

Jack the Ripper: A Look at the Mental Health of the Notorious Serial Killer

Šalković, Dominik

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Sveučilište J.J. Strossmayera u Osijeku
Filozofski fakultet Osijek
Dvopredmetni sveučilišni preddiplomski studij Engleskog jezika i književnosti i
povijesti

Dominik Šalković

**Jack Trbosjek: Pogled na mentalno zdravlje zloglasnog serijskog
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Mentor: doc. dr. sc. Jadranka Zlomislić

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IZJAVA

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Damir Jelčić, 0122227486
ime i prezime studenta, JMBAG

Abstract

Despite occurring a long time ago, the murders committed by Jack the Ripper still generate a lot of discussion and are still in the public eye. The mind of a serial killer is fascinating because it is beyond reason and logic that one can seem perfectly normal one moment and be a complete monster the next. The reason why it is important to determine what effect deteriorating mental health had on Jack the Ripper is because it would enable experts to understand the killer's actions and the meaning behind them. Furthermore, it could lead to the uncovering of the killer's identity. The purpose of this research is to prove that mental illness influenced the person we today call Jack the Ripper, and that mental health was the main cause of the crime. This present research was conducted by studying official police documents, and consulting more recent research on the topic. The outcome of this study is in line with popular thought, but not in every way. The research findings show that Jack the Ripper was not just a victim of his surroundings and his childhood, but also a victim of a mental disorder, because it was recently proven that those who suffer from psychopathy have slightly different genetic predispositions. The outcome that Jack the Ripper suffered from a mental illness was not a surprise, but what was a surprise was how many different traits the killer showed, traits which were symptoms of many illnesses of the mind.

Keywords: Murder, Letters, Mental illness, Jack the Ripper, Profile, serial killer, Whitechapel

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Introduction

The mystery of Jack the Ripper has captivated multiple generations and has inspired a plethora of research, either scientific or on a personal level conducted by those who were fascinated by it. The Whitechapel murders or murders committed by Jack the Ripper are some of the most infamous and notorious in all human history. The reason for that is the gruesome nature in which they were committed and the simple fact that to this day the perpetrator for these crimes has never been found. By using the available sources, such as books written by authors who studied the crimes, newspaper articles of and around the time the murders were committed and official police documents, this paper looks into the sociological, criminal and psychological background of the crimes. The first part of this paper provides information on each murder individually and looks at the circumstances and living conditions which preceded the crime. The main part deals with the killer's profile and his or her psychological state because the case of Jack the Ripper was instrumental in understanding the connection between mental health issues and crime. Next, the paper analyses the letters that were the only form of communication between Jack the Ripper and the police. The final part of the paper takes a detailed look into the media attention and its impact on the notoriety of Jack the Ripper in the late 19th century. The expected result of the collection and examination of the available data is to find a clear connection between the killer's actions and the symptoms of mental health problems.

1. The Whitechapel District

The Victorian era is considered to be one of the most prosperous in British history and it saw the expansion of the British Empire to occupy one fourth of the entire world. As flourishing as the Victorian Era might have been for Britain, there was a dark side of Victorian London that gave rise to one of the most notorious serial killers in human history. One district, in East London was the most infamous of all, and that was the Whitechapel district. In 1883, a famous English journalist, James Greenwood said that the area was “perhaps the foulest and most dangerous street in the whole metropolis” (qtd. in Begg 21). It became a show place for criminals in London (qtd. in Evans and Rumbelow 225). The reason for this stems from the mass immigration of Irish Immigrants and Jewish refugees which began in the mid-19th century. Their destination of choice was the East End of London and soon the entire parish of Whitechapel became overcrowded. In addition, the Irish immigrants caused unrest with their frequently violent behaviour influenced by drinking while the Jewish refugees were resented because of cultural differences and were victims of prejudice. A segregated community ensued where Jewish refugees lived separately from others. Because of the poor housing and working conditions the district became characterized by extreme poverty, poor sanitation, homelessness, and drunkenness which was made worse by the pollution which stemmed from London’s many factories. It was as if the entire district entered a time-warp and was back to the dark ages. An overcrowded, low-quality slum area is called a rookery and these rookeries were vastly overcrowded with people who were on the brink of starvation. The data shows that in 1881 there were 30,709 residents of Whitechapel but only 4,069 occupied houses (“Whitechapel Case Study”). It was very hard for men to find work and for women it was almost impossible, which is why slums became breeding grounds for criminal activity. Particularly Whitechapel was notorious as a rookery with criminal activity like robbery, alcohol abuse, and vast poverty that drove many women to prostitution. The police information claims that there were around 60 brothels and around 1200 women working as prostitutes in Whitechapel (qtd. in Evans and Skinner 283 *The Ultimate Jack the Ripper Sourcebook*). The economic problems in Whitechapel coincided with the steady rise of social tension in the United Kingdom. Because of unemployment and incredibly difficult living conditions in which many of the working class found themselves, there were frequent demonstrations which led to public unrest. The racist and anti-Semitic attitudes which were associated with Whitechapel, along with an influx of crime widely influenced the public perception of Whitechapel and it was seen as Victorian England’s capital of sin.

2. The Murders

On Friday, the 9th of November 1888, a grossly mutilated body of Mary Jane Kelly was found in Dorset-street, Spitalfields (“The East-End Tragedies”). It was the last in a long line of gruesome murders which terrorized the Whitechapel district of London. As it has already been mentioned, the Whitechapel district was a very impoverished part of London and it had seen a rise in criminal activity towards the end of the 19th century, which is why it is difficult to separate the murders and the culprits. During that time, a substantial number of murders occurred but only five have been made canon when it comes to Jack the Ripper. It is possible and highly probable that the man we know today as Jack the Ripper killed more women in Whitechapel. As has already been mentioned, crime was a commonplace occurrence and the number of murders, especially those of prostitutes was high. The problem was that the murders of prostitutes were rarely reported in the press and definitely were not widely reported; only when the murders became more gruesome and happened more often did they gain worldwide attention. The murders occurred when the press was in its ascendancy therefore the crimes quickly gained notoriety. Because of that, today we are able to chronologically and in great detail explain how and when the Whitechapel murders occurred. Before developing his Modus Operandi and acquiring the confidence to commit more gruesome and heinous murders, it is possible that the perpetrator committed a few murders before the murder of Marry Ann Nichols, which is the first murder attributed to Jack the Ripper.

2.1. The Murder of Mary Ann Nichols

The first murder attributed to Jack the Ripper was that of Mary Ann Nichols. According to the article “Another Murder in Whitechapel” from *The Times*, Mary Ann began working as a prostitute after she had lost her job and she was on duty the night of her murder. She was found unconscious in Buck’s row in the early hours of the morning and at first thought to be drunk and passed out (“Another Murder in Whitechapel”). Even Doctor Henry Llewellyn, who pronounced her dead, was shocked at the apparent lack of blood at the crime scene (“Another Murder in Whitechapel”). Her wounds were much less grotesque than those of the Ripper’s later victims, but they were still beyond a normal person’s comprehension. She had a severed throat and a few serious and jagged wounds to the abdomen which would have killed her immediately (Evans and Rumbelow 58-61). Based on her clothing, the police deduced that she was an inhabitant of the lodging houses near to where she was killed (“Another Murder in Whitechapel”). Like the other Ripper’s victims, she also had very few or no family so identification was difficult. This was

further complicated by the fact that prostitutes were reluctant to give their real names, and usually worked under nicknames. This all allowed the killer to roam freely without worrying whether his victim mentioned her name to anyone she knew. Because of the many murders occurring at the time in Whitechapel, the police believed that there was a ferocious maniac on the loose and the New York state commissioner of lunacy called the killer a lunatic (“Probably a Lunatic”).

2.2. The Murder of Annie Chapman

The murder of Annie Chapman was the one which produced a state of panic in the entire Whitechapel district. Her mutilated body was discovered on the early morning of the 8th of September in Hanbury-street that was occupied mostly by poor Jewish immigrants (“East End Outrages”). The injuries of Annie Chapman were very similar to those of Mary Ann Nichols, which led to establishing a definite link between the murders. She was also found with a severed throat and severe wounds to her abdomen caused by a blade of similar length and design to that used in the murder of Mary Ann Nichols (“East End Outrages”). Unlike the first murder, it was clear that the deed consumed a lot of the perpetrators time and this was the first murder than shows evidence that the killer found some enjoyment in killing. Also, this was the first time that there was a witness to the murder. A man heard an argument in the early hours of the morning but did not give it much attention as such behaviour was very common among the inhabitants in this very underprivileged part of England (“East End Outrages”).

2.3. The Murder of Elizabeth Stride

The next murder attributed to the Ripper was that of Elizabeth Stride. She was murdered in late September of 1888 (“Two More East End Murders”). Stride’s murder was different from the other Ripper’s victims in that she was not mutilated after the murder. The Ripper used his preferred method of a severed throat, but it remains unknown what prevented him from completing his brutal fantasy as usual. Her body was still warm when it was discovered as was her blood (qtd. in Evans and Skinner 157-158, “Letters from Hell”). This evidence indicates that the time of her murder closely coincided with the time the body was discovered and that the perpetrator probably had to flee in haste. This probably made him angry and left him feeling unfulfilled which is why he committed the next murder just a few moments later.

2.4. The Murder of Catherine Eddowes

Catherine Eddowes was murdered only an hour after Elizabeth Stride and her murder was committed in a very brutal fashion. Her body was found in Mitre Square (“Two More East End Murders”) in a state almost too horrendous to put into words. The severed throat, Ripper’s signature was still visible. According to the article “Two More East End Murders” from *The Times*, her face was disfigured, she was disembowelled, and her intestines were placed on her right shoulder. The article also notes that there were injuries to her ears, fingers and almost every part of the upper body. In addition to the explanation of wounds the article also notes that it was evident to the police that the deed was done by a practiced hand. Based on the evidence procured from the crime scene, the police concluded that the murder of Catherine Eddowes was committed by the same person who killed Elizabeth Stride (“Two More East End Murders”). What is interesting is that the newspapers expected more similar crimes to happen and more brutal murders to follow, because, according to them, the murders showed too much system and method, and were committed by someone who cared little about being detected (“Two More East End Murders”). By this time, it was quite clear that a dangerous serial killer was roaming the streets of Whitechapel.

2.5. The Murder of Mary Jane Kelly

It is believed that the last murder to have been committed by Jack the Ripper was that of Mary Jane Kelly. Like the other victims, she was working as a prostitute and was living in relative poverty, but she did differ from the usual Ripper’s victims. According to the article “The Seventh Murder in Whitechapel” from *The Pall Mall Gazette*, she was in a relationship and had a son. In addition, she was also more educated than the average prostitute, so she was not a typical Jack the Ripper victim (“The Seventh Murder in Whitechapel”). moreover, what is unique to the death of Mary Jane Kelly was that she was murdered within a furnished room, not out in the open (“The Seventh Murder in Whitechapel”). This gave the killer more time to mutilate the body and it is believed that the mutilation and evisceration of the body lasted approximately two hours, as opposed to minutes in which the other bodies were mutilated (Begg 301). She was murdered during the morning of 9 November (“The Seventh Murder in Whitechapel”). According to the detailed description of the murder, the mutilation of her corpse was by far the most extensive of any murders. The Ripper’s signature, a severed throat was visible again but the extent of the mutilation which the killer performed is difficult to understand. According to the book *Jack the Ripper: Scotland Yard investigates* by Evans and Rumbelow, the entirety of her abdomen and

thighs were removed, while her breasts were cut off and her face was hacked beyond recognition. Additionally, the killer took out the victim's organs and intestines and laid them on the bed. Almost every part of her body was slashed or mutilated so that she was only recognised by her ears (Evans and Rumbelow 177).

3. The Killer's Profile

It is difficult to show the true picture of someone whose identity has never been discovered, but based on recent research and knowledge we have today of the behaviour and tendencies of serial killers it is easier to understand who the man behind Jack the Ripper could be. Before getting into the profile of Jack the Ripper, the question asks itself whether it was a man. There have been many witnesses and witness statements taken by the police which describe a man but also this conclusion can be drawn from the method of the killings and the method with which the killer dealt with the bodies. As the crimes were committed very quickly in a very brutal manner, it is probable that the killer had to be strongly built to overpower the women very quickly. Males commit murders up close and personal because they want to assert dominance over the individual but women use methods like poisoning with arson because they want to show that they are clever and cunning. Interestingly there was a theory, even in 1889 that the killer was a woman ("The Whitechapel Murders"). A tall, strong woman that had been working for slaughterhouses ("The Whitechapel Murders"), but it is highly unlikely that the murderer was a woman because of the aforementioned information in this paper. When connecting different crimes to the same individual the term Modus Operandi is used. Modus Operandi describes the killer's habits of working. The Ripper's Modus Operandi includes a severed throat and severe mutilation of the abdomen which often includes disembowelment and the removal of organs. The slicing of the throat is what he uses to kill, and the following injuries could be and probably are just a continuation of his fantasy. It is what he later does with the bodies which makes him unique and makes it easier for the detectives to connect different crimes to the same perpetrator. The excessive mutilation of the abdomen and the disembowelment of the victim is what the Whitechapel murders are most famous for.

As has been mentioned before in this text, there have been some eye-witness accounts of a man leaving the crime scene soon after the murder and it is highly probable that the police even interviewed the man we know today as Jack the Ripper. Most experts agree that Jack the Ripper was a very ordinary man who was unassuming in appearance and manner, as most serial killers are. According to the official FBI Dossier on Jack the Ripper, it is thought that he was probably around 170 cm tall with dark hair and somewhere around 30 years old. This is also confirmed by eye-witness accounts and the FBI Dossier according to which killer probably dressed in nicer and more expensive clothing to give an impression of someone wealthy to look more appealing to prostitutes so they would be more unassuming of his true nature ("Subject: Jack the Ripper," 5). He most probably led a normal life but was probably without much contact with other people

and seen as a loner by the people who knew him. One person of interest for psychologists to look at is always the mother of the killer. "A boy's best friend is his mother" (Psycho 37.08-37.10). He was probably raised singlehandedly by his mother with a very absent father and it is probable that this mother had a high number of sexual partners and encounters which led to a total lack of care which then led to the killer's lack of sympathy and the inability to show empathy towards other people. It is also possible that he witnessed violent sexual scenes as a child and connected violence with sexual pleasure and gratification. It is also possible that he was abused by his mother at some point during his lifetime. Because of his childhood, the perpetrator probably held a lot of pent-up anger which he released by murdering animals which is a very common characteristic of serial killers. He discovered increased areas of dominance and power and upgraded from animals to crime probably in later life. That is pure speculation but based on what is known today about killers who committed similar crimes it would not be a far-fetched conclusion.

His behaviour would not have been out of the ordinary. He was a working man of low class who lived a single life just like many of his contemporaries. It would also be a logical conclusion that he visited the brothels of which there were many in Whitechapel and that he was acquainted with the women he would later murder. In 1888 there was no technological innovation like fingerprints or DNA testing to help the police, so they had to rely on witness statements. But not only that, mental health was almost an unknown subject and it was very difficult to understand how a mentally ill person would behave. The police were under the impression that they were looking for a madman who could easily have been identified when seen but based on what we know today this seems rather foolish. In the early days, a theory existed that the murderer we know now as Jack the Ripper, must have been familiar with the anatomy of the human body and must have been skilled with a knife. The reasons for that were the lack of blood on the crime scene and the removal of the victim's kidneys. This led police to believe that the killer had some previous anatomical knowledge and that it was possible that the killer was either a surgeon or a doctor of some kind or a butcher, and was familiar with disembowelling animals and such. However, the trained doctors who worked on the autopsy disagreed, and said that the removal of the kidney was done very crudely by someone who clearly had no knowledge of precise incisions and medical skill (R. Jones, "Was it Catherine Eddowes's Kidney"). Regardless of these doctors' opinions, the previously mentioned theory based on precise incisions and medical skill prevails even today.

Additionally, it remains unknown why the murders stopped so abruptly. There have obviously been many theories put forward by different experts and those interested in the case

and a few reasons have been given. One is that he moved and continued killing, just not in Whitechapel. The second possible reason is that he died and therefore no more murders could have been committed. The third and the most unlikely reason is that he stopped killing or changed his Modus Operandi. However, the third reason appears to be unlikely because for killers who kill in such a way it becomes a process without which they would not be able to survive. It can almost be looked at like they were addicted and needed murder to survive because that was how they dealt with the trauma they went through during their childhood or throughout their lives. That he moved and continued killing is an obvious conclusion as made evident by the fact that Jack the Ripper was brought into connection with a few murders that had happened in the United States of America and a Scotland Yard¹ inspector was sent to New York to investigate (“The Whitechapel Murderer”). The police in Vienna (“Jack the Ripper Again”) and historians from South Africa believe that Jack the Ripper committed crimes even there (“Jack the Ripper may hail from South Africa”). Because of the travel restrictions of the time and the financial difficulties of workers it is improbable that Jack the Ripper could have travelled the world and killed wherever he went. That is why I believe the killer must have died. As has been said, the living conditions in Whitechapel were very poor and it was not unlikely to see people fall ill at a relatively young age, especially the Whitechapel residents who were heavily addicted to alcohol. If we consider the pollution of London, I think it is more likely that Jack the Ripper fell ill and passed away rather than travelled overseas and continued his killing spree.

¹ Headquarters of the Metropolitan Police, responsible for policing London

4. The Killer's Mental Health

Serial killers of today have been a great platform for research into mental health because by interviewing them and examining their behaviour we can draw conclusions about how mental illness influences the actions of human beings. The most common disorder that serial killers suffer from is an antisocial personality disorder, or in layman's terms, psychopathy, and sociopathy. But the range and intensity of mental illnesses is wide and many other illnesses like schizophrenia or bipolar disorder can be found when examining the minds of serial killers. The intensity of the illnesses and their effects also differs from individual to individual. The evidence found concerning Jack the Ripper leads me to believe that he suffered from an antisocial personality disorder, but there are some who consider that he suffered from a more serious illness, which will be showcased later in this text. It is quite common for a serial killer to display either the symptoms of a psychopath or a sociopath, but the case of Jack the Ripper is quite rare because the killer displayed both aspects of the disorder. A psychopath is someone who lives without a conscience. A common trait to most people diagnosed as psychopaths is a very unhappy person for who it is difficult to connect to others and shows a lack of empathy to others (Legg).

The profile of the psychopath is very similar to the profile of the man we know today as Jack the Ripper. It is also probable that the man known as Jack the Ripper had a very abusive mother and his relationship with her shaped his character. This is an attribute of a sociopath, although it could have functioned as an element which impacted on his choice of the type of victims, female prostitutes, and the way in which the murders were committed but not on the murders themselves. Psychopaths are intelligent, charming people who are skilled at mimicking emotions and mimicking interest in people, but it is all a ploy for them to manipulate others for their own personal gain. They are very calculated and careful when planning moves and stick to their plans despite the obstacles in the way and are adept at using aggression in such a way to benefit them. Psychopaths have a slightly different brain from a neurotypical one ("Psychopaths brains show differences in structure and function"). The brain of a psychopath is underdeveloped and there is damage to the ethics and morality section of the brain. The profile of Jack the Ripper fits perfectly into this description. What is believed about Jack the Ripper today is that he lived with a very abusive mother and that he was a loner and rarely involved in any kinds of relationships but that he behaved like any normal person would and it would be impossible to find anything unusual about the person during his everyday life. Evidence from the murders proves this theory. The perpetrator showed a general lack of emotion but also was calm and

collected enough to mutilate and dismember the body there on the streets after the murders were committed. The murders were not an impulse but were planned and very carefully orchestrated. Despite there being no evidence of sexual activity on the victims' bodies some psychologists suppose that there was a sexual aspect to the murders. As has been mentioned before in this text it is possible that because of what he had witnessed as a child, the killer connected sex and violence and that the only way for him to gain sexual pleasure was to commit violent murders. The killer left his victims naked and usually with legs wide open. These positions in which the killer left them were considered degrading and it was done to humiliate the victims. This opens the possibility that the killer was a misogynist and carried hateful feelings towards women which were caused by the behaviour of the only other women in his life, his mother, although it is also possible that the killer was married once and that his dislike of women was further established by his failed marriage. Further evidence that supports the psychopath theory can be seen in the Ripper's third and fourth murders, which were only a couple of hours apart. This shows that the perpetrator thought that the murders were a very important process which was a part of the killer's own identity and he considered the event of murder as something very important to him, which is why he needed to finish the plan he imagined. He was interrupted during one murder and he needed to finish the plan and fulfil his fantasy. He saw murders as something very important to him and it is possible that he sought to murder to vent his sexual frustration.

Some psychologists of the time considered that the killer suffered from a disorder called hypersexuality. Hypersexuality is the extremely frequent or suddenly increased libido and is defined "as a dysfunctional preoccupation with a sexual fantasy" (Weiss). It is usually considered a symptom of another medical disease, one of which is a bipolar disorder. "Bipolar disorder is a mental disorder that causes unusual shifts in mood, energy and activity levels" ("Bipolar disorder"). The connection between the bipolar disorder and Jack the Ripper lays in the swiftness and brutality of his attacks. Bipolar disorder is characterized with maniacal episodes in which an individual behaves or feels abnormally energetic or irritable. Another symptom of a bipolar disorder is the reduced need for sleep during manic phases ("Bipolar disorder"). Every murder Jack the Ripper committed was in the dead of night, very early in the morning. This could show that once the episode started the killer felt a need to kill and could only return to his relatively normal state after committing the deed. Despite this evidence it would be hard to claim that Jack the Ripper suffered from bipolar disorder. The biggest argument against is the final murder. It was committed quickly but the killer was calm enough to dissect and mutilate the body for a further few hours which would be impossible with maniacal mood shifts. Also, people who tend to suffer from bipolar disorder would be prone to public outbursts and usually suffer from some

form of a substance abuse disorder so it would be very difficult for the perpetrator to keep a quiet profile and live a quiet life as he did. As it has been said he blended into everyday life because he was so ordinary, there was nothing to distinguish him from the many which roamed the streets of Whitechapel. Also, if we keep to the profile of the perpetrator it is clear that he lacked emotion and empathy, unlike those with bipolar disorder who lose control of their emotions, something which the perpetrator in the case of Jack the Ripper did not suffer from.

There has also been a claim put forward recently by one of the world's top experts on criminal behaviour, Scott A. Bonn, a criminology professor with a master's degree from the San Jose University who claims that the killer known as Jack the Ripper was suffering from schizophrenia and was a poor Polish Jew called David Cohen. By reading the report of Thomas Bond, and examining the criminal profile of Jack the Ripper with the help of more recent research he concludes that the Ripper was a disorganized killer who did not plan his killings and left behind corpses as evidence for all to see (Bonn). He was a maniac with homicidal tendencies and his murders were fuelled by fear and hatred of women (Bonn). What this theory fails to take into account is the behaviour of the killer in the third, fourth and fifth murders. By being interrupted during his third murder, he proceeded to commit another murder shortly after. To me this is evidence of a killer who planned every single little detail of his intended murder and when he could not live out that plan or fantasy, he proceeded to do it again all over from the beginning. Evidence from the fifth murder concludes that the killer had spent close to two hours dissecting and mutilating the body of his victim, which to me is not a sign of someone who is angry and maniacal but a sign of somebody who is cool and collected and had no worry about being caught during his deed. David Cohen passed away in an asylum soon after the murders stopped, which is also something that makes Bonn claim that he is Jack the Ripper. Definitive proof of who Jack the Ripper was will probably never be found, but I am of the opinion that the killer was able to hide in plain sight because of his normal behaviour and that he did not stand out from the crowd, like David Cohen, who stuck out in every way possible.

5. Letters

The only form of communication that Jack the Ripper had with the police and the media are letters which he allegedly sent to either the police headquarters or newspaper agencies. From one of these letters his name was drawn, Jack the Ripper. It is not unusual for killers and especially those who suffer from some sort of personality disorder to be in contact with the police. They tend to have a need to be involved in the investigation and usually thrive on notoriety, and it is probable that Jack the Ripper enjoyed his new moniker. There are four letters which are considered today to be genuinely written by Jack the Ripper although this claim has been disputed. This paper is written according to the opinion that the letters sent to the police were genuinely written by Jack the Ripper

5.1. The Dear Boss Letter

The Dear Boss letter is the first letter written by Jack the Ripper and it was addressed to the Central News Agency of London and forwarded to the Scotland Yard. The letter was written in red ink and its overall tone was one of mockery and included allusions to future murders (R. Jones). Initially it was thought to have been a hoax because the police received many letters of a similar nature. What made the letter of crucial importance was the fact that only a couple of days later, Catherine Eddowes, one of the Ripper's victims was found with missing earlobes which the killer promised he would do in his Dear Boss letter (R. Jones). The letter was signed with the moniker Jack the Ripper, and from this moment on the killer was known as such. Soon after the police published the letter in hope that someone would recognize the handwriting, but it was to no avail (R. Jones). There is a sense of high confidence even arrogance in the Ripper's words which insinuate that the plan to commit further murders existed for some time. These were not sudden killings; they were meticulously planned and there was probably a reason why the specific targets were chosen by the killer. This showcases further evidence for the thesis that Jack the Ripper suffered from an antisocial personality disorder,

5.2. The Saucy Jacky Postcard

Another correspondence was written by Jack the Ripper just a day after the double murder. The content of the postcard is not dissimilar to the content of the first letter and deals with the summary of the double murder which happened the night before. It has also been proven with modern forensics that both this postcard and the Dear Boss letter were written by the same person (R. Jones). Whether they are authentic or just cleverly written fabrications by a

journalist is up for debate. In the 1930s there was a journalist who claimed to have written both the Dear Boss letter and this postcard in order to keep the business alive, but his involvement has never been proven (R. Jones). Based on the knowledge we have today and if we take the case of the Zodiac killer² into consideration, these two correspondences have elements which a killer of the profile of Jack the Ripper could have potentially written.

5.3. The From Hell Letter

The next letters are concerned with the individual by the name of George Lusk. According to the website run by Richard Jones, a much renowned Jack the Ripper expert, George Lusk was the president of the Mile End Vigilance Committee and was a very prominent figure in both the crime fighting world and the press in September and October of 1888. This led to him being approached by many shady characters that began stalking him. One of these characters asked a clerk in a leather shop about him and was able to learn the address of George Lusk but without the home number. The woman who was working as a clerk said later in her witness statement that the person refused to go to a pub to find Mr. Lusk after she told him that he was there (R. Jones). If true³, this would fit into the profile of the character of Jack the Ripper who avoided public places where a lot of people gathered. The letter later arrived at Lusk's home address, but the envelope lacked the house number (R. Jones). This proves a connection between the person who inquired about Mr. Lusk and the person who wrote the letter. The letter is probably the most famous of all of Ripper's correspondences because of the fact that with the letter the parcel also included a kidney. On his website, Richard Jones also writes that at first, Lusk just thought it was a prank, but after conversing with some of his fellow Committee members he sought medical opinion and the kidney was taken to Dr. Openshaw, a Pathological Curator to examine and come up with a theory where it came from (R. Jones). The reason why this kidney caused such a stir was because the Ripper's fourth victim, Catherine Eddowes, had her kidneys removed by the killer. It was the opinion of Dr. Openshaw which caused many to believe that the letter was actually written by the killer. He concluded that the kidney was of a human adult and that it showed extensive damage which was caused by alcohol and came from someone who had been dead for about three weeks (R. Jones). This seemed to confirm the opinion that it was genuinely sent by the killer to Mr. Lusk and this fact was widely reported in the media. The counterparts of Dr. Openshaw, and even the medical opinions of today were a

² The Zodiac Killer was a serial killer who murdered 5 people during the 1960s and 1970s and he communicated with the police by writing cryptograms, or coded letters only one of which was ever solved.

³ The information came from a reliable source

little less certain about the kidney being from Catherine Eddowes (R. Jones). The only thing that could be confirmed was that it was a human kidney. Because of the lack of surviving evidence, it is impossible to say with certainty whether it was a kidney from a murder victim or just a prank by a medical student and opinions remain divided.

5.4. The Openshaw Letter

Because of his involvement with the Ripper crimes and his frequent appearances in the media Dr. Openshaw became a recipient of a letter apparently written by the killer. It dealt with the conclusion that Openshaw came to by analysing the letters apparently written by Jack the Ripper. (R. Jones). This is probably the least known letter written by Jack the Ripper and the least likely to have been written by him. Although, according to author Stephen P. Ryder, this letter was the platform for author Patricia Cornwell to substantiate her claim that Walter Sickert was the Ripper, because there was a match of mitochondrial DNA extracted from the envelope of this letter and that found on other letters written by Walter Sickert (Ryder). However, the performed test is not considered definitive proof of identity.

6. Media and its Influence on the Notoriety of Jack the Ripper

The media instigated panic by repeatedly issuing reports such as: “London lies today under the spell of a great terror. A nameless reprobate – half man, half beast – is at large, who is daily gratifying his murderous instincts on the most miserable and defenceless classes of the community” (“A Woman is Found Murdered”).

The myth of Jack the Ripper and the hysteria which spread through Whitechapel during that time can be attributed to the growth of media attention. The case of Jack the Ripper was the first to create global interest and a worldwide media frenzy that led to incorrect conclusions and the creation of myths which are still believed today about Jack the Ripper. The power of all media and especially the power of the press towards the end of the 19th century was unprecedented. The police communicated with the public through news agencies by publishing photo-sketches, letters and any information connected with the murder which could have led to the apprehension of the suspect (J.G. Jones). As has already been mentioned in this paper, the murders happened amid social unrest and a time of great inequality between the classes. The hallmark of reporting of the time was sensational journalism. It was due to this sensational journalism that the name Jack the Ripper is so well known today. But, according to historian Jon Gregg Jones this journalism had a second goal and that was to cause social change in England and act as a plea for government to change something. In addition, he surmises that the press argued that the murders were a consequence of the state of the slums and called for the improvement of housing conditions (J.G. Jones). Very little was said about the actual victims of the crime. The newspapers and certain news agencies tried to push their agenda forward. They highlighted the situation in the slums of Whitechapel and put emphasis on the socio-economic and environmental causes of poverty (Fisher). The name Jack the Ripper was not just a name for a killer that was used by journalists; it served as a symbol of the horrendous living conditions in the slums of East and West London (J.G. Jones). This is why the name is so well known today; it served as a sort of mythology and symbol for the suffering in Whitechapel and served as a personification of everything that was believed to be wrong with Victorian society (J.G. Jones). The murders of Jack the Ripper did cause one thing. Finally, the entire nation was familiar with the conditions that the lower class had to deal with in their everyday life, and his murders played a part in the movement which later caused numerous reforms which helped improve the social situation in England

Conclusion

To understand the crimes committed by Jack the Ripper, one must first understand his mental state and the conditions in which he grew up. By examining vital works of authors familiar with the topic, alongside newspaper articles and press reports of the crimes, it can be concluded that Jack the Ripper was mentally disturbed and suffered from an antisocial personality disorder which was in part caused by the conditions in which he grew up. The killer's childhood would have been a very unhappy one due to the fact that he was growing up in a poverty-stricken part of the country while having to contend with an abusive mother and constant exposure to violence. This would have most certainly left some sort of a mark on the individual, and it led to the killer's lack of empathy. That the murders were committed in a very cold fashion is evidenced both by the calmness and nerve the killer displayed as he stayed behind to dissect the victims and in the contents of the letters which he sent to the police. There is also some evidence to substantiate the claim that he suffered from a more serious illness such as Bipolar disorder or Schizophrenia. However, these claims are not viable if we recognize that the main symptoms of these illnesses contradict the behaviour of Jack the Ripper and mostly ignore the evidence which proves that the murders were meticulously planned and committed by a very calm and composed individual. In spite of the vast amount of research, the identity of Jack the ripper remains a mystery, but it confirms that the legend of Jack the Ripper will never cease to exist and that much more research will be conducted in the future analysing the profile of the killer. By understanding how and why the killer committed the crimes, one day his identity could finally be found, and the mystery put to bed.

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