Who wrote the Jack the Ripper letters?  
A stylometric analysis  

Dr Andrea Nini  
andrea.nini@manchester.ac.uk  
www.andreanini.com  

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27 Sept 1888
Dear Boss letter

7 Aug 1888:
Martha Tabram

31 Aug 1888:
Mary Ann Nichols

8 Sept 1888:
Annie Chapman

Dear Boss,

I keep on hearing the police have caught me, but they went for me just yet. I have laughed when they look so clever and talk about being on the right track. That joke about Leather Apron gave me real fits. I am down on whores and I shant quit ripping them till I do get buckled. Grand work the last job was. I gave the lady no time to squeal. How can they catch me now. I love my work and want to start again. You will soon hear of me with my funny little games. I saved some of the proper red stuff in a ginger beer bottle over the last job to write with but it went thick like glue and I cant use it. Red ink is fit enough I hope ha ha ha.

The next job I do I shall clip the lady’s ears off and send to the

yours truly

Jack the Ripper
Whitechapel, London

7 Aug 1888: Martha Tabram
31 Aug 1888: Mary Ann Nichols
8 Sept 1888: Annie Chapman
30 Sept 1888: Elizabeth Stride & Catherine Eddowes (double event)

27 Sept 1888 Dear Boss letter

1 Oct 1888 Saucy Jacky postcard

I was goading dear old Boss when I gave you that...
Dear Mr Williamson

At 5 minutes to 9 o'clock tonight we received the following letter the envelope of which I enclose by which you will see it is in the same handwriting as the previous communications.

"5 Oct 1888

Dear Friend

In the name of God hear me I swear I did not kill the female whose body was found at Whitehall. If she was an honest woman I will hunt down and destroy her murderer. If she ['was an honest woman' deleted] was a whore God will bless the hand that slew her, for the women of of [sic] Moab and Midian shall die and their blood shall mingle with the dust. I never harm any others or the Divine power that protects and helps me in my grand work would quit for ever. Do as I do and the light of glory shall shine upon you. I get to work tomorrow treble even this time yes yes three must be ripped. will send you a bit of face by post I promise this dear old Boss. The police now reckon my work a practical joke well Jacky's a very practical joker. ha ha ha Keep this back till three are wiped out and you can show the cold meat.

Yours truly

Jack the Ripper"

Yours truly

T.J. Bulling

5 Oct 1888
Moab and Midian letter

27 Sept 1888
Dear Boss letter

1 Oct 1888
Saucy Jacky postcard

30 Sept 1888 (double event)
"Whitehall mystery"
Whitechapel, London

7 Aug 1888: Martha Tabram

31 Aug 1888: Mary Ann Nichols

8 Sept 1888: Annie Chapman

30 Sept 1888: Elizabeth Stride & Catherine Eddowes (double event)

2 Oct 1888: The 'Whitehall mystery'

5 Oct 1888: Moab and Midian letter

2 Oct 1888: From Hell letter

16 Oct 1888: From Hell letter
Whitechapel, London

7 Aug 1888: Martha Tabram
31 Aug 1888: Mary Ann Nichols
8 Sept 1888: Annie Chapman
30 Sept 1888: Elizabeth Stride & Catherine Eddowes (double event)
2 Oct 1888: The ‘Whitehall mystery’
9 Nov 1888: Mary Jane Kelly
17 July 1889: Alice McKenzie
10 Sept 1889: Pinchin Street Torso

5 Oct 1888: Moab and Midian letter
27 Sept 1888: Dear Boss letter
1 Oct 1888: Saucy Jacky postcard
16 Oct 1888: From Hell letter

PUBLISHED

130 ‘JACK THE RIPPER’ LETTERS

4 PRE-PUBLICATION LETTERS

209 Jack the Ripper letters, from 24th Sept 1888 until 14th Oct 1896
RIPPER REVEALED  Clues in newly-uncovered painting could prove the ARTIST is Jack the Ripper

A new book claims a painting by a Victorian artist - and Ripper suspect - contains clues that allude to his role in the murder of five prostitutes in East London in 1888

EXCLUSIVE  By Annabel Murphy
31st August 2018, 4:30 pm  Updated: 31st August 2018, 7:27 pm

CLUES hidden in a newly-uncovered painting could prove that the artist behind it is infamous serial killer Jack the Ripper.
Maria Coroner  21 years old

Charged with sending two letters signed as ‘Jack the Ripper’

She had written two letters of this character, as she admitted when apprehended, one being addressed to the chief constable and the other to a local newspaper. On searching the girl's lodging the police found copies of the letters. The prisoner excused her foolish conduct on the ground that "she had done it in a joke"
The enterprising journalist theory

The Littlechild letter

8, The Chase
Clapham Common S.W.,
23rd September 1913

Dear Sir,

I was pleased to receive your letter which I shall put away in 'good company' to read again, perhaps some day when old age overtakes me and when to revive memories of the past may be a solace.

Knowing the great interest you take in all matters criminal, and abnormal, I am just going to inflict one more letter on you on the 'Ripper' subject. Letters as a rule are only a nuisance when they call for a reply but this does not need one. I will try and be brief.

With regard to the term 'Jack the Ripper' it was generally believed at the Yard that Tom Bullen of the Central News was the originator, but it is probable Moore, who was his chief, was the inventor. It was a smart piece of journalistic work....
Research questions

1) Is there linguistic evidence that any of the four pre-publication texts were written by the same person?

2) If there is such evidence, is there any evidence that connects any of the post-publication texts to this person?
Methodology

Average text length of the Jack the Ripper corpus: 83 tokens (min. 7, max. 648)

\[
d_J(A, B) = 1 - \frac{|A \cap B|}{|A \cup B|}
\]

Text A = {the cat, cat sat, sat on, on the, the mat}

Text B = {the dog, dog sat, sat on, on the, the mat}

\[d_J(A, B) = 1 - \left(\frac{3}{7}\right) = 0.57\]
Two earliest pre-publication letters

Letters sent to the Central News Agency
The 132 million word 19th century section of the Corpus of Historical American English (COHA);

The 34 million word Corpus of Late Modern English Texts 3 (CLMET3), spanning from 1710 to 1920;

The 19 million word Extended Old Bailey Corpus (EOBC), including the proceedings of the Old Bailey from 1720 to 1913.
[letter back till I] is virtually unique to these two texts
Research questions

1) Is there linguistic evidence that any of the four pre-publication texts were written by the same person?

   There is very solid linguistic evidence that *Dear Boss* and *Saucy Jacky* were written by the same person

2) If there is such evidence, is there any evidence that connects any of the post-publication texts to this person?
I love [NP my work] (Dear Boss)

The police now reckon [NP my work] a practical joke (Midian)

you’ll hear about [NP [NP saucy Jacky] [Gen s] [N work]] (Saucy Jacky)

well well [NP Jacky] [VP’s [NP a very practical joker]] (Midian)

ripping them till [NP I] [VP do [VP get buckled]] (Dear Boss)

The next job [NP I] [VP do] I shall clip (Dear Boss)

[VP do] a bit more work (Dear Boss)

Do as [NP I] [VP do] and the light of glory (Midian)

I keep on hearing [NP the police] have caught me (Dear Boss)

and send to [NP the police officers] (Dear Boss)

[NP The police] now reckon (Midian)

[NP [ADJ Grand] [N work]] the last job was (Dear Boss)

helps me in my [NP [ADJ grand] [N work]] (Midian)

is fit enough I hope [INTJ ha, ha] (Dear Boss)

They say I’m a doctor now [INTJ ha ha] (Dear Boss)

Jacky’s a very practical joker [INTJ ha ha ha] (Midian)

I wasn’t coddling [NP dear old Boss] (Saucy Jacky)

I promise this [NP dear old Boss] (Midian)

thanks for [VP keeping [NP last letter] [PART back] [SUBCL till I got to work]] (Saucy Jacky)

[VP Keep [NP this] [PART back] [SUBCL till three are wiped out]] (Midian)

... [NP saucy Jacky’s work] [ADVP tomorrow] [NP double event] [NP this time] (Saucy Jacky)

[CL I must get [INFCL to work] [ADVP tomorrow] [NP treble event] [NP this time]] (Midian)
Research questions

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There is very solid linguistic evidence that *Dear Boss* and *Saucy Jacky* were written by the same person.

2) If there is such evidence, is there any evidence that connects any of the post-publication texts to this person?

There is some evidence that *Moab and Midian* was also written by this same person.
Conclusions

New evidence for the Jack the Ripper case. Historians should evaluate the implications.

“This communication [Moab and Midian], if correctly attributed to the same source as the others [Dear Boss and Saucy Jacky], certainly tends to detract from the apparent veracity of its predecessors”
(Evans & Skinner 2001: 38)

The question is not

‘who was Jack the Ripper?’

but

‘who created Jack the Ripper?’
Who wrote the Jack the Ripper letters?
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You can download the Jack the Ripper corpus, these slides, and find a link to the article on my website