

The Mysterious Murder of Mrs. Shakespeare: Transgressive Performance in Nineteenth-Century New York

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The Journal of American Drama and Theatre
Volume 34, Number 1 (Fall 2021)
ISSN 2376-4236
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It began, as it so often does, with a passing remark. Journalist Herbert Asbury's *Gangs of New York: An Informal History of the Underground*, which offers a colorful and anecdote-driven account of nineteenth-century urban life, makes a fleeting reference to the gruesome 1891 Jack the Ripper style killing of a woman known to her compatriots as "Shakespeare." According to popular legend, she had been famous in the city's seamiest neighborhoods for her drunken recitations of the major female roles from *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *The Merchant of Venice*.^[1] Who was this woman who performed Shakespeare's most notable female roles of Ophelia, Lady Macbeth, and Portia on the margins of American society—presumably for an audience as intoxicated and destitute as herself? Her moniker of "Shakespeare"—as well as her supposed murderer, the notorious Jack the Ripper—have helped to hold her place in the headlines and in history,^[2] when tens of thousands of other impoverished women in New York have vanished from the record books—if, indeed, their names were ever known to any beyond their immediate circles. Her story invites historians to consider how apparently isolated incidents become history, and the ways in which archives can perform for researchers.

In drunkenly declaiming passages from the Bard, Mrs. Shakespeare, also known as Carrie Brown, did no more than Edmund Kean, Junius Brutus Booth, and other male performers before her. Her association with Shakespeare's work somehow tinged her demise with an additional touch of pathos. Here was a woman who supposedly mastered the poetry of the Bard, yet who, according to contemporary accounts, had fallen into a life of petty crime and debauchery. The manner of her murder, which echoed the sensational killings in London's Whitechapel district only three years before, also became inextricably intertwined with her putative link to the sex workers and other women targeted by Jack the Ripper. Many US newspapers mentioned the "low" women or "drunkards" questioned in connection with her death, and the police investigation of her murder revealed anew the scabrous underbelly of New York's most poverty-stricken areas. According to one newspaper, "the habitués of Water Street (the neighborhood of the murder) turned out in force [at the inquest]."^[3] Amongst the many rumors circulating around the identity of her killer, ultimately a penniless Algerian immigrant, Ameer Ben Ali, stood accused of her murder. Would-be observers thronged the trial (supposedly hundreds of men and only five women) whom the court turned away from the "strangest criminal trial America has yet produced."^[4]

But the performances around Mrs. extended beyond her penchant for the Bard. Her killing inspired its own series of performances. Only days after the murder, wax stagings depicting the grisly scene appeared in multiple city dime museums. Authors churned out pulp fiction, comic book style stories of that fateful night. The trial for her murder, meticulously recorded in newspapers around the country, revived "Shakespeare" for another role. Since police never caught the original London Ripper, the public craved a reason for his senseless crimes. Thus, crowds greeted the American trial with eager expectation, imagining it as an opportunity to mete out justice, bring calm to the chaos created by Mrs. Shakespeare's

murder, and to resolve the troubling questions about urban poverty exposed by her killing. But the trial soon degenerated into a racist spectacle when police charged Ben Ali with her murder and newspapers across the country vilified him as a Moor and an “Arab,” heaping religious and ethnic slurs on his head. Descriptions of Ben Ali’s ethnic and racial otherness echoed the speculation in London that *their* Ripper was a foreign Jew.^[5] The spectacle of “Shakespeare’s” murder continues today, through internet forums run and inhabited by “Ripperologists,” amateur true crime investigators who scrutinize the details of her murder for evidence that Jack the Ripper killed her, or one of the many suspects responsible for grotesque crimes during the Ripper’s heyday. Across space and time, “Shakespeare” finds a theatrical afterlife as her body was produced, performed, and transformed for its audience.^[6]

This essay explores the spectacular print, stage, and public performances around Mrs. Shakespeare’s murder. Her case offers opportunities to unravel a complex tangle of questions: How did the identities of working woman, actress, and alcoholic play out alongside familiar nineteenth-century notions about gender roles and middle-class respectability? How did race, racial science, and racism intersect with the ways in which the trial unspooled for public consumption, so that it became a kind of parodied *Othello* with a Moorish assailant attacking this unlikely Desdemona? How does her connection with the mythological Jack the Ripper continue to produce new and eager spectators in the digital age?

Theatrically speaking, the rhetoric around Mrs. Shakespeare’s murder sits at the tipping point in a genre shift from melodrama towards realism. Newspapers told her story using the familiar sentimental tropes of melodrama, particularly with its emphasis on transgression, redemption, and retribution. Melodrama framed addiction and poverty as evidence of moral weakness, while offering temperance, prosperity, and respectability as rewards for aspiring to white middle class values.^[7] The tableaux—as part of the milieu of nineteenth-century family friendly entertainment—continued this narrative. In the hands of museum managers, the scene of her grotesque murder became representative of the seedy underbelly of New York City, a place for onlookers to gaze in wonder and repulsion.

As the murder trial reshaped the theatrical performance, Shakespeare’s body shifted from a focus of pity to a site of empirical analysis. The influence of nineteenth-century forensic scientists Alphonse Bertillon and Cesare Lombroso legitimated criminology as a science, one that focused on the born criminal and bolstered racist theories about criminal appearance and behavior. That changing discourse extricated her murder from a romanticized narrative and resituated it in late nineteenth-century (racial) science. If mid-century melodramas had offered faith and compliance as “cures” for social ills, the emerging scientific language of realism and naturalism turned audiences’ attention towards new problems and new potential “solutions,” albeit based in racist and nativist assumptions of criminality that would imprison Ameer Ben Ali for eleven years before he was pardoned, released, and allowed to return to Algiers.^[8]

More than a century after her murder, modern day investigators figuratively exhumed “Shakespeare’s” body—sutured to the cultural mythology of Jack the Ripper—into the “annals of true crime” and “the imagination of modern horror.”^[9] On internet forums such as “Jack the Ripper Forums”(jtrforums.com)^[10] and “Case Book: Jack the Ripper” (casebook.org), self-identified Ripperologists share primary evidence material, revel in her autopsy, and speculate as to the murderer’s true identity, extending and expanding the spectacle of Carrie Brown’s brutal homicide. In her exploration of the true crime media genre, Jean Murley describes the emergence of modern true crime in the mid-twentieth century as “a new way of narrating and understanding murder—one more sensitive to context, more psychologically sophisticated, more willing to make conjectures about the unknown

thoughts and motivations of killers.”^[11] Internet communities formed around Jack the Ripper have democratized the discourse around “Shakespeare.” Any forum member can create threads, post evidence, share their research (both the highs and lows) and theorize about her murder while interacting with and sustaining the Ripperologist community. Her association with the cultural icon has enabled the spectacle of her murder to move into the twenty-first century—as of 20 December 2021, the most recent post on jtrforums.com about Carrie Brown had been made just a day earlier.

In writing this essay, we acknowledge that we are contributing to the continued speculation and spectacle around “Shakespeare” and her gruesome demise. Yet, the speculation and spectacle become proof of how her theatrical afterlife moves through different mediums and genres (now into theatre history and performance studies). By examining the ways in which her performances have reverberated in popular culture, we explore how historical moments are shaped and reformed through theatrical interpretations. We use the name “Shakespeare” to invoke a character, a cultivated stage presence for the lower millions of the city, whether created by herself or bestowed upon her by others. We use the name “Carrie Brown,” the name identified in the press, to indicate the person, whose murder and subsequent undoubtedly impact her living descendants to this day.

“Death lies on her like an untimely frost”

Asbury’s fleeting mention of “Shakespeare’s” murder in *Gangs of New York* describes a horrific slaying that took place sometime on the anniversary of William Shakespeare’s own death. Reconstructing the circumstances around “Shakespeare’s” murder proves no easy task. Its sensationalism means that details vary among different accounts. What is known is that on 25 April 1891, police announced the murder of a woman the night before at the East River Hotel in the city’s Fourth Ward.^[12] Newspapers from New York to Omaha reported that the victim had been strangled, stabbed, and then disemboweled.^[13] Identical crosses were carved into the flesh of her back and on the wall.^[14] She was naked except for an apron and another unnamed article of clothing that were both wrapped around her head so tightly the coroner had to cut them off.^[15] Some of the garments found in the room were recognized as those worn by prisoners at Blackwell’s Island, suggesting that she had recently been released from one of her many terms of imprisonment for drunkenness, vagrancy, and other petty crimes.^[16] Who launched the rumor that linked her murder with Jack the Ripper remains unknown, but early reports from the New York *Herald* and *Evening World* connected the crime to the London killer based on the body’s mutilated state and the marks on the wall.^[17]

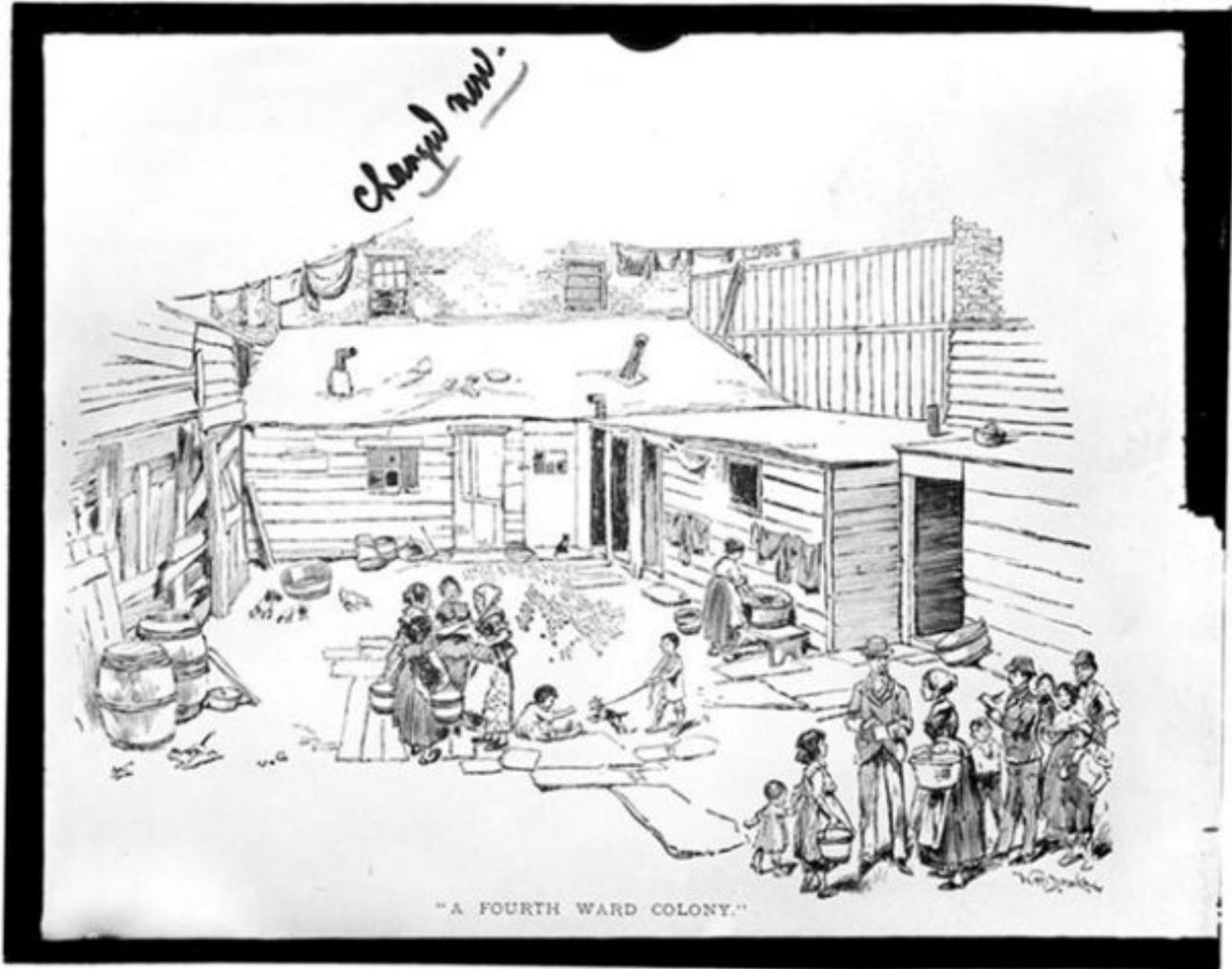


Fig 1. John Jacob Riis, c. 1895. “A Fourth Ward Colony,” image owned by the Museum of the City of New York (<https://collections.mcny.org/>).

The murder immediately caused a sensation. The coroner’s delay in coming to the hotel allowed “curious crowds” to gather outside in hopes of getting a glimpse of the horrid scene. When the coroner finally arrived, enough people had assembled that the police had to physically push them back as the coroner brought down Carrie Brown’s body in a pine coffin and made his way to the morgue for examination.^[18]

There, the autopsy became its own spectacle. Conducted by Deputy Coroner Dr. William T. Jenkins, its audience included a group of seven doctors from Bellevue Hospital as well as a reporter from *The Evening World*.^[19] The examiners posited strangulation as the cause of death, with the mutilation following. The details are horrifying. The body showed multiple cuts in addition to the cross-like etching on her back and parts of the intestines were missing. In a shockingly clinical tone, the newspaper noted that “the left ovary . . . was completely torn away.” The *Evening World* also felt compelled to remark that “there was no evidences [*sic*] of wounds or injuries on the breast.”^[20]

As Karen Halttunen notes, this kind of “sexual autopsy” circulated in the public sphere had become more and more pervasive since the mid-1830s (particularly after the notorious 1836 murder of New York prostitute Helen Jewett and escalating after the Jack the Ripper murders of 1888).^[21] The public’s appetite for intimate and gory details grew as well. Halttunen chronicles the perceived escalation in “sexual narratives of murder . . . popular tales . . . extensively explored issues of sexual nature, development, and impulse, and attributed significant causal power to *sexuality*.”^[22] Yet, these highly sexualized, clinical, and often grotesque accounts of female murder victims (which often included descriptions of sexual assault, sexual promiscuity, or failed abortions) were frequently juxtaposed with familiar tropes of fallen women whose romantic disappointments, innocence, or temporary lapses in judgement had led them into sin and thus to a violent end. For example, George Ellington’s 1869 study *The Women of New York: Or, The Underworld of the Great City* offers a chapter entitled “Women of Pleasure” that describes how a “nice girl” might have found herself stranded as a sex worker in an urban slum:

Heartsick and utterly miserable, she left her home and entered on a life of sin in the metropolis. At first she was happy. She made plenty of money and gratified a long-cherished ambition to dress well. The gay society she was in pleased her. . . . But soon the taste for all these things began to fail. . . . And not knowing what this want was, she plunged wildly into dissipation. . . . And then she went down rapidly. All self-respect was lost. She was found drunk on the street, and taken to the station-house, and sent to the island.^[23]

Two decades later, these same tales about women’s descent into the dark side of city life persisted. The *New York Herald* made a similar claim about Mrs. Shakespeare herself, saying that after her husband died she,

came to New York to dissipate [her money]. . . . She attracted a great deal of attention at once from the dissolute people she chose to associate with because of her superior intelligence. She was fairly good-looking, exceedingly vivacious, and spent her money with a free hand as long as it lasted. . . . When the woman’s money was spent, she went headlong into the gutter, and for many years she had revolved around the boozing dives, the Island [prison] and public institutions [workhouses].^[24]

The paper’s account sets up the now-familiar tale of the innocent woman, led astray by her foolish choice to leave the safe shelter of a peaceful domestic setting for the unbridled license of the city and its anonymous encounters with strangers.



Fig 2. An article on the slums of New York published weeks before Carrie Brown's murder: "New York's Inferno Explored by the Booths. Commissioner Ballington Booth and Mrs. Booth, of the Salvation," New York Herald (New York, New York), no. 74, 15 March 1891.

Relatively little seemed known of Mrs. Shakespeare at the time of her death. Rumors swirled through newspapers that she claimed at various points to have been an actress in Britain and the wife (or mistress) of a Broadway businessman. According to one witness, "Shakespeare" boasted that she received an allowance of thirty dollars a month from a wealthy Broadway man who had threatened to "have her mouth stopped" because she had become a liability. Another witness claimed that "Shakespeare" had been living with an Italian at the lodging house of "One-eyed Tony" and had had an argument with this man shortly before her death.^[25] Soon after her murder, other narratives began to come out, claiming that she was Carrie Brown (possibly born in Liverpool as Caroline Montgomery) and that she had been a sea captain's wife in Salem, Massachusetts.^[26] Stories emerged about her marriage to Captain Charles Brown (who had abandoned her or whom she had deserted, depending on the storyteller). Some tales alleged that Brown had died and left her a wealthy woman, but that she had squandered her fortune. Others said she had been in service but dismissed for "riotous living." By the time of her murder, she had supposedly been arrested at least twenty-eight times for drunkenness.^[27] The coroner's report supposedly confirmed

her intemperate habit: the state of her kidneys and liver showed that she likely suffered from alcoholism. According to an officer who had detained her numerous times, she once told him, “I could have been one of the finest ladies in the world instead of what I am, and I suppose I’ll be a tramp until I die.”^[28]

Modern day amateur genealogical investigations of Brown’s life suggest that she was indeed born in Liverpool around 1834 as Ellen Caroline Montgomery. Census data puts her in the US by 1860, suggesting that if she *had* been an actress in England, she had immigrated to America comparatively early in her career, since she appears established in New England by age twenty-six.^[29] To date, we have been unable to locate evidence of her work onstage in the US or England under variations of her maiden or married name. One contemporary account referred to her as a “failed” actress, so she may have either spread the story of her time in the theatre herself or made an abortive attempt at a career (and possibly under a different name). There is some circumstantial evidence that she knew a brief period of domestic stability in Salem, MA, married to one Captain Charles Brown. She had at least two children: Mary Ella Brown (born when Carrie was roughly twenty years old) and Charles E. Brown (born when Carrie was about twenty-three). The only widely-known photograph (supposedly) taken of her in life shows a modest-looking woman, apparently dressed in mourning—or at least in a very dark dress—with her hair covered by a white cap and wearing a white apron. She is posed against an ivy-covered balustrade with a rustic scene painted in the background. A sketch of her in profile appeared in W. B. Lawson’s sensational dime novel *Jack the Ripper in New York* in 1891. The face in the profile bears some resemblance to the photograph and is noteworthy for its demure appearance.^[30] Despite these respectable, well-groomed images, it appears that by the time of her murder (at around age fifty-seven) she lived as a sex worker in New York City, far away from either her home in England or her family in Massachusetts.^[31]



Fig 3. Image reported to be of Carrie Brown (also known as Ellen Caroline Montgomery) that is widely circulated on Ripperology websites. It can also be found on FindaGrave.com, which sources some biographical information from casebook.org and jtrforums.com. Members continue to leave virtual “flowers” for her at <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/89386829/carrie-brown>.

“When beggars die, there are no comets seen”

The grisly circumstances of her death led many at the time (and since) to speculate that the notorious Jack the Ripper, whose 1888 crime spree in London’s Whitechapel district had left a series of unsolved murders and terror behind, had come to New York.^[32] Officials in charge of the case fueled these rumors. Before Brown’s murder, New York City police Inspector Thomas Byrnes had taunted his London counterparts with their inability to solve the Ripper case. Based on the circumstances surrounding her death, some New Yorkers imagined that the Ripper had taken Byrnes’s “dare” and crossed the Atlantic to continue his crime spree in America. Investigators heightened public curiosity by refusing to deny the

possibility that she might have been murdered by the Ripper. When asked if he believed that “Jack the Ripper” had killed “Shakespeare,” the lead coroner on the case responded, “I believe this case is the same as those of London. . . . I do not see any reason to suppose that the crime may *not* have been committed by the fiend of London.”^[33] After Ben Ali’s conviction, Byrnes reveled in his success, even claiming that he had “documentary evidence” that Ben Ali lived in London during the time of the Ripper murders: “I do not say that he is the London Ripper, but this has a tendency to indicate that he may be.”^[34]

Indeed, within one week of her untimely death the association between “Shakespeare” and Jack the Ripper would be cemented in the public imagination. On 29 April 1891, Doris’s Eighth Avenue Museum publicized an exhibit featuring, “a wax group representing the murder of Carrie Brown by Jack, the Ripper.”^[35] An advertisement announced that the tableaux would present “The Tragedy Just as It Occurred” with the “Lifelike figure of Carrie Brown, known as Shakespeare, also Frenchy the supposed murderer, in the act,” and “the very room furniture.”^[36] As the *New York Herald* reported, “The enterprise shown by Manager Doris is, perhaps praiseworthy, but the subject appeals rather to the morbid or perverted taste, and it is doubtful if the expense incurred in the affair will be offset by corresponding box office returns.”^[37] Despite the *Herald’s* skepticism, the exhibit ran for months, drawing horrified spectators to this terrifying effigy of Mrs. Shakespeare’s final performance. Mark Sandberg has described these kinds of wax effigies as modeling cautionary tales for women through their “pedagogical bodies,” and indeed, tableaux of wax figures depicting the dire fates that awaited those who strayed from paths of rectitude were popular among both middle-class and working-class theatre managers.^[38] Doris’s Museum featured a veritable buffet of these pedagogical bodies alongside Mrs. Shakespeare’s. A 13 September 1891 advertisement promises spectators tableaux of the “History of Crime,” including scenes of robbery and murder and “The Drunkard’s home,” described as a “scene of dirt and squalor.” In “The Drunkard’s Home,” the advertisement notes that, “Father, mother, and children are drunk,” and the paper guarantees that, “One look at this scene is worth more to the youth of this city than a score of temperance lectures.”^[39] Spectators might stroll from their viewing of the “History of Crime” and “The Drunkard’s Home” past one labeled “Jack the Ripper and his victim, Old Shakespeare.”^[40]

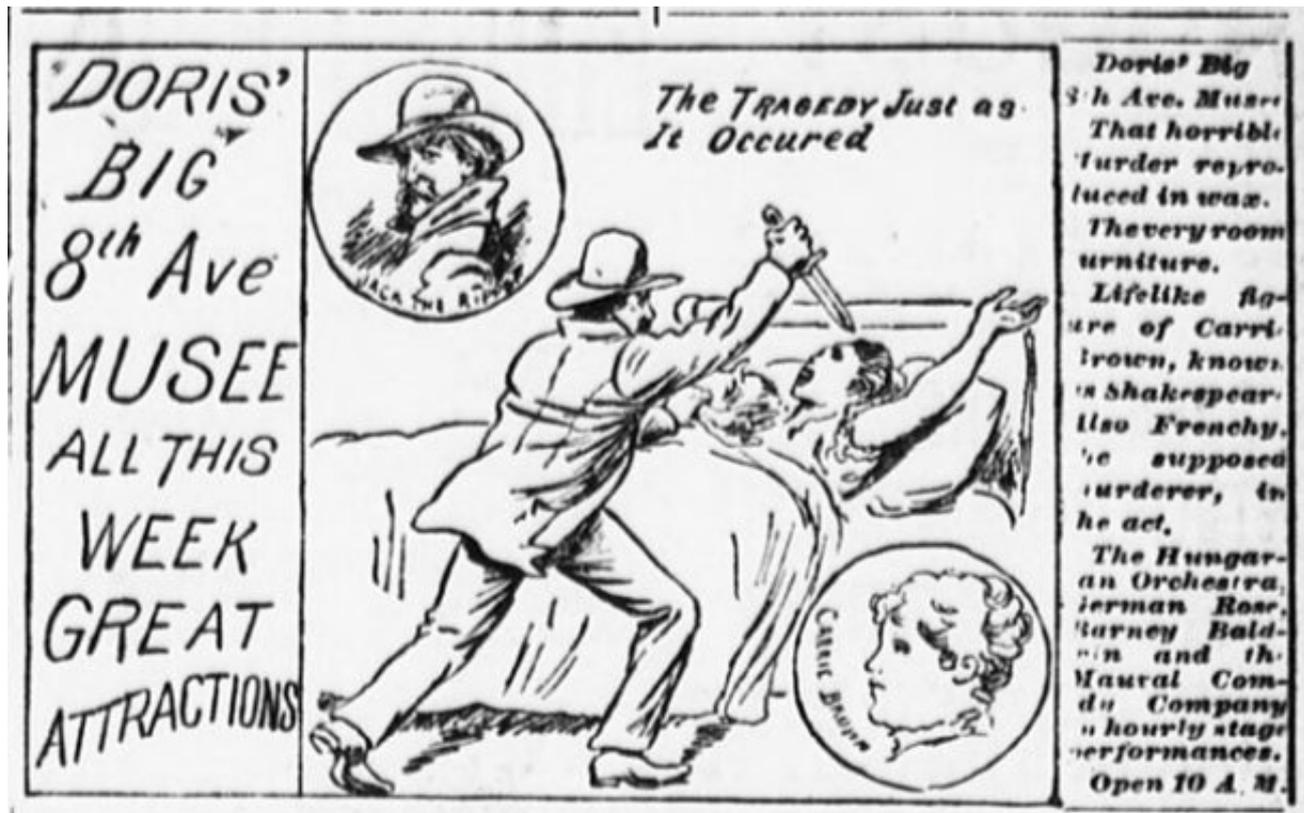


Fig 4. The Evening World (New York), 29 April 1891, BASEBALL EXTRA, 3. We want to acknowledge that we first found this image digging through jtrforums.com.

Doris's Museum also helped spectators to draw contrasts between the "normal" and what lay beyond. In addition to his standard fare of enfreaked bodies (such as Maury the human pin cushion and Congo, the leopard man), Doris's Museum featured fat shows and beauty contests – thus opening a forum for audiences to gauge appropriate vs. freakish female appearances. His space also became home to actress Fanny Herring, known as the Sarah Bernhardt of the Bowery. Herring had begun by performing with the likes of Edwin Booth and had been known for her breeches roles but ended her career as one of Doris's resident actors.^[41] In fact, this Bernhardt of the Bowery shared a stage with the Shakespeare of the Bowery—Herring appeared in shows at Doris's Museum while the Mrs. Shakespeare murder effigies were still on display.^[42]

Andrea Dennett's study of American dime museums characterizes John B. Doris's downtown locale as a particularly lively specimen of the genre. By the end of the nineteenth-century, the Fourth Ward where Shakespeare/Brown enjoyed her final "performance" had become one of the most noisome and crime-ridden parts of the city. Observers described it as "the only rival of the Sixth (5 Points) in its triple distinction of filth, poverty, and vice." And another observer noted, "Generally speaking, Water Street was a thoroughfare of vice and iniquity to challenge the imagination of the most graphic Victorian preacher."^[43] It proved the site of multiple murders, including those chronicled in *Gangs of New York*, and the showdowns between thugs with vivid nicknames such as Patsy the Butcher and Slobbery Jim.^[44]

As Dennett notes, the dense concentration of saloons and brothels in New York's lower wards made such areas ripe for the kinds of spectacles Doris had on offer.^[45] Yet by the late nineteenth century these crime and disease-ridden streets had also become a perverse kind of attraction for elite white spectators. The craze for "slumming" began in England, but had recently caught on in New York, and one city paper described it as a "fashionable form of dissipation," through which wealthy citizens could experience the novelty of poverty, drug abuse, and alcoholism for an evening, before returning to the safety of their everyday lives.



Fig 5. Cover of W. B. Lawson's "Jack the Ripper in New York; Or, Piping a Terrible Mystery." Image available through "Casebook," a site dedicated to collecting "Ripperology." View the dime novel in its entirety at "Jack the Ripper in New York; Or, Piping a Terrible Mystery," Casebook: Jack the Ripper,

https://www.casebook.org/ripper_media/rps.dime1.html (accessed 22 October 2021).

This same spectacle of poverty appears in Lawson's 1891 novel about Carrie Brown's murder. *Jack the Ripper in New York* uses the narrator as a vehicle to bring the reader into the seedy slums of the Fourth Ward. In lurid detail, the story follows a detective who is looking for "Shakespeare" when she is killed and then proceeds to investigate her murder. While the white upper class could visit the Fourth Ward as tourists, Lawson brought the slums into the home, illustrating the streets Carrie Brown frequented as places where "crime and sin flaunt their ugly heads," and "debauchery runs riot," describing it as a "hell-hole that will ever remain a black spot on a fair city." Brown herself is described as merely "one of the great class of unfortunates to be met with in this Whitechapel of Gotham."^[46] Although the novel concocts and hypothesizes a number of suspects drawn from press reports and the author's imagination, the story leads the audience to familiar conclusions: invoking the Ripper murders through the comparison to Whitechapel and implying that the perpetrator is a dubious, dark-skinned foreigner.^[47]

"Blood Will Tell"

Ameer Ben Ali was not considered a murder suspect at the time of his arrest on Friday 24 April 1891, the night following the killing. According to the police, Ben Ali was the cousin of the man last seen with Carrie Brown as she entered the East River Hotel on that fateful night, and it was *that* man whom the police considered the primary suspect for her murder.^[48] According to witnesses, the unknown man (who signed his name "C. Knick") had a "small light brown mustache and light brown hair."^[49] By contrast, Ben Ali—also known under the aliases George Frank, George François, and George Francis, but familiarly called "Frenchy"—was "a dark complexioned man with a black mustache and black hair."^[50] Unable to locate "C. Knick" a week into the murder investigation, the police changed their story. On 1 May, the *Herald* reported that police believed that Ben Ali, who had remained in police custody, was actually the man they had been looking for all along. While Carrie Brown had entered the hotel with a blond, fair-skinned man, Ben Ali also had a room at the hotel that night, across the hall from Brown's. Although not noted in the original report, detectives claimed they had found blood in Ben Ali's room and on his person, which they sampled and sent to microscopists for analysis.^[51] Ben Ali found himself in a dangerous position. He had difficulty speaking English and his cousin, an early suspect, had been arrested but released since he had a "fair reputation" and had an alibi, unlike Ali who possessed "a savage disposition."^[52]

The phrases used to describe Ali offer an eerie echo of those used in London in the 1880s to characterize Jack the Ripper. London police initially grabbed a number of Jewish men for the Ripper murders. They—like Ali—had "dark complexions, black hair . . . and heavy foreign accents."^[53] As Sara Blair points out, in Ripper narratives, Jack the Ripper became "representative of a deviant civic agency whose virulent corruption threatens the purity of native 'Anglo-Saxon' institutions and character."^[54] Noted cultural historian Sander L. Gilman theorizes that the image of the Ripper as a Jewish "ritual butcher," or a *shochet*, arose from Anglo-Saxon conspiracies about Jews as sexually mutilated and diseased.^[55] Not only did the United States import the Ripper sensation; it imported the xenophobic rhetoric along with it. Upon the New York Police Department's proclamation that they had the Ripper in custody, the *Herald*

remarked, “It is soothing to national pride to believe that we can catch our ‘Rippers’ on this side of the ocean.”^[56] The *Patriot* in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania even dubbed Ben Ali, “The New York Ripper.”^[57] Ameer Ben Ali’s conviction of second-degree murder on Independence Day of that year allayed the anxieties of white Americans, and further cemented the dogma of Anglo-Saxon superiority.

Criminal profiles of Jack the Ripper festered with more than just malignant fears of violent immigrants. The rising field of criminology infused descriptions of the Ripper with scientifically supported racist understandings of the natural born criminal. The history of scientific criminology begins with Belgian statistician Lambert Quetelet, who in 1835 developed a statistical method to calculate the qualities of the “average man” (including body mass index, etc.) This “average man” was based on white-European notions of intellectual and physical capabilities. In the 1880s, French police officer Alphonse Bertillon applied Quetelet’s ideas to criminal investigations. Using eleven key physical measurements, he created an identification and categorization system for known criminals in Paris. Historians also credit him with creating the modern-day concept of a mugshot, using a face front-on and a profile view to give clear images of the skull.^[58] In England, the search for the “criminal type”—that is, the biologically-determined criminal—was spearheaded by scientists such as Francis Galton (the cousin of Charles Darwin and the leader of the turn of the century eugenics movement) and Havelock Ellis, whose 1890 book, *The Criminal*, brought the theories of Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso to English readers. Lombroso’s foundational text, *Criminal Man* (1877), used ancient theories of physiognomy combined with contemporary phrenology to explain behavior and personality types through skull measurements and facial features. “In general,” Lombroso argues, “born criminals have projecting ears, thick hair, a thin beard, projecting frontal eminences, enormous jaws, a square and projecting chin, large cheek-bones, and frequent gesticulation. It is, in short, a type resembling the Mongolian, or sometimes the Negroid.”^[59] The *Herald*’s description of Ben Ali certainly echoes this racist phenotype: “Nothing certainly in his physiognomy, his history, so far as it is known, or his characteristics makes it at all improbable that he would commit even such a horrible crime as this.”^[60]

The trial theatricalized the racist science undergirding early criminology, with newspapers paying close attention to Ben Ali’s appearance and behavior. Various papers described him as having a “small head” with a “sharp projection” in the back, a “long and thin” nose, and a “weak” chin. A lawyer for the prosecution insisted, “Ben Ali is an ignorant Arab, an Arab of the lowest type, ‘as low in the scale of intelligence as a fellah of the Egyptian rice fields, or a sikh or se poy soldier [*sic*].’” In a dramatic finale, Ben Ali closed the trial with a passionate defense of his innocence, “The long, stoop shouldered, brown man raised himself as high as he could in his chair. A torrent of words broke from him. He threw his head far back and looked upward while he threw his long arms swiftly aloft and then crossed them on his gaunt breast.”^[61] Accompanying these descriptions of his theatrical gestures are several sketches of these *de facto* tableaux vivants.



Fig 6. “‘I Implore God!’ Cries Ben Ali,” New York Herald, 3 July 1891, 3.

Drawing on Michel Foucault’s concept of the medical gaze, Kirsten Shepherd-Barr coined the term “diagnostic gaze,” to describe how in the late-nineteenth century, scientific developments and theatrical innovation were encouraging audiences to focus on biological and psychological reasons for behavior, both onstage and off.^[62] This anatomization of both spectator and performance coincided with the rising of the naturalist theatrical genre. In his manifesto on naturalism, playwright Émile Zola stated that, “Naturalism, in letters, is equally a return to nature and to man; it is direct observation, exact anatomy, the acceptance and depiction of *what is*.”^[63] Thus, in the trial reports, the cloaking of racist discourse in scientific language (and influenced by scientific rhetoric) presented to an audience a definitive claim of “what is”: that Ameer Ben Ali was biologically predetermined to be Jack the Ripper.

The seeming obsession with Ben Ali's appearance points to this diagnostic gaze at work. It also appears in a spectacularly theatrical moment of the trial. On the second day of the trial, 1 July 1891, "two blue print photographs" of Carrie Brown's mutilated corpse were shown to the courtroom. The autopsy photographs displayed the body of a relatively slender woman with her organs (intestines) protruding from a gash several inches long just below her abdomen, down her thigh, and around to her buttocks.^[64] Rather than noting what the images depicted, court writers paid particular attention to Ben Ali's gaze as he looked at them. The *Herald* observed,

When the pictures came into Lawyer House's hands Frenchy gazed at them with much interest. His forehead was lined with many wrinkles and his eyes showed intense speculation as he gazed—but that was all. Not one sign was there upon him of fear or remorse. If the man be a criminal he has a most marvelous faculty of self-control.^[65]

Patricia Cline Cohen notes that early colonists tried suspected murders by having them touch the corpse and if it "bled fresh blood," that proved the suspect guilty.^[66] In her extensive study of the 1836 murder of Helen Jewett, she remarks how the gaze had flipped; juries no longer focused on the murdered corpse but rather, scrutinized the suspect's reaction as reflective of guilt. Towards the end of the century, the influence of criminal anthropology dictated that a suspect's appearance reflected not only his propensity to commit crime, but his biological predisposition to criminal behavior.

Without the man who was last seen with Carrie Brown, a witness to the murder, or a strong motive for Ameer Ben Ali, the prosecution rested its case on circumstantial forensic evidence. Prominent physicians Dr. Austin Flint, Dr. Cyrus Edson, and Dr. Henry Formad testified that amongst twenty specimens sampled from the crime scene and from Ben Ali's person, all of them contained mammalian blood. Several specimens (including that from under Ameer Ben Ali's nails, the sleeve of his shirt, and the sheet from Room 31) showed bile mixed in the blood that contained matter that examiners speculated to be the contents of Carrie Brown's small intestine.^[67] According to witnesses, she had eaten nothing for days before her murder until that night when a friend gave her corned beef sandwiches, cabbage, and some cheese.^[68] Her last meal, according to the microscopists' findings (summarized by Dr. Flint in the *New York Medical Journal*), explained the presence of "partially digested muscular tissue" and "the hard residue of spiral and other vegetable cells" in the blood-bile admixture.^[69]

During the trial, the physicians' testimony became a live-action scientific serial. Both Dr. Formad and Dr. Flint were given writing utensils and blackboards to use on the stand, with Dr. Flint drawing out diagrams of intestinal fluid cells to show the jury how to recognize them under a microscope. While the invention of the microscope dates back to the Renaissance, the latter half of the nineteenth century witnessed major developments in technology as well as increasing medical specialization and the subsequent rise of microbiology, which made microscopy a prestigious science. As the diagnostic gaze in the theatre invited audiences to gaze inward, the microscope allowed spectators to go even further. However, the novel technology made the science out of reach for the average audience member.^[70] During the trial, however, the inner life of "Shakespeare's" cells and viscera were presented for lay spectatorship to prove that Ben Ali's criminality was surely more than skin deep.

Ultimately, Dr. Formad's insistence that he would "stake his life" on the fact that the blood on Ali's garments and on Carrie Brown's bed were the same proved "the strongest thing said against Frenchy's

innocence.”^[71] According to Dr. Flint, the case marked the first time a guilty verdict resulted from circumstantial blood evidence.^[72] However, *The Medical and Surgical Reporter* later disputed the validity of this claim, arguing that “it would seem a little hazardous to convict a man on the microscopically established identity of minute collections of blood and intestinal matter” and that “at present there seems to be a feeling that the accused was made a scape-goat for the reputation of the Police Department.”^[73] As a lawyer present at the sentencing pointed out, “the Police Department was on trial just as much as the prisoner was—that they stood or fell in popular estimation by reason of the verdict this jury should find.”^[74] The eagerness of the New York police to prove themselves over their London counterparts amidst an increasing reliability on racist criminology enabled them to pin the gruesome crime on an innocent man.^[75]

In a surprising twist, Ameer Ben Ali received a pardon for Carrie Brown’s murder in 1902. Affidavits submitted by reporters Jacob Riis and Robert Butler claimed that when they had initially viewed the crime scene, they did not note any blood stains in Ben Ali’s room that the police officers swore were there. Furthermore, the key to Carrie Brown’s room—which had yet to be located by the time of the trial—was reportedly found in Jersey City in 1901, left behind by a Swedish boarder whose whereabouts were unknown.^[76] The sensationalism of the story, bolstered by invocations of Jack the Ripper, nationalist pride, and racist/nativist notions of criminality, pushed the conviction of a man that would be overturned eleven years later.

“She should have died hereafter”

As Ben Ali’s trial and eventual pardon suggest, the fetishized afterlife of Brown/“Shakespeare” exposed the systemic racism that pervaded the growing field of medical criminology. To some observers, Ben Ali’s humiliation, terror, and abuse at the hands of the New York police must have seemed justified by the new “science” that supposedly gave credence to long-held prejudices. In Ben Ali’s story, Brown/Shakespeare’s body becomes the accusing prop—like Desdemona in *Othello*.

After Ameer Ben Ali’s release, “Old Shakespeare” all but disappeared from popular culture.^[77] In the contemporary era, she has found new resonance as the archive continues to perform her afterlife. Susan Stabile argues that museums such as Kimball’s, Barnum’s, and others juxtaposed sensationalism with “disciplinary systems of decorum, law, and order,” which “both perform and undermine heteronormative fictions of white womanhood.”^[78] By the standards of her day, Shakespeare’s/Brown’s transgressions against the respectable middle-class female behaviors of her era appeared legion: She left her home and children to strike out on her own; she consumed alcohol; she refused to be rehabilitated into a temperance/Christian culture; she claimed to have been an actress; and she used her sexuality for profit as a sex worker.

The relentless post-mortem re-norming of every transgressive aspect of Mrs. Shakespeare’s/Carrie Brown’s career appears in each of the spectacles constructed around her murder. It appears in the fixed tableaux at Doris’s Museum that erased her identity and subsumed it under the pseudonym of “Shakespeare” and tucked the tale of her life behind Jack the Ripper’s legend. The re-norming surfaces in each newspaper report that re-dissected her body for the public gaze, just as it was anatomized on the autopsy table. It creeps through the moralizing tone of the trial testimony and pulp fiction accounts that hold her up as a cautionary tale of how far a once-respectable woman might fall. For subsequent generations of archivists, her body performs as a puzzle to Ripperologists debating the Ripper’s identity.

Ironically, both Brown and Ben Ali become supporting characters in these dramas, rather than central figures—and like Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, they “go to’t”^[79]—their deaths moved offstage and attributed largely to their own faults and follies.

On websites such as casebook.org (self-described as “the world’s largest public repository of Ripper-related information”^[80]) and jtrforums.com (“Ripperology For The 21st Century”^[81]), Ripperologists act as detectives, sharing and scrutinizing all bits of evidence regarding Carrie Brown’s murder. While their stated purpose is a gathering of primary evidence to deduce if Ameer Ben Ali or some other suspect could be Jack the Ripper, these forums serve another function. True crime can be found on a number of mediums, but on the internet, “true crime offers opportunities for audience-producer interactivity that changes the relationship between the consumer and the content.”^[82] In Cornel Sandvoss’s illumination of performance in fandom, he observes that while fans are “consumers of (mediated) performances,” they are also performers “as others acknowledge their consumption.”^[83] In the mediated universe of Ripperologists forums, their communal identification as Ripperologists performs and consumes their extensively curated collections of Ripper-related artifacts and information. It is through this medium that Carrie Brown/ “Shakespeare” again becomes a spectacle.

In a way, these forums present a new kind of dime museum where the users are both the managers of the museum and the spectators. In the anatomical dime museums of the nineteenth century, “the boundaries between graphic sex education and pornography were blurred” as the public vied for any glimpse of the hidden body.^[84] Similarly, as Jean Murley explains, “True crime is obsessed with full-on visual body horror.”^[85] One notable interaction appears on the thread, “Photographs of Carrie Brown,” started on casebook.org in February 2003. Users shared their excitement over finding Brown’s autopsy photographs. Questions about the wounds and their similarity to other Ripper victims abounded, culminating in the final post of the thread, where a user posted a gruesome analysis of the photographs, linking the placement of the body and its wounds to various sexual positions.^[86]

Other less graphic posts include speculating where the East River Hotel would be located today, sorting fact from fiction in Brown’s case, and supporting the genealogical research being done by one of her descendants.^[87] The extensive amount of time that regular users will spend interacting with other Ripperologists has cultivated a niche community.^[88] While true crime enthusiasts are rigid about sticking to “just the facts,” there are moments in the threads where a user will comment on how long it had been since they had seen another user or to compliment someone on their writing (always Ripper-related, however).^[89] New users are welcomed gracefully into the community, simply by announcing their interest in the Ripper.

Sleuthing through primary source material that is posted in these online niches, Ripper enthusiasts recreate, reproduce, and recirculate knowledge about and through Carrie Brown. However, unlike other media such as novels, magazines, blogs, and podcasts that invoke Brown’s presence (through her deceased and mutilated form), these forums are not meant for mass consumption. Forums shape and sustain communities that are peripheral to Carrie Brown herself, yet are deeply invested in her presence. Critical analysis of her autopsy photographs imagines her body as a route to a different and novel answer to who Jack the Ripper might have been. Along the way, the community is maintained around the spectacle and speculation of Brown’s body.^[90]

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^[1] Herbert Asbury, *Gangs of New York: An Informal History of the Underground*, 43. There actually seem to have been two women in the Bowery known locally as “Shakespeare,” which can make untangling the tale of the murdered “Shakespeare” even more challenging. Several sources also said that she had a second name, Jeff Davis, whose origins only the *New York Times* reports: her support for the “lost cause.” However, this would seemingly contradict another rumor that her supposed husband was in the Union navy during the Civil War. “Byrnes Says He Has a Clue,” *New York Times*, 26 April 1891, 2.

^[2] The *Albany Law Journal* waggishly (and callously) suggested that “Old Shakespeare” had not been murdered by Jack the Ripper, but by Bacon’s ghost. *Albany Law Journal*, 9 May 1891.

^[3] *Troy Weekly Times*, 14 May 1891.

^[4] *New York Herald*, 30 June 1891.

^[5] Ali (also known as George Frank), was referred to in some reports as “Frenchy” and in others as an “Arab.” It is not within the scope of this essay to unpack the racism and emerging eugenics in the press’s treatment of Ali, whom some papers labeled a “creature of strange and unnatural desires,” and as “little above a monkey in intellect,” but it certainly merits further exploration. According to the *Wheeling Register* (West VA) on 3 July 1891, Ali claimed, “By the garment of Allah, I am innocent.” The *New York Tribune* reported that he spoke Arabic at his trial and questioned why he had taken his oath on the Bible rather than the Koran (see 4 July 1891). Also see the *Star and Herald* (Panama), 16 May 1891 and the *New York Herald*, 30 June 1891. There was also speculation about his religion—primarily because of his tattoo of a cross: “‘Frenchy’s’ behavior since his arrest has shown that he is not a Moslem [*sic*], for he doesn’t pray at the rising and going down of the sun. Besides, a Moslem would not have a cross about him.” “Is it the Same ‘Frenchy’,” *New York Herald*, 4 May 1891, 4. Comparatively new (and untested) forensic methods were used to link Ali to the crime scene, including traces of blood and bodily fluids from the victim.

^[6] The term, “theatrical afterlife,” is drawn from Mechele Leon’s *Molière, the French Revolution, & the Theatrical Afterlife* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2009), which explores the ways that Molière’s work echoed in the years following his death. Similarly, we use “theatrical afterlife” here to denote how Carrie Brown/Shakespeare’s murder reverberated across popular and theatrical culture.

[7] Scholarly discussions about the histories and legacies of US melodrama have continued to shift over the last half-century. Foundational studies in the field include David Grimsted's 1968, *Melodrama Unveiled: American Theatre and Culture, 1800–1850*; Bruce McConachie's 1992 *Melodramatic Formations: American Theatre and Society, 1820-1870*; Jeffrey D. Mason's 1993 *Melodrama and the Myth of America*; and Rosemarie K. Bank's 1977 *Theatre Culture in America, 1825–1860*. More recent studies include John Frick's 2003, *Theatre, Culture, and Temperance Reform in Nineteenth-Century America*; Amy Hughes's 2012 *Spectacles of Reform: Theater and Activism in Nineteenth-Century America*; Jeffrey H. Richards and Heather S. Nathans, eds. 2014, *The Oxford Handbook of American Drama* (which contains several chapters on melodrama, including those by Scott C. Martin, Amelia Howe Kritzer, Mark Mullen, and Mark Hodin); as well as recent works by John L. Brooke, Douglas A. Jones, Jr., Sarah Meer, Laura Mielke, Tavia Nyong'o, and others who have offered works that link the melodrama form to specific political issues in nineteenth-century America.

[8] Ariela J. Gross further explains how eugenics, when it emerged in the late nineteenth-century, brought with it the empirical language about how racial science could enshrine white citizenship into law. Near Eastern and North African immigrants would be caught in the midst of this racist legal conundrum, with how to classify their whiteness debated heavily within state and federal court systems. This would begin to be litigated several years after Ben Ali's trial but was firmly cemented in American consciousness by the time he was released. See Ariela J. Gross, *What Blood Won't Tell: A History of Race on Trial in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 230–5. For evidence of Ben Ali's pardon, release, and departure from the US, see "'Frenchy' Pardoned," *Daily People* (New York, New York), 17 April 1902, 3; "Departure Of 'Frenchy.' to Bring an Action for Damages Against the State," *Daily People* (New York, New York) 25 April 1902, 2.

[9] Jane Caputi, "The New Founding Fathers: The Lore and Lure of the Serial Killer in Contemporary Culture," *Journal of American Culture* 13, no. 3 (1990): 3.

[10] Jtrforums.com is currently in a state of transition (the tribulations of digital archives!) and threads referenced in this essay are in the process of being archived. The site's previous administrator is also uploading much of the research shared on the forum to CarrieBrown.net, although as of 22 October 2021, it is still very much a work in progress.

[11] Jean Murley, *The Rise of True Crime: 20th-Century Murder and American Popular Culture* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2008), 2.

[12] *Boston Herald*, 25 May 1891.

[13] *The Patriot* (Harrisburg, PA), 27 April 1891. British newspapers also picked up news of the murder, some reporting it only days after the fact. See *Reynold's Newspaper* (London), 26 April 1891 and the *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle*, 2 May 1891.

[14] "Ghastly Butchery by a New York Jack the Ripper" *New York Herald*, 25 April 1891, 3.

[15] *New York Herald*, 30 June 1891. The New York paper *People* complained bitterly that Shakespeare's murder was yet another demonstration of police incompetence since they seemed unable to track down her killer. *People*, 26 April 1891. "Murder in the Second Degree," *New York Herald*, 4 July 1891, 3.

^[16] “Ghastly Butchery by a New York Jack the Ripper” *New York Herald*, 3.

^[17] *New York Herald*, 25 April 1891, 3; *The Evening World*, 25 April 1891, 1.

^[18] “Ghastly Butchery by a New York Jack the Ripper” *New York Herald*, 3.

^[19] Other newspapers record an account of the autopsy, but *The Evening World*’s account is the most complete, as well as the most clinical in its language.

^[20] *The Evening World*, 25 April 1891, 1.

^[21] Karen Halttunen, *Murder Most Foul: The Killer and the American Gothic Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 192. For more on the notorious Jewett case, see Patricia Cline Cohen, *The Murder of Helen Jewett: Life and Death of a Prostitute in Nineteenth-Century New York* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999).

^[22] Halttunen, *Murder Most Foul*, 181. Italics original.

^[23] George Ellington, *The Women of New York: Or, the Under-World of the Great City* (New York: The New York Book Company, 1869), 295.

^[24] *New York Herald*, 26 April 1891, 17.

^[25] Ibid.

^[26] Some papers initially claimed that the “real” Carrie Brown had not been murdered and that the victim was an unknown woman. This story faded quickly however.

^[27] *Omaha World Herald*, 26 April 1891. Note that the paper has several misstatements about the case, including the location of the crime and the names of the initial suspects. They also claim that her husband’s first name was James, not Charles, and that she had two daughters, not a daughter and a son (though it should be noted that one of her daughters might have died).

^[28] *Omaha World Herald*, 26 April 1891. Mrs. Shakespeare may have been working as a sex worker during this time and it was also tacitly acknowledged (though not stated explicitly in the various newspaper reports we have reviewed) that there may also have been evidence of sexual activity. The coroner’s report also showed that she was anemic and that was reported in the paper, along with the physical evidence of her alcoholism, see *New York Herald*, 30 June 1891.

^[29] Note that this site offers census data as well as grave site location information for Brown: “Carrie ‘Old Shakespeare’ Brown,” Find a Grave, <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=89386829> (accessed 22 October 2021).

^[30] Of her appearance, the narrator notes “Ordinarily I would pass her without much notice.” W. B. Lawton, *Jack the Ripper in New York*, 1891, 2. See cover image below.

^[31] Note that her body was returned to her remaining family in Salem on 15 May 1891, according to the *Star and Herald* (Panama), 16 May 1891.

^[32] Indeed, the largest cache of present day information on Brown survives on websites devoted to Jack the Ripper that mention Brown's killing as an *attempt* to place the Ripper in the US.

^[33] "Many Arrests: But No Identification of 'Jack the Ripper,'" *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 25 April 1891, 8. Italics added.

^[34] "Frenchy Found Guilty," *Pittsburgh Dispatch*, 4 July 1891, 6.

^[35] George C. Odell, *Annals of the New York Stage*, vol. 14: 1888–1891 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1945), 687.

^[36] Tableaux Advertisement, *The Evening World*, 29 April 1891, BASEBALL EXTRA, 3. Obviously, the furniture was probably not authentic and was likely to be a reproduction. The titillation of the crime scene also found its way into the theatre. One theatre in Pittsburgh restaged a popular show, advertising that the scenery had been altered to look like the East River Hotel and replicated the murder. See *New York Herald*, 3 May 1891, 10.

^[37] Odell, *Annals of the New York Stage*, vol. 14, 687. The wax tableaux were also available at the Gaiety Museum and the Eden Musée in New York City starting the week of 3 May 1891. See Odell, 739–740 and *New York Herald*, 3 May 1891, 10. One commentator in the Pennsylvania-based newspaper the *Patriot* wrote, "The morbid curiosity of the people was never more fully or disgustingly illustrated than in the announcement of a New York museum manager that all the details of the recent 'Ripper' tragedy will be re-reproduced [*sic*] in wax for the edification of his patrons. The person who can find any gratification in such a sight most assuredly has a peculiar twist in his mental structure." *Patriot*, 27 April 1891, 4.

^[38] Quoted in Stabile, "Still(ed) Lives," *Journal of Material Culture* 14, no. 2, 375.

^[39] *New York Herald*, 13 September 1891. For more on this topic, see John Frick, *Theatre, Culture, and Temperance Reform in Nineteenth-Century America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

^[40] Note that the tableaux retained that label even after Ameer Ben Ali's trial and conviction for the murder.

^[41] Andrea Dennett, *Weird and Wonderful: The Dime Museum in America* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 60.

^[42] It might be interesting to explore Herring's career juxtaposed against Brown's "performance" for Bowery audiences. Herring was roughly the same age as Brown (Herring was born in England in 1834), and Herring was described as "hoydenish" and became known for her success in breeches roles.

^[43] Michael Batterberry and Ariane Batterberry, *On the Town in New York: The Landmark History of Eating, Drinking and Entertainments* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 104.

^[44] Ibid., 106.

^[45] Dennett, *Weird and Wonderful: The Dime Museum in America*, 61. Interestingly, Dennett adds that sites like Doris's were often interspersed with dime museums that featured anatomical or medical exhibits, which were, in fact, thinly veiled quack clinics for patrons suffering from syphilis.

^[46] W. B. Lawson, "Jack the Ripper in New York; Or, Piping a Terrible Mystery," in *Log Cabin Library* no. 115 (1891): 2.

^[47] For more on how crime fiction positioned race in its narratives in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Maureen T. Reddy's *Traces, Codes, and Clues: Reading Race in Crime Fiction* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003).

^[48] "New York's 'Ripper' Known to the Police," *New York Herald*, 26 April 1891, 17.

^[49] "Ghastly Butchery by a New York Jack the Ripper'," *New York Herald*, 25 April 1891, 3. Some other reports have his name as "C. Niclo" or "C. Nichols."

^[50] The "Ripper" Left a Fairly Plain Trail," *New York Herald*, 27 April 1891, 3.

^[51] Ameer Ben Ali claimed that the blood found on his shirt and stockings was menstrual blood from a sex worker he had visited. The expert physicians who analyzed the blood testified that there were no epithelial cells found in the blood samples from his person, indicating that it was not menstrual blood. See Austin Flint, "Some Medico-Legal Points in the 'Frenchy' Murder Trial," *New York Medical Journal* 54 (July 1891): 39–41.

^[52] "Is This New York's 'Jack the Ripper?'" *New York Herald*, 1 May 1891, 3.

^[53] L. Perry Curtis, *Jack the Ripper and the London Press* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 30.

^[54] Sara Blair, "Henry James, Jack the Ripper, and the Cosmopolitan Jew: Staging Authorship in 'The Tragic Muse,'" *ELH* 63, no. 2 (Summer 1996): 490.

^[55] Sander L. Gilman, *The Jew's Body*, (New York: Routledge, 2009), 490–2.

^[56] "Not the Same 'Ripper,'" *New York Herald*, 1 May 1891, 6.

^[57] *The Patriot*, Harrisburg, PA, 15 May 1891, 1.

^[58] Nicole Hahn Rafter explores the impact of European innovations in scientific criminology on American criminal anthropologists, including the adoption of Bertillon's methodologies in the United States. See Nicole Hahn Rafter, "Criminal Anthropology: Its Reception in the United States and the Nature of Its Appeal," in *Criminals and Their Scientists: The History of Criminology in International Perspective*, eds. Peter Becker and Richard F. Wetzell, 159–82 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

- ^[59] Havelock Ellis, *The Criminal* (New York: Scribner & Welford, 1890), 84. Interest in phrenology in the mid-nineteenth century drove a demand for lecturing on criminality by displaying skulls from the cadavers of executed criminals, see Ann Fabian, *The Skull Collectors: Race, Science, and America's Unburied Dead* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 25.
- ^[60] "Is This New York's 'Jack the Ripper?'" *New York Herald*, 1 May 1891, 3.
- ^[61] "Implore God! Cries Ben Ali," *New York Herald*, 3 July 1891, 3.
- ^[62] Kirsten E. Shepherd-Barr, "The Diagnostic Gaze: Nineteenth-Century Contexts for Medicine and Performance," in *Performance and the Medical Body*, eds. Alex Mermikides and Gianna Bouchard (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 37-8.
- ^[63] Emile Zola, "Naturalism in the Theatre," in *Documents of Modern Literary Realism*, ed. George J. Becker (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 201. Italics added.
- ^[64] Autopsy photos from the New York City Municipal Archives (see below).
- ^[65] "Blood Stains May Prove Frenchy Guilty," *New York Herald*, 1 July 1891, 3. The supposed images of her autopsy have circulated around internet forums See "Carrie Brown a.k.a. 'Old Shakespeare,'" Casebook: Jack the Ripper, <https://www.casebook.org/victims/carrie.html>(accessed 22 October 2021).
- ^[66] Cline Cohen, *The Murder of Helen Jewett*, 13. Interestingly, William Shakespeare invokes the same method in *Richard III* when Henry VI's wounds supposedly reopen and bleed as his coffin is carried past Richard.
- ^[67] A definitive test for distinguishing human from animal blood would not be found until 1901. See "A New Forensic Method of Differentiating Human and Animal Blood," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 36, no. 16 (20 April 1901): 1118.
- ^[68] Reports also note that roundworm eggs were found, which are not uncommon in people living in extreme-poverty and have poor hygiene practices, although this went unremarked.
- ^[69] Austin Flint, "Some Medico-Legal Points in the 'Frenchy' Murder Trial," *New York Medical Journal* 54 (July 1891): 40.
- ^[70] For more about naturalistic theatre and microscopy, see Kari Nixon, "Seeing Things: The Dilemma of Visual Subjectivity at the Dawn of the Bacteriological Age in Strindberg's *The Father*," *Configurations* 24, no. 1 (Winter 2016): 25-52.
- ^[71] "Frenchy Breaks Down and Weeps" *New York Herald*, 2 July 1891, 3.
- ^[72] Flint, "Some Medico-Legal Points," 40.
- ^[73] "The Medico-Legal Aspect of the Jack-The-Ripper Case," *The Medical and Surgical Reporter*, 15 August 1891 65: 279.

[74] “‘I Implore God!’ Cries Ben Ali,” *New York Herald*, 3 July 1891, 3.

[75] Ameer Ben Ali’s case is discussed in Yale Law Professor Edwin M. Bouchard’s *Convicting the Innocent: Errors of Criminal Justice* (New Haven: Yale University, 1932).

[76] New Evidence for “Frenchy,” *Daily People* (New York), 24 May 1901, 3.

[77] Two books in the 1930s reference her murder. The first is Edwin M. Bouchard’s *Convicting the Innocent: Errors of Criminal Justice* (1932) and the other is Alexander Woollcott’s short story “It May Be Human Gore: V MURDER FOR PUBLICITY” in his 1934 collection *While Rome Burns*. The short story recounts Old Shakespeare’s murder and the subsequent trial. Leaning heavily on the sensationalism of the story, Woollcott describes Brown as a “raffish sexagenarian prostitute” and a “dilapidated and jocular hag.” “The Frenchy case, famous in its day forty years ago but since largely forgotten,” Woollcott writes, “should, it seems to me, have a prominent place in American murder annals, if only for the felicitous proper names, ideal for melodrama, which were involved in it.” For more see, Alexander Woollcott, *While Rome Burns* (New York: The Viking Press, 1934), 220–3. A book has also recently come out that reexamines the case in detail and disagrees with Bouchard’s perspective that Ameer Ben Ali was innocent. Curiously, the author does not consider the racial dynamics at play and the rise of racist criminology in his argument. See George R. Dekle, Sr., *The East River Ripper: The Mysterious 1891 Murder of Old Shakespeare* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2021).

[78] Stabile, “Still(ed) Lives,” 375.

[79] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, V, ii.

[80] “Casebook: Jack the Ripper,” <https://www.casebook.org/index.html> (accessed 21 October 2021).

[81] “Jack the Ripper Forums – Ripperology for the 21st Century Statistics,” <http://jtrforums.com> (accessed 21 October 2021). See 10n.

[82] Murley, *The Rise of True Crime*, 133.

[83] Cornel Sandvoss, *Fans: The Mirror of Consumption* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 45.

[84] Dennett, *Weird and Wonderful*, 64.

[85] Murley, *The Rise of True Crime*, 5.

[86] On Tuesday November 29, 2005 at 6:48pm, an unregistered guest (that is, not an official member of the forum) with the username sickard posted this explicit and graphic message that will not be reproduced here to a *casebook.org* thread discussing the wounds seen on the autopsy photographs. See “Photographs of Carrie Brown,” Casebook: Jack the Ripper, <https://www.casebook.org/forum/messages/4921/5374.html> (accessed 21 October 2021).

[87] Key examples of interesting threads about Carrie Brown include (but are certainly not limited to) a dissection started in 2016 about where exactly the hotel she was murdered in was located (“Carrie Brown

Murder in the New York Times,” Jack the Ripper Forums, <https://www.jtrforums.com/forum/the-victims/other-possible-victims/carrie-brown/27051-carrie-brown-murder-in-the-new-york-times?t=26525> [accessed 6 June 2021].), a “Shooting the Breeze Thread” from July 2020 to casually discuss aspects of her murder (“Carrie Brown: Shooting the Breeze Thread,” Jack the Ripper Forums, <https://www.jtrforums.com/forum/the-victims/other-possible-victims/carrie-brown/34855-carrie-brown-shooting-the-breeze-thread?t=34156> [accessed 6 June 2021].), a thread from 2008 that questions whether or not she was a victim of Jack the Ripper where the original poster notes that they had made a separate post to acknowledge the anniversary of her death, but felt it inappropriate to begin the discussion there (“Was Carrie Brown A Ripper Victim?,” Casebook: Jack the Ripper, <https://forum.casebook.org/forum/ripper-discussions/victims/non-canonical-victims/carrie-brown/726-was-carrie-brown-a-ripper-victim> [accessed 22 October 2021].), and a 2011 thread that begins with parsing through the contradictory details of Brown’s biography before moving to a discussion of the location of her grave in Salem, Massachusetts (and how several commenters had visited and been told to leave). A supposed descendant of hers interrupts the chat to state that he has no issue with anyone visiting the cemetery where she’s buried (“Carrie Brown: UK Background,” Jack the Ripper Forums, <https://www.jtrforums.com/forum/the-victims/other-possible-victims/carrie-brown/12639-carrie-brown-uk-background/page2> [accessed 6 June 2021].). Interesting to note, there is some, although not complete, overlap between users of the forums. See 10n.

^[88] There’s also been a recent migration of jtrforums.com members to a private Facebook group called, “The Carrie Brown File.” See 10n.

^[89] In this thread from 2003, a forum user, Tom Wescott, writes of how he is happy to see a fellow user and even reveals that he knows about the other user’s work outside of the forum (although, still Ripper-related). (“Photographs of Carrie Brown,” Casebook: Jack the Ripper, <https://www.casebook.org/forum/messages/4921/5374.html> [accessed 22 October 2021].). In a 2014 thread, a user asks if a frequent poster, Wolf Vanderlinden, is still working on his book about Carrie Brown and congratulates him for a “well done” article in a Ripperologist magazine (“Forthcoming book?,” Casebook: Jack the Ripper, <https://www.casebook.org/forum/messages/4921/12087.html> [accessed 22 October 2021,].).

^[90] It is interesting to note that the theatre is tangential to the work of Ripperologists, as this recent thread on Ameer Ben Ali’s attending a minstrel show during his time at the Matteawan State Insane Hospital demonstrates (“Ali at a Minstrel Show at Matteawan,” Jack the Ripper Forums, <https://www.jtrforums.com/forum/the-victims/other-possible-victims/carrie-brown/576659-ali-at-a-minstrel-show-at-matteawan> [accessed 6 June 2021].). See 10n.

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