

The Knight is Darkest Before the Dawn: Batman, the United States and Post-9/11 Gothic

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CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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CONTENTS

Abstract		xi
Introduction	‘A Dark Knight’	13
Chapter 1	‘I Shall Become a Bat’: The Beginning of Batman	23
Chapter 2	A Modern American Empire: Imperialism and the Post-9/11 United States	60
Chapter 3	Narrativising Fear: The Gothic Genre	99
Chapter 4	Batman and the Gothic: Genre, Lens, Articulation	133
Chapter 5	Translating Trauma and Triumph: The Chronotope and Law of Post-9/11 Batman	169
Chapter 6	Batman’s Empire: Imperialism, Gothic Articulation and Post-9/11 Politics in <i>Batman Incorporated</i>	200
Chapter 7	Coming to Terms with Fear: The Post-9/11 Gothic Genre	232
Conclusion	‘Why Do We Fall?’	267

Appendix	‘The Hero We Need, Not the One We Deserve’: Vigilantism and the State of Exception in <i>Batman Incorporated</i> (Reproduced from <i>Graphic Justice: Intersections of Comics and Law</i>)	277
Reference List		301

List of Illustrations

Chapter 1:

1.1 – Clayface	29
1.2 – Man-Bat	29
1.3 – Two-Face	31
1.4 – [Left] The Joker’s first appearance, [Right] Heath Ledger’s Portrayal of the Joker	32
1.5 – [Left] Batman as portrayed by Adam West in the 1960s, [Right] Batman as he appears in <i>The Dark Knight Returns</i>	34
1.6 – Media representations of Batman: [Top] From <i>Batman: The Animated Series</i> , [Middle] from <i>Batman: Gotham Knight</i> , [Bottom] from <i>Batman: Arkham Knight</i>	35
1.7 – [Left] Batman, Robin and Batgirl, [Right] Batman’s villains, all from the 1960s TV series	41
1.8 – The Penguin, as portrayed by Danny DeVito in <i>Batman Returns</i>	53
1.9 – [Lower panels] The destruction of Wayne Tower	55

Chapter 2:

2.1 – Ferguson’s typology of empire	78
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Chapter 3:

3.1 – [Left] James Buchanan Barnes, [Right] The Winter Soldier	113
3.2 – [Left] Cthulhu, [Right] The Winter Soldier	115

Chapter 4:

- 4.1 – Superman intercepts the Russian warhead 136
- 4.2 – Steve Rogers at Ground Zero 139
- 4.3 – [Left] Bane in the comic books, [Right] Bane in *The Dark Knight Rises* 142

Chapter 5:

- 5.1 – Notable Superhero Emblems [From Left to Right]: Batman in black, Batman in black and yellow, Superman, Green Lantern, Daredevil, Captain America 181

Chapter 6:

- 6.1 – Batman Incorporated agents using violent tactics against Leviathan in (from left to right) South Africa, France, Argentina, Hong Kong, Haiti, Japan, Australia and the United States 224

Chapter 7:

- 7.1 – Iron Patriot 245

Abstract

My thesis demonstrates how Batman texts produced after 9/11 map the social, cultural and political turmoil of the post 9/11 era, including the political and ethical ambiguity of many official United States responses to the crisis. In this way it demonstrates the use of this popular culture figure and the narratives in which he is embedded to articulate contemporary fears about the aftermath of the attacks, including the concerns about both the possibility of increased terrorist activity in the U.S. and the unease about the strategies used by authorities in the United States to address this social crisis in confidence, including international military incursion by U.S. troops and enhanced surveillance measures.

Batman is also explored as an example of the Gothic genre, utilising generic conventions such as the ambiguous hero/villain of Gothic narrative (each the opposite face of the other), the liminal nature of the Gothic *mise-en-scene*, and the use of the irrational. In each case I demonstrate the value of these conventions in articulating the fears generated by the 9/11 attack and its aftermath, with a particular focus on how the use of these Gothic strategies enables a more nuanced assessment of the situation than the reductive good/evil, us/them narrative familiar from popular media.

The thesis also proposes that a ‘post 9/11 Gothic (sub)genre’ has developed that, like the *Batman* texts, enables the presentation of a reflection on the post 9/11 environment, which is more complex than many popular culture and tabloid journalism narratives.

