

Twisting in the Wind

The Murderess and the English Press

Women accused of murder in nineteenth-century England got bad press. Broadsides, newspapers, and books depicted their stories in gruesome detail, often with illustrations of the crime scene, the courtroom proceedings, and the execution. More than murders committed by men, murders by women were sensationalized. The press – and the public – were fascinated by these acts ‘most unnatural’ of the fairer sex.

Judith Knelman contends that this portrayal of the murderess was linked to a broader public agenda, set and controlled by men. Women were supposed to be mothers and wives, giving and sustaining life. If a woman killed her baby or husband, she posed a threat to patriarchal authority. Knelman describes the range and incidence of murder by women in England. She analyses case histories of different kinds of murder, and explores how press representations of the murderess contributed to the Victorian construction of femininity.

If readers in the nineteenth century shivered at accounts of murder by women, we should get an equal chill up the spine today reading about how these women were cast out. *Twisting in the Wind* is a book that won't leave any of its readers – true crime fans, sociologists and criminologists, historians, or researchers in women's studies – hanging in doubt.

JUDITH KNELMAN is an associate professor in the Graduate Program in Journalism at the University of Western Ontario.

This page intentionally left blank

Twisting in the Wind

**The Murderess
and the English Press**

JUDITH KNELMAN

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO PRESS
Toronto Buffalo London

www.utppublishing.com

© University of Toronto Press Incorporated 1998
Toronto Buffalo London
Printed in Canada

ISBN 0-8020-2915-9 (cloth)

ISBN 0-8020-7420-0 (paper)



Printed on acid-free paper

Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data

Knelman, Judith, 1939–

Twisting in the wind : the murderess and the English press

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-8020-2915-9 (bound) ISBN 0-8020-7420-0 (pbk.)

1. Women murderers – England – History – 19th century.
 2. Murder in mass media – England – History – 19th century.
 3. Women in the press – England – History – 19th century.
- I. Title.

HV6046.K53 1998 364.15'23'082094209034 C97-931800-9

University of Toronto Press acknowledges the financial assistance to its publishing program of the Canada Council for the Arts and the Ontario Arts Council.

Let us reform our schools, and we shall find little
reform needed in our prisons. – *John Ruskin, 1860*

This page intentionally left blank