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Jack the Ripper and Oscar Wilde: the Influence of the Late-Victorian Press in the Development of Their Reputation

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Scandal often does as much harm to the listeners as to those who devise it, even if it were to do no other harm than disturb the mind, as it does, and give rise to temptations to speak or write about it to others.

— St. Vincent de Paul.

Abstract

The late-Victorian press had the duty to keep their readers informed about the murders of Jack the Ripper in 1888 and the trials of Oscar Wilde in 1895. Not only did these cases become progressively sensational due to the peculiar personalities of both the Ripper and Wilde, but they were seen as the means to express disapproval of the habits associated with an area like Whitechapel, and the practice of homosexuality, respectively. This dissertation aims at identifying the methods employed by Victorian journalists to either downplay or accentuate certain aspects of both cases, aiming to satisfy the curiosity of the reading public. Using the British National Archive as the primary source, this thesis undertakes a synchronic analysis of the publications of Victorian newspapers and cartoons about the episodes for which Jack the Ripper and Oscar Wilde are responsible. The research shows a strong correlation between the journalists' subjectivity and the impact it had on the reputations of Jack the Ripper and Oscar Wilde. The thesis concludes with the realization that Jack the Ripper became a legend in a short period of time since the publications during the "autumn of terror" were more oriented towards unveiling his identity than condemning his crimes. Conversely, Oscar Wilde's references in the Victorian press were restricted to attacks on his persona. Only after the development of sociobiological theories of homosexuality was Oscar Wilde rescued from the catalogue of disowned public figures, thus achieving a reputation far better than he had in the nineteenth century.

Keywords: Late-Victorian press, Jack the Ripper, Oscar Wilde, sensationalism, reputation.

Table of contents

1. Introduction	6
2. Victorian press	7
3. The case of Jack the Ripper	8
3.1. Social context	8
3.2. The role of media during the “autumn of terror”	9
4. The case of Oscar Wilde	13
4.1. Social context	13
4.2. The role of media during Oscar Wilde’ trials	15
5. A comparison of the cases	19
6. Conclusion	19
7. Works cited	22
8. Appendix	24

1. Introduction

Queen Victoria's reign (1840-1901) remains one of the most successful chapters in the history of Britain. It was extremely fruitful in industrial terms and The Great Exhibition of 1851, the railway system, and the rise of the middle classes are three main examples that reflect so. Victorian morality could be best described as the epitome of Puritanism; however, during the late-Victorian period, "public prudery masked a flourishing trade in vice" (Garton 2004, 101). It is considered a period of sexual revolution despite the strictness of Victorian prudishness. Some of the most remarkable theories that challenged the traditional structures of social order were born throughout the period, such as *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Origin of Species* (1859) by Charles Darwin, and Sigmund Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899). The Victorian ideology of emphasizing individual interest could be best exemplified as what has been further labeled by modern literature scholars as Victorian *Bildungsroman*, a "formation" novel in which the individual's identity is shaped by personal experiences — and potentially traumatic as it involves self-identity crisis and isolation from society — as in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Charles Dicken's *David Copperfield* (1850) (Purchase 2006, 169).

In this light, psychological, political, economic, and scientific publications dating from the Victorian age remain the point of departure of contemporary studies on the infrastructure of the Victorian generation. The role of media should be taken into consideration to discuss the presentation of noteworthy events to Victorian Puritan society. And apart from that, in which ways did the Victorian press manipulate the publications of sensitive issues that could challenge Victorian Puritanism to keep the readership undisturbed? Did the extreme preoccupation with avoiding popular alteration create speculations and distorted ideas of reality? This dissertation aims at proving the influence of the Victorian press in the development of two of the most remarkable events of the late-Victorian period: the brutal assassinations of Jack the Ripper in 1888 and the trials of Oscar Wilde in 1895. Finally, both cases will be compared to discover the aspects they have in common that got the attention not only of journalists but also of Victorian society.

Following a synchronic examination of national magazines and newspaper articles, the analysis is divided into four sections. To find out the extent to which the press guided Jack the Ripper and Oscar Wilde's reputation in Victorian society, the methodology includes a variety of newspapers rather than just the most influential from the period, since all of them contribute to public opinion to a greater or lesser extent. Firstly, a brief outline of the situation of the

Victorian press provides the regulations it had to undergo to be commercialized during the mid and late-Victorian years. Secondly, the case of Jack the Ripper's criminal actions will be analysed, as is the mystery behind his anonymity through the publication of the advances (and lack thereof) of the Metropolitan Police in the media during the autumn of 1888. Thirdly, the examination will cover the famous trials of Oscar Wilde and how the press manipulated the writer's former reputation and encouraged prejudices about homosexuality. The fourth and last section will deal with the similarities and differences between both cases and the impact of the close relationship between sensationalism and subjectivity of Victorian papers on Jack and Wilde's honor. The newspapers used in the project are from the British Newspaper Archive (referenced with the initials BNA throughout the thesis). Other sources are the BBC, the Encyclopedia Britannica, the British Library (abbreviated as BL), the *Punch Magazine*, and the UK Parliament.

2. Victorian press and the taxes on knowledge.

The repeal of the 'taxes on knowledge' is one of the most highlighted events in the history of the Victorian press; however, taxation over paper duties is an issue that has previously shaken the pillars of The British Empire. In the previous century, the British Parliament during the reign of King George III established the Stamp Act (1765). Since the nation was in debt from the Seven Year's War, the act was passed as a revenue source and imposed on all paper documents in the colonies in a similar way as the Sugar Act did in 1764. Nonetheless, the legislation was not well received by colonists who organized the Stamp Act Congress in the same year the act was passed. To stop the Stamp crisis, the British Parliament passed the Declaratory Act in 1766 as a "reaffirmation of its power to pass any laws over the colonists that it saw fit" (History 2019). The hostility that originated the excise on paper was one of the factors that detonated the American Revolutionary War.

The taxes on knowledge were a system of taxation including four excise duties. The advertisement duty, the newspaper stamp, and the excise on paper were the core of this system. The duty on paper was the most applied tax since it covered a diversity of paper-based items until its repeal in 1861. The perpetual labor of the APRTOK and NPPARPD¹ in the reforms of 1855 and 1861 allowed the insertion of a wide variety of newspapers in 1861. While the twenty-five-year period from 1830 to 1855 saw up to 415 new newspapers introduced to the market,

¹ The Association for the Promotion of the Repeal of the Taxes on Knowledge and the Newspaper and Periodical Press Association for the Repeal of the Paper Duty.

the six years between 1855 and 1861 saw 492 new ones. Nonetheless, the leadership of ‘national’ dailies such as *The Times*, *Daily News*, and *Morning Post* remained almost immovable (Hewitt 2015, 98). In any case, the newspaper hierarchy is not an aspect that conditions the study of the impact of the media on the mentality of its readership.

3. The case of Jack the Ripper

3.1. Social context

3.1.1. Prostitution and class conflict.

Throughout the final years of Queen Victoria’s reign, London was the stage of an insurgent sexual revolution and an unceasing battle between the upper and lower classes. Despite the superficial Puritanism that best describes Victorian morality, the surreptitious reality was the upswing in pornography, sadomasochism, pedophilia, prostitution, the wide-spreading of brothels, sexual diseases, and homosexual encounters in the late 19th century. *Ergo*, both high-born and underclass spheres blamed each other for the country’s disgraces.

Such was the concern about the forces that could challenge Victorian prudishness that even influential figures of the period expressed their alarming preoccupation with the threat that streetwalkers were in society. Regarded as the greatest novelist of the Victorian era, Charles Dickens also spread his ideas on prostitution. He commissioned Urania House together with the British philanthropist Angela Burdett-Coutts in November 1847. This residence consisted of a safe space for prostitutes — or what they both called ‘fallen women’ — for them to rehabilitate into exemplary wives (Purchase 2006, 126). The truth behind this home was not to help prostitutes but to keep them apart, as they were pointed out as the focal point of the spread of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

The rivalry between the East End and the West End of London was known before the appearance of Jack the Ripper; nonetheless, his crimes in Whitechapel reinforced the reciprocal prejudices on class, gender, and religion. The “Bloody Sunday” on November 13, 1887, is a clear example of this hostility.² The continuous situation of mob violence and class discrepancy “spurred the Tory press to conjure up the specter of a dangerous criminal class in the East End bent on wreaking havoc in the prosperous and fashionable parts of town” (Curtis 2001, 54-55).

² Around ten thousand unemployed workers gathered in Trafalgar Square to denounce the poor working conditions that made families live in poverty. The Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Charles Warren banned all possible protests in Trafalgar Square and conquered the area with more than four thousand constables. The riot symbolized the absence of free speech “and the perception that socialist and other left-wing groups had failed to establish themselves as mainstream political forces” (Ness 2009, 564). Despite its name, the number of injured individuals on the “Bloody Sunday” adds up to 128, 1,2% of the total amount of protesters involved.

The social antagonism stems from the rise of the middle class due to the rapid industrialization of Britain. This phenomenon conditioned the overcrowding of cities and towns and the subsequent escape of the middle class to the suburbs.

3.1.2. Sexual muckraking and tabloid sensationalism

In a context when a sexual scandal was unveiled together with the next one as a chain-reaction consequence, prostitutes' avowals of the abusive behavior of their clients were a spotlight to the press. Hence, the publication of these masculine misconducts led to public concern over the pejorative working conditions of streetwalkers.

The success of tabloid sensationalism conditioned the exposition of the abuses of prostitution consumers, their identities, and sexual diseases. There was scant regulation on child prostitution until the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885, which raised the age of consent for girls up to sixteen years old (see [image 1](#), UK Parliament). Before this legislation, child prostitution was commonplace in the period. Josephine Butler's "Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon" attracted the middle-class readership due to its explicitness in relating the selling of infant girls by their poor families to upper-class libertines for no more than five pounds (Walkowitz 1982, 545). This feminist representative made remarkable labor in the propagation of the mistreatment of prostitutes and the subsequent uncovering of men's hidden parallel lives.

3.2. The role of media during the "autumn of terror"

3.2.1. Modus operandi

Jack the Ripper's signature is riddled with blood and picquerism. His atrocities displayed his intense hatred for sex workers and incited hypotheses of all kinds. The press faced his heartless crimes with such explicitness that proves the shallow puritanism of the period. The paradoxical situation resulted from the fact that every article that narrated Jack's cruelties was rapidly spread among the readers. Indeed, the journalistic practice of reporting his assassinations as raw as it could be, reflected that this style of storytelling was well-received by the Puritan audience.

It was believed that Jack the Ripper was the author of seven murders in Whitechapel; however, later investigations revealed that just five of them ended up in the Ripper's hands. His crimes go beyond being just assassinations: there was a complete psychological discourse behind the murders. The *modus operandi* of cutting the throat from ear to ear and the subsequent mutilation of breasts and genitalia always in the dead of night represented two main ideas: on

the one hand, the slaughterer had great knowledge about anatomy, medicine, and the nightlife in Whitechapel; and on the other hand, he detested prostitutes.

The inquisitiveness that Jack the Ripper created was because his *modus operandi* was loyal to five features. First, picquerism is obvious in all the crimes he committed and eventually became more savage as the homicides went by. Next, Jack killed his victims before undertaking the mutilations. By incapacitating them first, he silenced the ladies not to prevent their agony but more precisely not to be discovered. Thirdly, he desired his atrocities to be the subject of public discussion as he placed the victims in the open to feed into their degradation. What's more, they all were attacked from the back — a key factor to distinguish the Ripper's crimes from others of the period — and had certain organs extracted via precise cuts, an odd technique that confused the police force (Keppel et al. 2005, 16). Finally, the victims were purposely left with their legs wide open showing their intimate parts as an act of humiliation. Jack spurred a stir that agitated Whitechapel because of his faithfulness to this particular *modus operandi*, which eventually gave personality to the anonymous killer.

The last mutilation was considered the concluding brushstroke for the portrayal of the legend of Jack the Ripper owing to the gore in it. Mary Jane Kelly, a twenty-five-year-old prostitute, was found dead in his room in Miller's Court on Dorset Street. Jack drove his *modus operandi* on another level due to two alterations: he killed her in her bed and the only feature he did not harm was Miss Kelly's big eyes. Police officers describe it as “the horrific and horrible sight that greeted the eyes of the policeman and other witnesses of whose subsequent traumas we hear nothing” (Begg 2004, 301). As it was the fifth crime attributed to Jack the Ripper, the press knew how to deal with its presentation. For instance, the *Illustrated Police News* presented the classic comic-like cover with striking drawings related to the homicide: a full portrait of the victim, a map of the zone, the moment the body was discovered, the removal to Shoreditch mortuary, and the recreation of Jack sneaking out, among many other illustrations (see [image 2](#), BNA). Consequently, considering that the event was a national scandal, newspapers such as the *Pall Mall Gazette* enlarged the story by means of exposing the victim's private life and so keep on taking popularity and economic profit with the case (see [image 3](#), BNA).

3.2.2. The letters

A decisive factor in the analysis of the role of Victorian media during the Whitechapel assassinations is the publication of the letters that Jack the Ripper wrote and sent to individual newspapers, the Central News Agency in London, and the Metropolitan Police. Not only were the letters a resource to extract clues about the persona of Jack the Ripper, but they also were an element to distort the story through falsifications and unreliable hints about the murders.

Jack the Ripper owns the authorship of at least two letters confessing his crimes. The first relevant one was received by the Central News Agency on 27th September 1888. Labeled as the “Dear Boss” letter, the criminal mocks the incompetence of the police officers in the first middle part and manifests forthcoming “funny little games” in the second half of it (see [images 4](#) and [5](#), Britannica). The message was initially ignored by the Metropolitan Police because, in all likelihood, it was a hoax created by reporters. The popular “enterprising journalist” theory pointed out that Tom Bulling, a journalist from the *Central News Agency*, or Frederick Best, another one from *The Star*, could be behind the creation of this letter (Nini 2018, 623). Nonetheless, the “Dear Boss” letter became a plot point in the story as the early name “Leather Apron” given to the unknown murderer (see [image 6](#), Britannica) was now replaced by “Jack the Ripper” when it became publicly known he signed the letter in such a way. In spite of that, another key part remains more useful in deciding whether the letter was from the real killer or not. In the final section, the killer states that he will “clip the ladys ears off” of his next victim as a way of proving his authorship (see [image 4](#), Britannica). On September 30th, Catherine Eddowes was found with one earlobe cut.

The head of the Whitechapel Vigilance Committee George Lusk received on October 16, 1888, a small box with an unsigned letter and half a human kidney. “From Hell” was the return address and the iconic prepositional phrase that named the second letter written by Jack. In it, the murderer explains that the half kidney belongs to the last victim and the missing half has been fried and eaten. The strong sarcastic tone, the concluding challenge “catch me when you can”, and the confirmation that the body of Catherine Eddowes suffered the mutilation of the kidney were pieces of evidence newsworthy enough to justify its publication in the press. Some papers preferred to avoid mentioning the mutilations altogether and others relied on euphemisms to lighten the cruelty of the actions (Curtis 2001, 221). On the contrary, the *Driffield Times* and the *Shields Daily News* published explicitly the letter, the delivery of the half kidney, and the police interpretations of the event (see [images 7](#) and [8](#), BNA).

The overexposure of the case obstructed severely the investigation due to the massive delivery of hoax letters allegedly signed by Jack the Ripper. The Metropolitan Police were being fooled around as they were incapable to follow the trail of the assassin. In this light, John Tenniel drew the cartoon “Blind-Man’s Buff” in the satirical magazine *Punch*. It portrayed a blindfolded police officer being teased by criminals to reflect the general underestimation of London’s Metropolitan police (see [image 9](#), BL).

3.2.3. Speculations and prejudices

Among the many downsides resulting from the publication of the letters, the sociological impact they prompted is one of the worst of them. The threshold of anonymity was being reduced given that the readership now knew what Jack the Ripper’s handwriting and misspellings were like. The general desperation to discover Jack’s identity can be proved by Queen Victoria’s proposal to Lord Salisbury to offer a reward for further information (Walkovitz 1982, 566). Hence, gossip and ensuing bias spurred since the criminal’s literacy and unprecedented *modus operandi* was an indicator of his possible status and occupation.

Rumours acknowledged Jack the Ripper’s obsession with organ extraction as a clue of his profession and social class. His clear-cut mutilations were the basis of this hypothesis. Apart from that, “the close proximity of London Hospital to the district in which the murders occurred fuelled the flames of speculation” (Wilson and Odell 1987, 123). Another medical-related theory blamed a workaholic gynecologist who tried to find the cure for neurasthenia due to the inefficient, merciless procedures of the Victorian period (Curtis 2001, 221). The popular entertainment turned into a battle of classes when it was proposed that the Ripper was a prominent doctor.

As the debate on prostitution was tenser than ever, ongoing speculation also deteriorated the overall conception of prostitutes and the sexual antagonism between Victorian men and women. Posterior theories suggested that only the last victim was a high-class sex worker; the rest of them were homeless ladies whose assassinations were the Metropolitan police and journalists’ means to degrade the image of sex workers. The tone of rejection plus pejorative adjectives were common means to reflect prejudices. On October 3, 1888, the *Telegraph* stated that Catherine Eddowes was among “houseless waifs, penniless prostitutes, like herself” (quoted in Rubenhold 2019, 216). Middle-class entrepreneurs also took a profit from the scandal. For just one penny people could visit a waxwork exhibition with Lady Nichols represented as how the killer, even when the figure of Jack the Ripper was not developed yet, mutilated her body

(Williams 1892, 6). The murders opened the doors to new ways of stimulating the late-Victorian economy despite that it might be considered immoral to do so.

Religion was also the target of social prejudices. Migratory Jews who lived in Whitechapel suffered ethnocentric discrimination from the West End since they made prosperous businesses in the area. In this light, one of the many outcomes of the general feeling of anti-Semitism was the accusation of humble Jewish individuals of being Jack the Ripper itself. It is the case of John Pizer, alias “Leather Apron”, a bookmaker accused of being the killer by the press. As a result, one journalist from the *Star* had to pay John Pizer fifty pounds to avoid a lawsuit for false accusations, damages, and legal fees (Curtis 2001, 123-124). The media had an essential role in strengthening or lightening speculations, and the *Star* was the newspaper that fed the Jewish-killer theory the most.

The persistent treatment of the murders as a media event resulted in the normalization of the cases. Prejudices were most suffered by lower classes since the East End was now commonly considered a dangerous zone coupled with the belief that a slaughterer was living in the area disguised as a doctor, gynecologist, or bootmaker. Fear and untruthfulness could be breathed around every corner of Whitechapel. Therefore, during the fall of 1888, the Church underwent higher attendance since poor women considered it an option not to be alone either in their rooms or in the street. (Walkovitz 1982, 564). What’s more, even one year after Jack the Ripper’s murders — when the situation in Whitechapel was much better than in 1888 and the social fever for the cases was almost over — newspapers still benefited from the gaps in the story to fill their pages with more speculations. For instance, the *Illustrated Police News* published on September 28, 1889, a depiction of Jack’s unknown actions before and after committing the crimes under the headline “Dr. Forbes Winslow Conjures Up the Secret Actions of Jack the Ripper” (see [image 10](#), BBC).

4. The case of Oscar Wilde

4.1. Social context

4.1.1. Homosexuality in the late-Victorian period

Among the several instances in which Victorian morality has proved itself to be highly contradictory, the trials of Oscar Wilde could be the epitome of social hypocrisy and public punishment. Convicted of “gross indecency”, the Irish poet and playwright served two years in prison with hard labor after the allegations about his homosexual encounters with some

individuals and his relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas proved to be true. The role of media during the trials transformed drastically the reputation of Oscar Wilde from being looked up to by the aristocracy, to being forced to exile to Paris.

Although Wilde underwent progressive unpopularity that ended up in an unfortunate destiny, he was relatively lucky only regarding the two-year sentence. The Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 mentioned in the previous case (see [image 1](#), UK Parliament) has also an essential role in the context of homosexuality in the late-Victorian period. The legislation was modified when Henry Labouchere, Liberal MP for Northampton, introduced Section 11 in the Criminal Law Amendment Act, which made illegal all homosexual acts of “gross indecency” and therefore “Oscar Wilde and Alan Turing, among many others, were convicted and punished for committing homosexual acts” (UK Parliament, n.d.). Before this section, the legislation was ambiguous with regard to what was considered a homosexual activity. The general verdict was “acts of buggery” and penal servitude for life.

4.1.2. The reputation of Oscar Wilde before the trials

Oscar Wilde was considered an honorable figure among the English elite. His quote “You can never be overdressed or overeducated” proved that he had every intention to be either praised by his appearance or by his wit. Even though his homosexuality was considered a national scandal after the trials, “the proclivities of Wilde were, moreover, common knowledge in London for a long time before his tribulations began” (Adut 2005, 214). Consequently, it can be considered hypocritical the behaviour of late-Victorian society with the writer.

This period of Wilde’s life is characterized by literary success and social recognition. The first three months of 1889 were the most triumphant for the playwright: *An Ideal Husband* and *The Importance of Being Earnest* were played at the most renowned theatres in the West End. In both dramas, Wilde mocks the culture and manners of Victorian society through the characters of Lord Arthur Goring and Algernon Moncrieff. Even though the notion of dandyism can be traced back to Lord Byron’s concept of the Byronic hero (Schmid 2002, 81), Oscar Wilde renewed the figure of the dandy through Goring, Moncrieff, and himself. They all share some features of their outstanding personalities, but most importantly, their dressing style, creating in this way a hallmark that has persisted for decades.

The appearance of Oscar Wilde in the press before the trials was initially limited to being satirized for his dressing style and distinctive manners. On July 17, 1880, *Punch Magazine* publishes “An Aesthetic Midday Meal” by cartoonist George du Maurier. The customer, Jellaby

Postlethwaite, represents Wilde's feminine posture by sitting with his legs crossed and hands clasped. What's more, the absurdity of the scene depicts Wilde as a dull artist who orders a "freshly-cut Lily" as his meal (see [image 11](#), *Punch Magazine*). The glances of incredulity that surround him express how misunderstood Aestheticism was at the time.

Oscar Wilde's oeuvre was also the target of criticism once he made a name for himself. In July 1894, he published *Poems in Prose* in the *Fortnightly Review*. *The Disciples* is the poem of the collection that deals with the sorrow of the pool in which Narcissus used to look at his own reflection. The intensification of self-praising is also carried by the personification of the pool, as the pool states that it is lamenting Narcissus' death because 'In the mirror of his eyes I saw ever my own beauty mirrored' (Wilde 1909, 202). Cartoonist Thomas Nast mocked the overwhelming egocentric atmosphere of *The Disciples* in 'Mr. O'Wilde', a caricature published in *Harper's Bazar* on February 11, 1882. Wilde embodies Narcissus, again with the emblematic Aesthete element of a flower, pleasantly gazing at his own reflection beside a summary of the poem on the right side. One of the most subtle satires spread over the cartoon could be "A dollar sign within the reflected blossom [that] establishes the pool as a mirror of truth, a surface which transforms Wilde's lanky form into a lion (a punning reference to 'lionizing' or celebrity seeking)" (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, n.d.). The idea of reflections is reinforced in the cartoon by the echo of the mountains, which bounce 'He is an aesthetic sharm' (see [image 12](#), BL). Wilde used fashion and poetry as means of expressing his art; however, the media used them as means of hiding prejudices against his feminine conduct and rumored homosexuality.

4.2. The role of media during the trials of Oscar Wilde

4.2.1. The beginning of the trials: missing information

The Libel Case of Oscar Wilde constitutes a tragic chapter in the history of the LGBTQ community. Wilde had a love affair with Lord Alfred Douglas «Bosie», a British aristocrat and poet. Not only was the homosexual factor what spurred the trials, but the age gap between them was also a key aspect to sentence Wilde. On February 18, 1895, his lover's father the Marquess of Queensberry left a five-word card in the Albemarle Club. The note read: "For Oscar Wilde, posing sodomite [sic]." Wilde ignored his friends' guidance of fleeing to France due to the seriousness of the accusation and sued the Marquess for defamation. The first references to the Libel Case are characterized by censorship.

Wilde's ignorance or overlooking of the Marquess' past and personality was a factor that seriously affected the repercussion of the first trial. The Marquess of Queensberry already had

a bad reputation among the upper class: he lost his seat in the House of Lords for his “aggressive atheism” and was also fond of attacking influential personalities (Adut 2005, 230). Most importantly, he had previous experience with homosexuality within his family. The Prime Minister Lord Rosebery and the Marquess’ oldest son Viscount Drumlanrig had a love affair that ended with the latter’s death, which was initially believed to have been caused by a shooting accident and later a suicide (McKenna 2005, 314). Wilde sued the Marquess for defamation, but he was declared “Not Guilty”. Wilde’s overestimation made him believe that the Marquess’ arguments were not solid enough, but the jury called for a second trial, in which Wilde would be the subject of possible “gross indecency”.

The coverage of the case in newspapers was increasingly multiplied due to the sensational development of the trials. Nonetheless, dealing openly with homosexuality in the Victorian press was extremely uncommon and the main result was the irregularity of the expurgation of the most controversial aspects. National papers either avoided publishing the Marquess’ card or did it partially. When the libel case opened on April 3, 1895, at the Old Bailey, The *Evening Standard* dedicated five columns on its cover to the prosecution and included the note as “Oscar Wilde posing as —————” (see [image 13](#), BNA). The censorship made it impossible for the readers to have an opinion on the accusation and boosted curiosity and speculations about the gravity of the issue.

4.2.2. The climax of the trials: attitudes

The three trials of Oscar Wilde took place between April 3rd and May 21st, 1895. During this period, attitudes towards the writer, homosexuality, and the upper class metamorphosed into general social rejection as Wilde was finally convicted of “gross indecency”. The judiciary was extraordinarily respected by the press and public opinion.

The justice system is one of the main elements responsible for the transition of Oscar Wilde from popular idealization to social ostracism. The respect for the judiciary can be seen in the fact that “societal sanctioning of elite homosexuality required prior legal measures even in instances where the transgression was already common knowledge” (Adut 2005, 239). After the trials, newspapers changed their approach to the writer’s behavior to a much harsher critique. For instance, the *Bristol Mercury* of April 6, 1895, shows gratitude to the Marquess for “getting rid of a pest which must have been known to many others in London beside himself” and celebrates Oscar Wilde’s downfall as “a public benefit in purifying the atmosphere of the stage and of the fashionable novel” (see [images 14](#) and 15, BNA). Journalists sometimes made

it obvious that their articles were not purely informative. Taking as an example the *London Evening News* from May 27, 1895, the tone of the report is one of humiliating Wilde by quoting what he once said about the ineffectiveness of public opinion and the possibility of feeling free while being imprisoned. Then, the newspaper makes a conclusive pun: “No one will grudge him the opportunity of putting his doctrine to the test” (see [image 16](#), BNA). The combination of the justice system and the subjectivity of the press ceased the former social respect for Wilde as a writer and turned him into a criminal.

Oscar Wilde’s extraordinary identity made it possible for criticism to be directed towards several directions not even necessarily related to sexuality or literature. In this way, the wide range of derogatory comments made social rejection more solid. As Ari Adut asserts in her article, “Wilde was hence represented as the avatar of the degenerate upper classes” (2005, 240). This statement can be observable in the previous newspaper article from the *London Evening News* since the journalist states that his privileged position does not allow him to appreciate the “common clay” (see [image 17](#), BNA).

4.2.3. The resolution of the trials: overexposure

The article of the *London Evening News* commented in the previous section evokes dissenting sentiments towards the Irish writer. While the left-positioned column reflects the journalist’s consideration of Oscar Wilde and the Marquess of Queensberry, the right-positioned one aimed at feeding the curiosity of the readership about Wilde’s future in jail.

The Victorian press had the duty to communicate the development of the most highlighted events of the time; however, the details usually exceeded the limits of what was necessary to publish. Additionally, the tone and style of the publication often revealed that the journalist supported one of the parties. For instance, the previous article of the *Evening News* includes a brief transcription of the third trial in a novel-like narrative style and derogatory tone in the right column (see [image 18](#), BNA). Then, it entails an accurate description of Wilde’s new life in prison. The schedule shows the prototypical routine of prisoners in Pentonville: daily attendance to Church, industrial work, and physical activity. It was specified to Wilde “no talking” or “play-writing, although it might be the most profitable for the prison department”. The article even included Wilde’s diet: “cocoa and bread for breakfast” and “tea-time at 17.30”

(see [image 19](#), BNA)³. This preciseness might have been done to compare Wilde's new accommodations with the previous comfortable life as a successful writer.

Other newspapers consider it more relevant to expand on the developments of the trials. In a span of two columns, the *Illustrated Police News* of April 20, 1895, publishes extensively the contributions of the witnesses to the trials. One of them declares that he worked as Wilde's secretary and copied a part of the play *A Woman of No Importance* (1893). The periodical also includes a trip to Paris in which Wilde invited the unnamed man to his hotel room, kissed him two times, and took him to diverse clubs (see [image 21](#), BNA). In this example, the journalist's approach is highly objective if compared with the *Evening News*. The *Illustrated Police News* of May 25, 1895, published on its cover page the final scenes of the third trial. The intention to mock lies in two vignettes portraying the transformation of Wilde's appearance before and during the trials. His personal belongings are being sold off to pay debtors (see [image 22](#), BL). Illustrations, as well as extended narrations, were powerful means to reflect attitudes against Wilde.

The role of the press in reporting and magnifying the relevance of the trials affected the discrepancy between Oscar Wilde's biographers. Those who witnessed any instances of the trials reported their experience with such emphasis that distorted the reality of the occasion. Newspapers' pretentious accounts and the individual desire to contribute to the case can be best exemplified in Frederick Roden's *Oscar Wilde studies*:

But if the press reports, which were frequently accompanied by grotesque illustrations of Wilde's physical appearance, could not have done enough to make the trials into an event that aroused considerable voyeurism, then it would be left to Wilde's biographers to make his exit from the Old Bailey into an even more mesmerizing spectacle, and it is here that the habitual distortions of his life become most visible. (Roden 2004, 25).

Journalists had the responsibility to write their articles from an impartial perspective; nonetheless, seldom were newspapers' illustrations not intended to reflect certain opinions. As has been demonstrated by the role of the *Illustrated Police News* in communicating the verdict of Wilde's third trial, the press tradition of deteriorating the image of Oscar Wilde was later undertaken by biographers whose work did not correlate with other Wilde biographers.

³ If the reader wishes to see a final scheme of the column organization of the *Evenings News* of May 27, 1895, and the parts this thesis has analysed, please check [image 20](#), BNA.

5. A comparison of the cases

Jack the Ripper became a well-known criminal owing to his savage mutilations and his witty artifices of tricking the Metropolitan Police. Conversely, Oscar Wilde was already a celebrated novelist, poet, and playwright before the trials; however, his popularity reached the non-reading public as a result of the press commercialization of the court case. Both figures were once the subject of idle talk in late-Victorian England, but which aspects shared both Jack the Ripper and Oscar Wilde that made their cases extremely profitable for the press? Which ones differed?

One of the major reasons behind the overexposure of the cases is the odd personalities of both Jack the Ripper and Oscar Wilde. On the one hand, the scarce information about Jack the Ripper made readers interested in the police officer's advances on the case. Not only was anonymity beneficial for the Ripper but also journalists discussed the subsequent speculations in their articles. On the other hand, Wilde's eloquent personality was a key factor in the repercussion of the trials. One of the assistants of Wilde's second trial labeled his monologue on platonic love as "the finest speech of an accused man since that of Paul before King Herod Agrippa" (Hyde 1962, 15). The impact of Wilde's oratory roused the jury's collapse in making a final verdict, which made Wilde stand a third trial.

Despite the disparate resolutions between the investigation of Jack the Ripper and the verdict of Oscar Wilde, both events had an impact on the behavior of the Victorian press. As [image 10](#) has demonstrated previously, the media was more inclined in adding fuel to the mystery that surrounded Jack the Ripper than cover Ripper-like murders occurring in Whitechapel in 1889 (Walkowitz 1982, 569). In contrast, Oscar Wilde's verdict was clear. Victorian society agreed with disowning him and eradicated their interest in the writer. Wilde's wife forbade him to ever see their sons again and changed their surnames (Adut 2005, 240). Wilde spent his final years in France — where homosexuality was decriminalized as an outcome of the French Revolution — and died of meningitis at forty-six years old.

6. Conclusion

The mutilations of Jack the Ripper and the publications of Oscar Wilde's private life were events of nationwide interest, riddled with speculation and prejudices affecting the views on prostitution and homosexuality in the late-Victorian period. With this dissertation it can be proved that the press' management of such events conditioned discrimination against the East End — specifically Whitechapel residents, prostitutes, and Jews —, and homosexuality. Late-Victorian newspapers were remarkably determined by the relationship between the Victorian

conservative rule and the press interest in answering the readership's ghoulish crave for new information on such cases. Indeed, this project has portrayed some of the techniques that journalists employed to keep the cases relevant by means of exposing the victims' private life and feeding the morbid fascination behind the anonymity of Jack the Ripper with speculations. They also intended to soften the impact of Oscar Wilde's trials to protect the Victorian Puritan flag, as in the censorship of the word "sodomite" in certain British newspapers.

Given this kind of evidence, one cannot help but wonder: Why were both Jack the Ripper and Oscar Wilde considered criminals by the media when the former murdered and humiliated prostitutes and the latter defended his sexual orientation until the point of going to jail and fleeing the country? This thesis has proved that the multiple positions that the 1880s and 1890s newspapers adopted in their articles stimulated both protagonists' reputations. The anonymity of Jack the Ripper has also contributed to the scarce justice for the Whitechapel victims. Furthermore, the development of the discipline known as "Ripperology" is a direct product of the fascination that surrounds the figure of the serial killer since he was consolidated as a legendary assassin in 1888. Regarding Oscar Wilde, the resurgence of his name was less imminent. The vast coverage of the trials and the social ostracism that the writer experienced is a clear representation of the aphorism "Justice must be seen to be done". This system of resorting to a court case, overstating it, and using it as a warning has been explored centuries before by writers like William Shakespeare. It is what happens with Claudio's trial in *Measure for Measure*, specifically when Lucio describes Lord Angelo's strict judicial thinking: "And follows close the rigour of the statute / To make him an example" (I, 4, 67-68). Wilde's case was used as a model of what would happen to anyone in the late-Victorian period who legally intended to challenge Victorian Puritanism. In the psychological field, the philosopher and historian Michel Foucault argued in *The History of Sexuality* that Victorian society faced a transgressive sexual revolution closely similar to that of the 21st century, both dealing with "a dispersion of sexualities, a strengthening of their disparate forms, a multiple implantation of 'perversions'" (Foucault 1976, 37). It was not until a sexually literate mindset was consolidated by Foucault studies and the like that society showed solidarity with Oscar Wilde.

The main difference between both figures becoming legends in cinema, literature, and fashion is mainly due to two aspects. First, as Jack the Ripper was a person to be afraid of, during the "autumn of terror" some prankster teens used him as the prototypical murderer to frighten girls on the streets of Tunbridge Wells (Corke 1975, 25). The frivolity that his crimes have acquired throughout the centuries to this day can be seen in London souvenirs about him

or tours visiting the places where the bodies were found. As a recent example, the public perception of the case has made the author of one of the most brutal mutilations of history feature in a children's board game, smiling and holding a knife and a stomach (see [images 23](#) and 24). In the matter of Wilde, he has become a legend in the fashion industry due to the reborn of the figure of the dandy in the last decade. Celebrities such as Timothée Chalamet, Billy Porter, and Donald Glover have been selected as fashion icons, the latter having a “whole soul-dandy thing going on” (Elan 2020). Even though the modern dandy is mostly confined within the limits of the red carpet, the fact that the present press applauds the influence of Wilde's style in fashion strengthens, even more, the ancient relationship between the press and the readership's opinions.

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8. Appendix

Image - 1

[CH. 69.] *Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1885.* [48 & 49 VICT.]

85. woman or girl, or any other person who, in the opinion of the justice, is *bonâ fide* acting in the interest of any woman or girl, that there is reasonable cause to suspect that such woman or girl is unlawfully detained for immoral purposes by any person in any place within the jurisdiction of such justice, such justice may issue a warrant authorizing any person named therein to search for, and, when found, to take to and detain in a place of safety such woman or girl until she can be brought before a justice of the peace; and the justice of the peace before whom such woman or girl is brought may cause her to be delivered up to her parents or guardians, or otherwise dealt with as circumstances may permit and require.

The justice of the peace issuing such warrant may, by the same or any other warrant, cause any person accused of so unlawfully detaining such woman or girl to be apprehended and brought before a justice, and proceedings to be taken for punishing such person according to law.

A woman or girl shall be deemed to be unlawfully detained for immoral purposes if she is so detained for the purpose of being unlawfully and carnally known by any man, whether any particular man or generally, and—

- (a.) Either is under the age of sixteen years; or
- (b.) If of or over the age of sixteen years, and under the age of eighteen years, is so detained against her will, or against the will of her father or mother or of any other person having the lawful care or charge of her; or
- (c) If of or above the age of eighteen years is so detained against her will.

Any person authorized by warrant under this section to search for any woman or girl so detained as aforesaid may enter (if need be by force) any house, building, or other place specified in such warrant, and may remove such woman or girl therefrom.

Provided always, that every warrant issued under this section shall be addressed to and executed by some superintendent, inspector, or other officer of police, who shall be accompanied by the parent, relative, or guardian or other person making the information, if such person so desire, unless the justice shall otherwise direct.

11. Any male person who, in public or private, commits, or is a party to the commission of, or procures or attempts to procure the commission by any male person of, any act of gross indecency with another male person, shall be guilty of a misdemeanor, and being convicted thereof shall be liable at the discretion of the court to

6

[48 & 49 VICT.] *Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1885.* [CH. 69.]

be imprisoned for any term not exceeding two years, with or without hard labour. A.D. 1885.

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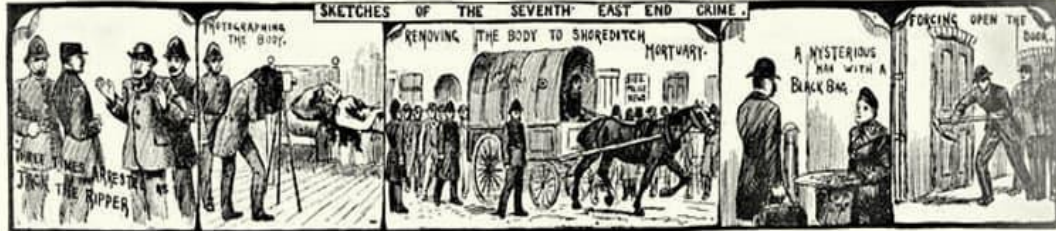
POLICE THE ILLUSTRATED NEWS

LAW COURTS AND WEEKLY RECORD

No. 1,592.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 1888.

Price One Penny.



THE SEVENTH MURDER IN WHITECHAPEL.

A STORY OF UNPARALLELED ATROCITY.

Although more complete details of the revolting murder which was discovered in Spitalfields yesterday morning are now obtainable, the story is practically the same that we told in our afternoon editions yesterday. Not one of the hideous facts which were then recorded can be taken back. This is now the seventh crime of the kind which has occurred in this immediate neighbourhood, and the character of the mutilations leaves very little doubt that the murderer in this instance is the same person who has committed the previous ones, with which the public are fully acquainted.

SCENE OF THE MURDER—"HOW THE POOR LIVE."

The scene of this last crime is at No. 26, Dorset-street, Spitalfields, which is about two hundred yards distant from 35, Hanbury-street, where the unfortunate woman, Mary Ann Nicholls, was so foully murdered. Although the victim, whose name is Mary Jane Kelly, resides at the above number, the entrance to the room she occupied is up a narrow court, in which are some half a dozen houses, and which is known as Miller's-court; it is entirely separated from the other portion of the house, and has an entrance leading into the court. The room is known by the title of No. 13. The house is rented by John McCarthy, who keeps a small general shop at No. 27, Dorset-street, and the whole of the rooms are let out to tenants of a very poor class. As an instance of the poverty of the neighbourhood, it may be mentioned that nearly the whole of the houses in this street are common lodging-houses, and the one opposite where this murder was enacted has accommodation for some 300 men, and is fully occupied every night.

HOW THE VICTIM LIVED.

About twelve months ago Kelly, who was about twenty-four years of age, and who was considered a good-looking young woman, of fair and fresh-coloured complexion, came to Mr. McCarthy with a man named Joseph Kelly, who she stated was her husband, and who was a porter employed at the Spitalfields market. They rented a room on the ground floor, the same in which the poor woman was murdered, at a rental of 4s. a week. It had been noticed that the deceased woman was somewhat addicted to drink, but Mr. McCarthy denied having any knowledge that she had been leading a loose or immoral life. That this was so, however, there can be no doubt: for about a fortnight ago she had a quarrel with Kelly, and, after blows had been exchanged, the man left the house, or rather room, and did not return. It has since been ascertained that he went to live at Buller's common lodging-house in Bishopsgate-street. Since then the woman has supported herself as best she could, and the police have ascertained that she has been walking the streets.

WHEN LAST SEEN—"SWEET VIOLETS" IN THE COURT.

Kelly had a little boy, aged about six or seven years, living with her, and latterly she had been in narrow straits, so much so that she is reported to have stated to a companion that she would make away with herself, as she could not bear to see her boy starving. There are conflicting statements as to when the woman was last seen alive, but that upon which most reliance appears to be placed is that of a young woman, an associate of the deceased, who states that at about half-past ten o'clock on Thursday night she met the murdered woman at the corner of Dorset-street, who said to her that she had no money and, if she could not get any, would never go out any more but would do away with herself. Soon afterwards they parted, and a man, who is described as respectfully dressed, came up and spoke to the murdered woman Kelly and offered her money. The man then accompanied the woman home to her lodgings, which are on the second floor, and the little boy was removed from the room and taken to a neighbour's house. At any rate, none of those living in the court or at 26, Dorset-street saw anything of the unfortunate creature after about eight o'clock on Thursday evening, but a person living in the court opposite heard her singing, it is said, the song, "Sweet violets," but this person is unable to say whether any one else was with her at that time. Nothing more was seen or heard of her until her dead body was found.

THE DISCOVERY OF THE CRIME.

At a quarter to eleven yesterday morning, as the woman was 30s. in arrears with her rent, Mr. McCarthy said to a man employed by him in his shop, John Bowyer, "Go to No. 13 (meaning the room occupied by Kelly) and try and get some rent." Bowyer went, and on knocking at the door was unable to obtain an answer. On looking through the keyhole he found the key was missing. The left-hand side of the room faced the court, and in it were two large windows. Bowyer, knowing that when the man Kelly and the dead woman had their quarrel a pane of glass in one of the windows was broken, went round to the side in question. He put his hand through the aperture and pulled aside the muslin curtain which covered it. On his looking into the room a shocking sight presented itself. He could see the woman lying on the bed, entirely naked, covered with blood and apparently dead. Without waiting to make a closer examination he ran to his employer and told him he believed the woman Kelly had been murdered. McCarthy at once went and looked through the broken window, and, satisfying himself that something was wrong, despatched Bowyer to the Commercial-street police-station, at the same time enjoining him not to tell any of the neighbours what he had discovered. Inspector Back, H Division, who was in charge of the station at the time, accompanied Bowyer back, and on finding that a murder had been committed at once sent for assistance. Dr. Phillips, the divisional surgeon of police, and Superintendent Arnold were also sent for. On the arrival of the latter he caused a telegram to be sent direct to Sir Charles Warren, informing him what had happened, and Inspector Abberline, who had already arrived, despatched a message to Sir Charles Warren to bring the bloodhounds.

A SICKENING AND UNPARALLELED SCENE.

Mr. Arnold, having satisfied himself that the woman was dead, ordered one of the windows to be removed. A horrible and sickening sight then presented itself. The woman lay on her back on the bed, entirely naked. Her throat was cut from ear to ear, right down to the spinal column. The ears and nose had been cut clean off. The breasts had also been cleanly cut off and placed on a table which was by the side of the bed. The stomach and abdomen had been ripped open, while the face was slashed about, so that the features of the poor creature were beyond all recognition. The kidneys and heart had also been removed from the body, and placed on the table by the side of the breasts. The

liver had likewise been removed, and laid on the right thigh. No portion of the body, however, had been taken away by the murderer. The thighs had been cut. A more horrible or sickening sight could not be imagined. The clothes of the woman were lying by the side of the bed, as though they had been taken off and laid down in the ordinary manner. While this examination was being made a photographer, who, in the meantime, had been sent for, arrived and took photographs of the body, the organs, the room, and its contents. Superintendent Arnold then had the door of the room forced. It was a very poorly furnished apartment, about 12 ft. square, there being only an old bedstead, two old tables, and a chair in it. The bedclothes had been turned down, and this was probably done by the murderer after he had cut his victim's throat. There was no appearance of a struggle having taken place, and although a careful search of the room was made, no knife or instrument of any kind was found.

CAPS WERE DOFFED AND TEARS WERE SHED.

After a careful examination of the remains by several doctors, the body was placed in a shell, which was put into a cart and conveyed to the mortuary. It was at ten minutes to four o'clock that a one-horse carrier's cart, with the ordinary tarpaulin cover, was driven into Dorset-street, and halted opposite Miller's-court. From the cart was taken a long shell or coffin, dirty and scratched with constant use. This was taken into the death chamber, and there the remains were temporarily confined. The news that the body was about to be removed caused a great rush of people from the courts running out of Dorset-street, and there was a determined effort to break the police cordon at the Commercial-street end. The crowd, which pressed round the van, was of the humblest class, but the demeanour of the poor people was all that could be desired. Ragged caps were doffed and slatternly-looking women shed tears as the shell, covered with a ragged-looking cloth, was placed in the van. The remains were taken to the Shoreditch mortuary, where they will remain until they have been viewed by the coroner's jury. Dr. McDonald, coroner, in whose district the murder has happened, has fixed Monday morning for the opening of the inquest at the Shoreditch Town-hall.

WHERE WERE THE BLOODHOUNDS?

From inquiries made among the persons living in the houses adjoining the court, and also those residing in rooms in No. 26, it appears clear that no noise of any kind was heard. Up to the present time the occurrence is enveloped in as much mystery as were the previous murders. The man Kelly was quickly found, and his statement ascertained to be correct. After the examination the windows were boarded up, and the door padlocked by direction of the police. It was reported that bloodhounds would be laid on to endeavour to trace the murderer, but for some reason this project was not carried out, and, of course, after the streets became thronged with people that would have had no practical result. The street being principally composed of common lodging-houses, persons are walking along it during all hours of the night, so that little notice is taken of any ordinarily attired man. The murderer, therefore, had a good chance of getting away unobserved.

THE COOL DARING OF THE MURDERER.

A correspondent who last night saw the room in which the murder was committed says it was a tenement by itself, having formerly been the back parlour of No. 26, Dorset-street. A partition had been erected, cutting it off from the house, and the entrance door opened into Miller's-court. The two windows also faced the court, and, as the body could be seen from the court yesterday morning, it is evident that, unless the murderer perpetrated his crime with the light turned out, any person passing by could have witnessed the deed. The lock of the door was a spring one, and the murderer apparently took the key away with him when he left, as it cannot be found. The more the facts are investigated, the more apparent becomes the cool daring of the murderer. There are six houses in the court besides the tenement occupied by the deceased.

THE MAN WITH WHOM DECEASED HAD LIVED.

A young woman named Harvey, who had slept with deceased on several recent occasions, has made a statement to the effect that she had been on good terms with the deceased, whose education was much superior to that of most persons in her position of life. Harvey, however, took a room in New-court, off the same street, but remained friendly with the unfortunate woman, who visited her in New-court on Thursday night. After drinking together, they parted at half-past seven o'clock, Kelly going off in the direction of Leman-street, which she was in the habit of frequenting. She was perfectly sober at the time. Joseph Barnett (called in other reports Kelly), an Irishman, at present residing in a common lodging-house in New-street, Bishopsgate, informed a reporter last night that he had occupied his present lodgings since Tuesday week. Previously to that he had lived in Miller's-court, Dorset-street, for eight or nine months with the murdered woman Mary Jane Kelly. They were very comfortable together until another woman came to sleep in their room, to which he strongly objected. Finally, after the woman had been there two or three nights he quarrelled with the woman whom he called his wife and left her. The next day, however, he returned and gave Kelly money. He called several other days and gave her money when he had it. On Thursday night he visited her between half-past seven and eight and told her he was sorry he had no money to give her. He saw nothing more of her.

COINCIDENCES AS TO DATES.

A somewhat important fact has been pointed out, which puts a fresh complexion on the theory of the murders. It appears that the cattle boats bringing life freight to London are in the habit of coming into the Thames on Thursdays or Fridays, and leave again for the Continent on Sundays or Mondays. It has already been a matter of comment that the recent revolting crimes have been committed at the week's end, and an opinion has been formed among some of the detectives that the murderer is a driver or butcher employed on one of these boats—of which there are many—and that he periodically appears and disappears with one of the steamers. This theory is held to be of much importance by those engaged in this investigation. There is also, it is to be noted, a striking similarity in the period of the month in which the crime has been committed, for while two of the most atrocious of the other murders were committed on the 7th of the months of September and August, this was commenced or committed on the 8th—approximately the same period in the month. This would seem to indicate that the murderer was absent from the scene of these horrors for fixed periods, and that his return was always about the same time.

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25. Sept. 1958.

Dear Boss

I keep on hearing the police have caught me, but they wont fix me just yet. I have laughed when they look so clever and talk about being on the right track. That joke about Leather Apron gave me real fits. I am down on whores and I shant quit ripping them till I do get buckled. Grand work the last job was. I gave the lady no time to squeal. How can they catch me now. I love my work and want to start again. You will soon hear of me with my gunny little games. I saved some of the proper red stuff in a ginger beer bottle over the last job to write with but it went thick like glue and I cant use it. Red ink is fit enough. I hope ha ha. The next job I do I shall clip the lady's ears off and send to the

police officers just for jolly wouldnt
you. Keep this letter back till I
do a bit more work. then give
it out straight. My knife's so nice
and sharp I want to get to work
right away if I get a chance.
Good luck.

yours truly
Jack the Ripper

Dont mind me giving the trade name

want good enough
to post this before
I got all the red
ink off my hands
cure it
No luck yet. They
say I'm a doctor
now- ha ha

GHASTLY MURDER

IN THE EAST-END.

DREADFUL MUTILATION OF A WOMAN

Capture : Leather Apron

Another murder of a ghastly even more diabolical than that perpetrated in Buck Row, on Friday week, was discovered in the same neighbourhood, on Saturday morning. At about 10 o'clock a woman was found lying in a back yard at the foot of a passage leading to a long house in a Old Brown's Lane, Spitalfields. The house is occupied by Mrs. Richardson, who lets it out to lodgers, and the door which admits to this passage, the foot of which lies the yard where the body was found, is always open for the convenience of lodgers. A lodger named Davis was going down to work at the time mentioned and found the woman lying on her back close to the flight of steps leading into the yard. Her throat was cut in a fearful manner. The woman's body had been completely ripped open, and the heart and other organs laying about the place, and portions of the entrails round the victim's neck. An excited crowd gathered in front of Mrs. Richardson's house, and also round the mortuary in old Montague Street, whither the body was quickly conveyed. As the body lies in the rough coffin in which it has been placed in the mortuary, the same coffin in which the unfortunate Mrs. Nicholls was first placed—it presents a fearful sight. The body is that of a woman about 45 years of age. The height is exact five feet. The complexion is fair, with wavy dark brown hair; the eyes are blue, and the lower teeth have been knocked out. The nose is rather large and prominent.

ANOTHER EXTRAORDINARY LETTER. HORRIBLE SUGGESTION.

From inquiries made on Thursday night we are enabled to give the following particulars of a communication made to the members of the Whitechapel Vigilance Committee. Mr. Lusk, builder, of Alderney Road, has received several letters purporting to be from the perpetrator of the Whitechapel murders, but believing them to be the product of some practical joker he has regarded them as of no consequence. On Tuesday evening, however, he received the following letter in a cardboard box containing some fleshy substance:—

"From hell. Mr. Lusk,—Sir,—I send you half the kidney I took from one woman; preserved it for you; the other piece I fried and ate. It was very nice. I may send you the bloody knife that took it out if you only wait a while longer.—Signed, "CATCH-ME-WHEN-YOU-CAN, Mr. Lusk."

The receiver was at first disposed to think that another hoax had been perpetrated, but eventually decided to take the opinion of the Vigilance Committee. On Thursday morning that body decided to take the contents of the cardboard box to a medical man whose surgery was near. Mr. F. S. Reed, assistant to Dr. Wiles, examined the contents of the box, and declared the substance to be half a human kidney divided longitudinally, but in order to remove any reason for doubt he conveyed it to Dr. Openshaw, who is Pathological Curator to the London Hospital Museum, who examined it and also pronounced it to be the portion of a human kidney—a "ginny" kidney; that is to say, it had belonged to a person who had drunk heavily. He was further of opinion that it was the organ of a woman about forty-five years of age, and that it had been taken from the body within the last three weeks.

It will be within the recollection of the public that the left kidney was missing from the body of the woman Eddowes, who was murdered and mutilated in Mitre Square. Mr. Lusk and another

THE LONDON MURDERS.

AN EXTRAORDINARY LETTER.

LONDON, Thursday Evening.—The Press Association, from inquiries made in Mile End to-night, is enabled to give the following particulars of a communication made to the members of the Whitechapel Vigilance Committee. Mr Lusk, builder, of Alderney Road, has received several letters purporting to be from the perpetrator of the Whitechapel murders, but, believing them to be the product of some practical joker, he has regarded them as of no consequence. On Tuesday evening, however, he received the following letter in a cardboard box containing some fleshy substance:—

"From H—.

"Sir,—I send you half the kidney I took from one woman. I preserved it for you. The other piece I fried and ate. It was very nice. I may send you the bloody knife that took it out if you will only wait a while longer. (Signed)

"CATCH ME WHEN YOU CAN."

The receiver was at first disposed to think that another hoax had been perpetrated, but eventually decided to take the opinion of the Vigilance Committee. This morning that body decided to take the contents of the cardboard box to a medical man, whose surgery was near. Mr F. S. Reed, assistant to Dr Wiles, examined the contents of the box, and declared the substance to be half a human kidney, divided longitudinally, but in order to remove any reason or doubt he conveyed it to Dr Openshaw, who is pathological curator to the London Hospital Museum, who examined it, and also pronounced it to be portion of a human kidney, a "ginny" kidney—that is to say, it had belonged to a person who had drunk severely. He was further of opinion that it was the organ of a woman about 45 years of age, and that it had been taken from the body within the last three weeks. It will be within the recollection of the public that the left kidney was missing from the body of the woman Eddowes, who was murdered and mutilated in Mitre Square. Mr Lusk and another member of the Vigilance Committee took the parcel to-day to Scotland Yard; but the police authorities there referred them to detectives at Lemon Street. At the latter place the officer who is directing inquiries took down Mr Lusk's statement, which he considered to be of great importance, and the box and its contents were left in care of the police, pending further investigations.

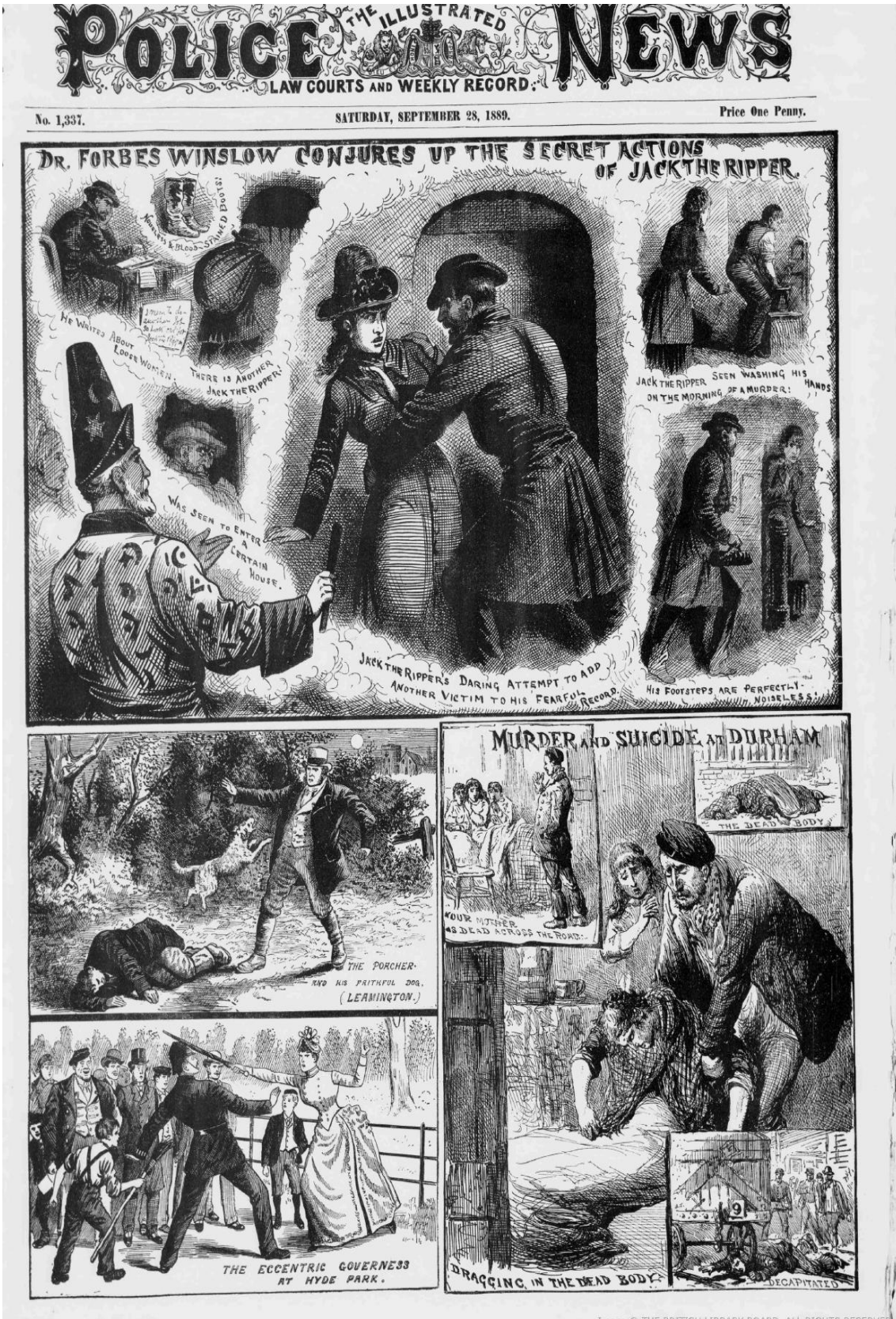
PUNCH, OR THE LONDON CHARIVARI.—SEPTEMBER 22, 1888.



BLIND-MAN'S BUFF.

(As played by the Police.)

"TURN ROUND THREE TIMES,
AND CATCH WHOM YOU MAY!"





AN ÆSTHETIC MIDDAY MEAL.

At the Luncheon hour, Jellaby Postlethwaite enters a Pastrycook's and calls for a glass of Water, into which he puts a freshly-cut Lily, and loses himself in contemplation thereof.

Waiter. "SHALL I BRING YOU ANYTHING ELSE, SIR?"

Jellaby Postlethwaite. "THANKS, NO! I HAVE ALL I REQUIRE, AND SHALL SOON HAVE DONE!"

Image - 12



THE QUEENSBERRY CASE.

OSCAR WILDE IN THE BOX.

VIEWS ON LITERARY ETHICS.

INTERESTING EVIDENCE.

The hearing of the charge of criminal libel brought by Mr. Oscar Wilde against the Marquess of Queensberry was begun at the Central Criminal Court this morning, before Mr. Justice Collins.—Sir E. Clarke, Q.C., M.P., with Mr. C. Mathews and Mr. Travers Humphreys, appeared for the prosecution; Mr. Carson, Q.C., Mr. C. F. Gill, Q.C., and Mr. A. Gill (defence); and Mr. Besley, Q.C., with Mr. Monckton, watched the case on behalf of Lord Douglas Hawick.—The Court was densely crowded. Mr. Oscar Wilde occupied a seat at the solicitors' table, while the Marquess of Queensberry took his place in the dock immediately the Judge entered the Court.

The Clerk of Arraignment read the indictment, which charged the Defendant with having published a malicious and defamatory libel.

The Defendant pleaded Not Guilty, and also that the libel was true, and that its publication was for the public benefit.

Sir E. Clarke, in opening the case, said—You have heard the charge against the Defendant is that he published a malicious libel with regard to Mr. Oscar

Wilde. That libel was published in the form of a card which was left by Lord Queensberry at a club to which Mr. Oscar Wilde belongs. It was a visiting card with the Marquess of Queensberry's name printed upon it, and had also written upon it the words, "Oscar Wilde posing as ——" It is in respect of the libel so published on the card that this charge is brought.

Of course, it is a matter of serious moment that such a word as Lord Queensberry had written should be in any way connected with the name of a gentleman who has borne a high reputation in this country. It is not an accusation of the gravest offence. "Posing as ——" indeed appears to suggest that there was no guilt of the actual offence, but that in some way or other the person of whom the words are written has appeared to be, indeed desired to appear to be, a person guilty of or inclined to the commission of that gravest of all offences. The publica-

The Bristol Mercury

SATURDAY, APRIL 6, 1895.

The BRISTOL MERCURY was established March 1, 1790. The BRISTOL DAILY POST was issued in conjunction with the MERCURY January 24, 1840, and incorporated with it January 28, 1876.

TELEPHONE No: 149.

Oscar Wilde.

THE most striking event of the week is the sensational ending of a notorious trial which closes in nameless infamy

the career of the apostle of aestheticism, the most fashionable of society playwrights. The Queensberry family has been eccentric for generations, but the Marquis must be given credit in this case for a courage which was lacking to other men, in getting rid of a post which must have been known to many others in London beside himself.

Egotistical effrontery has always been the main stock in trade of the author of "A Woman of No Importance," but it was simply colossal when, with the knowledge he possessed, he could stand in the witness box and engage in a clever play of wit with Mr Carson, whose cross-examination was most masterly and at last beat down the guard even of his agile antagonist. Profound sympathy must be felt for the family of the sinner, and particularly for the two sons upon whose name an ineffaceable stigma will henceforth rest, but we are very strongly of opinion with the judge and jury that the action of Lord Queensberry and its results will be very greatly for the public good. As Mr W. S. Gilbert endeavoured years ago to show in drawing the character of Reginald Bunthorne, there is something unhealthy and unwholesome even in the greenery gallery phase of maudlin aestheticism. The later developments of the same school both in literature and the drama have become undeniably sensual, and have made the most sacred relations and the most solemn obligations the subject of jeer and gibe. It is impossible to take up a review without seeing some protest against the outburst of hysteria from which literature is

Image - [15](#)

suffering. This trial sweeps away all the sophistries which are put forward in the name of art, and comes back to the plain old English proverb that it is impossible to touch pitch without being defiled. Oscar Wilde wrote and said many things which were shocking to ordinary minds, and seemed to have no further merit than that they were what other people would not think it right to say. He carried it off because Society is prone to take its entertainers at their own valuation, and he pretended that all this was cultured wit and the highest art. But we see what it has degraded him to when it makes a page of the "Daily Telegraph" read like a page from the life of Tiberius. In the light of this lurid commentary, Society will not wish to appear as what he painted it, and his downfall may be a public benefit in purifying the atmosphere of the stage and of the fashionable novel.

Image - [16](#)

It has been the fashion to concede a certain amount of immoral licence to men of genius, and it is time that public opinion should correct it—all the more when we find a counsel so distinguished as Sir Edward Clarke gravely submitting to a jury that his client should not be judged as an ordinary man in the matter of decent language and manly feeling, because, forsooth, he had intellectual powers above the average. There is no temptation to dwell on a very unsavoury subject. Wilde has vanished from the stage of public life for ever, and we may leave him in his goal to be consoled with one of his own pretentious platitudes which is singularly appropriate to the occasion. Writing in the *Nineteenth Century*, he said: "The things people say of a man do not alter a man. He is what he is. Public opinion is of no value whatever. After all, even in prison a man can be quite free. His soul can be free. His personality can be untroubled. He can be at peace." No one will grudge him the opportunity of putting his doctrine to the test.

He was one of the high-priests of a school which attacks all the wholesome, manly, simple ideals of English life, and sets up false gods of decadent culture and intellectual debauchery. The man himself was a perfect type of his class, a gross sensualist venerated with the affectation of artistic feeling too delicate for the appreciation of common clay. To him and such as him we owe the spread of moral degeneration amongst young men with abilities sufficient to make them a credit to their country. At the feet of Wilde they have learned to gain notoriety by blatant conceit, and to pass as men of genius by despising the emotions of healthy humanity and the achievements of wholesome talent.

THE LAST SCENE

In the Oscar Wilde Prosecution.

HIS REMOVAL TO GAOL.

The Work He Will Have to do Described.

When Wilde heard his sentence the despair depicted in his shrinking face, as the crowded Court rose and leaned towards him, was terrible to see.

"May I say nothing, my lord?" asked the distraught man, his brain reeling, and his great intellect deserting him.

"No!" was the stern rebuff.

No! the brilliant wit was doomed to the silence of solitary imprisonment, the man of fashion was condemned to shorn locks and the convict's garb, the voluptuary to the labour of the treadmill, the poet to the maddening torture of two years hard labour.

One solitary voice raised the cry of "Shame!" to be rebuked instantly by an un pitying silence.

THE PLANK BED.

During the first month, while on the wheel, Wilde will sleep on the plank bed, a bare board raised a few inches above the floor and supplied with sheets—clean sheets are given to each prisoner—two rugs, and a coverlet, but no mattress. His diet will be—

Cocoa and bread for breakfast at 7.30.

Dinner, at noon, one dry bacon and beans, another soup, another cold Australian meat, and another brown flour suet puddings, with the last three repeated twice a week, potatoes with every dinner. And

Tea at 5.30 as already stated.

After he has finished his spell on the wheel he will be put to some industrial employment, not play-writing, although it might be the most profitable for the prison department, but probably post bag-making, tailoring, or merely picking of oakum. He will exercise in the open air daily for an hour, walking with the rest of his ward in Indian file, no talking allowed.

He will be allowed no communication with outside, except by special permission, until he has completed three months of his sentence, and then he may write and receive one letter, and be visited for twenty minutes by three friends, but in the visiting cell, separated from them by wire blinds and in the presence of a warder. After the first letter and visit the same may be repeated at intervals of three months. But all these concessions are dependent first upon industry and next upon conduct. The plank bed cannot be escaped from until a certain number of marks, awarded only for work done, and in the same way letters and visits are accorded. Wilde will attend chapel every morning at 9 a.m. and twice on Sundays. He will be visited, if he wishes it, by the chaplain, and as often as he likes, also daily by the Governor or Deputy Governor.

arrived Wilde asked him for the letter written, and he gave it up to him. He told witness to say nothing about their visit to Paris. On another occasion Wilde visited him at his lodgings. One night when they were at a hotel Wilde kissed the waiter. (Laughter.)

Mr. Gill: What happened then?

He put his arm round my neck.

What else?

He put his arm round Douglas.

Mr. Gill (quickly): Never mind that. Keep to what he did to you.

Cross-examined by Mr. Newton (who told him not to mention any name), witness said he was introduced to Taylor by a gentleman he met in Paris.

At the time you were introduced to Taylor were you leading the same kind of life as you are now?

Yes.

What is that?

I am a comedian and a bookmaker's clerk.

(Laughter.)

For years past you have been living with a man named Burton.

Yes.

And committing immoral acts and getting money from gentlemen by accusing them of crimes?

Never. I have never got money in that way.

Sir John Bridge: Did you ever do any secretarial work for Wilde?

Yes. I copied something about "A Woman of No Importance."

Edward Shalley, a publishers' clerk, said his employers published books for Wilde, and in that way he made his acquaintance. At Wilde's invitation he dined with him at an hotel. Witness took too much wine, and afterwards accompanied Wilde to a private room, where he stayed all night. On the following night he had supper with Wilde, who kissed him on each occasion, and took him to various clubs. Wilde wanted him to go to Paris with him, but he could not get away. At the end of 1893 witness wrote to Wilde, telling him their acquaintance must cease.

Image - [23](#)



Source: WhitechapelJack

Image - [24](#)



Source: Virus! Halloween