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“Mrs. Pace” and the Ambiguous Language of Victimization

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In the framework of the criminal law, “justice” emerges only in the wake of victimization, the suffering of illegitimate and unwanted loss or harm. Those who administer justice—whether retributive, reconciliatory, or restorative—require a victim they can serve, and the forms and parameters of the justice that victims obtain is related to the ways they and their victimization are viewed by the agencies of justice and the broader society within which they operate. Despite some long-term continuities, the place of the victim in the criminal justice system has been historically variable. The same could be said of attitudes toward victimization, which are affected by factors ranging from class or gender prejudices to fears of social decline. Attributions of “helplessness” or “innocence,” for example, may attach more easily to some categories of victim (e.g. elderly middle-class women) than others (e.g. teenage working-class males) in the “hierarchy of victimization” (Walklate 2007, 28). In many cases, even inherently sympathetic individuals may have to demonstrate adherence to particular social expectations—such as definitions of respectability or femininity—in order to be seen as “deserving” victims, thereby assuring public compassion and state assistance. Some victims have few opportunities to be heard, while others manage to use language to influence the administration of justice, supplement the justice they receive, or compensate for the justice they believe they have been denied. Even in those cases, however, victims’ experiences may be appropriated for many purposes over which they have little control.

The case of Beatrice Pace, a British woman acquitted of murdering her husband with arsenic in 1928, is a valuable example for the complex relationships between the personal experience and social understanding of victimization. Her trial was a sensation in its time, and, despite being charged with murder, “Mrs. Pace” emerged as a popular media persona, especially after the physical and psychological brutality she had suffered in her marriage became known. Alongside Pace’s domestic misery, what some saw as her victimization by the criminal justice system was a central element in media commentary on her case. However, Pace was not merely commented upon: she wrote a post-acquittal, serialized memoir for a prominent London-based newspaper in which she analyzed her experiences according to her own attitudes

toward marriage and motherhood, offering interpretations that were sometimes far more ambiguous than those of her self-appointed champions. Not least for this reason, Pace remains a striking figure, even across eight decades: accused of a secretive, premeditated spousal murder, she was nonetheless viewed sympathetically, giving her an unusual opportunity to express her own views after the conclusion of her legal ordeal.

The Mysterious Death of Harry Pace

On January 10, 1928, after a long illness, Harry Pace, a Gloucestershire quarryman and sheep farmer, died at his home in Fetter Hill, near the market town of Coleford in the Forest of Dean, leaving his wife Beatrice widowed with five children. Although a doctor certified Harry's death resulted from "natural causes," the suspicions of his siblings and mother resulted in police investigations, a post-mortem examination, and a coroner's inquest. According to the *Dean Forest Guardian*'s first article on the matter, on January 20, by the time Harry's postponed funeral took place, the "Fetter Hill mystery" was not only a local scandal but had even drawn national press attention. Public interest grew when forensic analysis revealed Harry had died of arsenic poisoning, and Scotland Yard detectives were called in to investigate. The protracted coroner's inquest into Harry's death featured extensive testimony about his illness, his family's suspicions, the Paces' eighteen-year marriage, and the possible means by which some three times the lethal dose of arsenic had found its way into his body. Evidence was largely circumstantial and sometimes inconclusive, but a few things became clear.¹

Harry Pace had begun to suffer from severe pain, nausea, and paralysis in July 1927, after he and his wife had "dipped" some of their sheep, a process in which the animals were bathed in an arsenic-based solution to remove parasites and clean their wool. Harry was hospitalized, which brought little improvement, and in October he returned home, where he seemed to get somewhat better under his wife's care. His earlier symptoms returned, however, on Christmas Day and steadily worsened until his death. Beatrice Pace had a troubled relationship with her in-laws, who suspected her of adultery, and, as the *Dean Forest Guardian* reported on March 30, 1928, they were concerned that Harry was "not being done right

by” (5). Some suggestions also surfaced during the inquest that Harry had had an explosive temper and was occasionally violent, and several witnesses testified that during his illness he had been “hopeless,” “intensely depressed,” and had spoken of “doing himself in,” claims that his kinfolk vehemently denied (*Dean Forest Guardian*, April 20, 1928, 5; April 27, 1928, 5; May 4, 1928, 3).

On May 22, following four months’ inquiry, the coroner’s jury reached the verdict that Harry had been poisoned “by some person or persons other than himself” and recommended further investigation; however, in a tense scene dramatically described in the *World’s Pictorial News* on May 27, the coroner—in accordance with the laws governing inquests—refused to accept their decision, insisting that they must name the person responsible if they suspected anyone. After a brief pause, the jury’s second verdict charged Beatrice with murder. Soon thereafter, Pace’s Member of Parliament (M.P.) started a legal defense fund on her behalf, and donations and messages of support poured in from all parts of Britain—and even from abroad—as she awaited trial in prison. Her trial in Gloucester was brief but remarkable. On July 6, after the prosecution had rested, Pace’s barrister—who for four days had relentlessly cross-examined prosecution witnesses—asserted not only that the Crown had utterly failed to make its case but also that a formal defense was unnecessary. The judge agreed and immediately directed the jury to find Pace not guilty. (Pace’s unused defense would have been that Harry had poisoned himself.) As described by the *Daily Mirror* on July 7, the “dramatic end” (4) to Pace’s trial was raucously greeted by crowds in Gloucester, and it was reported on the front pages of several newspapers. Beatrice sold the story of her “martyrdom” to the *Sunday Express* for more than £3,000—what today would be a significant, six-figure sum—and her trial, which the *News of the World*, July 8, called “one of the most amazing within living memory” (9), remained a topic of discussion not only among newspaper commentators but also in Parliament.

The “Martyrdom” of Beatrice Pace

Shortly after Harry Pace’s death, the *World’s Pictorial News*, January 22, 1928, described him as a “highly respected” and “hard-working” man, and Beatrice insisted their marriage had been “absolutely

happy" (3). Subsequently, however, in statements to police on February 15 and March 11 (Mrs. Pace Papers), she revealed that she had long been a victim of domestic abuse. Although these statements were referred to and partially read aloud at the inquest, they were not made generally public until a pre-trial hearing in early June. The result, in the press, was the posthumous transformation of Harry Pace's image from that of a caring father who might have met his demise through foul play to that of a bestial tormenter of his wife and family. Ostensibly the "victim" in this case, he came to be seen as a cruel villain. After Beatrice's acquittal she gave her own vivid description, in the *Sunday Express*, July 29, of Harry's violent rages: he had frequently beaten her (sometimes with a stick or strap), had tied her to the bed, and had menaced her with a razor, hatchet, and pistol. He occasionally locked his family out of the house, impulsively killed two of their dogs, and was cruel to some of their farm animals. He set the family's blankets on fire, buried one baby's clothes in the yard, destroyed the chimney-pot by throwing rocks at it, smashed the family's pictures, and, on Christmas Day 1927, bashed in the kitchen fireplace grate after threatening to kill his family. Beatrice claimed that fatal birth defects in two of their deceased children had been caused by beatings. (In all, five of the ten children she had borne had died.) As recounted in the *World's Pictorial News* on July 29, Harry was "insanely jealous" (10) of his wife and had often prevented her from leaving the house or followed her when she went out; as Beatrice told police in her statements, Harry's own "immoral associations with other women" were an additional "cause of unhappiness" between them. He seems to have frequently sought out sex with local girls, and she claimed he had even molested her sister when the victim was only twelve years old.

Vivid depictions of violence and perversion were thus central aspects of the Pace story, around which other key narratives developed, particularly Beatrice's idealization as a wife and mother. She was viewed sympathetically not only because of her suffering but as a result of the stoicism with which she had borne it: despite her nightmarish married life, she had kept a respectable house and devotedly raised her children. Although clearly depicted as a victim, she was not seen as utterly powerless. The capable domesticity and doting motherhood she maintained in the face of her unpredictable husband's frequent beatings and other transgressions positively shaped her public persona: the inherent compassion she was due as an impoverished widow was amplified by her respectable femininity. Pace's "martyrdom"—a term used in various newspapers—also included the arduous months of police investigation, public scrutiny,

imprisonment, and trial, during which she demonstrated the same fortitude, motherly devotion, and generosity that she had shown in coping with her difficult marriage: as Anthony Praga put it in the *Sunday Express* on July 8, she was “the woman who endured” (11).

Although the media highlighted the scrupulous and fair presentation of the prosecution’s case and praised the wisdom of the judge’s decision, other parts of the criminal justice system faced criticism. During parliamentary questions in the House of Commons on May 23, 1928, Labour M.P. Will Thorne asked whether the Home Secretary, Sir William Joynson-Hicks, was aware that when Pace was questioned in March she had been ordered “to proceed to Coleford Police Station to be interrogated by Scotland Yard officers” for 13 hours even though “the children were in bed at the time, with the result that the family left the house without any breakfast” (*Parl. Deb.* 5s, 217: 1890). Condemning the “third-degree methods” of the police, he questioned whether orders to employ this “wicked system” had originated at the highest levels of the police hierarchy (1891). Joynson-Hicks denied that there was “anything in the nature of third degree in this country at all” and (accurately) pointed out that Pace had “thanked the police for the consideration which they had shown her”; nonetheless, others also criticized the children’s treatment and the lack of “ordinary courtesy” shown by the police, doubting whether Pace’s gratitude could be taken seriously after her lengthy questioning (1891).

The coroner’s inquest was also criticized because of its long duration and the coroner’s refusal to accept the jury’s first verdict. As the *Daily Mail* reported on April 27, “local sympathy” with Pace “has changed to indignation at the long ordeal to which she has been subjected” (11). Although the coroner’s insistence that a suspect be named was procedurally correct, a letter to the *Times* on May 29 suggested that the “many” Englishmen who “complacently believe that one of the superiorities of their law over that of foreigners is the treatment of an accused person as innocent until he is proved guilty” must have been “rudely shocked” by the Pace verdict (13). Although the verdict was technically only a “charge,”

if Mrs. Pace is acquitted on trial, the fact will remain that it will stand recorded in the files of all the newspapers of the country that a Coroner’s jury actually found her to have killed her husband by poison. Justice, as well as logic, surely demands that this misuse of language should be removed from our Statute-book (13).

When Pace was indeed acquitted less than two months later, the *Daily Mail*, July 9, returned to this point, suggesting that the inquest verdict meant she remained under a “cruel slur” (12). The previous day’s

Sunday Express had argued that Pace's "martyrdom compels an immediate inquiry into the obsolete and antiquated procedure of coroners' courts" in order to ensure "no recurrence of the cumbrous and clumsy methods which inflicted on Mrs. Pace an ordeal without precedent or parallel" (12). The July 8 edition of the *Sunday Times* quoted R. Hopkin Morris, a barrister and Liberal M.P., who noted critically that "no prosecution would have been launched against Mrs. Pace by the Director of Public Prosecutions if his hand had not been forced by the findings at the coroner's court" (18). On July 9, the *Manchester Guardian* reported statements suggesting public opinion was "very much exercised about the conduct of the coroner in the Pace case" and urging reforms to help prevent such problems occurring again (9). On the same day, the *Citizen*, in Gloucester, made a broader critique: Pace's "extraordinary murder trial" pointed to "a very real danger that our methods of crime investigation are changing, to the prejudice of accused persons and...of the sound principles and traditions by which hitherto the rights and liberties of the individual have been scrupulously safeguarded" (4).

These were not the only examples of how Pace's particular experience of victimization was used by others. Two days after her acquittal, on July 8, her socialist M.P., A. A. Purcell, who had set up her defense fund and helped arrange her legal representation, stated in the *Sunday Times* that she was due "adequate compensation" for the "heavy pressure" and "constant anxiety" she had endured: "Flogging," he insisted, "would have been humane in comparison with it" (18). The next day, in Parliament, Purcell and others attacked the Conservative government's refusal to provide compensation:

Mr. PURCELL: Is there really no sense of decency on the part of the Government? [Interruption.] I repeat, is there no sense of decency on the part of the Crown in connection with a case that has resulted in half this woman's home being destroyed by members of the public who are in a morbid sense out for sight-seeing? Is nothing to be done for a woman who in this case has been thrown into prison without an atom of evidence that she was in any sense responsible for the crime? (*Parl. Deb.* 5s, 219: 1857-58)

During debate, the government was urged to take steps "to guarantee poor persons, particularly those implicated in charges involving life or death, the fullest and best legal and technical defense free from cost" (1857). Pace's poverty and the forensic complexity of her case symbolized for some the imbalances in the justice system. There was a rudimentary system of legal aid, but one journalist, writing in the *World's Pictorial News* on June 3, argued that, "experience shows that in such cases, the best legal brains in the country are not available for the defense, although no expense is spared in obtaining the most eminent

counsel in the land to undertake the duties of counsel for the prosecution" (9). Pace's individual victimization was thus used by politicians and press alike to make wide-ranging commentaries on civil liberties, the justice system, and the provision of legal assistance.

However, Beatrice Pace was not merely depicted as the victim of a brutal husband and an overbearing police and court system. James Douglas, writing in the *Sunday Express*, July 15, 1928, not only saw his newspaper (which published Pace's memoir) on the side of Britain's abused women—"the sorrowful sisters of Mrs. Pace" as he described them—but also argued that the acquitted widow was a "victim of our inhuman marriage and divorce laws": "Why did not Mrs. Pace escape? The answer is that she was too poor to escape, and that she believed it was her duty as a wife to bear unimaginable agonies and degradations and cruelties" (12). Although he could not say "how many husbands take advantage of our pitiless laws to convert marriage into a secret devilry in which they may with impunity gratify their basest and most brutal passions," there were, Douglas claimed, "husbands like Harry Pace on every street of every village and every town. Everybody knows them" (12). The solution was not only "making it as cheap and as easy to get out of marriage as it is to get into it," but also expanding state aid to divorced mothers: "Let us," he declared, "insure motherhood as we insure unemployment" (12). On August 5, Douglas published excerpts from letters that abused women had sent him in response to his article, and he used these "raw slabs and slices of married life" (10)—in which some women compared their experiences to Pace's—to reiterate his critique.

Mrs. Pace Speaks

After months in the public eye, Beatrice Pace finally had the chance to participate in the media discourse around her case through a six-part weekly series in the *Sunday Express* between July 8 and August 12, 1928. In it, she recounted her youth, marriage, and experiences as a murder suspect. She also gave advice, responded to some of the numerous letters she received, and described her post-acquittal life. In doing so, she certainly made use of pre-existing press narratives about her; nevertheless, she also offered a far more complex version of "Mrs. Pace." Key ambiguities in her account related to the meaning of her victimization, her relationship with her husband, and the broader institutional and social critiques which

others had made based on her case. Unsurprisingly, her memoir featured detailed accounts of her late husband's brutality: summarizing her marriage as "week in, week out, month in, month out, year in, year out—nothing but work, meals, rows, and beatings" (*Sunday Express*, July 29, 1928, 15), she fleshed out previously reported violent episodes. In her memoir's first installment, appearing in the *Sunday Express* on July 8, she also emphasized the suffering and anguish caused by the long legal proceedings, revealing, for instance, that the anxiety they caused had led to vision and hearing problems (1).

Victimization was therefore central to Pace's portrayal of herself and her experiences, framing the domestic brutality she suffered within a journey from naïve youth to experienced adulthood. Describing herself as a rural *ingénue* when she married, Pace claimed, "I had never had a sweetheart or a man friend. I still believed that the doctor brought babies. My mother had told me nothing" (*Sunday Express*, July 15, 1928, 11). Her innocence not only helped justify her decision to marry Harry despite what she later saw as obvious warning signs, but it also added poignancy to a marital "hell" marked by sexual brutality, infidelity, and perversion on the part of "a terribly passionate man" who, "when the mood was on him didn't care what he did" (*Sunday Express*, July 22, 1928, 11). Pace, however, transformed her victimization into a form of authority. In the *Sunday Express* on August 5, she noted the contrast between her younger, innocent self and the experienced woman she had become: "I try to think of what I felt as a young girl married to such a man, and when I think of it now, as a woman of thirty-seven, I wonder how it was that I stuck it for so long" (15).

Pace opened her serialized memoir with reference to a well-established theme, her maternal identity: appealing to "every mother in England," she asserted—as she often did—that her only concern had been for her children (*Sunday Express*, July 8, 1928, 1). Three weeks later, on July 29, in "A Talk to Wives," she claimed her lifelong sacrifices were *for* her children and had ennobled her victimization: her suffering "for them" was "proof" that she "had something to love and to work for" and also made her feel closer to her husband (14). She also emphasized her marital devotion. Facing relentless cruelty, she remained focused upon (and found some solace in) taking care of her family: "There was, first of all, Harry—I always tried to do my best for him—and after that came the children, and then myself" (*Sunday Express*, August 5, 1928, 15). Pace's active adoption of her victim status built upon the existing idealizing narratives in the press, giving her authority, and making her a figure of sympathy, particularly among women. In doing so, she

actively claimed her victim status through a form of deliberate “self-fashioning” that has been identified in different historical periods (Hurl-Eamon 2005, 16; Walklate 2007, 28). One female correspondent expressed the reaction of many readers to Pace’s dramatic depiction of her ordeals when, in a letter reprinted in the *World’s Pictorial News*, July 29, she stated, “Those who have had trouble can sympathize with you” (14).

There were, however, more questionable aspects of Pace’s story, such as her reluctance to seek help and her unwillingness to leave her abuser. As the *World’s Pictorial News* on August 5 stated, Beatrice had once taken Harry to court for assault after he had beaten her “more cruelly than usual” (8) while she was pregnant. She had also once gone to the police after another violent incident, only to send away the officer who came to her house. She had reason to fear Harry’s anger; however, her relative silence was also motivated by a fear of “disgrace,” and, as she put it in “A Talk to Wives” (*Sunday Express*, July 29, 1928, 14), she “dreaded the gossip round about almost as much as the stick.”² On August 5, the *World’s Pictorial News* reported that Beatrice had kept some details of Harry’s cruelty from her family out of fear that her brothers “would have killed him had they known” (8), but they cannot have been fully unaware, as her description of several events makes clear. The same article also recounted what Beatrice had told detectives on March 11: she had once left her husband to live with her father, but Harry convinced her to return with a pledge that his behavior would improve (a promise that had held only a couple of weeks). In the July 22 installment of her *Sunday Express* series, Beatrice wrote that one of her brothers had offered her “a home with him if I would leave Harry,” which she again did; however, feeling herself “drawn by him,” she soon returned: “I had to go back to Harry,” she wrote, “no matter what he did to me” (11).

On August 12, in “The Beginning of a New Life,” her concluding article for the *Sunday Express*, Pace even contemplated the possibility that her “pity” for her husband had contributed to his violence:

It may be that I was mistaken to pity him, and that his man’s pride was hurt. It may be that he thought to himself, “Pity me, does she? I’ll show her who’s the best man here!” And perhaps when his fury was on him, those thoughts made him more cruel (12).

As she had put it in “A Talk to Wives,” while her life with Harry was “sometimes hell,” there was “some happiness in sticking to it, and in not losing my love for him,” and here she reiterated her devotion, asserting “I couldn’t leave him, and at bottom I didn’t want to” (*Sunday Express*, July 29, 1928, 14).

Although claiming that, if given the chance to choose again, she “would not marry a man of his type for all the money in the world,” she was adamant that she had been right to stay: “I have said it before, and I say it again—I loved Harry, and I would have stood by him whatever he did, and for another eighteen years, if he had lived” (*Sunday Express*, August 5, 1928, 15). Not only had she stayed, she also assisted in concealing his sexual predations. Although her abused had been “sent away from home” (revealed in her February 15 statement), she helped cover up Harry’s other indecent assaults. She convinced the father of one of the girls with whom there “was trouble” not to take legal action by paying him, and, on another occasion, sympathies due to her pregnancy dissuaded a second set of parents from taking her husband to court (*World’s Pictorial News*, August 5, 1928, 8).³

Pace’s comments hardly supported the uses made of her case for wider social or political purposes, as she was largely uncritical of those who had investigated and prosecuted her. Far from denouncing “third-degree” police methods, the *Dean Forest Guardian* on May 18 reported that Pace had praised the “great consideration and kindness” with which Scotland Yard detectives had shown her. (Although a front-page article in the March 25 issue of *The People*, allegedly quoting Pace herself, had suggested harsh treatment, subsequent statements avoided any suggestion of police impropriety: the paper, ultimately, issued a retraction.⁴) In her memoir, she simply referred to the “terrible days” of the inquest which, “stale and unhappy,” were “best forgotten” (*Sunday Express*, August 12, 1928, 12). She also praised the “wonderfully kind” prison authorities who, as she put it, “never made me feel that I was a prisoner charged with murder” (*Sunday Express*, July 8, 1928, 11). She made no case for compensation, did not critique the prosecution’s case (other than to assert her innocence), and even refrained from directly criticizing the coroner.

Moreover, although Pace’s story would seem to have supported James Douglas’s dire depiction of the plight of poor and abused women, her feelings toward her marriage were more ambivalent. In her first substantive discussion of her relationship with Harry in the *Sunday Express*, on July 15, she stated:

I began to love him—I cannot explain why or how—and once having begun I never left off, not even through all those years when he was terrible to me. He was my man, whatever he did. He had taken me as a girl, and I grew to be a woman with him. I suppose I was a great fool (11).

Pace’s reference to her youthful naivety seems aimed at defusing potential criticism of such loyalty. A week later, she defended her commitment: “I am sure you will all say that if Harry was mad, I must have

been madder to stay by him and put up with it, but as I said at the beginning, Harry was my man, and I had to stick to him" (July 22, 1928, 11). In the next installment, on July 29, she responded to letters from women who had in fact questioned her decision to remain with her abuser. First dismissive—"I do not believe that the women who say they would have run away would really have done so"—Pace then sought refuge in the authority her victimhood granted her:

There are things in married life which unmarried women cannot understand and which even married women who have kind husbands cannot understand. There are things deep down in us that only experiences like mine can make us realize—feelings and ideas that a happy life doesn't bring out (14).

Among these feelings was the conviction that she had been right to stay: "You feel that you mustn't just turn your back and run away from things like a coward. You feel that you've got to fight for what you've got, to keep it and to make it better. And whatever love there is in your life you feel you want to keep it alive" (14). Whereas James Douglas had argued that men such as Harry Pace sullied the sanctity of marriage and had urged that it should be made easier for women to escape from them, Beatrice suggested that sufficient devotion made even an abusive marriage worthwhile and that leaving amounted to cowardice. In "A Talk to Those About to Marry" (*Sunday Express*, August 5, 1928), she stated that "a fairly happy marriage" is based on "making allowances for each other's bad points"; on this principle, she found her husband's remorse after abusing her ("he was nearly always sorry after he had been cruel to me") allowed her to forgive him: "Harry's regret made up to me for many a sore back. It was his best quality, and I knew it, and it helped me to allow for his bad qualities" (15). Beatrice clearly thought it had been a mistake to marry Harry, but, once married, she failed to see—and claimed she did not want—a way out. It was this message, with all the authority of her tortuously acquired experience, that she sought to impart to her women readers.

Conclusion

There are limits to any single case study, but Beatrice Pace's story is an example of the "ambiguity" of victimization, one deriving from inherent complexities in the narrativization of experience rather than from victims' personal failure to express themselves properly. The image of "Mrs. Pace" was contradictory. It

exemplified not only a weakness implied by long years of abuse but also the patient strength with which she endured it. Pace's victimhood was nonetheless the key source of her authority, even if her marital devotion, while seen as noble, also raised doubts about her judgment. She was celebrated simultaneously as an extraordinary individual and an "everywoman" whose experiences represented those of other abused wives. In navigating these contradictions, Pace added her own complexities. Vividly depicting Harry's brutality, she asserted her undying love for him. Decrying his sexual predations, she admitted helping to conceal them. Insisting that she had always put her children's interests first, her spousal loyalty had kept them subject to his cruel whims. Her memoir shows that when victims are given the chance to speak what they say may, like their experiences themselves, be far more equivocal than their advocates would prefer. Beatrice's statements—which effectively reinforced traditional notions of wifely commitment—made it more difficult to weave her story into broader critiques of the judicial system or social inequality. She was undoubtedly well aware of her position and of the danger that her popularity might wane were she to deviate too far from her identity as a good wife and mother. Her memoir was also, of course, shaped to fit journalistic needs, even if the degree of editorial direction she received remains unknown.⁵

Pace's experiences, as extraordinary as they were, speak to broader issues in the histories of crime, violence, and gender. Some scholars emphasize the intense scrutiny to which women—whether as perpetrators or victims—have been subject in the criminal justice system, left to the mercy of hostile judges, jurors and journalists. Based upon a study of fifteen women executed in Britain, for example, Annette Ballinger has argued that "the mere fact that a woman has broken the law ensures that she will be regarded as someone who has failed to fulfil gender role expectations": the refusal or inability to conform to "conventional female roles" thus subjects women to public censure and "judicial misogyny" (Ballinger 2000, 3). Certainly, the ways crime suspects (and victims) are perceived affects their treatment by the police and judicial system; however, I suggest that exploring this issue involves not only a more subtle consideration of gender roles but also a complex appraisal of women's treatment as crime suspects. For instance, alongside women who have been demonized by the public and unfairly condemned by the justice system we should take into account those who were able to actively generate public support and who were acquitted. Women, that is, such as Beatrice Pace.

Her case also, I suggest, helps to shed light on the particular cultural context in which it occurred. Some feminist historians have characterized the interwar period as dominated by a backlash against women's previous gains, a reactionary cultural shift based on a pervasive image of womanhood founded upon sexual propriety, matrimony, and maternity (Oakley 1981, 21; Beddoe 1989, 8; Kent 1993, 110-11). Such themes, indeed, were prominent; however, there was a "plurality of discourse" and a "polyphonic quality" to debates about gender roles in the 1920s that featured a diversity of feminine images in popular culture and the press (Melman 1988, 146-47). Some of these included more positive associations between women and the world of work and also accepted somewhat less restrained attitudes toward sexuality. Moreover, the coercive power of the media to impose conservative gender roles between the wars has also been drastically overstated and the "intense debate" around them has been insufficiently emphasized (Bingham 2004, 246). The image, for instance, of the relatively independent "modern woman" coexisted and competed with more traditional female identities. Beatrice Pace, for example, was undoubtedly seen to embody marital and maternal virtues; nonetheless, she was positively depicted as building a new, independent post-acquittal life, one that, she stated, would not include another marriage.

Combined with her husband's extreme violence and immoral behavior, her image as a loyal wife and caring mother swayed public sympathies in her favor. However, this was by no means inevitable: Pace's remarkable popularity began well before her innocence had been established and despite circumstances—including hostile local gossip—which might have raised questions about her character. Her example suggests that some discourses of femininity, while in themselves confining, could benefit those women who successfully appealed to them. As Martin Wiener, with reference to Victorian attitudes toward rape, has argued, "the new higher valuation of female character" enhanced "the claims of women of all ages to protection against bodily assault" (Wiener 2004, 92). While it is difficult to judge what impact, if any, popular support for Beatrice Pace had on the verdict in her case, it clearly encouraged politicians to defend and assist her, motivated people from all walks of life to support her emotionally and financially, and enabled her to sell her story for a substantial sum. The idealized narratives applied to Pace not only provided her with such tangible benefits but also framed a self-image that she embraced; these were narratives not only *to which* she was subject but also *through which* she could act. Ultimately, however, her case is also an example of how victims often cannot control the depiction of their own experiences. Other

people used Beatrice's story for a variety of political and journalistic purposes. She was fortunate that most of these were in some way beneficial to her, even if they presented her experiences in very different terms than she did herself. Pace's "martyrdom" is a vivid example of the power narratives of victimization have in women's encounters with the criminal justice system. It also highlights the ambiguities of such narratives resulting from the various cultural concerns they reflect and the many interests, beyond those of victims themselves, that shape the ways they are used.

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¹ The investigation and inquest were given detailed coverage in the *Dean Forest Guardian* between January and May 1928, and an effective summary is provided in Stratmann 2005, 104-19.

² A recent study has suggested that it was not at all uncommon in the early twentieth century for abused women to make complaints to police and then refuse to press charges (Emsley 2005, 64).

³ Although Beatrice admitted one affair in her March 14 statement, it played no role in her trial or public discussion of her case because the authorities kept it—along with other potentially damaging information—secret.

⁴ The article led the two investigating detectives to take legal advice and consider a libel action. On October 28, *The People* retracted its suggestion of "third-degree" methods and reimbursed the detectives' legal costs. Metropolitan Police records, National Archives, MEPO 3/1638.

⁵ Pace was literate (she was an avid letter writer while in prison), and the *Sunday Express* repeatedly sought to emphasize her story's authenticity: the July 13 *Daily Mail* contains an advertisement for Pace's series with a photo of her writing her memoir; two days later the *Sunday Express* included a close-up image of her handwritten manuscript.