



## After Dark

# NOVEL PRESUMES THE RIPPER WAS CANADIAN

by **ROB BULL,**  
Canadian Press

Jack the Ripper may have been a Canadian, perhaps even a graduate of that venerable institution, McGill University's faculty of medicine.

That, at least, is the theory of novelist Chris Scott, writer-in-residence at McGill's cross-town rival, Concordia University.

Jack the Ripper, who killed five London prostitutes between August and November 1888 and was never captured, has a special place in the folklore of modern society.

With the centenary of his crimes sparking new interest, Jack the Ripper has been back in the public eye, the subject of a TV mini-series starring Michael Caine and featured in a number of books, including Scott's engrossing novel simply titled Jack.

Scott based his work on the premise that Jack the Ripper was none other than Canada's own Dr. Thomas Neill Cream, convicted and hanged in England in 1891 for the poison-murder of five other young women.

Records show that Cream's last words, as his feet fell through the trap door of the scaffold, were "I am Jack . . ."

Crime buffs agree there were other suspects, including a prominent London society doctor, a failed British solicitor who committed suicide shortly after the last Ripper murder, and Queen Victoria's retarded grandson, the Duke of Clarence.

"Cream wanted others to believe he was the Ripper," Scott said in an interview. "He convinced himself he was the Ripper. So I said, 'Why not let him be the Ripper?'"

Why not, indeed.

Cream, who grew up in Quebec City and the Ottawa Valley, practised medicine in London, Ont. He was also one of the most thoroughly bad men in Canadian history.

The Canadian Encyclopedia, for example, says Cream "was responsible for a string of murders in Canada, the U.S. and Britain. He was also a thief, arsonist, blackmailer and illegal abortionist."

However, there's one major obstacle to the theory that Cream was Jack the Ripper: Cream was supposed to be in jail in Illinois — for poisoning the husband of one of his mistresses — at the time of the murders in London.

Scott argues that Cream may have bribed his way out of prison to commit the killings after his lumber baron father died and left him a large inheritance.

This book, however, is not a whodunit. It starts off with a confession in a courtroom as Cream is sentenced for the poisonings of the five women.

"As a writer, it's always hard for me to classify my books, they

don't always find an independent slot," said Scott, author of Bartleby, To Catch a Spy, Antichthon and Hitler's Bomb.

"I suppose you could call Jack an alternative history . . . an attempt to recreate history, to give it substance and character.

"Basically, it's a work of fiction."

What Scott does is attempt to get into the mind of a mass murderer. "I do believe he (Cream) was a person with a multiple personality."

In the book, the mentally un-

balanced Cream constantly changes character — one minute he's G. Wentworth Bell-Smith, a Canadian lay missionary to London's "women of the unfortunate class" (prostitutes); the next, an Irish police detective called Malone.

He then reverts back to his true identity, Dr. Cream, a deranged murderer.

The book keeps jumping between truth and fiction.

**Jack, by Chris Scott. Published by Macmillan of Canada; 282 pages; \$19.95.**



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