The way 9 11 impacted the american society english literature essay

Literature, British Literature

The way 9/11 impacted the American society and its aftermath is well represented in O'Neill's novel " Netherland." TurmoilOne of the first victims of the change in cultural landscape of America, according to Faludi, after 9/11 were feminists. Their demand for equal status " sissified" pre-9/11 America and softened the country for attack. The nation needed to move quickly to a wartime footing with the need to emphasize its blustering masculinity, what Faludi describes as " as a 'not now, honey, we're at war' mentality" made attacking feminism commonplace. Faludi offers an overwhelming amount of data showing just how underrepresented women's voices were in the media in the aftermath of 9/11, and the few women who were given a platform tended to attack feminism. A not-so-new gender paradigm made a comeback, Faludi explains: Men were strong protectors and women were innocent victims. Faludi explores the post-9/11 media's portrayal of our leaders " with such comic hyperbole" as Texas gunslingers and caped superheroes. This trend became ridiculous in 2004 when both President Bush and Democratic candidate John Kerry competed to show who was the more devoted hunter. At a campaign stop in Ohio, Kerry swaggered into a gun shop, reports Faludi, " to inquire, in freshly acquired twang, 'Can I get me a hunting license here?' " A necessary corollary of the macho superhero myth, Faludi explains, are innocent, dependent women in need of their menfolk's protection. Thus, the 9/11 widows were subject to a rapturous media circus focusing on their victimhood, their difficulties in coping. In one absurd example, TV host Geraldo Rivera interviewed several wealthy, suburban 9/11-widows, whose husbands had gotten rich in high finance, and chivalrously handed the group a check for $50, 000. Yet when four 9/11

widows, known as the " Jersey Girls," began questioning US intelligence failures that allowed the attacks to happen, they were pilloried as " witches" by conservative pundits like Ann Coulter. The new female exemplars were women like Karen Hughes, who selflessly left her White House job as presidential speechwriter to return home to her kids. As fellow conservative speech writer Peggy Noonan wrote approvingly in The Wall Street Journal: Hughes " doesn't have to wear makeup now. She can have a soft face. She can wash her face in Dove foamy cleanser." In her most provocative chapter, Faludi exposes the mythical nature of the " rescue" of Private Jessica Lynch from an Iraqi hospital: " It was a tale of a maiden in need of rescue." Faludi shows that the military rescue was " made for Hollywood." In fact, as revealed later by the BBC, hospital staff had earlier attempted to return Lynch to American forces, only to be deterred by American soldiers shooting at their ambulance. The " rescue" of Lynch led to a bestselling personal memoir that Lynch didn't write, and that suggested, against Lynch's own objections, that she'd been raped. Faludi meticulously traces the roots of our post-9/11 myths back to the Puritans. Disasters were viewed then as God's retribution for social laxity – perhaps unsurprisingly, argues Faludi, women were often victimized as a result of post-crisis hysteria (e. g., the Salem witch trials). Faludi also explores the frontier myth of strong men protecting weak women from Indians and southern blacks: " Our ancestors had already fought a war on terror, a very long war," writes Faludi. At book's end, Faludi details the perilous consequences of our post 9/11 fantasies: " By living in a myth, we made the world and ourselves less secure. By refusing to grapple with the actual failures that led to 9/11" we leave ourselves open to further

attack. Faludi saves much of her scorn for a media that went along with the fantasy: " The media-inflamed need for a virile 'victory' drove our stampede to war, while the domestic assault on traitors and 'moral idiots' foreclosed any rational prewar discussion."

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O’Neill, who was born in Ireland, raised in Holland and now lives in New York, seems incapable of composing a boring sentence or thinking an uninteresting thought, whether he’s writing about dating (" We courted in the style preferred by the English: alcoholically") or the darker stuff that keeps us awake at night, like the nuclear plant just up the river (" Indian Point: the earliest, most incurable apprehensions stirred in its very name"). O’Neill’s prose glows with what Alfred Kazin called " the marginal suggestiveness which in a great writer always indicates those unspoken reserves, that silent assessment of life, that can be heard below and beyond the slow marshaling of thought." And O’Neill knows how to deploy the quotidian fripperies of our laptop culture to devastating fictional effect. There’s a moment in " Netherland" involving a father, the son who has been taken from him, and Google Earth that’s among the most moving set pieces I’ve read in a recent novel. The father hovers over his son’s house nightly, " flying on Google’s satellite function," lingering over his child’s dormer window and blue inflated swimming pool, searching the " depthless" pixels for anything, from thousands of miles away, he can cling to. O’Neill’s novel is full of moments like this: closely observed, emotionally racking, un-self-consciously in touch with how we live now. The plot in " Netherland" runs on two tracks. The first tells the story of a family. The narrator, Hans van den

Broek, is a Dutch-born equities analyst (he compares himself, in terms of influence if not infamy, to Henry Blodget) who lives in a TriBeCa loft with his British-born wife, Rachel, and their son. When 9/11 forces them to flee farther uptown, they end up living, almost by accident, in the shabby-glamorous Chelsea Hotel, and it is there that their marriage slowly cracks apart.(warmodgenis shecvla) Rachel wants to take their son back to London and her family. He'll be safer there, far from George Bush and the United States, a country she has begun to think of as " ideologically diseased." Hans, unsure of his feelings, starts to believe he is " a political-ethical idiot." O'Neill writes beautifully about what it sometimes felt like in the months after 9/11, when you couldn't attend a dinner party unless you were intellectually armed for hours of bitter debate: " For those under the age of 45 it seemed that world events had finally contrived a meaningful test of their capacity for conscientious political thought. Many of my acquaintances, I realized, had passed the last decade or two in a state of intellectual and psychic yearning for such a moment — or, if they hadn't, were able to quickly assemble an expert arguer's arsenal of thrusts and statistics and ripostes and gambits and examples and salient facts and rhetorical maneuvers. I, however, was almost completely caught out." What Hans and Rachel are trying to avoid, he tells us, is " what might be termed a historic mistake. We were trying to understand, that is, whether we were in a preapocalyptic situation, like the European Jews in the '30s or the last citizens of Pompeii, or whether our situation was merely near-apocalyptic, like that of the cold war inhabitants of New York, London, Washington and, for that matter, Moscow." It doesn't matter. Rachel and their son are soon

gone, while Hans stays behind in New York. The book’s second story line, and perhaps its more resonant one, is about the solace Hans finds in the vibrant subculture of cricket in New York, where he is among the few white men to be found on the hundreds of largely West Indian teams in the city, teams that fan out, in the hazy summertime, across scrabby, lesser-known public parks. O’Neill seems to know all there is to know about this sport. He writes about it with casual grace, describing, for example, the cricket batsman’s array of potential strokes: " the glance, the hook, the cut, the sweep, the cover drive, the pull and all those other offspring of technique conceived to send the cricket ball rolling and rolling, as if by magic, to the far-off edge of the playing field." The cricket these men play is, they realize, not quite the game they fell in love with back in the Antilles. The New York fields are too small, and not well tended. Here is more of O’Neill’s lovely writing about the game: " This degenerate version of the sport — bush cricket, as Chuck more than once dismissed it — inflicts an injury that is aesthetic as much as anything: the American adaptation is devoid of the beauty of cricket played on a lawn of appropriate dimensions, where the white-clad ring of infielders, swanning figures on the vast oval, again and again converge in unison toward the batsman and again and again scatter back to their starting points, a repetition of pulmonary rhythm, as if the field breathed through its luminous visitors." O’Neill cracks open a teeming world on the fringes of Manhattan, and through it we witness the aspirations of countless men who otherwise are invisible to wealthy Manhattanites. (" You want a taste of how it feels to be a black man in this country?" one character asks. " Put on the white clothes of the cricketer. Put on white to feel

black.")Hans's guide through this alternative city is Chuck Ramkissoon, a talky, street-smart Trinidadian who is alive in ways Hans is not. Some of Chuck's business practices are shady (he runs an old-world " weh weh" gambling ring and intimidates his rivals), but he's a Gatsby-like American dreamer as well, a man who hopes to build a world-class cricket arena in Brooklyn. Chuck wants to make a killing on his cricket center, but he also has bigger ambitions: he essentially wants to save the world. " All people, Americans, whoever, are at their most civilized when they're playing cricket," he explains. " What's the first thing that happens when Pakistan and India make peace? They play a cricket match. Cricket is instructive, Hans. It has a moral angle. ... I say, we want to have something in common with Hindus and Muslims? Chuck Ramkissoon is going to make it happen. With the New York Cricket Club, we could start a whole new chapter in U. S. history. Why not?" Some of the best parts of " Netherland" are Chuck's rambling political and cultural monologues, delivered as Hans drives him around the boroughs. (Ostensibly, Chuck is helping Hans prepare for his driving test. Unwittingly, Hans is Chuck's chauffeur, shuttling him to some of his least tasteful business dealings.) The book's few lesser moments occur at the Chelsea Hotel, where a cast of eccentrics — including a man who wears angel's wings and a wedding dress — are asked to carry cheap metaphorical freight. Chuck's vast cricket plans don't pan out, and he vanishes under murky and ultimately grisly circumstances. Did he kill himself? one friend asks. Another responds: " You idiot! Chuck isn't a suicide guy! This guy has more life inside him than 10 people!"" Netherland" is a bit like the wily and

ebullient Chuck Ramkissoon. It has more life inside it than 10 very good novels.

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Now, in " The Emperor’s Children," her splendid new novel, she has produced a formally nimble novel of formidable scale. Set mostly in New York City at the turn of the 21st century, " The Emperor’s Children" is a masterly comedy of manners — an astute and poignant evocation of hobnobbing glitterati in the months before and immediately following Sept. 11." The Emperor’s Children" entwines the stories of Danielle Minkoff, Marina Thwaite and Julius Clarke, who met at Brown University and came to New York in the early 1990’s, giddy with the parochial entitlement of expensively educated young Americans. Each expected to do something important and each, at 30, is still struggling to make something of him- or herself. The most pragmatic of the three (she has Midwestern roots), Danielle has a job as a producer of television documentaries, but her skills exceed the demands of her job, and she finds herself doing stories about liposuction. Julius, a gay half-Vietnamese transplant from a small town near Detroit, is a freelance critic and flibbertigibbet who has failed to live up to his collegiate precocity. He has written no books, has found no steady work and despises the " bourgeois regularity" required to hold down an office job. Marina, a " celebrated" beauty and the daughter of the legendary journalist and liberal opinion-maker Murray Thwaite, has been struggling for years to finish a book that will reveal how children’s fashions reflect " complex and profound truths" about our culture. In their way, these three embody the different methods by

which American privilege is accrued and idly sustained. In the spring of 2001, two destabilizing forces enter their lives: Ludovic Seeley, an Australian magazine editor who holds nothing sacred and plans to start a contrarian publication that will spur a revolution, and Frederick Tubb (known as Bootie), a chubby, bespectacled 20-year-old in possession of a healthy dose of smarts and an unhealthy amount of resentment. A college dropout, and the nephew of Murray Thwaite, Bootie desperately wants to be self-reliant — to carve out a path of true Emersonian independence in a commodified culture that equates individualism with personalized salads. Having fled his drab, well-meaning mother and his dreary home in Watertown, N. Y. — the community where his uncle was also raised — Bootie comes to live in the exquisite Thwaite household in New York. Here he will begin work as Murray’s " amanuensis" (Murray’s word), only to discover that his idealized uncle’s " vaunted authenticity" is not what it seems. (like US?)" The Emperor’s Children" is a novel about the gap between the real and the perceived, and Thwaite père is Messud’s most striking embodiment of that gap. Here is a man who purports to believe in " the voice of the people" and has never met a liberal cause he doesn’t like, yet is mildly repulsed by the young, troubled black client of his wife, Annabel, who works at a nonprofit social service agency. A proponent of trust and democracy, Murray nonetheless conducts extramarital affairs and behaves with the sort of entitlement that comes more easily to male intellectuals than to their wives. Coming home late one night, he steps in cat vomit, and although he’s revolted he barely pauses as he tiptoes down the hall : " It still was not, nor could it ever be, his role to clean up cat sick." That chore is left for his (very

busy) wife to deal with in the morning." The Emperor's Children" is, on its surface, a stingingly observant novel about the facades of the chattering class — with its loves, ambitions and petty betrayals — but it is also, more profoundly, about a wholesale collision of values: those of the truth-telling but hypocritical Murray Thwaite, who epitomizes earnest 1960's liberalism, and the Machiavellian Seeley, who represents postmodernism and its assumption that truth is fungible. The metaphorical pawn in their struggle — a struggle over status — is Bootie Tubb, who is too young to accept that he lives in a world of filigreed self-absorption rather than pragmatic transcendentalism, and who rightly sees Murray's self-satisfaction for what it is. And so Bootie — poor, clueless Bootie — becomes both the novel's antihero and its hero, setting out to expose Murray by writing a tell-all article for Seeley's new magazine. The discovery of his plan polarizes the Thwaite family and their friends, though even Murray has a flash of admiration for Bootie's strict-minded principles; he himself has been worrying over his daughter's woolly-headed lack of accomplishment (" I'd like to write something — articles, a book — that mattered," she tells him) and the fact that she and her friends are " stymied ... by the absence of any limitations against which to rebel." chide" The Emperor's Children" is full of satirical chiding, but it's one of the more delightful — even delicious — forms of such chiding I've encountered. Messud's prose is whorled and Jamesian, of a syntactical complexity that only a confident stylist could handle. Her plot is labyrinthine and deftly orchestrated; without wanting to reveal its twists and turns, I can say that what might seem harsh or overdetermined in the hands of another writer is dealt with unflinchingly but not viciously. For the most

part, the details hit home. As a 30-year-old Ivy League graduate employed by a " contrarian" publication and editing a cultural section like the one Seeley eventually hires Marina to run, I squirmed when the character expresses delight at her new job. It’s " not ditsy cultural," she tells Danielle, " like listings — he wants essays, serious but controversial essays on cultural issues. ... Like, is PEN really a worthwhile institution. ... Or a renegade appraisal of modern art, the New York art scene, is Matthew Barney a fraud, that kind of thing." (I once tried to assign exactly that piece. Touché.)It seems to me, too, that there’s another reason " The Emperor’s Children" is so distinctive: it’s an incisive novel about America that isn’t really an American novel. Messud writes with the amused candor of someone who lacks a native’s attachment. (The American-born daughter of a Canadian mother and an Algerian French father, she grew up in Australia and Canada and was educated at Yale and the University of Cambridge.) And she is ironic about the American myth of the self-made man, studying such characters with a sardonic eye. Even if, now and then, Messud’s critique of American culture seems to miss the mark, the result is at the very least interesting and worthy of debate. One could (and should) question, for example, whether she’s right to lump together McSweeney’s, The Onion and The New York Observer as publications that represent a generation’s lack of aesthetic direction, magazines that " aren’t for anything, just against everything," as Danielle puts it. But the real shock to the system in this comedy of manners isn’t Bootie’s revelations about Murray or Seeley’s paper revolution. It’s another kind of encroachment — Islamic fundamentalism. The novel’s action takes place over the course of nine months, and in the seventh month Sept.

11 arrives, with its own destabilizing force. Startlingly, this element of the novel feels entirely organic, an accurate summation of what did and did not change on that day. If 9/11 didn't bring with it the end of irony — as Graydon Carter, editor of Vanity Fair, proclaimed it would — it did make it hard to launch a magazine like Seeley's, with its bright superficiality; and so he takes off for England. " The revolution," Marina concludes, " belonged to other people now, far away from them, and it was real." Meanwhile, Murray is busily renewed, formulating a studied position on whether America has brought this disaster upon itself. But it is Bootie, in self-imposed exile — scoffing at Murray's pettiness — who comes closest to articulating the book's take on the events of Sept. 11 and the relationship between perception and reality: " It was an awesome, a fearful thought: you could make something inside your head, as huge and devastating as this, and spill it out into reality, make it really happen. You could — for evil, but if for evil, then why not for good, too? — change the world." Among its many pleasures, this novel indisputably reminds us of one truth that cannot be declared fungible: the obdurate reality of the human imagination. " The Emperor's Children" is a penetrating testament to its power.

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The past has been remade entirely by the event that happened, and of course the future also. The future will always be redolent of the ineradicable event, choking on the ashes of its psychic fallout. Which is to say, the period before 9/11 became a victim of its terror, when the future was unmasked as a place where terror lay waiting. All of this thinking belongs to the ideology

of modernism, not because the apocalyptic did not have a significant place in the premodern world—of course it did and does—but because 9/11 and the ensuing " War on Terror" threatened to put the public imagination in a state of permanent anxiety.

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The best poem of this kind in Poetry after 9/11 is Andrea Carter Brown's " The Old Neighborhood," which also deploys the Latin motif of ubi sunt (" where are") to stirring effect: Where is the man who sold the best jelly doughnuts andcoffee you sipped raising a pastel blue Acropolis to yourlips? Twobrothers who arrived in time for lunch hour with hot andcold heroes where Liberty dead ends at the Hudson? and so on, a long enumeration of vanished persons, down to the poem's conclusion: I know none of their names, but I can see their faces clearas I still see everything from that day as I ride away fromthe place we once shared. Where are they now? And how?

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Recent discussions of torture often refer to examples or dilemmas portrayed in the popular television series, 24. Each season covers the unfolding drama of a twenty-four-hour period during which terrorists attempt to cause devastation and mayhem across the United States. The action dramatically races from one crisis to another as the authorities just about manage to avert most, but not all, of the attacks and bombings. Leading the defenders is Jack Bauer, former head of the fictional Counter Terrorist Unit (CTU). Bauer is the classic indestructible hero who always finds a way to save the day.

Part of the success of 24 has been its remarkable timeliness and even prescience of current events. The first season was in production in 2000 and aired on Fox Broadcasting just a month after 11 September 2001. US agents were portrayed using torture on 24 well before photographs were released from Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad. " Enhanced interrogation techniques" were portrayed and discussed in 24 long before they became a commonplace of news analysis and debates about the " war on terror". 24 has captured the Zeitgeist of at least part of the early twenty-first century's reaction to terrorism. Jack Bauer has become a lightning-rod for debate over the war on terrorism. Not only will he find a way to avert disaster, he will resort to any way—including torturing. To date, 24 has shown the torture of known terrorists, suspected terrorists, US agents, a former director of the National Security Agency, the son of the US secretary of defence, Bauer's girlfriend, his brother, and sundry relatives and other citizens suspected of knowing something vital. When it became clear that the US president was behind season five's terrorist plot, the audience was left to wonder whether Bauer would torture even the president. Traditionally, torture has been portrayed in popular media as a tool of psychopaths and megalomaniacal monsters. 1 The terrorists in 24 also engage in torture, and Bauer has been the recipient of horrific torture. Clint Eastwood's Dirty Harry character introduced the possibility that the hero would resort to torture. Now 24 shows numerous examples of the " good guys" resorting to torture, even if some agents remain uncomfortable with the practice. Not only does 24 frequently show the hero using torture, 24 brings torture into living rooms around the world on a grand scale. Broadcast by the major US television

network, Fox, the show is available on 236 channels worldwide, reaching one hundred million viewers. 2 Kiefer Sutherland, who plays Bauer, is the most highly paid television actor in the world and received an Emmy nomination for each of the series' first six seasons. According to the non-profit organisation, Human Rights First, the number of instances of torture on prime-time television has increased dramatically since the 11 September attacks. The Parents' Television Council, a watchdog group, claims " ' 24' is the worst offender on television: the most frequent, most graphic, and the leader in the trend of showing the protagonists using torture." 3Legitimising Torture? The concerns are not just that gruesome scenes of torture and agonised expressions are displayed on the public airwaves. Some are worried that 24 has gone beyond being simply fictional drama to where it influences public opinion and even government and military policy on torture. Proving any causal link would be extremely difficult, leading to allegations and denials of the potential associations and correlations. On the one hand, Kiefer Sutherland maintains that torture on 24 is simply a dramatic device. The scenes are not real; he knows it and everyone else knows it too. " I have not seen an average citizen in the US or anywhere else who has watched an hour of 24 and after watching was struck by this uncontrollable urge to go out and torture someone. It's ludicrous." Any suggestion, he claims, that 24 has influenced public opinion or military policy on torture is an absurd attempt to shift blame onto a fictional character. Speaking almost with contempt, Sutherland says: " If you can't tell the difference between reality and what's happening on a made-up TV show, and you're correlating that back to how to do your job in the real world, that's a

big, big problem." 4Jane Mayer interviewed several people involved in this debate for the New Yorker. 5 Unless otherwise footnoted, the quotations in the following paragraphs come from her article. Rush Limbaugh, a conservative talk-radio host in the United States, dismisses any suggestion that the writers and producers of 24 are trying to influence public opinion on torture: " They're businessmen, and they don't have an agenda … Torture? It's just a television show! Get a grip." However, some of those writers and producers disagree. Joel Surnow, 24's co-creator and executive producer, describes himself as a " right-wing nut job". He claims that 24 captures the mood in America and forces people to look at what threats to national security are actually like. He claims that extreme measures are necessary to deal with these threats adequately, adding, " America wants the war on terror fought by Jack Bauer. He's a patriot." David Nevins was the executive at Fox Television who purchased the 24 pilot in 2000 and continues to have an executive role in its production. He claims that the show's core message " is that extreme measures are sometimes necessary for the greater good. The show doesn't have much patience for the niceties of civil liberties or due process". Torture in 24 has raised concerns among those teaching military interrogation. The dean of the US military academy at West Point, Brigadier-General Patrick Finnegan, met the 24 team in 2006. He and three of the United States' most experienced military and FBI interrogators asked the producers to change the way they portray torture. Interviewed by Mayer, Finnegan said the show was having " a toxic effect" on real American soldiers, interfering with training and causing them to be more accepting of unethical and illegal behaviour. Finnegan claimed it was increasingly difficult

to convince cadets that America should respect international law and human rights, even when terrorists don't. On interrogation issues, support for torture was traced back to 24, with cadets pointing out that although " torture may cause Jack Bauer some angst, it is always the patriotic thing to do". Other military law professors interviewed by Mayer claimed similar perspectives among the officers they teach. Lieutenant-Colonel Diane Beaver, a staff judge advocate, revealed how 24 became real life at the US prison camp at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Beaver wrote the legal opinion which gave the go-ahead for " aggressive interrogation techniques" at Guantanamo. In the absence of formal guidance on interrogation techniques from the Pentagon, 24 was influential during brainstorming meetings at Guantanamo in September 2002. Beaver claims many people at Guantanamo were fans of Jack Bauer, who gave them lots of ideas for interrogations. The show contributed to an atmosphere in which people were encouraged to go beyond what they otherwise might have done. Claims are also made that 24 has influenced high-ranking US policymakers. Limbaugh organised a meeting between Surnow and US Supreme Court justice Clarence Thomas, which led to a symposium in Washington, D. C., in 2007. The event was entitled: " ' 24' and America's Image in Fighting Terrorism: Fact, Fiction, or Does It Matter?" One of the participants was Michael Cherthoff, US secretary of homeland security from 2005 until 2009. He praised the way the show depicts the war on terrorism, stating: " Frankly, it reflects real life." US Supreme Court justice Antonin Scalia defends the use of torture in certain interrogation situations. At a conference in 2007, a Canadian judge noted, " Thankfully, security agencies in all our countries do

not subscribe to the mantra ‘ What would Jack Bauer do?’ " Scalia retorted, " Jack Bauer saved Los Angeles … He saved hundreds of thousands of lives … Are you going to convict Jack Bauer? Say that criminal law is against him? ‘ You have the right to a jury trial?’ Is any jury going to convict Jack Bauer? I don't think so." 7Another talk-radio host, Laura Ingraham, claimed on Fox News that the popularity of 24 demonstrated American support for the use of enhanced interrogation techniques. " The average American out there loves the show 24. OK? They love Jack Bauer. They love 24. In my mind that’s [as] close to a national referendum that it’s OK to use tough tactics against high-level Al Qaeda operatives as we’re going to get." Fiction and EthicsUsing fiction to examine ethical issues is one thing; it is quite another to claim that the popularity of those narratives reflects widespread agreement with all they portray. Philosophy and ethics have used cases and thought experiments to teach and think through ethical decision-making. Parables and stories are used similarly in religion and popular culture. Few would argue that fairy tales promote a view that giants and elves actually exist. That is not the purpose of fiction. Some fiction provides little more than entertainment, but it can also convey values and ethical ideals. The Grimm brothers’ fairy tale, The Frog Prince, or a modern equivalent like Shrek, can teach the importance of not judging people by their external appearances. Accepting narrative’s influence on ethics has nothing to do with whether one believes frogs can turn into princes or that ogres live in the woods. But being fiction does not mean it has no ethical influence, as Kiefer Sutherland appears to believe. Quite the contrary, its fictional nature may give it a more powerful impact. The power of narrative lies in its capacity to capture our

emotions and imaginations, and cause us to reflect on our values and beliefs. Sometimes exposure to narratives is not accompanied by critical reflection. Hence, the concern that regular exposure to certain narratives can lead people to accept uncritically the values portrayed. Thus, fears that 24 promotes torture fit into broader debates over whether frequent exposure to violence and sexuality in films and computer games influences individuals and their beliefs. Proving whether or to what extent 24 has affected policy or public opinion on torture will not be possible. We can examine what 24 portrays about torture. Some claim that 24 straightforwardly asserts that torture is a necessary tool in the " war on terror". The rest of this article will seek to show that this is an overly simplistic view, and that 24 presents a more complicated perspective. This is more clearly the case in season seven, which aired in 2009. Whether this more nuanced stance was in response to the military and public criticism noted earlier is uncertain. What quickly became apparent from the start of season seven was that a central theme was the ethics of torture. Both sides of the issue were frequently presented throughout the season. In the following sections, quotations from the show will be referenced according to the time during the show's twenty-four hours when the statements were made.

Season Seven

The day begins at 8: 00 am with Jack Bauer testifying before a Senate sub-committee chaired by Senator Blaine Mayer. Bauer admits he tortured Ibraham Hadad, who was planning to attack a bus with forty-five innocent people on board. He did what he " deemed necessary to protect innocent

lives" (08: 03). The senator replies with a common objection to torture: " So basically, what you are saying Mr Bauer, is that the ends justify the means and that you are above the law?" Jack accepts the first point, but rejects the second point. He is willing to pay the penalty for breaking the law and allow a jury to decide what price he must pay. Bauer does not want to be seen as a criminal who breaks the law and tries to get away with it. He believes that in certain circumstances, the law must be broken. But he thinks the public are entitled to know how agents like him operate. Later (09: 24), he tells an FBI agent, " It’s better that everything comes out in the open. We have done so many secret things over the years in the name of protecting this country, we’ve created two worlds: ours and the people we promised to protect. They deserve to know the truth and they can decide how far they want to let us go." Before the Senate hearing goes further, Bauer is taken by FBI agent Renee Walker to assist with an ongoing investigation. As season seven progresses, Walker comes to accept Bauer’s methods. At first she is willing to let Bauer intimidate Schector, an informant with a shady background. She warns Bauer that he can threaten Schector, but cannot lay a hand on him (08: 50). When verbal threats accomplish nothing, Bauer asks what he should do. Walker replies, " Do whatever it takes." Bauer prepares to stab Schector in the head, but as he starts to talk, he is killed by a sniper, later identified as Tanner. Walker becomes more willing to torture over the objections of her boss, Larry Moss. He emphasises the incompatibility of torture and law enforcement agencies, stating, for example (08: 44): " Renee, we are the FBI not CTU. We honour the law, even when it’s not convenient." Later on (15: 26), he tells Bauer: " Jack! The rules are what

make us better." Bauer quips back, " Not today." Tony Almeida is a former CTU agent working both sides of the conflict in season seven. When he is thought to be working for the terrorists and being interrogated legally, he discloses no information. Walker suggests they try something more forceful (10: 36): " There are methods of coercion that we haven't even considered: pharmaceutical …" Moss interrupts her: " The argument is crazy. It's illegal. And it's over." An hour later (11: 49), Walker is trying to get information from Tanner, the sniper from earlier who was shot while being apprehended. She shoves her gun into his wound, but then has second thoughts. Tanner snickers, so she grabs the air tubes on his ventilator. He protests, " You can't do this. You're FBI. This is illegal. I have rights." She pinches off his air supply, and a few minutes later walks out of his hospital room with information about a planned kidnapping. Later, Agent Walker teams up with Bauer to get information from Vossler, a rogue secret service agent who helped kidnap the president's husband. Over Moss's objections (15: 23), Walker holds Vossler's wife and son hostage while Bauer demands that Vossler tell them what he knows. They convince Vossler that Walker will kill his family if he doesn't co-operate. He does, but Walker is deeply disturbed. The transition into Jack's world is clearly not an easy one. As the season ends, she is considering whether to torture Alan Wilson, a captured terrorist ring-leader. Another FBI agent pleads with her (07: 56), " Please don't do this. You've done your job. You arrested him. Let the courts take it from here. Stop this now before it's too late. Don't throw away your career. This is absolutely insane. Larry would not have wanted this. Don't dishonour his

death like this." Her boss, Larry Moss, had earlier been killed in the line of duty, but his arguments live on.

The Rule of Law

In season seven, opposition to torture is part of a broader emphasis on the importance of the rule of law, both for individuals and society. In this season, strong characters oppose torture, such as Moss, who gives his life combating the terrorists. Another strong character on this side is the US president, Allison Taylor. She campaigned on a number of fundamental principles: not to negotiate with terrorists (11: 05), the banning of torture and the reform of the intelligence agencies (18: 30). However, as season seven develops, she acknowledges to Senator Mayer that " things haven't appeared as black and white as they once did" (18: 30). Nonetheless, her resolve remains firm. Having decided to commit US troops to remove General Juma, the ruthless dictator of the fictional Sangala, she tells the Joint Chiefs of Staff (13: 34): When I took the oath of office I swore to myself and to the American people that this country would continue to be a force for good in this world. We are a nation founded on ideals, and those ideals are being challenged today. Now, how we respond will not only define this administration, but an entire generation. And not just Americans, but Sangalans and anyone else who looks to us for guidance and strength. I won't fail them. This is the basis of the " moral high ground argument" used against torture. Using torture undermines the moral credibility of an individual or nation. The underlying basis of the US Army's approach to interrogation, from President Abraham Lincoln to the current field manual, FM 34-52, is that " military necessity

does not admit of cruelty" or torture. 9 The same perspective is upheld by the Geneva Conventions and other international treaties outlawing torture. 24 shows how taking the moral high ground can influence international politics. As President Taylor prepares to send US troops into Sangala, she wants assurances that General Juma will not be killed in a way that perpetuates the cycle of violence. She tells the democratically elected president, Mr Matobo (09: 21), " Then punish him [Juma] according to the rule of law. That’s the only way democracy will work in Sangala: if no one is treated outside the law, not even Juma." The same argument is made of torture. As a violent technique, it promotes further violence. As an illegal practice, it undermines the rule of law and the moral authority of those who use it. At another point (18: 30), Senator Mayer warns President Taylor that by excusing Bauer from testifying before his Senate committee, she would be sending a dangerous message that " under certain circumstances you believe his methods are acceptable … Pardon Jack Bauer and you’re telling every interrogator in the field that it’s open season again". When America did this before, it led to " a national tragedy". The president agrees: " It was a tragedy. I still believe that." This appears to be a thinly veiled condemnation of recent historical events involving torture. Upholding the law is not the easy option, as this season demonstrates. Jonas Hodges owns a weapons manufacturing company and runs a private army of mercenaries. He was one of the ring-leaders behind the terrorist plots. After he is captured, President Taylor considers ordering his torture, but decides she must uphold the law. Her principles are later tested more personally. It is discovered that her own daughter ordered Hodges’ eventual assassination.

President Taylor's family beg her to cover it up, but she declares, " I can't just disregard the law." In the end (07: 52), she decides: " I have a sworn duty to enforce the Constitution. Failing to uphold that oath would be the worst kind of hypocrisy … as president, this is what I have to do. No matter how much it breaks my heart." She, like Bauer, must accept the consequences of her actions. Upholding the law will break her heart and possibly cause her to lose her family. By the end of the season, Bauer himself seems persuaded that the law must be upheld. When Alan Wilson, the high-ranking conspirator, refuses to talk, Agent Walker discusses with Bauer the need to do something, obviously considering torture (07: 29). Bauer says, " I've been wrestling with this my whole life. I see fifteen people held hostage on a bus; everything else goes out the window. I'll do whatever it takes to save them; and I mean whatever it takes." But then he notes that Walker works for the FBI, unlike him. " You took an oath. You made a promise to uphold the law." He concludes: " These laws were written by much smarter men than me. And in the end I know that these laws have to be more important than the fifteen people in the bus. I know that's right. In my mind I know that's right. But I just don't think my heart could ever have lived with that."

The Role of Emotions

Bauer here points to a core theme running through season seven: the balance between thinking and emotion in ethics. Until very recently, many held that ethics was a rational activity which required keeping emotion at bay. At best, emotions were a distraction from clear thinking; at worst, they

promoted irrational behaviour. More recently, renewed attention has been given to the role of emotion in ethics. Emotions are acknowledged to be central to how we perceive ethical dilemmas and how we are motivated to act upon our ethical beliefs. Ethics is now acknowledged to involve a complex interplay between thinking and emotion. In addition, narratives, including television dramas and films, play an important role in helping us examine and reflect on ethical problems and situations. 10Traditional torture narratives have been more straightforward. In films like Marathon Man, torture is repulsive and difficult to watch. The torturer, Dr Szell in this case, is clearly sadistic and immoral. In 24 and more recent torture narratives, things are more complex. What are we to make of the hero who tortures? The impact can therefore be more complex, as when US Army cadets claim that if their hero, Jack, tortures people, it can't be that bad. Herein lies one of the dangers in how 24 portrays torture. The torture scenes usually avoid the shocking, grotesque images of some films. However, in doing so, they also avoid the reality of how repulsive torture actually is. In previous seasons, innocent people are tortured and then return to life as usual. The most ridiculous example occurs in season five when Bauer interrogates his girlfriend, Audrey. CTU believes she has information, so he grabs her by the throat, yelling and screaming at her to stop lying. She is then handed over to the official CTU torturer and tortured. When they discover that she was telling the truth all along, she and Bauer hug and kiss and their relationship goes back to normal. (es amtkicebs ro normal ari torture ra)The reality is that torture is physically and psychologically destructive for those on whom it is inflicted. Accounts of actual torture show it to be more horrific and

repulsive than what we see in 24. While some scenes are gruesome, they are sanitised for living-room consumption. By hiding scenes that would elicit stronger emotional reactions against torture, 24 promotes the lie that torture is not that bad. Accurate portrayals of torture reveal that it is barbaric and inhumane, akin to rape. That is why it has been called " the most profound violation possible of the dignity of a human being". 11Actual accounts of torture note also that torturers themselves are psychologically destroyed through torturing. This contrasts with how 24 portrays torturers, as " kindly torturers rather than tyrants". 12 Philosopher Slavoj Zizek claims that one of the ideological lies of 24 is that agents like Bauer " are warm human beings —loving, caught in the emotional dilemmas of ordinary people". 13 In contrast, Joe Navarro, a leading FBI interrogator told Jane Mayer, " Only a psychopath can torture and be unaffected. You don’t want people like that in your organization. They are untrustworthy, and tend to have grotesque other problems." Season seven does at least address some of the emotional impact torture has on torturers. After Walker tortures Tanner and threatens to kill Vossler’s wife and son, Agent Moss tells her (16: 10): " I’m scared of what is happening to you. You put these people through hell and it doesn’t bother you." She replies, " I didn’t say that it didn’t bother me. I said that it worked. Of course it bothers me. I see that woman’s face. See her child staring at me with such … She had no idea her husband was a killer, a traitor to his country. And she looked at me as if I was the monster." She is shown looking deeply at herself in a mirror, possibly reflecting on who she is becoming. At the beginning of the season (08: 03), Bauer tells Senator Mayer that he has no regrets about what he has done during his career. Later (17:

42), he tells him: " Every day I regret looking into the eyes of men, women and children knowing that at any moment their lives might be deemed expendable in an effort to protect the greater good. I regret every decision or mistake I might have made that resulted in the loss of a single innocent life." By the end of the season (07: 45), as he lies seemingly dying, he is deeply conflicted. " I made so many mistakes. And I always thought I would have the time to correct them." (Presumably in season eight we will learn how Bauer defies death and whether he finds relief from his regrets.)However, what seems important in 24 is whether the agents feel bad when their questionable decisions don't have good outcomes. For example, a waitress named Marika was dating one of the terrorists, Dubaku. After Walker and Bauer pointed out Dubaku's true identity, Marika agreed to help them capture him, even though she had no training. She was killed during a car chase, leading Walker to get angry with Bauer (17: 46). " I want to know that you feel something. I want to know that you feel the same sort of pain that I do." She slaps his face. " Do you feel that?" Another slap. " Do you feel that?" Bauer replies: " You're going to be alright. It's gonna take a while but you will learn to live with it." As the season's final episode shows, however, it is questionable whether Bauer has learned to live with his actions. Ruthlessness changes people. Being tortured and conducting torture has hugely detrimental effects on people. The father of a Greek military torturer said at his actual trial, " I had a good boy, everybody said so. Can you tell me who turned my son into a torturer and destroyed him and my family psychologically?" 1424 fails to show this side of torture and therefore grossly distorts the perspective the general public is given on torture.

Exaggerating Torture’s EfficacyAnother inaccuracy in 24 is the frequency with which it shows torture working successfully. Experienced interrogators hold that aggressive interrogation rarely works. Tony Lagouranis was a US Army interrogator in Iraq who told Jane Mayer that soldiers there would imitate what they saw on 24. He would intervene because, " In Iraq, I never saw pain produce intelligence." Rather, " physical pain can strengthen the resolve to clam up." Several former military and FBI interrogators have stated that the way torture is portrayed in 24 and other recent shows and films is completely unrealistic. Executive producers from 24 and another highly successful television series, Lost, stated in a documentary filmed by Human Rights First that their scenes were invented on set and are divorced from reality. The fact that anyone takes them as realistic has caused the producers to realise that they need to present torture in a more responsible way. 15In contrast to previous seasons, when 24 declared that everyone had his or her breaking point, season seven notes that some people can resist torture. We are told that military and counter-terrorist training has given Vossler and Almeida the ability to withstand torture. When Agent Moss discovers that Walker tortured Tanner (12: 04), he reminds her that information obtained that way " may not even be valid. You know as well as I do: coercive interrogation is unreliable". When she says that Tanner was not lying, he replies: " You know that? How do you know he wasn’t just telling you what you wanted to hear?" Such claims are made frequently by those experienced with interrogation in the field. In 24, President Taylor points to the ultimate irony (18: 36): " Torture was originally intended to force false confessions. Now we use it to try and find the truth." While torture

sometimes produces useful information, it undermines legitimate interrogation and, more importantly, trust-building. Lagouranis told Jane Mayer that military and FBI experience shows that the best way to gather intelligence is through rapport-building—" the slow process of winning over informants"—and non violent ruses that take suspects by surprise. In season seven, the terrorists pull off such a ruse (23: 05). Knowing that Tony Almeida would not break under torture, Jonas Hodges' right-hand man tricks him into thinking he will help the FBI. The plan works to lure the FBI into a trap which buys Hodges valuable time. In many instances, basic police work and building trust between various parties produces good intelligence more effectively than torture, and upholds the rule of law designed to protect those same military and police personnel. Moral Equivalence? The basic ethical reasoning behind the justification for torture is that the ends justify the means. National security sometimes requires torturing those believed to have crucial information. The rights of a few must occasionally be dismissed for the sake of the many. If this is true, the means are amoral. Season seven reveals a fundamental problem with such reasoning. Throughout, the terrorists and Bauer use similar tactics to achieve their ends. Both sides beat and torture people. Commonly in this season, someone is kidnapped to force a family member to co-operate. The terrorists kidnap the president's husband and threaten to kill him unless she co-operates. Agent Walker threatens to kill Vossler's wife and son unless Vossler co-operates with Bauer. If the ends justify the means, Bauer must have different ends compared to the terrorists to avoid being seen as equally unethical. But as we get to the climax of the season, we see the fallacy in this reasoning.

While being interrogated by Bauer, Jonas Hodges claims the two of them are the same. Both should be regarded as heroes, not criminals. Hodges says they both have the same ends: they both follow their instinct to protect their country. Hodges justifies his terrorist attacks on the United States (03: 27) with the same utilitarian argument Bauer uses: " Yes, a few innocent lives would be lost but only to save the greater number. Having the courage to make those hard choices gives us a lot in common, Mr Bauer." Emotionally, Hodges expresses regrets similar to Bauer’s (21: 07): I get no pleasure from the knowledge that people will die at our hands. One single soul, the loss of one soul, is tragic to me, let alone the numbers we are talking about. But do not forget, that every war worth fighting involves collateral damage. And what we’re doing is fundamentally and absolutely necessary. Bauer vehemently rejects this association and insists he has nothing in common with Hodges. Yet Bauer has dismissed the rights of the few in order to save the lives of the many. He has threatened the innocent to get terrorists to co-operate with him. He risked an innocent person’s life " to protect the hundreds if not thousands of innocent lives" (17: 46). Hodges shows that Bauer’s utilitarian ethic can be used to justify almost anything—including crashing commercial aeroplanes and releasing a biological weapon. The Necessity DefenceThe measures Jack Bauer takes are portrayed in 24 as dictated by " necessity". Actions are not right or wrong, but " necessary". Bauer defends his use of torture by saying (08: 03) that he does " what I deemed necessary to protect innocent lives". He defends the decision to involve Marika, which ended in her death, by saying (17: 46): " What we did wasn’t wrong, it was necessary." The sense is that one particular action is

always necessary, but part of the problem is that it is always what seems necessary to Jack. Such decision-making takes away the importance of explaining why one approach is more ethical than another. Ironically, it also takes away moral responsibility. The use of torture becomes " necessary", just as 2 + 2 is necessarily 4. No debate, no justification needed. Unlike the psychopath, Jack does not want to torture or use people as pawns. But he has to. Once we see him weighed down by regret and sadness, we can excuse him. Unlike the terrorist, he didn’t really choose this path. However, Hodges reveals the fallacy in this reasoning. A related problem is an emphasis on black-and-white thinking. Season seven shows it on both sides. Bauer tells President Taylor that she must let him pursue the terrorists (15: 02): " Madam President, you don’t have another choice." Bauer argues with the FBI agents over how to rescue President Taylor’s husband (15: 23): " You’ve got one of two choices. Now you can either phone the president and explain to her that your conscience won’t allow you to do what is necessary to save him. Or you can simply do what is necessary. Pick one." After Marika is killed, Bauer claims they had no choice over whether to use her or not. As the president considers whether to give Hodges a pardon for his information, her chief of staff declares (18: 43): " With coercive methods off the table, it’s our only option." But often there is another option, one that can achieve the same ends but by legal means. Success is not guaranteed, but neither is it with torture. Actual interrogators favour the use of rapport-building or non violent ruses. Throughout season seven, rational argument and basic police work produce results. Senator Mayer persuades Bauer (21: 42) " to start trusting the institutions that you sacrificed so much to protect". One of the

tragic moments of the season then occurs as Senator Mayer is murdered, leaving Bauer to resort to his usual tactics. Shortly afterwards, Bauer and Almeida enlist the help of a port authority security guard whom the terrorists bribed to help them unwittingly. Bauer promises to protect him as he goes to meet the terrorists. But when they prepare to kill him, Almeida says (22: 31): " Forget about him, Jack. He was dead the minute he stepped out that door. You and I both know that." Bauer is torn between his promise and the mission. Almeida continues: " Don’t break your own rules. You may save one man. But what about the thousands of people who could die in a biological attack?" In Bauer’s system, necessity requires that one man be sacrificed for the many. He accepts that for himself. But now he wavers. Will he uphold his promise to the security guard, or be led by necessity? He discovers that he does have a choice. He finds another option which allows him to rescue the guard and still accomplish his mission. Later (23: 32), Walker tells him, " You did the right thing." In spite of what they may say or do, the " good guys" in 24 still know that the means matter. The Ticking BombAccording to Jane Mayer, the appeal of 24 " lies less in its violence than in its giddily literal rendering of a classic thriller trope: the ‘ ticking time bomb’ plot". I have examined the ethical and philosophical problems with the ticking-bomb argument elsewhere. 16 Here, I will comment on its use in 24 to create a heightened sense of urgency. The regularly displayed ticking clock reminds viewers that valuable time is passing—even during commercial breaks. Split screens are used to show that the action continues on many fronts. Even while the authorities plan and debate, the terrorist plot unfolds and progresses. Time is of the essence, and the moral wrangling is delaying the

inevitable: the bomb is about to go off, and someone in custody has vital information. The way the show engages one's emotions is ethically significant. " Such a sense of urgency has an ethical dimension. The pressure of events is so overbearing, the stakes so high, that they necessitate a kind of suspension of ordinary moral concerns." 17 The sense of urgency suggests that the protagonists don't have a choice. This means torture is necessary. The assumption is that Jack's gut reaction will lead to the right decision. He sometimes gets it right, but he also gets it wrong. Circumstantial evidence linked Vossler to the terrorists, so they threatened his family and got crucial information. But circumstantial evidence also led Jack to burst into Marika's apartment, threatening those inside who turned out to be innocent. He judged Almeida's loyalties wrongly over and over throughout the season. Emotions alone are not good ethical guides. What makes 24 so insidiously dangerous is its infusion with ticking-bomb scenarios. These drag the viewer along with a sense of urgency and the necessity of stopping the bad guys at all costs. Just as advertising uses sight, sound and all our senses to suggest we buy this or that, 24 uses similar means of persuasion. It elicits emotional reactions to suggest that although what we see may or may not be ethical, it is necessary. Lieutenant-Colonel Beaver noted that 24 contributed to an atmosphere in Guantanamo where interrogators believed they were at the battlefront, urgently needing to make difficult but necessary decisions. 18 In such situations, rules and calm reasoning get thrown out the window. Yet it is in the midst of turmoil and uncertainty that rules and principles are crucial to provide reasoned justification for ethical decisions. The emotional aspects are important, and must be considered, but not in isolation from careful

thinking. ConclusionThe beginning point of justice must be that all humans are entitled to be treated humanely and with respect. That implies no one should be tortured, even enemies in war. Lieutenant-Colonel Beaver stated that a key moment in the justification of aggressive interrogation techniques at Guantanamo was the removal of the protections afforded under the Geneva Conventions. Without those rights, few constraints remained on interrogation techniques. Each technique was justified " so long as the force used could plausibly have been thought necessary in a particular situation to achieve a legitimate government objective, and it was not applied maliciously or sadistically for the very purpose of causing harm". 19This comes remarkably close to Bauer’s justification for torture—and Hodges’ justification for terrorism. Bauer warns that once agents start down the road of harsh interrogation, they are on a steep and slippery slope. He reminds Walker (07: 29) that there is an important legal line in interrogation: " You cross that line, it always starts off with a small step. Before you know it you’re running as fast as you can in the wrong direction just to justify what you started in the first place." Reports from Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib follow a long history of similar instances of harsh interrogation getting out of control. Although the rational arguments against torture are presented in 24, especially in season seven, they tend to be swept away in a torrent of cinematic emotion and exciting action. A fundamental problem with Bauer’s position, which is predominant in 24, is that people can be treated as assets and pawn in the war on terror. When he describes Marika as such (17: 03), even Walker reacts: " She’s not an asset, Jack. She’s a human being." Torture undermines that perspective. It is an extreme way of treating

someone as an asset, just a source of information. To torture people is to deny them their fundamental status as a human being with dignity. They become little more than " assets" or " collateral damage", a view that diminishes the dignity of every person.