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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am Frank. I am busy, ambitious, I am confused and unsure.
Frank is not my real name. The name Frank I use mostly when writing as a
pseudonym, primarily on historical grounds. However, I realize through
years shopping lists, graffiti, letters, thoughts of any kind, I have
this regrettable habit of getting personal. In such and the like I am
the phony 'wolf bastard' of 'my' words across 'not me' but
not a lot of the time, I tend towards the grossly self-indulgent. I
find it easier to write objectively in the third person and so I do
and I have now up with Frank.

There are many reasons why it's Frank, and not Dave or Alan or Tim.
Frank, as a word in itself, means among other things: open or unbridled
expression, unrestrained, unmitigated, these are qualities I desire.

I would like to thank Micheal Fitzgerald and Conor Foy for lending me
some of the material and Leslie, a librarian in Trinity's Berkley Library
for helping with some of the older books.

Ironically, thanks to the
role of it by the entertainment industry, the name Frank now conjures up
(for me) images of a man with a heart and mind far removed from those of
a saint.

And so, for the purposes of this thesis, or parts thereof, I will call
myself Frank. After David Hopper's racing physicist Frank Smith in the
film Blue Velvet, after my number of Sylvester Stallone characters,
the most of which is Frank Lewis, another lone-prisoner-fucks-the-system
character (the film Lock-up was yet to be released in Ireland,
unfortunately) and finally, after writing another Frank, in the novel
Novel The Wasp Factory who, among other things, likes to blow things
alive for kicks.

I must be a very sick person. I have often had a feeling that I would

an introduction (of sorts)

I am Frank. I am lazy - shiftless. I am confused and unsure.

Frank is not my real name. The name Frank I am merely adopting as a pseudonym, primarily on technical grounds. Whenever I write things down; shopping lists, graffiti, letters, thoughts of any kind, I have this regrettable habit of getting personal. In much and the same way as the character 'spoilt bastard' of Viz comic screams 'me! me! me! me! me! a lot of the time, I tend towards the grossly self-indulgent. I find it easier to write objectively in the third person and so to this end I have come up with Frank.

There are many reasons why its Frank, and not dave or alan or tim. Frank, as a word in itself, means among other things; 'open or candid in expression; unrestrained, unminstakable. true! these qualities I admire; having made attempts to cultivate them for a number of years, in speech at least, if not in deed. Frank, as a name, is the informal form of Francis, as in St. Francis of Assisi. Ironically, thanks to the use made of it by the entertainments industry, the name Frank now conjures up (for me) images of a man with a heart and mind far removed from those of a saint.

And so, for the purpose of this thesis, or parts thereof, I will call myself. Frank. After Dennis Hopper's raving physcotic Frank Booth in the film Blue Velvet , after any number of Slyvester Stallone characters. the atest of which is Frank Leone, another lone-prisoner-fucks-the-system character (the film. Lock-up has yet to be released in Ireland, unfortunately) and finally, after erics brother, Frank, in Iam Banks Novel The Wasp Factory who, among other things, likes to burn sheep alive for kicks.

I must be a very sick person. I have often had a feeling that I would

prefer to be sick and deranged and do mad socially unacceptable things than to remain as I am, a neurotic, paranoid hypochondriac who, at the age of 22, still lives at home with his family and worries about the size of his penis.

This, I know, is not possible. I've seen 'One flew over the cuckoo's nest' I saw what happened to Jack Nicholson at the end of that film. Fucking the system like that just doesn't work. And so I call myself Frank. He's my fantasy altergo. Pathetic, I know, but then ... I'm a pathetic kinda guy.

Bruce Wayne is aware that his actions as Batman would be socially unacceptable and for this reason he too makes use of a dual identity.

In the thesis (of sorts) which follows I hope to show you, luckless reader why I find Batman to be the most human, realistic and identifiable character of the much-maligned superhero genre with specific reference (eventually) to Frank Miller's 1986 reading of the Legend that is - the Batman.

But first, a history lesson ..

CHAPTER 1. The Birth Of The Superhero

In the introduction to his book The encyclopedia of superheroes,¹ Jeff Bovin attempts to define exactly what it is characterises the average super hero. Among the factors he considers essential are an alterego. A distinctive costume, a superpower of one kind or another and a tendency 'to work actively and magnanimously for the common good! A recognisable enough description to any one living in the late twentieth century, but up until the year 1929 the concept of comic book heroes, super or otherwise did not exist. The concept of comic book's didn't even exist.

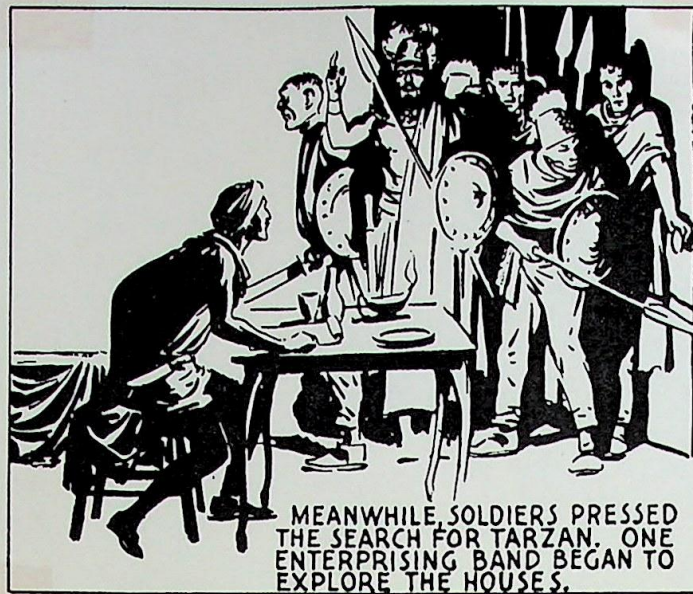
The closest thing to the comic strip form as we know it was the 'Daily Strip' that appeared in most newspapers each morning. Classified by The World Encyclopedia of Comics as ' a comic feature appearing across a daily newspaper page, usually in a horizontal arrangement of panels.'² These daily strips possessed many of the hallmarks of what we now consider comic strips - the sequential narrative, continuing characters, dialogue enclosed within the picture- but the majority of them only sought to extract a laugh from reader with the final panel. Some strips made use of adventurous settings (e.g. Felix the Cat in the jungles of Africa) but never for any higher purpose than to set off the familiar slapstick and buffoonery.

Roy Crane was the first to break away from the conventions of caricature and broad humour by introducing to his strip Wash Tubbs , the dashing figure of Captain Easy, soldier of fortune in 1929. A few months later Harold Foster's adaptation of Edgar Rice Burrough's novel, Tarzan of theApes and P. Nowlan ad R. Calkin's Buck Roger's in the Twenty Fifth Century completed the transformation. The adventure strip was born. (The adventure strip did not necessarily herald a total transformation of the comic strip; merely a diversification' a broadening of the medium's horizons). Harold Foster s beautiful illustrative style, which owed more to magazine illustration and figurative art than the likes of Mutt and Jeff , went a long way towards reducing the caricatured, big footed look of comic strips which up until then had seemed almost obligatory. (Fig. 1.1).

These characters could not yet be classified as super heroes however. The comic strip adventures of both Tarzan and Buck Rogers were adaptations from existing novels and as such would not have been conceived with the concept of superheroics in mind. Tarzan spent his time swinging through the trees of Africa and Buck Rogers was depicted, in his initial adventures at least, fighting to liberate America from the mongol invaders in the twenty fifth century. Essential to the durability of the superhero concept has been the idea that the reader might find something in the character or adventure with which s/he might identify, be it superman's bundling alterego Clark Kent, Tatman's personal hatred of all criminals or Captain America's patriotic zeal. The chances of a reader identifying with a character whose adventures were set in twenty-fifth century America or the jungles of Africa were thus seriously undermined.

By 1931 the great depression had taken a firm hold on America and a touch of realism was required to keep the readers interested. The paramount problems of the United States were listed as, in order of severity: Prohibition, Administration of justice, and Lawlessness. A more realistic hero was needed for the readers of america's newspapers; one who might give them hope in these lawless times.

Dick Tracy, created by Chester Gould in 1931 was one such hero, appearing for the first time in the October 4th edition of the Chicago Tribune. Dick Tracy was a hero 'created to meet the desperate need of the times.'³ As Gould once said in an interview: "I decided that if the police couldn't catch the gangsters, I'd create a fellow who would"⁴ Tracy's fictional origins were explained for the first time in the episode of Oct 12th 1931: The powerless witness of a hold-up in which his sweetheart, Tess Trueheart is kidnapped and her father murdered, Tracy joins the police force in anger and unrelentingly tracks down the criminals responsible for the act.



MEANWHILE, SOLDIERS PRESSED THE SEARCH FOR TARZAN. ONE ENTERPRISING BAND BEGAN TO EXPLORE THE HOUSES.



THEY CAME INTO HALAM'S HOUSE. IN THE SECRET CELLAR. LETHOR GROWLED INSTINCTIVELY BEFORE TARZAN COULD STAY HIM.



LETHOR SPRANG TOWARD THE SPEAR-BLOCKED EXIT. "KILL THE LION," THE CAPTAIN SHOUTED; "HE KILLED OUR COMRADES."



"HALT, LETHOR!" TARZAN COMMANDED. THEN HE CALLED UP "IF YOU TOUCH LETHOR, I'LL KILL HALF OF YOU BEFORE YOU CAN KILL ME."



RIGHT HERE, SHERIFF, RIGHT HERE! MEET THE GIRL FRIEND!

HOLY SMOKE! LOOK AT THAT FACE - OW!

ABOVE: TARZAN BY HALFOSTER C. 1929. ONE OF THE FIRST ADVENTURE STRIPS. [HORN, MAURICE, 1976, P.]
LEFT. IN 1931 CHESTER GOULD'S DICK TRACY GAVE AMERICA HER FIRST REAL COMIC BOOK 'PEOPLE'S HERO'. [HORN, MAURICE, 1976, P.]

While the poor, stylised artwork was rather a step back from Hal Foster's beautifully executed 'Tarzan' adventures, the gritty realism of the story made up for it (Fig. 2.2). The Dick Tracy strip was violent, brutal, often cruel and occasionally controversial. One of Gould's more memorable methods of getting rid of an enemy was when he had Tracy vapourize a villain by the name of Intro with a lazer canon. Somebody asks Tracy where Intro is and Tracy replies "You're breathing him".⁵

And so, with the appearance of Dick Tracy, special agent', the idea of a peoples hero was firmly established as a staple of the comic strip. A hero who would protect the people and put right the things the readers themselves felt helpless to change. Before this idea could be elaborated upon in any manner, a more basic development was necessary in the method by which our heroes' daring adventures could be disseminated.

The Birth of the Comic Book

Up until the early thirties, the nearest thing to the modern comic book as we know it, had been compilations of previously printed newspaper strips (Richard Outcault's 'Yellow Kid' was being reprinted as early as 1897). In 1933, the eastern color publishing company (a leading New York firm involved in printing four colour comic sections for newspapers to be used as Sunday color supplements) began issuing comic books as promotional giveaways for their larger clients. The first of these was called Funnies on Parade and was used by the firm Proctor and Gamble. A salesman at the eastern color company, one Maxwell Charles Gaines (Subsequently regarded as the father of the comic book) noticed how popular these freebies seemed to be. He gathered together a new collection of newspaper strips which he called famous funnies, stuck 10 cents stickers on them and left them at some newstands to test the market. Sold out. America's first commercial comic book (the Japanese had published the first such collection in the 1920's).

Famous Funnies was however, still only a collection of reprints. In 1935 a Major Malcolm Wheeler - Nicholson published the first collection of exclusively original material going by the name of New Fun Comics, it mainly featured humourous sketches. In 1937, the Major sold his interests in comics to Harry Donenfeld, a pulp fiction writer. Donenfeld was to have a pivotal role in the creation of the costumed superhero industry. Before the burden of innovation could be passed on to Donenfeld, Wheeler-Nicholson would make one further contribution to the development of the genre. Realising that adventure rather than humour was the way forward for comic books, he had Jerry Siegal and Joe Shuster, the creators of Superman, on his books by 1936, producing a range of lacklustre adventure strips such as Dr. Occult, Slam Bradley and The Spy.

When Donenfeld took over in 1937, he brought in an accountant, Jacob Liebowitz to act as his new publisher. Together, they went into the comic business 'with the attitudes of the garment industry - Piecework, Sweatshop, Assembly.'⁶ An awareness of this is important for it was exactly this attitude that made the companies fortunes while holding the development of the comic books themselves back for so long and keeping them from realising their full potential.

Leibowitz moved in fast. He arranged a meeting in December of 1937 with Jerry Siegal. That meeting resulted in Siegal and Shuster entering into a contractual agreement with D.C. comics (named after Donenfeld's first new title Detective Comics, launched in January of that same year). According to historian Steve Gerber, the contract arrived at through this meeting stipulated that

Siegal and Shuster would continue to produce 'Slam Bradley' and 'The Spy' exclusively for D.C. for two years.

That D.C. would be the sole owners of the material, that the creators would be paid

ten dollars a page of story and finished art for their troubles and that D.C. would have first option on acceptance of any new comic features that Siegal and Shuster might originate.⁷

Siegal and Shuster had just dug the first sod of their own grave. In 1938 Siegal took their creation of Superman to Donenfeld and Liebowitz. They had created him back in 1933 as 17 year old school friends and dragged the idea around to every newspaper syndication agency in the country only to have it universally rejected. D.C. accepted it and decided to use Clark Kent as the protagonist of their new title, Action Comic . Before Superman had even made his first appearance in public however, Leibowitz sent a release form to the two young men.

According to an article in Playboy magazine by Harlan Ellison, the release reads, in part, as follows:

I, the undersigned, am an artist or author and have performed work for strip entitled Superman. In consideration of \$130 agreed to be paid to me by you, I hereby sell and transfer such work and strip, all good will attached thereto and exclusive right to use the characters and the story, continuity and title of strip contained therein to you and your assigns to have and hold forever and to be your exclusive property.⁸

In agreeing to sell themselves to D.C. comics in this manner, Siegal and Shuster lost all rights to their own creation of Superman. Consequently guaranteeing the comics industry a state of permanent infancy for the next forty odd years.

Superman appeared for the first time in public on the front cover of

Action Comic 1 in June, 1938. Dressed in his now universally-familiar costume, he was depicted lifting a car over his head and ramming the front end into the side of a mountain. Based heavily on Philip Wylie's 1930 science fiction novel Gladiator, Superman was a rather simplistic shallow character in comparison. The gladiator obtains his superpowers after his timid hen-pecked father injects his pregnant mother with a special formula in the hope that the child will not grow up a wimp also. Whenever the boy uses his superpowers he is labelled a freak and spends his days tortured by the fact that he doesn't fit in. A professor suggests he father a superhuman race. The gladiator wonders about the ethics of it all and goes to a mountain top to ask God for his help, whereupon he is struck down by a bolt of lightning. Siegal and Shuster would appear to have rejected the rather didactic tone of this story, plumping instead for the Superhuman, God-made-man angle. All the same, it caught on to such an extent that in a few short years, the concept of superheroics was positively rampant in its ubiquity.

What Siegal and Shuster did with Superman - whether they realised it or not at the time - was to turn the conventions of heroic adventure strips on their head. The characters of Tarzan and Buck Rogers were, as pointed out before, ordinary mortal human beings set in alien worlds as backgrounds for adventure. The phenomenal success of Chester Gould's Dick Tracy at the start of the decade had pointed to a need for some sense of realism to be brought to the adventure strip. Ironic then, you may think, that I should try to make the case for the superhero, one of the most fantastically unrealistic inventions of any 'literary' medium. The adventures of Superman, in contrast to those of Tarzan or Buck Rogers, were set in a universally recognisable locale - that of the imaginary city of Metropolis - a word which in itself is used to describe the main city of any country (fig 2.3). Superman's alter-ego 'Clark Kent', bundling cub-reporter with the 'Daily Planet' was also given an image with which the reader could readily identify. According to Reitberger and Fuchs it is the tragedy of all superheroes that

TWO BLOCKS FROM THE NEWSPAPER OFFICE,
THE CUB REPORTER TURNS INTO A DIM ALLEY,
WHERE A STARTLING TRANSFORMATION
TAKES PLACE!



SUPERMAN, AS DRAWN BY WAYNE BORING.
[HORN, MAURICE, 1976, P.]

they have to live one half of their lives as normal humdrum mortals without being able to find fulfillment in that sphere.⁹

It is with this unfulfilled humdrum mortal that the reader first identifies, which in turn leads to the possibilities of identifying with the super hero.

The "little man" likes to project his wishful thinking into the shape of a big, strong man. Superheroes are no more than the expression and fixation of narcissistic aggrandisement; they show how the adolescent reader or the infantile grown-up sees himself in his dreams.⁹

The superhero half of Superman was the ultimate in Walter-Mitty-type fantasy. Written as he was, as a being from outer space, Siegal and Shuster were not restricted to creating another human hero at the peak of his physical and intellectual capabilities; they could create a God-made-man. Superman could fly; run at the speed of light; he possesses microscopic, telescopic, x-ray and heat vision; he has a superbrain which endows him with a phenomenal memory - he has, in his time, memorized the entire Metropolis phone book - and ... he's very strong.

Yes, you're right. the new 'super' hero did stretch all bounds of credibility; he was too fantastic for thoughts of his existence to be entertained by any one over the age of four; but he was also the virtual personification of the American dream. He stood for the hopes and dreams of all the desperate immigrants who had ever made their way to this 'New World'. America is made up in its entirety of desperate immigrants; the only native Americans are the dispossessed Red Indians. Also he came at a time when after just emerging from a Great Depression it seemed the world was about to enter into a global war for the second

time in twenty odd years.

The superhero's time had come.

FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER ONE

1. ROVIN, Jeff, 185, p.IX (introduction)
2. HORN, Maurice, 1976, p.731
3. QUEEN, Ellery, 1970, p.XXI (introduction)
4. ibid.
5. COTTA VAZ, Mark, 1989 p.20
6. ELLISON, Harlan, 1988, p.174
7. ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. REITBERGER, Reinhold and FUCHS, Wolfgang, 1972, p.124

bit of a joke really, this superhero business. Flying around in tights, doing good deeds just because that's what superheroes like to do. They only appear vacuous to us because we have become so much more sophisticated in these, the dying years of the 20th century and require a more realistic three dimensionality of our heroes. In 1938, the needs of the people were quite different, what with the rise in lawlessness and the prospect of a second world war coming so closely after the end of the first. Frank of course rather likes the idea of a two-dimensional hero. Frank appears rather unbalanced in his cynical attitude to life which is why, one would suppose, he still enjoys reading fantasy stories depicting the inevitable triumph of good over evil doesn't believe it in his heart of hearts but he can at least dream, can't he

Chapter Two The Batman

Sad day for Frank.

Batman isn't an original creation. Always thought he was. Well, not original, as such - Bob Kane was only asked to create a new hero by the editors of D.C. As a direct consequence of Superman's success - thought of him as the first human superhero. The first so-called superhero driven by such human feelings as vengeance. He wasn't. The ghost-who-walks was the first.

The ghost-who-walks or Phantom as he was more properly known first as a daily strip for King Features Syndicate on Feb 17, 1936. Created by Lee Falk, the phantom is a mysterious hooded figure of justice. As the story goes, he is carrying on a long tradition of crimefighting, begun in the 16th century when the first phantom swears to devote his life to fighting evil. After finding the skull of the pirate who killed his father. Due to the hereditary nature of this crusade, the phantom is essentially not just a man but a legend. Feared by his enemies as 'the-ghost-who-walks'.^[1] He lives in skull cave and adopts the sign of the skull as his personal symbol; to instil fear and dread into the most vicious of criminals. He wears a dark hooded bodysuit, the design of which is based on the image of a certain avenging spirit, held sacred by the jungle natives.

Lee Falks's phantom, it can be seen, provisionally established quite a few superhero cliches, before they were to become enshrined in the statute books of comics by Siegal and Shuster's superman. The idea of vengeance; of a personal crusade against crime was not original. Chester Gould had started this with Dick Tracy in 1931. When each phantom died, his son would ceremoniously take over the role of phantom by, among other things, reciting the oath of the skull.

I swear to devote my life to the destruction of piracy, greed, cruelty and injustice, and my

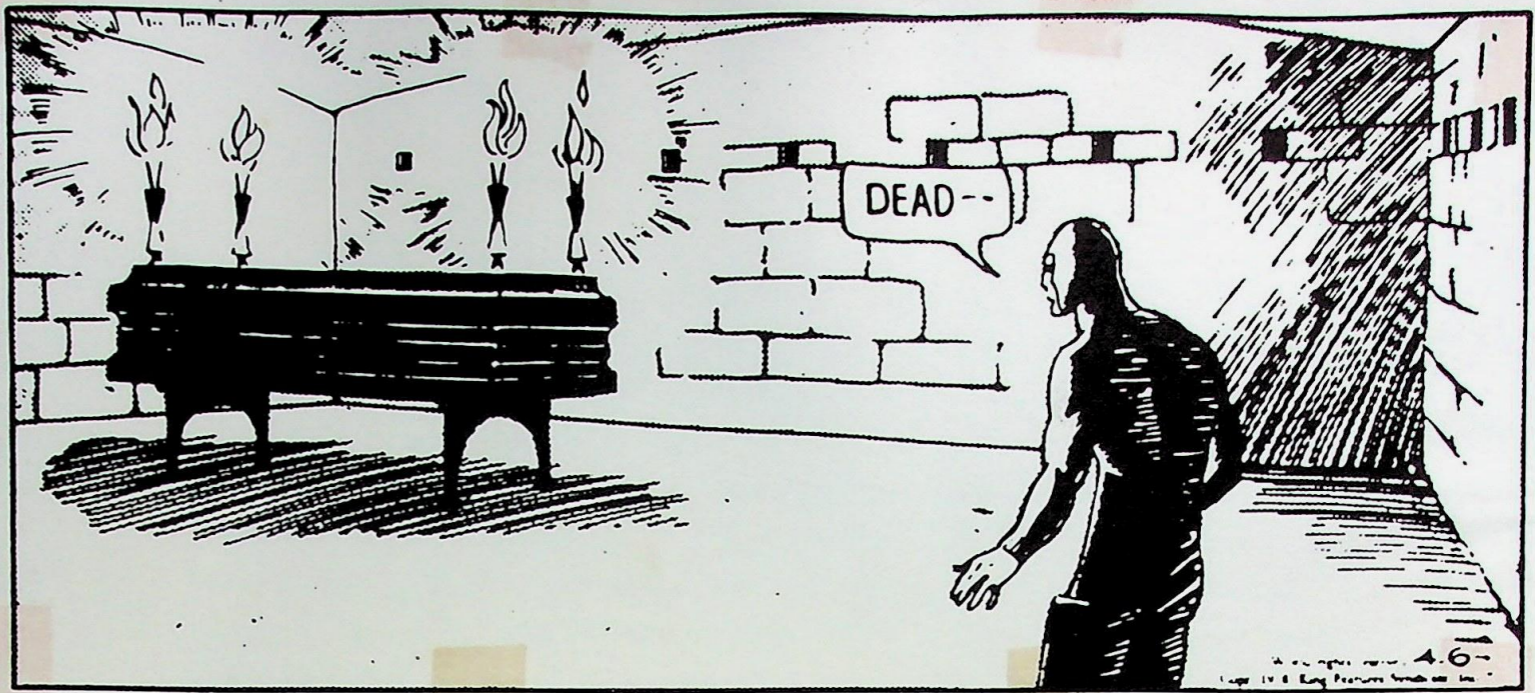
sons and their sons shall follow me. 2

Each phantom was in himself written as an ordinary mortal human being. But by making the phantom's particular crusade an hereditary, never-ending one, Falk brought the idea of invincibility to the comic strip hero. The ideals of the phantom were immortal; the phantom was effectively invincible.

Another idea Falk brought to the developing concept of the superhero, was that of the symbolic costume. The shadow had used a dark cloak to symbolise his ability to cloud the minds of men. In 1936 he had, however, only appeared in pulp magazines and on a long running radio show. It wasn't until 1940 that the shadow was given a definitive visual realization for the comic book version. Before the phantom, the clothes in which comic book crimefighters such as Dick Tracy, Buck Rogers or Flash Gordon were attired, had not been used for the purposes of symbolism. The particular outfit worn by a character functioned merely as a device by which said character could be easily recognised. The advent of the phantom's bodysuit paved the way for a much higher degree of symbolism in comic book characterizations. As well as being dressed in a dark bodysuit, the design of which is based on a sacred avenging spirit, the phantom wears a leather gun belt with a death's head skull on the front. On his right hand he wears a death's head ring and on his left hand, a ring in the shape of the letter P. The imprint of the 'P' on a person's skin would signify that hereafter that person was protected by the phantom. The aura of myth and mystery created by Lee Falk and his use of symbolism was obviously a major influence on Bob Kane in his creation of Batman. (Fig 2.1)

Bruce, Bob and Batman

After the phenomenal success of Superman the editors at D.C. comics Inc. asked Bob Kane to come up with a new superhero along similiar lines.



ABOVE: LEE FALK'S PHANTOM BROUGHT A SENSE OF SYMBOLISM TO THE ADVENTURE STRIP. IT WAS ALSO THE FIRST COSTUMED HERO. HORN, MAURICE, 1976, P.



With the help of pulp fiction writer Bill Finger, Kane came up with Batman. First appearing in Detective 27 in May of 1939, the original dark knight wore a grey bodysuit, blue trunks, boots, gloves and cowl, with a black bat-like cape. A black bat symbol was featured on the chest of his costume. Acknowledging a wide range of influences; the avenging crusades of both Dick Tracy and The Phantom, the swashbuckling adventure of contemporary films such as Robin Hood and The Mark of Zorro, the dark cloak-and-dagger feel of 'The Shadows' pulp adventures and even sketches for a flying machine by Leonardo Da Vinci which Kane had found in a book when he was thirteen, Batman seemed to fit in quite well beside his predecessor, Superman. He had the now obligatory alterego, the costume with which to strike fear into the hearts of the most vicious of criminals and the square jaw. But he was different, honest.

The very first Batman stories were set in New York. This was changed with the winter issue of Batman 4 in 1941 - a companion volume to Detective set up to accommodate Batman's ever expanding world - to the fictitious city of Gotham. Defined by Batman editor Denny O'Neill as

New York below fourteenth street after eleven O'Clock at night. Recognisably New York but with the emphasis on the grimmer aspects of the city. 3

Batman's Gotham City served the same purpose as Superman's Metropolis. If the character's adventures are set in a real city (e/g/ Dick Tracy's Chicago) readers can suspend belief with such thoughts as 'I know that area. That sort of thing doesn't happen there' or worse: 'He wouldn't last five minutes in that part of town'. By making the setting fictitious yet recognisable at the same time, the reader is drawn into a world of fantasy, ironically making the story all the more believable. This is more or less where the similarities end.

On the most basic level there is the costume. Superman's costume is a lurid, patriotic red, blue and yellow. It is a daytime costume. It reflects the radiance of the blue Metropolis summer sky. The choice of colour was not made with the hearts of criminals in mind, but the hearts of the people.

When I'm needed, I'll wear this costume,
and the world will know of ...
Superman! 4

Superman is a people's hero first, criminals enemy second. Batman only ever went out at night. During the daytime, he stuck rigidly to his alterego of Bruce Wayne, carefree millionaire, inheritor of the Wayne fortune.

Off again, sir? Shall I fetch your tights?
Never during the day, Alfred 5

The costume itself was designed with the night in mind, and the criminals who might be found there. In issue one of Batman (Spring 1940), the origin of the batman was told for the first time. On the second page of the story, subtitled 'who he is - and how he came to be!' Bruce WAYNE, after deciding to become a vigilante, is searching for a disguise to suit his chosen crusade -

criminals are a superstitious cowardly lot,
so my disguise must be able to strike terror
into their hearts. I must be a creature of
the night, black, terrible .. A..A..
(as if in answer a high bat flies in the
open window!)

A bat! That's it! It's an omen ... I shall
become a bat! (Fig. 2.2) 6

Superman, to my mind, has an ego problem. He designs his costume so that people will recognise him. Batman designs his so that criminals will fear him.

Batman is mortal. He can die. Just like you. Just like me. Just like Frank.

'Bruce Wayne run over by a bus! That would make a great headline. It would be good to see one of your favourite superheroes die, the same way as the little old lady down the road. Won't happen, of course. Batman's world, while it may seem dark and dangerous, is still essentially a world of fantasy; the product of a scriptwriters imagination. But by writing the character as an ordinary mortal human being, instead of some sort of God-made-man, the possibility of his being killed is always there. This gave the early Batman adventures a far greater sense of danger and excitement than those of his fellow crimefighter in metropolis. In contrast, Superman's invincibility seemed somewhat fantastic and unbelievable. His powers became so immense, so fantastic in fact, that quite early on in his career, an achilles heel had to be developed. Introduced by Bob Maxwell for the Superman radio show, Kryptonite was announced as the one thing in the known universe that could kill Superman. Radioactive fragments of Superman's former home (the planet Krypton), Kryptonite was originally red in colour but soon settled for its permanent green hue.

And so, The Phantom was written as a mortal human being. Made invincible by the fact that his was an hereditary crusade, passed on from father to son' Superman was invincible, but had to be given a handicap to give him some sense of credibility; Batman was the only one of the 'Golden Age' superheroes made invincible only by his keen mind and strong body. Prior to his donning the cape of Batman Bruce Wayne had spent years studying criminology and had trained his body to physical perfection - 'until he (was) able to perform amazing atyletic feats! 7

It was in Batman's motivation - an intrinsic part of the superhero's make-up - that he differed most strongly from the likes of that wimp in Metropolis Superman had his powers handed to him on a plate. The planet on which he was born was going to blow up so he was sent off in an experimental space rocket. Thanks entirely to the great difference in the gravities of the two planets, Superman finds he is endowed with superhuman powers on earth. In 'the origin of Superman', told for the first time in 1948, his adoptive father is dying, it is his father's dying wish that his son use his 'amazing powers' to 'become a powerful force for good!' He tells the young Clark Kent that he must 'hide (his) true identity! They must never know Clark Kent is a .. a Superman!'⁸ As stated in an earlier version of the beginnings of the character, which appeared in 1939 in Superman 1

Clark decided he must turn his titanic strength into channels that would benefit mankind and so was created ... Superman, champion of the oppressed, the physical marvel who had sworn to devote his existence to helping those in need!⁹

Superman never tired of gloating oabout his wonderous powers. Later on in the same story, he announces:

The threat's banished .. but the Talon's hirelings were slain by their own electrical apparatus! Only my super-physique saved me!¹⁰

He strikes me as a rather smug individual. I can't find any real reason for him to take up this crusade. O.K. so it was his father's dying wish that he do this, but as soon as his father was dead, he could have decided what to do with his life. In reading some of his early adventures, it seems to me that there is no real motivation behind his great deeds. It's like he was being really nice. Nothing more.

While seeking absolutely no form of personal gain whatsoever, - except perhaps a little public adulation - I, Superman, will save the world.

Batman has a real reason to fight criminals. He's not doing this for the public. Fuck the public. He's doing this for himself. An altogether more selfish, (human?) reason. Batman is on a vengeance trip. The reason the dark knight hates criminals is because, as a child, he witnessed the brutal murder of both his parents as he returned home with them from a movie. Going back to that legend of the batman story which appeared in Batman 1 spring 1940, an armed man steps out in front of the Wayne family and demands Mrs. Wayne's pearl necklace ...

'leave her alone, you! Oh...'
'You asked for it!' (A shot is fired)
'Thomas!' You've killed him. Help!
Police .. Help!
'This'll shut you up!'

(The boys eyes are wide with terror and shock as the horrible scene is spread before him).

'Father ..Mother!..Dead! They're
D..Dead' [C]

A few days later the young Bruce Wayne swears 'on the spirit of (his) parents' to avenge their deaths and dedicate the rest of his life to a war on all criminals; his own personal war, after instigating such a brutal tragic event as Batman's 'raison d'etre' Bob Kane ensured that Batman would always have an incentive to fight.

FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER TWO

1. HORN, Maurice, 1976, P.551
2. ROVIN, Jeff, 1985, p.221
3. COTTA VAZ, Mark, 1989, p.66
4. SUPERMAN, 1972, p.201
5. MILLER, Frank, 1988, p.88
6. COTTA VAZ, Mark, 1989, p.XIV (preface)
7. ROVIN, Jeff, 1985, p.20
8. SUPERMAN, 1972, p.201
9. ibid. p.21

Frank takes the world personally too. that is to say, events which take place around him are seen through his eyes as affecting him or not having any relevance whatsoever. Its a common enough complaint .. 'the tropical rainforests are not my problem. I dont use hairspray.' that kind of attitude. ;consequently, Batman is seen by Frank as a role-model. not an incredibly adult way of looking at life, admittedly but Frank doesn't care. he's only twenty two - he hasnt sorted himself out yet. he needs a rolemodel. even an unbalanced one. Frank remembers a time when he was asked by one of his friends whether he wanted to go home or go into town. Frank couldn't decide. he had spent so many years in art college or rather in his brain asking himself questions that he no longer had the ability to answer even the most elementary questions with a spontaneous yes or no. Bob Kane's Batman did not seem to suffer from such self-destructive doubts.

CHAPTER THREE : WILL THE REAL BATMAN PLEASE STAND UP ?

One of the reasons Batman can be successful fifty years plus after his first appearance is that he has changed.

The essential myth has remained the same but it has adapted to the tenor of the times.

So says Deny O'Neill, sometime editor of Batman and detective comics in an interview with speakeasy magazine. Me, I'm not so sure. Admittedly Batman wouldn't have retained his popularity for over 50 years if the character had not adapted to the tenor of the times, but it is my belief that the so-called essential myth has become somewhat blurred.

Thanks to the all-pervasive influence of television and the fact that comics are still being read only by a very select, discerning audience - being regarded in the main as juvenile trash - the image of Batman most prominently fixed in the mind of the general populace, is that of Adam West and Burt Ward hamming it up for all they're worth in the (albeit marvellously) tacky television series of the sixties.

Hollywood's Batman was, however, a rather one-sided character; an hilariously earnest caped crusader pledged to rid Gotham City of all its dastardly villains; to stem this neverending tide of crime and lawlessness, (to paraphrase our dynamic duo). Among the mythical elements of the dark knight's psyche to which the T.V. series failed to allude were; the schizoid nature of the Bruce Wayne/Batman character, the ordinary human mortality of our hero and above all the personal tragedy which gave birth to Batman's extraordinary crimefighting passion. It is this personal loss and the violent nature of the event which continually haunts Batman, obsesses him and consequently makes him appear so much more human than your average do-goody flying superhero.

A Journey Through Batman

The first major alteration to the basic myth-that-is-the-Batman was the arrival of Dick Grayson, alias Robin the Boy Wonder. Robin's arrival came so soon after Batman's first appearance that it could be considered a major development in the general scheme of things. The repercussions caused are so great however, that it must instead be looked upon as the first major blurring of the original concept.

Robin made his first appearance in detective 58 in April of 1940, a mere eleven months after Batman. He (Robin) 'was to relieve the gloom of isolation, demanding by his very presence that the bitter Batman become more sympathetic, more human'. Batman's new foil was introduced to the story thus: Real name Dick Grayson. As a member of the flying Graysons family acrobatic team, he witnesses the deaths of his parents as they practice their act. On learning that the so-called accident was actually the work of crime lord 'Boss' Zucco who had been menacing the circus for protection money, the young Grayson vows to avenge their deaths. Batman while seeking out Boss Zucco for reasons of his own, overhears Dick's pledge of vengeance fearing for the boys safety, he takes him back to the Batcave. They go after Boss-Zucco together, Batman eventually taking Dick under his wing, as Robin, the Boy Wonder. Bob Kane, and Bill Finger - who was at this stage writing most of the stories - ensured that Robin was given a personal tragedy every bit as brutal and violent as the Batmans, so that the young boy's extraordinary crime fighting passion might be no less passionate than that of his mentors.

Two hands are better than one, it is said. I don't know. It has been argued that the bright red, yellow and green of Robin's costume served to lighten the general tone of the adventures, previously set by the long shadows of Gotham's night and the dark blue and grey of Batman's costume. It would appear that in creating this laughing, fighting young daredevil companion for the dark knight, the writers were voluntarily abandoning

the very essence of what made Batman so different from his peers. Robin's arrival coincided with the toning down of Batman's original rage and hatred of criminals and the adoption of a much higher moral outlook, in particular towards the sanctity of life. 'Use only the flat of your sword, Robin! Remember we never kill with weapons of any kind' .

It has also been argued that Robin provided an opportunity for some much needed dialogue, which indeed he did. But I am of the opinion that the character of Batman does not need dialogue. Not in his night-time crime-fighting incarnation. During the day, as Bruce Wayne he had Alfred his loyal butler to talk to as his confident. The writers should have got around the problem by introducing a few more close friends into Bruce Wayne's life; not the life of Batman. Vigilantes on personal vengeance trips hve no need for talk. Clint Eastwood as Dirty Harry is a man of few words, while Charles Bronson does not make use of a dancing boy companion in any of his 'Deathwish' movies. The ultimate in such no-talk all-action avenging crime fighters must surely be Sylvester Stallone, in, for example, his film 'Cobra' , when as a cop who ignores red tape and lets things doe, he informs some poor ne'er-do-well -c'crimes the disease, and I'm the cure.' and yes I know, I'm mixing my media here. It s unfair to make comparisons between comic books of the 1940's with their youth-orientated sense of self censorship and ultra-violent vigilante films of the 1970's and 1980's. But my basic premise is sound. Robin the Boy blunder ruined Batman. He made him talk too much. He made him laugh; an worst of all put a smile on the dark knight's face. This regrettable change in tone can be seen quite clearly by comparing the visage of Bob Kane's original Batman to that of the same character a mere two years later.

'The Batman meets Doctor Death' (Detective comic =29, July 1939) was only the third ever issue featuring the Batman. Drawn by Bob Kane (Fig 3.1), the slits used in the original Batcowl to designate eyes are long, white and pencil thin. They are executed at what can only be described as an 'evil' angle. The long dark ears of the cowl follow more or less the

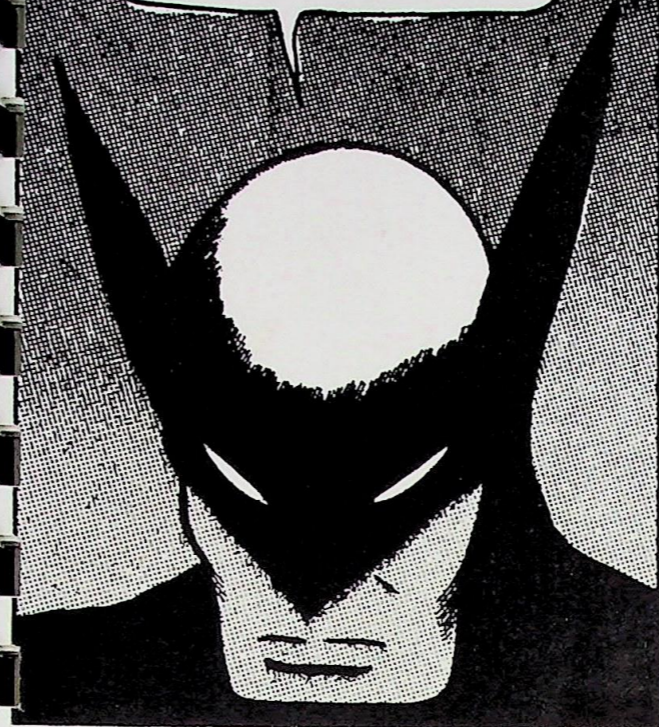
same angle, coming to a point just above the top lip. The lower, visible portion of the face retains the high-cheekboned and square-jawed look of the supposedly good-looking Bruce Wayne (The draughtsmanship was very crude by today's standards) but the mouth is positively grim. Occasionally, in moments of silent, righteous pleasure, a line is used to denote something of a smile but it is a grim smile.

By the appearance of the winter issue of 'Batman' in 1941 (No. Four) Robin had been Batman's companion for little over a year. The difference this 'laughing, fighting young daredevil' made to the countenance of the dark knight was startling (Fig 3.2). The ears on his cowl had shrunk till they amounted to little more than token symbols. This in turn allowed the visible area of Bruce Wayne's face more prominence in relation to the portion hidden by the Bat-cowl, giving our hero a more human look. The long thin slits that had previously sufficed as 'eyes' were replaced by half-moon shapes, with the result that the vengeful, determined frown of old resembled more closely the wide-eyed look of a young school-girl. Most damaging of all, the sculpted cheekbones of Bruce Wayne, while still half hidden under the Batcowl, were now to be seen breaking into a fully rounded smile. The grim tight-lipped mouth was replaced by a perfectly white wall of all-american teeth. The end. Batman had lost it. He was now right up there with that other all-smiling peoples twit, Superman.

Bob Kane, Bill Finger and Kane's assistant, Jerry Robinson (who's style of drawing Batman quickly became definitive) were probably only answering to a perceived need for a lightening up of the general tone of the series. It must be pointed out once again; that personally motivated vigilantes work alone. They don't indulge in 'idle banter, they don't smile constantly and they don't have dancing, brightly-costumed little boys follow their every move, with the eagerness of a newborn puppy.

Robin would grow up, eventually leaving Batman to go to university. But that would not be until 1969. Before that, a lot more events would

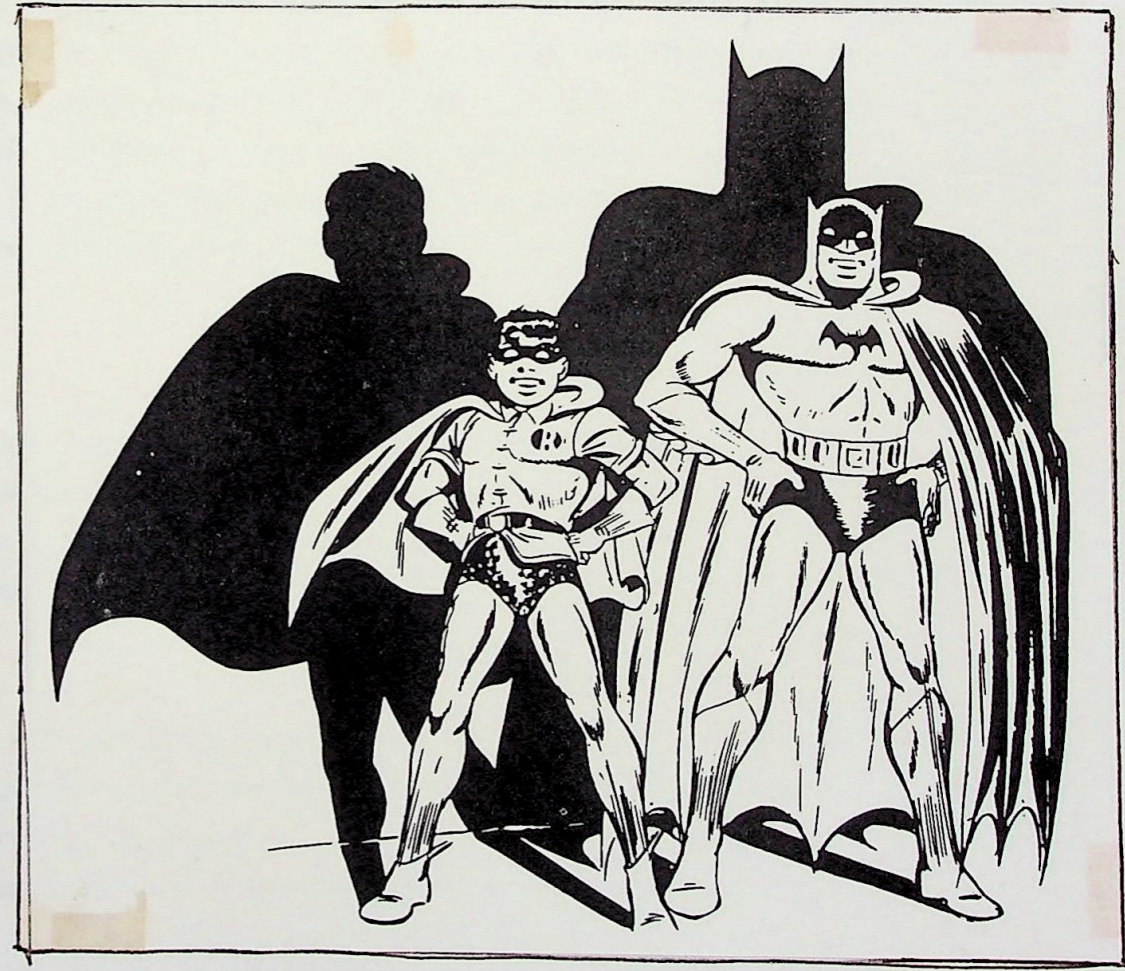
YOUR CHOICE
GENTLEMEN! TELL ME!
OR I'LL KILL YOU!



LEFT: DETECTIVE #29, JULY 1939
IN THE EARLY DAYS BATMAN
WENT TO WAR AGAINST
CRIME AND DIDNT PLAN ON
TAKING ANY PRISONERS.
[COTTA VAZ, MARK, 1989, P. 11]

BELOW: BY ~~THE~~ THE EARLY NINETEEN-
FORTIES, THE ARRIVAL OF ROBIN
CAUSED 'BATMAN' TO LOSE ALL HIS
FORMER MANEVOLENT CHARM.

[HORN, MAURICE, 1976, P.]



conspire to further the damage done to Batman's original principles by the unfortunate arrival of the Boy Blunder.

Batman Goes To War

Thanks to Stegal and Shusters supremely limited vision and the shrewd business sense of Liebowitz and Donenfeld, comic book production in the nineteen forties was still the most blatantly commercial of all graphic art forms. The direction taken by Batman and his contemporaries was dictated solely by perceived public demands or, to put it another way, what the editors thought the public demanded. In the early 1940's the American public was dictated to by events in Europe and the growing threat of global genocide. Batman went to war.

He had to. His adventures and those of his relatively small-time adversaries in Gotham City appeared very parochial and ultimately insignificant in comparison to the real-life holocaust taking place in Europe. Batman was soon busting Nazi spy-rings in Gotham city and making trips to significantly named places like Independence Hall in Philadelphia; promoting the idea of Buying War Bonds to help the war effort.

Fellow Americans, you too can sign a declaration
of independence. Independence from slavery ...
For should the axis win, Americans will be slaves
in Bondage!

Batman appeared with Robin on the cover of Batman 17 in July of 1943 astride a huge golden eagle, accompanied by an escort of two military planes and exhorting the American public to "keep the American eagle flying! Buy war bonds and stamps!" (Fig 3.3). Earlier on in the year, our dynamic duo were depicted on the cover of Batman 15 firing a belt

BATMAN
No. 17

JUNE
JULY



ten cents

BATMAN

KEEP
THE AMERICAN
EAGLE FLYING!
BUY WAR BONDS
AND STAMPS!



BOB
KANE

BATMAN AND ROBIN HELPING THE WAR EFFORT.
(ORIGINALLY BATMAN #17, JUNE/JULY 1943)
THIS COPY TAKEN FROM 'TALES OF THE DARK KNIGHT.'
COTTA VAZ, MARK, 1989, P. 18. [-32-]

feed machine gun in a patriotic and determined manner at the unseen enemy with the legend 'keep those bullets flying! keep on buying war bonds and stamps!'"

Using the pages of Batman to make patriotic morale-boosting speeches and promote the buying of war bonds was a positively subtle approach in comparison with that of Captain America. Created in March 1941 by Jack Kirby and Joe Simon, Captain America Comic told the story of how scrawny Steve Rogers, previously rejected for military service, drank a secret potion which gave him super-human abilities. In the great tradition of comic book plotting, the creator of the potion Dr. Abraham Erskine is assassinated by the Nazis, taking with him governmental hopes for a whole army of superpatriots. Dressed in his dazzling red, white and blue flag-inspired costume as 'a living symbol of life and liberty' Captain America goes to war against the axis, quickly becoming the ultimate comic-book manifestation of wartime American patriotism. (Fig 3.4)

After the war, however, he lost a lot of his patriotic zeal. Created to capture the emotions of the American public during the war. Making the transition from fanatical Nazis to criminalal of a more parochial nature proved too much for Captain America and his adventures stopped for a while in May ;of 1949 after only 74 issues.

Batman too found it difficult to return to Gotham City and the joker after the patriotic intensity of his buy Bonds campaign. Formerly the darkest and most brooding of all the superheroes, even he had become, in the words of Julius Feiffer, 'Shrill'.

With the attendant decline in the population of the superhero many publishers went out of business. The inspiring heights reached by many superheroes during the war simply could not be matched by the cold turkey of the post-war years. William M. Gaines, son of M.C. Gaines saw the necessity for a move away from the fearless superpowered crimebuster



JACK KIRBY'S 'CAPTAIN AMERICA' - CREATED
TO CAPTURE THE EMOTIONS OF THE
AMERICAN PEOPLE DURING WWII.
[HORN, MAURICE, 1976, P.]

genre and in 1950 began publishing his 'New Trend' line of horror, science fiction, crime and war stories. Some of the titles that Gaines put out spoke for themselves: Crypt of Terror, Vault of Horror, Shock Suspense Stories, Haunt of Fear etc. (Fig 3.5). While the artists of these stories were lauded in some quarters for the high quality of their work and their innovative use of graphic storytelling techniques, their gruesome and often gory tales displayed, in the words of Maurice Horn, 'A callous disregard for civilised sensitivities.' This trait, argues Horn,

...While acceptable, perhaps even desirable, in formats designed for mature readers .. was certainly objectionable in a popular medium overwhelmingly aimed at children. It seemed like a sure way to bring censure to the comic book.

The seduction of the Innocent

By the early fifties, Gaines titles and the more crude excessive gore and violence of his imitators led to heavy public scrutiny. Senator Joseph McCarthy had launched his crusade against alleged communist infiltration of the federal government in 1950, exploiting the general feeling of paranoia that had emerged in post-war America. Four years later, Dr. Frederic Wertham's book Seduction of the Innocent effectively added comic book reading to the list of unamerican activities. According to Wertham, the reading of such crime stories led to juvenile delinquency. Wertham's idea of a crime story was one in which any crime was depicted, conveniently allowing for the inclusion of the innocent superhero in his arguments. The good doctor reserved a lot of his energy for attacks on Bruce Wayne and 'Dick' Grayson's obviously homosexual relationship.

sometimes Batman ends up in bed injured and young

Robin is shown sitting next to him ... Batman is sometimes shown in a dressing gown. As they sit by the fireplace the young boy sometimes worries about his partner: "something's wrong with Bruce. He hasn't been himself these past few days". It is like a wish dream of two homo-sexual living together. Sometimes they are shown on a couch, Bruce reclining and Dick sitting next to him, jacket off, collar open, and his on his friends arm.

That he was in all probability a crank, mattered not one jot. The publication of Wertham's book led to the Estes Kefauver senatorial subcommittee hearings on comic books and later that same year, in an effort to avert outright abolition, the publishers set up the comics code authority, a self-regulatory body aimed at cleaning up some of the excesses of previous years. Among the rules laid down by the authority were

policemen, judges, government officials and respected institutions shall not be presented in such a way as to create disrespect for established authority. In every instance good shall triumph over evil and the criminal punished for his misdeeds.

The code goes on to ban all scenes involving nudity, excessive bloodshed, attacks on religion or race and the depiction of crime as something from which any pleasure or profit might be obtained. Perhaps the publishers had a vested interest in keeping their comics narrowly focused and child-like? Eternally grateful for the naivete of Siegal and Shuster, the major comic book houses still ran their businesses with piezework, sweatshop mentalities. The artists got paid for the work, while the publishers reaped all profits from trademarks and copyrights. By keeping their comics squeaky clean, they ensured themselves of the continued

patronage of the parents, who were indirectly their best customers.

The crackdown of the fifties and subsequent comics code authority resulted in a lot of publishing houses folding, artists giving up - some, like Wally Wood of E.C. comics committing suicide - and Batman being sent on exotic missions all over the world in a move away from the characters original tone, the darkness and violence of which was not against the rules. In August 1955 Batman travelled back in time to solve an archeological riddle, in 1957 he was searching Siam for a life-saving serum in around the world in eighty days (Detective 248, Oct.) and by 1958 he had graduated to space travel, narrowly escaping death-by-fruit.-

A ... a brace of giant bananas .. plummeting
from above! Clear out of here .. fast!
- Ha, ha .. this is the end of the trail for
you, crimefighters!

Television was beginning to take hold as a medium of communication/entertainment, the Americans had begun tests on the first hydrogen bomb and in 1957 the world's first manmade satellite Sputnik 1 was launched by the Russians. The new emphasis on fantastic alien storylines was undoubtedly seen by D.C. as a method by which Batman could cash in on the sci-fi fad while still keeping within the bounds of their own codes 'Guidelines'. The 'monster fad', so-called by editor Jack Schiff, continued to reach such ridiculous heights that in 1961, Batman was depicted on the cover of detective 287 exclaiming in exasperation 'Great Scott! another bizarre creature with a fantastic weapon!' See also Fig (3.6)

Pop Goes Batman

In 1964 Julius Schwartz, a comics editor previously responsible for reviving the concept of the superhero with his revamped version of flash for showcase comics in 1956, was ushered in to replace Jack Schiff in an



10c

SEPT. NO. 118



BATMAN

Featuring
"The Merman Batman!"

YES, ROBIN,
I'VE BECOME A
HUMAN "FISH!"

BATMAN! YOU MEAN,
YOU CAN BREATHE THE
OXYGEN IN THE WATER,
BUT CAN'T SURVIVE
ON THE SURFACE?



BATMAN #118, SEPTEMBER 1958. TAKEN FROM 'TALES OF THE DARK KNIGHT'. [COTTA VAZ, MARK, 1989, P.99]

effort to arrest flagging sales of Batman and Detective comics. Bob Kane was no longer in charge of the overall finished artwork, and together with artist Carmine Infantino, Schwartz initiated Batman's new look bringing Batman back to Gotham, they streamlined the Batmobile, put an elevator in the Batcave to replace the old winding staircase and most significantly enclosed the black bat symbol on Batman's chest in an elongated yellow moon shape. (The huge Coca-Cola Corporation, in realising that the very ubiquity of their product and the old Coca-Cola disc-shaped logo were beginning to make their product, if not invisible, then at least an all too familiar part of the American landscape, would use a similar device, the so-called 'white dynamic contour curve' in 1970, in an equally successful effort to bring about renewed awareness of their product). (3.7) Schwartz's yellow moon (Fig 3.8) gave renewed prominence to the black 'Bat' symbol, the relevance of which had become somewhat lost over the years, as the Batman had developed from his dark knight beginnings into the two-dimensional smiling superhero cliché that was to cause the genre so much embarrassment in the more enlightened years to come.

Such was the extent of this success, that it led directly to the development of the cult TV show 'The adventures of Batman' which appeared for the first time on ABC-TV in 1966. As already stated at the beginning of this chapter, Hollywood's vision of Batman was, as worked out by executive producer, William Dozier, camp, hilariously earnest and so bad as to be brilliant. The plan worked. Lofty publications such as Life magazine featured Adam West on their covers, dressed in his ridiculous ill-fitting Batman outfit and while the show was successful the comic books reflected the network's influence by turning Batman into a camp, lighthearted figure (Fig 3.9).

With the demise of the T.V. Show in 1969 a return to basics was called for. The character of Batman had by now been through just about as many different incarnations as seemed possible at the time. Any further changes in direction, without the necessary degree of thought and

consideration, would result in an irrevocable loss of character identity.

EXHIBIT A - BROADCAST RECORDS

1. [Illegible]
2. [Illegible]
3. [Illegible]
4. [Illegible]
5. [Illegible]
6. [Illegible]
7. [Illegible]
8. [Illegible]
9. [Illegible]
10. [Illegible]
11. [Illegible]
12. [Illegible]
13. [Illegible]
14. [Illegible]
15. [Illegible]

FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER THREE

1. HANSOM, Dick, 1989, p.33
2. DANIELS, Les, 1971, p.12
3. COTTA VAS, Mark, 1989, p.53
4. Ibid., p.13
5. STALLONE, 19-
6. COTTA VAS, Mark, 1989, p.35
7. ROVIN, Jeff, 1985, p.-
8. FEIFFER, Jules, 1965, p.48
9. HORN, Maurice, 1976, p.-
10. WERTHAM, Frederic M.D., 1954, p.-
11. HORN, Maurice, 1976, p.749
12. COTTA WAZ, Mark, 1989, p.60
13. Ibid., p.63
14. Ibid., p.65
15. BAYLEY, Stephen, 1986, p.

CHAPTER 4: THE DARK KNIGHT RETURNS

In 1986 a new Batman story appeared written and drawn by a young man by the name of Frank Miller. Originally put out in a series of four books/chapters, the story was quickly made available in a deluxe version comprising all four chapters bound together and printed on good quality paper with an introduction by much-respected comics writer, Alan Moore. This 'prestige format', as it is known in America, helped Miller's Batman achieve a level of critical attention ordinarily reserved for more prominent forms of popular culture such as rock music or cinema.

It was not the lush 'graphic novel' presentation that caused the stir however, but the perceived damage that Mr. Miller had done to the myth that had been - THE BATMAN. Actually, critics were divided in their opinion of the dark knight returns, Stephen King referring to it as 'probably the finest piece of comic art ever to be published in a popular edition'. Whatever one's opinion, Miller's vision of Batman succeeded in peeling away many of the layers of superhero silliness that had been accumulated by the genre over the years; more specifically it marked a return for the batman to his dark knight origins. Before any further comment on Miller's Batperson however, mention should be made of the events which led to such a landmark development in the concept of superheroics.

As early as 1961, Stan Lee, editor of Marvel comics had - with the help of artist, Jack Kirby - come up with his 'Hero with a problem' concept, in an effort to pump some life into the genre and escape some of its accumulated trappings. His character, The Hulk, based in part on Mary Shelley's 'Frankenstein's monster' The Hunchback of Notre Dame and Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde while appearing evil, inevitably felt frightened and misunderstood, while Spiderman couldn't mend his own costume and often had girl-problems.

The marvel world of superheroes was still however, a world in which any

sense of reality could be conveniently suspended in the name of Action and Excitement. In times of need, frail and weak Dr. Blake would pound his magical walking stick on the ground, converting it instantly into an 'uru' hammer and himself into 'Thor' legendary Norse God of Thunder (Fig 4.1). These early Marvel characters were drawn by Jack Kirby whose epic style, while almost definitive in its rendering of superheroics, essentially disguised any sense of humanity Lee may have been attempting to write into his characters.

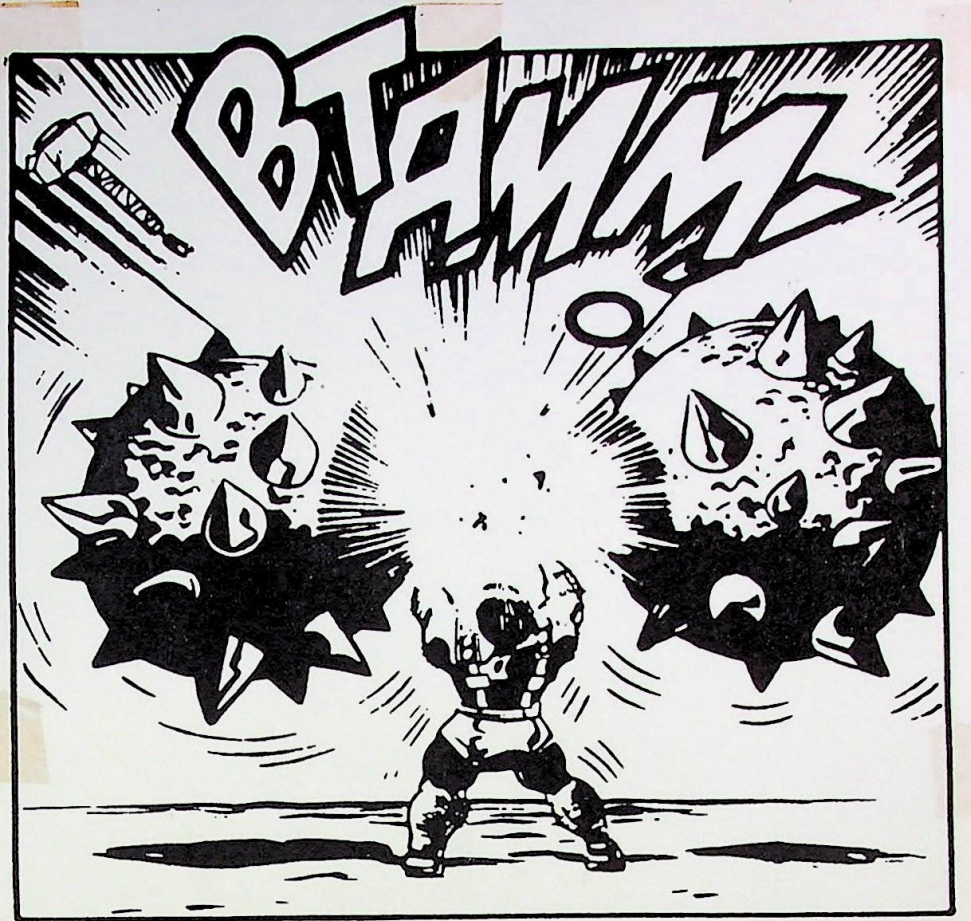
By 1969, with the demise of the Batman T.V. Show, the concept of the superhero had been twisted into something of a joke. Over 30 million viewers watched the original show each week from 1966 to 1969. A far greater audience than any comic book character could ever hope to demand. The success of the show ensured that Batman, in the eyes of the public, epitomized more than any other, the essential silliness of the comic book hero' it became apparent to the editors at D.C. that a major reappraisal of the character was necessary. Writer Denny O'Neill, artist Neal Adams and Julius Schwartz decided they could do no better than go back to the basics - 'Figure out what really constitutes this character.' in a major move, (Batman 217, Dec. 1969) Robin who was now seen as a good looking young man with a strong jawline all of his own, was sent off to Hudson university; Batman sealed up the old batcave under Wayne Manor, moving the entire operation to the heart of Gotham city. An abandoned subway station conveniently located under the Wayne Foundation building

Oh-h. .no, Master Bruce!

H-how will-er-we function as the crimefighters of old?

By becoming new-streamlining the operation..

By discarding the paraphernalia of hte past and functioning with the clothes on our backs ..the wits in our heads!



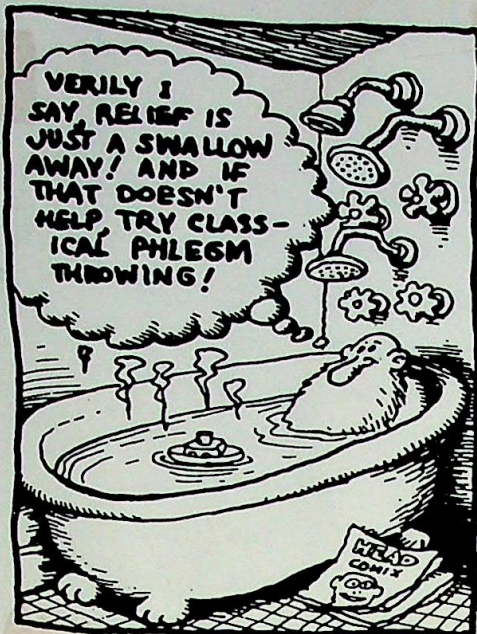
Jack Kirby, "Thor." © Marvel Comics Group.

Even Batman's alter-ego Bruce Wayne is given a rebirth, changing from the idle-rich playboy to a wealthy and powerful, politically ambitious young man.

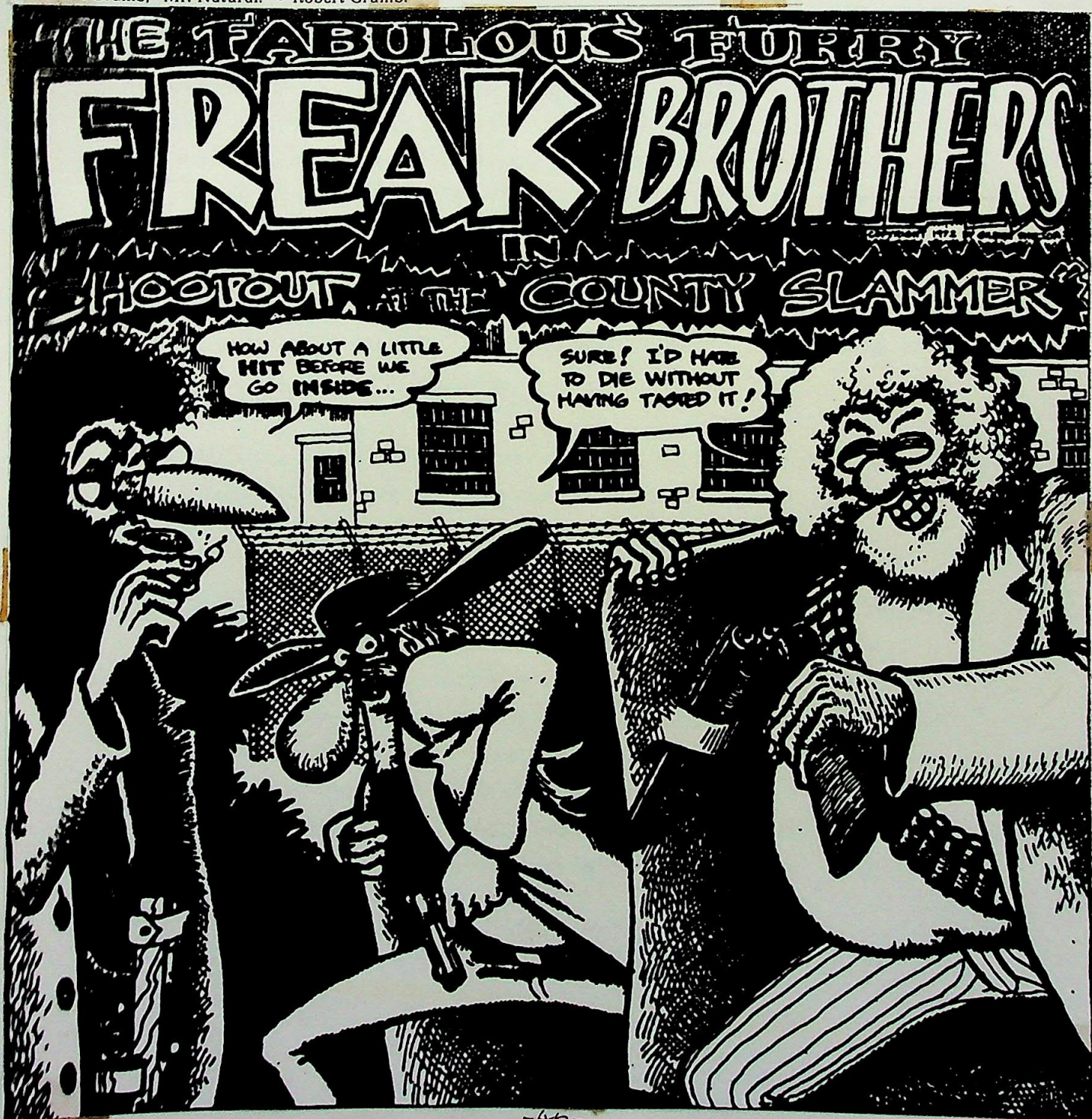
While Adams and O'Neil were attempting to bring some sense of relevance for the superhero genre - they went on to write a story for D.C. in which The Green Arrow's sullen young Assistant Speedy was depicted as a heroin addict - changes no less fundamental were taking place outside the mainstream industry itself.

Dr. Frederic Wertham's Book, Seduction of the innocent and the consequent establishment of the Comics Code Authority invariably sent many writers and artists underground. Historically beginning with Jack Jaxon's God Nose in 1963, the underground 'Comix' writers concerned themselves with tales of free love, perverse sex and in case of Gilbert Shelton's The Fabulour Forry Freak Brothers, the relentless pursuit of illicit narcotic substances. Some writers such as Shelton and Robert Crumb (Fig 4.2 and 4.3) survived the summer of love to be absorbed into the (fringes of the) mainstream. A larger percentage of them, considering themselves ideal and individualistic of mind, dropped out through lack of self-discipline.

Denis Kitchen (an underground artist with no such self-destructive ideologies) finding it difficult to deal with the flighty, often incompetent San-Fransisco-based underground publishers founded his own Kitchen-Sink Enterprises Inc. in 1970. Other like minded artists began producing their own comics and soon an independent network of comics was established, providing an alternative to the monopoly of the two giants and their ubiquitous superhero. With this ever-expanding range of comics, genres and titles and the more selective demands of the new communications-era comic-buying public, specialist comic shops or direct sales outlest such as Forbidden Planet began sprouting up all over Britain and America. The final nail in the coffin for D.C.'s and



Robert Crumb, "Mr. Natural." © Robert Crumb.



Marvel's monopoly came in 1981, when Jack Kirby, legendary creator of Captain America and The Fantastic Four took his latest creation, Captain Victory to the independent Pacific comics. Disillusioned with the industries continued retention of all copyrights and trademarks, Kirby's new contract stipulated that he retain all rights to his character of Captain Victory - whether original artwork or product merchandising. The first creator-owned superhero was born.

Which leads us invariably to Frank Miller. The main problem facing Mr. Miller was the same problem that would face any writer given the task of writing a new Batman story. For whatever reasons - good management, luck or sheer cult of personality - Batman is, with the exception of Superman, the only superhero character to have been continually produced since the industry was first started by Siegal and Shuster in 1938. He is a character 'whose every trivial and incidental detail is graven in stone on the hearts and minds of the comic fans that make up his audience' To alter any one of these details in any major ways to effectively wipe out that history.

O.K. So don't wipe it out. Rearrange it a little. Rearrange it a lot. Go back to the basics. Start again.

Frank Miller's Batman is split up into four books. In book one, The Dark Knight Returns we are introduced to Frank Miller's vision of Batman and his world.

Very first page. Millionaire Bruce Wayne is in the lead in the Neuman Elimination Race. 'The (computer) readings stop making sense. I switch to manual ... I'm in charge now and I like it'. Still the same idle-rich thrill-seeking Bruce, the perfect public persona of Batman, relentless vigilante and defender of the oppressed. The front end of the car lurches, crashes, rolling over the finish line in a ball of flames. Bruce Wayne says an oft repeated line to himself - 'This would be a good death' - but he decides not good enough and bails out,

suffering 'only superficial burns'.

It is made clear immediately that this particular Bruce Wayne has something of a deathwish. Two pages later it is made clear why. Batman has been retired for ten years (reason not given) and as a result Wayne feels he has no real reason to live. "I walk the streets of this city I'm learning to hate, the city that's given up, like the whole world seems to have.' Gotham itself is no longer depicted as the urban adventure playground it was in the 1940's with the giant advertising props such as typewriters, tea-cups and hockeysticks which were a particular trademark of writer Bill Finger. Miller's Gotham, as well as being peopled by tortured souls such as Bruce Wayne, is overrun by a gang of teenage anarchists who go by the name of the 'Mutants'. It is while watching 'The Mark of Zorro' on television - cited here as the film Wayne had seen with his parents on the night of their murder - that Bruce Wayne finally surrenders to his need for the existence of Batman in his life

The time has come

You know it in your soul,

For I am your soul ...

you cannot escape me ...

There is too much in Frank Miller's Dark Knight Returns to analyse in any great detail here.

I will look specifically then at some scenes which include Miller's depiction of Superman in an attempt to illustrate his revisionist concept of the superhero.

The very first visual actualisation of Clark Kent comes on page 14 of the third book, chapter entitled Hunt The Dark Knight. Kent is shown standing with one foot on a stone, chest out, chin up, overlooking a radiant vista of fauna and flora. Bruce Wayne, who is also present clearly regards Kent's smug, god-like demeanour with disdain - 'There's

just the sun and the sky and him, like he's the only reason it's all there'. Kent is given a physique resembling that of a god-like athlete; square jaw, unfeasibly broad shoulders and a height, it would seem, of some seven feet. Bruce Wayne in comparison, is shown here with the shrunken face of a sick, older man (politician Brian Lenihan's face after coming out of hospital springs to mind). The 'Real' superhero meets the living cliché, perhaps?

Superman, who had previously been asked by a viciously one-sided caricature of Ronald Reagan to have a word with Bruce Wayne, acknowledges the fact that the world has no room for superheroes. At least not visible ones. He gives the authorities his obedience and his invisibility. He stays out of the limelight and in return he is given a licence and allowed to live. But not Batman:

When the noise started from the parents' groups
and the sub-committee called us in for questioning ..
You were the one who laughed. That scary laugh
of yours. "Sure we're criminals," you said. "We've
always been criminals". "We have to be criminals".

It is clear here that Miller is on the side of Batman. There is a difference in his mind between the lack of real motivation present in clichéd superheroes such as Superman and intensely personal crusade of the Batman. Miller has been quoted as saying:

Batman has to be a force that in certain
ways is beyond good and evil .. our society
is committing suicide by lack of a force
like that.

As mentioned previously, this vigilante-speak was regarded in some quarters as meritorious of a danger-to-society classification. The Dark Knight Returns is, for all it's dangerous talk, still only a comic

book. It marks the return for Batman to his original ideals as created by Bob Kane in a time when the world was ready to acknowledge it's need for a force 'beyond good and evil'.

In the final showdown between Superman and Batman - they have become enemies due to differences in their handling of a world that no longer considers itself in need of a superheroic force - Batman accuses Superman of being a patriotic, empty yes-man;

You've always known just what to say ...

Yes .. To anyone with a badge ...

or a flag ...

implying that Bruce Wayne won't necessarily say yes to anyone bearing the appropriate symbols of authority. He has become a fully-fledged revolutionary. At the end of the book he gathers the 'sons of Batman', together with Carrie Kelly, a thirteen year old girl who has taken the role of Robin, to plan his revolution. (During the course of the story, 'The Sons Of The Batman' are born out of the remains of the mutant gang. They bring to their war against crime the same psychopathic dedication they had previously reserved for committing them).

It begins here .. an army .. to bring sense to a world plagued by worse than thieves and murderers ..

You might wonder what this Batman would progress to if Miller was tempted to write a sequel; the dictatorship of a small country perhaps? Like I said, it's only a comic book. Miller's Batman is possibly insane and quite definitely obsessed but this is the way the character was originally conceived and as such marks a welcome return to form.

I can't leave The Dark Knight Returns without mentioning some of the technical devices employed by Miller to produce this landmark vision of

Batman. Varley uses the latest print technology to produce a dark-earth feel to Batman's world; a certain step up from the lurid four colour printing taht was previously regarded as obligatory; burnt sienna, raw umber and suchcolours are used to great effect. Particularly in the scenes at the city dump where Batman finally defeats the Mutant gang leader.

The constant newsflashes which run throug the four books off a grimly humourous view of a society gone mad;

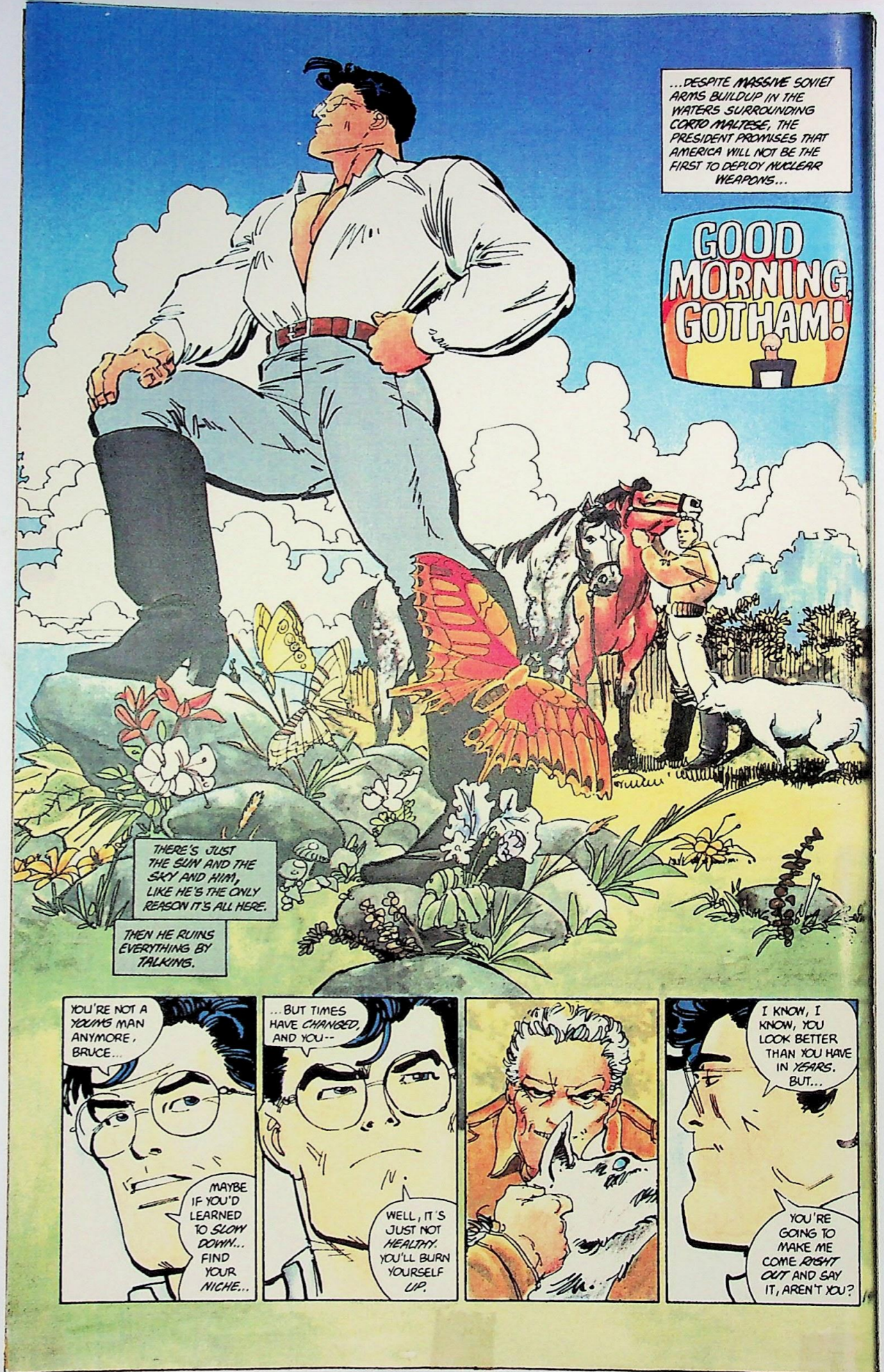
The American hostages guild has declared a general strike, in response to treatment of their members in the recent Libyan incident.

The media is also used as something through which Miller airs some pro and anti vigilante arguements in an effort to provide the story with a more balanced point of view:-

The council of mothers today petitioned the Major to issue a warrent for the immediate arrest of the Batman, citing him as a harmful influence on the children of Gotham.

Another petition on the M:ayor's desk came from the Victims Rights TAsk Force demanding an official sanction of the vigilante's activities.

The revolutionary vigilante wims through in the end however, and it is with this reading of Batman that Miller leaves us.



...DESPITE MASSIVE SOVIET ARMS BUILDUP IN THE WATERS SURROUNDING CYPRUS MALTESE, THE PRESIDENT PROMISES THAT AMERICA WILL NOT BE THE FIRST TO DEPLOY NUCLEAR WEAPONS...

GOOD MORNING GOTHAM!

THERE'S JUST THE SUN AND THE SKY AND HIM, LIKE HE'S THE ONLY REASON IT'S ALL HERE.

THEN HE RUINS EVERYTHING BY TALKING.

YOU'RE NOT A YOUNG MAN ANYMORE, BRUCE...
MAYBE IF YOU'D LEARNED TO SLOW DOWN... FIND YOUR NICHE...

... BUT TIMES HAVE CHANGED, AND YOU--
WELL, IT'S JUST NOT HEALTHY. YOU'LL BURN YOURSELF UP.

I KNOW, I KNOW, YOU LOOK BETTER THAN YOU HAVE IN YEARS. BUT...
YOU'RE GOING TO MAKE ME COME RIGHT OUT AND SAY IT, AREN'T YOU?

I KNOW, I KNOW, YOU LOOK BETTER THAN YOU HAVE IN YEARS. BUT...
YOU'RE GOING TO MAKE ME COME RIGHT OUT AND SAY IT, AREN'T YOU?

CLARK KENT (ALIAS SUPERMAN) AS SEEN BY FRANK MILLER. MILLER, FRANK, 1986, P.14 (BOOK THREE)



FRANK MILLER'S APOCALYPTIC VISION OF BATMAN.
THE SONS OF THE BATMAN, THE MUTANTS AND CARRIE
KELLY (THE NEW ROBIN) ARE WITH HIM
MILLER, FRANK, 1986, P. 30 (BOOK FOUR)

FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER FOUR

1. MILLER, Frank, 1986, back
2. Moore, Alan, 1986, second page
3. COTTA VAZ, Mark, 1989, p.107
4. ibid., p.113
5. MOORE, Alan, 1986, third page
6. MILLER, Frank, 1986, p.1 (book one)
7. ibid.
8. ibid.
9. MILLER, Frank, 1986, p.17 (book one)
10. MILLER, Frank, 1986, p.14 (book four)
11. MILLER, Frank, 1986, p.31 (book three)
12. CANNON, Martin, 1987, p.46
13. MILLER, Frank, 1986, p.38 (book four)
14. ibid., p.47
15. MILLER, Frank, 1986, p.3 (book two)
16. ibid.

CONCLUSION

You have just been through the history of the super hero, as personified to to speak, by the character of the Batman. Exciting stuff, wasn't it.

I used the Batman for a number of reasons. First of all, as already mentioned elsewhere in this weighty tome, the Batman is, apart from Superman, the only character whose career has spanned the history of the industry continuously since it was started in 1939. His development mirrors that of the entire superhero genre.

More specifically I choose Batman because I like Frank Miller's reading of the character. It is his Dark Knight Returns that more or less started me buying comics. A lot of noise was made back in 1986 in comic reading circles when the book first came out, apparently. After doing my research for this project, I find it odd that the original Batman, as conceived by Bob Kane, resembles quite closely the character in Miller's books. It was due solely to commercial concerns that the character was twisted so badly out of shape.

For all the talk about Frank Miller's Batman however, there is one very basic factor that gives his Batman its comparative sense of reality. It's not the pensive dialogue and the consequential lack of exclamation marks!!!! Nor is it the film noir look achieved by a combination of Miller's pencils, Klaus Janson's solid, blocky inks and the subtle palette of Lynn Varley, though these factors undoubtedly help.

The basic element that had been missing in the superhero's world until the 1980's was simply one of time:

...the characters remain in the
perpetual limbo of their
-to-late twenties and the
presence of death in their world
is at best a temporary and
reversible phenomenon.

Miller's Batman is old. He has been retired for ten years when the story begins. In the end he fakes his own death with the help of some chemicals;

a clumsy enough comic book cop-out but we'll let Mr. Miller away with it; he tells a good story.

People inside the industry itself have since cited this work as being a major step in the right deirection for the future development of super-heroes in general; the only direction if they are to regain some of the revelence they lost after the golden age of comics and more specifically, Dr. Frederic Wertham's Seduction of the innocent in 1954.

This will presumably not be a problem for Frank Miller. He is continually working on a screenplay for the up-and-coming Robo Cop two film. He has finished with Batman. Time has come to the Batman.

Footnote: Moore, Alan, 1986, p.4.

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