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# Personating the Ripper: civilian performance and the melodramatic mode

Abstract: This article illuminates how the Ripper murders and their 1888 coverage re-theatricalised not only London, but also many provincial towns. It looks beyond canonical theatrical contexts for, and responses to the Ripper, exploring extra-theatrical, popular performance 'scenarios' by civilian men, outside professional sites of theatricalised or medicalised spectatorship. It examines how civilian men personated key figures in the Ripper 'scenario': the plain-clothes detective, the Ripper's female victims; and the Ripper himself. These civilian performances illuminate our understandings of *fin-de-siècle* masculinity and its intersections with the melodramatic mode in theatre and culture. Simultaneously interrogating these performances through the lenses of *fin-de-siècle* theatre culture, the periodical press, and the anthropology of ritual magic reveals the cultural complexities of the 'personations' happening in streets and homes across the United Kingdom.

Keywords: Ripper, Hyde, personation, melodrama, detective, cross-dressing

The Whitechapel murders remain Britain's most famous unsolved crimes. An unknown serial killer (possibly self-)styled as 'Jack the Ripper' murdered at least five, and perhaps as many as eleven women in London's East End, between April 1888 and February 1891, with panic at its zenith between autumn 1888 and spring 1889. This article illuminates how the Ripper murders and their 1888 coverage theatricalised and re-theatricalised not only the East End, the original 'theatre of [the Ripper's] atrocities', or London, but many British provincial towns and cities.[1] Previous scholarship has detected a range of professional theatrical contexts for, and responses to, the Ripper, including Richard Mansfield's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1888), Henry Irving's *Macbeth* (1888), Sims and Perritt's *London Day By Day* (1889) and Thomas Barry's Whitechapel waxworks.[2] This article looks beyond the professional theatre. Within performance studies, Diana Taylor and Justin Blum depict the cultural 'scenario' as a unit of enacted narrative which 'bears the weight of accumulative repeats'.[3] This article explores the extra-theatrical, popular performance 'scenarios' personated by civilian men in response to the Ripper murders, outside professional sites of theatricalised or medicalised spectatorship. Specifically, it explores how *fin-de-siècle* civilian men performed as key figures in the Ripper 'scenario': first, as the plain-clothes detective, whose well-publicised existence and professional invisibility caught the masculine imagination; second, as the Ripper's victims, represented in the press and by their impersonators as prostitutes; and third, as the Ripper himself. These civilian performances illuminate our understandings of *fin-de-siècle* masculinity: simultaneously interrogating these performances through the lenses of *fin-de-siècle* theatre culture, the periodical press, and the anthropology of ritual magic reveals the cultural complexities of the 'personations' happening in streets and homes across the United Kingdom. Above all, despite the personations' heterogeneity, it is possible to detect a prevailing performance mode recurring throughout: melodrama. This is unsurprising: melodrama was the *fin de siècle*'s prevalent theatrical form in both London and the provinces. A November 1888 'analysis of theatrical companies on tour' noted that 'melodrama easily [held] the field' across the country.[4] Melodrama

offered plots which, however exciting, presented formulaic, cathartic and frequently familiar endings, fulfilling Diana Taylor's narrative of the performance scenario as offering 'all the elements' of dramatic structure: 'encounter, conflict, resolution, and denouement'.[5] Taylor argues that the portable performance scenario makes 'visible, yet again' in society 'what is already there: the ghosts, the images, the stereotypes'.In 1888, part of the potency of these civilian performances in staging the fraught and haunted 'what is already there' was the scenarios' 'formulaic' combination of ruthless reiteration and the possibility of 'reversal, parody, and change'.[6] Civilian performances allowed ordinary people to appropriate Taylor's 'resolution, and denouement' as the conclusion to their own, much-repeated and always accumulative 'scenarios' beyond the professional stage. To reinscribe the Ripper murders as a melodramatic plot in 1888–9 offered its actors the promise of enacting 'resolution and denouement' at least within their own performance: an attractive action for civilians caught in a real-life scenario that nobody was able to end.

On 4 August 1888, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, Thomas Sullivan and Richard Mansfield's adaptation of Robert Louis Stevenson's 1886 novella, opened at London's Lyceum theatre.[7] The production would offer the first theatrical paradigm for understanding the Whitechapel murderer. *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*'s run encompassed the period in which the five women now identified as 'canonical' Ripper victims were killed: Mary Ann Nichols (31 August), Annie Chapman (8 September), Elizabeth Stride and Catherine Eddowes (both in the early hours of 30 September), and Mary Jane Kelly (9 November). The run also encompassed the murders of possible Ripper victims Martha Tabram (7 August), Annie Farmer (20 November), and Rose Mylett (20 December).[8] Visual traces of Mansfield's production infused the murders' press coverage. The 'theatre' publicity poster which the devil is pasting in *Punch*'s cartoon 'Horrible London: or, the Pandemonium of Posters' (13 October 1888) shows a murderer in a bent, snarling stance reminiscent of Mansfield's Hyde in the 'double exposure' photograph that pictured him simultaneously as Jekyll and Hyde.[9] A week earlier, Mansfield's ability to transform from doctor to murderer had seen him suggested as a suspect to the City of London Police, in an anonymous letter from an audience member: 'I felt at once that he was the Man Wanted … I do not think there is A man Living So well able to disgise [*sic?*] Himself in A moment …'.[10]Above all, Mansfield's performance made 'Hyde' the media's first avatar for the murderer, before the 'Ripper' moniker emerged. Within four weeks of opening night, newspapers speculated on the existence of 'a "Mr Hyde in real life"; 'a real Mr Hyde […] abroad among us', a 'fiend of which Hyde was the type', in markedly theatrical language.[11] The *Pall Mall Gazette* described the Ripper as 'a tolerably realistic impersonification' of Hyde, while the *Globe*'s description of Whitechapel as 'haunted' by 'Hyde, who goes about killing for the mere sake of slaughter' echoes the Lyceum script, in which Hyde is happy to 'kill – and kill – and kill, for mere sport of killing'.[12] Even after 3 October 1888, when the press printed the red-ink 'Dear Boss' letter signed, for the first time, by 'Jack the Ripper', newspapers continued to call the killer 'the Whitechapel Hyde', speculating that 'the crimes may be attributed to the effect produced upon a diseased mind by the performance'.[13] This was not the only cited literary source for the murders: the *Saturday Review* blamed Ripper copycats on the penny dreadfuls, provoking the 'lower orders' to 'play the murderer or the thief', while there were general complaints regarding newspaper coverage as likely to spur more violence.[14] On 29 September, the *St Stephen's Review* related that 'between the

Whitechapel Murders and the weird performance of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, the mental condition of people with highly-strung nerves is becoming very serious'.[15]

Even before Lyceum theatre located the Ripper in the West End, the East End's theatrical and criminal geographies closely overlapped. One of the victims was herself a former performer: Catherine Eddowes had been a ballad-hawker, which involved singing the ballads as a form of advertisement; Eddowes sang in a police cell in Spitalfields hours before she was murdered.[16] The Whitechapel workhouse mortuary on Old Montague Street, where spectators thronged to see the bodies of several Ripper victims, was directly behind the Pavilion Theatre. One doctor described it as actually 'in the Pavilion-yard'.[17] The Pavilion was increasingly central to London's Yiddish theatre scene (especially since the January 1887 demise of the Hebrew Dramatic Club in nearby Spitalfields). Simultaneously, the Whitechapel Jewish community was suspected of harbouring the Ripper, whom the press depicted in anti-Semitic caricatures.[18] The Pavilion was located at 191–3 Whitechapel Road; nearby at 106–7 Whitechapel Road, Thomas Barry's penny theatre showed waxworks of the victims' corpses and a wax effigy of the killer from autumn 1888; in February 1889, Barry was found guilty of causing 'a common nuisance' by 'causing large numbers of persons to assemble in front of' the theatre.[19] As the mortuary attracted spectators, the East End theatres' performances and tableaux became reminiscent of the mortuary.

Now, however, West End geographies of theatre and murder also overlapped, as Lyceum theatregoers began sighting 'Hyde' in the streets. In September 1888, one young man suffered an epileptic fit on a West End omnibus immediately after seeing Mansfield's production, having sat beside 'a most repulsive-looking man, whom he immediately concluded must either be the Doctor himself or the Whitechapel murderer'.[20] Subsequently, cultural memory sufficiently linked the Hyde plot and the Ripper murders for Joseph Jacobs to misremember in 1894 that Stevenson's novella had 'appeared in the midst of the Jack the Ripper terror' as 'the artistic reflex of that mysterious series of crimes'. The 1886 novella predated the murders by two years: in fact, it was Mansfield's performance which had 'appeared' alongside that 'terror', not as its 'reflex' but as its interpretative framework.[21] There were other London theatrical evocations: coverage of the murders and the Lyceum *Macbeth*, which succeeded *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* on 29 December, continued to co-condition each other.[22] Not only Mansfield but the music-hall Scottish dancer J.W. Cardownie was suspected as the murderer; Cardownie was actually arrested as the Ripper outside Bermondsey's Star Music Hall, verifying his identity by producing his 'stage properties and […] medals'.[23] In 1889, as Justin A. Blum has argued, George R. Sims and Henry Pettitt's *London Day By Day* evoked the murder of Mary Jane Kelly in the onstage killing of Maude Willoughby.[24] Melodrama was thus the first theatrical mode to draw on the Ripper killings in a piece of new writing. Sims had covered the Ripper killings for *The Referee* and collected explicit photographs of the mutilated victims before such images were widely available.[25]

Blum draws on Diana Taylor's concept of the 'scenario' as a unit of enacted narrative, as a 'meaning making paradig[m]' structuring 'social behaviors, and outcomes' and which 'bears the weight of accumulative repeats'.[26] In my reading, just as the Hyde scare and *Macbeth* reportage reveals the murders' resonances for the West End despite the particularity of East End topography, civilian performances across the UK as key figures from the Ripper 'scenario' reveal the scenario as far more portable than

has been previously assumed. In citing melodrama as the mode or frame in which civilian performances remediated the Ripper's real-life murders, I stop far short of Claire Harman's brilliant account of how the 1839 melodrama *Jack Sheppard* (adapted from William Harrison Ainsworth's novel) inspired Francois Courvoisier's 1840 murder of Lord William Russell.[27] The theatrical and literary phenomena in this article are necessarily more diffuse and speculative: this is because the civilian performance scenarios provoked by the Ripper are far more multiple and mutable than a desire only, in the words of the *Saturday Review*, to 'play the *murderer*' (emphasis mine). The rest of this article explores these performance scenarios, their indebtedness to melodrama, and the degree to which they make 'visible, yet again, what is already there: the ghosts, the images, the stereotypes'.[28]

Three categories of male civilian performance arose in response to the Ripper, encompassing the three key figures in the Ripper scenario. These included men impersonating plain-clothes detectives; men impersonating the Ripper's female victims, and men impersonating the Ripper himself. The last category includes the best-known examples of men whose confessions were the product of delusion, whether well-known 'culprits' such as Theophil Hanhart, a mentally-ill teacher who 'confessed' to being the Ripper in December 1888, or homeless men who - decoding euphemistic newspaper reports - exposed themselves and possibly masturbated in front of women, in public and at random. Of the men who performed as the Ripper, I am interested in 'performances' of the Ripper intended for small audiences, often of only one person: men who falsely identified themselves as the Ripper, or threatened to impersonate him to coerce the women these men abused in domestic settings.

Although I have used the term 'impersonate' to describe their behaviour, the most common term used to describe all these performances - as detective, victim, and Ripper - was 'personate', a word with longstanding theatrical as well as legal connotations. Thomas Heywood's *Apology for Actors* (1612) used 'personation' to signify a contemporary acting style that offered a proto-naturalistic, believable alternative to the 'over-acting, tricks, and toiling too much' of actors given to 'violent absurdities'.[29] 'Personation' appeared in this positive sense throughout the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries (OED). By the 1880s, it covered all kinds of performance. Thus readers of the *Pall Mall Gazette* learned in 1885 that the duke's guards in the Kendal-Hare *As You Like It* revival would be 'personated by real guardsmen', while, in the year of the Ripper killings, theatrical critics praised E. S. Gofton and Tom Paulton for 'personat[ing]' two comic thieves in *Erminie* at the Manchester Theatre Royal, complimented E. S. Willard on 'the polished villains which he has so long and so admirably personated', and congratulated child actress Maud Sinclair on her performance as Cissy Denver in a revival of Jones's *The Silver King* (of which more later), 'her personation being admirable'.[30] Equally entrenched, however, were personation's connotations of illegal deceit, introduced by Francis Bacon in the 1620s.[31] Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers similarly equated 'personation' with 'criminality', Macaulay's *History of England* (1849–55) bracketing 'personating' with 'begging, stealing, cheating [and] forging' in the criminal career of forger Robert Young (c. 1657–1700).[32] In autumn 1888, British defendants were accused in court of 'personating' a motley assortment of characters, from voters and charitable clergymen to 'the bard "Cadifor"' (the poetic alias of Edward Samuel, an insurance superintendent who enjoyed some eistedfodd success and who was 'personated' by repeat offender John Benjamin) usually for financial

gain.[33] The Whitechapel murders offered civilians new opportunities for 'personation'.

As early as 10 September 1888, the *Northern Echo*'s 'London Letter' reported that 'everybody in [Whitechapel] has turned amateur detective'; a month later, *Freeman's Journal* reiterated the point.[34] Detective 'personations' soon spread beyond Whitechapel. The day after *Freeman's* report, a Ratcliff Highway (today's Limehouse) seaman was followed by an 'excited crowd' of amateur detectives; the next day, it was reported that a sailmaker in Ipswich 'gave out that he was a detective from Scotland-yard' and proffered pieces of paper with 'undecipherable' [sic] messages, promising that 'the murderer would call […] and upon being confronted with the written paper it would have a strange effect'.[35] By November, however, formal 'personations' of the detective were sufficiently common for the press to dub them 'a nuisance' and 'foolish and cruel'.[36] On 10 November, chimney-sweep William Avenall and carver Frederick W. Moore, both aged twenty-six, approached oil-and-colourman Henry Edward Leeke in a pub and identified themselves as 'detectives in private clothes', who would 'arrest him as the Whitechapel murderer'.[37] A prolonged street attack followed, with Avenall and Moore reiterating to a crowd that 'He's Jack the Ripper, we are detectives'; when Leeke fled into a house, Avenall continued to tell the female residents 'he […] was a private detective' and initially made the same claim to an approaching constable.[38] The courts (who sentenced Avenall and Moore to fourteen days' hard labour) and newspapers strongly deplored the defendants' 'personations', and those of 'any rough who takes it into his head, for a lark or otherwise, to call himself a detective officer'.[39] The issue of motive - 'for a lark or otherwise' repays scrutiny, as does Avenall's commitment to his 'personation', explicitly identifying himself as a detective to as many audiences as possible (victim, passers-by, a house full of women, and a genuine constable).

'Personation' of a detective was not entirely new, but had previously been used to obtain entrance to a house for burglary or assault.[40] However, two factors made 'personating' a detective an especially potent scenario in 1888. The first factor was the profound ambivalence civilians felt about the 'detective in private clothes'. Avenall's commitment (and that of others) to personating the detective reveals the pleasure of such a personation – Avenall later described it as a 'frolic' – however, when Avenall finally abandoned his performance, it was to berate policing deficiencies: 'if the — police can't do their duty, I can'. [41] Avenall's 'personation' can be read as one of a portfolio of contemporary satirical and theatrical commentaries on Whitechapel policing's inadequacies. Three weeks earlier, a poem in *Fun* had noted that 'Now Jack the Ripper, with his knife/Goes safely down the busy street,/Alert to take another life', and mocked the police for 'red tape blundering', but concluded that 'One cannot do the work of ten,/And they are ruled by Scotland Yard'.[42] This impression of police understaffing implies a civilian need – or opportunity – to make up the 'work of ten' that Avenall echoes. Metropolitan Police Commissioner Charles Warren had resigned two days before Avenall's assault on Leekes; by Christmas, the favourite music-hall song was the mocking 'Who Killed Cock Warren', decrying Warren's mismanagement of the 'unpromoted bobbies'.[43] While 'Cock Warren' certainly had elements of Cockney slang in the published and reported lyrics, by September 1889 *Judy* responded to the discovery of the Pinchin Street Torso (an unidentified torso and potential Ripper victim) with a song ventriloquizing local sentiment; [44]

> Ere's another murder in Whitechapel; and ain't we got a set
> Of sparklin' British di'monds for our polis? yes, you bet!
> As unless the Ripper gives 'is self up, 'is conscience to assuage,
> In every probability 'e'll live to a good old age![45]

Gone was any sympathy for the detective who 'cannot do the work of ten'. Simultaneously, the song's Cockney dialect recollected and re-ventriloquised (even 'personated') the anger of Avenall and other East End vigilantes. The relative success of Avenall's 'personation' (its duration; his successful duping of Leeke, passers-by, and residents; the fact that the police were called *on Leeke*, not himself; that Constable Downey initially treated Avenall as a genuine detective) reflects the fact that it was not only the Ripper who was a 'Jekyll-and-Hyde' figure in the public consciousness. The intriguing new category of 'detective in private clothes' in the East End offered civilians a Jekyll-and-Hyde style avatar for imitation, with echoes of Mansfield. Just as Mansfield's Jekyll became Hyde before the audience's eyes, without prosthesis or costume change, so civilians could 'personate' plain-clothes detectives in front of a street crowd, a masquerade not necessitating masks.[46]

Potentially, Avenall was also appropriating the cultural capital of the developing canon of plain-clothes detectives in melodrama. Detectives had been appearing on the popular London stage since 1863, when Horace Wigan had first played Jack Hawkshaw in Tom Taylor's *The Ticket-of-Leave Man*.[47] Since then, melodramas featuring heroic, inexorable plain-clothes detectives had included C. H. Hazlewood's *The Detective* (1864), Bouicault and Reade's *Foul Play* (1868), Scott's *The Detective* 1875), Wilkie Collins's melodramatic adaptation of his own *The Moonstone* (1877) and Henry Arthur Jones and Henry Herman's *The Silver King* (1881).[48] Audiences had also seen Inspector Bucket unmask Lady Dedlock in mid–1870s versions of *Bleak House*. Several of these plays laid great stress on the difficulty of identifying the detective in public, whose wily disguises allowed him to infiltrate criminal milieux or become indistinguishable from civilians. Hawkshaw in *The Ticket-of-Leave-Man* is able to receive intelligence reports from other incognito detectives in the tea-room of a London suburb.[49] In *Foul Play*, Inspector Burt is mistaken for 'one of the swell mob' and repeatedly escapes identification; Sam Baxter, Jones's detective in *The Silver King*, slips onstage and quietly controls the behaviour of his criminal targets before they are 'alarmed' to realise his presence in the public house – a scenario that would have appealed to Avenall.[50] These earlier melodramas remained popular in the 1880s, with reprints and revivals. In January 1888, *The Ticket-of-Leave Man* was received with 'favour so pronounced' at the Olympic Theatre, while throughout that year *The Silver King* was being continuously performed by at least two, and sometimes as many as three provincial companies, alongside a stand-alone London revival at the Globe.[51] In fact, the period 1888–9 seems to have seen a spike in *The Silver King*'s popularity: in 1889, the *Graphic* named it as one of their 'plays of the year', unique in a list otherwise entirely comprised of new writing.[52] Amateur detectives also appeared in melodramas during the 1880s, thanks to persistent adaptations of sensation novels in which heroic young men solved mysteries. Foremost among these were Robert Audley in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) and Walter Hartright in Collins's *The Woman in White* (1859): adaptations of both novels were revived relatively frequently in the 1880s.[53]

Nor would Avenall have been alone in recognising the cultural potency of the amateur detective regarding the Ripper killings: in the first melodrama overtly dramatising the murders, Xavier Bertrand and Louis Clairian's *Jack L'eventreur* (1889) at Paris's Chateau d'Eau theatre, the Ripper's conqueror was 'an amateur detective named Robinson'.[54]

The second cultural incentive for 'personating' the detective was the kind of scenario that personation enabled: pursuing and arresting a suspect. The *Fun* poem complained of 'red-tape bungling': an embryonic and soon-to-be ubiquitous complaint about paperwork as policing was repeatedly overhauled and professionalised.[55] Then, as now, bureaucracy was (aside from corruption) the least comprehensible and tolerable aspect of policing for civilians. The plain-clothes detective offered an intriguing alternative: the man of action, eschewing office-work. For chimney-sweep William Avenall and his analogues, the arrest 'scenario', with its scapegoat and gathering crowd, built social cohesion: witnessing distressing events, including violence, makes an audience feel more bonded as a group.[56] The pseudo-arrest also proleptically enacted the communally-held desire of ending the Ripper's crimes. Civilian performance shared the stimulating and cathartic function of similar sequences in melodrama: the pursuit, capture, and extermination of a villain, comparable to Taylor's 'conflict, resolution, and denouement'.[57] But Isabel Stowell-Kaplan goes further, arguing persuasively and specifically that the Victorian detective, 'real or stage' existed in what she calls an innately 'melodramatic mode'.[58] The Victorian populace, she argues, understood the 'real-life detective' as 'the melodramatic arm of the institution of policing'.[59] The melodramatic scenario, centring on a detective, and reproduced by civilian performance, was invoking powerful cultural forces. As Peter Brooks notes, 'the desire to express all' was 'a fundamental characteristic of the melodramatic mode', used to 'utter the unspeakable'.[60] In this case, the 'unspeakable' that the scenario of performed arrest 'uttered' was the identity of the Ripper, 'unspeakable' because unknown outside the scenario which created that knowledge through performance. Above all, melodrama could both redress and overwrite the inadequacies Avenall identified in the police who '[couldn't] do their duty': melodrama 'strives to find, to articulate, to demonstrate, to "prove" the existence of a moral universe which, though put into question, mashed by villainy […] does exist and can be made to assert its presence and its categorical force among men'.[61]

Other detective 'personators' were more obviously theatrical than Avenall: the unnamed 'medical man' who 'disguised himself' as a detective for investigations in Whitechapel on 11 December had 'most palpably artificially blacked his face' and 'wore a jersey in place of a coat', explaining that 'he thought [these] were detective means'.[62] This ostentatious and bizarre disguise, coupled with descriptions of his action in 'officiously making enquiries' - suggests a scenario that exposed the 'stereotype' of the detective and an almost burlesque conception of what disguise and 'detective means' might be.[63] Again, this is strongly reminiscent of stage melodrama, where detectives frequently disguised themselves in ways conspicuous to the audience, yet invisible to others on stage: Hawkshaw wears a 'suit of black (eccentric)' and 'a wig and whiskers' in *The Ticket-of-Leave Man*.[64]

While those personating the detective typically intended 'plain-clothes' invisibility (whether enacted successfully or not), those men who 'personated' prostitutes swiftly became hyper-visible. As early as 5 October, Hampstead labourer William Webb was

locked up for seven days for waving a knife while wearing 'hat, skirt, petticoat, and jacket' in order to 'go to Whitechapel to find the murderer'.[65] Two more working-class men were arrested in November 1888: on 14 November, Clerkenwell porter John Brinckley received fourteen days' hard labour for having been 'drunk and disorderly' while wearing 'a woman's skirt over his other clothes' to 'try and find Jack the Ripper'. Brinckley had subsequently collared a 'respectable gentleman' and 'said he wished to give him into custody, as he was "Jack the Ripper".[66] On 15 November, forty-four year-old bricklayer Edward Shannon was arrested after loitering in a doorway wearing 'a hat and a veil and a skirt' in order to 'loo[k] out for Jack the Ripper'. Shannon was 'charged with being a suspected person, loitering for the supposed purpose of committing a felony'.[67] The possibility of transvestite prostitution looms large: however, cross-dressing had indeed become a well-publicised police and journalistic tactic for Ripper-baiting. In early October a Detective Sergeant John Robinson had been assaulted by cab-washers while cross-dressed in order to pursue a suspect: the story was covered by most major newspapers, as was the account of a young journalist unmasked by Whitechapel women.[68] A year later, sixty-one-year-old Edward Hamblar was taken to court for 'disorderly conduct and being dressed in female attire', specifically a hat, veil, 'dress, two flannel petticoats, and a dress improver' in Ratcliff (today, Limehouse). Hamblar described his 'conduct' as 'only a freak', but 'All the people round him said he was "Jack the Ripper"'.[69] Brinckley, in the later stages of his arrest, had apparently briefly identified himself as 'Jack the Ripper' and threatened to 'rip […] up' a policeman.[70]

Brinckley, Shannon, and Hamblar's personations and receptions by the crowd show how mutable and highly-charged Ripper performance scenarios became. Personating the plain-clothes officer revealed the 'stereotypes' of the officious but effective detective, the 'melodramatic arm of the institution of policing' whose 'melodramatic mode' offered the opportunity to 'prove' that a 'moral universe' still existed.[71] Reports of the 'personations' recognised them as essentially theatrical: Webb's knife-brandishing in Hampstead was described as him 'acting about' with the knife.[72] The Ratcliff crowd's identification of Hamblar as the Ripper is more complicated. One explanation might be that the 'Ripper' had become a surrogate for all sexual deviance: however, there had never been any serious police or media suggestion that the Ripper cross-dressed. Moreover, although Hamblar was nearly lynched by the crowd, similar violence had been meted out to a clutch of supposed 'Rippers' whose appearances had been difficult to decode, but *not* obviously sexualised, including a Limehouse seaman with paint on his clothes, the blackface doctor, and 'a City constable walking along the Commercial road' wearing 'a low broad brim hat of rather singular appearance'.[73] In this light, the Ratcliff crowd's group attempt to rewrite the sexually ambiguous scenario of cross-dressed bricklayer as a Ripper-lynching in a melodramatic scenario of revelations reveals that scapegoating scenario's potency as a mechanism of cultural control. Melodrama, concerned with exerting 'categorical force' to decode and purge aberrance, offered a cultural framework for unmasking and excluding a scapegoat. Individually or collectively apprehending a supposed suspect temporarily fulfilled paradoxically opposed cultural needs: first, attaching the culturally-charged 'persona' of the Ripper to a scapegoat who was then detained enacted the longed-for arrest. Second, by alleging one kind of 'personation' (that the scapegoat is 'personating' a false identity, in Hamblar's case female, to obscure his 'true' Ripper self), the accusers forced the scapegoat to decode that personation, whether as doctor playing detective or bricklayer on a 'freak'.

'Personations' of both detective and victim were at their zenith in November 1888. The third kind of performance, where men 'personated' the Ripper to women they knew, began in October and continued steadily for at least the next twelve months. The earliest case is that of a young Cardiff woman persecuted by 'a young man with whom she was formerly acquainted' who threatened 'to do for her the same as "Jack the Ripper" had done for the others […] some night when she little thinks of it' in early October; later that month, Edinburgh resident Alexander Grant threatened a young woman (possibly a prostitute) that he 'would do what Jack the Ripper did'.[74] By 23 October, the *Dundee Courier* identified a 'swarm of creatures who, in imitation of the foul fiend of Whitechapel, indulge in the cowardly practice of writing threatening letters to women, and attacking them on the street at night'.[75] On 23 April 1889, Belper man Frederick Noble wrote to his 'sweetheart' Harriet Harrison: 'I will cut your head off, and do a Jack the Ripper on you […] I will find you wherever you go. I shall take your heart out and fry it and eat it, and will write a letter to your mother with the blood', clearly evoking the 'Dear Boss' letter's discussion of blood-based ink and the 'From Hell' letter's claim to have fried and eaten a victim's kidney.[76] Less than a month later, Huddersfield 'traveller and evangelist' Thomas Wantling was charged with assaulting and threatening his wife and children, telling her 'he would kill her and the children […] and that he would be a "Jack the Ripper" that night'.[77] Given the theatricality of Victorian evangelists (particularly 'travellers' such as Wantling, who often evangelised in the open-air and had to attract new audiences in each location), it is perhaps unsurprising that Wantling appropriated a performative persona. Such cases rarely included claims to *be* the Ripper in real life, but rather the threat of appropriating his persona. As the Ripper's crimes became better known, the performance scenario became more stable, with a decision to perform the Ripper becoming ever more frightening and convincing. Newspaper coverage of Ripper-personations recognised the theatrical element of these abuse cases from early in their coverage. In late October 1888, an Irishwoman, Miss Killigan (or Killegan) went into hysterics and died after a man 'brandish[ed] a knife and exclaim[ed], "I'm Jack the Ripper"': the press called her death the 'sad result of personating "Jack the Ripper"' and criticised the man for having 'personated the Whitechapel monster', once again appropriating the language of the stage.[78]

Frederick Noble incorporated as many elements as possible of the Ripper's profile (including blood-ink and threats of cannibalism) into his re-staging of the murderer. Often, the scenarios' violence seems to have correlated with the abuser-performer's dedication to 'personating' the Ripper. The longer the scenario ran and the more 'weight' of 'accumulative repeats' it bore, the more overtly theatrical the surrounding language became. In December 1888, a Mrs Rigg died in Sunderland after being stabbed in the throat by a husband who threatened to 'play "Jack the Ripper"'.[79] The word 'play' recurred in a Blackburn divorce case in May 1889, when Jane Leighton said her husband 'frequently took knives with him to bed, and in the dead of night threatened to '"play Jack the Ripper" with her'.[80] In late August, a Southwark man assaulted a woman and, producing a knife, threatened to 'show her how Jack the Ripper finished off his people'.[81] The Southwark attacker's verb choice is crucial. By offering to 'show' his victim a murder which nobody had seen, the Southwark attacker indicates the degree to which the 'accumulative repeats' of the Ripper scenario in public discourse had made him feel part of the Ripper's audience, spectating at the murders. In the 1880s, 'show' was still current as a synonym for

'perform'; simultaneously, of course, it carried the (still-current) colloquial sense of 'conveying a threat of punishment or humiliation' (OED). In his linguistic choice, the Southwark attacker positions his victim simultaneously as spectator, co-actor in and victim of the 'show' he performs. The nocturnal, bedroom setting of the 'play' in Wantling and Leighton's attacks rearticulates for *fin-de-siècle* criminology the cultural slippage between woman as participant and victim in the marital bed. This slippage recurs throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, in both private and public discourse. While Charles Kingsley cheerfully and sado-masochistically reimagined the marriage bed as 'our altar […] there you should be the victim I the priest' in his letters to Fanny Grenfell, *fin-de-siècle* sex manuals asserted that 'wife-torturing' was the 'degraded' marital status quo, with women customarily 'victimised, your soul and body offered up, *slain*, on the altar of [a husband's] sensuality' unless able to discuss sex without 'concealment and mystery' beforehand.[82] The authors of *Searchlights on Health* (1894) recognised that early marital sex was frequently 'legalized rape'; as Sos Eltis has shown, the 1893 melodrama *A Life of Pleasure* depicts 'a wife's revulsion and fear at a husband's violent assertion of his legal rights'.[83]

Men personated the Ripper in a wide variety of urban centres, from Sunderland to Southwark, and from Edinburgh to Cardiff. This geographic variety indicates that while the original crimes' circumstances and local reception were deeply embedded in the East End's specific theatrical and forensic topographies – with a reciprocal, intertheatrical impact on the West End's repertory in 1888 – the Ripper's scenario of sexual coercion and violence became extremely portable. The Ripper's 'persona' was a collection of behaviours that could be 'personated' or 'played' by any man. The three kinds of 'personation' which arose in response to the murders – Ripper, detective, or prostitute – show how far the Whitechapel 'scenario' had travelled. The three personations constitute different forms of performance ritual. Personating the Ripper most clearly reveals a desire to vicariously threaten - and in some domestic abuse cases, enact - the Ripper's violence, appropriating the Ripper 'persona' in order to capitalise on women's panic and heighten the impact of male abuse. Importantly, however, domestic abusers' fascination with being seen as the Ripper is matched elsewhere in Victorian culture, even excluding the group of mentally-ill individuals who 'confessed' to being the Ripper out of compulsion or delusion. George R. Sims, Ripper journalist, co-author of *London Day By Day* and mortuary photographs collector, recollected with relish his experience of going 'to the Pavilion Theatre, Whitechapel' late at night, carrying 'a long Japanese knife of a murderous character for melodramatic purposes' in a 'black bag' in 1888, continuing 'I often wonder what would have happened' had someone 'cried out, "That's the Ripper," and my black bag had been opened. […] On the occasion when I carried the black bag and Japanese knife I […] was standing among the people, close to the very spot where one of the worst murders was committed'.[84] Sims's behaviour evinces a desire to 'personate' or be understood as 'personating' the Ripper even without an embedded narrative of domestic violence. Police failures to identify the Ripper ensured that he retained a degree of fictionality: even the *Daily Telegraph*, when documenting the stabbing of nineteen-year-old Southwark prostitute Ellen Worsfold by 'man of means' Collingwood Hilton Fenwick, described him as 'A Real Jack The Ripper', implying the unreality of the Whitechapel murderer.[85] Audiences are more willing to take the perspective of villains in drama when they believe them to be fictional, compared to audiences who believe they are watching real-life villainy. It is possible that the

cultural sense of the Ripper as a legendary, theatrical figure legitimised the performance of Ripper-like violence, while 'personating' the Ripper offered a framework for the performance of sadistic, misogynist desire.

Sims's anecdote implies a fantasy of being 'revealed' as the murderer – there is no stated need for him to be 'standing […] close' to 'one of the worst murders', except the titillation of dark tourism and possible 'discovery'.[86] Sims's fantasy reflects the importance of revelation to Ripper personations. The cited domestic abusers were interested neither in assaults unaccompanied by ekphrasis nor in committing acts of violence subsequently recognised by others as appropriating the Ripper's methodology. Instead, accounts of the violence centre on the threat to 'play the Ripper': the moment of announcing the Ripper 'personation' which – as in Sims's hypothesised 'unmasking', or any other *fin-de-siècle* narrative of horrific revelation, is most effective because it is so unsuspected. Although 1888 saw, as Mary Augusta Ward noted, 'a taste just now for the horrible', revelations of concealed crimes and secret identities structured Victorian theatrical and literary culture, well beyond the Lyceum productions of the *Dr Jekyll and Hyde* melodrama and *Macbeth* that were the murders' nearest temporal neighbours.[87]

Although I have traced the possible theatrical antecedents for 'personating' the detective (all of which were concerned with 'unmasking' criminals and sleuths), certain Ripper 'personations' had strong literary elements. The December 1888 case of the stalking of a young Knightsbridge woman included escalating messages from a 'scoundrel', including a whispered message of 'This is your first warning. I am Jack the Ripper' and an anonymous note pinned to her cloak: 'This is your second warning, and the last. I am Jack the Ripper'.[88] The victim's 'hysterics' sent her to an asylum; the note posted by the culprit (believed to have 'some unknown spite against the girl') recalls the warning messages in Sheridan LeFanu's 'The Watcher' (1847).[89] They also anticipate Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes's 'The Adventure of the Dancing Men' (1903), in which a heroine with a chequered past receives threatening messages of the approach and arrival of her former lover, culminating in 'PREPARE TO MEET THY GOD'.[90] While 'The Dancing Men' was published in 1903, Donald A. Yates has argued for an autumn 1888 setting.[91] Holmes scholars also identify the story's American detective, 'Wilson Hargreave, of the New York Police Bureau' as Thomas Byrne, the famous first chief of the New York Police *Detective* Bureau (1882–92), who in autumn 1888 was heavily featured in the British press, criticising Scotland Yard and claiming he himself would have caught the Ripper quickly.[92] Conan Doyle was equally critical of the police's handling of the murders, and remained deeply preoccupied with the crimes.[93] 'The Adventure of the Cardboard Box' (1893, but set in August 1888) sees severed ears sent to Holmes's client, echoing the 'Dear Boss' Ripper letter and 'Saucy Jacky' postcard (1 October 1888), which respectively announced the intention and bemoaned the impossibility of removing murder victim Catherine Eddowes's ear during the rushed events of 30 September's 'double event'.[94] In 1905, two years after 'The Dancing Men', Conan Doyle was still fascinated enough to tour the Whitechapel murder sites with a selection of Crimes Club co-members, including actor H. B. Irving.[95] It is possible the 'Dancing Men' messages reflect Conan Doyle's fascination with the crimes and their coverage.

The 1888 'personations' of plain-clothes detectives draw on both the contemporary phenomenon of East End investigators 'in mufti' and a quarter-century tradition of staging detectives in melodramas: re-read from an anthropological point of view, this civilian performance combines hoaxing with a ritual of sympathetic magic.[96] In itself a *fin-de-siècle* concept, James George Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1890) defined sympathetic magic as mimetic: a ritual is performed which enacts or symbolises the outcome sought, as in the creation and destruction of voudou effigies.[97] 'Personating' a detective was essentially optative performance, dramatizing a sought-after future, while also enacting the heroism and cultural capital of the detective. An equivalent and adjacent ritual was the burning of 'Jack the Ripper' guys in November 1888, enacting the murderer's destruction.[98] For some, detective-personation may have constituted a 'ritual of inversion', enabling them to overpower their class superiors: with the exception of Avenall, it's notable how often men 'of the labouring class' arrested 'gentlem[en]' as the Ripper.[99] Did these labourers enjoy the carnivalesque overturning of social status, creating scenarios which explored Diana Taylor's possibilities of 'reversal […] and change'?

Personating the Ripper's victims – i.e. dressing as gaudy, dishevelled women, and walking alone at night in the East End of London – liberated a different kind of suppressed male desire. That John Brinckley and Edward Shannon both attributed their appearance to [variations on] 'looking out for "Jack the Ripper"' implies the detective's cultural potency (the importance of deduction trumps the dubiety of cross-dressing) but also acknowledges the detective's gender performativity: Detective Sergeant Robinson had, after all, legitimately cross-dressed in 'a woman's hat and mantle' because of a local 'scare' that the Ripper 'was about'.[100] The heterogeneity of the cross-dressers, from Edward Shannon's quietly-convincing 'loitering' in Bloomsbury to John Brinckley's attention-grabbing disorder in Clerkenwell implies a spectrum of motivations, from the possibility of genuine transvestite prostitution to a pantomimic burlesque of femininity.[101] Personating the Ripper himself licenced men to embody the Ripper's lawless violence temporarily, a kind of 'gaudy night' for those such as Southwark resident McCarthy who rejected his arrest for assault by saying he 'did not care. He was "Jack the Ripper" for that night'.[102] Personating the Ripper's victims perhaps evinces the desire to experience not only the women's vulnerability – to the Ripper, the police, or crowds – but the physical structures of their femininity: it is hard to forget that sixty-one-year-old Edward Hamblar was found wearing 'a large dress-improver'.[103] The court laughed at his dress-improver. The immediate comic commentary of the presiding magistrate, Mr Saunders – that Hamblar 'did not make a handsome woman' – further undercuts the subversive and disturbing potential of male cross-dressing, and reinscribes Hamblar's performance as more akin to the grotesque, highly legible pantomime dame, the 'incontinent and stupid Widow Twankey' of late-Victorian misogyny, than a plausible honey-trap.[104] For Saunders – a noted racist and anti-Semite whose xenophobia in other cases offended the mainstream and Jewish presses – to evoke the pantomime would have been a conservative, imperialist gesture, made at a time when London's most famous pantomimes constituted 'a celebration of British supremacy', satirising those who sought emancipation from class or gender constraints.[105] Pantomime offered perhaps the only reassuring theatrical framework for receiving a sixty-one-year-old ship joiner's personation of womanhood.

Although Mr Saunders was keen to write off Hamblar's transvestism as comedy, the civilians who personated or burlesqued the Ripper, his victims, or the plain-clothes detective usually did so with violent or even tragic results. Their 'freaks' or 'larks' have typically been dismissed in Ripper scholarship, as nuisance hoaxes which take criminologists no closer to unmasking the 'real' Jack the Ripper, and in theatre history as of less interest than the professional theatrical productions – at the Lyceum and beyond – which co-conditioned the Whitechapel murders' coverage. In fact, these male civilians' personations illuminate a complex nexus of anxieties and desires, and draw on a rich topography of literary and theatrical antecedents and analogues: the Knightsbridge stalker's abuse may even have inspired a Sherlock Holmes mystery.

Above all, the 'personations' need to be understood as occurring in the mode of melodrama, as the Ripper scenario intensified the conflicting desires which melodrama fulfilled: the desire to witness and 'play' out violence vs. the desire 'to "prove" the existence of a moral universe'.[106] Personations of characters from the Ripper scenario foregrounded costumes and props, from Hamblar's dress-improver and the 'medical man's blackface to Webb and Sims's 'long knives', while the lexis in which their 'acting about' was described indicates that these personations were recognised as essentially theatrical – even when their consequences included real violence. The 'personations' reiterate melodrama as the cultural framework through which communities received and reinscribed the murders in locations well beyond Whitechapel, thanks to the portability of the Ripper 'scenario'. These civilian melodramas enacted not only the anxieties but also the desires – sometimes misogynist, sometimes transgressive, sometimes aspirational or expiatory – which the Ripper murders revealed. The melodramatic mode allowed people to expose Taylor's 'that which is already there' through their personations, not only on the professional stage, but in the streets, pubs, and private houses of *fin-de-siècle* Britain.

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[14] Anon., 'The Influence of the Penny Dreadful', *Saturday Review*, 20 Oct 1888, p. 458.
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[31] Francis Bacon, *The Historie of the Reigne of King Henry the Seuenth* (London: I.H. and R.I., 1629), p. 113.
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[33] 'The Provinces' *Standard*, 5 November 1888, p. 3; 'A Lunatic Lord', *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, p. 4 November 1888, p. 7; 'A Notorious Swindler at Swansea', *Western Mail*, 26 September 1888, p. 3. Anon., *The Celtic Who's Who* (Kircaldy: The Fifeshire Advertiser Limited, 1921), p. 152.
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[35] 'London Tragedies', *Aberdeen Weekly Journal*, 4 October 1888, p. 5; 'Tragedies in London', *Ipswich Journal*, 5 October 1888, p. 5.
[36] 'The Weekly Times', *Manchester Times*, 17 November 1888, p. 4.
[37] 'The Spitalfields Murder', *Daily News*, 13 November 1888, p. 5.
[38] *Ibid*.
[39] 'The Weekly Times', *Manchester Times*, p. 4.
[40] Haia Shpayer-Makov, *The Ascent of the Detective: Police Sleuths in Victorian and Edwardian England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 348.
[41] 'The Spitalfields Murder', *Daily News*, p. 5.
[42] 'Tragedies at the East End', *Fun*, 24 October 1888, p. 175.
[43] See: 'The Oxford', *Standard*, 27 December 1888, p. 2; 'Politics at the Pantomime', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 28 December 1888, p. 3; 'Chirgwin and Co.', *Penny Illustrated*, 29 December 1888, p. 407.
[44] The Pinchin Street Torso was the mutilated and partially dismembered body of a woman, never identified, discovered in Whitechapel's Pinchin Street on 10 September 1889. See: 'Another Murder and Mutilation in Whitechapel', *The Times*, 11 September 1889, p. 5.
[45] 'Our Own Hurdy-Gurdy', *Judy*, 18 September 1889, p. 139.

[46] It is worth noting that Avenall explored this subversive form of performance – a 'personation' that could not be decoded simply by reading his appearance – at a time of critical anxiety about performances of female characters who were not straightforwardly aesthetically and psychologically legible. Exempla include Ellen Terry's Lady Macbeth (1888), Marion Terry in the first version of Wilde's *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892), and Mrs Patrick Campbell in Sims and Buchanan's *The Black Domino* (1893) and Pinero's *The Second Mrs Tanqueray* (1893).
[47] Isabel Stowell-Kaplan, 'Mediating Melodrama, Staging Sergeant Cuff', *Nineteenth Century Theatre and Film*, 46.1 (2019), 3–17, 3.
[48] *Ibid*.
[49] Tom Taylor, *The Ticket-of-Leave Man* (Chicago: Dramatic Publishing Company, 1912), p. 5.
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[51] 'Olympic', *Era*, 30 January 1888, p. 2; for 'On The Road' articles in the *Era* detailing tours of *The Silver King*, see 7 April 1888, p. 7; 12 May 1888, p. 7; 18 August 1888, p. 8; 25 August 1888, p. 7; 15 September 1888, p. 15; 13 October 1888, p. 10; 24 November 1888, p. 10; 8 December 1888, p. 9; 28 December 1889, p. 5. See also: 'Mr Charles Dornton', *Era*, 7 April 1888, p. 7; 'London Correspondence', *Birmingham Daily Post*, 24 April 1888, p. 5; 'Drury-Lane', *Standard*, 27 April 1888, p. 4; 'Public Amusements', *Liverpool Mercury*, 24 October 1888, p. 5; 'Plays in the Provinces', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 2 November 1888, p. 11.
[52] 'The Theatres', *Graphic*, 28 December 1889, p. 794.
[53] There were at least nine London productions of *Lady Audley's Secret* between 1880 and 1888, and four London productions and three provincial tours of *The Woman in White*. See: 'Easter Monday', *Morning Post*, 30 March 1880, p. 6; 'Drury Lane', *Standard*, 2 April 1880, p. 4; 'Surrey', *Standard*, 9 March 1881, p. 4; 'Philharmonic', *Standard*, 21 May 1881, p. 4; 'Astley's' *Standard*, 2 June 1882, p. 4; 'Crystal Palace', *Morning Post*, 11 June 1884, p. 1; 'Imperial', *Standard*, 29 January 1885, p. 4; 'Theatrical and Musical Intelligence', *Morning Post* (25 October 1886), p. 3; 'Theatrical and Musical Intelligence', *Morning Post*, 14 November 1887, p. 3; 'Miss Josephine Fiddes', *Era*, 25 April 1880, p. 14; 'Ipswich', *Era*, 3 June 1882, p. 2; 'Mr W.H. Swanborough', *Era*, 14 June 1884, p. 15, 'Miss Forbes-Brette', *Era*, 13 September 1884, p. 17; 'Bishop Auckland', *Era*, 20 September 1884, p. 3; 'St James's Theatre', *Guardian*, 3 December 1884, p. 5; 'New Cross', *Era*, 26 June 1886, p. 19.
[54] '"Jack The Ripper" Dramatized', *North-Eastern Daily Gazette*, 31 August 1889, p. 3.
[55] 'Tragedies at the East End', *Fun*, 24 October 1888, p. 175.
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[58] Stowell-Kaplan, 'Mediating Melodrama', 11.
[59] *Ibid*.
[60] Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), p. 4.
[61] *Ibid.*, 20.
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[63] *Ibid*; see also Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, p. 28.
[64] Taylor, *The Ticket-of-Leave Man*, costume list; Stowell-Kaplan, 'Mediating Melodrama', 6.
[65] 'A Man in Female Costume With A Knife', *Evening News*, 5 October 1888, *Jack the Ripper Casebook* [https://www.casebook.org/press_reports/evening_news/18881005.html, accessed 5 April 2019].
[66] 'Disguised in Female Attire', *Star*, 15 November 1888, p. 4.
[67] 'Looking Out For "Jack The Ripper"' *Star*, 17 November 1888, p. 2.
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[69] '"Jack the Ripper" Scare', *Star*, 17 October 1889, p. 4.
[70] 'Disguised in Female Attire', p. 4.
[71] Brooks, *Melodramatic Imagination*, p. 4, p. 20.
[72] 'A Man in Female Costume With A Knife'.
[73] 'London Tragedies', 5; 'Attempt to Lynch an Amateur Detective', p. 5; 'A Constable Mistaken For "Jack The Ripper"', *St James's Gazette*, 15 November 1888, p. 7.

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[75] 'The Epidemic of Violence', *Dundee Courier and Argus*, 23 October 1888, p. 3.
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[80] 'Threatening to Play "Jack the Ripper"', *Blackburn Standard*, 11 May 1889, p. 6. In November 1889, Sheffield man Henry Carrey, a 'powerful looking-man', and long-term abuser, stabbed his wife, Rose Carrey, his violence having escalated after he 'threatened to play Jack the Ripper on her'. See: 'Stabbing A Wife at Attercliffe', *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, 8 November 1889, p. 2.
[81] 'Jack the Ripper scare', *Leicester Chronicle*, 24 Aug 1889, p. 3.
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