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PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTAL CHILD HOMICIDE IN ENGLISH POPULAR VISUAL CULTURE 1800-1850

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Abstract

This article discusses in depth several English illustrated broadsides produced in the first half of the nineteenth century and depicting child homicides. It provides the most detailed analysis to date of the complex interplay of illustration, verse and prose on murder sheets from the period. The cultural representations of homicides of children found in these broadsides contributed in important ways to understandings of culpability for the killings of infants and young children. Rather than simply illustrating the texts on the broadsides, the visual images amplified the emotional resonance of this medium, arguably increasing its effectiveness. In the hands of anonymous, plebeian ballad writers, copy writers, engravers and printers, these dramatic narratives of child killing and the fates of those accused expressed many things that resonated with wider discourse: deep seams of gender hostility, with men sometimes being blamed for women's killings, and women for men's; deep anxieties about the vulnerability of child life in the face of both female and male monstrosity; anxieties about the possibility of madness instigating appalling deeds; rich moral and religious messages about crime and redemption; and strong and complex links between popular cultural understanding and experience and formal legal proceedings.

Keywords: Infanticide; child-murder; broadsides; visual culture; emotions

Introduction

In researching infanticide and child killing in the nineteenth century, I was initially daunted to find on broadsides and in newspapers explicit illustrations of the killing of children and even of mangled infant corpses. Today in Britain we are not accustomed to seeing images of dead infants in the media, apart from those participating in visual rhetoric against warfare, and even these occur only rarely.² And the very idea of a graphic illustration of a murdered

¹ Margaret L. Arnot is Honorary Research Fellow in History, University of Roehampton m.arnot@roehampton.ac.uk. My thanks are due in particular to the anonymous referees for this journal, whose advice was invaluable. Thanks too to the editors of the journal who have been very helpful throughout the process of getting this work to press. Too many people to name have contributed insights in conference and seminar discussions where I presented aspects of this work. Of particular mention are that SOLON conferences are always a revelation, and colleagues at the University of Roehampton have helped in many ways, not least of course through providing study leave during which aspects of this work were refined.

² On visual rhetoric in general see Roland Barthes, 'Rhetoric of the Image' in his *Image—Music—Text* trans. Stephen Heath (Fontana, 1977) pp.32-51. More specifically on dead children in visual rhetoric about war see: Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (Penguin, 2003). The use of such images remains contested as evidenced by soul-searching about the publication of pictures of three-year-old Syrian refugee Aylan Kurdi washed up on a Turkish beach in late summer 2015. See for example: BBC News Website, 'Migrant crisis: Photo of drowned boy sparks outcry,' 2 September 2015, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-34133210> [Accessed 2 September 2015]; Jamie Fahey, 'The Guardian's decision to publish shocking photos of Aylan Kurdi,' *The Guardian*, 7 September 2015. Other general scholarship that has helped my thinking about images includes: Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,' in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zorn (Fontana, 1973 [1955, trans. 1968]) pp.219-53;

child is anathema; a taboo against such images even exists in crime drama.³ This contrasts with widespread representations of other forms of violent death in modern media. Mark Pizzato is probably right when he suggests that spectatorship of death is an inevitable aspect of human culture, from ancient 'real' sacrificial rituals, through to screen violence. Through such spectatorship individuals experience 'fear, suffering and death ... vicariously ... [and] explore the potential meanings of our own mortality'.⁴ This article results from the haunting power of the historical illustrations that demanded explanation; and from curiosity to understand the yawning chasm between the present and the past in this area of visual representation, given continuities in spectatorship of death more generally.⁵ My central quest here is to understand what broadsides tell us about the popular mediation and understanding of parental child homicide. The peak of broadside production and readership occurred in the first half of the nineteenth century, when a happy coincidence of improving

David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (University of Chicago Press, 1989); E. H. Gombrich, 'The Visual Image: Its Place in Communication,' in E. H. Gombrich, *The Image and the Eye: Further studies in the psychology of pictorial representation* (Phaidon, 1982) pp.137-61; W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* new edn (University of Chicago Press, 1987); W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory* (University of Chicago Press, 1994); Janet Wolff, *The Social Production of Art 2nd edn* (Macmillan, 1993). Since I began my work on images of child killing in this period, Cathryn Wilson completed her PhD, where she reproduced nine graphic images of child killing from the *Illustrated Police News* spanning the years 1872-1899. She did not however analyse the images: Cathryn B.A. Wilson, 'Mad, Sad, or Bad?: Newspaper and Judicial Representations of Men Who Killed Children in Victorian England, 1860-1900,' unpublished PhD thesis, University of Essex, 2012, pp.133-41. Daniel Grey accomplished a very interesting analysis of a single illustration from a 1896 issue of the *Illustrated Police News* in: Daniel J. R. Grey, 'Discourses of Infanticide in England, 1880-1922,' unpublished PhD thesis, Roehampton University, 2008, pp.70-6.

³ For a general discussion see John O. Thompson, 'Reflexions on Dead Children in the Cinema and Why there are Not More of Them,' in Gillian Avery et al. (eds.) *Representations of Childhood Death* (Macmillan, 2000) pp.204-16. An interesting specific example can be seen in the cult crime drama 'Prime Suspect'. For general background see Deborah Jermyn, *Prime Suspect* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). In a series renowned for breaking new ground in graphic depiction of morgue scenes and autopsies, in the one child murder plot, there is no depiction of the body, and the morgue scene is distanced and sentimental: *Prime Suspect 4: The Lost Child* (John Madden, Granada Television, UK, 1995). Ania Wilczynski suggests that taboo may even underlie what she claims is a paucity of scholarly research on the subject of child killing: *Child Homicide* (Greenwich Medical Media Ltd, 1997) p.11.

⁴ Mark Pizzato, *Theatres of Human Sacrifice* (State University of New York Press, 2005) p.2. Perry L. Curtis has made a similar point in relation to Jack the Ripper murder representations: *Jack the Ripper and the London Press* (Yale University Press, 2001) p.2. Jean Seaton's eclectic study powerfully evokes the pervasive and gruesome violence of the Roman coliseum where, at its height, the spectacle of 'live death' occurred on average nearly every second day – thus also highlighting key elements of continuity in consumption of visual death spectacle: Seaton, *Carnage and the Media* p.54 for frequency of the shows; For a view by a classicist: Keith Hopkins, *Death and Renewal* (Cambridge University Press, 1983). Rosalind Crone's study of Victorian spectatorship of violence also notes continuity with the present: *Violent Victorians: Popular entertainment in nineteenth-century London* (Manchester University Press, 2012) epilogue.

⁵ Historians are increasingly recognising the validity and importance of studying visual images as sources: Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence* (Reaktion Books, 2006); Ivan Gaskell, 'Visual History,' in Peter Burke (ed.) *New Perspectives on Historical Writing 2nd edn* (Polity, 2001) pp.187-217; Ludmilla Jordanova, *The Look of the Past: Visual and Material Evidence in Historical Practice* (Cambridge University Press, 2012); Roy Porter, 'Seeing the Past,' *Past & Present*, 118 (1988) 186-205.

working-class literacy, advances in printing technology, and the ambition of new entrepreneurial printers created a mass market.⁶ They are therefore key popular cultural sources. More particularly, the article demonstrates how images on nineteenth century broadsides relating to child killing were important elements in the social and cultural construction of ideas and emotions about culpability for child homicide. These spoke to deeper anxieties about child life, families, maternal, paternal and social responsibilities for children, community values and personal safety.⁷ I have selected half a dozen illustrated broadsides about the killing of infants and children by parents to analyse at depth. While there was certainly stranger violence against children, and deaths in non-family child-care settings, here I am most interested in how fatal family violence was depicted and understood.

⁶ On the reading habits of the poor and rising literacy, see Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public 1800-1900* 2nd edn (Ohio State University Press, 1998); David F. Mitch, *The Rise of Popular Literacy in Victorian England: The Influence of Private Choice and Public Policy* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992); David Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture England 1750-1914* (Cambridge University Press, 1989).

⁷ Thus building on historical scholarship focusing on media representations of family violence during the long nineteenth century in England. This note focuses only on infanticide and child killing, but important methodological insights come from wider family violence studies. For newspapers, including their use in individual case studies, a methodology used in this broadside analysis, see: Margaret L. Arnot, 'Gender in Focus: Infanticide in England 1840-1880,' unpublished PhD thesis, University of Essex, 1994; Margaret L. Arnot, 'The murder of Thomas Sandles: meanings of a mid-nineteenth century infanticide,' in Mark Jackson (ed.) *Infanticide: Historical Perspectives on Child Murder and Concealment, 1550-2000* (Ashgate, 2002) pp.149-67; Carolyn A. Conley, *Certain Other Countries: Homicide, Gender, and National identity in Late Nineteenth-Century England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales* (Ohio State University Press, 2007) ch.6; Carolyn A. Conley, *The Unwritten Law: Criminal Justice in Victorian Kent* (Oxford University Press, 1991) ch.4; Ginger Frost, "'I am master here": Illegitimacy, Masculinity, and Violence in Victorian England,' in Lucy Delap et al. (eds.) *The Politics of Domestic Authority in Britain since 1800* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) pp.27-42; Ginger Frost, 'Motherhood on Trial: Violence and Unwed Mothers in Victorian England,' in Claudia C. Klaver et al. (eds.) *Other Mothers: Beyond the Maternal Ideal* (Ohio State University Press, 2008) pp.145-62; Melissa Valiska Gregory, "'Most Revolting Murder by a Father": The Violent Rhetoric of Paternal Child-Murder in *The Times* (London), 1826-1849,' in Jennifer Thorn (ed.) *Writing British Infanticide: Child-Murder, Gender, and Print, 1722-1859* (University of Delaware Press, 2003) pp.70-90; Daniel J. R. Grey, "'Agonised weeping": Representing Femininity, Emotion and Infanticide in Edwardian Newspapers,' *Media History*, 21 (2015) 468-480; Grey, 'Discourses,' esp. ch.1; Ann R. Higginbotham, 'Sin of the Age: Infanticide and Illegitimacy in Victorian London,' *Victorian Studies*, 32:3 (1989) 319-337; Judith Knelman, *Twisting in the Wind: The Murderess and the English Press* (Toronto University Press, 1998); Hilary Marland, 'Getting away with murder? Puerperal insanity, infanticide and the defence plea,' in Jackson (ed.) *Infanticide* pp.168-92; Martin J. Wiener, 'Convicted murderers and the Victorian press: Condemnation vs. sympathy,' *Crimes and Misdemeanours*, 1 (2007) 110-25. The one book directly focused on press representations of infanticide is written by a journalism scholar and remarkably fails to consider relevant historiography: Nicola Goc, *Women, Infanticide and the Press 1822-1922: News Narratives in England and Australia* (Ashgate, 2013). There is little scholarship using broadsides specifically: Miriam Jones, 'Fractured Narratives of Infanticide in the Crime and Execution Broadside in Britain, 1780-1850,' in Thorn (ed.) *Writing British Infanticide* pp.112-42; Beth Kalikoff, *Murder and Moral Decay in Victorian Popular Literature* (UMI Research Press, 1986) esp. ch.4; Ellen L. O'Brien, *Crime in Verse: The Poetics of Murder in the Victorian Era* (Ohio State University Press, 2008). Some work very usefully analyses newspapers and broadsides together: Bridget Walsh, *Domestic Murder in Nineteenth-Century England: Literary and Cultural Representations* (Ashgate, 2014) ch.1.

Before explaining my methodology in more detail, consideration of child death and its representation in the nineteenth century helps us understand the broader social and cultural context that contributed to the creation of the violent images on the broadsides. High infant mortality was the norm until the early twentieth century, thus ensuring that nineteenth century people routinely encountered child death in their lives. In the worst cities in the last decade of the century, there were 220 infant deaths per 1,000 live births, compared with a general mortality rate of 18.2 deaths per 1,000 live births.⁸ Physical proximity to actual death was part of everyday life, where the bodies of deceased family members would usually be kept in the home between death and burial.⁹ Furthermore, viewing the actual murdered bodies of victims soon after death, often in situ, was regular practice for coroner's court juries, and indeed ordinary spectators would also sometimes scramble to catch a glimpse.¹⁰ Even more alarming than infant mortality rates, at mid-century, 61 per cent of homicide victims were under one year of age.¹¹ Infanticide and child killing frequently featured in literature.¹² Representations of infant and child death (sometimes violent) in folklore, fairy-tale, ballads, private diaries and letters, religious sermons and texts, theatre, and classical music as well as literature were consequently ubiquitous, though a lot more could be said about them than is available at present.¹³ As far as visual records are concerned, there is

⁸ Julie-Marie Strange, *Death, Grief and Poverty in Britain, 1870-1914* (Cambridge University Press, 2005) p.230. For graphic representation see figure 1.1 'Infant mortality rates in France, England and Wales and Scotland, 1800-2006,' in Eilidh Garrett et al. (eds.) *Infant Mortality: A Continuing Social Problem* (Ashgate, 2012); and on infant mortality as an element in working-class family relations: Ellen Ross, *Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London, 1870-1918* (Oxford University Press, 1993) ch.6; Strange, *Death, Grief and Poverty*, ch.8.

⁹ Strange, *Death, Grief and Poverty*, ch.3.

¹⁰ Ian Burney, *Bodies of Evidence: Medicine and the Politics of the English Inquest 1830-1926* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000). On voyeurism at murder scenes see Crone, *Violent Victorians* pp.91-2.

¹¹ Pauline Prior, *Madness and Murder: Gender, Crime and Mental Disorder in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Irish Academic Press, 2008) p.121.

¹² Kristin J. Brandser, 'In Defence of "Murderous Mothers": Feminist Jurisprudence in Frances Trollope's *Jessie Phillips*', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 5 (2000) 179-209; Aeron Hunt, 'Calculations and Concealments: Infanticide in Mid-Nineteenth Century Britain,' *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 34 (2006) 71-94; Christine L. Krueger, 'Literary Defenses and Medical Prosecutions: Representing Infanticide in Nineteenth-Century Britain,' *Victorian Studies*, 40 (1997) 271-94; Josephine McDonagh, *Child Murder and British Culture 1720-1900* (Cambridge University Press, 2003); Josephine McDonagh, 'Child-Murder Narratives in George Eliot's *Adam Bede*: Embedded Histories and Fictional Representation,' *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 56 (2001) 228-59; Deborah A. Symonds, *Weep Not for Me: Women, Ballads, and Infanticide in Early Modern Scotland* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997).

¹³ Avery et al. (eds.) *Representations*; Ralph Houlbrooke, 'Death in childhood: the practice of the "good death" in James Janeway's *A Token for Children*,' in Anthony Fletcher et al. (eds.) *Childhood in question: children, parents and the state* (Manchester University Press, 1999) pp.37-56; Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Children* (Yale University Press, 2001) ch.3; Linda A. Pollock, *Forgotten children: Parent-child relations from 1500-1900* (Cambridge University Press, 1983) ch.4; James Walvin, *A Child's World: A Social History of English Childhood 1800-1914* (Penguin, 1982) ch.2. I have located a productive line of thinking about famous child deaths in literature, in particular Little Nell in Dickens *The Old Curiosity Shop* and Eva in Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. A representative

some scholarship on funerary monuments, paintings and photographs.¹⁴ Scholars are yet to address the harrowing illustrations of infant and child killing that are the subject of this paper. Perhaps they were cultural manifestations of a necessary process of coming to terms with the level of infant homicide, yet for historians the images may be 'messengers from the dark side' that they prefer not to see.¹⁵

I examined broadsides related to child killing available digitally on the John Johnson and the Harvard Law School Library collections of Crime and Execution Broadsides.¹⁶ These collections represent eclectic survivals of the many millions of cheap, single page news-sheets that circulated throughout Britain in this period, the crime and execution broadside being one of the most popular genres.¹⁷ Until the removal of the stamp tax on newspapers in

example can be seen in Richard Walsh, 'Why We Wept for Little Nell: Character and Emotional Involvement,' *Narrative*, 5 (1997) 306-321.

¹⁴ Nicola Brown, 'Empty hands and precious pictures: post-mortem portrait photographs of children,' *Australian Journal of Victorian Studies*, 14 (2009) 8-24; Erika Langmuir, *Imagining Childhood* (Yale University Press, 2006) ch.3; Nigel Llewellyn, "'[An] Impe entombed here doth lie": the Besford Triptych and Child Memorials in Post-Reformation England,' in Avery et al. (eds.) *Representations* pp.52-64; while primarily about literature, Laurence Lerner's book includes some pithy observations about visual material: *Angles and Absences: Child Deaths in the Nineteenth Century* (Vanderbilt University Press, 1997); Orme, *Medieval Children* ch.3; some general art books include useful, brief references: Lionel Lambourne, *Victorian Painting* (Phaidon, 1999) ch.15.

¹⁵ Marina Warner, *No Go the Bogeyman: Scaring, Lulling and Making Mock* (Vintage, 2000) p.30. For a detailed and moving psychoanalytic study of the universality of repressed fears of infanticide see Dorothy Bloch, *'So the Witch Won't Eat Me': Fantasy and the Child's Fear of Infanticide* (Grove Press, 1978).

¹⁶ Dying Speeches & Bloody Murders: Crime Broadsides collected by The Harvard Law School Library, <http://broadsides.law.harvard.edu/> [Accessed 1 September 2016]; The John Johnson Collection: An Archive of Printed Ephemera, <http://johnjohnson.chadwyck.co.uk/marketing.do> [Accessed 13 September 2016].

¹⁷ The fact that these are fairly random survivals of printed ephemera (though some archival collections were collated by particular contemporaries) means that no firm conclusions can be drawn about why notably elaborate broadsides were made about any particular crime. Broadside scholars agree that most murders, as notorious and exciting events, received due notice from broadside printers. For nineteenth-century English crime and execution broadsides see: especially: Kate Bates, 'Empathy or Entertainment? The Form and Function of Violent Crime Narratives in Early-Nineteenth Century Broadsides,' *Law, Crime and History*, 4 (2014) 1-27; Philippe Chassaing, 'Popular representations of crime: the crime broadside – a subculture of violence in Victorian Britain?' *Crime, Histoire & Sociétés/Crime, History & Societies*, 3 (1999) 23-55; Crone, *Violent Victorians*; V.A.C. Gatrell, *The Hanging Tree: Execution and the English People* (Oxford University Press, 1994) esp. ch.5; Thomas Gretton, *Murders and Moralities: English Catchpenny Prints 1800-1860* (Colonnade, 1980); Jones, 'Fractured Narratives'. For general history of the broadside see: Robert Collison, *The Story of Street Literature: Forerunner of the Popular Press* (J. M. Dent & Sons, 1973); Victor E. Neuburg, *Popular Literature: A History and Guide* (Penguin, 1977); Leslie Shepard, *The History of Street Literature* (David & Charles, 1973); Martha Vicinus, *The Industrial Muse: A Study of Nineteenth Century British Working-Class Literature* (Croom Helm, 1974). Other key scholarship illuminating the longer history of this medium includes Sandra Clark, *Women and Crime in the Street Literature of Early Modern England* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Patricia Fumerton et al. (eds.) *Ballads and Broadsides in Britain, 1500-1800* (Ashgate, 2010). Joy Wiltenburg has enabled longer-term understanding to be placed in comparative cultural perspective: Joy Wiltenburg, *Crime and Culture in Early Modern Germany* (University of Virginia Press, 2012); Joy Wiltenburg, *Disorderly Women and Female Power in the Street Literature of Early Modern England and Germany* (University Press of

1855, most working-class people could not afford newspapers, and they were far more likely to purchase broadsides that were an important element in working-class culture. Searching the databases on the terms 'filicide' and 'infanticide' as crime types, 47 broadsides reporting relevant crimes were found (excluding records of gaol delivery which only report the bare details of the crimes). Of these, three are exact duplicates so 44 discrete documents were located. Of these, 20 include pictorial representations. Three include more than one illustration. Eight of the illustrated broadsides are very graphic, depicting the killing of the victim or victims and/or their corpses after death. One broadside, which does not include violent depiction, nevertheless contains three elaborate illustrations linked closely with the narrative in the broadside. One includes a portrait that may or may not have been an effort at realistic representation. While seven of the broadsides are illustrated with stock images of scaffolds, some of these have high production values, and some are clearly related to the executions described in the broadsides. Certainly, a few of the illustrations are mismatched with the narrative or only tangentially relevant, but the overall conclusions that can be drawn from this small sample are that many surviving broadsides about child killing are illustrated, a significant proportion of these contain graphic depictions of killing and/or corpses, and many broadside printers made a significant effort to ensure that illustrations were either especially commissioned for noteworthy crimes, or that stock images were chosen carefully in order to link sensibly with the text.¹⁸ Four of the six broadsides discussed in this paper were selected from these searches on 'filicide' and 'infanticide'. The broadsides related to a step-parent case were located by other means because these were not included in searches on these two key terms. This methodological issue does not detract from the overall conclusion that there were many depictions of violence against children on broadsides that demand analysis.

Children die at the hands of adults in all sorts of circumstances. Infants are totally helpless, and young children continue to rely on adult nurture – both physical and emotional – for many years. This vulnerability can lead to death by deliberate murderous assault, by the slow yet relentless accumulation of constant physical abuse, by neglect, and by abandonment. Children suffer criminal deaths at all ages. Historians often distinguish between newborn child murder and the deaths of all children older than newborn. This is

Virginia, 1992); Joy Wiltenburg, 'True Crime: The Origins of Modern Sensationalism,' *American Historical Review* 109 (2004) 1377-404.

¹⁸ Rosalind Crone (*Violent Victorians*, pp.107-10) notes similar developments in the first half of the nineteenth century: increasingly detailed woodcut imagery on many broadsides reporting violent crime, some of which clearly relates to the crimes depicted, some use of narrative imagery when more than one image is included, including some representations of the condemned prisoner in gaol, really graphic violence on some broadsides, and some use of portraits of both perpetrators and victims.

because in England between 1624 and 1803 there was a separate law covering newborn child killing, and a specialist field of medical jurisprudence continued to apply in trials for newborn child murder. There were also particular circumstances underlying newborn child killing that differentiated it from the deaths of older children – in particular, some (usually very young and unmarried) women sought to hide their pregnancies and births in order to avoid discovery of their illicit sexual activity.¹⁹ Furthermore, evidence suggests that in the nineteenth century, newborns, at least sometimes, were not actually valued as much as older infants.²⁰ Some of these different circumstances and different responses can be found in the contrast between the single broadside about newborn child killing that is analysed here together with those representing the killing of older children.

The fact that such complex broadsides as those analysed here were not the 'norm' does not invalidate their cultural value. As Martin Wiener notes, 'the cultural imagination of great crimes offers the historian rich texts for interpretation. Chief among such crimes has been murder ... intimate murders have not been simply private affairs but have allowed potent anxieties to be publicly "worked through" in press coverage and in court ... [offering a window] into influential developments in society and culture'.²¹ Selecting outstanding examples for analysis has a rich analytic pedigree.²² This article is microhistorical because in my view such studies are necessary before better clarifying 'a lively narrative of continuity and change' in affective life in Britain as it impacted all forms of violent family crime from the early modern to the modern world.²³

¹⁹ This point is covered in much of the historiography of infanticide noted later. For introduction see in particular Arnot, 'Gender in Focus'; Mark Jackson, *New-Born Child Murder: Women, illegitimacy and the courts in eighteenth-century England* (Manchester University Press, 1996); Anne-Marie Kilday, *A History of Infanticide in Britain c. 1600 to the Present* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

²⁰ Margaret L. Arnot, 'Understanding women committing new-born child murder in Victorian England,' in Shani D'Cruze (ed.) *Everyday Violence in Britain, 1850-1950: Gender and Class* (Longman, 2000) pp.55-69, pp.62-3.

²¹ Martin J. Wiener, 'Alice Arden to Bill Sikes: Changing Nightmares of Intimate Violence in England, 1558-1868,' *Journal of British Studies*, 40 (2001) 184-212, p.185.

²² Modern examples include Arnot, 'The murder of Thomas Sandles'; Richard Evans, *Tales from the German Underworld: Crime and Punishment in the Nineteenth Century* (Yale University Press, 1998); Gatrell, *The Hanging Tree* ch.17; Martin J. Wiener, 'The Sad Story of George Hall: Adultery, Murder and the Politics of Mercy in Mid-Victorian England,' *Social History*, 24 (1999) pp.174-95.

²³ Barbara Rosenwein has achieved such a narrative for the general history of emotions stretching across the boundary between the medieval and early modern: *Generations of Feeling: A History of Emotions, 600-1700* (Cambridge University Press, 2016). Rosenwein has also championed a microhistorical approach to unraveling the history of emotions. By highlighting the distinct lack of pacific behaviour and emotional control in homes hiding domestic violence together with the cultural representations of that violence, this article also contributes to her call for a more nuanced understanding of the dominant long durée 'civilization' thesis of Norbert Elias: Barbara Rosenwein, 'Worrying about Emotions in History,' *The American Historical Review*, 107 (2002) 821-45; Jan Plamper et al., 'The History of Emotions: An Interview with William Reddy, Barbara Rosenwein, and Peter Stearns,' *History and Theory*, 49 (2010) 237-65; pp.250-2; Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations* revised edn, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Blackwell

Analysing these broadside images matters for several reasons. Law was in the nineteenth century a field characterized by intense emotional contradiction, and still is. The combination of the images and the texts on these broadsides has particular emotional resonance, confronting us with the absolute centrality of emotions to the politics of criminal justice processes, and more specifically, to understandings of culpability for child killing. While law is often associated with a kind of distant, dry rationality, these sources explode a rich variety of emotions associated with law, in particular pity, compassion, shame and vengeance. Historians, philosophers and literary critics are critiquing the concept that law is an entirely rational domain, and debating the role of disgust, shame, remorse, revenge and vengeance, anger, empathy, compassion and forgiveness within the legal domain.²⁴ These developments rest on convincing philosophical arguments dismantling dualistic notions of the relationship between emotions and intellect.²⁵ The forensic examination of broadsides in this paper contributes incrementally to this scholarship, while also adding the very important dimension of the visual image. A team of legal scholars considers the 'emotional appeal' of images and their 'communicative power' to be fundamentally linked and related to the fact that 'the first perception of the image is a non-verbal one'.²⁶ Despite certain scholarly reticence to address images in legal circles, related to the myth of law's special rational

Publishing, 1991) [1939]. A number of criminal justice historians employ Elias to consider apparent reductions in violence in the nineteenth century. Relevant historical scholarship includes: Katherine D. Watson (ed.) *Assaulting the Past: Violence and Civilization in Historical Context* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007); Martin J. Wiener, *Men of Blood: Violence, Manliness and Criminal Justice in Victorian England* (Cambridge University Press, 2004); J. Carter Wood, *Violence and Crime in Nineteenth-century England* (Routledge, 2004); Pieter Spierenburg, *A History of Murder: Personal Violence in Europe from the Middle Ages to the Present* (Polity, 2008); and see especially the on-going debate in *Crime, Histoire, Sociétés/Crime, History, Societies*. The influence of Elias in understanding the history of violence has been popularized by Stephen Pinker: *The Better Angels of Our Nature: A History of Violence and Humanity* (Penguin, 2012).

²⁴ Susan Bandes (ed.) *The Passions of Law* (New York University Press, 1999); Nancy E. Johnson, *Impassioned Jurisprudence: Law, Literature and Emotion, 1760-1848* (Bucknell University Press, 2015); David Nash et al., *Cultures of Shame: Exploring Crime and Morality in Britain 1600-1900* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Martha C. Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness: Resentment, Generosity, Justice* (Oxford University Press, 2016); Martha C. Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame and the Law* new edn (Princeton University Press, 2015). Recent general historiography on emotions highlights the significance of understanding how pity, compassion and shame were constructed and understood historically: Ute Frevert, 'The History of Emotions,' in Lisa Feldman Barrett et al. (eds.) *Handbook of Emotions* 4th edn (The Guildford Press, 2016) ch.2. Historical scholarship on infanticide has developed detailed understanding of the centrality of shame to this crime and its understanding, which will be considered later.

²⁵ Martha C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge University Press, 2001); Robert C. Solomon, *Not Passion's Slave: Emotions and Choice* (Oxford University Press, 2003); Robert C. Solomon (ed.) *Thinking About Feeling: Contemporary Philosophers on Emotions* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

²⁶ Christina O. Spiesel et al., 'Law in the Age of Images: The Challenge of Visual Literacy,' in Anne Wagner et al. (eds.) *Contemporary Issues of the Semiotics of Law: Cultural and Symbolic Analyses of Law in a Global Context* (Hart, 2005) pp.231-55, pp.237,247.

status and the association of the visual image with the non-rational,²⁷ the theoretical perspective of Christina Spiesel and her colleagues is gaining considerable sway, and a steady trickle of historical scholarship in diverse fields addresses the power and influence of images concerned with crime and law.²⁸ The images analysed in this essay draw us immediately to the heart of the powerful emotional element in understandings of parent responsibility for infant and child homicide, linking the domains of intellect and emotion, and popular and legal culture.

As emotions and images are at the centre of this analysis, the remainder of this introduction considers these in more detail. The first issue to address is 'the vexed question of what, exactly, emotions are', and how they work.²⁹ What is certain now is that biological determinists are simply not correct: emotions have many histories. At the historical moment studied, Wordsworth noted the enormous importance of words themselves, "not only as symbols ... of passion, but as *things*, active and efficient, which are of themselves part of the passion."³⁰ Scholars of the history of emotions continue to stress the great significance of different and changing emotional lexicons in understanding this history and the in-depth analysis of language undertaken here acknowledges this importance.³¹ But there is more to

²⁷ Costas Douzinas and Lynda Nead have explained this succinctly: 'Art is assigned to imagination, creativity, and playfulness, law to control, discipline, and sobriety'. Costas Douzinas et al., 'Introduction,' in Costas Douzinas et al. (eds.) *Law and the Image: The Authority of Art and the Aesthetics of Law* (The University of Chicago Press, 1999) p.3.

²⁸ Examples in different fields include: Freedberg, *The Power of Images*; Gatrell, *The Hanging Tree*, ch.5; Linda C. Hulst, *The Witch as Muse: Art, Gender, and Power in Early Modern Europe* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); Mitchell B. Merback, *The Thief, the Cross and the Wheel: Pain and the Spectacle of Punishment in Medieval and Renaissance Europe* (Reaktion Books, 1999); Leslie Moran, 'The Judicial Image, Photography and Celebrity Culture in the Nineteenth Century,' unpublished conference paper, 'A Time of Judgement' conference, Plymouth, 24 June 2016; Craig Newbury-Jones, 'Judges as Moral Arbiters in the Popular Illustrated Press,' unpublished conference paper, 'A Time of Judgement' conference, Plymouth, 23 June 2016; Diana Bullen Presciutti, 'Domesticating Cannibalism: Visual Rhetorics of Madness and Maternal Infanticide in Fifteenth-Century Italy,' *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 45 (2015) 159-195; Cath Quinn, 'Images and impulses: representations of puerperal insanity and infanticide in late Victorian Britain,' in Jackson (ed.) *Infanticide* pp.193-215. Contemporary legal critique of the power of images dissects the use of still and video photographic evidence in court, and the implications of live broadcasting of legal proceedings. See for example the work of Glenn Porter, 'Zak Coronial Inquest and the Interpretation of Photographic Evidence,' *Current Issues in Criminal Justice*, 24 (2012) 39-49; Glenn Porter and Michael Kennedy, 'Photographic truth and evidence,' *Australian Journal of Forensic Sciences*, 44 (2012) 183-92; and Neal Feigenson et al., *Law on Display: The Digital Transformation of Legal Persuasion and Judgment* (New York University Press, 2009).

²⁹ William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge University Press, 2001) p.ix.

³⁰ William Wordsworth, 'Note' to 'The Thorn,' R. L. Brett et al. (eds.) *Lyrical Ballads* (Routledge, 1988) p.289 as cited in Adela Pinch, 'Emotion and History: A Review Article,' *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 37 (1995) 11-9, p.109.

³¹ Ute Frevert et al., *Emotional Lexicons: Continuity and Change in the Vocabulary of Feeling 1700-2000* (Oxford University Press, 2014); Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Cornell University Press, 2006); Thomas Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category* (Cambridge University Press, 2003).

it than language and emotions are not only social and cultural constructs: they are human experiences that 'interact in a dynamic way' with emotional expression (in words, facial expressions and bodily gestures, dance, art, music and many other ways besides).³² Central to understanding the power of broadsides is the psychological observation, taken up by historian William Reddy in developing his theory of emotions, that "[t]here is ... some clear evidence that choosing to express an emotion or to cognitively rehearse it may intensify or even create the actual experience of that emotion."³³

The cognitive rehearsal of emotions was stimulated powerfully by the multi-media quality of the broadsides, which in turn ensured the very real experience of emotions amongst the broadside consumers. The most complex crime and execution broadsides contained many sections – a verse, prose accounts, perhaps a confession, perhaps a letter from the prison cell, and one or more images. As Miriam Jones notes, 'it is possible to read the seemingly careless heterogeneity of broadsides as eloquent in their own terms; indeed, to think otherwise is to assume that broadside printers were illiterate or amateurish, and they were neither'.³⁴ Broadside were usually sold by patterers, who spoke or shouted words from the broadsides in the streets to attract buyers, or chaunters who actually sang the ballads in the streets for the same reason. After purchase the sheets were read aloud, and gatherings of people at times either sang or chanted the verses printed on the broadsides. Anthropologists, literary critics, musicologists, art critics and historians have noted the emotional resonance of multiple forms of non-verbal communication such as poetry, music, art and drama.³⁵ We have already noted the significance for emotional response of both words and images, but the presence also of verse and song is likely to have heightened affect. As 'audio-visual-textual' media, broadsides were the 'multi-media' of nineteenth century culture and modern scholarship on the powerful interaction between film and emotion is surely relevant when considering the relationship between affect and expression in the nineteenth century broadside.³⁶

³² William Reddy provides thorough background to the divide between scientific research premised on alleged biological givens and anthropological research that focuses entirely on cultural construction, and the quotation here comes from his effort to develop a theory beyond the dualistic impasse: William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling*, quotation from p.xii.

³³ Margaret S. Clark, 'Historical Emotionology: From a Social Psychologist's Perspective,' in Andrew E. Barnes et al. (eds.) *History and Issues in Human Consciousness: Some Interdisciplinary Connections* (New York University Press, 1989) pp.262-9,p.266 as cited in Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling* p.xii.

³⁴ Jones, 'Fractured Narratives,' p.119.

³⁵ Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling*.

³⁶ Carl R. Plantinga, *Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator's Experience* (University of California Press, 2009); Deidre E. Pribram, *Emotion, genre, and justice in film and television* (Routledge, 2010); Belinda Smail, *The Documentary: Politics, Emotion, Culture* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

I expect many of these broadsides did actually get wet. Thomas Dixon's work on the history of tears in Britain provides important context for this essay, and it certainly demonstrates tearful times extending through the period studied here.³⁷ Overall though, Dixon's work focuses primarily on the personal accounts of well-known figures, together with 'more reflective writings, whether in the form of literature, philosophy, science, or journalism', revealing ideas about weeping.³⁸ By documenting the rivers of tears running through the crime and execution broadsides studied, this article corroborates and deepens Dixon's insight that tears were a crucial element in nineteenth century justice, tied closely to experiences of mercy and pity. These emotions remained tied to urgent questions about the fate of the soul of the accused for the working-class consumers of broadsides as much as for educated, elite characters such as Mr Justice Willes.³⁹ These publicly experienced popular cultural sources suggest that the tearful courtroom he describes for the Road Murder case was not bounded by the walls of the court house, but extended not only into the homes of newspaper readers, but also into the public houses, the streets, humble dwellings and lodging houses where broadside consumers lived and played.⁴⁰

This work contributes to the history of emotions in another important way. Much work to date delves into specific emotions, such as love, anger and fear, yet most scholarship on revenge focuses on the ancient, medieval and early modern worlds: revenge in modern Britain requires much more consideration.⁴¹ Revenge is vital in consideration of these broadsides in

³⁷ Thomas Dixon, *Weeping Britannia: Portrait of a Nation in Tears* (Oxford University Press, 2015); Thomas Dixon, 'The Tears of Mr Justice Willes,' *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 17 (2012) 1-23.

³⁸ Dixon, *Weeping Britannia*, p.9.

³⁹ Dixon discusses Willes's weeping and eventual suicide within complex cultural contexts, including continuing religious discourse about weeping, but does not extend the analysis of tears, justice and pity to wider culture: Dixon, 'The Tears of Mr Justice Willes,' pp.16-23. The religious context is also discussed in Dixon, *Weeping Britannia* pp.69-80.

⁴⁰ Dixon, 'The Tears of Mr Justice Willes,' pp.8-10; Dixon, *Weeping Britannia* pp.177-9. On tears in court see also Wiener, *Men of Blood* pp.137, 202, 219, 225, 242, 251.

⁴¹ The focus in this note is on the history of emotions more likely to be linked to violent crime and criminal justice. Terry K. Aladjem, *The Culture of Vengeance and the Fate of American Justice* (Cambridge University Press, 2008); Joanna Bourke, *Fear: A Cultural History* (Virago, 2005); Peter Gay, *The Cultivation of Hatred: The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud* (W. W. Norton, 1993); Timothy Gorrige, *God's Just Vengeance: Crime, violence and the rhetoric of salvation* (Cambridge University Press, 1996); David Konstan, *Pity Transformed* (Duckworth, 2001); Michael Laffan and Max Weiss, *Facing Fear: The History of an Emotion in Global Perspective* (Princeton University Press, 2012); Fiona Mchardy, *Revenge in Athenian Culture* (Duckworth, 2008); William Ian Miller, *Humiliation: And Other Essays on Honour, Social Discomfort and Violence* (Cornell University Press, 2000); William Ian Miller, *An Eye for an Eye* (Cambridge University Press, 2006); Nash et al., *Cultures of Shame*; Barbara H. Rosenwein (ed.) *Anger's Past: The Social uses of an Emotion in the Middle Ages* (Cornell University Press, 1993); Thomas J. Scheff et al., *Emotions and Violence: Shame and Rage in Destructive Conflicts* (Lexington, 1991); Carol Zisowitz Stearns et al., *Anger: The Struggle for Emotional Control in America's History* (University of Chicago Press, 1986); Peter N. Stearns, *American Fear: The Causes and Consequences of High Anxiety* (Routledge, 2006); Peter N. Stearns,

two respects. First, violent crime motivated by revenge features here, and consideration of responses to such crimes needs more nuance than is yet achieved in historiography on nineteenth century violence. And second, the broadsides feature a striking, constant tug of war between harsh judgement or vengeance, and pity or mercy. Legitimation of the criminal justice system itself depended on popular understanding that the scales of justice were appropriately balanced between vengeance and mercy and these broadsides illustrate complex negotiation of that balance when considering different crimes of violence against children.⁴²

My determination to understand the images contrasts markedly with the work of most other scholars who have studied crime and execution broadsides from this period. Overall, these popular cultural sources have not received enough attention from British historians, and those who have studied them, have tended to favour textual analysis over the illustrations, or noted them only in passing.⁴³ The notable exceptions here are Thomas Gretton, V. A. C. Gatrell, and Rosalind Crone.⁴⁴ Gretton highlights technological developments in engraving techniques and print technology that enabled more detailed broadside imagery to be printed especially from the 1820s.⁴⁵ His most important interpretive point, taken up at depth in this

Jealousy: The Evolution of an Emotion in American History (New York University Press, 1989); Strange et al. (eds.) *Honour, Violence and Emotions in History* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2014); Richard Ashby Wilson (ed.) *Humanitarianism and Suffering: The Mobilization of Empathy* (Cambridge University Press, 2011).

⁴² Timothy Gorrige highlights how vengeance was a critical component of ideas about the right functioning of the criminal justice system during the nineteenth century: *God's Just Vengeance* esp. ch.8. The 'new retributivism' justifies the role of revenge in modern criminal justice: see for example Charles K. B. Barton, *Getting Even: Revenge as a Form of Justice* (Open Court, 1999). Extra-legal 'vigilantism' today is actually the modern manifestation of community surveillance and policing that pre-dated formal legal systems as key elements in modern states, and lived on alongside them throughout the period covered by this study. See for example Conley, *The Unwritten Law* ch.1; E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common* (Merlin, 1991). For an interesting suggestion requiring more research, that very low conviction rates for child killing in Carmarthenshire could be explained by juries being satisfied with the 'justice' dealt by community moral policing, see R. W. Ireland, "'Perhaps my Mother Murdered Me": Child Death and the Law in Victorian Carmarthenshire,' in Christopher Brooks et al. (eds.) *Communities and Courts in Britain 1150-1900* (Hambledon, 1997) pp.229-44. There is no integrated analysis for the nineteenth century of responses to revenge-motivated homicide and the retributivist element in the criminal justice system itself.

⁴³ For example: Kate Bates refers to pictures on broadsides as 'decorative illustration' and avoids their analysis claiming, wrongly, that 'much emphasis has been given to woodcut illustrations of broadsides': 'Empathy or Entertainment?' p.6; Ellen O'Brien extracts the ballads alone and writes about 'the poetics of murder' in her *Crime in Verse*. See also: Richard D. Altick, *Victorian Studies in Scarlet* (W. W. Norton, 1970); Chassaigne, 'Popular representations of crime'; Clark, *Women and Crime*; Judith Flanders, *The Invention of Murder: How the Victorians Revelled in Death and Detection and Created Modern Crime* (HarperPress, 2011); Fumerton et al. (eds.) *Ballads and Broadsides*, chs. by Simone Chess, Frances E. Dolan, Thomas Pettitt and Joy Wiltenburg; Jones, 'Fractured Narratives'; Kalikoff, *Murder and Moral Decay*; Walsh, *Domestic Murder*; Joy Wiltenburg, *Disorderly Women*.

⁴⁴ Crone, *Violent Victorians*; Gatrell, *The Hanging Tree* esp. ch.5; Gretton, *Murders and Moralities*.

⁴⁵ Gretton, *Murders and Moralities* pp.14-5. See the wider literature on popular printed images in this period for further detail and implications: Patricia Anderson, *The Printed Image and the*

article, is that the 'crucial task' of the broadside images was 'the triggering of associations and the arousal of emotions', though he fails to analyse how this actually operated in particular broadsides.⁴⁶

In *The Hanging Tree* (1994) V.A.C. Gatrell made a notable contribution to thinking about at least some of these illustrations. His consideration of the emblem of the scaffold on broadsides and in popular prints is cited widely by scholars.⁴⁷ Gatrell recognizes the 'symbolic charge' of woodcut illustrations of the scaffold. They 'connected their perusers with the psychic energy of the execution. They ... offered the crowd its only visual mirroring of itself as well as of the scaffold's emblematic power';⁴⁸ and again: 'however rough, [the image] might stand for the sensations which the executions released'.⁴⁹ Gatrell agrees with Gretton that these broadside images of the scaffold had a powerful emotional appeal: but he goes further by suggesting that broadside buyers wanted to capture emotional memory through possession of the material object.⁵⁰ Yet after his powerful writing about scaffold imagery, by implication, Gatrell wrongly dismisses the significance of other images when he repeats the common view that '[w]oodcuts ... were appropriated without regard to local topography or credibility'.⁵¹

More recently, Rosalind Crone has taken a detailed and serious look at other elements of illustration on broadsides.⁵² She is persuasive about the links between the broadside imagery and a wider popular culture of violence, but fails to analyse the emotional work of

Transformation of Popular Culture 1790-1860 (Clarendon, 1994); Gerry Beegan, *The Mass Image: A Social History of Photomechanical Reproduction in Victorian London* (Macmillan, 2008); William Ivins, *Prints and Visual Communication* (M. I. T. Press, 1969 [1953]); Louis James, *Print and the People 1819-1851* (Allen Lane, 1976); B. E. Maidment, *Reading Popular Prints 1790-1870* 2nd edn (Manchester University Press, 2001); B. E. Maidment, *Dusty Bob: A Cultural History of Dustmen, 1780-1870* (Manchester University Press, 2007); A. Hyatt Mayor, *Prints and People: a social history of printed pictures* (Princeton University Press, 1980 [1971]).

⁴⁶ Gretton, *Murders and Moralities* p.20.

⁴⁷ Gatrell, *The Hanging Tree* pp.156-96.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p.157.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p.177.

⁵⁰ Crone provides fascinating detail about murder souvenirs such as those manufactured in the Staffordshire potteries: *Violent Victorians* pp.92-96. Radojka Startup has detailed the souvenir hunting that followed the notorious discovery of the murder of Maria Marten in the Red Barn Murder in 1827: 'Damaging Females: Representations of women as victims and perpetrators of crime in the mid-nineteenth century,' unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 2000. More recently, Ricardo Vidal has analysed a modern parallel, the purchase of art made by serial killers, suggesting that for modern consumers the close yet safe encounter with the criminal 'constitutes a way of taking control over the unfathomable, the violence of murder and ultimately the violence of death itself': Ricardo Vidal, 'The Power of Negative Creation: Why Art by Serial Killers Sells,' in Maria-José Blanco et al. (eds.) *The Power of Death: Contemporary Reflections on Death in Western Society* (Berghahn, 2015) pp.115-25, pp.123-4.

⁵¹ Gatrell, *The Hanging Tree* p.158.

⁵² Our agreement on the general trajectory of the development of broadside imagery on broadsides representing violent crime was noted earlier.

the images within any particular examples. In this analysis then I deepen and extend the insights of previous scholars of crime and execution broadside imagery, taking into account the other modes of expression on the broadsides. A key problem for some historians who avoid using broadsides is the vexed question of 'truth'. Broadside were by their nature often a mixture of fact and fiction, and in some cases, a broadside could be entirely fabricated, called a 'cock' at the time. Common fictional elements on execution sheets related to real crimes were speeches of the condemned from the scaffold, and details of the execution itself. After all, for the main sales opportunity of the public execution event itself to be exploited, the story had to be printed in advance!⁵³ My view is that there is no rationale for excluding 'cocks' from analysis of broadside discourse about crimes against children. For all broadsides the boundary between fact and fiction was fluid and producers and consumers knew this. And as Natalie Zemon Davis, Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero have pointed out, even official legal documents 'have a large fictional component ... directed toward pleasing a certain audience'.⁵⁴ They are all sources of value to the historian, communicating cultural meanings of their subjects, and this analysis includes two broadsides that were probably 'cocks'. Joy Wiltenburg would concur, considering 'the essence of these accounts lay less in factual accuracy than in emotional impact'.⁵⁵

The hesitancy of many scholars to consider broadside images at depth may arise in part from lack of clarity about how to analyse the relationship between words and images. Recent scholarship exploring visuality in nineteenth century Britain contains important clues as to how we might proceed. As Kate Flint and others have argued, '[t]he Victorians were fascinated with the act of seeing',⁵⁶ and this research indicates that this included fascination with seeing infant corpses. The following extraordinary passage from the first medical treatise about infanticide at the beginning of a cultural panic about infanticide in the 1860s demonstrates in textual form the desire to tame the spectral infant corpse through vision, at the same time constituting this spectre in powerful, melodramatic and imaginative detail:

⁵³ Henry Mayhew cites a broadside seller on the judicious inclusion of fiction in broadsides: "'If the *Times* was cross-examined about it ... he must confess he's outdone, though he's a rich *Times*, and we is poor fellows'": Henry Mayhew, 'Street-Sellers of Stationery, Literature, and the Fine Arts,' in Mayhew, *London Labour and London Poor: The Condition and Earnings of Those That Will Work, Cannot Work, And Will Not Work. Vol. 1. London Street-Folk* (Charles Griffin and Co., 1861) pp.227-350, p.245.

⁵⁴ Quote from Edward Muir et al., 'Afterword,' in Muir et al. (eds.) *History from Crime* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994) p.235. See also Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Stanford University Press, 1987).

⁵⁵ Joy Wiltenburg, 'True Crime', p.1393.

⁵⁶ Kate Flint, *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination* (Cambridge University Press, 2002) p.1; Carol T. Christ et al., *Victorian Literature and the Victorian Visual Imagination* (University of California Press, 1995).

... the feeble wail of murdered childhood in its agony assails our ears at every turn, and is borne on every breeze. The sight is horrified as, day after day, the melancholy catalogue of murders meets the view and we try to turn away the gaze in the hope of some momentary relief. But turn where we may, still we are met by the evidences of a widespread crime. In the quiet of the bedroom we raise the boxlid, and the skeletons are there. In the calm evening walk we see in the distance the suspicious-looking bundle, and the mangled infant is within. By the canal side, or in the water, we find the dead child. In the solitude of the wood we are horrified by the ghastly sight; and if we betake ourselves to the rapid rail in order to escape the pollution, we find at our journey's end that the mouldering remains of a murdered innocent have been our travelling companion; and that the odour from that unsuspected parcel too truly indicates what may be found within.⁵⁷

Through a 'frenzy of the visible' this passage highlights its opposite: deep-seated anxiety about the invisibility of newborn child murder, together with passionate desire to achieve knowledge through vision.⁵⁸ This passage also illustrates the porous and shifting boundaries between visuality and textuality that has been explored by a number of scholars both theoretically and in the specific context of nineteenth century culture. All agree on the necessity to employ 'mechanisms of visual and [textual] interpretation, in order to show how the interaction between pictures and words produces meanings'.⁵⁹ If we add the 'verbal' or 'aural' element of broadsides into the picture, we can imagine how the readers, viewers, listeners and singers of broadsides contributed to the constitution of meanings and values

⁵⁷ William Burke Ryan, *Infanticide: Its Law, Prevalence, Prevention, and History* (J. Churchill, 1862) pp.45-46. Josephine McDonagh's work (*Child Murder*) alerted me to the sense of the spectral infant corpse of this period.

⁵⁸ Quotation from Jean-Louis Comolli, 'Machines of the Visible,' in Teresa de Lauretis and Stephen Heath (eds.) *The Cinematic Apparatus* (Macmillan, 1980) pp.122-3, as cited in Flint, *The Victorians* p.3. On the strong metaphoric association between vision and knowledge in Western epistemology see: Evelyn Fox Keller et al., 'The Mind's Eye,' in Sandra Harding et al. (eds.) *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science* (Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2004) pp.207-24.

⁵⁹ Julia Thomas, *Pictorial Victorians: The Inscription of Values in Word and Image* (Ohio University Press, 2004) p.8. Other books that have influenced my consideration of the relationship between word and image include: Catherine J. Golden (ed.) *Book Illustrated: Text, Image, and Culture, 1770-1930* (Oak Knoll, 2000); Lorraine Janzen Kooistra, *The Artist as Critic: Bitextuality in Fin-de-Siècle Illustrated Books* (Scolar, 1995); Maidment, *Reading Popular Prints*; Richard Maxwell (ed.) *The Victorian Illustrated Book* (University Press of Virginia, 2002); Martin Miesel, *Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial, and the Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth-Century England* (Princeton University Press, 1983); J. Hillis Miller, *Illustration* (Reaktion, 1992); Rosemary Mitchell, *Picturing the Past: English History in Text and Image, 1830-1870* (Clarendon, 2000). And more specifically on the illustrated press, see: Celina Fox, *Graphic Journalism in England During the 1830s and 1840s* (Garland, 1988); Christopher Hibbert, *The Illustrated London News: Social History of Victorian Britain* (Angus and Robertson, 1975); Mason Jackson, *The Pictorial Press: Its Origins and Progress* (Hurst and Blackett, 1885); Andrea Korda, *Printing and Painting the News in Victorian London* (Ashgate, 2015); Peter W. Sinnema, *Dynamics of the Pictured Page: Representing Nation in the "Illustrated London News"* (Ashgate, 1998); C. N. Williamson, 'Illustrated Journalism in England: Its Rise,' *The Magazine of Art* (January 1889) 104-8, 141-4, 173-6; C. N. Williamson, 'Illustrated Journalism in England: Its Development,' *The Magazine of Art* (January 1890) 297-310, 334-40, 391-6.

gleaned from the rich interplay of image, text, verse and music within the context of common cultural and social norms of the time.⁶⁰

Those accused of the homicide of infants and young children in the nineteenth century fall into a few clear categories defined by their relationship to the children, with important consequences for responses to these alleged crimes. Categories related to parental killings form the structure of the paper: first, a maternal killing of a toddler where the mother was variously represented as monstrous and mad; next, a killing of two young children by a step mother, where vengeful motivation resulted in no mercy; third, a newborn child murder by a very young unmarried woman; fourth a murder/suicide perpetrated by the father; and finally a child killing by a father and his second wife, step mother to the deceased child. The conclusions of this article suggest that the cultural representations of homicides of children found in these broadsides contributed in important ways to understandings of culpability for the killings of infants and young children. Rather than simply illustrating the texts on the broadsides, the visual images amplified the emotional resonance of this medium, arguably increasing its effectiveness. It seems clear that it was not only the crimes against the children *per se* that garnered emotional responses, but also the alleged perpetrators of the crimes. The identity of the accused, the nature of their intimate relationships with other adults who potentially played roles in the child's death, and the motivation for their violence, including emotional motivation, all were integral to cultural understandings of culpability. In the hands of anonymous, plebeian ballad writers, copy writers, engravers and printers, these dramatic narratives of child killing and the fates of those accused expressed many things that resonated with wider discourse: deep seams of gender hostility, with men sometimes being blamed for women's killings, and women for men's; deep anxieties about the vulnerability of child life in the face of both female and male monstrosity; anxieties about the possibility of madness instigating appalling deeds; rich moral and religious messages about crime and redemption; and strong and complex links between popular cultural understanding and experience and formal legal proceedings.

1 Monstrous and Mad Mothers

While much scholarship about infant murder in the nineteenth century focuses on the 'humanitarian narrative' about poor, seduced and ashamed maidens and their 'lenient' legal treatment for allegedly killing their unwanted infants, particularly newborns (more of that later), there is also a figure of monstrous maternity that haunts nineteenth century representations. Indeed, the parallel discourses of shamed innocence (a particularly young

⁶⁰ Unfortunately it is not possible to analyse the musical element of the broadsides in this article because I do not know the tunes used, or if indeed the verses were sung rather than spoken.

woman as 'good', passive victim) and monstrosity (a woman who is 'bad' and actively murderous) can be seen as cultural projections of a primal psychic split between the internalized 'good' and 'bad' mother, posited by Melanie Klein.⁶¹ Certainly, the monstrous mother has been a subject for contemplation in myth, literature, theatre, and fairy-tale since ancient times, and was an important component in the cultural fantasy of witchcraft. Furthermore, modern media critics have considered the persistence of monstrosity in representations of women committing violent crimes against children to the present day, including the ways in which the 'dichotomy between "good" and "bad" women ... serves as a means of patrolling, controlling and reinforcing the boundaries of behaviour considered "appropriate" for all women'.⁶² Then and now, child killing is intricately tied up with deep emotional elements in life: love between couples who are the parents of the child; love for infants and children; threats to life from vulnerability; maintaining the social fabric through reproducing the species; harmony of home; reputation of the family; and sacredness of the mother/infant bond. A woman who kills a child in her care both betrays her bond with the child, her social responsibility, and her covenant with nature, or God, or both, to nurture her child. She has transgressed way beyond the pale and as such is contemptible. Yet in the eyes of some juries and commentators, and since Infanticide legislation in England and Wales of 1922 and 1938, in the eyes of the law, many women who kill newborns or small infants are also victims: young, seduced and abandoned, at the mercy of their bodies and

⁶¹ This split and its complex manifestations is central to Melanie Klein's psychoanalytic theory. See for example some of her earlier work for the initial development of the notion: *Love, Guilt and Reparation and other works 1921-1945* (Vintage, 1988). Other scholars have suggested in different ways that the cultural construction of monstrosity in female criminals has its roots in deep psychological structures: Yvonne Jewkes, *Media and Crime* 2nd edn (Sage, 2011); Rosalind Minsky, *Psychoanalysis and Culture: Contemporary States of Mind* (Polity, 1998).

⁶² Allison Morris et al., 'Rocking the cradle: Mothers who kill their children,' in Helen Birch (ed.) *Moving Targets: Women, Murder and Representation* (Virago, 1993) pp.198-217, p.217. More research is needed on the continuities and changes in the visual representation of monstrous mothers. On the widespread representation of monstrous mothers see: Helen Birch, 'If looks could kill: Myra Hindley and the iconography of evil,' in Birch (ed.) *Moving Targets* pp.32-61; Tony Bowers, "'I wou'd Not Murder my Child": Maternity and the Necessity of Infanticide in Two Novels by Daniel Defoe,' in Thorn (ed.) *Writing British Infanticide* pp.172-95; Lillian Corti, *The Myth of Medea and the Murder of Children* (Greenwood Press, 1998); Marilyn Francus, *Monstrous Motherhood: 18th-Century Culture and the Ideology of Domesticity* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012); Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, *The Complete First Edition. The Original Folk and Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, trans. and ed. Jack Zipes (Princeton University Press, 2014 [First published in German 1812 and 1815]): see for example 'Hansel and Gretel,' pp.43-8; 'The Juniper Tree,' pp.148-57; 'Little Snow White,' pp.170-7; Edith Hall et al. (eds.) *Medea in Performance 1500-2000* (Legenda, 2000); Jewkes, *Media and Crime*, ch.5; Barbara Kellum, 'Infanticide in England in the Later Middle Ages,' *History of Childhood Quarterly: The Journal of Psychohistory*, 1 (1974) pp.367-88; Anne-Marie Kilday, 'Maternal Monsters: Murdering Mothers in South-West Scotland, 1750-1815,' in Yvonne Galloway Brown et al. (eds.) *Twisted Sisters: Women, Crime and Deviance in Scotland Since 1400* (Tuckwell, 2002) pp.156-77; Lyndal Roper, *Witch Craze: Terror and Fantasy in Baroque Germany* (Yale University Press, 2004); Marina Warner, *Managing monsters: six myths of our time* (Vintage, 1994) ch.1; Briar Wood, 'The trials of motherhood: the case of Azaria and Lindy Chamberlain,' in Birch (ed.) *Moving Targets* pp.62-94.

their weak minds, and economically vulnerable.⁶³ While a terrible example to other women, in many cases such women are seen to deserve pity, and sometimes to deserve legal exoneration or mitigation on the grounds of mental illness. While Cathryn Wilson suggests that ‘the boundary between “sad” and “mad” was not always clearly defined in cases concerning murder of a child, indeed, sympathy for female defendants was often a result of these boundaries being merged’, I would suggest that even cases such as that represented in the broadside discussed next, perpetrated by women who initially seem incontrovertibly “bad”, could be complicated by blurred boundaries.⁶⁴ This bundle of contradictions was based on deep-seated fears, fears of the social fabric breaking down, fears of women’s sexuality, fears of strong women, fears of murderous mothers: what strength and fortitude a woman must have to kill her child! The culpable, monstrous mother manifested in representations across the nineteenth century in three main ways: the cruel mother; the heartless stepmother; and the baby farmer, although for the purposes of this paper about parental child homicide I focus on two cases representing the first two types of monstrosity.⁶⁵

We are told in the broadside in **Fig. 1** below, referring to an 1828 Somerset case, that Sara Mitchel, wife of a labourer, was imprisoned and awaiting her trial for theft in Shepton-Mallet Bridewell.⁶⁶ She was permitted to take her seven-month-old infant into prison with her, as

⁶³ Infanticide Act 1922 12 & 13 Geo. V, c. 18; Infanticide Act 1938 1 & 2 Geo. VI, c. 36. Regarding the passage of the 1922 Act, see Daniel J.R. Grey, ‘Women’s policy networks and the Infanticide Act 1922’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 21 (2010) 441-463.

⁶⁴ Wilson, ‘Mad, Sad, or Bad?’ p.30.

⁶⁵ On the monstrosity of baby farmers and the disappearance of this figure from the pantheon of monstrous mothers, see: Margaret L. Arnot, ‘Infant death, child care and the state: the baby-farming scandal and the first infant life protection legislation of 1872,’ *Continuity and Change*, 9 (1994) 271-311; Daniel J. R. Grey, ‘“More Ignorant and Stupid than Wilfully Cruel”: Homicide Trials and “Baby-Farming” in England and Wales in the Wake of the Children Act 1908,’ *Crimes and Misdemeanours*, 3 (2009) 60-77; Ruth Ellen Homrighaus, ‘Wolves in Women’s Clothing: Baby-Farming and the British Medical Journal, 1860-1872,’ *Journal of Family History*, 26 (2001) 350-72; Ruth Ellen Homrighaus, ‘Baby Farming: The Care of Illegitimate Children in England, 1860-1943,’ unpublished PhD thesis, University of North Carolina, 2003.

⁶⁶ ‘Particulars of a mother murdering her infant child by dashing out its brains and her confession of killing another child in the same manner’ (T. Birt, Printer, Seven Dials, n.d. [dated on John Johnson website c. 1824-1841; My dating from record linkage about the case: 1828]) Bodleian Library, University of Oxford: John Johnson Collection: Broad sides: Murder and Execution folder 7(9). Online, durable URL: http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&res_dat=xri:johnson:&ft_dat=xri:johnson:rec:20080811120525kg [Accessed 19 October 2015]. Image published with permission of ProQuest and Bodleian Library. Further reproduction is prohibited without permission. Image produced by ProQuest as part of the *John Johnson Collection* www.proquest.com. Note: in quoting from broadsides I retain the original spelling and I avoid the use of [sic]. The indictment lists her husband’s occupation in a ‘mason’, a higher status trade: The National Archives (TNA) ASSI 25/20/21, No. 11, ‘An Inquest taken at Shepton Gaol the 17th of May 1828 on Joseph Mitchell’ Assizes: Western Circuit: Indictment Files. FELONIES. Som. Her name in the indictment and various newspaper reports is spelt Sarah Mitchell, but I retain the spelling on the broadside in this discussion. All archival documents referenced in this article are held by TNA.

was common practice.⁶⁷ The rough yet powerful image depicts her in the very moment she seizes her child to kill it. Its dynamism provides the image with a dramatic and horrific narrative: the next moment will see the infant's head smashed against the bedstead.

PARTICULARS OF A MOTHER
Murdering her Infant Child
BY DASHING OUT ITS BRAINS, AND HER
CONFESSION of Killing another Child!
IN THE SAME MANNER.

Printed by T. BIRT, 10, Great St. Andrew Street,
(Photocopy and read),
Seven Dials, London.



Country orders punctually attended to.
Songs and Ballads, in great variety, wholesale and retail.

VERSE.

O LISTEN to the horrid tale,
And shed the pining tear,
How Sarah Mitchel did of late,
Destroy her infant dear!
A Labourer's Wife—she might have toil'd,
To earn her daily bread,
But slighting honest means, she now
Awaits a judgment dread.

For stealing plate, she stood accused,
And Justice did prevail,
And with her infant, seven months old,
Was safely lodg'd in jail.
And it was thought a Mother's love
Would much that favour prize,
To have her darling infant still
To glad a Mother's eyes!

But O! how shocking to relate,
A woeful tale to tell,
When with her Infant, close confin'd
Within the lonely cell—
It's gentle smiles—its little hands—
Could not her pity move—
And in one cruel moment, she
Forgot a Mother's love.

Against a bedstead standing near,
She dash'd her Infant's brains,
And stood with cruel heart unmov'd,
To view its dying pains.
A Thief before—no mercy now
Could look with pity mild,
Since to her crime no added charge,
The Murder of her Child!

The Coroner his Verdict gave,
Of "Wilful Murder" soon,
And now the guilty wretch awaits
The dreadful day of doom,
And yet more horrid to unfold,
Of guilt a secret store,
She has confess'd that she had kill'd,
An Infant once before.

What must this wretched woman feel,
What pity can she crave,
Whose bloody hands have rashly sent,
Two Infants to the grave!
Ye Mothers dear, that Children have,
And can their crime controul,
Weep for those helpless babes, and pray
For the sad Mother's soul!

Figure 1: Mitchell Broadside

⁶⁷ Lucia Zedner, 'Wayward Sisters: The Prison for Women,' in Norval Morris et al. (eds.) *The Oxford History of the Prison: The Practice of Punishment in Western Society* (Oxford University Press, 1998) pp.295-324, pp.307-8 and Henry Mayhew et al., *The Criminal Prisons of London and Scenes of Prison Life* (Griffin, Bohn and Company, 1862).

The image works closely with and amplifies the prose text that commences: 'It seldom falls to our lot to record a crime attended with so much cruelty', a 'dreadful' murder.⁶⁸ The image depicts a dark, enclosed space, the darkness standing visually for the darkness of the deed being depicted. Mitchel's face is set and determined. Her breasts are exposed above her laced corset, a prominent nipple adding to the terrifying narrative – perhaps, just a moment before, she had been breastfeeding her baby. Her exposed breasts emphasise the monstrousness of her maternity, while the exposed body of the infant grasped upside down highlights its utter helplessness, and points toward the gross exposure of its innards occasioned by the mother's smashing its head against the iron bedstead. The text of the moralizing prose fills in the gory details, describing 'the little skull being broken to pieces, and the brains scattered upon the ground', making a 'mangled corpse' for the Coroner and jury to inspect.⁶⁹ The prose further reports that Mitchel confessed to the prison keeper that she had killed another infant about two years previously in the same manner, and that no one knew she had done it.⁷⁰ His 'horror' was matched by the 'horror' that filled the coroner's jury as they inspected the mangled corpse, heard the case and returned a verdict of 'wilful murder'. Widespread newspaper reports of the same coroner's hearing are much briefer and matter-of-fact: it was left to the broadside to communicate the horror.⁷¹

⁶⁸ 'Particulars of a mother murdering her infant child by dashing out its brains'.

⁶⁹ The importance of bodies in infanticide discourse has been variously emphasised, including: by Miriam Jones in relation to infanticide broadsides: 'Fractured Narratives'; by Thomas Laqueur in the context of the construction of the humanitarian narrative: 'Bodies, Details, and the Humanitarian Narrative,' in Lynn Hunt (ed.) *The New Cultural History* (University of California Press, 1989) pp.176-204; and by my own work on the medical jurisprudence of nineteenth-century infanticide: 'Gender in Focus,' ch.3. This needs to be seen in the wider context of fascination with corpses in the period, often analysed in the contexts of gender, medical spectatorship and dissection: Elizabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, femininity and the aesthetic* (Manchester University Press, 1992); Carol Christ, 'Painting the Dead: Portraiture and Necrophilia in Victorian Art and Poetry,' in Sarah Webster Goodwin et al. (eds.) *Death and Representation* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993) pp.133-51; Sander L. Gilman, "'Who Kills Whores?" "I Do," Says Jack: Race and Gender in Victorian London,' in Goodwin et al. (eds.) *Death and Representation* pp.263-84; Ludmilla Jordanova, *Sexual Visions: Images of Gender in Science and Medicine between the Eighteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989); Lynda Nead, *Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain* (Basil Blackwell, 1988); Sally Powell, 'Black Markets and Cadaverous Pies: The Corpse, Urban Trade and Industrial Consumption in the Penny Blood,' in Andrew Maunder et al. (eds.) *Victorian Crime, Madness and Sensation* (Ashgate, 2004) pp.45-58. On the murdered corpse see: Shani D'Cruze, 'The Eloquent Corpse: Gender, Probity, and Bodily Integrity in Victorian Domestic Murder,' in Judith Rowbotham et al. (eds.) *Criminal Conversations: Victorian Crimes, Social Panic, and Moral Outrage* (Ohio State University Press, 2005) pp.181-97; Ruth Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987); Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Virago, 1992) ch.7. And more broadly Shelley Day Sclater and her colleagues emphasise the fundamental interpenetration of human bodies and law: Andrew Bainham et al. (eds.) *Body Lore and Laws* (Hart Publishing, 2002).

⁷⁰ The status of this confession is obviously dubious and it may well have been made while insane. The likelihood of a death from such violence going unnoticed was small.

⁷¹ *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle*, 26 May 1828; *Royal Cornwall Gazette*, 24 May 1828; *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 24 May 1828; *The Examiner*, 25 May 1828, p.348; *The Morning Chronicle*,

Yet the message of the broadside is not so simple. Despite her 'dreadful' deed, and 'theft of a quantity of silver plate from the house of a gentleman', she was an 'unfortunate woman', 'a wretched woman'; the broadside claims that she committed the crime 'in a fit of insanity' caused by her 'drinking a great deal of spirits' and that her lack of demonstrated remorse 'shewed the dreadful disorder of her mind'.⁷² There is also a certain dynamism in the image, including the flying hair, that has some resonance with the powerful Romantic vision of female madness painted by Swiss artist Henri Fuseli, that gained wider circulation in Britain through printed reproductions.⁷³ Insanity was also the explanation favoured at her Assize trial when she was found not guilty on the grounds of insanity and committed until his Majesty's pleasure was known.⁷⁴ The same conflicted message of horrific monstrous motherhood with a subtext of compassion is embodied in the verses on the sheet, offering an additional response to the reader:

O Listen to the horrid tale,
And shed a pitying tear,
How Sarah Mitchel did of late,
Destroy her infant dear!
A Labourer's Wife—she might have toil'd,
To earn her daily bread,
But slighting honest means, she now
Awaits a judgment dread.⁷⁵

Thus the verse invites the reader, or listener, to feel pity for the woman who is no longer able to live a properly feminine, domestically ordered life. This call to pity in the first stanza mirrors prose references to her as 'unfortunate' and 'wretched', and contrasts with the

23 May 1828; *The Hull Packet and Humber Mercury*, 27 May 1828; *The Newcastle Courant*, 31 May 1828; *The Standard*, 23 May 1828. Page numbers are given in newspaper references when they are visible on the digital databases employed in research, but they are often omitted in the scans.

⁷² 'Particulars of a mother murdering her infant child by dashing out its brains'.

⁷³ Henri Fuseli, 'Mad Kate,' c.1806-7, oil on canvas, 920x723mm, Goethe-Museum, Frankfurt; 'Mad Kate,' Etching & Engraving, 124x86mm, engraved by William Bromley, A.R.A., published by Joseph Johnson. From *Poems* by William Cowper, London, 1808, vol. II, frontispiece, Royal Academy of Art. On earlier visual rhetoric of female infanticidal madness in Renaissance Italy see Presciutti, 'Domesticating Cannibalism,' p.183. This case occurred just prior to exploration of the appearance of madness in engravings in medical texts, and later through asylum photography. Specifically on female madness see Hilary Marland, *Dangerous Motherhood: Insanity and Childbirth in Victorian Britain* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Quinn, 'Images and impulses'; Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980* (Virago, 1987). More generally on the development of visual imagery of the insane in this period see: Simon Cross, *Mediating Madness: Mental Distress and Cultural Representation* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Mike Jay, *This Way Madness Lies: The Asylum and Beyond* (Thames & Hudson, 2016).

⁷⁴ *Bristol Mercury*, 26 August 1828.

⁷⁵ 'Particulars of a mother murdering her infant child by dashing out its brains'.

parallel visual and textual narrative of monstrosity. Yet after describing the murder, the voice of the verse shifts back to merciless judgment:

A Thief before—no mercy now
Could look with pity mild,
Since to her crime is added thus,
The Murder of her Child!⁷⁶

Yet, in the last stanza, the verse again implores readers and listeners to try to imagine the wretchedness of the woman, and to pray for her:

What must this wretched woman feel,
What pity can she crave,
Whose bloody hands have rashly sent,
Two Infants to the grave!
Ye Mothers dear, that Children have,
And can their crime controul,
Weep for those helpless babes, and pray
For the sad Mother's soul!⁷⁷

This last stanza is remarkable for the explicit statement of the deep fear underlying cultural representations of monstrous motherhood: that all mothers have within them the power to kill their infants.⁷⁸ While the tears of the reader and listener were summoned on behalf of the mother at the beginning of the verses, by the end, their object shifts to the 'helpless babes' and, the 'sad' mother is presented as in need of prayers.

The role of broadsides in normative religious discourse has been emphasised by other scholars, and the call to prayer is also consistent with the formulaic involvement of the Devil in criminal acts still contained within indictments at this time: 'not having the fear of God before her eyes but moved and seduced by the instigation of the Devil', Mitchel committed her monstrous act.⁷⁹ The encouragement of weeping links closely with some actual courtroom scenes. With reference to the courtroom during the brief 1865 trial of Constance Kent for murdering her brother, in 1865, Thomas Dixon suggests that 'the ritual power of the occasion itself, and its dramatization of narratives of sinfulness, justice and death as much as any psychologically identifiable emotional response, ... was productive of tears' shed by those in the courtroom, including the judge, the accused, the defense counsel, the jury and

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ 'Particulars of a mother murdering her infant child by dashing out its brains'.

⁷⁸ Bloch, 'So the Witch Won't Eat Me'.

⁷⁹ TNA ASSI 25/20/21, No. 11. Assizes: Western Circuit: Indictment Files. FELONIES. Som.

Reference to the powers of the Devil in the aetiology of crime also occurred in court rooms: Dixon, 'The Tears of Mr Justice Willes'. An accurate history of the perceived role of the Devil in crime during the nineteenth century remains to be written.

the public.⁸⁰ Dixon also emphasises the religious signification of tears in nineteenth century Britain, the Bible offering ‘templates for crying at one’s own sinfulness, lamenting over the evils of the whole world, shedding tears of ecstasy or dread in response to God or the Devil, and weeping in pity and compassion’.⁸¹ There were many interrelated contexts in which connections between weeping, religion and crime were made in this period, including court rooms, scaffolds and in scaffold crowds, pulpits, literature, medical texts ... and the popular literature of the street, such as this broadside about Sara Mitchel. A dread of the monstrous mother, so powerfully communicated through the graphic image, and of the disturbance to domestic order caused by her act, pity and sorrow for her defenceless victims, and compassion for the dramatically and terribly failed mother came together in the tears summoned by the broadside, not only expressive of emotion but also of a ‘complex set of cognitive and cultural responses to the world’.⁸² We will see the significance of tears in some of the other broadsides discussed below.

While at one level it could be argued that an attempt to distinguish between ‘bad’ and ‘mad’ child-killing mothers was central to the nineteenth century judicial process, the Sara Mitchel broadside beautifully encapsulates the cultural ambivalence with respect to these women and thus I write about the ‘bad’ and the ‘mad’ together. It was often the case that acts of child killing by mothers were just so inexplicable that the only avenue that seemed open to judges and juries was to advise and deliver insanity verdicts which avoided the death penalty. The significance of these verdicts for understanding outcomes of trials for child killing by both single and married mothers during the nineteenth century has been discussed by various scholars.⁸³ The association between madness and maternity was of course not new. The belief that women’s bodies affect their minds in unique ways is as old as scholarly

⁸⁰ Dixon, ‘The Tears of Mr Justice Willes,’ pp.9-10.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.16.

⁸² *Ibid.* p.23.

⁸³ Arnot, ‘Gender in Focus,’ esp. ch.5; Roger Chadwick, *Bureaucratic mercy: the Home Office and the treatment of capital cases in Victorian Britain* (Garland, 1992) ch.7; Joel Peter Eigen, *Unconscious Crime: Mental Absence and Criminal Responsibility in Victorian London* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003) pp.71-83; Joel Peter Eigen, *Witnessing Insanity: Madness and Mad-Doctors in the English Court* (Yale University Press, 1995) pp.142-9; Marland, *Dangerous Motherhood*, ch.6; Hilary Marland, ‘Getting Away with Murder?’; Hilary Marland, ‘Languages and Landscapes of Emotion: Motherhood and Puerperal Insanity in the Nineteenth Century,’ in Fay Bound Aberti (ed.) *Medicine, Emotion and Disease, 1700-1950* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) pp.53-78; Alison Pedley, ‘“A painful case of a woman in a temporary fit of insanity”: a study of women admitted to Broadmoor Criminal Lunatic Asylum between 1863 and 1884 for the murder of their children,’ unpublished MA thesis, University of Roehampton, 2012; Grey, ‘Discourses,’ esp. chs.2-4; Roger Smith, *Trial by Medicine: Insanity and Responsibility in Victorian Trials* (Edinburgh University Press, 1981) esp. ch.7; Nigel Walker, *Crime and Insanity in England. Volume one: The Historical Perspective* (Edinburgh University Press, 1968) esp. ch.7; Tony Ward, ‘The Sad Subject of Infanticide: Law, Medicine and Child Murder, 1860-1938,’ *Social & Legal Studies* 8 (1999) 163-80; Martin J. Wiener, *Reconstructing the criminal: Culture law and policy in England, 1830-1914* (Cambridge University Press, 1990) pp.268-9.

medicine itself. The ancient fantasy of the empty womb as a wandering animal that could cause 'hysteria' as it bumped painfully into organs far from its rightful place became embedded in medieval and early-modern scholastic medicine.⁸⁴ Child-birth itself was recognized by medieval and early-modern women as carrying great psychological risks.⁸⁵ Modern scientific medicine gave the womb more permanent visceral moorings, however, the power of the gravid womb, and women's reproductive bodies more broadly, also generated much creativity, fantasy and fear historically, and the permanent moorings given to the womb by modern medicine did not eliminate notions that women's bodies could unseat their reason. In fact, as scholarship cited immediately above indicates, during the nineteenth century, women with recently born infants were considered a special group, less responsible juridical subjects who required unique law to deal with their situation. This notion was not captured in any statute law until the Infanticide Act 1922, but was reflected in dead-end debates about legislative change, and in legal cases.⁸⁶ In about 90 cases of over 700 alleging the murder and manslaughter of children up to the age of 7 heard before the Old Bailey 1840-1880, an 'insanity defence' was used.⁸⁷ I use the term broadly in the way Joel Eigen defines it in his 1995 study of madness and mad doctors in the English Court between 1760 and 1843.⁸⁸ I have singled out cases where any witness, the accused or any questioning of witnesses, or indeed the defendant themselves, called into question the mental state of the accused at the time of the alleged crime. Such 'defences' were often attempted in cases where the children killed were older than newborn, and the mitigating offence of concealment was unavailable on a murder indictment. In many trials where some sort of 'defence' of insanity was broached the women's bodies almost seemed to speak for themselves through a language of female bodily sensation and popular understandings of unbalanced human behaviour. There were apparently quite loose standards for testing *mens rea* in many of these cases where women perceived to be vulnerable killed their infants. My argument that the act of a married woman – such as Sara Mitchel – killing her child was so

⁸⁴ Laurinda S. Dixon, *Perilous Chastity: Women and Illness in Pre-Enlightenment Art and Medicine* (Cornell University Press, 1995); Helen King, *Hippocrates' Women: Reading the Female Body in Ancient Greece* (Routledge, 1998); Rebecca Kukla, *Mass Hysteria: Medicine, Culture, and Mothers' Bodies* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).

⁸⁵ Jane Sharp, *The Book of Margery Kemp*, trans. and introd. B. A. Windeatt (Penguin, 1985) (Kemp: c. 1373 – c. 1440); Jane Sharp, *The Midwives Book Or the Whole Art of Midwifery Discovered*, ed. Elaine Hobby (Oxford University Press, 1999 [Simon Miller, 1671]).

⁸⁶ Arnot, 'Gender in Focus,' esp. ch.3; 'Report of the Capital Punishment Commission; together with the minutes of evidence and appendix,' *Parliamentary Papers* [henceforth *PP*] 1866, No. 3590, Vol. XXI, pp.1-722; Grey, 'Discourses,' esp. ch.2; Ward, 'The Sad Subject'.

⁸⁷ These cases have been extracted by manually reading through all the relevant volumes of the *Central Criminal Court Sessions Papers*, as a more accurate way of finding all the relevant cases than using the search tools in the *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*. See Arnot, 'Gender in Focus,' ch.5. When I cite from the *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* I use the spelling of the original source (available online in facsimile) thus avoiding digitization errors.

⁸⁸ Eigen, *Witnessing Insanity*.

outside the bounds of common understandings of femininity that such killings were often considered mad *per se* is supported by other historians.⁸⁹ So with such cultural perceptions, it is not surprising to find lay witnesses in the courtroom telling stories of madness which exonerated women. The effect of this on the result of trials on murder indictments for the murder of children older than newborn was marked. In the 40 years from 1840, before the Old Bailey, 34.9 per cent of women tried for killing their young children were found either insane on arraignment, or not guilty on the grounds of insanity.⁹⁰ These narratives of madness and trial outcomes are underpinned by a thread of visual representations of 'mad' women committing monstrous crimes, of which the Mitchel broadside is an early example.⁹¹ But not all monstrous mothers were considered mad.

On 31 January 1848, Harriet Parker, a slender, freckled, dark-haired woman in her thirties, five feet one inch tall, stood before the bar at the Old Bailey charged with the murder of Amina Blake, aged seven, the daughter of her partner Robert Blake. She had also murdered Amina's brother Robert, aged five, but was not tried on that indictment. This was a passionate, vengeful murder of her stepchildren, carried out while Parker was consumed with jealousy caused by the philandering behaviour of her partner, with whom she lived in an adulterous relationship.⁹² This was a truly Medeaesque crime overladen with the stepmother

⁸⁹ Arnot, 'Gender in Focus,' ch.5; Hilary Marland argues that by the later nineteenth century through development of the medical diagnosis of puerperal insanity, the risk of infanticide was seen as an integral element of femininity: Marland, *Dangerous Motherhood*, ch.6; Pedley, "A painful case".

⁹⁰ Recent work by Jade Shepherd and Cathryn Wilson highlights the significance of insanity verdicts for fathers who killed their children in the last half of the nineteenth century and this will be considered later: Jade Shepherd, "One of the Best Fathers until He Went Out of His Mind": Paternal Child-Murder, 1864-1900,' *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 18 (2013) 17-35; Jade V. Shepherd, 'Victorian Madmen: Broadmoor, Masculinity and the Experiences of the Criminally Insane, 1863-1900,' unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 2013; Wilson, 'Mad, Sad, or Bad?'

⁹¹ There are a number of relevant images published in the *Illustrated Police News*, a popular newspaper launched in 1864 that continued the graphic tradition established by broadside images, but with increasing levels of detail because of the more sophisticated technology used to create the images. There were other short-lived illustrated crime newspapers, and non-specialist newspapers sometimes carried crime illustrations, which await comprehensive analysis. Scholarship focusing particularly on newspaper representations of child murder in England includes: Goc, *Women, Infanticide and the Press*; Gregory, "Most Revolting Murder"; Grey "Agonised Weeping"; Wilson, 'Mad Sad, or Bad?' On sensational reporting of violent crime more generally a good place to start in what is now a fairly extensive literature is Crone, *Violent Victorians*.

⁹² Extensive evidence about this provocation was given during the Old Bailey trial, but it had no effect on the final verdict, though Parker was 'strongly recommended to mercy by the Jury, in consideration of the unparalleled provocation under which she perpetrated the crime'. *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.2, 10 July 2017), January 1848, trial of HARRIETT PARKER (t18480131-641). In *Men of Blood* Martin J. Wiener notes that jealousy was often successful as a partial defence to spousal murder. Of course Parker took out her jealousy on children, which probably made all the difference, but this does highlight that jealousy has yet to find its British historian. In early modern France, Natalie Davis has found that jealousy was used by some peasant women (but not men) in their appeals for pardons for crimes, suggesting different gendering of jealousy compared with nineteenth-century England: Davis, *Fiction in the Archives*. For the USA see Stearns, *Jealousy*.

trope that generated complex cultural expressions in broadsides, newspapers, a pamphlet, the *Old Bailey Sessions Papers* and unpublished legal papers. At issue were Parker's perceived monstrosity, her sexual transgressions, her jealous emotions and vengeful actions, her cruelty, and the possibility of her redemption. When the evidence concluded, the jury took little time to deliver a guilty verdict, the judge returned the death sentence, and three weeks later, Harriet Parker was executed on 21 February 1848 at Newgate.

In one sense, Parker's execution for this appalling double murder was unremarkable. Murder at this time was the main reason people hanged. In 1848, 60 individuals in England and Wales went to the gallows, all of them for murder.⁹³ While executions were certainly no longer the regular events they were in the early years of the century, they were still an established aspect of social life in Britain. Fewer of those executed were women than men, and by 1848, there was increasing criticism of capital punishment; the execution of women for some was particularly indefensible and in that year, Parker was one of only two women executed.⁹⁴ So Parker's femininity and the fact that she was hanged for murdering young children are both noteworthy, because a higher percentage of men charged with this crime were hanged than women, and more women than men were likely to be found insane for the murder of children older than newborn in nineteenth century England.⁹⁵ Her counsel's effort to raise an insanity defence was not taken seriously and despite her diminutive appearance, Parker was perceived as monstrous in many ways.

⁹³ 'Tables showing the number of criminal offenders for the year 1848', *PP*, 1849, No. 1081, Vol. XLIV, pp.51-129 (Note that there seems to have been a pagination error by clerks at the time handwriting numbers onto the original, so it is best to use its internal pagination to find specific items. See p.8 within document and digital image 8).

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* On increasing concerns about corporal and capital punishment of women, see Gatrell, *The Hanging Tree*; 'Report of the Capital Punishment Commission'.

⁹⁵ Arnot, 'Gender in Focus'.

LIFE, TRIAL, CONFESSION AND EXECUTION

Of Harriet Parker for the Murder Of Amina and Robert Blake, In Cupid's Court, Golden Lane.

COPY OF VERSES.

In Newgate god there does bewail
In sorrow, grief, and shame,
A wretched female, doomed to die:
Harriet Parker is her name,
Sick'doom'd to die a shameful death!
What a dreadful sight to see
A woman thus to end her days
Upon the fatal tree!

CHORUS.

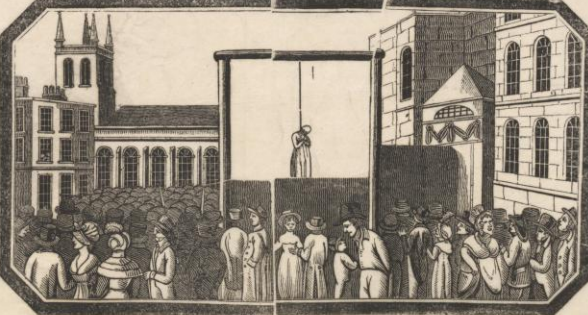
The dreadful bell will sound her knell,
To warn her death is nigh;
In grief not vain she does complain,
And for forgiveness cry.

With Robert Blake, from Birmingham,
The wretched woman came;
He left his wife, and then in guilt
His partner she became.
His children, too, he brought with him,
And gave them to her care;
Two seven years old, one five; they left
Their mother in despair.

In Cupid's Court, near Golden Lane,
They lived not long in peace;
He slighted her, and she deserv'd
His vengeance should receive;
She cruelly his children killed;
How dreadful to unfold!
She pressed her hands upon each mouth,
And left them dead and cold.

Old Bailey.
This morning, at ten o'clock, the wretched woman who was tried and convicted last session, suffered the extreme penalty of the law this morning in front of the Debtor's door, in the Old Bailey. At an early hour the sheriffs, with their usual attendants, arrived at the prison, and after partaking of some refreshment, proceeded to the condemned cell, where they found the reverend ordinary engaged in prayer with the wretched culprit.

After the usual formalities had been observed of demanding the delivery of the body of the prisoner into their custody, she was conducted to the press-room, where her irons were struck off. The executioner, with his assistants, then commenced pinning her arms, which operation they skilfully and quickly despatched. During these awful preparations she sighed deeply, but uttered not a word. At a quarter before 8, all the arrangements having been completed, the bell of the prison commenced tolling, and the melancholy procession was formed:—The reverend ordinary, preceding the culprit on her way to the fatal drop, began reading in a distinct tone, the burial service for the dead. No sound, if we except the deep sighs of the unhappy woman, interrupted the clergyman, as the procession moved along the subterranean passage. On arriving at the steps leading to the scaffold, she turned round, and tremulously thanked the sheriffs and the worthy governor of the prison, for their kind attentions to her during her confinement. Then, with a slow motion, she ascended the scaffold, on reaching which she was placed in the neces-



Of whom their mother heard the news,
Her feelings who can tell?
She wrung her hands, in bitter grief,
And in despair she fell.
"O, cruelly beyond belief,
My children did induce
To guilt a wretch they did,
Both innocent and pure.

The criminal before the bar,
In agony did stand;
And there she was convicted by
The laws of God and man,
To die a death of public shame
Upon the fatal tree;
And thousands will assemble there,
Her wretched end to see.

What meet this woman's feelings be,
Confess'd in Newgate's cell,
Since she did kill those pretty babes?
Who eyes her evil tongue still?
Deep jealousy inspired her heart
This cruel deed to do;
O, such a deed we seldom read,
So horrible and true.

So to conclude this sad affair,
Good folks of each degree;
Old and young, I pray beware
Of cruel jealousy.
Harriet Parker now must end
Her days upon the tree,
This fond mother; oh what a sad
And bloody sight to see!

Printed and Published by
Moses, and J. Spence, 28 B.

The following is a copy of a letter, which she addressed a few days before her execution, to the man Blake:—

"Newgate, Feb. 7th, 1848.

"Dear Robert.—This is the last time you will ever receive advice from me. My days are numbered; so near and dear to you would this day forthright I shall be silent have been spared. I deserve me in the grave. Take therefore these awful fate, and God give me few lines into consideration: never strength to go through all! and perceptible, and she ceased to exist. Promise to forsake cup has passed. I may be received her who ought to hold the only one than mine to save us all: God in mercy forgive me! I freely forgive you all your wrongs to me; I have prayed that he will fit you for the heavy trial I have brought upon you, and oh! may we meet in that land in which sorrow and misery will flee away. I only ask that you will sometimes shed the tear of pity and forgiveness over my unfortunate lot. You may yet be happy in this world with Esther. Your innocent children are I trust in heaven; this is to me a great comfort, and I pray that it may be to you. Awful as my fate is, I would rather die than live again the wretched life I have done for the last twelve months. Be warned Robert, and remember that those who break the sacred tie pledged at the altar of God will never prosper. More than one within these walls can testify to the truth of this by bitter experience. It has brought us to misery, shame, and sorrow. The heart of man can hardly pity us: only one shed a tear on my misery at my trial, and that was Mrs. Moore. I wish you to pay some debts for me; I shall die much happier if you will. I owe the milk-woman 8d., Bridget did one half-day's work for me, and likewise Mrs. Washington a trifle; and the greengrocer, for coals, I think about 2s. 6d. Be sure and answer directly, and tell me you will comply with my last request. Likewise get my marriage lines from Mrs. Mears; you can include it in the letter; it will be a satisfaction to all. Now, Robert, I must conclude; and that God in mercy may forgive, bless, and prosper you and yours, is the sincere prayer of the heart that detests these lines. From the unhappy

"HARRIET PARKER,"



Figure 2: Parker Broadside No. 1

The broadside in Fig. 2 makes this point powerfully with a crude woodcut depicting the moment of death.⁹⁶ A woman is throttling a child, one hand round its neck and the other clenched into a fist. Her face is set in a cruel scowl, brow furrowed, mouth down at the

⁹⁶ 'Life, trial, confession and execution of Harriet Parker for the Murder of Amina and Robert Blake, In Cupid's Court, Golden Lane' (N.P., 2 & 3 Monmouth-court, Bloomsbury n.d. [1848]). Bodleian Library, University of Oxford: John Johnson Collection: Broadside: Murder and Executions folder 11 (11). Online, durable URL: http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&res_dat=xri:johnson:&ft_dat=xri:johnson:rec:20090626110309kg [Accessed 3 November 2010]. Image published with permission of ProQuest and Bodleian Library. Further reproduction is prohibited without permission. Image produced by ProQuest as part of the *John Johnson Collection* www.proquest.com.

corners. The younger brother lies awake in the bed, witnessing the death of his sister, the witnessing broadside consumer thus drawn in to the terror of the child.⁹⁷ The graphic image makes public the gruesome private murder and orchestrates the emotions of the consumer through both the representation of monstrosity and of the horror of witnessing the crime. The broadside's emotional impact is strengthened by the unusually detailed scaffold image of the execution of a woman at the top of the broadside.⁹⁸ The ballad confirms both the violence of the murders and the dread of execution:

She cruelly his children killed;
How dreadful to unfold!
She pressed her hands upon each mouth,
And left them dead and cold.⁹⁹

It was 'such a deed we seldom read, / So horrible and true', and her death upon the tree 'a dreadful sight to see' after '[t]he dreadful bell will sound her knell'. Yet the overall message of the verses condemns Parker, shames her for her adulterous relationship, for her cruelty towards the children, for the immense suffering she has caused to the mother of the children, and for her dreadful expression of '[d]eep jealousy'. The moral lesson is a warning to those reading and listening:

Good folks of each degree;
Old and young, I pray beware
Of cursed jealousy.¹⁰⁰

Jealousy is directly tied to revenge in the discourse. The *Old Bailey Minutes of Evidence* indicate that Parker herself was acutely conscious of her desire for revenge both before committing the crime, and afterwards when she told a police constable that she committed the crime to revenge the father.¹⁰¹ In the verses on the second broadside discussed at depth here (**Fig. 3**), Parker's voice exclaims 'Revenge was sweet—when I deprived / The pretty little babes of breath'.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ This type of representation of witnessing violence is quite common on broadsides. On the interesting emotional dynamics set up by this position see: T. J. Clark, *The Sight of Death: An Experiment in Art Writing* (Yale University Press, 2006); Moira Peelo, 'Framing homicide narratives in newspapers: Mediated witness and the construction of virtual victimhood,' *Crime, Media, Culture*, 2 (2006) 159-75.

⁹⁸ Gatrell, *The Hanging Tree* ch.5.

⁹⁹ 'Life, trial, confession and execution of Harriet Parker'.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ The *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, (t18480131-641). This evidence was repeated in some of the cultural sources too.

¹⁰² 'Trial, sentence, & execution of Harriet Parker, who was executed this morning, in front of the Old Bailey for the wilful murder of Amina and Robert Henry Blake, in Cupid's Court, Golden Lane, St. Luke's' (Birt, Printer, 39 Great St. Andrew Street, Seven Dials, n.d. [1848]) Bodleian Library, University of Oxford: John Johnson Collection: Broadside: Murder and Executions folder 11(12).



Figure 3: Parker Broadside No. 2

Blake and Parker's illicit sexual relationship was seen as the basis for the vengeful crime and full blame for the relationship was placed on Parker. This was despite the fact that according to the cultural sources, Blake was cheating on a living wife while Parker's husband was dead. In verses on the second broadside, ascription of blame to Parker is strengthened by its expression through Parker's own voice:

With Robert Blake I got acquainted,
And daily caused pain and strife,

Online, durable URL: http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&res_dat=xri:johanson:&ft_dat=xri:johanson:image:20090626115711kg:1 [Accessed 3 November 2010]. Image published with permission of ProQuest and Bodleian Library. Further reproduction is prohibited without permission. Image produced by ProQuest as part of the *John Johnson Collection* www.proquest.com.

Often I false tales invented
To take him from his lawful wife;
I by m cruel false inventions
Caused him from his wife to part,
Tore the children from their mother,
And left her with a broken heart.¹⁰³

Of course Robert Blake was an equal party to the relationship, and as father was the lawful guardian of his children and thus entitled to take them wherever he wished, but these niceties found no place in the vilifying discourse about Harriet Parker that rested on the double standard of sexual morality prevalent at the time. The centrality of sexuality to women's reputation has been highlighted by Shani D'Cruze and Lucia Zedner, and D'Cruze and Louise Jackson have made direct links between perceived sexual transgression and increased culpability in homicide cases.¹⁰⁴ It is therefore no surprise that Parker was blamed for the relationship.

The enormous difference in the role of tears in the Parker broadsides when compared with the Mitchel sheet is noteworthy. Examining the first example in detail (**Fig. 2**), we find that although the verses dwell persistently on emotions of dread, 'sorrow, grief, and shame', pain, despair, agony, and jealousy, they do not call forth tears from the consumer. That the crime was too horrendous for tears is also implied in the prose of the broadside where in an alleged letter from Parker, she writes: 'The heart of man can hardly pity us: only one shed a tear on my misery at my trial, and that was Mrs. Moore'.¹⁰⁵ The pathetically tiny petition file housed in the Home Office records in the National Archives provides moving evidence of the broad public acceptance of Parker's monstrosity. The Home Office did not receive any petitions for mercy for Parker before her execution, except her own petition sent on her behalf by the Ordinary of Newgate.¹⁰⁶ One brief petition was received from an Irish doctor after her execution. Parker was thus sexually incontinent, monstrous and vengeful, her dry-eyed case one where almost nobody felt compelled to weave a defensive narrative in legal

¹⁰³ 'Trial, sentence, & execution of Harriet Parker'. A very similar message is given in the verses on another broadside: 'The life, trial, confession and execution of Harriet Parker,' in which she is represented as a victorious huntress – 'I hunted him both day and night' and 'Soon Robert Blake I overcame, / And I confess I was to blame'.

¹⁰⁴ Shani D'Cruze, *Crimes of outrage: Sex, violence and Victorian working women* (UCL Press, 1998) p.61; Lucia Zedner, *Women, Crime, and Custody in Victorian England* (Clarendon Press, 1991) p.18; Shani D'Cruze et al., *Women, Crime and Justice in England Since 1660* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) pp.58-60. See also Grey "'Agonised Weeping'" for discussion of Louise Masset case in 1900 where illicit sexual activity contributed to the jury's lack of sympathy; Frost, 'Motherhood on Trial'. Frank Mort adds class into the picture, suggesting that at this time excessive sexuality was seen as fundamental to working-class immorality: *Dangerous Sexualities: Medico-moral Politics in England Since 1830* 2nd edn (Routledge, 2000) part 1.

¹⁰⁵ 'Life, trial, confession and execution of Harriet Parker'.

¹⁰⁶ TNA HO 18/244/44, Home Office: Criminal Petitions, Series II.

terms that would save her life. But were there any sympathetic or redemptive messages about Harriet Parker that served to ameliorate her monstrosity?

There are two key issues for consideration: feminine and religious redemption, which were closely tied together. Parker's indictments charged that 'not having the fear of God before her eyes but being moved and seduced by the instigation of the Devil', she choked and suffocated the two children.¹⁰⁷ The extent of religious narratives in this case indicate that at mid century, without any convincing evidence of insanity and with incontrovertible evidence of vengeful pre-meditation, supernatural explanation for the motivation remained important. The Evil One still stalked the world searching for vulnerable souls and once Parker had acted under his influence, she needed redemption. Evidence given before the Old Bailey, and repeated in some cultural sources, suggests that Parker herself may have said before committing the crime "'you shall find a complete Devil in me'.¹⁰⁸ One of the many broadside ballads about the case has Parker's voice pleading: 'Satan why didst't o'er though tempt me / To commit that fatal deed?'¹⁰⁹ A remarkable, anonymous fourteen-page account of Parker's journey between imprisonment and execution, probably written by the prison visitor, survives.¹¹⁰ The bulk of it is devoted to a detailed spiritual biography of Parker, detailing the parts of the Bible studied with the visitor, and her wavering journey through self-doubt to religious conviction and thus, to salvation.¹¹¹ If to some at least only possession by the Devil could explain Parker's crime, newspapers and broadsides delighted in the traditional tale of penitence which Parker's behaviour apparently told.¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ TNA CRIM 4/343/35 and TNA CRIM 4/343/37, Central Criminal Court: Indictments. I have not yet traced when this language disappeared from English indictments.

¹⁰⁸ *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, (t18480131-641); 'The trial, sentence, and execution of Harriet Parker, who was executed at the Old Bailey this morning, for the wilful murder of Robert and Amina Blake' (Birt, Printer, 39, Great St. Andrew Street, Seven Dials, n.d. [1848]) Bodleian Library, University of Oxford: John Johnson Collection: Broadside: Murder and Executions folder 7(20). Online, durable URL: http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&res_dat=xri:johnson:&ft_dat=xri:johnson:image:20080819153830kg:1 [Accessed 3 November 2010].

¹⁰⁹ 'Trial, sentence, & execution of Harriet Parker'.

¹¹⁰ Anon., *A Record of One Under Sentence of Death* (Macintosh, Printer, 1848). The letter was also printed in a number of newspapers and on three of the four broadsides studied: *John Bull*, 12 Feb. 1848, p.108; *The Era*, 20 Feb. 1848, p.16; 'Trial, sentence, & execution of Harriet Parker'; 'Life, trial, confession and execution of Harriet Parker'; 'Life, confession, and execution of Harriet Parker, for the murder of Amina and Robert Blake (n.p., 2&3 Monmouth Court, Bloomsbury, n.d. [1848]) Bodleian Library, University of Oxford: John Johnson Collection: Harding B 9/3 (201).

¹¹¹ V.A.C. Gatrell discusses similar eighteenth-century narratives of the penitent condemned and their usefulness for evangelical proselytizing: Gatrell, *The Hanging Tree*, pp.375-82. This is obviously a genre with a long history: St Augustine, *The Confessions*, 4th century, available in many modern editions e.g. (Penguin, 2002).

¹¹² *John Bull*, 21 February 1848, p.124; *The Times*, 22 February 1848, p.7.

The close relationship between discourses of religion and femininity is evident in another extraordinary record, a letter ostensibly written by Parker to her partner, and reproduced in many broadsides and newspapers. It was allegedly written from Newgate on 7 February 1848, two weeks before her execution. Cross-referencing between sources suggests that this letter was probably genuine. While she represents herself as a reformed woman, deeply contrite in relation to the suffering she has caused Robert's wife, Parker also admonishes him for his desertion of his wife and begs him to return: 'Be warned Robert, and remember that those who break the sacred tie pledged at the alter of God will never prosper'. She asks Robert to pray for her 'that when the bitter cup has passed, I may be received by Him who drank a more bitter one than mine to save us all'. She implores him to 'sometimes shed the tear of pity and forgiveness over my unfortunate lot', noting that only one person has shed tears of pity on her behalf.¹¹³ At the same time she forgives Blake all his wrongs to her and takes comfort from her trust that the children she murdered are in heaven. The extraordinary ending to the letter lends credence to its being genuine. She outlines a list of small debts that as a good housekeeper she wishes Blake to pay on her behalf – to the milk-woman, to 'Bridget' and "Mrs. Washington' for work done for her, and the greengrocer for coals. And finally, she wants him to fetch her 'marriage lines from Mrs. Mears' and to enclose it in his letter of reply to her.¹¹⁴ Whatever the rest of the world may think of her, she wishes to die in the knowledge of her own respectability symbolized by her marriage certificate and her assiduous attention to financial probity.

Reincorporation from a vengeful monster devoid of 'natural' feminine care back into the fold of normal femininity was part of the religious narrative. The journey of spiritual redemption, which Parker chose to take in the weeks before her execution, probably helped her survive the dual terrors of memories of her crime and anticipation of the violent ignominy soon to befall her on the scaffold. The script for the journey was widely available in the culture – she might have read this conventional story in crime and execution broadsides related to other prisoners, but more likely, had absorbed it from popular oral culture.¹¹⁵ The narrative required rejection of sexuality outside the bounds of marriage and pursuit of appropriate domestic activities. She is represented as accepting blame for her sexual transgressions, exhorting Blake to live a sexually moral life, instructing repayment of her domestic debts, and reclaiming her marriage certificate. The work of the prison visitor and the Reverend Ordinary of Newgate with the condemned can be seen as brilliantly summed up in the

¹¹³ 'Life, trial, confession and execution of Harriet Parker'.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Gatrell *The Hanging Tree*, ch.4.

synecdochic 'pair of cuffs' which Parker knitted Blake as a gift before she died.¹¹⁶ Having committed the most horrifying and de-sexing crime imaginable to society Parker sought Blake's forgiveness through a token of her traditional womanly textile skills, given together with the Good Book.¹¹⁷ As Tennyson wrote, 'Man for the sword and for the needle she ...': her redemptive journey saw her return from violence to her needle.¹¹⁸ What is certain is that Parker was aware that her life and transgression were being made public through the high profile case and her reported words and actions indicate a conscious scripting of herself within the norms of femininity: an assertion of agency within a very circumscribed existence.

To return to maternal monstrosity, there is an uneasy, underlying tension in both the broadsides and the prison visitor's pamphlet about Parker that mirrors the transparent fear expressed in the Mitchel broadside that all women have the potential to murder their children. In religious terms, the prisoner visitor quotes 1 John 3:15, exhorting the reader: "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer."¹¹⁹ Any reader who has hated, who has expressed anger, harboured 'hard thoughts' or been unkind – that is, every reader – is according to the prison visitor in equal need of redemption through Jesus Christ as Harriet Parker needs to be saved.¹²⁰ The focus on how easily Parker had been led astray, by failing to attend Church, reading novels instead of the Bible, and giving way to her sexual urges, together with the rather alarming quote from 1 John, stirs anxiety that such a creature of unbridled, violent passion could lurk amongst one's closest acquaintances. The same suspicion of lurking monstrosity is reinforced by its visual communication in the second Parker broadside reproduced here (**Fig. 3**). This includes a prominent alleged portrait of Harriet Parker.¹²¹ Parker appears as an ordinary woman, reasonably well dressed, quite attractive with a long neck and the dress a bit down on one shoulder. This is not overall a vampish image, though the exposed shoulder could be visual code for her sexual transgressions. However I would suggest that the overall message of the image is that an ordinary woman can commit these ghastly crimes. The very act of giving Parker a human

¹¹⁶ *The Times*, 22 February 1848.

¹¹⁷ On the continuing importance of the gift binding the social fabric in modern society see Jacques Godbout, *The World of the Gift* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998). It could be argued that there was also an element of moral vengeance behind this particular gift.

¹¹⁸ Alfred Lord Tennyson, *The Princess: A Medley* (Edward Moxon, 1848). On the significance of women's domestic textile skills to femininity see D'Cruze et al., *Women, Crime and Justice*, p.34; Rosemary Mitchell, 'A Stitch in Time?: Women, Needlework, and the Making of History in Victorian Britain,' *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 1 (1996) 185-202; Talia Schaffer's research suggests that at mid-century there was an important crystallisation of the significance of needlework as signification of womanhood: 'The History of the Victorian Domestic Handicraft,' in Kyriaki Hadjiafxendi et al. (eds.) *Crafting the Woman Professional in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Ashgate, 2013) pp.25-42, p.27.

¹¹⁹ Anon., *A Record* p.2.


¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ 'Trial, sentence, & execution of Harriet Parker'.

face through this image and the ascription to her of appropriate domestic femininity as she neared her end presents those following these cultural scripts with the painful fact that Parker was a real woman, not a phantasm and as such, monstrosity inheres as potential in all women.¹²² There was however an alternate and less terrifying model of the maternal killer in nineteenth century culture and we turn to her next.

2 The Humanitarian Narrative

Heart-rending Execution of Fanny Amlett,
 A Grazier's Daughter, near Scarborough, who was basely Seduced from Home by a
NAVAL OFFICER,
 Who brought her to Disgrace, and then Deserted her.
SHE BECAME PREGNANT,
 And ashamed to return to her Parents, She wandered about in a state of Distraction, among Fields and unfrequented places, and frequently Slept all night in the open air: At length the young of Labour seized Her, and without Human Assistance, in a lonely place, She brought forth a lovely Child:
 In a fit of Despair, and scarce knowing what she did, she Drowned Her New-born Babe: For which She was brought to Trial, and **EXECUTED.**
 In the Seventeenth Year of her age, Together with a Copy of Plaintive Verses.




FANNY AMLETT, a very accomplished and handsome young woman, was the 2d daughter of Mr Richard Amlett, a wealthy grazier, residing at Rase-dale, a village on the sea-coast, near Scarborough. At the age of 16, she attracted the attention of a dashing Lieutenant of the Navy, who fell passionately in love with her the first time he beheld her. They had frequent interviews, during which he used all his endeavours to persuade her to elope with him, and on many had he engaged her affections; that in all probability she would have yielded, had not her father discovered the design, and prevented it. On purpose then to keep clear of the importunities of her pretended lover, her father sent her off to a relation of his near Shrewsbury, in hopes that he never would see her more: but the good old man was deceived, for the wily lover made such artful enquiries, that in less than a month he discovered where she was. Unfortunately for this poor young woman, the ship to which the Lieutenant belonged was stationed at the Nore, and thither he hastened with all possible speed. He immediately disguised himself in a shooting dress, and set out for the farm-house. No words could express his delight when he met the object of his love walking on the sea-banks. On beholding him she fastid away, he took her in his arms, kissed her with rapture, and after an hour spent in delightful conversation, they parted, she having engaged to meet him on the following evening.

Fanny was now so deeply in love with her insidious betrayer, that he had little difficulty in persuading her to elope with him. Accordingly, one fine evening in June, they met as usual, when overcome by his flattering tongue, & five promises she absconded with him in a boat, leaving her clothes behind her. They went to Gravesend, where they stopped all night, and set off next day for London, & passing for man and wife, took apartments near Fitzroy-square. For the space of 4 months Fanny lived in the greatest happiness; her mind was dazzled by the splendid style in which she was kept, & the pleasures which surrounded her. But, short-lived were her joys: a unsuspecting maid perceived rat in the smiles and excesses of her deceitful lover, the serpent that would sting her to death. Her seducer soon found that his purse could not keep pace with his extravagance. He applied to his friends, but was told that they were determined to uphold him in prison no longer, & that for the future he must confine himself to his pay. The ship to which he belonged was ordered to a distant station, & he took leave of Fanny with much affected tenderness, vowing to return and marry her. Accordingly he set off; but Fanny almost broke-hearted, for some time the head of an regularly once a fortnight, and in the last letter she ever received was enclosed a gold note. After this she heard from him no more. Her situation now may be felt by all who can sympathize with the sorrows of a ruined female, but it cannot be described. Far situated in a state of pregnancy, destitute of money, ashamed to return to her friends, her clothes all sold and pawned, this wretched, but lovely young woman, was cast destitute upon the world. In the gloom of night she left London, and gaining the suburbs, she wandered till day light, abandoned to the fate of a human being, she got habited a hodge, and went all day, in some critical manner she travelled to a habitor, walking at night, & covering herself by day, soliciting charity, as well as heretics. Sometimes distressed with cold, she would creep into a shed or ditch, & in such a situation she was taken in labour. No human assistance was near to help her in the hour of nature's sorrow, & on the cold ground, with silver pains and throes she brought forth a lovely child. She carried her infant in her arms for some miles, till coming to a stream, where she plunged her babe into the stream. Two countrymen saw her, and tried to save the child, but in vain. She was then sent to prison. When her trial came on, she pleaded guilty, year on all the Judge pronounced her to die, and he about noon while passing a sentence of death upon her. But what language can express the agonies of her distracted parents, her brothers & sisters, when they came in the prison to take their last farewell of their lost Fanny? A sad matter, they fastid away. She was led to the fatal scaffold at York, on Monday last, & suffered amidst thousands of weeping spectators.

J. CURRAN, Printer, Monument-court, 7 Ditch. Transcribers and Country Shoppe supplied with Sheet Hymns, accompanied with Engravings, not to be equalled in England for Beauty and Cheapness. Also, Blank Songs, Nuptials, &c.

HER HANGER SHE DID FEEL
 With horror from the shore,
 And on the cold north wind he
 And wept from night till morn.
 No more proud they the sky,
 When Fanny was in labour's pain,
 No noise nor but was night,
 On banks and lanes the faculty crept
 Into a ditch had by,
 To hear how kindly she wept,
 Would soothe every eye.
 Three ladies, gentle and sweet about,
 Alas! her shrieking frame,
 And from her mouth a lovely boy,
 With wail and weeping came.
 O think in pity on her fate,
 Ye tender mothers dear,
 Ye who at ease, all cares forgot,
 Think not to shed a tear,
 She had no clothing for her child,
 And once was by her side,
 With anguish and despair most wild,
 She plung'd it in the wave,
 Yet deep a tear for Fanny's fate,
 Her heart was good and kind,
 And motions, from her sad estate,
 No action so may find.
 None would have'd with misery,
 Poor Fanny's trouble is now,
 Ah, no for another day to live,
 Now yet a feeling son,
 For Fanny Amlett's fate,
 Sober'd from Widdow's tear,
 All in the fashion of her party
 A scaffold ends her day.

FOR Fanny Amlett stop a tear,
 Sobber'd from Widdow's tear,
 All in the fashion of her party,
 A scaffold ends her day,
 And weeps from night till morn,
 No more proud they the sky,
 When Fanny was in labour's pain,
 No noise nor but was night,
 On banks and lanes the faculty crept
 Into a ditch had by,
 To hear how kindly she wept,
 Would soothe every eye.
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 No action so may find.
 None would have'd with misery,
 Poor Fanny's trouble is now,
 Ah, no for another day to live,
 Now yet a feeling son,
 For Fanny Amlett's fate,
 Sober'd from Widdow's tear,
 All in the fashion of her party
 A scaffold ends her day.

Figure 4: Fanny Amlett Broadside

¹²² Judith Knelman's short descriptive account of the Parker case agrees with a couple of my points: the judgment of Parker because of her sexual transgression, and the importance of the narrative of penitence: Knelman, *Twisting in the Wind* pp.134-6.

In searching through broadsides and newspaper reports related to child killing in the nineteenth century, I found no pictures of a young, unmarried mother killing her newborn. This is despite the fact that this was by far the most common kind of child homicide accusation at this time. Instead of an image of a murdered newborn, I will consider the broadside in **Fig. 4**. It was printed by noted printer J. Catnach, who set up business in the 'low' London printing locale, Seven Dials, in 1813. This is dated between 1813-1841 by Harvard Law Library, so it could have been one of his prized, early productions, and it also survives in the Bodleian John Johnson Collection.¹²³ I have not found any other references to the execution of Fanny Amlett in York, which supports the conclusion that this broadside is probably a 'cock' – apocryphal, but still worthy of examination as a piece of street literature. Whether representing a 'real' crime or not, this broadside beautifully encapsulates the sentimental cultural narrative underpinning judicial lenience towards women who murdered their newborn infants which was the dominant trend in nineteenth century newborn child murder cases.¹²⁴ The eye and sentiment of the reader is immediately drawn in by a well-rendered woodcut depicting a dashing young British officer entreating his young beloved to leave with him in the boat next to the shore. His hand points to the boat, his eye entices the woman, while her eye is cast out to the horizon, drawing the viewer, too, into contemplation about what her future will hold as a result of succumbing to the officer's seduction. The viewer is also reminded of the wrong committed to the father of the young woman (a 'wealthy grazier' the text informs us) as he is depicted at the top of the broadside, accompanied only by his farm dog, beside a tree stripped of leaves, symbolic of his blasted hopes, and the raven in the branches foretelling death. In the pictorial narrative, which proceeds from top to bottom of the broadside, the woman passes from the control of her father, into the hands of the officer, and thence, into the grip of the law, here represented by

¹²³ I have used the Harvard copy: 'Heart-rending execution of Fanny Amlett: a grazier's daughter, near Scarborough, who was basely seduced from home by a naval officer, who brought her to disgrace, and then deserted her. She became pregnant, ... in a fit of despair, and scarce knowing what she did, she drowned her new-born babe: for which she was brought to trial, and executed' (J. Catnach, Printer, Monmouth-court, 7 Dials, [between 1813 and 1841]) Trials Broadside 401, Historical & Special Collections, Harvard Law School Library, <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HLS.Lib:1088048> [Accessed 2 November 2015].

¹²⁴ Many scholars discuss the emergence of a humanitarian or 'lenient' approach to many of these cases from the eighteenth century onwards, including: Arnot, 'Gender in Focus'; Grey, "'Agonised Weeping'"; Grey, 'Discourses'; Daniel J. R. Grey, "'The Agony of Despair': Pain and the Cultural Script of Infanticide in England and Wales, 1860-1960,' in Rob Boddice (ed.) *Pain and emotion in modern history* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) pp.204-19; Higginbotham, "'Sin of the Age'"; Peter C. Hoffer et al., *Murdering Mothers: Infanticide in England 1558-1803* (New York University Press, 1984); Jackson, *New-Born Child Murder*; Mark Jackson, 'The trial of Harriet Vooght: continuity and change in the history of infanticide,' in Jackson (ed.) *Infanticide* pp.1-17; Kilday, *A History of Infanticide*; Dana Rabin, 'Bodies of evidence, states of mind: infanticide, emotion and sensibility in eighteenth-century England,' in Jackson (ed.) *Infanticide* pp.73-92; Tony Ward, 'Legislating for human nature: legal responses to infanticide, 1860-1938,' in Jackson (ed.) *Infanticide* pp.249-69; Ward, 'The Sad Subject'.

the male figures of executioner and chaplain, and the grim, inert symbol of the scaffold. This scaffold image is unusual in showing the face of the condemned kneeling in prayer before execution, rather than the inert, shrouded body dangling after death. Fanny implores both God and the broadside consumer for mercy, a visual device that amplifies the main message in the text.

A story of male perfidy is told in the prose section of the broadside which follows the 'seduction plot' common in novels developing the infanticide theme and in popular melodrama.¹²⁵ The villain here is a particular kind of rakish masculinity indulging in seduction without responsibility, and the carefully wrought ensign on the ship highlights that these crimes of abuse of women and subsequent infant murder are not confined to the 'savage' colonized other, which was a key discourse about infanticide in the early nineteenth century, but are carried out on British shores.¹²⁶ Fanny, 'deeply in love with the insidious betrayer ... with a flattering tongue, & fine promises', eloped with him to London where they lived the high life for a few months before he deserted her.¹²⁷ Like 'The Cruel Mother' in the traditional ballad, and Wordsworth's protagonist Martha Ray, Fanny's infanticide tale was rural.¹²⁸ She left London, hiding her shame by day and making her slow way through the countryside to Yorkshire, by night. Naturalization of Fanny continues in the verses:

Like some fair flowret in the vale,
That blooms the pride of May,
But blown at random by the gale,
It sweets doth fade away.

...

Remote she wander'd to and fro,
Expos'd to cold and wind.
Her hunger she did satisfy
With berries from the thorn,
And on the cold earth she would lie,

¹²⁵ Brandser, 'In Defence of Murderous Mothers'; George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, ed. and intro. Margaret Reynolds (Penguin, 2008 [1859]); Kristine Krueger, 'Literary Defenses'; Kristen Leaver, 'Victorian Melodrama and the Performance of Poverty,' *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 27 (1999) 443-56; McDonagh, *Child Murder*; McDonagh, 'Child Murder Narratives'; Startup, 'Damaging Females'; Walter Scott, *The Heart of Midlothian*, ed. and intro. Claire Lamont (Oxford University Press, 2008 [1818]); Frances Trollope, *Jessie Philips* (Nonsuch, 2006 [1843]).

¹²⁶ Rashmi Dube Bhatnager et al., *Female Infanticide in India: A Feminist Cultural History* (State University of New York Press, 2005); Daniel J. R. Grey, 'Creating the "Problem Hindu": Sati, Thuggee and Female Infanticide in India, 1800-60,' *Gender & History*, 25 (2013) 498-510; McDonagh, *Child Murder*.

¹²⁷ 'Heart-rending execution of Fanny Amllett'.

¹²⁸ Francis James Child (ed.) *English and Scottish Ballads*, vol. II (Little, Brown and Co., 1860) contains two versions of 'The Cruel Mother' on pp.267-71, and a closely related ballad with a different title: 'Fine Flowers in the Valley,' pp.265-6; William Wordsworth, 'The Thorn,' in *Lyrical Ballads 1798*, ed. Harold Littledale (Henry Frowde, 1911) pp.117-32. Strong pastoral elements continued in infanticide literature of the nineteenth century, e.g. Eliot, *Adam Bede*.

And weep from night till morn.¹²⁹

Ah, the weeping. As in the Mitchel broadside discussed earlier, the prose and the ballad seek floods of tears from the consumer. 'Her situation now may be felt by all who can sympathise with the sorrows of a ruined female, but it cannot be described'. Fanny 'wept all day' as she hid behind hedges. When she was eventually brought to trial and pleaded guilty, the Judge could not persuade her from this plea, and like the real Mr. Justice Willes, 'he shed tears while passing sentence of death upon her'.¹³⁰ Fanny then suffered the extreme penalty of the law, 'amidst thousands of weeping spectators'. And if that weren't enough, having read the prose narrative, the consumer approaches the verses to be entreated from the first, 'For Fanny Amlett drop a tear' and to '[m]ark, her sufferings how great, / Behold her tearful eye'. When she creeps into a ditch to bear her child, the reader is again addressed:

To hear how bitterly she wept,
Would moisten every eye
...
And from her womb a lovely boy,
With wail and weeping came.
O think in pity on her lot,
Ye tender mothers dear,
Ye who at ease, all cares forgot,
Blush not to shed a tear.

Just in case readers and listeners have not caught on, in the penultimate stanza we are called to 'drop a tear for Fanny's fate' and again in the final stanza, 'For Fanny Amlett drop a tear / ... A scaffold ends her days'.¹³¹ This broadside shares the language of tears with the Mitchel broadside. Yet in contrast to the ambivalence of the latter, here image, text and verse share a unified voice of pity for the shamed woman, and the real 'crime' is depicted as the seduction of the innocent and deluded young woman.

The sentiment strongly conveyed in images and text in this early-nineteenth century broadside was also voiced by leading figures who influenced the outcome of infanticide trials. Building on the views of medical practitioner Erasmus Darwin, who argued that young women killing their illegitimate babies should be 'real Objects of our greatest Pity', in 1783 Dr William Hunter delivered a highly influential paper about infanticide that continued to be cited as expert opinion into the nineteenth century:

¹²⁹ 'Heart-rending execution of Fanny Amlett'.

¹³⁰ 'Heart-rending execution of Fanny Amlett'; Dixon, 'The Tears of Mr Justice Willes'.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

In most of these cases the father of the child is the real criminal, often cruelly so; the mother is weak, credulous, and deluded. Having obtained gratification, he thinks no more of his promises: she finds herself abused, disappointed of his affection, attention, and support, and left to struggle as she can, with sickness, pains, poverty, infamy; in short, with complete *ruin for life!*¹³²

This kind of sympathy for young women bearing children resulting from 'seduction' was strengthened by the furore surrounding the bastardy clauses of the 1834 New Poor Law which made it much more difficult for the mother of an illegitimate child to get support for it from the father.¹³³ It is particularly significant that pity for the shamed young woman was then echoed in textual sources from the 1860s when the Victorian 'infanticide panic' was at its height. William Burke Ryan, who was the first Victorian medical man to make a strong critical statement about the extent of infanticide in Britain, can be cited as an example. Even Ryan, who wrote of a 'slaying epidemic' which ensured that 'the feeble wail of murdered childhood in its agony assails our ears at every turn', could plead that society should regard young unmarried women killing newborns with forgiveness and pity because they were the 'unhappy victims of ... seduction'.¹³⁴

A number of historians, including Joel Eigen, Peter King, and Deirdre Palk, have pointed out that in the eighteenth and first part of the nineteenth century, juries and sometimes judges often searched for ways to reduce the culpability of defendants in order to mitigate harsh penal statutes which punished those convicted with execution.¹³⁵ One group which benefitted from this practice was single, young women accused of killing their newborn babies and the foregoing discussion illustrates the key shame narrative supporting mitigation, which had its modern roots in eighteenth century sentiments discussed by

¹³² Dr William Hunter, 'On the uncertainty of the signs of murder, in the case of bastard children,' *Medical Observations and Inquiries*, 6 (1784) 266-90 – published posthumously. The long-term significance of this essay is evident from its prominence in a key nineteenth-century medical jurisprudential work, from which I have taken the quote: William Cummin, *The Proofs of Infanticide Considered. Including Dr. Hunter's Tract on Child Murder, with Illustrative Notes* (Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green, and Longman, 1836) p.5. For Erasmus Darwin's view from 1767, see *The Letters of Erasmus Darwin*, ed. Desmond King-Herle (Cambridge University Press, 1981) p.42.

¹³³ Arnot, 'Gender in Focus,' ch.2; Committee for Amending the Law in Points Wherein it is Injurious to Women (CALPIW), *Infant Mortality: its cause and remedies* (CALPIW, 1866); Ursula R. Q. Henriques, 'Bastardy and the New Poor Law,' *Past & Present*, 37 (1967) 103-29; Higginbotham, "'Sin of the Age'"; McDonagh, *Child Murder*, ch.4.

¹³⁴ Ryan, *Infanticide* pp.45-6,28.

¹³⁵ Eigen, *Witnessing Insanity* ch.1; Peter J. King, 'Decision-Makers and Decision-Making in the English Criminal Law, 1750-1800,' *Historical Journal*, 27 (1984) 25-58; Deirdre Palk, *Gender, Crime and Judicial Discretion 1780-1830* (Boydell Press, 2006) pp.125-35. For primary evidence see 'Report of the Capital Punishment Commission'.

Thomas Laqueur and Dana Rabin.¹³⁶ Mark Jackson has pointed out that the clauses in Lord Ellenborough's Act of 1803, which repealed the Jacobean concealment of birth statute and brought all killings of bastard newborns back within the common law of homicide, were designed to stamp out lenient treatment of these women and to increase convictions for these crimes.¹³⁷ He found that on the Northern Assize Circuit there were more executions of women for killing newborns in the early nineteenth century than there had been during the later decades of the eighteenth.¹³⁸ It could well be the case that the Fanny Amlett broadside was produced in the early years of Catnach's business in response to a perceived increase in executions of women for infant murder. My research on nineteenth century judicial records indicates that this increased punishment of mothers for killing their babies was relatively short-lived and that the shame narrative so eloquently communicated in the broadside under discussion dominated legal decisions in cases where mothers were accused of killing their newborns in the nineteenth century.¹³⁹ This argument is supported by the work of other scholars in the field, though the thread of ambivalence caused by fears of monstrous motherhood remained.¹⁴⁰ The medical jurisprudential dilemmas of proving live birth, and a gap in the law between abortion and murder, which effectively rendered the infant in the process of birth unprotected by any law, meant that gaining convictions for alleged murders of newborns by mothers who had been unassisted at the births, was extremely difficult.¹⁴¹ No woman in England was hanged for the murder of her own infant after Rebecca Smith in Wiltshire in 1849, and the child in that case was a month old. Here, the mother had admitted poisoning eight of her children, so this was an extreme case, part of the mid-century poisoning epidemic and thus an unlikely candidate for humanitarian sympathy.¹⁴² At the Old

¹³⁶ Laqueur, 'Bodies, Details'; Rabin, 'Bodies of evidence'. See also Hoffer et al., *Murdering Mothers*; Jackson, *New-Born Child Murder*. For wider context on the centrality of shame in criminal justice discourse and practice see: Gattrell, *The Hanging Tree*; Martin Ingram, 'Shame and Pain: Themes and Variations in Tudor Punishments,' in Simon Devereaux et al. (eds.) *Penal Practice and Culture, 1500-1900: Punishing the English* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) pp.36-62; David Nash et al., *Cultures of Shame: Exploring Crime and Morality in Britain 1600-1900* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Robert B. Shoemaker, *The London Mob: Violence and Disorder in Eighteenth –Century London* (Hambledon and London, 2004); Robert B. Shoemaker, 'Streets of Shame? The Crowd and Public Punishments in London, 1700-1820,' in Devereaux et al. (eds.) *Penal Practice* pp.232-57.

¹³⁷ Jackson, *New-Born Child Murder*, pp.168-77.

¹³⁸ Ibid, p.176.

¹³⁹ Arnot, 'Gender in Focus'.

¹⁴⁰ Lynn Abrams, 'From Demon to Victim: The Infanticidal Mother in Shetland, 1699-1899,' in Brown et al. (eds.) *Twisted Sisters* pp.180-203; D'Cruze et al., *Women Crime and Justice* pp.79-80; Elaine Farrell, 'A most diabolical deed': *Infanticide and Irish society, 1850-1900* (Manchester University Press, 2013); Ginger Frost provides a very interesting example of just how far the humanitarian narrative could stretch in 'Motherhood on Trial'. Grey, "'Agonised Weeping'"; Grey, "'The Agony of Despair'"; Grey, 'Discourses'; Higginbotham, "'Sin of the Age'"; Kilday, *A History of Infanticide*; Wiener, 'Convicted murderers,' pp.112-3.

¹⁴¹ Arnot, 'Gender in Focus,' ch.3.

¹⁴² Katherine D. Watson, *Poisoned Lives: English Poisoners and their Victims* (Hambledon, 2004) p.88; Katherine D. Watson, 'Religion, Community and the Infanticidal Mother: Evidence from 1840s Wiltshire,' *Family & Community History* 11 (2008) 116-33.

Bailey, there was not a single person, female or male, found guilty of murdering a newborn infant after 1828.¹⁴³ Most suspicious newborn infant deaths that ended up in the Old Bailey were prosecuted as concealment, not murder, or returned as concealment verdicts on murder indictments. And as the century wore on, punishment for concealment decreased to a norm of short prison sentences, especially if the accused pleaded guilty to concealment: by the decade 1870-79, over 70 per cent of women who pleaded guilty to concealment before the Old Bailey received sentences of less than two weeks' imprisonment, one of these even being non-custodial.¹⁴⁴ I am certainly not claiming that all these women intentionally killed their babies – it is impossible for the historian to know whether concealment indictments and partial verdicts on homicide charges were legal fudges to get around the medico-legal difficulties in cases where newborn infants were intentionally killed, or charges and verdicts proportionate to the minor crime of simply concealing a birth where the baby was either born dead or died soon after from natural causes. Nevertheless this data still supports the premise that the criminal justice system treated suspicious deaths of newborn babies rather leniently. The Fanny Amlett broadside indicates synchronicity between popular cultural narratives and the broad trend of judicial lenience, adding popular and visual dimensions to the links Christine Krueger has drawn between literary representations and judicial outcomes.¹⁴⁵

3 Murdering Men: Monstrous, Pitiably and Victims of Women

The popular cultural messages about men murdering their children could be complex as can be seen from the two broadsides discussed in depth here. The first represents the drowning of his three children by recently widowed 'John Marlew' followed by his suicide, and a subsequent spousal murder by his brother. The second represents the murder of an eight-year-old child after extended cruelty by the father, John Smith, and his second wife, stepmother to the dead child. These represent only a small proportion of the different types of male child-killing cases encountered in criminal trials.¹⁴⁶ Nevertheless they serve as an

¹⁴³ Catherine Welch, 10 April 1828, was the last case – *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, CATHERINE WELCH (t18280410-17). According to Capital Punishment UK she was executed at Newgate on 14 April 1828: <http://www.capitalpunishmentuk.org/1828.html> [Accessed 6 March 2012].

¹⁴⁴ Arnot, 'Gender in Focus,' appendix 1, table 7, p.284.

¹⁴⁵ Krueger, 'Literary Defenses'.

¹⁴⁶ Arnot, 'Gender in Focus'; Linda Danson et al., 'Child murder and the media: A study of the reporting of child murder in *The Times* 1887-1900,' *The Journal of Forensic Psychiatry*, 7:3 (1996) 495-503; Frost, "'I am master here'"; Gregory, "'Most Revolting Murder'"; Grey, 'Discourses'; Kilday, *A History of Infanticide* pp.69-72, 138, 157, 201-2; Dana Rabin, 'Beyond "Lewd Women" and "Wanton Wenches": Infanticide and Child-Murder in the Long Eighteenth Century,' in Thorn (ed.) *Writing British Infanticide* pp.45-69; Shepherd, 'Victorian Madmen'; Wilson, 'Mad, Sad, or Bad?' J. R. Dickinson and J. R. Sharpe note the extreme rarity of indictments of men for killing their newborn infants in their sample: 'Infanticide in early modern England: the Court of Great Sessions at Chester, 1650-1800,' in Jackson (ed.) *Infanticide* pp.35-51. Earlier historiography considered men mainly in the context of

interesting entrée into considering cultural representations of paternal child killing in the first half of the nineteenth century. While monstrosity was certainly an important theme, the broadsides also include narratives ameliorating the responsibility of the male killers. These concern bereavement, 'poverty' and inability to fulfil their role as provider, and the 'evil witch' narrative suggesting that the men's acts were crucially influenced by women who transgressed the boundaries of appropriate femininity. It is noteworthy that this latter narrative of women as the real villains behind male acts of child killing exactly reverses the cultural narrative of male perfidy underlying female acts of infanticide, discussed above in relation to the Fanny Amlett broadside.



Figure 5: Marlew Broadside

burial insurance killings: George Behlmer, *Child Abuse and Moral Reform in England, 1870-1908* (Stanford University Press, 1982) pp.121-3; Thomas Forbes, 'Deadly Parents: Child Homicide in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century England,' *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, 41:2 (1986) 175-99; Lionel Rose, *Massacre of the Innocents: Infanticide in Great Britain 1800-1939* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986); and on 'blood libel' accusations including those against men see Luc Racaut, 'Accusations of infanticide on the eve of the French Wars of Religion,' in Jackson (ed.) *Infanticide* pp.18-34.

There are other similarities between the Fanny Amlett and Marlew broadsides. In both broadsides, visual images, prose and verses have a more united voice than is the case for many broadsides; this may be because they are both probably 'cocks' without reference to particular events.¹⁴⁷ I have located three different versions of the Marlew broadside: the one already cited, dated as 1820s-1830s in the Bodleian Harding collection, printed by William Kent of Newcastle; another, without the illustration but with the same text, in the British Library, printed by Horlock, which the BL suggests may have been made in Swanage in 1885;¹⁴⁸ while another appears in Cambridge University Library printed by J. Catnach in London, and dated c.1830 by that library.¹⁴⁹ I have yet to locate an actual case association for this broadside so the British Library's catalogue entry suggesting it is a 'possibly fictitious account of murder and suicide' is probably correct.¹⁵⁰ This all suggests that at least one and probably two versions of the Marlew broadside date from the first half of the nineteenth century, and that the meanings communicated by the broadside continued to have currency across many decades.¹⁵¹

The powerful image occupies the top third of this broadside. The bold text immediately above the image ensures that the viewer knows the narrative moment depicted: the man is in the process of drowning his children immediately before committing suicide by the same means. The simple image of the suicidal man's grief stricken, sunken features, immune to the imploring arms of his drowning child, initially elicits shock, yet the mournful face of the man, together with the description of him immediately above the illustration as 'the miserable Man, in a fit of Despair' produces a shift towards sympathy for the pitiable fate of this family.¹⁵² This message is strengthened by many textual elements in the broadside. The

¹⁴⁷ 'A horrid and dreadful account of John Marlew, who with his three starving children, went to seek assistance from a rich brother, - relating, how his brother's wife turned them out of doors, when the miserable man, in a fit of despair, went home, and drowned himself and three children in a well in his garden' (William Kent, Printer, 22 Side, Newcastle, n.d. [1820s-1830s]) Bodleian Library, University of Oxford: John Johnson Collection: Broadside: Murder and Execution Folder Harding B 9/4 (236). 'John Johnson Collection: An Archive of Printed Ephemera', ProQuest, Online durable URL http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&res_dat=xri:johnson:&rft_dat=xri:johnson:rec:20080811114318kg [Accessed 30 October 2015]. Image published with permission of ProQuest and Bodleian Library. Further reproduction is prohibited without permission. Image produced by ProQuest as part of the *John Johnson Collection* www.proquest.com.

¹⁴⁸ Exactly the same title ([Swanage]: Horlock Printer, [1885?]) in BL broadside folio: General Reference Collection 74/1888.c.3(141).

¹⁴⁹ Exactly the same title (London: J. Catnach, Printer, 2 & 3 Monmouth-Court, 7 Dials [ca 1830?]).

¹⁵⁰ COPAC: <http://copac.jisc.ac.uk/search?title=John%20Marlew&rn=1> [Accessed 30 October 2015].

¹⁵¹ On Catnach's retirement date see Charles Hindley, *The Life and Times of James Catnach (Late of Seven Dials), Ballad Monger* (Reeves and Turner, 1878) p.xi.

¹⁵² 'A horrid and dreadful account of John Marlew'.

'mournful verses' leave no doubt, indicating that tears are the appropriate feeling response to the tale:

Come listen to this mournful tale,
All those who have a heart to feel;
Nor will they blush to shed a tear,
This tale of misery to hear.¹⁵³

We are furthermore drawn into sympathy through the prose depicting the experience of the penurious man's brother when asked for help: The brother, powerfully moved by the story of Marlew's misery and the 'perishing hunger' of the motherless children 'was affected to tears during the recital of his miseries'. The narrative guides us to an encounter between the poor man and his sister-in-law. His brother sent him to her with clear instructions that she provide the poor man with food for the family: 'falling upon his knees' he begs his sister-in-law 'to have pity upon his children'. The prose reiterates that he was '[i]n despair, such as no language can describe' while the verses remind us that he was an ordinary man fallen on very hard times: an '... honest man of low degree, / Reduc'd to want and beggary'. But his sister-in-law did not follow her husband's instructions, instead turning her starving brother-in-law away. The reader witnesses the tragedy through yet more tearful eyes. Upon discovering his wife's behaviour, the rich brother dispatches a servant to his brother's house, carrying both victuals and money. Yet this is too late: the servant discovers the bodies in the fateful well. It was '[w]ith tears' that the servant 'returned and told his master of the horrible tale'. Marlew's brother, 'distracted to madness ... immediately blew out his wife's brains with a pistol, then went and delivered himself up to justice'.¹⁵⁴

The broadside thus tells a tale of three-fold transgression and crime. The first was the moral heartlessness and insubordination of the rich brother's wife, which the broadside claims underlay the whole 'horrible catastrophe'. She refused to give Marlew food for his family, although her husband had directed her to do so. Description of the husband's instruction as an 'order' is repeated several times on the broadside. When Marlew sought her help, he received a 'haughty reception'. His sister-in-law, 'an inhuman wretch', with a pitiless, 'flinty heart', spoke to him 'in a most insolent tone'. '[A]lthough his entreaties might have softened the most hardened heart' she 'rudely pushed the miserable family out of doors', sending them away with no food at all.¹⁵⁵ The second crime was Marlew's murdering his children by

¹⁵³ 'A horrid and dreadful account of John Marlew'.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

drowning them in a well, followed by his own suicide. And the third was the rich brother's murder of his wife. It is important to consider carefully the sympathetic stance of the broadside towards the murderous men.

Despite the horror of this violence – the father tying his children together ‘with a thick cord ... and deaf to their piercing cries’, throwing them into a well – we have seen how the broadside seeks the sympathy of the reader and listener by turning attention onto the pitiable suicidal father rather than dwelling upon the violence against the children.¹⁵⁶ Cathryn Wilson, too, found in narratives of paternal murder/suicide in *The Times* during the later nineteenth century a tendency towards sympathy for fathers unable to support their children achieved in part by a similar narrative shift away from the murdered children to focus on the fathers' stories.¹⁵⁷ This historical cultural representation of a father killing his children and committing suicide because he could no longer perform his role as family provider has uncanny echoes in other times and places. While constructions of masculinities are both unstable and varied, many historians of both middle- and working-class masculinity have found a long-term continuity in the association of masculinity with providing for families. As John Tosh notes of the nineteenth century middle class, ‘To form a household, to exercise authority over dependants, and to shoulder the responsibility of maintaining and protecting them – these things set the seal on a man's gender identity’.¹⁵⁸ Marlew's domestic authority was fatally undermined by his unemployment, poverty and inability to feed his family.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ ‘A horrid and dreadful account of John Marlew’.

¹⁵⁷ Wilson, ‘Mad, Sad, or Bad?’ p.157.

¹⁵⁸ John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (Yale University Press, 1999) p.108. See also: Joanne Bailey, ‘Masculinity and Fatherhood in England, c. 1760-1830,’ in John H. Arnold et al. (eds.) *What is Masculinity? Historical Dynamics From Antiquity to the Contemporary World* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) pp.167-86; Joanne Bailey, *Parenting in England 1760-1830: Emotion, Identity, and Generation* (Oxford University Press, 2012); Sean Brady, *Masculinity and Male Homosexuality in Britain, 1861-1900* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Trev Lynn Broughton et al., ‘Introduction: The Empire of the Father,’ in Trev Lynn Broughton et al. (eds.) *Gender and Fatherhood in the Nineteenth Century* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) pp.1-28; Leonore Davidoff et al., *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English middle class, 1780-1850* (Hutchinson, 1987) pp.334-5; Leonore Davidoff et al., *The Family Story: Blood, Contract and Intimacy, 1830-1960* (Longman, 1999) pp.135-57; Megan Doolittle, ‘Fatherhood and Family Shame: Masculinity, Welfare and the Workhouse in Late Nineteenth-Century England,’ in Delap et al. (eds.) *The Politics of Domestic Authority* pp.84-108; Megan Doolittle, ‘Fatherhood, Religious Belief and the Protection of Children in Nineteenth-Century English Families,’ in Broughton et al. (eds.) *Gender and Fatherhood* pp.31-42; Megan Doolittle, ‘Missing Fathers: Assembling a History of Fatherhood in Mid-nineteenth Century England,’ unpublished PhD thesis, University of Essex, 1996; Frost, ‘“I am master here”’; Eleanor Gordon et al., ‘Domestic Fathers and the Victorian Parental Role,’ *Women's History Review*, 15 (2006) 551-9; Karen Harvey, ‘Men Making Home: Masculinity and Domesticity in Eighteenth Century Britain,’ in K. H. Adler et al. (eds.) *Homes and Homecomings: Gendered Histories of Domesticity and Return* (Wiley Blackwell, 2011) pp.66-86; Karen Harvey, *The Little Republic: Masculinity and Domestic Authority in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford University Press, 2012); Shepherd, ‘“One of the Best Fathers”’; Shepherd, ‘Victorian Madmen,’ pp.170-207; Julie-Marie Strange, ‘“Speechless with Grief”: Bereavement and the Working-Class Father, c. 1880-1914,’ in Broughton et al. (eds.) *Gender*

The centrality of the expectation that men should exercise domestic authority in their homes meant that the normal behaviour of control and mastery could easily translate into domestic violence which was widespread in working-class homes and not uncommon in middle-class families in the nineteenth century.¹⁶⁰ The story on the broadside is one of atrocious domestic violence directed by men against both children and a spouse, yet neither of these transgressions is harshly judged. Only the insubordinate wife is roundly condemned and the reader is not counselled to pity her despite her gruesome fate. Cathryn Wilson also found sympathy for male child killers when women's bad behaviour was deemed the cause of the men's murderous actions. Wilson describes this shift of blame in the case of James Walker who murdered one of his three children in 1886. On the day of the murder his wife had left Walker with the children to go out drinking and *The Times* reported that he "lived unhappily with his wife."¹⁶¹ She was reported to have stayed out all night and only discovered her child was dead the next day. There are echoes of the circumstances of Parker killing her stepchildren discussed earlier (Blake, too, only discovered that his children had been murdered the morning after spending the night with a prostitute). Yet in the Walker case, all the sympathy was reserved for the child killer. *The Times* reported the crowd's behaviour at the child's funeral, clear social manifestation of the cultural script in the Marlew broadside: "At the funeral of the child, the mother, to whose misconduct Walker attributed his crime, was made the subject of a hostile demonstration on the part of the crowd, and was with difficulty protected by the police from violence."¹⁶²

Martin Wiener has found evidence within trials of some jury sympathy for men's murders of their spouses in the first part of the nineteenth century, which would correlate with the lack of criticism of Marlew's brother killing his wife.¹⁶³ While Wiener and other historians point to reduced tolerance of male violence, recent work by Jade Shepherd and Cathryn Wilson

and Fatherhood pp.138-49; John Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Essays on gender, family and empire* (Pearson Longman, 2005) p.37.

¹⁵⁹ Different aspects of domestic authority are usefully considered in Delap et al. (eds.) *The Politics of Domestic Authority*.

¹⁶⁰ Anna Clark, 'Domesticity and the problem of wifebeating in nineteenth-century Britain: working-class culture, law and politics,' in D'Cruze (ed.) *Everyday Violence* pp.27-40; D'Cruze, *Crimes of outrage*; Maeve E. Doggett, *Marriage, Wife-Beating and the Law in Victorian England* (University of South Carolina Press, 1993); Elizabeth Foyster, *Marital Violence: An English Family History, 1660-1857* (Cambridge University Press, 2005); A. James Hammerton, *Cruelty and Companionship: Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Married Life* (Routledge, 1995); Ellen Ross, 'Fierce Questions and Taunts: Married Life in Working-Class London,' *Feminist Studies*, 8 (1982) 575-602; Nancy Tomes, 'A "Torrent of Abuse": Crimes of Violence Between Working-Class Men and Women in London, 1840-75,' *Journal of Social History*, 11 (1978) 328-345; Wiener, 'Alice Arden to Bill Sykes'; Wiener, *Men of Blood*.

¹⁶¹ *The Times*, 3 May 1886, p.4, cited in Wilson, 'Mad, Sad, or Bad?' p.160.

¹⁶² *Ibid*, p.162.

¹⁶³ Wiener, *Men of Blood*.

complicates the picture by suggesting that the kind of sympathy for paternal child killing under certain circumstances represented in the Marlew broadside may have continued through to the end of the nineteenth century.¹⁶⁴ Shepherd has concluded that sympathy for paternal child killing triggered by men's failure to live up to the expectation to provide for their families lay behind a steady trickle of insanity verdicts and consequent admissions to Broadmoor Criminal Lunatic Asylum.¹⁶⁵ Furthermore Wilson has outlined for the same later nineteenth century period a range of circumstances surrounding paternal filicides that resulted in representations sympathetic to the male perpetrator, and indeed, to many verdicts of insanity that avoided the capital penalty for murder.¹⁶⁶ Marlew's brother is explicitly described on the broadside as 'distracted to madness'. Furthermore, Marlew's extremely downcast face in the woodcut, reiteration of his 'despair' in the prose, and explanation in the verses that 'His poor wife's death distress'd his mind', together indicate loss of reason. Wilson defines the different circumstances resulting in sympathy for male child killers in the cases she studied as poverty, bereavement and betrayal and we have seen different versions of these narratives operating on a single broadside.

Yet sympathy was not always extended to fathers who did not provide adequately for their families. In many manslaughter and neglect cases fathers were punished for failure to fulfill their duty to provide. An exemplary case will suffice here. After the passing of the New Poor Law in 1834, if a man was unable to provide for his family, it was his responsibility to take them into the workhouse. Edward Harvey, tried before the Old Bailey in 1856, fell foul of this requirement.¹⁶⁷ He, his four children and his common law wife had been in Bethnal Green workhouse in the middle of 1855. Clearly, they did not want to repeat this experience. When unemployment later in the year led again to destitution, the family failed to enter the Union after Harvey received the order to do so. The occasional basic rations received from the Union were not enough to prevent Harvey's two middle children, aged five and seven, dying from starvation in December that year. There was little sympathy for his failed fatherhood and he was imprisoned for a year on conviction for manslaughter. His partner, Harriet Ray, was acquitted – neglect to provide was deemed primarily the father's crime when there were

¹⁶⁴ More research is needed to differentiate long-term trends in responses to male child killing and spouse killing. Shepherd, "One of the Best Fathers"; Shepherd, 'Victorian Madmen'; Wilson, 'Mad, Sad, or Bad?' The sympathy communicated by the Marlew broadside also correlates with some sympathy noted by Melissa Gregory in representing certain kinds of paternal child killing in *The Times* in the first part of the nineteenth century: Gregory, "Most Revolting Murder".

¹⁶⁵ Shepherd, "One of the Best Fathers"; Shepherd, 'Victorian Madmen'.

¹⁶⁶ Wilson, 'Mad, Sad, or Bad?'

¹⁶⁷ Edward Harvey and Harriet Ray (1856), *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* case (t18560107-185).

two parents.¹⁶⁸ All of this strongly indicates the need for comprehensive research into media representations of these paternal crimes (all homicides and murder suicides such as that represented on the Marlew broadside) and their relationship to trial outcomes across a long time period.

The interwoven stories on the Marlew broadside also support Melissa Gregory's argument that representation of the pain of infanticidal fathers served to legitimize domestic violence against women.¹⁶⁹ The two different acts of male domestic violence depicted reflect the few dramatic cases in real life where fathers and husbands solved the problem of their failure through murder, even family annihilation.¹⁷⁰ These were, and are, crimes with an ancient lineage: crimes rooted in shame (already considered in the different context of murders of newborns by young women); crimes committed to avenge honour slighted.¹⁷¹ The powerful

¹⁶⁸ For a more comprehensive analysis of Old Bailey cases where both parents were indicted in circumstances where poverty was an issue and their child died, see Arnot, 'Gender in Focus,' ch.6. See also Conley, *The Unwritten Law*, ch.4; Grey, 'Discourses,' ch.5.

¹⁶⁹ Gregory, "Most Revolting Murder".

¹⁷⁰ Today Marlew's actions are often termed familicide/suicide or family annihilation. It is nearly always perpetrated by men and this also seems to have been the case in the past. Failure of the man's ability to provide is often but not always one causal element in these crimes. If the mother is left to live, the child killings can be vengeful murders to cause her extreme suffering. A sample of the increasing historical scholarship that discusses murder/suicide and familicide (more work is required on the UK): Olive Anderson, *Suicide in Victorian and Edwardian England* (Oxford University Press, 1987); Victor Bailey, *"This Rash Act": Suicide Across the Life Cycle in the Victorian City* (Stanford University Press, 1998) pp.71-3,218-9; Elizabeth Barnes, 'Loving with a Vengeance: *Wieland*, Familicide, and the Crisis of Masculinity in the Early Nation,' in Millette Shamir et al. (eds.) *Boys Don't Cry? Rethinking Narratives of Masculinity and Emotion in the US* (Columbia University Press, 2002) pp.44-63; Timothy B. Benford et al., *Righteous Carnage: The List Murders* (toExcel, 2000 [1991]); Hilda Bruch, 'Mass Murder: The Wagner Case,' *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 124:5 (1967) 693-8; Daniel A. Cohen, 'Homicidal Compulsion and the Conditions of Freedom: The Social and Psychological Origins of Familicide in America's Early Republic,' *Journal of Social History*, 28:4 (1995) 725-64; Charles Patrick Ewing, *Fatal Families: The Dynamics of Intrafamilial Homicide* (Sage, 1997); Karen Halttunen, *Murder Most Foul: The Killer and the American Gothic Imagination* (Harvard University Press, 1998); Barbara T. Gates, *Victorian Suicide: Mad Crimes and Sad Histories* (Princeton University Press, 1988) pp.47-50; Rowland Hughes, "'Wonderfully Cruel Proceedings": The Murderous Case of James Yates,' *Canadian Review of American Studies*, 38 (2008) 43-62; Jonathan Richards et al., "'I may as well die as go to the gallows": Murder-Suicide in Queensland, 1890-1940,' in John Weaver et al. (eds.) *Histories of Suicide: International Perspectives on Self-Destruction in the Modern World* (University of Toronto Press, 2008) pp.304-28; Thomas J. Scheff, 'Social-emotional origins of violence: A theory of multiple killing,' *Aggression & Violent Behavior*, 16 (2011) 553-60; James Sharpe notes the relative absence of this type of case in early modern England: J. A. Sharpe, 'Domestic Homicide in early modern England,' *The Historical Journal*, 24 (1981) 29-48; Neil Websdale, *Familicidal Hearts: The Emotional Styles of 211 Killers* (Oxford University Press, 2010); Donald J. West, *Murder Followed by Suicide* (Heinemann, 1965) - an important study on the topic in modern England; Daniel E. Williams, 'Writing under the Influence: An Examination of *Wieland*'s "Well Authenticated Facts" and the Depiction of Murderous Fathers in Post-Revolutionary Print Culture,' *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 15 (2003) 643-68; Wilson, 'Mad, Sad, or Bad?' pp.148-55.

¹⁷¹ On honour, gender and violence historically see: Lynn Abrams, 'The Taming of Highland Masculinity: Inter-personal Violence and Shifting Codes of Manhood, c. 1760-1840,' *Scottish Historical Review*, 92 (2013) 100-22; Margaret L. Arnot et al., 'Why gender and crime? Aspects of an international debate,' in Margaret L. Arnot et al. (eds.) *Gender and Crime in Modern Europe* (UCL Press, 1999) pp.1-43; Elizabeth Ewan, 'Disorderly Damsels? Women and Interpersonal Violence in

image of male despair on the broadside combined with prose and verse shot through with the language of suffering and pity provided a compelling stimulus to sympathy. And we will soon see that the narrative of quite atrocious male violence being blamed on women who have failed to behave within the strictures of female propriety was not confined to the Marlew broadside.

Pre-Reformation Scotland,' *Scottish Historical Review*, 89 (2010) 153-71; Ute Frevert, 'Male crime in nineteenth-century Germany: dueling,' in Arnot et al. (eds.) *Gender and Crime in Modern Europe* pp.173-88; Barbara Holland, *Gentlemen's Blood: A History of Duelling from Swords at Dawn to Pistols at Dusk* (Bloomsbury, 2003); Richard Hopton, *Pistols at Dawn: A History of Duelling* (Portrait/Piatkus, 2007); Robert Muchembled, *A History of Violence* (Polity, 2012); John Norris, *Pistols at Dawn: A History of Duelling* (The History Press, 2013); Valeria Pizzini-Gambetta, 'Gender norms in the Sicilian Mafia, 1945-86,' in Arnot et al. (eds.) *Gender and Crime in Modern Europe* pp.257-76; Paul Robinson, 'Courts of Honour in the Late Imperial Russian Army,' *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 84 (2006) 708-28; Robert B. Shoemaker, 'Male Honour and the decline of public violence in eighteenth-century London,' *Social History*, 26 (2001) 190-208; Robert B. Shoemaker, 'The Taming of the Duel: Masculinity, Honour and Ritual Violence in London, 1660-1800,' *The Historical Journal*, 45 (2002) 525-45; Spierenburg, *A History of Murder*; Carolyn Strange, 'Adjusting the Lens of Honour-Based Violence: Perspectives from Euro-American History,' in Aisha Gill et al. (eds.) *"Honour" Killing and Violence: Theory, Policy and Practice* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) pp.46-68; Strange et al. (eds.) *Honour, Violence and Emotions*; Stephen D. White, 'The Politics of Anger,' in Rosenwein (ed.) *Anger's Past* pp.127-52; For some contemporary perspectives on 'honour', gender and violence see: Nazand Begikhani et al. (eds.) *Honour-based Violence: Experiences and Counter-Strategies in Iraqi Kurdistan and the UK Kurdish Diaspora* (Ashgate, 2015); Gill et al. (eds.) *"Honour"*; Mohammad Mazher Idriss et al. (eds.) *Honour, Violence, Women and Islam* (Routledge, 2011).

The Suffolk Tragedy!

The Trial, Confession and Execution

OF
JOHN and ELIZ. SMITH,
FOR THE
MURDER of their DAUGHTER.



MARY ANN SMITH,
Hang up by her cruel Father and Mother, to a Beam in a Shed, in the Depth of Winter,
and there barbarously beat and starved to Death!

THE TRIAL.
JOHN SMITH, and Eliza Smith, his wife, were indicted for the Willful Murder of Mary Anne Smith, their daughter, only 8 years of age, in the parish of Cockley, in the county of Suffolk, by beating, starving, and exposing her to cold, from the 21st of December to the 11th of February. Mary Smith, sister to the prisoner John Smith, and that her brother came to her crying, saying his eldest girl was ill, she would certainly die, and the others would follow: whereupon she went to his house the next morning, and found the eldest girl ill in bed, in a filthy chamber, and the children below were also in the same state, and did not notice any object. I told the prisoners the children were certainly starved. I took the youngest house with me. On the Friday following, I again visited the eldest girl, and, on turning down the bed clothes I saw her body, arms and neck much discoloured, when the female prisoner said it was a disorder that came out the day before. The child begged of me to undo her feet, but the prisoner objected to it, as she had just tied them up. The child told her the female prisoner had hung her up, but did not describe in what manner. Mary Clark deposed that having heard the children were starved, she went to visit them, and was shocked with their dreadful appearance; that she gave them oranges, cake and wine and water, which they devoured voraciously; the eldest child was covered with bruises. This witness, as well as the first, said the male prisoner, during his first wife's time, was the most affectionate of fathers and husbands. Ann Cameron also deposed, that Smith was always, when she kept his house, an affectionate father, and the children then had always their bellows full. John Walker, carpenter, said that he visited the children, and found them languid and lifeless; the eldest was in a very dreadful state, she was more emaciated than any child he ever saw; and that her feet were mortified to the ankles. Mr. Scobbing Renshaw deposed that he opened the body of the deceased; and that she died from want of food, and mortification. John Wright, constable at Halesworth, said he apprehended the male prisoner; and that he told him, he once said to his wife, it was a hard thing they could not get a bit of meat after working hard; and she said yes it is, but the children will soon be off our hands, and we shall do better.— He told me his wife insisted the child should be put into the shed, and he sent her there three different nights. He also said he had hung her up, but not by the neck, but by the middle, as so for her feet to touch the ground. Farmer Higman, James Reeve, esq and Mr. Hayward all gave the man prisoner a charge of being a traitor and affrontable parent. The Judge having summed up the evidence, the Jury after five minutes deliberation, found both prisoners GUILTY. After the Jury had returned their verdict, the Judge proceeded to pass sentence of death on the prisoners, which he did with the following observations: "Prisoners at the Bar.—You have had a fair and impartial trial, and now stand convicted of a most barbarous murder, at which human nature revolts—that of your child, by a series of unparalleled cruelties and tortures. An offence more wicked than yours cannot be. You, John Smith, the unnatural father of the child whom you were bound to cherish and comfort, not only inflicted tortures, but suffered the said child to be persecuted by your wife. You, the woman prisoner, are equally guilty; for you, instead of being an affectionate mother to the child, withheld from her the common sustenance and necessaries necessary to support life. I do not mean here to upbraid you; you are about to fall victims to your country's just laws. I entreat you not to expect mercy can be administered to you in this world; but prepare, by pious devotions, for the tribunal before which you will shortly have to appear. You will be removed from hence to the place from whence you came, and from thence to the place of execution on Monday next, where you will be hanged by your necks until you are actually dead, and may God, in his infinite mercy, receive your souls." The prisoners were immediately conveyed in a post chaise to Ipswich Jail. It may be remarked, that Smith and his wife had not spoken together from the time they were committed to jail till the Saturday evening previous to their execution.—During the trial they never even glanced at each other.—The man seemed much affected dur-

ing the trial, and particularly so, as the Judge was passing sentence, when he wept bitterly.—The woman prisoner, on the contrary, seemed indifferent to either the trial or the sentence, and never moved a muscle. About twelve o'clock on the following Monday, they were executed at Ipswich, in presence of an immense concourse of spectators; when they both confessed their guilt, acknowledging it to have been their intention to destroy all their children.—They appeared, however, perfectly posited, and were launched into eternity, a sad example of the depravity of human nature! The husband was thirty-nine years, and his wife twenty-seven. The wife whilst on her return to Ipswich Jail, after her conviction, observed, she did not care for death, but she had only one wish, and that was—to see her husband hanged first.

COPY OF VERSE

DRAW near awhile both old and young,
and listen to my tale.
To draw a tear from every eye, it surely cannot fail.
Barbarity of the blackest dye, to you I now unfold:
Which woe you bear, I will make your hearts and souls unfold.
At Cockley in Suffolk, a guilty pair did dwell,
The husband being a labouring man, and he respected well.
His wife, a weak step-mother, hard-hearted sure was she,
As when that tale you've read, might plainly you will see.
They took poor little Mary Anne, and tied her by the waist,
To a beam in a dreary shed, to smother that poor berth.
They also beat and starved her—oh, dreadful to relate.
To think their cruel parents should this poor child so hate.
But justice soon o'ertook them, and stopp'd their dark career,
And before the judge and jury they soon did appear.
The woman speak'd so hardened to all that poor'st amongst,
Yet as she approach'd her awful death, she found on the ground.
'Twas then their conscience prick'd them sore, they then their crime,
When appear'd, and in public, to suffer in their turn.
Their prayers will deserv'd their fate—
Why else could they expect?
But let us hope that for their crime, since they did repent.

Figure 6: Smith Broadside

The broadside in Fig. 6 tells the story of John Smith, aged 39, and his second wife (and thus stepmother of his children), Elizabeth, aged 27, systematically starving and assaulting their

daughter.¹⁷² This crime occurred in Suffolk in 1812.¹⁷³ There is a rich language of emotion in this document, particularly in the verses and represented in the image, and in its intended effects on the viewer. The broadside is comprised of an elaborate, graphic image occupying about a third of the broadside immediately underneath the banner headline. The production values in the headline are high and immediately impressive, drawing the reader in with the exclamation of 'Tragedy!' in the top line. As the eye follows the story down the page, it is immediately arrested by the horror of the image, representing gross parental abuse.¹⁷⁴ The powerful illustration represents monstrosity, particularly in the face of the father, and anguished suffering in the face of the child. The prominent axe and spade in the bottom right hand corner indicate the intended secret burial of the corpse of the child, and their position next to the father implies that this was his intended responsibility. The narrative thus evokes the eloquence of the corpse representing the appalling transgression of domestic norms even before the child's death.¹⁷⁵ The image is equivocal regarding the responsibilities of the wife. While her face appears much more passive than her husband's, and she holds the lamp in an apparently helping role, she also holds the birch in a position about to beat the child.

The text label immediately underneath the image strengthens the graphic message: the father and mother (in that order in the text) are 'cruel'. Not only was Mary Ann hung up in a shed, but this was also 'in the Depth of Winter'. She was 'barbarously beat' and in the end starved to death.¹⁷⁶ So cruelty and barbarism are key messages in both image and this short passage of text. Barbarism here is used to condemn the Smiths as uncivilized 'others', behaving in utter contempt of the most basic social expectations of parents.

¹⁷² 'The Suffolk tragedy!: The trial, confession and execution of John and Eliz. Smith, for the murder of their daughter' (n.p., n.d., [1812?]) Trials Broadside 482, Historical & Special Collections, Harvard Law School Library, <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HLS.Lib:1088203> [Accessed 2 November 2015].

¹⁷³ TNA ASSI 94/1678. Assizes: Norfolk, Home and South-Eastern Circuits: Indictment Files. Lent & Summer. Hunts, Beds, Bucks, Camgs, Suff, Norf & Norwich City.

¹⁷⁴ The idea of hanging a child up in this way is shocking to a modern reader, yet there is evidence from modern Greece that hanging children up by ropes can be used as a form of punishment: Muchembled, *A History of Violence* p.20. For corporal punishment of children in nineteenth-century England see the semi-autobiographical fiction of Samuel Butler, *The Way of All Flesh* (Jonathan Cape, 1903); Walvin, *A Child's World*, pp.45-60. One pamphlet about this case used it to warn family heads and others inclined to abuse such as that committed by the Smiths that execution awaited them if their cruelty should lead to death: Anon., *Brownrigg the Second; or the Cruel Stepmother. The Full Particulars of the Trial and Execution, of John and Elizabeth Smith, At Ipswich in the County of Suffolk ...* (Printed and sold by J. Pitts, Seven Dials [1812]). 'Brownrigg the Second' in the title refers to the notorious case in 1767 when Elizabeth Brownrigg abused her female apprentices to the point of killing one of them. She too hung her victims up. She was executed at Tyburn on 14 September 1767. This case was widely reported in the eighteenth-century press and it is very interesting to see that cultural memory of the case lasted nearly half a century.

¹⁷⁵ D'Cruze, 'The Eloquent Corpse'.

¹⁷⁶ 'The Suffolk tragedy!'

The text below the image is comprised of three parts: first, a report of the trial; second, a short report on the demeanour of the prisoners in court and of their double execution; and finally, a 'copy of verses'. Despite awkward meter, the verses perform elemental emotional work and thus develop the emotional language of the image. The first stanza calls up the visceral responses of readers and listeners with which we are now familiar: they seek to 'draw a tear from every eye' and expect the story told to produce horror, making the consumer's 'hearts'-blood run cold'. The key to the listeners' understanding that these criminals have been properly punished is represented in the last stanza: they 'felt their crime' – the agony of a guilty conscience, and the shame brought about by public hanging. The condensed, narrative quality of the ballad is fundamental to its power – by comparison with many broadsides, these verses are short and swift: there are only five four-line stanzas. The message of 'barbarity' in prose and image is mirrored in the verses – indeed, these 'monsters' expressed 'barbarity of the blackest dye' through their atrocious treatment of their child. The verses marvel that such levels of hatred could be harboured by parents for their child, leading to cruelty 'dreadful to relate'.¹⁷⁷ When all this is considered together, the tears entreated by the verses are definitely on behalf of the suffering of the child whereas in the Mitchel, Amlett and Marlew broadsides varying amounts of the consumer's sympathy is guided towards the perpetrators.

The verses express a different view of the relative culpability of the parents than that communicated graphically. In one stanza the father is a well respected 'labouring man', while his wife is described as 'a cruel stepmother, hard-hearted sure was she', this point reiterated later in describing her in court as 'hardened to all that pass'd around'. As in so many crime and execution broadsides, despite the horror of the crime depicted, the verses conclude with a very brief expression of 'hope that for their crimes, sincere they did repent'.¹⁷⁸ We have already noted that repentance by the criminal was required for closure of the moral tale of crime and punishment, yet in these verses, this closure is accomplished in perfunctory style, with no call on the broadside audience to experience pity for the criminals. Their crime was just too horrendous, expressive of monstrous paternity and monstrous maternity.

With more words available than in the verses, the prose could embellish fundamental points emphasised in the verses, and also reveal more complex and contradictory narratives. The main section of prose reads as a news report of the trial, beginning with rather formal outline of the indictment. The word 'indicted' in the first sentence sets the serious tone, and as

¹⁷⁷ 'The Suffolk tragedy!'

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

description of the case unfolds, we are told that witnesses 'depose'. Medical expertise is also prominent, with a surgeon who saw the murdered child before she died describing her 'dreadful state, ... more emaciated than any child he ever saw; and ... her feet were mortified at the ancles'.¹⁷⁹ Another medical man 'deposed that he opened the body of the deceased; and that she died from want of food, and mortification'.¹⁸⁰ The jostling of points of view in this broadside, including this use of legalistic and medical language, supports Miriam Jones's characterization of 'the hybridization of orality and professionalism that characterizes broadside accounts of child-murder'.¹⁸¹ The early nineteenth century was a crucial period for development of professional expertise in medical jurisprudence in Britain, and many key medical jurisprudential texts that became central to professional practice in the nineteenth century remained to be written, so this 1812 popular cultural representation of the delivery of medical evidence in court is certainly interesting, and I think begs further research to refine understanding of the development of such representations and their relationship with court practice.¹⁸²

The message regarding the comparative culpability of the parents in the prose is complex. Both the story of greater paternal monstrosity represented by the image, and the story of the monstrous stepmother indicated in the ballad, can be found competing in the prose text, just as different narratives compete for ascendancy during any criminal trial. While the sister of the male prisoner claimed it was her brother's new wife who had hung the child up in the shed, and she together with some other witnesses claimed the male prisoner had always been a kind father, the constable who arrested the father retold the story the father had told him – that while his wife 'insisted the child should be put in the shed', it was he who actually 'put her there three different nights. He also said *he had hung her up*, but not by the neck, but *by the middle*'. Furthermore, a pamphlet about the case also represents the father carrying out the abuse in the shed.¹⁸³ Yet the story that the man was corrupted by his cruel second wife is also suggested in other evidence: one witness is reported as saying that the father looked after his children well while married to his first wife; and the policeman in the text reports the father claiming that in response to his complaints about their poverty despite his hard work, his new wife said that 'the children will soon be off our hands, and we shall do

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Jones, 'Fractured Narratives,' p.122.

¹⁸² Catherine Crawford, 'Medicine and the Law,' in W. F. Bynum et al. (eds.) *Companion Encyclopedia of the History of Medicine. Vol. 2* (Routledge, 1992) pp.1619-40, pp.1629-30; Catherine Crawford, 'A scientific profession: forensic medicine and professional reform in British periodicals of the early nineteenth century,' in Roger French et al. (eds.) *British Medicine in an Age of Reform* (Routledge, 1991) pp.203-30; Katherine D. Watson, *Forensic Medicine in Western Society: A History* (Routledge, 2011) pp.56-61.

¹⁸³ Anon., *Brownrigg the Second*.

better'.¹⁸⁴ In the end, even though the poverty narrative peeped out between the lines, there was no escaping the overall message of monstrosity. Both parents were convicted after a five-minute jury consultation, after which the judge told the prisoners that they stood 'convicted of a most barbarous murder, at which human nature revolts—that of your child, by a series of unparalleled cruelties and tortures. An offence more wicked than yours cannot be'.¹⁸⁵ His first upbraiding was for the father for inflicting tortures and allowing the child to be persecuted by his wife. The female prisoner was 'equally guilty', particularly for withholding nourishment for the children. The judge's wish for the prisoners' repentance effectively communicates the tight knit between religion and criminal justice at the time: 'you are about to fall victims to your country's just laws. I entreat you not to expect mercy can be administered to you in this world; but prepare, by pious devotions, for the tribunal before which you will shortly have to appear':

The broadside reports that they both confessed, including to intention to kill all their children, ensuring that the broadside gave the message of justice rightly dispensed. The conventional narrative of penitence was also completed, yet they remained 'a sad example of the depravity of human nature!' and were promptly hanged before 'an immense concourse of spectators' at Ipswich.¹⁸⁶

Underlying the depiction John Smith's monstrosity in this broadside lies the ancient trope of the monstrous woman. The man's defense represented in the broadside rests on the power of his wife to corrupt him. Elizabeth Smith 'seemed indifferent to either the trial or the sentence, and never moved a muscle'; and in the verses, 'the woman seem'd so hardened to all that pass'd around'.¹⁸⁷ One of the characteristics of witches was alleged to be their inability to shed tears.¹⁸⁸ Elizabeth's imperviousness is compared with John who in court 'seemed much affected'... and 'wept bitterly' when sentenced. Lack of demonstrated affect and dry eyes continued in modern times to influence responses to defendants in the dock.¹⁸⁹ This message that the woman was the worst monster was blatant in the title of one of the

¹⁸⁴ 'The Suffolk tragedy!'

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ See the first systematic book on witchcraft written by two Dominican friars - powerfully influential and published over two centuries: Heinrich Kramer et al., *The Malleus Maleficarum* (The Hammer of Witches) (1487) in Alan C. Kors et al. (eds.) *Witchcraft in Europe, 400-1700: A Documentary History* 2nd edn (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001) p.215; and several seventeenth-century Scottish witches confessed that they could not weep: Sir George Mackenzie, *The laws and customes of Scotland, in matters criminal wherein is to be seen how the civil law, and the laws and customs of other nations do agree with, and supply ours* (Printed by James Glen, 1678) p.106. I have not yet been able to trace this issue in nineteenth-century English witchcraft beliefs and accusations.

¹⁸⁹ A relevant example is the Australian 'dingo baby case' where Lindy Chamberlain, notoriously dry-eyed, was wrongly convicted of murdering her baby. For a range of essays see Adrian Howe, *Lindy Chamberlain Revisited: A 25th Anniversary Retrospective* (LhR Press, 2005).

pamphlets about the case: *Brownrigg the Second; or the Cruel Stepmother ...*.¹⁹⁰ And this was despite the fact that within the pamphlet (as in one of the narrative threads in the broadside) the man is described as inflicting the tortures in the shed. The figure of the powerful, evil Lady Macbeth figure behind the apparent male 'sovereign' (whether King or male head of the family) is as old as myth, embedded in Western culture through the story of the 'fall' in Genesis, contemplated in 'high' literature, and evident in popular literature of the street such as the broadside and pamphlet about the Smith case. Men were certainly capable of being monsters, but how much of that was understood as caused by women's malign influence, particularly where the mistreatment of children was concerned?

Conclusion

Messages on the broadsides studied are frequently complex, contributing to sometimes conflicted responses to and understandings of crimes of violence against children. At the most basic level the broadsides demonstrate horror and fascination with these homicides of children. Graphic violence in word and image symbolized starkly conflicts of power in intimate family relationships that usually remained hidden in closed domestic spaces. A clear gender war is represented in these broadsides, where women were sometimes blamed for male crimes, and men for women's transgressions, with children sometimes the victims of primary hostility between the parents. Fundamental matters associated with the ties that bind families and societies together were at stake. All the perpetrators violated dramatically societal norms regulating family relationships. The broadsides were part of the fraught discourse that was generated by such dramatic transgressions. They sought understanding of why these murders happened, and how each killer should be dealt with. The level of culpability of the perpetrator was of most significance because the tear in the fabric of society occasioned by the crime could only be healed through the operation of properly ordered justice re-establishing the boundaries of acceptable behaviour.

By stimulating deep emotional engagement with the stories of child killing, the broadsides expressed diverse anxieties about maternal and paternal violence, oppressive power relationship between women and men in intimate relationships, and the unpredictability and potential lethality of raving madness. The emotions generated encouraged intense engagement with the process of making sense of these extreme acts, and amplified the moral reflection and learning encouraged by the texts. The broadsides often sought to strike some kind of balance between condemnation of quite horrific acts, and sympathy for the dreadfully failed mothers and fathers represented as committing these crimes. The visceral

¹⁹⁰ Anon., *Brownrigg the Second*.

horror of violent murders is powerfully strengthened by graphic images of violence on most of the broadsides discussed. This research has presented quite startling images of violence against children, and considered their unique visual language as integral to the social and cultural meanings communicated in the broadsides selected for analysis. The depiction of the violence certainly increased the likelihood of powerful emotional responses in broadside consumers. It was impossible to elide the physical reality of the extreme violence necessary to kill when confronted with images of the moment of death. Occasionally, through particular facial representations, woodcuts also drew the consumer into the emotional state of the killer: Parker's scowl on one of the sheets about her case; John Smith's vicious cruelty; Marlew's utter despair. The illustration of Marlew's sorrow corresponds with generation of sympathy for his failed masculinity through the verses and prose account, providing a compelling stimulus to pity. Coherence between text and image is even more straightforward in the other 'cock' studied, the Fanny Amlett broadside, where the central image of the young woman's seduction illustrates the sexual exploitation that lay at the heart of pity for the woman orchestrated by the verses and prose. None of the graphic, violent images on the other broadsides combined the pathos and violence that worked together in the Marlew image. Rather, these images communicated horror and in the words of another broadside scholar, 'astonishing spectacle'.¹⁹¹ It is noteworthy that the broadsides that I have linked to actual cases carried more complex messages. Images of graphic violence could be moderated with some element of pity for the perpetrator communicated by verse and prose. In some images of the scaffold, the figure of the prison chaplain is included, and the meaning of his presence augmented by narratives of right penitence accomplished by the prisoner in his or her journey between trial and scaffold. In other broadsides, the figure of the chaplain is missing, with verses and prose bearing the full weight of communicating any narrative of penitence. Multi-textual within themselves, these broadsides were also closely inter-related with consideration of child killing in other cultural products as diverse as illustrations, fairy tales and novels in what is now recognised as the 'canon'. While these relationships are indicated rather than fully analysed here, the article points to the need for deeper understanding of how representations of child killing in broadsides and other contexts were culturally linked.¹⁹²

This paper also highlights many ways in which the broadsides and actual cases of child killing in the criminal justice system were related. Tears play a crucial role in these

¹⁹¹ O'Brien, *Crime in Verse* p.69.

¹⁹² Key work on literature without reference to broadsides includes McDonagh, *Child Murder*; Krueger, 'Literary Defenses'; and on discussion of broadsides which would benefit from broader cultural contextualisation see Jones, 'Fractured Narratives'; O'Brien, *Crime in Verse* pp.65-77.

broadsides and links between these representations and the tearful courtrooms described by Thomas Dixon have been drawn. Perhaps surprisingly, these tears in a number of the examples communicate pity for the fatally flawed mothers and fathers who killed their children, rather than for the children themselves. Even in the Parker sheets, where absence of tears is presented as evidence of lack of pity for the condemned, in this notorious revenge-motivated slaughter, the broadsides do not encourage tears of pity for the children. In the Fanny Amlett broadside, rivers of tears flow for the innocent maid seduced and not for her murdered newborn, mirroring the seduction plot in other cultural representations of infanticide in the nineteenth century as well as the relative lenience of courts when faced with women who were accused of killing their newborn infants. While a little sympathy for Marlew's murdered children is evident in a reference to them as 'poor babes', still, the tears summoned in the verses are sought as response to the 'tale of misery' rather than the fate of the children *per se*. In the Mitchel sheet, the tears are primarily summoned in sympathy for the shockingly failed motherhood and Mitchel's apparent madness. The significance of the association of tears with orchestrating responses to the criminals rather than to the dead children lies in the function of the broadsides in the discourse about justice. The child victims were already dead; it was the fate of the prisoner that lay in the balance. Further work on emotional courtrooms is required to really tease out the relationships between the courts and these cultural representations of tears.

It has been argued that in some broadsides the sanity of mothers, and on occasion fathers, who killed their children, was questioned. While the archetype of the monstrous mother is clear in graphic imagery, in the Mitchel broadside a contrary narrative of possible madness disrupts any certainty about motive, and raises the new horror of unpredictable, violent madness. The broadside's complexity conveys tensions between monstrosity, madness, harsh judgment and mercy and thus raises the question whether in some cases explanations of madness were perhaps defences against the horror of monstrosity. Even in the Fanny Amlett 'cock', containing a simple narrative of female vulnerability from male seduction, an implicit question is raised about her sanity: 'With anguish and despair most wild, / She lung'd it in the wave'.¹⁹³ In the Marlew broadside, his 'despair' was cast as close to madness, brought about by bereavement, poverty and his inability to provide for his family. Some relationship between these cultural representations of madness and the quite frequent use of the insanity defence and verdict in child killing court cases has been suggested. A certain congruence between the stories in the broadsides and some judicial

¹⁹³ 'Heart-rending execution of Fanny Amlett'.

outcomes indicates a shared discourse between popular and legal culture that needs further exploration.

Penitence also emerges as an important theme in broadsides. While certain prisoners could be pitied and at least partly exonerated by their classification as mad, in other cases, this explanation was not available. The Parker case is illustrative: her vengeful motivation excluded any explanation of madness, and the judgement contained in the broadsides is mirrored by the lack of petitions for mercy in her Home Office file. Yet despite the monstrously transgressive act represented in picture, prose and verse, the Parker broadsides and the prison visitor's pamphlet describing Parker's life between trial and execution tell a story of reincorporation of the criminal through both her religious penitence and her assertion of appropriate femininity. These documents illustrate an intimate connection between the broadside narratives of penitence and the actual lived experience of at least one prisoner. While such evidence is not easy to find, this case suggests the need for further investigation of the relationships between the work of prison chaplains and visitors, the subjectivities of prisoners, and cultural narratives about penitence.

This discussion indicates certain common threads in responses to both male and female perpetrators. The horror of the crimes ensured that there was an element of monstrosity in the representations of all the criminals, apart from the young woman 'Fanny Amlett' who killed her newborn in the 'cock' discussed. While the monstrous mother had a well-known, long and mythic heritage, these broadsides point to the need for more analysis of the ways in which monstrosity was gendered, rather than focusing only on mothers. Sympathy for both female and male perpetrators can also be discerned when difficult or tragic life experiences led to the crimes, or when the possibility of the insanity of the perpetrator was considered. Yet misogyny emerges in different ways in the broadsides, and is not matched by a similar level of vilification of men. The most undisputed, negative view of a man comes through in the Fanny Amlett broadside, where the naval officer who seduced Fanny emerges as dashing, deceptive and exploitative. The well-crafted image emphasises this deception by depicting him kneeling before Fanny, a conventional sign of a man making a marriage proposal. In the end there are more female than male villains in these sheets. The wife of Marlew's brother is described as a most heartless and disobedient woman and ultimately blamed for the familicide committed by her brother-in-law, and for her husband's murder of her. Not only did her insubordination cause the mass slaughter, but it also triggered the prior emotional despair of Marlew, powerfully rendered in the depiction of his face in the engraving, and the immediate trigger of his murder/suicide. The misery and mass slaughter occasioned by her insubordination is not matched by any of the other stories! Discussion of

the Parker broadsides noted the consistent blaming of Parker for the adulterous sexual relationship with Blake, the father of the children she murdered in revenge for his philandering. Illicit sexuality was seen as the ultimate cause of these murders, and while his dubious sexual behaviour was certainly not ignored, the verses in particular contained misogynistic blaming of Parker in what could only be fictional renderings of the story of their relationship and emigration from Birmingham to London. Even the murderous abuse of his daughter carried out by John Smith was not presented in the broadside as indisputably his own fault – and thus the text ameliorates the undoubted monstrousness of his face in the woodcut. Here, an evil stepmother narrative emerges, blaming his new wife for distracting Smith from the path of good fatherhood into practices designed to kill his children.

While a handful of scholars recognise the significance of this ephemeral genre, this detailed study indicates the importance for criminal justice history of continuing research and analysis of broadsides. Although accurate figures for print runs and distribution of most individual broadsides are not available, the huge scope of the broadside business in the first half of the nineteenth century is commonly acknowledged, and there are many valuable collections to be found online and in libraries. Broadside, and particularly illustrated broadsides as indicated in this article, are a rich source for exploring popular cultural mentalities with respect to crimes against children and even better, when the legal case any individual broadside relates to can be pinned down, they can then become part of a rich web of meaning woven around an individual case, as indicated by the record linkage accomplished in this article. Study of more broadsides about crimes against children in the nineteenth century could deepen the insights in this article about gendered responses to domestic tensions that were part of the cultural and social worlds of the plebeian and working-class consumers of broadsides.

Finally, this work provides intriguing insights into some of the big questions that remain unanswered or under explored in the history of child killing in Britain in the long nineteenth century. The Marlew broadside when read together with the research of Jade Shepherd, Cathryn Wilson and Melissa Gregory suggests that there may be a long story of sympathy for paternal child killing in certain circumstances that runs parallel with the story of judicial sympathy for women committing newborn child killing (despite the infanticide panic at mid-century). The long story of the use of insanity defences for both men and women in child killing cases is hinted at in the broadsides. While much is already known from current scholarship, for some reason most scholars choose to study either women or men. My own gendered study (1994), and that by Daniel Grey (2008), need to be extended and re-

interrogated in light of recent research.¹⁹⁴ We still need a detailed, long durée, fully gendered picture of criminal justice and cultural responses to child killing in all its guises. It seems as though we could well be looking at a discourse that splits men up into monstrous and 'good' fathers as well as splitting women up into monstrous and 'good' mothers, with narratives of madness being used to explain the inexplicable killings of their children by mothers and fathers deemed basically 'good' according to the norms of acceptable parenting. But this hypothesis is undoubtedly over-simplified and does not at the moment account for change over time. Any comprehensive fully gendered analysis across the 150 years or so from the late eighteenth century to the passing of the Infanticide Act 1922 would undoubtedly make new discoveries about the similarities and differences in the discourses about child killing by women and men, and their treatment before the courts for these crimes.

¹⁹⁴ Arnot, 'Gender in Focus'; Grey, 'Discourses'.