

NINETEENTH CENTURY GENDER STUDIES

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Victorian “Mysterymania” and #MeToo

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<1>Nineteenth-century mystery, a genre always predicated both on the idea that we *don't* know something but that we *can come* to know it, offers us epistemologies—reading clues, seeing patterns, investigative reporting—that we continue to use today in grappling with sexual violence in our culture and on our campuses. I recently realized connections between my research on the mid-nineteenth century boom in mystery narratives and our efforts in the present moment to document sexual violence when, as Vice-Chair of my Academic Senate, I served on my institution's Title IX implementation committee. Working with faculty on the processes and effects of Title IX mandatory reporting, I was reminded of the ways in which nineteenth-century mysteries highlight violence suffered by female characters, but also how they suggest that these characters' experiences can foster detective skills necessary for exposing and combatting such violence. This connection helped me to rethink my initial alarm at being told that I was now a mandatory reporter of any sexual violence disclosed to me on my campus, an alarm shared by many of my fellow faculty members, who (like many faculty members across the United States) worried that we were being asked to surveil our students in potentially retraumatizing ways.<1> My work with nineteenth-century mystery narratives has led me to understand Title IX implementation as a huge social project (one recently strengthened by Department of Education revisions) in which we all *do* need to see ourselves as detectives, but not Foucauldian detectives—those figures of hegemonic authority, surveillance, and judgment.<2> Instead, we can follow the ways in which the mid-nineteenth century mystery offers a form of master-perception that is rooted more in empathy and identification *with* than identification *of*, and we can act like the community-focused female detectives in the novel of urban mysteries, who acquire skills in watchfulness in order to make sexual violence more visible and to challenge it. The graphic visibility of violence in nineteenth-century mysteries, especially in their most inexpensive and popular manifestations, can help us to understand and historicize the central tenet of both Title IX and #MeToo: that confronting and combatting sexual violence is predicated on its exposure and documentation.

<2>The visibility of sexual violence in mid-nineteenth century penny mysteries can seem especially startling when contrasted with the silences, ellipses, euphemisms, and understatements about violence we encounter in much of the nineteenth-century literature that forms the focus of academic study. We can find such silences even in novels that created a stir with their apparent frankness, such as Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847). Jane, threatened by Mr. Rochester with sexual violence, refers rather coyly to the possibility of his falling into “wild license” and, even in the fraught moment in which she notes “the present—the passing second of time—was all I had in which to control and restrain him” for “a movement of repulsion, flight, fear would have sealed my doom,—and his,” feels fully confident in her power to defuse him. Indeed, she is so

assured of her power that while she finds the moment “perilous,” she also notes it is “not without its charm” (258). In Jane’s conviction of her ability to handle Rochester, we can hear an echo of the idea that truly virtuous women should be able to repel the violence that comes their way, an idea that pervades much nineteenth-century literature and culture. Contrast Brontë’s scene to a scene of wild license in Thomas Frost’s contemporaneous *The Mysteries of Old Father Thames* (1848), in which fifteen-year old Lolah Hastings, having been spotted by sexagenarian pedophile Colonel Eldrington (“one of those pests of society who . . . seek to revive the vigour of past days by stimulating their passions by the seduction of females of extreme youth”), is decoyed by him into a procuress’s house and violently raped (68; pt.9). Despite the virtuous girl’s spirited defiance of her attacker—“I will not submit to this infamy while I am able to resist!” she cries (72; pt.9)—she is finally unable to fend him off:

Long but vainly did Lolah Hastings struggle with her persecutor; in vain her resistance—in vain her screams, for not a sound passed beyond the four walls of that chamber of mystery and guilt. With her shining black hair hanging dishevelled on her shoulders, with her clothes torn, and her face and neck suffused with burning blushes, she was thrown upon the matted floor of that strangely-contrived apartment, and the libertine colonel succeeded in the penetration of his design. (73; pt.10)

The violence of the colonel’s penetration of his design—the attack that leaves Lolah’s hair disheveled, clothes torn, and body thrown—is rendered graphically twice over in Frost’s serial, appearing in both prose description and in the cover illustration of the preceding installment [see figure 1]. While such renditions clearly show us the shocking content that made mid-century penny fiction notorious—and that gave rise to such labels as the “penny blood” and (a little later) the “penny dreadful”—they are also of a piece with Frost’s general mission of exposing what too often goes ignored.

<3>Indeed, Frost throughout aligns himself with Asmodeus, a demon who can see through roofs and walls (and who thus functions as a kind of patron-demon of the *Mysteries*). Proclaiming that, “Asmodeus-like,” he will “penetrate the abodes of vice and misery” and “reveal the mysteries” that have been concealed (3-4; pt.1), Frost explicitly meditates on the exposure of sexual violence:

The whole subject is a painful one; but shall we suffer evil to exist unnoticed, and to spread its hideous ramifications throughout the whole framework of society, for fear of shocking the sensitive by its exposure? Let us choose the lesser of two evils; to unmask an abuse is the first step to its removal. (131; pt.17)

Such envelope-pushing exposures, too often only recognized as part of the commercial lure of penny fiction, were also politically radical. Frost, a laboring-class Chartist who produced a number of city-mysteries in the 1840s, turned Lolah Hastings into a character whose experiences of violence culminate in a challenge to cultures of misogyny. The mixed-race daughter of one Colonel Hastings, Lolah is kidnapped as a child from her father’s house and grows up a penniless and abused street dancer. After briefly being restored to her father—during which time she attends the school where she catches the eye of the “libertine colonel”—her father is murdered, and her rape leads to her becoming a courtesan. Lolah, however, not only survives her rape (and manages to knock her attacker unconscious during his second attempt), but through some canny detective work is also able eventually to bring her procuress to justice. The procuress ends up transported for seven years, while Lolah ends up married to aristocrat Norman Ashley. Frost includes a series of scenes during Norman’s courtship of Lolah in which the couple

frankly discuss these events. When Lolah, who notes that “misfortune in woman is too often visited with reprobation rather than with the pity which it surely deserves,” rather anxiously tells Norman that she was “vilely and brutally outraged by one whom the world calls a gentleman,” and afterward accepted “an offer of protection” in order to survive, Norman responds by hoping that she does “not think so meanly” of him as “to suppose that the occurrence of such misfortune could tend to diminish [his] affection” (186; pt.24). After Norman assures her, “your candour has secured you the continuance of my esteem, and no circumstances could ever diminish the ardent passion with which you have inspired me,” (an assurance that prompts Lolah to swiftly send her current protector packing), Norman overtly declares that he has “no right” to pass any judgment on her for “what may have occurred before [they] were acquainted” (187-88; pt.24). Such discussions and sentiments, recurrent in the urban mysteries, run strikingly counter to the dominant account of how sexual violence is represented in mid- and even late-nineteenth-century literature. We might immediately think, for instance, of a work like Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* (1891), which, a full four decades after Frost’s novel, is utterly silent about the details of Tess’s rape, and sees Tess’s new husband Angel, after hearing her account of Alec d’Urberville’s attack, coldly reject her, claiming she suddenly seems to be a different person.<3>

<4>The graphic depictions and discussions we see in Frost’s *Thames* are foundational to the urban mysteries as a whole: indeed, the novel that sparked the genre, Eugène Sue’s *Les Mystères de Paris* (1842-3), opens with an explicit warning about the unvarnished delineations to be found in the pages to come. “This beginning announces to the reader that he must here witness sinister scenes,” cautions Sue’s narrator in his opening sentence, underscoring the novel’s twinned mission to expose scenes generally concealed and to capitalize on “the sort of fearful curiosity that is sometimes provoked by terrible spectacles” (I: 2). The sinister scenes we find in these narratives regularly display and even focus on violence against women, a focus that continues to inform popular mysteries today. However, as Frost’s *Thames* demonstrates, even as the urban mysteries exhibit violence much more explicitly than do the more middle-class fictions of the nineteenth century, they also directly engage with the sources of such violence and offer challenges to it. In so doing, the urban mysteries both highlight distinctions and make connections between forms of violence suffered by women (and men) across the social spectrum. As they offer stories that exhibit a variety of forms of violence that enslaved women, working-class women, and middle-class women could be subject to, they also provide moments of nineteenth-century intersectionality, clearly showing what Kimberlé Crenshaw has called instances in which “race, gender, and class domination converge” (1246). By looking back at these mysteries in our #MeToo moment, we can find not just examples of Victorian sexism and misogyny, but also ways in which Victorian culture was already acknowledging sexual violence as “social and systemic” rather than “isolated and individual,” and imagining women with differently intersecting experiences and identities as agents of change who could readily detect, recount, and challenge forms of everyday aggression (Crenshaw 1241-42).

<5>The sinister scenes Sue depicts in his Parisian *Mysteries* which show us violence against women (and that also expose systemic connections between forms of violence) begin in the novel’s opening pages. The very first scene shows us the narrative’s hero, master-of-disguise, and proto-superhero Prince Rodolphe (posing as an artisan fan-painter), emerging from a dark doorway in the hardscrabble *Cité* to save a young prostitute, *Fleur-de-Marie*, from a threatened beating by the rough *Chorineur* (or “Stabber”), an ex-convict who has been demanding that the

young woman buy him a drink. When Rodolphe, after besting the *Chorineur* in a fight, takes them both to a local bar for some refreshment, *Fleur-de-Marie* relates to them a horrifyingly detailed account of the violence that she suffered as a child abandoned on the streets of Paris, and how she was only recently, at the age of sixteen, drugged, raped, and sold into prostitution. As the men listen to *Fleur-de-Marie*'s story, the *Chorineur* demonstrates his redeemable nature by vociferously registering his commonality with the prostitute as a victim of social inequality. Exclaiming, "it is really surprising, my wench, how much we resemble each other!" the *Chorineur* eventually apologizes for his behavior, saying "how sorry I am, that I threatened to beat you just now, and frightened you" (I: 33, 39). *Fleur-de-Marie*'s compelling testimony, her "recital, made with such painful frankness," has the effect of making alliances and countering violence (I: 46).

<6>As the novel progresses, we encounter many more female characters from across the social spectrum who suffer physical and sexual violence. While some of these characters (including *Fleur-de-Marie*) are eventually destroyed by the violence they have suffered, many exhibit impressive resilience, and some even transform into vigilante figures who rival Prince Rodolphe himself in their ability to detect things and perform masked vengeance. The most powerful of these vigilante characters is the beautiful and ruthless Cécily. A mixed-race former American slave, Cécily was virtuously fending off increasingly "brutal attempts" by her slave master to rape her when Rodolphe, fortuitously traveling through the American South, first encountered her (V: 70). Speedily rescuing both Cécily and her slave fiancé David, Rodolphe brings them to Europe and employs David (who had been educated in medicine) as his personal physician. Although once away from the plantation, Cécily—in a rather abrupt move—suddenly rejects David to pursue a villainous path, the novel makes much of her remarkable talents: she possesses a "plastic, adroit, insinuating mind," "an intelligence so wonderful that in a year she spoke French and German with perfect ease," and "an audacity and courage proof against everything" (V: 71). Indeed, she is so formidable that Rodolphe himself seeks her help in vanquishing the novel's most villainous master plotter and sexual predator, a notary named Jacques Ferrand. Cécily infiltrates the malefactor's house in a titillating disguise and tricks the notary into giving her concrete evidence of his crimes before—rather poetically—deliberately goading him into such a state of satyromania that he actually perishes of it [see figure 2]. Cécily agrees to enact her sexy masked vengeance on Ferrand because she is "sincerely indignant at the recital of the infamous violence," especially towards women, perpetrated by the arch-villain (V: 72). Notably, in his depiction of Cécily, Sue both follows and exposes the racist idea of the supposed licentiousness of female slaves. While in the end he can't seem to let Cécily enact her sexualized vigilantism without first transforming her into a character who is truly, at heart, sexually promiscuous, the shocking and rather unconvincing abruptness of her transformation from the chaste, virtuous partner of David into a wanton lone-ranger villainess-vigilante highlights (even if unwittingly) the artificiality of such racist constructs.

<7>Sue's Parisian *Mysteries* was fast to become perhaps *the* most popular nineteenth-century novel in any language.<4> As translated editions appeared throughout Europe and America, Sue's novel inspired a new, international genre of narrative mystery and generated a transatlantic "mysterymania" for narratives purporting to expose the burgeoning secret underworlds and economic inequalities shaping the rapidly urbanizing mid-nineteenth century.<5> These mysteries regularly followed Sue in including scenes of violence against women alongside

scenes that feature female vigilantes and detective characters bent on uncovering and challenging such violence. Indeed, the *Mysteries* importantly incubate the literary detective by exploring characters—both male and female—who live on the margins of society but gain power by developing their detective skills. These proto-detectives often draw on their experiences of social disempowerment to help them to out-see and outwit the genre’s many “oxymoronic oppressors” (David S. Reynolds’s term for the character type of the “outwardly respectable but inwardly corrupt social leader” [86]).<6> Collectively, the *Mysteries* champion an empathetic form of master-perception, one rooted in using one’s own experiences to strengthen one’s imaginative ability to inhabit other minds. We can see empathetic master-perception especially informing many of the female detective characters that emerge in the hundreds of British and American urban mysteries inspired by Sue’s Parisian chronicles, in narratives set in burgeoning metropolises (such as Frost’s *Thames* and G. W. M. Reynolds’s *The Mysteries of London* [first series, 1844-46], or, across the Atlantic, Ned Buntline’s *The Mysteries and Miseries of New York* [1848] and Osgood Bradbury’s *The Mysteries of Boston* [1844]), but also in factory towns (Bradbury’s *The Mysteries of Lowell* [1844]), and even small hamlets (Philip Penchant’s *The Mysteries of Fitchburg* [1844]).

<8>The ways in which empathetic master-perception can lead to cross-class coalitions in the *Mysteries* is powerfully showcased in Reynolds’s *The Mysteries of London*, a gargantuan serial that ran under a number of different titles from 1844 to 1856 and was the most popular novel of mid-century England, famously outselling Dickens’s 1840s offerings.<7> In his *London Mysteries*, Reynolds, like Sue, depicts the many kinds of violence that women could be subject to in the modern world (violence suffered at the hands of both male and female perpetrators). He also, however, expands upon Sue’s interest in female characters who not only survive violence but whose experiences help them to become powerful detective-advocates for themselves and others. Among the many active, resilient, and powerful female characters in *The Mysteries of London*, Eliza Sydney, Diana Arlington, and Ellen Monroe comprise a particularly fascinating interconnected trio. All three of these major characters experience social and/or sexual falls, but none are destroyed by their experiences; instead, they are able to thrive and prosper, and to use their varied life experiences to develop skills in detecting and protecting themselves and others from villainy.<8>

<9>We first meet Eliza Sydney in the opening installment of Reynolds’s novel, although we don’t know it: she’s running around the city cross-dressed as “Walter” Sydney, and it is not until the third installment that Reynolds delights in revealing the stalwart Walter to also be the nubile Eliza [see figure 3]. Eliza is eventually sentenced to two years in Newgate for the complex inheritance-fraud scheme concocted by her guardian that had her impersonate her deceased brother for several years, the full details of which she was only partially aware. Readers might expect such disreputable behavior as cross-dressing and its subsequent punishment to destroy fully the reputation of an upper-middle class character like Eliza. However, after Eliza serves her sentence, she returns to her comfortable Upper Clapton villa, handily fends off repeated sexual attacks by Montague Greenwood, the novel’s master-plotting/master-of-disguise arch-villain, and eventually moves to Italy where she marries royalty and becomes the Grand Duchess of Castelcicala (notably, the Grand Duke proposes to her *after* finding out about her time in prison). As the powerful and wealthy Grand Duchess, Eliza builds a kind of international spy network to

keep an eye on London happenings—and in particular on the doings of Montague Greenwood, whose Italian valet, Filippo, is in Eliza's pay.

<10>Eliza's surprising ascent from disgraced jailbird to royalty occurs as a direct result of her accepting the help of a sharp-eyed, sharp-witted courtesan, Diana Arlington. We meet Diana in the novel's second installment, and learn shortly thereafter her history: an educated, middle-class young lady, she was seduced and abandoned by Montague Greenwood (who was simultaneously ruining her father in a financial con). While Diana's reputation does suffer as a result of the seduction—following her father's suicide, she becomes a courtesan after finding out that no one will employ her otherwise—Diana nevertheless enjoys considerable power over her fate. When we first meet her, she's living under the protection of one Sir Rupert Harborough, but after realizing his moral turpitude she coolly leaves him, and selects (from a remarkably large prospective pool) a new protector, the Earl of Warrington. This relationship soon flourishes into one of deep mutual respect, and Diana uses the resources available to her as the wealthy Earl's companion to befriend and aid Eliza before she's sent to prison (having ferreted out evidence that Eliza is more innocent than guilty), and then to send Eliza to Italy after she is released. Eventually, the Earl of Warrington asks Diana to marry him, and Reynolds writes in succinct commentary on both Eliza's and Diana's happy outcomes: "Such are the strange phases which this world presents to our view! That same Fortune, who, in a moment of caprice, had raised an obscure English lady to a ducal throne, placed, when in a similar mood, a coronet upon the brow of another who had long filled a most equivocal position in society" (II: 94-95; pt.64).

<11>Such capricious fortune also smiles on Ellen Monroe, who, like Diana Arlington, inhabits a most equivocal position in the novel. After her father, like Diana's, is ruined financially by Montague Greenwood, Ellen finds herself in penury, and as she scrambles to survive she allows herself slowly to be groomed by an "Old Hag" procuress into prostitution [see figure 4]. When Ellen finally agrees to one night with a paying customer (none other, of course, than Montague Greenwood), she becomes pregnant. However, just like Eliza and Diana, Ellen is not destroyed by her social and sexual fall, or by having a child while unmarried. Instead, she demands that Greenwood support the baby (he does), and becomes a mesmerist's assistant, a ballet dancer, and finally, a renowned actress. Unknowingly helped by Eliza Sydney's spy network, Ellen successfully fends off subsequent sexual attacks by Greenwood, and she boldly tracks down and calls out other potential sexual predators who threaten her [see figure 5]. Like Cécily before her, Ellen also engages in masked vigilante action. When she detects, for instance, that ostensible hero Richard Markham is about to walk blindly into a trap, she uses the skills she has learned from the stage to venture out to Holywell Street, coolly purchase "everything suitable to form a complete male disguise," and saunter off "without exciting any particular notice" to save her friend (I: 319-20; pt.40). Drawing upon the "considerable amount of fortitude and self-possession" that "she had acquired . . . from the various circumstances in which she had been placed," and wielding a loaded pistol (which she "learnt to fire . . . at the theater"), Ellen handily rescues Richard (I: 320; pt.40) [see figure 6]. Finally, after blackmailing Greenwood into secretly marrying her so as to legitimize her baby (II: 165; pt.73), and after years of serial adventures, Ellen, having become Eliza's friend, learns of Eliza's detective network. "Are you angry with me for having thus placed a spy upon the actions of your husband?" Eliza asks Ellen. "Oh! no—no," Ellen replies, "on the contrary, I rejoice! For doubtless you have saved him from the commission

of many misdeeds!” (II: 412; pt.104). In this moment, Ellen clearly acknowledges the value of watching, noting, and recording misdeeds in order to be able to help curtail them.

<12>Such scenes, characters, and coalitions were also explored and developed by a vigorous and diverse set of American writers. Again and again the transatlantic *Mysteries* show women’s power as inextricably connected to their abilities in master-perception *and* deception in ways that do not have to do damage to their reputation and that often help them redress and foil instances of sexual assault and violence against women. These mysteries regularly celebrate the ascendant social trajectories of marginalized and threatened female characters who draw on their experiences in order to foster impressive abilities with the reading and manipulating of signs. Socially or sexually fallen characters, factory girls, and slaves can become masterminds behind both domestic plots and international intrigues in American *Mysteries*. Seeming prostitutes such as Ellen Bruce in Tom Shortfellow’s *Mysteries of New York* (1845) can turn out to be female vigilante Robin Hoods; promiscuous wives such as Fanny Gardner in Buntline’s *The Mysteries and Miseries of New Orleans* (1851) can take down entire filibustering missions in Cuba; and forty-year old chamber-maids, such as Tabitha Jones in Bradbury’s *Second Series of the Mysteries of Boston* (1844), can disguise themselves as courtesans to foster cross-class alliances. Southern heiresses, such as Ella Howard in Philip Penchant’s *The Mysteries of Fitchburg* (1844), can likewise disguise themselves as courtesans in order to punish nefarious and deceitful men. Visiting the hamlet of Fitchburg, Ella takes on the villainous Ruel Lenox *and* his father, both serial seducers, by posing as a sexually available woman. As Ella completes the “fatal snares she was continually setting for the destruction of Lenox,” the narrator applauds her canny ability to out-deceive the villain: “they walked together, the *deceiver* and the *deceived!* The searching eye of Ella Howard could read the inmost thoughts of Ruel Lenox! And he, who had thought to deceive, was himself deceived!” (19, 23). Although Ella herself notes at the end that “mine has been a fearful part to act,” after successfully punishing both sexual predators, she peacefully decamps back to the South to enjoy her inheritance (25).

<13>In ways that anticipate the #MeToo movement’s aims of making sexual violence and harassment visible while also fostering female solidarity, Sue’s Cécily, Reynolds’s trio of powerful fallen women, and characters like Tabitha Jones and Ella Howard show how female vigilante detective action in the *Mysteries* generally involves community-focused women bent on making violence against women more visible as they work to combat it. We can find many more instances of this across the genre. Big Lize in Ned Buntline’s *The Mysteries and Miseries of New York* (1848), who works as the seductive bait for a panel thief, uses her skills in deception to protect the novel’s suddenly impoverished heroine from seduction.<9> Mary Trevor in J. Wimpleton Wilkes’s *The Mysteries of Springfield* (1844) draws on her own experience of being seduced to gain the knowledge necessary to foil her seducer’s next plot, thus protecting *Springfield*’s romantic heroine from harm.

<14>Such depictions of female heroism and collectivity were clearly noted by other writers intent on exposing sexual violence and calling for social change. Harriet Jacobs, for instance, mobilizes *Mysteries* tropes and structures to enhance her proto-feminist message in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861). Jacobs echoes the *Mysteries* in observing how experiences of violence and subjection can heighten detective skills. “Slaves, being surrounded by mysteries, deceptions, and dangers,” she writes, “early learn to be suspicious and watchful, and prematurely

cautious and cunning”; a good thing, she argues, for skills in watchful craftiness constitute “the only weapon of the weak and oppressed against the strength of their tyrants” (155, 101).<10> Moreover, Jacobs explicitly positions herself as a master-perceiver, casting her struggle with her master—who constantly threatens her with rape—as a kind of mystery plot, a “competition in cunning,” in which she plays the role of a sharp-eyed master of disguise who eventually and handily outwits her adversary (155). “Competition in Cunning” is the title of chapter 25 of *Incidents*; even before this, Jacobs sets herself up as an adversary who is more than her master’s equal in cunning, perception, and disguise. “Thus far I had outwitted him,” she notes when she hides in her first attic storage space right in her town, while he rushes out of town to search for her, “and I triumphed over it” (100). When she finally escapes to New York—the “City of Iniquity” (199)—she is well able to penetrate a false letter: “I knew, by the style, that it was not written by a person of his age, and though the writing was disguised, I had been made too unhappy by it, in former years, not to recognize at once the hand of Dr. Flint,” and asks “did the old fox suppose I was goose enough to go into such a trap? Verily, he relied too much upon ‘the stupidity of the African race’” (172). Even as Jacobs relates the horrors of taking cover in her punishingly small hiding places—the “dismal hole(s)” in which she dwells for years—she also recasts herself as a kind of Asmodeus who, literally seeing through roofs and walls, “command[s] a view” of the world and bears witness to many unfortunate histories, including bondwomen being raped by their masters and then turned out (113, 100).

<15>The act of bearing witness to such violence—of exposing it, of acknowledging its widespread, systemic presence in our world in order to challenge it—is one of the central projects of the nineteenth-century mystery, as well as the central purpose of both Title IX mandatory reporting and the #MeToo movement. Sensational penny mysteries, in exploring the potential of disadvantage and disability to foster skills that could lead to greater advantage and ability, and in highlighting collective action, offer unexpectedly candid views of sexual violence in the nineteenth century; they also provide a counterpoint to the narrative of Victorian silences on the subject of sexual assault. Like #MeToo testimony, these mysteries offer shocking narratives that are also an important kind of evidence. They correct silences found in canonical works by writers such as Dickens and Hardy, and they can help us see more clearly the radical feminism in genres they intersect with, including the slave narrative (especially Jacob’s *Incidents*) and the later “sensation” novel (including those by Mary Elizabeth Braddon).<11> Attending more closely to such popular but understudied literature in our classrooms and our research can help us to rewrite our understandings of silences about sexual violence both in the nineteenth-century and today.

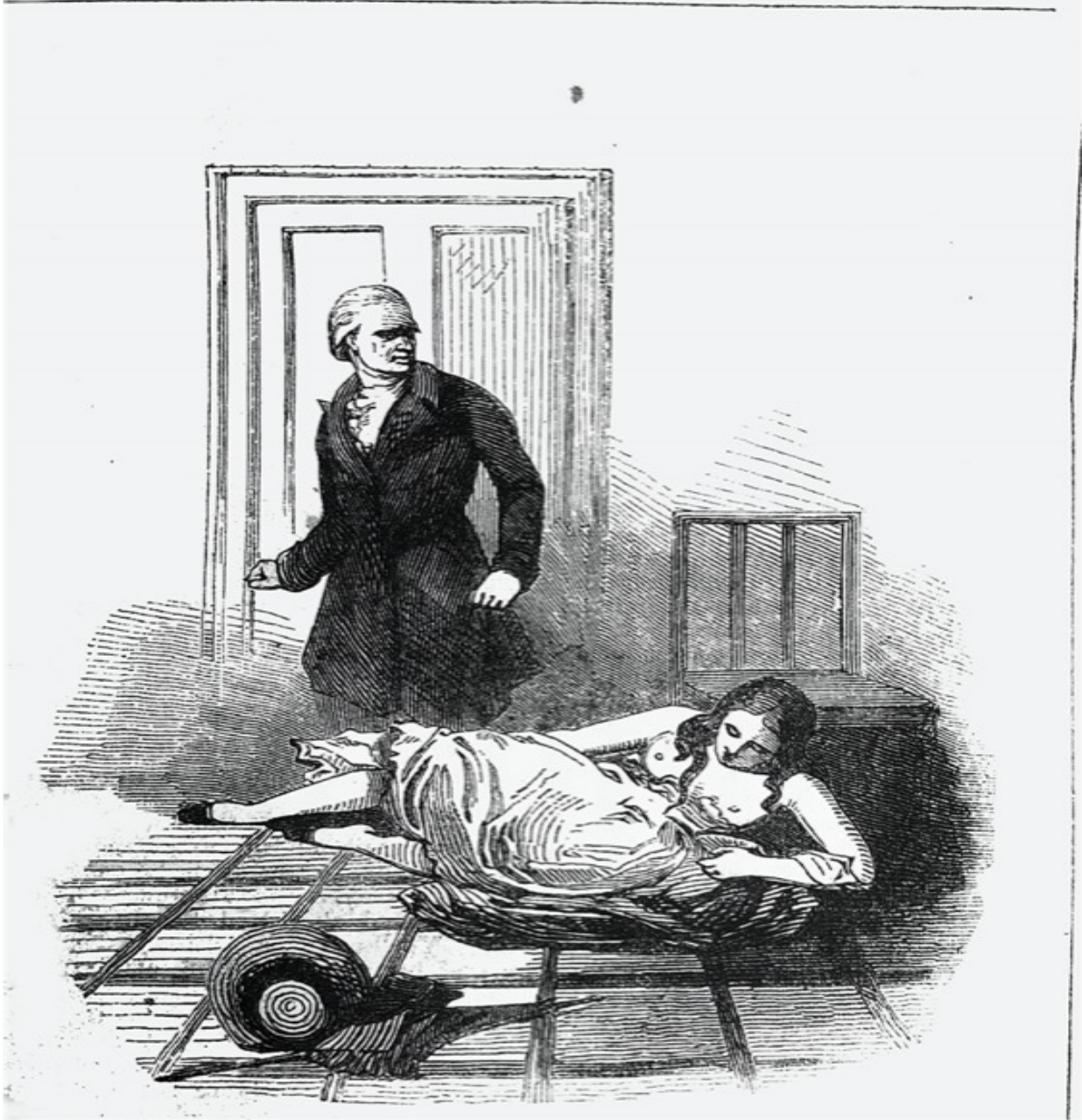
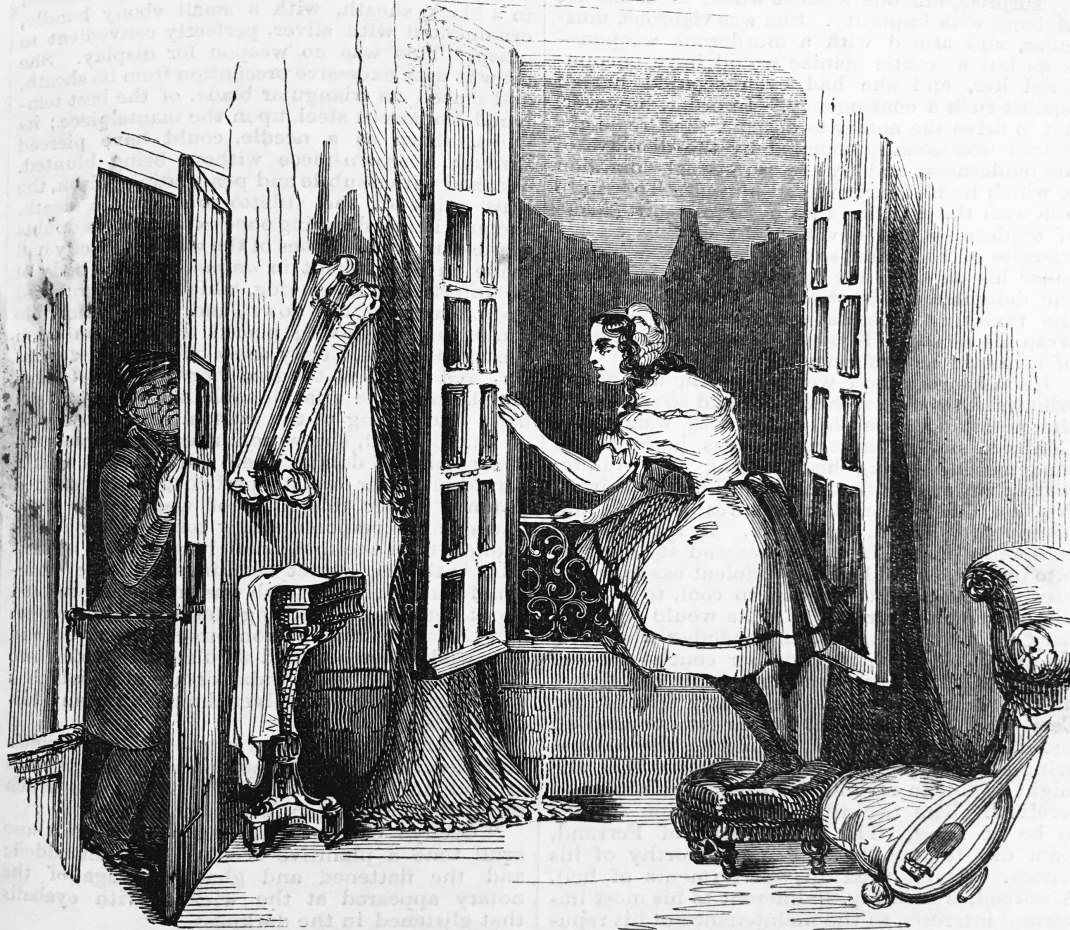


Figure 1. Lolah Hastings on the floor of the “strangely contrived apartment,” after being attacked and raped by Colonel Eldrington. Illustration for the ninth installment of *The Mysteries of Old Father Thames*, 1848. Author collection.



[Cecily Escaping from the House of Jacques Ferrand.]

strengthened the chain with which Cecily had bound him. In one word, the lust of the sensualist, stifling the appealing voice of reason, threw him blindfolded into the torrent of lascivious desires, which bore him thoughtlessly onwards.

The notary was finally forced to concede that

would not for a moment entertain the suggestion, and expended *two thousand francs* in furnishing her apartment.

Such generosity was unprecedented in the notary, and demonstrated the extraordinary violence of his passion.

The terrible retribution of this hardened and

Figure 2. Cecily, having obtained evidence of the villain Jacques Ferrand's crimes, escapes through the window while Ferrand, in a "torrent of lascivious desires," tries to break into the room. Illustration for the twenty-fourth number of the Roscoe Library Edition translation of *The Mysteries of Paris*, 1855. Author collection.



foils, single-sticks, dandy-canes, and hunting-whips, were huddled together in one corner of that bureau. And yet all the confusion of these various and discrepant objects was so regular in appearance—if the phrase can be understood—that it seemed as if some cunning hand had purposely arranged them all so as to strike the eye in a manner calculated to encourage the impression that this elegant boudoir was inhabited by a man of strange feminine tastes, or a woman of extraordinary masculine ones.

There was no pompous nor gorgeous display of wealth in this boudoir: its interior, like that of

By the wall facing the window stood a French bed, on the head and foot of which fell pink satin curtains, flowing from a gilt-headed arrow fixed near the ceiling.

It was now nine o'clock, and the sun shed a flood of golden light through the half-open casement upon that couch which was so voluptuous and so downy.

A female of great beauty, and apparently about five-and-twenty years of age, was reading in that bed. Her head reposed upon her hand, and her elbow upon the pillow: and that hand was buried in a mass of luxuriant light chestnut

Figure 3. Cross-dressing Eliza Sydney, reposing in dishabille with some of her male riding garb on and near her chair. Illustration for the third number of *The Mysteries of London*, 1844. Author collection.



"Name the matter in which my poor services can avail your lordship," returned the count, "and I pledge myself in advance to meet your wishes."

"My lord," said the Earl of Warrington, "I must inform your lordship that I am somewhat interested in a cousin of mine of the name of Eliza Sydney. This lady loved a man who was unworthy of her—a wretch whose pursuits are villany, and who enriches himself at the expense of the unwary and confiding. The heartless scoundrel to whom I

almost equal to a stigma and to shame! To continue my brief tale, my lord—this man, with a demon heart, is one who will persecute my cousin Eliza to the very death. A lady of my acquaintance, who can also tell a tale of the unequalled villany of this George Montague Greenwood——"

"What!" ejaculated the count; "do I hear aright? or do my ears deceive me? What name did you give the miscreant who administered opiate drugs to a woman with the foulest of motives?"

Figure 4. Ellen Monroe approached by the "Old Hag" procuress. Illustration for the twenty-first number of *The Mysteries of London*, 1844. Author collection.



such an idea ever enter his mind, must I not retain myself worthy of that repentant sentiment on his part?"

"You cherish a miserable delusion, my child," said the hag; "and I am surprised at your confidence in the good feelings of a man of whom you have already seen so much."

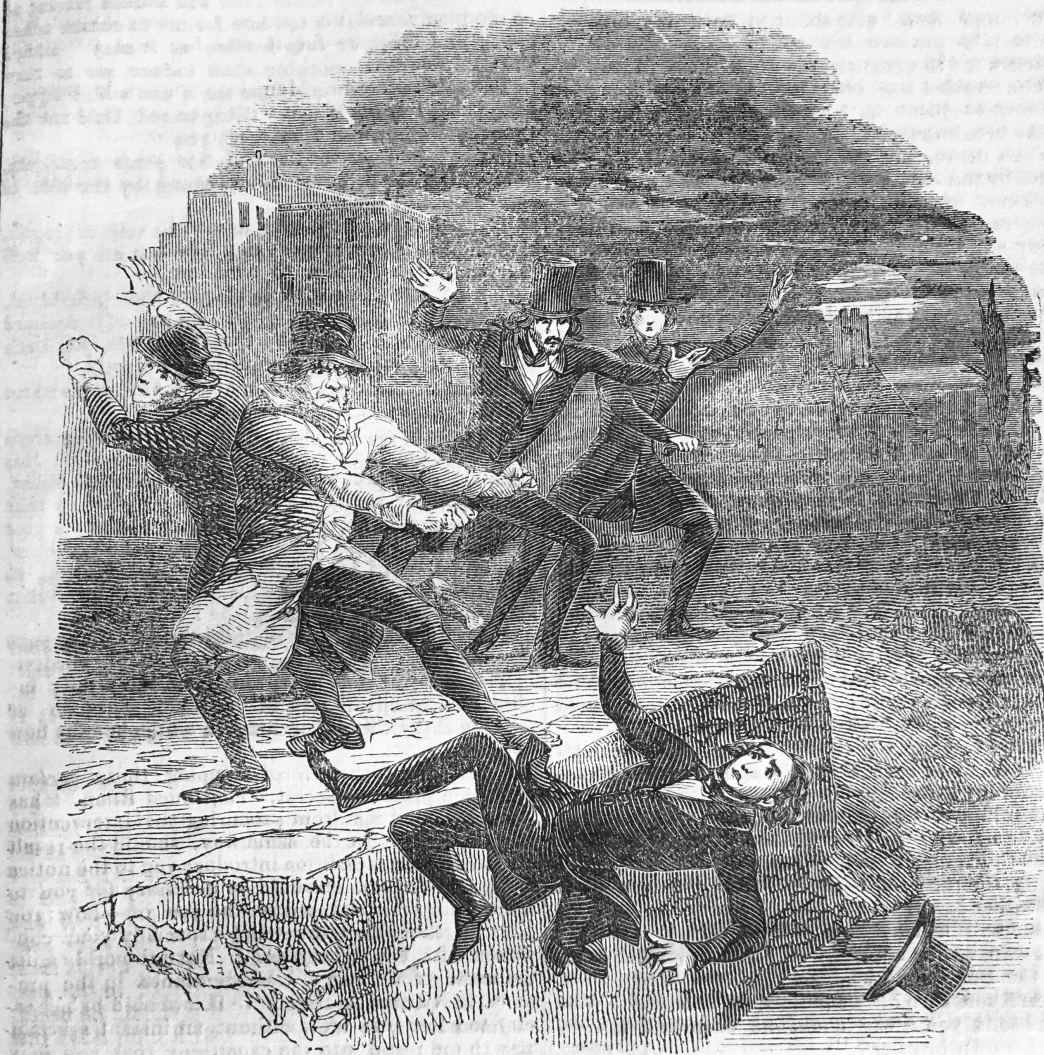
"Ah! there is a higher power that often sways the human heart," observed Ellen; and, as she spoke, her eyes were fixed upon the inscriptions on the tree, while her heart beat with emotions

"My father dwells with a friend, and is happy," observed Ellen.

"But he is dependant," exclaimed the old hag; "for you yourself once said to me, '*We are dependant upon one who cannot afford to maintain us in idleness.*' How happy would you be—for I know your heart—to be enabled to place your father in a state of independence!"

"Would he be happy did he know that he owed the revival of his prosperity to his daughter's in-

Figure 5. Ellen Monroe in disguise at a masquerade ball, having tracked down a priest who has sexually threatened her, and chastising him by declaring "Your conduct was base—was cowardly; and, as a woman, I eagerly embraced the opportunity to avenge myself." The narrator assures us that "There was something very terrible in the lesson which that young woman gave the libidinous priest on this occasion; and he felt it in its full force" (II: 57; pt.36). Illustration for the fifty-seventh number of *The Mysteries of London*, 1845. Author collection.



CHAPTER CV.

THE COMBAT.

In spite of the suspicions entertained by Mr. Monroe and Ellen concerning the genuineness of the appointment for which Markham was engaged, the young man was too devotedly attached to the memory of his brother not to indulge in the most wild and sanguine hopes.

Thus, as he proceeded to the place of meeting near Twig Folly, he communed with himself in the following manner:—

“If my brother be involved in pecuniary difficul-

possible that I am now about to meet you once more? On the 10th of July, 1831, did we part on the summit of the hill which overlooks the mansion of our ancestors. This is the 2d of January, 1840. Eight years and a half have now elapsed since the day of our separation. Ah! I know the proud—the haughty—the independent disposition of my brother! Were he prosperous—were he successful in his pursuits, (be those pursuits what they may,) he would not seek me now. He would wait until the accomplishment of the twelve years: he would not seek me until the 10th of July, 1843. Then should we compare notes, and ascertain who was the more prosperous! Yes—this would be my brother’s mode of conduct. And therefore he is unhappy—

Figure 6. Cross-dressing Ellen Monroe, holding a pistol, comes to the rescue of Richard Markham, who has been lured into a trap. Illustration for the forty-first number of *The Mysteries of London*, 1844. Author collection.

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My sincere thanks to Marlene Tromp, whose innovative panel on “Narrativizing Victorian Violence in the #MeToo Era” at NAVSA 2019 allowed me to reflect on these connections and present the first version of this piece.

Notes

(1) In response to concerns about the potential for retraumatization in Title IX investigations, ATIXA (The Association of Title IX Administrators) released a whitepaper in 2016 titled “The Seven Deadly Sins of Title IX Investigations,” the first sin of which, “Failing to understand and use trauma-informed investigations and questioning,” directly addresses the need to “avoid retraumatization” (2-6). While this whitepaper was written for those doing investigations rather than for everyone designated a mandatory reporter, it addresses many of the concerns raised by faculty nationally during the establishment of new mandatory reporting practices following the “Dear Colleague Letter” of 2011.

(2) The “Dear Colleague Letter” of 2011 provided new guidance about universities’ duties regarding mandatory reporting of sexual harassment and violence that was codified in Title IX of the Higher Education Amendments of 1972; it specifies that all university employees who are not confidential employees (such as health providers) are required to report any incident of sexual violence of which they become aware. The Department of Education’s “Title IX Final Rule,” in effect as of August 2020, revises the “Dear Colleague Letter” in ways that change some processes regarding formal complaints and hearings but that do not change mandatory reporting. The “Final Rule” strengthens the mandate to report, and the role of Title IX Coordinators, by specifying that schools must respond promptly to reports and by making it illegal for a school to be “deliberately indifferent” to any report of sexual harassment or violence. The “Final Rule” also codifies the practice of offering resources to students by mandating that, upon any report, the Title IX Coordinator must “promptly contact . . . the complainant to discuss the availability of supportive measures, consider the complainant’s wishes with respect to supportive measures, inform the complainant of the availability of supportive measures with or without the filing of a formal complaint, and explain to the complainant the process for filing a formal complaint” (“Summary” 3).

(3) The details of Alec d’Urberville’s rape of Tess, and of her descriptions of it to her mother and to Angel, all happen in between sentences and sections. The attack, occurring right at the end of “Phase the First,” shows only Alec’s cheek touching Tess’s before the rape is briefly discussed as a *fait accompli* and the section ends (119). When Tess tells her mother, we learn only that “Tess went up to her mother, put her face upon Joan’s neck, and told” (130), and Tess’s confession to Angel occurs literally between two of the novel’s “Phases”—at the end of “Phase the Fourth” Tess “press[es] her forehead against [Angel’s] temple” and “enter[s] on her story,” while “Phase the Fifth” opens after the telling: “Her narrative ended; even its re-assertions and secondary explanations were done” (293, 297).

(4) Peter Brooks has called Sue's serial "perhaps the most widely read novel of the nineteenth century" and "possibly the greatest bestseller of all time" (*Plot* 146; "Forward" xiii).

(5) The term "mysterymania" was coined by Alfred Crowquill (pseud. of Alfred Henry Forrester) in his 1845 "Outlines of Mysteries" essay in *Bentley's Miscellany*, which discussed *The Mysteries* novels of Paris and London (529). European urban mysteries titles include *Les Mystères de Rouen* (1843); *Les Mystères du Vieux Paris* (1854); *Nouveaux Mystères de Paris* (1867); *Die Geheimnisse von Berlin* (1843); *Los Misterios de Madrid* (1844); and *Los Mistérios de Lisboa* (1854). Italy, in the middle of its unification period, produced over a dozen urban mysteries titles, including *I Misteri di Roma Contemporanea* (1851-53); *I Misteri di Genova*; *I Misteri di Palermo*; *I Demagoghi, O, I Misteri di Livorno* (1853-54); at least two different *I Misteri di Firenze* (1854); and *I Misteri di Napoli* (1869-70). London mysteries, such as Paul Feval's *Les Mystères de Londres* (1844) and Thomas Frost's *The Mysteries of Old Father Thames* (1848) were inspired by both Sue's *Mysteries* and G. W. M. Reynolds's wildly popular *The Mysteries of London* (1844-48). In his extensive dissertation *Welcome to Sodom* (2005), Paul Erickson discusses over 100 American antebellum urban mysteries, while David Pike notes in his 2007 *Metropolis on the Styx* that if all the urban mysteries fiction of the mid-nineteenth century were to be gathered with and without the titular "Mysteries" designation, "the list expands beyond citability" (160). Although they invariably concern problems and opportunities that arise as a result of the modern city's hard-to-read landscape, these novels of urban mysteries form a fascinatingly hybrid group. Their organizing plots range from cross-class courtships and confidence pranks to elaborately-plotted seductions and complex masked-avenger scenarios, and they variously explore such issues as marriage, rape, murder, high-end gambling, capitalist corruption, exploited workers, aristocratic excesses, international secret societies, republicanism, revolution, imposture, theft, burglary, blackmail, and fraud.

(6) Reynolds coins and develops the term "oxymoronic oppressor" in *Beneath the American Renaissance* (86); the quoted definition comes from his introduction, with Kimberly R. Gladman, to *Venus in Boston and Other Tales of Nineteenth-Century City Life*, which collects three novels by George Thompson, including one of his (many) urban mysteries, *City Crimes* (1849) (xlvii).

(7) Dickens was famously annoyed by this (as well as by Reynolds's cavalier adaptations of some of Dickens's own characters and formats in his serials *Pickwick Abroad* [1837-38] and *Master Timothy's Bookcase* [1842]). Reynolds's great success with his London *Mysteries*, however, inspired a host of other writers to take up the genre, including Dickens—who engaged urban mysteries tropes in novels like *Dombey and Son* (1848), and who produced a fully-fledged *Mysteries* narrative in *Bleak House* (1852).

(8) Ellen Bayuk Rosenman observed in 1996 that "in terms of plot alone" this trio of characters "depart[s] dramatically from the nearly hegemonic Victorian treatment of female sexual experience, in which the fetish of female virtue and the cataclysm of a sexual fall are unquestioned" (34).

(9) Panel thieves would employ women to pose as prostitutes and lure unwitting customers into their lairs, where they would be hiding behind a panel. They would then jump out from behind the panel to rob or blackmail their victims.

(10) The adoption of *Mysteries* language by writers of slave narratives such as Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs has been explored by Carl Otrowski and Jennifer Rae Greeson. Otrowski's "Slavery, Labor Reform, and Intertextuality in Antebellum Print Culture: The Slave Narrative and the City-Mysteries Novel" traces Douglass's use of urban mysteries tropes, and also the explicit borrowings by *Mysteries* writers George Thompson and George Lippard from Henry Box Brown's slave narrative (493, 500-02). Greeson's "The 'Mysteries and Miseries' of North Carolina: New York City, Urban Gothic Fiction, and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*" examines Jacobs's use of the *Mysteries*' sensational depictions of sexual exploitation and argues that "it was the politicization of illicit female sexuality in urban gothic discourse that provided the conceptual framework through which the sexual order of Southern slavery could be made intelligible—and intolerable—for Northern readers," concluding that "considering urban gothic fiction and abolitionist narrative together, as part of the same story of the fallen woman in the antebellum Northern United States, complicates and destabilizes our sense of how each genre functions on its own" (279, 302). Greeson, however, also rather puzzlingly claims that all fallen women in the *Mysteries* are punished, and does not consider how Jacobs aligns herself not just with a sisterhood of fallen women but also with a sisterhood of female vigilante detectives.

(11) Braddon's earliest novels sprang out of the urban mysteries: her first novel *The Trail of the Serpent* (1860) is a novel of urban mysteries, and she produced, while also writing *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), a halfpenny *Mysteries* serial titled *The Black Band, or, the Mysteries of Midnight* (1861-62). She famously declared that in her first novel she was aiming to employ the "plot-weaving of G. W. R. [sic] Reynolds" (*Trail* 422).

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