

In What Ways did 19th Century Theatre Respond to Contemporary Crime: With a Focus on the Dramatization of Real-Life Cases and Criminals

By Sarah Elizabeth Twyford

Abstract

During the nineteenth century there was a surge in violent crime. The creation of the printing press allowed for the criminal investigations to be printed en masse in the newspapers for the public to read. Without access to the police reports, enquiries or trial documentation, the facts presented by the press became the widely accepted truth of these investigations despite many details being fabricated or opinion based. In this thesis I explore the ways in which real life murder was represented in the newspapers and how these were adapted into theatre productions. With reference to the newspaper's coverage of the crimes, this thesis details the many ways in which theatre across the nineteenth century responded to contemporary crime.

The first murder explored in this thesis is the Elstree murder where John Thurtell murdered fellow gambler William Weare in 1823. With neither party truly being a victim, I argue how the changing opinions of criminals and victims portrayed in the press directly affects the theatre's portrayal of the murderer and the murdered on the stage. The second case looks at the Polstead murder where Maria Marten was murdered by her lover William Corder in 1827. What is interesting about this case is the belief that her body was discovered a year later through her mother's recurring dream. This fictitious anecdote taken from the newspaper's coverage on the murder becomes a focal element of the theatre's adaptations, leading to more supernatural and paranormal narratives. The final case study discussed in this thesis is that of the Whitechapel murders which are notoriously associated with 'Jack the Ripper'. Despite the twenty first century belief that the Ripper murdered five women, I discuss how the mass hysteria portrayed in the press lead to fourteen female murder victims being associated with the Ripper, causing his name to be associated with female murders for almost a decade across the world. In contrast to the popularity and constant retelling of the murders both in newspapers and documentaries today, the Ripper case severely lacked theatrical representation.

Word Count: 35,041

September 2020

School of Arts, University of Kent

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor Dr Helen Brooks, who is to blame for my ever-growing interest in theatre history. I will be forever grateful for the help, support and motivation you have given me over the last year. I appreciate the questions and discussions posed to me by my other supervisor Dr Sophie Quirk which helped me to focus my argument and explore other research avenues I had not thought of. I would also like to thank Tom Kennett and Joanna Baines from Special Collections and Archives in the Templeman Library and the National Library of Australia as, without their efforts in digitizing archival materials for me, this thesis would not have existed. Lastly, I would like to show my gratitude to my family for putting up with me constantly talking at them about nineteenth century crime and theatre; especially my mum for staying up late reading countless drafts and my partner Adam for humouring me when I would start an hour-long discussion on my thesis.

In What Ways did 19th Century Theatre Respond to Contemporary Crime: With a Focus on the Dramatization of Real-Life Cases and Criminals

Contents

	Page
Introduction	3
Chapter One: The Elstree Murder (1823)	14
Chapter Two: The Polstead Murder (1827)	32
Chapter Three: The Whitechapel Murders (1888-1891)	50
Conclusion	63
Bibliography	65

Thesis Introduction: Murder as a Theatrical Artform

Suppose it [the murder] over and done... Suppose the poor murdered man to be out of his pain, and the rascal that did it off like a shot, nobody knows whither; suppose, lastly, that we have done our best, by putting out our legs to trip up the fellow in his flight, but all to no purpose... why, then, I say, what's the use of any more virtue? Enough has been given to morality; now comes the turn of Taste and Fine Arts. A sad thing it was, no doubt, very sad; but we can't mend it...

Therefore let us make the best of a bad matter; and, as it is impossible to hammer anything out of it for moral purposes, let us treat it aesthetically, and see if it will turn to account in that way. Such is the logic of a sensible man

(De Quincey 2009, From *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts* p.12-13).

In his satirical essay, *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts*, critical author and intellectual Thomas De Quincey commented on attitudes towards crime in the early nineteenth century. As one of the first people to question the public's love of murder, De Quincey wrote multiple essays on society's fascination with morbid matters. With the example above, De Quincey wrote as though he had access to a first-hand account of this lecture on the fine art of murder by 'the Society of Gentleman Amateurs', when actually the narrative is a fictitious display of dark humour. His parody provides a valuable insight into how people discussed the beauty of murder as if it were art. When describing the work of murderer John Thurtell, De Quincey speculated that: 'when the first glow of enthusiasm had subsided, I have found most judicious critics to agree that there was something *falsetto*¹ in the style of Thurtell' (De Quincey 2009, p.31). By describing Thurtell's murder as '*falsetto*' there is an emphasis that his 'art' (murder) lacked uniqueness in the eyes of these 'critics' who believed themselves to be connoisseurs in the art of murder. This contextualisation of contemporary attitudes towards crime is one of the key arguments addressed in this thesis, as the case study on Thurtell in chapter 1 will demonstrate. The idea of murder as an artform is taken to its ultimate expression in its translation to the theatre, which is the focus of this thesis.

Attitudes Towards Crime: Our Fascination with Murder

There is something intriguing in the decision to create entertainment out of a horrific event like a murder. The attraction to watching murder being dramatised for entertainment purposes is not purely located in history, but still remains a part of our society today. This grim fascination can be seen in the popular true crime drama genre shown on both television and on-demand screening services. New releases this year include *Dirty John*² (2 June) on Netflix, *Des*³ (14 September) and

¹ Falsetto: meaning 'high-pitched artificial voice' (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary* 1982, p.349).

² *Dirty John* is an American drama. The first series from 2018 followed the story of John Meehan who was stabbed to death by his wife's daughter in 2016 after stalking, threatening, and terrorising them for years. The second season, which first aired in June this year, was based on the real-life murderer Betty Broderick, who killed her ex-husband and his wife in 1989.

³ *Des* is based on the Muswell Hill murder case where serial killer Dennis Nilsen murdered at least 12 young men through strangulation between 1978 and 1983.

*Honour*⁴ (release date to be confirmed in autumn) on ITV and *The Salisbury Poisonings*⁵ (14 June) on BBC One. All of these dramas are based on real murder cases that occurred in the last forty years, with the most recent being the Salisbury Poisonings in 2018. These are just a few examples of recent and forthcoming real-life murder dramas adapted for the public's entertainment. In modern society, the production of violence can be found as easily in contemporary entertainment (in the form of documentaries, television programmes and films), as it could be in the nineteenth century through theatre adaptations of crime.

A number of scholars have attempted to explain the fascination with real-life crime. American crime and popular culture specialist Jean Murley argues that the viewer can enjoy watching crime because they understand that the guilty party will get their 'comeuppance' in the end. There can also be a need to understand the criminal's motives and reasoning behind committing crime, the quest for knowledge in order to create some semblance of reasoning (Murley 2008, p.4). Taking a different position, criminal justice expert Steven Kohm explains how the concept of 'naming and shaming' offenders encourages a more disciplined society by marginalising the accused as an outcast, with those unanimously accusing being dominant (Kohm 2009, p.191). Kohm argues that there is a sense of comradery in reading about and accepting a universal hatred towards a criminal, meaning that newspapers can use emotional manipulation to unify their audience (Kohm 2009, p.189). This thesis is not attempting to explain why people are fascinated by real-life crime but rather focuses on the decisions made when adapting crime to the stage.

Hypothesis, Argument and Theory

This thesis explores the ways in which some theatres of the nineteenth century adapted real-life and current murder cases into performances. Their adaptations were based on the 'truth' available to them through the newspaper coverage on the murders as this was the only information on the crimes that was accessible to the public. Each chapter focuses on a different case study where the theatrical representations of murder were significant in regards to their portrayal of the facts and the underlying social commentaries given. These case studies are the Elstree murder (Weare murdered by Thurtell), the Polstead murder (Marten murdered by Corder) and the Whitechapel murders (all murders associated with Jack the Ripper between 1888 and 1901). In chapter 1 I argue that the two Elstree murder productions warn the audience against the vice of gambling as the criminal characters portrayed on the stage are described as the 'true victims of gaming'. In chapter 2 however, where I examine how the Polstead murder was altered for the stage, I argue that most facts are cast aside to make room for a new fantastical narrative based on a fictitious notion that Marten's mother had a dream about her death. Marten is portrayed to be the archetypal innocent country girl; her sweet and innocent disposition being a commentary on the place of women in society and a warning as to what happens if they stray from their place. In chapter 3 I continue to explore the representation of female murder victims by examining the Whitechapel murders. Here I

⁴ *Honour* is a dramatization of the murder of Banaz Mahmud in 2006 which was instigated by her family as an 'honour' killing for her loving the wrong man.

⁵ *Salisbury Poisonings* is a dramatic adaptation of the Salisbury poisonings in March 2018, where former double agents for England's intelligence service Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia Skripal were poisoned with Novichok nerve agent. Though both survived the attack, the same nerve agent was found in a perfume bottle in a bin in Amesbury. The bottle was found by Charlie Rowley and was given to Dawn Sturgess, who died after spraying it on her wrist in June 2018. This was believed to be an accidental killing due to the disposal method of the attempted murder device.

argue that the murderers are characterized on stage as heroes purging London of the bad women that taint it.

Through a focus on the newspaper's coverage of the Elstree, Polstead and Whitechapel murders, this thesis will identify and discuss the main approaches used by nineteenth century theatres when responding to contemporary crimes. I discuss the theatre's drive towards authenticity in these productions by analysing how accurately they follow the narratives offered in the papers. When I examine *The Hertfordshire Tragedy* in chapter 1, I show how the production is presented as closely mirroring the newspapers coverage of the murder, with promotional paraphernalia making sure to publicise the connection. In contrast, in chapters 2 and 3 I demonstrate how productions focussed on the Polstead and Whitechapel murders became fixated on specific elements of the murders coverage to which they built their own fictional narrative that included references to the actual events.

Despite many of the performances being popular with audiences, there were ethical risks and moral questions raised by producing work on recent and ongoing murder cases. Each murder case has one production that pushes their murder play a step further by incorporating an element of the real-life murder into their staged adaptation. The Surrey's production of *The Gamblers* in chapter 1 used items present at the Elstree murder scene, the Cherry Fair performance of the Polstead murder in chapter 2 was partially staged at the crime scene and Emm's production of *Jack the Ripper* in chapter 3 claimed to have a similar effect by creating 'Jack the Ripper's bedroom' with 'relics' from the time (Emm 1930, Programme). Despite both latter murders' performances taking this approach, the Polstead adaptations were highly successful whereas the Whitechapel murder versions were not. This was a risky move and caused backlash from audience members, newspapers, and magistrates which led to *The Gamblers* (Elstree) being forcibly closed and *Jack the Ripper* (Whitechapel) never being performed. For those that did succeed, like adaptations of the Polstead murder, companies were rewarded with sold out auditoriums, country- wide tours and decade- long production runs.

At the heart of this thesis lies the theatrical representations of the criminals and victims when compared to the opinions of the papers at the time of production. The Coburg's production of *The Hertfordshire Tragedy* (Elstree), which I examine in chapter 1, and the many adaptations of the Polstead murder (chapter 2) represent their murderer as an inherently evil villain with no redeeming features. Staying true to the melodramatic archetypal characterisations, the murderer's misdeeds are heightened and exaggerated to amplify the malevolent nature of the murder in question. However, as we shall see in chapters 1 and 3, the murderer is not always represented as the criminal on stage. The choice to depict a criminal like Thurtell (Elstree) or Jack the Ripper (Whitechapel) as the protagonist or the victim on stage was entirely dependent on how the newspapers focussed on the murderers as individuals rather than killers. I also, where applicable, compare the newspaper's portrayal of the criminals and victims to the real individuals, as these are not always the same.

The Rise in Violent Crimes

It is important to address the wider context when discussing crimes of this period. The nineteenth century was chosen as the focus of this thesis due to the increase in violent crimes. Part of the reason for this increase was the absence of international conflict during the period. Elaine Reynolds explains in her chapter in *Policing and War in Europe* that crime rates rose when a country was not in a state of war (Reynolds 2002, p.14). The American revolution (1765-1783) and the Napoleonic wars (1803-1815) acted as a deterrent against crime at home as the violent acts were occurring overseas in the various battles Britain was fighting. However, after the war period was over, crime

rates in Britain rose again due to increased unemployment. Kay Handford outlines how the war with France in the late 1700's caused homelessness due to living costs rising (through wages lowering and rent rising) and that, after the war, many soldiers became vagrants (Handford 2009, p.7). Though not directly discussed in this thesis, it is important to note that this affected the case studies explored in chapters 1 and 3 as Thurtell (murderer) had a military background and some early Ripper suspects were believed to be soldiers home from war. The same links are not shared with the Polstead murder as the fictional elements of the story overshadowed the facts. Alongside the rise in actual crime, this is the first time we see it represented on stage.

The Growth of the Printing Press

The violent murders that occurred during the nineteenth century could be read about in a large number of newspapers. The growth and development of printed media allowed for popular events to be advertised by multiple newspapers which were sold across Britain. In his book *Serializing Fiction in the Victorian Press*, English and literature historian Graham Law (2000) describes how more people were learning how to read and write through the introduction of Sunday Schools (Law 2000, p.8). The improved accessibility of education increased the volume of literate individuals across all social classes, which allowed for an increase of interest in printed works. With new technologies allowing for the production of printed media to be cheaply and efficiently manufactured, more newspapers, magazines and journals came into existence (Flanders 2011, p.4). Communal subscriptions and hourly paper rentals were created and could be accessed via libraries and coffee and public houses so that the opportunity to read was there without the cost of buying (Law 2000, p.11).

The growth of the press led to an increase in coverage and popularity of crime reporting. More papers meant a higher demand for stories to maintain interest and gain further popularity. It is no surprise, therefore, that the papers started broadcasting criminal cases in more and more detail. As Judith Flanders explains:

in the month after Weare's [Elstree] murder, the four pages of *The Times* consisted of two pages of advertisements, two columns of news, a few letters, some birth and death announcements; and the rest of the paper was entirely given over to police, trial and magistrates' court reports (Flanders 2011, p.27).

The significance of the growth and heightened readership of newspapers can be seen in chapter 1 on the Elstree murder. The Elstree murder was described as the very first trial by newspaper by scholars today such as Lucy Worsley, Judith Flanders and Gary Powell; by which the press took ownership of the murder narrative and condemned Thurtell (murderer) as a criminal days after his arrest and months before his trial. By the time of the Whitechapel murders, as Flanders states, newspapers were receiving massive interest in their murder articles, with the *Times* dedicating twenty percent and the *Telegraph* thirty percent of their contents to crime coverage (Flanders 2011, p.426).

Melodramatic Structure and Characters

It is not surprising that with such interest in the papers, the popular stage would pick up on the coverage of recent murders and try to turn these stories into money-makers. The newspaper coverage of these murders translated to the stage through the melodramatic form due to the nature

of their stories, including villains and victims, lending themselves well to the melodramatic format. It is notable that all the real-life crimes discussed in this thesis are translated to the stage as a melodrama. Though I have not been able to conduct a close textual analysis of the genre of melodrama, it is important to understand the melodramatic form was integral to the success of the reimagining of these crimes. I demonstrate this in this thesis through criminals being reimagined as melodramatic villains which becomes a focal topic of discussion in chapters 1 and 2, which helps me draw broad conclusions on the criminal and victim representations discussed.

To have an understanding of how the genre shapes the boundaries of my analysis, it is important to discuss how the structure of melodrama was well suited to the narrative of the murders presented in the newspapers. Edwin Wilson and Alvin Goldfarb describe how the structure of the 'well-made play' was believed to be the perfect scriptwriting format which was popular in the late 1800's. This structure could be applied to melodrama, which was a popular theatre genre throughout the nineteenth century. Edward Dent argues that melodrama was a dominant theatrical genre until the beginnings of cinema in the early twentieth century (Dent 1945, p.20). The 'well-made play' had a cause-and-effect structure and revolved around a secret being revealed to the audience but not the characters. This form in the late nineteenth century relates to the productions of the Whitechapel murders in chapter 3 as detective work is used to uncover more information about the killings. As Wilson and Goldfarb further explain, some melodramatic scenes bordered on the sensational using spectacle and special effects as a form of escapism for their audiences (Wilson and Goldfarb 2004, p.364). David Mayer in his chapter on 'Encountering Melodrama' expresses melodrama to be 'responsive to immediate social circumstances and concerns' (Mayer 2004, p.145-146). With this in mind, in each chapter I argue how the representation of criminals and victims provides a wider social commentary. Wilson and Goldfarb finally express how the 'well-made play' is rounded off with no loose ends to finish (Wilson and Goldfarb 2004, p.368). As I will argue in chapters 2 and 3, the melodramatic structure does not lend itself well to unsolved crimes (when referring to the Whitechapel murders) or unfinished business, as will be explored in the Polstead murder when a production closes with the implication of Corder (murderer) being hung and not directly staged.

Much information about the nineteenth century stage has come to light through the recent works of Jim Davis, Jackie Bratton, Janice Norwood and David Mayer. Their work in recovering and reclaiming Victorian and nineteenth century theatre history has created an understanding of the period in which other scholars can contribute further research. My thesis builds on this and contributes to the recovery of nineteenth century theatre by working on a part that no one else has yet. An in-depth analysis of the plays discussed in this thesis has not been analysed in contemporary literature before, making this thesis the first to compare these case studies together. My work provides a template which highlights the ideas that need to be considered in doing further research on real-life murder adaptations in the nineteenth century.

Methodology

It is important to address the methodology I have used to gather, quantify and discuss the sources surrounding these three murders. As is evident in some of the sources used above, in particular the more dated secondary sources, my access to both primary and secondary information has been very limited whilst writing. There are few scripts surviving from this period which makes it hard to do this kind of work on melodrama due to lack of extant materials. With all case studies discussed in this thesis, I have attempted to give reference to every adaptation of each murder discussed that occurred in the nineteenth century to give a sense of the longevity and performability of their stage

presence. None of these productions were performed in major, large-scale venues and their coverage in the media and lasting resources (in terms of scripts, programmes, and playbills) are rather limited. With reference to the Polstead murder in chapter 2, the production history was difficult to track due to the volume of productions being alluded to in the newspapers containing little detail describing their content, cast, or running time. As Flanders notes in her study *The Invention of Murder*, there are only two scripts of Polstead murder adaptations remaining from the nineteenth century. One she believes is associated with the Welsh production from Swansea, whilst the other she believes to be used by a touring theatre company in the 1890's (Flanders 2011, p.61). Neither of these scripts I was able to access, but I am aware that further information on the topic could be gleaned from these sources.

The real challenge when writing this thesis was the lack of evidence and my inability to access what is available due to the lockdown and restricted travel instilled by the Covid-19 outbreak. Half of this thesis (from March-September 2020) was written during the Covid-19 pandemic meaning that I was writing remotely, in isolation, and was unable to access any archival materials that have not been digitised. My intention with this thesis was to focus on the extant scripts in order to create a lengthy narrative and character-based discussion on the ways that the theatre modified the real murder case to suit the stage. Unfortunately, though some archival institutions (like Special Collections and Archives in the Templeman Library and the National Library of Australia) were able to create digital copies for me, many of the scripts I had hoped to use for this thesis became unavailable once lockdown began. Out of all the theatre adaptations of murder discussed in this thesis, there were only five where I had access to the scripts and only one of those had been published and was accessible outside of an archive.

With the lack of evidence available for me to explore the theatre productions discussed in this thesis, I have chosen to adopt Thomas Postlewait's (2012) concept of speculative histories in order to deal with the absence of materials. In taking this approach I am informed by Postlewait's chapter 'The Nature of Historical Evidence' where he discusses the nature of theatre historical research. He explains a speculative historian's approach to theatre history when there is a lack of evidence available. Postlewait attempts to answer the 'what' and 'how' of events by analysing the data available as well as what is missing. With reference to the mysterious killing of Christopher Marlowe, Postlewait explains that '[despite] lacking facts, the speculators must develop their narratives by means of *arguments by analogy... guilt by association... and reasoning*' (Postlewait 2012, p.238). As Postlewait's speculative histories theory explains, the necessity to hypothesise in theatre history is paramount when attempting to decipher both the content and the effects of these plays due to their lack of evidence. Postlewait weighs up the value of different types of sources and how they can be used to hypothesise where there are gaps in history. He describes this approach as the work of a '*macrohistorian*':

For the *macrohistorian* the challenge is to identify, among the many possible external conditions that may contribute to the event, the primary factor that shaped, directed and perhaps controlled the actions and thoughts of the participants in the event. (Postlewait 2007, p.240).

Alongside this speculative approach my research has been heavily dependent on digitised newspaper archives. Via archives like Proquest, British Library Newspapers and Gale Newsvault I have read more than 250 newspaper articles relating to the crimes and theatrical adaptations covering the period 1823 to 1951. These articles directly contribute to the construction of this thesis. The newspaper coverage of both the crimes and theatre productions provides an insight into both

the extent to which audiences would have known about the murders as well as an overview of the production narratives, allowing for comparisons to be drawn between the two.

Taking the speculative approach, in chapters 2 and 3, I have used early twentieth century plays to hypothesise about what productions staged in the nineteenth century might have been like. Through Special Collections and Archives at the Templemen Library, I have been able to gain access to the 1920s and 1930s scripts written by Andrew Melville (known as and referred to in this thesis as Andrew Emm) who wrote plays on both the Polstead murder and the Whitechapel murders focussing on Jack the Ripper. In reference to the Elstree murder in chapter 1, I have been able to access a version of *The Gamblers* and *The Hertfordshire Tragedy* through the National Library of Australia. The other script made accessible to me was *Jack l'Eventruer* which was translated to English and published by Frank Morlock in 2011. All other productions, and further descriptions on these plays, discussed in this thesis have been discovered by searching the newspaper archives for examples of murder melodramas based on these three case studies.

Chapter Overview

My thesis will provide insight into the ways in which theatres responded to contemporary crime. This thesis provides a unique insight into nineteenth and early twentieth century theatre through the analysis of productions based on contemporary crimes. Despite each chapter being focussed on a murder case study, each theatrical outcome created was distinct. Even when multiple theatres focussed on one particular crime, their take on the case differed drastically from that of their competition. As I argue throughout, this is due to the newspapers' take on the crime, as it is the opinions and 'facts' provided in the press that shape the narratives and characterisations depicted on the stage.

Chapter 1 begins with an exploration of the Elstree murder, where William Weare is murdered by fellow gambler John Thurtell in 1823 with the help of Thurtell's accomplices William Probert and Joseph Hunt. The motive of the crime appears to be revenge after Thurtell lost money to Weare, who had supposedly cheated to win (Worsley 2014, p.46). Whilst travelling to Probert's rented cottage in a hired horse and gig, however, there was an altercation which led to Thurtell slicing open Weare's throat and bludgeoning him to death with the butt of a gun. Hunt and Probert then stripped the body and disposed of it; firstly in the pond behind Probert's property and then later moving Weare's remains to a lake in Elstree (Flanders 2011, p.25). They divided Weare's belongings between them and travelled back to London, leaving the blood and brain covered gun and knife near the original lake in Radlett (Flanders 2011, p.20). The murder weapons were quickly discovered which led to the three men's arrests (*Morning Chronicle* 1823, A).

In chapter 1 I compare the criminal representations in the theatre to that of both the newspapers and the real-life individuals. The work of Victorianist Judith Flanders (2011) and specialist in criminal law Eric Russell Watson (1962) underpin my analysis of criminal and victim representations. Watson's chapter on Thurtell and Hunt in *Famous Trials 6th Series*, though dated, closely follows the investigation and trial with detailed information undisclosed elsewhere. He gives invaluable descriptions of the accused men (Thurtell, Probert and Hunt), helping to create a true-to-life image of each which I compare to the versions presented in the theatrical productions, which were purportedly based on the 'truth' provided by the newspapers. The only mention of the theatre in Watson's chapter is in relation to the legal proceedings against the Surrey theatre's manager based on the portrayal of Thurtell (the murderer) in the production of *The Gamblers*. In contrast, Flanders

focuses on the cultural awareness of the murder by following the newspapers' developments on the case from their first article to the conclusion of the story. She references the performance at the Surrey theatre whilst discussing how all-encompassing coverage of the murder became, and how it gradually moved further and further from the real-life truth. Though her chapter 'Trial by Newspaper' does go into some detail on the advertisement and plot of the Surrey's production, the focus of her work is predominantly on the newspapers' attention regarding the murder and not on the play's adaptation of the papers' views.

What makes the Elstree murder so unique is the way in which the newspapers discussed every intricate detail about the murder, the victim and the criminals involved. The opinions of the media, which emphasised Thurtell's (the murderer's) guilt before his trial had taken place, were adopted by readers as truth. Due to the papers' influence on the outcome of the investigation this became known as the first 'trial by newspaper' and is remembered for this in modern criminology and law history. Yet it was not only the first 'trial by newspaper', it was unique as the two theatre productions which adapted the crime directly reflected the thoughts posed by the newspapers. As I argue, this led to each theatrical adaptation varying drastically in their representations of villains and victims: largely as they were produced at different stages in the investigation where opinions on those involved changed dramatically.

In chapter 2 I turn to another murder, occurring just a few years after the Elstree murder: the Polstead or 'Red Barn' murder, where Maria Marten was brutally killed by her lover William Corder. Both Marten and Corder lived in Polstead, a small farming village in Suffolk. In 1827 Marten planned to elope with Corder, son of a local farmer and father of her child (*Morning Chronicle* 31 Oct 1828). In the May of that year, the couple had planned to meet late one night at a barn on the Corder family's property before heading to Ipswich to get married. Marten arrived at the rendezvous point only to be stabbed in the chest and shot through the eye before being buried in a shallow grave by the man she loved (Flanders 2011, p.52). Unlike in the Elstree Murder, Corder had no accomplice, no witnesses and covered his tracks so as not to arouse suspicion. It was almost a year later that the body was discovered. Concerned as to the whereabouts of their daughter after months of no contact, the Marten's discussed the night of her disappearance with their neighbours to discover that Corder had headed towards the barn with a pickaxe; unusual behaviour for one planning to elope the same evening. Prompted by their neighbour's suspicions, and with the permission of Corder's family, they searched the barn and found Marten's remains in a shallow grave (*Morning Chronicle* 31 Oct 1828). The name most commonly associated with this murder is the 'Red Barn' murder due to the colour of the building becoming a major identifiable feature of the crime as all aspects of the case occurred in the Red Barn, including one of the theatre productions that will be discussed in this thesis.

Chapter 2 continues to draw on the work of Flanders as well as being influenced by the work of British historian Lucy Worsley (2014) and nineteenth century theatre researcher Catherine Pedley (2004). Both Worsley and Pedley cite primary materials that I have not had access to due to Covid-19. Pedley's journal article, *Maria Marten, or the Murder in the Red Barn: The Theatricality of Provincial Life* provides detailed descriptions of and quotations from James Curtis' book entitled *An authentic and faithful history of the mysterious murder of Maria Marten*; a copy of which is held at the Garrick Club Archives which I had intended to visit before lockdown happened. In his book, Curtis details the Polstead Murder case and the related theatre performances, having been present at many of the productions. He was a writer for the *Times* newspaper and one of their main reporters on the case. Pedley uses Curtis' work to focus on touring and provincial theatre adaptations of the Polstead murder. Though Pedley's chapter does discuss the work of a specific

touring theatre company, she concentrates on the performance mediums. By contrast, my focus targets the different ways the Polstead story is altered to suit the stage.

Where Pedley discusses archival materials like Curtis' book, Worsley describes her personal experience in *A Very British Murder* when visiting the archives held in St Edmundsbury Museum as well as travelling to Polstead to attain a personal perspective on the murder. When retracing the case and handling the items that remain, Worsley gives an insight into the ongoing interest in the Polstead murder today as a large portion of the museum is dedicated to the crime as well as there being plaques around the village indicating where everyone lived and approximately where Marten was buried (Worsley 2014, p.91-92). Worsley's more personal approach to discussing the crime encourages the reader to live the discovery of the murder alongside her, echoing how the theatre productions enabled audiences to witness the events themselves. Worsley, much like Flanders, focuses on the media's interest in the murder and how this affected the opinions of readers. In terms of performance, Worsley does not discuss theatrical adaptations, instead she focuses on the performative qualities of the execution, the display of Corder's dead body and the attention the village received after the murder had been reported by the newspapers.

The fascination with the Polstead murder stems from the myth that the victim's body was revealed through her stepmother's recurring dream, which became one of the focal points of the theatre's adaptations of the murder. This transforms from an anecdote in the newspaper's coverage to being the major plot point in adaptations of the Polstead murder; with key changes in the narrative including fortune telling Gypsies that have no connection to either the 'truth' portrayed by the newspapers or the real-life murder case. I will demonstrate how the Polstead murder productions received great success in the numerous stage renditions of the crime, which were largely due to the individuals involved in the crime suiting the character archetypes present in the melodramatic genre. These representations, I argue, were accentuated and exaggerated in the theatre due to the strong sentiments against Corder being present in the newspapers. With one of the Gypsy characters being the hero and Corder being the villain, I draw attention to how, though embedded in the narrative, there are connotations that suggest the victim, Marten, is also partially to blame as it was her 'feminine charms' that were Corder's undoing.

This derogatory view of women is carried across to the last case study examined in this thesis, which no commentary on murder in the nineteenth century can exclude: Jack the Ripper. Although police and contemporary opinions agree that there were only five murders, here I look at the wider scope of all murders attributed to Jack the Ripper in the press. Though chapter three looks at the wider scope of the Whitechapel murders that occurred between 1888 and 1901, all these cases were attributed to the work of Jack the Ripper and directly influenced the grandeur of his legacy. It is widely accepted today that the Ripper murders consisted of five women between August and November of 1888. The canonical five are believed to be Mary Ann (Polly) Nichols, Annie Chapman, Elizabeth Stride, Catherine Eddowes and Mary Jane Kelly, all of whom had their throats slit by the murderer. What makes this case so memorable in comparison to other serial murderers at the time is the brutality of the killings, with each murder being more violent than the last. The women's throats were cut open, their genitalia mutilated with some abdominal organs removed. The double murder of Stride and Eddowes occurred on 30 September followed by the final Ripper killing of Kelly on 9 November within her lodgings; the only Ripper murder to occur indoors.

Most literature discussing the Whitechapel murders attempts to identify the killer by following the newspapers' ever-changing theories. This can be seen in the work of cultural historian Christopher Frayling (2007) and religious and cultural historian Darren Oldridge (2007). Frayling explores all the main ideas that the newspapers fabricate regarding the Rippers' identity and suggests how these

ideas originated from witness statements, suspects, and police arrests. His work, like the newspapers at the time, assumes that there is only one murderer to identify. Oldridge, on the other hand, explores some of the earlier theories posed in the newspapers that were quickly dismissed after the idea of a singular serial killer began to circulate. Whereas in *Jack the Ripper Crime Archive*, popular British culture historian Val Horsler (2007) gives an overview of the whole murder case with a focus on the newspapers reports and the letters signed by Jack the Ripper that were sent to the police. Her in- depth analysis of the crime helps to emphasise the brutality of the murders and how, despite the attempted fearmongering of the newspaper, the streets were just as busy during the murders as they were before 1888. This is interesting to note as it shows that, though the papers claimed hysteria through the volume of coverage the Whitechapel murders received, it was still business as usual for the people of Whitechapel, more so for those attempting to catch the killer. Members of the public began walking the streets of Whitechapel trying to investigate the murders for themselves, creating a wave of interest in amateur detective work.

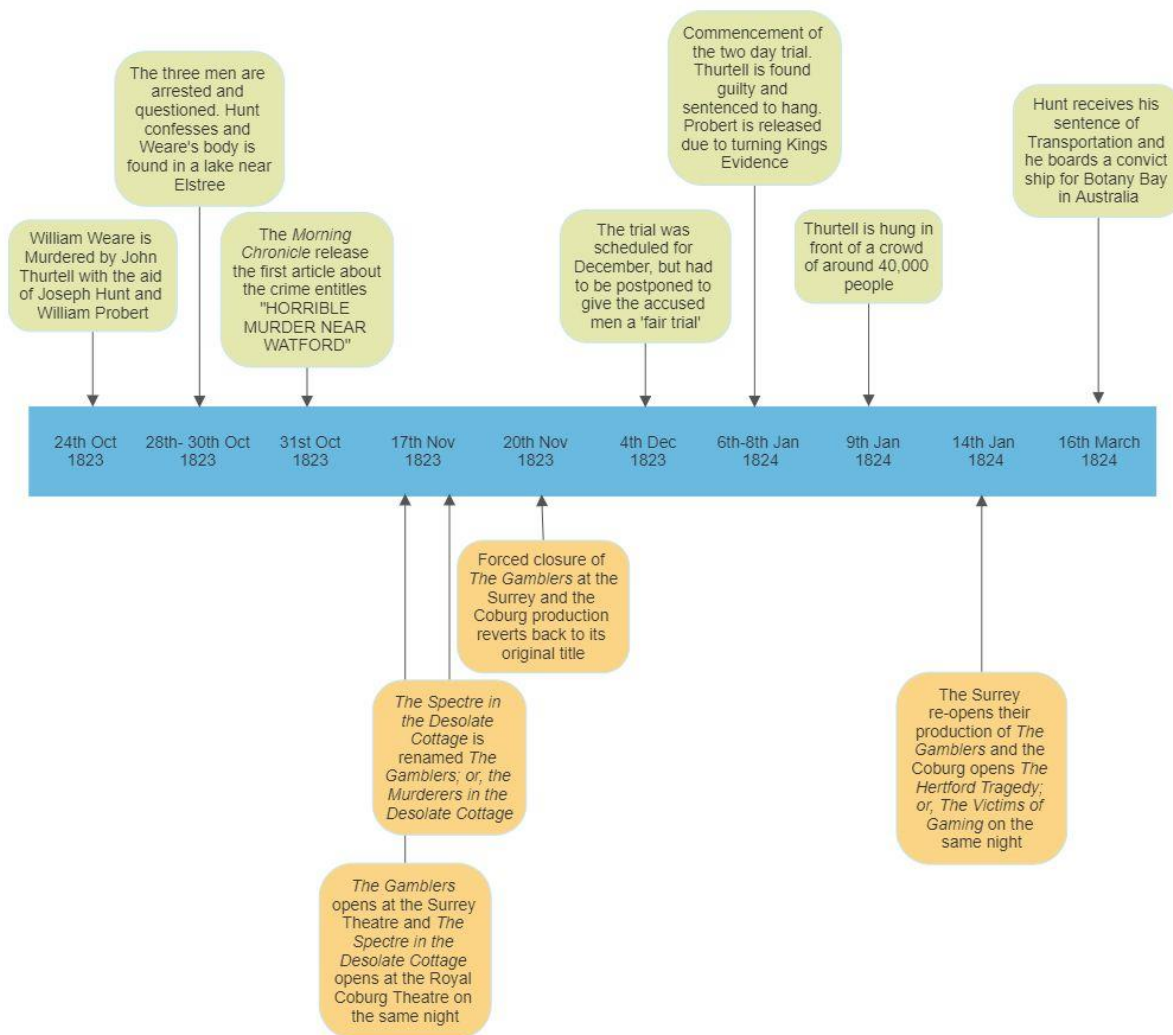
Significantly, none of the scholarship written on the Whitechapel murders discuss theatrical adaptations. This is largely due to the lack of performances documented on the Whitechapel murders. As I demonstrate, there were small scale amateur production adaptations of the Ripper murders that occurred during and after the investigation that were not well documented because they were popular works in penny theatres and other illegitimate performance spaces. The productions of *Jack l'Eventruer* in France (1889) and *Jack the Ripper* in Brighton (1930) are the only two Whitechapel murder adaptations discussed in detail in this thesis due to the lack of materials available. These two productions discussed in chapter 3 are either produced at theatres overseas (*Jack l'Eventruer*) or are scripts which were never authorised by the Lord Chamberlain (*Jack the Ripper*). Unfortunately I was unable to go to the British Library to ascertain as to why the licensing for this production was revoked, so the majority of information has been precured from newspaper articles, programmes, playbills and the contents of the script itself.

Like the adaptations of the Polstead murder, I argue how both productions on the Whitechapel murders passed the blame from the criminals to the female victims in an attempt to make the murderer a sympathetic antiheroic figure. I discuss how both adaptations also chose to portray the female victims as provocateurs that cause their own deaths. In a continuation of the attitude towards women presented in the Polstead murder productions, I explain why the two productions presented in chapter 3, despite being written forty years apart and being drastically different in their narratives, could reach the same decision to blame the victims for their own murders.

The main ways in which the theatres discussed in this thesis responded to nineteenth century crime can be seen in how their choice of narrative, staging and characterisation reflected the newspaper coverage of the murders at the time of production. Each chapter explores the theatres authenticity to the papers' narratives on the murders, though justifies why some of these chose to move away from the original plot presented by the press. Examples of this can be seen in the Polstead murder productions in chapter 2 focussing on one element of the story, or the play *Jack l'Eventruer* in chapter 3 connecting their adaptation of the Whitechapel murders to recent Ripper activity in France. The portrayal of criminals and victims changes drastically in the Elstree and Whitechapel murder productions depending on where the performance dates coincide in the chronology of the cases. Where the Elstree murder plays disagree in their opinion of the identity of the criminals and victims, the Whitechapel murder adaptations differ in their representation of the murderer's identity.

Chapter One: Adaptations of the Elstree Murder by the New Surrey and Royal Coburg Theatres (1823-24)

Chronology



Character Key

<u>Real People</u>	<u>Surrey Portrayal</u>	<u>Coburg Portrayal</u>
John Thurtell (Murderer)	John Woodville	Edward Freeman
William Probert (Accomplice)	William Mordaunt	William Holford
Joseph Hunt (Accomplice)	Joseph Bradshaw	Charles Fellwood
William Weare (Victim)	William Frankly	Mervin
Eliza Probert (Wife/ Witness)	Amelia Mordaunt	Elinor Holford

Introduction

Murder, though it hath no tongue,
Doth speak with most miraculous organ

(Shakespeare *Hamlet* 1997, p.1207)

On 24 October 1823, in the countryside a couple of hours outside the city of London, the quiet rural town of Radlett was upturned by the gruesome murder of William Weare. Known as the Elstree murder, this fatal altercation between gambling associates became a media sensation. Newspaper coverage of the case varied from stating the facts of the murder to describing how Thurtell's 'complexion [which was] naturally sallow, assumed a deadly pale, and he appeared to shudder and shrink backwards' when shown the murder weapon at the inquiry (*Morning Chronicle* 31 October 1823). Before the case had gone to trial, the papers were condemning Thurtell as the murderer, leading to this case being known as the first 'trial by newspaper'. The quote shown above which derives from act two of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* was adopted by the *Morning Chronicle*, the first newspaper to publish an article on the murder. The scene from *Hamlet* discusses how re-enacting real-life scenarios can be used as a truth serum to reveal a criminal, which translates to how the papers disclosed the killer's identity before he had been convicted. This quote was also adopted by the Surrey Theatre to the same effect when advertising their production of the Elstree murder entitled *The Gamblers; or, the Murder in the Desolate Cottage*.

The productions of the Elstree murder, I argue here, became the first examples of theatre creating staged adaptations of real-life contemporary crime. As such the Elstree murder is the ideal place to start in exploring representations of real-life crimes on the nineteenth-century stage. It also provides valuable insight into key themes which will recur throughout this thesis regarding the authenticity of the plot in relation to the newspaper's coverage, the risks present when performing real and current murder cases, and the representation of criminals and victims on stage. This performance was highly fictitious due to the backstory and motives of the criminals being unknown at the beginning of its run. However, when it was restaged after John Thurtell's (the murderer's) execution, there was no attempt to update the narrative when new information came to light, denying audiences their need for authenticity.

The discussion of the Elstree murder presented in the press became the source for theatre re-imaginings. On 17 November, three weeks after the murder, performances at the Surrey and Coburg theatres in London were staged. As I show when discussing the play's titles and plotlines, these first staged renditions were not successful due to their proximity to the murder and lack of truthful representation of the newspaper's coverage. I then go on to demonstrate how, when re-staged after the trial and execution of Thurtell (murderer), both theatres performed to full houses though were criticised by the papers for their content choices which led to the productions ultimately being banned. Both productions were chastised for being insensitive and distasteful by the press. *The Gamblers* caused a lot of controversy due to its unlawful representation of Thurtell (murderer) and its ethically questionable portrayal of Weare (victim).

Due to the timings of these productions, this chapter will also raise questions about morality and the ethics of producing real-life cases as they are still unfolding in reality and how this factors into the theatre's representations and justifications of their Elstree murder productions. The Coburg play focused on historical accuracy (in accordance with the 'facts' provided by the papers) and the Surrey focused on spectacle. This chapter will conclude with a comparison between the two productions with reference to their production specifics and newspaper reviews. I will show why neither of these productions lasted longer than a year after the murder was committed.

The Desolate Cottage at the Coburg: The Risk of Copying without Context

Contextualising the placement and relationship between the Surrey and Coburg theatres is important for understanding why these two theatres produced more than one staged version of the Elstree murder. Situated less than 400 metres apart on the south bank of the river Thames (Landmark Information Group 1879), the Coburg was built in 1818 to directly rival the Surrey due to an ongoing feud between the two theatre's owners in regard to rent (Hamilton and Baylis 1926, p.21). Their proximity and competitive natures allowed for these two theatres to become renowned for taking each other's managers, actors, and plotlines to try and steal the other theatre's audience (Hamilton and Baylis 1926, p.52). Their competitiveness contributed to both theatres creating productions of the Elstree murder in an attempt to upstage the rival theatre.

An example of the Coburg attempting to copy the Surrey's work can be seen in the first theatrical representations of the Elstree murder. Before the case went to trial, both the Surrey and Coburg theatres produced plays responding to the Elstree murder. On the opening night of *The Gamblers* at the Surrey, the Coburg produced their own murder play entitled *The Inseparables; or, the Spectre in the Desolate Cottage*. Perhaps sensing the success of the Surrey's play due to the topical nature of the piece, the following night the Coburg re-named their production *The Gambler's; or, the Murderers at the Desolate Cottage* (*Morning Post* 1823, p.1). The change of title made the Coburg's play appear to be another piece about the recent Elstree murder, though in actuality it was an adaptation of the French production *Les Deux Inséparables* (The Two Inseparables) (*The Drama; or, Theatrical Pocket Magazine* Nov 1823, p.194). The plot followed a pair of lifelong friends who shared the same love interest. After one is murdered in the Desolate Cottage, the other feels conflicted as to whether to pursue his love or find his friend's killer, with the resolution including lightning, ghosts and the murderer's identity being revealed in the Desolate Cottage (*The Drama; or, Theatrical Pocket Magazine* Nov 1823, p.194-5).

Due to the reputation of the Coburg for copying the Surrey, the name of the play and the timing of the production, it was assumed by the newspapers that *The Desolate Cottage*, like *The Gamblers*, had a connection to the recent murder. Most papers commented on their 'expectation' that the production was connected to the murder and, after watching the play, concluded that it was only the title that can be interpreted as a '[slight] reference' to the murder (*The Drama; or, Theatrical Pocket Magazine* 1823, p.193). All papers discussing *The Desolate Cottage* addressed the lack of connection between the Coburg production and the murder instead of focussing on the production as an un-connected entity; thus drawing the two together even though they are un-related. The reasoning for this stands in where these articles are placed in relation to the rest of the papers. The majority of the Coburg reviews are placed after (many of them directly after) the Surrey Theatre reviews on *The Gamblers* which are placed after articles relating to the progression of the murder investigation (*Sussex Advertiser* 24 Nov 1824, p.4).

FURTHER PARTICULARS OF THE
MURDER OF MR. W. WEARE.

About one o'clock on Saturday last, Mr. Fenton arrived in Hertford, and immediately repaired to the Town Hall, where the Magistrates were then sitting, for the purpose of requiring permission to visit John Thurtell, for whom alone he is professionally concerned. Mr. Fenton made his application in the first instance to the Rev. Mr. Loyd, he being the gentleman with whom Mr. Fenton, in conjunction with Mr. Jay, of Norwich, communicated in behalf of the prisoner on Thursday. Mr. Loyd immediately informed Mr. Fenton, that he was sure the order of the Magistrates for limiting the professional assistance to the prisoner to one solicitor, and he being Mr. Jay, would not be rescinded. Mr. Fenton being dissatisfied with this answer, said, that as the town-agent of Mr. Jay, who was then in Norwich, it was his bounden duty to make his application to the Magistrates collectively, from the heavy professional responsibility which devolved upon him. Mr. Loyd said, that as some circumstances of a serious nature had transpired since Mr. Fenton was last in Hertford, it was absolutely necessary that the assistance of any kind were allowed in behalf of the prisoner, that the character of the applicant should be strictly investigated, and that he (Mr. Loyd) must communicate the circumstances to which he alluded, to the magistrates. Mr. Fenton said, that he could have no possible objection to any investigation which the magistrates might desire respecting himself, but that he should like to be present at the time, to afford any personal explanation which the case might require. Mr. Loyd then said that he would repair to the magistrates, and requested Mr. Fenton to follow him up stairs, which he accordingly did. Mr. Fenton had remained 25 minutes in the lobby of the magistrates' chamber, he was sent for, and upon entering the room he stated that his business there was to desire permission to visit John Thurtell, as his professional adviser. He said that he acted as the agent of Mr. Jay, who from his residence at Norwich, and the nature of his business (he being an eminent conveyancer) was not so well calculated to conduct such a case as a solicitor residing on the spot; therefore Mr. Jay was anxious that Mr. Fenton should give the necessary professional aid. One of the magistrates remarked, that the prisoner Thurtell, as well as Mr. Jay and Mr. Fenton, were perfectly aware before Mr. Jay was admitted on Thursday, of the imperative nature of the order already referred to; that only one solicitor should be admitted, and had the opportunity of making their own selection; they had done so, and as the choice had fallen upon Mr. Jay, he alone could now be permitted to have access to his client. Mr. Fenton admitted the fact to be as described by the magistrates, and that Mr. Loyd heard both Jay and Mr. Fenton consider which of them should visit the prisoner on Thursday; and Mr. Loyd here added, "Yes, and I heard Thurtell himself refuse to see you (Mr. Fenton), and indeed say, that as he never saw you in his life, he would not communicate with you if you did enter his apartment; that he

The rigorous confinement of Thurtell, Probert, and Hunt, and more particularly the extraordinary refusal of the magistrates on Saturday last to admit Mr. Fenton, the solicitor, to Thurtell, to receive instructions for his defence, has excited a sympathy which does not belong to the case. The magistrate who is most earnest in enforcing the restrictive regulations, is the Rev. Mr. Loyd, who it is said, remains for several hours in the day in the goal, and constantly communicates with the prisoners. The condition and demeanour of the prisoners continue much the same as before.—Thurtell, except when pressed on the subject of the murder, is perfectly collected, and does not betray the slightest symptoms of emotion. He is shaved daily, and is regularly attentive to his person, according to the habit of a man who had been accustomed to the decencies of life. At intervals, during several days past, he was much engaged in writing (as he said) instructions for his defence, and at the close of last week, and subsequent to his consultation with Mr. Jay, of Norwich, he expressed a more than usual anxiety to communicate with his solicitor. Probert has neither the resolution nor the composure of Thurtell; he is agitated at his present situation, and extremely uneasy respecting his wife. The latter has, in some degree recovered from her indisposition, and has become more calm and collected. Hunt takes the matter easier than Probert, and has not yet been apprised that the magistrates intend to proceed against him as well as the others.

Among the visitors to Gill's Hill on Saturday last, were Mr. and Mrs. England, and as Mrs. E. was about entering the cottage at the back door, she stopped to arrange the lower part of her pelisse, and in so doing observed a gold seal close to the threshold; it was partly covered by leaves, was not dirty, and is now in possession of Mr. England. It is of jeweller's gold, and conical in its shape—is much worn at the upper part by the friction of the ring, and has a crystal stone, on which are engraved the initials J. T. in a flourish; such also are those of the prisoner Thurtell.

A great number of persons visited Gill's Hill Lane on Tuesday. The persons who have the care of the roads in that neighbourhood, have found it necessary to fill up the gap which had been made in the hedge in the lane, by persons cutting slips from it.

COURT OF KING'S BENCH. (Wednesday.)

Mr. Chitty this morning moved the Court for a *mandamus* to the Magistrates of Hertford, to compel them to admit a gentleman named Fenton to the prison of that county, for the purpose of assisting a man named Thurtell, confined in the said prison on a charge of murder, with the necessary advice to his defence. After a few observations from the learned Judges, the motion was granted, and the *mandamus* ordered to issue.

Mr. Chitty afterwards moved for an information against the Managers of a Minor Theatre, for announcing to the public a dramatic representation of the incidents in the late murder; and obtained a rule to show cause.

pure use medicine... ministered a quantity of it to Mary Ann Tims, and almost forced her to take it. He had, he said, repeatedly entreated of her not to use any medicine he procured the ingredients, and being a married man with a family, he did it to avoid exposure.—He produced several letters he had written to this woman, after he left his master's service, beseeching her not to repeat the horrid attempt, and to this vile woman alone he attributed all his present misery.

Mr. Conant said there was no doubt the shocking and depraved woman Turner was, if possible worse than he was; but that could not exculpate him from the horrid crime of participating in the atrocious project; and whatever credit a jury might wish to pay to her testimony, it was his (Mr. Conant's) duty to send him to trial on the charge.

He was accordingly committed for trial, and the two women bound over to prosecute.

FIRST RECORDED SPEECH OF A KING

The following is the first speech of a King on record, in the Parliamentary History of England. It was delivered *Anno Domini* 1106, by Henry I to the great Barons of the realm, whom he had summoned, by Royal mandate, in London. He had supplanted his brother Robert of Normandy in his right to the English crown, and being apprehensive of that injured relative's vengeance, he endeavoured, by the most artful insinuations, to engage the Barons and other Nobles in his late restoration.—"My friends and faithful subjects, both foreigners and natives, you all know very well that my brother Robert was both called by God and elected King of Jerusalem, which he might have happily governed, and how shamefully he refused that role for which he justly deserves God's anger and reproof. You know also, in many other instances, his pride and brutality; because he is a man that delights in war and bloodshed. I know that he thinks you a parcel of contemptible fellows; he calls you a set of gluttons and drunkards, whom he hopes to tread under his feet. I truly, a meek, humble, and peaceable King, will preserve and cherish you in your ancient liberties which I have formally sworn to perform; will hear ken to your wise counsel with patience, and will govern you justly, after the example of the best of Princes. If you desire it, I will strengthen this promise with a written charter, and all those laws which the holy King Edward, by the inspiration of God, so wisely enacted, I will swear to keep inviolate. If you, my brethren, will stand by me faithfully, we shall easily repulse the strong arm of the cruellest enemy we can make against me and these kingdoms. If I am only supported by the valour and power of the English nation, all the threats of the Normans will no longer seem formidable to me."

SURREY THEATRE.—A new Melo-drama, entitled *The Gamblers*, chiefly founded on the horrible event which recently took place in Hertfordshire, was last night represented at this Theatre. It is an unprecedented circumstance for any piece to be brought forward on any public occurrence pending the notice of the Law, and as the transaction referred to on the present occasion is of so very atrocious a nature, there is undoubtedly a stronger objection to the introduction of such a subject. Public attention, and, we may add, public anxiety, has been deeply excited by the event in question, but as it is difficult to start novelties, and as the expense of a Theatre is constant, and the success precarious, some allowance may be made for Managers. The outline of the piece in question in a great degree follows the lamentable story, but the murdered man is here made to recover sufficiently to point out the assassins before his death, and the claims of justice are satisfied. The public must decide upon the propriety of the exhibition. We have only to add, that the scenes of the fatal action seems to be faithfully represented, and the gig and horse actually employed in the execrable service, are presented to the audience. Again we must say, that the public must decide, and we feel reluctant to make any further comments on the occasion.—(Evening Paper.)

SURREY THEATRE.—This Theatre also produced a Drama on the subject of that flagitious event which now so much occupies public curiosity and solicitude. The Piece is entitled *The Gamblers, or the Desolate Cottage*. The title of the Piece sufficiently explains its nature, and spares us from the disagreeable task of entering into a detail. A Ghost is introduced, and his supernatural information leads to the discovery of the guilty. The same objections, of course, apply to this exhibition as to that which we have previously noticed. The scenery is copied from the local site of the deplorable event, and a strong interest is excited; but this anticipation of legal justice, though the whole was much applauded, was not unattended with symptoms of disapprobation.—(Ibid.)

As can be seen in the above newspaper clipping, the review of the Surrey theatre's production of *The Gamblers* (seen bottom right) is printed after the article detailing 'further particulars of the MURDER OF MR. W. WEARE' viewed in the top left (*Sussex Advertiser* 24 Nov 1824, p.4). The newspaper clipping shown below is a continuation of this newspaper that shows how the reviews of the Surrey and Coburg theatres were placed within the same article.

The chronology of these pieces is key to the saleability of the papers and, knowing that the Surrey and Coburg are rival venues, the papers do not want to admit that *The Desolate Cottage* is not connected to the murder as its pseudo tethers to the crime were helping to boost readability, if only to suggest that there was no connection to begin with.

The Desolate Cottage was an adaptation of a French melodrama that pre-dated the murder, meaning that the change of title was a deliberate act to make audiences believe it to be another Elstree murder adaptation. An article in the *Times* started by discussing how the title of the piece gave the 'allusion [that] the dialogue would have borne upon the recent murder; but no such thing [is present]' (*Times* 18 Nov 1823, p.2). However, unlike *The Drama*, the *Times* satirically commented on the play's narrative through creating quasi-connections between the play and the murder case where there are none:

...but no such thing, except we could fancy the cabriolet in which the ghost travels to be Probert's gig, one or two trite remarks to the spirit of gaming having whetted the assassin's knife, and a French hut being Gill's- hill- cottage, and a pool of fire to be his pond (*Times* 18 Nov 1823, p.2).

After the play reverted back to its original name, *The Inseparables; or, the Spectre in the Desolate Cottage* continued to be performed through to December, though with gradually reduced success as it went from first to third place on the bill of nightly performances (*Morning Chronicle* 24 Nov 1823). It can be deduced, therefore, that it was *The Inseparables'* false connection to the murder that made it a successful production as, after the connection was severed due to the name change, the play's popularity severely decreased as it was no longer mentioned in the newspapers.

Some papers discussed the name change of *The Desolate Cottage* being, like the Surrey theatre, due to its connection to the Elstree murder causing legal action from the Magistrates. Both *the Mirror of the Stage* and the *Times* looked at what was legally happening to the Surrey theatre and used this to fuel their own conclusions as to why the production was not connected to the recent murder. Both papers claimed that, due to magisterial interference, *The Desolate Cottage* had to alter the plot to avoid sanctions from the law similar to what the Surrey Theatre faced with their production of *The Gamblers*:

It was said that the local magistrates had interfered in the course of the day to suppress the performance; and probably their interposition led to the erasure of pertinent passages (*Times* 18 Nov 1823, p.2).

The lack of credible source for this information means that the integrity of this fact is questionable, though there is potentially some truth to this claim of legal interference, as Frederick Burwick claims in his chapter in *the Handbook of British Romanticism* that the Coburg also received a court order to close, but claimed that, like the Surrey, their play pre-dated the murder and offered to change the name in order to avoid further legal action (Burwick 2017). This is corroborated with papers which show that, on the 20 November (the day *The Gambler's* at the Surrey was forcibly closed by magistrates) the Coburg changed the name of the production back to *The Inseparables; or, the Spectre in the Desolate Cottage*; presumably so as not to incur further legal implications like the Surrey (*The Mirror of the Stage; or, New Dramatic Censor* 1 Dec 1823, p.138). Though not explicitly about the Elstree murder, it is still important to include this piece when discussing theatrical responses to the Elstree murder as the reviews it received from the papers seemed disappointed in the absence of real connection to the crime. This is in stark contrast to reviews seen later in this

chapter when the theatres are chastised for creating productions based on such a gruesome real-life event.

Adaptation of the Murder Plotline: Accuracy versus Spectacle

Despite their competitive natures and use of the same source materials, the Surrey and Coburg theatre's attempts to portray an authentic representation of the murder drastically differed. The Surrey collected murder memorabilia in order to have spectacular scenes on stage that included items the audience would have read about in the papers. The Coburg on the other hand focussed on the details and made the setting, props, and character portrayals as close to the 'truth'⁶ as possible. The Surrey and Coburg took very different approaches when advertising their productions despite both drawing from the facts and opinions demonstrated in the press.

Due to the plethora of witnesses⁷ that saw Thurtell and Weare on the way to Elstree, the horse and gig were easily identifiable by the proprietors of the theatre that purchased them for their production, and likewise would be easily identifiable by an audience who would have read about them in the newspapers. The horse and gig Thurtell used to take himself and Weare to Elstree had been hired by Hunt the morning of the murder, meaning that it was returned in the days preceding and was available to hire again afterwards (Flanders 2011, p.24). Probert's financial situation led to the contents of his cottage in Radlett being auctioned to cover his outstanding rent payments to his landlord. This allowed for the theatre to gain furniture from the murder house, including 'the late murder table at which the party supped, the sofa as described to having been slept on with other household furniture' (Borowitz 1988, p.120). In 'The Promise of Documentary', Janelle Reinelt (2009) discusses the significance of using real life materials when creating truth-based art. She explains that 'the documentary is not in the object but in the relationship between the object, its mediators (artists, historians, authors) and its audiences' (Reinelt 2009, p.7). Using the horse and gig does not make this piece documentary theatre: but rather the knowledge that the audience have of its use within the murder case and its authenticity being the real ones and not replicas, the gig is used to create a sense of 'truth' to the performance. The association between the items used in the play and their authenticity in their use in the murder was solidified in the Surrey's advertisement focussing on the murder memorabilia acquired. The playbill stated that the production included the 'IDENTICAL HORSE AND GIG Alluded to by the Daily Press in the Accounts of the Late Murder' whilst mentioning the other items collected at auction below (New Surrey Theatre 1823, Playbill). Due to these being used in the murder, the audience's expectations for the performance relied on the appearance of the horse and gig, overshadowing the rest of the production.

In contrast to the Surrey theatre's production of the Elstree murder which used the time before re-opening *The Gamblers* to purchase more props and set for their existing production, the Coburg learnt from their failed performance of *The Desolate Cottage* that the connection to the murder had to be genuine. Their second play entitled *The Hertfordshire Tragedy* prided itself on its attention to detail as it accurately followed the newspaper's coverage on the murder case from the completion of the murder through to Thurtell's (the murderer's) sentencing at the trial. This allowed for their production of *The Hertfordshire Tragedy* to closely resemble the settings and narrative of the murder, including the trial itself. The murder of Weare (victim) is also made a focal point of the

⁶ The 'truth' being subjective as it was based on what the papers chose to publish about the murder case and trial.

⁷ A total of fifty-four witnesses appeared in court, though many more were questioned (Watson 1862, p.42).

narrative arc by being the climax for the end of the first act, with the curtain falling before the final blow is dealt⁸. After being shot, Mervin (Weare) pleads with Freeman (Thurtell) to: 'Spare my life, and I'll restore all that I have won of you' (Milner 1824, p.19). This more accurately reflects the real-life crime than what is shown in *The Gamblers*, as Thurtell's first attempt to murder Weare failed due to the gun backfiring (Flanders 2011, p.25). The idea that Weare carried his life savings on his person was the main justification for murder used in both productions, with the Surrey manufacturing the conclusion that Mordaunt (Probert) regained the money that he had lost, whilst the Coburg production, as in the actual murder case, split the 'paltry spoil' between the three men (Freeman, Holford and Fellwood) as they moved the body (Milner 1824, p.25). The reasoning for the murder also mirrors the real case, as Thurtell originally wanted to regain the money he lost whilst gambling before the moment escalated to Weare's murder.

With the passing of the trial and the evidence provided being publicised by the papers, there were more facts circulating than fiction which allowed for *The Hertfordshire Tragedy* to create a more historically truthful rendition of the murder than the Surrey. More accurate characterisation of those involved in the murder led to less opposition against character portrayals in the press. The production's narratives were regarded as distasteful by the newspapers due to their content being based on a real murder that had just occurred:

We are sorry to find this theatre [the Coburg] has followed the bad example set by its neighbour [the Surrey], in venturing to produce a drama at all alluding to the late horrible event which has so agitated the whole kingdom; and we are still more hurt to think that this house should have done more, by giving detail of all the revolting circumstances with a precision truly disgraceful, for in fact, the plot is a complete epitome of all the facts which have appeared in the newspapers! (*The Drama; or, Theatrical Pocket Magazine* Jan 1824, p.308).

It seems that the papers blamed the Surrey for the Coburg's actions as they were renowned at this time to copy each other's performance content. Unlike the Surrey that focused on the spectacle of providing murder memorabilia, the Coburg's dedication was towards the contents of the plot, complete with an accurate rendition of the trial with an impersonation of the Judge Mr Justice Park (*The London Magazine* Feb 1824, p.202). As can be seen by the above quote, *The Hertfordshire Tragedy's* strong resemblance to the real crime caused a similar, though much more muted, negative reaction from the papers as *The Gamblers* received for their misrepresentation of Thurtell.

Criminal Representations

The constantly changing criminal and victim opinions demonstrated by the newspapers are paramount to the understanding of these adaptations as the Coburg and Surrey production's differed drastically on their representation of Weare (victim), Thurtell (murderer) and Probert (accomplice). Before his trial, Thurtell was portrayed as a potential serial killer connecting to many missing persons at the time, a view that derived from the brutality of the crime against Weare. In contrast, newspapers seemed almost sympathetic towards Thurtell as he attended his execution with dignity and poise, something few could muster when facing the drop. *The Gamblers* by the

⁸ Due to the censorship of the Lord Chamberlain, the amount of blood and violence that could be shown on stage was restricted, meaning that a performance was more likely to be produced if the murder was implied instead of shown explicitly on stage.

Surrey takes on the initial portrayal seen in the newspapers of Thurtell being a serial criminal with no redeeming qualities, making him the stereotypical bad guy. In contrast, the Coburg wrote and produced a piece on the murder when attitudes towards Thurtell had changed, making their interpretation of Thurtell more likeable in *The Hertfordshire Tragedy*.

Though it is never in question that the Thurtell characters in the plays committed the murder (even, in the case of *The Gamblers*, before he had been proven guilty in court), the Surrey portrays him as the most evil archetypal villain, whereas the Coburg make him more relatable by fabricating a sympathetic back-story to suggest why he murdered Weare. This section on *Criminal Representations* will demonstrate how and why these adaptations of the Elstree murder differed so drastically on their portrayal of the criminals despite only being written two months apart.

John Thurtell (Murderer)

As previously mentioned in the introduction, information on the murder could only be sourced through reading articles in the newspapers, so the opinions and ‘facts’ portrayed by the newspapers became the opinions and ‘facts’ shared in the theatre’s adaptations of the crime. Newspaper coverage of the Elstree murder was detailed and extensive, beginning the day after a body was found.⁹ On 31 October, seven days after the murder had been committed, the *Morning Chronicle* published the first of many articles that followed the murder investigation’s progress. The article entitled ‘MOST HORRIBLE MURDER NEAR WATFORD’ described the inquiry in detail, including a full description of Thurtell, Probert and Hunt’s initial statements (*Morning Chronicle* 31 October 1823).

From the first newspaper article on the Elstree murder, Thurtell was condemned as the murderer despite the trial that would confirm his guilt being scheduled for December. Thurtell did not admit to the crime, however his accomplices gave full confessions of their involvement with Thurtell’s plan, complete with where the men concealed the body, leaving Thurtell’s statement of ‘I am sorry for it; but I know nothing about him [Weare]’ to implicate him further through his lies (*Morning Chronicle* 31 October 1823). Though not a direct commentary on Thurtell, Weare’s murder was described as being ‘in a manner, which, for cold-blooded villainy as to the mode of effecting it, and the diabolical ferocity which accompanied its perpetration, has seldom been equalled’ (*Norfolk Chronicle* 8 November 1823, p.4).

The news of the murder investigation quickly spread, leading to each publication providing its own incriminating evidence against Thurtell, whether relevant to the Elstree murder or completely fabricated to fit their own narratives. As the main murder suspect¹⁰, Thurtell was already gathering bad press, which would later escalate to him being accused of fictitious crimes such as:

John Thurtell, and a person of the name of Wood, both paid their addresses to a Miss Noyes, sister to Mrs Probert. The demoniacal jealousy of Thurtell, carried him to the resolution of murdering his rival, and to further his intentions, a feigned letter was written, purporting to come from Miss Noyes, fixing an assignment with Wood... It has been decided that Wood was to be murdered by Thurtell, and as a silent and bloodless way of

⁹ Though the body was that of William Weare’s, it had not been identified at this point and, throughout the investigation, there was speculation as to whether Weare was indeed dead based on the newspaper coverage of events (*Morning Chronicle* 31 Oct 1823).

¹⁰ There was a lot of evidence against Thurtell that meant his guilt was probable, including a matching pistol to the murder weapon being found in Thurtell’s lodgings (*Morning Chronicle* 31 Oct 1823).

putting an end to him, a pair of dumb-bells were the weapons to be employed. Wood almost from instinct became alarmed on first entering the house, and by a precipitate retreat gained the outer door, and thus saved himself from the fate that awaited him (*Morning Post* 5 November 1823).

Articles about Thurtell's 'attempted murder' of Mr Wood were quickly corroborated by a statement by Wood in which he describes following a man (presumably Thurtell's murder accomplice Hunt) into an abandoned house and witnessing 'Thurtell spring from the back parlour and strike the man [Hunt] with a heavy blow, which knocked him with great violence' as Thurtell attacked the wrong man, allowing Wood to escape (*Sussex Advertiser* 17 November 1823, p.4). In his chapter on Thurtell and Hunt in *Famous Trials* 6, Eric Russell Watson describes how many papers like the *Times* published articles on 'crimes actually executed or merely contemplated' by Thurtell (Watson 1962, p.42). Flanders explains this point further in her chapter 'Trial by Newspaper' when she expresses how the 'hysteria infected everyone' from *the Morning Chronicle* fabricating stories of Thurtell making acquaintance with countless people shortly before their disappearance or murder, to young schoolboys writing letters to their parents claiming to know Thurtell's hit list (Flanders 2011, p.29-30). Despite the lack of court conviction, Thurtell had already been condemned by the newspapers and was becoming a household name, a demonic maniac capable of mass murder. It is important to remember that, when initially being reported on, the Elstree murder case had yet to go to trial so Thurtell was not a convicted murderer and there was still the potential for him to be an innocent man.

The Surrey's production of *The Gamblers* mirrored the newspapers in condemning Thurtell despite the case awaiting trial, obscuring the lines of morality and legality due to its questionable plot choices and date proximity to the murder. *The Gamblers* representation of Thurtell followed the same vein as the newspapers by making Woodville's (Thurtell) murder of Frankly (Weare) calculated and the last of multiple attempts to end his life. Woodville's attitude and pre-meditated murderous intent is disclosed in his opening monologue: 'The night is dark and horrid as my purpose; thrice have my snares been laid for Frankly's [Weare's] life, and thrice hath he escaped me' (*The Gamblers* 1824, p.5). The predatory connotations and the idiom used in these lines capture the evil nature of his character as he has attempted to lure Frankly to his death on previous occasions before the start of the play. The example above given of Wood describes Thurtell's attempted murder to almost a comedic effect, implying that Thurtell was a failed serial killer, which is reflected in *The Gamblers'* portrayal of Woodville (Thurtell) having failed to kill Frankly (Weare) multiple times. Though there is no evidence to suggest that Thurtell tried to kill Weare before Elstree, this is not a far stretch from what people believed Thurtell capable of at the time as evidenced by the plethora of newspaper coverage stating that Weare was only one of countless Thurtell victims.

There was an element of risk involved in the creation of *The Gamblers* as its proximity to the murder meant that the facts presented in the newspapers were very limited with many articles based on hearsay and fiction. The Surrey's representation of Thurtell (murderer) caused controversy in the legal proceedings which led to legal action being taken against the theatre by the accused's official representatives. With its start date being so soon after the murder was committed, *The Gamblers* became increasingly detached from the true case as new information came to light whilst the production remained the same. Questions were raised by both the newspapers and Magistrates regarding the morality of producing a play based on a current and ongoing murder investigation. Both the newspapers and Magistrates shared concerns in relation to *The Gamblers'* presumptuous plotline straying away from what was known about the murder at the time. The *Morning Chronicle*

expressed the worries of the Magistrates about the production as they believed it would ‘create an unfair prejudice against the parties accused’ (*Morning Chronicle* 18 Nov 1823).

In an attempt to justify the staging of *The Gamblers*, the Surrey alluded to the play preceding the murder whilst simultaneously drawing comparisons between the two to help solidify their association. The Surrey theatre justified its choice for the production to open mid-November through a lengthy paragraph on the playbill advertising its release. It explained that the productions publication pre-dated the murder events and how the comparisons that could be made between the real-life case and the play’s narrative were purely coincidental, expressing that:

[after the] horrifying circumstances connected with the recent SANGUINARY MURDER¹¹, were considered to possess too near an affinity to the subject [play] about to be represented; and the Managers of this Theatre, from motives of peculiar delicacy, deemed it necessary to retain the Drama altogether, or at least till such time as the assimilating events of the day should be obliterated from public recollection (New Surrey Theatre 1823, Playbill).

This statement emphasised the link between *The Gamblers* and the Elstree murder, highlighting their connection with the crime through deception by suggesting their production pre-dates the murder. The playbill suggests the creation of *The Gamblers*, like *The Desolate Cottage*, was connected through association rather than being based on the crime. This marketing strategy downplays the productions use of all major characters sharing their first names with those involved, the narrative bearing an uncanny resemblance, and the horse and gig used in the murder. The advertisement attempted to justify these choices through explaining that the facsimiles of the real murder were intended to produce a ‘more impressive sense of sad reality’ to enhance their original production instead of becoming a commentary on the recent murder.

With the trial date being set for 4 December, the legal representative of Thurtell (murderer) became increasingly more ruthless with prosecuting publications that deemed his client to be a murderer before a fair trial had been conducted to prove this. Mr Chambers, representative of Thurtell in the legal case, visited the theatre to warn manager Llewellyn ‘Boiled Beef’¹² Williams¹³ (Worsley 2013, p.50) about the ‘dangers... likely to arise’ should the production mirror the murder case (*Morning Chronicle* 18 Nov 1823). Legal action was taken against the proprietors of the Surrey theatre due to their unlawful representation of Thurtell who was yet to be found guilty of murder in a court of law. Because of this, it was announced after the performance on 20 November that the ‘legal authority [was] prohibiting the further representation of this piece’ (*Morning Post* 20 Nov 1823). After a run of three days, *The Gamblers* had an enforced ban from being performed while Mr Williams and Mr Romney (printer of the playbill) were both taken to court for ‘obstruct[ing] the course of public justice’ through making incriminating accusations against Thurtell (*Mirror of the Stage* 15 Dec 1823, p.171) (*Morning Post* 20 Nov 1823). Their trial too made it into the newspapers, with coverage of the lengthy affidavits from the prosecution resulting in Williams being prosecuted with a ‘rule absolute

¹¹ Sanguinary: meaning bloody or gory.

¹² ‘Boiled Beef’ was a nickname coined due to his father owning a popular boiled beef house in the Old Bailey (Thornbury 1878).

¹³ Williams was manager of Sadler’s Wells Theatre at the same time as managing the Surrey. (Thornbury 1878).

for a criminal information' (*Morning Post* 26 November 1823). The performance was not allowed to be produced again until after the trial had been completed and a verdict reached.

The Surrey theatre's production of *The Gamblers* is the only production discussed in this thesis that affected the actual murder investigation due to its portrayal of the accused criminals. Due to both the newspapers and Surrey theatre publicly damning Thurtell months before his trial was scheduled to occur, the Court of King's Bench discussed the potential of postponing the trial due to unfair prejudice against the accused:

one of the persons in the said drama intended to represent the said John Thurtell... we are of opinion that there is here quite enough to connect the representation with John Thurtell, under the very offence for which he now stands committed for trial; and that it appears to have been formally laid in evidence before us, brings to our consideration whether public Newspapers or public Theatres are to publish or exhibit upon the stage circumstances under which a British subject is about to take his trial for life, before a Jury of his countrymen, it is quite impossible that any man, who considers the nature of such publication, can withhold his disapprobation of such a public exhibition (*Morning Post* 26 November 1823).

The judge ruled in favour, rescheduled the trial for the 6 January in an attempt to ensure a fair trial due to all the incriminating media and theatre coverage. The fear was that the plethora of publications describing Thurtell's guilt had the potential to sway the jury's verdict, despite their impartial status. Despite the Surrey's production of *The Gamblers* being forcibly closed, newspapers continued to discuss the Elstree murder and gave detailed descriptions of the legal proceedings like the Court of King's Bench hearing (as previously quoted) to keep the momentum of the story going before the trial date.

The public opinion of Thurtell changed after his trial as his manners and demeanour portrayed that of a gentleman rather than a murderer and a criminal. Flanders describes how Thurtell respectfully carried himself up to the scaffold, describing how the crowd took their hats off to him as he bowed slightly in a gentlemanly fashion as he accepted his fate with grace and dignity (Flanders 2011, p.40). With an audience of approximately 40,000 people, there were many witnesses to make statements on Thurtell's chivalrous behaviour (Worsley 2014, p. 48). One of the execution broadsides published on the day of the hanging detailed Thurtell's middle class background, claiming he had 'every appearance of an innocent man' as he approached the drop (Chubb 1824). There is a prayer from the writer hoping that he may rest in peace as, the writer claims, his downfall was not his fault:

we see him surrounded with gamblers and sharpers, who lead his unsuspecting mind into the labyrinth of Gambling --- the cause, the only and dreadful cause of hatred being instilled into his mind against a more fortunate adventurer, in the moment of frenzy he stabs him, (according to evidence adduced at the trial) and murders a person who is a professed friend and an acknowledged associate. (Chubb 1824).

Despite Chubb's opinion running counter to the facts, *The Hertfordshire Tragedy* adopts this stance and details Thurtell's fall from grace; how he was forced into becoming a criminal rather than the true to life story of him already being one beforehand. Where the Surrey painted Thurtell to be pure evil, the Coburg depicted him to be a saintly individual whose downfall was due to him being manipulated by others. *The Hertfordshire Tragedy* at the Coburg opened two months after *The Gamblers* at the Surrey, allowing it to be a well-informed adaptation based on more current and

factual articles presented in the newspapers after the trial and execution of Thurtell. By the time this production was performed, Thurtell had already been hung for his crimes, meaning that there was more creative freedom with the narrative due to the conclusion of the murder investigation.

Despite Thurtell being found guilty of wilful murder, the popular opinion reflected in most newspapers and used in *The Hertfordshire Tragedy* was that he was a good man whose downfall was a result of the company he kept, rather than his own. Thurtell's character, called Edward Freeman, is described to be an honourable man with a strong moral compass. He sets up the backstory for his character in a monologue describing that he has been sent to London by his father, saying:

I must have an eye to business; the heavy sum with which I am charged by my dear father, to relieve the urgent difficulties of a friend; once safely lodged in the banker's hands, to meet the coming bills, my mind will be eased of its burthen (*The Hertfordshire Tragedy* 1824, p.6).

Freeman's (Thurtell's) repentance of his sin and his wish for the same not to happen to others completes his honourable character arc as he has learnt from his mistakes and is ready to pay the ultimate price for it. As the plot progresses, Freeman loses the £1,500 he was carrying by being enticed into a rigged game against Mervin (Weare). He asks for a loan from the other men to appease his father and is plagued with a very guilty conscience before Fellwood (Hunt) manipulates him into agreeing to kill Mervin in order to regain the money he lost. In the final scene we see Freeman receiving a guilty sentence in the Court of Justice. When asked if he has any comments on the jury's verdict, Freeman's only wish is that he and Fellwood 'might be the last, the very last Victims of Gaming' (*The Hertfordshire Tragedy* 1824, p.32). The same sense of honour and dignity was described at Thurtell's hanging, as previously discussed, despite him being guilty.

The view of Thurtell being an honourable man influenced by his public hanging, the newspapers and the theatre shifted the public opinion which made this media persona of him seem truthful; despite contrasting drastically to the real-life man. The real Thurtell (murderer) had been on trial for fraudulent insurance claims due to his cloth manufacturing warehouse catching fire; he was guilty despite the court's ruling in his favour (Flanders 2011, p.23). This was the most recent of Thurtell's dishonest ventures, as he was a well-known fight rigger and had been the manager of both the *Black Boy* and *Cock Tavern* respectively before he was dismissed from both for attracting the wrong crowds to the public houses (Watson 1962, p.19 and 26). His newest venture had been gambling, having been seen at William Rexworthy's billiard saloon in Spring Gardens with Probert and Hunt the week leading up to the murder (Watson 1962, p.33). Thurtell was a failed cloth merchant, a boxing promoter, a gambler, an insurance fraudster and indebted to Weare before he became a murderer.

William Probert (Accomplice)

Due to Thurtell being a convicted murderer before the performance of *The Hertfordshire Tragedy* and pre-emptively perceived as guilty in *The Gamblers*, neither production could portray a criminal of that calibre as the protagonist of their performances. Throughout *The Gamblers* and in act two of *The Hertfordshire Tragedy*, the focus moves from Thurtell (murderer) to his accomplice in the crime William Probert. Both the Surrey and the Coburg theatres, despite being written months apart, portray Probert as a sympathetic man who is down on his luck and unaware of the murder being committed near his home by Thurtell (murderer) and Hunt (accomplice). Both theatres work on

humanising Probert through allowing the audience to witness his private life and family dynamic, casting him as more of an antihero who falls from grace instead of the accessory to murder that he was in the real-life case.

What is interesting about Probert's (accomplice) portrayal being similar at both the Surrey and Coburg venues is that there was a great difference in the understanding of his participation in the murder and trial between the two production dates. The Coburg's production of *The Hertfordshire Tragedy* would have been influenced by the choice by the Court's Bench to choose Probert, instead of Hunt¹⁴, to turn King's Evidence¹⁵ and testify against Thurtell and Hunt. However, the decision for Probert to turn King's Evidence was not decided until the 3 December, meaning that Probert was still being charged with assisting a murder when *The Gamblers* was performed (*Morning Post* 8 December 1823). Where their opinions on Thurtell vary drastically, it is strange that both theatres create the same character for Probert despite having very different information available to them at the time.

As I will demonstrate, *The Gamblers* portrayal of Probert (accomplice) is actually due to the same reason as the Coburg's production. Probert's involvement in the crime was left vague in the newspapers, instead focussing on the information gleaned on the murder from his wife. Though Probert had not yet been chosen to turn King's Evidence, the newspaper coverage regarding Probert centred around his wife and the evidence she could provide to the case. Mrs Eliza Probert was arrested shortly after Probert and, when questioned, described how 'She heard the conversation of the parties respecting the division of money; and also heard them speaking of burning the purse and note book' and later that evening 'saw John Thurtell dragging a corpse by the legs, while Hunt held a mould candle' (*Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette* 13 November 1823). Witnessing the men move the body and hearing them dividing Weare's money between themselves made her statement integral to the case. Her testimony was essential as all other witnesses could describe the appearance of Thurtell (murderer) and Weare (victim) on the road to Radlett but could not prove that Thurtell was involved in his murder. Legislation at the time dictated that a wife could not testify against her husband, meaning that Probert would be chosen to turn King's Evidence in order for her statement to be used against the other two men in court (Watson 1962, p.44).

Probert's (accomplice's) position translated to both stage productions through Probert being unaware that a murder had occurred until Thurtell's character shares the information with him, thus claiming deniability through his lack of involvement as was shown in the newspapers. In *The Gamblers* Mordaunt (Probert) is a poor man who has gambled the last of his money away to Frankly (Weare). After the murder has been committed in *The Gamblers*, Woodville (Thurtell) and Bradshaw (Hunt) give Mordaunt back the money he lost gambling. He is grateful until he realises that the men want a favour, discussing their recent murder that led them to Mordaunt's house. Mordaunt is shocked by what these men have done in order to gain some money, exclaiming that 'till now I thought that poverty was misery, but compared to crime like yours, it must be bliss supreme' (*The Gamblers* 1824, p.17). This implies that Probert was not aware of the murder of Weare until after it

¹⁴ Hunt (accomplice) was the first of the three men to confess to his involvement in the murder and cooperated with magistrates from his arrest, making him the first choice for turning King's Evidence.

¹⁵ King's Evidence allows the individual chosen immunity from the crime in question in return for their full cooperation.

had been committed, which is highly improbable as the murder was supposed to occur at his home in Radlett.

The idea of Probert not being involved in Weare's murder was also represented in *The Hertfordshire Tragedy* as, though mentioned by name in the first half, Holford (Probert) does not make a physical appearance in the play until after the murder has happened in the second act. His absence from the play's first act mirrors Probert's supposed absence from the case as portrayed by the newspapers as one explains how Thurtell 'mention[ed] to Probert that he was going to take up a friend who was to be killed, which Probert did not believe' (*Lancaster Gazette* 10 January 1824). Holford (Probert) first appears on stage waiting for Freeman (Thurtell) after the murder has been committed. Shocked to discover that his friend is capable of murder, Holford exclaims '[w]ho is this Stranger, that should have been my guest, but has become your victim?' (*Hertfordshire Tragedy* 1824, p.20). This solidifies his lack of involvement in the murder as he is unaware of the identity of the victim as well as the occurrence of the crime before Freeman discloses the information.

The innocent depiction of Probert (accomplice) portrayed in the newspapers and the theatres stood in direct contrast to the criminal activity carried out by the real-life Probert in the years before and after the murder. In *Famous Trials 6*, Eric Russell Watson helps to paint a detailed picture of Probert, describing him to be:

a man of gigantic stature but of puny spirit, brazen and impudent when he conceived himself to be in safety; craven in a moment of real danger; of little education, but of much low cunning; plausible, well-dressed, a master of every species of roguery and cozenage, maintaining a smart gig, and displaying in the most embarrassed circumstances the unblushing front of the professional bankrupt (Watson 1962, p.17).

After being declared bankrupt and receiving financial aid, Probert (accomplice) refused to answer questions when being examined as bankrupt which resulted in him being imprisoned at the King's Bench Prison for over two years (Watson 1962, p.18). It is implied that he filed for bankruptcy on false charges, meaning that he, like Thurtell, was taking advantage of the system to fill his pockets. He had not been long released from prison when he became involved in the plan to murder Weare. Less than two years after the murder trial, Probert attended court on horse stealing charges with the verdict being death by hanging (Flanders 2011, p.38). His actions after the trial showed his true colours, making his portrayal in these performances a product of their time and not well suited for lengthy runs due to the public opinion of their protagonist souring.

Victim Representation

With both Thurtell's (murderer's) and Probert's (accomplice's) representations in the theatre running largely counter to the reality of their lives, it is fitting for their interpretation of Weare to be mostly fictitious as well. Though a victim in the Elstree murder, Weare had just as seedy a past as Thurtell and Probert, making them acquaintances through years of mutual transgressions. However, in the early newspaper reports, knowledge of Weare's background was not known or disclosed as his victim status defined his representation. This can be seen in the Surrey's *The Gamblers* where Weare is portrayed to be almost ignorant of how his winning streak has provoked the other characters into despising him enough to want to kill him. Frankly (Weare) is oblivious to the immediate danger he is in when in the company of Woodville (Thurtell) and even refers to him as a friend before his murder.

By contrast, *The Hertfordshire Tragedy* takes a differing stance to *The Gamblers* by villainising Weare as it is due to his cheating in gambling with the other men that led to his murder. Mervin (Weare) actively seeks out and recruits others to find unknowing victims to rob of their money through the guise of gambling. This reflected how attitudes towards Weare changed after Thurtell's execution due to a conspiracy theory that Weare was still alive, having faked his death as a hoax, began to circulate.

The Gamblers was staged a couple of weeks after the murder was committed, when the papers were portraying Weare to be a blameless victim. This representation translated to the Surrey's stage adaptation of the murder. Weare's character Frankly is first seen at a Gambling House in Pall Mall playing Hazard¹⁶ against Mordaunt (Probert), who loses all his money to Frankly's winning streak. Oblivious to the pain he has caused Mordaunt, Frankly exclaims: 'I've regularly cleaned the room out – never had such luck' (*The Gamblers* 1824, p.8). The line is intended to suggest that it is by luck, not cheating, that Frankly has won all of the money he has earned, making him an innocent victim to people who were not really prepared for the risks that are present when gambling. His portrayal in *The Gamblers* goes along the same vein as that shown in the newspapers at the time, who were sympathetic to Weare and his family after his murder:

He [Weare] was passionately fond of sporting, and would go any distance for a day's shooting... He was inoffensive in his manner, and correct in all his dealings; he had been about three years in Lyon's-inn, and was much respected. Billiards was a favourite game with him, and he played well (*Norfolk Chronicle* 8 Nov 1823, p.4).

This description paints Weare to be a respectable member of society who maintained his position on the right side of the law. Though only mentioned briefly, he is also described to be a man 'without any particular occupation' by the same newspaper (*Norfolk Chronicle* 8 Nov 1823, p.4). When looking more closely at the description of Weare, it is unclear whether the newspapers lacked information on Weare or whether they were trying to hide his unlawful ways in order to amplify his sympathetic portrayal in their chosen storyline. The playbill of *The Gamblers* refers to innocents falling prey to the 'Tribe of Sharpers' that frequented the gambling industry and conned good men out of their money, forcing them to turn to crime to appease their vices (New Surrey Theatre 1823, Playbill). It is implied that Woodville (Thurtell) is one of these sharpers and Mordaunt (Probert) becomes one after gambling against Frankly (Weare). In the case of the real-life people, it is rather the opposite, as Weare had a reputation for setting 'a variety of traps to catch unwary pigeons' (Watson 1962, p.22). This more accurate, true-to-life representation of Weare can be seen in *The Hertfordshire Tragedy*, though is still a fictitious and biased characterisation of the man in order to make Thurtell and Probert look like the victims of the crime.

The original portrayal of Weare in *The Gamblers* was morally perverse and unsympathetic to his recently bereaved family. In a review written the day after the opening night, the manager Mr Williams explains how he had 'softened all the strong parts of the newspaper accounts, and... concluded the piece in a manner very different from what might be supposed' (*Morning Chronicle* 18 Nov 1823). The ending he is referring to is the choice to have the murder of Frankly (Weare) not actually conclude with his death. The murder is performed on the stage, however Frankly, presumed dead, makes a re-appearance at the end of the play to confront his attempted murderers (*Times* 18 Nov 1823, p.2). It is partly this choice to bring back from the grave the Frankly (Weare) that questions the moral integrity of the piece, as many writings chastise the play for causing further

¹⁶ Hazard is a game of dice that was very popular during the early nineteenth century.

suffering to Weare's grieving family. *The Drama; or, Theatrical Magazine* believed the play 'tears wide the wound that has been inflicted on the wretched parents of the deceased criminal' through the knowledge that Weare's murder is not being taken seriously (*The Drama; or, Theatrical Pocket Magazine* Jan 1824, p.306).

The theatre's lack of murder reflected questions raised by the newspapers as to the identity of the body found in the lake in Elstree and whether it was actually Weare. Fuelled by the newspapers, this belief causes the coroner to doubt the identity of the deceased and the decision was made to exhume Weare's body for further identification, causing his family yet more suffering (*Morning Chronicle* 24 Nov 1823). The version of *The Gamblers* sourced for this thesis does not include the re-appearance of Weare as the ending, instead concluding with Woodville (Thurtell), Bradshaw (Hunt) and Mordaunt (Probert) being arrested for Frankly's (Weare's) murder (*The Gamblers* 1824, p.22). From my analysis of the Elstree murder theatre productions, I believe this to be because the former version of the script was censored after the Magistrate's interference in closing the production in November 1823. This would allow for an edited version to be created for *The Gamblers* re-opening in January 1824 in order to avoid further legal action against the theatre.

In contrast to *The Gamblers'* portrayal of Weare being a sympathetic character and unfortunate murder victim, *The Hertfordshire Tragedy* blamed Weare for the downfall of both Thurtell and Probert. Mervin (Weare) is the instigator of every character's misery in the play comparatively to the portrayal of Woodville (Thurtell) in *The Gamblers* reflecting how the villain character differed depending on the popular opinion of the papers at the time. It is implied that Mervin cheats to win, the same way he has done with other characters before, and that this is how he has chosen to make a living. When approached by Freeman (Thurtell) asking for a £50 loan (when he had just lost to Mervin thirty times that amount), Mervin says:

I am not to be trifled with; all who enter these walls risk their property against that of other... we come to win, and not to beg for money. If, as you say, you have robbed an honest man [Freeman's father, whom the money belonged to] to gratify your strong propensity, rob, then, another to replace the sum; rob, without pity or remorse, as we do here; but stand not whining like a horsewhipped cur¹⁷ (*The Hertfordshire Tragedy* 1824, p.12).

Mervin (Weare) in *The Hertfordshire Tragedy*, represents social concerns regarding gambling in the early nineteenth century. In *Social Opposition to Gambling in Britain: An Historical Overview*, Roger Munting notes that one of the major worries about gambling was its association to crime (Munting 1993, p.296). He explains how 'gamblers operated outside or on the margins of the law, though gambling *per se* was never altogether outlawed. But gambling was a happy hunting ground for cheats and fraudsters' (Munting 1993, p.304). Mervin (Weare) epitomises this fear as he uses his gambling house as a 'happy hunting ground' to trick other characters into gambling away all their earnings. Mervin cheats characters Lennox (a gambling lacky) and Fellwood (Hunt) out of their money and recruits them to find more unfortunate souls to swindle which leads to Mervin winning all Freemans' (Thurtell's) money (*The Hertfordshire Tragedy* 1824, p.8-10). The character of Lennox is used to help amplify the severity of Mervin's 'pigeon traps' as he, like Fellwood, serves Mervin by finding unsuspecting victims to lure back to Mervin's gambling den; where he will then cheat his way into winning all of their money before recruiting them to help find more people to con in return for a small cut of the profit (*The Hertfordshire Tragedy* 1824, p.8).

¹⁷ Horsewhipped cur was another word for mongrel.

With Thurtell becoming a popular figure in the newspapers, it would be difficult to sympathise with both the murderer and the murdered at the same time, meaning that opinions of Weare started to change. Mervin (Weare) manipulates the situation as he dismisses Freeman (Thurtell), mocking him for trying to fix his precarious situation that Mervin created. Although Weare was not demonised in the papers the way he was at the Coburg, the papers strongly sympathised with Thurtell, the murderer. As Flanders explains, some papers started to publish articles saying that the whole affair was a bet between Thurtell and Weare, leading to questions about the authenticity of the murder (Flanders 2011, p.42). A newspaper documenting the build up to the trial explained how people were gathering the night beforehand, some ready to hear the verdict of 'not guilty' due to a catch-penny pamphlet entitled 'We-are Alive' and some making bets about whether Weare would make an appearance at the trial (*Sheffield Independent* 10 Jan 1824). If this narrative woven by the media was believed to be true, then many would have felt animosity towards Weare for failing to be present at the trial and ultimately causing the death of Thurtell as the jury could not prove him innocent. This allowed for a plot like *The Hertfordshire Tragedy* to be created so that an audience could see the evil Mervin (Weare) receive justice with his death.

Both of these productions, though reported to have performed to full houses, were deemed abhorrent and distasteful by the papers; a view shared by the Magistrates which almost cost the theatres their licences (*Times* 13 Jan 1824, p.2). There is no end date for these productions that I have found, though they are not mentioned in the newspapers after February 1824, leading to my conclusion that neither production was staged for more than a month after the execution of Thurtell (murderer). This is undoubtedly due to interest in the murder subsiding after Thurtell's execution as the Elstree murder had reached its denouement and no further progression on the case could be made. Though the productions had ended, they had a lasting effect on their respective theatres when it came to renewing their licenses in October 1824. *Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle* explained what happened when the Surrey and Coburg applied to renew their licenses:

Applications were made to the Bench of Magistrates for the renewal of the licenses of the Surrey, [and] the Coburg... The first was granted to Mr Williams, the present occupier, after some strong observations on the impropriety of such representations as "The Hertfordshire Tragedy," portraying [sic] all the profligate scenes connected with Wear's murder by John Thurtell. The second to Mr. Francis Glossop... accompanied by similar remarks with respect to "The Hertfordshire Tragedy;" (*Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle* 1824, p.339).

Despite the hearing being eight months after the staging of these plays, both theatres were condemned for their productions on the Elstree murder and warned against creating future works of this nature. The newspapers discussing the licencing renewal of the theatre's show that the situation was out of the ordinary, otherwise it would not make for good reading. Another paper explained how the theatres were 'admonished' not to perform these productions again, emphasising the severity of the situation and implying that the theatres would lose their licences if they were to be re-staged (*The Examiner* 1824, p.685). Despite there being a clear audience for this genre of theatre (as this thesis argues), authorities expressed their concern for staging such a current but gruesome portrayal of violence. The risks were therefore significant in producing murder productions based on real-life, there being a fine line that future theatre would have to tread in order for their productions to be allowed to be staged without risk of the venue being shut down. It is for this reason, alongside the receding interest in the Elstree murder, that *The Gamblers* and *The Hertfordshire Tragedy* were not performed again.

The real-life case and its longevity in the public's interest limited how long the performances remained popular, as interest in the murder reduced after the execution of Thurtell. This stands in direct contrast with theatre adaptations of the Polstead murder, as shown in chapter 2, which continued to be performed for decades after the murder event. Unlike the Elstree murder, the story of Maria Marten and the Red Barn became more interesting than that of the murder itself, making its legacy develop into a tale akin to folklore instead of the factual event that occurred in 1827. Due to its elevated status, the Polstead murder became a performance for both large- and small-scale theatre companies and was adopted by both touring theatre companies and big names in residence of specific performance venues.

As discussed in this chapter, both the Surrey and the Coburg theatres produced plays based on the Elstree murder shortly after the event occurred. Due to the difference in production dates, each performance focused on different elements of the murder case dependant on what information was available at the time and what contemporary popular belief was surrounding the individuals involved. The Surrey produced *The Gamblers* using Probert (accomplice), instead of Thurtell (murderer), as the protagonist in order to make the piece more relatable to the audience. At the time of writing, Thurtell was associated with every crime imaginable, meaning that he was not favourably viewed and so was not suitable to be the leading role of a melodrama. By the time *The Hertfordshire Tragedy* was being performed at the Coburg, attitudes were more favourable towards Thurtell. It was the specific image of genteel Thurtell who was about to be hung, however, that people were captivated by and the Coburg narrative mirrored articles describing his fall from grace despite him being a repeat offender. Alongside the changing attitude towards Thurtell, the portrayal of Weare (victim) shifted between the two productions as, after Thurtell's death, he was villainised in the press. The Coburg captured this villainization by focusing on his background as a swindler to fuel their interpretation, despite him being the victim in the real murder case.

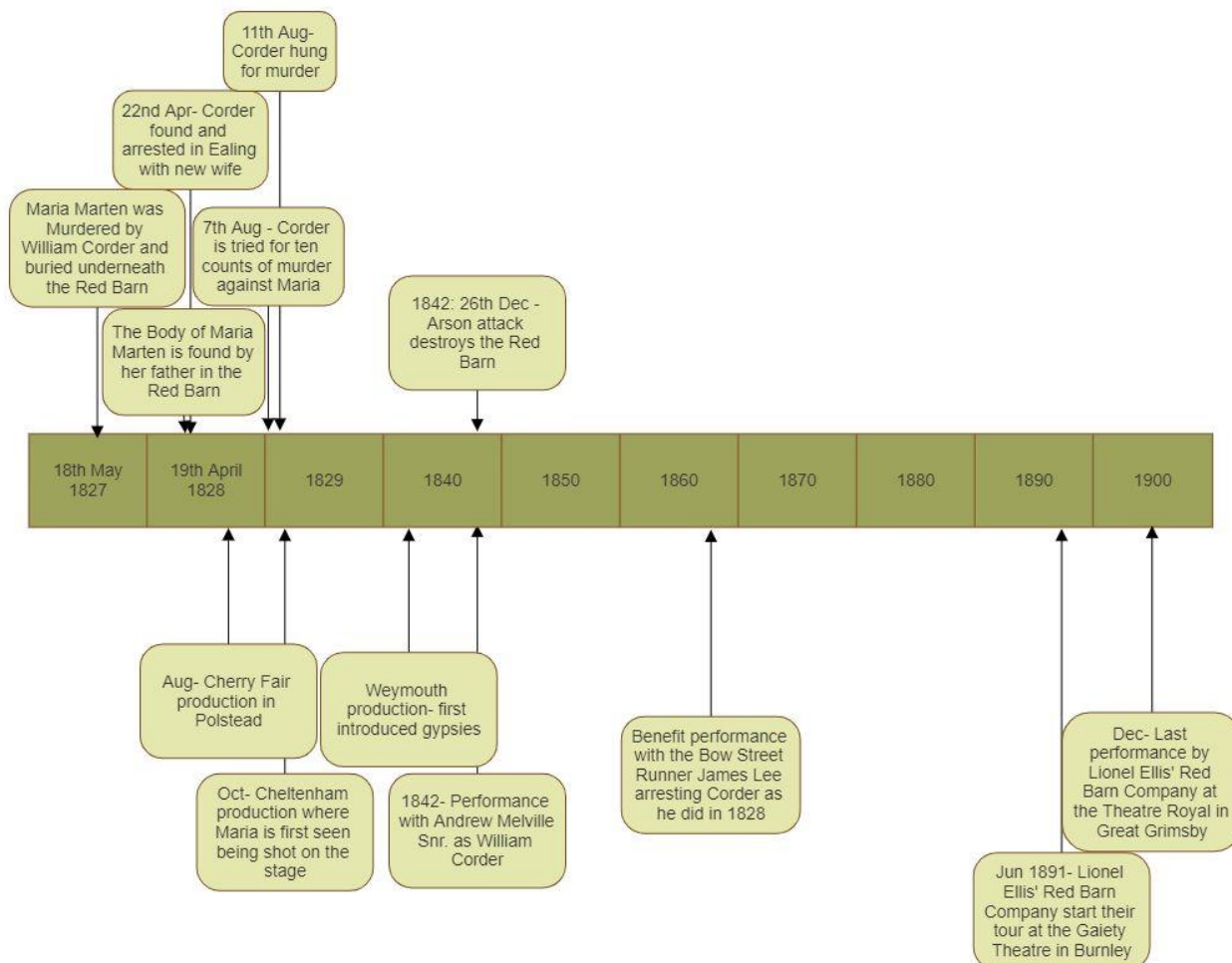
Conclusion

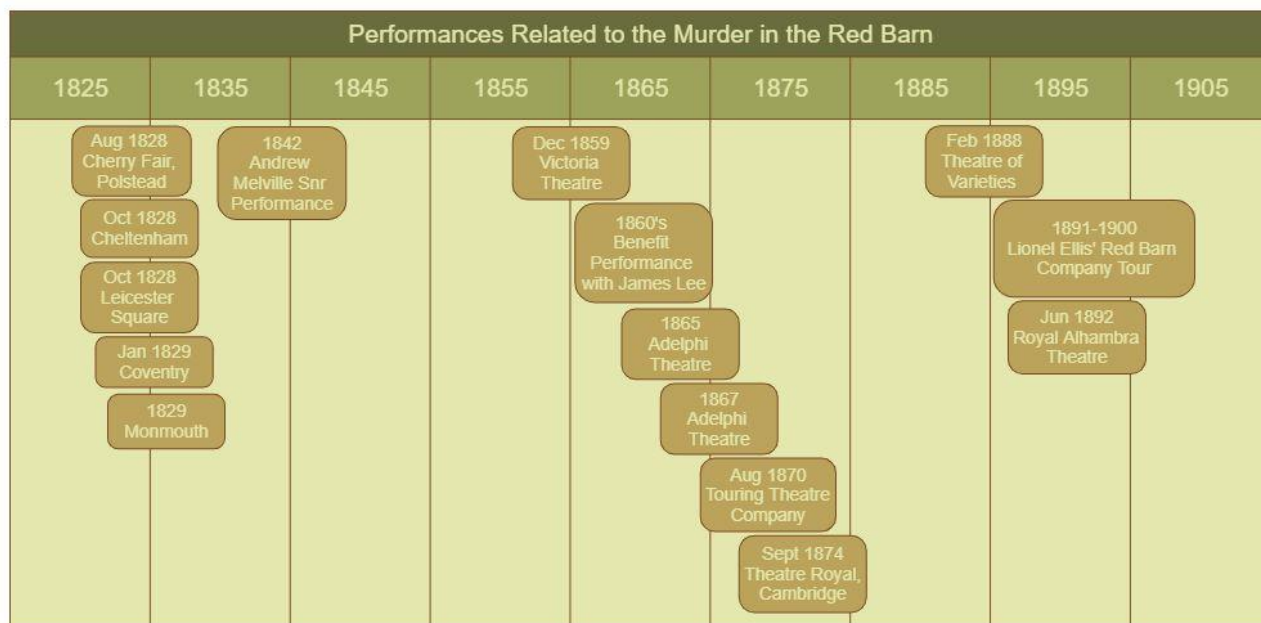
Though based on the same murder case, the Surrey and the Coburg took very different approaches in the staging of their productions. *The Gamblers* favoured spectacle over accuracy, with their climactic scene of the murder being overshadowed by their use of the real horse and gig used in the murder appearing onstage. The Coburg focussed on recreating the build up to the murder and the aftermath in as much detail as possible, allowing the audience to live the murder as it unfolded onstage. Despite the differences in their approaches to staging the murder, both theatres were equally criticized by the newspapers for producing works on the recent murder and were described as insensitive, immoral and distasteful. Both theatres performed to full houses in spite of their negative reviews during their runs in 1824. This, alongside the interference of Magistrates due to their representations of the criminals and victim, led to both *The Gamblers* and *The Hertfordshire Tragedy* being banned from being performed in either venue.

Where the Elstree murder newspapers condemned Thurtell for murder before his trial, in the next chapter we shall see how William Corder (murderer) was demonised by the press to suit his melodramatic profiling as an archetypal villain. The themes of criminal and victim portrayal are pushed further as, though opinions on those involved in the murder do not change in the newspapers, I argue how the numerous adaptations of the murder case are much more loosely associated to reality than the examples explored in chapter 1.

Chapter Two: Theatre Adaptations of The Polstead Murder

Chronology





** Please Note: This is a list of performances accurate to the year or date, however should not be considered a comprehensive list of all performances related to the Polstead murder. (Flanders 2014), (Emm 1928, Playbill) (*Lloyd's Illustrated Newspaper*, 20 Sept 1874) (*Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 15 Sept 1874) (*Morning Post*, 7 Oct 1828) (*Theatrical Observer*, 9 Oct 1828) (*Coventry Herald*, 30 Jan 1829) (*Satirist*, 7 September 1834) (*Bucks Herald*, 27 August 1870) (*Nottingham Evening Post*, 13 Feb 1888) (*Northampton Mercury*, 25 Oct 1828) (*Sunday Times* 11 Dec 1859) (*Liverpool Mercury*, 1865-1867) (*Dart*, 29 Sept 1893) (*Hartlepool Mail*, 15 May 1895) (*Manchester Courier*, 1895) (*Era* 1892-1900).

Introduction

The Great Macready was interrupted during his performance of "Macbeth" at Drury Lane Theatre with the remark that William Corder had answered with his life for the murder in the Red Barn. He suitably replied to the satisfaction of the audience

(Emm 1928, Playbill).

William Corder, a farmer from the small village of Polstead, was hung on 11 August 1828 for the murder of Maria Marten. So the story goes, renowned actor William Macready paused during one of his iconic performances of *Macbeth* at the patent theatre Drury Lane¹⁸ to pass comment on Corder's execution. In fact, I can prove that this story was fake through piecing different archival materials together. After posting an article about commemorating the centennial of the Polstead murder, the *Times* included a paragraph written by Llewellyn Hutchinson, member of the *Three Counties Club* in Surrey:

¹⁸ The Licencing Act meant that, from the mid eighteenth century to the 1840's, legitimate drama like Shakespearean tragedies and comedies were only allowed to be performed in their entirety at the patent theatres: Drury Lane and Covent Garden (Dent 1945, p.13) (Hudson 1951, p.16).

Your [previous] article on the Red Barn murder reminds me of a story my father used to tell 50 years ago. Perhaps it may be old enough to be new to many. A gentleman who had been present in an official capacity at the hanging of the murder wished to distract his thoughts. So he booked a seat for the play, which happened that evening to be *Macbeth*. He arrived rather late at the theatre, just in time to hear Duncan shout the first words of Scene IV. : “Is execution done on Cawdor?” The poor man incontinently fled, to seek distraction elsewhere! (Hutchinson 1928, p.13).

The line in *Macbeth* that Hutchinson was referring to is about the Thane of Cawdor, past ally and present enemy to Duncan, King of Scotland, to which Malcolm (the King’s son) replies that witnesses of his execution heard him ‘[confess] his treasons’ (Shakespeare 1997, p.1363). With the execution occurring at mid-day and theatre productions starting around 6:30pm, it was plausible that those attending the execution during the day could watch a production in the evening. On the 11 August (the day of the execution) Macready was reviving his role as Macbeth, though not at Drury lane as suggested; at the Theatre Royal in Birmingham (*Birmingham Gazette* 11 Aug 1828 p.1-3). Here is a classic case of what Thomas Postlewait would describe as ‘gossip’ and ‘hearsay’ of half-truths being passed on for generations and being mistaken as facts (Postlewait 2007, p. 236).

Advertising that Macready was performing at Drury lane was plausible to any fan of Macready’s work, as he was a renowned actor who regularly performed at this theatre, one of two theatres in London to receive royal patronage from the King. It is a fact that Macready was performing in his renowned role of Macbeth on the day of the execution and it is understandable how some would confuse the lines of *Macbeth* to be a statement about the recent trial and execution of Corder; but the two are merely coincidences that have been brought together.

Though this anecdote is the work of fiction, at its essence is the connection between the theatre and the real-life murder which is at the heart of this chapter. The sheer volume of productions, newspaper articles and murder memorabilia created for the population to enjoy has allowed for the Marten case to become a stable entity in our performance culture, with productions of the Polstead murder occurring in almost every decade since the event itself. In Judith Flanders chapter ‘Trial by Newspaper’ she lists numerous productions of the murder based on their media coverage (Flanders 2011, p.61). Flanders claims that the first performance, like the Elstree murder, dated before the trial in July 1828. However, unlike *The Gamblers* and *The Hertfordshire Tragedy* which were both performed in London, the first performance of the Polstead murder was performed where the murder occurred.

Performances and Playtexts

The lack of surviving materials makes it difficult to discuss in detail the specifics of individual performances for the Polstead murder, what their narratives entailed and how they were received by their respective audiences. Flanders explains that, out of the plethora of theatrical renditions of the murder, only two scripts relating to the Polstead murder remain from the nineteenth century. It can, however, be deduced that performances were largely successful due to the story surviving and being relayed in history and theatre today. A detailed trawl through the Gale Newspaper Archive shows that the Polstead murder was performed in almost every decade from the conviction of Corder in 1828 up until the 1990’s. In February 2020, there was a performance of the Polstead murder entitled *The Balled of Maria Marten* performed at the Stephen Joseph Theatre in

Scarborough, showing that there is still an audience for Polstead murder productions today (Oliver 2020).

Using the archival materials available, this chapter explores why the Polstead murder, in comparison to the Elstree murder, was better tailored to the melodramatic format and how this allowed it to transcend its original murder narrative. Some Polstead murder adaptations focussed on an anecdote in the newspapers on Maria Marten's body being discovered through a recurring dream. This element of the story was used to fabricate a whole plot including Gypsies and the paranormal which loosely followed the narrative of the press. Using playtexts and press reviews, I will demonstrate why many Polstead adaptations focused on elements of the murder case and not their portrayal of the victim like with the Elstree Murder.

The performances that are highlighted in this chapter span the entirety of the nineteenth century, from the arrest of Corder (murderer) in 1828, to the ending of the Whitechapel murders in 1900 discussed in chapter 3, to productions occurring in the early twentieth century in 1928. The first production of the Polstead murder was performed at the Cherry Fair in the village of Polstead itself in 1828. This production is discussed in reference to its temporal and physical proximity to the murder investigation along with its use of the crime scene as a performance venue. I then focus on Lionel Ellis's Red Barn Company who produced the most successful piece of murder theatre discussed in this thesis; their tour almost lasting a decade. Where *The Desolate Cottage* (Elstree) attempted to feign a connection to the murder, Lionel Ellis originally claimed that there was no link between his performance of *The Red Barn* and the Polstead murder before embracing it once realising that the association would boost production rates.

With most productions of the Polstead murder being performed years after the conclusion of the murder investigation, there are interesting examples I explore in this chapter of how the boundaries between art and life can be blurred when creating a production based on a real-life murder case. Where the production of *Maria Martin; or, the Murder at the Red Barn* at the Theatre Royal in Cambridge in 1874 received vehement protest from its audience for not hanging their actor portraying Corder at the end of the play, a production of the Polstead murder at the Theatre of Varieties in Burton-on-Trent in 1888 shocked and frightened their audience when the prop gun used by the actor playing Corder backfired and shot off his finger during a performance. In this section I discuss the expectation of staged violence in the theatre in comparison to the choice to witness a public hanging and where the boundaries lie between real-life and dramatizations on the nineteenth century stage.

With all the information revolving around the murder open to the public, this segment will go on to explore the elements of the newspaper stories the theatres honed in on in order to create a performance about the murder case that involved Gypsies and the paranormal, as is demonstrated in Emm's production of *Maria Marten; or, The Mystery of the Red Barn* (1928). With reference to *The Mystery of the Red Barn*, this chapter will compare the societal view of women to the portrayal of female victims in both the newspapers and the theatre.

Authenticity to the Crime Narrative

This section will explore the ways that the Polstead murder was adapted to the stage and moved away from the newspaper's portrayal of the murder case. The view of the Polstead murder narrative within the theatre community became universally appropriate entertainment, as other performances of *The Red Barn* and *Maria Martin* were billed around Christmas time alongside

pantomimes, so the story clearly adapted over the decades to be a low form of family friendly entertainment (*Northampton Mercury* 25 Oct 1828) (*Sunday Times* 11 Dec 1859). This solidifies how the narrative of the theatre transcended the original murder case to become more embedded in folklore and fairy tales akin to the narrative of pantomimes like *Dick Whittington* and *Snow White*.

Unlike the Elstree murder plays which closely followed the progression of the case, the performances based on the Polstead murder became increasingly detached from the original murder. This was due to many productions focussing on an element of the Polstead murder, like the dream-reveal of Marten's (victim's) body or the gruesome details of the coroner's report, instead of attempting to stage the entire story. This led to versions of the Polstead murder case becoming more fictitious and being seen as associated with the crime instead of adaptations.

The Cherry Fair and the Red Barn Scene

The first well-documented performance of the Polstead murder happened at the Cherry Fair in Polstead in the summer before the trial. This performance summarised the crime as it focussed on the brutality of the murder by including the coroner's report. The Cherry Fair performance in the summer of 1828 was the first of a substantial volume of Polstead murder adaptations to grace the stage during the nineteenth century and set the precedent for how artistic licence on the story could stretch and stray from the truth¹⁹. Like *The Gamblers* and *The Desolate Cottage*, this piece was produced before the trial had occurred, meaning that Corder had not been sentenced at this time. Though little remains from this performance for us to ascertain the specifics, much can be gleaned from the information available. There is no remaining script from the Cherry Fair production, however the *Times* reporter James Curtis wrote a detailed book entitled *An Authentic and Faithful History of the Mysterious Murder of Maria Marten* which included a description of this performance in Polstead. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic I was unable to view this book myself, so I have used Catherine Pedley's article for the *Nineteenth Century Theatre and Film* journal that includes quotes and descriptions of the book's contents as my main reference for the Cherry Fair production (2004).

The full extent of the brutality of the murder was disclosed months after the body was found by the newspapers re-printing the story once new information was collected on the specifics of the murder. Unlike with the Elstree murder, the discovery of the victim's body (Marten) pre-dated the arrest of the accused (Corder). This meant all facts surrounding the cause of death were supposedly present from the first newspaper article on the murder, which in turn meant that newspapers had to 'uncover' new information in order to maintain their reader's interests. The Cherry Fair attempted to provide both new material and spectacle in their production by including a scene where the coroner's newly disclosed inquest report was read within the Red Barn where Marten's (victim's) body was found four months prior. Pedley explains that the 'events represented within this barn scene were entirely fictitious; the stage revealed Maria's body on the floor, with the coroner and the members of the inquest jury standing around her' (Pedley 2004, p.29). The Cherry Fair production focussed on the coroner's report instead of attempting to produce the whole murder investigation as the report was the only new piece of information to be disclosed in the press since the discovery of the body in April.

¹⁹ The first theatrical adaptation of the Polstead murder was performed in May 1828 at the Stoke by Nayland Fair (Pedley 2004, p.28). Other than the place and date, no other information regarding this performance was accessible at the time of writing so it has not featured in this thesis.

Just as *The Hertfordshire Tragedy* had included the trial and sentencing in their plotline, it was only fitting that the Cherry Fair production include the newest progression of the murder chronology in theirs; especially as the evidence shared by the coroner was quite shocking. This information was discovered after exhuming Maria's body from her grave for a more thorough inspection of her remains as the initial surgeon's autopsy report lacked specifics, reporting that the cause of death was a bullet through the eye (*Hampshire Chronicle* 2 June 1828, p.2). The new material disclosed in the coroner's report made the Polstead murder much more shocking as it was unclear as to which wound inflicted on Marten's body actually killed her as all were deadly (*Berrows Worcester Journal* 14 Aug 1828):

The chief cause of death which he [the surgeon] spoke to decidedly was that of a wound in the orbit... On the left side of the chemise which still enveloped the corpse, a cut about an inch and a half in length was discovered, and corresponding with the size and position of such cut, was traced a wound between the fifth and sixth ribs. Near the apex or lower point of her heart a wound was likewise detected piercing the left side obliquely, and entering into the ventricle or cavity (*Hampshire Chronicle* 2 June 1828, p.2).

The Cherry Fair's production had a strong relationship to the 'contemporary event' of Marten's (victim's) murder as it was performed at the crime scene in the village where the murderer (Corder) and the victim lived and grew up. The centrality of the Fair's association with the murder was key to its success as audiences were attracted to this performance by the spectacle of standing within the Red Barn whilst re-living the story. In her chapter 'Toward a Poetics of Theatre and Public Events: In the Case of Stephen Lawrence', Janelle Reinelt (2010) uses the murder of Stephen Lawrence in 1993 to describe the effect of documentary theatre. She explains that 'In accounting for the appearance and success of these [documentary] plays, the critical relationship to the contemporary events that sparked them is almost always central' (Reinelt 2010, p.37). Similarly to the Surrey acquiring the horse and cart used to enact the Elstree murder in chapter 1, this promenade- site specific Cherry Fair piece added a level of excitement for the audience as they were given the opportunity to experience the murder site in a way that was comparable to Marten (victim). The theatrical examination of Marten's body was performed within the Red Barn itself in Polstead; which meant that the families of the deceased and accused lived within walking distance of where the production was staged.

In relation to the Cherry Fair performance, understanding the level of focus the Red Barn received enables us to appreciate how the idea of entering the building enticed people into attending the Fair; with Curtis predicting around 200,000 visitors went to Polstead in the summer of 1828 (Addy 2006). To put this into perspective, Polstead was a small village consisting of approximately twenty houses, with travellers rarely visiting except to see the Cherry Fair in the summers (Addy 2006). The Red Barn became iconographic with people purposefully travelling to Polstead to obtain a piece of it as a murder souvenir (Worsley 2014, p.99). Despite a suspected arson attack destroying the building in 1842, it is described to 'still exist in good repair, and is not unfrequently visited by strangers' by the *Topographical Dictionary of England* in 1848 (*Chelmsford Chronicle* 30 Dec 1842, p.3) (Lewis 1848). The advertisement of the village stating that the Red Barn still exists when it had been destroyed, along with many theatre productions about the Polstead murder including the site within their titles, emphasises the importance of the Red Barn building in the public's association to the Polstead murder.

The focus of the Cherry Fair's production was predominantly on the setting being within the Red Barn and highlighting the new information on the murder of the coroner's inquest which was first disclosed by the newspapers for public readership. This is not only the first adaptation of the

Polstead murder to be staged, but it is the first production described in this thesis to focus on elements of the murder case and not remain true to the entirety of the newspapers as it focuses on the main elements of the story that can be emphasized due to the location of the production.

Lionel Ellis' Red Barn Company

Though the plotline of the Polstead murder became the most widely performed of the three case studies discussed in this thesis, many of its adaptations, like the Cherry Fair in 1828, were more loosely associated with the murder case. One of these was a production written by and starring Lionel Ellis, founder of Lionel Ellis' Red Barn Company, who toured with his murder production entitled *The Red Barn* from 1891 through to 1900. Following the progression of their work, it is interesting to document how *The Red Barn* linked to the Polstead murder, shaped and transformed the company from a small-scale touring group in northern England with a performance repertoire to a renowned company performing across Britain with their *Red Barn* production alone.

The only production of the Polstead murder that lasted longer than a couple of weeks was the production of Ellis' *Red Barn*, which toured for nine years. Lionel Ellis' Company first introduced the *Red Barn* whilst touring with their other performances of *The Right Man* and *Folds of the Flag* (*Era* 23 Jan 1892). It is described as a 'New Drama' written by C.A. Clarke (*Era* 23 Jan 1892). After a couple of months of performances, the production is re-branded in June to be a piece co-written 'by George Corner and Lionel Ellis' (*Era* 18 Jun 1892) before touring with '[bookings] at present nothing but "THE RED BARN"' from October onwards (*Era* 15 Oct 1892). This demonstrates the growing success and popularity of *the Red Barn* as it was first produced at the end of their billing to being the only performance running; Ellis changing the name of their production company to 'The Red Barn Company' to suit. After performing for five years, the tour reached a natural conclusion at the end of 1895 as Ellis started posting more and more gaps he wanted to be filled in their tour in the newspapers. In a paper in 1896 he advertised the chance to buy the rights to *The Red Barn*, after previously threatening legal action against anyone who attempted to plagiarize his work. It appears that Ellis revived the Red Barn Company for a year's tour in 1898, but at an elevated status for larger theatres. The final presentations of Lionel Ellis' *Red Barn* production manifested in two performances in late 1900 at The Peoples Palace in St Helens and The Theatre Royal in Great Grimsby.

Though the narrative of *The Red Barn* is vastly different from the narrative of the Polstead murder case, the major plot points of the piece are undeniably influenced by the murder in 1827 and contribute to the progression of the narrative transitioning into a myth. The production was said in newspaper reviews to have 'taken full advantage of its [the murder's] horror and its supernatural accompaniments which can be seen in the key scenes in *Red Barn* (*Portsmouth Evening News* 25 Sept 1894). The story included the character William Carlton (Corder) who inherited a farm after the death of his father, reflecting the real-life Corder who worked as a tenant farmer²⁰ in Polstead after his father passed (*Era* 18 June 1892). Carlton (Corder) is married to Lucy, but was secretly married to Mary Merton (Marten) beforehand. He attempts to drown Mary Merton (Marten) before luring her to the Red Barn and murdering her (*Era* 18 June 1892). The murder scene occurs through 'visions which appear at the back of the barn'; a scenic design adopted by other productions like *The Mystery of the Red Barn* by Emm in 1928. (*Portsmouth Evening News* 25 Sept 1894). The main 'supernatural accompaniment' used in this adaptation of the Polstead murder was the dream reveal

²⁰ A tenant farmer cultivates land they do not own.

of the murder; in this version it is the victim's brother Willie Merton that has the dream and not Marten's mother (*Portsmouth Evening News* 19 December 1892, p.1) (*Portsmouth Evening News* 25 September 1894, p.3) (*Era* 18 June 1892). This dream became a dominant recurring theme in many theatre productions based on the Polstead murder.

1891	1892	1893	1894	1895	1896	1897	1898	1899	1900
<p>Jun: Gaiety Theatre, Burnley</p> <p>Jul: Theatre Royal, Middlesbrough</p>	<p>Jan: Kimberley Street, Bedford</p> <p>Feb: Kimberley Street, Bedford</p> <p>Mar: Theatre Royal, Barnsley</p> <p>Jun: St James' Theatre, Manchester - Grand Theatre, Walsall - Royal Alhambra Theatre, Barrow-in-Furness - Theatre Royal, Leeds</p> <p>Jul: Barrow - Theatre Royal, Leeds</p> <p>Aug: Princes' Theatre, Preston - Theatre Royal, Rochdale</p> <p>Sept: Theatre Royal, Runcorn</p> <p>Oct: Lyceum Theatre, Crewe - Theatre Royal, Bilston - Theatre Royal, Wednesbury - Theatre Royal, West Bromwich - Theatre Royal, Birkenhead - Theatre Royal, Norwich</p> <p>Nov: Theatre Royal, Kings Lynn</p> <p>Dec: Alhambra, Stourbridge Star, Wolverhampton - Princes' Theatre, Portsmouth - County Hall, Salisbury</p>	<p>Jan: Gaiety Theatre of Varieties</p> <p>Apr: Muncaster Theatre, Bootle - Theatre Royal, White Haven</p> <p>May: New Theatre Royal, Bury</p> <p>Jun: St James' Theatre, Manchester - Theatre Royal, Drewsbury</p> <p>July: Theatre Royal, Leeds</p> <p>Nov: St James' Theatre, Manchester</p>	<p>Mar: Theatre Royal, South Shields</p> <p>Apr: Theatre Royal, North Shields</p> <p>May: Theatre Royal, Stockton - Theatre Royal, Middlesbrough</p> <p>Jun: Theatre Royal, Darlington - Theatre Royal, Leeds</p> <p>Jul: Gaiety Theatre, Burnley</p> <p>Sept: New Princes' Theatre, Landport</p> <p>Oct: Theatre Royal, West Bromwich</p> <p>Dec: Rotunda Theatre, Liverpool</p>	<p>Jun: Theatre Royal, Great Grimsby - Theatre Royal, Lincoln</p> <p>Jul: Princes' Theatre, Preston - New Theatre Royal, Stockport</p> <p>Aug: St James' Theatre, Manchester - Prince of Wales Theatre, Salford - New Theatre, Nuneaton</p> <p>Oct: New Princes' Theatre, Landport - Theatre Royal, Bristol - Queens Theatre, Birmingham</p> <p>Nov: Empire Theatre, Aberdare - Public Hall, Wrexham</p>			<p>Jun: Queens Theatre, Birmingham - Stars Theatre, Wolverhampton</p> <p>Jul: Grand Theatre, Cardiff - Theatre Royal, Bristol</p> <p>Aug: Royal Albert Theatre, Gloucester - Theatre Royal, Stratford - Theatre Royal, Chesterfield</p> <p>Sept: Theatre Royal, Warrington - Empire Theatre, Huddersfield</p> <p>Oct: Victoria Theatre, Stanley (Durham) - Theatre Royal, Greenock - Pavilion Theatre, Edinburgh</p> <p>Nov: Princes' Theatre, Blackburn - Harte's Theatre, Openshaw</p> <p>Dec: Theatre Royal, Aston – under- Lyne</p>	<p>Nov: Peoples Palace, St Helens</p> <p>Dec: Theatre Royal, Great Grimsby</p>	

(*Era* 1891- 1898) (*Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser* 5 June 1893) (*Leed's Times* 29 July 1893) (*Shields Daily Gazette* 31 March and 16 Apr 1894) (*Northern Echo*, 7 May and 16 June 1894) (*Burnley Express*, 28 July 1894) (*Hampshire/Portsmouth Telegraph*, 22 Sept. 1894) (*Gloucester Citizen*, 9 Oct. 1894) (*Liverpool Mercury*, 10 Dec. 1894) (*Hartlepool Mail*, 16 May 1895) (*Portsmouth Evening News*, 7 Oct. 1895) (*Bristol Mercury*, 15 Oct. 1895) (*The Dart: A Journal of Sense and Satire*, no. 992, 25 Oct. 1895).

The similarities between *The Red Barn* and the Polstead murder were clear enough for production reviews to unquestionably link the two together, as the *Portsmouth Evening News* described the murder of Mary Merton to be: 'another thrilling scene [with] the thoughts of the murderer being represented by visions which appear at the back of the barn' (*Portsmouth Evening News* 25 Sept 1894). Despite the obvious parallels between the Polstead murder case and the performance of *The Red Barn*, Ellis continued to argue against their similarities until he realised he could profit from them. This reflected the advertisement for *The Gamblers* in chapter 1 as both productions deny their connection to their perspective murders despite their clear links. Where Ellis claimed there was no connection, the newspapers started to draw comparisons between the real-life murder and *The Red Barn* from the beginning of their tour. With the publicity created for the company due to the papers connecting it to the earlier Polstead murder productions, Ellis began embracing his piece as an ode to the original performances of the murder narrative in August 1894 by expressing his play to be a re-invention of the original story; a performance 'founded upon an old fashioned piece' (*Burnley Express* 4 Aug 1894, p.5). I would argue that this change in opinion was due to the association with the Polstead murder creating a higher interest with larger audiences which Ellis could further profit from by agreeing with the newspapers that there was a link. With reference to the production timeline provided above, *The Red Barn* had a highly successful run which I have concluded was due to its association with the murder plotline.

Though the production paid homage to the murder itself, the papers did not compare *The Red Barn* to the actual murder presented in the newspapers, but rather to earlier theatrical adaptations; demonstrating that, by the end of the nineteenth century, the performative story of the Polstead murder had become more memorable than the original murder itself. This is in sharp contrast to the Elstree murder productions where the newspaper coverage was taken as fact, meaning that the theatre's authenticity to the press narrative was integral to attract large audiences. Whereas the Polstead murder adaptations differed drastically from the actual murder narrative due to the cultural memory of the murder being dominated by fictional versions. Here the reality gets left behind as fiction takes over, allowing for themes of Gypsies and the supernatural, which are key late nineteenth century theatre tropes, to be integrated into the plotline.

Romanticism: The Role of the Gypsies

Theatre adaptations of the Polstead murder quickly moved away from the original chronology of the story by focussing on elements of the original newspaper reports on the case which led to the addition of subplots and extra characters. Many of the deviations away from the original murder case stemmed from the domestic nature of the crime meaning that additional characters had to be written in to fill all the character archetypes needed when producing a melodrama. One of the most prominent of these additions was the integration of Gypsies and the paranormal into the narrative. According to Flanders, the Gypsy characters were first introduced in *The Red Barn, or The Gypsy's Curse* performed at the Royal Theatre in Weymouth (*Sunday Times* 28 May 1967, p.30) (Flanders 2011, p.61).

The idea of mesmerism, the supernatural and Gypsy foresight all lend themselves to the Polstead murder narrative due to a deviation in the storyline that became a focal point in the newspaper's stories about the murder. Either by divine intervention or psychic abilities, Marten's mother was believed to have had a dream where she saw Marten (victim) by the Red Barn, which led to Marten's father discovering the body. Days after Marten's body was found and Corder (murderer) was

arrested, the *Morning Chronicle* released an article on the murder, detailing the specifics of the crime including how the body was found:

[Maria's parents] fears were... strongly agitated by the mother dreaming on three successive nights last week that her daughter had been murdered and buried in the Red Barn! ... near the spot where the woman dreamt her daughter lay buried ... The circumstances that have led to the discovery of this most atrocious crime, are of an extraordinary and romantic nature, and manifest an almost special interposition of Providence in marking out the offender (*Morning Chronicle* 24 April 1828).

The persistent dream that Marten's mother described accumulate to a sizeable section of the article and was reiterated throughout, giving the mysterious revealing of the body precedence over the murder itself. The 'romantic nature' of the body's discovery translated naturally into the Romantic drama on the stage. In their chapter on 'Theatre from 1800 to 1875', Edwin Wilson and Alvin Goldfarb describe romanticism to be a rejection of neoclassical rules and often includes supernatural elements with the protagonist being a social outcast (Wilson and Goldfarb 2004, p.363). The growing belief in the supernatural other is enforced by scientific creations like the camera which allowed people to have physical evidence of fairies and ghosts when the photographs became distorted due to the long exposure (Ireland 2002, p.77) (Armstrong 1992, p.246). The magical reoccurring dream of Marten's mother became the major plot device integrated into adaptations to reveal the murder, as can be seen by the playbill of Emm's *Mystery of the Red Barn* in 1928 stating the 'mystery of the Red Barn was disclosed by a dream' to help set up his 'murder reveal' scene (Emm 1928, Playbill). With adaptations of the Polstead murder being seated more within the realms of believability than most Romantic dramas, it would not sit well if this were the only moment in the play to comment on the divine or the supernatural. With Gypsies being both 'social outcasts' and associated with supernaturalism, they were easily integrated into leading roles in the theatrical Polstead murder storyline.

Incorporating the dukkering²¹ abilities associated with Gypsies during the nineteenth century helped to solidify the supernatural through-line of productions as well as pandering to the fascination of British people with a demonstration of Romani Gypsy life on the stage. Though Egyptians, shortened to Gypsies, had been notably identified in Britain in the sixteenth century, the Egyptian Act made identifying as a Gypsy a capital crime and remained in legislation until it was removed from the Statute Book in 1783 and repealed in 1856 (Floate 2010, p.3). This meant that the Gypsy presence within Britain would have been more secretive and concealed before the 1800's in order to avoid punishment for existing. Despite there still being thousands of Gypsies in the United Kingdom during this period, their presence within Britain became more pronounced and distinguishable during the nineteenth century (*National Intelligencer* 1828). With their existence within the United Kingdom being more defined, there was a greater amount of open discussion surrounding Gypsies on a social level through newspapers and theatre productions. There was both fascination and scepticism expressed by the papers when discussing the newly emerged Gypsy population and their traditions, which was reflected in the theatres' adaptations of the Polstead murder.

The character of Hagar (or Haggar) Lee is used to solidify the paranormal through-line of the plot in *The Mystery of the Red Barn*. Lee is described by other characters to be both a 'fortune teller' and an 'old witch' due to her ability to read peoples palms (Emm 1928, p.11). The title of 'fortune teller' would be an acceptable title used by many Gypsies to describe their profession for county records when moving around, whereas the term 'old witch' clearly has negative connotations (Floate 2010,

²¹ Dukkering is the Romani word for 'fortune telling' (Floate 2010, p.113).

p.19). By showing both the cynic and believer's views of the Gypsy, Emm is mirroring the views of the papers during the nineteenth century. George Behlmer explains in his journal article *The Gypsy Problem in Victorian England* that the view of Gypsy groups in the early nineteenth century were 'grossly inconsistent' as opinions portrayed by the newspapers seemed to change frequently from positive to negative (Behlmer 1985, p.234). This is further expressed in *The Mystery of the Red Barn* when Lee first demonstrates her powers. Her first palm reading is for Maria's sister Anna, who is told by Lee that '[t]he more you give, the more the stars tell... For silver I tell it all... I cannot tell you much with a threepenny piece. The fates usually will not take less than a shilling' (Emm 1928, p.3). With the vague description of Anna's future as the matriarch of the family, it is difficult to tell if she is meant to have supernatural powers or whether she is using deception as a way of making a living. Whereas her next reading is for Marten (victim), where she provides an accurate description of her future:

Your lines are clear and distinct – The fates will have to handle you carefully – you will learn your lesson when it is too late – wealth and fortune are within your reach, but there are shadows, and a break. You will love, and love well. You are not a flirt, yet you will welcome that love. A warning! believe not all you hear – act on your first impulse, and see, there is a death... You have lately met one who will decide your fate. He is rich, and hopes to make you happy (Emm 1928, p.11).

Lee's prophecy comes true as a year later Corder (murderer) proposes to Marten (victim) when he discovers that she is pregnant with his child. Corder tells Marten to meet him at the Red Barn so that they can elope, when in fact he is planning to murder her (Emm 1928, p.27-35). This approximately follows the narrative of the real Polstead murder as it was Corder's intention to elope with Marten that led her to the Red Barn and ultimately to her death. The accurate clairvoyance demonstrated by Lee sets up the expectation of the paranormal within the narrative which foreshadows Marten's mother's dream where she sees the murder and burial of Marten in the Red Barn later in the play.

Protagonist and Hero: Robin the Gypsy of Justice

With Marten as the victim and Corder as the villain, another person is needed to complete the melodramatic narrative as the protagonist and hero. Due to the domestic nature of the murder, there is no sympathetic character present within the real-life crime that can be adapted into the protagonist as Corder acted alone. In *The Mystery of the Red Barn*, the character of Robin is introduced to play both as the love interest of Marten as well as the symbol of justice when apprehending Corder. Following the melodramatic genre, making a Gypsy the hero suits the social outcast archetype required in this form of drama.

Robin is used as both the hero figure and the tragic romantic interest of Marten (victim). Despite Robin announcing that he would never give up his life as a gypsy, after his father Romanoff's death the audience re-enter the story a year later to find that Robin has settled down in London and works for the government as a Bow Street Runner (Emm 1928, p.23 and 48). He is ready to give up his life as a gypsy if it would mean having a life with Marten, as he explains: 'it was cruel of me to ask you to live my life [as a gypsy]. So I am living yours. I shall have nearly money saved soon, and I am coming back to claim you' (Emm 1928, p.25). This change of heart enforces his feelings towards Marten, as it was very uncommon for male Gypsies to marry outside of their community (Floate 2010, p.14). The fact that he is ready to abandon everything he knows to be with her creates further sympathy towards him as it is already known that she is destined to die later in the play, meaning that he is the

character that loses the most in the play as his father, sister and love interest all die within the narrative.

By avenging Marten's death, the Gypsy protagonist also poses as a social commentary on the view of policemen by being the enforcer of justice. The concept of a Bow Street Runner being the hero helps to instate the notion that the police are to be trusted as an ally of the people. I argue that this element of the story was included to instil trust in policemen as they were often seen as government spies at the beginning of the period (Oates 2007, p.1) Despite being written in 1928, it is interesting to see that Emm's production reflected the opinions of policing from one hundred years prior. This is shown in the play through Constable Acres siding with Corder and attempting to forcibly remove Romanoff (Gypsy) and his family from Corder's (murderer's) land for trespassing, despite them offering to pay (Emm 1928, p.9-10). The character of Robin is established as a hero and the love interest of Marten first before he is re-introduced as a member of the police force, thereby showing the audience that not all policemen are untrustworthy. He then tracks down Corder to a house in Ealing, where he is attempting to find a wealthy wife. Robin creates a true sense of justice by finding the evidence to prove Corder's guilt and arresting him (Emm 1928, p.49). This mirrors the change in attitude towards policing that became apparent from the 1870's onwards with the creation of a more organised police force through the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) and the 1890 Policing Act introducing salaries to the profession (Oates 2007, p.2) (Clapson and Emsley 2002, p.111-112). It was around this time that policing started to become a profession admired by others, instead of being deemed as a government technique of controlling the people. I would argue that this element of the plot is an original instalment by Emm as the police were more widely accepted by the early twentieth century so the idea of a hero becoming a police officer would have been embraced by the audience.

Criminal and Victim Representations: The Hero, the Heroin and the Villain

The stereotypical fashion by which Corder was villainised and Marten was victimised by the newspapers, though perfectly suited to the melodramatic format, was not an accurate representation of either individual. Despite the plethora of theatrical adaptations present in the newspapers of the murder, the portrayal of Corder and Marten stayed constant. Unlike with the Elstree murder where the depiction of the murderer differed in each production, the representation of Corder never changed as the murder occurred a year before the body was found and Corder was the only suspect. To accentuate his villainous caricature, Corder was elevated from his real-life occupation as a farmer in Polstead, to an 'opulent farmer' in the newspapers and elevated further to the 'squire of Polstead' in productions like Emm's *Mystery of the Red Barn* (*Morning Chronicle* 24 Apr 1828) (Emm 1928, p.5).

Corder's (murderer's) representation in the theatre reflects the paper's choice to elevate his status from farmer to Squire in order to exaggerate his unwanted sexual pursuit of Marten (victim). This section will focus on Emm's *Maria Marten; or, the Mystery of the Red Barn* when discussing the views of Marten and Corder within the theatre as Emm's work reflects the major plot points and character choices of earlier nineteenth century productions. Despite the script by Emm being written in the early twentieth century, his rendition of the Polstead murder helps us to understand the key elements of the narrative that have survived through copious retellings and re-creations of the original murder. Unlike the Elstree murder, the newspaper's views on the criminal (Corder) and victim (Marten) did not change after the trial and sentencing, leading to views of Corder progressively worsening over time. As I will demonstrate in this chapter, the portrayal of Marten

provides insight into the newspaper's lack of focus on the representation of female victims in the murder case as there is little- to- no information about Marten presented beyond her being the victim of a murder.

Corder the Villain

After Corder's arrest, the *Morning Chronicle* was the first to report the story on the 24 April with the headline 'HORRIBLE MURDER' (*Morning Chronicle* 24 Apr 1828). The identities of Corder (murderer) and Marten (victim) were altered in order to fit the narrative the papers wanted to spin. Corder was arrested in April shortly after Marten's body had been discovered. Despite not yet being convicted of murder, like Thurtell in chapter 1, Corder was immediately condemned by the press and would be in every publication following his arrest. Corder is described by Judith Flanders to be a 'moderately prosperous tenant farmer' by trade; a profession that is elevated to 'opulent' farmer in *the Morning Chronicle*, and again to the 'squire of Polstead' in the theatre (Flanders 2011, p.45) (*Morning Chronicle* 24 Apr 1828) (Emm 1928, p.5). The gentrification of his status within Polstead was used in order to characterise him as a wealthy man preying on sweet innocent country girls (Flanders 2011, p.45).

This predatory manner can be seen in Corder's and Marten's first encounter in *The Mystery of the Red Barn* where Corder pursues Marten once they are alone:

<u>CORDER</u>	[...] I am so glad they have gone.
<u>MARIA</u>	Glad? Why?
<u>CORDER</u>	Because we are alone.
<u>MARIA</u>	(Attempts to cross) Come, let us join the others.
<u>CORDER</u>	There, don't go. I have been waiting for this chance.
<u>MARIA</u>	Mr. Corder!
<u>CORDER</u>	Sit down. I want to talk to you
<u>MARIA</u>	Really Mr. Corder, you take my breath away. I would rather join the others.
<u>CORDER</u>	Why, are you afraid To be alone with me?
<u>MARIA</u>	Yes, no, not afraid
<u>CORDER</u>	Just a little timid?
<u>MARIA</u>	Yes, I suppose that's it – I don't know.
<u>CORDER</u>	There is no need to be afraid, I wont bite you. You are a very pretty girl, in fact, quite beautiful. (she looks up) Different from the town girl. Come now, what will you charge me for a kiss?
<u>MARIA</u>	Oh, sir, please let me go. (Emm 1928, p.11-12).

This dialogue has strong predatory implications and is rather uncomfortable to read. It portrays Marten (victim) to be a young, innocent girl who was completely uninterested in Corder's (murderer's) advances. This was also a focus of the papers, which attempted to obtain a response from Corder on the matter before his hanging. Despite the inquisitor's efforts for a full confession, '[h]e never [...] would account for enticing her from her father's house... he always remained silent' (*Sussex Advertiser* 18 Aug 1828, p.4). His silence on the matter does not deny his guilt, allowing his voracious pursuit of Marten to remain a part of his legacy.

Unlike Thurtell in the Elstree murder, there was no attempt at redemption in the papers for Corder (murderer) as Marten (victim), unlike Weare, was truly innocent of any wrongdoings. This was

reflected in the press by Corder being described as a cold-blooded killer. As previously mentioned, the full extent of Corder's assault on Marten was not disclosed until her body was re-exhumed for further examination. The initial surgeon's report on the murder when the body was found, however, was still incredibly shocking. The press coverage spared no details, sharing with their readers the disturbing state Maria's body was found in:

Mr. Lawton, a surgeon, spoke to the appearance of the body when found. A green striped handkerchief was around the neck, drawn extremely tight, so as to form a groove, as if it had been pulled by some person; a handkerchief pulled so tight would have killed any one; there was a stab in the neck an inch and a half deep, and another in the heart; the sword found appeared to fit the latter wound; a pistol bullet appeared to have passed through the eye and shattered the nose (*Berrows Worcester Journal* 14 Aug 1828).

The sheer brutality of the murder 'rivalling in cold-blooded atrocity that of Weare' led to Corder being accused of ten counts of murder against Marten (*Morning Chronicle* 24 Apr 1828) (*Berrows Worcester Journal* 14 Aug 1828). Many newspapers explicitly compared the cruel death of Marten in the Polstead murder to the brutal killing of Weare in the Elstree murder; almost as if the newspapers were passing the baton across for the new murder to take centre stage. Due to the viciousness of the Polstead murder, it was unclear which injury killed Marten, so ten counts of murder were made with appropriate evidence against Corder for every plausible way he could have ended her life due to wounds found on her body. It is suggested that there were multiple murder weapons (a gun, a sword, another smaller sharp object, a handkerchief and the soil she was buried underneath) (*Berrows Worcester Journal* 14 Aug 1828).

The details of the murder were so horrifying that it was difficult to believe that this was Corder's (murderer's) first murder. This translated onto the stage through Corder either being a serial killer or by attempting to murder Marten on multiple occasions. *The Red Barn* by Ellis included Carleton (Corder) attempting to drown Marten before she is 'decoyed to the Red Barn, and foully murdered' (*Era* 18th June 1892). This adaptation showed that the murder was planned and not spontaneous, further fuelling the idea of Corder being a forward planning murderer. *The Mystery of the Red Barn* by Emm in 1928 further uses the role of Gypsies as a plot device to disclose Corder's murderous background. The character Ishmael Romanoff (a Gypsy and father of Robin) had a daughter, Rosa, who had a child out of wedlock with Corder before he murdered her. Romanoff's plotline ends with Corder stabbing him in the back, murdering him in order to avoid the responsibility of raising Rosa's child (Emm 1928, p.21). This foreshadowed Marten's murder in the play as, when she announces she is pregnant, history repeats itself as Corder (murderer) plans to kill her by pretending to elope, the same way he murdered Rosa. This play goes further than the narrative presented in the press as, unlike Thurtell in the Elstree murder, Corder was only portrayed to have murdered Marten and no others. In contrast, *The Mystery of the Red Barn* enforces Corder's villain status by inventing new crimes, like leaving a young child motherless, to show progression in his murderous ways by his next kill being Marten whilst still pregnant.

Where family were used to humanise Probert (accomplice) in the Surrey and Coburg theatres, the character of Corder's mother is used to show the extent of Corder's cold hearted nature in adaptations of the Polstead murder. She is portrayed to be an old, frail widow who wishes to see her son settled as 'Lord of the Manor, and be a credit to the name of Corder' before she passes (Emm 1928, p.15). Corder's response is an aside to the audience:

I wonder what she would say if she knew that the estates are mortgaged up to the hilts and within a few months, the crash will surely come! [sic] I am in a devil of a mess. It is

these women, that's what it is. I have been a fool – a fool. I must pull myself together, and make a monied marriage. That's it, yes, that's it. It is the only way (Emm 1928, p.16).

Corder (murderer) is portrayed here to be a typical melodramatic villain by disclosing his evil plan to the audience. Similarly to Probert (accomplice) in *The Gamblers*, Corder is down on his luck and behind on mortgage repayments. However, where Probert shoulders the burden, Corder blames the women that he has seduced and paid off in the past as the source of his problems. Despite admitting that he needs to marry for money, he proceeds to continue his affair with Marten for a year after this declaration. In chapter 1, Probert's (in *The Gamblers*) and Thurtell's (in *The Hertfordshire Tragedy*) money issues create sympathy towards them as it is due to other characters misleading them that causes their money problems, whereas Corder's are self-inflicted due to his flawed characteristic in womanising that led him to bankruptcy in the play.

With his portrayal in both the papers and the theatre being increasingly damning, throughout the nineteenth century Corder became a figure that people loved to hate, which caused audiences to wish to witness justice being served in staged productions. Again, this is a typical display of melodramatic villainy, as Michael Booth describes in *Theatre in the Victorian Age*, '[t]he stage villain often played directly to [the] galleries, hurling moral defiance at them and receiving in return white-hot execrations bursting from a thousand throats' (Booth 1991, p.166). The residual feeling of animosity towards the villain would be resolved at the end of the play through them either repenting for their wrongdoings or dying which satisfied the audience through justice being served. Seeing the criminal receive their comeuppance at the end of the play reflected the reality of the criminal being hung in the real murder cases. After pleading innocent, Corder was found guilty and sentenced to death by hanging on 11 August 1828 (*Sunday Times* 5 Sept 1841). Some 7,000 people attended to watch his sentence being fulfilled, while a further 5,000 viewed his body when on display in Shire Hall immediately after the event (Flanders 2011, p.54) (Worsley 2014, p.94). There seemed to be a sort of grim fascination in watching the death of a murderer which some members of the public wished to see repeated on the stage.

This need for closure and being present for the enacting of justice translated to the theatre through the sentencing of Corder in Polstead murder adaptations. Where most productions, like Emm's *Mystery of the Red Barn*, conclude with Corder going mad and seeing the ghost of Marten haunt him in his jail cell, a production of *Maria Martin; or, the Murder at the Red Barn* at the Theatre Royal Cambridge (1874) chose to include Corder's sentencing within their narrative (Emm 1928, p.55). The final scene concludes with the hangman's rope being placed above the actors' head before the curtain falls, implying to the audience that Corder's sentence was fulfilled (*Sheffield Daily Telegraph* 15 Sept 1874, p.5). The audience, however, were unsatisfied with this outcome and waited in the auditorium for the hanging to commence. The manager, Frederick Hughes, appeared on the stage to appease the crowd:

[Hughes] apologised that he was unable to gratify his patrons by actually hanging the actor – Mr. Concannen – who represented the murderer, William Corder, unless with his own consent, which he was hardly likely to give (*Lloyd's Illustrated Newspaper* 20 Sept 1874).

With the villainization of Corder, I argue that this production toes the line between art and life through the audience's reaction to the lack of hanging represented on stage. The audience appear genuinely irritated by the hanging being implied instead of demonstrated, 'the gods shouted furiously, and expressed a desire to see the murderer actually hung in their presence' (*Sheffield Daily Telegraph* 1874, p.5). The need to witness Corder hang on the stage is akin to the desire to watch Corder hang at Bury St Edmunds, despite one being fictitious and the other reality.

The anticipation to witness Corder's hanging in the theatre stems from a desire for spectacle which mirrors the audiences of *The Gamblers* witnessing the horse and gig from the Elstree murder; and is not a desire to see any real violence on the stage. This can be seen in a Polstead murder adaptation at the Theatre of Varieties in Burton-on-Trent (1888) where the malfunctioning of a prop gun caused the actor playing Corder to lose a finger mid-production. The audience were highly perturbed by the show of violence, their hysteria 'deemed it impossible to proceed with the performance' (*Nottingham Evening Post* 13 Feb 1888, p.3). The difference between witnessing a public execution and witnessing a theatrical hanging is in the expectation: when attending the theatre it is expected, however realistic, that any violence performed is staged and not real, whereas by choosing to be present at a hanging, the expectation is to watch a convicted criminal die. As the Burton-on-Trent performance demonstrates, there is a vast difference between staging violence and the violence actually occurring on stage. Due to the publicity and expectation associated with witnessing a public hanging, it seems that the audience have almost forgotten that this is a dramatized adaptation, with the real Corder having been executed over forty years ago.

Marten: The Heroine or the Victim?

The fixed representation of Corder as the villain mirrors the fixed representation of the female victim (Marten) in the Polstead murder. Marten (victim) was portrayed both in the papers and the productions as young and innocent, despite having had three children out of wedlock. Where Corder's hanging is implied and not performed on the stage, in most productions of the Polstead murder Marten was shot in front of the audience. Though this was shocking in the first production that included Marten's murder in Cheltenham in 1828, it became expected in the narrative by 1888 when the *Theatre of Varieties* were performing their adaptation of the Polstead murder (*Theatrical Observer* 1828) (*Nottingham Evening Post* 1888, p.3).

Despite Marten's name being used in many theatre adaptations of her murder, her importance within the narrative was downplayed as was reflected in the absence of information about her in the papers. Marten is described as the 'pride of the village' in the theatre; being sweet and innocent, which reflects the newspapers views of her being a 'fine young woman' (Emm 1928, p.2) (*Morning Chronicle* 24 Apr 1828). This viewpoint of her being innocent and virginal is widely inaccurate as she had already borne three children by three men, one of those being Corder, by the time of the murder (Flanders 2011, p.45). Unlike Weare (victim) in the Elstree murder who received, however vague, a description of his personality and interests, Marten (victim) was never depicted as anything other than a murder victim, a mole catchers' daughter or the picture of virginal innocence (*Hull Packet* 29 Apr 1828). There is never any further description into who Marten was as the focus was solely on her death and the state of her corpse when her body was found. There is little to no attempt by the newspapers to give a wider view of her personality other than being an innocent murder victim, which was a viewpoint that carried into the theatre. There is no depth to her character and unlike Corder (murderer), there is no backstory provided for her within the theatre adaptations. Further examples of this can be seen in the newspaper coverage of productions like Cheltenham (1828) and Coventry (1829) which only discuss the character of Marten in relation to how her murder is acted or revealed on the stage (*Theatrical Observer* 1828) (*Coventry Herald* 30 Jan 1829, p.1). Marten serves as the dramatic function of the victim due to the interest being in with the villainization of Corder. The way the crime is presented provides valuable insight into mid-nineteenth century attitudes towards women and female victims of crime.

Marten's youthful and innocent representation was a commentary on the societal ideals of women at the time. Her murder in the play reflected the dangers of straying from feminine norms as, after her loss of innocence with her pregnancy out of wedlock, she was portrayed as a cumbersome nuisance. Some performances advertised themselves as a caution to men against tempting fate, questioning Marten's status as a victim. In 1842, Andrew Melville Senior began the family's first connection to the Polstead murder through his performance in a murder adaptation as William Corder. Both Emm's performance in 1928 and that of his grandfathers in 1842 were said to give 'the warning' to their audiences about men suffering the consequences of giving in to their high libidos (Emm 1928, Playbill). When describing songs written about the Polstead murder, Lucy Worsley explains that there was 'a strong moral message to the listener, a warning to the nation's hot-headed young men, advertising them against succumbing to their basest instincts' (Worsley 2014, p.97). We see this same idea in *The Mystery of the Red Barn* where the blame is placed on Marten (victim) for getting pregnant and wanting to marry Corder (murderer) which he believed would 'ruin [his] future prospects' (Emm 1928, p.35). When plagued by the ghost of Marten whilst awaiting his execution, Corder says: 'Well, you brought it on yourself -- you are to blame, with your pretty face and your winsome ways -- you shouldn't have demanded marriage' (Emm 1928, p.53). The moral message of these productions is not: refrain from murdering, but rather: refrain from pursuing women, as they may get pregnant and drive you to murder, passing the blame from the man who murdered onto the victim. Despite Emm's production being written and staged in 1928 after the view of women had changed due to their involvement in World War One and the suffrage movement, the attitude towards women presented in the play reflects attitudes at the time of the murder one hundred years prior.

Conclusion

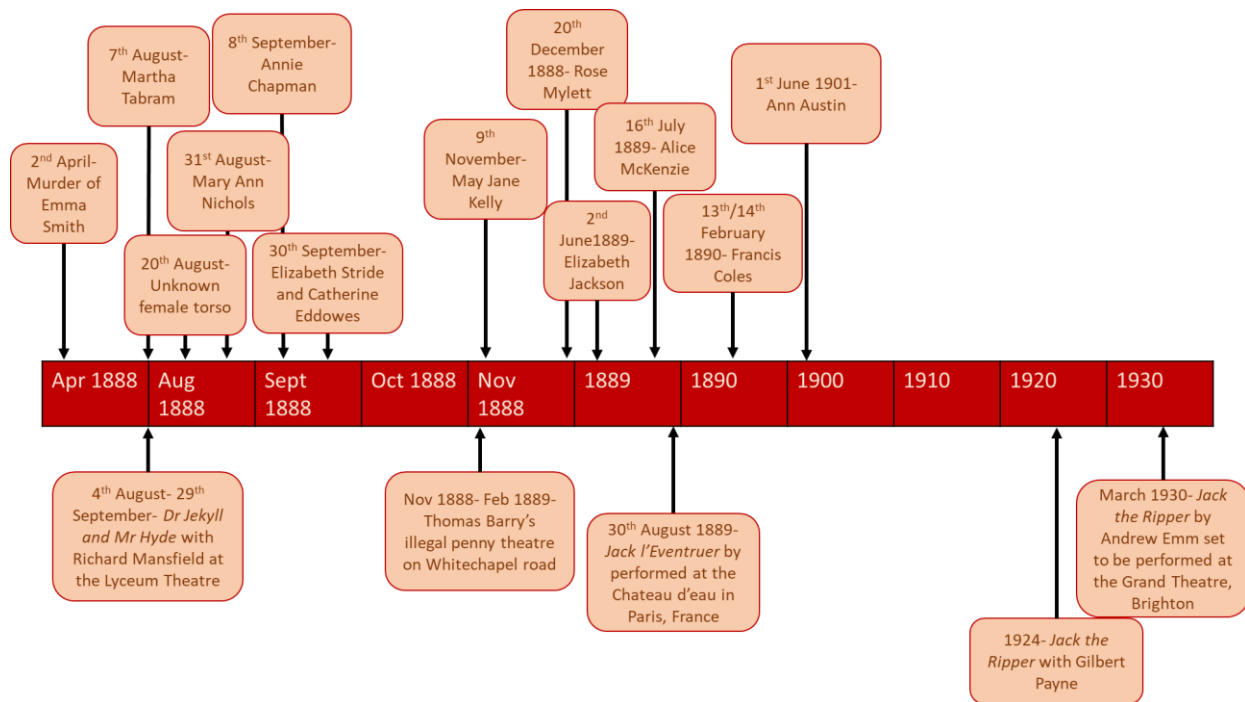
Unlike the Elstree murder performances that ended a couple of months after Thurtell's execution, adaptations of the Polstead murder continued to be performed regularly for decades after the case had ended. This was in part due to the theatre's narrative transcending the original murder case to become a stand-alone story. Through focussing on elements of the murder narrative presented in the newspapers, theatre adaptations of the Polstead murder became associated with myths and folklore through the incorporation of the paranormal otherness. Productions like Emm's *Mystery of the Red Barn* incorporated Gypsies in order to pander towards the Romantic fashioned melodrama, complete with fortune tellers and a sympathetic protagonist who developed from being the social outcast to the hero who ensures justice prevails at the end. The clairvoyance demonstrated by the Gypsies supported Marten's mother's dream reveal of the murder, allowing it to be acceptable within this narrative of the Polstead murder.

The Cherry Fair production incorporated the extra immersive layer of performing within the Red Barn, allowing the audience to witness the Polstead case unfold first-hand in the murder setting. The ferocity of the attack against Marten (victim) first disclosed theatrically at the Cherry Fair continued to develop with further press coverage on the coroner's inquest which led to the representation of Corder (murderer) being altered to fit the archetypal melodramatic villain. The hatred towards Corder went beyond the normal response to melodramatic villains as the need to witness justice being served caused an uproar in the Theatre Royal Cambridge as the actor playing Corder was not portrayed to hang for his crimes.

As touched upon in this chapter, the role of women in their portrayal as victims in the Polstead murder, chapter 3 takes the theme further as I demonstrate how theatre adaptations of the Whitechapel murders openly blamed women (the victims) for the protagonist's (murderer's) fall from grace that led them to kill. Like the theatre adaptations of chapter 2 focussing on Marten's mother's dream, the Whitechapel murder productions centralise humanising the Ripper by creating an identity for him, drawing attention away from the murders themselves.

Chapter Three: The Whitechapel Murders- The Jack the Ripper Case (1888-1901)

Chronology



Introduction

with an ape-like fury, he [Hyde] was trampling his victim under foot and hailing down a storm of blows, under which the bones were audibly shattered and the body jumped upon the roadway. At the horror of these sights and sounds, the maid fainted.

It was two o'clock when she came to herself and called for the police. The murderer was gone long ago; but there lay his victim in the middle of the lane, incredibly mangled.

(From *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* by Stevenson 1886)

Robert Stevenson's gothic novella *The Strange case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* was adapted to the stage by Thomas Russell Sullivan for actor Richard Mansfield in 1887. The play explored how the use of drugs can turn the most sophisticated doctor into a murderous monster at a time where substance abuse was becoming increasingly popular and murders were being publicised regularly in the press²². It was first performed on 9 May 1887 at the Boston Museum before touring with great

²² Examples substance abuse resulting in murder include: the case of Mary Ann Cotton (soft soap and pesticide serial killer, 1873), the Liverpool poisoning (arsenic, 1884) and the Aigburth poisoning (arsenic, 1891). The

success in the northern states of America (Winter 1910, p.58). A tour was scheduled for England, which Mansfield hoped to 'seek renown beyond the ocean, to act in London, and to return a conqueror' (Winter 1910, p.83). *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* opened on 4 August 1888 at the Lyceum theatre in London, the home of famous actor Henry Irving; a theatre renowned for presenting sophisticated dramas (Winter 1910, p.95) (Wilstach 1908).

Unfortunately for Mansfield, the timing of his tour and the violent content of the play directly coincided and reflected the Whitechapel murders which occurred less than three miles away from the venue. Two murders believed to be the work of Jack the Ripper (Jackson and Mckenzie) occurred in the months leading up to the performance and one during the production run on 11 September (Pinchin Street Torso) (*York Herald* 1889, p.4). Some audience members believed that Mansfield's representation of Hyde was too similar to the actions of Jack the Ripper to be a coincidence, which led to an anonymous letter being sent to the police on 5 October 1888 claiming that Mansfield was the Ripper:

I have A great likeing for acters So that I should be the Last to think because A man take a dretfull Part he is therefore Bad but when I went to see Mr Mansfield Take the Part of Dr Jekel & Mr Hyde I felt at once that he was the Man Wanted & I have not been able to get this Feeling out of my Head... I thought it Strange this Play Should have Commenced before the Murders for it is Really Something after the Same Stile. The Murders take place on Saturday nights Mr M never has A Performance on Saturday. The Murders Once Took PLace on Friday & once Mr M Was to ill to Perform at the Saturday Morning Performance (Anonymous 1888).

There is no evidence to suggest that any further action was taken against Mansfield, so it can be assumed that the letter was dismissed by police as one of many Ripper identity letters that they received with little evidence or credibility. Though his performance was not favourably reviewed in the newspapers, audience numbers began to drop around the same time Mansfield was accused of being the Ripper. What is interesting is that Mansfield had already retired his roles of Jekyll and Hyde and continued his tour with other performances in his repertoire like *A Parisian Romance* and *Prince Karl*. The last performance of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* at the Lyceum was on 29 September, the night before the double murder of Elizabeth Stride and Catherine Eddowes (*The Era* 29 September 1888). Despite being a coincidence, I would argue that the evidence against Mansfield was substantial enough for him to feel the need to respond in order to keep audiences on side. It could be interpreted that Mansfield responded to the allegations against himself through a benefit performance of *Prince Karl* that was performed on 13 October for 'the poor of the East End' (Winter 1910, p.102). Through the creation of a benefit performance for vagrants and lower-class individuals of the Whitechapel area, Mansfield created a theatrical response to the recent murder by producing entertainment for those the Ripper was targeting in an attempt to dis-associate himself from the murder. With no further Ripper murders occurring in October, I would argue that any residual concern about Mansfield's identity was gone after this event as there was no further mention of Mansfield in connection to the Ripper.

Despite predating the murders, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* became the first theatre production to be associated with the Whitechapel murders. In Christopher Frayling's chapter in *Jack the Ripper. Media, Culture, History* he focuses on the three main angles the Victorian press took in trying to uncover the identity of Jack the Ripper. One cultural representation of the murder bares

latter case was eventually deemed accidental suicide on account of the victim being an arsenic addict and having 'found enough arsenic in the Maybrick house to kill 50 people' (Irving 1950, p.106-113).

resemblance to *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* where Jack the Ripper is a specialist (in medicine or butchery) who is leading a double life due to illness, vengeance or drugs (Frayling 2007, p.16-17).

Though not a production on the Whitechapel murders, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* stands as an example of how theatre adapts when unintentionally responding to recent real-life murder cases. The relationship between theatre and crime underpinned the last two chapters in this thesis, whereas in this chapter I detail the limited theatrical response to the Whitechapel killings. The name Jack the Ripper has become the identity of one of the most notorious serial killers in British history, with the fascination with his identity overshadowing both his crimes and the women he murdered in newspaper coverage and theatre productions of the time. As I will demonstrate, the murder case was difficult to adapt to the stage due to the shortage of individuals representation in the newspapers, as neither the murderer nor the victims were described in detail. There is very little substance as there is no narrative arc, no closure, and no sympathetic characters, meaning that all these elements are artificially injected into adaptations of an (arguably still) ongoing case. With headlines about Jack the Ripper occasionally being printed decades later, his legacy was still very much alive, his name becoming equal to mythical characters like Sweeney Todd; with the facts being blurred with the medias fiction like that of the Polstead murder in chapter 2²³. Therefore, I argue, there are few attempts to adapt the Whitechapel murder case to the stage. As I show by the examples discussed in this chapter, there is little evidence or information on some of these performances which restrict my ability to discuss them in detail.

Unlike the previous two chapters, this chapter focuses on the lack of adaptations and the difficulty behind attempting to produce a play based on a murder investigation that never reaches a conclusion. As I will show, there were few attempts to adapt the real-life crime story to fit the stage. I have identified four productions of the Whitechapel murder: Thomas Barry's penny theatre performance in 1888, *Jack l'Eventruer* in France in 1889, *Jack the Ripper* in 1924 and another *Jack the Ripper* in Brighton in 1930. This chapter focuses on *Jack l'Eventruer* and *Jack the Ripper* from 1930 as there are existing scripts from these two productions still remaining today. This chapter explores the ways in which these two productions attempted to provide their own idea of who Jack the Ripper could have been which reflected progression of the newspaper's theories on his identity. Both productions create a similar motive for the killings in which they blame the victims, a choice which the press did not openly chastise, which I argue implies they agreed with the villainization of these women. Both the Elstree and the Polstead theatre performances were produced after the murders had been committed and the murderer apprehended; the same cannot be said for the Whitechapel murder plays. Though an effort is made by *Jack l'Eventruer* to follow the number of murders to date, the lack of knowledge on the specifics of the murder case made it difficult to translate onto the stage. With more murders being associated to the Ripper for years after 1888 and no murderer convicted of the crime, there is no clear story arch presented in the newspapers for theatre adaptations to recreate, meaning that there were very few adaptations of the Whitechapel murder created.

²³ This can be seen by the works of *The Mystery of the Red Barn* (1928), *Sweeney Todd* (1929) and *Jack the Ripper* (1930) all being written and produced by Andrew Emm within a short time frame (*Western Daily Press* 11 Mar 1930 p.12) (*Daily Mail* 17 Nov 1930, p.11).

Performances Associated with the Whitechapel Murders

When researching this chapter, I found evidence of four productions on the Whitechapel murders that were performed between 1888 and 1930. Each production varied drastically in terms of venue and approach to the murder. With the focus of this thesis being the theatre's response to the real-life murders, the productions of *Jack the Ripper* in 1924 and Thomas Barry's penny theatre performances will not be discussed in detail due to the lack of accessible archival materials providing information on these two pieces. However they will be discussed briefly in order to provide a wider understanding of other productions of the Whitechapel murders that were occurring during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Where the Polstead and the Elstree murders produced highly successful murder adaptations, the Whitechapel murders lacked performability due to the case being too close to home. The sense of impending threat was not there as it was with *Jack the Ripper*, meaning that theatre managers and audiences had more freedom to adapt the murder information without fear of being the next victim. The Whitechapel murders were happening on the theatres doorstep and some actresses were threatened by letters from the murderer. Marie Montrose received a threatening letter from *Jack the Ripper* on 17 November 1888 while performing *My Sweetheart* at the Alexander Theatre in Sheffield (Jones 2017). This shows that the fear of the Ripper spanned beyond London, with women in the midlands receiving messages from the Ripper. Winifred Hare also received a letter of a similar nature on 7 January 1901 when performing *Dick Whittington* at the Coronet Theatre in Notting Hill (*Evening Telegraph* 1901, p.3). Both these actresses received aggressive letters whilst performing in plays completely unrelated to the Whitechapel murders. The nature of the theatre industry meant that these women would have been travelling home late at night, around the time the Ripper murders were occurring, giving another frightening layer of threat behind the letters. The danger of further Ripper murders did not lessen, as murders associated with *Jack the Ripper* continuing to be published as late as 1909 with the murder of 'Little Kitty' in Spitalfields near the other killings (*Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser* 3 July 1909).

Though not discussed in detail, the first production I have been able to identify entitled *Jack the Ripper* to be performed on an English stage was part of a 'stock season' in an 'English mining village' in 1924 with a young Gilbert Payne in the cast²⁴ (*Evening Telegraph* 2 Jan 1924, p.2). This performance was described by Payne to be 'by dint [stroke] of ingenious patching' with reference to works such as 'Dick Turpin,' 'Charles Peace,' and 'The Grip of Iron' (*Evening Telegraph* 2 Jan 1924, p.2). Without access to the archives there is no way of learning if any more information on this performance exists. It is still important to include, if only briefly in this chapter. The distance from the murders both in time and geographically, I would argue, are the reason why the production could be performed.

Looking beyond conventional theatre productions like Payne's *Jack the Ripper* in a Public Hall, it is likely that there were many unlicensed performances of the Ripper murder that coincided with the murders. Though I have found no evidence to suggest this, Justin Allen Blum explains in his PHD thesis *Murder, Myth, and Melodrama: The Theatrical Histories of Jack the Ripper*, there were likely many unlicensed productions based on the murders being performed at music-hall venues and penny-gaff theatres²⁵ throughout London (Blum 2015, p.80). In Blum's chapter on 'The Ripper, the Fat Lady, and the Demon Barber: The Penny Theatrical Traditions in the East End' he goes into detail

²⁴ Gilbert Payne wrote pantomime books and was influential in the work at the Kings Theatre Dundee in the early twentieth century (*Evening Telegraph* 2 Jan 1924, p.2).

²⁵ Penny-gaffs, or penny theatres, were make-shift performance spaces erected in basements and storefronts.

about one specific penny-gaff's reaction to the Ripper murders, following the work of Thomas Barry at 106 and 107 Whitechapel Road. (Blum 2015, p.82) Barry's performance space included waxworks of female victims, freaks and adaptations of *Maria Marten* and *Sweeney Todd* (Blum 2015, p.85). It is important to mention to work of Barry when discussing productions of Jack the Ripper as, alongside visiting the crime scenes, this would have had the same visceral effect for audiences as the Cherry Fair murder production held in the Red Barn in chapter 2, or the productions of the Elstree murder including items used to carry out the crime like the horse and gig in chapter 1. As Blum argues, the work of penny gaffs is usually overlooked and forgotten in theatre history as 'they generated very little in the way of dramatic scripts, official licenses, internal account books, press reviews and other creative, critical, and bureaucratic documentation' (Blum 2015, p.79). It is unfortunately for this reason that this thesis will not be going into great detail about penny theatres at the time of the Whitechapel murders as there is little information available proving performances based on the Ripper murders occurred. Blum's thesis proves that performances of this nature did exist, leading to my hypothesis that more amateur, unlicensed performances of the Whitechapel murders were being performed in the same neighbourhood as where the murders occurred.

With production narratives showcasing crimes of a similarly shocking nature to the Whitechapel murders, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* became a performance associated with the Ripper through unfortunate timing. Though there were other performance adaptations of the Ripper murders, like Barry's penny-gaff performance and Payne's *Jack the Ripper*, there is little information about these smaller productions that is remotely accessible which has led to them being overlooked and forgotten in the context of the Ripper's history.

Media Coverage: The Creation of Jack the Ripper

To understand the productions attempting to portray the Whitechapel murders I must first explain the representation of the murderer as advertised in nineteenth century newspapers, which differs drastically to our contemporary understanding of the case. As the title suggests, this chapter focuses on the murder of women in and around the Whitechapel area occurring between 1888 and 1901. This case study is in contrast to those present in the other chapters in this thesis as it discusses multiple murders performed by multiple killers that were all attributed to the figure of Jack the Ripper. The murders connected to Jack the Ripper both today and by the police of the nineteenth century refers to the canonical five women, however the newspapers wove a very different story. The public sense of the Jack the Ripper murders goes further, attributing the Ripper to the murder of over a dozen women within London between 1888 and 1891 (Oates 2007, p.7) (Horsler 2007, p.7). Copycat murders continued both within Britain and internationally for decades afterwards, causing the fear of the Ripper to continue. No-one was convicted for any of these women's murders despite countless suspects being arrested; their cases remaining unsolved today. The brutality of these murders, with no guilty conviction, led to them being connected in the media, as it could neither be proven nor disproven that all the women murdered in the Whitechapel area shared the same killer.

The identity of Jack the Ripper was one that the papers constantly adapted and changed depending on which theory was the most popular. The murderer's legacy was solidified with the first of many letters signed from 'Jack the Ripper' being sent to the police and Scotland Yard on the 27 September 1888 (Horsler 2007, p.42). After the press re-printed the letter for mass readership, his name became internationally renowned, despite the letter being believed to be a hoax (Horsler 2007, p.8). The police did not believe the murders to be connected; whereas the press had reached that conclusion through the development of the *Whitechapel Murders* storyline after the death of

Nichols, the third female to be murdered in Whitechapel that summer. To keep papers selling, the identity of the murderer continued to develop and adapt to renew interest even after the murders ceased to occur.

The lack of narrative resolution allowed for multiple newspapers to reach their own conclusions as to who the murderer could have been, an idea which was adopted by some theatre productions. This, I argue, was reflected in how the theatre concentrated on the Ripper's identity instead of the murders of the victims. The fabrication of the Ripper narrative progressed as the murders continued, which can be seen in the theatre as it is their production dates allow their Ripper representations to differ drastically. I will demonstrate this through the productions *Jack l'Eventruer* in Paris (1889) and *Jack the Ripper* in Brighton (1930), which both respond to the Whitechapel murders according to the newspaper coverage available to them in their perspective time periods. Though both *Jack the Ripper* and *Jack l'Eventruer* were based further in fiction than the theatrical adaptations of the Elstree and Polstead murders, they accurately reflect the newspapers' lack of connection to reality as they weave their own narrative without consulting the actual criminal investigation. Both *Jack l'Eventruer* and *Jack the Ripper* created their own narratives surrounding the Ripper's crimes and attempt to find the reason for the Ripper murders. I demonstrate in this chapter how both productions blame women for their murderous ways.

Lack of Criminal and Victim Representation

The question of the Ripper's true identity was at the heart of the newspaper's coverage on the murders and became the essence of Emm's *Jack the Ripper* production in 1930. Emm hybridises the two main theories that became the most accepted after the Ripper murders stopped; that Jack was a professional surgeon or a lunatic. With the French police becoming involved in the search and apprehension of the murderer, *Jack l'Eventruer* adopts the opinion that the Ripper was a member of a gang in 1889; the first widely publicised opinion on the Ripper's identity. These ideas were made plausible by the papers, which rallied behind whichever notion would encourage further readership.

The first performance adaptation of the Whitechapel murders was *Jack l'Eventruer* (1889) by Bertrand and Clairian (also known as Marot and Pericaud). It was performed at the Chateau d'Eau theatre (now the Palace de la Republique) in Paris on 30 August 1889, a year after the first Ripper murder had been committed. This play focuses on the role of the amateur detective in its representation of the Ripper case with reference to recent French involvement in the ongoing investigation. This production is important when discussing adaptations of the Whitechapel murders as, though not performed in Britain, it was the only piece performed whilst murders were still occurring that has a surviving script and a large amount of press coverage.

Though there had been many suspects by the beginning of 1889, the English police had yet to convict anyone of the murders the previous year. This caused public discomfort as people became more desperate for a resolution to the case, which produced more theories about the Ripper's identity to be presented by the papers. One of these came in the form of Alfred Gray, a sailor who was arrested in Tunis, France in January 1889:

A few days ago the police effected the wholesale capture of a gang of ruffians of the deepest dye, and among them was a man whom they were led by various signs and symptoms to suspect of being the murderer who has hitherto baffled the researches of their colleagues in England (*Dundee Courier* 17 Jan 1889).

I would argue that the identity of the Ripper being portrayed as the leader of a gang in *Jack l'Eventruer* was chosen to corroborate the French's involvement in the development of the Jack the Ripper case. The quotation above claiming that the Ripper had been captured helped to reimagine one of the earliest theories as to who the Whitechapel murderer was. As Darren Oldridge explains in his book *Jack the Ripper: Media, Culture, History*, the idea of a singular murderer which was advertised by some newspapers was in direct competition with the idea that the murders were being carried out by a local High Rip Gang: a group that theoretically protected the vulnerable like vagrants and street workers in return for payment, though were known to kill those who refused to pay for their enforced services (Oldridge 2007, p.48). Where most storylines about the Ripper followed the former idea, Bertrand and Clairian have opted to adopt the more dated theory of gang warfare; presumably for the French connection to the murder investigation stated above as this would be a narrative better known by a predominantly French audience.

In contrast to *Jack l'Eventruer's* use of an early Ripper identity theory, the production of *Jack the Ripper* by Andrew Emm (1930) had the advantage of writing retrospectively which allowed for his adaptation of the Whitechapel murders to reflect the more widely accepted theories of the Ripper's identity. Writing forty years after the murders allowed for Emm to hybridise the two more commonly accepted theories of the Ripper being a surgeon (due to his skill with a blade) or a madman (due to the brutality of the murders). Emm's production of *Jack the Ripper* was set to be performed at the Grand Theatre Brighton in 1930. Emm's adaptation concentrates on the motive behind the murders by providing multiple examples that are used as excuses for his crimes. John Furnel (the Ripper) is depicted to be an acclaimed young surgeon who has a family history of madness, mirroring the changing beliefs of the Ripper's identity in the papers.

After the volume of murders started to decrease and the threat of further killings began to lessen, newspapers continued to discuss the identity of the Ripper and would reach multiple conclusions instead of pinpointing one individual, presumably so that one of their theories would prove to be correct if the murderer was ever caught. One such example can be seen in the *Manchester Courier and Lancaster General Advertiser*, who put forward three ideas as to the identity of the murderer in 1901. The first was that of a 'Polish Jew' and 'known lunatic' who was placed in an asylum after the murders had been committed, whereas the other two suspects descriptions read as follows:

The second possible criminal was a Russian doctor, also insane, who had been a convict in both England and Serbia. This man was in the habit of carrying about surgical knives and instruments in his pockets; his antecedents were of the very worst, and at the time of the Whitechapel murders he was in hiding, or, at least, his whereabouts was never exactly known. The third person was of the same type, but the suspicion in his case was stronger, and there was every reason to believe that his own friends entertained grave doubts about him. He was also a doctor in the prime of life, was believed to be insane or on the borderland of insanity, and he disappeared immediately after the last murder, that in Miller's Court, on the 9th November, 1888... The Theory in this case was that after his last exploit, which was the most fiendish of all, his brain entirely gave way, and he became furiously insane and committed suicide (*Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser* 4 May 1901, p.1).

As shown above, theories surrounding the identity of the Ripper managed to be specific and vague at the same time, usually passing the blame to foreigners through fear of outsiders or by concluding that the killer was a 'lunatic': that no one of sound mind could butcher women in such a manner. The theory that, due to the nature of the murders, the Ripper had a skilled profession using sharp objects, which was where the theory of the surgeon starts to grow in popularity in 1901. The *Star*

was one of the first to apply this mentality as it was founded on a story connecting three murders and creating the concept of the 'Whitechapel Maniac' in September 1888. Due to this being the most popular theory, other papers also adopted the idea of a single murderer. It was due to its popularity in relation to that of the High Rip Gang that allowed this story to be adopted by all the papers while the former, though claimed to have as much legitimacy as the Whitechapel Maniac, stopped being used in the newspaper's narrative after the beginning of September 1888 (Oldridge 2007, p.51). All of these theories come into play in the creation of Furnel's character, as his mother explains how his deceased fathers' family were all 'maniacs' (Emm, no date). On hearing of his heritage, he realises why his mother had refused to give her blessing for his marriage proposal to Deering:

[talking about himself in the third person] He must not marry in case he were to pass [sic] on his inheritance to another generation. A maniac! A thing to be pitied, and shunned! A thing to be placed between iron bars – a being not responsible for his actions --- Woman, woman! What have you done ? (Emm, no date).

The concept of hereditary disease was still relatively new, with physician Erasmus Darwin being the first to hypothesise that 'the susceptibility to be afflicted with a hereditary disorder like gout, epilepsy, insanity, or consumption could be enhanced when an individual was exposed to certain triggering environments' (Wilson 2003, p.112). The triggering moment for Furnel is the discovery of his inherited insanity in adulthood and not beforehand. It is believed that Furnel inherited the 'taint' of being a 'maniac' from his father and his mother forbids him from marrying through fear that he will pass on the genes to the next generation. After this discovery, Furnel tears up his diploma from the Royal College of Surgeons, symbolising the end of his career and the beginning of his descent into madness. He curses her for withholding this information from him for so long, which is followed by her collapsing and dying at the end of the scene, foreshadowing his curse on all women and his powers over life and death later in the play.

The element of Emm's play that uniquely separated it from the other Ripper productions was a post-performance experience where he planned to give the audience the chance to explore his solution to the identity of Jack the Ripper. After the performance's conclusion, both the programme and playbill advertised further entertainment where 'members of the audience will be invited to visit "JACK THE RIPPER'S" Bedroom... [and] can enter the wardrobe (in search of relics' (Emm 1930, Programme). The use of the word 'relic' shows that Emm wants his audience to believe he has sourced new murder artefacts from the Whitechapel case for the audience to view. Janelle Reinelt explains in her chapter 'The promise of documentary' how audiences respond to 'authentic' displays of real life on stage:

Spectators come to a theatrical event believing that certain aspects of the performance are directly linked to the reality they are trying to experience or understand. This does not mean they expect unmediated access to the truth in question, but that the documents have something significant to offer (Reinelt 2009, p.9-10).

The addition of 'Jack the Ripper's Bedroom' is presumably part of the work Emm claims to have done in uncovering new information about the Whitechapel murders through dedicating '[a] considerable amount of time... to searching the records and pursuing proof positive' (Emm 1930, Programme). Due to the lack of genuine items remaining from the murder scenes, Emm attempted to recreate the visceral experience audiences would have received from the Cherry Fair performance within the Red Barn or witnessing the Elstree murders horse and gig cross the stage through providing an interactive experience for the audience to create their own interpretation of who the murderer was,

similar to the amateur detective work presented by Jackson in *Jack l'Eventruer* when he is trying to collect evidence.

The distance in time between *Jack the Ripper* and *Jack l'Eventruer* is most evident in their representation of the murderer as the opinions presented in the press differed drastically between 1889 and 1930. *Jack l'Eventruer* portrays its Ripper murderer to reflect one of the earliest Ripper identity theories due to recent developments in the case occurring in France where the production is staged. In contrast, *Jack the Ripper* focuses on intertwining the two lasting Ripper identity concepts due to him writing decades after the end of the Ripper murders. As demonstrated through the murder memorabilia collected in the Elstree murder or the Cherry Fair's production set at the scene of the crime, I demonstrate how Emm attempted to connect his rendition of the murder to the actual case through inviting the audience to explore 'Jack the Ripper's bedroom' on stage.

Lack of Victim Representation: Reasoning for the Murders

As touched upon in chapter 2 with the representation of Corder (murderer) in the Polstead murder, both characterisations of Jack the Ripper presented in *Jack l'Eventruer* and *Jack the Ripper* became murderers due to the betrayal of their female love interests. With the Ripper being a faceless individual, both plays have attempted to create backstories and motives for their portrayal of Jack the Ripper in order to create a more sympathetic character. Unlike with the Elstree and Polstead murder productions, both *Jack l'Eventruer* and *Jack the Ripper* have the murderer as the protagonist of the piece. With little known about the Ripper's true identity and no conviction for the murders, these productions have no true to life individual to portray on the stage, giving them full artistic licence with the Ripper's background and motive for killing. Both productions present women in a misogynistic fashion, blaming them for the protagonist's downfall that leads them to murder. Where the Polstead murder productions warned men about women, these Whitechapel murder productions openly blame women for their own murders as it is their promiscuous and adulterous ways that have caused their deaths.

The women in *Jack l'Eventruer* are shown to be the provocateurs of their own deaths by sharing information with the police about the gang members resulting in their hanging. The deaths of the victims were in part blamed in the newspapers on the incompetence and distrust of the police, a theme which underpins *Jack l'Eventruer*. With crimes of this nature, it was common practice for rewards to be issued to encourage the public to turn in familial criminals in return for monetary compensation; though with the Whitechapel murders no reward was offered (Oates 2007, p.7). The police were chastised in the inquest for destroying evidence without first ensuring proper documentation²⁶, potentially affecting the outcome of the case (Horsler 2007 p.49, 63). The opening scene of *Jack l'Eventruer* emphasises this notion that the police were not to be trusted, as the Commissioner explains his methods for apprehending the gang members by stating:

My plan... is to *lancer la femme*, or, in other words, when I want to run a band of ruffians to earth I send out a lot of good- looking girls, who live with the rascals, find out their secrets, and eventually deliver them over to justice. Proceeding in this manner I have got many miscreants comfortably hanged (*Daily Gazette for Middlesbrough* 2 Sept 1889).

²⁶ This is in reference to the chalk message discovered after the double murder on 30 September that read: 'The Juwes are the men that will not be blamed for nothing' (Horsler 2007, p.49).

The Commissioner explains that he is blackmailing some fifty women into working for him through keeping their identities a secret in order to hide their adultery from their husbands in return for their complete cooperation in collecting incriminating information on the gang members (Marot and Pericaud 2011, p.18).

It was mistakes like this that made the papers question the competence of the police, which can be seen in *Jack l'Eventruer* through the reveal of the inspector Peter Weld that the Commissioner spoke to was Jackson in disguise, as the real Peter Weld was kidnapped by his fellow gang members whilst Jackson retrieved information from the police (Marot and Pericaud 2011, p.39-40). The amateur detective work undertaken by Jackson mirrors crime detective literature of the time like Sherlock Holmes which is believed to be a direct response to people's interest in trying to find a solution to the Ripper's identity. Morlock, who translated the *Jack l'Eventruer* script into English, discusses in his introduction the copious detective novels that were produced after the Ripper murders in an attempt to create an answer to the unanswerable question of the Ripper's identity. Although not strictly mentioned in the play, Morlock draws similarities between the characterisation of Peter Weld and that of Nick Carter²⁷; to the extent where he re-names the character in the translation to the latter's name to emphasise the similarities. He explains that this is not uncommon practise in French and German literature and both usually 'imitate shamelessly' the works of other authors in order for characters to be easily identifiable to the reader or viewer (Morlock 2011, p.7).

The concept of amateur detecting shown in *Jack l'Eventruer* derived from the papers description of the public taking the law into their own hands in an attempt to catch the Ripper. Though Val Horsler explains that there were more police on the streets as both uniformed constables and street-clothed detectives, the streets were just as busy as before the Ripper murders (Horsler 2007, p.53). In fact, it could be argued that Whitechapel became busier with people attempting their own detective work on the cases, leading to crime scenes being flooded with people eager to uncover some clue that the police had overlooked, which in turn led to citizens arrests and lynch mobs accusing any who looked remotely like the suspect descriptions (*Bristol Mercury* 12 Nov 1888). This is reflected at the beginning of *Jack l'Eventruer* when Jackson (the Ripper) disguised himself as American inspector Peter Weld, who makes inquiries into the police departments recent work regarding the capture and conviction of local gang members, something the police had been failing to do up till now. By using his amateur detective skills, Jackson (the Ripper) is able to infiltrate the police force and seamlessly retrieve all the information he needs in order to avenge his fellow gang members by hunting down these women.

Jack l'Eventruer reflected the newspaper's reports on the women (victims) by emphasising that a large quantity of women were being targeted and murdered by the Ripper. After discovering that his gang is being double-crossed by their female lovers, Jackson declares he will track down each of the women who have wronged them, killing eight over the course of the performance offstage by slitting their throats to then parade their bodies around the stage (*Daily Gazette for Middlesbrough* 2 Sept 1889). At this time, it was widely believed that the Ripper was still at large, with eight women's murders having been committed by the now notorious Jack the Ripper. This play is significant due to it being the first and potentially only production of the Whitechapel murders to be produced in a theatre whilst the Ripper case was ongoing. *Jack l'Eventruer* mirrored how many women were believed to be Ripper victims at the time, with some papers producing summaries of the murdered individuals identities being that of an 'unknown woman' (probably referring to the Rainham

²⁷ Nick Carter was the American equivalent of Sherlock Holmes who first appeared in fiction in 1886.

Mystery²⁸ in 1887), 'Martha Turner', 'Ms. Nicholls', 'Mrs Chapman', 'Elizabeth Stride', 'Mrs Eddowes', 'Mary Jane Kelly' and a 'Woman murdered in Castle-alley' (which would later be identified as the body of Alice McKenzie) (*Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette* 18 July 1889, p.5).

Forty years later, Emm's production of *Jack the Ripper* also placed the blame on the murder victims, creating a narrative that suggests they were to blame for their own deaths whilst simultaneously painting the murderer in a sympathetic light as the antihero of the production. In *Jack the Ripper*, all the women in Furnel's (the Ripper's) life manipulate and humiliate him to the point where he becomes a woman hating serial killer. This monologue creates the idea that the women's promiscuous and deceitful nature which has driven Furnel (the Ripper) mad enough to be capable of murder. The issue of 'filthy women' was archetypal of 'Bad Women' plays written by the Melville's during the late nineteenth century. David Mayer in *Why Girls Leave Home* describes the female roles to include 'transgressive women: disobedient daughters; abandoned, mistreated, rebellious, adulterous, and alcoholic wives' (Mayer 2006, p.584). Women were portrayed in an unsympathetic light and often female characters were at the centre of any negative plot points. Though it was common practice to label all women as 'bad women' as their place was believed to be in the home and not in the streets, regardless of whether that was for protesting or prostitution. This can be seen in *Jack the Ripper* when Furnel exacts his revenge on women in a monologue:

Is it time? Now's my change, I can still hear the hum of the city – I will get more than two tonight. Mad, am I? I am the only person in London who is sane. I can prove that. I will rid London of a pestilence, and leave it clear [sic] of these filthy women; there shall be no more . In a few short weeks I will complete the work I have commenced, and receive the thanks of the remaining people, and earn the gratitude of the world, and the self satisfaction that I have blotted out a filthy profession. chosen by the women I once loved! . (REMOVES DRESSING GOWN, and gets HAT AND COAT) They little suspect what fate awaits them. I will track them down, and dealwith them as they deserve. When I have finished my work there will bot be one of these women left. (GOING TO WINDOW) (Emm, no date, p.60).

This monologue reinforces the theory of the murderer being a lunatic but also starts to create reasoning behind why the Ripper targeted women, turning the victim into the provoker. Like *Jack l'Eventruer*, Furnel becomes the Ripper to exact revenge on the women who have wronged him. He is portrayed at the beginning of the play to be a level-headed and well- mannered individual who is readying himself to propose to Grace Deering. It is then rumoured that Deering has been prostituting herself behind Furnel's back, which his colleague Philip Dare helped to enforce. This drives Furnel insane, making him a woman-hating monster and vowing to purge London of all the bad women.

This echoes the newspaper's coverage of the murdered women as little detail was given about who they were asides from their name (if identified) and their appearance at the time of death, though it was implied that the women were prostitutes as an explanation for them being on the streets at the time of their murders (*Hartlepool Mail* 1888, p.3). Unlike Maria Marten, none of the Whitechapel victims are painted in a sympathetic or virginal light as it was believed that they were all street workers, described simply as 'Whitechapel unfortunates' by the press (*Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette* 24 Aug 1889, p.4). Hallie Rubenhold's book *The Five. The Untold Lives of the Women Killed by Jack the Ripper* shares the stories of Ripper's murder victims who have largely been

²⁸ The Rainham Mystery was part of the Torso Murders: a series of murders where women's disembodied torsos would appear. No one was ever convicted of the murders and many of the victims, though murdered by a different killer, became known as Jack the Ripper victims at the time.

remembered as the 'canonical five' or the 'murdered prostitutes' whose identities and lives have been overshadowed by their deaths and the identity of their murderer. She explains that there is little evidence to prove that three of the known victims were actually prostitutes and were more likely to be vagrant due to not having enough money for lodgings for the night (Thompson 2020). This shows the lack of research instigated by the papers into the identities of these women as their portrayal in history as sex workers originated from the newspapers concluding this to be the reason why they were out alone at night. This is reflected in *Jack the Ripper* through the ambiguity of whether Furnel's (the Ripper's) fiancée has been prostituting herself. The discovery that Deering (lover) might be prostituting herself sends Furnel over the edge, becoming the Ripper. Furnel (the Ripper) realises the mistake he has made when Deering's name is cleared as she re-appears after being absent for most of the play and explains her whereabouts by stating she 'returned to England only last week' (Emm, no date, p.61). No further description is given as to where Deering went or what she was doing, presumably so the audience still has the seed of doubt as to her innocence.

The degrading view of female street workers, though not mentioned explicitly in the paper's murder coverage, was reflected in the press reviews of *Jack l'Eventruer*. Where the paper's negative attitudes were muted in their comments on the real victims through their lack of description, there was no filter when expressing their animosity towards female characters in *Jack l'Eventruer*. Betty Blackthorn is the only lower-class women in *Jack l'Eventruer* to be given a backstory and identity. In the script she is portrayed as inherently flawed, but her misdeeds are attributed to originate from a wish to avenge her own loss. It is explained that her son was taken from her as a baby, so she took another's daughter to enact her revenge, kidnapping and raising Kitty (or Ketty: the love interest and heroine of the story) on the streets with her (Marot and Pericaud 2011, p.130-131. Despite confessing to Kitty's kidnapping and cooperating with the police in the apprehension of Jackson (the Ripper), Blackthorn is referred to as 'an old Whitechapel harridan', 'Whitechapel hag' and a 'horrible drunken harpy' in the play's newspaper reviews (*Nottingham Evening Post* 31 Aug 1889, p.3) (*Daily Gazette for Middlesbrough* 2 Sept 1889) (*The Era* 7 Sept 1889). The papers could voice their true opinions about this fictitious character as, though an attempt is made on her life, Blackthorn is not a Ripper victim, whereas more discretion and sensitivity is required when dealing with real people.

The production of *Jack L'Eventruer* had the potential to be largely popular due to it being the only production on the Whitechapel murders being performed at the time, however the unpolished set design and lack of attention meant that the generalised view of London and the murders did not quite fulfil the audience expectation of a murder melodrama. Reviews of the performance were not overly favourable despite performing to 'large and characteristic audience[s]' (*Daily Gazette for Middlesbrough* 2 Sept 1889). By the end of the nineteenth century set design had developed and become much more elaborate and realistic (Booth 2001, p.327) with box sets being erected behind a proscenium arch (Wilson and Goldfarb 2004, p.389). These box sets would consist of three walls to portray the setting with working doors and windows and the 4th wall being that of the proscenium arch that the audience look through (Fisher-Sorgenfrei 2016, p.344). In contrast to these productions happening decades before the Whitechapel murders, *Jack l'Eventruer* was criticised for its lack of attention to detail with regards to the set designs accuracy and rushed finish. One review stated that '[t]he piece was not well put on the stage, and the pictures of London life were coarse and incorrect reproductions of some of Cruikshank's²⁹ prints' (*Nottingham Evening Post* 31 Aug 1889, p.3). As lavish sets became more commonplace, there was a greater demand for extravagance and attention to detail, as can be seen through T.W Robertson's working door handles and Boucicault's working

²⁹ George Cruikshank was a renowned caricaturist of the mid-to-late nineteenth century known for creating illustrations for the likes of Charles Dickens.

train on stage (Hudson 1951, p.26-27). With press reviews predicting a large interest from British audiences in this production, including inaccurate backdrops of London when performing a piece based on real life is arguably unacceptable. With the last mention of this production referring to it in the past tense, it can be assumed that production was no longer staged after the 12 September (*Daily Evening Bulletin* 12 Sept 1889, p.4).

As far as my research can show, Andrew Emm's performance was the first production of *Jack the Ripper* to be submitted to the Lord Chamberlain; however it was not granted a licence and so was never staged, as the *Daily Mail*, *Times* and *Western Daily Press* explain:

Mr. Andrew Melville, proprietor of the Grand Theatre, Brighton, has been refused permission by the Lord Chamberlain, Lord Cromer, to produce a play entitled "Jack the Ripper." The Lord Chamberlain states in his letter that he considers the theme and title extremely undesirable (*Daily Mail* 11 Mar 1930, p.12).

Expressing the story of Jack the Ripper as 'extremely undesirable' reflected reviews of both the Elstree and Red Barn murder productions written a century ago; both of which papers showed adversity towards despite them performing largely to full houses. It is also noteworthy that a production of *Jack the Ripper* was performed at the Repertory theatre in Gloucestershire four years after Emm's play was meant to be produced (*Gloucestershire Echo* 1 Mar 1934, p.3). There were also adaptations and productions based on the Ripper case including *London Day by Day* (1889), *The Lodger* (1933) and *The Brass Candlestick* (1951) to name a few (Blum 2015, p.113) (*Western Gazette* 24 Feb 1933, p.5) (*Times* 4 Jan 1951, p.8). Without being able to access the archives, it is difficult to determine which element of Emm's *Jack the Ripper* caused the Lord Chamberlain to refuse permission for its staging.

Conclusion

Both productions created by Emm and Bertrand and Clairian attempted to bring the case of *Jack the Ripper* to a close by providing an identity to an otherwise still unidentifiable figure in history. Though they adapted different opinions presented by the newspapers, they both chose to make the murderer the protagonist and blame the victims, making them responsible for their own deaths though their wanton nature. The idea of showcasing the Ripper's bedroom in Emm's *Jack the Ripper* as an interactive experience for the audience draws comparisons to the Elstree and Polstead productions where there was an attempt to incorporate real-life elements of the murder on stage.

As far as my research can show, the production of *Jack l'Eventruer* was the first purpose-written performance based on the Whitechapel Murders to be staged in a theatre. Whether due to its outdated representation of the Ripper being a member of a gang, its lack of attention to detail with set design or the deplorable timing of it being staged when three more murders were committed, the running of this performance was no longer than a couple of weeks. Though it is difficult to understand why *Jack the Ripper* was unlicensed by the Lord Chamberlain, it is clear that the lasting impression of the Ripper's identity was that he was either a 'maniac' or a surgeon as these are the two opinions that are carried forward into his attempted rendition of *Jack the Ripper*.

Thesis Conclusion

Through the examination of theatrical productions around three major murder cases in the nineteenth century, this thesis has demonstrated that the theatre's response to these focused on their portrayal of victims and criminals and not in detailing the murders. As I have demonstrated, these productions were directly influenced by the newspaper's coverage on the murders as this was the public and the theatres source of information on the crimes. At the heart of the theatres adaptations on the murder was the relationship between the newspapers and the theatres as they were both forms of mass media that presented the recent murders to the public for entertainment and profit.

The newspapers focussed on telling the stories of the individuals involved in the murders, meaning that the way they were portrayed on the stage was entirely dependent on the newspaper's views of the criminals and victims. Comparing the different productions provides a valuable insight into the ways in which theatres responded to the crimes. As the murder cases progressed, opinions on some of the criminals changed whilst others intensified in their damnation in the newspapers. I have demonstrated how this led to different variations of the same individuals being portrayed despite all being accurate to the period they were staged in.

What was described in the newspapers was taken as truth by the public, meaning that the theatre's adaptations had a need to create authentic adaptations by reflecting the newspaper articles. The newspapers focussed on telling the stories of these murders through their representation of the victims and criminals. This translated to the stage through the melodramatic format where the portrayal of villains and victims was integral genre, which was used to dramatize every theatre re-imagining of the murders. The use of 'authentic' props tying the real-life crime to the fictional representation. The visceral connection between the murder and the theatre allowed for me to draw comparisons between their use of real-life murder memorabilia and the use of docu-drama and verbatim theatre on stage.

This thesis has shown how some theatre productions took their focus on creating truthful adaptations further by incorporating items from the murders within their portrayals, creating docudrama-esque elements to their reimagining's of the crimes. Through examining the ways in which the theatres attempted to create authentic adaptations of the murders, I have discovered that there was an element of risk involved in portraying real-life cases so close to when the murders were committed or when fear of further murders still remained. Running throughout each of these productions is an awareness of the risks in representing real-life criminals which is counterbalanced by the fact that these productions drew in large audiences. As I have demonstrated with the case studies used in this thesis, for some productions the risk did not pay off as they were either shut down by the Magistrates or the Lord Chamberlain refused to allow them to be staged at all.

Though there has been a lack of information available on these productions either due to the materials not surviving or me being unable to access them during the lockdown, I have used Postlewait's speculative histories in order to analyse other plays. This approach allowed me to hypothesise about the productions of the time despite not having access to their scripts. Due to the restrictions in place whilst doing this master's thesis, I was unable to cover all elements of these case studies and their theatre adaptations. This thesis focuses on the representation of real-life murders on stage and is not a commentary on other public spectacles with performative qualities. There is room for future scholars to explore the play's narratives, the melodramatic format, the

performability of public executions and trials as well as looking at further case studies of real- life murders that were adapted into theatre productions.

With acknowledgment to the potential for further research, this thesis provides a glimpse into the ways that nineteenth century theatre responded to the Elstree, Polstead and Whitechapel murders. By conducting this research into these three murder cases, I have analysed theatre productions that have scarcely been discussed outside of their contemporary settings, despite being adaptations of such well known murders of their times. This is not to suggest that these are the only crimes to occur during the nineteenth century that were connected to the stage, but they are prominent examples of how newspaper coverage on real-life crime affected the representation of criminals and victims in the theatre.

Word Count: 35,041

Bibliography

Secondary Sources

- Addy, David. (2006). 'The Nineteenth Century after the Napoleonic Wars'. St Edmundsbury Chronicle.
- Armstrong, Nancy. (1992). 'Emily's Ghost: The Cultural Politics of Victorian Fiction, Folklore, and Photography. A Forum on Fiction, Vol. 25, No. 3 (Spring, 1992). Duke University press. pp. 245-267.
- Behlmer, George. (1985). *The Gypsy Problem in Victorian England*. Victorian Studies Winter 85 Vol. 28, p.231-253.
- Blum, Justin Allen. (2015). *Murder, Myth, and Melodrama: The Theatrical Histories of Jack the Ripper*. University of Toronto
- Booth, Michael. (2001). "Nineteenth- Century Theatre". In *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Theatre*. Edited by Brown, J. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p.299-340
- Borowitz, Albert. (1988). *The Thurtell-Hunt Murder Case*. London: Robson Books
- Burwick, Frederick. (2009). *Romantic Drama: Acting and Reacting*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 69-72
- Burwick, Frederick. (2011). *Playing the Crowd: London Popular Theatre, 1780-1830*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Burwick, Frederick. (2017). "Theatre and Drama". In *Handbook of British Romanticism*. Edited by Ralf Haekel. Boston: Walter de Gruyter GmbH.
- Clapson, Mark and Emsley, Clive. (2002) 'Street, Beat, and Respectability: The Culture and Self-imaging of the Late Victorian and Edwardian Urban Policeman' in, *Policing and War in Europe*. edited by Knafla, L. Westport and London: Greenwood Press. p107-132.
- Clayton, Antony. (2000). *Subterranean City. Beneath the Streets of London*. London: Historical Publications.
- The Concise Oxford Dictionary*. (1982). 7th Edn. Edited by Fowler, H, Fowler, F, and Sykes, J. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- De Quincey, Thomas. (2009). 'On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts'. In *Thomas De Quincey On Murder*. Edited by Marrison, R. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p.8-34
- Dent, Edward. (1945). *A Theatre for Everybody. The Story of the Old Vic and Sadler's Wells*. London: Staples Press Limited.
- Esslin, Martin. (2001). "Modern Theatre: 1890-1920". In *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Theatre*. Edited by Brown, J. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p.341-379
- Faulk, Barry. (2014). *Music Hall and Modernity. The Late-Victorian Discovery of Popular Culture*. Athens: Ohio University Press.
- Fisher Sorgenfrei, Carol. (2016). "Performing "Progress": From imperial display to the triumph of realism and naturalism, 1790-1914". *Theatre Histories: An Introduction*. 4th edn. Edited by Nellhaus, T. Oxon: Routledge. p.325- 362 (contributors: Bruce McConachie and Gary Jay Williams)

- Fitzgerald, Michael. (2011). *Ragged London. The Life of London's Poor*. Gloucestershire: The History Press.
- Flanders, Judith. (2011). *The Invention of Murder. How the Victorians Revelled in Death and Detection and Created Modern Crime*. Harper Press.
- Floate, Sharon. (2010). *My Ancestors Were Gypsies*. 3rd Edn. London: Society of Genealogists Enterprises Limited
- Frayling, Christopher. (2007). "The House that Jack Built". In *Jack the Ripper. Media, Culture, History*. Edited by Warwick, A and Willis, M. Manchester: Manchester University Press
- Gandy, Michael. (2007). *Family History Cultures and Faiths*. London: The National Archives
- Gray, Drew. 2013. London's shadows the dark side of the Victorian city. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Hamilton, Cicely. Baylis, Lilian. (1926). *The Old Vic*. London: Jonathan Cape Limited.
- Handford, Kay. (2009) *Vagrancy Through the Ages*. Guildford: Charlottesville Jubilee Trust Ltd.
- Horsler, Val. (2007) *Crime Archive Jack the Ripper*. Richmond: The National Archives.
- Hudson, Lynton. (1951). *The English Stage 1850-1950*. London: George G Harrap and Co. LTD
- Hughes, Kathryn. (2014). *Gender Roles in the 19th Century*. British Library.
- Ireland, Richard. (2002) 'The Felon and the Angel Copier: Criminal Identity and the Promise of Photography in Victorian England and Wales' in, *Policing and War in Europe*. edited by Knafla, L. Westport and London: Greenwood Press. p53- 86.
- Jackson, Russell. (1989). *Victorian Theatre: a New Mermaid Background Book*. Edited by Gibbons, B. London: A&C Black Publishers Limited
- James, David. (1975). *Crime and Punishment in Nineteenth Century England*. London: Edward Arnold Publishers.
- Jones, David. (1982). *Crime, Protest, Community and Police in Nineteenth Century Britain*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Jones, Richard (2017). 'Miss Marie Montrose'. 20 Nov. Jack the Ripper Tour.
- Jones, Richard. (2016). 'Jack L'Eventruer'. 16 Sept. Jack the Ripper Tour.
- King, Peter. (2003) 'Moral Panics and Violent Street Crime 1750-2000: a Comparative Perspective'. In *Comparative Histories of Crime*. Edited by Dunstall, G, Emsley, C and Godfrey, B. Cullompton: Willan Publishing. p53-71
- Knight, William. (1997). *A Major London 'Minor': The Surrey Theatre 1805-1865*.
- Kohm, Steven. (2009). 'Naming, shaming, and criminal justice: mass-mediated humiliation as entertainment and punishment', *Crime Media Culture*, vol. 5(2), p. 188–205.
- Law, Graham. (2000). *Serializing Fiction in the Victorian Press*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Lawrence, Paul. (2003) "Scoundrels and Scallywags, and Some Honest Men..." *Memoirs and the Self-Image of French and English Policemen c.1870-1939*, In *Comparative Histories of Crime*. Edited by Dunstall, G, Emsley, C and Godfrey, B. Cullompton: Willan Publishing. p.125-145.
- Lewis, Samuel. (1848). *A Topographical Dictionary of England*. 7th Edn.

- Mayer, David. (2004). "Encountering Melodrama". *Cambridge Companion to Victorian and Edwardian Theatre*. Edited by Powell, K. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mayer, David. (2006). "'Why Girls Leave Home': Victorian and Edwardian 'Bad-Girl' Melodrama Parodied in Early Film". *Theatre Journal*, 58(4), p.575-593.
- McConachie, Bruce. (2016). "Nationalism in the Theatre, 1760-1880". *Theatre Histories: An Introduction*. 4th edn. Edited by Nellhaus, T. Oxon: Routledge. p.291- 324
- Morlock, Frank. (2011). *Sherlock Holmes Jack the Ripper*. Black Coat Press: Encino
- Munting, Roger. (1993). *Social Opposition to Gambling in Britain: An Historical Overview*. *The International Journal of History of Sport*. 10:3, p.295-312.
- Murley, Jean. (2008). *The Rise of True Crime: 20th- Century Murder and American Popular Culture*. London: Praeger.
- Oates, Jonathan. (2007). *Unsolved Murders in Victorian and Edwardian London*. Barnsley: Wharnccliffe Books.
- O'Brien, Ellen. (2000). "'The Most Beautiful Murder": The Transgressive Aesthetics of Murder in Victorian Ballads'. *Victorian Literature and Culture*. Cambridge University Press. p15-37.
- Oldridge, Darren. (2007). "Casting the Spell of Terror: The Press and the Early Whitechapel Murders". In *Jack the Ripper. Media, Culture, History*. Edited by Warwick, A and Willis, M. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Pedley, Catherine. (2004). 'Maria Marten, or the Murder in the Red Barn: The Theatricality of Provincial Life', *Nineteenth Century Theatre and Film*, 31(1), p. 26–38.
- Postlewait, Thomas. (2007). 'George Edwardes and Musical Comedy: The Transformation of London Theatre and Society, 1878-1914' in *The Performing Century: Nineteenth- Century Theatre's History*. Edited by Davis, T and Holland, P. Palgrave Macmillan Limited: Basingstoke. p. 80 -103.
- Postlewait, Thomas. (2012). 'The Nature of Historical Evidence: A Case Study'. In *The Cambridge Companion to Theatre History*, Edited by Wiles, D and Dymkowski, C. Cambridge University Press. p.231-245.
- Powell, George. (2018). *Convicted: Landmark Cases in British Criminal History*. Gloucestershire: Amberley Publishing.
- Reinelt, Janelle. (2009). "The promise of documentary". In *Get Real: Documentary Theatre Past and Present*. Edited by Forsyth, A, and Megson, C.
- Reinelt, Janelle. (2010) "Toward a Poetics of Theatre and Public Events: In the Case of Stephen Lawrence". In *Dramaturgy of the Real on the World Stage*. By Martin, Carol. Palgrave Macmillan Limited. Proquest Ebook. p.27-44.
- Reynolds, Elaine. (2002) 'Sir John Fielding, Sir Charles Whitworth, and the Westminster Night Watch Act, 1770-1775', in *Policing and War in Europe*. edited by Knafla, L. Westport and London: Greenwood Press. p.1-20
- Shakespeare, William. (1997) "The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark". In *The Riverside Shakespeare*. 2nd Edn. Edited by Blakemore Evans, G, et al. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company. p.1183-1245.
- Stevenson, Robert. (2010). *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Storey, Neil. (2010). *Prisons & Prisoners in Victorian Britain*. Gloucestershire: The History Press
- Watson, Eric Russell. (1962). "Thurtell and Hunt. 1824". In *Famous Trials 6th Series*. Edited by Hodge, J. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books
- Wilson, Edwin. and Goldfarb, Alvin. (2004). *Living Theatre: A History*. 4th edn. The McGraw Hill Companies.
- Wilson, Philip. (2003). 'Erasmus Darwin on Hereditary Disease: Conceptualising Heredity in Enlightenment English Medical Writings'. *A Cultural History of Heredity II: 18th and 19th Centuries* [Conference] p.109-122.
- Worsley, Lucy. (2014). *A Very British Murder*. BBC Books.

Primary Sources

- Anonymous. (1888). "Anonymous letter to City of London Police about Jack the Ripper". London: The British Library. Held by London Metropolitan Archives.
- Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette*. (1889). British Library Newspapers.
- Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle*. (1824). Nineteenth Century UK Periodicals.
- Berrows Worcester Journal*. (1828). British Library Newspapers.
- Birmingham Daily Post*. (1895). British Library Newspapers.
- Birmingham Gazette*. (1828). British Library Newspapers.
- Bristol Mercury*. (1895). British Library Newspapers. (Two Articles).
- Bucks Herald*. (1870). British Library Newspapers. (Two Articles).
- Burnley Express* (1894). British Library Newspapers. (Two Articles).
- Caledonian Mercury*. (1818). British Library Newspapers.
- Chelmsford Chronicle*. (1842). British Library Newspapers.
- Cheshire Observer*. (1893). British Library Newspapers.
- Chubb, William. (1824). "Execution of John Thurtell". Harvard Law School Library.
- Coventry Herald*. (1829). British Library Newspapers.
- Daily Evening Bulletin*. (1889). Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers.
- Daily Gazette For Middlesbrough*. (1889- 1894). British Library Newspaper. (Two Articles).
- Daily Mail*. (1930). Daily Mail Historical Archive. (Three Articles).
- The Dart: A Journal of Sense and Satire*. (1893). Nineteenth Century UK Periodicals. (Two Articles).
- Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette*. (1823). British Library Newspapers.
- The Drama: or, Theatrical Pocket Magazine*. (1823). British Periodicals. (Three Articles).
- Dundee Courier*. (1889). British Library Newspaper.
- East London Observer*. (1889). Casebook.org.

- Edinburgh Evening News*. (1898). British Library Newspapers.
- Emm, Andrew. (1928). *Maria Marten or, The Mystery of the Red Barn*. Playbill. Melville Collection in Special Collections and Archives. Templeman Library.
- Emm, Andrew. (1928). *Maria Marten*. Unpublished script. Melville Collection in Special Collections and Archives. Templeman Library.
- Emm, Andrew. (no date). *Jack the Ripper*. Unpublished Script. Melville Collection in Special Collections and Archives. Templeman Library.
- Emm, Andrew. (1930). *Jack the Ripper*. Programme. Melville Collection in Special Collections and Archives. Templeman Library.
- Emm, Andrew. (1930). *Jack the Ripper*. Playbill. Melville Collection in Special Collections and Archives. Templeman library.
- The Era*. (1892-1900). British Library Newspapers. (Seventy-Five Articles).
- Evening Telegraph*. (1901-1924). British Library Newspapers. (Two Articles).
- The Examiner*. (1824). Proquest.
- Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*. (1828). British Library Newspapers.
- The Gamblers*. (1824). 'The Gamblers: a new melo-drama in two acts of peculiar interest, as performed for the 1st and 2d times, November 17 & 18, 1823 : suppressed by order of the Court of King's Bench, re-performed ... January 12, 1824, at the New Surrey Theatre' Playtext. In *Murder of Weare*. National Library of Australia.
- Gloucester Citizen*. (1894). British Library Newspapers.
- Gloucestershire Echo*. (1934). British Library Newspapers.
- Hampshire Chronicle*. (1828). British Library Newspaper.
- Hampshire/Portsmouth Telegraph*. (1894). British Library Newspapers.
- Hartlepool Mail*. (1888- 1895). British Library Newspapers. (Four Articles).
- Hull Packet*. (1828). British Library Newspaper.
- Hutchinson, Llewellyn. (1928). '*The Red Barn*'. *Times*, 15 Aug. 1928, p. 13. *The Times Digital Archive*
- Judy, or the London Serio-Comic Journal*. (1885). Nineteenth Century Periodicals.
- Lancaster Gazette*. (1824-1893). British Library Newspapers. (Two Articles).
- Landmark Information Group. (1879). *County Sheet London*, County Series 1:2,500.
- Leeds Intelligencer*. (1828). British Library Newspapers.
- Leed's Times*. (1893-1894). British Library Newspapers. (Two Articles).
- Life and recollections of Calcraft, the hangman*. (1871). Nineteenth Century Collections Online.
- The Literary Gazette: A weekly journal of literature, science, and the fine arts*. (1823).
- Liverpool Mercury*. (1865 1894). British Library Newspapers. (Three Articles)
- Lloyd's Illustrated Newspaper*. (1864- 1874). British Library Newspapers. (Two Articles).
- London Magazine* (1824). Proquest. (Two Articles).

- Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*. (1893-1909). British Library Newspapers (Seven Articles).
- Manchester Times*. (1895). British Library Newspapers.
- Milner, Henry. (1824). 'The Hertfordshire Tragedy; or, the Victims of Gaming: a serious drama in two acts (founded upon recent melancholy facts) as first performed at the Royal Coburg Theatre'. Playtext. In *Murder of Weare*. National Library of Australia.
- The Mirror of the stage: or, New dramatic censor*. (1824). (Three Articles).
- Morning Chronicle*. (1823-1828). British Library Newspapers. (Seven Articles).
- Morning Post*. (1823-1828). British Library Newspapers. (Seven Articles).
- Northern Echo*. (1894). British Library Newspapers. (Three Articles).
- Newcastle Courant*. (1828). British Library Newspapers. (Two Articles).
- New Surrey Theatre Playbill. (1823). 'New Surrey Theatre: First Night of the Gamblers. To the Public'. Harvard Law School Library.
- Norfolk Chronicle*. (1823). British Library Newspapers.
- Northampton Mercury*. (1828). British Newspapers.
- Nottingham Evening Post*. (1888-1889). British Library Newspapers. (Two Articles).
- The Owl: A Journal of Wit and Wisdom [Birmingham]*. (1898). vol. XXXVI, no. [981], 17 June 1898, p.10. Nineteenth Century UK Periodicals.
- Portsmouth Evening News*. (1892-1895). British Library Newspapers. (Six Articles).
- Reading Mercury*. (1847). British Library Newspapers.
- The Satirist; or Censor of the Times*. (1834). Nineteenth Century UK Periodicals.
- Shields Daily Gazette*. (1894- 1895). British Library Newspapers. (Three Articles).
- Sheffield Daily Telegraph*. (1874). British Library Newspapers.
- Sheffield Independent*. (1824). British Library Newspapers.
- Standard*. (1828). British Library Newspapers.
- Sunday Times*. (1841- 1859). The Sunday Times Historical Archive. (Four Articles).
- Sussex Advertiser*. (1824-1828). British Library Newspapers. (Three Articles).
- The Theatrical Observer*. (1828). Proquest British Periodicals.
- Thornbury, Walter. (1878). 'Sadler's Wells', in *Old and New London: Volume 2*. London: Cassell, Petter & Galpin, 1878. p.289-296. British History Online.
- The Times*. (1823-1951). Times Digital Archive (Seven Articles).
- Western Daily Press*. (1894- 1930). British Library Newspapers. (Two Articles).
- Western Gazette*. (1933). British Library Newspapers.
- Wilstach, Paul. (1908). *Richard Mansfield: the man and the actor*. London: Chapman and Hall
- Winter, William. (1910). *Life and Art of Richard Mansfield, with Selections from his Letters*. New York: Moffat, Yard Company.

York Herald. (1889). British Library Newspapers.