

Gotham City and the Gothic literary and architectural traditions

In 1998, the various monthly *Batman* titles published by DC Comics depicted the fictional Gotham City being rocked by an earthquake measuring 7.6 on the Richter Scale. The 18-issue storyline - entitled *Cataclysm* (Grant et al. 2002) - explored all the dramatic potential of this event, and a notable visual consequence of the story was that afterwards the comic book Gotham no longer look like the city as it had been portrayed in the 1990s *Batman* movies. This ended a six-year period where Gotham had, on the page, mimicked Gotham as depicted on screen. In cinemas, thanks to the work of set designer Anton Furst who had worked on Tim Burton's *Batman* in 1989, the city was depicted as a retrofitted sixteenth-century urban nightmare, with gargoyles and buttresses jostling for space with neon lights and advertising hoardings.

One of the themes of the Gothic is a relationship between different temporalities “existing on the margins... between past present and future” (Beville 2009: 96), with aspects of the present being disrupted by a return of an element from the past. The depiction of Gotham City in *Batman* comics published in the 1990s is bookended by violent cataclysms that first show an intrusion of the past into the present and then of the present destroyed to make way for the future. This article argues that elements of the Gothic visibly intrude into various incarnations of Gotham City between 1989 and 2002 (including monthly comics featuring Batman, the graphic novel *Arkham Asylum* and the films by Tim Burton): not only in a stylistic manner, but also in terms of different eras colliding. To examine gothic elements present in these examples of Batman narratives, including notions of mirroring, circularity, and stylistic qualities of the architecture and depicted environment, this article will look at how Anton Furst’s work influenced the art of Batman comics and will situate these within the media landscape of different versions of the Dark Knight – film, television, comics – lending elements to each other. The look of Gotham City and how Batman comics reflect technological developments of each period of their historical creation and embellishment will be examined, as well as the roots of Gotham City itself in terms of its name and geographical references.

For the scope of this article, stylistic refers to gothic narratives taking place in gothic locations, while the temporality – intrusion of the past into the present – is a signifier of a gothic plot. Anne Williams sees gothic sites as places that writers choose because of inherent qualities that the location itself might signify, for example: “Having chosen to portray a castle... Castles have dungeons and battlements”, which in turn evoke in the reader: “the pleasures of melancholy, the delights of terror, the thrill of fear” (Williams 1995: 20). So, locations such as the Batcave, and narrow dark streets overlooked by gargoyles might lead to sensations of claustrophobia, of being observed by ghastly creatures. Architecture also has an important part to play in creating a gothic atmosphere on the page, “forging a link between Gothic architecture and literature established one of that genre’s defining conventions” (Davison 2009: 30). Comics featuring Batman and dramatisations of *Batman* comics on screen have had familiar locations over the years, such as Wayne Manor and the Batcave, but Furst’s designs for the 1989 film brought a distinct gothic sensibility to the fictional architecture.

The Batcave itself first appeared in the 1943 movie serial *Batman* under the title “the Bat’s Cave... established as Batman's secret base of operations, located under Bruce Wayne's residence in Gotham City. It was made up of a dimly lit main chamber that featured a bat insignia on one of its rocky walls and a state-of-the-art crime laboratory in a separate room” (Reinhart 2013: 20). It then appeared in the pages of *Batman* and *Detective Comics* in 1944, before being elaborated on in terms of its size and contents in a variety of comics in subsequent decades. Additions included a costume room in 1950 and the emergency chute, which would be a memorable feature of the 1960s TV series, first appeared in print in 1952 (Fleisher 1976: 47). The Batcave started off as a fairly utilitarian space and a location to showcase contemporary technology. Although following Anne Williams’ ideas of gothic locations, the reader might think of the Batcave as inherently gothic – i.e. a dimly lit, damp, cavernous space populated by bats – it acquired additional gothic elements as the comics progressed. A notably gothic version of the Batcave saw print in 1986, with Frank Miller’s depiction of demonic bat imagery in this underground lair, and this is a character-forming trope that haunts Batman in this mini-series and subsequent *Batman* comics. As Donovan and Richardson note in their contribution to *Batman and Philosophy: The Dark Knight of the Soul*: “in *The Dark Knight Returns*, Wayne dreams about a childhood experience in which he... falls into the rabbit hole and into what will later become the Batcave. Here he encounters what he describes as an ancient bat... breath hot with the taste of fallen foes, the stench of dead things” (Donovan and Richardson 2008: 139).

Underground lairs are not uncommon for heroes or villains, and Burton’s film came just over a decade after the first big-budget DC Comics adaptation – Richard Donner’s *Superman* (1978) – which gave Lex Luthor a subterranean base of operations next to underground subway lines beneath Metropolis, but save for perhaps a buried library having a slight gothic frisson to it, this again was a space carved out for utility rather than a gothic atmosphere. Various authors have noted the relationship between Miller’s mini-series and Burton’s *Batman*, including Will Brooker (Brooker 2015: 1), Kevin K. Durand, Mary K. Leigh (Durand and Leigh 2011: 95), and Dennis O’Neil (O’Neil 2008: 22), with Frank Miller’s gothic style influencing the aesthetics and mise-en-scène of Tim Burton’s film. So, if one considers the varying influence of the Gothic on appearances of Batman in print and on film, then the second-half of the 1980s can be singled out as a period when it was first particularly apparent.

Batman opened as the number one film at the American Box Office in its week of release in June 1989, paying for its \$35 million budget in a single weekend (Box Office Mojo 2017), and eventually made over ten times that amount in profit. In contrast, the fortunes of DC's print titles had been on the wane during the 1980s, while rival publisher Marvel's sales had increased (Great American Novel 2015). While there was a relative decline in sales of DC's serialised titles, a *Batman* graphic novel released four months after Burton's film – Grant Morrison and Dave McKean's *Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on Serious Earth* – went on to become the most successful superhero graphic novel ever released (Singer 2011: 64). These two texts, which were unusual formats for a *Batman* story – the first film to feature the character in 23 years and a hardback graphic novel “which blends painting, drawing, photography, and mixed-media collage” (ibid) - both had a gothic sensibility in common. The film used Furst's designs and Burton's directing style to create an environment of chiaroscuro lighting and set design with elements that were stereotypically Gothic, using features such as gargoyles as evocations of the uncanny alongside urban decay. The graphic novel takes this one step further, giving deformed villains such as Killer Croc the presence of atavistic monsters, as haunting creatures from the subconscious. The gothic nature of these stories was also present in a story entitled 'Gothic', only the second serial to run in a new *Batman* monthly comic *Legends of the Dark Knight* in 1990, and later rereleased as a stand-alone graphic novel entitled *Batman: Gothic*. This was by the same writer as *Arkham Asylum*, which will be discussed later. The film's cityscape would also be used as basis for the look of Gotham City itself in the regular *Batman* titles from 1992 onwards, and an examination of this forms the main focus of this essay.

Batman in the comics had always been seen as a modernist urban hero (Wainer 2014: 71), and while the notion of a man dressing as a bat to create a fearful alter-ego has an inherent gothic sensibility to it, the amount of gothic elements (both in terms of gothic locations and gothic storytelling) in *Batman* comics and live action adaptations has varied considerably over the twentieth century, with certain periods including elements of camp and pop art (the 1960s), and urban grime and lawlessness (the 1970s). By looking at these changes, the reader can see that the depiction of *Batman* and his environs has varied over the decades, dependent on differing notions of what evokes modernity in each era the character has been published in. Modernity and scientific progress is represented on the page via the different models of Batmobile as his form of transport, and his use of an increasingly technologically advanced crime lab. Tim Burton's influences as a filmmaker came from the tradition of European fairytales and horror films (Magliozzi 2009: 9), so his collaboration with Furst - who had previously designed the film adaptation of Angela Carter's *The Company of Wolves* in 1984 (Ede 2010: 5) - was apt in bringing a very different sensibility to the superhero movie. A recent film based on a DC Comic (*Superman III*, 1983) also used a darker version of its hero than audiences were used to compared with previous on-screen portrayals, set against the backdrop of industrialised America (the film features an unshaven aggressive clone of Superman, with locations including an oil refinery and a car wrecker's yard). However, Burton's *Batman* was set in a world removed from our own via stylised architecture that was familiar via gothic elements and skyscrapers, but also foreign because of the unusual combination of these elements and the elaborate scale of the architecture shown on screen.

[Insert fig.1 here]

In February 1992, Furst's sketches were directly reproduced on the covers of three Batman comics (*Batman* #474, *Legends of the Dark Knight* #27 and *Detective Comics* #641), which featured a three part mini-series entitled *Destroyer*. In this story Furst's designs were used to make Gotham City in the Bat-titles resemble the city in Burton's film, coinciding with publicity for the sequel *Batman Returns*, released in summer 1992. Furst tragically had committed suicide the previous winter, but his designs for the first film were used to inform the look of the second.

The first film made Warner Brothers a profit eleven times their initial investment of \$35 million, and led to a Batmania for spin-off products similar to that found in the 1960s (as a result of the TV show), and would continue a trend of cross media convergence between Batman's onscreen adventures and the comics that inspired them. In the 1960s, Batman titles responded to the popularity of the contemporaneous TV show introducing characters such as Barbara Gordon / Batgirl into the comics, who had first appeared on the small screen. In 1993 Harley Quinn appeared in an issue of *The Batman Adventures* comic, having first featured in *Batman: The Animated Series* a year earlier. While *Batman* comics inspired his appearance in other media, the greater success of dramatised adventures of the Dark Knight, led to elements from film and TV appearing in the source material.

When DC began to tie the 1990s Batman comics into the contemporaneous films, they did so with gusto, not only reproducing Anton Furst's art on the cover of the comics mentioned above, but also an illustrated text feature about his work was included at the back of *Legends of the Dark Knight* #27 (O'Neil, Sprouse et al. 1992) in tribute to the late designer. Several of the streets of comic book Gotham now resembled those designed by Furst, and some panels were faithful copies of his work, albeit with the ominous sky in his sketches replaced with a more uplifting sunrise in the closing double page spread of *Detective Comics* #641 (Grant 1992: 20-21).

[Insert fig.2 here]

This new version of Gotham is presented with the comment "Gargoyles to frighten people onto the path of righteousness, rounded edges to confuse the malevolent beings, thick walls to lock in virtue" (Grant 1992: 20-21). The text thus includes gothic elements alongside the art. In this mini-series, the Furstian Gotham is revealed through an act of destruction, via the work of a terrorist with the nom-de-guerre of The Destroyer - a disgruntled ex-Navy SEAL with a grudge against the bland architecture that had sprung up across Gotham, believing that the older (and until that point) unseen buildings were so unsettling, they would help keep evil at bay. However his actions have no limiting effect on the activity of Gotham's villains over subsequent issues, but what they do achieve is to provide a cityscape perhaps more suited to the weird characters who populate Batman's Rogues Gallery.

It seems slightly absurd that by destroying a handful of buildings, a very different cityscape might be revealed, however it is worth bearing in mind the way certain cities have been designed in the real world. There are grand avenues of Paris that allow uninterrupted views in and out of the city, and in London certain protected views of the city from different vistas (for example being able to see St Paul's Cathedral), are intended to be preserved when new skyscrapers go up. The London View Management Framework should be obeyed when architects submit plans for new buildings in London, and "adopt a picturesque approach to protecting the aspect of the City" (Allison and Thornton, 2014: 30). However certain new skyscrapers in London have defied this rule. So, a view of a Gothic cathedral that had been available for centuries might suddenly disappear due to urban regeneration. Conversely one could imagine living in the future, where the views of older buildings in London – for example churches designed by Nicholas Hawksmoor - might suddenly be revealed to a new generation, when more recent buildings are demolished.

In the *Destroyer* storyline, flashbacks to Gotham City from a century earlier show the architect Cyrus Pinkney - who could be considered the fictional avatar of Tim Burton and Anton Furst – being employed by Batman's great-great-great-grandfather Solomon Wayne, to create a city with a sense of religious purpose, to help ward off malevolent spirits. Although Pinkney's work disappears from the pages of *Batman* comics when it is demolished by an earthquake, later writers picked up this storyline. In 2012, DC published a sequel entitled *Gates of Gotham* (Snyder 2012), in which Solomon's son Alan Wayne, hires another architect to continue Pinkney's work. In an article by a fictional architectural historian printed in *Legends of the Dark Knight* #27, Aristotle Rodor (actually Dennis O'Neil) quotes Solomon Wayne as saying "There is here nothing of that focus of piety and industriousness that marks the mighty cities of Europe. Indeed, at times I feel that Evil Seeps into our precincts from the areas of Godless Nature which surround us, that the Dark One rides the winds that waft through our lanes from the corruption to the woodlands, depositing lodes of Malice in our eaves and crannies" (O'Neil 1992: 23). As with the earlier quotation, the writer links the fictional gothic architecture of Gotham with a gothic atmosphere that might infect the residents.

Although Gotham and gothic have the same homonymic prefix, gothic derives its 'goth' from the peoples of the same name (Thomson 1818: 13) and the 'goth' in Gotham finds its way to being the name of Batman's home city via a town in England named after the Anglo-Saxon for "Goat's Town" (Burrows and Wallace 1998: xii). Burrows and Wallace trace the nickname for New York from Medieval legends to a mention of the name in Irving's *Salmagundi* periodical (1807-1808), which led to common use of the name on awnings and shop signs by the end of the nineteenth century, as people in Manhattan found affection for this alternate name for their city. In the English Gotham, confronted by an unwelcome visit from King John in the thirteenth century, the locals: "engaged in idiotic behaviour... knights reported back to the monarch that the townsfolk were clearly mad, and John accordingly spared them... this more beguiling – if tricksterish – sense of Gotham, Manhattanites assumed as an acceptable nickname" (ibid: xiv). If, as the authors suggest, it was the idea of Gotham as a place of tricksters that appealed to the inhabitants of New York then then is particularly apposite as the name of Gotham City, a place where trickster villains such as The Joker and The Riddler reside.

The name of Gotham City in *Batman* comics came from local inspiration as Batman creators Bob Kane and Bill Finger were living in New York, where DC comics were published, when they came up with the idea for the comic in the 1930s, “Consequently, the setting of their hero’s adventures had to be Manhattan... Bill Finger here refers to ‘Gotham’ as an old nickname for New York, which can be traced back to Washington Irving” (Gehmann and Reiche, 2014: 143). Burrows and Wallace quote Dennis O’Neil as seeing specific parts of New York as inspiration for different DC comic book cities: “Gotham is New York’s noirish side – Manhattan below Fourteenth Street... Metropolis presents New York’s cheerier face, Manhattan between Fourteenth and One Hundred and Tenth Streets” (Burrows and Wallace 1998: xiv), however twenty-first century Gotham – as represented on screen by the film *Batman Begins* (2005) and its sequels – was also realised by location shooting in a different city: “scenes filmed... in Chicago help to bring Batman’s world to life in an immersive manner that would not be possible by filming on cramped soundstages” (Reinhart 2013: 225). Gotham City on screen and in the pages of *Batman* comics has taken its inspiration from New York, Chicago and the imagination of set designers such as Anton Furst. While Mark Reinhart sees the use of real Chicago locations in *Batman Begins* as ‘immersive’, the Gothic designs created by Furst make the Batman films directed by Tim Burton claustrophobic and atmospheric, which in turn became a feature of the comics published between 1992 and 1998.

As Gotham became increasingly gothic in the nineties, this seems an ideal location for the likes of anthropomorphic, disturbing characters such as the Penguin and Catwoman, both featured in *Batman* comics and *Batman Returns*, not to mention a man who dresses up as a Bat to inspire fear in the hearts of evil-doers. In a Gotham more gothic than New York’s Gotham, the design of the streets the Dark Knight and the villains inhabit mimics the design of the characters themselves. With Batman comics referring to real life locations (New York), fictional locations (Furst’s set designs), and the locations having a sensibility in keeping with the characters, all of these elements have a degree of mirroring – the stories being a reflection of influences the creators were interested in at the time of their production. When Burrows and Wallace suggest the inspiration for Gotham as lower Manhattan and Metropolis as being New York City above Fourteenth Street, this notion of two cities only meters apart was realised on screen in a recent version of the two fictional locations, as *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* (2016) situates the two cities as either side of the same river. This might lead to speculation that if one city stands in for Manhattan, the other may represent either Jersey City to the West or Brooklyn to the East, however the locations actually used in the making of the film included places as disparate as Michigan, Chicago and East Los Angeles, while the building doubling for Wayne Manor is actually Sutton Scarsdale Hall in Derbyshire (Internet Movie Database 2017). The creation of Gotham on screen as a portmanteau city isn’t new – Christopher Nolan’s *Dark Knight Trilogy* (2005-2012) used various locations in London for filming – but the mirroring of Metropolis and Gotham City as light and dark locations opposite each other is an intriguing idea which could suggest other readings of the two cities as opposites: futuristic and old-fashioned, ordered and disordered. Although the proximity of the cities makes the plot of the film absurd – how could Batman and Superman only just have become aware of each other when their activities are only separated by a river – this mirroring has gothic potential. Round notes the conjuring of villains such as Gaiman’s Corinthian and Stoker’s Dracula in gothic comic books and literature as a mirrored dark inversion of their protagonists (Round 2014: 190) and how the mirroring of panels and images on the comic page is a way of evoking dreams and nightmares (ibid: 166).

The bookending of 1990s Gotham on the page through similar acts of destruction includes plot elements as a mirror, with the end of one period of comic book storytelling being linked thematically with its beginning, the reveal of Furst's Gotham in the comics through an act of building destruction sees it wiped out by similar destruction on a much larger scale: "repetition of events demonstrates... reality as mirroring" (Mishra 1994: 73). However each act of repetition or reflection, such as Gotham City named after an old term for New York, and the drawings of Gotham on the page looking like Gotham on the screen, includes a degree of change. The comic book medium is as a collage of different elements: comic book artists have to work out different angles the buildings might be seen from, and base these on only a small number of pre-existing sketches. Mishra also notes that the mirroring of characters might involve the reflection being uncanny and creating "a spectacular self" (ibid: 250). Batman, as well as many of his allies and adversaries, are characters who have a changed mirrored image. Many have alter-egos – Batman / Bruce Wayne, Catwoman / Selina Kyle etc. – that reflect or externalise an element of their character, such as Bruce creating a costume and persona designed to "strike fear into the heart of evil-doers" and Selina being a cat burglar. In terms of this mirroring being revealed also in the architecture, Gotham is a city beset by evil characters, so at times is overlooked by gargoyles which have a malevolent countenance.

In a coda to the main story in *Detective Comics* #719 (Dixon 1998), a seismologist in the hills above Gotham City notices unusual bat activity and then turning to her seismograph realises that it is presaging an imminent earthquake. After phoning her employer Bruce Wayne, she is only able to get through to an answer phone in the Batcave. When Bruce returns home in the next issue of this story - *Batman: Shadow of the Bat* #73 (Grant 1998) - the tremors hit with devastating effect. It is worth noting that as well as the Gothic architecture revealed in Gotham city over the last six years being destroyed in the earthquake, so are some of the pop art trappings of the Batcave such as the giant penny and giant model dinosaur. Although brought back in later comics, not only is the earthquake destroying the Gotham of the 1990s, it is also destroying the trappings of the Silver Age Batman as well. This is presenting a tabular rasa, a landscape of devastation and a site for future reconstruction, and all of these elements are considered in subsequent stories.

Outside of the destruction of Wayne Manor, the comics also portray a jumble of snapshots showing Gotham City in chaos. In contrast, a building containing Barbara Gordon looks intact amongst the devastation. The caption reads: "Her building is owned by Bruce Wayne. She remembers suddenly how he was mocked all those years back, when he fortified all of his properties against earthquakes" (Grant 1998: 18). Regarding the architecture shown on the page, the reader might think that Bruce's tastes ran to the early modern rather than the Gothic, as while her 1930s office block survived, the brownstone arches, buttresses and looming architraves of the brick built Gotham City Police Headquarters fall to the ground. New York of the 1930s – which inspired Kane and Finger – contained architecture "drawing from the Moorish, Byzantine, and Gothic... But by the middle thirties the otherworldly or futuristic flavour of Deco (itself influenced by esoteric influences) gained prominence" (Vlack 1974: 131). In Gotham the older architecture is destroyed, but the more modernist Deco style architecture survives, pointing the way to the future.

Tim Burton described Gotham as "a dark, Gothic, timeless American City" (Brooker 2000: 285), and Anton Furst's expressionistic sketches which inspired the 1990s comics are even darker and eerier than the Gotham that reached the screen. Fictional architecture doesn't necessarily have to be logical in terms of its geographical and structural presence and Laurie Ede quotes Furst as stating: "You're not dealing with reality with film; you're dealing with the film's own reality" (Ede 2010: 05). There is menace present in the plot of the film with the people of Gotham stalked by costumed villains and their henchmen, and there is also menace in Furst's designs: oppressive iron girders cut across industrial cathedrals, looming arches and exposed steel fretwork make urban routes claustrophobic rather than expansive, over-sized post-industrial elements tower monstrously over any people unfortunate enough to walk by.

The architecture of Gotham which survives at the end of the nineties is similar to what Kane and Finger might have observed when they were inventing Batman. In this respect the content of the comics is returning to their beginnings. Art Merman notes: "1930s modernism as a cultural and aesthetic phenomenon has been addressed as a cultural movement" (Berman 1994: 313); the creators of Batman lived in a time when art deco and architecture was responding to "the machine age, fitness to function, and objectivity... the triumph of modern art... in the industrial field" (Agha in Leonard and Glassgold 2013); America between the world wars embraced new technologies and ideas, with American monthly comics themselves only emerging as a new medium towards the end of the thirties. As Barbara's building mimics some of more modernist Deco architecture, rather than the gothic-inspired buildings which preceded it and have now been demolished, it predicts the architecture that will come to surround it. The gothic Gotham is replaced by a more futuristic city, as the man who will come to pay for a new Gotham city (filled with lustrous skyscrapers, as in modern New York) is a resident of Metropolis, Lex Luthor. Luthor's vision of a new Gotham was created in an America between two Gulf wars with new media technologies and a new comics medium (on the web) in its early years, but the sleek lines of his new city recalls the art of the original Gotham from 1939. There is a circularity in style – original Deco and new Deco – and in origin, 'old Gotham' revealed by building destruction, New Gotham made necessary by wide-scale devastation. The felling of buildings during *Batman: Cataclysm* uncannily predicts perhaps the events of September 11th 2001, which *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* (2016) would later comment on as the inadvertent destruction of a Wayne Building by Superman in Metropolis provokes a schema of revenge when witnessed by the Dark Knight.

While New York influenced both Gotham City and Metropolis in the pages of DC Comics, it was different aspects of the city that the creators of the comics chose for their inspiration in creating the two fictional cities inspired by it. For Gotham: "edged New Yorker architecture from the late 19th and early 20th century... raw brick walls, stone made gargoyles" (Gehmann and Reiche 2014: 144), for Metropolis: "orientation towards the future not the past is illustrated by a higher quality of modern buildings" (ibid). So, a resident of Metropolis, when rebuilding Gotham City, is bringing some of the sensibility of his home with him.

When Batman observes the devastation of his city after the earthquake, he stares impassively at the ruins; a sequence of panels show him unmoving, with the same blank expression on his face on the second page of *Shadow of the Bat* #74 (Grant 1998: 2). He doesn't know how to react to such a scene until he hears a cry from help under the rubble with gives him a reason to move. But even then, as R'as al Ghul notes in a subsequent episode printed in *The Batman Chronicles* #12: "There is no villain to bury your fists into. No Bane, no Joker. Your childish yearning for vengeance can find no outlet... Who is the madman now? Your city no longer needs protection. Gotham has fallen" (Renaud 1998: 22). Batman needs Gotham in order to exist – his impetus to dress up as a bat was to fight crime on the streets of the city, so while the city has entire streets destroyed, much of his raison d'être has also been removed.

A few of the buildings that copied Furst's designs survive the earthquake - the final page of the *Cataclysm* crossover at the end of *Robin* #53 (Dixon 1998: 22) depicts Batman, Nightwing and Robin standing on top of a domed observation tower, with stylised eagle heads looking over the buildings of Gotham. For fans of Furst's work, there may have been some recognition when seeing this building appear in the pages of *Robin*. With this issue providing the ending of the *Cataclysm* storyline and the end of most of the more gothic Gotham on the page, it's another example of mirroring. This building had appeared, via a reproduction of Furst's sketch on the cover of *Legends of the Dark Knight* #27 (O'Neil, Sprouse et al. 1992) at the beginning of the period where his building design was incorporated into the pages of Batman comics, and it appears again at the end.

[Insert fig.3 here]

The legacy of Cyrus Pinkney and Solomon Wayne's creation of Gotham in the past shapes its future when rediscovered in the present. The legacy of the past is a frequent element in *Batman* stories, not to mention the ubiquitous revisiting of his original trauma, the death of Bruce Wayne's parents by a gunman in Crime Alley. Following the destruction of Pinkney / Furst's Gotham in the *Cataclysm* cross-over, Gotham enters a period of even greater lawlessness than usual in a year of stories entitled *No Man's Land* (Gale et al. 1999), before a more futuristic Gotham is built on the ruins of the old in the style of other science-fiction comic book cities such as Neo-Tokyo in the manga *Akira*. Corporate evil is quite often a trope in the pages of novels and comics speculating about the twenty-first century and beyond, so it is appropriate that Gotham City is rebuilt by Lex Luthor, a super villain who is also a multi-millionaire businessman. As Gotham was previously influenced by echoes from the past – gothic influences on the architecture, characters haunted by childhood events – here it is disturbed by a potential future, a modernist city built on the ruins of the past.

The cityscape of Gotham – partially destroyed, revealed, more fully destroyed, recreated – and the psyche of the characters – disturbed by crime related tragedy, alter-egos created in response, strange personas as crime fighters / villains – have a gothic circularity to them. As Spooner writes: “Gothic... in its persistent fixation on the past returning, is disposed to evoke circularity, despite the drive towards denouement required by the narrative format” (Spooner 2004: 200); narrative arcs in American comic books are an ideal medium for this gothic circularity. A long sequence such as the Batman comics which featured Anton Furst’s city designs have a beginning echoed in their end, and can be contained as a run of comics with a narrative start and finish. However these comics are preceded by hundreds of other Batman stories, with many more published afterwards. A more discrete story such as Morrison and Janson’s *Gothic* is only five issues long, and republished as a stand-alone graphic novel, but again refers to stories printed before, and other Batman stories (separately) by the writer and artist would follow. Each Batman serial has a beginning, middle and end, but is part of a much longer narrative, so certain elements have to return to their initial state for the story to have another subsequent instalment. Batman can never fully clear the streets of Gotham from crime, or his narrative couldn’t continue after each storyline ends.

As a crime fighter, Bruce Wayne seems more ambivalent as an influence on the city than Lex Luthor’s ambitions to rebuild after the Cataclysm. As Batman, Wayne observes and interacts with inhabitants of the streets at night, but as in his billionaire daytime persona – a man with the wealth to add buildings to the skyline – he does so sparingly with only the commissioning of the building where Barbara Gordon resides, and various iterations of a Wayne Tower that appear in other comics. Perhaps he is reluctant to follow in the footsteps of his ancestor Solomon. While this earlier Wayne used architecture to inspire “piety and industriousness”, Bruce fights crime more prosaically with his fists instead. *Cataclysm* and *No Man's Land* (still being reprinted as trade paperbacks) proved to be popular and inspired a move in the opposite direction of the previous decade. In contrast to earlier comics being influenced by the films, a small-screen version of Gotham responded to this storyline: the TV series *Birds of Prey* (2002) focused on the female vigilantes of the city, Black Canary, The Huntress and Barbara Gordon's Oracle in *No Man's Land* and the newly rebuilt Gotham (Frankel, 2017: 255). This coincided with the rise of other TV action heroines at the time such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) and *Dark Angel* (2000-2002), as much as the absence of Batman in much of the *No Man's Land* storyline in the comics.

This essay has concentrated on the gothic Gotham in the main *Batman* comics between 1992 and 1998, and how this followed the work of Anthon Furst and Tim Burton in the films *Batman* (1989) and *Batman Returns* (1992). Elements of gothic storytelling also appeared in other *Batman* titles in stories by Grant Morrison that arrived in comic shops between the releases of the two films: the graphic novel *Arkham Asylum - A serious house on serious Earth* (Morrison 1989), and a five-part story in the comic *Legends of the Dark Knight* entitled simply 'Gothic' (Morrison 1990). In these, specific architecture influences the stories – Arkham Asylum itself and Gotham City's cathedral – and also the narratives have a more overt gothic sensibility than the regular *Batman* comics, involving the past heavily influencing the present, and elements of madness, hauntings and horror. Julia Round writes that: "It is difficult to define Gothic consistently", but she notes that different periods of gothic literature have included elements such as "murders, monsters, ghouls... creeping terror and the unsaid... deviancy, violence and out-and-out horror" (Round, 2014: 11), and both of Morrison's early *Batman* tales invoke many of these themes. The story in *Gothic* includes a child killer, a spectral nun and a plague intended to deliver souls to the devil, *Arkham Asylum* has many depictions of insanity, and portrays characters such as Killer Croc as monstrous and demonic rather than simply as a murderer with sharp teeth and a grotesque skin condition.

While the story *Destroyer* juxtaposed a Batman storyline in the present with a tale of Gotham architecture created as a bulwark against evil in the past, *Arkham Asylum* has a narrative in the present and the past where architecture is intended to ward against evil. While the Dark Knight is summoned to the titular location by the Joker in exchange for hostages, there is also a parallel story set in the past, concerning the founder of the asylum - Amadeus Arkham. Arkham battles evil and madness by setting up a madhouse while fighting his own demons and family history of insanity. Exaggerated renderings of the characters suit Morrison and McKean's story, as Will Brooker describes the characters in his book *Batman Unmasked*: "McKean's Batman is a devil-eared shadow rather than a concrete human figure, while his Joker, all swirling fluorescent hair and gleaming white face, remains a blur who refuses to be pinned down" (Brooker 2000: 272). In this depiction of Batman and his Rogue's Gallery, the characters are more atavistic, with the writer and artist creating a story that has as much to do with the tropes of horror fiction than superhero narratives.

Dave McKean's art style, which combines collage, sketchy line drawing, photorealism and photographs, suits the script perfectly, bringing a Gothic sensibility of chiaroscuro, mist, branches rattling against windows, and spider webs to the page. Uncertain gender and sexuality have also been associated with the Gothic as a genre, before acceptance in modern society; as Ruth Anolik writes: "Gothic anxieties regarding sex and sexuality are a manifestation of the fear of the unknown... an anxious response to the difference of the sexual Other – male, female or homosexual – who resists epistemological apprehension" (Anolik 2007: 4). Morrison and McKean present the Joker in drag, dressed like Madonna (Singer 2011: 65), who flirts with Batman in the graphic novel. The suggestion of homosexuality and gender fluidity are in keeping with Gothic sensibilities and the fear of the unknown, as well as the inclusion of "subversive or sensational fiction" (Round, 2014: 56). Morrison himself said that he: "always saw *Arkham Asylum* as a glimpse into the darkest corners of Batman's interior life. It's a dream story" (Brooker 2015: 46), and so the rendering of the characters as more exaggerated, nightmarish and archetypal than other *Batman* comics, are in keeping with this atmosphere and perhaps how Batman himself might imagine his villains in his dreams. In turn Batman (perhaps as dreamed / conjured by the inhabitants of Arkham) is depicted by McKean as "monstrous, expressionistic, abstract" (Brooker 2015: 47), the character also being portrayed in a similar manner to his enemies. As sections of the book refer to *Alice in Wonderland*, perhaps like the inhabitants of the asylum, Batman wouldn't be inside the location if he weren't mad as well.

The graphic novel is a labyrinthine exploration of Arkham Asylum; the madness of its founder contrasted with the behaviour of its modern inhabitants. Within the plot, attempts to add order to the chaos – for example weaning the character Two Face off the binaries of his coin based decision-making – just lead to more threat and disturbance. Ellen Brinks notes a theme of demasculinisation within Gothic literature, "the masculine subject whose psychosexual coherence is at risk or voluntarily sacrificed" (Brinks 2003: 12). Two Face is rendered toddler-like (unable to control his bowels) by his temporary cure, while various other characters taunt and attempt to humiliate Batman; in the scenes in the past, Arkham wears his mother's wedding dress after his psyche crumbles, following his inability to cure a patient and protect his family from a psychopath. With references to mythology, Freudian psychoanalysis and nineteenth century children's literature, and flashbacks to Amadeus Arkham's past, the graphic novel shows Batman's narrative in the present affected by many elements from times past. As Fred Francis writes: "the text is primarily concerned with history and haunted by ghosts of the past... in a process of gothic absorption" (Francis in Ursini, Mahmutovic, Bramlett 2017: 128), the building and its inmates are haunted by past deeds of Amadeus Arkham's family and the narrative is haunted by Morrison's interest in literature from the past in a book littered with quotations. Even within the circular narratives of superhero comics, Francis notes that the author is also referring to previous tales of the Dark Knight: "resurrection is particularly apt for Morrison, since Frank Miller had effectively 'killed' the Batman... *The Dark Knight Returns* closes with... the moment of resurrection" (ibid: 132); each of these works deal with death and destruction, rebuilding and resurrections. Batman may be broken or killed in certain narratives, but is restored at the end to go through the process again in the hands of other creators, who may explicitly revisit earlier stories or ignore them as they choose.

While *Arkham Asylum* has a gothic sensibility in text and a gothic location based on work by previous Batman artists and writers, Morrison's second Batman story, *Gothic*, deals with a threat that escapes from archetypal gothic architecture, which is to say a European medieval church, loosed on the streets of Gotham. Here a glowing spirit, Catholic guilt, and supernatural evil are juxtaposed with the Caped Crusader's more down to earth crime solving. *Gothic* was published in the monthly comic *Batman: Legends of the Dark Knight*, initially designed to tell self-contained stories that could be collected as graphic novels; it coincided with the graphic novel boom (and subsequent bust) of the early nineties on the back of other successful mature superhero comics such as *The Dark Knight Returns* (1986) and *Watchmen* (1986). Storylines included Faustian bargains, mind-altering drug addictions, facial disfigurement, alcohol-induced hallucinations, vampires, abusive parents and the undead - all of which could have been suitable narratives for gothic fiction in general. In *Gothic*, the gothic elements are those connected with the supernatural and imagery of death. Round notes the connections between temporality in comics – this storyline again shows an intrusion of the past into the present – and the connection with “the metaphor of haunting... and the symbol of the crypt” (Round, 2014: 57). The narrative includes gothic / religious locations that have a connection with death and life after death, these elements continue when the comic also depicts more mundane parts of the city such as warehouses; the gothic elements follow Batman into prosaic architecture rather than being confined to gothic spaces that might be more sympathetic to them.

The *Batman* franchise has gone through periods where the style of the comic relates to its presentation in other media and vice versa - such as the camp and pop art sensibilities of both *Batman* comics and the *Batman* TV show in the 1960s, or the more realistic Gotham in pages of *Batman* after its post-earthquake reconstruction and the supposed realism of the Christopher Nolan films. However, as there is something inherently gothic about the characters - disturbed individuals who wear their mental illness in the display of their personalities through their clothes, actions and behaviors (the exaggerated and theatrical nature of supervillains) - a style of architecture that has an unsettling presence is particularly apt as their environment. As Randall M. Jensen states, "as witnessed by the architecture of the Gotham cityscape and by the pervasive presence of fear, the unknown and the uncanny, Batman's story is a truly Gothic one - and this movement of the past into the present is another hallmark of the present" (Jensen 2008: 89).

Batman comics contemporary with and following Tim Burton and Anton Furst's reimagining of the character led to comics that were gothic in nature via storylines by Grant Morrison and his successors on the various Bat-titles. Gothic in terms of aesthetics - shadows, cobwebs, cracked mirrors and skeletons - gothic in terms of content - mental degradation, abuse, guilt and obsession. Following the urban reconfiguration in the *Destroyer* storyline, the comics also show the Gothic in terms of architecture after the set designs of Anton Furst were transferred to the pages of the monthly titles set in Gotham. Each of these stories and intersections see an intrusion of the past into the present, and an intrusion of representation from one medium into another. This cross-fertilization of different types of storytelling is apt for a gothic sensibility, as Beville notes: “a classification of the text as part of the Gothic-postmodern genre... its ghosts; its monsters; its Promethean concerns... and its multiple layered approach to storytelling” (Beville 2009: 118). The texts show an intrusion of different times into different periods and the publications show intrusions of different media into each other – the look of the films being used as a template for the comics.

Many of the comics use the idea of mirroring to inform their plot and structure, and this mirroring moves across media as the comics inspire films and TV shows. The fictional locations that Batman inhabits are haunted by the phantoms of incandescent nuns and dragon like psychopaths, while the art is haunted by the manifestation of Gotham City in a different medium. Both the text and the metatext (the comic being part of a franchise with different iterations in different media) are disrupted by intrusive presences. While this cross-pollination of *Batman* comics by *Batman* films was intended as a publicity tool to a certain extent, the publishers of DC Comics inadvertently brought a gothic sensibility not only to the tone of the storylines but also to their locations. This created a unique sensibility to a nearly a decade of Batman comics, while conjuring a genre particularly suitable to the character.

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