

B196069_MSc Intermediality_Dissertation.doc

X

by Sam Fern

Submission date: 11-Aug-2022 05:03AM (UTC+0100)

Submission ID: 184928491

File name: B196069_MSc_Intermediality_Dissertation.docx (160.94K)

Word count: 15800

Character count: 86405

Exam Number: B196069



Examination Number: B196069

Title of work: The Intermedial Myth of the Batman

Programme Name: MSc Intermediality

Graduate School of Literatures, Languages & Cultures

University of Edinburgh

Word count: 16085

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Pillars of Gotham

PART ONE

Modern Mythmaking: Constructing a Post-Crisis Comic Identity

PART TWO

Reboot, Recast, Reflect: The Caped Crusader on Camera

PART THREE

Customise, Control, Curate: Playing the Hero

CONCLUSION

Mapping the Batman

BIBLIOGRAPHY

INTRODUCTION

Pillars of Gotham

Who is the Batman?

The typical understanding of Batman revolves around particular pillars of the mythos. The wealthy Thomas and Martha Wayne are shot dead in an alley, leaving their orphaned son Bruce to be raised by the butler, Alfred Pennyworth. Bruce spends his youth training for a lifetime of crime-fighting. Eventually, Bruce dons a bat costume to disguise his identity and frighten his enemies, which range from gangsters like Carmine Falcone to monsters like Killer Croc to costumed criminals such as the Joker. Typically, Batman will not kill or use firearms, instead employing themed non-lethal gadgets and vehicles such as the Batmobile and Batarangs. He works out of the Batcave and occasionally enlists younger sidekicks under the name 'Robin'. Bruce's identity is a closely-guarded secret, his public persona is typically somewhat *laissez-faire* to hide his true nature, and his only significant ally in the Gotham City Police Department is Commissioner Gordon.

After more than eighty years of adventures, Batman has passed through many lenses of adaptation and reinvention. Despite how Barrett notes that “transmedia franchises run the risk of alienating [their] audiences,”¹ the myth of this hero has only grown with each reinvention. He has been an illegal vigilante or a deputised member of the police force, a lone wolf or a team leader, young or old, modern or futuristic or Victorian, merciful or murderous. Jenkins writes that “more and more, storytelling has become the art of worldbuilding,” yet the

¹ Kyle Barrett, “The Dark Knight’s Many Stories: Arkham Video Games as Transmedia Pathway,” *Iperstoria*, no. 16 (2020): 130.

world of Gotham remains entirely oriented around Bruce Wayne.² Still, even with an immovable pin at the centre, it has grown to the point that it “cannot be fully explored or exhausted within a single work or even a single medium,” where the storyworld of Batman is “bigger than the film, bigger even than the franchise.”³ It is an ever-reflecting, refracting structure of adaptation and reinvention to rival any legend and any myth.

Many ideas have been proposed for the character’s longevity. Monnet has pinned it to “the themes of childhood trauma and haunting, the dark city of Gotham, ethical ambiguity and the two sides of justice and revenge.”⁴ Winstead claims it is due to the “collective memory of Batman’s origins and stylistic elements” and how that sheer longevity has taken priority over the “minute details of the comic book narratives,”⁵ describing a somewhat self-perpetuating or momentum-based mythmaking process wherein sheer longevity itself, compounded over the years, will eventually lead to a form of cultural immortality.

This dissertation explores how exactly this structure of character, setting, and story has evolved, expanded, adapted, and abstracted itself over the last thirty years, and argue that the key factor behind its longevity and persistent cultural resonance lies in the particularly transmedial operations of the Batman mythos, and the potent myth-making effect of intermediality itself.

² Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 116.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Agnieszka Soltysik Monnet, “‘I’ll Be Whatever Gotham Needs Me to Be’: Batman, the Gothic and Popular Culture,” in *The Gothic in Contemporary Literature and Popular Culture*, ed. Justin D. Edwards and Agnieszka Soltysik Monnet (Routledge, 2012), 111.

⁵ Nick Winstead, “‘As a Symbol I Can Be Incorruptible’: How Christopher Nolan De-Queered the Batman of Joel Schumacher,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 48, no. 3 (2015): 573-4.

Talk of the Town

Invariably, a character who has branched so far into different mediums, particularly collaborative mediums like film and videogames, has likewise stirred up a vast presence within research into most areas of the arts and humanities, making a direct line of coherent discussion or critical lineage difficult to pin down. Still, within that eclectic array of conversations, there are multiple key critics who have focussed closer on the themes that this dissertation will draw from: transmedial art, entertainment franchise media, print-to-screen adaptation, superheroes within comic studies, blockbuster cinema narratology, performance studies, and the regulating force of genre in popular culture.

Intermediality is here taken in Rajewsky's sense as "a critical category for the concrete analysis of individual medial configurations."⁶ The sources in this dissertation often conform to Rajewsky's conception of medial transposition as "the transformation of a given media product [...] into another medium," but this dissertation is more concerned with how the wider mythos of any property can create an overall nature of media combination, or the "process of combining at least two conventionally distinct media or medial forms."⁷ While a particular Batman work might be a feat of medial transposition, the web of interrelation between these works creates a macro-work operating on media combination: a mythos. This aligns closer with Rippl writing how "scholars of intermediality investigate how meaning is generated in/by inter-, multi- and transmedial constellations and cross-medial references,"⁸

⁶ Irina Rajewsky, "Border Talks: The Problematic Status of Media Borders in the Current Debate About Intermediality," in *Media Borders, Multimodality and Intermediality*, ed. Lars Elleström (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010): 54.

⁷ Irina Rajewsky, "Intermediality, Intertextuality, and Remediation: A Literary Perspective on Intermediality," *Intermedialities*, no. 6 (Fall, 2005): 51-52.

⁸ Gabriele Rippl, "Introduction," in *Handbook of Intermediality: Literature, Image, Sound, Music*, ed. Gabriele Rippl (De Gruyter, 2015): 2.

but requires greater specificity on what stars comprise these ‘constellations’ and a more precise term within intermediality to give to that form of cultural astronomy.

Jenkins pioneered the notion of convergence culture, highlighting the rise of transmedial properties and the increasingly innovative efforts by popular culture works to break down the divisions between mediums, both for artistic effect and financial gain.⁹ This approach takes an intermedial perspective but focuses in on the potential for a work’s referential activity to be a form of interactive narrative expression, in which the work itself signals or gestures towards an unseen work and relies on audience awareness and perception to piece together the full message, and thus better inform of its intentions or substance.¹⁰

Many critics referenced here, such as Dru H. Jeffries,¹¹ have continued from Jenkins’ work in their own studies into convergence culture, or else looked specifically into areas such as narratology like Marie-Laure Ryan,¹² or transmedia in videogames like Matteo Genovesi.¹³ While this dissertation builds from Jenkins’ work here in establishing an analytic lens, it substantiates its close reading analyses with the more medium-specific critics that have followed him such as Ryan, Jeffries, and Genovesi, instead of using Batman specifically as an illustration of Jenkins’ theories.

These studies have contributed to a tangible focus on the rise of the modern transmedia franchise and its orientation around comic book or superhero media, including the development of cinematic universes and the increasing quality and independence of

⁹ Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Dru H. Jeffries, “Convergence Culture and the Caped Crusader: Batman and the Environment of New Media,” *Cineaction*, no. 77 (2009): 42–49.

¹² Marie-Laure Ryan, “Transmedia Narratology and Transmedia Storytelling,” *Artnodes*, no. 18 (2016).

¹³ Matteo Genovesi, “Choices and Consequences: The Role of Players in The Walking Dead: A Telltale Game Series,” *Open Cultural Studies* 1, no. 1 (2017): 350–358.

videogame series. Elisavet Ioannidou,¹⁴ Liam Burke,¹⁵ and Doru Pop¹⁶ have investigated the abstracting effects of branching transmedial franchises, especially its consequences on audience perception of storyworlds, an area further studied by Stephan Packard in how superheroes can be “both a transmedial entity and still a comic-book character.”¹⁷ These critics have been vital for this dissertation’s moments of macro-analysis. For theories concerning adaptation, whether from print to screen or *vice versa*, Linda Hutcheon and Siobhan O’Flynn’s *A Theory of Adaptation* is indispensable for examining adaptation’s creative and commercial factors.¹⁸

While the idea of mythos and mythologies can rarely be discussed without some reference to Barthes or Saussure, their focus on the psychological or social activity or transmission of semiotic messaging within popular culture does not align with the specific focus of this dissertation. Elements of iconography and signified meanings are vital to the communication of superhero narratives on both a commercial branding side and for the storytelling mechanics of those essentialist graphic character designs. However, such topics are better suited for a more audience-focused study of the reception of Batman media over time and the actual intended or received meaning of those works, rather than this more internally focused, narratological, architectural examination of how the mythos has reinforced, challenged, and expanded its story structures through reinvention and transmedial movement.

¹⁴ Elisavet Ioannidou, “Adapting Superhero Comics for the Big Screen: Subculture for the Masses,” *Adaptation: The Journal of Literature on Screen Studies* 6, no. 2 (2013): 230–238.

¹⁵ Liam Burke, *The Comic Book Film Adaptation: Exploring Modern Hollywood's Leading Genre* (University Press of Mississippi, 2015), ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ed/detail.action?docID=3039951>.

¹⁶ Doru Pop, “Parasitical Stories, Narrative Viruses and Hybrid Storytelling in Fantasy Cinema and Culture,” *Ekphrasis. Images, Cinema, Theory, Media* 13, no. 1 (2015): 91–101.

¹⁷ Stephan Packard, “Closing the Open Signification: Forms of Transmedial Storyworlds and Chronotopoi in Comics,” *StoryWorlds* 7, no. 2 (2015): 55–74. 61.

¹⁸ Linda Hutcheon and Siobhan O’Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation* (Oxon: Routledge, 2013).

This study builds on a rich body of work which similarly explores superhero media. Will Brooker has written at length on the history and social impact of Batman and his world, analysing the character's social resonance in a more Barthian tradition.¹⁹ Other critics have approached Batman from fields such as animation like Daniel Martin,²⁰ multimedia marketing like Matthew McAllister and Jared LaGroue,²¹ gender studies like Nathan Tipton,²² or videogame studies like Kyle Barrett,²³ all of whom have informed sections of this dissertation.

Why is Batman worthy of study? Arguably, the idea of 'Batman' can be seen as just an exercise in branding and commercial marketing: the licensors or licensees can put the name on anything they desire and make it 'Batman'. 2022 saw the release of Matt Reeves' *The Batman* promoted through a range of biscuits stamped with the character's face.²⁴ While it may seem that the property has outlived any degree of artistic integrity, these mundane items quietly evoke over eighty years of artistic production, and in their symbolic references must appeal to something persuasive, engaging, and substantive within our global culture. Therefore, the grand portfolio of Batman media is a valid area of academic attention due to its titanic presence within popular culture, the phenomenon of its longevity and ceaseless creative production since 1939, and the countless artistic minds that have contributed to its vast mythology.

¹⁹ Will Brooker, *Hunting the Dark Knight : Twenty-First Century Batman* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012).

²⁰ Daniel Martin, "Reanimating the Dark Knight: Superheroes, Animation and the Critical Reception of The Lego Batman Movie," *Animation: an Interdisciplinary Journal* 15, no. 1 (2020): 93–107.

²¹ Matthew P. McAllister and Jared LaGroue, "'Hey, Kids. Who Wants a Shot from the Merch Gun?!': LEGO Batman as a Gateway Commodity Intertext," in *Cultural Studies of LEGO*, ed. Rebecca C. Hains and Sharon R. Mazzarella (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019).

²² Nathan G. Tipton, "Gender Trouble: Frank Miller's Revision of Robin in the Batman: Dark Knight Series," *Journal of Popular Culture* 41, no. 2 (2008): 321–336.

²³ Barrett, "Many Stories.

²⁴ OREO Cookie, "OREO meets Batman," February 2022, YouTube video, 00:00:15, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IIa3EgGpMes>.

Myth and Mediality

To clarify the discussion of many works about the same set of characters and settings, this dissertation requires consistent terminology defining these story spaces, and how such imaginative spaces can relate to one another. This dissertation focusses on the construction of a cultural ‘mythos’ through intermedial practises, so mythological vocabulary is persistent for the impression that Batman has made into the cultural imagination. However, different terminology is required for describing and parsing the narrative structures at work on the creative generation of this mythos.

The differences between ‘intermedial’, ‘intramedial’, and ‘transmedial’ are vital. ‘Intermedial’ describes modes of medial referentiality that combine or overlap separate mediums into a single experience, while ‘intramedial’ is used to describe modes of referentiality between separate works of the same medium. The term ‘transmedial’ was coined by Jenkins in his work on ‘cultural convergence’, the idea of an accelerating breakdown in medial borders hastened by the development of increasingly digital forms, and thus the changing relationships between separate works or texts.²⁵ Thus, ‘transmedial’ concerns a “story [which] unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive [...] contribution to the whole.”²⁶ However, acknowledging how critics such as Javanshir have noticed the term to have become “an umbrella term used to describe wildly diverse forms such as; escape rooms, mixed reality games, secret cinema, virtual reality experiences, [or] second screen apps,”²⁷ This dissertation gives the most attention to comics, videogames, cinema, and television, with the latter two compounded here as ‘film’. This provides an ideal structure for the sections of my analysis.

²⁵ Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*.

²⁶ Ibid, 97-8.

²⁷ Ryan Javanshir, Beth Carroll and David Millard, “Structural Patterns for Transmedia Storytelling,” *PloS One* 15, no. 1 (2020): 2.

Furthermore, with ‘storyworld’ becoming an ambiguous term in intermedial discussions of franchise media, it is here used to connote any specific and contained work made in a deliberate and exclusive continuity. Christopher Nolan’s *Dark Knight* film trilogy (2005-2012) is an example of one storyworld, Alan Moore’s self-contained graphic novel *The Killing Joke* (1988) would be another, Rocksteady Studios’ *Arkham* videogames (2009-2016) are a third, and so on. This discussion will also analyse grey areas of referentiality where these storyworld borders collide or communicate. Meanwhile, the cultural space shared by these works is referred to as the ‘mythos’, including works of any medium which tell a story including that character.

While this mode of thinking “contests the existence of, say, a single James Bond character [or] Batman character,” it does allow for a “conceptualization of characters as represented entities with an intentional inner life.”²⁸ This approach is essential to balancing the objective analysis of ‘Batman’ as a web of narrative elements, and Batman as a fictional person. This web of continuity and contradiction, even between instalments of the same purported storyworld, produces an oblique form of mythmaking. Without a definitive text to orbit, the mythos delineates and describes itself through the agreements and disagreements of its works. Ironically, our clearest perspective on the mythos often comes from its most controversial, ill-fitting works highlighting exactly what it is not.

Choosing a Chapter

For a character that has lasted for so long, the sheer quantity of narrative content overwhelms the scope of most studies, especially when it comes to comics and graphic novels. This can lead to what Monnet identifies as a tendency for “cultural analyses of a phenomenon like

²⁸ Ibid, 142.

Batman [to] run the risk of ignoring [...] the question of continuity and, instead, shoehorning one theory onto a select group of accommodating texts.”²⁹ The selection of texts made here addresses only one chapter in a varied history, and therefore only speaks to our contemporary cultural understanding of the mythos. While choosing a smaller selection of texts may highlight specific instances of intertextual and transmedial referencing or show greater detail in the nature of adaptation itself, it would not do justice to the macro-analysis of this dissertation’s aim and would lead to generalised conclusions working from an insufficient sample group. This broader survey, while necessitating more concise and efficient analysis, allows for a more accurate overall conclusion to be drawn about a larger pattern of transmedial referentiality developing within modern franchise media and, given the practical limitations of this dissertation, better fulfils the proposed objective.

The most prominent works of film and videogames have drawn from a particular era within Batman’s publication history, but not the first. In broad strokes, the first continuity of DC Comics begins in 1939 and runs until 1985, when the DC Universe became too complicated for new readers and once-modern heroes like Batman, Superman, and Wonder Woman had become relics. Facing this, DC brought about the company-wide crossover event *Crisis on Infinite Earths*³⁰ and cleaned their narrative slate with an apocalyptic cataclysm. The DC universe restarted as the ‘Post-Crisis’ continuity (1985-2011), which ran until *Flashpoint*³¹ brought about a second universal reboot into the ‘New 52’ continuity (2011-present).

The Post-Crisis continuity has most influenced the modern perception of the Batman mythos through film and videogame media. Generally referred to as a continuity, this period

²⁹ Monnet, “Whatever Gotham Needs,” 98.

³⁰ Marv Wolfman, *Crisis on Infinite Earths* (New York: DC Comics, 2000).

³¹ Geoff Johns, *Flashpoint* (New York: DC Comics, 2011).

is best understood as a shared narrative atmosphere than a precisely curated history. Its narratives are rarely adapted into works aspiring to perfect page-to-screen fidelity. Thus, while their connections are noteworthy, the adaptations discussed here are not judged as stronger for their accuracies nor weaker for their changes.

This dissertation focuses on untangling, identifying, and following the strands of narrative substance that have woven this intermedial tapestry of modern myth. The sources in question belong to a variety of franchises overlapping in period, necessitating a layered structure for their analysis. Therefore, my structure will cover the same period from the perspective of three different mediums, moving from comics to film to videogames in its survey of material, with each part consistently contextualising itself with the other two. This analytic approach will show how the mythos structures and strengthens itself through that echoing process of adaptation and influence across medial boundaries.

PART ONE

Modern Mythmaking: Constructing a Post-Crisis Comic Identity

Dividing Time

In the aftermath of the apocalyptic crossover event *Crisis on Infinite Earths* (1985), the past, present, and future of Batman in comics came under scrutiny. This was an opportunity to free the hero from fifty years of fictional history and redraft him and his world. This shift in Gotham City's atmosphere produced some of the most celebrated and influential comics in history, including *The Dark Knight Returns* (1986), *Year One* (1988), *The Killing Joke* (1988), *A Death in the Family* (1988), *Knightfall* (1993-4), and *The Long Halloween* (1996-7).

With this new era unfolding throughout the 90s, alongside the first emergent film franchise from 1989-1997, the transmedial potential of the comic book was all too clear. These bestsellers within the comic industry have equally become the key influences for the films, television series, and videogames discussed. My discussion indicates where they will later be most prominently adapted but saves the analysis of their secondary usage, or adaptative utility, for its medium-specific section.

Between 1985-2000, the superhero comics industry began exploring the graphic novel format, enabling self-contained stories with broader structures, mature themes, and longer production times for creative development.³² The graphic novel does not depend on constant

³² Daniel Stein and Jan-Noël Thon, eds, *From Comic Strips to Graphic Novels: Contributions to the Theory and History of Graphic Narrative*, second edition (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015).

reminders of the last issue, nor heavy teasers for the next. This shift into a more substantial binding gave comic books a place in mainstream bookshops, rather than niche comic book shops or what few newsstands still remained. By entering a broader market space, this allowed the most notable works in comics to move more easily into public awareness.

I focus on examining the works which have since become more closely woven together by their shared influences and the intertextual commentaries of their later adaptations, following a chronological structure and delineating the artistic lines of heritage where relevant, but overall use their respective successes to describe a shared cultural atmosphere around Batman.

Miller's Melancholy Militant

The first key work of this period is Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* (1986), a groundbreaking work looking at Bruce Wayne as an old, retired man finding a new reason to put on the cowl, and coping with the emotional and physical trauma of his career.³³ Notably, this shocking reinvention had a cover depicting Batman silhouetted against a lightning bolt, foreshadowing its bold deconstruction of the character we expect to see in that shadow.³⁴ Monnet aptly notes that *Returns* "reviv[ed] wide public interest in Batman," exemplifying how processes of extreme deconstruction and reinvention are not only beneficial for long-running franchises and mythic narratives but necessary.³⁵ For a text that works against so many expectations around Batman's mythos, its success highlights the reward of negotiating the narrative tension between serving and challenging audience perceptions.

³³ Frank Miller, *The Dark Knight Returns* (London: Titan Books, 1997).

³⁴ Ibid, cover.

³⁵ Monnet, "Whatever Gotham Needs," 105.

Miller transforms Gotham City from a 20th century industrial city into a technological metropolis “saturated with mass media.”³⁶ Gangsters become punk-like ravers, monsters become mutants, all of Batman’s villains have grown old, and Batman is an urban legend once again. Pre-Crisis, Batman was aged around thirty for over thirty publication years with no end in sight. Miller’s modernisation allowed time to catch up and provide that ending, albeit an open one. It is unsurprising that Miller’s Batman “bears little resemblance to [the pre-Crisis] urban protector” and for that reason surely succeeded in its reinvention of the property.³⁷

Miller’s portrait of Bruce Wayne as a broken old man out of time has few familiar pillars to lean on. *Returns* depicts a bitter, authoritarian, self-righteous Batman, typifying what Winstead calls the “militarized, aggressive Batman waging a full-on war on crime” of the late-1980s and 1990s.³⁸ Monnet notes that in the 1980s, Batman had already been “represented as a dark figure, but his characterization lacked the ethical complexity and sharp intelligence”³⁹ that would lead to Miller’s Batman, a character whom Tipton accurately describes as a “methodical, always thinking, crime-fighting machine.”⁴⁰ This is a man tired of criminals never staying locked up, whose unprocessed trauma manifests in a self-destructive secondary identity: suitably, Batman “is depicted as a repressed beast” and “a kind of addiction.”⁴¹

Despite all his anger, there is a melancholy to Miller’s Batman centred around the implicit death of Jason Todd, the second Robin. This is an event that had not occurred in any comics but would eventually happen two publication years later in Starlin’s *A Death in the*

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Winstead, “As a Symbol,” 575.

³⁹ Monnet, “Whatever Gotham Needs,” 105.

⁴⁰ Tipton, “Gender Trouble,” 328.

⁴¹ Monnet, “Whatever Gotham Needs,” 105.

Family.⁴² Upon catching Bruce gazing at Robin's empty costume on display, Miller's Alfred wryly remarks: "Hardly the hour for antiques, is it?"⁴³ As Tipton posits, this statement acts as "Miller declar[ing] his independence from the long-standing Robin tradition"⁴⁴ and thus the pre-Crisis way of operating. A further reflective ethical element is brought into stark light when Batman is later considering a new Robin in teenager Carrie Kelly despite Alfred begging him to remember what happened to Jason, with Bruce simply saying that "he was a good soldier. He honoured me."⁴⁵ To have a hero acknowledge using child soldiers, and coldly frame their death as honourable sacrifice, shows an honest self-reflection and deconstruction that typifies the harsh ethical themes of this era.

Returns drastically rewrites the moral code of Batman. Miller's borderline antihero resists killing criminals only to preserve his reputation, instead of valuing the lives of all citizens equally. For instance, Batman is content to break the Joker's neck and paralyse him for life to stop his crimes forever. Disgusted at Batman exploiting a technicality, the Joker finishes the job himself. Once Bruce has tamed Gotham City, albeit invoking the ire of the government at his authoritarian methods, he fakes his death in a fight against Superman to stop the government hunting him and orders a dying Alfred to burn down Wayne Manor and destroy his public identity. After this, he goes on to live only as Batman, operating discretely through a vigilante militia tattooed with his symbology.

A year after *Returns*, Miller volunteered to write *Year One* (1988), depicting Bruce as a young man developing himself from a balaclava-wearing vigilante into an iconic force for good.⁴⁶ *Detective Comics* #33 (1939)⁴⁷ and #47 (1941)⁴⁸ had covered the broad strokes, but

⁴² Jim Starlin, *A Death in the Family* (Burbank: DC Comics, 2011), 107.

⁴³ Miller, *Returns*, 11.

⁴⁴ Tipton, "Gender Trouble," 328.

⁴⁵ Miller, *Returns*, 93.

⁴⁶ Frank Miller, *Year One*, (New York: DC Comics, 2005).

⁴⁷ Bill Finger, and Bob Kane, *Detective Comics* #33 (New York: Detective Comics, 1939).

⁴⁸ Bill Finger, and Bob Kane, *Detective Comics* #47 (New York: Detective Comics, 1941).

Year One would be the first comic run dedicated to the exact circumstances which brought Batman into being. This focused on Bruce Wayne waging a two-man war on organised crime and police corruption with Detective Gordon, navigating his strained relationship with Alfred, and meeting his first costumed ally in Selina Kyle's Catwoman. Once the mob is brought to justice, Gordon illuminates the newly-made batsignal to summon a hero he now counts as a "friend," and explains that his costumed antics are giving rise to a new form of criminal, including a bank robber in clown makeup calling himself the Joker.⁴⁹ Between *Year One* and *Returns*, Miller's works bookend all later adventures for any other creative team which chooses to agree with them, structuring the mythos with a distinct and traceable historicity, and give casual readers a two-stop tour of Batman at both extremes.

Jeopardy and the Joker

Alan Moore's *The Killing Joke* (1988) stands independently from other continuities but has become one of the most influential texts for later adaptations, especially Burton's *Batman* (1989), Nolan's *The Dark Knight* (2008), and Rocksteady Studios' *Arkham* series (2009-2015). Potentially, its self-contained and succinct nature allows for easier transposition of its material. At its heart, *The Killing Joke* explores the Joker's origins and his connection to Batman, framing their relationship as the heart of the mythos with a reflective and somewhat romantic dynamic.⁵⁰

While the comic depicts some of the Joker's most unforgivable crimes, it also shows him sympathetically as a failed comedian and husband, a victim of gang violence and his own psychology. Even after the Joker shoots Gordon's daughter Barbara, Batman offers to

⁴⁹ Miller, *One*, 96.

⁵⁰ Alan Moore, *The Killing Joke*, (New York: DC Comics, 2008).

rehabilitate him, yet the story ends with a silhouetted panel in which we cannot tell whether Batman is putting his hand on the Joker's shoulder to laugh at his joke or strangle him to death.⁵¹ Though *The Killing Joke* "reinstated the sadistic side of the Joker's psychotic personality" in a way that would soon echo into film in *Batman*,⁵² its moral ambiguity problematises Batman's difference from his antagonists, casting doubt on his sanity and his representation as a positive force.

The Killing Joke is referenced as presumed reader knowledge in many later texts, including *A Death in the Family* (1988) in the same year. Jim Starlin's seminal tragedy depicts the Joker's murder of the second Robin, Jason Todd, and Batman's despair at having failed him. A doom had hung over Jason's head since Miller's *Returns*, in which Batman initially refuses any help because of "what happened with Jason."⁵³ In addressing exactly what that future reference means, *A Death in the Family* is an intriguing example of a later text working backwards from a previous text, filling a gap in the mythos that had become an ever more ominous mystery as Jason's adventures had continued.

Furthermore, within this story the Joker is said to have only just escaped incarceration after "what he did to Barbara," this single reference demonstrating how the events of *The Killing Joke* carry such potent impact that all we need to be given is a link between 'Joker' and 'Barbara' to know exactly what Batman is talking about.⁵⁴ While it does not factor into the plot, allowing those who have not read *The Killing Joke* to follow without confusion, this allusion sets the atmosphere of the story, indicates the depiction of a potentially more vengeful Batman who may ultimately become Miller's brutal authoritarian, and underlines

⁵¹ Ibid, 49.

⁵² Jeffries, "Convergence Culture," 43.

⁵³ Miller, *Returns*.

⁵⁴ Starlin, *A Death in the Family*.

the post-*Killing Joke* conception of the Joker being not only a genuine threat to Batman but his singular nemesis.

This looser approach to continuity, weaving a web of intertextual references and allusions, prompts the reader's memory without imposing the pressure of having to read every story. In this way, comic books within this period could safely assume that casual readers would have heard about the latest plotlines, assuming the presence of the Batman mythos within the general zeitgeist. Within a storytelling tradition, this is also uncannily similar to techniques of oral storytelling and ancient myth, which relied not on the perfect preservation of a definitive text, but the enthusiastic communication of particular narrative events within a general sequence.⁵⁵

This ancient manner of storytelling remains integral to modern narratives, just as audiences of Homeric tales understood pre-existing myths such that their familiarity would "ride over any potential points of confusion."⁵⁶ Then as now, specific narrative connections could be left to the storyteller. In this way "characters in transmedia stories do not need to be introduced so much as reintroduced, because they are known from other sources," and this principle holds true even for specific plotlines echoing between incarnations.⁵⁷

Where *A Death in the Family* makes the most use of the rapid production of the comic book medium is in the murder of Jason Todd: a choice made by the readership. At roughly halfway, Jason lies beaten in a burning warehouse, left for dead by the Joker. However, the next page reveals a direct message from the creators to the readers, inviting them to call one of two telephone numbers to vote whether Todd will live or die.⁵⁸ This democratic, interactive moment in the storytelling was duly honoured, and Batman finds that Jason has

⁵⁵ Jan M. Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).

⁵⁶ Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 122.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Starlin, *A Death in the Family*, 97.

died from his wounds. Not only does *A Death in the Family* create a landmark moment in the cultural myth of Batman, but it makes use of interactive storytelling in a way that even videogames would not replicate until 2016's *Batman: The Telltale Series*.

This event highlights a particular resonance effect when the plotlines of one iteration can affect the tonalities of separate works within the mythos. *A Death in the Family* and its sequel *A Lonely Place of Dying* (1989) have been largely responsible for solidifying the modern conception of Batman as a hero mournfully devoted to working alone, with Alfred telling Bruce in the latter story that “since Master Jason’s death, you’ve changed,”⁵⁹ that now Bruce does “all your thinking with those sadly bruised and battered knuckles”⁶⁰ and that he wants Bruce “to care again [and] be the Batman I remember.”⁶¹ Beforehand, as in *The Dark Knight Returns*, such a melancholy and violent hero was a jarring change of pace: while often working independently, prior to Jason’s death Batman typically had a Robin waiting in the wings. However, once this emotional note had been struck in print, Batman’s self-destructive rejection of emotional connection quickly became a defining transmedial character trait, even becoming his primary character arc in works like *The Lego Batman Movie* or *Arkham Knight*.

Breaking the Bat

The subsequent *Knightfall* trilogy (1993-4), consisting of *Knightfall*,⁶² *Knightquest*,⁶³ and *Knightsend*,⁶⁴ continued this trend of loss, tragedy, identity, and multifaceted villains. *Knightfall* covers Batman’s first confrontation with his closest equal, Bane: an orphan raised

⁵⁹ Ibid, 159.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid, 157.

⁶² Doug Moench, Chuck Dixon and Alan Grant, *Knightfall, Volume One* (New York: DC Comics, 2012).

⁶³ Chuck Dixon, Alan Grant, Doug Moench and Jo Duffy, *Knightfall, Volume Two: Knightquest* (New York: DC Comics, 2012).

⁶⁴ Doug Moench, Alan Grant, Chuck Dixon, Jo Duffy, and Denny O’Neil, *Knightfall, Volume Three: Knightend* (New York: DC Comics, 2012).

in a prison and therefore “a victim, like Batman, of debilitating childhood trauma.”⁶⁵ Bane trains to the peak of physical and mental potential, driven by the fear of a mythological bat. When he hears of Batman, Bane undergoes a chemical experiment pushing him beyond Batman’s natural limits. This leads to him deducing Batman’s identity, setting every villain in Gotham loose to weaken him, and finally confronting Bruce in his own home and effortlessly breaking his back. Bruce is forced to retire and undergo long-term medical treatment, passing the mantle of Batman to Jean-Paul Valley in the sequel series *Knightquest*.

Formerly the lethal assassin Azrael indoctrinated by a violent cult, Valley was taken in by Bruce Wayne for potential rehabilitation and makes progress resisting his mental conditioning to become a hero. However, Valley’s will to resist his conditioning fails against the temptation of Batman’s arsenal and authority. He defeats Bane mercilessly, deals out increasingly violent punishment for minor crimes, and begins to murder criminals. In *Knightsend*, on Dick Grayson’s advice as Robin, Bruce forces himself back into action and narrowly overcomes Valley. Soon after, he hands the mantle of Batman to Grayson while he continues his recuperation, realising that a Robin would be the rightful heir to the cowl.

Bane’s character has been adapted into many mediums, particularly *Batman & Robin* (1997) and *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012), though the character of Jean-Paul Valley has only been significantly adapted into the *Arkham* videogames. The wider influence of *Knightfall* over *Knightquest* and *Knightsend* speaks to the mythic significance of pitting a hero against his direct analogue only to fail and lose what seem to be his defining traits: his secret identity, his physical prowess, his motivation, his independence. That one of the most famous moments of the Batman mythos revolves around Bruce being utterly helpless highlights the mythos as orienting around a character study.

⁶⁵ Monnet, “Whatever Gotham Needs,” 110.

The final work of note within this period is *The Long Halloween* (1996-7)⁶⁶, one of the key inspirations for Christopher Nolan's *Dark Knight* trilogy. This text tells the story of Holiday, a serial killer operating on public holidays with themed attacks on members of the criminal underworld, police force, and justice system. Jeph Loeb and Tim Sale's gangster epic returns Batman to his noir detective roots, reflecting on Batman's original runs in *Detective Comics* from 1939 but updating the cast to reflect the lean towards more fantastical or science-fiction villains. In essence, this is a reimagining of what Batman would have been if the full cast and setting had been established from the start, and follows on from Miller's *Year One* continuity.

Batman is no longer an amateur but still an urban legend, taking his first steps into wider recognition by allowing Jim Gordon to introduce him to Harvey Dent. This triumvirate takes on the five crime families of Gotham while struggling to reconcile their duty to remove criminals from society with the reality that the Holiday killer is doing the same thing. This brings to question Batman's no-killing rule while interrogating his oath to clean up the city at any cost. By forcing himself to cooperate and compromise with Gordon and Dent, Bruce must take on the personal responsibilities that Batman was created to avoid.

In a much-adapted moment, Dent's psyche snaps in court when a criminal throws acid on his face, scarring him for life and fracturing his hold on sanity, reality, and legality, Batman's responsibilities as an independent agent collide with his failure to save his friend, breaking the naivety of his black-and-white moral code as he realises that he has created one of Gotham's most dangerous villains and is partly accountable for their crimes. This defines the hero as having duties not only to save victims of crime but criminals themselves,

⁶⁶ Jeph Loeb, *The Long Halloween* (New York: DC Comics, 1998).

delineating a new angle on Batman not as a foil to individuals, but to the systems that have failed them, and the fine line between vigilantism and villainy.

Character Conflict

To have the motivations and philosophies of Batman broken and remade in the wake of *Knightfall*'s similar physical deconstruction of the hero, this era has not only marked the beginning of Bruce Wayne's tale with tragedy and loss but structured it as the emotional framework of his life. This broadly expands the genre of Batman stories from fantastic adventures or procedural mysteries to include psychological thrillers and epic tragedy, a shift that echoes across medial borders into later adaptations.

The hero's modern depiction is no longer the classic construction that Batman is just Bruce Wayne's crime-fighting pseudonym. Now, Batman and Bruce are two valid identities at war for one body. Just as *The Dark Knight Returns* shows that Batman must blow up Bruce's personal life to survive, *Knightfall* shows that Bruce must destroy his body to be free of Batman. The Post-Crisis Batman is a character in conflict with himself, struggling to reconcile a stable identity out of a web of trauma, ethics, and iconography.

This is a deconstructed, self-aware conception in which Bruce Wayne consciously creates something far greater than he could ever live up to. The idea of Batman is now separate from Bruce Wayne or any man, turning the overall 'Batman' character into a duality: a setting in which we find two identities in dialogue. The cultural iconicity of Batman becomes a persistent point of insecurity to whoever wears the cowl. Within this selection of texts, we can see a broader imagination at work within Batman's Post-Crisis mythos. This is a character fighting to become a symbolic figure within the constraints of mortality, morality,

Exam Number: B196069

and responsibility. Just like every villain in Gotham, Bruce Wayne is obsessed with finding out who Batman really is.

PART TWO

Reboot, Recast, Reflect: The Caped Crusader on Camera

The Batmen

In almost every film depiction of Batman, either live-action or animation, he has had to introduce himself in full costume to a person understandably puzzled by whatever is standing in front of them, to utter the simple yet iconic line, “I’m Batman.”⁶⁷ Michael Keaton lifts a criminal by his collar to speak it right into his face;⁶⁸ Val Kilmer calmly explains it to the vanquished Riddler;⁶⁹ Kevin Conroy proclaims it to the disapproving ghost of Thomas Wayne;⁷⁰ George Clooney extends it as a courtesy to Mr Freeze;⁷¹ Christian Bale hauls a mob leader vertically out of a car and growls it.⁷² Will Arnett sings it in a musical number.⁷³

While this serves the character’s needs within the scene, it always has the secondary purpose of establishing this particular actor’s performance of a symbolic figure. With the audience being safely confident of knowing who is playing the lead of the film they have paid to see, and even children per Jenkins are likely to “enter the movie with preexisting identifications because they have played with the action figures,”⁷⁴ this moment of proclamation may seem oddly redundant. But for this hero, the revolving door of men beneath the mask is particularly busy.

⁶⁷ *Batman*, dir. Tim Burton (1989; United States: Warner Bros., DVD).

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Batman Forever*, dir. Joel Schumacher (1995; United States: Warner Bros., DVD).

⁷⁰ *Batman: The Animated Series*, created by Eric Radomski and Bruce Timm, aired 1992-1995, HBO Max.

⁷¹ *Batman & Robin*, dir. Joel Schumacher (1997; United States: Warner Bros., DVD).

⁷² *Batman Begins*, dir. Christopher Nolan (2005; United States: Warner Bros., DVD).

⁷³ *The Lego Batman Movie*, dir. Chris McKay (2017; United States: Warner Animation Group, DVD).

⁷⁴ Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 123.

The works in question for this section can be divided into four key continuities. First, the film series consisting of *Batman* (1989), *Batman Returns* (1992), *Batman Forever* (1995), and *Batman & Robin* (1997), directed by Tim Burton for the first two films and Joel Schumacher for the second two films. Alongside this comes the televised *Batman: The Animated Series* continuity unfolding over three primary shows (1992-2001). There is then a gap of almost a decade due to how Schumacher's *Batman & Robin* "killed the franchise"⁷⁵ before Christopher Nolan's film trilogy of *Batman Begins* (2005), *The Dark Knight* (2008), and *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012). Finally, we have Zack Snyder's broader Justice League trilogy of *Man of Steel* (2013), *Batman v Superman* (2016), and a third film which exists in two competing forms: *Justice League* (2017), initially directed by Snyder but mostly reshot by Joss Whedon, and *Zack Snyder's Justice League* (2021), made of Snyder's original material after the poor reception of Whedon's cut and unprecedented fan demand for the intended tale, echoing *A Death in the Family*'s readership pushing for Jason's death. Our final multi-part series will be the Lego iteration of Batman from *The Lego Movie* (2014), *The Lego Batman Movie* (2017), and *The Lego Movie 2: The Second Part* (2019). Despite being situated within the Snyder timeframe, this iteration is better analysed last due to its parodic nature and unifying depiction of all preceding continuities.

Keaton, Kilmer, Clooney, Chaos

The 1989-97 series marks Batman's first earnest cinematic adventure on the 50th anniversary of the character's publication, and the first two films "[exhibit] the weary, isolated Batman that originated in *The Dark Knight Returns*."⁷⁶ Within the first scene, the character's mythological aspiration is clear: Batman commands two beaten criminals to "tell your friends

⁷⁵ Winstead, "As a Symbol," 573.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 575.

about me,” letting them go free just to spread his mythic presence. Furthermore, as Jeffries describes, “[because] we are not given an explanation for Batman’s presence right away – he simply exists – we might [...] compare his representation to that of a mythic figure.”⁷⁷

For the first theatrical film of any property to already assume even a mythic awareness on the audience’s part highlights a secondary dialogue happening between the creative team and the audience. Jeffries accurately identifies how “as in transmedia narratives, our familiarity with the character is assumed by the filmmakers”⁷⁸ and we can see this in action, even though Jeffries later comment that “understanding the film in this way [is] doomed to failure, because Burton’s film exists in a narrative universe separate from the comics, from the serials, and from the television show.”⁷⁹ This requirement for transmedia narratives to be contained within the same continuity is already exclusionary to tales drawn from a more mythological heritage, in which no single text is absolute, and thoroughly outdated in light of the comic book medium’s well-loved multiverse approach to continuities, in which stories of any medium are typically regarded as being independent yet connected.

The moral character of Batman is a departure from even Miller’s authoritarian hero. Monnet outlines how the character’s “several structuring principles” typically include how he “does not intentionally kill any villains,”⁸⁰ yet the Burton-Schumacher Batman routinely murders his enemies when given the chance. In the rooftop climax of *Batman*, he refuses to let the Joker climb a rope-ladder into his getaway helicopter, and instead ties Joker’s leg to a broken statue which drags him to his death.⁸¹ *Batman Returns* shows him deliberately setting a criminal on fire with the Batmobile exhaust, as well as pushing a criminal down a sewage

⁷⁷ Jeffries, “Convergence Culture,” 45.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Monnet, “Whatever Gotham Needs,” 99-100.

⁸¹ Burton, *Batman*.

pipe with a live explosive.⁸² *Batman Forever* had Batman throw a handful of coins at the chance-obsessed Two-Face standing on a high beam, deliberately manipulating the villain's mental fixations to make him flail, lose balance, and fall to his death.⁸³ In essence, one of the key lines of continuity in this series is not the stringently anti-lethal moral code of the comics, but an antithetical murderous morality made especially for the movies.

Further confusion arises around casting Bruce himself. While Burton kept a continuous cast across *Batman* and *Batman Returns* with Michael Keaton leading as Bruce Wayne, Schumacher replaced Keaton with Val Kilmer in *Batman Forever* then George Clooney in *Batman & Robin*. These changes are not remarked upon within the films either by Michael Gough's Alfred or Pat Hingle's Commissioner Gordon, the only actors to remain for the entire series, or by Chris O'Donnell's Robin in the second two films. There are no recurring villains between films and even Billy Dee Williams' Dent is recast to Tommy Lee Jones in *Batman Forever*, confusing how far we are meant to approach the series as a single narrative.

Gotham City undergoes a drastic design refurbishment between each film, from an industrial hellscape in *Batman* to a fantastical Gothic wonderland in *Batman Returns*, with Burton's "noir, gothic visualisation" being so popular that they almost immediately "became central to the Batman universe, particularly for the video games and subsequent moving-image adaptations."⁸⁴ Still, for the next two films Schumacher's art deco neon metropolis steamrolls the nightmarish fantasy with skyscraper-sized statues holding roads and bridges and buildings aloft and repainting the gothic element with a cartoonish, raving colour palette of theatrical excess.

⁸² *Batman Returns*, dir. Tim Burton (1992; United States: Warner Bros., DVD).

⁸³ Schumacher, *Batman Forever*.

⁸⁴ Barrett, "Many Stories," 135-6.

As Winstead notes, “Schumacher took the franchise and the character thirty years into the past” rather than developing the story concept in new directions.⁸⁵ While Burton had created a post-*Killing Joke* hero “characterized by masculine brooding, violence, psychological complexity, and loneliness”⁸⁶ with what Monnet describes as “compelling representations of the complex and troublingly attractive Joker [and] Penguin,”⁸⁷ Schumacher pivoted the same character into a world of “colorful costumes, exaggerated set pieces, and cartoonish, one-dimensional villains.”⁸⁸ The clearest example of this is *Batman & Robin*’s adaptation of Bane: the eloquent, philosophical, self-made genius and combat master who had manipulated Batman’s cleverest villains in *Knightfall* is here a feeble, crazed prisoner who inflates into a grunting oaf serving Poison Ivy. The failure of these films reinforces Jeffries’ theory on successful transmedial storytelling, in which “each text in a [transmedia] franchise should contribute to the understanding of the same narrative universe, if not the advancement of the narrative proper.”⁸⁹ By not only abandoning Burton’s themes but contradicting the tone, style, and design of its universe, the franchise erodes its own foundations and resists attempts to rewatch it as a unified work.

Either of these options may have been popular in their own right, with even Schumacher’s vision aligning with Adam West’s popular “campy”⁹⁰ television series. There has been space for both approaches within the mythos, with Monnet noting how “Batman often oscillates between dark and light versions, intensely alone and sometimes slightly mad [...] or playful and energetic as he dances/fights alongside his young sidekick.”⁹¹ However, the whiplash effect of tonal change, design overhaul, and constant recasting made the series

⁸⁵ Winstead, “As a Symbol,” 573.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 575.

⁸⁷ Monnet, “Whatever Gotham Needs,” 103.

⁸⁸ Winstead, “As a Symbol,” 573.

⁸⁹ Jeffries, “Convergence Culture,” 45.

⁹⁰ Winstead, “As a Symbol,” 573.

⁹¹ Monnet, “Whatever Gotham Needs,” 101.

incomprehensible: as Winstead describes it, “just as mainstream audiences had accepted [Burton’s] big screen Batman as part of the cultural mythos and identity of the character, director Joel Schumacher took over.”⁹²

This changeability in elements of character and design mirrors the transmedial connective tissue of the comic book medium. Comic books are an essentialist and graphic medium. With artists regularly changing, character design must be an iconic template, abstracted instead of absolute. Bruce Wayne has no defining features common to each of his notable outings in comics other than dark hair, blue eyes, and pale skin. It is the proximity between this bland Caucasian template and a hyper-stylistic bat costume which informs the overall character.

Notably, in 1989’s *Batman*, while we meet Batman in the opening scene, we do not see Bruce Wayne until twenty-five minutes later as an anonymous party guest in Wayne Manor being asked by reporters “which one of these men is Bruce Wayne,” to which he replies with puzzlement: “I’m not sure.”⁹³ Five minutes pass before Bruce overhears them examining a suit of Japanese armour, informs them of its origin, and only introduces himself when they ask how he knows. While tongue-in-cheek, this scene highlights Bruce’s Post-Crisis characterisation as an introspective, identity-obsessed character trying to reconcile his natural identity with his created identity and balance his public face somewhere between both.

⁹² Winstead, “As a Symbol,” 575.

⁹³ Burton, *Batman*.

Cartoons, Course-Correction, Conroy

Contrasting that haphazard, iconic approach to canon, in which continuity is an accessory to story rather than a structural factor, the continuity of *Batman: The Animated Series* took the opposite approach. This series began as *Batman: The Animated Series* from 1992-1995,⁹⁴ then returned with a visual redesign to take advantage of emerging graphic animation technologies for *The New Batman Adventures* from 1997-1999,⁹⁵ before taking a leap into a futuristic setting and aesthetic with considerable computer-generated imagery for *Batman Beyond* in 1999-2001.⁹⁶ Despite these gaps, the storyline maintains continuity and for clarity's sake is referred to here as *The Animated Series*. Voice actors remained the same for their characters throughout, and Kevin Conroy and Mark Hamill's depictions of Batman and the Joker have since been used in animated films and videogames beyond the show's own storyworld due to their popularity and recognisability.

Driven by the creative minds of Eric Randomski, Bruce Timm, and Paul Dini, *The Animated Series* took a precise approach to continuity and serialisation. While much changed from the comics, such as reinventing many villains' motivations, the show mixed its crime-of-the-week format with multi-episode stories, over-arching plot threads, and a creative approach akin to comics of the 1980s and 1990s valuing curated chronologies and over-arching narratives to build a consistent and attentive readership. This allowed for the slow construction of audience investment in character arcs.

For instance, Dent is introduced in the second episode, "On Leather Wings,"⁹⁷ but does not become Two-Face until the seventeenth and eighteenth episodes, "Two-Face Part

⁹⁴ *Batman: The Animated Series*.

⁹⁵ *The New Batman Adventures*, created by Bruce Timm and Paul Dini, aired 1997-1999, HBO Max.

⁹⁶ *Batman Beyond*, created by Bruce Timm, Paul Dini and Alan Burnett, aired 1999-2001, HBO Max.

⁹⁷ *Batman: The Animated Series*, season 1, episode 2, "On Leather Wings," dir. Kevin Altieri, aired September 19, 1992, HBO Max.

I”⁹⁸ and “Two-Face Part II,”⁹⁹ making the loss of his sanity and identity more impactful to the viewer while also gaining a stronger empathetic bond with Batman’s grief and shame at failing him. Comparatively, Schumacher gave his live-action Two-Face a fleeting newsclip backstory on a background television, showing only the moment of his face being burned.¹⁰⁰ Coupled with recasting the actor, the audience has no comparative basis on how different Two-Face is from Dent, highlighting the strength of *The Animated Series*’ long-form approach.

This series was aware of its place within the mythos and the audience’s own awareness, with the near unique claim that in its original run from 1992-5, the show title was never displayed in its opening credits. As the show begins, we hear Elfman’s theme to *Batman* (1989) against quick-cutting scenes. First, two robbers blowing up the door to a bank, then a strange car races down the road, the robbers escape the police by climbing a building, but on the rooftop they are confronted by a living shadow. A fight ensues, the robbers are defeated, and a strike of Miller-esque lightning illuminates Batman against the Gotham skyline, the sheer iconicity of his design functioning as the title declaration. From there, we see only the episode title on an impressionistic art panel before the show begins, framing each episode like a standalone short film, or a graphic novel as opposed to a serial comic.

This conscious lack of identifying language in a medium filled with title cards and overt branding demonstrates a reliance on the audience’s familiarity with the setting, actions, and audio-visual iconography of Batman to understand what they are watching, while also intriguing new viewers with such a self-confident display of needing no introduction nor

⁹⁸ *Batman: The Animated Series*, Season 1, episode 17, “Two-Face Part I,” dir. Kevin Altieri, aired November 7, 1992, HBO Max.

⁹⁹ *Batman: The Animated Series*, Season 1, episode 18, “Two-Face Part II,” dir. Kevin Altieri, aired November 14, 1992, HBO Max.

¹⁰⁰ Schumacher, *Batman Forever*.

linguistic explanation. This continuity has no actual relationship to the Burton-Schumacher series and serves as the first example of that series being artistically abstracted by having its visual and auditory cues adopted as a film language for the Batman mythos. Its rewriting of villain backstories has even been adapted into live-action film, such as the Emmy-winning episode “Heart of Ice”¹⁰¹ inspiring *Batman & Robin*’s depiction of Mr Freeze as a scientist trying to cure the fatal disease of his cryogenically frozen wife, or “Mad Love”¹⁰² informing the relationship between Harley Quinn and the Joker in the Snyder continuity of *Suicide Squad* (2016)¹⁰³ and *Birds of Prey* (2020).¹⁰⁴

Many episodes such as “Beware the Gray Ghost” and “Legends of the Dark Knight” speak directly to the audience’s awareness of prior incarnations. The former episode sees Bruce Wayne investigate the actor behind one of his childhood television heroes, the Gray Ghost: a masked, noirish detective. Adam West voices the actor who had played the Gray Ghost, Simon Trent, and is given pale blue glasses in allusion to the colour of West’s costume in the 1960s *Batman* TV series. This places *The Animated Series* in dialogue with its most popular medial predecessor, and allows for moments of mutual intermedial exchange via Conroy and West. Trent even comments to Batman that the Batcave is an “almost exact replica of the Gray Ghost’s lair,” acknowledging West’s Batman as having pioneered the vast layout, the technological ‘batcomputer’, and the distribution of vehicles and trophies.¹⁰⁵

The later episode “Legends of the Dark Knight” directly applies the visual design and writing style of prior shows and incarnations to this one by way of a group of children

¹⁰¹ *Batman: The Animated Series*, Season 1, episode 3, “Heart of Ice,” dir. Bruce Timm, aired November 21, 1992, HBO Max.

¹⁰² *The New Batman Adventures*, Season 2, episode 11, “Mad Love,” dir. Butch Lukic, aired January 16, 1999, HBO Max.

¹⁰³ *Suicide Squad*, dir. David Ayer, 2016 (United States: RatPac-Dune Entertainment) DVD.

¹⁰⁴ *Birds of Prey*, dir. Cathy Yan, 2020 (United States: Warner Bros. Pictures) DVD.

¹⁰⁵ *Batman: The Animated Series*, season 1, episode 32, “Beware the Gray Ghost,” dir. Boyd Kirkland, aired March 27, 1993, HBO Max.

relating their experiences of Batman to each other.¹⁰⁶ The first section mimics the comic style of the 1950s and 1960s, with slapstick humour and childish character designs. The second section adapts Frank Miller's style of the 1980s with a brutal older Batman fighting mutant gangs with near lethal force and a tanklike Batmobile in a futuristic Gotham, with much dialogue lifted from the graphic novel. Here, his Robin is identical to Carrie Kelly. The final section returns to the show's own style, showing a fight between Batman and Firefly in a theatre with all the children hiding in the seats mimicking the show's audience.

This storyworld continued into *Batman Beyond* (1999-2001), depicting an aged Bruce giving up his crime-fighting career when he suffers a heart attack during a fight and must use a gun to ward off the criminals, breaking his oath against firearms.¹⁰⁷ Years later, teenager Terry McGinnis breaks into Bruce's home and steals the Batsuit to avenge the murder of his adoptive father, mimicking Bruce's own origin story.¹⁰⁸ Through his natural aptitude, Terry convinces Bruce to train him as the new Batman and faces many carnivalesque villains of his own. In this way, the *Animated Series* continuity ends with a perfect reflection on the current cultural myth of Batman requiring the character to have passed through those certain narrative motions: a young man afflicted by criminal tragedy, trained by an elderly mentor, who becomes a costumed crime-fighter with an array of themed gadgets.

Nolan's Closed Canon

Christopher Nolan's *Dark Knight* trilogy shows a distinct progression in its core characters across a consistent setting, a conscious attempt to rebuild Batman's live-action reputation

¹⁰⁶ *The New Batman Adventures*, season 2, episode 6, "Legends of the Dark Knight," dir. Dan Riba, aired October 10, 1998, HBO Max.

¹⁰⁷ *Batman Beyond*, season 1, episode 1, "Rebirth: Part 1," dir. Curt Geda, aired January 10, 1999, HBO Max.

¹⁰⁸ *Batman Beyond*, season 1, episode 2, "Rebirth: Part 2," dir. Curt Geda, aired January 10, 1999, HBO Max.

after the confusing Burton-Schumacher series. While Bruce Wayne's love interest Rachel Dawes is recast between the first and second film, all other characters are kept the same. *Batman Begins* (2005) provides a full origin story akin to *Year One*, including the murder of the Waynes, his training as a young man, a short stint as a balaclava-wearing vigilante, creating the Batsuit, building his relationship with Gordon, and ending with the same scene of Gordon informing Batman on a rooftop of the emergence of the Joker.¹⁰⁹ The film is closer in genre to *The Long Halloween* than the entirely grounded *Year One*, bringing together problems around institutional corruption and organised crime along with the more outlandish, quasi-supernatural villains of Scarecrow and Ra's al Ghul.

Overall, this is a distinct departure from the previous franchises, and the realist tone of Nolan's trilogy immediately distances them from those continuities. However, the title of *Batman Begins* still communicates to the audience a direct lineage from *Batman*, *Batman Returns*, and *Batman Forever*. Moreover, the titular 'Begins' hints at it being a prequel. This binding and distancing technique speaks to the mythological atmosphere around the character, the stories of Batman existing as an anthology of disparate works, mixed together but never compounded. *The Dark Knight* (2008) shifts away from that lineage, being the first film not to use the word 'Batman' in its title.

In terms of character, Bale's Bruce exhibits a core fixation with the moral code of Batman, particularly the refusal to kill. *Batman Begins* shows Bruce as a young man smuggle a revolver to the trial of his parents' murderer, Joe Chill, but only moments before he can fire, a gangster executes Chill in front of him. Afterward, Bruce admits to Rachel that "all these years, I wanted to kill him. Now I can't."¹¹⁰ It is only after her admonishment that "justice is

¹⁰⁹ Nolan, *Batman Begins*.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

about harmony” that he abandons the use of guns and begins his physical training under the tutelage of Ra’s al Ghul and the League of Shadows.¹¹¹

Still, Batman draws a fine line between murdering someone and failing to protect their life. He does not have a code around killing so much as guns, seeing his “one rule” as pertaining only to cold-blooded murder than preserving life.¹¹² If villains create lethal circumstances, Batman has no responsibility to protect them. For instance, he burns down the League of Shadows instead of obeying their order to execute a criminal, yet the collapsing building kills many. Later, he leaves Ra’s al Ghul trapped on an exploding train while he flies away, saying that “I’m not going to kill you, but I don’t have to save you.”¹¹³

In line with the Miller-esque narrative of Batman becoming more brutal as he ages, Nolan’s Batman repeatedly pushes the boundary of his anti-killing morality in *The Dark Knight*. Upon seeing Dent flipping a coin to decide whether to execute Gordon’s son, Batman tackles Dent off a lethal height and only saves himself, even though his earlier rescue of Rachel Dawes falling from a skyscraper had established his ability to save Dent.¹¹⁴ Notably, Batman does save the Joker after similarly pushing him off a building. There, the villain cackles that “I think you and I are destined to do this forever” as Batman pulls him back up, in an allusion to the centrality of their conflict to the ever-reinvented mythos.¹¹⁵

In a direct commentary on Batman’s morality in film, Nolan re-stages a fight between Batman and the Joker from *Batman* (1989) with a different moral outcome. Burton has Batman in the Batwing flying and shooting at the Joker; the villain is standing alone in the middle of a highway shooting back, each of them trying to kill the other while staring their

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² *The Dark Knight*, dir. Christopher Nolan (2008; United States: Warner Bros., DVD).

¹¹³ Nolan, *Batman Begins*.

¹¹⁴ Nolan, *The Dark Knight*.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

own death in the face, and the conflict ends in the Joker shooting down and crashing the Batwing.¹¹⁶ Nolan adapts this moment by having his Batman riding down the highway on the 'Batpod' motorbike, guns pointed at the Joker as the villain shoots at him, provoking him to shoot or crash into him while muttering "hit me, hit me, come on, I want you to do it..."¹¹⁷ Their lethal game ends in Bale's Batman coming just metres shy of killing the Joker before his moral code wins out and he crashes the bike himself with a roar of anguish.

As mentioned earlier, *The Dark Knight* drew heavily on *The Long Halloween* in its handling of Dent's transformation into Two-Face, building out the comic mythology with an intriguing approach to the source material, preserving its character arcs but subverting its plot. For instance, while *The Long Halloween* shows Harvey survive an indoor bombing without a scratch, he is disfigured by a gangster in court throwing acid on him during a deposition.¹¹⁸ *The Dark Knight*, however, first presents Harvey in court and shows him disarming a gangster who tries to shoot him in the face during a deposition, then later has him brutally scarred during an indoor bombing.¹¹⁹

This conscious twisting of carefully replicated events detaches the emotional arc of key characters from the story details, allowing each element to retain its importance for character progression but exhibiting the mix-and-match freedom of the mythic subject matter for plot, shifting the ingredients to best suit a fresh retelling. While this may be an act of narrative infidelity for a typical adaptation, it highlights how the transmedial nature of Batman's tales allows for key events of singular works to gain mythic relevance when deconstructed and reorganised into a new medium.

¹¹⁶ Burton, *Batman*.

¹¹⁷ Nolan, *The Dark Knight*.

¹¹⁸ Loeb, *Halloween*.

¹¹⁹ Nolan, *The Dark Knight*.

Moreover, the trick of switching circumstance and consequence, setting and event, is a vital method of preserving canonical features while still providing the audience with authentically surprising and engaging stories: an audience who have seen Dent scarred in court in *Batman Forever* will not experience the required shock at seeing it happen again in *The Dark Knight* unless something changes, albeit within limits. This comforts the audience's existing knowledge of and nostalgic familiarity for famous elements of the mythos, while protecting their key desire to be shown something fresh and original. Heath Ledger's Joker even presents his own backstory to various characters in three conflicting stories,¹²⁰ adapting the philosophy of Moore's *Killing Joke* iteration that "if I'm going to have a past, I prefer it to be multiple choice."¹²¹

The Dark Knight Rises (2012) makes multiple connections to previous works. Loosely combining *The Dark Knight Returns* with *Knightfall*, *Rises* shows an aging and battered Bruce Wayne at a loss for an identity or purpose without the ability to be Batman.¹²² However, at the emergence of Catwoman and Bane, he binds his broken body in mechanical aids, evoking Miller's aged Batman using mechanical supports. In his first confrontation with Bane, Batman has his back broken over the villain's knee identically to their fight in *Knightfall* and must recover his fitness to defeat him.

Instead of adapting the Azrael arc, the film instead borrows from the loose supporting role of Robin: not a leading vigilante himself, but the closest thing to a rogue hero left in the city. Joseph Gordon-Levitt's John Blake deduces Batman's identity and allies with the hero, in turn receiving lessons on vigilantism. At the end, Batman fakes his death and that of Bruce Wayne to live anonymously abroad—recalling Miller's Batman faking the death of Bruce

¹²⁰ Nolan, *The Dark Knight*.

¹²¹ Moore, *The Killing Joke*. 40.

¹²² *The Dark Knight Rises*, dir. Christopher Nolan (2012; United States: Warner Bros., DVD).

Wayne to unify his psyche—and leaves the Batcave and his arsenal of equipment to John Blake in his will. As Winstead describes it, Batman here “transcends the physical and becomes part of the fabric of society.”¹²³ Nolan’s Bruce is the author of a myth, a performance artist whose creation truly comes to life only when the author dies. No longer a man, he becomes “an incorruptible symbol.”¹²⁴

Vitality, John Blake is identified as Robin John Blake at the reading of Bruce’s will, and with Blake’s acceptance of the Batcave, Nolan completes the *Knightsend* plot of Bruce handing the mantle of Batman to his first Robin. This reconciles key aspects of each Robin: Blake is an orphan like Dick Grayson and Jason Todd, and like Todd he grows up as a disaffected, angry youth. He figures out Bruce is Batman like Tim Drake, and like Grayson again he goes on to become a detective and Batman’s preferred successor. Robin Blake is an amalgamation of each origin story while following Batman’s own origin: a tragic end for his parents, a solitary upbringing, a dedication to training himself, and an emotional progression from desiring vengeful punishment to protecting victims. He even swears off guns when he accidentally kills an attacker by firing a ricocheting warning shot.

Subtext, Superman, Snyder

With Burton and Schumacher having given us a Batman with no clear beginning nor ending, and Nolan having shown a fully contained start-to-finish life story, a third angle on continuity appears when we include Zack Snyder’s trilogy of *Man of Steel* (2013), *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* (2016) and the two editions of *Justice League* (2017, 2021), as well as cameos in David Ayer’s *Suicide Squad* (2016).

¹²³ Winstead, “As a Symbol,” 584.

¹²⁴ Winstead, “As a Symbol,” 583.

The first film does not show Batman, being a Superman reboot, but in the climactic fight we see references establishing the character through silent iconicity. Moments apart, we see a comedic “Keep Calm and Call Batman” poster in a Metropolis construction site, followed by a satellite bearing the “Wayne Enterprises” logo.¹²⁵ Taken together, these show that Bruce Wayne is a super-rich, technology-oriented public figure, though perhaps an urban legend still as Batman. The sequel, *Batman v Superman*, opens with Bruce arriving in Metropolis during *Man of Steel*’s final act, revisiting the scene from his perspective, and ensuring through a process of retroactive continuity or ‘retconning’ that Bruce had been present.¹²⁶

Batman v Superman broadly covers the history of Ben Affleck’s Batman through implication alone. The Waynes’ murder plays out silently in fragmented shots: the family leaving a theatre, a confrontation in a dark alley, the shooting, the child fleeing from the funeral, falling into a cave of bats.¹²⁷ Filmed mostly in slow-motion, this representation mirrors comic panels, declaring the film’s fundamentally transmedial perspective on the character. As we discover that this Batman brands criminals with a bat-shaped scar to encourage other prisoners to kill them, Jeremy Irons’ Alfred disdainfully comments “new rules?” to which Bruce bluntly replies: “We’re criminals, Alfred. We’ve always been criminals.”¹²⁸

This shows a direct dialogue between the film presupposing an audience knowledge of Bruce’s morality in other works, and a desire to take those rules to their limit with such twists as casting Batman not as a hero of social law, but a criminal out for personal justice. When Clark Kent challenges Bruce at a public gala on why he dislikes Superman, Bruce

¹²⁵ *Man of Steel*, dir. Zack Snyder (2013; United States: Legendary Pictures, DVD).

¹²⁶ *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice*, dir. Zack Snyder (2016; United States: Warner Bros. Pictures, DVD).

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

retorts that “maybe it’s the Gotham City in me; we just have a bad history with freaks dressed like clowns.”¹²⁹ This line carries narrative weight only through the supposition of wider knowledge of the Batman mythos on at least an intramedial level and would sound absurd to anyone unaware of the Joker.

Later, we see a bloodied, burned, red and green costume preserved in the Batcave, bearing a golden ‘R’ and spray-painted with the phrase “Joke’s on you, Batman!”¹³⁰ This reference to Robin’s fate in *A Death in the Family* is a moment of absolute iconography, the storytelling purely visual and reliant on the audience’s awareness of the mythos. By having Affleck replicate the moment in *The Dark Knight Returns* when Bruce gazes on the costume and overlaying it with narrative detail from *A Death in the Family*, Snyder’s film fills the information gap in Miller’s tale with the answer we have since learned from Starlin’s, giving us a fully-informed depiction of that event to motivate a more vengeful, violent iteration. Lex Luthor additionally taunts Batman about having “let your family die,” evoking the title to the audience directly.¹³¹ While *Justice League* does not develop this, *Zack Snyder’s Justice League* does in one of Bruce’s apocalyptic visions of the future, in which Jared Leto’s Joker taunts Batman about “why [he] would send a Boy Wonder to do a man’s job.”¹³² This implies that Robin may have died trying to murder the Joker on Batman’s orders. Within the decision to expand on this plotline in the director’s cut, we see increased willingness to trust that any audiences willing to watch it will be able to pick up on this implication.

Snyder’s approach to Batman is heavily drawn from Miller’s works, to the point of having Batman wear the same robotic armour when fighting Superman¹³³ as Miller depicts in

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² *Zack Snyder’s Justice League*, dir. Zack Snyder (2021; United States: Warner Bros. Pictures, DVD).

¹³³ Snyder, *Batman v Superman*.

The Dark Knight Returns.¹³⁴ While this Batman hasn't retired, he has grown bitter, judgmental, and righteous, and allows criminals to die from their own violent actions. For instance, when a kidnapper holds Superman's mother hostage with a flamethrower and Batman only has a gun, he shoots the flamethrower's fuel canister such that the man explodes from his decision to light the weapon.¹³⁵ This requires Batman to put himself between the blast and Martha Kent, showing he values his rules about guns and murder enough to risk himself. Notably, in Bruce's dystopian visions he sees himself gunning down his enemies with automatic rifles and snapping their necks: a small step over a thin line, but a stark challenge to the mythos.¹³⁶

Mirroring the Burton-Schumacher flip of tone and character, Joss Whedon's *Justice League* reshoots many of Bruce Wayne's scenes to reference prior iterations. For instance, Bruce's antique Asian armour collection is not present in Snyder's version,¹³⁷ and references Bruce's aforementioned introduction in Burton's *Batman*.¹³⁸ Furthermore, as Bruce researches intergalactic villain Steppenwolf, Jeremy Irons' Alfred sarcastically longs for "the days when one's biggest concerns were exploding wind-up penguins."¹³⁹ This references the Penguin of *Batman Returns* and his missile-strapped penguins,¹⁴⁰ and the *Lego Batman* franchise featuring explosive clockwork penguins. Vitally, no mention had been made before of the Penguin or such contraptions, with the line relying on the audience's prior knowledge.

¹³⁴ Miller, *Returns*, p.190.

¹³⁵ Snyder, *Batman v Superman*.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ *Justice League*, dir. Zack Snyder and Joss Whedon (2017; United States: Warner Bros. Pictures, DVD).

¹³⁸ Burton, *Batman*.

¹³⁹ Snyder and Whedon, *Justice League*.

¹⁴⁰ Burton, *Batman Returns*.

Man, Myth, Lego

The Lego Batman Movie, released just months after Snyder's *Batman v Superman*, is the keystone of the *Lego Batman* continuity, which had existed as a brand since the early 2000s, including a videogame trilogy and tie-in animated films. This iteration of the character, as voiced by Will Arnett, even had a substantial role in *The Lego Movie* (2014) before this spin-off project and a later role *The Lego Movie 2* (2019). This iteration is unique in having reversed the typical transmedial journey of other iterations moving broadly from comics to films to videogames and toys.

The Lego nature of the film is a testament to Hutcheon's comment that "electronic technologies have made [...] fidelity to the imagination—rather than [...] reality—possible in new ways,"¹⁴¹ but going by Plantinga's understanding of the "ontologically realistic" film as one which "conforms with the reality it represents,"¹⁴² this film exhibits as much realism in its textures and lighting as any live-action depiction, with Daniel Martin noting how the "faux stop-motion style [...] emphasizes the scale and plastic texture of its minifigure characters" by employing an "authentic" and "brazenly toyetic" style of cinematography.¹⁴³

Where the previous films had established their own continuities, *The Lego Batman Movie* freely admits existing within a communal imagination or network of properties. For instance, Alfred tells a melancholy Batman that he had "undergone similar phases in 2016, 2012, 2008, 2005, 1997, 1995, 1992, 1989, and that weird one in 1966," deftly listing each notable film adaptation from Ben Affleck that same year all the way back to Adam West.¹⁴⁴ However, this line is played sincerely and parodically, establishing Batman's emotional

¹⁴¹ Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 29.

¹⁴² Carl Plantinga, *Alternative Realities* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2021), 22.

¹⁴³ Martin, "Reanimating the Dark Knight," 96.

¹⁴⁴ McKay, *The Lego Batman Movie*.

motivation. This is a film about the mythos, “function[ing] as a nostalgic celebration of the superhero’s vast multimedia history.”¹⁴⁵

While the plot is not an adaption of any specific comic or film plotline, many strands of narrative content intertwine beyond outright references, to the extent of Martin commenting on a “bold, postmodern metatextuality” in the film’s awareness of prior works.¹⁴⁶ Arnett voices Batman in a gravelly imitation of Bale, while Michael Cera’s spritely tone for Dick Grayson evokes Ward’s 1960’s depiction,¹⁴⁷ contrasting the most serious and playful versions of each character. The core emotional arc strongly echoes the love-hate dynamic central to Moore’s *Killing Joke*, examining Batman and the Joker’s destructive relationship in romantic language. For instance, the Joker desires to be Batman’s “greatest enemy,” citing how Batman is “obsessed” with him and “what [they] have is special,” though Batman refuses, driving the Joker to tears by saying that he is currently “fighting a few different people.”¹⁴⁸ Burton’s original Dent, Billy Dee Williams, returns to voice Two-Face after being recast in *Batman Forever*: a minor role oriented towards audiences familiar with that specific version of the character.

Heroic Heritage

Across these representations of Batman in motion, we see an increasing concern for curated continuities, over-arching narratives, and series identity. Furthermore, film has demonstrated a key strength in the preservation of mythic elements in its ability to reframe, restage, and

¹⁴⁵ McAllister, “Hey, Kids,” 94.

¹⁴⁶ Martin, “Reanimating the Dark Knight,” 96.

¹⁴⁷ *Batman*, season 1, episode 1, “Hi Diddle Riddle,” dir. Robert Butler, aired May 21, 1966, DVD.

¹⁴⁸ McKay, *The Lego Batman Movie*.

recast iconic moments to shed new light on their meanings or recapture the authentic reaction to their first happening.

Simultaneously, the echoing effect shown in Post-Crisis comics is replicated in the expanding film section of the mythos: every later work, whether in the same continuity or not, cannot escape the lasting impressions of its predecessors. Though they may strive for independence, there is an inescapable narrative bloodline expressed through referential details. It is in the employment of those details that a series can describe a new identity.

No matter who is under the cowl, or if they are just a stroke of paint or group of pixels, each one stands in the shadow of the Batmen before them and builds their Gotham on the foundations left behind. While this can weigh new iterations with narrative burdens or distasteful airs, it also affords a creative shorthand and an open dialogue with a growing audience, where the full work of a previous film can be invoked through the inclusion of mere notes in the soundtrack of the next one. Moreover, with sufficient distance from crossing multiple medial boundaries, a film can gain a broader perspective on what has come before, and in equal parts of sincerity and parody, tell a meta-tale about the mythos itself.

PART THREE

Customise, Control, Curate: Playing the Hero

Gotham Games

With the videogame medium being a collaborative intersection of audible, visual, and textual layers of narrative, it is no surprise that its works are able to draw directly from various sources across media. Barrett notes that “video games have often been overlooked within transmedia studies,” but with the videogame industry now rivalling cinema both financially and in popular attention, the workings of this medium are a vital area for transmedial analysis.¹⁴⁹

With multiple film and television projects in the Batman franchises, there have been many tie-in games of varying scales, but the typical approach of directly adapting the story of a film into a videogame routinely draws criticism for predictability, while deviation damages fidelity. For instance, *Batman Begins*’ videogame adaptation in 2005 featured many of the film’s cast voicing their characters with a faithful plot, but never saw sequels.¹⁵⁰

Writing on the videogame adaptations of *The Lord of the Rings*, Harvey puts their success down to “the playfulness inherent in Tolkien’s storyworld,” that there is a sense of explorative enjoyment in the fabric of Middle-Earth.¹⁵¹ For a mythos in which a man dressed as a bat fights figures drawn from intrinsically playful spaces, such as the clownlike Joker or

¹⁴⁹ Barrett, “Many Stories,” 133.

¹⁵⁰ Eurocom, *Batman Begins*, EA Games, 2005, PlayStation 2.

¹⁵¹ Colin B. Harvey, *Transmedia: Narrative, Play and Memory Across Science Fiction and Fantasy Storyworlds*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015), p.75.

game-obsessed Riddler, the ludic strain in Middle-Earth is certainly as prevalent in depictions of Gotham.

There have only been three continuous series which take a distanced position from any singular work of the Batman mythos and work to create their own self-standing continuities. These series overlap in their time periods, but in rough chronology consist of the *Lego Batman* trilogy (2008-2014), the *Arkham* trilogy (2009-2015), and Telltale Games' duology of *Batman: The Telltale Series* (2016) and *The Enemy Within* (2017).

Building Blocks

Lego games typically take a parodic approach to their adaptations of films. However, *Lego Batman* is a broader adaptation of the Batman mythos and creates a far more independent storyworld, branching back into the film medium through *The Lego Batman Movie* and a spin-off game, *Lego DC Supervillains*, identifying the continuity as being equally capable of supporting a transmedial storyworld as any live-action series.

The fact that the *Lego Batman* continuity operates with such individuality and consistent identity is a testament to the mythos being comprised of reconfigurable blocks of narrative. These story and design elements thrive on deconstruction and transformation. For instance, the costume designs and Elfman's 1989 score evoke Burton's films, while the lighter, colourful tone and presence of Robin share Schumacher's energetic approach, cohering that divided continuity better than the films.¹⁵²

A key example of this is the interactive menu between story missions: instead of having a textual menu, the player must explore the Batcave to change costume, view trophies,

¹⁵² TT Games, *Lego Batman: The Videogame*, Warner Bros. Games, 2008. PlayStation 3.

look up statistics, and choose what to do next.¹⁵³ In this structure, we see the Batcave of the Burton-Schumacher and *The Animated Series* continuities approximately reconstructed in Lego. Vehicles from those series act as entryways into plot sequences, such as jumping into the Batmobile to play the next mission. The player must literally move through the setting of other iterations in order to access this one, subordinating the *Lego Batman* storyworld.

The first game features no spoken dialogue, relying on mime and emphatic tonal noises for prominent emotions, such as Batman's surly grunting.¹⁵⁴ Comic books had given Batman a print language, film had given him an audible voice. This jump to videogames could have facilitated either approach, so the decision to rid Batman of language speaks to a universal understanding of the character. Even for children too young to have seen the films or read the comics, the game trusts that players only have to recognise Batman visually to understand his actions.

The second two games, *DC Superheroes*¹⁵⁵ and *Beyond Gotham*,¹⁵⁶ each feature full voice acting featuring voice actors from prior adaptations. For example, Clancy Brown reprises his role as Lex Luthor from *The Animated Series*, alongside Adam West doing voice cameos as a fictionalised version of himself, replicating the same validating transmedial function as his appearance in "Beware the Gray Ghost." This allowed the franchise more flexibility on its source material and a wider commentary on Batman's history.

The second game was accompanied by an animated film of the same name to provide a new adaptive source than the darker live-action films, with producer Jon Burton stating that "we planned to make a 'Lego Batman' movie, and then we could base our video game on

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ TT Games, *Lego Batman 2: DC Super Heroes*, Warner Bros. Games, 2012, PlayStation 3.

¹⁵⁶ TT Games, *Lego Batman 3: Beyond Gotham*, Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment, 2014, PlayStation 3.

that.”¹⁵⁷ The fact that the film was actually released after the game demonstrates how intermediality allows for a more flexible approach to synchronicity, and challenges the typically monodirectional flow of adaptation. While the creators make a game based on a film, the audience perceives a film based on a game. Even if a work is created for the sole purpose of being turned into something else, it has a structuring value to the mythos.

Batman Bespoke

Rocksteady Studios’ *Batman: Arkham* series (2009-2015) explores the mythos across three core games—*Asylum*, *City*, *Knight*—multiple shorter spin-offs, and an animated movie, *Assault on Arkham*. The *Arkham* series is not tied into any specific continuity, and as Barrett comments, the series “is a successful pathway for audiences into Batman’s ever-expanding transmedia universe” through its simultaneous accessibility and narrative depth.¹⁵⁸ Supporting this, Liam Burke’ writes how “adaptations [...] have supplanted the role of the original comics” in being the primary access point to the Batman mythos. This highlights the potential erosion of the medial hierarchy through transmedial storytelling, opening the door for adaptation to decentralise from its typical print media starting point.¹⁵⁹ A variety of prequels and spin-offs, such as *Arkham Origins*, were created by different studios, featured different voice actors, and are not typically regarded as canon to the Rocksteady trilogy.

This relationship between videogames and comics is shown in the interactive menus of *Arkham Asylum*. Every character’s biography page depicts them not as they are presented in the game, as realistic three-dimensional animation models, but as two-dimensional, graphic designs harking back to their comic designs, and even including their first appearance within

¹⁵⁷ John Latchem, “Lego Deconstructs Batman,” *Home Media Magazine* 35, no. 14 (2013): 8.

¹⁵⁸ Barrett, “Many Stories,” 131.

¹⁵⁹ Burke, *Comic Book Film Adaptation*, 133.

those comics.¹⁶⁰ As far as this shows the comic design alongside the most important information about them, seemingly holding comics as the authoritative medium, the conscious decision not to use these designs in gameplay demonstrates the evolutionary development of those traditional designs into something new.

The plotlines of the *Arkham* series draw from a broad range of comics and films. *Arkham Asylum* takes significant cues from Grant Morrison's impressionistic graphic novel *Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on Serious Earth* (1989), in which Batman is trapped inside a psychiatric hospital overrun by supervillain patients and must confront each one in dreamlike situations.¹⁶¹ *Arkham City* revolves around Doctor Hugo Strange and Ra's Al Ghul turning a section of Gotham into an open prison, Batman attempting to cure himself and the Joker of a terminal disease, and Azrael studying Batman as the hero dispatches other side-villains.¹⁶² Ultimately, Batman fails to cure the Joker. *Arkham Knight* sees Batman haunted by hallucinations of his dead nemesis, Gotham being taken over by Scarecrow, and Azrael's plot to usurp Batman.¹⁶³ Finally, the Scarecrow reveals Batman's identity to the world, forcing Bruce to fake his own death with the "Knightfall Protocol"¹⁶⁴ by blowing up Wayne Manor, combining aspects of *Knightfall* with *The Dark Knight Returns*.

In a move which prompts casual audience familiarity and rewards long-term fans, Conroy, Hamill, and Arleen Sorkin reprised their roles as Batman, the Joker, and Harley Quinn from *The Animated Series*, alongside writer Paul Dini. Duly, the games have many strands of referentiality back to that continuity, along with key works in live-action film and television. *The Animated Series* established an iconic visual and sound design for Harley Quinn, such as Sorkin's voice and her wearing a classical jester's outfit. When the player first

¹⁶⁰ Rocksteady Studios, *Batman: Arkham Asylum*, Eidos Interactive, 2009, PlayStation 3.

¹⁶¹ Grant Morrison, *Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on Serious Earth* (New York: DC Comics, 1989).

¹⁶² Rocksteady Studios, *Batman: Arkham City*, Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment, 2011, PlayStation 3.

¹⁶³ Rocksteady Studios, *Batman: Arkham Knight*, Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment, 2015, PlayStation 4.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

meets Quinn just minutes into *Arkham Asylum*, she reveals a punk-like redesign but exclaims in her *Animated Series* voice: “Heya, Bats! How do ya like the new look?”¹⁶⁵ With no prior design presented within this continuity, this is a clear reference to the animated series. Suddenly, an independent storyworld has affixed itself to another, if not layered them together, and begun drawing lines of structure through the mythos.

The *Arkham* continuity similarly draws from live-action and animated media. In broad strokes, as Barrett notes, “there are continuous audio and visual cues to cinematic adaptations [...] through the visualisation of Gotham, and the [musical] scores.”¹⁶⁶ *Asylum* takes architectural cues from Burton’s Gothic sets, while *City* and *Knight* weave in industrial zones, Schumacher-esque neon arcades, and “an array of high-rise buildings that reflect Nolan’s mise-en-scene.”¹⁶⁷ Across the trilogy, the soundtracks alternately draw from Elfman’s operatic string and horn motifs in the Burton-Schumacher and *Animated Series* continuities during more explorative sections, while evoking Hans Zimmer’s bombastic score for Nolan’s trilogy during the percussion-heavy action sequences. These techniques create a multi-sensory transmedial experience as the player explores a mythic cohesion of storyworlds.

The player can curate this abundance of transmedial references through aesthetic options, offering the ability to mix-and-match characters and vehicle designs from previous continuities into a bespoke experience. For instance, alongside the series’ own canonistic designs, Batman can don the costumes worn by West, Keaton, Bale, or Affleck.¹⁶⁸ Moreover, comic designs can even be brought into realistic detail from landmark titles like *Year One*, *The Dark Knight Returns*, or *Flashpoint*, and if the player wants to make the most of the

¹⁶⁵ Rocksteady, *Arkham Asylum*.

¹⁶⁶ Barrett, “Many Stories,” 143-4.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 140.

¹⁶⁸ Rocksteady, *Arkham Knight*.

animated series voice cast despite the aesthetic clash, they can embody Conroy's cartoonish Batman from *The Animated Series*.¹⁶⁹ Thus, the *Arkham* series communicates with a wider mythos by exploiting the narrative flexibility of its medium, challenging the dictatorial atmosphere of 'official' lines of continuity and affording a degree of mythic authority to the audience. Notably, there are no design options from other Batman videogames outside of the series, implicitly defining the *Arkham* designs as the authoritative videogame iterations.

A Tailored Tale

Both *Batman: The Telltale Series*¹⁷⁰ and its sequel *The Enemy Within*¹⁷¹ are presented across multiple 'episodes' each containing a handful of 'chapters', remediating terminology from television and print media. Instead of the *Arkham* approach of free-roaming exploration punctuated by cinematic cut-scenes, these games are mostly cinematic cut-scenes during which the player is given prompt options around what to say or do next before the scene continues. Unable to reverse any choices, the player must focus on plot and character, weigh their opinions on the story, and bear any consequences. This gives the player a sense of responsibility lacking in the prescribed plot of the *Arkham* or *Lego Batman* games, and thus a more active hand in the story. This is in line with Genovesi writing on *The Walking Dead: A Telltale Series* about how "the user's decision-making power" is "one of the most important features in [its] transmedia experience."¹⁷² After each episode, the games display what other players chose instead so the player can compare their decisions, demonstrating the narrative

¹⁶⁹ Rocksteady, *Arkham City*.

¹⁷⁰ Telltale Games, *Batman: The Telltale Series*, Telltale Games, 2016, PlayStation 4.

¹⁷¹ Telltale Games, *Batman: The Enemy Within*, Telltale Games, 2017, PlayStation 4.

¹⁷² Genovesi, "Choices and Consequences," 350.

flexibility of this continuity, and players can transfer their decisions from the first game into the second to preserve their continuity.¹⁷³

The series twists key elements of the Batman mythos. In the first game, Bruce discovers his parents had ties with organised crime and used Arkham Asylum to experiment on patients.¹⁷⁴ This forces Bruce to reorient his motivations towards reparation instead of revenge. Dent's slow transformation into Two-Face is the manifestation of a repressed personality, akin to his depiction in *The Animated Series*. The Joker is reworked as the anonymous John Doe, a patient at Arkham whom Bruce befriends. In *The Enemy Within*, Bruce exploits John's friendship to infiltrate a gang led by Bane and Harley Quinn, who is not the Joker's infatuated subordinate but a leader whom he idolises, flipping their traditional gendered roles but preserving their fraught, manipulative relationship.¹⁷⁵

With these key changes, the player's choices govern how larger narratives unfold through minor interactions, with the game unfolding not through violence and aggressive victories but the player's care and prioritisation of character relationships. Across both games, this influences Dent's actions and design as Two-Face, whether John Doe becomes an antihero in Batman's footsteps or an outright villain in Harley's, whether Catwoman becomes an antagonist or an ally, and whether Gordon is a genuine friend or a begrudging associate. This can create a compassionate, empathetic, cooperative Batman who prioritises people's wellbeing at the cost of victory, or a ruthless one-man army who will sacrifice emotional bonds and endanger others to bring criminals to justice.

Notably, the only elements of aesthetic customisation in either game come in choosing the highlight colours used in the design of Batman's gadget technology, such as

¹⁷³ *The Enemy Within*.

¹⁷⁴ *The Telltale Series*.

¹⁷⁵ *The Enemy Within*.

blue, white, purple, or red, or in the choice between the original mode of full-colour play versus the ‘Shadows’ mode. In this latter mode, the game is rendered almost entirely in monochrome to create a film noir atmosphere harking back to the original pulp detective roots of the character, with only the occasional pop of colour on key props or costume elements that the player needs to recognise. The graphic texture of cell-shading within these transmedial games “recalls the aesthetic style of the comic books,” placing the player into the living world of comics.¹⁷⁶ These choices are less detail-oriented than the *Arkham* series, prioritising visual atmosphere of the game over specific referential details.

The series’ unique position in the evolution of the Batman mythos is its treatment of the audience’s relationship to prescribed narrative patterns and the assumed structures of the mythos. While tools are provided for players to steer events and characters into familiar areas, the audience can change them at will. This allows for an internal focus on who the character is inside the suit and how it feels emotionally to make his choices, rather than an external perspective on the practicalities of crime-fighting, exhibiting how “transmedia producers [can] depict important ramifications inside larger narrative schemes”¹⁷⁷ on a mythological level.

Empowering the Audience

Across all three continuities seen here, the Batman mythos has opened itself up to increasing levels of interactivity not only with the hero’s bodily actions or appearance but with their emotions and behaviours. Whether the audience is given a rendition of their storyworld in faux plastic bricks, realist textures, or comic stylisation, each represents an authentic

¹⁷⁶ Genovesi, “Choices and Consequences,” 354.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 357.

experience of embodying a fundamentally symbolic character and reflecting on one's own understanding of their actions.

The expansive nature of a videogame world, and its significant gameplay time, also allows greater opportunities for transmedial and metatextual referencing without the constraint of an unchanging runtime or page count, with designers able to cohere aesthetics and atmospheres at leisure, carve into virtual reality an imaginative space, and manifest the history of a hero. Where comics and films enforce a distance between the given story and the received effect, videogames brought the audience closer to the character's experiences and build a more direct empathetic bond by fighting in Batman's boots.

Games have yet to realise a fully interactive narrative experience in which plot and action are equally flexible in the player's hands. However, there is an undeniable motion being made through this medium of democratising modern mythologies and affording fans and newcomers alike the tools to explore these events, symbols, motifs, and relationships on their own terms. These series enable players to experience unique adventures through their own actions and choices, augmented by transmedial references evoking distinct narrative atmospheres, and strengthening the player's personal investment in this mythos.

CONCLUSION

Mapping the Batman

Writing on hybrid storytelling and transmedia, Doru Pop has described the current interactions of the entertainment and arts industries as “a culture in which monolithic and traditional media are replaced by de-centred, ever growing, trans-media environments,” an attitude in which “traditional texts have become hypertexts.”¹⁷⁸ This space has “no sense of limitation, nor does it have boundaries.”¹⁷⁹ As this survey of transmedial works has shown through both close reading and wider thematic comparison, the mythos that has formed around Batman has certainly become a text without limitation or boundary, no longer obeying a hierarchy in the authority of its media or a single direction in its processes of adaptation. Because of this, the mythos is not an institution with a single medial entryway: audiences are invited into the same shared pantheon of narrative elements by any door of their choice, with any iteration as valid as any other.

The concept of Batman is simple, flexible, and lends itself to adaptation through the use of key character boundaries, structuring relationships, and an ever-growing series of medial motifs in visual and sound design. These building blocks allow for new iterations to preserve the stories by challenging them: to take two or more elements of much-replicated narrative substance and pair them differently together, restaging and interchanging circumstantial details to preserve mythic fidelity in refreshed circumstances. This holds to Jenkins’ writings on convergence culture along with Rippl’s constellation structure of

¹⁷⁸ Pop, “Parasitical Stories,” 93.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

intermedial analysis charting the connections between potentially disparate elements, and through Rajewsky's approach, better defining or clarifying medial configurations through the movement and construction of these transmedial properties.

The Post-Crisis comics conception of Batman layered the existing cast of characters, relationships, symbolisms, genres, and ethics with an introspective, psychological element reflecting his growing cultural iconicity outside the pages. This ran a thread of epic tragedy through the narratives, defining the life of Bruce Wayne around encountering endless tragedy and continuing on regardless, always on the knife-edge of losing his identity and becoming just another part of the problem.

Film adaptations have struggled to adapt the character's stringent code of behaviour, but as the series have progressed and built consciously upon one another, that metatextual struggle for a singular Batman film identity has becoming increasingly more internalised in the introspective stories in just the same way as the comics had done. This demonstrates that the reinforcing structures of the Batman mythos rely on metatextual reflection: these are compounded narratives, always resonating, created not to be definitive but just one more among many. Through their differences and contradictions we see moments of oblique definition to the core concept, highlighting what it was at the time of creation and inevitably, upon reception, skewing it a little further into something else: a task for the next iteration to process. This year of writing has seen the release of Matt Reeves' *The Batman* (2022) starring Robert Pattinson. Further research would benefit from its inclusion as its continuity expands and develops in this tradition across what already promises to be a transmedial series of films and television shows such as interquel streaming show *The Penguin* (2023).

Videogames have now brought audiences even closer to the mythos, folding eighty years of comics and forty years of film into the foundation of an interactive mythos. This has

allowed for new challenges to creative authority, prescribed canonicity, and an increasingly blurred line between storyteller and audience. Moreover, this has increasingly shed light on the mythos as a communal property that speaks to a nostalgic familiarity with the character that knows no medial boundaries, nor requires outright delineation of overall canonicity: only that moments of referentiality are clear in their direction and inform the story being told whether in event, tone, genre, or design.

This dissertation has analysed the layering processes of adaptation and transmedial referencing in the Batman mythos over the last thirty years, charting the echoes and resonances of the Post-Crisis continuity through the narrative atmospheres of film and videogames. Beyond the authority or originality of any individual work, it is this intermedial echoing effect that has connected them all. As this effect continues with the proliferation of Batman media, further studies may find it ever more visible that even those storyworlds which do not appear to be in direct contact are no less related or influenced by mutual formative inspirations or shared descendants. Ultimately, this dissertation demonstrates that the referential and relational potential of intermediality, and specifically the binding power of transmedial techniques, can overcome any medial, temporal, or narrative boundaries to forge a decentralised, adaptive, and endlessly reconfigurable mythological network from story ideas as simple and iconic as a man dressing up as a bat to fight crime, heal his mind, and protect his home.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Batman. Directed by Tim Burton. 1989; United States: Warner Bros. DVD.

Batman. Season 1, episode 1, "Hi Diddle Riddle." Dir. Robert Butler. Aired May 21, 1966. DVD.

Batman & Robin. Directed by Joel Schumacher. 1997; United States: Warner Bros. DVD.

Batman Begins. Directed by Christopher Nolan. 2005; United States: Warner Bros. Pictures. DVD.

Batman Beyond. Created by Bruce Timm, Paul Dini, and Alan Burnett. Aired 1999-2001. HBO Max.

Batman Beyond. Season 1, episode 1, "Rebirth: Part 1." Dir. Curt Geda. Aired January 10, 1999. HBO Max.

Batman Beyond. Season 1, episode 2, "Rebirth: Part 2." Dir. Curt Geda. Aired January 10, 1999. HBO Max.

Batman Forever. Directed by Joel Schumacher. 1995; United States: Warner Bros. DVD.

Batman Returns, dir. Tim Burton (1992; United States: Warner Bros., DVD).

Batman: The Animated Series. Created by Eric Randomski and Bruce Timm. Aired 1992-1995. HBO Max.

Batman: The Animated Series. Season 1, episode 2, "On Leather Wings." Dir. Kevin Altieri. Aired September 19, 1992. HBO Max.

Batman: The Animated Series. Season 1, episode 3, "Heart of Ice." Dir. Bruce Timm. Aired November 21, 1992. HBO Max.

Batman: The Animated Series. Season 1, episode 17, "Two-Face Part I." Dir. Kevin Altieri. Aired November 7, 1992. HBO Max.

Batman: The Animated Series. Season 1, episode 18, "Two-Face Part II." Dir. Kevin Altieri. Aired November 14, 1992. HBO Max.

Batman: The Animated Series. Season 1, episode 32, "Beware the Gray Ghost." Dir. Boyd Kirkland. Aired March 27, 1993. HBO Max.

Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice. Directed by Zack Snyder. 2016; United States: Warner Bros. Pictures. DVD.

Birds of Prey. Directed by Cathy Yan. 2020; United States: Warner Bros. Pictures. DVD.

Exam Number: B196069

Dixon, Chuck, Alan Grant, Doug Moench and Jo Duffy. *Knightfall, Volume Two: Knightquest* New York: DC Comics, 2012.

Eurocom. *Batman Begins*. EA Games. 2005. PlayStation 2.

Finger, Bill and Bob Kane. *Detective Comics #33*. New York: Detective Comics, 1939.

Finger, Bill and Bob Kane. *Detective Comics #47*. New York: Detective Comics, 1941.

Johns, Geoff. *Flashpoint*. New York: DC Comics, 2011.

Justice League. Directed by Zack Snyder and Joss Whedon. 2017; United States: Warner Bros. Pictures. DVD.

Latchem, John. "Lego Deconstructs Batman." *Home Media Magazine* 35, no. 14 (2013): 8.

Loeb, Jeph. *The Long Halloween*. New York: DC Comics, 1998.

Man of Steel. Directed by Zack Snyder. 2013; United States: Legendary Pictures. DVD.

Miller, Frank. *The Dark Knight Returns*. London: Titan Books, 1997.

Miller, Frank. *Year One*. New York: DC Comics, 2005.

Moench, Doug, Alan Grant, Chuck Dixon, Jo Duffy, and Denny O'Neil. *Knightfall, Volume Three: Knightstend*. New York: DC Comics, 2012.

Moench, Doug, Chuck Dixon and Alan Grant. *Knightfall, Volume One*. New York: DC Comics, 2012.

Moore, Alan. *The Killing Joke*. New York: DC Comics, 2008.

Morrison, Grant. *Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on Serious Earth*. New York: DC Comics, 1989.

OREO Cookie. "OREO meets Batman." February 2022. YouTube video, 00:00:15, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IIa3EgGpMes>.

Rocksteady Studios. *Batman: Arkham Asylum*. Eidos Interactive. 2009. PlayStation 3.

Rocksteady Studios. *Batman: Arkham City*. Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment. 2011. PlayStation 3.

Rocksteady Studios. *Batman: Arkham Knight*. Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment. 2015. PlayStation 4.

Starlin, Jim. *A Death in the Family*. Burbank: DC Comics, 2011.

Suicide Squad. Directed by David Ayer. 2016; United States: RatPac-Dune Entertainment. DVD.

Telltale Games. *Batman: The Enemy Within*. Telltale Games. 2017. PlayStation 4.

Telltale Games. *Batman: The Telltale Series*. Telltale Games. 2016. PlayStation 4.

The Dark Knight. Directed by Christopher Nolan. 2008; United States: Warner Bros. Pictures. DVD.

Exam Number: B196069

The Dark Knight Rises. Directed by Christopher Nolan. 2012; United States: Warner Bros. Pictures. DVD.

The Lego Batman Movie. Directed by Chris McKay. 2017; United States: Warner Animation Group. DVD.

The New Batman Adventures. Created by Bruce Timm and Paul Dini. Aired 1997-1999. HBO Max.

The New Batman Adventures. Season 2, episode 6, "Legends of the Dark Knight." Dir. Dan Riba. Aired October 10, 1998. HBO Max.

The New Batman Adventures. Season 2, episode 11, "Mad Love." Dir. Butch Lukic. Aired January 16, 1999. HBO Max.

TT Games. *Lego Batman: The Videogame*. Warner Bros. Games. 2008. PlayStation 3.

TT Games. *Lego Batman 2: DC Super Heroes*. Warner Bros. Games. 2012. PlayStation 3.

TT Games. *Lego Batman 3: Beyond Gotham*. Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment. 2014. PlayStation 3.

Wolfman, Marv. *Crisis on Infinite Earths*. New York: DC Comics, 2000.

Zack Snyder's Justice League. Directed by Zack Snyder. 2021; United States: Warner Bros. Pictures. DVD.

Secondary Sources

Barrett, Kyle. "The Dark Knight's Many Stories: Arkham Video Games as Transmedia Pathway." *Iperstoria*, no. 16 (2020): 130-147.

Brooker, Will. *Hunting the Dark Knight: Twenty-First Century Batman*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2012.

Burke, Liam. *The Comic Book Film Adaptation: Exploring Modern Hollywood's Leading Genre*. University Press of Mississippi, 2015. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ed/detail.action?docID=3039951>.

Genovesi, Matteo. "Choices and Consequences: The Role of Players in The Walking Dead: A Telltale Game Series." *Open Cultural Studies* 1, no. 1 (2017): 350-358.

Harvey, Colin B. *Transmedia: Narrative, Play and Memory Across Science Fiction and Fantasy Storyworlds*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015.

Hutcheon, Linda and Siobhan O'Flynn. *A Theory of Adaptation*. Oxon: Routledge, 2013.

Ioannidou, Elisavet. "Adapting Superhero Comics for the Big Screen: Subculture for the Masses." *Adaptation: The Journal of Literature on Screen Studies* 6, no. 2 (2013): 230-238.

Javanshir, Ryan, Beth Carroll and David Millard. "Structural Patterns for Transmedia Storytelling." *PloS one* 15, no. 1 (2020): 2.

Jeffries, Dru H. "Convergence Culture and the Caped Crusader: Batman and the Environment of New Media." *Cineaction*, no. 77 (2009): 42–49.

Jenkins, Henry. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: New York University Press, 2006.

Martin, Daniel. "Reanimating the Dark Knight: Superheroes, Animation and the Critical Reception of The Lego Batman Movie." *Animation : an interdisciplinary journal* 15, no. 1 (2020): 93–107.

McAllister, Matthew P., and Jared LaGroue. "'Hey, Kids. Who Wants a Shot from the Merch Gun?!': LEGO Batman as a Gateway Commodity Intertext." In *Cultural Studies of LEGO*, edited by Rebecca C. Hains and Sharon R. Mazzarella, 47–71. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019.

Monnet, Agnieszka Soltysik. "'I'll Be Whatever Gotham Needs Me to Be': Batman, the Gothic and Popular Culture." In *The Gothic in Contemporary Literature and Popular Culture*, edited by Justin D. Edwards and Agnieszka Soltysik Monnet. Routledge, 2012.

Packard, Stephan. "Closing the Open Signification: Forms of Transmedial Storyworlds and Chronotopoi in Comics." *StoryWorlds* 7, no. 2 (2015): 55–74.

Plantinga, Carl. *Alternative Realities*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2021).

Pop, Doru. "Parasitical Stories, Narrative Viruses and Hybrid Storytelling in Fantasy Cinema and Culture." *Ekphrasis. Images, Cinema, Theory, Media* 13, no. 1 (2015): 91–101.

Rajewsky, Irina. "Border Talks: The Problematic Status of Media Borders in the Current Debate About Intermediality." In *Media Borders, Multimodality and Intermediality*, edited by Lars Elleström. Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

Rajewsky, Irina. "Intermediality, Intertextuality, and Remediation: A Literary Perspective on Intermediality." *Intermedialities*, no. 6 (Fall, 2005): 43–64.

Rippl, Gabriele. "Introduction." In *Handbook of Intermediality: Literature – Image – Sound – Music*, edited by Gabriele Rippl. De Gruyter, 2015: 1–31.

Ryan, Marie-Laure. "Transmedia Narratology and Transmedia Storytelling." *Artnodes*, no. 18 (2016).

Stein, Daniel and Jan-Noël Thon, eds. *From Comic Strips to Graphic Novels : Contributions to the Theory and History of Graphic Narrative*. Second edition. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015.

Tipton, Nathan G. "Gender Trouble: Frank Miller's Revision of Robin in the Batman: Dark Knight Series." *Journal of popular culture* 41, no. 2 (2008): 321–336.

Vansina, Jan M. *Oral Tradition as History*. University of Wisconsin Press, 1985.

Winstead, Nick. "'As a Symbol I Can Be Incorruptible': How Christopher Nolan De-Queered the Batman of Joel Schumacher." *Journal of Popular Culture* 48, no. 3 (2015): 572–585.

FINAL GRADE

82/100

GENERAL COMMENTS

Instructor

An outstanding, very well-researched dissertation offering a carefully-thought transmedial analysis of Batman. The dissertation is very ambitious in scope and frames the question exceptionally well. The introduction demonstrates comprehensive understanding of conceptual ideas and media texts, showing clear evidence of independent insight and breadth of research. The argument is logically organised and offers a consistent and coherent argument throughout, with all parts related to each other and to the core argument. The sub-headings are captivating but obscure and unclear (and should have been included in the table of contents). The analysis evidences an excellent level of attention to detail; for example, the argument on the influence of comics in videogames is particularly insightful and well-developed (page 50). However, even if the dissertation aims to address the stated question on a narrative level, there was scope to engage in film analysis to achieve further depth; for example, on page 40, there is a reference to a sequence mirroring comic panels which could have been analysed in some detail. In the conclusion, the myth-making potential of intermediality mentioned at the start of the dissertation could have been elaborated further too. While the dissertation is reads well and demonstrates a high level of linguistic competence, please note that while television and cinema cannot be conflated under the term "film". In sum, a truly excellent dissertation. Well done!

Second-marker's comment: feedback and grade agreed

PAGE 3

PAGE 4

PAGE 5

PAGE 6

PAGE 7

PAGE 8

PAGE 9

PAGE 10

PAGE 11

PAGE 12

PAGE 13

PAGE 14

PAGE 15

PAGE 16

PAGE 17

PAGE 18

PAGE 19

PAGE 20

PAGE 21

PAGE 22

PAGE 23

PAGE 24

PAGE 25

PAGE 26

PAGE 27

PAGE 28

PAGE 29

PAGE 30

PAGE 31

PAGE 32

PAGE 33

PAGE 34

PAGE 35

PAGE 36

PAGE 37

PAGE 38

PAGE 39

PAGE 40

PAGE 41

PAGE 42

PAGE 43

PAGE 44

PAGE 45

PAGE 46

PAGE 47

PAGE 48

PAGE 49

PAGE 50

PAGE 51

PAGE 52

PAGE 53

PAGE 54

PAGE 55

PAGE 56

PAGE 57

PAGE 58

PAGE 59

PAGE 60

PAGE 61

PAGE 62
