Penny Dreadfuls & Murder Broadsides

Google ‘penny dreadful’ and you’ll see pages of results for the TV show of that name. The three-season gothic thriller, starring Eva Green no less, is set in late Victorian England. You might or might not know that the show takes its name from a new kind of serialized fiction which first appeared in London in the 1830s. It wasn’t Charles Dickens or Mary Shelley but it was cheap – only a penny – easy to read, entertaining, and extraordinarily popular.

Dreadful Readers

The emergence of the penny dreadful in England coincided with improved literacy. Nationwide educational reforms launched in the 1830s aimed to eventually provide universal, free, and compulsory state-funded education. In England, when printing was introduced in the 1470s, literacy was likely under 10%. By the 1830s, literacy rates were about 66% and 50% for men and women, respectively. By 1900 the literacy rate had risen to 97%. What’s more, in the nineteenth century there was sustained and unprecedented population growth. In England, between 1800 and 1850 the population doubled; it then doubled again between 1850 and 1900! That growth was accompanied by a marked demographic shift: already by the 1820s almost half of the UK’s population was under 20! Not only did the period mark an almost exponential increase in mass-produced and cheap print, on scales inconceivable prior to the Industrial Revolution, but it found a global mass market of readers – an increasingly large number of whom were young and literate. It’s in this environment that the penny dreadful made its debut.


[66]

and very good; but was often brought into difficulties, by a ſhare of curioſity, ſeldom to be found in perſons of his age, which was now about ten. He ſpent all his pocket-money in going to ſee wild beaſts and ſtrange fiſh, and had more joy in viewing an *Indian* prince, than another would have had in eating a ginger-bread king. He poſſeſſed a great portion of perſonal bravery; he was the cock of his ſeat in the ſchool; neither would he have refuſed, upon a proper occaſion, to have encounter'd *Jack* the *Giant-killer* himſelf.

About the year 1741, Mr. *Jonathan Gadabout*, his father, was preparing to make a voyage in perſon to the *Weſt-Indies*; he having ſome affairs to ſettle in *Jamaica*, which could not be managed without his preſence. The day before his departure, Maſter JEMMY, as was his conſtant cuſtom both morning and evening, came to aſk his Papa's bleſſing, which he did with more than uſual earneſtneſs; and when he had obtained it, he remained ſtill on his knees, urging that he had ſtill another favour to aſk. "Name it, my child, ſays his father." *Why, it is*, replied he, *that I may accompany you to the* Weſt-Indies. Nothing could have ſurpriſed Mr. *Jonathan Gadabout* ſo much,

as

The first children's periodical, *The Lilliputian Magazine*, 1751 British Library

Before the nineteenth century, there wasn't much in the way of fun and entertaining reading material for children. In fact, children's literature as a genre was a pretty late starter, only getting off the ground in the eighteenth century, and even then it was usually didactic, pious, and moralizing – not particularly fun. The first children's periodical, *The Lilliputian Magazine*, published by John Newbery, didn't appear until 1751. By the late 1790s, Churches and religious organizations had begun to publish children's periodicals and Sunday School magazines, but again they were rather stuffy and conservative, not really the kind of thing that children were excited to read. But that was about to change.

Fun Facts: Victorian child labor

It's worth noting that most working class children had very

little time for recreational activities. During the nineteenth century, most working class children, by the time they were ten years old, went to work – running errands for shopkeepers, as assistant chimney sweeps, crossing sweepers, page boys, working in textile mills and in coal mines. And don't imagine that they worked part-time hours. To give you some idea of a child's work schedule consider that in England the Factory Act of 1833 barred children younger than nine from working in textile factories; and those aged from nine to thirteen were limited to just nine hours a day or 48 hours a week. Yes, a nine-hour work-day for a nine-year-old was considered progress.
* *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature, 1830–1914*, p. 30

Binge Reading Victorian Netflix

In summing up the nineteenth-century 'reading revolution', historian Dr Mary Hammond writes: 'The period 1830–1914 saw some of the greatest changes in readerships and the types and availability of reading material ever experienced in the Western world.'* By the start of that period, serialized fiction was already becoming hugely popular. It's how Charles Dickens got his start with the serialization of *The Pickwick Papers* in 1836–37. But most early serialized fiction was intended for adult readers. What's more, although books were now cheaper than they'd ever been, they were still beyond a working child's meagre wages; for example, *The Pickwick Papers* was published in twenty 32-page installments, but at 5 shillings (1 shilling = 12 pennies) per installment, it was far too expensive for most working class adults, let alone children.

A LARGE PICTURE & No. 2 GIVEN WITH No. 1.

THE

BOY DETECTIVE

OR, THE

CRIMES OF LONDON.



ONE PENNY WEEKLY. SOLD EVERYWHERE.

OFFICES: NEWSAGENTS' PUBLISHING COMPANY, LIMITED, 147, FLEET STREET, E.C.

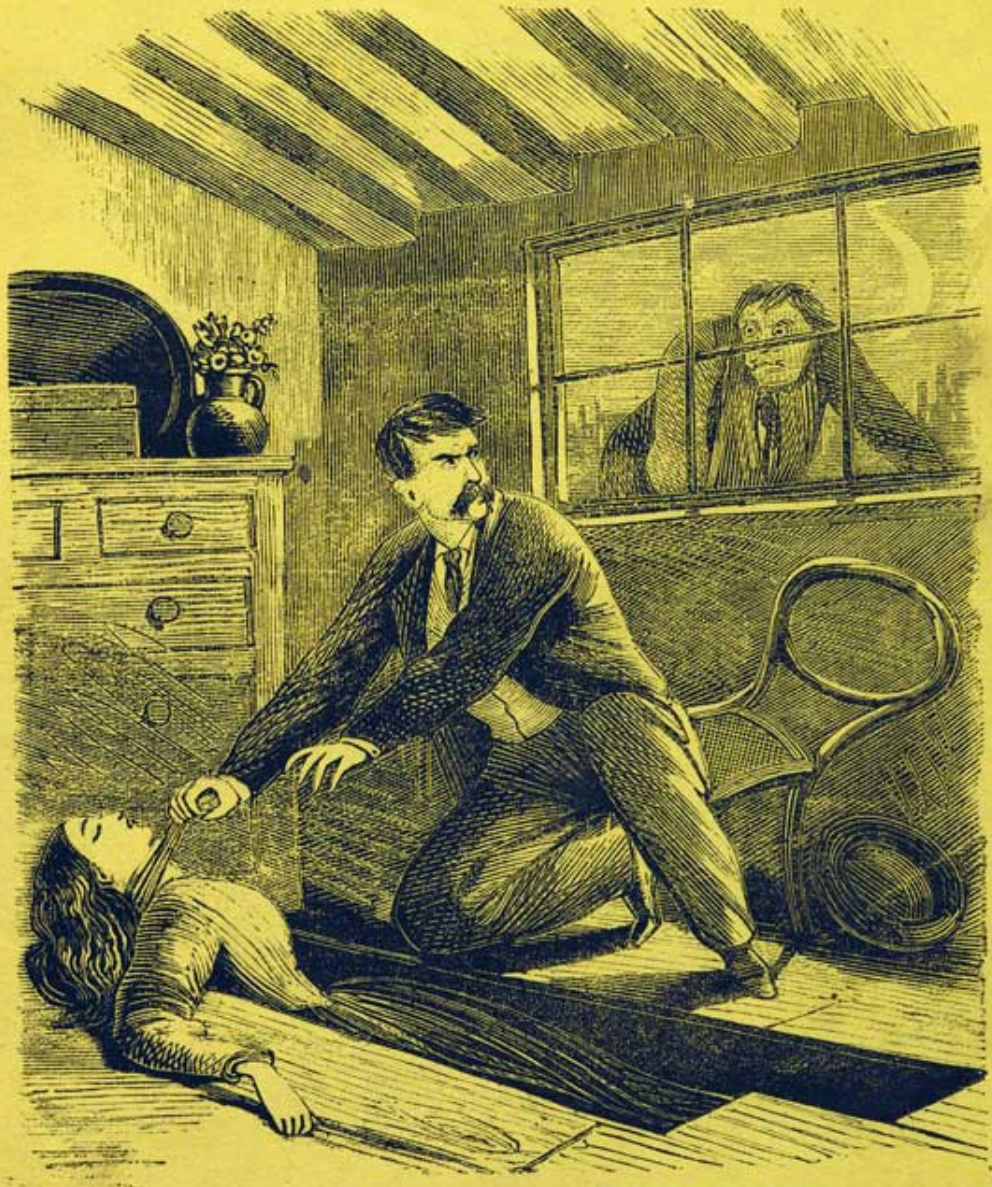
1

TWO TALES AND TWO NUMBERS EVERY WEEK.] 1D. [TWO BEAUTIFUL ENGRAVINGS WILL BE PRESENTED GRATIS.

THE WORK GIRLS OF LONDON:

THEIR

TRIALS AND TEMPTATIONS.



PRICE ONE PENNY.

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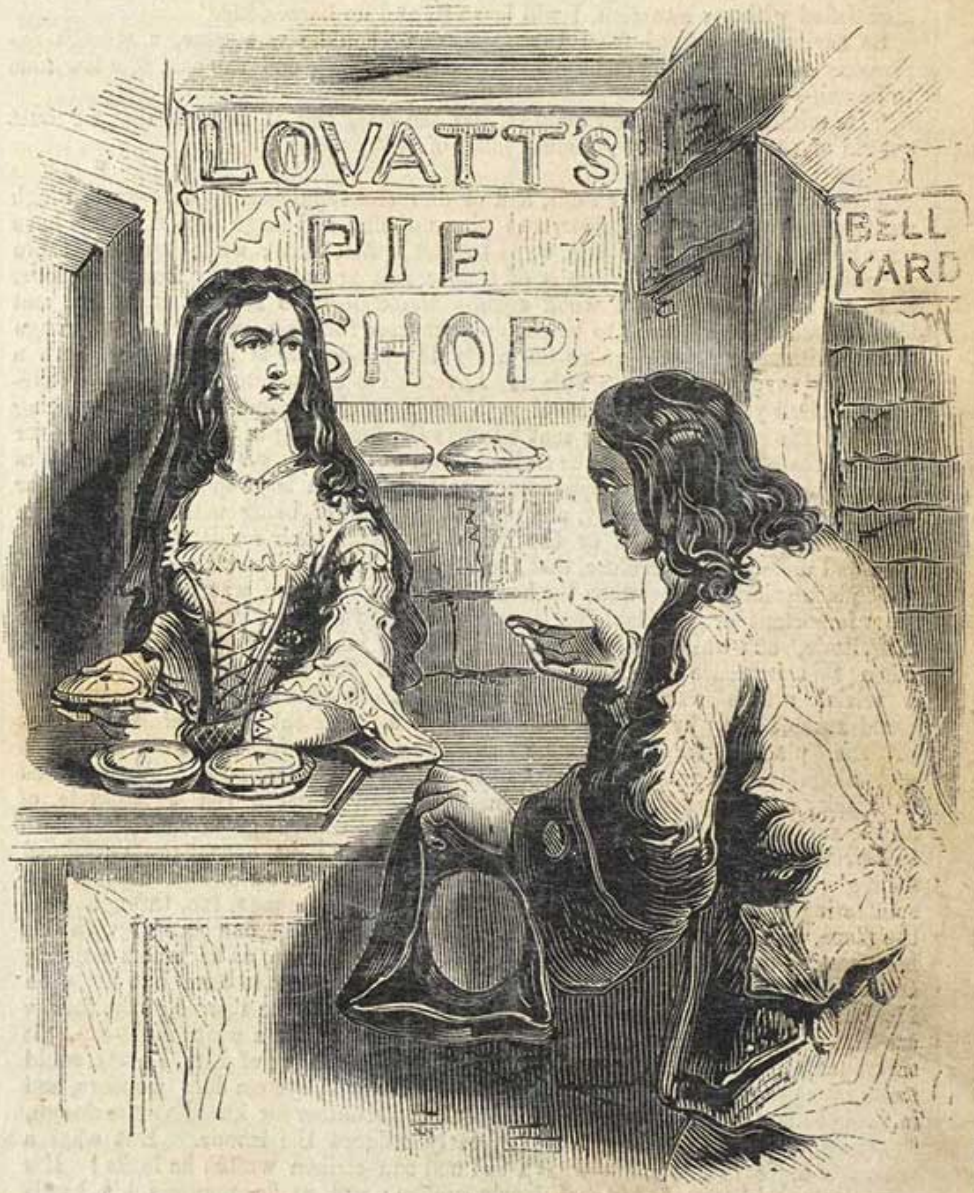
NEWSAGENTS' PUBLISHING COMPANY, LIMITED, 147, FLEET STREET.

2

Penny dreadfuls: **1**. *The Boy Detective; or, the Crimes of London*, 1866 British Library
2. *The Work Girls of London: their trials and temptations*, 1865 British Library
Enter the penny dreadful, typically eight or sixteen pages, printed on cheap paper, taking its serialized story cues from gothic thrillers of the previous century. Most of the stories are now forgotten, but one notable exception is everyone’s favorite homicidal barber, Sweeney Todd. Before he appeared in the pages of a book, he was butchering his victims and selling their remains as meat pies next door in a penny dreadful serial, ‘The String of Pearls: A Romance’, published in *The People’s Periodical* in 1846.

against the poor and destitute to keep them so. If you will assert that my conduct will be the nature you describe, it is quite impossible for me to prove the contrary."

He turned and was about to leave the shop, but Mrs. Lovett called after him saying—



THE STRANGER AT MRS. LOVETT'S PIE SHOP.

"Come in again in two hours."

He paused a moment or two, and then, turning his emaciated countenance upon her, said—

"I will if my strength permit me—water from the pumps in the street is but a poor thing for a man to subsist upon for twenty-four hours."

London: Printed and Published by E. Lloyd, 12, Salisbury-square, Fleet-street.
charge—Price only TWOPENCE—Send 3 postage stamps, and you will receive one as a sample (postage free).—Published by Lloyd, Salisbury-square, London.

"You know, Mrs. Ragg, the last you told me of him was that—that Mr. Todd had said he was mad, you know, and then you went to fetch somebody, and when you came back he was gone; and Mr. Todd told you the next day that poor Tobias ran off at great speed and disappeared. Has anything been heard of him since?"



THE MURDER OF THE USURER.

"Ah, my dear, alas! alas!"

"Why do you cry alas?—Have you any more sad news to tell me?"

"He was my only son—and all the world and his wife, as the saying is, can't tell how much I loved him."

Minna Gray clasped her hands, and, while the tears coursed down her young fair cheeks, she said—

"And I, too, loved him!"

as a sampl (postage free).—Published by Lloyd, Salisbury-square, London.

2

Sweeney Todd before Sweeney Todd: Pages from *The People's Periodical,* 1846, a penny dreadful which debuted the murderous barber of Fleet Street. **1**. Mrs. Lovett's infamous meat pies; **2**. Sweeney Todd at work

British Library

Dreadfully Deleterious

A nineteen-year-old house painter from rural Berkshire was arrested for robbery. Armed with a pistol, he had ambushed passersby presenting his victims with a Dick Turpin style ultimatum: 'your money or I'll blow your brains out!' He then proceeded to steal their cash and watches. When apprehended he was wearing a mask and carrying a gun. In 1876, Alfred Saunders, an errand-boy in London, was arrested and charged with stealing seven pounds and four shillings (a considerable sum) from his father. He confessed to stealing the cash, and admitted using it to 'breakfast and dine in rather an expensive way'. Thirteen-year-old Alfred, now with a taste for the high life, also purchased, with the stolen money, a toy gun, a lantern, and a cigar holder.*

* These two cases from *Youth, Popular Culture and Moral Panics*, 1998, pp. 80–85

What do these crimes have in common? Besides their youthful perpetrators and an apparent flair for the dramatic, it would appear very little. However, in both cases, the youths were found to be in possession of penny dreadfuls. And during both trials it was suggested that penny dreadfuls were responsible for turning these impressionable boys to crime.

PART 1 PRICE 1d.

EDWIN J. BRETT'S

JACK HARKAWAY'S SCHOOL-DAYS



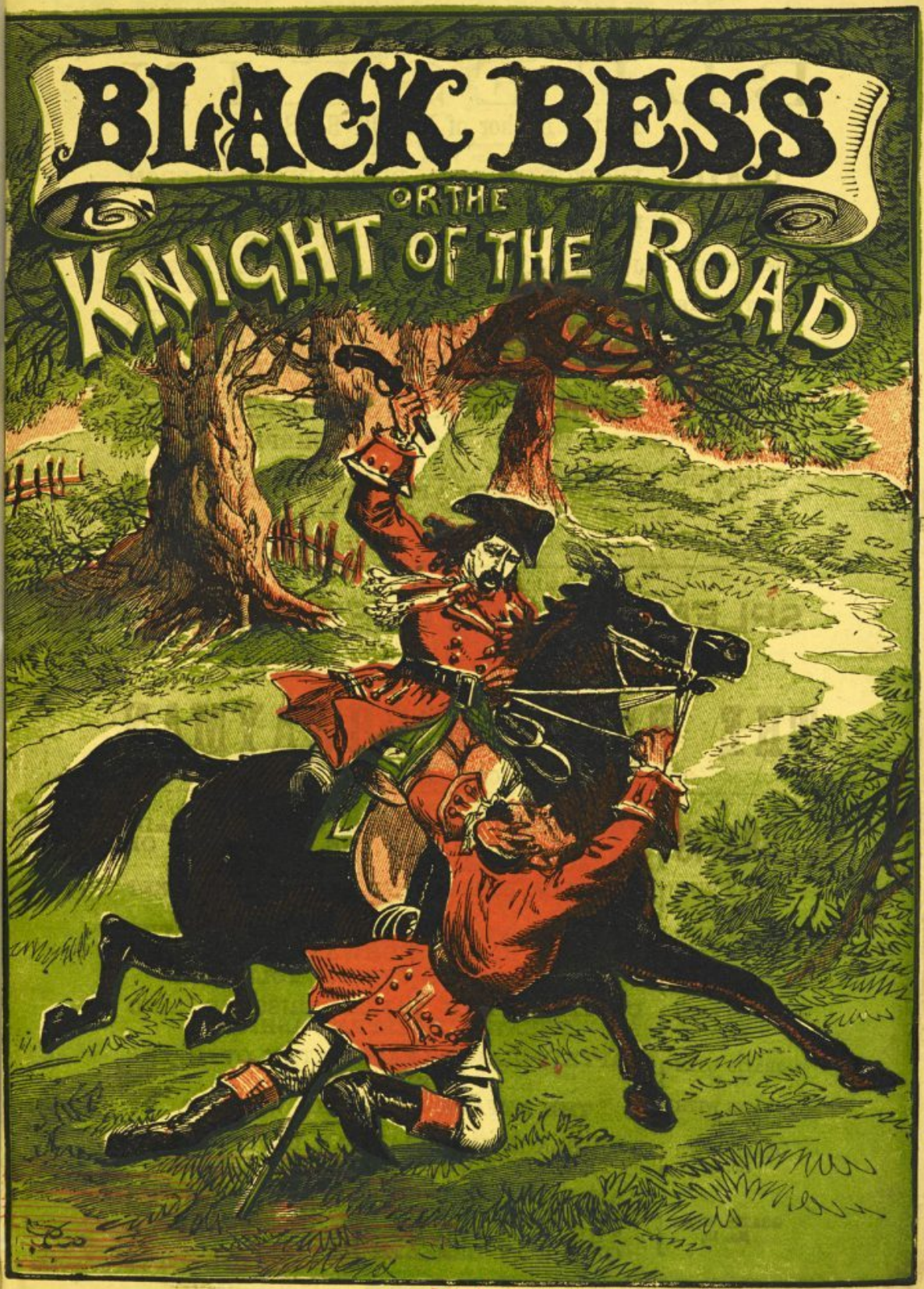
BOYS OF ENGLAND EDITION

EDWIN J. BRETT,
"BOYS OF ENGLAND" OFFICE,
173, FLEET STREET
AND ALL BOOKSELLERS.

Nos. 1 & 2, and a MAGNIFICENT PICTURE, PRINTED IN COLOURS,
TURPIN LEAPS BESS OVER THE HORSES OF THE MAIL COACH.

BLACK BESS

OR THE KNIGHT OF THE ROAD



LONDON:
Published by E. HARRISON, and Sold by all Newsagents everywhere.
PRICE ONE PENNY.

1. *Jack Harkaway's School-days*, a penny dreadful from *c.* 1880 British Library.
2. Cover of the penny dreadful, *Black Bess, c.* 1866–68, a serialized fictional account of the real-life highwayman, Dick Turpin. Black Bess was the name of his horse  British Library

In Victorian England, especially in booming cities like London, crime was on the rise, especially juvenile crime. Not only were penny dreadfuls condemned as unsophisticated, or in the words of literary critic Francis Hitchman in 1890, 'foul and filthy trash', but they became a scapegoat. Long before radio, TV, cinema, video games, smart phones, and the Internet corrupted children [irony], quite a few Victorian cultural commentators blamed penny dreadfuls for corrupting impressionable young readers. In 1893, one complained:

> *It is almost a daily occurrence with magistrates to have before them boys who, having read a number of 'dreadfuls', followed the examples set forth in such publications, robbed their employers, bought revolvers with the proceeds, and finished by running away from home, and installing themselves in the back streets as 'highwaymen'. This and many other evils the 'penny dreadful' is responsible for.**

* John Springhall, 1994, pp. 326–27

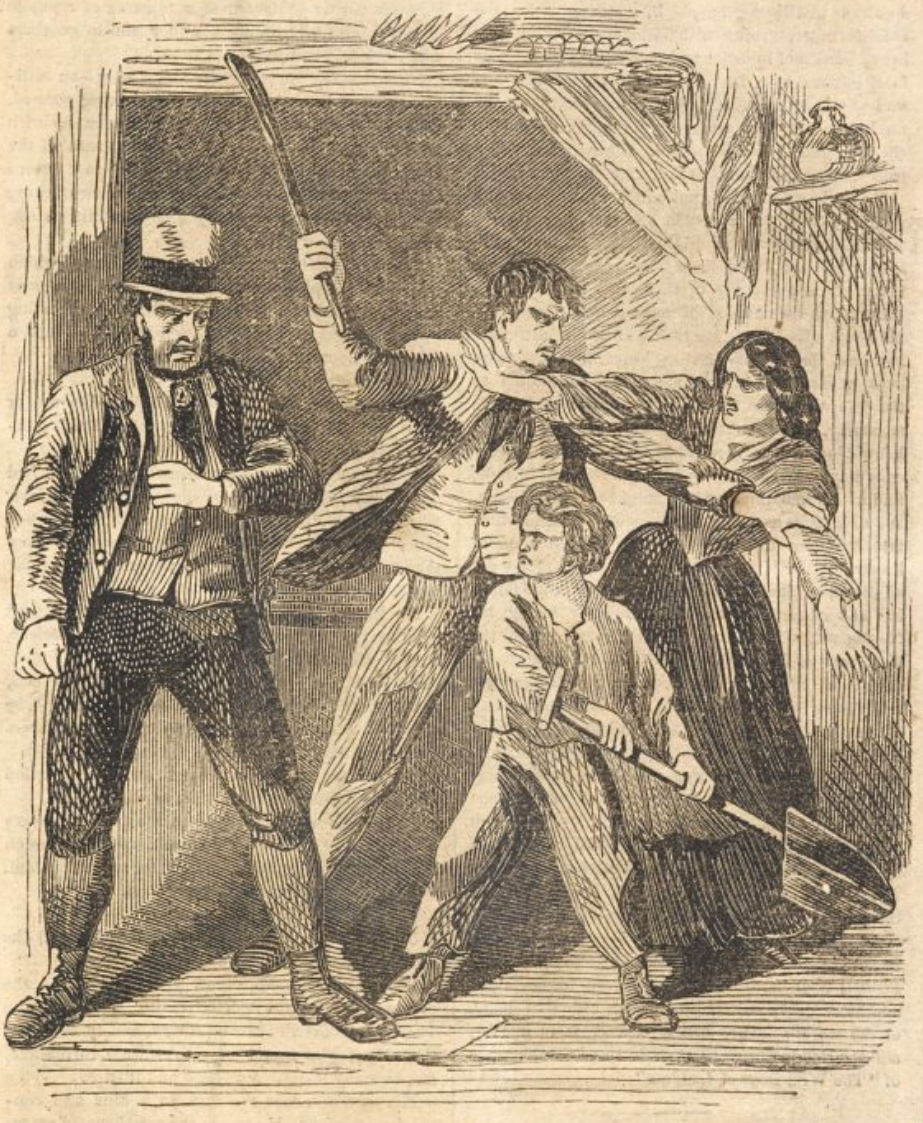
This fabricated moral panic induced pious publishers to launch rival periodicals intended to counteract the pernicious influence of penny dreadfuls. British Clergyman, John Erskine Clarke, launched such a periodical. His successful weekly *Chatterbox* (1866–1953), ran for decades. Out with blood and guts, pirates, bandits, highwaymen, and psychopaths; and in with tales of heroic dogs saving drowning children, saccharine morality tales, and kittens aplenty.

THE

WILD BOYS OF LONDON;

OR,

THE CHILDREN OF NIGHT.



DICK LANE AND MAT THE MONGREL.

INTRODUCTION.

A LONDON street boy's life is a story which has never yet been told in words of simple truth, though the subject is one which gives scope for a tale of extraordinary interest. There is no occasion to invent incidents or to exaggerate facts. The adventures of the poor outcast children of

[THE RIGHT OF DRAMATISING IS RESERVED.]

No. 31. *June* 29, 1867. *Weekly—One Halfpenny.*

Chatterbox.



Learning to Walk.

1. The penny dreadful, *The Wild Boys of London*, about a gang of juvenile criminals. 1866 British Library
2. The weekly halfpenny *Chatterbox* was launched in 1866 to counteract the corrupting influence of the penny dreadful Hathi Trust
Although *Chatterbox* sold for just half a penny, it's very unlikely that it was regularly bought and read by working class children. Although penny dreadfuls were broadly condemned, not everyone agreed. Some saw penny dreadfuls as a gateway to more serious literature. Frederick Willis, a London hat-maker wrote that penny dreadfuls had 'encouraged and developed a love of reading that led onwards and upwards on the fascinating path of literature'. And up-and-coming author H.G. Wells said of his boyhood love of penny dreadfuls, 'Ripping stuff, stuff that anticipated Haggard and Stevenson, badly illustrated and very, very good for us'.

"It was Lord Northcliffe [Alfred Harmsworth] who killed the penny dreadful: by the simple process of producing a ha'penny dreadfuller."▿

▿ A tongue-in-cheek A.A. Milne (author of *Winnie the Pooh*), 1948

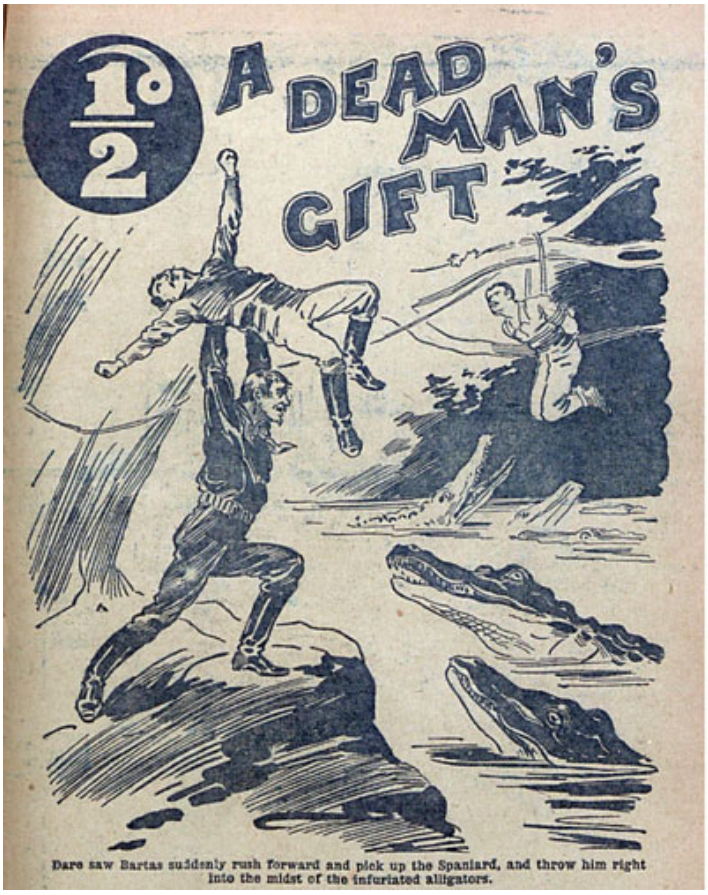
* Penny dreadful & penny blood are commonly used synonymously. More precisely, 'bloods', from the *c.* 1830s, were for adult readers; 'dreadfuls', from the *c.* 1860s, were targeted primarily at children. See *Gothic Fiction, from Shilling Shockers to Penny Bloods,* pp. 140, 151

Between 1866 and 1914, in England, more than 500 children's periodicals were published. In the early 1800s, penny dreadfuls* had been targeted at a broad working class audience. But that changed in the 1850s when publishers began to target children, especially young boys, with titles like *Boy's Own Magazine* (1855–74), *Boy's Own Paper* (1879–1967), *Boy's Journal* (1863–71), *Boys' Miscellany* (1863–64), *The Boy's Standard* (1875–92), and the most popular *Boys of England*,

debuting in 1866 with the gripping subtitle, ‘A Magazine of Sport, Sensation, Fun, and Instruction’. *BOE* was the most popular of the time, boasting a print-run of more than 250,000 by the late 1870s. Its founder Edwin Brett devised shrewd promotional campaigns to expand the magazine’s readership – they included competitions and prizes; among them were books, watches, dogs, pigeons, and ponies. The prize-draws regularly attracted more than 10,000 entries. The multi-pronged marketing strategy also included reader polls, standalone prints or posters, a Christmas special, and opportunities for its young readers to have their artwork or letters appear in the magazine.

Curious storylines for a magazine claiming to take the moral high ground against violent & pernicious penny dreadfuls. *The Halfpenny Marvel*, 1895 & ’94

Dr Bob Nicholson





Dreadful Decline

By the 1890s, the penny dreadful was competing with hundreds of periodicals and with more and cheaper books too. One of the first media moguls, the newspaper publisher Alfred Harmsworth, keen to combat the bad influence of penny dreadfuls (and make a pretty penny), launched several successful halfpenny magazines, beginning with *The Halfpenny Marvel* in 1893.

HORRID MURDER

Of Three Children, by George Lucas, in Aldermanbury, and

Dreadful Suicide of the Murderer.



On Sunday morning, at a quarter to nine o'clock, one of the most appalling and tragical events that has taken place in the City within our memory, occurred. The principal actor in the melancholy affair was a man named George Lucas, and the scene of the frighful act was at the house No. 3, Zion Gardens, Aldermanbury.

It appears that Lucas, who was thirty-eight years of age, occupied the whole of the house in question, and let out all parts of it but the kitchen and attics; and his family consisted of his wife and three children—namely, George, a fine boy, aged ten years; Anne, aged seven; and Alfred, aged four; and Ann Hammond, the niece of Mr. Lucas, aged eighteen.

Lucas, who is described as a steady, sober, and well-conducted man, had been employed for many years as warehouseman in different situations in the City, but owing to the slackness of trade, has been out of employ for the last six months. This circumstance has preyed so heavily upon his mind, that he has once or twice lately expressed his fears that he would lay violent hands upon himself; and upon those occasions, his wife, who is a very decent and sensible woman, used every effort and argument in her power to dissuade him from harbouring such a thought, and was in hopes that she had succeeded in doing so, as he lately appeared more cheerful. The fourth floor or attic of the house consists of three bed-rooms, the first of which was occupied by Lucas and his wife as a bed-room; the second by the eldest boy, George, who slept in a small cot; and the third by the two youngest, and Ann Hammond.

At seven o'clock yesterday morning Lucas got up and went down stairs as usual, leaving his wife in bed, and in a few minutes afterwards was followed by Ann Hammond, who also left the two younger children asleep, and at eight o'clock Mrs. Lucas came down stairs, and found her husband and niece. At this time Lucas was employed in cleaning his boots and those of his children; and up to a quarter to nine o'clock nothing particular was observable in his manner more than usual. When he had done cleaning the boots and shoes, he shaved himself in the kitchen, and when he had done, Mrs. Lucas, having still some fears of his laying violent hands upon himself, asked him if she should put up his razors for him. He replied that he would put them up himself, and having wiped the one he was using, he went to the drawer for the purpose, as Mrs. Lucas supposed, of putting them up; but, as it afterwards appeared, he did not do so, and from this circumstance there can be no doubt that at this time he contemplated the frightful act which he in a few moments afterwards committed.

It was his custom on every Sunday morning to bring his children down stairs to be dressed preparatory to taking them to church, and at the time before mentioned he asked his wife in the calmest manner if he should go up for the children, and she requested he would. He then proceeded to the attic, and, as it appeared, his first victim was the little girl Ann, whom he wrapped up in a shawl, and carried from the further bed-room to that in which himself and his wife had slept, and placing her on the front of the bed, cut her throat from ear to ear.

He next carried the little boy Alfred to the same place, and, placing him on the [illegible] also cut his throat in the same manner.

[illegible]e eldest son was his last victim, and there is no doubt from the fact of his [illegible] one stocking and garter on, that the poor little fellow was in the act of [illegible]g, when his wretched father summoned him to destruction. It would seem [illegible]rom the carpet in the passage leading from the room in which he had slept [illegible] of the third room, where he was murdered, being rolled up in many places, [illegible]e poor little fellow had struggled very hard, and his cries was so loud as to [illegible]rd in the next house.

[illegible]wever, on getting him inside the door, his wretched father cut his throat, and [illegible]is own, as both fell quite close together, the boy on his left side, and the [illegible]rer on his right; both heads were not more than six inches apart. Mrs. [illegible], thinking that her husband was up stairs much longer than was necessary, [illegible]er niece from the kitchen to see what was detaining him, and the girl, on [illegible]along the passage, saw the younger boy on the side of her aunt's bed, with [illegible]t cut as has been before described. She instantly shrieked out for assistance, and Mr. Pearson, a gentleman occupying apartments on the next floor, ran up stairs with Mrs. Lucas, when the appalling sight above described presented itself.

An alarm was instantly given, and police constable Richard Andrews, 155, who was on the beat, and William Henry Wallace, 6, proceeded up stairs, but the fury of the unhappy man had by this time accomplished its object in so determined a manner that death in each case must have been instantaneous. The scene which presented itself in the third room baffles description. The razor with which the murderer effected his purpose was held firmly in his right hand, and its blade is a striking object, as it is in a round position, with its point resting on the right cheek of the poor boy.

On the policeman entering, the blood was still flowing from the wounds, and a great quantity lay around the bodies, but the constable did not feel warranted in disturbing either. The feelings of Mrs. Lucas on beholding the scene may be better imagined than described, and considerable fears were for some time entertained that she was wholly bereft of reason; but, by the soothing influence of several ladies in the neighbourhood, she soon became calm.

Mrs. Stephens, a lady residing next door to Lucas, was in her attic at the time, and hearing the dreadful screams of the children, she knocked violently at the wall, and fearing that something serious was the matter, hastened down stairs and went in to acquaint Mrs. Lucas of her suspicions, but at this moment the murder was discovered.

The melancholy event having gained immediate circulation, a great crowd of persons soon collected, and many were anxious to get a view of the bodies, but the police on duty prevented their curiosity being gratified.

Major Law, the superintendent of City police, arrived at ten o'clock, and gave directions to the constable that the bodies were to remain in the same situation in which they were found until viewed by a coroner's jury.

At six o'clock last evening the Lord Mayor, accompanied by his medical attendant, again visited the unhappy widow—Mrs. Lucas; she appeared more composed than might have been expected; but it being deemed advisable that the unfortunate sufferer should be removed from the vicinity of the scene of horror as quickly as possible, Mr. Bell kindly undertook the office, and, in company with her neice, Ann Almond, conveyed the poor woman to the residence of her sister, in Holywell-street, Westminster. Mrs. Lucas's maiden name was Almond, and she comes from the village of Fairlight, in Kent, where she has an aged mother dependant for support upon her deceased husband, jointly with his brother-in-law, Mr. Green, who married Mrs. Lucas's sister, and upon whom a situation in Somerset House was lately conferred by Lord Minto. The deceased lived on the most affectionate terms with every member of his family, but since January last has suffered extreme mental depression at short intervals, which his friends attributed to the loss of his situation at Messrs. Basset's. His subsequent failure to fulfil the duties of his situation at the floor-cloth manufactory, which appears to have arisen from his not understanding the technicalities of the business, increased his anxiety, and probably accelerated the unfortunate event detailed above. On Saturday his spirits were observed to be unusually low, and his brother-in-law, Mr. Green, sat up with him until a late hour. Too much praise cannot be given to Messrs. Stephens and Gurry, neighbours of the deceased, in aiding the humane endeavours of the Lord Mayor, who, to the honour of his character as a magistrate and a man, did his utmost to solace the wretched widow.

Yesterday afternoon an inquest was held before Mr. PAYNE, touching the deaths of George Lucas, and of his three children, George, Anne, and Alfred. After the jury had proceeded to view the bodies, the Coroner briefly summed up very feelingly, remarking that it was the most distressing case he could recollect in the history of inquests. No doubt, however, could exist, that in a fit of temporary insanity, arising from anxiety for his family, he had destroyed himself and his offspring. The jury almost instantly returned a verdict to that effect.

Printed and Published by E. LLOYD, 231, Shoreditch.

1

EIGHT PERSONS MURDERED!

A Father, a Mother, Two Husbands, Three Children, and an Uncle, all POISONED by Margaret Joyer, and Katharine Rentner, for which Horrid and Monstrous Crimes, they have been Executed.



MARGARET JOYER, a widow, and servant to S. K. Rentner, also a widow, both about 38 years of age, are accused; the first of having killed by poison eight persons, all of whom, except one, were her near relations: the latter of having poisoned her husband at the instigation of her servant. According to the indictment, M. Joyer poisoned, in May 1825, her uncle; in June 1826, her mother 68 years of age; in December 1830, her father 70 years old, in August 1831, her husband; in December the same year her 3 daughters 2, 5, and 10 years of age and lastly in August 1833, the husband of her mistress, with her assistance. She is said to have done all this with so much caution, that no suspicion whatever was excited by the deaths of all the 7 persons, and an investigation into the cause of the death of the 8th Victim, would perhaps have led to no result had not the criminal (so it is stated in the indictment) been led by her heated fancy to make a confession, induced as she avers by a spectre which appeared to her, and so terrified her, that she confessed all the dreadful crimes that she had committed on the eight persons.

We have received the following account dated 27th March, the Jury has left the hall. M. Joyer guilty on six out of the eight counts in the indictments, both M. Joyer and Katharine Rentner are sentenced to death. M. Joyer as a parricide, must also stand on the scaffold in her shift, barefooted, and covered with a black veil, while her sentence is read to the people: her right hand will then be cut off, and she will be executed on the spot.

A Copy of Solemn Verses.

IN this dark and lonesome cell,
To-morrow doom'd to die,
We offer up our prayers to God,
For mercy now we cry.

Though our offence is very great,
For which we cease to live,
His goodness reach to all who ask,
And seek Him to forgive.

Our crimes are of the deepest die;
Such foul unheard-of crimes,
Surpassing all was ever known
Before at any time.

Father and Mother, Children three,
Husband and Uncle too,
A deadly poison we prepar'd,
'Twas certain death, tho' slow.

The dreadful tortures they endur'd,
No mortal tongue can tell,
But when our victims ceas'd to breathe
Conscience became a hell.

Comfort and Peace affrighted fled
From our accursed place,
The Spectres of the Murdered dead,
Grinn'd daily in our face.

At length we could no longer rest,
Beneath our guilty load,
Streightway our guilty deeds confess'd
Our monstrous deeds of blood.

Oh! for such foul inhuman deeds
Will our two lives atone?
Nothing on earth can make amends
The injury we have done.

The torments keen and agony
That now we feel within,
Are sure to haunt the guilty mind,
Who lives in shame and sin.

A vast eternity now soon
Will fill our wond'ring sight,
Our earnest prayers are may it be,
All in the realms of light.

J. Catnach, Printer, 2, & 3, Monmouth-court, 7 Dials.

TRIAL AND Sentence Of

Dr BARNARD

THIS DAY GUILTY TRANSPORTED FOR LIFE

A scene of bloodshed of the deepest dye has been committed in this Neighbourhood which has caused a painful and alarming sensation among all classes in this place, in consequence of its being committed by an individual that is well known to most of the inhabitants who are going in great numbers to the fatal spot where the unfortuuate and illfated victim has met with this melancholy and dreadful end.

On the news arriving at our office, of the awful and cruel murder being committed, we at once despatched our reporter, who can rely on the authenticity of the important information at the spot where the tragical scene had taken place, and on h arrival he found the place completely besieged by m .. women and children of all classes, gathered around where the vital spark had fled which was never to be regained on the face of this earth.

Deep was the conversation among the accumulated persons as to how a fellow creature could be guilty of commiting such a revolting and diabolical act upon one who it appears was much respected by the inhabitants that reside around this part.

The reporter states that on the police authorities arriving at the place they had some difficulty in preserving order, but after a short elapse of time this was accomplished. They then proceeded to the spot were the lifeless corpse laid and took posession of the same, which presented one of the most awful spectales that have been witnessed for many years.

What could have been the motive for such a cold and wanton murder being committed we are at a loss to conceive, without it was in consequence of some disagreement having taken place between the unfortunate victim and their assailent,and then ending in the depriving their fellow creature of life, that none on earth is able to restore again, and which we are forbidden according to the commandments to take away; but this seems intirely violated in many instances by our dissipated and irregular habits; which tends to the committal of such serious things, and thro' disobeying the scriptural advice, brings the degraded creature to an untimely end, according to scripture! "He that shedeth mans' blood, so shall his blood be shedden!" which we entirely agree with in these instances, and fully acknowlege the just sentence that is often obliged to be carried into effect, and certainly must say that were it not for the rigidness of those laws many of us many of us would not be able to proceed on our journey at heart; so therefore we are in duty bound to call upon those laws being fully acted up to, for it is our opinion that those crimes are very seldom committed without there is some disregard or ill feeling towards their unfortunate victims, and thereby end their days of existence in a dreadful manner.

The unfortunate person being so well known and so much respected, every one feels anxious to know every particular, and it is the constant enquiry amongst them to know if there is any one apprehended for the murder or is there anything more known as to lead to the suspicion who it has been committed by, all being very desirous to hear of the perpetrators of this diabolical and horrid deed. We feel much for the family, who are throwu into the greatest affliction through this dreadful circumstance, and which has cast a gloom through the circle of friends in which they moved.

As a member of society there will be no one that we know of who will be more missed; one, who was often seen to relcive the wants of his fellow creatures, as far as circumstances would permit, and whose society was courted by all. As members of the family to which they belonged, none will be more missed, but those who are now remaining will deeply feel the loss and deplore the lamentable death of their respected and worthy friend.—Just as we are going to press we have recieved information from our correspondent that something has been elicited from a party that has thrown a light on the subject, and which has led to the apprehension of one of the principle offenders.

Barnett, Printer, Highgate.

EXECUTION

Of John Holloway for the Murder of his Wife at Brighton

Holloway Murdering his Wife



CALL me not to a strict account
How I have lived here:
For then I know right well, O Lord,
Mine vile I shall appear.
I read not to continue my life,
For surely then must fall,
What I have done, and what I am
Thou knowest very well.

Wherefore with tears I cease to time
To beg and to entreat,
Even as a child that feels done ill
And feareth to be beat,
So come I to the throne of grace,
Where mercy doth abound;
Desiring mercy for my sin,
To heal my deadly wound.

O Lord, I need not to repeat
What I do beg and crave;
For thou dost know before I ask
The thing that I would have,
Mercy, good Lord, mercy I ask,
This is the total sum:
For mercy, Lord, in all my suit,
O let thy mercy come.



Holloway digging his Wife's Grave.



JOHN HOLLOWAY was put to the bar charged with the wilful Murder of his wife, Celia Holloway, aged 32, at Brighton, in Aug. last.

David Maskell sworn—I live at Brighton and am a labourer. On Monday afternoon, about four months ago I went into a place called the "Rottingdean," in Preston, which lies on the side of the high road, in the plantation of Mr. Standford's farm, and in a sort of hollow, overhung with branches of trees, a little on the left of a narrow footpath, up the hill, leading from the "Hole in the Wall," to the Church hill, I stooped to the earth, and fancied some of it had been moved I poked some of the mould away with my stick, and saw a piece of red cotton sticking through the earth, I took no particular notice of it then; but went home, and mentioned to my wife, who said it might be a small child buried there. I mentioned it to several persons; but I did not go and tell the Magistrates. I mentioned it to Mrs. Gillam, and on Friday night, myself and her husband went to the spot between 6 and 7 o'clock, Gillam scratched the dirt away, and the piece of red cotton was still there. We poked the stick into the earth, which smelt very strong and nasty.

Catherine Bishop, wife of Henry Bishop, labourer, Brighton.—The deceased was my sister, and was married about six years ago to the prisoner, John Holloway, who was then a bricklayer. I saw the deceased for the last time about six months ago, she then lodged with me in Cavendish Street; she (the deceased never lived long together with the prisoner. He left her when she was pregnant with the second child, and enlisted in the Blockade Service, if she had been spared another month, she would have had a third child. While the deceased and I were living in Cavendish-street the prisoner was taken up by the parish, and he was compelled to allow his wife 2s. a week, to assist her in her maintainance; he used to send the money by the other prisoner, Ann Kennard, with whom he lived. I produce a piece of figured cotton from my quilt, it corresponds with the gown that was upon my late sister when her corpse was dug out. I am positive the stays now produced, belonged to my sister; she mended them when we were living together. The prisoner always treated my sister very ill, he almost starved her to death.

Several other witnesses proved that the prisoner had often threatened to kill his wife, and treated her in a most brutal manner.

Feldick the high constable, was on duty on Saturday night, when the prisoner, Holloway came to the watch-house, and gave himself up, as he had heared the officers were after him for the murder of his wife. He declared he was innocent, and said, that about five months ago, he saw her part of the way on the London-road, as far as Preston, where he left her with her box, she intended to get upon the first coach for London. That she had 10*l.* with her; 9*l.* he gave her himself, and one she saved up. The woman Kennard, was in custody before he gave himself up.

After the evidence had been gone through, the following confession, signed by Holloway, was read:

"Ann Kennett knew nothing of this circumstance going to happen until I got the whole of Celia,s clothes in that house. When I told her what my intentions were she promised to assist me. I then went and fetched Celia, who came with me to the south end of North Steine Row. I left Celia there, and told her to wait till I came for her. I went into this house in North Steine Row, and told Ann that she was just by, and Ann concealed herself in a cupboard. I then called Celia, and when she came into the house, I shut the door, and told her to sit down upon the stairs, as my partner was up stairs in bed. I kept her in conversation some time, when under pretence of kissing her, I passed line round her neck and strangled her. I found I could not manage this by myself, so I called Ann to help me, which she did by taking hold of each end of the rope till the poor girl dropped. I then dragged her into a coal hole under the stairs, and having fastened the end of the cord to a nail, I left her suspended by the neck. I then proposed cutting her up, but Ann told me to wait till the blood was settled; then the next thing we did was to burn the things, the bonnet. particularly. The next day, I cut the body, and emptied the chaff out of the bed to have the tick to carry part of the body away in; I cut off the head first, and I think I carried the arms with the head: Ann Kennett followed to see whether the blood came through the tick. The first attempt we made did not succeed, and I went back, and put the body into a box, and then into the ticken; the next day I borrowed a wheelbarrow, also a pick and shovel, and the same night I wheeled the body till we came near to the Hare and Hounds, when we turned up the hill and then down the foot-path that leads to where the body was found. I made an attempt to dig a hole that night, but found it too dark, so I put the box under some bushes near the spot, with the pick and shovel; then I took the barrow home, and the next morning I went and dug a hole with an intent to bury box and all, but the roots of the trees prevented me, so I took the body out, threw it into the hole, and covered it up, after which I destroyed the box. Ann pawned the deceased's clothes."

The confession being read throughout with such silent attention that a pin could almost have been heard, had one dropped in the Court—

The Judge called upon the prisoner to make any observations he might think proper to the jury.

Holloway said "My Lord. I have not a single word to say for the purpose of saving my life; I don't wish my life to be spared; but I will tell your Lordship, that if justice is done fairly, I ought not to be hanged; for when such a murderer as Winter was spared last Assizes, my life ought not to be taken. I think, my Lord, that no man ought to be hanged for murder in this country after Winter was saved, who murdered his wife—and his was a ten times more plain murder than this of mine. I say again, I don't wish my life to be saved, tho' your Lordship does not know but I save another, and there is no positive evidence, except my confession, which may have been made to save another that I did the murder. But not wishing to save my life, I admit what I did was a most cruel murder, and Ann Kennett is innocent. I am the man. I have no witnesses, and do not wish to call any one to save my life."

The jury without hesitation found the prisoner Guilty.

He was sentenced to be hanged, and his body to be given for dissection.

Horsham, Dec. 16.—The awful sentence of the law was carried into execution on this day amidst an immense concourse of spectators assembled from all parts.

The Brighton Tragedy.

O! Neighbours, you will scarcely think
That which I tell is true;
A murder like to this could be,
Of deepest, blackest hue.

Murder is the worst of crimes
That e'er the devil was slave,
And damns a soul most certainly
With everlasting pain.

And murder will for justice cry
Unto all-seeing Heav'n,
For who should rise take that away,
Which can't by him be giv'n.

But such there are, as will be seen
By this most horrid tale;
And that a murd'rer should exist
Like this we must bewail.

'Twas close by Brighton's famous town,
Near Preston, southern,
A Fisherman one early morn,
Observ'd a fun ral dress.

He saw it just ab ve the ground,
Then off he ran straight,
And took a constable, who search'd
And brought the dead to light.

They clear'd away the earth, and then
(For members with them aged),
They found a female body there
Without thigh, arms, or head.

Oh, who could such a deed have done?
Spread through the neighbourhood;
And Justice by her laws bore
To trace the deed of blood.

The dress it was identified
Upon that very day,
The body it was known to be
Of Celia Hol...way.

Her husband had for mur'rial years
Not lived with his wife,
At last with smiles he led her home
To take away her life.

Jane Holloway, how could you take
This woman's life away,
Whose babes God you swore to love
And cherish all her days.

A surgeon who did examine
The body that was doom'd,
A male child he discovered
Within its mother's womb.

The murd'rer then turned'd himself
For some short space of time,
Hoping to escape you shrewd
For this most dreadful crime.

But mark the hand of Providence,
His conscience so op'rated,
He gave himself to justice up
And then the whole confess'd

"Eight years ago I married was
With her whose you see;
But I've heard a ship did go,
As we could not agree.

"When I return'd a girl I met,
Ann Kennard was her name,
And went along with her to live,
As man and wife the same.

"My wife at this much vexed was.
And did me so enrage,
That I resolv'd to be reveng'd,
And her life to de-stroy.

"I took a house in Donkey-Row.
And there I did her lead;
I threw her down upon the ground,
And pinch'd her throat till dead.

"But I resolving to make sure
Is my wife's blood to give,
I took out my large pocket knife,
And then I cut her throat.

"But how the body to removal
Now occupied my mind,
So I cut off head, arms and legs,
And left the rest behind.

"I put the body and the thighs
Into a box at night;
Near Preston Copse I buried them,
To keep them out of sight.

"'Twas I alone who did the deed,
None help'd me, no, not one,
And how can I for pity ask,
When pity had for none?"

Thus you see by God above
All murders are concern'd;
The prisoner was, by his own words,
To the gallows condemn'd.

At Lewes he was tried for this
By Judge and Jury fair;
They found him GUILTY—and deemed,
He should be hanged there.

At Horsham goal he was brought out,
As thousands there did view,
And when the fatal drop it fell,
His body the world adieu.

It is a shocking sight to see
Men at the gallows die;
But blood for blood, and life for life,
Both Law and Justice cry.

After he hung till he was dead,
His body was cut down,
And for dissection it was sent
To Surgeons in the town.

Oh, Neighbours, then beware of strife,
Nor let your passions rise;
But lead a good and sober life,
Be prudent and be wise.

There's not a crime that can escape
The Almighty's seeing eye;
If you meet no punishment on earth,
You'll meet it when you die.

Then pray to GOD to keep you safe,
And in your Church attend;
Be loyal subjects to your King,
And God will bless your end.

Printed by J. Catnach, Monmouth Court, 7 Dials.

Barbarous MURDER AT ENFIELD,



Committed on the body of Benjamin Danby, aged 27, on the 19th Dec. 1832.

THE village of Enfield has been thrown into very considerable alarm by the discovery of the body of Benjamin Danby, the son of the late Mr. Danby, the well-known wig-maker in the Inner Temple, who was found inhumanly murdered in a ditch on Enfield Chase, near the New River, on 20th Dec. last.

It appears that some years ago the deceased offended his father and went to sea. A few weeks since he returned to London with a considerable sum of money, when he went to reside with a relation, Mr. Addington, master-baker, of Enfield. He was in the habit of visiting public-houses, and conversing freely with any one whom he met with.

On Wednesday, the 19th inst deceased left the residence of Mr, Addington, and proceeded to a neighbouring public-house called the Horse Shoe. While there he entered into conversation with three men, named William Johnson, a gardener; Samuel Fair, a brewer's drayman; and —— Cooper, a labourer; who perceiving that he had plenty of money, invited him to join them in a game at dominoes, to which he consented, and they played till the landlord turned them out. Nothing further was heard of young Danby till the following morning, about six o'clock, when his body was found lying in the ditch in a lane called White's-lane, by a boy named Dennis and a man named Weller, who were going to their daily labour. They caused an immediate alarm, and several of the villagers came to the spot, when on turning the body on its back, they found the face dreadfully lacerated, and the right cheek nearly cut off. In the throat, near the jugular vein, there was a deep stab, which appeared to have been effected by a butcher's knife. The body was dressed, and from the appearances of the earth by the side of the ditch, the unfortunate man seems to have struggled hard with his murderers. The mutilated corpse was carried to the Horse Shoe, and the parish authorities forwarded information of the horrible affair to the Coroner.

On Friday an inquest was held on the body, which presented a most appalling spectacle. The right side of the deceased's face was cut across as if he had struggled with the murderer when he attempted to cut his throat. The poor fellow's cheek was cut completely through—the jugular vein and windpipe were separated, and at the spine there were three or four haggling cuts, as if the perpetrator had made an effort to cut it through: the chin was cut off, and the face generally mangled. The wound in the neck the doctor pronounced to be quite sufficient to cause death: and from the nature of the other wounds, there is no doubt but the deceased struggled desperately with his merciless assailants. His fingers were nearly cut off, no doubt in laying hold of the knife to save himself.

The Jury sat for several hours examining witnesses, and ultimately adjourned the inquest to Wednesday, the 26th inst., when Cooper made a full confession to the Magistrates of the murder, which was effected by the prisoner Johnson, who first tripped up the unfortunate young man, and then stuck the knife in his throat: they afterwards robbed him of between three and four pounds, and threw him into the ditch, where they left him.

The Coroner then summed up the evidence, and the Jury returned the following verdict:—'We find that about midnight, on the 19th instant, the deceased, Benjamin Couch Danby, aged 27, was wilfully murdered by William Johnson and John Cooper, and that Samuel Fare was an accessary before the fact. They are now safely lodged in Newgate to await their trial.

COPY OF VERSES.

COME, listen to this tale of woe, good people far and near,
A wretched deed I will unfold, most shocking for to hear;
To read of such a cruelty will make your blood run cold,
Committed by these monsters base for the sake of worthless gold.

The victim to those wretches hands had lately come from sea,
A young man aged twenty-seven, brought up respectably,
Whose friends within the Temple dwells, and Danby known by name,
With aching hearts they now lament barbarians secure'd shame.

A month or so has scarce elapsed since Danby came on shore,
Not thinking that we all so soon his sad fate should deplore:
To Enfield with delight he went his Cousin for to see,
But, ah! that poor unhappy place did prove his destiny.

To the Crown and Horse-Shoe at Close side, young Danby did repair,
With liquors to regale himself---a British sailor's cheer,
Those ruffians then enticed him at dominoes to play,
And when the house shut up at night deluded him away.

Down a dark lane, call'd Enfield Chase, they did him thus trepan,
In view of getting more to drink---how wretched was the plan;
So barbarously with knives and sticks they fell him to the ground,
His throat they cut, and robb'd from him the bare sum of 4 pound.

But now they are to justice brought for their sad cruelty,
Let's hope, to die as murderers upon the fatal tree,
A public spectacle to view, all others for to warn,
That they from sinfulness soon may to righteousness return.

Printed by W. Taylor, wholesale and retail,
16, Waterloo Road, near the Coburg Theatre.

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TRIAL and SENTENCE
Of Job Joseph Ward For the
MURDER
Of a Little Boy Named Timothy Easthead.

COPY OF VERSES

WHAT means that sad despairing cry
A'by thus with anguish heaves thy breast,
Oh, why doth tears bedim thy eyes,
What reason thou so much distress,
Say women dost thou mourn the loss
Of some false friend deceitful Sex,
Or has misfortune, o'er thee grown,
Or dost thou mourn a husband dead

Ah! no, she cried in accents wild,
No more will beam my eyes with joy
For ruthless hands has slain my child,
And wrapp'd his breth my blooming boy
Base Herodian vengeance must have swept
Or struck the willain as he stood,
But oh! mercy fled, and Angels wept
To witness such a deed of blood.

Not 3 short summers had thrice blossom'd
And fill'd my joy my widow'd heart,
Till cruel Death relentless doomed,
Me and my cherish boy to part,
Job Joseph Ward! been didst the deed,
My paramour I sadly rave,
'Twas thou who caused my babe to bleed
'Twas thou who tore my wounded son.

One night when absent from my home,
Alas that night with horrors full;
The wretch to death my cherish doom'd
With a hammer broke my infant's skull,
When I returned, oh God I cried,
There lay my child with panting breath
No mortal aid, my boy could save,
Or snatch him from the grasp of death

But God has heard the Widow's cry,
The murderer is by Justice ta'en,
An ignominious death he'll die,
His plea at mercy-seat in vain.
Sweet mercy will not intercede,
No hopes of pardon here we catch,
No pitying voice will for him plead,
For justly he deserves his fate.

Adieu sweet babe, oft o'er thy tomb,
Shall thy best mother mourn in grief,
'Till Death shall kindly for me come,
And give my widow'd heart relief,
E'en strangers as they grave they pass
Shall stop awhile and to read
With aching hearts exclaim alas,
Ah, true it was a cruel deed.



This morning being appointed for the trial of Job Joseph Ward, who stands charged with the Wilful Murder of Timothy Easted, a boy of one year and nine months old, the first witness called was Jane Easted the mother who was deeply affected while giving the following evidence. On Saturday night, November 20th about 10 o'clock the prisoner returned home the worse for drink bringing with him some meat for supper, when he desired her to go out for some beer, and lighted her up stairs. At this period the deceased was fast asleep in bed and quite well, she told her paramour not to beat the baby while she was gone, and he promised he would not, but on returning in the course of three minutes, the poor child was groaning loudly; she immediately took it out of bed, exclaiming to the prisoner, 'Oh! what have you done to my dear child?' and ran up with it to the parlour lodger, Mrs. Roe. She further stated the child appeared to be dying, and that she took the child to Mr. Barfoot, a Surgeon next door who examined it, and found it had a blow upon the head, he gave her some medicine, and she took the child home, but, at Mr. Barfoot's desire, it was afterwards taken to the London University Hospital, where it very shortly died

Cross Examined.—Had lived with the prisoner previously, but they separated, and came together again. When she left the prisoner he was in the act of frying a steak, and when she returned he was engaged in the same way, witness & the prisoner where to have been married very shortly, and the banns had been published.

Mr. Robert Denny, house surgeon to the hospital, stated that the deceased was admitted by him at half-past 12 o'clock on Saturday night, it was brought by its mother and some other female, the mother said the child had received an injury on the head from a man, but she did not say who he was, the child was perfectly insensible, and had lost all power of motion, on examining the right side of the head he found the skin much puffed up all over, extending down to the cheek, produced from the effusion of blood under the skin, at this time he could detect no fracture, there was no external wound, but there was a bruise on the side of the head. The child breathed with difficulty, and the pulse at the wrist was scarcely perceptible, and the extremities were cold. The symptoms became gradualy aggravated, and the child died at half-past 2 o'clock. The child was healthy, and on opening the head, he found a fracture extending nearly the whole length of the right side of the head, and a portion of the bone depressed to the extent of half an inch on to the brain, which was very much torn and lacerated. In his opinion the injuries the child had received were quite sufficient to cause death.

Cross-examination.—Did not think that a blow from such a hammer must necessarily have produced much greater local injury than their appeared in this case. Would not swear that it was impossable for the injuries to have been afflicted by a fall of a person upon it, but he thought it highly improbable.

Lord Denman.—Supposing a drunken man getting into bed with his clothes on, might not two of the buttons of his coat, if he had fallen



with violence on the child, have caused the fractures Witness.—In my opinion they could not Mrs. Easthead recalled by the court.—The prisoner had been in the habit of ill-using the child and he has told me he has fal en down in the street with it in his arms. He never liked it was in my arms, and upon another occasion he told me to take the—— out of the bed; I have gone down on my knees to him beg him not to ill use the poor child.

Elizabeth Roe (the parlour lodger) being sworn, she stated that when Mrs. Easted ran up to her with the infant, the child seemed almost dead, the groans of the poor little thing were dreadful and by her advice it was taken to Mr. Barfoot. She also said, that about three weeks ago he smacked its face violently and tore out a piece of flesh with his nails. The witness stated that she saw the child on its being brought from Mr. Barfoots and said that its head appeared to be much swollen, she stated that Mrs. Easted [the mother, had at one time got rid of the prisoner, but she took him back again to live with her. John Roe, the son of the last witness deposed on Sunday morning, having heard that the prisoner had come home, he ran out with the intention of fetching a policeman, when the prisoner followed and asked witness what he wanted with him? he was told that he new very well what he was wanted for, when a policeman came and took him

The prisoner said 'I did not hurt the child.' The prisoner then ran off, and witness followed him and stopped him, and a policeman came up and asked him what was the matter, and witness said that the prisoner had shamefully ill-treated his child, and he replied that he did not beat or ill-treat the child, but that he fell upon it.

This was the case for the prosecution.

Mr. Payne then addressed the jury at some length, and called upon several witnesses, who gave the prisoner a good character for humanity, and also stated that he appeared to be exceedingly fond of children.

The jury then retired for about twenty minutes, when they returned and the Foreman declared a verdict of Guilty.

The Prisoner was then removed from the bar. He was shortly afterwards again placed at the dock to receive the awful sentence of the Court.

The Lord Chief Justice, addressing him said that he had been convicted, after a most careful and patient inquiry, of the highest crime known to the law—that of a murder of a fellow creature, and his crime was aggravated by the circumstance of his victim being a infant, who could not by any possibility of giving offence, or done injury to him or any one else. What motive he had for the commision of the offence was known only to himself and his Maker; but it was clear that he had taken the opportunity of the temporary absence of the female with whom he was living, and was the mother of the infant, to destroy the child in a most brutal manner. He could not ho'd out any hope of mercy or commutation of the sentence he was about to pronounce, and he hoped that his miserable end would prevent the commission of a similar offence. The Judge entreated him to make the best use of his time in making his peace with his Creator.

What can you hope for or expect from human tribunals but that the law should be executed with the utmost severity against you? Its sentence, and I pronounce it with pain and sorrow, is, that you be taken to the place whence you came, to be thence removed to the place of execution that you shall be hanged by the neck till you are dead, and that your corpse be buried in the place of your imprisonment, and may the Lord have mercy on your soul.

The prisoner, was then taken from the dock.

H PAUL, Printer, 22, Brick Lane, Spitalfields.

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A selection of crime or murder broadsides: **1**. Horrid murder of

three children, 1842 British Library; **2**. Eight persons murdered, between 1836–41 Harvard Library; **3**. Dr Barnard sentenced to penal transportation, 1855 British Library; **4**. Execution of John Holloway, 1831 Harvard Library; **5**. Barbarous murder at Enfield, 1832 Harvard Library; **6**. Trial and sentence of Job Joseph Ward, 1841 British Library

Murder Broadsides

* See *Crime, Broadsides and Social Change, 1800–1850*, p. 22

Executions had long been public affairs and were frequently attended by thousands, if not tens of thousands, with many coming from farther afield to 'make a day of it'. The more notorious the condemned and the more grisly the crime, the greater the crowd. But executions were also an opportunity to make a profit. Sold on execution day, for a penny or less, were broadsides (sheets printed on one side) recounting the crimes and confessions of the condemned, and pity for their victims. They were accompanied by often lurid illustrations and gory details, including a little Victorian-style CSI to describe the perpetrators' capture and conviction.

Left: A Souvenir 'murder mug', *c.* 1824 Royal Pavilion & Museums, Brighton & Hove; **Right**: Glazed earthenware figure of condemned murderer James B. Rush, 1848/49 Norfolk Museums Collections





Alongside the peddlers who sold broadsides were others hawking trinkets and souvenirs. While enjoying your fun family day out on execution day, you might treat yourself to a commemorative murder mug – yes, an actual mug commemorating someone's execution by hanging. And if drinking your tea from a murder mug is not to your taste, perhaps I can interest you in a porcelain figure of James Rush, hanged in 1849 for a double murder, and whose execution drew a crowd of 20,000.

Murder of William Weare by John Thurtell and two accomplices. Hand-colored etching, published 14 January 1824 © National Portrait Gallery, London

Trial & execution of Captain William Moir for the murder of William Malcolm, 1830 Harvard Library

Murder Fonts

Over the course of three centuries, from Gutenberg in the 1450s right through to John Baskerville in the middle of the

eighteenth century, the technology of printing had remained virtually unchanged. In fact, so little had changed that Gutenberg would surely have felt quite at home in a printshop of the 1750s. But the Industrial Revolution changed every aspect of the printing industry, powering it with steam and then electricity, mechanizing printing, typefounding, paper-making and typesetting, transforming printing into a genuine mass medium. But the nineteenth century also witnessed a rich aesthetic transformation too – a full-blown typographic renaissance. If in the eighteenth century Giambattista Bodoni had shocked his contemporaries with the extreme contrast and novelty of *his* fonts, then the nineteenth century shrugged and said, 'hold my beer'.



A small taste of what happened to fonts in the 19th century. From *Hamilton's Catalogue Nº 14,* published in 1899

Unicorn Graphics via H&Co.

Murder broadsides made use of a dizzying array of new display typefaces designed for a burgeoning poster advertising industry. The so-called Fat Face typefaces, extreme contrast versions of the previous century's Didone or Modern types, were especially popular with printers of these broadsides.



Advertising demanded more and bigger fonts. From *Street Life in London,* 1877

LSE Library

The century also gave birth to the first sans serif printing types, *c.* 1816, initially called Egyptian and later dubbed Grotesque or Gothic. The 1820s saw the first reversed contrast typefaces, initially called French Antique or Italian. Then Ionic, which shared a lot with Moderns and Egyptians but with bracketed serifs. Then came the slab serifs (confusingly, like the first sans, also know as Egyptian) appeared in the same decade, immortalized in cuts like Clarendon (1845). And then

there was everything in between: condensed, expanded, shaded, inline and outline, flared, twisted, rounded, wedge and bifurcated serifs, ornamented, floral, and other eccentricities which still pretty much defy classification.


Because nothing says murder and execution like a floral woodtype, *c.* 1826  British Library


Murder broadside published in 1862 that resembles a Commercial Classics specimen. I like the square counters in the sans Harvard Library


Murder broadside from 1865. An early geometric sans? Also, that **U**!  Harvard Library


Ransom note typography, 1832  Harvard Library


Another Fat Face typeface, a favorite with printers of crime broadsides, 1835  Harvard Library


A cut-off-the-corners ‘college’ font. Reading, 1862  Harvard Library

Murder or execution broadsides followed a fairly consistent formula: Fat face, bold condensed sans and heavy Clarendon-esque slab serifs for the title and subtitles, and Sometimes even a decorative wood type – I guess the printer, who had surely purchased the expensive wood-type for other purposes, wished to get their money’s worth.

Cut & paste hangman. The same Old Bailey courthouse woodcut with space left under the scaffold for the addition of the requisite number of hanging figures. The courthouse has since been rebuilt (1902), but in the background is St Sepulchre’s Church, built in the 17th century and still standing  Harvard Library

The wood engravings and woodcuts used for the illustrations are of the victim, the actual crime in progress, or a town-square filled with spectators. Many of the illustrations are of executions performed outside the Old Bailey in London, which was once attached to Newgate prison. Frequently in the gallows woodcuts, a space is left under the scaffold for the addition of the requisite number of hanged figures.

“Between 1735 and 1868 in England and Wales, more than 9,300 people convicted of capital crimes were publicly executed.”▿

▿Source: Harvard Library

The End

In England, the Capital Punishment Amendment Act of 1868 brought an end to public executions and the murder broadside. And by the start of the twentieth century, penny dreadfuls were on the way out, steadily supplanted by countless alternatives and sometimes evolving into new kinds of periodicals, from comics to general interest and educational magazines; but also into equally lurid and sensational periodicals like the popular, *The Illustrated Police News*, forerunner of the tabloid press, and once voted, ‘the worst newspaper in England’.

Above: Victorian *nasty,* from *The Illustrated Police News*, Saturday 28 March 1896
It ran sensational stories of blood, guts, and the bizarre – everything from a maniacal octopus to suicides, murders, murder-suicides, peeping-toms, patricide, matricide, and fratricide; and with truly memorable headlines like, ‘Shock for mourners when dead girl sits up in coffin’ (22 April 1899), and ‘Girl shoots a man dead at a ball for treading on

her foot and declining to apologize’ (5 Feb. 1898).

Two covers and an interior full-page illustration from *The Illustrated Police News,* (1896, 1898, 1899) once dubbed ‘the worst newspaper in England’. Appetites for the kind of content penny dreadfuls once served was fulfilled by other illustrated periodicals, forerunners of the tabloid press © British Newspaper Archive

The nineteenth century witnessed a reading revolution. Never before in the West had so many read so much. Crime broadsides shed light on early nineteenth-century mores, on attitudes towards morality, crime, punishment and redemption – and their penchant for the macabre. Although cheap, sensational, and ephemeral, penny dreadfuls were always much more than disposable entertainment. They improved literacy, and whether praised or pilloried, they got children excited about reading regularly. The genre forever transformed children’s literature, introducing generations of young readers to the novel and enduring notion of reading for pleasure. ◉

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