Murder, Myth, and Melodrama:  
The Theatrical Histories of Jack the Ripper

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Centre for Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies
University of Toronto

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Abstract

In 1888, several murders in the London boroughs of Whitechapel and Spitalfields became the first modern serial killings reported by mass-circulation daily media. These were identified with “Jack the Ripper,” a name that still resonates in popular culture and entertainment. This dissertation looks to the theatrical culture of London, arguing that theatre and drama provided models for the creation of this figure, which has the cultural status of a “myth” in the sense defined by Roland Barthes. Drawing on the vocabulary of Barthes and on Diana Taylor’s idea of the “scenario” as a unit of enacted narrative with mythic cultural force, four case studies from a variety of London stages trace how ideas and anxieties about urban modernity were taken from the stage and used by newspaper writers and the public to imagine the Ripper. The first looks at a production of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde that took place at the same time as the murders, showing how these modeled the killer for a middle-class audience. The second describes an illegal basement theatre in the East End that used representations of the murdered women as one of its variety of entertainments, arguing that these both resisted and confirmed definitions of the murders, the victims, and Whitechapel itself as “obscene.” A third case looks at London Day By Day, a successful 1889 melodrama, arguing that this was the first representation of the Ripper on
a legitimate stage, albeit in a conflicted and partially-obscured way that nevertheless reveals how crucial melodrama and its iconography was to popular understandings of the murders in the first place. The final case study looks at The Lodger, a 1914 novel that was adapted to stage and screen, tracing how urban legends about a possible killer functioned to consolidate the image of the murders in the 20th century. In conclusion the contemporary practice of “Jack the Ripper Walking Tours” is briefly surveyed to argue that contests over visuality, poverty, obscenity, and urban space that had important currency in the late-Victorian theatre are an integral part of the Ripper myth and remain relevant to this day.
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In addition to Stephen Johnson, who served as the primary advisor, the committee that supervised this thesis included Professors Nancy Copeland and Charles Keil. John Astington served as a member of the defense committee, and the external examiner was Jim Davis of the University of Warwick. Much of what is good in this work is the result of their valuable insights, and all errors are mine.
Introduction:

Myth Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow

“Who is Jack the Ripper?” is a question that has been answered in dozens of ways in hundreds of works of fiction, non-fiction, and more than a few that have described themselves as the latter, while most definitely being the former. The question continues to be enthusiastically addressed today in a whole range of literary, dramatic, and other cultural products. One answer is proposed by the contemporary cable television drama *Penny Dreadful*: the unsolved Ripper murders are mentioned several times in the first season, which is set in London in the 1890s and has Dracula, Dr. Frankenstein, Dorian Grey, and an American werewolf as principal characters. In this series from writer John Logan, who has also penned scripts for James Bond films, Jack the Ripper is one Victorian monster among many in a sexually-charged narrative world, wherein spectatorial pleasure comes from admiring the slickly gothic mise-en-scène, while recognizing the equally suave play of meta-fiction. In a more ostensibly factual medium, Russell Edwards’ recent claims to have identified the Ripper as the Polish barber Aaron Kosminski, an identification made through the analysis of DNA on a shawl allegedly worn by one of the victims, is no less marked by reference to genre tropes. The “World Exclusive” that Edwards authored for the *Daily Mail* in advance of the release of a book detailing his investigation features maps, photos of suspects, and other visual “evidence” arranged in a fashion resembling the pin-boards familiar from television police procedurals like *CSI*. In its online incarnation it includes a video discussing DNA testing; this is characterized by the paradoxical combination of copious jargon and minimal specificity, a mixture familiar from the way in which television crime programs refer to scientific
testing in the pursuit of plot points.\textsuperscript{1} In this news story, as in so many before it naming a variety of men as suspects, Jack the Ripper is the perp who is finally fixed within a meticulously assembled web of evidence at the end of a procedural whodunit. Whether invoked by a television drama in which Frankenstein’s monster works as a stage-hand at a theatre showing Gothic melodramas, or identified as a historical individual in a news story that made headlines all around the world, Jack the Ripper is today inseparable from narrative structures and iconographies drawn from dramatic fiction.

This thesis will argue that this has always been the case. From the moment Jack the Ripper received that name in a letter postmarked on 27 September and mailed to “The Boss, Central News Office, London City,” and indeed even before this, “he” was a quasi-fictional character created in an act of cultural dramaturgy, in which the public and the periodical press collaborated to knit together ideas, events, and images. The resulting fabric had a weave tight enough to have a recognizable structure and pattern, but open enough for new strands to be seamlessly incorporated as the garment took shape. Popular entertainment was one of the principal storehouses from which the necessary material was drawn, with the theatre serving this function particularly well. This took the form of images and characterizations drawn from specific plays and performances given in London in 1888, as well as broader themes and narrative tropes pulled from the theatrical tradition more generally. I would strongly contend that it is now, and will almost certainly remain, impossible to give an answer to the question “who is

\textsuperscript{1} Russell Edwards, “World Exclusive: Jack the Ripper Unmasked: How amateur sleuth used DNA breakthrough to identify Britain’s most notorious criminal 126 years after string of terrible murders,” \textit{Mail Online}, 6 September 2014. Edwards’ “breakthrough” was widely reported in newspapers and national newscasts all around the world, and almost none of these reports noted the highly questionable provenance of the shawl or the fact that it was his sole piece of evidence. In October 2014 serious questions about the validity of the calculations underlying the DNA analysis were raised; these did not generate the same flurry of coverage as the original claims.
Jack the Ripper?" that definitively and incontrovertibly names the late-Victorian person who viciously murdered, and horrifically mutilated, a number of impoverished women who occasionally worked as prostitutes in the boroughs of Whitechapel and Spitalfields. This project will argue that it is equally impossible to give an answer that explores the culturally concocted character Jack the Ripper without extensive and detailed reference to the history of theatre and performance of the late-Victorian period.

The Autumn of Terror

Before outlining the theoretical apparatus that will frame my argument, which will be presented as a series of case studies on the performance culture of London, it may be useful to provide a basic factual outline of the Whitechapel murders as they occurred and were reported on in the press in the autumn of 1888. This will consist of a brief chronological outline of the murders that were considered part of the series attributed to the same serial killer, including a summary of the “eyewitness” accounts given by individuals claiming to have seen that killer, and followed by a discussion of the process by which the name Jack the Ripper was assigned to the murderer. For this outline I rely on the work of Donald Rumbelow, Phillip Sugden, Paul Begg, and Robin Odell, all among the authors of what Begg characterizes as “highly factual reference titles” about the Whitechapel murders, which he distinguishes from the many speculative books “propounding a theory about the killer’s identity” in an attempt to solve the crime across historical distance.² While the work of all of these authors would be categorized as “popular history” or “true crime,” all make extensive and usually careful use of documentary sources; Begg’s *Jack the Ripper: The Definitive History* makes meaningful gestures toward analyzing the cultural history of London in

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the late-Victorian period, and Odell’s *Ripperology* is both a history of the murders and a meta-history of the non-fiction literature about the case in its concentration on “the story of Ripperology, as the study of this subject has become popularly known.”³ While much of what is presented here will be recalled in subsequent chapters, this sketch will serve as a means of orientation as well as the foundation of my argument that the “facts” about the murders, characterized as they are by contingency, uncertainty, and mess, required borrowings from dramatic fiction to give them the discernible shape they have today.

*Victims and Witnesses*

In the early morning hours of 7 August 1888, the body of Martha Tabram was discovered in a stairway of the George Yard Buildings, just off the Whitechapel High Street. She had been stabbed in the abdomen at least 22 times; doctors who testified at the inquest into her death believed that two different knives had been used and that at least one of these was a “sword bayonet or dagger” of the kind that would be issued to a soldier.⁴ The investigation turned up two possible eyewitnesses: a friend of Tabram’s named Mary Ann Connelly, and a police constable who described encountering a member of the Grenadier Guards, a unit stationed at the nearby Tower of London, loitering in George Yard at about 2AM. Neither Connelly nor Tabram had a fixed address; like most of the subsequent Whitechapel murder victims they lived in casual boarding houses and supported themselves by a combination of menial work when they could get it, and prostitution when they could not. Connelly told police she had been with Tabram on the evening of 6 August, which was a Bank Holiday, and that she had last seen Tabram in the early

morning hours of the 7th when they had been picked up by a pair of Guardsmen and each gone off with one. While inquiries were conducted among soldiers stationed at the Tower, no arrest was made in connection with the death.

In Begg’s words, “whether or not Martha Tabram was murdered by Jack the Ripper is now debated,” with most present-day writers on the case agreeing with an 1894 report by Melville Macnaghten, who was then Chief Constable of the Metropolitan London Police, that she was not. As a matter of cultural history this question is irrelevant; what is important is that Tabram’s death was linked by the press to the murder of Mary Ann “Polly” Nichols in Buck’s Row, Whitechapel, on Friday 31 August. Whether or not Polly Nichols was the first “true” Jack the Ripper victim, the public perception of a series of murders had already emerged in the reporting on her death. Nichols had been strangled and killed by having her throat cut, and there were extensive mutilations to her abdomen; while no eyewitnesses were forthcoming the police responded to neighborhood rumors about a local man known by the nickname “Leather Apron,” who was reputedly a cobbler with an alleged sideline in extorting money from local prostitutes. When Annie Chapman was found dead in the back yard of 29 Hanbury Street, Spitalfields on Saturday 8 September, a Polish-Jewish shoemaker named John Pizer, who was identified as “Leather Apron,” turned himself in to H Division of the Metropolitan Police. He was investigated and cleared of the murders. The injuries inflicted upon Chapman were similar to those suffered by Polly Nichols, and during the post-mortem examination it was also found that Chapman’s uterus had been removed. Elizabeth Long, a friend of Chapman’s who identified her body, testified at the inquest that she had seen the victim in the company of a man she described as over 40 years of age and wearing a black overcoat. Although she had only seen him from the

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5 Begg, *Jack the Ripper*, 67.
back she claimed to be sure that he was a foreigner and that his “shabby genteel” appearance meant he was not a laborer.\(^6\)

Two more murders occurred a few weeks later, in the early morning hours of Sunday 30 September. Swedish immigrant Elizabeth Gustafsdotter, known in London as Elizabeth Stride, was discovered outside of the International Working Men’s Educational Club in Berner Street; her throat was cut but it was concluded that the arrival of club steward Louis Diemschütz, who discovered the body when he nearly drove his pony and cart over it, had disturbed the killer before any further mutilations could be carried out. Later that morning, the body of Catherine Eddowes was found by a police constable in Mitre Square, Aldgate; this was the only murder carried out within the bounds of the City of London proper. Eddowes was mutilated in a fashion similar to Polly Nichols and Annie Chapman, and a kidney and part of her uterus were removed and carried off by the killer. Eddowes had been in police custody for public drunkenness on the day she was killed, and was released at around 1AM; a witness named Joseph Lawende described seeing her not long after this near the entrance to Mitre Square, in the company of a man of around 30 years old who had a peaked cap, a fair mustache, and a generally “shabby” appearance.\(^7\)

The last of the murders usually described as the work of Jack the Ripper was committed on Friday 9 November in Miller’s Court, off Dorset Street, Spitalfields. Mary Jane Kelly’s body was discovered by the rent collector in a room that she had shared with her common-law partner Joseph Barnett, though the investigation would establish that he had left at the end of October after a quarrel about Kelly’s frequent drinking and occasional recourse to prostitution as a means of supporting herself. Without dwelling on them or describing them in detail, it should be noted

\(^7\) Begg, *Jack the Ripper*, 239-40.
that the mutilations inflicted upon Kelly were far more extensive than those of any other victim, and that a fireplace in the room had been used to burn up some of her clothing and, possibly, parts of her body.\textsuperscript{8} This killing also yielded the most detailed description of a possible suspect when George Hutchinson, a laborer who knew Kelly, came forward on 12 November and described seeing Kelly with a dark-haired man of “quite respectable” appearance, wearing an a coat trimmed with astrakhan and carrying a large gold chain. The precise details of this somewhat unlikely description will be explored in depth below, but for the present it is enough to remark on how evidently varied the alleged “eyewitness” accounts of the possible murderer were. The inquest into Kelly’s death was concluded with unusual rapidity and, while nearly any murder in London for the next several decades could evoke memories of the Whitechapel murders, it was evidently the last of the series.

\textit{Naming “Jack the Ripper”}

In what follows, I will be less interested in specifics of the Whitechapel murders than in the way in which the killings were organized around a culturally constructed image of their possible perpetrator. Historian L. Perry Curtis traces the development of the Ripper phenomenon in the press throughout the autumn of 1888, contextualizing the reporting within the tradition of mid-Victorian murder news, as well as the distinctly literary traditions of the Gothic and “sensation” types of novel. While arguing that “much of the Ripper press coverage was fiction [but] few contemporaries regarded it as such,” Curtis ultimately stresses the novelty of the Whitechapel events and their coverage: “instead of relying on tried and true formulas and familiar scenarios, reporters had to stretch their imaginations and create episodes as well as motives because they

\textsuperscript{8} Odell, \textit{Ripperology}, xxiv.
were just as baffled as police by these [Ripper] attacks.”

Curtis is especially concerned with the way in which the lack of finality in the unsolved Whitechapel murders frustrated the ability of journalists to fully deploy the conventions of Gothic and detective literature; while I concur with him that “instead of a reassuring end to the story, these mutilation murders left gaps into which all kinds of theories, daydreams, and nightmares rushed pell-mell,” I will analyze specific scenarios drawn from the theatrical and performance culture, which Curtis almost completely ignores, to show how these were the source of many of the “daydreams and nightmares,” used in 1888 to make sense of the killings, and also became important to the cultural and dramatic afterlife of the murders. Crucial to this process was the establishment of a particular name around which ideas about the murders could be organized, and the coining of “Jack the Ripper” as that moniker can be traced to a particular letter that functions as an exemplary object for analyzing how a number of murders in and around Whitechapel and Spitalfields, East London, came to function as a cultural myth of virtually universal significance.

During the first weeks of reporting on the murders, newspapers frequently referred to the killer as “the fiend” or “the Whitechapel fiend;” the nickname “Leather Apron” was used to discuss a possible killer until the shoemaker identified with that soubriquet was identified and cleared by police. The so-called “Dear Boss” letter, signed “Yours truly Jack the Ripper dont [sic] mind me giving the trade name,” was mailed with a postmark of 27 September and received

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10 Ibid, 10. Curtis makes brief mention of some of the kinds of performances I will deal with at length here, including Richard Mansfield’s *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Madame Tussaud’s waxworks, and the East End “penny gaff” tradition, but does not explore the theatre as a social form or describe any performances or plays in detail. Curtis over-states the connection between the box-office failure of Mansfield’s season and the Ripper murders and wrongly describes Henry Irving, whose knighthood he anachronistically projects back to 1888, as the producer of Mansfield’s season at the Lyceum (78-9).
on 29 September. It was thus sent following a lull of almost three weeks after the murder of Annie Chapman, and arrived one day before the “double event” when Elizabeth Stride and Catherine Eddowes were killed, at the perfect time for a purported letter from the killer to make headlines and generate frenzied public interest. The snappy signature was a key part of the letter’s appeal, but equally important was its addressee: “The Boss, Central News Office, London City.” Rather than mailing it to the police or one particular newspaper, the author addressed his correspondence to the Central News. Founded in 1870 by journalist and Liberal politician William Saunders this agency was, like its competitors Central Press, National Press, and the still-extant Reuters, a provider of news summaries, racing results, and parliamentary transcripts that were purchased by papers throughout London, the provinces, and the world. With text provided by telegraph, and images and facsimiles sent via mechanically reproduced stereo-sheet, these agencies were able to simultaneously distribute items across a wide spectrum of media outlets with almost no lag-time.\(^\text{11}\) This meant that on the 1\(^{\text{st}}\) of October newspapers from across the London political spectrum, and indeed all around the world, reported on the latest murders in Whitechapel alongside discussion of a letter from “Jack the Ripper,” which was reproduced in its entirety in the \textit{Daily News} and as a stereographic facsimile in the 4 October \textit{Daily Telegraph}.

A few policeman and journalists regarded the “Dear Boss” letter and a subsequent postcard, written in the same hand and signed “Saucy Jack,” as authentic correspondence from a killer. Most police officials and many writers in the late-Victorian era and since have, however, concluded that they were a hoax. George R. Sims, a journalist and playwright who had a lifelong interest in the Whitechapel murders, and whose work as a social reformer and playwright will be

\(^{11}\) In Britain the first major use of wire reporting in foreign affairs was in coverage of the Crimean War; for an account of the various telegraphic news agencies and an analysis of their ownership by various political factions, see Allen J. Lee, \textit{The Origins of the Popular Press in England: 1855-1914} (London: Croom Helm, 1976).
at the heart of Chapters Two and Three of this thesis, was quick to observe what has become the widely accepted theory about the letter. In a piece written on 7 October he explains:

Curious, is it not, that this maniac makes his communication to an agency which serves the entire press? It is an idea which might occur to a Press man perhaps; and even then it would probably only occur to someone connected with the editorial department of a newspaper, someone who knew what the Central News was, and the place it filled in the business of news supply. [...] Everything therefore points to the fact that the jokist is professionally connected with the Press.  

The officials in charge of leading the investigations concurred, and in a memoire written many years after the fact it was claimed that “the police belie[ved] that [the author of the ‘Dear Boss’ letter] was a journalist, and that they had an idea which one.” The veracity of the letters was, though, beside the point: Jack the Ripper was a good name, evoking both the horrific violence of the murders and cultural associations as varied as the characteristic British sailor “Jack Tar,” the eighteenth century highwayman Jack Sheppard, and the mysterious and demonic “Spring Heeled Jack” figure, who breathed fire and leapt over buildings in London folklore. From that point on, a key aspect of the killer’s identity had been settled: Jack the Ripper was to be the proper name with which images, ideological contests, and cultural and creative imaginations related to the murders would be signed.

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14 Curtis, *Jack the Ripper*, 144-145.
Mythology, Monstrosity, and Scenarios of Gendered Violence

Much of my argument will depend on recovering details about theatrical performances that have traditionally been neglected by theatre history, in order to show how they fed into the creation of the variety of possible faces that built up around the name Jack the Ripper. This relies on the tools of documentary history, but I will also use an analytic framework in the tradition of Roland Barthes’ seminal *Mythologies* that additionally incorporates recent ideas drawn from folklore, cultural history, and performance studies. From the moment of their occurrence the Whitechapel murders were subject to the sort of cultural transformation, described by Barthes, that “giv[es] a historical intention a natural justification, and mak[es] contingency appear ‘eternal.’”15 Judith Walkowitz’s *Cities of Dreadful Delight*, one of the rare works to place the Whitechapel murders within the framework of serious cultural history, historicizes the crimes in just this way in arguing that “the Ripper episode […] established a common vocabulary and iconography for the forms of male violence that permeated the whole society, obscuring the different material conditions that provoked sexual antagonism in different classes.”16 My argument will trace the role that the theatrical and entertainment culture of London played in providing this “common vocabulary and iconography;” I will also, through case studies that move between theatres with different social and class affiliations, show how the material conditions and ideological concerns of different strata of late-Victorian society were in fact built into the Ripper myth.

The association between myth and the theatre is as old, in the west, as both cultural forms. The ancient Greek plays that sit at the beginning of both anthologies of drama and theatre

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history textbooks are mythic stories that were given voice and embodied in action before the Athenian public in the fifth century before the common era. The London theatre was, from its own origins as a professional entertainment industry in the Tudor period, frequently concerned with history plays that functioned to shape and transmit a national mythology; later the theatre would also function as a primary channel for the dissemination of information about current events in the form of theatrical narratives. This latter function was superseded by the explosive growth of the periodical press that came in the mid-nineteenth century, with new printing technologies and the repeal of the stamp-duty; J.S. Bratton persuasively suggests that it was during the Crimean War of the 1850s that the popular theatre decisively gave way to the penny newspaper as the primary source from which working class British audiences learned about international news.17 While newspapers took over this informational function, they frequently did so by borrowing the dramaturgical and narrative strategies of the popular theatre in specific ways that I will document with relationship to the Whitechapel murders. Pictorial realism, the dominant aesthetic of late-Victorian theatre and one that could encompass everything from domestic drama to lavish historical pageantry, “satisfied the taste for the recycling of contemporary visual experience from the spectator’s own contact with the diurnal world through stage production back to his [or her] storehouse of material images” in dramas that combined the quotidian world of the urban street with sensational spectacle.18 The theatres of late-Victorian London were primed, both by long history and popular aesthetic predilections of the moment, to provide the vocabulary for sensational murders to be transformed into “mythic speech [which] is

made up of material which has *already* been worked on so as to make it suitable for communication.”

Barthes describes the cultural function of myth as an essentially conservative one. He emphasizes how mythic icons like the image of an African soldier saluting the French Tricolor on the cover of an issue of *Paris Match* magazine work, functioning as a “plenary, intransitive, gestural, theatrical” language by which “the oppressor conserves” the world of social relations, managing problems like colonialism and racial conflict behind an image that is both stirring and evidently “natural.”

This sort of function is clearly visible in recent scholarship on the mythic category of the “monster,” one into which the Jack the Ripper figure obviously falls. Building on the work of the linguists Mark Johnson and George Lakoff, Stephen T. Asma describes monsters as “conceptual metaphors that act like lenses for filtering and organizing our experiences,” a description clearly consonant with Barthes’ idea of the myth.

Jeffrey Jerome Cohen identifies as the cultural work of the monster the prevention of “mobility (intellectual, geographic, or sexual) [and the] delimiting [of] the social spaces through which private bodies may move;” myths like this serve as a “monstrous border patrol.”

This function is detectable in the movement of anxieties about Jack the Ripper across class and geographic lines: wealthy and middle-class women in the West End of London worried about a killer who struck only impoverished women in the East, while the male novelist Compton Mackenzie would later recall how, in his childhood, the sight of “Whitechapel” on the list of destinations for a public conveyance would instill a terror in him that nothing could be done “to save everybody inside

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20 Ibid, 149.
that omnibus from being cut up by the knife of Jack the Ripper.”

In arguably the most influential recent application of Barthes’ ideas to performance studies, Diana Taylor articulates the conceptual category of the “scenario” which she explicitly compares to Barthes’ “myth” “as meaning making paradigms that structure social environments, behaviors, and outcomes” by means of images and plot structures that “bear[…] the weight of accumulative repeats” and in so doing “make[…] visible, yet again, what is already there: the ghosts, the images, the stereo-types.” Taylor acknowledges the possibility for a given scenario to have the oppressive force Barthes assigns to myth, but also insists on the intensely local and potentially contestable nature of the individual articulation of a scenario realized in a particular performative situation:

All scenarios have localized meaning, though many attempt to pass as universally valid. Actions and behaviors arising from the setup might be predictable, a seemingly natural consequence of the assumptions, values, goals, power relations, presumed audience, and epistemic grids established by the setup itself. But they are, ultimately, flexible and open to change.

My analysis will treat the Victorian theatre as the source of scenarios, of discrete units of “setup and action,” that were incorporated by the press and public into the construction of the mythic figure Jack the Ripper. Even if this myth served, on balance, to enforce class and gender borders by “obscuring the different material conditions that provoked sexual antagonism in different classes,” scenarios came from and played out in distinct theatrical cultures across the social and geographic strata of London. In being poached from and adapted to specific audiences, tensions

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23 Quoted in Walkowitz, City of Dreadful Delight, 221.
and contradictions also took up residence inside the myth, keeping it from being unitary in its meaning, and enabling a broad spectrum of later cultural and creative uses to be made of Jack the Ripper. I will look to Taylor’s notion of the scenario as a tool with which to explain how particular stage figures, plots, and modes of acting that already had the status of myth were selected by the press and public for inclusion in discussions of the Whitechapel murders, why they seemed culturally persuasive to nineteenth century readers and audiences, and how they became part of an enduring industry in the re-presentation of the Ripper figure.

**Theatre Audiences, Imagined Communities, and Friends of Friends**

My argument will be composed of four case studies that comprise, when taken together, a “study of the social geography of myths” as called for by Barthes’ in “Myth Today.” These will aim to document the production and transmission of ideologies through the theatrical performance of scenarios, showing the crucial importance of entertainment for the production and circulation of culture in an overlapping set of communities. Relying on Raymond Williams’ description of culture as “‘a whole social order’ within which a specifiable culture, in styles of art and kind of intellectual work, is seen as the direct or indirect product of an order primarily constituted by other social activities,” I will focus entirely on performances created and circulated within London to argue that attendance at a particular theatre, like readership of a given paper or attendance of particular social events, constitutes an “other social activity” forming a community within which shared meanings are generated and transmitted. In one of the few full-length studies of reception in a specifically theatrical context, Susan Bennett describes how a series of frames function around any theatre event and emphasizes how “cultural assumptions affect

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performances, and performances rewrite cultural assumptions” for individual audience members.\textsuperscript{27} As a site for the transmission of myths and other ideologies, the theatre is a two-way street; it is also a key venue for the study of cultural transmission because the audience is physically present, thus “the very public nature of theatre arts stresses the necessity to consider both production and reception as socially and ideologically determined” activities.\textsuperscript{28}

In becoming physically affiliated in order to experience an aesthetic product a theatre audience is, then, both a real community and a kind of literal but temporary embodiment of the “imagined” community described by Benedict Anderson. While he is primarily interested in the nation state, Anderson argues that “all communities larger than the primordial village of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined,” which is to say they are based upon an awareness of collectivity that persists even when other members are not directly visible to each other; this is governed by a shared set of expectations and concepts requiring the beliefs that such communities “to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.”\textsuperscript{29} Crucially, the late-Victorian period was one in which theatrical audiences were also in the process of being re-imagined: Tracy C. Davis notes that by the mid-1880s the perception that it was possible to travel to London on regular rail services to see major stars of the day was having an adverse impact on the receipts of both provincial theatres and touring companies.\textsuperscript{30} At the same time theatres within London were losing their focus on serving the immediate geographical neighborhood with a variety of genres and types of dramatic fare and

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid, 59.
\textsuperscript{30} Tracy C. Davis, \textit{The Economics of the British Stage: 1800-1914} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 339.
shifting toward specializing in a single type of performance, with the effect that “a house not
only became wedded to a particular sub-specialty of repertoire, but the repertoire itself was thus
‘cleansed’ for a particular kind of ‘public.’”\(^{31}\) Theatre was one of many ways in which London
was divided into sub-cultures; readership of particular newspapers was another. In tracing
characteristics of Jack the Ripper as scenarios enacted in particular theatres with distinct class
and other social affiliations, I will argue that the figure that emerged was loaded with contested
meanings even as it became a myth connected with London as a metropolis, and drew Londoners
together through the process by which “fiction seeps quietly and continuously into reality,
creating the remarkable confidence of community in anonymity.”\(^{32}\)

My primary focus, then, will be upon a historical and semiological analysis of specific
performances and performance cultures as they helped to create, consolidate, and circulate the
Jack the Ripper figure. Like Judith Walkowitz, who writes about the Ripper press phenomenon
as one of many “sensational narratives of sexual danger” that circulated in late-Victorian
London, I will attend to practices of urban spectatorship.\(^{33}\) I will also document, in several
instances, person-to-person transmission of stories about the Whitechapel murders as what
folklore scholars call “urban legend” or “contemporary legend,” a genre related to myth and
characterized by “straddling the divide between fact and fiction, partaking of the nature of both”
as stories are transformed and retold as a part of oral culture, often with reference to the friend of
a friend as a source of authenticity.\(^{34}\) In documenting all these registers of transmission, my
study I will rely on play-texts, theatrical reviews, press coverage of juridical events and murders,

\(^{31}\) Ibid, 110.
\(^{32}\) Anderson, \textit{Imagined Communities}, 36.
\(^{33}\) \textit{Walkowitz, City of Dreadful Delight}, 10.
paratheatrical ephemera like playbills and souvenir programs, and first hand-accounts like diaries and letters to explore how Jack the Ripper, a myth still resonant today, was created on the basis of scenarios that exposed and managed anxieties about gender, class, and modernity across the cultural landscape of London. The geographical boundaries of the study will be restricted to London and each case study will be based on one particular theatre or theatrical performance created there within living memory of the Whitechapel murders, though I will occasionally glance toward other places and later dramatizations of the killings on stage and screen.

Chapter One is a case study of Richard Mansfield’s production of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, which was performed in London’s West End at the same time that the Whitechapel murders were going on in the East. This performance was reviewed in the same newspapers that were carrying the first flurry of news on the killings, and “Jekyll and Hyde” quickly became one of the most persuasive and often-discussed ways of understanding the murderer. Mansfield’s acting in a dramatization of Robert Louis Stevenson’s novella offered two crucial ideas for discussions about the Whitechapel murderer in the weeks before he was called Jack the Ripper: an on-stage transformation from Hyde to Jekyll in full view of the audience served as a conceptual model of how the killer might be able to perform acts of horrible butchery and then blend into society; while themes about the promethean over-reach of scientific curiosity by Dr. Jekyll resonated with long-standing cultural anxieties about anatomical medicine that the mutilation of the Whitechapel victims also invoked. Neither of these themes were novel to Mansfield. His dramatic repertoire and the theoretical understanding of acting as the professional exercise of “double consciousness” were shaped by a desire to compete for professional status with Henry Irving, the most prominent actor-manager the day and usual tenant of the Lyceum Theatre that Mansfield rented. The venue itself is important, for through its association with
Irving it functioned as a kind of quasi-national theatre and a “Temple of Art” for the middle-class. While Mansfield was performing in a venue chosen because it was considered emblematic of the link between theatre and professionalism, questions about whether the Whitechapel murders showed evidence of their perpetrator’s possession of professional medical knowledge were being fiercely debated in the press and in the inquests into the murders of Polly Nichols and Annie Chapman. Curiously, it was middle-class professionals themselves, in the form of doctors and the juridical officials overseeing the inquest, who most strongly insisted on discussing the killer’s possession anatomical knowledge; they were, in other words, comparing the killer’s professional credentials to their own. Mansfield’s performance was thus, to an extent not yet fully explored either in theatre history or Ripperology, a key frame for emerging understandings of the Whitechapel murders: it provided the broad outlines of the “scenario” of the mad doctor that came to be one of the thickest threads in the fabric of myth, and performatively showed how this figure might be evading police.

Chapter Two takes up some of the same cultural anxieties about anatomical medicine, but locates them in the radically different class and geographical setting of an illegal penny theatre in the Whitechapel Road. Thomas Barry, the proprietor of this theatre, was summoned to court by his neighbors because of the public disturbances created by the display of “various fat people and dwarfs, and all kinds of monstrosities,” including graphic images of the Whitechapel murder victims, as advertisements for his business. Theatres like Barry’s also showed waxworks figures of the murder victims, alongside the performance of short versions of popular mid-century melodramas like Maria Marten and Sweeney Todd, that showed violent murder and often

36 “A Penny Show,” The Era, 9 February 1889.
thematized it as a form of class exploitation. By investigating the repertoire of this theatre, both the dramas it presented and the other spectacles it offered, a complex picture of how the Whitechapel victims and the figure of Jack the Ripper were seen in the very neighborhood where the crimes took place comes into focus. Such shows cast the murdered women as “freaks” and may have encouraged viewers to identify with the killer in seizing anatomical knowledge that was officially forbidden to members of the working class, but they also showed sexual violence and murder as something done by upper-class men to poor but honest girls of virtue. As shocking as it may be that anyone in the East End wanted to be entertained by Jack the Ripper, the scenarios that were drawn on so that people could be so diverted were full of complex ideological resonances that may even have resisted the kind of conservative forces Barthes assigns to mythification. Such theatres were themselves also part of an intense cultural contest about the East End, which was home to many prosperous merchants as well as site of some of the most degraded rookeries in all of England.

In Chapter Three, I examine London Day By Day, a play by George. R. Sims and Henry Pettitt that premiered at the Adelphi Theatre in September of 1889. This play featured an on-stage murder that was, I will argue, written and staged in such a way as to intentionally evoke the Whitechapel murders. At a time when the London theatrical press was loudly condemning the appearance of Jack the Ripper plays in other countries, London Day By Day became one of the hits of the 1889-90 theatrical season and generated no apparent outrage. Both an analysis of the performance as far as it can be reconstructed and a consideration of Sims’ abiding interest in the Whitechapel murders – through contacts in the police he owned post-mortem photographs of the victims, and told with relish a story about how a coffee-stall keeper who claimed to have met the Ripper on the night of the murders of Elizabeth Stride and Katherine Eddowes identified Sims
himself as the Whitechapel killer\textsuperscript{37} – suggest that the reference to the murder was intentional. Sims and Pettitt “got away with it,” escaping both official censorship and critical outrage, because the play itself was a thoroughly conventional repetition of a very old plot about a villain attempting to arrange a bigamous marriage in order to steal a fortune from a young couple in the labyrinthine modern metropolis. Reading this old plot against George Hutchinson’s detailed “eyewitness” description of Jack the Ripper, and considering the ambivalent balance between a recognizable allusion and a deniable accident of iconography achieved by Sims and Pettitt’s play, shows how thoroughly the Whitechapel murders were \textit{already} understood according to images and scenarios drawn from the melodramatic tradition of theatre and drama.

The final case study in Chapter Four skips forward to 1915, and begins with Horace Annesley Vachell’s play \textit{Who Is He?} A dramatic adaptation of Maria Belloc Lowndes’ novel \textit{The Lodger}, this was the first play to appear on the legally censored London stage that was openly acknowledge to depend on the Whitechapel murders for its plot. It transformed the novel, a thriller about a landlady who comes to realize that her tenant is a serial killer whose murders are the talk of London, into a comedy about a landlady who mistakenly suspects her boarder is the criminal in question. This little-studied play is important in its own right, and also as an intermediary between the literary iteration of the story and its far more famous adaptation into the early Alfred Hitchcock film \textit{The Lodger: A Tale of the London Fog}. All three of these works together and the core of the story they tell are analyzed as an “urban legend,” about a suspicious tenant occupying rented rooms who vanishes as mysteriously as he first arrives, that can be traced back to the time when the Whitechapel murders were occurring. This process of transmission hinges on a dinner party where Belloc Lowndes and the painter Walter Sickert were

\textsuperscript{37} George R. Sim, \textit{My Life: Sixty Years’ Recollections of Bohemian London} (London: Eveleigh Nash, 1917) 141.
both present; documenting the friend of a friend passage of details, along with the transformation of the story and addition of new ideas and images, shows how thoroughly Jack the Ripper was a product of what folklorist Jan Harold Brunvand calls “communal re-creation, […] the process by which each teller of a story re-creates the plot from a partly remembered set of details [and] then unwittingly varies the story” based on both his or her personal aesthetic sensibilities and the new social situation in which it is being retold.  

Each of these case studies will involve looking back, into the long history of particular plots, theatres, or dramaturgical and theatrical forms; each will also look forward to the way in which late-twentieth and twenty-first century fictionalizations of the Ripper murders draw on the objects at the heart of each case study. The focus, however, will be on works produced within London and within living memory of 1888. Bounding my study in this way means that I will trace the intersection of the Whitechapel murders with theatrical forms of entertainment from the time when the killings were committed, through to the appearance of the first feature-length cinematic work made in London that drew on them. Treating Jack the Ripper in much the same way that Linda Williams analyzes various iterations of Uncle Tom’s Cabin in American theatrical, cinematic, and televsual cultures, I will analyze the Ripper myth as what Williams, borrowing a phrase from Henry James, calls a “‘leaping’ fish,” the reworking of a story so compelling and so mobile that it “made itself ‘at home’ in so many places that it was hard to pin down to any particular text or form.”  

Beginning the case studies in specific theatres, and analyzing live performances given on particular dates, grounds the argument in the specific social and cultural geography of London; considering these alongside the mechanically-

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reproduced periodical press and culminating with the analysis of a film shows how such intensely localized phenomena became myths able to “leap” across space and time, making Jack the Ripper a figure drawing on the past, articulating a vision of the present, and slashing its way into the future.
Chapter 1

Seeing Double at the Lyceum: Richard Mansfield, Dr. Jekyll, and Dr. Jack

In the first week of September of 1888, the killer who would receive the name Jack the Ripper at the end of the month was already beginning to become a major phenomenon in the London press. Early in the month, the most widely circulated theory was that the killings were the work of “a sort of ‘high rip’ gang in the [Whitechapel] neighborhood which, ‘blackmailing’ women of the ‘unfortunate’ class, takes vengeance on those who do not find money for them.” 40 The nickname “Leather Apron” was reported for the leader of the theoretical gang, and on 6 September The Star identified the Polish-Jewish shoemaker Jonathan Pizer with this figure; by 10 September Pizer had established his innocence to the satisfaction of the police. 41 The “high rip” idea subsided while another suggestion made at the same time came to prominence. On 1 September, the day after Polly Nichols was killed, it was suggested “that Whitechapel is haunted by a demon of the type of Hyde, who goes about killing for the mere sake of slaughter;” 42 a week later, writing on the same day that Annie Chapman was murdered, W.T. Stead mused that “there certainly seems to be a tolerably realistic impersonification [sic] of Mr. Hyde at large in Whitechapel.” 43 Implicated alongside Hyde was his outwardly respectable alter-ego, and by mid-October one paper suggested that the explanation of the killings “most in favour [with the press was] the Jekyll and Hyde theory, namely, that the murderer is a man living a dual life, one

40 “Another Awful Murder in Whitechapel,” Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper, 2 September 1888.
41 Paul Begg, Jack the Ripper: The Definitive History (Harlow, UK: Pearson, 2005),196. Begg notes that The Star paid Pizer £50 in order to forestall a defamation suit.
42 The Globe, 1 September 1888.
43 “Another Murder – And More to Follow?” Pall Mall Gazette, 8 September 1888.
respective and even religious, and the other lawless and brutal.” This Jekyll and Hyde theory had both a literary and theatrical model: from early August of 1888 until October the only authorized stage adaptation of Robert Louis Stevenson’s 1886 novella *The Strange Tale of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* was being performed by the actor Richard Mansfield at the Lyceum Theatre. As Jekyll and Hyde was being used by the press and public in order to articulate an understanding of seemingly incomprehensible violence in London’s East End, an actor visiting from the United States was performing the same story in the most prestigious theatrical venue in the metropolis’s entertainment center in the West End.

In this chapter, I will explore the connections between Mansfield’s theatrical practice and what I shall call the “Dr. Jack” hypothesis, which used the Jekyll and Hyde idea to speculatively explain what was motivating the Whitechapel killer, and how he was able to evade detection. I will argue that this way of understanding the killings has at its core two distinct but often related “scenarios,” to use Diana Taylor’s term for a pre-existing cultural script that “bears the weight of accumulative repeats.” The first of these is that of the mad doctor or scientist, whose destructive actions exhibit the danger of the quest for knowledge taken to a Promethean extreme. The second is the scenario of the inner other, a darkly violent second self that cannot quite be concealed or kept in check by an outwardly respectable individual. Both of these scenarios came together in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* as performed by Richard Mansfield at the Lyceum, but both also have longer pedigrees as part of Victorian cultural aesthetics. Henry Irving, the first actor to receive a knighthood and the regular lessee of the Lyceum Theatre at which Mansfield performed, built a career acting in dramas that thematized and depicted the inner-other; I will argue that Mansfield’s decision to perform the dual title-role in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* was

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44 *East London Advertiser*, 13 October 1888.
intended to directly rival Irving in this regard. The legacy of the Lyceum as a place where a particular segment of London society came to be entertained and artistically enlightened by Irving was crucial to the reception of Mansfield as an artist, but also to the way in which the Dr. Jack idea drew inspiration from Dr. Jekyll as performed in that theatre.

Crucial to this discussion is an understanding of how the social class and professional status of the Lyceum’s audience and actors overlap with those of the writers and public figures who created and reinforced the Dr. Jack myth. During Irving’s tenancy “the Lyceum was sleekly organized to make an aesthetic and commercial success of every production and an intellectual and social success of the institution of the theatre in general.” Irving’s productions, as well as his self-presentation, were calculated to address an audience that included both society figures and respectable middle-class professionals, and to ensure them that what they saw at his theatre could be “accepted as Art of the highest quality.” Irving’s entire career constituted a bid to make the theatre a socially and culturally acceptable profession akin to law and medicine; doctors and lawyers would also be instrumental in articulating and publicizing the Dr. Jack idea in the public forum of the inquests held over the Whitechapel murder victims. So prevalent was this notion in 1888 that the first book-length study of the murders, written by American Samuel E. Hudson and published in Philadelphia in December of 1888, gave as “facts” of the case that the unknown killer “was remarkably cunning, and that he possessed a thorough anatomical knowledge and had graduated in dissection.” The author of this pioneering work of “Ripperology” makes use of a wide variety of London newspapers as sources, and as Christopher

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Frayling has observed, the Dr. Jekyll idea became the “category [of Ripper speculation that] proved to be most popular both in the press, and among commentators from the reading public at large.”49 Journalists too were making a self-conscious bid for professionalism at the time: while the Whitechapel murders were ongoing there were also discussions about converting the semi-formal National Association of Journalists into an incorporated National Institute.50 In effect the most prevalent hypothesis involved men with ambitions of professional respectability accusing each other – or, in the case of medical professionals who speculated about the Ripper as a mad doctor, themselves – of being both Jekyll and Hyde. Dr. Jack was how many in official London solved the problem of how any individual could, both physically and psychologically, commit the kind of horrific murder-mutilations that were happening in the streets of Whitechapel without being caught in the act or suspected by those closest to him. This solution drew on scenarios that expressed long-standing anxieties about the potential for violence lurking beneath class privilege and anatomical medicine, anxieties that Irving had been dramatizing for his Lyceum audience for several decades before Manfield rented his theatre to present the performance that would function most directly as a cultural intertext for the Ripper murders.

The coincidence of Mansfield’s performance and the Ripper murders usually merits a few lines in historical works about the killings, but none of these closely examine how either the play, or the Lyceum stage on which it was performed, contributed specific ideas and

49 Christopher Frayling, “The House That Jack Built,” in Jack the Ripper: Media, Culture, History, ed. Alexandra Warwick and Martin Harris (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2007), 17. Frayling’s assertion is based on a survey of reporting in the Pall Mall Gazette, which digested reports from other London papers, as well as the letters to the editor of The Times and those held in Police and Home Office archives that were written to the authorities. He notes that those with the literacy and self-regard to write to police and the papers were overwhelmingly from the upper registers of society, “mainly […] members of professions, elderly clerics and trigger-happy representatives of the armed forces” (13).

iconographic possibilities to the cultural and intellectual climate in which seven murders in the East End of London became the media phenomenon “Jack the Ripper.” In their publication of the script written for Mansfield by Thomas Russell Sullivan under the abbreviated title *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Alex Chisholm and Martin Danahay reproduce newspaper reports and primary documents related to the murders while offering little of the analysis proper to theatre or cultural history. Danahay has recently published an article discussing Mansfield’s on-stage transformation from Hyde to Jekyll, and especially the well-known double-exposure photograph made of it during the 1880s; his primary argument is that this transformation and the photograph depicting Mansfield in both roles (Figure 1.1) “should be read as a piece of quick change artistry […] aligning him with chapeaugraphy and shadowgraphy acts and escape artists like Houdini” rather than as a precursor to the sort of special effects scene in the early cinema of a figure like Meliès.51 While I will accept many of his conclusions in my own description of Mansfield’s transformation, my primary concern will be to establish how that transformation related to pre-existing scenarios of the mad-doctor and the double-self in ways that allowed the production to serve as a point of contact between these ideas and the Ripper phenomenon for members of the respectable professional classes, who made up much of the Lyceum audience and led the juridical and journalistic discussions of the Whitechapel murders and their possible perpetrator.

With this in mind, I will begin by placing the circumstances that brought Mansfield to London during the 1888 “autumn of terror” into the historical context of his particular place in the world of late-Victorian theatrical acting. This will first require an examination Henry Irving’s history at the Lyceum, Mansfield’s ambitions to be considered “the premier international actor”

of his time, and one important set of theories about acting as the controlled expression of “double consciousness.” Mansfield’s choice of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde as his signature performance was, I shall argue, consciously made in a direct effort to both imitate and outdo Irving. Following this, I will analyze the thematic treatment of medical and scientific knowledge in Mansfield’s season of dramas, including both Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde and the play A Parisian Romance, which concluded with his performance of a death by apoplexy, alongside press reporting on the inquests into the deaths of the Ripper victims. By way of conclusion I will look briefly at the most popular and influential dramatizations of the Ripper murders in recent years, those inspired by Stephen Knight’s 1976 book Jack the Ripper: The Final Solution. This “true crime” book and the many film dramas based on it name Sir William Withey Gull, or a fictional version of him, as the perpetrator of the Ripper murders as part of a grand Masonic conspiracy; while this identification is almost certainly factually inaccurate with regards to the Whitechapel murders, it is clearly an instance of Dr. Jack speculation drawing on Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde and the legacy of double-acts performed by another knight and mason, Sir Henry Irving.

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Figure 1.1

*Dr. Jekyll, Double Consciousness, and Irving’s Lyceum Repertoire*

Mansfield first performed *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* in a U.S. tour of 1887-8, and a script was first commissioned from the playwright T.R. Sullivan some time in the first half of 1886. Though a lifelong British citizen who had first acted professionally in England, Mansfield’s first successes on stage were in New York and Boston, and later in his career he would become a fierce and outspoken partisan of the American theatre. In the years before his 1888 visit to London,

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53 Katherine Linehan, “Two Unpublished Letters From Robert Louis Stevenson to Thomas Russell Sullivan,” *Notes and Queries* September 2003: 321. A letter from Stevenson to Sullivan granting permission for the dramatization is dated 18 June 1886, so the project had obviously been initiated by that date.

54 For a further account of this see Justin A. Blum, “The Lyceum Theatre and Its Double: Richard Mansfield’s Visit to the Greenwich Meridian of Late-Victorian Theatre,” *Nineteenth Century Theatre and Film* 42.2 (Winter 2015), forthcoming. In that context I analyze some of the same issues presented in the present chapter to conclude that the financial and personal failure of Mansfield’s season in London was integral to his decision to become “American” in his public...
though, Mansfield’s primary professional objective was to succeed in that city and “preferably at the Lyceum,” and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* was the drama he believed would allow him to accomplish this. In an interview given to the press to publicize the opening of the play at Madison Square Garden in New York, Mansfield describes how:

> Stevenson has given a very brilliant idea for the portrayal of a character which, as Edwin Booth said to me at the Tavern Club’s rooms in Boston, will be absolutely new to the stage. We have had our ‘Lyons Mail’ and our ‘Corsican Brothers’; we have had innumerable dualities before and since the days of Garrick, but in every case either the play has depended upon the resemblance of two persons, or the actor has simply shown his power to play two parts. In the former case all sorts of mechanical claptrap has been necessary; and in the latter there has always been ample time for change of costume, makeup and facial expression […] In this case, the novelty exists in the fact that the characters are as wide apart as the poles, and yet one merges into the other in the presence of the audience. The actor must rely wholly on his art to impress the audience with the fact that the demon is changed into the man.  

An analysis of this extended explanation suggests why the Lyceum was so important to Mansfield as a venue, and also why this drama struck him as an ideal one to perform there.

Mansfield dramatizes the decision to adapt *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* as an encounter with Booth, the pre-eminent actor of the American stage for decades prior to 1887, but one who was definitely in the twilight of a career that would end in 1891. The setting for this encounter, the Tavern Club, was a private social institution created in 1884 by what the

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56 *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 12 September 1887.
Club’s current website describes as a group of wealthy young men “seeking a lively alternative to Clubs in Boston at the time.” In short, Mansfield characterizes himself as the sort of “distinguished public figure, […] a celebrity by appearance, publicity, media exposure, and hobnobbing with other celebrities” for which Henry Irving was the absolute model, even if the recently founded Tavern was less venerable an institution than the Garrick Club to which Irving belonged, alongside the notable figures of London arts and letters. A further comparison to Irving is implied in the titles of plays mentioned: both *The Corsican Brothers* and *The Lyons Mail* were mid-nineteenth century melodramas of double identity that were identified with Charles Kean – at one time arguably the most famous living actor in his own right – that became “two of [the] most popular vehicles” identified with Irving during long tenure at the Lyceum. *The Lyons Mail*, in which he played the dual roles of the upright bourgeois Joseph Lesurque and the debauched criminal Dubosc, for whom Lesurque is mistaken and in whose stead he is nearly executed, was included in Irving’s repertoire during a tour of North America that was ongoing at the time Mansfield made these remarks. The two actors performed in Boston at the same time in January of 1888; it was during this period that the preliminary arrangements for Mansfield’s rental of the Lyceum were made. This was facilitated by their mutual friend and biographer William Winter, and the extent to which Mansfield regarded his relationship to Irving as one of competition is suggested in a letter to Winter confessing that “altho’ rejoiced to think I shall meet Irving—as an opponent I don’t care to face him, and he comes to Boston on my second week!”

For Mansfield, Irving was both a paradigm to be emulated and a rival to be bested. It was

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59 Ibid, 158.
60 Winter, *Life and Art*, 79.
the novelty of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* in comparison to Irving’s performance in older dramas like *The Lyons Mail* that would allow him to do this. While Irving’s double role allowed him to create “contrasting portraits of nobility and depravity in identical looking characters,” the drama is so constructed that in performing it Irving was always able to exit the stage completely, and effect the change of costume and demeanor necessary to create these portraits out of view of the audience.\(^{61}\) By contrast, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* offered Mansfield the opportunity to create two characters who are radically different in appearance, in spite of physically being the same man; and in the dramatization and staging of the scene in which Hyde’s transformation into Jekyll is witnessed by the doctor’s medical colleague Dr. Lanyon, he would make the transition between them without the benefit of “ample time for change of costume, makeup, and facial expression.” Doing this in full view of the audience would also serve to show that Mansfield was not using a second actor as a body double, another technique that Irving frequently utilized. While this was done in both *The Lyons Mail* and *The Corsican Brothers*, in which it enabled Irving to appear to have a sword fight with himself, the most famous instance of this technique appeared alongside the use of other stage technologies that might be included in Mansfield’s “mechanical claptrap” in Irving’s most famous play with a double theme: *The Bells*.

In this play Irving played the role of Mathias, a well-respected Alsatian burgomaster whose fortune was made when he robbed and murdered a Polish-Jewish merchant during a Christmas Eve blizzard. The plot is exceptionally simple by the standards of Victorian melodrama: having managed to successfully conceal his crime from his neighbors and family for fifteen years, Mathias is unnerved when the anniversary of the murder brings a snow storm similar to the one in which he committed the deed. Disturbed by the combination of a show he

\(^{61}\) Richards, *Sir Henry Irving*, 160.
has recently seen, in which a mesmerist forced audience members to reveal their innermost thoughts, together with the townsfolk’s gossip about the village’s unsolved mystery, he begins to hear the sound of the bells that adorned the merchant’s horse and sees a vision of himself committing the murder. A few days later, as he is preparing the dowry for a wedding he has arranged between his daughter and the quartermaster of the local gendarmerie, Mathias finds a single piece of gold left from the Jew’s purse; that night he retires and dreams that he is on trial for the murder and robbery. When the judges order a mesmerist to extract the truth from him, Mathias relates the full story of murdering the Jewish merchant and disposing of his body in a lime kiln; convicted and sentenced to hang by the imagined court, Mathias awakes and is discovered by his wife and neighbors in the last throes of a fit that ends in his actual death, leaving his dark secret forever undiscovered.

The two iconic scenic moments in the Lyceum staging of this play were the dream trial and the vision of the Jew’s murder. Both of these are scripted as physical embodiments of Mathias’ memory and mental anxiety over his evil deed and the possibility that it will be detected. Each was conducted behind the main body of the set, which was an apparently realistic bourgeois domestic interior, by drawing away the rear set of flats on which the scene was painted to reveal a scrim that could be rendered transparent with differential lighting. Each relied on the use of a second performer to double Irving: in the vision of the murder he appeared “dressed in a brown blouse and hood over his head, carrying an axe” and about to strike the Jew (Figure 1.2), while just before the trial scene Irving as Mathias retired to an alcove from which a hand, presumably that of the double, extended to extinguish the candle while Irving made his way to where the upstage court could be rapidly revealed. These two visual coups-de-théâtre, and

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Irving’s performance in them, were key to establishing *The Bells* as an overnight success that became one of the most critically and commercially successful pieces to appear on the nineteenth-century London stage: it ran for 151 consecutive nights when it opened at the Lyceum in November of 1871, and continued to be a part of Irving’s repertoire both at that theatre and on tour. By Jeffrey Richards’ estimation Irving “performed it 800 times all over both Britain and America, essaying the role for the last time in the week of his death in 1905.”

Figure 1.2

The first vision, of Mathias about to strike down the Jew in the snow, is especially crucial for an understanding of Irving’s success in the role and the success of the play over this long duration. This scene was added by Leopold Lewis in his translation and adaptation of Erckmann-Chatrian’s *Le Juif Polonais*, replacing one in which a second Jewish merchant who very much

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63 Richards, *Sir Henry Irving*, 402.
resembles the murdered one enters Mathias’ inn on the fifteenth anniversary of the killing. In his opening night review of the play, Clement Scott describes this as a dramaturgical calculation of “ill effect, [in that] it tells the listeners unhesitatingly that Mathias is a murderer,” though he admits that “the illusion is admirably contrived, and most effective” as staged by Irving. Scott’s observation that this change removes any sense of suspense or tension over Mathias’ guilt that may have featured in the original French version of the play is correct, but this suggests that the theatrical pleasure of the play in performance relied not upon the suspense of the whodunit type, but rather on Irving’s portrayal of Mathias as a man “at once in two worlds, between which there is no link – an outer world that is ever smiling, an inner world which is a purgatory.” The plot is a pretext for the virtuosic performance of the character’s double nature, which actually requires that the audience know “unhesitatingly that Mathias is a murderer;” the vividly pictorial revelation of this is not a defect of dramatic structure but a theatrical necessity. For an actor like Mansfield seeking to establish his preeminence in London, The Bells and its scenes of doubling stood as the example of a star-making turn. By boasting that his own Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde featured a novel depiction of the theatrical double, one that was accomplished without off-stage preparation or “mechanical claptrap” like scrims and vanishing walls, Mansfield was claiming that he could perform the sort of signature role that Irving’s audience of “the ‘respectable’ classes […] accepted as Art of the highest quality;” moreover he would do so instantaneously, and in full view of the public.

Thematically, Irving’s double act in The Bells served to suggests that an evil deed like

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66 Meisel, Realizations, 404.
murder might underpin the wealth of an apparently upright person like Mathias. It also contained, though, the promise of personal torment and supernatural justice for the wrongdoer: though Mathias had saved himself from financial ruin and established his fortune through the opportunistic murder of the Polish Jew, fifteen years later a combination of the weather and his neighbors’ gossip drives him to torment and eventual death by being strangled by an imagined rope. Irving could also, though, play this theme for laughs: in the first half of 1888, the same calendar year that Mansfield came to London but one theatrical “season” earlier, Irving revived Charles Selby’s English-language version of the play *Robert Macaire*. This play, which was first performed at the Lyceum in 1835 by the French actor Frédérick Lemaître, is a kind of comedic inversion of *The Bells* theme of the inner double. Macaire is a rogue and murderer disguised as the respectable Monsieur Redmond; the play dramatizes the efforts that he and his accomplice Jacques Strop make to conceal their identities, and ends when they are tracked to an inn by gendarmes and shot while trying to escape. The play concludes with Macaire dramatically admitting his true identity and nobly confessing, with his last breath, to his own guilt in a murder for which an innocent woman is being held.

Macaire was originally created as the conventional villain of a conventional sentimental melodrama called *L’Auberge des Adrets*, but Lemaître imposed his own charismatic conception of the character as a “gay, cynical rascal, quipping as he killed” and the character’s popularity quickly overtook that of the play. On stage and in print Macaire, known for his shabby-genteel appearance, became one of the icons of Second-Empire France. The notion that anyone you meet in the modern city could be a rogue in disguise, but also that the rogue might be a charismatic personality in spite of his dangerous secret, was approved by no less socially-elevated a critic than Queen Victoria, who wrote in her diary after seeing Lemaître play Macaire in 1845 that he
was “quite admirable, acting beautifully and inimitably, as a swindler, thief, and even murderer.”\textsuperscript{67} Irving’s performance in the drama in 1888 was not considered one of his great triumphs: one critic was particularly disturbed by the incongruity between the comedic tone of the criminal misadventures depicted by the play and the bloody realism with which Macaire’s death was staged. It nevertheless serves as a reminder of just how pervasive depictions of evidently respectable characters with murderous secrets was in the Victorian theatre, as well as how closely such roles were associated with the rise to prominence of major actors of the period. The costume Irving wore as Macaire was modeled on that long associated with the character and worn by Lemaître (Figure 1.3); perhaps completely coincidentally, the same “shabby genteel” appearance fit the description offered by the witness Elizabeth Long in describing the man she had seen with Annie Chapman on the night of her murder.\textsuperscript{68}

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\textsuperscript{67} Qted in Robert Baldick, \textit{The Life and Times of Frédérick Lemaître} (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1959), 194.
\textsuperscript{68} Philip Sugden, \textit{The Complete History of Jack the Ripper} (New York: Carroll and Graff, 2002), 96. Long testified about this man at the inquest, and described him as “foreign,” although she provided no details about how she reached that conclusion.
\end{flushleft}
The depiction of doubles, whether comical or serious, and whether in the form of a single character concealing a dark inner self or two characters who are doppelgangers of one another, was a long-standing and much-utilized thematic and plot device in Victorian and late-Victorian literature that took on a particular resonance when utilized in drama and performed on the stage. Dramas of the double mirrored the prevailing theoretical conclusions reached in discussions of nineteenth-century acting, and especially in debates about whether or not an actor could or should personally experience any of the emotions attributed to a character in the moment of performance. This question, most influentially articulated early in the century with the posthumous publication of Diderot’s *Paradoxe sur le comédien*, was resolved by London critics of the late-Victorian era in the notion of “double consciousness.” Drawing on the mid-Victorian work of G.H. Lewes, whom he “credited […] with the introduction of the word *psychology* into the vocabulary of dramatic criticism,”^69^ William Archer utilizes the idea of double consciousness to describe the existence of “two or more strata, or lines of thought, which […] co-exist in [the] mind while acting.” Through careful training these strata would allow for acting in which a compelling performance is possible because “one part of [the actor’s] mind is given up to [the] character, while another part is criticizing minutely [his or her] own gestures and intonations, and a third, perhaps, is watching the audience, or is busied with some pleasant or unpleasant recollection from [the actor’s] private life.”^70^ Though Archer insists on emphasizing points of difference between his own argument and Diderot’s, which he characterizes as the source of “much false logic and paradox-mongering,”^71^ Joseph Roach argues that ultimately “Archer’s

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^71^ Ibid, 4.
attempt to refute the *Paradoxe* ends with his appropriation in the name of Victorian science of most of its contents, and especially the idea of double consciousness.”72 From Diderot, through Lewes to Archer, the notion that a skilled performer could maintain consciousness over and rationally calculate the elements of his or her acting was absolutely essential to Victorian performance theory; while Irving’s own writings and speeches about the art of acting do not add up to anything like a comprehensive theory of acting the phrase occurs throughout them as well.73

Dramas based on the scenario of the double, particularly those like *The Bells* or *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, in which the double-self is located within a character, thus give the opportunity for a kind of meta-performance in which character and actor face up to similar challenges. Mathias is able to present a face of complete innocence to all those around him for fifteen years, despite being tormented by anxiety over his secret, and John Oxenford’s opening night review in *The Times* singles out for special praise the way in “which Mr. Irving accurately represents [Mathias’] frequent transitions from a display of the domestic affections to the fearful work of self-communion.”74 Likewise Dr. Jekyll spends the first scene of Sullivan’s script, an encounter between the doctor and Agnes Carew, a love interest invented for the purposes of the dramatization, trying to convince her that they must part while concealing from her and her father, who he will shortly murder in the person of Hyde, that he is “doomed to eternal wretchedness, the possessor of a secret [he] dare not even utter.”75 The characters in these

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dramas founder, exhausted by the effort and calculation necessary to perform the respectable self that hides their murderous inner other, and ultimately die of the strain. In a compelling performance as one of these characters the actor, by contrast, succeeds in calculating and calibrating voice and body to delineate a variety of apparent selves, and the alternation between them, in a way that could astonish the audience with its apparent effortlessness. In other words, each character’s failure as a practitioner of double consciousness highlighted the successful exercise by the performing actor of what was understood to be the theoretical underpinning of acting at the highest professional level.

In the context of cultural speculation over the Whitechapel murders it was *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, a drama on the theme of the inner double, that provided one especially pervasive way of describing who the killer might be. The theory of double consciousness, which explained how an actor could remain in complete control while performing in such a drama, offers a means of explaining “the coolness, deliberation, cunning, professional knowledge displayed, the skill in destroying every clue and [...] success in eluding the police [...] of England, [that] stamps the author of the assassins [sic] as a man confessedly of intelligence of more than common order.”

Committing such murders would require the skillful work of self-presentation in a variety of contexts. The killer would have to present a harmless face to his victims, ensuring that “there was nothing in his appearance to make a woman distrust him, as the Berner Street and Mitre Square tragedies occurred after the Chapman horror had put every abandoned woman in London on her guard.” He would have to go about his daily life and, like Mathias, give no hint to anyone around him of the dark secret he carried. For W.T. Stead, one of the foremost voices

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Alex Chisholm (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2005), 53.
77 Ibid., 11.
arguing in September and October of 1888 that the killer should be sought among the ranks of the privileged, and especially those of the medical profession, the ability of the killer to do “his bloody work […] with the lust it is true of the savage, but with the skill of a savant point[ed] rather to Mr. Hyde than to a wandering lunatic.” Elements of the crimes recalling anatomical medicine were presumed to point to medical professionals as suspects, an idea that will be explored in more detail below, but they also implicated the exercise of control over appearances through double-consciousness that was the actor’s professional province, in the same way that anatomical dissection was that of the doctor.

At least one member of the London public made a direct connection between Richard Mansfield’s performance on stage and the murders. A letter sent to the Metropolitan Police dated 5 October, by a writer who identified him- or herself only as “M.P.,” describes its writer as someone who had seen Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde in person and “felt at once that [Mansfield] is the Man Wanted” for the murders. The letter notes the coincidence of the fact that Mansfield’s residence at the Lyceum began the same week as the murder of Martha Tabram, who was widely believed at the time to be a victim of the Whitechapel killer. Its allegation hinges, though, on Mansfield’s ability to successfully and calculatedly create a state of horrible rage and then transform out of it: as M.P. puts it, given “the driftful manor [sic] [in which] he works himself up in his part, it might be posable [sic] to work himself up so that he would do it in reality, […] and I do not think there is a man living so well able to disguise [sic] himself as he does in front of the public [or] so well baffle police.” Mansfield’s ability to calculatedly perform a transition from

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78 Pall Mall Gazette, 14 September 1888.
vicious blood-fiend to noble doctor in front of an audience of attentive spectators testified to the possibility that he might be capable of doing the same thing in the streets of Whitechapel. The police evidently did not take this accusation seriously, and no writer in the mainstream press ever made a similar suggestion that the actor was in fact the killer. The critical discussion of Mansfield’s on stage transformation did, however, publicize the Jekyll and Hyde scenario that became a key way the Whitechapel murders were discussed, and I will shortly turn to an analysis of the terms in which this transformation was previewed and reviewed in the London press. Before that, though, I will focus on the intertwining of the scenario of the internal other with that of the mad doctor and the dangers of anatomical medicine.

**Dr. Jekyll, Dr. Jack, and Dr. Phillips: Promethean Science and the Medical Murderer**

If the skillful application of double consciousness could offer an explanation of _how_ the Whitechapel killer managed to carry out his crimes while convincing his victims he was not dangerous and evading detection, it left unanswered the question of _why_ the murders should be committed in the first place. Dr. Jekyll provided imaginative grounds upon which to consider this question, as well. The theme of scientific inquiry taken to an unwholesome extreme, with the anatomical knowledge necessary for the preservation of life through modern medicine threatening to unbalance those who seek to possess it at all costs, is reflected in _Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde_, and came to be a major part of how the Whitechapel murders were discussed in the official inquests that were carried out over the bodies of the killer’s victims. These were public spectacles in their own right: when the coroner Wynne E. Baxter began the inquest into Polly Nichols’ death at the Working Lads’ Institute on 10 September 1888, “a considerable number gathered round outside the building in which the Coroner was to hold his court, and the premises
in which the mortuary is situated were […] thronged round at both entrances by people eager to see anything that might transpire. “There was anxiety about the potential for the crowds to become disordered and interrupt proceedings, as the “large attendance of the general public in court and in the precincts of the institute” meant that during this and all subsequent inquests it was necessary that “the approaches thereto were guarded by a large number of constables.” It was nevertheless considered possible that the public spectacle would have a beneficial social effect, with “the thorough threshing out of known facts from the alarmist fiction and vague rumours […] probably exert[ing] a quieting influence” over the crowd. The press would also render these quasi-theatrical proceedings as a form of dramatic literature as newspapers, especially The Times and the Daily Mail, summarized the inquests in detail and attempted to present the words of the coroner and the witnesses as directly as possible. The drama that unfolded was one in which a legal proceeding saw a juridical official and medical men publicly discussing the possibility that a professional man just like them might be responsible for the crimes they were considering, effectively acting as Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde in Whitechapel.

Robert Louis Stevenson’s The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde is but one of many examples of Victorian literature to explore the Promethean dangers of scientific inquiry even, and perhaps especially, when it is conducted with apparently noble aims. In the section of the novella that is written in the first person as Dr. Jekyll, Stevenson emphasizes that the experiments that unleashed Dr. Hyde were conducted in reaction to the realization “that man is

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82 The Times’ summaries are arguably the most comprehensive, while those in the Daily Mail are frequently print the transcripts of the proceedings with dialogue headings and set speeches that resemble playscripts.
not truly one, but truly two," composed of a purely good and purely evil self.\textsuperscript{83} His effort to separate them by means of a drug is an attempt to liberate the two from each other:

If each, I told myself, could but be bound in separate identities, life would be relieved of all that was unbearable; the unjust delivered from the aspirations might go his way, and remorse of his more upright twin; and the just could walk steadfastly and securely on his upward path, doing the good things in which he found pleasure, and no longer exposed to disgrace and penitence by the hands of this extraneous evil.\textsuperscript{84}

In the end these two entities are not, of course, completely separable because they still share a single physical body; the unintended consequence is that the evil Hyde becomes the usual physical manifestation of the pair, and it is only by taking the drug he has formulated that Dr. Jekyll can regain his “upright” self. Though Jekyll’s scientific research is described in the prose version as “being rather chemical than anatomical,” it is through the “laboratory or dissecting-rooms” in his London residence, which had previously belonged to “a celebrated surgeon,” that Hyde typically enters and leaves, strongly connecting Hyde to the work of anatomy and the conduct of autopsies.\textsuperscript{85}

The stage version of the story scripted by T.R. Sullivan for Mansfield gives Dr. Jekyll a hands-on medical practice as a surgeon in his own right, to go with his chemical experimentation. Agnes Carew, the love-interest invented for the dramatization, recalls for him how they fell in love as he “watched by [her] poor old nurse who was dying […] night and day, with all that human skill could do, with more than human patience and devotion.”\textsuperscript{86}

\textsuperscript{83} Robert Louis Stevenson. The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1886). (Project Gutenberg, 1992), EPUB edition, 83.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., 84.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 35.
\textsuperscript{86} Sullivan, Dr. Jekyll, 54.
that medical applications of “human skill” are founded on the anatomical dissection of cadavers, as well as the controlled expression of violence in the form of interventions like surgery and blood-letting, underlies Jekyll’s almost comically understated reply: “yes, it was a strange courtship.”

Jekyll then excuses himself from the presence of Agnes and her father, the old soldier Sir Danvers Carew, by claiming to be called away to a patient in urgent distress, before returning in the form of Hyde to murder Sir Danvers. While Sullivan’s scripting essentially uses Jekyll’s patients as plot devices – the “old nurse” dies conveniently and sentimentally so that her doctor and her charge can unite over her deathbed, and a patient is Jekyll’s excuse to leave the presence of his fiancé before he transforms into Hyde – it also meant that the iteration of Dr. Jekyll on stage at the time of the Whitechapel murders and their inquests was portrayed as a direct medical practitioner in a way that the same character is not in Stevenson’s novella.

Wynn Baxter, the coroner who presided over most of the Whitechapel murder inquests, was a solicitor by trade. He was not, however, without his own scientific or indeed medical knowledge: Baxter was an enthusiastic Governor of the London Hospital as well as a member of both the Geological Society of London and the Royal Microscopical Society; he would later translate monographs by the Belgian Botanist Dr. Henri van Heurck into English. In late September of 1888, as he alternated between conducting the inquest into Polly Nichols’ death on 87 Ibid., 55
88 Baxter was the chief coroner for the County of Middlesex Eastern District, and conducted the inquiries into the deaths of Polly Nichols, Annie Chapman, and Elizabeth Stride, as well as those into the deaths of Martha Tabram in August 1888 and Emma Elizabeth Smith in April 1889 which are not generally considered Ripper murders. In the case of Catherine Eddowes, who was killed in Mitre Square within the City of London, a City coroner named Crawford presided. The body of Mary Jane Kelly was, improperly as it turns out, taken to the mortuary of North East District of Middlesex and the inquest was conducted by Dr. Roderick Macdonald, over Baxter’s objections. For this dispute see Begg, Definitive History, 246.
89 These were The Microscope: Its Construction and Management (London: Crosby, Lockwood, and Son, 1893) and A Treatise on the Diatomaceae (London: W. Wesley, 1896).
31 August and that into Annie Chapman’s 8 September murder before two separate coroner’s juries, he became the official voice of public speculation about whether or not anatomical knowledge would have been required in the commission of the Whitechapel murders. His questioning of the medical professionals who were involved in the case, as well as his own direct statements to the jury, were printed in the papers and were responded to in both the mainstream press and in specialist medical publications. By the time he closed the Chapman inquest on 26 September with unequivocal statements of his own belief that the killer of both Nichols and Chapman must have been possessed of advanced anatomical knowledge, the Dr. Jack idea had been clearly formulated and widely disseminated with his official backing.

Dr. Rees Ralph Llewellyn was a doctor in private practice, with a surgery at 152 Whitechapel Road; he was summoned to the scene of Polly Nichols murder in Bucks Row before the responding constables were aware that she was beyond the reach of medical help. He performed the postmortem examination of her body on 1 September and testified as the medical expert before the inquest into her death. Dr. George Bagster Phillips, Police Surgeon for the H Division of the Metropolitan Police who had jurisdiction over the area where most of the Whitechapel murders were committed, performed the autopsy on Chapman and was the medical expert called at the inquest into her murder; he was also in attendance at the post-mortem examinations of all the subsequent Ripper victims. Of the two women murdered in September, Nichols’ body had been subject to far less mutilation than that of Chapman, and in his testimony Llewellyn was equivocal about the incisions that had been made in her throat and abdomen, noting only that they had been “fairly skillfully performed.”90 After Chapman’s death, when it became known that her uterus had been removed by her killer, Llewellyn performed a second

90 Quoted in Frayling, “House That Jack Built,” 17.
examination upon Nichols and was “recalled [before the coroner’s jury and] said that he had been to the mortuary and again examined [Polly Nichols’ body] and no part of the viscera was missing.”

Dr. Phillips’ testimony in the Chapman inquest was much more engaged with the question of the killer’s anatomical knowledge, leading to tensions between himself and Baxter. In his initial testimony Phillips flatly refused to provide any details of the mutilations that had been inflicted on Annie Chapman, but was willing to allude to the theft of organs and give a relatively extended discursus on the knife that was used to commit them:

He should say that the injuries could not have been inflicted by a bayonet or sword bayonet. They could have been done by such an instrument as a medical man used for post-mortem purposes, but the ordinary surgical case might not contain such an instrument. Those used by slaughter-men, well ground down, might have caused them. He thought the knives used by those in the leather trade would not be long enough in the blade. There were indications of anatomical knowledge, which were only less indicated in consequence of haste. The whole of the body was not present, the absent portions being from the abdomen. The mode in which these portions was [sic] extracted showed some anatomical knowledge. Despite his hesitancy to be more detailed in open court, Phillips testimony offered plenty of fuel for anyone wanting to use the killer’s actions to speculate about his possible identity. By disqualifying a soldier’s bayonet, which he himself had concluded in an inquest also run by Baxter was used to murder Martha Tabram, he was excluding her case from the tally of what would soon be called the Jack the Ripper murders. In ruling out the leather worker’s knife he

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publicly reiterated that Jonathan Pizer, alias “Leather Apron,” was no longer considered by police to be a viable suspect. Most strikingly, though, he named precisely the sort of knife that he himself had used in committing the autopsy as a candidate for the murder weapon. While equivocating on whether the ordinary surgeon’s case would contain such a knife, and speculating that a slaughtering knife might also have been used if rendered more than usually sharp, Dr. Phillips initial testimony publicly foreclosed two of the most popular theories about the killer and put forward the notion that one of his own professional tools could have been the murder weapon.

When the Chapman inquest resumed the following week, Dr. Phillips balked at Baxter’s insistence that he discuss in detail the mutilations inflicted upon the murdered woman and name the organ that had been removed in open court. Since the coroner’s jury was only required to establish the time, place, and cause of death, and to decide whether that cause was natural, self-inflicted, or a case of willful violence by some other person, Phillips was entirely within reason to assert that his testimony to that point was more than enough to establish that Chapman’s injuries had been neither accidentally- nor self-inflicted. Baxter insisted that the jury had a “right to hear all particulars, and Phillips relented, agreeing only once “the court [had] been cleared of all women and boys […] to give medical and surgical evidence” in the detail that Baxter wanted. 93 Male reporters were allowed to remain in the jury room, though the summaries that most papers published were less detailed than the rest of the inquest coverage. One provincial paper summarizes how “Dr. Phillips gave additional evidence in detail, indicating that several vital portions of the body had been cut out, and said his idea was that the object of the mutilation was to obtain possession of the womb […] and] that there were also other indications that the

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murderer had made certain calculations consequent upon the possession of anatomical knowledge,” a knowledge which he explicitly compared to his own. Under questioning from Baxter, Phillips speculatively imagined committing the murder himself and asserted that he “could not have performed all the injuries, even without a struggle being made, [in] under a quarter of an hour. If he had done it in a deliberate way, such as would fall to the duty of a surgeon, it would probably have taken him the best part of an hour.”94 Since the inquest also heard that Chapman had been seen alive at 5:30AM and discovered dead “a little after six,” it was being suggested that the killer had managed to lure her into the yard at 29 Hanbury Street, kill her, perform a procedure that an experienced surgeon would require fifteen minutes to an hour to perform, and escape completely, all in half an hour.95 The Times, which ran the most detailed inquest coverage of any paper, declared “totally unfit for publication […] the details of the deliberate, successful, and apparently scientific manner in which the poor woman had been mutilated,” refraining from naming the organs taken and simply summarizing Phillips’ opinion that “the mode in which the knife had been used seemed to indicate great anatomical knowledge.”96 This knowledge was “apparently scientific” and, moreover, the killer’s surgical skill was explicitly comparable to that of a respected police surgeon.

In refusing to give this testimony in the presence of “women and boys,” Dr. Phillips was also declaring the knowledge and skills he possessed obscene in a way that tapped into longstanding disputes about the public presentation of anatomical knowledge. Only a few decades prior to the Ripper murders, doctors in London had joined with groups like “the Society

95 For the difficulty of pinning down an exact timeline for this murder, see Sugden, Complete History, 96-98. Most crucial for the present analysis is the timeline Dr. Phillips believed, and what it led him to conclude about the killer’s surgical skill.
96 The Whitechapel Murder,” The Times, 20 September 1888.
for the Suppression of Vice, an evangelical Protestant group that prosecuted pornographers,” to prosecute the operators of public anatomical museums that dispensed patent medicines and treatises about disease – usually venereal disease – to a mixed- but mostly working-class public. This social reform campaign reached its zenith in 1873, but the ideological effects of its redefinition of certain categories of anatomical knowledge as potentially obscene continued to be felt in the late-Victorian period. In the next chapter will have more to say about how such definitions resonated in cultural contests about poverty and entertainment in the East End; for the present discussion the crucial point is that for doctors themselves this represented a bid for professional respectability. A.W. Bates notes that by the 1870s the acquisition of anatomical knowledge through the dissection of cadavers, once controversial, had become for doctors “a professional right of passage that […] was thought by some to inculcate the attitudes of detachment and indifference that made medical practice tolerable[; […] though disliked by many, anatomy had become the gateway to medical practice, and as such was jealously guarded” against the imposition of showmen and quacks. By joining with anti-vice groups to defend their prerogative, medical practitioners established a kernel of mystery and even obscenity that lurked, Hyde-like, at the heart of what made their profession legitimately professional. By speculating that the killer of Annie Chapman possessed anatomical skill but refusing to disclose details of her injuries in mixed company, Dr. George Bagster Phillips mystified the knowledge he possessed but also highlighted the obscenity of that knowledge and the fact that he shared it with the murderer.

In summing up the Nichols and Chapman inquests, coroner Baxter drew on the testimony

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98 Ibid.
given by the medical experts in a way that left no doubt that he was personally convinced that the killer was possessed of a degree of anatomical knowledge that strongly suggested he was a doctor, or at least someone with medical training; he went on from this to offer a curiously specific speculation about the possible motive for the murders. In summing up the Nichols inquest for the jury on 23 September, he reminded the jurors of the similarities between her death and that being discussed in the ongoing Chapman inquest. He told the Nichols jurors that mutilations “had in each case been performed with anatomical knowledge,” turning the equivocal statements that Dr. Llewellyn had made into absolute certainty. He went on from this to suggest that:

robbery was out of the question, and there was nothing to suggest jealousy. There could not have been any quarrel, or it would have been heard. The taking of some of the abdominal viscera from the body of Chapman suggested that they may have been the object of her death. Was it not possible that this may also have been the motive in the case they had under consideration? He suggested to the jury the possibility that these two women might have been murdered by the same man with the same object, and that in the case of Nichols the wretch was disturbed before he had accomplished his object. 99

What the jury thought of these speculations is impossible to say, and from the point of view of a coroner’s inquest they were at best superfluous and quite likely irrelevant. No suggestion of motive was logically necessary to establish that a woman whose throat had been slit and abdomen slashed had suffered from neither accident nor suicide, and the jury took only a few minutes to return a verdict of “willful murder against some person or persons unknown.”

Three days later, in concluding up the Chapman inquest, Baxter went into even more

detail about his anatomical theory of the murders and their motive. *The Times*’ summary of his summation narrows in on the medical profession, and indeed on surgeons like Dr. Phillips who were accustomed to performing autopsies, with almost hypnotically repetitive assertions about the killer’s skill and knowledge:

[The] uterus had been taken from [her] abdomen […] and] the injuries had been made by some one [sic] who had considerable anatomical skill and knowledge. There were no meaningless cuts. The organ had been taken by one who knew where to find it, what difficulties he would have to contend against, and how he should use his knife so as to abstract [sic] the organ without injury to it. No unskilled person could have known where to find it or have recognized it when it was found. For instance, no mere slaughterer of animals could have carried out these operations. It must have been someone accustomed to the post mortem room. The conclusion that the desire was to posses the abdominal organ seemed overwhelming.\textsuperscript{100}

Baxter even had a new explanation as to why the killer may have wanted to remove the uterus from Chapman. He claimed that on the morning after the Nichols inquest concluded, when accounts of it would have been published in the 24 September newspapers, he was contacted “by the sub-curator of the Pathological Museum,” possibly at the London Hospital where he was a governor, and told that “some months ago an American had called on him and asked him to procure a number of specimens of the organ that was missing in the deceased[, …] stat[ing] his willingness to give £20 apiece for each specimen.” The American was described as curiously persistent; describing his desire to give the uteri away to other doctors as a specimen along with a medical publication he had written about the womb, “he still urged his request” even when told

\textsuperscript{100} “The Whitechapel Murder,” *The Times*, 27 September 1888.
that organs could not be supplied in such a manner. Though he did not directly accuse this hypothetical American doctor, the large sum of money on offer led Baxter to speculate: “was it not possible that the knowledge of this demand might have incited some abandoned wretch to possess himself of a specimen?”\textsuperscript{101}

This theory also recalled the culturally fraught history of medical anatomy in its resemblance to the 1828 Burke and Hare murders in Edinburgh, in which the two confederates had killed a total of sixteen people in order to supply bodies for dissection by Dr. Robert Knox. A major press sensation throughout Britain in their time, these killings were still very much remembered at the time of the Whitechapel murders; they were indeed the inspiration for an 1884 short story, “The Body Snatchers,” by none other than Robert Louis Stevenson. A letter written to \textit{The Star} on 18 September, while the inquests were ongoing, recalled the case in making essentially the same argument that Baxter would present to the Chapman jury: “that biologists have been so infatuated by their pursuits as to cause murder to be committed in aid of their researches is a matter of history,” and so had to be considered as a possible motive for the Whitechapel murders.\textsuperscript{102}

The editors of \textit{The Lancet}, London’s foremost medical journal, were quick to reply to the medical theory of the Nichols and Chapman murders put forward in such letters and in Baxter’s summation. \textit{The Lancet} feared that “the public mind – ever ready to cast mud at legitimate research will hardly fail to be excited to a pitch of animosity against anatomists and curators […] by the] Burke and Hare” theory being put forward by the official in charge of a judicial inquiry. Strangely, though, the editorial is most concerned with dispelling “the theory that cupidity was the motive of the crime;” it ridicules not the connection between medicine and the murder or the

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{102} “Another Theory,” \textit{The Star (London)}, 18 September 1888.
idea that the killer might be a doctor, but rather the suggestion “that an author of a medical work to be published in America would should need to have uteri specially procured for him in England,” as well as the patently unlikely suggestion that someone wishing to give the organs away would pay the princely sum of £20 each for them. Finding fault only with the economics and logistics implied by Baxter’s fanciful speculations, *The Lancet* editorial actually describes the mutilations that were inflicted upon Annie Chapman in more detail than any regular newspaper had done up to that point, presumably on the assumption that its audience would possess the specialized knowledge and correct professional demeanor to countenance such horrors. The writer actually concurs with the coroner in concluding that “obviously the work was that of an expert – of one, at least, who had such knowledge of anatomical or pathological examinations as to be enabled to secure the pelvic organs with one sweep of a knife.”\(^{103}\) In spite of a stated intention to dismiss public anxiety and divert suspicion from “anatomists and curators,” London’s most important medical periodical simultaneously claimed the right to precisely describe the horrors inflicted upon Annie Chapman as part of its proper discursive field, and legitimated the suspicion that the killer possessed the same specials knowledge as, and may indeed have been one of, its professional readers.

The issue of the killer’s anatomical knowledge and medical competence would be discussed at the inquests for the subsequent Whitechapel murder victims as well. The testimony given by doctors at the inquest into the death of Katherine Eddowes, who was killed in Mitre Square on 30 September as the second victim of the so-called “double event,” stood in opposition to Dr. Phillips suggestions and coroner Baxter’s confident assertions that the murderer was a skilled anatomist. City of London police surgeon Dr. Frederick Gordon Brown,

consulting pathologist Dr. William Sedgwick, and the private physician Dr. William Sequiera, who was the first doctor to reach Eddowes after her death, were all “agreed […] that [Eddowes’ wounds] were not inflicted by a person of great anatomical skill […] and that the murderer had no particular design on any particular internal organs,” despite the fact that her uterus and one kidney had been removed and carried off by the killer. \(^{104}\) Despite this skepticism, and despite the fact that Wynne Baxter’s confident conclusions about the murderer’s likely skills and possible motives were both legally unnecessary and quite possibly erroneous, the Dr. Jack idea had taken hold.\(^{105}\) Though factually unverifiable, the suggestion resonated with long-standing public anxieties about anatomical medicine, and put some members of the medical profession in the position of suggesting that the perpetrator of horrifically violent murders was someone possessed of the mysterious and potentially obscene knowledge that was the foundation of their profession. When Baxter stood before a jury on the East End premises of the Working Lads’ Institute on 26 September, he made the suggestion that the Whitechapel killer might have been inspired by an American doctor looking to amass a collection of women’s reproductive organs as anatomical specimens. As the press reported on this public judicial spectacle, effectively dramatizing the proceeding as a scenario about the danger that scientific curiosity could go beyond the boundaries of reason and slide into violence, it mattered very little that this American doctor may have been a figment of rumour or imagination. That same night an indisputably real

\(^{104}\) “The East End Murders,” *The Times*, 12 October 1888.

\(^{105}\) On the subject of anatomical skill, Baxter was flatly wrong in arguing that “there were no meaningless cuts” to Annie Chapman’s abdomen, which was slashed at rather more than was strictly necessary to remove her uterus. On the subject of the American seeking to purchase wombs, this character has been connected by noted Ripper historian Steward P. Evans with his favorite suspect, the Canadian-American quack “Dr.” Frances Tumbley. There do not, however, seem to be any sources independent of Baxter’s testimony identifying either the American doctor or the Pathological Museum curator; *The Lancet’s* objection about the size of the sum offered is a reasonable one and suspicion about the entire suggestion seems warranted.
visitor from America, Richard Mansfield, would stand before the public on the West End stage of the Lyceum theatre and portray a fictional English doctor who, because of his own unbridled scientific curiosity, occasionally turned into a murderous man-monster. It is to the details of Mansfield’s time in London and the specifics of how his performance was evaluated in the same newspapers that were responsible for the circulation of news about the Whitechapel murders that I now turn.

**Legitimate Artist or “Quick-Change Artiste”?: Critical Reception of Mansfield’s Transformation**

When he first arrived in London to give the performances in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* that he hoped would give him a place beside Henry Irving in the pantheon of practitioners of the double-conscious art of theatrical acting, Richard Mansfield was the subject of two controversies that were widely reported in the British press. These had nothing to do with the Whitechapel murders: Mansfield and his cast stepped off of the steamship *The City of Rome* on 21 July, several weeks before the murder of Martha Tabram, and more than a month before the death of Polly Nichols began the press sensation that dominated the autumn of that year. Mansfield’s *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* had been covered in the columns that London papers devoted to American theatrical news since its 1887 opening, and in 1888 the two principal points of interest in anticipation of his arrival in London were: first, whether he would in fact be preempted, beaten in his bid to become the first serious actor to perform the Jekyll and Hyde dual-role on the London stage by an imitator who was also traveling from the U.S.; and second, precisely how it was that Mansfield accomplished his famous Hyde-to-Jekyll transformation on stage, whether some sort of mechanical trickery was involved in this moment, and ultimately whether it
constituted a proper example of theatrical Art. This first question was crucial for publicly establishing Mansfield’s credentials as the “official” representative of Jekyll and Hyde in the U.K., and cementing the relationship between his play and Robert Louis Stevenson’s novel; the second provides us with some of the best evidence available for understanding how Mansfield’s transformation must have appeared on stage. The way in which London theatrical reviewers resolved the controversy in their own appraisals of the performance in Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, as well as critical reception of his subsequent acting in the drama A Parisian Romance, also helped to cement the connection between Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde on stage and the mythic Dr. Jack idea of the Whitechapel murders. If Mansfield’s performance was a key part of how the murders were imaginatively understood, this understanding also fed back into the way his subsequent acting was evaluated. The impact this had on the failure of Mansfield’s tour, which was financially disastrous for him, is impossible to completely ascertain; what is clear is that anxieties about the public display of the medicalized body bound the West End stage and the East End streets together in an intimate ideological tangle.

In the 1880s there was no legal agreement between the U.K. and the United States with respect to international copyright, and a work first published or performed on one side of the Atlantic was subsequently ineligible for copyright protection in the other nation. This situation was particularly distressing to British authors.106 It meant that when Richard Mansfield performed Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde in the U.S., he was dogged by many imitators, the most persistent of whom was the German-born actor Daniel Bandmann. During the U.S. tour, Mansfield and his press agent E.D. Price actually used these imitators as a way to generate publicity and position their version as the official and “authorized” one. Even though it was

legally unnecessary, Stevenson’s permission had been sought before the adaptation was written, and Sullivan had met with the Scottish novelist and read him the text of the version he wrote for Mansfield; in April of 1888 Mansfield and Price took out newspaper advertisements quoting from Stevenson’s letters to Sullivan, and emphasizing the fact that they had paid a royalty of £20 per month while performing the play in America despite having no legal obligation to do so. The publication of his private letters in a commercial advertisement deeply offended Stevenson, who nevertheless maintained a cordial relationship with Sullivan, and continued to collect the royalty for the duration of the U.S. tour.107 During his 1887-8 United States tour Mansfield was unable to take any action to stop others from performing as Jekyll and Hyde, but he was successful at positioning himself as the most prestigious actor doing so and casting others as imitators of his performance.

The rental agreement that Mansfield and Irving signed in February of 1888 commenced on 1 September of that year, and Mansfield’s Lyceum performances were initially scheduled to commence on 6 September. Earlier that summer, though, it was announced that Daniel Bandmann had leased the Opera Comique in London, and would debut his own version of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, with a script closely cribbed from that performed by Mansfield, on 6 August. Mansfield was determined not to be preempted by a rival in what was supposed to be his own star-making turn, and immediately began logistical and legal action against Bandmann. Mansfield extended his rental of the Lyceum to begin in August and arranged for his own opening to be moved up to the 4th of that month; meanwhile Henry Irving, acting on Mansfield’s behalf, rented out the Opera Comique so that Bandmann would not be able to advance his own opening date. An organized press campaign similar to that carried out in the U.S. was launched

to establish the authorized nature of Mansfield’s play: advertisements described it as a “dramatization by Russell Sullivan, by permission of Robert Louis Stevenson;”\textsuperscript{108} and in the closing-night speech of his own Lyceum season Irving assured the audience and assembled press that “Mr. Mansfield was the first actor who conceived of the idea” of dramatizing the novel, and that he and Sullivan had done so “with Mr. Stephenson’s approval and sanction.”\textsuperscript{109} With the approval of both Irving and Stevenson, a writer who had “consolidated [his] literary reputation and moved […] toward fame” with the publication of \textit{The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde}, there was little doubt among the London press that his was the authorized and thus more prestigious dramatization;\textsuperscript{110} Mansfield’s payment of royalties he was not legally obligated to remit was described as a rare instance of “honourable” behavior in the adaptation of a literary work to the stage.\textsuperscript{111}

Mansfield’s financial relationship with Stevenson brought him more than just prestige; it also gave him a legal outlet to pursue an injunction against Bandmann. Upon his arrival in London he went, with Irving for company, to the offices of Stevenson’s U.K. publisher Longman’s. The publisher agreed to take legal action against Bandmann on Mansfield’s behalf, and an injunction was duly filed. During the judicial proceeding, Bandmann’s representatives argued that their client was not in violation of the copyright because his script had been edited to ensure that there were no verbatim quotes from the dialogue in Stevenson’s novel; \textit{The Era} doubted the truth of this assertion, but pointed out that if true then the absence of quotes was a reasonable defense under the terms of the recently decided case respecting the dramatic

\textsuperscript{109} \textit{Morning Post (London)}, 9 July 1888
\textsuperscript{111} \textit{The Era}, 4 August 1888.
adaptation of *Little Lord Fauntleroy*. On the basis of this assertion about dialogue, Mr. Justice Stirling declined to enjoin Bandmann’s performance entirely, but an undertaking was issued and Longman’s reasserted the case on 7 August, claiming that the copyright had been violated in Bandmann’s 6 August opening. At a hearing on 7 August, Bandmann’s counsel claimed that they were awaiting papers from America that were relevant to their case, and the action was held over on the promise that the performance would not be repeated until they had arrived; the case was never resumed and, with Mansfield’s production opening on 4 August and establishing his precedence, Bandmann quietly left London without having performed his Jekyll and Hyde a second time.

The way that Mansfield and his press agent handled the Bandmann threat had many characteristics of what Vincent Landro describes as a “pseudo-event,” the sort of public spectacle commonly cooked up as a means of theatrical publicity in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first parts of the twentieth. While Bandmann was a threat they were reacting to, rather than one they intentionally created, the press and legal campaign generated publicity but were ultimately, like the wholly concocted events analyzed by Landro “less about advertising ballyhoo than about constructing celebrity identities to which audiences were ready to respond” in the fashion desired by the actor and publicist. Mansfield was able to be seen in public, beside Irving, defending both the originality of his adaptation and his legal right to be the only person presenting it. He was able to publicize his own largesse in paying royalties during the U.S. tour, thus cementing both his relationship to the literary figure of Robert Louis Stevenson and his likeness to Irving, whose own generosity in cultivating cultural, literary, and artistic

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112 Ibid.
celebrities with his well-advertised hospitality was a key part of how he eased “the passage of the West End elite into the privileged ranks of Victorian bohemia” and ultimately became the first theatrical knight.\textsuperscript{114} Mansfield made himself the official face of \textit{Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde} and also, by sheer coincidence, moved the opening of his production so that it occurred only three days prior to the murder of Martha Tabram. Beating Daniel Bandmann to the London stage and turning the dispute into a pseudo-event put the names of Dr. Jekyll and Richard Mansfield in the press in the days immediately prior to the first murder that would come to be connected to Jack the Ripper, allowing the otherwise anonymous M.P. to observe in a letter to the Metropolitan police that it was “strange [that] this play should have commenced before the murders.”\textsuperscript{115}

Before the Whitechapel murders commenced, a U.K. correspondent to the \textit{New York Times} assured readers that Londoner’s interest in the dispute between Mansfield and Bandmann was “lively, and, as public interest through the general knowledge of Stevenson’s novel was already great, Mansfield’s engagement will open to large patronage.”\textsuperscript{116} London theatergoers were also interested in another dispute about Mansfield’s performance, this one generated between two segments of the American press. The debate was about whether Mansfield’s transformation in the play’s climactic scene was effected entirely by the means of the actor’s well-developed control of his voice and body, or included the use of mechanical aids; broadly speaking, it set reviewers writing for papers in the theatrical periphery who adopted the latter

\textsuperscript{114} John Pick, \textit{The West End: Mismanagement and Snobbery} (Eastbourne: John Offord, 1983), 90. Pick’s chapter on Irving emphasizes how the actor-manager engaged in publicly visible acts of conspicuous consumption, including his lavishly decorated productions but also the staging of events like the famous Beefstake Room suppers, as a way of securing both is own social position and that of the theatrical profession in general.


position against critics from the East Coast, and especially New York, who supported Mansfield’s own claims of the former. A report made the rounds of many mid-Western papers claiming that a reviewer in St. Louis had disguised himself as a stage hand in order to watch Mansfield’s transformation from the wings; these reports unequivocally claimed that Mansfield performed the transformation through a combination of theatrical lighting, a rubber mask that formed the face of Hyde, and a spring-loaded wig that allowed the mask to be instantaneously withdrawn into the actor’s collar.¹¹⁷ Contrary to this, the New York Times was insistent that “Mr. Mansfield uses no mask […] except the natural mask with which an artist covers his face in any character [and] no person of any intelligence witnessing the performance could ever be deceived by such a theory.”¹¹⁸ Even more remarkably, a correspondent to the Daily Mail of London cited a report in an unnamed Pennsylvania paper describing how Mansfield manifested the transformation between Hyde, who is described in Stevenson’s novel as “pale and dwarfish” and substantially smaller than Jekyll because he represents only the evil part of his nature, by means of a pneumatic suit that was “invented by a rubber company specially for this scene.” This was allegedly inflated and deflated by means of a patented noiseless valve that could be connected to “tube[s] concealed in the scenery.”¹¹⁹ Such assertions were effusively denied by the New York Tribune in an unsigned review that may well be by William Winter, Mansfield’s close friend and later biographer:

The transformation is wrought in physical bearing, in stature and demeanor, in facial expression, and above all, in what can only be indicated as the magnetic radiation of an interior spirit […] The supreme merit of this work of Mr. Mansfield’s is that it far

¹¹⁷ Omaha Daily Herald, 4 January 1888.
¹¹⁹ Daily News (London), 25 December 1887.
transcends personal display; that it comes home to every human heart and has a meaning for every human soul; and it at once gives him a place, as a tragic actor, among the men who are radically important to the age in which they live.  

Three days after this review was published the *Kansas City Star* cried “alas for the people who depend for their instruction upon the dramatic columns of the New York papers[,] for those New York critics who are able are not honest, and those who are honest are not able,” perhaps in snide reference to Mansfield’s perceived personal intimacy with the East Coast press establishment. 

At stake in this debate was both the question of Mansfield’s artistic legitimacy, and the right of the New York critics to confer it. As Danahay notes, an important part of the context for this dispute was the extent to which “audiences had come to expect mechanical devices on stage, especially in melodrama,” and at the Boston Museum, the very theatre where Mansfield opened *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and the last venue he played before departing for London, he found himself in close proximity to theatrical mechanics deployed in another genre. A playbill for the “farewell engagement of Mr. Richard Mansfield[,] supported by his own company,” announces that the next occupant of the theatre is to be “the Wonderful Kellar with the marvellous [sic] musical prodigy Echo, the Famous lightning calculator Psycho, and the mystical Hindoo Sorcerer Nana Sahib in the weirdly fascinating entertainment ORIENTAL OCCULTISM.” The late-Victorian stage magician Harry Kellar was well known for his displays of music- and game-playing automata like Echo and Psycho, alongside illusions like 

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120 *New York Tribune*, 13 September 1887. 
121 *Kansas City Star*, 16 September 1887. In addition to his personal connection to Winter, it was to the *New York Times* that Mansfield and his press agent provided the letters from Stevenson arguing that his was the only authorized *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. 
self-decapitation and levitation that were often performed in playhouses and reviewed by drama critics. A reviewer of the Boston show that followed hard on Mansfield’s heels argued that such mechanical tricks did not necessarily suffer from exposure, for “on the contrary, those who have seen [them] once will want to go again to note how easily they have been deceived and to admire the neatness with which the methods are worked.”\(^\text{124}\) Crucially, as described by Lynn M. Voskuil, by the late-Victorian period this kind of theatrical pleasure was held to be at odds with acting as an artistically legitimate practice; in particular a distinction was drawn between the highly visual style of Irving’s theatre and that of mid-century sensation dramas. For Irving:

To act naturally […] meant to practice a sleight of hand whose mechanisms remained fully hidden from the audience and whose goal was to awe spectators into believing that what they saw on stage was real rather than invite them to delight in their own sagacious penetration of the play’s artifice, as had been the case with sensation theatre.\(^\text{125}\)

Properly artistic acting meant exercising double consciousness to calibrate a performance in a way that hides the very act of calibration from the audience. In insisting that Mansfield’s transformation was accomplished by means of mechanical aids, American provincial critics were assimilating it to a register of theatricality and a kind of pleasure that depended on being tricked, but also on the possibility of having the trick exposed. In serving up spoilers they gave themselves a crucial role, while also striking at the New York theatrical establishment and what they perceived as its too-cozy relations between actors and reviewers. Mansfield and his supporters vehemently resisted such aspersions both because they were probably not true, and because they forestalled the possibility that the actor could compete with Irving by performing a

\(^{124}\) *Boston Daily Journal*, 16 June 1888.

\(^{125}\) Voskuil, *Acting Naturally*, 192.
“work of art, pure and simple.”

Rumors about the use of mechanical devices were of interest to the London press before Mansfield’s arrival, and he continued to deny them during his residency at the Lyceum. E.D. Price wrote to *The Era* to assure the public “that Mr. Mansfield’s wig is of the ordinary kind, without springs or other mechanical devices, and that he does not use a rubber mask, a skin cover, or adventitious aid of any kind.” Mansfield gave an interview to the *Pall Mall Gazette* in which he repeated the claim that no aids were used, as well as reiterating the assertion that his double role was superior to that of “Mr. Irving as Dubosq and Lesurques in ‘The Lyons Mail’” because *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* “is the only [play] in which an actor tries to double two parts, which in character, appearance, and individuality are at opposite poles.” Most London critics accepted that Mansfield performed without the aid of rubber suits or pneumatic clothing; few joined the writer of the *Standard*’s early review in asserting that “the probability is that a very cunningly devised mask of oilskin or indiarubber forms the face of Hyde, and is, with the wig, displaced by a rapid movement,” though most did agree with the sentiment expressed in the same review that “by what[ever] means this [transformation] is effected […] the change is amazing in its completeness and rapidity.” On balance, though, critical reception of the play as a whole was less than enthusiastic; while London’s critics generally admired Mansfield’s acting it was widely “regretted that so original and powerful an effort is not associated with a better play.”

Two important reviews – that of the influential critic Clement Scott in the *Daily Telegraph*, and that published in *The Times* – invoke the question of mechanism in unfavorably comparing

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128 “The Transformation in ‘Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.’ How It Is Done by One Who Knows,” *Pall Mall Gazette*, 1 September 1888.
130 *The Graphic*, 11 August 1888.
Mansfield’s dramaturgy and command of stagecraft to that usually associated with the Lyceum and its customary tenant.

The controversy over rubber masks and inflatable undergarments allows for some informed speculation about the transformation that these critics witnessed on Mansfield’s opening night. That the use of these devices seemed plausible to anyone suggests that there was a genuine and perceptible difference between the apparent stature and physiognomy of the two characters as he delineated them. The double-exposure photograph used to publicize the play provides some evidence of this (Figure 1.1), but as Danahay suggests “this photograph does not directly document Mansfield’s performance, but does situate him within the use of technology to further his career.”\textsuperscript{131} The photograph is an artifact of the photographer’s studio, not the performance process. The literary record of that performance, in the form of the prompt script of the Boston Museum run of 1887, suggests that colored lights were used both to establish mood around the character of Hyde and as part of his physical appearance. It indicates that the lime lights focused in from the wings were changed to red at the first mention of Hyde before an assembly of Jekyll’s friends, and that these were switched to green any time the character of Hyde himself appeared onstage.\textsuperscript{132} While this change of color is not noted by any of the London reviews, many do observe that the stage was in relative darkness for the transformation scene at the end of the third act, with the Standard critic observing that “the time [of the scene] is midnight, according to the book […] and while] the stage is, perhaps, a bit dimmer than is

\textsuperscript{131} Danahay, “Richard Mansfield,” 56.
\textsuperscript{132} Sullivan, \textit{Dr. Jekyll}, 50. Danahay and Chisholm’s edition incorporates stage directions and notes from the Boston Museum prompt script; the Lyceum prompt script does not seem to have landed in any archive and the copy held by the Lord Chamberlain’s collection lacks detailed stage directions, but the famously well-outfitted Lyceum stage would have been capable of producing any effects described in the earlier version of the production.
essential, [...] there is quite enough light to make the features readily discernible,”[133] while the *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News* believed that Mansfield’s task in effecting the transformation was “much helped by the semi-darkness in which most of the play passes.”[134] The script also suggests that Mansfield used his voice to smooth over the moment of transition: stage directions describe how he drinks the potion that will turn him temporarily back into Jekyll and, while still in the physical character of Hyde, “reels, staggers and clutches at the table, call[ing] out in Jekyll’s voice “Lanyon! Lanyon!” before straightening himself up and emerging completely as Jekyll. Reviews on both sides of the Atlantic emphasize the apparently instantaneous nature of this transition, and Danahay persuasively locates the performance within the genealogy of “quick change artistry […] aligning him with chapeaugraphy and shadowgraphy acts and escape artists like Houdini.”[135] Combining lights, vocal control, and exceptional ability to manipulate both his posture and his facial expression, Mansfield transitioned from Hyde to Jekyll with astonishing rapidity and completeness.

It was this very rapidity which led both Clement Scott and *The Times*’ critic to temper their appreciation of the performance they witnessed. Describing the Stevenson novella on which the play was based as “a morbid, unsatisfactory, gruesomely uncanny chapter of useless psychological analyses, unrelieved by one touch of humanity and unenlightened by the bright contrast that the stage property demands,” Scott laments that the play reserves the on-stage transformation for a point so late in the evening that the dramatic version of the story “had lost all interest” long before the scene which audiences and critics alike were so anticipating. He also suggests that the Jekyll and Hyde characters were too well delineated by Mansfield, who he

found more theatrically effective as the snarling man-monster than the overly-ambitious doctor, noting that when Mansfield was Jekyll:

> The torture of the good man overmastered by the preying and corroding evil; love, honor, respect, love of existence all sacrificed for the mad fascination of transformation; the sight of a strong man weakened and debased by a taste for depravity […] the feeling that the brutal Hyde is oozing through the pores and racking the frame of this poor distracted creature; […] all these things were foreshadowed, but not wholly grasped by the actor.\(^{136}\)

The review in *The Times* follows a similar line of reasoning, noting that “there is but little scope for acting in what has been described as Mr. Stevenson’s ‘psychological study.’ As applied to the dramatic version of Mr. Stevenson’s book, the accuracy of the word ‘psychological’ is open to question.” The speed and completeness with which the transformation was performed meant that:

> There is no transfusion of thought or character between ‘Dr. Jekyll’ and ‘Mr. Hyde[; …] Mr. Mansfield’s appearance, now in one part and now in the other, involves no more psychology than the ‘business’ of a ‘quick-change artiste’ in the music-halls. There is much more psychology, for example, in Mr. Irving’s impersonation of Mathias in *The Bells*.\(^{137}\)

For these critics, among the most influential in the landscape of the London periodical press, the performance did not have to involve prosthetics to be mechanical. The failure to adequately capture the depth of the character’s psychology, a failure that was one of both dramaturgy and performance, revealed Mansfield’s bodily control to be impressive in the way that the performances of the Wonderful Kellar were, and not the equal of those by which Irving had

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\(^{137}\) *The Times*, 6 August 1888.
transformed the Lyceum into a venue regarded as a “Temple of Art.”

While London notices about *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* were thoroughly mixed, even those critics who were less than enthusiastic found the transformation impressive and most predicted that the production would be successful. It was not, however, and in October Mansfield began to vary his bill with performances of *A Parisian Romance* and *Prince Karl* replacing *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* most nights. The failure of the play has been attributed to the connection drawn in the press and the public mind between Mansfield’s performance and the Whitechapel murders; a review written in September does note that while:

> The recent outrages in the East of London, the dread of a sudden presence, the horror of the unexpected, may have given a fillip to the mouthings and jabberings of this loathsome Hyde; [… but] those who admire Mr. Mansfield’s observant power and sudden intensity must long to see him well clear of the moral deformities that will be pressed into his artistic service.

In an evident effort to curry favor with the public Mansfield, against the explicit advice of Irving and his business manager Bram Stoker, gave the first performance of *Prince Karl* as a benefit for an East End settlement house devoted to “unfortunate” women. It must be noted, however, that Mansfield was already dissatisfied with box-office receipts by the last week of August, before the murders of Polly Nichols and Annie Chapman had occurred. Mediocre notices from influential critics, as well as the fact that in order to beat Bandmann as the first Jekyll and Hyde in London he had opened a month prior to the traditional beginning of the theatrical season, at a

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141 Winter, *Life and Art*, 103.
142 Ibid., 101.
period when many fashionable Londoners were away from the metropolis, must also have contributed to the play’s disappointing drawing power. While Mansfield had counted on an association with Irving and the Lyceum to establish his star as a leading performer, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* looked like a “one-part play, designed wholly for the exhibition of Mr. Mansfield’s idiosyncrasies,”¹⁴³ paling in comparison to the visually detailed and “integrated […] spectacular whole” that London audiences had come to expect at the Lyceum.¹⁴⁴

If Mansfield’s instantaneous transformation from Hyde to Jekyll did not completely satisfy either critics or audiences in London, it did serve as a potential example of how the individual who committed the Whitechapel murders might be capable of luring women into dark corners, performing acts of truly horrendous savagery upon them in the space of only a moment, and then blending back into society. While his theatrical performances in a play based on Stevenson’s novella helped provide the language for press and public to discuss the real-life murders, when he changed his bill to *A Parisian Romance* the carnage in the streets was fed back into reviews of his performance. In this drama Mansfield played the dissipated and lecherous Baron Chevrial, and the final moment of the play saw him die on stage in an epileptic fit that was, it was hinted, probably the result of venereal disease. Many critics condemned the performance, one on the grounds that “the public, in these days of aggravated horrors, show [sic] no disposition to take delight in fiends like Hyde, or gross sensualists like this French Baron.”¹⁴⁵

Another writing in *The People*, a paper aimed primarily at the literate working class, found that the display of a body in a state of medical collapse was obscene in a way that resonates with the inquest testimony about anatomical knowledge:

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¹⁴⁵ Unidentified press clipping, Victoria and Albert Museum Theatre Collection, Lyceum 1888 Box.
Not enough that the ghastly horror now haunting our streets was horribly reflected by [Mansfield] in the ghoulish blood-fiend Hyde, but now, in his revolting impersonation of Baron Chevrial, this public entertainer imposes upon play-goers, for their recreation, forsooth, the hideous spectacle, happily rare, save in a hospital or madhouse, of a decrepit debauchee writhing through the throes of one epileptic fit to be stricken dead as he gibbers in the contortions of another while the words of cynical blasphemy are arrested on his paralysed lips.\textsuperscript{146}

Even critics recommending the performance did so with a kind of queasiness, as in the notice that “despite its revolting type of nature and the unpleasant truthfulness with which Mr. Mansfield depicts death from an apoplectic [sic] fit, it is from first to last a masterly and instructive dramatic study” thanks to Mansfield’s acting.\textsuperscript{147}

With the retrospect available to the historian the reviews of \textit{A Parisian Romance} recall, albeit imperfectly, the controversy over Naturalism and obscenity that erupted when the Independent Theatre Society staged Ibsen’s \textit{Ghosts} in 1891, when it was described by Scott as a “play that deals with subjects that hitherto have been to most men horrible and to all pure women loathsome.”\textsuperscript{148} In the present study, though, it appears as a evidence of a kind of mythic feedback loop: \textit{Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde} provided a key set of scenerios by which the Whitechapel murders could be understood with reference to medical practitioners and discourses, and the Whitechapel murders provided an important context for a further understanding of Mansfield’s performances. A crucial context for these was their venue, Henry Irving’s Lyceum Theatre, where a generation of respectable Londoners went to see art that reflected both their aspirations, in the form of

\textsuperscript{146} “The Theatres: Lyceum,” \textit{The People}, 7 October 1888.
\textsuperscript{147} Clipping marked “Lyceum Theatre,” \textit{The Sunday Times}, n.d., Victoria and Albert Museum Theatre Collection, Lyceum 1888 Box.
\textsuperscript{148} “Royalty Theatre,” \textit{The Daily Telegraph}, 14 March 1891.
Irving’s bid for professional respectability, and their anxieties, as the very dramas that earned him that status reflected the possibility that apparently respectable people just like them might have a secret dark side. Mansfield’s *Jekyll and Hyde*, a production calculated to double Irving’s own double-acting, provided a point of contact between the aesthetic imaginary those Londoners saw on the West End stage, and their imaginative understanding of the all too real violence happening on East End streets. The production, and its place in the longer legacy of the Lyceum under Irving, provided important context for public understandings of the Whitechapel murders and for the process of mythification that played out in the press, as well as in another set of public events: the inquests conducted after each of the murders and widely publicized and transcribed in the papers. Even the individual who coined the name “Jack the Ripper” seems to have been aware of the discourses around medicine and professionalism that were being woven into the emerging myth. The “Dear Boss” letter, which was posted on 27 September and received by the Central News Agency on the 29th, is signed “Yours Truly, Jack the Ripper (don’t mind my giving the trade name)” and concludes with a postscript written perpendicular to the rest of the text adding “they say I am a doctor now ha ha.”

149 Conclusion: Dr. Jack and Dr. William Withey Gull

Most Victorian stage dramas about double selves end with the guilty parties suffering the consequences of living a second life, and order restored. In *The Lyons Mail*, Lesurque is saved at the last minute from being hanged by the deathbed confession of his doppelganger Dubosc; the curtain that falls on Mathias in *The Bells* and Dr. Jekyll in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* finds both remorseful if not completely repentant and, most importantly, dead. The drama of Dr. Jack, by

contrast, offered no such satisfying conclusion: the series of murders being carried out in the streets of Whitechapel eventually stopped, but any fresh violence in the East End and many unsolved killings all around the world would be imaginatively linked to the Whitechapel murders for generations.

A conclusion to the Dr. Jack scenario was eventually provided almost 90 years after the murders, with the 1976 publication of Stephen Knight’s book *Jack the Ripper: The Final Solution*. Claiming to be a work of non-fiction, this book was based on a story that was told to Knight by a man calling himself Joseph Sickert and claiming to be the illegitimate son of Walter Sickert, the painter whose leading role in another iteration of the Ripper myth will be discussed in Chapter 4. As a “final solution” Knight named Dr. William Withey Gull, one time Royal Physician in Ordinary, as the killer; he claimed that the murders were motivated by a conspiracy to protect the royal family from the revelation of the shocking fact that Prince Edward Albert Victor, the heir to the throne, had married and fathered child with a Catholic East End shop girl named Annie Elizabeth Crook, which would thus have made the child the heir presumptive and created both moral and constitutional crises for the nation. Sickert’s alleged “son,” who was legally named Joseph Gorman and later recanted the entire story, claimed that the prince and the shop-girl first met in his “father’s” East End studio, where Eddie was taking painting lessons and Annie was earning money by posing nude as an artist’s model. In this story Mary Jane Kelly, the final Ripper victim, was one of the witnesses at the clandestine marriage, and later looked after the couple’s daughter after Annie was picked up in a government raid on an apartment in Cleveland Street where Eddie had hidden his wife and daughter.\(^{150}\) Kelly and three friends,

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\(^{150}\) This was probably a conflation with the 1889 Cleveland Street scandal, in which a homosexual male brothel in Cleveland Street was raided by police; it was subsequently rumored that Albert Edward Victor had been a client of the brothel.
Elizabeth Stride, Annie Chapman, and Polly Nichols, watched over the girl for a time before deciding that they would blackmail the government; rather than submit to their demands a conspiracy of Freemasons in high office assigned Gull to murder the women with the help of a coachman named John Nettley. The daughter, who was given the name Alice Crook, survived and eventually became the mistress of Walter Sickert; the artist and the clandestine Catholic heir were, Joseph Gorman/Sickert claimed, his mother and father.

This story, which if true would have made Joseph Gorman the rightful King of England, has never been taken seriously by any reasonable historian; as history it is, to put it plainly, hogwash of the highest order.\footnote{A particularly detailed refutation of the theory is offered in Donald Rumbelow, *The Complete Jack the Ripper* (London: Penguin, 2004), 223-240.} It is also, though, a compelling narrative, as full of twists and unexpected turns as any urban melodrama of the late-Victorian stage. The decade of the 1960s and 1970s were also the period of the Vietnam War, the Profumo Affair, Watergate, and student uprisings on both sides of the Atlantic; these decades saw the flowering of “conspiracy theories focusing on the machinations of […] ‘secret societies,’” a genre of cultural myth that had its first major modern flourishing at the time of the French Revolution.\footnote{Jovan Byford, *Conspiracy Theories: A Critical Introduction* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011) 61. Byford traces the emergence of the term “conspiracy theory,” in its contemporary sense, to the 1980s (38), and the literary circulation of stories answerable to this term to post-Revolutionary literature that attributed the French Revolution and subsequent terror to an alliance of anti-clerical secret societies, including the Freemasons (40).} This kind of explanation of the Ripper murders, as laid out in Knight’s book, is deeply resonant with many of the same anxieties that went into the Dr. Jack hypothesis in the first place. Gull’s medical vocation, which is historically true, as well as his Freemasonry, which was invented by either Gorman or Knight, rhyme with the theme of anatomy as secret and potentially dangerous knowledge.\footnote{David Peabody, “Exploding the Ripper Masonic Link,” *MQ (Masonic Quarterly)* 2 (July 2002). “But,” I can hear you thinking, “of course a magazine published by the Mason’s, refuting
release of Knight’s book in 1976, this “royal conspiracy” articulation of the Dr. Jack idea has been one of the most often-dramatized versions of Jack the Ripper, forming the plot of at least three major works. The 1978 film Murder By Decree has Sherlock Holmes, played by Christopher Plummer alongside James Mason as Dr. Watson, as the man out to crack the conspiracy. The 1988 television miniseries Jack the Ripper, starring Michael Caine as Inspector Fred Abberline, uses Richard Mansfield as its principal “red herring,” with official suspicion falling on the actor before Gull’s role is discovered. Significantly, in this version the actual royal conspiracy is occluded and it is insanity and despair over the waning of his surgical skills that drives Gull to kill. Most recently, the royal conspiracy forms the basis of From Hell, a film with Johnny Depp as an opium-addicted Abberline and Ian Holm as Gull that is based on the landmark graphic novel of the same name by Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell.\footnote{In the extensive footnotes to From Hell, Moore admits that “Knight’s theory has been roundly attacked and derided in recent times, and there are grounds for supposing that much of Final Solution may have been intended as an ingenious hoax” (Appendix, 1). The graphic novel instead uses the theory as the occasion for an extended and wide-ranging discursus on late-Victorian culture, history, and the meaning of modernity that self-consciously mixes fact and fiction; the dramatization of it as a film has no such evident ambitions.}

It is beyond the scope of my project here to analyze these dramatizations in detail; they constitute, for the purposes of this study, evidence of the long reach of Dr. Jack as a scenario. With his outwardly respectable exterior concealing the horrible nature of the crimes to which he turns his surgical tools, the Dr. Gull created by royal conspiracy fictions has more to do with Dr. Jekyll as portrayed on the Lyceum stage by Richard Mansfield than with the historical physician Sir William Withey Gull. In making the villain of this conspiracy theory a doctor in service to the royal family, this contemporary myth blends two tropes that commonly occur in conspiracy the claim that the doctor who committed the Jack the Ripper murders was part of a Masonic plot, would claim that said doctor was not a Mason.” I’m inclined to trust Peabody, but perhaps I’m part of the conspiracy. I leave it to you, gentle reader, to decide.
theories: the “occultist,” which focuses on the conspirators’ possession and manipulation of arcane powers and knowledge not available to the wider public, and the “materialist thread […] which focuses on money and corruption as the main source of the conspirators’ power and influence.” This is, in many ways, a reversal of the way the Dr. Jack idea functioned in 1888, when it was given persuasive force by its relationship to a theatre identified with drama as a middle-class profession, as well as by the fact that it was articulated by legal officials and medical men themselves, who debated whether the killer was possessed of their own professional expertise. It was, in other words, a scenario through which respectable Londoners imagined men of their own class as the killer and, perhaps, fantasized about committing the murders themselves. For all its improbable twists and turns, Knight’s Final Solution is a straightforward conspiracy theory of the occult and materialist type, a tale of the depredations of members of the ruling class using medical expertise to murder lower-class women in order to save royalty from scandal, and in the process stealing the British throne from its rightful heir. While this late articulation of Dr. Jack was sheer fantasy, in the next chapter we shall see how many of the same issues of obscenity and anatomy looked from the perspective of East End residents in 1888-9, when the Whitechapel murders were ongoing and at least some people in the neighborhood were willing to create and attend theatrical entertainments that depicted them.

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155 Byford, Conspiracy Theories, 80.
Chapter 2

The Ripper, the Fat Lady, and the Demon Barber:

The Penny Theatrical Tradition in the East End

The reaction of London’s West End papers and their middle-class readership to the murders that took place in Whitechapel in the Autumn of 1888 was, I have argued, given a distinctive shape by reference to a history of dramas exploring the potential dark face of individual bourgeois psychology. In the late-Victorian era this kind of drama, centered on the individual star actor or actors whose virtuosic performance was the center of a visually integral work, was increasingly identified with notions about a national theatre that would answer Matthew Arnold’s call for a drama “admirable in organisation, purpose, and dignity, […] a modern drama […] corresponding with fidelity to a very palpable and powerful ideal, the ideal of the *homme sensuel moyen*.”\(^{156}\) Derived largely from Arnold’s observation of French actors, especially those of the Comédie Française, this modern drama was to be both an articulation of Britain’s unique national culture and a part of an international network of artistically credible works mutually intelligible to members of a trans-national middle class. Arnold left no doubt that he was calling for an “institution in the West of London” to be imitated by “a second of like kind in the East,” but only after the occidental theatre had achieved sufficient success.\(^{157}\) Though the iteration of this history most closely identified with the Ripper events was by the American actor Richard Mansfield, it took place in a theatre building and a theatrical tradition strongly identified with Henry Irving, imaginatively embroiling Jack the Ripper and his crimes with the idea of a


\(^{157}\) Ibid., 456.
middle-class national theatre.

With its lack of state support and no formal actor training apparatus, Irving’s Lyceum fulfilled only some of the aesthetic criteria of Arnold’s total plan for a national theatre; the East End had no theatres capable of serving as even distant prototypes for a such an institution, but possessed a variegated theatrical culture of its own. In this chapter I will explore one feature on the East End’s theatrical landscape: the penny theatres that were, in terms of both geography and the social and economic constitution of their audience, the closest entertainment spaces to the milieu in which the Whitechapel murders actually took place. Such theatres, or “penny gaffs” as they were popularly known, form a little-treated part of the history of the London theatre; they have largely escaped sustained critical attention because they generated very little in the way of dramatic scripts, official licenses, internal account books, press reviews, and other creative, critical, and bureaucratic documentation that is the stock-in-trade of the theatre historian. Surviving accounts of them come mostly from writers of the upper and middle classes – journalists and memoirists like Dickens, George Augustus Sala, Henry Mayhew, and Montagu Williams – who entered them and described their audiences in the spirit of either anthropological exploration or reformist zeal. Such writers tend to agree on the relatively low artistic standard of the entertainment offerings they saw in penny theatres, as well as the relative lack of sophistication they saw in the audiences that habitually attended them. John Springhall, building on the sociological phrase coined by Stanley Cohen, has emphasized the tendency for writing about such street-level theatres to get caught up in a rhetoric of “moral panics over popular culture” that places it “in opposition to high culture or art” and emphasizes the capacity of the low-brow offerings to corrupt the morals of the young.158 While large East End theatres like the

158 John Springhall, *Youth, Popular Culture, and Moral Panics: Penny Gaffs to Gangsta-Rap*,

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Britannia in Hoxton or the Pavilion in the Whitechapel Road had, since mid-century, aspired to attract “those [local] families that [were] hitherto […] in the habit of visiting the west end whenever they desired to go to a theatre,” even such relatively affluent audiences were never far from orientalist condescension like that expressed in 1903 by the A. St. John Adcock, who characterized the Pavilion’s patrons by their “general inclination, especially among the fair sex, […] to discuss the play as if it had been sheer reality, and to pour scorn and loathing on the villain, a tearful pity on the distressed heroine, and unlimited admiration on the hero.” Adcock’s description obscures the variety of perspectives from which East Enders would have viewed the theatre, but in so doing reveals how the working-class audience was regarded by many in the press and public: if the best theatres in the area were imagined to be patronized by an audience so generally unsophisticated as to be unable to distinguish fiction from reality in their outpourings of emotion, then its not hard to see how the worst could come to be regarded as potential vectors of moral contagion.

Typically located in basements or storefronts, penny theatres in the East End and elsewhere operated in a precarious relationship to the laws governing the stage. Lacking the necessary licenses to present spoken drama, many ostensibly presented only pantomimes or rough “operettas,” recalling in this gesture at obeying the statute the so-called “Minors” during the era of the Patent Monopoly; many others simply operated as patently illegal venues. The precise legality of the non-dramatic entertainments on offer at many gaffs, which could include the display of visual art, wax-works, and the appearance of various sorts of freaks, was seldom

completely clear either. The number of such venues operating in London cannot be reliably estimated for any part of the nineteenth or early-twentieth century, and they were almost certainly on the wane in the 1880s, as music-halls came to occupy an increasingly important place on the entertainment map of London in general and the East End in particular, but the Whitechapel Road still had several penny theatres at the time of the Whitechapel murders. The entrepreneurs who ran these may well have been the first theatrical professionals to explicitly make Jack the Ripper a figure of entertainment, and they did so only steps from where the murders associated with him took place. These theatres may, in fact, have been competing with the very murder sites themselves for the coins that residents of Whitechapel had to spend on entertainment: it was reported that “at 29 Hanbury Street people were charged a penny to enter the yard in which the Chapman woman was murdered.”\(^{161}\) The physical locations of the murders were theatricalized even as local theatres looked to the killings for dramatic and iconographical content.

This chapter will take the form of a visit to one such theatre, located at 106 and 107 Whitechapel Road. This theatre has been documented in a handful of newspaper reports and the name of its owner and operator, one “Thomas Barry, a showman,” are known because of a legal conflict between Barry and his neighbors that reached the courts in February of 1889. What probably made this case newsworthy to the papers that carried items about it was that “it was alleged […] that finding his ordinary attractions had entirely failed to arouse public interest [Barry] took advantage of the excitement which had been caused by the murders in Whitechapel to exhibit ghastly and disgusting representations of the [Whitechapel murder] victims” outside of

his theatre. In reporting the story the newspapers also provide brief accounts of the sorts of entertainments offered by Barry, which included pictures placed outside, a waxworks and freak show inside, and short versions of melodramas of crime and murder from earlier in the nineteenth century that remained standards of the fairground and basement theatres well into the twentieth.

Taking Barry’s theatre as characteristic of the other venues of its kind located in and around Whitechapel Road, I will attempt to place each of these three categories of popular entertainment — the exhibition of images outside as an inducement to patronage, the display of extraordinary three-dimensional bodies in the form of wax effigies and living freaks, and the dramatic presentation of well-known melodramas — into its aesthetic and historical context, and show how each contributed to a mythic image of Jack the Ripper as a cultural figure. In particular, each of Barry’s entertainments can be located in a tradition that offered the display of the female body as its performance product; Barry’s use of the Whitechapel murder victims in this mode turned his theatre into a point of ideological contact between these traditions and the Ripper phenomenon, and gave public form to significant ideological messages about social class and gender that revolved around the murdered women. These messages were not always clear or internally consistent: depending on who was viewing them, images, figures, and performances shown by Barry presented the female body as both an object in need of rationalizing and reformist intervention from educated professionals, and the unwilling subject of sexual and economic exploitation by the moneyed classes.

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162 “Whitechapel Nuisances,” Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper, 10 February 1889.
The Whitechapel District Board of Works v. Thomas Barry

Placing Thomas Barry’s penny theatre into its historical and aesthetic context will require a kind of centrifugal operation: because so little is documented about this specific theatre we must expand the inquiry to other representational practices in similar cultural registers and look at longer traditions of particular genres and specific dramatic works to attempt to establish the potential resonances a theatre like Barry’s might have had for its audience. To set the stage for this it is worth establishing what specifics are documented about Barry’s theatre at 106 and 107 Whitechapel Road in the press accounts about it.

According to a report of The Era, which appeared on 9 February and provides significantly more detail than an item published in Lloyd’s Weekly the following day, Barry was brought to the Central Criminal Court by the Whitechapel District Board of Works on 6 February 1889 “upon the charge of creating a nuisance by exhibiting figures illustrating a show, and thereby causing idle people to assemble in the Queen’s highway.” At the trial the prosecution presented a petition “signed by a number of residents in the neighborhood, which had been presented to the Whitechapel District Board, complaining of the show as an injury to trade and a nuisance to the inhabitants.” The prosecutor, a Mr. Poland, QC, called witnesses including an unnamed Police Constable who testified about the nature of the images depicting the Whitechapel victims, a Police Inspector Cudmore who “stated that many known thieves loitered among the crowd that gathered outside the premises,” and “Henry Tate, in the employ of Mr. Hunt, a cheese-monger, of 108 and 109, Whitechapel-road,” who gave testimony about the kind of dramas that were performed in Barry’s establishment and the injurious effect the crowds were having on the sale of cheese and other provisions. Mr. Purcell, the council for the defense, presented “a counter-petition, signed by forty-three other inhabitants of the locality, saying that
the show was not the least nuisance to them,”163 and called a number of witnesses who testified that in addition to Barry’s show and unconnected with it there were present “in the thoroughfare a seal and crocodile show under a canvas, a cocoanut-shying stand, knife-ringing stands, shooting galleries, [and] men drawing teeth and selling corn-plaisters [sic], [all of which] caused equally large crowds to assemble.”164 In spite of this defense, and Barry’s testimony in his own behalf that “he wished to carry on his business with as little annoyance to others as possible,” he was found guilty.165 At the suggestion of Mr. Poland he was released on his own recognizance, after posting a bond of £100. Within the next year or two thereafter he must have moved on, as the 1891 London census records the premises of 106 and 107 Whitechapel Road, for which Barry had testified that he paid an annual ground rent of £245, as uninhabited.166

Though few specifics are offered, some sense of the show provided by Barry does emerge in these accounts. One important characteristic, and the very thing that seems to have caused him trouble with his neighbors, was that the performance extended into the street, both in the form of the offending images and in the person of a barking showman, possibly Barry himself, who “kept calling out till the ‘house’ was filled [while] performers, in stage dress, appeared every time they wanted to ‘draw the house full,” all while noise was made in the form of “a barrel-organ grinding, a fog-horn blowing, and a gong being beaten.”167 Inside there was a waxworks, as well as a number of freaks including “a ‘bearded woman’” who was purported to have been “caught by Buffalo Bill, and, having long hair and a long beard, she represented ‘half a gorilla and half a woman;” a “fat French woman [of whom] it was stated that she weighed 39st.

163 “A Penny Show,” The Era, 9 February 1889.
164 “Whitechapel Nuisances.”
165 “A Penny Show.”
167 “A Penny Show.”
11 lb., and measured 8 ft. round her shoulders;” as well as “a ‘female champion boxer’ who boxed three rounds with a tall soldier.” The dramatic repertoire, described by Henry Tate and other witnesses, included three named plays: Maria Martin; Cartouche, the French Jack Sheppard; and Sweeney Todd.

In offering this panoply of entertainments to the public, it’s unlikely that Thomas Barry had any manifest political or ideological aim beyond the desire to turn as many passersby into audience members as possible, and thereby transfer pennies from their pockets to his own. His show, and the legal troubles it caused him with neighboring operators of more culturally-respectable businesses, were nevertheless part of an intense competition that was taking place in the streets of London in the 1880s, and in Whitechapel in particular as the Whitechapel murder phenomenon was unfolding, about how the city and its many communities would be defined. While we may speak of one ideological position in this contest as broadly “hegemonic” or another as “resistant,” the truth is that in the streets of the East End there were as many sides of the debate as their were individually invested social actors in Whitechapel Road: members of a penny gaff audience who were living in daily proximity to the places where the Whitechapel murders were committed, who might have known the murdered women or imagined themselves as possible future victims; reformers anxious to cast both real and stage violence as symptoms and possible causes of economic and social degradation; local elites like the cheesemonger Hunt anxious to avoid any association between the street where they plied their trades and violence or poverty; and local showmen like Barry who could use spectacular stage violence and the display of violated bodies to generate profit and, perhaps, veiled protest against commercial and class interests that were defining the East End from without. All of these perspectives can, and indeed must, be read in the entertainments offered by an illegitimate theatre characterized by what
Stuart Hall has called “the double-stake in popular culture, the double movement of containment and resistance, which is always inevitably inside it.”\footnote{168} Whatever part of any given entertainment can be shown to resonate with a particular position or ideology, they should all be understood as part of a complex dialectical tension between ideas about wealth and poverty, the individual and the mass, private and public as spatial categories, and decency and obscenity that were playing out in late-Victorian culture as a whole and condensing around the figure of Jack the Ripper.

Image, Mass, and Urban Spaces and Spectacles

We begin on the pavement outside of Numbers 106 and 107 Whitechapel Road, with an analysis of the “representations of the Whitechapel murders of ‘Jack the Ripper’” that Thomas Barry exhibited there as part of an effort to attract audience members that also included the playing of musical instruments, appearances by some of the freaks and actors who performed inside the theatre, and the verbal solicitations of a showman who may have been Barry himself. The documentary descriptions of such images are relatively scant, at least in terms of giving any concrete vision of what they actually looked like, so while reading them as closely as possible from the available evidence we will also rely on other images from similar cultural contexts to provide some idea of how they may have appeared to potential patrons and Barry’s neighbors.

The most descriptive account of Barry’s images is given in The Era, which paraphrases the testimony of an anonymous Police Constable who described how “pictures relating to the Whitechapel murders [were] exhibited at shop No. 106, [and] one picture showed six women lying down injured and covered in blood, with their clothes disturbed.”\footnote{169} In his memoir Round

\footnote{169} “A Penny Show.”
London: Down East and Up West magistrate Montagu Williams, who claims to have “personally visited and closely inspected” all of the half-dozen or so penny theatres he found in Whitechapel Road in the late 1880s or early 90s, states that “the Whitechapel murders were favourite subjects for representation; and while several showmen merely dabbled in these crimes, so to speak, one enterprising member of the fraternity exhaustively dealt with the whole series by means of illuminated coloured views, which his patrons viewed through peep-holes.” Though he confirms that Barry’s use of likenesses of the Whitechapel murders outside of his premises was not the only way in which such pictures were used, Williams offers no further description or detail about what any of the images he saw looked like. What is clear from both of these accounts, though, is the moral dimension that the constable and the magistrate attached to what were regarded as “ghastly and disgusting representations of the victims.”

In this regard, the pictures shown outside of the shop at 106 Whitechapel Road were part of what was felt by many late-Victorians to be a major cultural problem, to which legislative and educational remedies were necessary: the public display of indecent images in urban environments. The Indecent Advertisements Act, 1889 sought to deal with this practice by levying a fine of forty shillings or a term of one month’s imprisonment, with or without hard labor, against:

whoever affixes to or inscribes on any house, building, wall, hoarding, gate, fence, pillar, post, board, tree or any other thing whatsoever so as to be visible to a person being in or passing along any street, public highway, or footpath, and whoever affixes to or inscribes on any public urinal […] or exhibits to public view in the window of any house or shop,

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171 “Whitechapel Nuisances.”
any picture or printed or written matter which is of an indecent or obscene nature.\textsuperscript{172}

This legislation supplemented the mid-century Obscene Publications Act, which specified similar punishments for anyone involved in the production of images or printed matter deemed socially unacceptable, by specifically criminalizing the display of such material. Although the 1889 Act’s specific mention of “any advertisement relating to syphilis, gonorrhea, nervous debility, or other complaint or infirmity arising from or relating to sexual intercourse” suggests that purveyors of patent medicines and medical advertisers were a primary target,\textsuperscript{173} Parliamentary records show that the Home Secretary was asked in June of 1890 to invoke the law against “the Aquarium advertisement known as ‘Zaeo [which] was more or less indecent, and ought not to be exhibited in London.’”\textsuperscript{174} Although the Home Secretary declined to act in this case, the suppression of advertisements for entertainments was understood by at least some parliamentarians as something that was within the scope of the law.

Linda Nead persuasively traces the emergence of concerns about obscenity as a prominent feature of British culture to the mid-Victorian era, when new technologies enabled printed words and images to be distributed in forms that were “cheap, produced on an unprecedented scale, [and able to] reach a mass and heterogeneous audience.”\textsuperscript{175} Patricia Anderson has correspondingly argued that by around 1860 the expanded distribution of printed

\textsuperscript{173}Ibid, 846.
matter, made possible by inventions like rototype printing and by reductions in the duties and tariffs levied on both raw paper and finished publications, had effectively created the first truly “mass” audience in British history, and that “the hallmark of a transformed and expanded popular culture was its increasingly pictorial character.”176 This rapid expansion could be imagined as a social good – in the 1880s the journalist and illustrator Mason Jackson wrote approvingly of how “pictures speak a universal language, which requires no teaching to comprehend” and argued that “the development of the newspaper press and its unrestricted use as the exponent of public opinion is one of the most interesting signs of modern progress”177 – but the unchecked circulation of images and ideas also invoked cultural anxiety, which legislation like the Obscene Publications and Obscene Advertisements Acts sought to contain. It was this sort of anxiety that the display of images of the Whitechapel murder victims as advertisements for an illegitimate theatre activated, and so an admittedly speculative reconstruction of what these pictures may have looked like is necessary.

While the Police Constable’s testimony paraphrased by The Era gives no sense of what medium Barry’s pictures were executed in, it does provide a likely date for at least one of the images. The description of “six women lying down injured and covered with blood” suggests that the image was produced some time in October or early November of 1888, immediately after the killings of Elizabeth Stride and Catherine Eddowes on the night of 30 September brought the total number of women murdered in Whitechapel in 1888 to six, and before the death of Mary Jane Kelly on 9 November made it seven.178 On the basis of this date and brief

178 Historians and criminologists of today are in general agreement that five women — Kelly,
description, the cover of *The Illustrated Police News* of 13 October, 1888 (Figure 2.1) suggests itself as a possible analogue for the irrecoverable images used by Barry.

**Figure 2.1**

*The Illustrated Police News* was a publication aimed squarely at working class audiences, and strongly associated with graphic depictions of murder, murderers, accident victims, and other sensational imagery. Its founding publisher, George Purkess, got his start in the publication of serialized “penny dreadful” literature that typically served the same youth audience as the penny gaffs. Fellow “dreadful” publisher Edward Lloyd went upmarket when his *Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper* became an outlet for moderate liberal politics and culturally serious, if often

Eddowes, Stride, Annie Chapman and Polly Nichols — killed between 31 August and 9 November 1888 were victims of the serial murderer popularly known as Jack the Ripper. In 1888 two earlier murders now not usually considered related, that of Emma Elizabeth Smith on 3 April and Martha Tabram on 7 August, were widely considered to be Ripper murders, and in the years immediately after a host of unrelated and sometimes fictional crimes were so regarded.
sentimental, journalism under the editorships of Douglas Jerrold (1852-7) and his son William (1857-84). By contrast, The Illustrated Police News under Purkess retained the subject focus and iconographical practices of the controversially sensational fiction from which it had been born.

Like Thomas Barry’s theatre, the paper placed boldly executed and graphically violent images on the outside of a cultural product in an attempt to garner the attention of a potential consumer, and convince him or her to part with a penny to see what was inside; like the image described at Barry’s trial, the 13 October cover features depictions of six prostrate murdered women. Given their similarities of content and the similar socio-cultural audience to which they were addressed, I suggest we regard the depictions of Whitechapel victims on covers of The Illustrated Police News as part of a genus closely related to the representations of the same women that were displayed by Whitechapel Road showman, even if a precise species relationship cannot be proven from the available evidence.

Titled “Sketches of the Fiendish Work of the Monster of Whitechapel, His Six Crimes,” the multi-celled panel at the heart of the 13 October cover shows the recumbent corpse of all six of the murdered women, and also depicts each alive in the moments leading up to her death. In the cases of Emma Elizabeth Smith, Annie Chapman, and Catherine Eddowes each woman is pursued by a man in a bowler hat who is, presumably, “the Monster of Whitechapel” himself.

What’s especially notable is the use of a single pictorial area to encompass multiple temporalities, and the resulting multiplication of bodies: every woman is depicted at least twice, and some as many as four times if the row of six coffins occupying a cell in the top part of the panel are counted as representations of their presumed occupants. In this sense any single depiction of multiple women murdered at different locations on different days as one pictorial object was the conceptual opposite of the painted panorama, a nineteenth century category of
visual entertainment that was regarded as culturally improving for the members of the “heterogeneous and mostly working class public” who attended it, because it created the “illusion that they were masters of the world, of collective space; in the panorama, a city was a calm configuration arranged around the spectators” into a temporal and spatial illusion of continuity and wholeness. Instead of this unified visual field, the 13 October cover of The Illustrated Police News assembles fragments of time and space and images women’s bodies into an pictorial object to be consumed visually as part of what Tom Gunning has called the “Kaleidoscope of Urban Attractions,” which addressed residents of “the modernizing city as spectators in an urban environment which increasingly tied visual stimulation to commodity culture.”

The description given in The Era of the images of the Whitechapel victims that Thomas Barry placed outside of his penny theatres in Whitechapel Road strongly suggests that they must have done the same. In this case it was their content, but also their mode of pictorial operation, and the relative cultural illegitimacy of the theatrical enterprise for which they advertised, that made pictures like Barry’s so unquestionably obscene.

Indeed, Barry’s publicly displayed images did something which the analogous illustrated newspaper covers did not: because they were consumed by a spatially unified public that they aimed to forge into a paying theatre audience, they threatened to erase the fiercely contested boundary between a “mass” audience and an unruly “mob.” While the Indecent Advertisements Act took effect only on 1 January 1890, and thus could not have been leveled at Barry in his February 1889 trial, he was charged precisely with “creating a nuisance by […] causing large

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numbers of disorderly people to assemble and obstruct the highway.”¹⁸¹ His pictures, and the crowds they gathered, illustrated the extent to which “the regulation of culture was a spatial and an urban problem, created by the possibilities of indiscriminate viewing and consumption in the streets of the Victorian city,” a problem that became all the more acute in an area like the East End, which was perceived by many middle-class Londoners and the West End papers that served them as both disturbingly close to the center of metropolitan power and privilege in geographic terms, and impossibly distant from it in social and moral status and standing.¹⁸²

In analyzing the spatial and economic relationship between the slums and suburbs of Victorian London, historians H.J. Dyos and D.A. Reeder argue that the oppositional use of the two terms “did not come about before the 1880s – when the assumed place names of the suburbs were first swept aside by the collective gibe of suburbia – and the all-too-real housing ‘problem’ began to take shape as a public issue.”¹⁸³ This is not by any means to suggest that no consciousness of the existence of spaces differentiated by social class existed before this time, but rather that by the late-Victorian period a process of urban dis-integration, in which the city itself had become “too vast, and the consciousness of the crowd too immanent, to admit the intimacy of a single community for the whole,” had progressed to the point that it required a specific vocabulary to express the “characteristic tensions [that were] being produced not so much, perhaps, between class and class as between the individual and the mass, and between the individual’s inner life and his [sic] outward behavior.”¹⁸⁴ William J. Fishman also cites evidence that the term “East End” itself came into popular currency around 1880 to describe what is today

¹⁸¹ “Whitechapel Nuisances.”
¹⁸² Nead, Victorian Babylon, 161.
¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 360.
the municipally defined borough of Tower Hamlets, and define it as “an area which, according to established *mores*, constituted a permanent threat to the social order,” with the Whitechapel and Spitalfields areas in which the Ripper murders took place, and in which Barry’s theatre was located, regarded as the darkest part of this dark continent.\(^{185}\) The Ripper murders themselves, but also their social circulation in the form of imagery like that displayed by Thomas Barry, played a role in establishing this cultural separation between spaces.

A well-known cartoon and poem published by *Punch* at the height of the Ripper scare neatly expresses the dark possibilities that obscene imagery could have when displayed to an undifferentiated mass. “Horrible London: Or, the Pandemonium of Posters” depicts a devilishly grinning bill-sticker plastering the walls of an East End street with graphic advertisements for penny dreadful literature and sensational stage melodramas (Figure 2.2). The satiric verse attached to the cartoon argues that the residents of areas characterized by “squalor and grime” are susceptible to “taking in through the eyes such suggestions of sin” as those depicted by these “placards portentous.” Though the author of this doggerel verse stops short of explicitly naming the proliferation of images of violence as the cause of the Whitechapel murders, the implication is there to be drawn as he predicts that “mural monstrosities, reeking of crime […] must have an effect that will tell in good time upon legions of dull-witted toilers.”\(^{186}\) The assumption underlying this idea is that visuality is in itself such a powerful force that images expressed in “realist colors” may cause the un- or under-educated members of the working classes to devolve into criminal behavior.

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\(^{186}\) “Horrible London: Or, the Pandemonium of Posters, *Punch, Or the London Charivari*, 13 October 1888.
In a study tracing the cultural construction of the East End in literature and film, Paul Newland analyzes “The Pandemonium of Posters” and argues that “what is interesting about this image is the way in which it marks the fabric of the city as a site of narrative. Walls operate as texts. The city not only produces narratives and provides the stage on which narratives might develop, but also displays the traces of these narratives within its very materiality.” He goes on from this to suggest that for late-Victorian Londoners “an idea of the East End was already, in

some senses, operating as a proto-cinematic phenomenon;” instead of another teleological argument that the arts and culture of the nineteenth-century city were struggling and straining to give birth to the motion picture, he means by this that “mythical narratives were already impacting upon knowledge of the social life of this area” and that, crucially, “these images were being visualized,” expressed both in images and in language marked by optical tropes and metaphors. Clearly one of the senses in which the visual culture of London in 1889 can be said to have been “proto-cinematic,” or at least analogous to later developments in cinematic culture, is in its capacity to address an undifferentiated urban audience of various levels of literacy. As with later debates and contests about the danger that the cinema, with its ability to unite immigrants and members of the working classes into an audience that always threatened to become a mob, posed to both the moral sanctity of the individual viewer and to the social order, public displays of sensational imagery marked the visual as potentially dangerous regardless of its content, and obviously so when the images themselves were representations of graphic violence, as in bills displayed in the “Pandemonium of Posters” or Barry’s sidewalk display of Ripper images.

According to the rhetorical formulae employed in many calls for social reform published in the 1880s, a slum was an area that was obscene in and of itself, even without the presence of graphic posters. The introduction to one of the most influential such tracts, Andrew Mearns’ anonymously published 1883 pamphlet “The Bitter Cry of Outcast London,” assures the reader that “no respectable printer would print, and certainly no decent family would admit even the driest statement of the horrors and infamies discovered in one brief visitation from house to house” in London’s poorest neighborhoods, and because of this he has had “to tone down everything and wholly to omit what most needs to be known, or the ears and eyes of our readers
would have been insufferably outraged.” While Mearns expresses a sense of obligation to protect his readers from encountering the affliction of poverty through their eyes, ironically it was the failure of the buildings in, and occupants of, slums to adequately close themselves off to view in order to maintain a visual distinction between private and public that was a principal sign of their degradation. Mearns speaks with horror about how, in one characteristic tenement, “the rooms are separated only by partitions of boards, some of which are an inch apart […] while there are no locks on the doors, and it would seem that they can only be fastened on the outside by a padlock.” When George R. Sims, whose play London Day By Day will be the focus of the next chapter, published his accounts of visits to London slums in the late 1870s he called them a “dark continent […] as interesting as any of those newly-explored lands which engage the attention of the Royal Geographical society,” and noted with particular horror that on approaching one tenement he was able “to see a good deal of the inside through cracks and crevices and broken panes, […] most of the houses are open day and night, and knockers and bells are things unknown.” A slum was a place simultaneously unfit to look at, and too open to the view of those reform-minded individuals with the courage to explore it.

Inherent in this kind of social reform literature is the paradox stated by Mearns: how can

189 Ibid, 73.
190 Sims first published his work in periodical pieces reminiscent of Henry Mayhew’s Morning Chronicle series of the late 1840s; like Mayhew, Sims collected his journalism and published it in book form beginning with How the Poor Live in 1889. Mearns’ 1883 pamphlet made extensive use of Sims newspaper pieces as source material, so many of Sims’s observations on poverty were published three separate times between 1879 and 89.
192 Ibid, 4.
its authors convince their relatively well-off audience of the extent and urgency of the poverty problem, and the need for both private philanthropy and Parliamentary action to address it, when the very details that might move readers toward this conclusion are too horrible to fully render without verging into obscenity? Charles Booth’s monumental series *Life and Labour of the People in London*, which commenced its publication in 1889 with the volume concerning poverty in East London, proposes one answer to this problem: it uses the observations of the School Board visitors upon whom Booth relied for what he hoped would be an account of every street and house in all of London to create a color-coded map, aiming to objectively identify every part of the city on a continuum between the “lowest grade” of black and “wealthy” yellow. Significantly, Booth’s project does not ignore the visual details of areas that might have been seen as obscene, it transforms them into an alternative visual object that runs no risk of being obscene in itself. As he puts it in the introduction to the series:

> No one can go, as I have done, over the descriptions of the inhabitants of street after street in this huge district [i.e. East London], taken house by house and family by family — full as it is of picturesque details noted down from the lips of the visitor to whose mind they have been recalled by the open pages of his own schedules — and doubt the genuine character of the information and its truth. Of the wealth of my material I have no doubt. I am indeed embarrassed by its mass, and by my resolution to make use of no fact to which I cannot give quantitative value. The materials for sensational stories lie plentifully in every book of our notes; but, even if I had the skill to use my material in this way — that gift of the imagination which is called ‘realistic’ — I should not wish to use it here. There is struggling poverty, there is destitution, there is hunger, drunkenness, brutality, and crime; no one doubts that it is so. My object has been to attempt to show
the numerical relation which poverty, misery, and depravity bear to regular earnings and comparative comfort, and to describe the general conditions under which each class live.¹⁹³

For Booth, as for Mearns, the potentially obscene details that he cannot or will not describe are the structuring absence that underlies the reformist work; unlike Mearns, though, Booth finds another visual form in which to express them. Instead of creating “realistic” verbal or visual pictures of “hunger, drunkenness, brutality, and crime,” Booth abstracts these “picturesque details,” first into statistics, and then into the abstract visual form of cartographic representations of the city informed by these numbers.

Ironically, while most of the murders attributed to Jack the Ripper happened in streets marked by Booth’s survey as either black to signify “lowest class, vicious, semi-criminal” or dark blue for “very poor, casual, chronic want,” the whole of Whitechapel Road in the area between Commercial Street and the London Hospital was labeled in all three of the versions of the poverty map that was produced in 1889-90 as red for “well-to-do” (Figure 2.3).¹⁹⁴ What the Whitechapel murders, and any attempt to turn them into objects of popular entertainment, did was threaten to erase this distinction in the imagination of the broader metropolitan public. This is one of the reasons why Thomas Barry’s neighbors took him to court: not only were his images sensational in themselves, in attracting crowds of precisely the sort of “slow-witted toilers” Punch warned against in “The Pandemonium of Posters” they created the sort of sensational scenes that authors of reformist literature about urban space had come to rely upon for

¹⁹⁴ See Laura Vaughan, “Mapping the East End Labyrinth,” in Jack the Ripper and the East End, ed. Alex Werner (London: Chatto and Windus, 2008), 220-1 for an account of these three maps, as well as for a modern cartographical analysis relating the exact sites of the murders to Booth’s categorization of streets throughout the East End.
authenticity and authority, while insisting that they could not directly describe them. The obscene content of Barry’s images created another kind of obscenity, a theatricalized mass of unruly bodies drawn by the spectacle of violated women to a vulgar commercial enterprise. Whether it was the content of the images themselves or the size of the crowd to which his neighbors most objected, their real quarrel was with the way these images and the crimes they depicted threatened to define the “well-to-do” places where many East Enders lived and worked as “slums.” Though Mr. Hunt and his fellow small traders won their case against Thomas Barry’s brand of theatricality at the Old Bailey, in the court of myth and history they have fared less well: “Whitechapel” has for more than a century evoked rather fewer thoughts of prosperous grocers than images of a labyrinth stalked, in both fact and fiction, by the menacing figure of Jack the Ripper.

Figure 2.3
Waxes, Freaks, and the Objects of Anatomy

Stepping inside the shops at 106 and 107 Whitechapel Road that Thomas Barry used as a penny theatre in the late 1880s, we will now examine the display of exceptional bodies in the form of wax effigies and performing freaks. While accounts of some penny theatres suggest that a waxworks or a freak show were the principal entertainments on offer, in many others both kinds of display were apparently offered as a kind of curtain-raiser or intermediate show between whatever outdoor attractions were offered in order to solicit patronage, and one or more short melodramas performed as the final part of the total bill. This seems to have been the case at Barry’s theatre, which included a wax-works and at least three identified freak performers — a bearded woman, an exceptionally fat Frenchwoman, and a female boxer — but also staged melodramas that will be analyzed in the next section. At present we will consider the practice of displaying wax effigies of the Whitechapel murder victims, something that may have been done at Barry’s theatre and can be definitively documented at several others in Whitechapel Road, alongside the live performance of freaks who most accounts of East End gaffs suggest were overwhelmingly female.

None of the surviving newspaper accounts offer much objective detail on Barry’s wax exhibition: The Era mentions only “an imitation policeman in wax outside” the theatre, and the fact that there was a more extensive waxworks inside, while Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper does not mention waxes at all. A Daily Mail article from September 1888, describing the scene in Whitechapel Road in the immediate aftermath of Annie Chapman’s murder, describes ballad sellers hawking copies of “Lines on the Terrible Tragedy” outside a “wretched waxwork show [that] had some horrible picture [sic] out in front, and people paying their pence to see
representations of the murdered woman within.” This might be a description of Barry’s enterprise, or of a competitor’s. Though he may have attended Barry’s gaff as well, Montagu Williams account of his first trip to another penny theatre further east on Whitechapel Road describes how “the curious and prurient [were] allowed sufficient time to examine the waxworks” before one of the freak performers, a strong-woman named Miss Juanita, gathered them for a performance that consisted of lifting weights attached to her hair and boxing with a member of the audience. Among these figures he claims to have seen “a horrible presentment of Matilda Turner [sic], the first victim, as well as one of Marry Ann Nichols, whose body was found in Buck’s Row.”

Montagu Williams description of these two waxes suggests that they attained a level of gore that was greater than the illustrations of the victims publicly displayed outside the theatre, or in print sources like The Illustrated Police News. Even the most gruesome of the penny-paper covers, such as the 29 September panel titled “The Terrible Tragedy of Annie Chapman’s Life the Latest Victim of Mysterious Crime” (Figure 2.4), assiduously avoid showing abdominal wounds and internal organs, or exposing any part of the victims’ bodies that would normally be covered by clothing, with the exception of their stockinged ankles; since the P.C. who was testifying for the prosecution at Barry’s trial is paraphrased as referring only to quantities of blood and disheveled clothing, it seems reasonable to conclude that the images outside his gaff met about the same standard for gory explicitness. By contrast, Williams describes wax figures in which “the heads were represented as being nearly severed from the bodies, and in each case

196 Williams, Round London, 7.
197 Presumably Martha Tabram, who was called Turner in early reporting on her murder and likely used the name after separating from her husband Henry Tabram.
198 Ibid, 8.
there were shown, in red paint, three terrible gashes reaching from the abdomen to the ribs;”\textsuperscript{199}

This would seem to indicate that at least the waxen flesh of the figures’ abdomens was exposed; as such, the effigies were part what was by the 1880s a long tradition of depicting murdered human bodies and especially aestheticized female figures in wax as objects that combined macabre fascination with some gesture toward cultural enlightenment and anatomical instruction.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{image.png}
\caption{Figure 2.4}
\end{figure}

In the 1880s and 90s the most famous single exhibition of wax figures in the world was, as it doubtless is today, that conducted in the vicinity of Baker Street under the name of Madame Tussaud’s. Advertisements for the museum were ubiquitous throughout London, and these almost invariably mentioned its Chamber of Horrors, for which an additional charge of six pence was applied on top of the one-shilling general admission. The addition of new figures, either to the regular exhibit or the Chamber, was routinely covered by the theatrical columns of major

\textsuperscript{199} Ibid, 5.
London papers, and the 1888 edition of Charles Eyre Pascoe’s annual *London of To-Day* city guidebook features an advertisement for Tussaud’s on its fly-leaf that opens with the names of notables like “Sir Francis Bacon, Sir Charles Warren, Jenny Lind, [and] Pope Leo XIII” that could be encountered there, and closes with a mention in bold type of the “Chamber of Horrors, Lipski and Pranzini.” Its price would have made a visit to Tussaud’s a special occasion for, if not indeed wholly out of reach of, most members of a penny theatre audience, but the ubiquity of the museum’s and especially the Chamber’s fame and advertising would still have made both a recognizable part of the cultural landscape that a showman like Barry would have been striving, whether consciously or unconsciously, to imitate.

Tussaud’s Chamber of Horrors had evolved out of its founder’s practice of displaying wax models she had made of the severed heads and bodies of figures like Robespierre and Marat, who had been killed during the French Revolution and its violent aftermath. These quite

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200 See, for example, “Public Amusements,” *Reynold’s Newspaper*, 2 October 1881 which includes an item on “a portrait of Guiteau, the notorious assassin who committed the foul murder of the lamented President Garfield [being] appropriately placed in the Chamber of Horrors at Madam Tussaud’s.”

201 Warren was of course deeply embroiled in the Ripper case in his role as Metropolitan Police Commissioner, though his headline mention in an ad published before the Ripper events probably owes to a combination of the positive publicity he received for his military service in Egypt in the early 1880s and the negative press he got in connection with the Bloody Sunday riot in Trafalgar Square in 1887.


203 Henri Pranzini was executed in 1887 for the murder of an infamous demimonde and her household staff in Paris; Israel Lipski in the same year for the murder of a young woman in East London who had been forced to drink nitric acid. Lipski’s name became connected with the Ripper murders when Israel Schwartz, who seems to have disturbed the Ripper and a possible accomplice in the course of mutilating Elizabeth Stride outside the International Working Men’s Education Club in Berner Street, testified that the killer hissed the word “Lipski” at him, causing Schwartz to flee (see Sugden 212-8 for a full account of this testimony).

204 See Kate Berridge, *Waxing Mythical: The Life and Legend of Madame Tussaud* (London: John Murray, 2006), 146-53 for an account of the ongoing controversy over whether a figure of Marat dead in his bath created by Tussaud herself was a copy of, or the model for, David’s
gruesome figures remained in the Chamber throughout the nineteenth century, but as the century went on most of the new additions were effigies of the perpetrators, rather than victims, of famous murders and other crimes.\textsuperscript{205} It is possible that Tussaud’s did show tableaux of murders in progress that placed both the murderer and victim together in the 1880s;\textsuperscript{206} at the time Allsop’s Waxworks Exhibition, a Tussaud’s imitator that toured Britain charging the same one shilling admission, definitely had a group of “life-size wax figures of Lord Cavendish and Mr. Burke being attacked in Phoenix Park by the Invincibles” who stabbed them to death in an Irish Republican terrorist action.\textsuperscript{207} If violated bodies were not the regular stock-in-trade of Tussaud’s Chamber of Horrors during the second half of the nineteenth century, it was still not immune from “criticism from clergymen and journalists that [it was] glorifying and immortalizing crime,” with \textit{Punch} particularly critical in the middle years of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{208} Indeed, in the 1860s the museum made an abortive attempt to relabel the Chamber of Horrors as the “Chamber of Comparative Physiognomy,” putting forward the notion that viewing accurate renditions of the bodies, faces, and heads of famous criminals might have an educational value in allowing the public to recognize and further abhor criminals and criminality in daily life. Though short-lived, this was an attempt to assimilate the macabre horrors tradition to another important, and culturally controversial, mode of display in wax: the exhibition of anatomical models.

\textit{Marat Assassinè.}

\textsuperscript{205} See Pamela Pilbeam, \textit{Madame Tussaud and the History of Waxworks} (London: Hambledon and London, 2003), plates 1 and 23 for Robespierre and Marat, respectively.

\textsuperscript{206} This seems to have been the case, for example, in the museum’s figures of Burke and Hare. However, since Tussaud’s don’t publish a catalogue of historical images and denied multiple requests to access their archives on the basis that they “do not allow students as a matter of policy,” I can only point with certainty to plate 23 of Pilbeam’s book, which shows a figure of George Joseph Smith coolly drying his waxen hands as he stands over the body of his young wife floating in the tub in which he has just drowned her, but dates from 1915.

\textsuperscript{207} “Wanton Destruction at a Public Exhibition,” \textit{Manchester Times}, 23 June 1883.

\textsuperscript{208} Pilbeam, \textit{Madame Tussaud and the History of Waxworks}, 159.
Unlike Tussaud’s Chamber, which can be seen as a representational tradition parallel to the exhibition of wax figures in Whitechapel Road gaffs but running in a relatively higher cultural register, by the late 1880s the exhibition of anatomical waxes in dedicated museums had been virtually eliminated from London. A.W. Bates has traced this campaign of suppression as part of an organized effort by doctors to eliminate showman-physicians like Dr. Joseph Kahn, who frequently dispensed medical advice, patent medicines, and pamphlets about venereal disease on the premises of anatomy museums that were usually open only to men, but attracted relatively large working-class audiences. Joining with anti-pornography advocates, “the successful prosecution of Kahn’s museum [in 1873] under the Obscene Publications Act of 1857 branded all public display of anatomical specimens as potentially obscene, [and] thereafter anatomical education was restricted to medical professionals and public anatomy survived only in side-shows” of the kind conducted by showmen in places like Whitechapel Road.209 Thus, while a waxworks like Thomas Barry’s in 1889 may have seemed a poor relation of Tussaud’s Chamber of Horrors across town, it was among the only remaining venues for “the persistently ambiguous exhibition of anatomical waxworks, which in some cases had genuine scientific credentials and purpose and in others used its purported educational value to add a gloss of respectability to what was actually a raree show for the prurient.”210

Wax figures of the Whitechapel murder victims as exhibited in 1888 or 89 were also defined in part by an intense legislative and cultural effort to restrict the circulation of both bodies and representations of bodies. Both the Obscene Publications Act of 1857 and the Indecent Advertisements Act of 1889, already discussed, were based in part on a presumed link

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between representations of the body and venereal disease, sexual dysfunction, and other forms of abnormality. The Contagious Diseases Acts of the 1860s had allowed police to more-or-less-arbitrarily arrest women believed to be prostitutes so that they could be forcibly examined for venereal disease and, if found to be infected, confined in hospitals until deemed cured. These were repealed in 1886 after decades of agitation by feminists led by Josephine Butler, but they had arguably had the effect of “imposing preconceptions about prostitute identity on a much more fluid situation, [and] were responsible for the definition and stigmatization of a distinct prostitute class.”211 The women who were the victims of the Whitechapel murders embodied this “fluid situation;” most turned to sex work only when they could not find other small menial jobs with which to support themselves, but where nevertheless described almost entirely in the discussion of their deaths by the West End press as “unfortunates,” defined by their prostitution. As an exhibition of their bodies open to anatomical inspection by working class viewers, it is hardly surprising that a witness like the magistrate and reform advocate Montague Williams found waxworks of the victims “revolting in the extreme,” particularly since they used the fact that “the Whitechapel murders were fresh in the memory of the public […] [for] commercial account.”212

Williams’ appraisal of East End freak exhibitions is no more approving. In describing Miss Juanita, the strong-woman and lady-boxer who opened the show at a gaff he visited opposite London Hospital, he speculates that “much of the interest which […] she excited among the passers-by” who became the show’s patrons was due to the fact that she “did not appear to be more than sixteen years of age [and] wore fleshings.” Attributing to his fellow patrons a prurient

212 Williams, Round London, 5.
interest in her apparently naked body, Williams himself seems to have inspected her physicality closely enough to allow him to observe that “when the performance was over, every nerve in the poor creature’s body seemed to be quivering,” though the attention is stated as paternalistic concern rather than sexual interest, and he is quite clear that he found her physical exertions “a sickening sight.”  

Williams presents his encounters with the East End freaks as those of intrepid explorer who, upon learning of “four or five” penny theatres operating in the immediate vicinity of the London Hospital, “personally visited and closely inspected all these premises, and anything more degrading and debasing than the performances that went on there [he] never saw.” Performers he witnessed comprised any “number of monstrosities,” including the “fat women and performing Zulus,” and the likes of what was probably the bearded woman shown by Barry and described as having been captured by Buffalo Bill, who Williams describes as “a most disgusting-looking object.”  

The freaks described by Williams and attributed by *The Era* to Barry’s show were all distinctly other, and overwhelmingly female. As exceptional bodies presented to public view in close proximity, the East End freaks and wax effigies of the Whitechapel victims were here subject to a kind of representational and ideological conflation. Both the living women and the representations of the dead were, at least from the perspective of a reformist magistrate and quite probably to many audience members, subject of simultaneous interest and loathing. Whether disgust or pleasure predominated in the experience of looking at such othered bodies depended on the individual viewer’s cultural expectations, though a mingling of the two was likely experienced by a commentator like Williams, who seems to have taken a certain pleasure in his stated disgust.

Though Williams provides the most direct witness to freak performances in Whitechapel

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213 Ibid, 7
214 Ibid, 8-9.
Road at the time of the Ripper murders, and the only direct description of wax figures of Whitechapel murder victims displayed in an East End penny gaff, the audiences for such theatres have typically been regarded as overwhelmingly male and mostly made up of “poor, out-of-work boys, young laborers, errand boys, shop boys and girls, milliners’ girls, apprentices and the ubiquitous costers.” They could, however, be more culturally mixed — Mayhew reports attending a mid-century penny show at which roughly ten percent of the audience were adult men and a large majority of the people in the house were young women and girls — so they must still be regarded as encompassing a diversity of social viewpoints and audience expectations. In light of this, our brief survey raises a few evocative but probably insoluble questions. What level of realism and detail did wax figures of this kind achieve? Without remaining examples of any images of such figures, we can be reasonably certain that the kind of mimetic detail executed by Tussaud’s and striven after by its up-market imitators like Allsop’s, whose display of the murders of Cavendish and Burke by Irish Republicans was valued at £350 when its seven figures were destroyed in 1883, would have been unachievable for a showman like Barry whose annual ground rent was only £245. If such penny shows nevertheless styled themselves consciously after Tussaud’s massively successful Chamber of Horrors, which was at the time devoted more to the display of effigies of murderers than the murdered, might Barry’s or any other waxworks have attempted to display a figure of “Jack the Ripper” in wax? There were certainly other images depicting “the killer” in circulation at the time, including the cover of every single issue of The Illustrated Police News published in November of 1888, with the 24 November “Portrait: Sketches of Supposed Whitechapel Monster and Incidents in the Case” a characteristic example showing multiple ways of rendering him that might have provided models

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216 “Wanton Destruction at a Public Exhibition.”
(Figure 2.5). If penny theatre waxworks like Barry’s were still given to the exhibition of anatomical figures, is it possible that a reclining anatomical “Venus” like the one owned by Kahn, which could have the front of its torso removed to display 85 separate sculpted organs inside (Figure 2.6), might have been adapted with the addition of a bit of paint and the near-removal of its head to be exhibited as a Whitechapel murder victim?
Whatever they may have precisely looked like, the exhibition of wax images and freakish bodies in Whitechapel Road penny theatres like Thomas Barry’s placed the Whitechapel murder victims into representational traditions that mingled an ostensible educational intention with a strong, and potentially arousing, appeal to voyeurism. In standing next to an effigy of a Whitechapel murder victim with “gashes reaching from the abdomen to the ribs,” a viewer was in some sense taking the same perspective on the body of a Whitechapel victim that visitors to Kahn’s museum had taken toward his famous “Venus” figure, implicitly adopting an anatomical world-view that categorized such women as prostitutes and regarded them as a medical problem to be sorted, diagnosed, and contained. The sensationalism of the effigies, and a history of active attempts by medical men to categorize anatomical knowledge as obscene when offered to anyone outside the profession, made the purchase of such a view for a mere penny a

217 Williams, Round London, 5
potentially transgressive act. At the same time, young male and even female viewers were also adopting the position of the Whitechapel killer himself, standing over the bodies of his victims before turning their attention to live performances by other exceptional women. If this sensation of identifying with the killer was experienced, whether the feeling was revolting, pleasurable, or pleasurably revolting must have varied widely according to the individual’s predilections and predispositions. In the East End the polyvalent possibilities were further multiplied by the fact that many of the patrons of such shows may have personally known, or at least been familiar with, the very women they were seeing represented in wax. While Montagu Williams, in celebrating his own role as a magistrate in attempting to suppress penny shows, states that “one cannot help deploring the pernicious influences which these places must have exercised in the past over the poor and ignorant,” the number of representational traditions and potential modes of spectatorship and identification that intersected in them compels us to complicate his easy dismissal of “these horrible dens.”

Class Conflict and Myth in the Popular Dramatic Tradition

In describing testimony given by various figures at Barry’s February 1889 trial, The Era provides the names of three specific plays that were performed there. *Cartouche, the French Jack Sheppard* is named alongside *Maria Marten* and *Sweeney Todd*. *Cartouche* had its origin in the eighteenth century tradition of highwayman dramas based on the historical figures Jack Sheppard and Dick Turpin, which are most famously represented by Gay’s 1728 *The Beggars’ Opera*, and which where updated for the nineteenth century London stage by the prolific W.T. Moncrieff in 1825 and J.B. Buckstone in 1839. *Maria Marten*, also performed frequently under

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218 Ibid, 11.
variations on the title *The Murder in the Red Barn*, was first staged in 1828 and was based on an actual murder that occurred in Polstead, Suffolk in May of 1827, followed by the trial and execution of the murderer William Corder in August 1828. *Sweeney Todd* was probably first dramatized in March of 1847 on the basis of a serial novel, *The String of Pearls*, that had been running in Edward Lloyd’s *The People’s Periodical and Family Library* since 21 November 1847 but hadn’t actually concluded by the time the drama opened at the Royal Britannia Saloon as the opening piece to the feature drama *The Lear of Private Life.*

All of these plays were staples of the illegitimate stage in the second half of the nineteenth century, and all offer insight into the formation of the Ripper myth in two different but related ways. In the first place, the plays themselves are mythic: all are examples of dramas based on violent crimes that had either occurred, or were widely accepted as having a basis in fact, and so are in their own right examples of how the stage functions as a venue for transforming the cultural memory of events into mythic signifiers. In the second sense, the secondary meaning of these myths, the social problems they both posed and managed, were brought into contact with the evolving Ripper figure by being staged in a location that was itself becoming mythic, Whitechapel, and by a direct association with Jack the Ripper forged by Barry’s commercial use of images of his victims, and by reports like those in *The Era* and *Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper* that linked his show to the Whitechapel murders. Like the imagery and other performances in Barry’s theatre, these plays focused on the depiction of bodies, often female bodies, both receiving and committing acts of violence. The plays contributed to the characterization of the Whitechapel murderer and his victims in ways that resonated for their audiences by enacting scenarios of commercial and sexual violence with which they were

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219 “Public Amusements for the Week,” *Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper*, 28 February 1847 seems to provide the earliest announcement of the play.
already familiar, and these have in turn shaped mythic perceptions of the Ripper down to the present day.

All three of the plays named in connection with Barry’s theatre were durable staples of both penny theatres and of legitimate ones, like the Britannia in Hoxton or the Pavilion in Whitechapel Road, that served largely working-class audiences. Paul Sheridan argues that the popularity of such crime dramas in penny gaffs is evidence that the audience at such theatres, which he follows reform-minded Victorian journalists and commentators in seeing as made up largely of juvenile delinquents and “the lost and damned,”

nevertheless had “a strange streak of innocence running in its veins when plays such as Maria Martin [sic] or The Demon Barber [i.e Sweeney Todd] were put on [because] these horrors were more real to them than any they committed in their own lives, and their usual rowdiness [sic] would be shocked into petrified silence as the terrible murders were committed before their eyes on the stage.”

Quite contrary to this opinion, I want to suggest that these plays were enduringly popular with working-class audiences at least in part because they expressed an ideological critique of class relations in a colonial society increasingly dominated by the capitalist marketplace, because the “setup and action” they depended on depicted violence as either a means by which the lower classes were sexually and commercially exploited, or else as a legitimate mode of resistance to such exploitation. Though they existed in a multitude of versions, only a few of which have survived as texts that can be read by the historian, over the decades between their initial appearance and their staging in Thomas Barry’s theatre these plays had effectively become “scenarios” in the sense of the term employed by Diana Taylor: as pre-existing narrative structures reiterated to an audience already broadly familiar with their plots, variations on Sweeney Todd, Maria Marten, or

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221 Ibid 4.
**Jack Sheppard** and his brother highwaymen were “meaning making paradigms that structure[d] social environments, behaviors, and potential outcomes.” An examination of these plays will suggest that the tradition which each of them constituted was one loaded with distinct messages about issues of social class and gender that had at least potentially subversive meanings.

Barry seems to have operated a kind of repertory system, typical for a penny theatre, in which short versions of plays “each […] lasted about twenty minutes to half-an-hour, and the shows followed each other in succession as audiences were collected.” It is not specified whether a single play held the stage for a period of one or more performances in an effort to attract as many individual customers as possible, or if performances of multiple plays alternated on a given date, perhaps with live performances by freaks as a separate “show,” in order to encourage individual audience members to take in (and pay for) multiple different performances as part of a single evening’s theatrical outing; the latter seems more plausible but in either case the gaff was clearly being operated as a volume business. We also cannot say with any certainty what the particular half-hour version of *Maria Marten* would have included when performed at 107 Whitechapel Road in 1889, or what exact relationship the text of the *Cartouche* played there would have had to other versions of the Jack Sheppard story, or even whether distinct textual scripts were composed for Barry’s *Sweeney Todd*, or if his actors instead used the well-known structure as the basis for improvisation. But by examining the histories of these plays, a few features of the scripts from earlier versions that do survive, and accounts of versions of these plays witnessed on penny stages, we can suggest some of the key iconographic and ideological features that the plays would almost certainly have had. Ultimately I will suggest that there was an ideological and iconographic slippage between these dramatic scenarios and the evolving

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223 “A Penny Show.”
Ripper mythos, so that a working class audience that had gone past images of the Whitechapel victims to see a production of *Sweeney Todd* would find features of the drama resonating with their experience of current events, and later audiences and artists looking at and representing Jack the Ripper were reproducing a mythology that incorporated images and ideas taken as much from *Maria Marten* as from any historical events in Whitechapel.

For our first act we’ll look at *Cartouche, the French Jack Sheppard*. Of the three plays under consideration it is the oldest and the most complicated to pin down textually. As its title suggests, the play was clearly in the tradition of dramatizations of the story of the early eighteenth century housebreaker Jack Sheppard, whose reputation was built largely on a number of successful escapes from London jails. Following his execution in 1724 Sheppard’s story was told in a number of media, including a prose biography by Daniel Defoe, a major dramatization by Gay as *The Beggars’ Opera*, and Hogarth’s famous series of engravings *Industry and Idleness*, in which the allegorically-named apprentice Tom Idle was probably based on Sheppard. Its definitive nineteenth-century form was established in 1839, with the serialization of William Harrison Ainsworth’s novelized version of Sheppard’s life in the pages of *Bentley’s Miscellany*, which served as the basis for dramatic versions that proliferated so widely that in 1839 *The Examiner* declared:

> Jack Sheppard is the attraction at the Adelphi; Jack Sheppard is the bill of fare at the Surrey; Jack Sheppard is the choice example of morals and conduct held forth to the young citizens at the City of London; Jack Sheppard reigns over the Victoria; Jack Sheppard rejoices crowds in the Pavilion; Jack Sheppard is the favourite at the Queen’s;

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and at Sadler’s Wells there is no profit but of Jack Sheppard.225

One of the keys to this popularity was almost certainly the convention, which began with Mrs. Keeley’s famous performance as Sheppard in Buckstone’s version of the play at the Haymarket, of having an attractive woman play the role of the young thief as a breeches part, thus providing one of the few outlets for a man in early- and mid-Victorian London to publicly inspect the legs of a woman in a relatively legitimate public setting. The chief villain of the story, Jonathan Wild, was presented in these versions as both a criminal and an agent of the government, who colludes with Sir Rowland Trenchard in a series of murders that allow the latter to disinherit his elder siblings and claim an estate to which both Sheppard and his fellow apprentice, the industrious Thames Darrell, have superior claims. Though set in the distant historical past, the subversive potential of a story that made a hero of a young man driven to crime by the machinations of a corrupt peer with the aid of a government agent was clear to theatrical authorities. When Lord William Russell was murdered in 1840 by his valet Courvoisier, who testified that he had read Ainsworth’s novel version of *Jack Sheppard* immediately before killing his master, a ban on new Sheppard plays was imposed.

The prohibition on Sheppard dramas was only erratically enforced by a succession of Lords Chamberlain,226 and was officially lifted in 1880.227 In the intervening years the ban was gotten around by changing the names of the characters, or else using foreign analogues like Louis Dominique Cartouche, as the subject of dramas with similar plots and themes. Though such specific subject-matter prohibitions would have had little meaning in the context of an unlicensed penny theatre, where the presentation of *any* spoken drama was illegal to begin with,

226 Springhall, *Youth, Popular Culture and Moral Panics*, 166.
Charles Whibley’s *Book of Scoundrels*, first published in 1897, suggests the extent to which the figures of Sheppard and Cartouche had become imaginatively interchangeable: it devotes a chapter to each criminal and another to a comparison “of these great men [who] harboured a similar ambition, so their careers are closely parallel.” In Thomas Barry’s Whitechapel penny-gaff there probably was no functional difference, either in terms of the theatrical event that would have been performed or the audience’s reading of that event, between presenting a play called *Jack Sheppard* or doing one calling its title character Cartouche and merely mentioning the English figure in the subtitle.

Playbills from the Pavilion document several productions of a *Cartouche* play from the 1860s and suggest that their relationship to the tradition of *Jack Sheppard* dramas was straightforward in that context as well. Characters in the play are sometimes described by the bills in ways that relate them to those in the *Jack Sheppard* dramas: when Gribichon is listed as “the French Blueskin, the faithful follower of Cartouche,” the character is being named quite literally as his counterpart in the versions of the Sheppard story dramatized by Buckstone and others. By the same token *Cartouche*’s Count d’Aubani, described in another Pavilion bill as “the Robber Count,” is directly analogous to Sir Rowland Trenchard. In one key point of staging, the use of a female performer to play the character of Sheppard, the evidence for *Cartouche* in the East End is mixed: in 1860 the character was played at the Pavilion by “Miss

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Marriott,” in 1861 by “Mr. William Travers,” and in 1868 by “Miss M.A. Bellair.”\textsuperscript{231} Though apparently not always observed at the licensed Pavilion, it seems that the convention of cross-dressed performance was honored in at least some penny theatres: in his 1874 account of a “visit to a Whitechapel gaff,” James Greenwood describes seeing Mrs. Douglas Fitzbruce as the title character in an “original equestrian spectacle entitled ‘Gentleman Jack, or the Game of High Toby,’ with real horses and a real carriage.”\textsuperscript{232} Though he seems not to have been able to make much sense of the performance he witnessed, Greenwood leaves little doubt that the “buckskin shorts, and boots of brilliant polish knee high and higher” that were sported by Mrs. Fitzbruce were a significant focus of audience interest as she fired pistols, robbed a coach, and carried off the daughter of a rich man.

What I mean to suggest here is that the two stories, \textit{Cartouche} and \textit{Jack Sheppard}, were interchangeable in both themes and characters to a high degree: whatever name the title character went by, he was a criminal with a penchant for daring escapes, a loyal sidekick, and an array of antagonists belonging to or acting as agents for an elevated stratum of society. Though the specific details of any part of the longer narrative may not have been staged in a short penny theatre version, they could nevertheless be counted on to reside within the audience’s cultural milieu and memory. While the coincidence in name between “the picaresque superstar of English highwaymen, Jack Sheppard, the agile prison-breaker [who] used to stroll around town in fancy attire as if to defy the authorities […] [with] swagger or ‘sauciness’ [that] seemed to anticipate this new Jack” the Ripper has been widely remarked upon,\textsuperscript{233} the resonance between the two

\textsuperscript{231} “Mixed playbill for Morna, or, The lost one; Alone in the pirate’s lair; Cartouche, the French Jack Sheppard,” Pavilion Theatre, 1868. East London Theatre Archive database, V&A Theatre Collections. \url{http://www.elta-project.org/browse.html?recordId=2554} Accessed 5 March 2015.

\textsuperscript{232} James Greenwood, \textit{The Wilds of London} (London: Chatto and Windus, 1874), 12.

\textsuperscript{233} L. Perry Curtis, \textit{Jack the Ripper and the London Press}. (New Haven: Yale University Press,
Jacks, or rather between Jack the Ripper and the theatrical figure of Cartouche presented in Thomas Barry’s penny gaff, is also more complex than this. There may have been some sense in which the two figures bled together, particularly in their apparent ability to evade capture, but a significant feature of the nineteenth century dramatic tradition around Sheppard is that he actually receives more violence than he commits, and that this comes at the hands of bailiffs, noblemen, and the principal antagonist Jonathan Wild, who is both a criminal and a secret agent of the state. To the extent that Jack Sheppard and Jack the Ripper could be conflated as heroic figures evading the law, the dramatic legacy of the highwayman drama would have been to cast the forces of law and order as themselves corrupt to begin with. Moreover, if the “French Jack Sheppard” on Barry’s stage was played by a woman, the play would have shown the actions of a corrupt and conspiratorial state directed against the female body, which the Ripper murders also threatened. These two possibilities – that the Whitechapel murderer might be either a heroic figure expressing resistance to authority, or else a menacing force colluding with it to destroy “women of the people” – would seem irreconcilable on their face, but both would nevertheless have been evoked by performances of a Jack Sheppard scenario in a venue close to the murder sites that used images of the slain women as part of its theatrical appeal.

Discussion of our second dramatic feature, Maria Marten, requires a brief carpenter’s scene set in the village of Polstead, Suffolk. It was there, in May of 1827, that William Corder, whose mother held the lease on the Red Barn that would become ineluctably linked to the story, murdered the young Maria and concealed her body beneath the floor of the selfsame premises. In April of 1828, after nearly a year spent living in the capital and writing letters to the Marten
family assuring them that their daughter was alive, and well, and living in London, her body was 
exhumed and Corder was arrested by a London policeman named Lea or Lee, who found the 
killer living with a wife who was “much older than he[, …] of a lady-like appearance,” and most 
definitely not Maria Marten. The resulting trial and execution in Suffolk were public 
spectacles and press events worthy of lengthy dramaturgical analysis in their own right, but it is 
to the long tradition of Maria Marten plays on the theatrical stage that we must now confine 
ourselves. By the time such a play was performed on the penny stage of Thomas Barry’s theatre 
in Whitechapel Road, six decades of reiteration and transformation had distilled notions about 
gender, class, and the spectacle of violence that had accumulated in the drama, and that made its 
staging in direct proximity to both the real sites of the Whitechapel murders and to 
representations of the victims’ bodies potentially fraught with meaning for a working-class 
audience.

The use of the Red Barn story as an entertainment on and off stage began at the time of 
Corder’s arrest and trial, and persisted throughout the nineteenth century. At the 1828 
Bartholomew Fair, an exhibition of pictures of “Corder’s Head, Miss Marten, Red Barn, Trial, 
Execution, &c” was the third-highest-earning penny act; it was out-grossed only by 
menageries charging six pence a gander, and the one-penny spectacles “The Fat Boy and Girl” 
and “The Pig-Faced Lady.” The first recorded dramatic version staged in London seems to 
have been performed at the Pavilion Theatre in late 1828, and like the various Jack Sheppard-
related plays done there, it is well attested in playbills held by the Theatre Archive of the 
Victoria and Albert Museum. Variations on the play featured heavily in the repertoire of

235 “Conclusion of Bartholomew Fair,” Morning Chronicle, 8 September 1828. 
236 This last was, as it turned out, “nothing more or less than the young she bear, closely shaved!” (“Bartholomew Fair,” Morning Chronicle, 14 September 1828.)
legitimate East End theatres through the 1860s. It was almost certainly just as popular in penny,
fairground, and other types of semi-legitimate and outright illegitimate theatres, and venues like
Barry’s preserved the Maria Marten tradition in all of its mythic dimensions right through to the
twentieth century.

Surviving scripts and accounts of performances place the Maria Marten tradition within
what Michael Booth characterizes as the “village variety” of domestic melodrama, strongly
marked by “the portrayal of the upper classes as heartless oppressors and seducers[; …] the
villain of a village play will be the local peer or landowner bent on corrupting the heroine,
evicting or imprisoning her old father as a weapon against her, and murdering the righteously
interfering hero.” Surviving Red Barn plays are within this tradition in presenting Corder as a
social-climbing member of the exploitative upper class, who uses Maria to gratify his sexual
appetites and then kills her because, as he tells her in one published version attributed to a
nineteenth century playwright named John Latimer, “you are a clog upon my actions, a chain
that keeps me from reaching ambitious height, [so] you are to die!”

By contrast, Maria is consistently portrayed in the dramas as a relative innocent who
succumbs to the seduction of a man above her in social class, and eventually pays for this folly
with her life. At the time of Corder’s actual trial, it was widely known that the historical Maria
Marten had borne children to several men out of wedlock, but she was nevertheless described in
the press as a “fine young woman,” if prone to making the occasional “imprudent connexion.”
Her killer was, by contrast, “the son of an opulent farmer in the neighborhood” who had been
able to lay his hands on the considerable sum of “about four hundred pounds” in order to make

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238 Maria Marten or, the Murder in the Red Barn, ed. Montagu Slater (London: Gerald How,
1928), 63.
his initial escape to London.\textsuperscript{239} Although Maria’s indiscretions were minimized by many newspaper writers because she was only the “daughter of a mole-catcher,”\textsuperscript{240} she was almost immediately subjected to a thorough whitewashing of her character along conservative moralistic lines that completely elided her earlier pregnancies and previous relationships: James Curtis, author of the first book-length publication about the case to appear in 1828, calls her “the innocent nymph of her native village,”\textsuperscript{241} and in several surviving dramatizations of the story her father is upgraded from a vermin catcher to “Farmer Marten.” We can compare this to the aftermath of the Whitechapel murders in 1888, when the large and emotional crowds of friends and acquaintances that attended several of the victims’ funerals almost invariably described the murdered women, all of whom struggled with addiction to alcohol and at least occasionally resorted to prostitution, as “quiet and inoffensive, sober and industrious,” effectively resisting the characterization of the women most common in the West End press;\textsuperscript{242} middle-class writers in the radical press like George Bernard Shaw even lauded them as “women of the people.”\textsuperscript{243} The story of Maria Marten’s murder in the Red Barn was both a historical analogue for this process, and a potentially persuasive outlet for some members of a working-class audience in Whitechapel to make sense of the violence that was at the center of a media storm they were collectively weathering. When William Corder disposed of Maria Marten on Thomas Barry’s stage, he would have suggested to viewers what kind of man Jack the Ripper might be, thus interweaving elements of the Red Barn murder into the Ripper myth.

\textsuperscript{239} “Accidents, Offenses, &c. Examiner, 27 April 1828.
\textsuperscript{240} “Horrible Murder, Morning Chronicle, 24 April 1828.
\textsuperscript{242} Judith Walkowitz, City of Dreadful Delight, 215-6.
\textsuperscript{243} “Blood Money to Whitechapel,” The Star, 24 September 1888.
As the last act of our penny-theatre triple bill, we turn to the dramatic exploits of Sweeney Todd. The trio of plays presented on Barry’s stage were in fact frequently identified together as part of the common repertoire of what one anonymous critic called in 1879 “fourth-class” theatres, given over to the presentation of “Jack Sheppard, Sweeney Todd, Maria Marten, and such-like offal.” I have thus far suggested that the plays Maria Marten and Jack Sheppard, especially if the title character of the latter was portrayed by a woman performer, might have been interpreted by a gaff audience as assertions that violence is something leveled against women and working-class heroes by economically advantaged men and representatives of a corrupt state. As a paradigm for viewing the Whitechapel murders, plays like this would have fed into characterizations of the murdered women as “poor but honest,” victims of oppressive social forces and predatory men of privilege. Sweeney Todd in his eponymous play, by contrast, would have offered an unalloyed vision of pure villainy and violence, albeit one that was also marked by the same inherent issues of economic and social class. Of all the figures portrayed on Barry’s gaff stage, the London-based murderer Sweeney was perhaps the best analogue for Jack the Ripper, and provides the best parallel example for how a mythic figure could come to be strongly identified with a particular geographic locale and cultural iconography through a process of dramatic myth-making.

Unlike Jack Sheppard, Maria Marten, William Corder, or even Jack the Ripper, Sweeney Todd does not seem to have had any direct and verifiable basis in historical fact prior to his first appearance in the 21 November 1846 number of Edward Lloyd’s The People’s Periodical and Family Library. The serial in which the murderous barber appeared, The String of Pearls, was

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244 The Lantern (pseud.), “A Plea for Fourth-Class Managers, The Era, 16 March 1879.
245 The only person to seriously maintain otherwise in print is Peter Haining, though his evidence for a “historical” Sweeney consists mostly of a few choice quotes from Dickens novels and is
probably written by either Thomas Pecket Prest or James Malcolm Rymer; though the debate about which of these two men deserves the credit or blame for inventing the demon barber is not without interest, it need not detain us here. Regardless of who wrote it, the story serialized by Lloyd made a clear identification between Sweeney Todd, the avaricious barber who murdered customers in order to steal their gold before depositing their bodies to be turned into “pork pies” and sold by his accomplice Mrs. Lovett, and a particular location in Fleet Street near St. Dunstan’s church. This association proved so durable that dramatic and later serial versions were often subtitled _The Demon Barber of Fleet Street_, and no major retelling of the Todd story on stage or in print has ever departed from this setting.

This collocation of the murderous barber and his accomplice, who turn the entire neighborhood into unwitting cannibals, with the centre of British print culture suggests one potential cultural resonance of the story. If periodical publication was, in the way suggested by Benedict Anderson, a key cultural force through which the British nation imagined itself into communal being, then the nineteenth century creation of the Todd myth and its setting in the same geographic location from which these publications emerged might be drawing an implicit comparison: the press fed a ravenous public on the textual bodies of murder and accident.


246 See Helen R. Smith, _New Light on Sweeney Todd, Thomas Pecket Prest, James Malcolm Rymer, and Elizabeth Caroline Gray_ (Bloomsbury: Jarndyce Antiquarian Booksellers, 2002) for the argument that Rymer, who also authored the gory serial _Varney the Vampire, or The Feast of Blood_ makes a more likely candidate than Prest, whose specialty was knocking off Charles Dickens in works like _Barnaby Budge_ and a series of “Penny Pickwicks.” Contrarily Kristen Guest in “Are You Being Served? Cannibalism, Class, and Victorian Melodrama,” _Eating Their Words: Cannibalism and the Boundaries of Cultural Identity_, ed Kristen Guest (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001) argues that “among mainstream middle-class Victorian writers, none exemplified the two-fold fear of being consumed and the fear of consuming another like Charles Dickens […] [whose] sense of the uncomfortable fit between capitalism and middle-class virtues of enterprising benevolence […] is expressed in his persistent use of cannibal metaphors,” so that a career spent aping Boz would hardly disqualify someone as the inventor of Sweeney.
victims, just as surely as Sweeney and Mrs. Lovett were imagined to have fed customers (pressmen among them?) in her pie shop on actual human flesh. Serial fictions and the stage brought Fleet Street and the imaginary acts of cannibalism committed there to parlors, melodrama houses, and basement penny gaffs throughout London as entertainment, even as newspapers composed and printed in the actual Fleet Street spread murder, myth, and sensation that forged their readership into a public with a sense of communal identity.

The first dramatic version appeared under the title *The String of Pearls; or, the Fiend of Fleet Street* on or about 1 March of 1847, three weeks before the conclusion of the run of the first printed serial. It went up at the Royal Britannia Saloon, announced as the opening piece to the feature drama *The Lear of Private Life* on a bill that, at 2d. for the gallery and with box and lower stall seats costing only sixpence, was the cheapest on offer in Lloyd’s “Public Amusements” listings of licensed theatres for the week. The author was the prolific house playwright of the Britannia, George Dibdin Pitt. Robert L. Mack characterizes the interplay of print and drama as follows:

Dibdin Pitt initially took the central idea for his popular stage version of the barber's story from Lloyd's periodical, the latter […] paid the dramatist back in kind […] by incorporating elements of Dibdin Pitt's own characterization of Todd within his subsequent, more elaborate versions of the story. The cross-fertilization that began with the narrative exchanges between the publisher Edward Lloyd and the dramatist George Dibdin Pitt was to become something of a recurrent motif in Todd's history. His very story is rapacious and appetitive, forever consuming whatever material it might happen to

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Given this back and forth process and the relatively large number of times the play was printed and performed throughout the nineteenth century in highly variable versions, usually attributed to Dibdin Pitt (if, indeed, attributed to anyone), it is almost impossible to establish even a speculative textual history of the play. It is highly likely that Dibdin Pitt, the actors at the Britannia, or both in concert continued to rework the play until the writer’s death in 1855. Shortly after this, it was done at the Britannia in a “new version [with] new and startling effects” in November of 1856. The play continued to be described as one of the theatre's “popular pieces” in 1859 and was staged at the Britannia with Dibdin Pitt's half-brother William in the title role in 1871.

It is in connection with the 1856 “new version” at the Britannia that I have located the first clear (albeit parenthetical) statement claiming a factual basis for Sweeney Todd. The play was shown as an afterpiece following a play called The Danites, an acrobatic performance by “The Three Athos,” and a comic turn by “Mr. Fred Carlos, the popular comedian and vocalist of 'Ally Sloper' renown.” In the words of the bill the show was “to conclude with the New Version of the successful Drama, in 3 Acts, (founded on the most extraordinary facts that ever occurred in the City of London,) and entitled Sweeney Todd the Demon Barber of Fleet Street.” While I can't confidently claim that this was the very first reference to Sweeney's story as factual, after this period such references proliferate. In briefly condemning an 1862 production at

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249 See Jim Davis, “Afterword: The Cannibalization of Sweeney Todd,” in Nineteenth Century Theatre and Film 38.1 (Summer 2011), 86-8 for an account of the early history of the drama at the Britannia.
251 “Theatres &c.” The Era. 17 November 1861.
252 “Britannia, the Great Theatre.” The Era. 26 March 1871.
Birmingham, *The Era* mentions that “*The String of Pearls* has been the great attraction of the week, which, as a specimen of the sanguinary sensation school, out-Herods Herod, and although founded on fact contains portions of such repulsive horror as to be anything but pleasant.”\(^{254}\) A bill for an 1867 appearance by George Yates, one of the most (in)famous interpreters of the role of Sweeney, promised an “extraordinary Drama, founded upon facts which occurred in the early part of the reign of George the Third.” An 1892 version held by the Lord Chamberlain's collection and licensed to the Royal Birkenhead theatre refers to itself in manuscript as “a true story of 1799.”\(^{255}\)

What none of these appeals to the genuine historicity of Sweeney Todd's story make explicit is whether they represent merely a pro forma convention, or a genuine belief on the part of those who made and received them. The truth is almost certainly somewhere between these two poles, and a pair of articles appearing in *The Times* in 1939 suggests as much. The historicity of Todd is first called into question in the “Entertainments” section by M. Willson Disher, who takes a widespread belief in it for granted:

Many people believe that there once lived in Fleet Street a demon barber called Sweeney Todd. So firmly is this opinion held that his career of crime is taken for granted. Were not Dick Turpin, Jack Sheppard, and Maria Marten actual persons? Then, it seems to be argued, so must he have been. In Fleet Street his shop can still be pointed out, yet no evidence admissible in a court of law has been found even to hint at Sweeney Todd's existence, either under his own name or any other, at any time in this country.\(^{256}\)

Later in the same issue, in the editorial pages, *The Times* publishes a somewhat tongue-in-cheek

\(^{254}\) “Provincial Theatricals.” *The Era*. 18 May 1862.
“Affirmation of Sweeney Todd” that accuses Disher as an “iconoclast [who] with savage swipe on swipe knocks into nothingness an image which has been, if not exactly venerated, at any rate cherished with awe and wonder for a century or more.” While not exactly defending Todd as a real historical individual, the editorial argues that he constitutes the sort of cultural figure in which “given the moment and the stimulus, we believe to the roots of our being, and the belief remains a habit.” There are, in this way of stating it, two kinds of factuality: a historical one verifiable by documentary evidence, and a cultural one justified by the social and psychic utility of the material: “it is useless for learned sceptics [sic] to maintain that Sweeney Todd, or Robin Hood and Little John, or Blondel, cannot be proved to have ever existed or can be proved to have never existed. We cannot get on without them.”\(^{257}\) In the case of \textit{Sweeney Todd}, the editor of \textit{The Times} argues that these two factualities are so blurred by “habit” and cultural custom as to be virtually inseparable; they are, in other words, mythic.

Issues of social class are intimately bound up with the history of Sweeney Todd and the myth-making process I'm tracing here. Sweeney emerged from within the pages of a publication that was aimed squarely at the literate working-class, and was part of a commercial print culture in which news, fiction, advertising, and opinion regularly overlapped. His dramatic exploits became associated, particularly on the stages of illegitimate theatres that served members of the working-class regardless of literacy, with stories like \textit{Jack Sheppard, Burke and Hare}, and \textit{The Red Barn} that were based on historical cases, a proximity which served to destabilize boundaries between history, myth, and fiction in all of these dramas. Like many of these other plays \textit{The String of Pearls} addressed popular anxieties about the anonymity of urban living and the dangers of unfettered capitalism. Jim Davis suggests that “a critique of urban society is implicit in \textit{The

\(^{257}\) “Affirmation of Sweeney Todd.” \textit{The Times}. 26 July 1939.
String of Pearls, as is the power of cannibalism as a metaphor for the predatory nature of class and capitalism.” Kristen Guest extends this insight in her persuasive reading of how Dibdin Pitt’s play presented the Britannia audience with the unabashedly evil Todd and Mrs. Lovett, two business-owning entrepreneurs, in an effective “reversal of the mainstream view of the lower classes as threatening other [in which] the designation of the poor as cannibalistic ‘savages’ is contested by the play’s representation of unwitting ‘cannibals’ as victims of capitalistic greed.”

Born in an enterprise mixed between news and fiction and addressing powerfully, if indirectly, some of the key cultural anxieties of his audience, Sweeney Todd seemed, from at least the 1850s, to be true enough to be touted as “founded on fact.” Like many of the incarnations of “Jack the Ripper” after him, Sweeney had a face that was no less “real” for being a product not of objective historical fact but of dramatic fiction.

Conclusion: The Penny Theatrical Legacy

The entertainment culture of the East End as exemplified by Thomas Barry’s penny show treated bodies, especially those of women and especially of those women who were victims of the Whitechapel murderer, as objects of public spectacle. While this display of violated corpses to a working-class audience was unarguably sensational, it was also deeply polyvalent in its meanings, messages, and historical antecedents, as well as in the way it was received both in and out of the borough of Tower Hamlets. The display of two-dimensional images in the shop-window or on the exterior of Number 106 Whitechapel Road turned the Ripper victims into commercial advertisements, meant to draw the eye of the passer-by, and placed them as part of a

visual culture that was interpreted by middle-class reformers as chaotic, potentially dangerous, and a key sign that Whitechapel and the surrounding areas should be classified as “slums” in need of the civilizing influences of Christian charity and Parliamentary reform. The display of wax images of the Ripper victims, by Barry or another catch-penny showman, inside a space that was out of view of the street and the non-paying public, categorized the murdered women as exceptional specimens like the dwarves, obese French-women, bearded ladies, and lady boxers who they were displayed beside. While this certainly made them objects of curiosity and spectacle, the contested tradition of the popular anatomical museum, in which such a display must also be located, suggests that the show also had other cultural resonances. Among these was at least some sense of reclaiming the view of the interior of the victims’ bodies from privileged men of medical and legal authority, even as it potentially allowed viewers, some of whom might have numbered the victims as friends and acquaintances, to imaginatively stand over and look into their bodies in the same way the killer had. The melodrama depictions of crime offered by Barry as his principal attractions not only stirred the senses of the audience, but also dramatized a view of violence as a product of class and commerce as it was visited upon a “poor but honest” girl by a lover above her in the hierarchy of social class, or upon anonymous members of the public by a fiend intent upon his own commercial advancement.

Though Jack the Ripper “himself” may not have been depicted directly inside or outside of Barry’s theatre, his victims’ presence in the same representational milieu as mythic villains like William Corder and Sweeney Todd conferred upon him the same monstrous status these figures had, and effected an iconographic and ideological mingling of their features with “his.” In the 1970s Sweeney, as brought to the stage first by the playwright Christopher Bond and later and more famously with music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim and book by Hugh Wheeler,
shifted from pure villain to a Jack-Sheppard-like anti-hero, with his nineteenth century modus
operandi of dropping victims to their death replaced by the distinctly Ripper-esque slashing of
throats with a gleaming silver razor. The “Ripper and the Royals” conspiracy plot, first
articulated as “fact” by Stephen Knight in the 1977 Jack the Ripper, The Final Solution, relied on
the same class antagonisms and sexual politics at the heart of the old Maria Marten, right down
to having the concealment of an illegitimate baby born of the illicit union of a wealthy cad and a
naive girl of the people as the motive for murder. While few historians have accepted that such
conspiracy theories have anything like a basis in reality, they have become an inextricable part of
the popular understanding of the Ripper murders and central to many, if not most, fictional and
dramatic treatments of them made in the last part of the twentieth century and the early years of
the twenty-first. It is beyond the scope of my present inquiry to provide further historical or
dramaturgical analyses of these re-presentations or the conspiracy theory behind them; I mention
them here to suggest that they are based not on any hidden facts of the case, but on the
intertwining of visually and dramatically expressed popular myths that must be traced back to the
late 1880s, when a showman named Thomas Barry introduced Jack to Sweeney and Maria in the
confines of 106-107 Whitechapel Road.
Chapter 3

Always Already the Ripper:

*London Day by Day* on the London Stage

Some time between ten o’clock in the evening and midnight on 9 November 1889, one year to the day after the death of Mary Jane Kelly in a small room in the East End of London, Henry de Belleville stabbed a woman to death in the heart of the West End. Unlike the victims of the Whitechapel murders, this woman was not mutilated after her death. What de Belleville lacked in comparison to the Ripper in terms of gruesomeness he more than made up for in volume: the 9 November killing was his forty-ninth such murder, out of a total that would run to one-hundred and eighty-six. His modus operandi was remarkably consistent: each of his murders was carried out in almost precisely the same way and against exactly the same woman, his estranged wife, who enjoyed a successful career as a singer in music halls and cabarets under the assumed name Maude Willoughby. At the end of the evening she rose up to take a curtain call and prepare to repeat the entire bloody business the following night.

The death of Maude Willoughby was, of course, part of an enacted fiction. It concluded the penultimate scene of the penultimate act of *London Day By Day*, a melodrama written by George R. Sims and Henry Pettitt that was performed at the Adelphi Theatre from 15 September 1889 to 17 April 1890. This run makes it one of the relative hits of the 1889-90 London theatrical season. While it has not been entirely ignored by theatre historians, in part because it marked the first starring turn by George Alexander, who had up to that point been a member of Irving’s company at the Lyceum and would shortly thereafter assume management of the St. James theatre and begin fruitful collaborative relationships with playwrights Arthur Wing Pinero
and Oscar Wilde, like most titles in the history of stage melodrama it has received little analysis in its own right. The present chapter will be a case study of the play and its production that puts it into multiple historical contexts: that of its popular but historically neglected playwrights, particularly Sims, and of the Adelphi theatre where they worked as house writers; that of a particular strain of urban melodrama deriving from the theatrical adaptation and translation of a particular set of stories, from French to English and back again, multiple times beginning in the 1840s; and finally that of the Whitechapel murders. Along the way I will build a case, composed of strong circumstantial evidence and a number of eyewitness accounts, that the murder of Maude Willoughby as staged in *London Day By Day* was a copycat killing, invoking the murder of Mary Jane Kelly. I will suggest, in fact, that this was an intentional reference on the part of the playwrights and stage-manager responsible for bringing it to the stage; while this is not ultimately provable beyond all reasonable doubt, a preponderance of the evidence clearly suggests that the iconographic relationship between the Whitechapel murders and the play was available to be read, whatever the playwrights’ intentions may have been.

*London Day By Day* is an exemplary event for my analysis of how the figure of Jack the Ripper was formulated and circulated as a myth in and around the late-Victorian theatre. While this period has most often been discussed as that in which “modern drama” emerged in England in the form of Naturalism, with the plays of Ibsen appearing on the London stage and setting the paradigm for new modes of production and styles of performance and dramaturgy, popular melodrama remained the dominant commercial aesthetic. The play by Sims and Pettitt was in

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260 Besides brief mentions in connection with Alexander, *London Day By Day* (and indeed the very murder scene I will discuss in detail) is the focus of David Mayer’s “The Music of Melodrama,” in *Performance and Politics in Popular Drama: Aspects of Popular Entertainment in Theatre, Film, and Television, 1800-1976*, ed. David Brady, Louis James, and Bernard Sharratt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 49-64. This is by far the longest piece of writing on the play currently extant.
this tradition, with its narrative based on a long-circulating story that worked its way from Paris to London, and from serial novels to the stage, on multiple occasions; at the same time elements of its staging, dramaturgy, and performance were distinctly innovative in their own right. This mixture of the well worn and the innovative parallels the vertiginous process by which pre-existing tropes of theme and character contained in dramatic scenarios were pulled into the cultural discussion of the Whitechapel murders. Henri de Belleville’s murders were, I shall argue, Ripper killings twice over: they depended on popular images of the Whitechapel murders, while these images themselves drew on the long melodramatic tradition.

**George R. Sims at the Adelphi: Journalism, Realism, and “Realizations”**

In September of 1889 George R. Sims had been one half of the Adelphi Theatre’s in-house playwriting team for six years; he was also a year into what would prove to be a lifelong obsession with the Whitechapel murders. While the killings were going on in late 1888 he covered them extensively for *The Referee*, where he was an editor and regularly published columns and poetry under the pseudonym “Dagonet.” In the years after the murders stopped, he continued to maintain a lively interest in them; in 1913 he was the recipient of a letter from retired Chief Inspector John Littlechild naming Francis Tumblety as a suspect. According to a memoir by his fellow journalist J.B. Booth, Sims owned “a horrible series of photographs of the ‘Ripper’s’ victims, the mutilations and wounds being emphasized in red ink,” at a time when

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261 Dagonet was an open pseudonym, which Sims used interchangeably with his real name. The *Casebook: Jack the Ripper* web-site reproduces much of this writing, including a long ballad about experiments made by Met Police Commissioner Charles Warren with bloodhounds, at [www.casebook.org/press_reports/dagonet.html](http://www.casebook.org/press_reports/dagonet.html), consulted 12 January 2015.

such photos had not been widely published. Sims’ belief that he knew who the killer was will play a role in the next chapter; of importance at present is the fact that he, like the medical men who obsessed about the murderer’s anatomical knowledge, was interested in the murders and described the Ripper as a double of himself. Sims writes in his own autobiography about being mistaken for the killer thanks to a portrait included with one of his social reform publications: a coffee-stall keeper claiming to have sold a drink a man with bloody shirt-cuffs on the night of the double murder of Elizabeth Stride and Catherine Eddowes saw Sims’ portrait “outside the cover of the sixpenny edition of [his] ‘Social Kaleidoscope,’ [which] was taken to Scotland Yard […] as the likeness of the assassin.” Nor was this the only time he was in danger of being misrecognized as the killer, as he describes in an incident precipitated by his occupation as a playwright:

I had borrowed from Paul Meritt, the dramatist, a long Japanese knife of a murderous character for melodramatic purposes, and putting it in a black bag, I had gone to the Pavilion Theatre, Whitechapel, late at night. I often wonder what would have happened if some one [sic] had cried out, ‘That’s the Ripper,’ and my black bag had been opened. […] On the occasion when I carried the black bag and Japanese knife I was in a bowler hat, I remember, and was standing among the people, close to the very spot where one of the worst murders was committed.

The authenticity of both of these anecdotes is unverifiable – Sims did have plays produced at the Pavilion, but did not have one running there in late 1888, and there is no official record of the

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coffee-stall keeper’s accusation in Metropolitan Police files – but it is also beside the point, which is that Sims was well known as a commentator on the murders while they were happening, and maintained a strong imaginative engagement with them, repeatedly describing his own resemblance to the killer and reveling in the frisson of narrowly avoiding being misapprehended as a murderer because he frequented the area where the murders took place.

Sims’ role as in-house playwright at the Adelphi was also marked by his work as a popular journalist. He was brought into the Adelphi position in 1883 by Agostino and Steffano Gatti, restaurateurs turned theatre managers who followed the career arc of their father, a manufacturer and vendor of frozen dessert novelties who had branched out into owning and managing music halls in the 1860s. At the time they hired him Sims was something of a hot theatrical property as his 1881 drama *The Lights o’ London*, first played at the Princess’ Theatre, had made a smashing success. The following year William Archer already described him as “one of the potentates of the English stage[; although] his reign has scarcely begun, and is perhaps not yet firmly established, […] there is every probability that the future of the drama for the next ten years or so lies in a considerable measure in his hands.”

Archer’s opinion of Sims’ potential is tempered, though, by ambivalence about the playwright’s journalistic work. On the one hand, this alternative career meant that “the minutiae of middle and lower class life in London – its heroism, its pathos, its humor, its rascality, its barbarism – are known to Mr. Sims from personal observation and from the minute and daily study of what M. Zola would call the ‘documents’ relating to them.” On the other hand, Sims’ relentless journalistic output robbed him of the possibility of being Zola’s “genius to come,” who could articulate the “greatness of reality” and

the “true poetry of humanity” in the new form of Naturalistic drama.\textsuperscript{268} In Archer’s opinion “an occasional respite from the necessity of ministering to the ever-recurring hunger of that insatiate monster the press, might have enabled Mr. Sims to make some permanent additions to English literature. As it is, his production has often been remarkable, generally clever, but always ephemeral.”\textsuperscript{269}

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\caption{Figure 3.1}
\end{figure}

If Archer found that “the peculiar action of modern journalism upon the mind of its slaves can be traced very clearly in Mr. Sims” to too great a degree for his playwriting to be considered properly literary, he nevertheless strongly admired the stagecraft that Sims built into


\textsuperscript{269} Archer, \textit{English Dramatists}, 295.
plays like *The Lights o’ London*. He notes with particular approval the use of two paintings as the basis for the staging of tableaux at moments of crucial dramatic significance. The first of these came in the fourth act, when the hero Harold Armytage and his wife Bess find themselves penniless in the streets and consider entering a workhouse, and the scenic painting and arrangement of supers was made to resemble Luke Fildes’ *Applicants for Admission to a Casual Ward*, an 1874 painting after his own engraving *Houseless and Hungry* (Figure 3.1). In the second instance the fifth act, which is set in a realistic depiction of Borough Market on the South Bank of the Thames, opened with a tableaux representing Frederick Barnard’s lost painting *Saturday Night at the East-End of London*. Martin Meisel refers to the use of sets and bodies onstage to represent images drawn from other media as “realization,” which his influential study identifies as among “the most fascinating of ‘effects’ on the nineteenth-century stage, where it meant both literal re-creation and translation [of images] into a more real, that is more vivid, visual, physical present medium” of action directly embodied before spectators. Meisel traces the history of this practice across the entire century, and notes an especially vibrant tradition around mid-century of whole dramas being invented to “realize” famous series of popular paintings and engravings on social issues. Plays like T.P. Taylor’s *The Bottle* and J.B. Johnstone’s *The Drunkard’s Children*, which realized Cruikshank’s two engraving series of the same titles, “became a prime vehicle for social feeling, despite an official dramatic censorship, which, however, concentrated on a rather narrow range of taboos.”

In fact, the images that Sims realized in *The Lights o’ London* can be contextualized

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270 Ibid, 298.
271 First published in *The Graphic*, 4 December 1869.
274 Ibid, 147.
within an ongoing debate about realism and sentiment that is strongly related to contests about the very Naturalist drama that Archer was advocating. Meisel includes both Fildes and Barnard among the “rather short-lived school of urban realist painters in England” who were substantially influenced by the moralizing works of Cruickshank and Hogarth, as well as W.P. Frith’s work in the 1860s and 70s.275 A critic reviewing Barnard’s *Saturday Night at the East-End of London* when it was shown as part of an exhibition of contemporary European art in 1878 thought its depiction of “a narrow street, lit with flaming gas-lamps, crowded with constermongers’ barrows, drunken women, and – the most prominent object of all – a butchers shop, with beef and mutton rendered to the life, or rather to the death!” amounted to an image of “man at his lowest depth of poverty and vice.” The same reviewer nevertheless concludes that there was “for all its error, a touch of sympathy about the London picture, […] and] though it is as coarse in execution as in subject, [it] is human and interesting.” The same critical terms could be applied to Sims’ theatrical output: *The Times* savaged his 1882 play *The Romany Rye* for pandering to “a class of playgoers whose notions of dramatic art are satisfied with the reproduction upon the stage of the sordid scenes of low life they see every day around them.” In spite of this appraisal the play had a healthy run, and several months later *The Times* unfavorably compared it to *Love and Money* by Henry Pettitt and Charles Reade, which was staged at the Adelphi. While Sims’ play was an example of an “outrage upon good taste and common sense” with its “repulsive features of life in the slums, its man-monkeys, its real cabs and horses, its real rain, and its real mud,” Pettitt and Reade’s play was “free from the gutter element” and so offered playgoers an opportunity to “turn from the sordid realism of *The

275 Ibid, 397.
277 “Princess’s Theatre,” *The Times (London)*, 12 June 1882.
Romany Rye to the fountain of old-fashioned sentiment with heart-felt satisfaction.” For a critic like Archer, Sims’ “sympathetic observation” allowed him “to give us many of those touches of nature which raise such scenes above the level of mere mechanism” without reaching the level of Naturalist poetry; more aesthetically conservative voices decried Sims as a realist with all the potential sordidness and controversy that term could entail.

If Sims’ early plays were too old-fashioned and journalistic for Britain’s chief critical partisan of Naturalist drama but too modern for The Times, the craft and technique by which his scenes were brought to the stage was considered cutting edge. The 1881 visit of the Duke of Saxe-Meiningen’s players to the Drury Lane revolutionized the way London theatres staged movement and crowd scenes, and the success of The Lights o’ London must in part be attributed to the fact that it was, in David Meyer’s description, one of the first plays staged in London by a native company that had crowd scenes up to the new standard set by the Meininger company. Typically, this meant that the number of bodies on stage was increased relative to earlier practices, while the supers were rehearsed in order to make their movement appear natural and spontaneous while still forming clearly legible stage pictures and gathering into formations that highlighted the positions and actions of the leading performers. Henry Pettitt, Sims’ collaborator on London Day By Day and a whole host of other plays that premiered at the Adelphi in the 1880s and 90s, had been personally involved in the negotiations to bring Saxe-Meiningen’s company to London. When the Gattis put Sims and Pettitt two together in 1883 they were combining a journalist, with a strong but short record of financial success in the theatre, with a

278 “Melodrama at the Princess’s and the Adelphi,” The Times (London), 20 November 1882.
280 Sims, My Life, 281.
more seasoned playwright whose commercial instincts were considered almost infallible. Both were well versed in cutting edge methods for staging “realizations” and other well-worn theatrical sensations.\textsuperscript{281} The Adelphi was a relatively large house identified with commercial drama, and while the Gatti brothers’ hiring of Sims was hardly equivalent to devoting their theatre to the production of Ibsen dramas, they were nevertheless bringing in a writer who was identified in some critical quarters with “the lowest depth of the degradation of the stage” for his depiction of “the repulsive features of life in the slums.”\textsuperscript{282} Hiring a playwright who would proudly remember himself as “Zola diluted at Aldgate Pump” was part of a distinct aesthetic strategy that frequently saw the Adelphi under the Gattis focus on depictions of modern urban life employing modern stage technologies,\textsuperscript{283} while retaining “stirring sentiment” as the “stock in trade” with which the their management was identified by a later historian.\textsuperscript{284}

By the 1880s this use of the theatrical apparatus to represent a quasi-journalistic view of modern life by means of technological novelty was, paradoxically, a tried and true practice. \textit{London Day By Day} was particularly exemplary of this kind of drama, but the tendency is evident throughout the Gatti Brothers’ management of the theatre. The 1877-8 season, their first as part-holders of the Adelphi lease, opened with Boucicault’s \textit{After Dark: A Tale of London Life}, a play originally performed in 1867, which opens with a realistic depiction of the exterior of the then recently completed Victoria Station, and is best known for its sensation scene in which the hero narrowly escapes from the path of an oncoming underground railway train after being

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Sims claims that Pettitt was as “financially successful as any author of his time,” and he left an estate of almost £50,000 at his death in 1893, which was substantial for anyone in the period, let alone a playwright (Ibid, 162).
\item “Melodrama at the Princess’s and the Adelphi.”
\item Sims, \textit{My Life}, 134. The phrase was coined by Archer, with Sims concluding “I don’t know whether it was meant as a compliment, but I took it as one, and I am still grateful to the famous critic for it.”
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
tied to the tracks by the villain. The 1882-3 season featured Charles Reade’s Drink, adapted from Zola’s L’Assommoir and in the tradition of earlier urban temperance dramas like The Bottle; it also included Pettitt’s Taken From Life, which featured a simulated explosion in reproducing on stage the 1867 I.R.A. bomb attack on Clerkenwell Prison. While this was simply a plot device used to get the hero out of the prison into which the villain has contrived to have him unjustly thrown, it was also particularly timely as it came in the midst of a renewed I.R.A. campaign that had already seen bombings in Manchester, London, and Liverpool, and which culminated in a series of explosions targeting railways, the Houses of Parliament, and the Tower of London in late 1884 and early 1885. In the Ranks, a nautical melodrama that marked the first Sims and Pettitt collaboration during the 1883-4 season, was preceded by another Boucicault play, The Streets of London, with its sensation scene of a tenement on fire that was considered emblematic of “the ingenuity of machinist, gasman, head carpenter, costume designer, and stage manager.”285 The text of the play was also designed to be continually updated and adapted so that it was set in any city where it was staged, while placing its harrowing tale of a crooked banker inflecting cruel poverty on an the family of an honest sea captain amidst whatever financial crisis was topical at the moment.286 Urban melodramas were by no means the only kind of drama put on by the Gattis: The Harbour Lights, a Sims and Pettitt collaboration that starred William Terris and Jessie Millward and became the most commercially successful plays of the 1880s when it ran from Christmas of 1885 through to the end of the 1886-7 season, was set in a provincial port town. It did, however, feature a scene on the gun-deck of a thoroughly modern

286 See my “Adaptation, Piracy, and the Case of Dion Boucicault’s The Poor of _____,” in A Tyranny of Documents, the Performing Arts Historian As Film Noir Detective, Performing Arts Resources 28 (2011), 127-34 for an account of the malleability of this play, which was first performed in the 1850s as The Poor of New York.
navy ship, as well as a sensationaly impressive climax in which “a clever mechanical change” gave the impression that Terris’ hero was climbing down a massive cliff to save Millward’s heroine from a rapidly rising tide. Mechanical innovation in the service of visual realism was a key characteristic of the Adelphi in the 1880s, and urban melodramas were an important part of the repertoire.

London Day By Day was an example of this type of drama, and one that drew on a particular scenario that was particularly promiscuous, circulating as the core of a huge number of plots over the previous half-century. A full summary of the particular articulation of this plot in Sims’ and Pettitt’s drama cannot be concisely given, but at its heart the play is about the machinations of Henry de Belleville, the principal villain, who tries to arrange a bigamous marriage to Violet Stanhope, thereby securing for himself a fortune which she is not aware she has inherited. To do this he allies with a Jewish moneylender named Harry Ascalon, and attempts to derail the attraction between Violet and Frank Granville, an impetuous but basically good youth whom de Belleville has led into a life of gambling and carousing before the opening of the play. This basic setup can be traced back to Eugène Sue’s serial novel Les Mystères de Paris, and in particular to the dramatization of one episode of the novel as the 1843 melodrama Les Bohémiens de Paris by the playwrights Adolphe d’Ennery and Eugène Grange. This was translated for two different London theatres in the same year: the Surrey showed The Bohemians of Paris; or the Mysteries of Crime by C.Z. Barnett, while the Adelphi gave the play as The Bohemians!: or the Rogues of Paris by Edward Sterling. In 1845 the scenario was further adapted, again for two different theatres, with its location changed to London. Charles Selby’s London By Night, at the Strand, and T.W. Moncrieff’s The Scamps of London; or the Crossroads

287 Austin Brereton, Dramatic Notes: A Yearbook of the Stage (London: Carson and Comerford, 1886), 81-2.
of Life!, at Sadler’s Wells, both incorporated the staging of a leap from a bridge that had originated in J.B. Johnstone’s drama *The Drunkard’s Children* as a realization of the final plate of Cruikshank’s series of engravings (Figure 3.2). Boucicault’s *After Dark: A Tale of London Life* opened at the Princess’s Theatre in 1867 and was, as we have seen, revived at the Adelphi under the Gattis; Frederick Marchant updated Moncrieff’s *The Scamps of London* for the Royal Victoria in 1868 by adding Boucicault’s scene of a rescue from an onrushing underground train.\(^{288}\) In many of these iterations of the scenario, the villain is or pretends to be a Frenchman; in all of them he has a history of seducing women into false marriages and either abandoning them to suicidal despair or murdering them outright.\(^{289}\) An extremely free adaptation that returned the setting to France as *The Crimes of Paris* was written by Paul Merritt and George Conquest, both of whom also wrote plays in collaboration with Pettitt at various points in their careers, and appeared at both the Surrey and Olympic Theatres during the 1883-4 season.

*London Day By Day* picked up this scenario, with its nefarious and often French villain preying on a variety of women as the Minotaur in the center of a labyrinthine “modern Babylon, where there are so many doubtful characters and so many Bohemians.”\(^{290}\) As we shall see, it kept with the tradition of “reproducing the surface details of life [that] began [by] reconstructing the

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\(^{288}\) In neither case was the train effect original. The American playwright Augustin Daly was able to secure an injunction against *After Dark* when it was given in New York, on the basis that Boucicault had stolen the method of staging from him; ironically Daly probably lifted the effect, which he subsequently patented, from an 1865 London play called *The Engineer*. Further discussion of the origins and popularity of these types of drama in the period between 1820 and 1870 can be found in Katherine Newey, “Attic Windows and Street Scenes: Victorian Images of the City on Stage,” in *Victorian Literature and Culture* (1997): 253-62.

\(^{289}\) The villain is obviously French in those version set in Paris, but in *The Scamps of London* as composed by Moncrieff and updated by Marchant he calls himself “M. Devereux” and affects a continental sophistication and accent, although his real name is eventually revealed to be the decidedly English and thoroughly punny “Fox Skinner.”

immediate physical environments of the lives of London audiences, as well as exterior views of the main sights of the city” that defined much of late-Victorian staging, and the dramatization of versions of this story in particular. This mixture of the verisimilar and the sensational was well within the mainstream of the nineteenth century English theatrical tradition, but it was also, at least potentially, legible as the theatrical realization of Jack the Ripper.

Figure 3.2

Fact Bleeding Into Fiction: A Pall Mall Gazette Review and George Hutchinson’s Suspect

The specifics of the plot that Sims and Pettitt contrived to elaborate the basic scenario of the “scamps and bohemians” plays into London Day By Day are complicated even by the standards of Victorian melodrama, with a superabundance of aliases on both sides of the line between good and evil, and a surfeit of both coincidences and sensation scenes depicting realistic interior and

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exterior locations all around London. The heroine, Violet Stanhope, works as an artist and painting teacher under the name Violet Chester, which she has assumed upon being released on a ticket of leave after serving a prison sentence for a jewel theft she did not commit. Her failure to report herself to Scotland Yard as a parolee is an effort to avoid alienating her wealthy clients, but it also stands in the way of the American private investigator Patrick O’Brien, who has arrived in London with £100,000 that have been left to Ms. Stanhope by one of the actual thieves in an attempt to ease his guilty conscience during his terminal illness. O’Brien makes inquiries with the drunken and dissolute solicitor Marks, who shares his office with the Jewish moneylender who call himself Harry Ascalon, but is in fact the second of the actual jewel thieves. Henri de Belleville overhears O’Brien’s description of the case to Marks, and draws the link between Violet Chester, whose sweetheart Frank Granville he has been leading into a life of gambling and debauchery, and Violet Stanhope. De Belleville takes it in hand to marry her and thus gain her fortune, blackmailing Marks into stymieing O’Brien in his search and intentionally botching the case of Maude Willoughby, a prominent concert singer who hires the solicitor to search for the husband who abandoned her in Nice. This Frenchman, who once called himself Granville when he seduced and married her, is of course none other then Henri de Belleville.

The unraveling of this complicated scenario runs to four acts, and in production each included at least one scene set in a lavishly realized representation of a London landmark of the day. Following an expositional scene in Marks’ office, Act I showed Violet painting in a park with a view on Hampton Court palace; Act II featured a lavish depiction of the sort of fashionable club found in the vicinity of Pall Mall; Act III framed the murder of Maude Willoughby by de Belleville with two scenes set in a realistic depiction of Leicester Square that was so striking that on the first night its appearance was greeted with “raptures of applause” even
before the scene had commenced; the finale of the play, in which all identities are revealed, de
Belleville arrested, and Violet cleared of theft and engaged to Frank Granville, was staged on a
realistic recreation of St Katherine’s Wharf in the East End docklands. The Times notes how “the
employment of electric light,” which the Gattis had installed in the Adelphi in 1888, “appears to
be particularly favourable to scenic effects in this play enabling, as it does, important
transformations to be made while the stage is plunged into absolute darkness.” With its
convoluted plot and the rapid and completely concealed changes between realistic depictions of
recognizably real locations, London Day By Day turned an old scenario and new stage
technologies toward a representation of the city as an astonishing spectacle of visual
discontinuity. Without venturing into the wilds of discussing whether or not this can properly be
considered “proto-cinematic,” it can surely be regarded as “kaleidoscopic” in the sense described
by Tom Gunning in analyzing the aesthetics of early cinema: like David Brewster’s
“philosophical toy,” the play “combined order and transformation by creating an aleatory and
unpredictable movement within a highly structured visual composition and consistent frame,” in
this case both the frame of the Adelphi stage and that of the melodramatic scenario.

The Pall Mall Gazette’s review of the 15 September opening of London Day By Day
draws a direct and striking analogy between the play’s kaleidoscopic plot and the social
geography of the Whitechapel murders. The review’s author, possibly Marion Henry
Spielman, describes Sims’ and Pettitt’s work as a “drama […] that] suffers from what, to use a

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293 “Adelphi Theatre,” The Times (London), 16 September 1889.
294 Tom Gunning, “From the Kaleidoscope to the X-Ray: Urban Spectatorship, Poe, Benjamin,
295 Christopher Kent, “Periodical Critics of Drama, Music, & Art, 1830-1914: A Preliminary
critic for the Gazette from 1884-90. The review is, like most of those written for mass-circulation
polite word, one may call intricacy;” after summarizing a plot that is “as tortuous as the courts round Backchurch-lane,” the review invites the reader to “try and hunt these dramatic Rippers to their lair.” This geographic reference recurs in the summation of the play’s final moments: “having explored the main thoroughfare of this drama – the theatric Backchurch-lane – let us, in our character of detective to these dramatic Rippers, follow their tracks up the Pinchin-lanes, the Black-alleys, and the various dark corners upon which light is wanted, and try and put two and two together.” This act of critical addition is carried out in summarizing the play’s final act as “a jolly row, a melodrama rally in which all the characters seem to turn up[, …] there is the usual scandal at the police-court, […] Jack-the-Ripper is run down at last, and another Adelphi success has been scored.” While the last of the so-called “canonical” Ripper murders had occurred nearly a year before *London Day By Day* was produced and the *Gazette* review written, these references were freshly topical: in the early morning hours of 10 September 1889, a dismembered and badly decomposed female torso had been discovered stuffed beneath a railway arch at the intersection of Pinchin Lane and Back Church Lane. Press and police opinion were divided as to whether this as another Ripper murder; the *East London Advertiser* quoted one of the investigating detectives stating that it was not believed that the killer was “Jack” himself, but that “whoever the murderer may be, he has evidently been a close observer of the Ripper’s work; he has probably studied the newspaper reports.” The *Pall Mall Gazette*’s coverage speculated that “with some show of reason, the gruesome discovery of this morning is also to be attributed to the perpetrator of the atrocities commonly associated with the name of ‘Jack the Ripper;’” in the late edition of the paper it published a map showing the locations of no less than nine

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murders that were attributed to the killer (Figure 3.3).

![Scene of Whitechapel Murders](image)

**Figure 3.3**

The *Pall Mall Gazette* review of *London Day By Day* is, so far as I have been able to locate, the only review of the play to draw a direct connection in writing between Henri de Belleville and the figure of Jack the Ripper. Despite the critic’s decidedly tongue-in-cheek tone, we should take this connection seriously as a marker of how thoroughly the public understanding and discussion of the Whitechapel murder was suffused with the scenarios and representational logics of melodrama. *Pall Mall Gazette* editor W.T. Stead encouraged a crusading “New Journalism,” which he pioneered in his 1885 reporting on “The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon;” Judith Walkowitz emphasizes the way this method of reporting mixed cultural and literary genres by “dr[awing] on older cultural forms – particularly melodrama and the literature of urban exploration – but grafted on [to] newer forms – late-Victorian pornography and fantasy,
the Gothic fairy tale – that were also not of [Stead’s] construction.”

Even before the Whitechapel murders the area where they occurred was characterized by “melodramatic accounts of family disintegration, violence, biological degeneration, and undifferentiated, monotonous wretchedness [that] were […] superimposed on the East End.” The actual streets of Whitechapel and Spitalfields were especially prone to being understood melodramatically because of what Peter Brooks describes as the genre’s capacity to get beneath “the surfaces of the modern metropolis [and] pierce through to a mythological realm where the imagination can find habitat for its play with large moral entities.” In a post-sacral society melodrama articulates “what we could call the ‘moral occult,’ the domain of operative spiritual values which is both indicated within and masked by the surface of reality,” allowing the potentially overwhelming spectacle of the crowded modern city to be read as evidence of a transcendent moral order.

In describing a West End melodrama with reference to an already melodramatized understanding of East End space, the Pall Mall Gazette exemplifies the extent to which the boundary between enacted social fact and embodied dramatic fiction was permeable and prone to the seepage of scenarios, images, and ideologies. Another eyewitness account published at the time of the Whitechapel murders further suggests the fluidity with which melodrama bled into the creation of Jack the Ripper, a figure that in itself served to allow moral meanings to be affixed to a real killer who was permanently occulted by virtue of escaping capture.

On 12 November 1888, three days after the murder of Mary Jane Kelly and immediately following the conclusion of the inquest into her death, an unemployed laborer named George

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299 Ibid, 30.
Hutchinson walked into the Metropolitan Police H Division station at 160 Commercial Road and gave a statement to Sergeant Edward Badham and Division Inspector Ernest Ellisdon.

Hutchinson gave his place of residence as the Victoria Working Men’s Home, at 39041 Commercial Street. He told police that he had been friendly with Kelly, occasionally giving her sixpence or a shilling, and that he had seen her alive at about two in the morning on 9 November, approximately an hour before the time at which it was estimated she had been killed. Hutchinson claimed to have spoken briefly to Kelly that night and, more importantly, he said that he had seen her meet up with a man in Thrawl Street who accompanied her in the direction of her lodgings in Dorset Street; Hutchinson told the police that he had followed the pair for some distance and could give a detailed description of the man.

Both the late-Victorian police and subsequent Ripperologists have generally treated Hutchinson’s testimony as that of “the witness most likely to have met Jack the Ripper.”

There are some variations between the description that Hutchinson furnished to police on 12 November and the one he provided to the press a day later, which was widely and immediately circulated in both London and international papers. This second description is longer and contains details not present in the police record, so it is the one worth quoting at length:

The man was about 5ft 6in in height, and 34 or 35 years of age, with dark complexion and dark moustache turned up at the ends. He was wearing a long dark coat trimmed with astrakhan, a white collar with black necktie, in which was affixed a horse-shoe pin. He wore a pair of dark spats with light buttons over buttoned boots, and displayed from his waistcoat a massive gold chain. His watch chain had a big seal with a red stone hanging from it. He had a heavy moustache curled up, and dark and bushy eyebrows. He had no

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side whiskers, and his chin was clean shaven. He looked like a foreigner [...] The man I saw carried a small parcel in his hand about 8in long and it had a strap around it. He had it tightly grasped in his left hand. It looked as though it was covered in dark American cloth. He carried in his right hand, which he laid upon the woman’s shoulder, a pair of kid gloves. He walked very softly.  

The description in the police file omits the mention of the watch chain and its seal, as well as the description of kid gloves; it adds a description of his waistcoat as “light” in color and the detail that he was wearing a “dark felt” hat. The police file also records that Hutchinson referred to the man as of “Jewish appearance” rather than as a “foreigner,” though at the time in the East End the two terms could be used almost interchangeably.  

It is possible that George Hutchinson saw a man matching this exact description with Mary Jane Kelly on the night she was killed. Immediately after interviewing him Chief Inspector Abberline, who was in charge of the Metropolitan Police investigation of the Whitechapel crimes, wrote in his notes that he considered Hutchinson “an important witness,” and recorded his initial “opinion [that] his statement is true.” Many serious writers about the case are, like Phillip Sugden and Donald Rumbelow, current or retired police officers themselves; there is an observable tendency in serious factual accounts of the murders to defer to Abberline as “an experienced and outstanding detective,” who possessed an “unrivalled knowledge of the East End.” Hutchinson’s description could plausibly be of the same dark haired, “shabby genteel”

305 Sugden, *Complete History*, 337.
306 Donald Rumbelow, *The Complete Jack the Ripper*, Revised and Updated Edition (London:
man who Elizabeth Long claimed to have seen in the company of Annie Chapman before her
death in early September; though she believed him to be somewhat older than Hutchinson’s
estimate of his suspect and did not think she would be able to recognize him again, Long’s figure
also “had on a dark coat […] and] appeared to be a foreigner.”

There are, however, serious grounds to doubt Hutchinson’s story in its details if not its
broad outlines. Begg, while ultimately concluding that Hutchinson probably did see the Ripper,
considers that:

> It is tempting to dismiss [his] testimony because his detailed description seems to good to
be true […] and because he didn’t give his story to the police until after the inquest had
been concluded, which suggests that he may have been a publicity seeker spinning a yarn
safe in the knowledge that he wouldn’t be contradicted by an army of witnesses attending
the inquest proceedings.

Hutchinson’s description of the suspect’s ostentatious display of wealth in the form of a massive
gold chain with a jeweled pendant is also suspicious. Dorset Street, off of which Mary Kelly’s
lodgings in Miller’s Court were located, was reputed at the time of the murders and after to be
“the worst street in London,” so dangerous that “policemen [went] down it as a rule in pairs;”
it is difficult, though perhaps not completely impossible, to imagine that someone who had
previously committed four murders in the open without being captured would so conspicuously
adorn himself in order to commit a fifth in such a dangerous locale.

Regardless of what, if anything, George Hutchinson actually witnessed in the early
morning hours of 9 November, his description matches “the costume and stance of the classic

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308 Begg, Definitive History, 296.
stage villain, sinister, black-mustached, bejeweled, and arrogant, who manipulated his privilege and wealth to despoil the vulnerable daughters of the people.”\textsuperscript{310} In fact J. Bernard Partidge’s illustration of “the Stage Villain” for Jerome K. Jerome’s 1906 book \textit{Stage-Land} (\textbf{Figure 3.4}) could, with its dark overcoat, light waistcoat, dark hat and curled mustache, serve as an illustration of most of Hutchinson’s description.\textsuperscript{311} This account matches the theatrical vision of what a villain \textit{should} look like; regardless of whether it was completely fabricated by Hutchinson in order to insert himself into London’s most infamous current event, embellished on the basis of someone he actually saw, or even a completely accurate description of a real human being, it is evidence of the melodramatization of the East End and the creation of a mythic Ripper figure with roots in the Victorian performance tradition. It fit the particular manifestation of what a man who threatened women with sexualized violence looked like, dressed in dark clothing that signaled wealth and social standing that were not necessarily real, but rather evidence of the greedy aspirations that motivated the villain’s violent menace. Possibly foreign and probably Jewish, Hutchinson’s suspect combined traits of both the principal “black villain” and his money-lender sidekick in plays like \textit{After Dark}, \textit{The Scamps of London}, or \textit{The Bohemians!} This meant that “he” also combined traits of Ascalon and de Belleville in \textit{London Day By Day}, and it is to an analysis of how that play used the latter figure to stage a moment that may have been intended, and could clearly be received, as a “realization” of the Mary Jane Kelly murder that I now turn.

Realizing the Ripper: Scene VII of *London Day By Day*

In addition to the caricatures of actors in character that were typically included in reviews by its famously snide “Captious Critic,” the *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News* frequently ran full-page layouts showing serious representations of a variety of scenes from successful London plays. Such a spread was published for *London Day By Day* on 19 October 1889 (*Figure 3.5*), more than a month after the play’s opening and a week after the same periodical had reviewed it.
and snidely remarked on its literary dependence on a variety of other sources, suggesting that “it would have been perhaps simpler to have named it ‘The Ticket of Leave Woman’ at once.”

The full page illustration contains five separate cells: one, in the top left of the page, shows Violet Stanhope painting in the park outside Hampton Court Palace in Act I; two in the upper- and lower-right corners represent Act II with both the exterior and interior of the West End club in which it is set depicted; the largest illustration in the center of the page shows the exterior of Leicester Square, the major scenic sensation that was heavily remarked upon by critics for its realism when it was shown at the beginning and end of Act III. In the lower-left corner of the page is an illustration of Scene VII, the middle scene of Act III, showing the moment immediately after the murder of Maude Willoughby by her estranged husband, the villain who calls himself Henri de Belleville (Figure 3.6). This illustration and an analysis of how the scene and act it depicts were both written and staged by a team of theatrical producers including George R. Sims, a journalist with a documented enthusiasm for the Whitechapel murders, can be read together to suggest that the scene could be read in performance as a realized depiction of those murders.

312 “Our Captious Critic: ‘London Day By Day,’” Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News, 12 October 1889. The reference is to Tom Taylor’s 1863 hit The Ticket-of-Leave Man which has a title character who, like Violet Stanhope/Chester in London Day By Day, is paroled after being convicted of a crime he did not commit. 313 London Day By Day is unpublished; references are to the prompt-script, a copy of which is held in the Theatre Collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum Archive. This divides the play into 4 acts and a total of 11 scenes, all titled with Roman numerals. Confusingly, the scene list at the beginning of the script numbers all of the scenes in continuous sequence (e.g., Scene III is the first scene of Act II, and Act III comprises Scenes VI, VII, and VIII), while the scenes themselves are headed with numbers that begin again from I with each act; the page numbers also start from 1 at the beginning of each act. For the purposes of citation I will provide Act number, Scene number as given in the master list, and page number as given in the typescript.
Figure 3.7

The *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News* illustration shows de Belleville stealing away from the supine body of Maude, a knife in his right hand and his open left hand positioned so that it overlaps, and indeed almost appears to be grasping, her lower torso or genital region. His iconic depiction as the typical “Stage Villain” is unmistakable, but so is the resemblance between this image and penny newspaper illustrations of the Whitechapel murder victims that had been published throughout the last months of 1888 (Figure 3.7). Maude Willoughby is indistinctly rendered in an impressionistic style that shows none of her fictional wounds, a stark contrast to the way papers like the *Illustrated London Police News* often realistically rendered the facial features of the Whitechapel victims and graphically depicted at least some of the physical trauma visited upon them in the form of blood. The positioning of de Belleville, however, and especially the evocative placement of his open left hand, strongly recalls the way that penny paper illustrations frequently placed figures to obscure the abdomens of the Whitechapel victims, hiding the most gruesome of wounds from view in a way that calls attention to the fact of this concealment. Though aimed at a distinctly different class of audience than the penny paper, the *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*’ depiction of this theatrical
moment strongly recalls the visual grammar with which working-class readers had been supplied images of the Whitechapel victims. In fact this iconography of the murdered or threatened woman lying supine, throat exposed as evidence of her susceptibility to sexualized violence, can be traced back into the literary and visual tradition of the “penny dreadful” tradition of *Varney the Vampire* (Figure 3.8), but also forward and away from London into Robert Weine’s self-consciously avant-garde *Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* (Figure 3.9). The “J. Swain, Eng.” who signed the image of *London Day By Day* was thus participating in the circulation of a particular mode of representation across class and geographic boundaries; though less lurid than many published depictions of the Whitechapel victims in 1888, the family resemblance and thus the place that it occupies in an iconographic tradition is unmistakable.

![Figure 3.8](image)

*Figure 3.8*
It is conceivable that the illustration of Scene VII of *London Day By Day*, as published in the *Illustrated London News*, may have been influenced by the aesthetic practice of rendering the Ripper victims in print without necessarily being evidence that the scene as performed recalled the murders directly. Swain may, in other words, have distorted his representation of the theatrical event that he saw or heard described in a way that invoked the culturally compelling Whitechapel murder images that already existed. There is, however, textual evidence that Sims and Pettitt altered the play during the weeks before it opened in a way that brought the murder into the full view of the audience, thus foregrounding them as part of the visual fabric of the performance. A comparison between an early draft of the scene, included in the script submitted to the Lord Chamberlain’s Examiner of Plays for censorship, and the prompt-script that represents the text as performed strongly suggests that the playwrights intentionally chose to

314 Both Joseph Swain and his son, J.P. Swain, were active engravers in the 1880s. The elder Swain worked collaboratively with many Pre-Raphaelite artists on engravings of their paintings, and was for a time the head illustrator for *Punch*; both father and son worked for the *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News* and the *Illustrated London News*, both of which were aimed at a wealthier audience than the penny *Illustrated London Police News*. Which “J. Swain” produced this image, or if it should instead be considered a workshop product overseen by one or both of them, is unknown.
put their own participation in the visual iconography of murders like the Whitechapel killings quite literally at center stage.

Scene VII of the Adelphi prompt script begins with an interview, between Maude Willoughby and the hero Frank Granville, in Maude’s rented rooms overlooking Leicester Square. Maude shares with Frank the knowledge that Henri de Belleville is actually her estranged husband, who married her under the alias Frank Granville. She promises the real Frank Granville that she will attempt to intervene in de Belleville’s plan to blackmail Violet Stanhope into marrying him, but makes Frank promise that he will only reveal the secret of her marriage to de Belleville as a last resort. Frank leaves, and Maude has a short monologue in which she laments her status as an abandoned wife; though she has since made a successful career as a concert singer her marriage to de Belleville still brings her to lament that “there are no happier years for me[, …] I gave this man my love, and he has spoilt my life.”

David Mayer’s analysis of the score of this scene describes how the “tender and sentimental andante played at the rise of curtain [on the scene] to establish Maude’s loneliness” is restated during this soliloquy, which ends with her drawing back the curtains and looking out over the cityscape. The prompt script indicates that the music then drops out at the sound of an electric bell. Maude, mistakenly believing that Frank Granville has returned, opens the door to admit de Belleville. He offers her money if she will not interfere with his scheme to marry Violet; she refuses and they quarrel, at which point the music resumes what Mayer characterizes as an “allegro agitato.” In the course of the argument Maude reminds her husband that he is already “an assassin, the man [the police] have searched for in vain, the man who robbed and murdered a wealthy Russian at an Hotel [sic] in Nice!” She promises to allow him to escape, provided he abandons his pursuit of Violet; if he

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does not she threatens to call the police and “send [him] to end [his] days in the galleys or on the guillotine.” At this point his speech, which has mixed bantering French interjections like “eh bien, ma chère” and “c’est drôle ça” with the occasional explosive “mon Dieu!” shifts into any icy sequence of calculated parallel clauses. “I would rather kill myself. I would rather kill you,” he tells her as he locks the door and pockets the key. Stage directions indicate the he follows her as he continues: “It is my life against yours now. You would betray me, you would send me to the guillotine; you would speak the words that would ruin me to-morrow. Perhaps you have spoken your last words tonight!”

At this point, according to Mayer’s reading of the prompt script against Henry Sprake’s score, the music which has been “hurried, rising and falling” shifts to a sequence of “the same notes or groups of notes repeated with heavy emphasis.” The music seems to give the sonic indication of multiple violent stabs, though the stage directions are comparatively spare:


A vision Maude’s murdered corpse is indicated as an extended tableau at center stage while the music “segues into an andante, a musical comment on Maude’s lonely death.”

This scene is figured substantially differently in the copy of the script that was submitted for the approval of the Lord Chamberlain’s Examiner of Plays on 23 July 1888. In this version of the scene there is no staged confrontation between de Belleville and Maude; instead he is seen

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sneaking into her room through a window before her arrival and overhears her interview with 
Frank Granville from a position behind he curtains. When Frank leaves, Maude retires into 
another room and de Belleville emerges from his hiding place, reveals to the audience his 
intention to kill her in a soliloquy of his own, and then follows her through the door and off-
stage. “A piercing scream” from off indicates the moment of the murder before de Belleville re-
emerges and climbs back out the window, at which point the stage directions indicate “rose lights 
in MAUDE’S room on her face.”322 Had it been staged this way, the murder would have been 
conducted out of the audience’s view and Maude’s body seen only distantly, through a door in an 
off-stage room rather than in the center of the stage as it was in the performance indicated by the 
prompt script. We can infer from this that the proprietors of the Adelphi did not particularly fear 
that the Lord Chamberlain’s Examiner, who under the Licensing Act was ostensibly empowered 
to sit with a copy of the submitted script in hand through a performance of the play and to 
 sanction any deviation from that version as written, to do anything of the sort. The physical state 
of the script in the Lord Chamberlain’s Play Collection, which is written out in what appear to be 
several different hands on several different sizes and qualities of paper, and includes 
emendations and alterations made directly on the text, suggests that what was submitted may 
well have been a compositional draft. There are other major differences of plot between the two 
versions, most notably the fact that in the earlier script Violet Chester has a father who is the one 
on a ticket of leave, while in the prompt-script version she herself is the one wrongly convicted 
of jewel theft.

That the play was still under revision even after it had been cleared by the censor in July 
is actually documented in a theatrical gossip column of 31 August 1889, in which the columnist

322 Ibid, 30-1.
describes visiting Sims the day before to find him “engaged in putting the finishing touches to
the new Adelphi play he has written with Mr. Henry Pettitt.” This warranted reporting because of
a particular technical novelty: the two playwrights were working together in real time from their
respective homes by means of a “telephonic communication [line] between the study of Mr.
Sims and the study of Mr. Pettitt” in what the columnist surmises was probably “the first time in
the history of the stage that two dramatists have collaborated by telephone.”323 Whether they
were working over the phone or in person at the time, at some point Sims and Pettitt made the
decision to kill off Violet Stanhope’s father and, more importantly for the present discussion, to
bring Maude Willoughby and her estranged husband face-to-face so that he could murder her on-
stage and leave her body to form a tableau in full view of the audience. Like Mary Jane Kelly,
probably the last Ripper victim, Maude Willoughby was killed in a rented room; like most of the
Whitechapel victims who “were married and had lived apart from their husbands,” Maude had a
complicated romantic history. Though she turned to a life on the stage because of her husband’s
persistent criminality, rather than turning to casual prostitution “in consequence of intemperate
habits” as the Whitechapel victims were understood to have done,324 Maude’s situation recalls
the persistent reality that in the Victorian period “the actress could not supercede the fact that she
lived a public life and consented to be ‘hired’ for amusement by all who could command the
price.”325 When, moments before her fictional death, Maude Willoughby looked out on a
theatrical depiction of the West End and opined “London! I wonder how many lonely hearts
there are like mine to-night in this great city,” she invoked complicated cultural associations
between female performers and commercial sex that could link a West End actress playing a

323 “Theatres,” The Graphic, 31 August 1889
324 Daily Chronicle, 10 November 1888.
concert singer with East End “unfortunates.”

The murder of Maude Willoughby, and the tableau of the living actress Mary Rorke performing as a dead body, staged at the Adelphi in 1889 invoked the visual grammar that had been used to depict the Whitechapel murders in 1888. It was thus a theatrical “realization,” not of any one specific image of the murders, but of an iconographic tradition that mixed fact and fiction and transited between print and performance. As scripted and staged, the scene was book-ended by two scenes carried out in a realistic depiction of Leicester Square; these constituted the major theatrical “sensations” of the performance, investing it with a sense of both spectacle and realism. While the critic writing in The Athenaeum protested that “some violence is done to the sense of propriety when M. Marius is made to kill his wife on stage,” even The Times, which had been so repulsed by the realism of Sims’ The Romany Rye, lauded London Day By Day for its depiction of “the bustle, the wealth, the squalor, the vice of the great cities,” which is taken as evidence of the playwrights’ “broad humanitarian sympathies.” The Leicester Square scene was key to this as evidence of both the advanced stagecraft of which Sims and Pettitt and the management of the newly electrified Adelphi were capable, as well as a “realism of the London streets” that was both social and sensational, and depended on the kind of direct journalistic observation of urban reality that was taken as Sims’ particular stock-in-trade.

Scene VI, which is immediately prior to the murder of Maude Willoughby, takes place in what the prompt-script describes as “Leicester Square – Realistic scene of London life.” The long scene does almost nothing to advance the plot: Violet attempts to see Maude Willoughby, whose rented rooms are on the Square, but finds she is not home; the drunken solicitor Marks

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328 “Adelphi Theatre,” The Times (London), 16 September 1889.
329 London Day By Day III.VI, 1.
follows Violet in order to report to de Belleville where she lives, and the American O’Brien searches for her in vain while de Belleville’s other accomplice, Ascalon, attempts to confound him. The only event of any narrative significance is a short encounter between Marks and Frank Granville, in which the former repents his dissipated life and tells Frank that he should ask Maude Willoughby for information that can be used to foil de Belleville’s blackmail attempt against Violet. Much of the scene is concerned with comic business surrounding the character Jack, a “street arab” who works as a crossing sweeper. This cockney boy was played by the actress Kate James as a “trousers role.” This mode of performance was particularly associated during the period with opera and Shakespeare, in both of which it allowed the female body to be viewed without skirts in a way that highlighted the sexuality of the performer as “the male ‘freedom’ that such cross-dressed women exhibited on the stage itself contributed to their erotic appeal, to the scandalousness of their untenable promise” of sexualized visibility.³³⁰ At the same time there were women admired for their verisimilar performance as boys, a phenomenon that was especially prevalent in the music halls and reached its apogee in the much-admired performances of Vesta Tilley.³³¹ In both forms, however, transgendered performance was at least potentially densely loaded with sexual and political complexity for members of the audience.³³²

Jack interacts with most of the principal characters during the Leicester Square scenes, and in the final act serves as a witness against de Belleville, who he sees in Scene VIII creeping

³³² See Jim Davis, “‘Slap On! Slap Ever!’ Victorian Pantomime, Gender Variance, and Cross-Dressing,” *NTQ* 30.3 (August 2014) for an account of the complex, and sometimes contradictory, ways that sex, gender, and age intertwined when men played women and women played boys on the Victorian stage.
out of Maude’s apartment after the murder, but most of young Jack’s time on stage is spent arguing with a Coffee Stall Keeper, a fictional character with the same occupation as the real figure who mistook Sims for the Whitechapel murderer, and engaging in debate with a passing Gentleman about social reform legislation. To this man’s protestation that it is “terrible that children should be allowed out in the street at this hour of the night[, and] there will soon be a law, I hope, to prevent it,” the streetwise youth responds with a tirade of verbal and physical disagreement:

I suppose you’re one of those coves that’s always passin’ Hacts o’ Parliament to prevent poor folks earning their living. Here! (Shouting after GENT: – hits him on back with broom) The lor [i.e. law] makes me go to school all day so I can’t earn nothing then. If the lor’s going to make me go to bed all the evening ‘ow do you think I’m goin’ to live?

Though not precisely the sort of dramatic conversation about social issues that Shaw would argue for in *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* a few years later, this sort of scene did serve as a reminder of Sims’ previous journalistic work as a social reform advocate. The realistic depiction of Leicester Square complete with “the Alhambra lighted up,” an effect enhanced by the Adelphi’s new electric lights, was made even more realistic by the inclusion of comic relief in the form of local color touching lightly on social issues. This spectacular and sentimental realism was alloyed with the complexly layered theatrical pleasure of seeing a young woman perform as a boy in tight-fitting trousers.

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333 Ibid, 5-6.
334 So new was the electrical light at the Adelphi that the prompt script is marked with instructions for “battens,” “floats,” and “wings;” the vocabulary of gas lighting was still used to manage the performance in production.
Scene VIII, immediately following the murder, returns to Leicester Square. The passage of time is marked by the fact that at the outset of the scene the lighting directions indicate “no lights at the back of the Alhambra cloth;” the theatre is thus represented as having closed for the evening. The stage nevertheless remained crowded, if an advertising bill for the play printed by the firm of F. Harris and Company that represents this scene is an accurate representation of the staging (Figure 3.10). In the dramatic action of the scene, de Belleville exits the building in which Maude’s rooms are located, which appears to be in the down-stage-right corner of the image. He encounters Violet and tries to prevent her from entering Maude’s residence and discovering the murder, while Frank and O’Brien also appear on the scene. Frank threatens to reveal the secret of de Belleville’s marriage, at which point the villain loudly denounces Violet as a non-reporting ticket-of-leave holder, which reveals to O’Brien that the woman he has known as Violet Chester is in fact the Violet Stanhope who he has been hired to locate and bestow a fortune of £100,000 upon. At this point de Belleville enjoins the considerable crowd of onlookers to seize Violet and they, evidently able to see through his false and villainous manner, turn on him and surround him with chants of “Down with him! Down with him!” A melee ensues in which O’Brien allows himself to be seized by a pair of arriving police officers so that Violet and Frank can escape through the crowd as the act curtain drops, and it is this moment that is depicted in the bill.

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337 Ibid, 22.
The scene depicted in this image is recognizably Leicester Square, viewed from a position in the south-west corner facing toward the east. The Alhambra, which dominated the eastern end of the Square in the 1880s, is in the background; a coffee stall is located in the foreground on the stage-left side of the scene. If this is a realistic depiction of the staging, it is impossible to determine which elements and figures are painted on the back-cloth and which represented by separate wing-flats downstage of it, though Maude’s building seems likely to be painted on a flat placed in a set of downstage grooves and the coffee stall gives the appearance of being a three-dimensional piece. O’Brien is being dragged off by two constables, while Jack attempts to draw their attention to de Belleville, who is sneaking off toward stage-left. It is impossible to know if any of the human figures represented in the scene would have been painted
into the background; in the image some of the figures in the extreme distance seem too small to be representations of people on the actual Adelphi stage in anything like correct perspective. Less important than the strict accuracy of the image as a witness to the production is the sense it gives of a mass of bodies on stage; I count at least forty supernumeraries who are in various states of agitation and affray that suggest living human bodies in well-rehearsed action.

As with the staging of a massive outdoor scene in Borough Market in Sims’ *Lights o’ London* earlier in the decade, the “rally” on the pavement in *London Day By Day* was taken by critics as a shining example of the artful arrangement of a crowd scene, and one of the play’s most worthwhile moments of spectacle. The representation of Leicester Square, only about a ten-minute walk through the heart of the West End from the Adelphi stage where it was being depicted, was greeted on the opening night with a round of applause. The critic for the high-brow weekly *The Academy* found it “incumbent on us to call attention to the gulf that divides the ‘Adelphi Guests’ of the present production from the seedy and impossible ‘Adelphi Guests’ of our youth,” turning the full force of the Victorian editorial voice to the praise of this advanced stagecraft. The murder of Maude Willoughby was thus framed within the sort of sensational spectacle that was one of the staples of nineteenth-century British theatricality. This was constructed dramaturgically in a way that opened up on a gently humorous and sentimental form of social commentary, and staged in a manner that was the very model of a modern kind of theatrical realism that “satisfied the taste for the recycling of contemporary visual experience,” with the kind of new and rigorous staging introduced to Europe by the Meininger company and mastered at the Lyceum by Irving.

Nor was staging the only way in which the play was perceived to be a departure from the

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worst excesses of earlier forms of melodrama at the Adelphi. While the scenery, and the
Leicester Square scene in particular, were probably the most universally praised elements of a
production that was critically well-received, the performances of the three actors who portrayed
the hero, heroine, and villain were also subject to positive notice of their subtlety and realism:

The new drama of Messrs. Sims and Pettitt is produced under novel conditions. For the
conventional and stagey representation of melodrama is substituted an artistic and
finished rendering of the principal characters. The hero no longer struts and swaggers, the
heroine moderates her transports of grief, the villain is bland and affable, and the
traditions generally of the Adelphi are violated.340

Because its usual stars, real-life and on-stage lovers William Terriss and Jessie Millward, had
temporarily abandoned the Adelphi for a lucrative North American tour under their own
management, the play was cast with George Alexander as Frank Granville, Alma Murray as
Violet Stanhope, and the Frenchman Claude Marius Duplany, who worked under the
professional name Monsieur Marius, as de Belleville.

None of these actors was typically associated with popular melodrama of the kind in
which they performed together at the Adelphi. Alexander is most familiar to historians of the
theatre for his partisanship of the “New Drama” of Wilde and Pinero, and his long tenure as
actor-manager at the St. James Theatre that ended in a knighthood. The actor who would go on
to play the roles of Aubrey Tanqueray and John Worthing in The Second Mrs. Tanqueray and
The Importance of Being Ernest in the 1890s spent most of the 1880s as a member of Irving’s
company at the Lyceum, playing Laertes, Macduff, and Faust opposite Irving’s Hamlet,
Macbeth, and Mephistopheles, and the role of Christian in an 1887 revival of The Bells. While it

was asserted in theatrical gossip columns that he was “only leaving the Lyceum temporarily, and because there is no ‘juvenile’ part in *The Dead Heart,*” the play with which Irving opened his 1889 season, there was also a sense that Alexander’s star was on the rise and he was outgrowing the position of third fiddle to the duet of Irving and Terry.\(^\text{341}\) *Pick-Me-Up* wryly suggested such a sentiment in observing that “Mr. George Alexander has come over from the Lyceum to be the leading man at the Adelphi and to have his name printed in extra large type on the programme.”\(^\text{342}\) If he was getting a chance to perform a leading role for a change, the Adelphi was getting an actor associated in a relationship of apprenticeship with the most prestigious performer in the most artistically serious theatre of the day, and one review of his performance in *London Day By Day* concludes that his habituation to “the poetic company of Goethe and Faust and Shakespeare and Macduff [enabled him] to show us that melodrama can be made interesting without excess and fury.”\(^\text{343}\) Some weeks after the opening, *The Era* praised him again for having “the courage to discard all the conventional peculiarities of the melodramatic hero, and rely for his success upon the presentation of a simple, natural, and gentlemanly realization of the stage lover.” It was as though his performance actually transcended the form of the popular melodrama, arriving at “one of the most interesting and effective studies of histrionic art ever witnessed in a drama of this description.”\(^\text{344}\)

Alma Murray, too, had been a member of the Lyceum company before performing at the Adelphi, though her work in the 1880s moved into a register even further removed from that of the popular melodrama. Her break-out moment came at the Lyceum in 1880 when, thanks to one of the episodes of illness that punctuated Ellen Terry’s career, Murray stepped from the

\(^{341}\) “Theatres,” *The Graphic*, 31 August 1889.

\(^{342}\) “Through the Opera Glass,” *Pick-Me-Up*, 12 October 1889, 22.


supporting role of Jessica into the part of Portia opposite Irving’s Shylock in his famous staging of *The Merchant of Venice*. Within a year she went off in search of “a more important part than those in which she has generally been seen at the Lyceum,” taking leading parts in plays like the Gaiety Theatre melodrama *A Fight For Life*.\(^{345}\) She finally and conclusively established herself, though, in 1886 when she became associated with the new phenomenon of private performances given by subscription in an effort to avoid the jurisdiction of the Lord Chamberlain, a method that was key to the so-called “Ibsen Campaign” and the establishment of Naturalism as an important theatrical mode. The play in which she first appeared under such auspices was of an altogether different variety: Shelley’s 1819 poetic drama *The Cenci*, previously considered unstageable both for its highly rhetorical nature and because of its strong themes and depiction of violence, incest, and parricide. The Lord Chamberlain would refuse to license it until the 1920s, but Alma Murray played the role of Beatrice Cenci in an 1886 performance before a private club audience that included Browning, Wilde, and Shaw. Wilde wrote that this performance put her “in the very first ranks of our English actresses as a mistress of power and pathos.”\(^{346}\) She thereafter became a member of the Shelley and Browning Societies and appeared in private performances of plays by both poets; in the early 1890s she was described as a “poetic actress without rival[...] not merely an artist but in [...] herself a *work of art*,”\(^{347}\) and late in her lifetime she was remembered as “the leading actress of the English literary drama.”\(^{348}\) Though she was experienced in a variety of types of drama ranging form high tragedy to comedy and

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popular melodramas like *London Day By Day*, by 1889 Murray was primarily identified with a kind of poetic drama that mixed artistic aspirations with potentially transgressive avant-gardism.

Like the leading couple whom his villain opposed, Marius had performed on the Lyceum stage before coming to the Adelphi. He, though, had performed there in the 1860s, before Irving was associated with the theatre, as a cast member in musical comedies and burlesques like *Chilperic* and *Little Faust*. During this period he bounced back and forth between Paris and London; after serving in the Franco-Prussian war on the side of his homeland he returned to London for good in the 1870s, and became a leading member of the company at the Strand when it was staging performances of W.S. Gilbert’s early plays, as well as some of the first English translations of the works of Jacques Offenbach. In 1879 he played opposite Florence St. John in an extremely successful production of Offenbach’s *Madame Favart*; the pair immediately threw over their respective spouses and lived and performed together, frequently reviving this piece, until separating in 1888. Marius was being cast against type in *London Day By Day*, leading the *Paul Mall Gazette* to worry in its opening notice that he would be rejected by the Adelphi audience: “Can you imagine that rollicking, genial, humorous, farcical Frenchman Marius a villain? Why, he hasn’t a grain of the villain in his composition, and we should say that an Adelphi audience won’t be satisfied with anything under a real stunning scoundrel of the deepest and deadliest dye.”

Critical and audience consensus nevertheless found that his performance worked, particularly alongside those of his co-performers; it was “refreshing […] to see a bland, oleaginous desperado, such as M. Marius presents, in place of the grim, malignant,

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and hypochondriacal villain of average performances.”

Taken altogether the Adelphi management had, by reaching for its stars into the academy of art that was Irving’s Lyceum, the upscale world of private poetic drama, and the light opera, assembled a cast that was seen to moderate and modernize the typical practices of melodramatic acting.

*London Day By Day* was thus well within a set of well-worn representational conventions, even as it pushed at the boundaries of the forms it embodied. Sims and Pettitt drew on an old melodramatic scenario, and enlivened it with the realization of a recent sensational murder. This was framed by a sensation scene that mixed the long legacy of Victorian spectacular theatre with novelties like electrical light, management of stage crowds that was perceived to be cutting edge, and acting that came from outside of the melodramatic tradition. They took an image of a Whitechapel murder taken from the penny illustrated press and put it on the stage of a theatre that aspired to be a paragon of West End popular entertainment, had the killing committed by the unlikely hand of a light opera star, and then plunged the stage into total darkness. The mix of styles of performance and modes of representation crossed social, geographic, and aesthetic boundaries, though it still concluded with the triumph of good people over the potential dangers of the urban labyrinth and its predatory villain in a way that the actual Whitechapel murders, as marked as they were by iconographic reference to popular melodrama, had not. In concluding this case study we will make a brief excursion across the English channel, following the path of *The Bohemians of Paris* in reverse, to examine another play performed in 1889 that openly acknowledged its depiction of the Ripper murders in a way that *London Day By Day* did not: Gaston Marot and Louis Péricaud’s *Jack l’éventreur*.

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351 “Drama,” *Athenaeum*, 394.
Conclusion: *Jack l’éventreur* and the London Theatrical Press

In the sort of coincidence that might very well be drawn from the plot of a Victorian melodrama, some of the same August theatrical columns that brought Londoners news about the upcoming production of *London Day By Day* reported on a “new drama, which the management of the Chateau d’Eau Theatre, Paris, have had the questionable taste to base upon the revolting subject of ‘Jack the Ripper.’” Although the British actor Marland Clarke had presented a play under the title *Jack the Ripper* at the Standard Museum in Brooklyn in January of 1889, the Chateau d’Eau drama was the first Ripper play to receive wide coverage in London papers. Clark’s version was probably only given a few times; on its opening in January the *Brooklyn Eagle* concluded that the “play needs revision badly,” and when it was withdrawn and reworked for a February reopening, the same paper damned it with the faint praise that the new staging had “been made less bad by revision and expurgation than it was on the first presentment.” The foreign theatrical columns of London papers seem not to have noticed it or deemed it worth mentioning until the substantially more successful French Ripper play became a subject of derision. With a run of 42 consecutive nights, *Jack l’éventreur* was the most performed play of the Chateau d’Eau’s season, without achieving the status of a major hit.

The London theatrical columns were united in their amazement that “two French playwrights of some reputation have taken in hand the repulsive subject of the Whitechapel

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352 “Theatres,” *The Graphic*, 31 August 1889. The same column revealed the cast of “the new romantic drama by Mr. George R. Sims and Mr. Henry Pettitt,” and another item in the same section of the paper on the same date describes Sims’ and Pettitt’s telephonic collaboration on revisions to the script.
murders.”  

The play was dismissed for its derivative dramaturgy: “apart from the ghastly interest surrounding the central figure, which was portrayed [sic] with dramatic vigour by M. Dalmy, there was nothing in the plot which has not been repeatedly put upon the Transpontine boards.”  

The plot of the play is, in fact, essentially a tissue of melodramatic convention: “Jack” is Jackson, leader of a gang of London criminals that has been subject to a major police crackdown in the recent past. In the first act he disguises himself as the chief of the New York police in order to interview Sir Stevens, commissioner of the London force, and discover that the police are relying on “the fifty prettiest women in London[,] … from the back-alleys of Whitechapel to the salons of Saint James Palace,” who are paid to become mistresses to notorious criminals and then inform on them.  

The Ripper crimes are thus explained as the murder of the police-informant mistresses of criminals who have recently been arrested, and Jackson’s mutilation of his victims is meant to frighten other women out of betraying their lovers in this fashion in the future. Throughout the play he maintains an incongruously chaste relationship with Ketty, a supposed orphan who is known within the criminal underworld as “the Little Virgin;” she is in fact the missing daughter of the wealthy Sir James Plack, who has hired Sir Stevens to locate the long-lost child abducted by a dishonest servant many years before. Sir Williams Haxell, who is engaged to Plack’s daughter Miss Ellen, is hero of the piece; he aids the comically incompetent detective Robinson Brownn [sic] in searching for both Plack’s missing daughter, and the Whitechapel killer. The climax of the play comes when Jackson suspects that Ketty is about to betray him, and he is shot dead by Brownn before he can murder her, declaring with his dying breath that “Jack the Ripper is dying! …But Jack the Ripper does not die! Others

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will take my place to revenge those lost to Newgate.”

The basic dramatic features given specific articulation in this plot – the poor but virtuous girl who discovers herself to be an heiress, the adoption of disguises by both detectives and criminals, and scenes of low-life revelry set in a picturesque urban underworld – are common elements of the long melodramatic tradition. Indeed, many of them are common between Jack l'éventreur and London Day By Day. But while the London theatrical press noted that Sims’ and Pettitt’s play was of “no particular novelty” in terms of its plot, Marot and Pericaud’s play was derided as “a regular bloody-head and rawbones play […] created] by scraping together odds and ends from various sources, and cementing those familiar materials with an abundance of more or less pathetic situations that are equally trite[; …] its only originality lies in its title.” The play was culturally and geographically remote from both the West End, and from a notion of British propriety, with the Daily News reassuring its readers that “public taste in such matters has happily undergone some improvement among us since the incidents of the murder of Mr. Weare were introduced into a piece at the Surrey Theatre while the accused was still awaiting trial. […] It is not the less strange that audiences can be found in any civilized country to tolerate such ‘actualities’” as a play about Jack the Ripper. Recalling the fact that in 1823 the management of the Surrey had in fact paid for the gig in which William Weare was ambushed and murdered by John Thurtell, and used it in a stage representation of the story, this review implies a kind of popular-Darwinian view of national culture. The English might once have provided an audience for such “ripped from the headlines” spectacles, but only ever in “transpontine” houses like the Surrey, and at any rate the culture had evolved well past such morbid spectacles.

359 Ibid, 205-06.
361 “The Drama in Paris,” The Era, 7 September 1889.
Except, of course, that it had not. As we say in the previous chapter, theatres in the East End had little trouble finding audiences enough for Ripper-themed spectacles; even if these were not in what a *Daily News* critic might have considered a “civilized” part of the country, they were mirrored by the spectacle of Madame Tussaud’s in the heart of the West End where “actualities” filled the Chamber of Horrors. More directly, the “curiously English, yet un-English” spectacle of a French actor committing Whitechapel murders onstage was actually happening at the Adelphi at the same time it was going on at the Chateau d’Eau. If Sims and Pettitt’s play was characterized by degrees of novelty in its leading actors’ performances and its technological staging, it still drew on the same traditions of melodramatic dramaturgy that animated *Jack l’éventreur*, and touched the visual tradition of representing the Whitechapel victims in ways that were legible to at least some critics at the time. That they got away with it, staging the evident realization of a Ripper murder without attracting the ire of the same critics who condemned *Jack l’éventreur*, is both a marker of the nationalist prejudice of that critical establishment, and an indicator that melodrama and the iconography of the Whitechapel murders were always already so deeply intertwined that the same features that made it visible allowed it to be overlooked.

Sims’ and Pettitt’s staging of what might have been the first officially licensed “realization” of a Whitechapel murder on the London stage was thus a moment of both creation and discovery. In putting such a killing on stage they may have been making a claim to a particular kind of realism, the same that was made when Clerkenwell prison was bombed in Pettitt’s *Taken From Life* or the exterior of a workhouse was shown as a Fildes painting in Sims’ *Lights o’ London*. In staging the murder as an “actuality” but burying the murdered woman within a conventional melodramatic plot, they were putting a character potentially recognizable
as the Ripper on the London stage but also finding that he was already there waiting for them. George Hutchinson claimed to be an eyewitness by casting himself as a kind of melodrama hero with his detailed description of the “real” villain in melodramatic terms, just as a pair of West End playwrights could wrap a realized representation of such a villain within a thoroughly commercial dramatic product in a sentimental journalistic mode. *London Day By Day* ultimately offered an assurance that while the melodrama of the Ripper, enacted in London’s streets and the periodical press, was frustrated from reaching its expected climax because of the killer’s apparent ability to evade justice, it could be completed in the theatre. The play’s depiction of a Whitechapel killing was thus a deeply ambivalent act that recombined the visual and dramatic traditions of both periodical page and popular stage: it provided both a frisson of recognition supplied by visual stimulation and a sentimental suggestion of the need for the kind of social action for which Sims advocated early in his journalistic career. Importantly, though, in transferring one image of the Ripper as a mythic figure from the penny periodical page to the West End stage, the play loosened its association with the geographical and social specificity of the East End, rendering it a portable figure of modern entertainment across class and cultural boundaries. In the next chapter we will see how the importance of this mobility, the ability of the fish to leap across media and through time and space, became increasingly important in twentieth-century iterations of the Ripper scenario.
Chapter 4

Who Is The Lodger?

Urban Legend From Page, to Stage, to Screen

Short of leaving the country to see plays like *Jacques l’éventreur* staged abroad, late-Victorian Londoners who wanted to be publicly entertained by theatrical performances depicting Jack the Ripper and his crimes had two options: they could go down the scale of cultural legitimacy and social acceptability to illegal or quasi-legal penny gaffs, or else engage their imaginations to see allusive references of the kind I have described in the case of *London Day By Day* at the Adelphi. It was not until the winter of 1915, when both Victoria and her immediate successor Edward VII were dead and Britain was in the middle of the First World War, that the Lord Chamberlain’s office sanctioned for presentation in a licensed theatre a drama that was unmistakably inspired by the Whitechapel murders. *Who Is He?* was written by Horace Annesley Vachell, a playwright nearly as prolific as George R. Sims and today even more neglected by theatre history, and it was in an important sense the diametrical opposite of *London Day By Day*: while Sims and Pettitt’s melodrama allowed Londoners the opportunity to see a coded representation of Jack the Ripper in what was, to all outward appearances, a melodrama having nothing in its plot to do with the 1888 Whitechapel murders, Vachell’s comedy held out to its audience the transgressive possibility that a depiction of the notorious murderer would be seen on stage, only to resolve into a farcical case of mistaken identity which meant that no Rippers were shown on the Haymarket stage where it initially played.

The few instances in which *Who Is He?* has been written about in historical or critical scholarship have focused on the 1915 play as an adaptation of Marie Belloc Lowndes’ 1912
novel *The Lodger*, which tells the story of a couple of former domestic servants who keep a boarding house and discover that their sole tenant is a serial murderer of women called in the novel the Avenger, but clearly modeled on Jack the Ripper. Such references to the play are generally perfunctory, if not outright dismissive, and typically consider it interesting primarily because Alfred Hitchcock, who would also dramatize the story in his 1927 film *The Lodger: A Story of the London Fog*, admitted that his first exposure to the narrative had been when he “had seen a play called *Who Is He?* based on Mrs. Belloc Lowndes’ *The Lodger.*” Richard Allen, in an important study of Hitchcock’s film that makes crucial connections to the late-Victorian literary culture that influenced it, and also provides one of the most extended scholarly analyses of the film alongside Belloc Lowndes’ novel, devotes only one sentence to what he calls Vachell’s “successful London stage production.” Coville and Lucanio’s book-length attempt to comprehensively catalogue as many Ripper fictions as possible dismisses the play as “an undistinguished comedy which fared adversely with audiences.” Among published writers only Charles Barr provides any direct evidence of having read or closely researched *Who Is He?*, providing a brief synopsis and short production history in an appendix. Importantly, he also credits it as a possible shaping influence on the narrative of Hitchcock’s film as adapted from Belloc Lowndes:

The lodger, in Marie Belloc Lowndes’s novel, is guilty of the [Avenger] murders.

Hitchcock’s standard line in interviews was that of course he ought to have been guilty in the film too, but commercial pressures, and specifically the mechanics of the star system,

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prevented this. As usual, we don’t have to accept what Hitchcock said. His standard account also included the memory of first encountering the story, and being impressed by it, in the form of its early stage adaptation, *Who Is He?*; and in this the lodger is, as he will be in the film, innocent of the murders and something of a gentleman […] It is hard to see that the film would have been strengthened in any way by making him guilty.366

Barr’s study is an avowedly revisionist one that seeks to complicate auteurist readings of Hitchcock’s work by analyzing his early films in the framework of “an acknowledgement of source materials that would, one guesses, be seen as a distraction from the single-minded rigour of the analytical project” of reading them entirely as evidence of the expression of a single great artist.367 Hitchcock’s *The Lodger: A Story of the London Fog* has probably been the single most important fictional depiction of the Ripper story, both in terms of aesthetic influence and sheer volume and quality of scholarly analysis it has received as part of just such analytical projects. It was lauded upon its release as possibly “the finest British film ever made,”368 Hitchcock himself remembered it later in life as the third feature he directed but “the first true ‘Hitchcock movie.’”369 It has been described by later scholars as “not an apprentice work but a thesis, definitively establishing Hitchcock’s identity as an artist,”370 and as “a baseline work for understanding Hitchcock’s subsequent films and […] an anthology of his future filmmaking practice.”371 At the same time, a deliberately provocative study like Barr’s point us to the ways in

366 Charles Barr, *English Hitchcock*, (Dumfriesshire, Scotland: Cameron and Hollis, 1999), 34.
367 Ibid., 9.
369 Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, 43.
which analysis of a neglected work like *Who Is He?* can complicate and enrich our understanding of Hitchcock’s film, its place in his development as an artist, and the space *The Lodger* occupies in film history and scholarship on cinema.

With this in mind, I will devote a final case study to *Who Is He?* and its related works, considering the play as the first drama unambiguously based on the Ripper murders to play in London on an official license. This analysis will be both textual and contextual, examining the way in which the play was written, staged, publicized, and reviewed, and considering it as an adaptation of Marie Belloc Lowndes’ novel *The Lodger*, as a shaping influence along with this novel on Alfred Hitchcock’s film *The Lodger: A Tale of the London Fog*, and as part of the long history of public entertainment related to the Whitechapel murders that makes up my wider study. This analysis will comprise four sections. In the first, in order to facilitate comparison, the three iterations of the lodger story on page, stage, and screen will be summarized in chronological order of their appearance, with the circumstances of the first appearance and critical reception of each briefly sketched before the plot is outlined in broad strokes. In the second, I will document a long tradition of urban legends about a lodger figure that predates the composition of Marie Belloc Lowndes’ novel, and crucially informs how the novel and its first dramatic adaptation were related. In the third section, I will examine Vachell’s transformation of the story into the unlikely form of a drawing room comedy, considering this against the background covered in section two, and in the context of censorship of the stage as practiced during the First World War. In the fourth and final section, I will discuss specific features of the way in which the lodger figure is characterized across the three works, focusing on how elements this depiction that are introduced in Vachell’s stage adaptation are picked up by Hitchcock’s 1927 film. Looking at how specific narrative and iconographical details of *Who Is He?* anticipate
features of *The Lodger: A Tale of the London Fog* will clarify the film’s likely debt to Vachell’s play, and situate it within the wider context of Ripper mythology. Analyzing a work crucial to the establishment of Hitchcock as a cinematic “auteur” into these contexts highlights the importance of collaborators and source materials in defining Hitchcock’s aesthetic practices, allowing us to analyze “Hitchcock” as a mythic figure in his own right, with his authorial status defined in part by the intertexts and traditional scenarios woven into his version of *The Lodger*.

**The Lodger on Page, Stage, and Screen**

Marie Belloc had not yet married Times reporter and future editor Frederick Lowndes when she began her own writing career in 1888. She was hired by *Pall Mall Gazette* editor W.T. Stead, at the same time that “Stead […] took the lead in extracting copy from the Ripper murders” as one of the chief journalistic voices engaged in covering the story, “compil[ing] and summariz[ing] news accounts from the morning papers in his evening publications [while] offering some characteristic twists of his own.”372 Stead sent Belloc to Paris where she acted as a foreign correspondent and collaborated on a guide for British visitors to the 1889 Exposition Universelle. In 1911 one of the final numbers of the American publication *McClure’s Magazine*, a muckraking periodical that combined advocacy journalism, of the kind Stead practiced in London, with popular fiction like Conan Doyle’s “Sherlock Holmes” stories, carried Belloc Lowndes’ first version of *The Lodger* as a short story. W.L. Courtney commissioned an extended version as a serial for *The Daily Telegraph* that began its run in 1912, and in 1913 Methuen brought out a single volume edition of the compiled text. As Christopher Pittard notes, reviews of this edition

were favorable in spite of Belloc Lowndes’ later recollections to the contrary;\textsuperscript{373} the commercial success of the book was such that within a year of its release Belloc Lowndes “was at last beginning to earn about half of [her] income with fiction,” fulfilling a long-held personal goal of abandoning journalism to focus full time on novel writing.\textsuperscript{374}

Belloc Lowndes’ version of The Lodger focuses on the Buntings, an aging couple who married in middle age and were once domestic servants. At the novel’s outset they have left service and own a small house in Bloomsbury, west London, the upper floors of which they let out in order to support themselves. The first chapters sketch their domestic situation but also their desperation: the Buntings have been some time without steady tenants, and have made ends meet by selling items of furniture and living as frugally as possible on the small amounts of cash that Bunting is able to earn by working outside as a waiter; Daisy, who is Mr. Bunting’s daughter and Mrs. Bunting’s stepdaughter, lives with an aunt because they cannot afford to support her. Mr. Bunting has taken to spending half-pennies that the couple can ill afford on newspapers, so that he can read about the exploits of the Avenger, a serial killer whose deeds are patterned on the Whitechapel murders. This killer strikes down drunken women in the East End of the city, and leaves triangular notes bearing his moniker that are written in a distinctive red ink. Mr. Bunting especially relishes visits from Joe Chandler, a young Metropolitan Police detective who is working on the Avenger case. Chandler is friendly with the Buntings at least in part because of his romantic interest in Daisy. The Buntings are saved from financial ruin when a mysterious stranger, calling himself Mr. Sleuth, arrives on their doorstep the day after an Avenger murder has been committed, carrying nothing but a small leather bag. Sleuth has in his possession a large

\textsuperscript{373} Christopher Pittard, \textit{Purity and Contamination in Late Victorian Detective Fiction}, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), 189.

number of gold sovereigns, with which he is distinctly careless; he pays in advance for all of their rooms so that he will be the only tenant, and engages Mrs. Bunting to go out shopping for clothing and other necessities he requires because he has no luggage, which he describes as losing in a “very great misfortune” the previous day.\textsuperscript{375}

Sleuth’s behavior continues to be eccentric as he settles into life at the Buntings’; he turns a set of prints of Victorian beauties that Mrs. Bunting has hung in one of his rooms toward the wall, and spends most of his days engaged in close study of the Bible and a book of concordance which he annotates obsessively. Mrs. Bunting frequently hears him leaving the house very late at night, and returning in the small hours of the morning. Odd events cause Mrs. Bunting to suspect that her tenant may be the Avenger: while cleaning his room one day when he is out, she jars a wardrobe and finds that a stream of red ink runs out from inside of it; later he wakes the Buntings up late at night with a foul odor, created when he burns a set of clothes in their stove because he has jammed the shilling meter on the one in his chamber by over-using it in what he describes as the conduct of scientific experiments. Mrs. Bunting’s suspicions are such that she eventually goes so far as to attend the inquest for one of the Avenger’s victims in order to hear an eyewitness describe the killer, but she always stops short of sharing her suspicions with either Joe or Mr. Bunting. Events finally come to a head when Sleuth escorts Mrs. Bunting and Daisy to Madame Tussaud’s as a celebration for the girl’s birthday; the group chance to encounter the commissioner of the Met and his counterpart from Paris in the Chamber of Horrors, where Sleuth overhears them discussing the Avenger murders. The Met commissioner attributes these to the “Liverpool and Leipsic man,” a mental patient who was confined for a series of similar murders committed in those cities, before managing to escape with the asylum’s entire monthly payroll in

\textsuperscript{375} Marie Belloc Lowndes, \textit{The Lodger}. (Chicago: Academy, 1988), 22.
Thinking that Mrs. Bunting has betrayed him, Sleuth scolds her in words that confirm his identity as the Avenger before vanishing out the fire exit, never to be seen by the Buntins again. In a final chapter, Mrs. Bunting at last shares her knowledge openly with her husband, and while they don’t share this information with Joe they are relieved when, some months later, a knife and a pair of rubber-soled boots matching those that belonged to Sleuth are found in Regent’s Park. This is a key point of divergence between the otherwise very similar short story and novel versions: in the shorter text it is directly stated that Sleuth’s body is fished out of the Regent’s Park Canal, something which can only be taken as an implication in the novel and which, as we shall see, demonstrates a particular level of engagement with discussions of the Ripper events as an urban legend that were circulating in the first decades of the twentieth century. The novel concludes with the suggestion that these events happened some time in the past, and that Joe and Daisy have since been married and the Buntins have returned to domestic service.

If we take his autobiographical writing at face value, Horace Annesley Vachell spent much of the First World War attempting to reenlist in the British military. Despite his best efforts and at least one false dawn when he received “a letter […] from the War Office addressed to Lieutenant H.A. Vachell,” it was evidently decided that the war effort could do without the writer who had graduated from the Royal Military College, Sandhurst as long ago as the early 1880s. Denied the opportunity to serve in uniform, Vachell engaged in prolific service to the drama instead; since, as he later recalled, “playgoers went to the play to distract their minds [and] the authorities approved of this,” writing for the theatre could at least count as half a contribution

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376 Ibid. 214.
377 Ibid. 224.
to the war effort, and his stage output during the period can be regarded as a veritable bombardment.\textsuperscript{379} When \textit{Who Is He?} opened at the Haymarket in December of 1915, with Henry Ainley in the title role and Clare Greet as Mrs. Bunting, it was the fourth play of Vachell’s staged in the West End that year. The comedy \textit{Quinneys}, a sentimental piece about a Yorkshire antiques dealer and his family, also starred Ainley and ran at the Haymarket from April to December; the war drama \textit{Searchlights} ran with H.B. Irving at the Savoy from February to May; and \textit{The Case of Lady Camber} opened at the Savoy in October. This last play, like \textit{Who Is He?}, was about a man suspected of murder: in \textit{The Case of Lady Camber} the younger Irving played a nobleman incorrectly suspected of poisoning his wife, though the play was an entirely serious melodrama. So prolific was Vachell that \textit{The Stage} devoted an entire section to him in its annual review of theatrical trends, and while H.M. Walbrook opined that he would “probably, as a dramatist, never take a sufficiently steady, shrewd, and unsentimental view of life to qualify him for the writing of a great play,” he nevertheless pronounced Vachell “the one established dramatist who can look back upon 1915 with almost entire satisfaction.”\textsuperscript{380} Vachell fired a repeated salvo on the West End in 1916, debuting a further four plays that year as well, including an adventure melodrama loosely based on the character of Sherlock Holmes called \textit{Mr. Jubilee Drax}.

Reviews of \textit{Who Is He?} were, on balance, positive but not glowing; \textit{The Times} critic mused at the reaction of the opening night audience, finding it subdued in particular scenes that “ought to have been exquisitely comic, and, to be sure, laughter there was, but not quite the wild, uproarious laughter that the situation seemed to demand.”\textsuperscript{381} \textit{Variety} covered it in a short item, its

\textsuperscript{379} Ibid., 216.  
\textsuperscript{381} “Who Is He? Mr. Vachell’s Comedy at the Haymarket,” \textit{The Times (London)}, 10 December
critic finding that the play was “not a very strong farce, but […] superbly played by Henry Ainley and Clare Greet,” and auguring with the insider’s cynicism characteristic of the publication that its “small cast […] makes it possible to whip it into a quasi success.”\footnote{“Short-Casted Farce Has Chance,” \textit{Variety} 41.3 (17 December 1915), 4.} This prediction proved correct: when it closed at the Haymarket on 8 April 1916,\footnote{“Theatres,” \textit{The Times}, 7 April 1916.} following a respectable run of four months, the play had already been remounted in at least one provincial production at the Grand Theatre in Hull;\footnote{“Who Is He? at Grand Theatre,” \textit{Daily Mail (Hull)}, 10 March 1916.} in 1917 it would run 56 performances Broadway under the title \textit{The Lodger}, with future B-movie horror star Lionel Atwill in the title roll and Beryl Mercer as Mrs. Bunting.

Throughout its run at the Haymarket, \textit{Who Is He?} was described in press advertisements an on playbills as “very freely adapted from a novel by Mrs. Belloc Lowndes,” and an elementary sketch of the plot will make it clear just how free this adaptation was.\footnote{\textit{Who Is He?}, playbill, 9 December 1915, Victoria and Albert Museum theatre collection (Haymarket 1915 box).} Like \textit{The Lodger}, \textit{Who Is He?} begins with the Buntings at home discussing the Avenger murders. The sound of newspaper boys in the street tempts Bunting, who would like to read about the latest murder, but his wife reminds him that they are in dire financial straits, unable to “spare even one ha’penny.”\footnote{Horace Annesley Vachell, \textit{Who Is He?}, London: British Library, Lord Chamberlains Collection, 1.2. NB: The four acts of this play in the typescript held by the LCP are each numbered from one, so for the purposes of quotation I will cite act followed by page.} Bunting is forced to make do with discussing the case with Irene Harding, a young woman who lodges in their house and is an out-of-work typist; through their conversation we learn that the victims of this set of Avenger murders have been young, attractive women in the West End, who are gunned down with a pistol and left with triangular notes written in red ink upon their bodies. The generally accepted theory of the murders is that the killer “has sustained a
wrong at the hands of a woman, a wrong great enough to have unhinged his mind.” Mr. Bunting is hopeful that his son Tom, who works as a detective constable, will be the one to apprehend the Avenger. This discussion is interrupted by the arrival of a mysterious stranger at their door, his face almost completely enveloped in a large red muffler and a small leather bag clutched in his hand. He introduces himself as “Mr. Parker” and takes a room in the Buntlings’ house, wherein the whole action of the play takes place in the drawing room (the first three acts) and Mr. Parker’s chambers (the fourth and fifth acts).

As the play progresses, Mr. Parker undertakes a series of actions that lead Mrs. Bunting and her stepson Tom to suspect that he is the Avenger. He burns his leather bag, and is frequently absent from the premises at night; Mrs. Bunting also discovers that he is in possession of a pistol and a map of the area in which the murders have been taking place. He also shows himself to be an amateur scientist, using a microscope to prove to Mrs. Bunting that her grocer is adulterating her foodstuffs, and demonstrating for her a chemical reaction in which he turns two apparently clear chemicals into a substance resembling red ink. This behavior is explained to the audience when the lodger receives a visit from a lawyer named Prentiss, and it is revealed that Mr. Parker is not who he claimed he is, though his exact identity is only revealed at the end of the play. What is discovered in the second act is that he has been jilted by his fiancé, who eloped with his own dissolute nephew, and that Prentiss has sought out the lodger because this nephew has forged a small cheque against his uncle’s account. As part of this search, Prentiss placed a newspaper advertisement asking for information about a man carrying a particular monogrammed leather bag, which is why the lodger burnt the article described; he admits to carrying a pistol because of thoughts of suicide that have since passed. Anxious to remain

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387 Ibid. 1.9.
incognito and avoid revisiting the scandal of his jilting, the lodger declines to repudiate the cheque and tells Prentiss that he wants only to be left alone in order to pursue his social-scientific interest in making a first-hand investigation of poverty in the streets of London and writing up the results in a book, an occupation which explains his late night walks and the maps in his possession. Before leaving him, Prentiss reminds him that if he truly swears off romance it is to the benefit of his duplicitous nephew and former fiancé: “if you remain unmarried, you are playing their game, [for] if anything should happen to you, these worthless people must profit by your decease.”

In due course, the lodger hires his fellow tenant Irene to work as a typist on his manuscript about “the Pathology of the Submerged Tenth,” and romantic attraction blossoms between the two. Much of the humor of the play is generated by the attempts of Mrs. Bunting, convinced that Mr. Parker is the Avenger, to interpose herself between her two tenants, while Tom suspiciously grills Parker about his interest in crime. At the climax of the drama, Tom arrives with an Inspector and a group of constables to arrest Mr. Parker, only for Prentiss to reappear and reassure everyone that his client is in fact “a distinguished nobleman […] Lord Twyford, of Twyford, Lord Lieutenant of Slowshire, a Privy Councillor, and […] a personal friend of the Chief Commissioner of Police.” This is all the evidence that the Buntings and Irene need to accept that he is totally innocent of the Avenger crimes, and Prentiss leaves with the party of policeman to have the warrant against his client dismissed while Lord Twyford proposes marriage to Irene.

As has already been noted, Alfred Hitchcock described Who Is He? as his first exposure to any sort of story about a lodger who might be a serial killer. The exact circumstances by

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388 Ibid., 2.13.
389 Ibid. 4.8.
which he came to direct a cinematic version of the same narrative are subject to dispute in the biographical record. Patrick McGilligan repeats Hitchcock’s own assertion “that *The Lodger* was the first property that he himself chose from the studio’s available properties,” while Spoto claims that producer Michael Balcon assigned the project to Hitchcock with screenwriter Eliot Stanard already attached because “Balcon thought Hitchcock’s strong sense of character and narrative could balance the mystery aspects of the story […] which would justify any eerie visual touches Hitchcock had learned from the Germans.” Balcon had been responsible for the collaboration between Gainsborough Pictures and UFA that had sent a young Hitchcock to Munich and Berlin, where he had observed F.W. Murnau working on *The Last Laugh*, and regardless of whether filming *The Lodger* was Hitchcock’s idea or Balcon’s, it is clear that this experience was a key part of the reason why the project was considered ideal for the young director. The artistic avant-garde of Weimar Germany exhibited an almost obsessive fascination with sexualized murder which, as Maria Tatar has argued, manifested itself in the cinema and “legitimated the presence of Jack the Ripper in German ‘high culture’” products like Wedekind’s “Lulu” plays and their 1928 cinematic adaptation by G.W. Pabst. Hitchcock had been an avid theatregoer during his time in Germany, and had certainly shown an interest in Expressionist film, both while working in the Weimar republic and as a member of the Film Society, which had been responsible for the London premiers of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* and Leni’s *Waxworks*, two works also influenced by the iconographical representation of the Ripper, in the

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early 1920s. Hitchcock’s first two feature films, *The Pleasure Garden* and *The Mountain Eagle*, were made in Germany, and were so heavily influenced by Expressionist visual style that the Balcon’s business partner C.M. Woolf refused to release them on the grounds that “British moviegoers […] were accustomed to rather more simple views presented by American melodrama and the static, brightly lit drawing-room comedies and romances served up by the British studios.” Woolf also blocked the initial release of *The Lodger* for similar reasons, which induced Balcon to hire Film Society founder Ivo Montagu to re-edit the picture. Some reshoots were evidently required, though their precise nature is uncertain, and Montagu’s clearest contribution was in reducing by as much as three-quarters the number of title cards in the film and commissioning the graphic artist F. McKnight Kauffer to redesign those that remained.

When the film was finally officially released in February of 1927, more than 8 months after principal photography had wrapped, critical response was overwhelmingly positive and included a strong focus on Hitchcock’s contribution: Spoto notes that it was quite possibly “the first time in British film history that the director [of a picture] had received an even greater press than his stars,” no small thing given that the title part was played by Ivor Novello, arguably the biggest British star of the 1920s. The film’s visual style was celebrated at a time when calls were being made for the creation of an aesthetically serious British cinema that would match the achievements perceived in many continental traditions, while at the same time stemming the tide

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393 For a well documented discussion of the culture of British cinema in the 1920s, including the importance attached by the Film Society and its members to avant-garde European movements like Expressionism, Soviet Montage, and French Impressionism, see Chapter 2 of Tom Ryall, *Alfred Hitchcock and the British Cinema*, (Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1986).
of “the millions of pounds that leave [Britain] yearly as the hire for American films.” Though distinctly influenced by German cinema, Hitchcock’s “tale of the London fog” was seen as an example of a distinctly British art film that still retained commercial appeal.

*The Lodger: A Story of the London Fog* begins not in the home of the Bunting family but in the streets of London. Following a title sequence designed by Kauffer, which shows the clear influence of the titles and cards used in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* while building both fonts and backgrounds around a triangular motif that mimics the Avenger’s notes and evokes the love-triangle that the film will create, we see a stylized depiction of the latest Avenger murder. This begins with an extreme close-up of a young woman screaming in terror, strong backlight turning her blond curls into a glowing halo. The film cuts from this to a close-up of a theatre marquee, surrounded by blackness, that flashes out the title of an evocatively named review – “To-night ‘Golden Curls’” – before cutting back to the young woman’s body, shown in a low-level shot lying dead on the pavement. The sequence that follows depicts the aftermath of the murder: a witness describing the killer’s muffled face to police and reporters while a crowd gathers to stare at the body, the reporter calling in details that are then displayed going out over a teletype machine, newspapers are printed and distributed. One paper is received by the chorus girls in the “Golden Curls” review, who discuss the fact that the murders always happen on Tuesdays. Another group of young women, models in a clothing store, are shown receiving the news and discussing the fact that blondes are always targeted, leading one to declare “No more peroxide for yours truly.”

The first introduction to the Bunting residence comes nearly fifteen minutes into the film.

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397 “British Films,” *The Stage*, 30 December 1926.
399 Ibid., 00:11:12
when Daisy, one of the models shown discussing the Avenger crimes, returns home to find her father and the young detective Joe also studying the latest newspaper. Later that night the title character arrives at the Bunting residence; with a large scarf muffling his face and a hat pulled down on his head, he matches the description of the Avenger that was circulated earlier. He takes a room from the Buntings, paying for an entire month in advance. Mrs. Bunting is surprised to find him turning images of Victorian belles toward the wall, and asks Daisy to remove them; the suggestion of romantic attraction between Daisy and the lodger begins in this encounter. Throughout the rest of the film a rivalry between Joe and the lodger develops over Daisy’s affections, and Mrs. Bunting comes to suspect that her tenant is the Avenger when she hears him sneaking out the front door the following Tuesday night, only for another murder to be committed just around the corner from their house. Mrs. Bunting shares her suspicions with her husband, and in spite of their best efforts to keep their tenant away from Daisy the pair sneak out together the next Tuesday night. Joe confronts them in the street and tells Daisy he will no longer court her, and when left alone he independently reaches the conclusion that the lodger must be the Avenger. Joe then rushes to the Buntings’ with a warrant and a pair of police constables, breaking open a locked cabinet in the lodger’s chamber to discover a leather bag that has inside it a picture of a mysterious blonde girl, a gun, a map plotting the location of all the Avenger murders, and clippings of newspaper accounts of the killings.

When Daisy and the lodger return home Joe promptly handcuffs his romantic rival in spite of Daisy’s protestations, though the lodger is able to escape and run off into the city. Daisy follows and finds him, and the two sit on a bench in a square while he explains that the photograph in his room is that of his sister. In flashback we see that she was the first Avenger victim, a debutante murdered at her coming out ball, and learn that the lodger vowed to his
mother in her dying moments that he would find and exact vengeance on the Avenger, which explains his interest in the case and his possession of a revolver. When Daisy takes the still-handcuffed man to a pub to warm up, the patrons quickly become suspicious and pursue the pair. The lodger is finally trapped and assaulted by the mob when his handcuffs snag on a fence, and is only saved from being beaten to death when a newspaper boy is heard shouting out the news that the real Avenger has been caught and Joe arrives to rescue him. The film ends with a coda in, which the lodger is shown recovering from his ordeal in hospital and later welcoming Daisy, along with her father and stepmother, into his own stately home. The lodger and his new fiancé share a kiss on a grand staircase, while through a window the marquee for “Golden Curls” can be seen flashing.

Even these relatively brief summaries may begin to make apparent some of the similarities and differences in the way that each of these three iterations of the lodger story deploys a similar group of characters and elements of plot. I will have more to say below about how particular points of similarity and difference in character, plot, and theme can be read across the three works, in order to both suggest that Who Is He? was an important intertext for The Lodger: A Story of the London Fog in ways not generally recognized by critical scholarship, and also to relate all of the works as a group to the cultural myth of Jack the Ripper that was forged in the late-Victorian period and passed on to the twentieth century. First, though, I want to turn to particular stories about a lodger figure that far predate even Marie Belloc Lowndes’ use of them in fiction. Tracing these stories, which circulated in both print and oral form, and analyzing their meaning as the particular form of myth called by folklorists “urban legend” will help to both clarify the inspiration for the various forms of the lodger in fictional media, and establish what each of these may have meant to its first audience. In particular it may help us to make sense of
Horace Annesley Vachell’s unorthodox decision to turn a novel based on the Jack the Ripper murders into a drawing room comedy.

**Urban Legends, Secret Knowledge, and “Good Stories” About Jack The Ripper**

In her personal papers and autobiographical writings, Marie Belloc Lowndes offers several slightly different versions of the same story about how she was inspired to write *The Lodger*. Writing in all cases well after the publication of the novel, she describes a dinner party conducted at an unspecified date in the home of an unspecified host, at which an unnamed man tells a story about how “his mother had had a butler and a cook who had married and kept lodgers. They were convinced that Jack the Ripper had spent a night under their roof.”\(^{400}\) What varies across the accounts is her description of whether the story is told directly to her, or is overheard by her as the young man tells it to another guest; in either case the story describes a chain of hearsay from butler and cook, to their former employer, to her son, to a guest at a society function. As Pittard has pointed out in analyzing the novel alongside other examples of late-Victorian detective fiction, this account’s reliance on such a chain of evidence marks it with the kind of “friend of a friend” background described by folklorists dealing with urban legends, in which multiple layers of transmission are taken “to offer factual legitimacy to a narrative that may otherwise seem fantastic [because …] the testimony adds authenticity to truth claims.”\(^{401}\) He builds from this to a relatively persuasive reading of the novel as informed by its relation to the urban legend as a literary form because, like stories of “insects found in Coke bottles, or the infamous Kentucky Fried rat, many urban legends are motivated by a fear of material


\(^{401}\) Pittard, *Purity and Contamination*, 190.
contamination, of mess, of dirt [and] *The Lodger* offers a similarly complex treatment of these themes in its explicit combination of a narrative of crime and detection with the domestic work of cleaning” that is undertaken by Mrs. Bunting.402 Somewhat strangely, though, Pittard also argues that “reading Sleuth straightforwardly as Jack the Ripper […] reduces the text to crime narrative; [while] acknowledging the text’s disputability, by contrast, opens up the richer possibility of the novel’s status as an examination of urban myth.”403 This is perhaps because he considers the text almost exclusively within the literary culture of fictional writing about crime, thus ignoring the extent to which Jack the Ripper as a figure was already characterized by all the disputability and complicated transmission of ideas and ideologies that characterizes myth and urban legend, and indeed the extent to which the lodger story is traceable as just such a legend.

While Belloc Lowndes never named the young man from whom she had first heard the lodger story, the civil servant and classical scholar Edward Marsh records that he was present when it was told to her by the painter Walter Sickert.404 Both Sickert and Belloc Lowndes knew Marsh well, and all three moved in the same London- and Paris-based literary and artistic circles throughout the teens and twenties, so it is eminently plausible that all three would have attended the same dinner party. Sickert’s fascination with murder was well known: a number of paintings combining figures of nude women with those of clothed men that he completed between 1908 and 1910 were sometimes displayed under titles related to the Camden Town Murder, the notorious 1907 killing of the prostitute Emily Dimmock.405 More importantly for our purposes,

402 Ibid., 200.
403 Ibid., 208.
405 See Wendy Baron and Richard Shone, eds, *Sickert: Paintings* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 206-15 for reproductions and analyses of the Camden Town Murder paintings, most of which were also sometimes shown under other titles. None of these directly reproduces either Dimmock’s appearance or the physical circumstances of her murder, with which Sickert
he had his own lodger story that he evidently relished telling, in which he claimed that the landlady of a flat and studio he had occupied in Mornington Crescent, Camden told him that in 1888 his very rooms had been rented to veterinary student who was odd and furtive but at first harmless-seeming, and who had a propensity for late night walks. She concluded that her tenant was Jack the Ripper after noticing signs that he had burnt blood-soaked clothing on the fire in his room. However, before she and her husband could report this to the police the young man’s health collapsed and his mother fetched him back to Bournemouth, where he quickly deteriorated and died. So taken was Sickert with this story that he completed a murky, mysterious study of the rooms some time in 1906-07 and titled it “Jack the Ripper’s Bedroom” (Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1

would definitely have been familiar, and compositional sketches for some of them seem to predate the killing entirely.

407 This painting is currently in the collection of the Manchester Art Gallery; information about it can be accessed via their online catalogue.
The story about the former servants of a young society gentleman’s mother letting rooms
to Jack the Ripper that Belloc Lowndes records is obviously not identical to the story that Sickert
is known to have told, about being informed by a landlady that he was personally occupying the
Ripper’s former rooms. This could reflect a conscious choice on the part of Belloc Lowndes to
change details to avoid specifying her source – given the notoriety of Sickert’s Ripper story, it is
likely others would have recognized his version – or it could be an example of what the folklore
scholar Jan Harold Brunvand calls “communal re-creation” of an urban legend, “the process by
which each teller of a story re-creates the plot from a partly remembered set of details [and] then
unwittingly varies the story by adding, dropping, or changing certain details.” Belloc Lowndes
might have heard the story from Sickert any time after 1906, but the earliest written accout of the
dinner party where she heard a similar story occurs in her diary of 9 March 1923. At that date
she may even be conflating details of her own fictionalization of the story with whatever she
could recall of first hearing it many years earlier. In fact variations on the story can be traced
back long before either Sickert or Belloc Lowndes heard or retold it, and so we should consider
that their versions and those told by any landladies, dinner companions, or individuals with
whom either of them may have discussed it to be instances in an ongoing process of communal
re-creation.

The first iterations of a story about a boarding house tenant who was possibly Jack the
Ripper can actually be traced to the time when the murders were being committed. From this
beginning the lodger story contained details that would appear in later fictionalizations, and also
took on the characteristics of an urban legend. In mid-October of 1888, it was reported in several

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papers that the police were watching a boarding house kept “by a stout, middle-aged German woman, who speaks very bad English.” According to these reports she had been in contact with the police when one of her tenants, a man in the habit of returning home at very late hours, gave her a blood-soaked shirt to wash before going out and failing to return; optimistically the *Daily News* concluded that “it is believed from the information obtained concerning the lodgers [sic] former movements and his general appearance, together with the fact that numbers of people have seen this man about the neighborhood, that the police have in their possession a series of important clues, and that his capture is only a question of time.”410 Such optimism was obviously misplaced, and the following year this account appeared in a modified form, this time attributed to the noted London psychologist Dr. Forbes Winslow. It was claimed, in a report first appearing in the *New York Herald*, that Winslow had in his possession a pair of bloodstained rubber boots and a bloody coat that he believed had belonged to the Whitechapel killer. According to the story, he had obtained these from a friend who kept a lodging house, and who had rented rooms in the autumn of 1888 to a strange man who was frequently out all night, and would spend his days compulsively writing religious tracts, “at times […] writ[ing] 50 or 60 sheets of manuscript about low women, for whom he professed to have a great hatred,” in a single day.411 The Metropolitan Police took this seriously enough to investigate, and Winslow showed them notes about an acquaintance named Callaghan who kept a lodging house and claimed to have rented rooms to a Canadian, calling himself “Mr. G. Wentworth Bell Smith,” in August of 1888. According to these notes this man had often “occupied himself in writing on religious subjects” and had a special mania “regarding ‘women of the streets,’ who he frequently said ought to be all drowned;” the investigating officer also examined “a pair of felt galoshed boots such as are in

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common use in Canada, and an old coat” that were said to have been left behind by Wentworth Bell Smith, all of which “were motheaten” but free from bloodstains. It was verified that neither Forbes Winslow nor Callaghan had contacted police about this mysterious lodger in 1888, though the former held himself out as a specialist on the criminal mind and had been in contact with police a number of times to share theories about the murderer at the height of the public frenzy.

Forbes Winslow documented his discussion with a friend about a mysterious lodger for police, but would not vouch for the veracity of the story, telling the investigating officer that the press reports were “a misrepresentation of a conversation with a New York Herald reporter […] who] gave him to understand the discussion would not be published” in any case. While these early lodger stories have been taken by some later writers to refer to the Canadian-American con-man and quack physician Francis Tumblety, a favorite suspect among many modern Ripperologists, what they most clearly constitute is an almost textbook case of the generation and early transmission of the urban legend upon which The Lodger would be founded. Particular details like manic religiosity and the suspicion of guilt being created by the disposal of clothing are present from the beginning, and persist in Belloc Lowndes’ novel, but most importantly the “friend of a friend” structure of repetition and revision is visible in these early accounts.

412 Stuart P. Evans and Keith Skinner, The Ultimate Jack the Ripper Companion: An Illustrated Encyclopedia, (New York: Carroll and Graff, 2000), 596. The particular police report about the interview with Forbes Winslow, which Evans and Skinner reproduce from a photocopy they made in the 1970s, has since been lost from the Met files.
413 Ibid., 595.
No doubt variations on this lodger story were widely repeated through just such friend-of-friend networks from its first appearances in the late 1880s, through the first decades of the twentieth century. George R. Sims, who was also acquainted with Belloc Lowndes and had employed her as a correspondent for a series of illustrated volumes published from 1902 under the series title *Living London Its Work and Its Play, Its Humour and Its Pathos, Its Sights and Its Scenes*, reports having been told a lodger story at around the same time that Sickert would have been told a variation by his landlady, and possibly repeated it to Belloc Lowndes. In a 1911 newspaper piece looking back on his journalistic career, Sims mentions such an incident:

Three years ago, when the discussion as to Jack [the Ripper]’s identity cropped up again in the press, […] and] a lady called upon me late one night. She came to tell me that the Whitechapel fiend had lodged in her house. On the night of the double murder he came in at two in the morning. The next day her husband, going into the lodger’s room as he left it, saw a black bag, and on opening it discovered a long sharp knife, and two bloodstained cuffs. The lodger was a medical man, an American. The next day he paid his rent, took his luggage, and left.

Both Sims’ repetition of this story and his dismissal of it on the basis that “there was ample proof that the real author of the horrors had committed suicide in the last stage of his manical [sic] frenzy” document the person-to-person transmission of theories and ideas about the Ripper murders in the early twentieth century. The bloody cuffs and long knife in a black bag are all elements of other stories told by Sims about times when he himself had been mistaken for the Ripper, and he almost certainly heard the theory that the murderer had committed suicide from former Metropolitan Assistant Commissioner Sir Melville Macnaughten, who corresponded with

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Sims about their mutual interest in crime and published his “belief that the individual who held up London in terror resided with his own people; that he absented himself from home at certain times, and that he committed suicide on or about the 10th of November 1888” in a memoir that appeared in 1914. The way in which Belloc Lowndes’ first short-story version of The Lodger ends – with the suspect drowning himself in the Regent’s Park Canal – suggests that she too had been party to this different piece of urban legend.

In fact Macnaughten’s memoir was one of three published in the early 1910s by police officials who had worked on the Ripper case. Robin Odell has characterized these publications as among the first flowerings of “Ripperology” as a non-fiction genre, marking “the beginning of a process where the events of 1888 in all their horrible simplicity started to be clouded by […] complex theories involving layers of detail,” a process clearly related to the circulation of urban legends about the killer’s possible identity among civilians but given the additional imprimatur of their authors’ official status. Macnaughten, his fellow former Met Assistant Commissioner Sir Robert Anderson, and former City of London Commissioner Sir Henry Smith all published autobiographies devoting a chapter to their involvement in the Ripper murders, and each gave the impression that he was personally well aware of the killer’s identity but prevented, even decades later, from revealing it. These accounts are both coy and mutually exclusive. Anderson avers “that ‘undiscovered murders’ are rare in London, and the ‘Jack-the-Ripper’ crimes are not within that category,” but refuses to identify the killer in any more detail than to say that he was a Polish Jew on the grounds that “Scotland Yard can boast that not even the subordinate officers of the department will tell tales out of school, and it would ill become [him] to violate the

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unwritten rules of the service." Smith directly refutes Anderson’s suggestion, stating that the killer was neither Polish nor Jewish, and rather fancifully details how an individual whom he is sure was the Ripper wrote and asked him to a series of meetings in public squares in various sections of London, but kept these appointments only fleetingly, by appearing on the opposite side of a dark street or square. Macnaughten’s suggestion about who the Ripper was and when he committed suicide is compatible with neither of these accounts.

Taken together with non-official accounts about a lodger who was the Ripper, these policemen’s recollections show how contradictory stories were circulating, in both oral and written form through both person-to-person and mass-mediated channels, at the time that Marie Belloc Lowndes was writing The Lodger and as Horace Annesley Vachell was adapting it into the stage drama Who Is He? Despite their many differences and apparent incompatibilities, what these accounts have in common is that they all constitute claims to a particular personal knowledge about the perpetrator of the Whitechapel murders, even as specific information about his identity is withheld or deferred. This double move, of claiming secret knowledge while also refusing to disclose it, is on the one hand related to the fact that as Odell puts it “it is clear that the men in the top echelons of the police did not know the identity of Jack the Ripper,” nor did any keepers of lodging houses, their friends, or their friends of friends. On the other hand, though, it relates the circulation of these stories to the territory of myth and specifically the poetics of the urban legend: as Banvard describes them, “by definition, urban legends are told as true (at least by some tellers some of the time) but are not literally true” and are often explicitly

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419 Odell, Ripperology, 38-44 details Smith’s “extravagant” account, and suggests that it is particularly geared toward humiliating both his superiors at the City of London Police and members of the Metropolitan force, whom he perceived as rivals.
420 Ibid., 52-3.
understood as such by their hearers because the point is not their factual veracity, but rather their tacitly acknowledged role as carriers of ideological and social messages forming and modulating relationships between hearers and tellers. As folklore scholar Gillian Bennett puts it:

Legend is a genre capable of straddling the divide between fact and fiction, partaking of the nature of both. [...] [There are] two sorts of information [that] are potentially derivable from legend performances: information about events and information about the speakers; which, put together, create a third type of information: information about the world as the speaker sees it. This is an important (even dangerous) statement to have to take responsibility for, so speakers take advantage of the dual nature of legend, shifting its position along the axis from fact to fiction and back as circumstances or their view of human nature dictate.

Decades after the Whitechapel murders, stories about an unnamed Polish Jew or boarding house resident who was actually Jack the Ripper speak, whether told in person or in writing, of their tellers’ collective desire to have and share this secret knowledge without being fully responsible for it. A boarding house keeper could share the thrill of having slept under the same roof as the killer, while explaining away her failure to identify him to police by noting that the definitive proof reached her only after he had gone; an aging police official could cite the dictates of professionalism and gentlemanly discretion as the reason why he was only able to hint at an identity he claimed to know with confidence. Tellers of these stories placed themselves in proximity to an enigmatic figure of terror and social transgression, but did so within a form that dictates that they need not risk being completely and unambiguously believed.

421 Bruvand, Encyclopedia of Urban Legends, 450.
Sandy Hobbs suggests the analytical category of the “good story” to describe folktales or contemporary legends\(^{423}\) that “seem to have proved themselves ‘good’ by their ability to survive despite the lack of supporting evidence.” He notes that “further support for their ‘goodness’ lies in their frequent use as central plot lines for plays, novels, and films.”\(^{424}\) In both of these senses the lodger tale must be classified as a very “good story,” surviving and spreading for decades before inspiring works in all of these genres. With this in mind I want now to turn to Horace Annesley Vachell’s decision to dramatize *The Lodger*, and in particular to propose how an understanding of this narrative within the context of its history as an urban legend may throw new light on to his reworking of the novel into a theatrical comedy.

**From Gothic Thriller to ‘Bloomsbury Comedy’**

The title typed on the front page of the copy of Horace Annesley Vachell’s dramatic adaptation of *The Lodger* that was submitted to the Lord Chamberlain’s examiner of plays to be censored is “Mr. Parker.” This has been crossed out on the typescript, and the title “Who Is He?” written in by hand.\(^{425}\) This change was evidently decided upon some time between when the play was sent out to be typed and its submission to the Lord Chamberlain’s office some time before 2 December 1915, the date upon which Ernest A. Bendall prepared the report recommending it for a license without requiring alterations to the text. The shift in title better reflects the chief themes of the drama, for while a member of the audience would have to sit through almost the entirety of the play to learn that “Mr. Parker” had all along been an alias for Lord Twyford of Twyford,

\(^{423}\) Hobbs prefers the term “contemporary legend” to “urban legend” for the former’s ability to encompass rural folktales, though in any case related to the Whitechapel murders the appropriateness of urban legend need hardly be argued for.


\(^{425}\) Vachell, *Who Is He?*, title page.
“who is he?” at once foregrounds the problem of the title character’s identity that is at the center of the dramatic action of the play. It also made for better advertising copy, for in the run up to the production, the question of identity was also applicable to the play itself: would the play be a faithful adaptation of The Lodger, and thus show its audience a title character identifiable as a surrogate for Jack the Ripper?

A preview item about the play that ran in The Times the weekend before it opened describes how “public curiosity in the production of Who is He? […] has been stimulated by the appearance on the hoardings of a striking poster showing a man’s muffled face, with little visible but a pair of searching eyes.”

The vocabulary used to describe this advertisement suggests that it was intended precisely to intrigue and unsettle; while no copy of it seems to have survived it is possible that the same picture, or one very like it, is represented in a photographic spread from a file of unattributed newspaper clippings held in the Victoria and Albert Museum’s theatrical archive (Figure 4.2). I will shortly have more to say about the image, and especially its strong resemblance to one of the most iconic shots in Hitchcock’s version of The Lodger, but for now what I want to focus on is the apparent seriousness of the expression. If this was indeed the sole image used on a poster advertising the play before its opening, it is difficult to read such an advertisement as in any way making reference to the farcical nature of the drama that was to come. At the same time, a straightforward adaptation of The Lodger into a play about a landlady who discovers that she has a tenant who is a serial killer obviously modeled on Jack the Ripper would have risked having its license refused outright by the Lord Chamberlain’s office. While plays about crime, and even quite overtly sexualized murder, were frequently allowed, as late as 1930 a play called Jack the Ripper was refused a license when submitted by a company in

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426 “Plays of the Week: Mr. Vachell’s New Comedy,” The Times (London), 6 December 1915.
Brighton on the grounds that, while rehearsals and scenic preparations were well advanced, “the theme and title [were] extremely undesirable.” Even had it been in the nature of Vachell’s dramatic instincts to explore the darker side of the novel he was adapting, given that as Gordon Williams has suggested “by the start of 1915 […] it was clear that the war, far from bringing disaster had brought a boom,” the risk of rehearsing a play that might not be licensed would probably have been something that the Frederick Harrison and E. Lyall Swete, the play’s producers, would not have countenanced.  

![Figure 4.2](image)

We might ask, then, why Vachell was attracted to *The Lodger* as a subject for dramatization in the first place. It is here that the status of the underlying story as an urban legend offers a potential answer, for in the way the play was adapted and advertised we can read

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the same double move – promising secret knowledge about forbidden contact with a transgressive figure, while deferring any actual transgression by virtue of the generic codes that circumscribe the promise – present when stories about the lodger were told as urban legends. The same *Times* preview that describes the advertising poster goes on to enact exactly this movement. After describing the image in strong terms it continues, alternating between the promise of a mystery opening up onto the forbidden and the reassurance that nothing that can properly be called impropriety will be shown:

Now that the title of Mr. Vachell’s comedy is announced it is obvious that the eyes are those of Mr. Ainley, but there is no clue as to the nature of his part. Mr. Vachell’s play is ‘very freely adapted’ from a novel by Mrs. Belloc Lowndes, and it is just possible that what has been written as tragedy has been adapted into comedy.  

The description of the play as a comedy is offered in explicitly non-committal language, even as it undoes the claim that “there is no clue as to the nature of [Ainley’s] part,” and while the drama’s status as an adaptation of *The Lodger* is confirmed the “very freely adapted” phrase, which appeared on the playbills and advertisements published once the play was open, can be taken as reassurance that the darker possibilities of this literary dependence will not be explored.

In this sense, the way in which the play was composed and advertised can also related to the structural properties of urban legends, which defined the lodger as a story even before Belloc Lowndes’ novel existed. In addition to the characteristics already discussed – being told as true but usually understood to not be, being underpinned by a process of transmission that often passes through “friend of a friend” connections, and existing in a variety of versions – Brunvand notes that “often [the urban legend’s] narrative structure sets up some kind of puzzling situation

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that is resolved by a sudden plot twist.”

Much in the pre-production publicity for *Who Is He?* – its interrogative title, its “striking” poster showing the haunted eyes of a mysterious figure, its relationship to a novel known to be about a subject generally considered taboo on the stage – seems calculated to puzzle the potential audience member into buying a ticket in order to see how these questions will be resolved. Writing in the annual *Stage Yearbook*, Walbrook notes how when the play was performed “the hideous and far-famed Whitechapel murders formed the rather jarring background of a series of pleasantly Vachellian comicalities and sentimentalities.” Seen from the perspective of urban legend, this mismatch between the actual plot and its “background” is an important structural feature, and not an instance of what later critics writing about the play would deride as “ill-advised humor” when what was really called for is “a more fundamentally serious approach to the Ripper phenomenon” as a subject of fiction.

Turning murder into drawing-room comedy is a twist that used the codes of genre to allow contact with an unrepresentable figure, dissolving the worst implications of this contact in the same way that urban legends absolve their teller of full responsibility for whatever transgressions are hinted at by their tale.

In dramatizing *The Lodger*, even or perhaps especially in the unlikely form of a drawing-room comedy, Vachell was both relying on and cementing the underlying lodger tradition’s status as a “good story,” capable of surviving mutually incompatible variations and leaping across media. If *Who Is He?* was a hit with Londoners, it was at least in part by drawing them in with the promise of a variation on a story that many would have read in Belloc Lowndes’ novel, but might also have heard or overheard being told in dining rooms, lodging houses, and other

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431 Walbrook, “Drama of The Year,” 3.
places where friends of friends gather, only to twist the known features of that story into a comedy of mistaken identity. In this way the play’s exterior relationship to the tradition of both legend and literature mirrors the internal construction of this mistaken identity plot, which depends on the continual supply of misleading information leading to wrong conclusions that are finally overturned. This was a plot structure taken up, albeit with major variations, by Hitchcock and his collaborators in *The Lodger: A Story of the London Fog*; and with this in mind I will now turn to a comparative analysis in order to suggest that Vachell’s reworking of Belloc Lowndes’ novel as a stage play should be credited as a much more direct influence on Hitchcock’s film than has typically been the case.

**Reworking the Iconography of *The Lodger* Across Media**

When *Who Is He?* was on stage in the West End of London, Alfred Hitchcock was a teenager working as an advertising artist for the Henley Telegraph and Cable Company. He avidly attended both the cinema and the theatre, and later freely admitted that Vachell’s play had been his first introduction to the lodger story. To date, though, there has been no systematic discussion of direct links between the film and play; indeed except for occasional observations like Spoto’s that in the “seriocomic theatrical adaptation, the lodger turns out to be an innocent young aristocrat” in the same way he is in the film, most discussions of Hitchcock’s work have either ignored the play altogether or mentioned it only in passing before treating the film as an essentially independent adaptation of Belloc Lowndes’ novel.\(^{433}\) The relationship between play and film has no doubt been obscured by the difficulty of locating and reading the text of the former, which is listed on the frontispiece of his literary autobiography among the “other books

by Horace Annesley Vachell” but that may never actually have been published, and is today only available in the form of the typescript held by the British Library as part of the Lord Chamberlain’s collection of plays submitted for censorship.\footnote{Vachell, \textit{Distant Fields}, n.p. This is the only evidence I have ever seen suggesting that the play was published as a book. The entry reflecting the play’s dramatic copyright registration with the Library of Congress in on 30 December 1915 also records it as “typewritten,” the same format in which it appears in the LCP collection. Library of Congress Copyright Office, \textit{Catalogue of Copyright Entries Part 1, Group 2}, New Series 12.9, 1254.} In addition to the difficulties that this lack of a playtext creates for comparison, Hitchcock’s own later self-mythologizing has further confused the issue of influence on his career in general, but especially on “the first true ‘Hitchcock movie.’” He was famously cagy about crediting collaborators: as Spoto notes, the director privately admitted to Michael Balcon in the 1920s that Ivor Montagu had made a major contribution to the picture, but never so much as mentioned the editor in “many lengthy discussions about \textit{The Lodger}” with later interviewers and biographers.\footnote{Spoto, \textit{Dark Side of Genius}, 89.} Hitchcock gave similarly conflicted, and often contradictory, accounts of the genesis of \textit{The Lodger}’s ending and the title character’s innocence, sometimes even within the same interview. In a single conversation he told Truffaut that while he might not have wanted to have the Novello character to actually “turn out to be Jack the Ripper,” his preference would have been to have “him go off in the night, so that we would never really know for sure[, b]ut with the hero played by a big star, one can’t do that;”\footnote{Truffaut, \textit{Hitchcock}, 43.} but also that in his version of \textit{The Lodger} “the theme of the innocent man being accused […] provides the audience with a greater sense of danger [because] it’s easier for them to identify with him than with a guilty man on the run. I always take the audience into account.”\footnote{Ibid., 48.} We might accuse Hitchcock of here trying to have his cake and eat it too, presenting the innocence of Novello’s character as both evidence of the artistic compromises he was forced
to make by a star system to which he opposed himself as an aesthetic maverick, but also taking credit as a man of the people who understood how to draw in his audience and manipulate their sympathies for the way in which the character’s innocence accomplishes this goal. In either case, it conveniently effaces the fact that the idea of an innocent lodger at the center of a plot in which misleading coincidences give a false impression of his guilt is something he would have witnessed directly as an audience member of the play.

Figure 4.3

Given how often Hitchcock returned, in his later career, to narratives built around a “wrong man” (or sometimes wrong woman) who is taken to be perpetrator of a crime or crimes of which he is actually innocent – *The 39 Steps, Strangers on a Train, North by Northwest*, and of course *The Wrong Man* are but a few of the most iconic examples in his oeuvre – I would suggest that we take seriously the possibility that the device of the innocent lodger was one of
the things about *Who Is He?* that strongly impressed the young Hitchcock in the first place.

While this is ultimately something about which we can only speculate, there exists rather more
direct evidence that specifics of the play were very much present at the forefront of Hitchcock’s
thinking, or that of one or more of his collaborators in a position to strongly influence aesthetic
choices about scripting and production, when the film was being made and later publicized. If we
compare the publicity poster for *Who Is He?* already discussed, and the image that probably
relates to it (Figure 4.2), to the iconic first appearance of Novello as the lodger more than fifteen
minutes into Hitchcock’s film (Figure 4.3), it is clear that they resemble one another in ways that
distance both from this moment as described by Belloc Lowndes. When Mrs. Bunting opens the
door to her lodger in the prose fiction, it is to discover a “long, lanky figure of a man, clad in an
Inverness cape and an old fashioned top hat;”438 the only mention of a scarf or muffler of any
description is in connection with Joe Chandler, when he comes to see the Buntings after a long,
cold night spent investigating the Avenger murders.439 As Michael Williams documents, still
versions of the closeup image of Novello’s muffled face were used as publicity stills for *The
Lodger: A Story of the London Fog*, and a illustrated version of this image appeared on the 12
March 1927 cover of *Picture Show* with the decidedly punny caption “the eyes have it!”440 The
distinctive way in which *Who Is He?* represented the lodger’s first appearance was even subject
to parody in an illustration of the other cast members preserved in the Theatre Museum archive
(Figure 4.4), and it seems almost impossible that Hitchcock should have stumbled on such a
similar visual image and used it in such a visually similar way by sheer coincidence. Nor were
direct invocations of an image associated with the Haymarket drama the only way in which the

439 Ibid., 87.
advertising for the film recalled the stage play; Williams also notes a press-book produced by Gainsborough that had as its cover “a full-page still of the film’s ‘hero’ slumped against a courtyard lamp post while on the run from the police” late in the film’s narrative, this time captioned with “a simple but pressing question […] in large bold letters: ‘WHO IS HE?’” In both creative and commercial ways, those responsible for The Lodger: A Story of the London Fog were clearly borrowing and making reference to a stage play that had been at least a minor success in the West End a decade earlier, and that was well within their memory and, almost certainly, that of much of their audience.

Figure 4.4

We can also see what appears to be a strong narrative dependence on Who Is He? in the way that the film characterizes the murders committed by the Avenger with regard to their victims, method of commission, and location. In Belloc Lowndes’ novel the parallels between the Avenger murders and the Whitechapel murders of 1888 are clear and direct: the victims are middle aged women killed while under the influence of strong drink by a man with a knife. While mutilations are not explicitly described in the text they are invoked: the first description of the Avenger murders hinting that “the murderer had been to special pains to make clear that

\[441\] Ibid., 126.
some obscure and terrible lust for vengeance possessed him. Later, when Mrs. Bunting attends the inquest for one of the killings and meets with a police inspector who she knows, he encourages her to leave midway through the proceedings with the admonition that “I don’t suppose you want to hear the medical evidence. It’s always painful for a female to hear that.” The strong sense is that the bodies are being mutilated, but any direct reference to this is occluded from the narrative, and the triangular sheets of paper marked signed with red ink stand in as signifiers that can be safely described in a novel without rendering it unfit for polite readers. In geographical terms the murders are depicted as having started out in the East End but gradually moving westward, with a double killing patterned on the “double event” of 1888 taking place in King’s Cross and the Edgware Road. This is perhaps the most significant way in which the Avenger murders differ from the facts of the Whitechapel killings as they were known in 1912, though it has both narrative and thematic significance that Mr. Bunting unknowingly articulates when he tells his wife, who has by this point started to grimly suspect that their tenant may be the murderer, that “the Avenger’s moving West – that’s what he’s doing. […] I said he’d come our way, and he has come our way.” In this iteration of the story the Avenger threatens to erase the distinction between East End and West, but the distinction is still imagined as meaningful in a way that roots the fictional crimes in their factual historical antecedents.

*Who Is He?* describes the Avenger murders in drastically different terms that distance them from the facts of the Whitechapel killings, adapting their social significance to serve the ends of a conventional romantic comedy plot. The first we hear about them is an off-stage newsboy’s cry about the “‘Orrible Murder! Murder at St. Pancras;” the murders are not imagined

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443 Ibid., 165.
444 Ibid., 122.
as moving toward the West End, but simply as taking place there without any reference to the East. While the conclusion, reached in a newspaper that Irene reads aloud to the Buntngs, that “the pinning of three cornered bits of paper and the use of red ink confirms the hypothesis that some obscure and terrible lust for vengeance possessed the unhappy creature” may imply mutilations, the victims are killed with a gun rather than a knife. Moreover, the murder victims are not inebriated “unfortunates,” but attractive young women killed while returning home from social outings, visits to the theatre, and legitimate jobs. These characteristics are carried over almost exactly into the Avenger murders as depicted by Hitchcock, with the additional fact that the killer preys not merely on attractive young women, but on attractive young blondes. In narrative terms what this change does in each dramatization is allow the Avenger, and the lodger to the extent that he is taken for the Avenger, to function as a direct threat to the young woman in the plot to whom the lodger also shows a romantic attraction. In each case the leading female role is adapted to embody a kind of femininity that contested traditional definitions of gender roles in the moment of production: as a young unmarried typist living away from home Irene can be taken as emblematic of the many young women entering the work force during the First World War, especially as men were shipped to the front; though she lives at home with her parents, Hitchcock’s Daisy Bunting is a short-haired, free-spirited fashion model clearly intended to evoke the flapper figure of the 1920s. Significantly, another feature that Vachell introduces to the lodger story and that Hitchcock’s film replicates is having the drama end with an engagement: the Avenger is able to threaten these New Women with sexual violence precisely because they circulate in public, while each of the lodgers neutralizes the threat by drawing her out of the world of work and into his secure upper-class home. There would seem to be a

genuine ambivalence here; in both cases in order for the suspense to work (comically for Vachell, as thrilling tension for Hitchcock) the audience must feel that the same man who is mistakenly perceived as a threat to the female protagonist as a single woman will redeem her from this threat as a bride. It is deeply unclear whether what is being dramatically depicted is the idea that New Women must be coerced into heteronormative coupling via the threat of sexual violence – recall that one of the chorus girls in Hitchcock’s film falls victim to the Avenger when she quarrels with her beau and goes off alone – or whether what is being proposed is a paradigm of companionate love across class boundaries in spite of this threat; both readings are eminently possible in each case. In this sense the dramatizations on stage and film are both worse and better than Belloc Lowndes’ novel as versions of the Jack the Ripper story: they are less true to the historical facts of the actual Whitechapel murders, and perhaps truer to the way in which these murders were almost immediately ripped out of their actual historical and social context and used to address the anxieties of Londoners, and indeed people all around the world, who were never themselves in any genuine danger from the Whitechapel killer.

This is not to say the Belloc Lowndes does not herself revise elements of the wider tradition of Ripper mythology for her own particular thematic reasons. In one sense, The Lodger can be read as an exploration of one of the particular problems raised by previous urban legends about a lodger figure: how could someone who knew, or even suspected, they might have the most wanted man in the world under their roof not have gone to police immediately at the time? In relation to this problem, Elyssa Warkentin observes that Belloc Lowndes’ novel is written using “limited omniscient third-person narration, mostly from Mrs. Bunting’s point of view, with occasional diversions to Mr. Bunting’s perspective.” While this ignores a few instances in

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446 Elyssa Warkentin, “Using a ‘woman’s wit and cunning’: Marie Belloc Lowndes Rewrites the
which the narration shifts, giving the reader apparent access to the thoughts of both Joe Chandler and the lodger himself, it is a broadly correct characterization of the narrative: most of what we get in the novel is not things as they are, but things as Mrs. Bunting sees them. In its first half the novel shows Mrs. Bunting able to deny to herself that her strange new tenant might be the Avenger, though Belloc Lowndes cleverly founds these denials in the very evidence that anyone familiar with the history of types like “the Ripper as decadent English Milord” and “the Ripper as mad doctor” that circulated in the late-Victorian period might actually read as confirmation that he is the killer.\footnote{Christopher Frayling, “The House That Jack Built,” Jack the Ripper: Media, Culture, History, eds. Alexandra Warwick and Martin Willis, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 16-38.} From the moment he arrives on her doorstep Mrs. Bunting takes Mr. Sleuth’s odd mannerisms as indicators that he “belong[s] by birth to the class with whom her former employment [as a maid in wealthy households] had brought her into contact.”\footnote{Belloc Lowndes, The Lodger, 16.} She has her reasons for wanting to see him this way: the Buntings have been without tenants for some time, and their last set were from a less-than-elevated background and had to be evicted for unpaid rent, so a genuinely wealthy gentleman is just what they need to stave off financial collapse. Later that same night, when Sleuth turns toward the wall a series of portraits of “Victorian beauties,” this stirs in her not a sense of unease but “a comfortable recollection [of] an incident in her long-past youth” when the eccentric nephew of her employer, “Mr. Algernon – that was his rather peculiar Christian name – had had the impudence to turn to the wall six beautiful engravings of paintings done by Mr. Landseer.”\footnote{Ibid., 29.} This may be a direct allusion to the young aesthete Algernon in Wilde’s The Importance of Being Earnest – Belloc Lowndes knew

http://www.ncgsjournal.com/issue71/warkentin.htm
Wilde, and was particularly close to his wife Constance – but it is at any rate a clear indication that she is taking Sleuth for the figure of a Wildean dandy. She might see this as making him more likely to be a Ripper-like killer under “the decadent aristocrat thesis,” the much circulated notion that the perpetrator of the Whitechapel murders might have been an individual of wealth and status killing in spite of, or even in order to indulge, his refined sense of aesthetic taste; instead she uses it to reassure herself that “her new lodger was not so strange as he appeared to be.”

Allen reads the general portrayal of Sleuth as an aristocratic and “queer” figure against the biographical fact of Belloc Lowndes’ intimacy with Constance Wilde to suggest that this relationship “surely informs her portrayal of the lodger as someone who, from the class and maternal-feminine standpoint of Mrs. Bunting, requires nurturing and protection.” This reading is useful, but it needs to be emphasized that Mrs. Bunting’s standpoint is not generated only by her “maternal-feminine” instincts but also by an economically motivated desire. Indeed, the novel never conclusively establishes that Sleuth is a gentleman, only that he seems to be one to Mrs. Bunting, who has her own reasons for wanting him to be this way.

The novel also cannily identifies Sleuth with one of the other major Ripper types that was widely discussed in the late-Victorian period, that of the mad doctor or man of science whose murders are evidence of a mind that periodically comes unhinged. When he first comes to the Bunttings’ house, Sleuth is delighted to find an old shilling-in-the-slot stove in the attic room above his bedchamber, and rents this space as well with the stuttering explanation that he is “a man of science [who …] make[s], that is, all sorts of experiments […] [which] often require the presence of great heat.” Over the course of the novel it becomes clear that these scientific

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450 Ibid., 30.
451 Allen, “The Lodger and Hitchcock’s Aesthetic,” 49.
452 Belloc Lowndes, The Lodger, 19.
investigations coincide with murders committed by the Avenger, and actually represent the immolation of bloody clothing and other evidence of his crimes under the guise of “carrying out a somewhat elaborate experiment.”453 Sleuth hints at his own possible medical vocation or at least a wide experience of doctors: when Mrs. Bunting lies and tells him that she’s been to see a physician when she was in fact at the inquest of an Avenger victim, he tells her “doctors are a very maligned body of men, […] I’m glad to hear you speak well of them, […] being human they are liable to err, but I assure you they do their best.” By this point in the novel Mrs. Bunting has already admitted to herself that her tenant is probably the killer, and during her visit to the inquest she has heard one witness describe what was unmistakably an encounter with Sleuth, and yet even at this point she finds herself reassured by his words, for “doctors had always treated her most kindly, and even generously.”454 In transposing her feelings about medical men onto Sleuth, Mrs. Bunting once again misrecognizes her lodger in a way that offers her an ostensible explanation for his strange behavior other than the reality that he is the Avenger, even as it aligns Sleuth with one of the important mythic dimensions of the Jack the Ripper figure on whom he is based.

In an undated archival document quoted in a paper by Ellen Turner, Belloc Lowndes claims that when “writing […] The Lodger [she] avoided reading the contemporary records of Jack the Ripper’s activities,” which she claims she did not know much about because “when his crimes started and horrified London [she] was very young […] and was actually living abroad, so only knew the story in vague outline.”455 This ignores the fact that she was actually abroad working for W.T. Stead, one of the chief journalists responsible for the Ripper press

453 Ibid., 46.
454 Ibid., 172.
phenomenon, and is difficult to square with the extent to which she seems to be knowingly manipulating the tradition in characterizing Mrs. Bunting’s view of the lodger. Her reasons for exploring Mrs. Bunting’s psychology in this way are hinted at in a passage near the middle of the book, in which she almost explicitly admits to herself that Sleuth is the Avenger “but though she felt that her secret suspense and trouble was becoming intolerable, the one way in which she could have ended her misery [i.e. sharing her suspicions with Joe Chandler, who is downstairs] never occurred to Mrs. Bunting.”

Belloc Lowndes, herself the founding vice-president of the Women Writers’ Suffrage League, explicitly connects this to the place of women in society:

> In the long history of crime it has very, very seldom happened that a woman has betrayed one who has taken refuge with her. The timorous and cautious woman has not infrequently hunted a human being fleeing from his pursuer from her door, but she has not revealed the fact that he was ever there. In fact, it may almost be said that such betrayal has never taken place unless the betrayer has been actuated by love of gain, or by a longing for revenge. So far, perhaps because she is a subject rather than citizen, her duty as a component part of civilized society weighs but lightly on woman’s shoulders.

This reads very much as the voice of Belloc Lowndes herself, explaining Mrs. Bunting’s distorted apprehensions of Sleuth’s behavior – how she could see evidence that should immediately connect him to the Avenger and interpret it in just exactly the opposite way, as well as her failure to betray him to police even in moments when her ability to self-deceive slips away – as products of her social condition as a woman. I would differ here from Warkentin’s reading of the novel as avowedly feminist because it shows that “by collecting information about Mr.

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457 Ibid., 109.
Sleuth […] Mrs. Bunting assumes a measure of power of her lodger. It is within her power to turn him in at any time, and although she never takes such an action, the fact that the possibility exists imbues her with secret power over his life. Though possible, such a reading ignores the question of why Mrs. Bunting never exercises her “assume[d] measure of power.” The novel’s feminism instead, I suggest, resides in the play of perspective that shows Mrs. Bunting resisting this knowledge, and then pulls back to explain her resistance and failure to act as symptoms of a social order in which her only imaginable options are to ally herself with a killer, or else see herself as one of his impoverished victims.

In dramatizing this very serious novel, Horace Annesley Vachell reverses the play of misrecognition to create a comic effect rather than a political or social statement. From the perspective of the Ripper tradition, we can say that his version of Mrs. Bunting is eminently correct to interpret her lodger’s behavior – his interest in scientifically piercing the skin of reality by mixing chemicals and staring into a microscope, his avowed aversion to women, and his late night walks for the purpose of social investigation – as possible evidence that he is the Avenger. But the plot of Who Is He? has been stacked against her, and in order to create dramatic irony for comedic effect, apparently rational explanations for everything that appears to indicate that Mr. Parker, while aka Lord Twyford, is not aka the Avenger are provided to the audience but withheld from Mrs. Bunting. By laughing at her for laboring under this misapprehension, though, the audience may also be laughing at its own desire to see a play that holds out the promise of a look at Jack the Ripper on stage.

The question of narrative perspective in Hitchcock’s The Lodger: A Tale of the London Fog is a complicated one that has been the subject of extensive critical discussion; my comments

on it here will necessarily be abbreviated and focused on the evident relationship with the other sources. Hitchcock told Truffaut, albeit many years after the fact, that in constructing *The Lodger* as a screen story he “treated it very simply, purely from [Mrs. Bunting’s] point of view.”\(^{459}\) In a paper that studies Hitchcock’s adaptations in order to pursue the argument that it was the modulation of interior and exterior perspectives available in his reading of novels, rather than the immediate dramatic possibilities of the plays he attended and filmed, that most strongly influenced him as a film-maker, Thomas Leitch calls Hitchcock’s recollection into question on the basis that “unlike Beloc Lowndes’ novel, Hitchcock’s film includes many scenes from which Mrs. Bunting is absent” and, more importantly, “the most important difference between the novel and its film adaptation is not a difference in strategies of focalization but a difference in the subjectivity being focalized.”\(^{460}\) In this reading, the psychological complexity of Mrs. Bunting’s depiction in the novel is replaced by that of the lodger in the film, who carries with him the trauma of having witnessed his sister’s murder at the hands of the Avenger, along with the dark possibility that in tracking and seeking to exact vengeance on the Avenger he may be becoming indistinguishable from him.

We might, though, find some coherence in Hitchcock’s statement if we examine it with Vachell’s stage play interposed between his film and the novel as a source. While Belloc Lowndes’ novel is constructed in part to give the reader a perspective on Mrs. Bunting’s willful misinterpretation of evidence, as she looks for ways to deny that her lodger is a psychopathic killer, Vachell’s play makes farcical comedy out of the same character’s unwittingly false interpretation of what could easily be understood as good evidence of the lodger’s guilt. The

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\(^{459}\) Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, 27.

central section of Hitchcock’s film, between Novello’s first appearance as the lodger and his revelation of the true purpose for his sojourn with the Buntlings, actually replicates the point of view occupied by Mrs. Bunting in the stage play as the standpoint from which the cinematic narrative is constructed. The camera, and by extension the audience, experiences the same uncertainty that afflicted Clare Greet as Mrs. Bunting on stage, albeit to different tonal effect. Both stage and screen versions of Mrs. Bunting truly are, as Leitch notes, “greatly simplified psychologically,” but the arrangement of the camera and use of montage nevertheless push the viewer to share her incorrect reading of the circumstantial evidence she is presented about her lodger.

This might just as well not have been explicitly intended by Hitchcock – his statement to Truffaut about adopting the landlady’s perspective may be a simple instance of misremembering – but what considering it this way clarifies is how the film, in misdirecting its audience only to reveal this manipulation by offering alternative explanations for all of the evidence pointing to the lodger’s guilt, foregrounds its constructedness as a narrative. What is being revealed as much as anything is that there is somebody behind the camera, actively thinking about the construction of perspective and using the materials and techniques of the cinema to consciously manipulate the audience. If, in watching the film, we move from suspecting the lodger to sympathizing with him, the subjectivities being focalized are not only within the diegesis of the film, but also outside it, standing in the authorial role of manipulating and making decisions about the work in ways that “limit, exclude, and choose […] imped[ing] the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction.” One of the key facets of

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461 Ibid.
Foucault’s description of the idea of authorship, which is related to but not identical with the act of creation behind a given work, is that not everything that can be regarded as written is afforded an “author function[, which] is therefore characteristic of the mode of existence, circulation, and functioning of certain discourses within a society.” To be thought of as “authored” is often a mark of cultural prestige, one not strictly afforded to all moving pictures today, and certainly not taken for granted as a norm in the cinema of the 1920s. Because it draws on strategies and ideas found in its literary and dramatic sources, especially those that emphasize the question of perspective within and around the text, The Lodger: A Story of the London Fog can be justly called the “first true ‘Hitchcock movie’” because of how forcefully it states the existence of a “Hitchcock” behind the camera, even if Hitchcock is in this case taking his own and possibly Eliot Stanard’s memories of a play from 1915, reading them against a novel of 1912 and the backdrop of urban legends about events that occurred in 1888, and having the whole thing revised by the editorial intelligence of Ivor Montagu. If Who Is He? is the question, The Lodger is one potential answer, though he may or may not be the Avenger, and even if he is not Jack the Ripper he just might be the auteur.

**Conclusion: A Ripper in Light, Shadow, and Fog**

As I have argued in previous chapters, central to all iterations of the Ripper myth in the late-Victorian era is a strong cultural concern with visuality as a major problem, if not the defining problem, of modern urban existence. Throughout the nineteenth century and with accelerating intensity as it wore on and gave way to the twentieth, technologies for the mass reproduction of images and the production of illumination on a large scale, together with the centralization of

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463 Ibid., 108.
human habitation in industrial urban centers characterized by the close coexistence of “all sorts and conditions of men,” offered more to the eye of the city dweller than to anyone at any period before. The paradox at the iris of this situation is the possibility that when everything can be and is brought within the field of vision, nothing can actually be seen. The Ripper figure himself participated in and condensed this problem: on the one hand he was an apparent master of vision, able to navigate urban space and even violently push his gaze beyond the boundaries of the surface of the human body; on the other hand he embodied the problem of illegibility caused by an excess of things to see, for surely many people saw the killer every day and yet no one recognized him as the violent monster he was.

The urban legend of the lodger and its specific iterations across three media of mass entertainment that have been explored here are also characterized by a relationship to this idea. Maria Belloc Lowndes takes up issue of visibility in *The Lodger* to argue that the political subjugation of women exacerbates the problem: Mrs. Bunting *can* assemble the evidence to identify the killer, but she resists doing so because the position of a rational social subject is denied to her. She willfully misreads the clues, and even when she can no longer do so she keeps the Avenger’s dark secret to herself. In choosing to dramatize the story as the play *Who Is He?*, Horace Annesley Vachell was playing on his London audience’s desire for contact with the Whitechapel murders in ways that were safe enough to be allowable both in the social situation of the West End theatre in wartime, and to the state officials responsible for censoring that theatre. The result is a comedy that plays the instability of visual evidence for laughs, at the landlady’s expense but also at the audience’s, as it stokes the desire for the experience of seeing Jack the Ripper publicly represented only to deny that he has actually been present on stage. The adaptation of both works into the film *The Lodger: A Story of the London Fog*, directed by
Alfred Hitchcock, manipulates and manages the problem of vision through the perspectival tools of the narrative cinema as they were developing in the 1920s, under the influence of a continental European avant-garde tradition. The film uses perspective to mislead the audience in ways that highlight the potential illegibility of the visual, but ultimately forestalls this by revealing the manipulation as a construction of the director figure, who manages and manipulates both what and how the audience sees.

In documenting how the figure of the cinematic auteur emerges in this case in a work at the intersection of adaptation and urban legend, I mean to suggest that “Alfred Hitchcock,” like “Jack the Ripper,” is in important ways a myth. *The Lodger: A Story of the London Fog* represents the first time Londoners could see, in the emergent mass-medium of the feature-length narrative film, a story about the latter figure made on their own patch. Importantly, this film could travel in space and time in a way that no previous drama related to the Whitechapel murders could. It has arguably become the single most important aesthetic representation of the Ripper, a visual icon with which all twentieth and twenty-first century attempts to represent the figure in dramatic and cinematic media have had to reckon. And yet, as we know, everything is wrong with this picture. In the first place, there is no Ripper in it: it follows the lead of a decidedly farcical stage comedy in suggesting that it has shown us the killer, only to then tell us that it has not. In the second, as historians of the Whitechapel murders have pointed out, most of the murders attributed to the Ripper took place on clear evenings;\(^464\) aside from Sir John A. Teniel’s famous “Nemesis of Neglect” cartoon (Figure 4.5), in which the killer himself is depicted as a kind of floating miasma with an uncanny and insubstantial grin, fog does not seem

\(^{464}\)Bearing in mind that most of the murders were committed between 2AM and 5AM, the excellent “Casebook: Jack the Ripper” website posts meteorological records for the date of each murder and the day immediately prior [http://www.casebook.org/victorian_london/weather.html](http://www.casebook.org/victorian_london/weather.html);
to have played a major part in earlier representations or discussions of the murders during the period from 1888 to 1891, when the initial images of the killer that we have so far discussed were being formed. But it plays a defining role in the images and the title of *The Lodger: A Story of the London Fog*, and in most subsequent film dramatizations of the Ripper story; Clive Bloom suggests, “there was no fog in the autumn of 1888 when the murders took place, but fog is a trope of the film versions of Jack the Ripper.”\(^{465}\) That a moving picture based on historical murders that focuses on a man who is not the killer and is atmospherically dominated by a fog that was not there is only an indicator of the reality, already documented in our discussion of the relationship between the Whitechapel murders and the theatrical culture of late-Victorian London, that the Ripper has always been a creature assembled more from misremembered fictions and figurative tropes than anything as mundane as meteorological facts or narrative consistency.

THE NEMESIS OF NEGLECT.

"There floats a phantom on the slum's foul air,
Shaping to eyes which have the gift of seeing,
Into the spider of that loathly lair.
Face it—for vain is fleeing
deep-phanted, nightless, lurking, hating,
it's murderous crime—the nemesis of neglect!"

Figure 4.5
Conclusion

The Ripper After Censorship and in the Streets

The works of dramatic art at the center of the four case studies covered in this thesis were created in the period between 1886, when T.R. Sullivan first began working on a script for Richard Mansfield’s version of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, and 1927 when Ivor Montagu helped Alfred Hitchcock re-cut *The Lodger: A Tale of the London Fog*. All of the works were either created or performed live in London, by artists for whom the 1888 Whitechapel murders were a part of their living memory; though Hitchcock was born more than a decade after the murders, his childhood was spent in the East London neighborhoods of Leytonstone and Poplar where “the unsolved case of Jack the Ripper [...] was still household gossip” that fed into his youthful fascination with violence and famous murder cases.\(^{466}\) The works created in this period were key to establishing the mythic meanings of the Whitechapel murders by drawing on scenarios, themes, and images from the theatrical tradition; in turn the ideas about the killer created during this period were, as the occasional glances made toward later versions of the Ripper story have suggested, key to the way the figure was dramatized and interpreted by generations for whom the events of 1888 were shrouded in an ever-thickening fog of history.

Probably the most persistent theme present in all the dramatic entertainments surveyed is that of the power, and possible danger, assigned to vision in the modern metropolis. With this comes an attendant cultural importance placed upon the regulation of the city as a visual field and disciplining of individuals as practitioners of vision. The Dr. Jack idea, persuasively suggested to the press and public by Richard Mansfield’s performances in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr.*

Hyde, was structured around anxiety about the fact that the medical understanding of the body was dependent upon a point of view that straddled the line between expert knowledge and obscenity. When medical men fought over whether the killer possessed such knowledge, they implicitly suggested that the horrific mutilations conducted by the Whitechapel killer could be seen as the extreme double of the regulated application of violence through surgical medicine. In illegal or quasi-legal penny entertainments in the Whitechapel Road, these anatomical anxieties were explored from a radically different class position: if knowledge about the interior of the body was, as doctors themselves had worked to define it, obscene, then popular forms of theatrical exhibition that offered this knowledge to working-class audiences had an oppositional quality. This put displays of Ripper victims in a polyvalent and thoroughly complex relationship to viewers living in the very neighborhood where the women had lived and died. At the same time, this type of theatricality was itself a factor in a cultural contest in which local elites battled both entertainment entrepreneurs, who turned the depiction of murder into commercial profits, and well-meaning social reformers who depicted the whole of the East End as an impoverished slum analogous to a diseased body in need of radical surgery. When George R. Sims and Henry Pettit wrote an old-fashioned melodrama that included what can arguably be regarded as a depiction of a Ripper murder, they skirted the issue of obscenity by staging this potentially transgressive scene within the bounds of a longer iconographic tradition that also, paradoxically, served to guarantee that the allusion to the Whitechapel murders was legible. At the same time these playwrights’ London Day By Day was making a hit at the Adelphi, London theatre critics were condemning foreign plays that did essentially the same thing in the strongest possible terms because the creators of these had the audacity to put Jacques l’éventreur in the tile of their plays. Horace Annesley Vachell’s decision to adapt a serious book about a Ripper-like murderer into a
farcical comedy of mistaken identity, as well as Alfred Hitchcock’s serious-minded modification of the same theme in his own version of *The Lodger*, can be contextualized within the mythic field of urban legends about the Whitechapel murders, as well as the space of the city as a visual landscape. With their complicated relationship between truth and belief, urban legends and the dramatic entertainments built upon them offered the frisson of contact with the unrepresentable murderer within a generically safe narrative space. Though these dramatic fictions were located within the potentially baffling world of the city at night, the potentially sinister implications of the illegibility of urban space were played for surprise rather than menace.

What each of these cases testifies to is the power of the forbidden visual image, its ability to serve as a boundary marking social hierarchies, but also its magnetic attraction, which can draw audiences toward the thrill of a glimpse into the obscene. Given the close association between the Whitechapel murders and the idea of obscenity, it is probably not surprising that no serious play about the killings featuring a character called “Jack the Ripper” was performed on the licensed London stage until after 1968. By the time that Peter Barnes’ *The Ruling Class* transferred from the Nottingham Playhouse to the Piccadilly Theatre on 26 February 1969, the passage of the Theatres Act 1968 had ended official censorship of the British stage, and thus redefined the meaning of obscenity within the theatrical culture. Indeed Barnes’ play, which is set in the present day and begins with the death of the 13th Earl of Gurney in a staged act of autoerotic asphyxiation that results in the inheritance of his title by his son, Jack Arnold Alexander Tancred Gurney, almost seems like it was calculated to include as many themes and incidents that would theretofore have been disallowed by the censor as possible. Jack Gurney begins the play as a delusional madman who proudly declares that he is “the Creator and ruler of the Universe, Khoda, the One Supreme Being and Infinite Personal Being, Yaweh, Shangri-Ti,
and El, the First Immovable Mover, [...] the absolute Unknowable Righteous Eternal, the Lord of Hosts, the King of Kings, Lord of Lords, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, the One True God, the God of Love, the Naz! He meditates while perched upon a cross, and believes himself married to Marguerite Gautier, *La Dame aux Camélias* in Dumas’ novel and later play about a kept woman. At his family’s urging, this figure is impersonated by Grace Shelley, a young exotic dancer who is also his uncle’s mistress; when she and the Gurney family conspire with a psychiatrist to have Jack “cured” of his delusion, he fixates on his given name and declares:

> The God of Love is dead. [...] The punishment is death. I’ve finally been processed into right-thinking power. They made me adjust to modern times. This is 1888, isn’t it? I knew I was Jack. Hats off. I said Jack. I’m Jack, cunning Jack, quiet Jack, Jack’s my name. *(Produces knife, flicks it open.)* Jack whose sword never sleeps. Hats off I’m Jack, not the Good Shepherd, not the Prince of Peace. I’m Red Jack, Springheeled Jack, Saucy Jack, Jack from Hell, trade-name Jack the Ripper!

The political cutting edge to the play consists in the fact that Jack Gurnsey’s family and fellow peers, who are horrified by his conviction that he is the embodiment of the God of Love, are ready and willing to accept him as a psychopath who argues in the House of Lords for the return of flogging and capital punishment, and is secretly convinced that he is really Jack the Ripper. As a theatrical spectacle the play toys with the full range of what had previously been taboo on the stage: criticism of the peerage, the representation of a Christ figure for any reason other than “a desire to promote the cause of [...] religion,” and nudity in the form of a striptease performed by “Marguerite” following her marriage to Jack. The 1972 film adaptation, which stars Peter

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468 Ibid., 86.
469 Dominic Shellard, Steve Nicholson, and Miriam Handley, *The Lord Chamberlain Regrets...:*
O’Toole as Jack and follows the play almost scene-for-scene, was duly given an “X” rating upon its release.

*The Ruling Class* was understandably controversial; though many critics counted it as evidence of the emergence of a major new dramatic talent, it met with outright condemnation from others, and had only a short West End run.470 Over the next decade, the newly uncensored London stage saw a few more plays about the Ripper, many of them focused on depicting the murders during their actual historical period, and several taking the form of musicals with numbers strongly influenced by the music-hall tradition. Many of these shared the class-conscious politics of Barnes’ play, though none achieved the notoriety or critical status of *The Ruling Class*. Doug Lucie’s 1979 *Force and Hypocrisy* is noteworthy as it was an avowed dramatic adaptation of Stephen Knight’s *Jack the Ripper: The Final Solution*, the conspiracy-theory text that, as described above, has become probably the most popular source material for feature films depicting the Ripper since its publication in 1977.471 Whether, as in Barnes’ play, depicted as an imaginary schizophrenic peer driven to kill by the medical “cure” worked upon him, or as in Lucie’s shown as a historically factual medical man working in league with a royal conspiracy, the Ripper was being drawn from the long history of cultural and theatrical dramaturgy traced above, outlined by the anxiety over medicalist practice and discourse that *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* exhibited, and shaded in with the ideologically-charged description of murder as something practiced by the upper classes as a means of social control and sexual

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exploitation that animated much of the popular melodramatic tradition. The theatrical emergence of the Ripper figure on the London stage at this point in history was a function of the end of censorship, which allowed the character to be shown and enabled him to function as a cipher for timely themes that also connected back into the repertoire. The use of the figure to critique the peerage and the monarchy in plays that were exuberant in their violation of taboos that had been in force only a few years earlier testifies to how powerfully the Ripper myth had become identified with the theme of obscenity during eight decades when the figure was not directly representable on the censored stage.

I want now to step outside of the theatre and, by way of conclusion, to briefly survey a different set of contemporary cultural productions that are almost certainly the most often-repeated and most widely-seen live events based on the Whitechapel murders. Jack the Ripper walking tours of the East End of London have been offered by a variety of individuals and companies, for audiences ranging from a few dozen to several hundred, depending on the season and the type of tour, on a nightly basis for nearly three decades. After a brief survey that situates the long history of Ripper tours within the cultural practices of contemporary tourism, I will conduct a dramaturgical analysis of three distinctly different tours, all created and offered by authors of non-fiction works about the Whitechapel murders, examining the differing ways in which these tours theatricalize and curate the space of the East End. The Ripper murders are particularly apt to serve as the basis for walking tours, in which the embodied action and vocal production of professional guides transmits stories and ideas to an assembled audience of walker-spectators, because of both the inherent theatricality of the scenarios on which the Ripper was initially constructed, and the confluence of the major themes those scenarios explored with cultural practices and historical circumstances that structure contemporary tourism.
Tourism, Performance, and Vision

Foundational works of scholarship that consider contemporary tourism as a cultural form describe the close connection between tourism and modern ideas about visuality and seeing, as well as the performatory dimensions of the frequent reliance that the activities offered as tourist attractions have on the production of synthetic experience that is staged for individual spectators. Drawing on Irving Goffman’s dramaturgical analysis of everyday life as a scene of social performances that are scripted by cultural norms, anthropologist Dean MacCannell considers modern tourist attractions as “cultural productions” by which “leisure” is created and marked off as a distinct category of social experience that is by definition “at a slight remove from the world of work and everyday life.” For MacCannell, this kind of tourist experience is often created by the productive intermingling of what Goffman calls “front” and “back” space: by taking tours that go behind-the-scenes and reveal the work that goes into creating cultural performances and social realities that are normally taken as given, tourists are offered the experience of the “apparent authenticity proffered by tourist settings” that are in fact constructed as stage sets. In another important sociological work on tourism, John Urry develops the idea of the “tourist gaze” as a distinct mode of vision that is socially constructed, but also “tied into, and enabled by, various technologies, including camcorders, film, TV, cameras and digital images.” In the most recent edition of an often-revised text, Urry and collaborator Jonas Larsen trace the development of modern tourism from the Enlightenment, when “vision became the dominating sense in modern societies,” through the historical development of photography as a medium enabling the separation of vision and object. This allows for the commoditization of what is seen

473 Ibid., 106.
as photographically charged “scenery” that “enhance[s], frame[s] and substitute[s] for physical travel in complex and contingent ways, especially as photography is bodily central to the tourist encountering of the other.”

Central to these and many other works in the sociology of tourism is the question of ontology, focusing on how vision and modes of performance function to structure tourists’ experiences in a way that is taken to be natural or authentic.

While drawing on the foundational work of MacCannell and Urry, Chris Rojek argues for an analysis of tourist experience that acknowledges the relevance of ontological “questions of experience and being,” but brackets them in order to focus on “questions of epistemology,” such as “how we pattern tourist experience and what rules we use when we engage in ‘escape’ activity” like vacations. In order to do this, Rojek develops two key terms: “indexing,” and “dragging,” to describe tourists’ relationship to specific sites. In this analysis, “indexing refers to the set of visual, textual and symbolic representations” that tourists mentally associate with a particular place to be visited; these are then “dragged” into the experience of the visit when it actually occurs, but can also be used to engage in a form of vicarious tourism through interaction with media. The focus in such an analysis is not on the question of authenticity, but on an analysis of how literary, televisual, and other forms of media conveying knowledge and ideas about a site or culture are dragged, either consciously or unconsciously, behind travelers and then used to structure their experiences. In the case of a popular tour of Krakow’s Jewish quarter marketed as a “Schindler’s List tour” what is emphasized is how “cinematic events are dragged on to the physical landscape and the physical landscape is then reinterpreted in terms of the

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475 Ibid., 155.
cinematic events. This is, I suggest, a particularly apt way of thinking about contemporary Jack the Ripper tours in the context of the dramatic genesis of the Ripper as a character. Tourists often take these walking tours because of a familiarity with, and attraction to, the case born from engaging with the murders as a subject of cinematic, televisual, and literary productions structured around the mythic figure of the Ripper. This myth, drawn on the scenarios discussed above, becomes the “index” that is “dragged” into the actual physical space of the East End, so that it is seen by tourists as the set for vocal and kinesthetic performance that holds itself out as providing a factual narrative, but is also structured by a long history of overlapping dramatic fictions.

The area of the East End of London where the Whitechapel murders took place first became a tourist attraction of a kind at the time the murders where actually ongoing. In addition to hundreds of police officers and a variety of local “vigilance committees” who set up night patrols, Judith Walkowitz notes that at night “the East End became a sideshow for West Enders fascinated by the murders, […] since] there were plenty of eccentric and disoriented men in Whitechapel to begin with, […] the presence of amateur and professional sleuths, voyeurs, and cranks must have exacerbated the fears and anxieties of the local population.” The first organized tour of locations connected with the murders was probably given early in the twentieth century to the members Crimes Club, a group composed of literary men and police officials who gathered to discuss famous murders and other criminal matters over dinner and cigars. Robin Odell documents a meeting on 19 April 1905 arranged by “S. Ingleby Oddie, [then] coroner for Central London and a founding member of the club, […] when fellow members were taken on a

477 Ibid., 54.
tour of Ripper murder sites, led by Dr. Gordon Brown, City of London Police Surgeon, and escorted by three City detectives.” Arthur Conan Doyle is documented as a definite member of the party and George R. Sims, who was also founding member of the club, may also have taken part; no doubt if he did it provided an occasion to trot out his reminiscences of being mistaken for the killer back in 1888. Precisely when commercial Jack the Ripper walking tours were first offered to the general public is difficult to say with any precision; Richard Jones, owner of a company called London Discovery Tours, claims on his own website to have started giving Ripper tours in 1982, and also suggests that “his was the first walking tour company to offer Jack the Ripper Walks every night of the week,” a formulation that suggests he is aware that his was not the first company ever to offer such tours. Graham Watson, a long-time employee of a company today known as London Walks, claims to have led Ripper tours for that company since the middle of the 1980s; today London Walks offers a tour led by Donald Rumbelow, author of one of the best selling factual accounts of the murders. Ripper tours were probably consolidated as a regular part of London’s tourism landscape in or just after the one-hundredth anniversary of the Whitechapel murders in 1988, an anniversary on which the literary critic Jane Caputi claims that “mourning, which might seem appropriate to the occasion, was notably absent […] while] in both the United States and England, the legend of the Ripper was ubiquitously retold, and millions were familiarized with its elements – [by] a massively promoted made-for-TV movie, innumerable newspaper accounts, […] and scores of new books on the master

481 Graham Watson in discussion with the author, 9 June 2009.
The net effect of the anniversary was to enlarge the supply of media available to members of the public who might be interested in building a personal mental index about the case.

We will shortly turn to a detailed comparison of specific tours that relates them to the cultural tensions evident in late-Victorian theatricality analyzed in earlier case studies; first, though, the history of informal private tourism that preceded the commercial tours of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries needs to be placed in its own context. The earliest of these unofficial tours, conducted in 1888 by individuals who were often “bent not only on observing but on hunting the Ripper,” represented an attempt to make personal contact with a media sensation. To use Rojek’s terminology, the index that these tourists dragged into their perception of the streets of Whitechapel and Spitalfields was composed of press reports about the murders and broader cultural understandings of the East End drawn from literary and other sources. Amateur sleuths who descended on Commercial Road in the second half of November, after the publication of George Hutchinson’s suspect description explored in Chapter Three, were effectively dramatizing themselves as heroes searching for a villain drawn from the repertoire of melodramatic theatrical characterizations. Implicit in such social performances is an equation between urban space and the melodramatic theatre, a venue characterized by the “transformation of the stage into plastic tableau, the arena for represented, visual meanings” that frequently involved the reproduction of urban space through stage technology. These social actors made a stage out of the city that was so often seen on stage, a vertiginous dramaturgical

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483 Walkowitz, City of Dreadful Delight, 213.
process that later fed back into the depiction of a Whitechapel murder in Sims and Pettitt’s *London Day By Day*.

These early Ripper tours were also dependent upon the literature of social exploration and reform analyzed in Chapter Two, as Sims’ own possible participation in the Crimes Club’s 1905 walk makes clear. Tony Seaton connects this style of writing to a long history of urban literature, but also to the phenomenon of slum tourism or “slumming,” which is defined as “contact between the rich and poor in the territory of the latter,” with the underlying motives of those engaging in such tourism often characterized by close “connections between hedonism and philanthropy.” This literature helped to create a wider understanding of the East End as a degraded social space, an understanding that was both resisted and enabled by the transformation of the Ripper murders into theatricalized entertainments within Whitechapel and the surrounding areas. At the same time, the slum tourism of men like members of the Crimes Club served as the basis for new literary productions by members like Sims and Conan Doyle, and also functioned as “a metempsychotic, repeated journey of identity enactment in which the traveler implicitly follows in literary footsteps to gain a small slice of the mythic glamour of the Bohemian, the flâneur, the investigative journalist, the charity worker and other cultural role models whose practices have valorized slumming.” Walking to the murder scenes then, as now, reenacts the literature of urban exploration and social investigation; it also adds to the list of possible cultural role models for the practice of urban perambulation the Whitechapel murderer, a figure created and given his “proper” name by the same press that published many of the writings of late-Victorians like Sims, Mearns, Booth, and others stretching back to include figures like Dickens,

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486 Ibid, 43.
Mayhew, and Pierce Egan whose work blurs the lines between personal journalistic investigation and imaginative fiction. Members of the Crimes Club exploring the East End to see crime scenes in 1905 replicated the journeys earlier visitors, including members like Sims, had taken in their capacity as investigators reporting back on the “dark continent” of London’s impoverished others; they also imaginatively engaged with the subject position of the Ripper himself.

Though non-commercial in nature, the journeys made by those with a living memory of the Whitechapel murders to the East End in order to search for the killer or encounter the locations of his crimes were the antecedents of later forms of tourism. Men of letters, amateur sleuths, and others who traveled east had, through their interest in the Whitechapel murders, an embodied experience of “the myth of London as two worlds,” a division which had material dimensions in the line between rich and poor, temporal ones in visions of the city by day and night, and, most crucially in the latter part of the nineteenth century, special dimensions as the East End came to be understood as an impoverished double of the West.\textsuperscript{487} This divided understanding of the city was in part productive of the mythic figure of Jack the Ripper who was stationed on the boundary, doubling the urban exploration of philanthropists with his own gruesome style of flâneurie. It was then replicated and reinforced in the cultural performances of individuals searching for the killer or studying the scenes of his crimes as a form of recreational and social activity.

**Ripper Tourism and Myth Today**

Contemporary Jack the Ripper walking tours are commercial cultural productions taking place in an East End that has gentrified significantly in recent years. They depend, like the 1905 walk led

\textsuperscript{487} Ibid, 36-7.
for members of the Crimes Club by Dr. Gordon Brown, on the presence and performance of a
guide who presents himself or, on some occasions, herself, as an expert commentator on the
Whitechapel murders, and often as a certified expert in leading guided tours. In closing we will
briefly survey a representative sample of such tours: that devised and often led by Donald
Rumbelow on behalf of the company London Walks; the tour developed by Richard Jones and
offered by a wide variety of guides employed by his company London Discovery Tours; and that
offered by a company called Secret Chamber Tours. London Walks and London Discovery
Tours are both venerable institutions in the field, having offered Ripper walks since the 1980s,
while Secret Chamber is a relative newcomer to the field. All of these companies also offer other
walking tours in London or other UK cities, and several large package tour operators also offer
Jack the Ripper walks, but these three form a representative sample of commercial operators for
whom the Ripper tour seems to be a primary line of business. All rely heavily, for both the
attraction of customers and the experience they create for tourists, on the “indexing and
dragging” process described by Rojeck: the tours are often taken because an individual is, or is
traveling together with, someone with extensive previous engagement with the Whitechapel
murders through televisual and cinematic dramas and documentaries, as well as fiction and non-
fiction literature and theatrical drama.

Each of these tour companies uses online advertisements and promotional literature to
extol the expert status of its own guides. As the author of one of the standard non-fiction works
on the killings, it is perhaps unsurprising that Rumbelow’s tour for London Walks is also

488 Insights and claims in this section are based largely on my own experience taking these
Ripper tours, observing them as an audience member, and speaking to other tourists and guides.
While doing archival research for the rest of this thesis I took the London Walks tour and the
London Discovery Tours walk two times each, in March and June of 2009. The Secret Chamber
tour did not exist at that time and I have not taken it, though it is well documented on a number
of different websites run by the company.
typically the largest Ripper tour offered, frequently attracting an audience of tourists numbering well into the hundreds on a summer evening. Richard Jones is also a prolific author of books on UK tourist sites, including a large-format volume illustrated with photographs that closely tracks his East End Ripper tour. 489 Secret Passage tours employs Neal Storey, author of a number of books about the Whitechapel murders including a somewhat fanciful volume identifying Canadian-American quack physician Richard Tumblety as the Ripper, and claiming that he was socially acquainted with Bram Stoker and served as the model for the character of Dracula. 490 In addition to these literary bona fides, much is made of the experience of the various guides as consultants for both documentary and fiction films; the London Walks website makes the exaggerated claim that Rumbelow has “been the chief consultant for every major film and television treatment of the Ripper for the past 25 years,” 491 while the Secret Passages website claims that its guides “are the technical advisors to hit shows Ripper Street and Whitechapel.” 492 Many of the guides working for these companies are also described in marketing material as holding Blue Badge certifications, signifying the completion of a rigorous course run by the Guild of Registered Tour Guides that takes more than a year to complete and currently costs around £5,000. 493

As a source of authority claims, the promotional information provided about tour guides advances three distinct but strongly intertwined arguments. Blue Badge certification, along with

acting training mentioned in the biographies of several guides, suggests an expertise specific to tourism, promising a well-scripted, well-controlled, and well-performed tour. Authorship of one or more non-fiction works about the Ripper murders serves to authenticate the guide’s knowledge, and also holds out the promise of access to insights drawn from contact with archival documents. Believing that the guide has served as an advisor to filmic and televisual media based on the Ripper story draws a connection between the touristic experience and that media, emphasizing how such dramatic fictions function as the “set of visual, textual and symbolic representations” that form the index of ideas that draw individual tourists to the site, and upon which they draw to shape their embodied experience of it.494

The spatial experience that guides provide to tourists on any Jack the Ripper walk is conditioned by more than a century of changes to the architectural fabric of the East End that have seen many of the late-Victorian sites associated with the Whitechapel murders demolished or rendered publicly inaccessible. Of the locations where women were murdered in 1888 only the paving stones in Mitre Square, where Catherine Eddowes was killed, remain unchanged, though later buildings now surround the square itself. The Miller’s Court buildings in which Mary Jane Kelly was killed are now an open space within the perimeter of a secure parking structure, the row of houses on Hanbury Street behind which Annie Chapman’s body was discovered were replaced in the mid-twentieth century by a brewery complex with an imposing wall occupying the former frontage of the buildings, and other streets and buildings associated with the killings have undergone similar alteration. A doorway in what was once a model apartment block on Goulston Street, within the frame of which a piece of Catherine Eddowes’ bloody apron was discovered on the night that she and Elizabeth Stride were killed, has today

been walled up and incorporated into the façade of Happy Days, a Chinese buffet restaurant.\footnote{Donald Rumbelow, “Jack the Ripper,” in \textit{London Walks: London Stories}, ed. David Tucker (London: Virgin Books, 2009), 240-1.} The geographic scale of the murders also poses a problem for walking tours: while the total area in which the killings took place is relatively small, the locations where the bodies of Polly Nichols and Elizabeth Stride were found are sufficiently far from each other, and from the rest of the sites associated with the murders, that they cannot be conveniently visited by a group walking tour that accommodates individuals with varying levels of mobility while lasting only two hours.

The tours under consideration address these problems of geography and architecture by selectively excluding sites in ways that are also shaped by practical considerations about the logistics of a particular walk. Rumbelow’s walk for London Walks starts outside the Tower Hill Tube station, within the bounds of the City itself, and thus his first episode of narration is provided with one of the most famous tourist landmarks in Britain in the background. The tour proceeds north past St. Botolph’s Aldgate Church. It then passes through Mitre Square, where Catherine Eddowes was killed, before heading west to the location in Goulston Street where a piece of her bloodied apron was discovered, thus following the general path walked by the murderer in the early morning of 30 September 1888. The tour then continues north and ends at the renovated Old Spitalfields Market; this is directly across from the historic Christchurch Spitalfields, opposite the Ten Bells Pub where many of the women murdered in Whitechapel in 1888 where known to drink, and not far from the multi-story secure car park that now stands where Miller’s Court was located.\footnote{Ibid, 242.} This route effectively skirts the western perimeter of the area historically regarded as the East End, and Rumbelow’s tour eschews direct visitation of
most of the murder sites. Instead, he typically stops to deliver narration in front of buildings like the Tower or the area’s Wren and Hawksmoor churches, which are only tangentially related to specific events in the Ripper murder narrative, but which were historically present in 1888. This decision is at least in part logistical: the walk is open to all comers and frequently attracts a groups stretching into the hundreds during the summer, and while a second guide will sometimes lead a smaller group that departs in advance of the larger one, many tourists insist on being guided by Rumbelow himself. This simplified route sticks to relatively wide streets and open spaces, favoring squares and areas like the public market where a large group can gather around the guide to listen to extended expert narration in a setting of relative calm. Both the Secret Chamber and London Discovery Tours walks take a decidedly different spatial approach. Starting east of the boundary of the City, at Aldgate and Aldgate East Tube stations respectively, they cap group sizes at a few dozen tourists and move through the relatively narrow streets east of Commercial Street. This means that in the course of the walk, tourists pass through the Edwardian arch separating Gunthorpe Street from the Whitechapel Road in order to stand on the patch of gravel that used to be occupied by the George Yard Buildings, where Martha Tabram was killed. They likewise walk down Hanbury Street, standing to listen to an account of Annie Chapman’s death against the brewery wall that has replaced the house where she was murdered, and pass as close as is physically possible to the parking structure that has replaced Miller’s Court.

The three tours here considered make differing uses of still- and moving-image media that are related to the way each navigates the space of the East End. Donald Rumbelow does not show any images as part of his tour; he does, however, characteristically pull a hand trolley full of the latest edition of his *The Complete Jack the Ripper* behind him; copies are offered for sale
at the end of the walk at slightly below the cover price, with the extra incentive of a personalized autograph from the author. This book is extensively illustrated with images of late-Victorian London and of the murder victims, including graphic post-mortem photographs. Guides working for London Discovery Tours carry a dossier of A4-sized photographs with them, including many of the same images published in Rumbelow’s book, and these are used as visual aids during the explanations of particular events or the significance of given locations. Secret Chamber tours goes one step further, with guides carrying small battery-operated projectors that are used to show both still and moving images directly on the walls of Whitechapel and Spitalfields. Their promotional website calls this “Ripper-Vision,” and claims that it creates “the most up-to-date Jack the Ripper tour anywhere in London and the most exciting, shocking, [and] a must for anyone who loves a good gruesome mystery.”

For his part Rumbelow considers the use of images inappropriate, claiming that “you can always tell the second rate [tours] because they’ve got a lot of gory pictures. If they have to show you pictures they aren’t doing a good enough job of telling the story.”

Given the tenor of Donald Rumbelow’s assertion about the use of imagery and the tone of advertisements for competitors that do show images, which suggests that the London Walks tour is old-fashioned in its non-use of media, it is tempting to see this as a modern iteration of the conflict over the social role of the image in urban space analyzed in Chapter 2. Rumbelow is not, of course, overtly hostile to the display of gory pictures under all circumstances; he includes them in his published book on the subject. A trans-historical resonance can be traced here, but it is qualitatively different from that of the moral panic over visuality expressed by Punch in “The

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498 Donald Rumbelow, in conversation with the author, 10 June 2009.
Pandemonium of Posters” (figure 2.2). What is at stake here is a dispute between professionals in the tourism industry, who hold themselves out to be experts in both that field and in the study of Ripperology, over how best to cultivate what the anthropologist Adam Reed labels “city-seeing eyes,” a mode of visual perception through which the viewer is “able to perceive the pasts of the city in the present.”499 For Reed this is, crucially, a category of expertise acknowledged and sought by history enthusiasts who often act as tour guides, but possessing it requires a level of training and practice above and beyond that usually possessed by the tourist.500 The ability to see a late-Victorian building in a brewery wall, or to imagine a complete scene from the past based on one historic church building, is something that the expert tour guide cultivates and performs for an audience as a mark of expertise. Whether transformed purely into words or aided by still and moving images, the guide uses his or her own perceptual training to curate the East End for a group of spectators, letting them see through the eyes of an expert and effectively turning this section of London into an open air museum, making information about the Ripper and his exploits a commercial analogue of the secret knowledge passed between friends of friends in Chapter 4.

The different approaches to space and media offered by these tours may also be described as analogous to the distinction that Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett draws between “in situ” and “in context” as modalities for the display of ethnographic objects in a traditional museum setting. The in context method, which relies on classification and arrangement by type, “establish[es] a theoretical frame of reference for the viewer, offer[s] explanations, provides[s] historical background, make[s] comparisons, pose[s] questions, and sometimes even extend[s] to the

500 Ibid, 128.
circumstances of excavation, collection, and conservation of the objects on display.”\textsuperscript{501} By contrast, the “\textit{in situ} entails metonymy and mimesis: the object is a part that stands in a contiguous relation to an absent whole that may or may not be re-created.”\textsuperscript{502} These are, I would argue, less like poles on a continuum than like sides of a coin: though inherently not visible at the same time, each mode of display implies the other. In context displays depend upon the viewer’s belief that the object on display was taken from an “authentic” situation, while \textit{in situ} recreations of the “physical, social, and cultural setting” can always be subject to the framing effects of interpretation.\textsuperscript{503} We can broadly say that the Rumbelow tour is more contextual in nature, in its assertion of the importance of narrative, even as the use of period buildings as backdrops gestures at an \textit{in situ} use of an architectural fragment to stand in for the vanished late-Victorian streetscape. Tours that approach closer to actual murder sights and use these as the display points for images are arguably favoring an \textit{in situ} approach, taking the exact physical location and whatever slight traces of a vanished building, if any, remain there as the crucial elements of their embodied display that stand in for what is long gone in the streetscape. Images serve as an aid to imagination in this case, while the guides’ discussion often focuses on contextual issues of interpretation aimed at allowing tourists to apprehend the historical context in which the murders occurred.

A key feature of both in context and \textit{in situ} displays is that they depend on “detachment[, which] refers not only to the physical act of producing fragments but also to the detached attitude that makes that fragmentation and its appreciation possible.”\textsuperscript{504} In terms of a museum display

\textsuperscript{502} Ibid, 19.
\textsuperscript{503} Ibid, 20.
\textsuperscript{504} Ibid, 18.
this means literally removing the object from its place of origin and placing it in a display cabinet, usually in a colonial metropolis somewhere; a form of this operation is at stake in Ripper walking tours, which use vision and narrative to create a perceptual separation between the spatial and architectural features of the East End, where contemporary people live and work, and the fundamentally mythic territory stalked by Jack the Ripper. Entering into the former while, with the help of an expert guide, perceiving the latter is productive of leisure as a distinct category of experience, and of a distinct kind of leisure that values contact with the past in a way that mixes abstract historical understanding with the embodied sensation of movement and engagement with sensational images and stories. Such tours are performances in the particular sense indicated by Joseph Roach, representing “the kinesthetic and vocal embodiment of social memory and self-invention” that is often dependent upon “an urgent but often disguised passion: the desire to communicate physically with the past, a desire that roots itself in the ambivalent love of the dead.”505 One of the key contemporary meanings of the Ripper myth resides in its function as an attraction for travelers interested in “dark tourism” by which exceptional, and exceptionally violent, deaths are contemplated as a leisure activity, with appropriate detachment and an ambivalent mixture of playfulness and grimness.506 Ironically, within the landscape of the modern global tourism industry, Jack the Ripper functions as a means of organizing the East End into precisely the sort of rational, economically productive space that the Whitechapel murders themselves suggested it could never be. A series of murders, characterized by the dramaturgical operation of the press and culture in general into a monstrous figure who seemed to certify that

the area was a backwater into which the effluvia of those unable to be fully captured by the rationalized system of urban factory labor pooled, has now transformed that same space into a draw for contemporary tourists, which is to say people for whom even being away from work has been reconfigured as an economically productive activity. A complex of imagery built up around the murder of late-Victorian prostitutes, figures whose ambivalent place in society can be understood at least in part due to the uncomfortable way their lives blurred the lines between activities regarded as legitimate and illegitimate forms of labor, has been turned by business interests into a cultural product drawing spectators to have a sensuous experience of this deeply multivalent history.

In the late-Victorian era, cultural contests that were expressed in dramatic entertainments likewise flooded into the imaginative space occupied by the mysterious individual or individuals who managed to avoid arrest or identification while murdering women in the streets of Whitechapel and Spitalfields in 1888. Drawing on theatrical scenarios that expressed, visualized, and managed anxieties about issues like the violence inherent in many forms of medical practice, the superfluity of human bodies in the modern urban landscape, and the susceptibility of those bodies to unruly behavior induced by images, the figure of Jack the Ripper was created to occupy this void. The graphically violent and sexual nature of the crimes of which this imagined monster was the perpetrator meant that, for many decades after the killings, he had to be represented in covert, though often playful, ways. While the force of taboo no longer governs representations of sex and violence in the same way it did before 1968, the memory of the power of obscenity is inscribed in the way the Ripper figure is today conjured to reveal hidden truths in the form of conspiracy theories dramatized along lines of class conflict that are themselves deeply melodramatic, having been iterated through countless performances in a huge variety of
variations of murder plays like *The Murder in the Red Barn.* But ultimately, whatever mythic model an individual tourist has in mind while walking along with Donald Rumbelow in the East End, or whether a contemporary film-maker adapts the idea of the mad Dr. Jack, the mustachioed villain of popular melodrama, that of the religious maniac, a combination of these, or something else entirely, what is at stake is nothing like the factual veracity of events surrounding the gruesome murders of impoverished women in a particular historical time and social setting. At issue, instead, is how a diverse set of social actors came together to form imaginative understandings of these events by using a mix of fact, conjecture, and enacted fiction that forged the Ripper as a figure, but also forged Londoners into overlapping communities based on class, geography, and interactions with dramatic, journalistic, and literary media. As I hope the case studies in this dissertation have shown, the theatrical origins of this figure testify to the particular power of performance to transmit and transform ideas and ideologies into embodied action that can be experienced as individual memory and woven into cultural history.
Bibliography

The following archives were consulted in preparing this thesis; individual documents from each collection are noted within the text:

Bishopsgate Institute, London History Collection.

British Library, Lord Chamberlain’s Play Collection

New York Public Library, Billy Rose Theatre Division.

Victoria and Albert Museum Archive, Theatre and Performance Collection.

Except where otherwise indicated in the text, periodical sources were accessed via the following digital archives:

British papers excluding The Times and Illustrated Police News:
19th Century British Library Newspapers. find.galegroup.com

Illustrated Police News:

The Times of London:
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U.S. papers excluding the New York Times:
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