Mass Surveillance and the Negation of the Monomyth

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Abstract: The enduring popularity of superhero narratives in the post-9/11 cultural landscape testifies, to some extent, to the continued cultural ubiquity of Joseph Campbell's 'Hero's Journey', but the notion of heroism itself is challenged somewhat by another seemingly ubiquitous product of the terrorist attacks: the proliferation, and absorption into Monomythical narratives, of the tropes of mass surveillance and technologically-aided snooping. It is my argument that the ability to perform such acts of surveillance essentially precludes and negates the Hero's Journey itself – not for moral reasons, but because these acts represent the use of a power beyond that of a mortal hero, and the essential repositioning of the characters in question as godlike beings. As a result of this repositioning, the Monomyth – a pattern which, after all, describes the progress of mortal humans through dangerous terrain that they do not always understand – no longer applies, and thus neither do the terms *hero* or *heroic*. Thus, the Batman of Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight* and *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*'s Nick Fury negate their own heroism and, by committing acts of hubris, invite the miasma and nemesis they are seen to suffer by the respective films' conclusions. In this way, the paranoia and, indeed, surveillance possibilities of the post-9/11 age can be seen to inform and, to an extent, redefine, both the Monomyth and the very concept of the Monomythical hero.

Keywords: Mass surveillance, Monomyth, Superhero, Panopticon, Hubris

Introduction

The Hero's Journey or 'Monomyth', as defined by Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, is essentially a structural pattern common to a wide range of stories from around the world, in which an ordinary yet heroic figure leaves the comfort of home, immerses him or herself in the unfamiliar and extraordinary events of an outside world of which he or she has no real experience, fights and wins a decisive victory and, once this is

done, returns home with some essential boon or blessing. The enduring popularity of superhero narratives in the post-9/11 cultural landscape testifies, to some extent, to the continued ubiquity of this structure, but the notion of heroism itself, especially that defined by Campbell's pattern, is challenged somewhat by another seemingly unavoidable product of the situation the world has found itself in since those terrorist attacks: the proliferation and absorption into Monomythical narratives of the tropes of mass surveillance and technologically-aided snooping. In a way, these tropes can be perceived as logical extensions of the heroic archetype, in as much as the hero himself must be seen to become increasingly skilled and resourceful as his journey progresses and the ability to predict the movements of an adversary or threat is unequivocally useful.

On top of this, as Hagley and Harrison argue, "The post-September 11 resurrection of the superhero genre, particularly in film, is a direct response to the feelings of helplessness and terror that Americans experienced in the days and years following the attack" (120), and so it stands to reason that the heroic figure should be presented as being willing to do what is necessary to protect people within this frightening new landscape. This is especially true when one considers the extent to which post 9/11 governments have endeavoured to safeguard the populace from the nebulous threat of attack by means of the cross-institutional panoptic methods of discipline and surveillance outlined by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* (209–18). It would seem to stand to reason that 'heroes' whose self-appointed tasks involve the protection of innocent people from forces that would do them harm would seek to use such methods.

Interestingly though, it is increasingly the case that heroes portrayed as performing such acts tend also to be seen to suffer for having done so, often to the point where whatever victories they enjoy essentially become pyrrhic ones. It is easy to imply from this that these narratives contain some kind of intrinsic moral judgment woven into their fabrics, and that the writers or film-makers are inviting audiences to disapprove of the protagonists' actions: after all, mass surveillance and the resultant erosion of personal privacy and liberty is a subject that tends increasingly to invoke strong feelings in the population. As Burke points out, while the post 9/11 discourse often tended to evoke superhero iconography and semiotics in order to make a frightening new sociopolitical status quo more understandable and perhaps less daunting to a nervous populace – see, for instance, terms such as *Axis of Evil*, which seems engineered to sound like a comic book supervillain team – these films also invited "more liberal assessments" (36–37). It is my argument, however, that the ability to perform such acts of surveillance essentially precludes, negates and resets the Hero's Journey itself – not for moral reasons, but because these acts represent the use of a power beyond that of a mortal hero, and as such signify an essential repositioning of the characters in question as attempted usurpers of divine power. As a result of this repositioning, the Monomyth – a pattern based around mythological tropes and stories which describes the progress of mortal humans through dangerous terrain that they do not always understand – no longer applies, and thus neither do the terms *hero* or *heroic*.

So it is that the examples I have chosen to focus upon – the Batman of Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight* (2008) and *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*'s (2014) Nick Fury – negate their own heroism and, by committing acts of hubris, invite the miasma and nemesis they are seen to suffer by the respective films' conclusions, leaving each of them needing to begin their Hero's Journey again. In this way, the paranoia and, indeed, surveillance possibilities of the post-9/11 age can be seen to inform and, to an extent, redefine both the Monomyth and the very concept of the Monomythical hero. In fact, it is my position that the situations in which these characters are left at the denouement of their respective stories can only be seen to make sense within the context of their having succumbed to temptation and the resultant failure of their respective monomythical journeys.

Enlightenment versus Hubris

In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces,* Joseph Campbell outlines the monomythical pattern, naming seventeen separate stages, spread across three sections or subheadings. While not all of these stages are either vital to or omnipresent within heroic narratives, some are extremely important and cannot be substituted out or omitted. The first subheading, *Departure,* features stages wherein the putative hero is called to venture out on a quest or adventure, temporarily refuses to do so, but eventually crosses the threshold that separates the safety of home from the wider world outside. The second subheading, *Initiation*, sees the hero beset by trials and temptations, facing a need to reconcile with a parental figure or proxy, and experiencing death and rebirth – either figurative or literal – before finally being able to receive his or her boon. The final subheading, *Return*, is often given less importance in modern heroic narratives, for it describes the stages of the journey that occur after the main struggle is over, which is to say the hero's journey back home, crossing of the return threshold and new status as master of two worlds. In *The Monomyth in American Science Fiction Films,* Palumbo makes it plain that the Monomyth describes transcendence and the individual's journey toward enlightenment (2), and as such it can be no coincidence that Campbell's formulation of the pattern is partially derived from the lives of religious leaders, as well as mythological heroes whose tales represented aspects of pantheistic belief systems. The Hero's Journey concerns the navigation of life's transitions within the movement from what one is now towards the person one is going to become, and this movement is one of continuous rebirth, self-discovery and rediscovery. As such, the hero must explicitly be seen to be human, as opposed to divine, and 'apotheosis' – the final stage before the granting of the boon – is defined by Oxford English Dictionary online as "the action, process, or fact of ranking, or of being ranked among the gods; transformation into a god" (*OED Online*). This, of course, is not something that can happen if one is already there, so to speak.

Equally, the transcendence or enlightenment that represents the ultimate monomythical boon must be seen to depend on the hero surmounting the individual stages of the journey. It is through perseverance and endurance that we reach our boon, or else power is usurped without being properly earned. Transcendence is the natural surpassing of human traits, while to challenge or attempt to artificially replace the divine is hubris which invites nemesis or even miasma. It is my argument that mass surveillance is the opposite of transcendence, because being able to 'see' all without the heightened consciousness of a god must imply a lack of vision and the commensurate inability to properly decode that which one is observing, and thereby an absolute inability to see truth. As Campbell himself has it, "If the hero has, like Prometheus, simply darted to his goal (through violence, quick device, or luck) and plucked the boon . . . then the power that he has unbalanced may react so sharply that he will be blasted from within and without" (37). In other words, the hero may be subverted from his true path by the lure of easy or unearned power – indeed, he or she may even see it as the only way to successfully complete their tasks – but power unearned is equal to power without responsibility, which precludes enlightenment without some kind of course correction. Mass surveillance represents this, and this is why Batman and Nick Fury each meet some form of nemesis, their heroic journeys are reset, and they are forced to begin anew.

A Dark Knight's Fall from Grace

Explaining his childhood preference for Batman to other superheroes, Stephen King writes that "There was something about Superman that I always found a little . . . preordained. He was too strong for me, too capable. Batman, however, was just a guy" (2). In fact, as Morrison points out, Batman was created specifically as "a deliberate reversal of everything in the Superman dynamic" (25–26), a successful attempt to emulate the latter's huge popularity by creating his polar opposite. In other words, Batman's humanity is an absolute prerequisite for the character's success. Bruce Wayne is a hero in the same way that classical figures such as Odysseus are heroes: a mortal man whose perseverance, survival and victories rely on skill, cunning and physical prowess, as opposed to super powers so potent that they could reasonably be deployed as a *deus ex machina* solution to even the most threatening of situations. Indeed, while it could be argued that to be a costumed superhero is to be akin to a god in the pantheistic sense, it is important to note that Batman has always been an exception to this.[1] Kaveney stresses this exception, pointing out that he is "an extraordinary human being who has trained many standard human abilities to their limits and beyond, but has no special abilities," stressing that the character can only really be classed as a superhero as a result of corresponding to certain tropes, such as the loss of his original family or his status as a "figure of the twilight" (5).

Jonathan Nolan, the co-writer of *The Dark Knight*'s screenplay[2], makes the connection between Batman and the heroes (as opposed to gods) of antiquity explicit, explaining that *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* informed the script's creation: "What struck me about *the Iliad* was the reason for its enduring appeal is it's an examination of what it means to be a man . . . he (Bruce Wayne) wrestles with those things" (viii), expanding upon this by explaining that "To me, there's no moral there other than the individual choices Batman makes along the way . . . It's about a man. It's about the individual decisions made by a hero . . . answering the question of how far is too far" (xvii–xviii).

Within the context of *The Dark Knight*, the pivotal decision made by Bruce Wayne (Batman's alter ego) is to employ methods of mass surveillance in order to anticipate and attempt to stop the plans of his antagonist, The Joker. Alongside the research and development wing of his company, he has developed a device that essentially transforms every telephone in Gotham City into a transmitter that simultaneously listens in to all the conversations of Gotham's citizenry and creates a form of sonar panopticon. In other words, it both hears and sees all, at the cost of the privacy and civil liberties of Gotham's citizenry. Interestingly, Wayne is self-aware enough to realise the implications of what he is doing and to know that he cannot trust himself with this amount of power, but is simultaneously oblivious enough to instead impose the implementation of the device upon

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[1] Indeed, Marvel Studios' hugely successful series of superhero films have featured several characters who actually are gods of the Norse pantheon, most notably Thor and Loki.

[2] Jonathan Nolan is also the creator, Executive Producer, and head writer of *Person of Interest,* a television show expressly concerned with digital mass surveillance and the effects this has on the people both engaged in and affected by it. The show features an artificial intelligence called The Machine, which was designed specifically to watch and monitor the population in order to prevent another 9/11-style attack. The Machine's creator, Mr Finch, is often confronted with evidence of his own hubris, and it is made plain that his choice to use a backdoor he has programmed into The Machine to accrue information he uses to help those in need represents, in effect, the monomythical journey upon which he embarked after the nemesis that this hubris inflicted upon him and his loved ones. There is no irony in the idea of the show's protagonists engaging in mass surveillance to achieve their ends, as The Machine is framed as a new god, so those that work for 'her' can be seen as heroes in the pantheistic sense, and 'she' is unaffected by postlapsarian human frailties and is thus able to process the information accrued without committing hubris.

his employee and confidante Lucius Fox, telling him that only he is trustworthy enough to wield that sort of power (Nolan 293). He is at once making as if to refuse the lure of godlike power while using the equivalent of such power to force an ordinary man to do his bidding, and as such is behaving very much akin to the mercurial gods of several pantheons. Fox is placed in a position where the use of this device is presented as the only effective way to save a large number of lives and prevent the city from devolving into anarchy, and so is effectively blocked from refusing on moral grounds, though he does insist that he will resign his position as CEO of Wayne Enterprises if the machine is not dismantled after its initial use.

Batman's actions affirm Slavoj Žižek's assertion that while "the traditional *hero* sacrifices himself for the cause; he resists the pressure of the tyrant and accomplishes his Duty, cost what it may", the hero who betrays his or her beliefs in pursuit of victory enters "the domain of *the monstrosity of heroism* where our fidelity to the Cause compels us to transgress the threshold of our 'humanity'" (Žižek 320, emphasis original). Batman's monstrous action is, essentially, to attempt to usurp the power of the divine – in this case the physical ability to see and hear all – without possessing the divine attributes necessary to properly process and wield such power. Without the godlike wisdom necessary to understand, contextualise and parse all the information that these usurped abilities provide him, the data is open to misinterpretation at best and is at worst meaningless, and therefore useless. For Batman, it represents the height of hubris and the beginning of a corresponding fall from grace. Beattie agrees that Batman's humanity marks him out as specifically *not* a superhero (Beattie), and points to the fragility of human goodness in the face of overwhelming terror – when confronted by an enemy whose actions and ideals one can neither predict nor comprehend, even the most noble among us can be tempted to over-reach, and this is what Batman does. It is instructive, also, to view the events of *The Dark Knight* as allegories for both the threat of international terrorism and the 'war on terror' itself.

In his article, "The Dark Knight's War on Terrorism," Ip makes plain the parallels between Batman's sonar-based mass-surveillance system and that set up by the American National Security Agency after the September 11th attacks (221), drawing attention to the resultant tension within the actions of Batman (and therefore the forces of justice and protection for which he acts as allegory) between what is legal/good and what is right. This tension, Ip argues, reaches its apex at the end of the film when Batman decides to accept blame for the crimes of the late Harvey Dent, the erstwhile District Attorney driven to murderous madness by the actions of the Joker, in order to enable Gotham City to remember the dead man wholly as a hero (and as a result allow the passing of draconian detention laws with more than a passing resemblance to the Patriot Act), in a way that Batman, who is steeped in violence, darkness and anger, perhaps cannot be. Ip's interpretation is that by "accepting responsibility for Dent's crimes, Batman accepts his status as an outlaw and implicitly acknowledges that his previous acts of vigilantism, while laudable and even necessary, must nonetheless be treated as illegal" (229).

It is my argument, however, that Batman takes the blame and allows himself to be hunted as a criminal by the Gotham Police as a direct result of, and reaction to, his act of hubris in engaging in mass surveillance; in fact, his fall from grace at the end of the narrative only truly makes sense on these terms. There is no good reason why Batman should choose to take the blame for Dent's actions, less still for Police Commissioner Gordon, whose young son was kidnapped by Dent and is an eye witness to events, to agree to go along with the idea. Batman is a hero to the people of Gotham: he could very easily be held up as an example, and unlike Dent he has not murdered or kidnapped innocent people. Their actions and decisions only make sense if one sees that they essentially have no choice: Batman's hero's journey has been interrupted and, to an extent, negated by his attempt to usurp divine power, and it is the knowledge of this that makes it necessary for

him to begin the journey again. In effect, his own feelings of guilt serve as both his nemesis and the plague upon his house, and so it is beholden upon him to find some way to atone for his actions.

Equally, Brooker points out that *The Dark Knight*'s conflict is centred around the "ambiguity between hero and villain . . . Joker's agenda is to make Batman cross the boundary between them, and Batman struggles to resist," adding that the film is "not about fear, but terror, with all the specific cultural associations that word evokes in the twenty-first century" (199). Indeed, as Brooker further notes, the film itself is at pains to label the Joker as a terrorist, the better to allow Batman to justify his act of mass surveillance (200). In itself, this creates an interesting juxtaposition between the hero and his adversary, in as much as Batman's entire modus operandi is predicated upon the idea that "criminals are a superstitious and cowardly lot" and thus that dressing as a creature of the night and striking from the shadows would keep them in a state of fear, perhaps even acting as a deterrent to any criminal act (Finger and Kane 25). In the context of Nolan's films, Bruce Wayne explains in *Batman Begins* that, "Bats frighten me. And it's time my enemies shared my dread" (Nolan 65). In other words, Batman's tactics rely on terror, and the Joker's actions in the film represent an attempt to blur a set of boundaries that are already indistinct at best by using the hero's methods against him. Batman's resultant use of mass surveillance signifies the complete obliteration of these boundaries and his abandonment of the tactics of a mortal hero, however temporarily.

Temptation

The third stage of the *Initiation* section of Campbell's pattern is entitled *Woman as the Temptress*, and deals with that which can lure the hero off the monomythical path to enlightenment. Despite Campbell's choice of title, temptation does not need to take a gender-based or sexually specific form; rather it represents anything that can derail the Hero's Journey by luring the hero in question away from his or her task. As Campbell puts it, "every failure to cope with a life situation must be laid, in the end, to a restriction of consciousness. Wars and temper tantrums are the makeshifts of ignorance; regrets are illuminations come too late" (121). In other words, this temptation represents, as Vogler has it, "a crisis of faith" (168), specifically faith in the correctness of the righteous course of action upon which the hero originally embarked. The temptations of Christ in the Synoptic Gospels are perhaps the ultimate examples of this idea – Jesus is able, if he so desires, to implement the power of his divine father in order to escape both his temptation in the desert and the crucifixion, but to do so would represent the negation of both his role and his final transcendence. In other words, while sexual temptation is a common cause of heroic testing, especially in classical narratives – see, for example, Odysseus' rejection of Calypso in *The Odyssey* (88–101) – godlike power must be seen to be more tantalising still, especially when the hero is beset by seemingly insurmountable odds. To fall to temptation, especially under terms such as these, represents the outright failure of the Hero's Journey, and if the hero in question survives it becomes necessary for him or her to begin again from the first stage of the Monomyth, *The Call to Adventure,* if he or she is to achieve the enlightenment that their initial crossing of the threshold implies that they have sought.

And indeed, this is the case here: as *The Dark Knight Rises*, the third film in Nolan's trilogy opens, we are told in voice-over that eight years have passed since Harvey Dent's death and that in that time Batman has disappeared and Bruce Wayne has become a seldom-seen recluse (Nolan 358–59).[3] It is only as a result of an extraordinarily pressing

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[3] *The Dark Knight* is the second.

threat to Gotham (*The Call to Adventure*) that after some prevarication (*The Refusal of the Call*) Wayne is moved to don the cape and cowl and once again cross the threshold and return to his journey. On top of this, the physical frailty Bruce Wayne displays at the start of *The Dark Knight Rises* does not appear to correspond to any injuries sustained in the previous film: indeed, at the end of *The Dark Knight*, Batman is fit and healthy enough to be able to escape the Gotham police fairly handily, and the clear implication is that he ceases to fight crime on the night he takes the blame for Dent's actions. It is clear that, as per Campbell, he has been "blasted from within and from without" (37) as a result of his attempt to use godlike power to skip the stages of the Journey ahead of him, and it has left him broken, both physically and spiritually. Even when Wayne does reclaim the mantle of Batman, these frailties are still apparent, and it is only by besting the physical and mental injuries he has amassed and summoning the fortitude to escape the impenetrable prison in which Bane has left him that he is able to properly resume his journey.

Nick Fury and Project Insight

Batman is, of course, amongst the most instantly recognisable superhero characters, and as such is well placed to be of use in investigating the implications of modern narratives and ideas for the Monomyth. However, it is arguably of even greater interest to examine the effects of hubris and mass surveillance on a character that is far less iconic, indeed one who has never been more than a supporting player within a series of interlocking superhero narratives. Nick Fury has, to date, appeared in eight films and a handful of episodes of a television show within what is referred to as the 'Marvel Cinematic Universe (or MCU) but never in a capacity larger than that of supporting player.[4] Despite this, Fury's position as Director of the 'Strategic Homeland Intervention, Enforcement and Logistics Division' (or S.H.I.E.L.D.) and evident willingness to work toward some version of the nebulous idea of the greater good, implies that he himself has, at some point, embarked upon his own hero's journey, and as such it is worth analysing the events surrounding and leading up to Fury's downfall and course correction in *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* in order to examine the culpability Fury and S.H.I.E.L.D.'s engagement in acts of mass surveillance and other such hubris has in causing the reset of this journey.

It is also worth reflecting that while Fury does not fit the profile of a costumed superhero in the way that Batman – despite his lack of superpowers – does, he is still presented as a character who is fundamentally heroic: he sees the protection of the Earth as his remit, and in the context of the MCU even goes so far as to ensure that the constituent parts of The Avengers come together as a team. In other words, it can be argued that these two characters have heroism in common, and that the biggest difference between them is that Batman is the main protagonist of the stories in which he features, while Fury fulfils the role of a supporting character.

As a result of this, an issue that complicates a proper analysis of Nick Fury is the relative lack of previous scholarship that exists on this iteration of the character: unlike Batman and, to some extent at least, Marvel Comics heroes who have headlined their own films such as Iron Man and Captain America, Fury has not been analysed in any great detail, and in this sense this close reading is an attempt to break new ground. In their analysis of *The Avengers,* Hagley and Harrison do point to Fury and his agency's

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[4] This term is used to refer to the films and television shows produced by Marvel Studios, as well as the interlocking continuity between them. Nick Fury has, to date, appeared in *Iron Man, Iron Man 2, Thor, Captain America: The First Avenger, The Avengers, Captain America: The Winter Soldier, Avengers: Age of Ultron* and *Avengers: Infinity War* as well as episodes of the TV show *Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*

infringement on both the public and the individual heroes' privacy, ostensibly in order to protect the people and gather the Avengers together as a team, as well as pinpointing the parallels between the alien attack in that film's final act and the events of 9/11 (222–23). This juxtaposition makes explicit Fury's own justification for the ruthlessness and dishonesty of his actions: he does what he feels he needs to do in order to protect the greater good. However, even the few existing analyses of monomythical tropes within *The Avengers* tend not to look particularly closely at Fury, focusing instead on his more colourful co-stars. Fernandez, for example, examines the ways in which the individual heroes featured within the film are each given the opportunity to show how they have been updated to fit a more modern socio-political context than the ones into which their original comic book counterparts were first introduced, but Fury is mentioned only in passing, or as a foil to Loki (the film's main antagonist) (5).

As a comic book character, Nick Fury first appeared as part of a war strip created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby named *Sgt. Fury and his Howling Commandos*, but as Peter Lee notes, he was soon repurposed into the role of superspy and S.H.I.E.L.D. director in line with early Marvel Comics' general reinforcement of 1960s anti-Soviet unease (42). The character received varying degrees of exposure over the decades, but it was only when the writer Mark Millar updated the more traditionally super-heroic Avengers as part of their 'Ultimate' publishing line that a retooled Nick Fury was positioned as the Machiavellian force behind the formation of the hero team (DiPaolo 240).[5] The cinematic version of the character hews closely to this template: it is clear within the context of the films in which he appears that Nick Fury is in possession of more knowledge than he could conceivably have amassed using conventional means of intelligence. He first appears at the end of *Iron Man*, having managed to bypass Tony Stark's state-of-the-art home security, making plain to Stark that he is savvier and more knowledgeable than him. In *Thor* he has located and taken possession of the Tesseract, and knows to appoint Erik Selveig to study it. In *Iron Man 2* he shows Tony Stark that he has greater knowledge of and insight into the latter's late father than Stark himself does. In *The Avengers,* even the chaos and uncertainty brought about by the Asgardian trickster god Loki does not prevent Fury from being able to micromanage the disparate personalities of the heroes who will come to make up the eponymous team, and while Stark, followed by Captain America, become aware of Fury's machinations, it is plain he has taken even this into account in his calculations, for when the team stands united in the film's final act they do so in apparent defiance of the S.H.I.E.L.D. director's ploys, despite the fact that this unity was Fury's plan all along, as was the Avengers' decision to continue away from the agency's umbrella.

Indeed, even Fury's appearance implies the usurpation of divinity in order to see all. According to the *Poetic Edda,* the Norse god Odin is also one-eyed, having plucked one out in order to leave it in the well of Mimir, and consequently gain the ability to see all (Larrington 7). Fury, too, is missing an eye – indeed in *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, it is only his milky-white eyeball that is able to open files that are locked by retina scan technology, further implying that his physical part-blindness is inexorably linked to his pursuit and guarding of knowledge. Odin, though, is an Aesir, and as such is equipped with the wisdom to see all. Fury is not, and so his assumption of the role is not only an act of hubris but also doomed to be curtailed by his own human limitations. Odin's sacrifice of his eye, crucially, enhances both his vision and perception, whereas for Fury, the loss of an eye must surely signify a lack of depth perception and curtailed peripheral vision. Equally, Odin's ravens Huginn and Muninn have the task of flying around the world in order to bring information back to their master, and S.H.I.E.L.D.'s resources up to and

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[5] The character, previously depicted as Caucasian was presented in *The Ultimates* as resembling the African-American actor Samuel L. Jackson. Jackson would eventually play the character in the Marvel Cinematic Universe films.

including Project Insight could be seen to serve the same purpose for Fury, but again he lacks the divine wisdom to be able to properly process and use this information.

Captain America: The Winter Soldier presents the falls of both Fury and S.H.I.E.L.D. as being the inescapable results of the miasma brought about by the hubris of challenging the gods. S.H.I.E.L.D.'s infiltration by Hydra is shown not only to be thorough, but also a direct result of the agency's decision to use Nazi war criminals as assets in order to be a more efficient espionage operation, ensuring that the plague within this house is one that is not so easily cured, and that Hydra is aptly named, in a mythological sense. For all his knowledge and abilities, it is worth repeating the observation that Fury is blind in one eye, and as such (unlike Odin) his actual vision will always be limited: his suspicions about the activities of his agency come far too late. Fury's peripheral involvement in *Project Insight*, alongside the slow build-up of other acts of mass surveillance inexorably leads to the abrupt end of this particular iteration of his monomythical journey. There is also a parallel here with the protagonist of Sophocles' *Oedipus the King,* in as much as that play's eponymous king strikes himself blind upon the realisation that the hubris that has brought about the miasma that besets Thebes. Oedipus' actions inadvertently challenged the gods, but he performed them with open eyes, and his kingdom suffers for it. The one-eyed Fury's involvement in *Project Insight* is inadvertent to a point, but he has long benefitted from the godlike powers that his position afforded him, and so when his kingdom falls it does so far less accidentally.

Project Insight itself is a plan set in motion by S.H.I.E.L.D, which for decades has slowly been corrupted from within, to take the godlike power of mass surveillance to its logical conclusions and, in doing so, usurp still more power. By using the DNA of individuals deemed as enemies, the agency will be able not only to follow, watch and listen to their every movement, but also to use that DNA as a target on which to lock their weapons. Here we see an explicit correlation of knowledge and power, with the ability to see all leading to the potential to destroy all that can be seen. For Fury, this is the final straw in more ways than one: he has tacitly supported this plan by simple dint of turning the other way and enjoying the surveillance abilities his overreaching agency has afforded him. By turning against S.H.I.E.L.D. he precipitates his own fall and the resultant necessity of starting the Hero's Journey from scratch, but like Batman before him, it is necessary that Fury be 'blasted from within and from without,' before he can begin again – and in his case, the resetting of his journey is far more complicated.

Pseudo Apotheosis and a Boon of Sorts

Within the context of the Monomyth, the ultimate boon can only come after the hero has endured *Apotheosis*, or death and rebirth, and so Fury's need to begin his journey again must be seen to be complicated by the fact that this is exactly what happens to him. The Winter Soldier, a seemingly-unstoppable assassin, is sent to kill him, and Fury is critically wounded before appearing to die on the operating table. It is revealed to Captain America and the Black Widow that this death was faked, the better for Fury to quietly appraise and use the element of surprise to gain the upper hand over the Hydra forces within S.H.I.E.L.D, prevent *Project Insight* from reaching fruition and then disappear into the shadows, seeking literally to work on a smaller scale. We see then that unlike Batman, Fury's second hero's journey takes place after the achievement of a *Boon* of sorts – in this case, his hubris has been so total and the miasma has seeped so deeply into that for which he is and has been responsible, that the only boon he can possibly attain after dying and being reborn is the right to begin again. The enlightenment he achieves allows him to understand that he has not yet done enough to become enlightened: the actual process of apotheosis, as opposed to death, is part of this boon, coupled with the right to a second

chance. Unlike Batman and his sonar panopticon, Fury does not intend to allow Project Insight to be activated, and it is this that affords him the chance to begin again after his 'death.' Bruce Wayne's penance and negated journey involves the retirement of a persona: Fury's death and rebirth are far more literal.

Fury and S.H.I.E.L.D, it is clear, represent facets of an archetypically postlapsarian narrative: Fury's rise, fall and methods mark him out as intrinsically similar to Alexander Pierce, the driving force behind Hydra and *Project Insight*. It is no coincidence that the two were so close – Pierce represents the path down which Fury could well have found himself proceeding had he not had the residual conscience and moral wherewithal to draw a line in the sand. It is clear that Pierce too was once a good man, but his need for power without awareness, while founded upon good intentions, ultimately corrupted him, as Hydra's presence – literally the serpent in Eden – corrupted the agency both men purport to serve. In a postlapsarian world, man cannot hope to emulate the divine or attain perfection, and any attempts to do so must necessarily result in failure: so it is here. S.H.I.E.L.D. as it stands is a lost cause and, like Fury himself, must die in order to be reborn.

At the end of *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, Fury is seen to literally burn the apparatus he helped create, before meeting Captain America and the Falcon at his own grave – in other words the physical marker of his death and rebirth – telling them that he is headed to Europe, literally embarking on a new journey. He is next seen in "Beginning of the End," the final episode of the first season of *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.,* helping the protagonists of that show to further curtail Hydra's activities, and stop the threat of a former colleague who, crucially, is attempting to harness powers that would render him unstoppable. He tasks Phil Coulson, one of the few S.H.I.E.L.D. agents he has always trusted, to build the agency back up from scratch, making it plain that this is because he knows Coulson will not be tempted to play god. When asked what he himself will do, Fury says that he is, "Trading in my bird's eye view for two solid feet on the ground" ("Beginning of the End"), confirming that he is aware of the reason for his fall, and that he plans to undertake his renewed journey the proper way, without attempting to usurp power, as well as making explicit the thematic link between the surveillance apparatus he is abandoning and Odin's ravens. When one's monomythical journey is taken on foot as opposed to in the sky (on the S.H.I.E.L.D. helicarrier, with all the surveillance technology that location implies) it is far harder to be tempted into taking shortcuts.

Conclusion

Describing the way in which a panopticon functions, Foucault states that "the director may spy on all the employees that he has under his orders . . . he will be able to judge them continuously," adding that, "enclosed as he is in the middle of this architectural mechanism, is not the director's own fate entirely bound up with it?" (204). In other words, as Caluya explains, it is "a machine of power in which everyone is caught" (625). The implication is that in order to set up any kind of mechanism of mass surveillance, it must be necessary in any postlapsarian world for the person watching to be watched him-or-herself, but it is my argument that the trap is a larger and more complex one than this implies. In Biblical terms, man first succumbs to temptation when Adam eats the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, and his punishment is to be banished from what is effectively paradise, forced thereafter to live in an imperfect, postlapsarian world. In other words, the fall of man occurs as a result of his desire for proscribed or divine knowledge, and as such we can see the actions of both Batman and Nick Fury in these terms.

As Kaveney points out, superheroes' arch nemeses tend often to be dark mirrors of the heroes themselves (12), and within the context of *The Dark Knight* the Joker is explicit in reinforcing this belief (Nolan 262), while Fury's close friendship and bond of trust with the duplicitous Pierce strongly highlights the similarities between those two men. In "Dark Knights and the Call of Conscience," Howard observes that Batman's "quest to purge Gotham of crime and avenge his parents' death is played out on the moral equivalent of a razor's edge" (198), and it is clear that the events of *The Dark Knight* correspond to his blurring of these lines at the very least. Lucius Fox is very clear when he tells Bruce Wayne that his sonar-based panopticon is "Unethical. Dangerous . . . *wrong"* (Nolan 293), and it is striking that Wayne does not disagree with him: he is aware of the line he chooses to cross. This is made plain when he tells Gordon "You either die a hero or live long enough to see yourself become the villain . . . I'm not a hero" (321), and he chooses to take the responsibility and blame for Harvey Dent's murders, elevating the latter to the status of Gotham's saviour. In other words, he has failed so entirely as a hero – in his own eyes at least – that he is willing to see his name attached to the same crimes he originally set out to avenge and prevent. He has been blasted from within and, as I have pointed out, the physical frailty he shows in *The Dark Knight Rises* corresponds to being blasted from without. It is clear that in a postlapsarian world – in other words, a world brought about by man's inability to resist temptation – even the best among us are still susceptible to this outside stimulus, and that to succumb to it represents a microcosmic re-enactment of man's original fall.

In discussing this stage of the Hero's Journey, Campbell states that "every failure to cope with a life situation must be laid, in the end, to a restriction of consciousness . . . regrets are illuminations that come too late" (121). Both Wayne and Fury are seen to regret their actions, but by the same token neither man is surprised by his fall. They are both keenly aware that in giving in to temptation and, figuratively at least, partaking of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, they have not only negated their individual monomythical journeys, but have also given up the moral high ground upon which they have heretofore stood, however precariously. Hence they have both lived long enough to see themselves becoming 'the villain' and this knowledge corresponds to the final detonation that leads to their ultimate internal blasting, as it were. The choice with which they are subsequently presented is whether to allow themselves to fade into memory in their new perceived roles – in Batman's case, that of duplicitous murderer, and in Fury's that of traitor and potential terrorist sympathiser – or to re-embark upon the Hero's Journey from the start, by heeding the *Call to Adventure.* Ironically, it is perhaps this very willingness to again cross the threshold to adventure and set out upon the road of trials that marks both Batman and Fury out as ultimately heroic figures, and while their physical suffering and ultimate understanding of their transgressions do not correspond to *apotheosis* or *the boon,* they do allow them some kind of understanding of the dangers they face in their respective second attempts at the Hero's Journey.

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