The Knight is Darkest Before the Dawn:

Batman, the United States and

Post-9/11 Gothic

Christopher Comerford

Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

University of Technology, Sydney

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.

Signature of Student:

Date:

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CONTENTS

<div align="center">

List of Illustrations

</div>

Chapter 4:

Chapter 5:

Chapter 6:

Chapter 7:

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.

Introduction: 'A Dark Knight'

'I am a Batman fan and an academic. I do not see the two as distinct.'

– Will Brooker, *Hunting the Dark Knight: Twenty-First Century Batman*,

p. 2

'This fascinating new hero was horned like the Devil and most at home in darkness; a terrifying, demonic presence who worked on the side of the angels. Whatever the reasons, these carefully calculated tensions and contradictions ensured Batman's cyclically renewed popularity, while Superman's appeal would eventually blur into something tackier as his fierce humanism became reconfigured as nostalgic self-delusion. Superman's brand of essentially optimistic problem solving found its cynical counterpart in Batman's obsessive, impossible quest to punch crime into extinction, one bastard at a time.'

– Grant Morrison, *Supergods: Our World in the Age of the Superhero*, p.

26

In the introduction to *Capitalist Superheroes* (2012), his compelling analysis of superheroes and neoliberal capitalism, Dan Hassler-Forest discusses a 2002 cover of the magazine *Der Spiegel*, a German weekly news publication. This cover depicts senior members of the George W. Bush administration – namely President Bush himself, Vice

President Dick Cheney, Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, and Secretaries of State General Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice – with their faces superimposed on the bodies of fictional, violent action heroes, including Rambo, Mad Max, Conan the Barbarian and Batman. The cover bears the title 'DIE BUSH KRIEGER' – 'the Bush warriors' in German – and portrays the Bush administration, then attempting to curry favour with Europe for the United States' plans to invade Iraq, as a collective of bloodthirsty slaughterers. Rather than finding the crass portrayal an insult, the Bush administration responded enthusiastically to *Der Spiegel*'s satire, requesting poster-sized duplicates of the cover for use in the White House. Hassler-Forest notes the inherent, ironic oddity of Bush's response: 'Apparently the notion that there was anything offensive about the depiction of American heads of state as bloodthirsty action movie icons and vindictive superheroes was completely alien to the Bush administration' (2012, p. 1).

Crude though it was, the *Der Spiegel* cover offered a glimpse into an area of the discourse surrounding the post-9/11 world. Attempting to cultivate an image as the saviours of the world, their seemingly-just campaign against al-Qaeda in Afghanistan validated by a claim of seeking security for the living and retribution for the dead, the United States faced criticism of how it composed itself in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. By the close of the decade, the nation's government had been responsible for two major military incursions – Afghanistan in 2001, and Iraq two years later in 2003 – and countless operations elsewhere in the Middle East. While the Bush administration – and, to a lesser extent, the Obama administration – presented its global and domestic agendas as a campaign of protection and liberation from tyranny,

critics of the War on Terror saw them as conquerors intent on spreading a new American empire across the world.

This claim of empire triggered discourse surrounding the ethical and moral ambiguity of America's post-9/11 domestic and international affairs, discourse which manifested in several ways; two in particular were the scholarly and the creative approaches. The first, the scholarly approach, argued both the affirmative and negative aspects of empire in a historical and post-9/11 context. Notably, critics such as Noam Chomsky (2003) and Chalmers Johnson (2004) argued against the United States' contemporary hegemonic power, challenging the Bush administration's notions of guardianship and security. Chomsky cited the United States government's willingness to exploit the trauma of 9/11 and the unstable geopolitical landscape as a means for furthering their own agendas. Concurrently, challenging how the government conducted itself post-9/11 was prohibited; in light of increasing domestic security policies and further military action in the Middle East, Chomsky argued that the government '[declared] that it is unpatriotic and disruptive to question the workings of authority – but patriotic to institute harsh and regressive policies that … subordinate a frightened population to increased state control' (2003, p. 217).

It is this forbidden question of the workings of authority that forms the second manifestation of post-9/11 discourse: the creative approach. Fictional texts in a range of media and genres have confronted the ethical and moral ambiguity of the post-9/11 United States' government and the actions it has taken, generating spaces where issues can be resolved, argued or better understood. Using fiction to articulate and to interpret the real world is nothing new, yet in post-9/11 discourse there is a profound power in

the manner fiction conveys meaning when it concerns this discourse. In essence, post-9/11 fiction has the capacity to inform or deform the complexity of issues, ranging from large-scale domestic security policies – notably mass surveillance and border protection – and foreign affairs – predominantly those associated with campaigns in the Middle East – to smaller, more personal concerns and anxieties, such as the audience's responses to the trauma and shock of the 9/11 attacks.

Much of post-9/11 fiction articulates support for the United States' controversial actions in the wake of the attacks, diluting complexity and simplifying the conflict of the War on Terror into a 'confrontation between modern and primitive' (Höglund 2014, p. 17), consisting of the heroic American empire and the apparently subaltern threat of conflated Middle Eastern terrorism. Concurrently, a mode of writing has emerged that takes an inverse approach; rather than supporting United States imperialism, these texts explore the complexity of the post-9/11 world and, in key instances, openly confront assumptions of American superiority and the government's self-claimed just cause of the War on Terror. This mode seeks to discuss the more nuanced facets of the conflict that cannot be purely synthesised into 'good' and 'evil' binaries.

The gothic genre of writing aids in exploring this nuance. Jerrold E. Hogle makes a case that the gothic genre is one of the more thoughtful and comprehensive methods of articulating this trauma:

> We need fictions to better understand the *meaning* for us of anything we
> choose to represent from the world we have observed, even if that
> meaning turns out to be traumatic contradictions in our own minds and

cultures, and I find that the best of the post-9/11 uses of Gothic fiction
achieve that purpose for attentive readers by using the conflicted un-
naturalness basic to the Gothic itself to help us concurrently grasp and
conceal how profoundly conflicted we are about the most immediate and
pervasive cultural "woundings" of our western world as it has come to be.
(2013, p. 75, emphasis added by original author)

The central aim of this thesis is to define a new fictional (sub)genre that I term *post-9/11 gothic*. Utilising key Batman texts as a focused case study for this genre, I seek to call attention to the prevalence, in many modern popular culture texts, of a more nuanced discussion surrounding how the post-9/11 world is articulated and understood. This discussion eschews the strict binaries of what Johan Höglund (2014) terms the *American imperial gothic* mode of writing, the inverse of post-9/11 gothic and a genre that supports the formation of American empire and its dubious post-9/11 practices.

I have chosen Batman as a post-9/11 gothic case study because, arguably, both the character and the franchise provide excellent examples of recent fiction that comprehensively engages with the moral complexity of the post-9/11 world. The Batman franchise has a seventy-six year history of reflecting the time and place in which its texts are created; the character's potency in acting as a contemporary mirror of social, cultural and political issues, seen through the exaggerated lens of the superhero genre, cannot be understated. Though my research focuses on defining the post-9/11 gothic genre of writing through Batman, I also draw attention to how the genre highlights Batman's capacity to communicate real ideas through pop culture, sharpening the character's cultural relevance in the post-9/11 world.

I do not claim that all Batman texts published in the post-9/11 period are themselves relevant to the post-9/11 discourses I will be interrogating; rather, that this select range of texts best intersect with and interpret these discourses. As I will show in Chapter 7, these specific texts fulfil the criteria of the post-9/11 gothic (sub)genre that I will define, and are thus the most useful of post-9/11 Batman texts to contextualise this genre.

This thesis is divided into two sections. The first section, comprised of Chapters 1 to 3, establishes the three central areas of research – Batman, post-9/11 American imperialism, and the gothic genre, respectively – which will be analysed in the second section, comprised of Chapters 4 to 7.

Chapter 1 provides a genealogy of Batman, both as a character and a popular culture franchise. I focus on key moments in Batman's publication history, beginning with the character's conception in 1939 as an antithesis to the first superhero, Superman, published the year prior in 1938. Following this, I map several ways that the character has evolved over seventy-six years through media including comic books, novels, television shows, video games and major motion pictures. The chapter highlights how Batman is both distinct and similar to the character's superhero contemporaries, providing insight as to how Batman is a useful lens through which to articulate issues of post-9/11 American life.

Chapter 2 chronicles the social, cultural and political climate of the post-9/11 United States, beginning with a recapitulation of the events of September 11, 2001, and both the immediate and long-term aftermaths. Concurrently referring to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's formative study *Empire* (2001), I cite a number of important scholars

and theorists – including Chomsky (2003), Johnson (2004), Niall Ferguson (2004), Michael Parenti (2011), Julian Go (2011) and Höglund (2014) – who have commented extensively on American imperial formation, both historically and in the context of post-9/11. I also highlight how Giorgio Agamben's theoretical concept of the *state of exception*, an extrajuridical suspension of law that is outlined in Agamben's book of the same name (2005), relates to the post-9/11 United States and its imperial policies regarding security and international interventionism.

Chapter 3 details the facets of the gothic genre in both a historical and contemporary context. I document a brief history of the genre and its genesis in Horace Walpole's original gothic novel, *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), before outlining the gothic genre's capacity to articulate fear, terror and trauma across various periods; I cite this aspect of the genre as useful in discussing the post-9/11 world through Batman. I also analyse Michel Foucault's notion of *heterotopia* (1984), a conceptual no-space that provides an area which reflects the world but is not reality; similar to utopia, the heterotopia is a conceptualised representation of real world aspects which aids the gothic's contemporary relevance.

Chapter 4 merges the research areas of Batman, post-9/11 United States imperialism and the gothic genre, beginning an outline of the post-9/11 gothic (sub)genre. The chapter predominantly focuses on Christopher Nolan's Batman film *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012) as an intersection of all three research areas, demonstrating how Batman texts can be used to discursively analyse the formation of contemporary American empire. The chapter examines the differences between genre and mode as tools used to analyse this formation. The chapter also deploys Jacques Derrida's influential paper *The*

Law of Genre (1980) and its assertion that texts are able to inhabit, or 'participate', in multiple genres simultaneously. I use Derrida's paper not only to indicate how Batman texts are multigeneric, but also to show how texts participating in post-9/11 gothic do not do so exclusively.

Chapter 5 explores notions of representation of law and translation of trauma in post-9/11 gothic. This is accomplished through Mikhail Bakhtin's work (1981) on the literary chronotope, a tool of identification for a text that situates it within a specific spatial and temporal context. I argue that, in addition to any meaning one can derive from post-9/11 texts, there is a degree of narrative identity that is imprinted upon the text by the time and place in which it was created. I follow this with an analysis of Jason Bainbridge's (2007) notions regarding how superhero texts represent 'postmodern' forms of law, coupled with Hogle's (2014) assertions regarding the gothic and its articulation of trauma. These latter two points serve to identify intrinsic facets of post-9/11 superhero texts and gothic narratives, respectively, and how they both contribute to the formation of the *post-9/11 gothic chronotope*.

Chapter 6 analyses Höglund's work on the American imperial gothic (2014) in greater detail. I identify key facets of Höglund's study and how they relate to post-9/11 gothic through both congruence and contrast, underlining post-9/11 gothic's function as an inverse of the practices in texts which Höglund identifies as being American imperial gothic. As I demonstrate, Batman texts ably negotiate complex notions of security, morality and ethics in the Bush administration's War on Terror in the Middle East; my analysis of Bush and Batman also acts as a companion to my previously published work

regarding Batman, the Obama administration and the death of Osama bin Laden (see Comerford 2015), included in this thesis as an Appendix (p. 273)

Chapter 7 incorporates ideas from the previous chapters and provides a comprehensive outline of the post-9/11 gothic genre. I provide examples of the genre, not only in Batman texts but those of other franchises, exemplifying the genre's practice in mapping and elaborating on the moral and political complexity of the post-9/11 world. I contrast post-9/11 gothic speculative texts such as *Star Trek Into Darkness* (2013) and *Battlestar Galactica* (2003-2009) to more direct, realist post-9/11 fiction including *24* (2001-2014) and *Homeland* (2011-2015) which align with Höglund's American imperial gothic; I use the former texts to emphasise the capacity of post-9/11 gothic to provide a more nuanced representation and interpretation of the post-9/11 world.

Post-9/11 gothic is, I argue, a genre that provides audiences with a medium through which to negotiate the post-9/11 world we live in. The scholarly analysis of multifaceted sociocultural issues and political concerns regarding security, ethics and morality are vital, but there is a unique power in fiction's capacity to enable its audience to engage in these complex discourses that cannot simply be reduced to 'good' and 'evil'. I argue that Batman is a figure ideally placed to aid in that engagement, precisely because he is a character who is able to balance good and evil and embody elements that are more ambiguous, more ambivalent, and more nuanced. Where President Bush sought to personify himself as the hero of post-9/11, engaging in a righteous campaign of retributive justice against those who attacked the United States, Batman acknowledges that he is no such figure, asserting such at the conclusion of Nolan's film *The Dark Knight*: 'I'm not a hero … I'm whatever Gotham needs me to be' (2008). The first

chapter begins by identifying Batman and the variety of representations in which the character can manifest.

Chapter 1 – 'I Shall Become a Bat': The Beginning of Batman

'Who is the Batman? Imagine him. Perhaps you see Adam West in a soft grey costume… Frank Miller's hulking, middle-aged vigilante… George Clooney posing awkwardly in a sculpted plastic suit… an armour-encased, snarling Christian Bale… the lantern-jawed hero of the animated series… Or you're simply a lifelong lover of Batman, and he's a combination of some or all of the above.'

– Will Brooker, *Hunting the Dark Knight: Twenty-First Century Batman*,

p. ix

1.1 – Introduction

This chapter introduces the DC Comics character of Batman. Primarily, the chapter establishes the cultural and scholarly context – and practice – of the character and his fictional narratives, including the circumstances of the character's initial creation and publication history. The chapter then outlines how Batman texts articulate real world ideas, representing political, social and cultural notions that are contemporaneously relevant. Drawing from a narrative history spanning over three quarters of a century, Batman texts have a great capacity for featuring real world issues – mostly related to violence, crime, morality and ethics – to critically engage with them in the fictional world. More recently, Batman texts have represented the issues of the post-9/11 world;

as such, the chapter charts a brief timeline of key Batman storylines that have been published following 9/11, which is the period on which my study focuses.

The chapter also distinguishes the potency of Batman texts in representing these notions when compared to other, similar superhero texts. While Batman is not the only superhero character to articulate the fears and anxieties of the post-9/11 world – with Captain America being another notable example – I argue that Batman's complex moral and ethical dimensions, derived in part from the Gothic derivation of the text and its hero, situate the narrative to respond in a nuanced way to the complexities of the post 9/11 socio-political environment.

1.2 – Batman: Who He Is and How He Came to Be

Since 1939, Batman's fictional origin story has remained largely the same across various adaptations[1]. At the age of eight, Bruce Wayne witnessed the shooting death of his parents in the lawless backstreets of Gotham City, at the hands of criminal Joe Chill. In his adult life, Wayne swore a vow in his parents' names to fight for those who had none to stand for them and to bring justice to Gotham. This in turn led to the creation of the Batman persona, a crimefighting symbol intended to bring order to Gotham. Batman operated outside the law in his pursuit of criminals, to the chagrin of Gotham Police Commissioner James Gordon and the law enforcement service intended to protect the city. Initially wearing an outfit consisting of charcoal clothes, thick boots, purple gloves

---

[1] Key narratives that have maintained Batman's initial origin story include the Adam West *Batman* television series (1966-1968), the films *Batman* (1989) and *Batman Begins* (2005), the *Arkham Asylum* video game (2009) and the recently-rebooted comic book series beginning with *The Court of Owls* (Snyder & Capullo 2012).

and a cowl in the style of his eponymous chiropteran influence, Batman was an acrobatic, violent and unyielding presence who fundamentally altered the criminal dynamics of Gotham. Batman would also eventually be a founding member of the Justice League, a superhero team featuring the majority of DC Comics' biggest comic book characters, including Superman and Wonder Woman.

Batman was created in 1939 by Bob Kane and Bill Finger. The character debuted in the *Detective Comics* anthology comic book series, beginning in Issue #27 within a story titled 'The Case of the Chemical Syndicate'. The character's creation was inspired by sources such as the title character of the 1920 film *The Mark of Zorro*, the 1930 silent film *The Bat Whispers* and the 1934 pulp serial character The Bat (Morrison 2011, p. 17). Batman was one of *Detective Comics'* first superheroes; the genesis of the character stemmed from the success of Superman, initially published the year before in 1938's *Action Comics #1* (Siegel & Shuster). Batman was antithetical to everything Superman embodied; where the latter donned bright colours of red and blue, fought in daylight and unambiguously identified as heroic, the former was a dark-clad, brooding nightmare who did battle in the shadows and was concerned with darker, more noir, detective-inspired narratives partially inspired by Sherlock Holmes (Morrison 2011, p. 17). The initial, noir-influenced representation of Batman, a 'hero of the night' according to Grant Morrison, was a counterpoint to the brightness embodied by Superman's 'hero of the day' (2011, p. 16). Batman was also considered within the fictional universe as a mysterious and shadowy figure on the level of a myth or urban legend to be feared and avoided, rather than as the recognisable and public paragon of justice that Superman embodied. As a counterpoint to Superman, who was not afraid to show his face, Batman's cowl obscured his facial features, leaving only his eyes and jaw exposed and

further adding to the nightmarish image used to psychologically intimidate Gotham's criminal element – who are, as Batman himself calls them, 'a superstitious, cowardly lot' (Loeb and Lee 2003, p. 8). This is shown clearly in Tim Burton's *Batman* film (1989), during a scene where two criminals discuss how a third was taken by 'the Bat'. One of the criminals dismisses Batman's existence, saying there 'ain't no Bat', shortly before Batman rises ominously behind and physically assaults them. The same criminal asks Batman 'What are you?', as opposed to 'Who are you?', underlining the criminal's perception of Batman as something to be feared as opposed to someone; mob boss Carmine Falcone echoes the criminal's question in *Batman Begins* (2005) shortly before he is similarly assaulted by Batman**.**

From the beginning, an interesting quality of Batman has been his moral ambiguity. Not only is Batman's vigilantism called into question frequently by the fictional legal authorities of Gotham, but a number of the character's tactics for curtailing crime are questionable at best. This was evidenced when, during his first published adventure (Kane & Finger 1939), Batman tossed a criminal into the vat of acid from which he'd only moments before saved a hostage. Whilst the wounding and killing of criminals quickly vanished from Batman's repertoire of crimefighting techniques at the behest of editorial oversight, following the beginning of the character's self-titled comic book series in 1940 (see Daniels 1999, p. 42, and Cwik 2015), the physical and psychological violence the character regularly inflicts on Gotham's criminals is presented as more harmful than the tactics used by other superheroes. Superman is usually content to capture his archnemesis Lex Luthor and imprison him, however in one memorable episode Batman deals with his own archnemesis the Joker by repeatedly and brutally punching his face, knocking out several teeth and leaving the Joker disfigured before

handing him to Commissioner Gordon (Loeb and Lee, 2003). Much of the character's popularity stems from Batman's self-claimed mission for law in Gotham juxtaposed with the questionable methods of achieving it; Vincent M. Gaine supports this by identifying Batman as a 'liminal' hero, whose popularity partly depends on '[crossing] social thresholds between legality and criminality, justice and oppression' (2010, p. 1). This ambiguity started in *Detective Comics #27* and became one of the character's most enduring hallmarks.

Another prominent distinguishing aspect of Batman is the character's humanity. Batman, when compared to his superhero peers, has consistently been represented as a more grounded, flawed character who eschews much of the supernatural or extra-terrestrial ephemera that influences and creates other superheroes and their narratives[2]. In comparison to Superman's range of superpowers including flight, eye-lasers and superhuman strength, Batman's *modus operandi* for dealing with criminals involves hand-to-hand fighting, a keenly-trained intellect and a variety of gadgets cultivated through Wayne Enterprises and Batman's own creativity. In place of superpowers, Batman fights crime with only his imposing physicality and technical knowledge; as noted Batman academic Travis Langley deftly articulates, '[Batman's] the one who works by night, needs a car to get him into town, and is the most mortal … the one we can most easily believe might inhabit our world' (2012, p. 5).

The lack of superpowers is seen by some critics (see Langley 2012 & Brooker 2012) as aiding audience engagement with the character. Batman remains understandable and

---

[2] There are other 'realistic' superhero fiction characters who do not rely on the supernatural; examples such as Green Arrow and The Punisher come to mind. However, in the case of the former, the character does not have the moral and ethical nuance that Batman possesses, and the latter is more prone to immoral violence, where Batman maintains a (comparatively) more ethical code in terms of his violence.

relatable due to the character being devoid of superpowers, and therefore represented as more realistic with the capacity for emulation. This is highlighted in texts such as E. Paul Zehr's *Becoming Batman* (2008), which provides details on fitness regimens intended to show how, theoretically, one could literally become Batman. The realistic qualities of the character are also sharply emphasised when compared to his enemies, who are mostly exaggerated, irrational and, in some cases, supernatural. As examples of the more extremely irrational foes Batman faces, Clayface is a criminal made of shapeshifting clay who is able to mimic the form of any person (see Figure 1.1), while Man-Bat is a scientist who, after an accident with a serum designed to cure deafness, unwillingly transforms into a creature that is a hybrid of a man and a bat (see Figure 1.2). Villains who are somewhat more understandable include the Calendar Man, a serial killer who is themed around murdering victims on significant days of the year, and Black Mask, a crime lord with a fixation on masks who operates a criminal empire within Gotham.

In comparison to stories involving the Justice League, which traditionally deal with world-ending threats and dangerous superpowered villains, Batman's contemporary narratives usually involve more commonplace issues and obstacles. Smaller-scale stories exclusively featuring Batman explore everyday issues alongside the superhero qualities of the narrative. For example, during Scott Snyder and Greg Capullo's *Death of the Family* (2013), a prolonged assault on Gotham by the Joker leads to Batman rallying his 'Bat-family' of sidekicks, such as Robin, Nightwing and Batgirl, to aid him. The family later discover that the Joker may have infiltrated the Bat-Cave at a prior date and could know their secret identities, an issue compounded by Batman having actively withheld knowledge of that possibility from his sidekicks. Batman's individual relationships with his family members are strained because of his compartmentalisation

of information and unwillingness to trust them, with the eponymous 'death of the family' referring to the deterioration of Batman's familial relations. Another narrative, Peter J. Tomasi and Patrick Gleason's *Requiem for Damian* (2014), centres on Batman's grieving period following the death of his son; while the plot follows Batman seeking outlandish methods of bringing his son back from the dead, including by kidnapping the DC Comics incarnation of Frankenstein's monster to exploit the creature's understanding of the supernatural, the narrative keeps the very real and understandable grief of losing a child as the focus.

Contrasting these narratives concerning small-scale and personal issues, Batman also features in stories dealing with larger public concerns; Snyder and Capullo's *The Court of Owls* (2012) highlights government corruption through several prominent Gotham citizens being part of a clandestine criminal organisation, a notion also explored in Snyder's anthology series *Batman Eternal* (2014). The corruption of government is also explored through Geoff Johns' *Batman: Earth One* (2012), which takes place in an alternate universe where Bruce Wayne's mother and father, the latter a Gotham mayoral candidate, are murdered by the Penguin, who is himself running for mayor and wished to eliminate the competition. Issues of surveillance and domestic terrorism are explored in Snyder and Capullo's *Zero Year* narrative (2014), where the Riddler has occupied Gotham and maintains control of the city through panoptic use of the city's cameras and electronics. Grant Morrison explores terrorism, both domestic and international, in the *Batman Incorporated* series (Morrison *et al.* 2012, Morrison & Burnham 2013, and Morrison & Burnham 2013), which follows Batman's international team of superheroes pursuing an al-Qaeda analogue named Leviathan across the world. Leviathan utilises brainwashing, torture, sleeper agents and suicide bombings to spread terror; Batman and

his Incorporated initiative combat them whilst dealing with the moral and ethical complexity of fighting international extremism.
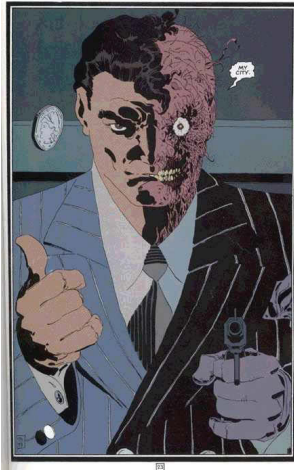
Over the course of three quarters of a century, the Batman comic also constructed a pantheon of supporting characters still ingrained in public consciousness. Villains like the Joker, Two-Face, the Penguin and the Riddler became popular through their initial thematic *modi operandi*, which gave them distinct traits; the Riddler, for example, has a compulsion to leave riddles for Batman to solve and wears clothing utilising a question mark as a motif, whilst Two-Face's crimes are all based around binary options and coin flips, to represent the character's literal dual nature between the scarred and unscarred halves of his body (see Figure 1.3). Later, Batman's villains gained greater popularity as they evolved, having their motivations repurposed to align with contemporary tastes. For example, the Joker's debut in 1940's *Batman #1* (Finger and Kane) presented a verbose, cackling, two-dimensional serial killer as one of Batman and Robin's first villains (see Figure 1.4 Left). A campy, outlandish figure dressed in garish purple with green hair, scarlet lipstick and chalk-white skin, he themed himself around the Joker playing card and killed with a form of venom that left its victims with rictus grins. By contrast, Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight* film in 2008 presented an iteration of the Joker with hideous self-inflicted facial scars (see Figure 1.4 Right) who used suicide bombings and assassination attempts to spread chaos through Gotham, being labelled a terrorist by Gotham's police. This interpretation, played in the film by Heath Ledger, was considered one of the most potent incarnations of the character and aided in making

the Joker Batman's most lethal adversary today. Many of the other characters in Batman's gallery of villains regularly feature in contemporary narratives, their motivations and methods updated to better fit the contemporary era.
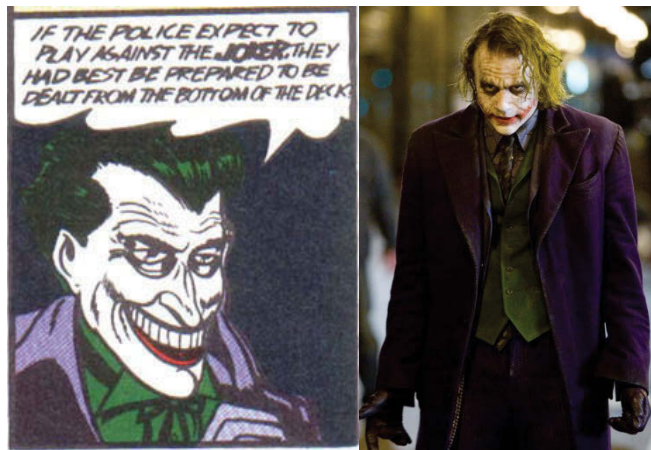
Figure 1.4 – [Left] The Joker's first appearance (taken from Kane & Finger 1940), [Right] Heath

Ledger's portrayal of the Joker (taken from *The Dark Knight* 2008)

Rather than fading from popularity or being forced out of print, the Batman comic book remained popular enough that the self-titled comic saw publication from 1940 all the way through to its seven hundred and thirteenth issue in 2011, before the entire DC Comics line was subsequently rebooted[3]. This number of issues does not include the annuals, spin-offs, sister series and one-shots that have borne the character's name since 1940, nor the frequent appearances and team-ups Batman regularly made in books like *Justice League of America* or *Superman/Batman*. In fact, since the 2011 reboot Batman has prominently featured in or had his name attached to no fewer than fifteen of DC Comics' fifty-two monthly ongoing comic book series at the time of writing.

---

[3] This reboot, coinciding with a comic book event titled *Flashpoint* (Johns & Kubert 2011), was implemented to make it easier for new readers to access the storylines of DC Comics' characters, restarting all their comic books at new Issue #1s.

Further, Batman has been a headline character in two of the three comic books that radically redefined the superhero genre in the late 1980s, both of them seminal in comic book and superhero publication history. The first is *The Dark Knight Returns* (1986), the Frank Miller story arc[4] dealing with an aged and retired Batman returning to active service in a post-apocalyptic Gotham overrun by both terrorism and rampant governmental corruption. The book was, in part, a contemporaneous political commentary on what was seen as the 'ossified power structures' of the reign of United States President Ronald Reagan (Morrison 2011, p. 190), featuring the President himself as a character in the narrative. The second is the one-shot comic[5] *Batman: The Killing Joke*, Alan Moore's 1988 origin story for the Joker that presented the tragic and violent circumstances surrounding the birth of the psychopath; the nightmarish incarnation of the Joker used by Moore and Bolland contrasts with the character's more farcical debut in 1940 (Kane & Finger). These two books, along with Moore's superhero deconstruction *Watchmen* (1988), helped to usher in the so-called 'Dark Age of Comic Books' (Voger 2006), where superhero texts became concerned with representing more serious, mature content that engaged socially and politically with actual issues, fears and anxieties of the time. This was a marked change from the lighter, campier, family-friendly tone of previous decades, represented most graphically by the Batman of the 1960s television series (1966-1968), played by Adam West.

---

[4] An 'arc' refers to a span of comic book issues that combine to tell a single story (see Griffin 1998, p. 75). These issues are usually reprinted together as a 'collection', 'graphic novel' or 'trade paperback' (see Griffin 1998, p. 73).
[5] A one-shot comic refers to a narrative that takes place in a single, self-contained issue, similar to a limited series (see Griffin 1998, p. 73).

Figure 1.5 – [Left] Batman as portrayed by Adam West in the 1960s, [Right] Batman as he appears in *The Dark Knight Returns* (taken from Miller & Janson 1986)

In particular, *The Dark Knight Returns* influenced many subsequent comic books and film adaptations that followed its publication, most notably both Christopher Nolan's Batman film trilogy (2005-2012) and the upcoming film *Batman v. Superman: Dawn of Justice* (2016), which utilises visual design and character motivations from Miller's work. In addition, *The Dark Knight Returns* has also been adapted into its own duology of animated films (2012 and 2013). As well, *The Killing Joke* was one of the books Ledger utilised when creating the backstory and motivation for his role as the Joker in 2008's *The Dark Knight* (Collura 2006), evidencing the continued influence of Moore's original, landmark narrative.

Figure 1.6 – Media representations of Batman: [Top] From *Batman: The Animated Series* (1992-1995), [Middle] From *Batman: Gotham Knight* (2008), [Bottom] From *Batman: Arkham Knight* (2015)

Batman has also been represented in a variety of other media. This includes film, notably Tim Burton's eponymous *Batman* film (1989) and its sequel *Batman Returns* (1992) where Batman was played both times by Michael Keaton, Joel Schumacher's farcical *Batman Forever* (1995) and *Batman and Robin* (1997) which featured Val Kilmer and George Clooney playing Batman, respectively, and the critically successful and contemporised *Dark Knight Trilogy* (2005-2012) directed by Christopher Nolan and

starring Christian Bale as Batman in all three films. The range of adaptations also spans television, in particular the 1960s series starring Adam West (1966-1968) and the Batman voiced by Kevin Conroy in the 1990s animated series (1992-1995, see Figure 1.6 Top). Conroy would also later voice Batman in several animated motion pictures, including *Batman: Gotham Knight* (2008, see Figure 1.6 Middle), an anime tie-in for Nolan's film trilogy, and the *Batman: Arkham* series of video games (2009-2015, see Figure 1.6 Bottom). Batman has also featured in radio plays, including the 50th Anniversary special *Batman: The Lazarus Syndrome* (1989), novels, such as John Shirley's *Batman: Dead White* (2006) and Tracy Hickman's *Wayne of Gotham* (2012), and manga, most notably Jiro Kuwata's series based on the 1960s Adam West television show (2014 & 2015). Batman comic books have been in print for over seventy-five years; in addition, the character has been adapted into eleven live-action films and two live-action television series, while also being the protagonist of over thirty video games. These myriad adaptations argue that the character is not only highly attractive to readers and viewers, but also that it is able to adapt to changing social and cultural contexts.

1.3 – Multiversity: The Many Lives of Batman

As an anthology, cross-media, cross-platform narrative, Batman cannot be seen as the product of one guiding mind or one particular politics. In choosing a set of Batman texts for analysis I looked specifically for those that addressed the events of 9/11 and its aftermath. My interest is in how the Gothic elements of Batman – moral ambiguity, confrontations with and articulations of fear, discerning the rational within the irrational – enable the texts to respond in a particular way to that political event and the socio-

political environment it created. I am also aware that I have not addressed media-specific aspects of the texts; particularly, the specific ways in which Batman (and Gothic as a genre) is constituted (verbally, visually, acoustically, kinesthetically) in film, television, comic books, video games and other media.

However, I believe that my generic analysis is based on the recognition of specific elements or conventions that apply across media and platforms. For example, the ambiguous nature of the Gothic hero, the moral ambiguity of the narrative that cannot be easily resolved as a statement of right and wrong, and the incisive use of rationality to question and dispel the irrational. In doing so, however, I do not doubt that there is a rich vein of analysis still to be mined, which deals with the specificities of each medium and its particular appeal for and address to readers. Here I refer to recent studies of the multiple adaptations of texts such as Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories: Lynette Porter's edited volume, *Sherlock Holmes for the 21st Century: Essays on New Adaptations* (2012) and the essay collection edited by Louisa Ellen Stein and Kristina Busse, *Sherlock* and Transmedia Fandom (2012). Both collections provide a fascinating range of studies that consider specific adaptations of Sherlock Holmes adventures for film – including the recent films starring Robert Downey Jr (2009 and 2011) – and television – particularly the series *Sherlock* (2010-2016) and *Elementary* (2012-2016).

Clearly Batman texts are open to similar analysis, however this would take my thesis in a different direction and would not enable me to pursue the detailed political and historical analysis that accompanied and informed my generic study. I have, therefore, delimited my study by narrative rather than medium, and I believe this has enabled me to explore in depth the way that the Batman narrative responded to the social and

political environment of the early 21st century. This is not to claim that all Batman narratives performed this role, nor that this is the only way to analyse Batman, and I look forward in the future to addressing specific adaptations of the narratives and the nuances of meaning they enable.

Given the plethora of representations Batman has had since 1939 – from edgy vigilante to 60s high camp to stern counter-terrorism crime-fighter – the character has created and addressed a wide variety of audiences. Will Brooker notes the myriad ways in which Batman can be repurposed and represented for a variety of audiences when addressing the character's diverse images in his book, *Hunting the Dark Knight* (2012). In addition to a comprehensive analysis of Batman in terms of the various media forms the character has been adapted into (see Brooker 2012, pp. 44-88), Brooker also opines that Batman manifests in a variety of forms, representative of a range of social and cultural ideas and concerns[6]. Brooker draws on Eileen R. Meehan's analysis of Burton's 1989 *Batman* film to support his argument; according to Brooker, Meehan describes Batman as consisting of a 'deluge of material' that 'creates an intertext into which we fit ourselves, positioning ourselves to construct different readings of the film and positioning the film and its intertext to suit our own particular purposes' (2012, p. x, quoting Meehan 1991, p. 47-48). Meehan's idea is useful for Brooker in two ways; firstly, it provides a broad guide for both of Brooker's Batman books, *Batman Unmasked* (2000) and *Hunting the Dark Knight* (2012), which analyse and chart comprehensive timelines of Batman both since his initial publication and during the post-9/11 era, respectively. Secondly, Meehan's idea aids Brooker in identifying the certain 'hierarchies' forming a 'binary opposition' (2012, p. xii) that various

---

[6] I have provided a comprehensive list of Batman's different manifestations both in the preceding section and epigraph of this chapter.

interpretations of Batman exist within. This binary, Brooker argues, consists largely of the 'good' Batman – being the more serious works of the likes of Miller, Burton and Nolan – and the 'bad' Batman – the contemporarily unappreciated, camp and farcical versions of West and Schumacher (2012, p. xii)[7].

The initial style of the Batman comic book, a noir detective story influenced by pulp heroes like Zorro and Sherlock Holmes, was dominant until the 1950s when Fredric Wertham's book *Seduction of the Innocent* (1954) was published. This was a controversial text that claimed to expose the aspects of superhero comics that might negatively influence their child readers. For example, Wertham claimed there was the suggestion of a homosexual relationship between Batman and his sidekick, Robin, implicitly linking the then-taboo notion of homosexuality with the concept of paedophilia (1954, p. 191). Wertham's homophobic allegation of the relationship was meant as a negative criticism of the Batman character. Though Wertham's work was later discredited, with many of its assertions rendered invalid and others found to be outright fabrications[8], the book initiated the creation of the Comics Code, a set of standards and practices designed to censor material in comic books deemed unfit for juvenile consumption. Despite Wertham's focus on the alleged homosexuality of Batman and Robin, as opposed to the violence the Batman comic depicted (Brooker 2000, p. 146), the creation of the Code nonetheless transformed the Batman comic book into a lighter, more child-friendly narrative focusing on humour and, ironically, camp. In fact, the camp version might be read as a resistant response to the infantilisation of the genre; adding an ironic element to the comedic and family-friendly version of the

---

[7] See Meehan's work (1991, pp. 47-65) for a consistent analysis of Batman as a commercial intertext.
[8] In particular, Langley notes several flaws in Wertham's research methods (2012, pp. 206-210), whilst Carol L. Tilley (2012) offers a compelling critique of Wertham and his book.

character that, at least subtextually, could have been intended as a retort to the Code's draconian imposition on behalf of Batman's writers.

This shift towards camp for Batman was best exemplified by Adam West's representation of the character in the successful 1960s television show (1966-1968) and its accompanying film (1966). West's Batman was a softer and friendlier representation of the character than the previous noir comics, matched by a psychedelic technicolour 1960s art style influenced by the prevalent drug culture and hippy movement of the era. The villains wore garish and outlandish clothing in terms of colour and material – including Frank Gorshin's portrayal of the Riddler favouring a tight, lime green, question mark-patterned leotard (see Figure 1.7 Right) – and were caricatures of the comic book villains. Batman himself was more light-hearted and gregarious with other characters in comparison to the more brooding, isolated figure from the comics, with Robin, the eager sidekick in bright colours, always ready to help. A number of comical elements were included in the series and the 1966 *Batman* film. A notable example was the anti-shark spray Batman uses in the 1966 film to dislodge a shark that is biting his leg, which then causes the shark to explode. During this period, the noir-inspired tone of the Batman comic was abandoned for the comedy of the television adaptation; though the character and narratives changed dramatically in the wake of the Comics Code Authority and Wertham's book (1954), Brooker asserts that the comic was already moving towards a more humorous, 'pop and camp' tone in the early 1960s (2000, 146), and that Wertham's interpretation of Batman was not 'the sole motivating force' for the character's tonal shift (2000, p. 160). It is noteworthy that the television series – despite its contemporary public reputation as what Brooker claims is a '"corruption" of the comic book' (2000, p. 186) – saved the comic book from going out of print, as the title

suffered from lack of sales in 1965, the year before the series began (2000, p. 179-180). The popularity of the television series fully triggered the comic's transformation in order to appeal to a broader audience, and also restored sales of the comic through a symbiotic relationship between readers and viewers. For example, the show's executive Gardner Dozier requested both the creation of a new Batgirl (see Figure 1.7 Left) and the resurrection of Batman's then-deceased butler Alfred Pennyworth in the comic books (2000, p. 187), so that the characters could be included in the television series, whilst the comics ran full-page advertisements for the television series on the inside of the front cover (2000, p. 188). In this way, the comics were 'subtly and gradually rebranded and marketed … as adaptations of the TV series', in what Brooker terms as 'a complex cycle of mutually advantageous appropriation' (2000, p. 187).

Figure 1.7 - [Left] Batman, Robin and Batgirl and [Right] Batman's villains, all from the 1960s TV series

Following Batman's embracing of camp, the franchise's texts began moving into more serious and cerebral territory. This gradual shift had its origins in several Batman comic book narratives produced during the 1970s, most notably during the series' stewardship by the creative team of Denny O'Neill and Neal Adams. These include 'The Joker's

Five-Way Revenge' (O'Neill & Adams 1973), which began to process of altering the Joker from the camp 60s incarnation to the more psychotic villain of contemporary narratives, and a series of stories introducing Middle Eastern terrorist mastermind Ra's al Ghul (O'Neill and Adams 1971). The shift created the context for Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* comic book (1986), which reinterpreted Batman as a more morally ambiguous figure than previously represented in any other adaptation, including the original noir-inspired vigilante of 1939. Miller's work raised questions as to whether Batman was as morally deficit at those he fought in his crusade against crime. The book acted in part as a return to and journey past the noir inspirations that had first influenced the character, depicting a Batman that was morally and ethically ambiguous in washed-out colours (see Figure 1.5 Right). Similarly, Tim Burton's *Batman* film (1989) and its sequel *Batman Returns* (1992) featured Michael Keaton in a more serious role as the title character and living in a cavernous Wayne Manor that more closely resembled a mausoleum than a mansion. Similar to Miller's depiction of the character, Keaton's Batman was more ambiguous and sinister than previous incarnations; a scene in *Batman Returns* notably has Batman kill a henchman by putting dynamite in his trousers and throwing him down a manhole. The films utilised a tableau of gothic imagery in a Gotham reinterpreted not as the city of adventure promulgated in West's television representation and the earlier comics, but as a nightmarish realm of stone gargoyles on rooftops, tall, ominous buildings and darkened streets, inhabited by ruthless and unknowable psychopaths. The latter was most notably articulated through Jack Nicholson's iconic portrayal of the Joker, the character's menacing laughter and horrific rictus a terrifying alternative to Cesar Romero's lipstick-wearing, cackling interpretation from the television series.

Despite the success of Burton's films, the camp returned to Batman in the 1990s. Director Joel Schumacher attempted to transform Batman once again with the parodic, comedic, family-oriented films of *Batman Forever* (1995) and its sequel *Batman and Robin* (1997). Schumacher's films were a stark contrast to the comics, which had maintained the more dramatic tone Miller's work had re-established. *Batman and Robin* in particular featured cartoonish sound effects, cheesy one-liners and a plethora of puns made by the film's villain Mr Freeze, played by Arnold Schwarzenegger. Concurrently, the comics had recently emerged from a story arc titled *Knightfall* (O'Neil *et al* 1993), where Batman's back is broken by the villain Bane, leaving him immobile and unable to fight crime in a Gotham that rapidly falls towards anarchy. This in turn was followed by the yearlong *No Man's Land* story arc (Rucka *et al* 1999), its narrative dealing with a Gotham severely damaged by an earthquake, cut off from the rest of the United States and left to devolve into an anarchic state. Similarly, the highly successful *Batman: The Animated Series* (1992-1995) relied on a more dramatic tone in line with Miller's work; key episodes included 'Heart of Ice' (1992), which introduced the origin story of Mr Freeze becoming a supervillain in order to save his terminally ill wife, and the two-part 'Robin's Reckoning' (1993), depicting Robin's vengeful quest to apprehend the man responsible for killing his family. Both narratives earned Emmy Awards for *The Animated Series*' writers (Toon Zone 2001). By contrast, Schumacher's films, and *Batman and Robin* in particular, received such overwhelmingly negative responses that plans for a third film in Schumacher's series were cancelled. Though the elements for which Schumacher was criticised were confined primarily to the Batman films, both the character and the comic books suffered an overall slump in popularity at the turn of the millennium. While never being cancelled or completely falling out of favour with

readers, the negative impact of Schumacher's work had compromised the attempt to portray the character as a more serious or dramatic superhero.

Batman's popularity received a significant boost from Christopher Nolan's rebooted film series, which started with *Batman Begins* (2005). The film was a more realistic depiction of a man becoming a superhero, with the flaws and fallibilities that are associated with that assumption of the mantle. Christian Bale's internally-tormented Bruce Wayne became Batman through gruelling physical training and the use of military hardware in place of gadgets, creating a suit made of armoured Kevlar rather than West's cloth costume or Keaton's rubber outfit. *Batman Begins* and its sequels, *The Dark Knight* (2008) and *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012), confronted issues of class struggles, domestic terrorism, effective justice and the fear of a world influenced by post-9/11 sensibilities. Nolan's Batman fought against villains who did not rely on the magic or the supernatural to spread chaos, most notably Heath Ledger's facially-scarred terrorist representation of the Joker discussed previously in this chapter. The unexpected success of Nolan's film series once again brought Batman to the forefront of popular culture, resulting in a resurgence of sales for the comic book. Nolan's serious tone still pervades the Batman comics, with the most notable example being Scott Snyder and Greg Capullo's highly successful story arc that began in the wake of DC Comics' 2011 reboot with *The Court of Owls* (2012).

This constant reinvention of the character and storylines supports Brooker's assertions, both regarding the many characterisations of Batman and the ability for the character to be redefined in the eyes of a newer audience. No matter the interpretation, Brooker argues, Batman '[corresponds] to a minimal defining structure' (2012, p. 40), however

variant narratives become in comparison to their predecessors. The 1939 comic book debut, West's 1960s camp incarnation, the gothic brooding of Burton's films, the farce of Schumacher's work and the drama of Nolan's reboot all feature a man named Bruce Wayne, whose parents died after being shot by a criminal in an alleyway. Their deaths galvanised Bruce into becoming Batman, wearing an outfit themed after a bat and fighting crime in Gotham City. Despite the sharp variances and differences between each adaptation, all these representations are considered to be Batman and utilise that basic structure. Without this structure, Brooker states that the character would be 'simply unrecognisable' (2012, p. 40). The characterisations change over time, reflecting the society that produced them, but are always still identifiable as Batman[9]. Jennifer Dondero also notes this through analysis of the progression from Adam West's 1960s incarnation to the darker, brooding figure of Burton's 1989 film, in the wake of Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* (1986):

> Comic book fans and mainstream media embraced this new version of Batman. Tim Burton's *Batman* was one of the highest grossing films of 1989… the colour palette for Batman comics became bleaker as the Bat Symbol became an icon of vigilante justice. Fans began to replace Adam West and brightly coloured comic panels with a darker hero. By the early 1990s, old and new fans embraced Batman as a hero for a new era, a champion who – more so than his comic book contemporaries – could represent justice in a corrupt, post-Vietnam world (2013, p. 31).

---

[9] Uricchio and Pearson also provide a thorough analysis of the elements comprising Batman's minimal defining structure (2015, pp. 205-236).

The most prevalent representation in the past decade is Nolan's post-9/11-influenced armoured Batman. While the 9/11 attacks themselves were never explicitly represented within the comic books, Nolan's film narratives or other media, Batman's characterisation underwent a serious overhaul in the aftermath of 9/11. In particular, Batman's self-given authority over Gotham came under challenge, as did the motivation of the character. This seemed to be based on suggestions in Miller's work that Batman was unstable and not necessarily heroic.

Batman's stance as a staunch and yet extra-legal defender of civil liberty was recently explored in the 75th anniversary comic book series *Batman Eternal* (2014). In this series Commissioner Gordon is wrongfully imprisoned for seemingly destroying two trains full of passengers while in pursuit of a criminal; it later transpires that Gordon was not responsible, and was instead misled by an illusion. During Gordon's imprisonment, the corrupt interim head of the Gotham City Police Department instigates a manhunt to apprehend Batman. Despite Batman being declared illegitimate as a protector of Gotham, the majority of the city's populace still readily embrace his campaign against the criminal element (Snyder *et al* 2014). This scenario exemplifies Cassandra Sharp's notion that superheroes autocratically assume control of criminal situations 'because popular sovereignty demands it' (2012, p. 360) despite the ethics of such illegal activity in Batman's case.

The characterisation of Batman has been influenced by ideas prevalent in the post-9/11 world, particularly those related to the populist desire for security and effective justice. Rather than a costume, Batman now wears armour; instead of a Batmobile, he uses a military-grade vehicle called the Tumbler; Batman's figurative war on crime has

become a literal war against terrorism, codified by his explicit declaration of war against Bane and the League of Shadows in *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012) and calling his sidekicks 'an army of Batmen' in the war against terrorist organisation Leviathan in *Batman Incorporated* (Morrison *et al.* 2012, p. 123). As Batman has adapted to represent contemporary ideas and issues, so too have the character's villains. The Joker is portrayed as a terrorist in *The Dark Knight* (2008). The Riddler of the comic books went from being a one-note, riddle-themed emulator of the Joker to a megalomaniacal despot who ensconces the entirety of Gotham City in one gigantic death trap ruled by a Bentham-esque panoptical control centre for months (Snyder, Capullo, Miki & Plascencia 2014). The Scarecrow's fear gas, previously used as a farcical method of inducing fear akin to LSD, became a potent narcotic with more immediate life-threatening properties and referred to as a substance like methamphetamine or krokodil. The physical appearance and violent tactics of Ra's al Ghul, leader of a group of supernatural villains called the League of Assassins, construct him as an embodiment of the West's contemporary fears about Islam and the Middle East. I will discuss 9/11 and its aftermath in more detail in the following chapter, as well as Batman narratives' specific capacity to depict aspects of the post-9/11 world in Chapter 4.

The predominant factor responsible for Batman's longevity and enduring popularity is the character's ability to be continuously repurposed and contemporised. This repurposing spans all elements of Batman's narratives; the protagonist, the supporting characters, the story and setting are all malleable and able to be adapted or interpreted through a contemporary lens, where other superhero characters remain comparatively static. Part of this stems from Batman's ambiguity; Agnieska Soltysik Monnet argues that 'like any enduring Gothic figure, Batman's regenerative cultural power depends on

his ambivalence, his ethical complexity and moral ambiguity' (2012, p. 96). The character's humanity is also frequently explored in order to better engage with audiences. The concept of becoming Batman is used to justify the idea that the character could just as easily exist in our real world as in the fictional one. In addition to Zehr's book (2008) which outlines the realistic exercise regimens and dietary requirements needed to be Batman, critics such as Brooker (2000, 2012 & 2013) and Langley (2012) cite that Batman's more realistic aspects make him an identifiable character, in certain respects, and easier to relate to compared to other superheroes. In an analysis of the fan culture surrounding Batman's ongoing popularity, Dondero opines that:

Archetypes, according to Swiss psychologist Carl Jung, are meaningful figures and symbols in our culture that represent our collective ideas of the best and worst parts of humanity. We see these figures in our own lives and celebrate them in our stories … From a traditional Jungian perspective, Batman most readily fits in with The Shadow archetype, which can be defined as an archetypal figure who represents the things we want to keep hidden from our conscious selves, such as immoral tendencies or things that we find emotionally painful (2013, pp. 31-32).

Batman can be seen as embodying this latter element, the 'things that we find emotionally painful'. By dealing with identifiable and relevant issues, the Batman comic book and its leading character are both able to speak to audiences about contemporary concerns[10]. In his influential work *War, Politics and Superheroes* (2011),

---

[10] I will be exploring Batman's use as a gothic articulation of trauma in more detail in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

DiPaolo maps the matrix of political and sociocultural concerns which superhero texts intersect and represent, citing their potency in presenting complexity:

> These stories are unsettling, and don't provide easy answers for the audience member. Instead, the [texts] inspire use to meditate on the tense and controversial issues of our day and inspire us to think in unconventional terms … As we … go to see a supposedly disposable form of entertainment … we need to consider whether we will use the action-packed story as a means of escape from the real world, and from responsibility in it, or allow the politics underlying the spectacle to make us directly wrestle with difficult issues, and inspire us to react with similar thoughtfulness and sensitivity to the pressing questions of our time. (2011, p. 10)

Jason Bainbridge's work (2007) also addresses superheroes' abilities to articulate such concerns. In an exegetical explanation of superhero comics books and their representation of the legal system, Bainbridge argues that superheroes undergo 'a process of estrangement by which to highlight the inadequacies in the present system in the same way a test case might highlight the inadequacies in the law' (2007, p. 462). Part of what makes Batman a lasting cultural influence is the representation of our contemporary fears and concerns, directly interrogating or deconstructing ideas and problems relevant and specific to our time. Throughout his work, Bainbridge persuasively asserts the usefulness of using contemporary superhero comic books to depict aspects of the law, citing their 'Derridean deconstruction of the neat binaries … that have underlied [sic] the comic book representation of the legal system to this point'

(2007, p. 461), providing a unique space 'where the relationship between heroism and law can be articulated, agitated and interrogated' (2007, p. 469); in effect, these comic books become heterotopic sites for isolating and engaging with ideas. Contemporary Batman texts possess the ability to question post-9/11 dynamics of law, justice and security, as the desire and perceived need for global security – in some cases, through extreme and exceptional methods – has escalated.

The Batman character has always been a product of its time, with specific incarnations representing the culture they were formed in. Each incarnation addresses both broad and specific sociocultural issues of the time, addressing them in a more realistic manner when compared to other superheroes. Batman's relative realism, enduring popularity, ability to be constantly reinvented and focus on more ambiguous subject matter than other characters enables greater critical engagement with the character and associated narratives.

1.4 – 'Don't Talk Like You're One of Them; You're Not': Congruence and Contrast

Claims of the cultural power of the Batman narrative do not preclude a similar potential in other superhero texts. For example, several critics have noted that Captain America was created as a jingoist national icon for the character's eponymous country, and that the character was used as a real world propaganda tool in the war against Nazi Germany in World War Two. Grant Morrison argues the Captain's usefulness at combatting real world fear with fictional justice; '[Writer Jack Kirby] knew that wish-fulfilment pictures

of American superheroes punching out Hitler's teeth would sell magazines in a fearful world, and his instincts were right' (2011, p. 40).

Superheroes are essentially formed from such wish-fulfilment, an idea Brooker reinforces by observing that their creations involve 'imagining a better world and creating an alternate version of yourself … to patrol and protect it' (2013, p. 11). A wide variety of characters fit this definition of a superhero, in addition to Batman; Superman was created by Joe Siegel and Jerry Shuster following the Great Depression as a response to the penury and hardship of that time (Morrison 2011, p. 4), whilst Captain America was conceived by Joe Simon and Jack Kirby as a pre-emptive, effective response to the Nazis during World War II (Wright 2003, p. 36). These characters work towards enacting security in their respective settings – cities, countries or, in some cases, worlds – through overcoming their personal weaknesses, which makes them heroes. In turn, these characters embody fictional representations of ideals embraced by its audiences; DiPaolo asserts that superhero narratives 'bill themselves as tales of courage and friendship, representing American ideals at their best while attempting to pass on a strong moral code' to their audiences (2011, p. 5).

Batman is a similar superhero to his contemporaries in essentials: his quest for justice in Gotham mirrors Superman's efforts to safeguard Metropolis or Green Lantern's activities in Coast City. He is not the only human who has become a superhero without magical or fantastical intervention or who uses weapons and tools rather than explicit 'superpowers' to get the job done; for example, Marvel's Iron Man and Ant-Man also fit this paradigm although they depend wholly on technology to fight crime, whereas

Batman is still a capable superhero without his weapons and tools[11]. The character is also not the only superhero who deals with issues of nationalism, exclusion, security (in the national rather than juridical sense) and the effects of the post-9/11 world; Captain America appears in a story arc titled *The New Deal* (Rieber & Cassaday 2003), concerning the immediate aftermath of 9/11 within the Marvel Universe.

As argued earlier, Batman's realistic characterisation allows readers to better understand and identify with elements of the Batman comic book. The villains faced by Batman, while exaggerated, embody real world fears and concerns, in contrast to the more supernatural or outlandish villains faced by other superheroes. In his psychoanalytical study, Langley (2012) assesses the psychological composition and motivation of Batman and several of his villains. Among them, Langley assesses the possibility that Two-Face may suffer from Dissociative Identity Disorder (p. 176), psychologically damaged with a split personality that manifests metaphorically in the character's scarred visage (see Figure 1.3) and in his shifting of moods. Similarly, Langley notes that Penguin, an outlandish character who physically resembles his namesake (see Figure 1.8), embodies the concept of a superiority complex by '[overcompensating] for feelings of inferiority' (Langley 2012, p. 125) derived from years of schoolyard bullying and social ostracism for the character's strange appearance and demeanour.

---

[11] Examples of this can be seen in both *Batman Incorporated: Gotham's Most Wanted* (Morrison & Burnham 2013), when Batman, stripped of his utility belt, escapes a locked metal crate as it sinks into water then immediately proceeds to fend off the armoured, sword-wielding villain The Heretic, and in *The Court of Owls* (Snyder & Capullo 2012), where Batman is once again deprived of his gadgets yet still manages to escape the labyrinth the Court have trapped him in through cunning and use of the labyrinth's environmental features.

There is also a much closer relationship between the situations presented in the Batman comic and those from the real world than there are in most other superhero texts: for example, while Superman traditionally wears a costume to do battle against enemies who use superpowers, lasers or alien abilities, Batman contemporaneously employs armour, a consequence of engaging in combat in zones of realistic violence where such protection would be necessary, with criminals who use guns and knives. That is, Batman's mortality demands that he protect himself from the kinds of weapons used by criminals and terrorists in our contemporary world.

Several contemporary Batman narratives deal directly or indirectly with the post-9/11 environment[12]. One such prominent text is Grant Morrison's *Batman Incorporated* comic book story arc (Morrison *et al* 2012, Morrison & Burnham 2013 and Morrison & Burnham 2013). The story represents Batman combating an omnipresent terrorist threat named Leviathan, a global extremist network led by Talia al Ghul whose objective is to destroy Batman by taking over the world. Leviathan is a nebulous organisation with

---

[12] I note here that, at time of writing, there is no existing official Batman text that directly deals with the event of 9/11 itself, unlike Captain America's *The New Deal* (Rieber & Cassaday 2003) mentioned above, and 9/11 is not an event that has been cited as occurring in any existing text within DC Comics' larger comic book, video game or film universes.

agents carrying out terror attacks in major countries. In response, Batman forms a global franchise of international peacekeepers tasked with defending their nations from Leviathan; this global franchise, titled Batman Incorporated, has international agents in every major country who are all answerable to the American Batman. Throughout the narrative, questions are raised regarding extra-legal justice and the subtext of the story indicates Batman's establishment of a state of exception across the world to combat Leviathan. This is to say, Batman locates Leviathan and its activities as outside the legal and moral protection of the state, enabling he and his agents to use whatever force they want or need to destroy the organisation and its members. Morrison's narrative involves several contemporary issues related to terrorism and the post-9/11 world, including suicide bombings, domestic terrorism and, most disconcertingly, agents of Leviathan hidden among the civilian populace; the latter is reminiscent of real hidden extremists working for al-Qaeda. Adding to the post-9/11 influence on the narrative, Leviathan's leader Talia al Ghul is of Middle Eastern descent, and her foremost bodyguard the Heretic is clad in traditional Arabic robes and headdress. In a direct visual reference to 9/11 itself, Leviathan orchestrates the bombing of Wayne Tower; the image used in a panel of the comic book bears a resemblance to the destruction of the World Trade Centre (Morrison & Burnham 2013, p. 113, see Figure 1.9).
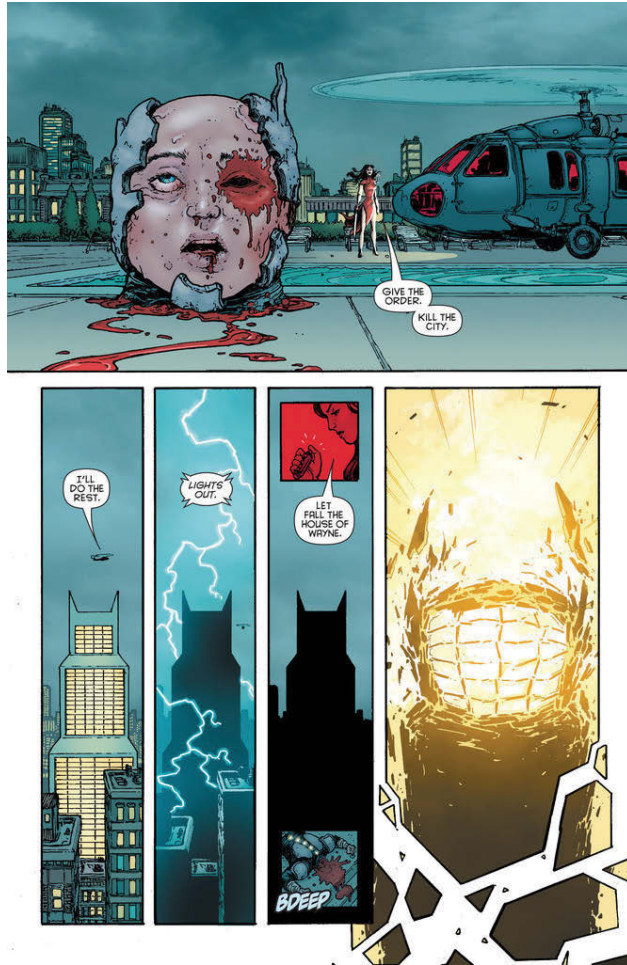
Figure 1.9 - [Lower panels] The destruction of Wayne Tower (taken from Morrison & Burnham 2013)

Similar issues are explored in Scott Snyder and Greg Capullo's ongoing story arc beginning with *The Court of Owls* (2012). This first narrative concerns a clandestine group of high-level officials and politicians who constitute the titular Court, an analogue to secret organisations such as the Illuminati and the Freemasons, who are in open conflict with Batman. The narrative confronts ideas of governmental corruption; key members of the Court's leadership are notable public figures involved in controlling Gotham's infrastructure and governance. Notions of domestic terrorism are also explored, represented by the Court's agents – most of whom are citizens of Gotham –

sent to sow discord in order to gain control of the city. I undertake a closer reading of both Morrison's and Snyder and Capullo's narratives in Chapters 6 and 7, respectively.

Contemporaneously, Batman's actions juxtapose the desire for security with the extra-legal means used to attain it. Ambiguity forms a key element both in the character's activities and in the audience's responses to them. Given Batman's description as a superhero, it seems that audiences are meant to support Batman's form of vigilante justice. Part of what helps separate Batman from other superheroes, however, is that the character's moral ambiguity encourages a variety of ways the texts can be read, whether Batman is the positive guardian of Snyder's work or the ethically unsound vigilante of Miller's narrative. There is also a concerted effort by contemporary scholars to map the politics and subtext of Batman texts onto everyday life. Monnet, for example, cites the assessments of several critics – including DiPaolo, Brett Chandler and Tony Spanakos – in her analysis of Batman, at once described as a 'feudal lord' running Gotham city as a fiefdom, a 'progressive challenge to the status quo [that questions] the nation-state's "monopoly over the legitimate use of violence"', and a '[representative of] social order [whose] enemy is anarchy' (2012, p. 109). Todd McGowan draws direct parallels between the state of exception enacted by Batman in *The Dark Knight* (2008) and the United States' own exceptional state enacted because of the War on Terror; McGowan notes that conservative critics see the Batman of *The Dark Knight* as 'an analogue for George W. Bush', since both Batman and Bush 'find the law inadequate for dealing with extreme threats'[13] (2009). While, according to interviews with Nolan and others in

---

[13] As an example of this, Australian right-wing political commentator Andrew Bolt (2008) reductively represents *The Dark Knight* (2008) as a diluted depiction of Bush's policies, drawing parallels between scenes of torture and surveillance in the film with the real actions of spying on American citizens and infringing on human rights. Bolt consistently misrepresents Nolan's depiction of Batman as a tacit legitimation of Bush's actions, opening his article with the exaggerated declarative 'FINALLY Hollywood makes a film that says President George W. Bush was right' (2008).

The Art and Making of The Dark Knight Trilogy (Jesser & Pourroy 2012), the film was not explicitly produced with these ideas in mind, they are nonetheless relevant to how the film is interpreted; as Monnet argues, *The Dark Knight*'s ambivalence 'leads to opposed interpretations of the film's textual politics' (2012, p. 109). This is a key reason for the use of Batman to articulate and debate ideas in the post-9/11 world; ambiguity and complexity are key to both the actual events of 9/11 and our means of understanding and responding to them. By contrast, as I discuss in the next chapter, much current popular culture represents the post-9/11 world in terms of simplistic binaries.

The ever-present tension between morality and legality within the Batman persona has encouraged many composers of Batman texts to reject binaries in their narratives in favour of a more nuanced approach to complex cultural themes. This is evident in the *Dark Knight Trilogy* films; for example, after the preceding film (2005) depicts Batman as a new and positive influence in safeguarding Gotham, *The Dark Knight* (2008) questions that influence and whether or not it is the cause of attracting terrorists like the Joker to Gotham. Complexities regarding the ethics and legitimacy of Batman's execution of justice are debated by Rachel Dawes and Harvey Dent; the former compares Batman to Caesar, while the latter defends Batman because of his 'public service' in protecting Gotham. Dent, as Gotham's District Attorney, later reiterates his defence of Batman's status as an 'outlaw vigilante', stating Batman will be held to account by the people of Gotham after he has dealt with the Joker. Dent – along with other characters in the film, including Commissioner Gordon and Alfred Pennyworth – views Batman as both illegal and necessary; an aporia similar to those that form the foundation of a state of exception.

The comic books and other related narratives of the post-9/11 period also question both Batman and the villainy he is sworn to combat: for example, the *Batman Incorporated* story arc (Morrison *et al* 2012, Morrison & Burnham 2013 and Morrison & Burnham 2013) implies a reciprocal relationship between the existence of Batman and the terrorist organisation Leviathan. The story suggests that Batman's presence is the impetus behind Leviathan's creation – emphasised by its leader, Talia al Ghul, having previously had a romantic relationship with Batman – with Leviathan existing, predominantly, to destroy Batman. In addition to this chapter's previous example of the police pursuing him in *Batman Eternal* (Snyder *et al.* 2014), the comic book series *Gotham Central* (2011) focuses on the police officers of Gotham City and their occasionally antagonistic relationship with Batman, distorting the comic book's original concept of having the police, embodied by Commissioner Gordon, giving tacit approval to Batman's vigilantism. An early storyline in the series' first volume, *In the Line of Duty* (Brubaker & Rucka 2011), features one officer whose partner is killed by Mr Freeze; the officer condemns Batman at the story's conclusion when Freeze is apprehended, because Freeze and other villains like him may not have existed if it weren't for Batman's interference in Gotham[14].

Again, this ambiguity is in contrast to the Superman narratives, which are constructed in terms of 'good vs. evil'; Superman is not the same kind of morally ambiguous character as Batman. In Zack Snyder's *Man of Steel* film (2013), which was produced by Nolan,

---

[14] The origin story commonly utilised for Mr Freeze – as in *The Animated Series* (1992-1995) and *Batman and Robin* (1997) – concerns Victor Fries, Mr Freeze's original identity, being transformed in a scientific accident while researching a cure for his terminally ill wife, Nora. This origin story suggests Batman does not have a direct impact on Freeze's creation. However, during the recently-rebooted comic book series (Snyder, Tynion & Fabok 2012), Freeze's origin is altered so that the project to cure Nora – who, rather than being his wife, is merely a frozen woman with whom Victor Fries has an obsession – is shut down by Bruce Wayne. The accident that transforms Fries occurs when he attacks Wayne, resulting in the same outcome as the previous origin story.

Superman's father Jor-El asserts that Superman is intended as 'an ideal to strive towards', to show humanity 'the potential of every person to be a force for good'. Conversely, at the conclusion of Nolan's *The Dark Knight*, Batman states that 'You either die a hero or live long enough to see yourself become the villain. I can do those things. Because I'm not a hero… I'm whatever Gotham needs me to be (2008)'. Batman's ambiguity makes the character an ideal conduit for interrogating and coming to terms with the moral and ethical complexities of the post-9/11 world. In the next chapter I explore the complexity of the social and political landscape in the United States post-9/11, as context for my study of Batman.

Chapter 2 – A Modern American Empire: Imperialism and the Post-9/11 United States

'America and the other major states do need a new consensus on terrorist threats, weapons of mass destruction ... the use of force, and the global rules of the game. But in turn, the administration should understand the virtues of the old order that it wishes to displace.'

– G. John Ikenberry, *America's Imperial Ambition*, p. 45

2.1 – Introduction

This chapter begins by establishing the landscape of the post-9/11 era, including a brief overview of the September 11 attacks and the origins of the War on Terror. The chapter then analyses the actions taken by United States leadership over the fourteen years since 9/11, also documenting evidence of an imperialist attitude in America as far back as the 1800s. It is important to understand the difference between 'imperialist' actions or behaviour and the formation of 'empire' itself, a distinction this chapter elucidates. The studies of theorists and critics such as Michael Parenti, Niall Ferguson, Noam Chomsky, Chalmers Johnson, Julian Go, Howard Zinn, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri help delineate and investigate the presence of imperialism and empire within the United States both prior to and following 2001. The chapter also applies the concept of the *state of exception*, an extra-juridical zone of suspended law theorised by Giorgio Agamben and based on the work of Carl Schmitt, to the contemporaneous United States. Finally,

the chapter briefly establishes how the United States has garnered a negative reception, globally and domestically, to many of its military actions connected to the War on Terror. This reception has led to a perceived decline of the nation – socially, politically, economically and ethically – in the eyes of its critics.

The purpose of this chapter is to highlight examples of imperialist activity the United States has undertaken since 9/11. This, in turn, serves as a foundation to examine certain post-9/11 issues, namely the public fear of another attack and the justification of extraordinary measures taken by the United States government in the name of security. These issues will be explored throughout the rest of the thesis, in particular the way they are narrativised and understood through fictional means.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter, and indeed this thesis, to comprehensively explore every individual aspect and issue of the post-9/11 American empire in its entirety. Nor is it possible to give an exhaustive list of examples related to them. This chapter aims to elucidate key post-9/11 issues – namely military intervention, increased domestic security policies, foreign relations and the global reaction to all of the above – that are at the heart of the current American political formation, and provides a context for how these issues will be analysed for the remainder of the thesis.

2.2 – Security Era: The Penumbra of 9/11 and the War on Terror

The particulars of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks (referred to hereafter as simply '9/11'), perpetrated by al-Qaeda[15] and its leader Osama bin Laden, have been extensively documented by official reports and become well-known to the public. The attacks involved four United States commercial airliners hijacked by 19 members of al-Qaeda with the intent of ramming the planes into the World Trade Centre towers, the Pentagon, and the White House.

Two planes, American Airlines Flight 11 and United Airlines Flight 175, struck the twin towers of the World Trade Centre in New York. A third plane, American Airlines Flight 77, impacted the Pentagon building in Arlington, Virginia. The fourth plane, United Airlines Flight 93, was partly retaken by its passengers and diverted from its target, believed to be the Capitol Building or the White House in Washington D.C., to crash in an empty field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States 2004, pp. 4-14). The attacks were responsible for the immediate deaths of 2977 people (CNN Library 2013); this figure includes passengers on the planes, people inside and directly outside the World Trade Centre, emergency workers and military personnel within the Pentagon. The figure does not include the nineteen hijackers themselves, nor the subsequent deaths of victims from illnesses, such as cancer, caused by smoke or dust inhalation at Ground Zero.

The 9/11 attacks came without direct warning and caught the United States almost completely by surprise. The National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United

---

[15] For the purposes of this thesis, al-Qaeda will be spelt thus; alternate spellings include al-Qaida and al-Qa'ida.

States, in its commercially-released final report which scrutinised the events and after-effects of 9/11 (2004), made it clear that measures utilised at the time for security screening within the American airports whose planes attacked the World Trade Centre were insufficient and contributed to the success – and, in the case of United Airlines Flight 93, partial success – of the attacks themselves (see 2004, pp. 1-14). The perceived failure of the US to secure its citizens and prevent the tragedy of 9/11 was explicitly mentioned in former United States National Coordinator for Counterterrorism Richard Clarke's testimony during the 9/11 Commission itself. In a hearing for the Commission, Clarke apologised to the American people:

> … your government failed you, those entrusted with protecting you failed
> you and I failed you. We tried hard, but that doesn't matter because we
> failed. And for that failure, I would ask – once all the facts are out – for
> your understanding, and for your forgiveness (FDCH E-Media 2004).

9/11, and the perceived failure in preventing it from occurring, became a catalyst for the United States to enact policies aimed at tightening security and border protection. The United States also pursued a greater international campaign against al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. These measures were implemented to seek the prevention of similar terrorist attacks in the future. Then-President George W. Bush stated that the US would not be cowed by the attacks on its soil, rather that it had become a nation 'awakened to danger and called to defend freedom'. He further declared the waging of a 'war on terror' that '[would] not end until every terrorist group of global reach [had] been found, stopped and defeated' (Bush 2001), predicating his notions on the basis that al-Qaeda and the Taliban were driven by hatred for America and the values the nation stood for.

The United States then went to war in Afghanistan, chiefly with the intent of hunting al-Qaeda and bin Laden. This action would eventually lead to Bush's successor, President Barack Obama, authorising the successful Operation Neptune Spear which resulted in the death of bin Laden in 2011.

The United States government's proclamation of the necessity for preventative action also governed the nation's subsequent invasion of Iraq. Allegations of strong links between Iraq and al-Qaeda were asserted by Bush, who cited the former as offering medical aid and training in bomb-making to the latter. Iraq and al-Qaeda, Bush claimed, had 'high level contacts that [went] back a decade', citing their union as a direct threat to their '[shared] common enemy' of the United States (Bush 2002). Under the aegis of a coalition of military forces from the United States, United Kingdom, Australia and Poland, Bush asserted that Iraq's invasion by this coalition was necessary and executed with a 'cause [that is] just', aimed at deposing Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and his 'support for terrorism' (Bush 2003). Both the invasion of Iraq and the incursions into Afghanistan were conducted as campaigns of Bush's War on Terror.

As well as international security measures, the United States also focused on tightening border and domestic security following 9/11. Of particular note was the increased airport security, cited in the Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States as being insufficient – and, in the case of one airport security screening officer for American Airlines Flight 77, 'marginal at best' – prior to the 9/11 attacks (2004, p. 3). Domestic surveillance was also increased following 9/11, providing greater scope for the United States government – and the NSA, the National Security Agency, in particular – to intercept communications between persons of

interest linked to al-Qaeda. Amendments to FISA – the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, implemented in 1978 – were made after 9/11 under the justification of preventing further terrorist attacks on American soil. William Bloss identifies several key factors surrounding the increase in US domestic surveillance, chiefly examining the components of the controversial 'Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act', better known as the 'USA PATRIOT Act'. Bloss notes that the Act worked to change, among other things, the statutory definition of 'domestic terrorism' in order to afford greater latitude to police conducting investigations into such terrorism (2007, p. 214). This worked in conjunction with what Bloss saw as, at the time, an effort on the part of courts and statutes to '[dismantle] several traditional privacy and search safeguards to ostensibly allow the police to be more effective in combating crime, drugs and terrorism' (2007, p. 210, citing Bloss 1996).

The 9/11 attacks threatened the United States' image as the 'world's most powerful state' (Ikenberry 2005, p. 133). The threat stemmed from al-Qaeda's ability to strike at America's core, successfully destroying one national monument and attempting to destroy two more. While the possibility of an attack had been previously contemplated, such an actual eventuality had never seriously been thought to ever occur; the attacks shocked the nation and the world. Following 9/11, a gradual fear – both of terrorism and insecurity – permeated the US and its Western allies, influencing policies and actions undertaken to prevent another similar attack. Noam Chomsky notes that 'after 9/11, [the United States] was "peering into the abyss of the future"' (2003, p. 217, citing Rockwell 2001). What had once been considered unlikely to occur on American soil, attacks of

such magnitude, were now made clear and apparent. 'The awesome threat of terror', Chomsky claims, 'was now too palpable to ignore.' (2003, p. 217)

The United States' domestic response to 9/11 and subsequent military incursions into Afghanistan – as well as the 'preventive war' rationale used to legitimate the connected conflict against Saddam Hussein in Iraq (Chomsky 2003, p. 12) – eventually prompted questions regarding the legality, morality and ethics of actions taken by the US following 9/11. Critics of the War on Terror believed the United States' actions were not legitimated by 9/11; among them, Arthur Schlesinger opined that America's incursions in the Middle East had invited 'a global wave of hatred of American arrogance and militarism' (2003) while Chalmers Johnson asserted that the United States had become 'a military juggernaut intent on world domination' (2004, p. 4).

A particularly outspoken view asserted that the United States government had initiated the War on Terror with an imperialist attitude. The nation had potentially become an outright empire, albeit one undeclared; prior to 9/11, Johnson offered that the US might be considered an 'unacknowledged' empire (2000, p. 5), whilst Richard Haass offered the notion of an 'informal' empire which utilised imperial foreign policy 'to organize the world along certain principles' (Bacevich 2009, p. 219). Fresh declarations of American empire were made by 'an increasing number of voices … since September 11' (Kelly 2003, p. 350). Niall Ferguson offered that the 'inhibitions' that kept many critics from openly declaring the United States as an empire 'seemed to fall away in the aftermath of [9/11]' (2004, p. 4). The attribution of 'empire' or any form of 'imperial' behaviour as a descriptor to the US, was vehemently denied by both Bush and Obama (Go 2011, p. 1).

Claims of an American empire are not new, as the country has been accused of existing as an empire – or, at the very least, propagating an imperialist attitude – since its colonial beginnings (see Zinn 2008). What differentiates some of the post-9/11 claims of empire are what both John Dunham Kelly (2003) and Susan Kay Gillman (2005) identify as a resetting of American cultural history. After embracing past transgressions, 9/11 forms 'the beginning of history for the U.S. public' as a new start for present transgression, spurring the need for 'a moral response to an immoral, transgressive world' (Kelly 2003, pp. 362-363). The implication of this historical reset is that the short term memory of the American people displaces past imperialist claims, moving them from a state of transgression into a state of acceptance, or at least a state of ignorance. This displacement is threatened by the transgression of 9/11. The idea of resetting American history from the point of 9/11 is a notion Kelly asserts that '[critical] scholarship can and should attack' (2003, p. 348). Gillman echoes similar sentiments, observing that the US '[appears] to be condemned repeatedly to discover and announce empire's presence, each time with the same shock of the new' (2005, p. 196).

Further, rather than being an entirely new empire in and of itself, Gillman questions whether the 'new' American empire is only rendered as new compared to other, previous empires. Rather than a purely military expansionist empire or what Gillman terms the 'colonial empire [of] the European model' (2005, p. 204), the United States exists as an empire that is also reliant on trade and commercial expansion into other nations. The negative impact of this kind of imperialism is explored in-depth by Michael Parenti (2011), whilst the variance in American imperial form – combining military power and commercial trade as methods of imperial influence – is explored by Niall Ferguson (2004 and 2005). Both will be investigated further in this chapter.

In his book *Hegemony or Survival* (2003), Chomsky argued that the domineering actions taken by the United States government in 9/11's aftermath had demonstrated an imperialist attitude. When describing the beginning of George W. Bush's military campaign against Saddam in Iraq, a campaign initiated in 2002, Chomsky illustrates how the United States government had 'ignored' claims from experienced aid organisations that such a campaign could constitute a 'humanitarian catastrophe' (2003, p. 2); subsequently, Chomsky argues that the US has cultivated a 'display of contempt for democracy for which no parallel comes easily to mind' (2003 p. 4). Johnson echoes similar sentiments, opining that the 9/11 attacks 'produced a dangerous change in the thinking of some of [the United States'] leaders, who began to see [the] republic as a genuine empire … no longer bound by international law, the concerns of allies, or any constraints on its use of military force' (2004, p. 3). G. John Ikenberry agrees, offering that 'America's nascent neoimperial grand strategy [threatened] to rend the fabric of the international community and political partnerships' when such partnerships were most needed (2002, p. 45). In the wake of 9/11, the United States became insular as well as expansive, increasing its own security while claiming to strive for security abroad. This juxtaposition between self-protection and international expansion was considered both 'politically unsustainable [and] diplomatically harmful', and could only, as Ikenberry opines, 'trigger antagonism and resistance that [would] leave America in a more hostile and divided world' (2002, p. 45).

2.3 – 'Democracy Born of Free Land': Turner, the Imperial Frontier and National Expansion

The United States has historically displayed a demeanour of superiority and prominence, priding itself as a nation beholden to no other. Colonial expansion following America's original settling by European colonists led to an attitude of ordainment and rightful possession of the land, in part due to conquering what was seen as a wild and untamed frontier. Frederick Jackson Turner, noted late-19th and early-20th Century American historian, examined the notion of conquering this frontier, for the good of the settled new American people, the native 'Indian' population and the newly-birthed United States of America. His work contains many claims that are contemporarily disputable at best, and consistently demonstrates an ignorance and subjugation of America's indigenous population; nonetheless, Turner's work is useful in situating America's current imperialist attitude in an early, relevant sociocultural historic context. Turner's work also offers the seeds of imperial behaviour that critics like Chomsky, Johnson and Go would later cite as comprising the United States' post-9/11 attitude.

Turner wrote many papers concerning American colonial history, but his analysis of the conquered frontier chiefly took the form of 'The Significance of the Frontier in American History' (1893, pp. 31-60), a paper later considered a landmark piece of both American and colonial research. In his paper, Turner advocated that the strength of the nation arose from having conquered the natural frontier in increments, becoming masters of their domain and triumphing through adversity. The enlarging frontier line and constant encroachment of new settlements each time the border expanded inevitably

led, in Turner's analysis, to social and industrial taming of the wild. The frontier, Turner wrote, as 'the meeting point between savagery and civilization' (1893, p. 32), needed to be controlled, and only the people of the United States – rather than the indigenous population, or the Europeans who had initially sent settlers to colonise the country – were able to see that control properly exerted. Rapid American growth across the frontier identifies what Turner called 'the distinguishing feature of American life' (1893, p. 32). Growth, expansion and surpassing of boundaries, conquering wilds, asserting dominance over difficult circumstances or treacherous geography; Turner claimed these elements inextricably comprised 'American character' (1893, p. 32). American expansion was also seen by Turner as a response to what he termed the 'Indian frontier', with the indigenous population cited as 'a common danger, demanding united action' (1893, p. 41).

More disturbing than Turner's ideas about the innate superiority of the new people of the United States were his assertions regarding why the frontier could be managed only by them. He indicated consistently throughout his paper that America's frontier expansion was itself a stark representation of modernity conquering the savage. Before European colonisation, Turner offered that the land itself was nothing but vast tracts of untamed wild; colonialism brought modernity and, with it, improvements through civilisation. This notion is uncomfortably summarised when, in reference to America's ongoing frontier expansion, Turner asserted:

> …the wilderness has been interpenetrated by lines of civilization growing
> ever more numerous. It is like the steady growth of a complex nervous
> system for the originally simple, inert continent… [one] must study this

70

economic and social consolidation of the country. In this progress from

savage conditions lie topics for the evolutionist. (1893, p. 41)

In Turner's paper, he further outlined the misguided notion that being able to tame the

frontier is part of what led to the intellectual superiority of the United States.

Evidencing a complete disregard and disrespect towards the indigenous people of

America, Turner focused exclusively on how the white settlers who founded the new

nation, whose presence was only interpreted in positive terms within Turner's view,

were the only truly intelligent inhabitants of the land. Of note is how Turner cited that

'the conditions of frontier life [created] intellectual traits of profound importance'

(1893, pp. 58-59) during America's colonial period, in contrast to the savage 'common

danger' of the Indian (1893, p. 41). Living on the frontier and experiencing what were,

at the time, the harshest conditions imaginable, created aspects of the white colonial

mindset Turner described as 'masterful' and 'dominant'(1893, pp. 58-59), language

used to implicitly further subjugate the indigenous people of America. In Turner's view,

having carved a nation from the wilds they expanded upon gave the settlers – now seen

by Turner as the people of the United States – license to be seen as the country's sole

owners and superior inhabitants.

Furthermore, Turner identified the promotion and exertion of united democracy

produced by the frontier and its colonies as, in his opinion, the most fruitful result of

America's expansion. Though he mentioned problems that could arise from this

democracy overtaking what he saw as selfishness and underdeveloped law – or, in his

words, the 'manifest evils that follow from the lack of a highly developed civic spirit'

(1893, p. 55) – Turner nonetheless believed that 'the democracy born of free land' was

'the most important effect of the frontier' (1893, p. 55). Despite failing once again to take into account the indigenous population – who, having lived there far longer than the settlers, thereby rendered his claim of a 'free land' incorrect – Turner nonetheless heralded the United States' proliferation of democracy as 'the triumph of the frontier – with all of its good and with all of its evil elements' (1893, p. 54). The settlers' expansion across the American frontier, in Turner's opinion, could only be seen as a positive occurrence. Enlightenment and modernity as the colonial settlers spread their influence could only be interpreted as a force for good. Those who were worried about or sought to curtail this expansion – in particular, Turner cited the 'English authorities' and their efforts at frontier regulation (1893, pp. 56-57) – could not halt the settler advance. The new United States of America was, according to Turner, endurable, indomitable and unstoppable.

Though Turner did allow that negative impacts came about as a result of America's colonial expansion, the content of his work indicates a prevalently positive attitude in regards to this expansion and its ensuing creation of what he perceived as civilisation and democracy within the United States. The European settlement had, in Turner's view, allowed the nation to become colonised and democratised, displacing what Turner saw as the savage indigenous population who were incapable of the kind of rational, modern democracy and industrial progression the settlers cultivated. Further, Turner believed the nation only capable of further enlarging its borders over time; 'He would be a rash prophet who should assert that the expansive character of American life has now entirely ceased… the American energy will continually demand a wider field for its exercise' (1893, p. 59).

As a capstone to his analysis of the frontier, Turner finalised his paper by asserting that American history had only begun with the settlement of the European colonists, who had now become the American people. At the time of Turner's paper the country had been largely settled and expanded upon by the colonists, leaving little left of the supposed 'free land' that the colonists originally sought to inhabit (1893, p. 31). Ignoring once more the indigenous population, Turner closed his paper by claiming that, following the formation of the United States and a century of life under the American Constitution, 'the frontier has gone, and with its going has closed the first period of American history' (1893, p. 60).

Though Turner's work is not the only scholarship that addresses American imperialist expansion, it is one of the most significant in understanding how this imperial formation is constituted. Subsequent historical military events and their respective consequences – including, but not limited to, the Spanish-American War, American military participation in World War I and World War II, as well as in the Korean War and the Vietnam War, and covert and overt activity during the Cold War – have also been crucial in delineating this formation, though this thesis does not expand on those events. Nevertheless, Turner's work provides an historical context that enables us to understand America's imperialist activity, during and after the aforementioned conflicts, and also during and after the 9/11 attacks.

2.4 – Imperial Ambition: Outlining American Empire

The United States has a unique role within the world's nations as both the West's most potent military arsenal and its most prominent diplomatic arbitrator. As part of this role, opinions regarding the nation's international and domestic conduct in the aftermath of 9/11 are wildly varied; one far end of the spectrum consists of those who argue the United States' benevolence and affirmative status in regards to protecting its citizens, to those who suggest the United States is a nation only intending to continue its marked imperial spread and move towards global dominance. The debate surrounding American imperialism – whether or not the United States constitutes an empire, and if its actions in achieving security are justified – is complex, nuanced and impossible to resolve definitively. It is my belief that the United States can be considered an empire, and that it is, intentionally or not, conducting itself under the aegis of imperial power.

The claim the United States exists as an empire, or anything resembling an imperial institution, has been vehemently denied as often as it has been asserted. As mentioned earlier, Presidents Bush and Obama have both readily dismissed the notion that America is an empire (Go 2011, p. 1). Obama, in particular, regularly discounts such ideas; during a 2013 address before the United Nations General Assembly, he argued that the notion of the United States as an empire, while being 'useful propaganda', was not 'borne out by America's current policy or public opinion' (Lynch & McCormick 2013). Obama even opined that America is vital not as an imperial body seeking expansion, but rather that its absence in international matters – specifically citing the United States' recent activities in Syria – would result in 'a vacuum of leadership that no other nation is ready to fill' (Lynch & McCormick 2013). Similarly, Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman

posits that America is instead an 'umpire' rather than an empire, an arbitrator merely promoting adherence to international 'rules that [have] earned broad legitimacy', with the intent of '[compelling] acquiescence as necessary' (2013, p. 17). When discussing the United States' invasion of Iraq and their ongoing military presence in the Middle East, former United States Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld stated the coalition behind the invasion, including the United States, 'covet no territory or resource or military base – only a safer world' ('Rumsfeld praises UK Iraq role' 2003).

Delineating the complex terms of empire and imperialism is difficult for several reasons. Among them, sociology professor Julian Go cites that the fixed meanings of these terms have evolved since their original usage, meaning that, to some, claiming the United States is an empire may 'unfairly charge it with all kinds of wrongdoing and aggression' (2011, p. 5). The subjective manner in which these terms can be interpreted also means that any definition can potentially be loaded with 'heavy political and emotional baggage' (2011, p. 5), making a clear, objective definition problematic depending on who is describing the term. Largely, the distinction between *empire* and *imperialism* is that the former is a sovereign political institution, while the latter is the ideology and method through which that institution attains, exerts and maintains power.

One interpretation of empire, defined by Ikenberry, offers that the term 'refers to the political control of the domestic and foreign policies of weaker countries' (2004, p. 146). Another definition comes from leading imperial theorists Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, who analyse the formation of empire in their eponymous seminal text *Empire* (2001); empire is analogised succinctly as a 'global concert under the direction of a single conductor' (2001, p. 10). They further elaborate that empire is a complex

geopolitical construction, implicitly affirming the difficulty in concretely asserting how an empire is defined. Above all else, though, Hardt and Negri make it clear that:

> Empire establishes no territorial center of power and does not rely on fixed boundaries or barriers. It is a *decentered* and *deterritorializing* apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers. Empire manages hybrid identities, flexible hierarchies, and plural exchanges through modulating networks of command. The distinct national colors of the imperialist map of the world have merged and blended in the imperial global rainbow' (2001, pp. xii-xiii, emphasis added by original authors).

The first point of Hardt and Negri's notion, regarding the lack of a territorial center of power, suggests that the rule of an empire is executed in a broad, as opposed to focused, fashion. Rather than the nation of the United States itself being the centre of power for its own empire, the empire becomes an extension of that power as it is applied elsewhere. American empire works to deterritorialise its subordinates with an ever-expanding frontier, not dissimilar to the original colonial frontier, the conquering of which Turner claimed was necessary to the composition of modern American character.

In his book *The Face of Imperialism* (2011), political scientist Michael Parenti argues at length in favour of the United States being considered an imperial state. Parenti, echoing Ikenberry (2004), describes imperialism as 'the process whereby the rulers of one country use economic and military power to expropriate the land, labour, markets, and national resources of less powerful countries on behalf of wealthy interests at home

and abroad' (2011, p. 24). Parenti's work highlights key moments of America's history that demonstrate imperial intervention; specifically, how this international intervention and its insidious methods of military and economic coercion predominantly lead to forms of control over other, subjugated nation-states into which the United States insinuates itself. Parenti uses examples including Yugoslavia (2011, p. 102), Iraq (p. 105), Iran (p. 112) and, extensively, Cuba (pp. 87-100), illustrating how American empire is formed, in part, through the collection of satellite nations that are subject to United States power. Parenti's well-argued examples highlight the process through which American empire expands its borders by cultivating what Parenti terms are 'cooperative "allies"' (2011, p. 101); similarly, Ferguson uses a table of imperial 'typology' to explain the different methods empire can manifest and control its subjects – militarily, economically, socially and politically – as well as the varied political ideologies the empire can subscribe to (2005, pp. 18-19, see Figure 2.1). Ferguson states that the table can be read 'as a menu rather than a grid' (2005, p. 18), highlighting that empire can consist of any number of the elements he lists in imperial typology.

Metropolitan system	Self-interested objectives	Public goods	Methods of rule	Economic system	Cui bono?	Social character
Tyranny	Security	Peace	Military	Plantation	Ruling elite	Genocidal
Aristocracy	Communi-cations	Trade	Bureaucracy	Feudal	Metro-politan populace	Hierarchical
Oligarchy	Land	Investment	Settlement	Mercantilist		Converting
Democracy	Raw materials	Law	NGOs	Market	Settlers	Assimilative
	Treasure	Governance	Firms	Mixed	Local elites	
	Manpower	Education	Delegation to local elites	Planned	All inhabitants	
	Rents	Conversion				
	Taxation	Health				

Figure 2.1 - Ferguson's typology of empire (2005, p. 19)

As an example of the process of the United States cultivating 'cooperative "allies"' (2011, p. 101), Parenti outlines the methods through which Cuba was gradually manipulated and attacked by an imperial America. Parenti documents US interactions with Cuba as far back as 1959, when the previously free market system of the latter moved more towards a socialist structure that eschewed '[domination] by American corporations' (2011, p. 88). As a result, the revolution that moved Cuba away from American economic influence, instigated by Cuban dictator Fidel Castro, caused consternation for then-US President Dwight Eisenhower's administration, leading to Eisenhower instigating what Parenti claims were 'all kinds of illegal operations aimed at overthrowing the revolutionary government' (2011, p. 89). Among these operations were instances of sabotage and intelligence-gathering by a clandestine group, as well as the training of Cuban terrorist groups by an American paramilitary force formed by the CIA (2011, p. 89). Chomsky even refers to the covert disruption in Cuba caused by the

United States as 'terrorist operations', continuing after Eisenhower and through the terms of Presidents John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon (2003, pp. 84-85).

Eisenhower's directive in turn led to a number of actions taken by the United States government which, Parenti notes, could also be used to inflict damage on other countries resistant to American control. Denouncing regime changes, imposing economic sanctions, demonizing national leaders and accusing target nations of 'posing a threat to regional peace and stability' are tactics the United States allegedly utilises in order to instigate control over what the government sees as troublesome countries (Parenti 2011, pp.90-91). Cuba is only one example of control the United States government exerts in order to expand American influence and, thus, extend the borders of the empire.

The United States leads the West in the number of nuclear warheads in its possession ('Status of world nuclear forces' 2015) and is a dominant international military force in terms of materiel and manpower; Parenti even describes the nation as '[presiding] over an armed planetary force of a magnitude never before seen in human history' (2011, p. 18), while Johnson cites that 'The indispensable instrument for maintaining the American empire is its huge military establishment' (2000, p. 222). As a prominent member of the United Nations, with a head of state often colloquially referred to as the 'Leader of the Free World' (Fousek 2000, p. 156), the United States is a key figure in terms of international relations and foreign policy. The United States government utilises the nation's power, both military and economic, to subjugate or intercede upon other nation-states. As with Parenti's example of Cuba, those in defiance of or opposition to American imperialism are not accommodated. Empire is built upon

imbalance and paradox, both of its own creation and of the kind of power it manifests. Go's explanation of imperial power states that it ultimately resides within 'a central political authority … [exercising] unequal influence and power over the political (and in effect the socio-political) processes of a subordinate society, peoples, or space'; concurrently, imperialism is how the authority of empire is 'established, extended, or maintained' (2011, p. 7).

With the declared intent to pursue global security and seek justice against those behind the 9/11 attacks, the United States began a campaign, both domestically and internationally, seeking to counter the threat of terrorism and emphasise the nation's imperial power. The United States has maintained a foothold in several areas within the Middle East since hostilities began in Afghanistan in 2001, with troops still deployed in the region at time of writing in 2016. The NATO-led Operation Resolute Support, formerly the International Security Assistance Force, commanded by the United States' General John F. Campbell, outlines in their mission statement that their continued '[conducting] operations in Afghanistan' is to assist in upholding proper governance within the nation and to 'support … the Government of … Afghanistan' ('About RS' 2015). Such support is only possible due to the United States' invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and, at time of writing, ongoing military presence there. Similarly, Saddam Hussein was deposed as President of Iraq after a coalition of nations undertook an invasion in order to safeguard the country, convict Saddam and uncover the weapons of mass destruction he was alleged to have possessed. Not only were no such weapons found, but the invasion sparked the eight-year Iraq War and further destabilised an already tenuously-governed nation. The Iraq invasion was pre-empted by the United States' declaration of war through the Joint Resolution to Authorize the Use of United

States Armed Forces Against Iraq, proposed and signed into law by Bush in October, 2002. Further, the United States was directly responsible for the killing of Osama bin Laden in 2011 during Operation Neptune Spear, a surgical strike on bin Laden's Abbottabad compound. I will go into further detail on this Operation in the following section of the chapter, but I include this brief mention here as further evidence of the contemporary exertion of American imperial power, undertaken in pursuit of the United States' self-proclaimed goal of security, freedom and justice for the 9/11 attacks.

2.5 – *Necessitas legem non habet*: bin Laden, Zubaydah, Snowden, and the Exceptional States of America

Deriving notions of state-sponsored security from the works of noted political theorist Carl Schmitt, Giorgio Agamben's work analyses the capacity for a nation-state to self-regulate and control its security by relying on exceptional circumstances. Agamben's seminal text *State of Exception* (2005) explores the eponymous concept of the *state of exception*, whereby a state exerts an exceptional power to suspend law. The conceptual etymology of the state of exception is rooted in *iustitium*, a Latin term literally translating to 'standstill' or 'suspension of the law' (2005, p. 41), originally an institution of law in the Roman Empire. This suspension enables sovereign or governmental controllers a broader scope of power residing outside the regular moral or legal bounds of the law. Agamben notes this suspension is also usually driven by a necessity that is claimed as such by its enactors; the leader of the nation-state asserts the exception is necessary for the nation-state's security. Need is used by the nation-state's leader as a validating factor for the declaration of a state of exception. Thus, a Latin

maxim Agamben utilises becomes particularly relevant when describing the core of a state of exception: *necessitas legem non habet* – literally, 'necessity has no law', or otherwise interpreted as 'necessity creates its own law' or 'necessity does not recognize any law' (2005, p. 24). It is worth noting that Agamben points out that necessity, in and of itself, 'is not a source of law, nor does it properly suspend the law' (2005, p. 25), yet it forms the exception which suspends the law all the same. The state of exception relies on aporia, an extra-juridical and irresolvable paradox.

The United States' position as a global hegemon with exceptional powers is explored within *State of Exception* (2005). While outlining the eponymous theoretical concept of the book, relating to a state's powers overriding the law for the sake of security, Agamben cites the United States as a prime contemporary enactment of an exceptional state. By using the 2001 PATRIOT Act as an example, Agamben describes an exceptional state as being one that legitimates military and political supremacy over others in times of crisis (2005, p. 3-4). Exceptional status for juridical or security purposes, irrespective of actual intent, paves the way for implementation of an *iustitium*. Declaring a state of exception enables the nation-state a broad, sweeping and, in some cases, unlimited scope of power.

With the stated intent of protecting the country and the world at large, the post-9/11 United States has engaged in activity that is frequently justified by its leadership as being exceptional or extraordinary to the applicable 'norm' (2005, p. 25) of the law's operation. A primary example of this is 2011's American-led Operation Neptune Spear, where seventy-nine United States commandos conducted a raid on Osama bin Laden's compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan, a raid which resulted in bin Laden's death (Myers

& Bumiller 2011). Fierce debate emerged surrounding the legality and ethics of the killing, including both the intrusion into Pakistan's sovereign territory, and the claim bin Laden was unarmed when he was killed. Responding to these claims, the Obama administration effectively tried to quash the debate by asserting that Operation Neptune Spear was legitimated; succinctly emblematic of this notion, a spokesman for the American embassy in London noted that, as bin Laden and al-Qaeda had themselves declared war on the United States, '[in] war you are allowed to attack your enemy' (Bowcott 2011). In his speech immediately following bin Laden's killing, President Obama framed the operation as a universal affirmative, citing bin Laden's responsibility for 'the murder of thousands of innocent men, women, and children' from 9/11, and asserting that bin Laden's killing – implicitly irrespective of any criticism or debate surrounding its ethics and legality – was 'the most significant achievement to date in [the United States'] effort to defeat al Qaeda' (Phillips 2011).[16]

Ethically and morally, the removal of bin Laden was not undertaken without a measure of need, and not solely in the opinion of the United States government. As the leader of a preeminent terrorist organisation, claiming credit for the most brazen terrorist attack of the 21st Century, bin Laden was not an innocent man. Further, if he had been captured, instead of killed, and brought to trial, either in the United States or elsewhere, the problems that could have potentially arisen from the prosecution and public trial of bin Laden may well have eclipsed any issues that arose from his actual death. Legal and academic experts have speculated on the concerns and difficulties a judicial case may

---

[16] I explore Operation Neptune Spear and the post-9/11 United States' use of the state of exception, using a direct articulation through the *Batman Incorporated* comic book narrative, in further detail in '"The Hero we Need, not the One We Deserve": Vigilantism and the State of Exception in *Batman Incorporated*' (Comerford 2015), published as a chapter of *Graphic Justice: Intersections of Comics and Law* (Giddens 2015) and included in this thesis as an Appendix (p. 273).

have encountered had bin Laden stood trial, including issues of bin Laden's personal security, legal bias, rampant media coverage and reactions from the public[17]. Whether legal or extrajudicial, the death of bin Laden nonetheless raised questions as to its validity, simultaneously highlighting larger issues of the United States' extra-legal activity over the course of the War on Terror. The Abbottabad raid, executed by crossing into another country's sovereignty, and the killing of bin Laden, despite the White House stating that he was unarmed when he was shot (Apuzzo & Goldman 2011), appears to go towards validating the opinions of those who, like Go and Chomsky, believe the United States' sole source of international potency resides within their military strength – a point which will be expanded upon further in the next section of this chapter.

The danger here lies within how far the United States may decide to go in a future operation similar to Neptune Spear, if the nation continues with its imperial *modus operandi*. If need is continually used as a validator for such operations, or for actions like the invasion of Iraq, the pursuit of al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and, more recently, the 'secret campaign' of United States drone strikes aimed at destroying Islamic State extremists in Syria (Miller 2015), the United States could potentially continue placing itself outside of juridical purview in order to pursue the 'freedom and security for the American people' that George W. Bush promised he would fight for in 2001, mere days after 9/11.

Part of how the United States government places itself outside juridical purview, in the name of Bush's 'freedom and security for the American people' (2001), is

---

[17] See Chanen 2007, Cruickshank 2009, and Lambert 2011.

comprehensively detailed in the US Senate Intelligence Committee's Report on Torture (2014). The Report investigates the Central Intelligence Agency's treatment of prisoners following 9/11. The commercially-available edition of the Report omits a considerable amount of material from the complete, classified edition, with the latter containing redacted material and a length in excess of 6,000 pages (Rhodan 2014). Despite the truncated length of the Report's commercial edition, it nonetheless contains sufficiently damning evidence as to how the United States conducted itself with prisoners captured during the post-9/11 era.

The Report's central aim is to study the treatment of prisoners and validity of the use enhanced torture methods in the wake of 9/11 at various CIA holding sites. Throughout the Report it is made clear that those of the CIA involved in both the holding and torture of prisoners acted, at times, outside proper juridical purview; inaccurate and insufficient information regarding facility conditions, torture techniques, veracity of detentions, and prisoners' medical treatments are listed as major concerns regarding the CIA's various imprisonments[18]. In addition, the torture utilised by the CIA to extract information for use against al-Qaeda was 'not an effective means of obtaining accurate information or gaining detainee cooperation' (Senate Select Committee on Intelligence 2014, p. 3). In some cases, the CIA's detainees 'did not meet the legal standard for detention' (p. 16) or possessed no knowledge of the information the CIA sought (p. 17). The Report asserts that the CIA's Detention and Interrogation Program in the years following 9/11 'was inherently unsustainable' (p. 20). It is important to note that the report outlines several areas where juridical oversight was maintained; the CIA did not wholly act illegally throughout the entirety of its torture program. Despite this, it is evident

---

[18] See Senate Select Committee on Intelligence 2014, pp. 3-22

throughout the Report that, on several occasions, the CIA's self-claimed necessity superseded legality, and ethics, in the Agency's pursuit of information. An early example the Report highlights is the detention of Abu Zubaydah, a captured al-Qaeda facilitator[19]. Taken into custody in 2002, Zubaydah was believed by the CIA 'to possess detailed knowledge of al-Qa'ida terrorist attack plans' (p. 35). This belief was later refuted by the Senate Committee; the report states '[the CIA's] assessment significantly overstated Abu Zubaydah's role in al-Qa'ida and the information he was likely to possess' (p. 35).

Zubaydah's rendition to the CIA-codenamed DETENTION SITE GREEN was followed by questioning from FBI officers, where he indicated he intended to cooperate with authorities (p. 38). Despite Zubaydah's offering of information that correlated with existing CIA databases, invasive and coercive techniques to extract more information from Zubaydah were considered (p. 39) and later implemented (pp. 51-55), irrespective of the FBI's objection to the CIA's plans (p. 40). Prior to implementing these techniques Zubaydah asserted that, aside from intelligence he had already provided, the specific information regarding al-Qaeda that the CIA sought was not information he possessed. The torture inflicted on Zubaydah – including waterboarding, isolation and confinement for over eleven days in a box barely the size of a coffin (p. 53) – was considered successful by the interrogation team precisely because it proved Zubaydah *did not* possess the information the CIA required (p. 49). The CIA then claimed that these techniques 'were necessary to gain [Zubaydah's] cooperation' (p. 56). Before implementing these techniques the CIA asserted that the torture itself, for the purposes of safeguarding the United States and obtaining pertinent information to prevent more

---

[19] See Senate Select Committee on Intelligence 2014, pp. 35-57

terrorist attacks, simultaneously justified the need for extreme methods and superseded other concerns, including Zubaydah's own health. The CIA's ALEC Station, in communication with Zubaydah's interrogation team, confirmed that 'the interrogation process [took] precedence over preventative medical procedures' should Zubaydah have developed health problems (p. 47).

This is only one of a number of illustrative examples the Report details that portray the CIA, an agency of the United States government operating under the government's authority, overstepping its boundaries in the pursuit of security. Arguably, the torture of Abu Zubaydah, and the various legal loopholes the interrogators exploited to implement it, is made possible through an *iustitium*-like process. In this instance, law is not entirely abandoned but is largely eschewed or misrepresented, as it was when the CIA detailed the process of Zubaydah's interrogation and level of cooperation in a subsequent Presidential Review (p. 56) and neglected to brief the Senate Intelligence Committee on the interrogation altogether (p. 57). Once again, the validating factor of 'necessity' is used, by the United States, to justify a process that was not only ineffective, but also abhorrent.

In a similar vein, the abhorrence of American imperialism manifests in the broader scope of their powers of information gathering. In 2013, former CIA employee and contractor Edward Snowden leaked a massive number of classified documents pertaining to the United States' state-sanctioned surveillance program, responsible for spying on citizens of both the United States and many other countries, allied and otherwise. In conversations with American journalist Glenn Greenwald (described in Greenwald 2014), who worked closely with Snowden both immediately before, during

and after the leak of the documents, Snowden spoke of the unprecedented amount of data – including telephone conversations and email correspondences that number in the billions – that the NSA is able to regularly retrieve from the unknowing public. These communications are taken with the intent of tracking down terrorists and, consequently, preventing further terrorist attacks, using what Greenwald terms as 'the government's tactic of invoking 9/11 as the justification of this spying' (2014, p. 78). The processes related to how the NSA spies on its own citizens, which Greenwald outlines courtesy of Snowden's information, are invasive to privacy and morally grey at best[20].

The United States is guilty of flagrant abuse of power through the use of these invasive surveillance programs. Greenwald succinctly notes that the United States' spying capacities represent 'the ultimate imbalance, permitting the most dangerous of all human conditions: the exercise of limitless power with no transparency or accountability' (2014, p. 169). Bloss, writing about US domestic police surveillance six years prior to Snowden's leaks, stated that as surveillance techniques evolve and escalate following 9/11, their '[effects] on safety, civil liberties, and civil lives must be carefully considered', in order 'to ensure that longstanding democratic ideals are protected while enabling the police to maintain a safe society' (2007, p. 224). In terms of Bloss' second quote, the practices implemented in the NSA's surveillance programs indicate that the United States government is more concerned with, through a state of exception, achieving the latter at the expense of the former.

---

[20] For a comprehensive outline of the abilities and capacities of the NSA's surveillance programs, as provided by Snowden's documents, see Greenwald 2014, pp. 90-169.

2.6 – Power, Decay, Isolation: Decline of the Empire

The central theoretical body of knowledge surrounding American empire largely surrounds issues of identification. Many scholars openly declare that the United States currently constitutes an empire; Niall Ferguson (2004), being particularly outspoken on the topic, argues in favour of identification of the American empire without condemnation. Ferguson asserts that America is and has been an empire – or, possibly, merely a hegemon – for a long time, but implies that this is not necessarily a wholly negative identifier. Following comparisons to aspects of previous historical examples, such as the Egyptian and Athenian empires, Ferguson notes that the world may best be served and protected by the use of 'self-conscious American imperialism', self-conscious in the sense that 'Americans need to recognize the imperial characteristics of their own power today and, if possible, learn from the achievements and failures of past empires' (2005, p. 21). Ferguson also cites the lack of necessity for the United States to deny its imperial mindset; as the nation's post-9/11 foreign policy has shifted 'from the defense to the offense', Ferguson claims it may be 'therapeutic' if the United States '[determines] the precise nature of [its] empire – since empire it is, in all but name' (2004, p. 7).

Similarly, Dimitri K. Simes notes that empire in and of itself is not a 'uniformly negative' experience, citing the United Kingdom as an imperial template concerned with 'a desire to promote development, but with a self-sacrificing willingness to spend its resources towards that end' (2003, p. 92). Echoing similar sentiments are other critics such as neoconservative writer Max Boot, who argues that imperialism is a source of overall positive development for contemporary America, and 'has been the greatest

force for good in the world during the past century' (2003). Boot's troubling assertion is that American empire is validated as a concept through the pattern of past military successes, misguidedly citing the defeat of Nazism and the Taliban as examples where imperial actions have resulted in what Boot considers to be inarguable global good (2003).

Based on current research, and despite overt statements to the contrary made by Presidents Bush and Obama (Go 2011, p. 2) and former Secretary of Defence Rumsfeld ('Rumsfeld praises UK Iraq role' 2003), the United States can be seen as at least demonstrating an imperialist attitude, if not wholly constituting an empire itself. Further, the United States can be understood as conducting affairs with imperial or expansive intent. As Parenti notes at length in relation to Cuba and other satellite nations (2011), the United States is constantly increasing its area of influence through control of military and economic channels, rather than pure territorialism. This influence is used as a manner of expanding its dominion over 'subordinate [societies], peoples or space' (Go 2011, p. 15).

Though no less powerful proportionally in terms of the amount of materiel and personnel possessed and capable of warfare, the ongoing military actions the United States has taken abroad have eroded its supposed claims to moral and ethical superiority. Military power can act as the primary tool of empire but is not the only means of expanding control, given the more recent ways imperial formation has been described – such as Parenti's discussions of economic influence (2011), or the table of imperial typology outlined by Ferguson (2005, p. 19). Despite the strong military power the United States still possesses, the other means through which imperial control is

suffused are being slowly eroded. A chapter in Chomsky and Andre Vltchek's *On Western Terrorism* devoted entirely to 'The Decline of U.S. Power' documents a brief history of American imperial slump – particularly in political and moral contexts – going as far back as the 1940s, following the end of the Second World War (2011, pp. 149-173). Chomsky also cites the increasingly immense national debt the United States owes China as a factor other critics reference when discussing America's decline of power (2015, p. 90). Johan Höglund argues in *The American Imperial Gothic* (2014) that the American empire is entering a 'economic, military and ideological slump' and a form of 'imperial "dusk"' similar to that of the former British empire (2014, p. 8).[21] By many accounts, the United States is currently in an economic, political, moral and social decline.

Contemporaneously, many critics assert that the American military responses in the aftermath of 9/11 have weakened the nation's position as a global superpower. The weaknesses are seen particularly as the after-effects of actions taken by the United States to curb terrorism and assert their imperial power. Journalist Dave Lindorff, citing and agreeing with neoconservative political commentator Charles Krauthammer (2014), argues that President Bush's overly militaristic post-9/11 agenda followed by President Obama's 'weak-kneed foreign policy' in 9/11's wake has led to a 'decline', and that 'America's bluff is being called' (2014). Several historians and academics are featured in an article by journalist Mary O'Connell citing reactions to 9/11 as '[accelerating] the decline of the U.S. empire' and leading to its proposed eventual 'reign' ceasing by 2025 (2014). In an interview with Alex Doherty, Go also deftly summarises part of America's decline and reliance on military power to maintain control:

---

[21] Höglund's ideas regarding the American empire's suitability as a model for gothic study will be explored in more detail throughout this thesis.

You have the strongest power in the world militarily which is economically weaker and weaker. So in a sense, military power becomes all the US has. All the more reason to fear that it will use it to prevent itself from falling further. It's like the biggest, strongest, most feckless bully on the block who has lost all his candy to the other weaker kids. What would we expect might happen next? (Go & Doherty 2013)

Military power remains the one domain in which the United States unquestionably dominates the West; as such, the reliance on violence as response to a crisis becomes untenable. Exceptional measures called for by the United States government, in its continuing post-9/11 mandate for security, threaten the validity of its claims that military responses, rather than diplomatic or otherwise, are a necessary evil. Prior to 9/11, Stephen D. Krasner, describing the concept of abiding by national sovereignty, offered that such sovereignty is characterised by 'organized hypocrisy', and that rules separating sovereignties and their governing authorities are frequently violated and 'legitimated … [by] the need to preserve international stability' (2001, p. 242). The United States validates its military actions as being taken to secure peace, and strength of force is the central pillar upon which American imperial power rests. Such legitimation relies on civic-minded justifications of security and safety from those responsible within the United States government; justifications used by political and military authorities that led to, among other things, the killing of Osama bin Laden, the torture of Abu Zubaydah, the invasive surveillance of United States citizens and, more broadly, the perpetual war footing that America contemporaneously maintains.

Combined with a reliance on military power to exert authority, the shift towards a more explicitly exceptional state resembling the kind Agamben outlined has negatively isolated the United States in two distinct ways. The first is in the United States' claims to its unique and powerful status as the West's foremost military power and diplomatic statesman; writing in 2002, Ikenberry cited that part of America's immediate post-9/11 grand strategy of how it organised world power, and wielded its own, consisted of having 'no peer competitor', ensuring that 'No coalition of great powers without the United States will be allowed to achieve hegemony' (2002, p. 49). Similarly, despite the military and economic power the nation possessed at the turn of the millennium, Johnson asserted that that United States' drive to expand its foreign influence was an ultimately self-defeating notion; 'A classic mistake of empire managers is to come to believe that there is nowhere within their domain – in [the United States'] case, nowhere on earth – in which their presence is not crucial' (2000, p. 221). Ikenberry's and Johnson's respective assertions foreshadowed President Obama's justification that the United States is vital to international matters, maintaining a leadership role that 'no other nation is ready to fill' (Lunch & McCormick 2013).

The second way the United States has become isolated is in the negative perception of the nation's exertion of military power abroad. Go's description of the American empire as 'the biggest, strongest, most feckless bully on the block' (Go & Doherty 2013) evidences this view, perceiving the United States as nothing but a punishing force of military dominance. Schlesinger opined that the invasion of Iraq turned global opinions of the post-9/11 United States from sympathy to hatred, asserting that opinion polls in friendly countries '[regarded] George W. Bush as a greater threat to peace than Saddam Hussein' (2003). In a paper critiquing America's imperial qualities, Simes (2003)

asserts that the nation's "'one size fits all" approach' (p. 102) to the 'aggressive promotion of democracy' (p. 100), particularly in the Middle East, runs the risk of putting the United States' foreign policy 'back onto the track of dangerous imperial overreach' (p. 102). The United States' emphasis on both its military power and unique status within other Western nations increasingly isolates it from its peers, inviting criticism and condemnation. While the United States is undeniably powerful, Simes notes that its leaders 'must let go of the pretension that the United States is the ultimate font of global wisdom' (p. 101).

Similarly, the justification of using military power to prevent violence is not wholly sound. Howard Zinn's graphic novel adaptation of *A People's History of American Empire* (2008), a non-fiction comic book outlining the history of America's imperial ambitions from 1890 onwards, consists of a graphic representation of Zinn giving the content of the book's historical analysis as a public lecture. One of Zinn's early assertions is that the United States government 'used 9/11 as an excuse for another rampage of empire' (p. 7); he then argues a case against American empire, drawing on historical evidence of expansion, dominion and colonial assertions of power. Zinn's evidence begins with the 1890 Wounded Knee Massacre (pp. 10-17) and continues as recently as the invasion of Iraq in 2003; referencing another historical form of empire, Zinn directly compares George W. Bush and the Guantanamo Bay detention facilities to Roman Emperor Tiberius and his infamous torture chambers (p. 257). Describing the United States' military responses following 9/11, Zinn states:

We can all feel a terrible anger at whoever, in their insane idea that [9/11] would help their cause, killed thousands of innocent people. But what do

we do with that anger? Do we react with panic, strike out violently and blindly just to show how tough we are? … now we are bombing Afghanistan and inevitably killing innocent people because it is in the nature of bombing … to be indiscriminate… We are committing terrorism in order to "send a message" to terrorists… It is the old way of thinking, the old way of acting. It has never worked. (2008, pp. 4-5)

Throughout *A People's History of American Empire*, Zinn historically evidences much of what critics such as Go, Parenti and Chomsky cite as constituting an imperial behaviour in the United States, historically ingrained within the heart of the nation. As Turner asserted in his work on the frontier (1893), outlining the concerns surrounding the end of frontier expansion whilst listing the achievements of the new American people in conquering it, the United States has been driven by a need to assert its mastery within its domain. In Turner's case, the desire to control the supposed 'free land' of the country through colonial and agrarian expansion fuelled the 19th century American mentality of domination through mastering the natural. This, in turn, was married with the concept of *manifest destiny*; that American settlers were preordained, a 'chosen people' (Tuveson 1980, p. 91) whether by divine right or simple self-held ideals of cultural superiority, to expand across the country and claim it as their own. Whilst not all ideals related to manifest destiny or any form of frontier expansion are necessarily compatible contemporaneously, it's arguable that such an ideology – constituted within the first steps the colonial United States took as its own nation – is still crucial in dictating the current trajectory of the United States' actions.

Further, if exceptionalism is necessary for the United States to continue legitimating its policies and military actions, Agamben notes that such an inherently subjective declaration raises further concerns, inevitably creating a disjunction of logic. Agamben uses a definition of necessity from Giorgio Balladore-Pallieri that posits necessity can cause the existing juridical order to be 'threatened with ruin' if not utilised with purpose, as necessity is such an 'entirely subjective' choice that is 'relative to the aim that one wants to achieve' (2005, p. 30, citing Balladore-Pallieri 1970, p. 168). Agamben then goes on to state:

> [The] only circumstances that are necessary… are those that are declared to be so… The attempt to resolve the state of exception into the state of necessity… runs up against as many and even more serious aporias of the phenomenon that it should have explained. Not only does necessity ultimately come down to a decision, but that on which it decides is, in truth, something undecidable in fact and law. (2005, p. 30)

Such purposeful steps toward propagating an exceptional, imperialist attitude are conceivably taken because of a perceived lack of control. The 9/11 attacks shocked the world and constituted an incursion the United States was not adequately prepared for, signalling that places previously thought to be safe were no longer so. Such lack of control, lack of foresight or lack of ability to adequately prepare arguably influence actions the US subsequently took, first in its pursuit of 9/11's perpetrators and later in its larger campaigns of the War on Terror. The strikes and incursions into Iraq and Afghanistan, the targeted killing of Osama bin Laden, even the more recent drone strikes frequently launched by the United States against Islamic State militants in Syria;

each action is not only retributive against those who have threatened and continue to threaten the United States and its citizenry with further violence. Each can also be seen as preventive, avoiding another 9/11 or similarly fundamental strike at the heart of the American empire. Chomsky even identifies these types of actions as constituting a 'preventive war', rather than a pre-emptive one (2003, p. 12). These actions are also undertaken as an attempt to retain whatever dominion the United States is still able to maintain, globally and domestically, making it clear to the world that terrorism will, however long it takes, be fully combated, despite any of the perceived political, moral or ethical shortcomings perceived to be inherent to the United States.

Despite the application of any of these ideas, however, the United States is in a state of deterioration. While not responsible for as many of the tectonic shifts in national security policy following 9/11 as his predecessor, President Obama's administration has nonetheless retained or updated many of the measures introduced by the Bush government and engendered distrust by doing so. Go has posited that any empire '[insisting] on their exceptionality [does not] behave well', and that 'self-fashioned exceptional empires that are failing behave worse still' (2011, p. 245). Understanding the contemporaneous United States as an empire in and of itself, as a functioning political entity primarily concerned with expansion and territorial control through social, economic and military methods, there is only so long it can continue with this level of dissenting opinion before public support becomes untenable. The preventive and doggedly aggressive means with which the American empire now flaunts its military superiority, as an overt form of imperial power, serves to curtail another potential 'failure', similar to that which Richard Clark apologised for in 2004. Perhaps, this time, the intention is for the American empire to succeed at keeping its citizens

safe, thus military strength almost wholly replaces diplomacy as the chief power in the United States' international arsenal. But the cost of this safety is the post-9/11 United States being an exceptional state, where the need for security eclipses civil liberty and extends into the realm of autocracy and *iustitium*. The American empire is the last superpower, perceiving its potential, encroaching obsolescence and relying on violence, deceit, coercion and military practice to ensure security and maintain dominion.

The fourteen years of 9/11's aftermath have seen the United States operate more as an imperial entity. In addition, the nation's actions and responses to 9/11 have produced public fear, both of the state and its enemies. While the examples I have used in this chapter are relevant in establishing aspects of the post-9/11 United States' landscape, it is also crucial to analyse the fear, distrust and lack of understanding these aspects have manifested as a by-product. There is the fear of another attack – hence the United States' 'preventive war' (Chomsky 2003, p. 12) against terrorism – but also the fear of Simes' 'imperial overreach' (2003, 102), that the country will exceed its boundaries in attempting to ensure security. Such fear is not helped by the distortion of issues of the post-9/11 world, usually through withholding of information of the reduction of complex issues into simplistic binaries. I will be analysing these binaries throughout the thesis; in particular, the way popular fictional representations of the post-9/11 world – acting as conveyors of meaning and providing discourse on the relevant issues – can both aid and hinder understanding and reasoning of the contemporaneous concerns.

Chapter 3 – Narrativising Fear: The Gothic Genre

'Perhaps the Gothic is an entirely serious attempt to get to grips with difficulties in social organization, or the organization of the psyche; perhaps it is a rather down-market or debased form of tragedy, akin to melodrama; perhaps it is an escapist form, in which the reader is encouraged to avoid rather than to confront fear and anxiety.'

– David Punter and Glennis Byron, *The Gothic*, p. xix

3.1 – Introduction

This chapter introduces the second of the three research areas: the gothic genre. While the term 'gothic' encompasses a number of definitions – including styles of fashion, music and architecture – this thesis uses the gothic genre specifically as a representation of fear, or a 'literature of terror'. The chapter charts a brief history of the gothic genre, which began with Horace Walpole's seminal text *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), considered the world's first gothic novel and 'regarded as the originator of gothic fiction' (Punter 1996, p. 43).

The chapter then analyses key elements that are foundational to both the genre and its use throughout this thesis. First, the reappropriation and constant redefinition of what a text needs to be in order to be considered gothic in the 21st Century. Second, the value in utilising gothic as a genre that embodies contemporary fears and concerns as a way of understanding and coming to terms with them, narrativising aspects of human history.

Third, the use of gothic texts as heterotopic 'counter-sites' (Foucault 1984, p. 24) that aid in reflecting real world events and paradigms.

3.2 – Monstrous Origin: *The Castle of Otranto* and the Genesis of the Gothic Genre

The word 'gothic' offers a variety of definitions. Its earliest etymology can be traced back to early Germanic barbarian tribes, called the Goths, responsible for the fall of the Roman Empire (Punter & Byron 2004, p. 3-6). Gothic also refers to a style of architecture, whose definition is considered difficult to precisely ascertain (Punter & Byron 2004, p. 32) but predominantly refers to the use of pointed arches, ribbed vaulted ceilings and architectural elements that relate to or represent part of the human body (see Moore 1906 and Frankl & Crossley 2000). Contemporarily, gothic may also refer to a style of fashion concerned with dark colours, body modification and tastes for particular metal and industrial styles of music.

The gothic genre of writing similarly comes with a variety of meanings; while there are key factors of the genre that are easily identifiable, it is not a genre that is locked into one specific identification. Predominantly, the gothic is associated with horror. Visceral and psychological elements play a key role; common gothic narrative devices include vampires, otherworldly creatures, haunted castles and representations of abuse or torture (see Punter and Byron 2004, pp. 257-297). Beyond surface elements of violence and the supernatural, the gothic genre also interrogates sites of past transgression and embodies concepts of fear both historical and contemporary; Catherine Spooner notes that the gothic genre 'is profoundly concerned with the past, conveyed through both historical

settings and narrative interruptions of the past into the present' (2006, p. 9). Similarly, Höglund suggests that gothic writing 'brings the horrors of the past to our attention' (2014, p. 174). David Punter and Glennis Byron, both eminent scholars of gothic studies, assert that the genre came into being around the eighteenth century; the genre's name derived from the Goth barbarian tribes of Germanic origin, however the word 'gothic' soon grew out to encompass an umbrella term describing anything considered barbaric (2004, p. 7), including the depiction of particular art styles that were considered distasteful and 'without principles' (Moore 1906, p. 1).

The use of the gothic descriptor also came about as a direct challenge to 'classical' modes of binaristic thinking. The name 'gothic' implied something barbaric, whilst the structures of the classical offered reason and stability. Punter and Byron examine this aspect as forming sets of binaries between both orders; gothic was 'chaotic' where classical was 'well ordered', gothic was 'ornate and convoluted' where classical was 'simple and pure' (Punter & Byron 2004, p. 7). In particular, where the classical presented a realm of 'clear rules and limits' the gothic countered with 'excess and exaggeration… a world that constantly tended to overflow cultural boundaries' (Punter & Byron 2004, p. 7). In his initial and highly influential study of the genre, *The Literature of Terror* (1996), Punter asserted that the gothic was 'the product of the wild and the uncivilised' (1996, p. 5), which would later become crucial in casting light on 'whole areas of English cultural history which were being ignored', areas that could be greatly explored by creating a link between the present and the 'forgotten, "Gothic" past' (1996, pp. 5-6). Through exploration of these binaries and the link between past and present, scholars like Punter and Byron begin to highlight the gothic genre's

tendency to simultaneously exist outside of and challenge established cultural structures, the 'models to be followed' of the classical school of thought (1996, p. 5).

The first gothic novel was Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* in 1764. The novel deals with the death of prominent lord Manfred's son, Conrad, on the eve of his wedding to another lord's daughter, Isabella. Conrad is killed after being inexplicably crushed by an enormous helmet minutes before his marriage. The selfish, vain Manfred only fleetingly views this as tragic, but is more concerned about the death being an ominous portent related to a prophecy made regarding Manfred's house ceding the eponymous castle to another family '*whenever the real owner should be grown too large to inhabit it*' (Walpole 2001, p. 17, emphasis added by original author). Manfred interprets this as a supernatural intrusion on his power, and grows increasingly paranoid that his own death is imminent. Consequently, Manfred arranges a marriage with Isabella in an attempt to cement his power within Otranto. However, Manfred's machinations result in him killing his own daughter, Matilda, whom he thought to be Isabella; he had intended to murder the latter in a fit of rage over her perceived infidelity to him with another man. The novel concludes with another family taking Otranto through marriage, whilst Manfred is left alone to deal with the consequences of his actions.

What elevates *Otranto* from being a mere melodramatic tale is its inclusion of what would become elements of gothic fiction, specifically in regards to the unnerving and the supernatural. Throughout the narrative, the realistic story concerning betrayal, tragedy and the succession of lordship for Otranto is constantly interrupted and intruded upon by the supernatural or the inexplicable. This begins with Conrad's death beneath

the gigantic helmet, one of the first and most notable gothic elements Walpole pioneered, which is seen by Manfred as a 'tremendous phœnomenon [sic]' (2001, p. 18). The helmet is otherwise ignored by others in the castle, who dwell more on the horror and sadness of Conrad's gruesome death rather than what caused it. The inexplicability of the helmet crushing Conrad is then accompanied by the seemingly random appearance of an armour-clad giant in the castle who may be the owner of the helmet, a figure witnessed by Manfred's domestics (2001, p. 32). A hanging portrait of Manfred's grandfather comes to life, heaving its breast and sighing, when Manfred demands Isabella's hand in marriage (2001, p. 24). A statue of Alfonso, one of Otranto's former princes, spontaneously bleeds from the nose in what is interpreted as an omen of ill will, precipitated by Manfred attempting to marry his daughter Matilda to the father of another powerful family, in order to consolidate power (2001, p. 85). Most prominently, the ominous prophecy made regarding Manfred's house governs his actions in attempting to prevent the loss of his power. The prophecy is outlined at the beginning of the story as '*That the castle and lordship of Otranto should pass from the present family, whenever the real owner should be grown too large to inhabit it*' (2001, p. 17, emphasis added by original author). This prophecy is interpreted by Manfred's servants as being connected to the lord's irritation and his desire to hasten Conrad's wedding, so that Otranto might remain with his family. These instances serve as supernatural interruptions throughout the narrative and are largely left unexplained; as with the example of the giant helmet, the supernatural elements are only mildly remarked upon by most of the characters, despite how obviously odd and unnatural these instances are.

Walpole's narrative was the beginning of what would come to be known as the gothic genre. Walpole himself stated, pseudonymously in *Otranto*'s original preface, that the story maintained an '*air* of the *miraculous*', reintroducing elements Walpole claimed had been historically 'exploded' and eschewed by then-contemporary romance narratives (2001, p. 6, emphasis added by original author). Further, Walpole maintained that terror was *Otranto*'s 'principal engine', which in turn '[prevented] the story from ever languishing' (2001, p. 6). Punter and Byron emphasise *Otranto*'s fundamental importance to the gothic genre, citing the book as the first example of showing how 'the supernatural comes to represent the past, whether psychological or historical, rising up to assert its power in the present' (2004, p. 179). The novel itself does not bear many of the hallmarks of the horrific that would later typify the gothic. Punter and Byron suggest that, despite the novel's contemporary critical and literary significance, early readers of *Otranto* may have found the novel's ideas ludicrous or entirely unbelievable (2004, p. 178). This is a notion Walpole acknowledged, in part, in *Otranto*'s introduction; opining that audiences might find his 'well drawn' characters 'too little serious' for the piece, Walpole conceded that he was 'not blind to [his] author's defects' (2001, p. 6). Despite this, in a preface to a later printing of *Otranto*, Walpole discussed his more serious intent to combine two forms of fiction in the novel's writing: the older style of narrative romanticism, where the fantastic and the unbelievable were dominant, and the newer 18th Century style of romantic writing relying on more realistic, factual depictions of people and settings (2001, pp. 9-13). The novel's gothic aesthetics were also influenced by Walpole's personal interest in reviving styles of gothic architecture, resulting in the rebuilding of his home in Strawberry Hill into 'a miniature Gothic castle' (Punter & Byron 2004, p. 177).

With the publication of *The Castle of Otranto*, and a marriage between the fantastic and realistic modes of romantic writing, Walpole's work was the first text of the gothic genre. Elements and ideas introduced in *Otranto* would eventually promulgate within other texts – some of which belonging to disparate genres – that can be defined today as gothic. Above all, though, the gothic, as Walpole envisioned it, relies on realism; though he affirmed the work was imaginative and fictitious, featuring unreal qualities of fantasy and the supernatural, Walpole claimed that he '[could not] but believe that the ground-work of the story [was] founded on truth' (2001, p. 7). While this is true of many forms of fictional texts, the gothic has a particular relationship with terror and realism that will be explored in greater detail throughout this chapter.

3.3 – Literature of Terror: Contemporary Gothic

Though *The Castle of Otranto* pioneered the gothic genre, other writers would eventually lead to the genre's proliferation through a variety of media. In addition to the architectural style, gothic now encompasses novels, television shows, films, music, art displays and fashion. Notable historic examples of the gothic genre in literature following *Otranto* include Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, also considered the first science fiction novel (1818), Robert Louis Stenvenson's *The Strange Tale of Dr. Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) and H.P. Lovecraft's various tales of the Cthulhu Mythos, particularly *The Call of Cthulhu* (1928) and *The Shadow over Innsmouth* (1936). More modern literary examples include Cormac McCarthy's *Child of God* (1973), Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*, beginning

with *Interview with the Vampire* (1976), Harry Crews' *A Feast of Snakes* (1976), Susan Hill's *The Woman in Black* (1983), Iain Banks' *The Wasp Factory* (1984), Patrick Süskind's *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer* (1985), Bret Easton Ellis' *American Psycho* (1991), Laurell K Hamilton's *Anita Blake: Vampire Hunter* novels, starting with *Guilty Pleasures* (1993), and Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* (1996). More recently, gothic fiction has proliferated throughout television and film as well, with noteworthy examples, among others, including *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), director David Fincher's film adaptation of *Fight Club* (1999), *Supernatural* (2005-2015), *True Blood* (2008-2014), *American Horror Story* (2011-2015), director James Watkins' film adaptation of *The Woman in Black* (2012), the first season of *True Detective* (2014) and the television adaptation of *Hannibal* (2013-2015).

Classic gothic texts featured a range of genre conventions that have been noted as key to the genre's origins, sometimes derided as archetypal. Robert D. Hume, writing in 1969, mentioned a few of them, including 'haunted castles, supernatural occurrences (sometimes with natural explanations), secret panels and stairways, time-yellowed manuscripts, and poorly lighted midnight scenes' (p. 282). Citing the 'chilly indifference or condescension' the genre received from contemporaneous literary critics, Hume's analysis sought to highlight the deeper complexity of the genre found through literary critique. Broadly, Hume argued that gothic writing emerged from 'recognition of the insufficiency of reason or religious faith to explain and make comprehensible the complexities of life', concerned predominantly with 'moral and emotional ambiguity' (p. 290).

A common link between many of these gothic texts is the representation of fear as it manifests within human experience. The gothic novel acts as a method of remembering past transgressions and their intrusions upon the present, manifesting in horrific or otherworldly forms. For example, in *The Castle of Otranto*, Manfred's fear emanates from his own largess and the selfish manner in which he operates his castle and exerts his dominion. This transgression of hubris intrudes upon his present in the supernatural forms he encounters, such as Conrad's death by the crushing helmet or the giant's foot and arm encountered in the castle, seemingly without reason, by Manfred's domestics. Several of the supernatural intrusions emanate from aspects of Manfred's past, including the sighing portrait of his grandfather and the portentous bleeding nose of former Otranto prince Alfonso's statue. *The Castle of Otranto*'s narrative shows the past haunting Manfred's present, punishing him for his tyrannical rule and his current attempts to maintain his power. Höglund describes this haunting quality of the gothic, noting that the genre can be considered 'the literature of the repressed … where the horrors of an individual's past cannot be completely forgotten' (2014, p. 173).

Gothic texts are psychological in nature, traditionally associated with horror. Hume argues that a gothic novel contains an aspect of psychological engagement between the text's protagonist and the scenario they are faced with. This engagement eclipses the normal kind of engagement a reader has with a text – as this can be said of practically any other kind of novel or genre – and becomes concerned more with the psychological reactions and understanding of the text's protagonists. The true horror of a gothic text is derived less from blatant grotesquery or violence, but through the psychological fear of the protagonist. This creates a 'concern for *interior* mental processes' of these protagonists, '[displaying] the reactions of [the text's] characters to trying or appalling

situations' (Hume 1969, p. 283). Part of what makes *Otranto* a gothic text is that it depicts the inner thoughts of Manfred to the reader, as he attempts to deal with his own selfish tendencies and his fear arising from the supernatural threat that haunts him. Similarly, engagement with other gothic texts like *Frankenstein* (1818) and *Dracula* (1897) comes from reading the reactions and introspections of protagonists like Victor and Jonathan Harker, respectively, as they deal with their particular gothic situations. Contemporary gothic texts, such as Dennis Lehane's *Shutter Island* (2003), also focus extensively on the psychological element; Lehane's protagonist Edward Daniels deals with a deteriorating mental state over a past transgression regarding his wife, having to cope with hallucinations and a psychological breakdown in a manner not dissimilar to Manfred's slow deterioration in *Otranto*.

The psychological fear comes from what is both known and unknown, a sense of familiarity that is not quite right. This sense is called 'the uncanny', derived from a concept examined in Sigmund Freud's paper of the same name (1955). The uncanny refers to the elements that are at once familiar, unfamiliar and repetitious; in Freud's own words, the uncanny 'is undoubtedly related to what is frightening – to what arouses dread and horror' (1955, p. 219). Freud derives the term from the German word '*unheimlich*', itself an opposite of both '*heimlich*' (homely) and '*heimisch*' (native), summarising *unheimlich* as 'the opposite of what is familiar' (p. 220). The uncanny describes the unknown as inducing fear, further expanded on by Punter's reference to fear of what we do not understand but that is nonetheless familiar. Punter, citing Freud's work, states that the uncanny is established within a dialectic 'between that which is *known* and that which is *unknown*' in reminding us of something we have experienced

in the past, but has now arrived in our present (2007, p. 130). The uncanny instils fear, Punter asserts, because of 'our own sense that we have *been here before*' (2007, p. 130).

The Castle of Otranto (1764) unknowingly manifests the uncanny to great effect, centuries before Freud coined the term. The castle itself and the people within are familiar to Manfred, but both the past and the unknowable continually assail him. He becomes paranoid about the people around him, worrying that his power will be taken from him. The castle becomes an uncertain locale, with familial spectres from the past – embodied in the sighing artwork of his grandfather and the bleeding statue of former prince Alfonso – being at once unknowable and creating a sense of unease about the castle. Manfred's fear derives from not knowing, not having answers for these occurrences or for the question of whether he can maintain his power and his castle. The uncanny particularly works retroactively in *Otranto* because the supernatural aspects of the story are incorporated into the realism of the castle itself; were it not for the statue, the artwork, the giant or the falling helmet, the castle would seem fairly normal, and the narrative would be far more mundane. The addition of these irrational elements into a realistic location creates unease rather than outright horror.

The uncanny is a hallmark of the gothic genre that is present in many texts. Besides *The Castle of Otranto*, another literary example of the uncanny in gothic is Lovecraft's short story *The Rats in the Walls* (2011, pp.1-24), first published in 1924. Delapore, the story's narrator, inherits his ancestral home of Exham Priory in England, and returns there to restore the estate to its former glory. The sound of rats moving in the walls of the Priory unnerves Delapore for days, eventually causing him to investigate where the rats are coming from. He later discovers an enormous city beneath the Priory that he

was previously unaware of. The city served as the site for a number of human sacrifices; the victims were cultivated by Delapore's ancestors. A grotto discovered there is described by Delapore as particularly 'Gothically grotesque' (p. 21). Seeing the horrors of decayed human remains underneath the Priory and learning of his ancestors' cannibalism drives Delapore insane, causing him to partially eat the flesh of one of his companions and be committed to a mental institution at the story's conclusion.

The uncanny disrupts what is familiar in order to create tension. It serves to '[make] things *uncertain*: it has to do with the sense that things are not as they have come to appear through habit and familiarity, that they may challenge all rationality and logic' (Bennett & Royle 2009, p. 37). Embodying fear in the gothic genre through the uncanny can translate to the conceptualisation of an 'Other'. The Other is usually created as a manifestation of negativity or opposition, usually conceived from the historical or temporally past concerns that plague the text's protagonists. The Other is usually the antagonist of a gothic narrative, and may be supernatural in nature. The Other exists similarly to the uncanny but resides further away from familiarity and into what Ruth Bienstock Anolik terms as being wholly 'irrational, uncontrollable and incomprehensible' (2004, p. 1). To return to the previous example of *Otranto*, one can define the supernatural, otherworldly force hounding Manfred as a kind of Other that represents uncertainty and instigates the decline – or cessation – of hegemonic power through Manfred's own deteriorating mental state. With an oppositional reading, Manfred himself can be interpreted as an Other that embodies the same power he fears to lose, and gains a degree of unknowability through the unconscionable act of murdering his daughter at the novel's conclusion. Manfred is also antagonistic to the rest of his family – the more morally affirmative protagonists of the narrative – and is

alienated from them due to his demeanour. In essence, the Other of the castle's spectres haunts Manfred, whilst Manfred as the Other haunts his family.

The gothic Other has historically been repellent in narratives, or at least counter to the actions and feelings of many gothic texts' protagonists. This quality can be seen particular in the antagonistic Others of *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*, and also in the wide variety of cosmic deities Lovecraft created for the Cthulhu Mythos. A few examples of more modern gothic Others include the Winter Soldier from the *Captain America* film of the same name (2014) – a former United States soldier turned brainwashed cyborg assassin, and an old figure from Captain America's past – the ancient vampire goddess Lillith from *True Blood* (2008-2014), and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'s immortal and omnipotent First Evil (1997-2003) – a living embodiment of evil that can take any physical form and is virtually indestructible. These Others represent the uncanny through their resemblance to – or, in the Winter Soldier's case, former existence as – normal human beings with irrational modes of thought and action, yet are simultaneously unknowable in aspects of their demeanour and nature, alienated from the protagonists of their respective narratives.

The Other represents something far outside the norm in a gothic text, but can also most readily embody whatever fear the text is analysing. Anolik highlights Count Dracula as one of the most potent figures in the gothic Other, embodying a variety of fears or archetypes dependent on how the text is interpreted; Anolik cites critics who analyse Count Dracula as a critique of racial and class anxieties, among other issues (2004, p. 4). Translating the Other through various lenses allows further critical exploration, analysing them as a figure representing a particular sociocultural idea or context. Anolik

and Douglas L. Howard's edited collection of essays, *The Gothic Other* (2004), highlights not just the supernatural quality that composes the Other and their alien nature, but also analyses the Other's use in fiction as a symbol for contemporaneous concerns. Anolik asserts that 'writers from many canons and cultures are attracted to the always transgressive Gothic as a ready medium for expression of racial and social anxieties', using the figure of the Other as 'a ready code for the figuration of these anxieties' (2004, p. 2).

The Other is a force within gothic fiction that is simultaneously repulsive, abject and compelling. Taking the abject as 'the excessive dimension of either a subject or an object that cannot be assimilated' (Buchanan 2010, p. 1) that is intrinsically linked to something within ourselves – as opposed to something external, which can be *rejected* instead – then the Other is quite often represented as an antagonistic presence invariably derived from our own selves. This is why many Others – such as the examples I mentioned above – either resemble or are derived from the appearance of people like us. While the more alien Others in gothic fiction – such as Lovecraft's cosmic deities – are still potent as figures of horror, I would argue that the more compelling, affective gothic Others are those that resemble humans. An Other formed from ourselves, rather than something more unrealistic, adds to the link between the fiction and the reality it discursively mirrors.

Captain America's film representation of the Winter Soldier character, in the film of the same name (2014), is an effective gothic Other because the audience knows the realistic, understandable person at the heart of the unknowable gothic horror. James Buchanan Barnes was an American soldier who fought alongside Captain America in

Germany during World War II (see Figure 3.1 Left), before seemingly falling to his death in a ravine (*Captain America: The First Avenger* 2011). Barnes was later rescued by Hydra, a paranormal division of Hitler's armed forces, and transformed into the Winter Soldier; he was tortured, brainwashed and fitted with a cyborg left arm to replace the limb he lost in the ravine (see Figure 3.1 Right). The Winter Soldier is a masked, remorseless assassin utilised by Hydra over decades, cryogenically frozen in order to be reanimated whenever Hydra needs somebody killed. The film depicts Barnes' torture at the hands of Hydra, as well as the brainwashing process regularly used to maintain the Winter Solider persona.
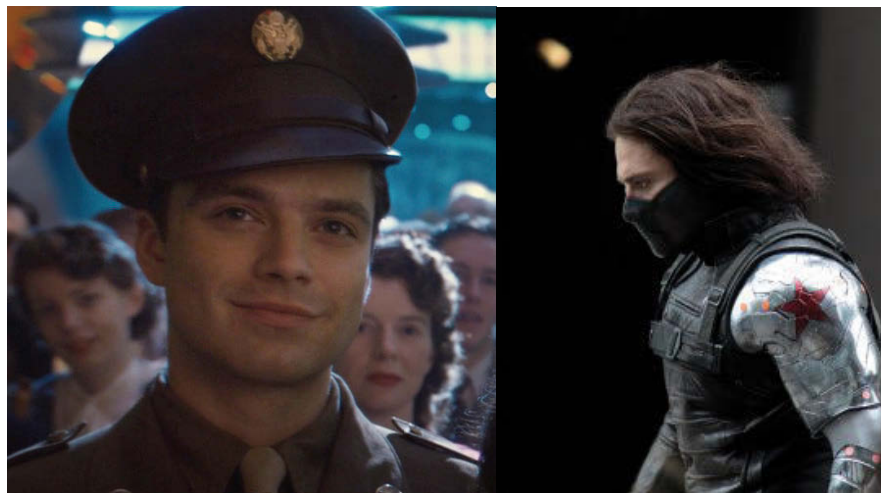
Figure 3.1 - [Left] James Buchanan Barnes (taken from *Captain America: The First Avenger* 2011), [Right] The Winter Soldier (taken from *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* 2014)

As well as consisting of gothic elements such as body modification and of being a haunting presence from a character's past – in this case, Captain America's – the Winter Soldier character is also considered an Other because he is a personification of the ruthless, alienating logic of Hydra. Throughout the film, Hydra is presented as a morally questionable force of opposition to Captain America; the organisation's leader claims to want to take control of the world's surveillance technology in order to pre-emptively target terrorist threats before they emerge. In reality, Hydra is only concerned with

furthering an agenda of genocide and world domination. The Winter Soldier represents Hydra's antagonist logic, as a tool the organisation uses to dispense their will. Due to his silence, indomitability and inscrutable demeanour, as well as his affiliation with Hydra, the Winter Soldier is thoroughly alien to the protagonists of the film. However, he is more relatable when his true identity is revealed and he is remembered as Barnes, the sympathetic, understandable man he was before he was transformed into a cyborg. The film contains several scenes highlighting the tragedy of Barnes' transformation, and Captain America has difficulty fighting an enemy who is his former friend. Before his climactic battle with the Winter Soldier, the Captain begs him to walk away; 'Please don't make me do this', he asks. During their fight, the Captain throws away his shield and says he won't fight the Winter Soldier; he insists to Barnes that 'You're my friend'. Though the Winter Soldier counters by saying 'You're my mission', before pummelling the Captain, Barnes eventually regains control and saves the Captain before he drowns in Lake Potomac.

The realistic Other is contrasted by the unrealistic. Lovecraft's Cthulhu, which first appeared in the short story 'The Call of Cthulhu' (2011, pp. 61-98) originally published in 1928, is a gothic Other who is an entirely incomprehensible elder god outside the norm of human understanding. Cthulhu is worshipped by cultists and resembles a creature that is part octopus and part dragon. Both Cthulhu's intentions and actions are completely alien and incomprehensible; the elder god waits beneath the ocean within 'the nightmare corpse-city of R'lyeh' (2011, p. 92) to unleash his monstrosity upon the world. Cthulhu, like other creatures Lovecraft created, inspires madness in those who witness it. As a gothic Other, Cthulhu represents fear of the alien and the unknown; the

horror derived from the creature is much more blatant and divorced from reality than the realism and tragedy of the Winter Soldier.

Figure 3.2 - [Left] Cthulhu (taken from DeviantArt 2012), [Right] The Winter Soldier (taken from *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* 2014)

Both Others I have used as examples are effective in producing fear and horror (see Figure 3.2), but the Winter Soldier is a more critically engaging Other; the character is a realistic, and therefore comprehensible, form of the Other. If gothic fiction's potency as a comment on sociocultural concerns relies largely on its ability to channel realism into the fictional narrative, and for the fears represented within that narrative to have resonance with its readers beyond mere fictional engagement, then the Other must work as a distinct representation of such fears in a manner that becomes predominantly applicable to the readers it is attempting to speak to. The Winter Soldier represents the realistic fears surrounding global security, illegal surveillance and state-sanctioned violence; the character is deployed in the film to assassinate civil dissenters, a weapon used by Hydra, the organisation that has taken control of the United States' security measures[22].

Embodying or constraining gothic presence in a text into a distinct Other, a character wholly separate from and unknowable to the protagonists and the audience, establishes

---

[22] I will be exploring the Winter Soldier's use as an articulation of post-9/11 concerns, interpreted through the gothic, in further detail in Chapter 7.

a sustained binary between good and evil, us and them, the familiar and the alien. Within gothic fiction, this is useful in creating a demarcation between the protagonist and the antagonist. However, as with the example of the Winter Soldier character, as well as several more I will explore in detail throughout this thesis, the gothic genre also offers a level of ambiguity that provokes more nuanced study of its subject matter; this ambiguity is crucial to my research, regarding the dissolution of binaries as they are established by pro-imperial post-9/11 fiction. The gothic counters a problematic that coincides with my previous analysis of United States imperialism in Chapter 2: contemporary fiction that delineates social and cultural issues within a binary do themselves disservice in failing to comprehensively engage with the subject matter. This is particularly an issue facing contemporary fictional depictions of the Middle East and representations of the real world extremist groups that emanate from the region. In these scenarios, the gothic is adept at investigating the grey area between these binary poles of black and white. Höglund (2014) outlines the concept of the American imperial gothic, a subgenre of writing concerned with eliminating the complexity of the post-9/11 world and aligning texts to support 'the politics and practices that sustain the US empire' (2014, p. xi). Höglund persuasively argues and condemns the American imperial gothic as repurposing the gothic to establish these unhelpful binaries; as I will show in subsequent chapters, an inverse to Höglund's assertions exists in the form of post-9/11 gothic, a subgenre which deconstructs such binaries and restores ambiguity.

Another prominent gothic convention is the articulation of violence, usually relating to horror and the supernatural. A majority of classic gothic texts depict violence, from Conrad's supernatural death and Manfred's murder of Matilda in *Otranto* (1764), to the vampiric blood-draining *Dracula* (1897) and the murder of Victor's associates at the

hands of his monstrous creation in *Frankenstein* (1818). Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik emphasise the depiction of violence as a feature of gothic texts:

> While concerned, at the level of plot, to re-establish 'good', the Gothic text is frequently marked by an obsession with violence, darkness and death; with 'evil' as a supernatural force; and with the 'uncanny' as an inexplicable phenomenon. This is indeed Gothic as a literature of terror. (2005, p. 2)

While violence is a scant element of *Otranto* compared to the greater psychological components of the novel, contemporary gothic texts like the films *Underworld* (2003), *Van Helsing* (2004) and *Dracula Untold* (2014) utilise violence within their narratives. All three texts feature protagonists who are in some way connected to the gothic; the eponymous protagonist of *Van Helsing* is discovered to be a werewolf towards the end of the film, *Underworld*'s Selene is a vampire, and *Dracula Untold* utilises a new representation of Stoker's original vampiric creation. The gothic protagonists are violent and prone to combative behaviour, brutally assaulting or killing opposition while exerting their gothic tendencies; Van Helsing does battle with his own version of Count Dracula towards the film's conclusion whilst in his werewolf form, Selene uses guns to take down her Lycan enemies, and the Dracula of *Untold* leads an assault force of vampires to slaughter the Ottomans. Not all gothic villains are concerned with monstrous or even physical violence; recent examples include the gothic Others of *Doctor Who*'s The Master (1963-2015) and Jim Moriarty in the modern-day television adaptation of Sherlock Holmes (2010-2015), both of whom rely more on subterfuge, manipulation and technology rather than the ferocious means used by Others like Van

Helsing or the Dracula of *Untold*. Whether it is used directly or indirectly by characters, violence is a key tenet of many gothic narratives.

Further pinpointing aspects of the gothic genre, Chris Baldick asserts that a Gothic narrative contains 'a fearful sense of inheritance in time with a claustrophobic sense of enclosure in space, these two dimensions reinforcing one another to produce an impression of sickening descent into disintegration' (1992, p. xix). In other words, the return of an ominous past to entrap and the constricting of the space of the present combine to create a downward spiral, a tale that '[invokes] the tyranny of the past … with such weight as to stifle the hopes of the present' (1992, p. xix). Baldick's definition applies primarily to the gothic genre of writing as opposed to fashion or architecture, however one can see how Baldick's ideas about past tyranny may apply to the latter given the often ominous, haunted and ancient qualities gothic architecture offers, as a stark contrast to more modern buildings.

Indeed, ominous gothic buildings also contribute to a broader understanding of the genre. Teresa Goddu examined the practice of vampirism in Kentucky, specifically through a 'clan' of teenagers who met in an abandoned house to drink each other's blood and killed puppies in a local animal shelter (1999, pp. 125-126). Using this Kentucky clan as an example, Goddu observed that place was fundamental in defining the particular cultural identity of these teenagers in relation to similar vampire clans elsewhere in America. Goddu asserted that 'gothic horror is articulated through particular locations' and that 'if the gothic is the repository for cultural anxieties, then the specific form and site of its conventions have much to say about its cultural effects' (1999, p. 126).

Place creates both locational and temporal context for the gothic. Just as the cultural background of 1764 England combined with Walpole's interest in gothic architecture to produce *The Castle of Otranto,* location and temporal place construct different meanings for gothic across epochs. Stoker's *Dracula* emerged in 1897 at the height of popularity of invasion literature, a genre concerned with articulating the decline or collapse of the British Empire through external forces in texts such as George Tomkyns Chesney's *The Battle of Dorking* (1871) and H.G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds* (1898). *Dracula* was largely concerned with tensions regarding the shift out of a colonial mindset and ideas surrounding racial mixing (see Arata, 1990). The novel dealt with the eponymous Transylvanian vampire's attacks on several individuals, told through an epistolary style. The European threat of Count Dracula assaulting a cast of largely British characters forms part of Stephen D. Arata's study of Stoker's bibliography, with the belief that this and several other novels by Stoker were concerned with representing and alluding to foreign threats against Britain (1990, p. 625). In particular, the novel *Dracula* represented a turn towards representing the British Empire and ideas surrounding it in a gothic fashion, a mode of genre termed 'imperial gothic' by Patrick Brantlinger. Part of the use of imperial gothic was to highlight reversions towards savagery and atavism (Brantlinger 1985, p. 245), founded in contemporary fears surrounding the end of Victorian Britain (Arata 1990, pp. 622-623). An aspect of *Dracula*'s gothic appeal is in mirroring real world anxieties by situating the novel's conflict and setting within a realistic locational and temporal context. The mirrored reality within the text 'is read in a specific place in the present, thereby disturbing a sense of reality along with the aesthetic values supposed to sustain it' (Botting, 2012, p. 19), meaning that the line between reality and fiction becomes less distinct given how much closer to reality the text is. Reading *Dracula* in its contemporary context

augments the text's power; the reality it depicts evokes the possibility of horror from the fictional world, itself an articulation of contemporaneous racial and social issues, being inflicted upon the real.

This is also true of more modern gothic texts, constituted and contextualised by place. The television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, which ran from 1997 to 2003, depicts realistic teenage characters within Sunnydale High School, a seemingly normal high school in the United States. The characters deal with common issues like sexual intercourse, homosexuality, fears of post-school life and the adolescent move towards understanding identity. These issues are explored alongside the gothic elements of vampirism and supernatural creatures, acting both as a genre convention and as a reflection on the characters' issues; for example, Buffy undergoes a constant internal struggle throughout the series over whether or not to accept her vampire slayer identity, a plot that parallels her character's growth into adulthood. The show is a gothic text utilising vampires, werewolves and much of the supernatural paraphernalia traditional in the genre, and reflects the rise of feminism, particularly through the use of a strong independent female lead, and greater comprehension of sexuality in teenagers towards the end of the 1990s. The place of *Buffy* both in the contemporary (at the time) temporal setting and the familiar high school location aids articulation and interrogation of the issues the series pursues. The gothic 'is both temporally and culturally inflected – what terrified the eighteenth-century reader will not frighten the twenty-first century cyberspace surfer' (Horner and Zlosnik 2005, p. 2).

Part of what *Buffy* achieves as a gothic text is its ability to juxtapose the horror of the unknown with a sense of the familiar, a key aspect of the genre from a critical

standpoint. Familiarity is key when discussing a gothic text; Spooner underlines gothic's contemporary usefulness in that the genre 'has become so pervasive precisely because it is so apposite to the representation of contemporary concerns' (2006, p. 8). In order for the gothic text to be truly resonant in the reflective way Spooner and Punter discuss, grounding must be created within the text to anchor its audience in the known. The familiarity is then juxtaposed beside the irrationality and unknowable qualities of the terror embodied in the text. The issues explored in *Buffy* that are familiar to audiences – such as sexuality and self-acceptance of identity – become more potent when articulated through the facets of dark fantasy and horror the narrative utilises; the unknown, the mysterious and the ambiguous. The text is then able to distort or more aggressively interrogate aspects of the society it depicts and reflects. *Buffy* is also imprinted with the time and place in which it was created, giving the text a certain meaning that is irrevocably tied to the temporal and spatial place in which it was created. Such imprinting helps shape *Buffy*'s identity as a text of its time, confronting and interrogating issues of the era, the same way *Dracula*, *Frankenstein* and *Otranto* confronted the issues of their respective times[23].

In her study of the gothic's popularity, Spooner highlights key themes the genre excels in discursively engaging with, both at its inception and contemporaneously (2006, p. 8). These themes apply to a variety of gothic texts, and *Buffy* embodies all of them. First is Spooner's assertion that the gothic deals with 'the legacies of the past and its burdens on the present' (p. 8); Buffy herself is the latest in a long line of vampire slayers, her powers received from an ancient spell that affects slayer bloodlines. In several episodes, Buffy is also forced to deal with the burden of having over a millennia's worth of slayer

---

[23] I explore this notion of narrative imprinting, through use of Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the narrative chronotope, in further detail in Chapter 5.

history, as well as the prospect of training subsequent slayers, resting on her shoulders. This occurs concurrently with Buffy coming to understand past transgressions and ethically questionable decisions made by the Watchers' Council, the historical authority tasked with training new slayers.

Second, Spooner cites 'the radically provisional or divided nature of the self' (p. 8). Buffy constantly attempts to balance her life as a slayer with that of a high school student and, once she graduates, a full-fledged adult. Throughout the series, Buffy yearns for a normal life that reconciles her slayer side, juxtaposed with her growth from a teenager into an adult. The *Buffy* series' representation of duality between a slayer and a woman allegorises coming of age, which is apropos considering the initial high school setting of the narrative, acting as a modernised *bildungsroman*.

Third and fourth in Spooner's list are the interconnected 'construction of peoples or individuals as monstrous or "other"' and 'the preoccupation with bodies that are modified, grotesque or diseased' (p. 8). Most of the enemies Buffy faces throughout the narrative are supernatural in nature, including vampires, werewolves, magicians; many of these enemies – especially the vampires – are hybridised, consisting of the monstrous 'other' and the human side or host. The narrative begins by inferring that all vampires are monstrous, evil and out to drain the blood of the residents of Sunnydale, where Buffy acts as a slayer. However, as the series progresses, there are several vampires who are eventually singled out as separate from their malevolent kin; notably the eventual main characters of Angel and Spike, whose backstories paint them in a more sympathetic light as they ally with Buffy. The text uses these characters to map the dissolution of binaries and complicates the apparent black and white perception of

vampires versus humans, presenting both as ambiguous; this can be interpreted as the text articulating issues of social perception, cultural nuance and racial conflation.

While Spooner is careful to clarify that the gothic is not simply concerned with '[reflecting] social anxieties in a straightforward manner' (p. 8), she then goes on to note that the genre does provide 'a lexicon through which anxieties both personal and collectivise can be narrativized' (p. 9). Where *The Castle of Otranto*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and other examples of the genre both historical and contemporary, excel as gothic texts is in their ability to confront these anxieties through a supernatural lens, aided by the particular spatial and temporal context in which these texts are created. Of interest is Spooner's claim that the gothic also acts as a repository for the fears they articulate; when discussing the history of the genre and its association with barbarism, Spooner asserts the gothic also provides 'a means through which Western culture could displace its fears into an exotic, distanced other and thus feel safe' (pp. 20-21). This displacement of fear enables the gothic to create a target for contemporary fears and concerns, embodying that fear as a justified source of antagonism. Spooner notes the gothic's use as a 'defensive' form of text '[on] the eve of the bloody and unpopular war with Iraq' (p. 20); through the genre, text creators are able to form a figure or institution that acts as the targetable source of these fears. Spooner compares this to Matthew Lewis' *The Monk*, a gothic text published in 1796 concerned with creating a sensationalised fictional version of Catholicism in order to highlight the 'cruelties' of the faith (p. 20)[24].

---

[24] The notion of the gothic acting as a place for Western culture, and specifically the United States, to displace and deposit their fears is one that I will be studying throughout this thesis; particularly, in relation to the work of Johan Höglund and the American imperial gothic (2014).

It is important to note that not all of the elements cited and explored above are common to all gothic texts. Many appear in the majority of gothic texts, however it is not uncommon for texts that are not explicitly gothic to nonetheless belong to or utilise facets of the genre, participating without subscribing exclusively to all of the genre's tenets[25].

3.4 – 'Over there, there where I am not': Botting, Foucault and the Mirror of Heterotopia

An important function of the gothic genre is its ability to create a mirror of the real world blended with the tension of the supernatural. Since familiarity is a foundation of the genre, it is able to represent fictional worlds that bear resemblance to and hallmarks of our own. As established earlier, part of *Dracula*'s scholarly appeal came from the reflections the text offered about contemporaneous fears regarding the move away from colonialism and the perceived end of the British Empire. Set in a realistic depiction of 1890s England, featuring normal – that is, not supernaturally-altered – protagonists that contended with the gothic threat of the European vampire, *Dracula* created a space to interrogate these ideas in relation to reality against the backdrop of a mirrored, yet distorted, depiction of British society. Part of *Dracula*'s effectiveness inevitably lies within this mixture of the realistic, the characters, setting, and the fantastic, the supernatural qualities of the vampires.

---

[25] I will be exploring this idea in greater detail in Chapters 4 and 7.

Fred Botting, engaging in discourse with ideas posited by Michel Foucault, uses the idea of the mirror to explore the notion that the gothic genre's 'reflections [exceed] the proper balance of identification and correction' for representing real world paradigms (2012, p. 19). In this effect, gothic texts have an innate ability to speak more directly to and evoke contemporary fears and concerns because they are closely aligned with the real world those fears reside in, as well as the specific temporal moment those fears manifest within. Simultaneously, the reflection of the real world is twisted and distorted. The supernatural quality of Count Dracula's vampirism is juxtaposed to the everyday reality of the reader's own world; the realism anchors the reader in an otherwise fantastical text.

With reference to the ways in which mirrors reflect the real, Foucault describes the concept of *heterotopia*; a 'counter-site' (1984, p. 24) that refutes or interrogates utopian and negative spaces within social discourse. This concept acts as a direct opposite to the concept of a utopia, as a space of virtuality that mirrors reality. Foucault's idea of heterotopia is concerned with binaries; initially describing the juxtaposition of spaces, Foucault outlines 'a light, ethereal, transparent space, or again a dark, rough, encumbered space' in relation to the spaces of dreams and passions (1984, p. 23), much the same way Punter and Byron describe the duality between classic and gothic paradigms, between the civilised and the barbarous (2004, p. 7). These spaces are related, Foucault argues, yet diametrically opposed to one another.

Similarly, heterotopic spaces 'are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality' (1984, p. 24) and are outlined by Foucault as being both physical and conceptual sites. While he does list actual, physical locations that can

act as heterotopias in particular contexts, the conceptual site of the heterotopia is a place that can act as a counter or inverse to the real world; the mirror is a distortion, yet still recognisable. In defining heterotopia, Foucault first outlines the sites known as 'crisis heterotopias', which are 'privileged or sacred or forbidden places' existing for those who are 'in a state of crisis' (1984, p. 24). Foucault defines crisis heterotopias as consisting predominantly of physical sites, such as boarding schools or honeymoon sites, and of states of being, such as pregnancy, menstruation and being of an adolescent or elderly nature (1984, p. 24). Such sites are set outside of the norm, and Foucault argues that these sites are being subsumed by the second type; that of 'heterotopias of deviation' that places individuals of a deviant nature once again outside of the norm. Foucault cites prisons and psychiatric hospitals as heterotopias of deviation (1984, p. 25). Connected to these ideas are Foucault's assertions regarding the inherent juxtapositions within heterotopia; Foucault states that heterotopias are simultaneously 'a system of opening and closing' that are both isolated and penetrable, that they are 'most often linked to slices of time' and 'juxtaposing in a single real place several … sites that are in themselves incompatible' (1984, pp. 25-26). Succinctly, heterotopia is a site where ideas and concepts can be isolated, and yet still explored and interrogated by outside forces.

Though, in his initial paper, Foucault refers more to physical sites as heterotopias – for instance, using a library as the representation of heterotopia's links to different aspects of time (1984, p. 26) – he also applies the notion of heterotopia more conceptually. Foucault uses the example of a mirror as virtual space to interpret both utopia and heterotopia, first referring to utopia through the actualisation of self in a space that does and does not exist: 'I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that

opens up behind the surface'. In this way, the utopia is a fantasy, virtuality as an image offered to Foucault that does not physically exist in reality; a 'placeless place', as Foucault terms it. He then follows this with the use of the same mirror as a heterotopia, representing reality as the image before his eyes even if the image in the mirror is false in and of itself. 'The mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy ... it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real … and absolutely unreal' (1984, p. 24).

Utopia itself is also unreal; Thomas More's original conception of utopia literally translates, in Greek, to 'no-place'. Given the ideas in More's founding work in *Utopia* (1516) – concerning a seemingly-perfect island nation that has somehow created an ideal society – the term is apropos, as such an idyllic, perfect society as the one More envisioned – or, as Ruth Levitas terms it, an 'absolute utopia' (1990, p. 203) – is unlikely to ever exist. More's vision created an ideal for humanity to achieve; utopia as a concept represents 'not just a dream to be enjoyed, but a vision to be pursued' (Levitas 1990, p. 1). Utopia shows a mirror of the real world and what it could strive to achieve in an ideal world, while remaining outside possibility. It exists purely as a concept in a heuristic practice that engages readers with the possibility of a social order different from the one they are used to.

Heterotopia, too, exists as a concept, yet it differs as an analytical tool in comparison to utopia. Heterotopia is at once similar and antithetical to utopia; the concept exists in a place that does not, that is alternative to the norm, but is much closer or opposite to the real world rather than existing beyond its reach. The reflection offered by conceptual

heterotopic sites bears greater parity to reality, but is distorted, warped and kept separate from contaminating that reality. To refer to Foucault's example of the mirror, we can see the place embodied in the mirror, reversed from where we stand and offered with clarity, and yet such a place does not actually physically exist. What is reflected in the mirror – the person's face – is real, but the actual reflection itself does not exist in reality.

Gothic texts, similarly, can be considered heterotopias. Using Foucault's general ideas about heterotopia as a foundation, the gothic text acts as a mirror that reflects our world, and is at once real and unreal. It is real in the context of representing a world that anchors itself within a semblance of realism, in the physical sense of being a text that exists on the page, on a computer screen or on a television the same way the physical object of Foucault's mirror existed. Simultaneously, the gothic text is unreal in its depiction of a world in which the supernatural exists in active relationship with the real. The mirror is there, the image it represents is there, and despite the virtual space of that image being a fiction, the fact that the image exists at all grounds it in a measure of reality. Relying on the realistic underpinnings of gothic as asserted by Spooner, Punter and Botting, the gothic Other is also a signifier of the heterotopic counter-site of 'over there, there where I am not' that Foucault draws our attention to (1984, p. 24).

Place is fundamental in understanding the gothic genre through a heterotopic lens. Realistic setting of either locational or temporal nature is essential to context, eliciting greater resonance with the audience of the text. The heterotopias of the gothic are built from familiarity in order to interrogate other elements, realistic and fantastical. They are mirrors of contemporary culture and society but are warped, somewhat, by what it is

they interrogate. Gothic's heterotopic counter-site, against what Foucault terms are 'real sites that can be found within [a] culture', effectively acts as a space where elements are 'simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted' (1984, p. 24). Once more, reality is present but also not present; the gothic text mirrors familiar and realistic elements but distorts them through lenses of supernatural exaggeration.

To once again draw on it as an example, the narrative of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) exists as a heterotopia. Throughout its seven years of broadcast, the fictional world realistically represents the contemporaneous setting of an American high school in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The familiarity of the reflected world is interrupted by the inclusion of the supernatural; the real world elements of *Buffy* exist, but the specific setting of the narrative remains divorced from our reality. The more recent vampire television series *True Blood* (2008-2014) operates in a similar fashion, presenting a realistic depiction of the American Deep South in Louisiana that is intruded on by the inclusion of vampires, werewolves and other supernatural trappings. Both series also use these horrors and distortions of reality to interrogate real world concerns; *Buffy* confronts the aforementioned aspects of high school and burgeoning adulthood. Likewise, *True Blood* deals with issues like drug culture, political oppression and homophobia, with the latter especially articulated through the public ostracising of vampires and derogatory terminology of 'fang banger' to denote humans who have sex with vampires. Both *Buffy*'s and *True Blood*'s respective narratives exist in correlation to reality, but are distorted through their relationships between the supernatural, the unknowable, and the real. The contemporaneous issues and setting the narratives utilise also solidify the texts' specific temporal contexts; Foucault notes that heterotopias 'are most often linked to slices in time' (1984, p. 26).

The gothic genre enables an engagement with contemporary issues similar to other genres, most prominently science fiction, through this juxtaposition of the real and the unreal. Science fiction as a genre is usually cited as having developed from the gothic with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), considered both a prominent gothic novel and 'the first real novel of science fiction' (Aldiss & Wingrove 1973, p. 51). Part of the appeal of science fiction is through interrogation of a realistic element when viewed through a speculative prism; a well-known example of this is Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, first published in 1953. The narrative concerns a speculative United States future reliant on book-burning and stemming flows of information, reflecting contemporaneous fears regarding the McCarthy era and decline of civil liberties during the heightened fear of communism (Bradbury, 2013). Emphasising the relationship the gothic and science fiction, Brian W. Aldiss argues that both genres are intrinsically linked as replications and interpretations of realistic ideas and concerns:

> Science fiction is the search for a definition of man and his status in the universe which will stand in our advanced but confused state of knowledge … and is characteristically cast in the Gothic or post-Gothic mode. (Aldiss 1973, p. 8)

Such counter-sites and reinterpretations of the real world are crucial, allowing ingress of new ideas and methods of combating or protecting against the implications these sites make about modern culture and society. Using terminology that will be explored further in this thesis, gothic fiction taps into a mode identified by Phillip Thurtle and Robert Mitchell in relation to superhero comic books as the 'logic of the anomalous', positing that particular texts serve to prepare or inoculate their readers for the ramifications of

anomalous, impossible-to-predict events if they are ever to occur in the real world; Thurtle & Mitchell cite 9/11 and the uncanny, coincidental publication of a Superman comic book the day afterwards, also featuring an aircraft crashing into a skyscraper, as one example (2007, pp. 267-268). Thurtle and Mitchell's idea of this logic is mostly concerned with superhero narratives, but is also helpful when explaining the gothic as a mode of articulating real world problems through genre. Thurtle and Mitchell outline the logic of the anomalous as a way of predicting present day concerns and disasters and of 'better [understanding] how to think about our depictions and comprehension of disasters in entertainment media' (2007, p. 269). Through this logic, they argue, we are able to better understand real world implications embedded in fictional disaster, 'emphasizing the ways in which new information, such as the foreshadowing of an event, emerges as a result of repetition itself' through various fictional interpretations (2007, p. 294). Concluding their paper, Thurtle and Mitchell assert:

> If we pay attention to where our entertainments take us and how they allow us to explore a logic of the anomalous, we are more likely to invent those affective capabilities that recognize the ways in which our interactions with the world create potential futures – which is, in any case, inevitable (2007, p. 297).

The gothic is a useful tool to analyse fictional representations of real world concerns. For there to be meaningful discourse on the contemporaneous anxieties of the post-9/11 world, the binaries imposed on these anxieties, which restrict more complex discourse, need to be removed, if not at least partially dissolved or diluted, in order to unpack the extensive complexities of situations that are oversimplified or left unexplained. For this

analysis, a useful fictional analytical tool for exploring the grey between the black and white is the character of Batman.

Chapter 4 – Batman and the Gothic: Genre, Lens, Articulation

'It can be observed that the gothic is often described as a form of remembering. According to much scholarship on the gothic, the gothic is the literature of the repressed… Much gothic criticism has transposed this model onto the history of (imperial) Western nations and argued that repressed memories of the practices of empire… will not remain hidden and repressed. They take form in gothic culture.'

– Johan Höglund, *The American Imperial Gothic: Popular Culture, Empire, Violence*, p. 173

4.1 – Introduction

This chapter will focus on combining the central areas of study the previous three chapters have outlined – that of United States imperialism, the Gothic genre, and the fictional narratives of Batman. The central theme for this and all subsequent chapters is to introduce the concept of a *post-9/11 gothic* lens, a subgeneric tool useful for interrogating and engaging in discourse with representations of the concerns, anxieties and horrors of the post-9/11 world – particularly within the United States. The chapter deploys theoretical underpinnings from Jacques Derrida's influential paper *The Law of Genre* (1980) to aid in establishing ideas. In addition, the chapter further outlines some distinctions between Batman texts and other texts of the superhero genre in relation to this area of discourse, further demonstrating Batman texts' capacity as a gothic mode of analysis.

Chapter 1 described how elements of the Batman comic book and its associated media were able to respond to societal, cultural and political concerns, with most of these elements being especially prominent in the latter 20th and early 21st Centuries, in the same manner that characters such as Captain America were born almost wholly out of responses to these concerns. Similarly, Chapter 3 outlined how the gothic genre is adept at confronting and representing these concerns, providing a fictional space where real issues can be reasoned with. As popular culture has evolved to become a greater analytical component in the study of contemporary issues, articulating and interpolating them, so too has the superhero genre, and Batman in particular, expanded to encompass a language and subtext directly interrelated with reality. Hence, fictional forms become better focal points for comprehensively understanding the factual.

4.2 – The Shadow and the Bat: Post-9/11 and *The Dark Knight Trilogy*

As argued in this thesis, Batman is a more grounded and realistic character than many of his fictional superhero compatriots. The character's humanity is exemplified through both a lack of superpowers and participation in narratives that deal with more realistic issues, compared to other superhero texts. Batman is relatable to the audience, in part, because it is more possible for the character to exist; it is more believable for somebody to become or emulate Batman than it is to do the same with the alien Superman. The Batman texts' realistic setting also aid audiences in relating to the fictional narrative, as the city of Gotham closely correlates to cities like New York or Chicago. Batman texts that utilise this realism are fertile ground for real world discourses.

The most popular and oft-critiqued Batman comic book that represents real world discourses is Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* (1986). The narrative concerns a retired Bruce Wayne coming to terms with obsolescence and impotence in a post-apocalyptic Gotham, where gangs of mutants and criminals have led to socio-political decay in the city. The United States government of the narrative is also uninterested in aiding Gotham, with a fictional representation of Ronald Reagan instead focusing on using Superman to fight the Soviet Union. In order to restore a semblance of order to Gotham, Wayne returns to active duty as Batman, recruiting a new Robin and unintentionally raising a cult-like army of followers who call themselves the 'Sons of the Batman'. Batman and the Sons work against the gangs, the government and Superman to safeguard their city.

Among those who have exhaustively analysed the text, Miller's narrative is described by fellow Batman writer Grant Morrison as 'a violent operatic myth of eighties America … a definitive product of its times … [its] influence became all-pervasive for decades' (2011, p. 190). The story, according to Morrison, represents aggression against the 'ossified power structures' operated by a fictional and 'all but mummified' Ronald Reagan, the then-President of the actual United States; the Reagan of *The Dark Knight Returns* enlisted a 'true-blue Republican' version of an aged Superman as an enforcer, an 'idealistic government stooge' and a direct opponent to Batman's renewed vigilantism (2011, pp. 190-194). The narrative also recontextualised Batman, from a vigilante existing simultaneously within and in opposition to Gotham's legal system, to 'a rugged libertarian' and outright 'antiestablishment rebel' working to cleanse a crime-rampant Gotham, directly resisting both Gotham's law enforcement and a United States

government which had seemingly abandoned the city (2011, pp. 190-194). He operated

against the constricting forces of both Reagan and his enforcer Superman, the latter

being deployed against Batman and Gotham by the President the same way one might

deploy a nuclear weapon. *The Dark Knight Returns* was originally published during the

1986 US bombing of Libya, orchestrated by Reagan during the Cold War in 1985

(McCredie 1987). The then-contemporary Cold War influence of the United States

versus the Soviet Union is at least alluded to in the narrative during several scenes;

among them are a scene where Superman punches through and destroys a Soviet fighter

jet (1986, p. 120) and another where Superman is deployed to intercept a Russian

nuclear warhead, diverting it from its intended American target to explode in the empty

desert (1986, pp. 164-168, see Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1 – Superman intercepts the Russian warhead: taken from Miller 1986, pp.164-165.

136

While not the first Batman text to have direct critical relevance to contemporary events, *The Dark Knight Returns* is often cited by authors and readers as a seminal Batman narrative. As noted in Chapter 1, the text has influenced a variety of contemporary Batman media narratives – most recently Nolan's *Dark Knight Trilogy* (2005-2012) and director Zach Snyder's upcoming *Batman v. Superman: Dawn of Justice* film (2016) – and has been analysed extensively since its publication in 1986[26]. Part of the text's popularity is its reflection of contemporaneous events, primarily through the fictional Ronald Reagan and the thematic undertones of the Cold War woven throughout the narrative's second and third acts. Clark Kent tells Bruce Wayne that there is no room for superheroes in the world anymore, and that 'heroic American troops' are the answer to the Soviet threat (1986, p. 119). *The Dark Knight Returns* erased the dominant cultural image of Batman previously cultivated from West's 1960s television representation, replacing it with the grim, serious characterisation that would become the template for modern interpretations of the character. The book also made a concerted effort to reflect the current era through Reagan, the Soviet Union and the threat of nuclear war, using the Batman narrative to reflect on both aspects.

Morrison emphasises the discourse present between reality and the fictional world throughout both his comic books and non-fiction works, affirming the usefulness of fiction – and superhero texts in particular – as a conduit for understanding real world events. He makes the following observation as a basis for his assertions about the power of superhero comics after 9/11:

---

[26] Recent, detailed and dedicated studies of *The Dark Knight Returns* can be found in Brooker (2000), Klock (2002), Skoble (2005), Brooker (2007), Nayar (2009), and Morrison (2011).

The descent of the kabbalistic thirty-second path of the tree of life

describes an apocalyptic event involving the merging of two distinct

spheres: the earthly and the lunar. The lunar sphere is the imagination, the

world of thoughts and dreams. The earthly sphere is of the mundane,

solid and heavy. In short, not only does real life become more like a

story, stories must pay the price of this exchange by becoming more real

and allowing the rules of the material world to impinge upon their

insubstantial territories. I can think of no more potent image of this union

of real and imaginary than the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center

on September 11, 2001 (2011, p. 345).

The interrelated relationship between reality and fiction in superhero comics became

closer following the 9/11 attacks. As figurative apexes of capability and social justice,

their job to protect civilians and repel villainy, superheroes became ideally situated as

fictional interpreters of the tragedy itself and its aftermath. John Ney Rieber and John

Cassaday explored this idea quite directly in their comic book *Captain America: The

New Deal* (2003), one of the most forthright explorations of 9/11 from either Marvel or

DC Comics[27]. The first issue of the narrative sees Captain America, garbed in his

civilian identity as Steve Rogers, sifting through the rubble of Ground Zero for

survivors mere days after the attack (see Figure 4.2). There is constant questioning, both

from himself and other characters, about what the Marvel universe's superheroes could

have done to prevent the attack, and what they could still do to circumvent al-Qaeda's

efforts. This is particularly pointed in reference to Captain America himself, as both the

---

[27] Interestingly, the monthly *Captain America* comic book series in which *The New Deal* was originally
published in 2002 was not initially written as a response to 9/11; the series' first story arc was
announced in August 2001, then rewritten by Rieber after 9/11 occurred, into what would become *The
New Deal* (Cronin 2014).

leader of the Avengers superhero team and as a literal embodiment of the ideals of the United States. If a man clad in the American flag, considered a paragon and prominent leadership figure within the narrative and one of the strongest men alive, is unable to protect civilians or prevent 9/11, then the narrative's implication is 9/11's enormity could not be countered by superheroes[28]. This was a tragedy that seemingly eclipsed the efforts of fictional characters written to be the most effective protective figures.

Figure 4.2 – Steve Rogers at Ground Zero: taken from Rieber & Cassaday 2003.

While *The New Deal* is a comparatively rare case of a superhero text conversing with 9/11 and its aftereffects in such a direct manner[29], the attacks have influenced a number

---

[28] For a further analysis of Rieber and Cassaday's text, see Dittmer (2005).
[29] Another prominent exception to this is *The Amazing Spider-Man* volume 2, issue #36, which dealt with various Marvel characters' reactions to 9/11 and was published in October, 2001 (Straczynski & Romita, Jr.).

of other superhero texts. Batman narratives in particular have been influenced by the post-9/11 world. The most prominent example of this would be Nolan's *Dark Knight Trilogy* (2005-2012); the films present a Batman more closely aligned with post-9/11 sensibilities, in a Gotham strongly modelled on the ecology of fear and preventive military action that characterises the contemporary United States.

The military qualities of Nolan's Batman are apparent from the first film, *Batman Begins* (2005). When designing his attire, Bruce Wayne elicits the aid of Wayne Industries Applied Sciences coordinator Lucius Fox. A tour of the company's vault of expensive and experimental gear – all fashioned for use by the military – sees Fox offer Wayne an 'advanced infantry' Kevlar body piece designed to stop bullets and knives, a gun to shoot grapples and the Tumbler, a desert-camouflaged vehicular behemoth initially built to create bridges over rivers in combat zones. Nolan's stern, hyper-masculine Batman is clad in military-grade body armour as opposed to a costume, driving the tanklike Tumbler as opposed to the cartoonish Batmobiles utilised in preceding films and narratives; in comparison to the character's most recent film incarnation at the time, where Burton and Schumacher's Batman wore easily-torn rubber and drove a Batmobile adorned with intimidating fins and curves, Nolan's Batman is a sleek soldier whose suits, gadgets and vehicle are functional rather than fashionable. Preventive military action and the rise in domestic surveillance are apparent in *The Dark Knight* (2008), with a series of sonar microphones placed throughout Gotham that allow Batman to monitor civilian conversations, theoretically curtailing crime before it occurs. *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012) makes the military themes of the trilogy further explicit by having Batman, upon returning to Gotham from his imprisonment in the Middle East by Bane, literally declaring war on the enemy after

saving Commissioner Gordon from death. Though my research focuses more on extrapolated readings that are not necessarily anchored to authorial intent, it is worth noting that even Nolan himself openly stated *The Dark Knight Rises* is 'a war film… a revolutionary epic' (Vejvoda 2012). Nolan's Batman, played in all three films by Christian Bale, was a deep-throated, bone-breaking voice of authority, embodying a figure designed to wage war on the criminals and terrorist elements threatening a post-9/11-influenced Gotham[30].

Nolan's trilogy additionally made several of Batman's antagonists more gothic within the post-9/11-inspired setting. These villains were recontextualised as more believable and realistic antagonists in comparison to their previous film and comic book incarnations. The Scarecrow and Ra's al Ghul spread a gaseous, narcotic fear toxin through a large section of Gotham, driving its inhabitants towards mob-like violence under its influence. The Joker, explicitly referred to as a 'terrorist' by Harvey Dent in Nolan's second film (2008), orchestrated a violent, domestic campaign of proliferating fear throughout Gotham with bomb threats and targeted assassinations, somewhat portentous and uncanny in the light of the real and recent threats and acts of violence made by the terrorists of Islamic State. Bane eschewed his comic book counterpart's gaudy, lucha libre wrestler garb and reliance on the drug Venom that provided him with his incredible strength (see Figure 4.3 Left) – a visual design also used for the character in Schumacher's *Batman and Robin* (1997) – but instead relied on an anaesthetic mask and tactical clothing, becoming an anarchist leader who incited Gotham's populace to

---

[30] Justine Toh also offers a compelling analysis (2010, pp. 127-140) of the 'matrix of consumer desire, military fetish and an ultimate reliance on force' in relation to post-9/11 Batman, arguing that Nolan's Batman reads 'as a complex allegory for the conduct of America's War on Terror' (2010, p. 127).

riot, with a skewed take on the implications of corrupt government and the Occupy Wall Street movement (see Figure 4.3 Right).

Figure 4.3 - [Left] Bane in the comic books (taken from O'Neil *et al.* 1993), [Right] Bane in *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012)

These villains, with the possible exception of Nolan's Joker, utilised unrealistic elements as part of their means of antagonising Batman; for example, Ra's al Ghul's plan relies on fictional microwave technology that evaporates Gotham's water supply. However, the villains' metaphorical elements – each with an emphasis on spreading fear, a theme permeating all three films – are closely aligned with elements of the real post-9/11 world. Nolan's trilogy also mirrored the contemporary United States in a more believable, realistic fictional setting, especially in comparison to the brooding gothic architecture of Burton's films and the camp humour and exaggeration of Schumacher's. Nolan's Gotham was a city closely modelled on modern-day New York, shot in Chicago (Jesser & Pourroy 2012, p. 74) and relying on an 'industrial, and modernist aesthetic' (Jesser & Pourroy 2012, p. 72).

The Dark Knight Trilogy allowed Batman's continuing relevance as a popular culture lens ideal for translating, understanding and reinterpreting current events and social paradigms to sharpen within the post-9/11 world. The character's overall popularity underwent a renewed surge thanks to Nolan's trilogy and several other concurrent narratives, particularly the *Arkham* video game series (2009-2015) and the critically acclaimed recent comic book run by Snyder and Capullo, beginning with *The Court of Owls* (2012). Both these and other narratives echoed the more realistic representation used in Nolan's films. Other associated narratives, both pre- and post-9/11, became re-contextualised as useful tools to engage in real world discourses; in addition to *The Dark Knight Returns* (1986), the late 1990s storyline *No Man's Land* (Rucka *et al.* 1999), concerning a Gotham cut off from the United States after almost being destroyed by a massive earthquake, was adapted in part for Nolan's third film, *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012), here recontextualised as a city sealed off from the rest of America by bombs, controlled by the fear of domestic terrorism and social anarchy. The Batman comic books published following *Batman Begins* (2005) were, in particular, refashioned to emulate the style and themes of Nolan's films, focusing on security issues and terrorism; in contrast to Captain America narratives, Batman texts did not directly engage with post-9/11 terrorism or name it as such, but the ideas surrounding the actual themes of post-9/11 were nonetheless present. Particular comic book story arcs which focus on the themes include *Batman Incorporated*, Grant Morrison's narrative of a global Batman franchise and peacekeeping force (2012 & 2013), the alternate-universe *Batman: Earth One* (Johns & Frank 2012 and Johns & Frank 2015), the seventy-fifth anniversary anthology series *Batman Eternal* (Snyder *et al.* 2014) and *Zero Year,*

Snyder and Capullo's yearlong exploration of a city held captive by a panoptic Riddler (2014).

One of Batman's most noteworthy tenets – one that is also a characteristic of gothic protagonists – is the character's internal conflict. This conflict has aided the shift in Batman texts towards more realistic narratives. In almost a complete contrast to other characters, such as Superman and Wonder Woman, Batman suffers from ongoing mental anguish over both his parents' deaths and the ongoing traumas he faces while defending Gotham. The character exists with a conflicted sense of self in both his everyday life and the execution of his vigilantism. The dichotomy between aiding the law – '[preying] on those who prey upon the fearful', as Christian Bale's incarnation of the character declares in *Batman Begins* (2005) – and operating far outside of existing state legality is a notion that remained largely unexplored in Batman texts until *The Dark Knight Returns* (1986), before being emphasised and deconstructed by Nolan's films. While outlining a discussion between Nolan and fellow *Dark Knight Trilogy* writer David S. Goyer that extensively details their desire to present Batman realistically, Brooker determines that the film series' post-9/11 sensibilities and grounded, dirty visual style are derived more from crime novels than the 'over-the-top styling' of fellow superhero narratives (2012, p. 89-91). Having this version of Batman '[work] within the conceivable bounds of human potential' and be represented as 'an angry, conflicted, serious, committed person' (Brooker 2012, p. 91) shows a much more active and believable agent who is opposed to crime, more so than stable, emotionally well-adjusted contemporaries like Superman[31]. Previous filmic depictions of Batman –

---

[31] This is not to suggest all other superheroes do not bear the same emotional and mental burdens Batman does; rather, that Batman is the superhero represented with these burdens most consistently, continually informing prominent elements of the character and the narratives.

especially Schumacher's incarnations played respectively by Val Kilmer in *Batman Forever* (1995) and by George Clooney in *Batman and Robin* (1997) – relied on two-dimensional characterisations; Kilmer, in particular, made a failed attempt to represent the dichotomy between Bruce Wayne and Batman, struggling to decide which persona he wished to inhabit before ultimately deciding that both could co-exist[32]. Both Kilmer's and Clooney's attempts at psychological complexity pale in comparison to Nolan's Batman as played by Bale.

While Batman does possess a self-given moral contract to halt crime and defend Gotham, the violence employed by the character in pursuit of this contract partially refutes the strict 'hero' title as it is applied to his fellow crimefighters. Batman is consistently represented and described as an anti-hero, a 'liminal figure … who crosses social thresholds such as those between legality and criminality, justice and oppression' (Gaine 2010, p. 1), but is ultimately working for the side of good. Several post-9/11-published narratives eschew the cleaner plotlines of superhero characters simply combating antagonists. Recent arcs have dealt with an examination of Batman's tactics as being too extreme, almost on the same morally reprehensible level as those of the people he fights (see Snyder *et al* 2014 and Tomasi & Gleason, 2014). It is made clear by the character's internal monologue that Batman sees himself, perhaps self-deceivingly, as a positive force, and that Gotham would be worse off without him. This gives Batman implicit moral license to execute any action, short of killing, necessary to protect the city. A lack of a strictly binary good or evil presence within Batman begins to show how he can be identified as a gothic protagonist; Hume notes that gothic

---

[32] It is unclear whether Kilmer's lacklustre representation of the dichotomy is due to his performance, Joel Schumacher's script, or a combination of the two. However, it is worth noting that Schumacher stands by how *Batman Forever* was completed, implicitly supporting how his narrative presented the dichotomy through Kilmer's performance (see Hughes 2015).

protagonists are 'complex villain-hero[es]' (1969, 283) who are, like the atmospheres of the texts they inhabit, 'fearsome and profoundly ambiguous' (1969, p. 287).

Part of the appeal of Batman texts is their flexibility in terms of genre. Over seventy-five years of history, Batman narratives inhabit a variety of genres that span detective fiction, fantasy, science fiction and crime, rather than being simply or exclusively superhero texts. This is not to say Batman texts, and superhero texts in general, are not already identifiable within other genres, nor that they remain isolated from them; as I will investigate further in this chapter, Jacques Derrida (1980) asserts that a text's participation in multiple genres is unavoidable, perhaps even necessary for comprehensive understanding, and I argue that this participation is actually a key component in how the superhero genre is formed. Rather, the Batman texts published post-9/11 are useful at articulating elements of those genres in a critical sense, the character being an effective means of sociocultural commentary. Where the gothic exists, as Warwick contends, as 'a mode rather than a genre' (2007, p. 6), so too can Batman texts be seen both as a mode *and* as a genre.

4.3 – 'I am necessary evil': Batman Gothic and *The Dark Knight Rises*

Johan Höglund's notion of the American imperial gothic, which I noted in Chapter 3, establishes a subgenre that is predisposed towards eradicating whatever threat is posed to the American Empire, destroying such threats righteously in their texts. Seeking support for the controversial practices of the post-9/11 United States government by eliminating their nuance, the texts informed and shaped by the American imperial gothic

seek to simplify contemporary conflicts in the post-9/11 world as purely good and evil; with the Americans and their allies as the former, and Islamic extremists, terrorist organisations and their compatriots as the latter. Höglund critically analyses American imperial gothic texts and their role in justifying political and military actions taken in the wake of 9/11, mapping the texts as detrimental to audiences' understanding of the post-9/11 world's true complexity. In Höglund's assessment of the genre, the American good is exemplified by modernity, usually articulated through superior firepower and devotion to the military-industrial complex. This complex, in the American imperial gothic, is seen as the restorative, rational answer to a disorganised world; Höglund notes that the genre suggests, '[w]ith the right dedication [and] hardware, chaos can be out-gunned' (2014, p. 1). Through the gothic's capacity to articulate fear, the genre is concerned with:

> [testifying] to the many anxieties that have gripped and grip [the United States]. Thus, while the American imperial gothic does map and even encourage the megalomaniac fantasies and desires that fuelled American imperialism it also reveals the monstrous form such fantasies and desires may take. (2014, p. 12)

The texts of the American imperial gothic also remove the complexity of the societal movements, responses and contexts that inform the conflict, with the implication that the United States' supposed superiority derives purely from their modern, technologically-superior advantage over the savage inhabitants of the lands they invade. Very little nuance is present in texts that glorify combat or dilute the complexity of post-9/11's cultural politics; I will provide examples of these texts, as well as my own

counterpoint to them, further in this chapter. The conflict in the Middle East 'has been cast as a confrontation between modernity and the primitive' (2014, p. 17), which Höglund argues is a reductive oversimplification of what is one of the most multi-faceted and convoluted geopolitical conflicts in recent history.

Many Batman texts interrogate established binaries of ethics, morality and legality; the character himself is a morally ambiguous figure who eschews any kind of binary good or evil identification, and narratives frequently comment on the legal and moral aporia of Batman's quest for justice. Interestingly, Nolan's trilogy subtly suggests that the motivations of its villains may not be wholly abhorrent. In *Batman Begins* (2005), Ra's al Ghul wishes to see Gotham destroyed as it has become too corrupted by crime; the film shows much of Gotham's criminal underbelly and depicts the city as potentially unsalvageable. The Joker in *The Dark Knight* (2008) enables Harvey Dent to exact effective, proactive justice against the mob and the corrupt police officers in Gotham. The films do not legitimise the villains' actions, and in the end their respective defeats at Batman's hands are framed by the film and the characters' reactions as positive, but there is still suggestion of a modicum of rationality underneath those actions. The subtextual exploration of villainous motivations yields results that provide a rationale, and perhaps even a justification, for elements of these antagonists' actions. By extension, this exploration offers a discursive engagement that re-establishes complexity – on psychological, judicial and moral levels – and moves towards at least partially dissolving the binary.

One notable example of this comes in *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012). The narrative presents Gotham as an expansive, metropolitan paradise, in contrast to the grimy streets

explored in *Batman Begins* (2005) and the clean, if crime-ridden cityscape from *The Dark Knight* (2008). Persistent effort on the part of law enforcement has managed to almost completely eradicate organised crime in Gotham, achieved through the Dent Act; legislation named after Gotham's deceased District Attorney Harvey Dent, killed at the conclusion of *The Dark Knight*. The Dent Act gives extraordinary powers to police and legal authorities to arrest criminals swiftly – while never explicitly outlined, the implications of the Dent Act's powers suggest an almost Agamben-like state of exception enacted by the police – and was implemented eight years prior to the narrative's opening. Mayor Garcia's speech to those gathered for Harvey Dent Day, the anniversary of Dent's death, praises the Dent Act and the effectiveness of Gotham's law enforcement. Garcia simultaneously dismisses Batman, who has vanished for the eight years since Dent's death; compared to the good work Gotham's police department has achieved, Batman is nothing more than 'a murderous thug in a mask and a cape' who is mistakenly blamed as Dent's killer. Gotham's public clearly support the Dent Act and its effectiveness against crime; Garcia mentions those who wish the Act repealed, and his declaration, 'Not on my watch', is met with vigorous applause from the audience. Gotham is apparently renewed, no longer the 'heart of criminality' it was in *Batman Begins* (2005).

As a contrast to Gotham's seemingly utopian protectorate, the audience is also provided with a comprehensive view of the corruption still existing at the city's core. The Dent Act is founded on the death of its namesake, driven insane by the Joker and motivated to kill those that Dent self-determined were responsible for the death of his partner, Rachel. Dent's death came after he threatened to kill Commissioner Gordon's son. The misattribution of Batman for Dent's death and the cover-up of Dent's actions, which if

made public would tarnish his reputation and undo much of the good work he did legally fighting Gotham's criminals, are necessary lies made by Batman and Gordon to ensure peace within Gotham. These lies deeply unsettle Gordon, believing his dishonesty cancels out the good the Dent Act eventually achieves. Gordon almost gives a speech to the audience at Harvey Dent Day, prompted by that unsettled feeling; he decides not to give it, but the speech is later stolen and read out on television by Bane. In his speech, Gordon is appalled at his willingness to '[praise] the madman who tried to murder [his] own child', and believes the only course of action is his resignation. The intended good behind Gordon's actions, in covering for Dent's insanity, is acknowledged by Gordon himself as insufficient for justifying the lie. Despite this, Gordon also recognises it as a necessary evil; he attempts to rationalise this notion to fellow police officer John Blake, who is appalled at Gordon's actions:

> There's a point, far out there, when the structures fail you, and the rules aren't weapons anymore; they're shackles, letting the bad guy get ahead. One day you may face such a moment of crisis, and in that moment I hope you have a friend like I did, to plunge their hands into the filth so that you can keep yours clean. (*The Dark Knight Rises* 2012)

Corruption also manifests through corporate entities, specifically in the character of John Daggett and his attempts to usurp authority at Wayne Enterprises. As a man who only '[understands] money' and ends up taking control of Bruce Wayne's company, Daggett is ruthless and selfish in his actions. He allies himself with Bane, the film's primary antagonist, to use the latter's mercenary cohort as a means of taking control of Gotham. Daggett's primary assault on Gotham takes place, both literally and

metaphorically, through the corporate structure, organising for Bane's men to instigate a terror attack on the Gotham Stock Exchange building and for Daggett's company to obtain a majority stake in Wayne Enterprises, respectively.

Bane, and the army of ideologue militants he leads into the city, initiates the plot of the film from its first scene, capturing a nuclear scientist recently employed by Wayne. Killing under an aegis of overthrowing those in power to return control of the city to Gotham's populace, Bane's antagonism is far more blatant and invasive than Daggett's prolonged, clandestine economic chokehold. The important contrast between Bane and Daggett as antagonists is that the former is presented as what the character himself terms a 'necessary evil', whilst the latter is merely concerned with selfish personal gain irrespective of consequence. Bane initiates a campaign that causes many deaths but will, in his own justification, ultimately benefit Gotham's citizenry. This latter point comes to a head in a speech Bane delivers during a civil uprising:

> We take Gotham from the corrupt! The rich! The oppressors of generations who have kept you down with myths of opportunity – and we give it back to you, the people … the powerful will be ripped from their decadent nests and cast out into the cold world we know and endure! (*The Dark Knight Rises* 2012)

Bane is framed by the protagonists of the film as an outright villain, in comparison to Batman. Alfred, Bruce Wayne's butler and Batman's source of intelligence information, establishes early in the narrative that Bane is a former disciple of Ra's al Ghul, the deceased leader of the League of Shadows, who attempted to destroy Gotham in *Batman*

Begins (2005); he frames Bane as a mirrored antagonist to Batman, as both were trained by the League and followed divergent paths. Innocent people die during the course of Bane's campaign, and the audience later learns that any pretence of democratising Gotham by bestowing its citizens with greater agency is a lie. This lie, not dissimilar to the one Gordon told to maintain peace through the Dent Act, obscures Bane's true aim from Gotham's citizenry: to destroy Gotham entirely, fulfilling the plan first attempted by his master Ra's al Ghul. There is little doubt by the film's second act that Bane is a villain, and does not truly have the interests of Gotham's citizens at heart.

Despite this, the above quote from Bane at least suggests an awareness of the anxieties already within Gotham's society, and his campaign in occupying Gotham utilises extreme measures that he purports will eradicate these anxieties; his occupation of the city ends up creating further anxieties on top of the existing fears. This scene, taking place at the beginning of the film's third act, comes after a comprehensive exploration showing just how ineffective and corrupt Gotham's legal power structures are. The Dent Act is a fierce state of exception declared against criminals, built on a lie that invalidates the Act's original aim and removes its legitimacy. The corporate bodies actually working for the betterment of the city, like Wayne Enterprises, are easily usurped by military might and the right amount of money, in the form of men like Daggett. Near the beginning of the film's third act, Gotham's police officers ineptly enter a trap set by Bane, who easily seals them inside a collapsed tunnel to take control of the city with his own men. An implication throughout the prior two acts of *The Dark Knight Rises* is that, just as the city's initial failure to protect itself spurred the creation of Batman in the first film, so now does the city's absence of morality and ethics, as well as its takeover by external forces, symbolise the need for a figure that can take control and aid the people.

If the law cannot achieve stability, Bane acts as a false mouthpiece for the people and their desire to claim stability themselves.

Bane's movement uses forceful and invasive tactics to lead the populace to civility as justification for that violence. In this manner the film does not entirely demonise Bane's claimed ideology nor the 'oppressors' of society the character assaults; the audience has witnessed several scenes of corruption which emphasise the need for change in the city's power structures. The film, which 'testifies to the many anxieties that have gripped and grip' the United States, maps the 'megalomaniac fantasies and desires that [fuel] American imperialism' while simultaneously '[revealing] the monstrous form such fantasies and desires may take' (Höglund 2014, p. 12).

Bane challenges Gotham's power structures and, in effect, confronts the anxieties that political and corporate concerns exert over the city, through a megalomaniacal personification of forceful challenge, populist justice and desire for growth. Gotham's people are ruled by corrupt police who lie to the public, by corporate concerns that control their welfare, and by external forces that easily topple whatever internal power structures allege to control the city. Bane offers them an alternative, imbuing the people with a false sense of agency against the rich and powerful who Bane claims would seek to control them. Bane's actions are not the overt fear-mongering Ra's al Ghul attempts in *Batman Begins* (2005), nor the self-styled agency of chaos that the Joker embodies in *The Dark Knight* (2008). Yet, through masking his intentions in the guise of revolution and social upheaval, Bane's quest to destroy Gotham sheds light on the inadequacies of the city's power structures, and on the desire of Gotham's populace for better democratisation of their city.

Though ultimately working for destructive purposes, Bane's appearance in Gotham mirrors Batman's; both emerge in the city as an antidote to its corruption and rampant crime. As noted in Chapter 1, following 9/11, Richard Clark acknowledged '[the United States] government failed you, [and] those entrusted with protecting you failed you' (FDCH E-Media 2004). Perhaps Bane's occupation of Gotham articulates the notion of what might occur if agency is forcibly taken from that government and given to the people, however temporarily. Bane's campaign represents a gothic form of social power that remedies the kind of perceived governmental failure which Clark identified.

This initial study of Bane, and specifically the ambiguity he represents, is one example of using contemporary Batman narratives to study how the gothic can articulate real world situations within the post-9/11 climate[33]. Several Batman texts now exist that are able to speak to the aftermath of 9/11, the anxieties and fears of both the United States populace and the rest of the world, and the way these fears have permeated the popular culture narrative. These texts also align with a number of others not related to Batman, which are adept at articulating and coming to terms with the post-9/11 era.

For the purposes of this thesis, the genre lens with which these texts will be analysed will simply be termed *post-9/11 gothic*. This term exists as a critical (sub)genre alongside others of a gothic derivation, such as southern gothic, postcolonial gothic (Sugars and Turcotte 2009) and Höglund's oft-referenced American imperial gothic (2014). Post-9/11 gothic also somewhat builds upon and uses elements from American gothic, as the two work in similar fashions; where American gothic seeks to illuminate

---

[33] Though not concerned with the gothic, Slavoj Žižek (2012) also offers a compelling oppositional reading of Bane in *The Dark Knight Rises* as a 'good terrorist', challenging the notion of Bane as an outright villain and even asking if Bane's actions are not those of Harvey Dent's 'taken to an extreme'.

and articulate the colonial 'unspeakable history [of America], primarily race and slavery [and] sexual violence against women' (Groom 2012, p. 112), post-9/11 gothic takes an approach that studies the United States, among others, through a lens that prioritises contemporaneous concerns, which include racial and sexual issues, but also the military, political, social and cultural consequences of the 9/11 attacks. Though the attacks have facets and motivations that originate before 2001, as the Commission Report highlights (2004), post-9/11 gothic is, given the first word of its title, concerned with what happened after them.

Broadly, post-9/11 gothic Batman texts are concerned with articulating and interrogating the concerns, fears and anxieties that are relevant to the post-9/11 environment, with a predominant view of how these concerns are manifested and understood in context of the United States. Whereas the notion of the American imperial gothic seeks to establish binaries in representing the real world through popular culture, post-9/11 gothic seeks to restore the complexity, challenge established notions and dissolve binaries as much as possible, or at least interrogate them. Connected to this subgenre is a specific application of Batman that analyses the United States' current hegemonic, economic and sociocultural 'slump' (Höglund 2014, p. 9) in the days following 9/11. Post-9/11 gothic texts question the notions of American imperial gothic and its texts' perceived ideas of United States superiority. Specifically, key Batman texts act as means of interrogating this slump and recontextualising elements of it to be better understood.

Phillip Thurtle and Robert Mitchell's notion of the 'logic of the anomalous' (2007), mentioned in Chapter 3, is relevant to several post-9/11 gothic Batman texts. In

particular, Thurtle and Mitchell describe comic books as a kind of database that can catalogue disastrous events and allow readers to experience and come to terms with their ramifications through fictional engagement. These texts, they claim, are also predictive of disaster through repetition; Thurtle and Mitchell use the specific example of an *Adventures of Superman* comic (Casey, Wieringo & Marzan Jr. 2001) depicting damage to the twin towers of a LexCorp building (Thurtle & Mitchell 2007, pp. 267-8), which itself also mirrors a similar scene of a plane crashing into the twin towers of Wayne Enterprises in *The Dark Knight Returns* (1986, pp. 170-171). The *Adventures of Superman* comic featuring the damaged towers was completed months in advance of its publication date of September 12, 2001, though the similarities to 9/11 and the towers' resemblance to the World Trade Centre were noted, prompting DC Comics to offer retailers the opportunity to return the comic (ICv2 2001). In this manner, the comic was uncannily portentous in its depiction of an event that almost exactly mirrored the tragedy of the day before it was published. Thurtle and Mitchell call this predictive and repetitious exploration of real world disasters through comic books a 'logic of the anomalous' (2007, p. 269), with an anomaly in this case based on a disruption of the norm produced through repetition (2007, p. 270). The otherwise normal day, week or even month of September 2001 was disrupted by the 9/11 terrorist attacks, an event so far outside normal prediction or expectation that it produced an anomaly.

The usefulness of the 'logic of the anomalous' lies in using these comic books as guides to how we might interact with the future of our world. Though the example of the Superman text is not post-9/11 gothic, the factors comprising the 'logic of the anomalous' are relevant to how post-9/11 Batman texts are read. In particular:

It is only by fully exploring the differential between embodied and industrial scales … that we acquire the ability to gather information about our world, act on this information, and then see the potential futures that our actions open up. This not only allows us to see how and what types of disasters are introduced when a new technology or substance allows for spectacular powers to become part of the everyday; in addition, it opens up a world that recognizes the importance of novelty, or the ability of the world to change in unanticipated ways. If we pay attention to where our entertainments take us and how they allow us to explore a logic of the anomalous, we are more likely to invent those affective capabilities that recognize the ways in which our interactions with the world create potential futures (2007, pp. 296-297).

Batman texts are ideal for this use; the majority are set in the present day, with a realistic representation of an American city, featuring many characters that the audience is able to relate to as they have neither superpowers nor supernatural influence, and in a fictional world that represents many contemporaneous fears of the post-9/11 world. Batman texts within post-9/11 gothic manage to differentiate themselves from any similar gothic exploration of superhero texts because the issues they explore resonate with audiences to a degree greater than that of other superhero narratives. Many Batman narratives serve as a contemporised incarnation of the gothic that serves a similar purpose to the texts produced by Stoker and Shelley; highlighting internal and external fears, and seeking means of understanding those fears and the issues producing them.

This latter notion links to Spooner's ideas surrounding the 'transformation' of the gothic genre from its beginnings. Spooner asserts that contemporary gothic is largely concerned with acting as 'a series of revivals, each based on a fantasized idea of the previous one', and that the gothic genre 'possesses no original [identity]' (Spooner 2006, p. 32). Similarly, Punter highlights several ways in which the genre can be understood in disparate texts that can still be considered gothic (1996, pp. 1-4) and cites the genre's 'multifarious forms' (p. 18), including romance novels (p. 2) and more blatant horror in the style of Lovecraft (p. 3). As the gothic genre has evolved in literary canon it has been continually repurposed, describing different anxieties and emphasising different fears. This kind of evolution also takes place within Batman texts. Much as the character of Batman himself has been altered from a pulp, noir-influenced counterpoint to Superman's shining, colourful patriotism, gothic too has undergone transformation from a genre specifically focused on 'a way of perceiving an obscure past and interpreting it' (Punter 1996, p. 52) and into a tool used to confront 'an injustice that must be resolved, an evil that must be exorcised', interpreting the anxiety of the past as 'a site of terror' (Spooner 2006, p. 18) that threatens the present.

Punter pinpoints the gothic's specific capacity for exploring and understanding fear, citing it as a characteristic of gothic fiction:

> Fear is not merely a theme or an attitude, it also has consequences in terms of form, style and the social relations of the texts; and exploring Gothic is also exploring fear and seeing the various ways in which terror breaks through the surfaces of literature, differently in every case, but

also establishing for itself certain distinct continuities of language and symbol. (Punter 1996, p. 18)

Post-9/11 gothic counteracts the American imperial gothic's binary emphasis; post-9/11 gothic instead aims to move towards a greater understanding of issues that eschew binary reduction. Contemporary fears regarding international terrorism, a failing economy, the spread of domestic insurgency, perceived governmental ineffectiveness and the desire for effective justice are all anxieties currently present in the United States. Using Batman texts as case studies, post-9/11 gothic highlights and analyses these fears as they are perceived by others.

The post-9/11 gothic genre also confronts issues of complexity in the post-9/11 environment and, specifically, the actions and rationales of contemporary American imperialism. Many fictional texts produced over the last decade have positioned the United States as a heroic protagonist, justifying the conflict in the Middle East and ongoing military, economic and judicial activities, both foreign and domestic, as being undertaken for the benefit of the United States and the world. Fictional texts such as the television series *NCIS* (2003-2015), and *Quantico* (2015), the films *G.I. Joe: Retaliation* (2013) and *White House Down* (2013), and video games such as *Battlefield 3* (2011) and *Medal of Honor: Warfighter* (2012) are largely supportive of the United States' agenda in the post-9/11 world, framing aspects of their international military incursions and domestic security policies as positive steps; Höglund even notes that *Warfighter* (2012) was produced by Electronic Arts in partnership with weapons manufacturer Magpul, who provided links on the game's web page where players could purchase real guns based on those used by American soldiers in the game (2014, p. 124). Several

science fiction action films were also produced following 9/11 which portrayed the United States as an unambiguously staunch defender of humanity, embodying the concept of the Other in extraterrestrial creatures who are easily dispatched by the modern weaponry and hardware of the American military. Films such as *War of the Worlds* (2005), *Battle: Los Angeles* (2011), *Battleship* (2012) and the first three films of the *Transformers* franchise (2007, 2009 & 2011) are simplistic in portraying the United States as a binary 'good' to the 'evil' of their foes[34].

More potentially harmful than the texts that are openly simplistic in portraying post-9/11 ideas and concerns are those that attempt, and fail, to demonstrate complexity. Films, television shows and video games such as *24* (2001-2014), *Homeland* (2011-2015), *The Hurt Locker* (2008), *American Sniper* (2014) and the *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare* games (2007-2011) attempt to represent themselves as thoughtful and three-dimensional in portraying the conflicts and issues of the time. Not only do these texts lack almost any semblance of true nuance in depicting the post-9/11 world, but a number of them – especially the *Modern Warfare* video games, which literally turn the conflict into entertainment through putting the player in fictional representations of real world combat zones in the Middle East – actively glorify the violence of the United States' military campaign in the Middle East, presenting the conflict as a positive step taken for domestic and global security. *24* (2001-2014), in particular, is also quite blatant with its stance on the War on Terror; namely, that the tactics employed by the United States in combating 9/11's perpetrators are both necessary and affirmative[35]. *24*

---

[34] In addition to films, Höglund also offers a comprehensive analysis of how the American military-industrial complex has embodied diluted concepts of post-9/11 through video games (2014, pp. 115-129), citing examples such as *America's Army* (2002) and *Quake 4* (2005).

[35] Admittedly, *24*'s production began shortly before the events of 9/11, but most seasons after the first are almost exclusively concerned with the post-9/11 world and its implications within the fictional narrative.

is considered part of what Yvonne Tasker terms 'terror tv', a category of narrative that 'stages political violence and official attempts to tackle that violence' (2012, p. 46). Within the television show's narrative, the United States is predominantly understood as a global peacekeeping force confronting terrorists who are almost always Middle Eastern in origin and who use nuclear weapons or suicide tactics to undermine and destroy America. While corruption in areas of the United States government is at times explored in the narrative, the antagonists are wholly villainous representations, usually of Islamic extremists or Russians, with the latter consistently perceived and represented as a dominant threat to America. A similar example of failed complexity can also be found in *Homeland* (2011-2015); while the show is somewhat more subtle and nuanced when compared to *24* in its depictions of extremism and threats to the United States – due in part to several episodes' plots taking place in Middle Eastern countries, such as Iran and Lebanon, in an attempt to explore domestic situations and the motivations of extremists – *Homeland* predominantly depicts countries in the Middle East and their inhabitants as an unambiguous threat to the nation[36]. Perhaps the psychological toll taken on the main characters can be read as a critique of the use of torture, however the text remains, at best, highly ambivalent on this point.

Höglund opens *The American Imperial Gothic* with the assertion that the eponymous concept is specifically designed to elicit 'quiet acceptance of US imperialism' in its readers, '[encouraging] its audience to think about global relations strictly in terms of good and evil' while actively '[discouraging] protest at this simplification' (2014, p. x). He further states that his study utilises a particular form of postcolonial analysis that relies on 'the ways in which literature has become a way to counter the destructive

---

[36] It should also be noted that Howard Gordon and Alex Gansa, the developers of *Homeland*, both formerly worked on *24*.

influence of imperial discourses and practices' (2014, p. 12). It is my contention that Batman's post-9/11 gothic texts fulfil a similar role, illuminating the complexities of 9/11 and its aftermath that have been either ignored, diluted, removed or revised by other texts. In doing so, the genre becomes a means of conversing with and, potentially, countering the adverse effect United States imperialism has on its citizens.

4.4 – 'Genres are not to be mixed': Derrida and the Law of Genre

Merely investigating the intended meaning behind these Batman texts from the authors' perspectives is inadequate; as Roland Barthes once noted, 'To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a single signified [and] to close the writing' (Barthes 1967, p. 147), preventing the text from being comprehensively engaged with. My analysis of these Batman texts keeps in mind the intention their respective authors had when creating them, but predominantly focuses on other ways to read these texts. I've offered an initial example of this previously in this chapter, regarding Bane and *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012).

Batman's increasing interaction with real world elements speaks to a growing trend in superhero narratives to address contemporary social, cultural and political concerns. Brooker briefly outlines the ways Nolan's trilogy interacts with the post-9/11 period, claiming of *The Dark Knight*:

> Nolan's authorial interests connect with and, consciously or not, explore
> the key contradictions of the "war on terror" … [enabling] people – from

professional critics to casual viewers – to talk about an issue central to the first decade of the twenty-first century, working through its dilemmas and debating its terms. (2012, p. 210)

Jacques Derrida's influential notions on genre are relevant to how Batman texts articulate real world ideas. Specifically, in the paper of the same name, Derrida asserts that his eponymous Law of Genre relies on genre being 'precisely a principle of contamination, a law of impurity, a parasitical economy' (1980, p. 59). Rather than simply identifying by one explicit descriptor, Derrida convincingly asserts that genre transcends simple categorisation, utilising a process that enables texts to exist with multiple generic descriptors.

Chiefly, Derrida's argument is that no text is ever completely described by any one genre; thus, genre should not be used as a formulaic tool that wholly contains the meaning of a text. This is not to say that genre itself is not a useful tool for mapping the meanings and themes of a text, but rather that the exclusive use of one genre is inadequate to fully explore how a text functions. However, while singular genres are not wholly conducive to the comprehensive analysis of a text, Derrida emphasises that the answer does not lie in a combination or hybrid of genres; the opening sentence of his paper declares that 'Genres are not to be mixed' (1980, p. 55), a notion Derrida repeatedly stresses throughout his work. Instead, Derrida suggests, texts utilise facets from various genres rather than only one; in Derrida's words, 'a sort of participation without belonging – a taking part in without being part of, without having membership in a set' (1980, p. 59). Participating in multiple genres allows texts to test the limits of those genres, to find the borders, implicit and explicit, between forms of genre and how

they map ideas in specific kinds of texts. Mapping the uses of a specific genre in a text also enables identification of the meaning that genre is providing to the text, as well as how they interact with meanings from other genres that are also evident in that text. Despite Derrida's advocating for texts participating in multiple genres, he does recommend that each genre maintain a minimal defining structure that identifies it as that genre; 'if a genre exists … then a code should provide an identifiable trait and one which is identical to itself, authorizing us to determine, to adjudicate whether a given text belongs to this genre or perhaps to that genre' (1980, p. 64).

Gothic texts are well-served by the crossover of elements from other genres; Hume (1969) refutes the unhelpful use of basic, rigid sub-classifications for the gothic genre. Hume's notion posits that gothic texts are able to borrow elements from their respective subgenres and categories, whilst still remaining indelibly gothic. Gothic novels, Hume claims, are predominantly described as belonging to one of three categories. First, 'sentimental-Gothic', a kind of 'sentimental-domestic' narrative that features the conventions of the gothic genre – namely 'ghosts and [a] gloomy castle atmosphere' – to enhance the otherwise realistic qualities of a text (p. 283). Second, 'Terror-Gothic', which Hume cites as being considered 'the most nearly "pure" Gothic novel'; given Hume's use of Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) as an example of Terror-Gothic, it can be assumed that he is referring to the presence of outright horror and the supernatural in these kinds of gothic texts (p. 283). Third, 'Historical-Gothic', historical fiction texts that merely utilise a 'Gothic atmosphere' in their composition (p. 283). Hume rejects these categories as 'unsatisfactory' (p. 283), noting the overlap of gothic elements between texts that, while still gothic, are markedly different from each other; as an example, Hume notes the starkness between *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) and *The*

Mysteries of Udolpho (1794). To build on Hume's comparison, there are key differences between both texts that are still considered gothic. *Otranto* contains underlying themes of horror and terror that are left unexplained, deemed as supernatural occurrences and given little focus, against the central narrative of royal succession and paranoia in Manfred. The story utilises melodrama and romantic themes alongside terror and the supernatural. *Udolpho* also uses romance and has similarly florid prose, but is a decidedly more rational gothic novel. As opposed to *Otranto*, the protagonist, Emily, is not as morally deficit as Manfred, and the supernatural elements are later given rational explanations, being the work of humans rather than of true supernatural intervention. Elements from all three gothic subgenres that Hume notes above are present, to varying degrees, in both *The Castle of Otranto* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Both texts, and the gothic genre, explore the limits of reason, and the degree to which rationality can be used for explanation[37].

Derrida emphasises the capacity of genre as mode of interpreting and overlapping with reality, utilising a quote from literary theorist Gérard Genette:

> The history of genre-theory is strewn with these fascinating outlines that
> *inform and deform reality*, a reality often heterogeneous to the literary
> field, and that claim to discover a natural "system" wherein they construct
> a factitious symmetry heavily reinforced by fake windows. (Genette ,
> quoted in Derrida 1980, p. 60)

---

[37] Punter undertakes a similar analysis (1996, pp. 58-62) comparing and contrasting the differences between Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian* (1797), and Matthew Lewis' *The Monk* (1796); in particular, Punter cites Radcliffe's concluding explanation and rationalisation of the 'apparently supernatural machinery' in *Udolpho* (1996, p. 60), and Lewis '[making] no excuses for the supernatural' (1996, p. 61) in *The Monk*.

Thus, genre allows itself to inform aspects beyond simple narrative lines of demarcation. If we take the 'factitious symmetry' as a relation between genre and the heterogeneous reality Genette cites, it is conceivable that genre is then able to readily both 'inform and deform' our own reality. As with key examples such as Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* (1986) and Nolan's film trilogy (2005-2012), Batman, as a discursive and textual tool, has a capacity to be informed and shaped by real concerns, offering a fictional, 'fake window' on an aspect of the real world. While the texts themselves are fictional, the ideas they speak to and the heterotopic spaces the texts provide for us to explore these issues are not. The texts fulfil a function of genre also outlined by Genette; using Batman texts, participating in multiple generic forms, to highlight the concerns of the post-9/11 world helps address the gap in how particular discourses of security, ethics and morality are reasoned with. When describing the changing configuration of genres, Genette notes:

> These strained configurations are not always useless – quite the contrary.
> Like all provisional classifications, provided they are taken as such, they
> often serve an unquestionably heuristic function. In any given case, the
> false window may open onto a true light and reveal the importance of an
> unimportant term; the slot left empty or laboriously filled may, much
> later, find a legitimate occupant. (Genette 1979, p. 45).

Superhero texts can participate in multiple genres. The superhero genre itself does exist; Peter Coogan (2006) outlines the beginnings of the genre, establishing that the majority of superhero texts, and their protagonists, rely on three key conventions – pursuing a particular goal, possessing powers and maintaining a costumed identity. Coogan

succinctly cites 'mission, powers, and identity' as '[t]he three elements [that] establish the core of the genre' (2006, p. 39). However, texts within the superhero genre, as with other forms of literature, are at least informed by – if not active participants of – genres outside their origin. Contemporary Green Lantern texts are superhero space operas that draw on elements of science fiction and fantasy, early Captain America narratives juxtaposed the superhero genre with World War II, and Brian Bendis' recent *Alias* series (2009) combines the superhero genre with elements of crime noir and detective fiction. Batman texts themselves exist at any one time as political allegory, camp comedy (for the Adam West-influenced era in particular), science fiction, children's narrative, noir detective fiction or even specifically gothic horror; the latter is best exemplified in Grant Morrison's aptly-titled *Batman: Gothic* (2015), originally published in 1990 and pitting superhero Batman against the potentially-otherworldly killer Mr Whisper[38]. The texts are able to participate in each of these genres whilst still remaining superhero texts.

Post-9/11 gothic can be seen as a specific (sub)genre of its own, standing alongside other contemporaries like American gothic – which focusses on the abhorrence of slavery and racial violence – and Southern gothic – related to exploring the macabre aspects of the American South. While still identifiable as a superhero-centric text – relying once again on Derrida's assertion that texts need not exclusively belong to one genre or one mode of classification – the Batman narratives nonetheless evince the gothic qualities of moral ambiguity and the use of rationality to combat and expose the irrational, an identity that is apposite to post-9/11 gothic. Spooner refers to Derrida's work in her outline of the gothic genre and its relevant subgenres, believing that 'to

---

[38] Another noteworthy and particularly relevant example of Batman's participation in gothic horror is Moench and Jones' *Batman & Dracula: Red Rain* (1991).

participate [in genre] does not entail complete identification; it merely suggests a relationship with that genre' (2006, p. 26). In the following chapter, I will detail how Batman's relationship with post-9/11 gothic enables texts to articulate issues of trauma and the law.

Chapter 5 – Translating Trauma and Triumph: The Chronotope and Law of Post-9/11 Batman

'[He] draws his strength from the ferment of our darkest fears of abandonment, loss and meaninglessness … Batman says 'No' to our terrors and gives us a powerful, low-culture image of defiant humanity at its peak. At his best, Batman encourages us to use our resources in service to our community and our best ideals.'

– Grant Morrison, *Many More Lives of the Batman*, p. 45

5.1 – Introduction

With the three central areas of research (Batman, the post-9/11 United States and the gothic genre) now introduced, this chapter begins a more thorough combination of Batman texts and real world issues for comparative study. The chapter chiefly examines the relationship between fiction and the real world through Batman texts in closer detail, for how these texts are able to aid understanding of the post-9/11 United States. To do so, the chapter explores key works which fundamentally enhance that understanding. The chapter examines the discourse of critical theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, whose landmark 1937 work on chronotopes, and the spatial-temporal understanding of texts, aligns with my prior genre analysis provided by Derrida's work in 1980, and of comic book scholar Jason Bainbridge, whose work includes extensive exploration of the intersections between superhero media and representations of law. The post-9/11 gothic genre's presence in key Batman texts is enabled by what I argue is a chronotopic

imprinting effect; the texts are imprinted with specific values of the space and time in which they were created, which are immutable even when these texts are studied in different contexts. These texts are also popular because they offer the kind of substantive, effective and 'postmodern' justice that Bainbridge elucidates (2007, p. 461); this justice manifests in real events such as the invasion of Iraq and the killing of Osama bin Laden. The chapter also utilises Jerrold E. Hogle's insight on how the gothic genre adeptly interprets and represents the trauma of the post-9/11 aftermath, and how this trauma is an intrinsic component to the post-9/11 gothic subgenre.

5.2 – Fake Windows, Real Worlds: Superhero Texts and Bakhtin's Chronotopes

Since *Action Comics'* debut in 1938, superhero narratives have been formed by the real world circumstances surrounding them. Created as a result of political, social or cultural concerns and events, the vast majority of contemporary superheroes owe their genesis – and, in some cases, ongoing success – to representing these issues and acting directly as a response to them.

To use a prominent example, the birth of Captain America in December, 1940 is owed to the Second World War; creators Joe Simon and Jack Kirby fashioned the character as a patriotic response to the conflict slowly encroaching across the globe. Clad in the vibrant colours of the American flag and wielding a star-painted shield made of impenetrable vibranium, the Captain's debut appearance in the self-titled *Captain America Comics #1* (Kirby & Simon 1940) saw him punch a caricatured Adolf Hitler in the jaw across the front cover. Published nearly a year before the attack on Pearl

Harbor, the issue initially sold close to one million copies (Sickels 2013, p. 321). Despite America's lack of involvement in the War at that time, Simon and Kirby nonetheless created Captain America to respond to the Nazi threat as a pre-emptive move before the War reached United States shores. Simon recalled that 'We wanted to have our say… [we] felt very good about making a political statement… and taking a stand' (Wright 2003, p. 36).

Other characters and teams created since 1938 have had similar influences stemming from real world issues. The X-Men, a team of mutant superheroes, prominently reflect social issues such as racism (see Lyubansky 2011), religious persecution (see Dalton 2011, pp. 85-89) and LGBT concerns (see Hartl 2006). Wonder Woman began in 1941 as a symbol of feminine empowerment (Morrison 2011, pp. 41-45, Hendrix 2007). Iron Man explored themes and concerns surrounding the Cold War (Genter 2007). Even Superman's initial adventures involved combating domestic violence and institutional corruption (Bainbridge 2007, p. 456). As I argued in Chapter 1 with Batman, superhero texts reflect the society and values of the time in which they are produced; part of the genre's appeal is its ability to translate contemporary issues within their fictional narratives.

This does not mean that superheroes were and are exclusively concerned with the representation of reality. Though one of the superhero genre's greatest strengths is in commenting or critiquing real world ideas, the vast appeal of the genre relies on escapism and fantasy. This escapism particularly manifested during what is called the superhero genre's 'Silver Age' from the 1950s to the 1970s (Morrison 2011, pp. 59-142), a period where narratives became the kind of colourful, surreal, fantasy-driven

titles known for eschewing plot, characterisation and logic in favour of pulp science fiction oddities and drug-inspired digressions. A narrative of this type that is one of the most pervasive in popular culture memory is the 1960s Adam West-starring *Batman* TV series.

Further, Bainbridge convincingly asserts that many representations of superheroes – figures whom, he later argues, are able to explore realistic paradigms – are fundamentally non-rational. Using the fantastical examples of the Flash – who utilised super-speed and the ability to time travel – and Spider-Man – given arachnid powers by a radioactive spider bite – Bainbridge states that 'from the start' many superheroes 'existed in opposition to modernity', even 'challenging the rationality of science' during the Silver Age period (2007, p. 462). Part of the purpose of this non-rational representation was to directly challenge the natural order, representing elements that could originate from a realistic setting but transgress or be divorced from the reality of that setting in order to create new information. Superhero texts, and the genre at large, are at their most critically potent when they undertake this challenge of the natural order, or confront an inadequacy in reality that must be addressed. Bainbridge argues a similar notion when he claims that superheroes:

> challenge … both notions of truth and the status quo, most obviously in subversive texts like *The Dark Knight Returns* … but also more subtly in the way the superhero challenges the rationality of modernity by presenting a world founded on irrationality … In so doing the superhero presents an alternative or corollary to modernity, a process of estrangement by which to highlight the inadequacies in the present

system in the same way a test case might highlight the inadequacies in the law (Bainbridge 2007, p. 462).

Bainbridge also asserts that this interrogation of modernity through the superhero lens 'represents an attack on the notion of absolutes' (2007, p. 463); he suggests that the rigid structures of 'truth, law or justice' (2007, p. 463) require this challenge made by superhero texts. In specific regard to the law, Bainbridge claims that the irrational superhero 'becomes another way of suggesting that law's rationality is stifling – and limiting … and that rationality may actually delimit law and the choices for how law can operate' (2007, p. 463). Using an irrational figure to address deficiencies in the rational law is the kind of quality that frames the superhero as, in the words of Hassler-Forest, 'an inherently contradictory form of popular mythology' capable of filling the 'gap between the formal structure of the law and its unclearly defined moral and ethical content' (2015, p. 107).

Arguably, contemporary superhero popularity resides in the realism of its depiction. As I have discussed in Chapters 1 and 4, Batman's particular popularity experienced a boom following 9/11 and the advent of the Nolan films. The character's realistic aspects, stretching back to his birth in 1939, made Batman a natural fit for stories told to a world more concerned with the reality of fear than flights of fancy. Where a fellow contemporary character like Superman declines in popularity in the post-9/11 zeitgeist – namely due to being perceived as, according to DiPaolo, 'a Godlike figure, too powerful for anyone to relate to' (2011, p. 139) – Batman's human character and comparatively realistic narratives engage readers directly. As *Batman Begins* (2005) writer David S. Goyer explains:

'One of [Nolan's] mantras when we were working on the script was *it has to be real, it has to be real*… [Batman] is the most realistic of the super heroes. There is a grittiness and grimness to him… he is the only [superhero] who's conflicted… conflicted heroes are more interesting to watch because they're more human – we can relate to them.' (Brooker 2012, p. 90)

Closeness to real life aids Batman's capacity to represent contemporary concerns. This closeness also helps to articulate the notion of Batman texts possessing social and cultural value across different eras of publication and modes of delivery. Part of how this value is realised is through use of a specific post-9/11 narrative chronotope.

Mikhail Bakhtin, borrowing a scientific term from Albert Einstein's Theory of Relativity in 1937, defines a chronotope as 'the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature' (1981, p. 84). The chronotope, as used by Bakhtin, is a categorising tool that works in concert with genre, relating the meaning of a text to the time and historical setting in which it was published. According to Nele Bemong and Pieter Borghart, Bakhtin's notion allows for time and space to become 'categories through which human beings perceive and structure the surrounding world' (2010, p. 4), producing meaning that becomes both fundamentally inseparable from the text's identity, and an aspect of how that text is processed discursively. A chronotope is the site where 'spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole', where space and time converge within a text, its genre and its critical purpose (Bakhtin 1981, p. 84). Chronotopic analysis of a text allows for exploration and definition of 'a literary work's

artistic unity' (Crossley 2007, p. 5). One of the chronotope's chief uses in my research is in identifying the specific post-9/11 values Batman texts embody that are relevant to the time and space they were created in; the real world ideas, issues and anxieties that inform how the texts are created and interpreted. This then begins to show how these texts themselves do not just reflect, but also embody the time and space in which they were made; in Bakhtin's words, the chronotope in a text creates an embodiment of time that 'thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible' (1981, p. 84).

Bakhtin's initial exploration of literary chronotopes covered their presence within established genres and forms of texts, such as Greek Romance narratives and the Rabelaisian novel. Throughout each literary analysis, Bakhtin identified concrete areas where spatial and temporal significance became crucial to how these texts were identified. As part of this study of the chronotope, Bakhtin analysed the gothic genre and its use of the castle as a spatial signifier within texts like *The Castle of Otranto* (Bakhtin 1981, pp. 245-246). In particular, Bakhtin's study highlighted key facets of the castle, and how it related to *Otranto*'s gothic qualities; the use of legends, traditions and the ancestral qualities of the castle were cited as key components that gave the gothic castle its identity as an aspect that heavily informed and defined the identity of *Otranto* as a gothic novel. Expressions of particular time and space are vital to forming a text's identity, with the castle and its gothic architecture being iconic elements of early gothic definition (and, as mentioned in Chapter 3, an element stemming directly from Walpole's fascination with such architecture).

In this way, chronotopes work well in concert with my prior analysis of Derrida's work on genre (1980) in Chapter 4. Whilst Derrida asserted that texts did not necessarily have

to be relegated exclusively to any one generic identifier, rather that they participate in multiple genres and aspects all at once, chronotopes as defined by Bakhtin act as identifiers that provide distinct and clear signifiers for the ideas that are constructed within a text. There are components of texts that mark them as specific kinds of texts, as opposed to texts belonging to a genre; as above, Bakhtin identified elements such as the castle locale and elements of the supernatural denoting texts as belonging to the gothic chronotope. This did not make the work an exclusively gothic text, as if that genre is the only one the text is capable of identifying with. Rather, the chronotope identified aspects that composed part of the text's identity and, in turn, allowed that identity to signal genres the text may be able to participate in.

Dale Townshend evaluates Bakhtin's analysis of chronotopes, arguing that chronotopes can be a useful tool of definition for the gothic aesthetic, as they provide 'a critical vocabulary for [the] rather nebulous sense' of what constitutes a particular text as gothic (2014, p. xliii). Townshend also asserts that the gothic chronotope has undergone transformation and redefinition throughout the history of separate publications. The gothic chronotope is now less concerned with the dominant signifier of castles in texts like *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) that Bakhtin identified, but more with the grotesque body, in texts like *Frankenstein*; this evolution of the chronotope's function is germane to the ongoing evolution of the genre, recontextualising the identifying aspects into a more modern setting that still expresses fear and anxiety within an enclosed temporal space (2014, p. xlii-xliii). Townshend further suggests that the twenty-first century marks 'the instantiation of another Gothic chronotope, new in that it is inflected with current socio-economic anxieties' whilst still relying on earlier gothic signifiers and conventions (2014, p. xliv). This recontexualisation and refashioning of previous gothic

definitions can be attributed once again to Spooner's assertion that the gothic is built upon redefined versions of itself that possess no original, constantly being born anew but unmistakably reliant on the old (2006, p. 32). Chronotopes, like genre, are both fixed and fluid; the present being haunted by the past is a key gothic convention contemporarily as it was in *Otranto* (1764), whilst Townshend notes the contemporary shift from the castle to the grotesque body as the focal point of gothic fiction (2014, pp. xlii-xliii). There is a constant process of evolution that enables chronotopes to identify contemporaneous aspects of texts. The chronotope relies on historical and contemporary understanding of the genre it encapsulates, and imprints specific meanings from that genre upon the text; as Brooker asserts that Batman's various incarnations are reliant on a 'minimal defining structure' (2012, p. 40) that clearly labels them all as Batman, no matter their respective disparities or differences to each other, the chronotope provides a similar structure to the text it imprints its meanings on. The chronotope can also be considered as the 'code' Derrida cited in *The Law of Genre* that should provide identifiable traits to a genre, 'authorizing us to determine … whether a given text belongs to this genre or perhaps to that genre' (1980, p. 64).

The contemporaneous gothic chronotope can be identified in a method similar to how Bakhtin identifies the chronotope of the Greek Romance. Fundamentally, each iteration of the gothic chronotope relies on spatial and temporal specificity; as I've explained previously, the horror of the gothic text relies on contemporarily relevant representations of fear and anxiety, predominantly focused on the military, political, social and cultural consequences of 9/11 and the fear produced by the attacks. Motifs and aspects that are deployed in many gothic texts help form the chronotope; Bakhtin's citing of ancient architecture and Townshend's citing of the grotesque bodies are

equally signs of a gothic text and figures of the genre, identifications that are decades apart yet nonetheless correlative to each other.

Several of the key thematic factors of the gothic chronotope can also be found in Höglund's work (2014). Centrally, Höglund claims that gothic texts are inherently concerned with a representation of the past that attempts to constrain the present; they 'bring the horrors of the past to our attention' (Höglund 2014, p. 174), so they might be acknowledged or reasoned with. Spooner's argument for what constitutes the gothic similarly acknowledges the return of past transgression, but relies more on stagnation; Spooner claims that the horrors of the gothic text show how the past 'chokes the present [and] prevents progress and the march towards personal or social enlightenment' (Spooner 2006, pp. 18-19).

Contradicting Spooner's claim is Jerrold E. Hogle's argument that the gothic is more progressive than preventative. According to Hogle, the composition of gothic texts 'always [begin] with trauma' (2014, p. 72), providing a space where the reader can come to terms with the real horrors the texts represent and the anxieties they confront. In the wake of 9/11, Hogle extols the virtue of the gothic as a means of '[helping] us grasp the complex of feelings with which we face trauma', a mode which is adaptable, evolutionary and relevant, 'even as the content of those complexes changes across the history of human civilizations and Gothic fictions' (2014, p. 80).

Superhero texts are ideal for using the gothic to explore the complex of feelings which Hogle identifies. Cassandra Sharp asserts that superhero texts are adept at both articulating aspects of reality and the law and in helping readers understand and come to

terms with the ideas being narratively utilised. Relying on Richard K. Sherwin's analysis of the 'cinematic jurisprudence' of Krzysztof Kieslowski (2005), Sharp convincingly argues that superheroes enable a transformation of 'normative understandings into expectations of the legal system' through witnessing 'the interactions and motivations of a superhero in responding to an ineffective legal system and increasing modes of criminality' (2012, p. 355). Sharp also utilises work on 'cultural criminology', a framework developed by Nicki D. Phillips and Staci Strobl as a perspective that 'rejects the positivist notion of objectivity in favour of a focus on the meanings of symbols and styles within particular cultural and subcultural frameworks' (2006, p. 305). In this manner, Sharp debates the differences and usefulness of law in relation to both legal and substantive justice, comparing the juridical framework of the former to the moral impetus of the latter. Declaring that the superhero exerts authoritative justice 'because the law is deficient' (2012, p. 358), similar to Bainbridge's claim that superheroes point out the law's 'inadequacies' (2007, p. 462), Sharp's position is that superheroes are ideally placed to elucidate and discuss notions of contemporary law and justice.

The chronotopic hallmarks of superhero texts can, broadly speaking, be brought down to five distinct elements present in almost every contemporary superhero narrative. These hallmarks also partially overlap with the conventions of the genre. However, the hallmarks are useful here in constructing a post-9/11 gothic chronotope; as I will demonstrate, both the superhero chronotope and the post-9/11 gothic chronotope are quite similar to each other, enhancing their respective uses when both post-9/11 gothic and the superhero are used in concert.

First, the superhero identity is created through trauma; the death of a parent or loved one, an invasive alteration of their body or senses, or some other catastrophic event. For example, Batman's origin story involves the death of young Bruce Wayne's parents (Miller & Mazzuchelli 1987); a booby trap set by Vietnamese supervillain Wong-Chu grievously injures Tony Stark, forcing him to build the life-saving arc reactor in his chest that will eventually enable him to create the first suit of Iron Man armour (Lee *et al.* 1963); Peter Parker receives a life-threatening bite from a radioactive spider which eventually gives him spiderlike superpowers, shortly before his Uncle Ben is killed by a criminal, prompting Peter to adopt the Spider-Man identity (Lee & Ditko 1962).

Second, the superhero institutes a mandate of protection, whether it is to protect a group of people or, more commonly, a city or larger geographical area. For example, Batman largely focuses on protecting Gotham City; Spider-Man and Daredevil defend New York; more cosmically-influenced heroes, like Superman, Green Lantern and Thor, fashion their mandate of protection to encompass Earth itself.

Third, the superhero is unbounded – or at least only minimally constrained – by the strictures of the legal system, striving to achieve justice that may be substantive if not strictly legal. A host of vigilante superheroes – primarily Batman, but also Spider-Man, Daredevil and Green Arrow, among others – operate with the self-proclaimed understanding that they are separate from the law and yet, paradoxically, fight to defend it. As I've mentioned previously in this thesis, several Batman narratives have confronted the character's illegal nature, as well as the juxtaposition of illegal tactics to ensure greater justice and security for Gotham.

Fourth, the superhero utilises a particular emblem or brand, which becomes a signifier of their character and their *modus* in a succinct visual manner. The bat emblem across Batman's chest, in both its pure black (see Figure 5.1A) and black-and-yellow iterations (see Figure 5.1B), is one of the most immediately recognisable of these signifiers in contemporary popular culture; other examples include Superman's red-and-yellow 'S' symbol emblazoned on his chest (see Figure 5.1C), Green Lantern's green-and-white lantern emblem (see Figure 5.1D), Daredevil's interlinked 'D' initials (see Figure 5.1E), and Captain America's white star within red, white and blue concentric circles, as depicted on his shield (see Figure 5.1F). These symbols are visual abbreviations of everything the superhero encapsulates, recognisable within the fictional universe and iconic in reality.

Figure 5.1 – Notable Superhero Emblems (From Left to Right): Batman in black (5.1A), Batman in black and yellow (5.1B), Superman (5.1C), Green Lantern (5.1D), Daredevil (5.1E), Captain America (5.1F)

As with genre, not all of the elements of the superhero chronotope apply to every superhero character, but they do correlate to a minimal defining structure that aids in understanding what constitutes a superhero. The nature of these four aspects and how they affect superhero characters also changes, given temporal and spatial specificity; to return to the Iron Man example above, the original villain responsible for Tony Stark's injuries was the then-contemporary Vietnamese communist leader Wong-Chu in the

1960s, before being contemporised into the more Middle Eastern extremist-influenced enemies that the 2000s Iron Man origin stories utilise[39].

Finally, the fifth aspect of the superhero chronotope is exclusively concerned with the depiction of time. Bakhtin coined the term '*adventure-time*' (1981, p. 87) as an amalgam of elements that construct the depiction of time in the Greek Romance novel; unimportant events and the flow of time are largely omitted, whilst the important, pivotal moments of the narrative are those the narrative focuses on. Rather than relying on the 'everyday cyclicity' (1981, p. 91) that real time operates within – the cycle of days as twenty-four hour periods and the regular flow of time – adventure-time instead collates a flow of time constructed by the major events of a narrative. These events exist around 'an extratemporal hiatus that appears between two moments of a real time sequence' (1981, p. 91); any time that is not relevant to these events is not represented in the text. Bakhtin argues that the plot within the traditional Greek Romance narrative is not as important as the beginning and ending points. Despite whatever occurs in the plot, the beginning narrative trajectory ensures that the ending is a foregone conclusion. The narrative poles of the journey are not what the novel is structured around – 'rather, it is around that which lies (that which takes place) between them' (Bakhtin 1981, p. 89). The adventure-time does depict time's effect on the novel's characters in the same way it would be experienced by real people, leading to readers experiencing through the novel what Bakhtin terms 'an extratemporal hiatus between two biological moments' (1981, p. 90).

---

[39] Tony Stark's wounding and building of the arc reactor is consistent in all of Iron Man's origin stories. However, in Ellis and Granov's *Iron Man: Extremis* (2007) and the first *Iron Man* motion picture (2008), Wong-Chu has been replaced by more contemporary antagonists; namely al-Qaeda and a Middle Eastern extremist group named The Ten Rings, respectively.

Superheroes are subject to their own form of adventure-time[40], particularly with origin stories which truncate the temporal process and only show the relevant moments of a character's creation. For example, *Batman Begins* (2005) achieves this with a quick series of opening scenes depicting Bruce Wayne's release from prison, followed by his subsequent recruitment and training by the League of Shadows. These scenes are interspersed with relevant moments showing how Wayne was initially incarcerated. The key moments of Wayne's origin, leading to the creation of the Batman persona, are focused on, eschewing the rest of that time.

Adventure-time is defined by its effect – or lack of one – on the characters; in the Greek Romance narrative, according to Bakhtin, time does not have an effect on the characters, '[changing] nothing in the life of the heroes' (1981, p. 90). As a contrast to the Greek Romance narrative, Bakhtin explores what he provisionally terms '*the adventure novel of everyday life*' (1981, p. 111, emphasis added by original author), a kind of text where adventure-time and everyday time intersect. Bakhtin initially uses the texts of Apuleius and Petronicus as examples of the adventure novel of everyday life, which eventually led to the 'characteristic features' of those texts being proliferated in other genres (1981, p. 111). The adventure novel of everyday life is more concerned with depicting a fuller temporal journey of the protagonist; Bakhtin cites the example of Apuleius's 2nd Century AD narrative *The Golden Ass* (1962), which follows a prolonged literal and metaphorical journey as the protagonist, Lucius, is transformed into an ass and seeks to return to human form. The journey through stages such as guilt, retribution,

---

[40] The comic book medium also specifically uses adventure-time; only relevant moments are shown on each panel, the flow of time understood to be occurring in-between panels. Early Batman comic books also largely followed the tenets of what Bakhtin would identify as adventure-time; there was little effect on Batman or any other character at the end of each comic, and no sense of any important journey or character arc taking place. This changed after the 1960s, when superhero comics became more serialised and the longer-term effects of the narrative were felt in subsequent issues.

punishment and redemption forms part of the chronotope of the adventure novel of everyday life, reliant on a solid exploration of time that omits little, different from adventure-time's omission of unimportant temporal moments. The contrast of adventure-time in Greek Romance and the adventure novel of everyday life is stark; where the former only highlights important moments in the hero's journey that ultimately leave them unaffected, the latter is a 'temporal sequence [that] demands precisely concreteness of expression' (Bakhtin 1981, p. 119). The superhero genre's specific version of adventure-time – a notion I will term *superhero-time* – is similar to both the Greek Romance and adventure novel of everyday life forms of adventure-time, in that it omits temporal events that are unneeded for the context of the narrative's progression, yet time has an effect on the character rather than none at all; the journey is quite clear, though not as protracted as in Bakhtin's example of Apuleius's text.

All five aspects of the superhero chronotope – trauma, protective mandate, lack of legal stricture, personal symbolism and the use of superhero-time – are applicable to Batman; in turn, Batman's embodiment of the superhero chronotope works well with the gothic genre. Batman texts' use of trauma is germane to the chronotope; Hogle describes how the gothic genre represents trauma, going so far as to say the gothic 'is inherently about deep-seated and large-scale, even national and international, traumas that are intimated and yet masked behind hyperbolic symbols of them' (2014, p. 73). With a particular focus on texts produced in the wake of 9/11, Hogle argues that the gothic is useful from a standpoint of narrativising and coming to terms with the real traumas the attacks perpetrated, as well as within the aftermath. Post-9/11 gothic texts 'can *both* bring out *and* keep at bay our deepest ambivalences toward the worst of cultural traumas', with the intention to 'see just how conflicted and multi-dimensional they are as we look back

on them from a frightening closeness and a comprehensible distance' (2014, p. 76, emphasis added by original author). Fictional texts that utilise a degree of realism, directly or indirectly confronting the ideas and traumas of the post-9/11 world, can be utilised as discursive engagements with actual reality. Superhero texts in particular, married to a post-9/11 gothic sensibility, can 'raise questions about what we think "justice" actually is, and the relationship between justice and the law' (Sharp 2012, p. 354), as well as utilising the gothic's capabilities of 'the power to help us deal with larger cultural traumas' and the 'horrific nature of their most visible symptoms' (Hogle 2014, p. 75).

The realistic exploration of trauma is a key aspect of the post-9/11 gothic chronotope, and is central to how that chronotope imprints its meaning on relevant texts. In comparison to the superhero chronotope, where each character responds to their own trauma, the trauma of post-9/11 gothic is the event of 9/11 itself. Many of the facets comprising the superhero chronotope are present in post-9/11 gothic; effective justice and a protective mandate, for the United States and the world abroad, are both sought. Post-9/11 gothic texts use a form of superhero-time to remove the relevant procedures needed to secure legal justice, instead relying on the key spatial and temporal moments that will result in that justice. A police procedural television series like *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* (2000-2015) removes the months of forensic analysis, criminal investigation and legal process that would ensue following a real murder; usually, the killer is located within the forty-five minute span of an episode, and the only events the show depicts are those relevant to finding the killer. Post-9/11 gothic texts operate the same way; the film *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012), which concerns the operation that led to the death of Osama bin Laden, shows only the key events of the narrative that lead to

the operation itself, keeping the narrative focus on justice being achieved rather than the proper process of achieving it.

Every text is imprinted with a specific temporal and spatial identity; the time and space in which the text was created indelibly marks it with specific meaning relevant solely to that period, no matter what kinds of interpretations or other meanings can be additionally gleaned from the text. In the case of post-9/11 superhero texts, particularly with examples like *Captain America: The New Deal* (Rieber & Cassaday 2003) that use fiction to directly confront the reality of 9/11 and its immediate aftermath, the text's identity as a specific post-9/11 text is blatantly apparent. With others, like *The Dark Knight* (2008) and *Batman Incorporated* (Morrison *et al.*, 2012), the post-9/11 elements are apparent but the particular chronotopic identity is not as pronounced; the texts were not produced as direct responses to 9/11 in the same manner *The New Deal* was. The texts are written and published in the wake of 9/11, and to varying degrees are inflected with the same anxieties and fears that are representative of the period. Their identity is influenced by the events of 9/11's aftermath and the ensuing issues and anxieties that typify the time. These Batman texts are informed by and address the social and individual trauma of 9/11 without directly describing the event or its real world aftermath the way *The New Deal* does. The texts also do not didactically use 9/11 itself in their narratives, but instead articulate 9/11's aftermath through metaphor and allegory.

Batman texts discursively engage with the post-9/11 world and its trauma; part of the texts' potency as engagements with the real trauma comes from having represented similar fictional trauma before. To refer once again to Thurtle and Mitchell's work,

texts within the post-9/11 gothic subgenre enable us to experience the events and their consequences, '[enacting] what can be imagined though not directly experienced without grievous or fatal bodily injury' (2007, p. 268). As a database of anomalous events, not unlike the anomalous event of 9/11 itself, superhero texts prepare their readers for the realistic possibility of such traumas through fantasised and fictionalised means. Such a repetitious narrativising of these events give a sense of the uncanny when experienced in real life, such as the *Adventures of Superman* comic – completed months earlier – which was published the day after 9/11, depicting the twin towers of Lex Corp being destroyed in a manner similar to the World Trade Centre. 'The effect,' Thurtle and Mitchell claim, 'is a feeling of having seen this image before' (2007, p. 268).

A post-9/11 narrative can express its textual identity in a number of ways. Two means that are similar, yet work for different goals, are the method of the American imperial gothic, as outlined by Höglund (2014), and the method of post-9/11 gothic, which I will elucidate. The former is concerned with texts produced following 9/11 that appear, either implicitly or explicitly, to fundamentally dilute the complexity inherent to the real world issues that the texts aim to represent. In many cases, this dilution forms a strict binary between good and evil, us and them, the American empire and the rebellion in the Middle East. Any form of comprehensive discussion or working through the issues at hand is quelled by such an oversimplification. The post-9/11 gothic method, however, engages in thorough discourse with the realistic facets the text represents. This method, useful when used in conjunction with superhero texts, explores and confronts the concerns and anxieties that have arisen in the post-9/11 world.

Morrison's *Batman Incorporated* comic book series (Morrison *et al.*, 2012, Morrison & Burnham 2013, and Morrison & Burnham 2013) particularly addresses elements of the post-9/11 chronotope. The world is suffering a multitude of attacks orchestrated by the terrorist group Leviathan, whose members often wear Arabic robes and headdresses and answer to Talia al Ghul, their leader of Middle Eastern birth. Batman forms a global initiative named Batman Incorporated, a franchise capable of internationally fighting crime with agents in every major country across the world. A large number of Batman Incorporated's activities are instigated by the desire for both preventative actions against Leviathan and through the need for preserving international stability. Sovereign borders are routinely crossed by Batman himself, the American leader of this initiative, with no thought of respecting international legal restrictions. It is difficult not to read elements of this text as Morrison's response to the United States-led alliance of nations that invaded Iraq and Afghanistan following 9/11. Similar, too is the manner in which both the fictional Batman and the real George Bush eventually lose local and international support for their respective war efforts, with the former even being cut off from police support and his organisation actively outlawed from Gotham City.

Other Batman texts published in the same period as Morrison's are also imprinted by the post-9/11 gothic chronotope; I will be analysing several of these texts in greater detail further in this thesis. The post-9/11 gothic subgenre has particular value when it is located in many of these texts, identifying both the inherent chronotopic identity of the texts and the key anxieties the texts attempt to confront.

5.3 – 'An obsessive, impossible quest to punch crime into extinction': Bainbridge and Superhero Law

An aspect of Batman's ability to negotiate the chronotope of post-9/11 gothic is in how concepts of law and justice are represented; both concepts are vital to our understanding of post-9/11 anxieties and how they are dealt with. The notion of superheroes representing the legal system forms the basis of Bainbridge's 'An Exegesis of Superheroes' Interrogations of Law' (2007). Bainbridge posits the notion of a '*premodern*' form of law; this law bypasses accountability and provides a 'direct line' to the truth (2007, p. 457), downplaying or ignoring the legal structures and due process that comprise modern forms of law. Rather than being concerned with proper judicial process, justice becomes 'transcendent' and is more concerned with favouring 'emotion … over rationality' (2007, p. 458). Though he cites examples of premodern law in texts such as the television series *NYPD Blue* (1993-2005) and the film *Dirty Harry* (1971), Bainbridge asserts that premodern law is 'more powerfully advanced in the figure of the superhero'; superhero premodern law presents a notion of populist justice, in which justice is achieved not through the legal 'delivery of the verdict', but rather by 'the defeat of the villain' (2007, p. 458). Premodern law, according to Bainbridge, is largely 'crime control enacted by an avatar of justice (the superhero), while simultaneously sidelining the modern legal system of law' 2007, p. 457). If, as Bainbridge asserts, superheroes can confront the 'inadequacies of the present [legal] system' (2007, p. 462) through their representation of the law, then it stands to reason these texts, and others that are informed by post-9/11 gothic sensibilities, are able to discuss and confront the problems that have emerged in the post-9/11 United States in social, cultural, political and military areas. Whether these texts confront the War on Terror, the domestic response to 9/11 or notions surrounding the idea of a contemporary, post-9/11 American

empire, the post-9/11 gothic subgenre discursively engages with texts that highlight the inadequacies, deficiencies and problems in inherent to what they confront. As Bainbridge elucidates throughout his work, superhero texts that explore premodern law enhance and complicate discussions surrounding modern law by exposing the law's inadequacies; the superhero '[personifies] the inherent tensions in law' (2007, p. 457), restoring complexity to previously diluted discussions of how law should function.

Superhero texts also address inadequacies in the non-fictional analysis of post-9/11 American imperialism. In 2005, Susan Kay Gillman observed that the 'astonishingly crude' reductive questioning of the concept of contemporary American empire merely asks 'for or against?', or whether one is a believer or a critic of the concept of American empire (2005, p. 198). Gillman argued that many then-contemporary imperial studies often diluted the discussion surrounding it, leaving those engaging with it discursively 'stranded with only two choices, celebration or condemnation of the imperial object of study' (2005, p. 199). While Gillman does not document the complexity of contemporaneous existing scholarship on American empire in her paper, such as the work of Johnson (2000), Ikenberry (2002), Kaplan (2002) Chomsky (2003), and Ferguson (2004)[41], her assertion that certain discussions surrounding an American empire are largely diluted into binaries of 'good' or 'bad' is not wholly incorrect, and is still pervasive contemporaneously.

As I've outlined previously in this thesis in relation to Höglund's work (2014), many fictional texts actively propagate or represent these binaries. Such texts, chronotopically imprinted by several of the post-9/11 ideas I established earlier in this chapter, do suffer

---

[41] Gillman does minimally address the work of Johnson (2000), Kaplan (2002) and Ferguson (2003) in her paper, but not in a substantial fashion.

from a lack of complexity; this lack is noted by Höglund as a characteristic of the American imperial gothic. To refer once again to Nolan's film trilogy as an example, Mridul Bordoloi asserts that such discursive films 'masked as superhero franchises', designed in some cases to specifically target younger audiences, 'play an important role in ideologically conditioning particular/targeted subject positions into accepting/internalizing a particular hegemonic world view', with Nolan's films in particular seemingly validating and endorsing 'the hegemony of capitalism' (2012, p. 92). Bordoloi's view, regarding the values Nolan's films present is not without merit, yet does not fully address the nuance of Nolan's work. A binary that presents capitalism trumping criminality is inherent to the trilogy; indeed, this binary can be seen in the Batman comic books and related media as far back as the character's 1939 origins. While this binary is implicitly present in the first two films of Nolan's trilogy, it is challenged in the third film, *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012), with the near-total collapse of both Bruce Wayne's and Gotham's capitalist and governmental hegemonies, respectively. Bordoloi largely evaluates Nolan's films as a binary of capitalism versus anarchism, with characters like Ra's al Ghul and Bane created as gauche, exaggerated enemies of the West who exist merely to be 'demonized as a ghoul' (2012, p. 92) as enemies of capitalism. Bordoloi argues that the films serve little purpose other than to represent alternatives to capitalism that are treated as nothing more than deception, the illusion of a true alternative; Bordoloi claims that Bane's false proclamation of a socially-liberated Gotham in *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012), which I explored in Chapter 4, represents a deception 'offered by the advocates of the capitalist mode of economy to undermine the commitment of those adopting [an] alternative position' (Bordoloi 2012, p. 95). Though he does briefly address the notion that Nolan's films possess 'a certain note of ambivalence' (Bordoloi 2012, p. 97) in their depiction of

capitalism as an ultimate good, Bordoloi predominantly appears to align Nolan's work with the same kinds of texts Höglund (2014) cites as reducing the nuances of the post-9/11 world into unhelpful binaries.

Nolan's films, deploying elements of the superhero and post-9/11 chronotopes, articulate a more complex narrative than Bordoloi's analysis would suggest. In *The Dark Knight* (2008) especially, the post-9/11 world's economy of fear is articulated by the Joker's campaign of violence against the city and the terror experienced by the citizens moving to escape the city on ferries, which occurs towards the film's conclusion. The citizenry are unaware of where the next attack will take place or in what capacity, emphasised by the difficulties the police department faces in predicting where the Joker will attack and how best to combat it. Batman, as the enforcer of Bordoloi's perceived 'hegemony of capitalism' (2012, p. 92), does manage to stop the Joker, but at the cost of many deaths, including Rachel Dawes, his closest and oldest friend. Framing Batman as a capitalist in the method Bordoloi suggests, his tactics in *The Dark Knight* are not entirely effective, and the law's inadequacy to combat the Joker's tactics is directly highlighted throughout the film. Criminal banker Lau, about to be transported to a court hearing at the height of the Joker's campaign, tells Harvey Dent – and, by extension, Gotham's law enforcement – that he believes they are ineffective: 'You can't protect me. You cannot even protect yourselves' (2008). There is also a suggestion made by Alfred that Batman's very existence has triggered not only the Joker's presence, but the escalation of crime in Gotham as a whole; 'You crossed the line first, sir. You squeezed [the criminals], you hammered them to the point of desperation, and in their desperation they turned to a man they didn't fully understand' (2008). Following the death of Bruce Wayne's friend Rachel at the hands of the Joker,

Alfred blatantly clarifies Wayne's responsibility; while Batman has 'inspired good,' he also 'spat in the faces of Gotham's criminals. Didn't you think there might be some casualties?' (2008). Far from being the solution to the city's problems, the capitalist hegemon has only made them worse. The radical threat of the Joker calls to mind the shock experienced from 9/11; while elements of the real world attack were not entirely unprecedented, given prior events like the 1993 World Trade Centre bombing, the sheer scale of the 9/11 attack was a shock that, as evidenced by portions of the 9/11 Commission Report (2004), much of New York's law enforcement was not adequately prepared to handle.

Perhaps one of Nolan's most prominent statements which reflects the post-9/11 chronotope comes during Bruce and Alfred's initial analysis of the Joker's erratic criminal *modus operandi*. When discussing how to deal with the Joker, Bruce suggests he is just another uncomplicated criminal, driven by money or selfish gains. Alfred refutes this suggestion, believing instead that the Joker constitutes a different kind of criminal:

> Some men aren't looking for anything logical, like money. They can't be
> bought, bullied, reasoned or negotiated with. Some men just want to
> watch the world burn (2008).

This is not dissimilar to a portion of the speech George W. Bush made the week after 9/11, marking the beginning of the War on Terror. In a way similar to Wayne's belief that the Joker is comparable to the kind of threats Batman has already faced, Bush

compares al-Qaeda to terror 'as what the mafia is to crime', and goes on to say that '[al-Qaeda's] goal is not making money; its goal is remaking the world' (Bush 2001).

As respective figures of the real and fictional enforcement of justice, if not law, both Bush and Nolan's Batman confront the post-9/11 world as autocratic sovereigns who believe it their mission to combat their respective threats of the epoch. Both figures exert their own kind of 'American unipolar power' (Ikenberry 2002, p. 45). Bush invaded Iraq and Afghanistan and led a coalition of nations under the aegis of global security, an initiative uniting countries but nonetheless spearheaded by the United States. Batman may not have invaded a nation, but the character is American and the threats the character faces in *The Dark Knight* (2008) – aside from the Joker, who is presented as a domestic American terrorist – are foreign, belonging to Russian, Italian and Chinese nationalities. During the film Batman even crosses sovereign borders into Hong Kong to obtain Lau for criminal prosecution in Gotham, as Lau cannot be extradited legally from China. Ikenberry's notion of 'American unipolar power' (2002, p. 45) is also represented in *The Dark Knight* through Harvey Dent's tacit approval of Batman's actions after the fact; knowing full well who is responsible for Lau's sudden appearance outside the Gotham Police Department, Dent tells the press, 'I don't know about Mr Lau's travel arrangements, but I'm sure glad he's here' (2008).

Both Bush and Batman also undertake their respective campaigns due to self-proclaimed moral impetus. The Joker of *The Dark Knight* presents a clear and present danger to Gotham, whilst the real al-Qaeda represented at the time – and still represents today – a relevant threat to the United States. In a critical exploration of *The Dark Knight* as a gothic text, Avril Horner also draws links between the American

protagonists and their conflict with gothic 'cultural "others"', mentioning the Italian and Russian examples from the film. Horner suggests the film embodies elements of the post-9/11 era by utilising the Joker as a threat similar to the terrorism of al-Qaeda, declaring the former is 'a grotesque gothic expression of the potential violence and unpredictability of the terrorist, the ultimate cultural "Other" who has become a global threat' (Horner 2013, p. 179). Batman believes it his duty to combat the Joker, rationalising his use of extreme and invasive tactics to Lucius Fox when showing the latter the massive surveillance system he has set up to spy on every citizen in Gotham (2008). The character finds it necessary to utilise this system, the same way Bush believed his administration would use 'every necessary weapon of war' in his war against al-Qaeda (Bush 2001). Batman's surveillance technology in Nolan's 2008 film also bears an uncanny – and, presumably on the part of Nolan, unintentional – resemblance to the United States government-sanctioned NSA domestic surveillance programs, including PRISM and MYSTIC, which were exposed by Edward Snowden five years later in 2013, as invasive intrusions on citizens' privacy[42] (see Greenwald 2014).

Batman is criticised for his extra-legal methods in *The Dark Knight* by Gotham's populace. For example, Lucius Fox declares that the surveillance technology is 'unethical, dangerous … too much power for one person', making it clear he disagrees with Batman's tactics; 'As long as [the technology] is at Wayne Enterprises, I won't be'

---

[42] Another odd coincidence between *The Dark Knight* and Snowden; both Batman and Snowden are connected to this surveillance technology, and after their subsequent use and exposure of it, respectively, both are pursued by law enforcement. Batman evades the police in *The Dark Knight*'s closing scene and remains in seclusion during the eight years, within the narrative, between *The Dark Knight* and *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012) and is referred to in that time as a criminal. Similarly, at time of writing Snowden remains a fugitive actively sought after by the United States government; Snowden is seen in the eyes of the government as, in Chomsky's words, 'the most wanted criminal in the world' (2015, p. 176).

(2008). Despite criticism of his *modus operandi*, Batman's actions are given moral license through tacit approvals such as the one offered by Dent earlier in the film; referring to Batman in a dinner conversation, Dent offers that 'Gotham City is proud of an ordinary citizen standing up for what's right' (2008). Dent, Commissioner Gordon and the rest of Gotham's law enforcement view Batman's actions as what Sharp terms is a viable 'antidote to [the] law's failings' (2012, p. 359), useful as a tool to carry out the substantive and effective justice that the legal system prevents them from achieving. This is not dissimilar to a notion posited by John Dunham Kelly, who critiques the real post-9/11 military responses from the United States as 'intensifications of a U.S. interventionist plan, launched by a … government that was already planning to intensify and develop its assertions of sovereignty but was unsure, before 9/11, what public face to give its actions' (2003, p. 348). The 9/11 attacks gave the Bush government the opportunity to viably pursue both the terrorists responsible for those attacks and to preventively target those who might perpetrate similar attacks in the future.

Such effective justice comprises Bainbridge's exploration of the notion of postmodern law. Arguing that the concept is usually embodied in a particular figure, as justice has been since ancient mythologies first conceived of it, Bainbridge states that it is justice, not law, that forms part of premodern law's foundation; 'whereas law often remains nebulous and abstract, justice is more capable of personification and it is at the centre of the premodern idea of law' (2007, p. 460). Bainbridge's description of postmodern law replicates and inverts his critical precepts of premodern law; instead of negatively framing working outside the legal system, those who do so instead become positive agents. The law becomes 'an impediment to justice' (2007, p. 461) rather than a source of it, and those who work apart from it are championed rather than criticised.

Superheroes best embody the postmodern idea of law as they exist apart from the legal system, with Bainbridge noting that the idea of a superhero being 'a locus for justice' rather than law suggests 'justice may be … something that exists *outside* the legal system' (2007, p. 460). Bainbridge states:

> As the superhero genre develops and the black and white distinction between heroes and villains is eroded, the genre throws into question ideas of law and justice, differences between morality and law and evil and illegality (where actions can be good but illegal and legal but evil). Here, the superhero is interrogating law on a number of levels while at the same time engaged in a Derridean deconstruction of the neat binaries (hero and villain, good and evil, moral and lawful, legal and illegal) that have underlied the comic book representation of the legal system to this point (2007, p. 461).

Notions of the kind of postmodern law found in superhero narratives are also implicit in the way the post-9/11 United States government conducts itself. Actions that range from the Bush government's campaigns in the Middle East to the Obama administration's rationales behind the potentially-illegal killing of Osama bin Laden are seen as judicious and right, carried out for the benefit of the United States and the world. These legally and ethically questionable actions, undertaken with potential gains for the nation in mind, are seemingly validated by morality in the eyes of the government; according to Hardt and Negri, 'moral intervention often serves as the first act that prepares the stage of military intervention', and that in particular more recent international police actions are undertaken and 'dictated unilaterally by the United States' (2001, p. 37). Such

intervention undertaken on moral grounds also serves to attempt to reinforce faith in the populace; Horner, summarising work by Zygmunt Bauman, states that 'it is vital in a disintegrating social culture that people can continue to believe in absolute justice, benign states and effective governments, even though such institutions have become eroded and weakened' (2013, p. 181). The idea of 'absolute justice' correlates to Bainbridge's definition of 'postmodern justice'; justice that is apart from the legal system, more populist in nature. To reiterate Bainbridge's sentiment, the kind of justice employed by the post-9/11 United States sees 'the defeat of the villain' rather than the 'delivery of the verdict' (2007, p. 458) as the more desirable goal. Moreover, the justice sought is retributive in nature; Sharp draws on Joseph Campbell's landmark study *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949) to illuminate how superhero texts are concerned with acquiring Campbell's 'elixir' of justice, a 'communal crying out for justice' which the superhero strives to achieve (2012, p. 356). Through use of boundless justice, the superhero addresses the critical gap 'between the formal structure of the law and its unclearly defined moral and ethical content' (Hassler-Forest 2015, p. 107). Justice is pursued through use of superhero-time, where the restrictions of law are not represented in the text. Sharp's work argues that:

…the vigilante superhero … is defined by a retributive desire to acquire this elixir of justice … it is this very aspect of the monomyth that resonates most strongly with an audience coming to terms with justice desires. That is, the superhero monomyth provides a vivid symbolisation of a natural human quest for justice. Just like that of the superhero, the journey for human beings to find justice is predicated on retributive desire because the ordinary world does not seem to provide an adequate

connection between legal process and justice. The superhero narrative …

provides a familiar vantage point from which to contemplate an

increasing penal populism. (Sharp 2012, p. 356)

While I use Batman as a case study in this thesis, post-9/11 gothic fiction is predicated on similar views of addressing inconsistencies and gaps in law and the pursuit of justice. The texts are chronotopically imprinted with the concerns of the time, existing in a spatial and temporal relationship with the reality they interpret. While Höglund's American imperial gothic texts operate in a similar fashion, they seek to close the gap through simplified applications and a diluted understanding of justice. Post-9/11 gothic, mirroring the American imperial gothic in heterotopic fashion, addresses the gap more substantially.

Chapter 6 – Batman's Empire: Imperialism, Gothic Articulation and Post-9/11 Politics in *Batman Incorporated*

'Moral intervention often serves as the first act that prepares the stage of military intervention. In such cases, military deployment is presented as an internationally sanctioned police action. Today military intervention [is often] dictated unilaterally by the United States, which charges itself with the primary task and then subsequently asks its allies to set into motion a process of armed containment and/or repression of the current enemy of Empire. These enemies are most often called terrorist, a crude conceptual and terminological reduction that is rooted in a police mentality.'

– Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, p. 37

6.1 – Introduction

This chapter compares post-9/11 gothic Batman to the central thesis of Johan Höglund's influential work regarding the American imperial gothic. This mode of writing, Höglund argues, is openly supportive of empire but simultaneously highlights the inadequacies and inherent monstrosity within that form of empire; a number of these texts highlight the inadequacies consciously, rather than coincidentally. The vast majority of texts Höglund cites as American imperial gothic are produced post-9/11, their meaning imbued with the fears and anxieties permeating the time.

In this chapter, I seek to highlight aspects of Höglund's American imperial gothic and repurpose them as tools to discursively articulate American empire in post-9/11 gothic; my intention is to analyse the cultural politics of the imperial institution, demonstrating how popular texts represent and engage with these politics. Much of my analysis of Batman as post-9/11 gothic relies on a reading of Höglund's work. However, rather than simply acknowledge or glorify the monstrosity of empire, as the American imperial gothic does, I seek to demonstrate how post-9/11 gothic texts acknowledge and *deconstruct* that monstrosity, presenting examples through Batman narratives that will be analysed in closer detail in this and the following chapter. I focus on Höglund's work here in order to evaluate the American imperial gothic in light of my posited notion of post-9/11 gothic, highlighting the critical intersections between the two (sub)genres.

After outlining key aspects of Höglund's assertions regarding the American imperial gothic, the chapter analyses Batman's use as a fictional tool that critiques imperial violence, the shortcomings of empire and the gothic juxtapositions of post-9/11 cultural politics. Using Grant Morrison's *Batman Incorporated* narrative (2012-2013) as a nuanced counterpoint to the more blatant pro-imperial allegory of Frank Miller's *Holy Terror* comic book (2011), I argue that post-9/11 gothic Batman texts are ideally placed to interrogate and represent these cultural politics, identifying both positive and negative facets.

Finally, the chapter undertakes a broader analysis of the gothic juxtaposition inherent in Batman specifically, in that he is simultaneously an Other but also a combatant against the Other. This ability to alternately support and contend with aspects of American imperialism implicated in recent texts is a hallmark Batman shares with no other comic

book superhero, and is a central legitimation of the character's capacity for critical articulation of such imperialism.

6.2 – 'With the Right Hardware, Chaos Can Be Out-Gunned': Höglund's American Imperial Gothic

The central thesis of Höglund's work on the American imperial gothic is that the genre acknowledges and validates the actions of the American empire, with little space for substantial criticism of that empire. Concerned with narratives that recognise the existence of empire whilst highlighting the inherent monstrosity of such empire, Höglund states that the American imperial gothic exists as a mode of writing 'openly supportive of American empire [that] also testifies to the many anxieties that have gripped and grip the nation' (2014, p. 12). This mode primarily exists as a lens through which to view texts created within the post-9/11 world, as a means of both discursively mapping and drawing attention to the inherent issues within the contemporary American empire. Höglund articulates the American imperial gothic's inherent dichotomy by claiming the mode '[encourages] the megalomaniac fantasies and desires that fuelled American imperialism', whilst simultaneously '[revealing] the monstrous form such fantasies and desires may take' (2014, p. 12). The American imperial gothic seeks to diminish the intricacies and nuance of post-9/11 into easily identifiable 'good' and 'bad' conflicts, creating a binary where the American empire is considered as a 'good' form of modernity that is constantly at war with the 'bad' Other, a savage force of antagonism that only the empire can destroy. While American imperial gothic texts seek to represent monstrous, sometimes exaggerated, threats derived from the reality faced in

post-9/11, Höglund determines that such threats are inherently of humanity rather than something truly alien; 'the demons that face us in the imperial gothic must be exorcised not with a bullet to the head but through a nod of recognition' (2014, p. xi).

The idea of the American imperial gothic acts similarly to the original idea of imperial gothic, first cultivated through the British invasion narratives of the late 19th Century. As noted in Chapter 3, Brantlinger associated texts of this era with reversions towards savagery and atavism, highlighting divisions between the perceived uncultured savagery of the subaltern and the progressive rationality of modernity, the latter embodied by the power structures of the British Empire. Many of these texts, Brantlinger noted, were marked by combining 'the seemingly progressive, often Darwinian ideology of imperialism with a seemingly antithetical interest in the occult', with narratives suggesting 'that Western rationality may be subverted by the very superstitions it rejects' (1985, p. 243). The early imperial gothic texts were galvanised by fears of both the decline of the British Empire and the advance of foreign cultures and ideas in the wake of colonialism, seen by some as postcolonial attacks upon modernity. Brantlinger cites Stoker's *Dracula* and H.G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds* as notable examples of imperial gothic fiction, among others, where the European other is represented as a supernatural or extra-terrestrial force, respectively, and antagonises the rational British protagonists with the intent of destroying them. Citing and building upon Brantlinger's assertions, Höglund acknowledges that 'the imperial gothic is a form of writing encouraged by the eclipse of the British empire … the literature of terror as it becomes obsessed with the perceived "dusk" of an empire' (2014, p. 8).

Höglund's work addresses notions of empire, both positive and negative, as they are outlined by key commentators. While Höglund does mention critics who have argued positively for empire in certain aspects – particularly Niall Ferguson's idea of an American 'liberal empire' and Max Boot's belief in the usefulness of imperialism in contemporary America – he aligns his work with those who are openly critical of American empire as an affirmative institution. Listing a number of textual references, Chomsky (2003) and Johnson (2004) among them, which challenge the affirmative aspects of American empire and argue the failings of the institution (2014, pp. 13-14), Höglund is critical of those who champion a post-9/11 empire. Though he does briefly analyse American gothic texts in a historical context, using the colonial fictional texts by Charles Brockden Brown as an example of what he terms 'imperial frontier gothic' (2014, p. 21), Höglund's work prioritises analyses of texts produced post-9/11.

A noteworthy aspect of the texts Höglund analyses is that they concurrently highlight and embrace graphic violence as a support of empire; Höglund draws comparison between the images of real torture in Abu Ghraib and the films *Saw* (2004) and *Hostel* (2005), fictional texts which both represent grotesque violence and are classified within the so-called 'torture porn' genre (2014, p. 135). Both *Saw* and *Hostel* present the torture of imprisoned people as a practice of empire at once indulgent and abhorrent; *Hostel* in particular, with its protagonists captured by a group of global torture practitioners who pay exorbitant amounts to torture people of various nationalities, represents the brutal maiming and killing of its character as a decadently enjoyable practice in the eyes of some of its characters. The films acknowledge and reject the grotesquery of their violence, but, as Höglund points out, they also use that grotesquery as a selling point; both texts are part of what Höglund calls a 'perverse affect of pleasure

and disgust', establishing a creative economy where audiences 'may detest the actual practice of torture but … will still, paradoxically perhaps, pay to see it performed' (2014, p. 137). With *Saw* and *Hostel* deploying an array of subtextual references to Abu Ghraib and similar torture being carried out in the Middle East, Höglund refers to the narratives as 'polyphonous gothic texts … simultaneously [condemning] and [encouraging] the horrors they seek to interrogate', both as texts '[querying] the voracious nature of capitalist society' and as commodities '[inspiring] and [feeding] off the same system' (2014, p. 137). This inherent disjunction used as a quality of American imperial gothic texts, at once condemning and supporting acts of violence and torture, avers a seemingly irresolvable dichotomy.

Höglund's work is also concerned with the decline of empire, characterising the contemporary decline of the perceived American empire as an 'ideological slump' rather than an outright collapse (2014, p. 9). The narratives produced following 9/11 are particularly deft at articulating notions of an American imperial gothic; Höglund argues that in the wake of the attacks the United States became besieged by cultural Others, in reality and in fiction. Imperial gothic texts of this period were 'frequently [casting] the United States as a vortex of modernity beleaguered by the gothic Other' (2014, p. 3). Using the film *Battle: Los Angeles* (2011) as a prominent example, Höglund outlines how post-9/11 narratives concern metaphorical embodiment of the threat of the Other as an invading force upon the United States, similarly to Brantlinger's assessment of the British and imperial gothic. The aliens of *Battle: Los Angeles* provoke a colonialist fear of eradication, with the film's characters believing the aliens are here for Earth's resources; 'When you invade a place for resources, you wipe out the indigenous population. Those are the rules of any colonisation. And right now, we are being

colonised' (2011). Höglund also cites similar films, released in the same period, which reduce post-9/11 to a simplified alien invasion metaphor, including *Skyline* (2010), *The Darkest Hour* (2011), the *Transformers* films (2007-2014) and the Steven Spielberg remake of Wells' *War of the Worlds* (2005). The apocalyptic alien invasion of the United States is, according to Höglund, 'one of the most popular and commercially viable plots of post-9/11 culture' (2014, pp. 138-139).

The dilution of the issues surrounding the 9/11 attacks and their aftermath, represented in American imperial gothic texts, causes problems on multiple levels. Part of the practice of these texts is to conceptualise reality, and aid the audience in discursively engaging with the issues the texts attempt to face; a great degree of value is placed on fiction's capacity to communicate real ideas. Joanne P. Sharp analysed Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony, which posited that hegemony is conceived by a variety of institutions, or 'dominances', that are responsible for '[forming] the norms regulating social reproduction' (2000, p. 30). These institutions work together to form hegemony, but do not exert power equally; Sharp noted that Gramsci's concept relied on 'positions within the institutions' that 'are more empowered to affect normalizing standards' (2000, p. 30). These institutions ranged from those of rigid structure, like government, to the more informally composed, like families and social groups. In evaluating Gramsci's notions, Sharp posits that hegemony is reliant on, and validates, the power of popular culture in reflecting reality:

> …hegemony is constructed not only through political ideologies but also,
> more immediately, through detailed scripting of some of the most
> ordinary and mundane aspects of everyday life. Gramsci's concept of

hegemony posits a significant place for popular culture in any attempt to

understand the workings of society because of the very everydayness and

apparently nonconflictual nature of such productions. Any political

analysis of the operation of dominance must take full account of the role

of institutions of popular culture in the complex milieu that ensures the

reproduction of cultural (and thus political) norms. (Sharp 2000, p. 31)

Building on Sharp's analysis of Gramsci, Jason Dittmer asserts that popular culture aids

in the understanding of contemporary geopolitics. Popular culture, Dittmer argues, is

one of several avenues that attempts to 'create order out of the complexity of global

events by constructing narratives through which the region's place in the world is

understandable and legitimate' (2005, p. 627). Dittmer's work aligns the American

comic book production staff of *Captain America* as empowered figures of institution,

further arguing that the staff create a narrative that will 'consequently influence the way

readers view the world and locate their own place as Americans within it' (2005, p.

627). Outlining the character's connection to representations of the United States

military power and geopolitical relations, Dittmer then proceeds to offer a

comprehensive analysis of how *Captain America* texts inform reality, and help

constitute an understanding of America's place in the world; Dittmer contends that,

rather than being merely 'an artifact [sic] of entertainment for children and young

adults', the character of Captain America is instead 'a truth claim regarding the

characteristics that define America against a backdrop of otherness' (2005, p. 633).

Furthermore, a creative narrative that uses metaphor or symbolism as a substitute for

reality has a far better chance of being absorbed by audiences than depictions that

didactically engage with actual post-9/11 discourse. Philip Hammond compares contemporary wartime filmmaking to the myth-making used during and after the Vietnam War; those texts that were 'critical, more or less anti-war' were ignored in favour of 'revisionist films which tended to rehabilitate the war' (2011, p. 8). It is conceivable that the rehabilitating Hammond mentions serves to reduce the negative impact of the Vietnam War – and more specifically, the United States' participation in it – in order to create a fictional vision of the War that is more palatable to filmgoers. Similarly, Hammond draws on assertions made by Guy Westwell that films critically confronting the reality of post-9/11 are not as successful with audiences as those films that do not; 'although the Iraq war has prompted many critical responses from film-makers, these have largely proved unpopular with audiences; while the few films that have been relatively successful have also tended to be much less critical' (Hammond 2011, p. 9).

American imperial gothic texts defend current United States imperialism as a necessity; rather than simply informing viewers of this notion, the texts condition viewers to accept this imperialism as both immutable and indispensable. Höglund's work correlates with this idea; 'Not only does [the mode] encourage its audience to think about global relations strictly in terms of good or evil,' Höglund asserts, 'it also provides a sense of entitlement that discourages the protest at this simplification that is perhaps lodged in the audience's throats' (2014, p. x). The notion of necessity is key to understanding the American imperial gothic, with texts 'frequently [identifying] empire as an essentially modern institution' (2014, p. 17).

The simplification of real ideas in fictional texts is linked to historical formation. Possibly signalling a 'return of the new' along the lines of Thurtle and Mitchell's 'logic of the anomalous' (2007), Höglund analyses the notion, implicit and explicit in many texts produced in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, that American society had been here before. Several fictional texts were quick to conflate the nuanced and complicated ideologies, circumstances and events surrounding both the Taliban and the 9/11 bombers themselves with Adolf Hitler and the Nazi regime, the latter being a conflict seen especially by popular culture in much clearer and more concrete terms of good versus evil.[43] Höglund identifies an example of this comparison in *The West Wing* (1999-2006), a television series concerning the day to day operations of The White House. An episode produced three weeks after 9/11 featured several main characters speaking to schoolchildren about 9/11 and its consequences, in their capacity as political representatives. The character Toby Ziegler, the White House Communications Director who, in the words of another character, is 'in charge of crafting [the White House's] message to the public' (2001), makes a tendentious comparison between 9/11 and World War II: 'When you think of Afghanistan, think of Poland. When you think of the Taliban, think of the Nazis. When you think of the people of Afghanistan, think of Jews in concentration camps' (2001). Jack Holland asserts that this episode '[adopted] an explicitly pedagogical theme to *teach* viewers how to think about the events of 9/11' (2011, p. 85, emphasis added by original author), while Höglund, also citing Holland, finds such a conflation useless and unhelpful, believing that a text requiring audiences to mistake the Taliban for the Nazis is 'a request to disregard the historical specificity of the Taliban in favour of metaphor' (2014, p. 92). This also does not help in the context

---

[43] This is not to say that World War II was in and of itself a strict binary conflict; rather that this is the popular view historically held by a variety of texts produced in the decades since 1945. Popular culture categorically cites Hitler and the Nazi regime as an example of ultimate, largely uncomplicated evil.

of framing the 9/11 attacks themselves; if the Taliban are the Nazis then 'their intention must be to dominate', meaning 9/11 ceases to be seen as 'an act of vengeance and anger, the obscene gesture of a group of reasonably well-organised and well-funded fanatics,' but is instead framed as 'a first step towards a new global hegemony' (2014, p. 92). The comparison lacks demonstration of the specific historical conditions that allowed for the rise of the Nazis, which differ from the way the Taliban attained power. Equating the Taliban and the Nazis also implicitly strips away the unique qualities of the kind of threat both the Taliban and al-Qaeda pose to the United States; the implication is that, as the Nazis were defeated by the United States and its ally nations, the Taliban are equivocal in that they can be defeated in a similar manner. Ignoring the specific threat of the Taliban allows the United States to disguise their imperialist practices, constructing a narrative that portrays America as unequivocally heroic.

The foundation of the American imperial gothic is a focus on conflict narrative with the cultural Other. This conflict arises from a contact point between the United States and a foreign entity, resulting 'not in a cultural merger, but in a Darwinian struggle for survival' (Höglund 2012, p. 1). Many texts concerned with an American imperial gothic attitude cast their antagonists as underdeveloped, outmoded or savage in comparison to the contemporary United States. The antagonists' views are usually diluted as being singularly homicidal – or even genocidal – with particular focus on their single-minded campaign against the imperialistic United States. Diplomacy is no viable option for resolution to these conflicts on either side, and thus violence becomes the only means of a solution. 'With the right dedication,' Höglund notes, 'and the right hardware, chaos can be out-gunned' (2014, p. 1).

This mode of storytelling also contributes to how American imperialism, and its central tenet of practiced violence, is regarded domestically and internationally. Ikenberry persuasively asserts that a key element of the post-9/11 United States military doctrine is the necessity for them 'to play a direct and unconstrained role in responding to threats' (2002, p. 54). Go also backs this assertion, believing the rapidly declining economic state of the US has pressured them into accepting military power as the only legitimate course of action in the Middle East; as the US becomes 'economically weaker and weaker … military power becomes all the US has' (Go & Doherty 2013).

In addition to discussing the United States' legitimations of violence and exceptional tactics in the War on Terror, Höglund also posits that the violence inherent in this military power is represented in texts as having a constructive, restorative quality. Höglund analyses post-apocalyptic texts that offer the view that the world can be rebuilt following such 'end of the world' scenarios (2014, pp. 164-165); he cites vampire horror novel *The Passage* (Cronin 2010) and its sequel *The Twelve* (Cronin 2012) as fiction that maintains this view. Interestingly, *The Passage* author Justin Cronin contends, in an interview cited by Höglund, that post-apocalyptic texts concern building a new society in the ruins of the old. Cronin claims that every story 'that deals with "the end of the world" – is actually a creation story' (Cross 2012). A reformed world in the wake of apocalypse denotes a new frontier that can be tamed and mastered, continuing a cycle of violence and establishment of renewed hegemony. This cycle, based on Höglund's assertions, demonstrates the indomitable quality of the American spirit and allows the text to suggest that, in order to restore some form of stability, the world needs to be unmade. Many imperial gothic texts confront apocalyptic scenarios, and there is potential in such a narrative being a fantasy that endorses violence as the

ultimate stabilising agent; even if the rest of the world has to be destroyed in order to secure it, peace can be achieved through violence. It is conceivable that this reformation constitutes a frontier the post-9/11 United States can conquer in much the same way Turner praised the American people for doing in the 19th Century. After all, Turner asserted that the frontier '[furnishes] a new field of opportunity, a gate of escape from the bondage of the past' (1893, p. 59); perhaps such escape through destroying the old world is the only means of instilling total control over the new one. Examples which demonstrate the post-apocalypse as a chance for rebirth, as Höglund cites it being a component of the American imperial gothic, include the films *28 Days Later* (2002) and *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015), the television adaptation of *The Walking Dead* (2010-2016) and the video game *Fallout 4* (2015); all of these texts contain gothic qualities, and are concerned with the formation of societies and potential revival of humanity in the wake of the apocalypse.

Höglund's American imperial gothic takes a critical view of Batman texts. Nolan's *Dark Knight* films are criticised for their military theme, with Höglund drawing comparisons between the fictional Batman and real American police action. Höglund identifies the similarities between the real threat of al-Qaeda and the fictionalised representation of Middle Eastern violence embodied in *Batman Begins* by the League of Shadows. Concurrently, Höglund mentions the pro-imperialist reading of Nolan's films, especially *The Dark Knight*, which actively compare Batman to the Bush government, a notion referenced by scholars such as DiPaolo (2011, p. 54), Gaine (2010, p. 5) and McGowan (2009), in addition to more journalistic opinions from Bolt (2008) and Klavan (2008). However, Höglund also offers a counterpoint to the imperialist reading of the films, instead interpreting the texts as being critical of empire, with enemies like

Bane and Ra's al Ghul being compared to both George W. Bush and his father, respectively, in their fascist, invasive methods of control and governance (2014, pp. 115-117). I find the latter notion particularly apt, given Bane's reverential attitude towards Ra's al Ghul and his attempt to fulfil the League's original mission of peace attained through violence; Bane's replication of Ra's al Ghul's tactics articulates a repeat of events undertaken by the Presidents Bush in the Middle East, with George Bush Sr. leading during the First Gulf War and his son initiating the Second Gulf War, an alternate name for the invasion of Iraq. Rather than establish a position on either reading, Höglund instead uses Nolan's films as a symptom of larger issues of imperialism within the military-industrial complex; he offers that '[t]hese two readings of Nolan's trilogy both make sense' (2014, p. 116).

Though I disagree with the notion that Nolan's films promote American imperialism through Batman, rather than his enemies, reading them in this fashion allows underpinning ideologies to be critically evaluated. The American imperial gothic is primarily concerned with critiquing texts that acknowledge and seemingly implicitly accept empire, reading the texts as pro-imperialist and allowing Höglund to deconstruct them as imperial propaganda; similarly, post-9/11 gothic texts similarly acknowledge empire, allowing a deconstruction of imperialist ideologies, yet the texts themselves are more openly critical rather than accepting of that empire and the controversial post-9/11 actions American imperial gothic texts seek to validate.

6.3 – In Support of Violence: Imperial Critique and *Batman Incorporated*

Höglund discusses the concept of a 'virtuous war' (2014, pp. 125-6), and uses this concept with two articulations; first, to describe the literal virtualisation of war through video games as a method both of '[recruiting] and [training] soldiers' and also '[disseminating] the notion that war is the only viable way to manage global crises' (2014, p. 125); second, to outline war's use as 'clinical', strategically targeted for a particular enemy and purpose, a 'type of war [that] allows the pretence that military violence is precise and clinical' (2014, p. 126). I would argue that Batman has been used as a virtuous warrior deployed into post-9/11 discourse; Höglund even compares the concept of virtuous war to 'the military-grade violence that Batman dishes out only to criminals in Nolan's trilogy' (2014, p. 126). The character is, according to which adaptation is being critically analysed, usually concerned with being virtuous in the first sense; the character's campaign against the criminal element of Gotham at the behest of the 'popular sovereignty [that] demands it' (Sharp 2013, p. 360) is undertaken with the intent of serving the people and bringing stability to the city. Batman views his campaign as only good, justifying any morally grey actions the character may undertake in his quest for substantive, effective justice that is not impeded by legality.

But using 'virtuous' in the second way, as a clinical and precisely targeted element deployed against a specific enemy, Batman texts can be seen as 'deployed' against representations of post-9/11 anxieties. I have shown in previous chapters of this thesis how the Nolan films are a particularly effective conduit for confronting post 9/11; I have also used several oppositional readings of the texts to show how the films can be used as arguments for or against particular political and social ideologies. While other

superhero narratives, particularly those of Captain America[44], are more often deployed to directly, and sometimes didactically, articulate these kinds of ideologies, Batman texts nonetheless have been used in the past for targeting those ideologies, rather than leaving them to interpretation. The most notable historical example is Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* (1986), which operates as an anti-government critique and articulation of 1980s Cold War anxieties, specifically emblematised through the use of a fictional depiction of Ronald Reagan, the enemy threat of the Soviets, and Batman's crusade of effective justice against both criminals and government alike. Miller has long been an outspoken libertarian and right-wing political identifier, and a common critique is that Miller's views are often blatantly inserted into his characters and narratives, used specifically as vehicles for these views (Barnett 2011). In the past, Miller has confirmed that his comic book work is informed by his and other political ideologies; during a 2000 interview to promote *The Dark Knight Returns'* sequel, *The Dark Knight Strikes Again* (2002), Miller stated that he had planned the sequel so that readers would 'see various political fronts and points of view and forces of society represented by these superheroes' (Brownstein 2000).

Miller's use of Batman as a conduit for his views was taken to a logical extreme with the *Holy Terror* superhero graphic novel (2011). The narrative was produced as a direct result from and response to the events of 9/11, and was originally written to feature Batman fighting Islamic terrorists. Miller was prevented from using Batman when his editor left DC Comics, taking Miller and the narrative with him to Legendary Comics; this prompted Miller to rewrite the part and instead create an original superhero called the Fixer for Legendary Comics (Boucher 2010). *Holy Terror* concerned the Fixer and

---

[44] See Rieber & Cassaday (2003) and *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (2014)

his love interest, Natalie Stack, battling al-Qaeda in the fictional Empire City – a locale clearly modelled on New York. Throughout the text, Islam as a whole is conflated with the al-Qaeda extremists by Miller; reviewer Spencer Ackerman read the text as 'a screed against Islam, completely uninterested in any nuance or empathy toward 1.2 billion people [Miller] he conflates with a few murderous conspiracy theorists' (2011). Despite the change of protagonist from Batman to the Fixer, *Holy Terror* was considered '[f]or all intents and purposes … a Batman story', one that was 'ideologically troglodytic' in its fictional depiction of al-Qaeda and its '[equating] Islam wholesale with terrorism' (Lamar 2011). Miller's superhero oeuvre, including *Holy Terror* and, to a lesser extent, the alternate reality reboot comic book *All-Star Batman and Robin, the Boy Wonder* (2008), serve as an example of the way Batman can be deployed to glorify or validate the kind of violence and simplification that post-9/11 gothic seeks to combat.

It is not surprising that a character such as Batman – relying predominantly on violence and extra-legal tactics as a means of achieving justice – might be co-opted by American writers or critical analysts as an analogy for the United States' imperialism and breaching of national sovereignties. The legitimation of real world violent tactics, like drone warfare and deployment of soldiers in the Middle East, can be linked to legitimation of Batman's actions; the latter represents 'the self-designated speaker of the community, sent to represent [just punishment] under the rubric of resolving injustice satisfying crime control ideals' (Sharp 2012, p. 363). Batman is an American force of violent nature, swiftly dispatching enemies with weapons and physical strength regardless of legality. 'From "the Bat Bunker comes individualized, American-style retributive justice" providing a seductive resolution to an inadequate justice system', an

embodiment of American ideals with none of the legal strictures (Sharp 2012, p. 365, citing Phillips 2010, p. 39). This view, largely propagated in journalistic discourse rather than academic, regularly equates Batman with the kind of pro-imperial readings I discussed earlier in this chapter. Conservative Australian political commentator Andrew Bolt even goes so far as to claim the Batman of *The Dark Knight* was explicitly modelled on then-President George W. Bush, with Bush's actions post-9/11 seemingly legitimated by the subtext of Nolan's film (2008).

As an avatar of retributive vengeance capable of delivering effective justice against the criminal element, it is not difficult to entertain the perception of Batman as a purely violent figure who articulates the supposed effectiveness of United States imperial violence. The majority of post-9/11 narratives fall on the side of Batman's tactics being legitimate and acceptable, not least of all because the existing governmental and legal structures in Gotham – the police department, the Mayor's office, anyone in a position to offer true, legal, official means of achieving justice – are either ineffective or corrupted. Batman's vigilantism is needed as a necessary measure to ensure stability within Gotham City. Issues of double standards and condemnation of Batman's tactics have frequently been addressed, not just in Nolan's films but in other recent narratives.[45]

The most prominent narrative which addresses Batman's tactics, presenting the most literal representation of Batman being in control of an empire, is Morrison's *Batman Incorporated* story arc, discussed in Chapter 1. The setting already bears distinct similarity to aspects of the post-9/11 United States, confronting issues of suicide

---

[45] For example, see Brubaker & Rucka 2011, Johns 2012, Morrison & Burnham 2013 and Snyder *et al.* 2014.

bombing and international insecurity against the background of the invasive, Middle Eastern-oriented terrorist threat of the Leviathan organisation. Batman's collective of international agents, universally led under the aegis of Batman himself, enforce their own form of justice against Leviathan. Sovereign borders have little to no meaning in the pursuit of Leviathan; Batman's agents are not selected for legal legitimacy but rather so that Batman has eyes and ears within that country, with a representative tasked to defend their homeland. This frequently necessitates Batman's own incursion to work in tandem with the agent; rather than being an independent crimefighter in their own right, the representative becomes an extension of Batman's own agency. For example, the most prominent crimefighter in Japan originally bore the unique moniker of Mr. Unknown; following the superhero's enlisting with the Incorporated initiative, he is referred to instead as the Batman of Japan (Morrison *et al*. 2012, p. 51), similar to other national heroes featured in the *Batman Incorporated* narrative. Batman's omnipresence in the *Batman Incorporated* narrative is best summarised when Bruce Wayne, presenting himself as Batman's personal financier for the Incorporated initiative, tells the media there is nobody in the world who can escape the wrath of Batman Incorporated. Anywhere there is ineffective justice or corrupted legal systems, Incorporated will take root and spread its influence. 'Batman,' Wayne tells the media, 'is everywhere. And if he didn't exist, well…I guess we'd just have to invent him' (Morrison *et al* 2012, p. 118).

The fictional Incorporated initiative, singularly led by Batman, correlates to principles derived from Hardt and Negri's influential study of empire (2001). Batman operates the Incorporated initiative with multiple international agents answerable only to him, their actions taken in the name of global peace and stopping Leviathan. He deploys the

initiative into a virtuous war – both in the moral and clinically strategic sense outlined by Höglund (2014, p. 125) – against Leviathan, asserting that only Batman and his agents are capable of stopping the terrorists. The empire of the Incorporated initiative is vast, a protective entity to counter the 'ring around the world' created by Leviathan's international reach (Morrison *et al.* 2012, p. 130); the Incorporated initiative implements a planet-wide state of exception, similar to Agamben's definition (2005), with Batman as the state's *auctoritas* who implements a global *iustitium* to combat Leviathan. Batman acts as *auctoritas* in the same manner that Hardt and Negri define part of empire as 'a global concert under the direction of a single conductor, a unitary power that maintains the social peace and … is given the necessary force to conduct, when necessary, "just wars" at the borders against the barbarians' (2001, p. 10). The centre of imperial power for Incorporated is nationally decentralised, operating from a person rather than a single country, though that person is still representative of one; Batman is an American leading a global coalition of willing national representatives. To reiterate Hardt and Negri's assertion:

> Empire establishes no territorial center of power and does not rely on fixed boundaries or barriers. It is a *decentered* and *deterritorializing* apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers. Empire manages hybrid identities, flexible hierarchies, and plural exchanges through modulating networks of command (2001, pp. xii-xiii, emphasis added by original author).

Wherever Batman is in the world, the centre of Incorporated's power follows him. Although his agents willingly join the Incorporated initiative, accept Batman's

leadership and support his war against Leviathan, they are nonetheless tasked to maintain the empire's hold on its satellite nations. A sequence in the first *Batman Incorporated* volume (Morrison *et al.* 2012) depicts multiple Incorporated initiative agents operating in France, Hong Kong, Australia and South Africa, attacking Leviathan's presence there in the name of Batman (2012, pp. 125-135). What prevents the Incorporated initiative from being identified as fascist or totalitarian is its claimed mandate of security; Hardt and Negri note that '[e]ven though the state of exception and police technologies constitute the solid nucleus and the central element' of empire, such an institution 'has nothing to do with the juridical arts of dictatorship or totalitarianism' (2001, p. 26). Quite the opposite is in effect; in empire 'the rule of law continues to play a central role … right remains effective and (precisely by means of the state of exception and police technologies) becomes procedure' (2001, p. 26).

The Incorporated initiative also constructs its own notion of sovereignty that is derived from morality. The agents do not ask their governments for legal legitimacy in their operation[46], with Batman's own self-given social contract to seek out and eliminate criminality seemingly legitimating his own imperial expansion. This kind of imperial sovereignty stems from the impetus I noted in the epigraph of this chapter and discussed in Chapter 5, regarding moral intervention in an adverse scenario '[serving] as the first act that prepares the stage of military intervention' (Hardt and Negri 2001, p. 37). Batman Incorporated's actions are not debated or consulted with any governing

---

[46] It should be noted that the character of George Cross, a British member of the Incorporated initiative whose superhero alias is The Hood, is an operative of the fictional UN-backed intelligence organisation Spyral; the clandestine institution initially tasks Cross to join the Incorporated initiative as a double agent. Despite Cross initially complying, he eventually betrays Spyral and is nearly killed by their agents. I mention this to highlight that Cross, in contrast to his Incorporated initiative peers, is the only member with a modicum of government-sanctioned mandate to combat Leviathan, however the legality of this mandate is nebulous at best.

world authority or council, nor the United Nations, and are instead undertaken with implicit moral license.

This is similar to Hardt and Negri's claim that recent real military action takes not the form of a unified, debated or global effort, but is more often the province of the United States alone. As the self-defined policeman of the world, the United States frequently 'charges itself with the primary task and then subsequently asks its allies to set into motion a process of armed containment and/or repression of the current enemy of Empire' (2001, p. 37). This is evident in the Bush administration's invasive foray into Iraq: fielding claims that the conflict in Iraq was instigated illegally (MacAskill & Borger 2004), the United States of 2003 nonetheless invaded the country with what it believed to be an implicit moral license, intent on disarming Saddam Hussein's stockpile of Weapons of Mass Destruction and protecting the citizenry of Iraq. The governmental regime of Iraq was unilaterally referred to as the enemy by Bush and his supporters; during the 2002 State of the Union address, Bush outright claimed that Iraq, along with the hostile nations of Iran and North Korea and their 'terrorist allies', '[constituted] an axis of evil' (Bush 2002), in much the same way Höglund earlier discussed the conflation of the complex threat of the Taliban with the earlier example of the Nazis (2014, p. 92). Bush initiated the invasion of Iraq to protect the world, to remove a threat he found necessary to eliminate, and to quell what he saw as a centre of terrorism whose objective was to 'enslave whole nations and intimidate the world'. Iraq, Bush claimed, was regarded by terrorist organisations as 'the central front in their war against humanity' (CNN 2005). This is in the same vein as Batman's rationale that Leviathan presents a clear and present danger to the fictional world of Gotham. The Incorporated initiative battles Leviathan in several countries, including a stint in an

unidentified part of the Middle East (Morrison 2011), justifying their campaign with the notion that Leviathan is an evil that cannot be quelled by legal or judicial means.

I do not mean to equate Bush's real actions in Iraq with Batman's own in the fictional realm; the horrific scope of the violent reality cannot ever be paralleled or entirely encapsulated in fiction, though fiction nonetheless allows us to reflect on that horror and violence. Leviathan is presented as a malicious force of Middle Eastern origin, but was not created or motivated in the same political or religious fashion as the Taliban; similarly, while they utilise brainwashing and suicide bombings as terror tactics, Leviathan lacks the socio-political complexity of extremist groups like al-Qaeda. The *Batman Incorporated* narrative is useful as an articulation and reflection of both the actions of the United States government – particularly the Bush era, but also the Obama administration[47] – and the extremists it combats in the post-9/11 period. The Bush government instigated a campaign that breached sovereign borders, without any form of third party oversight from governing entities; the fictional Incorporated initiative undertakes a similar campaign that begins in the Middle East, and takes the step of having Gotham's law enforcement criticise Batman's actions as illegal and unwanted. After the tragedy of 9/11 Bush sought to remove Osama bin Laden, al-Qaeda and, later, Saddam; threats of a Middle Eastern derivation that had, at least in Bush's perception, become clear and present dangers that only the United States could sufficiently eradicate. *Batman Incorporated* suggests that a more personal impetus informs this kind of campaign; the fictional Middle Eastern leader of Leviathan, Talia al Ghul, has a prior romantic relationship with Batman, and has a personal grudge against him for both

---

[47] For a further analysis of *Batman Incorporated* as an articulation of the Obama administration, and specifically the killing of Osama bin Laden, see Comerford 2015, included in this thesis as an Appendix (p. 273).

spurning her love and, in her mind, kidnapping their son and turning him into his latest sidekick, Robin. The Bush government was later condemned for its actions in the Middle East, suffering accusations of illegality and markedly low approval ratings; *Batman Incorporated* mirrors this by having Batman, who has previously enjoyed support both from Gotham and from figures like Commissioner Gordon, be exiled from Gotham and branded a criminal, the Incorporated initiative's presence within the city strictly forbidden (Morrison & Burnham 2013, pp. 78-79). In a speech at a National Endowment for Democracy event, Bush declared the invasion of Iraq was crucial to winning the War on Terror, associating bin Laden with Iraq and stating the United States '[would] not tire or rest until the war [was] won' (CNN 2005). Batman's indomitability adeptly mirrors Bush's resolve, with the former insisting that he will 'see [the conflict with Leviathan] through to the end' (Morrison *et al.* 2012, p. 125).

The necessity inherent in both figures' justifications for their respective campaigns mirrors elements of Agamben's state of exception being a necessity in and of itself (2005). As I have previously argued, Batman embodies aspects of Agamben's conceptual framework, existing outside the juridical sphere and yet embodying some of its ideals in the execution of his vigilantism. Batman sees his campaign as necessary; in this fashion, the narrative mirrors the same way Bush saw the invasion of Iraq, and the actions taken in the Middle East against al-Qaeda, as necessary. The United States saw a violent military option as legitimate in its pursuit of al-Qaeda and its invasion of Iraq, sanctioning torture and arrests that, as I've outlined in Chapter 2, were ultimately ineffective and continue to be scrutinised today (see also Senate Select Committee on Intelligence 2014). The *Batman Incorporated* narrative articulates this legitimation of violence, as military tactics are exclusively used and endorsed by Batman as the leader

of the Incorporated initiative. Each international member of the initiative is authorised to use violence against Leviathan (see Figure 6.1).

Figure 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 (taken from Morrison *et al.* 2012, pp. 134-135)

The use of violence in the Middle East conflict was seemingly vindicated when Bush, giving his infamous 'Mission Accomplished' speech on the deck of the aircraft carrier *USS Abraham Lincoln* in 2003, claimed that 'the Battle of Iraq [was] one victory in a war on terror that began on [9/11]', and that America and its allies' presence thus far had shown 'a turning of the tide', once again affirming that the United States' presence was intended to liberate Iraq and ultimately bring prosperity and 'establish a government of, by, and for the Iraqi people' (Murphy 2003). The tenor of Bush's speech, as well as other speeches he made regarding the invasion of Iraq, implies that Iraq could not have reached an appropriate state of civil order without American military intervention. References to the terrorists present within and receiving aid from the Iraqi regime prior to America's intervention harkens back to Hardt and Negri's

assertions regarding imperial 'police mentality', a notion that arguably influenced much of the Bush government's actions during that period (2001, p. 37).

Similarly, the *Batman Incorporated* narrative scrutinises this legitimation of the use of violence. Batman's violent tactics results in victory through the complete destruction of the Leviathan network at the conclusion of Morrison's story (Morrison & Burnham 2013). While Batman himself does not deal the final blow to Leviathan's chief architect, the Incorporated initiative that he founded nonetheless eradicates the threat and preserves global stability. The personal cost is great, but Batman views this as a necessary cost if the result is a free Gotham and a world without Leviathan. However, the narrative then engages in further discourse with the damaging effects of legitimated sovereign violence, with the Incorporated initiative entering 'liquidation' (Morrison & Burnham 2013, p. 74) then subsequently collapsing shortly after Leviathan's defeat (2013, p. 204). The narrative restores Batman to a role exclusively defeating crime in Gotham, implying that he must remain more in a domestic security role rather than be concerned with spearheading international efforts. Batman leads soldiers, 'an army of Batmen' (Morrison *et al.* 2012, p. 123), as their *de facto* general, but the end result proves that Batman cannot work as that general. The return to crimefighting in Gotham is framed by the narrative as a natural, beneficial eventuality.

Deploying the *Batman Incorporated* narrative as a critique of United States imperial violence highlights actions taken in the War on Terror and criticises them in a fictional heterotopic space. Morrison's narrative uses the post-9/11 environment as a setting to critique both the Bush and Obama government's actions, incisively arguing that the state's imperial violence against al-Qaeda and Iraq, among others, leads only to further

destruction. However, despite Morrison's implicit excoriation of the United States, the conclusion of the narrative arguably makes a case for the indomitability of the nation, particularly as a guardian against implacable foes and a survivor of horrific trauma. Following Batman's return to domestic crimefighting – which comes after, among other things, the death of his son and several of his colleagues – Commissioner Gordon muses on the power of Batman's spirit to overcome any adversity. 'Batman always comes back, bigger and better, shiny and new,' Gordon notes. 'It never ends. It probably never will.' (Morrison & Burnham 2013, p. 142).

6.4 – The Dichotomous Other: The Aporia of Batman's Gothic Juxtaposition

The *Batman Incorporated* narrative provides an example of how Batman texts are apt at representing post-9/11 gothic. The narrative doesn't just acknowledge or propagate American imperial violence, as in some of the texts Höglund cites as part of American imperial gothic. Rather, the text questions and, in some areas, counters the legitimacy of the imperial violence it fictionally represents. While the *Batman Incorporated* narrative seemingly legitimates aspects of the Bush government's actions in the Middle East – as well as similar aspects undertaken by Barack Obama's administration[48] – by its conclusion, the more important critical aspects come from the narrative's criticism of American imperialism. The text, and the character of Batman in particular, highlight the post-9/11 gothic horror inherent in both the enemy the United States faces and in their own internal imperial practices. Batman is able to do this, in part, because of the character's gothic aporia.

---

[48] I once again refer to my work comparing Barack Obama to the *Batman Incorporated* narrative (Comerford 2015), included in this thesis as an Appendix (p. 273)

In this context, an aporia denotes a logical disjunction inherent in the description and execution of a practice. The aporia is a process where two opposing yet similar ideas are juxtaposed, unable to achieve a resolution. For example, Agamben himself terms the state of exception's inherent necessity as an aporia, when converting a state of exception into a state of necessity that aims to legitimate the exception in the first place (2005, pp. 29-30). The premise of Agamben's notion of a state of exception is inherently an irresolvable juxtaposition, as the suspension of the law for the sake of preserving it is a contradiction that cannot be resolved. The aporia represents the site at which a text's contradictions are revealed; in Agamben's case, the aporia he identifies is the lawlessness enforced to protect law's existence.

As I have explored previously, Batman's existence relies on contradiction. The character is an extralegal figure fighting to preserve legality, on the side of police and government but in direct opposition to the legitimacy they necessitate; Hassler-Forest offers that Batman can be seen as the law's 'illegal but necessary supplement' (2015, p. 109). There is nothing about Batman that can term the character as strictly a hero or a villain; even the 'anti-hero' moniker that classifies Nolan's, Morrison's and Snyder's respective contemporary interpretations of Batman is insufficient. Batman may believe himself to be undertaking his campaign against crime for positive reasons, and ultimately for the betterment of Gotham, but the means with which he executes that campaign are inherently illegal and in direct opposition to the legal sanctity he is striving to preserve.

Therefore, as a figure ultimately governed and created by an aporia, Batman can be used to target the positive and negative aspects of the post-9/11 epoch. Many texts that

227

feature the character predominantly use Batman to communicate a particular social, cultural or political ideology but provide a nuanced assessment of such ideology; using the example in this chapter, *Batman Incorporated* ultimately critiques and highlights the destructive potential of imperial violence in the fight against terrorism. In addition to my prior discussions of Morrison's work in this chapter and of Nolan's work in Chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis, I will be examining several key Batman texts in the following, final chapter. For the moment, I want to establish the ways in which Batman texts adopt and enhance the analytical framework put forward by Höglund, given that the framework informs how post-9/11 gothic is conceptualised.

Several texts Höglund cites as examples in *The American Imperial Gothic* (2014) largely glorify, fetishize or propagate imperial violence and adherence to the American empire. These texts are concerned with the battle between the virtuous, heroic protagonists and the embodiment of contemporary gothic Other. Among others, Höglund references franchises such as *G.I. Joe*, *Resident Evil* and the *Quake* video game series as examples, before discusses ways in which some of these texts use the character of the Other as a force for good, or at least align them with the texts' protagonists. In particular, Höglund cites the films *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (2003) and *Underworld* (2003) as featuring supernatural, gothic Other protagonists – both including vampires – that are aligned with the side of heroism. These former 'villains of the British imperial gothic' have now been employed to 'fight for Anglo-Saxon empire', still retaining the elements that mark them as embodiments of gothic terror but now utilising that terror for heroic purposes (2014, p. 122). Using these gothic Others as heroes who previously and exclusively embodied evil, the texts comment on using more ambiguous characters and motivations in order to explore what

should be considered 'good'. The heroic gothic Other reassesses the binary 'good vs. evil' that many texts of the American imperial gothic dilute contemporary issues into, bringing the text closer to a discursive balance.

In *Batman Incorporated*, the character simultaneously articulates the positive and negative aspects of empire building through use of the Incorporated initiative. Having agents in other countries to bolster the Incorporated initiative allows Batman a wider capacity for understanding and better combatting Leviathan. The Incorporated initiative's enlistment of some of these agents also allows them to be trained more effective crimefighters; the American Batman recruits and teaches Jiro, the newly-minted and inexperienced Batman of Japan (Morrison *et al.* 2012, p. 51), giving him funding and technology to improve his crimefighting skills, and does similarly for the Dark Ranger, also known as the Batman of Australia (2012, p. 129). Prior to the crackdown instituted by the Gotham Police Department, the Incorporated initiative acts as a metaphor for the benefits of American influence over other nations – the agents the initiative enlists are made more effective by Batman's presence. The story implies some of these regions would not have been able to adequately protect themselves against Leviathan had Batman not intervened, especially in the case of the undisciplined and amateur Batman of Japan, and of the Native American Man-of-Bats, who was nearly killed by Leviathan agents and needed Batman's aid in dispatching them (Morrison *et al.* 2012, pp. 147-158).

Concurrently, *Batman Incorporated* articulates the aspects of imperialism that are problematic and ineffective. The expansion of the Incorporated initiative fails to prevent Leviathan from undertaking many of their major actions, including the extremist

indoctrination of schoolchildren (Morrison & Burnham 2013, p. 77), an attack on the centre of Gotham by brainwashed child soldiers (Morrison & Burnham 2013, p. 19), and the aforementioned 9/11-esque destruction of Wayne Tower by bombing (Morrison & Burnham 2013, p. 113, see Figure 1.8). Batman even admits his Incorporated initiative has ultimately failed to end Leviathan, disbanding the organisation by the conclusion of the narrative (Morrison & Burnham 2013, p. 204).

The dichotomy Batman embodies creates its own kind of chronotopic identity. This identity aids Batman texts in distinguishing themselves from other superhero texts as specific modes of critical material. The identity acts as another way of categorising specific Batman texts as useful to the post-9/11 world. The majority of Batman texts produced since 9/11 feature a marked parallel between real and fictional worlds, embodying elements of the 9/11 attacks and their aftermath within the narratives. Coupled with the chronotopic identity that the post-9/11 gothic subgenre has developed, Batman texts become a useful method of questioning most of the values Höglund cites in his own work on American imperial gothic. In a way, the *Batman Incorporated* narrative might even be seen as an example of Batman imperial gothic; acknowledging the ineffectiveness and monstrosity within empire, even if beneficial, whilst directly questioning those notions within the text. The character's popularity, dichotomy and range of genre participations converge to create a revealing lens through which to discuss the anxieties and horrors of the post-9/11 world.

In the next and final chapter I will be analysing close readings of several key texts, both of Batman and other franchises, that best define post-9/11 gothic and its relation to United States imperialism. Understanding this imperialism is aided by viewing these

texts in relation to the post-9/11 chronotope, as a representation of fears and anxieties inherent to both the American empire and its citizenry. Though a number of post-9/11 Batman texts highlight the inadequacies in United States governance and their international efforts to fight terrorism, the texts – and post-9/11 gothic as a whole – ultimately seek to embolden readers in discursively confronting these inadequacies. When asked on Twitter what element of his writing on the Batman comic book he wanted subsequent writers to maintain, Scott Snyder answered in a pair of Tweets that he hoped to show '[t]hat Batman in the post 9/11 era can be more about inspiration than intimidation. About being brave enough' (Snyder 2015) 'to face your fears and [work towards] overcoming them, whether national dilemmas or personal demons' (Snyder 2015).

Chapter 7 – Coming to Terms with Fear: The Post-9/11 Gothic Genre

'The Gothic … is inherently about deep-seated and large-scale, even national and international, traumas that are intimated and yet masked behind hyperbolic symbols of them. All of these, too, are enveloped in the Gothic by conflicted conventions that are simultaneously threatening to, and protective of, the audience, oscillating between the horrifically "realistic" that is too immediate and the imaginatively "marvellous" that is safer because it is unbelievable…'

– Jerrold E. Hogle, 'History, Trauma and the Gothic in Contemporary Western Fictions', in *The Gothic World*, p. 73

7.1 – Introduction

This final chapter outlines the (sub)genre of *post-9/11 gothic*, a hybrid of traditional gothic sensibilities and the particular chronotopic infusion of post-9/11 ideas, fears and anxieties. The end result is a genre which articulates current concerns about security, legality, ethics and terrorism in the post-9/11 world. The chapter begins with an introduction of the conventions of the genre, which includes the figures, settings and themes of post-9/11 gothic narratives, and uses key examples from relevant texts to highlight these points. The chapter then progresses into a focused analysis of three post-9/11 gothic texts to demonstrate some of these themes and conventions: Snyder & Capullo's interconnected Batman storylines *Zero Year* (2014) and *The Court of Owls* (2012), the superhero film *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (2014), and two texts

from the *Star Trek* franchise, television series *Star Trek: Enterprise* (2001-2005) and motion picture *Star Trek Into Darkness* (2013).

Post-9/11 gothic concerns itself with exploration of the fears and anxieties of society in the years following the 9/11 attacks, confronted through irrationality. Texts within the genre are predominantly concerned with ideas and themes surrounding terrorism, domestic security and civil liberties in the aftermath of 9/11. The genre's primary function is to provide a means of articulating, interrogating and coming to terms with the horrors and fears of the time, as a place where these fears can be discursively reasoned with and understood.

The term 'post-9/11 gothic' has been used in previous academic studies. Notably, in addition to the work undertaken by Hogle on the gothic and trauma (2014, p. 75) which I have previously cited in Chapters 5 and 6, the term has also been used by other scholars; Blake (2012) uses the term to specifically describe the television series *Fringe* (2008-2013) in relation to its place besides other scientific gothic texts produced in post-9/11 times (2012, p. 48) and more broadly associates the gothic genre with post-9/11 (2012, pp. 37-56), whilst Munford & Waters (2013) refer to fictional gothic heroines who are produced in post-9/11 (2013, p. 140), and Kavadlo (2015) briefly mentions that David Cronenberg's film *Cosmopolis* (2012) can be read as a gothic text in a post-9/11 setting (2015, p. 58). All of these sources use the term 'post-9/11 gothic'. However, the key difference between my usage of post-9/11 gothic and those cited above is that I use the term as the name of a specific genre, whilst the other sources refer to it more as a term for gothic texts that are produced in the post-9/11 period, rather than as a genre in its own right.

In many ways, post-9/11 gothic concerns itself with ideas and critiques inherent to the original gothic texts. In Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) the irrational elements – the giant helmet that crushes Conrad apropos of nothing at the story's beginning, the immense foot later seen by Manfred – are not readily rationalised, at least not to the degree of the instances of gothic irrationality that are explained in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (Radcliffe 1794). The supernatural events and aspects of *Otranto* are accepted by the characters, something unexpected and unexplainable but ultimately ignored as such, rather than directly questioned. Post-9/11 gothic seeks to question the apparently unexpected and the unexplained, interrogating the irrationality (from the United States perspective) of both the 9/11 attacks themselves and the experiences of those living in the age of its aftermath; in this sense, the texts align more with Radcliffe's rational approach to the gothic. The attacks were seen as an irrational act with little precedent, and al-Qaeda's motives confused America and its government; Bush mentioned during his initial declaration of the War on Terror that 'Americans are asking: Who attacked our country?' and 'why do they hate us?' (2001). Indeed, much of the rhetoric presented by Bush and others in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 questioned why anyone would want to strike at the heart of the United States in such a brazen manner. The post-9/11 gothic genre exists partly to help the audience do what Punter terms as '[coping] with psychological facts for which no rational explanation exists' (1996, p. 26).

7.2 – Terror, Law, Order and Chaos: The Genre Figures of Post-9/11 Gothic

Post-9/11 gothic utilises several types of characters that are key to the genre's identity. Not all post-9/11 gothic texts feature these characters as part of their narrative composition, and those that do, do not always include them as literally as I will describe them. Nevertheless, the three types of character are the most useful figures of the genre that contribute to how the text is constructed and understood.

Chief among these figures is the terrorist or extremist, an antagonist concerned with committing violence against a city or nation. The terrorist adheres to a radical ideology as a key motivator; in contemporary settings, this can manifest as a skewed or extremist interpretation of existing religious doctrine, usually Christianity or Islam. This ideology informs the character and is used to justify the violence they inflict on their targets. The terrorist will either act independently or as part of a group or cell, and there may even be a strong bond between these antagonists with a familial quality. For example, Bane in *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012) refers to at least one of the members of his terrorist group as 'brother', using the radical ideology of the League of Shadows to justify the destruction of Gotham City. Ra's al Ghul, the League's former leader who wanted Gotham destroyed and was killed during a fight with Batman in *Batman Begins* (2005), is used by Bane as a religious-style figure whose methodology is to be followed; in destroying Gotham, as al Ghul wished, Bane believes his group 'will fulfil Ra's al Ghul's destiny' (2012).

The terrorist and their group may also have history with the nation against which it is aggressing, either in a domestic (their home) or international (a perceived enemy) sense.

In the latter case, there may be a perception that the enemy nation committed undue violence against the terrorist's homeland. Many post-9/11 texts based in a contemporary setting feature Middle Eastern extremist characters whose motivation for attacking the United States is linked almost exclusively to the War on Terror, usually either as reprisal for the invasion of Iraq or the conflict in Afghanistan; television shows such as *24* (2001-2014), *NCIS* (2003-2015) and *Homeland* (2011-2015) use this motivation in their terrorist characters, albeit in a way that fails to encapsulate any of the intricacies of those conflicts. Texts highlighting this motivation in a more nuanced fashion include the films *Green Zone* (2010) and *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012) and the television series *Spooks* (2002-2011), narratives which directly confront post-9/11 and do not reduce the ethical complexity of the terrorist into a motivation fuelled solely by the desire for revenge. While they feature the kinds of characters who could be labelled 'terrorists', with *Zero Dark Thirty* being a semi-fictional account of the pursuit of al-Qaeda and eventual killing of bin Laden, these texts attempt to explore the circumstances that eventuate in some of these people taking up arms against the United States. In particular, *Green Zone* and the book the film was adapted from, *Imperial Life in the Emerald City: Inside Iraq's Green Zone* (Chandrasekaran 2006), attempts to present the conflict between the United States and Iraq as a circumstance leading to people on both sides taking up arms.

The terrorist cell may also have history with the nation against which it is aggressing, believing the nation itself to be overly oppressive or responsible for needless violence and casualties. In this case, vengeance for slain countrymen is usually a key motivator for the terrorist character. Again, *24* reductively uses this motivation, with characters like Abu Fayed and Samir Mehran attempting to commit terrorist attacks on the United States due to personal vendettas against the nation. Fayed's terrorist brother was killed

by a United States counter-terrorism agent, while Mehran saw the Americans as a conquering force seeking to subjugate his homeland, the fictional Middle Eastern nation Kamistan; Mehran is motivated to prevent this outcome, seeing his actions as a reprisal against the United States for the other nations in the Middle East that have already been corrupted by United States influence. In contrast, the film *Star Trek Into Darkness* (2013) instead uses a more nuanced interpretation of this motivation as impetus for its primary antagonist, Khan; explicitly labelled a terrorist by Starfleet, ostensibly the fictional representation of the United States in the film, Khan seeks to destroy Starfleet in revenge for several morally dubious acts on behalf of its leader, Admiral Marcus, including the hostage-taking of many of Khan's brethren and the use of Khan as a scapegoat for military action. Khan's impetus for revenge is far more complex than the simplistic representation of such in shows like *24*; I will explore *Into Darkness* and Khan's motivation in more detail in the last section of this chapter.

The role of the terrorist as a genre convention is to fictionally embody perceptions of the foreign threat of the real post-9/11 aftermath. As a figure of antagonism, the terrorist represents the contemporary fears of extremism, the perceived irrationality invading the norm, and of a large-scale attack on the level of 9/11. Much the same way that the Other is used in gothic texts as a source of hostility – and, in the case of texts like *Dracula* (1897), an embodiment of fears of the invasion and collapse of the British Empire – the terrorist threatens the protagonists, and the realm they defend. They are the potential instigators of the kind of trauma Hogle argues is endemic to gothic texts produced in post-9/11 (2014). The terrorist, given their role as the Other of the text, also contributes to the 'us' vs. 'them' binary that many of these texts explore. The robotic Cylons of the reimagined *Battlestar Galactica* (2003-2009) – a series which neatly articulates many

aspects of post-9/11 gothic – embody this concept. Prior to the series' beginning, the Cylons were created by humanity; they rebel, starting a war with humanity which lasts for many years, before an armistice ends the war and prompts the Cylons to vanish. For four decades, the Cylons remain hidden until, at the start of the series, they return to begin a second war with humanity – embodying the gothic's tenet of the past returning to haunt the present – with mechanical agents who are able to perfectly mimic human form – creating a sense of the uncanny. Through the use of covert tactics, nuclear weapons and an immense fleet of spaceships, the Cylons devastate the colony worlds humanity inhabits. The event is referred to throughout the series as 'the attack on the colonies' or, simply, 'the attack', in much the same way the September 11 attacks are shortened to just 9/11. Humanity then spends the next five years fleeing the Cylons, evading extinction and fearing another attack. The Cylons are referred to through the entirety of the series as something wholly separate, alien and Other from humanity. When the Cylons later form a tenuous alliance with humanity, there is enmity and distrust that emphasises the 'us' and 'them' binary on both sides.

The terrorist figure will usually be combatted by one or both of the other types of figures: namely the police officer – or other law enforcement – and the government representative. The former is a legally appointed security figure who will defend the city or nation from the terrorist threat, and is usually operating with moral good for the people they defend. Commissioner Gordon, as Gotham City's legally-appointed police chief, inhabits this role in the Nolan Batman films (2005-2012), as do other examples like *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*'s Sam Wilson (2014), *Iron Man 3*'s James Rhodes (2013), the MI-5-employed protagonists of *Spooks* (2002-2011) and, arguably, Daniel Craig's post-9/11 incarnation of James Bond, beginning in *Casino Royale*

(2006). In contrast to the law enforcement's very direct combat with the terrorist character, the government representative usually operates in a more indirect, administrative or advisory capacity, dealing with political machinations, corruption or more global defence against terrorism. The character of Maya in *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012) is such a representative, a CIA officer who spends the majority of the film uncovering intelligence both to use in the fight against al-Qaeda and to track down bin Laden[49]. Her work is as invaluable to the fight against al-Qaeda as that of the soldiers who raid bin Laden's Abbottabad compound; both forms of operation are vital to the eventual success of Operation Neptune Spear. Other examples of similar government representative characters include District Attorney Harvey Dent – prior to his corruption by the Joker – in *The Dark Knight* (2008), *Battlestar Galactica*'s President Laura Roslin (2003-2009), and MI-6 spymaster M, as played by Judi Dench in the post-9/11 James Bond films *Casino Royale* (2006), *Quantum of Solace* (2008) and *Skyfall* (2012).

Where legality fails, the fourth figure of the genre emerges – the vigilante. Ideally suited to superhero texts, but featuring in others as well, the vigilante offers effective justice where the law enforcement and government representative fail. They will usually have a moral code or ideology that mandates their actions, and will be driven to aid the citizenry, protecting them from the impending terrorist attack. The vigilante is usually anti-heroic, using tactics that may border on being similar to those used by the terrorists, and is also liminal in their heroism; 'an individual who crosses social thresholds such as those between legality and criminality, justice and oppression' (Gaine 2010, p. 1). In addition to superheroes like Batman, vigilantes in post-9/11 gothic include characters

---

[49] Much of *Zero Dark Thirty* reproduces actual historical elements of the hunt for, and eventual killing of, bin Laden. In contrast to the film's fictional representations of several real figures like bin Laden, CIA Director Leon Panetta and then-Vice Admiral William H. McRaven, Maya is a character who, though taking inspiration from several key figures involved in pursuit of bin Laden, is nonetheless fictional.

such as *True Blood*'s Eric Northman (2008-2014), a vampire who is initially sworn to the American Vampire Council, or AVC. Through the course of the series, Eric becomes disillusioned with the AVC's bureaucratic manner, taking it upon himself to break from their mandate and institute his own kind of justice against impending threats from an evil vampire king and his werewolf allies. Eric becomes hunted by both the king and the AVC alike, yet maintains his own moral code in pursuing threats to the vampire community in his town of Bon Temps. Though Eric's tactics involve kidnapping, torture and eventually murder, he executes these actions with the will to protect Bon Temps, using that impetus as an implicit moral license. In addition, the eponymous protagonist of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) acts as a kind of vigilante later in the series, eschewing the legal control imposed upon her by the Watchers Council and conducting her own operation against the vampires. Though I cited him above as an example of the law enforcement figure, there are also instances where James Bond, as portrayed by Daniel Craig, goes rogue in order to secure effective justice; in particular, *Quantum of Solace* (2008) sees Bond evade both the CIA and his employers MI-6 to proceed on his own and take down antagonist Dominic Greene, once it becomes clear that both government agencies are neither willing nor able, respectively, to bring Greene to justice.

Both the legal figures – the law enforcement and the government representative – and the vigilante are used in the narrative to offer defence of the city or nation under threat from the terrorist, embodying the desire for effective legal security in the post-9/11 world. Their defence will often be of the fifth genre figure of post-9/11 gothic: the civilian. While not usually given specific focus in the same manner as the above three figures, the civilian is used to portray the effect of the ongoing conflict on somebody

unconnected to its military and political mechanisms. This is a focus *Battlestar Galactica* (2003-2009) regularly portrays, featuring episodes that depict the civilians coping both with the fear of another Cylon attack and the uncertainty of a government that is constantly in opposition with the military on how situations should be dealt with. *Batman Begins* (2005) also uses the character of a young, unnamed boy in Gotham, played by Jack Gleeson, who is directly affected by Ra's al Ghul's campaign against the city; appearing in key scenes of the film, the boy is a defenceless bystander who must be rescued by Batman during al Ghul's gas attack towards the film's conclusion, acting as a firsthand point of view from the civilians at the epicentre of al Ghul's attack.

These figures will usually converge in the main setting of a post-9/11 gothic text, a city or other urban, metropolitan environment where the terrorist attack is intended to take place. Many narratives utilise locales that replicate New York-style architecture; while the Nolan Batman films (2005-2012) use Chicago as a shooting location to make Gotham look reminiscent of New York, texts such as *The Avengers* (2012), *Iron Man 3* (2013), *Person of Interest* (2011-2015) and use New York itself as a locale. Both *Sherlock* (2010-2016) and several of the post-9/11 James Bond films, notably *Skyfall* (2012) and *Spectre* (2015), use London in place of an American city, while *Battlestar Galactica* (2003-2009) uses the fictional Caprica City to show the devastation being wreaked by the Cylons on other cities just like it across the colony worlds of humanity. The setting provides a space where the themes of post-9/11 gothic can be better understood; through mirroring New York, the site of the original 9/11 attacks, the narrative enables to viewer to situate themselves better within the discourses the text intersects with.

7.3 – Ambiguity and the Disaster Event: Key Themes of Post-9/11 Gothic

Predominantly, post-9/11 gothic addresses themes of trauma, terror, security, morality and violence. The narratives reflect and articulate the time and depict the uncertainty and unease that permeates military, political and sociocultural fields. There is also an intent in some post-9/11 gothic narratives to expose or confront irrationality on multiple levels; specifically, the perceived irrationality of the attacks themselves, the terrorists' ideologies, and, on a more personal level, the idea of morality and ethics in the American-led War on Terror being questionable, if not outright villainous.

I term the central focus of post-9/11 gothic narratives as the 'disaster event'; this term usually refers to an attack, either impending or having recently happened, but can also be an event in the hypothetical, in that an attack is suspected to be taking place soon, enabling the protagonists to take preventative action. The plots of post-9/11 gothic narratives are predominantly concerned with either the response to or prevention of a large-scale attack on a city or nation. The narrative may begin shortly after a previous attack, referenced within the story repeatedly as impetus for the prevention of a similar attack; the Marvel Cinematic Universe films demonstrate this with the alien Chitauri and their invasion of New York in *The Avengers* (2012), which leaves widespread destruction and devastation. In the following films that take place in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, most notably *Iron Man 3* (2013) and *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (2014), the event is referred to as 'the Battle of New York' and treated as a 9/11-style attack by those who experienced it[50]. A similar disaster occurs in the recently-rebooted series of *Star Trek* films; in the first, self-titled film (2009), the planet

---

[50] The after-effects of the attack, including rebuilding efforts and relocating displaced citizens, are also briefly noted in the *Daredevil* television series (2015), a part of the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

Vulcan is destroyed by the Romulans, an event ominously referred to in the sequel, *Star Trek Into Darkness* (2013), and used by Starfleet as both motivation and justification for the militarisation of the previously explorative, peacekeeping initiative. The disaster event of a post-9/11 gothic can also be of a smaller scale than a citywide cataclysm; the protagonists of *The Dark Knight* (2008) are fearful of further Joker attacks and work to prevent them, the fear compounded by anxiety at the apparently irrational and chaotic nature of the Joker's *modus operandi*. Similarly, later seasons of *True Blood* (2008-2014) address the fallout of vampire king Russell Edgington's brutal murder of several humans; this is in addition to his public declaration of antagonism between humanity and vampires, an act that damages their previously good relations and causes the AVC to ensure, once Edgington is stopped, that other vampires do not carry out similar attacks. In this manner, Edgington becomes both a disaster event in and of himself and a potential one for both 'sides' of the conflict, creating fear in both the humans and vampires that one side of that conflict will react with violence to the other.

Whether or not the disaster event is included in the text, the ramifications of the event are a primary focus of the text's themes. Discourses that are explored in the text can include those of security, ethics, morality, legality, trauma, legitimation of violence, and ideological extremism among others. The narratives' themes are usually foreboding and grim, treating the threat of a disaster event and its ramifications as serious and complicated subject matter. For example, *Iron Man 3* (2013) refers to the Battle of New York in *The Avengers* (2012) as an attack similar to 9/11 that has given protagonist Tony Stark a form of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder; key scenes in the film depict Tony suffering from anxiety and panic attacks whenever the Battle is brought up in conversation, and the memory of his near-death during the Battle drives him to prevent

the villains of the film – who are, seemingly, led by a Middle Eastern terrorist named the Mandarin – from carrying out another attack on New York. In addition to exploring the ramifications of trauma, *Iron Man 3* also appears to legitimate the use of violence in safeguarding America during a scene where, under attack from the Mandarin's agents who have kidnapped the President of the United States, Tony is called to rescue the President's advisors from Air Force One; Tony is forced to use his Iron Man technology to kill the terrorist who has attacked the plane. Another scene involves the character Iron Patriot – whose real identity is United States Army Colonel James Rhodes – as a state-sanctioned instrument of effective American justice, referred to by the President as 'a newly-minted resource' (2013) to combat the terrorist threat of the Mandarin. The Iron Patriot armour is an Iron Man suit painted with a star against the red, white and blue colours of the United States flag[51] (see Figure 7.1). After being captured by the terrorists, Rhodes is separated from the Iron Patriot suit, which is then retrofitted to serve as a device that keeps the captive President locked inside. When Rhodes eventually frees the President, he comments that the President '[looks] damn good' in the Iron Patriot suit (2013). The apparent glorification of America's military might, exemplified in the image of the President of the United States standing tall in a suit of powerful armour painted in the colours of the American flag, is then complicated by Tony Stark; after seeing how his technology can be abused by others, Tony makes the decision to destroy both the Iron Patriot suit and the remainder of his extensive arsenal of Iron Man armours at the end of the film. The power of American empire in *Iron Man 3* is acknowledged, yet challenged; the anxiety caused by the United States' perceived overreach in its security policy is addressed, yet the policy itself is neither fully

---

[51] The blatant nature of Iron Patriot as a representative of American military power is noted during the film by real-life political commentator Bill Maher and talk show host Joan Rivers, both appearing as themselves in cameo roles.

condemned nor condoned. Both the beneficial and harmful facets of the security policy are articulated by the text.

Figure 7.1 - Iron Patriot (taken from *Iron Man 3* 2013)

The exaggerated aspects of superhero narratives help establish why these post-9/11 texts are distinctly gothic, rather than merely participating in a post-9/11 mode of writing. The gothic is concerned with irrationality located within the familiar, specifically the irrationality found within both the literal figures of the text and the thematic content. As I have explained previously in this thesis, the 9/11 attacks were not wholly unpredicted, but were in and of themselves extraordinary and seemingly irrational to those who do not see the United States as culpable for the factors that led to those attacks. To reiterate Bush's words cited at the start of this chapter, the people of the United States initially asked 'Who attacked our country?' and 'why do they hate us?' (2001) in the wake of 9/11; the notion of such a direct assault on the United States' largest city was considerably outside the norm. The Bush government constructed the threat of al-Qaeda and their brazen attack as irrational, establishing a public narrative dependent on that

perceived irrationality. Our understanding of the attacks and their impetus is now far more comprehensive than it was fifteen years ago, allowing post-9/11 gothic texts to confront and clarify that perceived irrationality.

Part of the genre's confrontation with irrationality also uncovers threats within the mechanisms created to defend the American people following 9/11. Similar to how Bloss questions the ethics and effectiveness of the PATRIOT Act (2007), an Act ostensibly created for the security of the American people, post-9/11 gothic specifically interrogates the policies put in place by the United States following 9/11 as to their veracity as curtailers of terrorism, and not as abuses of power. This discourse is questioned thoroughly in *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, which I will explore in more detail in the next section of this chapter, but is also present in *Battlestar Galactica* (2003-2009). Military policies are implemented by Colonel Saul Tigh in the wake of both a Cylon assassination attempt on the life of Commander Adama, the senior military officer of humanity's survivors, and the imprisonment of President Laura Roslin, whose recent actions had destabilised the civilian government. These policies, claimed by Tigh to be a means of security and a way of restoring order after it becomes 'obvious that the government cannot function under the current circumstances' (episode *Fragged* 2005), involve strict military control and monitoring of the civilian ships of the fleet. When several civilian ships rebel against Tigh's orders, he sends armed marines to restore order; the civil disobedience and uprising on the vessel *Gideon* results in marines accidentally killing a number of civilians in an attempt to restore order (episode *Resistance* 2005). The government and the military, intending to protect the people, can be inverted in post-9/11 gothic texts as a source of antagonism, eclipsing the self-perceived irrational threat they purport to combat. Post-9/11 gothic narratives can depict

the government moving towards an autocratic entity, as opposed to democratic, in the pursuit of security through exercising power; *Battlestar Galactica* features two approaches to this idea, through both the civilian and military exercises of power. In the former, deceitful scientist Gaius Baltar is elected to be President of the surviving humans, replacing the democratic approach of his predecessor with an autocratic rule. Baltar's term as a harsh and ignorant President results in the survivors settling on an uninhabited planet, against the reasoned judgment of his military and political advisors, and the planet eventually being occupied by the Cylons, resulting in many human deaths. The military approach is explored through the character of Admiral Helena Cain, a ruthless military officer who, after assuming command of the human survivors' fleet, intends to abandon the civilian ships and take the human fleet's remaining, limited military power on a vengeful, doomed campaign against the Cylons.

The antagonism that can be demonstrated by the protective element, such as the government or the military, also informs one of post-9/11 gothic's key attributes: the prevalence of moral ambiguity. As I mentioned above, post-9/11 gothic texts rarely represent either side of the narrative's conflict as wholly 'good' or 'evil' in such a binaristic fashion. Tactics and ideologies used by both sides may come across as ethically questionable at best, or outright morally deficit at worst, undertaken in the pursuit of security or retention of power. This is also not accounting for the possibility that binary 'sides' like good and evil may not exist within the narrative; it may be impossible to determine either of these as absolutely present in a post-9/11 gothic text. For example, in *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012), Bane's self-claimed ideology of returning power to the people through violent overthrowing of Gotham's governance is countered by Commissioner Gordon's upholding of Harvey Dent's ideals about legality

and effective justice against criminals. Both sides of the conflict are morally ambiguous, with Bane using his rhetoric as a front for the desire to eliminate Gotham to uphold Ra's al Ghul's legacy, and Gordon's veneration of Dent soured by Dent's murderous actions and the events which led to his death, upholding Dent's legacy through lies and subterfuge. Another interesting example of the inverted protector is the filmic contemporisation of Superman's origin story in *Man of Steel* (2013), which juxtaposes Superman's role both as a protagonist and a Disaster Event; Superman's climactic, superpowered battle with his fellow Kryptonians destroys much of his hometown, Smallville, and the city of Metropolis, itself a stand-in for New York City. Superman later affirms his intent to protect Metropolis and the world from extra-terrestrial threats; he tells an American army general, with qualms about Superman's intentions for America, 'I grew up in Kansas, General. I'm about as American as it gets … I'm here to help'. Despite this, the film frames Superman's battle with the Kryptonians as morally ambiguous, given his apparent willingness to destroy vast swathes of the city in order to defeat his opponents. At time of writing, the film's sequel, *Batman v. Superman: Dawn of Justice* (2016), has not been released, yet the film's trailers imply that part of the narrative concerns Superman being treated as a Disaster Event rather than a protective superhero, with Batman seemingly called in to keep Metropolis and Gotham City safe from Superman. The trailers also suggest that the United States government will take military action against Superman to prevent another attack like the one that nearly destroyed Metropolis.

All of these conventions aid in producing the meaning of post-9/11 gothic texts. As discussed previously in this thesis, Höglund's articulation of the American imperial gothic is of a genre that seeks to reduce the complexities of 9/11, as well as the

responses to the attacks and the world of its aftermath, into predominantly binary terms. While the texts do, as Höglund states, acknowledge 'megalomaniac fantasies and desires that [fuel] American imperialism' as well as 'the monstrous form such fantasies and desires may take' (2014, p. 12), the narratives are ultimately concerned with aligning their audiences with the affirmative campaign that American empire seeks to execute in its pursuit of global security. The conflicts in these texts reduce 'the conflict between the Middle East and the United States' into 'a confrontation between modernity and the primitive', with empire depicted as an 'essentially modern institution' concerned with providing modernity to the 'savage' peoples of the Middle East (2014, p. 17). The enemy is seen as subaltern and unknowable, the galvanising agent behind antagonism against the American empire. As a way of linking back to the ideas Turner espoused regarding Americans being ordained to conquer the colonial frontier (1893), Höglund asserts that American imperial gothic texts are fundamentally concerned with '[the] idea that the US has a sacred duty to civilise and modernise', contextualising modernity as an 'apocalyptic threat when wielded by non-American cultures or by other species' (2014, p. 17). The United States, in terms of the American imperial gothic, is a force of righteous justice, the only possible candidate for spreading modernity to the rest of the savage world.

Post-9/11 gothic re-establishes the complexity of these discussions, refuting the notion of America's absolute good inherent to many American imperial gothic texts. The genre seeks to articulate rather than merely acknowledge the horrors of the post-9/11 world, presented through a gothic lens to create a link to the relatable, understandable, irrational and uncanny qualities of the genre that scholars such as Punter (1996), Spooner (2006) and Hogle (2014) have previously outlined. The seemingly benevolent

power of the American empire, as it is constructed both in the American imperial gothic and in public discourse, is at once addressed, challenged and deconstructed. Post-9/11 gothic explores the explicit, surface-level horrors of the conflicts both domestic and international in the aftermath of 9/11, while simultaneously uncovering the deeper horrors of how American empire exerts its power over the populace and how it maintains its global image of moral and ethical superiority, providing a space where the aforementioned themes of security, trauma and morality, endemic to the post-9/11 world, can be discursively engaged with.

7.4 – Questions of Ethics, Morality and Security: Post-9/11 Gothic in Batman, Captain America and Star Trek

Post-9/11 gothic encompasses a variety of texts; in addition to the texts I have discussed in the previous section, I will now conduct close readings of several key texts that exist within the genre. These texts utilise some of the themes and conventions present in other forms of gothic, but predominantly chart methods of meaning-making that are distinct related to the post-9/11 world.

Batman texts do participate heavily in post-9/11 gothic in several key narratives, including the previously analysed *Batman Incorporated* (Morrison *et al* 2012) and Nolan's Batman films (2005-2012). Recent texts such as these and several others have taken cues from the formative work by Miller in *The Dark Knight Returns* (1986) and fused them with the fear and anxiety produced by the post-9/11 world, in effect contemporising some of Miller's ideas regarding a future America controlled by an

oppressive, omnipresent government. Arguably, post-9/11 Batman texts are conceived as a way of *avoiding* the kind of future Miller laid out, once again relying on the kind of 'logic of the anomalous' that Thurtle and Mitchell (2007) outlined as a means of preparing for or coping with such an eventuality.

Though I have already highlighted the ways Batman himself is gothic, both in characterisation and select narratives, the character is also involved in a number of important post-9/11 gothic storylines. Batman is presented as a morally ambiguous anti-hero; though he claims to have the Gotham citizenry's best interests at heart and fights to protect their security, he concurrently breaks the law through his vigilantism, flaunting the ineffectiveness of Gotham's police department, and uses brutal tactics to enforce justice that are almost as violent as the foes he combats. Like characters of other post-9/11 gothic texts, Batman is a protagonist who is continually haunted by trauma from the past which galvanises his actions in the present – in this case, the death of his parents. This trauma propels Batman forward, not only to halt crime in Gotham but to prevent the orphaning of another child in the same manner he experienced[52]. Batman's attempted prevention of further criminal attacks on Gotham City have been recontexualised, in recent narratives, as akin to the prevention of another 9/11-style attack by extremists[53].

Something many pre-9/11 Batman texts share with *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) is their propensity for either ignoring or accepting the irrational or surreal aspects of the

---

[52] Batman has also legally adopted at least two different characters with the Robin moniker as his children, both of whom were orphaned in a similar fashion. This adoption was partly out of guilt for not saving their parents, and partly so they may follow a path of purpose similar to his own. See Joel Schumacher's *Batman Forever* (1995) and *Batman #357* (Conway & Newton 1983) for examples of this.
[53] See *The Dark Knight* (2008), *Batman Incorporated: Gotham's Most Wanted* (Morrison & Burnham 2013) and *Batman: Endgame* (Snyder & Capullo 2015).

narrative, rather than being entirely unsettled by them. The irrationality of a man in a bat costume beating up colourful villains – some of them supernatural or extra-terrestrial – in a realistic setting was not really questioned much before the Miller's work (1986) began to confront some of these aspects, a confrontation which Nolan's films (2005-2012) propagated. Post-9/11 Batman texts question the character's inherent irrationality, as well as provide rationale for the stranger elements of the Batman mythos; if pre-9/11 Batman's gothic quality resembled Walpole's position on the genre, post-9/11 Batman is almost certainly gothic in the rational, explainable style of Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794). A key example of this is the Joker; the character was originally presented as a criminal who survived falling into a vat of acid. The experience drove him insane, giving him the bleached skin and green hair that became part of the character's iconic visual appearance (Moore and Bolland 1988). Though the Joker first appeared in the Batman comic book as a serial killer (Kane & Finger 1940), he was later written as a cackling, campy antagonist who spoke with pun-laden dialogue and executed villainous plots that usually involved garish, circus-themed mechanisms. By contrast, *The Dark Knight* (2008) translated the Joker through a post-9/11 gothic lens; the character is now depicted as a dangerous terrorist possessing a kind of psychopathy whose clinical roots extend far back into childhood, with the acid-bleached skin and coloured hair replaced by makeup and hair dye; a fellow bank robber states that the Joker wears this cosmetic 'war paint' in order 'to scare people' (*The Dark Knight* 2008). Since Nolan's film and Heath Ledger's portrayal of the Joker, many Batman texts have used similarly-styled depictions of the character[54]. While not all of Batman's villains are given the same realistic treatment as the Joker, there are still others whose motivations and *modus operandi* have their inherent irrationality

---

[54] See Azzarello & Bermejo 2008, Daniel 2012, Snyder, Capullo & Glapion 2013 and *Suicide Squad* 2016 for examples.

questioned by the narrative. The characters of post-9/11 gothic arise to confront or assist Batman in many narratives. The role of the decent police officer is usually filled by Commissioner Gordon, whilst oppositional government figures like Commissioner Forbes (Snyder *et al*. 2014) work against the affirmative campaign against crime that Batman attempts to execute.

Key post-9/11 gothic Batman storylines are critical of contemporaneous actions taken by the United States; the narratives act as a heterotopic no-space (Botting 2012) where ideas can be sought out and reasoned with. The fear illuminated by these texts is represented as at once realistically accessible but presented in an unrealistic or skewed manner; for example, the recent retelling of Batman's origin story, *Zero Year* (Snyder, Capullo, Miki & Plascencia 2014), depicts the panoptic towers and death traps of Gotham City, occupied and controlled by the villainous Riddler, as an articulation of the real world increase in United States surveillance. The text discursively represents the misuse of power that NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden feared may transpire should the real United States government's surveillance power continue unchecked[55] (Greenwald 2014, pp.42-43). The Riddler is presented more as a villain than an ambiguous antagonist in the style of Nolan's Bane (*The Dark Knight Rises* 2012), yet the narrative depicts Gotham as being lawless and overrun with criminals prior to Riddler's occupation of the city. There is an inference that the citizens may unite in the face of a common foe, despite the fact the Riddler attempts to turn Gotham into a feuding pre-industrial zone with limited electricity and beleaguered law enforcement.

---

[55] Interestingly, the *Zero Year* comic book arc began single issue publication in June 2013, the same time Snowden was publically revealed to have been leaking classified documents to news journalists (Greenwald 2014, p. 80). There is no evidence to suggest that any of the *Zero Year* creative team were aware of Snowden's information prior to writing the narrative, though the storyline – published in single issues over a year of real time – may have potentially been altered as it progressed, in light of Snowden's revelations.

Inevitably, Batman defeats the Riddler in order to stabilise Gotham. To underline the point that Batman, rather than the Riddler, is intrinsic to Gotham's security, Batman is forced to activate the deactivated power of the entirety of Gotham City by hooking an electrode up to his heart, starting up the power with his own pulse (Snyder, Capullo, Miki & Plascencia 2014, p. pp. 212-215), becoming the quite literal beating heart of Gotham. Snyder's narrative characterises Batman – and, by proxy, Batman's method of enforcing security in Gotham, however ambiguous in its morality – as essentially vital to the city's continued operation, especially in comparison to the Riddler's sociopathy and murderous intent.

Zero Year is a contemporised retelling of Batman's origin story, itself initially told in Miller's *Batman: Year One* (1987), and thus depicts Batman's overthrow of Riddler's occupation of the city as Batman's debut as a vigilante. As such, the present fear of a controlled, subjugated Gotham combines with the past – and, in the timeline of the narrative, more recent – trauma of his parents' deaths, galvanising Batman into preventing a similar attack like the Riddler's from repeating itself. This recontextualises Snyder and Capullo's *The Court of Owls* story arc (2012 & 2013) as such prevention of an attack; the narrative is the first that was written by Snyder and Capullo, in 2012, yet takes place chronologically five years after *Zero Year*, which was published two years later in 2014. The story involves a clandestine group of Gotham's elite citizenry – the titular Court of Owls – who enact a city-wide night of occupation across Gotham. Wearing stark white owl masks and utilising cryogenically-frozen undead superhuman assassins called Talons, the Court seeks to control Gotham and wrest its security responsibilities from Batman, who they deem unworthy to protect the city they see as theirs, rather than his. The Court are mythologised in Gotham's history as the subject of

a nursery rhyme, discredited as nothing but a tale to scare children, but reveal themselves to be quite real and having many controlling interests within Gotham. The nursery rhyme, which includes a stanza warning to 'speak not a whispered word of [the Court] or they'll send the Talon for your head' (Snyder, Capullo & Glapion 2012, p. 40), then becomes portentous, galvanising Batman to prevent their attacks on the city. The omnipresence of the Court following the revelation of their existence is unnerving; they are able to activate Talons for attacks in any part of the city at short notice. Furthermore, Batman is initially unable to discern the rationale behind the Court's sudden activation and attempt to capture the city, until their leader, Lincoln March, reveals himself to be Bruce Wayne's half-brother, implementing the Court's attack on the city purely to destroy Batman and his allies.

Implicitly, Snyder's narrative combines the real fears of both domestic terrorism and abuse of governmental power, the latter given that the Court's members are comprised of the upper echelon of Gotham's citizens, including local government and judicial oversight. At question simultaneously are the notions of how to defend pre-emptively against terrorist attacks and the trust placed in the government to keep the citizenry safe. The Court's aspiration of controlling Gotham entirely also brings to mind some of the larger issues concerning American imperialism; there is nothing to stop the Court from expanding its power outwards if they are able to subjugate Gotham, creating an empire within the city.

In a more direct fashion, post-9/11 gothic manifests within Morrison's *Batman Incorporated* story arc (2012-2013). Without repeating my prior analysis of Morrison's story, found in Chapters 4 and 6 of this thesis, the issues of imperialism, preventative

action and the underlying notions of legitimate vigilante justice are key to the narrative. Batman controls the global empire of the Batman Incorporated initiative, ostensibly created as a peacekeeping force to safeguard the world against the immense terrorist presence of Leviathan. Agents of Incorporated are in every country of the world, ready to be utilised by Batman to bring down agents of Leviathan and ensure continued security. The leader of Leviathan, Talia al Ghul, uses her most-trusted agent, the Heretic, as an extension of her will; the Heretic, bound by an almost religious adherence to al Ghul's will, is a supernaturally-enhanced and towering figure, clad in clothing resembling traditional Arabic desert clothing over thick body armour, seemingly either a mockery or homage of the stereotypical representation of Middle Eastern terrorists in contemporary popular culture. The narrative interrogates notions of international incursions and state-sanctioned violence; with Batman articulating American empire, the Incorporated initiative self-assumes the duty of combating Leviathan by breaching state sovereignties. The eventual collapse of the Incorporated initiative and its outlawing in Gotham signals that the Incorporated initiative's imperial campaign, however benevolent-seeming, does not and cannot wholly work. An implication exists at the story's conclusion when Batman returns to fight crime exclusively in Gotham, after the initiative is dissolved: Batman should only fight crime and protect others on his own soil, rather than going to someone else's. The narrative confronts the Bush government's unpopular campaign into the Middle East, represented in Batman's American leadership of the Incorporated initiative and the public backlash and outlawing Batman receives in wake of his failure to stop Leviathan, yet suggests the power Bush wields is better used domestically, seen when Batman returns to his more successful campaign of exclusively fighting crime in Gotham.

Other Batman texts – most prominently Nolan's film trilogy (2005- 2012), the *Arkham* video game series (2009-2015), Snyder's *Batman Eternal* anniversary storyline (2014) and Tomasi & Gleason's *Requiem for Damian* (2014) – confronts aspects of the post-9/11 world, but other superhero texts depict the fears and anxieties of post-9/11. A prominent recent example of this is *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (2014), dealing with similar themes of security and stability as those Nolan explores in *The Dark Knight* (2008). In *The Winter Soldier*, Captain America deals with the notion of the United States' leading terrorism prevention agency, S.H.I.E.L.D., developing new technology for the peacekeeping initiative Project Insight. The conceit of Insight is that it enables massive flying HQs called helicarriers to roam the world and pre-emptively eliminate potential terrorist threats whilst having the capability to enact global, warrantless surveillance of any world citizen. It soon transpires that S.H.I.E.L.D. is a front for Hydra, a World War II-era Nazi special research unit that deals almost exclusively in the mythological and the paranormal. Hydra seek to turn the pre-emptive technology of Project Insight against America and the world at large, taking the real fears of governmental abuse of surveillance and security power to a logical extreme. As part of their operation, Hydra utilise the Winter Soldier, a brainwashed cyborg super-soldier who is periodically cryogenically frozen over decades and only released when Hydra intend to use him for purposes of assassination or destabilisation. The Soldier acts as a dark reflection of the kind of enforcement and power Captain America could eventually serve, with the Soldier's cryogenic freezing paralleling the Captain's own freezing in Antarctica during World War II (*Captain America: The First Avenger* 2011).

While Hydra is seen by the protagonists of *The Winter Soldier* as an evil presence, most of their actions in the film are presented as ethically grey rather than outright morally

reprehensible. Hydra's leader and former S.H.I.E.L.D. executive, Alexander Pierce, justifies the increase in America's power through Project Insight as a necessary means of security in a world that is increasingly insecure and, in Pierce's opinion, far too reliant on 'diplomacy', 'handshaking' and 'rhetoric' as a means of attaining peace; Pierce claims that 'to build a better world sometimes means having to tear the old one down' (2014), a phrase that calls to mind the notion of restoration through the apocalypse as opined by Höglund (2014, pp.164-165). Though Hydra, a former Nazi division, utilises Project Insight, the Project itself is also greenlit and initially supported by those in S.H.I.E.L.D. who are not connected to the Hydra's infiltration; prior to Hydra's exposure, S.H.I.E.L.D.'s director, Nick Fury, oversees the construction of Project Insight's helicarriers, debating the Project's necessity and usefulness with a sceptical Captain America. Project Insight's technology is deployed in order to prevent a potential alien invasion, similar to the Battle of New York that occurred in the previous film, *The Avengers* (2012); as in *Iron Man 3* (2013); the technology is intended to wage the kind of 'preventive war' which Chomsky condemned (2003, p. 12).

The Winter Soldier is an effective post-9/11 gothic text. In addition to the constant references to the 9/11-like elements of the Battle of New York, the preventative aspects and amorphous power of Project Insight at once articulate several key post-9/11 aspects; among them are Bush's initial declaration of the War on Terror with the statement that America will 'know the plans of terrorists before they act, and find them before they strike' (2001) and the abusive systems of government surveillance which Snowden and Greenwald initially sought to expose (2014). The autonomous nature of Project Insight's helicarriers also refers to the Obama administration's propensity for frequent drone strikes that minimise the risk to American soldiers (see Byman 2013 and Weiner

& Sherman 2014). Pierce's belief that his control of Project Insight is necessitated by the current geopolitical climate, and that its power can only be a positive thing, can be countered by Greenwald's assertion that unless the power granted by government surveillance 'is held in check by rigorous oversight and accountability, it is almost certain to be abused' (2014, p. 4). Project Insight acts as a fictionalised representation of Greenwald's and Snowden's fears taken to a logical extreme. The post-9/11 qualities of the film are augmented by the gothic; as I explored in Chapter 3, the Winter Soldier himself is a cyborg Other, an unnatural combination of man and machine, and the character's ghoulish cryogenic freezing and periodic unfreezing almost constitute a form of living death. Further, Hydra itself is governed by a radical ideology born of both Nazi ideals – harkening from its founder, Nazi executive Red Skull, in 1941 (*Captain America: The First Avenger* 2011) – and of a belief that, in Hydra scientist Arnim Zola's words, 'humanity could not be trusted with its own freedom' (*Captain America: The Winter Soldier* 2014), implying that Hydra is itself something beyond humanity. Hydra's use of the mythological creature it takes as both its name and insignia, as well as their history with the occult and the supernatural, make them a dangerous and inscrutable foe.

Both *The Winter Solder* and the films of the Marvel Cinematic Universe in general, especially those released following *The Avengers* (2012), reinforce the extraordinary nature of the New York attack and use it as impetus for the continued deployment of further extraordinary elements, like Project Insight and the Winter Soldier, to combat it. According to Hydra in their guise as S.H.I.E.L.D., it is only through extraordinary measures that America can be made safe; the film uses this viewpoint as a distorted articulation of the necessity Bush claimed in the United States' Iraq and Afghanistan

campaigns. While the film ultimately culminates in the thwarting of Hydra's plans, it still leaves doubt as to whether Captain America's reactive method of peacekeeping is a better alternative than the pre-emptive style Hydra seeks to employ. This issue is also further explored in subsequent texts of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, most notably the film *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015), which involves Tony Stark's creation of a defective artificial intelligence meant to implement preventive justice which instead resorts to genocide, and the television series *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* (2013-2015), which follows a team of operatives who rebuild S.H.I.E.L.D. as a legitimate, yet still clandestine, organisation dedicated to protecting the Earth. These texts within the Marvel Cinematic Universe intersect with discourses of security, debating the beneficial and harmful aspects of state-sanctioned and pre-emptive violence without fully negating either viewpoint. *The Winter Soldier,* in particular, disassembles the United States' post-9/11 rhetoric regarding the perceived need for invasive domestic and international security; by interrogating this need through Hydra's extremist ideology, the film represents the lack of nuance in real discussions of security as being detrimental to how the discourse is established.

Another post-9/11 gothic text concerned with protecting the Earth is the television series *Star Trek: Enterprise* (2001-2005). While the series entered production prior to 9/11 and largely avoided post-9/11 topics for nearly two seasons, there was an eventual and intentional shift towards that kind of storytelling. An alien race named the Xindi appear suddenly above Earth, launching an attack that devastates the United States and kills millions of people; this is done at the behest of a group of time travellers who falsely state that humanity will destroy the Xindi if the Xindi do not attack Earth immediately. Having no notion of why the Xindi would attack Earth, Starfleet sends the crew of the

starship *Enterprise* into the Delphic Expanse, a nebulous and uncharted area of space where the Xindi are said to dwell. The *Enterprise*, previously a ship of exploration, is outfitted with advanced weaponry and accompanied by a team of specially-trained marines called MACOs, an acronym for Military Assault Command Operations. During their journey into the Expanse, the crew of the *Enterprise* learns that a second attack, of a much larger scale, is being planned by the Xindi; their mission quickly becomes a race to destroy the Xindi weapon before it can destroy Earth.

The post-9/11 chronotopic identity of *Star Trek: Enterprise* is evident; a conscious effort was made on behalf of the producers to represent both the post-9/11 world and aspects of the War on Terror, a notion producers Rick Berman, Andre Bormanis and Brannon Braga emphasise during the *In a Time of War* documentary featured on the *Star Trek: Enterprise* Season 3 Blu-Ray (2014). Actor Scott Bakula, who played *Enterprise*'s Captain Jonathan Archer, noted that the series' writers were driven by the desire to reflect the real post-9/11 in the science fiction series because of the freedom the genre allowed them in telling those stories (Collura 2013). Through displacing the real issues of 9/11 into a fictional form that reflected rather than didactically replicated them, *Star Trek: Enterprise* was able to articulate and confront these issues in a less constrained way. While the show was seen by some critics as a 'direct political comment' and an 'unsubtle echo of contemporary events [such as] the attack on 9/11 [and] the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq' (Robb 2012, p. 215), many episodes of the third season (2003-2004) – which constituted the main story arc regarding the Xindi and the journey into the Expanse – dealt with the subject matter in a nuanced manner.

The ethics of both surviving in the dangerous regions of the Expanse and in launching a reciprocal attack on the Xindi were questioned; one episode (*Damage* 2004) featured the *Enterprise* crew, after suffering considerable damage from a Xindi attack, stealing a piece of vital technology needed for repairs from an innocent civilian vessel. The theft is justified, though not liked, by Captain Archer as a necessary measure in order to reach the Xindi weapon in time and secure Earth's safety; the civilian vessel is left behind to spend three years getting home. As with *Batman Incorporated* and *The Winter Soldier*, the episode questions the rhetoric of necessity and the suspension of the law that are both utilised by the Bush government, creating a more ambiguous situation surrounding that necessity than the apparently straightforward narrative of Bush's rhetoric. Though *Enterprise* manages to successfully prevent a second Xindi attack, the events of both the initial attack and *Enterprise*'s journey into the Expanse are referred to throughout the rest of the series; a subsequent episode in the show's fourth season (*Home* 2004) depicts the aftermath of the Xindi's first attack and highlights the undiscerning xenophobia that has been engendered in humans because of it. The Xindi become the perceived terrorist figure, a notion complicated by the Xindi's attack arising from misleading circumstances to begin with, and the narrative shifts into a more imperial gothic approach similar to *Dracula*; both Starfleet and the Xindi separately become imperial institutions each facing a fear of collapse, using that fear as impetus for their respective campaigns against each other. Implicitly, the series articulates the threat of al-Qaeda through the Xindi, but the latter is represented as a more comparable, and possibly superior, threat to Starfleet, in comparison to how the strength of the real al-Qaeda pales when compared to the military dominance of the United States; in this manner, the narrative portrays the United States, embodied in Starfleet and the crew of the *Enterprise*, as justified in their campaign, as they are combatting an equivocal

military force rather than a much smaller extremist group. Though *Star Trek: Enterprise* predominantly demonstrates nuance in its reflection of post-9/11 politics, there are areas where its articulated notions are not wholly appropriate.

Several of the key themes from *Star Trek: Enterprise* regarding xenophobia, pre-emptive justice and security-minded militarisation, as well as the ethics and morality of the above, are also confronted in the film *Star Trek Into Darkness* (2013). While not quite as nuanced as *Enterprise* in its depiction of post-9/11 politics, there is still a degree of resonant thematic material; the plot, set a century after *Star Trek: Enterprise*, concerns a terrorist attack on Starfleet headquarters that nearly destroys the building and kills most of Starfleet's military and governmental leadership. Captain James T. Kirk is ordered to take his own starship *Enterprise* – itself also ostensibly a ship of exploration that is converted into a more powerful vessel for the purposes of a military expedition – to preventatively strike at the Klingons who, according to Starfleet's Admiral Marcus, are planning an attack on Earth. Marcus claims the Klingons are in an alliance with human terrorist and former Starfleet intelligence officer John Harrison, the perpetrator of the attack on Starfleet headquarters. As Bush's 'axis of evil' speech (2002) stripped the United States' enemies in Iraq of any nuance and illustrated them as an unambiguously antagonistic threat, so too does Marcus attempt to portray the Klingons as a similar kind of villainous, uncomplicated Other. It later transpires that Harrison, who in actuality is a genetically-engineered superhuman named Khan Noonien Singh, has been set up by Marcus as a scapegoat that will allow Marcus to enforce stricter military policies in Starfleet and legitimate his pre-emptive campaign against the Klingons. Marcus is motivated to prevent another attack similar to the one which destroyed the planet Vulcan in the previous film (*Star Trek* 2009), despite the fact his

motives and tactics – including the attempted deployment of torpedoes that are loaded with Khan's cryogenically frozen superhuman compatriots, forming a grotesque hybrid of a hostage situation and suicide bombers – are ethically and morally dubious. The film frames Marcus as a villain, who is later killed by Khan for his deceit and the capture of Khan's followers. Despite this, several of the issues the film raises, particularly in terms of Starfleet's preparedness for further cataclysmic events similar to Vulcan's destruction, neatly articulate the real United States' perceived need for greater security measures following 9/11. *Into Darkness* positions the seemingly vengeful quest to destroy al-Qaeda as a doomed effort, implying that Marcus – reflecting the United States government's desire for pre-emptive justice – cannot succeed given the ethical ambiguity and clandestine nature of his operation. Marcus uses his vessel, the aptly-named *U.S.S. Vengeance*, to further his campaign of pre-emptive violence, but the ship is heavily damaged and eventually crash-lands into Starfleet Headquarters in San Francisco, destroying much of the city on impact. The film uses the destruction as an ironic comment on the Bush government's motivations regarding their retaliatory campaigns in the Middle East; Marcus' *Vengeance* does the most damage domestically, rather than against the self-perceived 'enemy'.

These texts from Batman, Captain America and Star Trek are only a select few examples of the narratives that are encompassed by post-9/11 gothic. They are used as examples in addition to texts I have utilised in describing post-9/11 gothic's themes and genre conventions; narratives that utilise these themes and conventions include my examples of *Battlestar Galactica* (2003-2009), *True Blood* (2008-2014) and *Man of Steel* (2013), alongside other texts such as *Person of Interest* (2011-2015), concerning an artificial intelligence that predicts crime through unwarranted mass public

surveillance, *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015), which depicts a post-apocalyptic world ruled by rampant violence and cult-like ideologies, and the video game *Fallout 4* (2015), which almost literalises Höglund's notions of apocalyptic restoration (2014, pp. 164-165) by dealing with rebuilding the world in the aftermath of a nuclear war.

Post-9/11 gothic unites these disparate texts through a number of aspects. Among them are their sense of anxiety and fear, the presentation of a contemporary fear born of the past, the prevention or aftermath of an attack that devastates humanity, the moral ambiguity underlying the protagonists' and antagonists' actions, the uncovering of hidden truths that distort affirmative image, and the inherent sense of irrationality informing all of the above. This last tenet is, above all, a hallmark that distinguishes post-9/11 gothic from other forms of post-9/11 fiction; the perception and deconstruction of irrationality is key to the narrative, and the articulation of the issue or threat the text seeks to discursively engage with. Where many modern post-9/11 texts, chiefly *24* (2001-2014) and *Homeland* (2011-2015), represent the threats and anxieties of the real post-9/11 world in a very direct manner, post-9/11 gothic texts are concerned with depicting these threats and anxieties in a way that makes them indirect yet still accessible and relatable to audiences.

A central tenet of the American imperial gothic – and, concurrently, American empire itself – is its capacity to acknowledge and recognise post-9/11 horror, and the ways it manifests in the real world, whilst displacing that horror and the connection it has to the larger United States governmental apparatus. Höglund notes that in many ways the imperial gothic aspect fosters not 'a culture of remembering but one of forgetting … [bringing] the horrors of the past to our attention but only so they can be altered,

managed and forgotten' (2014, p. 174). By contrast, post-9/11 gothic seeks to remember in order to manage and come to terms with the horror, both past and present, in a way that does not dilute or forget where that horror has originated from. Perhaps the difference between the two genres is not so marked; Hogle claims that gothics texts published post-9/11 'can *both* bring out *and* keep at bay our deepest ambivalences towards the worst of cultural traumas so that we can see just how conflicted and multi-dimensional they are' (2014, p. 76, emphasis added by original author). Whether useful as a tool of forgetting or remembering, Hogle cites that the gothic as a genre 'keeps being re-invoked to help us face and not face 9/11' (2014, p. 80).

Ultimately, post-9/11 gothic texts remember, face and question the horrors of both 9/11 and the era the attacks have created in their aftermath. Post-9/11 gothic interrogates the imperialism born of that aftermath, the intent behind its formation and ongoing presence, and the security the American empire intends to provide to both the United States and to the world. Through the texts of post-9/11 gothic, the events of 9/11 are questioned, reasoned with and understood better; the texts are a step towards the complex discussions and discourses that the contemporary American political and military regime seeks to silence.

Conclusion: 'Why Do We Fall?'

'[A]t its best, the Batman story is about justice, restraint, and the desire to take a stand against evil – to make society as a whole the better for the effort… It is possible for a fan to embrace Batman's more problematic character traits … [b]ut it is also possible for someone to enjoy the heroism that Batman represents, and to strive to find a real-world way to emulate it, while being critical of the Batman universe and aware of the limitations of Batman's philosophy.'

– Marc DiPaolo, *War, Politics and Superheroes*, p. 69

'[C]ultural representations of the anarchy of empire can shore up national borders against perceived external threats, or can decenter the nation…'

– Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture*, p. 212

During Christopher Nolan's film *Batman Begins* (2005), a young Bruce Wayne falls down a well beneath his parents' mansion. He is assailed by a swarm of bats before he is rescued from the well by his father, Thomas. Recovering afterwards, Bruce is told by

his father that there is nothing wrong with his fear of the bats, nor with his fall down the well. 'Why do we fall, Bruce?' Thomas asks. 'So that we can learn to pick ourselves up' (2005).

Post-9/11 fiction, at its best, seeks to explore the fall, and the way we can pick ourselves up afterwards. From the most superficial of mainstream pulp narratives to the complex, multifaceted artistic expressions of morality and trauma analysed in this thesis, humanity's capacity for using storytelling as a method of navigating and responding to the post-9/11 world cannot be overstated, whether such navigation emphasises or obscures nuance.

The discourses produced by the post-9/11 world involve ethics, morality and security, and require a means of interpretation uninhibited by the limits of binaries. In his post-9/11 reading of Nolan's *The Dark Knight* (2008), Will Brooker contextualises Batman as a kind of Socratic *pharmakon* – a poisonous remedy (2012). Brooker references a case study by Jacques Derrida titled 'Plato's Pharmacy' (1981, pp. 63-171), concerning Socrates' retelling, written by Plato, of an Egyptian myth: the god Theuth attempts to give the unwilling King Thamus the 'gift' of writing to the people of Egypt. While 'gift' is the English translation of *pharmakon*, the original Greek word in Plato's text, the more literal interpretation of the term is associated with both affirmative and negative connotations. Through Derrida, Brooker notes that *pharmakon* can also mean 'drug' or 'poison' in addition to 'gift' or 'remedy' (2012, p. 189), transforming the word into a term that can combine both the affirmative and the negative connotations into a more ambiguous definition. Derrida uses the term in his essay to challenge the binaries of good and bad inherent in Plato's text; Theuth claims that *grammata*, the ability to read

and write, is a vital and useful skill for the Egyptian people, while Thamus rejects it as 'a criminal thing, a poisoned present' (Derrida 1981, p. 77), in part because of his inability to read or write and his reliance on the importance of speech over the written word. Brooker analyses Derrida's challenge of the underlying binaries of Plato's text, citing this challenge as emphasising the value of complexity over simplicity, of ambiguity over binary:

> [A]ny attempt to impose a clear-cut, binary opposition on a complex relay inevitably results in slippage and struggle. The relationship between cultural and textual energies is a process, not a neat division; black will always seep into white and colour will show through darkness. (2012, p. 188)

Batman has become a post-9/11 *pharmakon*, an ambiguous figure that is 'never fixed in meaning [and] flows from one term to another' (Brooker 2012, p. 195). Equally able to articulate the best and worst aspects of the post-9/11 world as both protector and antagonist, Batman texts are representative of post-9/11 gothic's ability to introduce uncertainty and unease into the American imperial gothic narrative of adherence to and superiority of the American empire. Nolan's films (2005-2012) deconstruct notions of effective civil justice and overthrow of the corrupt, whilst challenging the implicit acceptance of vigilantism as a substitute for state justice. Morrison's *Batman Incorporated* (2012-2013) investigates the successes and failures of empire through Batman's global brand, a collective of agents at once able to protect their countries while being beholden to their American benefactor's campaign against terrorism. Snyder and Capullo's *Zero Year* (2014) is a horrific interpretation of modern security

policies and mass surveillance, a fictional culmination of the fears that prompted Edward Snowden to reveal to the world the United States' clandestine surveillance approach (Greenwald 2014). In most of the above examples, Batman may defeat the 'enemy' of the piece, framing this defeat as an inherent good, yet the questions raised by these narratives – and, in many instances, their antagonists – do not always result in a neat 'good' or 'evil' result; this is one of the key tenets of post-9/11 gothic's textual operation.

I approached this research not only from a position similar to Brooker's, of being both 'a Batman fan and an academic' (2012, p. 2) wishing to further document the character's scholarly validity, but also as a critic interested in the fictional articulation of the post-9/11 world. There is a noteworthy connection between Batman and the post-9/11 world, which I have sought to clarify in this thesis, that is reliant on depictions of ambivalence and ambiguity. The concerns of the post-9/11 world cannot be adequately negotiated through binaries of 'good' and 'evil'; like the *pharmakon*, both approaches need to be incorporated for a more comprehensive understanding of these concerns.

At its core, post-9/11 gothic fundamentally challenges the perceived binary of the heroic America versus the savage and subaltern extremists of the Middle East, a binary upheld and emphasised by many in power in the United States government. As Chomsky notes, it is considered 'unpatriotic and disruptive to question' (2003, p. 217) how the post-9/11 United States composes itself and manages its power; such a question is vital to a comprehensive understanding of America's imperial might and its capacity for abuse of the state and its people. Chalmers Johnson offers similar sentiments, determining that the United States' self-managed image of post-9/11 heroism invites greater scrutiny:

We Americans deeply believe that our role in the world is virtuous – that our actions are almost invariably for the good of others as well as ourselves. Even when our country's actions have led to disaster, we assume that the motives behind them were honorable. But the evidence is building up that in the decade following the cold war, the United States largely abandoned a reliance on diplomacy, economic aid, international law, and multilateral institutions in carrying out its foreign policies and resorted much of the time to bluster, military force, and financial manipulation. The world is not a safer place as a result. (Johnson 2003, pp. 216-217)

I have argued throughout this thesis that post-9/11 gothic texts such as Batman scrutinise America's self-perception as heroic and virtuous. While offering a space for deeper and more personal issues of trauma and conflict to be explored by audiences, post-9/11 gothic deconstructs the United States' broader geopolitical assertions of unquestionable dominance and the necessity of its domestic and international security campaigns.

Chapter 1 illustrated key moments in Batman's seventy-six year history. Through analyses of notable Batman texts and comparisons to other contemporary superheroes, the chapter emphasised Batman's ability, as a popular culture franchise, to speak to political, social and cultural concerns. Just as Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* (1986) provided a space for dealing with the fears of the Cold War and the threat of nuclear weapons thirty years ago, so too do contemporary Batman texts articulate discourses of legality, security and the fear produced by 9/11.

Chapter 2 then explored the cultural and geopolitical landscape of post-9/11 America, citing several prominent theorists and scholars who have conducted extensive research on United States imperialism and the formation of a post-9/11 American empire, despite assertions from Presidents Bush and Obama that no such empire has been formed. While critics such as Ferguson (2004) have maintained that such an empire is not an inherently negative institution, others including Chomsky (2003), Johnson (2004), Parenti (2011), Go (2011) and Höglund (2014) have persuasively argued the adverse consequences of American empire. The horror of the 9/11 attacks and their aftermath have resulted in a United States more concerned with security, both domestic and global, sometimes to the detriment of both its image and its citizenry.

Chapter 3 introduced the gothic genre as a creative means of dealing with the issues and anxieties that 9/11 has created. A term encompassing a variety of definitions including styles of art, fashion and architecture, the gothic is most notably a literary genre with a history of narrativising fear and providing a space for the interrogation of societal concerns; as Punter asserts, fear in the gothic is not simply a theme but is a facet of the genre that 'has consequences in terms of form, style and the social relations of [its] texts' (1996 p. 18). The gothic genre is well-suited to articulate the concerns of the post-9/11 world not only because of its ability to navigate the fear produced by the attacks themselves, but also through use of the heterotopic counter-site, described by Foucault (1984) as a reflective space where reality is seen in a distorted fashion that allows interrogation of these concerns. The heterotopia, much like Foucault's example of the mirror (1984, p. 24), is a space that concurrently exists but does not exist in reality; it is a sequestered region of narrative discourse that can be seen, as in a text, but is not itself

real. The gothic through a heterotopic lens shows a world which is uncanny in its depiction of our society and culture, yet is distinctly different from reality.

Chapter 4 incorporated the central research areas of Batman, post-9/11 American imperialism and the gothic, beginning the process of defining the (sub)genre I term *post-9/11 gothic*. I observed the ways in which Batman texts serve as effective conduits to the real world through the gothic, reflecting societal concerns and anxieties in a manner that makes them accessible without being didactic. I used *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012) and the character of Bane as an example of the ambiguous moral and ethical content of Batman texts, a key factor of post-9/11 gothic. I also used Jacques Derrida's landmark work on genre (1980) as a means of demonstrating how Batman texts are able to participate in several genres concurrently, as do many post-9/11 gothic texts.

Chapter 5 utilised notions of narrative imprinting and postmodernity, assembling the concept of a post-9/11 gothic chronotope that imbues texts with specific meaning relevant to the location of its spatial and temporal creation. Using critical theory from Mikhail Bakhtin, Jason Bainbridge and Jerrold E. Hogle, the chapter established post 9/11 gothic's capacity for interpreting notions of trauma; specifically, the genre has an ability to, in Hogle's words, '*both* bring out *and* keep at bay our deepest ambivalences toward the worst of cultural traumas' (2013, p. 76, emphasis added by original author). Superhero texts use trauma as a galvanising agent, making the genre – and Batman texts specifically – effective in allowing audiences to navigate ideas of post-9/11 in fiction.

Chapter 6 undertook an analysis of Johan Höglund's American imperial gothic (2014), a mode of writing that aligns particular texts with acknowledgement and support of American empire. I used Höglund's concept as inspiration to develop an alternative notion for texts to deploy their fictional status to interrogate the ideas and practices of American empire. I established how post-9/11 gothic both builds upon and counterpoints Höglund's notions, providing a genre that divergently opposes and subverts discourses produced by American imperial gothic texts. I identified the presence of both the American imperial gothic and post-9/11 gothic in Grant Morrison's *Batman Incorporated* storyline (2012-2013), illustrating the inherent ambivalence of the text and its capacity for espousing both adherence to and rejection of the Bush administration's post-9/11 actions domestically and internationally. Where the American imperial gothic interprets post-9/11 geopolitics through reductive binaries of good and evil, '[providing] a sense of entitlement that discourages the protest at this simplification' (Höglund 2014, p. x), post-9/11 gothic instead challenges that simplification and establishes nuance in how audiences can understand and relate to the post-9/11 world.

Finally, Chapter 7 detailed the post-9/11 gothic (sub)genre itself. The genre engages with post-9/11 discourses surrounding trauma, ethics, morality, legality, geopolitics and security; I have demonstrated how the genre enables audiences to use fiction in negotiating the fears raised by 9/11 and its aftermath. I contextualised the genre through examples that include, in addition to Batman narratives, texts such as *Star Trek*, *Battlestar Galactica*, *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* and *Mad Max: Fury Road*. These and similar texts of post-9/11 gothic provide a thorough interrogation of the post 9/11 world's nuance. As much as post-9/11 gothic challenges the practices of empire

and returns complexity to geopolitical discourses, the genre also suggests recovery from the trauma of 9/11; there is as much about the genre that is bleak as it is hopeful. In an interview with Morrison, Brooker (2015) asks about the ultimate meaning of Morrison's Batman storyline, which comprises texts including *Batman Incorporated* and several other narratives that interrogate the figure of Batman and his place in the (implicitly post-9/11) world. Morrison responds that the crux of his narrative is left 'for my readers to decide in the end. For me, it was simply the story of a man who, instead of fearing or succumbing to the darkness and horror in his life, used it to inspire him to greatness' (2015, p. 44).

Following the work of Townshend (2014), I have sought to illustrate the intrinsic social, cultural and political inflections encoded in various post-9/11 texts through Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope, and how the meaning derived from them can be misconstrued or deformed if it is interpreted in a detrimental manner. I noted in the Introduction to this thesis that fiction has potency in conveying real world ideas through fictional means. Contemporary post-9/11 texts such as *24* (2001-2014) reinforce the perceived binary of heroic America and the savage Middle East; these texts abandon nuance in their depiction of post-9/11 geopolitics, and risk damaging audience perceptions of the real conflict. Complexity is needed for a comprehensive understanding of that conflict and its discourses; as I have argued throughout this thesis, Batman texts ably navigate these intricacies. Part of post-9/11 gothic's practice is in challenging the perceived irrationality of the 9/11 attacks, discursively mapping the complexities of the post-9/11 world and arguing for a more nuanced understanding; the genre answers President Bush's question of 'Who attacked us?' (2001) by elucidating

the military, political, social and cultural factors at the heart of the United States that led to the event and its aftermath.

In *The Dark Knight* (2008), Harvey Dent provides the quote which inspired the title of this thesis; when informing Gotham City's journalists that the law is doing everything they can to stop the Joker, Dent tells them to remember that 'the night is darkest just before the dawn…and I promise you, the dawn is coming' (2008). Batman is a means of interrogating the gothic night of the post-9/11 world, an ambiguous shadow of legality, morality and ethics who aids audiences in negotiating the fears of that night; Batman is 'not done yet. Not while Gotham City needs Batman. Not until the night's over' (Morrison *et al.* 2011, p. 216). Post-9/11 gothic creates a space where audiences can come to terms with the issues of the post-9/11 world. The genre seeks to define a narrative lexicon that interprets the aforementioned discourses of security, ethics, morality and trauma, enabling audiences to better understand their reality through fiction. To attain that understanding, we must be willing to confront the fears of the post-9/11 world, perhaps through a lens that challenges rationality. Bruce Wayne himself emphasises the power of Batman as an enduring signifier that is able to confront fear in order to accomplish what a mere man cannot:

> People need dramatic examples to shake them out of apathy, and I can't do that as Bruce Wayne. As a man, I'm flesh and blood; I can be ignored, I can be destroyed. But as a symbol… as a symbol, I can be incorruptible. I can be everlasting. Something elemental. Something terrifying… Bats frighten me. It's time my enemies shared my dread. (*Batman Begins* 2005)

Appendix – 'The Hero We Need, Not the One We Deserve': Vigilantism and the State of Exception in *Batman Incorporated*

The following is a chapter I contributed to the book *Graphic Justice: Intersections of Comics and Law* (ed. Giddens 2015, pp.183-200), during the course of my candidature. Both the book and the chapter arose from a conference of the same name where I presented the initial paper; the conference took place on 11 September 2013, at St. Mary's University (then known as St. Mary's University College), in the United Kingdom. The chapter has been reproduced here with kind permission of Routledge.

Elements included from *Graphic Justice* in this appendix are:

- The book's title page

- Copyright information

- Table of contents

- The first page of contributor biographies

- The chapter itself

Graphic Justice

Intersections of Comics and Law

Edited by Thomas Giddens

Contents

Contributors

Kim Barker (University of Wolverhampton) is a Lecturer in Law, and has previously taught at the University of Birmingham and Aberystwyth University. Kim's research interests span intellectual property but also digital properties, intersections of intellectual property and culture, comics and games.

Chris Boge (University of Cologne) is Assistant Professor of English and American Studies. He is an Honorary Research Fellow at the School of Law at Birkbeck where he teaches in the crime fiction and the law module, and a recipient of the Birkbeck Institute for the Humanities Visiting Fellowship.

Chris Comerford (University of Technology, Sydney) is a PhD candidate, whose fascination with Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight* in 2008 led him to study Batman and superhero comics at large. As well as pursuing work in academia, he also writes comic book reviews and digressions at http://thewritersmultiverse.wordpress.com.

Graham Ferris (Nottingham Trent University) is a Reader in Law at Nottingham Law School. He has written on legal education, legal history and property law. He is a qualified solicitor and has been teaching law for over two decades. He has been reading comics for over four decades.

Thomas Giddens (St Mary's University) is a Lecturer in Law and Co-Director of St Mary's Centre for Law and Culture. Alongside jurisprudence and popular culture, he is interested in the use of comics in law and legal studies, and is founder of the Graphic Justice Research Alliance (graphicjustice.blogspot.com).

Jérémie Gilbert (University of East London) is a Reader in Law. Among a range of publications, his latest book, *Nomadic Peoples and Human Rights*, was published by Routledge in 2014. He is a consultant for a number of non-governmental organisations on indigenous peoples' and nomadic peoples' rights.

Chapter 11

The hero we need, not the one we deserve: vigilantism and the state of exception in *Batman Incorporated*

Chris Comerford

Scholarly research into superhero comic narratives has arguably been neglected, particularly in regard to the latter's use as a lens for social commentary.[1] Accordingly, my interest in writing this chapter in the broadest sense is to enter into a dialogue with others, and provide space in which one can reflect on the value of the superhero comic book as a scholarly resource. Comic book narratives, I believe, offer rich ground for examining the interrelationship between real and fictional worlds, with Batman in particular examining the notions of vigilantism, ethics, and justice. I frame this conversation through discourse with Giorgio Agamben's conceptualisation of the 'state of exception'[2] and an analysis of the *Batman Incorporated* comic book written by Scottish author Grant Morrison and published by DC Comics in three volumes.[3] This analysis not only highlights intersections between graphic literature and the law, but also examines the inherent dangers present in utilising an exceptional state of security contemporaneously. In Morrison's work, Batman presents a more grounded, realistic character in comparison to his supernatural and extra-terrestrial contemporaries, and the *Incorporated* narrative is particularly useful as an analytical lens for ideas regarding the state of exception. This is due to the narrative's recent publication and representation of the post-9/11 United States – and, by extension, its links to the state of exception – through a fictional mode.

1 J Bainbridge, '"This is the Authority. This Planet is Under Our Protection" – An Exegesis of Superheroes' Interrogations of Law' (2007) 3 *Law, Culture and the Humanities* 455, 456.
2 G Agamben, *State of Exception* (first published 2003, K Attell tr, University of Chicago Press 2005).
3 G Morrison, *Batman Incorporated: The Deluxe Edition* (DC Comics 2012); G Morrison, *Batman Incorporated: Demon Star* (DC Comics 2013); G Morrison, *Batman Incorporated: Gotham's Most Wanted* (DC Comics 2013).

'Necessitas legem non habet':[4] terrorism and the state of exception

In his 2005 text *State of Exception*,[5] building on political and juridical ideas presented in his 1998 work *Homo Sacer*,[6] Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben explores the connection between power, necessity and the law relative to the concept of the state of exception, derived from German philosopher Carl Schmitt's seminal text *Dictatorship*.[7] In Agamben's paradigm, the state of exception is an idea that resides on the boundary between law and ethics. It is a state of being, evident in most civilisations dating back to the Roman era and the ideal of *iustitium* (literally, 'standstill' or 'suspension of the law').[8]

Agamben convincingly assesses previous attempts to define the state of exception as limited; averring that the term has been mired in internal contradictions and disjunctions of logic.[9] He further posits that the state of exception 'is a force of law without law';[10] by its nature, the central aporia of the state of exception negates the law itself. The latter exists depending on the 'necessity'. Necessity is not a source of law, nor does it properly suspend the law; it merely releases a particular case from the literal application of the 'norm'[11] for the 'common well-being of men'.[12] This perception is embodied in Agamben's appropriation of the Latin maxim '*necessitas legem non habet* (necessity has no law)'.[13]

The justification for the state of exception is largely represented as an 'emergency' or crisis.[14] It is constructed by those in power as the only means of defending a country or cultural group because of a gap in or absence of law. Agamben argues compellingly that enacting 'law' via the state of exception (eg Barack Obama's order to neutralise the threat of Osama bin Laden) and the prolonged absence of the 'norm',[15] can result in a situation worse than that which necessitated the exception in the first place. After all, an 'emergency' or 'crisis', like 'necessity', is a

4 Agamben (n 2) 1.
5 Agamben (n 2).
6 G Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (first published 1995, D Heller-Roazen tr, Stanford University Press 1998).
7 C Schmitt, *Dictatorship* (first published 1921, M Hielzl and G Ward tr, Polity Press 2013).
8 Agamben (n 2) 41.
9 Agamben (n 2) 1–2.
10 Agamben (n 2) 39.
11 Agamben (n 2) 25.
12 Agamben (n 2).
13 Agamben (n 2) 24.
14 Agamben (n 2) 21.
15 Agamben (n 2) 23.

subjective, not objective, phenomenon.[16] Autocracy, Agamben postulates, is a real threat to democracy if full executive powers are not returned in a timely manner to the usual mechanisms of a democratic government.[17] However, it must be noted that democracies employ the state of exception frequently. This is exemplified historically not just by totalitarian regimes such as Hitler's Germany,[18] but also by democratic ones, such as the Weimar Republic.[19]

The tragedy of al-Qaeda's 2001 terrorist[20] attack on the World Trade Center irrevocably affected the world. This momentous event escalated the War on Terror to a 'global civil war'[21] and created the 'necessity' for a state of exception. In effect, the state of exception denotes a situational emergency where usual faculties of law and judicial process are suspended and superseded by the emergency itself. In this scenario, a central figure or organisational entity determines the exceptional status of the state (when a state of exception can be declared), usually during crises such as war, and as such suspends proper legal processes to exclusively wield authority. This conception has its origins in the Roman notion of *auctoritas*.[22] In effect, the declarant of a state of exception becomes an arbiter of power largely devoid of official legal strictures. In this context, an organisational entity or central figure determines the exceptional status of the state. Agamben declares that the state of exception 'constitutes rather a kenomatic state, an emptiness of law'.[23]

Agamben's *State of Exception* persuasively analyses historical events from Roman to contemporary epochs, from totalitarian regimes, dictatorships, and terrorist organisations to democracies in his erudite examination of the state of exception as a paradigm in and of itself. A discussion by Agamben of former US President George W Bush's USA Patriot Act[24] exemplifies democratic instances of the state of exception in response to 9/11. In particular, the discussion notes how these acts can be classified as state-sanctioned vigilantism, in which citizens in a democracy can be deprived of their citizenship and human rights, through the example of captured Taliban agents in Afghanistan 'not [enjoying] the status of POWs as defined by the Geneva Convention'.[25]

---

16 Agamben (n 2) 31.
17 Agamben (n 2) 20.
18 Agamben (n 2) 2.
19 Agamben (n 2) 15.
20 'Foreign Terrorist Organisations' (*US Department of State*) <www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/ other/des/123085.htm> accessed 18 June 2014.
21 Agamben (n 2) 2.
22 Agamben (n 2) 74–88.
23 Agamben (n 2) 6.
24 Agamben (n 2) 3.
25 Agamben (n 2).

Advocating American strength in the face of adversity and declaring a War on Terror[26] was the beginning of a chain of security-driven events initiated by Bush in 2001 that eventually lead to the 2011 death of 9/11's chief architect, Osama bin Laden, during President Barack Obama's Operation Neptune Spear.[27] Although hailed by Obama himself[28] and others[29] as an affirmative action taken for the purposes of security, the killing of bin Laden – discussed later in this chapter – raised questions regarding its legality and ethics.[30] The killing also highlighted ways in which the contemporary United States could be seen as existing, to a degree, within its own state of exception.

'Batman is everywhere. And if he didn't exist, well . . . I guess we'd just have to invent him':[31] vigilantism and *Batman Incorporated*

It is within the real world context of the state of exception that we find the fictional text *Batman Incorporated* and contemplate the character of Batman as an agent who enacts the state of exception. Batman is an anti-heroic vigilante and superhero whose narrative 'highlights the inadequacies of the present [real world] system in the same way a test case might highlight the inadequacies of law.'[32]

During the 13 years since 9/11, comic book superheroes have gained greater popularity and worldwide exposure, primarily through motion pictures but also graphic literature. Arguably, one reason for the rise in

---

26 'President Declares "Freedom at War with Fear"' (*George W Bush White House Archives*, 20 September 2001) <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/print/20010920-8.html> accessed 20 March 2014.

27 M Phillips, 'Osama Bin Laden Dead' (*The White House Blog*, 2 May 2011) <www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2011/05/02/osama-bin-laden-dead> accessed 14 June 2013.

28 Ibid.

29 'Celebrating the Death of Osama bin Laden' (*Time Magazine*, 2 May 2011) <www.time.com/time/photogallery/0,29307,2068860,00.html> accessed 18 July 2013; O Bowcott, 'Osama bin Laden: US Responds to Questions about Killing's Legality' (*The Guardian*, 4 May 2011) <www.theguardian.com/world/2011/may/03/osama-bin-laden-killing-legality> accessed 18 March 2014; KH Govern, 'Operation Neptune Spear: Was Killing Bin Laden a Legitimate Objective?' in C Finkelstein, J David Ohlin and A Altman (eds), *Targeted Killings: Law and Morality in an Asymmetrical World* (Oxford University Press 2012) 348; D Wallace, 'Operation Neptune's [sic] Spear: The Lawful Killing of Osama Bin Laden' (2012) 45 *Israel Law Review* 367.

30 DA Green, 'Law, Justice and the Death of Osama bin Laden' (*New Statesman*, 2 May 2011) <www.newstatesman.com/blogs/david-allen-green/2011/05/bin-laden-osama> accessed 14 June 2013; R Lambert, 'What if Bin Laden had Stood Trial?' (*The Guardian*, 3 May 2011) <www.newstatesman.com/blogs/david-allen-green/2011/05/bin-laden-osama> accessed 14 June 2013.

31 Morrison, *Deluxe Edition* (n 3) 118.

32 Bainbridge (n 1) 462.

popularity of superheroes is the reciprocal relationship between ficti-tious and real worlds.[33] Fictional superheroes in the real global world of 'civil war'[34] facilitate a conversation between contemporaneous real world events vis à vis crime (domestic and international), justice, vigilantism and ethics. This is a reciprocal relationship; life mirrors art and art mirrors life.

Such a position is supported by academic Jason Bainbridge's premise that 'consideration of the superhero becomes a consideration of the relationship between law and justice – another way of thinking discursively about the law'.[35] The latter enables conversation with real world ideas through a fic-tional mode; the debut of *Iron Man*, for example, sees the character's arms trading backstory and violent origin both influenced and galvanised respec-tively by Middle Eastern extremists,[36] whilst *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* confronts contemporary corruption in US politics.[37] Where Batman is concerned, Christopher Nolan's *Dark Knight* trilogy[38] interrogates and reflects contemporary issues such as the Global Financial Crisis, the threat of domestic terrorism, and societal anxieties that have manifested since 9/11.

Several narratives released since Batman's 1939 creation[39] draw attention to lawless aspects of the character's practice,[40] as well as scholarship exam-ining the role of Batman as a representation of vigilantism,[41] prominent popular culture figurehead,[42] and significantly as an enactor of a state of exception.[43] The value of a particular exploration of real world vigilan-tism – and, by extension, its relation to implementing and maintaining an exceptional state – in a popular culture text such as Batman is that the popularity and wide circulation of the text suggests that the comic both articulates contemporary concerns about this practice and identifies the ways in which it has been reconciled in the popular imagination.

The narrative of *Batman Incorporated* follows the formation of an eponymous global peacekeeping effort under the leadership of the Dark

---

33 G Morrison, *Supergods: Our World in the Age of the Superhero* (Jonathan Cape 2011).

34 Agamben (n 2) 3.

35 Bainbridge (n 1) 457.

36 J Favreau (dir), *Iron Man* (Paramount Pictures 2008).

37 A Russo and J Russo (dirs), *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (Walt Disney Stu-dios Motion Pictures 2014).

38 C Nolan (dir), *Batman Begins* (Warner Bros 2005); C Nolan (dir), *The Dark Knight* (Warner Bros 2008); C Nolan (dir), *The Dark Knight Rises* (Warner Bros 2012).

39 B Kane and B Finger, *Detective Comics #27* (Detective Comics, Inc 1939).

40 See eg, E Brubaker and G Rucka, *Gotham Central: In the Line of Duty* (DC Comics 2011); G Johns, *Batman: Earth One* (DC Comics 2012).

41 Morrison (n 33).

42 W Brooker, *Hunting the Dark Knight: Twenty-First Century Batman* (IB Tauris 2012).

43 T McGowan, 'The Exceptional Darkness of *The Dark Knight*' (2009) 51 *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media* <www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc51.2009/darkKnight-Kant/text.html> accessed 11 June 2014.

Knight (hereafter referred to as 'Incorporated' or the 'Incorporated initiative'). Its purpose is to combat crime in almost every country worldwide by soliciting members from its international contributors, including Japan,[44] France,[45] China[46] and Australia.[47] All international agents fall under the aegis of Batman himself, operating centrally out of Gotham City.

The Incorporated initiative's chief antagonist is a terrorist network named Leviathan. The network utilises brainwashing, suicide bombers, child soldiers and religiously-informed symbolism to exert violence ostensibly against Incorporated and the world at large, preaching a campaign of anarchy and the overthrowing of the social order.[48] Their leader, Talia al Ghul, is of Middle Eastern descent.[49]

The war between Incorporated and Leviathan escalates and triggers a destructive battle in Gotham that kills Batman's son[50] and destroys most of Wayne Tower.[51] Subsequently, though Batman defeats Leviathan, Incorporated is officially outlawed and ostracised from both Gotham and the world at large, with police enforcing strict measures to halt Batman's crime-fighting efforts.[52] Incorporated enters liquidation, and the narrative concludes with Batman resuming his vigilante protection of Gotham alone.[53] Despite Incorporated's failure, the potential exists for Batman to revive the initiative in the future.[54]

The discourse in the current chapter, on *Batman Incorporated*'s narrative, is situated within the concept of the state of exception. It proposes that Batman enacts his own state of exception through vigilantism. Despite its problematic nature, vigilantism is not necessarily immoral or unethical. Indeed, it may be construed as a legitimate response to a vacuum in lawful agency, one that has perhaps more ethics than real-world scenarios, including those constructed by Barack Obama's Operation Neptune Spear.

The body of literature on vigilantism offers a plethora of definitions and interpretations. The antecedent of the term 'vigilante' is from the Spanish word *vigilante* meaning 'watchman, or guardian'.[55] Some assert that this positive connotation has shifted to a more sinister contemporary

---

44 Morrison, *Deluxe Edition* (n 3) 20.
45 Morrison, *Deluxe Edition* (n 3) 125.
46 Morrison, *Deluxe Edition* (n 3) 128.
47 Morrison, *Deluxe Edition* (n 3) 129.
48 Morrison, *Demon Star* (n 3) 77.
49 Morrison, *Demon Star* (n 3) 55.
50 Morrison, *Gotham's Most Wanted* (n 3) 50.
51 Morrison, *Gotham's Most Wanted* (n 3) 113.
52 Morrison, *Gotham's Most Wanted* (n 3) 80.
53 Morrison, *Gotham's Most Wanted* (n 3) 138.
54 Morrison, *Gotham's Most Wanted* (n 3) 204.
55 B Newby, 'Watchful Guardian or Dark Knight? The Vigilante as a Social Actor' (*International Foundation for Protection Officers*, July 2012) <www.ifpo.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Newby_Vigilante.pdf> accessed 19 June 2014, 1.

definition representing the transition from 'a heroic, selfless person' to 'a darker, more dangerous character'.[56] Brian Newby, in his study of the multifaceted nature of real world vigilantism historically and contemporaneously, proposes that one reason people are drawn to vigilantism is its capacity as an answer to 'a cause that they do not see being addressed through institutional channels'.[57] Vigilantes (both real and fictional) believe the 'current social structure to be ineffective in resolving a specific social problem'[58] that has been neglected; 'not in a lack of recognition of the problem, but in a lack of action against it'.[59] Jared Keller, in his informative study of vigilantism particularly in comic books, records the 'popular conception of vigilantism is of individual citizens "taking the law into their own hands" where conventional law enforcement is perceived to be absent or ineffective'.[60] Keller confesses he has been 'an avid reader and collector of comic books' and this fascination is the 'creative basis for examining vigilantism as a historical, political, and social occurrence'.[61] He further defines the comic book 'vigilante' through a historical lens as:

> [A] costumed adventurer who exhibits the characteristics of an anti-hero, or 'a good guy who does bad things for the right reasons.' In typical dichotomy between good and evil that characterizes the classic superhero stories of the 1940s and 1950s, the costumed vigilante lies somewhere in between the two, using violent methods and constantly forced to escape pursuit from regular law enforcement.[62]

Batman has been interpreted as the original anti-hero of the superhero genre 'employing illegal and morally dubious tactics (like torture and intrusive surveillance), instilling fear in his enemies, and displaying a strong willingness to work outside the law to capture criminals'.[63] The character has even been likened to 'a terrorist who fights criminals'[64] and who enacts a state of exception reflective of real world situations:

> Because of its non-contractual and public nature, vigilantism necessarily appeals to a different breed of sovereignty rooted in its reaction to crisis. Vigilantism . . . consists of violent acts that stand 'outside of

---

56 Ibid 2.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid 4.
59 Ibid.
60 J Keller, '*Pax Vigilanticus*: Vigilantism, Order, and Law in the Nineteenth Century American West' (*Wesleyan University*, April 2009) <wesscholar.wesleyan.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1241&context=etd_hon_theses> accessed 20 June 2014, 3.
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid 3–4.
63 Ibid 4.
64 Ibid.

the formal boundaries of an established socio-political order which, however, are intended by the violators to defend that order from some form of subversion.' In this sense, the nature of vigilante sovereignty closely resembles the paradigm of government stemming from the idea of a state of exception ... as basis for 'emergency powers' in constitutional governments.[65]

In contrast, academics Scott Vollum and Cary D Adkinson represent Batman in a more positive light suggesting that this vigilante label originates from Batman '[fighting] for justice on his own terms and in the context of what he considers to be just'[66] without the impediments of the law.

At an early age, Bruce Wayne witnessed Joe Chill murder his parents. As an adult, Wayne responded by dedicating his life to leading a campaign against crime no matter the personal or public cost.[67] Wayne styled himself as the Batman, a figure solely concerned with answering the criminal element of Gotham City. This answer appears in the form of physical violence and psychological tactics to combat the city's antagonists without any form of official legal process. In this reading, Batman is positioned more heroically: the unwilling victim of a lawless murder, transformed and imbued with agency. Batman is arguably driven by ethical precepts. He is bound by a non-lethal code and at times co-operates with Gotham City's Police Department, the latter often occurring within a paradox of simultaneously condoning and condemning the Batman's vigilantism.[68]

Readers that legitimise Batman's vigilante status represent him as a self-proclaimed ethical defender of innocents who utilises violence judiciously and justly, one who uses 'fear on those who prey upon the fearful'.[69] In the fictional world of Gotham, no sanctioned power validates Batman's campaign; his existence answers the lawlessness and ineffectual and corrupt police enforcement.[70] In the character's mind, legal strictures are secondary to the moral imperatives, 'Batman refuses to accept the official definition of law and takes it upon himself to become an arbiter of justice, deriving the sense of law from within himself'.[71]

Batman's self-appointed guardianship is articulated in the informative work of Cassandra Sharp. Sharp characterises a vigilante as one who,

65 Ibid 153, citing HJ Rosenbaum and PC Sedberg, 'Vigilantism: An Analysis of Establishment Violence'.
66 S Vollum and CD Adkinson, 'The Portrayal of Crime and Justice in the Comic Book Superhero Mythos' (2003) 10 *Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture* 96, 101.
67 F Miller, *Batman: Year One* (DC Comics 1988); Morrison, *Deluxe Edition* (n 3) 125.
68 Brubaker and Rucka (n 40).
69 Nolan, *Batman Begins* (n 38).
70 See eg, Miller (n 67).
71 Vollum and Adkinson (n 66) 102.

'autocratically assumes responsibility for societal power and authority on the basis that not only do circumstances warrant such exceptional action, but that popular sovereignty demands it'.[72] The notions of 'popular sovereignty' and vigilante justice in democracies including the United States are interrelated.[73] Underpinning popular sovereignty is the belief that 'the people' are the legitimate basis of government and thus, 'the people possess the right to reform, alter, or abolish their government at any time'.[74] Some interpretations go further and advocate that American vigilantism is enshrined in the US Constitution, cited explicitly in the Declaration of Independence.[75] These views work towards legitimating Batman's vigilantism as well as popular conceptions of vigilantism itself.

For Batman, it is a moral imperative to engage in social action, to enact 'popular sovereignty' and to assume responsibility in extraordinary circumstances to serve justice and Gotham's beleaguered citizenry who out of 'necessity' desire his presence at a time of crisis rooted in an absence of effective law. This paralegal guardianship gives readers an experience of 'justice' achieved at the expense of the legal and judicial constraints that the real world justice system enforces.

'An endless circle that feeds upon itself':[76] Batman, aporia and exceptional justice

Necessity acts as the platform for Batman's moral imperative; he is *needed*, because he believes the law has failed. This failure is at least implicitly confirmed by the law itself; Police Commissioner James Gordon, one of Gotham's few effective law enforcers, becomes a member of Incorporated, wearing a Bat-symbol badge and asking if his membership, 'makes [him] Batman, too'.[77] This suggests a measure of the law within Gotham has acknowledged its lack of efficacy and ceded to Batman's necessitous campaign. Indeed, Todd McGowan analyses that necessitous aspect and Batman's explicit connection to Agamben's work,[78] the state of exception through Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight* film,[79] and the use of Batman as 'a figure of exception'[80] and the issues inherent to that aspect.

72 C Sharp, '"Riddle Me This . . .?" Would the World Need Superheroes if the Law Could Actually Deliver "Justice"?' (2012) 16 *Law Text Culture* 353, 360.
73 CG Fritz, 'Popular Sovereignty, Vigilantism and the Constitutional Right of Revolution' (1994) 63 *Pacific Historical Review* 39.
74 Ibid 39.
75 Keller (n 60) 158.
76 Morrison, *Deluxe Edition* (n 3) 225.
77 Morrison, *Deluxe Edition* (n 3) 119.
78 McGowan (n 43).
79 Nolan, *The Dark Knight* (n 38).
80 T McGowan, *The Fictional Christopher Nolan* (University of Texas Press 2012) 126.

Batman embodies a fundamental aporia – an endless contradiction between law, existing to be upheld but still failing at achieving justice, and necessity superseding the law in order to achieve justice – by using Incorporated to enact a global state of exception. Batman exemplifies the state of exception by acting as a central entity exerting supreme power that supersedes legality. McGowan, through application of Agamben's paradigm to *The Dark Knight*,[81] offers that the state of exception enables one to 'realise the justice that ordinary law is incapable of realising'.[82]

Batman's moral code advocates non-lethal tactics and an ardent refusal to kill in order to maintain an affirmative status quo; this, at least, is a semi-adherence to some form of juridical upholding, rather than pure self-obsessed goal attainment. A central tenet of Batman's *modus operandi* is the restoration of order, despite the character's own refusal of complete adherence to such order; much like the ouroboros theme and imagery that permeates the comic book narrative,[83] Incorporated's aporia presents its own endless contradictory paradigm.

Batman breaks the law, by self-admission, to protect it; this exemplifies the state of exception's topological form relying on 'being-outside, and yet belonging'[84] to the structure of the law, with the figure declaring the exception being 'logically defined in his being by the exception' itself.[85] Batman's international network answerable only to him[86] and explicit declaration of 'war' with Leviathan[87] can be seen as an exertion of sovereignty, creating an entity acting with autonomy[88] primarily concerned with 'security of the nation and its citizens'.[89] In this manner, Incorporated almost becomes its own nation-state, a figure exclusively declaring a global state of exception that self-legitimises a campaign against terrorism.

Despite a lack of legal legitimisation of Incorporated's actions, Batman perceives this autocracy as wholly beneficial; eliminating Leviathan will bring a measure of peace in the fictional world much the same way the campaign against al-Qaeda and the killing of Osama bin Laden works towards real-world peace.[90]

On 1 May 2011, US President Barack Obama authorised Operation Neptune Spear, a military incursion which resulted in the death of Osama bin

---

81 Nolan, *The Dark Knight* (n 38).
82 McGowan (n 43).
83 Morrison, *Deluxe Edition* (n 3) 73, 79, 225.
84 Agamben (n 2) 35.
85 Agamben (n 2) 35.
86 Morrison, *Deluxe Edition* (n 3) 121.
87 Morrison, *Deluxe Edition* (n 3) 125.
88 R Jackson, *Sovereignty* (Polity Press 2007).
89 Ibid 136.
90 Phillips (n 27).

Laden. The operation saw a team of US Navy SEALs crossing international borders into the city of Abbottabad, Pakistan. The team conducted a raid on bin Laden's high-security compound, located by US intelligence, killing the leader of al-Qaeda under cover of darkness. Obama declared that bin Laden's death was a positive step and 'the most significant achievement to date in [the United States'] effort to defeat al-Qaeda'.[91]

Reaction to the killing of bin Laden outside the White House was polarised; one school of thought argued the killing was rationalised and necessary given the danger bin Laden posed to the rest of the world,[92] especially in light of the myriad issues a criminal trial would present to both the public and the prosecutors.[93] Kevin H Govern opined bin Laden's death was warranted and, 'in theory', no further amendments to current international jurisdiction laws would be necessary to execute similar tactical terrorist neutralising operations in future.[94] Conversely, *New Statesman* legal correspondent David Allen Green believed the operation could 'perhaps [be] an unlawful one',[95] while researcher and academic Robert Lambert noted the killing, amongst other elements, was a loss of 'moral authority'[96] in the ongoing War on Terror. The blurred legal and ethical boundaries stemming from defining in which manner bin Laden was intercepted and killed by the United States – that is, whether the killing was part of a legally-defined 'armed conflict' or as an assassination in its own right[97] – make it difficult to reach a determination regarding unlawful behaviour.

Irrespective of Operation Neptune Spear's definitive legitimacy, Obama's order opened his administration up to claims that he had acted illegally; in effect, as a vigilante '[fighting] for justice on his own terms and in the context of what he considers to be just'.[98]

Consider for a moment surface parallels between the actions taken by the Obama administration and the fictional Incorporated initiative.

---

91 Phillips (n 27).

92 D Searcey, 'Killing Was Legal Under US and International Law, Many Experts Say' (*The Wall Street Journal*, 6 May 2011) <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424 052748704810504576305470980463628> accessed 18 March 2014; Wallace (n 29).

93 JS Chanen 'If I Represented Bin Laden . . .' (*ABA Journal*, 1 September 2007) <www.abajournal.com/magazine/article/if_i_represented_bin_laden/> accessed 20 March 2014.

94 Govern (n 29) 348.

95 Green (n 30).

96 Lambert (n 30).

97 M Allen, 'Osama bin Laden Raid Yields Trove of Computer Data' (*Politico*, 2 May 2011) <www.politico.com/news/stories/0511/54151.html> accessed 24 March 2014; M Apuzzo and A Goldman, 'Bin Laden was Unarmed when SEALs Stormed Room' (*The Salt Lake Tribune*, 3 May 2011) <www.sltrib.com/sltrib/world/51742983-68/bin-laden-seals-compound.html.csp?page=1> accessed 2 April 2014; Govern (n 29); APV Rogers and D McGoldrick, 'Assassination and Targeted Killing – The Killing of Osama bin Laden' (2011) 60 *International and Comparative Law Quarterly* 778.

98 Vollum and Adkinson (n 66) 101.

A Western figure executes an order or initiative as an autocratic decision (in terms of the order taking place with explicit assistance of other entities). An argument is made for the order being in and of itself without legal legitimacy. The order supersedes all other concerns, legal, juridical and moral, for a self-admitted affirmative act by its executor (in several ways, representing a kind of contemporaneous *iustitium*).[99] This order, once executed, draws the ire of many and opens questions as to the nature of its legality and, oppositionally, whether its architect is not a cure worse than the symptom.

Aspects of academic Jason Bainbridge's body of work involve using superhero texts to interrogate real world law. Because of their unique position, Bainbridge believes superheroes are able to '[put] into question whether the law itself can be proactive',[100] rather than its realistic reactionary nature towards criminal acts, through an idea of 'premodern law'[101] legitimising superhero justice that ignores legality 'through [a] "direct line" to the truth and lack of accountability'.[102] While this does not legitimise the real world consequences, if such characters did exist it goes towards legitimising them within the fictional narrative and presents a springboard for beginning the comparison between the fact and the fantasy. The latter is emphasised by Bainbridge's statement that 'a consideration of the superhero becomes a consideration of the relationship between law and justice',[103] with belief that such narratives are uniquely positioned to do so.

Superhero texts and Batman texts in particular rely on 'the human ability to create forms that are larger than humanity itself' and that allow us to relate to the form's actions, 'to struggle with and repossess [them] as [our] own agency'.[104] Batman's realism in comparison to other superheroes makes the character a popular and more effective analytical lens for contemporary issues. Researcher Liam Burke notes, '[He's] an average guy . . . wealthy [and] intelligent, at the peak of human fitness, but an average guy nonetheless'.[105] Batman's fictional texts aid an understanding of contemporary acts and events through a paradigm based on but

99 See Agamben (n 2) 41.
100 Bainbridge (n 1) 465.
101 Bainbridge (n 1) 457.
102 Bainbridge (n 1) 457–58.
103 Bainbridge (n 1) 457.
104 S Carney, 'The Function of the Superhero at the Present Time' (2005) 6 *Iowa Journal of Cultural Studies* 100.
105 A Davies, 'Why Comic Book Superhero Batman is Still Popular after 75 Years' (*ABC Radio National*, 20 June 2014) <www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/drive/why-batman-is-still-so-popular-after-75-years/5535986> accessed 20 June 2014.

not entirely adherent to laws and strictures of reality; Burke cites Batman's use as a 'social barometer'[106] and that superhero comics can be 'an instantaneous reaction to what's happening in the culture ... they sort of respond symptomatically to the culture'.[107]

The *Batman Incorporated* narrative acts as both a symptom and interrogation of real world law and practices whilst mirroring elements of both encountered in history. The text is situated within a post-9/11 attitude through content, images and linguistic context; the narrative deals with a global extremist network in Leviathan (explicitly referred to as a 'terrorist organisation')[108] similar to the Obama administration combating al-Qaeda. Both networks launch worldwide attacks, utilising succinct nomenclatures evoking a symbolic apropos: Leviathan as a reference to Thomas Hobbes's work regarding the state of nature and war against all[109] (emphasised through the fictional Leviathan's campaign of anarchy against the established social order);[110] al-Qaeda as 'the Base' or 'the Foundation'[111] from which to initiate a global campaign. Batman's army of robotic Batmen (named with the portmanteau 'ro-bats') built to enter high-danger zones for combat[112] target crime in a similar fashion to the United States' real world use of drone strikes.[113] Several images bear similarities to hallmarks of the War on Terror, particularly a series of panels depicting the destruction of Wayne Tower[114] as a parallel to the fall of the World Trade Center.

One of the biggest points of comparison is the sovereign executors of power: the fictional Batman Incorporated, and the real world Obama administration. Headed by and answerable to a Western – specifically, American – figure of authority, overseen from the United States and executing worldwide

---

106 Ibid.
107 Ibid.
108 Morrison, *Gotham's Most Wanted* (n 3) 64.
109 T Hobbes, *Leviathan* (first published 1651, Everyman's Library 1965).
110 Morrison, *Demon Star* (n 3) 77.
111 G Foden, 'What is the Origin of the Name al-Qaida?' (*The Guardian*, 24 August 2002) <www.theguardian.com/books/2002/aug/24/alqaida.sciencefictionfantasyandhorror> accessed 16 June 2014.
112 Morrison, *Deluxe Edition* (n 3) 205.
113 For a further exploration of the use of drone strikes in relation to comic books, see Chapter 12 in this book. See also, K DeYoung, 'Judge Backs Obama Administration on Secrecy of Targeted Killings of Terrorism Suspects' (*The Washington Post*, 3 January 2013) <www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/2013/01/02/83799c18-5515-11e2-8b9e-dd877j594efc_story.html?hpid=z3> accessed 7 June 2013; C Savage, 'Pentagon Says US Citizens with Terrorism Ties can be Targeted in Strikes' (*The New York Times*, 22 February 2012) <http://atwar.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/02/22/pentagon-says-u-s-citizens-with-terrorism-ties-can-be-targeted-in-strikes/?ref=world> accessed 7 June 2013.
114 Morrison, *Gotham's Most Wanted* (n 3) 113.

activities motivated and justified as necessary and for the sake of justice; existing, for all intents and purposes, within their own self-defined states of exception. Both entities and their respective sovereignties would fall under what Stephen Krasner terms an 'organised hypocrisy',[115] their perceived lawless actions 'legitimated . . . [by] the need to preserve international stability'.[116] Implicitly, both figures of authority believe the world deserves a firmer, autocratic hand for the sake of security rather than a more lawful, potentially less swiftly effective approach.

Interrogations of justice and real world events by superhero texts are referred to by Bainbridge as texts '[that present] an alternative or corollary to modernity'[117] through utilising a fictional 'world founded on irrationality'.[118] This allows the texts to engage in 'a process of estrangement by which to highlight the inadequacies'[119] perceived in the real world by conversing with them through a fictional mode. *Batman Incorporated*, as a symptom of contemporary events that converses with and interrogates them, offers an alternative interpretation of the affirmative guardianship that both Batman and Obama identify with. As the enactor of a state of exception, a 'figure of necessity'[120] existing within 'a zone in which application [of the norm] is suspended',[121] Batman, by all accounts, 'has no limits'.[122] Devoid of boundary, Incorporated offers a dark alternative: what if Batman, and not Leviathan, is interpreted as the force of terror?

The *Batman Incorporated* narrative questions Batman's form of affirmative protection; Leviathan views Batman as an impediment towards their newer world order free of contemporary Western yoke. Batman sees himself and the Incorporated initiative as a necessary 'force of law without law',[123] believing the world is ill-equipped to deal with the nature of Leviathan's threat. To reinforce an oppositional viewpoint, Batman even refers to fashioning Incorporated into 'a terror made of shadows and flapping wings'[124] as an ominous, indistinct presence without legal oversight.

Incorporated effectively declares a state of exception by self-appointing itself as an enforcer against Leviathan outside juridical boundaries; in effect, Incorporated adopts a state of being 'devoid of law'[125]

115 SJ Krasner, 'Abiding Sovereignty' (2001) 22 *International Political Science Review* 229, 242.
116 Ibid.
117 Bainbridge (n 1) 462.
118 Bainbridge (n 1) 42.
119 Bainbridge (n 1) 42.
120 Agamben (n 2) 28.
121 Agamben (n 2) 31.
122 Nolan, *The Dark Knight* (n 38).
123 Nolan, *The Dark Knight* (n 38) 39.
124 Morrison, *Deluxe Edition* (n 3) 130.
125 Morrison, *Deluxe Edition* (n 3) 50.

within 'a zone of anomie in which all legal determinations . . . are deactivated',[126] with such determinations solely executed by Incorporated's own sovereignty and oversight. The absolutist policies with which Incorporated brazenly pursues Leviathan internationally implicitly defy the individual laws of national sovereignties for the purpose of sustaining Incorporated's own sovereign authority, with the justification that these acts are undertaken with the intent of achieving justice and security.

Taking Incorporated as existing under a state of exception that, at the very least, self-legitimises its campaign, problems arise. Agamben notes that a state of exception implies the production of 'a situation in which the emergency becomes the rule, and the very distinction between peace and war (and between foreign and civil war) becomes impossible'.[127] This posits a question: if Incorporated had not been liquidated, and had instead merely defeated Leviathan, how long would Batman's necessitous edict have lasted? How long could that state of *exception* exist for, even if the primary catalyst of the exception were removed?

Conclusion

Superhero comic books offer expediency towards justice[128] of which the real world is either deficient or devoid. By representing greater efficacy in comparison to real world justice, the texts '[consider] the relationship between law and justice'[129] by presenting and interrogating a world much like ours but 'founded on irrationality'.[130]

Narratives like *Batman Incorporated* evidence the interaction between fictional and real world paradigms. Though the narrative refrains from drawing a definitive conclusion as to the efficacy, usefulness, morality or deservedness of exceptional tactics to attain justice, it does offer a pyrrhic outlook regarding its implementation of a state of exception, leading to problems greater than the symptom. Terrorism may have been thwarted by Incorporated, but the damage to Batman, the Incorporated initiative and the world is tremendous in comparison to the gains brought by Leviathan's downfall.

The *Batman Incorporated* text upholds Bainbridge's notion that superhero narratives 'highlight the inadequacies in the present system in the same way a test case might highlight the inadequacies in the law'.[131] Consider, then, *Batman Incorporated* as a test case that highlights the ineffectiveness of exceptional security; a state of exception might offer a figure

126 Morrison, *Deluxe Edition* (n 3) 50.
127 Agamben (n 2) 22.
128 Bainbridge (n 1) 458.
129 Bainbridge (n 1) 457.
130 Bainbridge (n 1) 462.
131 Bainbridge (n 1) 462.

of absolute authority, capable of circumventing the impediment of the law to achieve 'true justice' with the belief that such a state deserves autocratic governance. However, if the end result is a state devoid of law capable of protecting the law, the exception raises questions regarding the symptom of necessity that could prove more troublesome than the opposition it answers. This coincides with Agamben's appropriated maxim: *Necessitas habet non legem* (necessity has no law).[132]

Superhero comic books occupy a unique position in their ability to reflect and converse with the epoch in which they're published. As an examination of the interrelationship between real and fictional worlds, *Batman Incorporated*'s representation of the state of exception interrogates applications of justice through grounding in contemporaneous events, averring a world where the justice we need may not be what we deserve.

Acknowledgements

Bibliography

Agamben G, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (first published 1995, D Heller-Roazen tr, Stanford University Press 1998).

Agamben G, *State of Exception* (first published 2003, K Attell tr, University of Chicago Press 2005).

Allen M, 'Osama bin Laden Raid Yields Trove of Computer Data' (*Politico*, 2 May 2011) <www.politico.com/news/stories/0511/54151.html> accessed 24 March 2014.

Apuzzo M and Goldman A, 'Bin Laden was Unarmed when SEALs Stormed Room' (*The Salt Lake Tribune*, 3 May 2011) <www.sltrib.com/sltrib/world/51742983-68/bin-laden-seals-compound.html.csp?page=1> accessed 2 April 2014.

Bainbridge J, '"This is the Authority. This Planet is Under Our Protection" – An Exegesis of Superheroes' Interrogations of Law' (2007) 3 *Law, Culture and the Humanities* 455.

Bowcott O, 'Osama bin Laden: US Responds to Questions about Killing's Legality' (*The Guardian*, 4 May 2011) <www.theguardian.com/world/2011/may/03/osama-bin-laden-killing-legality> accessed 2 April 2014.

Brooker W, *Hunting the Dark Knight: Twenty-First Century Batman* (IB Tauris 2012).

132 Agamben (n 2) 1.

Brubaker E and Rucka G, *Gotham Central: In the Line of Duty* (DC Comics 2011).

Carney S, 'The Function of the Superhero at the Present Time' (2005) 6 *Iowa Cultural Studies Journal* 100.

'Celebrating the Death of Osama bin Laden' (*Time Magazine*, 2 May 2011) <www.time.com/time/photogallery/0,29307,2068860,00.html> accessed 18 July 2013.

Chanen JS, 'If I Represented Bin Laden . . .' (*ABA Journal*, 1 September 2007) <www.abajournal.com/magazine/article/if_i_represented_bin_laden/> accessed 20 March 2014.

Davies A, 'Why Comic Book Superhero Batman is Still Popular After 75 Years' (*ABC Radio National*, 20 June 2014) <www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/drive/why-batman-is-still-so-popular-after-75-years/5535986> accessed 20 June 2014.

DeYoung K, 'Judge backs Obama Administration on Secrecy of Targeted Killings of Terrorism Suspects' (*The Washington Post*, 3 January 2013) <www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/2013/01/02/83799c18-5515-11e2-8b9e-dd8773594efc_story.html?hpid=z3> accessed 7 June 2013.

Favreau J (dir), *Iron Man* (Paramount Pictures 2008).

Foden G, 'What is the Origin of the Name al-Qaida?' (*The Guardian*, 24 August 2002) <www.theguardian.com/books/2002/aug/24/alqaida.sciencefictionfantasyandhorror> accessed 16 June 2014.

'Foreign Terrorist Organizations' (*US Department of State*) <www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/123085.htm> accessed 18 June 2014.

Fritz CG, 'Popular Sovereignty, Vigilantism and the Constitutional Right of Revolution' (1994) 63 *Pacific Historical Review* 39.

Govern KH, 'Operation Neptune Spear: Was Killing Bin Laden a Legitimate Objective?' in Finkelstein C, Ohlin JD and Altman A (eds), *Targeted Killings: Law and Morality in an Asymmetrical World* (Oxford University Press 2012).

Green DA, 'Law, Justice and the Death of Osama bin Laden' (*New Statesman*, 2 May 2011) <www.newstatesman.com/blogs/david-allen-green/2011/05/bin-laden-osama> accessed 14 June 2013.

Hobbes T, *Leviathan* (first published 1651, Everyman's Library 1965).

Jackson R, *Sovereignty* (Polity Press 2007).

Johns G, *Batman: Earth One* (DC Comics 2012).

Kane B and Finger B, *Detective Comics #27* (Detective Comics, Inc 1939).

Keller J, '*Pax Vigilanticus*: Vigilantism, Order, and Law in the Nineteenth Century American West' (*Wesleyan University*, April 2009) <wesscholar.wesleyan.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1241&context=etd_hon_theses> accessed 20 June 2014.

Krasner S J, 'Abiding Sovereignty' (2001) 22 *International Political Science Review* 229.

Lambert R, 'What if Bin Laden had Stood Trial?' (*The Guardian*, 3 May 2011) <www.newstatesman.com/blogs/david-allen-green/2011/05/bin-laden-osama> accessed 14 June 2013.

McGowan, T, 'The Exceptional Darkness of *The Dark Knight*' (2009) 51 *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media* <www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc51.2009/darkKnightKant/text.html> accessed 11 June 2014.

McGowan, T, *The Fictional Christopher Nolan* (University of Texas Press 2012).

Miller F, *Batman: Year One* (DC Comics 1988).

Morrison G, *Supergods: Our World in the Age of the Superhero* (Jonathan Cape 2011).

Morrison G, *Batman Incorporated: The Deluxe Edition* (DC Comics 2012).

Morrison G, *Batman Incorporated: Demon Star* (DC Comics 2013).

Morrison G, *Batman Incorporated: Gotham's Most Wanted* (DC Comics 2013).

Newby B, 'Watchful Guardian or Dark Knight? The Vigilante as a Social Actor' (*International Foundation for Protection Officers*, July 2012) <www.ifpo. org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Newby_Vigilante.pdf> accessed 19 June 2014.

Nolan C (dir), *Batman Begins* (Warner Bros 2005).

Nolan C (dir), *The Dark Knight* (Warner Bros 2008).

Nolan C (dir), *The Dark Knight Rises* (Warner Bros 2012).

Phillips M, 'Osama Bin Laden Dead' (*The White House Blog*, 2 May 2011) <www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2011/05/02/osama-bin-laden-dead> accessed 14 June 2013.

'President Declares "Freedom at War with Fear"' (*George W Bush White House Archives*, 20 September 2001) <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/ news/releases/2001/09/print/20010920-8.html> accessed 20 March 2014.

Rogers APV and McGoldrick D, 'Assassination and Targeted Killing – The Killing of Osama bin Laden' (2011) 60 *International and Comparative Law Quarterly* 778.

Russo A and Russo J (dirs), *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures 2014).

Savage C, 'Pentagon Says US Citizens with Terrorism Ties can be Targeted in Strikes' (*The New York Times*, 22 February 2012) <http://atwar.blogs.nytimes. com/2012/02/22/pentagon-says-u-s-citizens-with-terrorism-ties-can-be- targeted-in-strikes/?ref=world> accessed 7 June 2013.

Schmitt C, *Dictatorship* (first published 1921, Michael Hielzl and Graham Ward tr, Polity Press 2013).

Searcey D, 'Killing Was Legal Under US and International Law, Many Experts Say' (*The Wall Street Journal*, 6 May 2011) <http://online.wsj.com/news/arti- cles/SB10001424052748704810504576305470980463628> accessed 18 March 2014.

Sharp C, '"Riddle Me This . . ?" Would the World Need Superheroes if the Law Could Actually Deliver "Justice"?' (2012) 16 *Law Text Culture* 353.

Vollum S and Adkinson CD, 'The Portrayal of Crime and Justice in the Comic Book Superhero Mythos' (2003) 10 *Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture* 96.

Wallace D, 'Operation Neptune's [sic] Spear: The Lawful Killing of Osama Bin Laden' (2012) 45 *Israel Law Review* 367.

REFERENCE LIST

'About RS' 2015, *Afghanistan: Resolute Support*, viewed 10 October 2015,
    <http://www.rs.nato.int/mission.html>.

'Awards – 1993' 2001, *Toon Zone*, viewed 4 December 2015,
    <http://www.toonzone.net/shows/awards/1993.html>.

'Bush: Islamic radicalism doomed to fail' 2005, *CNN*, viewed 6 July 2015,
    <http://edition.cnn.com/2005/POLITICS/10/06/bush.transcript/>.

'Celebrating the death of Osama bin Laden' 2013, *Time Magazine*, viewed 18 July
    2013,
    <http://www.time.com/time/photogallery/0,29307,2068860,00.html>.

'Commander's corner' 2015, *Afghanistan: Resolute Support*, viewed 10 October 2015,
    <http://www.rs.nato.int/commanders-corner/index.php>.

'DC makes adventures of Superman #596 returnable', *ICv2*, viewed 26 November 2015,
    <http://www.icv2.com/articles/comics/view/714/dc-makes-adventures-
    superman-596-returnable>

'Rumsfeld praises UK Iraq role' 2003, *BBC News*, viewed 26 February 2015,
    <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/2999139.stm>.

'Status of world nuclear forces' 2015, *Federation of American Scientists*, viewed 26
    August 2015, <http://fas.org/issues/nuclear-weapons/status-world-nuclear-
    forces/>.

24 2001-2014, television series, Imagine Television, California.

28 days later 2002, motion picture, DNA Films, London.

American horror story 2011-2015, television series, 20th Century Fox Television, California.

American sniper 2014, motion picture, Malpaso Productions, California.

Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D. 2013-2015, television series, Marvel Television and Mutant Enemy Productions, California.

The Avengers 2012, motion picture, Marvel Studios, California.

The bat whispers 1930, motion picture, Joseph M. Schenck Productions for Art Cinema Corporation, New York.

Batman 1966-1968, television series, 20th Century Fox Television, California.

Batman 1989, motion picture, Warner Bros. Pictures, California.

Batman and Robin 1997, motion picture, Warner Bros. Pictures, California.

Batman begins 2005, motion picture, Warner Bros. Pictures, California.

Batman forever 1995, motion picture, Warner Bros. Pictures, California.

Batman returns 1992, motion picture, Warner Bros. Pictures, California.

Batman v. Superman: Dawn of justice 2016 [forthcoming], motion picture, Warner Bros. Pictures, California.

Batman: The animated series 1992-1995, television series, Warner Bros. Animation, California.

Batman: Arkham Asylum 2009, video game, Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment, Inc., California.

Batman: Arkham City 2011, video game, Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment, Inc., California.

Batman: Arkham Knight 2015, video game, Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment, Inc., California.

Batman: Arkham origins 2013, video game, Warner Bros. Interact Entertainment, Inc., California.

Batman: The dark knight returns, part 1 2012, motion picture, Warner Bros. Animation and DC Entertainment, California.

Batman: The dark knight returns, part 2 2013, motion picture, Warner Bros. Animation and DC Entertainment, California.

Batman: Gotham knight 2008, motion picture, Warner Bros. Animation & Syncopy Inc., California.

Batman: The Lazarus syndrome 1989, audio drama, BBC Radio 4, London, UK.

Batman: The movie 1966, motion picture, 20th Century Fox, California.

Battle: Los Angeles 2011, motion picture, Relativity Media, California.

Battlefield 3 2011, video game, Electronic Arts Digital Illusions Creative Entertainment AB, Stockholm, Sweden.

Battleship 2012, motion picture, Hasbro Studios & Bluegrass Films, California.

Battlestar Galactica 2003-2009, television series, Universal Television, California.

Buffy the vampire slayer 1997-2003, television series, Mutant Enemy Productions, California.

Call of duty: Modern warfare 2 2009, video game, Infinity Ward, California.

Call of duty: Modern warfare 3 2011, video game, Infinity Ward & Sledgehammer Games, California.

Call of duty 4: Modern warfare 2007, video game, Infinity Ward, California.

Captain America: The first Avenger 2011, motion picture, Marvel Studios, California.

Captain America: The Winter Soldier 2014, motion picture, Marvel Studios, California.

Cosmopolis 2012, motion picture, Canal+, Paris.

CSI: Crime scene investigation 2000-2015, television series, Jerry Bruckheimer Television, California.

Daredevil 2015, television series, Marvel Studios, California.

The dark knight 2008, motion picture, Warner Bros. Pictures, California.

The dark knight rises 2012, motion picture, Warner Bros. Pictures, California.

The darkest hour 2011, motion picture, Regency Enterprises and Bazelevs Company, California and Moscow.

Dirty Harry 1971, motion picture, Malpaso Productions, California.

Doctor who 1963-2015, television series, BBC Cymru Wales, Cardiff.

Dracula untold 2014, motion picture, Universal Pictures, California.

Fallout 4 2015, video game, Bethesda Game Studios, Maryland.

Fight club 1999, motion picture, Fox 2000 Pictures, California.

Fringe 2008-2013, television series, Bad Robot Productions, California.

G.I. Joe: Retaliation 2013, motion picture, Skydance Productions & di Bonaventura
        Pictures, California.

Green Zone 2010, motion picture, Working Title Films, London, UK.

Hannibal 2013-2015, television series, Living Dead Guy Productions, California.

Homeland 2011-2015, television series, Fox 21 Television Studios, California.

Hostel 2005, motion picture, Screen Gems, California.

The hurt locker 2008, motion picture, Voltage Pictures & Grosvenor Park Productions,
        California.

Iron Man 2008, motion picture, Marvel Studios and Fairview Entertainment, California.

Iron Man 3 2013, motion picture, Marvel Studios, California.

The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen 2003, motion picture, 20th Century Fox,
        California.

Mad Max: Fury road 2015, motion picture, Village Roadshow Pictures, Sydney.

Man of steel 2013, motion picture, Warner Bros. Pictures, California.

The mark of Zorro 1920, motion picture, Douglas Fairbanks Pictures Corporation, New York.

Medal of honor: Warfighter 2012, video game, Danger Close Games, California.

NCIS 2003-2015, television series, Belisarius Productions, California.

NYPD blue 1993-2005, television series, 20th Century Fox Television, California.

Person of interest 2011-2015, television series, Bad Robot Productions, California.

Quantico 2015, television series, ABC Studios, California.

Quantum of solace 2008, motion picture, Eon Productions, London, UK.

Saw 2004, motion picture, Evolution Entertainment & Twisted Pictures, California.

Sherlock 2010-2016, television series, BBC Cymru Wales, Cardiff.

Sherlock Holmes 2009, motion picture, Silver Pictures & Village Roadshow Pictures, California.

Sherlock Holmes: A game of shadows 2011, motion picture, Silver Pictures & Village Roadshow Pictures, California.

Skyfall 2012, motion picture, Eon Productions, London, UK.

Skyline 2010, motion picture, Relativity Media, California.

Spectre 2015, motion picture, Eon Productions, London, UK.

Spooks 2002-2011, television series, Kudos, London, UK.

Star trek 2009, motion pictures, Bad Robot Productions, California.

Star trek into darkness 2013, motion picture, Bad Robot Productions, California.

Star trek: Enterprise 2001-2005, television series, Paramount Network Television,
California.

Star trek: Enterprise season 3: In a time of war 2014, television series/Season 3 Blu-
Ray supplement, Paramount Network Television, California.

Suicide Squad 2016, motion picture, DC Entertainment, California.

Supernatural 2005-2015, television series, Warner Bros. Television, California.

Transformers 2007, motion picture, di Bonaventura Productions, California.

Transformers: Age of extinction 2014, motion picture, di Bonaventura Productions,
California.

Transformers: Dark of the Moon 2011, motion picture, di Bonaventura Pictures,
California.

Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen 2009, motion picture, DreamWorks Pictures & di
Bonaventura Pictures, California.

True blood 2008-2014, television series, Your Face Goes Here Entertainment,
California.

True detective season 1 2014, television series, Anonymous Content, California.

Underworld 2003, motion picture, Screen Gems, California.

Van Helsing 2004, motion picture, Universal Pictures, California.

War of the worlds 2005, motion picture, Amblin Entertainment, California.

The West Wing 1999-2006, television series, Warner Bros. Television, California.

The West Wing, season 3 special episode: Isaac and Ishmael 2001, television series
episode, Warner Bros. Television, California.

White House down 2013, motion picture, Centropolis Entertainment, California.

The woman in black 2012, motion picture, Cross Creek Pictures, California.

Zero dark thirty 2012, motion picture, Annapurna Pictures, California.

Ackerman, S. 2011, 'Frank Miller's Holy Terror is fodder for anti-Islam set', *Wired*,
viewed 13 February 2016, <http://www.wired.com/2011/09/holy-terror-frank-
miller/>.

Agamben, G. & Attell, K. [tr] 2005, *State of exception*, University of Chicago Press,
Chicago.

Aldiss, B.W. 1973, *Billion year spree: The true history of science fiction*, Doubleday,
New York.

Aldiss, B.W. & Wingrove, D. 1973, *Trillion year spree: The history of science fiction*,
Atheneum Books, New York.

Anolik, R.B. 2004, 'Introduction: The dark unknown', in Anolik, R.B. & Howard, D.L.,
The gothic other: Racial and social constructions in the literary imagination,
McFarland, North Carolina, pp. 1-14.

Apuleius & Lindsay, J. 1962, *The golden ass*, Indiana University Press, Indiana.

Apuzzo, M. and Goldman, A. 2011, 'Bin Laden was Unarmed when SEALs Stormed Room', *The Salt Lake Tribune*, viewed 2 April 2014, <http://www.sltrib.com/sltrib/world/51742983-68/bin-laden-seals-compound.html.csp?page=1>

Arata, S.D. 1990, 'The occidental tourist: "Dracula" and the anxiety of reverse colonization', *Victorian Studies*, vol. 33, no. 4, pp. 621-45.

Azzarello, B. & Bermejo, L. 2008, *Joker*, DC Comics, New York.

Bainbridge, J. 2007, '"This is *the Authority.* This planet is under our protection" – An exegesis of superheroes' interrogation of law', *Law, Culture and the Humanities*, vol. 3, pp. 455-76

Bakhtin, M.M., Holquist, M. & Emerson, C. 1981, *The dialogic imagination: Four essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, University of Texas Press, Texas.

Baldick, C. [ed] 1992, *The Oxford book of gothic tales*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Balladore-Pallieri, G. 1970, *Diritto costituzionale*, Giuffre, Milan.

Banks, I. 2013 [1984], *The wasp factory*, Abacus, London.

Barnett, D. 2011, 'Are Frank Miller's politics visible in his comics?', *The Guardian*, retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2011/nov/15/frank-miller-politics-visible-comics> accessed 9 July 2015.

Barthes, R. 1967, 'The death of the author', in Barthes, R. & Heath, S., *Image, Music, Text*, Hill and Wang, New York, pp. 142-48.

Bemong, N. & Borghart, P. 2010, 'Bakhtin's theory of the literary chronotope: Reflections, applications, perspectives', in Bemong, N., Borghart, P., De Dobbeleer, M., Demoen, K., De Temmerman, K. & Keunen, B. [eds], *Bakhtin's theory of the literary chronotope*: *Reflections, applications, perspectives*, Academia Press, Ghent, pp. 3-16.

Bennett, A. & Royle, N. 2009 [1999], *Introduction to literature, criticism and theory*, Routledge, London.

Blake, L. 2012, 'Vampires, mad scientists and the unquiet dead: Gothic ubiquity in post-9/11 US television', in Monnet, A.S. & Edwards, J.D. [eds], *The gothic in contemporary literature and popular culture: Pop goth*, Routledge, New York, pp. 37-56.

Bloss, W. 1996, *Privacy issues involving law enforcement personnel: A constitutional analysis*, unpublished doctoral dissertation (available at UMI microfilms, University of Michigan), Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, Texas.

Bloss, W. 2007, 'Escalating police surveillance after 9/11: An examination of causes and effects', *Surveillance and Society*, vol. 4, no. 3, pp. 208-28.

Bolt, A. 2008, 'Batman Bush true dark knight', *Herald Sun*, viewed 2 July 2015, <http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/bat-bush-true-dark-knight/story-e6frf7jo-1111117053351>.

Bolt, A. 2008, 'Column – It's George W. Batman', *Herald Sun*, viewed 4 December 2015, <http://blogs.news.com.au/heraldsun/andrewbolt/index.php/heraldsun/comments/column_its_george_w_batman/P60/>.

Boot, M. 2003, 'US imperialism: A force for good', *Council on Foreign Relations*, viewed 14 October 2014, <http://www.cfr.org/iraq/us-imperialism-force-good/p5959>.

Bordoloi, M. 2012, 'Re-packaging disaster post-9/11 and Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight* trilogy', *Journal of Creative Communications*, vol. 7, no. 1&2, pp.87-100.

Botting, F. 2012, 'In gothic darkly: Heterotopia, history, culture', in Punter, D. [ed] *A new companion to the gothic*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, pp. 13-24.

Boucher, G. 2010, 'Frank Miller's "Holy Terror" leaves Gotham: "I've taken Batman as far as he can go", *Hero Complex*, viewed 9 July 2015, <http://herocomplex.latimes.com/comics/frank-miller-takes-holy-terror-out-of-gotham-ive-taken-batman-as-far-as-he-can-go/>.

Bowcott, O. 2011 'Osama bin Laden: US Responds to Questions about Killing's Legality', *The Guardian*, viewed 18 March 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/may/03/osama-bin-laden-killing-legality>.

Bradbury, R. 2013 [1953], *Fahrenheit 451*, Harper Voyager, New York.

Brantlinger, P. 1985, 'Imperial gothic: Atavism and the occult in the British adventure novel', *English Literature in Transition*, vol. 28, no. 3, pp. 243-52.

Brantlinger, P. 1990, *Rule of darkness: British literature and imperialism, 1830-1914*, Cornell University Press, New York.

Brooker, W. 2000, *Batman unmasked: Analyzing a cultural icon*, Continuum International Publishing Group, New York.

Brooker, W. 2007, 'The best Batman story: *The dark knight returns*', in McKee, A. [ed], *Beautiful things in popular culture*, Blackwell, London, UK, pp. 33-48.

Brooker, W. 2012, *Hunting the dark knight: Twenty-first century Batman,* I.B. Tauris, London, UK.

Brooker, W. 2013, 'We could be heroes', in Rosenberg, R. & Coogan, P. [eds], *What is a superhero?*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK, pp. 11-7.

Brooker, W. 2013, 'Foreword', in Burke, L. [ed], *Fan phenomena: Batman*, Intellect Books, Bristol, UK, pp. 5-6

Brownstein, C. 2000, 'Returning to the dark knight: Frank Miller interiew, part 1', *Comic Book Resources*, viewed 8 February 2016, <http://www.comicbookresources.com/?page=article&id=192>.

Brubaker, E. & Rucka, G. 2011, *Gotham Central: In the line of duty*, DC Comics, New York.

Buchanan, I. 2010, *A dictionary of critical theory*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Bush, G.W. 2001, 'President declares "freedom at war with terror"', *George W. Bush White House Archives*, viewed 12 March 2014, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/print/20010920-8.html>.

Bush, G.W. 2001, 'Address to a joint session of Congress and the American people', *George W. Bush White House Archives*, viewed 12 March 2014, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/print/20010920-8.html>.

Bush, G.W. 2002, 'President delivers State of the Union Address', *George W. Bush White House Archives*, viewed 20 January 2016 <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html>.

Bush, G.W. 2002, 'President Bush outlines Iraqi threat', *George W. Bush White House Archives*, viewed 15 September 2015 <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/print/20010920-8.html>.

Bush, G.W. 2003, 'President discusses beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom', *George W. Bush White House Archives*, viewed 15 September 2015 <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/03/20030322.html>.

Byman, D.L. 2013, 'Why drones work: The case for Washington's weapon of choice', *Brookings*, viewed 25 January 2016, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/articles/2013/06/17-drones-obama-weapon-choice-us-counterterrorism-byman>.

Campbell, J. 1972 [1949], *The hero with a thousand faces*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey.

Casey, J. Wieringo, M. & Marzan Jr., J. 2001, *Adventures of Superman #596*, DC Comics, New York.

Chandrasekaran, R. 2006, *Imperial life in the Emerald City: Inside Iraq's Green Zone*, Knopf, New York.

Chanen, J.S. 2007, 'If I represented bin Laden', *ABA Journal*, viewed 20 March 2014, <http://www.abajournal.com/magazine/article/if_i_represented_bin_laden>.

Chesney, G.T. 2008 [1871], *The battle of Dorking*, Dodo Press, Gloucester.

Chomsky, N. 2003, *Hegemony or survival: America's quest for global dominance*, Allen and Unwin, Crows Nest.

Chomsky, N. 2015, *Because we say so*, Hamish Hamilton, London, UK.

Chomsky, N. & Vltchek A. 2013, *On Western terrorism*, Pluto Press, London, UK.

CNN Library. 2013, 'September 11th fast facts', *CNN*, viewed 7 December 2015, <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/07/27/us/september-11-anniversary-fast-facts/>.

Collura, S. 2006, 'The dark knight: Heath Ledger talks Joker', *IGN*, viewed 17 April 2015, <http://au.ign.com/articles/2006/11/08/the-dark-knight-heath-ledger-talks-joker>.

Collura, S. 2013, 'Remembering Star Trek Enterprise with Scott Bakula', *IGN*, viewed 25 January 2016, <http://au.ign.com/articles/2013/03/26/remembering-star-trek-enterprise-with-scott-bakula?abthid=5151aaa3105f95d319000005>.

Comerford, C. 2015, 'The hero we need, not the one we deserve: Vigilantism and the state of exception in Batman Incorporated', in Giddens, T. [ed] *Graphic justice: Intersections of comics and law*, Routledge, Oxon, pp. 183-200.

Conway, J. & Newton, D. 1983, *Batman #357*, DC Comics, New York.

Coogan, P. 2006, *Superhero: The secret origin of a genre*, Monkey Brain Books, Texas.

Crews, H. 1998 [1976], *A feast of snakes*, Touchstone, New York.

Cronin, B. 2014, 'Comic book legends revealed #468', *Comic Book Resources*, viewed 24 November 2015, <http://goodcomics.comicbookresources.com/2014/04/25/comic-book-legends-revealed-468/>.

Cronin, J. 2010, *The passage*, Ballantine Books, New York.

Cronin, J. 2012, *The twelve*, Ballantine Books, New York.

Cross, S. 2012, 'Justin Cronin: "It's not the end of the world, you know…"', *The Independent*, viewed 15 January 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/justin-cronin-its-not-the-end-of-the-world-you-know-8229142.html>.

Crossley, S. 2007, 'A chronotopic approach to genre analysis: An exploratory study', *English for Specific Purposes*, vol. 26, pp. 4-24.

Cruickshank, P. 2009, 'Put Osama bin Laden on trial', *CNN*, viewed 26 October 2015, <http://edition.cnn.com/2009/OPINION/11/13/cruickshank.osama.bin.laden.trial />.

Cwik, G. 2015, 'Holy murder! Watch Batman kill a bunch of people', *Vulture*, viewed 2 December 2015, <http://www.vulture.com/2015/08/holy-murder-watch-batman-kill-a-bunch-of-people.html#>.

Dalton, R.W. 2011, *Marvelous myths: Marvel superheroes and everyday faith*, Chalice Press, Georgia.

Daniel, T. 2012, *Batman – Detective comics, volume 1: Faces of death*, DC Comics, New York.

Daniels, L. 1999, *Batman: The complete history*, Chronicle Books, California.

Derrida, J. & Johnson, B. 1981, *Dissemination*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Derrida, J. & Ronell, A. 1980, 'The law of genre', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 55-81.

DiPaolo, M. 2011, *War, politics and superheroes: Ethics and propaganda in comics and film*, McFarland & Company Inc., North Carolina.

Dittmer, J. 2005, 'Captain America's empire: Reflections on identity, popular culture, and post-9/11 geopolitics', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, vol. 95, no. 3, pp. 626-43.

Dondero, J. 2013, 'Dark knight rising: How online Batman fandom helped create a

cultural archetype', in Burke, L. [ed.], *Fan phenomena: Batman*, Intellect Books, Bristol, UK, pp. 30-9.

Ellis, W. & Granov, A. 2007, *Iron Man: Extremis*, Marvel Comics, New York.

Faulkner, W. 1990 [1929], *The sound and the fury*, Vintage, London.

FDCH E-Media. 2004, 'Transcript: Wednesday's 9/11 Commission Hearings', *The Washington Post*, viewed 12 August 2014, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A20349-2004Mar24.html>.

Ferguson, N. 2004, *Colossus: The rise and fall of the American empire*, Penguin Books, London, UK.

Ferguson, N. 2005, 'The unconscious colossus: Limits of (& alternatives to) American empire', *Daedalus*, vol. 134, no. 2, pp. 18-33.

Ferguson, N. 2008 [2003], *Empire: How Britain made the modern world*, Penguin Books, Melbourne.

Foucault, M. & Miskowiec, J. [tr] 1984, *Of other spaces: Utopias and heterotopias*, 'Diacritics', vol. 16, no. 1, pp. 22-7.

Fousek, J. 2000, *To lead the Free World: American nationalism & the cultural roots of the Cold War*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill.

Frankl, P. & Crossley, P. 2000, *Gothic architecture*, Yale University Press, Connecticut.

Freud, S. 1955 [1919], 'The "uncanny", in *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud, volume XVII: An infantile neurosis and other works*, Hogarth Press Limited, London, pp.219-52.

Gaine, V.M. 2010, 'Borders of the bat: Batman's liminal heroism', Conference Paper, viewed 17 November 2015, <https://www.essex.ac.uk/history/documents/conferences/hero-gaine.pdf>.

Genette, Gérard. 1992 [1979], *The architext: An introduction*, University of California Press, California.

Genter, R. 2007, '"With great power comes great responsibility": Cold War culture and the birth of Marvel Comics', *The Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 40, no. 6, pp. 953-78.

Giddens, T. [ed] 2015, *Graphic justice: Intersections of comics and law*, Routledge, Oxon.

Gillman, S.K. 2005, 'The new, newest thing: Have American studies gone imperial?', *American Literary History*, vol. 17, no. 1, pp. 196-214.

Go, J. 2011, *Patterns of empire: The British and American empires, 1688 to the present*, Cambridge University Press, New York.

Go, J. & Doherty, A. 2013, 'The United States – An exceptional empire?', *New Left Project*, viewed 16 July 2014, <http://www.newleftproject.org/index.php/site/article_comments/the_united_states_an_unexceptional_empire>.

Goddu, T. 1999, *Vampire gothic*, 'American Literary History', vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 125-41.

Govern, K.H. 2012, 'Operation Neptune Spear: Was Killing Bin Laden A Legitimate Objective?' in Finkelstein, C., Ohlin, J.D. & Altman, A. [eds], *Targeted killings: Law and morality in an asymmetrical world*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK, pp. 347-73.

Greenwald, G. 2014, *No place to hide: Edward Snowden, the NSA and the surveillance state*, Penguin Group, Melbourne, Australia.

Groom, N. 2012, *The gothic: A very short introduction*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK.

Hamilton, L.K. 2009 [1993], *Guilty pleasures*, Headline, London.

Hammond, P. 2011, 'Introduction: Screening the War on Terror', in Hammond, P. [ed], *Screens of terror: Representations of war and terrorism in film and television since 9/11*, Abramis Academic Publishing, Suffolk, pp. 7-18.

Hardt, M. & Negri, A. 2001, *Empire*, Harvard University Press, Massachusetts.

Hartl, J. 2005, 'The "X-Men" come out', *Today*, viewed 10 February 2015, <http://www.today.com/id/12956661#.VNlNvCzYiAo>.

Hassler-Forest, D. 2015, 'Superheroes and the law: Batman, Superman and the "Big Other", in de Sutter, L., *Žižek and law*, Routledge, London, pp. 101-17.

Hendrix, G. 2007, 'Out for justice', *The New York Sun*, viewed 10 February 2015, <http://www.nysun.com/arts/out-for-justice/67866/>.

Hickman, T. 2012, *Wayne of Gotham*, It Books, New York.

Hill, S. 2012 [1983], *The woman in black*, Vintage, London.

Hogle, J.E. 2014, *History, trauma and the gothic in contemporary western fictions*, in Byron, G. & Townshend, D. [eds] *The gothic world*, Routledge, Oxon, pp. 72-81.

Höglund, J. 2012, 'Catastrophic transculturation in *Dracula, The strain* and *The historian*', *Transnational Literature*, vol. 5, no. 1, viewed 23 June 2015,

< http://dspace.flinders.edu.au/xmlui/handle/2328/26432>.

Höglund, J. 2014, *The American imperial gothic: Popular culture, empire, violence*, Ashgate, Surrey, UK.

Hoffman, E.C. 2013, *American umpire*, Harvard University Press, Massachusetts.

Horner, A. & Zlosnik, S. 2005, *Gothic and the comic turn*, Palgrave Macmillan, Hampshire.

Horner, A. 2013, '*The Dark Knight*: Fear, the law and liquid modernity', in Byron, G. [ed] *Globalgothic*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, United Kingdom, pp. 175-87.

Howe, S. 2002, *Empire: A very short introduction*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK.

Hughes, M. 2015, 'Joel Schumacher talks 'Batman Forever' legacy in exclusive interview', *Forbes*, viewed 3 February 2016, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/markhughes/2015/06/26/interview-joel-schumacher-talks-batman-forever-legacy/2/#3f720a4136b5>.

Hume, R.D. 1969, 'Gothic versus romantic: A revaluation of the gothic novel', *PMLA*, vol. 84, no. 2, pp. 282-90.

Ikenberry, G.J. 2002, 'America's imperial ambition', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 81, no. 5, pp. 44-60.

Ikenberry, G.J. 2004, 'Illusions of empire; Defining the new American order', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 83, no. 2, pp. 144-54.

Ikenberry, G.J. 2005, 'Power and liberal order: America's postwar world order in transition', *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 133-52.

Jesser, J.D. & Pourroy, J. 2012, *The art and making of the dark knight trilogy*, Abrams Books, New York.

Johns, G. & Frank, G. 2012, *Batman: Earth one*, DC Comics, New York.

Johns, G. & Frank, G. 2015, *Batman: Earth one, volume two*, DC Comics, New York.

Johns, G. & Kubert, A. 2011, *Flashpoint*, DC Comics, New York.

Johnson, C. 2004 [2000], *Blowback: The costs and consequences of American empire*, Henry Holt & Company Inc., New York.

Johnson, C. 2004, *The Sorrows of empire: Militarism, secrecy and the end of the republic*, Verso Books, London, UK.

Kane, B. & Finger, B. 1939, *Detective comics #27,* DC Comics [formerly National Allied Publications/Detective Comics Inc.], New York.

Kane, B. & Finger, B. 1940, *Batman #1*, DC Comics [formerly National Allied Publications/Detective Comics Inc.], New York.

Kaplan, A. 2002, *The anarchy of empire in the making of U.S. culture*, Harvard University Press, Massachusetts.

Kavadlo, J. 2015, *American popular culture in the era of terror: Falling skies, dark knights rising, and collapsing cultures*, Praeger, California.

Kelly, J.D. 2003, 'U.S. power, after 9/11 and before it: If not an empire, then what?', *Public Culture*, vol. 15, no. 2, pp. 347-69.

Klavan, A. 2008, 'What Bush and Batman have in common', *The Wall Street Journal*, viewed 18 January 2016, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB121694247343482821>.

Klock, G. 2002, *How to read superhero comics and why*, Continuum, New York.

Krasner, S.D. 2001, 'Abiding sovereignty', *International Political Science Review*, vol. 22, no. 3, pp. 229-51.

Krauthammer, C. 2014, 'Charles Krauthammer: Who made the pivot to Asia? Putin.', *The Washington Post*, viewed 13 October 2014, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/charles-krauthammer-who-made-the-pivot-to-asia-putin/2014/05/22/091a48ee-e1e3-11e3-9743-bb9b59cde7b9_story.html>.

Kuwata, J. 2014, *Batman: The Jiro Kuwata manga, vol. 1*, DC Comics, New York.

Kuwata, J. 2015, *Batman: The Jiro Kuwata manga, vol. 2*, DC Comics, New York.

Lamar, C. 2011, 'Frank Miller's *Holy Terror* isn't just a bad comic – it's a bad propaganda comic', *i09*, viewed 19 January 2016, <http://io9.gizmodo.com/5845828/frank-millers-holy-terror-isnt-just-a-bad-comic--its-a-bad-propaganda-comic>

Lambert, R. 2011, 'What if bin Laden had stood trial?', *The Guardian*, viewed 14 June 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/may/03/osama-bin-laden-trial-al-qaida>.

Langley, T. 2012, *Batman and psychology: A dark and stormy knight*, John Wiley and Sons Inc., New Jersey.

Lee, S. & Ditko, S. 1962, *Amazing fantasy #15*, Marvel Comics, New York.

Lee, S., Lieber, L., Heck, D., Kirby, J. & Ditko, S. 1963, *Tales of suspense #39*, Marvel Comics, New York.

Lehane, D. 2003, *Shutter island*, William Morrow, New York.

Levitas, R. 2010 [1990], *The concept of Utopia*, Peter Lang, Frankfurt am Main.

Lewis, M. 1999 [1796], *The monk*, Penguin Classics, London.

Lindorff, D. 2014, 'The US empire is in decline', *CounterPunch*, viewed 13 October 2014, <www.counterpunch.org/2014/05/27/the-us-empire-is-in-decline/>.

Loeb, J., Lee, J. & Williams, S. 2009 [2003], *Batman: Hush*, DC Comics, New York.

Lovecraft, H.P. 2011 [1924], 'The rats in the walls', in Lovecraft, H.P., *The call of Cthulhu and other weird tales*, Vintage, London, pp. 1-24.

Lovecraft, H.P. 2011 [1928], 'The call of Cthulhu', in Lovecraft, H.P., *The call of Cthulhu and other weird tales*, Vintage, London, pp. 61-98.

Lovecraft, H.P. 2011 [1936], 'The shadow over Innsmouth', in Lovecraft, H.P., *The call of Cthulhu and other weird tales*, Vintage, London, pp. 281-361.

Lynch, C. & McCormick, T. 2013, 'Obama to world: Bad news. The American empire is dead.', *Foreign Policy*, viewed 23 October 2015, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/09/24/obama-to-world-bad-news-the-american-empire-is-dead/>.

Lyubansky, M. 2011, 'The racial politics of X-Men', *Psychology Today*, viewed 10 February 2015, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/between-the-lines/201106/the-racial-politics-x-men>.

MacAskill, E. & Borger, J. 2004, 'Iraq war was illegal and breached UN charter, says Annan', *The Guardian*, viewed 9 July 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/sep/16/iraq.iraq>.

Maher, B. 2013, 'The US: World's policeman or schoolyard bully?', *The Guardian*, viewed 13 October 2014,

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/sep/14/usa-worlds-policeman-school-bully>.

Marshall, E. 'Defanging Dracula: The disappearing other in Coppola's Bram Stoker's *Dracula*', in Anolik, R.B. & Howard, D.L. [eds.] *The gothic other: Racial and social constructions in the literary imagination*, McFarland & Company Inc., North Carolina, USA, pp. 289-302.

McCarthy, C. 2010 [1973], *Child of God*, Picador, London.

McCredie, J.A. 1987, 'The April 14, 1986 bombing of Libya: Act of self-defense or reprisal?', *Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law*, vol. 19, no. 2, pp. 212-242.

McEvoy, E. 2007, 'Gothic traditions', in Spooner, C. & McEvoy, E. [eds], *The Routledge companion to gothic*, Routledge, Oxon, pp. 7-9.

McGowan, T. 2009, 'The exceptional darkness of The Dark Knight', *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, no. 51, viewed 13 October 2015, <http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc51.2009/darkKnightKant/text.html>.

Meehan, E.R. 1991, '"Holy commodity fetish, Batman!": The political economy of a commercial intertext', in Pearson, E.R. & Uricchio, W. [eds], *The many lives of the Batman: Critical approaches to a superhero and his media*, Routledge, New York, pp. 47-65.

Miller, F. 2011, *Holy terror*, Legendary Comics, California.

Miller, F., Janson, K. & Varley, L. 2005 [1986], *Batman: The dark knight returns*, DC Comics, New York.

Miller, F., Lee, J. & Williams, S. 2008, *All star Batman and Robin the boy wonder, volume 1*, DC Comics, New York.

Miller, F., Mazzuchelli, D. & Lewis, R. 2007 [1987], *Batman: Year one*, DC Comics, New York.

Miller, F. & Varley, L. 2004 [2002], *Batman: The dark knight strikes again*, DC Comics, New York.

Miller, G. 2015, 'U.S. launches secret drone campaign to hunt Islamic State leaders in Syria', *The Washington Post*, viewed 26 October 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/us-launches-secret-drone-campaign-to-hunt-islamic-state-leaders-in-syria/2015/09/01/723b3e04-5033-11e5-933e-7d06c647a395_story.html>.

Moench, D., Jones, K., Jones III, M. & Dorscheid, L. 1991, *Batman & Dracula: Red rain*, DC Comics, New York.

Monnet, A.S. 2012, '"I'll be whatever Gotham needs me to be": Batman, the gothic and popular culture', in Monnet, A.S. & Edwards, J.D. [eds], *The gothic in contemporary literature and popular culture: Pop goth*, Routledge, New York, pp. 96-113.

Moore, A. & Bolland, B. 1988, *Batman: The killing joke*, DC Comics, New York.

Moore, A. & Gibbons, D. 2004 [1987], *Watchmen*, DC Comics, New York.

Moore, C.H. 1906, *Development & character of Gothic architecture*, Macmillan & Co., London, UK.

More, T. 2003 [1516], *Utopia*, Penguin Classics, London.

Morrison, G. 2011, *Supergods: Our world in the age of the superhero,* Jonathan Cape, London, UK.

Morrison, G. *et al.* 2011, *Batman and Robin: Batman and Robin must die!*, DC Comics, New York.

Morrison, G. *et al.* 2011, *Batman: The return of Bruce Wayne*, DC Comics, New York.

Morrison, G. *et al.* 2012, *Batman Incorporated: The deluxe edition,* DC Comics, New York.

Morrison, G. & Burnham, C. 2013, *Batman Incorporated volume 1: Demon star,* DC Comics, New York.

Morrison, G. & Burnham, C. 2013, *Batman Incorporated volume 2: Gotham's most wanted,* DC Comics, New York.

Morrison, G. & Janson, K. 2015 [1990], *Batman: Gothic, deluxe edition*, DC Comics, California.

Morrison, G. & McKean, D. 2005 [1989], *Batman: Arkham Asylum: A serious house on serious earth*, DC Comics, New York.

Munford, R. & Waters, M. 2013, *Feminism and pop culture: Investigating the postfeminist mystique*, I.B. Tauris, London, UK.

Murphy, J. 2003, 'Text of Bush Speech', *CBS News*, viewed 6 July 2015, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/text-of-bush-speech-01-05-2003/>.

Murphy, J. 2003, '"Mission Accomplished" Whodunit', *CBS News*, viewed 6 July 2015, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/mission-accomplished-whodunit/>.

Myers, S.L. & Bumiller, E. 2011, 'Obama calls world 'safer' after Pakistan raid', *The New York Times*, viewed 26 October 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/03/world/asia/osama-bin-laden-dead.html>.

Nayar, P.K. 2009, 'Popular culture and the ecological gothic: Frank Miller's *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*', *Nebula: A Journal of Multidisciplinary Scholarship*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 38-50.

National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States. 2004, *The 9/11 Commission report: Final report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States*, W.W. Norton & Company Inc., New York.

O'Connell, M. 2014, 'How 9/11 hastened the decline of the American empire', *CBC News*, viewed 13 October 2014, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/how-9-11-hastened-the-decline-of-the-american-empire-1.2762110>.

O'Neil, D., Dixon, C., Duffy, J., Grant, A. & Moench, D. 2012 [1993], *Batman: Knightfall, volume 1*, DC Comics, New York.

Palahniuk, C. 1997 [1996], *Fight club*, Vintage, London.

Parenti, M. 2011, *The face of imperialism*, Paradigm Publishers, Colorado.

Pearson, R., Uricchio, W. & Brooker, W. [eds] 2015, *Many more lives of the Batman*, Palgrave, London, UK.

Phillips, M. 2011, 'Osama bin Laden dead', *The White House*, viewed 14 June 2013, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2011/05/02/osama-bin-laden-dead>.

Phillips, N.D. 2010, '*The dark knight*: Constructing images of good vs. evil in an age of anxiety', *Sociology of Crime, Law and Deviance*, vol. 14, pp. 25-44.

Phillips, N.D. & Strobl, S. 2006, 'Cultural criminology and kryptonite: Apocalyptic and retributive constructions of crime and justice in comic books', *Crime Media Culture*, vol. 2, no. 3, pp. 304-31.

Porter, L. [ed] 2012, *Sherlock Holmes for the 21st Century: Essays on new adaptations*, McFarland & Company Inc., North Carolina.

Punter, D. 1996, *The literature of terror, volume 1: The gothic tradition, second edition*, Pearson Education Limited, Harlow.

Punter, D. 2007, 'The uncanny', in Spooner, C. & McEvoy, E. [eds], *The Routledge companion to gothic*, Routledge, Oxon, pp. 129-36.

Punter, D. [ed] 2012, *A new companion to the gothic*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford.

Punter, D. & Byron, G. 2004, *The gothic*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford.

Radcliffe, A. 1980 [1794], *The mysteries of Udolpho*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Radcliffe, A. 2001 [1797], *The Italian*, Penguin Classics, London.

Rhodan, M. 2014, 'Here's what Dianne Feinstein said about the torture report', *TIME*, viewed 27 February 2015, <http://time.com/3625560/torture-report-heres-what-dianne-feinstein-said/>.

Rice, A. 2004 [1976], *Interview with the vampire*, Ballantine Books, New York.

Rieber, J.N. & Cassaday, J. 2010 [2003], *Captain America: The new deal*, Marvel Comics, New York.

Robb, B.J. 2012, *A brief guide to Star Trek*, Running Press, London.

Rockwell, J. 2001, 'The aftermath; Peering into the abyss of the future', *The New York Times*, viewed 4 February 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/09/23/arts/the-aftermath-peering-into-the-abyss-of-the-future.html>.

Rucka, G., Gale, B., O'Neil, D.J., Grayson, D., Edginton, I., Beatty, S., Klink, L. & Puckett, K. 2011 [1999], *Batman: No man's land, volume 1*, DC Comics, New York.

Schlesinger Jr., A. 2003, 'Good foreign policy a casualty of war', *Los Angeles Times*, viewed 4 February 2015, <http://articles.latimes.com/2003/mar/23/news/war-opschlesinger23>.

Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. 2014, *The Senate Intelligence Committee report on torture: Committee study of the Central Intelligence Agency's detention and interrogation program*, Melville House Publishing, Brooklyn.

Sharp, C. 2012, '"Riddle me this…?" Would the world need superheroes if the law could actually deliver "justice"?', *Law Text Culture*, vol. 16, no. 1, pp. 353-78.

Sharp, J.P. 2000, *Condensing the Cold War: Reader's Digest and American identity*, University of Minnesota Press, Minnesota.

Shelley, M. 2008 [1818], *Frankenstein; or, the modern Prometheus*, Penguin Books, London.

Sherwin, R.K. 2005, *Law's enchantment: The cinematic jurisprudence of Krzysztof Kieslowski*, in Freeman, M. [ed] *Popular culture and law*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 87-108.

Shirley, J. 2006, *Batman: Dead white*, Del Rey Books, New York.

Sickels, R.C. [ed] 2013, *100 entertainers who changed America: An encyclopedia of pop culture luminaries*, Greenwood Publishing Group, Connecticut.

Siegel, J. & Shuster, J. 1938, *Action comics #1*, DC Comics, New York.

Simes, D.K. 2003, 'America's imperial dilemma', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 82, no. 6, pp. 91-102.

Simon, J. & Kirby, J. 1940, *Captain America comics #1*, Marvel Comics, New York.

Skoble, A.J. 2005, 'Superhero revisionism in Watchmen and The Dark Knight Returns', in Morris, T. & Morris, M. [eds], *Superheroes and philosophy: Truth, justice and the Socratic way*, Open Court, Chicago, pp. 29-49.

Snyder, S. 2015, 'Scott Snyder on Twitter: That Batman in the post 9/11…"', *Twitter*, viewed 20 January 2016, <https://twitter.com/ssnyder1835/status/671110538080817152>.

Snyder, S. 2015, 'Scott Snyder on Twitter: "to face your fears and make…"', *Twitter*, viewed 20 January 2016, <https://twitter.com/Ssnyder1835/status/671110755664666624>.

Snyder, S., Capullo, G. 2015, *Batman, volume 7: Endgame*, DC Comics, California.

Snyder, S., Capullo, G. & Glapion, J. 2012, *Batman, volume 1: The court of owls*, DC Comics, New York.

Snyder, S., Capullo, G. & Glapion, J. 2013, *Batman, volume 3: Death of the family*, DC Comics, New York.

Snyder, S., Capullo, G., Glapion, J., Tynion IV, J., Albuquerque, R. & Fabok, J. 2013, *Batman, volume 2: The city of owls*, DC Comics, New York.

Snyder, S., Capullo, G., Miki, D. & Plascencia, F. 2014, *Batman, volume 4: Zero year – secret city*, DC Comics, New York.

Snyder, S., Capullo, G., Miki, D. & Plascencia, F. 2014, *Batman, volume 5: Zero year – dark city*, DC Comics, New York.

Snyder, S., Tynion IV, J. & Fabok, J. 2012, *Batman annual #1*, DC Comics, New York.

Snyder, S., Tynion IV, J., Layman, J., Fawkes, R., Seeley, T., Fabok, J., Nguyen, D., Janin, M. & March, G. 2014, *Batman eternal, volume 1*, DC Comics, New York.

Spooner, C. 2006, *Contemporary gothic,* Reaktion Books, London.

Spooner, C. 2007, *Gothic in contemporary popular culture*, 'Gothic Studies', vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 1-4.

Spooner, C. & McEvoy, E. [eds] 2007, *The Routledge companion to gothic*, Routledge, Oxon.

Staff Writer. 2015, 'United States of America Military Strength', *Global Firepower*, viewed 26 August 2015, <http://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.asp?country_id=United-States-of-America>.

Starlin, J., Wolfman, M., Aparo, J. & Perez, G. 2011 [1989], *Batman: A death in the family*, DC Comics, New York.

Stein, L.E. & Busse, K. [eds] 2012, *Sherlock and transmedia fandom: Essays on the BBC series*, McFarland & Company Inc., North Carolina.

Stevenson, R.L. 2003 [1886], *The strange case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde and other tales of terror*, Penguin Books, London.

Stoker, B. 2010 [1897], *Dracula*, Sterling Publishing Co., New York.

Straczynski, J.M. & Romita Jr., J. 2001, *The amazing Spider-Man #36*, Marvel Comics, New York.

Sugars, C. & Turcotte, G. [eds.] 2009, *Unsettled remains: Canadian literature and the postcolonial gothic*, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, Ontario.

Süskind, P. 1987 [1985], *Perfume: The story of a murderer*, Penguin Books, London.

Tasker, Y. 2012, 'Television crime drama and Homeland Security: From *Law & Order* to "terror tv"', *Cinema Journal*, vol. 51, no. 4, pp. 44-65.

Thurtle, P. & Mitchell, R. 2007, *The ACME novelty library: Comic books, repetition, and the return of the new*, 'Configurations', vol. 15, no. 3, pp. 267-97.

Tilley, C.L. 2012, 'Seducing the innocent: Fredric Wertham and the falsifications that helped condemn comics', *Information and Culture: A Journal of History*, vol. 47, no. 4, pp. 383-413

Toh, J. 2010, 'The tools and toys of (the) War (on Terror): Consumer desire, military fetish, and regime change in *Batman Begins*', in Birkenstein, J., Froula, A. & Randell, K. [eds], *Reframing 9/11: Film, popular culture and the "War on Terror"*, Continuum, New York, pp. 127-140.

Tomasi, P., Gleason, P. & Gray, M. 2014, *Batman and Robin, volume 4: Requiem for Damian*, DC Comics, New York.

Townshend, D. 2014, *Introduction*, in Byron, G. & Townshend, D. [eds] *The gothic world*, Routledge, Oxon, pp. xxiv-xlvi.

Turner, F.J. 1998 [1893], 'The significance of the frontier in American history', in Faragher, J.M., *Rereading Frederick Jackson Turner*, Yale University Press, New Haven, pp. 31-60.

Tuveson, E.L. 1980, *Redeemer nation: The idea of America's millennial role*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Uricchio, W. & Pearson, R. 2015 [1991], '"I'm not fooled by that cheap disguise"', in Pearson, R., Uricchio, W. & Brooker, W. [eds], *Many more lives of the Batman*, Palgrave, London, UK, pp. 205-36.

Vejvoda, J. 2012, 'Nolan: The Dark Knight Rises is a revolutionary epic', *IGN*, viewed 14 May 2015, <http://au.ign.com/articles/2012/06/05/nolan-the-dark-knight-rises-is-a-revolutionary-epic>.

Voger, M. 2006, *The dark age: Grim, great and gimmicky post-modern comics*, TwoMorrows Publishing, North Carolina.

Wallace, D.A. 2012, 'Operation Neptune's [sic] Spear: The Lawful Killing of Osama Bin Laden' *Israel Law Review*, vol. 45, no. 2, pp. 367-77.

Walpole, H. 2001 [1764], *The castle of Otranto*, Penguin Books, London.

Warwick, A. 2007, *Feeling gothicky?*, 'Gothic Studies', vol 9, no. 1, pp. 5-15.

Weiner, R. & Sherman, T. 2014, 'Drones spare troops, have powerful impact', *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, viewed 25 January 2016, <http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/2014/oct/09/drones-troops-impact/>.

Wells, H.G. 2010 [1898], *The war of the worlds*, Penguin Books, London.

Wertham, F. 1954, *Seduction of the innocent*, Rinehart & Company, New York.

Wright, B.W. 2003, *Comic book nation: The transformation of youth culture in America*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Maryland.

Zehr, E.P. 2008, *Becoming Batman: The possibility of a superhero*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Maryland.

Zinn, H., Konopacki, M. & Buhle, P. 2008, *A People's History of American Empire*, Henry Holt & Company Inc., New York.

Žižek, S. 2012, 'Slavoj Žižek: The politics of Batman', *New Statesman*, viewed 23
December 2015, <http://www.newstatesman.com/culture/culture/2012/08/slavoj-
%C5%BEi%C5%BEek-politics-batman>.

IMAGE REFERENCES

CHAPTER 1

1.1 – Taken from Miller, B.Q. & Perez, P. 2010, *Batgirl #13*, DC Comics, New York, viewed 3 December 2015, <http://vignette4.wikia.nocookie.net/batman/images/1/16/Clayface_002.jpg/revision/latest?cb=20111106212835>.

1.2 – Taken from Tieri, F. & Calafiore, J. 2008, *Gotham underground*, DC Comics, New York, viewed 3 December 2015, <http://vignette2.wikia.nocookie.net/marvel_dc/images/e/e1/Man-Bat_0006.jpg/revision/latest?cb=20150330103726>.

1.3 – Taken from Loeb, J. & Sale, T. 1997, *Batman: The long Halloween*, DC Comics, New York, viewed 3 December 2015, <https://vulpeslibris.files.wordpress.com/2008/10/dent.jpg>.

1.4 – [Left] Taken from Kane, B. & Finger, B. 1940, *Batman #1*, DC Comics [formerly National Allied Publications/Detective Comics Inc.], New York., viewed 3 December 2015, <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/7/7b/Comic_Book_-_The_Joker_%281940%29.jpg>.

– [Right] Taken from *The dark knight* 2008, motion picture, Warner Bros. Pictures, California, viewed 3 December 2015, <http://vignette1.wikia.nocookie.net/batman/images/f/f9/Heath_Ledger_as_the_Joker.JPG/revision/latest?cb=20090903145508>.

1.5 – [Left] Viewed 3 December 2015,
<http://photos.imageevent.com/batmanonfilm/bofimages/Batmanadamwest.jpg>.

– [Right] Taken from Miller, F. Janson, K. & Varley, L. 2005 [1986], *Batman: The dark knight returns*, DC Comics, New York, viewed 3 December 2015,
<http://www.wired.com/wp-content/uploads/blogs/geekdad/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/greatbatman03.jpg>.

1.6 – [Top] Viewed 3 December 2015, <http://nerdist.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Batman-Top-10.jpg>.

– [Middle] Viewed 3 December 2015,
<http://static.comicvine.com/uploads/original/0/40/316379-64689.jpg>.

– [Bottom] Viewed 3 December 2015, <http://cdn.wccftech.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/batman-arkham-knight-ps4-5.jpg>.

1.7 – [Left] Viewed 4 December 2015,
<http://a3.files.sabotagetimes.com/image/upload/c_fit,cs_srgb,dpr_1.0,q_80,w_620/MTI5NDgwMDUwNTA3NTc1MjY2.jpg>.

– [Right] Viewed 4 December 2015,
<https://morganrlewis.files.wordpress.com/2011/11/dabatmanvillains.jpg>.

1.8 – Viewed 1 February 2016,
<http://vignette4.wikia.nocookie.net/monstermovies/images/c/c9/Penguin_%28Oswald_Cobblepot%29.jpg/revision/latest?cb=20140809154913>.

1.9 – Taken from Morrison, G. & Burnham, C. 2013, *Batman Incorporated: Gotham's most wanted*, DC Comics, New York, p. 113.

CHAPTER 2

2.1 – Taken from Ferguson (2005), 'The unconscious colossus; Limits of (&
alternatives to) American empire', *Daedalus*, vol. 134, no. 2, pp. 18-33, p. 19.

CHAPTER 3

4.1 – [Left] Taken from *Captain America: The first avenger* 2011, motion picture,
Marvel Studios, California, viewed 14 December 2015,
<http://img4.wikia.nocookie.net/__cb20131202075157/shipping/images/0/01/Marve
l_-_Captain_America_-
_Bucky_Barnes_Userbox_%28Captain_America_The_First_Avenger%29.png>.

– [Right] Taken from *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* 2014, motion picture,
Marvel Studios, California, viewed 14 December 2015,
<https://soipondered.files.wordpress.com/2014/04/captainamericathewintersoldier5.
jpg>.

4.2 – [Left] Taken from 'Douzen' 2012, *DeviantArt*, viewed 14 December 2015,
<http://douzen.deviantart.com/art/Cthulhu-332693947>.

– [Right] Taken from *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* 2014, motion picture,
Marvel Studios, California, viewed 14 December 2015,
<http://static.comicvine.com/uploads/scale_medium/14/145984/3803775-
8906662723-13992.jpg>.

CHAPTER 4

4.1 – Taken from Miller, F., Janson, K. & Varley, L. 2005 [1986], *Batman: The dark knight returns*, DC Comics, New York, pp. 164-65.

4.2 – Taken from Rieber, J.N. & Cassaday, J. 2010 [2003], *Captain America: The new deal*, Marvel Comics, New York, viewed 23 December 2015, <https://p.dreamwidth.org/1e4de8f36ff6/-/img199.imageshack.us/img199/4963/capa2u.jpg>.

4.3 – [Left] Taken from O'Neil, D., Dixon, C., Duffy, J., Grant, A. & Moench, D. 2012 [1993], *Batman: Knightfall, volume 1*, DC Comics, New York, viewed 23 December 2015, <http://static.comicvine.com/uploads/original/11113/111133638/3416654-2122137-bane_0018.jpg>.

– [Right] Taken from *The dark knight rises* 2012, motion picture, Warner Bros. Pictures, California, viewed 23 December 2015, <http://static.comicvine.com/uploads/original/5/50639/3343046-bane+2.jpg>.

CHAPTER 5

5.1 – [5.1A] Batman (black) symbol, trademark DC Comics, viewed 12 January 2016, <http://www.vectortemplates.com/raster/batman-logo.gif>.

– [5.1B] Batman (black and yellow) symbol, trademark DC Comics, viewed 12 January 2016, <http://www.vectortemplates.com/raster/batman-logo-big.gif>.

– [5.1C] Superman symbol, trademark DC Comics, viewed 12 January 2016, <http://www.vectortemplates.com/raster/superman-logo-012.png>.

– [5.1D] Green Lantern symbol, trademark DC Comics, viewed 12 January 2016, <http://images.superherostuff.com/image-stickglsymbl-primary-shsnowatermark.jpg>.

– [5.1E] Daredevil symbol, trademark Marvel Comics, viewed 12 January 2016, <http://www.symbols.com/gi.php?type=1&id=2841>.

– [5.1F] Captain America symbol, trademark Marvel Comics, viewed 12 January 2016, <https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/564x/03/2f/ce/032fce11a0fb8e87c65b3369a6443674.jpg>.

CHAPTER 6

6.1 – Taken from Morrison, G. *et al.* 2012, *Batman Incorporated: The deluxe edition*, DC Comics, New York, pp. 134-135.

CHAPTER 7

7.1 – Taken from *Iron Man 3* (2013), viewed 25 January 2016, <http://static.srcdn.com/slir/w570-h380-q90-c570:380/wp-content/uploads/Iron-Man-3-Official-Iron-Patriot-Armor-570x380.jpg>.