



## ARTICLE

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# 'Terrible monsters Sin-bred': Blakean monstrosity in Alan Moore's graphic novels

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**ABSTRACT** William Blake's illuminated books are full of depictions of the monstrous, like Orc's or Urizen's metamorphoses, bestial figures such as the Leviathan in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (c. 1790-1793), and the masses of blood and flesh appearing in *The Book of Urizen* (1794). In contrast to eighteenth-century discourses in which moral virtue and monstrosity were polar opposites, Blake's universe is more complex and presents an ambivalent attitude towards revolution and social transgression embodied in the monstrous. The meanings of the monstrous in Blake are associated with evil in his works, where it can be understood as released or repressed energies, two types which correspond, respectively, to liberation or alienation. Via countercultural influence, Blakean antinomianism filtered down to Alan Moore, for whom the notion of evil depends on perspectives; thus, in Moore, the socially unacceptable can appear as monstrous, but monstrosity is also a mode through which to make visible the oppressive order that defines transgression as such. This article will discuss Blake and Moore's use of visual and verbal aesthetics to identify as monstrous characters like Satan, Urizen and Orc in Blake and William Gull, Asmodeus and Cthulhu in Moore to pinpoint the meanings that underlie them and how the direct or indirect Blakean influence operates in Moore's works. This will contribute to trace changes in their meanings as they pass from signifying energy to tyranny, from unfallenness to fallenness, or from conventional to visionary perception. This exploration will also show the changes in their mode of representation, contributing to understand the peculiarities of the Gothic side of Moore's construction of Blakean vision. To do this, a series of parallels found in several examples from Alan Moore's graphic novels will be analysed, especially *Swamp Thing* (1984-1987), where the hero is a vegetable-human hybrid; *From Hell* (1989-1998), where the villain acts as both mad scientist and monster in his perverse endeavour to violently reshape female desire to his will; *Promethea* (1999-2005), where a divine emanation is perceived as a threatening devil by opposing fundamentalists; and finally the horrible entities in *Neonomicon* (2010-2011) and *Providence* (2015-2017).

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### A literary genealogy of the monstrous: introduction

The meaning of contemporary figurings of the monstrous has its roots in past avatars of monstrosity. As the historical and socio-political concerns that shape these representations and determine their meanings mutate and fluctuate, new meanings emerge. These contain fossilised remnants of anxieties derived from old cultural dilemmas, but also new layers of implications added on due to new historical events. In this article, I will analyse a selection of passages from Alan Moore's graphic novels and argue for a Blakean reading of these in order to bring out the elements derived from William Blake (1757–1827).

Through these analyses and the identification of common Gothic elements, this article will focus on the parallels between the Gothic and monstrous metamorphosis and grotesque<sup>1</sup> imagery, as metaphors derived from their preoccupations with the changeable nature of perceptions, the dismantling of ideological notions of morality, and the combination of imaginative and political freedom and revolution. Identifying similarities and differences in the parallels will help define Moore's construction of Blake as an artistic predecessor whose construct reflects mainly reverence and inspiration.

The association between Blake and Alan Moore (1953–) stems primarily from the authors' common choice of a medium that combines the visual and the verbal. By virtue of this association, Blake is often especially admired in the realm of comic book art. Alan Moore's oeuvre is teeming with numerous intertextual allusions, quotations and visual references to Blake, not to mention the fact that he composed a performance piece about the Lambeth poet, called *Angel Passage* (2000).<sup>2</sup> Moore himself has often spoken in interviews about his interest in Blake and his works (see Whitson, 2006), and he is often considered today an ambassador of Blakean poetics, judging by his recently published afterword to the catalogue of the latest (and one of the greatest) Blake exhibitions, held at Tate Britain (London), which he centres around Blake's *The Ghost of a Flea*. Moore's use of Blakean references to explore the topic of evil, to revisit literary tradition, to defend a redemptive and imaginative concept of sexuality and their similar strategies in combining the visual and the verbal in a way that encourages active and dynamic readings have already been explored by Whittaker (2007), Di Liddo (2009: p. 179) and Green, (2011, 2012) respectively. Moore's methods, especially his use of literary references and profuse description in the scripts he writes for the artists with whom he collaborates (Murray, 2018: locs. 6059, 6127), give his graphic novels a distinctively literary quality. The present article finds specific relationships in Blake and Moore's uses of Gothic technologies of monstrosity (Halberstam, 1995: pp. 2; 22), and reflects on the extent to which they contribute to hegemonic constructions of the monster or use these technologies to disrupt cultural norms and antecedents. Halberstam's argument and Eagleton's account in *Holy Terror* (2005) of evil as a consequence of the distortion of reason provide the critical framework that shapes the interpretations in this article.

The late eighteenth-century witnesses the high tide of the Gothic revival and the first peak in the popularity of the Gothic novel. For writers and artists the Gothic past offered an opportunity to explore the relationship between traditions and the past and their own industrial and technologically advanced days (Spooner, 2007: p. 44). This interest in a 'barbarian' Germanic and Celtic past was in part motivated by a search for an authentic English national identity opposed to incipient modern cosmopolitanism (Punter and Byron, 2004: p. 8). Therefore Gothic became a tool for nationalist reactionaries opposing revolutionary French neoclassicism, but also potentially for any critic of eighteenth-century English society (see Bindman, 1973: p. 43 and

Shaub, 2018: pp. 64–67). Bindman points out that the subjects of Blake's early historical drawings inspire resistance against tyranny and revolution, an attitude that influenced later engravings like *Glad Day* (1803–1810) (Bindman, 1973: pp. 44–45). Although Gothic has been associated with a conservative turn in Blake, recent critics like David Baulch have discussed his more radical concept of Gothic (2018: pp. 33–34). The monstrous Gothic figures that represent patriarchal oppression stand out as one of the examples of the critical potential of the Gothic. A famous case is Montoni in Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794); Blake also created monstrous patriarchal mythological figures to criticise what he saw as an ideology of monarchical rule, state religion and war.

Antiquarianism, especially Northern Antiquities, a 1770 translation of PH Mallet's study, and James Macpherson's pseudo-bardic 'Ossian', which celebrated a native rather than classical epic tradition, made a strong impression on Blake. The attraction for a Gothic medieval aesthetics was felt in architecture as well, where there was an obsession to imitate the style in new buildings (Punter and Byron, 2004: p. 9), an extravagant example being the medieval-inspired castle the antiquarian Horace Walpole had built at Strawberry Hill (p. 10). Similarly, Gothic elements influenced eighteenth-century painters, many of whom foregrounded the visual expression of passion and irrational psychological states (p. 36), which often translated into monstrous and fantastical rather than naturalistic forms and figures. Henry Fuseli, a formative influence and friend of Blake, exemplified this tendency and made art inspired in non-classical mythologies, including monstrous imagery, such as *Thor Battering the Midgard Serpent* (1790).

Blake himself was highly invested in the Gothic across his career, from sketching and engraving Gothic monuments in Westminster as an apprentice to James Basire (Bentley, 2004: pp. 16–17; Baulch, 2018: p. 36), through writing his own Gothic poetry (such as 'Fair Elenor' (1783)), illustrating graveyard poets such as Edward Young and Robert Blair, and adopting Gothic modes and scenery in *Jerusalem* (1804–c.1820). Among his first sketches are also found drawings based on scenes from the history of Britain (see Bindman, 1973: pp. 33–37), which challenged contemporary antiquarian rejection of miracles and myths (pp. 40–41). Benjamin Heath Malkin presented Blake's Gothic as a 'simplicity and purity of style' in his 1806 *A Father's Memoirs of his Child* (Bindman, 1973: p. 30). Baulch analyses Malkin's biographical portrait of Blake as a Gothic poet to show how Blake's imaginatively excessive and monstrous Gothicism diverged from Malkin's neoclassical Gothic (2018: p. 35), while Bundock and Effinger give an ample catalogue of examples of the Gothic and monsters in Blake's visual art (2018: p. 9).

Alongside other Romantics, he significantly contributed to 'shaping the Gothic' (Punter, 1996: p. 87) and 'articulat[ed] a set of images of terror, which were to exercise a potent influence over later literary history' (p. 87). Blake's representations of evil, transgression, and his horrible and grotesque imagery emphasise the 'horror of domination and political violence' (Botting, 2014: p. 89) and the 'distortion' caused either by an excessive rational and authoritarian restrictions of passion, sexuality and liberty (pp. 89–90). The sublimations and degradations his mythological characters undergo are another important Gothic element that results of processes of liberation or repression respectively (Punter, 1996: p. 90). More recently, Bundock and Effinger (2018) have outlined how Blake's transformations can take the forms of positive, apotheotic transformations (see also Fallon, 2017), but also 'darker processes, Gothic 'mutations' that place stress on disintegrative negativity, degeneration, anatomisation.' (p. 10) Such transformations show Blake engaging with Gothic monstrosity, exemplified by his painting *Nebuchadnezzar* (c.1795) in

which the degraded tyrant king morphs into a monstrous beast. As Bundock and Effinger say in the introduction to their volume, Gothic is a shifting aesthetics in Blake, first signifying tyranny, but after 1800 it is attached to prophecy and vision (2018: p. 15).

A focus on the Gothic elements in Blake's work brings out important continuities between Blake and late twentieth and twenty-first century graphic novels, a medium that has been compared to the Gothic by virtue of its hybridity (Botting, 2014: p. 15; Smith, 2007: p. 251), along with its emphasis on 'fantasy, horror and the uncanny as outside realist forms of representation' (Smith, 2007: p. 252). As with Blake, academics have noted Moore's particular adoption of the Gothic (for example, in Green, 2013). This association adds to the multiple links between Blake and Moore, and suggests connections in their shared investment in the Gothic.

### Main concepts: the two sides of evil

The concerns that lie behind the monstrous images in Blake and Moore respond to similarities in the structures of feeling<sup>3</sup> of late eighteenth and late twentieth century Britain, and to the countercultural lines of influence derived at least in part from Blake, which can be traced back to Charles Algernon Swinburne and William Butler Yeats. Blake also influenced Aldous Huxley<sup>4</sup>, whose approach to Blake likely influenced Moore in turn. This relationship is evidenced by Moore's reference to Huxley's Blake-inspired *The Doors of Perception* (1954) and *Heaven and Hell* (1954) in the *Swamp Thing* issue 43, 'Windfall' (Moore et al., 1985c: p. 4). Moore was greatly inspired by the American poet Allen Ginsberg, who claimed to be a spiritual and poetic descendant of Blake (Kripal, 2007: p. 103). Although Moore discusses how he began to explore Blake seriously while researching for *From Hell*, several allusions and quotations indicate Blake's influence in previous work, such as *The Mirror of Love*, *V for Vendetta* (the hymn 'Jerusalem') and *Watchmen* ('The Tyger') among others. The list of channels through which Moore informed his reading of Blake is potentially endless, including Angela Carter, Iain Sinclair, Michael Horowitz, and many others (see Di Liddo, 2009: pp. 169–170 and Gray, 2017: pp. 50–52, for instance). The structures of feeling whose similarity is strengthened by this countercultural interest in Blake are those of eighteenth-century antinomianism and late twentieth century counterculture and alternative spiritualities, which share various components, as argued by Jeffrey J. Kripal (2007: p. 101)<sup>5</sup>. These consist in the discovery of an eternal visionary dimension beyond everyday life that is fundamentally at odds with social organisation (Kripal, 2007: pp. 102–103; pp. 106–108), thus fomenting rebellion against authority. A need to find authentic means to rebel against authority shapes Blake and Moore's complex and evolving representations of monstrosity and evil across their careers.

Readings of Blake from Swinburne onwards have emphasised some particular aspects. The focus of interest in counterculture is the Blake that, in Mark Lussier's words, stands for 'rebellion against authority and loss of sanity at the margins of culture' (2007: p. 158) and who is often popularly seen as a devil's advocate. This is the Blake that looked with hope at the French Revolution, criticised institutionalised religion and fought against sexual repression. This Blake embodies 'radicalism and revolution' (Botting, 2014: p. 22), the fear of which was codified in Gothic imagery during Blake's times by philosophers like Edmund Burke, in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). In this text, Burke termed the revolutionary ideals a 'monstrous fiction' (Burke cited in Cogan, 2018: p. 130) and described French radicals as children who murder their parent—the country, who 'hack that aged parent in pieces and put him

into the kettle of the magicians' (p. 131). Revolutionary thought and activity was thus associated with violent crime and witchcraft (Cogan, 2018: p. 131). Traditional and politically conservative discourses represented social transgression as monstrosity (Botting, 2014: pp. 1–2), while radicals like Thomas Paine and Anna Laetitia Barbauld used monstrosity and other Gothic technologies, like Blake, to reveal the injustices of imperialism and the ancien régime.<sup>6</sup> Blake's anti-establishment attitudes towards politics, religion and sexuality, especially notable in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (c.1790–1793), resonated powerfully with the concerns of rebellious countercultural groups in America and Britain during the 1960s, 70s and 80s. In this context, Blake's 'doors of perception' were known mainly through Huxley's exploration of psychedelic drugs in his books *The Doors of Perception* (1953) and *Heaven and Hell* (1956). For this reason, transformation in Moore's graphic novels echoes tendencies found in Blake: namely, the individual's capacity for imaginative vision or the lack thereof; his or her passage from a state of freedom to one of alienation or vice versa; and their transgressive potential in the eyes of society or an authority. The latter pattern is based on the idea that, a conventional, traditional or orthodox point of view perceives what is different or transformative as a threat to its own stability and hence sees it in a distorted and monstrous way.

It is the transgression of an authoritarian moral law that links Blake's and Moore's complex representations of evil in their countercultural works. Moore's ecological, anarchist and feminist ideas find their inspiration in Blake's criticism of enlightened reason and, more particularly, of Lockean empiricism. Recent critics have shown how Blake had a more complex relationship to the Enlightenment than has previously been recognised, endorsing its critique of superstition and state religion (see for example Fallon, 2017). An important divergence, however, was Blake's view of myth as a rich and important mode of human expression, in contrast to Enlightenment views of myth as primitive and erroneous (Fallon, 2017: p. 6). Just as Blake was antinomian in his rejection of state religion's inflexible moral law, he distrusted the ways in which some philosophical and scientific laws (especially Newton's physics and Locke's philosophy of mind) had seemingly become unquestionable, trapping individuals in what is already known (memory) without the freedom of vision (enthusiasm and imagination). From his antinomian point of view, Blake saw violence in the imposition of a rigid structure on the vital flux of desire. As Terry Eagleton argues in *Holy Terror*, a major form of evil is the terrorism of reason, the 'extreme limit' at which reason becomes unreasonable by refusing space for the excesses of societies' vitality (2005: p. 11). Some of the monsters and horrific transformations in Blake's and Moore's works symbolise this rigid extreme of reason, exemplified by Urizen's degeneration into a corpse in *The [First]Book of Urizen* (1794) and William Gull's metamorphosis into Blake's *Ghost of a Flea* in Moore's *From Hell* (originally published 1989–1996).

Coexisting with this notion of evil is a positive Romantic identification with evil and monstrosity. In *Romantic Satanism*, Peter A. Schock analyses how Satan from *Paradise Lost* became a Romantic embodiment of autonomy, desire and power in response to the historical and political events during the French Revolution and the Regency (2003: pp. 3–4). Blake and Shelley adapted Satan's autonomy and anti-authoritarianism to antagonise 'an Omnipotence embodying the dominant political and religious values of the era' (Schock, 2003: p. 5), as exemplified in *The Marriage*. Such writers celebrated Satan's perversity and monstrosity, and by so doing produced a Romantic 'countermyth that idealises revolution and free thought' (p. 6), as well as using it for irony and satire (p. 6). This Romantic Satanism is a model for later uses of other monstrous figures. Their formulation as evil or

monster is an ironic co-optation of the point of view of conventional morality. This is the case, sometimes, of Blake's Orc, who often becomes or is associated with Satanic snakes, and Moore's Swamp Thing (1983–1987), who is often described as repulsive and abject by hypocritical moralists who defend conservative values. Nevertheless, however much these figures embody utopian aspirations, their violent energies become problematic in the narratives.

To refer to these two types of evil I am going to use the terms adopted by Jason Whittaker in 'From Hell: Blake and Evil in Popular Culture' (2007: p. 192): 'satanic evil' for the Urizenic totalitarianism of reason and 'diabolic evil' for the Romantic alignment with 'monstrous' and excessive passions and imaginations, forces that actually express a greater good outside what is already known and surpassing existent conventions. I will also use the term 'kategoros' (a Biblical term from the Greek 'accuser') (p. 195) to refer to the satanic figures that embody the moral law, such as Urizen or William Gull. These figures produce monsters through their accusation of others, however their very own accusation reveals their own oppressive nature and the mechanisms of monstrosity. In the cases of Blake and Moore, the rhetoric of monstrosity used by the kategoroi turns against them, and they begin to be marked with characteristics of conventional monstrosity. In other words, the accusation of monstrosity makes monstrous the accused and, ultimately, the accuser.

### Blakean readings of Swamp Thing

By the time he was writing the script for Swamp Thing, Moore was already acquainted with Blake, as can be seen in chapter 6 of *V for Vendetta*, 'The Vision', first published in 1982, where the anarchist hero V quotes the hymn 'Jerusalem'. In a few more years he would write 'Fearful Symmetry' (1987), the episode of *Watchmen* where his understanding of Blake proves conspicuously to have become more refined. Considering these examples, it is reasonable to surmise that, even though Swamp Thing does not contain such an elaborate dialogue with Blakean concepts (as in *Watchmen*), its emphasis on certain topics might explain how Moore became interested in Blake and began to actively engage in intertextuality and rewritings of Blake.

The protagonist of the comics series is the Swamp Thing, a humanoid-vegetable hybrid creature whose story is taken up by Moore from issue 20, 'Loose Ends', to issue 64, 'Return of the Good Gumbo'. Moore does not present the Swamp Thing as a plant-man, as would be expected of a conventional horror monster based on a notion of closed and pure categories such as 'human' and 'plant'. Brian Johnson notes this questioning of the limits of the individual in Swamp Thing, which challenges 'conventional understandings of personhood' (2012: p. 23). By becoming a plant, but not relinquishing humanity entirely (in fact, the plant embraces humanity), the narrative reinforces a Bataillean 'insistence upon the reign of the limit' (Johnson, 2012: p. 25) that is also present in the erotic element in the series. The Bataillean notion of eroticism is based on 'the subject's essential "discontinuity"' (Johnson, 2012: p. 22), which he tries to overcome by returning to continuity through love, sex and death. The drive to return to this 'primal' state of continuity 'is manifest as a desire to push past the taboos (limits) that society has thrown up to defend itself' (p. 22). Thus, Abby and the Swamp Thing are an 'erotic' exit from the rational and autonomous Cartesian subject of knowledge' (p. 23).

This turn towards an eco-Gothic character model reflects Moore's frequent genre play combined with his appropriation of a pre-existent character (in this case Swamp Thing himself before the character was handed to Moore) (Murray, 2018: loc. 6154). He re-conceptualised the character as a cluster of vegetable

organisms that absorbed the consciousness of Alec Holland, a scientist killed in an explosion while he was conducting an experiment in the Louisiana bogs. The moulds and algae of the ecosystem became self-aware and took on Holland's memories and personality through their feeding on his decaying remains. The implications of this character's development are considerably original in the genre of superhero comics, as well as from a conceptual point of view: humanity appears as a property transferrable to any kind of living being, not as a prerogative of the homo sapiens species, but immanent in physical matter and in the body irrespective of its species. On one hand, this position reminds us of Blake's belief that 'every thing is Human' (J 34:48, Erdman, 1988: p. 180<sup>7</sup>); on the other hand, the occasional biological focus contrasts with Blake's suspicions of naturalistic outlooks and celebration of humanity as divine.

Some of the topics emphasised in Swamp Thing are 'the dark side of enlightenment and progress' (Botting, 2014: pp. 1–2) and the 'conflicts between science and the supernatural' (Smith, 2007: p. 254). Gothic science appears in the comic book series, for instance, through the Frankenstein-like villains Arcane (Holland's initial nemesis), or Jason Woodrue (the Floronic Man), two scientists driven mad by their hubris. In the following excerpt, Holland's inner dialogue with Arcane outlines how both their different monstrosities have been displaced by a rationalist, technological social order:

It's a... new world, Arcane. It's full of... shopping malls and striplights and software. The dark corners are being pushed back... a little more everyday. We're things of the shadow, you and I... and there isn't as much shadow... As there used to be. Perhaps there was once a world... we could have belonged to... Maybe somewhere in Europe... Back in the fifteenth century. The world was... full of shadows then... full of monsters... Not anymore.

(Moore et al., 1983: p. 8; original punctuation)

From the protagonist's view, the monstrous belongs to nature (against civilisation) and is ancient (as opposed to modernity and technology). However, the narrative questions the monstrosity of the Swamp Thing and the fairness of the order that tries to displace him: 'Maybe the world has run out of room... for monsters... Or maybe... they're just getting harder to recognise' (Moore et al., 1983: pp. 9–10; original punctuation). While civilised kinds of monstrosity (extreme rationalism and destructive technocracy) occupy nature, the original exuberance of nature is confined, which is understood as a loss of imagination and mystery. Nature, distorted by oppression, becomes monstrous. From the perspective of rationalistic modernity, the natural and imaginative come to seem monstrous because they do not adhere to the restrictions this viewpoint demands. Thus, when we encounter a depiction of nature as monstrous in this work, we need to consider it a codification of exuberance as monstrous through the point of view of technocratic reason. Natural exuberance is represented as diabolic monstrosity, and rationalistic modernity is depicted as a satanic monstrosity, following the terminology introduced at the beginning of this article.

In Blake, the initial opposition established between reason and energy in *Marriage* is understood as a fruitful complementarity that is only threatened by the possibility that one of the contraries annuls the other, establishing itself as the norm. In *Marriage* the two terms are already called 'Contraries' (E34). The domination of one of the contraries by the other is, in Blake's later book *Milton*, a Poem (composed 1804–1810), called 'Negation' as opposed to the notion of complementary ideas, called 'Contraries': 'Contraries are Positives/A Negation is not a Contrary' (30, E129). The nature of the opposition between contraries and negations is a recurrent theme in the illuminated book:

There is a Negation, & there is a Contrary  
 The Negation must be destroyed to redeem the Contraries  
 The Negation is the Spectre; the Reasoning Power in Man  
 This is a false Body: an Incrustation over my Immortal  
 Spirit; a Selfhood, which must be put off & annihilated  
 alway  
 To cleanse the Face of my Spirit by Self-examination.  
 (M, 40:32–37, E142)

The emphasis on diabolic evil in the Marriage is here replaced by an emphasis on satanic evil and negation. Similarly, the two contraries represented by Holland and Arcane in *Swamp Thing* are suddenly confronted with their negation, and thus shown as contraries. Holland and Arcane are both considered monsters according to the rationalistic values that oppress them; despite the fact that they have fought each other, the larger threat that negates them is the technocratic authority that wants to displace both of them as monsters.

At a stylistic and technical level, although the authors employ different strategies, they share an investment in complementarity and visual indeterminacy, as well as a tenuous link between text and image referent that amplifies the interpretive possibilities. As Murray says about Moore, ‘there are extended, quite poetic and often overpowering captions that add an element of literary style and describe the action in different ways than the visuals’ (Murray, 2018: loc. 6125). This is equally true of Blake’s illuminated books: the above quotation is accompanied by the illumination of a figure (possibly Milton) struggling with a monster with a snake and dog heads that could be Rahab Babylon (Eaves et al., 2019: ‘Illustration description’ to M, copy D, 40). The image only loosely connects with the scene in the text, where Milton is with Ololon, who does not appear in the picture. While Babylon Rahab does appear, Milton does not fight her as he appears to be doing in the illumination. Meanwhile, Moore’s ‘Rite of Spring’ shows, on page 19, the contour of Abby’s upper body hanging upside down from the top of the page, filled with (possibly stellar) sparkling dots and a coiling caterpillar or larva in the space of her thorax. The figure is surrounded by bird and fish forms, and the text, ‘Together we know the light, exploding upward in a bird-cloud, fragmenting into whirring feathered shrapnel, dancers in the glare...’ (Moore et al., 1985b: p. 19), connects with the visual image very loosely and freely.

According to Smith (2007: p. 254), *Swamp Thing* also defends excess in terms of imagination, another trait attributable to the Romantic legacy in contemporary graphic novels. In *Swamp Thing*, Abigail Cable’s story arc is a good sample of this theme. Abby is Arcane’s niece, mostly an ordinary human woman, even if presented as an outcast in some occasions, which is physically signalled by her unusual snow-white hair. In issue 34, ‘Rites of Spring’, she establishes with Holland a sentimental and sexual relationship, which society perceives as monstrous. In issue 47, ‘The Parliament of Trees’, a man called Howard Fleck discovers them together in the swamp and decides to spy on them and take some pictures to sell to a local newspaper. His description of Alec makes the protagonist monstrous: ‘this awful wet sorta green-black maggoty-lookin’ piece o’ business’ that smells like manure’ (Moore et al., 1986a: p. 2). He continues by exclaiming ‘I ain’t never seen nothing so digustin’! There was bugs and mold on that thing, an’ she was kissin’ it!’ (p. 3). In panels 4 and 5 of page 4, the image of Abby ingesting a tuber is made to look similar to a fellatio, underlining the sexual nature of the encounters between Alec and Abby (Green, 2016: p. 111) while Fleck comments ‘I almost threw up. I tellya, I saw things that’d turn a man’s stomach before they finally up an’ left! Gentlemen, I went through purgatory for these pictures!’ (Moore et al., 1986a: p. 5). The editors of the newspaper are more sceptical than Fleck, thinking Alec is

just a human in disguise. One of them, however, identifies Abby as her daughter’s carer at a nursery home, upon which he orders the publication of the pictures under the interests of ‘parental concern’ (p. 5): ‘My Sandy goes to that place an’ their staff spends their weekends half-naked with guys in kinky rubber suits!’ (p. 5). Outside these particular perspectives, the narration contributes to the reader’s understanding of this relationship as positive, beautiful and beneficial: it is the necessary connection between humans and the green (the term in the fiction for a sort of ‘Gaia’ consciousness). Unfortunately, the decisions of Fleck and the editors of the *Houma* newspaper lead up to the events in issues 48, ‘A Murder of Crows’, 51 ‘Home Free’, 52 ‘Natural Consequences’ and 53 ‘The Garden of Earthly Delights’, where we first learn of the media reaction and the ensuing public opinion that Abby’s feelings are abnormal and her behaviour perverted. The authorities also consider her as a ‘sexual offender’ (Moore et al., 1986b: p. 3), and Abby and Alec face a legal battle to free Abby and be allowed to reunite. Much in the same way the ‘enjoyments of Genius’ look like ‘torment and insanity’ to reasoning angels (MHH 6, E35), the psychedelic and sexual enjoyments of Alec and Abby look like obscenity to the hypocritical Fleck and the newspaper editors. Fleck lewdly enjoys his finding. Despite his claim that he was repelled by what he was seeing, Fleck does not ask for consent or stop taking photographs to warn of his presence when Abby appears, staying the whole time. Later, he affects decency by accusing Abby and Alec of depravity in front of the news team. The protagonists and their innocent, diabolic monstrosity are opposed to satanic social convention dictating what is human and what kind of sexuality is socially acceptable. These dictates can be understood as a mechanism of what Jack Halberstam defines as Gothic technologies, techniques at play in fiction, discourse and culture to produce definitions of abnormality (1995: p. 2) so that the predominant subjectivity is reinforced into its conventional normative associations (p. 22). Against these, in *Swamp Thing* morality is relativised through the narrative device of opposing diabolic innocence to satanic conventionalisms, revealing the beauty behind what is traditionally deemed grotesque, and the inhumanity behind the rules the heroes are transgressing.

Blake’s illuminated books abound with representations of the human body becoming plant or animal, which anticipate Moore’s questioning of the rigid boundaries of ontological categories such as ‘human’ and ‘vegetable’. In America, for example, plate 17 shows on the upper left side a female form that seems to ascend with her limbs transforming into branches and vegetable organs, until the uppermost design on the left is a hunching woman with her head buried in her lap, at the foot of a young tree on which a bird perches. This transformation is problematic in association with Moore, as in Blake it seems to point at a potential of revolutionary transformation that does not reach a full development, while images of Abby’s fusion with Alec seem to lead to a complete transformation. Milton, plate 43 contains a similar use of human figures fused with vegetable forms, but in this case, the context and meaning are more promising: the forces awakened by a triumphal Ololon seem to be changing men into living ears of corn that will be reaped at the ‘Harvest & Vintage of the Nations’ (43:1, E144), an apocalyptic evolution of societies into a more free and imaginative state. Blake often represented the overcoming of the barriers between the natural world and humans as a necessary step in the way to imaginative expansion. Similarly, Moore reflects verbally and visually a parallel need to recover a connection with nature through Abby and Alec’s union.

The erotic union between the human Abby and the humanised, sentient vegetation embodied in Alec, can be seen as participating in acts of Blakean ‘improvement of sensual enjoyment’ (MHH 14, E39) as Huxley understood them. Huxley’s idea of this

improvement was an entheogenic experience resembling those caused by the consumption of hallucinogenic plants. Abby and Alec's physical couplings take place through Abby's ingestion of fruits growing on Alec's body, and entail not only physical pleasure, but also a perceptual change caused by their hallucinogenic properties. In issue 43, 'Windfall', this Blakean subtext is reinforced by the appearance in a panel of Aldous Huxley's book *The Doors of Perception*, (Moore et al., 1985c: p. 4) based on one of Huxley's experiments with mescaline, through which he hoped to understand Blake's notions of Heaven and Hell (Green, 2016: p. 14) as they appear in the Marriage.

The issue shows the psychedelic effects of Swamp Thing's fruit from the point of view of different characters to elaborate on how they depend on perceptions, as Huxley believed. While Milo, a character whose view of the world is limited and spiteful, experiences seeing the world like Alec does as a horrible nightmare, Sandy, a sensitive-minded woman who is dying from cancer, has a peaceful and enlightening vision of the life that pervades her surroundings in company of her partner. The difference between the two states is expressed as hell and heaven (or at least some spiritual consciousness), the same as in Huxley's work (Moore et al., 1985c: pp. 14–15). Visually, the graphic novel reflects these visions through a high level of formal experimentation (Murray, 2018: loc. 6161) to emphasise their divergence from ordinary ways of perception. This is a common aesthetic motivation in Blake and Moore, as Blake also sought to break with accustomed modes of representation through his original development of illuminated printing.

The centrality of the changeable character of perceptions according to one's feelings and thoughts, which is emphasised in the comics series, was also a theme of paramount importance in other illuminated books besides the Marriage. The [First] Book of Urizen is a narrative of the tyranny of reason, where its god rejects what does not obey his laws. In the illuminated work, Urizen's monstrous children are rejected by their father as his reductive perspective makes him see organic and physical life as monstrous:

3. Most Urizen sicken'd to see  
His eternal creations appear  
Sons & daughters of sorrow on mountains  
Weeping! wailing! first Thiriell appear'd  
Astonish'd at his own existence  
Like a man from a cloud born, & Utha  
From the waters emerging, laments!  
Grodna rent the deep earth howling  
Amaz'd! his heavens immense cracks  
Like the ground parch'd with heat; then Fuzon  
Flam'd out! first begotten, last born.  
All his eternal sons in like manner  
His daughters from green herbs & cattle  
From monsters, & worms of the pit.

4. He in darkness clos'd, view'd all his race,  
And his soul sicken'd! he curs'd  
Both sons & daughters; for he saw  
That no flesh nor spirit could keep  
His iron laws one moment.

5. For he saw that life liv'd upon death  
(BU 23:11–27, E81)

In this passage, Urizen's children are elemental beings, just like Alec Holland is characterised in *Swamp Thing* from issue 33 (Moore et al., 1985b: p. 4). Their appearance in the visual images is also similar, especially that of the daughters, who are made

particularly monstrous by their association with monsters and worms and their visual form, reminiscent of Sin in *Paradise Lost*. Urizen redefines desire and sensory experience as the seven deadly sins of the soul, making routes to pleasure appear monstrous. Like Alec for the conventional, unimaginative mind, Urizen's sons and his daughters, linked to vegetable and animal life, appear frightening and monstrous for rational Urizen, because by being alive they shatter his commands: they move, change, die and regenerate, whereas Urizen intended to create a 'solid without fluctuation' (BU 4:11, E71), a permanent world of eternal stasis, matter without movement, which is inevitably inert and dead. He fails to understand that 'life liv[es] upon death' (BU 23:27, E81), that is, that in the material world, eternal life is only possible through regeneration, which presupposes death, and that new life always follows decay and death. Living beings do not always follow a repetitive, predictable pattern. As Canguilhem argues, monstrosity lies in this disruption of the predictability of nature that reveals its contingency (2008: pp. 135–136). Urizen considers this aspect of monstrosity as contrary to life, and not, as Canguilhem proposes, an imaginative attempt to surpass life's exuberance and abundance (2008: pp. 136; 141). After Urizen has enslaved humanity and narrowed their perceptions, his sons leave the earth. Together with the Biblical blueprint, the figure of a mighty demiurge such as Urizen is absent from *Swamp Thing*, where the protagonist is rather made monstrous from multiple places, from the economic power that exploits the environment to moralistic discourses on sexuality. While Urizen embodies a philosophical error that makes nature monstrous, in *Swamp Thing* more specific and worldly forms of exploitation are analysed from an everyday perspective (such as urban decay and the dangers of nuclear pollution), even if the comics series shows also how they originate in flawed concepts of categories and interests.

The focus in *Swamp Thing* on the monster's embodiment allows Moore to emphasise body horror, which is also a salient characteristic of Blake's Urizen. Alec's appearance is anatomised, just as Urizen's body is described forming in stages. Like Los, Urizen 'became what he beheld' (M 3:29, E97), and so does Alec's vegetable body, which imitates human anatomy: brown roots or twigs stick out of his muscled green limbs like veins or sinews, and his face echoes the appearance of a skull. A Gothic monstrosity is especially present also in Blake's bodies, which Baddock and Effinger catalogue:

Images of 'distorted sinews' (J 65:72, E217), leaking 'Marrow' (J 58:8, E207), and other viscera—The Lungs, the Heart, the Liver' (J 49:17, E198)—gruesomely spill out across Jerusalem. Urizen, 'In ghastly torment sick' (BU 13:4, E76), is born within a bloody, excremental chaos. So too is Enitharmon extruded from Los in *The Four Zoas*. (2018: p. 6).

Part of Holland's development entails the acceptance of the death of his original human frame and a choice to embrace his human consciousness despite the fact that his physical body is composed of agglutinated vegetable organisms. He is shown feeding on dead animals that decompose inside his body, an example of life living upon death. Alec and Abby's life-giving intimate encounters are peppered with images of natural violence, like creatures eating each other, death and putrefaction, and worms (Moore et al., 1985a: p. 18); this implies that attaining the plant consciousness of the protagonist entails a unity with the continuity of total experience in earthly life that amounts to eternity and encompasses equally life and death, pleasure and pain, and goes beyond conventional notions of good and evil.

For both authors, monsters are therefore those whose very natures cannot fulfil the Urizenic laws, because they exist beyond the divisions imposed by a rationalistic mode of knowledge.

Nonetheless, the monstrous continues to be an ambivalent category, since Urizen, like Arcane or Jason Woodrue, is himself depicted as monstrous and terrifying. Monstrosity allows both Blake and Moore to codify satanic error, as well as the diabolic rebellion of imagination against it. Blake creates this connection between the repressive and transgressive figures in his books to reflect the power of perspectives, to convey the possibility of every revolutionary change to transform into restrictive law, and to show that liberating vision may entail a sublime that can turn into horror because it surpasses ordinary ideas and mental structures. Moore is also aware that rebellion can get distorted into a new type of rule of law (Woodrue exemplifies this), and that released imaginations can also produce visions of horror (as attested if we compare Promethea to Providence). However, he also writes from a cultural context of greater relativism and scepticism, as well as consciously rejecting the idealised heroes of superhero comics, whom he tries to counteract by promoting characters that seem monstrous from a conventional point of view.

Other examples of this ambiguity in Blake can be found in *America*, a Prophecy, which presents the figure of Orc, the spirit of revolution, in diabolic terms; he is monstrous seen through the eyes of the Angel of Albion:

Art thou not Orc, who serpent-form'd  
Stands at the gate of Enitharmon to devour her children;  
Blasphemous Demon, Antichrist, hater of Dignities;  
Lover of wild rebellion, and transgressor of Gods Law;  
Why dost thou come to Angels eyes in this terrific form?  
(7:1–7, E53–54)

In the accompanying illumination on plate 7, however, the imagery belies the threatening description of Orc, as it depicts two people, seemingly a man and a woman, sleeping under a willow with a ram of radiant fleece, an image, suggesting a more peaceful coexistence with a powerful but not necessarily dangerous transformative energy. In the same book, Urizen is opposed to Orc, but even if he represents the contrary impulses, they are represented in similar positions, arms outstretched and palms facing down dominating the width of the illumination in plates 8 and 10, an uncanny effect reinforced by the fact that Urizen is standing on the precise words 'I am Orc' (8:1, E54) (Bruder, 1997: p. 129). Urizen is also monstrous, although this monstrosity acquires different characteristics, embodying sickness, death (conveyed through images of destructive storm and withering winter) and self-torment as causes of sublime fear:

... emerg'd his leprous head  
From out his holy shrine, his tears in deluge piteous  
Falling into the deep sublime! flag'd with grey-brow'd snows  
And thunderous visages, his jealous wings wav'd over the deep;  
Weeping in dismal howling woe he dark descended howling  
Around the smitten bands, clothed in tears & trembling shudd'ring cold.  
His stored snows he poured forth, and his icy magazines  
He open'd on the deep, and on the Atlantic sea white shiv'ring.  
Leprous his limbs, all over white, and hoary was his visage.  
(16:3–11, E57)

Urizen's sickness is represented by his 'leprous' head and limbs, and his association with death is reinforced by descriptions of his decrepitude: not only is he 'grey-brow'd' like any ordinary ageing human being, but also unnaturally white and 'trembling shudd'ring cold'. Much of his monstrosity is associated with ageing and death. Asma remarks that monsters in general can very frequently be seen as 'thumbnail sketches of our own destiny'

and 'elderly selves in much exaggerated form' that embody our fear of mortality (Asma, 2009: p. 266). In the case of Urizen, this same fear has precipitated his becoming monstrous, rather than prevented it. Moreover, with his 'tears in deluge piteous' and his 'dismal howling woe' he echoes the ghostly imagery of a tormented soul. This mixture of more archetypal imagery reminding of cruel gods of thunder and winter, and the more pathetic and human aspects contribute to his grotesque and monstrous portrayal. There is an obvious dissonance between Urizen's imposition of purity and perfection, and his own catastrophic appearance.

The monstrosity of the Angel of Albion is used against himself when a furious and demonic Orc sends the Angel's plagues back in his fiery winds, which afflict all the Angels representing different regions and cities. In plate 17, the guardians of Ireland, Wales and Scotland are explicitly described as prone to catching the infections as revolution spreads. However, in the following plate, number 18, the 'ancient Guardians' are 'smitten with their own plagues' (18:17–18, E57), which implies that the old order is falling from its own corruption and unsustainability. In this sense, the monstrous plague characterises an obsolete regime, but it is also absorbed and transformed by America and Orc, who can use the Angel's plagues to threaten his dominance (see Fallon, 2017: pp. 102–103 for more detail on this process).

This ambivalence of monstrosity is the same that is at play in Moore when his heroes are seen as perverts by the world surrounding them, even to the point of being criminalised, and when antagonists, either by contrast to them or by acquiring metaphorical monstrous traits, are revealed as bigots, intolerants or worse perverts than their rivals.

The connections between Swamp Thing and Blake's ideas about perception and imagination, mortality and eternity, rationality and monstrosity, are in this work indicative of (1) the route uniting Blake and Moore (Huxley), evidenced by Moore's use of references to Huxley's Blake-based works, which gives us an idea of what Blake is being assimilated (a psychedelic and countercultural Blake) and (2) the similarity in the structures of feeling the authors were themselves immersed in. However, this is precisely the basis that motivated a subsequent interest in Blake on the part of Moore and the possibility for a more elaborate dialogue and deeper understanding of Blakean poetics and symbols.

### Monstrous negation and Blakean transformations in *From Hell*

During the years he composed *From Hell*, 1989 to 1998, Moore acquainted himself more profoundly with Blake and incorporated more complex allusions to his work. The use of more sophisticated literary references was made possible thanks to Moore's decision to work with independent publishers after his break with DC Comics due to disagreements about the rights and merchandising of *Watchmen* (Murray, 2018: loc. 6241). In *From Hell*, Moore offers an account of the events of the 1888 Whitechapel murders by developing a collage of different theories, and mixing them with historical characters and episodes, building a dark and evil but prodigious example of a magical conception of history and of the power of fiction. In this graphic novel, Jack the Ripper is the Royal Physician to Queen Victoria, Sir William Witherspoon, a highly respected member of society and a prominent man of science. The cruel and alienating social order of imperialism is revealed through the brutality behind this exemplary figure when he is appointed to take charge of the case of Prince Albert Edward, who has begot an illegitimate child to a shopkeeper and prostitute, Annie Chapman. Yearning to satisfy his megalomania, Gull mistakes this command to cover up the scandal with a divine

sign that he has been chosen to protect patriarchal civilisation from an evil matriarchal force. He concludes he must ritually kill all witnesses, who are prostitutes, and thus remove the threat to the reputation of the Crown and also symbolically defeat femininity, irrationality and darkness.

This obsession with the control of women's sexuality was, at the time in which the narrative is set, 'widely perceived as the paramount means for controlling the health and wealth of the male imperial body politic' (McClintock cited in Brigley-Thompson, 2012: p. 79). The events that set up the plot of *From Hell* revolve around the enforced ideological constructs put in place to protect the British Empire, and allusions to them are frequent in the graphic novel, which consciously uses the anxieties about the imminent decline of the Empire as a backdrop and cause of the climate of repression.

Monsters are present in different forms in the narrative. The principal monster is the villain, the Urizenic William Gull. However, his point of view frames as monstrous the agents who disrupt the oppressive order he tries to maintain (especially the women protagonists). Gull is partially motivated by his misreading of Blake. The story is set precisely in the decades of the nineteenth century when interest in Blake began to emerge after his death thanks to Alexander Gilchrist's biography, William Michael Rosetti's edition of Blake's poetry and Swinburne's appreciation. In terms of Blake's theory of contraries and negations, Gull is a negation: he has mistaken opposition, which 'is true Friendship' (MHH, E42), with the intolerant annihilation of the other. He quotes the opening lines of *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, 'Enslaved, the Daughters of Albion weep, a trembling lamentation' (Moore and Campbell, 2001: 4.10), taking it as a triumphal celebration of the enslavement of women.<sup>8</sup> When Polly Nichols tells him she had worked in Lambeth Workhouse, he exclaims 'Lambeth, indeed? A famous poet once lived there' (Moore and Campbell, 2001: 5.26), believing this coincidence to be another portentous sign that she is one of the women he must eliminate. Gull, as the narrative implies, is not, as he would like to think, enacting Blake's prophecies, but actually reversing them, by embodying negation instead of contrariety. Gull functions as a *kategoros*, through whose perspective the victims are part of the ancient matriarchal force he wishes to suppress. Its image is condensed for him in the chthonic monster of primeval chaos, the Tiamat of Babylonian myth that Northrop Frye also identified with Blake's 'female Will' (Frye, 1972: p. 138), to which Gull's idea of femininity bears a great resemblance. Frye explains that the Female Will is the material 'Mother' nature that makes humans dependent on her (1972: pp. 74–75), often represented in culture as the Madonna and Child or as a courtly love lady (pp. 75–76). Moore's reading, however, implies the reverse of Frye's patriarchal interpretation of Blake. Moore does not explicitly criticise Blake's misogynistic moments, and his writing can also be problematic in relation to gender at some points. Nonetheless, in other works such as *Promethea*, figures of female divinity are all the opposite of Blake's Female Will, as they liberate humankind instead of enslaving it to matter, and embody the closeness of divine love instead of the celestial goddess' aloof indifference. Moore questions dragon-slaying myths in the sense Frye gives to them, by delving into their problems and consequences. The dragon-slaying hero is transformed in *From Hell* into a psychopath driven by hate that contributes to create waves of darkness and violence erupting in great wars and massacres of history. This displacement of the traditional hero contrasts with the stereotypical superheroes in comic books and exposes the dark ideological side of these self-appointed vigilantes and justice warriors.

Gull's theories bear a great resemblance to those of JJ Bachofen or JG Frazer (author of *The Golden Bough*, published in 1890) (Brigley-Thompson, 2012: p. 77). Bachofen's theory established

that the history of humanity had a first stage called 'hetaeristic' when women were of common property and served a powerful king who could choose the women he wanted; a second stage characterised by peaceful matriarchy; and a third (the contemporary) patriarchal stage, which he values as the period in which humanity is at its most independent from nature (Brigley-Thompson, 2012: p. 77). Frazer's theories similarly state that the origins of humanity were matriarchal, and that matriarchal societies were conquered by patriarchal ones by installing a king and ensuring his rule by associating the male king with symbols of the previous female authority to legitimise the king's dominion. Rather than straight from these sources, Moore took inspiration from more recent texts such as Robert Graves' *The White Goddess* (1948, based largely on Frazer's work) and Marilyn French's *Beyond Power: Men, Women and Myth* (1985) (Moore and Campbell, 2001: pp. 1, 11). Gull explains the demonisation of the ancient female deities, and the subsequent theft of their power by male heroes and rulers:

with symbols did male warlocks conquer women, first destroying or discrediting the goddesses that stood for women's power. The Mother Goddess Tiamat, demoted, was made devil first, then lowly chimera. Goddesses were replaced by Gods.... Herne usurped Diana's role as leader of the Lunar hunt: a male pretender to her female throne. (Moore and Campbell, 2001: 4.24)

Gull intends to continue this process, and in order to kill his victims, he first demonises them, identifying them with the monstrous female dragon. Gull's archetypal patterns culminate in Marie Kelly's murder in 10.19 (panel 6) when the panel image changes, and instead of seeing him in the Whitechapel rooms mutilating the woman, we see a Babylonian relief of the god Marduk slaying Tiamat. The positions of the figures are the same as Gull and Marie's body, and the monster has a gash in its belly like that Marie's body shows. In panel 9, Gull realises the similarity of his crime to the myth: 'Babylon? The myth of Tiamat and Marduk, the Enuma Elish... extraordinary. Absolutely extraordinary' (Moore and Campbell, 2001: 10.19). Here, Moore uses mythology to interpret historical events, a method that echoes Blake's syncretic use of mythology to criticise dominant values. While Moore uses Babylonian mythology as an allegory of patriarchy, Blake used a female personification of Babylon to allegorise state religion and its military propaganda. Moore uses a Blakean technique of overlaying reality with historical mythical figures in chapter 4 of *From Hell*. This contains Gull's famous trip around London with his coachman Netley, to whom he explains the mythical significance of several locations. In Blake's *Jerusalem*, another aspect of these combinations of history and myth is Los's construction of Golgonooza, 'the urban form of Jerusalem in the fallen world' (Johnston, 1970: p. 415), in London and its opposition to Babylon, 'its mirror image and the real metropolis of history, part Vanity Fair, part factory town, in which the fall is eternally recapitulated' (p. 415). Both cities are amalgamated, as Babylon is also Jerusalem in a state of ruin, and Blake used them both to express the oppressive and the visionary aspects of London: 'I behold Babylon in the opening Street of London, I behold/Jerusalem in ruins wandering about from house to house' (J, 74:16–17, E229). The passage in *From Hell* also exemplifies how the balance of opposition is turned into negation when one of the elements (the male principle, in this case), reduces the other (the female principle) to monstrosity and evil in order to assert its dominion. Murder is the radical form of negation chosen by Gull. He does not strive to enter into a dialogue with femininity or with women, his acts suppress this principle.

The women's behaviours are often shown as embodying the characteristics Gull is afraid of, specifically the power over their

own sexuality and their autonomy. Through Gull's point of view and often through the point of view of other male characters (husbands, partners, policemen, etc.), the reader becomes aware of the complex webs of oppression, which surround the women. For example, Marie's sexual behaviour turns promiscuous when she realises she is going to be killed, and her husband is unable to understand her reaction. Along the main storyline we see them as ordinary women, despite Gull's belief that they are Diana's priestesses, agents of chaos that threaten civilisation, rationality and order. Their connections to the symbols and archetypes Gull talks about is completely accidental. For him, women, especially prostitutes or sexually active women are automatically Diana's priestesses, 'Joy Maidens' or 'Daughters of Joy' (Moore and Campbell, 2001: 4.33) consecrated to the lunar world of dreams and irrationality by their gender and occupation; he does not think about them as individuals. However, the Dyonisiac side they represent in Gull's archetypal scheme is not cruel, authoritarian or brutal like Gull's idea of the Apollonian, solar and masculine. The opposition between the heroines and Gull functions in a similar way to Abby and Alec's relationship in *Swamp Thing*, which is opposed by their society's cruel moral hypocrisy. In both cases, like in Blake's *the Marriage*, the protagonists are of the Devil's party: while Gull's side can be identified as satanic, the women's Dyonisiac characteristics can be understood as diabolic.

In Gull's final visions, his perceptions reflect the moral implications of Gull's division of reality. He dreams his spirit visits Blake's home in the past, where the poet can see him as a supernatural apparition and sketch his portrait. The panel images show Blake's sketch, clearly identifiable as the draft drawing for *The Ghost of a Flea*, one of his 'Visionary Heads'. It is here that Gull is definitely identified as monstrous even in appearance. As Moore reflects in the comic book scene, Blake drew these heads at his house at Fountain Court (1819); Blake sketched them from visions he had in a series of night meetings with John Varley. Varley genuinely thought these were apparitions of spirits (Bentley, 2004: pp. 354–355). Gull metamorphoses into a creature that for Blake meant 'the spirit of blood-lust' (Damon, 2013: p. 154). In the final painting, the ghost of the flea carries a cup described as serving to draw blood (Cunningham cited in Bentley, 2004: p. 359) and a razor, analogous to Gull's Liston knife and its bloodshed. Moore consciously uses what was most likely Blake's playful choice of an image that would surpass Varley's physiognomic and astrological beliefs (Erle, 2018: p. 236). Some of the words the characters use in *From Hell*—'a face worthy of a murderer' (Moore and Campbell, 2001: 14.16)—are directly taken from Cunningham's account of Varley's comments on the figure (cited in Erle, 2018: p. 240). Moore's own reflections on the figure's satiric character in the afterword to the recent exhibition demonstrate that he is aware of its ironic aspects, and that Gull is foolish in his belief that this transformation qualifies him as some kind of grandiose demigod. This can be seen when, after his momentary transformation, he concludes he has become more than human, 'all things to all men', 'meaning' and 'energy' (Moore and Campbell, 2001: 14.10). Other dimensions of the image that make the association with Gull apt are vampiric and satanic associations, of which contemporaries were fully aware (Erle, 2018: p. 237). The most interesting (but also more distant) link suggested by Sibylle Erle is that between the ghost of the flea and Satan in Blake's *The ghost of Abel*, as in this work a scaly Satan claims human blood, because it implies his victory over Jehovah, a 'human' God that dies with every sacrifice of human life (Erle, 2018: p. 239). This aspect resonates powerfully with Gull's murders as sacrifices through which he thinks he will transcend common humanity, fulfil a divine mission and achieve a spiritually superior status. This transformation could also be compared to a similar one in Blake's *Urizen*, where *Urizen's*

invention of religion to subsume the world under his control also turns human beings into scaly monsters, a change that stands for the narrowing of their perceptions as a result of the dogmas *Urizen* imposes upon them:

1. Then the Inhabitants of those Cities:  
Felt their Nerves change into Marrow  
And hardening Bones began  
In swift diseases and torments,  
In throbbings & shootings & grindings  
Thro' all the coasts; till weaken'd  
The Senses inward rush'd shrinking,  
Beneath the dark net of infection.
2. Till the shrunken eyes clouded over  
Discern'd not the woven hypocrisy  
But the streaky slime in their heavens  
Brought together by narrowing perceptions  
Appear'd transparent air; for their eyes  
Grew small like the eyes of a man  
And in reptile forms shrinking together  
Of seven feet stature they remain'd
3. Six days they shrunk up from existence  
And on the seventh day they rested  
And they bless'd the seventh day, in sick hope:  
And forgot their eternal life  
(25:1–28:21, E82–83)

The process involves a hardening and solidification of the body reminiscent of *Urizen's* search for solidity, and a weakening and shrinkage of the senses that presupposes a diminished sensory capacity, without which a visionary perception of the environment is impossible, as is the realisation that humans are surrounded by the 'woven hypocrisy' of *Urizen's* priestcraft. Gull similarly reduces the women to dead bodies—an inert solid, while his own understanding is also shrunk and limited into the patterns of his paranoid fiction, which he tries to impose onto others like Netley in the same way *Urizen's* webs affect humanity.

The comparison suggests that Moore is also presenting Gull as enclosed within single vision, as only being able to understand the world according to a single code. Even if his mythical explanation is not ordinary, it takes the values that organise the ordinary society depicted in the graphic novel to their most oppressive extremes with a narrowly rationalistic outlook. Gull takes the side of what for Blake is satanic evil. In some instances, Gull almost paraphrases Blake, as when he declaims: 'The only place Gods inarguably exist is in our minds where they are real beyond refute, in all their grandeur and monstrosity' (Moore and Campbell, 2001: 4.18), which clearly resembles Blake's 'All deities reside in the human breast' (MHH 11, E38). In another passage, Gull declares that for Blake *Bedlam* was where 'the mad had locked away the sane' (Moore and Campbell, 2001: 4.22), a reversal of values in which civilisation is built upon wrong premises. In Blake's times, James Ward defended Blake against accusations of insanity, using almost identical terms: 'there are probably men shut up as mad in *Bedlam*, who are not so: that possibly the madmen outside have shut up the sane people' (cited in Bentley, 2004: p. 373). In *From Hell*, Gull attributes this sentence to Blake himself, as it appears in Gilchrist's biography, one of the sources for the Blakean material in *From Hell*, along with Peter Ackroyd's Blake (1996), Kathleen Raine's William Blake, and Bernard Nessfield-Cookson's paper 'William Blake's Spiritual Four-Fold City', from *The Aquarian Guide to Legendary London* (1990), all acknowledged in the Appendix. Oddly, Gilchrist tries to protect

Blake from accusation of madness through this attribution, reasoning that were he mad, he would not 'take common cause with the mad' (Gilchrist, 1907: p. 344), whereas Gull insists that Blake's mind was abnormal. All these parallels between Blake and Gull lead to the conclusion that Gull distorts Blake by thinking that the inner divine humanity is cruel and indifferent instead of merciful and compassionate. For him, the real hero in Blake is 'Satan', 'the Greek Apollo' (Moore and Campbell, 2001: 4.12) despite Blake's continuous opposition to the principles this Satan represents (religious indoctrination, institutional power, holy war, etc.).

Gull's transformation into the creature in *The Ghost of a Flea* is a response to Blake's representation of Gothic terror as 'distortion' (Punter, 1996: pp. 89–90). According to David Punter, these Blakean metamorphoses are sublimations due to liberation or, as in this case, degradations due to repression (1996: pp. 90–91). Difference and division are the origin of Blake's imagery of terror, especially in the mythical and theological sense of the passage from unfallen being to fallen, of which Urizen's division from eternity is a central example (Punter, 1996: pp. 90–91). Urizen becomes a cadaver, as we can see on plate 11 of *Urizen*, because he created a world he cannot perceive but as terrifying:

- 1: Los smitten with astonishment  
Frightend at the hurtling bones
- 2: And at the surging sulphureous  
Perturbed Immortal mad raging
- 3: In whirlwinds & pitch & nitre  
Round the furious limbs of Los
- 4: And Los formed nets & gins  
And threw the nets round about
- 5: He watch'd in shuddring fear  
The dark changes  
(8:1–10, E74)

In these lines, Los, from whom Urizen has just separated, is horrified by Urizen's changes and tries to use nets to prevent and contain Urizen's further division and disintegration. Urizen's body is the human body made monstrous by Urizen's perverse search for a purity only found in lifeless matter. However, the fact that Los creates a human body for him is good, as it stops Urizen in his fall and division. Urizen's search leads him to negation, as he seems to prefer disintegration to the world that emerges as a result of Los's intervention. However, through his own opposition to movement and change, he has provoked the material universe to become hidden from eternity. In Moore's graphic novel, negation also proves to be eventually self-defeating. Gull, like Urizen, is the reasoner who does not pay due respect to unreason and ends up consequently dominated by it (Eagleton, 2005: p. 10), and, in short, becoming a monster.

### Promethea: imposed metaphysics and monsters of the mind

After writing *From Hell*, Moore's particular attention to Blake seems to decrease, but the influence of Blakean ideas is more noticeable than before his deep research on the author. Promethea, initially published as a series running from 1999 to 2005, presents the story of Sophie Bangs, a college student who is writing a paper on a mythical figure in the (fictional) history of literature and art called Promethea, who has had different incarnations. These range from the daughter of a hermetic scholar from the times of Alexandria or a faery muse appearing to the Romantic poet Charlton Sennet, down to a pulp literature warrior heroine illustrated in the 1950s by the artist Grace Brannagh, who discovered she could transform into the character.

Young Sophie realises that she is the next human vessel of Promethea, whom she can channel through her poetry writing. During these transformations she is taught by this spiritual entity about magic, imagination and mysticism and helps her friend Barbara, another woman who used to embody Promethea, to find her husband in the spiritual spheres of the Kabbalah. During this quest she finds out what Promethea's goal is: to bring apocalypse, the end of our conventional beliefs about the world and the revelation of oneness with eternity. In other words, Promethea will liberate mankind from its 'mind-forg'd manacles' (SE 46:8, E27) and help humans realise that 'every thing that lives is Holy' (MHH 27, E45). Blake also employed the myth of Prometheus in America to emphasise the heroic aspects of Orc as an allegory of revolutionary ideals. He is held captive like Prometheus, and repressed: 'For chain'd beneath I rend these caverns' (1:18, E51). The Angel of Albion characterises him as a tormented figure, punished for his crime against authority, much like his mythological ancestor.

In this work, we can find examples of the concept of diabolic evil embodied in Promethea's father, whom fanatic Christian assaulters call 'devil worshipper' (Moore et al., 2000: 1.2<sup>9</sup>). Promethea is herself a 'pagan demoness' (Moore et al., 2003: 6.1) for the Christian fundamentalists that oppose her advent. The demon Asmodeus is presented as a noble creature in its own demonic way. He appears in a passage where, while on their spiritual journey through the Sephirot, Promethea/Sophie and Barbara lose control of the energy of the fifth sphere, Geburah, or Strength, and enter a Qlippa (pl. Qlippoth), the reverse side of the sphere or an empty version of it. The demon ruling this Qlippa, Asmodeus, tells Promethea about the Qlippoth: 'The Qlippoths are generally understood as hells, although the word means 'husks' or 'shells'. It's what remains when the sacred energy of things has departed. The sacred energy is meaning' (Moore et al., 2002: 6.18). While they do not acknowledge him, the demon Asmodeus torments them. In the moment they acknowledge him as part of their own human nature, the demon acquires a tractable human appearance, and they manage to return to the Sephira: 'Approach us with fear, with hatred and revulsion, and we will be fearsome, hateful and vile. Approach us humanely and with respect, and we will be human and respectable' (Moore et al., 2002: 6.17).

A parallel scene is happening meanwhile in the ordinary world,<sup>10</sup> where another young woman, Sophie's friend Stacia, has been left in charge of protecting the city of New York while Sophie helps her friend Barbara in the immaterial world. Through her drawing, Stacia can summon Grace Brannagh's avatar of Promethea inside herself, in order to fulfil her functions. In the following passage, she learns to acknowledge demons to conquer them:

Stacia: You're the eternal evil within mankind, didn't you say? It's the 'within' part that interests me. You're part of us somehow, aren't you?

Demon: ... we're clearly a part of you that you can't control.

Stacia: No. We can't. Not until we stop pretending that you're some force outside us .... Not until we're prepared to own you.... the opposite of disowning you, pretending you're not part of us. You, for example, Vepar. You cause turbulence. You kill men, cruelly. I've done that. I accept you, Vepar. I own you.

(Moore et al., 2002: 6.15)

Simultaneously, Sophie realises Barbara and she must acknowledge their own evil:

Barbara: Sophie, it's scum! Demons, they're \$%&ing scum, they're filth, they're...

Sophie: No, Barbara. No hate, no fear. No anger. It just chews that stuff up and feeds it back to us. Lord Asmodeus, We've trespassed here, and treated you without respect. Forgive us.

Asmodeus: That's better. In fact, that's much better. (2002: 6.16)

The angel Boo-Boo, Barbara's higher self, teaches the women that angels and demons are 'part of the same thing' (2002: 6.20). In fact, Boo-Boo seems to like and feel attracted to Asmodeus, thinking he 'ain't so bad' (2002: 6.20). Evil and monstrosity are to be the products of interacting perceptions and ideas, a notion that, as in *Swamp Thing* and *From Hell*, goes back to Blake.

There are clear similarities between this passage from *Promethea* and plates 17–19 of the *Marriage*, where the Angel takes the narrator to see his afterlife. The landscape takes on the conventional features of hell, and they encounter Leviathan in a raging sea:

By degrees we beheld the infinite Abyss, fiery as the smoke of a burning city; beneath us ... was the sun, black but shining [:] round it were fiery tracks on which revolv'd vast spiders, crawling after their prey; which flew ... in the most terrific shapes of animals sprung from corruption. ...; these are Devils. and are called Powers of the air, ....

But now, from between the black & white spiders a cloud and fire burst and rolled thro the deep blackning all beneath, so that the nether deep grew black as a sea & rolled with a terrible noise: ... distant about three degrees appeared a fiery crest above the waves slowly it reared like a ridge of golden rocks till we discoverd two globes of crimson fire. from which The sea fled away in clouds of smoke, ... it was the head of Leviathan.

(MHH 18, E41)

It is then that the Angel leaves the scene, and, without the influence of his perspective, the poet sees the scene change before him, just as Asmodeus shapeshifts with Sophie/*Promethea* and Barbara's change of outlook:

... this appearance was no more, but I found myself sitting on a pleasant bank beside a river by moon light hearing a harper who sung to the harp. & his theme was, The man who never alters his opinion is like standing water, & breeds reptiles of the mind.

... I found my Angel, who surprised asked me, how I escaped?

I answerd. All that we saw was owing to your metaphysics

...

(MHH 19, pp. E41–42)

In these lines, the ocean is substituted by a serene river bank. The presence of a harper singing replaces Leviathan, and foregrounds poetic and artistic inspiration, indicating that sublimity appears to be monstrous and insane to the Angel. The song echoes the proverb of hell 'Expect poison from the standing water' (MHH 9:45, E37), referring to the dispassionate inflexibility of reasoners; Leviathan is a force of disruption in the standing waters. The Angel's 'metaphysics' refers to the worldview that causes the Angel to perceive poetic inspiration and vision as a hellish experience. His perceptions are based on reflection (hence divorced from sensory experience). The Angel exemplifies Lockean assumptions that reflection is the definitive means to achieve knowledge of the world and superior to the passive sense and imagination.

There is also a similar dynamic in Blake's *Milton*, where Milton himself and then Blake recognise their own Satanic spectre as a step previous to overcoming negation. Thus, Milton exclaims 'I in my Selfhood am that Satan: I am that Evil One!/He is my

Spectre!' (14:30–31, E108), and Blake practises self-annihilation instead of negation. Both in *Milton* and in *Promethea* the solution proposed to conquer evil is an acknowledgement that it resides in the self, and is overcome by becoming conscious of one's own tendencies to imposition and selfishness. Both authors try to go beyond conventional notions of evil and avoid simplistic solutions like negation, abjection and projection of the monstrous on the other in favour of an understanding of monstrosity.

In *Promethea*, good and evil are understood in a similar way in the *Marriage*, as different parts of the same whole, both having a function and a purpose. When the subject is liberated from the limitations of conventional dualistic definitions, the unity of being and its meaning can be perceived:

Know that the scorched-black demons and the pristine, fluttering seraphs are in some sense naught but you yourself unpacked, unfolded in a higher space from whence the myriad gods unfurl, ....

(Moore et al., 2005: 6.12)

In more recent works, Moore turns to darker conceptions of the universe that, without contradicting his previous narratives, show a more disturbing aspect of imagination. In the following section, I will explain how these works relate to Blakean concepts of the monstrous consistent with his previous work.

### Neomicon and Providence: the horror of revelation

Moore's most recent graphic novels are based on HP Lovecraft's works. In them, the protagonists find great revelations and knowledge about the monstrous nature of the universe beyond the narrow frame of ordinary perceptions. Lovecraft is among Moore's life-long literary interests, and references to his works appear since early in Moore's comics, such as issue 37 of *Swamp Thing*, 'Growth Patterns' (1985), where Benjamin, one of John Constantine's associates, discovers the awakening of Cthulhu is imminent. Prior to *Neomicon* (2010–2011) Moore had also published the Lovecraftian short story 'The Courtyard' (1994) and the prose poems 'Zaman's Hill' and 'Recognition' (both 1995), all of them later adapted to comic format. Moore also referred to and commented on Lovecraft's myths in reviews, and in several issues of his series *The League of the Extraordinary Gentlemen*. Although in a darker vein than works such as *Swamp Thing* or *Promethea*, the Lovecraftian subject matter allows Moore to explore the same preoccupations: the nature and power of fiction in contrast to reality and the mythical and magical aspects of urban space. These characteristics carry the influence of Blake even to these Lovecraftian fictions. Blakean visionary power has deep connections to these experiences of maddening chaos, unsettling unrepresentability and coldly horrific mechanism. In Moore's works, Lovecraft takes on a Blakean flavour: the awe and also the danger of opening the imagination to assimilate a sublime universe. Unlike in Lovecraft, amidst the horror, there are still glimmers of wonder beyond what we already know. A new element brought into his works via Lovecraft, however, is the posthuman implications of a world where the human individual has been decentralised (Moore, 2014).

In both graphic novels, sexuality (especially female) and motherhood are seen from a Gothic angle, as Moore undertakes to bring out the sexual subtexts of Lovecraft's narratives and turn them into the actual source of horror. This interpretation of Lovecraft is inspired by the peculiarities of Lovecraft's life. Lovecraft was only married once for a short period and had no children. According to JT Joshi, he lacked any interest in sex (2013, chs. 3; 10). There are not any references to sexuality and very few women in his fiction. Moore decides to fill in this gap in Lovecraft, and interpret Lovecraftian monsters not merely as

'outer' cosmic threats, but as sexual acts and organs perceived as alien, grotesque and uncanny, taking the perspective of someone with an aversion to sex or even a sexual trauma. A consequence of this decision is that the female figures filling this gap become monstrous, as is the case of Elspeth Wade, Hekeziyah Massey/Mrs. Macey and Merrill Brears, the latter of whom will be the focus in this article. Moore himself alludes in 'Recognition' to circumstances in Lovecraft's life that may have led to his aversion to sex, such as his father's syphilis and the unknown circumstances surrounding it (Joshi, 2013: ch. 2) or, in Providence, to Lovecraft's aunts' habit of dressing their nephew like a girl when he was an infant (Moore and Burrows, p. 9).

The protagonist in *Neonomicon* is Merrill Brears, an FBI agent recovering from sex addiction who suffers the trauma of rape and becomes pregnant after an attack from a non-human Lovecraftian creature. It is an amphibian creature with a certain likeness to *The Ghost of a Flea*, the 'gargouille de la mer' (Moore and Burrows, 2011: 4.20), who, like Orc in America, rapes a woman and thus brings about the apocalypse. In the story, this creature has been discovered by a group of cultists who practice sexual rites with non-human entities. Brears ends up kidnapped by them while infiltrating the group to investigate a series of ritual murders.

The absolute freedom the cultists enjoy in the Gothic labyrinth below Salem and the horror bred in it suggest a reversal of the utopian aspirations to liberation of counter-cultural dreams. Brears decides to carry out some research about what happened to her and eventually succeeds in making sense of her atrocious experience in a surprising way. While believing she will be the mother of a monstrous God could sound like a terribly pathological way to cope with her trauma, that is what occurs, as the narrative establishes that apocalypse is the passage of humanity from an earthly plane to the world of dreams. Merrill's ordeal gradually unfolds into her quasi-religious conversion to the side of the monstrous, a vision whose full consequences can be found in Providence (2015–2017). Like the characters in *Promethea*, Merrill identifies the monstrosity inside herself, which is also for her a step towards psychic recovery and liberation.

Sexual body horror is also present in America, where the Nameless Shadowy Female is raped by Orc. In the passage, the Nameless Female does not speak initially. The encounter is alluded to in ambiguous terms, but there is an undeniable element of violence and coercion: 'Orc assay'd his fierce embrace' (1: p. 10, E51). This act leads in the illuminated book to an 'expansion of the senses' and to the birth of revolution, as Michelle Gompf says (2013: p. 78). The fact that it produces an emancipatory result is disturbing, especially from a gender perspective. This could be the cause why the Bard is also ashamed (2: p. 18, E52) by his own song after he describes this rape, although the cause of the shame is not explicitly stated. Gompf proposes that the Bard is 'ashamed of a reality in which sometimes violence is needed to expand senses' (2013: p. 79), and that even if this violence is unsanctioned it has a positive outcome. The portrayal of violence and of sexual violence in particular in Moore's *Neonomicon* is very close to this, as we start also with a female figure who struggles with some form of mental constriction (feelings of worthlessness in the case of Merrill), who then undergoes traumatic sexual violence (which is not in itself endorsed by the narrative) that ends up resulting in an expansion. In both, sexual body horror and monstrosity are used to represent the terrible cost of any radical social transformation.

In Urizen, after the fallen Zoa of reason creates a fallen universe in his search for eternal life, he is separated from Los, who becomes also divided. This is how Pity, later named Enitharmon,

comes to life to endure a fate similar to that of the Nameless Shadowy Female:

8. The globe of life blood trembled  
Branching out into roots;  
Fib'rous, writhing upon the winds;  
Fibres of blood, milk and tears;  
In pangs, eternity on eternity.  
At length in tears & cries imbodied  
A female form trembling and pale  
Waves before his deathly face

9. All Eternity shudder'd at sight  
Of the first female now separate  
Pale as a cloud of snow  
Waving before the face of Los

10. Wonder, awe, fear, astonishment,  
Petrify the eternal myriads;  
At the first female form now separate  
(BU 18:1–15, E78).

Her first apparition marks her difference from male Los as a source of horror, while traits that underscore physicality and anatomisation are given relief, such as 'blood, milk and tears'; her trembling and paleness are insisted upon, associating more frailty to the female body. The first corresponding image on plate 17 shows Los creating Pity. Pity shies away from Los's sexual approaches, which the poetic voice attributes to a 'perverse and cruel delight' (19: p. 12, E79) that characterises other female figures of hypocrite modesty and sexual repression in Blake. Yet Los pursues her despite her refusal, which raises the question whether she is raped by Los:

He embrac'd her, she wept, she refus'd  
In perverse and cruel delight  
She fled from his arms, yet he follow'd  
(19:11–13, E79)

This union issues in a monstrous childbirth that takes place, like the separation between Los and Urizen, among excruciating pains and psychological trauma (see illumination on plate 19). The separation of the sexes is also another reason to fear, even for the Eternals:

2. Eternity shudder'd when they saw,  
Man begetting his likeness,  
On his own divided image.  
(BU 19:14–16, E79)

Not only human anatomy but also the anatomy of reality are the source of horror both in Blake's more pessimistic works and Moore's re-elaborations of Lovecraft. Lucy Cogan analyses Urizen as a scientist who '... by dividing and defining the material universe is also slicing into it, tearing and mutilating the fabric of existence.' (2018: 134). Science, then, appears as a process of mutilation that turns living bodies into horrible bodies of knowledge: 'While that mutilation itself is morally distressing, so too is the 'body' of knowledge composed from the dissected data' (Bundock and Effinger, 2018: p. 22). This idea connects with Providence, where terror comes from the bewilderment of seeing the layers of reality peeling off one after the other, destroyed by extra-cosmic apparitions. The *Kitab* (or *Al-Kitab Al-Hikmah Al-Najmiyya*, 'The Book of the Wisdom of the Stars'), Moore's revamped version of Lovecraft's *Necronomicon*, is also a terrible body of knowledge that dissects and reveals these hidden layers of reality. The anatomy of reality is revealed as grotesque and

frightful. This body of knowledge, like Blake's Bible of Hell, corrodes apparent surfaces away.

Both in Blake's America and Urizen, and Moore's Neonomicon and Providence, the realities beyond conventional perception are encoded through imagery of the monstrous. In Blake, the corresponding narrative event is Orc's birth 'Writhing in pangs of abhorred birth' (Am 9:17, E54), as characterised by the Angel of Albion:

Ah terrible birth! a young one bursting! where is the weeping mouth,  
And where the mother's milk? Instead, those ever-hissing jaws  
And parched lips drop with fresh gore...  
(Am 9:22–24, E54)

The Angel of Albion stresses Orc's monstrosity by alluding to a lack of human (or even mammal) traits ('weeping mouth', 'mother's milk'), to his snake-like traits (the 'hissing' jaws) and (vampiric?) blood-thirst—his lips drop with gore. This birth, indebted to Milton's descriptions of Satan, Sin and Death in *Paradise Lost*, is highlighted as horrific and painful, representing the violence of the French and American revolutions. In America, Orc embodies American rebellion infecting also Great Britain, where the Gordon Riots had been a symptom of discontent towards the British war against American insurrection (Erdman, 1991: loc. 340–353). Blake expressed both admiration and hope for an independent America, but also concern for the fear, carnage and death it cost (Erdman, 1991: locs. 313; 354; 478). Erdman argues Orc became later a personification of Jacobin rebellion (1991: loc. 4928). In Moore, this passage finds a parallel in the final scene of Providence, where Merrill gives birth to Cthulhu, portrayed at the same time as a strange redeemer and as the harbinger of the collapse of reality. In Urizen, Orc's birth is described also as monstrous and shocking:

5. All day the worm lay on her bosom  
All night within her womb  
The worm lay till it grew to a serpent  
With dolorous hissings & poisons  
Round Enitharmons loins folding,

6. Coild within Enitharmons womb  
The serpent grew casting its scales,  
With sharp pangs the hissings began  
To change to a grating cry,  
Many sorrows and dismal throes,  
Many forms of fish, bird & beast,  
Brought forth an Infant form  
Where was a worm before.  
(19:24–36, E79)

Like Cthulhu, Orc is described in animalistic or even parasitic terms ('worm', 'serpent') as alien to the body gestating it, a suggestion increased by the mention of pain ('dolorous', 'pangs') and poison, until he acquires a definitive although unstable human form. Orc's growth process, inspired by contemporary but not yet well-known eighteenth-century scientific discoveries, is described through phylogenetic terms as going through stages that resemble less developed forms of life (see Asma, 2009: p. 155), which adds an effect of estrangement to the process of gestation. These passages exemplify a particular idea of revelation defined by Jason Whittaker in 'Dark Angels: Blake, Milton and Lovecraft in Ridley Scott's Prometheus': 'Revelation is always apocalyptic: the universe will resist and even destroy every attempt to reduce it to the sum of human knowledge, a process, which also unveils the strange or weird nature of our experiences and perceptions' (2018: p. 112). In Neonomicon and Providence, the birth of

Cthulhu, like the birth of Orc, is the prelude to a new age that will put an end to the deceit of the fallen world. In issue 4 of Neonomicon, Brears says to a former FBI agent:

... look at this species. We are pretty much vermin. Never mind. He'll sort that out, once he arrives .... The strange aeons start from between my thighs. And for everything else, for all this other bullshit... it's the end. He's beneath the waters now, but soon, in only a few months, he will come forth. And until then he sleeps. And dreams.  
(Moore and Burrows, 2011: 4.24–25)

Merril's discourse reflects an apocalyptic scenario where the 'bullshit' of the fallen world will be wiped out by a cosmic power that will come out of herself. In Urizen, Urizen and Los's transformations suggest degeneration and the world that emerges from this separation and fall is sterile and lifeless due to Urizen's mistake:

5. Ages on ages rolled over them  
Cut off from life & light frozen  
Into horrible forms of deformity  
Los suffer'd his fires to decay  
Then he look'd back with anxious desire  
But the space undivided by existence  
Struck horror into his soul.  
(13:41–47, E77)

It is in this way that Urizen becomes 'deadly black' (BU 13:50, E77) and a 'death-image' (BU 15:2, E78). He has created an infinite solid universe, without fluctuation, but therefore opaque. As they are now divided from eternity and its light, Los's fires decay, which implies that together with the material world he also becomes more opaque. Although not in a monstrous way (at least in this book), Los acquires a darker, fallen form. Similarly, in the Lovecraftian universe of Neonomicon and Providence, the indifferent vastness (and arbitrariness) of the universe is also perceived with horror by the characters. They live in a cosmos where human life is insignificant before the gods and creatures that live outside normal human perception of time and space. Robert Black specifically is continuously depicted as unaware of the whole implications of what is happening around him despite the available clues (e.g., that Doctor Alvarez is actually a talking corpse). Conspiring groups, preternatural beings and dark forces are more in control of his life than himself.

In the same way that some wariness of the dangers of revolution can be discerned in Blake's America, Neonomicon and Providence create expectations of a violent but redeeming apocalypse from a world of repression to a world liberated from it. However, the development of the narratives reveal an outcome that proves even more disturbing than Blake's plates, as humanity passes from repression to a world where meaning is completely absent, and in which most of the protagonists fail to survive psychologically. The idea of vision in this work, just as in Blake's, has consequences that can be as disquieting, as they are potentially redeeming.

## Conclusions

In these examples from Blake's and Moore's visual and verbal narratives, monsters can represent both diabolic and satanic evil. In a diabolic sense, they embody imagination, vision, socially unacceptable forms of sexuality and revolutionary energies. Their monstrous form is produced by the limitations of a satanic outlook. Satanic monsters stand for authoritarian violence, the moral law (under the specific figure of the *kategoros*), the separation between object and subject and excessive rationalism.

These monsters are dynamic figures that can metamorphose from diabolic to satanic meanings, as happens in Blake's representations of snakes and their association with Orc (Hobson, 1998: pp. 17–18), or Moore's representations of demons as personifications of passions. There are also changes from inhuman to human forms like the aforementioned demon Asmodeus in Moore or Blake's vision of Hell as the sea of Leviathan transforming into a placid river bank.

These changes contribute to the expression of the authors' similar perspectival approach to reality. This attitude is born from their common interest in criticising what they considered erroneous applications of Enlightenment rational thought, such as its rejection of myth, even when this can be liberating and empowering. Against it, they give imagination a central role in perception and knowledge. These are the main preoccupations that determine the affinity between their attitudes and Moore's interest in Romanticism, the Gothic and specifically Blakean ideas and symbols.

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## Notes

- In this article, the term 'grotesque' will refer in general to an aesthetics of the 'fantastical, hideous, ludicrous, bizarre, distorted, incongruent and unnatural' (Hurley, 2007: p. 138). Most prominently in Blake and in Moore we will find imagery that portrays the grotesque in its original sense as a depiction characterised by a lack of clear limits between one figure and another that represent things or creatures of different classes 'in a continuous state of flux and becoming, almost as if 'giving birth to each other' (Hurley, 2007: p. 139). In Blake, this is often an attempt to show the effects of an absence of clear imaginative vision that reduces nature and matter to a soulless chaotic sludge. In Moore, this type of grotesque shows less clear unity of meaning, ranging from carnivalesque devils to his interpretation of Lovecraftian monsters as manifestations of unknown psychic regions of humanity. Blakean grotesque can also be read as carnivalesque—whether it's the openness of the Divine Humanity, the body of Jesus, or other positive giant forms. In some cases, there will be references to a specifically Bakhtinian sense of the grotesque as degradation: 'The lowering of all that is 'high, spiritual, ideal, abstract' to 'the material level' (Bakhtin cited in Hurley, p. 138); in other words to presentations of the human body as thing, often carrying comic implications.
- In this spoken piece about Blake's life and afterlife, the running theme of the carnivalesque, grotesque and abject qualities associated with physical life end up, in the apocalyptic ending, inextricably linked to the fictional world and the spiritual imagination. Reality itself becomes freakish by virtue of Blake's imagination and works, including London's trains (identified with Blake's Behemoth) and including Blake himself, whose ghost scares his own child self, an encounter that reinterprets the incident Blake related of seeing God through a window in his childhood.
- This term, taken from Raymond Williams, refers to constructions and attitudes transmitted through discourses in process that authors are immersed in but also contribute to themselves (see Williams, 1977: pp. 133–134).
- There is no direct evidence of Yeats's readings of Blake having inspired Huxley, although their shared interest in mysticism, theosophy, and esotericism would make such a line of influence unsurprising.
- Kripal primarily deals with American counterculture, which had an enormous impact on British counterculture of the same decades. Moreover, American counterculture was already deeply infused with Blakean ideas and symbols (Kripal, 2007: p. 101). See also Sanders, 2018.
- See, for instance, Barbauld's Address to the Opposers of the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Act (1790). In this text, she characterises France as a nation liberated from the Gothic imprisonment in the dungeons of ecclesiastical and aristocratic power: 'Her dungeons indeed exist no longer, the iron doors are forced, the massy walls are thrown down; and the liberated spectres, trembling between joy and horror may now blazon the infernal secrets of their prison house. Her cloistered monks no longer exist, nor does the soft heart of sensibility beat behind the grate of a convent (...)' (Barbauld, 1790: p. 36). The language employed in Blake's *The French Revolution* (1791) is patently similar. She also characterises prejudice against France as an 'empire of gigantic shadows' (Barbauld, 1790: p. 37).
- From here on I will follow the usual format for Blake illuminated books: plate number then line(s) (except in Marriage, where there are not line numbers), plus E and page number—e.g., (3:2–3, E123). See 'Supplementary Information' for a key to title abbreviations.
- References to From Hell will include chapter number followed by page number, given that each chapter starts page numbering a new in the collected edition.
- Please note Promethea has no page numbers originally, so the numbers here displayed have been manually counted. To make up for possible mistakes and facilitate following the references, chapter numbers are included before page, the same as in From Hell.
- Moore often plays, like Blake, with the coexistence or superimposition of different realities, a mythical and an ordinary one. It is very tempting to see here as well inspiration in Blake's mythicisation of the urban space of London, which Moore practised in From Hell, but in Promethea New York is also dubbed mythically as 'The Radiant Heavenly City' (as in the title of Moore et al., 2000: p. 1), identifying it with an eternal Jerusalem. In his last novel, *Jerusalem*, Moore mythologises his hometown Northampton, especially the Boroughs area, by bestowing it of an eternal dimension called Mansoul, the same as Blake established Golgonooza as the city of art built by Los in London.

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### Competing interests

The author declares no competing interests.

### Additional information

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