ARCADA

Batman – A hero of the American monomyth

An exploration of comic book superheroes

Pekka Paalanen

EXAMENSARBETE	
Arcada	
Utbildningsprogram:	Mediekultur, regi
Identifikationsnummer:	8121
Författare:	Pekka Johan Karoly Paalanen
Arbetets namn:	Batman – A hero of the American monomyth – An exploration of comic book superheroes
Handledare (Arcada):	Matteo Stocchetti
Uppdragsgivare:	

Sammandrag:

Hjältar spelar en stor roll i fiktion i vårt samhälle, särskilt i serietidningar och deras filmatiseringar. Joseph Campbell introducerade konceptet av "klassiska monomyten"; ett grunläggande berättelsestruktur och en hjältefigur vars karaktärsdrag är så universala, att man kan hitta dom i varje mytisk berättelse från Prometheus till Luke Skywalker. Klassiska monomyten är ett grundläggande narrativ om hur en hjältefigur vandrar ut i en mystisk värld på ett äventyr, återvänder och hittar sin plats i sitt samhälle. I denna examesarbete representeras klassiska monomyten av Stålmannen. John Shelton Lawrence och Robert Jewett utvecklade en variation på Campbells monomyt. Lawrence och Jewett kallar denna koncept "amerikanska monomyten." Denna monomyt handlar mindre om hur en hjälte finner sin plats i sitt samhälle och mera om hur en ensam hjälte framstår, kämpar emot samhällets faror, vinner och sen försvinner.

Detta examensarbete framhäver båda monomyter – och en exemplarhjälte för både monomyt för praktisk uppfattning – och jämför dom i form av deras exemplarhjältar, för att slutligen presentera Batman som en hjälte av amerikanska monomyten. Syftet med denna examensarbete är också poängtera att även Campbells klassiska monomyt håller på att utveckla sig, och i framtiden kommer eventuellt flera variationer av denna hjälte-arketyp framstå.

Nyckelord:	populärkultur, superhjältar, serietidningar, filmer
Sidantal:	
Språk:	engelska
Datum för godkännande:	

DEGREE THESIS	
Arcada	
Degree Programme:	Media culture, directing
Identification number:	8121
Author:	Pekka Johan Karoly Paalanen
Title:	
	Batman – A hero of the American monomyth – An exploration of comic book superheroes
Supervisor (Arcada):	Matteo Stocchetti
Commissioned by:	

Abstract:

Heroes play an integral part in fiction in our society, especially within the realm of comic books and their film adaptations. Joseph Campbell introduced the concept of the "classic monomyth"; an underlying narrative structure and a heroic archetype whose characteristics are apparent in every mythical story from Prometheus to Luke Skywalker. The classical monomyth is an underlying narrative of how a heroic figure travels out into a world of wonder on an adventure, returns and finds his/her place in his/her society. In this thesis, the classical monomyth is represented by Superman. John Shelton Lawrence and Robert Jewett developed a variation on Campbell's monomyth, called the "American monomyth." This monomyth is less about finding one's self in one's society and more of how a lone hero appears, fights against the injustices of society, is victorious and then fades away.

The purpose of this thesis is to juxtapose both monomyths, compare their representative heroes – added to make the comparisons easier to comprehend – and in doing so define Batman as a hero of the American monomyth. The purpose of this thesis is also to point out that Campbell's classical monomyth is evolving, and that more variations of this heroic archetype will eventually appear.

Keywords:	
	popular culture, superheroes, comic books, films
Number of pages:	
Language:	English
Date of acceptance:	

OPINNÄYTE	
Arcada	
Koulutusohjelma:	Mediakulttuuri, ohjaus
Tunnistenumero:	8121
Tekijä:	Pekka Johan Karoly Paalanen
Työn nimi:	
	Batman – A hero of the American monomyth – An exploration of comic book superheroes
Työn ohjaaja (Arcada):	Matteo Stocchetti
Toimeksiantaja:	

Tiivistelmä:

Sankarit ovat isossa roolissa fiktiivisessä kerronnassa nyky-yhteiskunnassa, varsinkin sarjakuvissa ja niiden elokuva-adaptaatioissa. Joseph Campbell kehitti käsityksen "klassisesta monomyytistä"; perustavanlaatuisesta tarinarakenteesta ja sankarihahmosta, joiden tunnusomaiset piirteet ovat läsnä jokaisessa myyttisessä tarinassa aina Prometheuksesta Luke Skywalkeriin. Klassinen monomyytti on perustavanlaatuinen tarina sankarihahmon seikkailuntäytteisestä matkasta ihmeelliseen maailmaan, tämän paluusta ja kuinka hän löytää asemansa yhteiskunnassaan. Tässä opinnäytteessä klassista monomyyttiä edustaa Teräsmies. John Shelton Lawrence ja Robert Jewett kehittivät Campbellin käsityksen pohjalta muunnelman, nimeltä "amerikkalainen monomyytti." Tässä monomyytissä on vähemmän kyse asemansa löytämisessä yhteiskunnassa ja enemmän siitä, miten yksinäinen sankari ilmestyy, taistelee yhteiskunnan vääryyksiä vastaan, voittaa ja sitten katoaa.

Tämän opinnäytteen tarkoitus on verrata näitä kahta monomyyttiä, niiden kahta esimerkkisankaria – jotta rinnakkaisasettelu olisi selkeämpi – ja täten todistaa, että Lepakkomies vastaa käsitystä amerikkalaisesta monomyytistä. Tämän opinnäytteen tarkoitus on myös huomauttaa, että Campbellin klassinen monomyytti kehittyy jatkuvasti ja että lisää variaatioita tulee vääjäämättä ilmaantumaan.

Avainsanat:	
	populäärikulttuuri, supersankarit, sarjakuvat, elokuvat
Sivumäärä:	
Kieli:	englanti
Hyväksymispäivämäärä:	

CONTENTS

FOREWORD

This thesis started out as a labor of love that originated from the ruminations and discussions with friends and colleagues of the nature of heroes – both super and not – and what it was about them that attracted them so to us.

It began when I started working on my last project at Arcada. My initial idea for the project – a Batman fan film – was shot down because of its cost and the lack of faith in the project by the powers that be. At the time, I was heavily into comic books, and began thinking of conjuring up my own superhero. The result appeared in the film script "Scar", which I also proposed to be made into my final project at Arcada. Again, the script was shot down, again, because of the costs involved and the length of the script.

But there was always something more lurking behind the script, something that shaped the main character – the man known as Scar – that I always thought could have served as food for thought in an academic sense. My original thought was then to shed light on a new heroic archetype – a lone hero, if you will – that presented a third alternative while juxtaposing an example of the larger-than-life hero of the classic monomyth and an example of the more grounded anti-hero. The subject, however, proved too vast and too complicated a topic to be presented in this thesis and therefore awaits a lengthier dissertation that might do it justice. This is the thesis that came out of all that struggle.

I would like to thank everyone who purposefully tried to both help and hinder me during the writing of this thesis, and my years at Arcada as a whole. Those of you who helped, you were – and truly, still are – great. Those of you who were a hindrance; I thank you, too. You showed me that sometimes you have to run little, before you can learn to crawl.

Helsinki, May 2012

Pekka Paalanen

1 THE PURPOSE OF THIS THESIS

In May of 1939 – with the rising popularity of Superman – another legend stepped on to the stage of comic book superheroism. He was created by Bob Kane and Bill Finger and debuted in "Detective Comics #27." The character eventually became a hero apart, a shadowy vigilante, a brooding creature of the night.

This legend, of course, was Batman.

What of it?

Scholars have spoken – and written – at great length of both of these characters, often in broad terms. Superman has always been classified as the archetypal "hero", whereas Batman has been labeled an "anti-hero." (Spivey & Knowlton 2008 p. 54).

But doesn't Batman share certain qualities in common with Superman?

On one hand we have the hero of the classical monomyth, as presented by Joseph Campbell in his book "The hero with a thousand faces." It is the story of godhood, a coming-of-age story, of initiation into one's society. Superman's story – especially in the 1978 film adaptation of the superhero comic, "Superman" – is that of the hero of the classic monomyth, a Christ figure who has come to save Earth. He does not kill, and he always does the right thing for the right reasons.

In "Myth of the American Superhero", John Shelton Lawrence and Robert Jewett presented a new variation on the concept of the hero of the classical monomyth. Termed the "American monomyth", it does away with the religious components and the driving background concepts of initiation and rites of passage, and instead focuses on redemption – be it societal or personal – while the superpowers of the hero merely reflect the "hope for the divine", not an implicit religious subtext (Lawrence & Jewett 2002 p. 7).

The purpose of this thesis is to present Batman as a hero of Lawrence's and Jewett's concept of the American monomyth.

The first several chapters will illustrate Campbell's concept of the hero of the classical monomyth, with a clear example of said hero in the form of Superman. The purpose of this is to familiarize the reader with Campbell's concepts and ideas, as they are integral in understanding the difference between the two monomyths. The example of Superman is meant to provide the readers with a familiar and understandable character to which Campbell's concepts can be applied. The chapter about the character also lays the groundwork for later chapters, where the underlying differences and similarities between the two monomyths – and the two heroes that represent them – are made implicit.

The last chapters of this thesis will present John Shelton Lawrence's and Robert Jewett's concept of their variation upon Campbell's monomyth – the American monomyth – then note how Batman's story in Christopher Nolan's "Batman Begins" – with brief mentions of other films and stories in the franchise – correspond to this variation, while also noting the differences and similarities between these two heroes, and thus, the monomyths they represent.

A final conclusion explains the underlying differences and considers future variations on the concept of monomyths.

2   THE CLASSICAL MONOMYTH

"The hero with a thousand faces" – written by Joseph Campbell – was published in 1949. In it, he described the concept of the classical mononmyth. By drawing parallels between the origins and the tales of various ancient heroic characters, Campbell identified a classic mythical hero and a central narrative with which that said hero is created, a thought-provoking detailing of the "archetypal plot for heroic action in traditional mythologies" (Lawrence & Jewett 2002 p. 5). In short, his concepts pinned down similarities in how this archetypal hero was built; if the story of whatever hero is presented is the *bildungsroman*, then Campbell essentially identified the blue print – the building blocks – on how this mythic hero was and could be created.

Campbell distilled the very essence of folkloric heroes and translated and compared their toils to modern day myths (Campbell 1949 p. 30):

> …The standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: separation – initiation – return: … A hero ventures forth from the world of the common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won; the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.

Campbell's structure describes the journey of the hero of the classic monomyth in the following ways. First, there is the "call to adventure" (Campbell 1949 p. 49), where hero is presented with a challenge, and is called forth and set upon his journey.

This is followed by "refusal of the call" (Campbell 1949 p. 59), whereupon the hero hesitates, unwilling to upset the status quo. Once undertaking his travail, he may recieve "supernatural aid" (Campbell 1949 p. 69), he may "cross the first threshold" (Campbell 1949 p. 77). He may also experience being trapped inside "the belly of the whale" (Campbell 1949 p. 90). Second, there is what Campbell describes as "the initiation" (Campbell 1949 p. 97), during which the hero undergoes "the road of trials" (Campbell 1949 p. 97), the hero has a "meeting with the goddess" (Campbell 1949 p. 109), during which a female figure may come to represent "woman as the temptress" (Campbell 1949 p. 120). The hero also undergoes "atonement with the father" (Campbell 1949 p. 126), rises to "apotheosis" (Campbell 1949 p. 149) and, ultimately, receives "the ultimate boon" (Campbell 1949 p. 172).

The last part of the journey of the hero of the classical monomyth includes "the refusal of the return" (Campbell 1949 p. 193). Then comes "the magic flight" (Campbell 1949 p. 196), "the rescue from without" (Campbell 1949 p. 207), "the crossing of the return threshold" (Campbell 1949 p. 217), mastering "the two worlds" (Campbell 1949 p. 229) and, finally, "the freedom to live" (Campbell 1949 p. 238).

All these concepts are presented with clear examples, and though these events can take place in any order, they are still thematic events that all seem to be prevalent in stories of myth (Lawrence & Jewett 2002 p. 6):

> One can find examples of this plot in the stories of Prometheus stealing fire from the gods to benefit mankind, of Ulysses undergoing his adventurous journey, of Aeneas visiting the underworld to dis-

cover the destiny of the nation he would found, of St. George and the dragon, and of Hansel and Gretel. Campbell incorporates myths, legends, and the fairy tales of many cultures into this framework, suggesting that the archetype is molded according to rites of initiation, in which persons depart from their community, undergo trails, and later return to be integrated as mature adults who can serve in new ways. We see this training for permanent social responsibility as an important benchmark in assessing the American pattern in heroic mythmaking.

Campbell described this central narrative and plot by comparing old myths and drew comparisons, for these myths held great power over ancient cultures as they heavily influenced coming-of-age journeys and rites of passage, growing up and accepting ones adulthood; they essentially told the story of a child growing up to be an adult, and that young adult learning to accept his or her responsibilities in their respective societies. Campbell was also influenced by renowned psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung when developing these concepts (Alsford 2006 p. 3):

> Campbell, drawing as he does upon the work of the psychoanalyst Carl Jung, argues that the myth of the hero confronts us with the challenge of transformation, the call to develop, to progress, to grow up by freeing ourselves from the limitations of infancy.

In short, the journey of the hero of the classical monomyth is one that a person might relate to, as that person undergoes the same journey – though less fantastically and much more subconsciously – on their way of growing up, maturing and reaching their place in adult life.

Campbell himself later dismissed the relevance of the hero of the monomyth in modern times out of hand, citing that the hero's journey no longer applied in a contemporary society, nor where there any modern exemplars of a similar nature within modern fiction and myths.

He postulated that the monomythic hero was a relic of mythical times and the we – a modern, industrialized society – were now a postmythical society, and were no longer in need of such heroes, and should eschew them. In short, according to Campbell, the monomyth hero was no longer relevant (Campbell 1949 p. 387, 390):

> In the fateful, epoch-announcing words of Nietzsche's Zarathustra: "Dead are all the gods." One knows the tale; it has been told a thousand ways. It is the hero-cycle of the modern age, the wonder-story of mankind's coming to maturity. The spell of the past, the bondage of tradition, was shattered with sure and mighty strokes…. and modern man emerged from ancient ignorance, like a butterfly from its cocoon, or like the sun at dawn from the womb of mother night. It is not only that there is no hiding place for the gods from the searching telescope and microscope; there is no such society any more as the gods once supported. The social unit is not a carrier of religious content, but an economic-political organization…. Isolated societies, dream-bounded within a mythologically charged horizon,

no longer exist except as areas to be exploited… Today all of these mysteries have lost their force; their symbols no longer interest our psyche.

Scientific rationalism and the modern thought processes that came with them, Campbell – and many others, such as psychoanalyst Rollo May and scholar J.H Plumb (Lawrence & Jewett 2002 p. 21) – concluded, that there was no place for myth in a real world grounded in science, history and logic, that we already inhabited a world absent of any sort of mythic system altogether. It was decided that our society had been set free from the grip of myth by scientific advancement (Lawrence & Jewett 2002 p. 21):

> It is hard for us, bred on science and rationalism, to grasp how fearsome, how magical, the universe appeared to earlier societies, how full of wonders and portents it was. It could only be controlled by men and women larger than life. Heroes were necessary both as gods and as part of the ritual that kept the external world secure and tolerable… But epic heroes such as these essentially belong to rural worlds, to societies living near the wilderness. And no wonder then that they are dying, particularly in the Western world, where nature has become benign. (J.H Plumb, Disappearing heroes, 1974, p. 50-51)

Yet we continually encounter characters, stories and narratives that are veritably steeped in the traditions and styles that Campbell laid out for us (Lawrence & Jewett 2002 p. 6):

> We see this training [of youth maturing into adulthood through a journey akin to those of myth] for permanent social responsibility in assessing the American pattern in heroic mythmaking. Since this aspect of the classical plot is not typically present in the popular materials of contemporary America, many analysts of myth have concluded that we have become a postmythical culture… We disagree. The widespread current enthusiasm for materials such as "The Matrix", "Rambo", "Touched by an Angel", and the "Star Trek", "Star Wars" and the "Left Behind" franchises indicates that Americans have not moved beyond its symbolic call for lifetime service to a community's institutions, allows us to highlight its absence in the distinctive pattern of what we call here the "American monomyth."

If one observers the popularity of such franchises as "Star Wars", "The Matrix" and "Superman" – all which feature powerful protagonists, who undergo a journey of adventure and exploration fit for myth – one cannot help but notice, that the hero of the classical monomyth is, in fact, very much alive and kicking in modern times (Lawrence & Jewett 2002 p. 21-22):

> Reputable scholars such as J.H Plumb have repeatedly announced the death of the mythic heroes with magical powers to redeem the world. This reveals a peculiar analytic lag, because it was written in the heyday of superheroic dramas in popular culture. Thousands of images of heroes and heroines larger than life, with powers every bit as magical as those exercised in classical mythology, were floating about in the American entertainment system, yet they appear to have been unrecognizable to sophisticated minds. Since the traditional, classical mythology was no longer popular, its replacement by a new story form could not be grasped. Perhaps the visual appearance of the modern superheroes and – heroines made them so familiar in everyday life that they simply became invisible. More likely, the seedy products of pop culture, produced for profit and entertainment, lacked the sheen that had been gained by traditional myths, hallowed by centuries of serious scholarship. One thing is certain, in our view: mythology's death notices were greatly exaggerated, to use the phrase of Mark Twain.

Contemporary authors agree. Such contemporary titles such as "The Myth of the American Superhero", "The Psychology of Superheroes: An unauthorized exploration" and – most of all – "Our Gods wear spandex: The secret history of comic book heroes" could hardly suggest otherwise?

In this thesis, this hero of the classic monomyth is represented by Superman.

2.1 Superman

(Donner, "Superman" 1978):

> You will travel far, my little Ka-El, but we will never leave you, even in the face of our death. You will make my strength your own, you will see my life through your eyes, as your life will be seen through mine. The son becomes the father, and the father, the son.

(Donner, "Superman" 1978):

> They can be a great people, Ka-El, they wish to be. They only lack the light to show them the way. For this reason – above all, their capacity for good – I have sent them you, my only son.

Created by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster during a time when the comic book superhero was ascendant, Superman came to embody the character and trappings of the modern god-like superhero. With his blue uniform, the distinctive S-shield symbol on his chest and red cape (see Figure 1.), Superman became synonymous with the word "superhero." The character became the benchmark to which all other superheroes were – and still are, in a certain sense – compared.

Figure 1. "Superman – The Movie" movie poster. Warner Bros. Pictures 1978

As stated earlier, the reasons for the characters popularity was not only his trademark tights and clothes – only one color away from the color combination that makes up the colors of the American flag – but the fact that there was nothing another superhero could do that Superman could not do better; he was stronger, mightier and faster than a speeding locomotive, not to mention the fact that he was able to leap tall buildings in a single leap, which later evolved into the capacity for flight. His powers overshadowed those of other personages with superpowers, as stated by McGlothlin (2006 p. 6-7):

> What made Superman different was the combination of these elements… Superman wasn't just capable of amazing feats of strength, he was also bulletproof *and* could leap over skyscrapers… Not only did the Man of Tomorrow have powers far above those of mortal men, he had abilities far above most other costumed characters at the time. Moreover, unlike many of his fellows, Superman showed off his amazing abilities at seemingly every opportunity. When it came to delivering comic-book thrills, page for page, few could match the Man of Steel.

The time of Superman's origin was a booming era for comic books, a time when moral dilemmas were clear-cut, with no gray areas; the "good guys" were good, the "bad guys", of course, were bad. This was clearly something that the comic book-reading public enjoyed – moral certainties in the face of the uncertainties of the coming Second World War – and Superman was no exception. The Man of Steel's clear-cut sense of right and wrong appealed to younger readers, for the Superman could do no wrong and was always right. (McGlothlin 2006 p. 9):

> The Axis powers seemed like international bullies, and bullies were something a lot of comic-book reading kids understood quite well. What they and many others wanted was someone tough enough to stand up to the dictator powers once and for all. While America remained hesitant to assume the role

itself… publishers moved to fill the void with… red, white and blue-costumed heroes. [on the cover of "Captain America Comics #1"] Captain America, "Sentinel of our Shores", was depicted unsubtly belting Adolf Hitler square in the face..."

But it was not until 1978 that Superman became the widely-known popular culture icon he is today. The character had certainly been popular up to that point, but it was the full-length feature film "Superman" – directed by Richard Donner, written by Mario Puzo, author of "The Godfather" screenplay and novel both, and starring Christopher Reeve as the titular character – that really put the spotlight on the character, bringing him to the attention of more mature audiences.

The film recounts the origin of Superman, the sole survivor of the planet Krypton, and his early exploits, his first encounters with kryptonite – asteroid debris from his home-world that have now turned into poisonous green rocks which renders even Superman vulnerable – and his first battle with the evil Lex Luthor, played by Gene Hackman.

If one were to superimpose the structure suggested by Joseph Campbell's theory of the hero of the classical monomyth on the film, one would find striking corresponding notes in Puzo's story, as events play out according to Donner's direction.

Campbell coins several terms in his book. One of them is the term of a "magic flight" – as mentioned earlier – which is well-suited for comparison with the film when the planet Krypton explodes and Ka-El – soon to be Clark Kent, Superman's alter ego – is sent flying through space on his Kryptonian vessel.

Kal-El crashes in the countryside of Kansas, near the town of Smallville, where an elderly couple – the Kents – take the boy in and raise the boy as their own. Not only does this correspond with Campbell's concept of "rescue from without", but also is a clear allusion to Biblical events, namely when Moses is rescued from the Nile, having been carried away from his parents, who thought the child safer than in their care. This is not the only time the film makes use of religious allegories, or draws parallels between Biblical characters and Superman.

As Kal-El – now Clark Kent, as he is yet unaware of his true Kryptonian heritage – grows up, he begins to question his purpose. If he has been bestowed with these powers,

should he not use them to score touchdowns and impress girls? This, however, is not what he was meant to do. Jonathan Kent – his adoptive father – has words of wisdom for the struggling young man, before suffering a fatal heart attack (Donner, "Superman" 1978):

> … a man gets older, and he thinks very differently, things get very clear. And there is one thing I do know, son, and that is you are here for a reason… it's not to score touchdowns.

The death of Jonathan Kent sends Clark into an existential crisis, and he leaves Smallville to find his future, answering his "call to adventure."

Finding himself at the North Pole, Clark unveils a Kryptonian crystal, which grows into Superman's famous Fortress of Solitude – a positively Nietzschean concept – and allows access to his father Jor-El's – played by Marlon Brando – vast library of knowledge. They undertake a journey that lasts twelve years, finally leaving Clark Kent in the position to finally don the costume and responsibilities of Superman. This fits the description pertaining to Campbell's concept of "supernatural aid", for Jor-El's wisdoms lie beyond those of mortal men, allowing Kal-El to explore vast regions beyond space and time, as well as matters of the heart and mind (Donner, "Superman" 1978):

> There are questions to be asked, and it is time for you to do so… Come with me now, my son, as we break through the bonds of your earthly confinement, traveling through time and space.

After returning from this voyage through the stars, Clark Kent returns to Earth, and becomes Superman. After initially revealing himself to the world and after a budding romance with Lois Lane is established, things take a turn for the worse, as Lex Luthor's insidious plan begins to take shape. Luthor reprograms two nuclear missiles and retrieves a shard of kryptonite, two pieces that form the cornerstones for a plan to not only destroy Superman but to make Luthor a very powerful man.

When Superman finally wises up to Luthor and his schemes, Superman confronts Luthor in his lair, an underground base beneath the streets of New York. But before the men are able to meet, face to face, Superman must pass through a gauntlet of gunfire, flamethrowers and ice blasts.

This very much coincides with Campbell's concept of the "road of trials", though it is even more applicable later on, when Superman must race against time to stop two nuclear missiles, save a bus filled with children, a speeding train and stop an entire region of the United States – California – from breaking off from the main continent and sinking beneath the ocean.

With the kryptonite, Lex Luthor brings Superman down low. As the missiles streak towards their targets, Luthor chains the kryptonite to Superman's chest and leaves him for dead at the bottom of a watery depth. Campbell's example of the "belly of the whale" would be an apt comparison.

But once freed from the clutches of the kryptonite, Superman takes to the skies to stop the missiles, one of which was aimed at the San Andreas Fault. Superman manages to dispatch the first of the missiles – aimed at a populated area – but the second hits home, causing the San Andreas Fault to begin to collapse California into the Pacific Ocean.

In addition to several other heroic acts, in a herculean display of strength – the visuals highly reminiscent of Atlas lifting the globe – Superman dives into the San Andreas Fault, lifting tons of rock, essentially repairing the terrain, making the San Andreas Fault whole.

Unfortunately, in the chaos, Lois Lane is killed. Refusing to surrender, all the while going against the rules of his father, forbidding him from interfering with the history of humankind, Superman reverses time itself, allowing for her rescue. All of this, serves to establish Superman's rise to "apotheosis." All this, and more, serve to further drive the point across regarding the Christ allegory of the character.

After saving California and dropping Luthor off at a prison, Superman then flies off into the sky, following Campbell's description in the sense that Superman is now allowed to go on with his "freedom to live."

In short, Superman's story touches upon most – if not all – of Campbell's concepts for the hero of the classic monomyth.

3   THE AMERICAN MONOMYTH

Lawrence's and Jewett's American monomyth is based on Campbell's concepts, but presents a variation, one based on more contemporary popular culture, rather than on ancient tales. The description of the American monomyth is as follows (Lawrence & Jewett 2002 p. 6):

> A community in a harmonious paradise is threatened by evil; normal institutions fail to contend with the threat; a selfless superhero emerges to renounce temptations and carry out the redemptive task; aided by fate, his decisive victory restores the community to its paradisiacal condition; the superhero then recedes into obscurity.

Where the focus of Campbell's monomyth was on rites of passage and initiation, the American monomyth is based no longer on finding one's place in the world, but instead on redemption, be it of a personal kind or a more generalized, societal redemption. Furthermore, they suggest an underlying difference in not only the narrative, but the characters themselves (Lawrence & Jewett 2002 p. 6-7):

> Whereas the classical monomyth seemed to reflect rites of initiation, the American monomyth derives from tales of redemption. It secularizes the Judaeo-Christian dramas of community redemption that have arisen on American soil, combining elements of the selfless servant who impassively gives his life for others and the zealous crusader who destroys evil. The supersaviors in pop culture function as replacements for the Christ figure, whose credibility was eroded by scientific rationalism. But their superhuman abilities reflect a hope for divine, redemptive powers that science has never eradicated from the popular mind.

The religious allegories and subtext have been replaced by a more subtle subtext that allows for free interpretation, or at least one that is not clearly and consciously religious. The superhuman capabilities of the hero no longer derive from sources with overt religious connotations, but often are explained away with science, technology or simple human ingenuity. There is also a difference in narrative in terms of the antagonists of the story (Lawrence & Jewett 2002 p. 152-153):

> Since the 1980s, however, a more pessimistic strand of the monomyth has emerged: in this strand government itself is the oppressive, irredeemably corrupt Other. Rather than being an Edenic paradise corrupted by outsiders, the community shown in a fallen condition linked to evils within its own leadership. The mythic solution thus lies in confronting it with the… violence previously dealt to intruders, a violence that will break the rhythm of ordinary government.

The enemy in these American tales is no longer encroaching from without; it is lodged within, in the form of corruption and decadence. If one were to fight evil and injustice, one had not to look beyond one's shores. In contemporary films and stories, this evil injustice most often comes in the form of criminals that society's laws – or more specif-

ically, those who uphold those laws – are unable to contend with. It is up to the hero of the story, selfless and sacrificing, to take the fight to them.

Lawrence and Jewett also suggest that since this American monomyth exists in a realm closer to reality, this myth is presented as accessible to ordinary people, via a concept called "mythic massage" (Lawrence & Shelton 2002 p. 116):

> *Mythic massage* is a process of assuring viewers that the gap between myth and reality can be bridged. In "Death wish" the vigilante actions of the modern superhero solve the knotty problem of urban crime. Mythical redemption works out in everyday life according to mythical expectation. Complex social problems are neatly solved with a single gesture; tangled human relations are sorted out and resolved; evil is eliminated with a single heroic stroke. In "Death Wish" the elements of mythic massage touch the fate of villains and vigilantes, the achievement of justice for the community, and the redemptive impact on the world.

The film mentioned – "Death Wish", released in 1974 – tells the story of an unassuming architect who becomes a vigilante, killing criminals on the streets of New York. It bears an important mention, because the bridging of the real world and the mythical word, fiction and reality, was no more apparent than in the 1984 subway shootings in New York City perpetrated by a Bernard Goetz.

Goetz – a 37-year old electronics repairman – felt intimidated by four subway panhandlers. Goetz pulled the gun he was carrying and opened fire. The two men who escaped the first volley, he shot in the back. Since his actions mirrored Kersey's actions in the previously mentioned film, the press labeled him "the 'Death Wish' killer" and "the 'Death Wish' vigilante" (Lawrence & Shelton 2002 p. 119):

> … Goetz was lionized by many Americans as the living incarnation of the "Death Wish" scheme. For many, his behavior – regardless of the facts – was immediately assimilated into the mythic story of the righteous gunman purging the city of its evildoers. One citizen said: "I don't give a damn where he shot 'em [sic] or how he did. Those lousy punks deserved to die. God bless that man. We he pulled that gun, he was shooting for all of us."

In short, the variation upon Campbell's monomyth – Lawrence's and Jewett's – is one of a more realistic bent, more accessible to contemporary audiences, perhaps even to the point where one could seek to emulate the same scheme. The tale of this American monomyth is not one of finding one's self through rite of passage, but rather rising up to defend society from an internal threat and then fading into legend.

3.1 Batman

(Nolan, "Batman Begins" 2005):

> A vigilante is just a man lost in the scramble for his own gratification. He can be destroyed, or locked up. But if you make yourself more than just a man, if you devote yourself to an ideal, and if they can't stop you, then you become something else entirely… A legend, Mr. Wayne.

Created in the wake of Superman, during the rising popularity of superheroes by artist Bob Kane and writer Bill Finger, "The Bat-man" took many different incarnations, as the character wasn't quite formed yet. Ultimately, though, he became that "weird creature of the night" (McGlothlin 2006 p. 8) that we have all come to recognize.

A creation as old as that of Superman himself, Batman taps into more of the darker aspects of human nature, but still maintains much more of the larger-than-life epic myth that Superman represents.

Within DC Comic's shared universe, Batman is considered the opposite number of sorts of Superman. The flip side to Superman's coin; if Superman is the light, Batman is the dark. It is this minor, but quite noticeable, difference that both characters' popularity is built upon, and has provided much entertainment, such as in the form of the animated film "Superman/Batman: Public Enemies."

It was the character's different approach to crime fighting – pretty much everything else, too – that made him popular. Superman flies in broad daylight, without a mask, battling evil in the open, and once the work is done, he leaves the criminals in the hands of the police, takes a moment to bask in the glory of a grateful and awe-inspired populace, before taking flight into the sky again.

Meanwhile, Batman prowls the rooftops at night, turning hard-faced criminals into whimpering cowards with his fear-inducing scowl and cowl. He fights criminals in dark alleys, leaving them tied up for the police before withdrawing into the night that spawned him. Batman's approach is one steeped in fear. While his own personal code of honor will not allow for killing his opponents, he grasps that in order to succeed he must

be something more than just a man, something that will send criminals fleeing into the night in terror.

While the character has had many incarnations, including the well-known and well-received Tim Burton 1989 feature film adaptation "Batman" – and its sequel, "Batman Returns" – I have chosen to focus on the most-recent film adaptations by Christopher Nolan. While there are many reasons for this choice – including personal taste and the freshness of the material – the main reason is the fact that one of the core fundamental aspects of Batman has been respected in these films: Batman does not kill.

In Tim Burton's adaptation, Batman – played by Michael Keaton – shows little to no remorse when he drops the Joker – played my Jack Nicholson – off the roof of a church, to his death. In the sequel – "Batman Returns" – Burton's Batman shows little to no hesitation when fighting a thug, he straps a bomb to the thug's chest and drops him down a sewer pipe. Batman even throws in a small smirk while he does it.

While there is a body count in Nolan's first film – "Batman Begins" – this body count is only marginally influenced by Batman himself, and Batman himself does not actively attempt to kill anyone in the film. In the film's sequel – "The Dark Knight" – he even actively rescues the Joker from certain death, despite the countless people the Joker has killed. This is an essential and fundamental aspect to the character.

This does not, however, mean that Batman is incapable of taking a life, or rather, of leaving an enemy to face his death. This will be discussed later in this chapter.

"Batman Begins" – the first in Nolan's trilogy – tells the origin of Batman, the sad tale of the tortured Bruce Wayne – played here by Christian Bale – and how he becomes the man in the cloak and cowl. It tells how he is trained by a man named Henri Ducard – in reality Ra's al Ghul, the film's antagonist, played by Liam Neeson – and the League of Shadows, and how Batman ultimately foils Ducard's plan to poison Gotham City with a fear-inducing poison.

While there are certain bits of the story here that follow Campbell's concepts – Bruce Wayne finding his role as Batman and realizing his destiny through doing so, etc. – much of the story here follows Lawrence's and Jewett's concept of the American monomyth.

As the story begins, we meet an imprisoned and aimless Bruce Wayne, who is taken in by the League of Shadows to be trained as a soldier in their service. The young Bruce Wayne has yet to comprehend his true destiny – an aspect that the character shares with Superman, a hero of the classical monomyth – but he will soon grow into his own, as he begins to realize that the League harbors much more sinister motives and deals with criminals by killing them. This is a sentiment Wayne does not share. After a harrowing training session with Ducard, Wayne notices a man in a bamboo cage, a prisoner of the League of Shadows. When prompted, Ducard makes a statement that is decidedly cold-blooded – and sinister – in its simplicity. This foreshadows the split that will occur between the two men, and their differing concepts of justice (Nolan, "Batman Begins" 2005):

> He was a farmer. Then he tried to take his neighbor's land and he became a murderer. Now he is a prisoner. [When asked of the prisoner's ultimate fate] Justice. Crime cannot be tolerated. Criminals thrive on the indulgence of society's understanding.

While training with Ducard, we learn that Ducard himself has lost someone – just as Wayne did – and that his plight is not entirely unsympathetic. In fact, his loss of a wife might resound with some as an entirely reasonable argument for taking definite, lethal action against evil. But to Wayne, this is out of the question, as evidenced by a later scene in the film.

While Wayne trains with Ducard, we catch glimpses of Wayne's background, and the origin of the man who will become Batman. The story of Batman's origin is that much darker than that of the Man of Steel. The sole heir to the Wayne family fortune after the death of his parents, victims of street crime, Bruce Wayne has wandered the world, aimless, an angry young man seeking purpose.

After his training with the League of Shadows has come to an end, we return to the caged and imprisoned murderer. After being dosed with a fear-inducing poison – that

21

reveals Wayne's fear of bats, and the associated memories of his father – Bruce Wayne must prove himself to his peers by killing the imprisoned murderer, to be an executioner of the League's judgment. By killing, Wayne would prove himself not only worthy of fighting crime alongside the League of Shadows, but worthy of leading a group of his peers to Gotham, to destroy the city – now a corrupt den of decadence – by what the League considers an act of true justice. In a final act of determination, Wayne states he will not kill, not for the League or anyone else (Nolan, "Batman Begins" 2005):

> I will go back to Gotham and I will fight men like this, but I will not become an executioner.

With that, Wayne must fight the men he once considered allies, an alliance shattered by differences in opinion. As the stronghold of the League of Shadows burns in the aftermath of the battle, Wayne saves an unconscious Henri Ducard from a certain death, choosing not to take a life, and also choosing not to allow a death to occur, an important point that will be discussed later in this chapter.

Once the League is seemingly beaten, Wayne returns to Gotham, where he begins building the legend of the Batman. Here he will assume the alter ego identity of Batman. Here he will become a vigilante, working outside the law to fight crime, and will often be at odds with the very police forces he tries to help.

Returning to his father's company – Wayne Enterprises – he seeks the aid of Lucius Fox, who helps him with the technical aspects of building his superhero persona. Fox essentially being the Q to Wayne's James Bond.

It is here we see one of the clearest differences between Batman and Superman, namely, the costume (Nolan, "Batman Begins" 2005):

Figure 2. "Nolan, "Batman Begins" movie poster. Warner Bros. Pictures 2005

When it comes to comic book characters, the clothes definitely make the man; they are an extension of the character's persona. Superman's outfit is a bright amalgamation on cheerful colors. Batman's classic costume is a darker variation of the garish, traditional superhero "long underwear"-look (McGlothlin 2006 p. 7). Batman's original outfit consisted of a dark gray suit, with a blue-black cape and cowl and a yellow equipment belt. The color scheme of this uniform has varied over the years – even going completely black, save for the gray bat-symbol on the chest – but the message is clear; Batman is quite a different hero from the likes of Superman.

In "Batman Begins" (see Figure 2.) the dark color palette is dialed to even darker tones; the Bat-suit now consists primarily of shades of black, including the cape and cowl. The yellow equipment belt has been kept, however.

The second difference, while also cosmetic, is a question of the character's respective capabilities and superpowers. Superman's otherworldly powers of incredible strength, speed, his capacity to see through solid walls are all the clear marks of an otherworldly being. Batman has no superpowers, relying simply on his innate ingenuity, his honed physique and detective skills to win the day. His martial arts skills – not supernatural at all – are more suited to the postmythic world, his techno-gadgetry a variation on the otherworldly powers of Superman, powers rooted in the science of today. He is also not

23

merely a fighter reliant on technological wizardry, he is also a thinker. Indeed, this Batman, this "Dark Knight", is additionally known as "The Detective" (Vietti, "Batman: Under the Red Hood" 2010); which means to say that he shares many attributes in common with the traditional gumshoe detective.

Once the habitus of Batman has coalesced, it is time for Batman to take his fight to the streets of Gotham. His approach is one of fear. Having been imprisoned and once a would-be criminal himself, he has a firm understanding of the criminal mind. Also, while his own personal code of honor will not allow him to directly kill his opponents – something that differentiates Batman from Ducard – he does not mind borrowing a page from the guide book of how the League of Shadows would go about their business. That is to say, he grasps that in order to succeed he must be something more than just a man in the eyes of the criminals he intends to fight, something that will send criminals flee-ing into the night in horror (Nolan, "Batman Begins" 2005):

> People need dramatic examples to shake them out of apathy and I can't do that as Bruce Wayne. As a man, I'm flesh and blood. I can be ignored, I can be destroyed, but as a symbol… I can be incorrupti-ble, I can be everlasting… Something elemental, something terrifying.

Batman's tactics during the events of the film differ completely from Superman's tac-tics. In the Donner's 1978 film adaptation, Superman's first appearances involve stun-ning and public feats of bravery – rescuing Lois Lane from a crashing helicopter, arrest-ing a cat burglar, etc. – that he follows up with an honest meeting with Lois Lane that – despite the scene's romantic subtext – clearly has Superman presenting himself to the world as a straight-up, honest guy, who only wishes to help. In "Batman Begins", Bat-man's first appearance is a down-and-dirty dust-up with drug dealers at the Gotham docks, and later in the film, the shadowy vigilante is chased by police forces through the streets – and rooftops – of Gotham. Superman's approach seems to be one of forthright and transparency. Meanwhile, Batman moves in the shadows, operating in secrecy.

This is not merely a gimmick for the characters, as Superman's home turf – the cheery Metropolis – and approach to working with government officials differs quite a lot from Batman's relationship with the authorities of his gloomy hometown of Gotham City. While Superman has always remained apolitical of the government's policies, he has always operated within the guidelines and decrees of the government. In short, he has

never quite been a vigilante, as he has been a helpful hand, seldom criticizing the status quo (Jewett & Shelton 2002 p. 152):

> In the innocence of the axial decade, for example, the Lone Ranger and Superman always turn over the bad guys they capture to the sheriff or the police – and remain mute about the incompetence that demanded their assistance. (Myth of the American Superhero, Lethal Patriots Break the Rhythm)

This does not mean, however, that Batman has given up on society altogether. As evidenced by his actions in "Batman Begins", he seeks out the help of James Gordon and attorney Rachel Dawes, because they are the only people he can turn to in the corrupt city of Gotham. He could take his fight to the criminal underworld entirely by himself, he could go on a vigilante rampage, but he still believes that the system works, provided that the people making the decisions are not corrupt. Batman sees that the law is true. It is merely the instruments of that law – the people who enforce it – that are lacking. Once the balance has been restored, once the system has been made to work again, Batman seeks to end his nightly excursion into Gotham's underworld, an ending fitting a hero of the American monomyth.

As the legend of the Nolan, "Batman Begins" to spread, he recruits allies and meets new enemies, but little does he know that Ducard and his League of Shadows are still very much alive and that they are still proceeding with their own plans for Gotham. As Batman first appears, people begin questioning the rationale of having a costumed vigilante on their streets. Even Bruce Wayne himself questions the sanity of his alter ego (Nolan, "Batman Begins" 2005):

> Well, a guy who dresses up as a bat clearly has issues.

Here we see another difference between the characters of Superman and Batman. It is the question of choice. Superman's path was destined since his arrival on Earth. Batman, in many respects, never chose to become who and what he is. His origin can be traced back to a tragic and senseless act of violence, witnessed as a child; the death of his parents, Thomas and Martha Wayne (Geda, "Batman Beyond: Return of the Joker" 2000):

> Behind all the sturm and bat-a-rangs, you're just a little boy in a playsuit, crying for Mommy and Daddy! It'd be funny if it weren't so pathetic. Oh, what the heck. I'll laugh anyway.

While one may question whether this event was the sole reason for Bruce Wayne donning the cape and cowl of the Dark Knight, it certainly is the most compelling and is the one that writers seem to come back to, again and again. While many stories and iterations of Batman have raised the question of Batman's sanity or lack thereof, this thesis' purpose is not to do so, but it should, however, be remarked, that even this questioning of Batman's sanity marks another differentiating aspect of the types of heroes they represent.

As the League plots and schemes, we see Batman take the fight to the criminal underworld of Gotham. While the Gotham City that is presented to us here is far from the "harmonious paradise threatened by evil" (Lawrence & Jewett 2002 p. 6), it is much more in line with the more pessimistic tales of the heroes of the American monomyth, where "the community is shown in a fallen condition linked to evils within its own leadership" (Lawrence & Jewett 2002 p. 152). Indeed, corruption has spread so far into Gotham City, that an the external threat – presented by the League of Shadows – is all but inseparable from the internal threat – the corrupt policemen, judges and doctors of Gotham. As Ducard states (Nolan, "Batman Begins" 2005):

> You are defending a city so corrupt… we have infiltrated every level of its infrastructure.

As "normal institutions fail to contend with this threat" (Lawrence & Jewett 2002 p. 6), it is therefore Bruce Wayne's role – upon assuming the cloak and cowl of Batman – to be the "selfless superhero" to rise up and restore the community to its "paradisiacal condition."

In "Batman Begins", as things take a turn for the worse, Ducard and his men show up at Wayne's home, a prelude to a final showdown in Gotham's infamous Narrows, from which the League intends to start its assault on Gotham. Their weapon is fear, the very same weapon that the Batman himself has been using. But their fear-inducing poison will not only strike fear into the citizens of Gotham, it will cause a mass panic that will tear the city apart, something that the League of Shadows considers an act that will "restore the balance" (Nolan, "Batman Begins" 2005):

> [When told that millions of lives will be lost] Only a cynical man would call what these people have "lives," Wayne. Crime, despair… this is not how man was supposed to live. The League of Shadows has been a check against human corruption for thousands of years. We sacked Rome, loaded trade

ships with plague rats, burned London to the ground. Every time a civilization reaches the pinnacle of its decadence, we return to restore the balance.

Bruce Wayne – now Batman – on the other hand has a very clear response. For while he understands that the city of Gotham has grown corrupt, he believes that the system works, and that it is only the corrupt who have taken control that must be knocked off their perches in order to true justice to prevail (Nolan, "Batman Begins" 2005):

Gotham isn't beyond saving.

Also, when confronted of the clashing ideals of Ducard and Wayne, Ducard has a very simple solution to those who would dare oppose his view of fighting evil, what he considers "true justice" (Nolan, "Batman Begins" 2005):

Create enough hunger and everyone becomes a criminal… And this time no misguided idealists will get in the way. Like your father, you lack the courage to do all that is necessary. If someone stands in the way of true justice, you simply walk up behind them and stab them in the heart.

After the League enacts its diabolical plot to destroy Gotham City, Batman rushes to the rescue, aided by James Gordon – played here by Gary Oldman – to thwart the League's plans.

Batman faces down Ducard aboard a train that must be derailed or stopped in order to fully stop the League's plan. A fight ensues, and as the train begins to disintegrate around them, Ducard is soundly beaten. He asks Batman, whether he has now finally learned to "do what is necessary" (Nolan, "Batman Begins" 2005), whether he is now ready to kill Ducard.

It is here we can now return to the point raised by Wayne's earlier rescue of Ducard during the destruction of the League of Shadow's stronghold. While Wayne has stated he would never take a life, he also did not allow Ducard to die. By this point, must have realized, that Ducard's death might have stopped the League's plans from developing this far. Yet he has vowed not to take a life.

Here we return to the question of use of deadly force and whether it is an acceptable choice while dealing with their sworn enemies. Again, it is a question of choice. Superman – the true-blue boy scout of all heroes – represents a clear-cut hero for a time when clear-cut morality tales were the order of the day, a hero of the classic monomyth. Bat-

man himself, a hero of the American monomyth, proves much more complicated than that.

The best example of the difference here is when it comes to choosing whether to kill or let an enemy die. In the television show "Smallville," Clark Kent not only saves Lex Luthor time and again – a man who has been a dogged enemy for years – but berates Oliver Queen – Green Arrow – for killing Lex Luthor (Smallville, "Requiem" 2009). Would Superman kill Lex Luthor? No. Would Superman have saved Lex Luthor from certain death? Yes.

To Superman his capacity for violence ends at the killing blow; it is a line that he will not cross. Superman has no choice; to him, all life is sacred. Batman, however, is caught in between the terminator line of lethal and non-lethal action.

Batman is not arbitrary in his actions; he does save the Joker from certain death at the end of "The Dark Knight", after all. But the fact that the Joker's fall was a direct result of Batman's actions would suggest that the choice to let someone die is not something Batman does cavalierly or on a whim.

In "Batman Begins", Batman is faced with Ra's al Ghul, a man he has saved already at an earlier time. Faced with killing Ra's al Ghul, the man that was – indirectly – responsible for the death of his parents, Batman chooses not to. But when he gets the chance to save Ra's al Ghul from an imminent death again, he chooses not to do so, either. Would Batman kill Ra's al Ghul? No. Would Batman have saved Ra's al Ghul from certain death? No.

In "Batman Begins", at this critical moment of choice, Batman's response is terse. He will not take Ducard's life, but neither will he choose to save it, either (Nolan, "Batman Begins" 2005):

I won't kill you, but I don't have to save you.

As the railway begins to topple, Batman dives out of the disintegrating train, leaving Ducard to his fate. Thus, a "decisive victory" (Jewett & Shelton 2002 p. 6) has been won.

Once the dust settles, the story looks to the future. It becomes abundantly clear to us that Bruce Wayne has become the mask that Batman wears now. But it is also implied that there is still hope that once Gotham no longer needs its guardian and protector, Wayne may hang up his cowl and return to an ordinary life, as stated by Rachel Dawes (Nolan, "Batman Begins" 2005):

> Your real face is the one that criminals now fear. The man I loved – the man who vanished – he never came back at all. But maybe he's still out there, somewhere. Maybe someday, when Gotham no longer needs Batman, I'll see him again.

But until that day comes, Batman must return to the blackness of night, to fight in the shadows for a better tomorrow.

The fact that our hero cannot form any sort of romantic and serious attachment to anyone is not a only a common trope in comic book fiction, but it also falls in line with Lawrence's and Jewett's ideas regarding the American monomyth. After all, for the "selfless hero" (Lawrence & Jewett p. 6) to emerge and perform his "redemptive task" (Lawrence & Jewett p. 6), he must "renounce temptations" (Lawrence & Jewett p. 6). Therefore, Batman cannot get involved with anyone romantically, until after he has saved Gotham (Lawrence & Jewett p. 154):

> Women are desirable partners for the life-after violence – once the community is safe again.

Also, until Gotham is safe again – cleansed of the threats that cloud the horizon – Batman cannot "fade into obscurity" (Lawrence & Jewett p. 6).

While "Batman Begins" does not provide the text-book ending that falls in line with Lawrence's and Jewett's concept of the American monomyth in terms of endings – the film was meant to be the first in a new franchise, after all – future installments have hinted that an ending suitable to an American monomyth is on its way. As Harvey Dent – the District Attorney that is said to be Gotham's "White Knight" – states in "The Dark Knight", the film's sequel ("The Dark Knight 2008):

> [When asked who appointed the Batman] We did. All of us who stood by and let scum take control of our city… Whoever the Batman is, he doesn't want to do this for the rest of his life. How could he? Batman is looking for someone to take up his mantle.

In short, once Gotham has been rid of its enemies, restored to its "paradisiacal condition" (Lawrence & Jewett p. 6) – the incapable or unwilling collective redeemed by the selfless superhero – Batman hopes to recede "into obscurity" (Lawrence & Jewett p. 6).

In the end, though, both of these heroes – and the monomyths they relate to – represent hope. Superman represents the promise of a better tomorrow. This promise is even exemplified in his nickname, "The Man of Tomorrow." For if everyone would be like Superman – well-intentioned, strong and never deceitful – wouldn't tomorrow just be that much more super? In short, what Superman is, we may someday become and his rite of passage, his quest and achievement of finding his place in the world, is one that we all share.

Batman himself also stands for hope, but in the grimmer, more realistic sense of the practical American monomyth. This is poignantly illustrated in a scene with James Gordon and Batman at the end of "Batman Begins." In the scene, Gordon says that Batman has succeeded in bringing hope to the streets of Gotham and that the movement towards a better tomorrow for the city has begun (Nolan, "Batman Begins" 2005):

> … you really started something. Bent cops running scared, hope on the streets.

4 CONCLUSION

As stated earlier, the purpose of this thesis was to present Batman as a hero of Lawrence's and Jewett's concept of the American monomyth. This was done by first providing the reader with a basic understanding of Campbell's classic monomyth – and a representative hero of said monomyth – then Lawrence's and Jewett's American monomyth, and compare said American monomyth to the structure of how Batman's story was told in Christopher Nolan's film adaptation. Comparisons of both heroes – and the monomyths they represented – were also inevitable, as differences and similarities brought further definition.

All of this was done not only to point of the validity of Lawrence's and Jewett's claims, but also point out that there are different categories of heroes, and that while a certain concept – Campbell's monomyth – might remain valid, mutations and variations on that base template may arise, and indeed have appeared.

Fictional narratives – be they comic books or films, or adaptations of one to the other – are ever-evolving concepts, and the heroes within those narratives evolve, too. If the archetypal hero of the classic monomyth – and the related narrative – has changed once, into the variation of the American monomyth, perhaps the American monomyth may evolve – or is already evolving – into something else.

Until that day comes, future research into such emerging heroic figures is encouraged, if only to keep an eye out for any emerging new monomythic permutations – archetypal or no – that might appear, like lone heroes on the horizon.

4.1 "Scar"

As part of this thesis, I have included the feature film script "Scar." It is the modern day retelling of the Biblical story of Cain and Able, set in the world of motorcycle gangs.

The main character – Scar – is based around similar ideas that touch upon the concepts of Lawrence's and Jewett's American American monomyth. This is what was intended when the script was written.

5 REFERENCES

Alsford, Mike: 2006. *Heroes and villains*. UK: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 158 p.

Campbell, Joseph: 1949. *The hero with a thousand faces*. USA: Princeton University Press, 416 p.

Donner, R. (Director): 1978. *Superman* [Motion picture]. Warner Bros. Pictures, Dovemead Films. 151 min. (2000 restoration version)

Geda, C. (Director): 2000. *Batman Beyond: Return of the Joker* [Animated film]. Warner Bros. Animation. 77 min. (director's cut)

Lawrence, John Shelton & Jewett, Robert: 2002. *Myth of the American superhero*. USA: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

McGlothlin, Christopher: 2006. *Mutants & Masterminds: Golden Age Sourcebook*. USA: Green Ronin Publishing, 125 p.

Nolan, C. (Director): 2005. *Batman Begins* [Motion picture]. Warner Bros. Pictures, Syncopy. 140 min.

Nolan, C. (Director): 2008. *The Dark Knight* [Motion picture]. Warner Bros. Pictures, Syncopy. 152 min.

Rohl, M. (Director), Henderson, H. & Whitehead, D. (Writers): 2009. *Requiem* [episode], in Gough, A. & Millar, M. (creators) *Smallville* [television series]. 42 min.

Spivey, Michael & Knowlton, Steven: 2008. *Anti-heroism in the continuum of good and evil*, in Rosenberg, Robin S. (ed.) *The Psychology of Superheroes: An unauthorized exploration*. USA: BenBella Books, Inc., 259 p.

Vietti, B. (Director): 2010. *Batman: Under the Red Hood* [Animated film]. Warner Bros. Animation, DC Entertainment. 75 min.

6   APPENDICES

Figure 1. "Superman – The Movie" movie poster. Warner Bros. Pictures 1978

Figure 2. "Batman Begins" movie poster. Warner Bros. Pictures 2005