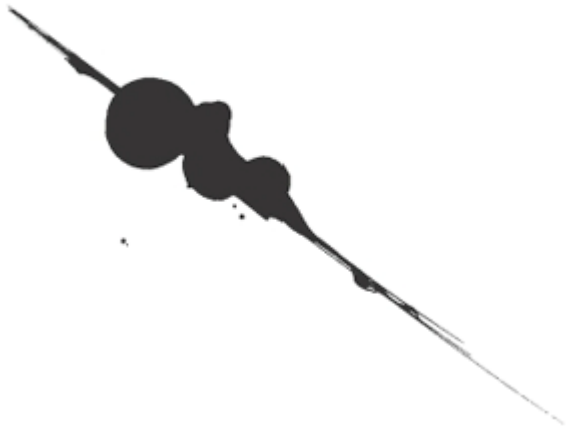


The Victorian Gender From Hell

Victorian Gender Roles in Alan Moore's *From Hell*



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INTRODUCTION

Ever since they happened, the Jack the Ripper murders inspired many to pen the story down or to capture the brutality of the killings on paintings. Although a lot of pieces of art were made, there is still one way of storytelling that includes both pictures and written text, the potential of which the majority failed to recognize: the graphic novel. However, Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell saw the untapped potential/opportunity in this medium, together creating *From Hell*, an epic and award-winning retelling of the murders, based on Stephen Knight's, former Ripperologist, *Jack the Ripper: The Final Solution*. Unlike other retellings of this notorious murder case this adaptation of the story stands out with its realistic depiction of the Victorian gender roles, showing the Victorian women's lack of agency and the dominating male hegemony of the age, while challenging the general presentation of the Ripper murders. In the following parts, I will detail what the medium of comics is, elaborate on the Victorian gender norms, and close the essay with my close reading analysis of *From Hell*.

The first recorded narratives from the prehistory of mankind, long before the existence of the written word, invariably relied on a sequence of pictures. From the cave paintings of the Stone Age to the painted amphorae of the Greeks, from the Egyptian wall paintings to medieval tapestries, humanity embraced various forms of pictorial depiction to formulate stories that would be preserved for centuries. Written language, and later on the printing press did not render visual storytelling insubstantial, instead, many forms were developed that capitalized on the interplay of written texts and images, like illuminated manuscripts from the medieval period, William Blake's illustrated poems or e.e. cummings' picture poems.

The reverse effect is also true: some painters, like William Hogarth, produced paintings that must be viewed together in a certain order so that the observer could get the story painted upon the canvases, hence reintroducing the idea of narrative sequentiality in visual arts. In the mid-19th century, however, something else happened: Rodolphe Töppfer laid the foundations of a new medium, that of comics. Töppfer wrote satiric stories accompanied by pictures and captions. Although Töppfer himself did not consider this as an individual art form, only a mere hobby, he could not have imagined how big of a thing his hobby would grow into. (McCloud, 17) The illustrated storytelling, however, did not spread without criticism. "William Wordsworth penned a sonnet, *Illustrated Books and Newspapers*," that inveigled against "this vile abuse of pictured page." (Heer, vii)

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Fast-forwarding to the early 20th century, Frans Masereel began his career as a famous woodcut artist. (Masereel, v-ix) The art form, being part of German expressionism, is rather conservative and was used by artists to express angst and frustration. (Willet, 111-134) One of Masereel's most famous works is *Passionate Journey* (in French: *Mon livre d'heures*), a captionless prints, that depicts the story of an everyman, an almost Hardian character, who tries to find love in the city, going so far as to be rejected by a prostitute. By the end, the everyman returns to the forest, to nature, embracing it only to die in the end.

The works of Masereel, although praised for their innovative techniques, were and still are seldom recognized as comics. It was not until much later that the new art form was deemed worthy to be properly defined. (McCloud, 19) While Will Eisner set the basics with the broader understanding of comics as "sequential art", Scott McCloud expands on this and introduces the idea of "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence". (McCloud, 9)

In his book *Comics and Sequential Art*, Eisner elaborates on how the comic book is a part of literature and how it revolutionizes it: "The comic book format presents a montage of both word and image. [...] The regimens of art (e.g. perspective, symmetry, brush stroke) and the regimens of literature (e.g. grammar, plot, syntax) become superimposed upon each other. The reading of the comic book is an act of both aesthetic perception and intellectual pursuit."(8) While the combination of pictures and words is what makes comics what they are, it is important to note that sometimes these elements can exist independently within a comic book, inventing new ways of communicating the story. This way, it can provide mood, a narrative bridge, or an implication of sound. The lettering, for example, can support a story element, or create an effect of terror, and violence. Moreover, images can stand on their own without words, therefore having the audience immerse themselves within the story, requiring them to "fill in the blanks" of the narrative, therefore the reader is required to exercise both visual and verbal interpretive skills. (10-24)

It is also important to clarify the difference between comics and graphic novels. The term graphic novel was first coined by Richard Kyle in the mid-70s, (Gravett, 8) however, it was the works of Art Spiegelman's *Maus I*, Frank Miller's *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, and Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons's *Watchmen*, the "Big Three" (Sabin, 87) that made the term more widespread. The evolution of this term resulted in a differentiation within the comics medium. However, the beginnings of this term, after its public acceptance, were not without backlash. As Annalisa Di Liddo contends, "many publishers took advantage of the propitious moment by seizing the opportunity to reprint low-quality works, or simply to repackage older

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series into book editions with restyled covers in order to sell them as representatives of the brand-new comics sensation. This is why Art Spiegelman, for example, was so sceptical of the term.” (16) Spiegelman’s reaction is understandable, considering that the term graphic novel was supposed to give the medium of comics validity within the literary medium. Famous comic book artist Eddie Campbell also issued an opinion in the discourse: “Graphic novel. It’s a misnomer, of course, but then so is ‘comic book.’ It has been lately discarded in some circles, but it will be a thing, like the sales receipt for a shirt, that you throw out and then find you’re going to need.” (120)

While the term graphic novel tried to solidify and enhance the role of the medium within the literary pantheon, at the same time it gained a secondary role in classifying the larger works. Roger Sabin, in his essay on *Adult Comics* (1993), classifies three types of graphic novels depending on the production, publishing, and the narrative motifs these graphic novels share. The first type comes out as a single book, produced in the same way as prose novels. The second type, rather different, is the one that is published in serial form, in instalments, that later results in being published in a book format (e.g. Neil Gaiman, Mike Dringenberg, and Sam Kieth’s *The Sandman*; Art Spiegelman’s *Maus*; Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell’s *From Hell*, etc.). The third type is similar in publication to type two but its self-standing narrative structure allows it to go on forever (e.g. Alan Moore and Kevin O’Neill’s *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* or Alan Moore and David Lloyd’s *V for Vendetta*, etc.).

According to the previously established classifications by Sabin, it is appropriate to refer to most of Alan Moore’s works as graphic novels. Most of his works like *Promethea* or *From Hell* match the characteristics of thematic unity, large structure, cohesiveness, and novel-like length. Moore’s secret lies in the fact that he largely focuses on the writing aspect of the production. That is why he can be called a literary writer who refers to, and plays with, the tradition of prose literature. (Di Liddo, 21-2) In order to understand why Moore is one of the few who revolutionized the field of comics, it is important to understand Moore’s views on comic book writing.

Moore achieved an immense reputation throughout his comics career, which earned him a place in the pantheon of comics industry. He is described by the British Council as “the grand elder statesmen” of comics and “one of the indispensable pioneers of the modern comic and graphic” storytelling. (Ayres, 2) General reader publications’ headlines include “How Alan Moore Transformed the Way I Saw Comics (Berlatsky, 2016), “Legendary Comics Writer” (*Wired*, 2009), and “Our Greatest Graphic Novelist”. Moreover, Moore’s comics have become

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significant to comics scholars, being one of the most cited comics creators in databases. (Beaty and Woo, 9) But what makes Moore special?

In his essay *Writing for Comics Volume 1*, Moore elaborates on different facets and layers of writing when it comes to this medium. He states that the medium itself, in general, struggles to develop stories that bear some significance, while failing to create relevant stories that would stand the test of time. Rather than focusing on social and environmental issues, such as pollution, race, or class problems, Moore implies that the idea should be grounded, connected to our everyday experiences, and teach us something meaningful. (2) Alan Moore, in a 1997 interview about the work in question of this paper, said the following: "With *From Hell*, the main idea was that of murder, any murder. It had occurred to me that murder is a human event at the absolute extreme of the human experience." (Moore and Campbell, *From this interview*, it can be said that Moore's initial intention was to delve deep into the human psyche and present us with an animalistic event done by a human.

Later on, he writes about how the characters should be built. There he details that it was Stan Lee who introduced a new approach to characterization by the use of two-dimensional characters. These characters could be summed up in 15 words. And while in the 60s (when Lee introduced this) it was enough, the majority of the medium stuck at this level and has barely evolved ever since. Moore advocates for a more thorough approach, encouraging comic writers to establish a full background for their characters, to attempt to unlock the mysteries of their past by means of a flashback or something else entirely. (20) During his time as a comic book writer (Moore generally defined himself specifically as a comics writer), he was known for his extensive scripts, detailing not only the dispositions of the panels, characters or objects but also the little minutiae of each and everything. In *The From Hell Companion*, Eddie Campbell details their elaborate work. He writes that Moore's script of the prologue, "this 2000-word opener, mostly describing the intimate details of a rotting seagull, plunged me [Campbell] head first into the horrors of *FROM HELL*". (9)

From Hell is a historical fiction that takes the reader on the path of a character who is shrouded in blood and mystery, even now: Jack the Ripper. This puzzling period of London's history inspired many to uncover the truth behind the five murdered Whitechapel women. Numerous accounts were written that allegedly reveal the truth about the murderer's identity. One such account is Stephen Knight's *Jack the Ripper: The Final Solution*. At the time of its publication, the Ripperologist community believed it to be valid, but later on it was discredited as a mere work of fiction due to questionable intel and sources it used.

VICTORIAN GENDER ROLES

Dear Boss,

"I keep on hearing the police have caught me but they wont fix me just yet. I have laughed when they look so clever and talk about being on the right track. [...] 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. [...] You will soon hear of me with my funny little games. [...] The next job I do I shall clip the ladys ears off and send to the police officers just for jolly wouldn't you. Keep this letter back till I do a bit more work, then give it out straight. [...]"

*Good Luck. Yours truly
Jack the Ripper"*

("Dear Boss" letter, 25th September 1888)

Although the Victorian era is known for industrialization, scientific discoveries, and the United Kingdom's expansion into an empire, some of its darkest history is buried deep within the stones of Whitechapel and letters such as these that were written in 1888, the year of the Jack the Ripper murders. This murder case is one of the most well-known murder cases in history where the perpetrator managed to escape justice, leaving behind not only smoke and mirrors but a changing society as well. This crude and bloody chapter of London's history was of great interest and fascination at its time as it is today still. Countless writers, investigators, and amateur sleuths tried to uncover the secret that would slash this Gordian knot of the Ripper's mystery. Centuries later, Ripperologists have been trying to connect the dots left behind by this mysterious killer without any breakthrough.

This raises an interesting question, which, however, must be asked in order to understand how Victorian society worked. Why were the people of London so interested in this particular murder case when violence, theft, and murder were everyday occurrences in London? The answer to this question lies in sensationalism.

Victorian journalism was sensational at its core. The British press' repertoire was notorious for its way of presenting news connected to vulgarity, the grotesque, and bloodshed. (Burnham, 79-80) Journalists, aiming to sell more papers, considered the public as nothing else than a hungry beast whose appetite they had to sate with news of theft, disaster, scandal, and

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murder. This shift in the quality of journalism marked the end of tender, respectful journalism that lasted until the 1880s; and so journalistic barbarism became the dominant mode of the press. (Jones, 136) It must be mentioned that since the goal was to generate great readership, the credibility of the press could be questioned.

The Oxford Learner's Dictionary defines the word sensationalism as "a way of getting people's interest by using words that are intended to shock the audience or by presenting facts and events as worse as or more shocking than they really are." Indeed, New Journalism was equated with this. (Curtis, 66) The sensationalizing of crime, deviance, and deformities became a core part of Victorian journalism but it also lived on in popular culture as well. However, this new type of journalism was not a unique idea; therefore, competition on the field was not uncommon.

The papers realized that in order to generate a bigger readership they must be separated from the mainstream competition. This desire to be unique in the field of journalism led to murders on the front pages with extra spaces and every line filled with mystery and gore, showing graphic accounts of brutal murder cases. Prime examples of such occurrences are the autopsy reports that summarized or even paraphrased the police inquests. It must be noted, however, that these autopsy reports did not include any photographs of the victim, so the journalists had to be as graphic in their depiction as possible. (Curtis, 68-9) Such autopsy reports were the ones about the gruesome murders of the Ripper.

The Whitechapel murders happened between 1888 and 1891. The official reports contain accounts connected to eleven murders in total that happened in this period. However, experts are divided on the fact whether one perpetrator, due to the evidence suggesting otherwise, committed all these cases. The evidence showcasing the methods of the killings suggest that there had to be several different killers, the exception being the case of five victims. Almost all of the victims were prostitutes of London's East End, who lived in the impoverished regions of Whitechapel, trading their womanhood for a few scraps, moving from one lodging house to another during the hour of the owl. These five victims were Mary Ann Nichols, Annie Chapman, Elizabeth Stride, Cathrine Eddowes, and Mary Jane Kelly. All of these women were in their forties with the exception being Mary Jane Kelly.

The throats of the women were slashed, their bodies mutilated, removing organs, such as kidneys, breasts and uterus. Due to the animalistic and mysterious nature of these killings, some Ripperologists argued that there must have been some ritualistic intention on the killer's

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part, associating the case with the occult. At the time of the murders, however, the police reached the conclusion that the killer must have been an expert, for the organs were removed with astonishing precision. (Marriott, 26-9) This led the Metropolitan Police and the public to believe the killer to be either a butcher or a doctor, however, the latter suggestion was quickly set aside. (Cook, 221)

Amidst the investigation, the press began to follow the events, keeping the public's attention on the case, "engendering something akin to social or moral panic." This moral panic further enflamed the discontent and tension between different groups of people and social classes within London. Without a visible culprit for the people to revile, however, the press and the public had to rely on metaphors such as "fiend", "monster", and "devil". This also meant that people had to imagine the figure behind the metaphors, sometimes associating the killer with a Jewish man, a Russian immigrant, or a man of the upper-class. (Curtis, 15-6) Ordinary people externalized their anxieties and anger into these serial murders. These anxieties surfaced due to the advancing changes of the Victorian era that questioned the era's domestic and gender ideology.

The value of family and the idea of the ideal marriage was at the center of Victorian society, however, by the end of the 18th century, this was challenged which caused a change in gender politics. (Griffin, 39) The two main events that shaped Victorian gender politics were the American War of Independence and the French Revolution, although the former had more immediate effects. The horror with which Britain viewed this conflict "was frequently expressed through images of an unnatural family affair or domestic strife," and the reassertion of the household harmony therefore became a pressing cultural preoccupation. As an answer, the reassertion of clear distinctions between the sexes that justified female submission were of vital importance of the British society. The categories of gender in the 18th century were "imagined as occasionally mutable, potentially unfixed, and even as a matter of choice." This mentality ended in the wake of the war, rendering the former limitations of gender boundaries unacceptable. (Wahrman, 40-1) This gender panic brought about the reformation of manners after the war, enforcing stricter social and moral codes. (Innes, 57-118) The French Revolution only enflamed these anxieties which resulted in the abandonment of politeness and sensibility "in favour of new discourses that emphasised "character" rather than "refinement" as the crucial component of respectable manliness." (Carter, 213-15; Tosh, 61-82, 83-102)

Another crucial element in changing British gender roles was the evangelic movement of the late 18th century.

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This religious movement wanted to establish a moral and virtuous society and, therefore promoted new domestic practices. For the evangelicals, there were two spheres of social life: the public sphere of work and politics and the private sphere of home. The former is full of greed, temptation, and vice, whereas the latter stands as a refuge from the dangers of the public sphere. In the light of this new domestic thinking, it was established that men were better suited to the public sphere, for they can withstand the temptations it offers. Meanwhile, women were left to the sphere of home with their sole purpose being the creation of an environment in which the family religion could prosper. (Davidoff, 321-357) The Industrial Revolution just strengthened this process, increasing the cultural value that was attached to home, making it one of the few things in the everyday life of middle-class people that made working life tolerable. (Tosh, 6, 31; Mintz, 67) Although the promise of refuge from the evils of the public sphere seemed promising, even homes themselves were potential victims of domestic strife.

In Victorian ideology, the comfort of home that can shield individuals from the harms of the public sphere could only be achieved by the unity of husband and wife. The only requirement for this unity was the harmony of thoughts and feelings. John Stuart Mill argues that marriage should be complementary based. According to Mill, the ideal marriage is built upon a diversity of complementary characters who help each other to become better, to achieve self-fulfilment. (Mendus, 185) Moreover, even though it was unity, it does not mean that it was a unity of equals. The 19th century domestic ideology of the Victorian era was centered on the simple fact that the man was the self-proclaimed protector of marital unity. Indeed, marriage was supposed to be a unity but it was a unity under the husband's will. If the woman was allowed to assert her own will, the idea of this marriage of unity would be jeopardized, resulting in the marriage failing. Although the will of the wife had to be aligned with the will of the husband, disagreements were allowed. They had to agree to disagree. Ultimately, the decision-making was the husband's privilege, and she had to accept those without second thoughts and complaints. (Davidoff, 117) But this was not the only way in which women were trapped in this evangelistic ideal of marriage. Women were expected to align their lives to their husbands, for pursuing their own goals and desires was seen as acts of selfishness and unwomanly behaviour. (Griffin, 47) A married woman was expected to pursue only the things that could make the life of her husband easy and happy, making their sole purpose to achieve her husband's full happiness, while neglecting her own in the process. This self-sacrifice on the women's part is one of the main elements of Victorian gender relations.

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Now that I established what the mainstream Victorian domestic ideology was, it is important to note that this drew a sharp line between those in marital unity and those outside the institution of marriage. Opposed to married women, unmarried women were allowed to own property, make contracts, or have the right of custody over their children if they were unmarried mothers. (Griffin, 50) Besides these rights that the unmarried women had, they could also apply for jobs, allowing them to make a living on their own. Of course, unmarried women posed a threat to the Victorian domestic ideology, yet it must not go unnoticed that unmarried women were just a minority in the grand scheme of society.

Although it seemed that this domestic ideology could work, and male authority would remain unchanged, during the 1870s and 1880s new discourses emerged connected to venereal diseases, juvenile prostitution, and the Jack the Ripper murders. These cases led to a change in public thinking, implying that male sexuality now posed a threat to women. People associated these problems with the men of the governing class, identifying upper-class male sexuality as the root of these problems.

Sometime before these problems emerged, the Contagious Diseases Acts or (CD Acts) were introduced (1864). The purpose behind these acts was to prevent army soldiers from contracting any type of sexually transmitted diseases. The Acts allowed police officers to arrest any woman suspected of prostitution. The suspects had to undergo physical examinations and if they were deemed infected, they would be confined in lock hospitals until such time they recovered from their disease or finished their sentence. (Holton, 149-151) The catch behind the Acts was that there was no clear definition of what constitutes a prostitute, therefore police harassment and overreach were everyday occurrences. The mentioned suspects were none other than women of the middle class who lived near military bases. (Walkowitz, 1) The introduction of the Acts did not go without social discontent. Josephine Butler and her supporters regarded the Acts as the acts of ““sadistic aristocratic villains who conspired to control women through state sanction and monopoly’.” (Walkowitz, 246-7) “This claim that the male political elite used their power to promote the sexual exploitation of working-class women posed a serious threat to the legitimacy of the political elite.” (Griffin, 101) Interestingly enough, the debates concerning the Acts did not include people who paid prostitutes for sex, meaning that the members of the Parliament did not consider male sexuality as part of the problem. The leadership believed that men found sexual satisfaction within the marital bounds, but this did not include the soldiers who sought satisfaction in the arms of prostitutes. (Griffin, 101)

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In 1885, following the events of the Acts, rumours about aristocrats preying on working-class girls began to spread. (Taylor, 26-9) The articles of *Pall Mall Gazette*, edited by W. T. Stead, only reinforced these rumours, which resulted in the extension of police authority, which allowed them to prosecute brothel owners and to outlaw homosexual acts by men. Although the CD Acts aimed at working-class male sexuality, in the end, it only resulted in the scrutiny of the governing classes. Numerous scandals regarding upper-class sexuality came to light, ranging from homosexual activities to sex scandals within the ranks of the parliamentary elite. (Cocks, 135-54) Even the murder of the five women by Jack the Ripper included some of the most interesting accusations, namely that the killer must have been a gentleman. (Walkowitz, 126)

British gender roles drastically changed by the end of the 18th century. Due to the industrial revolution London society transformed via which it changed the way British people thought about gender roles. The evangelic movement's discourse, which introduced the separate spheres, confined women to the home, robbing them of any agency, with the exception being unmarried women. This female subjugation transformed women into "angels in the houses" with their sole purpose being their husbands' happiness and ensuring the household harmony. However, the 19th century domestic and gender ideology was challenged by a series of scandals, social problems, and murders, which not only questioned the leading role of the upper-class but also planted the seeds of doubt in society about masculinity. All this was possible due to the Jack the Ripper murders and the CD Acts, which ultimately presented male sexuality as a threat to women. In the following chapter, I shall elaborate on how Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell's *From Hell* portrays this, placing the graphic novel at the intersection of this historical context in the close reading analysis. For the analysis, I shall use *From Hell: the Master Edition*, which is an updated edition of the original in the sense that unlike the original, which was black and white, it is the coloured version.

CLOSE READING ANALYSIS



Fig. 1. "Chapter 5: The Nemesis of Neglect" (Campbell)

"Your destiny's inscribed upon the streets wherein you grew; upon the horse you ride each day, you CANNOT change your mind! Our story's WRITTEN, Netley. Inked in blood long dry... engraved in stone."

- Dr. William Whitney Gull -

/From Hell, Chapter Four pp. 38-39./

The year is 1888 and London's East End is teeming with violence, scheming, and death. The 19th century is closing in on London's people. Something is shifting. The end of an era and the beginning of another is nigh and the dawn of the 20th century demands a sacrifice.

Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell's *From Hell* takes the reader back to the years during which the Whitechapel murders took place. We follow in the footsteps of Sir William Whitney Gull, Physician-in-Ordinary to Queen Victoria herself, who leaves a trail of blood in his wake on his quest to reinforce the power of the patriarchy with the blood of those who stand to threaten the royal house of Britain. These individuals are five Whitechapel prostitutes (Polly, Mary, "Dark" Annie, Liz, and Kate) who decide to blackmail the Crown with an illegitimate babe whose very existence could shake the monarchy to the core. As Gull murders these women, we follow Inspector Frederick Abberline as he tries to uncover the killer's identity but, in the end, finds himself amidst a shrouded conspiracy of the Freemasons.

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In his historical fiction of *From Hell* Moore presents us with the harsh realities of Victorian London society where women were not only objects of desire but also victims of violence. The novel exposes the oppression faced by women amidst the hypocrisy of 19th century Victorian domestic and gender ideologies. (Brigley-Thompson, 78) Moore uses the Jack the Ripper murders, and the idea of murder in general, to represent the dominant patriarchal force that spans across history, while the Ripper's victims stand for the ever-present oppressed female victims of the social system itself. A battle ensues within London that has been going on for hundreds of years between the Sun and the Moon, between the Romans and Boudicea... between man and woman. This battle of binaries is a returning theme in *From Hell*.

Women *From Hell*

Throughout *From Hell*, the reader encounters women from all social classes of London. The first time a woman appears is in the Prologue sequence, which takes place in 1923, thirty-five years after Jack the Ripper, when Abberline and Lees see a prostitute with one of her clients on the shoreline. When the couple gets seen, Abberline bursts out in anger, making the reader wonder what made him that angry at such a woman. (see Fig. 2.) From this onward the tone of



Fig. 2. Prologue: the old men on the shore (Campbell)

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the graphic novel is set. The grey colours and darker shades serve as the backbone of the graphic novel, resulting in the story being more grounded and realistic.

The next woman we meet with is Annie Crook in Chapter 1, one of the Ripper's original victims according to Stephen Knight's *Final Solution* and to *From Hell*. She is an ordinary middle-class girl who works in a sweetshop when Prince Albert (or Eddie) sets his eyes on her. The two become better acquainted and soon fall in love. This is a good instance of the rumors, which were alive at the time of the murders, namely, that aristocrats were preying on working-class girls. Although their relationship is short-lived since Queen Victoria got news of it, it introduces the initial theme of *From Hell*, which is about lonely women in a neglectful society. Ultimately, she's taken away and gets locked away in a lock house where Doctor Gull eventually drives her mad. This madness is encountered when Walter Sickert sees the mad Anne



Fig. 3. Chapter 3: "The Queen said, „Off with her head!" (Campbell)

on the street, muttering and later shouting about Alice, the illegitimate daughter, and the Queen who wishes for her demise. By showing only the silhouettes of the two characters Campbell manages to emphasize the not only physical but also the psychological trauma Annie was put through and the hopelessness of not only her but also the other women's situation who were condemned to madhouses under false pretences.

In Chapter 2, we meet with the wife of Gull, Susan. Even though she is not an active participant in the story, much of the ideal Victorian woman shines through her character. Whenever she appears on the panels of Chapter 2, which is from Gull's point of view, she usually appears small. (see Fig. 4) Her innocence is visible in the depiction of their first wedding night. Although much of the wedding night is invisible to the reader, we can still “hear” the noises, and the shrieks Mrs. Gull gives out: “Oh NO! William, it’s too BIG! William, stop it,

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Fig. 4. Susan the "Angel in the House" (Campbell)

you're hurting me! Take it out! Take it OUT!" (2, 12). This shows the true innocence the Victorian women lived in. For upper- and middle-class women being innocent meant the purity of both body and mind, namely the absence of the knowledge of sex. This meant that a truly innocent woman did not know anything about the love-making part of consummation and neither about the biological part of the process. (Mendus, 7) From this, it can be deduced that any sexual knowledge was the privilege of men, therefore they held the power, further enforcing the patriarchy and the subjection of women. However, in the graphic novel, this enforcement goes beyond that of psychological control, becoming a violent and forceful subjugation. Lacking the knowledge of what comes with the wedding night, Victorian women's first experience of intimacy was a forceful encounter, where male sexuality appeared as a menacing and alien thing. Following this, in the graphic novel, in the case of the "ideal Victorian marriage" of Susan, intimacy is depicted as a necessarily transgressive human experience.

As the story progresses, in Chapter 6, *From Hell* introduces Abberline's wife. She has little part to play in the story, which tells much about her nature. The few times she appears on panels it is with little significance. When Abberline arrives home after he is told to investigate the first murder in Whitechapel, Emma, his wife, obediently opens the door for him before he enters, as if she was awaiting his return. During dinner, an awkward silence hangs over the room, as if the two are emotionally distant. Emma appears to be shy, a wife who knows her place. When Abberline tells her about his predicament, that he has to go back to Whitechapel, she does not formulate her own opinions on the topic, only asks one question, enabling her husband to talk. (See Fig. 5) This shows what was expected of Victorian women: to support

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their husbands no matter what, to formulate their own opinion only when it aligns with that of their husbands, to keep the harmony of the house. Emma's character resembles that of Marie Jane Kelly's in terms of looks. (see Fig. 6) An aspect of this resemblance means that even in middle-class women there is a want, a desire for freedom, yet for all this desire, they can not escape the domestic and gender conventions the patriarchy set them into.



Fig. 5. Chapter 6: Victorian idyll (Campbell)



Fig. 6. The "two Emmas" (Campbell)

Another important female character is Queen Victoria herself. She does not appear very frequently on the panels of the novel, yet her presence can be felt throughout, for, according to the *Final Solution* and *From Hell*, she was the one who permitted the murders and allowed Gull to commit his atrocities. Most of the time, she is shown as a stern, motionless, and powerful woman, embodying the monarchy itself. (Miettinen, 91) Although she is a woman and presents

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a source of power, in truth, she is nothing more than an enabler of the patriarchy. This can be said because she lacks the female seductive power that Gull fears in the case of prostitutes.

Since the story revolves around the murder of the five prostitutes (Marie Jane Kelly, Polly Nichols, Cathrine Eddowes, Elizabeth Stride, and Annie Chapman), their significance must not be overlooked. Although Marie Jane Kelly is introduced at the beginning of the novel, we meet the ring of prostitutes in Chapter 3. These women stand in stark contrast with the women of the upper classes. Despite the fact that they are not confined indoors, and that they frequent pubs, they too are like those other upper-class women: (ab)used, ignored, and threatened. As opposed to the previously mentioned women, however, Marie Jane Kelly is the only woman who openly fights with a man, that being Joe Barnett. This touch with the public sphere is shown in how the prostitutes engage in temptations like drinking and sex.

The interwoven themes of alcoholism and promiscuity are present throughout the novel. The former is commonly shown in the case of the five prostitutes. Gull elaborates on the Dionysiac mystic culture of the Freemason Nicholas Hawksmoor and poisons his victims with grapes. Since Gull takes the Freemason ideology as his base for the strengthening of the patriarchy, these items and namedrops connected to Dionysus also connect to the alcohol. Hence, the alcoholism of the prostitutes can be seen as another indirect method of the enforcement of the patriarchy.

The other activity we can see the prostitutes engage in is sex. The only scenes where the reader might encounter open promiscuous activities are all connected to the prostitutes. The previously mentioned women, namely Emma, Gull's wife, and Queen Victoria, never engage in open and visible sexual acts. "The upper-class women come to represent the opposite of the prostitutes in every way, as the text depicts them as mostly static, silent, and sterile, concealed indoors." (Miettinen, 91) These women are suppressed into domestic roles. They find no joy in sex and they do not appear as sexually desirable, remaining only cold and rigid, whereas their contrasts, the prostitutes, frequently engage in sex for selfish reasons as well. Moreover, although unharmed, even upper- and middle-class women too are victims of male hegemony, which is made physically manifest in the murder of the women of Whitechapel. (Miettinen, 91)

The visual portrayal of the prostitutes is unique in this graphic novel, which makes *From Hell* stand out from all other Jack the Ripper fiction. Instead of presenting the victims of the Ripper as beautiful female creatures, Moore and Campbell decided to depict them as they probably really were in real life: disease-ridden and repulsive. In the Appendix, Moore clarifies

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that these “were ordinary women, who, despite their deprived and unhealthy situation, were trying to look attractive for the only job that society had seen fit to offer them.” (Appendix 1, 8) It is an important detail that in terms of looks the prostitutes are barely distinguishable from each other. Their facial features, their details are not clearly defined, in many cases; they are only identifiable due to their headpieces or clothing. (see Fig. 7.) Although, even these are unreliable at times because on the shadowy streets or in the barely lit rooms women seem to be very similar to each other. This loss of individuality, which eventually happens due to Gull's actions, is enhanced via this artistic depiction. (Di Liddo, 81)



Fig. 7. Chapter 3: Blackmail or Mrs Barnett

Men *From Hell*

Throughout the graphic novel, we can see men from all social classes of London but there are three important male characters in *From Hell* that shape the story: Prince Albert, Frederick Abberline, and William Gull.

In Chapter 1, the reader is presented with Prince Albert. He is accompanied by his tutor and friend, Walter Sickert. Albert embodies the hypocrisy that surrounds the aristocracy in the late 19th century. Against his friend's better judgment, Albert gets entangled with Annie Crook, the sweetshop girl, and eventually fathers a daughter to her. To topple all this, he even marries her in secret. The scandalousness of his character is even more when *From Hell* exposes the supposed homosexual relationships Prince Albert had. In Chapter 8, although the scene is fictional, as pointed out in the Appendix, Moore based Prince Albert's relationships on various known facts. Another case of such a scandal is in Chapter 13 when Abberline and other

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members of the police spy on a brothel for suspected homosexual activity. This is another instance of the hypocrisy and scandals connected to the British aristocracy of the time, which the press tried to uncover. The police know that Prince Albert frequents the place, yet they remain silent about it and do not apprehend him. This shows how the Crown tried to create the perfect family image in accordance with the Victorian domestic ideology. It must be mentioned that Prince Albert's storyline is a work of fiction but it is heavily based on factual elements that suggest Prince Albert's bisexuality.

Frederick Abberline is one of the male protagonists of the story. In the novel, he is the one who represents the middle-class male. At the start of the story, the reader would expect that it is him that they will follow throughout the plot but, in truth, he is also another victim of the Ripper. Although his marriage is the ideal Victorian marriage, he does not find comfort in it. The cold and distant state of this marriage is visible in Chapter 8 when Emma is so happy that Abberline said her name in his sleep. But in truth, he means someone else by "Emma". He finds comfort with someone else, outside the marital bounds, this being Mary Kelly under the pseudonym "Emma". Even though her identity is never truly revealed, Abberline knows exactly that she is a prostitute. This is another element showing the hypocrisy behind the domestic ideology of the Victorian era, for men were originally supposed to find comfort, both spiritually and sexually, in the domestic sphere with their married partner. He even goes as far as to be willing to have intercourse with Mary Kelly ("I dunno. I thought... well, I dunno what I thought. I thought we could p'raps, y'know, find a room somewhere nice." (9, 45). Throughout the novel, Abberline is one of the few people who tolerates prostitutes. This, however, shifts by the end of the novel after the murder of Mary Kelly. Thinking he was abandoned, his character changes and when he encounters another prostitute on the streets of London, he bursts out in anger, using phrases like "this dirty little scrubber" or "filthy fuckin' whore", eventually achieving the arrest of said prostitute.

The final and most important male character is that of Dr. William Gull. His character is one of the few most complex ones in the novel. He moves the narrative forward with his unquenchable desire to reassert male dominance over femininity. In Chapter 2, we get a deeper insight into his psyche and his view of women. Even in his childhood, he wanted to have a greater purpose than that of an ordinary man ("Though I should have a task most difficult, most necessary and severe, I should not care if none save I did hear of my achievement" (2, 3). His murderous persona is foreshadowed when he butchers a rat, staring at its innards and its dripping blood as if he were a priest.

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His misogyny surfaces in Chapter 2 as well when he is with his wife on their wedding night. Although the whole act is happening in darkness, we can still hear the sounds the two make during it. Gull's attitude is forceful. Neglecting his shouting wife, he continues the act, making it an act of rape. His forceful behaviour is also shown before the wedding night, when Gull and his close friend, Hinton, are at the insane asylum where Gull works. There, even though he addresses the poor disease stricken women of the institute as "my beauty", he forcibly enters the vagina of the mad patient with his hand. (see Fig. 8.) This shows not only his lack of empathy towards women but his misogyny buried deep within. This forcefulness only shows his violence buried deep within, which later manifests at night, as he changes into a fiend, a monster... a butcher.



Fig. 8. Chapter 2: The madhouse (Campbell)

Misogyny unleashed and love in blood

Throughout the story, Gull experiences several visions that not only shape his character arc but they also influence the killings as well. These visions slowly take over his mind as the story progresses. At first, even the reader is not entirely aware of the visions' presence. In

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Chapter 5, when Gull mutilates Polly's body, he hallucinates that Polly's body is full of light. (see Fig. 9.) The reader, in Chapter 5, is not yet a full participant in what Gull experiences and only sees that something is glowing but has no clear view of it. (Miettinen, 95) Whereas, in Chapter 8, the reader can see Gull's visions in their entirety, namely a glimpse of the future: a giant skyscraper. This drastic change is also visible in the change of the panels' size. In Chapter 5, it takes several panels to illustrate Gull's visions whereas in Chapter 8, the vision scene takes an entire page up and only one panel, making the visions appear more focused and concrete. Via Gull's visions the interpretation of murders becomes transcendental, making the prostitutes the embodiments of the diseased sexuality of 19th century women. (Gilman, 264) This makes Gull's actions appear as attempts at curing a corrupt society, wiping it clean of the Whitechapel women, the causes of the rot inside society, according to Gull. With the murders, he seeks to reassert male hegemony.



Fig. 9. Chapter 5: "She was full of light." (Campbell)

The Victorian male hegemony deemed any sexual acts, done by women, outside the marital bounds as deviant. (Hurley, 72) Therefore the sexual availability of the prostitutes and their lost innocence makes them not only deviants but also threats to the system of male hegemony. (Walkowitz, 183) In Gull's interpretation, the female threat, therefore, must be destroyed or sacrificed to preserve this system. This ritualistic behaviour is most visible when Gull mutilates the body of Mary Kelly. He tears out and burns her heart to ashes, only for the winds to take it away. This represents the ritualistic side of serial killings. However, there is also a sexual aspect to this.

According to Klaus Theweleit, when a murder occurs, there are two distinct desires within the murderer, the desire for proximity and distance. The penetration of the victim with

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the weapon satisfies these needs, creating an amorous relationship between the killer and victim which is both abstract and dehumanizing. Yet, in the end, this love destroys the female body. (196) This is most visible in Gull's character. Throughout the story, we can see him as the embodiment of the Victorian male hegemony. His only "normal" sexual encounter is with his wife. Other than that we see nothing of the sort from him. This is why Gull's character can represent the repressed sexual desires of the Victorian male that resurface like a raging beast on the women of Whitechapel. During the murders, Gull not only slashes the throats of the women but also violates their reproductive organs as well. By penetrating the uterus of the victims, Gull not only destroys their bodies but also takes their agency away.

Phallic dominance



Fig. 10. Chapter 3: Blackmail or Mrs. Barrett

Throughout the *From Hell*, the buildings and the architecture of London play a crucial part in the story. In Chapter 4, Gull and Netley, his accomplice, take a trip through the city, visiting strange and seemingly unconnected places, which eventually mark the locations where the five victims meet their demises.

The architecture of London is important because it supports the argument Gull delivers, almost as if it were a soliloquy, emphasizing the phallic control throughout the city. (Ali, 611) Interestingly enough, these buildings that stand as symbols of phallic control are mostly the churches of Nicholas Hawksmoor. However, these phallic symbols are not only churches but also obelisks as well. From this, the reader can deduce that this phallic control spans throughout history, meaning that it has been the case for centuries, throughout the world.

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These phallic shapes tower over the citizens of London, especially the women of Whitechapel. Every time Hawksmoor's Christchurch appears on the panels, it towers over the prostitutes, expressing how insignificant they are to the system. But not to Gull.

During the trip, Gull dissects the city ("we'll penetrate its metaphors..." (4, 6-9), as if it were a human body, draws on the map with straight lines that eventually form the menacing pentagram, the sign of Gull's devilish plan. There is a parallel between the city and Gull's victims. For Gull, London is a city of mysteries and battles that formed his glorified system of male hegemony. Through the myths and historical facts that Gull tells Netley, the city becomes a real and tangible body, a mystical and allegorical entity. Via these stories and places the city seems to be something that can be understood, something that can be controlled, whereas the prostitutes are unpredictable and wild creatures in Gull's eyes. (Di Liddo, 79)

In the graphic novel, London, especially Whitechapel, is presented as a maze with dark alleyways and dark streets. This sense of space is only made more claustrophobic by the narrow panels. (see Fig. 11.) In the center of this maze is Gull, the monster who skulks in the shadows,



Fig. 11. Chapter 3: Blackmail or Mrs. Barrett (Campbell)

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striking down the prostitutes. But, as with all maze, there is a way out as well, not just a way in. And this is shown in the end of *From Hell*, in the form of a vision.

From Hell makes the “death” of Marie Kelly ambiguous. Before the supposed demise of hers, Marie frequently allowed her “co-workers” to stay at her place to rest. But when Gull strikes in the dark, we do not see clearly the face of the victim, we only perceive her silhouette. In Chapter 14, Gull experiences his final vision, which can be interpreted as a failed ascending because the final panels show, presumably, Marie Kelly in the Irish countryside along with three of her daughters called Anne, Polly, and Liz. In the vision, Marie Kelly seems to see Gull's spirit and banishes it (“And as for you, ye auld divil, I know that ye're there, and ye're not havin' these. Clear off now wit' ye. Clear off back to Hell and leave us BE!” (14, 23) This means that Gull's place is not in the countryside but in the urban landscape, therefore Jack the Ripper/Gull “and his male power is constrained into the urban landscape of London, and the light (and feminine) countryside renders him and his masculine control powerless.” (Mietten, 92)

CONCLUSION

From Hell presents us with an intriguing narrative of the Ripper murders. Its dark and sinister tone helps to show this great mystery for what it really is: murder. While the attempts of other authors to mythicize the killings and seem to immortalize Jack the Ripper, Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell did the exact opposite. Their depiction of the story is grounded, more rooted in reality, even though it is shrouded in the mysteries of the misogynistic science of Gull. As I proved, *From Hell* successfully embraces Victorian domestic and gender ideologies, expanding on these with its intense and deep background information on the different character, such as Prince Albert, Dr. Gull, or the five victims.

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