

## What Use Our Work? Crime and Justice in *Ripper Street*

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### **Abstract:**

By the late 1880s, London's East End had come to represent the antithesis to enlightened progressive Victorian identity. Literary and journalistic narratives centred on its Gothic qualities and painted it as a labyrinth of crime, misery, and degeneration which embodied middle class fears. Until recently, neo-Victorian depictions frequently reproduced this Gothic gaze, sometimes re-positioning the nineteenth century as the other to a post-colonial perspective. In this article, I examine how the BBC's/Amazon UK's *Ripper Street* (2012-2016) deconstructs these biased gazes and in doing so disentangles the East End from the Ripper myth. By re-painting Whitechapel with imaginative historical realism, the series explores underrepresented Victorian identities and challenges the notion of crime as a social pathology. I argue that, by presenting itself as the result of numerous complex imperial and social interconnections, *Ripper Street* offers new, productive, and valuable perspectives on a formative past.

**Keywords:** detective fiction, East End, *From Hell*, Gothic, Jack the Ripper, *Ripper Street*, Whitechapel.

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Every new turn of this bewildering labyrinth reveals some fresh depth of social blackness, some strange and repulsive curiosity of human nature. What are we to do? Where are we to turn? (Anon., 1888c: n.p.)

London's East End offers itself a fertile and evocative setting for both Victorian and neo-Victorian narratives about urbanity and has been portrayed so often on screen that Clive Bloom argues it has become a "fractured scenario *for* history, a ruined memory of a landscape now reduced to its significant effects" (Bloom 2008: 239, original emphasis). Indeed, depictions of Whitechapel often adopt a distinct iconography of Gothic imagery dominated by looming shadows, portentously empty spaces, dreary gaslight, and imposing brick walls, and so distort the space into a

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grotesque dreamscape. Richard Warlow's TV series *Ripper Street* (2012-2016), however, seeks a more realist representation.

### 1. The Ripper Legacy

When the Ripper murders occurred in 1888, reporting media often resorted to borrowing imagery from the newly popular urban Gothic fiction in order to make sense of a series of violent crimes that offered neither outward coherence nor familiar scenarios or tangible motives, as this excerpt from *The Star* exemplifies:

Nothing so appalling, so devilish, so inhuman – or, rather non-human – as the three Whitechapel crimes has ever happened outside the pages of Poe or De Quincey. The unravelled mystery of ‘The Whitechapel Murders’ would make a page of detective romance as ghastly as ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’. The hellish violence and malignity of the crime which we described yesterday resemble in almost every particular the two other deeds of darkness which preceded it. Rational motive there appears to be none. The murderer must be a Man Monster [...]. (Anon. 1888b: n.p.)

As several scholars have noted, by presenting the killer as the supernatural epitome of the misery, depravity, and violence that seemingly defined the East End to the larger public,<sup>1</sup> Ripper discourse not only linked itself intrinsically to the urban Gothic (see, for example, Mighall 1999; Gray 2013; Ridenhour 2013), but in doing so re-inscribed the idea of an abject East End into the collective memory (see Curtis 2001, Warwick and Willis 2007, Werner 2008). Journalistic accounts like Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851) or Blanchard Jerrold and Gustave Doré's *London, A Pilgrimage* (1872), with their reports of crime, poverty, and disease and Doré's ambient portraits, had already shaped the area's status as the undesirable other against which a progressive, cosmopolitan Victorian identity was defined. Novels such as Margaret Harkness's *In Darkest London* (1889) or Arthur Morrison's *A Child of the Jago* (1896) continued to portray the East End as *terra incognita*; an urban wilderness that bred violence and degeneration.

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These notions were firmly embedded in a larger discourse. In accordance with the Victorian teleological worldview, which understood races and cultures as products of steady evolution, the Gothic mode productively encoded contemporary anxieties about the ‘return of the repressed’, the eruption of atavisms, regressions, or monstrosities – violence, alcoholism, crime, degeneration – in the modern metropolis, especially because the city retained elements of obscurity. Recognising London as a space that could be labyrinthine, mysterious, and potentially dangerous, Gothic literature re-located from feudalistic pasts to the contemporary cityscape, for example in Robert Louis Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), or Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897). Urban legends such as Spring-heeled Jack or Sweeney Todd paved the way for the Ripper myth and contributed to what Robert Mighall has termed a “Gothic of the City”: “Its terrors derive from situations peculiar to, and firmly located within, the urban experience” (Mighall 1999: 30, original emphasis).

Neo-Victorian narratives often reproduce this urban Gothic, for example in Tim Burton’s *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (2007), in John Logan’s Showtime series *Penny Dreadful* (2014-2016), or, as we will see, in *From Hell* (2001), Albert and Allen Hughes’s film adaptation of Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell’s graphic novel of the same name (1989-1996). These works evoke the Victorian city as a space of claustrophobia and isolation, full of ominous shadows and absences that hide murderers and monsters. As Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben suggest, “neo-Victorianism’s urban monsters tend to be strangely familiar rather than new” – not least because they often resurrect popular Victorian characters – and the urban Gothic mode is

particularly evident in neo-Victorian crime and/or detective fictions, those quintessentially urban genres, in which cities simultaneously function as emblems of advanced civilization, culture, and progress and of atavistic corruption that threatens their undoing. (Kohlke & Gutleben 2015: 20)

We will see that this pertains to *Ripper Street* as well.

Both detective fiction and the urban Gothic were shaped considerably in the later nineteenth century and, as Maria Isabel Romero

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Ruiz notes, reflected “a culture in which crime and punishment assumed increasing sociopolitical and ideological significance” (Romero Ruiz 2017: 45). Ruiz comprehensively outlines the ways in which these genres were and still are affiliated. As both negotiate boundaries and transgressions, interrogating what is seen as enlightened and progressive and what is literally outlawed in past and present society, they may easily converge or coalesce in neo-Victorian urban fiction. Kohlke and Gutleben have convincingly argued that in addition, “*neo-Victorianism is by nature quintessentially Gothic*” (Kohlke and Gutleben 2012: 4, original emphasis), that there exists a “generic and ontological kinship” between both phenomena, with neo-Victorianism

resurrecting the ghost(s) of the past, searching out its dark secrets and shameful mysteries, insisting obsessively on the lurid details of Victorian life, reliving the period’s nightmares and traumas. At the same time, neo-Victorianism also tries to understand the nineteenth century as the contemporary self’s uncanny *Doppelgänger*, exploring the uncertain limit between what is vanished (dead) and surviving (still living), celebrating the bygone even while lauding the demise of some of the period’s most oppressive aspects, like institutionalised slavery and legally sanctioned sexism and racism. (Kohlke and Gutleben 2012: 4)

This comprehensively explains why neo-Victorian settings, especially urban ones and particularly those in urban crime fiction, are also often portrayed as Gothic or Gothicised: neo-Victorianism, (urban) Gothic, and detective fiction all share structural affinities, even if they retain genre-specific perspectives. Constructed by a number of narratives as an othered space that houses savage criminals, vicious degenerates, vice, drugs, and shabby destitutes, the East End, then, lends itself particularly to neo-Victorian investigations of our uncanny *Doppelgängers* that can easily be framed in urban Gothic terms. Jean-Michel Ganteau has examined the interrelation of violence and vulnerability in the labyrinthine East End of Peter Ackroyd’s *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem* (1994), reading it as a space that devours social outcasts and forecloses human bonding (Ganteau 2015: 151). Other examples of this type of neo-Victorian urban Gothic are Kim

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Newman's 1992 novel *Anno Dracula* or the first book in George Mann's steampunk series, *The Affinity Bridge* (2008). In the first, Whitechapel is literally populated with vampires as the consequences of Count Dracula's triumph are fought out among the doubly victimised female blood prostitutes, savagely killed by Dr 'Jack' Seward, the Ripper, who seeks revenge for the loss of Lucy Westenra. *The Affinity Bridge* foregrounds fog, that London particular which, as Mighall notes, brings a sublime obscurity that engenders terror (Mighall 2007: 56), functioning as a "refuge of beggars, criminals, and whores" (Mann 2008: 32). In addition, a mysterious zombie plague haunts this steampunk East End and can easily be read as a metaphor for poverty or misery. Here, neo-Victorian fiction draws on these affinities between detective fiction and Gothic conventions to portray the East End through a distinctly Gothic lens.

Unlike these fictional representations, Richard Warlow's BBC (later Amazon UK Prime Instant Video) series *Ripper Street* eschews the Gothic gaze on the Victorian city and seeks to find an alternative mode, which may accommodate formerly marginalised, hidden, or tabooed identities without framing them as other. As we have seen, the neo-Victorian and the Gothic are affiliated, because they function in similar ways, so that conflating both modes seems aesthetically plausible. Reading *Ripper Street* as a Gothic drama is tempting based on those structural parallels and on an established visual tradition of portraying neo-Victorian London. Such readings are certainly also attributable to the fact that there has never been a comprehensive definition of what constitutes 'Gothic', along with its steady migration to the popular and the everyday, and across genre boundaries. As with any concept, applying it too widely or readily is seldom productive. A Gothic reading of the series is therefore theoretically possible, but, as I hope to demonstrate, neither exhaustive nor rewarding.

In what follows, I understand what I will call the Gothic mode to be an array of aesthetic signifiers and narrative devices (such as fog, darkness, the grotesque, the uncanny, the return of the repressed), all of which arouse dread, doubt, unease, or disgust in the viewer or reader, and which encode a person or space as monstrous, haunted, other, atavistic, or abject. Such signifiers are often aligned with the morbid and morose, or engage us by making use of our primordial fears and survival instincts. The Gothic mode helps to negotiate a wide variety of value systems and identities as it both destabilises and reaffirms what is seen as progressive, civilised, or

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enlightened, even if that progress is simultaneously called into question. While this negotiation of boundaries is a feature the Gothic mode shares with the genres in which it often appears, notably the neo-Victorian and detective fiction, Gothic relies fundamentally on the effect of ‘making strange’ in order to open such spaces for re-negotiation: it destabilises identities and challenges our knowledge of the world by evoking the uncanny, the monstrous, and the other, for example through distortion or fragmentation. Considering that it also relies on inducing dread, doubt, and disgust, the Gothic mode evaluates, if not judges what it portrays to a certain extent. As such, its aesthetic is intrinsically linked to its structure. I will use ‘Gothicised’ to denote where this mode has been successfully applied.

In light of this understanding, *Ripper Street* is Gothic merely in the sense that it is both neo-Victorian and an urban crime drama. I do not mean to suggest that *Ripper Street* never utilises settings that *could* be Gothic or narratives tropes that are often found in Gothic fiction – but I posit that the series does not employ these markers to *Gothicise* the East End. As I hope to show, *Ripper Street* tries to find an alternative mode that challenges the prevailing stigma of the East End as a space of exile, misery, and monstrosity (a reputation that lasted well into the twentieth century) and instead re-frames the locale as a diverse community that merits examination based on its vivacity and complexity. Often, the series in fact subverts, defies, or deconstructs Gothic conventions, thereby inviting viewers to question their ideas of the Victorian East End and to identify more closely with East End citizens. This becomes particularly evident when comparing the series to another screen portrait of Whitechapel during the Ripper murders that also features a detective plot.

## **2. Devils and Detectives: *From Hell***

We have seen that Victorian Gothic and urban detective fiction are structurally affiliated, and it is therefore no wonder that the success of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes, the archetypal model for detective figures, neo-Victorian or not,<sup>2</sup> can be linked to the Ripper murders (Willis 2007: 144). In a city widely perceived as impenetrably intricate and deeply divided between progress and degeneration, the Holmesian detective emerges as a reassuring collective symbol for rationality and order restored. An authority figure opposing the anarchic force of crime, he pervades the intricate web of seemingly chaotic and ambiguous traces with the help of

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ordering logic and finds causality where others see only contingency.<sup>3</sup> Albert and Allen Hughes's film adaptation of Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell's graphic novel *From Hell* (2001), one of the most recent and most popular Ripper films, delivers a portrayal of the neo-Victorian detective as a somewhat different figure: Inspector Abberline (Johnny Depp) is doomed to failure from the outset.

*From Hell* re-tells Abberline's quest to solve the murders of five street-walking women in Whitechapel and save Mary Kelly, while uncovering a conspiracy that permeates the highest circles of society, so that when Abberline uncovers Jack the Ripper's identity, he is unable to arrest him. The film weaves historical facts and popular conspiracy theories into a decidedly Gothic re-telling, satisfying what Roger Luckhurst calls a nostalgia for a re-mystified cityscape, a return to "hidden routes, secret knowledges, fluttering spectres, the ghosts of London past" (Luckhurst 2002: 541). *From Hell* paints the East End as a maze of uniformly gloomy, indifferent brick walls and shadowy doorways, accompanied by an eerie chiaroscuro and portentously looming spires set against an apocalyptic sky.<sup>4</sup> We encounter vast, empty compositions with distant vanishing points, in which darkness dominates, suggesting that uncanny evils lurk in those shadows. Here, Whitechapel is a realm of dreary, endless walls, sickly yellow gaslight, and wisps of fog – a familiar aesthetic shorthand for the Victorian city. Indeed, the opening sequence of close-up shots of Abberline smoking opium frames the narrative as possibly being part hallucination. Screen images are accompanied by the sound of faceless quarrels and pleas together with an atmospheric, threatening musical score. The inhabitants of this dismal maze are unruly, violent, and desperate; they often loiter, drink, bargain, or threaten others. Throughout the story, they remain on the sidelines, quietly adding flavour to the scenery with a mixture of apathy and voyeurism, but never deflecting from the plot-driven narrative.

Abberline, the tortured antihero, is an opium addict with prophetic dreams, whose brilliant methodical intellect is opposed by the bigotry and arrogance of his superiors, the political elite. His opium-induced visions add a supernatural element and are framed by the camera through expressionist aesthetics such as time lapse or distorted colours, both of which contribute to a Gothic narrative mode. Although this drug habit aligns the detective with his predecessor Sherlock Holmes, and though like him Abberline is driven, solitary and brilliant, the virtues of precision, objectivity, and focus

do not lead the detective to success, but self-destruction. He is hampered by his affection for Mary Kelly and his inability to negotiate class hierarchies, which is especially unfortunate as the Ripper turns out to be an aristocratic madman avenging and covering up the Duke of Clarence's secret marriage to an unfortunate. In Victorian and modern crime fiction alike, the boundaries between the 'good' detective and the 'bad' criminal can be difficult to maintain. In contemporary fiction especially, the detective is often also a profiler who, in Nietzsche's words, gazes into the abyss and finds the abyss gazing back and threatening to corrupt him. In *From Hell*, it consumes Abberline, who accepts defeat and dies of an overdose, thereby foreclosing the resolution we expect from a crime drama.

The film's 'abyss' contains a corruption that so deeply saturates Victorian society that it becomes uncanny, supernatural, and overpowering. The camera translates this into looming top-hatted shadows, drastically high or low camera angles, vast, threatening shadows or Orientalist-imperialist imagery. Here, the East End is at the mercy of a deceitful, decadent, and corrupt monarchy, which maintains its power through elitist, semi-occult secret societies; Masonic symbols become entangled with superstition and depravity. Vice permeates the ruling classes, who gawk and gape at Joseph Merrick (Joseph Drake), the Elephant Man, under the guise of charity or ignorantly exploit the lower classes. Sir William Gull (Ian Holm) embodies this class, and his comment to the prostitute Polly Nichols on Cleopatra's Needle – "Six men died to bring it here from Egypt" (Hughes 2001: 20:30-20:38) – before killing her as Jack the Ripper links colonial violence to his own. The Ripper murders are but a symptom of a deeper socio-cultural corruption, which is why Abberline's success in uncovering his identity remains eventually irrelevant. *From Hell* denounces a progressive Victorian imperialist identity as 'monstrous'. It re-positions the seemingly decadent and corrupt Victorian age as a Gothic other by presenting a grotesquely distorted and Gothicised East End "of the mind" (Bloom 2008: 241) which, as the vicious Id to a bigoted London upper class, becomes a limbo and an "intra-urban exile" for the disenfranchised (Pike 1981: 101).

### 3. Stepping Out of Jack's Shadow

*Ripper Street* takes a different approach. The series' title clearly evokes a specific time and place, a Victorian Whitechapel so distinctly marked by the Ripper murders that other signifiers become superfluous. While such



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sensationalist naming might be a selling point, it may also draw our attention to what we do or do not know about the East End: ‘Ripper Street’ as much obscures time and place as it evokes them. The series is set in Whitechapel six months after the last confirmed Ripper killing and follows Inspector Edmund Reid (Matthew MacFadyen), Sergeant Bennet Drake (Jerome Flynn) and former US army surgeon and Pinkerton Homer Jackson (Adam Rothenberg) through a variety of cases. It was first broadcast by BBC One in 2012, cancelled due to low viewing figures and, after dedicated fan campaigning, was taken up and broadcast by Amazon UK Prime Instant Video from 2014 to 2016.

I argue that the only instance where *Ripper Street* consciously and deliberately applies what seems to be a Gothic gaze is the opening sequence in ‘I Need Light’: we see a crowded street, bricks, cobblestones, dim gaslight, coaches, street fires, drunken laughter, prostitutes. An elderly guide leads a group of middle-class tourists on a tour of the Ripper murder sites – an anachronistic mixture of contemporary slumming and today’s Ripper tours for tourists. In narrow passageways, alongside rows of barrels and street dwellers, the guide’s monologue introduces the context of the Ripper murders, his manner of speech in keeping with Victorian sensationalist narratives. As he accompanies the outsiders through these labyrinthine structures, so does he allow us, the viewers, to acquaint ourselves with the setting as if we were part of the tourist group. Ironically, the group then come across what seems to be a real Ripper victim. In a parallel sequence, the audience is introduced to Reid and Drake, undercover at an illegal boxing fight. The montage juxtaposes rough noises and general movement with the subdued tones of ‘classic’ Gothic imagery and already quite literally disrupts the established image we are being acquainted with, suggesting there might be another side to it. Constable Hobbs delivers the alarming message that brings both scenes together: “They found a tart, sir. [...] She’s been ripped, Inspector” (Shankland and Warlow 2012: 2:53-3:00). Apparently, there exists an array of familiar symbolic markers that signify ‘Ripper’ to alarmed East Enders. Fred Best (David Dawson), the dapper *Star* journalist (who, it is indicated, is responsible for the Gothic style news coverage we know from historical sources), loudly claims that “citizens need their questions answered”, to which Reid hotly answers, “No! They need their fears pacified!” (Shankland and Warlow 2012: 6:15-6:21) This exchange is crucial: Reid prioritises the community’s long-term safety

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over whatever sensational ‘truth’ Best offers as temporary solace. Best remains an important figure throughout the series, as he embodies the commercial and sensationalist portrayals of Whitechapel through which it is mediated to a larger Victorian readership and through history. The journalist draws our attention to the (sometimes misleading) textuality of history.

This conflict becomes explicit in a confrontation between Reid and Best that borders on assault, when the Inspector accuses the reporter and editor of fear-mongering, insinuating witch hunts, manipulating crime scenes, and publishing the Ripper letters for profit, not information (Shankland and Warlow 2012: 13:10-15:40).<sup>5</sup> In doing so, Reid pushes the journalist against the latter’s office’s walls, on which are hung the framed reports of the confirmed Ripper killings: textual and visual traces with which we are familiar as historical sources, but whose ‘truth’ Reid calls into question. Best, by admitting to a degree of manipulation, affirms that the (Gothic) repertoire of visual and narrative conventions, which we now associate with the East End in general and the Whitechapel murders in particular, are part of a fictional translation that caters to Victorian taste but diverges from what Reid perceives as reality.<sup>6</sup> The scene invites us, as audience, to reconsider Reid’s perspective as ‘truer’ than Best’s.

From here on, the episode deconstructs the Gothic iconography with which it began. It is certainly no coincidence that we now see Leman Street in broad daylight for the first time, suggesting that there exists a different side to Whitechapel beyond the constructed, shadow-heavy convention and that this might be the ‘real’ one.<sup>7</sup> This re-imagined, ‘real’ Whitechapel is characterised by an abundance of textures and dashes of muted, but rich colour: subdued greens and reds, shabby blue clothes and grimy brick houses, the earthy tones of straw and wood. Throughout the series, the setting is outfitted with a veritable clutter of details, textured surfaces, material objects, and artefacts, from the shop and pub signs, countless advertisements plastered on walls with faded paint or white-wash to the papers, maps, photos, books, and folders that populate the police precinct. Leman Street and its surroundings are bustling with carts, horses, vendors, butchers, bakers, shoe shiners, shoppers, publicans, tradespeople, soldiers, slumming gentlemen, sailors, and children, Jewish and Asian people, as well as many women who are not immediately framed as prostitutes. Though we may also encounter the maimed, street urchins, beggars, and drunks – *Ripper Street* does not pretend they do not also inhabit the East

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End – they are seldom framed as the hissing, loitering, catcalling, leering, potentially dangerous and grotesque others or as the “hysterical, bigoted and nasty mob” (Bloom 2008: 249) we remember from other adaptations – such as *From Hell*. They are also often outweighed by ordinary citizens who are shown working, shopping, or gossiping.<sup>8</sup> Where *From Hell* employs empty, dark space to evoke the uncanny, *Ripper Street* imagines barrels, horse manure, and hay on the cobblestones, people carrying wicker baskets full of flowers or potatoes, people delivering pig halves or parcels, vendors of sweated clothes, watchmakers, laundry drying on washing lines, pie and bread stands, coffee and lemonade vendors, silverware stands, people selling laces and ribbons, furniture, tallow candles, books, or leather goods. We may discern a bird seller resembling a photograph of Slater Street (Jackson 2008: 137, see also Warner 2014) or a street full of second-hand clothes vendors not unlike surviving photographs of Whitechapel Street (Marriott 2008: 61-62). The streets are so crowded that we sometimes lose sight of our protagonists as they move through them.

In short, it looks as if the Victorian chronicler Henry Mayhew’s accounts had come to life, for example as he describes the Street-Sellers of Petticoat and Rosemary Lane and its “oyster stall, its fountain of ginger-beer, its coffee-house, its ale-house”, “the potato-can and the hot elder-wine apparatus, and smoking pies and puddings, and roasted apples and chestnuts” (Mayhew 1862, II: 37). *Ripper Street*’s clutter echoes Mayhew’s enumerations:

Dress coats, frock coats, great coats, livery and game-keeper’s coats, paletots, tunics, trowsers knee-breeches, waistcoats, capes, [...] plaids, hats, dressing gowns, shirts [...] [in] the dull brown-green of velveteen; the deep blue of a pilot jacket; the variegated figures of the shawl dressing-gown; the glossy black of the restored garments; the shine of newly turpented black satin waistcoats; the scarlet and green of some flaming tartan [...]. The ground has also its array of colours. It is covered with lines of boots and shoes, [...] with drab, green, plum, or lavender-coloured ‘legs’ [...]. (Mayhew 1862, II: 38)

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Mayhew's descriptions of shopkeepers as they "stand in the street (in front of their premises), they trade in the street, they smoke and read the papers in the street" are recreated in *Ripper Street*'s busy Whitechapel, which here aligns itself with non-Gothic intertexts (Mayhew 1862 II: 38).

There is little of *From Hell*'s eerie unstableness to be found in the series: *Ripper Street* strives for an authentic-feeling realist mode that is indebted to historical evidence outside the urban Gothic tradition. The fact that the production relied heavily on historical consultants underlines this outlook. Other East End settings we encounter are similarly portrayed. Whereas spaces like fighting rings and gambling dens may be associated with the Id, and back alleys, slums, graveyards, and workhouses are likely settings in Gothic fiction, this series does not frame these spaces as uncanny, other, or abject.<sup>9</sup> 'Uncanny', that sense of the uncomfortably strange, located at the border of the familiar and the unknown about to collapse and derived from Freud's 1919 German essay on the 'unheimlich', after all literally translates to 'un-home-ly'. Considering that *Ripper Street* equally, and often more frequently, takes place in homes, hospitals, orphanages, prisons, shops, pubs, brothels, music halls, dock sites, churches, and offices, the series hardly perpetuates the long-established tradition of framing the East End as Gothic exile and instead suggests this is a space that people actively, if not always voluntarily inhabit – a home nonetheless. These spaces may on occasion be dramatically lit or somewhat dismal, but that is not enough to comprise a Gothic mode. The shabby is not conflated with the demonic, and the camera remains neutral.

Similarly, while Whitechapel is traumatised and stigmatised by the Ripper murders,<sup>10</sup> the camera foregoes a Gothic aesthetic: The city is not haunted by ominous shadows, looming absences, or visual echoes. The first episode's killer is exposed as a copycat, and Reid is visibly relieved: "So now I ask us to undertake this: that we take a little joy in his continued absence. And that we then cease to look for him in every act of evil that crosses our path" (Shankland and Warlow 2012: 55:20-55:45). He adds: "We did everything in our power. Used every instrument allowed to us and many that weren't. All that is demanded now is – he is gone. And stays gone. He will own my life no more" (Shankland and Warlow 2012: 56:50-57:30). With this statement, Reid establishes that the 'Gothic' reign of the Ripper is over, that he, and with him the East End and the narrative, might now step out of the killer's shadow.

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*Ripper Street* is rooted in the aftermath of 1888. Having established that ‘Jack’ is indeed gone, however, the series gives itself space to portray and discuss a wide variety of topics and identities. These include fundamental social concerns such as gender roles, alternative sexualities, prejudice, charity, faith, and multiculturalism as well as political and economic issues such as worker’s rights, poverty, paternalism, Irish Home Rule, the status of India, the opium trade, youth criminality, police corruption, and national identity at large. The series frequently incorporates scientific developments, discussing medical psychology, biology, breeding and eugenics, direct and alternating electric current, fingerprinting, telephones, blood transfusions, and early forensics. Jackson often utilises contemporary Victorian scientific methods to analyse traces in what actually comprises a counterfactual element in the series,<sup>11</sup> but is in keeping with modern crime genre conventions and allows *Ripper Street* to be an effective crime drama with satisfying outcomes. This incorporation of forensic methods as a signifier of ordering rational logic also complicates a ‘Gothic’ reading, as dead bodies are not framed as grotesque or abject, and victims are treated with sympathy and care (cf. Romero Ruiz 2017: 60). The camera, for example, frequently provides objective close-ups of Jackson’s procedures and frames biological matter together with instruments such as tweezers, vials, and chemical solutions. It does not evaluate these items as much as catalogue them, as if taking stock. Similarly, the camera often lovingly lingers on scientific innovations such as electric light, the telegraph or later the telephone. This suggests a disinterest in framing forensic procedures as grotesque. If *Ripper Street* discusses undefined mysteries, sinister threats, and malevolent secrets, it locates them firmly in the human psyche, not the East End cityscape or the physical environment.

#### **4. We Are Not Magicians: Detective Inspector Reid**

*Ripper Street*’s protagonist Inspector Edmund Reid, though certainly inspired by his historical model, is rather different from the ‘Gothicised’ detective figures who precede him – tall, stout, dapper, and endowed with a certain gravitas, solemnity, and a quiet urgency. Though perceptive and outspoken, Reid is quite unlike the gaunt, ascetic Holmes or Depp’s elegantly dishevelled Abberline; he can be impatient, loud, stubborn, commanding, and impulsive, but he can also be dedicated and respectful. Where *From Hell*’s Abberline, rational, eccentric, and ultimately fatalist,

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seeks refuge in opium and seclusion, Reid prefers action, even if that is sometimes unwise. Relentless and forceful, Reid is capable of great compassion, but also great ruthlessness, even violence.<sup>12</sup> Others perceive him as driven by rage, grief, or despair. Unlike Depp's Abberline, Reid does not display supernatural sensitivities and remains fully rational. He occupies a space somewhere between the self-destructive, Byronic Abberline of *From Hell* and the focused, but irritable Holmes – and yet, he differs significantly from both. His chief aim as a policeman is not to penetrate the mystery, solve the puzzle, or single-handedly prove his intellectual genius, as he relies on Drake and Jackson too frequently; neither does he seek to blindly preserve the law. Instead, he aims not only to restore peace, but also to maintain it.<sup>13</sup> In his view, the law is not an ordering principle, but can derive its meaning and usefulness only from its function to protect the people of Whitechapel: "These streets we vow to protect", he states in 'The Beating of Her Wings' (2014) asserting his sense of duty to "these people to whom we promise safety, order" (Wilson and Finlay 2014: 36:30-36:35).

The concept of community is not just relevant to Reid's perception of justice, which is a driving force in the series. In Gothic narratives, Gothicised settings often exile or isolate characters, whether physically or psychologically, or pre-empt the formation of meaningful relationships. For example, in *From Hell*, the group of prostitutes that will become Ripper victims are repeatedly cast out of shelters, pubs, and houses, and they get lost alone in the darkened streets, even prey on each other (as in the portrayal of Elizabeth Stride, who furiously abandons her friend after she has rejected her lesbian advances). In *Ripper Street*, however, characters frequently form complicated, but meaningful relationships, including Reid's tempestuous friendship with Jackson, his complex friendship with Drake, his emotional and physical affair with Miss Goren (Lucy Cohu), who runs the orphanage, and later politician and reformer Jane Cobden (Leanne Best), or his courteous acquaintance with Joseph Merrick, as well as his intellectual companionship with scholar Isaac Bloom (Justin Avoth), whose theories have a lasting effect on him. Other characters bond as well: Drake and Rose Erskine (Charlene McKenna) become friends, then lovers, Jackson and Drake become friends after initial antipathies, and the relationship between Jackson and Long Susan (MyAnna Burning) frequently drives the plot. Female friendships, which contemporary popular media can sometimes fail to represent, also occur between Susan and Rose, Susan and Lucy

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Eames (Emma Rigby), Rose and Mimi Morton (Lydia Wilson), or Susan and Dr Amelia Frayn (Louise Brealey). These meaningful relationships function as signifiers for a larger Whitechapel community, and one presented as worth protecting.

Meanwhile such protection seems to be directed less against an uncanny, undefined malice deeply saturating the modern city and the East End in particular, and more juxtaposed with a different, less morally predefined concept. In the episode ‘Tournament of Shadows’ (2013), Reid discusses the relation of order and chaos and with that the function of the police with Isaac Bloom, an Ashkenazi intellectual who comes to embody the series’ central philosophy. The episode’s events have left Reid doubtful, his faith in the restorative power of his role as policeman shaken. Bloom recounts his brother’s belief that “justice has become a commodity”, and adds: “Is this the shadow of what is to be, inspector? My brother used to say, the future belongs to men of reason, not of faith”, to which Reid replies, “On that I would agree with him” (McCarthy and Finlay 2013b: 55:00-55:40). Bloom proposes his own theorem, which assumes a central position throughout the series:<sup>14</sup> The entropy of the universe tends to the maximum. [...] Everything from the smallest system to our entire world moves always, irretrievably, from order into chaos. And there is nothing to be done about it”; Reid initially disagrees, but Bloom simply counters: “Perhaps you are, after all, a man of faith.” (McCarthy and Finlay 2013b: 56:30-58:20). Bloom and his philosophy become a defining symbol of the struggle between order and chaos, in which Reid and his colleagues constantly (re-) negotiate their own position.<sup>15</sup>

Their criminal opponents are seldom geniuses, who challenges their intellect as worthy adversaries, nor representatives of monstrous, supernatural evil, but rather ordinary citizens driven by fear, greed, or compulsion, who are not as easily demonised. Reid comes to see that order and justice are man-made constructs, neither easily established nor maintained:

REID: I used to argue with a man who believed chaos was the natural state. All things doomed to fall apart. A fissure splitting wider, day by day set to swallow the gossamer dream that we make of order. I argued with him, yet, but,

ah... Now I feel the gossamer fray, Bennet. I feel the fissure yawn into abyss faster than we can weave afresh.

DRAKE: Mr. Reid. You used to tell me our work... that order... was a fight without end, but a battle worth the blood. You believed that.

REID: And I believe it still. And so we weave on... thread by thread. And we hold the promise we have made. (Wilson and Finlay 2014: 36:54-37:52, original pauses)

In this instance and many others, Reid delivers a meta-commentary on the neo-Victorian world he inhabits, for example when he ponders the nature of entropy, raising implicit questions about its meaning for a narrative concerned with the relevance of boundaries and laws. Whether he confronts Best about the disquieting effect of Ripper discourse, or baits the journalist with a story about “corruption and sex, Mr Best – surely it does not come more honey than that” (Wilson and Warlow 2013d: 46:40), his meta-commentary often disrupts and challenges ideas or prejudices established in urban Gothic or Victorian detective fiction. Especially his continued engagement with the concept of entropy and his querying of whether or not it might be the ‘natural state’ of things proves interesting, considering the detective genre (similarly to Gothic fiction) usually presupposes crime as a chaotic resurfacing of repressed urges, which transgresses what is understood as the ‘normal state of things’. In Gothic, the repressed spectres which haunt us are the resurfacing personal or collective traumata of the past and may be read on psychological or social terms. Entropy, on the other hand, as a statistical expression of disorder and chance, cannot be grasped through any such interpretive ideologies. It cannot easily be visualised or embodied through the monstrous or abject, because it is located outside ourselves and can only be addressed through reaction to it. *Ripper Street*, of course, still adheres to a classic detective fiction structure in that its episodes usually end with some sort of resolution, but if we suppose Isaac Bloom’s hypothesis to be correct and entropy an always already present factor, that does indeed make Reid’s endeavour to bring safety to the East End an uphill battle.

By using the mathematical concept of entropy, Reid employs a neutral vocabulary, which can transcend the Gothic mode, because it does not automatically endow ‘the abyss’ with malicious or predatory intent. If



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we adhere to Bloom, entropy is an intrinsic part of the larger workings of the world, and unlike the uncanny, the other, or the abject, it cannot serve as a tool through which to examine and negotiate our identity, because it already governs the universe and permeates self/other or natural/unnatural binaries. In any case, while Reid sometimes struggles with his own resolve to fight what Drake terms “a fight without end” (and on occasion lapses and fails), he also recognises that it is “a battle worth the blood”. Even at the end of the series, when his friends and his daughter have died or left him, he is shown to be working on a case – neither triumphant nor defeated.

##### **5. We Are Not Animals: *Ripper Street*'s ‘Hidden’ Victorians**

In contrast to many other depictions, *Ripper Street* foregoes a Gothic gaze on the East End and endeavours to turn a more impartial gaze on the Whitechapel community. It portrays and lends voice to an array of more ‘unlikely’ Victorian identities, many of which were or might still be marginalised, hidden, or tabooed, and links them to a variety of complex social and political issues embedded in Whitechapel’s abundance of cultures and customs. ‘The Weight of One Man’s Heart’ (2013), for instance, discusses disillusionment and post-traumatic disorders through the portrayal of a group of veterans from the Anglo-Egyptian War (1882), critiquing Victorian imperialism and masculinities alongside the still-relevant issue of war trauma. ‘Live Free, Live True’ (2014) interrogates ethical issues concerning abortions, especially among the working and lower classes, and features a transsexual character. The series also repeatedly discusses the East End’s immigrant population, for example the Irish, Polish, Indian, or Jewish communities.

As previously suggested, *Ripper Street* regularly employs characters or settings that could be staples of urban Gothic fiction but does not present them as other or uncanny. For example, ‘The Good of This City’ (2013) discusses gentrification as the destruction of East End communities for commercial gain and is set partly in an asylum and the underground railway tunnel. Both are spaces that feature in Gothic fiction or can easily be Gothicised. While certainly a heterotopic space, which runs “onwards forever, down the next century, and the one that follows” and has “the chill of eternity” (Wilson and Warlow 2013d: 22:00; 21:21), the tunnel lacks an eerie or uncanny atmosphere, seeing that it is illuminated by electric light and populated by busy workers. The bright and airy asylum lacks any

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typically Gothic dark cells and grotesque isolated inmates (again, *From Hell* provides examples of such a depiction). Lit like all other interior scenes, the asylum is presented instead as an institution that gives responsible care – at least until it transpires that the paternal Dr Crabbe (Anton Lesser) has used his patient Lucy (Emma Rigby) as a disposable sexual incentive for Stanley Bone (Paul McGann) and his urban renewal enterprise. “We cannot build a railway without destroying a slum or two” Dr Crabbe posits (Wilson and Warlow 2013d: 51:55), indirectly alluding to his plan to perform a lobotomy on Lucy to prevent her exposing his generous patron, after her illegitimate child has been taken from her. The young woman, poor, alone, and female, becomes emblematic of East End citizens who fall victim to entrepreneurial schemes: gendered exploitation is linked to capitalism, and thereby embedded in larger power relations.<sup>16</sup> Whereas individual aspects of this episode are also often used in Gothic fiction (imperilled femininity, a lost child, unethical doctors, forced confinement), they do not produce an overall effect of abjection or othering. Neither Lucy nor Bone, both having been treated at the asylum for epilepsy, are portrayed as grotesque. Instead, they are simply part of a plethora of identities whose stories play out in Whitechapel. In fact, *Ripper Street* sometimes prioritises such stories over the usual ‘whodunnit’ of crime fiction.

‘Become Man’ (2013) exemplifies this. The episode discusses women’s rights, especially those of female East End workers. It features the historical politician Jane Cobden, who was elected to the London County Council in 1889 and who faces opposition and condescension from her male opponents. These politicians, who, as East End outsiders, treat its citizens and women generally with disdain, are kidnapped by female workers and supporters of Cobden, who are associated with the matchgirl strike of 1888. Neither Cobden nor the male victims, however, are the focus of the narrative. Instead, it foregrounds Susan Hart’s awakening to the way in which society marginalises and exploits women, as she witnesses the efforts of the group’s leader Raine (Neve McIntosh) to provide for the maimed and disfigured match girls, many of whom suffer from phossy jaw as a consequence of their exposure to white phosphorus. Raine, intermediary to both Susan and the viewers, is given space and a voice with which to draw attention to the women’s plight:

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You are not alone in wishing our girls a better measure of living [...] of freedom, compassion. These girls be saved from slavery and disease and given a place, a voice. I insist on everything that was never insisted upon for me: education of the self, control of the self, respect of the self. (Menaul and Dickens 2013: 30:53-31:38)

The episode weaves together historical fact and speculation in order to highlight issues around female dependence, prostitution, and lack of education, while also depicting forms of female violence that defy Victorian notions of ‘womanhood’. This is a considerably more complex portrait than other East End narratives, *From Hell* included, usually provide: many neo-Victorian depictions deploy female Whitechapel citizens as a sort of atmospheric decoration in a miserable setting or to illustrate the perceived hypocrisy involved in Victorian moral politics and sexual repression. ‘Become Man’ presents Raine, Susan, Cobden, and the matchgirls as individual agents trying to carve out a social space for themselves and lets them voice their fears and hopes. By doing so, it presents a complex issue from myriad female perspectives and allows us to sympathise from a position of empathy rather than pity.

A similar approach is taken in ‘Threads of Silk and Gold’ (2013), which discusses homosexuality in connection with male prostitution and the Cleveland Street Scandal of 1889.<sup>17</sup> The topic continues to be discussed in later episodes. Notably, we are introduced to an intimate scene between lovers, in a series of softly lit close-ups more frequently used to depict heterosexual romance. Here, the scene outlines a loving and committed relationship between two young men. This helps strengthen the notion of homosexual love as a legitimate, genuine form of love rather than a wanton, illegal sexual act as Victorian law framed it. The main characters help provide context: Drake and Artherton (David Wilmot) are prejudiced in a conventionally Victorian way: “Buggery, sodomy, and homosexuality are crimes. There’ll be no bail, sir” (Hawkes and Finlay 2013b: 3:30-3:34). Fred Best, who we learn in this episode is homosexual himself, calls into question the value of a form of ‘justice’ that invades private homes to police the amorous affairs of consenting adults while actual physical violence inflicts harm in the streets. Reid, in the course of the episode, similarly begins to doubt this particular law after a financial analyst, involved in a

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scheme of prostitution and extortion, commits suicide. “What is the purpose of our work?”, he asks Drake, who prompts: “To protect, sir”, to which Reid replies: “And whom did the law protect today?” (Hawkes and Finlay 2013b: 27:35-27:46). Between his important recognition of homosexuality as ‘human love’ and his obligations as a policeman, Reid finds himself in a moral dilemma. The stance he arrives at seems to be a distinctly un-Victorian one, and yet we may easily follow his argument and see how his doubts come into being under the circumstances. The fact that Sergeant Drake decides that it is futile to question the law, instead of being instantly converted to Reid’s view, helps to illustrate that the characters are nevertheless grounded in their ‘Victorian’ environment – with all the conservative or liberal stances that entails. Here, *Ripper Street* draws a concise, but complex and sympathetic portrait of homosexuality as a form of love, a lifestyle, and a criminal offence. By projecting our present-day ideas surrounding same-sex relationships onto a re-created Victorian context evoked mainly by contemporary legal discourse regarding ‘sodomy’, *Ripper Street* discusses a subject that was tabooed or mostly represented one-dimensionally in the period discourse of the setting. In doing so it re-creates an imagined gender history and suggests that queer identities and queer love have always existed and struggled to survive, even if obscured by social, legal, or historical discourse.

*Ripper Street* re-imagines and challenges Victorian identities, which are at once defined and theorised in historical terms and called into question by characters’ immediate experiences. This may include Susan Hart’s encounter with the match girls or the portrayal of queer characters. Moreover, characters such as Isaac Bloom raise doubts about Victorian progressive identities and widely held prejudices about the East End itself. When vandals attack a number of religious institutions in ‘A Stronger Loving World’ (2013), Reid and Bloom again discuss the meaningfulness of Reid’s endeavour as a policeman:

REID: I will not allow fomenting of hatred in this community.

BLOOM: Inspector, the men of these streets are no brotherhood. We are neighbours of circumstance, necessity.

The fence of tolerance that pens us is frail.

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REID: We are not animals her, Mr. Bloom.

BLOOM: Now that is a radical view.

(Hawkes and Finlay 2013a: 10:06-10:30).

Bloom denies the idea of racial teleology, on which Victorian Gothic imagery, and with it East End stereotypes, rely by implying that humans are governed by fear and instinct:

I am rational, inspector. And I hear every day men such as yourself, who would have us believe our journey to truth will set us free. But man has no more desire for truth than a dung beetle. Like any animal, he desires meat and sex. And like any animal who feels himself caged by what he is, he will yearn for anything that lies beyond the bars. Dee called it magic. You call it progress. (Hawkes and Finlay 2013a: 37:45-38:18)

Fears of the caged animal resurfacing in a supposedly civilised, transparent, and enlightened world is a key feature of the Gothic mode (Mighall 1999: 130). Bloom destabilises this notion by doubting the existence of such civilisation and enlightenment, implicitly equating it with fantasy or superstitious belief in “magic”. In doing so, he forecloses a Gothic perspective, which negotiates between an atavistic past and an evolved present – raising interesting questions about notions of ‘progress’ in the neo-Victorian drama.

Bloom’s ultra-rational stance is complemented by Reid’s more compassionate nature. The inspector, while acknowledging and increasingly adopting Bloom’s views about entropy and human nature, needs to believe that culture will prevail over nature: “We are caged by what is, you said. But to see no further than the bars [...] that is a terror I could not endure” (Hawkes and Finlay 2013a: 55:40-55:55). As a detective figure and individual, he maintains that ideals of justice, community, and sympathy are valuable and necessary social constructs, even, and especially if “the entropy of the universe tends to the maximum” (McCarthy and Finlay 2013b: 55:00-55:20). In such a universe, justice is not an ontological fixity, but a man-made structure – and sometimes, merely a compromise. However, unlike *From Hell*’s fatalist protagonist who succumbs to opium,

*Ripper Street*'s characters chose to be 'men of faith' and commit to continuously fighting their uphill battle.

*Ripper Street* frequently confronts its characters with the inevitability of cause and effect within the uniquely diverse texture of Whitechapel, where social and economic forces cause acts of desperation. Many of the topics discussed in the series were tabooed or neglected in contemporary Victorian discourse or treated differently. Most cases, though solved by the detectives, have a tragic element: innocent people become involved and end up hurt or killed.<sup>18</sup> Even if the case originates in the deviant behaviour of an individual (which often entails East End outsiders, such as slumming aristocrats, politicians, or entrepreneurs), *Ripper Street* closely examines the effects of their selfish or desperate actions on ordinary, underrepresented Whitechapel citizens. These include workers, working women, children, criminals, employees, Irish immigrants, Jewish people, shop owners, reformers, and the policemen themselves.

## 6. Whitechapel as the Heartland

The series provides neo-historical case studies of complex problems rooted in the historical, social, and economic texture of Victorian Whitechapel, and does so without visually encoding it as a 'Gothic' space. Impressions of the uncanny, the abject, or the other in the form of chiaroscuro, time lapses, or extreme camera angles are notably absent, and the camera adopts a neutral, documentary style. Nonetheless, *Ripper Street* frequently engages with Victorian or urban Gothic stereotypes and lets Reid's meta-commentary challenge them. In 'Some Conscience Lost' (2016), an episode which discusses poverty in an age of workhouses and religious reformers by foregrounding the local paupers' struggle for retaining dignity, selfhood, and the possibility of self-determination, Reid's daughter Mathilda (Anna Burnett) is a researcher for Charles Booth. When she proposes to mark down an area as "lowest class, low for: vicious", Reid claims that Booth's categories "do not do justice to the human reality. These people are not vicious or idle or violent, they do not choose this existence, and yet in but three words, they are condemned" (Watson and Benette 2016: 21:42-21:53). Similarly, he questions Victorian stereotypes in 'A White World Made Red' (2016), which plays with the visual Gothic mode as an ironic homage to Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). Contemplating his daughter's copy of the bestseller, Reid comments: "The evil Transylvanian Count [...] because all

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foreigners are dangerous predators set on the parasitic cannibalism of our young women” (Watson and Young 2016: 48:00-48:06). Here, he delivers an astute, if laconic assessment of the novel’s contemporary appeal, with its notions of monstrosity or gender ideals implicitly linking back to the discourse on the Ripper cases. While the later development of the series merits its own detailed discussion, notions of monstrosity are also re-framed in connection with the serial killer called the Whitechapel Golem, whose wolfish disguise and bite marks associate him with bestiality and, as such, the Ripper. However, the wolf does not serve as a motif of biological regression but is encoded as a trauma of the displaced Ashkenazim. Like Mathilda does in ‘No Wolves in Whitechapel’ (2016), when she claims, “there are no princesses and monsters, only humans”, Reid dismantles the wolf motif as anthropologically human, not atavistic: “Homo homini lupus est” (Byrne and Warlow 2016: 3:54-10:45).

By consciously engaging with the stereotypes surrounding Whitechapel, *Ripper Street* re-constructs the East End as a chaotic, but fascinating living environment. It defies Victorian notions about criminality as a social pathology of the lower, allegedly ‘vicious’ classes or as atavistic regression, and rejects the urban Gothic trope that imbues the East End cityscape with a lurking malice engendered by the collective misery of the disenfranchised. Portrayed neither as monsters nor wretches, Whitechapel citizens are given space and a voice in the narratives, surfacing as complex individuals with the capacity to be both kind and selfish, good and bad. The series links criminality less to regressive or subconscious urges, and more to greed and desperation, often but not always caused by circumstances outside of the individual’s control. It stresses, on the one hand, that the law is not an ordering principle but meaningful only if it protects from harm and suggests, on the other hand, that breaking the law and harming others is not something we as humans overcome, but rather something we are all capable of, especially if we try to survive in a competitive environment such as the East End. This stance is an unusual perspective in a neo-Victorian urban detective drama.

In addition, if crime is the result of (bad) decisions made by all kinds of people, Whitechapel can serve as a microcosm that is interesting and relevant not because it is other, but on the contrary because it is familiar – often painfully so. Hence unsurprisingly, many characters in this series develop a certain, defiant local pride and attachment: Reid often speaks of

‘his’ streets and ‘his’ protection, and in ‘Some Conscience Lost (2016)’, Reid even describes the area as “alive and quick and stinky and bright. Whitechapel is life, in all its wild and rotten splendour. Beside it, the rest of the world seems a tomb”, with which Drake agrees: “It is rotten and wild. It is heaving, and pitiless, and ignorant. And I have yet seen nowhere to match it” (Watson and Benette 2016: 37:20-38:40). This assessment aptly sums up the series’ aesthetic. Visually, *Ripper Street* revels in an abundance of textures and colours, painting the East End in faded and blue-tinted greys often juxtaposed with red-tinted browns, adding dashes of deep green or muted red or often contrasting blue shadows with either white daylight or the warm glow of artificial light. This style complements a narrative that portrays Whitechapel as often shabby, sometimes dreary, with rare moments of peace, as a place of diligence and chaos, intense rather than lethargic, active rather than passive. Both characters and camera imply that there is a unique sort of beauty to be discovered among the bustle. Here, the East End is re-framed not as the abject, but the ‘real’, the authentic.<sup>19</sup> “It is our heartland, Bennet Drake” – “It is our life’s work, Edmund Reid” (Watson and Benette 2016: 37:40-37:43).

### 7. What Use Our Work: The Social Microcosm

Neo-Victorianism and the Gothic mode share an ‘ontological kinship’ in that both examine the past for the hidden traumas and nightmares that still impact the present, perhaps in unexpected ways. Considering this in connection with the wealth of Victorian urban Gothic texts that coined an image of the (Victorian) city as labyrinthine, obscure, and haunted by its own repressed monsters, it is no surprise that many neo-Victorian urban narratives also adopt a Gothic perspective. In addition, the Ripper murders and surrounding discourse visibly shaped a Gothic perception of London and the East End in particular, so this is especially true for neo-Victorian representations of the East End, which tend to re-mystify the metropolis for audiences living in satellite-mapped cities. *From Hell* certainly provides one such portrait. *Ripper Street*, while a Victorian urban crime drama which re-lives the Victorian past and examines it for surviving or lost cultural traces, eschews the Gothic gaze and instead re-imagines Whitechapel as demystified: shabby and stinky, but bright, not gloomy. It may be dismal at times, but not dreadful, chaotic, but not grotesque, rotten, but equally splendid and wild, but beautiful. *Ripper Street*’s Whitechapel is a space



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actively inhabited by a wide variety of people to whom it feels in no way uncanny or ‘un-home-ly’ – this may be illustrated by the decorations we discover in series four, for Queen Victoria’s diamond jubilee.

Among the series’ vocabulary we find concepts such as wilderness, the abyss, or the animal, or locations such as gambling dens, asylums, or graveyards, but these notions and places are disentangled from the Gothic mode. Violence or corruption are attributed not to a monstrous or atavistic evil lurking in a labyrinthine and obscure cityscape, but to the wider and less predefined chaotic force of entropy. The difference is small, but significant, because it lifts the stigma of being a realm of death and decay from the East End. *Ripper Street* never pretends that the East End is not a place of poverty, disenfranchisement, or tragedy – but it is not such exclusively. Whitechapel citizens live humble, exposed, and perhaps unlucky lives, but the series affords them an individual dignity, which the Gothic mode often forecloses. By adopting a more neutral perspective, the series is free to re-frame the East End not as an intra-urban exile or an other, but the heartland of Victorian London. It is a space that represents life – “in all its rotten splendour” – rather than death.

This splendour includes not just the different, lived-in settings we encounter, but a variety of different people. *Ripper Street* often examines the effect of various, interrelated social and economic circumstances,<sup>20</sup> value systems, and morals specific to the Victorian age and the British Empire on its underrepresented citizens, as well as myriad hidden or marginalised identities that may have once been perceived as monstrous: queer people, neuro-divergent people, Jewish or Chinese people, working-class people, or women demanding their voices be heard. If neo-Victorianism interrogates the Victorians as our familiar or strange Doppelgängers, *Ripper Street* presents us with a variety of likely, but also unlikely or unexpected examples and constructs an accessible because diverse Victorian past, in which we see ourselves mirrored. Exchanging the popular Gothic mode for a slightly more neutral perspective strengthens this effect. Whereas *From Hell*’s Victorians are presented as bigoted and vicious, *Ripper Street* eschews such teleologies and does not affirm our distance from the Victorians: “Is the truth” ponders Reid in ‘The Beating of Her Wings’, “that the abyss is neither within us, or without us. We *are* the abyss.” (Wilson and Finlay 2014: 43:24-43:37). Here he implies that othering is futile, because to be human *is* to be monstrous. If such is the

case, then present-day viewers are no more and no less (potentially) monstrous than their Victorian predecessors. Moreover, *Ripper Street* suggests that, if the universe is governed by entropy as a guiding principle, this fact obliges us to adopt more care and commitment towards one another. By mapping out Reid's, Drake's and others' ceaseless quest to maintain order and safety in the multifaceted microcosm of Whitechapel, the series invites us to empathise and identify more closely with our Victorian doppelgängers. Such identification is not always comfortable. However, where the Gothic mode employs disruption and subversion to challenge our ideas about ourselves and the world, *Ripper Street* normalises what we might be predisposed to imagine as an other. I posit that if Gothic 'makes strange', *Ripper Street* 'makes accessible'.

The series' case studies are embedded in historically rooted structures: Victorian laws, economies, politics, morals, or prejudices. Various characters present their differing perspectives or meta-commentary on those cases, allowing us to assess issues that remain relevant today in a new because defamiliarised light and in connection to their historical evolution. Such an approach implies that issues such as war trauma, transnationalism, sexism, abortion rights, capitalist exploitation, gentrification, or homophobia have always impacted people's lives. Moreover, *Ripper Street* utilises its neo-Victorian gaze to unearth 'forgotten' causalities or re-imagine 'hidden' histories, suggesting and (fictionally) affirming that underrepresented identities have always existed – why not in the complex microcosm of the East End? If the East End has indeed become a “scenario for history”, *Ripper Street* re-imagines it not as a “ruined memory [...] reduced to its significant effects” but as a complex cityscape: multifaceted, interrelated, thoroughly human, and encompassing “life, in all its wild and rotten splendour”.

### Notes

1. As much is evident from this excerpt of *The Evening Standard*: “The inhabitants of a district such as that in which these horrors were perpetrated are too familiar with sights and sounds of violence, and with the figures of criminals and ruffians, to take notice of any particular individual who, in other parts of the town, would draw immediate notice on himself” (Anon. 1888a:

n.p.). This passage is followed shortly after by further hyperbolic statements: “The monstrous and wanton brutality by which they are distinguished is rather what we might expect from a race of savages than from even the most abandoned and most degraded classes in a civilised community. It is terrible to reflect that at the end of the nineteenth century, after all our efforts, religious, educational, and philanthropic, such revolting and sickening barbarity should still be found in the heart of this great City, and be able to lurk undetected in close contact with all that is most refined, elegant, and cultivated in human society” (Anon. 1888a: n.p.).

2. Sherlock Holmes has been an immensely popular figure throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and the subject of countless neo-Victorian depictions, most recently Guy Ritchie’s *Sherlock Holmes* (2009) and *Sherlock Holmes: Game of Shadows* (2011). Steven Moffat has successfully translated him into contemporary London for BBC’s *Sherlock* (2010-present), and he has also been a model for Fox’s *House M.D.* (2004-2012), transcending his Victorian origins.
3. Although the canonical Sherlock Holmes seldom ventured into the East End, there have been numerous post- and neo-Victorian attempts to set the famous detective on ‘Jack’s’ heels. The German publishing house Verlagshaus für Volksliteratur und Kunst, which published translations of the canon alongside fake pulp adventures featuring the famous detective, added “Wie Jack, der Aufschlitzer, gefasst wurde” (How Jack the Ripper Was Taken) to its repertoire as early as 1907, beginning a long tradition. Recent examples include Carole Nelson Douglas’ *Chapel Noir* (2002), Lyndsay Faye’s *Dust and Shadow* (2009), or Edward B. Hanna’s *The Further Adventures of Sherlock Holmes: The Whitechapel Horror* (2010). Some of these versions, however, try specifically to prevent Holmes from catching the Ripper. In *Anno Dracula*, for instance, the great detective himself has been consciously excluded from the narrative, because according to the author, “the great detective would have identified, trapped and convicted the murderer before tea-time” (Newman 2011: 429).
4. As Clive Bloom has pointed out, the filmic East End has become a trope in itself, “rarely ever shot on location, because this world has to be isolated and contained, its alleys and cobbled ways an equivalent to the labyrinth of the mind, endlessly uncoiling, but endlessly confined in a circumscribed place” (Bloom 2008: 240-241).

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5. In 'A Stronger Loving World', Reid goes as far as mocking Best's ambition by comparing him to William Stead, the pioneer of 'new' investigative journalism. From Reid, this is clearly not a compliment.
  6. The title sequence itself seems to allude to the textual nature of the collectively imagined Whitechapel, considering that it overlays newspaper cuttings and character images, blends handwriting or maps over the imagery, or uses a newspaper typeface as its logo. The lively title music also differs considerably from the threatening score of *From Hell*.
  7. *Ripper Street*, like many other Whitechapel films, was not shot on location, but in Dublin. It is therefore inevitably fictional (Bloom 20078: 239).
  8. On the contrary, *Ripper Street* portrays Rose Erskine (Charlene McKenna), a prostitute at Susan's brothel who later pursues a career in the theatre, as a complex individual with aspirations who, while she may often be beset by bad luck, is not incessantly defined by her former status as a sex worker. In addition, Jackson, who frequently indulges in 'typical' East End vices such as alcohol and sex (both of which can be associated with the Id), is portrayed as a loveable scoundrel as well as a brilliant scientist.
  9. In fact, I would argue that the graveyard in 'Our Betrayal – Part 1' (2013) is less associated with the unreliable and malicious and more with peace: this is where, according to Rose, Drake "hides from life" (Wilson and Warlow 2013b: 42:49). After all, we see the place in grey daylight. Wives bring their working husbands lunch, and it is the setting in which Rose confesses her friendship and her love to Drake.
  10. This notion prevails throughout the series and is taken up repeatedly, be that through the comedic music hall rendering of the Ripper murders or the long friendship between Fred Abberline (Clive Russell) and Reid. Other examples include Jackson's framing as the Ripper by an old rival in 'A Man of My Company' (2013), the revelation that Mathilda Reid was deeply impacted by the discovery of Ripper case evidence brought home by her father, and the fact that he was pursuing a suspect in the case when the riverboat disaster, in which she was long believed to have been killed, occurred. For Reid, then, the Ripper trauma is closely connected to his own of losing his daughter. In later episodes, the detectives use their knowledge of the Ripper to arrive at conclusions about the behaviour of another serial killer.
  11. In the 1880s, the police's resources were limited: Gray provides a thorough overview of the police's procedures and shortcomings in his chapter on the Metropolitan police (Gray 2013: 209-230).

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12. This becomes especially clear when Reid calls for Drake to kill his rival Inspector Shine (Joseph Mawle) in the episode ‘Our Betrayal – Part 2’ (2013) or murders the man who has hidden his daughter Matilda in ‘The Beating of Her Wings’.
  13. When fear of cholera empties the streets in ‘The King Came Calling’ (2013), Reid sends his officers out in order to communicate security and solidarity to frightened citizens: “I want all other men out, where people can see them, not hiding in here. [...] We’ll not alarm these people by our absence” (Wilson and Warlow 2013a: 8:20-8:30). This correlates with his conversation with the priest who says, “I make my home where men’s fear lies. I fight it for them”, to which Reid responds, “Then you are welcome here” (Wilson and Warlow 2013d: 5:40-5:43).
  14. For example, Reid alludes to Bloom in ‘The Beating of Her Wings’ and quotes his stance exactly in ‘The Stranger’s Home’ (2016), set five years after their first conversation.
  15. Taking all five series into consideration, it may be said that *Ripper Street* itself moves incessantly from the fragile order of seasons one and two towards doubt and ambiguity, until the last season subverts the characters’ positions and makes them outlaws. Throughout, however, they continue to pursue what they perceive as ‘justice’, both within and without the law.
  16. Incidentally, the episode also explores how a patriarchal society isolates women and forces them to be competitors. Susan Hart struggles with her wish to be a successful madam and a friend to Lucy and Rose, noting that “[t]he truth of this world is that men have designed it for their own purpose and pleasure” (Wilson and Warlow 2013d: 1:15-1:20).
  17. Matt Cook provides a detailed study of homosexuality in Victorian London (see Cook 2003).
  18. This includes Mr Eagles (Hugh O’Connor), Constable Hobbes (Jonathan Barnwell), Mr Hinchcliffe (Justin Salinger), Bella Drake (Gillian Saker), Mr Buckley (Charlie Creed-Miles), or the numerous train wreck casualties.
  19. Notably, in ‘What Use Our Work’, Rose is kidnapped by a seemingly eligible bachelor who turns out to be a sex-trafficker. The backdrop to this story, however, consists of the idyllic Kensington Gardens or an interior so softly lit it becomes blurred. Both characters are dressed in cream colours, and it seems we witness Rose’s dream. The unreal dreamscape is juxtaposed with the richer shabbiness of the ‘real’ East End.
  20. These relations are often interlinked across the city, the empire, or the world: the East End is firmly embedded in transnational and global systems of

commerce and imperialism, connected to larger London and the world through railways and steam boats, telegraph lines, and business relations. We are presented with American investors, South African miners, Russian spies, Egypt-veterans, or Indian soldiers at various points in the series.

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