

## He Fears Not God, Neither Regards Man

*The most appalling tragedy that has ever been heard of in the west was committed . . . yesterday by a member of the tramp fraternity, the victim being Mrs. Robert Lane.*

—*Winnipeg Daily Tribune*, 6 July 1899

After Hilda Blake hid her smoking gun in the kitchen and then moved it, later that Wednesday night, to a spot under a lime barrel in the backyard, Brandon went through two very different stages of dealing with the murder. The two stages tell us much about the ethos of late nineteenth-century Canada and about Blake's liminal place in Canada's unsettled class system. During the first stage, while the revolver and Blake's role remained hidden, most of the town believed Blake's melodramatic story about the tramp, circled the wagons, and mobilized itself against this external threat. As we will see in subsequent chapters, the second stage—when the revolver came to light and an attractive British-born domestic stood accused of murder—was marked by class and gender puzzlement, and eventually by argument about whether or not Blake should be pardoned.

During the first stage, the wanderer outside the city's social ethos and the baleful foreigner combined into one fearful image of disorder. That image issued in straightforward melodrama. Melodrama, Peter Brooks asserts:

starts from and expresses the anxiety brought by a frightening new world in which the traditional patterns of moral order no longer provide the necessary social glue. It plays out the force of that