RE)TELLING RIPPER IN ALAN MOORE’S *FROM HELL*:

HISTORY AND NARRATIVE IN

THE GRAPHIC NOVEL

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(RE)TELLING RIPPER IN ALAN MOORE’S FROM HELL: HISTORY AND NARRATIVE IN THE GRAPHIC NOVEL

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ABSTRACT

(RE)TELLING RIPPER IN ALAN MOORE’S FROM HELL:

HISTORY AND NARRATIVE

IN THE GRAPHIC NOVEL

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When Alan Moore began his work on From Hell in the 1980s, the popular conception of the graphic novel as “low-brow” art still reigned. The inclusion of extensive annotations as an appendix to the novel, providing references and explanations in a manner that reflects academic conventions, attempts to situate his novel as not “merely” a creative fictionalization of the Ripper murders, but as a genuine, scholarly hypothesis as to the identity and motive of the killer. His hypothesis is so fantastic, however, that it nearly demands to be dismissed as pure conspiracy theory. Conflicting notions of scholarship and conspiracy raise questions about the abilities of narrative historiography to provide insight into the past. Moore grapples with issues of research and myth-building in a second, graphic appendix, and the two appendices work together examining the limitations of academic discourse as a whole and its ability to provide clear-cut answers to historical events.
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INTRODUCTION

In 1888, a series of brutal murders caused widespread panic among the citizens of London. Over the course of several months five women, prostitutes in an undesirable neighborhood called Whitechapel, were found with their throats cut, their bodies savagely mutilated, and internal organs removed. The killer became known as “Jack the Ripper” based on a letter sent to a London newspaper claiming responsibility for the crimes. Media attention to the murders put pressure on London’s police force, but despite an extensive investigation, very few leads were found. Moreover, the media spotlight muddled the investigation in many ways, as panicked citizens provided a number of false leads and the media unscrupulously exploited public hysteria over the crimes to boost sales—even the letter which gave Jack the Ripper his famous pseudonym eventually came under suspicion of being faked by journalists. Although the investigation continued into 1891, no suspect was ever arrested or tried for the murders. The brutal crimes remain unsolved today.

Despite the lack of definitive answers—or perhaps because of that lack—the Ripper murders entered the mythology of Britain, becoming a source of speculation and ghoulish curiosity for generations. Countless historians, folklorists, cultural critics, and amateur detectives continue to pour over the evidence today, searching for clues not only in the police records but also in other contemporary sources, hoping to piece together a
solution to the century-old crime. These “Ripperologists,” as the dedicated researchers have come to be known, have collected an impressive body of work, drawing from a wide variety of cultural and historical sources. Ripperologists explore any and all aspects of life in Victorian London in the hopes that something—perhaps something that at first appears completely unrelated to the murders—will shed light on the killer’s identity.

Alan Moore, a popular and critically-acclaimed graphic novelist whose previous work included *Swamp Thing, V for Vendetta,* and *Watchmen,* and would later include his wildly popular *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen,* joined the ranks of Ripperologists in the 1980s with *From Hell: Being a Melodrama in Sixteen Parts,* a graphic novel which depicts one theory as to the murder’s identity. Alan Moore remains a perpetual favorite for study, as his prolific and visionary work heavily influences the genre, “enliven[ing] and wholly elevat[ing] what is possible in comics as a form of literature” (Waiter and Bissette 161). Working in a media that originally focused purely on “escapist” tales for children and the childish, Moore pushed the boundaries, choosing themes and subject matter that are distinctly adult in nature (Versaci 2). The “rich, profound and complex” stories that Moore produced emphasized the graphic novel’s position as “real” literature, fit to be carefully and critically examine (Wiater and Bissette 161). Moore builds characters as powerful and multifaceted as those developed by authors of traditional, text-based literature, and places them in carefully-crafted worlds that both reflect and deconstruct literary tropes and cultural expectations.
Watchmen, for example, turned the traditional superhero figure upside down, “upending the principles of heroic victory and heroic self-sacrifice...in the end it looks like the saving of the world may not have been a good idea anyway” (Wolk 240). The forcibly-retired superheroes in Watchmen—most of whom possess no superpowers at all—are feared and distrusted by the people that they once protected, and often with good reason. The dystopian world in which these characters live is largely a product of so-called heroic actions these superheroes took in the name of American values and morality. “Gritty, deconstructivist, postmodern superhero comics became a genre” after Watchmen, but Moore was the first to invert the black-and-white morality that traditionally pervaded superhero comics (Millidge 17). Then there is Lost Girls, finally published in 2006, which explores the sexual awakenings of iconic childhood literary figures such as Wendy Darling of Peter Pan and Alice of Alice in Wonderland. Lost Girls does for sex what Watchmen did for superheroes, deconstructing the comic take on romance, sex, and sexuality. The novel incited a media firestorm, as several U.S. bookstores refused to stock the supposedly-pornographic title, concerned that the depictions of underage sex might violate obscenity laws (DiLiddo 135). Audiences debated the literary merits of erotic novels, and Moore, along with co-author Melinda Gebbie, defended the story as a “reworking of pornography as a genre via aesthetic ennobling, a praise of the imagination...[as] a beneficial force (135). Meanwhile, scholars mostly ignored the debate over pornographic content, focusing on the narrative and formal concerns surrounding the text. Acknowledging that the interplay of pornography and literature can produce interesting tensions, scholars turned to the
narrative success of such “meta-porn,” noting that Moore and Gebbie’s emphasis on the healing aspects of sex is often unconvincing (Charles Hatfield qtd. in DiLiddo 137). The critical debate over *Lost Girls* denotes the shift in academic attention to comic literature, as the adult storyline and deconstructive themes are accepted without comment by scholars, who are most concerned with the success or failure of narrative. Largely through Moore’s work, and his influence on the work of other graphic novel writers, graphic novels became a genre worthy of the same scholarly attention paid to text-based literature.

Meanwhile, Moore himself continues to stand outside the mainstream of the comic industry. Well known for shunning large comic publishers such as DC and Marvel, Moore works with small publishers that he finds more creatively compatible (Waiter and Bissette 169). His willingness to “flip it off and walk away” gives him rebel status in the industry, even as his work continues to set the bar for other artists and novelists (Wolk 242). The “extremist ideal” of his personal life—Moore is an anarchist with a keen interest in magic—is reflected in his creative work, as he strives to rework and reimagine the boundaries of what comics can illustrate (Waiter and Bissette 169). His daughter Leah explains that he “found the time to go mad,” calling himself a magician, worshipping a snake, and filling the house with occult paraphernalia (Khoury 7). Although his beliefs have mellowed in later years, his familiarity with the occult pervades his novels, including *From Hell*, which gives significant attention to the mystical side of Freemasonry. Moreover, that image of the mad artist is one that follows him, and one that he clearly uses as a marketing tool—his author photos accentuate his
long hair and beard, and his piercing stare. The tensions between these two versions of Moore—the author that others strive to emulate and the outsider who rejects all convention, even the unconventional conventions of comic art—play out in novels like *From Hell*, where he tinkers with the conventions of scholarly work, mimicking it in order to comment on and critique its function and utility.

In *From Hell: Being a Melodrama in Sixteen Parts*, Moore offers his interpretation of the evidence and conjecture surrounding the Ripper crimes, teaming with Eddie Campbell as co-author and artist. The prologue to *From Hell* first appeared in *Cerebus* in 1989, and the first six chapters were first published in the adult horror anthology *Taboo*. These early chapters were collected and published between 1991 and 1993 as *From Hell Volumes One-Three*, and it is here that, for the first time, Moore includes a list of explanatory notes for each chapter, detailing his sources and clarifying the research behind his tale. Although Moore is well-known in the industry for his dense and “artist-proof” scripts, these annotations made it clear that *From Hell* would be one of Moore’s most exhaustively researched novels (Millidge 16). *Taboo* ended publication in 1993, but *From Hell* continued to be published in separate volumes through 1996, when *From Hell Volume Ten* offered the final chapter and the epilogue; each volume contained Moore’s annotations. It wasn’t until 1998 that *Dance of the Gull-Catchers*, which included both the graphic-art commentary on the Ripper phenomenon and twenty-four pages of additional material, was published. The 600-page postmodern “magnum opus,” including Moore’s annotations as Appendix I and the graphic-art commentary
(although not the twenty-four pages of additional material) from Dance of the Gull-Catchers as Appendix II, was first published as a collection in 1999 (Millidge 20).

Since the late 1980s, when the prologue of From Hell first appeared, scholarly interest in graphic art as a literary genre worthy of study has grown tremendously. There are now highly-respected academic journals devoted to the research on the genre, and countless books examining the authors, artists and works have been published. When Moore began his work on From Hell, however, the popular conception of the graphic novel as “low-brow” art—not a fit medium for serious artistic work or adult discussion—still reigned. The inclusion of the annotations, which provide references and explanations in a manner similar to academic work, is significant in light of this, indicates that Moore seems to reject this popular notion. In “citing his work,” Moore raises the level of the discourse, situating his novel as not “merely” a creative fictionalization of the Ripper murders, but a genuine, researched hypothesis as to the identity and motive of the killer. His hypothesis, however, is so fantastic—featuring a prominent physician involved in a royal cover-up, with the complicity of Queen Victoria, the Freemasons, and the London police, morphing later into a mystical quest to secure the power of male rationality over female chaos through deadly occult rituals—that it nearly demands to be dismissed as pure conspiracy theory. The careful, scholarly work of the annotations in the first appendix do not allow for such casual dismissal, and the conflicting notions of scholarship and conspiracy raise questions about the abilities of narrative historiography to provide insight into the past. The outrageousness of the conspiracy theory only highlights the problematic nature of scholarly research that claims to offer definitive
answers to the past, when all historiography involves piecing evidence together in order to create a coherent narrative—a literary act that is inherently creative. The presence of one coherent narrative does not invalidate other plausible narratives, and while the academic work is deliberately constructed to imply a singular truth, it can in fact only offer a potential narrative, whose logic and plausibility is based in the expectations of both the scholar and her audience.

Moore explicitly grapples with these issues of history, narrative, and truth in his second appendix, titled “The Dance of the Gull-Catchers.” Recognizing his own complicity in perpetuating the mythos of the Ripper murders through presenting his version of the narrative, in this final, self-reflexive piece Moore indicates a need to examine the expectations of historical scholarship, and academic scholarship in broader terms, questioning the ability of academics to arrive at definitive conclusions even with the most careful of research. If the conventions of scholarship involve elements of narrative creativity, however, the conventions of literature involve elements of scholarship, and the two processes inform each other. The annotations are not merely scholarship, explaining the process that comes before narrative, but an integral part of both Moore’s narrative and the mythos surrounding the Ripper murders. They explore the tensions inherent in the human drive for both concrete, evidence-based answers and imaginative narrative, providing insight into the long-running fascination with Jack the Ripper, his crimes, and the mythos that surrounds the story.
CHAPTER I
MOORE AS HISTORIAN: APPENDIX I

In the first appendix, Moore uses the conventions of scholarly work to frame his novel, giving detailed (almost page-by-page) citations for the historical facets of the story. Referencing a wide variety of texts, both ones written and researched by Ripper scholars and ones that deal in other aspects of life in Victorian London, Moore provides an almost overwhelming number of names, dates, locations, and connections to serve as historical proof for the story he presents in the text itself. As with all scholarly citations, these references serve a dual purpose—first, to give due credit to the originators of an idea, and second, to establish the author’s position as a well-read authority on the subject matter. Moore establishes his credibility early on by giving prominent attention to famous names in Ripperology, beginning in the first sentence of the appendix: “From Hell’s prologue...is based upon a tentative suggestion put forward by the late Stephen Knight in his book Jack the Ripper: The Final Solution” (I.1). Knight, whose Final Solution caused a stir in the Ripperology world due to the evidence it provided and the stunning hypotheses that grew out of evidence, is a well-known figure among

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1 Citations are given as “chapter: page” throughout this essay. The chapters of the text itself are given as numerals 1 through 14, while the appendices are cited as roman numerals I and II.
Ripperologists. In reading and citing his work, Moore indicates that he is aware of a key aspect in the scholarly conversation surrounding the Ripper murders. In fact, Moore’s version of the Ripper mythos closely follows Knight’s in most ways; the hypothesis he presents is based largely on the evidence Knight collected. Knight interviewed a man who claimed that his grandmother had secretly married Prince Albert Victor, heir to the British throne, and had a daughter with him. The Ripper murders, he said, were a part of a royal conspiracy to cover up the marriage and the child—the women who were murder were supposedly witnesses to the marriage attempting to blackmail the Royal family using their knowledge (22). Citing similarities between the killings and supposed Masonic ritual killings, Knight further hypothesized that the Freemasons were involved in the murders and the cover-up \(^2\) (178). Although Moore does not restrict himself to the evidence and hypotheses Knight presents, his story closely follows Knight’s overall.

In this first annotation to the Prologue, Moore acknowledges his indebtedness to Knight his framing strategy of having two prominent figures in the Ripper investigation look back on their experience decades later. Since evidence, discovered by Knight, indicates that Inspector Abberline, a key investigator into the Ripper murders, and psychic Robert Lees, who claimed to have solved the Ripper murders using his psychic abilities, retired to same area, they may have remained in contact long after the investigation closed. Moore notes Knight’s careful research here: he discovered records showing a Lees as the executor of Abberline’s will, indicting “that the two men may have

\(^2\) It is important to note that the man Knight interviewed later recanted his story, claiming it to be a hoax. While this largely invalidates Knight’s hypothesis as a whole, the concern of this paper is not with the veracity of the narrative but with the research process—Knight’s research into the claims was thorough and scholarly, if later disproven.
kept in contact long after the events of 1888’s terrible Autumn” (I.1). In citing such a central figure in Ripperology, and in further presenting the evidence which lead that figure to his theories, Moore situates himself as a serious student of Ripperology. Moreover, in knowing Knight’s work well enough to cite a relatively minor fact about two periphery figures, Moore further positions himself as a Ripper scholar. Moore makes two important gestures in his notes for the Prologue which indicate his determination to provide a clear and scholarly account of his Ripper research. First, Moore admits to inferring information from the evidence presented—while circumstantial evidence suggests that the two men may have kept in touch, Moore admits that no hard evidence exists, and that therefore the events of the Prologue are conjecture (I.1). “This doesn’t mean that the claims are necessarily untrue,” Moore asserts, “but simply that they cannot be taken as hard and proven fact” (I.1). Moore will make similar statements throughout his explanatory notes, as few hard and proven facts exist in regards to the Ripper case. The theories regarding the Ripper murders are based mostly on inference and logic, drawing connections between those few pieces of evidence.

Still, Moore’s diligence in separating inference from fact only bolsters his credibility in these annotations. In acknowledging the many places in which he bases his hypothesis on conjecture, he situates himself as a trustworthy source—one who takes care to present his evidence fairly—which in turn makes readers more willing to accept his theory. The mixture of careful research and careful presentation leads to a compelling argument. Furthermore, Moore also points out that the conversation on the beach between Abberline and Lees is “a fabrication,” as no evidence directly indicates that such
a discussion took place (I.1). Here, Moore further retreats from framing his narrative as
absolute fact—while evidence suggests that the two men may have kept in contact, there
is no evidence whatsoever about what that contact consisted of. The evidence proves
nothing, but suggests a reasonable hypothesis. The particulars surrounding that
hypothesis are pure narrative device, however. Moore can only employ his imagination,
using the meager evidence as a starting point for his own version of the Ripper murders.
As above, what would seem to undercut Moore’s position as a serious Ripper scholar
presenting a serious theory as to the identity of the murderer actually increases his
trustworthiness, as the reader need not wonder what is fact and what is fiction in the
novel—the author carefully spells it out at every turn.

Although most of Moore’s narrative is based on Knight’s theory, Moore refers to
a wide variety of other authors as his annotations continue: Paul Begg’s *Jack the Ripper:*
The Uncensored Facts (18), Begg, Fido, and Skinner’s *Jack the Ripper A-Z* (19), Melvyn
Fairclough’s *The Ripper and the Royals* (21), and Donald Rumbelow’s *The Complete
Jack the Ripper* (22) are only a few of books on the Ripper murders that Moore draws
from. While the depth of Moore’s reading of Knight suggested his credibility as a
Ripperologist early on, the breadth of his research confirms it. Every panel of the novel,
it seems, is based on research by one Ripper enthusiast or another. Moore also cites a
variety of material which is not specifically related to the murders or Ripperology—
Stephen Jones’s *London...The Sinister Side* and J. A. Brooks’s *Ghosts of London: The
East End, City, and North* assisted Moore in setting the menacing tone (41), while Henry
Mayhew’s *London Labour and the London Poor* and Jack London’s *People of the Abyss*
offered him insight into the living conditions and daily lives of the murdered women (18). While not directly related to Ripperology, each new citation adds a new dimension to Moore’s story-telling—every aspect of his novel is meticulously researched, not just the material relating to the murders themselves. To readers unfamiliar with the Ripper researchers that Moore presents—or to those academic readers inclined to dismiss Ripper research as “pseudohistory” (as Moore himself will refer to the Ripperology phenomenon in the second appendix)—these sources may do more to showcase the level of research that went into the novels (II.16). Throughout the annotations, Moore shows a clear concern with historical accuracy, while carefully mapping the differences between evidence, conjecture, and narrative device.

The level of research Moore conducts is not uncommon in fictional work—most good fiction writers take care to carefully research the time period and society in which they set their work. What is unusual here is two-fold: first that the research process is made explicit in the annotations and second that the novel attempts to relate true events in a genre that focuses on the fictional. The second is far from unique, of course, as many authors have attempted to retell historical event in new ways. However, when combined with the graphic novel format, writing history, or even “pseudohistory” becomes a challenge. Where traditional historical novels can imbed relevant facts within the text without interrupting the flow of the plot, graphic panels have significantly less room for text. The text that is left tends to be mostly dialogue, and graphic novel authors who try to pack too many historical facts into their characters’ dialogue run the risk of having boring, explicative scenes that do little to advance the plot (Mikkonen 306). While the
graphic art can more than make up for missing text when it comes to scene building and setting the tone, it is far more difficult to depict specific facts—say, aspects of a character’s past that may be relevant to her current motivations—without diverging repeatedly from the plot in order to illustrate it. Placing these facts and explanations in the appendix allows the plot to carry forward without interruption, while still providing the reader with the researched information. In this way, the annotations are not separate from the narrative; in fact they are crucial to a full understanding of the text. Scholarship and literature are not independent aspects to be read and judged independently in Moore’s novel—instead, they inform and clarify each other. The annotations are themselves a part of the story.

For example, much of the appendix is devoted to Dr. William Gull—logically, as Gull commits the Ripper murders in Moore’s version of the tale—which pulls details of his childhood, medical training, and “meteoric” success from *William Withey Gull: A Biographical Sketch*, which was written by Gull’s son-in-law (I.2). The *Sketch* is not written by a Ripperologist, although Gull’s biography had certainly proved useful to previous Ripper scholars like Knight. The insights that it provides directly inform parts of the graphic novel, of course, providing information about Gull’s work and mannerisms that Moore uses as he scripts the novel. However, the annotations provide a place for Moore to discuss further aspects of Gull’s life and character. For example, he notes the title of one of Gull’s last papers, “A Cretinoid Condition Found in Adult Women,” in an annotation to panels depicting Gull’s work in the asylum (I.5). The paper comes up in the novel itself. It does, however, provide insight into Gull’s medical work, suggesting
his interest in women and female anatomy. Hardly damning evidence, it nonetheless offers another aspect of Gull’s psychology for consideration, and while one could read only the information provided in the graphic section of the novel and understand the storyline, the annotations allow for a deeper appreciation of the logic behind believing that Gull performed the Ripper murders. Without the annotations, a piece of the narrative is missing, as the research behind the story and the story itself are inextricably intertwined.

As before, Moore is careful to note where fact ends and speculation begins. For example, a major component of Moore’s narrative is Gull’s membership in the Freemasons—the secret society initially offers protection from the consequences of the murders, as high-ranking Masons working in key positions help stage the cover-up, and the societies rituals and symbology deeply influence Gull’s descent into madness and ritual murder. However, no evidence for Gull’s Masonic membership exists other than Knight’s assertion that he joined the group in 1842 (I.2). Unlike the reference to Knight in the Prologue, in which corroborating evidence in the form of Abberline’s will exist to give plausibility to the conjecture, here there is no corroborating source. In fact, the Masons directly dispute Knight’s claim, insisting the Gull never joined their group (I.2). Moore notes this dispute of his chosen hypothesis, defending it briefly by saying that “neither Knight nor the assembled ranks of Freemasonry are necessarily telling the truth, at which point an obscuring Victorian fog starts to engulf the facts of our narrative” (I.3). Highlighting again the scarcity of concrete evidence, here Moore recognizes the difficulties of forming a hypothesis when crucial pieces of the puzzle are inaccessible.
The “obscuring Victorian fog” prevents Moore from presenting a complete set of evidence to base his narrative upon, and yet Moore must make a narrative choice despite the lack of evidence. Although as above the research adds to credibility and informs the narrative, as an author Moore cannot leave this vital aspect of his story ambiguous—he must choose a position in order to move the narrative forward. These narrative leaps, unlike the inference of earlier examples, do little advance the academic credibility of the argument, being instead a narrative necessity that supersedes the scholarly work.

In even rarer moments, Moore fails to cite his research at all—and yet he notes this failure within the text. Referencing the name given to a minor character, he writes: “I confess that I’m currently at a loss as to where I got the name Lunigi from. I know it’s in one of the books currently that currently surround me…Either take my word for it or come round and do my housework” (I.32). On the one hand, this is an insignificant piece of trivia (after all, the character is only mentioned in passing), but in the midst of such thorough research, this omission is significant. Moore carefully traces a myriad of tiny details, and yet is uninterested in tying up this loose end. Moreover, he deliberately comments upon his failure, when if he simply did not mention it, it seems unlikely that his readers would have noticed. Moore again deviates from his attempts to mimic academic conventions here, undercutting in a small way the scholarliness that he so carefully builds in the rest of the appendix. Although he insists that the citation exists, he at the same time insists that his readers “take [his] word for it”—that they trust him with the evidence to back up his claims—and in this brief moment he distances himself from the academics that he so carefully imitates elsewhere. Unlike the narrative leaps of the
previous paragraph, this failure of research is a deliberate departure from the academic framing of the rest of appendix rather than a story-telling device, making its inclusion in the appendix all the more relevant. Returning to this moment in Chapter III, this distancing will indicate Moore’s uneasy relationship with the scholarship that he both performs and criticizes.

The assumption behind this attention to scholarship and scholarly convention, of course, is that Moore’s annotations are intended for a particular audience, one that can recognize and appreciate the academic work being done. Moreover, such an audience need be one that is educated in Ripper research, one that recognizes Knight’s name and his book, and can appreciate the various characters and events as not simply fictionalizations but as historical figures worthy of such intensive study. *From Hell*, then, seems to be written the Ripperologists in mind; at the very least, the addition of the dense, all-text annotations suggest such an educated and appreciative audience that expects more than the casual comic reader. This anticipation, and the “projection” of Moore’s prose annotations, in response to such an anticipated audience, is significant to the construction of discourse in the appendix (217). In his work on reader response, Stanley Fish noted the tension between an individual reader’s “interpretive decisions”—the choices each person makes about which aspects of a text pay attention to and which to ignore, and the author’s “projection” or invitation to the reader to pay attention to particular aspects (217, 220). While Fish argues that readers and not writers ultimately “make” a text, as the meaning conveyed is dependent on the interpretive strategies used, the idea of projection indicates an active author who attempts, consciously or
unconsciously, to shape meaning: “It follows then that what [authors] do is give hearers and readers the opportunity to make meaning (and text) by inviting them to put into execution a set of interpretive strategies” (220). In order for the communicative aspect of language and text to function, it must remain dialogic; reader and writer must interpret each other. Moore’s annotations suggest a projection of scholarly inquiry—Moore not only presents his research in the manner of the scholar, but he assumes a reader who would find such a presentation appealing, and will interpret the appendix according to the conventions of academia. When such conventions are applied to a topic as fantastic as Moore’s version of the Ripper murders, the simple dialogic expectations break down—educated readers are likely to be skeptical of claims that the Royal family commissioned the Ripper murders, however well-researched such a theory may be, calling into question Moore’s sincerity in his use of the conventions. Conspiracy theories challenge the traditional perception of scholarship as a path to understanding history, which in turn demands an interrogation of purpose in employing traditional scholarship.
Indeed, traditional scholarship seems inadequate to explain the wild and complex hypothesis that Moore presents. Closely following Stephen Knight’s theory from *The Final Solution*, Moore maintains that Gull, who held the position of Royal physician, is ordered by Queen Victoria to cover up the love affair and illegitimate child of her son, Prince Albert Victor, by commoner Annie Crook (1.5). Dr. Gull places Annie in the asylum that he runs and performs an experiment on her thyroid that renders her insane. This royal conspiracy is only the beginning, however, as several of Annie’s friends, who knew about the affair and the child, attempt to black mail the royal family (3.13). Dr. Gull is called upon to expand his cover-up operation, and commits the early Ripper murders in an effort to silence the women—with the full knowledge of high-ranking police and other officials (4.2). Gull’s involvement with the Freemasons becomes important as he comes to believe that his actions are justified not only by his directions from the Queen, but as a part of a mystical battle against an Illuminati threat to the Crown (9.11). Gull’s fragile grip on sanity weakens as the murders progress, and he eventually rejects the royal cover-up as anything more than a useful guise for his murders—he sees himself instead as the only one capable of completing a mystical ritual that will reinstate
rational male power over the chaotic female (4.6). He believes that his quest is a part of his Masonic duty, handed down from the Knights Templar. While in the annotations Moore offers research that points to Gull as a potential suspect for murders, these reasonable arguments are quickly overshadowed by the web of coincidences and tenuous connections that such a conspiracy theory relies upon.

In the Prologue, Moore (and Knight before him), makes a leap of logic, based on the small piece of historical evidence available to him. The historical document that Knight found does not prove that Abberline and Lees kept in touch after the close of the investigation, but the circumstantial evidence provided by the will makes such a scenario seem plausible. Moore offers similar circumstantial evidence to back up his claim about this conspiracy theory—for example, he shows that the mutilations performed on the Ripper victims correlate to rituals detailed in Masonic writing, including burning the victim’s heart (I.34). While the first theory appears reasonable, and readers are willing to accept the hypothesis almost without thought, the second is highly suspicious. Readers are unwilling to accept this theory as readily as others, opening the question of why conspiracy theories, even well-documented and thoroughly researched ones, are so highly criticized.

Common wisdom demands that conspiracy theories be dismissed out-of-hand, as the work of paranoid minds rather than rational thought. A variety of logic underpins that notion, most notably Occam’s Razor—simple and obvious explanations are more likely than conclusions that rely on feeble connections and coincidences. Moore’s version of the Ripper events—which is based on Knight’s theories—is compelling, and yet logic
dictates that a wide conspiracy including police, asylum physicians, high-ranking Masons, and members of the royal family is unlikely at best; even if such a group came together, the chances that not one of the conspirators ever spoke of the secret plot is even more unlikely. That no evidence of such a vast conspiracy has ever been uncovered, despite hundreds of dedicated researchers over the course of a century, is all but unbelievable.

Some scholars who study conspiracy theories would agree that such theories can and should be ignored. Levy argues that since knowledge is social—individuals rely on others to provide information that they cannot test or prove for themselves—conspiracy theories that dismiss this group production model in favor of a secret and limited “truth” are almost always going to be incorrect: “The social distribution of knowledge production is not guaranteed to produce truths, but is a powerfully truth-conducive mechanism of explanation production” (181). Conspiracy theorists, distrustful of information provided by authorities which they see as potentially corrupt, ignore that what Levy calls “epistemic authorities” are the ones in the best position to acquire truth, as they have resources and access unavailable to the lone conspiracy theorist (181). If the Freemasons say that Gull was never a member of the society, to return to an earlier example, they should be believed; the Freemasons are the “epistemic authority” in regards to their own membership. Levy argues that to question their response—with no evidence to the contrary—is foolish, as no one could possibly know better than they. Coady claims that to do so is not only foolish but disruptive, as it undermines the credibility of socially-acquired knowledge (25). If the individual must distrust the knowledge they acquire
from others—if it must be assumed that others are lying unless and until it can be proven otherwise—then the individual can no little with certainty, as all knowledge is based upon the testimony of others. Now distrusting the Masons statement is not simply an individual choice—Moore’s distrust encourages others’ distrust. While the single instance of unaccepted testimony will hardly dismantle the mechanism of socially-distributed knowledge, conspiracy theories cultivate—and reflect—a culture of distrust that inhibits that distribution.

A lone murderer, intelligent but deeply disturbed, is far more likely according to this model, as he would only need to keep his own secret. History offers many examples of such lone serial killers (although the term was unknown at the time of the Ripper crimes); men and women who have hid their crimes for decades without discovery, requiring only their own intelligence to escape detection—not a vast array of helpful coconspirators. Yet history also gives evidence of a variety of events once believed to be “mere” conspiracy that later proved true, indicating that such emphatic dismissals may in fact be intellectually suspect. Such issues arise from the dual nature of the term “conspiracy”:

[T]he term conspiracy has migrated from its classical sense of contained plot toward the mysterious operations of a vast organization, technology, or system. Since the Cold War, “conspiracies” have insistently been seen as the work of entities so dispersed and obscured that they are the very antithesis of traditional conspiracy. (Melley 159)
No one would try to deny that conspiracies exist: one only has to look to the recent terror attacks for evidence of small groups plotting against authority in secret. However, the conspiracy associated with the term “conspiracy theory” is the direct opposite of that, so large as to be indefinable. This is the conspiracy that draws disdain, as scope of such plots make them untenable.

Moore’s vision of the conspiracy surrounding the Ripper murders incorporates both definitions of the term. The original conspiracy is a conspiracy of two: Gull and Queen Victoria. The Queen’s wishes for Prince Albert Victor’s lover to “be SILENCED” are given in private, and when Gull goes to silence the woman, already at the asylum, he sends away the nurse and carries out the Queen’s orders in private (2.28, 2.31). Although a few others know about the relationship between the Prince and the prostitute, only the Queen and Gull know Anne’s true fate. At this small, contained level, the conspiracy seems plausible. Although no hard evidence exists to prove it, the motives behind each player’s actions are easy to understand—for the Queen, the protection of her family and bloodline, for Gull, duty to his monarch—and there is no conflicting evidence to deal with. The scenario may not be entirely convincing, but it can be entertained. Pigden argues convincingly that conspiracy theories should be examined and dismissed only if a methodological or concrete flaw found (221). Therefore, it would be perfectly acceptable to explore the possibility that the Freemasons deny one of their former brothers for reasons of their own, until evidence is produced to the contrary. Likewise, the two-man conspiracy to silence the Prince’s lover is also plausible. If no
conflicting evidence or methodological flaw exists, Pigden argues, then the theory exists as a reasonable alternative to the official or accepted explanation (221).

One potential methodological flaw is a conspiracy theory that is so large that it cannot be properly or fully studied and understood (Pigden 223). The early, common concerns are here placed in a scholarly context, as the coincidences and tenuous connections required to sustain the “mysterious operations of a vast” conspiracy cannot hold up to significant scrutiny. Indeed, Moore’s conspiracy becomes less believable the larger it gets. First, Gull enlists the services of a driver who drives him to the victims and later assists in the murders in minor ways (4.4). A single new conspirator does little to affect the plausibility of the scenario, but soon high-ranking Masons in various positions help direct police attention away from the murder scenes (12.26). Later, the Queen enlists the Mason’s ruling body to help stop Gull’s rampage, with little effect—and in fact, Gull uses their connections to the police to find one of the women in a jail cell (8.33). None of the many who are aware of the murderer’s identity attempt to turn Gull in to the police, and the Queen herself continues to looks the other way. By the time the Masons do take action to stop Gull, so many people are aware of his actions that even the idea that his crimes could remain secret is unimaginable. And yet the Masons complete another complex cover up that allows Gull’s good name to remain clean although he lives out the remainder of his life in an asylum. Even Pigden’s forgiving model for exploring conspiracies breaks under the weight so many moving parts, the failure of anyone of which would bring down the entire conspiracy.
However, the conspiracy that Gull creates in his mind is greater—and more untenable—still. Having seen a vision of the Mason deity (2.26), Gull believes himself to be engaged in “grand work,” that every murder he commits is a part of a great mystical ceremony intended to reassert the “rational” male dominance over the “chaotic” female figure (4.6). Gull notes patterns in the streets and monuments of London which reconfirm his belief in his quest, finding connections between ancient British battles and the present-day Mason rituals (4.9). Even the Illuminati make an appearance in Gull’s personal conspiracy theory, and he convinces the Queen of an Illuminati plot against the throne when she considers ordering an end to the murders. Gull’s internal conspiracy is far more complex than the already-intricate reality, making something as “simple” as a Masonic cover up of Jack the Ripper seem nearly plausible in comparison. On the other hand, Gull is clearly insane, and juxtaposing his internal conspiracy with the real one only emphasizes the ridiculousness of the entire endeavor—a conspiracy to murder which morphs into a conspiracy to contain and cover up for a murderer.

The believability of Moore’s research may appear to falter as the conspiracy spirals ever larger; however, he continues to present a wide variety of evidence to support his case. For example, when the Masonic leader first confronts Gull about the murders in Chapter Eight, he brings with him a letter from the Queen indicating her wishes that the “murders” be stopped (8.21). As only one woman had been killed at the time the letter was written, Sir Charles realizes that the Queen must have known about Gull’s plan beforehand (8.22). This letter, Moore explains in his appendix, is a real one—Queen Vitoria truly referred to multiple murders at a time when only one had been committed.
Such a connection appears as solid evidence that the Queen had prior knowledge of the crimes—until Moore explains that many in London believed that the earlier murder of another woman in Whitechapel could be connected to the Ripper crimes. Although the connection was later debunked, it was a “popular misconception” at the time, and the Queen might have an innocent reason for referring to multiple murders (I.28). “You pays your money and you takes your chances,” Moore remarks, underscoring the narrativity of the move—the letter can be connected to a conspiracy theory or not, depending on how it is interpreted (I.28). “[W]ithout narrative there can be no ‘conspiracy,’” Lowrie writes, “only acts, whose meaning lies open to interpretation” (9). Discussing conspiracy is necessarily a narrative act, as conjecture is necessary for those on the outside to make sense of the events surrounding a conspiracy. In researching the Ripper murders, then, both Moore and Knight are constrained by the very possibility of a conspiracy. If it exists, then it can only be examined and understood through conjecture. There will, by definition, be no evidence of a successful conspiracy—if the evidence was clear and unassailable, it would no longer be a conspiracy but a failed conspiracy. Moore, and Knight before him, must build a story to fit the evidence they have.

Hayden White notes that this narrativity is not constrained to conspiracy theorists and historians of conspiracies—all historians use tropes and devices of fiction writing as they construct the story of the past (Versaci 112). In fact, until the 16th century historiography—the writing of history—was “regarded as a literary art” and historiographers believed that the imagination necessarily played a role in discovering the importance of a historical event (White 52). It is only recently that historians have
considered their task to be a “fact-finding” one, free of a fictional component. However, White argues that even modern historians are engaged in the production of narrative; even the most well-documented historical treatise involves stringing together moments with an assumed cause-and-effect relationship. Sharing a variety of conventions, including selection, organization, and plotting, historical accounts can be considered “true novel[s]” (Veyne qtd. in Hutcheon “Historiographic” 836). Since no piece of historical writing takes into account every aspect of the event—it cannot, given how much of history remains unknown—these accounts must be “fictional” to a certain extent as they are constructed. Moreover, history is constructed by people who, despite their best efforts, are caught up in the ideology of their age and culture, making “truth” an impossible goal.

Returning to the early example concerning the annotations to the Prologue, we can see White’s ideas at work in Moore’s construction of the Prologue. The historical record indicates that the two men retired to the same area, and that someone with Lees’ last name executed Abberline’s will. This could be nothing more than coincidence—perhaps Abberline met an unconnected Lees later in life—but Moore (and Knight) assume a cause-and-effect relationship between the two pieces of historical fact. Although unlike the more exotic assumptions later in the book, this connection appears quite plausible, it is still an assumption. Making this assumption allows for the narrativization of the history; Knight, Moore, and the audience can all imagine a relationship between the two men that lasted beyond the events of the Ripper murders. While such a narrative is useful, as it allows for a neat resolution to the question, it must
not be forgotten that it is conjecture and not fact. White argues that the majority of history is constructed in just such a manner: conspiracy or not, the interpretation of otherwise unconnected “acts” is the historian’s job.
CHAPTER III
HISTORY AND NARRATIVE

This should not suggest, however, that fiction and history are interchangeable. Although they share many features, they occupy “different orders of discourse,” having different purposes (Lindenberger qtd. in Hutcheon “Historiographic” 836). Literature makes no inherent claim on historical veracity, for example, while historiography seeks first to instruct rather than to entertain. However, even these characterizations are blurred—historical texts are often constructed with the audience’s entertainment in mind, and some literature does, explicitly or implicitly, attempt to offer a measure of historical truth. In postmodern texts that examine historical events, such as From Hell, authors often not only narrate events, but also explore the very process of discovering and narrating the past. Hutcheon calls such postmodern explorations “historiographic metafiction,” emphasizing the author’s uncertain relationship with Jameson’s “concept of history”—as White suggests, the supposed “facts” of the past are constructed with more attention to ideologies than truth (Jameson qtd. in Hutcheon “Historiographic” 837). Rejecting a singular overarching metanarrative on which to base his story, the metafictional writer deliberately and self-consciously explores his interpretation and reinterpretation of history, aware that his story is not only fictional, but based on something that resembles fiction—whatever assumptions the author made in framing his
narrative are based in the ideology of the history he chooses work from. This type of
metafiction, then, explores not simply the process of writing but the assumptions behind it, and the uneasy relationship between author, subject, and audience.

This theoretical approach allows a more nuanced exploration of the blurred boundaries between research and plausibility. Although the first appendix shows detailed and exhaustive research on the part of Moore and the Ripperologists that he bases his text upon, indicative of the kinds of research scholars look for, the conclusions reached from this research are implausible at best. Despite an appropriation of academic conventions, Moore’s narrative fails to convince—the narrative is entertaining, but seemingly ridiculous. When it becomes clear that academia—specifically history and historiography—appropriate some of the conventions of literature, however, the implications of Moore’s use of such conventions is complicated. No longer is he simply aping scholarly conventions; the use of the conventions indicates a self-reflexiveness concerning the process of research and historiography.

If metafiction is “process made visible,” as Hutcheon suggests, then one could not ask for a more explicitly metafictional text than the first appendix to *From Hell*, exploring in minute detail the research Moore completed in preparation for writing the novel (“Poetics” 6). Moore takes a first-person approach through much of the appendix, not merely stating fact but explaining where he found the information, why he chose to illustrate Knight’s theory of the Ripper murders over any number of others (and when he deviates from Knight’s theory), and how he went about weaving so many pieces of speculation about Jack the Ripper, his victims, and his motives into one cohesive plot. “I
…hypothesize concerning the walks they may have shared together” marks the first use of first-person in the appendix, and also indicates a position of authorial power—the research indicates that the two men in question remained in contact after the investigation into the Ripper murders ended, but the walks themselves are a creation of the author (I:1). Yet the “I” also indicates that the annotations serve as personal reflection as well as explication of source material, as Moore clearly places himself at the center of his research process. Moore makes the connections, and consciously selects interpretations of the facts to build the narrative piece by piece. Despite the careful scholarship, the narrative is in fact constructed by Moore, and by the Ripperologists that came before him.

Therefore, when Moore deviates from the conventions of scholarship, as examined earlier when he declined to provide the reference for the minor character’s name in chapter nine, Moore does more than simply reject an academic format—instead, he comments on the very assumption that research can bypass or overshadow the narrativity of history. When Moore demands that his readers simply trust that his source exists, he highlights the notion that readers have and must “take [his] word for it” throughout the story—the evidence provided, no matter how well-documented, is framed on Moore’s terms, to present the story Moore wishes to present. In the end, it matters little whether the citation for that minor bit of trivia can be produced or not, because the trivia is only significant within the narrative that Moore presents. Realizing this, Moore further realizes his interpretation of events is one of many, and that his position as author is simultaneously extremely powerful and extremely negligent. The ability to string together evidence and speculation into a coherent narrative allows him to influence the
way in which his audience interprets the Ripper myth, but at the same time his interpretation is in constant peril, able to be undermined at any point by another interpretation of the facts. Moore can “project” his version of the narrative, but the narrative that the audience accepts may have little relation to his expectations. It is at points like this where we begin to see that Moore’s appendix is more than a simple mimicry of scholarly work—in fact, Moore uses the conventions of scholarship in order to deconstruct those conventions and to question the easy faith many have in the ability of scholarship to provide clear and unimpeachable answers.

The use of first person indicates that this is a self-conscious exploration of process on the part of the author. Moore’s “hypothesis,” which appeared to show authorial control over the narrative, can be reframed as a hesitant gesture; his unwillingness to do more than hypothesize regarding the factuality of this scene is only the first of many examples of such uncertainty (I:1). “I believe…” (I:2), “I have chosen to interpret…” (I:7), and “I suggest…” (I:20) are also frequent beginnings to Moore’s speculations on the events in London in 1888. These phrases reveal Moore’s unwillingness to assert a single Truth—unsurprising, given the subject matter. What is significant is that Moore acknowledges this aspect of construction, admitting to the uncertainty of the narrative he has created. By repeatedly placing the theories and ideas presented in the text in the context of earlier writers and historians, and later couching any of his own suggestions in weakened first-person, he indicates the centrality of the author in any reflection on the text. The narrativity of history takes center stage—at his most academic, in the pure-text
annotations to the narrative, interpretation and conjecture are still unavoidable. Moore’s language reflects that inescapable truth—that “truth” itself is a matter of interpretation.

If history itself is constructed, then it appears that the conspiracy theory offered by Knight and Moore should be as valid an interpretation as any other; Pigden’s suggestion that, barring conflicting evidence, conspiracy theories should be accepted as possible alternatives to accepted histories fits neatly into White and Hutcheon’s assertion that all history is constructed. Still, it quickly becomes clear that, despite the evidence and conjecture Moore offers, the conspiracy theory version of events is entertaining but not convincing. If Moore realizes, and is not concerned, that the annotations fails to convince many readers of his position, then what purpose did he see in constructing the appendix at all? Given Moore’s awareness of the constructed nature of history, his appropriation of scholarly convention becomes yet another commentary on scholarship itself. His use of the academic conventions only highlights the flaws in an epistemological structure that claims to be able to access a single “truth” through a compilation of facts. Although the conspiracy theory constructed by Moore is “obviously” illogical and unlikely, a misinterpretation of coincidences, cannot be proven any more wrong than any other narrative construction of events. All interpretations of history are subject to the biases and ideologies of the historian, and placing that interpretation in an academic context, surrounding it with facts and logical conjecture, does nothing other than prove (as Pigden asks) that there is no conflicting evidence, not that there is definitive proof.
“[Historiographic metafiction] defines deliberately diverse narrative forms that are open to the multiplication of interpretive levels, where self-reflexivity and intertextuality do not deprive the past of its historical significance and do not disconnect it from the author’s context,” making it an approach particularly suited to comic art (DiLiddo 62). The interplay of visual and textual narrative forms allow multiple ways of approaching the problems of self-reflexivity and intertextuality. Graphic novels allow writers and artists to construct far more complex scenes for the reader than either visual art or written language alone, as the text can reinforce, contradict, or juxtapose the artwork at any given time. Mikkonen extensively discusses the ways in which the presence of graphic illustrations forces authors to adjust the ways in which they depict characters inner world: “An extended use of verbal report of a character’s emotion and thought... can slow down the visual narrative flow considerably. The presentation of abstract thought and that of prolonged soliloquies pose special challenges to graphic narrative in this light” (306). Lengthy monologues about the way narrative functions would not be appropriate for a graphic novel like From Hell; however, the visual medium also opens several options unavailable to ‘plain’ text writers. Much can be said with a
facial expression or a pointedly-drawn scene, of course, but graphic novels also have a feature specific unto themselves—the “gutter” or space between the panels. McCloud argues that this “non representative non-space” is actually vital, as it is the space in which the action happens in the readers imagination (McCloud 66). The panels are static, meaning the reader must imagine what takes place to lead one panel into the next. Audiences interpret not only what is stated or shown, but what is intended through what is not stated and not shown in this “gutter.” The author’s self-reflexivity and his understanding of the history he presents can be clarified through the interplay of art and text—earnestness, irony, and other intentions become more evident in this form than in either text or art alone.

For example, Spiegelman’s *Maus* explores the experience of the Holocaust, as the narrator’s father tells it—but the narrator consistently brings into question the veracity of his father’s retelling. While the issue can be partially attributed to the failing memory of an aging man, Vladek himself denies the ability to convey the experience accurately. Of the fate of a fellow inmate at Auschwitz, shot for trying to escape, he says: “I don’t know that this is the way it was with Mandelbaum—only that very often they did so...Maybe they kicked and hit him in the head because he did not work fast enough...or maybe he got sick. So they put him in the ‘hospital’ and then in the oven” (35). Vladek cannot provide the resolution that the narrative demands—history, even his own, does not allow for the neat ending that a narrative conception of history demands. There are always multiple possibilities, and Vladek recognizes that he cannot restrict his story to a single coherent narrative. Several frames, each representing a different possible death for
Vladek’s friend, reinforce Vladek’s words—each is possible, each frame fits within the narrative’s construction, but the truth of any particular scene is questionable. The interplay of text and image reinforces Spiegelman’s struggle with the narrativity of history.

Moreover, the narrator is a fictionalized version of the author (and Vladek a fictionalized version of the author’s father), making such musings not simply discussions of historiography but a self-reflexive and metafictional exploration of this problem; his own story can have no clear and coherent narrative because his father’s does not. Speidelman’s artwork, as well as his text, reflect his struggle—in one of the most visually stunning scenes of the novel, the narrator is depicted as working at desk that sits on a pile of emaciated bodies, struggling to give a fitting depiction of the lives and deaths of the Holocaust victims. Speigelman writes of a series of dates: “Vladek died of congestive heart failure on August 18, 1982...In May 1987 Françoise and I are expecting a baby...Between May 16, 1944 and May 24 1944 over 100,000 Hungarian Jews were gassed in Auschwitz” (41). The reader expects to find a causal relationship between the dates listed, a narrative logic to the events that shaped the lives of Speigelman and his family—but there is none. These events have no clear relationship to each other, beyond their importance to the Spiegelman family; there is no narrative link in them. The text, while moving, is superceded by the artwork—the visual cues indicate Spiegelman’s crisis far better than the textual ones. His family and he have been irrevocably affected by the horror of the Holocaust, and Speigelman’s work in Maus is his attempt to give voice to that horror. But as the panel indicates, the unending presence of the past does not mean
that the past can be understood. Speigelman’s subjects are silent in death, unable to tell their story—and even if they could, Vladek’s comments indicate the futility of narrating the past. The interplay of words and text in a graphic novel like *Maus* allows the novelist additional media to comment on history and story-telling, which in turn allows for a more complex exploration of the theme than traditional media may allow.

Moore’s second appendix reflects the tensions between history and fiction that Hutcheon describes and Speigelman exemplifies. In this appendix, Moore returns to the graphic novel format, describing Ripperology both in a historical narration and as an insider. Moore describes Ripperologists, from the earliest Victorian storytellers recounting the murders at a dinner party to modern Ripper enthusiasts, as “gull-catchers,” chasing after answers that can never be found. Titled “Dance of the Gull-Catchers,” a play on the surname of Moore’s Ripper, the early written cues for self-reflection and reflection on are not entirely explicit; Moore maintains a third-person narration in the early pages while explaining how “They all take a swing at” explaining the Ripper mystery (II:1). The use of the third person implies that the narrator is not involved in the action—it is only others who “swing at” the truth and invariably miss. Yet the first line of appendix states, “This is harder than it looks” (II:1); although ambiguous, the line can be read as the narrator’s admission of participation—if the dance is more difficult than it appears from the outside, then Moore must have attempted the dance himself. Like the rest of the “gull-catchers,” Moore finds himself drawn into the intricate and impossible-to-understand mythos of Jack the Ripper. Tracing the evolution of the Ripper story, from early Ripperologist to the present, it is not long before the narrator reveals the first openly
reflexive moment: “Perhaps this is the purpose of all art, all writing, on the murders, fiction and non-fiction: simply to participate” (II:3). While reflexive, however, the line is not specifically self-reflexive, as it refers to fake letters written to police and newspapers at the time of the murders, claiming to be Jack the Ripper, rather than to the author’s own writing.

The moment is reflexive only because the reader assumes it to be so, and it is here that the visual representations become important. The panel containing the line depicts a woman, dressed in Victorian-era clothing but staring directly out of the panel at the reader. As her face is shadowed by her hat, the reader must look closely to see the woman’s eyes, increasing the level of connection the reader feels to the artwork. Drawn into the panel, the reader understands herself to be “participating” in the Ripper story, much as those letter-writers a century ago. Like the first line of the appendix, this panel will only become self-reflexive when the narrator finally reveals himself to be Moore, but here the reader must begin to reflect on his own part in the story early on.

Other panels continue the pattern of being self-reflexive for the reader and retroactively self-reflexive for the author: “Later stories will assemble [different strands of the story], selectively, in different combinations. Pick ‘n’ mix,” proclaims a panel on page four that depicts a bowl of candy the reader is invited to choose from (II.4) As White suggests, selectivity is a characteristic of both historiography and literature; here, the two come together, as Moore’s narrative becomes further bound up in the history of the Ripper murders (48). Pages six through twelve continue to depict suspects, victims, and other figures that look directly at the reader, demanding her attention and her
participation in the creation of the myth. It is not until page sixteen that Moore switches
from third-person to first-person, verbally confirming that the appendix is indeed self-
reflexive on the part of the author. This is visually confirmed at the same moment—
Moore is depicted in the first panel of the page, while Eddie Campbell, the illustrator, is
depicted in the second. In the third, the two men take their nets and join the gull-catchers
dance, officially joining those that came before them in building and rebuilding the
Ripper myth (II:16).

Interestingly, the verbal cue in this panel states, “The rest is pseudo-history,”
indicating that Moore and Campbell do not attempt to claim any more authority on the
subject than those who came before them (II:16). What the appendix makes clear,
however, is that the entire Ripper mythos is “pseudo-history,” a narrative constructed
from the barest of historical fact—in London in 1888, several young women were
brutally murdered, and the crime was never solved. Nothing at all beyond that is certain;
professional historians and amateur Ripperologists alike have nothing more than
conjecture and speculation. The version of events presented by Moore and Campbell
(and by Knight before them) seems unbelievable, a fantastic fictionalization of events,
but as the “Dance of the Gull-catchers” indicates, every narrative in the Ripper mythos is
necessarily fiction. Moore and Campbell can only pose their own theories and
speculations, and acknowledge that “the idea of a solution, any solution, is inane” (II:16).

Moore shifts between first- and third-person for several more pages as he
discusses his own research and writing and that of others interested in the murders (II:17-
20). Campbell depicts Moore several more times, as well, both amidst the other gull-
catchers and in more realistic settings, traveling and writing (II:18-19). In the final pages of the appendix, however, the written and visual cues make a final and telling shift, explicitly tying the self-reflection of the authors to the reflection of the readers. At the bottom of the page, Moore shifts into second-person plural when he says, “We’ll lock all the suspects in a room together. They can fight it out” (II:21). Moore brings the readers and authors together for a single purpose: each “inanely” wants to know the truth about Jack the Ripper’s identity. Reader and author are aligned against “them,” the suspects, but more broadly against history and its inability to clearly reveal its mysteries. However, the author and audience cannot be separated from the narrative of history, as they too are bound up in the story. Simply desiring an answer to the question of the murderer’s identity implies the acceptance of the narrative—escaping the “dance” of history-making is impossible.

“Truth is, it’s never been about the murders, not the killer nor his victims. It’s about us. About our minds and how they dance,” Moore finally claims in a panel that depicts a faceless mob of gull-catchers marching with their nets (II:22). This assessment implicates both reader and author in the ugly cycle of exploitation and consumption that has existed since the murders first began. Moore acknowledges and accepts the web, and moreover, he demands that his readers do the same. In the final appendix, Moore explicitly directs the readers’ attention to the questions and concerns of historiography and narrative, insisting that the complexities of the “dance” are constructions of “our minds” rather than realities of history—that the human need for answers drives us all to create a narrative that satisfies. Scholarship and research, then, become a means of
justifying that need, providing apparent “proof” for theories and speculation that a narrative approach to the reality demands. The implications of Moore’s mimicry of scholarly convention in the first appendix are made explicit in the second—Ripperology and the various theories arising from it highlight the limitations of scholarship even as it makes use of its conventions in an attempt to legitimize its activities.
Moore’s exploration of narrative and history in “Dance of the Gull-Catchers” highlights the ways in which historical scholarship is constructed. Moreover, it stresses the difficulty in escaping such constructions—the narratives were put into place long ago, and they are vital the shared understanding of the world. Deconstructing the narratives not only removes any sense of definitive truth in history, but also removes the ability to access such truth; if all history is constructed, then it is impossible to find the “right” construction. The conventions of scholarship, however, encourage the audience to believe that a construction can be legitimized if the appropriate academic measures are taken. In making use of the conventions of scholarship in the first appendix, Moore only emphasizes that point, as he builds a well-researched argument for an absurd theory—if scholarship can be used to involve Queen Victoria and the Freemasons in a broad conspiracy to murder prostitutes, it can be used to prove anything. Providing historical documentation in support of a theory is important in asserting its legitimacy, but every conspiracy theory is teeming with such evidence. In the end, it is the narrative, the manner in which the pieces of evidence are tied together, which makes the hypothesis believable or unbelievable.
The implications for scholarship are discouraging—if academia cannot provide, or at least aspire to provide, definitive answers to issues through careful research, then what can it hope to provide? Despite Moore’s skillful undermining of scholarly pursuits, neither the novel nor Moore’s commentary in the appendices undercuts the idea that some narratives are more probable than others. Moore specifically notes that at least some aspects of the narrative he choose to illustrate are “transparently ridiculous” (referring specifically to the breadth of the conspiracy he depicts) implying that more likely scenarios exist (II:20). Returning to conspiracy theory, we find that the logic behind the narrative is as important as the evidence; narratives that involve unlikely motives and high levels of cooperation among large groups, or ones that directly contradict the explanations of legitimate authorities, remain unlikely despite any so-called evidence that might be constructed. Although scholarship may not be able to provide incontrovertible proof, it can certainly strive to provide narrative explanations that are probable, based on both evidence and clear logic. Far from calling for an end to scholarly pursuits, Moore’s commentary in From Hell’s appendices demand critical readers of scholarship: ones who recognize the construction of the narrative and are both willing and able to question its believability.

If the deconstruction in From Hell’s appendices diminishes the legitimacy of academic pursuit and scholarship, it simultaneously expands the value of narrative, for even as it denies the possibility of accessing empirical truth, it highlights the importance of constructing meaning. The human drive to tell a story, to construct a narrative that provides some measure of understandability to the universe, shows in Moore’s conjecture.
and hypotheses, in the gull-catchers unending search for clues, and in the readers own
desire to continue and build the Ripper mythos. If no construction can offer definitive
truth, then each construction can offer smaller truths that provide humans with the
framework to understand themselves and their position within the world. The Ripper
murders are so appealing a subject because the mystery demands that construction—the
draw is in the unknown, and the possibilities that the unknown allows. Narrative,
whether based in careful scholarship or pure imagination, is central to humanity’s search
for answers. Hutcheon writes:

It is part of the postmodernist stand to confront the paradoxes, of the
fictive/historical representation, the particular/the general, and the present/the
past. And this confrontation is itself contradictory, for it refuses to recuperate or
dissolve either side of the dichotomy, yet it is more than willing to exploit both. (“Historiographic” 831)

The simultaneous use and subversion of scholarly conventions in the first appendix to
From Hell appear contradictory, but it revels in the contradiction. The blurred line
between historical fiction and fictional history expands the horizons of narrative and
literature—and Alan Moore thrives in such paradoxes.
WORKS CITED


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### VITA

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>January 1984</td>
<td>Born- Cleveland, Ohio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>B.A., Wittenberg University, Springfield, Ohio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-2010</td>
<td>Teaching Assistant, Department of English University of Dayton, Dayton, Ohio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>M.A., English University of Dayton, Dayton, Ohio</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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