculation that the act was one of insanity, arising from a hereditary disposition that had been compounded by the tribulations of puberty, which was more likely in girls than in boys to lead to 'homicidal mania.'"[46]

Kent's age, class, family history, and gender revealed her to be the complete opposite of the popular profile of a killer as she was not of the "criminal class" nor a woman who qualified as a infanticidal mother.

After her handwritten confession was read in court in 1865, one broadside decided not to cast Kent as the victim nor as the villain. Instead, the publisher chose to depict her as guilt ridden and repentant. No more was she the "innocent" girl unable to commit a heinous crime, yet she never fully became the cold, uncaring monster. Throughout the poem, the fictionalization of Kent speaks directly to the reader informing them of her guilt eating away at her soul. The speaker, Kent, claims:

> "My God give me pardon, I do not deserve,
> In my dreams I see Francis, the poor little love.
> Many times he's caress'd me and kissed my poor cheek,
> My heart nearly broken will in sorrow seek."

[46] D'Cruze and Jackson, 149.

The guilt of not only manifest in the metaphysical but also reality as she considers "to take my own life I did cowardly fear,/ Yet this hand it murdered this poor little dear" but ultimately opts to confess her sins in hopes of forgiveness.[47] Francis's innocence and age is reiterated throughout the broadside highlighting how heartless one must be to harm child. Yet, it is Kent who describes him the most as a "poor little love" and "poor little dear." This choice by the writer allows Kent to appear human and contrite, therefore, more sympathetic to the public. Fully pivoting away from the preconceived notions established five years earlier that would imply to the society that their perceptions of young woman and innocence were wrong. Painting Kent as sympathetic but not denying her actions gives previous beliefs and thereby social norms credence while acknowledging that there is no uniformity as Kent proves exceptionalism.

As Constance Kent proves, infanticide was not the only form of killing women participated in. Others killed acquaintances, siblings, lovers, and husbands both premeditated and not. Unlike with instances of infanticide, courts were required to determine if the crime was manslaughter or premeditated murder. Debates of intent relied heavily upon the circumstances presented to the court about the accused's relationships prior to the event and how they were perceived within the courtroom. For Constance, discussions surrounded the family dynamics between Constance and the older siblings to their father's new family. Servants commented on how within the home, the younger children from the second marriage were favored heavily. Constance also had history against her family as she and one of her brothers attempted to runaway from home soon after their father remarried.[48]

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[47] "The Confession of Constance Kent, of the murder of her Brother, Francis Kent, on June 29th, 1860," 1865, *English Crime and Execution Broadsides,* Curiosity Collections, Harvard Law School Library (Cambridge, MA), https://curiosity.lib.harvard.edu/crime-broadsides/catalog/46-990068464540203941.

[48] Hartman, 107-109.

Despite not fulfilling a predetermined category, each female killer stood at an intersection of identity. Victorians were hesitant to denounce women as criminal and chose to give them the title of deviant yet also tried to remove their femininity. Murder negated the attributes of femininity namely if the woman killed her spouse or her child. Killing husbands was a physical elimination of their dependence and subservience while the killing of an innocent child was morally evil going against the assumed nature of a woman to be a caregiver. Though they went against their femininity, these women still received sympathy as courts sought mitigating circumstances that would allow them to provide mercy. With the new legal policies, women were able to avoid harsh punishment by presenting themselves as victims of circumstance and utilizing their gender to gain sympathy from the courts and public. Despite a common theme of desperation being tied to murder, there was always an outlier that did not fit other categories. These women were not viewed to be sympathetic in anyway, but instead, embodiments of evil. No matter the case, the female criminal stood at an intersection regarding her identity as she could not completely a woman nor a criminal. Victorians struggled to comprehend this paradox which allowed many women to utilize the system and the press to inspire sympathy for their plight.

Chapter Two: Fictional Villain or Victim

While discussions of historical crimes are essential to the social, economic, and gender issues involved in understanding the unique position of murderesses in early Victorian society, it is also important to address the intellectual history of this time period. For this chapter, the focus shifts to discuss the presence of female murderess in Victorian fiction. Fictional works, such as novels, capture the thoughts and opinions of the writers as well as their audience. By examining how these women were depicted in a fictional format, insight can be gained into how these women were sold to the Victorian public as well as how they were received.

Novels act as a time capsule containing the intellectual history of the time in which they were created. Authors not only needed to have formatted their own opinion on the topics addressed within their pages but also write in a way that would appeal to their audience. Consumers are more likely to purchase items that they recognize themselves within or subscribe to the same beliefs associated with the product. By examining works intended for public consumption, analysis of fictional works grants understanding into the mindset and morals of the early Victorians which are difficult to obtain through court records and competing newspapers.

During the early Victorian age, the Industrial Revolution brought forth a literacy and printing revolution. Previously, mass production of paper products was limited by the lack of speed and the price of material. The invention of papermaking machines and the application of steam to the printing press allowed for newspapers and other periodicals to be produced cheaply and on a larger scale. In 1836, Parliament temporarily reduced the newspaper tax to a penny through the Reform Act thereby decreasing the price. The reduction of the stamp tax lower prices further making weekly paper purchases more affordable for the hundreds of thousands of

working-class readers.[49] Sally Powell points out that advancements in technology and access to literature among the poorer classes "resulted in a mid-century explosion in the publication of popular fiction with the burgeoning city offering a seemingly ever-expanding captive market for stories that effectively evoked the gothic flavor of city life or offered a means of imaginative escape in the form of sensational romance for weary working-class urbanites."[50] To compete in the expanding market, authors relayed stories that grabbed audiences' attention and retained it for continuous discussion and purchases. Many found their cash cow through the employment of murder in their works.

One popular format was the penny dreadful. Penny dreadfuls were "small, inexpensive, paper-bound books which invariably tended to dwell lovingly on crime, horror, and the substantial following of people in search of pleasurable terror, revulsion, titillation, and general escapism."[51] Edward Lloyd, one of the most prominent and successful of the penny dreadful publishers, directed his chief artist to put an extra dollop of saleable 'vigour' into illustrations destined for the dreadfuls ordering: "there must be more blood-much more blood."[52] Pictures had the ability to communicate with everyone in a time when literacy was not universal. The images associated with the story grabbed the buyer's attention while the story fulfilled their bloody fascinations. Dreadfuls that focused more on crimes such as murder were called penny-bloods that pulled either from current real-life crimes or from the imagination of the authors. One of the most successful penny-blood was entitled *The String of Pearls* which saw the debut of the

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[49] Richard Altick, *Victorian Studies in Scarlet* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1970), 58.
[50] Sally Powell, "Black Markets and Cadaverous Pies: The Corpse, Urban Trade and Industrial Consumption in the Penny Blood," in *Victorian Crime, Madness and Sensation,* Edited by Andrew Maunder and Grace Moore, (Aldershot, Hants, England: Ashgate, 2004), 45
[51] Patricia Anderson, *The Printed Image and the Transformation of Popular Culture, 1790-1860* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991),162.
[52] Ibid., 164.

infamous Sweeney Todd. Depictions of gruesome murders in penny dreadfuls as well as in serials were considered "cheap publications which supply sensation for the millions in penny and half penny numbers."[53] Individuals with lower incomes were more likely to buy this form of sensationalism as they found it more reasonable to pay a small amount once for the weekly episode or to receive their fill of entertainment.

Another popular format for authors was the serial novel. Writers chose the serial format as it expanded their readership though it resulted in drastic changes to traditional writing styles. Breaks between the next edition allowed novelists to experiment with cliffhangers. At the conclusion of an entry, the serial novelist had the opportunity to leave readers in suspense and with thrilling endings. Powerful endings peaked the audience's interest in the novel's story so much that readers were willing to buy the newest installment the next week. This style choice inspired continuous interest in the novel which publishers hoped would continued to sell copies until the novel's conclusion. William Wilkie Collins, who emerged as one of the most successful commercial novelists in the century, notably employed the technique of "make 'em cry, make 'em laugh, make 'em wait."[54] At the conclusion of a chapter, Collins ended with unanswered questions thereby stirring interest in the future chapters where all was answered.

The most popular novel format prior to the 1850s was the three-volume novel. The three-volume collection catered to a middle- and upper-class audience and sold at a stable price of thirty-one shillings and six pence beginning in the 1820s.[55] Unlike serial novels, volumes were sold at one high price that many could not afford. A single edition of a newspaper or magazine

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[53] Michael Diamond, *Victorian Sensation, or, the Spectacular, the Shocking, and the Scandalous in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London: Anthem Press, 2003), 190.
[54] J. Don Vann, *Victorian Novels in Serial* (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1985), 14.
[55] Simon Eliot, "The business of Victorian publishing," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel*, edited by Deidre David (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 44.

publishing a serial novel in increments sold for no more than 3d for a standard twenty-part novel.[56] Dividing the price allowed for those with lower income to spread out the payments and usually receive a cheaper overall rate. Two notable publications, *Household Words* and *All the Year Round,* each sold for 2d, selling on average 40,000 and 100,000 editions each week, respectively, when the 16-page editions included serial novels. In contrast, standard triple-deckers were unlikely to sell more than a thousand copies.[57] After the serialization ended, the completed work was reformatted as triple-deckers granting novelists more control over their work. The middle-class readership considered longer bodies of work to be an indicator of a novelist's significance; therefore, it was expected that upon a serial novel's completion the text would be transferred into the triple-decker format. Unlike their original publication, individual parts of serial novels were combined with each other in order to form three distinct volumes.[58]

Though many authors utilized serialization as a format, William Thackery opted to weaponize the form against what he viewed to be a lesser genre. During the 1830s to 1840s, Newgate novels dealt with crime at the center of their narratives. Newgate novels drew inspiration and their name from the Newgate Calendar, a collection of embellished biographies of criminals produced by the Newgate prison in London during the late eighteen and early nineteenth century. Mostly focusing on murder and robbery, these novels were criticized by moralists who viewed them as romanticizing criminals and glamorizing crime. Authors that faced this accusation claimed the purpose of these novels was not to tempt readers to enter a life of crime but to strip away falsehoods.[59] William Thackery's *Catherine: A Story* was written with the intention to refute claims made by other authors that created sympathetic criminals in their

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[56] Graham Law, *Serializing Fiction in the Victorian Press*, (Hampshire, New York: Palgrave, 2000), 28.
[57] Ibid, 27.
[58] Vann, *Victorian Novels in Serial*, 10
[59] Altick, 72-73.

works. Thackery responded to Charles Dickens whose works such as *Oliver Twist* painted criminals as desperate, flawed human beings. He claimed Newgate novels have misled their audience by making them feel sympathy for the criminal when they should be condemned. Thackery states, "the characters of the tale are immoral, and no doubt of it; but the writer humbly hopes the end is not so. The public was, in our notion, dosed and poisoned by the prevailing style of literary practice, and it was necessary to administer some medicine that would produce a wholesome nausea, and afterwards bring about a more healthy habit."[60] The purpose of *Catherine* was to introduce the readers to a true criminal so they may view her justly rather than from the eyes of a sympathetic novelists who imagined the character. Thackery's goal was to create characters and a plot so revolting that readers would refuse to read anything remotely similar again. *Catherine* was designed to be a deviation from popular literature, yet it was never reprinted after its original release until after Thackery had died. The novel's lack of sympathy made Catherine so unappealing as a character that Thackery was unable to unseat Dicken and other Newgate novelists from popularity.

Rather than craft an original tale, Thackery draws inspiration from an 18th century case to illustrate the evilness of the criminal. Thackery's *Catherine* was based upon a real-life murderess named Catherine Hayes who was burned for killing and dismembering her husband in May 1726.[61] The novel does not deviate from the historical case, but strongly reflects the values of the previous century more so than those of Thackery's 1839-1840 audience. Audiences were unable to connect with such an unsympathetic character nor the unrecognizable setting. With the novel being set in the previous century and based on historical events, Thackery kept Catherine's

[60] William Thackery, "Catherine: A Story" in *Fraser's Magazine* (London: James Fraser), Feb 1840, 210.
[61] Frederick C. Cabot, "The Two Voices in Thackeray's Catherine," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 28, no. 4 (1974), 406.

fate the same. Rather than die by hanging, Catherine, like her historical counterpart, was burned at the stake. Catherine's actions are viewed as pure evil but also traitorous. Prior to 1790, cases in which a woman allegedly killed her husband could include the charge of petit treason alongside willful murder. Those found guilty of petit treason face a more gruesome sentence of burning at the stake.[62] While wives killing their husbands was no longer considered treason, capital punishment remained a potential sentence albeit in a different form of hanging. Thackery, rather than altering the case, chose to maintain history to best illustrate the importance of justice. The imagery of a woman burning at the stake was powerful as burning, opposed to hanging, was torturous. Verdict of not only murder but also treason also enhances the criminality and evil of Catherine. Though she trespassed against her husband by killing him, she also wronged the country as she caused harm to its citizen and therefore the nation. The killing of her husband labeled Catherine as traitor to her sex as she went against her domineering provider and became an active aggressor.

Throughout the Victorian age, novelists used their works to address moral issues within society by imputing their own opinions into their works. While Thackery used the female murderess in attempt to criticize and denounce a literary genre, other novelists viewed these women as interesting character studies hoping to discover what place these women occupy within society. In order to achieve this, a new genre was established that would inherit the gore of the penny- bloods and Newgate novels, but incorporate the morals and setting of the serials and volumized works. By including a modern setting with relatable characters, values, and situations, authors appealed to readers who purchased material that was likely to contain ideas

[62] Kathy Callahan, "Women Who Kill: An Analysis of Cases in Late-Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth Century London," *Journal of Social History* 46, no. 4 (Oxford University Press, Summer 2013), 1020.

that they accepted as their own. Many authors were reluctant to push boundaries too far within their works out of fear of losing their audience. Some authors were willing to address more controversial topics but did so with the utmost care.

Beginning in the 1850s, a new genre emerged in Britain captivating audiences but also drawing heavy criticism. Sensationalism was a genre that relied on excitement, shocking revelations, and modern settings to provoke public interest. Typically, these novels were written for women by women. Women were the primary reading audience for novels, therefore, became the target audience for sensational writers. Authors such as Mary Elizabeth Braddon created strong willed females and characters, which even when wicked, were identifiable to readers. Some men also dabbled in the genre, yet the focus of every author was not on the rationality of the plot but the characters. Sensation novels were viewed as the "aristocratic branch of sensation literature" as they were sold as completed, longer works sold as a whole thus less affordable for the lower classes.[63] Upper- and middle-class women, therefore, became the target audience. Their literacy, stable funds, and leisure time provided them the opportunity to afford and invest in long form novels.

Sensationalism had many critics who found the genre to be a great stain and concern for the morals of Victorian Britain. H. L. Mansel wrote in an article addressing the numerous publications of sensational novels:

> "Excitement and excitement alone, seems to be the great end at which they aim […] And as excitement, even when harmless in kind, cannot be continually produced without becoming morbid in degree, works of this class manifest themselves as belonging, some more, some less, but all to some extent, to the morbid phenomena of literature-indications of a widespread corruption, of which they are in part both the effect and the cause; called

[63] Mrs. Oliphant, "Sensation Novels," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 91, no. 559 (Edinburgh) May 1862, 564-584.

> into existence to supply the cravings of a diseased appetite, and contributing themselves to foster the disease, and to stimulate the want which they supply."[64]

Sensational novels relied on plots that usually dealt with issues that were considered to be immoral such as murder, sexual promiscuity, and blackmail. Critics such as Mansel viewed the popularity of these novels to be an indication of the declining morals of society. By likening the appeal of sensation to a disease, Mansel claims that sensation is a corruption that affects an individual as well as society. He is right to address how literature is both a cause and effect of society, yet there is no proof that the rise of fictional sensation led to a rise in the immoral behaviors described in their pages.

While the shocking plot grabbed the attention of readers, the relatable setting was both an appeal and threat. Those who considered the sensation novel to be nothing more than "trash" did concede that proximity to reality was a strong element. By setting the story near reality, authors could create havoc while appealing to their audience. Mansel likened the use of contemporary setting to being "near a mine to be blown up by its explosion; and a tale which aims to electrify the nerves of the reader is never thoroughly effective unless the scene be laid in our own days and among the people we are in the habit of meeting."[65] Sensational novels were designed for excitement and creating shock within the otherwise known world, which -allowed them to dramatize but maintain the audience. Not everyone appreciated this written melodrama as the middle-class viewed the genre as a mark of their loss of control. By discussing taboo topics, values of the bourgeois were not maintained within the pages. Without promotion or spread of their morals, the norms that allowed the middle and upper to class to maintain influence over the working-class would be questioned and decline in prominence thus threaten the power of the

[64] H. L. Mansel, "Sensation Novels," *The Quarterly Review* 113, no. 226 (London), April 1863, 482-483.
[65] H.L Mansel, 488-489.

those who considered themselves morally superior.[66] Sensation novels were described as weakening the minds and moral fibre of the readers, but the middle class were actually afraid that the corruption exposed in the novels would convince the working-class that the ideal nature of the middle class was false, and in turn, weaken their power and influence over them.

The quintessential sensation novel was Mary Elizabeth Braddon's 1863 tale *Lady Audley's Secret,* which discussed murder, mental illness, bigamy, and deceit. Inspired loosely on the controversy surrounding the Road Hill Murder, Braddon creates the character of Lady Lucy Audley, whose real name is Helen Talboys, who lacks of emotional concern for anyone aside from herself which leads her to abandon her child, change her identity, remarry despite not receiving a divorce or death notice from her first husband, and commit attempted murder to preserve her secrets. Lady Audley, as she will be referred to, could have become a basic villain deceiving everyone within the story, yet Braddon chooses to provide great detail as to Lady Audley's reasonings behind her actions. As discussed in the previous chapter, the motivations are revealed to be desperation, though in a different form. After discovery, Lady Audley admits that throughout her life she has been told all that mattered was appearing beautiful so she could secure a marriage to a man of respectable means. Though Lady Audley succeeds in displaying her beauty, she failed to secure a marriage that would allow her security through wealth. Abandoned by her husband, George Talboys, Lady Audley chooses to leave her young son with her father so she may seek a way to support herself as a governess. As a governess, Lady Audley continues to exude beauty until she draws the attention of her future second husband who has the means to provide her a comfortable lifestyle.

[66] Andrew Maunder, "'Stepchildren of Nature': East Cunne and the Spectre of Female Degeneracy, 1860-1861," in *Victorian Crime, Madness and Sensation*, edited by Andrew Maunder and Grace Moore (Aldershot, Hants, England: Ashgate, 2004), 60.

Lady Audley's crimes make her irredeemable but also sympathetic to the readers. Her desperate need to find a husband especially one with money to escape poverty was not an uncommon sentiment as many women were forced to rely on their husband, or in their absence a male relative such as a father, for income and support. Lucy's early life of poverty instills in her the understanding that to succeed in the world you must marry well with love not being within the equation when it comes to survival. Though George abandoned his family first to seek fortune for a better life, he does not face the same scrutiny as Lady Audley for her efforts. George abandons not one but two dependents while Lady Audley leaves only her son. George's return is treated as if he is a hero accomplishing a great feat, but Lady Audley, who works as a tutor then marries a rich older man is condemned as bigamy. Lady Audley's attempt to kill George during her episode of madness demonstrates her desperation to hide her secret past to ensure her safety and security in her marriage to Sir Michael. Her second attempt at murder intended for Robert Audley is less desperate and more calculated. Her interaction with George in the garden was unplanned with him confronting her to expose her secret to all. With Robert, she was given fair warning and chose not to lose to her husband. Not only did she walk over an hour and a half out of her away in the middle of the night to the Castle Inn where she intentionally discovered what room he was staying, she waited and planned the best method to set the Inn ablaze with drawing attention to herself. With Robert conveniently not in his room at the time and George being revealed to have survived and once again departed for Australia, Lady Audley is not a murderess but is still considered dangerous enough to be locked away. Braddon does not settle for this to be the end for Lucy as the last page reveals that she died not long after she was committed. Braddon cannot bring herself to depict Lucy as violent as she is assumed to be yet cannot justify her worth enough in society to allow her continued existence. Despite Lady

Audley viewing society critically for what it was, her perversion of marriage through bigamy and attempted murder makes her unredeemable and worthy of a fatal end.

Within *Lady Audley's Secret*, Braddon stresses the paradox of outward beauty but inner beast. Lady Audley is described as a great beauty with childlike qualities, yet holds many secrets including her marriage, son, and potential madness inherited from her mother. Knowing her secrets would destroy any hope of a life of comfort and security, Lady Audley chose at a young age to embrace the one element about herself she was not ashamed to hide: her beauty. During her confession, she tells Robert her life story claiming that constantly being told how lovely and beautiful she, was caused her to become selfish and heartless. For Lady Audley, she was nothing without her beauty so it became her tool for survival. She concludes that her goal in life was to marry:

> "I heard all these things at first indifferently, but by-and-by I listened to them greedily, and began to think that in spite of the secret of my life I might be more successful in the world's great lottery than my companions. I had learnt that which in some indefinite manner or other every school-girl learns sooner or later – I learned that my ultimate fate in life depended upon my marriage, and I concluded that if I was indeed prettier than my schoolfellows, I ought to marry better than any one of them."[67]

To ensure she was care for if she ever went mad like her mother, Lady Audley knew her best option was to marry someone with whom she could live comfortably. She lacks the ability to love others fully as she does not reveal her true self. When her only protection in life through her second husband Sir Michael Audley is threatened, Lady Audley shifts to embrace the beast rather than the beauty to protect her future. Attempting to kill George and Robert was not a malicious attack against them but a means to protect herself by any means necessary.

[67] Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret* (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1862), 231.

While *Lady Audley's Secret* focuses on the possibility of mental illness as both encouraging and responsible for murderous actions, *Adam Bede* by George Eliot contains many similar themes but points to more sympathetic reasonings such as shame, desperation, and selfishness. Within her works, Eliot stresses not only the action of murder itself but the desperation of the situation her character was in that lead to the crime. Throughout the first third of *Adam Bede*, the audience is continuously told about the beauty of the antagonist: Hetty Sorrel. Much like Lady Audley, Hetty is lauded for her outward beauty which conceals the ugliness within her. The town, Adam, and Captain Donnithorne are captivated by her but cannot see the core of her personality is nothing but selfishness. Adam loves Hetty yet his lower status as a craftsman makes him unworthy in Hetty's opinion at first. Eliot describes Hetty's personal thoughts through the omniscient narrator saying:

> "Hetty's dreams were of luxuries: to sit in a carpeted parlour, and always wear white stockings; to have some large beautiful ear-rings such as were all the fashion; to have Nottingham lace round the top of her gown, and something to make her handkerchief smell nice, like Miss Lydia Donnithorne's when she drew it out at church; and not to be obliged to get up early or to be scolded by anybody. She thought, if Adam had been rich and could have given her these things, she loved him well enough to marry him."[68]

Hetty is incapable of possessing love for another individual as her selfish desires influence all her thoughts, actions, and dreams. Adam, despite his adorning nature and hard work, does not possess the wealth or status that would satisfy Hetty. Measuring all men by their coin demonstrates that her primary interest is her own comfort. While Lady Audley's desperation comes from survival instincts, Hetty makes active choices she thinks will elevate her to a level and provide her with the means to attain material goods and live comfortably. First, Hetty attempted to marry Captain Donnithorne, but failed to secure a proposal despite engaging in an

[68] George Eliot, *Adam Bede* (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1859), 98.

affair that leaves her pregnant. She then turns to Adam as she decides that even if he does not have money, it was better to marry a hardworking man who could provide some comfort while also disguising her pregnancy as his. Finally, unable to conceal her pregnancy, Hetty chooses to eliminate the proof of her sexual promiscuity and possibly herself to avoid the shame that would be inflicted upon her.

After abandoning her child, Hetty is arrested for the murder of the new-born child and found guilty. After the trial and conviction, future comfort no longer becomes Hetty's primary concern. Facing her mortality before the gallows, Hetty confesses her crimes to Dinah again out of selfishness: "I couldn't kill it any other way. And I'd done it in a minute; and, oh, it cried so, Dinah – I couldn't cover it quite up – I thought perhaps somebody 'ud come and take care of it, and then it wouldn't die. And I made haste out of the wood, but I could hear it crying all the while; and when I got out into the fields, it was as if I held fast I couldn't go away, for all I wanted so to go."[69] Though she originally intended to drown the baby, Hetty claims she abandoned the baby in the woods thinking someone would discover it and she would not be tied to the child at all. Abandoning the child had the same effect as killing the infant, however, she would not be tied to it or the shame associated if she avoided discovery. However, the abandonment led to death by exposure with witnesses who had previously seen her give birth and heard a child in her company. Due to these witnesses coming forward during the trial, Hetty's defense that she was never pregnant is shattered. Hetty's confession though she claims it is for forgiveness has another purpose. The cries of the infant haunt her, not the act itself. She is not contrite; she is desperate for personal comfort and hopes that confessing will bring peace.

[69] Ibid., 431.

Hetty and Lady Audley both sought comfort which could only be provided by using their beauty to marry above their station. Lady Audley leaves behind her absent husband, alcoholic father, and child to secure a match that will provide her protection in the form of money. Lady Audley's reasoning for this decision is based on her previous experiences forging her into a cunning, desperate woman. Hetty's reasonings for her actions come from her self-interest inherent within her personality. Both women see their victims as their main obstacle in achieving their goals as they threaten to expose their incompatibility with the upper class. For Lady Audley, her first marriage is still binding thus making her ineligible to marry again. Hetty's child is physical proof of her loss of virginity and corruption. Women during this time were said to a have a natural resistance to seduction and passions since desire was dormant if not existent in the female sex, yet if she did succumb, she was irredeemably defiled while men suffered no consequence.[70] Not only was Hetty placed in a precarious situation as a defiled woman but the child would be living proof while the Captain would suffer no consequences for his equal role in the affair and conception. Both women are driven to murderous actions out of desperation to hide evidence of deceit that threaten their future comfort. Rather than open a discussion about reincorporating, redeeming, or discussing the fallout of their actions, the authors choose instead to eliminate that which poses a threat to Victorian ideology. Lady Audley and Hetty both represent a perversion of womanhood and the domestic sphere. Lady Audley's calculated nature exposes marriage as both a hinderance and freedom for women. Hetty's murder of her child and her lack of remorse for her actions demonstrates a lack of maternal, therefore, feminine instincts.

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[70] Annie Cossins, *Female Criminality: Infanticide, Moral Panics, and The Female Body* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 59.

Neither woman is fully demonized yet they cannot be fully excused as there natural selfishness has cost them acceptance as proper woman.

Infant abandonment was regarded as a serious problem for moralists and social reformers in the 18th and 19th centuries referring to it as “a barometer of the morality and health of working-class society” that was “both a rural and urban dilemma that transcended geographical and national boundaries.”[71] Having characters from the working-class, such as Lady Audley and Hetty engage in these actions makes them sensational more so than relatable to the audience. Their actions were designed to shock the audience from within a recognizable setting. The abandoning of children was treated not as a relatable occurrence but as a reprehensible decision that goes against the morals tied to the protagonists, the authors, and the audience. There were two forms of abandonment. Some children were found on porches and church steps where it was guaranteed that they would be found and hopefully taken care of. Other mothers, like Hetty, left their children exposed to the elements where they would be eaten by animals, freeze, or starve. Abandonment investigations were difficult to pursue owing to the anonymous nature of the crime as women needed to walk a distance away from the crime scene in order to avoid being noticed and therefore tied to the child. It can be argued that some authorities were grateful when an abandoned child had been found dead as the ongoing financial burden needed to care for an orphan was not welcomed. Moral, social, and religious campaigners attempted to quell this practice by establishing foundling hospitals where unwanted children could be deposited safely rather than be killed. These hospitals faced several issues including the cost to care for the large number of children. Foundling institutions were problematic as they were encouraging illicit sexual relationships by providing an easy remedy for their shame. The hospitals also had high

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[71] Kilday, 84.

mortality rates with commentators claiming they were delaying infanticide to be done by their hands instead of the mother.[72] While mothers believed their infant had better chances with public welfare than enduring impoverished childhoods with their mothers, they were unaware of the mortality rate as many planned to reclaim their child when their situation had improved.

Much like Braddon, Eliot chooses to center the story around not the murderess but on a male figure. It is through the titular character's reactions that the audience become aware of what has occurred but also creates a bias. Adam spends the entirety of the novel misinterpreting all of his interactions with Hetty by only seeing the good in her. Adam's unreciprocated love for Hetty blinds him from fully understanding Hetty's emotions, desires, and actions. When he finds Hetty and the Captain in the woods, Adam believes she was seduced by the wealthier, older man and cannot come to terms with the thought that she willingly encouraged his advances in hopes of marriage. His blindness to her flaws is lifted after he is forced to face the truth of who Hetty Sorrel is during her trial. By allowing Hetty to be forgiven by the person she wronged the most, aside from the dead child, the audience becomes more sympathetic to Hetty as they witness the story through Adam's understanding eyes. For Braddon, the story follows Robert Audley, Lady Audley's nephew through marriage, as he investigates the disappearance and possible murder of his friend George Talboys. Robert's suspicions around Lady Audley turn into obsession as he steadily grows to hate her more, the more he learns about her past. Adam Bede sets up the audience to be more sympathetic to Hetty by the end as his views are those expressed to the audience. Robert Audley, however, investigates with a preconceived guilty verdict. With a protagonist whose own musings direct the novel, the audience is more disposed to see Lady Audley as a villain even when her insanity comes to light as an explanation. Adam and Robert

[72] Ibid., 85-89.

narrowly avoid becoming victims of Hetty and Lady Audley, respectively. Hetty's pregnancy forces her to flee thus granting Adam freedom to flee his marriage and entrapment into fatherhood. For Robert, Lady Audley attempts to burn him alive within the hotel, yet he was not within his room at the time.

In her private journals, George Eliot describes how the inspiration behind Adam Bede was a case told to her by her aunt, Elizabeth Evans, who served as a Methodist preacher. One of her aunt's tasks was to serve as confessor and companion to Mary Voce, a convicted child murderer executed in 1802.[73] Infanticide had become a common debate throughout the Victorian era especially when pertaining to courtrooms. In 1861, abandoning a child under the age of 2 years old to exposure was criminalized. Other facets of the new act included extending concealment of birth to apply to anyone regardless of gender, removed the requirement of the child being born alive to qualify for concealment, and extended charges of deliberate abortion to be applied to customers as well as suppliers. Infanticide cases were also strongly contested in the newspapers as the number of cases resulted in acquittals.[74] With most defendants, like Hetty, being young, single, working-class women, juries saw them as victims rather than villains often dropping charges, lessening the sentence, or decreeing temporary insanity. Hetty's case is unusual as she is found guilty and sentenced to be hanged, yet she too is spared this fate.

Though she is conscious that extenuating circumstance exist that can lead one to commit the ultimate crime, Eliot chooses to follow in Braddon's footsteps and remove her murderous female. Despite most infanticide cases being downgraded to manslaughter and receiving lesser punishments, Hetty is found guilty and sentenced to be hanged. However, Eliot circumvents the

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[73] Virginia B Morris, *Double Jeopardy: Women Who Kill in Victorian Fiction* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1990), 76.
[74] Ibid., 78.

verdict by having Captain return at the last moment with a stay of execution. The murderess is not killed, yet she cannot be allowed to continue in society therefore Eliot chooses to have her be banished from England. Hetty poses a threat to the social balance of Victorian society as her faults are public knowledge making her a fallen woman. Having no place in society or in the lives of those untainted by her crime, Hetty is removed from the plot permanently to signal how threats no longer exist to prevent a happy conclusion. Banishment for Lady Audley is slightly different as she is sent to France to live in an asylum without the comforts of her title or either of her identities. With neither woman remaining in Britain, the main couples are no longer separated by situation and receive the peace, comfort, and security the wicked women desired above all else. Removal but not execution ends the murderous cycle but still punishes the antagonist and removes the scourge of murder from society.

Unlike Braddon and Eliot, our third author, William Wilkie Collins is not as concerned with circumstances but the personality of the character that is revealed to be a murderer. Collins devotes his 1864-1866 serial novel, *Armadale*, to the examination of a character that already possessed the capability of murder. With the character Miss Lydia Gwilt, Collins created what Thackery was unable to: a truly despised character. The *Athenaeum* described her as "one of the most hardened female villains whose devices and desires have ever blackened fiction – a forger, a convicted adulteress, murderess and thief" while the *Spectator* claimed she was "a woman fouler than the refuse of the streets." The *Cornhill Magazine* that published the *Armadale*, lost 3,000 readers during the novel's original serialization sighting their inability to stomach the evil

of Miss Gwilt.[75] Collins relays to the reader that Lydia had previously been placed on trial for murdering her first husband by poisoning him with arsenic:

> "The verdict was Guilty, as a matter of course; and the judge declared that he agreed with it. The female part of the audience was in hysterics; and the male part was not much better. The judge sobbed, and the bar shuddered. She was sentenced to death in such a scene as had never been previously witnessed in an English Court of Justice. And she is alive and hearty at the present moment; free to do any mischief she pleases, and to poison at her own entire convenience, any man, woman, or child that happens to stand in her way."[76]

Lydia is depicted as not only earning sympathy but going as far as to make the courtroom experience an upheaval of emotion. When she presented herself, she did not plead innocence but described her circumstances as an ill-treated wife. By exploiting this form of sympathy, Lydia manipulated the courtroom to feel sympathy for her instead of her dead husband. Yet, from the description provided by Mr. Bashwood, there is a hint that she does not deserve the sympathy she has received. By claiming she is free to poison anyone for personal gain demonstrates that Miss Lydia has a personal agenda that goes beyond murdering her husband. Her manipulation of the courtroom granted her sympathy and later life, but her charms continue.

Lydia Gwilt acts as the antithesis of the typical Victorian woman as she utilizes her beauty to manipulate the men around her by enticing them so she may achieve her desires. Her goal throughout the novel is simple: marry Allen Armadale to receive his money or marry Ozias Midwinter, whose name is also Allen Armadale, then kill the other Allen and pose as his widow to gain his money. Driven by greed, Lydia is uncaring about those she must dispose of in order to exceed. Like Lady Audley and Hetty, Lydia is driven by selfishness and the desire for physical comfort through wealth, yet she has a darker tendency that made her less sympathetic to

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[75] Diamond, 207.
[76] William Wilkie Collins, *Armadale* (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1866), 228.

Victorians: her sexuality. Her use of seduction goes against the typical narrative of women being the seduced. Lydia is aware of her power and utilizes it to manipulate men. Lydia is beautiful and outwardly portrays the façade of a Victorian lady, but she conceals her jealousy, hatred, and calculative nature. Within her letters, Lydia remarks:: 'If so lady-like a person as I am could feel a tigerish tingling all over her to the very tips of her fingers, I should suspect myself of being in that condition … But, with my manners and accomplishments, the thing is, of course, out of the question. We all know that a lady has no passions.'"[77] Lydia herself admits that no true lady would have the passions that she does. Being older and previously been in relationships, Lydia is more experienced than other women discussed previously in utilizing her beauty to the fullest. As she begins seducing Ozias, the narrator claims: "perfectly modest in her manner, possessed to perfection of the graceful restraints and refinements of a lady, she had all the allurements that feast the eye, all the Siren-invitations that seduce the sense – a subtle suggestiveness in her silence, and sexual sorcery in her smile."[78]

Lydia is unusually astute and analytical. Virginia Morris points out that Lydia is unprecedented in literature stating: "Unlike Lady Audley, or George Eliot's Hetty Sorrel, who delight in their prettiness for its own sake and only secondarily for the attention it brings, Gwilt considers her face and figure a marketable asset. When she invests unsuccessfully, she pragmatically cuts her losses and tries another approach – with another man."[79] Morris is correct in this explanation as both Lady Audley and Hetty latch onto one single man hoping he will be their savior and provider. While this works for Lady Audley, Hetty's decision to tie herself completely to the Captain turns out to be a costly mistake. Lydia understands her position and the

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[77] Ibid., 248.
[78] Ibid., 78.
[79] Morris, 112.

inequality that exists between the genders and utilizes what she has available to the best of her ability. Despite being remarkably different from the other fictional murderesses described, Collins gives her the same conclusion by having the criminal woman destroy herself. For Lydia this comes through her facing her guilt after her plan to kill Armadale failed and committing suicide.[80]

Women like Miss Gwilt represented one of the greatest fear of men, the unseen female killer. The threat of women, who could easily kill their husbands with weapons of convenience around the home such as knives and poisons frightened men as they would be unable to prevent an unseen attack. With a woman being relegated to the home, she had access to the household items and could contaminate them without their husband being the wiser. The female poisoner acted secretly without overt physical aggression becoming a *bete noire*. The fear of female poisoners as the unseen threats occurred as preparing food was central to a woman's sphere of behavior where men would be unsuspecting.[81] Poisoners received less sympathy than infanticide killers due to the nature of their crime. Women were viewed as restrained but the knowledge that any woman was capable of this form of evil created anxiety especially when it came to poisoners. Women, being domestic, were the ones with access to the food and drink providing them the ability to introduce poison which would be consumed unknowingly. This unseen threat caused many men to become suspicious and fear the capabilities of women. Cases of infanticide and abuse could be connected back to self-preservation, but premeditation without just cause led many to view women in this category to be unforgivable. Sympathy from juries, judges, or the

[80] Winifred Hughes, *The Maniac in the Cellar : Sensation Novels of the 1860s,* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980), 159.
[81] Emsley, 156.

public was difficult to earn in cases premeditation, like poisonings, as their actions had soured the opinion of others on the woman herself.

One example of female poisoners striking fear into the hearts of Victorian men was Madeleine Smith of Glasgow. Smith was accused of murdering Pierre Emile L'Angelier, who she was having an affair with, in 1857. After discovering her family's intention to set up an arranged marriage with an upper-middle class man, Smith ended the affair with L'Angelier threatening to expose their relationship if she did not marry him. One month later after Smith was witnessed buying arsenic, Mr. L'Angelier died of arsenic poisoning. Though she stood trial, Smith was found not guilty due to lack of evidence.[82]

As strong critics and reforms pushed against sensationalism, a new threat to Victorian society was discussed more frequently: questioning of social reality. One outspoken opponent of sensational novels was the Archbishop of York William Thomson who went so far as to denounce stimulating narratives specifically identifying the works of Braddon and Collins. When addressing the perils of sensationalism, the *Saturday Review* agreed to an extent with the Archbishop stating, "Mr. Wilkie Collins and Miss Braddon possibly exhibit literary defects, but the true objection is that their books have a most dangerous influence upon the minds of their readers [...] it teaches people not to trust to appearances, but to believe that behind there lies a world of crime and misery."[83] Braddon, Eliot, and Collins all employ the same trope of outward beauty hiding the inward beast. This trope was used to articulate to the readers that at the heart of society the disreputable exist alongside the respectable.[84] All three identify an underlying flaw

[82] Judith Knelman, *Twisting in the Wind: The Murderess and the English Press* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 42.
[83] "The Perils of Sensation," *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science, and Art* 18, no. 471 Nov. 5, 1864, 559
[84] Hughes, 121.

that has corrupted the soul of the woman making her capable of murder. Without this inner evil, these women would be incapable of murder as none of them were destined to become murderers. For Braddon it was insanity, Eliot had selfishness, but Collins makes the inward beast a more twisted form of beauty. Lydia's sexual prowess makes her a predator but it was forged through her years of experience with men. Her desire for money is the same as Braddon and Eliot's characters, but Collins allows her inner beast to flourish far more.

Though there are many similarities between Braddon, Eliot, and Collins, Richard Altick claims there is a distinction between fiction writers during this period. Altick notes authors, such as Thackery and Collins, sought to depict 'the criminal mind' rather than examining the forces that resulted in the development of the murderer. The criminal character, whether male or female, was distinctly apart from society as they had the psychological predisposition to commit murder. For later authors, such as Braddon and Eliot, the examination of a murderer centered on the irresistible pressure of circumstance that pushed otherwise ordinary people to commit atrocious acts. By examining these forces, the authors also illustrated the personal and social factors that influenced human psychology. Instead of studying the criminal personality like Thackery and Collins, these authors studied the personality which became criminal.[85] While Altick is correct in seeing a division between the criminal mind and the circumstance methodology between the authors, he does not account for one basic distinction: gender. Thackery and Collins both created fictional women without having the experience or knowledge of what circumstances influenced female actions, attitudes, decisions, and beliefs. Braddon and Eliot, both being women, were well aware of the consequences or dangers women faced everyday due to the pressures of society and culture. For Braddon, she articulated the female fear of destitution that pushed Lady Audley to

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[85] Altick, 84.

protect her history and identity by tricking men and attempt to kill them to keep their silence. Hetty's desperation to rid herself of her greatest shame is articulated by a woman thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of the consequences she faced. Both of these instances were genuine fears of women needed to be expressed to all readers. Thackery and Collins would not have had the same experiences as their characters, but they are able to process and form an opinion based on their own knowledge. All four authors provide a unique take on the female criminal each having to express their own understanding while also communicating to their audience how the female killer should be read.

As mentioned throughout this chapter, many of these novels were inspired by true crimes both in the past and present to create a narrative appealing to Victorian readers. By building off the sensation of real cases, the novels appealed to both the fictional readers as well as the true crime. Recognizing familiar plots, characters, settings, and values made readers comfortable and willing to engage with more fictional works. Overall, the use of female murderers in fiction was used to increase the melodrama and shine a light on society. Fictional works spoke of their time but allowed authors freedom to explore tales that both related to the audience but appealed to their sense of shock, suspense, and intrigue. Novels provided character studies of murderesses which allowed readers to view them as sympathetic or unsympathetic depending on the author. The novel is a physical manifestation of the time period's author and the audience. Novels reflected the horrors and truths of society by articulating cultural practices and beliefs and provided examples of societal understanding.

Chapter Three: Spectacle of Murderous Proportions

Murder in Victorian Britain was a lucrative business to engage in. The rise of inexpensive mass print culture and the expansion of readership led to a growing fascination with crime. The crossover between fact and fiction allowed for expansion of sales by appealing to the wide range of audiences. However, the rise of entertainment centered on murder created a rise in debates surrounding national morals. Those who committed crimes were dubious characters, yet the intrigue surrounding them was seen as corrupting the public at large. Themes of violence, suspense, shock, and detection stoked the curiosity of the Victorian audience who gravitated to these cases. Cases where a woman lay at the center were cause for more interest. In this chapter two cases that brought forth massive publicity will be discussed to further articulate the role of murder in entertainment and society.

Print culture capitalized off the public's taste but also fascination for the morbid hoping to spark interest and encourage future purchases. Much like the penny dreadfuls, newspapers employed bold headlines with catchphrases to entice readers. Words such as "Dreadful, Horrible, Cruel, and Inhuman, Shocking Rape and Murder, and Horrible Murder!" enhanced the case to make it seem more interesting and therefore marketable. Illustrations also invoked powerful emotions. Images of crime and punishment had a "starkness of their style and the finality of the content, stock images of the gallows must have aroused at least a small frisson of pleasurable dread in many viewers. Similarly, broadside depictions of violent crime were surely graphic enough to satisfy all but the most bloodthirsty of pictorial tastes."[86] *Punch's Almanac* satirized this love for the macabre in the aptly titled piece "Blood." The publishing company thrived off gore in both the illustrations and pieces published under the Punch name. The publishers claimed, "we are a trading

[86] Patricia Anderson, *The Printed Image and the Transformation of Popular Culture, 1790-1860* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 23-25.

community – a commercial people. Murder is, doubtless, a very shocking offence; nevertheless, as what is done is not to be undone, let us make our money on it. Hereupon, we turn a murderer into a commodity, and open an account with homicide."[87] Homicide, unlike lesser crimes such as theft, grabbed readers attention in a way that ensured sales increased. Murder always brought with it the questions: why and how? Intrigue surrounding the case looked at the murderer asking why someone decided to commit the ultimate crime and how did their conscience allow for it to happen. Once the reader's attention was captured, newspapers, magazines, illustrations, and broadsides would quench their thirst to learn more while turning a profit.

Each format of print culture had aspects that made them favorable to their intended audience while also providing their own interpretation of the murders. Newspapers, unlike magazines, provided coverage of true crime within their market often reprinting articles from out-of-market sources. Articles provided removed but informed descriptions of crimes and ongoing cases. Their knowledge of the cases was passed along to the uninformed members of the public but always presented a narrative intended to establish the newspaper's position through speculation. The press was not an active investigator but did print their own findings and conclusions to the public to stir sentiment and gain readers. While facts were reported, opinion-based journalism was prominent within their pages as authors employed colorful, eye-catching vocabulary to draw in potential buyers. Newspapers had wide circulation but often competed with each other especially in metropolitan areas such as London. Produced cheaply and regularly, newspapers could easily be purchased by all members of society regardless of class as they did not require long term investment or expenditure. Individual copies could be sold and passed around

[87] "Blood," *Punch's Almanack* 2, (London: Punch Publications, 1842), https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.hnv1vz.

which encouraged discussion of the contents. One case in which the role of newspapers was essential to how a murderess was perceived by the public was the case of Martha Brown.

Elizabeth Martha Brown, known by her middle name to most, was born in 1811 as a poor peasant in Dorset. After her first husband died, Martha married a man 19 years her junior, John Brown, and opened a shop with him. Rumors had begun to spread that Mr. Brown had begun an affair with their married neighbor, Mary Davis. Martha argued with John often accusing him of infidelity. As John turned to drinking more frequently, Martha was physically abused by her husband. The 1853 Act for the Better Prevention of Aggravated Assault Upon Woman and Children allowed for protection for deserving, submissive, and dutiful wives. Despite the good intentions behind this law, many women were unwilling to take the main breadwinner of the family to court. His imprisonment or fine would hurt the family more than he could. Women in situations of abuse were resolved to suffer in silence choosing the safer and less vulnerable position by remaining with their abusers. As Clive Emsley points out: "wife beating began to cause disquiet early in the Victorian period, at least in respectable middle-class circles, yet it appears to have been accepted as a fact of life in many working-class communities." In homicide cases, often the court found mitigating circumstances like alcoholism. The cult of responsibility made wives less likely to complain since assaults were shameful and a sign of a lack of respectability.[88] For Martha Brown, staying silent to her husband's infidelity and physical abuse would only last so long.

On July 6th, 1856, John had not returned home and neither had their neighbor Mrs. Davis. When he eventually returned, Martha found him drunk. The couple engaged in their usual fighting according to neighbors until the shouting stopped and Martha alerted her neighbor, Richard Damon, that John had been kicked by a horse and subsequently died. Upon inspection, the

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[88] Clive Emsley *Crime and Society in England 1750-1900.* 2nd ed. Themes in British Social History (London: Longman, 1996), 47.

constable noticed the horse was in the field while Mr. Brown was within the home. Martha was arrested for suspicion. The coroner found numerous wounds on Mr. Brown's head, nose, and eyes inconsistent with Martha's story about the horse. While on trial, Mrs. Brown refused to describe her reasonings for murder and chose to sit silently in the courtroom. Martha would be found guilty by the jury and sentenced to die on August 9th.[89] Though petitions were sent to Parliament to commute the sentence, they were denied. Two days before she was scheduled to be hanged, Martha wrote her confession revealing how John had been abusing her and she had confronted him about the affair. Martha claimed John had attacked her first by hitting her head and shoulders while she exclaimed "If you strike me again, I will cry murder." Mary explains that John replied "If you do, I will knock your brains out through the window. I hope I shall find you dead in the morning" and presumably started to kick her torso. Martha then grabbed the nearest object of convenience, a hatchet, and struck him. Mrs. Brown claimed, "as soon as I had done it I wished I had not, and would have given the world not to have done it. I had never struck him before, after all his ill treatment; but when he hit me so hard at this time, I was almost out of my senses, and hardly knew what I was doing."[90] Despite the mitigating circumstances and her delayed plea of self-defense, Elizabeth Martha Brown appeared calm and composed in front of 4,000 witnesses when she was executed.

Within the newspapers, Martha Brown's case and confession had been reprinted beyond the rural area of Dorset. Those in London called upon the Home Secretary and Queen Victoria to show mercy to the woman. One anonymous individual wrote to the editor of *The Metropolitan* that

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[89] "Charge of Murder," *Dorset Country Chronicle and Somersetshire Gazette* (Dorset, England), July 24, 1856, British Newspaper Archives, 1005, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000408/18560724/030/0005.

[90] "The Confession of Elizabeth Martha Brown," *Manchester Daily Examiner & Times* (Lancashire, England), August 12, 1856, British Newspaper Archive, 2, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0003157/18560812/020/0002.

"the confession of poor Martha Brown carries truth in every expression of it; and more may be inferred than even she ventured to allege directly – that she was in mortal fear from her husband's drunkenness and violence, and despaired of surviving the night. It has been intimated that the mercy of the Crown might have been exercised in her favor had she not given false account in the first instance; but who can contemplate her state of mind – of horror and repentance – after the sad deed, and not feel that she was incapable of estimating her true position!"[91] On the day of her execution, the *Times*, *Daily News*, and *Morning Chronicle* all reprinted her confession in their newspapers each claiming in their own way that had it not been for her original contradictions, she would have been spared. The hanging of a woman had already drawn a lot of attention to the case, but her confession of abuse was reigniting a flame for the case. With her being in Dorset, Londoners could not attend the hanging meaning the conclusion of their version ended in a newspaper announcement for her death. By printing than reprinting the confession, the public's attention was brought to the case pleading for mercy to be shown. Martha Brown's confession had changed public opinion of the people in London, yet it was not enough to overturn the court's ruling in the rural town. While Brown was capable of altering the press's perceptions of her, other women struggled to have the press on their side.

Newspapers were not the only outlet that profited off homicide and were used to create narratives of cases. Broadsides reached the height in their popularity during the 1830s to 1860s. Illustrations were only rivaled by sensational fiction as the main selling point for magazines. Each broadside was a single sheet with a poem or story, with one woodcut costing a penny or half-penny. Coffee houses and pubs pasted the latest broadside on walls or passed them around which allowed

[91] Civis, "The Press and Calcraft. Poor Martha Brown," *The Metropolitan* (London), August 30, 1856, 5.

for anyone in the establishment to view them free of charge.[92] Broadsides were cheaply produced in mass quantities, therefore, were easily accessible to the public. Even the illiterate would be able to interact with them as the illustrations attracted attention. The passion for murder was not limited to a specific class. Respectable London families would send footmen to purchase half a dozen copies of the most recent broadside from street hawkers. As the aristocracy covertly engaged with the most recent outrage within their walls, the middle and lower classes openly discussed and read about real-life murder as they openly purchased the broadsides or viewed them for free within pubs.[93]

There were three phases of publication beginning in the 1830s. First was the 'Sorrowful Lamentation' which described the fate of the murder victim. The next release was a half-sheet detailing the crime directly from the newspapers. Finally, on execution day or soon after the full broadsheet was released embellishing accounts of the trial, confession, and execution through verses, woodcut portraits or gallows scenes. With only murderers being hanged, the concentration on fewer executions increased but also created a profitable market for printers. With a scarce supply of hangings, the value of broadsheets increased. Broadsheets were sold at 2d to 2 and 1/2d per dozen to street vendors who then added their own profits. Scaffold drama was commercialized to meet the demand of an audience that was expanding with literacy.[94] Broadsides were considered informational but did rely on dramatization to sell. A typical broadside described the crime committed and the consequence while also providing a moral warning to the reader. To meet

[92] Patricia Anderson, *The Printed Image and the Transformation of Popular Culture, 1790-1860* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 21-22.
[93] Richard Altick, *Victorian Studies in Scarlet* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1970), 42.
[94] Victor Gatrell, *The Hanging Tree : Execution and the English People, 1770-1868* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 159.

demand, the printers reprinted broadsides from other counties and reused images for multiple individuals.

As Rosalind Crone argues in her book *Violent Victorians,* violent entertainment provided another means by which Londoners expressed their violent desires. She claims that entertainment provided "an alternate and more suitable way to experience and even participate in violence" thus preserving social hierarchy rather than threatening it.[95] She attributes the decline in actual violence to the growing presence of violent entertainment as an outlet for aggression through fantasy. Various print media could describe and illustrate criminal actions to the readers by painting a graphic picture and allowed the human mind to complete. The primary consumers of true crime and print culture were women. Especially when trials involved a woman seeking divorce or killing her husband, women from all classes vied for a seat in the spectators' balcony. No women were allowed to sit on juries, but spectator stands, newspapers, and broadsides allowed women to participate in an indirect way. One of the most vilified murderess of the Victorian age whom women clamored to see in the courtroom was Maria Manning.

A Swiss Catholic by birth, Maria arrived in England where she found work as a domestic servant. She would accompany her lady on a trip to France where she met older, wealthier Mr. Patrick O'Connor. Upon her return to England, Maria had begun courting Frederick Manning, a man much closer to her in age who she also believed was coming into a sizable inheritance. Maria agreed to marry Frederick only to learn too late of his deception discovering he was not wealthy and an alcoholic. The married couple struggled to make ends meet and constantly fought. Eventually, Maria reconnected with O'Connor and began an affair. After learning about

[95] Rosalind Crone, *Violent Victorians: Popular Entertainment in Nineteenth-Century London (*Manchester University Press, 2012), 267.

O'Connor's railroad shares and wealth, Maria and Frederick created a plot to kill O'Connor and rob his corpse.[96]

Maria invited O'Connor to her home in Bermondsey, London for dinner. While preparing for dinner, O'Connor was shot by Maria in the back of the head then Frederick began to beat him with a crowbar. The couple took his money and keys to his home and buried his body under the floor of the kitchen. Maria was seen the next day at O'Connor's home ransacking the rooms for valuables and railway shares. Many witnesses had been told by Patrick O'Connor himself that he was going to the Mannings' home for dinner the night he disappeared. The couple, who had a history of quarreling, began to turn on each other. Maria and Frederick fled London in separate directions before the police arrived to search their house and identified O'Connor by his teeth. Police released the names and descriptions of both Maria and Frederick Manning to the public. Following the trail of eyewitnesses and using the telegraph, Scotland Yard was able to arrest Maria in Edinburgh while Frederick was found on the island of Jersey. Frederick immediately admitted to everything while Maria claimed she was running away from her abusive husband.[97]

The Manning trial was a hot ticket for Londoners. *The Morning Chronicle* said,

> "it was hardly possible to obtain even standing room, for not only was there a large attendance of barristers, who might naturally be supposed to feel a strong professional interest in the point about to be discussed, but also of a number of other persons, who, in the selfish indulgence of a disease curiosity, infected an atmosphere at no time of the purest quality, and obstructed by whispering, talking, jostling, and ridiculous because ineffectual efforts to leave the court, all those who came there for purposes of business."[98]

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[96] "The Murder at Bermondsey," *The Times*, (London), August 20, 1849: 6. *The Times Digital Archive*. https://link-gale-com.wvu.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/CS101220628/GDCS?u=morg77564&sid=bookmark-GDCS&xid=19bd039a.
[97] "Trial of Frederick George Manning, Maria Manning," *Old Bailey Proceedings Online,* t18491029-1890, (October 29, 1844), https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?id=def2-1890-18491029&div=t18491029-1890#highlight.
[98] "Case of Maria Manning," *Morning Chronicle* (London), November 8, 1849, 5, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000082/18491108/012/0005#.

For certain high-profile trials, the rich and fashionable vied with the lower classes from off the streets for the very limited spectator seats available within the Old Bailey. Though not allowed to be members of the jury, many women sought these valuable seats.[99] Women were the primary readers of sensational trials in newspapers, buyers of broadsides, and attenders of trials particularly of those centering on women who wanted divorce or were accused of murder.[100] The courtrooms were the center of the drama often compared to theatre productions. *The Times* pointed out the women present at the Manning trial were "by the aid of double opera-glasses, watching the misery of mind of the wretched criminal at the bar" and going so far as to claim, "they had shaken off all the delicacy of the female."[101] While women were viewed as the more virtuous of the sexes, they too had a taste for the macabre. Their fascination with murder stemmed from the need to finish the story. First learning about the crime in the papers, courtrooms were the next plot point while execution was the conclusion.

Maria's defense made her appear to be the money hungry villain, while Frederick, sensing the direction of the press, placed all the blame onto his wife. Both Mannings were sentenced to be hanged but received vastly different treatment from the press. Following the trial, *Punch* published a letter from one attendee to her friend describing her opinions on how the murderous couple appeared in court. While Mr. Manning was looking like the picture of a villain or monster, "Mrs. Manning was very nicely dressed, indeed. When I looked at her, I thought the jury must find such a black satin gown not guilty – but they didn't. Besides the black satin, she had a plaid shawl of the Stuart pattern. Wore a very beautiful cap, that I have no doubt will be fashionable, with such

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[99] Altick, 42.
[100] Diamond, 4.
[101] "The Bermondsey Murder." *Times*, October 29, 1849, 5, *The Times Digital Archive,* https://link-gale-com.wvu.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/CS84574557/GDCS?u=morg 77564&sid=bookmark-GDCS&xid=6d821d80.

beautiful lace lappets and lace ruffles that – no, I never! It did seem to me impossible that such hands, with such lappets, could commit a murder; but, then, such doubts made the sweetness of the interest."[102] Despite *Punch* praising Mrs. Manning's fashion sense, the black satin dress, a popular garment at the time, had become associated with her following the hanging thus causing it to fall out of style. When sentenced to death, Maria lost her composure and began screaming at the jury, "there is no justice and no right for a foreign subject in this country. There is no law for me. I have had no protection – neither from the Judges, nor from the prosecutors, nor from my husband."[103] By not only screaming in public, but berating a courtroom of men, Maria Manning threw herself further into the villain role as she disregarded all rules of decorum and proper etiquette expected of a woman. There was no denying based on evidence, witnesses, and her actions immediately following Patrick O'Connor's disappearance that Mrs. Manning was guilty. Her desperate screams further hurt her public image.

The trial cemented Maria Manning as a villain in all portrayal of her. Her adultery, her willingness to kill her lover, abandoning her husband, and stealing all went against the ideal of the Victorian woman. Following the trial Maria made no attempts to alter the perceptions of her. She could not be cast as innocent or scorned. Maria's involvement in the killing of her lover made it difficult for any other narrative to form. On the day of her hanging, Maria chose to remain hard and unfeminine. Who was sent to the gallows had a choice on how they presented themselves before the rope. As Maria approached the gallows she chose to remain defiant and resolute rather tearful and remorseful. Maria did not show weakness before her hanging.[104] Within *London Labor*

[102] "Old Bailey Ladies," *Punch's Almanac* 17 (Fleet Street, London: Punch Publications, 1849), 181.
[103] *The Bermondsey Murder: A Full Report of the Trial of Frederick George Manning and Maria Manning for the Murder of Patrick O'Connor* (London: W.M. Clark, 1849), 63.
[104] Shani d'Cruze and Louise A. Jackson, *Women, Crime and Justice in England since 1660* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 125.

and London Poor, Henry Mayhew gives his own opinion on the Manning case specifically in regard to Maria. He claims, “Every day I was anxiously looking for a confession from Mrs. Manning. All I wanted was for her to clear her conscience afore she left this here whale of tears, and when I read in the papers that her last words on the brink of eternity was, ‘I’ve nothing to say to you, Mr. Rowe, but to thank you for your kindness,’ I guv her up entirely-had completely done with her. In course the public looks to us for the last words of all monsters in human form, and as for Mrs. Manning’s, they were not worth the printing.”[105] With her last breath, Maria denied the British public their greatest desire: a closure through confession. Mayhew’s claim that he was done with her once he learned of the words demonstrates how public interest relied heavily on how news sated their needs. By not confessing, Maria had betrayed the Victorian audience.

Following the Mannings’ trial, broadsides were produced recounting the murder and trial to the public while advertising the upcoming hanging in the process. For the execution of Frederick Manning and Maria Manning, 2.5 million sheets were printed and sold tying Rush for the most copies sold for any execution.[106] One such broadside entitled, “Life of the Mannings Executed at Horsemonger Lane Gaol on Tuesday 13th Nov” included a poem retelling the events as well as the imagery of the hanging. Each stanza covers a different aspect of the case from Maria’s early years up to a moral concluding the story. The publishers took creative liberties in the story by creating dialogue for O’Connor: “Maria dear how could you leave me, Wretched you have made my life, Tell me why you did deceive me, For to be Frederick Manning’s wife.”[107] By including a fabricated opinion from the deceased, the publisher stirs the emotions of their audience to further craft Maria

[105] Henry Mayhew, *London Labor and London Poor: The Conditions and Earnings of Those that Will Work, Cannot Work, and Will Not Work* 1 (London: Charles Griffin and Company, 1861), 238.
[106] Mayhew, 308.
[107] “Life of the Mannings Executed at Horsemonger Lane Goal on Tuesday 13th Nov 1849,” 1849, *English Crime and Execution Broadsides* (Curiosity Collections, Harvard Law School Library, Cambridge, MA), https://curiosity.lib.harvard.edu/crime-broadsides/catalog/46-990095439080203941.

as a monster. O'Connor is depicted to be deceived not only through the murderous betrayal but also by having Maria not choose him. O'Connor, the victim, becomes a sympathetic character through the press which furthers the evilness of Maria.

The ending of the broadside's retelling offers a conclusion while also imposing a moral lesson. By discussing the trial and sentencing, the broadside offers a sense of closure to the reader by establishing how the wicked face justice. Much like earlier, a fictional dialogue is implanted in the story this time from the judge condemning them to the "fatal tree." By providing a conclusion to the events, the broadside allows the audience to view the true crime as an entertaining story not dissimilar to popular fictions. The ode concludes "Old and young pray take a warning, Females lead a virtuous life, Think upon that fatal morning, Frederick Manning and his wife."[108] By framing the tale as a lesson to be learned and a warning to potential copiers, the verbiage implies only women need to be virtuous not the men. Only Maria's faults, infidelity and promiscuity, are discussed aside from the murder and robbery both of which were condemned by society specifically when committed by women. Frederick's faults are not discussed or even relayed to public. Without equal blame and fault, Maria becomes the featured antagonist and more morally corrupt. The warning, therefore, frames the murder as not just a criminal act but also a repercussion for a woman's fall from grace. Though the concluding remarks imply the broadside is meant for a female audience to avoid becoming like Maria, her identity is constantly relegated to being only Frederick's wife. She loses her identity and individuality in marriage which is also reflected in the illustration of the gallows. The illustration used is a previously published image recycled and slightly edited. Frederick and the crowd are detailed while Maria only appears as a shadowy figure standing slightly off to the side, next to the hanging man. The figure vaguely resembles a female

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[108] Ibid.

shape but has no recognizable features and notably does not appear hanging like the central figure. Though Maria is more featured in the ode, Frederick is the one given the honor of an identity and face.

Though both women struggled financially, suffered through alcoholic husbands, stood accused, found guilty, and executed for murder, Elizabeth Martha Brown and Maria Manning demonstrate how intricate cases regarding female killers were from the 1830s to the 1860s. While some were seen as victims in their own right like Brown, others were vilified such as Manning. Manning's continence caused her to lose public support as she presented herself as unfeminine, harsh, and emotionless. Brown remained cordial even as she faced death while also feeding into the public's desires for information. Brown's confession provided the public an explanation, closure, entertainment, and allowed the publishers and street vendors to receive business. Manning refused to offer appropriate last words, reacted strongly to her verdict, and forced printers to create their own ending by creating a satisfying conclusion that could be sold to the masses. Though Brown withheld details of her home life at first, she was able to twist the narrative back onto John while Manning was trapped in her role as the villain. By yelling in the courtroom and accusing the nation of being against her, any hope of sympathy Maria would have earned for not being protected from her husband was lost. The metropolis had a strong role as well. With Brown, no attachments had been formed between those in London, Manchester, or other cities aside from what was read in the newspapers. Manning was well-known in London as was her husband. By having a larger, more populated city Manning had a larger public against her. Brown was unknown in London so she had less of a struggle convincing readers of her circumstances. Manning was condemned twice, once in the courtroom and once by the press. As for Brown she was found guilty by the court but

innocent by the public. Despite earning sympathy, Brown faced the same execution as Manning. Both of these executions would be heavily influential in the world of literature.

In attendance at Maria and Frederick Manning's hanging was Charles Dickens who was "astounded and appalled" not by the killers but of the wickedness brought forth by their execution.[109] In the early morning, Dickens arrived at Horsemonger Lane to witness the double hanging but commented mostly on the actions and attitudes of the audience. In a letter to the editor of *The Times* in the following days, Dickens claimed "thieves, low prostitutes, ruffians and vagabonds of every kind flocked on to the ground with every variety of offensive and foul behavior. Fightings, faintings, whistling, imitations of Punch, brutal jokes, tumultuous demonstrations of indecent delight when swooning women were dragged out of the crowd by the police with their dresses disordered, gave a new zest to the general entertainment."[110] According to Dickens, public executions brought out the worst of individuals as they disregarded human life for the sake of personal enjoyment and debauchery. The entertainment of crime caused an overall decline of morals. The crowd mentality created an environment in which criminal activity could flourish when the headlining event itself sought to discourage such actions. The moment of the hangings further demonstrates a lack of regard for the condemned: "there was no more emotion, no more pity, no more thought that two immortal souls had gone to judgement, no more restraint in any of the previous obscenities, than if the name of Christ had never been heard in this world, and there were no belief among men but that they perished like beasts."[111] Dickens famously included many descriptions of crimes such as prostitution and theft in his works such as *Oliver Twist*, yet when he personally encountered these actions he criticized them. Not only were the actions of the crowd

[109] Charles Dickens, "To the Editor of the Times," *Times*, Nov. 14, 1849, 4, *The Times Digital Archive,* https://link-gale-com.wvu.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/CS68190574/GDCS?u=morg77564&sid=bookmark-GDCS&xid=70650ace.
[110] Ibid., 4.
[111] Ibid., 4.

appalling, but the disregard for human life, even if that person was a murderer, was deplorable in Dickens's eyes. Though Maria Manning was widely disliked by the public, Dickens's discussion informs how public executions sparked a moral debate prior to the 1860s. Dickens as well as others brought forth their opinions on the abolition of public execution but were unwilling to discuss complete discontinuation of capital punishment.

Nearly ten years earlier, William Thackery also witnessed a hanging in person. His article in *Fraser's Magazine* entitled "Going to See a Man Hanged" recalls a similar scene to the one observed by Dickens. He describes a crowd of 40,000 onlookers pushing, dancing, giggling, drinking and partying.[112] Thackery, like Dickens, condemns the practice of public execution calling it useless revenge. Thackery concludes his article by stating, "I feel myself ashamed and degraded at the brutal curiosity which took me to that brutal sight; and that I pray to Almighty God to cause this disgraceful sin to pass from among us, and to cleanse our land of blood."[113] From Thackery's perspective, punishing violence with more violence does not eliminate criminals but causes the nation to be just as guilty for murder. The concern he had was not regarding the crowd but how capital punishment was a sin itself as it calls for more blood making all those involved responsible for another death, even if the victim is a killer themselves. Not everyone agreed with this sentiment as for some the threat of execution was the ultimate deterrent to future crime. When Mary Furley received respite one newspaper claimed, ""we are not advocates for the abolition of capital punishment. Far from it. We believe that, whilst human nature remains such as it is, capital punishment will be requisite for the defence of society from wanton wickedness and predetermined

[112] William Thackery, "Going to See a Man Hanged," *Fraser's Magazine* 22, no. 128 (London: James Fraser, August 1, 1840), 153.
[113] Ibid., 158.

atrocities. There are men whom nothing can deter but the prospect of death; there are also men who quail at nothing but the prospect of a public and an ignominious death."[114]

Another author who wrote of his presence at a public execution was Thomas Hardy. Hardy was 16 at the time of Elizabeth Martha Brown's execution but remembered that day for decades to come. In a letter written 70 years later, Hardy confided in Lady Pinney of Racedown that he was ashamed to admit he had attended the execution and described the scene. He described the scene stating:

> "I remember what a fine figure she showed against the sky as she hung in the misty rain, and how the tight black silk gown set off her shape as she was wheeled half-round and back. The hanging itself did not move me at all. But I sat on after the others went away, not thinking, but looking at the figure [...] And then it began to rain, and then I saw-they had put a cloth over the face-how as the cloth got wet, her features came through it. That was extraordinary."[115]

Unlike Dickens and Thackery who remark on their disgust in the practice of public hanging, Hardy recalls how he did not initially criticize the practice at the time. His description came from a fascination with the fatal figure rather than the impact the event had on the crowds. Hardy's shame for attending Brown's hanging notably comes a lifetime later and decades after public hangings were abolished. His lack of shame during the event was not uncommon as many who attended hangings enjoyed the free entertainment and shouted for punishments to fit the crime. Hardy's knowledge of the case and his observations at the hanging became the inspiration behind his novel *Tess of the d'Urbevilles*.

The push to end public executions was not a new phenomenon. Female victims of the gallows were used to being martyrs of the practice despite their villainous actions. As Shani

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[114] "Respite of Mary Furley," in *Taunton Courier and Western Advertiser* (Somerset England), May 1, 1844, 6, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000348/18440501/022/0007.

[115] Thomas Hardy to Lady Hestia Pinney, 20 Jan. 1926 in *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy* 7 edited by Richard Little Purdy and Michael Millgate (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 5.

D'Cruze and Louise Jackson describe in Women, Crime and Justice in England since 1600: "young, attractive, female bodies subjected to the violence of the gallows provided material for romantic narratives in favor of the restriction of public hanging. Condemned women who could display demure, submissive femininity could be represented as victims, even though they were criminals."[116] Infanticide once again became an issue for discussion as the vast majority of perpetrators were young women. Their youth, circumstances, and ability to project their femininity made juries hesitant to convict. With potential public execution as a sentence, juries began to favor lesser charges or alternate rulings such as temporary insanity to avoid condemning a young woman to death. Thirty-five women were charged and indicted for infanticide between 1856 to 1875. Twenty-three (65.7%) were convicted of a lesser crime, eight convicted of murder, and four were acquitted. Not only were conviction rates significantly lower, but the number of cases also decreased. From 1859 to 1860, there were 464 infant deaths known to the police yet only fourteen cases (3%) made it to trial with only one found guilty and sentenced to death.[117] With hesitant juries and extremely low conviction rates, the debate surrounding capital punishment reached its climax in the mid-1860s.

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[116] D'Cruze and Jackson, 127.
[117] Annie Cossins, *Female Criminality: Infanticide, Moral Panics, and the Female Body* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 83.

Conclusion

The Royal Commission on Capital Punishment was convened from 1864 to 1866 to debate the abolition of capital punishment. Commissioners brought forward evidence from court cases, legal precedence, and medical documentation ultimately disagreeing on complete abolition. The committee debated the topic of capital punishment but also the role that insanity, public fascination with hangings, and infanticide as potential obstacles in disbanding or continuing public executions. Dr. Hood testified before the committee to offer his professional opinion. He claimed doctors and lawyers fundamentally disagreed on the definition of insanity. Backed by the Attorney General for Ireland, Dr. Hood claimed the concept of a person killing another human being causes judges and juries to be predisposed to believe a defendant is insane. He claimed to know of several people acquitted on the grounds of insanity who showed no symptoms. Both men claimed, "if capital punishment was abolished, there would be much fewer acquittals on the grounds of insanity."[118] Others argued with one another on the role of executions. Lord Cranworth believed private executions would be preferable so long as newspapers publicize their reports and coroners provided an autopsy of the criminal's body.[119] Mr. Thomas Beggs disagreed with Cranworth claiming private executions would only excite greater curiosity and create an air of mystery around the criminal. He feared, "public executions would increase the morbid sympathy and interest felt towards a condemned criminal."[120] After testimonies, evidence, and arguments, the committee concluded that public execution would cease but capital punishment would continue.

The commission's recommendation was accepted through the passage of the Capital Punishment Amendment Act of 1868 effectively putting an end to public executions and forced

[118] *Report of the Capital Punishment Commission*, (London: George E. Eyre and William Spottiswoode, 1866), 2795-2980.
[119] Ibid., 82-86.
[120] Ibid., 2347-2348.

hangings to be carried out within the walls of prisons with few observers. Following the end of public executions, 'gallows literature' suffered extremely. Up until 1879, the press was allowed to attend executions within the prison.[121] The climax of the story was no longer the execution but the jury's verdict and judge's sentence. Murder was still an important ingredient for newspapers, but by the late nineteenth century the format had changed.

Crime panics did not end in the 1860s, instead it was a turning point. Without 'gallows literature,' true crime was relegated to the court rooms and newspapers. Newspapers continued to sell and sensationalize murder reaching a new height in the 1880s. The most well-known example of press sensation was in 1888 as Jack the Ripper terrorized Whitechapel. Coverage of the cases dominated newspapers including description of the crimes, gory illustrations, interviews with neighbors, theories surrounding the identity of the killer, and profiles of the victims. Late-Victorians ushered in a new era of criminal obsession with more illicit acts of sex and crime. Centered mostly in London, the late-Victorians would inherit the obsession with crime of their predecessors. New villains and victims would emerge as the detective genre surpassed sensationalism by the 1870s inspiring new stories based on both true crime and the author's imagination.

Cases of infanticide did not stop in the 1860s but took on new forms. Baby farming steadily grew reaching its height at the end of the 1860s. The system of paying for a child's boarding and care was a veil for infanticide as many children died within days. Baby farms had 90% mortality rates with fatalities being highest among illegitimate children. The secret business dealings involved hidden identities, covert transfers of children, cash payments, and high turn overs making

[121] McGowen, Randall. "Civilizing Punishment: The End of the Public Execution in England," *Journal of British Studies* 33, no. 3, (July 1994), 280.

it impossible to track records or provide accurate numbers.[122] On July 4, 1870, *The Times* denounced baby farmers as "the undertaker for the unwanted baby's death." Th article described farmers as "organized villainy," "the darkest, most ghastly shame in the land," "cold-blooded cruelty," and "a vile trade."[123] Baby farming had surpassed infanticide in moral evil as the perpetrator was no longer a mother motivated by desperation but a callous stranger economically benefitted through death. This switch alongside the end of public executions and the decline of the sensational novel indicates a shift in Britain along multiple lines. Socially, culturally, intellectually, and emotionally, Britian had moved beyond the era of shock and intrigue and into an age of sexual dangers, public appearances, and new viewpoints based within an urban landscape.[124]

For all three of these chapters, murder committed by women has been presented in a variety of ways: as a form of entertainment, a symbol of moral corruption, and tool of comparison between men and women, urban and rural, and sympathy or condemnation. The women presented in these pages each have a unique story, circumstance, reasoning, motivation, and outcome. Each of these women pushed the boundaries of femininity by committing murder demonstrating that not all Victorians could perfectly fit within the social groups designated by middle class ideals. The continuous intrigue surrounding female killers demonstrates that though reforms during the first half of the Victorian era sought to civilize the British population, the need for entertainment and desire to understand those who rejected their gender role could not be suppressed. As the century progressed, the division between classes began to blur as fascination with gore and women killers in particular drew the attention of Victorians of all classes. By presenting these killer women as

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[122] Kilday, 94.
[123] "The Verdict of the Coroner's Jury in the Brixton." *Times*, July 4, 1870, 9, *The Times Digital Archive,* https://link-gale-com.wvu.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/CS151300836/GDCS?u=morg77564&sid=bookmark-GDCS&xid=808012da.
[124] Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late- Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 18.

products of the Victorian age, this thesis has outlined their placement within cultural, social, intellectual, and emotional history. Due to their criminal nature, these women were unable to occupy the typical boundaries set for women yet they did not fit the criteria of criminal. Society viewed criminal women as deviants as they did not occupy a distinct location within the Victorian ideology. Criminals were restricted to poor, young, urban, men. Femininity was reserved for the submissive, pure, domestic, and dependent. Without fitting completely into either category, criminal women especially murderers occupied an intersection between identities that often created difficulties for jurors. Though they performed criminal actions, many relied on and utilized their gender and circumstances to lessen the sentences. Though this thesis concludes with the abolition of public hangings, murders continued to occur but new context and coverage was needed to expand this view.

Murder grasped the attention of all Victorians as those who sought the blood-soaked pages of newspapers and novels appeased their bloodied appetites in multiple ways. Reformers and moralists also gave their attention to these individuals as they sought to improve or stop the decay of the cities. The prominence of murder, the most well reported crime, allowed society to identify societal issues and further understand their origins. Homicide cases, both fictional and non-fictional, brought in crowds of people together to witness, theorize, and debate. Ultimately, the Victorian obsession with murderesses altered society legally through the introduction on new laws. Murder brought intrigue, shock, and delight. For the 1830s to 1860s, murder was a highly after sought commodity as print culture expanded alongside literacy and policing. By discussing murderesses of the 1830s to the 1860s, an exploration of gender roles and inequality can be addressed highlighting the importance of dichotomies to the mid-century Victorians. Through the examination of both the courtrooms and the court of public opinion, it can be determined that

sympathy was shown more frequently to women than men as circumstances and limitations of gender afforded women more flexibility around criminal law but stricter penalties for disrupting societal norms.

Though the Victorians were not the first individuals to create a spectacle surrounding murder, their gendered society and innovations in print culture expanded the genre by inviting intrigue and shock. The availability of entertainment would continue to expand to the present day where murder continues to sell. In the modern world, broadsides, public hangings, and sensation novels are things of the past; however, the appetite for crime in entertainment, especially murder, remains. Documentaries fill the space of broadsides by simultaneously informing and dramatizing murderous events. News channels and filmed courtroom proceedings allow those removed from the events to satisfy their need for inclusion and closure. Most notably, television and film allow for perspectives of murderous individuals to be created solely for the entertainment of the public. Much like the sensation novels of the past, television and film find inspiration in true crime yet orchestrate fictional events that build off the perception of society. As this research suggests, these publicized stories are created to sell a specific perception to their audience. Emphasizing the shock, unnaturalness, and horror makes these stories commercial successes. Whether these perspectives are sympathetic or not depends on many factors, but eventually a position on depiction must be reached to allow for storytelling.

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