Maier, Moritz A.

Jill and Jack, the Rippers? : Gender Politics and Constructing the (Female) Sex Murderer

In:

Kerstin-Anja Münderlein (Ed.), Crime Fiction, Femininities and Masculinities : Proceedings of the Eighth Captivating Criminality Conference, Bamberg : University of Bamberg Press, 17p.. 2024. DOI: 10.20378/irb-92502

Bookpart - Published Version

DOI of the Article: 10.20378/irb-94625

Date of Publication: 15.04.2024

Jill and Jack, the Rippers? Gender Politics and Constructing the (Female) Sex Murderer

Moritz A. Maier, independent researcher 0009-0003-4660-6112

Abstract

Jack the Ripper has never been definitively identified. And yet, the image constructed by Ripperologists and writers of Ripper fiction alike is strangely unequivocal in one aspect of identity, the masculinity of the serial sex murderer already encapsulated in his name Jack. "Jill the Ripper" by contrast, a theory attached to writer Arthur Conan Doyle, basically has no impact on the mythic image of the gentleman killer in popular fiction. But why is this? This chapter departs from the traditional gender politics of the Ripper and examines instances of Ripper fiction wherein Jack turns out to be Jill. Presumably no closer to historical truth than any of the theories, stories of female Rippers perform cultural work beyond speculative solutions in the sense that they question how we read and mentally construct the sex killer and his relationship to his victims.

Feminist scholars criticise the one-dimensional portrayal of female characters in the Ripper story, stereotypically reduced to victims. Only occasionally, writers involve them in the narrative in a less passive manner, for instance focus on their experience or give them active roles, e.g. as (amateur) detectives. This sets up a binary opposition between them and the male killer, a conflict that almost amounts to 'gender war'. But what if these expectations are subverted? From partnered killers to solo female Rippers, can such texts tell a new narrative, offer a different perspective? Or do they remain caught up in the existing myth and essentially become accomplices in the project of patriarchal terrorism?

Keywords

Jack the Ripper, Jill the Ripper, serial killer, stereotypes, violence

Jack the Ripper, as is well known, is the identity universally given to the Whitechapel murderer, a serial killer at large in the London East End around 1888. Never conclusively identified, however, any identity attributed to 'Jack' cannot be anything but hypothetical, constructed out of fragmentary facts, circumstantial evidence and mostly speculation. Nevertheless, the name given to the killer, which originates from a taunting letter to the press supposedly written by the killer,[1] is not only a cultural fixture but in turn fixes the images conjured up when reading it. Certainly,

[1] The authenticity of the 'dear boss' letter remains questionable. Some Ripperologists claim it as support for various theories, while others consider it a hoax – possibly penned by a journalist to raise the public excitement. Either way, the signature as 'Jack the Ripper' is clearly indicative of someone consciously creating a persona rather than genuinely reflective of the author.

most people will be at least vaguely familiar with one or more of the theories; diverse as those may be, they are united by the stereotype of the solo male sex murderer. Or sometimes a conspiracy of them.

Jill the Ripper, by contrast, is the mostly unknown counterpart to the unidentified but male killer. According to the *Jack the Ripper A-Z* (*JtR: A-Z*), the idea is most notably associated with crime fiction author Arthur Conan Doyle (Begg et al. loc. 5089),[2] even though he never went so far as to incorporate it or the Ripper as such into his Sherlock Holmes fiction himself. In reality, Jill the Ripper refers to a small set of related obscure theories or is their amalgamation (loc. 5089). According to one, the Ripper might have been a midwife, the reasoning hinging solely on the premise that her professional status enables her to move about at all hours unsuspiciously and even provides an excuse if seen blood-smeared. Supposedly, as fellow female she would be able to approach her victims without alarming them. A second theory follows a similar logic with a man disguised as a midwife, which already brings us back to the male killer. At any rate, neither gives any reason or motive why said midwife would even want to murder, so the theory must be identified for what it is: a narrative construct and device familiar to readers of crime fiction, no more than a clever ploy to temporarily obscure the killer's identity rather than to explain it. This of course is mirrored by some of the Ripper fiction which uses the female killer simply as a novelty to surprise readers at the resolution as opposed to actually offering a solution. Nonetheless, what can narratives of female Rippers offer on a deeper level? By their existence as fictional counterpoint, they can shed light on how (female) serial killers are typically constructed and gendered in the public imagination as the following review of this specific subset of the corpus illustrates.

Reflections on the Status Quo of Phallic Violence

The Ripper is almost irrevocably envisioned as male because of at least two aspects. One is the identity, or rather persona, constructed around – and by – the name. A second aspect is the stereotype of the sex killer interwoven with the popular-cultural image of serial murder, of which Jack acts as a prototype. This idea is not a new one, it in fact predates serial murder as recognised phenomenon. It has persisted in Ripper discourse since Krafft-Ebing's contemporary concept of *Lustmord*, one of the male deviances collected as *Psychopathia Sexualis* (Curtis 176). The image of the male sex killer has since been only further hardened by feminist scholars such as

[2] A word on Ripperology, sources and references: adherence to academic standards is flexible within the genre, occasionally resulting in the proliferation of what basically become legends. Although the theory of a female (or crossdressing) Ripper is frequently associated with Doyle, direct citations are absent with allusions to private conversation and correspondence at best. Tellingly, the *JtR: A-Z*, itself a reference book, fails to provide concrete references but at least describes the entry as a "generic term for stories suggesting that the murderer was a woman" (loc. 5086), and lists more (and better referenced) examples prior to and after Doyle.

Jane Caputi, who in her 1987 book *The Age of Sex Crime* imbues the principally individual psychology of the deviant with an ideological dimension affecting if not shared by audiences as well as copycats. The phallic violence in which a hard object penetrates the female body is equated by Caputi, directly drawing from Krafft-Ebing, with a form of displaced sexual act or fetish (129-30, 134), but beyond the individual this is claimed to align with systemic patterns of patriarchal violence. Patriarchy not only produces the occasional sex murderer, but condones him, celebrates him, perpetuates him "as a *hero* to his culture" (50, original emphasis). The individual release of perverted drives or their satisfaction transforms into ritualised violence against symbols of femininity, an ideology linked to the Ripper also by Alan Moore in his graphic novel *From Hell* as "social magic" (Moore and Campbell 4.8, 4.30, also appendix I.11). Back on the individual level, it is not difficult to see how this perception conversely resonates with images projected back unto the unidentified killer. The identity of the killer who is still unidentified must remain fragmentary, speculative, and fictional; yet paradoxically, it is recognisable by expectations alone.

Expectations play a role from yet another perspective as well. Accepting the cultural existence of female serial killers, it is likewise clear that neither their perceived image nor status is equal to their male counterparts'. Caputi attests a certain element of hero worship for male serial killers in patriarchal culture, but the exact opposite appears to be going on with female serial killers. In two related articles, Caroline Picart develops a Gothic criminality in which the standard metaphor for the male serial killer is the glamorously sexy vampire, whereas her metaphor for female serial killers is Frankenstein's disfigured monster as a necessary counterpoint ("Crime and the Gothic" 6). While Picart's analysis heavily relies on fictionalisations of real-life killers, in particular films about Aileen Wuornos, and does not entirely match the purely fictional dazzling *femme fatales* of cinema, the Frankensteinian metaphor has implications for their perception. Constructed of parts, the female serial killer is an aberration containing traditionally male aggressiveness in a female body in which it culturally has no place. Then again, the shallowness of such sexism is easily revealed when the opposite is also true, as in the Hammer film *Dr. Jekyll and Sister Hyde* (1971), where rational masculinity is corrupted by the transformation into evil femininity, which unleashes the monstrous Jack or rather Jill the Ripper. But what if the text leaves this question of gender lingering indeterminate, forcing readers to wonder?

Defining Ripper Fiction

Speaking of contradictions, at this point my conception of what constitutes Ripper fiction warrants explanation. I define it as a highly inclusive and open-ended category primarily characterised by its fragmentary and intertextual nature. Put simply,

Ripper fiction concerns itself explicitly with the Whitechapel murderer and the historical case, implicitly mimics either, or otherwise invokes either in meaningful ways. This sounds deceptively simple yet implies a wide spectrum of possibilities as well as complexities. Consequently, Ripper fiction also covers a variety of media and genres from speculative fictionalisation about the actual historical case to symbolic work that merely appropriates the character for completely different contexts. In other words, it ranges from true crime to pure fantasy, from rational detective story to irrational horror and even sensational adventure. Either way, the disassociation of character from plot, as well as the fragmentary nature of either with no definitive ur-text, result in what Alexandra Warwick once called a "narrative machine" (84). It produces endless possibilities for narratives, and hence endless intertextual connections to give the stories significance in turn. Given such a loose definition of Ripper fiction and the abundance of material, and acknowledging a consequently selective analysis, what are the possible narratives and how do they empirically stack up?[3] This question requires a very brief dissection of the Ripper myth as a whole and the gender dynamics within it to contextualise and differentiate available roles and the female Ripper subset productively.

Introducing the villain: Historically, the Whitechapel killer, though never identified, has been envisioned in practically every theory and representation as male by default. This was only further reinforced by the taunting 'dear boss' letter supplying the name Jack and a melodramatic villain personality. Most Ripper fiction reflects this male persona, merely over time shifting his narrative role from antagonist to occasional villain protagonist. Aside from Doyle's contemporary midwife theory, the female Ripper is the absolute exception to the rule and relatively recent. This move may be based on or at least be inspired by recent speculation, but more often seems simply a narrative device to disrupt expectations within the genre. The 2017 novel *Jack the Ripper Is Not a Man* casts historical Ripper suspect James Maybrick's wife Florence, and thus exploits the controversy still surrounding the Maybrick diary, while the 2021 movie *Ripper Untold* sets up a Jekyll/Hyde-like plot involving a pathologically alcoholic police surgeon, only to have him exonerated when his jealous wife is implausibly revealed to be murderously insane.

Falling victim: The victims historically appear to be invariably presumed impoverished female prostitutes, although that occupational status has been challenged recently by historian Hallie Rubenhold (2020). Most fictions simply follow this prem-

[3] Given the mass of Ripper fiction even under narrower definitions combined with the never-ending flood of new titles, a fully exhaustive empirical study now seems almost impossible; commendable efforts are Coville and Lucanio 1999, Meikle 2002, and chapters in Woods and Baddeley 2009. Despite the lack of focus on female Rippers hitherto, the selective corpus here can be considered fairly comprehensive and is a byproduct of research for my own forthcoming book on the Ripper myth and its fictionalisations.

ise, sometimes merely substituting other women of low repute for explicit sex workers. Frequently, this status directly justifies their demise, as for Lulu in *Pandora's Box* (1928). Male victims, appearing occasionally, must be differentiated as victims of circumstance rather than targets, unless part of a feminist copycat revenge plot conceit, for instance see the 1999 erotic thriller movie *Jill Rips* (based on Frederic Lindsay's eponymous 1987 novel) and to a lesser degree also the unfinished podcast *Jane the Ripper* (2019-?), or the logical consequence of gender-swapping shenanigans of the podcast *Jackie the Ripper* (2021-2022). What has changed recently is the victim's role within the narratives, from passive objects providing spectacle and clues to more pronounced and active roles as well as sympathetic portrayals. Examples are the graphic novel *From Hell* (1989-1998), or 2019's vengeful *Get Jack: A Killer Musical*.

Playing detective: In fiction, the distribution of stereotypical Victorian (professional) gender roles remained firm until recently, for instance in the German Sat.1 TV production *Jack the Ripper: Eine Frau jagt einen Mörder* (2016), where protagonist photographer Anna Kosminski seeks to prove her brother innocent by identifying the true Ripper. Tellingly, though, she remains an amateur detective and ultimately needs rescuing by her love interest Inspector Abberline. A similar photographer, added as secondary protagonist in the latest comic adaptation of *Yours Truly, Jack the Ripper* (2010), fares worse; true to Bloch's original, the Ripper triumphs. This seems to be not an isolated trend; the last five to ten years have seen a noticeable rise of often self-published romance and young adult fiction involving girl detectives, of which *Stalking Jack the Ripper* (2016) is only one example that made it to the best-seller lists. One notable early exception is Mrs Bunting in *The Lodger* (1913), who is described by Elyssa Warkentin as an early pre-Marple female amateur proto-detective, who snoops after her suspicious lodger (xxi).

Finding Complicity: Traditionally, the Ripper is envisioned as a solo perpetrator. With male Rippers, the major exception since the 1980s is the Masonic conspiracy narrative, in which the killer has accomplices or at least is covered up by complicit elements in the police force. The few female Rippers in fiction, to my knowledge, operate exclusively solo. Interestingly though, there are a few instances of partnered offenders, where the male Ripper has a female accomplice, as in Bloch's *Night of the Ripper* (1984), which highlights an uneven relationship of power. Bloch casts semi-historical suspect Alexander Pedachenko and invented Eva Sloane as murderous partners, yet the pair's status is uneven: as in their professional roles, a doctor and a nurse, he operates with sharp blade while she holds and strangles. And of course, he is semi-factual, she is fictional, as if to further underline their inequality. This is not the end of female complicity in Ripper fiction, however. Mrs Bunting is not an accomplice to the murders but is complicit in harbouring her lodger despite her

strong suspicions. The element of perceived female complicity in the Ripper narrative is even more insidious, though, when it comes to the victims. In contemporary press discourse, they were practically accused of bringing it upon themselves by their disreputable lifestyle or disregarding warnings to stay off the streets instead of presenting themselves to their would-be killer. Thus states Mrs Bunting, "[i]t serves that sort of hussy right!" (Lowndes, "The Lodger" 267). So, where does this uneven distribution of power, responsibility, and agency lead the female Ripper?

Who is Jill the Ripper? A Typological Identity Parade

Aside from Florence Maybrick in *Jack the Ripper Is Not a Man* and Elizabeth Cree in *Dan Leno & the Limehouse Golem*, hardly any fictional representation of Jill the Ripper is based on a historical person. Even if the latter novel creates a compelling illusion through historiographic metafiction, what Lizzie the Golem has in common with most representations of Jill is that they may pretend historicity but in fact arguably avoid getting too close to the actual documented case. Stories about Jill frequently invent either plots set in the context surrounding or adjacent to the historical murders or move away from the original setting entirely and create Ripper-inspired imitations transposed to a therefore unlimited range of settings. This makes the identification of Jill the Ripper with any given historical figure a mostly moot exercise, but consequentially draws attention to the issues of stereotypes and themes in so far as focus shifts from limiting historical fidelity to a wider scope of imaginary scenarios in which nevertheless commonalities manifest and become apparent. Both perspectives offer interesting frameworks to categorise the few distinctions apparent across representations of Jill.

A first category can be termed the '**hysterical Ripper**' and is the oldest type of female Ripper. It connects with assumptions about hysteria already floated in the context of the midwife theories after Doyle, some of which speculated female agitation variably caused by jilted jealousy or scorn (e.g. a convicted abortionist supposedly turned against the source of her criminal punishment) (Begg et al. 5089). This partially reflects lacking imagination concerning feminine motives for murder and partially has to do with limited understanding of, yet nonetheless socially prevalent concepts such as hysteria, mania, madness, (mis)used to label irrational behaviour. Consequently, the hysterical Ripper as a category is in a sense equally vague and confused; then again, its elements feed into most of the other manifestations. Examples of mania and mental illness include for instance the 1971 Hammer horror movie *Hands of the Ripper*, in which the Ripper's daughter suffers the trauma of seeing her mother killed by her father and is somehow triggered to also kill when conditions recall this childhood experience. In *Ripper: Letter from Hell*, a 2001 slasher movie, protagonist Molly masquerades as the survivor of a prior serial killer massacre which she may have conducted herself and ends up in an asylum cell which insinuates that

her study of psychology and psychopaths was a manifestation of her own mania. In *Ripper Untold*, the killer is the hysterical and pathologically jealous wife of Locque, police surgeon and part-time red herring, bent on retaking control over her husband. Mrs Bunting in the 2009 version of *The Lodger* suffers from manic and hallucinatory episodes about her stillborn child as well as "a lodger, whom she invented recently, a kind of romantic fantasy, [a] self-delusion that she was not the person imitating Jack the Ripper and killing these young women" (*Lodger* 2009, 1:25:15). All of the narratives expressly connect murderousness and mania in its feminine-coded form hysteria but fail to deliver much beyond this since mental illness itself is a fairly intangible concept in its folkloric or popular cultural understanding (as opposed to in clinical contexts).

A second category can be termed **'victim turned avenger'** and hinges on themes of revenge. The crucial aspect is the object at whom this revenge is directed and its causality. In one sense, the neglected wife in *Ripper Untold*, too, performs some form of revenge when she punishes prostitutes for her husband's infidelities, and similar motives could in principle be projected into the hysterical midwife narrative. Likewise, the aspect of victimhood has appeared elsewhere; the killer in *Ripper: Letter from Hell* is initially depicted and negotiated as survivor of a prior serial killer attack in her youth even if it is later insinuated that this might already have been her work, yet as follows there is logically no apparent motive besides mental disorder. However, the combination of themes of victimhood and revenge produces a distinct set of stories resonating with the larger cultural discussion of gendered violence that becomes visible in the following texts.

An early example is *Jill Rips*. The alternative title for the home video release, *Jill the Ripper*, makes the allusion even more overt, but as with other examples in this chapter this manoeuvre is more a case of Ripper exploitation than denoting a text about 'the' female Ripper. Rather, 'a' female Ripper is at large in present-day San Francisco, and it cannot even be stated that this is a copycat case in the strict sense since it remains ambivalent whether imitation is the killer's intention or merely the result of interpretation – in a twofold sense. The film makes the connection explicit in a newspaper article reporting on a female Jack the Ripper, but this speculation on the part of a fictive reporter of course also doubles as a marker to reinforce the intertextual point of reference for the reader or audience. Arguably, this move is a necessary one because the actual similarities are vague enough to slip by or be dismissed: while there are slashed throats, mutilations by knife, and sexual scandal, instead of the historical alleged prostitutes murdered in the notably impoverished part of town, the victims in *Jill Rips* are powerful businessmen moving as clients in the high-class circles of S&M culture. At best, the victims function less as an analogy between original and copycat than as the exact opposite, a stark contrast that highlights differences in the gendered distribution of power and agency between both situations.

Nevertheless, the exploitative invocation of the cultural signifier 'Ripper' and the reversal of gender roles associated with it posit the killer as an avenger out to seek retribution for wrongdoings against herself and women in general, overlapping the historical violence against prostitutes in Whitechapel and modern-day sex workers.

This theme has become more prolific and popular recently, appearing in multiple stories nearly simultaneously, notably resonating with emerging cultural developments such as the '#MeToo' movement. One such example is *Jane the Ripper*, a crime thriller produced in podcast form which ran for six episodes from 2019-2020. It unfortunately remains unfinished[4] but is remarkable for the current context in its conspicuous absence of engagement with the gender switch of its killer for most of it so far. Although the idea itself is obviously present from the onset, unavoidably looming from the paratext of the title, this does not find its way into the story proper until much later. In classic crime fiction fashion, the perpetrator remains absent from the narrative until one of the characters, Claire, is herself attacked at the cliffhanger closing of episode 3; up to this point, the killer exists (in a narratological sense) only in the speculations of Detectives Liam Morris and Holly Grant as they deal with the aftermath of each crime. This is also where the Ripper angle is shoehorned in because the setting is present-day Bristol, not Whitechapel in 1888, and the text consequently is Ripper copycat fiction rather than 'true' Ripper fiction, a point made mostly through Detective Morris who insists that the inflicted knife wounds remarkably resemble those of the original Ripper. The same seemingly applies to the choice of victims, women with an allegedly disreputable way of life, without the text bothering to make any of this much more than vaguely explicit apart from name-dropping Jack and his infamous moniker denoting the distinctive *modus operandi*. Nevertheless, the insinuation summons the image of the Ripper which henceforth must inform the imagination of the listener with all the intertextual implications this entails, i.e. the potential imposition of the popular cultural canon or even specific Ripperology possibly known to the individual recipient (one example the text obviously appropriates from Ripper lore is the existence of another 'double event'). When the killer eventually enters into the narrative discourse during the attack on Claire (e3, 30:55[5]), he manifests in typical Ripper fashion as a shadowy intangible form. He is as an active presence wreaking havoc yet remaining bare of any identifiable features. This is a genre convention typically achieved in visual media by camera work keeping the perpetrator partially off-screen or obscuring techniques of shadow play during scenes of action (which often is used to at least make

[4] It appears that the production of originally ten episodes was stopped short in early 2020 by the COVID-19 pandemic. A post from 9 July 2020 on the Facebook page of the project cites this and further complicating circumstances such as the concurrent issue of police brutality that fuelled the 'Black Lives Matter' movement as momentary cultural deterrents. As of February 2023, no new episode has been published.

[5] A note on podcast timecodes: references may be only approximate since platforms, in this instance Audible, have started to insert ads into streams and downloads.

visible culturally entrenched iconography such as knives, top hats, and opera cloaks that make the Ripper immediately recognisable in his function as the archetypal gentleman killer, though not his specific identity), or in narrative media simply by omitting any descriptive details. Since this podcast is basically a radio play, a mixed methodology applies; in this instance, the narrative voice makes an effort to obscure the attacker's gender by the use of ambiguous pronouns such as 'they' and 'their' rather than the cultural default 'his' or a revealing 'her' (alternatively, in an instance of internal focalisation the victim herself might simply be oblivious – this is reinforced by a revisitation of the scene in a nightmare by Claire, which highlights explicitly and repeatedly the shadowy aspect in the description of the assailant (e4, 09:30)), and yet the sound effects underpinning the scene feature male grunting, which reinforces the image of a 'Jack' at work.

One significant difference from history is the existence of a survivor, Claire; this allows not only for the narrative (re)construction of the crime by the investigators after the fact, but a narrative account of its experience. Claire must work through not only her trauma, but also deal with instances of victim shaming (e4, 28:00). From here on, things get more interesting as the relative focus on the victim takes a darker turn; the victim's feelings of powerlessness slowly transform into aggression and dreams of revenge. Indeed, she manages to find her suspect and take her empowering revenge, inadvertently complicating the serial killer case by creating the echo of the historical 'double event' and leaving clues that point to a female perpetrator. At least temporarily, this is ostensible empowerment in two different senses; one is on a level of personal satisfaction, the other rewrites the narrative (albeit accidentally and to Claire's disadvantage) as the usually so dominant original (in this case original copycat) is further obscured by her, a copycat's copycat. Unfortunately, it can only be speculated how this unfinished narrative might resolve itself, but the integrity of the temporary empowerment must be regarded as questionable and indeed collapses again in related narratives.

If *Jane the Ripper* offers both a male Ripper copycat targeting female victims and doubles him with a female secondary copycat targeting men, another podcast named *Jackie the Ripper* and running for 15 episodes from 2021-2022 takes a different approach reminiscent of *Jill Rips* but with a postmodern twist. One more text set in the present, this one takes interesting measures to conflate Ripper history and his story. Unlike the Ripper signifier simply imposed on a copycat as in the previous two examples, *Jackie the Ripper* deliberately blurs boundaries by superimposing as well as inverting the historical narrative over its own fiction. For instance, crime scenes match up and the victims (and other characters) are all named after historical figures, sharing surnames and only slightly adjusting first names (e.g. victim Martha Tabram becomes Marcus Tabram; there is a Chief Inspector Donna Swanson), which helps to construct the illusion of originality and insinuate that Jackie is not a

copycat but *the* Ripper transposed to the present. This can apply only within the storyworld, of course, since from an extratextual perspective the work is clearly an inverted derivative resulting in the opposite effect of recognition, which still has consequences for how Jackie is constructed and perceived. Whereas the avengers of the previous texts are obscure and silent, speaking only figuratively through the bodies they leave behind, Jackie is just as vocal as Jack the Ripper was with his alleged letters. Likewise, Jackie communicates via social media proudly announcing her (gender) identity, garnering not just antipathy but also admiration from her audience: "I like her... I like her, I think she's got style!" someone exclaims during the title sequence each episode. As this already suggests, the inversion seems to be largely a playful game and is full of comical moments, often related to inverted situations, gender stereotypes or genital puns, but there is also a more serious note to this. Although it transpires that Jackie is another victim of childhood trauma, she furiously refutes this as a patronizing simplification of her motives when confronted with this in the final episode showdown. "Shut up, you transparent arsehole! I don't need help now, I needed help then!" she retorts (e15, 10:20). However, she also dismisses the feminist vengeance angle: "You think I'm mean because of men. [laughter] Men don't define women . . ., I made my own journey. I wrote my own story. I'm not a man-hater, I'm a murderer! I'm a serial killer, I'm an icon!" (e15, 10:35). She draws the line in terms of gender when it comes to recognition, where in the public eye only men like Dahmer and Bundy are allowed to be truly evil, while women could only be evil because of men's wrongdoings, thus resonating with Picart's dichotomy. Ultimately, however, her aspirations and confidence are her downfall and end her project of female empowerment. Unlike the forever unbound male historical Ripper, the female Ripper is arrested, rendered powerless, safe.

A quite similar project to gain personal infamy and celebrity is thwarted for Elizabeth Cree in *Dan Leno & the Limehouse Golem*. Concentrating on her character and ignoring the novel's metafictional bent and its crucial intertextual flirtation with De Quincey's "On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts", Lizzie's project is arguably worse off by paradoxically both succeeding and failing spectacularly. Taking up the previous angle, her murder career can either be read as a quest to wreak vengeance on those who wronged her or as petty and opportunistic self-centredness. Parallel to the struggle for female empowerment, in effect limited to her own benefits, her concern is with artistic recognition. In this she fails, because the persona of the Golem she creates takes on a life of its own, leaving her behind to fall into obscurity. Like the roughly formed creature of folklore, the features of the killer disappear in disparity because her murderous career is barely uniform enough to be recognisable (prostitutes, a male Jewish scholar, an entire shopkeeper family), and many more of her private murders are not even registered. While she, the bad wife, is executed for the poisoning of her husband and doomed to obscurity, it is only the unidentified Golem which enters into legend.

Another, quite different approach can be termed '**queer Ripper**', one more type rendered problematic by its tendency to interweave its nominal subject, female killers defying sexual and gender heteronormativity, with secondary, decidedly gothic themes of the Other, transformation, and the unnatural, often manifesting as supernatural. Examples include for instance *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll & Ms Hyde*, *Jaclyn the Ripper*, and again *Dan Leno & the Limehouse Golem*. The latter novel along with its film adaptation ranges at the more rational end, despite its otherwise pervading gothic influences. Deviances of gender as well as sexuality relate to both Lizzie and the Golem. On the music hall stage, she portrays male roles, which also reflects private predispositions including her penchant for masculine violence. However, where her (gender) identity is difficult to pinpoint (the text at times insinuates lesbian relations with fellow performers along sadomasochistic favours to her manager, at times expresses asexuality in marriage; she prefers to adopt and 'live' her male roles as identities off stage), that of the Golem is impossible – at least in theory. A sexless creation in folklore animated by inscription of the Hebrew word for 'truth' (Pulham 160), the persona of the killer is instead brought to life by imaginations of a male killer, reflected by the set of male suspects which in the film version each in turn visually re-enact the murders on screen, while the possibility of a female killer is narratively denied. Even when the reader must guess Lizzie's murderous guilt after the ambiguous denouement, what is left to the public within the text is the monstrous woman in the form of the bad wife (breaker of the sanctimony of marriage and husband poisoner), executed and rendered safe, as opposed to the monstrous but unidentifiable serial killer remaining unchecked. In terms of queering the Ripper, the Golem therefore stands out for three reasons from the rest of Ripper fiction. The first is the relative rarity of the female killer, the second is her complex but plain queerness. This is in contrast to serial killer fiction in general, where it is a common trope embodied in such figures as Buffalo Bill or Hannibal Lecter (Picart "Crime and the Gothic" 6). Not so in Ripper fiction, where the usual *modus operandi* both constructs and in turn depends on masculine violence to be recognisable – and this is the third stand-out aspect – when this is how the gap is filled contrary to apparent fact as long as there is ambiguity.

Other Ripper fictions toying with ideas of queerness are less subtle, going for the theme of metamorphosis and literal transformations instead. *Dr Jekyll & Sister Hyde* is a gender-twisting spin on the infamous novella and Ripper-crossover, in which the doctor's experiment with splitting his personality into a good and an evil part does not produce the atavistic criminal troglodyte Mr Hyde of the original text, but instead transforms him into the attractive Sister Hyde. Unlike the unspecified chemicals in the original, this time female sexual hormones are necessary for the transformative potion and altered sexuality is the by-product. Whereas in the original the stock of chemicals simply diminishes and drives Jekyll to despair because he will no longer be able to transform back from troglodyte to gentleman, stuck in the

disgraced form of Hyde, in the adaptation already the substance or rather the act of its procuring is correlated with evil. In a spin on the well-established duality between Jekyll/Hyde, good and evil, the text frames Jekyll as well-meaning, restricting himself to harvest the necessary hormones from female corpses as a necessary evil, while Hyde resorts to more immediate measures to prolong her selfish existence by simply producing corpses. Thus, it is kind Jekyll who eventually pays the price for Hyde's promiscuous and murderous drives, framing femininity as monstrous as opposed to benevolent masculinity. At least, this is what the text suggests on the surface, although just as in the original novella things are less clear-cut upon closer inspection.

Without the presence of such a canonical key intertext in direct juxtaposition, *Jaclyn the Ripper* is even more blunt. A sequel to *Time after Time*, here the transformation is explained away by sci-fi technobabble as an accident with the time machine, dropping off the Ripper in present-day Los Angeles stuck in a woman's body due to an irreversible genetic mix-up. Ludicrous premise aside, the text is relevant for its clumsy negotiation of the difference between male and female versions of the killer. On the one hand, this is reflected in the flimsy rationale "*Because all chromosomes are not created equal*" (Alexander 294; original emphasis). Protagonist H.G. Wells, slipping into language of sexual domination, reasons a latent prior genetic deficiency in the Ripper has been reconstituted. Alluding (erroneously[6]) to "classic Turner syndrome", a "pitifully weak Y chromosome" is "trampled by a full-blown X chromosome" (22) and the Ripper's body is overtaken by monstrous femininity. On the other hand, said femininity is portrayed as stereotypically and unbelievably as only a male author can fantasise. Appalled and yet strangely self-conscious about the new body Jack hates, this version of the Ripper has to deal with sexual desires and even love which, although not staying her hand, make her emotional after killing her lover, a detective on the hunt for the killer. Ultimately, then, reconstructing Jack as Jaclyn remains a hollow gesture rather than serious engagement with female serial killers. Despite appearances, the narrative remains largely phallocentric, a point reinforced by the fact that the Ripper started out as an inarguably male monster (there is indeed the entire prequel) and voices his disgust for his new body throughout most of the novel, reflecting his still masculine personality and perspective. While the hesitant adjustment of Jaclyn to an existence now governed less by rational decisions than irrational impulses driven by hitherto unknown female hormones echoes the transformation of Dr Jekyll into Sister Hyde, both women cannot be female serial killers but stay caricatures of how male authors might imagine them. In the end it all comes back to Jack, whose masculinity is – at the most –

[6] If at all, the description is closer to Klinefelter syndrome.

compromised as deficient to distance his feminine-coded monstrosity from the masculine norm: as Wells reasons about genetic disorders, "that would explain Jack the Ripper's murderous psychiatric pathology" (294).

'The possessed Ripper': A fourth category moves even further along the gradient to the supernatural Other and involves the theme of spiritual possession. This topic is worthy of a full study of its own but must be touched on here for its implications in a few directly affected female Ripper narratives. Whereas the above texts suggest monstrous femininity taking over masculine rationality in abstract terms, the possession of a vessel through the spirit of Jack, i.e. an individualised entity and personality, operates on a different order. Although sex and, more importantly, gender of supernatural entities and spirits are open for debate, it is telling how this is framed differently across the corpus. Jacks are commonly possessed by evil forces and the Other, sometimes literally aliens, which arguably function as a partial excuse for masculine violence caused by outside influence, but this is less the case with Jills. *Hands of the Ripper* frames Anna as possessed by the spirit of her father, an only crudely veiled metaphor for her resurfacing childhood trauma. "The Final Stone" operates with a different metaphor; here the Ripper is an ancestor of the current killer, which ambiguously may be read as literal or as her obsession with the Ripper story manifested, and a similar perspective can apply to Mrs Bunting and her perhaps real, perhaps imaginary lodger in the 2009 version. The point is, however, that in each case the possessing influence is definitive: Jack. Only "The Final Stone" is an exception (because within the story the ancestral Ripper was ironically the wife of a male suspect). This has implications for the agency of the female killer; Jill is not acting of her own free will but rendered out of control as either driven by some mental disorder or steered by the will of another.

One last category, **'the indeterminate Ripper'**, has no attached character type but is its antithesis; yet it surfaces persistently, particularly in the later texts where it touches on the more abstract themes of ambiguity and expectations, and their media-specificity. Unlike the majority of stories which suddenly reveal female killers as an implausible final twist to surprise genre readers, two exemplary texts, one pulpy, one literary, actively play with these very expectations in a more productive manner or at least demonstrate their cultural entrenchment: William F. Nolan's short story "The Final Stone" (1986) and Peter Ackroyd's historical metafiction *Dan Leno & the Limehouse Golem* (1994), and their film adaptations from 1985 and 2017, respectively. In "The Final Stone", the Ripper reappears in Arizona in the present, when the titular final stone is placed back on London Bridge, transported, and reconstructed there. In the text, the Ripper is present from the beginning, but only as a disembodied voice via stream of consciousness. Finally, the killer is revealed to be Lenore Bascum, a family descendant. Yet the narrative remains ambiguous between supernatural and uncanny, and whose stream of consciousness is presented; Lenore

may have been literally possessed by the Ripper's spirit (just like Jack's daughter in *Hands of the Ripper*) or the voice is her own, a psychological explanation rendering her a copycat. Tellingly, the adaptation leaves no such ambiguities. The male Ripper is depicted literally materialising in Dracula-like fashion out of thin fog and commences to run amok. Additionally, he is not finally shot by protagonist Angie, but by the detective played by David Hasselhoff, her lover.

The Limehouse Golem is more intriguing. Likewise ambiguous yet much more complex, the novel goes out of its way to insinuate that the titular killer is male. 'His' own voice is presented in the form of entries from a journal attributed to John Cree, which the chapter structure as well as narrative misdirection further connect to him as not suspect but openly identified. And yet, the denouement appears to reveal the unreliable protagonist and wife Elizabeth Cree as not only the killer but also writer of the hoax journal, or so she claims. While ultimately even this must remain ambiguous, the text unmasks the reading process and the mechanisms that have almost naturally conjured the imagination and roles attributed to the male monster and the innocent damsel. The film, albeit restructured as detective story, achieves a similar effect by completely different means appropriate to its own medium. While the journal is unattributed in this version, its existence is not only known within the story but serves as the primary clue for the detective. Thus it is the detective who serves in the role as intermediary reader, and it is he who visualises the killings. Acted out in the theatre of his mind by the various male suspects, their alternating portrayals reveal not only the detective's subjectivity but also his and thereby the unresisting viewer's gender bias. Tellingly, however, neither novel nor film can resolve the bias, only make it visible. Within the story, Lizzie never achieves the fame she craves as an original artist of murder in her own right, but only solidifies the legend of the unidentified Golem.

Empowerment or Illusion: The Female Ripper and Her Discontents

Despite their relative minority role within the corpus of Ripper fiction at large, Jill the Ripper narratives are far from a homogenous subset. And yet, despite the more or less diverse cast of types, Jill is just as much a split personality as Jack is, but for different reasons. More explicitly framed by gender differences than the normative narratives of unambiguous male monsters, female Ripper stories are torn between making monsters of women, the demonisation of femininity on the one hand, and the struggle for female empowerment and gender equality for better or worse, given the nature of the leading figure. This in itself reveals problematic underlying gender dynamics and politics in the perception of serial killers and the corresponding (sub)genre in crime fiction. Whereas criminological studies (for instance Gurian 2021) slowly dismantle the stereotypical differences between male and female serial killers, the fact is that in the cultural sphere their representations are much more

distorted as well as entrenched after they overcame the hurdle to manifest in the first place; after all, "the idea of them as a recognisable entity, the serial killer, is a social construction, emerging in the 1980s as a perceived new phenomenon taking a stereotypical form" (Dyer 19) it arguably requires to even become recognisable. Although the Ripper crimes predate this and therefore are an individualised image before becoming category, most Jill the Ripper stories appear later as if in reaction to a new paradigm.

However, if Jill the Ripper represents a challenge to serial killer stereotypes and gender norms, it is apparent she faces resistance in more ways than by sheer number of publications. On the one hand, some of these stories simply turn and exploit different stereotypes of feminine monstrosity retrofitted into a masculine framework they can hardly escape even through literal metamorphosis. On the other hand, projects of female empowerment are frequently undermined (often by conventions of the genre of crime fiction), considering they nevertheless deal with a criminal, who then is rendered powerless and faces justice unlike the historical perpetrator and the myth. Nevertheless, arguably slow progress is discernible in the renegotiation of roles and stereotypes of the victims, and even if Jill the Ripper stories fail to significantly change the popular narrative, some of them make its cultural construction visible, sometimes by breaking expectations and temporarily disrupting patterns, sometimes by making fun of them and even the underlying language when for once – to quote the title sequence of *Jackie the Ripper* – "Whitechapel in East London is home to not a manhunt, but a womanhunt".

Works Cited

Ackroyd, Peter. *Dan Leno & the Limehouse Golem*. Vintage, 1998.

Alexander, Karl. *Jaclyn the Ripper*. Forge, 2009.

Begg, Paul, et al. *The Complete Jack the Ripper A to Z*. Rev. ed. John Blake, 2015.

Belloc Lowndes, Marie. "The Lodger." *McClure's Magazine*, January 1911, pp. 262-77.

---. *The Lodger*, edited by Elyssa Warkentin, Cambridge Scholars, 2015.

Bloch, Robert. "A Toy for Juliette." 1967. *Dangerous Visions*, edited by Harlan Ellison, Gollancz, 2012, pp. 125-39.

---. *The Night of the Ripper*. Grafton, 1986.

Bridge Across Time. Directed by E.W. Swackhamer, written by William F. Nolan, performances by David Hasselhoff and Stepfanie Kramer, NBC, 1985.

Caputi, Jane. *The Age of Sex Crime*. Bowling Green State UP, 1987.

Coville, Gary, and Patrick Lucanio. *Jack the Ripper: His Life and Crimes in Popular Entertainment*. McFarland, 1999.

Curtis, L. Perry, Jr. *Jack the Ripper and the London Press*. Yale UP, 2001.

Die Büchse der Pandora (Pandora's Box). Directed by Georg Wilhelm Pabst, performance by Louise Brooks, Nero-Film, 1928.

Dr. Jekyll and Sister Hyde. Directed by Roy Ward Baker, performances by Ralph Bates and Martine Beswick, MGM, 1971.

Dyer, Richard. *Lethal Repetition: Serial Killing in European Cinema*. BFI, 2016.

Faye, Lyndsay. "The Sparrow and the Lark." *The Big Book of Jack the Ripper*, edited by Otto Penzler, Vintage, 2016, pp. 192-209.

Garner, Richard. *Jill the Ripper*. Umbria, 2018.

Grant, Charles L. "My Shadow Is the Fog."1988. *The Big Book of Jack the Ripper*, edited by Otto Penzler, Vintage, 2016, pp. 871-77.

Gurian, Elizabeth A. *Serial and Mass Murder: Understanding Multicide through Offending Patterns, Explanations, and Outcomes*. Routledge, 2021.

Hands of the Ripper. Directed by Peter Sasdy, performances by Eric Porter and Angharad Rees, Hammer, 1971.

Jack the Ripper: Eine Frau jagt einen Mörder. Directed by Sebastian Niemann, performances by Sonja Gerhardt, Falk Hentschel, and Peter Gilbert Cotton, Sat.1, 29 Nov. 2016.

Jackie the Ripper. Directed by Adam Jarrell, written by Joel Emery, performances by Paul Waggott, Jennifer Tierney, and Acushla-Tara Kupe, Holy Smokes/Stak, 2021-2022. 3 seasons, 15 episodes.

Jane the Ripper. Created by Brittany Burke and Ian McGowan, performances by Adam Baugher, Brittany Burke, and S. Michael Clericus, Calamity Cast, 2019-2020. 6 episodes.

Jill Rips. Directed by Anthony Hickox, performances by Dolph Lundgren and Danielle Brett, Phoenician, 2000.

Lansdale, Joe R., et al. *Robert Bloch's Yours Truly, Jack the Ripper*. Collected ed., IDW, 2010.

Leconte, Pascale. *Jack the Ripper Is Not a Man*. Translated by Laurent Thompson and Laura Jones, self-published, 2017.

Lindsay, Frederic. *Jill Rips*. Andre Deutsch, 1987.

Maniscalco, Kerri. *Stalking Jack the Ripper*. Patterson, 2016.

Meikle, Denis. *Jack the Ripper: The Murders and the Movies*. Reynolds & Hearn, 2002.

Moore, Alan, and Eddie Campbell. *From Hell*. Collected ed., Knockabout Comics, 2000.

Nolan, William F. "The Final Stone." 1986. *The Big Book of Jack the Ripper,* edited by Otto Penzler, Vintage, 2016, pp. 781-93.

Penzler, Otto, editor. *The Big Book of Jack the Ripper*. Vintage, 2016.

Picart, Caroline Joan (Kay) S. "Crime and the Gothic: Sexualizing Serial Killers." *Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2006, pp. 1-18.

Picart, Caroline Joan, and Cecil Greek. "The Compulsion of Real/Reel Serial Killers and Vampires: Toward a Gothic Criminology." *Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2003, pp. 39-68.

Pulham, Patricia. "Mapping Histories: The Golem and the Serial Killer in White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings and Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem." *Haunting and Spectrality in Neo-Victorian Fiction*, edited by R. Arias and Patricia Pulham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, pp. 157-79.

Ripper: Letter from Hell. Directed by John Eyres, performances by A.J. Cook, Bruce Payne, and Jürgen Prochnow, Prophecy Entertainment and Studio Eight, 2001.

Ripper: Untold. Directed by Steve Lawson, performances by Jonathan Hansler, Phil Molloy, and Sylvia Robson, Creativ Studios/High Fliers, 2021.

Rubenhold, Hallie. *The Five: The Untold Lives of the Women Killed by Jack the Ripper*. Black Swan, 2020.

Stashower, Daniel. "The Ripper Experience." *The Big Book of Jack the Ripper*, edited by Otto Penzler, Vintage, 2016, pp. 621-32.

The Limehouse Golem. Directed by Juan Carlos Medina, performances by Bill Nighy, Olivia Cooke, and Douglas Booth, Concorde, 2016.

The Lodger. Directed by David Ondaatje, performances by Alfred Molina, Hope Davis, and Shane West, Sony, 2009.

Warkentin, Elyssa. "Introduction." *The Lodger*, by Marie Belloc Lowndes, edited by Elyssa Warkentin, Cambridge Scholars, 2015, pp. xi-xxx.

Warwick, Alexandra. "Blood and Ink: Narrating the Whitechapel Murders." *Jack the Ripper: Media, Culture, History*, edited by Alexandra Warwick and Martin Willis, Manchester UP, 2007, pp. 71-87.

Winger, C.F. Kip, and Damien Gray. *Get Jack: A Killer Musical*. VBI, 2019.

Woods, Paul, and Gavin Baddeley. *Saucy Jack: The Elusive Ripper*. Ian Allan, 2009.