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## **The World's Greatest Detectives: Analyzing the Relationship and Cultural Meaning of Sherlock Holmes and Batman**

Emma F. Reeves  
*University of Southern Mississippi*

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The University of Southern Mississippi

The World's Greatest Detectives: Analyzing the Relationship and Cultural Meaning of  
Sherlock Holmes and Batman

by

Emma Reeves

A Thesis Submitted to the Honors College of  
The University of Southern Mississippi  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirement for the Degree of  
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in the Department of English

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Approved by

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Katherine Cochran, Ph.D., Thesis Adviser  
Associate Professor of English

---

Luis Iglesias, Ph.D., Chair  
Department of English

---

Ellen Weinauer, Ph.D., Dean  
Honors College

## Abstract

The characters Sherlock Holmes and Batman represent a Gothic archetype aimed at uncovering societal fears and tensions. The thesis analyzes four Sherlock Holmes stories by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and four Batman-centered graphic novels from DC Comics. By looking at the two in conjunction with each other, this project develops a more comprehensive understanding of the Gothic detective hero in the historical contexts of Victorian England and modern United States of America. The two characters are first explained in terms of the Gothic and as archetypal figures before being examined in terms of their similar contemporary social contexts. Finally, the project uses the characters as a timeline of social anxiety in order to predict a trajectory for the archetype. The thesis also contemplates the reasons for the popularity and staying power of the characters. Altogether, the two characters reveal more about the readers themselves than any crime committed in the plot.

Key Words: Sherlock Holmes, Batman, Gothic, detective fiction, Victorian, 1980s, societal fear, cultural anxiety

## Dedication

Daddy:

Thanks for watching *Justice League* cartoons with me when I was little.

Because of you I grew up knowing I could be both a princess and Batman.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Katherine Cochran, for all her help in this project. Thank you for all your patience, as well as for always laughing with (at?) me when life got hectic. I have enjoyed these four years as your student, and I hope I can someday be half the teacher you are.

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## INTRODUCTION: THE GOTHIC DETECTIVE

T.S. Eliot once claimed that “the detective story, as created by Poe, is something as specialised and as intellectual as a chess problem, whereas the best English detective fiction has relied less on the beauty of the mathematical problem and much more on the intangible human element” (377). In essence, the best sleuth stories use a presented mystery, which the reader expects to be solved, in order to focus indirectly on a far greater and far more uncertain mystery—human nature. Of course, in order to attempt to interpret humanity’s motivations, the fictitious detective must first be able to interpret the crimes around him, to deduce an answer to the problems he has wittingly approached. While Poe may have created the detective fiction genre, his hero Le Chevalier C. Auguste Dupin did not perfect the elementary science of deduction, which allows for greater inspection of the human condition.

Instead, it was Sir Arthur Conan Doyle who created the world’s greatest (and only) consulting detective and master of deduction, one Mr. Sherlock Holmes of 221b Baker Street. Sherlock Holmes, a moody middle-class renaissance man with a cocaine addiction, entered the world in December of 1887, and with him came an entire iconography of the ideal crime solver: the hat, the pipe, the cloak—not to mention the acuity of mind to resolve even the most impossible cases (Cox 34). Along with Holmes, Doyle also created an entire cast of characters, such as Dr. John Watson, a retired military doctor and the chronicler of Holmes’s adventures, and Inspector Lestrade, the well-intentioned but somewhat bumbling agent of Scotland Yard who worked alongside the rest of the struggling police force. Furthermore, Doyle’s stories take place in late-Victorian, early-Edwardian London, an equally quintessential setting of contrasting

grandeur and destitution caused by the industrialization and world-wide change associated with the period. The stories followed Holmes through the criminal underbelly of London, always following the same path from a confusing tale around a plot twist to a tidy solution. Through the Sherlock Holmes mythos, Doyle established a hero and formula that has long since been revisited.

Still, a Victorian gentleman cannot appeal to all audiences; at some point readers always need novel reinvention of the basic archetype: in this case the genius yet mysterious detective. Thus, Batman was born. Created by Bob Kane and Bill Finger in 1939, Batman took up the mantle of the world's greatest detective. In *The Life and Times of the Dark Knight: The Complete History*, Les Daniels, Chip Kidd, and Bob Kane include an interview with the Batman co-creator Bill Finger who says the character was based in part on Sherlock Holmes himself, though the book presents this passage as an afterthought despite the fact that the text even goes so far as to describe the specific characteristics taken from Holmes in devising Batman. Batman matches Sherlock in terms of intellect, gadgetry, and specialized training; more importantly, Batman can brood in a cave while Sherlock shoots up before they both go help their allies at the police department who definitely need it. Furthermore, Batman's home of modern-day Gotham City matches Victorian London in terms of both extravagant wealth and degrading poverty, which often serves as the source of crime in the comics. Batman's English butler Alfred Pennyworth, sometimes portrayed as a retired military doctor, also acts as a tagalong helper just like Watson along with the well-intentioned but faltering Police Commissioner James Gordon, the modern Lestrade, both of whom again establish

an iconic set of characters. Therefore, Batman serves as an extension of the character of Sherlock Holmes.

Of course, the Caped Crusader does differ from Sherlock in a few ways that keep him interestingly unique. Sherlock never claims to be a superhero of any sort. Furthermore, while Sherlock does use disguises at times, he does not need a full-blown secret identity like Bruce Wayne needs the Batman alias. Baker Street in no way resembles the Batcave, the secret underground lair from which Batman works. Batman also breaks the typical pattern of the Holmes stories and does not always offer a neat little conclusion, logical with the bad guy caught. He works not as a copy of Sherlock but as a unique re-visitation of a new kind of hero with characteristics specific to his societal influences.

After all, both Sherlock Holmes and Batman are products of their times and audiences. Both characters exhibited (and continue to exhibit) mass appeal despite some setbacks. Originally, no credible publisher would print Doyle's stories, and when he was first serialized, the professionals degradingly considered them to be "shilling shocker[s]'—pulp fiction for the masses" (Sutherland). Publishers never expected Sherlock Holmes to last. Similarly, Batman has historically been considered merely a comic book, labeled as a child's interest only; as a result of the Red Scare in the 1950s, critics demonized and censored comic books almost out of print entirely (Pagliaro 32). Nevertheless, both characters resisted negativity critical response because of the overwhelming positive reception from the populace. Once Doyle found a suitable partnership with *The Strand* magazine and began publishing his shorter pieces, his stories "became immediately popular and once and for all established the detective . . . as [a] permanent [figure] in

literature” (Cox 48). Batman similarly has received extensive cultural attention since his inception, which, in spite of opposition, has made him one of the most recognizable and popular superheroes to date. Though both characters are excluded from the realms of high culture, they have always been appealing to the masses, making them of particular interest to cultural investigation.

Since their creations, Sherlock Holmes and Batman have captured their respective societies’ attentions, becoming two of the most preeminent and discussed pop culture icons. The consensus is that these characters are popular for their relatability. Michael Saler asserts in his article “‘Clap If You Believe in Sherlock Holmes’: Mass Culture and the Re-Enchantment of Modernity, c. 1890-c. 1940” that the simultaneous rationality and imagination of the Holmes stories fit into a new modernity, which was beginning to rely on scientific thought and to abandon the fantastic, coinciding with the time of a growing celebrity culture in Victorian England. He mentions that many Victorians believed Sherlock Holmes was a real person who consequently became more famous than Doyle. Therefore, it is no surprise that Zach Dundas says in his book *The Great Detective: The Amazing Rise and Immortal Life of Sherlock Holmes* that Holmes appealed and appeals to audiences due to the idea that anyone could be him; the reasonable, surprisingly simple methods Holmes uses could, in theory, be mastered by anyone, especially since the public believed him to be real rather than fictitious. Still, the Holmes stories represent just enough romance to capture the lingering fantasies of the public. Likewise, in her article “‘I’ll Be Whatever Gotham Needs Me to Be’: Batman, the Gothic, and Popular Culture,” Agnieszka Soltysik Monnet gives in-depth analysis to several interpretations of Batman over time, describing a few ways in which the character has changed with history. She

thus explores Batman as a figure able to evolve to match societal change, and she specifically questions whether or not the Batman character retains popularity due to his ability to reflect the culture. These characters have great staying power because they resonate with audiences.

The characters' ability to reflect society springs from their classification as Gothic fiction. The Gothic exists as a form of literature that focuses on horror and the unknown. Victoria Carrington's article "The Contemporary Gothic: Literacy and Childhood in Unsettled Times" serves as a basic lens through which readers can observe an important literary factor that connects Holmes and Batman. She asserts that Gothic literature focuses on darkness and horror because it expresses social anxieties, a concept that supports Ravi Kant's claim that the Victorian detective novel was inspirationally linked to nineteenth-century London, which he describes as an eerie hotbed of physical and moral decay ("Gothicising London in Detective Fictions of Arthur Conan Doyle"). Urban corruption influenced the Victorian mindset, for Beth Kalikoff illustrates the tendency of macabre Victorian novels to portray the ability of regular people to commit murder and other horrid crimes as the expression of an inherent fear in the masses of their own psyche. She uses this base fear to mention the devious methods often employed by Holmes who consistently disregarded police while contemplating his own criminal opportunities ("Fiction, 1870-1900"). Meanwhile, Gotham City, the literary setting of Batman, matches those bleak descriptions of Gothic London and presents a vigilante that Monnet describes as an ethically ambiguous figure that also acts outside of the law. Considering Batman's inception at the end of the Great Depression and beginning of World War II, as well as his resurgence in popularity in the 1980s at the end of the Cold

War period, Gotham City also represents a very real backdrop, even if not one particular city. As mentioned in *The Life and Times of the Dark Knight: The Complete History*, “The character [of Batman] had become a seething nuclear stockpile of a society’s dark dreams and desires” (Daniels et al). Altogether, the Gothic reflects social tensions in an attempt to make sense of them, much in the same way that Holmes and Batman seek to make sense of the crimes they face.

Sherlock Holmes and Batman can reflect their societies because their authors found inspiration in reality. As Cox mentioned, “It has been said that Sherlock Holmes, the legendary detective, owes at least part of his fame to an equally legendary criminal - Jack the Ripper. Initially, however, it was the Whitechapel murderer who received the greater amount of attention” (34). John Moore’s article “Sherlock Holmes Borrows a Plot” also confirms that Doyle did indeed base his stories on actual events; Moore asserts that Doyle drew inspiration from observed social anxieties, which confirms Carrington’s assertion regarding Gothic literature’s role as the articulation of cultural tension. Likewise, Darren Marks explains the many interpretations of Batman since his creation in terms of changing inspiration: the character of Batman shifted in the 1970s from expressing an old society’s values and anxieties to expressing new ideals and fears, specifics of which Marks fails to discuss in detail. Marks thus discusses Batman in terms of a figure that represents people trying to cope with the problems of society; Marks establishes the idea that Batman is a reflection of the average individual working within a culture to deal with the problems and ideals of that culture (“In the Face of Anomie: Batman from Golden Age to Modern Combinard”). Ultimately, Batman and Sherlock were created as a response to a societal need for a crime solver.

However, scholars fail to discuss these characters in relation to one another, despite their striking similarities; much of the work on the two is vastly different, though it mentions many of the same principles in regards to each other. Moreover, beyond the fact that current research does not link the two, the research also fails to draw societal conclusions. Many scholars claim that the characters provide a means of reflecting on their audiences, but scholarship largely fails actually to observe these audiences, both past and present. No one adequately explains what the characters, and all their many interpretations, say about their respective societies and audiences in terms of historical and societal tensions. Since it is established that these characters, who are appealing due to their nearly universal relatability, present a mirror image of their societies by which readers may interpret messages about those societies' specific anxieties, then research must use that idea to observe the readers through the text. This research hopes to create meaning and interpret purpose behind the connections between Sherlock Holmes and Batman through analysis of their relative messages concerning society. Specifically, this research proposes a better understanding of these two characters by connecting them, as well as better understanding of their roles as social mirrors and the subsequent insights about their respective societies. In doing so, the texts must be used as a means of better interpreting a historical viewpoint by which one could understand human motivations as was the original hope for the detectives.

Still, in addition to providing societal implications of historical influences and anxieties, the heroes also must reveal certainties about their audiences in terms of the overall cultures that produced audiences so receptive to these characters. After all, entire cultures transcend instances of turmoil or uncertainty; they refer to the shared fears and

values of a people group. These elements help to explain the way in which the characters baffled critics by appealing to the masses—the culture. Therefore, the characters enlighten readers on the ways in which culture both has changed and remained the same in order to accept this archetype across time and space. After all, if characters are made possible by their audiences, then that literature may be used to study the audience.

Of course, studying the audience again requires an even smaller scope through which one can study the individual readers. Both as a whole and as singular persons, the audience must be considered in terms of why these characters command such immense popularity. In essence, the research must seek to explain why generations continually return to this archetype through these characters. It cannot be about detective fiction; other detectives have not been so popular since the Victorian period. It cannot be about superheroes, for Batman cannot truly be classified as one. It must all refer back to this mysterious genius of a man who may be reinterpreted in different ways but who always relies upon the core aforementioned story elements and iconic details. Therefore, this research will seek to unearth the true appeal to the individual readers of Sherlock Holmes and Batman as the most iconic detective heroes.

Overall, the point of this research is to discover a new literary interpretation of Sherlock Holmes in conjunction with Batman. Since the ways in which the characters and their stories reflect social anxieties are most relevant to the observation of these Gothic heroes, the two characters must be compared and contrasted in terms of what the texts say about the historical and social backgrounds to the texts. Only through this understanding of the audience can the characters fully be interpreted and explained as such lasting literary figures. Ultimately, these characters remain as pop culture icons because they



represent the everyman through atypical yet candid approaches to fear while offering a means by which the everyman can control his surroundings, thereby providing the reader with understanding of himself within humanity. After all, if literature intends to deduce understanding about human nature, then that investigation should study at the feet of the world's greatest detectives.

## CHAPTER ONE: ANALYSIS OF HOLMES

Sherlock Holmes solved his first case in 1887 in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's story *A Study in Scarlet*; for the next several years, Doyle continued to write the detective who seemed intrinsically tied to the Victorian London he occupied. Michael Harrison wrote, "The London—the 'civilized' world—of 1878 . . . was so like that of our own in so many ways that it is difficult at times to bear in mind the thousand ways in which it was fundamentally different. This was because it was the world of an age of radical change" (46). Shifting from a model of rural agriculture and a relatively closed-off world, Victorian Britain became a place of urbanized industrialism and imperial prowess. The beginnings of a global culture meant the need for a new way to interpret the world, both near and far, as well as the self. Victorian London's instability thus prompted a wealth of Gothic literature aimed at discovering such an interpretation, and Sherlock Holmes rested firmly in that tradition. After all, "No man is an island—especially in Time . . . Each man is a part of the society in which he lives: he has a hand in giving it its peculiar flavour, and he has been moulded by it" (Harrison 46). Sherlock Holmes represents a century of progress, which caused paradigm-altering change; this change in turn formed the Victorian London Holmes both traversed and subsequently influenced. Therefore, an analysis of Holmes must include an in-depth look at the important fluctuations leading up to the fin-de-siècle in London.

Industrialization acted as a major impetus for the extensive transformation of London that eventually called for a figure like Holmes. Beginning late in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Industrial Revolution rapidly altered the English landscape. Railroads connected the far-flung to the nearby and expedited travels. These sorts of new technologies allowed for

the production of more food, which enabled a rise in population, which necessitated jobs, which drove people to urbanization (Steinbach 77-8). Cities became a Mecca for economic pursuits as more factories sprang up to meet the demands of an increasing population in need of goods; the capital city of London grew exponentially (Steinbach 12). Along with this increase in persons, the development of a complex class society with a newly emerging middle class further complicated the Victorian perception of economics (Steinbach 114). As Keating said, “[The United Kingdom] was then a nation. . . of commerce . . . She was a nation of prestige . . . She was a nation of order” (6). Industrialism shaped the British mindset and drove political decisions, especially in conversations regarding Imperialism, thereby making England both a nation of increasing power and a nation of strict internal structure. Moreover, Britain’s technological revolution would eventually impact the entire world and drive Europe into a new century with England at the helm (Steinbach 77). Ultimately, industry created a new perception of economics and the market that in turn shaped social perceptions, but it also resulted in a developing intellectual forum.

As technological advances changed the way the British lived, the social and scholastic spheres began to mirror the advancements affecting the nation. An influx of people meant an influx of ideas; technological advances, which often resulted in money to drive the aforementioned economy, cooperated with scientific research; and a market system in which people no longer produced their own necessities and earned more of a disposable income allowed individuals to engage in more intellectual work, eventually even as a career. Of course, the Victorian Era saw a sharp intake of unreasonable pseudosciences in addition to the solid discoveries the period fostered, for often the

popular “science” failed to represent legitimate investigations into the material world (Steinbach 229). Still, this popular awareness of any type of scientific pursuit became possible as politicians passed educational reforms like the Universal Education Act that increased the society’s literacy rates and consumption of pop literature (Jacobs 92). In other words, “By the time the bulk of Watson’s accounts of his exploits was before the public there had been created out of the new prevailing literacy . . . readers there waiting in numbers who were capable of appreciating the scientific method, the method that was Holmes’s great contribution to the business of the detection of crime” (Keating 15-16). As more people learned to read, the transfer of thought accelerated as magazines, newspapers, and printers everywhere found a market; reading was no longer a privilege of the wealthy. Indeed, throughout popular texts of the day, the advancements of Britain can be found: Imperialism claimed to provide romance as in Leonowens’s *The English Governess at the Siamese Court*; technology promised to win the day like in Marsh’s *The Beetle*; science challenged the limitations of mankind as in Shelley’s *Frankenstein*; and new theories of Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* questioned previously held notions regarding the organized religion. Hence, the very minds of the people changed with the Industrial Revolution.

Despite the many progressions of 19<sup>th</sup>-century England, these changes inherently exacerbated certain negative aspects of the culture. The rise of technology prompted an urban factory-based economy, which required replaceable workers to endure harsh conditions for minimal pay (Steinbach 79). As Keating puts it, “If Britain as a whole was boundingly prosperous, her very poor, the lowest of the low, lived in appalling squalor,” and Harrison notes that “there were three and a half millions living within the

Metropolitan area, of whom 90,800 were paupers on parish-relief” (11, 50). Urbanization caused overcrowding and horrid living conditions; children suffered starvation and mutilation; and women turned to prostitution in order to survive. The shining new era brought about hardship, making London a breeding ground for crime. Furthermore, the advancement of science prompted doubts; as illustrated in Robert Louis Stevenson’s science-gone-wrong novel *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, people feared what science could do as much as they revered it. Of course, these anxieties only increased due to the uprising of sensational journalism aimed at pleasing the newly reading public, which became all the more convinced of the degradation of their society (Diniejko). After all, the papers either covered the worldwide shortage of supplies as bemoaned in Malthus’s “Principles of Population” or the latest murder by Thomas Neill Cream or the terror of the savage Indian Revolt of 1857 in which imperialized natives brutalized the so-called martyrs sent to civilize and Christianize them. Even the developments that could have been positive, like industrialism and the advances to which it led, ultimately also caused the realization of deeper social issues. Regardless of the good and potential represented by the Industrial Revolution, its many consequences pushed Victorian London into a bittersweet era of confusion and complexity. Ergo, the Holmes mythos serves to make sense of these tensions while presenting a new hero equipped to face such a time.

When looking at the fears of the Victorians as expressed in the Holmes stories, one first finds a certain focus on the apprehensions coming from within London herself. After all, she represents the many aforementioned changes as the center of the ever-expanding and progressing British nation. To help manage these churning waters, the Metropolitan Police Force formed in 1829, but it was not until 1842 that the Criminal

Investigation Department formed at Scotland Yard (Harrison 140). Even then, though, the public displayed little confidence in these untrained, underpaid officers. Many revealed themselves to be corrupt, in addition to being unable to prevent some of the worst crimes London had ever seen (Keating 36). By 1888 with the onslaught of the mystery of Jack the Ripper, public opinion regarding the Metropolitan Police Force had not improved. Indeed, as Cox puts it, “The bloody crimes of Jack the Ripper galvanized London, making the public aware of brutality in the streets and the need for efficient police work. The relatively ineffective actions of Scotland Yard one usually finds in the Holmes stories, in fact, may simply reflect what the public felt was all too true (as the inability to catch the Ripper proved)” (34). The public viewed the supposed police heroes as failures unable to protect the women that Domestic Ideology, the dominating cultural mindset that stated that women were to be protected from the outside world by men in chivalric terms, mandated they save, prompting fears that the crime wave would extend to every mother and daughter in a gentleman’s home (Steinbach 25). London’s elite needed a new hero who would not fail. As the middle class doubted the competence of the police, gentlemen—not the street-dwellers—became the most prominent attackers of the police (Keating 131). And what better way for a man of substance to attack the police than through prose?

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle commonly portrayed his hero Sherlock Holmes as salvation to the Metropolitan Police Force, though not without an air of badgering criticism thereof. Numerous stories begin with a visit from Inspector Lestrade or another officer begging Holmes for help in an “unsolvable” case. Because of this common situation, in *The Sign of the Four*--notably published only two years after the

Whitechapel murders--Holmes considers himself “the only unofficial consulting detective . . . I am the last and highest court of appeals in detection. When Gregson or Lestrade or Athelney Jones are out of their depths—which, by the way, is their normal state—the matter is laid before me” (98). Even from the first Holmes story, *A Study in Scarlet*, he clearly recognizes his intellectual superiority over even the highest-ranking official detectives in the police force, and he often disparages the abilities of the force throughout the stories: “There is no crime to detect, or, at most, some bungling villainy with a motive so transparent that even a Scotland Yard official can see through it” (24). Holmes labels the officers of the Metropolitan Police Force as wholly inept, so much so that from the beginning of his published career as a consulting detective he employs ragamuffin children to do extensive detective work rather than consulting with the police, calling them “the Baker Street division of the detective police force” (43). The fact that these children often retrieve more answers and do so expediently further serves to endorse Holmes’s—and the London public’s—adverse opinions of the police force: low-class children could do a better job than Scotland Yard. The officers bumble because they serve as Doyle’s commentary on the real police force. Though the anxieties of London propagate a need for the police, they do not deserve the public’s already limited faith.

Since Doyle destroys the credibility of public protectors, Holmes serves as the altogether better hero. What give Holmes the license to denigrate the police detectives is his scientific methods that far excel any training received by a normal officer. As previously mentioned, Holmes introduced the scientific method to criminal investigations, and “applied science, that very Victorian characteristic, that was to be the young consulting detective’s most bruited weapon in the struggle he had committed

himself to” (Keating 20). The average officer represented an untrained, uneducated working-class man; even a detective did not epitomize the learned upper middle-class man as Holmes did. Holmes’s use of the refined art of science to catch criminals and solve “unsolvable” cases establishes him as a hero that an esteemed audience could appreciate (Steinbach 230). He mentions to Watson one issue “which has puzzled many an expert, and why? Because there was no reliable test. Now we have the Sherlock Holmes test, and there will no longer be any difficulty” (Doyle 17). Holmes literally solves a problem in his first published appearance that has plagued police and impeded justice, proving to audiences that he is the hero they need, what *The Sign of the Four* calls “a connoisseur of crime” (173). This usage of the French provides another subtle reminder of class; the Victorian people can only be safe with protection from the moneyed aristocrat who dabbles in crime for pleasure rather than the working man employed by the police. Nevertheless, Holmes does not represent a standard of justice, which causes tension between established law and the stories’ concepts of true justice.

Interestingly, Sherlock Holmes presents Victorian society with demurrals of the legal system. Holmes illustrates a new form of justice: blatant vigilantism. In fact, Harrison states that though Holmes seems to understand the concepts of right and wrong,

Nowhere in the record of his campaign against crime and criminals is there any evidence that he knew—or cared—about the legal arguments which would take a man to the gallows or save him from them. When Holmes feels that justice would be better served by his silence, he keeps quiet: indeed, he is open concerning his attitude towards the Law of the Statute as distinct from the Law which . . . is to be found in the heart of



every man who cometh into this world. Holmes has sufficient confidence in his own judgement of what is right and what is wrong to set himself up as a judge, jury, and—if need be—court of final appeal. (49)

Holmes judges situations by his own moral code rather than by their legality, making him altogether powerful. Holmes demonstrates no fear of the law; in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* Holmes admits to crime and then judges the law to be wrong for calling them such (254). Moreover, Holmes spends time in opium dens and knows members of the criminal class, in addition to being well known to them. The fact that Holmes often disguises himself as a delinquent blurs the line between him and the seedy underbelly of London, compounded with his cocaine addiction. Although taking cocaine is not illegal per se, “it must not be forgotten that, in order to become an addict, one must—at some time on the way to addiction—have acquired and taken the drug illegally” (Harrison 154). Not only in his detective work does he break the law, but he also does so in his personal life! Nevertheless, the police perceive him as “a man to be humored,” even in *A Study in Scarlet* (173). Despite Holmes’s own criminal activity, the representatives of the law obey his wishes and offer him allowances, even unto how they interact during an investigation. Still, in *The Valley of Fear*, Holmes asserts that “I go into a case to help the ends of justice and the work of the police . . . I have no wish to score at [the police’s] expense. At the same time, . . . I claim the right to work in my own way and give my results at my own time” (329). Though he determines how the law will adhere to him, he claims that he does not act apart from the law, merely above it: a crucial distinction as it attempts to confirm that Holmes does work as a good guy for absolute justice. He states on several occasions that he aims “to arrive at the truth,” showing that while he mistrusts

the law and its agents to find veracity, alternative methods apart from the law can reach the goal of the law (353). At times, Doyle even extends his ideas of the rights of the people searching for justice to characters more representative of the new common faces of London.

Doyle presents characters other than Holmes exhibiting vigilantism in order to comment on the needs of those on the margins of society. Holmes, a gentleman to whom Doyle allows vigilantism, serves as a contrast to the other paladins presented in the stories. The murderer from *A Study in Scarlet*, who admits to killing those who had destroyed his family, justifies his crimes by saying, “I determined that I should be judge, jury, and executioner all rolled into one. You’d have done the same if you have any manhood in you, if you had been in my place” (84). As mentioned earlier, Holmes often takes a similar stance, but Doyle goes a step further. He aligns masculinity with the character’s vigilante actions, and because of Domestic Ideology, this association would have appeared reasonable to contemporary audiences. Furthermore, it should also be noted that some of the stories present feminist notions intermingling with vigilantism, pointing to a possible recognition of women as another group vying for certain unmet needs. Several of the stories feature strong female characters; while it cannot be denied that several adhere to a conservative role of passivity, characters like Laura Lyons in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* who “defiantly” defends herself in “her office” point to active women in positions of independence like those held by men (284). Other women throughout the stories demonstrate similar wisdom and proactivity. Irene Adler, possibly the most cited example of an autonomous and powerful woman within the Holmes canon, also demonstrates a form of Holmes-approved vigilantism in her blackmailing the

Bohemian king. As an American prima donna, she represents three objects of social disdain (women, opera stars, and Americans); moreover, her affair with the King alludes to her as having a culturally unacceptable sexual autonomy. However, she still garners Holmes's respect through her intellectual prowess. Both Hope and Adler use acumen to commit their crimes. Therefore, Doyle insinuates that society fails to take care of certain groups and thereby resigns its control over them as they seek to take matters of justice into their own capable hands.

Of course, these sympathetic characters become overshadowed by more villainous representations of underclass vigilantes. Jonathan Small, a prisoner working with Sikhs after the Indian Rebellion of 1857, questions the concept of legality much like Hope does when he exclaims, "Justice! . . . A pretty justice! . . . Where is the justice that I should give [the treasure] up to those who have never earned it?" (*The Sign of the Four* 159). However, the fundamental difference between the convict and the American rests in the nature of the victims; Small killed rich military figures in London, whereas Hope's victims did not command societal accolades. Since Small ultimately becomes a villain for the murders committed while Holmes extends sympathy to Hope, Doyle effectively makes justice a class-based system. Indeed, in *The Valley of Fear*, a poor American, McMurdo, also questions his role in gaining justice: "We are but poor men that are trying in our own way to get our rights" (404). As Cox puts it, "Like . . . *The Sign of [the] Four*, *The Valley of Fear* focuses on a crime generated by a secret society or a cult's quest for revenge" (131). Like Small, McMurdo becomes the story's villain, duped by a detective figure, thereby confirming Doyle's sentiment that vigilantism can only exist for the members of the British elite classes, like Holmes, or for those who do not directly

distress the British elites, like Hope or Adler. Small and McMurdo cannot be allowed the same privilege because they lack intellect and adherence to class observances. Thus, the reader must look at all of these characters as a whole in order to determine Doyle's proposed legal order.

Throughout the stories, Doyle presents characters who act outside of the law. These vigilantes end up being labeled as both "good" and "bad." However, the inclusion of these characters serves to make commentary on the different sectors of the growing population that concern and threaten the established order within London. Each vigilante presented represents a group imposing upon British preeminence during the turn of the century—Americans, imperial rebels, women—in order to comment on British feeling towards each of these groups. For example, Hope, as well as some other American characters, garners some sympathy; after all, his family perished. However, he ultimately does go to prison, and McMurdo, another American, earns no sympathy. The other American characters receive acceptance only because they are described in terms of extravagant wealth in observance of British culture in deference to their own. Moreover, Small receives scorn as a villain, showing the British intolerance for imperial rebels. Finally, Adler ultimately must leave Britain before Holmes admits his admiration of her; plus, most of the women in the stories still receive anti-feminist and conservative treatment. This suggests that while Doyle may have viewed first-wave feminism as having some respectable qualities, he either could not promote its acceptance within London or could not stomach the movement in its entirety. Women, Americans, and rebels (the disenfranchised) lack the refinement of the privileged, which justifies Holmes's unwarranted actions. Ergo, Doyle subtly reinforces the status quo by showing how the

disenfranchised fail to achieve the same benefits as Holmes, thereby offering a modicum of comfort amongst all the unsettling change.

Another character represents the tension of the text's definition of justice. In *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, the primary villain, Stapleton, is a respectable member of the community and a naturalist who spent time in South America. The story reveals him to be an alleged heir to the Baskervilles fortune, though various events worked to disenfranchise him, prompting Stapleton to kill the recipients of the wealth he believes to be his own. He also assumes a false identity in order to carry out his plan. Therefore, Stapleton confounds the conclusions drawn about vigilantism in the texts because he is not a member of the underclass or a foreigner per se, and he uses similar scientific methods as Holmes to achieve his ends. Stapleton illustrates a changing paradigm of the nineteenth century in which "the natural philosopher was replaced by 'the man of science'" (Steinbach 280). The new concept of the scientist rested on the idea that "his word [had] broad applications and implications for society" (Steinbach 280). Stapleton's pursuits do not intend to better the British empire; the time he responds not using science to terrorize the British nobility is employed with catching butterflies, which offers no hope of improving the state of Britain. Holmes, however, uses his scientific knowledge to help people, moving away from a notion of science for the sake of knowledge and toward the idea of innovation for improvement. The text implies that rightful vigilantism may only be done by the man of science--not the natural philosopher. Therefore, the vigilante in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, though similar to Holmes in many ways, is not allowed his actions because of the way in which he deviates from Holmes's essential method.

Nevertheless, despite the slight comfort derived from watching the status quo survive, Doyle further investigates still more forums within society that represent new bands also experimenting with London's balance. Namely, scientific and spiritual affairs gained new unsettling attention. As previously stated, the increase in literacy led to popular literature, like penny dreadfuls, sensational journalism—all of which fed off the crime of the day in order to escalate public concern into mass terror. Education made the masses aware of more things to fear. For instance, in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, Doyle reveals the perpetrator to be a naturalist who uses his knowledge of science to frighten his victim and manipulate the potential witnesses. Like R. L. Stevenson and M. Shelley, Doyle employs a popular trope of the day: the idea of the “mad scientist” that made a villain of the one in accordance with the overwhelming technological progress that perplexed laymen. Moreover, the uncertainties associated with science, especially Darwinism, revealed societal apprehensions regarding the degradation of society. As outsiders and the working class appear to digress from horrid conditions, they become “apelike [in] appearance . . . [appearing] fearsome . . . in that dark, grimy, apartment which looked out upon one of the main arteries of suburban London” (29). This description of a murder scene in London points to the general belief that the depravity of the underclass would lead to the de-evolution of the masses; eventually, the public feared the entirety of the British society would be corrupted, illustrated as the darkness that connects to the artery of the city, which in turn affects the entire body of London. Interestingly, the science that sets Holmes apart as a hero also underscores public apprehension concerning the future of progress.

Furthermore, the progression of science became tied to rampant spiritualism of the age. While established religion began to dwindle, preoccupation with the supernatural did not (Steinbach 212-3). Of course, often the intersection between scholarship and the occult created strain, though Doyle and other contemporary writers often related the two. For example, *The Hound of the Baskervilles* shows the general tensions between rationality and superstition rectified through rampant spiritualism. The people all accept the superstition of the demon dog to be true because logic seems to approve despite this being a false conclusion. This stands in similarity to the Victorian acceptance of séances held by con artists who used technology to trick people into believing in supernatural occurrences. The 19<sup>th</sup>-century concern with understanding the world delved beyond scientific pursuits into new investigations in the metaphysical. These new scientific and spiritual oddities ultimately reflect the public fear of changing ideas within London.

Of course, beyond London herself, the Sherlock Holmes stories present a number of outsiders posing a serious threat to London, illustrating the public fear of the “Other.” As the century saw imperial upheavals and unsteady foreign relations through various rebellions and wars, ideas of vengeance became rampant in public concern (Steinbach 67-8). It should be no wonder, then, that *The Sign of the Four* focuses on imperial tensions. Small and his companion, described as an animalized savage, murder Englishmen for revenge, but by the end, the English exact revenge on the savage, sending him to the bottom of the Thames. Additionally, the character of Thaddeus Sholto, the effeminate hypochondriac, represents the corrupting power the Orient was thought to have for the British man (Said 8). As he is described, Sholto is a hermit in an apartment of oriental luxuries; his rooms mimic aspects of Oriental British colonies, yet Sholto

possesses altogether negative qualities, namely a loss of masculinity. The influence of the imperialized cultures destroys the British gentleman and corrupts him until he becomes weak and powerless. Either the impact empire feminizes the gentleman, as with Sholto, or the colonized savages attempt to harm the colonizer. The stories conclude that no sympathy can be given to the outsider; instead, it must be destroyed in the interest of British preeminence.

Beyond the Imperial “Other,” another threatening outsider encroaching upon London can be seen in the secret societies that dominate three out of four of the Holmes stories. In *A Study in Scarlet*, Watson recounts a tale of Mormonism, which “Mid-Victorian England [objected] to . . . When Watson recorded the case of a *Study in Scarlet*, it must have confirmed a good many of the more traditional British in their view that there was nothing wickeder than a Mormon” (Harrison 114-5). Watson then writes of Mormons as kidnapers, religious zealots, and murderers—a cult that threatens rightful family order. Indeed, “The victims of persecution [Mormons] had now turned persecutors on their own account, and persecutors of the most terrible description” (Harrison 67). The Mormons represent a fear-inducing group of suspicious mystery; *The Sign of the Four* then reveals a British man who relinquishes his natural rights as an Englishman in order to join the ranks of Indians, devoting himself to an honor code that respects the Sikhs as equals and terrorizes his countrymen with secret symbols. Finally, *The Valley of Fear* presents a story in which the primary villains belong to “the Eminent Order of the Freeman,” a group like the Freemasons (367). The quasi-socialistic organization threatens the social structure by killing respectable citizens for the so-called rights of the poor men. Their strange rituals and gang mentality contribute to portraying the society as a



collection of wicked thugs and vagrants. Combined with the secrets of the natural world controlled by the science of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, the inclusion of secret societies in the list of threats against London explain the quintessential fear of the Victorian British: that which they do not understand.

Since the fin-de-siècle collectively presented an entire society worth of the unknown and mysterious, Doyle offers a hero to make sense of it all. However, the hero for the Victorian age needed to represent the multi-faceted era itself; he needed to be something progressive, better than the heroes of past no longer relevant to a new age yet also attainable to the common man in need of hope. As Pearson puts it, “Like Hamlet, Sherlock Holmes is what every man desires to be; like Don Quixote, he is a knight-errant who rescues the unfortunate and fights single-handed against the powers of darkness” (123-4). Holmes masters the rapid change of the era, becoming a beacon of hope within the culture due to his ability to navigate gentility, science, the underclass, and a host of characteristics new to the aftermath of the Industrial Revolution. In many ways, Holmes represents what the common person aspires to be while simultaneously transcending the limits of a normal human. On the one hand, Holmes represents the hero as incredibly human, potentially even overly eccentric. The initial appeal of Holmes rests in the idea that his feats of deduction could be learned by anyone; even he states, “If I show you too much of my method of working, you will come to the conclusion that I am a very ordinary individual, after all” (34). He acknowledges that he is merely a man. However, Holmes as a man is self-destructive, socially awkward, drug-addicted, thrill-seeking, and prone to periods of depression. Holmes is also machine, “an automaton--a calculating machine” (*The Sign of the Four* 105) and “An enthusiast in some branches of science . . .

Holmes is a little too scientific . . . it approaches to cold-bloodedness . . . He appears to have a passion for definite and exact knowledge” (*A Study in Scarlet* 15). Essentially Holmes is a storehouse of information who finds no pleasure in human interaction, especially with women, and “cannot live without brainwork. What else is there to live for?” (*The Sign of the Four* 102). While Holmes cannot be the everyman hero because of his overly rational personality, his ability to foil every criminal made him the very figure that a crime-conscious England was seeking.

## CHAPTER TWO: ANALYSIS OF BATMAN

Obviously, Sherlock Holmes cannot match every society's needs. As the Victorian Era flowed into the Edwardian Period and eventually World War I, Holmes ceased to represent the hero of the major world power—in part because the United Kingdom no longer served as the crux of world eminence (Kagan 12). The United States of America developed technologically, politically, and socially through the end of World War I and into the 1920s, a time of prosperity. While World War I did bring about a great deal of worldwide change, the world stage shifted to spotlight the USA. Therefore, as Doyle wrote his last Sherlock Holmes story in 1927, the world no longer needed a British gentleman as its hero. As time passed, though, and affluence gave way to a Depression, the U.S. grew to need its own detective hero.

Thus, the Batman was born. Created in 1939, Batman was conceived in response to the overwhelming success of the hero Superman, first published in 1938 (Daniels et al, *Batman: The Complete History*). However, Batman's publication also points to a deeper psychological yearning for a hero, a need that Superman's alien, benevolent brawn could not satisfy. As stated in *Batman: The Complete History*, "Batman came out of the darkness, out of the collective unconscious where visions of avenging angels dwell . . . out of the shadows cast by . . . heroes who had gone before" (Daniels et al). In essence, the first writers of Batman derived the character both from the memory of past heroes, like Holmes, and from the ominous aspects of society's psyche, thereby intending him to be a more modern Gothic detective for a new time and place to solve the fears of his culture.

Of course, the culture of Batman—the culture of the 20<sup>th</sup> century—evolved throughout the period. A second World War and other major domestic and international affairs forced Batman also to fluctuate. The original night-prowling crime fighter became a campy object of morality, a live-action onomatopoeia, only to again shift back into the persona of the vigilante rogue. Yet by the late 1980s, the Batman mythos had surpassed its original darkness, assuming a far bleaker mentality; the Gothic hero reflected a society even grimmer than that of Depression-era rhetoric. Following the cultural upheaval of both international and domestic uncertainties, from the 1960s with the height of the Cold War and the debacles of the 1970s—for example, President Nixon’s Watergate Scandal and President Carter’s failure in to secure peace in the Camp David Accords-- into the Reagan administration of the 1980s, Batman rejected his light-hearted days of corny catchphrases, as well as the simple days of catching petty thieves. The mantle echoed the dark uncertainties of an unsteady and gilded age.

The arrival of the 20<sup>th</sup> century seemed to promise a grand new future for the United States, changing from a divided nation plagued by the memory of a civil war to a progressive, modern promised land. To the contrary, though, the century opened with labor strikes at home and a world at war, setting a tone of general uncertainty and conflict that would carry through for decades. Every time the nation seemed to settle in a sense of normalcy, she would find yet more fragmentation in disagreement, as reflected in the contrast of the conservative 1950s and the progressive 1960s. Even the 1970s saw protestation and disagreement through political movements, due to the Vietnam War and the scandalous Secret War, the covert bombings of Laos and Cambodia; it felt the uncertainty of the first presidential resignation after impeachment; it watched as failed

treaties led to the assassinations of global leaders; it raged through an established drug culture and sexual revolution (Reeves 192, 217, 220, 226). Instability and demoralization complicated the dreams for the century, but the public hope found restoration in the 1980s as a new president, Ronald Reagan, promised with his slogan “It’s Morning Again in America” a time of newfound Republicanism and neoliberalism (Thompson 15, “Presidential Campaign Slogans”). The public desire for a change that could unite the nation led to Reagan’s election, with the hope of ushering in consolation for the era. The 1990s reflected the desire for further change, with the election of a young and charismatic Bill Clinton, whose slogan “Don’t Stop Thinking About Tomorrow” prepared for the end of the century, Y2K—the modern fin-de-siècle (“Presidential Campaign Slogans”). Despite setbacks throughout the century, the nation still pressed onward in the spirit of American determination, accepting change in an effort to find relief after a century of tiresome disillusionment.

The nation began to find its relief in the economic boom of the 1980s, which in turn affected multiple facets of national development, much in the same way the Industrial Revolution impacted Victorian Britain. The “longest period of economic growth in the nation’s history” led to a population increase as unemployment dropped (Reeves 239). The population boom led to increased urbanization, and the increase in workers allowed for the expansion of industry, thereby creating cyclical progress. Reagan’s system of renewed laissez-faire economics, in which the government assumed as little control over the markets as possible while reducing taxes and expenditures, became quite popular as the average household saw an increase in annual income (Reeves 236). Additionally, Reagan also pushed for state-led educational reforms in order

to make the nation globally competitive and, by the end of the decade, over three-quarters of the adult population had a high school education, and nearly a quarter had completed some level of college (Reeves 241). An increasingly educated society provided a foothold for the expansion of technology, and the computer information age revolutionized the country leading into the 1990s, making the period one of extensive advancements in computers and applied science—namely those intended for public market consumption (Harrison 2). The country's prosperity united voters and the record-setting election put Reagan in office for a second term. Once his term expired, President G.H.W. Bush continued with Reagan's Republican ideals, but the country surged again in the 1990s once Clinton assumed the presidency with his fresh Democratic methods, showing a nation of general success rather than a nation that necessitated one ideology. It seemed as though the 1980s had revamped the country and set it on a fresh path toward the prosperity long awaited.

Furthermore, neoliberalism, originally focused on economic change, led to a moral backlash; a focus on the individual with laissez-faire tactics and a promise to secure the rights of this individual at all costs equaled radical conservatism (Harvey 11). After all, Reagan entered the White House in a time when the American public was used to leaders, like Nixon and Ford, failing to uphold the sanctity of the ethical leadership once promised. His plan for the country focused on a vision founded in conservative morals compounded “into an effective political and cultural rhetoric that answered back to a sense of malaise and decline which followed Vietnam, the political scandal of Watergate and waning economic prowess” that preceded his presidency (Thompson 8). Reagan claimed upon his election to stand for the righteous revival the nation wanted

after enduring a century so far of dissatisfaction. A rise in televangelists echoed the president's sentiments. Republicanism continued into the 1990s with the election of George H.W. Bush and, though Clinton reflected a national shift toward the Democratic party, he also asserted a youthful freshness that contributed to the general desire to escape the tired malaise of decades past and the public's belief in change to accomplish their desires. Americans looked toward the new century again hopeful of things to come.

However, rather than a continuation of confidence, perhaps the hope for the new century came about as a coping mechanism for a disenchanted public. Despite the economic boom and aforementioned discussion as to why the 1980s should have been exactly what the country needed, the 1980s ultimately continued the same pattern of corruption and discontentment that occurred in previous decades. For example, while the economic boom of the 1980s allowed for an era of consumption that can be viewed positively, alternative viewpoints criticize the new culture of "urban excess" that failed to recognize the "downside of economic change away from the urban centres" (Thompson 52). Increased growth merely called attention to the disparity of wealth between the rich and the poor, as the wealthy earned exponentially more during the period while the poor actually lost income. Stratification based on wealth began to become more pronounced in American society. Reagan also cut spending aimed at aiding impoverished families. Though poverty overall declined, the 1980s exacerbated certain economic dilemmas for the already struggling (Reeves 240). The people needed relief.

The Batman texts of the 1980s play into the country's economic inequity by further investigating characters' financial statuses and morality. Notably, Bruce Wayne's role as an affluent member of society exploits the reader's burgeoning distrust of the rich

and powerful who leave the poor behind. Despite his ability to aid the poor, the texts of the 1980s, specifically *Batman: Year One*, depict Wayne more as a playboy without concern for others, carelessly spending his money on booze, women, and the like (Miller 80). While it is revealed that he fakes this persona to negate any suspicion of him as being Batman, his assumption of such a persona reflects the expectation for the rich: corrupt, selfish, and unwilling to help anyone but themselves. Furthermore, all other wealthy characters in the text also use their money for their own pleasures, never helping the less fortunate. As the 1980s benefited the ultra-wealthy and left the destitute to suffer, so the text also villainizes the idea of the rich, even going so far as to valorize those without wealth. Jim Gordon, the only honest cop in Gotham City, and Selina Kyle, who eventually becomes Catwoman, are both depicted as minor heroes fighting for the poor despite their own monetary needs. The text aligns modest means to morality and wealth to wickedness as an appeal to the common man of the audience. While Batman is in fact the rich Bruce Wayne, the separation of the alias from the identity allows the hero to remain clean despite the money because Batman exists as an idea apart from money, an inhuman creature (Miller 34). Altogether, the role of the contemptible heir proves a foolproof disguise for Batman.

Beyond corrupt economic policies, the 1980s presented additional reasons to deplore those in power. However, Allen states, “Despite the suspicion of government, or perhaps in part because of it, and despite the disruptions of American society in the 1960s and 1970s, it is plainly neither easy nor congenial for most Americans to conceive of their government as an enemy or adversary” (33). The American public still wanted Reagan to represent the values with which he became synonymous, even when “the series



of scandals which flared in the US particularly during the latter part of the decade . . . were indicative of a polity riven with doubt and mistrust” (Thompson 181). Perhaps most notably, Reagan became involved in the Iran-Contra Affair. This scandal revealed that Reagan provided arms to rebels in Nicaragua against orders from both the Pentagon and the CIA with funds derived from even more secret trades with Iranians. The entire affair again led to shattered public trust of leaders. As President George H.W. Bush pardoned those responsible, the American public felt the confirmation that men of power exist above the law (Totenberg). Moreover, many within Reagan’s administration openly opposed racial integration measures, literally providing an example of authority refusing to help the public (Reeves 238). Even the televangelists of the 80s, the supposed religious leaders, amassed even greater fame as objects of terrible disgrace behind the scenes than as Biblical teachers (Thompson 167). Of course, with the inauguration of Clinton, sex scandals again called into question the country’s moral leadership (Harrison 5). Overall, neglectful lies, body counts, and sexual deviances proved the hypocrisy of those in control of the public trust and hope for guidance.

The Batman texts from the 1980s reflect this hypocrisy through depicting a police force rife with corruption. Indeed, *Batman: Year One* follows the Caped Crusader in conjunction with Officer Jim Gordon in order to highlight the rampant problems with the police force—not unlike those issues facing Holmes’s Metropolitan Police Force. However, whereas Holmes’s police officers flounder due to incompetence, Batman’s law enforcers tend to fake ineptitude as a mark of their own dishonesty, or they suffer from a lack of power mingled with the overwhelming pressure to conform. The text begins with the inclusion of a would-be editorial piece that outlines crime in the city, mentioning the

distrust the public has for cops, like the one who does not “notice any of what was going down, on account of how fixated he was on his Chocolate Chip Crunch Special. The security camera showed some kind of exchange between the perp and the good sergeant before the perp walked out, unidentified” (Miller 1). Clearly, the officer knows what criminal activity takes place in the city, but due to his proclivity toward being bought, justice does not occur. Nevertheless, the same cop is “still squeezing all the printer’s ink he can out of that one time he did something right and saved a kid,” showing both his desire for accolades and the media’s willingness to comply and praise these leaders despite failures and corruption. The text explicitly points out multiple times that the decay of the legal system extends to the highest authorities, seemingly leaving no hope for reformation and justice (Miller 3, 4, 36). Even the one good detective in the entire city, Gordon, still has his own faults that keep him from being a true paragon: Gordon maintains a mistress despite his wife being pregnant (Miller 68). Nevertheless, Gordon cannot fight the entire system “where the mayor and the commissioner of police use cops as hired killers” (Miller 70).

The late 1980s and early 1990s saw an increase in tensions between the police and citizens, including riots and trials over physically violent police actions believed to be unwarranted (Harrison 22, Thompson 143). At least one instance in *Batman: Year One* shows a cop profiling and assaulting an innocent African-American character, and it cannot be overlooked that every official and cop portrayed in the text is white (Miller 5). Furthermore, the atrocities of the Vietnam War would have resonated with audiences currently facing the beginnings of military conflicts in Middle East; soldiers, the police of the federal government, cannot be trusted not to kill innocents because of orders

(Harrison x). Therefore, based on the established legal system of Gotham City, the Batman mythos suggests that the written law no longer matters in modern America as the order of society cannot depend upon supposed defenders and leaders.

Because the Batman texts present readers with a setting in which police officers and other leaders cannot be distinguished from the villains themselves, the mythos necessarily offers a stance on vigilantism; the very existence of a Batman compares him to the police. His crime-fighting methods versus the police's methods and their relative effectiveness lead to a conclusion as to what makes a better agent of justice—established officers or a vigilante. It must be noted that the more recent texts, namely *The Court of Owls* and *The City of Owls*, rarely mention the police, thereby illustrating a continued distrust of police even unto a nearly complete write-off. This comes from the established sentiment concerning the authorities as established by the texts in the 1980s, namely *Year One* and *The Killing Joke*. The latter text also shows limited interactions with the police, other than a scene in the prisons in which it is revealed that they failed to keep the Joker detained, again pointing to Holmesian uselessness. The most important interactions between Batman and the police occur within *Year One*, making it the key to determining Batman's supremacy over them. First of all, the police, as has been mentioned, are corrupt throughout the text. But beyond their wickedness, they also fail to address the crime of the city; at least one set of panels depict a woman being attacked as police stand by doing nothing to help her (Miller 39). The police bomb a building and kill innocents (Miller 50). Batman's presence makes them look foolish (34). Conversely, throughout the comic Batman exhibits extensive combat training, tactical knowledge, and technological methods—not unlike Holmes's scientific methods that set him apart from the

Metropolitan Police Force. He is altogether more prepared, even without his money, to tackle the problems of his city, and he does so effectively, though not without setbacks from which he learns, whereas the GCPD only hurt the public. The text doubtlessly presents the police as failures and Batman as a successful helper.

Several characters aside from the hero himself enforce justice without backing from the police or law. By the Court of Owls arc, the Bat Family—in essence, those who work alongside Batman in close confidence—consists of several members, such as Nightwing, Batgirl, Red Robin, Robin, and Alfred Pennyworth. These characters are comprised of those Batman himself has trained and invited into his world of bat-themed justice. Ergo, Batman does not believe vigilantism is only his right. The texts also introduce Jim Gordon into the band of vigilantes; though not trained by Batman or privy to his secrets, Gordon still works alongside the Bat. Furthermore, Gordon commits his own acts of vigilantism, such as attacking corrupt officers who would threaten him and disobeying orders from his superiors when another's safety requires him to do so (Miller 19, 28). Though he originally does struggle with the mandate to stop Batman, *Year One* focuses on him gradually coming to terms with Batman's actions, culminating with employing him in a similar way that Lestrade employs Holmes. Though Gordon does not go to the Bat Cave with each new mystery like Lestrade, a flash of the Bat Signal into the night sky alerts the Caped Crusader of Gordon's need for the Batman's help (Miller 96). On pages 70-71, the graphic novel presents a two-page spread symbolic of Gordon's inner turmoil and journey. On the left, the text shows Gordon sitting on a bed looking at his gun while his pregnant wife sleeps; his contemplation of suicide as indicated by the text illustrates his flaws that plague him. On the right, the novel shows Gordon battling

the Batman, again showing something that Gordon is fighting against. The juxtaposition of these two images reminds the reader that Gordon and Batman are the same—flawed with good intentions. The text’s inclusion of Gordon’s perspective, flipping back and forth between him and Bruce Wayne, serves to place the two characters as foils to each other, ultimately bringing them together as a team. This union justifies Batman’s actions, thereby stating that vigilantism demonstrates a truer sense of justice than does institutional legality. The text ultimately expects the reader to conclude that acting apart from the law when the law fails to protect or destroy criminality can be heroic. Another example of a vigilante includes Catwoman, an interesting exception to Batman’s crime-fighting. Selina Kyle works to protect herself and the other women of her section of the slum from the corruption of gang leaders. Though her actions are not sanctioned by Batman, many of the criminal class believe her to be his ally; indeed, he does not stop her (Miller 86). Altogether, these instances of vigilantism state that any effort to help others and enact fairness is justified and right.

This stance automatically draws an important distinction, though, between accepted vigilantism and unacceptable vigilantism. The Court of Owls, the collective of elites who work to promote their own interests, act apart from the law—a secret society of vigilantes driven by a philosophy of elitism. Rather than the secret societies of the Holmes stories that at least wanted to right a supposed wrong, the Court’s only motivation is a matter of principle that the aristocracy of society must remain in power to the demise of the lower classes. Furthermore, this secret society exists as a peripheral to society, known by the public but thought to be an urban legend. The Holmes secret societies either acted in complete mystery to the public, as in the case of *The Sign of the*

*Four*, or with complete public understanding, as in *The Valley of Fear*. The Court of Owls's unique position as an entity known yet denied gives them power that mirrors Batman—some believe in his existence and some do not (not unlike how some believed Holmes to be a real person). Both become ideas that transcend humanity. In essence, *The Court of Owls* settles Batman as the hero, making him a prime example of how such a powerful organization should aid the city, and the text characterizes the Court as the villains, thereby indicating that anything done without Batman's idealistic approval cannot be justified.

Therefore, the text must eventually address money, a central topic for the Batman mythos. *The Court of Owls* focuses in part on the way in which elites fail to help the people struggling to survive, an action the text makes mandatory. Just as Bruce Wayne intends to implement public projects to restore Gotham City, he is deterred by the Court of Owls. The hero attempts to use his wealth for the good of others, setting the example of the way in which wealth should be used. However, the enemy, which secretly controls the society just as would a general cultural norm, refuses to permit wealth to benefit anyone but the richest in a population. Societal forces enable the wealthy to neglect those in need of their assistance. After all, as a conspiracy, the theory of the Court "is a theory of power. As such, it deserves attention for its understanding of the uneven distribution of resources and coercive power" (Fenster xiv). The Court illustrates the way in which wealth assumes control over the population and corrupts it. This notion can be seen in the earlier text, *The Killing Joke*, as well; the accident that drives the Joker to his insanity occurs because he attempts to use mob connections and crime to attain money.

Synthesizing this information, the reader finds money to be a corruptive power unless used for the betterment of society as whole, as Batman uses it.

In addition to troublesome domestic and foreign affairs, the 1980s also presented its own revolutionary advances in terms of science and technology that caused public concern similar to that felt by the Victorians. The explosion of the Challenger space shuttle in 1986 prompted a halt on shuttle launches for nearly two years, showing that the age of technical advancements no longer seemed as glorious. Also, the Chernobyl Nuclear Disaster occurred in 1986, again calling into question the cost of modern technology (Thompson xvi, xviii). Meanwhile, the decade also saw the onset of H.I.V. and A.I.D.S., which proved the limitations of science (Reeves 244-5). Despite the many possibilities technology should have represented, the decade suggested that technology could only kill rather than offer salvation. In more recent years, the threat of technology has been more informational; the surveillance systems used by the National Security Administration after 9/11 and Wikileaks reveal connected anxieties: the fear that technology has stripped privacy from modern society and that, despite constant access to information, the public still does not have access to the most critical knowledge. Altogether, both the disasters of the 1980s and more recent events point to a continued fear of the unknown, which technology cannot fix.

Batman reflects the uncertainty surrounding technology's capabilities in the way the texts depict criminal uses of technology. Most notably, the Talons, the assassins for the Court of Owls, exist in a science-fiction state of suspended animation, able to return to life in the proper conditions. This technology could be used to offer all people immortality, but instead the Court keeps it a secret and only uses it to bring back its

agents of death to wreak havoc on Gotham (Snyder *The Court of Owls*). Once again, the Batman text mirrors the Holmes stories by toying with modern recurrences of technology-based uneasiness; the Batman texts extend a general distrust of technology to suggest blatantly that advancements, like that which enables the Talons to be reanimated, will ultimately cause downfall and destruction of the society. After all, the Talons represent the pinnacle of human achievement in the ability to deny death, but they attempt to destroy the city. Still, even looking back to the texts from the 1980s, technology plays a key role in the creation of evil. In *The Killing Joke*, the final step in the Joker's transformation from regular man to Clown Prince of Crime occurs when he falls in a vat of chemicals. Again, an agent of progress results in the destruction of the individual as the Joker is disfigured and demented by the chemicals. Overall, the texts lead the reader to assume similar conclusions as in the Holmes texts: the progress of the age will lead to society's downfall.

To be fair, though, Batman would be nothing without his gadgetry, which complicates such a scathing notion of technology. After all, the 1980s saw the birth of public computer usage (Reeves 243). Similarly, the Bat Family remains in constant communication through technology, which allows for teamwork across the city, and Batman use special contact lenses that can merely look at an individual and gain access to crucial facts through facial recognition software (Snyder *The Court of Owls*, *The City of Owls*). Indeed, even *Year One* makes it clear that without the use of his technology and tools, Batman cannot be nearly as effective as he needs to be. He mounts a crucial escape with the aid of a sonar that calls live bats to his location. During the Court's siege on Wayne Manor, he uses a full-body suit of robotic armor, allowing the technology to cover



him completely. Batman becomes the machinery, as no aspect of his humanity remains visible. However, the suit saves him by allowing him to achieve feats of strength and endurance otherwise impossible. Therefore, the text acknowledges the usefulness, even necessity, of technology, but it does so not without an understanding of the dangers inherent in complete submission to the mechanization and digitization of society. Batman points towards the problems of technology mismanaged or used to overstep crucial boundaries.

Just as Holmes also addressed the fears emanating from outside of London, so also analyses of the Batman texts must look outside of the US. For the 1980s, international fears centered on the remaining vestiges of the Cold War mingled with the Iran-Contra Affair; for the 1990s, it meant the growing restlessness in the Middle East (Reeves 263). Popular media began to portray the fear that war would come to American soil; movies like *Red Dawn* and *Rocky IV* depicted foreign powers invading American soil—or at least the psyche of an American boxing hero. The conflicts in the Middle East continued to escalate in the 1990s until finally culminating on September 11, 2001. With the terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers, the nation saw “the return of the kind of fear and resulting rhetoric that characterized the Cold War” (Cohen 5). After 9/11 the implementation of a terror alert system, which daily shifted from Code Orange to Red without ever indicating the freedom to assume a less watchful stance, reflected and intensified the public fear. Hollywood remade *Red Dawn* and began producing more movies and television shows about life after a post-nuclear war. Conspiracy theories, whether they blamed the American government for the attacks or rested in Islamophobia,

began to rule public opinion. Simply put, the fear of the outside was that it would not remain outside.

All of this political unrest caused definite cultural commentary beyond the movies mentioned, and the Batman comics are no different. The recent Court of Owls storyline synthesizes the anxieties present in modern fears regarding foreign affairs. At its core, Batman's search for the Court reflects Cohen's commentary on post-9/11 rhetoric; Batman returns to past fears and preoccupations in the same way the American public resumed Cold War mindsets. The text explains that after the paradigm-altering death of his parents, Batman searched for the Court as the true villains behind the murders. However, his hunch relied on a nursery rhyme and conspiracy theory, not unlike the way that Americans relied upon anti-Communism during the Cold War and now use Islamophobia and other similarly groundless assumptions to base their actions. Batman interprets common occurrences as warning signs, and eventually threatens his own well-being in pursuit of an enemy his childhood self cannot find—a possible correlation to anti-terrorist legislation that arguably injured freedoms of speech and privacy. It is not until the Court comes to him that he is forced to accept their reality, though once they reenter his attention, he again obsessively searches for them, thereby reflecting the American return to the past with the forced realization of an enemy. Batman comments that owls “invade an enemy's territory... and build their nests inside his home” (Snyder *The Court of Owls*). Batman even states, “The most effective killer of bats, though, were the tiger owls. My ancestors let owls loose in the cave,” which then killed all the bats (Snyder *The City of Owls*). In essence, Batman comments on the foolishness of a past that aided and welcomed an enemy that eventually would attempt to destroy him; the text

implies that past mistakes, such as supplying arms to the Iranians who would eventually instigate terrorism on American soil, will destroy the country. To add to this overall message, the primary villain working for the Court, Talon, is revealed to be the reanimated body of killers from centuries previous; the text outright presents an instance of the past returning to kill. Ergo, the text reveals cultural fears that terrorist threats, which stem from past faults on the part of our would-be protectors, will kill the nation

Altogether, the 1980s up through recent years reflect a subversion of expectation that has left the public with general malaise and disenchantment with the promise of national revival. A gilded sheen covered the turn of the century, just as it did the last. Therefore, the resurgence of Batman into popular culture came due to a general need for a hero who could manage feigned decadence and lost innocence. As such, the 1980s and early 90s saw a startling amount of attention on the Caped Crusader, from comics to animated cartoons to blockbuster movies, all of which focus on the bleakness of the world due to corruption and dashed hopes of a better tomorrow. The Batman of this age assumed a more blunt and honest, perhaps even dark and grungy, aspect reminiscent of the world which he aimed to save. In order to study the Batman of modern times, it must be remembered from where he came and the Gothic undertones that define him. As previously mentioned, the Gothic aims to force the reader to come to grips with his or her greatest fears; the Batman comics, however, take the Gothic a step further by forcing the hero to wrestle with his own anxieties. Consider the origins of Batman: the vigilante alias of Bruce Wayne was created after nearly a decade of the Great Depression with failed attempts to reinvigorate the economy by symbolically murdering the wealth of the past generation, his parents, with the desperation of the current, their killer. Bruce, symbolic

of the next generation, represents the uncertainty of what will happen when the hope of restoration to glory is lost entirely, when the needs of the people lead to chaos. The character forces the reader to come to terms with his or her own fears in that Batman himself takes up the mantle in an attempt to deal with his own anxieties. Of course, this leads to an altogether dismal viewpoint for the comics, as Bruce Wayne states, “All we will see, when we look around . . . will be our own fears, our own frustrations. Our own demons” (Snyder *The Court of Owls*). Nevertheless, remembering this Gothic backdrop, which the text even acknowledges, gives the reader a greater understanding of the significance of the text, especially its hero and why he attracts such constant attention.

While the character of Batman has always been a child of darkness, the 1980s saw an emergence that wholly embraced the tenebrous essence by examining the character of Batman himself and asking the essential question: Is he good or bad? The texts force the reader to consider the possibility of a grey area rather than absolutes; after all, the flashbacks within *The Killing Joke* focus on relating the story of the bad day that transformed a common man into the Joker, intending the reader to develop sympathy for the worst villain in all the books. *The Killing Joke* plays a foundational role by enlightening readers of the delicate balance of the hero’s sanity and morality. The Joker asserts that “there’s no difference between me and everyone else! All it takes is one bad day to reduce the sanest man alive to lunacy” (Moore). The text hinges on this concept, that anyone can be like the Joker given enough turmoil. Indeed, the moment the Joker finally loses his mind, the text depicts the Joker staring into the eyes of the reader, clutching his now-green hair; the image breaks the borders of the image, setting the Joker apart as a three-dimensional character. The background is a black and white repetition of

the word “haha” in bold letters. This image intends to unsettle the reader, making him or her believe the Joker and his insanity could reach through the text to infect the reader; moreover, the brain’s desire to read each “haha” of the background creates an instance in which the reader also maniacally laughs, though internally. While, the intended victim, Gordon, does not crack, the text instead points out that Batman’s bad day, the death of his parents, “drove [him] as crazy as everybody else” because “why else would [he] dress up like a flying rat?” (Moore). Essentially, the text not only points to Batman as being as insane as the Joker, but it also parallels him to the Joker, thereby questioning his morality. More recent texts strive to ensure the heroism of Batman, making Bruce Wayne a philanthropist who no longer lives the playboy lifestyle (Snyder *The Court of Owls*). Batman helps people; at the core, he fights against injustice and crime itself in order to better his city. Nevertheless because of the constant acknowledgement of his illegal actions and dark personality, the text portrays the hero as morally ambiguous, thereby suggesting that the ends do justify the means.

Other texts also play with the concept of the hero as paralleled to the villain. In *The Court of Owls*, the opening pages depict Batman as working alongside the Joker, though later the text reveals it to be Nightwing in disguise. However, this pairing still draws the connection that the two are similar enough that a partnership seems reasonable. Indeed, when Gordon questions Batman about such a partnership, Batman merely explains it as, “A simple trick of the light,” (Snyder *The Court of Owls*). This comment points to the fact that on some level, Batman and his associates are good, merely playing in the darkness for the cause of greater justice. Dick assumes the mask of evil in order to fool other enemies for the sake of goodness because while the hero himself may be

upright, he cannot always be himself and must at times assume evil as a part of the work being done. Ergo, Batman may be good, but justice sometimes forces darkness upon its agent. Eventually, Batman grows to crave the darkness, saying in a time of desperation, “Away from the light. Back to the dark . . . have to find the dark” (Snyder *Court of Owls*). Furthermore, in *The City of Owls*, the villain and hero become even more analogous when it is revealed that the most recent Talon assassin claims to be Bruce Wayne’s brother. Though the text never provides absolute clarity regarding the truth of the allegation, but this intentional act shows the duality of Bruce Wayne’s mind. His would-be brother reflects the constant possibility that Batman himself could have become evil just as easily as he became a force for good. As the Joker said, the texts all work together to establish that Batman truly is merely a step away from madness. The graphic novels align the hero to his villains until they are nearly the same, thereby forcing the reader to ask what keeps him from losing his just mind--or better yet, what keeps an average individual from insanity and wickedness?

Because of this preoccupation with a mental precipice, the texts spend a great deal of time focusing on the unstable mental state of the hero. Specifically, in *The Court of Owls*, Batman enters a trap labyrinth, which terrorizes his mind. In the first few panels within the trap, the text shows Batman looking into water that he believes to be poisoned by the Court; his reflection is distorted and wild, forcing him to look at his own lunacy caused by the Court. Soon after, he looks at a framed picture of a past victim of the maze, crazed, and sees half of his face reflected and intertwined with the other victim, meaning that he will become the same. The section becomes even more disorienting as the physical page layout becomes confused. The pages rotate sideways, then upside down,

before finally turning upside down and backwards. This move distorts the reader and causes him or her to share in Batman's confusion. The labyrinth scene ends with Batman slowly taking on more and more owl-like qualities. The Court appears with the same owl-like qualities, showing that he becomes the evil with his insanity. However, in the final moments, when the owl-like creature of the Court descends upon him, in order to escape he becomes a bat, bigger and more powerful. Ultimately, though Batman hangs on the edge of sanity, it is the bat persona that saves him—both physically and mentally.

The Court of Owls story arc, the most recent of the publications, ends with Batman victorious, though uncertainty hangs in the air. The graphic novel completes the battle against the Court without answers as to whether or not the Talon is dead, Bruce's brother, and a host of other cliffhangers. Yet the novel continues with other one-shot stories, reflecting the realistic nature of life. One problem ends and leads to another; life continues without firm solutions. The 20<sup>th</sup> century proposed new hope for a bright future, but just as the text, each decade saw its own problems and led to no pat answers. Batman articulates the 20th century fears of corruption and technology, of uncertainty and conspiracy. More chilling, though, is the reflection of the fears of the future-- continuation. The text offers no hope for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, for Batman, unlike Holmes and Watson, offers no solutions and does not end with a trip to the theatre.

## CONCLUSION: THE MYSTERY SOLVED

The Gothic represents a long literary tradition of confronting readers with the most uncomfortable aspects of reality, though often in seemingly benign terms. A detective in London playing at justice like a game and a vigilante superhero dressing like a demonic bat act well within the genre. Both Sherlock Holmes and Bruce Wayne as the Batman search for their own brands of justice in corrupt societies, their own Gothic backdrops. While both characters have received much attention in various studies, even those concerned with the Gothic, this research aimed to look at the two characters in conjunction due to their striking similarities that provide a continuous view of social change and anxiety.

After all, the two characters essentially act as mirrors of each other, varying only as much as an archetypal blueprint should allow. Gotham City matches London in terms of the bleak and unruly. Bruce Wayne's closest ally and live-in butler, Alfred Pennyworth, is a retired military doctor, just like Sherlock's roommate Watson. Though Wayne employs a number of other helpers, though, he stays mostly cut off from society; in the same way, Holmes at times addresses individuals from every walk of life, but ultimately he maintains a detached persona. Both use methods and technologies unavailable to average individuals, and both fight villains that represent the worst of their homes, the outside world, and themselves. Additionally, just as Holmes becomes obsessed with a case, Batman also refuses to quit, even after serious injury. He demonstrates an urgency reflective of a new era no longer limited by the speed of a horse. While this does indicate certain differences between the two characters, these



discrepancies merely point to the adaptive nature of the essential character of the brooding genius detective.

After all, since their inceptions, both Holmes and Batman have undergone multiple changes, beyond the most basic change—the transition from Holmes to Batman. In the modern age, Sherlock Holmes has been rewritten by authors other than Doyle; he has been in television shows, movies, comics, and many books. Each interpretation adds new elements to the mythos; for examples, Benedict Cumberbatch’s recent interpretation of the character in the BBC production *Sherlock* looks at the character as an awkward “high-functioning sociopath,” whereas Robert Downey, Jr.’s American film version of the titular character made him a fast-talking, aloof narcissist (“The Sign of Three”). Still dozens of other versions could be mentioned, and Batman is no different. In the 1960s television show, Adam West played the role without any darkness; Batman was outgoing and ready to help the good citizens. However, even the 1990s children’s cartoon version returned the grime of Gotham with a fair amount of cynicism in the hero. Movies have seen him in fantastical terms, as in the 1989 Tim Burton film, and more realistic styles, depicted in the recent Christopher Nolan *Dark Knight* trilogy. These interpretations reveal their own truths about their audiences’ fears and cultures, but a few key texts from both Sherlock Holmes and Batman work to establish the main concerns associated with the characters.

In the four stories written by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the original creator of Sherlock Holmes, the detective of 221b Baker Street reveals the anxieties of fin-de-siècle London. After nearly a century of rapid industrialization, urbanization, and imperialism, Holmes deals with each of these issues in turn, taking time to look at the problems

embedded within London, the problems looming in the outskirts of London, and the problems entering London from outside influences. Whether threatened by poverty and a struggling police force, secret societies and developing ideas of justice, or vestiges of the Other and scientific terrors, Sherlock Holmes offers the British reader the quick solution needed for comfort. Sherlock represents what the everyman could aspire to be, though in truth no man could be Holmes. Nevertheless, the idea that a hero *might* exist to make sense of the rapid change offers enough hope for the reader to face the turning of the century and embrace a new age.

Alternatively, the idea of Batman, best understood in more modern texts of the 1980s and 2010s due to the increased popularity of the character during those times, represents the disillusionment of society after the embrace became duress. A century of promise turned to pessimism with corrupt leaders and abrupt change that resulted in tensions resembling the same fears of the Victorians. Once again, the detective hero faces problems inherent in the society, problems resulting from the mistakes of society, and problems seeking out society. Batman faces the same notions of secret societies, foreign threats, and class stratification—not to mention police corruption, vigilantism, and the limits of innovation. Unlike Sherlock Holmes, Batman offers no clear resolution; in fact, Batman offers no cheer at all. Though some may suggest that he still offers the hope of a possible hero, Batman again represents an unattainable ideal, and a marred idea at that. Perhaps there is some refuge in the idea that some benevolent power could look over society, but Batman excites the reader's apprehension more than his or her anticipation for the future.

Therefore, if Batman and Sherlock Holmes represent the same idea, the same character, together they can be used to follow a singular timeline of societal change, particularly in terms of cultural fears. Though they do vary across time and space, the global acceptance of their adaptations allows for the integration of any audience fluctuations into a collective contemplation. As such, the characters can predict trends in the archetype. Based off the change from generally hopeful as in the Sherlock Holmes stories to the dismal outlook of the most recent Batman graphic novels, the prognosis for coming interpretations of the archetype does not appear to be buoyant. Readers can expect a further digression into hopelessness in which the hero even ceases to exhibit heroic qualities, thereby offering readers no salvation or redemptive force. In fact, the 2011 *Flashpoint* comic series surrounding another DC hero, the Flash, offers such a viewpoint; the comic presents an alternate timeline in which Thomas Wayne, Bruce Wayne's father, accepts the mantle of the Batman, though without the principles of his son. The *Flashpoint* Batman kills and acts as much as a villain as a hero, working only for his own purposes. While the comic eventually returns the timeline to normal, the existence of the possibility of a perversion of the hero reveals the coming surrender to disheartenment.

However, the coming hero does not have to follow the prediction, for the literature provides a means by which society can practice proactivity. Since the literature shows societal fears, it stands to reason that greater knowledge of those fears allows for greater attempt at solving the ills. For example, understanding the cultural anxiety surrounding police and the specificities of those issues, a tension evident in both the Sherlock Holmes and Batman stories, can lead to reform aimed at the crux of the

problem. Corruption and a lack of training, though complex, can be addressed. Though optimistic, perhaps even naively idealistic, literature that does not attempt pragmatic improvement is worthless, so any potential betterment derived from Holmes and Batman must be considered.

At the very least, maybe the texts provide an outlet for the self-exploration. After all, any number of texts offer a hero, but these characters in particular have captivated audiences for over 100 years, prompting the question: Why do readers continue to return to Holmes and Batman? Unsettling though it may be, the realization of fear provides the aforementioned chance at betterment. But the crux of the characters come in the detective nature but not in the mysteries of the plot. Instead, the characters themselves offer readers with a mystery only they can solve; neither Holmes nor Batman ends a story unraveling the inner-working of his own mind. Yet readers can do just that—derive a solution to a character representative of themselves. If those characters serve as the stand-in for the reader, then the understanding of the hero becomes an understanding of the reader. If after all this time, Holmes still has not over-dosed and Batman still has not gone insane, then perhaps there is still hope for the reader. Watching these characters catch bad guys offers enjoyment—maybe even practical benefit—and learning the characters through each new interpretation, figuring out their complexities that make them continually intriguing, offers promise. Because maybe if we can understand the world's greatest detectives, we can deduce the mysteries inherent within ourselves.

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