

## The Fires of Promethean Meta-Reception in the Comics of Alan Moore

Alan Moore, a leading innovator in the graphic novel genre, draws heavily on the Prometheus myth in his *Promethea* series (1999–2005). An audacious mix of Wonder Woman, Dante's *Paradiso*, and Victorian-era writings on the Hermetic Qabalah, the work is held together through a plot based on Prometheus' ascent to the heavens and his bequeathal of fire to mortals. For Moore, fire represents human imagination, and Prometheus is the liminal character able to traverse the divide between the heavenly and the earthly realms, the imagined and the material. The titular character Promethea must bring about the end of Enlightenment materialism by reuniting all humanity with the creative potential of the imagination. Moore draws on the Prometheus tradition from poets as various as Aeschylus and Cixous to demonstrate this. While McAuley (2018) explores Promethean themes in the work, he does not delve into the detail of Moore's allusions, and other critics, such as Means-Shannon (2010) and McGillis (2012), have no more than touched upon the title's mythical allusion, ignoring the others replete throughout the work. This paper is a closer examination in how the Prometheus myth is at work both in the microcosm and macrocosm of the story.

But what is perhaps most interesting about Moore's work is its use of meta-reception: his comic is a story about how stories move through time and continue to interact with their predecessors. Vital to the plot is Promethea's interaction with her own *Rezeptiongeschichte*; she is a living story who can incarnate, and while her mortal hosts from various centuries die, each incarnation lives on in the Immaterialia (Moore's Idea Space or collective imagination). Thus previously-imagined versions of Promethea mentor the current Promethea, Sophie Bangs, representing the way new story adaptations interact with their source material. Moore even

invents specific antecedents to his comic, going so far as to write an imagined 2-page *Rezeptiongeschichte* in academic prose as a forward. While other scholars such as Means-Shannon have noted this plurality, none have viewed it through the lens of Jaus's reception theory. Each of these Prometheas emphasizes a different aspect of the Prometheus myth, and Sophie must choose how she will play out the story in her own incarnation. While these different versions of the Prometheus myth generally cooperate throughout the series, Moore also portrays the consequences of competing narratives, where two incarnate versions fight with disastrous results paralleling the events of 9/11, as noted but not explored in Curtis (2016; p. 172). In this way Moore rejects post-modern nihilism and the idea that all narratives are of equal value, but supports the benefits of coexisting narrative pluralities. In the end, Moore himself becomes Promethea, and the comic series, which imparts knowledge of the Hermetic Qabalah, is the fire designed to unlock the reader's imaginative potential.

#### Bibliography

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