This gruesome, troubling, and latest engagement with Jack the Ripper as a cultural anti-hero is presented for a contemporary Hollywood audience that is both savvy about horror-thriller, crime mystery tropes and preoccupied with the meanings and very real threats of serial killing in late capitalism. Temporal and spatial distance are once again instructive for helping the disgusted, but admittedly fascinated viewer to contemplate the significance of The Ripper and his successors in our time. The Western European colonial climate and the specifics of British imperialism at the turn of the previous century are framed by interrelated themes of sexology, psychiatry, and eugenics via Social Darwinism. These facets inform a cultural hygiene conspiracy that motivates the Ripper's infamous murders.

According to royal physician Sir William Gull (Ian Holm), secondary character Prince Edward (Mark Dexter) has a longstanding "taste" for prostitutes. This "taste" is a part of his aesthetic life of leisure, a familiar one to those who are privileged within the Empire. Locally known as Albert Sickert, the Prince is perceived to be a wealthy painter who regularly travels abroad, and ladies of the evening are favored among his exploited artistic subjects. As prostitute protagonist Mary Kelly (Heather Graham) facetiously says to leading man psychic detective Fred Abberline (Johnny Depp), "England doesn't have whores -- just a great mass of very unlucky women."

Albert becomes lovers with and has the nerve to marry an "unfortunate" woman (Ann Crook, played by Joanna Page). They wed in a Catholic church in the presence of Ann's friends who share her vocation, and the next heir to the crown is not a desirable one from the Queen's (Liz Moscrop) or her affluent followers' points-of-view. In unmistakably sexist terms that perhaps extend transhistorically, Ann's life violates the tripartite feminine archetypes of virgin, mother, and whore. Because she is seen to simultaneously exist within two of these categories, she transgresses their separation and this is not allowable. Ann Crook tells her friends that she loves the baby "to bits," an idiom that is rendered ironic when her life is shattered and her friends literally wind up in pieces.

Crook and her Prince are carted off in the middle of sex, baby Alice and her maternal grandparents vanish, and the women who bore witness to the unholy union are ghoulishly picked off one by one, with the exception of Mary Kelly. We are told more than once that they are being "punished," and this punishment is not just an act of revenge but also an act of censorship. With each murder, the audience is likewise visually punished by being expected to endure increasingly graphic and intimate imagery. This torturous viewing is complicated by a popular cultural obsession with serial killers and the sadistic and masochistic voyeurism that is allegedly intrinsic to watching horror movies. Film scholar Carol Clover asserts that "slasher" and other horror films centering on women's suffering are not merely about reifying victimization, but paradoxically empower spectators to reconsider their relationship to societal violence (Clover, 1992). While the film may be interestingly assessed by using this
type of critical lens, merely reading *From Hell* for its feminist potential would probably be analytically imprudent.

Although his ailing condition from syphilis is reported to the audience, we do not see Albert again once he is dragged away in a coach and brought to an undisclosed location. The coach's activities, including the transportation of doctor-turned-murderer Gull, are financially underwritten by Free Masons who are represented in the film as rich and racist. Unsurprisingly, they want the blame for the murders to be pinned on London's outsiders, especially its Jewry. Jewish butchers are targeted by some members of the police force who are clearly guilty of racial profiling.

In contrast to the backgrounding of Albert's illness, Ann's pains are visually enunciated in an extended and grotesque display. After being kidnapped, she is locked up in an asylum where she is silenced by a lobotomy, a vivid spectacle that is described by Gull to his medical colleagues and the audience as "a simple procedure...[to] permanently alleviate the poor girl's suffering." By the film's end, Sir William is also silenced by a lobotomy after his participation in the cultural hygiene project has gone too far.

Before his acts of brutal excess become a concern, Queen Victoria appreciates Gull's dedication to Prince Edward's situation. During a friendly chat with Sir William in Buckingham Palace, she tells him, "In all ways you attend to the health of our Empire. We are grateful." Throughout, the film simultaneously reproaches and fetishizes imperial England. The Ripper uses grapes to lure his victims, "so they'll trust whatever he offers," we are informed. Grapes in London's Whitechapel District are a luxury of wealth, leading to the conclusion that the murderer is a man of means, a gentleman. The grapes have semiotic cache, and act in the *mise-en-scène* to comment upon a diverse array of metaphorized things. When considered alongside the pulsing rounded images of veins and bloodiness depicted elsewhere in the film, the grapes might be metonyms for fetal heartbeats. If "proper" women are still expected to be the embodied containers for reproducing nation-states, this instance of symbolic valence cannot be underestimated.

Grapes are exotic fruits, imported via the relations of colonialism in late nineteenth century England. Moreover, they are coded as having a kind of peculiar testicularity. By murdering prostitutes and ending the risky possibility of their having stigmatized children within an unwilling-to-be-shamed Great Britain, this film's Jack the Ripper participates in an inverted insemination program that sterilizes and destroys rather than fosters life.

Importantly, the women are not only killed but are carefully mutilated, a practice that Abberline refers to as "ritual." The inspector's assistant Sargent Godley (Robbie Coltrane) remarks of one of the victims, "Before he cut her throat he removed her livelihood as a keepsake." The mutilations are a cautionary sign to the still living "unfortunates," and to members of the public who are frightened yet excited by the murders, and complicit with those taking pictures of the corpses to sell newspapers. Yet, Jack the Ripper is quoted in the film as saying, "One day men will look back and say that I gave birth to the twentieth century," and if this is true then he, as his contemporaries today, can thank the mainstream media in part for his infamy.

Like the graphic novel *From Hell* by Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell upon which it is based, the film makes an attempt to foreground a critique of misogyny, racism, and socio-economic disenfranchisement, but women, those labeled socially undesirable, and the poor
are still trampled in its perverse frenzy. The graphic novel's creators indicate that "Jack mirrors our hysterias. Faceless, he is the receptacle for each new social panic" (Moore and Campbell, 2001: Appendix II, 22). He may be seen as a "corporation" of multiple individuals doing "serial murder as a team sport" (Appendix II, 19), or as a commentary on "the dance" of "pussy," "money," "need," and "poverty" in capitalism (Appendix II, 24). Moore and Campbell explicate and question the fixation on The Ripper, saying he is a 'complex phantom we project. That alone, we know is real. The actual killer's gone, unglimpsed, might as well not have been there at all. There never was a Jack the Ripper" (Appendix II, 23).

Moore and Campbell may have intended their remarks to be theoretically provocative. However, like the film, they come across as problematic and as overtly anti-feminist. Asserting that Jack the Ripper cannot be understood as "real," that contemporary serial killers are products of a capitalist imaginary, and that our perpetual captivation with this variety of murderers is predicated upon intricate socio-cultural structures are compelling arguments. Unfortunately, these proclamations accomplish their cleverness by effacing the materiality of victims' already disrespected dead bodies.

References
