



FACULTY OF PHILOLOGY

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“ALL ELSE CONFUSION”: A STUDY OF THE TEXTUAL VIOLENCE ON ALAN

MOORE'S FROM HELL

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Summary

Contrary to what is stated in the initial dedication in Alan Moore's *From Hell* (1989), the book is actually far from being an account of the plight of the five women who fell to The Ripper's knife in 1888. Instead, its fiction could be said to have been laid out in the shape of a textual edifice, built to honour the memory of its genre's namesake: Jack. The aim of this essay is to map out the nocturnal abode where the book textual foundations can be found. The different sources of criticism used in the analysis of *From Hell* reveal how various layers of textual violence are inflicted on the victims. This violence is instrumental in rendering their bodies a palimpsest in which the genre can perform its work of textual recreation. In the end, the sway of the genre's meaning creation process seems to answer in the negative the question lying at the centre of this essay: is it possible to tell an anti-misogynistic story using a misogynistic genre?

Introduction

To many readers of Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell's colossal graphic novel *From Hell* (1989), it may have come as a disappointment that, after the initial dedication to the five canonical victims of the murderer known as "The Ripper," where authors go to cite their names and state that "you and your demise: of these things alone are we certain," there is relatively little in the rest of the book addressed to shed light on the personal plight of those five women who met their ends in the streets of Whitechapel during the autumn of 1888.

There is instead a considerable amount of attention which has been paid to the noble endeavour of myth recreation. An endeavour which, I find, sustains the bulk of the textual scaffolding of the work analysed and explains the elusive nature of the figures of these five women. It could actually be argued they have been shunned from Hell and kept in limbo since the limelight of the centre stage goes to the figure who shapes and justifies the beacon of the written word in this case. This is no other than the master mason of the building who we are about to enter: Jack.

With this essay I have intended to engage on an exercise of textual analysis, with a view to gauge the extent of the violence which the genre known as "Ripperology" exerts over the bodies of their victims. This violence, albeit understood as manifold, is first and foremost a textual violence. With the critical aid of theories by Russian semiotician Yuri Lotman, I have come to describe the process of meaning creation at text level and how this can be made to fit within a wider sphere of meaning known as the semiosphere, the collective imagination or simply culture. Instrumental to this analysis is the concept of genre studies as social function which localize its capacities as more akin to a prescriptive than a merely descriptive nature. Accordingly, in order to expose the violent nature of the process of textual reconstruction, I have made use of such concepts as "palimpsest" and "chronotope," as well as the linked concept of psychogeography, which help provide a layout of the process of textual reconstruction. As

part of this layout I have included key concepts such as Terry Eagleton's social analysis of the gothic genre (which justifies Moore's insertion in this typology) together with Christine Ferguson's coinage "Victoria Arcana" which identifies common trends in a group of British works of literature within the wider category of the gothic. Alongside the aforementioned, theories such as Julia Kristeva's modes of signification, her concept of the abject, as well as Mikhail Bakhtin's aesthetics of the grotesque are instrumental to some of the analysis offered in the sections below.

The essay has been organised around eight sections that aim to expose the process of textual construction associated to the writing of this novel. To a great extent, this process is based on the violence exerted on the bodies of the female victims, violence which is regarded within the genre to which the novel belongs as a fit "weapon" for meaning production.

In the first part of this analysis, under the name of "The Whetting Stone," we sharpen the critical weapons provided by Lotman. These are to lay bare the process of textual violence to which the bodies of the five canonical victims are subjected. The extent of this violence makes hostages of them within the textual edifice built by Jack. These five women, turned into palimpsests by force of the textual violence, are the raw material onto which the drive of commodification and gender patriarchal discourse known as "Ripperology" is going to develop the full measure of the cultural memory contained in the genre.

It is in the second part, known as "Victoria Arcana," that I try to extend the functional approach to genre into a wider scope. Along some of the guidelines pointed out by Christine Ferguson, I bring the focus on an invariant set of features within modern British literature dealing with the chronotope of Victorian London tinged with the works of the occult. In doing so, I try to outline its functional recurrent traits and certain aspects of temporality and the dynamics of historical analysis, which reveal the fundamentally different approaches followed by some British

psychogeographers and the theories by Lotman. The emphasis, in the general outlining of this genre, which could be understood as a subgenre within the gothic, as a carrier of those anxieties described by Eagleton, falls closer to the prescriptive tenets than the descriptive ones.

The full measure of the epic reconstruction of the past is delivered in part three of the analysis. Here the breath of the work of textuality is shifted from the level of the bodies of the victims to the text of the city, understood as a body. At this point in the procedures, I did call Kristeva's modes of signification to my aid in order to reveal how the balance between the realms of the "semiotic" and the "symbolic" can be shifted so as to create new meanings. The operational power of this analysis infuses the text of the city with a meaning which helps describe how the central character in the novel, Sir William Gull, swerves dangerously towards the most nocturnal of the textual boundaries.

I consider part four, "Grotesque Nativity", the "heart of darkness" of the novel, carrying much of the meaning content and representing the apex within the process of textual reconstruction. Here we face the descent from Kristeva's phenotext into the genotext. This journey comes burdened with the heavy load of personal as well as collective signification. Critical in the support of this analysis of the site of horror are the aesthetics of the grotesque by Bakhtin and Kristeva's concept of maternal abjection. Both have helped explain how the horror represented in patriarchal discourse by maternal abjection is visually and semantically characterised.

"The Fall Time of the Year" and "A Pint of Tripe" are respectively the names to parts five and six. Each one deals with a concept that is key to the development of the textual process which is characteristic to the genre: Lotman's concept of the semiosphere in part five and Kristeva's idea of the abject in six. Both parts can be explained along these same premises of the theory of textuality, if we understand the process of meaning creation implemented by the Victorian tabloids and the work of a new press, which infuses the genetic code of the gothic genre with

the explosive creative violence of the individuality of Jack the Ripper. Lotman's concept of the semiosphere enlightens how the cultural processes can be said to duplicate those of nature--a vision which is substantiated through the visual allegory provided by the motive of the autumnal leaves.

Part seven, named "The Writing and Unwriting of Names," covers the culmination of the process of textual reconstruction exerted by the genre. Here the text has been extended to its furthestmost abstract reaches of the realm of discourse, where an example provided by an old epic genre is attempted as a model of how literature can be deconstructed into the constellation of collective discourse. This is the non-place where the network of influences can be shown in full sway from the point of view of an overarching temporality.

The last of the parts in which I have divided my analysis, number eight, "Dancing to Jack's Music," covers the appendixes providing the autopsy of the text of the novel. The bare bones of the genre's skeleton are displayed, so we can come full circle to the theme of the textual violence exercised on the palimpsests that are the bodies of the victims.

Discussion

1.- The Whetting Stone

It is indeed quite telling the metaphor that author Alan Moore choses to describe the output of his work with artist Eddie Campbell, in which he sees their novel as “the post-mortem of a historical occurrence, using fiction as a scalpel” (Di Liddo 15). It is perhaps from these premises that we can be granted an insight into the role played by those five women who fell to the scalpel, or was it to the fiction? It is made clear to us that Moore’s agenda in this novel was to make use of the clearly defined and frequently trodden path of the genre known as Ripperology, in order to dissect a period in English history. In doing so, he intends to expose its maladies and social injustice in a way which is productive to his own narrative.

The fact that, within the boundaries of the narrative of an autopsy, the five women could be considered accessories to a crime that justifies this narrative does not seem too far-fetched; quite the contrary. If you are about to deal with an autopsy, and we are reminded of its definition according to the *Collins English Dictionary* in an epigraph to the first chapter, provided by Iain Sinclair; you most certainly will be in need of a supply of bodies where the scalpel can perform its writing. Because this is what the autopsy is about: the creation and interpretation of a text. A manual case of meaning creation in a long stream of meanings, the interpretation of the work of an artist who has changed the brush for a knife, according to the epigraph to the first chapter provided by Iain Sinclair, one of Moore’s most influential fellow writers and an adept hand at setting Moore on the steps of “the Ripper”:

Later, there is a room a bed

The dissection of time

Meat decor, exorcism in blood

The carving of forbidden words

on clean flesh pages (n.p; ch. 1)

This carving and those clean pages take us to the issue of textuality, an issue that can hardly be avoided in a genre which is so often constructed on the remains of so many others previous works, as we are minutely instructed in that last appendix of the novel.

The work Lotman as a semiotician offers an excellent platform from which one can try to understand the work of textuality and intertextuality within the weaving of the fabric of culture. Lotman argues that the text, not the sign, should be considered the basic entity of culture, the product of communication and the main object of semiotic study (*Universe of the Mind* 217-218). His understanding of what a text is goes beyond the realm of letters and claims for it the condition of multimodal and polyglot (Semenenko 75). The system of culture realizes itself in each text, through a principle of asymmetry in which two languages, that which Bakhtin dubbed as *consciousness* (Dentith 42), come into contact in order to create meaning. The nature of the artistic text tends towards the “infinite labyrinth of couplings” (Lotman, *Universe of the Mind* 14) in which it could be defined as “complexly constructed meaning” (Semenenko 81). If it is true that the text is marked by its expressedness, where we find systemic traces conditioned by an element of unpredictability --the forces of entropy and difference which enable the creation of meaning (Lotman, *Universe of the Mind* 36) -- it is also true that the text can be analysed not only in terms of what is there, but also in terms of what is not there (129).

Lotman’s premise of polyglotism, stating that meaning can only be created from other meaning --which precludes any self-sufficiency with regards to languages--, is congenial with Bakhtin’s dictum of the dialogical nature of cognition: “the essence of the text always develops on the boundary between two consciousness, two subjects” (“Speech Genres and Other Late Essays” 107). It is going to be in the interstitial spaces between both, right at the core of the factory of

meaning, where the trading of languages and consciousness that interest us, that of the author/s with the collective memory represented by the cultural text, is going to take place.

Culture, that most elusive of concepts, is for Lotman subjected to the Law of Isomorphism, which explains that culture is both the work of the collective mind and an invariant text (*Culture and Explosion* 77). Both a mechanism which creates texts and a text itself. He sees the general in the particular and vice-versa (*Universe of the Mind* 70). This nature of invariant text can take us to the idea of genre. It is indeed in this fashion how Lotman, among other authors¹, sees the agent capacity of genre, as the part of the structure that does not change in a group of texts (“The Discrete Text and Iconic Text” 67) and whose function in culture is to bestow memory to the system. This is indeed rich material on which certain parts of *From Hell* can be further analysed as bearers of a discourse which strays from the allegedly critical purpose of his author and gravitate towards the conservative. But it is in subsequent interpretations of the cultural function of the genre that we are going to find the crux of the textual appropriation of the characters of the five canonical victims.

When a genre acts as a recipient and bearer of memory, it does so in the capacity of being a recipient and bearer of discourse. In his essay “The Rhetoric of Sex/ The Discourse of Desire,” Samuel R. Delany defines discourse as the stabilization through language of the material, educational and habitual constraints affecting our freedom of action (33). Genres become synonymous with this concept, as containers of values and ideology. Authors go as far as defining the genre as the “textualization of a social event” (Bawarshi 357). Since the concept of genre implies a trade in reception, translation and functions as a “frame of reference” of different texts, it is only logical that the mechanisms of intertextuality come to the fore, particularly in the context of artistic reproduction and reception (Semenenko 90).

¹ Such authors as Carolyn Miller or Anis Bawarshi.

The more multidisciplinary and comprehensive the concept of genre becomes, the more efficient the critique of the transformative and representational powers of the discursive guidelines in genre. From the purely systemic functions of textual virtualization of the collective memory in culture, to the political, social and gender discourses which will be discussed in the present essay, this invariant form of patriarchal discourse acts as a mediating force between the reader and the author, but at the same time between the author and the tradition. A force that shapes and anticipates expectation while dictating predictability, within a construction that no longer is the dialogical open ground of two consciousnesses, but the enclosed space where stands “the house that Jack built” (Moore, Prologue 8).

The house made by Sir William Gull, “bricks of viscera, with knife as trowel” (22; ch. 12), has its plan drawn by the game of intertextuality on which Moore’s novel has been conceived. The major influences where the writer admittedly (16; app. II) has drawn upon in order to obtain plot, motives and ideas are Stephen Knight’s *JTR: The Final Solution* (1976), Iain Sinclair’s *Lud Heat* (1975) and *White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings* (1987). So it becomes once again painfully obvious that the role of each of the five women in this story is to provide a corpse which can be laid on the street, the bed or the table on which the autopsy is about to take place. Both of the aforementioned authors grant Moore with valid arguments on which to embark on his surgery of the Victorian era. In a format of narratively productive but, nonetheless, far-fetched conspiracy theory, Moore takes us by the hand in a ‘tour de force’ of bleak meandering through the slums, the palaces and the police stations where deranged physicists and toff conspirators engage in a counterinsurgent battle against the forces of destabilization.

Of the multiple forms of repressive violence exerted on this story, it is the violence against women that can be felt in its utmost degree not only at the level of discourse, but also in its instantiations within the semiotic life of Moore’s text. This semiotic life, granted by the imprint of the cultural memory on the consciousness of the audience (Lotman, *Universe of the Mind*

18-19), marks the gap hinted between the fictional lives of some of the characters and the records kept of what we know of the five names mentioned in the initial dedication of the novel.

Some of the works of non-fiction which are being currently published provide us with a valuable insight into the plight of the five individuals who fell to the scalpel of the genre. I purposefully say individuals because, according to Hallie Rubenhold's *The Five: The Untold Lives of the Women Killed by Jack the Ripper*, there is no evidence that they knew each other. This therefore renders scenes full of vim and drama, such as the one in which Mary Kelly characterizes the company as "the four whores of the Apocalypse" (15; ch. 3), as mere fodder for representational commodity to be dutifully cashed in real bank accounts. While we are at it, to the lack of a company, we should add the fact that out of the five women, there was only partial evidence of soliciting or prostitution in the case of two of them. What happened was that the police force assumed that all of them must be prostitutes and failed to conclude the obvious--that the Ripper targeted women while they slept rough (Rubenhold 15).

Moore holds an uneasy contradictory position when writing this novel. On one hand, he is adding a colossal and extremely well documented volume to the Ripper legend; on the other, he is quite conscious of the discursive toxicity he is selling into. This evidence becomes particularly poignant in the final appendix where the history of Ripperology is laid down, revealing the insides of the beast. The admission to having created a theme park around the murders (22; app. II) or having one of the characters deride the need to surround crime in "supernatural twaddle" which gives way to a new industry (2; ch. 9) should suffice as a testimony of Moore's pang in his conscience while at work.

The paradox of the society of spectacle for which this work has been created is that, in order to be believable, a story should hold the mark of the illusory or, in the words of Guy Debord, "the spectacle is the map of this new world, a map which exactly covers its territory" (31). A

particularly lucid panel opens page 15 of chapter 13, in which a weary and emotionally scarred inspector Abberline walks past a huge wall covered in publicity billboards, which in perspective act as the background to the profile of the battered policeman, at a time he has been painfully made aware of the scale of the operation involved in the murders. The awful realization that the institutions he has always fought to safeguard have been instrumental in some of the most gruesome murders inflicted to an unprotected group of paupers is made the more poignant by the physical presence of the billboards which act as a map of the geography of commodity and desire. A desire which devours spending capacity and builds altars in which sacrificial scapegoats will be turned into profit.

What lies at the centre of this discursive operation is the fact that the fate of Polly, Annie, Elizabeth, Kate and Mary Jane's stories continues to be defined and shaped by those male, authoritarian and middle class set of values which were at the core of the Victorian world (Rubenhold 15). Rubenhold would not probably be too much off the mark if she was to use the same adjectives to describe those values guiding the heads behind the industry of entertainment nowadays which continue to milk the proverbial cow of Ripperology. Long before they were to meet the blade of the Ripper, the five women came to inhabit a "living death" (58) as a consequence of their having strayed in that space of confusion described by Tennyson in his poem "The Princess". There they would meet their end, either in the darkness of their abandonment in a slum street or in the blood-stained horror of a room turned hell. There they are kept, in the textual cage of a genre, which continues to fester by the mantra that all except the ever-darkening glory of its master is confusion.

Of course the big picture of textuality in this novel would not be complete without a reference to the work of co-author Eddie Campbell. Much of the oppressive atmosphere to which the text is witness is created by the apt hand of Campbell, who translates discourse into drawing lines. Some revelatory examples can be found in the scenes where the four women are drinking in the

pub (13; ch. 3). Jared Gardner has pointed out some of the technical features that bring to the fore the narrative capacity of Campbell's drawing. His abrupt style of drawing has the effect of offering a more realistic rendition of the story in a way that some have defined as unfinished. Rude lines offer a background to the pictures and the overwhelming presence of the cross-hatching create the illusion of "a spider's web from which the poor women of Whitechapel cannot escape" (Gardner 61). These aggressive strokes and pervasive cross-hatching could be construed into a breakage of the textual code in operation while the dissection of the five women takes place. Nowhere is this matrix of vivisection more apparent than in chapter 10, where the dismemberment of the Ripper's victim takes place against a background of cross-hatched pattern.

Given the metatextual nature of the internet in the society we inhabit (Semenenko 99), which renders an event in reality perfunctory unless it has been sanctioned by the presence in the metatext, I find the profusion of graphic evidence of the Ripper's murders, particularly in a society verging on the timid or puritan when it comes to the display of violence, particularly telling. It can hardly be a coincidence that any random search for Ripper's victims in a search engine brings up a hoard of gory images, unless of course those images are the text of the legend.

I would like to come full circle to one of my tenets in the beginning of this essay, when I argued that the bodies of the five victims have been used as a palimpsest on which a new script dictated by the genre has been inscribed. The art of Campbell substantiates this scrubbing and erasure of limits, by virtue of which the women tend to merge with the background as part of the landscape they can be found in. This feature becomes particularly noticeable in the top panel on chapter 13, page 13. Gardner comments on how Campbell blurs the contours of the women who are found to dissolve into the surrounding grime of the interior, giving prominence to the

texture of the environment rather than the personal features of the characters sitting at the table (Gardner 60).

This idea of the textual appropriation of the bodies and lives of this group of women is substantiated in a prescient exchange between characters Mary Jean Kelly and artist Walter Sickert, in which she asks: "D'ye think after you've painted us ye can throw away the original?" (1; ch. 3). This line, coming from, as we shall see, the only female character in the novel invested with an agent capacity to fight patriarchal discourse or make it work to her own ends carries the crux of the textual appropriation which is about to take place. Not only are they going to experience the violence of being thrown away, disposed of by courtesy of the murderer, but they have also been turned into a commodity substantiated into artistic representation.

Once the commodity has been begotten, the original turns into the reproduction since it is denied of its primal status of being and is relegated into a secondary or tertiary level with no place in the trading landscape. That which is not susceptible of being turned into commodity has no place in modernity and, therefore, should make room for trade. In other words, those who cannot be traded will be tread upon, or sometimes both: "In order to gawp at and examine this miracle of malevolence we have figuratively stepped over the bodies of those he murdered, and in some cases, stopped to kick them as we walked past (Rubenhold 345).

The visual text on same page holds witness to the elusive reality of Mary Jean, whose body almost escapes representation on top panel, blurring into the surrounding background of hatching lines depicting the street (1; ch. 3). As we will comment later on, this capacity in the character opens up a window of opportunity within the much restrictive corset set upon women by patriarchal discourse. If invisibility is your lot, make that lot work for you.

2.- Victoria Arcana

Much of the textual appeal of Ripperology as a genre can be found to owe to its malleability to the representation of collective anxieties. This is a trait it shares with the gothic genre to an extent that it could be argued that “The Ripper’s crimes” are just another example in the productive factory of the gothic novel--a genre that, in the eyes of Terry Eagleton, works as a social group political unconscious:

One would need to imagine that our everyday social practices and relations, with all their implicit violence, longing and anxiety, were all the time waving a kind of fantastic subtext to themselves in some entirely imaginary place, a kind of verso to the recto of our walking life, as intimate and alien to it as id to ego, in which those familiar social processes are refigured in the light of all that they have abruptly repressed. (187)

What Eagleton saw as characteristic of the Anglo-Irish besieged elite in the Ireland of the XIXth century rings increasingly true in an England where global capitalism and the policies of immigration might have encouraged a feeling of alienation in certain groups--due to a new definition of what is to be English--which some might resolve by clinging to a notion of Englishness anchored in the past. That they do not resource to “an imaginary place” is debatable, as one tends to see in the past that oneself has set off to find.

The choice of a chronotope, along the lines of its definition by Bakhtin, have much to do with this set of pervasive anxieties, and many of the ones being elicited in the last few decades in British literature hold the mark of the circularity to and from the Victorian Age. It only seems fitting that the way novelists choose to devise the form in which time and space are jointly conceived and represented (Dentith 49) will have much to do with the anxieties on which the

novel's discourse is modelled. The choice of an apt chronotope will endow the author with a channel to allow for psychological representation which is both functional and recurrent.

The appeal to present day letters of Victorian society as a chronotope is substantiated in numerous titles that have appeared in the last few decades². However, the sway of its allure has not been restricted to literature, with works of art in different disciplines that can provide ample evidence, to an extent that Victorian ethos seems to have found a way into collective discourse, or perhaps it has never really left it. There seems to be something in the British psyche, as unempirical an opinion as this may be, that finds the image thrown back by the mirror of Victoriana as a desirable one. It is true that many of the authors, as it is the case with Moore, who chose to set their works in the Victorian period, do so with a critical aim. The nature of the times, more pliable to the extremes of despondency and the British class system, are prime raw material on which artists like Moore make their weapons shine. However, the extent to which this era has gripped both the collective British imagination and formed the foreign opinion about it, go further than that. There have to be deeper motives that artistic convenience for an era to evoke ideas of self-representation in the collective imagination so vividly. Perhaps these images become particularly gripping at times of crisis when slogans such as “Make Britain Great again” ignite the spirits of politics².

What Ferguson dubbed as “Victoria Arcana” in 2009 owes its alleged misogynistic stance not to “their political or cultural support of violent patriarchy, but rather to their exaggerated and undercritical investment in the same hermeneutics of suspicion and spectralization of power that animates the alternative historiography of New Historicism” (46). It is by placing some of the discourse of the novel in the terrain of the occult that its validation eludes the test of time. In the work of authors Iain Sinclair, Peter Ackroyd and Alan Moore, these practices are further

² Among others: Brian Talbot's *The Adventures of Luther Arkwright* (1978), Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* (1984) or Moore's series *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (1999-2019).

reinforced by an influence of psychogeography which seeks to uncover the textuality of space. This space, as would only seem fit given the particular anxieties elicited by the genre, is going to be that central seat of imperial power which is the city of London.

Perhaps this penchant for the occult and its manifestations explains the deviation that the concept of psychogeography would experience in their writing, from the initial approach typical of French situationists such as Guy Debord, who in his *Theory of the Dérive*, envisages the practice of psychogeography as a fight against the grip that capital articulates through the arrangement of spatial hurdles:

In a *dérive* one or more persons during a certain period drop their usual motives for movement and action, their relations, their work and leisure activities, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there... But the *dérive* includes both this letting go and its necessary contradiction: the domination of psychogeographical variations by the knowledge and calculation of their possibilities.

From Debord's initial approach to how the socioeconomic forces of capitalism are imposed on our cities and the manner in which they can be counteracted by a playful act of walking without a thesis, we arrive to Sinclair's much more focalized perspective as explained in his work *Lights Out for the Territory: 9 Excursions in the Secret History of London* (1998). Here the act of walking is given a sense of direction: the direction of the stalker on the prowl for prey (75). We can identify clear undertones of violence in the vision of a walker for whom the *flâneur* is no longer to be regarded as a role model, but who instead is described as a "stalker", a walker "with a thesis. With a prey" (75). Furthermore, the fact that the aim of this walking is, to a big extent, to unearth the "secret history" of the city, as revealed by the title, should put us on the track of a new type of psychogeography.

Sinclair's "walking with a thesis" serves as a vindication of the agenda of this group of English psychogeographers determined to "look for historical, anthropological, cultural impressions and memories, and to let them come to the surface" (Di Liddo 127). As these subjective impressions surface the realm of letters, they "become a palimpsest where a fictional map, both subjective and universal, is traced for the reader to confront and to recognize his/her own cultural references and identity" (127). But are they really meant to be read as so by the reader or has this palimpsest been conferred with a new meaning in those interstices of meaning-creation, between the process of representation and reception of the artistic text?

Sinclair describes how Mary Ann Nichols, the first of the canonical victims in her descent from housewife to destitute sinner, was caught in the fatal whirlpool of the "heated intestine of the city: she was slit, drawn out, unmeasured" (*White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings* 52). She has been caught in the insides of the body of a beast. Both Sinclair and Ackroyd take pains to describe the fearful architecture of this body of the city. To reveal the script hidden in its streets is but an exercise of exactness, a penchant for detail perhaps owing to the British imagination's love for the empirical, which bars the stroke of subjectivity from the palimpsest of the fictional map.

Sinclair's *Lud Heat* is teeming with motives and data which are going to be put to use by Sir William Gull in chapter 4 of *From Hell*. A repertoire of the architecture of fear and control that acts as a catalyst of the darkest forces in the city is disclosed in Sinclair's prose and poetry: "the whole karmic programme of Whitechapel in 1888 moves around the fixed point of Christ Church, that Tower of the Winds – closer & closer, until the risk of the final act is achieved, purgation/completion – performed in the decay of a pseudo-crypt" (23). Further attention is devoted to another of Hawksmoor churches in this inventory of the architecture of terror: "If Christ Church was magnet to the archetypal murder myth of the late nineteenth century, St George's-in-the-East was host to the definitive fear-prose of the early century" (24)—this being, incidentally, the place where Liz Stride's remains were taken in for the inquest (Moore

7; ch. 9). Sinclair is indeed speaking of the celebrated work by Thomas De Quincey “Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts” (1827). It is only a few lines below where he remonstrates against De Quincey’s unforgivable miss at the criminal agency of the church architecture, a feature that can only be explained since the essay did not grow from direct observation of the ground (24).

That Peter Ackroyd decided to term his history of London as a biography can only be taken as a statement of intents. He has also unreservedly ascribed to the corporeal metaphor of London as a living organism, which Sinclair so conjured in his ruminations about the powers of the occult at work in the city. This biography is dotted with reflections about the “onerous and exhausting condition of the city itself” (Ackroyd 259). In its pages the character that is London emerges as the actor and participant in some of the tragedies that have marked its anatomy. As said of Whitechapel at the time of the murders, “the streets and houses of that vicinity became identified with the murders themselves, almost to the extent that they seemed to share the guilt” (273).

It only seems fitting that when literary animism grants a life of its own to a city, this place should be also accredited with a legal persona. Streets may change their names in the course of time, but time’s architecture cannot be fooled by London’s Council administrative procedures: “Other roads and streets can prove to be injurious. Dorset Street was the site of Mary Kelly’s murder in the winter of 1888, at the hands of ‘Jack’; it reclaimed its original name of Duval Street after this peculiarly savage crime, as a way of preserving anonymity, only to be the site of a fatal shooting in 1960. In both cases no murderer was ever convicted” (275).

The penchant for the occult runs as strong in Ackroyd as it does in Sinclair and Moore. He finds traits of the hidden and often brutal mystical nature of the city in the popularity of certain myths: “the point is that ‘Spring-Heeled Jack’ became a true London myth because he was so fantastic

and artificial a monster”. It seems as if by means of the trope offered by such figures, the darkest pulses of the springing metropolis are to be adopted as some of the defining features of London’s “genius loci”: lurking violence, isolation, mystery. Further down on the same page, Ackroyd claims, “the fact that ‘Jack’, like a later and more notorious ‘Jack’, was never apprehended serves only to deepen that sense of anonymity which suggests the monstrous figure to be some token or representation of London itself” (502). We have come full circle again to the purported cartography of this English psychogeography school with a fictional map that, in its claim to universality, renders the dichotomy between subjective and objective reality insignificant.

The view Lotman had on historical events was not one marked, exclusively, by the predictability of their occurrence, as shown by the metaphor used by Semenenko in order to explain it: “History is not like a clew that one can unroll into a single thread, but rather resembles an avalanche of self-developing live matter” (72). Furthermore, in his *Universe of the Mind* Lotman goes on to argue that the conversion of a chain of facts into a text is invariably accompanied by selection (234). The text of the past is built in the present by the historian who, following Schlegel’s dictum, “is a prophet who predicts the past” (qtd. in *Universe of the Mind* 235). In an acutely marked contrast with this philosophy of time, Moore favours in his works of fiction a recurrent propensity to the abandonment of the illusion of time. His poetics are those of the eternal present, in accordance with theories that advocate for the equivocal nature of the traditional approaches to the concept of time.

The conversation between Sir William Gull and James Hinton in chapter two deals, among other issues, with the concept of a fourth dimension. Such concept put forward by Hinton’s son, mathematician Howard Hinton, advocates that “all times co-exist in the stupendous whole of eternity” (15; ch. 2). Within the dark womb of Christ Church in Spitalfields, Sir William outlines the master plan sustaining his venture into meaning creation. Events in history are

responsive to a pattern, as the masonry in the frightful architecture brought about by Hawksmoor: “Events rising towards inevitable convergence like an archways lines” (15; ch. 2). Time, thus, possesses an architecture, a notion “most glorious and most horrible” in the words of Sir William (15; ch. 2). Horrible indeed as this condemns as irrelevant any theory upholding an agent capacity for individuals in their own affairs. If all events tend towards an inevitable convergence, all events are necessarily predetermined in their occurrence. The physics which sustains such an architecture of time, as the one provided by the following excerpt, can hardly be sold as progressive thinking: “Our story’s WRITTEN, Netley, inked in blood long dry...engraved in stone” (37-38; ch. 4). The aforementioned patterns of predictability, laid out by the architecture of time, support the foundations of the textual edifice of which Jack, or Sir William in his more genteel impersonation, is the master mason. Within the bars of this prison lay the text of the bodies of the victims and Netley’s, the coach driver, to whom Sir William admonishes: “your destiny’s inscribed upon the streets where in you grew” (37; ch. 4). Texts which are, in turn, contained by the bigger text of the city, in a similar fashion to the isomorphism functioning within Lotman’s concept of the semiosphere, as it will be explained later. This particular scene, no doubt sketched in the mind of master of irony Alan Moore, has Sir William Gull standing outside of St Paul’s while Netley on his knees is being sick, perhaps unable to digest so much meaning as what he has been trusted with in this chapter.

Against the tide of predictability, the philosophy of language championed by Lotman can be seen as a liberating force which highlights the historical agent capacity of the individual. To him, the dynamic nature of culture encompasses the work of two antithetical drives: the system and the individual. He claims that, at the moment of explosion, the system acts like an individual (*Universe of the Mind* 224). He encapsulates this performative nature in a motto which reads: “the space of proper names is the space of explosion” (Semenenko 70). We will come later to this explosion within the text of the novel.

The literary agenda behind the archaeological drive of the genre precludes the dialogical form typical of the novel and demands a self-referential form of discourse. Chapters 4 and 10 mark the textual metamorphosis of the novel into the terrain of the epic. The language of the novel characterized by the presence of dialogical communication (Lotman, *Universe of the Mind* 144) veers towards the auto-communication of the myth. The presence of an otherness that trespasses the pages of the novel, whose music is “a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousness, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices” (Dentith 39), cannot be felt in the language of the myth which “always says something about me” (Lotman, *Universe of the Mind* 156). The extent to which discursiveness is done away with in this section of the novel can be discursively manifested when we compare the pair formed by Sir William Gull to that other of Don Quixote and his squire Sancho. Where the knight interacted with his companion in an interactive dialogue which dynamically changed their profiles, the surgeon only sees a brute, unfit for dialogue, whose sole function is to take him along the London streets while serving as an excuse for Gull’s monologues.

The self-referential discourse is taken to summits of cultural solipsism when events of an arguably local importance are to be made into historical landmarks with a global prescient generative capacity. A fact that can be explained if taking into account Moore’s understanding of the decade of 1880s to “embody the essence of the twentieth century, along with the attendant notion that the Whitechapel murders embody the essence of the 1880s” (14; App. I). How the violent nature of XXth century can have been pre-determined by a certain crime carried out in the streets of East London in 1888 will be further discussed when dealing with the novel’s heart of darkness, chapter 10.

This reduction of the communicative scope seems to go accompanied by a reductive scale in the setting, since the ramblings of Sir William and his driver in chapter 4 are going to be circumscribed to the traces on the map of the city of a pentacle of discursive power built in text

and mortar. A pentacle he was later to reduplicate in an architecture made with bricks of viscera and knife as trowel (22; ch. 12). This psychogeographical trend seems to be particularly predominant in Moore's exclusively literary production, where one of his characters in his novel *Voice in the Fire* "experiences a state of total symbiosis with the place in which he lives. The problems of the village and of its inhabitants become wounds and scars that plague his body" (Di Liddo 129). Again the recurrence of metaphors of body and place are filled with a capacity for creation of meaning.

3.- The Text of the City and Its Modes of Signification

Such an author as Alan Moore, who sees himself as a wizard, finds perhaps an adequate outlet for his fascination with the occult in the figure of Sir William Gull. If Sir William is a Victorian gentleman, Royal surgeon and a representative of the forces of western instrumental reason, he is also a believer in the powers of the occult and a fierce warrior on the battlefield between the forces of Venus and Apollo. Sir William and his coachman set upon a quest to read the text of the city through the study of its metaphors, uncovering its structure in an effort to penetrate the meaning of a literature set on stone, place names and associations (9; ch. 4). Holding together this construction, there is a gender discourse that infuses its brick, mortar and nomenclature with the code of a matrix, the patriarchal matrix.

Church spires, obelisks, towers are physical representations of the "phallus", to be understood as "what constitutes sexual difference: the symbol of women's lack and men's plenitude" (McAfee 32). Kristeva, through Lacan, regards the phallus as the ultimate signifier, the signifier of something that eludes articulation, while paradoxically constituting the reason for human speech (32). Following Kristeva's steps we can identify the development of subjectivity as shaped by "the transfusion of the living body into language" (15) and expressed through two modes of signification: one which expresses clearly ordered meaning and another that is the

discharge of the subject's energy and drives. The words she uses for these modes are *symbolic* and *semiotic*, respectively (15-16). Taking these modes to the actuality of the text we could talk about the realization of a genotext and a phenotext, where "genotext is to topology as phenotext is to algebra" (24).

Kristeva regarded the creation of meaning as the result of a dynamic dual process in which our "bodily drives and energy" find an expression through the use of language (14). The two modes of signification are the forces behind this process: the *symbolic* harnesses language within the constraints of logics and reason, whereas the *semiotic* is said to infuse the energy carried by our irrational drives into the strata of rational language. Therefore, a balance between the two modes is required in order to create meaning which is at once logical and revitalized by the force of the *semiotic*. A forceful shift in the balance between these forces may render language a stolid tool devoid of energy or find it deprived of a rational drive.

If we take the duality of modes to the sphere of the text, we can see how textuality operates at two levels. At the level of the genotext, there is a "process by which the author organizes or manifests semiotic drives and energy," while the phenotext carries the bulk of the logically structured communication conveyed by the realm of the *symbolic* (25). We could then, making use of Kristeva's theory, start to unravel Sir William's long ride into the night.

This construction of text is threaded together with a gender discourse pivoting around the chase of that elusive signifier which can be misleadingly associated to male sexuality, but which is instead infused in pure desire (32). Since desire is lack and the phallus only confers power to the extent to which others desire to obtain it, Sir William acknowledges the importance that discourse and the realm of the *symbolic* play in this chase. He then sets out in a ride that is descriptive as well as prescriptive. It uncovers the cartography of patriarchal discourse by performing a pilgrimage along the sites from which its symbolic potency can be drawn. It may

be not a coincidence that during their stop at the non-conformist cemetery at Bunhill Fields, Campbell, perhaps aided by Moore's metatext, chooses to include in a bottom-of-page panel the gravestone of that quintessential of English writers upon pilgrimage: John Bunyan (Moore 12; ch. 4). Moore does not miss the opportunity to point out the fact that "the date upon Bunyan's monument is exactly two hundred years to the day before the first of the Whitechapel murders" (12; app. I), in an exercise of intertextuality describing patterns of recurrence which is so dear to the group of writers previously mentioned.

Sir William's "walking with a thesis" (Sinclair, *Lights Out* 75) marks the departure of the surgeon from sanity and his descent into the arena of the primal abjection. His authoritative voice in chapter 4 is wrought in canonical undertones of self-reference, preparing the reader for a ride into the solar lands of the rational. Modern psychology prescribes the parting from the realm of the maternal as a condition for the founding of rational discourse. Under this light, the whole of chapter 4 could be considered a mythical Baedeker of how civilisation is built as compensation of mother's embrace (McAffe 35). All Sir William is left with in his chase is the cold Law of the father (32), embodied by the dark profile of Queen Victoria, or the acceptable vision of maternity and sublimation of desire according to the patriarchal matrix. From this solar phenotext under the rule of logics, syntax and semantics, he will progressively find himself straying into the land of the genotext. A departure from the sunny lands of reason into the darker abode of primal abjection, the grotesque and the pulsing drives encapsulated by the motility energizing rational discourse (24). He lays the structure of the text only to be lost later to the many dark waters of substantiation, that expression which was beautifully described by one of the characters in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) as the language of "blood and bloom" (377) and which in its alliteration carries a full measure of the potential that Kristeva assigns to the phonematic devices to be had in poetic language (24).

4.- A Grotesque Nativity

As Sir William parts with phenotext to ride deeper and deeper into genotext, a move that will be completed by chapter 10 when we are delivered the sombre epiphany of the modern world, we could think of him as a later-day Quixote who descends into madness to be confronted with his own set of grotesque visions. Although the fundamental voice used by Sir William, in its self-referential authoritative commentary of tradition, has more to do with the epic than with the polyphony and the dialogical devices which are intrinsic to the novel as seen by Bakhtin (Dentith 41), it could be argued that he does share, instead, that guiding principle of grotesque realism which is degradation (Dentith 65). Some of the features present in Bakhtin's aesthetics of the grotesque which guide much of his approach to the carnivalesque tradition in European culture and the work of Rabelais (63) are going to be put into use by Sir William although with different results, owing perhaps to a different understanding of its genetic functional power.

Sir William brings to completion in this chapter the process of erasure and engraving of the script that has come to annul and symbolize the body of the butchered women. Sir William's scalpel, which is Moore and Campbell's pen, brings the bodies into the text of the commodity through the speech of the grotesque. The horror that is unleashed in the interior of 13, Miller's Court, constitutes the dark centre of the book and the epitome of the narratology of the discourse of the body. By making this central scene in the whole edifice of violence against women the cornerstone of the semiotic life of the text, authors Moore and Campbell get dangerously close to a position of complacency in the narratology of horror. This is not to suggest that the aim behind the representational ethos in chapter 10 is simply voyeurism, but does the way a story is told not say something about its message? Given the incendiary charge of these pages, the sway of the diegesis is too strong to allow for a safe representational stance and everybody in that room is going to end with blood or ink in their hands. Whether these forces of representation ultimately fall on the field of glorification or vilification remains to be seen.

Throughout the book Moore conjures up the elusive nature of the figure of Jack the Ripper by eliciting pieces of trivia which have been associated to the crimes: black bonnets, chalk scrawls, pieces of anatomy. He goes on to claim that “these insignificant pieces of debris make up the corporeal mass of the largely mythic being that we call Jack the Ripper, and are deserving of comment” (23; app. I). Are these trinkets anything but tokens of the process of commodification inherent to the drive behind this text creation? Has this legend not been made bigger through an endless body of narration that, with notable exceptions, has tended to enlarge the figure of Jack while belittling those of the victims? Is the body of Jack not made ultimately of discourse which prescriptively and performatively perpetuates the crushing motion of the same process of commodification, to which Moore self-mockingly alludes to in chapter 9, through the words of inspector Abberline: “Mark my words, in ‘undred years there’ll be cunts like ‘im, wrapping these killings up in supernatural twaddle, making a living out of murder” (2; ch. 9).

While Sir William Gull embraces issues of the aesthetics of the grotesque described by Bakhtin such as the openness of the lower organs of the body to the world or the brutal materiality implicit in “the incessant reminders that we are all creatures of flesh and thus of food and faeces also” (Dentith 65). He does so from premises which are quite far apart from the “gay, affirmative, and militantly anti-authoritarian attitude to life” (63) that for Bakhtin characterized the aesthetics of the grotesque in the European carnival tradition. The grotesque in the crimes of Sir William, however, share with Bakhtin the essential principle in grotesque realism, which is degradation (65). Nevertheless, in the case of Sir William, this degradation has more to do with the contempt that the surgeon feels for the subject lying on the table of the theatre of operations than with a levelling mechanism narrowing the gap between social groups. It is the degradation and the contempt which are the product of the exercise of power. Instead of the boisterous grotesque laughter of the butcher raising over the racket of the street market we are

confronted by the derisive smirk of the experienced surgeon directing a magisterial dissection of a body in front of a group of students (14; ch. 10).

Let us not forget that those performative ministrations of carnival tradition commonly invested with a rebellious nature can also be, in turn, “a malleable space in which activities and symbols can be inflected in different directions” (Dentith 73). Indeed sometimes “the side that made most efficient use of carnival festivity was the party of authority” (73) and the forms of violence inflicted on the Jews, the transgressors of the code of sexuality or the bodies of the enemy in battle can bear testimony to this fact.

The wielding of power that the surgeon displays on the theatre of operations has in the tradition of European politics, evoked a recurrent metaphor embodied by the so called “iron surgeon”. This authoritative figure is expected to manage the affairs of the nation with the same assertive control that he exerts on the operating table. The discharge of violence which is often instrumental to positions of power seems, in the case of Sir William, a key to a position of enlightenment. Blood vouchsafes passage to a visionary trance which enables him to see through the trap of space-time. This trend, which has been a constant through the rosary of murders punctuating the story, only comes to a head in chapter 10, due to the intensity and the meaning of these visions. If one of these has Sir William minister a magisterial dissection of the body of the victim in front of a group of university students (Moore 14; ch. 10), a picture congenial to his position as manager of power and knowledge, the other has a much more ambivalent meaning.

Something in the act of violence, “some trigger in the brain” (20; ch. 10), is invoked by Sir William as a capacitor to access a portal to a higher reality, only known to gods. This a place out of place and a time out of time. This “Aettyr” Sir William comes upon is no other than modern day London, where he remonstrates among “morose, barbaric children playing

joylessly with their unfathomable toys” (21; ch. 10). Sir William plays the role of the prophet, a Jeremiah weeping over the breakage of the covenant between those strange people and their human nature: “Your days were born in blood and fires, whereof in you I may not see the meanest spark” (21; ch. 10). But is Sir William saying this or is his author? Is Gull prescient in his prophetic embodiment or is he a persona through which Moore remonstrates against modernity? This tirade, the disaffection of modern times makes Gull realize he is alone in Olympus and feels humbled by the experience, while it does not touch Mary at all: “how times levelled us. We are made equal... This world, where in comparison I am made ignorant, while you...you are made virtuous” (22; ch. 10). He then embraces the victim in a declaration of love, which claims for his horror the generative force to be drawn from the textuality of the grotesque. In an invariant text through his itinerary of murder, Sir William claims to have taken each of his victims in a wedlock of eternity. He has inscribed their names in legend, his legend, to the glory of his name, but which name is this?

As Sir William departs with history and enters the terrain of legend, the Aettyr of cockatoos, he embarks in a motion towards dissolution into the body of text. A disaggregation of his subjectivity which is customary in the process of textual creation and that has been punctuated through the agency of crime into an imbalance between the modes of the *symbolic* and the *semiotic*. Sir William’s descent from the solar heights of chapter four, the territory of the *symbolic*, has by now in chapter 10 been consummated into the nocturnal abode of the *semiotic*. For, as a prerequisite for his intended ascent into the higher scenes of meaning in chapter 14, Sir William must first consummate his descent to the lowest regions of horror.

This final move, both the result of a puritanical zeal for destruction and the nocturnal fruit of his foray into the map of the genotext, is not far from Kristeva’s concept of “maternal abjection”, which is construed as “a longing to fall back into the maternal chora as well as a deep anxiety over the possibility of losing one’s subjectivity” (McAfee 49). This tension

between impulses is also felt by a Sir William, who claims a desire for unity with his victims (Moore 23; ch. 10), while at the same time is propelled by a murderous drive to do away with the nauseating embrace of the maternal and material. The longing for dissolution of the self is felt as anxiety by Sir William, who answers back to his visions he is not Jack but William (25; ch. 10). After the process of dissolution of subjectivity has been initiated, the officiant of this grotesque nativity is ready to approach the central liturgy of his black mass: the amputation of the victim's heart which is thrown to the hearth and results in an explosion of light and energy. Sir William contemplates in awe the result of its combustion, while the dark matter of a black sun of horror beams out of 13 Miller's Court as the ominous emanation of an event which would resonate through history (28; ch. 10).

Within the collective tenet that has the Victorian era as a privileged carrier of the essences of British culture, it does not come as a surprise that its later decades, without a doubt the nadir of British dominance among the nations of the world, are regarded by Moore as the watershed of modernity:

It seems to me that the 1880s contain the seeds of the twentieth century, not only in terms of politics and technology, but also in the fields of art and philosophy as well. The suggestion that the 1880s embody the essence of the twentieth century, along with the attendant notion that the Whitechapel murders embody the essence of the 1880s, is central to *From Hell*. (14; app. I)

But it is in the end this particular event of the macabre evisceration of a working class woman at the hands of a high priest of science acting as midwife that comes to be regarded as the delivery of the twentieth century.

It cannot be a coincidence that Sir William, in preparation for his office, comes across W. B. Yeats in the British Library (14-15; ch. 9), another famous diviner into the horrors of modernity.

Yeats would write his poem “The Second Coming” in 1919, a work full of an impending sense of foreboding and doom, which was no doubt influenced by the troubled start of the events taken place in the early XXth century: “And what rough beast, its hour come round at/ last,/ Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born” (Yeats 235). In our case, the grotesque nativity that sees the delivery of the XXth century is going to take place not in Bethlehem, but near the original location of Bedlam hospital. It seems only fitting that a discourse steeped in self-referential tones, of mythical intensity and which revels in the imperial foundations of the modern era, vindicates such an ascent of the English imagination in the troubled affairs of humanity during the twentieth century.

The visual display of the text in chapter 10 has been dexterously encoded by Eddie Campbell into a darkening pattern of discourse in the shape of a fibre of cross-hatching. This cobweb that traps the characters into the text of the legend works as a code of sorts, inscribing the textuality of the ritual murder or sacrifice taking place, so that the Law of the Father can be substantiated once the abject and threatening reality of the mother is rejected (McAfee 32) and pulped in order to create text. On her remains and with her own blood, a new script containing the mandates of law and order will be inscribed. The fact that the scene where Gull is baffled by the threatening nature of modernity does not contain the same shadowy pattern makes us believe that this leap in temporality marks a change in discourse. This contrast is made particularly evident in the bottom panel where only Sir William is seen carrying the mark of the old pattern (Moore 21; ch. 10).

5.- The Fall Time of the Year

When cometh Jack Frost? the children ask

--Dylan Thomas, “Why East Wind Chills”

Out of the contact with the work of Ukrainian scientist Vladimir Vernadsky, Lotman came to think that the same principles, which were applied by the former to his concept of the biosphere and which sustain that “living matter is not an accidental creation but is the geological force that influences all geological forces on the Earth” (Vernadsky 58), could also be incorporated into a totalizing outlook which aimed to explain his own views on the principles of semiosis and the process of meaning generation: “Only the existence of the semiotic sphere makes message a message. Only the existence of intelligence, explains the existence of intelligence” (Semenenko 111). Therefore, by reformulating the fundamental law of semiosis, Lotman comes to realize that the primary is complex and the secondary simple or, in other words, that meaning can only be created by meaning, which implies that the space known as semiosphere is a mandatory condition for any act of communication to take place and any language to appear (*Universe of the Mind* 123):

The semiotic universe may be regarded as the totality of individual texts and isolated languages as they relate to each other. In this case, all structures will look as if they are constructed out of individual bricks. However, it is more useful to establish a contrasting view: all semiotic space may be regarded as a unified mechanism (if not organism). In this case, primacy does not lie in one or another sign, but in the “greater system,” namely the semiosphere. The semiosphere is that same semiotic space, outside of which semiosis itself cannot exist (“On the Semiosphere” 208)

The need to create a message precedes the creation of the message, in the same way that the web of entanglements which comprises message exchange influences the incorporation of a new arrival into its flow. But we should not understand the work of meaning creation exclusively as the result of impersonal forces out of sync with the operational modes of individuals. Quite to the contrary, it is by the individualization of the process that we can

sometimes incorporate meaning into our own “umwelt”. This is our own phenomenal self-world which comprises the reality surrounding us that we perceive (Andrews 64). Lotman sees the genetical force of the individual contained in the mark that a name carries: “The space of proper names is the space of explosion” (Semenenko 70). The same reason which explains that people are more likely to take into consideration natural disasters which have been christened than those which have not explains the moment in the story which summons the begetting of Jack the Ripper (Moore 37-38; ch. 7).

Tabloids, penny dreadfuls, and various other periodical publications had been reaping good profits out of crimes and executions for a long time before Jack was born. They did not commit the crimes, but they did conjure up the criminal force behind them. Here there is no trace of “supernatural twaddle” but only a constation of the work of the theory which explains the creation of meaning. This exchange between the two journalists--“A name, mr. Gibbs. That’s what we need. We need a name” (Ch. 7, 11)--explains the prescience of Best the journalist, who understands that these crimes ask for a new type of journalism, a new artistic form to be born (Lotman, *Universe of the Mind* 74). Again we have the motive of modernity springing out of the Victorian hyper-factory of meaning. Jack is born the moment Mr. Best puts his pen to paper to sign the letter he sends to the police. Only through text can the work be substantiated, as text contains the memory of its semiosphere and functions as a condenser of cultural memory (*Universe of the Mind* 70). Out of the semiosphere came Jack, endowed with meaning generation and regenerated in turn by it. Spinning on a cycle of renewal by the law of irreversibility of semiosis (74), acquiring new meaning, breathing new life out of old texts (Moore 39; ch. 7).

It is therefore established how, by virtue of such a systematic approach as Lotman’s, the different levels of textuality are brought about and integrated into a bigger textual pattern. It is asymmetry, binarism and isomorphism (*Universe of the Mind* 124) weaving together the

textuality of the bodies of the victims as they are welded into the wider sphere of the text of the city. In a similar fashion, this same textual scaffolding can explain the process through which Sir William Gull, as a result of the imbalance between the forces of the *symbolic* and the *semiotic*, achieves a passage into the realm of discourse. This passage is no other, in any case, but the process which is set in motion by the forces behind the textual creation brought about by the genre, or as Moore chose to refer to it: “the house that Jack built” (8; prologue).

This process is given visual support through a panel in which we can see Abberline in the background, asking about the whereabouts of the person who wrote the letter, while it shows a satisfied Best stretching at his desk in the office (10; ch. 9). An office which, incidentally, happens to be located “in Wapping, currently the home of Mr Rupert Murdoch, owner of a popular right-wing tabloid, which, unsurprisingly in this tale of obelisks and other arcane solar symbols, is called The Sun” (26; app. I). This is Moore at his best capacity to give us a sense of the semiosphere through the play of references, no matter how nuanced.

There is still another more powerful example of the work of how artistic design can provide an efficient weapon of textual generation, through visual language. Artist Eddie Campbell shows us a beautiful panel in which the crumbling edges of the front page of one of the tabloids called *Police News* turn into autumn leaves which are carried away by the wind (25; ch. 6). This motive of the leaves is sustained through further occurrence (11-12; ch 7; 13; ch. 8) which could lead us to believe that beyond the need for a temporal setting, as the murders took place during the autumn of 1888, this could be understood as an allegory threading the crimes into the weaving of semiosis.

Only through the necessary condition of the semiosphere, as a harbour and producer of meaning, can the text be substantiated. The text in turn crumbles into new leaves of meaning that are given to the autumnal winds of the dialogical process. It is thus that the process of

meaning generation can be inscribed into a natural metaphor. A metaphor that through sustained occurrence becomes an allegory of the thin line keeping apart cultural process from natural ones. In fact, in this case, it could be considered that the work of culture, reduplicates that of nature through a cyclical pattern which fills the London streets with fallen leaves of periodicals.

The winds of this trope that can be felt through the pages of chapters 7 and 8 come to a particular poignancy in the bottom panels (11; ch. 7; 3; ch. 8). These illustrations can be said to function both as poetic codas of the issues previously discussed. In the first of them a strong gust of wind bends over a leafless tree which stands in front of the ominous architecture of Christ Church in Spitalfields (11; ch. 7) designed by Nicholas Hawksmoor. The visualization of how the textuality of the city acts crushing on the naked tree, just on the same page where Jack the Ripper has been born, makes us think of a howling gale breathing on murder.

The second of these two pages shows the humble curb of one of the cobbled streets in Whitechapel littered in what seem to be holly leaves (3; ch. 8). Again, the presence of the leaves is a token of the powers of discourse, as Liz Stride is showing Mary Kelly the front page of the periodical *Police News*, featuring the murder of Annie Chapman. The fact that these leaves are from a holly tree could be read as an intimation of the grotesque nativity which we are about to be presented with in chapter 10, as well as a symbol of eternity-- something which would initially agree with Moore's poetics of a time out of time where these characters seem to be trapped. It is always the fall of the year in the house that Jack built.

There is in fact a powerful wedlock of dispossession at work in the genre known as Ripperology which can be exemplified in the display of the narrative representation carried out on this page. Two women who quite likely did not know each other are represented by a writer, in 1989, to go through the emotional harrowing experience of acknowledging they are the prey of the hunter known as "the Ripper," therefore adding up to the narrative momentum of a work in

progress. In turn one of them produces one example of the literature about the crimes which was being published in 1888. This game of literature inside literature resembles the metaphor of the “matryoshka dolls” inserting into one another, which Lotman used to describe the isomorphism that characterizes the structure of the semiosphere (*Universe of the Mind* 152). He compares the work of the semiosphere to a network of individual minds in constant interaction (124). All levels of the semiosphere are semiospheres inserted into one another, where each of them is simultaneously both participant in the dialogue and the space of dialogue (125). Consequently, a part of the sphere may function as the whole, or the whole can be taken as a part. Therefore, it can be inferred that to engage in the practice of the subgenre known as Ripperology is to come dangerously close to be engulfed into the same autumnal forces blowing away the leaves of the periodicals along the cobbled streets of Whitechapel.

6.- A Pint of Tripe

The force of the metaphor binding the work of culture to that of nature, which is in operation through the theme of the fall leaves, serves as well as a thread into that place of abjection and loss of meaning for the patriarchal discourse, a place Kristeva called a “bridge between the semiotic and the symbolic” (McAfee 85). The potential for meaning creation in motherhood was regarded by Kristeva as “a threshold between culture and nature” (86) and an opportunity to leave behind the stagnant waters of Cartesian dualism where Western thinking has been dwelling for centuries. However, this same place is regarded by Sir William Gull as “the most extreme and utter region of the human mind, a dim sub-conscious underworld. A radiant abyss where men meet themselves... Hell Netley, We’re in Hell” (Moore 31; ch. 9). The place that for the French critic represented a possibility for a new relationship between the realms of the natural and the cultural is for Sir William the lowest point within the pit of abject materialism and sexuality which he needs to visit so it can be desecrated by his scalpel.

Contrary to Kristeva's "Herethics of Love" which advocate for the maternal embrace of otherness within oneself (McAfee 85), therefore opening an opportunity for the meeting of natural and cultural processes, the duality in which patriarchal discourse is embedded can only see in this embrace the threatening engulfing waters of an ocean of nothingness and loss of subjectivity. It is the place of no meaning where the process of abjection must take place that sees the construction of identity, according to the tenets of modern psychology (47).

The abject is what pushes and destroys boundaries, threatening the very foundations of our personalities. Its language is the language of the semiotic, the chthonic forces driving behind the lines of the symbolic fruits of the logic. Its work, when kept at bay, is a necessary concourse of vitalizing energy which turns into a raging wind spreading fire and destruction when the balance between its forces is tipped. From these raging fires, letters are delivered which beget a new genre: Ripperology, perhaps a testimony to its modernity, and a vindication to the symbolic powers of the Victorian era preached by Moore. A phantasmagorical phalanx of readers, an army of consumers of gory details who, like a network of creators, are contributing to the hypertext of horror. They inhabit a nocturnal scene of a London street where an infinity of lighted windows are screaming out, "Jack the Ripper!!" (36; ch. 9). It is worth mentioning here that this scene is a testimony to the critical capacity of the work of Alan Moore to unveil the structure of discourse underneath and behind the story. As a point of interest, he mentions that the only convicted hoaxer was a woman (32; app. I), a fact that perhaps owed more to the incongruity of her gender than to the grievous nature of the literature produced.

In a letter whose heading gives title to the novel, Sir William Gull, through the aptly inept spelling of Netley, substantiates Jack's powers of speech. The text, steeped in a dark primaevial unconscious, delivers "the pint of tripe" promised by Rabelais in boastful defiance to anyone who can find a book to match his own (Dentith 67). "Catch me when you can" (Moore 34; ch. 9), says Jack no less boastfully. The letter encloses the anticipation of the prize in the form of

a jar with a kidney kept in alcohol which had been amputated to Kate Eddowes, which also serves as evidence to the narration. Awful as it is to admit it, this is another trinket of those which comprise the phantasmal entity known as Jack the Ripper, a monster whose flesh is commodification. Jack delivers his “pint of tripe” with the contempt for the female body and the underprivileged classes which is a mark of Sir William’s own class. So, when summer dies, bodies are to be pieced into jars and sold to the machine selling periodicals, so that Jack can live.

7.- The Writing and Unwriting of Names

I am not man so much as Syndrome; as a voice that bellows in the human heart.
I am a rain. I cannot be contained. Free of Life, how then shall I be shackled?
(...) Free of Time, how then shall History be my cage? I am a Wave, an
influence. Who then shall be made safe from me? (17; ch. 14)

In the foreword to his book *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth*, Robert Graves claims that “English poetic education should, really, begin not with the *Canterbury Tales*, not with the *Odyssey*, not with the *Genesis*, but with *The Song of Amergin*, an ancient Celtic calendar-alphabet, found in several purposely garbled Irish and Welsh variants, which briefly summarizes the prime poetic myth” (13). This text, according to legend, is the survivor of an oral tradition that has Amergin, the bard of the tribe of invading Milesians, claim their right to the land of Ireland through poetic invocation. Since their former possessors had a capacity to summon the forces of nature to their aid, destroying invading vessels and shielding thus the island from foreign aggression, it seems logical that successful claimers should try their weapons in the field of discourse. It would be in the end the might of textual weaponry the one that would decide the fate of the island:

I am a stag: of seven tines,

I am a flood: across a plain,

I am a wind: on a deep lake (...)

I am a tide: that drags to death,

I am an infant: who but I

Peeps from the unhewn dolmen arch? (qtd. in Graves 13)

Leaving aside the obvious irony implied in the fact that Graves decides to invoke the legacy of a song dealing with the rightful possession of the land through an act of cultural appropriation in which Irish and Welsh traditions are rendered fungible and put to the service of their English masters, I would like to point out the concomitances between *The Song of Amergin* and the lines from Sir William Gull with which I opened this section.

In both cases we hear the voice of someone who claims to have transcended the bounds of human nature to reach a fluid being that allows for mobility between realms and bestows the insight of consciousness. They have, through their voices, been infused with discourse, a fact which puts them in a position of power, to be granted the deeds to the land and plans that lay out the architecture of time, respectively.

Sir William Gull's ascension from man to syndrome, from mere surgeon to Jack the Ripper, is complete by chapter 14. His chase of the power represented by the phallus (McAfee 32) has been an invariant throughout the novel and after several intimations of this higher plane of consciousness, usually conferred through moments in which violence acted as a trigger of his atonement with the fourth dimension, he is finally granted passage into the sphere of collective consciousness.

It seems only proper that he chooses to manifest himself, once he has been dispensed of the limiting materiality of his dying body trapped in the mental asylum, in the form of a shower of

ink raining on a group of bewildered Greek fishermen (Moore 6; ch. 14). The obvious association with the idea of textuality can only spring to mind. Gull, Jack, is text and in his ramblings through the Aettyr of collective imagination he is set to become the wave, the influence behind the creation of an extensive list of other pieces of text.

Free of life and time, he bellows into the hearts of artists and criminals, acting as the spark which instils artistic creation of awe-inspiring quality, such as the cases of William Blake (Moore 10; ch. 14) and Robert Louis Stevenson (15) or instigates horrid ideas of crime into the psyche of the authors of the Moors Murders (13) or the Yorkshire Ripper (14). As it is congenial to his nature as a syndrome, Jack sets up patterns of recurrence in the history of crime and literature. His language is intertextuality as shown by the fact of “how often similar names show up in the oddly synchronistic annals of serial violence or murder” (41; app. I).

These notional ideas of the power to infiltrate and dominate other people’s consciousness are given visual support in chapters 14 and 2 through the perspective we are forced to adopt when looking through the eyes of Sir William Gull. The visual representation of this power finds in the synecdoche an apt trope to embody that part of Sir William’s body through which he can display his power to exert surgical control: his hands. The adoption of this technical resource achieves a high degree of narrative efficiency, as it manages to represent symbolically the agent capacity of the surgeon, whereas it forces us to adopt Sir William’s gaze.

Two panels are characteristic of the aforementioned trope: in the first we hear Sir William explain to his friend Hinton the necessity of violence in order to obtain change, as his hand in the bottom of the panel holds the key to a cell where five female-patients are locked (10; ch. 2). Note the almost infinite chain of symbology in the novel, a feature which Moore further exploits when one of the mentally deranged women calls Sir William, “Jack”. The second panel shows the scaly hands of Sir William who, in his capacity as syndrome, pests the imagination of

William Blake in the shape of the monster he was to portray in “The Ghost of a Flea” (10; ch. 14).

Jack has his name written, free from flesh and time, in the stars, forever shining frightfully in the night of human fear and anxiety: “I am escaped from space into the sphere of mind and myth and angels. I am Jack. I rise up hungry through the human night towards a naked moon... which is the world’s unconscious self. Which is all poetry and dream” (15; ch. 14). For other characters, however, the quest for liberation involves having their names unwritten from the lives of men. Mary Jean Kelly, the most elusive of all five canonical victims of “the Ripper”, understands that the very process of textual rewriting which is operated on their lives could be yet the biggest asset, if put to the right use by her. She manages to survive through cunning and a mobile personality. In a departure from the script marked by the genre, Moore offers hints that characters Emma, who befriends Abberline in the pubs of Whitechapel, and Marie Kelly are the same person. She uses her friend the inspector to come to some cash and makes herself light just in the nick of time before Gull pays a visit to 13 Miller’s Court.

If we accept the possibility of Marie Kelly as a survivor, we have then a duality of female figures with a capacity to rebuke the discourse of “the Ripper”. We have already seen how either Kelly or whoever was butchered in Miller’s Court was “made virtuous” (22; ch. 10) in the eyes of modernity, while Sir William was made ignorant by the same standards. Now, as Jack departs the land of the living to access the immortal shores of discourse, he is to come in direct collision with whom we are led to believe is Marie Kelly, who has survived Jack and managed to come back to Ireland and raise her own family of four daughters named after the other four victims (23; ch. 14). Her defiant stance can be read in two ways, both as a liberation of the grip of gender discourse--“Clear off back to hell and leave us BE!” (23)-- and also as a statement of the Irish will for self-determination against colonial rule from the metropolis. Whether that was Moore’s intention or not, the reader is invited to “work it out yourself” (42;

app. I). In any case, the imagery conjured by artists Moore and Campbell seems unequivocally in support of this thesis, with a woman who assertively dismisses intimidation in the face of fear: “I know that ye’re there, and ye’re not havin’ these. Clear off now wit’ ye” (23; ch. 14). As for the anticolonial interpretation, the image of a woman with four children standing outside of a cottage in the Irish countryside cannot but comply with the ethos of resistance to colonial despondency in the form of absentee English landlords that characterized much of the Irish XIXth century.

8.- Dancing to Jack’s music

The novel’s second appendix which was added to the single volume edition published in 1999 is a condensed history and criticism of the Ripper’s genre. In an extremely lucid account of the characters involved, the motivations, the many turns and twists of the fortune of the texts involved in this type of literature, Moore takes us by the hand in this game of Chinese whispers that Ripperology is.

The appendix entitled “The Dance of the Gull Catchers”, after the surname of the villain in the story, Sir William Gull, opens with a clear statement of intentions by Moore, where he declares it “a sport that should be outlawed, a fraud, an empty chase after a non-existent figure” (1; app II). However, the allure of its chase is made manifest by the multitude of people involved in it and its resilience through time, although allowing for adaptation to circumstantial changes in discourse. That Moore himself decided to dance this dance only shows the appeal of its music, an appeal that, despite the critical agenda of some of its pursuers, denotes that, as Lotman put it, “the need to create a message precedes the message” (*Universe of the Mind* 143). The production of the text is explained from the necessary condition of a sphere of meaning where it is produced. This appendix, it could be argued, aims at representing this sphere of meaning. By definition the aim to render such a description is bound to fail, as the semiosphere has to a

certain extent the makings of an abstraction, but its honesty, scope and lucid approach make it worth a close reading to any person interested in the story.

Along its many meanders the watercourse of fiction and discourse that makes up Ripperology is shown to be propelled by a strong current of conspiratorial theories and patriarchal discourse. The feelings of contempt for the victims and the awe and fascination in which the power-inspiring figures of the murderers are regarded are a constant in this constellation of the imagination. One of these theories, put forward by Stephen Knight in his *Jack the Ripper: The Final Solution* (1976), caught fire in the minds of such writers as Sinclair and Moore, and basically came to constitute the argument behind and throughout Moore's story. This particular conspiracy theory, although regarded by Moore as being likely to be nothing more than "an ingenious hoax" (1; app. I), provides him with an excellent plot to unleash his own autopsy of the Victorian society. That he held a view of the output of such a work as "the post-mortem of an historical occurrence, using fiction as a scalpel" (Di Liddo 15) should encourage us consider the first of the appendixes that accompany the graphic novel as the notes of a coroner's inquiry, revealing the extent of his text surgery. Where the first appendix deals more with the technical expertise and acumen behind the operation, the second is more metaphysical and reflective on the ends of such literature.

Within the operational drives of the genre described by Moore, it is possible to find traces of the DNA of the most unideological of ideologies. Capitalism, in its most liberal of impersonations, has found long ago that the best manner to remain aloof from the life and death struggle involving many other ideologies during the XXth century is to pretend not to be one. What is the point of overcoming an ideology which is not an ideology? What is wrong if in the pursuit of happiness we are asked to cross a few red lines? Capitalism, as Jack, festers in confusion. A place with few restrictions, which allows for an ever-growing abstraction, will see an exponential increase of the drive for profit in fields such as finance, where greed is granted

the illusion for eternal accumulation through the language of mathematics. An idea, not unlike the principle behind the fractal shape known as Koch's Snowflake, which provides an illustration of the dynamics behind the proliferation of contents in the genre (23; app. II). Where are the limits that Moore, in his deconstruction of the figure of Jack as text, dares to cross? Despite the validity of the textual discursive approach, the crime in this novel was still committed by an individual or individuals, and the five women were not just characters in a fictional genre (23; ch. app. II) This is the textual swamp that Moore in his "liaisons dangereuses" with the genre has come up to. A trap, a place of confusion such as the one described by Tennyson in his poem "The Princess": "Man to command and woman to obey; / All else confusion" (qtd. in Rubenhold 52).

Conclusion

The opening statement at the beginning of this essay remonstrated that despite the author's claim to dedicate his work to the memory of the five victims of "The Ripper's" knife, there is little in *From Hell* that can substantiate this intention. We would do better instead, in the light of the analysis disclosed in the ensuing chapters, to place this allegiance somewhere else, closer to the scalpel wielded by the murderer and alluded to by the author as an apt metaphor to describe his literary intentions behind the writing of his novel (Di Liddo 15).

It could be argued that the central question at the heart of this essay is one that wonders whether it is possible to write a novel that does not indulge in a misogynistic ethos while, at the same time, choosing to participate in a by definition misogynistic genre? The answer, following the critical lead of the theories endowing the concept of genre with social functions that go beyond the mere powers of literary taxonomy, should speak loud and clear about the impossibility of such a claim. However, since much of what is being elucidated here has to do with whether the way the story is told can encourage or preclude a form of narration that is akin and sympathetic to the plight of the victims, perhaps this point could be made clearer by comparing certain aspects of the novel and the genre to a different work of literature which engages the same theme of gender discourse but from different positions and through the use of dissimilar weapons.

In her book *Last Tales*, Isak Dinesen included a tale called "The Blank Page" which has a female storyteller engaging in the act of telling a story which had been handed down through different generations of tellers before her. We are taken to a convent "in the blue mountains of Portugal" (100) that for centuries has been granted the honour of manufacturing the linen for the "bridal sheets of all the young princesses of the royal house" (101). This privilege is made extensive to the fact that those bridal sheets are framed, named and kept in a gallery of the same

convent, which is thus turned into a repository of the virginal virtues endowing those princesses that have been put to the test of the linen. But, among the stained canvases, there is one which encourages the onlookers to thoughtful meditation: “it is in front of the blank page that old and young nuns, with the Mother Abbess herself, sink into deepest thought” (103). We had been previously prepared to make of the trope of the blank linen a source of meaning creation, since the storyteller warned the audience that “when the story-teller is loyal, eternally and unswervingly loyal to the story, there, in the end, silence will speak” (99). If we were to extend this metaphor of the blank page further, in its comparison with the narrative in *From Hell*, we should come to highlight how different their silences are. While in “The Blank Page” Dinesen can afford to let silence convey a thoughtful reflection as on the themes of gender discourse at play, silence in *From Hell* is the gag in the five women’s mouths that is preventing their stories from being told. Those stories are being sacrificed instead to the textual tyranny of Jack who is having their pages scrubbed blank before they can be filled with the omnivorous voracity of his script.

Going back to the theme of loyalties, it has been established that those at the heart of *From Hell* are not owed to the victims but to the perpetrator. The novel precludes the allegiance to the memory of the women through the construction of a textual edifice, which in the fashion of a Victorian workhouse, keeps its inmates in the eternal toil of servicing their master Jack. This building, erected in the nether-land of confusion, alluded to by Tennyson in his poem “The Princess” (Rubenhold 52), falls out of patriarchal discourse. It is, therefore, a place of no meaning and horror where the text of the bodies of the women can be scrubbed and written upon, within the bigger scale of the collective patriarchal imagination.

Nothing can be left blank because Jack deals in commodity and violence. Commodity, which precludes the dead end to the chain of commerce that to engage in “deepest thought” might lead up to. Violence, which, in the case of Jack, is not just an aesthetics, but an ethics too. Violence

which is administered as a form of redeeming justice, a warning to a deviate society and also as a form of knowledge, a sort of epistemology of the macabre that is shown to open the gates to higher spheres of reality.

Perhaps, one of the keys to the understanding of where the main difference between the two examples lies is given by Walter Benjamin who, in his essay “The Storyteller”, claims artisan status for storytelling: “traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel” (91). Unlike the story, Moore’s novel is the work of an industrial process, a daughter of the industrial revolution that seeks and revels in the might of a chronotope of power. We are prevented from joining in that liberating moment of deepest thought by a repressive dynamics of textuality and history that lock us in the workhouse crafted by genre gendered discourse. Our destiny seems to have been written before us and the fact that one of the characters could be read to have escaped her fate at the hands of the imperial master comes as too dull a consolation to make up for the previous litany of horrors.

Moore, in his last appendix to the novel, titled “Dance of the Gull Catchers,” engages in a meta-literary exercise dealing with many of the operating principles behind that subgenre of the gothic known as “Ripperology”. During its reading, one can appreciate the honesty and the insight with which Moore conducted his enquiry into the corpse of the text. It is possible as an afterthought, at that stage, a certain line by W. B. Yeats, from his poem “Among School Children”, springs to mind: “How can we know the dancer from the dance” (263). Because, if that is true, one should be careful with the music.

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