Envisioning the Ripper's Visions:
Adapting Myth in Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell's
From Hell

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Abstract:
The ongoing fascination with Jack the Ripper stems from the mystery that surrounds him – from the only fact that is unquestionable about him – his invisibility. Taking Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell's graphic novel *From Hell* (1989-1998) as an example, this article will reread Jack the Ripper in the context of the paradoxical intertwining of his physical absence and medial overrepresentation as formative of the Ripper myth and the significance of vision to his subsequent adaptations and appropriations. It argues that, on a metalevel, *From Hell* uses the myth of the 19th century serial killer as a space where broader issues of adaptation and post-Victorian engagement can be revealed, theorised, and commented upon. Reread in terms of metadaptation, the graphic novel foregrounds our own position vis-à-vis the Victorians, and points to the utility of the adaptive framework to neo-Victorian preoccupations.

Keywords: Alan Moore, Eddie Campbell, *From Hell*, graphic novel, Jack the Ripper, metadaptation, neo-Victorian.

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> How this diabolical monster succeeded in his infernal work time after time, in the midst of teeming millions of individuals, every one of whom would be only too glad to discover him, and to be the means of bringing him to justice? But no one of all of these multitudes, so far as they are aware, *ever get* [*sic*] *a glimpse at him*. (Anon., 'The Whitechapel Demon' [1888], emphasis added)[1]

Submerged in the Victorian fog, from the very beginning, Jack the Ripper has been associated with issues of perception and blindness. The murderer

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who prowled the Whitechapel area between 31 August and 9 November 1888, and who was deemed responsible for brutal killings and mutilations of London prostitutes (Polly Nicholls, Annie Chapman, Catherine Eddowes, Elizabeth Stride and Mary Jane Kelly), was and remains invisible. The ghostly character of the perpetrator, along with Victorian society's failure to see and catch him, has long been part and parcel of the Jack the Ripper myth. Even as early as 1888, a cartoon entitled 'Blind-Man's Buff (As played by the Police)' from *Punch* criticised the inability of the London police to solve the crime by depicting a constable, his face shrouded behind a piece of cloth, ineffectively trying to catch any of the potential murderers and openly derided by them: "Turn around three times, and catch whom you may" (Anon., 'Blind-Man's Buff', 1888: 139) The murderer's spectral character is further accentuated by another *Punch* cartoon (29 September 1888) in which he is depicted as a ghostly appearance – his mouth open, his right hand ready to strike – a morbid incarnation of crime. The accompanying poem 'The Nemesis of Neglect' associates Jack with the broader issue of slum crime:

> There floats a phantom on the slum's foul air,
> Shaping, to eyes which have the gift of seeing,
> Into the Spectre of that loathly lair.
> Face it – for vain is fleeing!
> Red-handed, ruthless, furtive, unerect,
> 'Tis murderous Crime – the Nemesis of Neglect!

Both illustrations throw into relief the uncanny nature of the murderer and our (the police's, witnesses', adapters', audiences') inability to identify him.[2]

Since he remains a faceless man, it is very simple for us, as it was for the Victorians, to superimpose a variety of identities upon him. Indeed, the most recent exhibition about Jack the Ripper at the Museum of London Docklands (15 May – 2 Nov 2008) foregrounded this palimpsestic character of the murderer. The exhibition accumulated a variety of references to the Ripper – from nineteenth century photographs of the London slums, to a number of portraits of degenerate individuals, who walked the streets of Victorian London at the time of the Ripper. The first image that confronted visitors was a wax mask of another murderer, which, apparently, was

exhibited at Madame Tussauds' during the time Jack the Ripper was haunting the streets of the Whitechapel area. Rather than portraying the culprit, these visual links to other known criminals render the only certainty we have about him – his invisibility. This obscurity of the real culprit was, as early as 1888, paradoxically intertwined with the flood of visual imagery, which mirrored contemporary fantasies about the provenance, appearance and motives of the murderer. In his wake, Jack – an enigma of the invisible – heralded an industry of the visual. In an act of displacement, the Ripper's identity was constituted as essentially intertextual and multimedial. He became a spectre: both a ghoul and a spectacle. Still, however much submerged in this imagery, Victorians remained blind to the true identity of the Ripper. In a similar fashion, we grope in darkness despite his multimedial presence in film, fiction, music, critical writing and the like.[3]

Taking Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell's graphic novel *From Hell* (1989-1998) as an example, this article will reread Jack the Ripper in the context of the paradoxical intertwining of his invisibility and medial overrepresentation as formative of the Ripper myth and the significance of vision to his subsequent adaptations and appropriations.[4] It will argue that, on a metalevel, *From Hell* uses the myth of the nineteenth century serial killer as a space where broader issues of adaptation and post-Victorian engagement can be revealed, theorised, and commented upon. Reread in terms of metaadaptation, *From Hell* foregrounds our own position vis-à-vis the Victorians and points to the utility of the adaptive framework to neo-Victorian preoccupations.

1.   The Ripper as a *Multimedia* Phantasm

Many critics have established the paradoxical nature of Jack the Ripper as both an unseen culprit and a visual spectacle. While Kate Lonsdale comments on his "definitional paradox" as "both labelled and disembodied, […] historical figure and discursive presence, […] representation and reality" (Lonsdale 2002: 98), Alan Moore's arguably controversial statement combines the Ripper's physical absence with medial overreferentiality:

> In terms of the Whitechapel crimes, we cannot establish a real material physical identity for the being we call Jack the Ripper. Not Gull, not Druitt, not Stephen, and certainly not

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> poor old bloody James Maybrick. *Jack the Ripper, in a very
> real sense, never actually had a physical existence. He was a
> collage-creature, made from crank letters, hoaxes, and
> sensational headlines.* (Moore and Sim 2003: 321, emphasis
> added)

As Sean Carney rightly states, reading this remark as a denial of the
Ripper's existence, or of his status as "nothing more than some
Baudrillardian simulacrum" (Alaniz, cited in Carney 2006), is simplistic in
view of Moore's historiographic preoccupations.[5] Rather, what Moore
seems to stress here is that the heightened media presence of the killer had
no single, tangible referent in London streets but was built on a variety of
textual and visual sources generated, albeit not exclusively, by the
imaginative faculties of the nineteenth century.

In fact, through an attention to the nineteenth-century media
technologies and discourses around visibility, Moore and Campbell throw
into relief the liminal position of Jack the Ripper and address his status as
myth. In their scenario,[6] Prince Albert Victor, the Duke of Clarence, secretly
and incognito, marries Annie Crook, a sweetshop seller, who bears him a
child. Informed about the matter, Queen Victoria summons William Gull,
the Royal Physician (and a member of the Freemasons), and sends him on a
mission to silence the girl. As it happens, Mary Kelly, a friend of Annie
Crook, discovers the true identity of Prince Albert and begins to blackmail
Walter Sickert, who introduced the prince to Annie and her friends. Once
Queen Victoria learns of this, she extends the scope of Gull's mission. He is
now to eliminate all the parties who knew about the secret marriage of
Prince Albert – all five women who, not coincidentally, fall prey to Jack the
Ripper in the course of the story.

The clandestine marriage, unofficial decisions of the Queen, the
'inexistent' Freemasonic order, spiritualism, and the detective work of the
London Police thematically underline what Kate Flint terms the Victorian
fascination "with the act of seeing, with the question of the reliability – or
otherwise – of the human eye, and with the problems of interpreting what
they saw" (Flint 2000: 1-2).[7] Even in the prologue of *From Hell*, the issues
of perception and the delusory character of appearances are foregrounded by
bringing together Inspector Abberline, the major figure in the investigation
of the Whitechapel murders, and Mr Lees, the Royal clairvoyant. Their

actions, especially those related to the quest for the murderer, reveal the mechanisms of political and social (in)visibility that hinder the capture of the Ripper. Lees's late confession, which reveals the spurious character of his visions, undermines Abberline's powers of perception and foregrounds the latter's life-long delusion. Yet the major source of deception in *From Hell* is the equivocal nature of Gull's criminality.

In combining two major discourses around the Whitechapel murders generated by late Victorian media, Moore and Campbell bring the issue of Jack's ambiguous presence to the fore. Most readily, *From Hell* feeds on the late nineteenth-century discourse that paired Jack the Ripper with medical men, and which was concerned with his psychological profile, rather than with the visible physical traits of degeneration, so convincingly purported by the followers of Cesare Lombroso and Bénédict Augustin Morel. The changes in Gull's psyche become most clearly articulated on the level of his perception and the graphic articulation of his gaze. The second chapter of the novel begins with the symbolic birth of William Gull who, as a child plagued by existential questions, approaches the light at the end of the tunnel in his father's boat. Already this first instance points to the complex nature of Gull's perception. The voices that he claims to hear in the tunnel bring whispers of his future – of deeds and events whose forms still preclude his understanding, but which already bud in his mind.

The early panels of the graphic novel, entirely dark but for the fragmentary utterances, together with Gull's remark concerning his pregnant mother's fascination with pictures of Napoleon as formative to his bodily appearance, also associate his birth with ocular phenomena and thus foreground the role of perception to his future development. Interestingly, the crucial stages of his growth are associated with the loss of vision. The initial boat trip with his father, Gull's joining of the Masonic order, his sexual encounter with his wife, as well as the opacity of St. Paul's Cathedral and the loss of vision of Gull's patient Annie Crook after his experimental administration of iodine – all related to an experience of distortion or loss of vision – appear to mark the seminal phases of his development. The blackness of the panels that depict these moments symbolically represents the sources of Gull's downfall, as well as our inability to pin down the mechanisms in the pathological gestation of a dysfunctional mind. These instances of blindness are accompanied by panels drawn almost entirely from Gull's point of view – the reader literally comes to see the world

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through his eyes. Thus the inference is that Gull's perception, rather than his appearance, is a space where his degeneration is clearly evoked.

His medical gaze is one in search of the pathological, which becomes clear in the scene when he enters Guy's hospital to examine its female patients. He identifies the insane syphilitic woman as the source of (both social and moral) pathology and degeneration. Interestingly enough, this search for the pathological is "reflected back on the Doctor who is rendered pathological in the process" (Smith 2004: 84). This is vividly represented in the patient's mistaken association of Gull with her husband Jack. The appellation of the wretched woman – "Jack is that you?" (Moore and Campbell 2006: Ch. 2, 11) – is an instance of foresight, a recognition of the pathological by the pathologised. At this point, in a sort of Lacanian (mis)recognition, the degenerate woman (mis)recognises the pathology and degeneration of a patriarch.[8] Interchanges between Gull's perspective and the female point of view indicate the change in the quality of his gaze, which is initially shown to be in control of the pathological but which gradually becomes pathologised. Focusing on Gull's (investigative, historical, patriarchal) gaze also highlights his preoccupation with a rereading of the past, as well as his appropriation of Britain's history, London's geography and medicine as a means of self-definition – an issue that will be tackled later in this article.

Figures 1 and 2: The pathology of the syphilitic woman is reflected back on the doctor.
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At the same time, the novel's rich references to the late Victorian media and their 'depiction' of the suspect can be linked to the counter-discourse of degeneration and to the belief in the physical manifestations of a corrupt soul. Early phantom-images of Jack the Ripper associated him with atavistic male types. According to the evidence of Elizabeth Long, a witness in Annie Chapman's murder investigation, he was "dark […] He looked like a foreigner" (cited in Jones and Lloyd 1975: 20). George Hutchinson, cross-examined in the fifth murder investigation, also calls attention to the dark complexion of the perpetrator and his 'degenerate' appearance: "dark eyes, bushy eyebrows; no side whiskers" (cited in Jones and Lloyd 1975: 77). Mary Chapel, who allegedly saw the murderer in The Prince Albert Public House, after the killing of Chapman, offers an account which records the uncanny appearance of the suspect and its effect on the witness:

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> It was the expression in his eyes – his look. It was so startling
> and terrifying. […] His shirt was torn to rags at the shoulders.
> And there was a narrow streak of blood under his right ear
> along the edge of his shirt. But it was his eyes. His eyes were
> as wild as a hawk's. (cited in Jones and Lloyd 1975: 27)

These descriptions of the alleged murderer show that, at the time, he was allied to the visibly degenerate – madness was manifest in his look and appearance – which was often linked to otherness and marginality. Also, the sporadic 'portrayals' of Jack the Ripper in *The Illustrated Police News* presented him as a foreigner.[9] Sander L. Gilman believes that the frequent linking of the Whitechapel murderer with foreigners catered to the needs of Victorian society, which relegated criminal activity and degeneration to the margins. In this way, the Jew, "with all of his associations with disease, [became] the surrogate for all marginal males", who could be read as "the source of corruption, if not for the individual, then for the collective" (Gilman 1993: 221). These issues are evoked in *From Hell* through the integration of nineteenth century media images of the culprit: the *Star* description read out by Abberline (Ch. 6, 17), the make-shift portraits in the *Illustrated Police News* (Ch. 8, 3), the coroner's reports (Ch. 8, 14-16), and the visual citations from *Punch* (Ch. 5), or the discussions among various clusters of characters.

In the context of these two discourses, Jack the Ripper becomes what Roland Barthes would describe as an echo chamber, a space resonating with "a plural 'stereophony of echoes, citations, references'" (Barthes, cited by Hutcheon 2006: 6)[10], which does not deny the physicality or historicity of the Whitechapel murderer(s) but helps to lay bare Jack's liminal situatedness, and his status as myth and as adaptation. The questions that arise are: Whom or what do we adapt? To which of the nineteenth-century 'witnesses' do we give credence? Which of the conspiracy theories developed since then seem most plausible? Lonsdale ascertains the difficulty that the Ripper's paradoxical status constitutes for his contemporary readers:[11] "[a]s soon as each of these fictions [about the Ripper] is published, its methodologies and authenticity are questioned by criminologists, historians, and Ripperologists alike" (Lonsdale 2002: 101). It is my contention that a reconsideration of Jack the Ripper in particular and the Victorian era in general in light of current adaptation theory could

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be helpful in answering some of the above-mentioned questions, and in determining the position of contemporary readers of that period.

In the traditional, narrow sense, adaptation has been understood as a kind of media transfer, more specifically, a novel-to-film transposition, which came with the burden of necessary fidelity, and what has been termed "logophilic" and "'iconophobic" bias and moralistic judgmentalism (Stam 2005; see also Leitch 2008 and Cardwell 2002). Today, however, we are witnessing a fortunate turn in adaptation studies towards a more liberal and positive understanding of its subject matter. While Thomas Leitch points to the fruitlessness of fidelity-based adaptation theories (Leitch 2008: 65), Robert Stam concedes the virtual impossibility of fidelity in adaptation, which always involves media-specific codes (Stam 2005: 16-19). His and Alessandra Raengo's rechannelling of the discussion onto the grounds of Kristevan intertextuality is symptomatic of the new trend epitomised by Linda Hutcheon's pluralistic approach in *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006), where she understands "adaptation *as adaptation*", as a conceptual "flipping back and forth between the work we know and the work we are experiencing" (Hutcheon 2006: 139), and where she famously declares the status of adaptation as a "repetition without replication" (Hutcheon 2006: xvi). Like Julie Sanders in *Adaptation and Appropriation* (2005), Hutcheon emphasises the dialectics and performativity of adaptation processes and regards their outcome as polyphonic and palimpsestic (Hutcheon 2006: 111). An analysis of Jack the Ripper within the framework of traditional adaptation criticism would be difficult, if not impossible, due to his simultaneously multimedial and phantasmatic character: there has never been one script of Jack the Ripper, ergo: there is no single 'original' source we can be faithful towards. In contrast, the more pluralistic, contemporary approach allows a reading of Jack the Ripper as an instance of adaptation – a polyphony of voices – be it in the nineteenth century sensational press, modern and postmodern media, or neo-Victorian reevaluations and rereadings within and outside of academia.

From the very outset, the mythical medial Jack the Ripper has been adopted for individual and group-specific philosophies. As myth, he has been a receptacle for changing modes of perception and articulation: "a system of communication […] a mode of signification, a form" (Barthes 1972: 109), open to an association with plural, intentional and ideologically explicit *signifieds*. A history of his adaptations, either overtly or covertly

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present in each new adaptation, can be inspected with the help of the proposed framework. While the nineteenth century media adapted him to cater for their own needs,[12] in the twentieth century he was used to foster ideological tenets from the neo-conservative policies of Margaret Thatcher to Tony Blair's 'Cool Britannia'. In 'Postimperial Landscapes', Elizabeth Ho argues that in the consistent turn away from the welfare state towards the ideologies of self-help and radical individualisation, the Ripper, as "the 'first' serial killer, becomes the Thatcherite poster child for the 'free-born Englishman'" (Ho 2006: 107). She continues: "for what better model, if perversely so, for 'born against radical individualization' than a serial killer?" (Ho 2006: 107) She also points to the Ripper's appeal to Blairite politics: "he is worthy of being included as 'cool Britannia' because he is capable of being a British 'brand' both at home and in the global marketplace" (Ho 2006: 107). Mythologised and adopted as part and parcel of Britishness, Jack the Ripper (and his adaptations) has also served as a means of criticism of contemporary and nineteenth century policies. For instance, Ho reads Moore and Campbell's *From Hell* as

> a deliberate attempt to intervene in […] celebratory misreadings of the late Victorian. [The authors] create a late nineteenth-century nightmare born out of the 'values' admired by Thatcher and by neo-Conservative historians like Gertrude Himmelfarb. (Ho 2006: 107)

Judith Walkowitz uses the "dark media fantasy of Jack the Ripper" to make a statement about historically specific justifications of violence against women and to unearth the multimediality of the Ripper myth (Walkowitz 1992: 201), characterised by a number of "competing discourses, narratives, and genres" (Ho 2006: 106).

Critics have also pointed out the historiographic preoccupations of contemporary adaptations and appropriations of the Whitechapel murderer. In 'The Tides of History: Alan Moore's Historiographic Vision,' Carney reads *From Hell* as "a discourse about history" (Carney 2006). Carney not only identifies Moore's preoccupation with the relationship between history and fiction but also reads him and his creation, William Gull, as "architects of history" (Carney 2006). Christine Ferguson shares Carney's belief, both in Moore's conceptualisation of fiction as productive of history (Ferguson

2009: 47) and in his self-conscious paralleling with Gull, but goes further in claiming that *From Hell*, as an instance of historiographic metafiction, perpetuates the misogyny of the Jack the Ripper myth, which is in line with Walkowitz's and Jane Caputi's readings. Situating the novel within the "Victoria-arcana" genre, Ferguson argues that the function of Moore's text is

> not to re-present a pre-existent and ontologically accessible nineteenth century in a linear or 'authentic' fashion but rather to *incant* it into being from a series of chaotically assembled textual fragments, loosely defined cultural "energies," and historical detritus. (Ferguson 2009: 46, original emphasis)

Such thematic preoccupations of Victoria-arcanic texts lead her to a comparison of the genre with the 'necromancy' of New Historicism, which, in turn, prompts her to recognise the source of the text's misogynist violence in its "exaggerated and undercritical investment in the same hermeneutics of suspicion and spectralization of power" as is the case with New Historical scholarship (Ferguson 2009: 46). She takes the assumptions of New Historicism – especially tenets three and four as identified by Aram Vesser "that literary and non-literary 'texts' circulate inseparably" and "that no discourse, imaginative or archival, gives access to unchanging truths, nor expresses inalterable human nature" (Vesser 1989: xi) – to further delineate the source of Moore and Campbell's misogyny:

> If there is no unchanging truth, then it surely doesn't matter whether someone or no one killed the Ripper victims; if literary and non-literary texts [...] are not substantially different in terms of impact and function, then novels as well as people might be indicted for producing the "dark, chthonic energies" that (apparently) fuel genocide. (Ferguson 2009: 61)

Whereas a reading of Moore and Campbell's *From Hell* within the historiographic framework intensifies the tension of the binary distinction between Jack the Ripper as a historical persona and as a myth, from where the misogyny, violence, and the problematics of simulacrum stem, a reading within the framework of adaptation can incorporate the complexity of this

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tension without perpetuating the questionable binary thinking that such a historiography can produce. Likewise, an adaptive framework can easily accommodate the problematic function, and the 'chaotic' accumulation, of various textual and media sources. While Carney and Ferguson have shown Alan Moore's historiographic engagement through a rereading of Jack the Ripper (William Gull) as a historian, and through the indication of the author's quasi-New Historicist scholarship, it is essential to consider Allan Moore and Eddie Campbell's self-reflexive status as adapters in their metafictional engagement – with the creation of the graphic novel in particular and with the ontology of adaptation in general. Within this reading, Moore and Campbell's "esoteric metatextualism" (Ferguson 2009: 55), rather than a monument to their misogyny, becomes a testimony to the role of a variety of media in the creation of the Ripper mythology, as well as a comment on the processes and status of adaptation and on the function of the adapter.

2.   *From Hell* **as Metadaptation**
Jack's adapters have often been compared to the Ripper. Commenting on Iain Sinclair's *White Chappell and Scarlet Tracings* (1987), Ferguson makes the relation deliberately clear:

> Sinclair's characters, in whose number he inserts himself as the sometime narrator 'Sinclair,' seek the solution to the Ripper case, not simply by reviewing the details of the case, but also by *becoming textual Rippers themselves*: mutilating, cutting up and re-arranging fictional and historical texts Dada-style to see if a solution might emerge from the remnants. (Ferguson 2009: 49, emphasis added)

This observation reveals uncanny echoes of the traditional approach to adaptation often equated with vampirism (Hutcheon 2006: 176), "cannibalization" (Stam 2005: 25), or with the doctoring of the original. This article proposes, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, to reverse the metaphor and reread Jack the Ripper, and particularly Moore and Campbell's *From Hell*, as a metafiction on adaptation and the adapter's work. While such a comparison, in which Jack the Ripper becomes one of the adapter's literary surrogates, carries with itself the same bias – if Jack is an adapter, adapters

are, in the best case, murderers – it is a risk worth taking, a risk which can lead us to a more positive rereading of *From Hell*, and, in a broader perspective, add to the debate of our situatedness vis-à-vis the Victorian era.

While Ferguson and Carney have shown that *From Hell* can be regarded as a metanarrative on the creation of history, Annalisa Di Liddo maintains that, apart from its attention to the strategies of history making, the graphic novel foregrounds the mediality of comics and the mechanisms of comic writing (Di Liddo 2009; see especially chapters one and two). These two metadimensions – metahistoricity and metacommentary on the genre of the graphic novel – are accompanied by a third dimension, which puts the issue of adaptation into relief. In 'Metadaptation: Adaptation and Intermediality – Cock and Bull', Eckart Voigts-Virchow coins the term metadaptation to talk about such works which "foreground not just the filmic process or other processes of text production, but also the adaptive processes between media, texts and genres" (Voigts-Virchow 2009: 146). While *A Cock and Bull Story* (2005) comments both on the particularities of the filmic mediality and on the issues of novel-to-screen adaptation, *From Hell*, as metadaptation, reflects both on the strategies of myth making and on a transfer from a multimedia context into an intermedial genre of the graphic novel.

The emphasis on the tension between invisible forces of degeneration and a media saturation with the serial killer as crucial to the phenomenon of Jack the Ripper, discussed in the previous part of this article, also allows Moore and Campbell to take up the issue of myth making and myth adaptation. As we have seen earlier, Jack the Ripper has been, over and again, associated with different *signifieds*. Julie Sanders recognises this changeability of myths and their adaptability, and sketches the implication of these characteristics to the processes of adaptation. She points out three frequent tendencies in the adaptation of myths: that of generalisation, indigenisation and self-reflexivity. While the first foregrounds universal themes that "endure across cultural and historical boundaries: love, death, family, revenge" (Sanders 2005: 71), the second highlights the influence of a particular socio-political and cultural moment on the outcome of adaptation (Sanders 2005: 69). Thus while the archetypal Jack the Ripper as a serial killer serves to divulge stories of timeless evil, his specific anchoring in the nineteenth century opens a space where he can be given new relevant context, as illustrated by Thatcherite and Blairite

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engagements. As much as they are intrinsically involved in the processes of indigenisation and universalisation, myth appropriations also work on a metalevel, self-reflexively commenting on the process of adaptation. As Sanders rightly remarks: "What mythical appropriations facilitate […] is a means for contemporary authors to carry out self-conscious investigations into the artistic process" (Sanders 2005: 65).

Moore and Campbell comment on the technologies of myth making and adaptation by foregrounding the significance of the nineteenth-century press in the 'creation' of the Ripper and in his exploitation for its own purposes. Here, the nineteenth century press becomes the surrogate adapter when the two reporters of *The Star* comment on the Whitechapel case: "Personally, Mr Gibbs, I couldn't give a monkey's fuck who did it. It's what we can MAKE of it" (Moore and Campbell 2006: Ch.7, 11, original emphasis). Whatever is to be 'made' of the Whitechapel murderer is here directly linked to the potential for increased circulation of newspapers. The reporters' reference to the archival material on the eighteenth-century criminal, Renwick Williams, indicates that the 'creation' of Jack the Ripper itself already constituted a case of appropriation of earlier press strategies, sensationalist stories, and the Gothic tradition.[13] Here, *The Star* echoes the function of the advertisement for Hudson's Soap from *The Graphic* (1 December 1888), which is early evidence of media that calculatingly adapted the Ripper for their own ends. The advert presents a London constable who, at a late night hour, comes across a Hudson's Soap advertisement that reads: "Arrest all Dirt and cleanse everything by using Hudson's Soap. Reward!! Purity, health & satisfaction by its regular daily use." Graphically adhering to the style of *The Illustrated Police News*, the advertisement knowingly uses the media hype around the murderer to sell a product. Also, through its references to 'purity' and 'dirt', it positions itself within the discourses of late nineteenth-century degeneration and purity campaigns.

One could claim, then, that *From Hell* is not about Jack the Ripper but rather about our perception of the myths that surround him and, more particularly, about every adapter's vision and visualisation of a phantom – not a phantom that has been recorded anywhere previously, but a phantasm that resurges in every process of adaptation. Hence, what the myth of Jack the Ripper does is to reflect the approach and attitude of the adapter rather than offering a general account of the murderer. Moore accentuates this in

Appendix II: "It's about us. About our minds and how they dance. Jack mirrors our hysterias. Faceless, he is the receptacle for each new social panic. He's a Jew, a Doctor, a Freemason or a wayward Royal" (Moore and Campbell 2006: Appendix II, 22). He adds:

> Perhaps there's no such bird. Its call, the colour of its plumage, these things are unknown. Its tracks are never found. The tracks of its pursuers, to the contrary, are everywhere. In studded football boots they endlessly cross-track and overprint the field of their enquiry. Only their choreography remains readable. (Moore and Campbell 2006: Appendix II, 1)

Whereas Appendix II adapts (and fictionalises) the history of Jack the Ripper's adaptations, *From Hell* also metatextually comments on the transfer of the multimedia context into a hybrid medium of the graphic novel, a discussion which Moore's other works, especially *The League of the Extraordinary Gentlemen* (1999 - present) and *The Lost Girls* (1991-1992), also take up. The character of the genre makes it relatively easy to account for the multimediality of the Ripper mythology by a collage-like compilation of a number of visual and verbal sources (which are not always directly related to the Ripper) and a variety of their genres: paintings (Sickert, von Stuck), etchings (Hogarth), watercolours (Blake), photographs (photos from murder scenes, Marx's portrait), posters, newspaper coverage, maps, novels, poems (Dickinson, Yeats), critical writing, and medical books (Gull). This citational appropriation of other media is also accompanied by an adaptation of specific media apparatuses. Panels that could be filmic stills are numerous, and specific points of view and page arrangements could be easily used as filmic scripts.[14] The use of the nineteenth century press techniques of illustration is overwhelming (especially in the depiction of the police's sighting of the victims, for example in Ch. 5, 34-35). A commentary on the mechanics of such transfer is made covertly. When the handwriting of the 'From Hell' letter suddenly 'invades' the lettering of the graphic novel on the 34th page of the ninth chapter, whose panels illustrate the 'journey' of Jack the Ripper's bloody token, it indirectly comments on how the hybridity of the graphic novel can accommodate the multimediality of the Ripper myth. It is especially evident in the recurring visual references

to the *Illustrated Police News*. Not only are the chosen issues physically present in the graphic novel, their mediality (sketching technique, panelling, page layout) is also, to a certain degree, taken over.

The historicity of the hybrid, adaptational character of the graphic novel is also established by this physical presence of other media and the use of other media apparatuses. The *Illustrated Police News*, like William Hogarth's engraving technique, also adapted by Campbell, has been regarded as a forerunner of contemporary comics. Hillary Chute and Marianne DeKoven highlight the significance of Hogarth's art when they claim that his "work is fundamental to understanding how graphic narrative builds on a tradition integral to the history of the novel in the eighteenth century" and how the beginnings of comic art were indebted both to novels and Hogarth's sequential art (Chute and DeKoven 2006: 768-769). Through a 'dissection' of Hogarth's 'The Reward of Cruelty' (from the cycle 'Four Stages of Cruelty') – its fragmentation, cropping, de- and recontextualisation – Moore and Campbell add to the pluralisation of its meaning, which can be seen as a comment on the mechanisms used by hybrid works in the appropriation of other hybrid works. The engraving depicts the final stage in the life of Tom Nero, preoccupied with mindless brutality from his early childhood, and his execution and dissection at the Royal College of Surgeons.

Figure 3 and 4: Detail, William Hogarth's 'The Reward of Cruelty', as it appears in chapter nine of *From Hell*. **© Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell**, reprinted with kind permission from the authors.

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Integrated in *From Hell*, Hogarth's engraving also refers to the possible way of life and death of Sir William Gull. As this plate is followed by a panel depicting the still living Mary Kelly in the position in which her mutilated body was later found, it can also be taken to indicate the mode of Jack the Ripper's last murder.

Figure 5: The position of Mary Kelly mirrors the arrangement of the body in Hogarth's engraving in the chapter nine of *From Hell*. © **Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell,** reprinted with kind permission from the authors.

This same, although significantly cropped, plate reappears in Appendix II, which is the adaptation of Jack the Ripper's adaptations. It functions there as a visual comment on the fate of one of the Ripper's adapters, Knight, and his epileptic seizures (Moore and Campbell 2006: Appendix II: 14). While these instances bring to the fore the mechanisms and aesthetics of the adaptation of the Ripper myth and reflect on the procedures of media transfer, they also open a space where broader issues of adaptation and the adapter's position, vis-à-vis the sources and the reader/spectator, can be discussed.

3.   Jack the Adapter

The comparison between Jack the Ripper and the adapter, introduced in the previous section as an opening for the discussion of *From Hell*'s status as metadaptation, will be used here to draw parallels between Moore

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and Campbell's Ripper as a literary surrogate of the adapter. When Ferguson points to Gull's role as an historian and reader of London geography and architecture, she draws attention to his misreading of the past due to the emphasis on his "authorial intention" (Ferguson 2009: 56). She states that "Gull's London-as-text remains unreconstructed by the modern hermeneutics of reader-response theory: authorial intention provides the sole legitimate context through which the city may be read" (Ferguson 2009: 56). She adds: "Less sex than text murderer, Gull the monster is incanted into being by words that have been scripted elsewhere, that write on him just as he attempts to inscribe the symbols of male domination on his victims' bodies" (Ferguson 2009: 57). More than a reader and a historian, Gull, one could argue, is an adapter who explores London's past (as an architectural and geographical space) and re-envisions it, however inappropriately. Gull's occult knowledge allows him to see the pagan culture thriving under the surface of civilised London. His journey with his coachman Netley, devised to "penetrate [London's] metaphors, lay bare its structure and thus come at last upon its meaning" (Moore and Campbell 2006: Ch. 4, 9), uncovers the city's past while simultaneously effecting a destruction of its recognised significance, as well as a demolition of the pervasive socio-cultural structures. His reflection on the history of St. Paul's Cathedral, built on a temple of Diana, generates a stream of associations whereby Jesus becomes a contemporary incarnation of a pagan god. The Christian God's provenance is revealed to Gull: "Apollo, Lud, Belios, Atum, Christ or Baal. All one God, Netley. All one God" (Moore and Campbell 2006: Ch. 4, 34). Gull's musings not only undermine the system by blurring pagan/Christian binaries, they also reveal the – to many imperceptible – ambiguities of male hegemony built on the cult of femininity:

> Here [in St. Paul's Cathedral] is DIANA chained, the soul of womankind bound in a web of ancient signs, that woman might abandon useless dreams of liberty … accept that she exists only to endlessly reflect male brilliance of a Father Sun. (Moore and Campbell 2006: Ch. 4, 35, original ellipses)

This uncovering of London's past, and its misogynist reinscription on the prostitutes' bodies, while predetermined by long-standing patriarchal

agendas, is also shown to destabilise the Victorian order, which is well evidenced by Netley's reaction: his vomiting is a defence mechanism against the abject, which threatens to pulverise the order, and with it, his subjectivity. Here, Gull's authorial intentionality uncovers other meanings not explicitly intended by the adapter (who, above all, wants to preserve and protect this order), as well as commenting on his role in the process of adaptation.

While not very desirable within a historiographic project, the significance of authorial intention within adaptation studies has been recently acknowledged:

> [A]dapters' deeply personal as well as culturally and historically conditioned reasons for selecting a certain work to adapt and the particular way to do so should be considered seriously by adaptation theory, even if it means rethinking the role of intentionality in our critical thinking about art in general. (Hutcheon 2006: 95)

Pointing to the mechanisms that outlawed the consideration of the adapter's intention, Hutcheon postulates rethinking "economic, legal, cultural, political, and personal complexities of motivation and intention in the process of adaptation" which, for her, is "a total of the encounters among institutional cultures, signifying systems, and personal motivations" (Hutcheon 2006: 95, 106). A rereading of Gull as an adapter puts the issue of motivation back on the horizon of adaptation studies. His wish to serve the Queen, reread through the signifying system of time as space and supported by the institutions of Freemasonry and medicine, makes us see his murders as a specific adaptation of the past. This, however, does not mean that his is the only possible and tangible version of it. Rather, what is made significant here is the crucial role of motivation in an analysis of any adaptation. This issue is also underlined by the choice of the medium, which, as Chute and DeKoven point out, foregrounds the style of its creator: "[the] graphic narrative is an autographic form in which the mark of handwriting is an important part of the rich extra-semantic information a reader receives" (Chute and DeKoven 2006: 767).

While covertly present in the choice of the medium and the main character's preoccupations, the issue of the adapter's motives is spelled out

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in Appendix I, a 42-page long commentary on Moore's sources, inspirations and adventures. It exposes his 'infidelities' and deliberate alterations of the documented story. For example, Moore avows: "The scene here, showing one of Oscar Wilde's celebrated parties is an invention for story purposes, although again it is based upon various established facts" (Moore and Campbell 2006: Appendix I, 36). Similarly, Appendix I foregrounds the impossibility of a 'faithful' adaptation of Jack the Ripper whose degeneration has never been eyed but in the mutilated bodies of his victims. The few traces that he has left are the only landmarks that can be helpful in the process of adaptation. Their contradictory character, however, undermines the possibility of a one-directional appropriation of his myth. Hence, what Moore acknowledges is that adapting Jack the Ripper indicates adapting the history of his adaptations. It is always an idiosyncratic and author-specific process, as the choice of the medium and its symbolic abstraction make clear. Chute and DeKoven believe that the mediality of the graphic novel "usefully challenge[s] the transparency of realism in integrating prose and drawing, rendering the question of verisimilitude productively unstable" (Chute and DeKoven 2006: 770).

The attention to the authorial particularities in the adaptation process also foregrounds the adapter's creative use of existing sources. While disclosing his sources – which include Ripperologist literature, official reports, Victorian doctors' writings, books on London's history and its ghosts, contemporary studies on serial killers and their psychological profiles – Moore also assesses their credibility:

> If I may, I should like to take this opportunity to opine that Dr Abrahamsen's book [*Murder and Madness, The Secret Life of Jack the Ripper*] is one of the very worst pieces of Ripper literature that it has ever been my misfortune to read, based largely upon flights of theoretical psychoanalytic fancy that strain credulity at best and at worst are simply unsupportable. The most alarming thing about this tome is the fact that the author is apparently a forensic scientist and 'expert witness' whose testimony might considerably decide whether somebody goes to prison or not. Read it and weep. (Moore and Campbell 2006: Appendix I, 27)

What is more, Moore comments on the difficulties faced by any adapter of the Whitechapel murders due to the physical invisibility and media overrepresentation of the culprit:

> This chapter [chapter seven] takes its title from the scrap of torn envelope found in the back yard at Hanbury Street after the discovery of Annie Chapman's body [...] I chose to construct the chapter's title around this piece of trivia because it struck me that *the entire literature of the Whitechapel murders has been based upon similar scraps and fragments* [...] *these insignificant pieces of debris make up the corporeal mass of the largely mythic being that we call Jack the Ripper.* (Moore and Campbell 2006: Appendix I: 23, emphasis added)

In this context, what Ferguson dismisses as "a series of chaotically assembled textual fragments" (Ferguson 2009: 46) is reevaluated as "the corporeal mass" of the Ripper's myth – an important point of orientation for an adapter. The value of textual debris and their adaptational echolalia is thrown into relief in Moore's metacommentary, in which, on the one hand, he acknowledges the complex pulsating fabric of textuality and visuality surrounding Jack the Ripper and, on the other, takes up the function which echoes the role that his surrogates, Gull, Abberline and the Victorian press, play in the fictional part of *From Hell*, namely the evaluation and creative use of sources. This highlights the significance of the adapter as reader and interpreter (Hutcheon 2006: 110-111).

In fact, Moore and Campbell highlight what is intrinsic for the medium of the graphic novel and adaptation alike, namely, "the compulsive need to fill in the gaps, to make connections between issues" (Chute and DeKoven 2006: 773). The mediality of the graphic novel, then, is indicative of the collaborative status of the adapter, whose work is performatively co-produced by the readers. The topic is further underlined by the thematisation of Abberline's, Gull's and the nineteenth century press' interpretative reappropriation of a variety of sources, which can be read here as a metaphor of an adapter's engagements. It is up to us, whether and how we understand all the meanings of the envelope in the seventh volume. Our knowledge of the Whitechapel murders, Moore's style, and his previous

works determine whether we can see the 'invisible' threads that Moore and Campbell introduce. In this context, *From Hell* is both thematically and formally preoccupied with reading as a creative and performative act.[15] In this sense, the graphic novel invites reader-response theory as a valuable tool in the reevaluation and rereading of history and adaptation, thus acknowledging the significance of context and audiences, which, as Hutcheon, among others, argues, should become more prominent in adaptation criticism.[16]

The four pages of chapter nine (33-36) bring together the problems of medialisation and adaptation, as well as their contextualisation, by depicting the epistolary hype that ensued after the Ripper case was made public. Letters written by anonymous pater familias, young boys or drunkards, and the adaptation of the various handwriting styles by Campbell, suggest, on a more general level, that we all participate in the creation of the Ripper myth, which is necessarily embedded in the history and mechanics of his previous mediations and adaptations. This point is taken further by the visual and verbal references to the Victorian media depictions of Jack the Ripper, whose rich interlacing and changing value are also covertly commented on in the main parts of *From Hell*. The first time *The Illustrated London News* issue of 8 September 1888 is depicted is in the finishing panel of the sixth chapter. The materiality of the newspaper, which shows one of the victims and some of the official investigators, becomes a visual metaphor of the changing significance of textual sources as its right side disintegrates in a handful of leaves that are blown away and travel further. They appear as the echoes that reverberate with the initial value of the page but are at the same time highly modified by the context in which they reappear. Like the repetitive return to the photograph of Mary Kelly's mutilated body, the use of illustrations from the periodicals metafictionally points to the status of adaptation as a "repetition without replication" (Hutcheon 2006: xvi). By both covertly and overtly adapting the history of Jack the Ripper's adaptations, *From Hell* investigates the issues fundamental to the process of adaptation: the what, who, why, how, when and where of adaptation (Hutcheon 2006). In this, it underlines the necessary mutation of adaptations and their osmotic character: their mirroring of issues topical for the adapters and dependent on their historical, socio-cultural, as well as individual, conditioning.

As has been shown, a rereading of *From Hell* within the pluralist framework of contemporary adaptation scholarship – however much it is still haunted by Jack the Ripper's/the adapter's 'murderous' undertakings – can exemplify theoretical postulates regarding the status of adaptation, its situatedness vis-à-vis the adapted sources, as well as the role of the adapter and the audience. What is more, it can also be helpful in outlining the position of contemporary neo-Victorian scholarship by drawing attention to its essentially adaptive or appropriative rather than historiographic character. In *Functions of Victorian Culture at the Present Time* (2002), Christine L. Krueger proposes that we develop:

> [T]he 'double vision' [which] Elizabeth Barrett Browning's
> Aurora Leigh urged poets to exert on past and present,
> viewing the Victorian legacy both as an intimate part of who
> we are and an alien other against which our own peculiar
> needs are thrown into relief. (Krueger 2002: xi)

A rereading of a neo-Victorian scholar as an adapter puts this stereoscopic vision into relief and allows us to regard his (and others') adaptive acts as "breaking down static, immobile accounts of the proximate and the removed, the self and the other, the normative and the transgressive" (Munford and Young 2009: 5). At the same time, the idiosyncrasy of the adapter's vision and visualisation can offer another perspective from which to view and reassess the past, a perspective, which, however problematic in certain areas (Moore and Campbell's self-conscious erasure and silencing of the female victims), can be telling in others (their metadaptive engagements). The turn to an adapter's motivations and style, as one of the parameters of adaptation, offers a space for a formal legitimation of the understanding of the Victorian period "in terms of diverse visions and debated positions" (Munford and Young 2009: 3), rather than as a monolithic "baggy monster" (James 1908: x).[17]

Notes

1.   Reprinted in Moore and Campbell 2006: Ch. 9, front page.

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2.   The phantom-like character of Jack the Ripper has enticed countless
     speculations concerning the scenario of the Whitechapel murders and the
     profile of their perpetrator. Victorian investigators differed as to the motives,
     background and character of the culprit, which accounts for the growing
     number of potential murderers: from early suspects such as John Pizer, a
     Polish-Jewish boot finisher also known as the 'Leather Apron', Montague
     John Druitt, a teacher found dead in 1888, and Aaron Kosminsky, a Jew
     incarcerated in an asylum, to a plethora of possible offenders 'identified' in
     the course of the last century. In an interview with *The Pall Mall Gazette*
     Metropolitan Police Inspector Frederick George Abberline accuses George
     Chapman, while another Inspector's letter (that of John George Littlechild)
     brings charges against Dr Francis Tambulty. As late as 1992, the diary of the
     merchant James Maybrick avows its author's guilt. Subsequent forensic
     investigations, DNA analyses and further tests conducted in many countries
     bring new, equally unsatisfactory and diverging theories. Walter Sickert, Sir
     William Gull, 'a friend' of Oscar Wilde, and even Lewis Carroll become
     suspects. This rich arsenal of alleged rippers offers fertile soil for adapters,
     who can pick and choose to their hearts' content.

3.   Films which adapt or appropriate the story of Jack the Ripper include: Alfred
     Hitchcock's *The Lodger* (1926), G. W. Pabst's *Die Büchse der Pandora*
     (1928), Hugo Fregonese's *The Man in the Attic* (1953), R. Backer's *Jack the
     Ripper* (1960), James Hill's *A Study in Terror* (1964), Jess Franco's *Jack the
     Ripper – Der Dirnenmörder von London* (1978), Bob Clark's *Murder by
     Decree* (1979), Nicholas Meyer's *Time after Time* (1979), David Wickes'
     Jack the Ripper (1988). Television documentaries such as *Jack the Ripper: An
     Ongoing Mystery* (Discovery, 2000) can also be found on YouTube, which
     features many a visual reference to the murderer. Fictionalised accounts of the
     Whitechapel murders embrace, among others: A. F. Pinkerton's *The
     Whitechapel Murders; Or, An American Detective in London* (1888), B. L.
     Porter's *A Study in Red: The Secret Journal of Jack the Ripper* (2008) and
     Carole N. Douglas's *Castle Rouge* (2008). The myth of Jack the Ripper has
     also been adapted to comics and graphic novels by Bruce Balfour (*Jack the
     Ripper*, 1990), Brian Augustyn (*Gotham by Gaslight*, 1989) or Iain Sinclair
     (*White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings*, 1987). Finally, he has also inspired songs,
     board games, musicals and operas.

4.   Here I use the differentiation between adaptation and appropriation as
     proposed by Julie Sanders, who regards adaptation in terms of transposition,
     commentary and analogue, while reserving the other term for all rereadings

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that are more loosely related to the adapted text and more critical towards it (Sanders 2005: 148). While I try to retain this distinction, I often use both terms in the same context in order to emphasise its particular focus (commentary or criticism).

5.   Carney argues that Alaniz's "logic falls prey to the binary thinking Moore seeks to avoid. In *From Hell,* he is not interested in the relationship between history and the meaning made from history, but in meaning as history, meaning as where humanity cannot but locate itself, with all the ambivalent violence entailed in that act of meaning-making" (Carney 2006).

6.   This scenario is itself an adaptation of Stephen Knight's *Casebook: Jack the Ripper the Final Solution* (1976) and Iain Sinclair's *White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings* (1978).

7.   This focus on the interplay between the perceptible and the imperceptible has often constituted the core of adaptations that revive the myth of Jack the Ripper. In Jess Franco's version, for instance, Jack's (Klaus Kinski's) eyes are often presented in close-ups, implying that the changes in his psyche, as well as his devious character, can be read from their expression. The film highlights the interplay between vision and blindness and its significance to the unearthing of Jack the Ripper's identity by creating a number of significant oppositions. For instance, Jack is constructed as a werewolf-like alter-ego of a renowned and humane doctor, while the person who contributes mostly to the development of the investigation is a blind beggar. Similarly, the Hughes Brothers' *From Hell* (2006) appropriates the horror convention to show Jack the Ripper's dark, impenetrable eyes whenever he commits a murder. The intensification of this device parallels the concentration of his crimes and culminates in his final murder and mutilation of Mary Kelly.

8.   Such parallels are used throughout the novel as clues to Gull's personality: for instance in chapter five, where the dreamy panels, which show his return home after the murder, are positioned next to the body of his first victim – a degenerate whore – and the panel depicting Joseph Merrick – the Elephant Man – a physical degenerate. Additionally, there is a suggestion of his degeneration in the use of the first person point of view. At the end of the second chapter, our perspective suddenly changes from Gull's to that of Annie Crook.

9.   On further associations between Jack and otherness, especially Jewishness, see Sander Gilman *Sexuality. An Illustrated History* (1989).

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10. This is the vocabulary used in contemporary adaptation studies to describe the status of adaptation products (see Pietrzak-Franger and Voigts-Virchow 2009: 1-16).
11. The term 'reader' functions here as a unifying category embracing everyone who participates in contemporary rereadings of the Whitechapel murders, from adapters and historians through Ripperologists to audiences.
12. On this point, see chapter seven of Judith Walkowitz's, *The City of Dreadful Delight* (1992), and chapter three of Andrew Smith's, *Victorian Demons* (2004).
13. On the issue of the nineteenth century press' appropriation of other stories in reports on Jack the Ripper, see Smith 2004, chapter three.
14. The Hughes Brothers comment on this filmic adaptability of *From Hell* in their commentary to the film, where they offer examples of their 'accuracy' in designing the shots according to the composition of chosen panels.
15. Mark the number of people who are reading in *From Hell* – from Gull's readings of the Victorian maps, architecture and female bodies, through the police inspecting the coroner reports and the press, through the press and its 'rereading' of facts, to, finally, the Ripperologists and the adapters, ourselves included, who reread all this debris.
16. On this point, see Hutcheon 2006, especially chapters four and five.

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