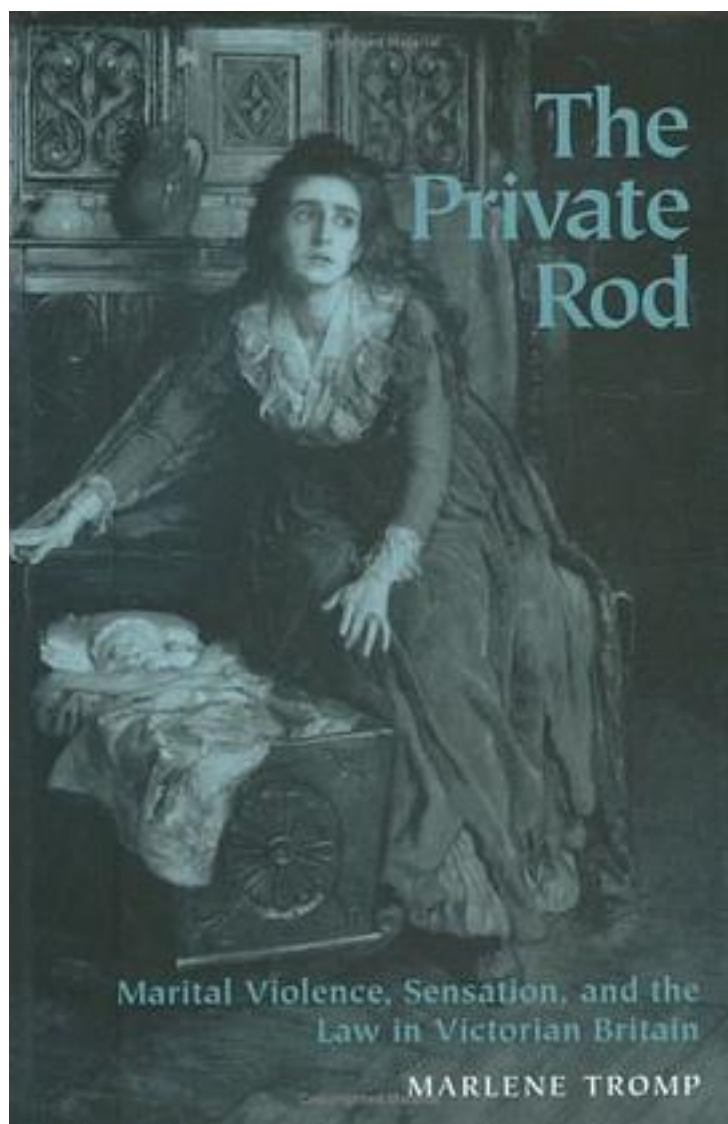


The Private Rod



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Sensation novels, a genre characterized by scandalous narratives and emotionally and socially provocative dialogue and plots, had their heyday in England in the 1860s and 1870s, in the midst of growing concern about codes of behavior in marriage. Largely excluded from the academic canon of the late twentieth century, sensation novels had an impact on Victorian culture that we have only recently begun to evaluate. Exploring the central metaphor of marital violence in these novels, Marlene Tromp uncovers the relationship between the representations of such violence in fiction and in the law. Her investigation demonstrates that sensational constructions of gender, marriage, "brutal" relationships, and even murder, were gradually incorporated into legal debates and realist fiction as the Victorian understanding of what was "real" changed. Sensation fiction's reconfiguration of literary and social norms, evident in works by Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, and Mary Elizabeth Braddon, is also explicitly evoked in the "realist" representations of domestic violence in novels by Margaret Oliphant and George Eliot. Despite the apparent gulf between fiction and the law, Tromp explores these texts as mutually constitutive forms through which a major shift in the understanding of domesticity took place. The Victorians responded to marital violence by debating its terms in both Parliament and the circulating libraries, incorporating the language of each realm into the other. By the end of the century, this cross-pollinating conversation threatened the tenuous legal and social fiction of peace and safety in the middle-class home, and new readings of the relationship between domesticity and violence emerged.

作者介绍:

目录:

[The Private Rod_ 下载链接1](#)

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[The Private Rod_ 下载链接1](#)

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