

Othering Voices and the Voice of the Other: The Depiction of Joseph Merrick in From Hell

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Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell's *From Hell* (1989-1996) is a partly realistic, partly fantastic horror comic about the notorious, unsolved Jack-the-Ripper case that happened in London in 1888. Despite the immediate physical violence of the murder and mutilation of several prostitutes from the London East End, the comic also introduces a metalevel to the plot that reveals larger formations of violence: the horrors of reducing human bodies to signs, of the insignificance of individuals' voices in the process of (mis-)reading and interpreting their bodies, and the excluding and de-subjectifying mechanisms affecting those with non-hegemonic bodies. While the main plot follows the murderer and his victims, the comic also contains many sub-plots in which (often historical) side characters are used to support this larger narrative in a condensed form. One of them is Joseph Merrick, also known as the 'Elephant Man', who suffered from a physical condition that caused severe deformities of his body.

In examining Merrick's appearance in *From Hell*, I will pursue a twofold approach: First, I will show how *From Hell* makes use of the medium-specific possibilities of comics in depicting Merrick's disability (in particular his speech impediment). This is done in a way that both clarifies his discursively underprivileged position within the plot, while at the same time turning him into a character with heightened subjectivity and power on a symbolic level: a character who can be read as a threat to the Ripper and who can even reach beyond the borders of the fictional story by disrupting the reading flow. Next, I will focus on the critical depiction of the normalising and authoritative force of media. The comic places Merrick and his 'deviant' body at the intersection of various discursive traditions and the respective narratives enforced by them, ranging from freak show exhibit to medical oddity. He becomes an echo of previous processes of mediation.

Kurzbiographie

Natalie Veith hat Anglistik und Germanistik an der Goethe Universität Frankfurt und der Cardiff University studiert. Ihren Magistra Artium erlangte sie 2013 mit einer Abschlussarbeit zum Thema *Distorted Voices: Counter-Narratives in the Works of Alan Moore*. Seit 2014 ist sie Mitglied der ComFor. Aktuell ist sie wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiterin der Goethe Universität Frankfurt und arbeitet im Rahmen eines DFG-Forschungsprojekts an ihrer Doktorarbeit zum Thema *Victorian*.