



Murder in Victorian Scotland: The Trial of Madeleine Smith

Douglas MacGowan

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A new look at the life and 1857 trial of Madeleine Smith, the young Scottish woman accused of poisoning an undesired suitor, this book uses analyses of Smith's correspondence with the victim and her trial testimony to reveal much about Victorian society, Scottish law, and the woman who received the nebulous verdict of not proven. The verdict not proven is unique to Scotland: while allowing a defendant to go free, the verdict often carries a stigma, as it not only indicates that the prosecution failed to prove its case, but also states that the defense failed to convince the jury of the defendant's innocence. Emile L'Angelier, the son of a working-class family from the Channel Islands, and Madeleine Smith, the daughter of a wealthy Glasgow family, were never properly introduced; however, they carried on an illicit affair that would end in tragedy. The absence of a clear verdict in this murder trial rocked Victorian Scotland and England. The story of the young girl who (presumably) poisoned her secret lover so that she could go forward with a family-arranged marriage would live on in print, on stage, and on the screen throughout the following century and a half.

By analyzing the correspondence between Madeleine and Emile, the criminal trial testimony, and the pathology reports on Emile's body, *Murder in Victorian Scotland* gives the most complete picture to date of the events surrounding this infamous crime. This book shows Madeleine's rise from an anonymous defendant into one of the leading social celebrities of the day. An in-depth look at the writings of Madeleine's biographers details the variety of ways in which Madeleine and Emile were depicted, various theories regarding the facts of the alleged crime, and the folklore mystique of the notorious case. *Murder in Victorian Scotland* provides valuable insight into the limited world of Victorian women and the great divide between social classes that doomed the daring relationship even before it had begun.

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