

# BATMAN AND SOCIETY



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## CONTENTS

**INTRODUCTION**

**THE MAKINGS OF THE BATMAN**

**THE AMERICAN PARALLEL**

**A PINCH OF SALT**

**REFERENCES**

**APPENDIX**



# INTRODUCTION

'Superhero': a word that forms an image of itself in the mind of each and every child, be it in the form of a costumed hero with superpowers or a dark silhouette which always appears to save the day or a more realistic real life figure like a brave mother or father. A child's notions of a hero and a villain convert into his fantasies and nightmares respectively, which in turn form a sizeable portion of his definitions of right and wrong. This is so because these fantasies, courtesy of their being the first ones to be imprinted upon a moldable mind, are the ones which stick, no matter how distant they are from reality. And they do convert into real life ethics, one way or another. And these ethics are interesting to observe if one goes from one fantasy and keeps going above to see a plethora of these fantasies from a birds' eye perspective. Sigrid Jones(2006) argues that children are not merely consumers of media texts (comics) and they also actively participate in evolution of the text and in the process they draw upon various elements from the text to create their own meanings.



Figure 1 [1]

This is the primary motivation of this article: to observe a common superhero figure, i.e. Batman, from the perspective of his comic's impact on morality and ultimately on society as a whole. Furthermore, the article expands on apparent parallelisms that exist between the modern American society and Batman. The first assumption that we are going to work with is the fact that superheroes do translate into fantasies, and from there, into ethics [A1]. The next level of the project corresponds to the choice of the superhero, Batman in this case, as the focal point, because of this comic having the obvious presence of an alternate means of societal governance, as well as poignant comments on established institutions like American democracy, in many of its artworks; and also because of the variety of antagonists, in terms of their motivations and their modi operandi. From there on, we move to the choice of medium (comics and movies), as comics are not only the origin of Batman, but also have a large repository of art available, along with a humongous reach among the population [A2].

The approach that has been followed in the course of this project is to understand the society that we live in, in context of some particular elements such as heroes, myths, archetypes and folklore. From there, the study moves to analyze the impact of visual art on such elements, with the focus moving to comics in the subsequent section. With the



appropriate context in place, the study then focusses on Batman as a hero and some fascinating possible parallels that exist in our real life world with the masked crusader. As a case-in-point, the parallel of Batman with the United States of America has been incorporated in the document. The existence of such a parallel leaves the reader with quite a lot of food for thought, when it comes to their perception of Batman.

Included with the report is a survey which substantiates the ideas proposed in this article. The idea of the survey was not to validate the assertions but only as a check for the existence and the strength of some common public perceptions regarding Batman, which are somewhat linked with. The responses of the survey have been taken from a diverse group with respect to nationality, occupation and field of study of the participants. With regard to the survey, it is important to note that the design and compilation was an informal part of the project, and the results of this exercise have not been used as a starting point in the project, but merely as substantiating entries to proposed premises. Also, no new ideas found their way from the survey into the proposition offered by the project.

## SOCIETY

For the purpose of this project, it is a prerequisite to have a clear understanding of the society that we live in. Some elements which are ubiquitous across a variety of cultures are archetypes, folklore, heroes, icons and myths. For the convenience of the reader, it is essential to define each of these societal instruments, so that to avoid any misinterpretations of the same. An icon is defined as a social marker that taps into the general western values. They exist in a state that is free of both history and personality and are predominantly visual images that can only express values and not opinions [2]. Carl Jung defined an archetype as “an inherited memory represented in the mind by a universal symbol and observed in dreams and myths” [3] Folklore comprises of the traditional beliefs, customs, and stories of a community, passed through the generations by word of mouth. Folktales, as the name implies, are tales from the folk, the masses. Legends about Paul Bunyan or Abraham Lincoln begin as spontaneous stories in an oral tradition that are changed and embellished before they are ever put into print form. Such stories are controlled by the popular consciousness rather than any dominant cultural voice. A myth is a traditional story, esp. one concerning the early history of a people or explaining some natural or social phenomenon, and typically involving supernatural beings or events. Myths serve as a type of rite of passage, teaching the dos and don’ts of a particular group and acting as social cement, a common bond of knowledge and understanding within the group [4]. In his book titled the ‘The Hero With A Thousand Faces’, Joseph Campbell discuss the definition of a hero, and outlines the various phases of a hero’s life. These phases are mentioned below in a sequential manner.

The hero is introduced in his ordinary world, where he receives the call to adventure. He is reluctant at first but is encouraged by the wise old man or woman to cross the first threshold, where he encounters tests and helpers. He reaches the innermost cave, where he endures the supreme ordeal. He seizes the sword or the treasure and is pursued on the road back to his world. He is resurrected and transformed by his experience. He returns to his ordinary world with a treasure, boon, or elixir to benefit his world.

Every society works with these checks in place, for a member of the society must be shown the ideal way of life, so that the society as a whole has something to strive for. Instruments like myths, archetypes, heroes, icons and folklore transcend all cultures, for they help a man identify his place in it. Building, or rather moulding the lives of the society’s





members is an integral role played by such instruments. In times of crisis, such stories are told and retold in order to enable the society to hold on to its morals. These instruments are basically a constantly learning source which enshrines the ideal (from the society's perspective) code of conduct. Moreover, they help a man understand the world and his place in it, and respond to eternal questions, such as the origin and the existence of evil. These also provide a system of wish fulfilment, in the sense that they provide a space to each and every member of the society, a space where multiple checkpoints of catharsis and or parallelism exist. So if a hero undergoes a tragedy and rises to success, this idea can be subject to a plethora of mappings of an even bigger plethora of tragedies present in the lives of the people. These mappings also act as a means for the people of the society to hold on to hope.

## COMICS AND VISUAL ART

Most of us have been in constant touch with some or the other form of visual art, from something as recent as graphic novels to the scriptures found in the *Bhimbetka* rock shelters. These pieces of art have played a set of diverse and key roles inside the respective societies, which include the showcasing and protection of cultures, thoughts and ideas, and influencing and shaping religions as we now know them. Not only can art be appreciated over the continuous stretch of human existence, at any given time as well, art functions as a source of catharsis for the citizens of the society (Aristotle) and thus contributes to the healthy functioning of the state.

Spread across our history are various examples where certain stories have adapted to reflect the cultures and ideologies of particular factions of the society. These adaptations enable this art to transcend time, as the notions of right and wrong, just and unjust, ethical and antithetical vary, and sometimes drastically so, with respect to time. But art perseveres by means of its ability to get moulded into different forms [Fig.2]. We retell the story to make it more relatable to our new circumstances. To cite some famous examples in this regard, Prometheus, Thor, Marduk, Perseus, Oedipus, Beowulf, all have a commonality attributed to them, and yet each of them finds a place in the history of mankind at different places and times. They were cultural heroes who explained a peculiar truth. Often their themes correspond with the "life, death, and rebirth" cycle, which is also explored in the Batman's Nolan trilogy (Begins, Falls, Rises).



Fig. 2 Molding of art shown by 6 differing versions of the same tale: Adam & Eve.

From left to right, Adam and Eve depicted in a mural in Abreha wa Atsbeha Church, Ethiopia; Depiction of the Fall in Kunsthalle Hamburg, by Master Bertram; Adam & Eve, illuminated manuscript circa 950, Escorial Beatus; Early Christian depiction of Adam and Eve in the Catacombs of Marcellinus and Peter; Adam and Eve from a copy of the Falnama (Book of Omens) ascribed to Ja'far al-Sadiq, ca. 1550, Safavid dynasty, Iran.[5]



From the assortment of visual art forms that are known to us, comics were chosen as the field of study due to certain very fundamental and dazzling features exuded by this art form. These drivers are explained in a sequential manner. As a precursor to the argument, it is essential to point out that panels and sketches are intrinsic features of comics. The starting point in the argument will be the fact that comics encourage an unparalleled amount of participation from the side of the reader. All art forms allow certain extents to which the observer can immerse their self into the art and vice versa. Comics offer an almost uncanny ease of readability to the average user, courtesy of its pictorial nature, which unlike language, requires no additional skill or expertise on the part of the reader. Another driver at play is the ease with which the panels inside a comic book offer closure to the user. This is best exemplified by the panel shown below, where the question "Who is the murderer?"[Fig.3] showcases the ease in which a user is able to slide between the panels and make their own sequential links, even for the information that is hitherto unknown.



Figure 3 'Who is the Murderer?' [1]

The last and perhaps the most important feature of comics is the attributed universality. Imagine a typical face in a comic book, with two dots as eyes, a couple of lines as the mouth and the nose and a circular boundary. Such pictorial representations represent an image which is as far away from reality as possible, and is yet relatable to almost everyone [Fig.4]. In contrast to the characters, the backgrounds are more than often more realistic and detailed. A point to note here is the level of detailing that is visible in the backgrounds in the Batman Year One [Fig.5], as compared to the characters of the comic. Readers are thus able to relate to the characters in comics with much comfort, and when each reader is given this ability, the art form collectively acquires an unmatched universality. Comics are thus able to impact users much more than any form of realist art.

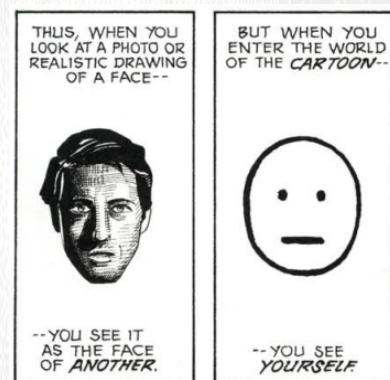


Fig. 4 Pictorial Abstraction [1]



Even in today's world, we see videos, memes and other pictorial forms of art gaining more and more traction each day. This intuition is coupled with studies that have been performed on the comparison of knowledge transfer by pictorial and textual art by the California government, with the results being biased towards the pictorial representation. It further advocates that participation and interaction with the visual arts broadens a child's point of view and experiences in the world. [7]

Fig. 5 Batman: Year One



## THE MAKINGS OF THE BATMAN

Batman's story chronologically initiates from the brutal murder of Bruce Wayne's parents in his childhood. The revenge that is bottled up inside that boy's mind ultimately transforms into a crusade against crime in the city of Gotham. Batman can be mapped onto the aforementioned societal instruments of myth, archetype, icon and hero. However, these mappings will all exhibit varying strengths. The instance of the mapping on Joseph Campbell's definition of a hero [8] is provided below:

*THE ORDINARY WORLD. The hero, uneasy, uncomfortable or unaware, is introduced sympathetically so the audience can identify with the situation or dilemma. The hero is shown against a background of environment, heredity, and personal history. Some kind of polarity in the hero's life is pulling in different directions and causing stress.*

*THE CALL TO ADVENTURE. Something shakes up the situation, either from external pressures or from something rising up from deep within, so the hero must face the beginnings of change.*

*REFUSAL OF THE CALL. The hero feels the fear of the unknown and tries to turn away from the adventure, however briefly. Alternately, another character may express the uncertainty and danger ahead.[8]*

Bruce Wayne belongs to a rich family, and is shown as an innocent boy bestowed with the fortune of loving and caring parents. The murder of his parents shakes up the situation and leaves a scar on young Bruce's mind and soul. He leaves Gotham in pursuit of the understanding of the criminal mind.

*MEETING WITH THE MENTOR. The hero comes across a seasoned traveller of the worlds who gives him or her training, equipment, or advice that will help on the journey. Or the hero reaches within to a source of courage and wisdom.*

*CROSSING THE THRESHOLD. At the end of Act One, the hero commits to leaving the Ordinary World and entering a new region or condition with unfamiliar rules and values.*

*TESTS, ALLIES AND ENEMIES. The hero is tested and sorts out allegiances in the Special World[8]*

In his exploits outside Gotham, Bruce meets Ra's Al Ghul, a person who offers him a path, a way of life. Bruce trains under the aegis of Ra's, who acquires the position of a mentor, much like Alfred Pennyworth (Bruce Wayne's butler and confidant). Bruce returns to Gotham and becomes Batman, a vigilante with a vendetta to combat crime in Gotham city. Through a series of adventures, Batman identifies his allies like Gordon, Fox and Catwoman and also enemies like Joker and Two-face among others.

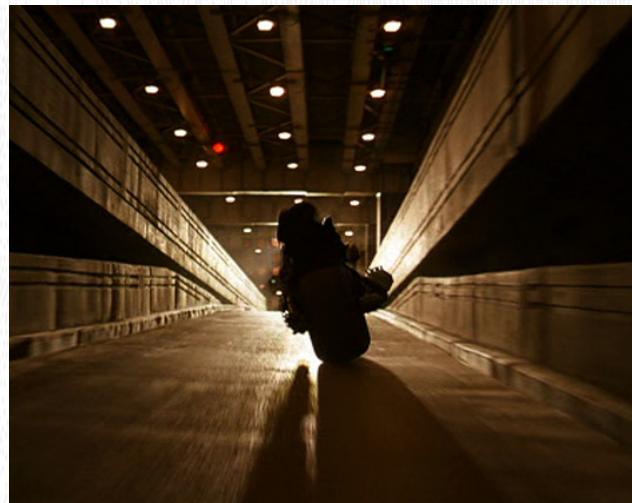




**APPROACH.** *The hero and newfound allies prepare for the major challenge in the Special world.*

**THE ORDEAL.** *Near the middle of the story, the hero enters a central space in the Special World and confronts death or faces his or her greatest fear. Out of the moment of death comes a new life.*

**THE REWARD.** *The hero takes possession of the treasure won by facing death. There may be celebration, but there is also danger of losing the treasure again.[8]*



*Fig. 6 The Reward: The Dark Knight (2008)[9]*

As time progresses, Batman and his allies face even bigger challenges and hurdles whilst fighting crime in the city. A fierce war with one of his arch enemies Joker, he chooses to hang the cape and take the fall for Harvey Dent, a reputed advocate of law and order in the city, who fell prey to Joker's devious plans. The reward or rather the potential reward for Batman was the restoration of hope in the minds of the peoples of Gotham.

**THE ROAD BACK.** *About three-fourths of the way through the story, the hero is driven to complete the adventure, leaving the Special World to be sure the treasure is brought home. Often a chase scene signals the urgency and danger of the mission.*

**THE RESURRECTION.** *At the climax, the hero is severely tested once more on the threshold of home. He or she is purified by a last sacrifice, another moment of death and rebirth, but on a higher and more complete level. By the hero's action, the polarities that were in conflict at the beginning are finally resolved.*

**RETURN WITH THE ELIXIR.** *The hero returns home or continues the journey, bearing some element of the treasure that has the power to transform the world as the hero has been transformed*





Fig. 7 *The Resurrection: The Dark Knight Rises* (2012)[9]

Beckoned back into Gotham city's war on crime an old Bruce Wayne faces an uphill task of resurrecting the spirit of Batman in the wake of Gotham's deplorable status. His final stand in both the comics and the movies gives him the chance to redeem the symbolism of Batman and pass on the baton to younger generations. When it comes to considering Batman as a folklore, the first commonality that comes to the mind is the presence of Batman as a character in the popular conscience of a vast majority of the people for a time span of roughly 70 years. A point of distinction exists between these two, for folklore, as the name implies, are the stories that originate from the masses while Batman has originated from the minds of a few creators. The origins are different but the end results are similar in nature.

The mapping of Batman over the definition of an archetype [3] is rooted in the perceived symbolic representation of Batman. Batman's perception is not only that of a superhero, but also that of post-modern thought in general. The reason behind the emphasis on the significance of post-modern influence over Batman is because of obvious hints of the same that are present in the storyline of the comics. The sense of tragedy and that of loss, accompanied by the lack of any religion, are fundamental tenets of the post-modern school of thought, which are religiously followed in Batman's life.

While it is true that Batman is symbolic of a superhero, there are some differentiators that exist between Batman and other superheroes which have enhanced his popularity and have strengthened his positioning in the popular conscience. Firstly, Batman, unlike Superman, has no super power, and yet is able to achieve as much, if not more. Secondly, the wish fulfilment that a reader derives from the reading of a superhero comic is more humanized, and thus, much more relatable. Batman represents ideas such as "Thou shalt not kill", which is a commandment lent from the Bible and "Dark is not evil", which is a trademark of post-modern art. It thus offers the perfect blend of tenets lent from a variety of sources, once again enhancing the outreach of Batman as an idea. Thirdly, Batman represents a power to overcome loss and tragedy, which marks another possible connect between the concept and an average reader's point of view.





## COMPARISON WITH VILLAINS

- The Joker represents the chaos that is inherent in each and every scenario that Batman faces in the war that he wages against crime, along with the impulses that he possesses as an individual. This conflict is starkly visible in *The Killing Joke*, where Batman and Joker both share a laugh over the last joke. The comic's plot also recites, in detail, that one day, which defined the fate of Joker, as he is known in the comics. This is just to point out the element of fate at play here.



*Fig.8 Killing Joke: Joker's Bad Day [10]*

- Two face is representative of the dual personality residing within the central character of the comic, viz-a-viz that of Batman and Bruce Wayne. The conflict between these two sides is poignantly showcased in the beginning of the comic *The Dark Knight Returns*, when Bruce hears the voice of this dual identity.
- Penguin acts as if he is a part of a rich socialite circle of the city, while actually acting as an agent of crime. 'Similar to how Brice Wayne is an act for Batman, only he does so as a rich idiot with a no day job, while also acting in philanthropy rather than descending into criminality.'[11]
- Hush: Many of Batman's villains have a personal tragedy for a backstory, but none echo Bruce's own so much as that of Thomas Elliot. He grew up in the same social circle as Bruce Wayne and showed a promising intellect at a young age, but Hush hated his abusive parents, making him a possible version of Batman, if Thomas and Martha Wayne's' parenting had gone irrevocably wrong. [11]

The interesting trend is the element of fate at play, which will become an even relevant facet of the Batman persona as the reader progresses through this document. Imagine the lives of Batman and his villains as a set of life paths which Bruce could have taken. This imagination's plausibility is made stronger because the tragic event of his parent's death eliminates a lot of normative life paths that a child may follow. Within this set, an argument can be made that Batman was perhaps the God of luck's favourite of sorts. *Even if and astonishingly, especially if it appears to be a weak argument, hold on to that thought.*





## THE OEDIPUS CONUNDRUM

The analysis of Batman so far, and especially the act of putting Batman and his villains in a comparative basket leads to a unique relation that exists between the myth of Batman and that of Oedipus [Fig. 9] is a legend who killed his father and married his mother, because of a curse that was set upon him. This legend, which was transformed into a play by Sophocles titled Oedipus Rex (429 BC), has been the source of numerous theories including Sigmund Freud's Oedipus complex. Batman has a peculiar mapping on this myth as well on this complex. The complex is characterized by two key elements, which are the presence of sexual love for the parent of the opposite sex and the wish to become the parent of the same sex. According to Freud, every person goes through the conflict brought about by the complex at some or the other point of time in their lives. There are variants of this complex that have developed after the original one by Freud (Carl Jung, Campbell). Bruce Wayne does certainly undergo this complex as his whole life is an attempt to become or at least tend towards the mirage of his father. In contrast, it should be remembered that Martha Wayne died in that brutal encounter, denying the possibility of providing for his mother, as Oedipus had. Instead, he had to find a surrogate mother, for whom he could enact his duties and he found one in American society (via Gotham). For Bruce cares about this symbolic mother with all his heart, but looks upon his father for every decision that he makes. While the circumstances point perfectly towards an almost perfect complex, an interesting point to be seen here is that there is no conflict that is faced by Bruce in the passing of the complex. For the representation of the symbolic Mother and Father and his predisposition in the context of Thomas and Martha's death lend an altruistic nature to Bruce's complex.

This relaxation of the complex is further strengthened when Bruce's life is mapped onto the original tale of Oedipus. Bruce does undergo an ordeal concerning his parents. But the fact remains that his parents were taken out of the equation, and this tragedy actually turned out to be a fortunate turn of events, given the fact that one considers Batman as an opportune end in itself. The catch here is that Bruce is not faced with hard choices, or with any choices where his actions generate regret. Oedipus, on the other hand, is fated to generate regret as he moves down his chosen course of action. To put things in perspective, consider what the death of Thomas Wayne meant for little Bruce: it symbolized the cementing of one of Bruce's hero, and that too at a stage when the boy was most impressionable, if nothing else. The death of such a hero makes him the obvious choice for the idol that Bruce will always abide by. When the same Bruce faces another mentor figure in the form of Ra's Al Ghul, his choice is once again made easy by the fact that he already has a supreme mentor in the form of his father.



Fig.9 Oedipus with the Sphinx



## THE AMERICAN PARALLEL

As a nation, America has faced a dearth of myths and archetypes which can position themselves in the minds of the people of the nation and give them an ideal to strive towards. Unlike other nations like those of Europe, the Americas are relatively recent in terms of their history. And whatever historical stories, myths and archetypes they have, have not had the opportunity to evolve through the phase where they get passed through various strata and generations of the peoples, primarily of the courtesy of getting pinned and penned down by the press rather too quickly. A relevant example here is that of Lincoln, whose actions as well as character were thought to be worthy of an archetype of the society. To a large extent, the attempt to pass it on as a folktale succeeded as the oral narrations of the deeds of Lincoln were able to gain a place in the popular conscience, along with getting influenced by the same. This situation gave the control of the tale in the hands of the popular culture than the more dominant cultural voices of that era.



The purpose of these elements like a hero or a myth, in the most rudimentary sense, is to provide examples which the population can live up to, thereby defining a national character. Simultaneously, they also function as representations of the civilization as a whole. The national character of America comprises of a self-made man, seeking success through natural traits, courage and sacrifice [A6]. A person who has at his disposal, the requisite resources and the inherent skill can achieve success. But so can a man who strives towards that success by means of his sweat and blood. An ideal enshrinement of the American national character can be brought about by either of these or a combination of these factors. American history is littered with examples from both ends of the spectrum,





from George Washington, who stands tall as a beacon of courage and sacrifice, to Bill Gates, a person who grew from nothing to everything by means of his own hard work.

The dual identity (Batman plus Bruce Wayne) is the perfect blend of this much needed symbolism. Bruce Wayne was able to achieve an adequate level of success in his life by virtue of his natural traits, which were, in his case, the wealth and fortune that he inherited. Moving to the other end of the spectrum, Bruce was not only able to dissociate his family history while creating an alter ego for himself in the form of Batman, he was also able to acquire the required tools and knowledge needed for his crusade against crime. Through his willpower, he was able to achieve the highest levels of mental and physical capacity a human can hope to master. This journey to success came with its share of conflicts, which have been aptly showcased across various comics and movies of the superhero [Fig. 10, 11 & 12]



*Fig. 10 Batman Year One (Part 1)[6]: Bruce displays qualities of a Rugged (post-modern) Individual by giving up his faith in societal institutions & developing his own stricter moral code and a separate belief system based on justice.*



*Fig. 11 Thou Shall Not Kill [6]: The self imposed moral code being followed to the letter.*



*Fig. 12 The Dark Knight Rises(2012) [9] : The Self Made Man, Batman, who returns from the pit of despair by his sheer will and determination.*





## THE COLLECTIVE'S NARRATIVE

With the need of a hero for the American people as well as the fit of Batman as a relatable hero for the American people established, we now proceed to observe how these facts consequentially lead to their effect at the level of America as a nation. The idea that gets accepted as a hero usually encompasses the dreams, aspirations and the thoughts that are echoed by an average citizen of that state. A very famous saying in the comic book fan circles is that 'Superman is the American Dream. Batman is the American Truth'. In other words, superman is something that is an ideal to strive towards, but which inherently puts a divide between what is achievable and what is not. The lost son of Krypton, with his customary blue and red uniform and Kansas as his hometown, is an imagery of a supernatural being turned American. His ideals and his notions often get lost in his supernatural prowess. Batman, on the other hand, is the face of the pragmatic American. Come to think of it, Batman has absolutes, but those absolutes come with the power of defining them circumstantially. The United States of America stands as one of the few nations in the world, who has had the stature as well as the authority to define the rules of the game before even entering it, with the game being a metaphor for international polity. This position of authority can be easily proven to the reader by means of some very significant international events in the recent human history, two of which are the Pearl Harbour and the 9/11 attacks. The Pearl Harbour is believed to be an opportune moment in the history of the II World War. With the ruthless attack on its own soil, the USA got a free hand at using every form of retaliation. Perhaps that is how they justified the atomic bombs to themselves as well as the rest of the world. There are still conspiracy theories that the government knew about Pearl Harbour and let it happen anyway, for the event provided a chance that they might have been on the lookout for. Even if the argument of the conspiracy is ignored, it stands to reason that Pearl Harbour worked in the favour of USA, considering the World War and its outcome. Another significant event in this regard is the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre, which has been followed by the war on terror led by the USA at various venues both home and abroad. Sanctioned drone operations, targeted killings, torture as a means of extraction of information are the new aspects of the modus operandi of the United States' policing authorities. *This policing has not been limited to just their own soil, but also across a variety of oil rich soils, if not the entire world per se.* The incident on 9/11 provided the nation with not only these policing gimmicks, but also with the justification to associate some religions to terrorism, which result in a plethora of practices at something as basic as an airport security check. This point is increasingly relevant in the light of various debates that are revolving around drone operations, torture as a means of extracting information, terrorism, Islam, so on and so forth. This feature of the nation's history is something close to an anti-Oedipus phenomenon. While all consequences end up generating regret in the tale of Oedipus, the events in the USA's context help improve the consequences to come in its favour. It seems that the fates are too kind.

## THE ORDER OF CAPITALIST REALISM

Order is and has been one of the central themes that exist in the implementation of the beliefs that Batman brings to the table. He brings with him, certain self-made assertions and absolutes, which are never questioned by the reader, for the context that is put in place is so deplorable and despicable that any state of affairs involving the teeniest bit of order naturally assumes a higher moral ground [A4]. A point to ponder over is whether an average





reader would find Batman equally relatable, had Gotham been a well off state in the first place. Another way to approach this would be to identify Batman's positioning in the minds of people from various classes in the same society at the same time. This desire for order is exemplified by the noticeable battle with the Joker, who is an agent of chaos, as well as in the comic book *The Dark Knight Returns* [13], where Batman proclaims a sort of emergency in Gotham, with him and his army as the interim guardians of the city.

A quick glance over US's policies on the international stage can reflect the nation to be an aberrant and dominant force, willing to impose its views, if necessary to meet its desired ends [A8, A9]. A recent and observable phenomenon has been the imposition of the American democracy across a number of nation states like Iraq and other middle-east ones. The nations are free only when they are free in the American way. Every other form of governance has ills that far outweigh the ills of the way professed by the USA. Not that in such a circumstance, the ills of the American way seldom see the light of the day. Because the context so painted gives this act of imposition a façade of an ideal state.

In order to make the point clearer, there exists a theory called Capitalist Realism, which basically conveys that liberalism and the economics followed by superpowers like USA, are a never ending loop [A5]. Even if these theories of economic and social governance lead to a crises of sorts, the solution to this predicament lies in a lowering of expectation, all the while keeping that very own theory as the heart of one's belief system. It is, in other words, the least worst solution. Across all the three notions discussed in this section, from Batman's order to America's idea of democracy to the response of Capitalist Realism in the face of an economic crises, the solution and the problem are entwined and tangled in a manner which, upon carefully engineered mental reconstruction, results in a self-sustaining loop.

Another interesting aspect to compare Batman and America's take on what justice and law means for them and for the rest of the world. Let us first see it from the superhero's perspective. Batman clearly considers himself to be above the law, for in terms of the number of criminal acts done by a character in any Batman movie or comic, Batman himself tops the list. Additionally, to consider the rights and liberties of 'criminals' seems unworthy of Batman. In most cases, Batman considers that some person, who for the sake of argument is named X, is a criminal. Post this observation, the entire show focuses on how this person X is taken to planet Batman, where civic rights or first amendment does not apply to you and being threatened to be dropped off the building is a perfectly legitimate thing to do. And as far as happy endings go, this person X is dropped back to planet earth and the criminal system is all smiles about it.

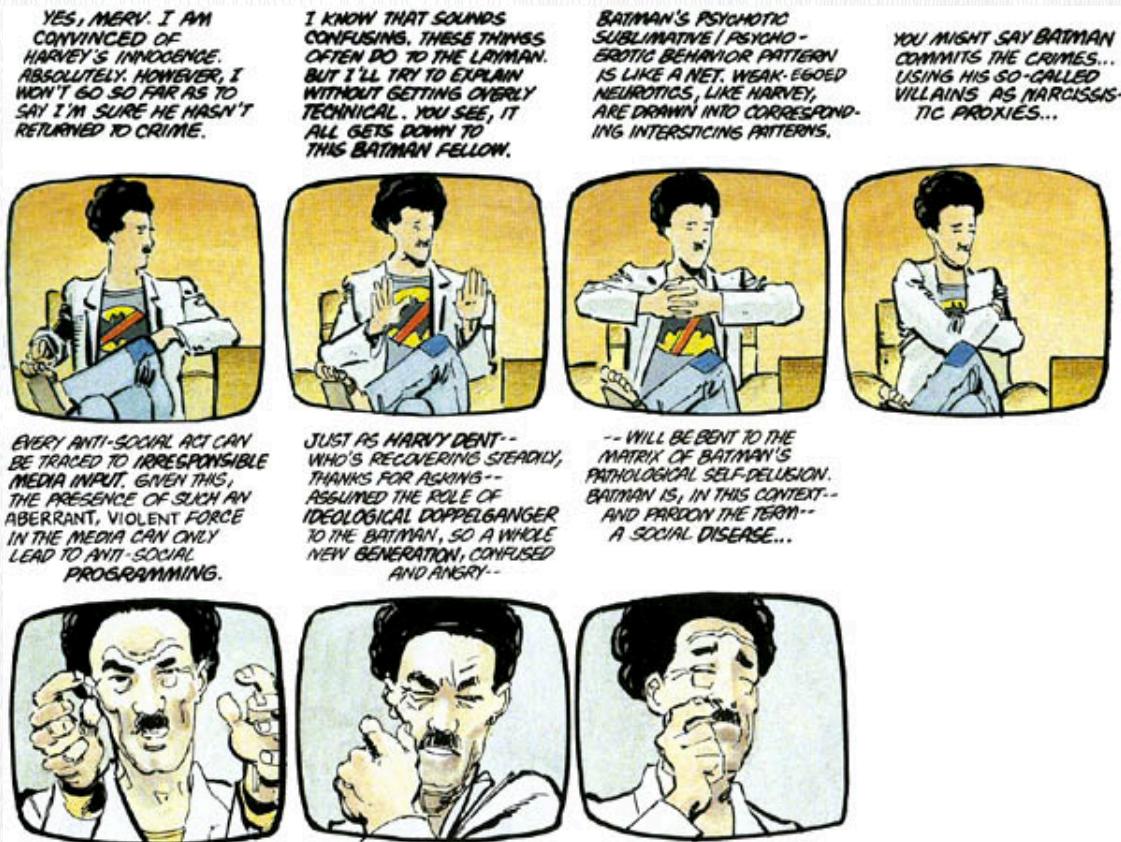


Fig. 13 *The Dark Knight* [9]





Every action has an equal and opposite reaction. This universal law manifests itself in two forms for Batman. Let us take the average cop in Gotham city. Lets say that this is an ideal and a good cop who has always done his duty with honor. He will now see this vigilantism as a perfectly legitimate way to go about things. Indirectly, this relaxing of one's own perceptions or ideals towards civic rights is in itself a degradation of one's thought process. Moreover, this upfront confrontation of the 'villains' of Batman does spawn more of them, a theory that is probably envisaged best by Joker, Batman's ultimate nemesis, who has been found to admit multiple times that his existence depends on Batman and he exists only because of Batman.



*Fig. 14 The Dark Knight Returns [13]*



*Fig. 15 The Killing Joke [10]*



What would be interesting to see is that apart from being a wealthy superhero, Batman has also gained the ability to always be right? Surely, if he were human, there must be one odd case where he might just have harassed a person who did not turn out to be a criminal? Surely he must have apologized to someone for falsely accusing someone? But what is interesting is that throughout all of Batman's works, which include comics, videos and movies, not once has Batman wrongfully judged a criminal and then repented it openly?

How does one see this for America? Imagine the American definition of freedom and also of terror as two big bullies who are trying to gang up and turn on the smaller children, who happen to be the other definitions. These bullies are particularly hard on the children whose lunchboxes are titled 'Oil'. To take a case from history, Angola was invaded by South Africa, which, at that time, was defending itself against terror groups. These terror groups were, according to an official press release by Washington, Nelson Mandela's African National Congress. Such was the case in 1988, and much has changed from that time on, for the worse.

Take the case of Israel and Palestine, for the newspapers have been riddled with stories regarding Palestinian 'terrorists' and American attempts to support the supposed peace talks. Palestinians are not ok with the definition of the freedom that the state of Israel and for all practical purposes, the US, has for them. And behold, they are immediately given the label of terrorists and are slaughtered without any concern for human life.

*"I think the United States is one of the key creators of this organization.....The United States did not plan the formation of ISIS," he adds, "but its destructive interventions in the Middle East and the War in Iraq were the basic causes of the birth of ISIS."*

- Former CIA analyst Graham Fuller

*"Isn't it obvious that Batman is in fact the defender of the status quo and champion of the privileged, who pays no heed to the spontaneous, the creative, or the beautiful, in favour of a inane sense of 'balance of the force', law and order restoration of the abilities of corporations to be free to exploit others ? Now where do you suppose Rush learned that from ? I don't know what we're doing here. The common trope of a mega-rich loonie with the means to fight injustice on behalf of a population that he despises is actually, in this case, more accurate than a DNA test."*

- Noam Chomsky



# A PINCH OF SALT

Adolescents form a major component of the reader base of comics across the globe. Adolescents are moldable minds, ready to soak in as much knowledge as is imparted to them. This project has, in its initial chapters, established the fact that comics are a medium which is easy to relate, courtesy of its visual and pictorial nature. And this enhanced ability of comics to become convenient forms of art for information dissipation makes them a potent tool in shaping the thoughts and perceptions of an average reader. The impact of a heroic figure thus becomes magnified manifold, and this is an observation that can not only be realized by a logical discourse of thought, but can also be experienced in a firsthand manner, if one is to remember what or who stood for a hero in one's life.

The next part of the project deals with the analysis of Batman as a character, in order to contextualize his character traits to the reader, with substantial evidence behind each such trait from one or more than one art forms of Batman that have come out since its inception in 1939. An interesting output of this exercise is the resultant element of fate at play in Batman's story, principally because of the strong anti-parallelism existing between the tales of Batman and Oedipus. Sequentially, the paper then moves to build and prove an analogy between Batman and the United States of America. And indeed, as it so happens, this analogy is rich with an extensive set of correlations and parallelisms to establish the validity of the argument.

So, who is Batman after all? Is he the masked crusader or the vigilante or the savior or is he just a façade for a suppressive regime? In Will Brooker's TED talk titled 'Tales of the Dark Knight' [12], he has argued that anyone can be Batman, and he does so with a positive outlook with regard to this observation. This study, however, feels that with the huge potential impact of Batman comics, as well Batman's analogy with the USA, this lax nature of this mapping carries within itself, a finite amount of risk. This risk is the possibility that one is not in control of what image of Batman will be formed in one's mind. If we convert these potential ramifications of the projection of a super hero in our mind and the way in which these projections shape our lives, it becomes clear that a modicum of control needs to be taken as a precautionary measure, if not a curative one.

In the last section, the theme of Order has been discussed with respect to both Batman as well as USA, but it must not be forgotten that both these agents undergo a certain disorder in order to reach a self-defined as well as self-justified state of order. What this fact corresponds into is the chance that both Batman and USA are also, in a way, experimenting with different states of orders, and this experimentation further jeopardizes the process with which we come to the perception of Batman that we hold [A7]. In essence, the risks inherent in the process of perceiving Batman as well as the potential harms if this perception goes awry makes a clear case for taking Batman with a pinch of salt [A10].



Fig. 17 [13]



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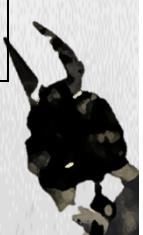


# APPENDIX

## CONCLUSIONS FROM THE SURVEY

The results of the survey were enlightening, to say the least. While not all the responses were in tandem in with the point of view proposed in the project, some of the responses did add strength to the propositions spread across a range of sections of the project. The most interesting points in the compilation of the result were related to the question related to the nature of Batman and Superman in terms of concepts of leadership theory(a mixed bag of responses) and the contrast of the responses of question 8 and 10, where the morality of an issue such as Vietnam was condemned with much greater ease than that of the Roosevelt's decision regarding Pearl Harbour. Each of these points opens up possibilities of future work in this area. However, to reiterate, the output of the survey has been to substantiate existing propositions of the project, and a compilation of the inference-premise mapping is attached below.

| S.N<br>o. | Question   | Data Point     | Inferenc<br>e     | Premise   | Refere<br>nce                  |   |
|-----------|--|----------------|-------------------|---|--------------------------------|---|
|           |  | %<br>poi<br>nt | Option            | Section<br>of the<br>project                            | Extract<br>from the<br>project |   |
| 1         | On a scale of 1 to 10, do you find yourself agreeing with Batman's modus operandi? | 82             | >=5               | People identify with the existence of Batman's ideology | Introduction                   | The first assumption that we are going to work with is the fact that superheroes do translate into fantasies, and from there, into ethics.                          |
| 2         | Which art form(s) of Batman are you most familiar with?                            | 61             | Comics and Movies | Comics and Movies have the maximum outreach             | Introduction                   | From there on, we move to the choice of medium (comics and movies), as comics are not only the origin of Batman, but also have a large repository of art available, |



|                               |   |    |        |  |  |   |    |
|-------------------------------|---|----|--------|--|--|---|----|
|                               |   |    |        |  |  | along with a humongous reach among the population.  |    |
|                               |   |    |        |  |  |   |    |
| 3                             | According to you, people of which age group would be most attracted towards Batman? | 50 | 20-30  | Importance of the project with regard to relevance of psychological feedback | -  | -   | A3 |
| <b>Batman versus Superman</b> |   |    |        |  |  |   |    |
| 4                             | Which one do you find to be having a more fixed approach to circumstances?          | 49 | Batan  | Self Explanatory   | The Order of Capitalist Realism, The American Parallel | He brings with him, certain self-made assertions and absolutes, which are never questioned by the reader, for the context that is put in place is so deplorable and despicable that any state of affairs involving the teeniest bit of order naturally assumes a higher moral ground. | A4 |
| 5                             | Which one do you believe offers a long term solution to crime?                      | 51 | Batman | Possibility of a popular bias OR Self sustaining Loop                        | The Order of Capitalist Realism, The American Parallel | In order to make the point clearer, there exists a theory called  | A5 |

|   |  |           |   |  |                       |  |    |
|---|--|-----------|---|--|-----------------------|--|----|
|   |  |           |   |  |                       | Capitalist Realism, which basically conveys that liberalism and the economics followed by superpowers like USA, are a never ending loop.   |    |
| 6 | Map the reaction of the two superheroes, viz-a-viz, {Batman, Superman} to the famous 'Case of the Two Ships', as was shown in Christopher Nolan's movie The Dark Knight? | 67        | Will try to apprehend the Joker while leaving the ship case to people's conscience, Will rescue the civilians and then combat Joker | The characteristics of a superhero and their associated paths to success: Preach an ideology and establishing symbols as agents of the preaching | The American Parallel | The national character of America comprises of a self-made man, seeking success through natural traits, courage and sacrifice.   | A6 |
| 7 | Map {Batman, Superman} onto one of the following options. Take into account the facts given below, as well as your own perception.                                       | Mixed Bag | Custodian, Controller ; Mentor, Leader ; Controller, Custodian ; Leader, Mentor   |  | A Pinch of Salt       | What this fact corresponds into is the chance that both Batman and USA are also, in a way, experimenting with different states of orders, and this experimentation further jeopardizes the process with which we come to | A7 |

|                     |  |    |  |   |  |   |     |
|---------------------|--|----|--|---|--|---|-----|
|                     |  |    |  |   |  | the perception of Batman that we hold.  |     |
| <b>The Americas</b> |  |    |  |   |  |   |     |
| 8                   | What is your stance on invasion of Vietnam by the US?                  | 77 | >=4(1: Moral; 5: Immoral)                        | Self Explanatory*   | The Order of Capitalist Realism, The American Parallel | A quick glance over US's policies on the international stage can reflect the nation to be an aberrant and dominant force, willing to impose its views, if necessary to meet its desired ends. | A8  |
| 9                   | What according to you was the rationale behind this invasion?          | 43 | To showcase America as the preacher of democracy | Careful framing of the option. Succession from democracy as an ideology to American democracy as an ideology, with America as the preaching agent | The Order of Capitalist Realism, The American Parallel | A quick glance over US's policies on the international stage can reflect the nation to be an aberrant and dominant force, willing to impose its views, if necessary to meet its desired ends. | A9  |
| 10                  | Inspector Gordon: '..It was too big. He was too big..'. Were President | 56 | Yes  | Self Explanatory*   | A Pinch of Salt  | In essence, the risks inherent in the process of perceiving Batman as   | A10 |

|    |   |    |  |  |  |   |     |
|----|---|----|--|--|--|---|-----|
|    | Roosevelt's actions really too big to be judged?                    |    |  |  |  | well as the potential harms if this perception goes awry makes a clear case for taking Batman with a pinch of salt. |     |
| 11 | What is your notion of the establishment of justice in any society? | 57 | You would actively support a system for establishing justice | Reflects a general inclination towards order |  |   | A11 |