

Grief and Loss in James O'Barr's *The Crow*

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Christianity is generally opposed to violent revenge. Surprisingly, then, James O'Barr's *The Crow* portrays its protagonist Eric Draven as a Christ-figure whose grief over the loss of his fiancé Shelley fuels his thirst for violent revenge. O'Barr, who was raised Catholic, composed *The Crow* after losing his girlfriend in a drunk driving accident. This project argues that O'Barr writes *The Crow* to work through his own grief. He channels his fantasies of revenge into a fictional scenario in which Christianity is not opposed to violent revenge. *The Crow* is O'Barr's tool for enacting his desire to alleviate his grief through revenge while remaining in a Christian universe.

You open the book to see an entirely black page. On the top of the following page, the word "LAMENT" is printed in large, bold, black capital letters against a white. Below, in slightly smaller letters is the phrase "PAIN & FEAR" centered between two periods. These three, cryptic words are tied together by a theme of suffering. The contrast between the white background and the black letters is stark, suggesting that the story to come will deal with similarly stark contrasts. On the bottom three quarters of the page, you see an image of a bullet-riddled man, very much alive, and posed with his arms up and his hands covering his ears and clutching the back of his head in a posture not unlike that of Christ's crucifixion, though his facial expression is placid, revealing no pain. Instead, his face shows an intense stare directed dead ahead. He is shirtless, quite muscular, and his pants are slung low. Like the words above, the image is entirely black and white. However, here, the background is pitch black in stark contrast to the man's white skin. His face is painted like a buskin mask, suggesting tragic events

to come. There are three strands of white barbed wire behind him and two bands of black barbed wire wrapped around his arm, suggesting boundaries that are painful to cross.

You turn the page and see another black background with two short poems written in white font. The first, entitled “PAIN” reads as follows:

A YEAR AGO . . . A COLD OCTOBER NIGHT . . .

A BROKEN DOWN CAR ON A DIRT ROAD . . .

A MAN . . . A GIRL . . . MADNESS . . . PAIN . . . AND THE SHADOWS . . .

MY GOD. THE SHADOWS . . .

These ominous lines foreshadow a plot filled with pain, suffering, and madness, involving a man, a woman, and a broken-down car. The frequent ellipses separate different details (i.e., the time, the place, the characters) about the situation that occurred a year ago, as well as the emotional dynamics of this as of yet sketchy situation. We get the sense that a traumatic event has occurred and the person remembering it evokes God from a world of shadows. Below, separated by a thin white line is another poem, entitled FEAR. Unlike the one above, this poem is held together by conjunctions such as “AND,” which make it read much more quickly as though the speaker does not want to live in the traumatic moment he describes. The poem describes an unnamed, third-person character in deep pain, slamming his head against a wall and screaming. He seems to be actively seeking, rather than fleeing from, pain and hatred: “PAIN, PAIN IS ALL HE WANTS. / AND HATE, YES HATE.” In the next line, the poem’s perspective shifts from third-person singular to first-person plural: “WE SHALL NEVER FORGET AND NEVER FORGIVE.” By switching to a first-person plural pronoun, the poem draws you in to the unknown character’s obsession with revenge. It ends with three short lines: “AND NEVER EVER FEAR. / FEAR IS FOR THE ENEMY. /FEAR AND BULLETS.” The repetition of fear highlights its importance,

but the lines speak of fear's irrelevance. Together, these poems establish an extremely negative, post-traumatic emotional world filled with extreme suffering and pain and a complete lack of fear. With this introduction, you are thrown into the dark, compelling, and tragic world of James O'Barr's *The Crow*.

Born in 1960, O'Barr was an orphan raised in the foster care system. At the age of eighteen, he joined the US Marine Corps, in which he illustrated combat manuals. Prior to joining the Marines, O'Barr's fiancée Beverly was killed by a drunk driver. In his 2010 Preface to a Special Edition of *The Crow*, O'Barr writes: "It was one of those defining moments when your life suddenly turns sideways for no goddamn good reason . . . A series of choices that trip and fall like Dominoes ending in irreversible consequences." After Beverly's untimely death, O'Barr began writing *The Crow*, which both fictionalizes his trauma and the writing of which acted as a posttraumatic therapy. Wildly popular, *The Crow* was made into a major motion picture in 1994 which was tragically punctuated by the on-set death of its lead actor Brandon Lee. "At the time," O'Barr writes, "the same guilt and self-hatred swelled in my soul ("If I'd never written this fucking thing . . .)." This project explores how *The Crow* exists as a monument to O'Barr's trauma, the erection of which was therapeutic for its author. It also explores how *The Crow* can be therapeutic for readers who have underwent trauma like O'Barr's. By exploring how O'Barr treated his own trauma through artistic creation, it seeks to better understand the interrelations between trauma, authorship, and audience.

The Crow is the story Eric Draven and his fiancée Shelley Webster. The traumatic event alluded to in the introductory poem "PAIN" is murder and gang rape of Shelley at the hands of several gang members who come upon Eric and Shelley in their broken-down car. Eric is killed as well, but is brought back to life through uncertain means as an invincible walking corpse,

unhindered by fear and bent on revenge. While the audience is given hints about this traumatic event over the course of *The Crow* it is not until the novel's end that we actually witness this horrific crime. This mimics the aftermath of trauma, which is often repressed by those not yet able to process painful events in the past. Over the course of the graphic novel, Eric actively seeks out the gang members responsible and eliminates them in a series of violent and cathartic acts of revenge. Finally, he travels to Shelley's grave and walks off into the sunset in an ambiguous ending that might signify his final reunion with Shelley, but might equally signify that he is condemned to live forever in a purgatorial state for his violent acts of revenge. Entirely colorless, the majority of *The Crow* juxtaposes black and white in stark contrast, suggesting a Manichean world of absolute right and wrong. However, interspersed in the general action are flashbacks characterized by softer gray hues and more indefinite linework in which objects blur into the background, giving it a dream-like quality. These gray flashbacks suggest a less morally dualistic world from which Eric has departed in the wake of his trauma.

The chapter begins with the word "INERTIA" in large white capital letters against a black background taking up one third of the page. The use of the word inertia is particularly interesting because the definition of the word is a tendency to do nothing or remain unchanged. The use of this word is ironic considering that in death, Eric is able to get the vengeance that he desperately craves, however for the most part things remain unchanged. The other two thirds of the page are occupied by the first panel which depicts a man stealing a computer and quickly walking down an alley with the stolen goods. The entirety of this chapter is drawn in pen and ink with very deliberate and distinct linework. The use of shadows and grey tones set the tone for the entirety of the novel. The thief is pictured walking down an alleyway, nervously being stalked by something he and the readers are unable to see. The thief audibly states "What the hell?" as he is

exiting the alleyway, this is when the undead Eric is introduced. Eric is drawn stepping in front of the thief from the shadows, his face painted like the sock, better known as the comedy mask. Eric's face is set in a stony expression, his shoulders squared back, and his eyes cast down making eye contact with the thief. The thief screams "Jesus H... Christ!" as he drops the stolen computer, smashing it on the ground. Two of the first spoken lines of dialogue in the novel concern themselves with religious imagery. "What the hell?" and "Jesus H... Christ" are used in consecutive panels and are an amalgamation of the divine holy and unholy, much like Eric himself. The following panel is a close up of Eric's face, his brow furrowed, and his eyes still cast down on the thief, and his expression looks almost pained. The layout of this specific page has less panels which allows for the images to be larger and more detailed. Mr. Jones tries to extort money out of Eric by threatening him with a knife for causing him to drop his stolen goods. After Eric does not comply Mr. Jones stabs Eric directly in the chest. Eric only looks mildly concerned as he is stabbed. The focus then shifts from Eric himself to Eric's blood, which is drawn to be the focal point of that panel. Blood is yet another allegorical representation of Jesus Christ that O'Barr is able to incorporate in the text. Eric's wound can be viewed as a holy wound, in which the blood of the innocent is spilled for the salvation of others. Mr. Jones pulls away, leaving the knife still in Eric's chest. Eric bows his head and closes his eyes, in a moment of contemplation and reflection. His facial expression is serene when he is faced with a physical pain. Mr. Jones says: "Man you must be dusted not to feel that..." and Eric replies "Pain? I know pain at the molecular level... it pulls at my atoms...sings to me in an alphabet of fear... I am the boiling man... come to break the bones of your sins, meat puppet..." As Eric is saying this, he pulls the knife from his chest and licks his blood off the tip, handing it back to Mr. Jones. The

line: “to break the bones of your sins” is fusion between holy benevolence and vengeful violence, much like Eric’s characterization.

Eric begins to talk about the ways in which he tortured an unseen character named Shelby to get the information about Mr. Jones. Eric proceeds to pull out a pair of shears and tell Mr. Jones that he cut off three of Shelby’s fingers and made him eat them to procure the information. Mr. Jones begins to sweat as Eric backs him into a corner and asks, “Fingers or toes?” as he holds the shears up to Mr. Jones’ face. Mr. Jones’ resolve immediately cracks and he gives Eric all the information he requested. After Eric gets his information, he bends down and leans close to Mr. Jones and grasps the sides of his face. Making direct eye contact Eric says, “Tell them I’m coming, Mr. Jones.” This line of dialogue is key in also drawing comparisons to the archangel Gabriel from the Old Testament. Gabriel is an interesting and telling choice for O’Barr to reference seeing as how he is known as the messenger and he is the angel that will blow his horn to announce Judgement day. Eric tells Mr. Jones to alert the others in the gang that he is coming much like Gabriel tells Mary that she is to give birth to the messiah. Eric much like Gabriel makes final judgements and determines every person that was involved in Shelly’s murder to be irredeemable. Though it is biblical in nature, O’Barr subverts the peaceful and often times peaceful messages that Gabriel is associated with to those of violence and mercilessness.

The final page in the opening section is a full-page panel of Eric walking away from Mr. Jones with one hand in his jacket pocket and the other gripping his shoulder. Eric’s eyes are downcast, and his expression is unreadable due to his makeup. Mr. Jones is slumped over in fear on the sidewalk, his hands grasping the sides of his head and his eyes looking down at the ground in front of him. Eric speaks as he walks away from the visibly shaken man. “Mr. Jones?” and Mr. Jones replies “Y...Yes, Sir...” and Eric asks him “Are there spots in a leopard’s eyes,

also?”. This question is Eric’s final line of dialogue of the opening section of the novel. This last line is a further nod to Eric viewing himself as the final judgement for these men. This line of dialogue is likely a play on the common phrase “a leopard never changes its spots” meaning that it is impossible for a person to change their character. In asking Mr. Jones if there are spots in a leopard’s eyes also, he is alluding to the fact that a person’s character can be seen in their eyes, and the spots in a man’s eyes are also unchangeable. Eric is the final judge, jury and executioner of this novel and his use of religious imagery throughout the novel is ironic and subverts all that is associated with biblical images. Eric’s story arc is almost parallel to that of Jesus Christ’s. A martyr, who was wrongly sentenced to death is resurrected. However, that is where the similarities in their stories end as each character takes a vastly different path to accomplish their goals after being resurrected.

Separating section one titled “INERTIA” and section two titled “shattered in the head” is a short poem by Arthur Rimbaud. The poem is printed in black ink on a predominantly white background. A black and white silhouette of Eric takes up the top half of the page, with half of Eric’s face being completely covered in shadows and blacked out entirely. The other half of Eric’s face is highlighted in white; his features look very sunken in and he has a tired looking expression on his face. The poem is titled Ordinary Nocturne in entirely capital letters. The poem depicts what should be an ordinary night but is somehow tinged with descriptive words that give the feeling that something is looming. The poem gives the reader the feeling that there is something lurking in this night that we are unaware of.

Hearse of my lonely sleep,

Shepherd’s cart of my stupidity...

The vehicle spins on the grass of an overgrown highway;

In a blemish high on the right window

Remove pale lunar fictions, breasts and leaves.

The third stanza stands out the most because it brings up key themes of loneliness, self-blame, shame, guilt and even some settings that become more important as the story progresses. The first line highlights the fact that death is merely a sleep like state for Eric and he is alone, disconnected from the one thing he craves more than life, his fiancée. The imagery of a vehicle spinning out on an overgrown desolate highway is key and foreshadows what is to come as the reader delves deeper into Eric's story. Each line foreshadows and reveals a telling detail about events to come or events that have past that the reader is unaware of. O'Barr also uses this poem to break up a more aggressive section that takes place in Detroit, on the mortal plane and a section that takes place in some ethereal world which can only be seen by Eric and the crow. The scenes that take place in this ethereal world usually are physical manifestations of how Eric processes his grief and guilt.

"shattered in the head" begins with the scene of a train moving along the tracks in the countryside. There is an immediate noticeable shift in tone as compared to "INERTIA" the words "shattered in the head" are all in lowercase letters and the art style is very different. Instead of pen and ink, and a staunch use of predominantly black and white, this scene is illustrated in charcoals and pencil, and uses a gradient of greys and whites. There is no harsh linework, edges are soft and blur into each other. The next panel shows the inside of the train, a luxury, old fashioned car with only one passenger, Eric. He is gazing out the window at a mare that is galloping alongside of the train. O'Barr draws the mare with human-like characteristics, the eyes are large and similar to that of a human's and the mane is drawn characteristically similar to human hair. Eric is not wearing in his iconic face paint and instead of his usual long,

black trench coat, he is wearing light grey. He is visibly smiling at the mare as it rides alongside the train, the first soft and happy facial expression the reader is shown. The following panel the reader is once again shown the outside of the train, but the weather has shifted and the sky surrounding the train is black, in the distance a barbed wire fence can be seen, and the mare is running right toward it, unaware of the danger. The next panel still shows a smiling Eric, waving at the mare, he too is unaware of the danger that she is in. He only realizes once it is too late, he can only watch as the mare becomes tangled up in the barbed wire, the visible pain on the mare's face evident, he begins to cry, pressing his hands to the windows, he is helpless. He looks down in defeat and the crow on the seat next to him chides "Shouldn't have looked, boy" Eric says nothing in response. The conductor, a skeletal figure comes up behind the crow, and startles Eric. "Tickets, please." And the crow looks back at Eric and asks "Well?". Eric looks horrified, tears still streaming down his face and the section ends. O'Barr's choice to exclude Eric from having any dialogue in this scene is key. Eric does not have any power in this scene, and it highlights that his violence stems from the fact that he had no control in what happened to him in life, so in death he is determined to take that power back. The use of a train and a conductor as a metaphor for the transitional period between life and death may hold some basis in reality. When a person is actively dying often times they can hallucinate and have visions of things that no one else can see and one of the most common visions have to do with travel, specifically trains. The use of a train in this scene further brings across the point that Eric has no control, a train only has one path and the conductor determines the speed and direction in which the train travels.

Book one of *The Crow* is titled "PAIN" and the page is predominantly a white blank page, only containing one panel on the side. The letters are printed in all caps in black ink and the panel depicts Eric hunched over in pain, crying and desperately holding the sides of his head.

The opening of the novel shows a rainy city block in Detroit, and Eric, partially out of the panel hunched over and walking forward in a determined way. The novel also includes an opening monologue by an unnamed omniscient narrator.

Still, so still, in the city tonight, twelve o'clock tick-tock, when all that is good slinks away like a beaten dog and the black black shadows are alive with the dead, twisted poetry in broken English, flesh and blood and staring faces... So grey and despairing, strong as steel but collapsed inside, The Crow laughs under a streetlight, a voodoo smile of one who lived and died and still yet lives... He makes his way home where he can be shapeless in the dark and paint his face in the colors of joy... Tonight, Hell sends an angel bearing gifts...

This opening gives the reader a sense of emotional turmoil that Eric is facing throughout the novel. The opening monologue foreshadows many things including the secondary plot line in which Eric must confront his grief rather than any physical threats. Arguably, the more difficult of the two tasks Eric is forced to confront his self-blame, survivor guilt, depression, and anger head on in recalling the events. According to Colin Ross' article *Self-Blame and Suicidal Ideation Among Combat Veterans* dealing with the traumatic event it is important to be reminded of the randomness of the situation.

Survivor guilt is a common condition among suicidal combat veterans. The self should have died, and the buddies should have lived. In cases of survivor guilt, I may go over some details of combat scenes to establish that who lived and who died was purely a matter of luck. If there is difficulty getting agreement on this point, I will review in more detail. The basic intervention is to get the veteran to look at himself through his buddies' eyes. They were robbed of the chance to have a life. What would they want for him?

How do they feel about him? I have never received anything but a positive evaluation of the self from this inquiry.

Though Eric does work through the memories it is unclear if he ever truly feels absolved of the guilt he experiences throughout the novel. Eric is never given this information and his rage and guilt are all consuming throughout the novel. It is difficult for him to focus on anything else other than avenging his fiancée and eliminating those who had a hand in her death. The opening monologue states that he is sent from hell as an angel bearing gifts, and so his primary focus isn't to alleviate his guilt, but to remove those he deems vile from the face of the earth.

Part one of the novel is titled "WHITE HEAT" and opens with a dilapidated house in the middle of a lot piled with garbage and overgrown with weeds. Eric stands at the window of the house and ruminates. The omniscient narrator speaks again and says "He hears gunshots... a girl crying... sobbing and begging. He could not help her but now he cannot remember why..." This speaks to Ross' article and how Eric is unable to see that the act of violence that he and Shelly faced was random, and he was physically unable to save her. The sentence is worded in a way that is Eric's own grief misleading him. The sentence makes it seem as though Eric just refused to help her, or that he should've tried more to help her, but it neglects the fact that he physically couldn't.

In this scene Eric is once again on the mortal plane and wearing his usual long trench coat and face paint. His hands are behind his back as he looks down, gazing out the window of the decrepit house. As Eric recalls the names of those responsible for his murders the scene transitions to some of the criminals on a street corner. The men are negotiating a deal to buy an illegal gun and Tin Tin, one of the criminals shoots an old woman who is just going about her business. The men then argue and Tin Tin murders the two other men in cold blood. He slips into an alley and begins to walk away from the scene, when he turns the corner into the alleyway Eric

is standing there and asks “Hello, Tin Tin... Remember me?” This panel takes up the entirety of the page and is once again drawn in pen and ink with very detailed linework. The shadows and small details further the idea that the city is rundown and dirty place, from the inhabitants to the surroundings. Tin Tin has the gun in his hand and is ready to shoot. Tin Tin states he doesn’t remember Eric and shoots him in the head. The bullet bounces off of Eric’s skull and ricochets back into Tin Tin’s arm. He falls to the floor and Eric picks up the gun and says: “Rejoice to the full in the glory that is about to be yours!” Tin Tin then asks who he is, and Eric continues: “And give thanks to the lord God who has called you to his kingdom!”. As Tin Tin continues to protest that he doesn’t know who Eric is, Eric recalls the incident out loud for the first time in the novel. “A year ago... a cold October night... a broken down car on a dirt road... A man... a girl... madness... pain... and the shadows... my god, the shadows!” The same poem at the beginning of the graphic novel is what Eric uses to describe the incident and just as he does the Crow itself begins to scream “Don’t look, don’t look”. The focus begins to shift from Tin Tin trying to place the blame elsewhere for the murders he helped commit to a flashback of Eric and Shelly. The art style switches from panel to panel, in the scenes with Tin Tin it remains harsh lines in pen and ink. In the flashback scenes, however it shifts to charcoals and pencil, and takes on a lighter and gradient quality. Eric rambles as he questions Tin Tin and imagines lying in bed next to Shelly. Gradually the flashback fades into white and without warning Eric puts the gun to his head and pulls the trigger. His final words to Tin Tin are “May God grant you the mercy that I cannot.” Eric is the complete antithesis of Jesus Christ in this scene, his ability for benevolence and peace is taken over by his anger and rage. Christ’s goal is to show mercy on those who may not necessarily deserve it. However, Eric’s sole purpose is to bring these men to justice.

Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, {1:79} To give light to them that sit in darkness and [in] the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

This section of text from the bible is taken from Luke and describes the ways in which God's mercy expels the darkness of the night and brings forth a pathway to peace. Contrary to this, Eric works in shadow and although he is not as morally bankrupt as his victims, he does not harm the innocent and seeks only to set right the wrongs that were done to he and his wife, he is the opposite of all that the bible describes as virtuous. Eric is merciless in his treatment of the murderers and acknowledges this in his line of dialogue immediately after he kills Tin Tin. God is the one to show mercy and benevolence, Eric is meant to send them to God. Eric is only the judge, jury and executioner for those that have sinned, he is the avenging angel. An avenging angel is, according to J.R. Craig a character existing somewhere between the extremes of good and evil. "The lack of remorse Eric displays when killing his tormentors also shows his character as one who is neither absolutely good nor bad, but one exhibiting the subtle shades of grey in his psyche" (69). This quote further draws parallels between Eric's character arc in *The Crow* and Jesus' in The Bible. Both are martyrs who are killed for their beliefs and both rise from the dead to accomplish a certain goal. However, the article also points out the murkiness of Eric's morality that allows Eric's story arc to separate itself from Jesus'. Eric has no qualms about murdering in order to bring justice and set right the atrocities that were committed when he and his wife were murdered, a drastic difference from the benevolent, peaceful Jesus Christ. This is what Robert determines as the avenging angel. The visual and textual imagery influence Eric's character arc and vice versa, though some of his actions can be deemed as morally reprehensible

he is not entirely so because he does things in order to right the wrongs that were committed against he and his fiancé.

The following page shows Eric sitting back in that dilapidated house, staring at pictures on the floor. The scene is predominantly grey and white, the only part of the panel that is drawn entirely in black is Eric sitting cross-legged on the floor. He is looking through old photos of Shelly that are drawn to give the illusion that they are floating across the page in an ethereal manner. Eric is grief stricken and just sits and stares out the window once more. The only text comes from the narrator that is broken up between panels that says “There is a man... playing a violin... and the strings... are the nerves in his own arm...” The scene is once again divided between the ethereal world and the real one. In the ethereal panels Eric’s grief overwhelms him, there are strings drawn across the panels acting similarly to the bars of a jail cell. He is trapped within his grief by these strings, that represent his own nerves. He is trapped and will experience pain regardless of whether or not he decides to break free from his prison. Also, in the ethereal world Eric watches a woman walk through the trees, her back to him and when she finally turns to look, her face is nothing but a skeleton.

The crow tells Eric not to look once again and Eric ties the used bullet casing in his hair and says the only line of audible dialogue in this section “Number one” he continues to stare out the window of his dilapidated house as the rain pours down on the glass. Eric’s behavior in this scene calls upon something that is similar to human trophy collecting, a practice done for ages. Human trophy collecting is the practice of acquiring human remains and although the bullet is not a piece of Tin Tin, it is a stark reminder to Eric of the deed he has done and the mission that he is set to accomplish. Eric weaves the bullet into his hair when he is thinking of the brutality and evil, they enacted toward him during the incident. There are many aspects of Eric’s

character that call upon ancient traditions used in battle since even before the middle ages. For example, an article by Michael Speidel sketches a long history of “the berserk warrior tradition”. Eric’s berserk rage in *The Crow* is attached to a really long tradition of warriors in Western culture. On page 255, there is a poem written by ancient Assyrian warriors that describes warriors taking off their armor and dancing during battle. These practices are echoed in Eric who (since he’s dead) doesn’t need any armor or protective devise and who dances when he is taking his revenge. This connection shows that Eric is not quite the outsider that he seems to be at first. Instead, maybe his grief drives him into really old practices of battle and revenge.

The focus of these past few scenes has been Eric’s vision and how he is unable to confront fully the incident, the past and his new reality. The crow often warns Eric not to look as he experiences the memories of the past that might trigger him, but in doing so he is also pushing Eric further from the truth. Eric is unable to confront the whole image of what happened the night that he died, he only reveals to the reader bits and pieces as well as bits and pieces of his memories about his relationship with Shelly. Eric is unable to navigate his feelings of grief on his own and is desperately floundering in his attempt to reconcile the past. Eric is unable to forgive himself for the events that occurred when he and his fiancé were killed, and his inability to recall, in full the events is furthering that grief. Eric refuses to see that he was physically incapable of helping Shelly when she was being raped and eventually was killed because he too was left half dead after being assaulted by the gang. In omitting this key fact, Eric’s ability to understand that event was random and out of his hands is lost on him. Referring back to Ross’ article about self-blame, and survivor’s guilt we are able to understand how Eric is refusing to emotionally deal with his grief in a healthy way and shifting focus to his revenge to alleviate his own guilt. It's interesting to think about how little Eric takes this strategy for dealing with his

guilt into account. Shelley would not have wanted him to seek out violent revenge. His revenge is more for himself than for her. We can imagine Eric being treated by a compassionate therapist like Ross and recovering, but that's not the story we get

Eric's character is complex and interesting to follow. He incorporates many real ways that people cope with grief in his over dramatized story. Eric's guilt, doubt, anger, sadness, denial, violence and madness are all in some way associated with dealing with grief. Through his revenge he is only somewhat sated and still finds that there is a hole in his emotional life once it is complete. Eric must still confront the fact that Shelly is dead and must confront the truth surrounding the situation, and while the evil men who perpetrated the crime will never be able to hurt anyone again that is only a fraction of the larger issue that Eric faces.

James O'Barr- Biography:

The raw, emotional, and visceral writing style of James O'Barr is rooted in his personal experiences with emotional trauma throughout his life. The accuracy in which he portrays the grief, rage and frustration that accompanies loss in the titular character, Eric, is indicative of his own dealings with loss. Starting in his childhood, he had to become adept in dealing with trauma and using his art as not only a creative outlet but an emotional one as well. Although the events that inspired *The Crow* took place later in his life, he had by that point mastered using his art as an outlet for his emotions**

Beginning with O'Barr's unstable childhood, he explains that he was born in a trailer, sometime between Christmas and New Year's Day. His biological mother was so drunk and high when she gave birth that he is unsure of his actual birthday. When he was brought to the hospital days later, the staff picked a date for him. O'Barr was not in the custody of his biological mother

for long and spent his early years in an orphanage and foster care. He was constantly surrounded by a large group of children and had very few parental figures. He recalls in an interview being loaned out to families on the weekend which he described as “not a good situation”. The families were usually offered a monetary incentive for taking orphaned children on the weekends. He describes the families that he was temporarily placed with, as such: “They shouldn’t have been allowed to have pets, let alone children.” As a result of his foster care upbringing O’Barr stated that the best way he found to get through the difficult times and avoid punishment was to be quiet, not draw attention to himself, and to entertain himself. He states that as a result of remaining silent for many years he didn’t have an evolved set of communication skills. This led him to express himself on paper, using art, rather than with his words. Ironically, O’Barr failed art class in his primary education, because his techniques were too advanced and surpassed what his teachers expected of him for many of the assignments.

James O’Barr wasn’t adopted until the age of seven. He was adopted by a hardworking, blue collar family from the south. His father worked eighty, sometimes ninety hours a week and made very little money. He was a bus driver and the only time O’Barr would get to see him was if he decided to join him on his route. Though, O’Barr admits that he never really spent much time with him. His adopted family failed to see art as a viable career option for O’Barr and was forbidden for many years from drawing inside his house because they felt it was a waste of his time. They believed in hard work and told him that his art was fine as a hobby, but that he needed to “go out and get a real job” which he subsequently did. He began washing dishes at a local restaurant and working at a nearby nursing home. With O’Barr being banned from drawing in his house he would have to go to the library or stay later in school in order to create his art in secret. O’Barr describes his life up until the age of sixteen as an “endurance test” that he had to

get through. He also felt as though, “God had his elbow on my neck” until he met a girl that would change the course of his life.

When he was sixteen, he met Beverly in high school and describes her as an “angel”. He depicts Beverly, in detail, as his exact opposite in every way. While he was, dark, brooding and sarcastic, she was light, always happy, and positive. They fit together and described their relationship as a perfect balance. In being with her, he felt all of his struggles in life were vindicated, that he had finally found everything he was looking for. He believed that he was being rewarded by God for not caving in and fighting through a very difficult childhood. James and Beverly were together for nearly every day for three years and were engaged, planning to get married after they graduated from high school.

However, tragedy struck for the young couple when Beverly was killed by a drunk driver. In O’Barr’s words, he was “destroyed”. He felt as though everything that he was working on up until that point was preparing for his life with Beverly. He was unsure of his belief in God at this point in time, but he said, and said he felt “betrayed by God” and that it was a continuation of the punishment he endured throughout his childhood. He spent three years after Beverly’s death doing destructive things and engaging in self-destructive behavior. But, after trying for years to escape the pain he realized that his coping mechanisms were not working, and he had to channel all of his emotions into *something* or he was going to “self-destruct”.

The vehicle he would use to channel his, grief, frustration and rage into would be *The Crow* and eventually working on it would become a self-expressed therapy for him. He would work his regular job eight to ten hours a day and then work on what would eventually become *The Crow* until three in the morning. Eric was an agent for O’Barr’s emotions although his physical rendering was based on such celebrities like Iggy Pop and Peter Murphy. Eric’s

physicality is evident through O'Barr's drawing style and he comes across as lean and cat-like. Shelly, however, is a literal translation of Beverly, and didn't change anything about her physicality in the novel. He describes trying to capture her innocence, and white light quality when drawing Shelly. O'Barr describes the experience as difficult and not something fun to do, it was like picking at scars and reopening old wounds for him. He could only do a few pages at a time before he had to stop working, due to the emotional toll it took on him. It took him almost nine years to finish the project, starting the first page in 1981 and finishing the entire project in 1989. The most important aspect of the project for him was getting everything he was feeling, and all that was in his head onto the paper. Many of the supporting characters are visually based off of people O'Barr associated with throughout his life and many of their names came from graffiti he saw throughout Detroit. O'Barr placed painstaking detail throughout the novel, and many of the background scenery throughout the novel is based on actual locations around Detroit as well. Most of the novel is done in pen and ink, predominantly in black and white, however many of the dream sequences are done in a wash or watercolors to give them their dream-like quality. O'Barr never intended to publish his work and it was a project solely for himself, and it was only years later that he happened to be lucky enough to have a friend that was willing to publish it.

O'Barr had worked on cars for twelve years after working on *The Crow* and felt that he wanted to do something different. He tested for a medical school and got in, but he needed to find a way to pay for it. He began working for a comic bookstore, making t-shirts for them and the owner loved his work. He asked O'Barr if he had any other material, because he was just starting his own publishing company and O'Barr decided to bring in *The Crow*. Instantly, the owner of the shop fell in love with his work and asked if he could publish it. *The Crow* became

one of their first books ever published and sold extremely well. By the release of the third issue, O'Barr was already getting calls from film companies who were interested in buying the rights.

When O'Barr sold the rights, he didn't expect the film to actually be made, however it began production very soon after. Producers greatly altered the original vision of O'Barr's work and he was very unhappy. It wasn't until Brandon Lee, who plays Eric in the film and director Alex Proyas were signed to the project did they insist that it be brought back to the original source material. During the making of the film, tragedy struck again and in a horrible prop accident Brandon Lee was shot and killed during filming. O'Barr felt similarly to when Beverly was killed, back when he began this project and he was left with feelings of grief, guilt and anger over the senseless death. The cult following that the film has amassed has led *The Crow* to be one of the most well-known and regarded comic books within the comic book community and secured its place in pop culture history.

Though O'Barr is widely known throughout the comic book community for his work on *The Crow* he is very different from many other artists that work in the field. He refuses to be what he calls a "typical" comic book artist, who only translates a script he is given into images. He has only done work in which he is both the creator, writer and artist because he feels that he must have a personal attachment to the project in order for him to be involved in it. O'Barr has stated that drawing can take an emotional toll on him and that there is a meaning for each and every line he draws on a page, nothing is unintentional. His projects usually consist of things that he has done for himself as a form of therapy and will not participate in projects that he is not emotionally vested in.

O'Barr is glad that he decided not to give up and accept things the way they were in his life. He is remarried and has a daughter and continues to work on his art as well as travel the

world attending different comic book conventions. He is glad that many people have connected with his work. He is also honored that he was able to fall in love, and that love exists for him again. His work is still revered to this day and *The Crow* remains a classic graphic novel and one that helped place comic books into the mainstream media.

Christianity and *The Crow* Section:

-Expanded and edited from my original draft, unfinished section.

Christianity is a recurrent motif featured throughout James O'Barr's *The Crow*. It is used both visually and textually to convey an inherent connection between the extremes of morality that Christianity is centered around and what role moral ambiguity plays as the intermediary between the two. Eric's characterization elicits a direct comparison to the passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Eric functions simultaneously as a Christ-like figure and anti-Christ, reciting bible verses while committing horrific acts of violence. O'Barr in his creation of *The Crow* uses the work of Michelangelo as a reference for all his illustrations of Eric and this further permeates the religious themes into the narrative. Michelangelo, a devout catholic, centered his work around depicting holy scenes. Eric's physical appearance is illustrated similarly to that of a high renaissance painting of Jesus Christ. Finally, the fall narrative, similar to that of Milton's *Paradise Lost* is interwoven throughout the text. The prelapsarian scenes between Eric and Shelly are illustrated using a different technique and color palette from the postlapsarian scenes allowing for a stark contrast between the two. Overt themes of Christianity are blended with extreme images of violence, death, destruction, neglect and rape to foster the sense of hopelessness and abandonment by God that O'Barr feels when creating the novel.

The novel begins with the word "LAMENT" printed in bold, black letters across an entirely white background. To lament, or to display a passionate expression of grief or sorrow is

fundamental throughout the Catholic faith. Many psalms focus on the theme of lamenting and many biblical passages focus on the experience of grief. There are more Psalms of lament than any other. The fact that O’Barr chose to open the novel with this word is not a coincidence. The purpose of psalms of lament are to call out to God in times of great suffering and despair and ask him to release the suffering from their despair. O’Barr has frequently discussed the original purpose of creating *The Crow* was to create therapeutic outlet in order for him to grieve. The loss of his fiancé, who was killed by a drunk driver was too much to bear and so he began *The Crow* as a way to relieve the pain he felt. In a way, *The Crow* was O’Barr’s own psalm of lament, and a tool used to help him grieve, and seek release from the suffering that accompanied the loss of a loved one.

Below the word “LAMENT”, in slightly smaller letters is the phrase “PAIN & FEAR” is located, centered between two periods. These three, cryptic words are tied together by a theme of suffering. Again, it is far from a coincidence that O’Barr uses these words in tandem. Pain and fear relate to O’Barr’s personal experience with grief. However, they can also relate to the passion of Christ. In fact, the term widely used with describing the trial, arrest and crucifixion of Jesus Christ; the passion, originates from the Latin word for suffering. The passion is pivotal in the Catholic faith and is meant to illustrate the fear, pain, uncertainty, and dread, that accompanies a demeaning death. The passion also illustrates for those of the Catholic faith that even God himself is not immune to feeling the same emotions that normal humans do when confronted with death.

On the bottom three quarters of the page, you see an image of a bullet-riddled man, very much alive, and posed with his arms up and his hands covering his ears, clutching the back of his head in a posture not unlike that of Christ’s crucifixion. Though his facial expression is placid,

revealing no pain or sorrow, but rather disdain. His face shows an intense stare directed dead ahead. He is shirtless, quite muscular, and his pants are slung low. The way his body is illustrated draws comparisons to many of Michelangelo's works depicting Jesus. His anatomy and posture illustrate that of power and are similar to Michelangelo's The Risen Christ sculpture. The parallels between the way in which Michelangelo sculpted Jesus Christ and the way in which O'Barr illustrated Eric are undeniable. The similarities do not end at physicality; both Eric and Jesus have been murdered and felt abandoned by God. They are each resurrected from the dead in order to complete a task. Although Eric perpetrates varying acts of violence, the reader is able to sympathize with him because of this Christ-Like persona, and the avenging angel motif recurring throughout the novel.

The chapter begins with the word "INERTIA" in large white capital letters against a black background taking up one third of the page. The use of the word inertia is particularly interesting because the definition of the word is a tendency to do nothing or remain unchanged. The use of this word is ironic considering that in death, Eric is able to get the vengeance that he desperately craves, however for the most part things remain unchanged. The other two thirds of the page are occupied by the first panel which depicts a man stealing a computer and quickly walking down an alley with the stolen goods. The thief audibly states "What the hell?" as he is exiting the alleyway, this is when the undead Eric is introduced. Eric is drawn stepping in front of the thief from the shadows, his face painted like the sock, better known as the comedy mask. Eric's face is set in a stony expression, his shoulders squared back, and his eyes cast down making eye contact with the thief. The thief screams "Jesus H... Christ!" as he drops the stolen computer, smashing it on the ground. Two of the first spoken lines of dialogue in the novel concern themselves with religious imagery. "What the hell?" and "Jesus H... Christ" are used in

consecutive panels and are an amalgamation of the divine holy and unholy, much like Eric himself. Mr. Jones tries to extort money out of Eric by threatening him with a knife for causing him to drop his stolen goods. After Eric does not comply Mr. Jones stabs Eric directly in the chest. Eric only looks mildly concerned as he is stabbed. The focus then shifts from Eric himself to Eric's blood, which is drawn to be the focal point of that panel. Blood is yet another allegorical representation of Jesus Christ that O'Barr is able to incorporate in the text. Eric's wound can be viewed as a holy wound, in which the blood of the innocent is spilled for the salvation of others. Mr. Jones pulls away, leaving the knife still in Eric's chest. Eric bows his head and closes his eyes, in a moment of contemplation and reflection. His facial expression is serene when he is faced with a physical pain. Mr. Jones says: "Man you must be dusted not to feel that..." and Eric replies "Pain? I know pain at the molecular level... it pulls at my atoms...sings to me in an alphabet of fear... I am the boiling man... come to break the bones of your sins, meat puppet..." As Eric is saying this, he pulls the knife from his chest and licks his blood off the tip, handing it back to Mr. Jones. The line: "to break the bones of your sins" is fusion between holy benevolence and vengeful violence, much like Eric's characterization. The focus on Eric's blood signifies the fact that Eric is linked

Eric begins to talk about the ways in which he tortured an unseen character named Shelby to get the information about Mr. Jones. Eric proceeds to pull out a pair of shears and tell Mr. Jones that he cut off three of Shelby's fingers and made him eat them to procure the information. Mr. Jones begins to sweat as Eric backs him into a corner and asks, "Fingers or toes?" as he holds the shears up to Mr. Jones' face. Mr. Jones' resolve immediately cracks and he gives Eric all the information he requested. After Eric gets his information, he bends down and leans close to Mr. Jones and grasps the sides of his face. Making direct eye contact Eric says, "Tell them I'm

coming, Mr. Jones.” This line of dialogue is key in also drawing comparisons to the archangel Gabriel from the Old Testament. Gabriel is an interesting and telling choice for O’Barr to reference seeing as how he is known as the messenger and he is the angel that will blow his horn to announce Judgement day. Eric tells Mr. Jones to alert the others in the gang that he is coming much like Gabriel tells Mary that she is to give birth to the messiah. Eric much like Gabriel makes final judgements and determines every person that was involved in Shelly’s murder to be irredeemable. Though it is biblical in nature, O’Barr subverts the benevolent and often times peaceful messages that Gabriel is associated with. What was distilled from biblical messages of nonviolence shift to those of violence and mercilessness.

The final page in the opening section is a full-page panel of Eric walking away from Mr. Jones with one hand in his jacket pocket and the other gripping his shoulder. Eric’s eyes are downcast, and his expression is unreadable due to his makeup. Mr. Jones is slumped over in fear on the sidewalk, his hands grasping the sides of his head and his eyes looking down at the ground in front of him. Eric speaks as he walks away from the visibly shaken man. “Mr. Jones?” and Mr. Jones replies “Y...Yes, Sir...” and Eric asks him “Are there spots in a leopard’s eyes, also?”. This question is Eric’s final line of dialogue of the opening section of the novel. This last line is a further nod to Eric viewing himself as the final judgement for these men. This line of dialogue is likely a play on the common phrase “a leopard never changes it’s spots” meaning that it is impossible for a person to change their character. In asking Mr. Jones if there are spots in a leopard’s eyes also, he is alluding to the fact that a person’s character can be seen in their eyes, and the spots in a man’s eyes are also unchangeable. Eric is the final judge, jury and executioner of this novel and his use of religious imagery throughout the novel is ironic and subverts all that is associated with biblical images. Eric’s story arc is almost parallel to that of Jesus Christ’s. A

martyr, who was wrongly sentenced to death is resurrected. However, that is where the similarities in their stories end as each character takes a vastly different path to accomplish their goals after being resurrected.

Eric is also frequently depicted as reciting biblical verses as he confronts his murderers. It is only in scenes of intense violence that we see O'Barr invoke the use of the bible in order to get his point across. The juxtaposition between visually jarring acts of violence and dialogue taken from sermon or the bible sets a disturbing scene and allows the reader to become aware of the fact that although Eric and Jesus Christ have many parallels, Eric is by no means a benevolent son of God.

Eric is once again in search of his fiancé's murderers. He is wearing a long, black trench coat and face paint. His hands are behind his back as he looks down, gazing out the window of the decrepit house. As Eric recalls the names of those responsible for his murders the scene transitions to some of the criminals on a street corner. The men are negotiating a deal to buy an illegal gun and Tin Tin, one of the criminals shoots an old woman who is just going about her business. The men then argue and Tin Tin murders the two other men in cold blood. He slips into an alley and begins to walk away from the scene, when he turns the corner into the alleyway Eric is standing there and asks "Hello, Tin Tin... Remember me?" This panel takes up the entirety of the page and is once again drawn in pen and ink with very detailed linework. The shadows and small details further the idea that the city is rundown and dirty place, from the inhabitants to the surroundings. Tin Tin has the gun in his hand and is ready to shoot. Tin Tin states he doesn't remember Eric and shoots him in the head. The bullet bounces off of Eric's skull and ricochets back into Tin Tin's arm. He falls to the floor and Eric picks up the gun and says: "Rejoice to the full in the glory that is about to be yours!" Tin Tin then asks who he is, and Eric continues: "And

give thanks to the lord God who has called you to his kingdom!” As Tin Tin continues to protest that he doesn’t know who Eric is, Eric recalls the incident out loud for the first time in the novel. “A year ago... a cold October night... a broken down car on a dirt road... A man... a girl... madness... pain... and the shadows... my god, the shadows!” The same poem at the beginning of the graphic novel is what Eric uses to describe the incident and just as he does the Crow itself begins to scream “Don’t look, don’t look”. The focus begins to shift from Tin Tin trying to place the blame elsewhere for the murders he helped commit to a flashback of Eric and Shelly. The art style switches from panel to panel, in the scenes with Tin Tin it remains harsh lines in pen and ink. In the flashback scenes, however it shifts to charcoals and pencil, and takes on a lighter and gradient quality. Eric rambles as he questions Tin Tin and imagines lying in bed next to Shelly. Gradually the flashback fades into white and without warning Eric puts the gun to his head and pulls the trigger. His final words to Tin Tin are “May God grant you the mercy that I cannot.” Eric is the complete antithesis of Jesus Christ in this scene, his ability for benevolence and peace is taken over by his anger and rage. Christ’s goal is to show mercy on those who may not necessarily deserve it. However, Eric’s sole purpose is to bring these men to justice.

Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, {1:79} To give light to them that sit in darkness and [in] the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

This section of text from the bible is taken from Luke and describes the ways in which God’s mercy expels the darkness of the night and brings forth a pathway to peace. Contrary to this, Eric works in shadow and although he is not as morally bankrupt as his victims, he does not harm the innocent and seeks only to set right the wrongs that were done to he and his wife, he is the opposite of all that the bible describes as virtuous. Eric is merciless in his treatment of the

murderers and acknowledges this in his line of dialogue immediately after he kills Tin Tin. God is the one to show mercy and benevolence, Eric is meant to send them to God. Eric is only the judge, jury and executioner for those that have sinned, he is the avenging angel. An avenging angel is, according to J.R. Craig a character existing somewhere between the extremes of good and evil. "The lack of remorse Eric displays when killing his tormentors also shows his character as one who is neither absolutely good nor bad, but one exhibiting the subtle shades of grey in his psyche" (69). This quote further draws parallels between Eric's character arc in *The Crow* and Jesus' in The Bible. Both are martyrs who are killed for their beliefs and both rise from the dead to accomplish a certain goal. However, the article also points out the murkiness of Eric's morality that allows Eric's story arc to separate itself from Jesus'. Eric has no qualms about murdering in order to bring justice and set right the atrocities that were committed when he and his wife were murdered, a drastic difference from the benevolent, peaceful Jesus Christ. This is what Robert determines as the avenging angel. The visual and textual imagery influence Eric's character arc and vice versa, though some of his actions can be deemed as morally reprehensible he is not entirely so because he does things in order to right the wrongs that were committed against, he and his fiancé.

The change in visual art style in this section of text begin to illustrate O'Barr's use of the fall narrative throughout the text. The prelapsarian panels throughout the novel are done in a wash, which is black and grey watercolor paints and very light linework. This creates a light, airy and dreamlike tone to these panels. These scenes are predominantly flashbacks to life before Eric and Shelly's murders took place. O'Barr is able to create parallels to Adam and Eve being cast out of paradise by God. In Eric's mind, Shelly was paradise and when she was murdered all ability to live in paradise again was lost to him. The postlapsarian panels, which make up the

majority of the novel are illustrated in pen and ink. This gives the panels a dark, harsh, foreboding, and ominous feeling. There are very few blank spaces left in the panels and they are usually cluttered, chaotic and violent.

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The central theme of Robert's article is to demonstrate the use of the avenging angel motif in popular film and graphic novels, specifically focusing on *Spawn* and *The Crow*. The article explores how religious imagery and iconography are used throughout each of the texts and on-screen adaptations to convey certain messages regarding the characters and the setting. In the case of *The Crow*, many religious symbols, dialogue and other imagery allow the reader to become better acquainted with the protagonists' moral standing. The protagonist of *The Crow*, Eric Draven, is aligned in both the novel and film adaptation with frequent imagery of crosses. This article has allowed me to view Eric's storyline through a Judeo-Christian lens and draw parallels between Eric's character arc in *The Crow* and Jesus' in *The Bible*. Both are martyrs who are killed for their beliefs and both rise from the dead to accomplish a certain goal. However, the article also points out the murkiness of Eric's morality that allows Eric's story arc to separate itself from Jesus'. Eric has no qualms about murdering in order to bring justice and set right the atrocities that were committed when he and his wife were murdered, a drastic difference from the benevolent, peaceful Jesus Christ. This is what Robert determines as the avenging angel.

In the article Robert further explains the meaning of avenging angel, which sees the protagonist existing somewhere in-between the extremes of good and evil. "The lack of remorse Eric displays when killing his tormentors also shows his character as one who is neither absolutely good nor bad, but one exhibiting the subtle shades of grey in his psyche" (69). The article has also led me to reflect upon how the art style and character development influence each other. The graphic novel is drawn entirely in black and white, which gives a noir quality to the work. Both the characters and the artwork have a greyness to them and are able to switch between the harsh black and white linework of the darker, violent scenes, and the soft, light greyness of memories in which Eric demonstrates his capacity for benevolence.

This article is very useful in bringing about new ways to look at the avenging angel motif. It is instrumental in explaining how the visual and textual imagery influence Eric's character arc and vice versa. However, there are certain areas in which the article falls short. It does not delve into too much detail regarding specific panels in the graphic novel, but rather focuses on how the movie adaptation. Though very similar, the movie adaptation departs from the graphic novel in order to make it more digestible for larger audiences. My project is focused solely on the graphic novel version of *The Crow* and how that version of Eric's character evolves and moves through his grief and loss. I believe that this article is a valid and useful source to an extent and allowed me to analyze *The Crow* through different lenses, however, I would need to research further into grief, loss, trauma theory and Eric's character evolution as a whole in order to obtain more well-rounded information for my project.

Goth: Undead Subculture by Lauren M.E. Goodlad.
<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/609119>. Goth.

Lauren M. E. Goodlad's article *Men in Black* is useful to understanding the form, symbolism and themes derived from 1980s goth culture that are prevalent throughout James O'Barr's *The Crow*. The article begins by describing the attributes of gothic narratives, specifically focusing on the masculine, feminine and androgynous aspects of the subculture. The article delves into the large role that male pain plays in music, novels and movies to emerge out of the genre, specifically focusing on those elements within *The Crow*. The article then goes on to describe how understanding male pain and the incorporation of the absent feminine is essential to understanding how the goth subculture contributes to the themes present in the novel. The article primarily focuses on the androgynous nature of the modern gothic protagonist. "Blood and tears signify the effluence of agonized feeling; yet, although both are exuded by the same body in pain, blood is the fluid of "masculine" vengeance, while tears bespeak "feminine" mourning." (95) The article also usefully brings about the effect that the crow as a character has on Eric's character arc.

This article succeeds in bringing about a wide variety of topics that will be useful when writing the final version of the paper. Goodlad expands upon areas of Eric's character arc and overall transformation that prove to be useful when looking critically at the text. Goodlad does delve into certain aspects of Eric's transformation post-trauma however, her focus on the androgynous aspects of his character is something that I am not looking to focus heavily on in my project. The article also uses descriptions of pivotal scenes to bring attention to O'Barr's juxtaposition of certain elements, for example the use of morphine and in-depth descriptions of pain. Goodlad states: "Ironically, however, morphine is a painkiller- productive of insensibility. Hence, when Eric plunges two hypodermic needles full of morphine into his breast, he reifies- by way of nullifying- the pain upon which his identity depends". (97) Analyzing the text with this knowledge allowed me to see that O'Barr incorporates a lot of juxtaposition and dramatic irony into the text during pivotal scenes. Goodlad also draws further attention to Eric's Christ-like characteristics, in looking closely at physical actions and attributes that both Eric and Christ have in common. "Although the body of the killing machine is recognizably macho, the repeated, self-inflicted, and explicitly Christ-like mortification and penetration of Eric's flesh- the spectacularization of his wounds, his sentience, and his pain- blur the distinction between masculinized blood and feminized tears." (97,101) This line was able to help me draw comparisons to Christ's crucifixion and recognize that Eric is simultaneously Christ-like and the antithesis of all that Christ is.

In analyzing *The Crow* using common tropes from the 1980s goth subculture the article is useful for bringing about new ways to look at the text. It helps me further understand certain elements of the text better and will be a key secondary source used in my project. However, Goodlad's focus on androgyny and how the storyline and character construction lead to a blurring of lines between feminine and masculine are not something that is useful to my project at this point in time. Though, if I could find further information on this topic, I would not be opposed to adding some key points when I am further along into the project. This article has also shown that I need to do further research into certain biblical themes and character attributes that I can reference in my thorough analysis of *The Crow*.

Rosaldo, Renato. "Introduction: Grief and a Headhunter's Rage," in *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993).

Rosaldo takes an anthropological approach to interpreting “how to talk about the cultural force of emotions.” While his main focus is to analyze the practice of headhunting in an indigenous Indonesian culture known as Ilongot, Rosaldo also reflects on the experience of losing his wife to a tragic fall off of a cliff during fieldwork. This is an excellent tie-in with my project, because Rosaldo processes his grief through anthropology, just as O’Barr processes his through art. Writing about his own grief, Rosaldo states:

“Lest there be any misunderstanding, bereavement should not be reduced to anger, neither for myself nor for anyone else. Powerful visceral emotional states swept over me, at times separately and at other times together. I experienced the deep cutting pain of sorrow almost beyond endurance, the cadaverous cold of realizing the finality of death, the trembling beginning in my abdomen and spreading through my body, the mournful keening that started without my willing, and frequent tearful sobbing. My present purpose of revising earlier understandings of Ilongot headhunting, and not a general view of bereavement, thus focuses on anger rather than on other emotions in grief.”

Here Rosaldo offers a phenomenology of grief that is similar to that offered by O’Barr. Rosaldo’s description is physical; it portrays grief as occurring in the body. Rosaldo’s phrase “powerful, visceral, emotional states” might be helpful for me describing the emotions portrayed in *The Crow*. In the quote above, it becomes clear that grief is very difficult to understand without having experienced first. Rosaldo’s experience with grief helps him to understand those of the Ilongot people, even though they are from a very different culture.

A few paragraphs later, Rosaldo discusses how writing about his own grief was a cathartic experience

“Rather than following after the completed composition, the catharsis occurred beforehand. When the initial version of this introduction was most acutely on my mind, during the month before actually beginning to write, I felt diffusely depressed and ill with a fever. Then one day an almost literal fog lifted and words began to flow. It seemed less as if I were doing the writing than that the words were writing themselves through me.”

Here, the act of writing itself is cathartic, releasing painful emotions and helping Rosaldo to process them. His account of this catharsis closely resembles O’Barr’s account of writing *The Crow* in the wake of his fiancée’s death.

Speidel, Michael. “Berserks: A History of Indo-European ‘Mad Warriors.’” *A Journal of World History* 13.2 (2002): 253-290.

Speidel’s article sketches a long history of “the berserk warrior tradition.” Its first two parts explore the history of Berserks from the Bronze Age through the Middle Ages. The third looks at the Berserk mind and the fourth looks at patterns in Berserk attack troops and the fifth looks at non-Western cultures such as the Aztecs. The first two parts will be useful in demonstrating that Eric’s berserk rage in *The Crow* is attached to a really long tradition of warriors in Western culture. On page 255, there is a poem written by ancient Assyrian warriors that describes warriors taking off their armor and dancing during battle. These practices are

echoed in Eric who (since he's dead) doesn't need any armor or protective device and who dances when he is taking his revenge. This connection shows that Eric is not quite the outsider that he seems to be at first. Instead, maybe his grief drives him into really old practices of battle and revenge. On page 254, Speidel writes: "Berserk warriors thus scorned armor, willfully foregoing body armor. They also raged uncontrollably in a trance of fury. These two qualities define berserks, although many sources mention only one or the other, even in cases where warriors were both naked and mad." This quote describes Eric's situation for 90% of *The Crow*.

In section three, on the Berserk mind, Speidel writes a lot about dancing on the battlefield. Vedic Indians, Tukuliti-Ninurta's, and ancient Germanic tribes all engaged in this behavior in a manner quite similar to Eric. Speidel also describes the frenzied state of Berserker warriors in history in a way that bears comparison with O'Barr's portrayal of Eric: "Berserks thus embody an abiding spirit in unbroken tradition from Vedic and Homeric times to those of the Icelandic sagas. The history of berserk warriors offers rich religious, cultural, and military detail from about 1300 B.c. to a.d. 1300 and links the bronze, iron, and middle ages, three thousand years of history seldom understood as belonging together" (278). In concluding his argument, Speidel suggests that, despite the time separating us from Berserk warriors, "it is not altogether true that as men ancient warriors elude us—in understanding Berserks we can bridge the gap." Speidel's bridging the gap can help us to humanize and understand Eric's rage and revenge as having deep historical roots.

Ross, Colin A. "Self-Blame and Suicidal Ideation Among Combat Veterans." *Journal of American Psychotherapy* 67.4 (2013).

This article is about how self-blame causes combat veterans to think about and commit suicide. The author is a psychotherapist and he draws on his clinical experience to share tips for treating a variety of self-blame in combat veterans. This article is useful because Eric's primary emotions throughout the novel are either self-blame or rage. It is very unclear whether Eric is cured of his self-blame over the course of the novel. Also, the idea of "survivor's guilt" (even though Eric doesn't technically survive) is an important one in *The Crow*. Ross describes his experience treating survivor guilt in veterans as follows:

Survivor guilt is a common condition among suicidal combat veterans. The self should have died and the buddies should have lived. In cases of survivor guilt I may go over some details of combat scenes to establish that who lived and who died was purely a matter of luck. If there is difficulty getting agreement on this point, I will review in more detail. The basic intervention is to get the veteran to look at himself through his buddies' eyes. They were robbed of the chance to have a life. What would they want for him? How do they feel about him? I have never received anything but a positive evaluation of the self from this inquiry.

It's interesting to think about how little Eric takes this strategy for dealing with his guilt into account. Shelley would not have wanted him to seek out violent revenge. His revenge is more for himself than for her. We can imagine Eric being treated by a compassionate therapist like Ross and recovering, but that's not the story we get. There's no evidence that O'Barr has gotten over blaming himself either for his fiancée's death or for Brandon Lee's death. This source, then,

might be valuable because it offers us a good way of understanding how Eric diverges from how a functioning person might overcome his or her guilt. Instead of a healthy process of overcoming survivor guilt, *The Crow* gives us the opposite, which might reflect O'Barr's unresolved survivor guilt.

Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft, et al. *Mary Shelley, Frankenstein: the 1818 Text*. W.W. Norton, 1996.

Mary Shelley's classic novel *Frankenstein* deals with themes of monstrosity and the nature of man. The themes used in the novel could prove extremely useful when examining similar themes that O'Barr incorporates into *The Crow*. *Frankenstein* includes aspects of how grief and guilt can emotionally impact a character dramatically, as well as loneliness, isolation and longing for a love that is forever lost. The impact of playing God that is prevalent throughout *Frankenstein* is also useful to understanding how and why this novel is useful in my project. The novel is also key to understanding fear and loathing, for example this passage from page 60 demonstrates that aimless, uncaring nature that fear and grief can have upon a person.

Morning, dismal and wet, at length dawned and discovered to my sleepless and aching eyes the church of Ingolstadt, its white steeple and clock, which indicated the sixth hour. The porter opened the gates of the court, which had that night been my asylum, and I issued into the streets, pacing them with quick steps, as if I sought to avoid the wretch whom I feared every turning of the street would present to my view. I did not dare return to the apartment which I inhabited, but felt impelled to hurry on, although drenched by the rain which poured from a black and comfortless sky. I continued walking in this manner for some time, endeavouring by bodily exercise to ease the load that weighed upon my mind. I traversed the streets without any clear conception of where I was or what I was doing.

Though Eric does have set goals to accomplish his mental state is very similar to Victor Frankenstein's in this scene, in which he is able to just wander without thought to any bodily discomfort such as rain. Wandering is for his own mental state and much like Eric that is what troubles him more so than any physical ailments. Frankenstein is a perfect novel to use in order to examine what constitutes monstrosity and if monstrous deeds or circumstances create someone who is monstrous.

King James Bible. Holman Bible Publishers, 1973.

The King James Bible, both old and new testament are important texts to use when analyzing the crow. The constant religious imagery, both text and illustrative play a large role when reading the crow. Eric's story arc is extremely similar to that of Jesus Christ and the amount of religious symbolism used when Eric is speaking makes it important to understand the biblical connections. At various points throughout the crow Eric made references to the archangel Gabriel, in which he presents himself as the messenger, as well as the bringer of judgement.

Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, {1:79} To give light to them that sit in darkness and [in] the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Sections of text from the bible that announce the coming of Jesus Christ to Mary, as well as the resurrection of Christ are key to breaking down the prevalent religious themes throughout *The Crow*. Eric's complex intertwined nature of good and evil can also be traced back to the biblical avenging angel that is common among our popular culture today and using the bible to analyze can help give the reader a clearer message behind the popular motif.

Stevenson, Robert Louis. *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Amereon House, 1978.

Stevenson's work calls into question the definition of monstrosity and how humanity is dual in nature. This theme is also present in *The Crow* because Eric can be both benevolent and vengeful. The assertion that Jekyll imagines the soul as a battleground for an angel and a devil makes it much more prevalent to *The Crow*. Eric was once a peaceful, unassuming man just living his life, but after the accident he became vengeful, angry, violent. The capacity for Eric to be all of these things was always lurking, however it wasn't until tragedy did he unlock the capability to become the newest version of himself. In *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Mr. Hyde slowly engulfs Dr. Jekyll and this is almost parallel to that of Eric and *The Crow*, Eric almost all at once loses what once made him human and after his resurrection, fueled by his grief became the antithesis of everything he once was.