



## **English History as Jack the Ripper Tells It: Psychogeography in Alan Moore's *From Hell***

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**Abstract:** Psychogeography is a visionary, speculative way of knowing. *From Hell* (2006), I argue, is a work of psychogeography, whereby Alan Moore re-imagines Jack the Ripper in tandem with nineteenth-century London. Moore here portrays the Ripper as a psychogeographer who thinks and speaks in a mystical fashion: as psychogeographer, Gull the Ripper envisions a divine and as such sacrosanct Englishness, but Moore, assuming the Ripper's perspective, parodies and so subverts it. In the Ripper's voice, Moore emphasises that psychogeography is personal rather than universal; Moore needs only to foreground the Ripper's idiosyncrasies as an individual to disassemble the Grand Narrative of English heritage.

**Keywords:** Alan Moore, *From Hell*, Jack the Ripper, Psychogeography, Englishness and Heritage

'Hyper-visual', 'hyper-descriptive'—'graphic', in a word, the graphic novel is a medium to overwhelm the senses (see Di Liddo 2009: 17). Alan Moore's *From Hell* confounds our sense of time, even, in that it conjures up a nineteenth-century London that has the cultural ambience of the eighteenth century. The author in question is wont to include 'visual quotations' (Di Liddo 2009: 450) of eighteenth-century cultural artifacts such as William Hogarth's *The Reward of Cruelty* (see *From Hell*, Chapter Nine). His anti-hero, Jack the Ripper, is also one to flaunt his erudition in matters of the long eighteenth century, from its literati—William Blake, Alexander Pope, and Daniel Defoe—to its architectural ideal, which the works of Nicholas Hawksmoor supposedly exemplify. This foregrounding of the eighteenth

century I shall explain here at the beginning, though Moore's imagining of nineteenth-century London will later become my focus.

In *From Hell*, the murderous savant Jack the Ripper traverses London to discover remnants of the eighteenth century, which, he hopes, will transport him from the nineteenth century to other times in English history. He holds London to be 'a literature of stones, of place-names and associations/where faint echoes answer back from off the distant ruined walls of bloody history' (Moore 2006: Loc 89), such that London time would seem a unified whole projected from deep within the 'slums of Hackney' in the form of a 'prophetic vision' (Moore 2006: Loc 90).<sup>1</sup> For the Ripper, nineteenth-century London preserves within itself the London of all times, an eternal London of sorts; any visionary who travels across time in London may therefore encounter 'Milton's ghost, or the Apostle Paul' (Moore 2006: Loc 91) as William Blake once did. The Ripper—in *From Hell*, a royal surgeon named William Gull—does not roam the streets only to encounter London's ghosts in a Blakean fashion, however, for he has the far greater ambition of forcing these ghosts into conversation. If Gull discovers London while roaming its streets, he does so on his own terms; that is, he projects his patriotic reading of English culture and history onto Londonscape, so that London will become "unified" as far as he can see.

### **Narrative Unity and the Rise of National Consciousness**

What has Gull's delusional reading of time to do with prophecy or history, however? Above all, why should anyone wish to be privy to his delusions? That Moore should associate the formation of a national consciousness (a term I will explain below) with the ravings of a notorious English murderer is already ironical, for such associations would effectively undermine sentimental conceptions of culture such as Gull the Ripper's. Ironic associations of this sort make *From Hell* a mockery of uncritical nationalism—a sentiment which seems to have so overcome Gull that he wants to elide the divides of time for the cultivation of "Englishness", i.e., a conception of culture that would encompass all local and historical memories. Moore's decision to pay tribute to Hogarth in a graphic novel where the Ripper journeys across various space-time continuums in search of "Englishness" seems particularly apt, seeing as it was, in fact, Hogarth who first introduced the graphic narrative as a unified form in the eighteenth century.

Here a brief overview of Hogarth's career would aid us in understanding the Ripper's nationalistic vision of a unified English time. Hogarth's paintings were hailed as revolutionary in the eighteenth century because they 'linked together moments in a dramatic way that allowed an original story to be told in pictures' (Petersen 2011: 46). *A Harlot's Progress*, for example, depicts a 'whole array of seemingly ordinary events' which accentuates the connection between social morals and feminine virtue (Petersen 2011: 45). Isolated episodes of everyday life become related within the frame of the painting, though not yet sequentially

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<sup>1</sup> "Loc" stands for 'location', which is a substitute for 'page' in some Kindle books.

as they would appear in the modern graphic novel. Unity was the ideal towards which Hogarth strove in this and other artistic endeavours, where the ostensibly unrelated became related; this vision of connecting disparate moments within a frame was, furthermore, a blueprint for 'modern sequential graphic narratives' (Petersen 2011: 47) such as Moore's.

Later in the first years of the nineteenth century, Blake became the first to create 'hybrid word-pictures' that unified the visual and the symbolic (Petersen 2011: 56). In *Jerusalem* (1804-1820) for instance, 'Blake shows himself as a miniature scribe writing backward [in the manner of a visionary prophet] on a scroll which unfolds across the lap of the sleeping giant Albion, who represents both England and all humankind' (Petersen 2011: 57). This notion of prophecy implies the continuity of time, which here expands across the lap of a divine figure in whom the English and the rest of humanity are one: time stretches onwards continuously and expensively as though to attest to the union of England and the rest of the world. One could make sense of this patriotic reading of Londonscape with reference to Benedict Anderson, who argues that "nationality, [...] nationness, as well as nationalism, [are] cultural artifacts of a particular kind" for any nationalist who sees the nation as 'an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign' (Anderson 1995: 4, 6). Boundaries—physical or metaphorical, geographical or cultural—give shape to a nation and so render it a conceivable whole, a sovereign entity with a distinct local culture to recommend it. A city as old as London may well possess memories and cultural treasures which converge to form a coherent and unified structure, namely, Heritage (with a capital 'H'), although Gull only calls it "Englishness" in *From Hell*. London seen through Gull's romantic lens rather resembles a frieze wherein time is depicted as continuous, linear, diachronic: here "Englishness" appears to be an enduring greatness unfolding across Londonscape, not unlike the continuous scroll of prophetic revelations across the lap of Albion.

### **English Psychogeography': the Various Definitions of Psychogeography**

To put it simply, Gull sees London as the microcosmic representation of his country, his England, and thus of "Englishness"—the culmination of English history, as it were. He reads Londonscape to trace Englishness, which, he assumes, should unite the London community and thereby define London. This perverse endeavour to read the land for the sole purpose of tracing "Englishness" I will call Gull's psychogeography; yet I should note that Guy Debord originally coined the word "psychogeography" to describe 'the study of precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals' (Debord qtd. in Coverley 2006: 88, 89). Let me rephrase my argument, then: Moore presents to us a new alternate world narrative based upon Gull's affinity with (or emotional investment in) the London land, and in so doing, Moore distorts the original meaning of psychogeography in *From Hell*. In this particular instance, 'psychogeography' describes no more than the patriotic sentiments that London rouses in the Ripper as though to justify his

killing of five women—a task he imagines in his insanity to be indispensable to his quest for a unified English time, and a coherent narrative about English Heritage. I will admit that this interpretation of psychogeography is problematic, that Henderson Downing is right to identify such appropriations of psychogeography as the cause for the gothicising of London and, relatedly, the ‘accumulation of symbolic capital within specific neighbourhoods that contribute to the production of marketable narratives for estate agents and property speculators’ (Downing 2016: 40). It is true that narratives of English history and heritage about the Ripper have done much to enhance London’s commercial value while speeding up its gentrification; it is ironic, indeed, that heritage is narrativised in the style of psychogeography—a subversive conception which should rather refer to the rethinking of the ‘urban space as an experimental site for a radical transformation of subjectivity and social relations’ (Downing 2016: 38), as it does in situationism. Moreover, Heritage as it is defined above prescribes rather than experiments with identity: in virtue of having produced a bestseller based upon the Whitechapel murders, which later turned into a Hollywood Blockbuster starring Johnny Depp, Moore may well have dealt in Heritage; he therefore can be said to have ‘repackage[d] and disseminate[d] variations on these themes to a wider audience’, eventually popularising and “clog[ging] the streets of Whitechapel with budding dérivistes for whom Jack the Ripper becomes a disturbingly compelling synecdoche of the violence and criminality attached to specific locations” (Downing 2016: 41).

It is also in response to Downing, however, that I now take psychogeography beyond situationism and examine “Jack the Ripper’s psychogeography” in *From Hell*. I describe and problematise the ways in which psychogeography has encouraged uncritical engagements with the city, on the one hand, and reconsider the extent to which Moore is complicitous in the Ripper’s psychogeographic endeavour, on the other. Is it fair to accuse the author of being complicitous if his contributions to Heritage are only some paranoid reflections on the Ripper, which in truth deprive Heritage of its diegetic cohesion? I do not think it reasonable to accuse Moore of having dulled the edge of *Debord’s* psychogeography when he does attack—however implicitly—any commercial appropriations thereof. Moore deals not with *Debord’s* psychogeography, in fact, but rather takes psychogeography beyond situationism and re-invents it through the Ripper; he gives voice to the Ripper’s psychogeography precisely to show—as I will argue below—that it is no more acceptable than his cold-blooded crimes. What then is the Ripper’s psychogeography, and how has its popularity shaped Heritage? Let us consider other definitions of psychogeography before we answer these questions. Elizabeth Ho has read *From Hell* as a psychogeographical narrative composed of the ‘reverberations of the past and its percolations into the present’ (Ho 2006:105). *From Hell* leaves Seamus O’Malley with a similar impression, namely that psychogeography means ‘the exchangeability of time and space’ (O’Malley 2012: 172) or ‘historical resonances inherited from the past’ (Julia Round qtd. in O’Malley 2012: 172). Jason B. Jones adds that psychogeography stifles all impressions of temporal passage to shed light on a

'monstrosity' of the human that is 'splayed across time' and "laid bare for all to see' (Jones 2010: 122), so that the past could be read as a critique of the present, or a reiteration of current social problems.

The consensus here seems to be that psychogeography is a subjective reinvention or a privatisation of time projected onto a large, continuous space, one not unlike the monstrous oneness that is the fourth dimension. Specifically, Gull the Ripper plays the role of psychogeographer and rereads history in order to give Englishness the connotation of greatness. His perverse psychogeography is in truth a nationalistic study of Londonscape, a site wherein all times supposedly co-exist, while all contradictions (i.e., all that logical causality would negate in the reader's experience of reality) are harmonised. A private, situated reading of time is inscribed upon the land and made eternal, as a result: this act of inscription (or projection onto the land) already suffices to engender an alternative to a commonly accepted world narrative, for that which is 'psychotic' or internal—psychogeographical—could then serve as a means to estrange something as familiar as London of the everyday.

I will interpret psychogeography as the study of space where historical memories and the relevant timelines are re-aligned. Psychogeography causes memories of times past to assume new relational meanings within a confined space, and thus it gives meaning to apparent randomness or propagate an 'emphatic pedagogy of all-encompassing vision and randomness', to quote Ho (Ho 2006: 119). Psychogeographic re-readings of time assume particular significance in London, the historic seat of the British Empire; Moore's experimentation with psychogeography, in particular, counters what has emerged in England as an ultra-nationalistic consciousness. Moore's vision of nineteenth-century London acts as a cipher for late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century critiques of modern English nationalism, for his "contribution" to Ripperology came at a time when the Ripper was becoming ever more culturally relevant, ever more "English". The eerie ambience of nineteenth-century Whitechapel, for instance, is preserved well into the present to attract thrill-seeking tourists who wish to travel back in time to "experience the Ripper", for the Ripper now embodies some sort of historical English experience, recalling, as he does, a distorted vision of the past that shapes Heritage alongside popular views of English culture—of Englishness. Thus by means of psychogeography, the Ripper has re-envisioned London as a totalising nationalistic narrative.

But it is also possible that psychogeography undermines rather than supports such nationalistic narratives by calling attention to their logical lapses. *From Hell* foregrounds the Ripper because he is a problematic part of the Heritage narrative—indeed a compromising part that foretells the disintegration of the whole. Gull the Ripper may fashion himself as an exemplary Englishman, but any failings he has as a storyteller could weaken the nationalistic narrative he means to consolidate. My contention, then, is that Moore portrays Gull the Ripper as an ill-fitting part of the narrative of an exceptional Englishness, so as to show psychogeography's futility as an identity-affirming project. In *From Hell*, Gull searches for the fourth dimension, the centre of history from which all London

times and memories derive relational meaning. Gull can hardly visualise this unified history, however, since psychogeography's foundational principle is that all temporal parallels eventually re-align, regardless of the interference of any self-proclaimed psychogeographer: that is to say, Gull the Ripper-cum-psychogeographer can only engender further urban legends about Englishness which none can place.

### **Complete English History, as Told by Gull the Ripper**

To know Gull the Ripper, one must first understand his totalising reading of English space-time. In Moore's vision of Victorian London, there exists a villain named Gull, who acts—kills—in hopes of giving shape to his thought and vision, to present to London a cartography of his mind. In *From Hell*, Gull is a cartographer of thinking, a pseudo-psychogeographer with a keen interest in one specific question: 'What is the fourth dimension?' (Moore 2006: Loc 29) The fourth dimension makes manifest the architectural layout of history, explains Gull to his fellow medical practitioner Hinton in Chapter Two, 'A State of Darkness'. The fourth dimension is the 'chamber of echoes' wherein past, present, and future 'co-exist in the stupendous whole of eternity' (Moore 2006: Loc 41). Whoever discovers the fourth dimension will acquire a superhuman awareness of a unified time and become the "architect of humanity" (O'Malley 2012: 174); but, by willing the convergence of all times in the fourth dimension, Gull also rejects any possible experience of a 'double consciousness', whereby one historical moment is recognised 'as simultaneously other to and identical with' (Jones 2010: 102) another.

The fourth dimension is in this respect a world of the same, or a *hyperreality* where time cannot be set against a linear plane and divided into distinct, comparable periods such as past, present, and future. At stake here is a 'diachronic explanation of human development'—of history, of 'our place in the world' (O'Malley 2012:174)—which will 'fill the vacuum left by the Christian tradition and its political structures' (O'Malley 2012:174). Seekers of diachronic explanations (whom Seamus O'Malley calls 'speculative historians') will put together 'the fragments of life' to discover 'the secret of history's shape' and 'the hidden blueprints to human events in the wake of modernity' (O'Malley 2012: 174). As O'Malley puts it, Gull, alongside Hinton, Crowley and Yeats, are 'merely the latest in a long century of speculative historians' (O'Malley 2012: 174). What O'Malley does not emphasise enough, of course, is that Gull alone splatters the blood of five prostitutes across London with a scalpel: Gull is a speculative historian distinct from any other in that he is his own visionary and his own psychogeographer—by which I mean Gull desires absolute control over the narrativisation of English history.

In *From Hell*, a balloon that asks us 'what is the fourth dimension?' appears against a completely darkened panel whenever Gull reflects on the metaphysical nature of history, or more generally on how time passes. The impenetrable darkness that infuses this panel—which, presumably, represents the fourth

dimension—deprives the reader of the privilege of sight, and consequently of her aptitude for spatial navigation. One can expect any graphic novel to present ‘maddeningly vague’ fragments of the depicted reality in order to ‘trigger any number of images in the reader’s imagination’ (McCloud 1993: 86); in turn, every reader will construct ‘whole images based on these fragments’ (McCloud 1993: 87) and imagine the same narrative world differently: this freedom in interpretation—and the consequent supposition of ‘the existence off screen of an element that has become invisible’ (Groensteen 2007: 41)—we may call ‘closure’. The darkness of the fourth dimension as it appears in *From Hell* can likewise trigger the desire for closure, and yet the balloon therein foregrounded manipulates any such endeavour, for Gull’s voice pierces through the darkness as though it were the only source of light and meaning: indeed, the balloon is ‘a point of anchorage, an obligatory passage’ to ‘direct’ the practice of reading (Groensteen 2007: 79, 80). By raising the rhetorical question of what the fourth dimension is, Gull offers to be the reader’s guide in an otherwise innavigable, un-readable space; he limits, by the same token, the reader’s role in imagining the narrative world which here is the fourth dimension, the so-called stupendous whole of eternity where all English times unify.

Remarkably, the protrusion of Gull’s meaning—his light—into the obscurity of the fourth dimension occurs beyond the panel described above; indeed it first takes place in Chapter Two, where Gull foresees that the phallus is the key to the fourth dimension, the blueprint of his speculative English history. Here he sees that an obelisk, bathed in sunlight, pierces the darkness of the fourth dimension. Scalpel-wielding, Gull believes himself this piercing light, the means to access eternity (Moore 2006: Loc 29). The phallus is his ideological *modus operandi* with which he spills female blood to connect all times and write his unorthodox version of English history. The phallus maximises Gull’s control over his victims’ bodies as well as the reader’s freedom to achieve closure, for it gives him the means to make London the transitional realm between the human and the superhuman: having transcended (or, rather, repressed) the raw sexuality of the prostitutes, humankind would, according to this rewriting, ascend towards the fourth dimension and become superhuman.

Since darkness must descend before meaning can be attained and transcendence achieved, Gull repeatedly spills female blood to bring about darkness. We grasp the symbolic significance of female blood for the first time in *From Hell* when Gull and his wife Susan first engage in coitus. These moments of intimacy unfold across the page horizontally—from left to right—to imitate the linear movement of time. These panels are immersed in a darkness that is eventually punctured by Susan’s announcement that ‘there is blood’ (Moore 2006: Loc 39), after which Gull ‘ma[kes] a little sound’ (Moore 2006: Loc 39) to signal both this spilling of blood and his sexual ecstasy. Gull’s inspection of Christ Church Spitalfields immediately follows, unfolding horizontally across the page as a linear sequence of events—as though the inspection chronologically succeeded the sex scene above. The first panel in the inspection sequence is not only lighted but also elongated, much like the phallic outline of Christ Church Spitalfields, i.e., one of

the architect Nicholas Hawksmoor's masterpieces: here sex in utter darkness and Gull's visit to Christ Church Spitalfields in broad daylight constitute a non-sequitur, whereby female blood and the phallus become connected through a subjective, associative narrative logic. As Scott McCloud explains, non-sequiturs in graphic narratives often legitimise such logical contrivances:

No matter how *dissimilar* one image may be to another, there is a kind of *-/ alchemy* at work in the space between panels which can help us find *meaning* or *resonance* in even the most *jarring* combinations./ Such transitions may not make "sense" in any traditional way, but still a relationship of *some* sort will inevitable *develop*. (McCloud 1993: 73; italics in the original)

Any narrative meaning thus 'developed' is unnatural to say the least: that day and night should be combined rather than differentiated in order for the fourth dimension to materialise is no more than Gull's belief. But once Gull explains (and in this way 'develops') this belief for the benefit of the reader, the reader will understand all the twists and turns that shape Gull's perception of Londonscape. The tenuous connection drawn between the darkness of blood and the brightness of the phallus functions as a kind of Proustian cognitive trigger, such that in *From Hell*, any spilling of female blood must prompt Gull to take over the narrative (as I will soon demonstrate). In other words, any time blood trickles across and darkens the panels, Gull will experience an ecstasy which allows him to create meaning, and which he will signify by making a 'little sound', thereby causing a balloon to appear to bring light to the state of darkness, i.e., the fourth dimension. Within Gull's narrative world, violence necessarily engenders the darkness from which meaning, the symbol of which is Gull's phallus, will emerge; Gull's light will necessarily lead the reader to the fourth dimension and, in this manner, "facilitate" the interpretive act of closure.

The non-sequitur triggered by the spilling of Susan's virginal blood certainly seems to succeed in guiding Gull towards a Dionysian meaning, which Hawksmoor supposedly had foreseen before Gull. Hawksmoor, who oversaw the construction of St. Paul's Cathedral alongside his mentor Christopher Wren, belonged to 'a secret fraternity of Dionysus cultists, originating in 1,000 B.C., [who] worked on Solomon's temple' (Moore 2006: Loc 41). Gull says that 'Hawksmoor cut stone to hold shadows' (Moore 2006: Loc 41), that Hawksmoor constructed this chamber arresting every slippery truth, every shadow on the walls of Plato's cave. Hawksmoor's Dionysian architecture expresses an omniscience which knows no ambiguity. Gull supposes that he and Hawksmoor share the Dionysian goal of seeking 'to become one with the processes of Nature and thus immortal' (Moore 2006: Loc 41), in other words of tracing the fourth dimension in London. The fourth dimension exemplifies the kind of psychogeography which tells of one true, originary English history—the kind to invalidate all other historical speculations. Gull's psychogeography, then, is a speculative world narrative which precludes or ends all others by virtue of its existence.



To acquire Dionysus's omniscience, Gull experiments with psychogeography by resorting to murder. Every time Gull executes a murder, he imagines that he gains a glimpse of the future of English history. In Chapter Eight, Gull raises his victim Kate Eddowe's entrails in one hand and his scalpel in the other (Moore 2006: Loc 267); he, a Victorian man, looks upwards at a modern high-rise, the elongated form of Hawksmoor's church tower, another "Dionysian" phallic symbol in the graphic novel. The phallic structure bridges Victorian and contemporary times to complete Gull's notion of eternity, thus realising a dimension of existence that precludes all (other) speculations about time. It is, once again, a non-sequitur that causes the fourth dimension to materialise: Gull's butchering of Eddowe's body gives rise to a bloodbath which darkens the panels, but when this act of violence reaches its climax, Gull finds himself immersed in light rather than in the darkness of blood. This occurrence again unfolds across the panels from left to right in a linear direction: Gull looks away from the corpse because he saw that his shadow was bathed in light; he then looks backwards towards the light, rubbing his eyes in disbelief, smearing blood across his face as he does so. What Gull finally discovers is the suspension of linear time, which is signified by a full-page depiction of the aforementioned luminous high-rise.

Consequentially, the blood that Gull spills with his scalpel brings about a moment of ecstasy and enlightenment: the high-rise symbolises a prophetic insight that shines upon Gull, much in the same way Christ Church Spitalfields earlier penetrated the darkness of Susan's virginal blood to evoke Dionysus. Once again, the phallus—the scalpel, Christ Church Spitalfields, the high-rise—emerges from a sea of darkness to offer meaning. Londonscape is drenched in blood so that it could become the blank page upon which Gull "sheds light" and, in this way, writes his psychogeographic account of English history. The scalpel symbolises Gull's as well as Moore's fiction. Unlike Gull, however, Moore wields the scalpel of fiction to perform a 'post-mortem of a historical occurrence'; he reveals consequently that the fiction of a great Englishness was written on an altar made of mutilated female bodies, that the Ripper's fiction-writing was in truth a ritual to sanctify oppression (Moore qtd. in Di Liddo 2009: 44). Moore uses the scalpel of fiction to expose Gull's agenda, whereas Gull uses the same to write a patriarchal Englishness. That the former writer merely parodies the latter I will elaborate later. Suffice it to say at the moment that the Ripper thinks he must murder to "overcome" five prostitutes, who represent that which is human and base, so that he can author—by means of psychogeography—a piece of speculative fiction set in a unified time.

In this so-called psychogeographical vision of history, the twenty-first century marks the denouement of English exceptionalism: for the Victorian man Gull, post-imperial living may very well herald the end of the English narrative. Gull now believes that he has witnessed, through Dionysus's eyes, the triumph of progress and industry, as well as the ambition in the mid-nineteenth century to subdue nature and the passage of time itself. One could argue (as Annalisa Di Liddo has) that Gull's psychogeography is merely 'a rigorous geometrical structure' serving to justify his insanity (Di Liddo 2009: 77), that Gull kills to

reproduce a pattern that he too readily perceived in the London landscape, and that, finally, such reproduction supports nothing but his 'hallucinatory relationship with time' (Di Liddo 2009: 77, 79). Sarah E. Maier even goes so far as to call Gull's psychogeography a 'cohesive self-narration', which 'contain[s] only randomness with recurrent motifs and stories either borrowed or unfinished that haunts the detective [...] and the reader/audience with the desire for impossible closure' (Maier 2012: 203). His interpretations of the fourth dimension, William Blake, and Masonic history are no more than 'rantings' (Maier 2012: 205). Yet I am inclined to think that Gull's self-narration coheres *as a result of* his rantings on Blake, the fourth dimension, and Masonic history, which all culminate in his Dionysian vision, that is, his vision of a world that enshrines a unique but universal Englishness.

The British Empire, Gull believes, will embrace global capitalist production in lieu of traditional craftsmanship such that the Queen's subjects will live amid mass-produced furniture that is 'mean-spirited and ugly' (Moore 2006: Loc 475). However, what remains eternal—what the fourth dimension forever safeguards, supposedly—is an exceptional Englishness, an exceptionally Anglocentric idea of Britishness, tied to the history of empire (see Tony Venezia 2013: 37). This exceptional Englishness is the connection between all times; it is also the common ground between Gull and the Briton of the late twentieth century, for the one is the 'forward-looking' Victorian middle-class man, while the other the backward-looking, nostalgic English subject of the postwar era. In *From Hell*, Gull's faith in England's greatness calls into existence a universe where the two meet. It is his nationalistic fervour that conjures before him England in the late twentieth century, the point in time where Thatcher endeavoured to 'put the Great back into Britain' (Ho 2006: 106).

Thatcher, like Gull, looked into history and grew invested in the notion of Englishness. In the face of globalisation, she, too, was devoted to Englishness as an exclusive cultural or political entity (and as something to be distinguished from "Britishness"; see Di Liddo 2009: 103). Thatcher used history to validate the greatness of Britain, like Moore's vision of the Ripper. To this end, her 'Victorian values' campaign, or her efforts in transposing the "Victorian" 'virtues of self-reliance and duty' (Ho 2006: 106) into the present, complements the Ripper's psychogeography. Thatcher wished to re-acquaint Britons of the late twentieth century especially with 'Victorian ideals of morality, global dominance, nationalism and myths of progress—financial, technological, social' (Murray 2005: n.p.). She emphasised 'English exceptionalism' after the fall of the empire to establish a parallel between the late nineteenth and the late twentieth centuries. In this vein she would remodel English history into a unified narrative, a fourth dimension of sorts.

The Ripper, incidentally, is the fragment of Victorian life having been incorporated into this coherent narrative of Englishness: he is the much-needed connection to the past vis-à-vis this self-affirming project. The Ripper is, to borrow Raymond Williams's words, the cultural and social residual of culture 'effectively formed in the past, but [...] still active in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present'

(Williams 1977: n.p.); he is ripped from the social past—the squalor of Whitechapel in the nineteenth century—and transposed to the nostalgic social present so that past and present coalesce. A key paradox in considering this nationalist mentality is '[t]he objective modernity of nations to the historian's eye [versus] their subjective antiquity in the eyes of nationalists' (Anderson 1995: 5): nationalists see the preservation of traditions in history; history, they imagine, brings harmony to the collective, though no such harmony could exist given the depersonalised relationships among the members of a community. The notions of national harmony and unity both lend themselves to further fictionalisation of Englishness, which here seems no more than an invention of commonalities: even the feeblest connections established among 'the people' would suppress any mark of difference, thus any sign of disharmony.

In *From Hell*, it is Gull who promulgates a unified history in the name of psychogeography to celebrate an exceptional English heritage in the most exaggerated manner, which he deems "Dionysian". To be sure, Gull does not in truth possess the Dionysian spirit inherent in psychogeography, nor does Thatcher, since neither has need for shadows, ambiguities, and paradoxes. Any criticism Moore intends for Gull here he also intends for Thatcher: psychogeography proves, if anything, that history cannot be unified. One recalls Nietzsche's reading of the Dionysian energy. Divine inspirations impress upon us 'the involuntary nature of image, of metaphor' (Moore 2006: Loc 373), even while tempting us to grasp at the shadows that we hold as truths. Divinity—the fourth dimension, the originary English truth—must reveal itself in a tempest, 'a depth of happiness in which the most painful and gloomy things appear, not as an antithesis, but [...] as a necessary color within such a superfluity of light' (Nietzsche 2003: Loc 369). Divinity possesses the dualistic, tempestuous character of a metaphor in that it need elude one-dimensional conceptions such as Gull's notion of the fourth dimension—which, like the aforementioned non-sequitur, forces all times into cohesion against a linear plane, so that time would necessarily progress horizontally across the page. The divine truth should rather trigger a process of involuntary, Proustian associations which, by virtue of being contradictory and dualistic, cannot be mapped in any one direction. The fragments of reality presented in a graphic novel are not what Nietzsche would call metaphors; nevertheless, they *are* divine and Dionysian in the Nietzschean sense, since they do encourage the reader to embark on a Proustian search for whole and meaningful images.

It follows that any true Dionysian architecture is predicated upon dualisms and Proustian associations, but certainly not one-dimensionality, continuity, or linearity. If truly a Dionysian exercise in creativity, psychogeography should reinforce the plurality of time. That is, psychogeography should encourage visions of alternate worlds while re-presenting history as that which provokes the most contradictory speculations; it should presuppose infinity rather than unity, the Dionysian rather than the Apollonian. Dionysus does not therefore offer any plain truths to any favoured psychogeographer as Gull would like to think. The divine, call it eternity or truth, is necessarily just beyond Plato's cave such that it is

glimpsed fleetingly through metaphors. Gull's desire for a visible emanation, a literal rendering, of the divine is already contrary to the Dionysian spirit. Gull privileges literality and accessibility whereas Dionysus metaphors and inaccessibility. Gull's literal-mindedness amounts to a reductive realism, a futile attempt to call objective and true his encounter with the divine.

To quote O'Malley, what Gull calls 'the architecture of history' reveals no more than his conceit that he has 'unlocked the secret to history's shape and purpose' (O'Malley 2012: 163). Gull thinks that 'history has a shape intelligible to some sort of human investigation. Dates recur, mythic patterns emerge, symbols shed light', and 'the narration of the past, whether it be in words or stone, serves as a mere reflection or symbol of a deeper underlying shape of world history' (O'Malley 2012: 176, 177). If he turns over enough stones, each of which holds a shadow, a withheld truth, he will be able to discern the contours of history where all times supposedly parallel. Nevertheless, the fourth dimension (if existent) is not to be divined by anyone, even though Gull's hubris tells him otherwise. It is only hubris that prompts Gull to assume an authoritative role in all "English" matters, or to play the exemplary historian who alone can locate the fourth dimension in London. It is hubris as well that convinces him of his exceptionality, that he alone is destined to translate Dionysus' secret into the fiction of the fourth dimension, of Real English History. Gull does not realise that realism is detached from the real. Modern realism, according to Ian Watt, 'has its origins in Descartes and Locke; it has been the study of the particulars of experience by the individual investigator', who is relieved of 'universals', a 'classical and universal heritage' (Watt 1966: 12, 13). The individual perception is always 'unique', therefore always 'new' (Watt 1996: 13); yet Gull's "realism", that is, his attempt at a realistic portrayal of the fourth dimension, champions both the universal and the individual. He is so convinced of the uniqueness of his vision that he considers it the stone arresting all temporal echoes, thus the key to understanding Heritage or Englishness. In the same vein, Gull holds his individual perception to be a universal doctrine (an Anglo-centric one, to be sure), one which he must imprint on the London landscape with his victims' blood. Gull means to organise history into a star-shaped circuit, a unified whole, thereby an account of history that precludes all others.

It is this desire to organize history that has given rise to "heritage"—a narrative on a continuing, near-complete Englishness. While the Ripper seems the missing puzzle piece required for the realization of such narrative totality, Gull more or less completes the character of the Ripper. By the end of *From Hell*, Gull, as Ripper, is elevated above London, a star-shaped circuit connected throughout by 'luminous filaments' (Moore 2006: Loc 469), themselves reminiscent of mutilated body parts. Gull projects onto London his individual perspective, his realism and 'meaning' (Moore 2006: Loc 471). In this final time travel sequence, Gull appears before us as a sort of divine actor, who, being capable of levitation, can project meaning onto Londonscape from an elevated standpoint. Gull here demonstrates his spatial awareness to prove that he has truly gained access to the otherwise innavigable fourth dimension. On seeing Gull's feet dangling above

London, the reader realises that Gull has taken to developing his narrative both vertically and horizontally: it is our anti-hero's feat of ascension that grants us a bird's eye view—a transcendental view—of linear time as it unfolds across Londonscape, or from left to right upon the page. In what is for Gull a final moment of revelation (for he is about to die in his own time, i.e., the nineteenth century), this aptitude for spatial orientation suddenly makes all times navigable and the fourth dimension attainable, rationally comprehensible.

Evidently, to reach any temporal destination, the vertical and horizontal axes of Gull's narrative need only to intersect; Gull therefore imagines time travel as an act of descension. He visits the Tower of London first in 1954, and later in 1817. Then he encounters Romanticism in the figure of Blake, who is eager to sketch the 'fearful beast' before him (Moore 2006: Loc 477). Afterwards, Gull's spirit materialises in the English future of the contemporary living room (Moore 2006: Loc 477). Gull's visitations follow a sequence, intimating his comprehensive understanding of all London times. When Gull at last espouses the insight that 'all things at the last are sullied' (Moore: 2006 Loc 480), he signals the denouement of the English narrative. Heeding the dramatic unity of beginning, middle, and end, Gull's episodic visitations form a synchrony whereby all temporal tracks cohere for the purpose of narrative completion. This speculative history bears the name of the fourth dimension: there time cannot possibly proliferate in any direction of which Gull does not approve.

### **Moore's Speculative, Psychogeographical Fiction**

One might ask if, towards the end, Gull's feat of narrative completion imparts to Moore's historical fiction (or alternate history) a proper conclusion. After all, *From Hell* is a 'melodrama in sixteen parts' foretelling Britain's degenerative destiny: for whom is the graphic novel a melodrama and for whom is it realism, however? Gull is invested in his universal realism; Moore, in contrast, mimics Gull's realism, rendering it a melodrama to better subvert it. While Gull single-mindedly pursues the fourth dimension, Moore writes the fourth dimension from Gull's point of view merely to taunt Gull. It is as O'Malley argues: Moore's subtitle of a melodrama reveals that Gull is 'a talented story-teller rather than a visionary who has access to universal truths' (O'Malley 2012: 180). Moore narrativises and so invalidates Gull's psychogeographical revelations. Gull has absolute faith in the existence of a unified English history, yet he is characterised in *From Hell* as someone who, however unwittingly, casts Queen Victoria as the mastermind of the infamous Whitechapel murders. By a stroke of irony, Moore makes Gull, who esteems himself a Dionysian visionary, the basis of a historical rumour.

Of course, Victoria's involvement amounts to no more than a conspiracy theory, one might say a groundless speculation; such paranoid re-readings of the past merely fuel Britain's rapidly expanding heritage industry, whetting the modern Briton's—and not only the Ripper's—appetite for a grand national narrative or a work of patriotic speculative fiction, in a manner of speaking. *From Hell* may seem to appeal to the common, if inappropriate, interest in the Ripper.

Testaments of Victorian progressivism—medicine, photography, and the newspaper, just to name a few—are put towards building the cult of a deranged misogynist. Moore makes the effort to parallel the Ripper's cult then and now. In Moore's imagination of Victorian times, Gull's first murder incites an unseemly excitement amongst many Londoners. The street where Gull butchered his first victim Polly becomes a site for revelry. A cameraman even gives the revelers instructions to parody the victim's horror: 'If you could clasp your hands over your, er, bosom, a-and, look horrified' (Moore 2006: Loc 178). In the graphic novel, the nineteenth-century media is said to direct the people's attention towards the Ripper's violence in a tone of celebration rather than one of condemnation. Moore cannot level this charge more squarely at his reader when he shows a couple viewing a film about Jack the Ripper in the final sequence concerning Gull's ascension to the fourth dimension: a woman leans towards her romantic partner for a kiss, though the man in question only urges her to 'give it a rest' and leave him in peace to contemplate the 'handywork of Jack the Ripper' (Moore 2006: Loc 475) portrayed on screen. This behaviour affirms Gull's assertion that he is a 'syndrome' (Moore 2006: Loc 478), that, by thus remaining *intrinsic* to English life, he has transcended his own time to achieve the vantage point.

Gull's assertion is far from baseless, given that the media today still fans nostalgia—or so Ho has suggested: 'Today Jack the Ripper is undeniably English [...] In the British heritage industry today, 'Whitechapel, Spitalfields, and the East End in general are promoted through advertising associated with Jack the Ripper' (Ho 2006: 103, 104). But while the heritage industry is referential to English exceptionality, London landmarks such as St. Paul's—which Gull also celebrates in *From Hell*—are no less so even when considered independently. We, the English, the Britons, or simply tourists from all over the world, revere this architectural testament to English heritage certainly no less than Gull, prompted, perhaps, by a conservative political climate wherein an 'identity-preserving, identity-enchanting, and identity-transforming aura lingers' (Ian Baucom qtd. in Ho 2006: 114). In the novel *Downriver*, Iain Sinclair presents the following criticism of Thatcher's conservative politics and, relatedly, her attempt to dabble in the business of heritage: 'Let the Prince have his Palladian toy around St. Paul's ... It was a sideshow ... serviceable for Royal Weddings, which could be timed to coincide with unconvinced by-elections' (Sinclair 2004: 288). St. Paul's then represents lineage to the English past. As backdrop to celebrations of the Royalty, the cathedral attests to the blossoming of an exceptional Englishness and the continuity of the English bloodline. As Gull freely admits, 'St. Paul's is in the centre. /We [he and his coachman Netley] are at the centre of [the] pattern now... our story's written, Netley, inked in blood...' (Moore 2006: Loc 116, 117): Englishness is as much inked in "our" blood as St. Paul's is erected upon Londonscape; St. Paul's is but the physical manifestation of "our" English core. The *de facto* fairy-tale landmark in what could only be called a propagandistic fantasy, St. Paul's also seems a chamber of eternity where the English present and the Ripper's optimistic reading of nineteenth-century England co-exist. Here St. Paul's is a symbol of the hyperreal, a sign that the fourth dimension has been attained indeed.

Moore reinvents the Ripper precisely to shatter these fantasies of the fourth dimension. *From Hell* constitutes no more than a conspiracy theory, a paranoid interpretation of the past, but, as such, it detracts from any narrative of one glorious England. Moore has turned the Ripper into an alternate world narrative in that his Ripper embodies an unofficial history, an envisioning of the past that is a critique of the present. In Monika Pietrazak-Franger's words:

Jack the Ripper has been, over and over, associated with different *signifieds*. Julie Sanders recognises this changeability of myths and their adaptability [...] Thus while the archetypal Jack the Ripper as a serial killer serves to divulge stories of timeless evil, his specific anchoring in the nineteenth century opens a space where he can be given new relevant context, as illustrated by Thatcherite and Blairite engagements. (Pietrazak-Franger 2009:169, 170)

So suspended between the past and the present, Gull, as the Ripper, is a malleable neither-nor, a mythical entity of service to the heritage industry. Yet Gull is something more: he is the fourth dimension, the myth-engendering agent through which *anyone* might speculate about the nineteenth century and its link to the present. This contrived connection is in and of itself a speculative fiction, which, in *From Hell*, shapes not only the character of Gull but also the panels for the retelling of English history. Barish Ali reminds us: 'The gap between comics panels is equivalent to, or a moment of, the Lacanian Real, which Judith Butler summarizes quite succinctly as "that which resists and compels symbolization"' (Ali 2005: 611). The Ripper is an unrepresentable fragment of Englishness, but for this precise reason, Moore speculates about him to speculate about Englishness and to stress, above all, that all such speculations are fabrications.

To return to the final time travel sequence in *From Hell*: Gull wields no control over time, in the end, since his transcendental vision is out of sync with the chronological progression represented upon the page. At this climatic moment, Gull climbs up an obelisk to 'go up into the gold' and realise '[his] ascension, his becoming', though the divine beings he encounters at the elevated plane of eternity 'insist' that he 'descend' (Moore 2006: Loc 483) once more. This encounter with the divine triggers in the minds of Gull and of the reader a set of Proustian associations, which, at this narrative moment, materialise as a series of unrecognised, un-remembered flashbacks. Here Gull descends into Ireland in the early nineteen-hundreds to see a woman calling after her children, all of whom are named after Gull's victims. Thus, the divine entities who force Gull to descend refute his earlier claim that he is a transcendent and therefore invisible force, a prevailing symptom all through English history; they cause him to wonder, even, why he is 'shown' (Moore 2006: Loc 484) this vision of Ireland, for it bears no causal relation to his criminal enterprise, and in any case, the woman cannot be the logical culmination of his "vision". That Gull's psychogeography is a lost cause becomes all the more apparent when, finally, the woman rests her eyes on Gull and asks him to 'clear off back to hell and leave us be': this impresses Gull as a

'perplexing vision' (Moore 2006: Loc 484), although it is in truth an associative twist, an intrusion, or an involuntary turn of event which drags Gull down from the vantage point and, indeed, all the way down to hell.

Even though Gull fashions himself as the signifier of Englishness, which bridges Victorian and modern times, he is finally brought down, so to speak, because of his inability to clear all confusions. As such, he is no more a perplexing vision and a fragment of time than the woman. Insofar as his true identity remains a mystery, the Ripper is a conscious fabrication, thus an idiosyncratic reading of time that is far from common or universal. Moore's "conspiracy theory" about the Ripper may well be a redundant puzzle piece which has no place in official English history. And yet in re-imagining history, *From Hell* also opens up the myth of the Ripper; that is to say, it mythicises the Ripper to encourage further speculations about the Ripper, for as Ryan Trimm puts it, 'appeals to the unifying abilities of heritage and its own wholeness instead reveal its internal tensions and fissures, the gaps between all the exemplars it would purportedly bring together' (Trimm 2018: 14). Furthermore: the 'fragmentation, mutilation, and cutting up witnessed in *From Hell*—not only manifested in the gaps between the panels, but also in the incisions of the murder victims represented—' will always inspire speculations about the Ripper, since Moore created this "hybrid" alternate world narrative precisely to inflict 'a mortal wound on history' (Ali 2005: 611). Moore means to save his work from 'becoming a teleological narrative with an underlying meaning' (Ali 2005: 611), though, ironically enough, his tale about one obsessed with narrative completion offers no ending but rather inundates us with narrative possibilities. Moore needs only to spread rumours about Gull, the captor of time, to free time: conspiracy theories and alternate histories alike will reinvigorate the flow of time, or rather of divergent times.

### **Conclusion: Parochial Psychogeography**

*From Hell* is an alternate world narrative (an alternate reading of history) that frees time. The prison of time is of course the fourth dimension, a teleological narrative which compels narrative closure. The fourth dimension is also a closed circuit of meaning, the spatial materialisation of a nationalistic feeling; it is Gull's vision and psychogeography: the assumption of English exceptionalism gives it its *genius loci*, and the workings of the patriotic mind its geography. Gull spatially conceives of Englishness for a unifying purpose, although those it seeks to unify may or may not affirm it. Those subjugated to Gull's History may in fact defy it. Moore, for one, re-interprets Gull the Ripper and in so doing, he writes his own English story, his own alternate history.

*From Hell* is in this sense a work of speculative fiction purposed to alienate an exceptional Englishness, the premise for a Real English History. Called "the fourth dimension" in *From Hell*, the Real is said to be a Plato's Cave arresting all shadows for an identity-preserving purpose: within lies the workings of a phallogocentric mind which fabricate the idea of an exceptional Englishness to connect all English times. Speculative fictions such as Gull the Ripper's recall the



Apollonian desire to seek rational meaning by writing History, and yet they are written in the most violent, Dionysian, spirit. Gull's Apollonian, rational narrative will come undone, nonetheless, if its inclination towards Dionysus is intensified through parody and satire. In *From Hell*, for instance, Moore unravels the fiction that is the fourth dimension by ridiculing Gull for his egotism. Moore reminds us that Gull's hunger for blood is far from extraordinary. In the end, Gull, though the Ripper, is no more egotistical than the next English subject who also craves an illustrious account of history validating an exceptional Englishness. Ego compels the 'exceptional' English subject to embrace historical causality in all its simplicity and so to overlook the horrors of colonialism, or the rampant social exploitations occurring in Whitechapel, the East End of nineteenth-century London where the Ripper murdered in cold blood. Moore's *From Hell* is, among other things, an affront to such egotism, a subversive presence in the unified time of Gull's imagining, and a satirical remark on any nationalistic endeavour to stop time, perhaps by means of writing History. The Ripper of Moore's imagining embodies a conspiracy theory ill placed in the English narrative, above all: he is a complication, a redundant puzzle piece, as such a symptom of Dionysian excess which defies any rational ordering of history so that speculations about the past will yet be possible. This Dionysian energy is the mark of SF in *From Hell*, a work that enables Moore to see (English) history differently while envisioning alternate (English) worlds.

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