The Search For Jack The Ripper Essay, Research Paper

You Don t Know Jack: The Search for Jack the Ripper

Jack the Ripper is one of the most notorious yet romanticized characters in modern history. His gruesome prostitute murder rampage of 1888 in Whitechapel, a poor district on the East Side of London, shocked Victorian society and fascinated the world for over a century. Jack the Ripper is not the first serial killer in history, but he is the first greatly publicized killer of the modern age. It is generally accepted among Ripperologists that he had five victims, all prostitutes, between August 31st and November 9th 1888. Almost everyone has heard of Jack the Ripper, but who was he? Well, no one knows for certain but there are over fifty theories regarding his identity ranging from a would-be King of England to a murderous Polish Jew. We may never discover who he was, but we must analyze some of these theories and form our own conclusion on the identity of this most fascinating individual (Wilson & Odell 163).

A few things must be said about Jack the Ripper and his murders before one can review the suspects. Jack the Ripper committed five gruesome murders in the autumn of 1888. All victims except one were disemboweled, severely mutilated, and some even had organs removed. It can be established by the heinous nature of his crimes that he was very mentally disturbed. Colin Wilson, a famous British Criminal Psychologist (Colby-Newton 47) believes he was a sick man, twisted by hate and saturated with sadistic cravings (qtd. Colby-Newton 47). But he must have possessed some knowledge of anatomy and, as Dr. Sequiera puts it, he must have been no stranger to the knife (qtd. Wilson & Odell 138). We come to this conclusion by analyzing level of the mutilations of his victims. The fact that he was able to remove a kidney from Catherine Eddowes in less than 10 minutes (Rumbelow 98) suggests at least some knowledge of anatomy and possibly some surgical skills.

All of the Ripper s victims were prostitutes. Mary Ann Nichols and Annie Chapman were killed about a week apart, and both had been severely mutilated. Elizabeth Stride and Katherine Eddowes were killed less than two hours apart on September 30th; an ordeal that would be dubbed a double event . Elizabeth Stride s throat was cut deeply from left to right; as was the Ripper s modus operandis, but her body had not been mutilated. Most suspect this was so because someone must have accidentally stumbled upon the murder and frightened the killer away. Unsatisfied due to an unfinished job, the Ripper walked three quarters of a mile and found Katherine Eddowes, another prostitute, whom he murdered and severely mutilated (he even removed her left kidney). The Ripper s last victim was Mary Jane Kelly, the only victim found indoors, in her doss in Miller s Court. Her body was also the most severely mutilated; most likely due to the fact that the killer was able to spend hours in his grim task as opposed to only minutes on the other victims between police patrols (Wilson & Odell 59).

Dozens of theories on the Ripper s identity have been formulated over the years and some have been weaker than others. The first such theory is that the killer was Thomas Cutbush. Cutbush was arrested in 1891 for stabbing two young women s buttocks in public. He was proclaimed Jack the Ripper by the Sun in a spectacular article (Colby-Newton 68). This theory was quickly dismissed by Sir Melville Mcnaghten, Assistant Chief Constable at Scotland Yard and future head of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), who claimed that there were at least another three men, any one of whom would have been more likely than Cutbush to have committed this series of murders (Wilson & Odell 276). George Chapman was another popular suspect at the time. A Polish barber-surgeon (Crime 72) who immigrated to England sometime in 1888, Chapman was later convicted of poisoning at least 3 of his wives and hanged in 1903. Chapman is considered a serious suspects because of his psychological profile was that of a killer, he possessed the needed anatomical knowledge, being a barber-surgeon and he was a resident of Whitechapel at the time of the murders. But, his known modus operandis is very different, and the switch from brutal mutilations to slow poisoning is the most frequent objection (Crime 73) to him being the killer.

But the strongest and most respected theory originates from Sir Melville Mcnaghten s notes. After exonerating Cutbush as the killer, Mcnaghten lists three main suspects. Michael Ostrog, who Mcnaghten describes as a mad Russian doctor and unquestionably a homicidal manic. (Cyriax 369) was a Russian Jew who had been recently dismissed from a Lunatic Asylum. Being a doctor automatically proves that he had the anatomical knowledge and the surgical skill to commit the murders. But Ostrog never did anything remotely as violent as the Whitechapel murders, and there is no real strong motive to support the accusation other than his insanity. Mcnaghtens s second suspect was Aaron Kosminski or Dr. Padachenko. Many believe Dr. Padachenko was a Russian maniac and a spy who was sent to London by the Okhrana (the Czar s secret police). Disguised as Aaron Kosminski, a Polish Jew, he committed these crimes to discredit British Police efficiency (Wilson & Odell 255). This is a likely theory as Dr. Padachenko was a homicidal maniac, and fully equipped with the knowledge and skills to commit the murders. The only problem is proving his existence. There is a great likelihood that he was a fabrication of a dishonest journalist (Wilson & Odell 256), William Le Queux, and there is no solid evidence that points to any proof that he existed. Mcnaghten s third and primal suspect is Montague John Druit. He is described as a sexually insane doctor who disappeared at the time of the Miller s Court murder [Mary Kelly], and whose body (which was said to have been upwards in ht water) was found in the Thames on 31st Dec. (Wilson & Odell 277). The only evidence against Druit is the fact that the murders stopped around the same time of his suicide, but Druit even being considered a suspect is due solely to Mcnaghten s incorrect notes. Druit was a barrister, not a doctor. He would possess no anatomical knowledge, he never committed a violent crime, and he committed suicide after his mother was admitted to a mental asylum and he was fired from his teaching job at Blackheath. Donald Rumbelow finds the theory that John Druit is Jack the Ripper quite convincing, the only thing it lacks for a total conviction is a single shred of evidence (Rumbelow 179).

The tale was drastically romanticized when it was suggested that the Duke of Clarence, Grandson of Queen Victoria, and would-be King of England was Jack the Ripper (TIME, Who was Jack the Ripper? ). Stephen Knight writes that Clarence or a group of Freemasons (which included the Royal physician Sir William Gull) killed the prostitutes because they were blackmailing the Prince (Knight 284). According to Knight the Prince had secretly married a catholic commoner, Annie Elizabeth Crook. He goes on to say that Mary Jane Kelly (the Ripper s last victim) had been one of the witnesses. She supposedly told fellow prostitutes Mary Nichols, Annie Chapman, and Katherine Eddowes (Elizabeth Stride who also went by the name of Mary Kelly was killed by accident) who then decided to blackmail the Prince. Either Clarence himself or a group of Freemasons killed the prostitutes to silence them (Knight 284). The fact that there is no evidence to prove this secret wedding, the gruesome nature of the crimes and the thought of the future King of England or the Royal physician roaming the streets of Whitechapel in search of prostitutes to disembowel makes this theory quite disturbing and not believable.

Maybe one of the people mentioned here was really Jack the Ripper. Though we are still far from any decisive conclusion on his identity, the future holds a chance that some evidence will come about which could well be the kind of positive proof of the Ripper s identity that our investigations have failed to provide. (Wilson & Odell 264). But maybe the killer is someone we have never heard of, as Donald Runbelow wonderfully puts it I have always had the feeling that on the Day of Judgment, when all things shall be known, when I and the other generations of Ripperologists ask for Jack the Ripper to step forward and call out his true name, then we shall turn and look with astonishment as he announces his name and say: Who? (Colby-Newton 87)