Crime in Verse

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Introduction


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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 2

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

2. At trial, M’Naghten’s attorney, Alexander Cockburn, launched an insanity defense. Applying recent medical theories not yet formally recognized in jurisprudence, including notions of partial insanity, he included the testimony of Dr. Forbes Winslow, who had just published *The Plea of Insanity in Criminal Cases* and who, controversially, provided diagnostic testimony about M’Naghten without ever having interviewed him. The jurors, instructed by the presiding judge to determine whether, at the time of his crime, M’Naghten had been “capable of distinguishing between right and wrong” and had been “sensible that [his act] was a violation of the law of God or of man,” shocked the public with an acquittal on the ground of insanity (Walker 95). M’Naghten was committed to Bethlem Hospital and later Broadmoor, where he died in 1865. M’Naghten’s trial is recorded in William C. Townsend’s *Modern State Trials*. For analysis of the trial and its judicial significance, see Nigel Walker’s *Crime and Insanity in England*; Roger Smith’s *Trial by Medicine*; Jane Campbell Moriarty’s *The Role of Mental Illness in Criminal Trials*; and Donald West and Alexander Walk’s *Daniel McNaughton: His Trial and the Aftermath*. 
3. Upon being apprehended, M’Naghten stated, “The Tories in my native city [Glasgow] have compelled me to do this,” and he explained that these Tories had been following him, that they had accused him of crimes of which he was innocent, and that they “wish[ed] to murder [him]” (Walker 91).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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


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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 3

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

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

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

4. Insanity did not constitute grounds for divorce.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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


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

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

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