SURVEILLANCE, SOCIAL ORDER, AND GENDERED SUBVERSIONS IN BATMAN COMICS, 1986-2011

by © Aidan Diamond (Thesis) submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

Batman is "the world's most popular superhero."[1] An icon of American exceptionalism, Batman has been featured in radio programmes, television shows, musicals, and more films than any other superhero since his 1939 comic book inception. While Batman has also been the subject of more scholarship than any other superhero, sustained scholarly inquiry of his vigilante infrastructures and their effects upon those Batman deems criminal is scarce; instead, critical readers prefer to interrogate his fascist undertones.

This thesis aims to ameliorate this lack of scholarship by interrogating Batman's regulatory surveillance assemblage, particularly how it is negotiated and subverted by Barbara Gordon/Oracle and Selina Kyle/Catwoman. Using Foucault's theories of criminality, Lyon's articulation of surveillance, Haraway's cyborg hybridizations, Mulvey's deconstruction of the gaze, and Butler's and Tasker's respective conceptualizations of gender, I argue that female characters problematize and complicate the otherwise unquestioned authority of Batman's surveillance assemblage in the 1986-2011 DC continuity.

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[1] "Batman Day Returns!" *DC Comics.* 14 June 2016, www.dccomics.com/blog/2016/06/14/batman-day-returns. Accessed 16 July 2017.

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Notes on Formatting

This project, by virtue of studying comics, encounters the problem of a citation style not standardized by the Modern Language Association with regard to formatting, parenthetical citations, and comicographies and bibliographies. The following decisions have been made in an effort to faithfully represent the original and multimodal nature of comics:

1. Dialogue or caption quotes, while edited to reflect prose-standard capitalization, have retained the emphases original to comics: italics and bold. Larger-sized lettering is indicated by CAPS LOCK.
2. Most superhero comics are unpaginated, making parenthetical citation difficult. When available, page and panel numbers are used (for example, to indicate the first panel on the second page: 2.1). When dealing with an unpaginated comic, the issue title will be used ("Mr. Wayne Goes to Washington: 2").
3. The format of the comicography is adapted from Allan Ellis' "Comic Art in Scholarly Writing: A Citation Guide" to meet the specifications of the Modern Language Association and respect the multiple authorship of graphic narrative.
4. Figures are included under fair use.

INTRODUCTION

I. Criminal Subjectivity and Subjective Criminality

On January 27, 2017, just days after the 45th American president had been sworn into office on a platform of unmitigated and unrelenting bigotry, the *New York Times* published the following headline: "Trump's Immigration Order Expands the Definition of 'Criminal'" (Medina). As an American—a queer, mentally ill, female American to boot—terrified by the prospect of this administration, I had been reading the news obsessively, half-convinced that the next alert would announce our impending doom by nuclear apocalypse. This headline was almost as bad.

I've been reading Batman comics since 2013, and studying them nearly as long. My relationship to the Dark Knight is by its very nature critical: I cannot flip through an issue without scrutinizing it for surveillance and regulation, without demanding from it a thorough and considered definition of what constitutes criminality. Because such definition is all but non-existent, I have always concluded that criminality in the DC Universe is a flexible and subjective concept. After all, from any legal perspective, superheroes are criminals themselves: vigilantism is against the law. But here, in this headline, was definitive proof of Foucault's histories of criminality and imprisonment, and a reification of what I'd concluded from comics: Criminality is inherently subjective, and it is always—

always—political.

While it's true that Trump has inspired comparisons to Batman's most famous villains (Fig. 0.1-2)—not to mention the Caped Crusader himself (Puglise)—I believe the most compelling connection between this project and the world into which it emerges is the calculated cultivation of a subjectively codified criminality. Batman, as I argue in the first chapter, regulates behaviours and individuals *he* finds deviant; agents of law enforcement historically have done, and continue to do, the same, whether operating as a police officer or the leader of the free world. Accordingly, contemplation of the criminalities regulated (or left unregulated)[1] by law is increasingly necessary. While pop culture may not be the best vehicle for this contemplation, understanding how fiction constructs and reflects the political realities of our world does help us navigate it.

Fig. 0.1: Political cartoon by Patrick Chapatte (*The New York Times*, 9 Nov. 2016) featuring Trump in the guise of a jack-in-the-box, styled as Cesar Romero's Joker (*Batman*, 1966-68).

[1] Less than a month into his presidency, Trump also began to unravel Dodd-Frank, the legislation designed to regulate Wall Street and prevent another global recession.

Fig. 0.2: Screencap from *The Daily Show* (27 Jan. 2017), where the face of Heath Ledger's Joker (*The Dark Knight*, 2008) has been superimposed over Trump's face.

II. Batman the Surveillant

This thesis is concerned primarily with the imposition and negotiation of social order in Batman comics published between 1986 and 2011. Its avenue of exploration of social order is surveillance: who looks at whom, through what means, in what circumstances, and why? Following Michel Foucault's expansion of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon as a surveillance construct that affects its subjects in such a way that they begin to regulate themselves, this thesis understands that to watch is to control; to be watched is to be controlled. This control in itself acts as a dehumanizing force. It effectively declares that those watched have no right to agency or personal political freedom; they are merely pawns on a chessboard, to be acted upon—to be regulated—as the watcher sees fit.

At the heart of the concept of regulation is the idea that those upon whom regula-

tion is imposed are unfit to regulate themselves; that they do not know what is in their own best interests; that they must be corrected, by force if necessary, into acting as the regulator deems best for themselves and for society as a whole. There are benign forms of regulation, imposed upon the body, that are necessary to the smooth functioning of society—a child must not be allowed to hurt another child, and must learn that violence against others is unacceptable—just as there are benign forms of surveillance. Medical surveillance, for example, allows public health officials to track trends in physical health and potential outbreaks of disease in select populations. Though these regulations are subject to abuse—one has only to recall the early years of the AIDS crisis to understand the extent to which medical surveillance can be abused—they are relatively unambiguous in their efforts to promote a safe society.

Not all surveillance or regulation, however, is benign. In 2014, Edward Snowden revealed the extent to which the National Security Agency surveilled American citizens regardless of criminal history, ties to terrorist activities, or an entire lack thereof. The regulating arm of the law is frequently misused against already marginalized communities, particularly those who tend to be (hyper)visible, such as trans people, people of colour, and neuroatypical and disabled individuals. The regulating arm of society (which, per Erving Goffman [1959, 1963], may be understood as stigma) is deployed against all of these individuals and women, LGBTQIA+ persons, and those who have committed even the smallest offences. It is this more ambiguous and often malignant form of surveillance I examine here in the form of Batman's regulatory surveillance assemblages. Per David Lyon's (2007) articulation of surveillance, I understand a surveillance assemblage to be

the composite means and methodologies through which information is gathered and acted upon. In the 1986-2011 continuity, Batman's regulatory surveillance assemblage includes electronic audio/visual surveillance, wiretapping, informant networks, police and other law enforcement databases, and torture, among other means of gathering information and correcting deviance. Using variations of these tactics, I argue that Barbara Gordon/Oracle and Selina Kyle/Catwoman problematize and complicate Batman's regulatory surveillance assemblages in Gotham—though not always for the better.

III. Scope and Methodology

The scope of this project is determined by the concept of continuity. In comics fan culture, continuity refers to a standardized narrative reality, and is often used in conjunction with "canon," or the source material. A source material, particularly in comics, may have many continuities; each continuity belongs to the same canon in addition to having its own specific canon. For example, the DC canon includes what Will Brooker terms the "dark" Batman and the "rainbow" Batman (2012: 178-179): the murderous Batman of 1939, the camp Batman of the 1960s, and the Batman examined in this project. Within the 1986-2011 continuity, however, Batman is not explicitly camp, and he is not characterized as a murderer. Each of these characterizations is dependent upon its continuity to be considered canon (accurate to that continuity), and yet all of them are indisputably canon, as they are all present in the source material released by DC.

DC Comics first took full advantage of the idea of continuity in 1985, with their *Crisis on Infinite Earths* storyline, which ended the previous five decades' worth of storytelling in an effort to make their comics more accessible to new readers. With *Batman:*

The Dark Knight Returns (1986), written and pencilled by Frank Miller, inked by Klaus Janson, and coloured by Lynn Varley, a new age of narrative continuity was established. *The Dark Knight Returns* presented only a possible conclusion to this new continuity (others may be found in Grant Morrison and Frank Quitely's *Batman: Incorporated* or Neil Gaiman and Adam Kubert's *Whatever Happened to the Caped Crusader?*), but in September 2011, DC Comics made the end of the modern continuity official. Cancelling every ongoing title, the publisher rebooted fifty-two new books, starting the numbering for each at #1 (even titles like *Detective Comics* and *Action Comics*, which were nearing their thousandth issues). Fittingly, this new continuity was dubbed the "New 52."

A reboot of continuity should be considered from two angles: first, as a commercial strategy designed to attract new customers, and, second, as a storytelling practice designed to allow decades-old characters to be updated and refined for a new era. The birth of the modern continuity in 1986 certainly achieved both; the New 52, and its successor, Rebirth (2016-present), have had middling success in each. The 1986-2011, also known as the Post-Crisis or "preboot" period in respective reference to the *Crisis on Infinite Earths* event of 1985 and the "New 52" reboot of 2011, covers comics published after *Crisis* and before the New 52. Nothing in or prior to *Crisis* or during the New 52 applies to this period by DC Comics' own admission: the 1986-2011 continuity is a contained, complete narrative arc and is, as such, very well suited to a sustained literary analysis such as the one I advance in this thesis.

As it would be practically impossible to coherently analyze the hundreds of issues spanning this continuity, I have elected to limit my close readings to specific texts of the

Bat-canon: *The Road to No Man's Land* and *No Man's Land*; *The Killing Joke, Batgirl: Year One,* "Oracle: Year One," *Gotham Knights* #43, *The Brave and the Bold* #33, and *Birds of Prey*; and *The Long Halloween, Dark Victory,* and *Catwoman: When in Rome*. I have carefully selected these comics for study for two reasons. First, I find them the most thematically engaging among comics of the modern continuity with regard to the representation of deviant bodies ("Othered" by race, gender, disability) and surveillance enacted upon and by them. Second, the comics analyzed in each chapter allow me to advance a more holistic understanding of twenty-five years of continuity due to the comics' specific formats and authorial teams, as will be discussed in Section VI of this chapter.

Further, I engage selectively with the comics published between 1986 and 2011 in pursuit of the most stable characterization whenever possible. Negotiating decades of comics in pursuit of such characterization is a challenge, as it requires both the assumption of faithful continuity and the willingness to set aside some interpretations in favour of others. For example, I assume that the Batman articulated by Frank Miller in *Batman: Year One* (1987) is the same Batman in *Birds of Prey, The Long Halloween,* and *Batgirl: Vol. 1*. Likewise, I assume that Miller's characterization of Jim Gordon in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (1986) as a grim, pessimistic misogynist should be set aside in favour of the Gordon articulated in *Year One*, whose stability is largely sustained throughout succeeding comics.

While this selectivity may appear suspicious, and could in some cases undermine my argument, I believe it is a necessary sacrifice for this project—indeed, for any continuity-based analysis. Inevitably, any character presented by hundreds of different people

undergoes change and experiences moments of self-contradiction. Therefore, what I attempt is a synthesis of the most stable elements of any given narrative pattern or character—those characteristics evidenced by multiple authors across multiple titles, story arcs, and decades. I substantiate these claims with as much evidence as I can, but I recognize that any such claim can be refuted at least once if one only looks hard enough. My aim, therefore, is the identification and analysis of the character traits and narrative patterns *most* evidenced by the text.

IV. Reading the Dark Knight

At a recent conference, I was asked by a respected scholar about my research. "Batman," I said, and braced for the reply.

"Batman! Hasn't there been enough on Batman?"

As the existence of this thesis attests, I do not believe so. But the Dark Knight *is* the subject of more scholarship than any other superhero save perhaps the first, Superman.

Will Brooker is by far the most prominent figure in Batman scholarship. His books, *Batman Unmasked* (2005) and *Hunting the Dark Knight* (2012), provide essential cultural criticism spanning Batman's 1939 inception to the early years of the twenty-first century. Brooker gracefully and thoughtfully engages with the queer Batman debate, synthesizing diverse perspectives and redeeming Fredric Wertham's original readings. Most helpfully, Brooker investigates the fraught question of authorship in comics, which in comics is especially complex. Any given comic has several authors, such as the writer, the penciller, the inker, the colourist, and the letterer, not to mention the editor in the case

of superhero comics. Accordingly, any given superhero character has dozens if not hundreds of "canon," or official, authors, and hundreds more "fanon," or fandom-centred, authors producing transformative works based on that character and their universe.

Beyond Brooker's work, Batman has been the subject of countless articles, essay collections, and book series. Scholars such as Leslie J. Anderson (2012), Lucy Rollin (1994), Julia Round (2017), Marc Singer (2006), and James Wurtz (2011) have investigated *Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on Serious Earth* (Morrison, McKean, and Saladino 1989) through psychoanalytic, psychogeographic, mythological, and authorial frameworks. *The Dark Knight Returns* has inspired its own share of analysis from Steve Brie (2010), Geoff Klock (2006), Nathan G. Tipton (2008), and many more. Characters such as the Joker, Batwoman, Catwoman, and Barbara Gordon feature prominently in Batman discourse, notably by Carolyn Cocca (2014, 2016), Michael Nichols (2011), Paul Petrovic (2011), Michael Smith (2011), Rik Spanjers (2010), Lesa Syn (2014), and Deborah Elizabeth Whaley (2011). Further characters such as Harley Quinn and Jason Todd are coming under increasing scrutiny, with the former the subject of a forthcoming essay collection (Barba and Perrin 2017) and the latter featuring more frequently in conference papers (Diamond 2017; Kambam, Pozios, and Bender 2010). Kevin K. Durand and Mary K. Leigh (2011) foster an approach to Batman grounded in literary theory in their edited essay collection; *Batman and Philosophy: The Dark Knight of the Soul*, edited by Mark D. White and Robert Arp (2008), adopts a philosophical lens, and Travis Langley's *Batman and Psychology: A Dark and Stormy Knight* (2012) examines the Caped Crusader through psychology. Roberta E. Pearson and William Uricchio synthesize these and other

approaches in their edited volume *The Many Lives of Batman: Critical Approaches to a Superhero and his Media* (1991), and its sequel (edited with Will Brooker, 2015).

One major area of study in Bat-related media is the queering of the Dark Knight, with which I do not engage in this project. As stated in my bachelor's thesis (2015), I do not believe the way in which this debate—about whether or not Batman can or should be read as anything but heterosexual—has been executed is neither productive nor useful; indeed, being queer myself, I consider arguments on every side to verge on homophobic. The debate originated in the late 1940s, but was popularized by Wertham's incendiary *Seduction of the Innocent* (1954). Though Wertham was more concerned with the harm suffered by the children he treated at his psychiatric clinic due to the societal homophobia of the era, the America in the midst of McCarthyism, the Lavender Scare, and the Cold War interpreted his (unsubstantiated) findings as follows: Comics, and especially the all-but-openly-gay Batman and Robin, turn good American children into delinquents and homosexuals.

Obviously, this reaction is horrifying; its effect upon the comics industry (namely, the Comics Code Authority) is deeply chilling. But the debate about Batman's hotly contested sexual identity is, to its detriment, so narrowly focused that it (1) ignores the fact that reading Batman and Robin, a child, as in a same-sex relationship positions Batman as a pedophile, thus confirming homophobic campaigns in the real world; (2) ignores a broader spectrum of sexual identity by insisting that Batman be either gay or straight, instead of, say, bisexual; (3) ignores the fact that the homosociality on which the gay Batman argument relies is equally, if not more so, dependent upon misogyny—or, alterna-

tively, that the straight Batman argument relies upon female characters being deployed as "no homo" plot devices, an equally misogynistic depiction. With respect to the confines of this thesis, I see no use in pursuing or participating in this discourse.

V. Beyond the Bat

In addition to the wealth of Bat-analyses available, broader superhero scholarship has informed this project. Among other scholarship, Dan Hassler-Forest's *Capitalist Superheroes: Caped Crusades in the Neoliberal Age* (2012), which reads capitalism and surveillance in contemporary superhero movies, indirectly prompts both my analyses in Chapter One and future readings of superheroes. The main scholarship underpinning this thesis, however, is that of José Alaniz's *Death, Disability, and the Superhero* (2014), Carolyn Cocca's *Superwomen* (2016), Neal Curtis' writing on superheroes and sovereignty (2013), and Nickie D. Phillips and Staci Strobl's *Comic Book Crime* (2013).

Phillips and Strobl's work exemplifies the lines of inquiry I wish to pursue in this project. In *Comic Book Crime: Truth, Justice, and the American Way,* both argue that superhero comics, far from embodying an idealized form of service and justice, reproduce systems of racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, and classism to harmful effect in their narratives—and, although the genre has come a long way, it has much farther still to go. I intend to build upon their argument here by suggesting that though Batman's regulatory infrastructure may not be overtly discriminatory, it is manned by a creature of absolute privilege against those he deems dangerously Other; that is, Batman's infrastructures are absolutely informed and shaped by racism, classism, ableism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and xenophobia, and so cannot avoid enforcing these prejudices.

José Alaniz's monograph on disability in superhero comics further grounds my research, as Barbara Gordon is physically disabled and wheelchair-bound. From a practical perspective, his research necessarily informs my own. However, Alaniz argues that superhero comics in the Silver Age to the modern age and onwards anxiously view physical difference (disability, gender, race) as a threat to be contained, much like criminality, madness, or poverty under Foucault's schema. His later article, "Standing Orders: Oracle, Disability, and Retconning" (2016), develops his understanding of disability and superheroes in reading Barbara Gordon/Oracle. Likewise, Carolyn Cocca's article, "Re-booting Barbara Gordon: Oracle, Batgirl, and Feminist Disability Theories" (2014), and her book, *Superwomen: Gender, Power, and Representation* (2016), offer examinations of Barbara Gordon that are grounded in intersectional feminism, particularly with regards to disability studies. While my analysis of Barbara does not draw overmuch on reading her through disability theory, as Cocca (2014, 2016) and Alaniz (2016) both do, their respective arguments inform my own and provide essential context for any criticism of the character.

Neal Curtis' article, "Superheroes and the Contradiction of Sovereignty,"[2] suggests that the narrative drive behind long-form seriality in superhero comics stems from the chronic instability of the superhero figure—that, following Jacques Derrida's *pharmakon,* the superhero is at once the cause of social ill and the only apparent cure. I intend to apply this argument in anticipation of a specific criticism of my thesis: that Batman singles out deviant bodies because they are criminal and, in doing so, prevents crime. Us-

[2] Curtis developed the arguments of this article into a monograph, *Sovereignty and Superheroes* (2016); regretfully, I only accessed it after this thesis was completed.

ing Curtis' argument, I counter that Batman also engenders this criminality by profiling the citizens he purports to protect and indiscriminately surveilling, confining, and punishing them. In short, he causes the problem he seeks to cure.

VI. Chapter Outline

Each of the three chapters in this thesis models a different approach to continuity-based analysis. The first examines a narrative based on an "event," where a storyline is comprised of dozens of individual titles over a certain period of time, and each issue is tied directly to the next regardless of title. The second endeavours to assemble a single narrative from a disunited series of single issues, one-shots, and extra features. The third confines its approach to an opus composed by a single authorial team (with the exception of the third volume's colourist and editor, the authors remain unchanged over the seven years of development and production).

The first chapter, "'Did Gotham City create him? Or did *he* create *it?*': Rebuilding the Panopticon in *No Man's Land*," examines the "event" comic of *No Man's Land* ([1999, 2000] 2011, 2012). Drawing upon Neal Curtis' adaption of Jacques Derrida's *pharmakon* (2013), Michel Foucault's articulation of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon ([1977] 2010), and Nickie D. Phillips and Staci Strobl's conceptualization of apocalyptic justice in superhero comics (2013), I examine the construction and enforcement of Batman's panoptic, regulatory surveillance assemblage. This assemblage, I argue, is used not benevolently for the strict purpose of crime-fighting, but as a tool to identify and enforce modalities of difference, with Batman himself serving as the normate (Garland-Thomson 1997: 8). Because Batman bases his conceptualization of difference upon his own identity

as a white, able-bodied, performatively neurotypical, cisgender, heterosexual man—and a wealthy man at that—any and all deviations from this baseline normate[3] are marked by his surveillance and the violence he employs to "correct" or confine this deviance.

The second chapter, "'I'm Oracle. I know everything': Narrative Trauma, Cyborg Feminism, and Building a Better System," interrogates how Barbara Gordon experiences and negotiates Batman's regulatory surveillance assemblage as a Gotham civilian, an aspiring law enforcement official, an able-bodied female vigilante, and a disabled vigilante surveillant. As a woman in a overwhelmingly patriarchal (and male homosocial) society, Barbara opts for the ostensibly less-regulated (than the Gotham City Police Department or the FBI) Bat-vigilantism. When Batman's surveillance assemblage fails to protect her and, in doing so, marks her as deviant due to her new disability, Barbara builds a superior and more all-encompassing surveillance network that tracks not only Gotham but the rest of the world as well. Using Peter Galison's adoption of cyborg origins (1994), Donna Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto" (1991), and Tobin Siebers' theory of disability (2008), I argue that Barbara achieves personal political freedom for herself through her new surveillant persona as Oracle. She does so, however, at the cost of subjecting Gotham and the other polities she surveils to even greater surveillance than Batman has ever managed.

The final chapter of this thesis turns to Catwoman and her own negotiation of Batman's regulatory surveillance assemblage. Though subject to the same patriarchal

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[3] Most notably developed by Rosemarie Garland Thomson in *Extraordinary Bodies* (1997), the normate refers to a "normal" person as constructed by an ableist society: someone without physical disability or extraordinary appearance, and who is and is perceived as neurotypical. Further, this conceptualization of normativity includes race (the normate, in the West, is white), and gender identity and expression (cisgender and coded in accordance with heterosexual conventions).

pressures as Barbara, as well as being an antihero at best and a criminal at worst by Batman's definition, Catwoman plays the system without colluding with it. Building upon Judith Butler's ideation of performativity ([1991] 1999), Laura Mulvey's analysis of gender in visual narrative (1989), and Yvonne Tasker's conception of musculinity (1993), I argue that Catwoman successfully defends her activities, interests, and narrative against Batman through her myriad performances of gender and gender roles, and especially her exploitation of the gendered politics of the gaze.

VII. Superheroes are Cool, Man![4]

One of the earliest criticisms about this project came from a fellow Bat-nerd—a graduate professor I respect, for whose course I had submitted the *No Man's Land* chapter as my final paper. The problem, he told me, albeit in a much lengthier note, was that I asked too much from superhero comics: critiquing monstrous villains as racist, ableist, or similarly cruel caricatures was not critically productive, because such caricatures are a necessary evil of the superhero genre. Without a monthly "big bad," superhero comics as we know them would simply cease to function. To argue against these villains would be to argue against the genre itself—something that I, as an avowed superhero fan, would surely be hesitant to do.

But I don't see the problem, because to me, there is nothing "necessary" about the evil these characters represent. Villainous caricatures are endemic in the superhero genre, but not inherent to it. The superhero stories I've loved best have always known the difference: Fraction, Aja, and Wu's *Hawkeye*, DeConnick's *Captain Marvel,* Genevieve Valen-

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[4] "Holy Musical B@man! Act 2 Part 5."

tine's superb *Catwoman* run, Rucka's *Wonder Woman*, Landis' *Superman*, and—of course—Batman. Snyder and Winick and Grayson and Rucka, O'Neil and Loeb and Morrison—the very best Batman comics had evils unbound to the Joker or Killer Croc or any of the other Rogues.

And so, this is where this professor and I will disagree: He believes that the superhero genre is innately and irredeemably flawed because of the degree to which it relies on thoughtless plot devices; I believe that it is neither innately nor irredeemably flawed, because I have examples by the dozen *proving* to me the heights to which it is capable of rising. There is a problem in the genre: I won't argue that, but writing off the genre, especially as it becomes ever more prevalent in our cultural landscape, is arguably worse than refusing to see the problem in the first place.

Here's how I see it: If you dismiss an entire genre because of its history of using racist, sexist, ableist, hetero- and cissexist tropes—well, first of all, a lot of stuff besides superhero comics will have to go. But more importantly, you stifle its capacity for greatness. By saying it only does what it can, by ascribing its development only to fan-interest or capitalism, you say that it cannot do anything else. And so, there's no expectation for the genre to meet. There are no heights to which its heroes can aspire.

I believe in superheroes. I say this without irony. And—though they frequently have me tearing out my hair in frustration—I believe in superhero comics. That they are capable of greatness, that this capability has been demonstrably proven time and again, is a foundational assumption I take with me into this project. The arguments advanced here, then, must not be read as an attack on superhero comics, or reason to dismiss them from

our cultural discourse. Rather, let this project be read as raising the bar for the genre.

So. Are you ready to fly?

CHAPTER ONE:
"Did Gotham City create him? Or did *he* create *it*?"
Remaking the Panopticon in *No Man's Land*

> …and after the Earth shattered and the buildings crumbled, the nation abandoned Gotham City. Then only the valiant, the venal and the insane remained in the place they called **NO MAN'S LAND…**
>
> —introductory caption to the "No Man's Land" tie-in issues

When we think of apocalypse, we typically think of catastrophe. Catastrophe is the inciting event of apocalypse: nuclear war, or global warming, or the eruption of a super volcano, or a cataclysmic earthquake. It is when something happens on a scale that is all but impossible to imagine, and what follows is the end of the world. The colloquial understanding of apocalypse as world-ending diverges from the original meaning of the word. By "apocalypse," the Greeks meant "revelation": a phenomenon that uncovers what is already there. Contemporary posthumanist scholarship tends to rely on this meaning as well. Rather than emphasizing the colloquial understanding of apocalypse as world-ending, posthumanism argues that apocalypse only ends *this* world, not all possible worlds. While the future we had envisioned may be lost, innumerable possible futures are revealed to us through that loss. These futures have always existed as possibilities; if apocalypse destroys anything, it is merely our unwillingness to imagine them.[1]

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[1] Franklin Ginn argues that apocalypse destroys only a future "in which the present human will endure unchanged" (2015: 357), thus allowing for infinite possible futures of different (post)humanity.

In their interrogation of crime and justice in superhero comics, Nickie D. Phillips and Staci Strobl (2013) repeatedly turn to the threat of impending apocalypse, which they argue most frequently manifests in heightened levels of crime (65, 70). The result of this apocalyptic crime wave, in the face of a protagonist's half-formed idea of what the world *should* be (a utopia), is crimefighting action by the protagonist, whose extremely violent and invasive (not to mention unconstitutional) actions are justified in attempting to avert apocalypse and achieve utopia: "The protagonists rise up, driven by a hunger and yearning for utopia that leads to extreme responses, unafraid of using violence and deception to rid the world of crime—of apocalyptic proportions—and to restore justice" (81). The problem, of course, is that utopia is subjective, and apocalypse, excruciatingly revelatory, endures: it threatens not an end to existence, nor something inherently dystopic, but deeper understanding of what already is. In other words, it threatens self-awareness.

Crucially, this self-awareness *is* a threat to a self resistant to revelation. One might, to use a genre-metaphor gone mainstream, say that self-awareness is a crimefighter's kryptonite. Self-awareness, after all, demands not only reflective introspection but also a critical engagement with the world and one's place in it; in interrogating the concept of selfhood, it necessarily interrogates the construction of an Other.[2] More broadly,

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[2] This is central to Jacques Derrida's conceptualization of difference:

> Encounter is separation. Such a proposition, which contradicts "logic," breaks the unity of Being—which resides in the fragile link of the "is"—by welcoming the other and difference into the source of meaning. But, it will be said, Being must always already be conceptualized in order to say these things—the encounter and the separation of what and of whom—and especially in order to say that encounter *is* separation. Certainly, but "must always already" precisely signifies the original exile from the kingdom of Being, signifies exile as the conceptualization of Being, and signifies that Being never is, never shows *itself*, is never *present*, Is never *now*, outside difference (in all the sense today required by this word). ([1978] 2005: 90)

critical discourse of the self and its Other interrogates the concept of personhood, which ultimately asks *who* is allowed to be human, and under *what circumstances?*[3]

The question of personhood is never easy to answer, bound up as it is in unstable and fluid values of humanness and citizenship. It is even more difficult to answer in the face of apocalypse, but that is precisely what I undertake in this chapter. Specifically, I pose this question to the *No Man's Land* (1999-2000)[4] arc of the modern DC continuity (1986-2011), which relates a year in which Gotham City has been designated a federal no man's land (no longer a part of the United States) after what can only be described as a series of crises comparable in their severity to the Plagues visited upon the Egyptians as Moses fought for the freedom of the Hebrews. An onslaught of criminal insanity and grievous personal injury (*Knightsaga*), a contagion deadlier than ebola (*Contagion*), and an earthquake registering 7.6 on the Richter scale (*Cataclysm*) all culminate in a city that is, at least in the eyes of the federal government, unworthy of being saved, in spite of the thousands still determinedly eking out a living within its borders.

As long as there are people living in Gotham, of course, Batman will work to regulate them. The *Road to No Man's Land* and *No Man's Land* story arc offers a remarkably clear picture of the regulatory infrastructures Batman constructs and employs to identify, classify, and intervene in patterns of behaviour that he deems undesirably deviant. These infrastructures—which, following David Lyon's theories of surveillance, I term "surveillance assemblages" (2007: 100-1)—are, with the rest of Gotham, devastated in the

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[3] As noted and argued by Phillips and Strobl in *Comic Book Crime,* this question preoccupies criminological study (2013: 19, 84, 105-106).

[4] See Fig. 1.01-1.02 for a brief overview of the *No Man's Land* plot.

cataclysmic earthquake, and must therefore be painstakingly rebuilt once Batman returns to the city, after having abandoned it for some months in a fit of self-flagellating despair. As Batman reconstructs his panoptic surveillance assemblages and begins to act on the information collected, his ideas of what, and more importantly, *who* is considered deviant, and thus less-human/not-citizen/un-person, becomes frighteningly clear, as does the fact that this regulatory behaviour existed before and endures after *No Man's Land.*

The longevity of Batman's surveillance assemblages, especially beyond the apocalyptic circumstances of *No Man's Land* and its immediate antecedents, would suggest that, as I argue in the first section of this chapter, the question of personhood, and the catastrophic cost of definitively declaring what constitutes a person, are not simply responses to extenuating circumstances. Rather, they are essential to Batman's self-appointed task to absolutely eradicate deviant behaviour, and allow Batman to be read, via Neal Curtis (2013), as a Derridean *pharmakon* figure, that is, as both the poison and its cure. I develop this reading through Phillips and Strobl's analysis of criminological trends in superhero comics, and David Lyon's understanding of surveillance as an apparatus that constructs the very patterns on which its watchers act.

The second section expands upon Batman's surveillance assemblages through Michel Foucault's examination of how criminal acts are pathologized and penalized, and Phillips and Strobl's analysis of comic book representations of criminals which situate criminality as an individual, not a societal, problem, thus allowing the institutions of class, race, ability, and gender/sexuality to be uncritically perpetuated. Here, I turn to the under-examined character of Dr. Leslie Thompkins, a dedicated pacifist, to argue that she

is a powerful counterpoint to Batman's articulations of control through discipline and confinement.

The final section of this chapter draws the two previous sections together in an effort to reconcile these typically violent acts of Othering with Phillips and Strobl's suggestion of a superhero's perpetual apocalypse and suggest an alternative understanding of apocalypse grounded in the concept of personhood. Taking as its foundation the idea that catastrophe, rather than being a natural disaster or a singular crisis, lies in the alienating response of people to each other, I suggest that apocalypse might be better understood as the conscious choice to repeat catastrophe. Batman's decision not to seek crime-fighting alternatives post-*Cataclysm,* but to rebuild his panoptic surveillance assemblages, sheds light on how apocalypse is not a singular crisis that ends the world, but rather an alienating response to a significant change in world order. The reconstruction of these assemblages is key to first understanding Batman's regulatory infrastructure, and second to recognizing the moments in which it fails and is subverted, as I argue in my subsequent chapters.

I. Establishing Narrative Continuity

No Man's Land and its narrative antecedents (*Cataclysm, Aftershock, Road to No Man's Land*) are "event" comics. Broadly speaking, event comics may be defined as a single narrative that runs through multiple titles; it is engineered chiefly as a means of getting readers of one comic series to buy other series, with the hope that new readers will continue to subscribe to the other series in the event. Because of this, event comics are generally despised among comics fans, as they are perceived as a marketing ploy that

prioritizes sales over story. It is difficult not to argue that story suffers. Wrangling not just one creative team (which can include ten or more individuals) but multiple teams is a Herculean task; ensuring narrative continuity between titles, while preserving each title's individuality so as not to alienate its original readers, is all but impossible. Event comics are derided as confusing, poorly planned and executed, and, because the universe's status quo is generally instated quickly after the event's conclusion, pointless.

No Man's Land, I believe, is an exception to this rule. Though it is by no means a perfectly executed narrative (the continuity between certain titles such as *Nightwing* or *Robin* is often jarring to someone only following the event, and the event's conclusion feels rushed), *No Man's Land*'s ambition, of a single story told over the course of a year in-universe and in publication, through at least twelve different comics series,[5] is realized. Each issue contributes to the development of *No Man's Land*'s catastrophe, depicting by turn the crises of faith, the turf wars of gangs and the remaining police, the struggle to provide and attain resources, and the efforts to resurrect the bridges connecting Gotham City to the outside world. In the crucible of Gotham's dystopia, relationships are forged and strengthened, with each title developing and analyzing the event through the themes and lenses with which they have been preoccupied. Rather than being weakened by so many perspectives, *No Man's Land* is strengthened by them; the very nature of its particular catastrophe demands that multiple voices be heard.

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[5] The series include: *Batman, Detective Comics, Shadow of the Bat, Legends of the Dark Knight, The Batman Chronicles, No Man's Land, Nightwing, Robin, Catwoman, Azrael, Young Justice,* and *Harley Quinn*. Granted, *Young Justice* and *Harley Quinn* each contribute only one issue, but this accomplishment remains significant.

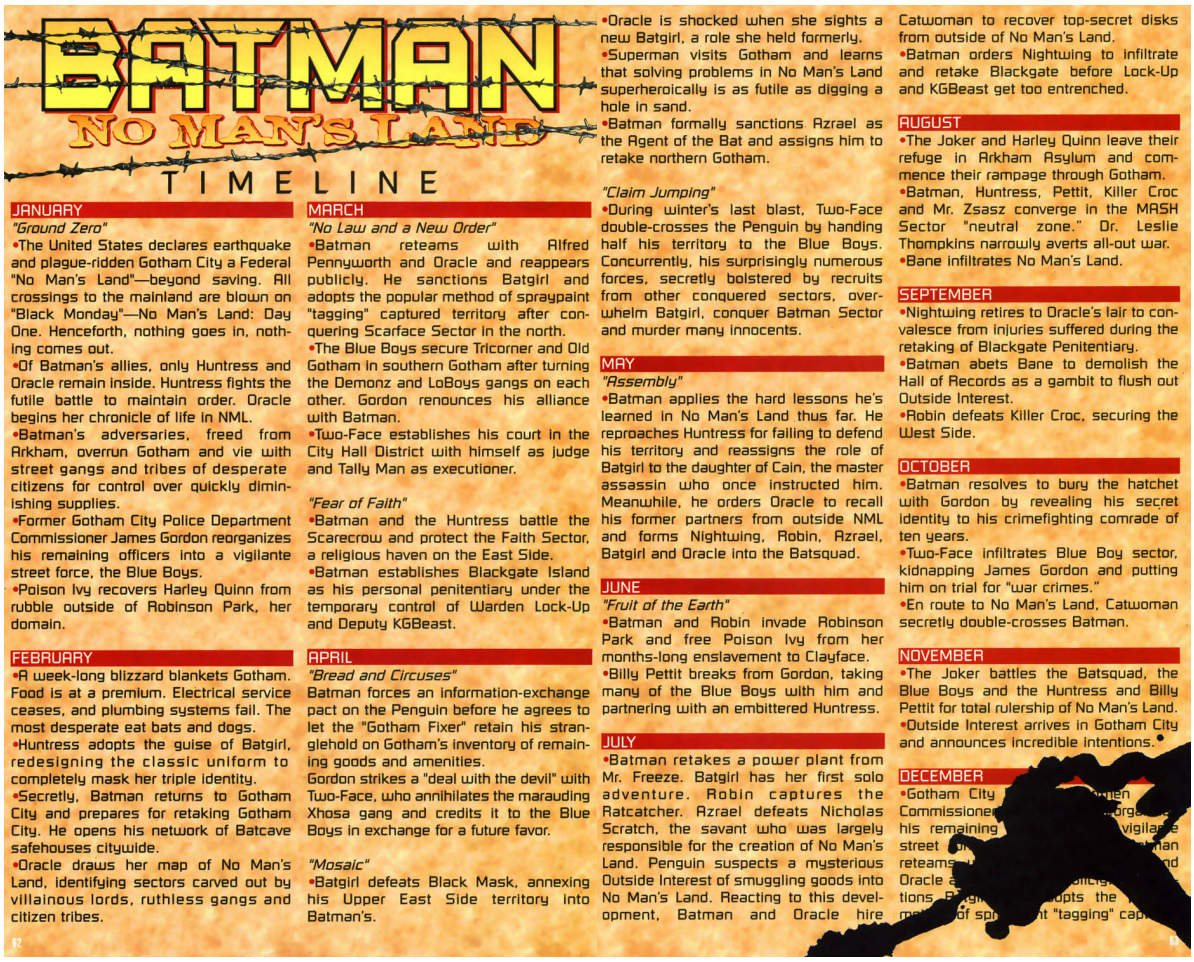

Fig. 1.01-2: "Timeline," *No Man's Land: Secret Files and Origins* #1. Copyright DC Comics, 1999.

In the 1986-2011 continuity, *No Man's Land* takes place ten years after *Batman: Year One* (Miller, Mazzucchelli, and Lewis 1986). Gotham's cast of characters, and especially Dick Grayson/Nightwing, Tim Drake/Robin III, Alfred Pennyworth, Barbara Gordon/Oracle, Selina Kyle/Catwoman, Commissioner Gordon, Helena Bertinelli/Huntress, Jean-Paul Valley/Azrael, and Dr. Leslie Thompkins, have been well-established. Characters such as Harley Quinn and Renee Montoya, both of whom would become significant figures in Gotham in the post-*No Man's Land* era, are contextualized and developed, ripe for major roles of their own. Batman's villains are especially entrenched in the Bat-

mythos, and add another level of menace to the city.

Because of the sheer scope of *No Man's Land*, it is impossible to cover everything in a single chapter. I do not attempt to do so here. Rather, I focus on Batman himself, and on how he interacts with and attempts to control the chaos in Gotham City.

II. Batman the Pharmakon; or, the Gotham Problem

In the aftermath of Gotham's devastation-by-earthquake, Batman-as-Bruce Wayne testifies before Congress in a desperate plea for the government to provide much-needed funds to rebuild the city. His case is a passionate one; no one has ever argued that Batman does not love the city to which he has dedicated his life. But passion is not enough, as the Senate committee points out. "You must be aware of your hometown's…*reputation* as seen by the average American," Senator Means says unsmilingly:

> It's seen as some kind of *asylum.* A *nightmare* carnival ride. An endless source of *horror* stories for the tabloids. A *haven* for the worst of the worst. And I might add that these are *not* hollow accusations. No "urban legends" here. Statistics *bear out* this dismal view. While the rest of the nation's violent crime rate steadily declines—Gotham's continues to *rise*. Across the board. (O'Neil et al., [1998] 2016: "Mr. Wayne Goes to Washington: 2")

It is, indeed, a dismal view. Compassion and loyalty removed from the picture, it is difficult to justify, as Batman attempts to do, the decades of work and trillions of dollars rebuilding Gotham would demand. It is even more difficult to feel that, on some level, Batman is responsible for Gotham's current predicament.

I do not suggest that Batman could somehow have prevented the earthquake (though it is worth noting that all the buildings he owns in the city were conveniently quake-proofed). I do, however, suggest that Batman bears some responsibility for first

determining that vigilantism was the best way to make a difference in Gotham, thereby undermining the efficacy and legitimacy of his Bruce Wayne persona; and second, founding his vigilantism on an Othering surveillance assemblage and enforcing that Othering with violence. Because of the first, Bruce Wayne is—despite his eloquent speech before Congress—routinely dismissed as an empty-headed playboy who knows nothing about his business or the realities of rebuilding Gotham. It is too late to change the perception of Batman's "real" persona, and accordingly restore what influence he might have had in advocating for his cause, by the time he realizes that

> Maybe Bruce Wayne can do more to help Gotham than *Batman* can. Wayne's money, properties. I can't believe I'm saying this, but his *place* in the community. They might mean *more* right now than any good a vigilante could do. (Grant et al., [1998] 2015: "At The End Of The Day")

However, Bruce Wayne's failure as Gotham's advocate might have been avoided if not for the dismal statistics cited by Senator Means, which returns us to the second point. Batman, in constructing a surveillance assemblage that identifies and classifies behaviour determined deviant by *him alone*, and then acting upon that intelligence with violence and confinement, creates a state of perpetual catastrophe—of, as Phillips and Strobl argue, eternally impending apocalypse in the form of heightened criminal activity (81). The national perception of Gotham as a nightmarish dystopia populated by monsters and madmen—as, in the words of Gotham's sinister enemy Nick Scratch, "Bedlam on the Bay" (O'Neil et al., [1998] 2016: "Mr. Wayne Goes to Washington: 1")—has its origins in the very surveillance assemblages employed by Batman in his vigilantism. In fact, the cover art of the issue in which Batman-as-Bruce Wayne testifies (O'Neil et al., [1998]

2016: "Mr. Wayne Goes to Washington: 2"; Fig. 1.03) presents a disturbing interpretation at Batman's corruption of Bruce Wayne's mission. Standing before the Senate, right hand raised in oath, Bruce Wayne casts a great shadow of a bat, its wings outspread, blacking-out the scales and blind gaze of Justice framed on the wall. The image suggests that Justice, blinded doubly by her nature and by the Bat-shadow, will not influence the proceedings; but Batman, his shadow surveilling those below him, cannot help but do so.

Fig. 1.03: "Mr. Wayne Goes to Washington: 2."

In *Surveillance Studies: An Overview,* Lyon explains surveillance as "processes in which special note is taken of certain human behaviours that go well beyond idle curiosity" (2007: 13). Building on this definition, I define a surveillance assemblage as a set of processes and technologies that (a) collect information, (b) classify collected information, and (c) allow the watcher to act on the collected information. In this context, information

consists of bodies, movements, and activities, and the patterns of each; in Lyon's words, human behaviours. Surveillance is the process that determines who does and does not belong in a certain place, at a certain time, acting in a certain way, and which (geographic, temporal, gendered, and especially racial, as race is a hyper-visible marker of difference) patterns are upheld (94). Most importantly, a surveillance assemblage is founded upon two key assumptions: first, that those surveilled are or will be guilty of deviant behaviour, which is determined by the watcher's chosen patterns of normative behaviour; and second, based on the information collected and classified, that the watcher has the ability to take effective and appropriate action in response to deviance or its potentiality.

The danger of such a surveillance assemblage as Batman's—wherein information is both gathered and acted on through violence—is that it effectively creates an endless and repetitious cycle. Foucault, describing the disciplinary effect of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon (an architectural design for a prison that allows the prisoners to be observed at all times from a watchtower into which the prisoners cannot see), argues that those observed internalize their own observer. Anticipating deviant behaviour being seen and punished, the surveilled regulate themselves in accordance with the expected punishment ([1977] 2010: 217-218); that is, they regulate themselves to avoid punishment if they can. To some degree, this is true of Batman's surveillance assemblages as well: much of his panoptic authority relies on the public perception that Batman knows or will quickly discover and decisively punish acts of deviance in Gotham. But in Foucault's and Bentham's conception of the panopticon, surveillance has an ostensible limit; it ends when the prisoner is released after having "paid his debt" to society. In Gotham, surveillance does not

end; one cannot earn freedom from the panoptic gaze by acting in accordance with the watcher's laws. Those under surveillance are eternally under surveillance, and must constantly anticipate punishment. Ironically, this situation removes any impetus to adhere to normative behaviour.

Nowhere is this clearer than in Batman's *No Man's Land*-era interactions with the varied members of Gotham's Rogues' Gallery. Encountering an escaped Mr. Freeze, Batman declares, even as he begins to attack, "My attempts to *reason* with you have always *failed*, Freeze—so excuse me if this time—*I don't even* ***try.***" Mid-battle with Clayface, Batman sneers that "Your ordeal has obviously driven you *insane,* [Clayface]—not that you were exactly a *mental health poster child* beforehand!" (Grant et al., [1998] 2015: "By Fire Or By Ice?"). Essentially, Batman has already determined how these two disparate interactions will go, based on the information he has accumulated, categorized, and acted on previously. Furthermore, he offers no incentive or opportunity for behaviour to change. In this way, it can be argued that he causes the very problem he seeks to solve —which brings us to the superhero as *pharmakon*.[6]

In *Dissemination* ([1972] 1981), Jacques Derrida considers the fluid and contradictory nature of the *pharmakon*. The term is typically translated as "remedy," a translation which, Derrida notes, is not incorrect, but rather incomplete. "Remedy," and its attendant associations of medicine, science, and rationality, occupy only "a single one, the most reassuring, of its *poles*" (97; emphasis in original); others, most notably "poison,"

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[6] Will Brooker, in *Hunting the Dark Knight* (2012), applies the concept of the *pharmakon* to Batman, but with regards to the Caped Crusader's cultural characterization. As such, I do not use his work here.

are far more ambiguous and even sinister. The *pharmakon* is inherently and irrevocably oxymoronic, as "it can worsen the ill instead of remedy it" (97). But the *pharmakon* is more complex than its medical connotation, as Derrida's analysis of Plato's *Pharmacy* indicates, and resists even the most "clear-cut oppositions: good and evil, inside and outside, true and false, essence and appearance." It is eternally (and impermanently) ambiguous, and polarizes even ambiguity: "Bad ambiguity is thus opposed to good ambiguity, a deceitful intention to a mere appearance" (103). Essentially, the *pharmakon* is both thesis and antithesis, and, as Curtis points out, these "supposedly opposing and separate terms […] are in fact mutually dependent. We can only make sense of one in reference to the other" (2013: 210).

Drawing on Derrida's work, Curtis argues that the superhero acts as a *pharmakon* in mainstream comics. This is especially true, he suggests, in cases where the superhero acts as sovereign, a leader without superiors who determines what and who is worthy of the protection the sovereign bestows, much as Batman does through his surveillance assemblages. The superhero-as-sovereign-as-*pharmakon* is a singularly contradictory figure negotiating both law and violence: the superhero breaks the law (vigilantism) in order to enforce it, or denies civil liberties (of the "bad guys") in order to protect those of the "innocent." Peace, Curtis writes, is "instituted only through a founding violence that does away with what went before" (2013: 210).[7] But peace and its antithesis, embodied in the *pharmakon*, present a cyclical conundrum, as Curtis continues:

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[7] Chris Gavaler, writing on the relationship between superheroes and fascism, suggests a similar dynamic: "viewed in their original context, [superheroes] express the paradox that […] utopianism can only be defended through the anti-democratic means of vigilantism and authoritarian violence" (2015: 1).

> the defence against chaos and war with which the sovereign is directly charged is an instantiation of the *pharmakon* as it also precipitates the chaos and war it should restrain. In other words, our means for securing order and defending ourselves turn out instead to be paths leading to our destruction and dissolution. (211)

Whether Batman's efforts to limit the behaviour he deems deviant and criminal actually engenders this behaviour is the subject of heated debate within[8] and without[9] the 1986-2011 story-world. More immediately, his attempt to aid Gotham as Batman by playing Bruce Wayne as a fool backfires spectacularly when Wayne, taken seriously, might have saved the city. In seeking to solve Gotham's criminal problem, Batman exacerbates it.

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[8] A tense moment in *The Long Halloween* (1996) between Batman and Commissioner Gordon in Arkham Asylum sums up the ambivalence of Batman's efficacy:

> GORDON: So many are here. Nearly *double* from when you first appeared. Not that there is a direct correlation, but…Do you ever give it any thought?
> BATMAN: No.
> GORDON: Oh.
> BATMAN [caption]: I know what Gordon is implying. That my…*presence*…somehow attracts these men and women to my city…Jim Gordon is a good man. He and the police do the best they can with limited resources. But, Gotham City *needs* Batman to protect her. From criminals such as Julian Day. The Calendar Man. (Loeb, Sale, Wright, and Starkings 87-88)

Another villain offers a similar indictment of Batman's crimefighting:

> You think the Joker cared about me? You think he even *notices* his victims? We're collateral damage. You're the reason he comes to Gotham. You're the reason they *all* come. ***Two-Face, Clayface, Scarecrow, Poison Ivy, the Black Mask, Mister Freeze…***They don't operate out of Chicago or L.A. You don't see them laying waste to Manhattan or Long Beach. Haven't you figured it out yet? None of those maniacs existed until you came along. All the madness comes from *you!* (Hine, McDaniel, and Owens 2010: n.p.)

[9] Though I am inclined to believe that the 1986-2011 actively and repeatedly suggests that Batman is responsible for his villains, or at least plays with this theory, this is far from accepted wisdom. Greg Rucka, who worked prolifically on *No Man's Land*, stated in a personal interview,

> I do not believe in, nor subscribe to, the populist (and lazy, in my opinion) theory that Batman creates his villains, or, to flip it, the villains arise because of the existence of Batman. The extension of that argument reads that Batman has created the problem, rather than fighting to resolve it, and that, in my opinion, flies in the face of the heroism inherent to these characters and stories.

This is, of course, the beauty of the *pharmakon*: read as such, Batman can both create his own villains and fight to resolve the problems they present.

III. Classification and Criminality: Who Gets to Be a Citizen?

At the heart of the "Gotham Problem" and Batman's attempts to "solve" it lie the questions of what makes a criminal, and how criminality should be punished. Ultimately—though the United States government offers its own response in *No Man's Land*—the task of answering and enforcing the solutions falls to Batman in his role as sovereign of Gotham. As Curtis argues, "The decision regarding friend and enemy, and therefore whose life is protected and whose is radically unprotected, is the permanent feature of a sovereign territory" (2013: 215). In the excised wasteland of Gotham post-*Cataclysm*, Gotham both embodies this decision and grapples with it on a weekly basis through what Foucault would term "disciplinary modalities of power" (2010: 206).

Given the pre-determining nature of Batman's surveillance assemblages—which, as Lyon argues, perform a dubiously moral act in classifying collected information "because each standard or category valourizes one viewpoint and silences another; it can create advantage or suffering" (2007: 73)—it is difficult to see that there could exist a more absolutist construct of deviance. Yet, as history has proven it is prodigiously willing and able to do, the US government steps in to offer a terrifyingly extreme concept of who "is protected and […] radically unprotected" as it orders the abandonment of Gotham:

> The citywide eviction excludes convicted felons, known terrorists or anyone with mob associations. All part of quarantining Gotham from the rest of the country. As the executive order stated, 'To contain and isolate the negative social elements that made Gotham [unliveable]! Once the bridges are blasted and the tunnels flooded, the city will be closed forever. And Gotham City becomes a prison for anyone unlucky enough to have chosen or *been* chosen to remain. (O'Neil et al., [1998] 2016: "Mr. Wayne Goes to Washington: 3")

Those who remain in Gotham by choice rather than federal command—such as the Blue Boys (former officers of the Gotham City Police Department), Barbara Gordon/Oracle, Alfred Pennyworth, various religious leaders, and Dr. Leslie Thompkins—are perhaps best understood as another of Plato's opposing poles: that of the *pharmakos*, a scapegoat figure considered as both the "*evil* and the *outside*, the expulsion of the evil, its exclusion out of the body (and out) of the city)" ([1972] 1981: 130).[10] The *pharmakos*, which can be productively applied to readings of both vigilante superheroes and especially their villains, is sacrificed for the good of its community, and crucially, by its community enacting against it lethal violence: thus, good is born of evil, and the *pharmakon* returns. "The city's body *proper*," Derrida writes, "thus reconstitutes its unity […] by violently excluding from its territory the representative of an external threat or aggression. That representative represents the otherness of the evil that comes to affect or infect the inside by unpredictably breaking into it" (133; emphasis in original). The *pharmakos* may thus be read as a form of exorcism: one rids oneself of evil by displacing it into another, but the act of purification (of the self, the city, or in *No Man's Land*, the United States) can never be an absolute good, as it is dependent upon catastrophic action—the willingness or eagerness to inflict harm upon another. The cost of this catastrophe is pointedly brought to light in *No Man's Land*: when the US government subjects "convicted felons, known terrorists or anyone with mob affiliations" to the sovereign ban, it loses a number of dedicated, law-abiding citizens as well.

Even a cursory examination of criminal justice reform in the United States will

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[10] For more on Batman and the *pharmakos*, see Will Brooker's (2012) discussion.

quickly reveal that criminality is closely tied up with ideas of citizenship, which is itself inextricably bound to constructions of personhood. Commit a severe enough crime, and not only will you face incarceration, but the revocation of supposedly inalienable rights: the right to vote; the right to earn a living; the right, as slaveholder Thomas Jefferson wrote in "The Declaration of Independence," to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Certain acts of criminality effectively revoke the right to citizenship, which, per Curtis' discussion of the sovereign, we might define as the right to the sovereign's protection:

> the entity that does not count [in the case of Batman, the criminal] is held subject to the law by being set outside it. It is subject to all the violence of the law but not its protection; it can be killed but not sacrificed or murdered. In this way its death is set outside any communal norm or rite, but the entity that is banned still defines and legitimizes the law that has abandoned it. (Curtis 2013: 215)

Curtis' chilling articulation of the consequences of being subjected to "the sovereign ban"—one can "be killed but not sacrificed or murdered"—describes a revocation of personhood and humanity. A tree may be killed, but no one would describe it as "murdered;" the countless African Americans slaughtered by police are categorized as victims of "killings," but not "murders," thus proving the desperate necessity of the Black Lives Matter movement's very name.

The same trend persists, albeit more subtly, in Batman comics, and especially in *No Man's Land,* through deliberate acts of Othering which Batman either personally undertakes or, through his silence, is complicit in perpetrating. In either case, he defines and reinforces "what type of person is considered a threat to the social order and what type of

person may be considered heroic" (Phillips and Strobl 2013: 19). As shown in the previous section, Batman casually classifies Mr. Freeze and Clayface alike as insane and therefore immediately deserving of violent discipline and confinement. With little exception, the individuals categorized as "deviant" in Gotham are identified by both "innocent" Gothamites and watchful vigilantes as "freaks," "monsters," "scum," "filth," and so on, regardless of the nature or motivation of their crime. Further, Batman's violent and invasive methods of regulating those he considers deviant makes a lie of the assertion that "to the Batman, *all* human life is *sacred*—even when it's tainted with *madness*…or *evil"* (Grant et al., [1998] 2015: "Arwin's Theory of Devolution"). All this culminates in what Phillips and Strobl term "apocalyptic incapacitation," or incarceration resulting from retributive justice (2013: 219), the "policy implication [of which] is that some people are monsters and irredeemable" (206). Such "monsters" are treated accordingly, thus obscuring the criminological belief that crime is a social and collective phenomenon engendered by capitalism and white, heterosexual/cisgender patriarchy, instead of rooted in individual criminality (104-5). This, in turn, can be read as the culmination of Foucault's argument that the prison *creates* criminals, "in the sense that it has been introduced into the operation of the law and the offense [*sic*], the judge and the offender, the condemned man and the executioner, the non corporal reality of the delinquency that links them together and […] has caught them in the same trap" ([1977] 2010: 222-223).

The conflation of criminality and other forms of what Batman considers deviance with monstrosity—dehumanization—results in a more localized execution of the violent Othering undertaken by the US government when it abandons Gotham City. By catego-

rizing his opponents as criminals, and thus non-persons, Batman also declares them to be non-citizens subject to the sovereign ban. In doing so, he absolves himself of any civil rights violations he may commit against them: one cannot violate rights that do not exist. Writing on the ethics of punishment, Phillips and Strobl note that in modern criminal justice systems, and especially their representations in superhero comics, punishment "is believed to work in the best interest of the greater good by potentially preventing more harm than is caused by the punishment's infliction of human suffering" (2013: 210). But if those punished are denied humanity, then punishment does not inflict human suffering; it simply disciplines a deviant body until, as Foucault describes, it becomes a docile one ([1977] 2010: 182). This discipline intends, Foucault argues, not to deter or penalize undesirable acts, but to reform the bodies to which such acts can be credited: "even if [systems of punishment] do not make use of violent or bloody punishment, even when they use 'lenient' methods involving confinement or correction, it is always the body that is at issue" (172). Most importantly, the "body of the condemned" in Batman comics is *only* a body, without rights, protections, or humanity.

I previously suggested that deliberate acts of dehumanization (such as that of the *pharmakos*), or complicity in these acts, are catastrophes; they certainly have a catastrophic effect upon Othered groups or individuals. But, as argued by Dr. Leslie Thompkins, a humanitarian and pacifist[11] who constantly challenges Batman's methods, inflicting catastrophe *is itself dehumanizing.* In denying humanity to others—in declaring that some people are not, in fact, people—one who perpetrates catastrophe is also subject to

[11] Though he does not directly address Leslie Thompkins' pacifism, Kevin J. Wanner's 2016 article offers a useful consideration of pacifism and its efficacy in superhero comics.

it. Winging into the midst of starved and desperate prisoners and offering aid, Batman is nonetheless identified immediately as ***"A MONSTER!"*** (Edgington et al., [1999, 2000] 2012: "Captain of Industry"). Recalling Phillips and Strobl's grim observation that criminality "is often written on the face, or the body, of the villain, creating a physical rendering of evil itself" (2013: 220),[12] the identification of Batman in full costume as monstrous suggests a recognition of un-human ambiguity, if not outright evil. Where Batman presents himself as remedy, his observers perceive a poison. And thus, we return, once again, to the *pharmakon*.

Leslie goes even further than the imprisoned Gothamites in her censure of Batman, comparing him to two "villains" with whom Batman frequently fights:

> LESLIE [caption]: This is Mr. *Zsasz*. One of my new No Man's Land patients. He's a pure sociopath. Cuts a new *hatch mark* into his skin every time he *murders* someone. Before Gotham City was *abandoned* he was kept in Blackgate Prison in a metal restraining box in a locked, padded room. To society, a *threat* of the *highest* order. And believe it or not, he's *not* my monster. […] Waylon Jones—better known as "Killer Croc"—has suffered a *lot* in his life and also been the *cause* of much suffering. Another *monster. Not mine.*
>
> LESLIE [caption; as Batman enters]: *My monster.* He frightens me more than anyone else I know…because he moves me more than anyone else I know. (Grayson et al., [1999, 2000] 2012: "Spiritual Currency")

Leslie's recognition and articulation of the double-edged blade of catastrophic Othering is especially crucial. Zsasz, murdering others, has no empathy, and consequently does not recognize the personhood of his victims. Yet, after each death, he inscribes his body with another tally mark, making his evil visible and quantifiable to any reader and marking

---

[12] Foucault observes a drive to physically identify criminality or its potentiality in teratological typologies ([1977] 2010: 221), proving that a visual cue to morality is not only an impulse of superhero narratives.

himself as deviant. Croc is similarly identifiable as un-human, with a tough green hide and razored teeth; but, as Leslie points out, he has suffered as much as he has inflicted suffering on others. In both cases, dehumanization is inflicted upon the self and Others, and the former does not excuse or permit the latter. In recognizing Batman as monstrous as either Zsasz or Croc, Leslie suggests that he is as culpable in, and ruined by, acts of catastrophe in Gotham City. He is his own *pharmakos*.

IV. Apocalypse/Catastrophe: Remaking the Panopticon

A perpetually impending apocalypse is relatively par for the course in superhero comics. Whether inflicted by alien invasion, multiversal collapse, or more mundane acts of violence, apocalypse is eternally imminent—and so, the superhero-as-sovereign is eternally thrust into extenuating circumstances that justify the extreme methods used to counter said circumstances (Phillips and Strobl 2013: 81). However, I offer here an alternative understanding of apocalypse, built on my articulation of catastrophe as a deliberate act of dehumanization or Othering. Apocalypse, I propose, occurs when the consequences of catastrophe are clear, but, notwithstanding, catastrophe itself is actively repeated. A concise example of this phenomenon is the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. Although the United States government later apologized and made reparations for this racist policy, it has been, in the past year, invoked as a matter of legal precedent for Donald Trump's proposed Muslim registry. In the original Greek, apocalypse uncovers, revealing what was there all along; in my understanding, it does the same, demonstrating the endurance of willing dehumanization. It is this form of apocalypse that visits Gotham City in *No Man's Land.*

After Gotham is severed from the United States, Batman vanishes, nowhere to be found. Bat-lights scavenged from car headlights and scrap metal beam his emblem into a pitch-black sky to no avail; hope for order, *any* order, even that imposed by Batman in the form of a sovereign ban, is unmet. Batman himself shucks the cape and cowl and fits himself into Bruce Wayne's polished tuxedos and casually ostentatious displays of wealth, unable to stomach returning to the city he believes he has failed (Grayson et al., [1999, 2000] 2012: "Ground Zero"). His sojourn as Bruce—dubbed by the media "Bruce's Bacchanalia"—would, one hopes, function less as an exercise in masochism than as a period of reflection and preparation for Batman's return to Gotham. But, like the hope of the Bat-signalling Gothamites, this hope is also doomed to be dashed. Upon returning to Gotham, Batman immediately begins to rebuild his surveillance assemblages, compensating for the dearth of electronic monitoring available with escalated violence.

Batman's first act to reestablish his sovereignty is to rebuild and co-opt surveillance networks, relying on the groundwork laid by Oracle/Barbara Gordon and Alfred Pennyworth, neither of whom left Gotham during the city-wide evacuation. He then proceeds to cultivate informants from the population of those he would have once incarcerated without a second thought—namely, the criminals who have, in his absence, carved out their own sovereign territories in the abandoned city. In order to render these deviant bodies docile, to borrow Foucault's terms, Batman imposes and/or threatens violence, demanding that criminals acknowledge and cede to his sovereignty in exchange for their continued freedom and safety. Crucially, this disciplinary demand reveals the subjectivity (and contradictory nature) of Batman's law-enforcement endeavours:

> BATMAN: You can *tell* me where [the guns] *are*—or I can *make* you tell me.
> PENGUIN: How? By arresting me? My apologies, Batman. You mistake Gotham for a town that still has *laws.*
> BATMAN: The law *always* applies in Gotham, Penguin.
> PENGUIN: Please! Even *taxes* aren't a sure thing anymore. […] Laws develop as a society *evolves.* Gotham has *regressed.* And in a regressed society, perhaps a *fixer's* skewed view of law is just as valid as a costumed *vigilante's.* Who's to say that I won't be the modern Hammurabi whose code of life shall lead us into the *future?*
> BATMAN: ***ME.*** (Gale et al., [1999] 2011: "Fear of Faith: Part 3")

Curtis, reading the superhero as *pharmakon*, evokes the oxymoronic nature of a vigilante crimefighter: someone who breaks the law in order to enforce it. This has always been true of Batman comics, but it is especially transparent in *No Man's Land*. To Penguin, Batman asserts that the law, and specifically *Batman's interpretation of it*, always applies; any challenge to Bat-law (in effect, a challenge to Batman's sovereignty) will be punished violently. In "Panopticism," Foucault argues that systems of criminal justice define their subjects "according to universal norms," but justice itself is not enforced in these norms: "the disciplines characterize, classify, specialize; they distribute along a scale, around a norm, hierarchize individuals in relation to one another and, if necessary, disqualify and invalidate" ([1977] 2010: 211). Batman cannot "arrest" Penguin any more than he can force Two-Face into a courtroom to avenge those Two-Face has murdered: "There's no judge to sentence you," Batman says. "No jury to convict. So what's left?" (Rucka et al., [1999] 2012: "Mark of Cain: Part 1"). What is left is Batman: the lone and enduring arbiter of "when, against whom, and in what context violence is appropriate" (Phillips and Strobl 2013: 18), who must discipline what he classifies as deviant through methods both bloody and "lenient," regardless of the fact that such methods

have been proven ineffective.[13]

After reestablishing his surveillance assemblages, Batman begins reestablishing systems of punishment and confinement, starting with Blackgate Penitentiary, the running of which he entrusts to the aptly-named and, in any context but that of *No Man's Land*, villainous Lock-Up. Batman surveils, collects, and delivers those subjected to his sovereign ban to Lock-Up, who at best replicates the linguistic forms of dehumanization imposed by Batman, casually referring to a new prisoner as "this freak" (Gale et al., [1999] 2011: "Mosaic: Part Two"), and at worst denies their very existence. But what galls most about the reestablishment of Blackgate and its systems of confinement is the distribution of resources. Gotham, completely cut off from outside aid, has no food, no power, and no shelter, except what can be scavenged from the city's wreckage or smuggled by entrepreneurs such as the Penguin. Those imprisoned in Blackgate, however, are provided shelter and sustenance and some measure of stability, to the extent that the inmates reject the option of escape or parole (Rucka et al., [1999] 2012: "The Belly of the Beast"), and "innocent" Gothamites resort to criminal behaviour in an attempt to be imprisoned:

> BATMAN: This man was already dead. You didn't kill him. […] *Did you?*
> GOTHAMITE: No! I didn't kill him! I found him dead. Dragged him here. Pretended.
> BATMAN: Why?
> GOTHAMITE: Because I couldn't take it! This place is hell! Look at my face! They cut me! For fun! But then I heard Blackgate's safe—food, shelter, protection. I heard that's where the murderers go! So that's where I wanna go!
> BATMAN: You're no murderer.
> GOTHAMITE: But you *have* to put me in prison, Batman! You're supposed to protect us, right? Keep us safe? Well, if Blackgate's safe, you have to

[13] At this point in the continuity, Batman has been active for ten years (Grayson et al., "Ground Zero").

> put me there! What kinda hero are you, turning your back on people like me? Why should murderers get all the breaks? I'm a good guy! Why don't I get to be safe too? (Gale et al., [1999] 2011: "Crisis of Faith: Shades of Grey")

Disciplinary modalities of power, then, *reward* rather than punish deviant behaviour; Batman's attempts to curb violence by enacting more severe violence backfires. Sovereignty, Curtis writes, "is a contradiction: it both creates and preserves, destroys and negates," and it is a contradiction expressed and maintained through the sovereign's "monopoly of violence" (2013: 218), which is Leslie Thompkins' primary argument against Batman's assumed sovereignty. "Violence," she says fiercely, "*any* violence—creates fear, which creates more violence…endless cycle. Curse of mankind" (Gale et al., [1999] 2011: "Misery Dance"). Batman's regulatory apparatuses, from his surveillance assemblages to his disciplinary confinements, thus act as *pharmakon* in a vicious, catastrophe-inducing cycle. In spite of Leslie's rebukes and the absence of any quantifiable success in ten years of crimefighting, Batman doggedly rebuilds his panopticon.

By rebuilding his panopticon—the combination of his surveillance assemblages and the confining prisons he methodically fills—Batman perpetuates this cycle of violent catastrophe in Gotham City, a cycle in which those whom he deems deviant are denied their citizenship and their humanity in one fell swoop. By determinedly refusing to engage critically with his effect on Gotham, which can most generously be described as maintaining the status quo, Batman thus perpetually repeats catastrophe, effectively ensuring the very apocalypse of enduring and absolute dehumanization that he seeks to avert.

V. Conclusion

Apocalypse originally meant something that reveals, and the trick with revelation, with uncovering, is that what is revealed has to have been present all along. Our understanding of the revelation may develop, but the revelation itself is nothing new; it has always existed. Apocalypse, in its way, ensures that what is revealed will endure.

In this chapter, I have proposed an understanding of apocalypse that, while distinct in the details, complements the classical understanding of apocalypse. What apocalypse in *No Man's Land* reveals, I have argued, is the willing reach of active cruelty by humans: a deliberate choice or an apathetic response to deciding that certain individuals or groups are undeserving of empathy or what ought to be inalienable rights. In other words, apocalypse reveals catastrophe; apocalypse is constituted by the conscious repetition of catastrophe.

No Man's Land offers a Gotham City in the midst of an apocalypse in the colloquial sense. Cut off from the outside world, subject to the sovereign ban of the United States government, without any of the infrastructures necessary to modern human survival, the city truly looks like a vision of the end of the world. A billboard at one of the city's bridges, which once offered visitors a warm "WELCOME TO GOTHAM CITY," has been revised to reflect Gotham's dystopic circumstances: "HELL COMES TO GOTHAM CITY" (Gale et al., [1999] 2011: "No Law and New Order: Values," Fig. 1.04). The hell created by the government's sovereign ban and the cataclysmic earthquake, however, is only the beginning. Batman's arrival and his replication on a microcosmic scale of the same surveillance, discipline, and confinement that failed the city in his previous vigilan-

tism and in the United States' response to the earthquake, bring the apocalypse into fruition.

Leslie Thompkins argues that violence, the "curse of mankind," only begets more violence. While she refers to the most literal definition of violence (that of bloody, corporal punishment), the violence of catastrophe—of dehumanization, of determining against whom disciplinary modalities may be enacted—is similarly cyclical, and leaves no one unscathed.

Fig. 1.04: Hell comes to Gotham City.

When it comes to the willful dehumanization of others, there is no winner. As sovereign, one might have the authority to determine which lives are worth saving, which lives belong to people and citizens, and which individuals may be considered subjects, not objects—but the authority to make such a determination does not exempt the sovereign from its cost.

CHAPTER TWO:
"I'm Oracle. I know everything":
Narrative Trauma, Cyborg Feminism, and Building a Better System

> A desire for a more normal life does not necessarily mean identification with norms, but can be simply this: a desire to escape the exhaustion of having to insist just to exist.
>
> —Sara Ahmed, *Willful Subjects* (2014), pp. 149

Having established the panoptic construction and function of Batman's regulatory surveillance assemblages in the previous chapter, I now turn to my examination of how female characters in the 1986-2011 continuity challenge this assemblage. Both of the women selected for analysis—Barbara Gordon/Oracle and Selina Kyle/Catwoman—critique Batman's regulatory apparatuses in distinct ways and with increasing efficacy and subversiveness. This chapter, which focuses on Barbara Gordon/Oracle, interprets Barbara's narratives in relation to Batman's regulatory surveillance assemblages and argues that while Barbara, as a disabled superheroine, evidences a failure in Batman's assemblages and manifests an alternative to them, she does not ultimately counter them. Rather than seeking to dismantle Batman's system, or instating a system of justice that does not identify, classify, and act against those it deems deviant, Barbara constructs her own regulatory surveillance assemblage. In doing so, she reinforces Batman's methods of justice and doubles the surveillance directed at Gotham City and beyond.

While the first chapter analyzed a fairly straightforward corpus—the two volumes

of *Batman: Road to No Man's Land* (1998), and the four following volumes of *Batman: No Man's Land* (1999)—this is not the case here. Barbara's history in-and-out of costume is far more scattered than the *No Man's Land* saga, or indeed the histories of most other members of the Bat-family. As the eight-year gap between *The Killing Joke* and "Oracle: Year One" suggests, the narratives in which she is a—if not *the*—primary protagonist are few and far between. The 120-issue *Birds of Prey* series (1999-2011), which I address in the fourth section of this chapter, is the notable exception to this pattern. While I refer occasionally to *Birds of Prey*; the short comic "Oracle: Year One," published in *The Batman Chronicles* #5 (1996); and *The Brave and the Bold* #33 (2010), the bulk of my analysis draws upon the mini-series *Batgirl: Year One* (2003), *Gotham Knights* #43 (2003), and *The Killing Joke* (1988). To concretely situate each of these distinct issues into a single narrative spanning almost thirty years, I use Thierry Groensteen's narratological understanding of braided images (*tressage*) via Craig Fischer and Charles Hatfield's work on serialized narrative cohesion.

Broadly, this chapter is organized in four parts. The first argues for the consideration of the analyzed texts as a continuous narrative, despite the chronological, titular, and authorial discontinuity. The second examines what I believe to be the first major failure of Batman's regulatory surveillance assemblage: the Joker's brutal (and implicitly sexual) attack on Barbara. Using José Alaniz's and Carolyn Cocca's respective readings of Barbara through the lens of disability studies, Donna Haraway's understanding of the cyborg as an innately monstrous figure, and Tobin Siebers' situation of disability studies through Foucauldian biopolitics, the third section argues that Barbara's acquired disability cannot

exist unregulated in Gotham given Batman's infrastructures, and that Barbara's creation of a new, superior surveillance assemblage allows her to escape regulation by him even as it necessarily regulates her and doubles the surveillance on Gotham's citizens. The fourth section builds on David Lyon's surveillance assemblages and Foucault's Panopticon to interrogate Barbara's new assemblage (operated under her alias, "Oracle") as it is enforced in Gotham and on a global scale by her team of superheroine operatives.

I. Establishing Narrative Continuity

Before embarking on the analysis of Barbara Gordon's relationship to Batman's surveillance apparatus, it is necessary to establish narrative continuity. This particular endeavour is part of my larger goal in this thesis: to argue that the Batman comics published between 1986-2011 by DC Comics constitute a single, sustained, and complete narrative, and can be more productively analyzed as a whole contextualized in its sociocultural period than as discrete and individual narrative units. As outlined in the introduction, in this thesis a "sustained, complete narrative" refers to a narrative with a defined beginning and ending. In the 1986-2011 continuity, this beginning and ending is respectively indicated by *Batman: Year One* (Miller, Mazzucchelli, and Lewis 1987) and *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (Miller, Janson, and Varley 1986).

As noted previously, the long-form narratives (either an ongoing title such as *Birds of Prey*, an ensemble event comic such as *No Man's Land*, or a contained miniseries such as *Batgirl: Year One*) in which Barbara Gordon features as a primary protagonist are relatively scarce.[1] Any dedicated analysis of Barbara must, then, not only delve into ob-

[1] By "primary protagonist," I mean a narrative in which Barbara acts as a focalizing agent. See Horskotte and Pedri (2011) for more.

scure one-shots but also contextualize those one-shots among her longer narratives and the 1986-2011 continuity as a whole. In *The System of Comics* (1999, 2007), Groensteen proposes to understand repeated panels as "braided" images, or narrative units that are repeated, cited, or echoed throughout a comic.[2] These braided visuals "cannot be viewed simultaneously" due to the distance (measured in pages or volumes) between them (148). Since, in Groensteen's theory of comics, a panel is the smallest possible unit of graphic narrative, the repetition of a panel both evidences and concretizes the comic as a narrative network. It thus opens the comic to reading ostensibly disparate units (pages, volumes) as mutually dependent (155, 158).

Fischer and Hatfield, writing on Eddie Campbell's compilation of thirty years' of comics (*Alec: The Years Have Pants*), apply Groensteen's principle of braiding to a cohesive serialized narrative, where Groensteen had largely restricted his analyses to clearly contained works by a single author or team of authors (as in the case of *Watchmen*). "Through braiding," Fischer and Hatfield argue, "the information and organization of a panel, a tier, and a page can be extended across many pages, across an entire book, and sometimes even across many successive publications" (82). In other words, braiding can cohere ostensibly disparate narratives—as in the case of single issues published in different years and titles, and under different authors.

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[2] Groensteen does not limit his conceptualization of repeated panels to panels repeated exactly: "The reprise of the same panel at two locations in a comic, contiguous or distant, does not constitute a perfect duplication. The second occurrence of the panel is already different from the first by the sole fact of the citation effect that is attached" (148).

Fig. 2.01: *Batman: The Killing Joke*, as originally coloured by John Higgins. The first two panels, and the fourth by implication, are braided throughout the 1986-2011 Batman continuity. Copyright DC Comics, 1988.

Fig. 2.02: *Batman: The Killing Joke,* as re-coloured by Brian Bolland for the twentieth anniversary reprinting. Copyright DC Comics, 2008.

Fig. 2.06: From *The Black Mirror,* in which Barbara's brother, James Junior, commits a series of crimes in the manners of Gotham's worst criminals, culminating on an attack on his mother (also named Barbara) with Joker toxin, in a panel styled to quote *The Killing Joke.* Copyright DC Comics, 2011.

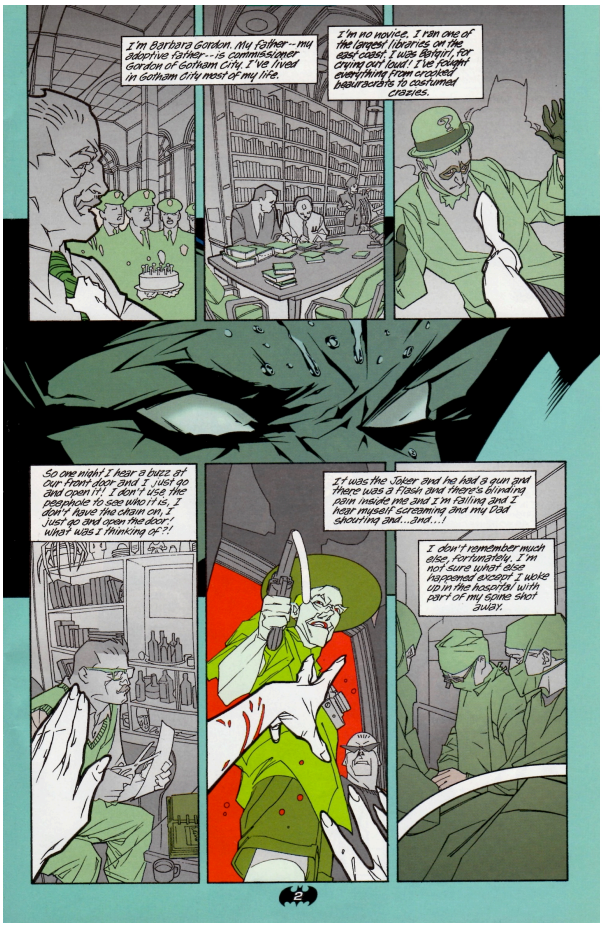

Fig. 2.03: The second page of "Oracle: Year One: Born of Hope," which documents Barbara's recovery from her attack. The first and second panel of the bottom tier are "quotes" from *The Killing Joke*, citing panels immediately before and during the Joker's attack on her. Copyright DC Comics, 1996.

Fig. 2.04: From *Batgirl: Year One*: Batman runs Barbara through the Batcave's gauntlet to determine if she is fit to wear the cowl. The gauntlet, featuring automatons in the guise of Batman's villains, demonstrates Barbara's courage: "If this is my future…I'm not afraid of it." Copyright DC Comics, 2003.

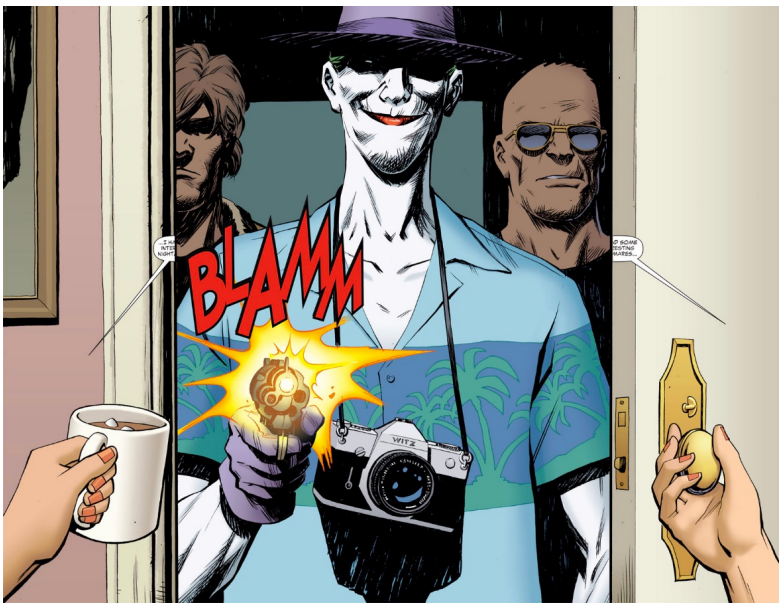

Fig. 2.05: From "Ladies' Night," *The Brave and the Bold* #33, in which Zatanna Zatara has a vision of Barbara's fate in *The Killing Joke.* Knowing she cannot prevent the attack, she enlists Wonder Woman to help her give Barbara a great night out. The issue closes with the Joker's attack and Barbara waking up from sleep to serve as Oracle. Curiously, colourist Trish Mulvihill chose to emulate Bolland's recolouring rather than Higgins' original work. Copyright DC Comics, 2010.

For the purposes of situating Barbara Gordon in a single, cohesive narrative, I identify two braided images: the original instance in which Barbara opens her door to be met with the Joker's gun (*The Killing Joke*, 1988); and instances in which Barbara's former abled body and her current disabled body are juxtaposed. These images frequently occur together, suggesting that, when they occur individually, one may stand for the other in resurrecting the spectre of Barbara's attack and the evidence of her history. The stylistic similarity of the images, present in the framing, composition, and, as seen in Fig. 2.05, the colouring, emphasizes the narrative continuity of these disparate stories, and they may thus be read as a cohesive narrative. As such, the stand-alone graphic novel *The Killing Joke* (Alan Moore, Brian Bolland, John Higgins, 1988) (Fig. 2.01, 2.02), the one-shot "Oracle: Year One" (Kim Yale, John Ostrander, Brian Stelfreeze, *The Batman Chronicles* #5, 1996) (Fig. 2.03), the miniseries *Batgirl: Year One* (Scott Beatty, Chuck Dixon, Marcos Martin, 2003) (Fig. 2.04), the single issue "Ladies' Night" (J. Michael Straczynski, Cliff Chiang, *The Brave and the Bold* #33, 2010) (Fig. 2.05), and the story arc "The Black Mirror" (Scott Snyder, Jock, Francesco Francavilla, *Detective Comics* #871-881, 2011) (Fig. 2.06) can be said to constitute chapters of the same extended narrative. Combined with the many instances in which Barbara's past abled body is juxtaposed with her current disabled body in the 1986-2011 continuity (*Gotham Knights* #43, *Birds of Prey* #6, *No Man's Land*), this series of self-contained narratives becomes a single narrative with chapters informing one another and which may be subjected to a sustained critical analysis.

II. Woman in the Refrigerator: The Bat-System's Failure

I argued in the previous chapter that Batman's regulatory surveillance assemblage identifies, classifies, and confines/corrects difference based on his own understanding of what difference is and how it manifests. Given that this understanding is usually predicated upon a standard of normality for which he is the baseline, it is unsurprising that he is equally self-centred in his enforcement of this regulation—and that accordingly, it is others who pay the price.

The 1986-2011 continuity is rife with examples of others paying the price for Batman's own actions, a phenomenon known as "fridging." The term derives from *Green Lantern* #54 (1994), in which the eponymous hero discovers that his enemy has murdered and dismembered Alexandra DeWitt, the hero's girlfriend, and stuffed her in the fridge. Comics writer Gail Simone drew from this scene to compile a list of "women in refrigerators," prefaced by the numbing acknowledgement that "Not every woman in comics has been killed, raped, depowered, crippled, turned evil, maimed, tortured, contracted a disease or had other life-derailing tragedies befall her, but given the following list […], it's hard to think up exceptions" (Simone 2000). "Fridging" refers to a trope in which a (usually female)[3] character is raped, murdered, or otherwise violently removed from the narrative to advance the male protagonist's character development via suffering. Violence in fridging, though enacted upon the female character, is never committed with the specific design of hurting her; rather, she is merely a conduit through which pain is inflicted upon

[3] There are exceptions to this rule; the most relevant is Jason Todd, the second Robin, who is brutally tortured and murdered in 1989's *A Death in the Family.*

the male protagonist.[4] Her very personhood is irrelevant.

Though Alexandra DeWitt is the founding figure of fridging, the best-known victim of this misogyny is Barbara Gordon, who escapes the trope to become one of the most powerful figures in the DC universe, a journey instigated in Alan Moore, Brian Bolland, and John Higgins' *Batman: The Killing Joke* (1988, 2008).[5] *The Killing Joke* is simultaneously revered as one of the best Batman stories published; acknowledged as an historically significant work that ushered the dark cynicism of *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight Returns* into the superhero genre to stay; and, finally, reviled as one of the most misogynistic superhero comics to date. In fact, due to its fridging of Barbara Gordon, *The Killing Joke* has come to represent in a single, damning volume the misogyny endemic in superhero comics.

The Killing Joke presents a Barbara who has put away her cape and cowl seemingly for good (though both *Gotham Knights* #43 and *The Brave and the Bold* #33 retroactively undo her "retirement"). Her role in the comic, as noted by Alaniz, Cocca, and others, is incidental at best: the Joker only attacks and violates Barbara because of her familial connection to Commissioner Jim Gordon and vigilante association with Batman. Both men are central to the Joker's masterplan du jour, which, in its simplest form,

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[4] Further inquiry into this phenomenon, especially regarding the homosocial/homosexual tension between villainous perpetrator and stalwart hero, is needed. The predominant use of women in fridging scenarios suggests that such tension is only allowable when mediated, violently, through the female character, thereby reifying the hero's heterosexuality and codifying the villain's violent evil as queer.

[5] Bolland recoloured *The Killing Joke* for its 2008 reprinting, substituting a drabber and more realistic palette for John Higgins' lurid, psychedelic hues (see Fig. 2.1-2 for comparison). Each colouring job provides a unique interpretation of the narrative, but I adhere to Higgins' colour work in deference to the original.

is a practical argument designed to prove to Batman that the Joker's perspective—that insanity is the only sane response to the chaos of the world—is incontrovertibly correct.[6] His case study is Barbara's father, Jim Gordon, whom the Joker endeavours to drive mad by forcing Gordon to witness his daughter's suffering. Accordingly, the Joker approaches Gordon at Barbara's home, shoots Barbara through the spine as soon as she opens the door, and, though it is never depicted explicitly, he and his accomplices strip and photograph her pornographically. These images are then projected on the walls of the Ghost Train (a ride at the Joker's abandoned amusement park) through which a naked Gordon is led, forcing him to bear witness to his daughter's violation, as the Joker deems this the best way to drive Gordon mad, and thus "prove [his] point" to Batman (Moore, Bolland, and Higgins 1988).

While the implicit sexual violence disturbs and horrifies, the most enduring trauma of the experience is undoubtedly the gun violence. The Joker's shooting her (with, as we learn in "Oracle: Year One," a bullet doctored to cause internal damage without killing) is one of the defining moments not just of Barbara's life, but of the 1986-2011 Bat-canon as well. First, this moment first definitively proves that Batman's regulatory surveillance assemblage is fallible (Beatty, Robinson, Floyd, Pinaha, and Giddings 2003). Second, it holds Batman accountable for this failure (Yale, Ostrander, and Stelfreeze 1996). Third, in its compulsive narrative repetition, the braiding through the 1986-2011

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[6] For a more detailed analysis of the Joker's (il)logic and his interpretation and perpetration of evil, see Michael Smith's "'And Doesn't All the World Love A Clown?': Finding the Joker and His Representation of Evil" (2011).

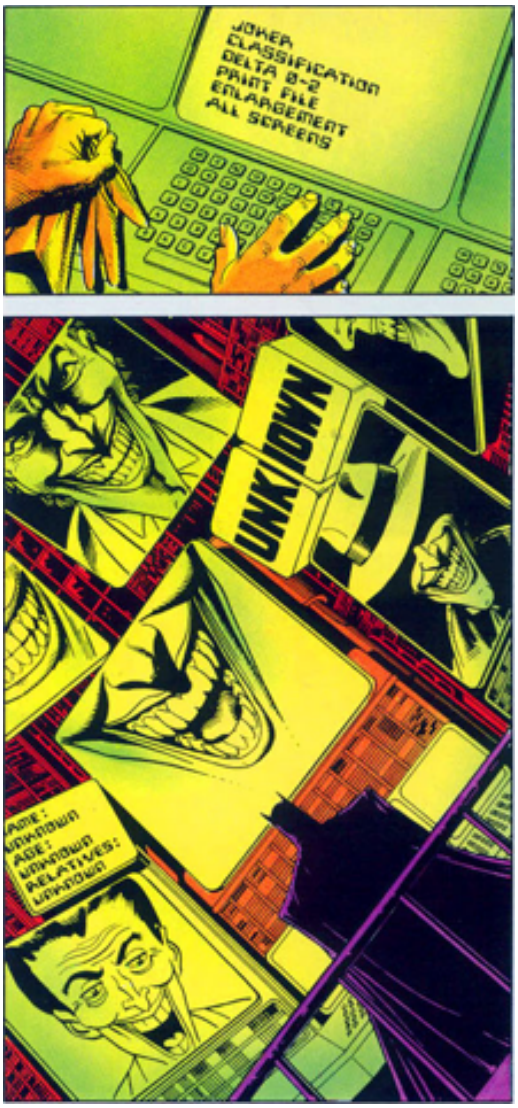
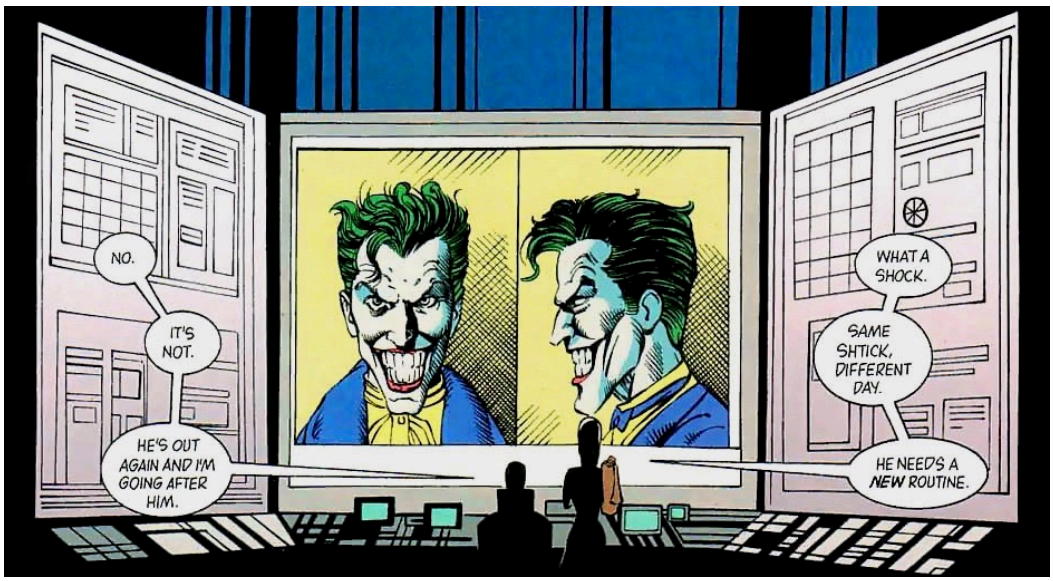


Fig. 2.10 (left): *The Killing Joke*'s (1988) representation of the Batcave and Batman's surveillance apparatus. The bottom three panels display the grotesquely invasive assemblage of screens and computer drives with which Batman collects and classifies information on antagonists such as the Joker—and, as seen in Fig. 2.09, Oracle.

Fig. 2.11 (below): From "Knights Passed," *Gotham Knights* #43. As previously noted, this issue retcons the timeline of *The Killing Joke* to insert a night of Barbara and Jason fighting crime in Gotham. This page, from the beginning of the night, features the Batcave's computer and screens (as shown in Fig. 2.10 from *The Killing Joke*). Barbara's presence here only reinforces the discomfort of her being surveilled in *Birds of Prey*, as she has gone from being a surveilling agent for Batman to being an object of his surveillance in the same way the Joker is an object of Batman's surveillance.



continuity refuses to forget (and to allow readers to forget)[7] the trauma caused by this failure, even as Barbara herself adapts to her disability and continues as an unparalleled hacker, information broker, and superhero in her own right ("Oracle: Year One," *Birds of Prey, Batman: The Black Mirror, Batgirl Vol. 1-3, Batman: No Man's Land,* et cetera).

Many other scholars have thoroughly and imaginatively canvassed the events, themes, and impact of *The Killing Joke*; I will not retread their arguments here.[8] Accordingly, I begin with *Gotham Knights* #43 (Beatty, Robinson, Floyd, Pinaha, and Giddings 2003), punningly titled "Knights Passed." Though published fifteen years after *The Killing Joke*, I nonetheless read it as the canon suggests: a flashback revelation of the events during and immediately prior to *The Killing Joke.* This is indicated by Batman's surveilling use of the Bat-computer (Fig. 2.10-2.11), which reveals Batman's responsibility in Barbara's assault.[9]

It is perhaps unfair to declare Batman somehow responsible, in however small a way, for Barbara's assault and resulting paraplegia. He did not order the Joker to her home; he did not procure the gun; he did not pull the trigger; he took no part in her photographic violation. But inaction, as much as action, has consequences and bestows re-

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[7] This is true only within the 1986-2011 continuity; with the New 52 reboot (Sept. 2011), Barbara's disability was "cured" and her attack lost its significance. See Carolyn Cocca's "Re-booting Barbara Gordon: Oracle, Batgirl, and Feminist Disability Studies" (2014) and José Alaniz's "Standing Orders: Oracle, Disability, and Retconning" (2016) for more.

[8] Most scholarship on *The Killing Joke* focuses on the relationship between Batman and the Joker, frequently in conversation with *The Dark Knight Returns*. Steve Brie (2010) uses both comics to examine Batman's vigilante ethics and their flirtation with totalitarianism; Michael Nichols (2011) situates Batman and the Joker in the combat myth to elucidate Batman's refusal to kill the Joker; Michael Smith (2011) undertakes the unenviable task of qualifying the Joker's evil.

[9] In doing so, I do not assign more or less responsibility to Moore, Bolland, and Higgins in their creation of *The Killing Joke*; I adhere to the rules of comics canon in that new information unless later contradicted should be accepted, including in application to previous works.

sponsibility. Batman's inaction regarding the Joker's escape cannot be considered as anything other than negligent and blindly egocentric. As we have seen, Batman uses the intelligence gathered and organized by his surveillance assemblages to confine and correct those he decides do not belong. In short, he *acts*. Action, we must remember, is one of the fundamental assumptions of surveillance; surveillance is only useful if the watcher can and will take effective and appropriate action should that other fundamental assumption—the guilt of the watched—prove true.

Fig. 2.07: From "Knights Passed," *Gotham Knights* #43. Note the lines of vision, and how Batman appears to never look at Barbara; though she has acted as a surveilling agent for him, she neither merits surveillance as an ally to be protected nor as a threat to be monitored. Copyright DC Comics, 2003.

Fig. 2.08: From "Knights Passed," *Gotham Knights* #43, the page directly following Fig. 2.07. Note both the culmination of the descent-by-ladder initiated by Batgirl and concluded by Oracle, and the implicit establishment of lines of vision. Batman here turns from Jason's memorial case to reject Barbara's insightful inquiry, but, armed with her own penetrating gaze, Barbara counters his rejection to successfully interrogate Batman's interiority.

Although Batman watches, identifies, classifies, and acts in his own surveillance assemblage, he is not universally successful—his comics would be rather dull if he were. But typically, any failure on his part results from a lack of information, a failure in the surveillance assemblage. In *The Killing Joke*, we witness Batman at work in the Batcave, a dozen Jokers grinning manically on the Bat-computer's varied screens (Fig. 2.10), co-ordinating with the Gotham City Police Department, and interrogating Gotham's Rogues Gallery for leads on the Joker's escape (n.p.). And while he searches similarly for the Joker in "Knights Passed" (Fig. 2.11), Batman also betrays an unnerving complacence about the Joker's continued freedom. "He can wait," Batman tells Barbara-as-Batgirl after her assigned surveillance of Robin (Jason Todd): "I know him well enough by now to realize that he won't surface until he can strike out at *me"* (19.5; emphasis in original). The hubris of this statement is self-evident, as Barbara wastes no time in pointing out:

> BARBARA: Then you're underestimating him. He doesn't have to attack you *directly* to hurt you.
> BATMAN: Of *course* he does—that's how it works with us.
> BARBARA: I hope you're right—but I wouldn't bet my life on it… (19.5-7)

Throughout the issue, and particularly on pages 19-20 (Fig. 2.07-8), Barbara is drawn in comparative reflection with Jason Todd, the second Robin who is understood as Batman's greatest failure.[10] Jason's status as "failure"—a position that echoes the self-centred arrogance of Batman's approach to vigilantism—is due to the fact that Batman blames himself for Jason's death in a way that precludes any acknowledgement of and improvement upon the underlying issues that led to the Joker's murdering Jason in *Bat-*

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[10] The flashback narrative of "Knights Passed" predates Jason's resurrection arcs (*Batman: Under the Hood*, 2006, and *Red Hood: The Lost Days*, 2011) both in publishing dates and narrative chronology.

man: A Death in the Family (1989, shortly after the Joker paralyzed Barbara). In short, Batman reacts to Jason's death with the least productive form of self-flagellating guilt, blaming himself for being too late to save Jason from the Joker instead of acknowledging the pattern of distance and distrust that drove Jason away in the first place. From the pluralized noun in the title to the very end of the comic, when Barbara visits Batman in the memorial shrine buried deep beneath the Batcave, "Knights Passed" not only suggests a similar pattern of repression over reflection in Batman's response to the events of *The Killing Joke*, but goes further to suggest that Barbara, as much as, if not more than, Jason, was victim to the fallibility of Batman's regulatory surveillance assemblage.

Crucially, the fallibility of Batman's regulatory apparatus is not the problem. Despite the fandom maxim about DC superheroes,[11] Batman is no god; he cannot be expected to be or act flawlessly. He cannot be expected to know everything, be everywhere, and save everyone who needs saving. However, given the narrative construction of his success rate as near-perfect,[12] it is worth noting the instances in which this fallibility manifests, and how it does so. In the case of Barbara Gordon, the fallibility lies not in the surveillance assemblage, but in Batman himself. He knows the risks incurred by the Joker's escape (on learning that he remains at large, Barbara coldly quips that she'll "sleep easy tonight waiting for the random *poison gas attack* or *laughing fish special* at [her] local market" [19.4]), but he does not take these risks seriously because they do not affect him

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[11] Ancient fandom proverb: The difference between Marvel and DC is that Marvel superheroes are men who want to be gods, whereas DC superheroes are gods who want to be men.

[12] With the exception of Barbara's attack and the death of Jason Todd, Batman can generally be relied upon to save the day. But even with a high number of casualties, the narrative typically treats Batman's eventual victory as an unqualified success.

directly. In this case, Batman is only willing to see a threat to himself; the possibility of collateral damage, of the Joker striking at him by proxy, unbelievably evades him,[13] and the art supports this theory. Throughout this conversation, Batman's gaze is directed either at Jason Todd, at whom Batman has just directed his regulatory surveillance assemblage, or off into the distance (19.1-3, 19.4-6).[14] Barbara, in this moment able-bodied and bearing his symbol on her chest, merits neither a look of acknowledgement nor of surveillance. Quite literally, Batman does not see her, and so he cannot see the potentiality of violence against her; Batman's surveilling gaze fails. Thus, while Batman instigated this flashback in the present at the issue's beginning, Barbara ends it, climbing as Batgirl down a fire escape and as her paraplegic present self down a dizzyingly long ladder into the Batcave's memorial room (19.7-20.1), armed with a piercing gaze to counter his refusal to see.

However, as with Jason Todd, Batman does not register this failure as a personal one. Rather, it is the system he has created that is flawed, and his guilt at such an imperfect construction blinds him to the necessity of his self-reparation.

III. The Body at Issue: Gender, Disability, and Cyborg Feminism

The one glaringly incontrovertible outcome of the failure of Batman's sur-

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[13] The World's Greatest Detective's hubris, evident here, tests the believability of his epithet. The first appearance of the Joker in the 1986-2011 continuity, at the close of *Batman: Year One* (1987), arrives with the threat "to poison the Gotham reservoir," which by its nature threatens *everyone* in Gotham City. *The Man Who Laughs* (2005), which relates the Joker's making good on this threat, suggests that the Joker wants only to cause chaos, and this is not dependent upon striking directly at Batman.

[14] The one panel in which he could conceivably turn his gaze to Barbara, or meet her own gaze (19.5) renders the question of seeing moot, as Batman is turned away from the reader (as he is throughout this sequence) and drawn on such a small scale that it is impossible to make any concrete determination.

veillance assemblage in *The Killing Joke* is that Barbara becomes disabled. While both Carolyn Cocca (2014, 2016) and José Alaniz (2014, 2016) analyze the representation and reception of Barbara's wheelchair use through the lens of disability studies, my analysis examines her re-situation in Gotham's regulatory surveillance apparatuses following her injury. Accordingly, I am less interested in the representation of disability here than in the ways in which power is exerted upon and by a newly non-normative Barbara. Barbara's new status as disabled—as, via Batman's standards of normativity, a physically deviant individual—means that the systems of confinement and regulation wielded against Gotham's non-normative population (epitomized by the Rogues Gallery) are now wielded against her as well. Where previously, albeit with some difficulty, Barbara had been condoned as one of Batman's surveillance agents—one who watched—she is now subject to that surveillance in an unprecedented and invasive way.

In the 1986-2011 continuity (see Appendix I), Barbara's induction into the Batfamily[15] is chronicled in Scott Beatty, Chuck Dixon, and Marcos Martin's *Batgirl: Year One* (2003). This nine-issue miniseries demonstrates Barbara's brilliance, ability, and drive toward executing justice: she hacks into surveillance networks and bluffs her way into classified areas of the Gotham City Police Department; she capably outwits and bests her martial arts instructor; and she relentlessly and resolutely pursues a career in law enforcement only to be thwarted at every turn. What also becomes immediately apparent is the degree to which Barbara's life is regulated by men *because of* her gender, and Bar-

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[15] 'The Batfamily' refers to the group of vigilantes associated with or operating under the authority of Batman. It encompasses all Robins and Batgirls, as well as Alfred Pennyworth, and in an extended sense, characters such as Helena Bertinelli/Huntress and Kate Kane/Batwoman, who cooperate with Batman without working for him.

bara's resentful awareness of that regulation.[16] Fuming in her room, her father shouting that he "won't *let* [his] daughter become a cop," Barbara notes acerbically that "You don't have to be [the oracle] Cassandra to see that Dad's on the short track to Police Commissioner. He could make it easier for me. Instead, he makes it *impossible*" (Beatty, Dixon, Martin, and Lopez 2003).

The problem for Barbara is not that she's unqualified. On the contrary, she has studied pre-law in college, become proficient in martial arts, and is a skilled researcher.[17] Barbara is likely overqualified for entry to the Gotham City Police Academy: Notwithstanding her qualifications, an application to the Academy sits on her desk, DENIED stamped across it in bright red ink. Similarly, on a preliminary interview for the F.B.I., at which Barbara hopes to serve as a field agent after earning a law degree, she is subjected to paternalistic mockery, deemed too short to qualify. Though both Gordon and Agent Boyle (somewhat smugly) point out that Barbara doesn't "meet our minimum *height requirements,*" implicit in their rejection (and explicit in Gordon's) is an objection to Barbara's gender, an objection that Barbara reads loud and clear. The very next page, in which she battles some criminals who have crashed Bruce Wayne's masquerade, Barbara reflects on these attitudes, recognizing how these men must see her: "Let them think they have the upper hand over the *little* girl. […] Let them believe they're closing their grips

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[16] It would be fair to read *Batgirl: Year One* metatextually, with Barbara being acutely aware of the misogynistic pitfalls of the superhero genre even as she attempts to circumvent them with "a nice feminist message" (n.p.); that she is unable to do so may, on one level, be attributed to the all-male creative team dictating her movements on the page.

[17] Her private office in the library, which would rouse the envy of any academic, features thoroughly annotated titles such as *Tracking Skills*, *Homicide Investigation Workbook, Police Weapons & Tactics, Unauthorized Justice, Order Without Law,* and *Vigilantism [obscured by framing] 20th Century*.

on a shrinking violet" (Beatty, Dixon, Martin, and Lopez 2003). Though the captions most literally apply to her current fight, their juxtaposition with Barbara's dismissals from the GCPD and the FBI indicates that she sees the same paternalism in her current adversaries as in Gordon and Agent Boyle. In the eyes of each man, and by extension the regulatory institutions they represent, Barbara's skills and abilities do not matter. Her body renders her immediately unfit.

Effectively, Barbara faces not one problem—that of being unqualified or incapable for her career of choice—but three: she is a woman in a patriarchal society that views gender as just cause for inclusion and exclusion; she is intelligent enough to recognize this fact, and so cannot be satisfied with it; but, as a young woman in her late teens, she is not quite canny enough to see her way out of the webs of patriarchal influence that restrict her opportunities.[18] Accordingly, Barbara chooses not to spurn existing models of crime-fighting or to counter the patriarchal hegemonies entrenched therein, but to enlist in what is ostensibly the least regulated of her options: Bat-branded vigilantism. In donning the Bat-symbol, cowl, winged cape, and utility belt, Barbara opts to remove herself from one level of regulation and place herself within another, higher level, where her body does not automatically (and systematically) disqualify her for her work.[19]

Barbara's gender might not automatically disqualify her for crime-fighting under

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[18] Given the non-linear nature of superhero continuity, it is difficult to state a character's age with any accuracy unless it is explicitly stated. As Barbara is described as a prodigy and allusions are repeatedly made that she began university several years early, I estimate that Barbara is, in the events of *Batgirl: Year One,* between the age of 18 and 21, having finished her bachelor's degree and beginning her search for a career.

[19] One might see Barbara's pursuit of a career in law enforcement as a similar endeavour to remove herself from the group of people who are regulated and join the group of regulators. See Table 2.01 for a breakdown of surveillance hierarchy in Gotham City.

Batman's watch, but it doesn't put her on equal footing with Robin (love interest Dick Grayson), Alfred Pennyworth (Batman's under-appreciated enabler/Jack-of-all-trades), or Batman himself. Rather, she exchanges (or is forced to exchange) one masculine homosocial world for another. Like every other female character who joins the Batfamily, Barbara is not recruited or chosen; her presence and actions under his symbol are permitted with the understanding that his permission can always be revoked.[20] As Barbara fights her way up Gotham's panoptic ladder, she is continuously subjected to surveillance and manipulation, and Batman, Robin, and Alfred compromise her secret identity with impunity in what might best be described as a degree of hazing that would put college fraternities to shame. There's no drinking, recreational drugs, or sexual assault, but plenty of breaking and entering, kidnapping, voyeurism, chloroform, and being abandoned without any tools or warning in a deadly obstacle course. What's more, at the end of the day, Barbara is denied even the credit for foiling the bad guy and performing some truly impressive physics calculations on the fly. Watching Batman and Robin swoop in and fly away victorious, Barbara thinks, "I did all the work…And they'll get all the credit. It's a Batman's world, Babsy. Might as well get used to it."

"It's a Batman's world" is possibly the truest description of life in Gotham in the entirety of DC's history. It is impossible to escape Batman's influence, and nearly as difficult to resist it. As a civilian, aspiring law enforcement agent, and active vigilante, Bar-

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[20] Helena Bertinelli, Kate Kane, Stephanie Brown, and Cassandra Cain all pursue vigilantism independently, constructing their own costumes, gadgets, and methodologies without Batman's sanction. His decision to induct them into the Batfamily (to varying degrees—only Cassandra is really made part of the family, as Batman takes over her training himself and formally adopts her as Bruce Wayne's daughter) is less, in my opinion, a recognition of their contributions than it is an effort to control vigilantism in Gotham City.

bara has no model for a world in which regulation is not imposed from on high. The only means she has of liberating herself of such regulation is to climb the ranks until she is the one imposing regulation and monitoring the surveillance assemblage.[21] Thus, when the regulatory surveillance assemblage for which she has served as agent is turned against her due to her disability and new deviance, Barbara's response is not a realization of the harm of such a system, but the conviction that she must surpass it by developing her own, as she does in "Oracle: Year One" and *Birds of Prey.*

José Alaniz (2016) skillfully analyzes "Oracle: Year One" from a disability studies perspective and, in *Death, Disability, and the Superhero* (2014), advances Tobin Siebers' (2008) counterargument to Donna Haraway's (1991) "Cyborg Manifesto." I intend to combine these critiques with Peter Galison's (1994) skepticism of cyborg origins into a single discourse here. I argue that, as much as Barbara's adaptation to her paraplegia is a quintessential disability narrative (as per Alaniz 2016), it is simultaneously a narrative of cyborg evolution. The cyborg is a miraculous, monstrous, deviant[22] hybrid of animal and machine, potentially unbound to existing hegemonies and biopolitics (Haraway 148, 163); but it is also indubitably a body, and a body as fallible and as vulnerable as all bodies are. It may resist the constructions of state power that act upon the body in

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[21] This mode of self-empowerment is best likened to "white feminism," or a feminism that prioritizes racial solidarity over resisting the white, capitalist, cishetero-patriarchy. A particularly stinging example of white feminism's priorities can be seen in the 2016 United States presidential election, when 53% of white women voted for the virulently racist, xenophobic, misogynistic, homo- and transphobic Trump administration over a qualified white woman who campaigned on a platform of inclusivity and diversity.

[22] The perceived deviance of disability (as opposed to the normality of able-bodiedness) is particularly ironic and, Tobin Siebers suggests, hypocritical: "It has often been claimed that the disabled body represents the image of the Other. In fact, the able body is the true image of the Other" (60).

abstract, but it is equally vulnerable to pain, hunger, or exhaustion (Siebers 63-64). Its politically subversive potential does not negate its embodiment. As such, I posit that this embodied cyborg, while guaranteed to gain the attention of Batman's regulatory surveillance assemblage, is perhaps best equipped to evade this assemblage, even as it is vulnerable to the concrete confinement or control exerted by this assemblage.

I do not intend to suggest that Barbara Gordon *is* this archetypical cyborg. Rather, I believe that she and her own regulatory surveillance assemblage can best be understood through Haraway's, Siebers', and Galison's respective (re)conceptualizations of the cyborg. Haraway describes the cyborg as "a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction […] a matter of fiction and lived experience that changes what counts as women's experience in the late twentieth century" (148). As Haraway explicates, the cyborg is not a creature of science fiction as much as one that recognizes the overarching narratives that have engendered it:

> In a sense, the cyborg has no origin story in the Western sense—a 'final' irony since the cyborg is also the awful apocalyptic *telos* of the 'West's' escalating dominations of abstract individuation, an ultimate self untied at last from all dependency, a man in space. An origin story in the 'Western,' humanist sense depends on the myth of original unity, fullness, bliss and terror, represented by the phallic mother from whom all humans must separate…The cyborg skips the step of original unity, of identification with nature in the Western sense. This is its illegitimate promise that might lead to subversion of its teleology as star wars. (150-1)

Like Athena, the cyborg emerges fully formed from its father; like Zeus to the Titans, the appearance of the cyborg heralds the end of the parent. In Barbara's case, there is no single origin story, but two distinct narratives, both of which are displaced in the continuity: *Batgirl: Year One* is a self-titled miniseries (other origin stories, such as *Batman: Year*

One or *Batwoman: Elegy* appear in *Detective Comics*); "Oracle: Year One" does not even take up an entire issue of *The Batman Chronicles*. From these separate (orphaned, illegitimate) origins, Barbara emerges, brilliant, stubborn, and tenaciously independent. Made metatextually parentless by the disunity of her own narratives, Barbara is aligned with the cyborg conception of family and community. "The main trouble with cyborgs," Haraway writes, "is that they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism" (151). Within the DC universe, the described un-parent could very well be Batman, the militaristic vigilante patriarch, or his alter-ego Bruce Wayne, a symbol of both capitalist success and the paternalism of state socialism.[23] But illegitimate offspring, as Haraway reminds us, are orphans in their own way, and "are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins. Their fathers, after all, are inessential" (151).

However, where Haraway sees innate subversiveness and power in the Frankensteinian hybridity by which the cyborg becomes, such hybridity is not inherently beneficial to the cyborg, nor does the illegitimacy of its parentage necessarily entirely remove original influence, as Frankenstein himself suggests. Disability scholar Tobin Siebers argues fiercely against Haraway's suggestion that cyborgs, innately powerful and subversive, live among us, embodied in people with disabilities (those who use wheelchairs, hearing aids, and more conventional prosthetics). He argues that the use of a prosthetic does not compensate for the loss of an ability, nor does it negate the experience of disability in an ableist society, as an inescapable and mutable lens of pain. "Rare," Siebers

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[23] Batman's socialist tendencies are displayed with rare extravagance in *The Road to No Man's Land*, wherein Wayne Enterprises attempts to singlehandedly save Gotham by keeping industry in the city, investing in small businesses, and conducting construction and repair work after the earthquake.

writes, "is the theoretical account where physical suffering remains harmful for long. The ideology of ability requires that any sign of disability be viewed exclusively as awakening new and magical opportunities for ability" (2008: 63).[24] Herein lies the problem of Haraway's disabled cyborg:

> Haraway is so preoccupied with power and ability that she forgets what disability is. Prostheses always increase the cyborg's abilities; they are a source only of new powers, never of problem. The cyborg is always more than human—and never risks to be seen as subhuman. To put it simply, the cyborg is not disabled. (2008: 63)

Siebers' critique of Haraway's cyborg is a necessary one, especially when reading a disabled character through cyborg theory. Barbara remains monstrously deviant, subversive, and networked—especially deviant, according to Batman's logic of normativity. However, she is not transformed by her disability so much as evolved to accommodate it. Becoming disabled, for Barbara, is not a moment of revelatory awakening; the only revolution of her disability is in the fact of its representation (Alaniz 2016, Cocca 2016) and in the roll of her wheelchair. However parentless and illegitimate she finds herself, or we find her, Barbara is still defined by the constructed world she inhabits—constructed by Batman, or by DC Comics—and so must navigate it by the rules it has dictated. She cannot betray her origins.

Peter Galison (1994), writing on the World War II origins of cybernetics (which

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[24] Jacques Derrida's more literal reading of the *pharmakon* as remedy/poison applies powerfully here:

> There is no such thing as a harmless remedy. The *pharmakon* can never be simply beneficial. […] the beneficial essence or virtue of a *pharmakon* does not prevent it from hurting […] This type of painful pleasure, linked as much to malady as to its treatment, is a *pharmakon* in itself. It partakes of both good and ill, of the agreeable and the disagreeable. Or rather, it is within its mass that these oppositions are able to sketch themselves out. ([1972] 1981: 99)

would be used in the development of the atomic bomb), argues that Haraway's faith in original independence is misplaced: "the associations of cybernetics (and the cyborg) with weapons, oppositional tactics, and the black-box conception of human nature do not so simply melt away" (260). Rather, like a scar hidden under transient makeup, such origins endure, shaping their (however illegitimate) progeny:

> Symbols matter: it counted for a great deal in the reception of cybernetics that its war applications were lethal, or potentially so. […] Would cybernetics, information theory, and "systems thinking" have proved such a central and enduring metaphor without combat? Would the pervasive postwar ontology of the enemy have had such a runaway success without the seduction of victorious military power? I doubt it. (263)

Thus, origins may be defied or subverted but not escaped; the original sin (of Eden, of gender, of war, of catastrophe) can be disguised but not undone. Having been disowned by the institution by which she was raised (the GCPD, in the person of Jim Gordon) and the institution to which she committed her adult loyalty (Bat-vigilantism), Barbara is by no means free of either. But denied entry to the echelons of regulation and, more gallingly, targeted by law enforcement as a vigilante and by Batman's regulatory surveillance assemblage as deviant, Barbara effectively disowns them in return *and* remakes herself in their image in the process of realizing her own cyborg potential. This is where Barbara most convincingly fits cyborg archetypology, and where, through her own filial faith, she exposes its vulnerability. Against the law of the GCPD and other enforcement agencies, Barbara is an active and unrepentant vigilante, but she breaks the law in pursuit of a public good. Against the ableist ideology of Batman's vigilantism, Barbara continues crime-fighting and sharing information (and operatives) as the situation requires.

IV. No One Does It Better than the Birds of Prey

Carolyn Cocca (2016) notes that, in her post-*The Killing Joke* superheroic persona of Oracle, Barbara

> embraces her new life, using a wheelchair as well as her exceptional intelligence, photographic memory, and facility with information sciences. These were skills that she had always had. But now, instead of using those skills occasionally as Batgirl, she would use them full time for her fellow superheroes as Oracle. (65)

Whereas her technological genius—her creative and masterful use of surveillance networks and computer databases—stems from her days as Batgirl and even earlier, her advancement of this genius, most alarmingly apparent in her hacking the human brain of a pedophile in "Oracle: Year One," is inspired by her new status as a disabled individual. The subversiveness of her representation as a disabled woman—a disabled woman who is attractive and desirable, who is capable and independent, and not an object of pity (Cocca 2016: 66-67; Alaniz 2016)—suggests the "secret resource for political change" Haraway sees in the cyborg (Siebers 2008: 64).

Nevertheless, the very fact of Barbara's disability underscores the flaw of uncomplicated, non-contradictory hybridized embodiment in Haraway's conceptualization. "Pain," Siebers reminds us, "is not a friend to humanity" (64); it is just pain. Like any human-made archetype, the cyborg is fallible, vulnerable to human frailties and corruptions. Thus, while Barbara emulates a cyborg after her disability as a means of evading or superseding Batman's regulatory surveillance assemblage, she is unable, or unwilling, to dismantle it. Much as the cyborg compiles itself from preexisting organic and cybernetic materials, Barbara builds her own surveillance assemblage from preexisting parts: she

recruits the established superheroine, Black Canary/Dinah Laurel Lance, as her field agent; she hacks into governmental surveillance networks around the world; she acquires funds (as Cocca points out [2016: 68]) from Wayne Enterprise grants or supervillain coffers; and she coordinates extensively with existing teams such as the Batfamily or the Justice League. Her very operation is an amalgamation of disparate units into a cyborg whole. This begs the question of why, exactly, Oracle and the Birds of Prey do not achieve that Harawayan subversion, and why Barbara's response to the failure of Batman's surveillance assemblage is to create the same type of system, but on a much broader scale.

Part of the problem is that the flaw condemning Batman's system to failure endures in Barbara's. Armed with the ability to see virtually everything at any time—having become an embodied panopticon, capable of performing the "total and detailed surveillance" through which "a sort of social 'quarantine'" may be imposed (Foucault 2010: 209, 206)—Barbara nevertheless fails to turn that incisive, perceptive gaze upon herself. This is demonstrated most clearly in the first arc of *Birds of Prey,* culminating in #6, in which the reader learns that the mysterious voyeur spying on Barbara in her apartment is none other than Batman. Barbara, justifiably, is furious at this invasion of her privacy:

> BATMAN: I've seen all that I need to see, Alfred. […] That Oracle is well. I needed to know that she's stable.
> ALFRED: And you feel that you're a proper judge of that, sir?
> BATMAN: That sarcastic edge wasn't lost on me, Alfred. Barbara carries a lot of responsibility as Oracle. I want to be sure she holds up under it.
> ORACLE: Nice to know you care, "Big Brother."
> BATMAN: uh?
> ALFRED: My word…

> ORACLE: You thought I didn't know you were watching me. I was just curious to know how long you'd keep the "Babscam" on. Thanks for not installing one in my shower or bedroom, "Big Brother." Oracle out. (Dixon, Land, Vasquez, and deGuzman 3-5)

What most rankles Barbara is the fact that Batman used the same methods on her that he employs to surveil antagonists such as the Joker (see Fig. 2.09-2.11). What should unsettle the reader is the evident hypocrisy in Barbara's rebuke of Batman, conveyed through the very cameras he had trained on her. Barbara, in a moment of intense personal triumph, has (much like her moment of interrogation in *Gotham Knights* #43) turned the surveilling gaze back on Batman, invading the "boy's-only" sanctum of the Batcave in a move that ensures that Batman, the arbiter of regularity, will think twice before spying on her again. "Game, set, match, *Batgirl,* you big jerk," she says to herself, connection safely closed (5). Barbara has secured her own privacy, but the same cannot be said for the residents of Gotham City, nor, indeed, anyone in the world.

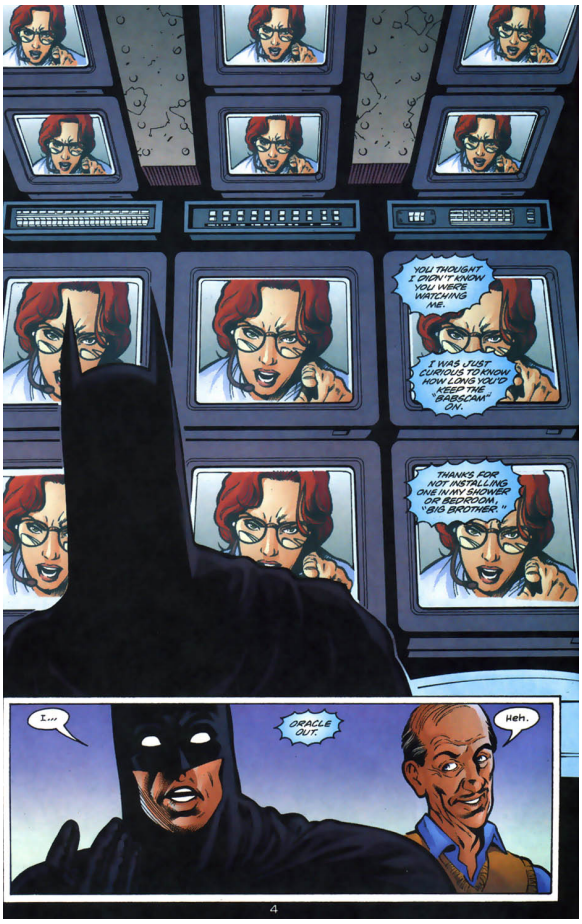

Fig. 2.09: From "Time's Rainbow," *Birds of Prey* #006. Here, it is revealed that Batman has been spying on Barbara as she begins her work with Black Canary. More importantly, Barbara has been spying right back, using her technological prowess to reverse Batman's surveilling gaze and infiltrate his sanctified Batcave. What is especially interesting about this scene is that Barbara does not seem to register the hypocrisy in accusing Batman of fascistic "Big Brother" tendencies in performing her own invasive surveillance upon him.

In constructing a regulatory surveillance assemblage to rival and surpass Batman's, Barbara only increases the "subtle, calculated technology of subjection" Foucault describes in "Panopticism" (2010: 210). The disciplines—(bio)power imposed upon bodies by the state/the panoptic watcher—Foucault argues, "characterize, classify, specialize; […] hierarchize individuals in relation to one another and, if necessary, disqualify and invalidate" (211). Lyon (2007) goes further. Surveillance, he argues, though "inherently ambiguous […] is never neutral" (96), and the digital collection of data only exacerbates the potential for its misuse (124). Barbara's creation and implementation of her own regulatory surveillance assemblage (an entity Lyon describes as "constantly undulat[ing], pulsat[ing] and mutat[ing]" [95]; one thinks Haraway would approve) is still an entity that surveils, without any oversight, anyone on the planet. Once such an absolute surveillance is implemented, it matters very little who operates the panopticon: power is still exerted upon subjected bodies.

V. Conclusion

Barbara's entire life has been ordered around systems of regulation and classification: as a civilian, a vigilante, the daughter of a policeman, and more. It is telling that the one job she holds outside of law enforcement and vigilantism is that of a librarian, someone responsible for ordering knowledge into easily accessible categories. Haraway suggests that "[w]riting is pre-eminently the technology of cyborgs" (1991: 176), though she muddies this claim in pollution and noise, by arguing that the cyborg alphabet recognizes itself as an imperfect communicator, incapable of exact translation or definition. Here, perhaps, Haraway's dark vision of a cyborg future comes into being: "From one perspec-

tive," she writes, "a cyborg world is about the final imposition of a grid of control on the planet" (154). Lyon reminds us that such control, achieved through the classification of surveillance data, "does not merely 'sort things out' in an objective or neutral way" (2007: 94), but rather perpetuates the biases of the woman behind the curtain. In Gotham, Batman has "made an angel of control and a devil of disorder" (Galison 1994: 266), and Oracle continues to do so. Her own team of vigilante crimefighters, though often at odds with Batman, follows his example in determining who is considered a threat and how they might best be disciplined.

Such severe binarism is inflexible, and occludes any grasp of the human world, painted as it is in shades of grey. Batman's system failed—first to protect Barbara from Gotham's own "devil of disorder" and then to protect itself from her surpassing it—demonstrating irrefutably that the system can be played. But, as Barbara's stints both as Batgirl and Oracle prove, playing the system does not mean dismantling it, though, as will be shown in the next chapter with Catwoman, it is not necessary to collude with an oppressive system to play it to one's advantage.

TABLE 2.01: Hierarchy of Surveillance and Regulation in Gotham City

Each bracket surveils all brackets below it.

Level	Surveillant	Conditions of Surveillance
5	Batman, Oracle	Independently, occasionally cooperatively
4	The Batfamily Proper	*Includes Alfred Pennyworth, Robins, "graduates" such as Nightwing*
3	Associates of the Batfamily	*Includes Batgirls, the Birds of Prey, superheroes from other cities/teams etc.; as permitted by Batman*
2	Gotham City Police Department; other law enforcement	Generally not privy to Batfamily surveillance, though the Batfamily is generally privy to theirs.
1	Rogues Gallery	*inconsistently and for personal gain*
0	Civilians	"Idle curiosity" does not constitute surveillance

CHAPTER THREE:
"Maybe it's none of your damn business": Surveillance, Subversion, and the Exploitation of the Gendered Gaze in Jeph Loeb and Tim Sale's Catwoman Trilogy

> men
>
> want to fix you
> save you
> or fuck you
>
> I can't be fixed
> and I don't care to be saved.
>
> — Jeanann Verlee, "Men"

Where Barbara Gordon supplements, surpasses, and collaborates with Batman's regulatory surveillance assemblages in order to preserve her own political freedom, such tactics are not feasible for all, and could not be sustained even if they were. Few, after all, have the technological prowess and financial access necessary to establish their own surveillance assemblages, and there is a limit to how many times Batman's regulatory surveillance assemblage can be superseded. Those seeking to evade Batman's regulations must, therefore, find alternative means of resistance. One such avenue is exemplified by Catwoman/Selina Kyle in Jeph Loeb and Tim Sale's trilogy of comic arcs: *Batman: The Long Halloween* (1996), *Catwoman: When in Rome* (2000), and *Batman: Dark Victory* (1999). In this trilogy, while Catwoman does not dismantle Batman's regulatory surveillance assemblage, she capably subverts it through calculatedly gendered

performances and effective counter-surveillance. Both of these tactics allow Catwoman to unsettle Batman's regulatory stranglehold and thus protect her independence and narrative agency.

My purpose in restricting my analysis to this trilogy is twofold: First, I wish to investigate the fraught question of authorship in comics, and given the innumerable authorial multiplicity of my other primary sources, using a narrative with a consistent and contained set of authors is better suited to achieve my goal than a multi-authored source. This is especially useful due to the uniqueness of Tim Sale's representation of Catwoman. Because of the artistic consistency maintained in *The Long Halloween* trilogy, the character is ripe for detailed visual analysis, where conglomerate narratives such as *No Man's Land* or Barbara's narratives present distinct challenges for such in-depth analysis.

Second, I intend to explore the very specific representation of Catwoman by artist Tim Sale, who portrays her with impressive musculature and eyes that seem to see all in a stark reversal of Batman's surveilling gaze. In Loeb/Sale's trilogy, I argue that Catwoman appropriates the right and the act of surveillance from Batman, as she constantly surveils him, and he is either unable or unwilling to stop her from doing so. What Catwoman sees, and how she uses this information, dominates the art and narrative, and defines her every interaction with Batman in an inversion of the passive female object/active male subject dichotomy identified by Laura Mulvey in visual media. However, this scopophilic upset is far from straightforward. Under Sale's pencil, Catwoman is a

physical spectacle: her abdomen ripples with musculature; her legs powerfully propel her from one rooftop to another; and out of the catsuit, her green eyes and red mouth arrest the gaze of any onlooker. All this culminates in a heady complication of Mulvey's articulation of female spectacle/male gaze, as Catwoman looks as much as she is looked at, and thus begs the question of performance in self-presentation and the politics of the gaze: who is allowed to look, at whom, and on what terms?

While again Foucault's work contributes heftily to this chapter, Mulvey's articulation of gendered gazes and spectacles, Yvonne Tasker's construct of "musculinity," or the masculinization of female bodies via musculature, Judith Butler's theories of performing gender, and Jack Halberstam's articulation of female masculinity all contribute to my examination of Catwoman's surveillance, performative spectacle, and exploitation of a system quite literally founded upon the right of a man to gaze unchallenged.

I. Establishing Narrative Continuity

Jeph Loeb, Tim Sale, Gregory Wright, Dave Stewart,[1] and Richard Starkings' trilogy of Gotham comics is comprised of *Batman: The Long Halloween*, *Catwoman: When in Rome*, and *Batman: Dark Victory.* Both *The Long Halloween* and *Dark Victory* are thirteen issues long, each series representing the passing of a year in Gotham, and each issue documenting events around a holiday. *When in Rome* is six issues, representing either a week (according to *When in Rome*'s own timeframe) or six months (according to the missing time in *Dark Victory* for which *When in Rome* is intended to account).

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[1] Stewart coloured *When in Rome*; Wright coloured *The Long Halloween* and *Dark Victory.*

Though I have described *When in Rome* as the second volume of the trilogy, it is more accurately understood as an alternative to issues #6-11 of *Dark Victory*, as Catwoman departs Gotham at the end of #5 and returns for #12.

Though published ten years into the 1986-2011 continuity (*No Man's Land*, which takes place approximately ten years into Batman's vigilante career, was published in 1999, just three years after *The Long Halloween* and alongside *Dark Victory*), the Loeb/Sale trilogy documents some of Batman's earliest and most influential stories. *The Long Halloween* sees the rise and fall of the *Godfather*-esque Falcone mafia family and Harvey Dent's fracturing into Two-Face, one of Batman's most enduring and tragic villains. *Dark Victory* exorcises *The Long Halloween*'s ghosts with the introduction of Batman's best-known and -loved associate: Dick Grayson as the first Robin.[2] *When in Rome*, by contrast, defiantly leaves both Batman and Gotham behind as Catwoman journeys to Italy in search of her own origins. While *The Long Halloween* and *Dark Victory* mark their time with serial killers (*Halloween*'s "Holiday" killer, who strikes on holidays to murder members of the Falcone family, is revealed to be both Harvey Dent and his wife, Gilda; *Victory*'s "Hangman," who murdered Gotham City Police officers, among others associated with the deaths of the Falcones, is revealed to be disfigured survivor Sofia Falcone), *When in Rome*'s battles are (more or less) psychological. Travelling with Edward Nygma, the Riddler, Catwoman contends with her own demons (and some of Gotham's transplanted rogues) to determine the lengths to which she is willing to go in

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[2] Dick Grayson's origin stories had already been introduced into the 1986-2011 canon in "Year Three."

order to preserve her selfhood and independence in Batman's Gotham.

II. The Body Spectacular

Before examining the ways in which Catwoman reclaims the act of looking in Gotham City, it is necessary to analyze the ways in which she manipulates both Batman's panoptic and personal gaze. Her manipulation of the gaze is constituted by her control of how she is seen, which is accomplished through her construction and adoption of performative personas: that of hyper-feminine high-society bachelorette and Bruce Wayne's paramour, Selina Kyle, and ambiguously-gendered prolific jewel thief and cat-burglar, Catwoman. Her embodiment of these personas ensures that Catwoman is perceived in such a way as to allow her to move through Gotham's high society and criminal underbelly with equal ease. Most crucially, each persona is defined by what Catwoman sees, and how she is seen by others, while performing.

In her seminal book, *Gender Trouble* ([1991] 1999), Judith Butler articulates the phenomenon of gender performativity. While later reflections on trans critiques of *Gender Trouble* (namely, that the very notion of performativity could suggest a fundamental insincerity to trans experiences and expressions) complicate Butler's original articulations of gender performance, it is nonetheless a critical concept deeply useful to my argument in this chapter with respect to Catwoman's personas. Primarily concerned with queer experiences of embodiment and gender, Butler defines gender performance not as a casual or frivolous decision ("today I feel like being *x* gender"), but rather as a deliberate expression of selfhood that allows the self to safely navigate its environment. Though

performances of identity persist to some degree regardless of the performer's surroundings, the performance may be tweaked or discarded entirely depending on the environment. For instance, a feminine gay man might perform more conventional heteromasculinity in his work place, and among his LGBTQ+ peers shed this performance of heteronormativity; similarly, a trans man may perform cisgender femininity in his workplace. Performativity, Butler writes, "is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration" (1999: xv). Most crucially (as can be observed from the examples provided above), gender performance typically has a specific audience in mind: that of the sociocultural arbiters of cisgender heteronormativity.

Broadly speaking, there is no singular arbiter of cisgender heteronormativity; individuals take their behavioural cues from the behaviour modelled around them, either by peers or by media representations. This is why diversity in media has become such a prominent issue. The absence of representations (especially positive) suggests that only what is shown is acceptable; if only heterosexual and cisgender characters are represented, it becomes easy to demonize any form of queer sexuality or gender nonconformity as unnatural, especially in oneself. Any society interested in policing normativity in its citizens (for example, a capitalist cisheteropatriarchy, as is common in the West) therefore has a vested interest in the representations of gender and sexuality proliferated in its midst. Butler asks, "To what extent does gender hierarchy serve a more or less compulsory heterosexuality, and how often are gender norms policed precisely in the service of

shoring up heterosexual hegemony?" (1999: xiii). The answer, of course, is entirely, given the millennia spent constructing and enforcing binarist gender roles in human societies. Maintaining these gender roles is thus simply another way of maintaining heterosexuality and, in doing so, the peculiar specular position of women under the arbitrating hetero-patriarchal gaze: as object and spectacle, available first for staring and second for possessing.

Laura Mulvey, whose 1975 essay "Visual Pleasures in Narrative Cinema" articulated the role of the male gaze in film (one sociocultural arbiter of heteronormativity), identified the perpetuation of patriarchal power through the "pleasure in looking" as "split between active/male and passive/female" ([1975] 1989: 19). In other words, the male character within the storyworld (and the presumed-male spectator watching the film, or, in our case, reading the comic) looks; the female character (and by extension, the forgotten female spectator) is looked upon, and "styled accordingly" for the looker's maximum pleasure (19-20):

> In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*. Woman displayed as sexual object is the *leitmotif* of erotic spectacle: from pin-ups to strip-tease, from Ziegfeld to Busby Berkeley, she holds the look, and plays to and signifies male desire. (19)

Essentially, women in Mulvey's conceptualization of narrative cinema exist only as object of the gaze—and, crucially, existing as object means not existing as subject. Woman, looked-at, is acted upon; she does not act for herself or upon others in the narrative. While "indispensable […] in normal narrative cinema," Mulvey writes, a woman's "vis-

ual presence tends to work against the development of a story-line" (19) precisely for this reason. She exists only insofar as is convenient to the main (male) character, or is pleasurable to the (presumed heterosexual male) spectator.

Fortunately, the "normal narrative cinema" Mulvey describes (19) is not the only form of visual narrative in which women may appear. Yvonne Tasker's (1993) interrogation of gender in action films identifies a means through which women may not only appear in genre film, but *act* in it as well, in both the sense of doing and performing. Tasker suggests that women are allowed to navigate, direct, and even occasionally dominate action narratives so long as they convincingly perform a specific type of masculinity, a type she terms "musculinity." By her definition, musculinity "indicates the extent to which a physical definition of masculinity in terms of a developed musculature is not limited to the male body within representation" (3). More succinctly, musculinity reinscribes the female body with masculinity through the development of musculature unconventional for femininity, thus troubling binarist assumptions of gendered bodies (3). The successful performance of musculinity allows the female performer to act in visual narrative. Where Mulvey argues that "normal narrative cinema" positions women "to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation" (1989: 19), Tasker offers action cinema, wherein a "musculine" woman may instigate or catalyze narrative action, as a potential site of solution. (Conversely, Tasker builds on Richard Dyer's work to note that if the action cinema makes an active subject of its women, it also recognizes its hyper-muscular men as spectacles in their own right [1993: 77].)

These theories of gender build upon each other into a useful model. Whereas Butler argues that all gender is performative, Mulvey identifies the ways in which certain performances of gender (especially conventional, cisgender, heterosexual femininity for a heterosexual male audience) are mandated, normalized, or enshrined in cultural discourses. Finally, Tasker articulates one way in which female characters can escape the burden of spectacular heterosexual femininity: they may actively navigate action narratives by assuming musculinity. It is, however, important to note Butler's caveat of sincerity or genuinity in performance. Simply because one performs does not mean that what is performed is not a meaningful and genuine part of one's identity. Indeed, Butler notes that gender is "constituted by the very 'expressions' of gender that are said to be its results" (1999: 33). Gender and its meanings are made by doing, expressed in performances to varied and diverse audiences, and such meanings are subject to change and development along with the self that expresses them.

III. Monstrous and Deviant: Breaking the Gender Binary

In Gotham, Batman is the arbiter of heteronormativity and its principle actant.[3] He determines what performances of heteronormative gender are acceptable and under which circumstances. He is particularly concerned with performances of heteronormative masculinity and strives to enforce his own conception of what constitutes acceptable

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[3] For further analysis of gender politics in Gotham, see the first chapter of my bachelor's thesis, "'Any more of your deviant behaviour': Masculinity in Gotham City," accessible here: http://hdl.handle.net/10166/3648. In this chapter, I argue, based on the case studies of Batman/Bruce Wayne, Jim Gordon, and lesbians Renee Montoya and Kate Kane, that Batman performs and polices a narrow heteromasculinity, and punishes instances of deviation from this idea of a correct masculinity.

heteromasculinity in the institutions over which he holds influence: the GCPD and the Batfamily, as Batman, and Gotham's social elite, as Bruce Wayne. Given the pervasive reach of his influence, which encompasses practically everyone in Gotham, criminal or otherwise, Catwoman's negotiation of her own gender performances as socialite Selina Kyle and morally ambiguous thief is nothing short of remarkable; each performance is tailored to allow her unobstructed passage through her respective circles *without* compromising her selfhood. Neither persona is false, nor solely performative. Instead, both are rooted in the truth of Catwoman's identity. Furthermore, neither performed persona is clearly and definitively gendered, as Selina casually upsets the rules of the heterosexual gaze with Bruce Wayne and Catwoman's body is simultaneously hyper-feminine and musculine.

The reader's first encounter with Selina Kyle in *The Long Halloween* (Fig. 3.01) drives home just how effectively she is able to manipulate gender expectations simply by allowing herself to be looked at in the manner expected by heteronormativity. The page (Loeb, Sale, Wright, and Starkings 1996: 15), of which she is the indubitable star, arrests attention with two long horizontal panels at the top and bottom bookending the centre panel. This panel, enclosed by a black-and-white pattern emulating a framed piece of art, is a portrait of Selina at three-quarters, capturing everything above the knee. Hip cocked, wild curls untamed, sporting a plunging neckline and a small fortune of silver jewelry, Selina looks designed to be looked at by everyone around her—particularly Bruce Wayne, who eyes her with quizzical appreciation in the last panel. However, Seli-

na is no passive object, as a more careful reading of the panel suggests: the thoughtful perch of her fingers on her chin, the artfully artless fall of her hair, the lettering's pointed tails, and Gregory Wright's colouring work (reminiscent of a halo or a spotlight) conspire to draw the reader's attention not to Selina's curves, but to her exposed eye (the other is veiled in her hair). With this one eye, Selina gazes out from the panel with something akin to satisfaction, if the curl of her lip is anything to go by. If others are allowed to look at her, it is only so that she is allowed to look her fill in return. Performing Mulvey's *to-be-looked-at-ness*, she captures attention and arrests thought—including that of the Batman.

Fig. 3.01: From The Long Halloween #1, "Crime"

Bruce, emerging from a chess-like encounter with the Falcones, is ready to sink into Bat-mode. Surveying the assembled mafiosi at the mob family's wedding, he thinks that it's "Time to go to work. It's late" (Loeb, Sale, Wright, and Starkings 1996: 15.1). However, as if in immediate contradiction, Selina appears unexpectedly, somehow escaping his notice until she commands it. "It's *hot,*" she corrects Bruce's unspoken words (emphasis in original): "Even for June. Years from now, when people are talking about the weather, they'll say: *'It's hot. But, not as hot as the night Johnny Viti got married'"* (1996: 15.2).[4] To this announcement—an interruption of Bat-justice, or a casual appropriation of narrative and spotlight—Bruce can only tilt his head and return her stare, his gaze physically unobstructed. He is, for once, not the instigator of surveillance, but its object. This dynamic will colour their every interaction, in both of their personas, throughout *The Long Halloween* trilogy: she baits a Bat-lure (with her beauty, her cunning, her criminality), and waits for him to bite.

In her civilian persona, Selina is doomed to wait. Her dates with Bruce Wayne are few and far between, which perhaps can be attributed to her unconventional approach to the tenets of heterosexual romance. Conventionally speaking, heterosexual romance operates much as Mulvey's gazing male/looked-at female dynamic does: the man sees, approaches, pursues; the woman *is* seen, *is* approached, *is* pursued. It is quite literally a matter of active subject/passive object. But the opposite is true between Bruce

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[4] Tellingly, this prophecy comes true: *Dark Victory* opens to Selina's observation that "It's hot. But, not as hot as the night Johnny Viti got married" (Loeb, Sale, Wright, and Starkings 2001: 22.2-3).

and Selina, in at least the Loeb/Sale trilogy. As seen in their first interaction, it is Selina who sees, approaches, and—as in her invitation to dance—pursues. On a rare night out, the two are approached by supervillainess Poison Ivy in the guise of a flower vendor, who inquires, "Would the gentleman like to buy the lady a rose?" (Loeb, Sale, Wright, and Starking 1996: 141.4). But before Bruce—Gotham's arbiter of cis-heteronormativity—can take his cue and pull out his wallet, Selina offers up a crisp green bill. "My treat," she says, smirking at her companion, and Bruce, eternally reactive, only sighs her name, "Selina…" (1996: 142.1), with some degree of exasperation. When he begins to avoid her, due to a plot set in motion by Poison Ivy's rose, she seeks him out and discovers him a captive of Ivy's botanical machinations; then, in a glorious two-page spread, Selina-as-Catwoman stages a rescue of the bewitched Batman.

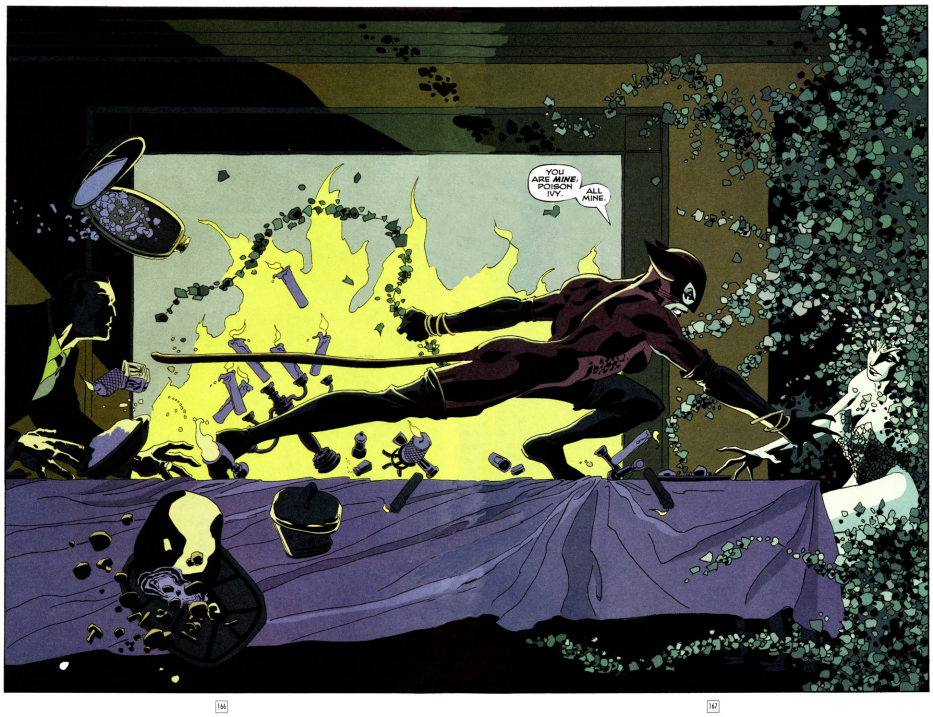

Fig. 3.02: From *The Long Halloween* #7, "April Fool's Day"

This scene (Fig. 3.02; 1996: 167-168) represents a collapse of the social spheres carefully constructed by both Bruce and Selina to separate their normative and deviant personas. Here, in the heart of Wayne Manor, where Selina has joined Bruce for a romantic dinner, Catwoman strikes in defence of her erstwhile paramour, lunging at Ivy with claws out. The image is powerful in its representation of Catwoman: though Selina veils herself in fashionable femininity, artist Tim Sale uses the Cat-suit to articulate each impressive muscle. Her shoulders bulge, her abdomen ripples, her legs and buttocks tense with immense strength and flexibility; she attacks with a bulky physical solidity rare in superhero comics' portrayals of women, where conventional comics wisdom reminds us that men are drawn with over-developed musculature (as aspirational figures for the presumed male reader) whereas women are drawn with exaggerated sexual features (as objects with whom the male reader would want to have sex).

While I would not necessarily read Sale's depiction of Catwoman as a deliberate inversion of this gendered dynamic in comics (nor Catwoman as a necessarily aspirational figure for readers of any gender), the creative choice to represent Catwoman as incredibly muscular suggests Tasker's musculinity in its purest form. In her civilian persona, Catwoman cannot intervene in Poison Ivy's plots without either compromising her masked identity or playing out that most tired of hetero-romantic clichés, a catfight between two women over the affections of a man. As Catwoman, however, her options are endless thanks to her adoption of her action-persona. Because Batman cannot determine the source of her information, he will not be able to discern her motives for interfering.

Is she feuding with Ivy? Casing Wayne Manor for a future burglary? Protecting Bruce Wayne for her own inscrutable reasons? Maybe, Catwoman would say, in precisely the same formulation, it's any or all or none of the above; maybe, it's none of his damn business.

Crucially, though Selina in her mod dresses and cat-eye sunglasses ignores gendered conventions (even as she performs adherence to them), it is not until she sheds her civilian skin to don the skin-tight Cat-suit that she can take on the role of an action protagonist (if not outright heroine). Tasker identifies the masculinisation of the female body through musculature as one way female characters can exert agency over their own narratives; this is precisely what Catwoman does. Where Selina pursues Bruce, Catwoman saves him, shoulders broad and back rippling with muscle, her physique all but indistinguishable from Sale's hyper-muscular Batman. Had Sale known of the sports bra, Catwoman may have even passed for male—but this, irrefutably and unforgivably, would cross the stiff sociocultural line between masculinity and femininity in such a way as to render it permeable, flexible, and therefore immaterial.

Catwoman does not—indeed, cannot—pass for male. The Cat-suit that reveals her advanced musculature also makes obvious her generous bosom and classically hourglass figure. But despite this gendered ambiguity, and perhaps because of it, Catwoman does offer an intervention into the gender politics of superhero narratives. The ambiguity of Catwoman's gender, buoyed by her persona-tailored performances, compromises Mulvey's heteronormative division of action and subjectivity, and complicates Tasker's

argument about the spectacle of both male and female bodies in action cinema. Where Tasker reminds us that action cinema reveals the spectacle inherent in the hyper-muscular and -masculine man, Catwoman's musculinity, combined with her irrefutable femininity, muddies the waters. Does she remain a spectacular object because of her musculinity or because women, in visual media, connote to-be-looked-at-ness? Or is it the gendered hybridity that creates the spectacle? Jack Halberstam (1998) notes that, "Ambiguous gender, when and where it does appear, is inevitably transformed into deviance, thirdness, or a blurred version of either male or female" (20). Batman's regulatory surveillance assemblage is designed to target deviant bodies and correct them into docility; Catwoman's hybridized and ambiguous gender marks her as deviant in a way typically not tolerated by Batman's assemblage. How, then, is she able to protect herself from Batman's regulation and revision?

Tasker (1993) reminds us that, "Both oppression and fantasised escape are […] in effect inscribed *over the body*" (133; emphasis in original). In gender performance and identity, much as in her shades-of-grey morality, Catwoman eschews extremes in favour of combining them into something uniquely her own. Simultaneously the object of the gaze and its actant, criminal and ally, masculine and feminine, firmly muscled and luxuriously soft, Catwoman carves out her own space and identity in Gotham City—and protects both through counter-surveillance directed at the Batman.

IV. Subject/Object: Counter-Surveillance and Narrative Agency

In the previous chapter, I outlined a hierarchy of regulatory surveillance assem-

blages (Table 2.01), in which each tier surveilled all those below it. This hierarchy positions Batman and Oracle/Barbara Gordon at the top, surveilling everyone, followed by the Batfamily, the Batfamily's associates, the Gotham City Police Department and other law enforcement, the Rogues Gallery (albeit inconsistently), and, at the very bottom, civilians, who do not surveil anyone on an institutional or individual level. Catwoman occupies a nebulous—we might describe it as hybridized—position in and adjacent to this hierarchy, parallel to the "thirdness" of her gender and the ambiguity of her criminality. As a criminal, she surveils her marks and is surveilled by Batman; as one of Batman's allies, she is, to at least a certain degree, exempt from the regulatory surveillance he applies to the more nefarious of Gotham's villains. However, as herself—a woman determined to protect the agency of her narrative—she turns her own surveillance equipment on Batman himself, an act of audacity exceptionally rare among Gotham's cast of characters, and, in doing so, protects her own deviance and narrative agency.[5] This protection is accomplished in two ways: Catwoman's surveillance of others (the Falcone-headed mafia, for instance, or the Riddler) is for her own immediate benefit, of course, but it also serves to make her useful to Batman. By contrast, her surveillance of Batman serves only herself; it allows her to dictate the terms of their interactions in *The Long Halloween* trilogy, and thus, metatextually, maintain her narrative agency free from Batman's influence.

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[5] Jason Todd (Robin II/The Red Hood) is an example of another character who successfully enacted surveillance against Batman without his knowledge, but Jason had the distinct advantage of (a) knowing Batman's civilian identity and habits, and (b) being, as far as Batman was concerned, dead.

Control of her own narrative—achieved by evading the influence and control resulting from Batman's regulatory surveillance assemblage—is Catwoman's primary objective throughout *The Long Halloween* trilogy. Her every action, each of which she frames in terms of narrative tropes and allusions, is designed to either explicate her own story or to manoeuvre around Batman's regulation, and the gender- and genre-appropriate damsel-in-distress tropes through which such regulation attempts to confine her.

Michel Foucault's (2010) meditation on the function of confinement and punishment in "The Body of the Condemned" suggests that "lenient" methods of punishment, such as confinement or correction (both of which, in addition to the more "violent or bloody" methods, are employed by Batman), situate punishable offences in the body itself (171-2). In other words, crime or deviance is not a social problem, exacerbated by institutions such as poverty, racism, misogyny, homo- and transphobia, ableism, and more. Instead, it is, in the words of Nickie D. Phillips and Staci Strobl (2013), "contained in the individual" (100).[6] Foucault also notes that punishment is not "above all (if not exclusively) a means of reducing crime" (2010: 171); rather, it is a means of regulating a deviant body until it becomes "both a productive body and a subjected body" (173). Panopticism, as a central feature of Foucault's conceptualization of confinement and subjection, exerts such a punishing force upon its subject. To be surveilled, then, and to know one is surveilled, is to regulate oneself into productivity and subjec-

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[6] Foucault further develops this individuation of crime in his essay, "About the Concept of the Dangerous Individual in 19th-Century Legal Psychiatry" (1978), in which he likens the attitude toward individuals who had committed crimes to attitudes directed at infectious disease outbreaks.

tion.

In Chapter One, I argued that the apparent omnipresence (and implicit omniscience) of Batman's surveillance assemblage renders such an assemblage panoptic. Criminal, uniformed, and civilian Gothamites alike act with the knowledge or expectation that if they behave in a manner Batman deems deviant, Batman will swiftly act to contain and discipline that behaviour, frequently through acts of extreme violence. Surveillance, to Foucault, is a force of discipline; to surveillance theorist Lyon, it is an expression of power:

> Surveillance serves various purposes, from entitlement to control (and sometimes both those at once), and is inherently ambiguous. Moreover, in order to work, many surveillance processes depend on the involvement, witting or not, of those who are surveilled. Such persons are not merely subject *to* surveillance, but subjects *of* surveillance. In those contexts where surveillance is perceived as or has the effects of control, the fact that its subjects interact and react with surveillance means that its effects are mitigated or magnified in part in relation to their involvement. Surveillance may be questioned or attacked as well as accepted meekly. The struggles make a difference to surveillance outcomes. (2007: 6-7)

As detailed by Lyon, surveillance is a multi-directional pathway. The actions of the watched—in "meekly" accepting their surveillance, manipulating it, or taking action against it—inevitably effects how that surveillance is enacted. A lack of objection allows for the unimpeded continuance of the surveillance assemblage; manipulation or counteraction may inspire reinvention or proliferation in an effort to combat each. It is especially significant, therefore, when the flow of surveillance changes—when the watcher becomes the watched. This is the case in *The Long Halloween* trilogy, as Batman becomes—and *becomes aware* of his status as—a surveilled object, a spectacle to Cat-

woman's penetrating gaze.

Drawing on Freudian psychoanalysis (especially the "castration complex"), Mulvey ([1975] 1989) acknowledges the "threatening in content" possibilities of the gaze, especially when it is a woman, and not a man, who gazes (19). Upsetting the scopophilic conventions in this way ejects man from the seat of surveilling authority; under Mulvey's deconstruction of visual pleasure in narrative cinema, the only apparent alternative in "normal" narrative is that of the *looked-at*. However, as Mulvey observes with a kind of apocalyptic optimism in her conclusion, such normal narrative appeared, in 1975, to be on the wane, creating space for unconventional and alternative narrative styles (26). *The Long Halloween* trilogy does not, I think, meet this challenge, but it does offer an interesting step forward. After all, Selina/Catwoman looks, and is looked-at, and the same can be said for Batman. A two-page spread, midway through *The Long Halloween*'s first chapter, exemplifies this dynamic in depicting Catwoman's aggressive response to Batman's interruption of her burgling the Falcone residence (Fig. 3.03; Loeb, Sale, Wright, and Starkings 1996: 24-25). Poised in the air, gemstones trailing her like a comet's tail, she strikes at him with her foot; at the left-hand-side of the page, the billow of his cloak suggests he retreats to avoid her attack. It is worth noting that, while Catwoman's spandex-clad-bosom catches the eye (much as her unveiled eye demanded attention in Fig. 3.01), she retains her musculature, clearly defined in her thighs, abdomen, and arms. Further, Catwoman is purely active in this scene. Her obvious femininity does not undercut or negate her embodiment of Tasker's musculinity.

Batman, on the other hand, retreats, or at least avoids. Compared to an aggressively active Catwoman, he is unusually passive, and in that passivity, as Mulvey suggests, he becomes spectacular.[7] His hands dwarf Catwoman's daintily-pointed (and, Mulvey might note, vaguely phallic in its extension) foot; his arms are corded with muscle, as thick around as Catwoman's thigh; his shoulders suggest an adult could sit on each without discomfort to themselves or Batman. The Bat-symbol stretches its wings across his brawny pectorals, and his torso bulges through the spandex. In fact, Batman's muscular spectacle is as consistent in *The Long Halloween* trilogy as Catwoman's, bringing to mind Tasker's (1993) analysis of male action heroes as spectacular as well:

> An analysis of the figure of the male bodybuilder as a movie star, needs also to acknowledge that as the muscular hero is caught by the camera, he is both posed and in motion at the same time. […] This combination allows us to problematise any clear set of critical distinctions between passivity, femininity and women on the one hand and activity, masculinity and men on the other. (77)

Sale and Wright imbue Batman with stillness, and accordant spectacle, just as they allow Catwoman to command the page. On the rare occasions when he erupts into motion, moving aggressively toward Catwoman, undeterred by her own activeness, he is usually motivated by the knowledge that she has been surveilling him without his knowledge for an unknown amount of time. His response, which escalates with each encounter, can therefore be read as a repudiation of the (female) gaze that has revealed him to be a

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[7] This active/passive dichotomy persists in their lettering as well: Batman's thought-captions are contained, regularly spaced, neatly lined up in the upper left-hand corner. Catwoman's, on the other hand, allot each word a "bubble," and conclude in a spiky, caps-locked and bolded shout that bursts through the dark of the Falcones' apartment.

spectacle—an object of visual pleasure.

Fig. 3.03, above: From The Long Halloween #1, "Crime"

Fig. 3.04, left: From *The Long Halloween* #1, "Crime"

The first encounter (Fig. 3.04; Loeb, Sale, Wright, and Starkings 1996: 49) portrays Catwoman crouched behind a building's balustrade, modestly equipped with unspecified surveillance equipment: presumably, telescopic night vision goggles and a long-range microphone and headset. From across the street, she has been surveilling a clandestine meeting between Batman, Commissioner Gordon, and District Attorney Harvey Dent (who would, at *The Long Halloween*'s climax, become one of Batman's great villains, Two-Face). The three men have been hashing out the details of an alliance to take down the Falcone crime family—an alliance to which Batman has only barely acquiesced, as he believes it will compromise his mission of vigilantism—when Batman abruptly vanishes, only to pry his way onto Catwoman's rooftop to loom over her. After what passes for pleasantries among the masked crowd, Batman draws back: "You *knew* I'd see you spying on us," he realizes (50.1), and, of course, that's the crux of the matter. Surveillance, as Lyon (2007) argues, is a two-way street at the most reductive; how the watched chooses to engage with the surveillance assemblage irrevocably changes the assemblage itself, and the watcher on the other end. Lyon writes that surveillance "is about vision, but not one-sidedly so; surveillance is also about visibility." No matter the context or purpose, "the watched play a role" in the watching (15-16).

For Catwoman and Batman, the discomfort in the corruption of the surveilling gaze—Catwoman looking, Batman being looked at—lies at least partially with Batman being unwittingly made a visual spectacle, to be classified and acted upon as Catwoman wishes. Because his objectification is to some degree unwitting or at least unanticipated,

Batman cannot prepare for the surveilling gaze; he is caught off guard, no performative armour at hand to protect himself. In this first case, Catwoman turns the surveilling gaze back upon Batman, but not necessarily to *spy* on him; her brief surveillance is intended to trigger a response from Batman's regulatory assemblage and, in this, it is absolutely successful. "I *don't* want to help," she tells Batman, who has drawn his cape around himself to look as imposing as physically possible. "But, I might be able to be *helpful*" (Loeb, Sale, Wright, and Starkings 1996: 50.2). In dubious exchange—Batman says "No promises"—Catwoman points out that, "Maybe, someday, *I'll* need help. And you can return the favor" (50.3-4) [*sic*].

Notably, in *Dark Victory*, Batman does return the favour, though he refrains from saying as much outright, and she wisely does not acknowledge the debt as paid. The circumstances are similar: "For weeks now," Batman reflects, "I've been hearing that *Catwoman* is on the prowl. Leaving a trial that is too easy not to follow" (Loeb, Sale, Wright, and Starkings 2001: 146.1). Catwoman, yet again, has purposefully triggered Batman's surveillance assemblage, knowing her choice to investigate Carmine Falcone's stolen corpse to be a perilous one. Right on time, Batman appears to save the day, but his heroism leaves a sour taste in Catwoman's mouth: "So," she says, hands on muscled waist, looking grimly away from Batman, "This is what I've become" (Fig. 3.05):

> CATWOMAN: I get into trouble and *you* save me. Not much faith in my nine lives…What *am* I to you? An ally? Competition? A criminal? Some stupid *damsel* in distress!
> CATWOMAN [cont'd.]: I know there's *something* about me you want. I can tell. You go all rigid when I'm around.
> CATWOMAN [cont'd.]: Let's do it. Right now. Take off the masks.

CATWOMAN [cont'd.]: No secrets. (153.1-4)

Throughout this speech, she turns progressively towards Batman; by the end, her clawed hand hovers just below his chin, poised to make good on her suggestion. For a single silent panel, Batman meets her eyes, appearing to consider the offer seriously, poised as if in the moment before a kiss. But, in the next panel, he is once again ramrod straight, eyes narrowed, in full Bat-mode as he interrogates her in apparent payment for her rescue: "What is your relationship to the Falcone Crime Organization?" he demands (153.5-6). However, the intimacy almost shared between them lingers, and when Catwoman departs, a "Happy Valentine's Day" her only answer, Batman does not stop her, likely in response to her gendered performance of sexual/romantic availability.

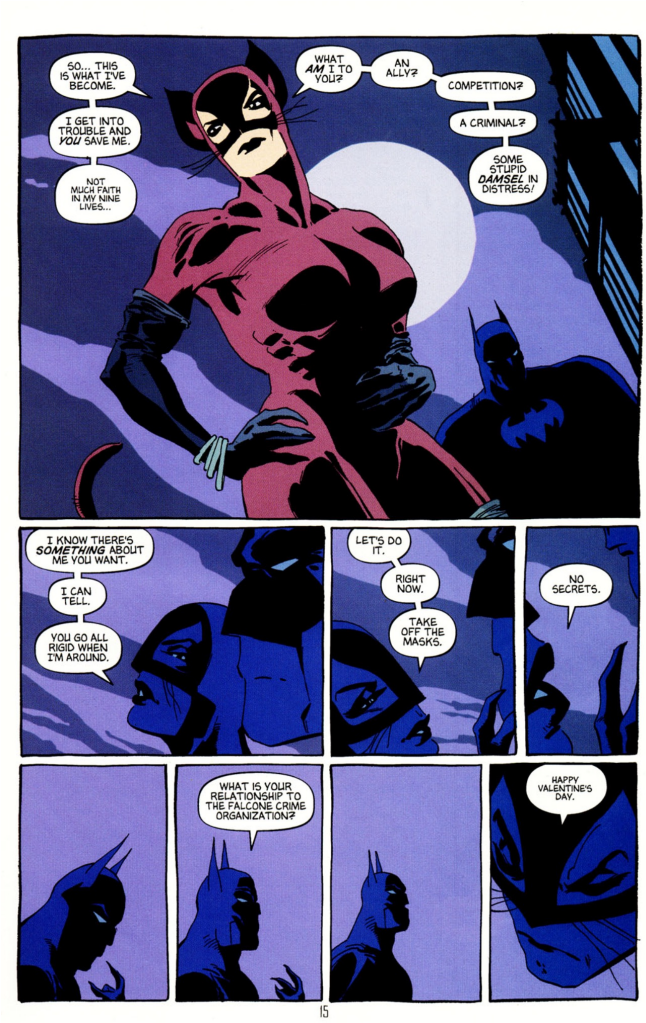

Fig. 3.05: From *Dark Victory* #5, "Love"

Other encounters pass more cordially. In *The Long Halloween* #6, "St. Patrick's Day," Catwoman uses the Bat-signal atop the Gotham City Police Headquarters to call a meeting. Batman is quick to condemn her use of the signal—"It's not a toy"—but sure to thank her for her victory against Poison Ivy in the previous chapter. Still others—*Dark Victory*'s first chapter, "War"—are underwritten with resigned apathy by Batman. "How long have you been there?" Batman asks, face shadowed, and remains impassive to her too-perceptive response: "Long enough. What's the world coming to when *I'm* about the only one you can trust?" (2001: 46.2-3). Batman himself, confessing his trust in her by not knowing the duration of her surveillance, must be asking himself the same thing.

However, Batman twice—near the climaxes of *The Long Halloween* and *Dark Victory*—responds with violence to Catwoman's surveillance, or manipulation of his surveillance assemblage. In each instance, he has entertained or is entertaining the idea that Catwoman could be the killer he seeks, either Holiday or Hangman. In *The Long Halloween*, he catches her in the act of surveilling him, but in *Dark Victory*, she catches him off-guard—which may explain the heightened degree of violence in the second encounter. However, despite the intimidating aggressiveness of Batman's responses, Catwoman is able to protect her self-interests by providing either no information or a great deal of misinformation. Furthermore, by coding her performances of acquiescence as conventionally gendered (as seen in the above example), Catwoman's refusal to cooperate is allowed to go unpunished by Batman and his regulatory surveillance assemblage.

The first violent encounter, in *The Long Halloween* #12, "Labor Day," on which

I will focus, is initially characterized by Catwoman's sultry reaction to Batman's looming arrival. "Don't you ever say *'Hello"*?" she inquires with a sly, half-lidded smirk (1996: 309). Batman, however, is having none of it. He demands "the *truth.* All of it" about Catwoman's connection to the Falcone family. When she deliberately misinterprets his demand as an offer to trade secret identities, he seizes her forcefully. Heedless of, or perhaps counting on, the spatial limits of the ledge on which they are precariously perched, Batman snarls, "This isn't the *time* for that schoolgirl act. *I want the truth"* (310). Catwoman immediately drops her coy mien, but does not abandon her performatively gendered strategy. If the "schoolgirl" act is not effectively countering Batman's interrogation, perhaps invoking Batman's chivalric tendencies through the guise of the scorned woman will do the trick. "You're *hurting* me," she tells him, carefully blank until the moment he releases her, when she curls protectively over the arm he had previously grasped, wearing a look that could kill (311; Fig. 3.06). This exchange can arguably be an expertly executed manipulation of Batman's self-doubt: Batman has constructed himself as the person who saves women, not the one who hurts them; only his enemies are subject to violence at his hands (as those outside of Batman's own sovereign ban). But something else happens, too. In each of the three panels, the perspective shifts as the white sliver of Batman's eye recedes and then is ejected from the frame; as Batman's gaze diminishes, Catwoman fills the panel, her own gaze rendered inescapably significant by Sale and Wright's use of chiaroscuro and Sale's positioning Catwoman's calculating eye in the very centre of the final frame. As much as Batman surrenders to

Catwoman's gendered performance, he is defeated by her unflinching gaze.

Fig. 3.06: From The Long Halloween #12, "Labor Day"

Catwoman's relation to Batman's sovereignty is ephemeral at best, as she observes in *Dark Victory* ("What *am* I to you? An ally? Competition? A criminal? Some stupid *damsel* in distress!" [2001: 153.1]). Batman offers no resolution then, nor can he in this scene from *The Long Halloween*, when she presents herself as a woman in mid-

abuse, typically the figure rescued by Batman, instead of as an erstwhile adversary he can press for information. Only once Catwoman has rewritten the rules of their encounter does she offer any kind of answer—which, of course, turns out to be no answer at all:

> CATWOMAN: Maybe, it's because the Roman treats the world as a ball of yarn…and you know how much cats like to *unravel* balls of yarn. Maybe, it's because whenever *he's* around…*you're* around. Maybe, it's none of your damn business. (1996: 312).[8]

And with that, she exits stage right, plummeting from their too-tight pedestal in a perfect swan dive, ignoring Batman's call after her. But Batman does not pursue her, perhaps still steeped in the shame she roused in him, or caught off-guard from her unlikely expression of romantic interest. Whatever the reason, Catwoman's departure, in full musculine glory, is achievable only because she performs conventional archetypes of femininity while in costume, and this performance, by some Bat-logic, supersedes her expression of gendered "thirdness" or deviance.

While Catwoman's methods for averting Bat-shaped regulation and interference in her life are cleverly engineered and ultimately successful in their execution, it is Catwoman's understanding of what Batman's regulation means that is arguably her most important contribution to the 1986-2011 continuity. Following her "Some stupid *damsel*

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[8] This exchange is echoed in the same precise formula in *Dark Victory*, when Catwoman offers her services in tracking down Carmine Falcone's stolen body:

> SOFIA FALCONE: Why would *you* want the job?
> CATWOMAN: Maybe it's the money. Maybe I'm just curious as to who took him and why. Maybe it's none of your damn business. (2001: 129)

in distress" exchange with Batman, Catwoman vanishes to Italy for six months, where she is beset on all sides by Gotham's C-list villains, Cosa Nostra machinations, and a series of increasingly intimate and unsettling dreams featuring the Caped Crusader. One particularly unnerving nightmare features Catwoman suffering from grievous injury, strapped to an operating table while Batman dons surgical scrubs and selects a scalpel. Catwoman has no interest in being the subject of Batman's impromptu medical intervention, however. Perhaps reading in her dreams the medical surveillance Foucault describes as providing the foundation for the "docile body" (2010: 180), she engages in this exchange:

> BATMAN: I am trying to save your life…
> CATWOMAN: ***How?*** *By dissecting every little part of who I am?*
> CATWOMAN [cont'd.]: ***No.*** Don't you *understand—? —This* is why I left you. You'll never accept me for who I really am…Only as the socialite, rich girl you want me to be…*Bruce*... (Loeb, Sale, Stewart, and Starkings 2005: "Chapter Three: Wednesday")

Catwoman's subconscious realization of Batman's secret identity, while important, is not the most important aspect to this dreamed exchange. Crucially, she understands his endeavours to "save" her as being inherently threatening—or at least, not inherently benign. At *When In Rome*'s close, Catwoman describes her greatest fear as "A world in which everywhere I turned, Batman was there to save me" ("Chapter Six: Saturday"), and this is precisely why: Batman's idea of saving someone is (albeit more metaphorically) carving them open and prying open their most carefully guarded secrets, and then leveraging this information until the person in question has reformed to his satisfaction. There is precious little room for individuality in this metric, or for identities that diverge

from Batman's.

V. Conclusion

Jeph Loeb and Tim Sale's *The Long Halloween* trilogy offers a unique depiction of Catwoman, where writing and art conspire to complicate her relationship to Batman and his regulatory surveillance assemblage. Where other portrayals have flattened her engagement with the femme fatale archetype and set her sights sexually on the Batman (and provided him the film noir high ground of rejecting her advances), *The Long Halloween* trilogy does no such thing. It certainly recognizes the type and history of the femme fatale in Catwoman's character, but it gifts her agency and nuance in her negotiation of Batman's expectations and classifications. David Lyon argues that, "As surveillance categories make people up to fit them, so those thus identified may also assert what they claim are their identities, those ways of thinking about themselves that make sense to them" (2007: 74).

This contest over identity is at the heart of *The Long Halloween* trilogy. Batman cannot successfully categorize Catwoman—even his single-minded focus on her relationship to the Falcone family finds no answer—because she does not allow him to do so. Catwoman instead offers a wide variety of options, discarding and donning each variation as the situation demands, until perhaps not even the World's Greatest Detective can tell which may be genuine, and that's the secret: each tailored performance contains a seed of truth. Combining her evident femininity with musculinity by turns subtle and overt, Catwoman is resolutely herself in any situation. Furthermore, she is able to remain

so because of her incisive understanding of the implications and workings of Batman's regulatory surveillance assemblage. Knowing it to endanger her freedom, she capably manipulates it for her own benefit. At *Dark Victory*'s close, far from Batman's prying eyes, Catwoman pays her respects to Carmine Falcone, who may have been her father. The trilogy, thus, is entirely her own story, and one whose integrity she will protect from Batman's oversight.

Catwoman offers an alternative negotiation of Batman's regulatory surveillance assemblage to Barbara's. Rather than making herself the highest agent of surveillance, effectively buying personal independence with the panoptic regulation of the world, Catwoman only enters herself into the stakes.

CONCLUSION:
"Criminals are a superstitious and cowardly lot."

I.

My colleague Lauranne Poharec laughed at me the first time I pointed out a surveillance camera to her. "This is *Scotland*, Aidan," she said, meaning Britain, and one of the most heavily surveilled countries in the world, and *obviously*.

"On a *bus?!"* I said.

"Batman has made you paranoid," said Lauranne fondly, and changed the subject.

The first iteration of Batman's origin story takes place in *Detective Comics* #33 (1939). After two rows detailing Bruce Wayne's foundational trauma and self-improvement curriculum, the latter of which has provided fodder for the ultimate wish-fulfilment fantasy of the last eighty years, it occurs to Bruce that he can't just rely on forensics and overdeveloped musculature to fight crime (or endure as a character). The solution comes to him at once: "Criminals are a superstitious and cowardly lot," he muses. The key is to terrify them into compliance. Naturally, the best way to do this is to dress as a bat.

Nearly eighty years later, with the tiniest inkling of that terror, I can only say this: Well played, sir.

II.

Fear, then, lies coiled at the heart of Batman's approach to crime-fighting. This seems deeply flawed, and verges on unheroic altogether: it assumes the worst of humanity without hoping for the best. For a character like Batman, a non-powered and deeply traumatized individual who tends to be more grounded in the "real world" than other DC superheroes, perhaps this is the only perspective that makes sense. Certainly, so far as Frank Miller is concerned, this is the case.[1] Perhaps, too, there is an innate heroism in believing the world to be a cruel and unfeeling place, and preparing each night to suffer in its name anyways. I do not, nor will I, dispute that.

But we are not just discussing heroes; we are discussing *super*heroes, and the prefix is crucial. The Oxford English Dictionary lists a dizzying number of examples of the prefix, and declares that its use means "higher than" or above/upon something ("super-, *prefix*"). As an adjective, it underwhelms: "very good or pleasant," or, in reference to textiles, of exceptionally high quality ("super, *adj.* 2 and *int.*"). But in the noun of "superhero," it becomes extraordinary ("superhero, *n*."). The "super" presupposes the "hero": one must surpass the most impossible expectations as a hero to be considered a superhero. All superheroes, therefore, are heroic, even if not all heroes are super.

This brings us back to Batman, and the question of the superhero. In college, I

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[1] In *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*' climactic battle against Superman, Batman's internal monologue offers the following insight into his psyche:

> You sold us out, Clark. You *gave* them—the *power*—that should have been ours. Just like your *parents* taught you to. *My* parents…taught me a *different* lesson…—Lying on the *street—shaking* in deep *shock—dying* for no reason at *all*—they showed me that the world only makes *sense* when you *force* it to… (Miller, Janson, and Varley 1986: 192.3-6)

worked out a definition of "superhero" that I still use today, one that describes the kind of hero I needed to believe in at the time. I don't believe this disqualifies my definition; perhaps it even augments its validity. Batman himself exemplifies the idea that we create the heroes we need when at our most vulnerable: he made himself into the hero he needed the night his parents were murdered, a being more terrifying than the worst thing he could imagine, who could swoop to the rescue in the lightless hours of night.

My idea of a superhero is divorced entirely from the idea of fear, because I don't believe in fear as an effective long-term tool for humanity's betterment. Further, being somewhat cynical myself, I can't countenance the despair of trying to fight crime and evil without believing in a cause beyond mere righteousness.[2] Instead, my understanding of just what that "super" prefix connotes is based on faith. To my mind, a superhero is someone who fundamentally believes in the human capacity for goodness; who has faith that people can and *will* do better than has been done before; who goes out into all the horrors and cruelties and apathies of the world and emerges with this faith unbroken. It's someone who believes that, in however small a way, every single person is capable of positively contributing to their community and the world; and more than that, that they will do so if given the opportunity.

III.

This definition, broadly speaking, does not describe Batman. Of course, in specific cases it may (a continuity spanning twenty-five years, in which Batman has been written, drawn, and edited by hundreds of people, is bound to contradict itself on occasion).

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[2] Which isn't to say that moral righteousness isn't a valid motivator; just that, without faith, it seems an awfully hollow one.

There may be dozens of panels that contradict the dominant characterization of Batman as controlling, sexist, ableist, and aggressively normative, but against the thousands of panels that enforce that characterization, such examples must be interpreted as outliers. Either they are the extradiegetic product of conflicting creative understandings, or they demonstrate that Batman is capable of empathy and that he's just repressed that capability so deeply that it can only be used rarely. My claim, therefore, is not that Batman is incessantly un-superheroic. He's just that way most of the time.

So why write about him? Why dedicate so much time and energy to a superhero I believe unworthy of the very name?

Batman, according to DC Comics' own marketing, is the world's most popular superhero. That alone should merit him a close, critical look. But more than that, he's a character whose narratives continually reflect the times in which he exists. Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* and *Batman: Year One* are as blatant commentaries on Reaganism and the War on Crime as are possible. Foes such as the cringingly-named KGBeast exemplify late-eighties Cold War frustrations, and *No Man's Land* presaged the War on Terror more insightfully than *Watchmen*. Conflicting portrayals of Catwoman, Batwoman, or any of the Batgirls reflect both feminist anxieties and anxieties about feminism: how to negotiate the patriarchy without contributing to it; who is allowed into, and who is served by, feminist movements; where does that thin line between empowerment and objectification lie in a fictional woman's fashion. The absence of characters of colour, or rather, the reluctance to acknowledge several characters as non-white, demonstrates the white supremacy dogging Western footsteps. And, while correlation does not

equal causation, it's difficult not to see both the implicit approval of the Gotham City Police Department regarding Batman's vigilantism and the vigilantism itself—which most frequently manifests in extreme physical violence against men of colour—as either reflecting or enabling police brutality in the United States.

In other words, I write about Batman to write about the world. Pop culture in any of its forms embodies the preoccupations and quandaries of its age. This is perhaps truer for superheroes, that genre of American Exceptionalism, than for other icons; it is certainly true for Batman. Studying the Dark Knight is a means of decoding his historical context, and how one makes sense of that context.

There remains, of course, work to be done. The depths of the 1986-2011 continuity are yet unplumbed: scholars have glossed over the six Robins, save perhaps Carrie Kelley or, in previous continuities, Dick Grayson; Cassandra Cain's *Batgirl* is all but ignored. The curious case of Stephanie Brown, who defied the Bat in an identity of her own design, and again as Robin, and again as Batgirl, is practically unmentioned. The ableism behind designating all mentally ill and physically disfigured people evil may be scathingly remarked upon in a footnote, but has yet to be thoroughly interrogated. And that does not even approach the successive New 52 (2011-2016) and Rebirth (2016-present) continuities, and their own radical adaptations and revisions of the Bat-mythos. Far from there being too much written on Batman, the surface has only barely been scratched.

My goal in this thesis has been to examine the regulatory surveillance assemblages underpinning Gotham society, which are managed by Batman and, to varying degrees, his allies, in the 1986-2011 continuity. These assemblages, which are enforced, ne-

gotiated, and subverted with varying degrees of success and intent by very different people, are indisputably integral to Batman's vigilantism and its effect on Gotham City. Nonetheless, they constitute only one small part of Batman's efforts to regulate normality and correct what he deems deviant. Nor is the evasion, subversion, or cooption of Batman's regulatory surveillance assemblages a straightforward case of the heroism of others enacted against a villainous tyrant obsessed with normality. Rather, such negotiations may prioritize the individual at the cost of the community—as is seen in the case of Barbara Gordon and, to a lesser degree, Catwoman. In this way, these analyses may provide a useful perspective on activism and resistance in the age of Trump.

In elucidating surveillance and regulation in Gotham's modern age, I have endeavoured to condemn neither the characters subjected to my analysis nor the genre that has produced them. My aim, instead, has been to understand complex, flawed, and often contradictory entities, without either excusing their faults or denying their cultural value, the latter of which has only increased in the twenty-first century. By outlining the means through which Batman enforces his sovereignty and polices the deviance and subjectivity of Gotham's citizens, and by interrogating the ways in which two white women negotiate their freedom through Batman's regulation, I hope to have complicated representational anxieties in superhero comics. It is not enough to have a woman, or a person of colour, or a queer or gender non-conforming or disabled or neuroatypical individual in a position of authority, if that authority is predicated upon the oppression of others. Complicity is not innocent. The systems of justice themselves, in superhero comics and beyond, must change. Future scholarship must take this into account. In the meantime, it is my hope

that this thesis offers a modest contribution to the study of superheroes, their interpretations of justice, their political preoccupations, and the ways in which gender continues to dominate their stories.

Appendix: Narrative Chronology in Batman Comics, 1986-2011

N.B. The following list represents not an official chronology certified by DC Comics, but my own interpretation of the 1986-2011 canon as a cohesive and continuous, albeit non-linear, narrative. I include it here in case it may clarify any confusion for my readers.

Dates in parentheses indicate the original year of publication as indicated by the cover date, not the date of the reprint.
Comics with an asterisk (*) indicate comics cited and analyzed in this work.

1. *Batman: Year One* (1987)
2. *Batman: Year Two* (1987) + *Batman: Full Circle* (1993)
3. *Batman and the Monster Men* (2006)
4. *Batman and the Mad Monk* (2006)
5. *Batman: The Man Who Laughs* (2005)
6. "Prey" (1990-1991)
7. *Batman: Ego* (2000)
8. *Batman: The Haunted Knight* (1996)
9. **Batman: The Long Halloween* (1996)
10. **Catwoman: When In Rome* (2000)
11. **Batman: Dark Victory* (1999-2000)
12. *Robin: Year One* (2000)
13. **Batgirl: Year One* (2003)
14. *Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on Serious Earth* (1989)
15. *Catwoman: Selina's Big Score* (2002)
16. "The Second Robin" (1987-1988) + *Batman Annual* #12 (1988)
17. *Nightwing: Year One* (2005)
18. *Nightwing* begins (1996-2009)
19. **Batman: The Killing Joke* (1988) + *The Brave and the Bold* #33 (2010)
20. *"Oracle: Year One" (1996)
21. *Batman: The Cult* (1988)
22. *A Death in the Family* (1988-1989)
23. *Batman: Year Three* (1989)
24. *A Lonely Place of Dying* (1989)
25. *Robin* begins (1991-2009)
26. *Knightsaga* (1993)
27. *Nightwing: Alfred's Return* (1995)
28. *Prodigal* (1994-1995)
29. *Troika* (1995)
30. *Contagion* (1996)

31. *Demon's Bane/Legacy* (1998, 1996)
32. "Inquiring Minds" (the introduction of Stephanie Brown as Spoiler) (1992)
33. *Cataclysm* (1998)
34. **Aftershock* (1998) + *Road to No Man's Land* (1999)
35. **No Man's Land* (1999-2000)
36. **Birds of Prey* begins (1999-2011)
37. *Batgirl: Vol. 1* begins (2000-2006)
38. *New Gotham: Evolution* + *Officer Down* (2000-2001)
39. **Gotham Knights* begins (2000-2006)
40. *Bruce Wayne: Murderer/Fugitive* (2002)
41. *Red Hood: The Lost Days* (2010-2011)
42. *Batman: Hush* (2002-2003)
43. *Death and the Maidens* (2003-2004)
44. *Batman: Hush Returns* (2004-2006)
45. *War Drums* (2004)
46. *Face the Face/One Year Later* (2006)
47. *War Games* (2004)
48. *Gotham Central* begins (2004-2006)
49. *Batman: Under the Red Hood* (2005-2006)
50. *War Crimes* (2005)
51. "Batman and Son" (2006)
52. *Batman R.I.P./Heart of Hush* (2008)
53. *Batwoman: Elegy* + "Cutter" (2009-2010)
54. *Countdown to Final Crisis* + *Final Crisis* (2009)
55. *Batman: Last Rites* (2009)
56. *Batman: Battle for the Cowl* (2009)
57. *Batman: Whatever Happened to the Caped Crusader?* (2009)
58. *Batman: Gates of Gotham* (2011)
59. *Batman: Streets of Gotham* (2009-2011)
60. *Gotham City Sirens* begins (2009-2011)
61. *Batgirl: Vol. 3* begins (2009-2011)
62. *Batman and Robin* (2009-2011)
63. *Red Robin* (2009-2011)
64. *Batman: The Black Mirror* (2010-2011)
65. *The Return of Bruce Wayne* (2010)
66. *Bruce Wayne: The Road Home* (2010-2011)
67. *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (1986)
68. *Batman Beyond* (2011)
69. *Batman: Year 100* (2006)

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I have closely followed the citation guide developed by Allen Ellis and documented by Gene Kannenberg, Jr. Under this schema, the writer and artist, among other authors if applicable, are cited, with their names followed by the letter representing their mode of authorship. Accordingly, 'w' stands for 'writer,' 'a' for 'artist,' 'p' for 'penciller,' 'i' for 'inker,' 'c' for 'colorist,' and 'l' for 'letterer.'

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