

The Visionary Heroism of William Blake and Alan Moore

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Chapter One: Introduction



From Hell—Chapter Four—Page 12

Figure 1.1: Alan Moore - *From Hell* (1989) (12, ch. 4)

The symbols which are mentioned in figure 1.1, symbols such as the obelisk and others which lie hidden beneath the streets of London, allude to a literary connectedness that is grounded in the historical and literal notions of place. “Encoded in this city’s [London’s] stones are symbols thunderous enough to rouse the sleeping Gods submerged beneath the sea-bed of our dreams” (Moore 19; ch.4). The graphic novel *From Hell*, from which this excerpt is taken, is written by Alan Moore and illustrated by Eddie Campbell, and published in serial form from 1989 until 1996 and collected in 1999. The narrative it is set predominantly in the impoverished East End of London and centers around the story of the Whitechapel murders which occurred between 3 April 1888 and 13 February 1891. Due to its foregrounding of notions of place, the work can be tied to psychogeography, an approach to geography which was coined in Paris in the 1950s by the Letterist Group¹. Rather than being viewed as a product of a particular time or place, psychogeography can be best described as set of ideas and traditions that are connected historically. It characterizes itself through the idea of urban wandering which has yielded the literary viewpoints of the wanderer, the stroller, the flâneur² and the stalker. In cities that are evermore hostile to the pedestrian, walking can be seen as an act of subversion (Coverley 13). Especially due to the street-level gaze, walking challenges official representations of the city such as mapped routes and instead explores marginal and forgotten areas (ibid). In this sense it challenges authority. Protests that occurred in the streets of Paris in the 1960s illustrate this dimension of psychogeography. In short, it can be best described as:

¹ The French Letterist Group was led by the theorist Guy Debord and would later evolve into the Situationist International (Coverley 11). The group attempted to transmute urban life first for aesthetic and later political for purposes (ibid).

² The French literary term flâneur, from the French noun flâneur, indicates a person strolling or sauntering, observing society. Though originally used to describe a type of man often seen on 19th century Parisian streets, during the 20th century the flâneur gained a symbolic status. Through the influence of German philosopher Walter Benjamin the flâneur came to represent archetypal urban experience.

[...] the act of urban wandering, the spirit of political radicalism, allied to a playful sense of subversion and governed by an inquiry into the methods by which we can transform our relationships to the urban environment. This entire project is then further coloured by an engagement with the occult and is one that is as preoccupied with excavating the past as it is with recording the present. (Coverley 14-15)

The literary relevance of Blake to the project of psychogeography lies with the author's own use of historical and literal notions of place, his connection to the occult and the inquisitive and occasional subversive nature of his oeuvre.

Contemporary psychogeographers include Alan Moore but also Iain Sinclair, author of *White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings* (1987), a work that similarly explores the Whitechapel Murders. Coverley suggests that it is urban life's mysterious and unknowable qualities that have encouraged dark and gothic representations of the city in psychogeographic work, and which has spurred a tendency to investigate crime and lowlife (14). Moore and Sinclair both dramatize the city as a place of darkness and crime, which can be seen for example in *From Hell's* bleak, rainy and gothic depiction of London, sketched wholly in black and grey. An example of this is figure 1.1 at the beginning of this introduction. An additional dimension of this representation of London is the use of elements of the occult, such as the obelisk.

This obsession with the occult is allied to an antiquarianism that views the present through the prism of the past and which lends itself to psychogeographical research that increasingly contrasts a horizontal movement across the topography of the city with a vertical descent through its past. (Coverley 14)

In the opening image Moore depicts the characters of Gull and his coachman Netley roaming the streets of London. When they are standing by the graveyard, an important detail, Gull explains Blake to Netley. He connects him to a "time of magic thinking when the Gods yet

walked with men” (Moore 12, ch. 4), and he identifies Blake as a druid, which indicates a magician or priest.

WILLIAM GULL. Blake was a throwback from beyond the Age of Reason, from a time of magic thinking when the Gods yet walked with men. By faith he was a Druid, such as praised the sun from Parliament Hill, yet Blake abhorred the Sun. Talking to Calvin, pointing to the sky, he cried “THAT is the Greek Apollo ! He is Satan !”³ Ironic that his bones rest here, beneath a Sun God’s obelisk. The obelisk’s Defoe’s, yet looms above the Prophet’s grave. It’s styled upon stones consecrated to the Sun God Atum, raised at Heliopolis, in ancient Egypt.

NETLEY. Styled on my John Thomas more like.

WILLIAM GULL. Netley ! How perceptive ! The obelisk is phallic, for the Sun’s a symbol of the male principle; of man’s ascendancy. It also symbolizes man’s left brain, our rational Apollonian side... and yet, each sunset casts its unforgiving shadow ‘cross the grave of England’s greatest Holy Fool (Moore 12; ch. 4)

What this excerpt puts forward is the connection between a horizontal movement across the topography of London with a vertical descent through its past. The reference to Daniel Defoe⁴ is also of importance, as this English author is also vital within the psychogeographical tradition, contributing works such as *Robinson Crusoe* (1719)⁵ and *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722), the latter of which gives a psychogeographical survey of the city of London.

³ The image of the Greek God Apollo as Satan alludes to *Diary, Reminiscence, and Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson* (1898) by Henry Crabb Robinson. The original quote reads: “I have conversed with the spiritual Sun. I saw him on Primrose Hill. He said; ‘Do you take me for the Greek Apollo?’ – ‘No,’ I said; ‘that’ (pointing to the sky) ‘is the Greek Apollo. He is Satan’” (Robinson 28). The connection between Apollo and Satan is that of reason, which is associated with this Greek deity and identified by Blake as the opposition of the imagination. By making this link Moore further develops his appropriation of Blake’s philosophy on the ambiguity of the concepts of reason and imagination, good and evil.

⁴ For a more elaborate account on Daniel Defoe’s role within the psychogeographical tradition see the chapter “London and the Visionary Tradition” from Merlin Coverley’s *Psychogeography* (2006).

⁵ About this work Merlin Coverley says: “Robinson Crusoe, with its twin motifs of the imaginary voyage and isolation, provides a broad outline of a character who encapsulates the freedom and detachment of the wanderer, the resourcefulness of the adventurer and the amorality of the survivor. In short, all those characteristics necessary for the urban wanderer walking unfamiliar streets” (34).

There is a reference to English author D.H. Lawrence that can be found in Netley exclaiming: “Styled on my John Thomas more like” (Moore 12; ch. 4) which refers to Lawrence’s work *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (1928) where it is used by the male main character as a nickname for his penis. Lawrence can also be placed with the tradition of psychogeography as he concerned himself with the effects of modernization and industrialization on society.

England’s “Holy Fool”, Blake, was also a Godfather of psychogeography, according to Ian Sinclair and Merlin Coverley (31). Blake belonged to those artists who aimed to shape the imagination within every man in order to counter a “stifling, deadening influence of a social and cultural environment dominated by restrictive reason” (Behrendt 13). He aimed, in other words, to counter the banalisation of society. By joining “the Devil’s party”⁶ (Blake 35), the artists which are all connected through psychogeography are on the side of creative energy, an energy both deconstructive as well as capable of renewing.

⁶ *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, which Blake wrote and illustrated between 1790-1793 features English author John Milton (1608-1674). About Milton, and in reference to *Paradise Lost*, Blake says: “Note. The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels & God, and at liberty when of the Devils & Hell is because he was a true Poet and of the Devils party without knowing it” (35). He ascribes Milton here to the creative energy represented as the demonic.

Chapter Two: Methodology

The critical tradition of the comics field is the central stage that carries the relation that exists between Blake and Moore. Moore's achievements as a graphic novelist have been widely celebrated. He has won numerous Jack Kirby and Eagle awards, as well as a Harvey and Eisner award. Several of his works, among which *From Hell* (2001), *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (2003), *V For Vendetta* (2005) and *Watchmen* (2009) have been adapted in cinematic productions despite his discomfort with adaptations across genres. For *The Comics Journal* on 6 June 2012 Moore was asked to comment on the film *Watchmen*, he says, "It was written to be a comic, not a movie, and they're not interchangeable". His attitude brings attention to the fundamental characteristic of the genre, the collaboration of word and image.

For a long time comics were associated with popular, or low, culture; "in Britain, comics have historically been tied to perception of popular culture as insignificant in comparison to high art, such as painting, opera, and the like" (Gibson 267). Consequently, it was not until the late 1990s and the first part of the 21st century, that graphic novels were acknowledged as anything but a fleeting phenomenon of popular culture (Serchay 4).

Comics' reputation was only established through the growing number of appearances it made within academic circles. This inclusion came about in the 1960s and 1970s according to *The Encyclopedia of Comic Books and Graphic Novels* (2010), "[...] when historians, art historians, communication arts specialists, and literature specialists began applying a range of analytic frameworks to pop-cultural artifacts, including comic strips and comic books" (Worcester 113). Particular close attention was paid to comics' symbolic qualities, its storytelling conventions, narrative devices and visual iconography (ibid). Gradually more theoretical approaches from across the humanities were employed, eventually resulting in a rich scholarly infrastructure. From this the comics field gained: "the Art and Comics area of

the Popular Culture Association in 1992; the establishment of the International Comics Art Forum in 1995; and the launching of the International Journal of Comic Art in 1999” (Worcester 113). Currently, there are many markets for comics: “newspaper comic strips, periodical comic books, graphic novels, alternative/ small press, miscellaneous print, manga format, webcomics and other new media (McCloud 253). Graphic novels are another product from this process of development. In order to understand where, how and why graphic novels originated it is key to look at preceding movements within the comics field.

The evolution of comic books has gone through four recognized stages. These are referred to as the Golden, Silver, Bronze, and Modern (or Iron) age, in line with the Greek and Roman myths referring to the material production within the field (Bryant 12). *The Encyclopedia of Comic Books and Graphic Novels* outlines the development of comic studies, but uses the development of the American superhero genre to function as a red thread through comic book history⁷. Consequently, it skips the era of the evolution of the medium prior to the rise of superheroes in the 1930s, the so-called Platinum Age (Bryant 12). Additionally, other genres (such as the Asian tradition of manga) do not develop exactly in line with the superhero genre. However, to include them is beyond the scope of the book, and this study.

The Golden Age of the superhero comic spans roughly from the 1930s until 1940s and its popularity can be explained in relation to the connection tied between wartime patriotism and anti-Nazi Propaganda (Bryant 12). The Silver Age brought comics a refinement of conventions and the creation of the Comics Code⁸ in order to bind the display of violent and sexual content (ibid). The Bronze Age, during from the 1970s until mid-1980s, produced the

⁷ For more information regarding the evolution of the comic book tradition, an explanation of terms and profiles of certain authors, see the previously mentioned *Encyclopedia of Comic Books and Graphic Novels* (2010), edited by M. Keith Booker.

⁸ The Comics Code, established in 1954, was a direct result of the controversiality surrounding comics as having potential negative effects on youths during the 1950s. The code had no actual legal authority and participation was voluntary, however, it enjoyed prestige to such an extent that eventually it went beyond its original mission of protecting readers against violent content and started to make it difficult for comics to question or critique certain issues (Booker). The code’s influence began to wane in the 1970s with the publication of successful darker and grittier comics such as for example those by Alan Moore. For more information see *The Encyclopedia of Comic Books and Graphic Novels* vol. 2.

framework which later yielded the dystopian comic. Urban unrest and social issues such as drug abuse, racism, poverty and social injustice were typical for comics from this age (ibid). The last age, The Modern age, roughly began in 1986 with the publication of Frank Miller's *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (1986) and Alan Moore's *Watchmen* (1987, with art by Dave Gibbons) (Bryant 13). These narratives focused on the complexity of storytelling and the theme of morality, which generated a rise in popularity for the anti-hero protagonist as well, establishing heroes characterized by their flaws and vulnerability (Bryant 13).

Additionally, the idea that a character would be driven by a vengeful idea of justice prevailed, in comics such as the popular *Wolverine* (1974) and *The Sandman* series (1989-1996) by Neil Gaiman (ibid). Generally there is still some confusion about what constitutes a comic and a graphic novel. The term graphic novel generally indicates a single publication, with one story and a specific cast of characters. It also addresses more mature content. One of the first comic works to be called a 'graphic novel' was Richard Corben's *Bloodstar* published in 1976. Comic books are serialized publications, usually issued in magazines; they can contain multiple stories with different sets of characters. What can be concluded is that as the ages progressed more comics and graphic novels of higher complexity were produced. This induced the still growing popularity of the comics genre, concurrently effectively shedding its connotation to low culture.

A number of parallels can be drawn between Moore's work which is rooted in the comics genre and William Blake's illustrated works. These are especially clear in a visual analysis that focusses on the characteristic combination of word and image. To bring to light the connection which exists between Blake and Moore, a more in depth look at Blake's philosophies is in order. Therefore, the third chapter is a short introductory discussion on the Moore's appropriation of the themes good and evil, Heaven and Hell, as this is visualized in his graphic novel *From Hell*. His interpretation is based on a philosophy by Blake which is

most notably present in *Marriage Between Heaven and Hell* (completed between 1790-1793). After this introductory discussion, the fourth chapter titled “Blake’s Imagination”, will explain Blake’s presence in Moore’s work by analyzing which footsteps of Milton Blake followed. The connection between the authors can be illustrated by looking at Blake’s *Illustrations of Milton’s Paradise Lost* (ranging between 1807-1822). A selection of the engravings from both the Butts and the Thomas of this work will be compared with a focus on the tradition of Miltonic iconography and the tradition of Genesis iconography. The fifth chapter, consists of a more in depth literary and visual analysis of the connection Moore makes with Blake in *From Hell* on the basis of psychogeographic elements. *From Hell* is read as contemporary case study of Blake’s philosophies as outlined in the introductory discussion and as a reestablishing of his views and of his energies. The final chapter will recapitulate and will bring forth how and why a number of Blake’s philosophical ideas are alluded to and regeneratively used in, for example, both *From Hell* but also diverge briefly to other works. Concluding remarks and suggestions for further research will also be present.

For this study a multidisciplinary approach focusing on a visual and literary analysis is appropriated. Anthropologist Micaela di Leonardo has addressed both the difficulties as well as the benefits of a multidisciplinary approach in cultural studies as she encountered them in her own research; “In particular, mixed methodologies, providing varying optics on the same phenomenon, act as a check on and a test of the validity of particular interpretations” (207). The validation of this thesis’ interpretation will be checked by looking at the visual and literary aspects of this study through different lenses such as historical contextualization, graphic studies, gender studies and cultural studies. However, the pitfalls of a multidisciplinary approach lie in accordance with its strength. It can quickly lose a distinctive focus or yield ideological points of view (di Leonardo 207). With this knowledge in mind, this

study will aim for a comparative literary approach, using a multidisciplinary framework. It will not consist of an ideology of William Blake or Alan Moore.

Chapter Three: Introductory Discussion

To William Blake, “[g]ood is not [...] straightforwardly good; evil is not evil” (Ferne 166). The philosophical poem *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* voices an appropriation of the concepts of good and evil that rejects them as rigid fixed categories. Blake strives for fluidity and adapts the controversial viewpoint of ‘The Demonic’. It investigates “a fundamental spiritual principle in the interest of the infinite efflorescence it [the demonic] enables” (ibid). In other words, the concept is inhabited with a sense of the spiritual that constitutes regenerative energy. This type of energy is indicated as the shared source of both the demonic and the divine. In Blake’s philosophy the angelic is that which obeys the rules; it is reasonable goodness. The demonic is that which moves further, beyond creation, as a creative source on its own (Ferne 165). When looking at the Creator from this perspective, it appears that his creative energy deems him a largely demonic force, which is a controversial idea.

The section of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* most relevant to this study is titled “The Proverbs of Hell” and is constructed as a set of short sayings. They are characterized by riddling language and actively involve the reader in a seemingly straightforward attempt to reform pre-existent paradigms. Even though they can be considered in isolation they are more coherent when read in the context of the whole. The tone of the Proverbs is challenging and critiques the uncreative angelic culture since it represents the voice of the demonic side (Fuller 9). In line with the favored demonic energy, the form of the Proverbs is irregular and seemingly random. This is done in order to tackle the static nature of the central notions it refers to. “The Proverbs of Hell” has three main targets, namely, “the values of orthodox Christianity, of scientific rationalism, and any philosophy taking a negative view of man’s passionate or imaginative nature” (Fuller 8). The way Blake’s philosophy interrogates the beliefs held by these three targets is through the idea of a shared source from which demonic and angelic energy originates.

From this source of the angelic and the demonic a specific energy can be structured. This creative, diverse and imaginative energy is of fundamental importance to the proverbs. It points to an underlying philosophy which can be illustrated by the following proverb: “Prudence is a rich ugly old maid courted by Incapacity” (Blake 35). This is said by the demons in “The Proverbs of Hell” and suggests that being prudent, a value often propogandised by orthodox Christianity, often brings a degree of incapability along. The human imagination is ruled by its passions and to deny them is unwise. The natural energies of love and sexuality suffer under orthodox Christian values, scientific rationalism and other philosophies that discourage it. “The careful, calculating or cunning are to Blake’s devils the cultivation of spiritual death” (Fuller 8). Another interesting example of the philosophy of the imagination can be found in the proverb featuring the crow and the owl. “The crow wish’d every thing was black, the owl, that every thing was white” (Blake 37). Both birds in this proverb seem to be expressing a wish for uniformity even though both are of a different species. They share a similar urge for security which leads them both nowhere. Their wish would stagnate the development of individuality and biological diversity and work against progression. In this work, the devils know that such an attitude is unproductive and unfruitful.

Their [the devils’] main affirmations are of individual uniqueness, a consequent moral and psychological relativism, and the praise of uninhibited vigour of thought and action in all spheres, most especially the sexual. Exuberance, excess, overflowing; fountains, lions and eagles; these are the positives of Hell. (Fuller 8)

To live the way this work dictates means undoing the existing paradigms which dictate oppositional thinking. It is much easier to wish, like the crow, that everything is black, in a safe kind of uniformity. However, the elements of energy, activeness and sexuality are vital to the development of the philosophy of the imagination, which will be underlined when examining the illustrations accompanying the text.

The visual elements of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* can be regarded as supplements to the text and its message. The first version of Plate number 10 is from copy H, from the Fitzwilliam Museum. This version of the last plate of “The Proverbs of Hell” is from 1790. A warm palate of colors is used, with a pink hue in the background and the text etched in olive green, dark blue, dark red and a light yellow. Animal imagery is added between the lines in which the literary imagery occurs and larger images decorate the first and last plate of every section. As can be seen in figure 3.1, the figure of Satan is seated in between two blue robed individuals. It is important to note that Satan is depicted with human qualities and in the nude, with no distinct biological representation of his sex.

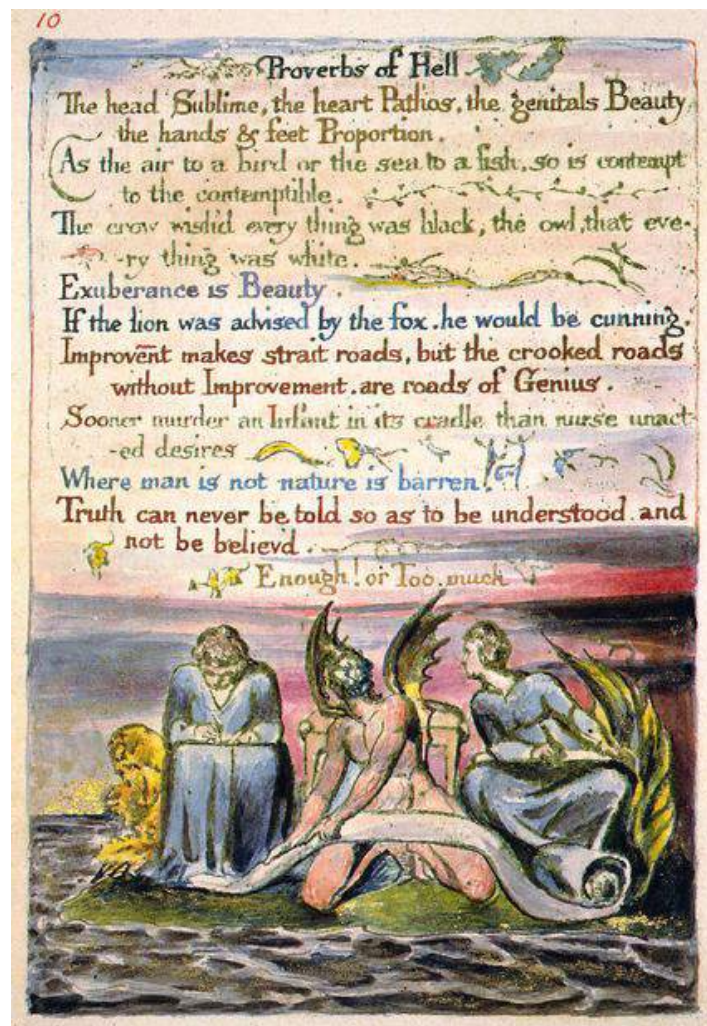


Figure 3.1: *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, (Bentley 10, Erdman 10, Keynes 10) Copy H, 1790 (Fitzwilliam Museum)

This androgynous quality very neatly connects to the fluid nature of the categories of good and evil as outlined by Blake. This is of importance since there is no gender structure that determines good or evil as either feminine or masculine. The two figures on either side of Satan can be seen as representing the angelic, due to the color blue, and due to the robes in which they are clothed. The activity in which they engage seem to be the writing on a scroll, referring to the learned character of the angelic. The figure on the right very diligently attempts to see what the other one is writing, in order to copy this himself. There is no drive for the creative production of thoughts of his own, alluding to Blake's idea of the angelic as a static force, opposed to the demonic force, which is seen as a more productive and creative energy. The fact that the devil in the middle holds onto the scroll suggests that the angelic and the demonic correlate to each other, and are both part of the same source.

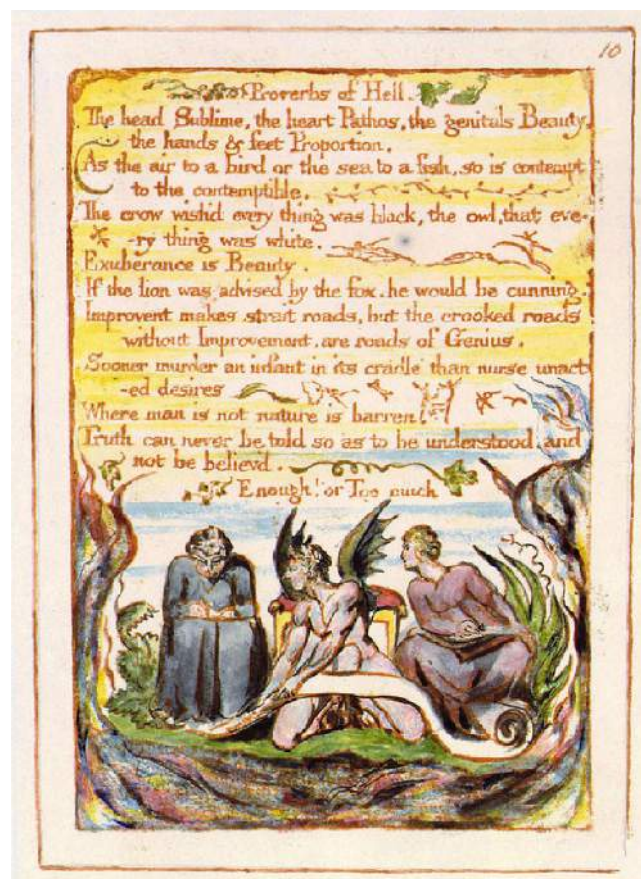


Figure 3.2: *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, (Bentley 10, Erdman 10, Keynes 10) Copy G, c. 1818 (Houghton Library)

Later versions of this work contain subtle differences even though they depict the same scene. This can be observed in figure 3.2, depicting a different version produced in 1818, currently held at the Houghton Library. “The significance of Blake’s designs sometimes changed for him as he reprinted them at different periods of his life, change being pointed by different styles of colouring, the emphasizing or painting over of different details, or a different juxtaposition of plates” (Fuller 65). Several aspects of the 1818 version of plate 10 differ from the 1790 version (see figure 3.2). Satan has dark colored wings, a more muscular physique and more detailed facial expression. This emphasizes both his strength as well as his position as a creature of Hell. However, his face being characteristically human, Satan becomes more relatable and less otherworldly. Placing the scene in a more vegetated area also emphasizes the natural aspect of the concepts of good and evil. The lush greenery and life depicted also underline the religious source, namely the Garden of Eden, and emphasizes that this is a portrayal of the demonic and angelic which Blake attempts to rewrite. What these two versions of the final image from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* underline is the work’s fundamental point about the philosophy of the imagination. “All deities reside in the human breast” (Blake 37). It outlines a form of spirituality which is naturally present in every person. Moore has taken up Blake’s philosophy on the imagination as the shared source of the demonic and the angelic within every man in his work *From Hell*.

Moore conducted extensive research for *From Hell* in order to make the link to an actual historic event. He looked into ‘Ripperology’⁹ as well as police and witness evidence and Masonic customs. This led to him concluding that out of the eleven women which are known to belong to the Whitechapel murders, a series of five murders were committed by the same man, namely, royal physician Sir William Gull. In *From Hell*, Gull receives an order from Queen Victoria to murder Annie Crook, an innocent shop assistant who is first

⁹ ‘Ripperology’ is a unofficial term used in popular culture to indicate so-called Ripper enthusiasts as well as those who study the Jack the Ripper case, the possible identity of the murderer and that of his victims.

impregnated by and later marries Prince Albert Victor, Duke of Clarence (Prince Eddy) without the knowledge of his royal position. When Annie's five best friends attempt to blackmail the crown with this knowledge Gull proceeds to murder them. However, their murders are not executions but rituals due to the religious and mythical visions Gull experiences while slaughtering these women. This is just one of a number of spiritual elements which links to Blake's philosophy on the imagination, as well as to psychogeography. This is further strengthened by Moore who makes Gull a member of the mysterious organization of the Free and Accepted Masons in London and utilizes Masonic rituals, themes and symbols to develop an interrogative philosophy on time, place, history and spirituality.

The literary connectedness which the novel embodies does not stay limited to just William Blake. Beside him, Joseph Merrick (the Elephant Man), Charles Howard Hinton, William Butler Yeats, Oscar Wilde, Walter Sicket and William Morris have small roles in the novel. The English poet William Morris (1834-1896) is woven into the narrative by one of the soon-to-be-victims of William Gull as she walks past a window through which she sees Morris reciting a poem for a society of men (Moore 32, ch. 8). The poem is called *Song II: Have No Thought for Tomorrow* which alludes to the following biblical quote: "Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (*King James Bible*, Matt. 6.34). This excerpt urges the reader to not give much thought to the next day but instead have a *carpe diem*, seize the day kind of mindset. Morris' poem is interwoven with the narrative of Liz's murder which points to a more gloomy reading of the Biblical quote. Only the first two stanzas appear in the graphic novel:

Love is enough: have no thought for to-morrow

If ye lie down this even in rest from your pain,

Ye who have paid for your bliss with great sorrow:
 For as it was once so it shall be again.
 Ye shall cry out for death as ye stretch forth in vain
 Feeble hands to the hands that would help but they may not,
 Cry out to deaf ears that would hear if they could;
 Till again shall the change come, and words your lips say not
 Your hearts make all plain in the best wise they would
 And the world ye thought waning is glorious and good: (Morris 1-10)

The use of this poem in the context of the narrative ascribes a specific meaning to what is taking place. With this scene Moore very skillfully shows the strength of the word and image combination which is characteristic of the genre. They are complementary. The poem appears to acknowledge the struggles of (in this case) Liz's daily life as a prostitute from a low social class, "Ye who have paid for your bliss with great sorrow" (Morris 3) but ends on an optimistic note stating the world is "glorious and good" (Morris 10). The frame that shows Morris reading this last line out loud is followed by the frame depicting Liz's murder in an almost ironic juxtaposition. What it evokes is a response from the audience, who identifies with the victim and perhaps unconsciously starts to question their existing beliefs on themes such as good and evil, Heaven versus Hell and fact versus fiction. By having in his main narrative the character of William Gull roam the streets of London while parallel supporting narratives use the footsteps of William Morris and other authors and noteworthy figures, Moore is able to show both the literary depth of the comics genre as well as fully explore the themes so central to the plot.

It can be concluded that the theme of good and evil in the novel is most closely tied to the murderer and his victims. While this appears to be nothing new, Moore attempts to show the ambiguity and fluidity of the concepts by redistributing power in the novel. Even though

he represents reason, justice and order as a doctor with a high social position, Gull is a psychopathic murderer. The women, though they are prostitutes and victims, are shown to be capable, kind and resourceful. Orthodox views of good and evil would have condemned them as evil, but Moore employs Blake his philosophy and through word and image questions the rigid nature of such an assumption.

The scene of the murders is the East End of London, the poorest region of the city. Most of the action of the narrative takes place here, which adds to the gothic and marginal representation Moore gives of the city. Prostitution is common and widespread here, having become a social ill. Victorian society named prostitutes 'daughters of joy' which highlights an ignorant and insensitive attitude towards these woman which commonly prevailed in that time, Moore says in the *Appendix of From Hell* (17). They were often accused of being nymphomaniacs and no regard was paid to their position (Moore 17). *From Hell* rejects this view and succeeds to reveal that these women might have been very self-reliant and that they formed a close community in order to keep an eye on each other, thus ascribing them with power and disrupting any type of rigid moral classification of these women as evil. Gull's power, on the other hand, is gradually taken away from him. The three targets that Blake aimed to interrogate Moore also questions; the values of orthodox Christianity, of scientific rationalism and anyone who take a negative view on man or women's imaginative nature.

Moore spends much time developing the character of William Gull and starts his narrative with incidents from his youth that portray the doctor's early fascination with nature and science. It begins with the portrayal of a young William who opens the eye of his dead father out of curiosity and continues with a scene in which he slices open a dead rat with a knife. It can be concluded that William Gull is driven by a clean and efficient curiosity combined with "an almost mystical and religious love for nature as the perfect handiwork of the Creator [...]" Moore says in the *Appendix of From Hell* (34). More than once, his victims

are first strangled before he mutilates their bodies with medical precision. The appreciation of nature and its mythical qualities is a positive quality; however, what Gull lacks is the ability to judge where the line between the metaphysical concepts of good and evil is drawn. He represents a lack of balance in terms of energy, which undermines the formation of his imagination as Blake intended it. In this character it becomes apparent how important the imagination is in order to make the difference between merely existing and actually living. Gull's development stagnates in one of the earlier stages of his mental development. Moore outlines in the Appendix how he identifies this stagnation in the morgue reports of photographs of Marie Kelly where an almost childlike absorption with the organic can be seen (34). Rector Harrison sums it up neatly when he speaks with William Gull's mother about young William's education. "What better basis for an education than the appreciation of nature in all her terrible glory? Why the very foundation of science and medicine lies in a preoccupation with natural forms, their workings, their shapes... The very marvel in them that moves men's hearts" (Moore 5, ch. 2).

The fact that Gull's heart is not moved towards compassion but towards a detached fascination is the key to understanding his actions. This is illustrated in the narrative through the presence of the fourth painting from the series *The Four Stages of Cruelty* (1751) titled *The Reward of Cruelty* by William Hogarth in the Gulls' residence (see figure 3.3). The painting depicts surgeons and physicians dissecting the remains of a murderer. It is an event attended by many academics and physicians. The surgeons show the same detached medical attitude that Gull has towards his victims. Though the series' intent is moral instruction, its placement in Gull's residence also underlines Gull's unbalanced imagination.



Figure 3.3: William Hogarth - *The Reward of Cruelty* 1751

Not only Blake's philosophy of good and evil as outlined in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* figures in *From Hell*. Allusions to *Jerusalem* and *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* are present, as well as a famous incident from Blake's personal life. A specific evening during which he was visited by a scaly phantom and produced the painting *The Ghost of a Flea* (1819-1820) is depicted and has a supporting function to the narrative. Moore comments in the Appendix of the graphic novel on Blake and the occult: "Blake saw visions because he 'spiritually belonged to earlier age of the world', the implication being that those we call prophets or visionaries simply have a different relationship with their subconscious mind to that enjoyed by the great majority" (12). This type of magic and the occult was indeed more common in more ancient times. A notion which is also picked up by psychogeographic thinkers and connected to the gothic depictions of the city and the idea of following footsteps left by earlier artists or visionaries.



Figure 3.4: William Blake - *The Ghost of a Flea* (completed between 1819-1820)

The Ghost of a Flea shows a beast with a muscular human physique but a reptile appearance. It has a forked tongue and small head, an open mouth, small and staring eyes, no clothing thus no defined sex, and seen walking from right to left between seemingly heavy and rich curtains decorated with stars and other patterns. In his hands are two items, an acorn and a thorn, which can be placed in the tradition of fairy iconography. This work portrays a figure which inspires and brings to mind images of the grotesque, fear and disgust. Fleas are creatures normally associated with the dead, the corrupt and the unclean. However, since this beast is portrayed much grander than the flea originally is, it can be concluded that this work attempts to link power with the connotations of the flea in order to create a powerfully monstrous creature. Moore and Campbell suggest that the creature which Blake sees in his house that evening is Gull's spirit. A startled fictional Blake comments on the face of the Flea, "a face worthy of a murderer" (Moore 16, ch. 14).



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Figure 3.5: Blake and The Ghost of a Flea (Moore 16, ch. 14)

In *From Hell* there are three instances in which *The Ghost of a Flea* figures. Once the painting appears as an object in the narrative foreshadowing later events and a second appearance occurs when William Gull enters the British Museum and meets the Irish poet William Butler Yeats who at that point is studying the painting *The Ghost of a Flea* (see figure 3.6). The third appearance is in chapter fourteen when Gull becomes the phantom Blake witnesses at his house, as can be seen on figure 3.6 on the previous page. In this disguise he says: “Below the skin of history are London’s veins that pulse and glisten with significance. That course with energy and meaning. I am that meaning. And I am that energy” (Moore 10, ch. 14). Meaning can be found in the streets of London, a psychogeographical idea which comes forward in this scene through the fusion of the notion of historic energy with the occult.

While being the Flea, Gull also becomes the energy which represents the demonic. He defines himself as: “ a voice that bellows in the human heart” (Moore 17, ch. 14) which can be read in line with Blake’s philosophy on good and evil, since it is a philosophy which dictates that divinity lies within the human breast. The demonic means excess, overflowing and creativity. When these aspects outweigh the angelic aspects of reason, prudence and uniformity, a character such as Gull can exist.



Figure 3.6: Yeats meets Dr. Gull (Moore 15, ch. 9)

Chapter Four: Blake's Imagination

Blake grounds his philosophies in an otherworldly sense of place in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, the locations Heaven and Hell; Moore connects his to the city of London. Both authors subvert existing philosophies which negate a negative view on man's imagination by presenting a more fluid and ambiguous appropriation of the concepts of good and evil. As previously mentioned, Blake is often seen as one of the first artists whose works contains themes and characteristics of psychogeographical ideas, together with Daniel Defoe and Thomas De Quincey¹⁰. This is not just on the level of literal notions of place.

They are linked [...] by more than merely a shared preoccupation with London, reflecting a wider awareness of *genius loci* or 'spirit of place' through which landscape, whether urban or rural, can be imbued with a sense of the histories of previous inhabitants and the events that have been played out against them. (Coverley 32)

In Blake's work a landscape often has spiritual characteristics. Consequently, the histories, artists and events he absorbs into his work are often theological. For this study Blake's interpretation of Milton's *Paradise Lost* will be analyzed on a visual and a textual level to see how Blake was aware of *genius loci* and what it meant to his work.

Paradise Lost follows Satan, Adam and Eve through the narrative of the biblical The Fall of Man. Remarkably enough, Milton chose to portray the character of Satan ambiguously, ascribing him with both negative as well as positive human characteristics. As a result this character is often read as the antagonist of *Paradise Lost*. This portrayal of Satan has led readers to start to identify Milton's Satan as an anti-hero. Professor Paul Stevens from the University of Toronto gave a lecture in 2011 on Milton's Satan and his contemporary

¹⁰ More in depth information on Blake's role within psychogeography was beyond the scope of this essay. However, there many fascinating works that explore it. Such as Peter Woodcock's *This Enchanted Isle: The Neo-Romantic Vision from William Blake to the New Visionaries* (2000)

relevance, hosted by the TOVO series *Big Ideas*, in which he stated that this Satan: “appears everywhere [and] it’s quite extraordinary how that rebellious, attractive figure of Satan permeates our culture”¹¹. Appearances within the comics genre include Phil Jimenez’s “Paradise Island Lost” part of the Wonder Woman-series, Lucifer Morningstar in *The Sandman*: “Seasons and Mists” (1992) by Neil Gaiman and the figure of Satan in Steve Orlando’s *Paradise Lost* (2007) with art by Hugh Vogt. However, much research can still be done to discover the scope and depth of the connection between the field of comics and Milton’s Satan.

Blake shows an theological interpretation in his work that does not equate God or his word solely with the Bible (Roberts 375). This is unusual in the sense that this interpretation undercuts the cultural influence of the Bible as a religious-moral law book that establishes different levels of hierarchal social inequality (Roberts 374). Blake offers a reading that aims to stimulate the imagination by embracing the idea that human beings are not inherently sinful and that God does not have to be appeased through sacrifice by Christ or man (Roberts 376). Additionally, it rejects the notion that God would expect a certain level of morality from man, which needs to be pursued constantly, only for the purpose of maintaining a relationship with him (ibid). According to Blake, “[s]uch an outlook [...] led to the denial of aspects of the human person and the subjection of some human beings by others” (Roberts 376.)

Since Blake has interpreted and then critically corrected Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and the tradition of Miltonic and Genesis iconography in a set of illustrations titled: *Illustrations of Milton’s Paradise Lost*. Three versions are known to exist of this set. In order to see how the already established traditions before Blake thought about Milton it will be compared to that which he added to it. Additionally, to underline the relevance of the connection between Miltonic iconography and psychogeography in a broader sense, an illustration of *Paradise*

¹¹ To find out more on the connection between popular culture and Milton’s Satan this lecture is a good starting point. It can be accessed here: <http://castroller.com/podcasts/BigIdeasVideo/2550429>

Lost by the English artist John Martin (1789-1854) will be looked at. Alan Moore's works will be referred to in order to establish a link between Blake's idea of imagination as it is influenced by Milton and contemporary use of this notion.

Blake produced three sets of engravings. One set was for Reverend Joseph Thomas in 1807. Another for Thomas Butts in 1808, and three more designs for a set for John Linnell in 1822 which, regrettably, was never completed. Blake chose to incorporate many elements of traditional iconography in the first few images of the illustrations of *Paradise Lost*. However, he makes subtle changes in order to bring out Milton's original vision more clearly. Through this incorporation of traditional elements Blake anticipates the viewer's expectations while at the same time he identifies what he will deconstruct and rework later (Behrendt 129). This can be found in the first few designs which solely depict the characters of Satan, Sin and Death. This is a traditional choice in previously established Miltonic iconography. Blake deviates from the established tradition by omitting set line or number citations. Doing this, the author alludes to the idea that a chronological order is not as important as seeing the designs as part of one, united vision (Behrendt 131). Additionally, contrarily to earlier designs, the scenes Blake choose to depicts are not necessarily heroic, theatrical or dramatic in nature but rather focus on specific details and ideas from *Paradise Lost* (ibid).

One of the first designs in the series, titled *Satan, Sin, and Death: Satan comes to the Gates of Hell* (figure 4.1), depicts a low stage on which the three figures are placed: Satan, Sin and Death. The flames that blaze behind them underline the destructive and renewing energy of the demonic principle that is being represented here. Satan's face has surprisingly human characteristics and his bulging muscles indicates his strength. Sin is depicted as half woman, half snake, which alludes to the fact that she is the offspring of the serpent, one of Satan's many disguises. The last figure, Death, is according to Behrendt, depicted for the first time in accordance with Milton's descriptions as a ghostly figure wearing a crown (134).

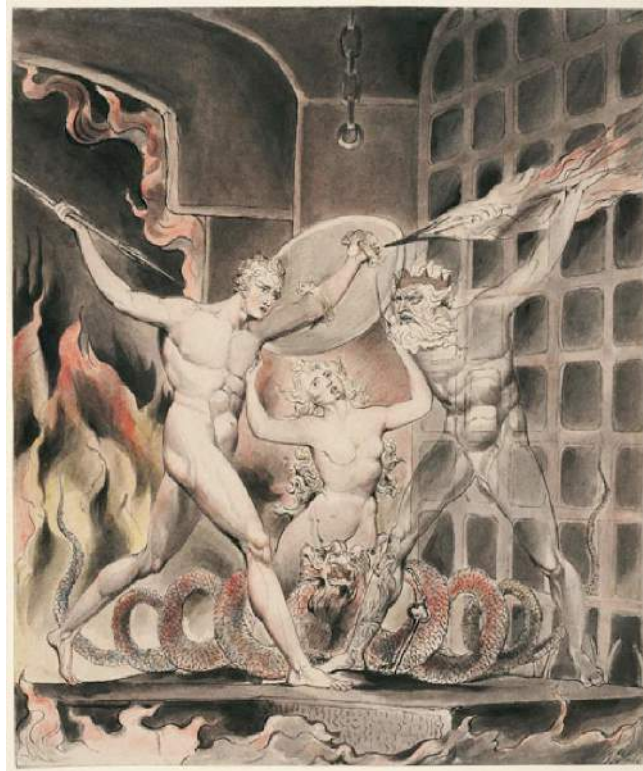


Figure 4.1: *Illustrations to Milton's Paradise Lost, The Thomas Set, object 2 Satan, Sin, and Death: Satan Comes to the Gates of Hell*

The three together form a demonic trio that is intended as a parody and a perversion of the Holy Trinity. This can be seen in the upraised arms of Satan and Death whose hands are holding spears and shields, standing with their legs spread apart in V-shapes (Behrendt). Both characters appear arrested in mid-movement making them active figures who lay emphasis on the figure of Sin in the middle. Taken together with the symmetrical nature of this tense display the parodic quality of this Trinity is only further underlined. The theme of place is foregrounded in this particular plate since the portcullis of Hell is seen behind the trio to the right, depicted as a heavy grid.

The second version of this illustration, from the Thomas Butts set (figure 4.2), further emphasizes the locale of the scene. The fiery quality of Pandæmonium¹², the capital of Hell,

¹² The word Pandæmonium originates from Greek and roughly translates 'all demons' or 'al' demon-place'.

is foregrounded even more through the addition of red and yellow colors. The heavy chain hanging from the ceiling reminds the viewer of a dungeon. The three figures are depicted larger and in arrested positions, leaning backwards as if recoiling. Death and Satan's gazes are directed down rather than to each other, suggesting that they recognize that they are kin through the same lack of genitals (Behrendt 136-137).



Figure 4.2: *Illustrations to Milton's Paradise Lost, The Butts Set, object 2 Satan, Sin, and Death: Satan Comes to the Gates of Hell*

Additional changes include Satan placing his left foot forward instead of his right foot and Sin is given a more sensuous look with a curvier body and more distinct facial features. It is interesting to note that Blake has given her many visually attractive qualities even though Milton indicates her as a repelling figure (ibid). This relates to the idea of a Hell as somehow heavenly as well. This indicates the fluidity of the concepts as well as underlines the parodic nature of Hell as it is depicted here.



Figure 4.3: Illustrations to Milton's Paradise Lost, Thomas set, object 6 Raphael Warns Adam and Eve

Figure 4.3 depicts the illustration titled *Raphael Warns Adam and Eve*. In the Thomas set, the guardian angel Raphael sits together with Adam and Eve and points upwards in a now familiar V position, arguably to heaven or Eden, but more obviously indicating the tree behind them around which the serpent is curled. This gesture can be read as foreshadowing later events. The thorned tree is an iconic representation of the cross, prefiguring the cross of the Crucifixion that will appear later and outlining those aspects of the Fall that the Son's death as man is to overthrow (Behrendt 150). On the left of the image Adam and Eve are seated, both holding one hand to their breast in response to the news that is brought to them by Raphael. Three animals are seen standing around the tree, a horse, an elephant and a peacock. Blake has included them even though they originally not were part of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The reason for this inclusion is that these animals are often connected to the Satanic. In the "Proverbs of Hell" they appear in the following two proverbs: "The rat, the mouse, the fox, the rabbit: watch the roots; the lion, the tyger, the horse, the elephant, watch

the fruits” (Blake 33-34) and, “The pride of the peacock is the glory of God. The wrath of the lion is the wisdom of God” (Blake 22). The horse figures in other proverbs as the voice of empirical reason (Behrendt 150). Pride and wrath are characteristic of the static type of reason that Blake associates with the Father. The lion, tiger, horse and elephant have to watch themselves not to let their creative energy overflow or indulge in excess, or else they will end up in Hell. The rat, mouse, fox and rabbit have to watch out for static uniformity. It can be concluded that a balance between imagination and reason is what should be aimed for.

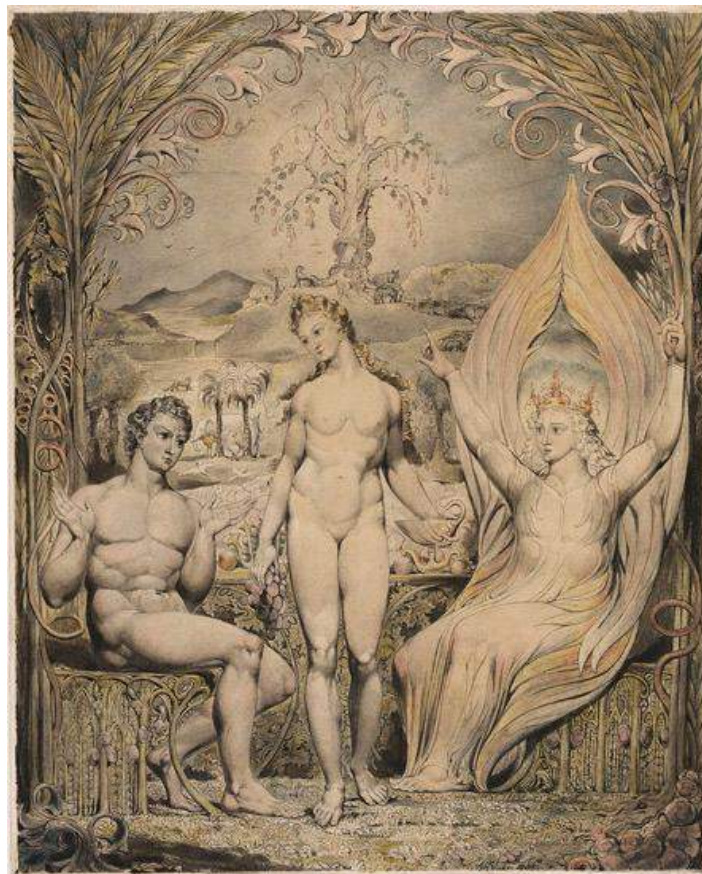


Figure 4.4: *Illustrations to Milton's Paradise Lost*, The Butts set, object 6 Raphael Warns

Adam and Eve

In the Butts set (figure 4.4) Blake revisited the composition, placing Eve in the center, the tree visible behind her shoulder. Her gaze is directed towards Adam and her hands are filled with food, ascribing her with emblems of domesticity (Behrendt 149). The fruits she is carrying foreshadow later events when she is seduced by Satan to eat an apple even though

this is forbidden. The separation that is suggested in this version by Adam and Eve's new positions occurs both in form and function (ibid). The symmetrical portrayal of the trio, and the V made with Raphael's arms stand out as reoccurring and allude to the Holy Trinity and to Blake's earlier depiction of Satan, Sin and Death. The image brings together several of Milton's ideas instead of just displaying a highly dramatic moment in the narrative. Blake adds to the existing tradition of the iconography the animals, the thorned tree and the new positions of the characters.

The third noteworthy image from Blake's *Paradise Lost* illustrations is *The Temptation and Fall of Eve* (figure 4.5). Eve and Adam both make choices that drive them down a path of division rather than unison which cuts them off from the symbolic Eden that exists only as an inward form (Behrendt 58). In order to nudge them along the path of physical and psychological unison again, the Son is crucified as a paradigm for their own self-rescue (ibid). "Thus Blake reads *Paradise Lost* as a psychodrama of man's imaginative disintegration- a history symbolically articulated in the narrative mythology of the Fall- and his potential self-redemption by emulation of the Son's symbolic example" (Behrendt 58). The moment that Blake depicts in *The Temptation and Fall of Eve* is striking. Though the Fall was traditionally illustrated as a moment in which both Adam and Eve should be present, Blake shows only Eve, implying that Adam's Fall is inherent to Eve's (Behrendt 160). It signifies that it is the sin of selfhood which they share that is the underlying motif, instead of a poor choice Eve made. The image contains familiar iconography. Eve stands before a tree bearing fruit with a serpent coiled around her body, which holds another piece of fruit up to her lips. Satan is shown standing with his back to the viewer beside the tree, holding vines and looking upwards to the thundering, dark sky.

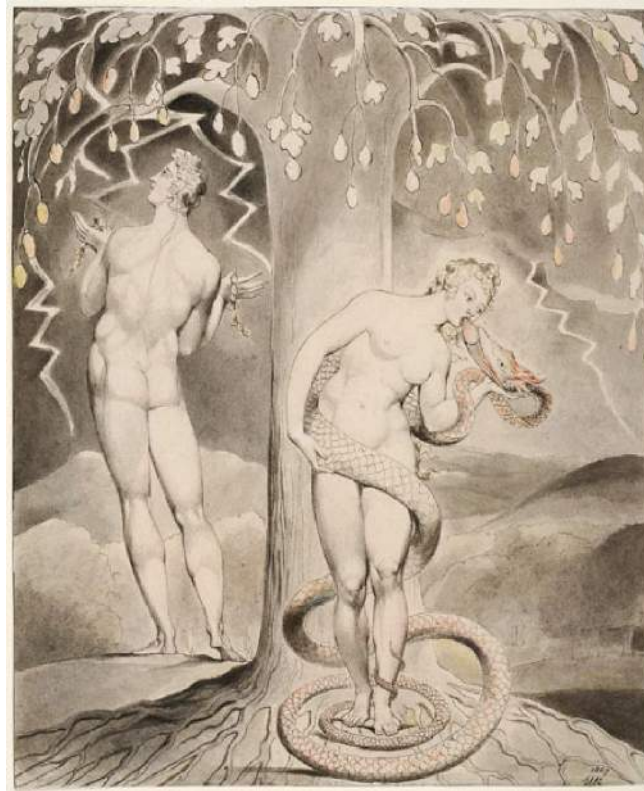


Figure 4.5: *Illustrations to Milton's Paradise Lost, The Thomas Set, object 9 The Temptation and Fall of Eve*

Eve is holding the Serpent to her lips which alludes to an earlier design, namely, *Satan Watching Adam and Eve*, where Satan is shown cradling the Serpent in much the same way, except for his horizontal posture. What this indicates is the nature of Eve's fall; she falls due to her own narcissistic pride, her vanity and her desire for physical and mental separateness, all values epitomized by Satan earlier (Behrendt 160). The Serpent covers Eve's genitals in the illustration. Her lips are close to his, implying a kiss only prevented by the fruit between them. Together these elements give the illustration a sexual dimension that should not be read as constituting something necessarily bad or evil. Quite an opposite meaning is conveyed; here, Blake shows (in line with Milton) how sex and sexuality are never inherently bad, but instead liberate and regenerate (Behrendt 161). The love Eve exhibits towards Satan here is

illicit, not sexual but selfish (ibid). In the Butts set the illustration of *The Temptation and Fall of Eve* (figure 4.6) is provided with more emphasis on certain iconographic elements, such as the addition of thorns to the tree. This helps the identification of the tree as the one participating in the Fall on which imagination is sacrificed through incorrect choices leading to the original sin of selfhood (Behrendt 163).



Figure 4.6: Illustrations to Milton's *Paradise Lost*, The Butts Set, object 9 *The Temptation and Fall of Eve*

The Fall cannot be described simply as the moment Adam ate the fruit since the Fall is a mental phenomenon. It constitutes a dis-integration and separation apparent with every individual, man or women, who “[...] contracts his imaginative vision, denies his mortal body as sinful flesh, and represses or perverts Energy” (Behrendt 162). Adam’s participation in the Fall is another manifestation of pride and selfhood that blinds his better sensibilities. He participates only because he consciously recognizes Eve’s error (ibid). “His participation in the Fall alienates him from God, from Eve, and from himself, thus both repressing and perverting his creative energy” (Behrendt 163). Satan only enjoys the Fall of Eve and Man

because it thwarts the Father's intentions. It is only in this perverse sense that The Fall of Man has any value to him, bringing out that man is merely an instrument in an ongoing mental battle (Behrendt 161). Luckily, the theme of choice returns here, since the Fall is initiated by free will, and so is man's redemption. Redemption which is achieved through participation in the vigorous mental and imaginative process of choice, as exemplified to us by Christ (Behrendt 167).



Figure 4.7: *Illustrations to Milton's Paradise Lost*, The Thomas Set, object 12 *The Expulsion*

The final illustration by Blake based on *Paradise Lost* that will be considered is the *The Expulsion* (figure 4.7). The scene shows the angel Michael holding Adam and Eve by the hand. He carries no weapons giving overall picture a friendly air. The couple's genitals are covered with vegetation and they are looking up towards the sky in which Blake shows the

four horsemen of the Apocalypse. Behind the trio lightning lights up the ground, illuminating the steps from which they have just descended. Satan the Serpent crawls out with them and is seen laying on the ground which is covered in thorns. In *The Expulsion* the pair leave Eden and enter the symbolical wilderness. Even though Eve sheds sorrowful tears the couple is holding hands and thus paint a picture of love and companionship. They are united through their resolution to face their destiny together. This is because know that there is an internal and spiritual paradise that they can attain. So even though they do not know what their future holds, they can be hopeful.

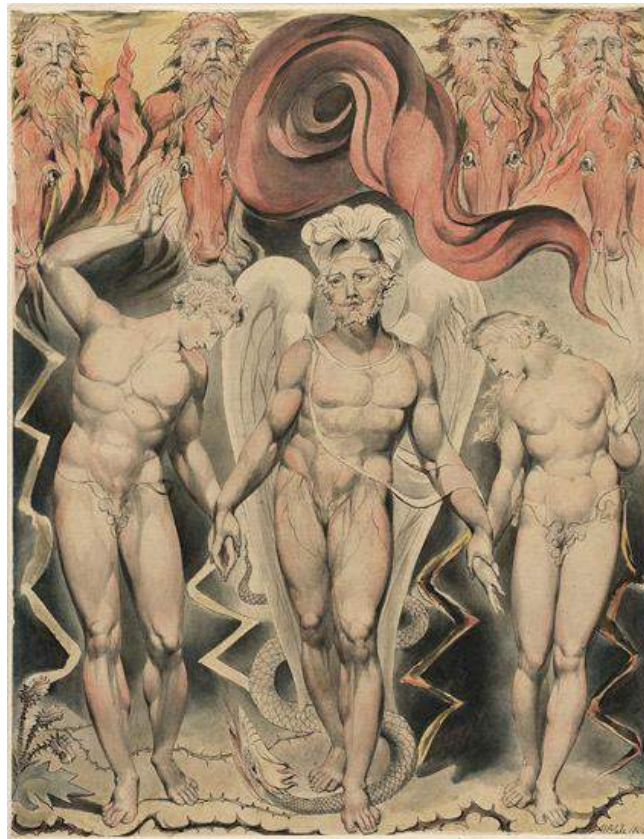


Figure 4.8: *Illustrations to Milton's Paradise Lost, The Butts Set, object 12 The Expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden*

The Butts sett illustration of the Expulsion contains subtle changes to indicate the unwillingness of the pair to leave Eden. Both Adam and Eve are looking down towards the

serpent and the thorns on the ground look sharper than before. Michael has a more troubled facial expression and he grabs Eve securely by the wrist instead of holding her hand lightly as before. By bringing out these details more closely the urgency of the situation is stressed and the troubling effect more keenly felt.

What analyzing the four illustrations *Satan, Sin, and Death: Satan Comes to the Gates of Hell*, *Raphael Warns Adam and Eve*, *The Temptation and Fall of Eve*, and *The Expulsion* has yielded is an insight in Blake's critical reevaluation of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. He used traditional Genesis iconography but also tapped into the established tradition surrounding Miltonic iconography. The difference between the Thomas and the Butts set hinges on the further development of details; details Blake considered gave an even more inclusive insight into the ideas embedded in the narrative of *Paradise Lost*. By paying extra attention to the décor and scene-setting of each illustration, a spiritual and otherworldly notion of place is foregrounded.

Blake often interrogates the two institutions of spiritual power: art and religion. This is apparent in his *Illustrations of Milton's Paradise Lost* as well. He questions their rigid philosophies by showing that they often inspire an imbalance within man's nature. This is because they generate social and cultural paradigms that root for selfish excess and which are on the level of reason characterized by tyranny and an imposed order (Behrendt 183). As a result a dissatisfied system is manifested, that can only be held together through force. This line of thought can be directly applied to the narrative of The Fall of Man where the imposed order drives Satan to rebel against the Father who then drives him away. Desire within this system hinges on greediness and lust, a mental imbalance manifested in the physical and that which accelerated the falls of Adam, Eve, Satan, Satan's followers and the Father (Behrendt 184). In this light it comes as no surprise that sex and sexuality are often perceived as inherently sinful and shameful, a view that is rejected by both Milton and Blake. The active

subversion of paradigms set by Orthodox Christianity and traditions in art through the notion of place is central to Blake's illustrations of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. This method is adapted by Moore in his work *From Hell*.

Figure 4.9 taken from chapter five from *From Hell* depicts a series of images in black and white all tied together by a single word: Ungh. The first frame shows a woman's face with an expression which is a mix between anger and fear. She having sex with a man but is having a vision at the same time. The sound uniting the frames is his moan of pleasure. The other frames depict her vision. They show a Jewish church; in front of which walk a few Jewish men. In the final frame the doors of the church burst open and blood gushes on the street. The woman does not explain the nature of her "erscheinung", her vision, to the reader. In the Appendix of the novel Moore outlines that this scene shows the moment of conception of Adolf Hitler.



Figure 4.9: Alan Moore, *From Hell* (2, ch. 5)

“Born in April 1889, simple arithmetic places Hitler’s conception some time around the July or August of the previous year. For obvious reasons, I’ve chosen August, in order to present the striking juxtaposition of a sudden inexplicable wash of blood occurring in one of the world’s most populous Jewish quarters at almost the precise moment that the future Reich-Chancellor fused into being [...]” (Moore).

Besides the juxtaposition of events, there is a subversion of religious chastity in this scene. It questions this idea through an explicit link between a visual depiction of a sex act with a depiction of an institution of spiritual power, the Jewish Synagogue. Additionally, this scene features a literal location (the Synagogue) but with the addition of an otherworldly dimension (the vision) and it ties historical events together (the moment of Hitler’s conception and a bloodbath in a Jewish quarter). These are examples of psychogeographical ideas that come together in this particular scene.

In the illustrations Blake made for *Paradise Lost* the locale of Hell has particular characteristics. In the illustration of *Satan, Sin, and Death: Satan Comes to the Gate of Hell* the setting of the scene looks like that of a dungeon. Pandemonium is Satan’s palace. It was designed by Mulciber, the former architect of Heaven and built in an hour. It is important to note that Mulciber is a different name for Vulcan, the Roman God associated with fire (including volcanic activity). Pandemonium is foremost a parody of heaven in a similar way as Satan, Sin and Death are a parody of The Holy Trinity. Milton’s original narrative on the creation of Hell, or Pandemonium, dictated a more positive view:

Anon out of the earth a Fabrick huge [710]

Rose like an Exhalation, with the sound

Of Dulcet Symphonies and voices sweet,

Built like a Temple, where Pilasters round

Were set, and Doric pillars overlaid

With Golden Architrave; nor did there want [715]
Cornice or Freeze, with bossy Sculptures grav'n,
The Roof was fretted Gold. Not Babilon,
Nor great Alcairo such magnificence
Equal'd in all thir glories, to inshrine
Belus or Serapis thir Gods, or seat [720]
Thir Kings, when Ægypt with Assyria strove
In wealth and luxurie. (Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book 1, lines 710 – 722)

In this excerpt Pandemonium is described in mainly positive terms, it is 'a Temple' with a gold roof and many luxuries and great glory. The idea of a Hell which can look heavenly is a notion that was encountered before, in Blake's depiction of Sin as an attractive woman.



Figure 4.10 John Martin *Pandemonium*, 1841, Louvre Museum

Figure 4.10 shows *Pandemonium* (1841) by Romantic English artist John Martin, who characterized his illustration based on Milton's *Paradise Lost* by adding architectural and industrial allusions. Notions of place are key to understanding this work. The architecture of nineteenth-century London is firmly recognizable in the pillars and graceful arches, but at the same time also relates to the original description of Hell by Milton. Among the familiar sights are the water-gates of Somerset House, the arcade of Carlton House Terrace in Pall Mall, and Charles Barry's architectural ideas for new Houses of Parliament. Lava, lightning and darkness reign in the foreground, where Satan is overlooking it all carrying a shield and a spear, a clear reference to *Paradise Lost*, and is draped in long red robes.

The fact that Somerset House is a renowned cultural center of the arts, that Carlton House was the residence of the later King George IV and that these two are merged with Houses of Parliament is of course no coincidence. By connecting these three institutions of power to the selfish energy as represented by Satan in *Paradise Lost*, Martin interrogates the system they represent. Additionally, the artist visualizes the fluidity of the concepts of Heaven and Hell. The institutions displayed are characterized by their power but also by the promotion of social and cultural paradigms funded on a type of reason that is characterized by tyranny and greediness. The combination of social-cultural icons with Miltonic iconography deepens Martin's interrogative angle. The presence of fire or flames in this painting conforms to Milton's original description as well as to Blake's more symbolical interpretation.

Traditionally associated with Hell, flames often decorate the images in Blake's *Illustrations of Milton's Paradise Lost* in which either Satan, his followers, or Hell is depicted. Fire foremost constitutes energy, a quality both Blake and Milton ascribe to Satan. The production of Blake's illustrations involved a chemical process which evolved as the artist developed himself. Eventually Blake discovered a technique he termed 'illuminated printing'. Instead of opting for the usual 'mixed method', in which designs were etched then

finished as engravings, he used a relief-etching technique (Viscomi 37). Designs were outlined with brushes or pens on copper plates, then traced with a needle run through acid resistant ink, and finally etched with nitric acid (ibid). This would get rid of the metal and reveal the design for printable relief (Viscomi 41). The reaction of the copper and the acid meant that Blake came in contact with a process which involved destructive and renewing forces on a daily basis.

For his illuminated printing Blake would use burins and no preliminary etching “with tone subordinate to line and texture and with lines amassed in parallel strokes rather than the conventional ‘dot and lozenge’ pattern (dots incised in the interstices of cross-hatched lines, the linear system characteristic of bank-note engraving)” (Viscomi 37). The precise moment the acid was administered and surfaces melted away Blake would refer to as the moment when painter and poet were combined; the method he termed: ‘the infernal method’ (Viscomi 41). This term indicates the renewing energy Blake connects to fire, the entire creation is consumed as it were, yet appears infinite and holy as it is characterized by an improvement of sensual enjoyment (Viscome 61). Blake’s connection to the theme of fire is thus a practical manifestation of his production methods. It is also present in the choice for incorporating the theme of fire or Satanic energy as well as in his choice of works to illustrate, namely, Milton’s *Paradise Lost* but also Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. Since fire to Blake constitutes energy that can both destroy and renew, it closely connects to his idea of the imagination.

In an interview Alan Moore gave in February 2013 with John Doran for free music newspaper *The Stool Pigeon*, Moore outlines his connection to acid. It centers around Moore’s work *Unearthing* (2010) which can be best described as an audiobook and work of photography in one. The main plot revolves around one of the artists’ best friends and colleagues Steve Moore, a hermit who stayed most of his life in the same house upon the same hill in London. Moore reveals that *Unearthing* also contains many themes and ideas

connected to psychogeography, a statement which is further confirmed by the fact that it was originally published in Iain Sinclair's *London: City of Disappearances* in 2006. On the role of acid in his life Moore comments:

“I would say that it had a tremendous impact on my life. When I first took acid, I saw a quality of hallucination that was only like that for a few years. Very much like a Martin Sharp illustration. It was very liquid and drifting. But then, a few years later — I'm sure that the acid was exactly the same — it was the landscape that had changed. The experience had become more crystalline and hard-edged. A bit more paranoid. But, yes, it made me realise that actually reality was a state of mind and that, as your mind could change, so could your reality”. (Moore)

The message which Moore's conclusion conveys is quite positive and can be applied to the overall argument about subverting existing paradigms. What accepting man's innate good and evil energies can do is bring forth a balanced imagination, the symbolic paradise. It represents a way of thinking that is open-ended and spirit-oriented. This point of view is intrinsically connected to the philosophy of *The Fall of Man*, based on Milton, that can be found in Blake's illustrations of *Paradise Lost*, which convey the same hopeful message. By following the example of the Son, leaving selfhood behind and forgiving sins, showing acceptance towards each other, a religion of compassion instead of a religion of morality could be possible, restoring the original harmony.

Chapter Five: *From Hell*

In October 2000, Neil Spencer conducted an interview with Alan Moore for *The Observer*. It was shortly after the publication of the collected edition of Moore's graphic novel *From Hell* in 1999. Commenting on his works' references to William Blake, Moore says:

“Blake represents the visionary heroism of the imagination. He was living in a London which was not much more than a squalid horse toilet, on which he superimposed a magnificent four-fold city and populated it with angels, and philosophers of the past. Art at its best has the power to insist on a different reality” (Moore)

Much of the city Blake visualized is built on the work of philosophers from the past. For this study Milton was chosen to represent this characteristic of Blake's work, which is analyzed in chapter four, but many more are present. Their ideas combined with what Blake saw of London in his own life produce works of considerable literary depth. An example is Blake's illustrated poem *Jerusalem the Emanation of the Great Albion* (1804-1820)¹³. This work is rooted firmly in the domains of spirituality and philosophy but also in history through the notion of place which is connected to the British national identity. Moore picked up this blend of themes and built his own London in *From Hell* in accordance. This chapter contains an analysis of the graphic novel based on the framework established in chapter four.

The city of London is intrinsically bound to the British identity. Similar to the idea of a personal identity, a collective identity is fluid and will change overtime. In a BBC TV interview, conducted in April 2012 by Tom Franks, Moore says: “In Britain we have quite a tradition of making heroes out of criminals or people who in other centuries might have been regarded as terrorists.” The graphic novels *From Hell* and *V for Vendetta* (illustrated by David Lloyd), elaborate on this mixture of history, nationality, fame and criminality, the former

¹³ *Jerusalem the Emanation of the Great Albion* by Blake is a work which is often connected to psychogeography because of the way in which Blake incorporates the city of London into the work's main argument.

investigating the identity of the Whitechapel murderer, and the latter follows an anarchist revolutionary in a dystopian United Kingdom. The identity of the murderer famously known as Jack the Ripper is unknown, but speculations first speculated that his nationality must have been anything but Britain. However, the myth was later gradually adopted into the bosom of British national identity.

The reason for this absorption is complex. As Moore observes, “Jack mirrors our hysterias. Faceless he is the receptacle for each new social panic. He’s a Jew, a Doctor, a Freemason or a wayward Royal” (Moore 22). These social panics manifest themselves when a person or an event is out of the ordinary or deviates from hegemonic structures. John Druiitt, the teacher selected by the police as the scapegoat Jack the Ripper near the end of the novel, fits the model due to his marginalized position as a homosexual man. Other Rippers were, among others, John Prizer (aka leather apron), a Jewish butcher; German body thieves; and Russian doctors, illustrating attitudes of anti-Semitism and xenophobia. It was at the Ripper centenary in 1988 that Britons and tourists started to celebrate the Whitechapel Murders and Jack the Ripper as belonging to the British national identity (Ho 105). This in itself is a problematic attitude to take with regards to a serial killer, and what *From Hell* aims is to get involved in is a process of confrontation and reeducation, highlighting that a celebratory reading of the Victorian age is inappropriate (Ho 107).

The concept of history, the national past, and the tendency to gloss over the imperial parts are central themes in *From Hell*. In the opening of this study we see how Gull takes his coachman and accomplice John Netley on a tour through London in order to show how official versions of history are often negotiated constructions. This clear psychogeographical scene can be found in the introduction of this study. While they pass various sites Gull outlines the story of its Non-Anglo Saxon history. The sites are often characterized by phallic shapes (such as Cleopatra’s Needle, Obelisks, cathedrals and more) and often touristic spots

presented as English heritage but founded on violence and trauma (Ho 109). Later on in the novel Gull addresses the concept of the banalisation of society through a vision he experience whilst murdering Mary Jane.

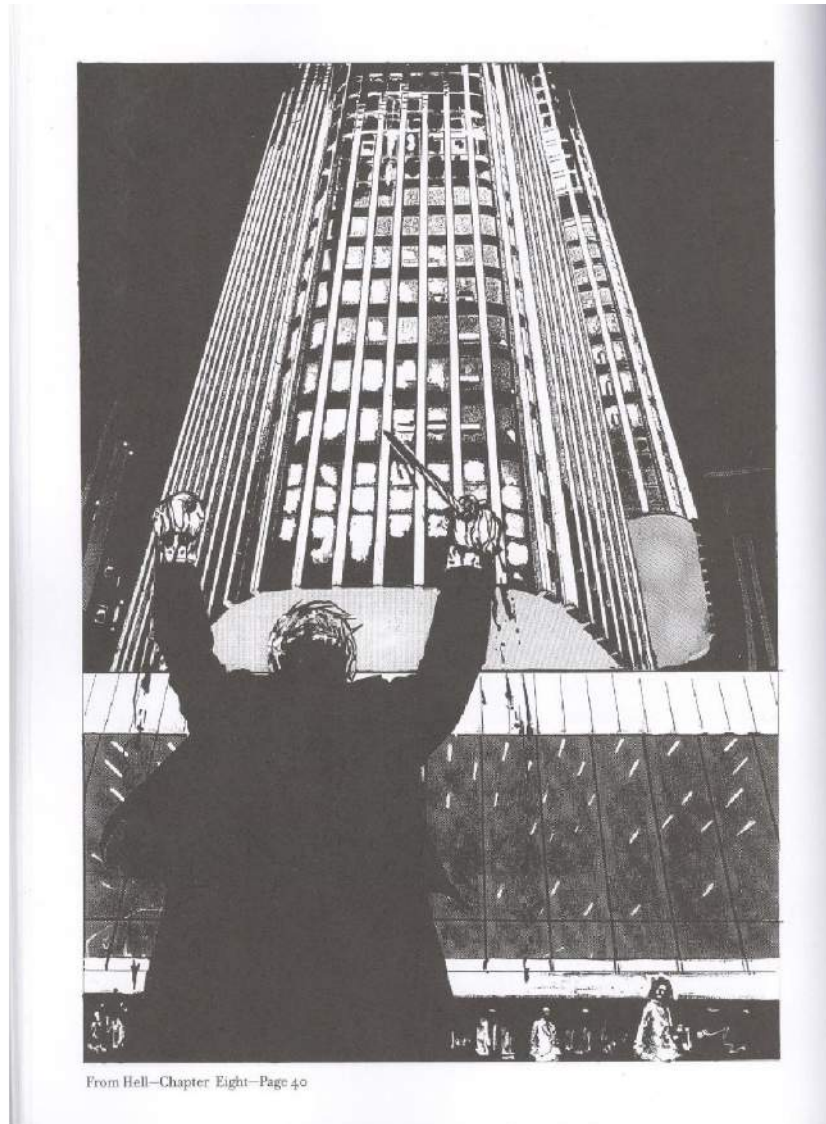


Figure 5.1 Moore, *From Hell* (40, ch. 8) William Gull during the murder of Marie Jane Kelly

Gull can be seen in figure 5.1, standing in front of an office building while he in fact is at that very moment mutilating Marie Jane Kelly's body. In his vision a phallic symbol of power is

rising up into the sky before him; he greets it holding up a bloody knife and Mary's heart. He then asks the 20th century people about him:

Where comes this dullness in your eyes? How has your century numbed you so? Shall men be given marvels only when he is beyond all wonder? Your days were born in blood and fires, whereof in you I may not see the meanest spark! Your past is pain and iron ! Know yourself! With all your shimmering numbers and your lights, think not to be inured to history. Its black root succours you. It is inside you. (Moore 21, ch. 10)

Gull's address to the dull faces of the office employees in the 20th century is an attempt to bring out the fluidity of history. Through this vision the occult is combined with unconventional Non-Anglo-Saxon history. The vision refers to sites which question the idea of current national belonging. When constructing identity, Gull says, instead of merely accepting history as a given fact, it is more useful to realize that it forms man at the core. Words such as 'shimmering' 'black root' and 'succours' refer to the concept of fire as a deconstructive but regenerative force. He urges to utilize this history of pain and iron as a creative energy to help in times of distress.

What ties in with Gull's interrogation and urging of finding a healthy balance between reason and imagination, is a more general observation Moore makes of (Victorian) England's morals and values. This concerns the symbolic identity of Jack the Ripper. The actual murderer's crimes are horrid, the systematic killing and maiming of sex workers. However, it pales into insignificance in comparison to the response the murders received from the public. What started as hoax became a reflection of character on a national scale. The narrative of *From Hell* shows how a letter was sent by the supposed murderer who signed with Jack the Ripper, but it turned out to be written by a figure from the London press. It triggered a stream of incoming correspondence from the public who pretended to be the supposed killer. In figure 5.2 Campbell sketches how a priest, a working-class man, a perverted man and two

young children are all writing the press letters in the name of Jack the Ripper, thus showing the scale of people fantasizing about killing and maiming innocent women. One of the letters successfully traced was written by a woman, which shows a gender transcending social ill (Moore 32).



Figure 5.2: Moore, *From Hell* (36, ch. 9) The ambiguous identity of Jack the Ripper

“In the case of the fraudulent and press-generated ‘Ripper’ letters, we see a clear prototype of the current British tabloid press in action, and for this reason it seemed poetically apposite that the letter be composed in Wapping, currently the home of Mr Rupert Murdoch’s highly popular right-wing tabloid, which, unsurprisingly in this tale of obelisks and other arcane solar symbols, is called *The Sun*” (Moore 26).

Moore identifies the media with male symbols of power such as the obelisk and brings forward how they strengthen and promote social ills. In the novel Gull belongs to the organization of the Free and Accepted Masons, which is portrayed as a spiritual institution with considerable power. Spirituality and the occult feature most prominently in the life and character of Gull, a choice which is not at all that evident.



Figure 5.3: The deity Gull calls Jahbulon (Moore 26, ch. 2)

The character of William Gull in Moore's graphic novel *From Hell* is endowed with a spiritual and magical awareness. In contrast to his profession as a medical specialist, which is highly logical and fundamentally reason-based, Gull turns to the Free and Accepted Masons and starts to worship a deity he calls Jahbulon (figure 5.3). It is an emanation which gives him purpose and allows his creative but evil energy to prosper, with disastrous consequences. Mathematician Charles Howard Hinton (1853-1907), who published an article titled "What is the Fourth Dimension?", has a small role in *From Hell*. Through this character Gull

investigates the idea of a Fourth Dimension. In an interview with Jay Babcock for *Arthur Magazine* in May 2003 on the arts and the occult, Moore speaks about the use of this concept. He explains that in the last half of the 19th century scientists, mathematicians and spiritualists mixed in order to explain spiritual phenomenon through this new dimension¹⁴. In the novel Campbell chose to portray the question “What is the Fourth Dimension?” posed by Hinton in the following manner:



Figure 5.4: What is the Fourth Dimension (Moore 1, ch.2)

It stands apart, in a lone text balloon against a black background and recurs throughout the narrative, making time a very prominent theme within the novel. Gull concludes that that time is most likely an illusion invented by man, which explains the lack of imagery. The question is quite literally still ‘in the dark’. The same goes for the frame that follows. In this frame, another question is posed: “Can history then be said to have an architecture?” (Moore 1, ch. 2). This question is similarly in the dark. For Blake history was shaped by philosophers and artist of the past. Moore blends time, history and spirituality by having his main character explore London and encountering representatives of each dimension.

¹⁴ The concept of Four-Dimensional Space, or 4D, in connection to art is elaborately investigated by Linda Dalrymple Henderson in her book *The Fourth Dimension and Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art* (2013). This book is recommended to readers looking for more information on this concept.

Chapter Six: Conclusions and Suggestions for Further Research

Milton, Blake and Moore are philosophical wanderers who share a tendency to connect history, spirituality and place in their works through philosophers of the past. They journey horizontally through urban, rural or spiritual locations and at the same time delve vertically through history. As this study has shown, their legacy is a transformation of familiar landscapes.

The cultural influence of Milton was vast in the eighteenth century, and continues to prevail in contemporary (popular) culture. This is primarily due to Milton's portrayal of the devil as a psychological and morally ambiguous character. Around *Paradise Lost* a rich tradition of visual iconography flourished, building on the visual iconography of the Book of Genesis. Blake took these two traditions and whipped them together in his illustrations of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, frequently adding new elements as he saw proper, attempting to bring out Milton's original vision more clearly as well as develop his own philosophies on Heaven and Hell. Blake's view on the concept of demonic and angelic is further explored in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, and most prominently in the chapter titled "The Proverbs of Hell". Through a set of highly critical proverbs Blake proposes a rebalancing of these principles by looking at them as energies. One represents reason, represented in the angelic, and the other imagination, represented in the demonic. In order for man's to reach his full potential, a balance must be established. Blake interrogates the existing more static division of good and evil in order to allow for a possible renewing of social and cultural attitudes. Moore reimagines these works by Blake with a similar purpose: reworking contemporary society.

The considerable presence Blake has within the comics genre is a subject on which much terrain can still be won. This study has brought to light Blake's presence within the comics genre by looking at Alan Moore's graphic novel *From Hell* (1999), created with artist Eddie Campbell. The first version of this study also included an analysis of a second work by

Moore: *Watchmen* (1986-1987). Beside a literal allusion to Blake in chapter V titled: “Fearful Symmetry”, which features Blake’s poem “The Tyger” (1794), Moore reworks the superhero genre conventions to expose their foundation on static notions of good and evil which enforce cultural paradigms regarding (among others) sexuality, nationality and spirituality. Due to the limited scope of this study this chapter was removed and the focus was laid on *From Hell*.

For *From Hell* Moore utilizes Blake’s concept of the imagination to address historic paradigms regarding the English national identity. He does this through the theme of locale, using historic sites in order to link them to historic figures. The leading character is William Gull, often depicted as the image of an actual gull, a character with a profession rooted in reason, namely, medicine. Throughout the narrative Gull attempts to dissect the notion of life, by dissecting the corpses of his victims. His intentions are selfish and reason is employed in a tyrannical way, which ascribes Gull to the Satanic and to Hell. Besides this character other seemingly banal portrayals of human behavior are utilized by Moore to reveal a larger social paradigm existing in the 20th century, namely that of the dumbing down of the majority through modernity. This rebellion against the opposing order that can also be seen in Gull’s exploration of the city on street-level, and by combining his portrait of London with spirituality, magic and the occult, Moore defines himself firmly as a psychogeographer.

The scope of this study is narrowed to a literary and visual analysis of work by Alan Moore. This choice was mainly founded on Moore’s significant presence within the comics genre, and due to the fact that this novel contains elaborate allusions to Blake’s work. Within Moore’s oeuvre there are other works which should be included in further research.

Watchmen, but also *V for Vendetta*, illustrated by David Lloyd, could not be included in this study, but outlines a dystopian post-nuclear war England set in the 1980s - 1990s in which a fascist government runs the country as a police state. V, the protagonist, opposes this party through an violent and theatrical campaign and is seen wearing an iconic Guy Fawkes Mask

in order to obscure his personal identity. This mask has been adopted by many revolutionists identifying with his cause today, in current society. David Lloyd, the illustrator who designed the mask for the graphic novel comments for BBC News in 2011 saying: “The Guy Fawkes mask has now become a common brand and a convenient placard to use in protest against tyranny - and I'm happy with people using it, it seems quite unique, an icon of popular culture being used this way”. This direct influence of the novel on popular culture and societies around the globe highlights the medium as an effective tool for social regeneration. In *V for Vendetta* there are two stanza's from Blake's poem “And Did Those Feet in Ancient Time” from the preface of *Milton: A Poem* (written and illustrated between 1804-1810). It reads:

Bring me my Bow of burning gold;
 Bring me my Arrows of desire:
 Bring me my Spear: O clouds unfold!
 Bring me my Chariot of fire!

I will not cease from Mental Fight,
 Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand:
 Till we have built Jerusalem,
 In England's green & pleasant Land (Blake 9-16)

As can be seen in figure 6.1 the person uttering these lines is V himself in his Shadow Gallery. The “Mental Fight” (Blake 13) that is mentioned refers to V's battle to free the people from the totalitarian government through anarchy. However, the Jerusalem he envisions turns out to inspire merely chaos and disorder. More research can be done into this combination of the comics medium, reader response and cultural identification. Other works by Moore such as *The Mirror of Love* (2004) and *Lost Girls* (1991-1992) address the social paradigms regarding sexuality more pointedly than the work featuring in this study, and are

thus also of value to be further explored. Finally, *Unearthing* (2006) is the most notably psychogeographical work by Moore and analyzing this work could further strengthened this study.

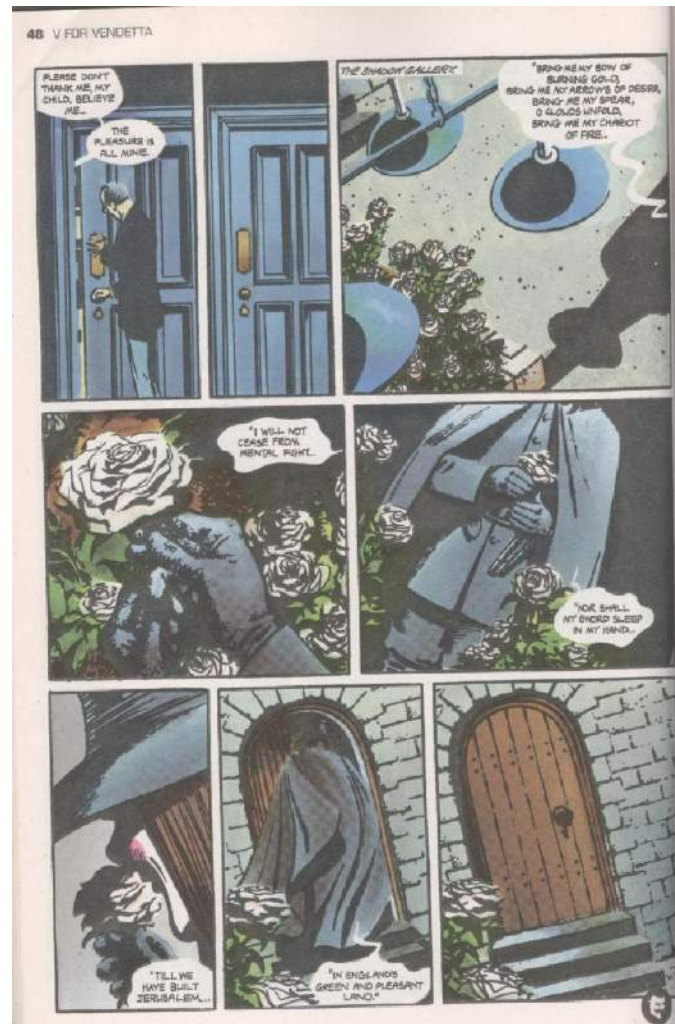


Figure 6.1: Reference to Blake in *V for Vendetta* (Moore 48, ch. 6)

William Blake's work lends itself for different utilizations across mediums. Allusions to Blake can be traced within all the categories of popular culture, music, art, literature etc. Concerning the contemporary relevance of this study it is in order to give a longer quote by Mary Lynn Johnson. She says:

“His [Blake's] purpose is to change lives, so that through those changed lives a nation and a world may be redeemed. [...] As the Preface [to Blake's epic poem *Milton*]

indicates, the New Age demands from its youth new works of imagination- possibly in the form of literary, graphic, or even musical creations that would do for Blake what Blake did for Milton: correct his errors and free up his misdirected creative energies to regenerate contemporary society.” (Johnson 247)

While more research can be done on the contemporary presence and influence of Blake’s footsteps, it can be concluded that his legacy is still being revived in order to encourage those works of visionary imagination that will launch regeneration.

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