'I hate this job': Guiding Ripper Tours in the East End

McEvoy, E.

https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-349-95359-2_9

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After having sampled the outrageous puns of the ‘pro-pie-etor’ of Mrs Lovett’s shop, visitors proceed first to Sweeney Todd’s barber shop (where they are tipped back in their chairs, throats exposed), then to the Ten Bells pub ‘where Jack the Ripper’s victims once drank’.[i] There they can listen to the landlady, Mrs Waldren, tell the ‘ultimate ghost story’.[ii] In a dramatized inset that owes much to Victorian melodrama, they meet Mary Kelly – a pretty chatty young woman, with a sweet singing voice – and her killer – a man with a certain rakish charm, a black cape, a top hat, and a knife. They see ‘the Ripper’ adopt the iconic slashing pose, and hear a scream followed by a laugh.

These are scenes from the London Dungeon. The Dungeon assumes that its visitors will be familiar with the Ripper narrative and plays on an iconography that has been long established. The popular image of the Ripper comes straight out of a line of Gothic texts and is, a s Warwick and Willis point out, ‘inextricably bound up with’ the fictional characters of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, Dracula, Dorian Gray, Sherlock Holmes.[iii] (To this list may be added Sweeney Todd.) ‘Ripper fictionalisation’ notes Mark Jones, ‘has its beginnings nearly contemporaneously with the crimes’, an American dime novel *The Whitechapel Murders; or, On the Track of the Fiend* being published in December 1888, and J F Brewer’s *The Curse upon Mitre Square* appearing earlier in the year.[iv] Novels, graphic novels, films, radio dramas, and even operas have taken inspiration from the events that took place in the East End of London in 1888-9. Traditionally, the rolling out of the Ripper story has been more common in other media than in the field of live performance. Of late, however, there has been a surge of performances of the story, though not on the conventional stage.[v] Daily, in London, the narrative is played out, to perhaps as many as 400 people a night, in the Ripper tours of the East End.[vi]

The tours involve a different set of issues from those of the Ripper performance in the London Dungeon, primarily because they take place at the actual sites of the murders. They are site-specific performances (in that they take place where the murders were committed) which are also examples of what has been called ‘thanatourism’ – ‘travel to a location wholly, or partially, motivated by the desire for actual or symbolic encounters with death, particularly, but not exclusively, violent

death'.[vii] Being performed *in situ* is both a major selling point and one of the most controversial aspects of the tours.

The Ripper walks have been the subject of critical interest before now. In an essay of 2007, David Cunningham considers the commodification of the Ripper narrative, arguing that the tours (and various other instances of Ripper mythologizing) act as cultural capital in the East End.[viii] Monica Germanà made the tours the subject of a keynote paper, given at Limerick University in 2014, which focussed on 'Guilty Pleasures' – both 'the murderer's disturbed notion of pleasure generated by the ritualistic murders of several women' and also 'the kind of voyeuristic pleasure that has been attached to the events, the victims, and the locations ever since the press began to draw attention to them in 1888'.[ix] My interest, in this essay, is specifically in the tours as street theatre. I will be both looking at dramaturgy (thinking, for example, about the structuring of the walks, and the narrative modes called upon) and considering the performance styles employed by guides. The Ripper tours are some of London's longest-running performances and some of its most changeful, for audience reaction and interaction are a significant part of the experience. The tours are highly self-aware, self-reflexive pieces of theatre, characterized by profoundly dialogic relations – not only to their audiences but also to a wider public. They are, after all, the subject of frequent commentary and criticism, some of which is vehemently negative. This essay will discuss some of the many and varied ways that guides of Ripper walks approach a subject matter that is problematic in many different respects, and consider the ways in which they register and attempt to deflect criticism, in particular charges of exploitation, sensationalism and misogyny. Central to the essay is the idea that guides' pre-emptive responses to criticism are responsible for some of the tours' most interesting features: the use of meta-theatre, parody and uncomfortable humour, the subtle, complex and fast-changing relations between guides and audiences, and the peculiarly complicated relation to Gothic. The final part of the essay looks at the tours in the context of Ripper tourism in the East End more generally, and, in particular, the controversial new 'Ripper Museum'.

Several companies operate the Ripper walks, vying with each other for clients. For the purposes of this essay I went on four in June 2016: the London Walks company's '*original* Jack the Ripper Walk',[x] the 'Ripper-Vision™ Tour',[xi] Ripping

Yarn's tours (all of which are guided by 'serving Yeoman Warders (i.e. Beefeaters) at HM Tower of London'),[xii] and the 'Jack the Ripper Tour' ('a walk worth investigating').[xiii] For the most part, Ripper walks operate in the 7-9.30pm time slot, though one leaves at 6.40pm to catch the early birds. Competition is fierce. In terms of the virtual presence, the coveted search terms 'Jack the Ripper', 'walk', 'walks', 'tour' and 'tours' are fought over. Internet searches will take you to different websites which turn out to be for the same walks. Much time, money and ingenuity has been spent on these sites, which are not merely confined to contact details, booking forms and testimonials, but also feature music, video clips, galleries and multiple pages of written text. Potential customers are treated to a surplus of relatively old-style Gothic imagery and texts. As well as the familiar image of the top-hatted Ripper, viewers are bombarded with images of dark streets and bloodied knives, and the sounds of strange singing and howling winds.[xiv] The predominant colour scheme is black and white and red. Selling points to attract the tourists are various. These include the benefit of an expert guide who has written a book on the subject,[xv] purpose-devised postcards and leaflets,[xvi] the chance to see black and white 60s photographs of sites now disappeared,[xvii] or presentation using the latest in video projection technology.[xviii] Prices range from free (but pay what you think the tour is worth at the end)[xix] to £12.50 (if you buy the tickets in the United Kingdom).[xx]

Tourists usually congregate for Ripper walks in the vicinity of Aldgate East/Tower Hill (perhaps by the picturesque coffee tram or in the park overlooking the Tower). There they are met by guides who are costumed in ways which reflect the content of, or their attitudes towards, their tours. Some dress relatively neutrally, others are subtly Goth-ed up, some are dressed in funereal/respectable black, while a few wear clothes that suggest nineteenth-century costume. Overwhelmingly, the guides are male. Rather naïvely I had expected the typical Ripper tourist to be a seedy, middle-aged man, along the lines of Edward Buchan of ITV's *Whitechapel*; I was to be surprised. On all four of the walks I attended, walkers were young (the majority seemed to be in their twenties or late teens), and there were slightly more women than men. Those over 30 tended to be accompanied by their children, whom in the main, I would put at between 12 and 15. The vast majority of tourists were not British. The composition of the groups varied, but North Americans (predominantly

those from the USA, but also Canadians) were the more numerous, followed by Europeans (in much smaller numbers).

After the meeting and greeting, and the establishment of a camaraderie, the walks begin. They are defined, for the most part, by the sites of the five 'canonical' murders – those of Mary Ann Nichols, Annie Chapman, Elizabeth Stride, Catherine Eddowes and Mary Jane Kelly.[xxi] Guides constantly remind tourists that they are on their way to the location of the next murder, directing them with shouts of: 'This Way', 'Over there' and 'Just there'. There are certain spots which all the tours visit. None misses Mitre Square, where Catherine Eddowes was murdered, for example, or the doorway on Goulston Street in which the bloodied apron and the graffiti with the reference to 'Juwes' was found. On each tour the guide mournfully notes the lost site: the place of the murder of Mary Kelly which is now merely a map coordinate in the chasm of a massive building site. There is some latitude in their choice of stopping-places. In one of the tours we pop into an unexpected courtyard, where high-rise buildings hide the light and a straggling sycamore lurches upwards. Some of the walks take in Artillery Passage. Guides use the close-set alley to evoke the street patterns of the nineteenth-century East End, but are seemingly oblivious of the fact that, now densely populated with candle-lit bistros, it fails to convey impoverishment.

Tourists on Ripper tours are subject to some strange abuttings of different worlds. As we stand outside the Ten Bells pub, the concert-going crowds entering Christ Church look at us with distaste. We are constantly bumping into other Ripper tours (though the touts from the restaurants on Brick Lane know for the most part that ours is a separate reality and don't impinge on it). We traipse through a landscape that is both here and not here, learning of the horrors of overcrowding in starkly depopulated areas. In many parts of the City, it being evening, blank office space looks down onto empty streets. Outside pubs and bars, a predominantly male clientele, noisy, fast-talking and pumped up with the adrenaline of City transactions, spills onto the pavements in tight clusters. Contact between the different worlds is limited, though at one point a besuited man cries out to us, 'They won't catch him'.

The primary narrative mode of the walks is that of the detective story. Not only might walkers be told (as we were on one walk) 'you are the detectives tonight', but the tours are structured like a detective narrative. All begin with a *mise en scène*. Guides impart some social history. They tell of levels of poverty in the Victorian East End, the stark contrasts between East and West London, the habits of dissolute West Londoners who used the impoverished East as their playground ('underneath that veneer of respectability...' as one guide has it). Then, the storytelling begins. The focus is on the murders, the victims, the suspects and the police personalities. Each stop in the tour is a chapter in the story. At the murder sites, we are given the circumstances surrounding the murders, the words of witnesses, and the personal histories of the victims. The crimes themselves are described with terrible exactness. At various points in the walk, particularly those when we are en route from one murder site to another, or where an important piece of evidence was found, we are encouraged to speculate about various and likely suspects, and are entertained by the sub-plot of the police investigation itself. For this is also a story about police procedure, the collecting of evidence, and the conflict between two police forces.

The relative blandness of the description I have just given disguises the fact that the Ripper tours are possessed of a sometimes overwhelming heterogeneity.They are fractured affairs which frequently indulge in bizarre juxtapositions. Even those that are more sedate have swift changes of tone, and are characterized by contradictory and conflicting attitudes towards their audiences. Guides of Ripper Walks adopt a variety of performance styles, ducking and diving between different modes in an attempt to render an extremely contentious subject matter enjoyable. They move from the relative formality of the lecture (complete with projections and handouts, in some cases) to other, less sober, performance modes. These include: meta-theatre (with bizarre monologues and parodies of other dramatic modes), street performance with audience interaction, and the more intimate mode of traditional storytelling, in which guides display considerable powers (many of them are also, or have been, theatre actors). Guides employ vivid hand gestures and frequently vary their tones, pace and volume. At one point on the Ripping Yarns walk, describing the finding of Chapman's body, the guide suddenly speeds up. 'There in that pale yellowish pool of light...', he starts, sketching its shape with his hand. Telling us of the injuries to Chapman's throat, he makes a slashing movement, and carves out of

the air the marks found on her mutilated body. Shortly afterwards, at the site of Stride's murder, we are told that the witness 'removed a match and struck it', whereupon our guide makes a large match-striking gesture, mimes the holding-up of the lantern, before (again) tracing a slash. Such storytelling sometimes runs counter to the documentary mode of the lecture. The stories come filtered through problematic viewpoints. Guides tantalizingly focus through male witnesses ('I'll show you exactly what that man saw') and even through the 'Ripper' himself. As one guide notes of the frustrated mutilation of Elizabeth Stride: 'Everything [he wanted to do to her], trust me, he did that and more to his next victim'.

The tours are notable not merely for the plurality of performance modes, but for the dazzling speed with which the guides shift from one mode to another. An integral component of the guides' story-telling is acting out. The guides speak the (few) words we know these women to have uttered, in a cockney falsetto; they relay the testimony of witnesses; they give us posh policemen and not-so-posh policemen and, in one case, Queen Victoria. Their vocal abilities are impressive. Within moments they can go from cold, factual accounts, to convivial story-telling or to urgent description, from mockney to Victorian posh, from bullying aggression to sinister dropped tones. They change as rapidly from relaxed co-walkers to formal lecturers, to enactors who seem to be almost possessed by the witnesses' stories they are relating. Their eyes fix, their movements become more rapid, and they become more inclined to use the present perfect tense: 'For the first time Jack the Ripper has murdered in two distinct police areas.'

Guides of Ripper walks are dealing with a subject matter that is problematic in many respects, not the least of which, for them, is the fact that the East End they are leading audiences through is very different from that of their narrative. This disconnect between contemporary and nineteenth-century East London is the source of some striking moments, provoking both elaborate reference to the theatrical nature of the tour and, in some cases, some interesting redirection of audience attention (to the guide rather than the scene). Operating on the principle that when a performer identifies a problem it is a problem no more, guides constantly refer to their surroundings in self-conscious ways, in an attempt to make the shortcomings of the locale more acceptable. They let us know that the places visited are as much

theatrical sets as crime scenes. When there is a felicitous collision between the present-day site and their narrative, guides not only remark on the fact but make facetious references to staging. One of the guides, gesturing to a hearse on Fournier Street (which, we were told was standing in for Hanbury Street), notes 'I'd just like to assure everyone that this is not a prop.' Another points through the large glass windows of an industrial building that stands near the site where Annie Chapman was murdered. He shines his laser onto a couple of mannequins lying haphazardly, one on top of the other, noting that their posture is suggestive of the activity in which Chapman had been engaged. At the recently vanished site of Mary Kelly's murder, in Spitalfields, guides go through elaborate forms of entertainment to displace attention from the crater. One of the guides does a prolonged choking-on-water routine. Another guide, referencing the fact that he is standing above us, notes that there are forty people at a level with his groin and addresses one woman in the crowd with: 'Ma'am! Ma'am! Stop looking! Have a bit of decorum!'

More serious for the guides than the disappearance of much of the nineteenth-century cityscape, is the charge of sensationalism. Some of the websites attempt to tackle the issue head-on, a favourite ploy being to display testimonials stressing how educational the tours are. As the Ripping Yarns website has it: 'we are not here to sensationalise, those most horrific of crimes, we are here to tell you the facts and allow you to come to your own conclusions!'[xxii] To make the point, it quotes Devlin and Caron, USA: 'This was so good what a tour the guide was excellent pure history with a few extras thrown in but no gimmicks' [sic].[xxiii] Guides deploy a variety of strategies to try and counter the charge of sensationalism. Some refer to historical bad practice, recounting stories of problematic consumption, and making references to the 'ghoulish sightseers' of the nineteenth century and 'tacky souvenirs', in an attempt to show their own comparative restraint. One guide tells us that, in the 1970s and 1980s, the Ten Bells pub changed its name to 'The Jack the Ripper' and sold Jack the Ripper t-shirts and red ale. Some tours dilute the Ripper content, incorporating other stories and histories that are related to the places they walk through (thus bringing the Ripper walk closer to the traditional ghost walk). This is (unsurprisingly) the strategy on the London Walks tour I attended, where, along with the terrible murders, we are told of Chaucer's residence above Aldgate, and Defoe's marriage at the 'prostitutes' church', St Botolph's. The choice of the peripatetic

lecture, with its fact-recounting and visual aids, as the predominant mode on the Ripper tour can also be read as a strategy to avoid sensationalizing of the subject matter.

The idea of 'Gothic' is strategically used by guides to distance themselves from charges of sensationalism, this despite the fact that Gothic fictionalization is the basis on which these tours are constructed and Gothic informs the tours at every level. Guides loiter in 'Gothic' locations (one tour finishes in a railway arch) and seek to create Gothic atmosphere. They draw on Gothic tropes (satanic psyches and monstrous bodies, the Gothicized East End); they construct a Gothic past in relation to an enlightened present; they are founded upon (or even could be said to literalize) the conjunction of space, time and horror that is at the centre of Gothic narratives. Gothic is the primary enabler of the tours. Gothicization gives the gloss of fictionality to the terrible facts about the murder of these women; it is the mechanism that renders the stories acceptable as entertainment. (It is worth noting that some Ripper tourists express surprise when they realize that the murders are 'real-life' murders).

Despite the Gothic nature of the walks, guides carry out a near-constant series of skirmishes with the idea of 'Gothic', which is equated with exploitation, sensationalism and bad faith (in relation to historical facts). A tactic frequently used is the naming and shaming of certain Gothic texts. Such texts as *From Hell* (2001), Hammer films and Victorian melodramas act as straw men for guides attempting to establish a cordon sanitaire, to oppose Gothic fiction to the real stories they have to tell. There are, of course, many ironies inherent in these ritual abjections of the Gothic. Guides are most likely to abjure texts such as *From Hell* when they are attempting to be most 'realistic'. Paradoxically, it is at moments when they seek to be most historically accurate that they end up removing the women from their historical context. One guide compares one of the older murdered women to Heather Graham who plays Mary Kelly in *From Hell*. To make the point, we are shown an image of Heather Graham looking winsome, beautiful, modest and guardedly voluptuous, with tumbling auburn hair and cast-down eyes, featured in a high-viewpoint shot which puts her breasts central to the frame. The use of the image

communicates a desirable femininity to which the Rippers' victims do not conform. Although the Gothic has been formally repudiated through the reference to *From Hell*, it is, at the same moment, re-employed as guides make of the undesirability of these women (who were being paid for sex) a Gothic trope. They repeatedly comment on the women's supposed ugliness. One guide, his hands curving to describe a voluptuous figure, makes a contrast between expectation and reality. Another makes an appeal to the men in the crowd, joking: 'I know what you're thinking, sir. You've had worse.' The Ripper Walks are Gothic texts in which dead women are central, but, contrary to Poe's adage, are not "the most poetical topic in the world". The women's undesirability becomes a mark of the ultimate Victorian grimness.

Laura Watson, spokeswoman for the English Collective of Prostitutes (ECP), notes that the ECP 'object[s] to the Jack the Ripper tours because they present the gruesome murder of five women as an exciting, tantalising event, glorifying the man whilst invisibilising the women'.[xxiv] The charge about the glorification of the Ripper is moot, or rather, it is more pertinent to the websites' than to the tours' treatment of the mythic figure. What is certain, however, is that these are walks determined by the steps taken by a murderer and mutilator of women, and their cohering principle is the search for the identity of the Ripper. As Watson says, 'gruesome murder' is made into an 'exciting, tantalising event'. In the words of Germanà, the 'dissected bodies [are] consumed over and over as fetishised objects.'[xxv] This is money-making predicated on a fixation with, and exploitation of, mutilated corpses. The content is used as bait: 'There is our first Jack the Ripper victim. There she is there. Now, I promise you, it can only get worse.'

There is a direct relation between guides' sensitivity to their role as pornographers of violence and their insistence on the need to respect and individualize the women. Telling: 'More about the area. And, more importantly, about the women he killed' is both a mission statement and a mode of self-vindication for the guides, most of whom attempt to make at least one of the prostitutes a more sympathetic character. One guide, for example, tells us of the fire-engine impressions that the drunk Catherine Eddowes was making when picked up for being drunk and disorderly, noting that she was 'a well-liked, cheeky, chirpy Cockney sort of person'. Another refers, almost with relief, to the popularity of Mary Kelly – and

her good looks. The telling about the women is fraught with difficulties, however. Far from being individualized, they are all ventriloquized in the same voice: that of a Horrible Histories cockney wench. Moreover, the women are not the typical subjects of the kind of stories the guides would liketo tell, so there are some strangely jarring features. Such comments as, 'Rather foolishly she spent all of her money on gin', show how the story mode can end up implying that the women were somehow responsible for their own murders.

Despite Watson's claim about the 'invisiblising [of] the women', they are only too visible on the tours. The unshrouding, the revealing of the photographs of the murdered women is a central act which brings to the fore some of the most contentious aspects of the tours in general. Whether the photographs are passed from guide to tourists, or projected on a wall as the guide invites the audience closer, the act foregrounds the commodification and consumption of a narrative of extreme sexual violence. The behaviour of the guides at these moments is revealing. Some cast themselves as protectors of sensibilities, warning tourists that they might not want to see the pictures of the women, naked and mutilated. Others throw a spotlight, as it were, on the moment of exchange, and their own role as sex profiteer. On one of the walks, the guide hands out the pictures, face down, like hard-core porn in a newsagents. At this point, there is a metaphorical turning-on of the house lights and the audience suddenly becomes the focus of attention. 'Sicko!' cries the guide accusingly, to the first person to take the image.

Ripper guides frequently make use of deliberately 'uncomfortable' humour. One guide, telling us about Elizabeth Stride, says, 'Remember, she was 45. She was probably looking for someone to spend the rest of her life with', before remarking that yes, she did find someone, and yes, it was for the rest of her life. Referring to the state of one of the murdered women's bodies, a guide remarks 'Suicide was quickly ruled out', and declares, in relation to the sex-work of Elizabeth Stride, who was Swedish, 'We could say she was on a weird cultural exchange'. At one level, this kind of humour is employed to lighten things up, and to entertain the crowds. At another level, it is employed because it references the disjunction between form and content: between the need for entertainment and the actual horror of the stories. In doing so it draws our attention back to the compact between audience and guides. It is precisely

through being uncomfortable, that such humour invites complicity; it acts both as a marker of what is problematic, and a bridge between guide and tourists.

The guides' very virtuosity, their ability suddenly to shift between different characters and performance styles, frequently functions at this meta-textual or deictic level. Such shifts mark, and become a means of alerting tourists to, the problematic nature of the tours. They highlight the need for discomfort, and, in doing so seek to provide a remedy for it. Character acting spills over the edges of the inset stories, as guides start acting out the kinds of unsavoury characters their tours supposedly repudiate. Some of the guides take on a range of characters *in propria persona*. 'Come 'ere!' says one in harsh Bill Sikes-type voice to a young lad in the group. At a later stage he does a creepy/sexual predator voice. Another guide references *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) murmuring 'Come closer, Clarice'. Such acts exploit Gothic in a complex variety of ways. Not only do they entertain, and signal problematic content, they also, through drawing comparisons between guides and such Gothic villains as Sikes and Lecter, create fictionalised, redeeming Gothic victim roles for the Gothic consumers, the tourists, (whilst, of course, these villain/victim roles are simultaneously dismissed because they are so far-fetched).

Two of the tours in particular make a feature of highlighting the most controversial subject matter: the 'Ripper-Vision' tour and the 'Jack the Ripper' tour. The guide of the 'Ripper-Vision' tour employs techniques borrowed from the repertoire of the Covent Garden street performer. He indulges in a vivid constant banter with his audience, keeping us engaged all the time, asking for a little 'golf clap' at one moment, and an 'Oooooh' at another. He is an adept in the street performer's art of exploring, constructing and moving interpersonal boundaries. He encourages us to respond positively, and when a 'yay' is raised comes out with a well-timed 'shut up'. His spiel indicates an awareness of many of the arguments that have been directed towards Ripper tours. First, he counters the 'glorifying the Ripper' accusation, 'For me, Jack the Ripper is not a man. Jack the Ripper is a brand. Like Disney. Like Starbucks.' Having disposed of Jack the Ripper the man, he deals with the 'invisibilising' argument. His final words are: 'I just hope that you've learned a bit more about the poor women.' The Ripper Vision tour is notable for its attempts to disarm feminist critique. As if to counteract the sexual content and

the ghastly objectification of the murdered women's bodies, the guide draws in humorous reference to male physicality. His is the only reference to a penis in any of the tours. He describes Albert Cadosch, who was using the outside toilet at the time of Chapman's murder, getting 'out his willy. It's my business, madam, to paint the pictures.' He constructs himself as an object of desire, flirtatiously references his own physical attractiveness. This is the guide who notes that forty people are looking at his groin.

The leader of the 'Jack the Ripper Tour' takes potential audience discomfort with the subject matter to a new level, making a feature of a full-scale assault on tourists' sensibilities. The tendency to register contempt for his audience is evident from the start when he says, 'You'll still see sites where prostitutes were murdered. [Pause.] Which is what you came for.' This tour is marked by constant self-referentiality, frequent use of parody, and some rapid and extremely uncomfortable changes of tone. It is a deliberately fractured performance, profoundly knowing. The guide touches on issues of memorialization, quipping that the site of Chapman's murder is 'marked by a gold life-sized statue of Annie and every hour a cuckoo comes out of her mouth and tells the time.' He does the voices – but so many of them and so discordant. There is the 'creepy bloke' voice, the serious factual 'documentary' voice (recounting atrocity with a provocative deadpan 'draw your own conclusions' tone), the aggressive, friendly, parodic, the Monty Python-ish.

The use of Gothic on this tour is particularly sophisticated. Like other guides, the tour leader makes a practice of importing what could be called a 'Gothic in quotation marks'. In his case, Gothic is frequently refracted through parody. After the meet and greet, he declaims in a horror film trailer voice, whilst simultaneously running his fingers along some fencing to produce an ominous clanking sound. Gothic is simultaneously rubbished and promised. On Gunthorpe Street, the guide stages the murder of Martha Tabram in a kind of one-man Monty Python-ish sketch. He first plays Tabram soliciting, then suddenly swaps sides, plays the Ripper - growling, accosting Tabram, lunging and stabbing. Swiftly he returns to the role of Tabram, jumping round, then staggering and reeling back. As if in a Victorian melodrama, he mimes the pulling of a handkerchief from the bosom to represent the flow of blood. This parodying of melodrama is a highly complex manoeuvre. It

complicates audience reaction to the tour and to the guide, it deliberately trivializes the subject matter, directs attention to the discrepancy between subject matter and medium, and forces unwilling laughter that leaves audiences feeling 'played'.

The East End is inundated with Ripper tours. At one point in Mitre Square, our tour is joined by four others. Our guide tells us that sometimes on a weekend he has seen eight tours there. The Ripper tours however are only one part of what has been referred to as a 'sensationalised industry built around Jack the Ripper',[xxvi] which includes the pub with the graffiti-art image of the Ripper on its outside wall, horribly dapper, brandishing a dripping knife, souvenirs, books, and, most recently, the 'Jack the Ripper Museum'.

The 'museum' occupies a tall narrow building on Cable Street. On its facade are two fake blue plaques. One is to George Chapman (a serial killer and Ripper suspect) who resided nearby, the other to Elizabeth Stride (whose body was laid out in the mortuary of St George's East, round the corner). The dominant colour scheme, unsurprisingly, is black and red, though there is also some pink around the figure of the black-silhouetted figure with the bag. There are red curtains in the multi-paned window and fake gas lamps inside.

The entrance room is filled with merchandise, including top hats, large wine glasses which bear an image of the Ripper in black and red, and t-shirts with the slogan 'Keep Calm I'm a Ripperologist'. The 'museum' takes its cues from Madame Tussaud's (pioneers of the Gothic mock-up) and Dennis Severs' house in Spitalfields. Like Severs' house, the 'museum' is set out in terms of a 'journey' through a series of mock-ups, positioned at different stages of time. There is a mock-up of Mitre Square, with the dead Catherine Eddowes being examined by a policeman, and a soundtrack of a scream and the cry of 'murder!' On the next floor is Jack the Ripper's sitting room ('Can you find any clues to the identity of the Ripper in this comfortable room?') Above the sitting room is a police station with the original whistle, truncheon et cetera of PC Watkins, who discovered the body of Eddowes. At the top is 'the bedroom of one of the murdered women' (a sign on the wall asks: 'Could the murdered women have avoided this terrible fate?'); on a loop is a plaintive rendition of the folk-song that Mary Kelly sang on the night of her murder. In the basement there is a mock-up of a church mortuary, a bloodstained bench in the middle; on the

walls, underneath funeral lights, the names, stories and images of the murdered women (including that of the eviscerated Mary Kelly) are displayed.

There has been much protest against the 'museum', since its opening in July 2015, not least because the original planning documents promised somewhere which would 'recognise and celebrate the women of the East End who have shaped history, telling the story of how they have been instrumental in changing society.'[xxvii] It has been criticized as 'a venue dedicated to the violent crimes of Jack the Ripper',[xxviii] which 'glamorises sexual violence against women'[xxix] and is 'misogynistic through and through'.[xxx] It has inspired an online petition 'Celebrate Suffragettes not Serial Killers'. A 'Jack the Rip-off Campaign' resulted in the setting up of a pop-up museum devoted to 'East End Women The Real story' in St George's East, with displays on such issues as 'Social Housing and Reform', 'Philanthropy for the Vulnerable', the matchwomen's strike of 1888, 'Education and Children' and the 'Radical Religious', with a particular emphasis on the connections between past and present radicalism. There has also been a series of demonstrations against the 'museum'. On 19th June 2016, I attended one organized by Class War. Shouting, 'Shut it down! Shut it down!' protestors let off a pink smoke bomb, and struck the building with inflatable hammers. They displayed banners and signs ('Male violence will end when we stop glorifying it', 'Dead Women are not exhibitions'), sounded klaxons, sang songs ('If I had a hammer'), threw eggs, and put 'Women's Death Brigade' stickers on the window. The demonstration involved some ritual shaming ('Shame on you! Wanker! Misogynist!' to a man who came out of the premises) and elements of carnival (some protestors wore cat masks, another sported a mask of the museum's owner). It was pointedly witty. Protestors pointed to the illegally displayed sign which was coming off its hinges. Someone shouted (alluding to the fact that the police were standing under the sign), 'Let me rescue the police!', another cut in, 'It's unhinged!', then came the *Life of Brian* allusion, 'It's a sign! It's a sign!'

Though concerns have been voiced about the Ripper tours, they have not inspired protest in the same way that the 'museum' has. Although occasionally a guide has been "hosed by a resident from a rooftop balcony",[xxxi] the tours are, by and large, tolerated by the general public. It's worth asking why. Partly, I think, this has to do with our understanding of gain and profit in a capitalist society – particularly in

an area where house prices are exorbitant. The public is more inclined to be sympathetic to mobile entrepreneurs in the wasteland of the City than to a former head of diversity at Google who deceives the planning authorities - and can afford premises in the first place. In addition, whilst a walk is characterized by ephemerality, a site has a permanence that leads to expectations of (respectful) memorialization. The difference between reactions to the museum and the walks has as much to with the different modes of performance involved: the mock-up and the tour. Where the mock-up is unmoving and unresponsive, the tour is a fluid and responsive (not to mention coercive) event. The tours implicate – even make complicit – their audiences. Moreover, tour guides and tourists take part in a broader theatre of the streets which is perhaps welcomed by some because of the depopulation of the area. It is worth noting that the tours run by the Ripper 'museum' are not the subject of protest and much of the protest at the Ripper museum takes the form of street theatre.

The walks and the 'museum' have very different relations to the Gothic. The 'museum', a realisation of the trope of the Gothic house, has no defence against the charges of trivialisation, fictionalisation and exploitation that accompany the use of the Gothic in this context. Indeed, it has no defence against the fact that *it is* Gothic, which, of course, is very different to the tours, which frequently, and disingenuously, repudiate Gothic. In general, the tours are characterized by an eminently sophisticated use of Gothic. Guides use it to promise entertainment, inject humour and mediate the social shamefulness involved in consuming the Ripper narrative. They summon up certain kinds of Gothic not to banish Gothic per se but to construct it even more effectively. The very rubbishing of certain Gothic texts could be said to enable the production of an über-Gothic. Distancing their narrative from selected kinds of Gothic fictionalization allows guides to conjure up superior affect, to freeze the blood with 'real horror'. For the Ripper tour guides, as for many other contemporary practitioners (but, notably, not the designer of the Ripper 'museum'), Gothic is always in the plural. Guides presume audiences' acquaintance with a long and varied tradition of Gothic – one that includes at least two centuries' worth of novels, Victorian theatre, a hundred years of cinema, not to mention television - and they are experts in the practice of playing off one kind of Gothic against another.

Theirs is a plurality of Gothics, most of which are in quotation marks, and nearly all of which are played defensively and strategically.

Ripper tours make a virtue of their 'tricksiness'. Indeed, this 'tricksiness' is well suited to the medium of the walk, where guides and audiences are on the go, very rarely travelling in a straight line, and always stopping only to start off again. The tours stage protest within themselves. By comparison with the Ripper museum, they provide volatile spaces for debate, discomfort, and contradiction. The very factors that can make them most uncomfortable are those that also provide them with redeeming ambiguity. The mercurial guides, darting from one mode to another, wrongfoot the tourists. They use a range of often dissonant performance styles. They frequently reveal profound discomfort with their chosen subject matter, staging objections to it, pre-empting criticism, and offering some knowingly specious ripostes. In the process they manage not only to problematize their subject matter, but also their approach, their own presence and that of their audience. As one guide put it: 'Right, the time has come for the BIG one! This way. [Drops voice.] I hate this job.'

Despite my interest in these deeply alienated and alienating mini-Brechtian theatres, I find them deeply controversial, upsetting and exploitative - distasteful in relation to the victims of the Ripper, and damaging in terms of contemporary sensibilities. The misogyny latent in them is never far from the surface. On the first walk I attend the guide insists on the physical ugliness of Annie Chapman. He itemizes her bulk, her smallness and the fact that she was in her forties at the time of her murder. As a small, middle-aged woman, I felt rather uncomfortable. Guides are not slow to make links between the women that the Ripper would 'tempt down an alleyway and turn into a jigsaw puzzle', as one guide put it, and the female members of their audience (at least those over 18). The Ripper-Vision guide, who makes ample use of volunteers, insistently draws parallels between the physiques of those women of nowadays and the murdered women. One smallish woman is chosen to illustrate the height of the fence between the Ripper and Cadosch (the man who almost saw him). Another small woman is chosen at the final stopping-place. The guide enacts a client/prostitute encounter with a young American woman (careful, however, to choose someone who is wearing jeans, in preparation for the 'She lifts

her skirt' line). He traces a gash traced along the neck of a Canadian woman and outlines mutilations against her body. What is most astonishing is the extent to which this enactment replays, in supposedly jocular mode, so many problematic aspects of the narrative being told, not least the gendered power relations, or issues of unwilling visibility. These women, upon whom he carves out a series phantom marks, are displayed in front of a crowd. Placing one woman against a wall, the guide projects an image of the murdered Mary Kelly. 'That's her thighbone'. It's as if the facetious dilution of the nineteenth-century story spills out into twenty-first-century misogyny.

I was not alone in my feelings of discomfort. Although many tourists on the walks seemed to be having a good time, there were some notable exceptions. It was the few under-16s who displayed their unease most visibly. By the end of one tour, as we stood underneath a railway arch, one girl was leaning against her mother, her arms round her neck, rocking back and forth. No wonder that, after another teenager had given as her reason for being on the walk, 'To learn not to be afraid', the guide replied, 'I hadn't expected that answer.'

Thanks to Robert Lee, David Short, Catherine Spooner, Herbie Treehead, Joy Bariana, Ayesha Taylor and Natalie Wall.

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[i] https://www.thedungeons.com/london/en/explore-the-dungeon/jack-the-ripper.aspx accessed 11th July 2016.
[ii] Ibid.
[iii] Alexandra Warwick and Martin Willis, introduction to *Jack the Ripper: Media, culture, history* (Manchester University Press, 2007), page 6.

[iv] Mark Jones, "Jack the Representation: the Ripper in Culture" in Benjamin Poore *Neo-Victorian Villains: Adaptations and Transformations in Popular Culture* (Rodopi Press, 2017), 161-179, pages 162-3. As Jones points out, the murderer in the earlier text is a "ghostly vengeful monk" (page 163).
[v] Crow Theatre company also perform the Ripper narrative outside conventional theatre spaces. In 2012, they produced a 'promenade, interactive recreation of a Whitechapel street' entitled 'Jack the Ripper's London' in a railway arch under London Bridge station. Since then they have offered workshops to schools.
[vi] This is the estimate of one tour guide. See http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/europe/united-kingdom/england/london/articles/Are-Jack-the-Ripper-tours-blighting-London/ accessed 4th July 2016.
[vii] Seaton, A V 1996 'Guided by the Dark: From Thanatopsis to Thanatourism', *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 2:234–244, page 240.
[viii] David Cunningham, "Living in the slashing grounds: Jack the Ripper, monopoly rent and the new heritage" in Warwick and Willis *Jack the Ripper: Media, culture, history* (Manchester University Press, 2007), pp. 159-175.
[ix] Monica Germanà, "Guilty Pleasures: Haunting Whitechapel" keynote address accompanying the author's photographic exhibition (Limerick University, 22-25 October 2014).
[x] http://www.jacktheripperwalk.com accessed 7th July 2016.
[xi] https://www.thejacktheripperwalk.com accessed 7th July 2016.
[xii] http://www.jack-the-ripper-tours.com accessed 7th July 2016.
[xiii] http://www.jack-the-ripper-tour.com accessed 7th July 2016.
[xiv] www.thejacktheripperwalk.com accessed 7th July 2016.
[xv] See, for example, http://www.jacktheripperwalk.com and https://www.jack-the-ripper-tour.com
[xvi] The London Walks guide offers these.
[xvii] This is the case on the "Jack the Ripper Tour", see https://www.jack-the-ripper-tour.com
[xviii] See the Ripper-Vision tour: https://www.thejacktheripperwalk.com
[xix] https://strawberrytours.com/london/tours/free-jack-the-ripper-tour
[xx] http://www.thejacktherippertour.com/bookonline.html
[xxi] Other victims, notably Martha Tabram, are mentioned in some of the walks.
[xxii] http://www.jack-the-ripper-tours.com accessed 7th July 2016.
[xxiii] http://www.jack-the-ripper-tours.com accessed 8th July 2016.
[xxiv] https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2015/aug/04/jack-the-ripper-industry-distort-london-east-end-prostitution-cable-street-museum accessed 11th July 2016.
[xxv] Monica Germanà, "Guilty Pleasures: Haunting Whitechapel" keynote address accompanying the author's photographic exhibition (Limerick University, 22-25 October 2014).
[xxvi] https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2015/aug/04/jack-the-ripper-industry-distort-london-east-end-prostitution-cable-street-museum accessed 11th July 2016.
[xxvii] https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2015/jul/29/museum-billed-as-celebration-of-london-women-opens-as-jack-the-ripper-exhibit accessed 11th July 2016.
[xxviii] http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/a-promised-womens-museum-opens-as-a-jack-the-ripper-exhibit-tonight-and-i-wont-take-it-lying-down-10436860.html accessed 11th July 2016.

[xxix] http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/11926093/Jack-the-Ripper-Museum-London-shock-attraction-left-me-horrified.html accessed 11th July 2016.
[xxx] Ibid.
[xxxi] http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/europe/united-kingdom/england/london/articles/Are-Jack-the-Ripper-tours-blighting-London/ accessed 4th July 2016.