Crime in Verse
Crime in Verse
The Poetics of Murder in the Victorian Era

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For Linda and John
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With her usual curiosity and generosity, Carolyn O’Brien has helped me to contemplate and consider murder as a subject of research for many years. For her genuine interest in all my ideas and endeavors, she receives my most special thanks and appreciation.
This study of crime in verse connects innovations in Victorian poetry to developments in the Victorian discourse of crime—a network of interrelated and often contradictory concepts informed by legal fictions, punitive mechanisms, medical theories, class conflicts, and gender codes. Tracing dialectical links between criminal discourse and poetic representation, the study assembles multiple genres—the street ballad, the dramatic monologue, the verse novel, the verse drama—and examines the ways in which poets adopted and adapted particular verse forms in order to accommodate the evolving epistemologies of crime and to elaborate the poetics of murder. Because significant institutional and ideological changes throughout the Victorian period complicated and obscured the meanings of murder, Crime in Verse frames its textual analyses with investigations of the specific historical contexts in which these meanings were renegotiated. Generating moral ambiguities and cultural anxieties, shifting understandings of murder—as a material act, an abstract idea, and an aesthetic representation—created opportunities for poets to coordinate interests in formal innovation, generic experimentation, and political expression. Poetically productive and topically resonant, the theme of murder assisted poets, and can assist us, in reconceptualizing the literary achievements and cultural engagements of Victorian verse.

Historicizing murder, while carefully highlighting poetic form and genre, this
project benefits from and responds to two ongoing critical projects in Victorian literary studies: the exploration of interdisciplinary and historicist approaches to literary representations of crime and, within the subfield of poetry studies, the development of interpretive methodologies that recognize poetry's political sensibilities. Predominantly, the novel, whether addressed in popular crime genres, such as Newgate, detective, and sensation fiction, or more broadly conceived in discussions of realist fiction, shapes our contemporary perspective of Victorian crime literature. Revealing the extent to which our studies of crime are bound up in understandings of genre, a scholarly concentration on the novel has generated a corresponding emphasis on the middle-class ideologies, interests, and fears of its authors and readers.

Following D. A. Miller’s groundbreaking *The Novel and the Police* (1988), which proposed a “radical entanglement between the nature of the novel and the practice of the police” and connected the novel’s “representational techniques” to cultural modes of “disciplinary power” (2), two decades of rigorous scholarship have refined our sense of the novel’s literary accomplishments and political participation while acquainting us with the social arenas and professional fields of criminal discourse. Even a partial listing of the most recent work attests to the continuing productivity and increasing specialization of this approach: Ronald R. Thomas’s *Detective Fiction and the Rise of Forensic Science* (1999) connects specific portrayals of criminal bodies, forensic technologies, and literary detectives to the emergence of an investigative science, the invention of a literary genre, and the renegotiation of cultural authority; Marlene Tromp’s *The Private Rod: Marital Violence, Sensation and the Law in Victorian Britain* (2000) presents portraits of marital violence in middle-class sensation fiction as evidence of the genre’s resistance to the high cultural conventions of literary realism and the conservatism of legal authority; Jonathan Grossman’s *The Art of Alibi: English Law Courts and the Novel* (2002) emphasizes the “trial-oriented” (1) nature of Victorian culture and, isolating novels and trials as the “era’s most prominent narrative paradigms” (2), reads juridical procedures and fictional texts as formal and logical analogues; Lisa Rodensky’s *The Crime in Mind: Criminal Responsibility and the Victorian Novel* (2003) argues that the novel’s third-person narrators and its “intensive exploration of the inner life” (7) granted readers access to the otherwise elusive interior of the criminal mind in ways that interrogated and affirmed legal definitions of criminal responsibility; and Lisa Surridge’s *Bleak Houses: Marital Violence in Victorian Fiction* (2005) explores how the narrative and metanarrative operations of the domestic novel are “charged” (9) with the energies and anxieties of continuing wife-assault debates, which were staged in the courts, the legislature, and the newspaper. 2 Attentive to the narrative strategies of fiction, the political identities of the bourgeoisie, and the intricate correlations between textual details, genre codes, and legal developments, such studies
have mapped important vantage points from which to survey the imbrications of literary genre and cultural discourse in representations of crime.

While novel scholars have been amassing and arranging texts in order to create assemblages of crime fictions that reveal patterns of political interest and literary inspiration, poetry scholars, also privileging middle-class literature, have tended to organize their work on crime poems around individual authors and texts. This tendency most likely reflects significant formal differences across genres of poetry, which render arguments for thematic cohesion and structural continuity less apparent. Foregoing the construction of comparative frameworks, analyses of verse representations of crime are largely focused in content and small in scope—and dispersed across decades of journal articles and book chapters. Even so, a loose constellation of poems could be said to define our view of poetry’s criminal interests. In particular, dramatic monologues, which comprise a subfield of transgression studies in their own right, and verse novels, which reproduce the narrative scope of more popular crime fictions, have garnered the most attention. While key texts, especially Robert Browning’s “Porphyria’s Lover” (1836), “My Last Duchess” (1842), and *The Ring and the Book* (1868–69), seem to dominate discussions about the subject of murder and the evolution of genre, other poetic representations of crime have attracted attention as contemporary scholarly priorities renew interest in their authors and themes. A second-wave feminist revival of Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s work, together with a corresponding focus on the gender, class, and racial politics of sexual violence, for example, has led to new work on the rape of Marian Erle in *Aurora Leigh* (1856) and the infanticide of the fugitive speaker in “The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim’s Point” (1848). Similarly, Oscar Wilde’s “The Ballad of Reading Gaol” (1898), long perceived as a less intellectually and aesthetically rigorous poem, has been revisited by scholars interested in biographical and sociological approaches to Wilde’s experience as a prisoner, the poem’s considerations of private and public forms of violence, and its relationship to late-Victorian prison reform.\(^3\)

To a significant extent, *Crime in Verse* is marked by these same patterns. In collecting a range of murder poems, however, this study begins to locate thematic and generic continuities across seemingly disparate texts, and by incorporating minor poems, noncanonical poets, and street verses, which are typically overlooked in studies of Victorian poetry and crime writing, it also begins to reorganize the terms of our conversation. Inspired by the insights, strategies, and omissions of previous scholarship, this project maintains a double vision. Asking questions about Victorian representations of crime and scholarly presentations of Victorian poetry, it upholds a now well-established tradition of delineating the contours of genre and discourse in order to understand the textual strategies and political significance of crime writing in Victorian England. In extending
that tradition beyond the realm of the novel, it also broadens our perspective on literary mediations of crime in terms of genre—and class. Insofar as they resonate across the generic divide of Victorian studies, the chapters that follow may nudge us toward a more trans-generic vision of Victorian literary crimes. In the meantime, however, each chapter remains invested in generic difference, privileging a poetry studies model attentive to the formal ingenuity and literary history of verse. Such an emphasis helps to foreground the dialectical and reciprocal processes of generic innovation and discourse formation, allowing us to consider how shifting epistemologies of murder influenced developments in poetic form and language—and how the tools of poetic form and language enabled poets to fashion topical critiques of Victorian England’s evolving criminal discourses.

In performing this task, Crime and Verse does not catalogue the many poems about murder published in the Victorian period or attempt to locate a unitary poetics of murder crisscrossing disparate texts. Rather, with a restricted topic and a selective scope it offers detailed analyses of a relatively small subset of poems, carefully observing the political dimensions of genre and following the intricate arguments of specific poems. Positioning these poems with respect to a complex network of criminal discourses, it also references various nonliterary texts. Trial transcripts, parliamentary debates, legislative acts, newspaper reports, journal articles, medicolegal treatises, political pamphlets, critical reviews, and private correspondence are pressed into service to reveal the interlocking features of legal discourse, genre codes, and individual poems.

While the theme of murder supplies apt demonstrations of how relatively brief or highly condensed poems can embed multiple layers of cultural meanings and make pointed political arguments, it also accesses multiple questions of power—between killers and victims, between juries and defendants, between the state and its subjects. For this reason, the theme of murder also offers the practical advantage of class mobility. Of interest to Victorians of all classes for a variety of reasons, murder inspired verse representations for a variety of occasions and audiences. In bringing together the murder poems of anonymous street balladeers, recuperated minor poets, and established canonical poets, this book poses questions about our notions of Victorian poetry—as an art form defined by Victorian poets and critics and a field of study continuously reshaped by contemporary academics. The inclusion of working-class street verse, for example, invites us to explore the selection processes with which we demarcate the field of Victorian poetry. And juxtapositions of high and low, major and minor texts suggest more diverse paths of literary influence and alternate models of intertextuality, which, in turn, allow us to reassess the role of verse as a genre of literature and a mode of public or political speech in Victorian culture.

In negotiating the textual and contextual components of this agenda, Crime
Introduction

in Verse reconsiders the historical conditions of and cultural responses to murder in Victorian England. A topic of interest to writers of all genres and all periods, murder possesses a trans-historical and a trans-generic resonance and often seems a universally understood transgression and a well-worn literary trope. But a more specifically historicized examination of murder reveals its multiple and contested meanings. No singular notion of murder regulated the spectrum of commentaries on criminal matters ranging from apprehension and punishment to diagnosis and deterrence. And assessments of specific murders were inflected by unique combinations of circumstance and evidence and were openly debated in multiple public arenas ranging from the courtroom to the newspaper to the scaffold crowd. Entangled within the changing institutional mandates of legal codes, medical theories, and penal policies, the meanings of murder were also increasingly complicated by changing understandings and definitions of violence. Institutional and ideological reformulations of murder often met in distressing ways, leading to intense public scrutiny of crimes and punishments that enfolded politically contentious matters of class conflict (such as in the case of public execution) and gender inequality (such as in the case of wife-murder). In each of these contexts, determining the meanings of murder, the subjectivities of murderers, and the ethics of punishment became disconcertingly and frustratingly contingent.

As the chapters that follow demonstrate, these contingencies, together with their attendant anxieties and the starkly unambiguous consequences of murderous violence, allowed poets to manipulate the theme of murder for poetic innovation and political commentary. An emphasis on literary form may privilege the same kind of de-contextualized—and de-moralized—evaluations of criminal artistry advocated by Thomas de Quincey, who sought, however playfully, to evaluate murder as a “meritorious performance” (987) and to assign aesthetic value to particular crimes. But, because of the counterdiscursive ways in which poets often managed the theme of murder, a discussion of the more topical agendas and specific aesthetic practices involved in these texts further underscores murder’s status as a diversely mediated act. Because murder has both a complex social history and a rich literary history, examining connections between modes of poetic expression and epistemologies of murder is accomplished most efficiently by linking textual minutiae and generic features to more local and specific cultural debates in which murder appears most politically contentious and poetically productive. Accordingly, while sustaining a focus on the strategic uses of poetic textuality, Crime in Verse subdivides its arguments about the poetics of murder into three separate chapters that explicitly align generic form and topical content.

The first chapter, “Murder, Execution, and the Criminal Classes,” balances an analysis of the politically immediate content of murder and execution ballads
with an overview of their evolution and reception. Imagining the voices of astonished witnesses and condemned murderers, these ballads, sold and sung in the streets, explored the shock of murder and the pathos of execution in ways that challenged class-based ideologies of crime and problematized hierarchies of poetic value. Constituting one of the most profitable branches of the broadside print industry, which flourished for most of the nineteenth century, crime ballads demonstrate a certain degree of generic cohesion, and thus despite significant shifts in classed definitions of criminality and adjustments to judicial applications of capital punishment, ballads written decades apart share fundamental rhetorical and structural characteristics. Yet, individual street ballads also register specific changes in criminal law, publicly aired attitudes towards particular crimes, and the micropolitics of individual murder trials and death sentences. While negotiating the mandates of genre, the tensions of class, and the unfolding histories of criminals, the broadside ballad industry developed and marketed the largest and most cohesive body of crime in verse. For these reasons, a careful study of the generic and discursive features of these texts assists us in accessing Victorian ideologies about those who commit crimes and those who write poems and expands our awareness of the cultural practices and social spaces of Victorian verse.

Chapter 2, “The Murderous Subject and the Criminal Sublime,” moves from the working-class poetry of the street to the middle-class poetry of the drawing room—and from historically based fictions of crime and punishment to wholly imagined accounts of malice and madness. Pairing contextual references to psychological theories, criminal laws, and controversial trials with a discussion of dramatic poetry’s capacity for sustaining irony and indeterminacy, this chapter explores the representation of murderous subjectivity in Browning’s “Porphyria’s Lover,” “My Last Duchess,” and “The Laboratory” (1844) and Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s “A Last Confession” (1870). In these texts, Browning and Rossetti coordinate interests in the generic attributes of the dramatic monologue and the specialist language of mental science. Working together, the violent themes, formal structures, verbal complications, and metrical patterning of these poems produce commentaries on mid-century medicolegal theories, which challenged longstanding notions of criminal responsibility with exculpatory arguments about homicidal lunacy. Inviting—but frustrating—readerly attempts to determine the sanity or insanity of their violent speakers, these meticulously crafted monologues uphold the obscurity of murderous subjectivity, and in doing so, produce a topically resonant version of the sublime. Dramatic portraits of deviance, as many studies of the dramatic monologue have previously argued, influenced the themes and forms of Victorian poetry in important ways, but foregrounding the epistemological contingencies and political contentiousness of murder allows us to consider the mystified and mystifying murderous sub-
jects of this hybrid form in terms of both poetic experimentation and cultural critique.

Examining accounts of domestic murder in the verse novel and the verse drama, chapter 3, “‘Household Law’ and the Domestication of Murder,” also stresses connections between generic hybridity and the intertextual frameworks and political entanglements of criminal discourse. Browning’s *The Ring and the Book* and two closet tragedies, Edward Robert Bulwer Lytton’s *Clytemnestra* (1855) and Amy Levy’s *Medea* (1884), place the problems of marital unhappiness and gender inequality on a trajectory of murderous consequence. Their domestic murder plots register substantial changes in the laws governing marriage and divorce and dramatize frustration with entrenched ideologies of patriarchal domesticity. Their murderous violations of hearth and home mark the increasing criminalization of domestic abuse and the implications of a new divorce court, which, opened in January 1858 and resembling a criminal court model, enforced England’s newly revised matrimonial laws, established a public record of private conflict, and supported a print media culture of domestic scandal. As domesticity encountered criminal and matrimonial law, and as courts and newspapers broadcast the details, an explicitly adversarial and combative version of marriage gained currency.

Variously imagining murderers, motives, and victims, and written decades apart, these three dramatic poems produce strikingly similar commentaries on the failures of domestic idealism and discipline. As they use wife-murder, husband-murder, and child-murder to imagine the gendered aspects of murderous agency, they establish a range of intertextual references and metatextual meanings. Browning, mixing his “fancy” (I.679) with the “pure crude fact” (I.35) of the “square old yellow Book” (I.32), transcribes the documents of a seventeenth-century Roman murder trial and, in very explicit terms, submits the case to the judgment of his contemporary audience. Lytton and Levy, condensing high Greek tragedy into closet dramas, generate new psychological portraits of Clytemnestra and Medea and recast the deterministic powers of fate as the controlling forces of patriarchy. In reformatting and reforming old domestic crimes, each of these poets invokes a long history of domestic alienation in order to express the modern urgency of domestic reform.

As these brief chapter summaries suggest, historicizing murder while examining the components of poetic genre requires that strands of criminal discourse and varieties of poetic utterance be differentiated in order to speculate about how these modes of representation are intertwined. Nonetheless, a common system of cultural logic and aesthetic value unites the distinct agendas of each chapter and the specific meanings of each poem. The most succinct expression of this common logic forms the epigraph of this introduction. Wilde’s claim that “[t]here is no essential incongruity between crime and culture” both alludes to
and destabilizes the categories used to “other” criminals and abhor their crimes, particularly violent criminals and crimes. Insisting that crime and culture are congruous, Wilde suggests the uncanny and unsettling ways in which murderous violence might be considered not as a terrible social anomaly but as a profound cultural symptom.

Wilde’s critique of incongruity appears in “Pen, Pencil and Poison” (1889), a witty and “brief memoir” of the famous nineteenth-century murderer, Thomas Griffiths Wainewright—a man who “followed many masters other than art, being not merely a poet and a painter, an art-critic, an antiquarian, and a writer of prose, an amateur of beautiful things and a dilettante of things delightful, but also a forger of no mean or ordinary capabilities and a subtle and secret poisoner almost without rival in this or any age” (993). As such, Wainewright represents a figure of high culture and, more generally, a member of British culture. Borrowing his title phrase from Swinburne, Wilde lists Wainewright’s professional implements—pen, pencil, poison—and thereby aligns writing, drawing, and killing as modes of expression. In the biographical overview of Wainewright with which Wilde begins his essay, he makes this association more explicit, noting that, having mastered the arts of drawing and painting early in life, “[i]t was not till much later that he sought to find expression by pen or poison” (994). Sustaining this witty subtext throughout the essay, Wilde goes on to document Wainewright’s “achievements in the sphere of poison” (995), multiple poisonings for financial gain, which resulted in the deaths of his uncle, his mother-in-law, and his sister-in-law, among others.

In arranging the details of Wainewright’s life, Wilde strategically emphasizes—in order to deconstruct—the apparent signs of incongruity, documenting Wainewright’s aesthetic sensibilities and social connections in order to address a collective misunderstanding of the relationship between crime and culture. A repeated reference to the fact that Wainewright was “susceptible to the spiritual influence of Wordsworth’s poetry” (994) and “Charles Lamb’s friend” (993), for example, allows Wilde to dismiss theories of crime and stereotypes of criminals while aligning this murderer’s tastes, aspirations, and society with those of his readers. When claiming kinships of intellect and sensibility with notable and accomplished cultural elites, Wainewright proves most threatening to the reassuring binary logic of normalcy and deviance. In concluding his character study, Wilde openly challenges the opinion of the recent Wainewright biographer, W. Carew Hazlitt, who claimed that “his love of art and nature was a mere pretence and assumption” (1007), and he likewise critiques the habit of “others” to “den[y] to him all literary power” (1007):

The fact of a man being a poisoner is nothing against his prose. The domestic virtues are not the true basis of art, though they may serve as an excellent
advertisement for second-rate artists. . . . That he had a sincere love of art and nature seems to me quite certain. There is no essential incongruity between crime and culture. We cannot re-write the whole of history for the purpose of gratifying our moral sense of what should be. (1007–8)

Wilde’s assertions clearly configure an aestheticist argument, which separates the criteria for assessing art and judging morality, but they also challenge the apparent desire to protect the refinements of artistic creation from the vulgarities of criminal transgression. Because Wainewright signifies artistic sensibility, literary talent, class privilege, and murderous cunning, Wilde’s pointed insistence on the sincerity of his “love of art and nature” is equally an insistence on recognizing the congruities of crime and culture.

In the case of Wainewright, Wilde suggests, applications of “moral sense” function as attempts to deny Wainewright-the-murderer legitimate membership in the culture and the class of which he was, in fact, a part. Attempts at scouring away this unwanted stain, with condemnations of his crimes or dismissals of his art, evince more fundamental cultural logics used to dispense with disturbing crimes—through acts of dissociation and defamiliarization. Wainewright’s proximity to the centers of cultural power and the realms of artistic celebrity incites such acts: “he is just a little too modern to be treated in that fine spirit of disinterested curiosity to which we owe so many charming studies of the great criminals of the Italian Renaissance from the pens of Mr. John Addington Symonds, Miss A. Mary F. Robinson, Miss Vernon Lee, and other distinguished writers” (1008). Wainewright also approximates ordinary Britons in distressing ways: “But had the man worn a costume and spoken a language different from our own, had he lived in imperial Rome, or at the time of the Italian Renaissance, or in Spain in the seventeenth century, or in any land or any century but this century and this land, we would be quite able to arrive at a perfectly unprejudiced estimate of his position and value” (1008). Inconveniently modern and undeniably English, the murderous Wainewright presents an interpretive problem; he cannot be relegated to the realms of “disinterested curiosity” or “charming studies,” and his cultural worth cannot be properly estimated or unanimously esteemed.

The rhetorical frameworks and spectacular punishments of nineteenth-century England, of course, systematically positioned the criminal at the margins of or beyond the borders of normative society by configuring crimes as the nearly exclusive domain of a delinquent class and by punishing crimes through official rituals of exclusion—incarceration, transportation, execution. Wilde uses Wainewright to scrutinize the moralizing tendencies of art criticism, admiring Wainewright not for his talents or character but for the mischief that he does to moral and criminal codes. With Wainewright as a case study, he can critique
the political convenience of troping the criminal other, particularly when he records Wainewright’s stubborn resistance to such othering techniques. Though Wainewright was never charged with the murders he was widely known to have committed, he was subject to such exclusionary acts when he was convicted of forgery and transported to Van Diemen’s Land in 1837. His punishment, Wilde speculates, might also be plotted on an axis of crime and culture: “to a man of his culture,” he explains, transportation was “a form of death” (1005). His social death imminent, Wainewright spent time in Newgate, where his cell became “a kind of fashionable lounge” visited by “[m]any men of letters,” and where he proudly continued to “hold the position of a gentleman” (1006). “I occupy a cell with a bricklayer and a sweep,” he reportedly exclaimed, “but they never offer me the broom!” (1006). Chronicling Wainewright’s life, Wilde explains that, admitting no fall from the upper classes and no affinity with the putative criminal classes, the peerless Wainewright left England aboard a transportation ship among a group of convicts that he disdainfully characterized as “country bumpkins” (1006). Wainewright’s description of his shipmates might appear an argument for the incongruity of culture and crime—he is the grand and snobbish exception to a rule separating ordinary gentlemen and common criminals. Yet, more characteristically, his comments serve a performative function: with them he stages his resistance to his literal and figurative cultural exile.

According to Wilde’s concise little study, Wainewright employs this strategy repeatedly, placing and replacing himself at the center of culture and thus resisting the pressures of criminal law and social outrage. He connects, for example, the deviant motivations of criminal acts to the normative values of the marketplace when he interprets his forgeries for financial gain—and perhaps implicitly his murders for the same reason—in terms of capital speculation. To an insurance agent who visited Wainewright and announced, “crime was a bad speculation,” Wainewright replied, “Some of your speculations succeed, some fail. Mine happen to have failed, yours happen to have succeeded. That is the only difference, sir, between my visitor and me” (1006). In this denial of difference, with which Wainewright willfully aligns himself with the centers of social power and the activities of the market economy, Wilde finds support for his contention that crime and culture correlate in significant ways. Imagining Wainewright’s journey to Van Diemen’s Land, Wilde supposes, “Crime in England is rarely the result of sin. It is nearly always the result of starvation. There was probably no one on board in whom he would have found a sympathetic listener, or even a psychologically interesting nature” (1006). Embedded in this reference to Wainewright’s psychological alienation is a theory about the social foundations of criminal motive. Wilde suggests that, whereas most English crimes bespeak social conditions of poverty, starvation, and class oppression, the crimes of the well-fed, well-bred Wainewright, who committed forgeries and murders for
capital gain, constitute a symptom of an acquisitive society or a sinister expression of its economic values. In this sense, the crimes of the greedy gentleman and the starving bumpkin simply represent two poles of the binary class model that defined nineteenth-century British culture.

A self-described “gentleman” among “bumpkins,” a convicted forger among respectable businessmen, and a poisoner among poets—one “who might have poisoned Lord Tennyson, or Mr. Gladstone, or the Master of Balliol” (1008)—Wainewright, as Wilde represents him, functions as a symbol and symptom of nineteenth-century British culture. He exposes unsettling congruities between a singularly transgressive criminal and a collectively disciplinary culture. “[T]oo modern” to be regarded with disinterest, he activates anxieties about the presence of crime in modern metropolitan-industrial Britain and what many perceived as its appalling conditions of moral and social corruption. Such anxieties about an unprecedented national increase in crime and a marked degeneration of national character established crime as a central metaphor for modernity, and this metaphoric status helped to publicize the specialized discourses of social science, medicine, law, psychology, and, eventually, criminal anthropology that emerged to explain and deter crime. Everyone, it seemed, whether imagined or imagining oneself as a potential criminal or a potential victim, had a stake in this ongoing conversation. For this reason, representations of murder, with great semiotic efficiency, could address questions of institutional control and ideological conflict while conjuring the intertextual network of discourses used to define criminality, apprehend criminals, judge crimes, and measure punishments.

When crime and culture are reconnected, murderers are never entirely unfamiliar; they come to signify ominous expressions of common cultural values, and their actions appear transgressive variations on established cultural practices. Murder demands a public response (an explanation, a trial, a death penalty), but it also is a response. This discomfiting paradox informs the poetics of murder—and the political resonance of murder—explored in this book. Just as Wilde linked murder to other modes of expression, the poems under consideration in this study grant murders and murderers an expressive function. Operating as symbols and symptoms, murderers, however ethically abhorrent, psychologically grotesque, and socially marginalized, are always in some way addressing, contesting, or implicating the centers of culture—scrutinizing its institutions and enacting its ideologies—through acts of extreme violence.

The fundamental logic with which Wilde dismantles the presumption of incongruity in his analysis of Wainewright is given a more nuanced articulation and wider application in Peter Stallybrass and Allon White’s influential study, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (1986). Observing that “what is socially peripheral is so frequently symbolically central” (5), they define their sense of a
In the murder poems comprising this study, the problems of mapping margin and center and differentiating congruities and incongruities are reiterated in pointed representations of specific locales where socially prescribed and
individually transgressive identities collide and conflict. While depictions of crime scenes, execution scaffolds, murderous psyches, and violated homes serve the purpose of institutional and ideological critique, the complexities of poetic voice, inflecting the psychologies and identities of their killers, further refine their portraits of “conflictual complexes.” In imagining the social and psychological sites of murder, these poems delineate the social contours of transgression by exposing the anxieties and confusions that surrounded murder and by playing with the margin-center logics that structured and regulated epistemologies of crime. With these interpretive operations in mind, we can see more clearly the formal and thematic links between the politics and the poetics of murder.

Stallybrass and White’s notion of politics and poetics, and their commentaries on the margins and centers of discourse formation, also signify with respect to the cultural status of poetry—both high and low—in the Victorian era. Just as the meanings of murder were shifting, so were the agendas and markets of verse, and for this reason, mapping intersections between poetic production and criminal discourse benefits from recent scholarship on intersections between verse forms and cultural politics. A specific interest in understanding the position of poetry and the concerns of poets in a post-Romantic, novel-oriented age has become an important part of contemporary scholarship on Victorian poetry and has yielded several important studies of the political and aesthetic life of Victorian poetics. In particular, Isobel Armstrong’s *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics* (1993), Antony Harrison’s *Victorian Poets and the Politics of Culture: Discourse and Ideology* (1998), and E. Warwick Slinn’s *Victorian Poetry as Cultural Critique: The Politics of Performative Language* (2003) have produced comprehensive theoretical arguments and practical demonstrations of poetry’s political interests by integrating the practices of formal analysis and cultural studies.

Armstrong’s *Victorian Poetry* advocates a rereading and rehistoricizing of Victorian poetry in order to uncover Victorian poetry’s “cultural project” (8) and its connection to “modern problems” (ix). At the outset of her book, Armstrong establishes a division between democratic and conservative approaches to poetry, which, borrowing an image from J. S. Mill, she describes as “two systems of concentric circles” (ix). Within these circles, Armstrong sees the experimentalism of Victorian poetry, and rescuing Victorian poetry from the neglect of twentieth-century criticism (a consequence of the Modernist projects of rejecting the immediate past and extolling aesthetic self-referentiality), she reexamines the modern sensibilities of the Victorians: “To see yourself as modern is actually to define the contemporary self-consciously and this is simultaneously an act which historicizes the modern” (3). Victorian “modernism,” she notes, “as it emerges in its poetics, describes itself as belonging to a condition of crisis, which has emerged directly from economic and cultural change” (3). As a
result of the “historicized consciousness” (6) of Victorian poetics, “[t]eleology is displaced by epistemology and politics because relationships and their representation become the contested area, between self and society, self and labour, self and nature, self and language and above all between self and the lover” (7). Armstrong later depicts this phenomenon as a “shift from ontology to epistemology” (16). Revisiting the split between the Victorians and the Moderns, Armstrong explains that whereas the Victorians “strive to give a content to these problems, political, sexual, epistemological, and to formulate a cultural critique, the moderns celebrate the elimination of content” (7). Because of these poetic proclivities and these critical silences, Armstrong contends, “[t]he task of a history of Victorian poetry is to restore the questions of politics, not least sexual politics, and the epistemology and language which belong to it” (7).

Laying a foundation for the recuperation of poetry’s politics, Armstrong enumerates several sets of tensions that structure the linguistic and epistemological projects of Victorian poetry. She negotiates—or, in her words, “circumvent[s]”—the interpretive dilemma of political unconsciousness and intentionality with “a more generous understanding of the text as struggle. A text is endless struggle and contention, struggle with a changing project, struggle with the play of ambiguity and contradiction” (10). Doing so “gives equal weight to a text’s stated project and the polysemic and possibly wayward meanings it generates” (10). This notion of struggle accommodates the burdens of poetry’s unsettling (and self-consciously modern) content while offering a context for considering formal structures and verbal ambiguities. In the “underlying element of struggle in poetry of this period,” she argues, we see “its engagement with a content, its political awareness” (11).

This sense of poetry’s “aestheticised politics” and “politicised aesthetics” (8) allows Armstrong to elaborate her very influential notion of “double forms.” Though inspired by the innovations of dramatic poetics, such doubling effects are not exclusively the prerogative of dramatic poetry and may be observed in “[o]ther devices, such as the framed narrative or the dream, dialogue or parody” (13). These features render the poem a feat of simultaneity in which the text functions both as “the subject’s utterance” and “the object of analysis and critique” (12). As such, the “double poem” becomes a “deeply sceptical form” as it engages “an expressive model and an epistemological model simultaneously” (13):

Epistemological and hermeneutic problems are built into its very form, for interpretation, and what the act of interpretation involves, are questioned in the very existence of the double model. It must expose relationships of power, for the epistemological reading will explore things of which the expressive reading is unaware and go beyond the experience of the lyric speaker. It is inveterately political not only because it opens up an exploration of the unsta-
ble entities of self and world and the simultaneous problems of representation and interpretation, but because it is founded on debate and contest. (13–14)

Presenting Victorian poems as “responsive” (15) rather than “symptomatic” (15), Armstrong replaces feminist and Marxist notions of a “political unconscious” with an active poetics that “dramatises relationships of power” (16) and leverages its historicized sensibilities for the “systematic exploration of ambiguity” (16) while insisting upon an “epistemological uneasiness in which subject and object, self and world, are no longer in lucid relation with one another but have to be perpetually redefined” (17). As these “double forms” encourage both “sceptical” and “affirmative” responses, they “compel a strenuous reading” (17).

Armstrong’s rereadings of Victorian poetry have several important applications for examining the poetics of murder. Her fundamental points about the acts of self-historicization, the burdens of content, the struggles of the text, the problematization of epistemology, the dramatization of power relationships, and the objectification of interpretation help to clarify the “strenuous readings” developed by representations of murder. Subsequent chapters will bear out the particulars of those applications, but a brief reference to the epistemological (and meta-epistemological) dimensions of the poetics of murder is in order here. Viewed as a blight on a progressively civilizing and rapidly urbanizing culture, crime was repeatedly presented as a modern problem to be scrutinized and solved through modern means—whether it be the rationalization of criminal law, the transformative applications of penitentiary science, the policing of the “dangerous classes,” the scientific methods of statistical societies, or the late-Victorian Darwinian approaches to criminal anthropology. As the fascination with civilization became an obsession with its corresponding failures, however, Victorians frequently claimed a responsibility to gather their intellectual and moral resources to control crime, while, at the same time, lamenting its unprecedented scale and frequency. Because such discussions of modern crime and punishment were concurrent with conversations about the modernization of poetry, the insights conveyed in Armstrong’s critical lexicon offer a foundation for viewing the subject of murder as an example of vexed modern content. It allows us to investigate the stresses and struggles built into verbal representations of extreme violence as particularly poetic strategies and to examine how poems encode—through double forms—the epistemological disturbances that murderous violence engenders.

The rubric of strain and stress also corresponds to artistic debates about what it meant, in terms of form and content, to cultivate modern poetry. Barrett Browning, in the voice of her poetess, Aurora Leigh, famously characterized the modern age in violent terms: “this live, throbbing age, / That brawls, cheats, maddens, calculates, aspires” (V.203–4), she argued, possessed poetic value and
energy, and for the poet to ignore this, she maintained, is “fatal” (V.210). The verbs that Barrett Browning selects to represent the activities of the Victorian age—“brawls,” “cheats,” “maddens,” “calculates”—suggest the appeal of the more transgressive and destructive forces of modernity, the allure of criminal plots for establishing a socially relevant aesthetic, the range of the political responsibilities of the Victorian poet, and the kind of active principle observed by Armstrong. In this context, murder, though an age-old crime, offers a devastating and extreme example of the struggles of ordering a modern world, but it also curiously encompasses the fatalities of a poetry that ignores the violence of modernity. Barrett Browning, prefiguring Wilde’s later comments on crime and culture—with their suspicion of “disinterested curiosity” and “charming studies”—argues that the poet who, investing in high cultural prestige, prefers to depict the violence of the literary or historical past, is poetically irresponsible, uninventive, and irrelevant: “To flinch from modern varnish, coat or flounce, / Cry out for togas and the picturesque, / Is fatal,—foolish too. King Arthur’s self / Was commonplace to Lady Guenever, / And Camelot to minstrels seemed as flat / As Fleet Street to our poets” (V.208–13). An unflinching look at the unromantic and unchivalric violence of modern industrial culture, she maintains, will liberate the modern poet from the strictures of poetry’s past, for modern themes will inspire formal innovation. “Never flinch” (V.215), she commands, and then instructs her readers to “[t]rust” that “the spirit” will “make the form” (V.224–25).

Considering relationships between the spirit of Victorian modernity and the form of Victorian poetry requires a closer examination of the most fundamental concepts of cultural studies criticism. In his book’s introduction, also concerned with interdependent social and formal functions, Harrison distills Foucauldian notions of discourse formation and renovates Marxist concepts of ideology in order to uncover how poems act “as social and cultural artifacts of historical importance” and “display subtle if not covert attempts to seize describable categories of cultural power by transmitting ideology . . . under the guise of eliciting pleasure” (1). Concerned with “middle-class writers,” and “a clearly established but nonetheless threatened” middle-class hegemony (2), Harrison explores their work as a “mode of cultural intervention” (1). Applying the insights of Terry Eagleton’s The Ideology of the Aesthetic (1990), Harrison considers artworks as “eminently contradictory” (3) and “ideologies as multiple” (4) as he traces how poetry appropriates and challenges ideologies through the “living sensibilities of its subjects” (3). He also cites Trevor Purvis and Alan Hunt’s definition of ideology, which, filtering Marxist understandings of ideology through Saussurian and Foucauldian articulations of discourse, allows us to “grasp the way in which language and other forms of social semiotics not merely convey social experience but also play some major part in constituting social subjects (the
subjectivities and their associated identities), their relations, and the field in which they exist” (3).

Harrison’s contention that “discursive practices can have ideological effects because they perpetually constitute and reposition the subjects engaged in them” (5) grants poetry’s formal practices particularly political functions: “the highly developed formulaic and conventional aspects of poetry as a linguistic medium—its specialized verse forms, traditions of figuration, metrical structures, and so on, which carry with them certain experiential expectations—establish it as a remarkably useful example for understanding the ideological effects of discourse generally” (8). Drawing upon Purvis and Hunt, Harrison explains, “discourses operate as economies ‘with their own intrinsic technology, tactics, [and] effects of power, which in turn they transmit’” (3). In this way, Harrison positions his readers to understand the intricacies and economies of verse forms as discursive technologies. Involved in numerous ideological conflicts, competitions, collaborations, and collisions, poems foster political meanings and perform “cultural work” (7) that “intervene[s] in discourse” and “accrue[s] power” (8).

With a similar interest in bridging formalist and cultural studies, Slinn’s *Poetry as Cultural Critique* notes that literary studies have sidelined “the intensive use of language in poetry” and foregrounded “thematic approaches to the politics of social discourse” (1). In order “to understand fully the function of figurative language in cultural processes (of which poetry is the most sophisticated form),” he argues, “we need to restore attention to that language, no matter how specialized its use—without losing sight of its continuity with social and historical contexts” (1). Slinn “redress[es] the balance by analyzing poetic content and process in order to show how poetry may enact cultural critique through its self-conscious formalism, its foregrounding of just those language acts that many of the literary scholars most sympathetic to cultural critique have seemed least to take into account” (1). In articulating this critique, Slinn extrapolates from Robert Con Davis and Ronald Schliefer’s *Criticism and Culture: The Role of Critique in Modern Literary Theory* (1991). He highlights their argument that critique need not be “applied exclusively to idealist discourses grounded in Reason” and cites their notion of “the study of literature as a form of cultural critique that examines the conditions and realization of discourse in its various groundings” (4). It is, in other words, an “institutional critique, which aims to discover the conditions and principles that govern existing institutions and cultural practices” (29). Slinn assembles a “range of contentious issues” to emphasize the scope of poetry’s project of institutional critique: “slavery, sexual politics, prostitution, pornography, male liberalism, consciousness, individual agency, aestheticism, representation, liturgical language, belief, philosophical idealism” (6).

In establishing “continuity” between poetic form and historical context, Slinn dispenses with more conventional notions of poetry’s liabilities: that
poetry is "self-enclosed" because "highly organized" and "ideologically tainted" because "predominantly bourgeois" or that the lyric indeed embodies New Criticism's "transhistorical essentialism" (9–10). To overcome binary divisions between materiality and ideology, intrinsic and extrinsic frames of reference, and mimetic and passive models of literary production, he, like Armstrong and Harrison, postulates a poetic practice of discursive simultaneity:

It is not a matter, in other words, of deciding whether the materiality of objects or the ideality of discourses provide the determining conditions for reality but of realizing—with both dialogism and textualism—that objects have no meaning outside a system of signification and that discourse performs no practice outside material existence. (23)

Slinn’s sense of poetry’s “performativity,” a textual characteristic but also a literary theory, allows the critic “to attend to the material particularity of the poem, to its specifically textual as well as contextual requirements” (24). Slinn maintains that poetry “is homologous with performatives insofar as generically it privileges self-reference, flaunts elocutionary effects, reiterates conventions and formulae, creates its own meaning, and, above all, does something with words” (25). Via performativity, “poem as verbal act, poem as performance art, performatives as portrayed content—formalism performs a double function, both linking and distinguishing poetry from its contexts” (25). Therein lie the poem’s capacity for and its mode of cultural critique: “poetry is more likely to expose, without necessarily subverting, enabling conditions” (29). As a poem simultaneously “reshapes” “reconstitutes” and “reiterates,” it performs “a double action” (23).

Armstrong, Harrison, and Slinn each note that Victorian poetry, traditionally construed as an aesthetic domain less amenable to political engagement or less susceptible to topical distractions, has been marginalized in the cultural studies milieu of contemporary Victorian scholarship. Creating a repertoire of new critical methods and readings, their scholarship has helped to transform the interpretive questions and strategies shaping Victorian poetry studies. Significantly, as they seek to retell the story of Victorian poetry, they each theorize doubling as a formal practice and discursive function that allows the poem to participate in multiple arenas—to operate aesthetically because politically and vice versa. Whether conceptualized as a simultaneity rooted in performativity, a verbal technology rooted in discourse formation, or a double form rooted in epistemological contention, such awareness of the cultural and political interests of poetry provides an important foundation for examining the poetics of murder.

While each of these studies privileges middle-class poetry and emphasizes
in order to demonstrate the ubiquity of the textual processes they theorize, their insights, which can also accommodate the poetry of the streets, provide multiple applications for a focused study of the poetics of murder. With poetry’s formal qualities marked as political engagement rather than aesthetic retreat, for example, the expressivist impulses of the condemned subjects of last lamentations may be considered in the context of the criminal law that condemns them. Their layering of affective tropes and legal discourse can be viewed as skeptical readings of state authority and ambiguous readings of individual transgression while their oft-noted poetic inferiority can be viewed as performances of working-class challenges to cultural authority and artistic propriety. Or, the metrical subtleties with which Browning and Rossetti modulate the voices of their murderous speakers can reveal exercises in textual stress and epistemological frustration—their poems “compel a strenuous reading” by invoking and reproducing the cultural debates surrounding newfangled theories of criminal insanity in early and mid-Victorian England. Further, observing the function of poetic genres as discursive technologies assists in sorting out the ways in which the adversarial language of the divorce court and the generic hybridity of the verse novel and the verse drama allowed poets to invoke legal and literary history in order to create historicized critiques of matrimonial law and domestic ideology.

Such reassessments of Victorian poetics, and their applications for examining verse representations of murder, position this study on a broader terrain of historicist scholarship. In Practicing New Historicism (2000), Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt write of a “methodological eclecticism” (4) that, among other things, consists in “tracking the social energies that circulate very broadly through a culture, flowing back and forth between margins and center, passing from zones designated as art to zones apparently indifferent or hostile to art, pressing up from below to transform the exalted spheres and down from on high to colonize the low” (13). The well-known New Historicist metaphor of circulation usefully links margin and center, high and low, in ways that are important for a study of murder and a study of poetry that seeks to revise assumptions about both. An emphasis on “circulation” encourages us to trace the movement of a theme—in this case, murder—but it also encourages the transgression of conventional and classed boundaries of poetic discourse. Social discourse (“hostile to art”) but also “low” discourse to which art and criticism are often hostile find common cause in representations of crime, which was itself often dismissively considered a “low,” vulgar, or sensational topic in Victorian culture. On another level, the notion of “social energies” that intrigues Gallagher and Greenblatt provides an apt term for describing the circulating social anxieties and cultural logics that determined and destabilized the meanings of murder.
But “social energies” also describes the interactive features of discourse and genre so important for explicating the poetics of murder. As Carolyn Williams has argued, “[t]he utility of the concept of genre for cultural study lies in its powerful fusion of historical and formal assumptions. For period study it is especially clear that the concept of genre enables a focus on synchronic relations while also depending upon the diachronic relations with antecedents of current practice” (519). Meanwhile, “discourse,” she argues, “resolutely transgresses received genre categories, resolutely encompasses much more than literature, much more even than textual practices” (519), for “[t]he notion of a ‘discourse’ is produced by grouping texts and practices across generic boundaries” (519). Responding to Derrida’s reflections in “The Law of Genre,” Williams asks, “What is ‘the law of genre’ but the play of formalism and de-formation in sociocultural terms?” (520), and she asserts a program for cultural studies worth quoting in full:

At this moment in literary and cultural studies, it might help to think of “dis- course” and “genre” as a dialectical pair, one foregrounding synchronic study and the other foregrounding diachronic study; one emphasizing historical discontinuity and the other emphasizing historical continuity; one tending (potentially, but not necessarily) toward thematic and the other toward formalistic oversimplifications. But these relations are now fluid, recombinant, open to exchange. Perhaps because of the powerful work the concept of “dis- course” has done in the last couple of decades of Victorian studies, now is a good time to rework the concept of “genre” as a fully cultural as well as a literary category. Cultural studies has shown us that literary studies do not corner the market on formal analysis; and it might well be that in the play of genres we can find one perfect place to study the way culture takes form. (520)

The idea of discourse and genre as a “dialectical pair,” pulling in two directions while inspiring “recombinant” articulations and acts of “de-formation,” offers valuable insight for exploring the ways in which poetry and murder operate in a “fusion of historical and formal assumptions,” creating synchronic and diachronic chains of meaning and invoking the trans-generic and interdisciplinary pastiche of texts that characterized the criminal discourse of Victorian England.

In his recent discussion of the “inter-generic competition and cultural transforma- tion” (“Novel Poetry” 493) marking the relationship between hegemonic realistic fiction and counterdiscursive poetic experiments, Dino Felluga considers the dynamics of genre in similar terms. Echoing the notion of social ener- gies found in Gallagher and Greenblatt’s discussion, he writes, “Genre should, I would suggest, be understood as an unstable field of energies affected as much
by critical perception and debate as by specific structural features. In fact, I would go further: there is no such thing as a reference to a text that is not a performative ordering of that text’s textuality, that does not in itself conform to and enact generic conventions” (495). Citing Ralph Cohen’s point that genres and texts are marked by their “interrelationship with and differentiation from” other genres, Felluga describes this process as a “performative loop” of generic “identification” and “self-estrangement” (495). If we retain an appreciation for the counterdiscursive maneuvers of verse and the “performative loop” of textual meaning, but extend the scope of intergeneric identification and differentiation beyond a contest between novels and poems, we can use genre to conceptualize other textual and performative mediations of murder: the newspaper, the trial, the scaffold, the medicolegal treatise, the Greek tragedy, and the “old yellow Book,” for example, all serve within a system of “fully cultural” genres and discourses, possess diachronic and synchronic markers, and encode varying degrees of identification, self-estrangement, and self-referentiality. From the lowly street ballad to the high Greek tragedy, we can see poets exploiting these multivalent qualities in their poetic representations of murder, which do not simply demonstrate the due course of heteroglossia, but rather suggest the measured participation of poets in the literary development of verse and in social responses to murder.

In acknowledging signs of participation, acts of intervention, and instances of differentiation, it is worth noting how poetic representations of murder, exploiting the performative features of verse, were poised to engage the dialectics of discourse and genre in ways that other textual forms were not. In the stories and testimonies of courtroom adversaries and witnesses, the social scientific and statistical data that quantified and charted a national crime epidemic, the biographical case studies that propounded etiologies for criminal lunacy, the newspaper reports that publicized shocking crimes and criminal trials, and the criminal acts, scandalous revelations, and detective plots of novels, murder was construed as a narrative event. At stake in the ceaseless activities of prosecuting, theorizing, documenting, legislating, pathologizing, punishing, publishing, and reading crime are the production and management of knowledge about crime and punishment. As these examples attest, it was most often by analyzing crimes as narrative constructs that Victorians attempted to comprehend murders and apprehend murderers. The fact that knowledge about crime and criminals was manufactured largely in narrative formats also helps to explain our contemporary focus on crime fiction; in the similarities between novels and other narrative forms—the trial, the newspaper report—we see obvious generic and discursive affinities.

Precisely because of the predominantly narrative contents and contexts of criminal discourse, poems, operating in the performative mode that Slinn
identifies, could develop striking counterdiscursive representations of murder and murderers. Poems, of course, by no means exclude narrative formats: street ballads reproduced, often in order to contest, the narrative imperatives of criminal trials, and with *The Ring and the Book*, Browning, transposing novelistic polyphony into dramatic verse, creates an excessively mediated, virtually indecipherable web of transgressive plots, suspicious characters, and unreliable narrators. Relying upon narrative structures and reproducing narrative epistemologies, however, they nonetheless consistently expose and destabilize their foundations by manipulating the formal features of verse or the cultural status of poetry. Last lamentations overturn criminal stereotypes when they foreground the affective voice, the lyrical sensibilities, and the verse-writing inclinations of the condemned criminal, and *The Ring and the Book* further complicates the psychologies and claims of its narrators with verbal twitches and metrical irregularities. Taking up the tools of verse, poets responded variously to more prevalent representational modes generated in the realms of officialdom, the forum of the popular press, and the literary marketplace, but as they exploit textual resources unique to verse form—lyrical voices and dramatic personae, metrical stunts and verbal surprises—their poems generate suggestive frictions that alert us to the performative strategies and verbal technologies shaping the poetics of murder.

References to the chapters that comprise this study appear throughout this introduction, but a more substantial overview of the individual chapters helps to elucidate the structural logic of the book and demonstrate the relationships between the theme of murder, the genres of poetry, and the tools of criticism outlined here. Beginning the study of murder and poetry in the streets, chapter 1 reads working-class crime ballads as inscriptions of class politics and interrogations of state discipline. While high poetry grappled with a changing market of literary consumption that privileged the novel, the market for street poetry flourished and expanded during the first half of the nineteenth century. Street ballads circulated in the thousands among the working classes, often attracting the attention and scorn of the middle and upper classes. As the author of an article in the *National Review* explained, “there is still a very large section of the British public, though probably a decreasing one, which must and will have life put into doggerel verse for its special delectation” ("Street Ballads” 415). The disappearance of these ephemeral texts into Victorian trash bins and library collections have stalled the development of ballad exegesis. A selection of anthologies and archives has inspired a few studies, but, for the most part, ballads have attracted more documentary than analytical approaches. Within an atmosphere of recovery created by a developing field of print culture studies, a growing interest in working-class studies, and a new commitment to cultural studies approaches to poetry, this chapter questions longstanding assumptions about
the transparency of this “bad” poetry and the cultural significance of translating life into “doggerel verse.” In important ways, the apparent badness of street ballads establishes a central conceit of a street poetics that self-consciously flouts the standards of high poetry, and, in the case of murder and execution ballads, the judicial authority of high culture.

Drawing upon the resources of library collections as well as ballad anthologies, chapter 1 reappraises crime ballads by reconstructing their literary and historical contexts and challenging critical dismissals of them as vulgar, sensational, and morally unsophisticated. Their popularity demonstrates a pervasive and continuous mediation of crime in verse, but close readings of these texts reveal that their popularity also signals a well-developed and widely disseminated political sensibility informed by the working-class experience of poverty, policing, and punishment. Quite often, these occasional poems announcing murders and executions posed challenges to class-inflected ideologies of crime and invited reflections on the disciplinary power of the state. With their aestheticized renderings of crime and punishment, balladeers, sometimes tacitly and sometimes explicitly, constructed verse arguments that critiqued the disproportionate supervision of the working classes and protested the systematic discrimination of judicial practices.

Murder and execution ballads appeared in two main formats: third-person “astonishing disclosures,” which alerted their audiences to the graphic details of crimes, and first-person “last lamentations,” which informed the public of the tragic aspects of executions. Sometimes constituting portions of larger broadsides and sometimes circulating as lone poems, ballads alerted audiences to their perspective and voice through the use of title phrases that marked them as “accounts,” “full particulars,” and “disclosures” or “sorrowful lamentations” and “copies of affecting verses.” The third-person ballad constructed the persona of the astonished witness, and the first-person ballad imagined the persona of the condemned criminal. Under close examination, the significance of these generic differences becomes strikingly apparent. Astonishing disclosures, for example, develop a political aesthetic in gruesome accounts of murders and descriptions of crime scenes. Deploying sublime images of violence, these graphic representations create highly condensed explorations of moral disorder. Their graphic detail—from exacting portrayals of the bloody remains of murder to imagined accounts of the frantic struggles of victims—simply overwhelms ready-made ethical dichotomies and longstanding legal definitions. Emotionally and intellectually overwhelming, murder becomes a mode of expression, as Wilde suggested, and, as such, murder prompts acts of interpretation by astonished witnesses and ballad audiences seeking to address the moral and epistemological questions raised by outrageous crimes.

First-person lamentations, in contrast, were advertised by publishers as verse
autobiographies. Outpourings of dreadful memories and terrifying fears, they were alleged to be written by condemned criminals in their cells on the eve of execution. With the persona of the criminal poet, these ballads destabilized ethical commonplaces and legal fictions by linking the sentimental poet and the violent murderer, thereby challenging a practice of capital punishment predicated upon the irremediable monstrosity of the condemned and the unimpeachable righteousness of the state. Slinn reminds us that “[f]ictive speech acts and real cultural practices are inseparable activities” (17), and he quotes Barbara Johnson’s suggestive example: “If people are put to death by a verdict and not by a poem, it is not because the law is not a fiction” (17). A similar trope of mutual performativity operates in last lamentations in which balladeers pitted lyrical sensibilities against legal reasoning, thus suggesting that when a condemned criminal is exonerated in a street poem and not in a courtroom, it is not because the law is not a fiction. With their politically adept applications of poetic license, last lamentations frequently privileged the authenticity of the lyric over the artifice of the law, problematizing trial verdicts and sentences and establishing skeptical readings of murder trials and scaffold deaths.

Removing murder from the context of retributive justice, the poems discussed in chapter 2 exchange the problems of judicial review for those of medical diagnosis. As the idea of the criminal lunatic was continuously revised during the nineteenth century, interpretations of a murder’s meaning, long predicated on legal procedures that pronounced judgments and meted out punishments by reading the details of the criminal act, were increasingly complicated by new theories of the criminal mind, which offered intricate definitions and expansive case histories to determine the responsibilities of and possible treatments for criminals. In differentiating and combining criminality and insanity, theories of homicidal lunacy and the extensive lists of symptoms that accompanied them synthesized Victorian moral values, legal codes, and mental sciences in disconcerting ways. Mental scientists expounded and applied their theories while attempting to establish the legitimacy of their knowledge and negotiate the conflicts between punishment and treatment. Meanwhile, their medicolegal analyses of specific cases, appearing in specialist texts, in courtroom testimonies, and in popular print, created rifts between theoretical abstraction and legal concreteness. In the charged environment of murder trials, the increasingly obscured boundary between sanity and insanity frustrated collective desires to define murder and punish killers and pitted the authority of medical experts against the fears of a concerned citizenry and the traditions of learned jurists.

The troubling distractions of complicated insanity defenses, “not guilty on the ground of insanity” verdicts, and new asylum treatments in cases of extreme violence and astonishing cruelty define the poetics of murder in Browning’s “Porphyria’s Lover,” “My Last Duchess,” and “The Laboratory” and Rossetti’s
“A Last Confession.” While Harrison emphasizes the notion that power circulates via discursive formations and that poems participate in this circulation via verbal and formal interventions, these dramatic poems suggest that anxiety circulates through these same discursive formations and that poets may exploit the curiosity and confusion surrounding these anxieties to simultaneously aestheticize and politicize murder. As they enforce tensions between psychological strands of medicolegal theory and commonsense traditions of criminal law, these dramatic representations of murderous subjects develop a criminal sublime, which upholds the fundamental obscurity of the murderer.

Demonstrating a shared interest in exploring criminal psychology and dramatic poetry, Browning and Rossetti prompt readers to consider the clinical or evidentiary meanings of their characters, and, situating their murderers outside the realm of judicial accountability, they withhold the comforts of moral resolution. Because they avoid normative scenarios of crime and punishment, their depictions of unapprehended killers allow them to imagine the states of consciousness and the problems of expression that characterize murderers—and that interest poets. With the careful modulation of voice, they establish the same conditions for epistemological doubt and ethical impasse that accompanied the medicolegal debates of the mid-Victorian period. Furthermore, in placing acts of murder and symptoms of madness in the context of sexual power and gendered violence, they generate a tension between the familiarity (literary or cultural) of violent sexual passions and the unfamiliarity of clinical medicolegal logic.

Balancing the discourses of sins and symptoms, Browning and Rossetti leave readers to question whether their speakers rehearse conventional stories of sexually charged violence or present medical specimens of a new diagnostic theory. In courting confusion, they aptly exemplify the kinds of doubling elaborated by Armstrong; they seize upon the strangeness of modern content and exploit the epistemological disturbances of a “double form” in order to develop an aesthetically playful but ethically serious mode of political critique, which enfolds questions about the codes of sexual power and the discipline of mental science. Compressing the voice of the murderous subject into a verbally dense transcript, each of these poems renders decisions on the matter of malice and madness impossible, and the persistence of indeterminacy sustains the aesthetic force of the criminal sublime.

Chapter 3 explores representations of domestic murder, which, repositioning center and margin, portray the home as a breeding ground for murderous intentions and actions. Aligning interests in generic hybridity and gender ideology, Browning’s epic verse-novel, The Ring and the Book, and Lytton’s and Levy’s closet verse-tragedies, Clytemnestra and Medea, emphasize the social constructedness and historical contingencies of both gender and genre, in order to
question the literary, legal, and ideological conventions and codes determining spousal relations. In imagining the devolution of domestic proprieties into criminal tendencies, these texts do not simply sensationalize the home, ruining cozy domestic interiors with bloody outbreaks of murderous violence. Rather, they embed outrageous acts of murder within complex portraits of premeditation and determination. Suggesting the psychological origins of violent agency, but explicitly tying them to domestic ideology and matrimonial law, they locate the origins of domestic murder in social institutions and cultural traditions. Whether hiding systematic abuse or fostering violent rebellion, these poems suggest, the private home is subject to the laws of a disciplinary state and the willfulness of outraged individuals. As such, it weakens and endangers—rather than strengthens and protects—its inhabitants.

The political arguments of these three poems become most apparent when viewed in light of mid-century marriage debates, which accompanied the renegotiation of matrimonial law and the public scrutiny of domestic violence. A wealth of contemporary scholarship has made us aware of the intricacies and contradictions of the middle-class separate spheres doctrine, which stressed the natural complementarity of empowered males and compromised females and mandated multiple strategies of paternalist protection and patriarchal discipline. Yet, while this optimistic vision of comfort and control circulated widely, Victorians also negotiated another model in which the home was populated not by angelic mothers and judicious fathers, but by self-interested legal adversaries negotiating the double binds of the state’s disciplinary power and the husband’s domestic authority. Deployed, like its idyllic counterpart, to discipline married couples and uphold gender hierarchies, this combative version of marital relations was given renewed public force in parliamentary debates about marriage reform and divorce law. With the establishment of a divorce court, which was modeled on the criminal court, and the incremental criminalization of certain forms of domestic abuse, the imperatives of an adversarial domesticity were frequently cited in the court and in the press. Stripping away the trappings of idealism and dismantling the façade of privacy, the very publicity of this model confronted Victorians with starkly pragmatic readings of the legal prohibitions and permissions of marriage contracts, while emphasizing the prerogatives of the state in sanctioning, enforcing, and dissolving marriages.

This distinctly combative version of marriage constitutes the primary frame of reference for understanding both the political resonance and the generic innovation of each of these domestic murder poems. With murder representing *in extremis* the more sinister aspects of a pragmatic adversarial script, Browning, Lytton, and Levy consider the kinds of spousal conflicts debated in parliament and publicized in divorce trials. Offering no sanctuary and affording no pleasure, domestic intimacy is characterized by the escalating pressures and
accumulating resentments of everyday homelife—which culminate in extraordinarily violent methods of resistance and redress. In manipulating the domestic themes and narrative logics of already-plotted stories—of legal history, in the case of Browning’s seventeenth-century Italian murders, and theatre history, in the case of Lytton’s and Levy’s ancient Greek crimes—these poets produced topically resonant metatextual commentaries on legal, literary, and cultural representation. Demonstrating how discourse and genre invoke synchronic and diachronic meanings, they forge intergeneric and intertextual links that enfold the disciplinary discourses of legal contracts and the melodramatic modes of public scandal. Implicating the long history of patriarchal power, and exchanging narratives of melodramatic villainy for narratives of institutional failure, they render a binary schema of innocence and guilt (central to divorce courts, criminal courts, and public opinion) inadequate and irrelevant while imagining the systematic pressures of public interests and private wrongs that mark and mar the domestic idyll.

In *The Ring and the Book*, for example, points of agreement in the monologues of the murderer, Guido, and his victim, Pompilia, establish arresting connections between divorce rights, husband rights, and murder rights. Providing rare moments of corroboration and consistency amidst a profusion of voices and a sprawling narrative, husband and wife (condemned murderer and dying victim) express strikingly similar interpretations of the domestic roots of their violent ends. As they both develop a cause-effect structure for their stories of marriage and murder, the unexpectedness of their coalescing voices establishes the interpretive authority of their critique and challenges the melodramatic codes shaping the public gossip and legal cases generated by their troubled marriage and their violent deaths. Working on the smaller scale afforded by closet drama and shielded from the censoring protocols of public performance, Lytton and Levy modernize the stories of high tragic murderesses by establishing congruities between the momentous agency of murderous violence and the everyday slights of gender inequality. They thus complicate traditional plots, which connected Clytemnestra’s crimes to the deterministic forces of fate and Medea’s crimes to a particularly feminine variety of vengeful monstrosity. Regretting their misguided investments in patriarchal fantasies of domesticity, Lytton’s and Levy’s murderers select killing as a response to the claustrophobia of domestic alienation. Dragging their private wrongs onto a public stage, their crimes force a reckoning with domestic ideology. Pessimistic and critical, these renovations of the epic poem and the tragic drama objectify the contemporary discourses of marriage law and genres of domestic scandal and ask their Victorian readers to confront and interrogate their own investments in domestic ideology and interpretations of household law.

As these chapters demonstrate, the theme of murder provided poets with a
content and a context for establishing political arguments and reviewing poetic agendas. While the politics of murder allowed poets to scrutinize the practices and relations of power informing crimes and punishments, it also informed their exploration of the interactions between genres of discourse and forms of verse. Literary murders may present readers with ancient crimes or familiar plots, but when examined in their immediate cultural context, they offer very nuanced examples of the dialectical and historical interplay of genre and discourse. As they affiliate themselves with and differentiate themselves from other modes of understanding crimes and apprehending criminals in Victorian England, the murder poems explored in this study highlight the epistemological and interpretive dilemmas surrounding murders and murderers. Examining these tensions in a select number of texts, *Crime in Verse* offers a starting point for reimagining the intertextual and interdependent meanings of murder’s political charge and literary resonance, and it allows us to glimpse more fully the social life and “cultural work” of Victorian verse.
A SITE OF EXPRESSIVE DIFFICULTIES and epistemological struggles, a sublime transgression and a capital offense, a modern content and a poetic enterprise, murder supplies ample evidence of Victorian poetry’s “aestheticised politics” and “politicised aesthetics.” With measured representations of stabbings, stranglings, smotherings, poisonings, bludgeonings, and drownings, poets used the characteristic particularity and performativity of poetic form to highlight the politics of interpretation and explore the play of genre. In commending modes of cultural and textual analysis that exchange the abstract for the particular, Gallagher and Greenblatt celebrate the allure of the “encounter with the singular, the specific, and the individual” (6). These terms, and their analytical implications, aptly describe the disruptive presence of murder poems amongst the ideologies, institutions, and disciplines informing and regulating criminal discourse.

Exchanging the abstract for the particular, murders in verse, variously mediated through the elaboration of bloody details, lyrical confessions, metrical ironies, suggestive rhymes, structural ambiguities, dramatic soliloquies, legal testimonies, discursive hybrids, and generic combinations, reveal the extent to which the formal features and generic conventions of poetry generated opportunities for cultural critique and poetic experimentation. Set within a self-consciously modern culture, which was continually and publicly reevaluating

—Oscar Wilde, “A Few Maxims for the Instruction of the Over-Educated”
its methods of disciplining criminals and controlling crime, murder poems—as double forms, verbal technologies, and performative speech—rather mischievously administered overwhelming doses of psychological details and intimate circumstances. In doing so, they exposed and interrogated the fictions and abstractions of criminal theories, policies, and laws.

Attentive to the historicity of poetry and murder, we can look beyond intimations of “transhistorical truth”—and rethink the stability of transhistorical themes—and instead highlight “historically embedded social and psychological formations” (Gallagher and Greenblatt 7). In Stallybrass and White’s formulation, this allows us to see the poetics and politics of murder as an encounter with the cultural embeddedness of “conflictual complexes.” In the poetry under discussion here, “historically embedded social and psychological formations” and “conflictual complexes” are directly and explicitly considered. Going well beyond transmitting ideology in “subtle or covert” fashion, they position themselves skeptically and polemically with respect to other legal, political, and aesthetic representations of murder. According to Gallagher and Greenblatt, the “commitment to particularity” and the recovery of “dense networks of particulars” (19) in New Historicism methodology protects against the loss of intricate meanings and local details. A similar kind of historicism is encouraged by all of the poems examined here. Most explicitly rendered in the advertised “full particulars” of astonishing disclosures, a resistance to abstraction and authority extends to the intimate psychological struggles of the criminal poet, the expressive idiosyncrasies of dramatic speakers, the hybrid innovations of the verse novel, and the modern renovations of ancient tragedies.

Finding poetic materials in the unsettled and unsettling epistemologies of murder, these poems also establish the cultural engagements and cultural politics of Victorian verse. As Antony Harrison argues, “encounters with poetic texts were an unusually complex psychological and emotional event for nineteenth-century readers. This was true not only because of the anticipated formal difficulties of such texts but also because of the widespread expectations that poetic words on a page meant a good deal more than other writing: they embodied the voice of a being possessed of extraordinary epistemological capacities” (10). While Harrison is primarily concerned with the middle-class experience of reading poetry, his comments have particular resonance for all of the poems examined in this book, as they establish a “productive friction” (Hadley 10) between low content and high form—and often thwart the very expectations that Harrison illustrates. In linking the domains of high literature and the politics of sensational curiosity, we find, then, another manifestation of poetry’s double form. Through the suggestive interplay of discourse and genre, through the semiotic operations of content and form, these texts extended the “cultural work” of poetic representation and established its modern content.
With an epigrammatic shorthand, Wilde, offering (much-needed) instruction to the “over-educated” and differentiating the scrutiny of the poet from the surveillance of the police, challenges the myopic failings of a disciplinary state and grants the poet the capacity for understanding and interpreting crime. In more subtle and less comical ways, the poems of this study both claim and challenge expressive sensibilities and interpretive power. Leveraging generic difference—for the purposes of political appropriation and contestation, generic variety and hybridity, and verbal particularity and incommensurability—poets adapt a variety of aesthetic modes (the sublime, the grotesque, the melodramatic, the tragic) and assume a variety of counterdiscursive stances as they reconsider the congruities and incongruities of crime and culture.

Historicizing murder and poetry, by examining dialectical relations between genre and discourse, we can begin to recover neglected texts, and, recognizing and acknowledging associations among major and minor, canonical and non-canonical, anonymous and notorious poets, we can reconsider lines of literary influence and retrace paths of intertextuality in ways that expand the terrain of Victorian poetry studies. While _Crime in Verse_ has relied upon a relatively small set of close and contextualized readings to make its arguments, its methods and its conclusions support a broader reexamination of poetic representations of murder. Answering Armstrong’s call for studies in poetic networking, we might assemble or imagine networks of murder poems. However speculative or contingent, such assemblages might highlight the occasions on which the sound effects and the staged authority of verse were publicized and rhetorically posed. We might, for example, revisit the verse editorials of daily newspapers or the sing-song communiqués of “Jack the Ripper.” Or, preferring more established poets, we might return to Wordsworth’s _Sonnets upon the Punishment of Death_ (1841), in which the intellectual precision, iambic cadences, and rhyming couplets of the sonneteer are used to insult the sloppy sentimentality and reform-minded aspirations of abolitionist parliamentarians and pamphleteers. Or, enjoying poetic scandal and humiliation, we might reconsider Sydney Dobell’s _Balder_ (1854), in which, suffering emotional traumas and generating textual confusion, the frustrated and “felonious” (281) speaker finds murderous motive in poetic ambition. As these brief references, and the preceding chapters, suggest there is much work to be done on the topic of crime in verse.
Introduction


2. This list cites only a few notable examples of the kinds of scholarly work that shape our notions of literary crime—the chapters of this book offer a more complete picture. While many of these studies focus exclusively on the novel, important interdisciplinary projects, such as Jan-Melissa Schramm’s Testimony and Advocacy in Victorian Law, Literature, and Theology and Simon Joyce’s Capital Offenses: Geographies of Class and Crime in Victorian London, also contribute substantially to our understandings of narrative representation and criminal discourse.

3. Subsequent chapters acknowledge the particularities and develop the insights of these studies of crime poetry, but I include a brief list here. Increasingly refined and focused studies of the narrative, dramatic, and lyrical dimensions of Robert Browning’s murder poems extend from Robert Langbaum’s The Poetry of Experience: The Dramatic Monologue in Modern Literary Tradition to the section entitled “Browning’s Ring Around a Murder” in Alexander Welsh’s Strong Representations to Melissa Valiksa Gregory’s “Robert Browning and the Lure of the Violent Lyric Voice: Domestic Violence and the
Chapter 1

1. Crime ballads were part of a much larger broadside trade, which comprised many genres and covered numerous topics. Execution ballads in particular contributed significantly to the cultural experience of capital punishment and flourished until just after public executions ended in 1868. Rather than repeating basic information about broadsides and ballads, this chapter builds upon existing histories in order to focus on devising and applying new critical strategies. For histories of the broadside trade, see Hindley’s History of the Catnach Press and Life and Times of James Catnach; Shepard’s History of Street Literature, John Pitts, Ballad Printer, and The Broadside Ballad; and Hepburn’s recent study, A Book of Scattered Leaves. For a discussion Irish street ballads, see Georges Denis Zimmerman’s Songs of Irish Rebellion.

2. Woodcuts were not fabricated to depict specific crimes or executions, but, rather, were used repeatedly and often incongruously. Prose reports contained information gleaned from trial coverage and public discussion. The separate authorship of the ballad, its visibility on the page, its audibility in the streets, and its inconsistencies in the use of woodcut images and journalistic prose make the case for individual ballads as independent texts, and, accordingly, this chapter focuses on the verse forms of the broadside trade. The specific publication year of a ballad is not always indicated. Whenever possible, I have dated ballads from newspaper coverage of crimes, trials, and executions.

3. While ballad historians typically describe them as working-class “hacks” making little more than a shilling per song, in 1861 the National Review extolled their gothic everyman qualities: “That self-denying mind, indifferent to worldly fame, which characterised the architects of our cathedrals and abbeys, would seem to have descended on our ballad-writers” (“Street Ballads” 409). In response to the statement, “Oh, anybody writes them,” the author notes, “we walk about the streets with a new sense of wonder, peering...
into the faces of those of our fellow-lieges who do not carry about with them the external evidence of overflowing exchequers, and saying to ourselves, ‘That man may be a writer of ballads’” (410).

Many publishers, with the exceptions of the notorious James Catnach and John Pitts, have fallen into obscurity as well. Hindley, Shepard, and Hepburn discuss ballad publishers and writers in their histories. See also Hughes’s “Foreword” in *Curiosities of Street Literature*; Mayhew’s *London Labour and the London Poor*; Vincent’s *Literacy and Popular Culture in England*; Gretton’s *Murders and Moralities*; James’s *Print and the People*; and Vicinus’s *Broadsides of the Industrial North*. For details about John Morgan, a known Victorian ballad writer, and for a full discussion of class, audience, and authorship, see Hepburn’s *A Book of Scattered Leaves*.

4. As cheap ephemera, broadsheets were discarded by consumers and were rarely collected by libraries. For years, contemporary scholars have had to labor to read a full selection, but that problem is now being remedied as libraries make their broadside collections available online. While anthologies, such as Hindley’s, have made these texts available, they have also fostered a habit of generalizing about thousands of texts by reading a very small proportion of the originals. Because printers produced hundreds and hundreds of crime ballads, including multiple songs for each crime and each execution, conjectures that they are uniform and undifferentiated are inaccurate. My analysis selects a relative few of the many hundreds that I have examined in order to focus on instances in which the ballads play with genre codes in the most aesthetically striking and politically resonant ways. These examples of generic play and political critique, however, are by no means rare, and they demonstrate that the generic codes of the street ballad produced and inspired poetic tinkering and innovation, political innuendo and analysis, and ethical interrogation and dissent.

5. Several contemporary studies have reviewed the methodologies of Mayhew. In addition to Joyce’s commentary in *Capital Offenses*, see Anne Humpherys’s *Travels in the Poor Man’s Country: The Work of Henry Mayhew*; Gertrude Himmelfarb’s *The Idea of Poverty*; and Deborah Epstein Nord’s “The Social Explorer as Anthropologist.” For a concise discussion of “criminal conversations” and the “rhetoric of reassurance” across a range of texts, including Mayhew’s, see David Taylor’s “Beyond the Bounds of Respectable Society” in Rowbotham and Stevenson’s *Criminal Conversations*.

6. David Philips identifies this writer as Archibald Alison, “Sheriff of Lanarkshire, High Tory and arch-opponent of trade-unions” (82).

7. Charles Smith’s account of the ballad trade explains the devalued labor of the ballad writer: “The established honorarium for a new song is a shilling, though eighteen pence is sometimes given for something ‘particular spicy.’ This miserable payment is defended by the publisher on the ground that, whatever he pays for a song, he cannot make it his own. ‘If I print a new song,’ says he, ‘on Wednesday, my neighbor is selling it on Thursday. How can I afford to pay for property which is at another man’s use as it is at mine?’” (254). The *National Review* reports that ballad writers could not support themselves in the trade (unless they sang and sold copies of their texts after printing) because “the price of an original ballad, in these buying-cheap days, has been screwed down by publishers to somewhere about a shilling sterling” (“Street Ballads” 409). The author of “The Poetry of Seven Dials” reports: “If one of the patterers writes a Ballad on a taking subject, he hastens at once to Seven Dials, where, if accepted, his reward is ‘a glass of rum,
a slice of cake, and five dozen copies;—which, if the accident or murder be a very awful one, are struck off for him while he waits” (404). Vincent explains that ballad writers were “remunerated at a level well below that of the average factory worker. It was a trade founded in pennies” (200).

8. Because of their “come all ye” introductions (“attend all you feeling parents dear,” “you kindest fathers, tender mothers,” “you feeling Christians,” “good people”) and pat conclusions (“hanging is too good for such a villain,” “she her desserts will get,” or “the blood of the murdered will not cry in vain”), Gatrell describes crime ballads as “objective correlatives” of “acquiescence, approval, identification with the law” (156). Reflections on generic regularity highlight a lack of political currency in textual codes that have not changed in “some two hundred years” (169). For similar reasons, Neuburg critiques their “muted” politics (“Literature of the Streets” 197), Cooper sees their “thread[s] of didactic quality” as collectively “confirm[ing] the lesson of the gallows” (26), and Kalikoff reads them as “moral fable[s]” that reassure audiences that “criminals are always subdued by society” (14–15). Casting crime ballads as working-class failures and novels as middle-class achievements, Grossman dismisses them as a “ritualized and unindividualized” whole, “indoctrinating docility” and “inculcat[ing] only one ‘right’ response to the punishment of vastly different people and crimes” (29). Kalikoff grants a historical dynamism to street balladry, but, relying on Hindley’s anthologized selection and understanding ballads as simple melodramas, her study, like the others mentioned here, does not account for the sheer variety of street ballads or the case-specific details of particular crimes and trials.

9. For another example of self-referential and self-parodying ballad humor, see “Trial and Execution of Betty the Cook, Who was Tried by the Servants in the Kitchen, and Executed in the Scullery, for Lying Too Long in Bed in the Morning.”

10. Hindley notes that spells of good behavior sometimes required the publication of fictional “cocks” in order to sustain business: “the patterer must live; and lest the increase of public virtue should condemn him to starvation, the ‘Seven Dials Press’ stepped forward to his aid, and considerably supplied him with—‘cocks’” (Hindley, Life 361). For a discussion of “cocks,” see Hepburn’s Book of Scattered Leaves.

11. This line features Hamlet’s reference to the power of the play to uncover the truth about his uncle’s crime and his father’s murder. Its suggestion that truth can be found through the representation of crime resonates with the analytical aesthetic of these “astonishing disclosures.”

12. An excerpt from this Times report is also cited in Wiener’s Men of Blood (140–41).

13. See also Margaret Arnot’s “The Murder of Thomas Sandles: Meanings of a Mid-Nineteenth-Century Infanticide” and Cath Quinn’s “Images and Impulses: Representations of Puerperal Insanity and Infanticide in late Victorian England.” For discussions of legal and medicolegal developments, see Roger Smith’s Trial by Medicine, Nigel Walker’s Crime and Insanity in England, and J. P. Eigen’s Witnessing Insanity: Madness and Mad-Doctors in the English Court.

14. As Jill L. Matus has argued, wet-nursing inspired particular moral judgments about sexual fallenness, innate criminality, and social contagion. Paraphrasing C. H. F. Routh’s alarmist discussion of wet-nursing in The Lancet in 1859, Matus summarizes the biological questions underlying his theories: “If blood was the medium through which the
Inheritance of criminality or insanity was passed, was not milk a vital and essential fluid like blood?” (161).

15. At Brough’s trial, Dr. Forbes Winslow testified that she exhibited the signs of a “structurally disorganized” brain and experienced a case of “transient insanity” during which she killed her children (“Recent Trials” 616). Her prior good mothering and her medical history were cited as evidence of a temporary insanity. Two other psychologists concurred at trial. After the case sparked controversy, Winslow explained:

In discussing the merits of this case, much stress has been laid upon the alleged immoral character of Mrs. Brough. It has been asserted that she was a depraved woman; that she was detected in an act of gross infidelity; and fearing the consequences of her vice, she, from a feeling of revenge, deliberately and premeditatively sacrificed the lives of her children, and then attempted her own! We do not deny that she was an adulteress; but if we are to form our judgment of her moral character from the evidence adduced at the trial, she is certainly not the horribly depraved woman represented by those who have severely animadverted upon her escape from the extreme penalty of the law. (622)

He went on to dismiss claims that moral lassitude made her responsible for her own mental breakdown: “we dismiss altogether the argument of Mrs. Brough’s legal accountability, based upon the presumption that her insanity was self-created, and the result of an habitual indulgence of a criminal passion” (625). After her death in Bethlem in 1862, an autopsy “revealed blood clots in her brain, which Dr. Hood correlated with a partial paralysis evident before the crime” (Smith, Trial 57).

16. By the mid-1850s, psychological readings of women’s violence were not out of keeping with general sentiment. Smith explains, “Femaleness was a major element in medico-legal decisions. Female criminal lunatics came nearest to enabling medical discourse to describe legally exculpatory conditions. This reflected a shared assumption that woman was closer to nature than man; medical discourse was therefore more appropriate to women’s lives” (Trial 160). However, this ballad significantly rejects melodramatic polarities and strict notions of individual responsibility in a case where these definitions were hotly debated. It avoids, for example, the sensationalizing of the adulterous affair, unlike the Times, which highlighted the “circumstances” that surrounded the crime as having “no parallel in the history of crime” (Times, 10 August 1854, 11).

17. Emma Pitt’s case also raised questions about adequate charges and appropriate punishments. As Marland explains, “the severity of the penalty for infanticide, death by hanging, compared with the mildness of the punishment for concealment was picked out as a particular failing of the law” (170). For a discussion of concealment and murder, long-contested in English law, see Mark Jackson, New-Born Child Murder: Women, Illegitimacy and the Courts in Eighteenth-Century England, and Peter C. Hoffer and N. E. H. Hull’s Murdering Mothers: Infanticide in England and New England 1558–1803.

18. Newspaper reports of the case used multiple spellings, including Duggan, Duggin, and Duggen.

19. In the nine years between 1826 and 1835, England saw 514 executions, with multiple executions fairly common (Gatrell 617). In marked contrast, in the thirty-one years between 1837 and 1868, 347 murderers were hanged in public (594).
20. For examples of broadside ballads accommodating multiple hangings, see “A Copy of Verses on those Under Sentence of Death” printed on the broadside “Sentences of the Prisoners at the Old Bailey Sessions, September 12” (1824), and “The Sorrowful Lamentation and Last Farewell to the World of Eight Unhappy People, Who Are to Die at the Old Bailey, on Tuesday the First.”

21. This was the case until the Criminal Evidence Act passed in 1898 and granted defendants the right to testify under oath on their behalf even while retaining counsel. For a summary of debates surrounding the passage of the Prisoner’s Counsel Act, see Cairns’s *Advocacy and the Making of the Criminal Trial, 1800–1865*. See also Emsley’s *Crime and Society in England, 1750–1900*.

22. Because ballad authors are unknown and because the illusion of criminal authorship is crucial for the meaning of these texts, I refer to the fictive authors, the featured criminal poets, as the speakers throughout the chapter.

23. The effect of anonymous authorship has particular significance in the first-person ballads since it upholds the marketing illusion that these expressive verse autobiographies emanated from the desperate minds of condemned criminals. These reality effects have not been treated explicitly in ballad criticism, and, in fact, authorial anonymity contributed to their obscurity in contemporary scholarship. In the absence of specific authorship, ballad scholars have sometimes drawn on publisher’s politics and histories, particularly those of James Catnach and John Pitts, for interpretation. Other critics stress rhetorical forms and generic conventions to determine meaning. Both approaches offer interpretive control over a voluminous, authorless body of work and help to sort out the discursive layers of state condemnation and execution, criminal autobiography and confession, ballad conventions and literary tragedy, as well as individual cases and public opinion. These approaches tend to ignore, however, the details of individual ballads that reveal the political features of ballad poetics.

24. A legal loophole created by the 1840 Insane Prisoner’s Act enabled Townley’s belated reprieve, and Parliament later amended the act in response to public controversy over the questions of judicial discrimination raised by Wright’s execution and Townley’s institutionalization. For histories of the Townley case as an application of the insanity plea, see Smith’s *Trial by Medicine* and Walker’s *Crime and Insanity in England*. For Victorian medical commentaries on the case, see Maudsley and Robertson’s *Insanity and Crime: A Medico-Legal Commentary on the Case of George Victor Townley*; “The Sequel of the Townley Case” in the *Journal of Mental Science*; and “Insanity and Crime” in the *Social Science Review*. For a brief discussion of Townley in the context of dramatic poets, see Faas’s *Retreat into the Mind*.

25. This cause-and-effect scenario is explicitly rendered in “A Copy of Verses on F. B. Courvoisier, who was Executed for the Murder of Lord William Russell,” printed in Bristol. The ballad states that Lord Russell “caught him in the act of plunder / . . . which made him plan the horrid deed.” Yet, this particular ballad positions the problem with respect to more conservative moral advice: “Let Honesty then guide your actions / And in your stations be content.”

26. For a discussion of the combined effects of the criminal’s speech, the ethics of counsel, and the rise of adversarialism in the Courvoisier case, see Cairns’s *Advocacy and the Making of the Adversarial Criminal Trial, 1800–1865*.

27. Armstrong’s list of poetic networks and pairings is inspired by existing studies,
some of which are published in the same two-volume special issue of *Victorian Poetry* in which her comments appear. This issue, entitled “Whither Poetry?” and edited by Linda Hughes, stages a dialogue between two “generations” of Victorian poetry scholars and offers selections of innovative new work in the field and commentaries on the evolving methodologies and priorities of Victorian poetry studies.

28. Browning’s vision of the condemned prisoner in his cell, the tortured psychology of condemnation, and the legal appeals in Guido’s final monologue are coincident with the popular vision of the condemned criminal presented over and over again in execution ballads. Guido pastes together various legal and religious defenses to challenge his death sentence—rather than to deny his crimes. Among these is a claim of madness and a request for asylum: “Sirs, my first true word, all truth and no lie, / Is—save me notwithstanding! Life is all! / I was just stark mad,—let the madman live / Pressed by as many chains as you please pile!” (XI.2418–21).

29. More concerned with establishing the poem’s affinities with Speranza’s Irish nationalist ballad, “Trial of the Brothers Sheares,” Heaney does not elaborate these parallels. He argues that Speranza’s (Lady Wilde’s) political ballad, “The Trial of the Brothers Sheares in ’98,” which appeared in a volume dedicated to Oscar Wilde and his brother, established an important antecedent for Wilde’s own political ballad. Heaney seeks to “draw attention to these parallels and foreshadowings and coincidences of style and behaviour between mother and son” and notes, “by recalling it, the provenance of the ballad is illuminated even if its stylistic faults are not extenuated” (101). Because the ballad represents the kind of work “not usually discussed within the academy” (101) and a text in which “Wilde the aesthete was stripped of his dandy’s clothes to become Wilde the convict” (102), Heaney argues, “the poem does give credence to the idea of poetry as a mode of redress” (102).

### Chapter 2

1. In January 1843, Daniel M’Naghten, a Scottish laborer, whose name is spelled variously in historical documents and press coverage, shot Edward Drummond, Prime Minister Robert Peel’s private secretary, whom he mistook for the Tory Prime Minister himself. Drummond died several days later.

2. At trial, M’Naghten’s attorney, Alexander Cockburn, launched an insanity defense. Applying recent medical theories not yet formally recognized in jurisprudence, including notions of partial insanity, he included the testimony of Dr. Forbes Winslow, who had just published *The Plea of Insanity in Criminal Cases* and who, controversially, provided diagnostic testimony about M’Naghten without ever having interviewed him. The jurors, instructed by the presiding judge to determine whether, at the time of his crime, M’Naghten had been “capable of distinguishing between right and wrong” and had been “sensible that [his act] was a violation of the law of God or of man,” shocked the public with an acquittal on the ground of insanity (Walker 95). M’Naghten was committed to Bethlem Hospital and later Broadmoor, where he died in 1865. M’Naghten’s trial is recorded in William C. Townsend’s *Modern State Trials*. For analysis of the trial and its judicial significance, see Nigel Walker’s *Crime and Insanity in England*; Roger Smith’s *Trial by Medicine*; Jane Campbell Moriarty’s *The Role of Mental Illness in Criminal Trials*; and Donald West and Alexander Walk’s *Daniel McNaughton: His Trial and the Aftermath*. 

Notes to Chapter 2
3. Upon being apprehended, M’Naghten stated, “The Tories in my native city [Glasgow] have compelled me to do this,” and he explained that these Tories had been following him, that they had accused him of crimes of which he was innocent, and that they “wish[ed] to murder [him]” (Walker 91).

4. After the M’Naghten verdict, the House of Lords responded to the apparent lapse in the application of criminal law with an extensive investigation into the legal test of insanity. The Lords devised a series of questions pertaining to the language of insanity and responsibility, the role of medical evidence at trial, and the proper instruction of juries. They called upon the English judges to address each question, and their responses became the “M’Naghten Rules,” a set of guidelines for English courts to consider and adjudicate insanity. “In effect,” Smith argues, the rules “restated the ‘right-wrong test’: a man was not responsible for his criminal deed if, at the time of committing it, he was unable to know that the deed was wrong” (Trial 15). In discussing mental science and juridical authority, Walker cites the influence of Isaac Ray’s Treatise on the Medical Jurisprudence of Insanity (1838). An American doctor, Ray could “make all his points by attacking English judges and counsel without the tact that was needed where his own courts were concerned” (Walker 89). The text criticizes legal notions of criminal responsibility, and because Alexander Cockburn used this text in his defense of Daniel M’Naghten, it influenced criminal cases and statutes.

5. Walker documents the increased recognition of insanity in murder trials, a trend that reflects the increased application of mental science theories and the increased use of defense counsel resulting from the 1836 Prisoner’s Counsel Act. Walker’s glimpse at the gradual but steady increase in insanity acquittals also underscores the exaggerated nature of public anxiety on the subject. Of persons indicted for murder between 1834 and 1843, 2 percent were found unfit to plead, and 7.5 percent were acquitted as insane. Between 1844 and 1853, 4.7 percent were found unfit, and 7.5 percent were acquitted as insane. Between 1854 and 1863, 5.7 percent were found unfit, and 10.1 percent were acquitted as insane. Between 1864 and 1873, 5.8 percent were found unfit, and 9.6 were acquitted as insane (Walker 86).

6. Rodensky offers a useful examination of the Victorian discourse of criminal responsibility. Problematizing the “straightforwardness” that characterized J. F. Stephen’s assertion that “[t]he general rule is, that people are responsible for their actions,” she explores “the necessary fractures in Victorian ideas and ideals about criminal responsibility” across a multigenre expanse of legal discourse comprising “legal opinions, statutes, treatises, histories, [and] articles” (3).

7. The Criminal Lunatics Act (1800) established the idea of criminal lunacy by introducing the special verdict of “not guilty on the ground of insanity.” The Criminal Lunatics Amendment Act (1816) provided for the transfer and custody of insane persons charged with crimes, and the Insane Prisoner’s Act (1840) further addressed the logistics of asylum transfers and certification procedures. This act was amended by The Insane Prisoners Amendment Act (1864) after George Victor Townley avoided a capital sentence because the 1840 act allowed prisoners to be certified between the trial and the sentencing. The Lunatics Care and Treatment Act (1845) and the Lunatic Asylums Act (1845) established the Commissioners of Lunacy and mandated county asylums. The Criminal Lunatics Asylum Act (1860), responding to demands that the criminally insane be separated from other lunatics, resulted in the construction of Broadmoor. The Trial of Lunatics Act
(1883), responding to pressure from the queen, revised the exculpatory language of the special verdict to a more deterrent-minded “guilty but insane.” The Criminal Lunatics Act (1884) addressed issues of mercy and the Home Secretary’s powers to appoint doctors and certify insanity.

8. Smith points out that because the “[t]reatment of the insane . . . became a potent symbol for society’s ability to regulate its affairs” (Trial 5), asylum reform resonated with a Victorian faith in institutionally driven social progress and corresponded to England’s national sensibility. W. F. Bynum explains that “[b]y the 1850s, when the asylum movement was in full swing . . . , British psychiatrists could look upon the combination of moral therapy and non-restraint as genuinely indigenous, humane, and therapeutically sound. They also saw it was peculiarly adapted to Britain, with its well developed tradition of individual liberty and toleration. . . . Thus, although moral therapy was generally linked to medical therapy in the total therapeutic programme, and although the non-restraint system was not rigidly observed in many asylums, these two themes were the most visible ones around which the nascent psychiatric profession emerged in early Victorian Britain” (229).

In his 1833 entry in Cyclopaedia of Practical Medicine, Prichard cites Esquirol’s assessment of madness and civilization: “In barbarous nations, among whom the mind is uncultivated. . . . [m]adness is comparatively rare (850). In contrast, Esquirol observes, the “changes . . . which have taken place during the last thirty years in our moral sentiments and habits, have produced more instances of madness in France than all our political calamities. We have exchanged our ancient customs and fixed habits, our old and established sentiments and opinions, for speculative theories and dangerous innovations” (850). In 1843, John Barlow proclaimed, “The cases of insanity, we are told, have nearly tripled within the last twenty years!—a fearful increase even after allowing to the utmost for a larger population!” (49).

In the second half of the century, anxieties about civilization evolved into more explicit narratives of regression and degeneration. By the late Victorian period, Vedia Skultans argues, insanity “is no longer seen as a problem to be grappled with by individual will-power, but it has become a major social problem which threatens the health of the nation rather than mere individual autonomy. The insane are thought to constitute a reservoir of bad heredity” (English Madness 133). Writing in 1870, Dr. Henry Maudsley explained, “I should take up a long time if I were to enumerate the various brute-like characteristics that are at times witnessed among the insane; enough to say that some very strong facts and arguments in support of Mr. Darwin’s views might be drawn from the field of morbid psychology. We may, without much difficulty, trace savagery in civilization, as we can trace animalism in savagery; and in the degeneration of insanity, in the unkinding, so to say, of human kind, there are exhibited marks denoting the elementary instincts of its composition” (Body and Mind 51).

9. The role of history, of course, has been central to definitions of the genre—from Robert Langbaum’s contest between sympathy and judgment, to Herbert Tucker’s historicized individual via the “art of disclosure,” to Isobel Armstrong’s statement that “psychological states are rooted in history” (Victorian Poetry 146). Placing “the genius of the dramatic monologue” in “the effect created by the tension between sympathy and moral judgment” (85), Langbaum highlights its ability to create a psychologized, historicized, and relativist judgment: “We adopt a man’s point of view and the point of view of his
age in order to judge him—which makes the judgment relative, limited in applicability to the particular conditions of the case” (107). Tucker links history to character formation: “[s]ubjectivity is] ironically demystified by the historical contextualization that is the generic privilege of the dramatic monologue and . . . one of its indispensable props in the construction of character” (“Dramatic Monologue” 22). With a focused application of Armstrong’s insights into the epistemological mischief of a “double form” exploring “utterance both as subject and as object,” this chapter adds another facet to discussions of history and dramatic poetics. In these murder poems, the mystification of subjectivity caused by medicolegal debates further complicates the interpretive irony, relativism, or authority of history.

10. Explorations of psychology were frequently associated with modernity. Armstrong notes that “[n]early all the commonest evaluative words in criticism at this time carry a psychological, human/social or moral reference,” and the repeated use of terms such as “human,” “sympathy,” “the sympathies,” “the affections,” and “feelings” reinforced this psychological poetics (Scrutinies 6).


12. Prichard did not originate the theories reported in his treatise, nor was he a mental scientist by training or profession. He collected continental research from the first decades of the nineteenth century and presented and popularized its conclusions in Victorian England.

13. In an effort to establish linguistic parallelism with monomania, Prichard suggests the words “Parapathia” or “Pathomania” to describe moral insanity (Treatise 10). Esquirol’s discussion of folie raisonnante sparked debates about ideas of madness marked by delusion and frenzy and madness marked by reason and irresistible impulse. Though “moral insanity” had been used early in the century, Prichard publicized these new definitions of madness in his Treatise on Insanity, which by all accounts became the standard text on madness until John Charles Bucknill and Daniel H. Tuke published their Manual of Psychological Medicine (1858).

14. Writers consistently warned about the misapplications and inconsistencies of insanity pleas in criminal and civil courts. In the Juryman’s Guide, Sir George Stephen cited the misjudgments inherent in criminal lunacy: “Men of science declare that monomania is consistent with sanity in all other points, and a jury acquits; we may be in error, but in our view such monomania amounts only to this, that a long-cherished feeling of malignity, or of criminal desire, has at length burst the bounds of common sense—as all criminality of desire, if not resisted in its incipient stages, invariably does,—and having obtained liberty to range, plunges its self-immolati...
in many crimes and transgressions, “it is in murder only, because it is now almost the only capital crime, that juries give credence to it” (141). He continues: “Nor is monomania, if such it may be called, peculiar to crime. There are very few men of active minds who are totally exempt from the habitual indulgence of some whim or fancy, which strengthens as life advances, and the gratification of which, at last, becomes essential to comfort, if not to happiness. Some select benevolent pursuits, as schools, visiting societies, or repositories. Some late distinguished men carried anti-slavery enthusiasm to monomaniacal pitch; we ourselves confess to a failing that way. . . . The essential difference between such cases and the monomania of criminal courts, is, that legitimate passion may in the one be indulged to the extent of folly, but takes a direction in which it cannot fall into crime; in the other it becomes criminal, because its direction is originally wrong: in both cases it is still passion, and not often abstractedly wrong” (142). Dr. Forbes Winslow critiqued the wholesale dismissal of responsibility in cases of partial insanity:

I am not prepared to give an unqualified assent to the dogma, that in every case of mental derangement,—without any reference to its degree or character,—ought the person to be screened from the penalty awarded by the laws for criminal offences. I am ready to admit, that if insanity be clearly established to exist, a primâ facie case is made out in favour of the prisoner; but that because a person may be proved to be strange and wayward in his character; to fancy himself a beggar when he may have the wealth of Croesus, or to be ill when he is in the buoyancy of health—to believe that such a person ought, of necessity, to be exonerated from all responsibility, is a doctrine as unphilosophical and untenable as it is opposed to the safety and well being of society. (“Criminal Insanity” 42)

15. By the 1870s, “Maudsley argues for the existence of insanity even where it ‘has so much the look of vice or crime that many persons regard it as an unfounded medical intervention’” (qtd. in Skultans, Madness 7).

16. See Faas and Mason for detailed discussions of “Porphyria’s Lover,” its antecedent texts, and theories of moral insanity. An excerpt in Blackwood’s entitled “Extracts from Gosschen’s Diary” (1818) was written by John Wilson, but Blackwood’s marketed the piece as an excerpt from the memoir of a German priest who records a condemned murderer’s confession of his murder of his mistress therein. Directly inspired by “Gosschen’s Diary,” Brian Procter’s “Marcian Colonna” (1820) is a poem about a man who murders his mistress. Procter exploits the aesthetic of the murdered woman’s body and the topic of the murderer’s calm but mad resolve, but he also retains more conventional elements of frenzy and mania. As Mason explains, “In both these sources not only is the murderer a lunatic, but his madness is described and discussed at some length” (257). Faas notes that though neither text “directly mentions or discusses ‘moral insanity,’” they each, like “Porphyria’s Lover,” portray a murderer who “glories in his crime and justifies it with great show of pseudo-logic and persuasiveness” (56). Mason concludes that “Browning could not have failed to entertain the idea that Porphyria’s murderer is a lunatic, as this is the essential character of his model in the two sources” (257). The “suggestive similarities between certain prominent innovations in the psychiatric theory of the day and the notion of mind suggested by ‘Porphyria’” (258) and Browning’s association with Procter and Procter’s position as a Metropolitan Commissioner in Lunacy in the 1830s also underpin
his case for Browning’s interest in insanity. In *The Life of Robert Browning* (1910), Griffin and Minchin locate the composition of “Porphyria” in St. Petersburg in 1834. Though this composition date precludes the direct influence of Prichard’s *Treatise*, it affords a possible historical connection to Prichard’s article on “Insanity” in the *Cyclopaedia of Practical Medicine* (1833) as well as earlier, continental discussions of moral insanity in the first decades of the century.

17. “Porphyria” was first published with “Johannes Agricola” in the *Monthly Repository* in January 1836. In *Dramatic Lyrics*, published in 1842, the two poems appeared under the heading “Madhouse Cells.” In 1849, still featured with its companion poem in “Madhouse Cells,” it was retitled “Porphyria’s Lover.” In 1863, “Porphyria’s Lover” appeared independent of a companion poem or a madhouse cell in *Dramatic Romances*. Although the committal of his homicidal lover to a madhouse in 1842 would have situated the text rather explicitly within the context of diagnostic controversy and asylum reform, the heading seems an incongruous afterthought. Placing the figure in a “madhouse cell” renders the dramatic setting impossible and the representation of madness conventional. As Mason argues, “[O]nly if Porphyria’s lover is grossly hallucinated can his utterance be consistent with such an environment. Moreover, if I am right about his particular species of lunacy, then hallucination is exactly the wrong sort of symptom for him to exhibit; it would shatter the delicate and startling portrayal of rational lunacy.. .” (265).

18. In *Browning’s Hatreds*, Karlin discusses the poem as a study in “aristocratic hau-teur” and “sexual hatred.” Exploring the poetics of domestic violence and the theme of “violent heterosexuality” (507), Melissa Valiska Gregory discusses the politics of identification and judgment that allow Browning to “engage the disquieting and outlandish (for the period) subject of domestic conflict in the first place” (494).

19. Ralph Rader has argued that the couplets, reflecting the Duke’s “deliberate calculation” (136) in acknowledging the murder, operate “to give a sense of submerged pattern running, like the Duke’s hidden purpose, through the whole” (139). Loy D. Martin has suggested that whether they signify an author’s presence or a character’s motive, “we are observing a doubleness or bifurcation of the text” (112), which ultimately suggests “an ontological division between what language is as an artificial and malleable aesthetic medium and what it says as a constant medium of human communication” (112–13). Extrapolating from this, Martin writes that Browning thereby establishes the “alienation between poetry and discourse” (113) and differentiates poetic skill in language from that of “unspecialized language consumers” (113), such as Renaissance dukes or Victorian poetry readers.

20. In his infamous attack on Rossetti, Robert Buchanan discusses “A Last Confession,” noting that it is “in the minutest trick and form of thought, suggestive of Mr. Browning” (“Fleshy School” 342). In differentiating himself from Browning, Rossetti claimed the figure of the Italian patriot as the seed of inspiration. In a letter to Franz Hüffer in 1873, Rossetti responds to Hüffer’s comparison of the two poets: “May I ask you to cut out the last paragraph in this page about Browning? The first nucleus of the Confession was the very earliest thing in the whole book, and was the simple and genuine result of my having passed my whole boyhood among people just like the speaker in the poem” (Doughty and Wahl, Vol. 3, 1233). He goes on to express his literary rights to the subject:

Browning by travel and cultivation, imported much the same sort of thing into English poetry on a much larger scale; but this subject, if any, was my absolute
birth-right, and the poem was conceived and in a manner begun long before 1848 (the date afterwards put to it, as characteristic of patriotic struggles,) and at a time when Byron and Shelley were about the limits of my modern English poetic studies. (1233)

In a letter to Swinburne, he claims that “A Last Confession” is “maybe the best of all my doings” and the “outcome of the Italian part of me” (Doughty and Wahl, Vol. 2, 762–63). Though his letter clearly represents an argument for his own literary authority both as an Italian and as a reader of transgressive poetry, it also reflects Rossetti’s poetic use of Italianness, which allows him to merge an aesthetic ideology of passionate excess with a desperate and violent political situation.

21. Jerome McGann has described the poem as a “politically disillusioned commentary on the situation in Europe, and especially Italy, after 1848” (Collected Poetry 383), but the poem’s psychological interests in murderous subjectivity also help to explain the unheroic figure of the Italian patriot. If we emphasize Italian politics, the speaker’s crime becomes a more generic crime of passion, a literary convenience for depicting more pressing political ideals. The stabbing, then, as disabling secret and narrative climax, signifies a tragic violence with which “A Last Confession” performs “operatic” gestures (Bullen 112). To be sure, Rossetti reinforces this convention when he claims the poem as a study of the “deadliest of all passion-woven complexities,” the explication of “terrible Love turned to Hate,” and a representation of “the savage penalty exacted for a lost ideal” (“Stealthy School” 793). Moreover, the speaker’s violent political, sexual, and religious transgressions clearly synthesize the sensual and affective interests of Pre-Raphaelitism and Rossetti’s own Art Catholic aesthetic. Victorian psychology, however, armed with moral theories of madness, undermined the mythologizing power of criminal passion. Its ideological force shrank under scientific scrutiny, giving it a flatness unsuitable for the sophisticated character development afforded by dramatic monologues.

22. Despite the fact that the poem exemplifies what he sees as the annoying traits of the collection, the “protracted hankering after a person of the other sex; it seems meat, drink, thought, sinew, religion for the fleshly school” (343), Buchanan grants an exception to “A Last Confession,” finding it less offensive than others because in it “[fleshliness] is fiercely held in check by the exigencies of a powerful situation and the strength of a dramatic speaker” (339). More generally, poetry of the transgressive limit alarmed critics like Matthew Arnold, George Henry Lewes, and Walter Bagehot because they saw in it the taste of the “scattered, headless” (66) middle class in modern art. Buchanan’s indictments somewhat echo Bagehot’s claim that “grotesque” art “takes the [character] type, so to say, in difficulties. It gives a representation of it in its minimum development, amid the circumstances least favorable to it, just while it is struggling with obstacles, just where it is encumbered with incongruities. It deals, to use the language of science, not with normal types but with abnormal specimens” (Bagehot 56). Bagehot’s invoking of the scientific language of “normal types” and “abnormal specimens” is also marked by the discourse of insanity. When Bagehot deploys the term “grotesque” to disapprove of a poetics of “ugly reality” (63), an art of “abnormal specimens,” or a portrayal of a “distorted and imperfect image” that might appeal to “the half educated” (66) quality of readers, the popular fascination with high-profile criminal insanity trials is, perhaps, implicated in the condemnation.
23. In acknowledging Browning’s influence, critics have typically cited “Porphyria’s Lover” and “My Last Duchess” as the poem’s literary antecedents, but in its fascination with manic excess, “A Last Confession” is more closely aligned with “The Laboratory.” Though often neglected in contemporary scholarship, “The Laboratory” inspired Rossetti’s first watercolor, which he completed in 1849. Its composition thus overlaps with the years given by William Michael Rossetti for the original drafting of “A Last Confession.”

24. Maudsley was notorious for such elisions. His concern with improper leavening intertwines history, will, and responsibility, but Maudsley also decentered the will: “When we reflect how much time and what a multitude of divers experiences have gone to the formation of character, what a complex product it is, and what an inconceivably intricate inter-working of intimate energies, active and inhibitive, any display of it in feeling and will means, it must appear a gross absurdity for any one to aspire to estimate and appraise all the component motives of a particular act of will” (*Body and Will* 29). He explains: “What the metaphysician has done is plain enough: he has converted into an entity the general term which embraces the multitude of particular volitions, themselves varying infinitely in power and quality, and has then referred them all to it as cause. So he talks habitually as if will had always the same nature, whereas these is no such thing. . . . A general will is not an entity, it is no more than a notion. No wonder that there is neither common end nor end to philosophical disquisitions concerning a notion of which each person is free to have his own notion” (17).

25. Maudsley writes: “Moreover, the particular will-faculty of the particular purposive act must be built up gradually by culture and practice; it may be a late acquisition which is unstable and easily lost, or it may be so grounded in the nature that it is merged and disappears in automatism. Therefore . . . the particular wills of particular acts may be impaired or abolished while the several wills of other acts are unimpaired, or . . . the single wills of single acts may survive amidst the general wreckage, like columns, broken or entire, of a ruined temple which still stand upright in its ruins; so giving rise to the manifold and diverse disintegrations of will which, despite the postulate of its metaphysical unity, are met with in the concrete” (*Pathology of Mind* 142). The idea of a character in ruins offers an apt metaphor for the speaker depicted in “A Last Confession.”

26. Applying Langbaum’s template of sympathy and judgment, Ronnalie Howard argues, “Internally the movement of the poem is determined by the narrator’s strategy, his desire in the face of death to lessen the magnitude of his crime, to secure relief from the torments of his conscience, to obtain pardon, or at least sympathy, from the priest” (“Rossetti’s ‘A Last Confession’” 23). In a later publication she argues that sympathy for the murderer ultimately overtakes judgment because “the real villain is the Austrian occupation,” which creates an “unstable world in which passionate natures become accustomed to living with violence, in which love and hate become intertwined” (*Dark Glass* 100). He is ultimately, then, a “victim of his times” (100). Though the speaker clearly develops a narrative strategy, as Howard argues, Rossetti neither resolves the matter through circumstance, lunacy, or religious principles nor asks readers to operate primarily within the context of sympathy and judgment. In fact, the text often thwarts both operations by forcefully contrasting his expressive mode and his rhetorical manner.

27. In 1848, an article reprinted in the *Journal of Psychological Medicine and Mental Pathology* advised priests that knowledge of physiology might “aid them at the confessional”: “To administer advice and consolation, he should be aware of the failings of his
patient, and how much is due to temperament and constitution. In fact, the good priest should have a tolerable acquaintance with physiology, in order to be most useful in his vocation” (“Moral Theology” 559).

28. Continuing his narrative, the speaker recalls the day when, at fourteen, she “asked [him] / If she was not a woman” (223) and when he observed her “breasts half-globed / Like folded lilies deepset in the stream” (225–26). Rossetti must have carefully considered the implications of her liminal status and the boundary of womanhood. In the draft stages of the poem, this passage occurs when the girl is thirteen years old; Rossetti changed it to fourteen for its publication in Poems. The speaker’s account of his victim’s sexual attributes is jarring because she occupies the margin between girl and woman, and at times his sexual responses take place when she is unambiguously still a child. His sexual desire thus fully transgresses Catholic and Victorian codes of sexual morality and thereby establishes him as man of habitual moral laxity—with all of its implications for guilt and responsibility. While Rossetti provides ample material for a critique of gendered violence (the entire mad-criminal scenario centers upon this fleshy core), an analysis of feminine othering and victimization within the poem remains unfinished, supplanted by an interest in his masculine subject’s inscrutable complexities. Rossetti’s fleshy aesthetic functions in the context of criminal insanity, as the conspicuous sexual dynamics of the crime feed theories of criminal motive and monomaniacal obsession. While Rossetti uses the speaker’s misogynist arguments to develop the poetics of obscurity, the eroticization of the girl-woman takes on a life of its own and, therefore, becomes one example of his larger poetic and artistic project of aestheticizing the feminine and radicalizing Victorian sensual and erotic representation. For an analysis of the dynamics of violence and desire, see Bullen’s The Pre-Raphaelite Body, which includes a discussion of the poem’s psychosexual dynamics and its place in Rossetti’s Pre-Raphaelite aesthetics.

29. A modified version of this recollection forms the speaker’s wish to reunite with his victim again in hell: “Ah! be it even in flame, / We may have sweetness yet, if you but say / As once in childish sorrow: ‘Not my pain, / My pain was nothing: oh your poor poor love, / Your broken love!’” (485–89).

30. See “‘A Last Confession’ (fair copy manuscript with corrections, Fitzwilliam Museum),” Rossetti Archive.

31. Rossetti removed the words “if God / Can Pardon me” from these lines, leaving only “what hope / Can reach me still” to allude to the question of divine judgment that informs the language of the confession. This revision further undercuts confessional religiosity and divine justice. The fragmented nature of the proceeding functions similarly. No priestly words pronounce judgment, and no dialogic reconciliation occurs because, at the end of his confession—and, most likely, his life—the speaker is lost in a hallucination of his victim’s revenge. His final words, then, conjure secular understandings of criminality, madness, and passion.

32. See Smith’s Trial by Medicine for discussion of some of these controversial trials. Faas argues that the poem can be most readily connected to the case of George Victor Townley. Considering the physicians consulted in the Townley case, Faas wonders “how Dr. Hitchman and Dr. Winslow would have adjudicated the mental state of Rossetti’s protagonist in ‘A Last Confession’” and asks, “Was the speaker’s obsessive behavior sufficient for certifying him as morally insane or as incapable of distinguishing right from wrong at the time of the deed?” (167). Responding to his own query, he writes, “As in the Townley
case, the learned doctors probably would have disagreed . . . ” (167). Rossetti’s drafting of the poem predates the Townley case and is clearly not directly inspired by it. However, Rossetti courts the kinds of diagnostic obscurities inherent in most theories and cases of criminal lunacy, and for Victorians reading Poems in 1870, the poem’s indeterminacy would no doubt be recognized in these terms.

Chapter 3

1. Welsh situates his discussion of Arcangeli within his larger study of the “erosion” of “strong representations” by “stor[i]es] of experience” (200). The representation of Arcangeli as a “mercenary defender of a moral monster,” who works for “bread and butter” and “thank[s] God for it” (208), helps Browning to “demol[ish] the pretense of lawyers to give a true account of what has happened” by revealing that the “professional managers of evidence” are “strictly rhetoricians” (208).

2. In addition to the 1857 Divorce Act, several other important pieces of legislation publicized and altered the practices of domesticity. These include: the Act for the Better Prevention of Aggravated Assaults Upon Women and Children of 1853; the Married Women’s Property Acts of 1870 and 1882; the Infant Custody Acts of 1873 and 1886; and the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1878. For histories of marriage law, see A. James Hammerton’s Cruelty and Companionship; Joan Perkin’s Women and Marriage in Nineteenth-Century England; Mary Lyndon Shanley’s Feminism, Marriage and the Law in Victorian England; Allen Horstman’s Victorian Divorce; Maeve Doggett’s Marriage, Wife-Beating and the Law in Victorian England; and John Gillis’s For Better or For Worse. Lawrence Stone’s Broken Lives: Separation and Divorce in England, 1660–1857 and Family, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1500–1800 cover pre-Victorian developments in matrimonial law. For a useful discussion of the complex intersections of common law, statute law, and case law and the mid-century political context of marriage debates, see Mary Poovey’s Uneven Developments.

3. In particular, I have in mind Poovey’s Uneven Developments, Chase and Levenson’s The Spectacle of Intimacy, Marlene Tromp’s The Private Rod, Barbara Leckie’s Culture and Adultery, John Tosh’s A Man’s Place, Kristine Otteson Garrigan’s Victorian Scandals, and Lisa Surridge’s Bleak Houses.

4. Insanity did not constitute grounds for divorce.

5. The male disadvantages and vulnerabilities introduced by such stringent requirements did not go unacknowledged in parliamentary debate. Anxieties about the extent to which the state should outrank the husband surfaced amidst the conversation. One member hypothesized “a case in which, under the influence of intoxication, or any other equally palliating circumstances, a man might once in his life be seduced into a house of ill-fame. Twenty years after, his wife, totally ignorant of the fact, might commit adultery; and on his seeking redress would, by the aid of spies and informers, who were always called into requisition in such proceedings, rake up the hitherto forgotten fact, and defeat his petition” (qtd. in Chase and Levenson 187–88).

7. The Times, Anne Humpherys explains, “reported the largest number of divorce cases and gave the fullest transcripts with the least comment,” and the “whole trial was reported over a series of weeks or months from the first hearing to the judge’s summing up and judgment, whereas the weeklies and later the tabloids felt under no obligation to report the trial in its entirety” (“Coming Apart” 221).

8. The repeat appearances of petitioning couples over months and years underscored both the desperation of miserable couples and the unyielding power of the divorce court. See, for example, the Times reporting on Curtis v. Curtis and Marchmont v. Marchmont in 1858.

9. Narrative fiction and print journalism have garnered the most critical attention in recent years. Critics have thoroughly teased out the political complexities of these genres and sometimes charted the links between the two. For analysis of melodramatic methods and Caroline Norton’s work, see Poovey’s Uneven Developments and Hadley’s Melodramatic Tactics. Juxtaposing press reports with fictional works, Leckie’s Culture and Adultery, Chase and Levenson’s Spectacle of Intimacy, and Lisa Surridge’s Bleak Houses chart interesting discursive connections between publicity and textuality.

10. For discussion of narrative fiction and marriage reform, see Trodd’s Domestic Crime in the Victorian Novel, Tromp’s The Private Rod, and Surridge’s Bleak Houses.

11. Discussing the representational relationships between divorce court reportage and developments in the Victorian novel, Leckie highlights the “[d]evices of surveillance and suspicion” (91) in divorce trials and press coverage: “When the crime is a domestic crime buttressed by a legally endorsed gender discrepancy and a powerful ideology relating to marriage and women’s sexuality, relating ‘exactly what happened’ is complicated by what arises like a leitmotif in the transcription of these cases: suspicion” (91).

12. The term “criminal” is applied to each character in the poem, and the poem enumerates many crimes inextricably linked to the laws of marriage rights, birthrights, and property rights. While I focus on murder, detailed accounts of the civil and criminal intricacies of divorce, annulment, reproduction, prostitution, adultery, rape, assault, inheritance, property, dowry, and so on, offer numerous variations on domestic transgression and terror. The stability of marriage and the security of domesticity are completely dismantled in this poem, and as Mary Ellis Gibson argues, even “the fate of Pompilia’s child remains obscure” (89) and, thus, “The Ring and the Book proposes no reknitting of domesticity, no ending that relieves its readers of the burden of its story” (89).

13. In Commentaries on the Law of England, Blackstone articulated an argument for husbands’ disciplinary authority: “For, as [the husband] is to answer for [his wife’s] misbehaviour, the law thought it reasonable to intrust him with this power of restraining her, by domestic chastisement, in the same moderation that a man is allowed to correct his apprentices or children; for whom the master or parent is also liable in some cases to answer” (qtd. in Doggett 34). As Doggett explains, this “doctrine of reasonable chastisement” (34) was “seized upon and endlessly reproduced” (38) throughout the nineteenth century.

14. In a discussion of the Caroline Norton case, the history of feminist criticism on the poem, and debates over the woman question, Susan Brown examines Pompilia as “speaking subject” and “cultural object” (30). Arguing that her presumed innocence ignores some of her “rhetorical agency,” Brown also encourages a skeptical reading of Pompilia’s monologue. Ann Brady situates Pompilia’s agency within the poem’s critique of “sexual cynicism” (125).
15. Blackstone explained: “A wife killing her husband is petit treason; but a husband killing his wife is only murder; because of the obedience which in relation of law is due from the wife to the husband” (qtd. in Doggett 50). As Doggett explains, punishments differed as well: “Until the end of the eighteenth century, the punishment for women guilty of petit treason differed from that imposed upon murderers; it also differed from that imposed upon male petit traitors. Whilst wife-murderers and male petit traitors were hung, female petit traitors were sentenced to burning alive. In practice, many women were garroted or strangled before the flames reached them, but this was not invariably the case” (50).

16. While in Italy, Lytton became acquainted with the Brownings via a letter of introduction from the well-known literary critic and advisor John Forster, who functioned as a surrogate father and a literary agent. See Harlan and Harlan’s Letters from Owen Meredith (Robert, First Earl of Lytton) to Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. For a description of Lytton’s popularity with young poets, see Harlan’s Owen Meredith. Raymond’s Victorian Vicerey briefly addresses Lytton’s popularity in the United States.

17. In referencing the two writers as Lytton (the younger) and Bulwer-Lytton (the elder), I follow biographers’ usage in naming father, Edward George Earle Lytton Bulwer-Lytton, and son, Edward Robert Bulwer Lytton. Lytton’s father pressed him into diplomacy and frequently discouraged his poetic endeavors, using a variety of reasons, including, at one point, the problem of their names. Writing to his son in 1854, Bulwer-Lytton explained, “I don’t think, whatever your merit, the world would allow two of the same name to have both a permanent reputation in literature” (qtd. in Harlan 62). When Chapman and Hall agreed to publish the Clytemnestra collection in 1855, Lytton’s father only conditionally consented to the venture, requiring that Lytton adopt a pseudonym and that he cease to write verse “for two years following the date of this publication” (qtd. in Harlan 67).

18. When Lytton himself wrote a biography of his father, The Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton, he stopped in 1831 (the year of his birth)—thus avoiding the problems of representing his life, his parents’ feud, his mother’s institutionalization, and his sister’s death.

19. For discussions of Bulwer-Lytton’s husbanding tactics, see Marie Mulvey-Roberts’s “Fame, Notoriety and Madness: Edward Bulwer-Lytton Paying the Price of Greatness”; Marilyn J. Kurata’s “Wrongful Confinement: The Betrayal of Women by Men, Medicine, and Law”; and Mitchell’s Bulwer Lytton.

20. According to Mitchell, Rosina Wheeler and Edward Bulwer met at a bluestocking gathering, and Harlan explains that Rosina always “bore the stamp of the Regency” (3). Rosina’s “mother was apparently well-versed in Wollstonecraft and assertive in declaiming the wrongs against women, and her father refused to support his family either financially or emotionally” (Mitchell 25). An uncompromising Regency bohemian, Rosina failed to embrace the mid-century feminine ideal and publicly deplored the “passivity” of English women (Mitchell 57). In the ongoing marital combat between the warring spouses, Rosina, deprived of legal opportunities, sought redress in the manipulation of public opinion: “Exposure is the only thing that complex monster dreads,” she explained, “and consequently the only check I have on him” (qtd. in Mitchell 44). Rosina published Cheveley; or, The Man of Honor, which caricatured her husband’s wrongs, and she sent angry and obscene letters to his personal friends and political colleagues. In 1858, shortly after
Bulwer-Lytton had taken up the position of Secretary of State for the Colonies, Rosina again asserted her powers of publicity: at an “uncontested election at Hertford, while Bulwer was addressing his constituents, Rosina appeared on the platform and, addressing the assembled crowd, began a violent denunciation of him” (Harlan 87). Responding to this public incident, Bulwer-Lytton committed her to an asylum. After three weeks of public outcry and press coverage, Rosina was released, and Bulwer-Lytton was forced to resign his position (Harlan 87–88).

21. In 1858, Lytton chaperoned his mother abroad after the asylum scandal. Constantly beset by the lobbying tactics of both mother and father, Lytton departed his mother after five months and never saw her again (Harlan 88). She died in 1882.

22. The circumstances and causes of Emily’s death remain obscure—in part because of the strikingly different accounts of her feuding parents. The “murdered girl” comment appears in Raymond’s *Victorian Viceroy*: “The memory of that murdered girl makes it sometimes all but impossible for me to forgive the man who systematically hastened and finally extinguished her existence” (76). See also Mitchell’s *Bulwer Lytton*.

23. In reviewing the volume, the *National Review* contended that “the more you read the less you admire him” (“The Poetry of Owen Meredith” 175) and that he demonstrated a “spurious poetic art, which invents decorative artifices to hide the emptiness of its form” (202). *Dublin University Magazine* noted the ever-present “danger of degenerating into mere imitation” (“Clytemnestra” 486) and explained that he “plagiarises” from Aeschylus and at times becomes “Tennysonian” (486). The *Eclectic Review* accused the poet of “free paraphrase of Shakespeare and Browning, variegated by touches, tones, and tints of Keats and Tennyson” (“Meredith’s Clytemnestra” 300), labeled him a “mocking-bird” (301), and listed correspondences between lines from Owen Meredith’s poems and those of other poets.

24. Writing to his father in 1853, Lytton confessed, “Since I sent off the MS I have discovered in one or two of the poems some quite unconscious plagiarisms wh. I will alter, but I know that most of them are altogether in the colour of other writers. The imitation, however, is more in form than in thought, I hope you will think. I believe language to be the last thing—the forging of an armory of oneself” (qtd. in Harlan 60).

25. Textual citations refer to scene number and page number.

26. Commenting on the divorce press and subsequent developments in Victorian marriage, Humphersys argues that while such press coverage progressively “naturalized” divorce (“Coming Apart” 228), it contributed to the social devaluation of marriage as an arrangement for reproduction and legitimate offspring and aided the consolidation of a companionate vision of marital relationships. As Shanley has argued, marriage transmutes into a “locus for companionship and mutual support” and thus “could not be properly understood solely as an institution for sexual or reproductive bonding” (“One Must Ride Behind” 369). Significantly, in each of these poems, characters allude to an ideal companionate model to situate their murderous resolve and to frame their desperate actions. But even the companionate model fails to salvage the relationships in question. The conditions for companionate unions, it seems, are simply not yet in place. In the case of *Clytemnestra*, the portended failure of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus might also suggest negative Victorian attitudes toward remarriage.

27. For textual history and composition dates, see Lynda Hunt Beckman’s *Amy Levy: Her Life and Letters*. 
28. Citations refer to page numbers in *A Minor Poet and Other Verse* (1884).

29. Although she focuses on “unevenness within the construction and deployment of mid-Victorian representations of gender, and representations of women in particular” (4), Poovey’s sense of the “two guises” of ideology—“apparent coherence and authenticity” and “internal instability and artificiality” (3)—aptly characterizes the quandary and the opportunity that Levy confronts in her *Medea*. For it is the unevenness, Poovey argues, that finally “allowed for the emergence . . . of a genuinely—although incompletely articulated—oppositional voice” (4).

30. I am indebted to Stuart Warner for this translation.

31. For discussions of Levy’s interest in ethnic and racial identities, see Linda Hunt Beckman’s *Amy Levy*; Cynthia Scheinberg’s “Canonizing the Jew: Amy Levy’s Challenge to Victorian Poetic Identity” and “Recasting ‘sympathy and judgment’: Amy Levy, Women Poets, and the Victorian Dramatic Monologue”; and Josephine McDonagh’s *Child Murder and British Culture*.


33. In *Child Murder and British Culture*, Josephine McDonagh categorizes Levy’s *Medea* with other late-Victorian “new Medeas” dating from the late 1860s, which “represented [her] unambiguously as the killer of her children” (164). She reveals “the new ways in which child murder had figured in evolutionary discourse, as the heroic act of the queen bee, or the primal mechanism for social adaptation, that allowed Medea to be reinterpreted” as both “a champion of women’s emancipation” and “a force of social progress” (165). McDonagh contends that Levy “saw child murder as the product of a barbarous and atavistic society” and thus it is “an act forced upon [Medea] by a degenerate and backward-looking society” (170). While these evolutionary metaphors and this evolutionary determinism usefully define the radicalism of Levy’s Medea and the pessimism of Levy’s critique, they tend to obscure the verse drama’s interest in the questions of agency surrounding marriage contracting and child-killing.

34. In his handbook of Hardy’s poetry, J. O. Bailey cites Edmund Blunden’s *Thomas Hardy*, which records Hardy’s claim that “it was a true story” (588). Bailey then offers his own vague corroboration: “I was assured by elderly people in Dorset that the event might well have occurred in some remote village” (588).

35. Perhaps, this ambiguity reflects Hardy’s deliberate vagueness about his views on marital and domestic politics that received so much attention after *Tess* and *Jude the Obscure*. Speaking in 1895 of *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy wrote, “I feel that a bad marriage is one of the direst things on earth, & one of the cruellest things, but beyond that my opinions on the subject are vague enough” (*Letters* ii.98).


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