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True Crime

CHARLOTTE BEYER

Abstract

This poem is a creative response to contemporary true crime narratives about baby farming in Victorian times, namely Alison Rattle and Allison Vale's *The Woman Who Murdered Babies for Money: The Story of Amelia Dyer* (London: André Deutsch, 2011); and the TV documentary, "Amelia Dyer: Martina Cole's Lady Killers."

Key words: True crime, baby farming, infanticide, motherhood, documentary.

Making a living from death
the baby farmer was at last
arrested, her crimes revealed,
the commentator explained,
the odd smell from a cupboard
concealing dead babies' bodies.
Opium had stilled their cries.
Money given in exchange
For the fragile lives discarded.

Sunken eyes, shrivelled skin
Hunger never stilled, thirst
Unquenched and ignored.
Emaciated limbs don't scream,
they speak a silent language.
To hear it, you have to listen,
imagining the bones inside
your own thriving children,
choices you have they didn't.

Those mothers who left their
babies, mark of their shame.
Those women who took the
babies, leaving them to die.
The everyday Victorian horrors
haunting our sleepless nights
have become today's true crime,
baby farming murder mystery,
a documentary shown on TV.