

Penny Bloods: Gothic Tales of Dangerous Women

Nicole C. Dittmer, Editor

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Edited by Nicole C. Dittmer, *Penny Bloods* collects sensational tales of “monstrous women” from the penny newspapers of the nineteenth century.

The stories are arranged in chronological order and are complemented with historical context, paralleling the development of the “monstrous woman” trope in British fiction and society. At the times of their publication, Britain’s newly literate working-class citizens lined up in droves to buy the penny newspapers and feed their imaginations. The tales reflect the tasty bits of Gothic literature, with fortune-telling hags, sequestered madwomen, seductive mistresses with secret supernatural powers, powerful men brought to their knees, blood-sucking maidens, and demons who barter for souls.

Entertaining and compulsive, the stories are an entry into the minds of their first readers. Published and republished throughout the nineteenth century, often with increasing popularity, these popular tales affronted the era’s literary elite, who squirmed with disgust at their profuse descriptions, mawkish dialogue, and convoluted plots. Today, these over-the-top flourishes are all part of the fun, with the stories polished and represented to reach new audiences who enjoy atmospheric supernatural tales.

MICHELE SHARPE (March / April 2024)

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