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Dustin Yeung. Heroism, Vigilantism, and Social Norms Reconsidered via Odysseus and Batman.

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This thesis explores the impact the mythical heroes of Odysseus and Batman had upon the societies of their audiences by being used as vehicles to deliver social commentary. This work stems from the desire to understand why heroism has been a recurring motif in Ancient Greek and contemporary American mythology. By analyzing the deployment of Odysseus and Batman in literature, a deeper understanding of the Ancient Athenian and contemporary American psyche can be gained. Chapter 1 explores the qualities that set Odysseus apart from other Homeric heroes and whether his unorthodox methods allow for him to be classified as a hero at all. Chapter 2 focuses on Sophocles’ usage of Odysseus to highlight one prominent social issue of Athens in the 5th century: the rising power of rhetoric. Chapter 3 illuminates the power vested in Batman as a symbol for justice by examining the relationships between Batman and Gotham’s institutions, citizens, and villains. Chapter 4 delves into Christopher Nolan’s molding of Batman into a hero befitting of an America grappling with complex debates about security and freedom in the aftermath of the September 11th terrorist attacks. The case studies of Odysseus and Batman offer a glimpse into the minds of Ancient Athenians and modern Americans, allowing us to gain a deeper understanding of the role heroes played in helping members of both societies understand and process the world. This thesis adds to comparative studies of mythology across cultures and sparks further inquiries into the extent that mythology may have shaped and influenced society as a result of their usage to understand the world.
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我要深深的感謝我的父母對我無條件的愛和付出。他們畢生不懈的努力為我豎立了榜樣。（國語 Mandarin）多謝啲親愛的爸爸媽媽！沒有你啲嘅教導，就無我今日啲成就。（粵語 Cantonese）
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Introduction

What is a hero? Why has heroism appeared as a recurring motif in mythology through the ages? Joseph Campbell laid the foundation for answering these questions in his seminal work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, where he observed that various cultures across the world and through time have utilized heroes as a central pillar of their mythology. Furthermore, through his cross-cultural studies, Campbell came to realize that many cultures utilized similar tropes in their mythologies about heroes. As a result, Campbell created the model of “The Hero’s Journey,” a template that described the shared elements of mythologies about heroes. In creating such a model to understand the narrative structure of myths across various cultures, it is apparent that Campbell recognized the ubiquity and power of such myths. As Campbell himself wrote in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, “Throughout the inhabited world, in all times and under every circumstance, myths of man have flourished; and they have been the living inspiration of whatever else may have appeared out of the activities of the human body and mind.”¹

This thesis builds off Campbell’s observations and seeks to explain how humans at various points in history have utilized heroes and mythology to understand and process the world around them. To achieve this answer, this thesis focuses upon two iconic heroes, one ancient and one modern, who have had monumental impacts upon the societies of their audiences: Odysseus and Batman. While contemporaneous heroes in the mythology of Ancient Athens and modern America such as Achilles or Iron Man were

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¹ Campbell 2004, 3
impactful as entertaining characters, Odysseus and Batman’s deployment by authors to explore important social issues have allowed their impact to transcend beyond being mere entertainment. For Odysseus, his rhetorical mastery and malleable moral code allowed him to undertake activities that brought both stability and destruction. As a result of his multifaceted nature, Odysseus thus became a fitting vessel for authors such as Sophocles to deploy in service of interrogating such complex social issues as the power of rhetoric in Athens. For Athenians in the 5th century, when Sophocles wrote several of his most famous tragedies, a dominant societal issue was the role of rhetoric in determining political power. While political power was previously limited to high-born elites from well-connected families, the rising power of rhetorical mastery in Athens afforded a new path toward political power and upward social mobility for certain wealthy Athenians. Those who could afford to pay for lessons from skilled orators could hone their own rhetorical mastery and secure political power for themselves, including those from non-elite families who would otherwise be denied political power. This phenomenon, paired with a deep distrust of commerce, thus left high-born elites feeling that rhetoric and its rising power posed an existential threat to their status atop the Athenian social hierarchy. By contrast, those who reaped the benefits of the new order in Athens embraced the dawn of new opportunities for themselves through rhetoric. Thus, it is evident that rhetoric and its role in Athenian society was at the forefront of the minds of most Athenians. In responding to this phenomenon, Sophocles utilized Odysseus, a character famed for his own rhetorical mastery, to explore the ramifications of rhetoric in his tragedies, a genre of Greek drama. In doing so, Sophocles provided a platform for Athenians to gain a deeper understanding of the world around them through debate and discussion.
In a similar vein, Batman’s characterization as a vigilante and ability to deploy morally controversial tactics allowed the hero to become a perfect vehicle for director Christopher Nolan to deliver social commentary within *The Dark Knight Trilogy*. In the wake of the September 11th terrorist attacks, the American government directed its focus and resources upon combatting terrorism. While most Americans agreed about the need to protect innocent civilians from harm, there was not consensus over the extent of powers should be granted to the government to combat terrorism, especially when it came at the cost of civil liberties. This thus created a rift in American society upon ideological lines. Those who felt strongly about the need for greater security likely would accept granting greater powers to the government to combat terrorism, even at the cost of civil liberties. By contrast, those who were concerned with the potential ethical or moral violations resulting from greater governmental power likely felt strongly about the need to carefully scrutinize and monitor counterterrorism activities. This tension dominated and shaped American discourse, society and by extension, *The Dark Knight Trilogy*. As a result, Batman, a character famed for his vigilantism, became an apt tool for Nolan to deploy in his films to explore the potential ramifications of extrajudicial operations and their impact upon civil liberties.

This thesis will utilize both Odysseus and Batman as case studies to gain a deeper understanding of the psyches of ancient Athenian and modern American audiences. This will be achieved by exploring the qualities of both characters that allowed them to be well-suited for social commentary and by analyzing their impacts upon their respective audiences. By doing so, we can gain a deeper understanding of how heroes and their
mythologies have played a critical role in helping humans understand the world in societies as varied as Ancient Athens and modern America.
Chapter 1: Odysseus’ Paradoxical Relationship with Kleos

This chapter explores Odysseus’ complex and paradoxical relationship with kleos and argues that Odysseus exerted far greater control over his kleos than any other Greek hero. For the ancient Greek hero, little was more critical to their conception of self and worldview than the concept of kleos. Translated into English, the term means “glory” or “fame,” which heroes sought to obtain through extraordinary feats of bravery or success on the battlefield. This concept of kleos is the term’s literal meaning of “heard-about-ness” encapsulated in sung poetry that would guarantee that the hero would be remembered for generations to come. Kleos therefore served as a form of social currency and would have been used as a barometer to measure each heroes’ status in the pantheon of greatness. With greater kleos came greater prestige and a higher perceived rank within the hierarchy of heroes. Thus, virtually every Homeric hero desired to have their name known for great deeds and would do anything to lay claim to even a small shred of kleos, even if it meant sacrificing his own life. This desire for kleos has great explanatory power when we examine the aspirations and actions of most Homeric heroes, from renowned superstars like Achilles and Ajax down to minor warriors like Iphidamas.

Kleos and the status it afforded to its heroes was the fundamental driving factor behind the actions behind virtually all Homeric heroes. More often than not, the acquisition or loss of kleos was a literal matter of life and death. The hero Ajax the Greater’s perceived slight to his honor by being denied the title of being “the best of the Greeks,” or having the most kleos, drove him to madness and set off the events of Sophocles’ Ajax. Prior to the start of the tragedy, Achilles had held the title of “best of

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2 Sophocles 2009
the Greeks,” along with the corresponding kleos that came with such a title. Renowned for his prowess in battle and almost superhuman strength, Ajax was deemed as a close second, behind only Achilles himself. However, with the death of Achilles in the Trojan War, Ajax logically thought that he would be in line to inherit the title of “best of the Greeks” from Achilles. Much to his dismay, this title did not pass on to him automatically. Instead, Ajax was forced to compete for the title in a series of competitions with the Ithacan king Odysseus, whose renown stemmed from his wits and guile, not his physical strength. As a result, Ajax felt that Odysseus was merely a subordinate in the pantheon of Greek heroes and unfit for the title of “best of the Greeks.” Upon the conclusion of the competition, it was Odysseus, not Ajax, who was crowned as the “best of the Greeks” by Agamemnon and Menelaus, the twin kings and leaders of the Greek war effort in Troy. Ajax was so wounded by the denial of the honorific title and needing to play second fiddle to Odysseus that he suffered a mental break. With his judgement clouded by his rage, Ajax then decided to go on a murderous rampage to kill all those he felt were responsible for his dishonor, including Odysseus, Agamemnon, and Menelaus. However, Ajax’s plot was ultimately foiled by Athena, who cast a magic haze over his eyes, blinding him into believing that he had successfully taken his revenge upon the trio. In reality however, Ajax had merely slaughtered the Greek army’s collection of livestock instead of his fellow Greeks. It is after Ajax’s rage fueled rampage that Sophocles’ Ajax began. The effects of Athena’s magic gradually wore off upon Ajax, laying bare the consequences of Ajax’s actions. Mortified that he had lost control and nearly murdered his own comrades, Ajax quickly realized that he had irreparably tarnished the legacy he had worked tirelessly to build through his exploits on the battlefield. In an attempt to
salvage what little honor he felt he had left, Ajax concluded that the only viable course of action he saw was to fall upon his own sword and take his own life. Ajax’s actions clearly illustrate just how important reputation was to Homeric heroes since they demonstrate that death was preferrable to living with dishonor.

In another example, Achilles’ pursuit of *kleos* during the Trojan War ultimately led to his death. In the *Iliad*, Achilles was forced to choose between two fates when faced with a conundrum: survive the Trojan War but have his name fade into obscurity or to die in battle but have his name remembered for eternity. Achilles ultimately chose the latter, sacrificing his own life in the pursuit of the eternal glory afforded by such a large amount of *kleos*. While it may have been natural for a powerful demigod to willingly throw himself into battle in pursuit of *kleos*, the choice was much more difficult for other less gifted mortals. One such mortal was Iphidamas, an extremely minor hero and character in the *Iliad*. Homer noted that Iphidamas, a young, non-Greek man who had his whole future in front of him, willingly gave up everything he had in order to fight against the Greeks in the Trojan War.³ Iphidamas knew that joining the war likely would guarantee his demise, yet he willingly accepted the risk for the chance to gain even a small shred of *kleos*. While Iphidamas was merely a minor character, his importance to the understanding of *kleos* far outstripped his minor role in the *Iliad*. The first important key was his identity as a non-Greek. His obsession with *kleos* that he shared with Greek heroes demonstrated that *kleos* existed as a powerful cross-cultural factor, with the same power over both Greeks and non-Greeks alike. The second important key was that for all of his sacrifices, Iphidamas only ended up as a minor, unimportant character in the songs

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³ Homer 2010, Book 11, Lines 252-284
sung of the Trojan War. Iphidamas’ willingness to lay down his own life in the small chance that he could obtain a small shred of *kleos* spoke volumes about how valuable glory was for him. Iphidamas’ decision clearly illustrated the carefully calculated judgement he made: that whatever small shred of *kleos* could be obtained with his death in battle was worth more than his entire future back on Thrace. This judgement thus further illuminated the immense value of even a tiny shred of *kleos*.

Thus, Achilles and Iphidamas act as perfect foils for each other in the understanding of the power of *kleos* in the ancient world. Their shared obsession with preserving their legacy via *kleos* shows that regardless of the stature or ranking of the hero, any amount of *kleos* was so valuable that it would be worth not only sacrificing their entire futures for, but their life as well. Their examples show that all heroes, from those that immediately spring to mind to those that barely have their existence acknowledged, placed an extremely high value upon *kleos* and the status it conferred.

However, in the *Odyssey*, Odysseus often acted in direct contradiction of the motivating principles of heroes in the *Iliad*. He repeatedly hid or concealed his identity from his hosts, enemies, and even his own subjects during his quest to reclaim his court in Ithaca. In particular, his actions during his encounter with the Phaeacians, Cyclops, and the suitors on Ithaca highlighted his seemingly paradoxical and counterintuitive actions. Odysseus’ comfort with anonymity stood in stark contrast with the normative attitudes of typical Homeric heroes towards *kleos*, causing the conflict between his status as a hero and seeming rejection of *kleos* to grow even larger. This begs the question: How can Odysseus remain a hero while appearing straying from the norm of seeking *kleos* at all costs? This chapter will take an in depth look at the details of Odysseus’ anonymity in
these three episodes from the *Odyssey* in order to provide a resolution to this paradoxical conflict between *kleos* and anonymity.

Odysseus’ strategic deployment of anonymity and repeated deferral of *kleos* rather than outright rejection of it in the *Odyssey* presents some helpful clues to answering this question. One clue stems from the Ithacan’s encounter and lengthy stay with the Phaeacians, which is detailed in Books 5 through 13 of the *Odyssey*. In these episodes, Odysseus intentionally hid his identity from many Phaeacians he encountered until he found the right moment to shed his anonymity. Odysseus’ deployment of anonymity was aided by his patron and close ally Athena, who actively assisted the Ithacan in his mission with her powerful magic. The first instance of Odysseus hiding his identity from the Phaeacians came in Book 7.\(^4\) Odysseus washed up onto the shore of Phaeacia and encountered Nausicaa, the daughter of King Alcinous and Queen Arete. During his entire encounter with Nausicaa, he opted to remain mum about his identity and never provided so much as a hint about his background to her. From there, he was guided to the palace of King Alcinous while Athena shrouded Odysseus in a magical mist to obscure him from the view of prying onlookers. Odysseus then threw himself at the feet of Queen Arete as the mist was dispersed, revealing him to the Phaeacians for the first time.\(^5\) While his visual anonymity had vanished at this point, his name and background still remained a tightly guarded secret. After being shown the traditional hospitality dictated by the tradition of *xenia* (being fed and bathed), Odysseus was faced with the decision to reveal his name, identity, and heritage in accordance with the traditions of *xenia* as an appropriate response to the hospitality shown to him. However,

\(^4\) Homer 2006, Book 7
\(^5\) Homer 2006, Book 7, Line 162-181
he broke with tradition and exhibited bad xenia in his role as a guest by continuing to remain mum about his identity. Deciding not to pry, the Phaeacians allowed Odysseus to maintain his anonymity. As Odysseus’ stay with the Phaeacians progressed, the Ithacan continued to remain tight lipped about his identity, but bits and pieces of his identity began to come to light. One such moment came when Odysseus initially refused to participate in the athletic competitions the Phaeacians were holding until taunts by the locals finally goaded Odysseus into action.\textsuperscript{6} From there, his supreme athletic ability, far outstripping the younger Phaeacians, gave a hint that he was more than just what appeared to be a decrepit, weary traveler.\textsuperscript{7} In celebration of his victory, a feast was held in Odysseus’ honor. As part of the celebrations, the bard Demodocus began singing about the events of the Trojan War, bringing Odysseus to tears.\textsuperscript{8} Seeing this, King Alcinous finally lost his patience and ordered Odysseus to reveal his true identity. Upon doing so, Odysseus began singing of his journey home from Troy.

Odysseus used anonymity in the Phaeacian episode as a tool to seize control over his own kleos by singing of it as a bard would. The first important note about Odysseus’ anonymity was that it was not only accepted, by explicitly encouraged by a goddess, Athena. Athena’s help in shrouding him in a magical cloud helped preserve his visual anonymity and also served as a tacit stamp of approval of his actions. This approval from the goddess of wisdom and strategy herself demonstrated that Odysseus’ actions should not be viewed as shameful or cowardly, but rather as shrewd and cunning. Furthermore, as Odysseus’ strategy shifted to a slow reclamation of his identity, Athena matched his

\textsuperscript{6} Homer 2006, Book 8, Line 196-205
\textsuperscript{7} Homer 2006, Book 8, Line 236-245
\textsuperscript{8} Homer 2006, Book 8, Line 655-672
efforts by shifting her aid accordingly. In a bid to call attention to Odysseus’ remarkable achievements during the athletic competitions, Athena (while disguised as a Phaeacian) spotlighted Odysseus’ resounding triumph over Laodamas by claiming that even a blind man could see Odysseus’ superiority. This pivotal moment marked the beginning of Odysseus’ reclamation of his identity and accumulation of respect on Phaecia. By emphasizing Odysseus’ clear superiority, Athena successfully grabbed the attention of the Phaeacians and thus set the stage for Odysseus’ retelling of his return from the Trojan War. It is precisely due to his being granted the rare opportunity to sing of his own *kleos* that Odysseus was able to shape his own narrative, rather than having it filtered or distorted by an intermediary. By literally singing of his own *kleos*, Odysseus catapulted himself to stardom amongst the Phaeacians. Thus, Odysseus’ intentional concealment of his identity and slow, calculated reveal was not a rejection of *kleos*. Rather, Odysseus’ adoption of anonymity was just a tool to set the stage for dictating his *kleos* on his own terms, rather than having his glory framed by other bards.

As Charles Segal noted in his paper “*Kleos* and its Ironies in the *Odyssey,*” Odysseus’ brazen actions mark a hard break from traditional heroic actions as he anointed himself as a hero while recounting his travels in Book 9. Segal continued on to note how strange this action was, as such praise would typically be offered up by others and not from one’s own mouth. The expectation of heroes refraining from self-promotion juxtaposed with Odysseus’ blatant self-aggrandization created a seemingly paradoxical situation. However, when viewed through the lens of Odysseus and Athena working in

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9 Homer 2006, Book 8, Line 246-253  
10 Homer 2006, Book 9, Line 1-25  
11 Segal 2018, 25
tandem to control the narrative around him, the function of the Ithacan’s self-praise becomes clear. Furthermore, Segal noted that Odysseus’ *kleos*, something that should be celebrated in the light of day, was paradoxically derived not from heroic actions. Rather, they instead came from *doloi*, or deception.\(^{12}\) It was not heroic deeds in battle that Odysseus was known for, but rather his willingness to employ any tactic to secure victory, including those strategies that other heroes would consider dishonorable or deceitful. Segal further argued that Odysseus’ lineage itself associated him with deception as his grandfather Autolycus had been blessed by the god Hermes with the gift of deceit and trickery. With mastery of deception and trickery running through his veins, it becomes abundantly clear that Odysseus’ propensity to craft deceptive ruses to shape his own *kleos* was not merely a useful skill for the Ithacan, but a fundamental component of Odysseus’ character. It is precisely Odysseus’ guile that helped him plan ahead and parlay his anonymity into an opportunity not afforded to other heroes: to shape his own *kleos* by taking on the role of a bard.

While it is evident that while Odysseus does not fit neatly into the tropes of a traditional Greek hero as Achilles does, it would be a mistake to dismiss the Ithacan as a non-heroic figure. As Margalit Finkelberg argued in her article “Odysseus and the Genus ‘Hero’,” Odysseus’ heroism within the *Odyssey* contained elements conforming to stories told for hero-worship.\(^{13}\) Thus, for the Ancient Greeks, heroism not only encapsulated moral or literal components, but religious ones as well, as the Ancient Greeks literally worshipped heroes, including Odysseus. Thus, Odysseus was not a hero that rejected *kleos*, but simply one that utilized unique and novel approaches to achieve it. The Ithacan

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\(^{12}\) Segal 1983, 28  
\(^{13}\) Finkelberg 1995, 12
was willing to sacrifice short term recognition by adopting anonymity as a useful means to achieve his end of securing *kleos* and carefully controlling its presentation. This was apparent when juxtaposing Odysseus’ actions surrounding his *kleos* with Achilles’. While Achilles was content to allow other bards to shape his *kleos* gained in the *Iliad*, Odysseus instead carefully chose his actions to gain the opportunity to shape his own *kleos*. While the Ithacan utilized a nontraditional approach to achieving *kleos*, it is evident that Odysseus shared in the common desire amongst heroes to secure glory.

In Book 9, Odysseus’ encounter with Polyphemus the Cyclops demonstrated another dimension of the Ithacan’s unique relationship with his *kleos*: remaining in control of his *kleos*, even while others spoke of him. Upon reaching the land of the Cyclopes, Odysseus and his men rowed to shore, where his men encounter a cave filled with sheep and cheese. The men wanted to take the cheese and sheep as supplies and expected depart immediately, while Odysseus ordered them to stay in order to receive gifts that were provided as part of the tradition of *xenia*. However, the men quickly discovered that Polyphemus would provide no such hospitality as he devoured two of the crew members. Angered by this, Odysseus wanted to avenge his fallen crew members immediately by slaying the Cyclops. However, he stayed his hand, setting a cunning, vengeful plan into motion instead. Finding themselves trapped in Polyphemus’ cave by a boulder only the Cyclops could move, Odysseus once again deployed anonymity to his advantage. When asked by Polyphemus for his name, the Ithacan reported that his name was “Nobody.” Upon hearing this, Polyphemus cackled evilly and revealed his true

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14 Homer 2006, Book 9, Line 289-300
15 Homer 2006, Book 9, Line 379-386
16 Homer 2006, Book 9, Line 484-488
intentions for Odysseus and his crew: that he would eat them all but would save “Nobody” for last. Understanding the gravity of the situation, Odysseus set his plan into motion and waited for Polyphemus to pass out before forcefully driving one end of Polyphemus’ sharpened club into the Cyclops’ eye, sending him into a fit of rage and pain. Seeking support from his fellow Cyclopes, Polyphemus flailed about and screamed for help, reporting that “Nobody was hurting him.” Odysseus’ cunning reporting of his name as “Nobody” to Polyphemus thus led to indifference from the other Cyclopes, allowing the Greeks to escape to their ships without being accosted by the other Cyclopes on the island. However, once onboard, Odysseus was unable to suppress his hubris and revealed his true identity to Polyphemus, along with several identifying epithets about himself to make his identity unmistakable. Odysseus then ordered the Cyclops to tell the tale to others both to increase his own kleos and to humiliate Polyphemus. Filled with rage, Polyphemus did so, alerting his father Poseidon about the Ithacan’s deception and prayed for Odysseus’ punishment.

This episode illustrated the significance of Odysseus’ strategic employment of anonymity as a means to achieve kleos, as well as the Ithacan’s rare ability to continue shaping his own kleos indirectly by directing others to frame his exploits as he saw fit. Odysseus once again relied heavily upon anonymity as a tactical tool in service of his goals, both short and long term. The short-term goal serviced by Odysseus claiming his name as “Nobody” was securing safety for him and his men. The Ithacan did so by claiming his name was “Nobody” to the Cyclops without revealing his true identity, which provided protection to him and his men as they escaped from the hostile island.

17 Homer 2006, Book 9, Line 530-538
With Polyphemus unable to identify a target for retribution, the other Cyclopes were ultimately unable to help. Odysseus’ clever ruse to sow confusion and miscommunication amongst the Cyclopes allowed the Greeks to escape safely, thus achieving the Ithacan’s short-term goal. The longer-term goal serviced by Odysseus’ tactical deployment of anonymity was his continued pursuit of shaping his own *kleos*. After securing safety for his men, he intentionally revealed not only his name, but also his heritage, exploits, and home to ensure maximal recognition of his herculean feat. Just as Odysseus concealed his identity from the Phaeacians until it suited his ends, the Ithacan again employed the same strategy with the Cyclops. With Polyphemus successfully petitioning the mighty god Poseidon to punish Odysseus as retribution, it was evident that the Ithacan’s plan to spread his *kleos* succeeded. With the tales of his exploits reaching even the highest levels of Greek society (Mount Olympus), it is undeniable that Odysseus’ tactics again allowed him to shape his *kleos* as he saw fit. However, they came at a great cost as Poseidon drowned the entirety of his crew in retaliation for Odysseus’ actions.

With the Phaeacians, Odysseus literally shaped his own *kleos* by singing of his own exploits as a bard, allowing him to filter and present his exploits in a favorable light. As a result, Odysseus was not only able to emphasize his triumphs, but also to mask his flaws or shameful moments. However, his secretiveness came at a cost as it temporarily damaged his relationship with King Alcinous, who grew increasingly frustrated with Odysseus’ deception. In a similar vein, Odysseus tightly controlled his *kleos* with the Cyclops, albeit in a more indirect manner. While Odysseus did not sing of his own *kleos* here, he manipulated and goaded Polyphemus into a fury that all but guaranteed his exploits reaching the ears of the Olympian gods. Odysseus even explicitly ordered
“Odysseus of Ithaca, son of Laertes, sacker of cities.” However, this again came at a cost as his crew were killed as a result of Odysseus’ hubris. This intentional and successful control of the reporting of his actions again demonstrate Odysseus’ ability to shape his kleos, albeit at a great cost to those around him.

As Seth Schein noted in his article “Odysseus and Polyphemus in the ‘Odyssey,’” regaining control of his identity was of utmost importance to Odysseus during his encounter with Polyphemus. The moment of Odysseus revealing his true identity to Polyphemus marked a turning point in the Ithacan’s journey as Schein argued that the Odyssey was primarily about Odysseus reclaiming his identity. Within the episode with Polyphemus, it was clear to see how Odysseus transitions from identifying himself as “Nobody” to Odysseus, the inflictor of pain and victor in their battle of wits. Schein further noted that the cave can be viewed symbolically as a tomb, with Odysseus’ emergence from the cave and subsequent reclamation of his own name symbolizing a return to life. Thus, Odysseus’ pronouncement of his own name in front of Polyphemus served a greater purpose beyond a ploy to further advance his kleos and a hubristic celebration of victory. The Ithacan’s actions also served as a metaphorical rebirth into the world, allowing him to reclaim his rightful identity as the famed Odysseus and shed the ill-fitting identity of a simple sailor without a shred of kleos to his name. However, while Odysseus benefitted from reclaiming his identity by securing greater kleos for himself,

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18 Homer 2006, Book 9, Lines 661-666
19 Schein 1970, 82
20 Schein 1970, 82
his actions were also extremely destructive to those around him as his hubris ultimately led to the death of his crew.

Odysseus’ encounter with the suitors illustrates yet another deployment of anonymity in service of securing his *kleos*. Odysseus’ management of the subsequent fallout of highlighted one final element of his rare ability to shape his own *kleos*. Odysseus not only could control his *kleos* by singing of it himself or by crafting a narrative for others to spread about him, but also by strictly limiting what details others could share about his exploits. Odysseus’ encounter with the suitors in Books 17 through 22 of the *Odyssey* clearly illustrated this phenomenon. These books detail how Odysseus again deployed unorthodox tactics by returning to Ithaca in disguise and slowly reclaimed his court from the treacherous suitors, who first appeared in Books 1 and 2 of the *Odyssey*. With Odysseus having been missing for years, the young men of Ithaca decided to seek Queen Penelope’s hand in marriage, as this would have bestowed the kingship upon the man chosen by the queen. Penelope’s resistance to remarriage strained her relationship with the suitors, who repeatedly attempted to pressure her into quickly making a decision. The suitors’ hubris paired with their excessive lifestyle fueled by gorging themselves upon the food stores of the royal court further only further exacerbated this tension.

Upon Odysseus’s return to Ithaca in Book 13, the Ithacan did not immediately reveal his identity or announce his return, again strategically embracing anonymity while plotting to reclaim his court from the parasitic suitors. He first stopped at the hut of his faithful herdsman Eumaeus and took on a disguise as a beggar. After careful preparations, Odysseus finally entered his own court in Book 17 while disguised as a
beggar, engendering physical and verbal abuse from the suitors as a result. The suitors repeatedly insulted and humiliated the disguised Odysseus for his outward appearance as a beggar, sparking a deep anger in the Ithacan king. Athena allowed the situation to fester, permitting the suitors to continue with their abuse and humiliation in order to further fuel Odysseus’ anger. After experiencing a complete disregard for proper xenia by the suitors in their role as guests, Odysseus’ fury drove him to lay out a plan to massacre the suitors with the help of his son Telemachus. The plan was set into motion with Odysseus proposing a competition to win the hand of Queen Penelope in marriage. Consisting of a challenge to shoot an arrow through twelve axes, the suitors duly agreed to participate. Unbeknownst to the suitors, the competition was merely a ruse to arm Odysseus and Telemachus ahead of their planned massacre in Book 22. With the doors to the hall locked and armed with his bow, Odysseus coldly shot an arrow through a suitor while throwing off his disguise, revealing his true identity to the terrified suitors. Odysseus and Telemachus then proceeded to murder all the remaining suitors in the hall out of revenge for their parasitic and insolent actions during Odysseus’ absence. After the massacre, the understandably angry families of the suitors surrounded Odysseus in search of answers and revenge. However, Athena intervened with her magic, forcing the angry families to forget about the massacre by erasing the event from their minds, preserving his kleos in the process.

Odysseus’ tactical deployment of anonymity in the episode with the suitors illustrated a direct challenge to conventional understandings of obtaining kleos, as the Ithacan demonstrated that it could be earned through seemingly unheroic activities as well. In this episode, Odysseus’ employment of anonymity, by debasing his role as a king
by dressing as a beggar, stood in stark contrast to the methods of other Homeric heroes. A traditional Homeric hero would never have hidden even a shred of their identity as it would be completely antithetical to their life’s purpose: to have their name and kleos spread as widely as possible. As a result, to not announce one’s name in battle would have been unthinkable. A hero that clearly illustrated this paradigm was Agamemnon. As he described his own homecoming to Odysseus in Book 11 of the Odyssey from the Underworld, Agamemnon recounted his profound regret over his conformity to this paradigm. Agamemnon’s wife Clytemnestra had plotted his murder and used the celebration of his return from the Trojan War as the necessary cover to complete her plan. As a result, Agamemnon advised Odysseus to return to his court in disguise in order to avoid sharing in his tragic fate.\(^\text{21}\) Furthermore, it would have been utterly unacceptable to a Homeric hero to lower themselves from their renowned status to that of a beggar, a role situated firmly at the bottom of Greek society. This paradigm was clearly reflected as no other heroes in Homeric epics adopt such an identity. It is only when examining Athenian tragedies, a genre of Greek drama distinct from Homeric epics, that heroes willing to conceal their identity by posing as beggars is seen. Euripides deployed Menelaus in the Helen as a hero who hid his identity to avoid being potential attempts on his life, but such depictions remained rare in the world of Homeric heroes.\(^\text{22}\)

Heeding the advice of Agamemnon in Book 11, Odysseus thus willingly took on the role of the beggar. He not only voluntarily dressed in the rags of a beggar but also accepted the debasement and humiliation that resulted from the suitors without complaint. This paradoxical departure from traditional norms may again appear to be an

\(^{21}\) Homer 2006, Book 11, Lines 570-578

\(^{22}\) Euripides 1938
outright rejection of *kleos* on its surface given Odysseus’ ready willingness to throw away the glory attached to his name. However, contrary to its surface level appearance, Odysseus’ actions were actually an implicit affirmation of the value he placed on *kleos*. While Odysseus’ actions would have been deemed as unheroic and unthinkable by other heroes, the Ithacan’s flexibility to utilize any tactics to survive helped preserve the Ithacan king’s *kleos*. Without Odysseus’ willingness to defer his *kleos* by adopting a disguise, he likely would have been killed by the suitors and failed to reclaim his kingdom, sharing in Agamemnon’s fate. Without a successful return to his court, any semblance of *kleos* would have been permanently wiped away in the process. Thus, while Odysseus’ tactical use of anonymity may have been seen as cowardly by proponents of the traditional model of Homeric heroism, his temporary deferral of *kleos* ultimately guaranteed the preservation of his life, rule, and *kleos* in the long term.

Alexander Loney’s chapter “The Multiple Meanings of Odysseus’ Triumphs” from the book *The Ethics of Revenge and the Meanings of the Odyssey* illustrated a third way Odysseus controlled his *kleos*: by silencing unsavory details of his exploits.  

Whereas Odysseus had previously controlled his *kleos* tightly by dictating what aspects of his exploits would reach the ears of others, the Ithacan was equally capable utilizing the opposite approach. Loney noted that after the massacre of the suitors, Odysseus’ nurse Eurykleia let out a celebratory shout after surveying the scene. However, Odysseus immediately silenced her and instructed her to refrain from celebrating. Loney noted that while the words coming from Odysseus’ mouth appeared to be a result of

23 Loney 2019
24 Loney 2019, 174
piety, they ultimately had an ulterior motive: to distance himself from his actions. Odysseus simultaneously silenced Eurykleia from telling of the massacre while providing her with the version he wished to be circulated: that the suitors simply reaped the justice they deserved, with his actions being implicitly approved by the gods. The instance of Odysseus silencing Eurykleia was extremely important as it was yet another example of Odysseus shaping the accounts of his actions, both via his own actions and with the help of his divine patron Athena. Paired with Athena’s erasure of the massacre from the minds of the suitors’ families, it is abundantly clear that the only authority that remained to speak or sing of Odysseus’s exploits was Odysseus himself. Thus, it is plain to see that exerting tight control over his own kleos was a critical facet in Odysseus’ modus operandi.

In summation, the resolution to Odysseus’ seemingly paradoxical relationship with kleos lays in the fact that the Ithacan did not reject kleos as one might believe from a cursory examination. On the contrary, Odysseus valued kleos just as much as other Homeric heroes. The only difference between them was that Odysseus merely diverged from other heroes in the methods he used to achieve kleos. Whereas other Homeric heroes would find hiding their name in any context antithetical to every fiber of their being, Odysseus utilized anonymity as a tactical strategy to achieve kleos. Furthermore, the kleos earned by other heroes were ultimately out of their control, as their exploits would be framed only by the bards who sung about it. By contrast, Odysseus masterfully seized control of his own kleos by using a variety of tactics. He accomplished this by singing of his own accomplishments, instructing others in how to speak of his exploits.

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25 Loney 2019, 176
26 Homer 2006, Book 22, Lines 509-516
and by silencing bystanders who could provide unfavorable details about his actions. This motif was echoed in Flavius Philostratus’ work *On Heroes*. Written during the late Second Sophistic Era (60-230 CE), the text attacked Homer’s credibility and the veracity of his claims. Within the text, it was claimed that Homer’s recounting of the Trojan War stemmed from conversations with Odysseus who was conjured from the dead. Odysseus then agreed to who provide a first-hand account of the war to Homer in exchange for a distorted retelling of events favorable to him. As Nagy and Due noted, “In return for telling all, Odysseus makes Homer promise to compose a song about his wisdom and bravery and to leave out any reference to his more virtuous rival Palamedes (*Her.* 43.11–16).” 27 With *On Heroes* being squarely focused upon Odysseus’ manipulation of his own narrative, it is clear that the ancient authors such as Philostratus also recognized the phenomenon of Odysseus seeking to exert control over his own narrative.

Ultimately, Odysseus leveraged anonymity as a means to his ultimate end: controlling his *kleos* in ways that were unattainable for other heroes. Odysseus first used anonymity with his encounter with the Phaeacians by hiding his identity to generate intrigue and interest in his story. With the Phaeacians sufficiently intrigued, he then was granted the chance to launch into song and sing of his own exploits, allowing him to control his *kleos*. During his encounter with Polyphemus on the island of the Cyclops, Odysseus employed the false identity of “Nobody” in service of his daring escape from the beast’s cave. Upon escaping, Odysseus again exerted control over his *kleos* by revealing his true identity to Polyphemus along with instructions on how to describe the encounter. In this effort, Odysseus was wildly successful as his exploits reached the

27 Nagy and Dué 2020
highest levels of Greek society: the gods on Mount Olympus. Finally, Odysseus
weaponized anonymity by casting aside his identity as a renowned king for the rags of a
beggar, helping him to eliminate the hostile suitors in his court. After the massacre, both
the Ithacan king and his patron Athena acted to actively control the framing of the event
to control his kleos. Odysseus silenced his nurse Eurykleia’s celebrations and distanced
himself from any culpability by stating that he simply meted out justice approved by the
gods. Athena went a step further by erasing any memory of the event from the minds of
the massacred suitors’ family members. The combined actions of Odysseus and Athena
thus left Odysseus as the only authoritative witness to the situation and in control of his
own kleos once again. Thus, it is abundantly clear that the matter of kleos was of the
utmost importance to the Ithacan king. His deployment of varied and cunning strategies
in service of securing and preserving his kleos demonstrate that although his methods of
achieving kleos were different, Odysseus cared deeply about his place in the pantheon of
Greek heroes by virtue of his obsession over controlling his own kleos.
Chapter 2: Odysseus, Sophocles, and Rhetoric in 5th Century Athens

While Odysseus is well known for his craftiness in battle, an often-overlooked aspect of Odysseus is his malleable code of ethics which freed him to utilize any strategy in the pursuit of victory. While other contemporaneous heroes as Achilles were restricted by a stringent code of heroic ethics, Odysseus was completely unrestrained. This chapter will argue that this malleable worldview made Odysseus a useful tool for tragedians like Sophocles as well as viewers of his tragedies. Sophocles composed his tragedies in a 5th century Athens experiencing significant social and political change. Whereas political power and social prestige previously were only accessible to high-born elites from well-connected families, the rising influence of rhetorical mastery offered a new path to power. Individuals who would have previously been denied any chance to shape Athenian society by virtue of their birth could rise to political power through their learned oratorical techniques. This disruption to the established social order deeply divided Athenian society. The established elites despised the new wave of upward social mobility powered by oratorical prowess as they felt it was an existential threat to their status in Athens. By contrast, those who could afford to pay for professional oratorical training embraced the growing influence of rhetoric and the new political power it afforded. With a deeply divided Athens as a backdrop, the tragedian Sophocles employed Odysseus as an apt vehicle to deliver social commentary with. Odysseus’ characterization as a master orator with an ambiguous moral code thus offered Sophocles the ability to comment upon the debate within Athens by highlighting the benefits and pitfalls of rhetoric through Odysseus’s actions. Odysseus was equally useful for the audience, as his actions served as a metaphorical Rorschach test for their own views of the changes in Athens and acted
as a starting point for Athenians to debate the merits of the rising power of rhetoric. Odysseus’ morally complex actions that brought both stability and disruption were thus the perfect tool to process the rapidly evolving Athenian sociopolitical landscape.

Before the creation of Sophocles’ tragedies, Odysseus’ depiction as a multifaceted figure equally capable of delivering social order or instability can be clearly seen in the *Iliad*. Odysseus’ depiction in the *Iliad* provided an early example of this phenomenon and served as the foundation for Sophocles’ later depiction of the character in his tragedies. Odysseus’ actions and usage of rhetoric in the *Iliad* demonstrated the complexity and duality in his usage of rhetoric, as it was capable of both bolstering social stability or razing it to the ground. An example of Odysseus’ rhetoric delivering social stability came in Book 2 as the Greek army faced a formidable mental challenge in the form of a test from Agamemnon, the commander of the Greek army. In a bid to discover which Greeks were truly committed to the Greek war effort in Troy, Agamemnon gathered the army and lied that the war had been abandoned so they could return home. Much to his dismay, all the men happily abandoned their posts. 28 Sensing imminent danger to the Greek war effort, Odysseus was spurred into action by Athena as he utilized both physical force and rhetoric to restabilize the Greek army. Odysseus began by beating Thersites, a Greek soldier, for his insolence and lack of commitment to the war effort. 29 Odysseus’ actions served as a powerful reminder of the consequences of stepping out of line, thus reinforcing the hierarchy of the Greek army. Additionally, Odysseus deployed his rhetorical mastery to appeal to the sense of soldiers’ sense of duty while reminding them

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28 Homer 2010, Book 2, Line 128-182
29 Homer 2010, Book 2, Line 287-330
of a prophecy that foretold a Greek victory only after 9 years of fighting. This speech was met with rousing cheers and applause, successfully rededicating the Greek army to their expedition.\(^{30}\) The combination of physical force and oratory thus provided an example of the powerful positive impact of rhetoric as it served to restabilize the social fabric of the Greeks in a moment of crisis.

By contrast, Odysseus’ usage of rhetoric in Book 10 illustrated its socially disruptive power. In this episode, Odysseus and Diomedes were dispatched to conduct a covert night raid upon the enemy Trojan camp. During their mission, they encountered and captured a Trojan spy, Dolon, who was on a mission of his own. Odysseus and Diomedes quickly captured the Trojan spy, securing a golden opportunity to extract critical information about the Trojan military in the process. Faced with a panicked figure, Odysseus calmed the Trojan down by promising to keep Dolon from death in return for truthful intelligence about the Trojans. Dolon duly agreed to this arrangement and upheld his end of the bargain by truthfully surrendering all the information he knew. Yet, this did not manage to keep him from harm. Rather, it hastened his demise as Dolon rapidly outlived his usefulness, as Diomedes ruthlessly decapitated the Trojan without hesitation nor protest from Odysseus. In this situation, Odysseus’ rhetorical mastery was once again deployed, albeit for a nefarious purpose. During the interrogation, Homer’s intentional choice to label Odysseus with the epithets of “crafty”\(^ {31}\) and “shrewd”\(^ {32}\) offered subtle hints to the Ithacan’s deception. Rather than holding up his end of the

\(^{30}\) Homer 2010, Book 2, Line 333-396

\(^{31}\) Homer 2010, Book 10, line 455

\(^{32}\) Homer 2010, Book 10, line 479
bargain, Odysseus allowed Diomedes to break the verbal promise made to Dolon in a blatant violation of the spirit of oaths so sacred to the ancient Greeks.

In Adele Haft’s article *The City Sacker Odysseus*, Haft noted the incredible effectiveness of Odysseus’ mastery of *doloi*, or trickery when paired with military strategy. In particular, Haft focused upon the uncanny resemblance between Odysseus’ night raid in Book 10 of the *Iliad* with the Trojan Horse trap detailed in the *Odyssey*. In both instances, Odysseus cunningly laid an ambush of his unwitting enemies under the cover of night. Both ambushes resulted in the brutal massacre of unsuspecting enemies, leaving the Trojans with little recourse but to lament their fallen comrades. Odysseus’ actions in both ambushes highlighted his mastery of deception, strategy, and willingness to utilize any tactic in pursuit of victory was on full display. While effective, Odysseus’ tactics were ultimately a double-edged sword. The benefits of Odysseus’ approach lay in the fact that they were extremely effective and fell perfectly in line with parts of the Greek warrior ethos: to pursue tactics that aid one’s friends while harming one’s enemies. By eliminating large swaths of the Trojan army in both the night raid and during the Trojan Horse episode, Odysseus undoubtedly shifted the tide of the war in favor of the Greeks while landing a devastating blow to the Trojans. However, the drawbacks of Odysseus’ methods exposed themselves as they led to blatant violations of Greek oath-making norms as well as divine punishment.

In both the night raid of the *Iliad* and Trojan Horse trap of the *Odyssey*, Odysseus used *doloi*, or trickery, as the central tenet guiding his actions. The deliberate choice of an

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33 Haft 1990, 52
34 Haft 1990, 51
ambush conducted at night, a tactic and time of day explicitly designed to catch combatants at their weakest and most unprepared state, is clear evidence of Odysseus’ trickery. Furthermore, Haft deftly noted the irony of Odysseus’ encounter with Dolon, a Trojan dispatched by Hector to engage in a covert reconnaissance mission of his own, during his night raid. Dolon, whose name was derived from the word for trickery, was engaged in a mission of deception, just as his Greek counterpart Odysseus was. In this manner, Dolon effectively served as Odysseus’ metaphorical mirrored reflection. With both men locked in a battle of wits and guile, Odysseus managed to outwit the man named after trickery itself. With Diomedes threatening to execute Dolon on the spot, Odysseus instead cunningly promised Dolon his safety in exchange for truthful intelligence about the Trojan camp. Given the strong emphasis in Greek culture put upon upholding one’s reputation and the power of verbal contracts in the form of oath-making, it is likely that Dolon genuinely believed Odysseus would uphold the bargain. Unfortunately for Dolon, his naivety blinded him to the possibility that Odysseus would use the traditional framework of oath making as a deceitful ruse. As a result, Odysseus promptly broke his promise to Dolon by allowing Diomedes to execute the Trojan, thereby outwitting a man named after trickery itself. As evidenced by Odysseus’ unflinching ability to deceive and wanton disregard for traditional forms of oath-making and ethics, it is clear that the Ithacan’s tactics came at a price. While undeniably effective, they left a clear trail of destruction in their wake. Odysseus not only crushed his enemies, but also the established norms and ethics that guided Greek warfare as well. Furthermore, Odysseus’ use of deceptive rhetoric led to further destruction as it drew the
ire of Zeus, who rained down blood and sought to punish and kill the Greeks as a result.\textsuperscript{35}

Thus, it is plain to see that the impact of Odysseus’ actions in the \textit{Iliad} was extremely complex. His mastery of rhetoric was deployed to restabilize the Greek war effort in a moment of crisis, but also destabilized the very social fabric of Greek life by trampling upon conventional norms of ethical oath making.

Building upon Odysseus’ multifaceted depiction in the \textit{Iliad}, Sophocles utilized Odysseus to deliver social commentary about Athens and its reckoning with rhetoric. In Sophocles’ \textit{Ajax}, Odysseus’s actions demonstrated how the seemingly destabilizing action of challenging established hierarchies could ultimately lead to greater social stability by circumventing internal strife. The \textit{Ajax} began after Odysseus was crowned as “the best of the Greeks,” as detailed in Chapter 1 of this thesis. Athena began by showing Odysseus the madness Ajax descended into. Rather than gloating over his rival’s misfortune, Odysseus was stricken with complete terror while witnessing Ajax’s descent into madness. After Athena removed the fog from Ajax’s eyes, he realized to his dismay that he had dismembered the Greek army’s supply of livestock. Slowly coming to his senses, he realized that he had almost murdered his comrades in a fit of rage and was struck by an indomitable sense of shame as a result. With his heroic reputation in tatters, Ajax believed that the only path forward to salvage his reputation was to commit suicide. Despite the many appeals of his closest allies to change course, they were unable to stop Ajax. Upon arriving at the scene, his grief-stricken half-brother Teucer immediately ordered a ritual burial to be prepared for Ajax. However, Agamemnon and Menelaus, two targets of Ajax’s failed massacre, forbid a proper burial due to their anger over Ajax’s

\textsuperscript{35} Homer 2010, Book 11, line 55-58
actions. This left both parties in a deadlock until Odysseus successfully convinced Agamemnon that all individuals deserved a proper burial, regardless of whatever contentious relationship laid in the past. This mediation won praise from Teucer and the followers of Ajax, who hailed Odysseus’ nobility and honor after previously reviling the Ithacan.

The impact of Odysseus’ usage of rhetoric in Sophocles’ Ajax again proved to be multifaceted as it disrupted the social order dictated by Menelaus and Agamemnon, yet ultimately preserved unity in the Greek army by circumventing internal strife. To understand this dynamic, it is important to note that the social order in the Ajax was framed by the Trojan War. The Greeks assembled to fight at Troy were under the command of Agamemnon and Menelaus and were thus subjected to the social fabric and customs decreed by the two kings. However, they saw themselves as basileis (leaders) in their own right as many were kings or leaders in their home cities. To streamline the war effort, a strict hierarchy was thus implemented in the Greek army, with deference to orders and authority central to its operation. This governing structure, however, was not the only component of the social fabric of the Greeks. The laws of the gods and divine customs were also important pillars of the Greek worldview. Divine laws commanded such respect that they often superseded the laws and institutions of the mortal Greeks. Thus, it is through these two power structures which the conflict between Teucer and Agamemnon can be understood. Whereas Teucer insisted upon a proper burial for Ajax out of deference to the divine laws governing such practices, Agamemnon allowed his personal grudge against Ajax to cloud his judgement. As a result, Agamemnon utilized

36 Sophocles 2009, Line 1619-1936
the socially constructed hierarchy and his authority as the commander of the Greek forces to forbid anyone from providing Ajax a proper burial. The motif of tension between divine authority and power from human institutions appeared in Sophocles’ *Antigone* as well. King Creon’s decree to forbid the burial of Polynices mirrored Agamemnon’s decision as both men issued orders that directly violated divine norms in an attempt to overpower divine authority with human institutional power. However, both Agamemnon and Creon were ultimately convinced to back down and permit the burials in accordance with divine customs. These episodes thus illustrated the belief the Ancient Greeks held that divine authority ultimately held greater importance than socially constructed authority.

During the resolution of Teucer and Agamemnon’s impasse, Odysseus utilized his rhetorical mastery to both build up the validity of Teucer’s demands and demonstrate the irrational nature of Agamemnon’s orders. He first began by swaying the allies of Ajax to his side by effusively praising the hero. He then turned his attention to Agamemnon by engaging in a Socratic dialogue to sway the Spartan king into submission. The Ithacan utilized several effective tactics to formulate a cogent argument. Odysseus first began by establishing his own credibility by coaxing Agamemnon into admitting that he was his greatest friend and that his opinion was valued. Odysseus next relied on the authority of the gods to argue that all people, even one’s greatest enemy, deserved a proper burial. Odysseus also argued that affording Ajax a proper burial would not only be just but would afford advantages to Agamemnon himself. Initially unconvinced, Agamemnon

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37 Sophocles 2005
38 Sophocles 2009, Lines 1615-1619
39 Sophocles 2009, Line 1634-1936
stubbornly argued for greater deference to him by virtue of his status atop the Greek military hierarchy and for holding onto grudges. However, Odysseus ultimately convinced Agamemnon to see that the divine laws superseded any human quarrels and that Ajax’s excellence warranted a proper burial. After accepting Odysseus’ appeals, Agamemnon finally acquiesced to Teucer’s’ demands, allowing him and his allies to commence with the burial of Ajax. Given Sophocles’ position as the author of the tragedy, the tragedian was able to tailor the narrative and actions of the characters in order to illustrate a clear message. Sophocles’ utilization of Odysseus’ rhetorical abilities may have signaled the tragedian’s conviction about the importance of piety and the importance of divine laws and customs. The tragedian’s masterful employment of Agamemnon and Odysseus as representations of human hubris and appropriate humility and piety thus allowed Sophocles to infuse cogent social commentary into an entertaining tale.

Odysseus’ rhetoric and intervention marked a clear form of social disruption by actively challenging the authority of Agamemnon and his decrees. With Agamemnon seated firmly atop of the military structure of the Greeks, any dissent would be seen as a disruption to both the command of the Spartan king and the social fabric of the army itself. Thus, this dynamic is likely why Teucer’s firm defiance of Agamemnon’s decree engendered his wrath. However, while challenges to social order would usually be viewed negatively and condemned, Odysseus’ disruption of Agamemnon’s excessively rigid dogma actually ensured greater stability. By successfully petitioning for Ajax to receive a proper burial, Odysseus exposed that the laws of the gods superseded those of

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40 Sophocles 2009, Line 1649
the clouded judgement of mortals in this situation. In doing so, Odysseus ensured that a rift did not grow within the Greek army. By assuaging Ajax’s allies, Odysseus eliminated any potential for internal strife and conflict that would have arisen from the desecration of Ajax’s body. The specter of internal conflict illustrated that the fallout from Agamemnon’s inflexibility would have caused exponentially greater damage to the social fabric of the Greek army than Odysseus’ simple challenge of authority. Furthermore, it is important to note the stability Odysseus garnered for himself as a result of his conciliatory role as well. By advocating on behalf of Ajax, Odysseus successfully reshaped his identity in the eyes of Ajax’s allies from a reviled, cunning rival to an honorable comrade who could look beyond personal grudges to advocate for justice. As a result of his actions, Odysseus secured his own standing and stability in the army by reducing the number of his enemies. Thus, it is evident that Odysseus’ deployment of rhetoric to disrupt the army’s social hierarchy ultimately proved to be an inspired decision as it provided stability not only for his own standing, but the entire Greek army as well.

As Elodie Paillard noted in her article “Odysseus and the concept of ‘nobility’ in Sophocles’ Ajax and Philoctetes,” Odysseus’ adaptability made the Ithacan uniquely qualified to preserve social order. Teucer, Menelaus, and Agamemnon were all stubbornly dogmatic and rigid in their approach to a conflict that required nuance and flexibility. Paillard noted that Agamemnon’s rigidity was unsustainable and that his strict adherence to his inflexible values provided a façade of justice while actually threatening

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41 Paillard 2020, 69
to completely unravel the social order of the Greek army. Agamemnon’s personal grudge against Ajax blinded him to the laws of the gods as well as social convention, leaving him unable to resolve the situation. Rather than responding appropriately and rationally, Agamemnon lashed out with the fullest extent of his power by utilizing the authority derived from the socially constructed hierarchy of the Greek army to forbid a proper burial of Ajax. Similarly, Teucer’s strong conviction paired with a sharp tongue rendered him just as powerless to resolve the dispute as Agamemnon. Both men relied solely upon their own position and strengths in attempt bludgeon the other into agreement but failed to see the futility in their approach. While Agamemnon attempted to use his rank as commander of the Greeks to justify his denial of a proper burial, Teucer grounded his justification for burial in Ajax’s prowess in battle and numerous achievements in service of the Greeks. Both men’s failure to see the futility of reasoning with the other left them at an impasse and the stability of the Greek army at risk of imminent collapse.

Where both Agamemnon and Teucer failed, Odysseus’ unique characteristics ensured that he was the perfect mediator for the situation. Odysseus’ flexibility, ability to understand the big picture, and clever appeal to divine justice ultimately helped to stave off disaster and bloody internal strife within the Greek army. Odysseus’ flexibility was a quality neither Agamemnon nor Teucer possessed. While Odysseus was a target of Ajax’s rage just as Agamemnon was, Odysseus was able to put his own personal grudge aside in pursuit of greater stability within the Greek army. Odysseus’ ability to see the grand scheme of things also afforded him the perspective that Agamemnon’s denial of Teucer’s demands would only lead to internal strife and conflict, severely crippling the

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42 Paillard 2020, 70
order of the Greek army and its war effort. Finally, Odysseus’ unique position as a highly favored protégé of Athena lent credence to his appeal to the customs and divine laws of the gods, which was believed to mean that all people deserved a proper burial under any and all circumstances. This confluence of factors, along with Agamemnon’s deep trust in Odysseus, positioned the Ithacan to be the perfect candidate in preserving the stability of the Greek army. Although Odysseus breached the social convention of deference to leaders of higher rank in the military chain of command by openly dissenting, the Ithacan’s disruption actually safeguarded social stability. While social order was disrupted in the short term, this temporary disruption helped to safeguard the long-term stability of social order by staving off disastrous civil conflict. Thus, when evaluating Odysseus’ actions in the *Ajax*, it is clear that they ultimately had a positive impact by providing stability to the Greek army.

While Odysseus was deployed to demonstrate the positive impacts of oratory in the *Ajax*, Sophocles utilized him in *Philoctetes* to illustrate the destructive effects of rhetoric when employed to corrupt and deceive. In the lead up to Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*, the Greek army realized that it lacked a critical component in defeating the Trojans during the Trojan War: the bow of Heracles. Its owner, Philoctetes, had been abandoned on the island of Lemnos by the Greek army en route to Troy due to a festering wound on his foot caused by a snake bite. Unable to find a cure and unwilling to tolerate Philoctetes’ complaints, the Greeks then left Philoctetes with neither supplies nor shelter and continued on their campaign to Troy. This naturally fractured the relationship between Philoctetes and the rest of the Greeks beyond all repair. This stalemate continued for ten years, until the Greeks received a prophecy from a Trojan seer that they would
need both Philoctetes and his bow to win the war. This left the Greeks with no choice but to attempt to secure Philoctetes and his bow’s services by any means necessary.

The action in *Philoctetes* began with Odysseus in dialogue with Neoptolemus, the son of the fallen warrior Achilles. In a fitting characterization, Neoptolemus displayed many of his father’s distinct characteristics and worldview, including a propensity for resolving conflict through combat, a penchant for obstinacy, and a commitment to a code of heroic ethics.\(^{43}\) These shared characteristics were on full display in Achilles’ negotiation with Odysseus in Book 9 of the *Iliad*. Dispatched on the orders of Agamemnon, Odysseus attempted to persuade Achilles to return to battle by promising glory and gifts, but his attempts ultimately fell upon deaf ears. Guided by a prophecy that foretold he would be fated to choose a long, unspectacular life in Phthia or a short, glorious life that would end on the battlefield, Achilles rebuffed Odysseus and chose to return to Phthia.\(^{44}\) After these efforts failed, Achilles’ mentor, Phoenix, attempted to sway Achilles to their side by telling the ancient story of Meleager, a warrior refused to help his friends in need while in a fit of rage.\(^{45}\) These efforts were ultimately in vain as Achilles’ stubbornness triumphed over any sense of duty to his allies. When Achilles was later finally spurred into action in the *Iliad*, it was not out of a sense of duty, but for a self-serving personal reason: to avenge the death of his closest friend Patroclus. Achilles’ treatment of the embassy sent by the Greeks and later about-face return to battle perfectly encapsulated the core tenets of the warrior’s character: stubbornness, a penchant to resort to combat as a means of conflict resolution, and a deep-set belief in a heroic code.

\(^{43}\) Sophocles 2017, Lines 103-115
\(^{44}\) Homer 2010, Book 9, Lines 516-522
\(^{45}\) Homer 2010, Book 9, Lines 724-762
Sophocles’ presentation of Neoptolemus’ strikingly similar worldview to his father may have been an intentional artistic choice to draw parallels between Book 9 of the *Iliad* and *Philoctetes*. In doing so, the tragedian tapped into the intertextuality that most in the audience likely would have recognized to set up a brilliant twist: that while Neoptolemus shared many of the characteristics of his father, he would ultimately fail in resisting Odysseus’ entreaties where his father succeeded. Odysseus, through his rhetorical prowess, slowly ground down Neoptolemus’ resistance to his deceptive plan. By emphasizing the importance of securing Philoctetes’ bow and the glory that would result from successfully deceiving Philoctetes, Odysseus eventually convinced a reluctant Neoptolemus to carry out the plan, even as it came at the expense of Neoptolemus’ morals.

Within the framework of the tragedy, it is plain to see that Odysseus had a disruptive impact upon the social fabric of the Greek army. While it may first appear that Odysseus’ deceitful tactics had a limited impact and scope by only influencing Neoptolemus, the Ithacan’s impact extended far beyond Neoptolemus himself. Cut from the same cloth as his father Achilles, Neoptolemus was utilized by Sophocles as the physical embodiment of the established Ancient Greek warrior ethos and moral code. In accordance with this ethos, Neoptolemus did not believe in deceitful rhetorical tricks, but in resolving conflicts through open and fair combat. By contrast, Odysseus was deployed by Sophocles to embody an alternative, destabilizing challenge to this established moral code. Odysseus did not seek to resolve conflicts in an open, hand-to-hand combat. Rather, Odysseus instead preferred to remain in the shadows by utilizing rhetorical appeals to glory, duty, and the greater good to secure the cooperation of other warriors to
serve as proxies for his ends. Furthermore, Odysseus spread his manipulative methods to impressionable young warriors, thus converting them to his side and away from the traditional morality of Greek warriors. Thus, Odysseus’ disruption of social order was not one of open conflict, but rather an undetectable dissemination, infiltration, and corruption of traditional morality in the minds of young warriors. While Odysseus ultimately succeeded in convincing Neoptolemus to deploy rhetorical deception to deceive Philoctetes, the Ithacan’s plan ultimately failed as Neoptolemus revealed the ruse to Philoctetes while returning his bow to him. While Odysseus’ plan did not fully come to fruition, Neoptolemus’ original plan to take Philoctetes’ bow by force did not either, leaving the tragedy at an impasse.

To resolve the situation, Sophocles ultimately deployed Heracles as a *deus ex machina* by having Heracles use his own rhetorical mastery to spur Philoctetes into action. This choice may have resonated deeply with Athenian audiences, as the city was in the midst of a cultural shift at the time of the original performance of *Philoctetes* in 409 BC. New individuals were afforded unprecedented social mobility and political power on the basis of their rhetorical prowess. While some welcomed this newfound social mobility, others who traditionally held uncontested power felt that the new influence offered by oratory was an existential threat to their social position and to the very fabric of Athens itself. With the knowledge that the audience was deeply divided about the role of rhetoric in Athens, Sophocles didn’t provide an explicit endorsement for either side. The tragedian instead chose to simply make an observation: that the old and new guard of Athens were locked in a battle to shape the city’s political future in their own image. By not choosing a side, Sophocles allowed the tragedy to act as a
metaphorical Rorschach test, with the political perspective of each audience member likely coloring their judgement of the action on stage. Those who were disturbed by the rising power afforded by rhetoric in Athens may have focused on how Odysseus and his deceitful rhetoric managed to exert an outsized influence on the events of the narrative while having the least time on stage of any of the characters. Odysseus not only reduced those around him to mere cogs in his schemes, but also directly threatened to corrupt the morality that guided Greek warriors. Conversely, those who supported the newfound power of persuasive oratory may have latched onto Heracles’ usage of rhetoric in a non-manipulative, socially beneficial manner. As Heracles’ words ultimately persuaded Philoctetes to return, it is evident that his rhetoric contributed to the ultimate victory of the Greeks in the Trojan War, thus allowing for the re-establishment of stability in Hellenic society. By illuminating the capacity of rhetoric for both nefarious and virtuous purposes, Sophocles not only cleverly infused the play with cogent social commentary, but also created cultural touchstones that Athenians could use to debate the merits of rhetoric.

Odysseus’ actions remain just as polarizing in the modern day as in Ancient Athens, as in Martha Nussbaum’s article “Consequences and Character in Sophocles’ Philoctetes,” Nussbaum argued in defense of Odysseus and his actions. Nussbaum noted that Odysseus was both a pragmatist and a utilitarian who was willing to undertake any strategy for the benefit of the greater good. As Nussbaum wrote, “Odysseus is an instrument of the common good, seeking not personal glory, but the best possible outcome for all. As a perfectly flexible tool of the general welfare, there is nothing he

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46 Nussbaum 1976, 30
will not do, not because he is entirely lacking in standards, but because he holds that the resulting general good is the only important standard.” Under this view, Nussbaum framed Odysseus’s deception of Neoptolemus not only as not shameful but also justified due to its ultimate effect of winning the Trojan War. While Nussbaum justified Odysseus’ actions via a strict utilitarian worldview, she conceded that his actions are ultimately callous and dehumanizing. The abandonment Philoctetes along with the reduction of both Neoptolemus and Philoctetes to mere means to an end clearly highlighted the cold calculus Odysseus viewed the world through.

While it may be tempting to simply excuse Odysseus’ actions as justified through a purely utilitarian calculus, the broader effects of such actions must be taken into account when evaluating their morality. While it is true that Odysseus’ deception ultimately led to victory in Trojan War, his schemes came at a large cost to others, such as Neoptolemus. Odysseus’ exploitation of his own status as a senior figure in the Greek army and a trusted ally of Neoptolemus’ father Achilles likely helped him to win the complete trust of Neoptolemus. Neoptolemus trusted in Odysseus so fully that he agreed to Odysseus’ deceitful tactics, even when they came in direct conflict his innate moral and ethical sensibilities. After executing Odysseus’ plan and successfully deceiving Philoctetes, the son of Achilles was wracked with sharp pangs of guilt as he had come to realize that his participation in Odysseus’ deception was morally unacceptable. Feeling a need to resolve the moral conflict consuming him, Neoptolemus ultimately returned the bow of Philoctetes that he obtained through deception, in spite of Odysseus’ threat that

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47 Nusbaum 1976, 31-32
48 Sophocles 2017, Lines 1187-1194
the Greeks would punish him for such an action. Furthermore, it is clear to see that Odysseus’ reduction of Neoptolemus into a useful pawn left considerable damage to Neoptolemus’ psyche. This is evidenced by Sophocles’ representation of Neoptolemus as scarred after being goaded into compromising his own moral values and using deception for illicit gain, even in the service of the greater good. Additionally, Neoptolemus’ reputation would also likely have suffered in the eyes of his fellow warriors, which was especially damaging in a society which placed immense value upon one’s reputation, as Odysseus himself knew so well. In evaluating this episode along with Odysseus’ previous schemes, an important Odyssean pattern emerges. While they secured victory for the Greeks or Odysseus, they often came at a great cost to those around him: Neoptolemus, Dolon from the *Iliad*, and those around him in the *Odyssey*.

By virtue of his famed rhetorical ability and malleable morality, Odysseus served as a fitting vehicle to deliver social commentary in an evolving Athens. As illustrated in the *Iliad*, *Ajax*, and *Philoctetes*, the impact of Odysseus’ oratorical skills was rarely clear cut. Instead, depending on the purposes with which the author wished to deploy Odysseus, the Ithacan was capable of affirming or razing social order and conventional conceptions of morality with his rhetoric. While Odysseus’ rhetorical mastery could have been used to rally the morale of a downtrodden army, it could also be deployed to corrupt an impressionable young warrior into lying and deceiving. Sophocles utilized Odysseus to great effect in the *Ajax* by using his famed rhetorical mastery to successfully argue for the importance of dispensing justice and adhering to the laws of the gods, even in the face of personal feuds. By contrast, Odysseus was employed by Sophocles in the *Philoctetes*

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49 Sophocles 2017, Lines 1656-1666
to demonstrate how the same rhetorical mastery could be used to twist words and ideas in service of deception and trickery, with wanton disregard for conventional norms and morality. These competing demonstrations of the power of oratory and rhetoric likely engendered strong feelings of contemporary Athenians watching the action unfold on stage. Those who welcomed the new social mobility afforded by oratory would likely have gravitated towards the Odysseus displayed in *Ajax*, while others felt acutely threatened by this new development would likely have pointed to the Odysseus of *Philoctetes* to illustrate the potential dangers of the rising influence of oratory. Amidst the backdrop of competing interpretations of Odysseus, it is clear to see that his versatile and morally complex character proved to be the perfect fit for a city grappling with their own complex relationship with power, politics, and persuasive elocution.
Chapter 3: The Power of Batman

While the Batmobile, Batcave, and various gadgets are iconic components to the character of Batman, perhaps the most important is the power vested in the identity of Batman as a symbol of justice. The Bruce Wayne of Christopher Nolan’s *The Dark Knight Trilogy* created and utilized the alter ego of Batman to effect change across Gotham, resulting in wide ranging impacts extending far beyond Wayne himself. I argue that this phenomenon not only set Nolan’s rendition of Batman apart from other contemporary superheroes, but also made Batman well suited for Nolan to provide social commentary with. For most superheroes, the extent of their power and impact upon their communities begins and ends with the abilities of the heroes themselves. Without the heroes’ constant presence and intervention in the city, their impact and influence simply wither away. While most heroes may have garnered respect and adulation from their fellow citizens, few heroes have been able to inspire their citizens to join in their crusade. This ultimately confined the power of the hero to their superhuman feats, thus precluding the possibility of effecting change beyond their own heroic acts.

One such hero that illustrates this paradigm is the hero Iron Man from the Marvel Cinematic Universe. While Tony Stark was enormously powerful and influential when wearing the Iron Man armor, Stark ultimately received little buy-in from ordinary citizens into the symbology and message of the Iron Man persona. One possible explanation for this apathy may be due to the factors that inspired Stark to adopt the Iron Man mantle. In the 2008 film *Iron Man*, Stark was the head of the highly successful weapons manufacturing company, Stark Industries. These weapons were sold for use in the

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50 Favreau 2008
Middle East, where they brought death and destruction to civilians. With these sales funding his flamboyant and extravagant lifestyle, Stark cared little for the destruction his weapons caused until he himself became a victim of them. During a trip to the Middle East to personally deliver a new array of weapons to the front lines, Stark was seriously injured by a falling bomb manufactured by Stark Industries. A piece of the bomb’s shrapnel became embedded in his chest, threatening to inch its way to his heart and serving as a powerful reminder of the destruction his weapons brought. Stark was then rescued by a local doctor, who created a powerful electromagnet that held the shrapnel at bay, giving Stark a second chance at life in the process. Now painfully aware of the destruction his weapons caused, Stark was thus utterly consumed by a feeling of guilt and decided to reform both his life and Stark Industries. Stark did so by announcing the immediate shutdown of the weapons manufacturing division of Stark Industries while creating the Iron Man persona to protect civilians from harm. Stark’s creation of the Iron Man persona was thus fundamentally and inextricably linked to a desire to repent for his past. While a powerful motivating force for Stark himself, ordinary citizens likely would not have had the same feelings of guilt from being indirectly responsible for death and destruction. The inability of ordinary citizens to relate to the driving force behind the Iron Man persona thus likely prevented the residents of Stark’s world from adopting Iron Man’s mission: to protect civilians from further harm. With ordinary citizens demonstrating little to no motivation to adopt the ethos of Iron Man in their own lives, Stark was ultimately isolated as the sole participant in his crusade. Thus, it is evident that there was Iron Man had not power beyond the physical capabilities of the hero himself. Furthermore, as a consequence of director Jon Favreau’s decision to center Iron Man
upon Stark’s subsequent heroic exploits as Iron Man rather than upon the impacts of the military-industrial complex, social commentary played a much smaller role in Iron Man than in Nolan’s The Dark Knight Trilogy.

Bruce Wayne’s methodical approach to crafting his identity as Batman provided a fascinating counterpoint to Stark’s approach as Iron Man. Wayne’s approach from the outset was to create an incorruptible symbol in order to take on a well-defined mission: to combat and correct the corruption plaguing Gotham that its existing institutions were powerless to solve. To achieve this end, Wayne carefully crafted the persona of Batman as an icon that ordinary citizens could rally behind. Furthermore, the fundamental motivating force behind the creation of the Batman persona was one that was both relatable and inspirational. Wayne was driven to create the avatar of Batman as a means to shield Gothamites from the consequences of criminal activity due to his personal experience and trauma with crime in Gotham, as his parents were murdered by the rogue gunman Joe Chill. Due to the extensive and pervasive nature of crime in Gotham, it is likely that most citizens would have been had some experience with the effects and consequences of crime. This phenomenon is clearly illustrated by a scene from Batman Begins where Rachel Dawes, Wayne’s childhood friend and assistant District Attorney, drove through an impoverished and crime ridden section of Gotham. Summarizing the state of Gotham, Rachel stated, “This city is rotting. They talk about the depression as if it’s history. It’s not. Things are worse than ever here. Falcone floods our streets with crime and drugs…. preying on the desperate, creating new Joe Chills every day.” 51 As a result of this shared experience among Gotham’s citizens, Batman’s mission to stop

51 Nolan 2005, 0:26:40 to 0:26:52
crime would likely have been highly resonant, as they too would have had a personal connection to the effects of crime. In this manner, Wayne successfully received significant public investment into the mission of Batman, thereby extending the power of Batman far beyond Wayne’s physical abilities in the suit.

The gradual growth of the power vested in the avatar of Batman by Gotham’s citizens can be traced through each installment of Christopher Nolan’s *The Dark Knight Trilogy*. In *Batman Begins*, the citizens of Gotham welcomed Batman’s crusade against crime, as only Batman was willing and able to take on the pervasive corruption in the city ignored by Gotham’s institutions. 52 While Gothamites welcomed the change brought to the city, they adopted a passive role in Batman’s campaign, content to allow Batman to clean up the corruption in Gotham. In *The Dark Knight*, small segments of Gotham joined in Batman’s crusade by dressing up in crude, homemade Batman costumes and patrolling the streets of Gotham. 53 Batman’s relationship with Gothamites finally reached its final form in *The Dark Knight Rises*, as groups of citizens fully adopted the ethos and methods of Batman to resist a takeover of Gotham by the terrorist Bane. 54 Their resistance represented the final evolution in Gotham’s relationship with the symbol of Batman, as the citizens actively fought to protect their city, even with the man in the suit incapacitated and imprisoned thousands of miles from the city. Nolan’s methodical and deliberate choice to portray Batman’s intricate relationship with the rest of Gotham ultimately served several important purposes in the trilogy. First, Nolan’s immersion of viewers into the world of the characters provided audiences with a full view of Batman’s

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52 Nolan 2005
53 Nolan 2008
54 Nolan 2012
actions and the reactions of Gotham’s citizens. In doing so, Nolan created a fully fleshed out society in Gotham with recognizable parallels to the society of audiences. By tying the two societies together, Nolan effectively amplified the impact of his social commentary as discussion of social issues explored in the films could thus serve as effective proxies for similar issues in the real world. In doing so, Nolan transformed the films from merely pieces of entertainment to effective platforms for debate and discussion for viewers.

In *Batman Begins*, Nolan’s depiction of Bruce Wayne’s journey in crafting a new crime fighting alter ego demonstrated the incredible impact one person can have in shaping the world around them. At the beginning of the film, a young Bruce Wayne experienced the trauma of witnessing the murder of his parents by the street thug Joe Chill, leaving him an orphaned child in the care of only his loyal butler Alfred. Following the tragedy, Wayne felt a sense of tremendous sadness and guilt, as he felt that it was his actions that led to the murder of his parents. His fear of bats, paired with the depiction of bats on the stage of an opera he attended with his parents, led to the Waynes leaving the theatre via a dark alley, where tragedy struck. While Alfred attempted to console the young boy by insisting it wasn’t his fault, the guilt within Bruce never subsided. The sadness eventually gave way to a deep-set anger, leading Wayne to conclude that the only way justice could be served was for him to take revenge by murdering the responsible gunman. However, to his dismay, Wayne’s plan was ultimately foiled as mobsters murdered Chill before Wayne could get a chance to. Upon discovering how close Bruce came to murder, his childhood friend Rachel Dawes became disgusted and lectured him on the difference between justice and revenge. While Wayne insisted that they were one
and the same, Rachel firmly disagreed and argued that “Justice is about harmony. Revenge is about you making yourself feel better.”\textsuperscript{55} With his worldview in tatters, Wayne gradually adopted Rachel’s view of justice and decided to reform his life by channeling his anger into a new, productive avenue: seeking a means with which to fight injustice. Wayne then proceeded to travel the world in search of physical training and education into the criminal mind. With his training complete, Wayne returned to Gotham with his newfound skills and purpose: to correct the corruption in the city that its existing institutions were powerless to fix. Before embarking on his crusade, Wayne astutely noted the need to craft an alter ego with which to amplify his message. As Wayne declared, “People need dramatic examples to shake them out of their apathy. I can’t do that as Bruce Wayne. As a man, I’m flesh and blood. I can be ignored, destroyed. But as a symbol…I can be incorruptible. I can be everlasting.”\textsuperscript{56} With this in mind, Wayne set out to craft his own mythology and narrative around Batman, paralleling Odysseus’ tight control over his own identity. The creation of the avatar of Batman as an anonymous vigilante crimefighter thus provided an extremely effective platform for Wayne’s crusade.

One key element of the Batman persona was the hero’s vigilantism as it afforded him the ability to sidestep the corruption that stymied previous efforts to combat crime in Gotham. With powerful individuals at every level of government, including police officers, judges, and city council members paid off by the mob, any effort to create reform from within the system was destined to fail. One scene that saliently illustrated the impotence and failure of Gotham’s legal system was Police Commissioner Loeb’s angry

\textsuperscript{55} Nolan 2005, 0:26:17 to 0:26:32  
\textsuperscript{56} Nolan 2005, 0:42:00 to 0:42:18
tirade against Batman. Although Batman had captured the mob boss Carmine Falcone along with the necessary evidence to sentence him to jail, Loeb still condemned Batman and his actions. As Loeb stated himself, “Unacceptable. Now I don’t care if it’s rival gangs, Guardian Angels or the goddamn Salvation Army…. get them off the street, and off the front page.” When confronted with the fact that Batman had been able to do what the police were unwilling to by Sergeant Gordon, one of the few uncorrupted police officers in Gotham, Loeb merely angrily retorted that “No one takes the law into their own hands in my city, understand?” Although Batman had delivered the justice that the Gotham’s corrupted police force could not, the police commissioner remained rigidly fixated on stamping out Batman’s vigilantism as a means of presenting a façade that Gotham’s institutions had not utterly failed in their duties to Gotham’s citizens. As a result, Commissioner Loeb’s myopic focus upon eliminating Batman’s vigilantism rather than reforming the corruption within the police force served as an ironic microcosm for the utter failure of Gotham’s institutions to address the roots of Gotham’s injustices. Thus, by operating outside the very institution that perpetuated and protected the corruption within Gotham, Batman’s vigilantism freed him to deliver justice to Gotham. Furthermore, Batman’s anonymity and strict moral code provided another layer of protection against the corruption of the mob. Without a target to bribe, the mob’s standard strategy to eliminate their opposition was effectively rendered useless. Finally, the theatricality of Batman’s methods provided a strong deterrent against criminal activity. Batman’s frequent and unpredictable interventions rendered the entire city of

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57 Nolan 2005, 1:05:54 to 1:06:18
58 Nolan 2005, 1:05:54 to 1:06:02
59 Nolan 2005, 1:06:12 to 1:06:14
Gotham into a metaphorical panopticon, as the mere mention of Batman would be enough to cause even hardened criminals to tremble in fear. This phenomenon was clearly illustrated when Batman prepared to raid the villain Scarecrow’s secret drug production facility. Upon hearing of the impending arrival of Batman, both Scarecrow and his henchmen immediately grew more anxious and fearful and sought to flee, thus clearly illustrating the power the idea of Batman held over Gotham’s criminals. Thus, Batman’s unique status as a vigilante, anonymity, and theatricality provided Wayne an incorruptible symbol of justice with which to reform a city teeming with corruption.

The importance of the Batman persona was also recognized by Grant Gerhart, as he noted in his article “Suiting up the Hero: Legacies of Medieval and Renaissance Armor and Identity in Christopher Nolan’s Batman Begins” that Batman’s self-fashioning of his identity was a critical component to his heroism. This identity, when paired with his exploits, helped to cement Batman’s status as a hero in the eyes of those around him. One element of the self-fashioning of Batman’s identity was the Batsuit itself. Gearhart noted the functional similarities between the Batsuit and armor for medieval knights, with both serving critical symbolic and pragmatic purposes for their wearers. The symbolic function of the creation of the Batsuit, as Gearhart noted, was to clearly demarcate Wayne’s transformation from a civilian to Batman. Gearhart wrote that just as medieval knights would finally don their full armor as a marker of the completion of their training and the beginning of their new status as a full-fledged knight, so too did Batman. A scene from *Batman Begins* detailed this process by depicting Wayne’s

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60 Nolan 2005, 1:26:47 to 1:29:00
61 Gearhart 2017
62 Gearhart 2017, 669
meticulous preparation and assembly of the Batsuit in the Batcave. Wayne underwent a rigorous process of crafting of the suit by conducting various tests of its components and gadgets, before finally completing the suit by spraying it with black paint to create its iconic look.\textsuperscript{63} With the creation of the suit completed, the symbolic and pragmatic purpose of the suit became clear: to provide physical protection for Wayne and to signify “when Bruce Wayne enters crime-fighting mode.”\textsuperscript{64}

Gearhart also noted the critical importance of the symbolism of Batman to Gotham and Wayne’s larger mission by drawing a parallel between Bruce’s plan and his father Thomas’ failed efforts to revive Gotham. Thomas had tried to leverage his social and political power to lift Gotham out of poverty, but ultimately failed miserably. As Alfred noted, “In the Depression, your father nearly bankrupted Wayne Enterprises combating poverty. He believed that his example could inspire the wealthy of Gotham to save their city.”\textsuperscript{65} Thomas’ efforts almost wiped out the most powerful company in Gotham, but ultimately gained little traction. Ironically, it was not Thomas’ philanthropy that stirred wealthy Gothamites into action, but instead the barbaric attack on the Waynes that led to some change. After a cursory analysis, Gearhart then concluded that Wayne adopted vigilantism as a direct response to Thomas’ failures. However, Gearhart failed to note the underlying factors that guided Wayne’s decision. After learning of his father’s failed attempts to reform Gotham’s institutions from the inside, Wayne realized the futility of attempting to reshape Gotham through political and philanthropic efforts alone. Instead, Wayne took note of the power of dramatic symbols to shake Gothamites out of

\begin{footnotes}
\item [63] Batman Begins, 0:52:41 to 0:52:56
\item [64] Gearhart 2017, 670
\item [65] Nolan 2005, 0:41:43 to 0:41:52
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their apathy. The unique ability of symbols to remain incorruptible and everlasting provided them with power absent in a human campaign for reform, even by someone as powerful as Thomas Wayne. The regression of Gotham back to a state of corruption following Thomas’ death clearly demonstrated the fallibility of a human approach, as Thomas’ reforms fizzled out without him. Armed with this understanding, Wayne thus crafted the alter ego of Batman to finally deliver lasting change. By remaining anonymous, Wayne not only neutralized the dangers that befell his father, but also democratized his mission by providing inspiration for Gothamites to join his crusade, as they too could identify with an ordinary citizen fighting corruption. Furthermore, the lack of an identifiable figure to neutralize struck fear directly into the hearts of criminals, as they could not identify their invisible enemy. Thus, Batman’s multifaceted identity, from his ability to inspire citizens and terrify criminals, offered Wayne a powerful tool with which to positively reshape Gotham.

In *The Dark Knight*, the Joker’s maniacal mission to destabilize Gotham by corrupting the symbol of Batman clearly demonstrated the power the identity held not just for Wayne himself, but for his enemies and emulators alike. The film opened with a survey of the shockwaves Wayne’s crusade sent through Gotham after the events of *Batman Begins*. The criminals that Batman terrorized grew both increasingly fearful and violent. The threat of Batman disrupting their operations drove the mob to adopt new, escalatory tactics. Whereas mobsters previously strolled freely in Gotham’s chaotic underbelly before the existence of Batman, they now carefully kept illegal business dealings to a minimum while arming themselves with increasingly powerful weapons. In response to this growing threat and inspired by Batman’s example, a small number of
Gotham’s citizens began taking to the streets in emulation of Batman’s vigilantism to join in the hero’s fight against corruption. Dressed in crude, homemade versions of the Batsuit, the “Batmen” patrolled Gotham armed with various firearms, in the hopes of pushing back against the tide of escalating crime. The growing power of Batman as a symbol became clear, as these emulators were clearly inspired by Batman’s vigilantism and decided to adopt his methods. While these emulators represented the realization of Batman’s plan to inspire the people of Gotham, the hero curiously rejected their help. During a scene in which the knock off “Batmen” shot at mobsters in an attempt to foil a drug exchange in a secluded parking garage, Batman intervened and accosted both the “Batmen” and mobsters. After being handcuffed with the mobsters and left for the police, one emulator angrily asked, “What gives you the right?! What's the difference between you and me?!” While Batman’s sharp retort of, “I’m not wearing hockey pads” provided comic relief for the audience, it offered a rare glimpse into the psyche of the hero. Presented with the poignant question of why Batman was allowed to take justice into his own hands while the “Batmen” are not, Wayne’s response illustrated that vigilantism was not justified simply out of a desire to stop crime. Rather, for vigilantism to be justified, the desire to stop crime must be paired with a strict moral compass that prohibited the delivery of justice unilaterally. Batman’s vigilantism embodied this paradigm, as his famous rule of no killing left the determination of the punishment for the crime to a third party. By contrast, the “Batmen’s” use of guns would imply that their approach to vigilantism would have made them judge, jury, and executioner. Nolan’s
clever deployment of Batman in this scene clearly illuminated the gradations and complexities of vigilantism. By contrasting the “Batmen’s” violent unilateral version of justice with Batman’s strict adherence to a separation of legal powers, Nolan effectively spotlighted Batman’s commitment to a justice rooted in harmony rather than revenge. As a result, Batman’s claim to be incorruptible was strengthened, a quality at the heart of Batman’s later conflict with the Joker.

The power of the symbol of Batman manifested itself in its power over the Joker as well, as the villain was irresistibly drawn to the Dark Knight and exhibited a maniacal obsession in trying to tear down Batman as a symbol for justice. Throughout the course of the film, the Joker set various schemes into motion with one singular goal: to destabilize Gotham by coercing Batman into breaking his moral code, thus destroying any credibility vested in Batman as a symbol for justice. In the first half of the film, the Joker set a plan in motion in an attempt to draw out Batman for a confrontation. To do so, the Joker began ruthlessly murdering civilians, with the threat of more murders for every day Batman did not reveal his secret identity to Gotham. Knowing that Batman’s modus operandi was to protect as many civilians from injustice as possible while maintaining his anonymity, the Joker effectively ensnared Batman into a Catch-22. Unable to accomplish both of his goals simultaneously, Batman was therefore trapped in an unwinnable dilemma, exerting severe stress upon the hero. Unwilling to sacrifice his anonymity due to its function as a key pillar in his fight against crime, Batman did not immediately respond. In response, the Joker delivered upon his promises and continually added to a rising civilian death toll. Unable to tolerate the escalating violence, Harvey

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69 Nolan 2008, 0:43:12 to 0:43:34
Dent then held a widely publicized press conference to falsely claim that he was the Batman in the hopes of appeasing the Joker. While successful in stopping the Joker’s indiscriminate massacre of civilians, Dent’s actions spawned the Joker’s next plan: an assassination attempt on Dent to destabilize Gotham further.

The attempt on Dent’s life was ultimately foiled by Batman, leading to the Joker being taken into police custody and interrogated by the hero. During this interrogation, the Joker’s responses to Batman revealed the importance he placed upon the hero in his worldview. As Batman questioned the Joker over his attempts to kill him, the Joker cackled and corrected him. The Joker gleefully said, “I don’t want to kill you. What would I do without you? Go back to ripping off mob dealers? You complete me.” The Joker further illuminated his beliefs by mocking Batman’s belief in justice and order, saying, “Don’t talk like one of them. You’re not, even if you’d like to be. To them, you’re a freak like me.” These quotes clearly illustrated the villain’s deep-set belief that he and Batman were intrinsically linked, merely two sides of the same coin. Nolan’s effective usage of dialogue in this scene thus provided a fascinating glimpse into the mind of the otherwise enigmatic villain while foreshadowing the Joker’s next scheme.

Determined to obliterate Gotham’s social stability by any means necessary, the Joker then decided to attempt to corrupt Batman, the incorruptible pillar of Gotham’s stability. Upon escaping from police custody, the Joker resumed his plan to break Batman by further escalating his schemes by capturing hostages and hiding them in an undisclosed location in Gotham. With the threat of executing the hostages if Batman did not intervene in time, the Joker effectively ensnared Batman in yet another difficult

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70 Nolan 2008, 1:27:56 to 1:28:12
dilemma: to rigidly uphold his morality or to rescue the hostages. Batman ultimately chose the latter, temporarily sacrificing protections of civil liberties in the process by wiretapping the unwitting and unconsenting citizens of Gotham in order to rescue the hostages. By driving Batman into yet another difficult dilemma of choosing between saving the lives of the hostages and violating rights privacy, it is evident once again that the Joker’s interest in tearing down the mythology of Batman demonstrated the immense power of vested in Batman as a symbol for justice. In the final scene between the pair, the Joker made one last ditch effort to corrupt Batman by forcing the hero to throw him off a building. Faced with the proposition of upholding his own moral code of not killing and the benefits of allowing gravity to eliminate the threat of the Joker, Batman rejected the utilitarian calculus that would have driven him to let the Joker fall. Instead, the Dark Knight remained steadfast in his commitment to his moral code, leading him to break the Joker’s fall and save his life. Upon experiencing this, the Joker finally admitted defeat, admitting that Batman truly was incorruptible. Through their final interaction, it is evident that Batman’s identity held extraordinary power over the Joker as he was willing to sacrifice his own life in a final attempt to force the Dark Knight into breaking his own moral code.

The special bond between Batman and the Joker in the Nolan trilogy was noted by Michael Nichols in his article “‘I Think You and I Are Destined to Do This Forever’: A Reading of the Batman/Joker Comic and Film Tradition through the Combat Myth.” In an analysis of their relationship, Nichols suggested that Batman’s presence in Gotham as a physical manifestation of order led to the inevitable appearance of a villain representing

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72 Nolan 2008, 2:12:35 to 2:13:40
73 Nichols 2011
the physical manifestation of chaos: the Joker. To aid his analysis, Nichols overlaid the combat myth paradigm seen in other mythologies onto Batman and the Joker, with Batman representing the figure of order and the Joker as the chaos monster that rose to challenge him. As Nichols detailed, it was inevitable that a villain like the Joker would arise in Gotham.\footnote{Nichols 2011, 246} This view was reflected in the films by both Gordon and Alfred, two of Batman’s closest associates. Gordon noted at the end of \textit{Batman Begins} that Batman’s rapid success against organized crime drove the mob to increasingly escalatory methods. Alfred amplified Gordon’s sentiments when explaining to Wayne that as a result of the immense pressure exerted by Batman’s success, the mob turned to a force they did not fully understand nor control as a result of Batman’s success: the Joker.

Furthermore, even characters not directly involved in Batman’s crusade attributed responsibility for the Joker’s actions to Batman. Commissioner Gordon’s wife angrily blamed Batman for bringing the craziness and danger of the Joker upon Gotham upon learning of the false report of Gordon’s death.\footnote{Nolan 2008, 1:03:18 to 1:03:46} As Nichols noted, “Rather than make the city safer, Batman’s efforts to achieve order seem to have engendered a newer, deadlier form of chaos.”\footnote{Nichols 2011, 246} Nolan’s deployment of the Joker as the byproduct of Batman’s crusade infused the film with a masterful twist of irony. Nolan’s decision to depict the Joker as the dark shadow to the hope Batman brought and as an unintended, destructive byproduct of Batman’s crusade helped infuse greater depth to the hero. Equally capable of bringing order and hope to Gotham or spawning an existential threat to Gotham, the duality

\begin{footnotes}
\item[74] Nichols 2011, 246
\item[75] Nolan 2008, 1:03:18 to 1:03:46
\item[76] Nichols 2011, 246
\end{footnotes}
imbedded within Nolan’s Batman thus made the hero a fitting character for the morally complex era the films were made in.

In *The Dark Knight Rises*, Nolan’s removal of Batman from Gotham spotlighted the evolution of Gotham’s relationship with the power vested in the Batman identity. No longer solely dependent upon Wayne’s nocturnal exploits, the power of Batman to effect change in Gotham extended beyond Wayne himself. This can be clearly seen when examining the adoption of Batman’s ethos and crusade by Gotham’s citizens, even in the hero’s absence from Gotham. At the start of the film, a temporary peace was restored to Gotham, albeit at the steep cost of Batman’s reputation. Forced to take the fall for Harvey Dent’s murders in order to preserve the fragile peace Dent brought before his descent into villainy, Batman was wrongly condemned as a murderer by Gotham’s citizens. As a result, Bruce Wayne retired from life as Batman and locked himself away in a wing of Wayne Manor, passively allowing his body and spirit to deteriorate. Wayne’s self-imposed exile continued for 8 years until a new danger arose in Gotham: a terrorist coup spearheaded by the powerful villain Bane. Forced into action without the luxury of rebuilding his strength, Batman was easily defeated by Bane and sent to a remote prison to waste away and suffer. Without its watchful protector, Gotham was immediately plunged into crisis. However, while the man in the Batsuit had been forcibly removed from Gotham, the spirit and ethos of Batman lived on in its citizens. Discontent with the prospect of meekly acquiescing to Bane’s plans, a small group of citizens adopted the ethos and spirit of Batman to lead a resistance effort spearheaded by John Blake, an idealistic, young police officer. Over time, the resistance slowly grew more powerful, managing to even convince the previously reluctant and cynical Deputy Police
Commissioner to join their ranks. In a physical representation of their new status as Gotham’s guardians, the resistance fighters adopted Batman’s iconography as a symbol of hope, scrawling the marking across the city in an act of defiance during their reconnaissance missions.

The citizens’ adoption of the iconography of Batman during their resistance represented the final stage in the evolution of Batman’s relationship with Gotham. In the beginning of their relationship, Gothamites were content to allow Batman to clean up the city’s corruption alone in *Batman Begins*. Seen as a powerful tool capable of undertaking actions necessary to bring the mob to justice, Batman was hailed as a hero who could do what the established institutions within Gotham could not. In *The Dark Knight*, the power of Batman’s symbol continued to grow. Not only was it a driving force that motivated all of the Joker’s schemes, but it also inspired the first contingent of citizens to fight against corruption and crime. While Batman opposed his emulators’ methods of using lethal force due to their unilateral delivery of justice, their presence nonetheless demonstrated that the influence of Batman’s symbology had begun to spread beyond Wayne himself. Finally, in *The Dark Knight Rises*, the adoption of Batman’s ethos by Gotham’s residents was on full display, thus fulfilling Batman’s original mission. As director Christopher Nolan noted in an interview with *IndieWire*, “The only way to me that made sense was in a more realistic tone and taking on the idea of symbolism. The take on the idea that [Bruce Wayne] would see himself as a symbol who would motivate the good of Gotham to actually start working on their own, so he would be a catalyst for change, and tip the scales. And that’s always going to be a temporary process. To me it only made sense if you were looking at going okay, ‘I’m going to do this until the point where it’s not
needed.” The lasting legacy Batman had upon the citizens of Gotham was most evident in the closing moments of *The Dark Knight Rises*. By this time, the citizens of Gotham had fully adopted a vigilance against the injustice that plagued the city at the start of *Batman Begins*. Batman, both as a crime fighting hero and the originator of an ethos internalized by Gothamites, had become a fully-fledged check upon the corruption that plagued Gotham at the start of Wayne’s journey. This stood in stark contrast with the ending of *The Dark Knight*, in which the order and serenity brought to Gotham was a fragile one, contingent upon the noble lie about Harvey Dent and the false belief that Batman had transformed into an unhinged murderer. As a result, the citizens of Gotham completely rejected the ethos of Batman and demonized the hero, leaving the city vulnerable to potential dangers lurking in the darkness. Thus, the end of *The Dark Knight Rises* provided a fascinating counterpoint by displaying the restoration of the symbol of Batman to its former glory and the successful conclusion of Wayne’s original mission: inspired citizens of Gotham ready and willing to defend against corruption and injustice.

In summation, Batman’s impact stretched far beyond the man wearing the Batsuit. While other superheroes such as Iron Man had significant impacts upon their communities, their impact was limited to their physical interventions. With ordinary citizens disconnected from and powerless to aid Iron Man in his quest to defend against world threatening events, there was thus little power vested within the Iron Man persona to inspire citizens to join him in his crusade. By contrast, Batman was able not only able to impact Gotham through his physical interventions, but also by serving as an icon for justice. In doing so, Wayne successfully inspired Gotham’s citizens to join in Batman’s

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Perez 2012
mission to combat crime and corruption, thus achieving the reform that had eluded his father’s human campaign. By showcasing the growth of the power vested within Batman as a symbol for justice in each successive film in the trilogy, Nolan effectively left audiences with a poignant observation of society. Where institutions may be burdened by corruption or bureaucracy, change can begin from a single individual lighting a spark of hope in others, paving the way for a brighter future.
Chapter 4: Batman, Christopher Nolan, and a Post 9/11 America

In *The Dark Knight Trilogy*, Christopher Nolan frequently depicted Batman heroically emerging from the shadows of Gotham City to fight off criminals and combat injustice. While Batman’s heroics may garner much of the spotlight, these heroics often overshadow the morally complex courses of action Batman is forced to utilize to achieve such heroics. This chapter will argue that Nolan capitalized upon this phenomenon by placing Batman in moral quagmires that mirrored those faced by American government officials in the wake of the September 11th terrorist attacks to deliver cogent social commentary. Created in the mid to late 2000s, *The Dark Knight Trilogy* was deeply influenced by the events of the September 11th terrorist attacks and the subsequent response to counter and combat terrorism. Following the attacks, the American government immediately directed significant efforts to combat terrorism, passing new legislation that provided expanded powers to do so. While Americans were united in the belief of the importance of preventing future terrorist attacks, the extent of the new government powers deeply divided the American public. Amongst the backdrop of an America grappling with the complex moral question of balancing security with liberty, Nolan utilized Batman as an apt vehicle to explore these issues. Batman’s established vigilante status was particularly useful as it afforded Nolan the freedom to deploy the hero in morally complex situations directly mirroring those of the real world. Furthermore, Batman’s actions and responses to the dilemmas crafted by Nolan were useful for viewers as well. With segments of the public coming to widely varying opinions about Batman’s actions in the films, the trilogy thus effectively served as both a metaphorical Rorschach test and platform for debate, just as Sophocles’ tragedies did for
Athenian viewers. With the trilogy depicting the multifaceted impacts of Batman’s actions that brought both security and violations of social order, the films effectively became a sandbox for viewers to process a key question: how far would violations of civil liberties be tolerated in exchange for security?

In the film *Batman Begins*, the complex moral quagmire entrapping Batman lay in his navigation of the disconnect between a population desperate for justice and Gotham’s systemically corrupt legal institutions. The inability of Gotham’s legal institutions to fulfill their purpose (delivering justice and fighting corruption) thus created the perfect conditions for vigilantism to arise. As the film showed, Gotham City teemed with crime and corruption, effectively creating an unescapable vise for all its citizens, even its most powerful and wealthy. This was clearly seen as Thomas and Martha Wayne, billionaire philanthropists and respected pillars of the community, were murdered in a dark alley in front of their son, Bruce. In spite of Thomas’s best efforts to lift the city out of its problems, going so far as to almost bankrupt his company Wayne Enterprises, the inertia of corruption proved to be too great. Furthermore, the pervasiveness of corruption in the city’s judicial and governmental institutions ensured that any attempts to reform would end in failure. As evidenced by Bruce Wayne’s meeting with the mob boss Carmine Falcone, even the most powerful heads of institutions were not exempt from taking mob bribes, as Falcone proudly gloated about having union officials, city council members, and even judges under his control.78 Thus, realizing the futility of attempting to solve Gotham’s social ills within the system itself, Wayne decided instead to operate outside the law as a vigilante in hopes of sparking reform.

78 Nolan 2005, 0:28:45 to 0:29:10
It is precisely in Wayne’s decision to operate extrajudicially that highlighted the moral complexity of the conundrum Wayne found himself trapped in. Unable to effect change through traditional, institutional means yet facing potential condemnation for acting extrajudicially, Wayne was effectively stuck in a Catch-22. To resolve this issue, Wayne chose a middle ground, in which Batman’s actions would disrupt social order in the short term but deliver greater social stability in the long term. While it may appear paradoxical that Batman could deliver both social disorder and stability, it is important to note the distinction between the social orders Batman affected. The first social order was the validity and integrity of the rule of law. In an ideal society, the law is imagined to be to be an impartial and fair system to deliver justice. Thus, any extrajudicial attempts to deliver justice would be a direct challenge to the legal system, effectively undermining the stabilizing effect of impartial justice upon society. In this manner, Batman’s vigilantism, with its lack of oversight and regulation from elected officials, could be interpreted as undermining social order. However, the second social order that Batman upheld and protected was rooted in the protection of the public interest and the delivery of justice. Through this lens, it is apparent that Batman’s actions were consistently in service of justice and the public interest. In an ideal society, these two social orders would be intertwined, with the legal system serving to protect the public interest. However, the situation in Gotham clearly demonstrated that the city’s legal institutions were disconnected from operating in service of justice and the public interest.

The confluence of Gotham’s need for justice and the lack of uncorrupted legal institutions that could deliver it thus created a void waiting to be filled by Batman’s complex brand of vigilantism. Batman’s steadfast resolve to deliver justice led him to
shoulder the responsibilities of Gotham’s institutions ignored: standing up to and combatting the mob. This helped bring genuine, positive change to the city, reaffirming social stability and protecting the public interest in the process. However, Batman’s extrajudicial escapades fell outside of the scope of legal oversight, presenting a direct challenge to both the legal system itself and the societal norm of respecting the rule of law. This thus created a seemingly paradoxical conflict as Batman’s actions simultaneously stabilized and destabilized Gotham, by delivering the justice it needed but undermining the rule of law in the process. However, this conflict can be resolved by holistically evaluating Batman’s actions and understanding their impacts on different timescales. While Batman’s actions were in violation of the letter of the law, they were in accordance with the spirit of the law and of the public interest it served. Batman’s vigilantism disrupted the social order of Gotham in the short term by violating the social norms of respecting the law, but ultimately delivered greater social stability in the long term by delivering the justice Gotham deserved and restoring harmony to the city.

In his article “Unbalancing Justice,” Timothy Peters noted the failings of the legal system in Gotham.79 One instance came from Police Commissioner Loeb’s rigid and myopic application of the law, which blinded him to justice that served the public interest. Loeb condemned Batman for taking the law into his own hands and decreed that he must be stopped, while simultaneously ignoring the fact that he himself had failed in his charge to combat the mob’s corruption. Loeb’s myopic focus upon Batman’s violation of the letter of the law rather than the hero’s success in delivering justice thus clearly demonstrated a worldview centered around preserving deference to the legal

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79 Peters 2007
system rather than serving the public interest. As Peters argued, “The law fails to recognize the one who is operating for true justice, fighting against the evil that has overtaken the city. The law operates blind, unaware of what it is actually doing.”

Additionally, Peters noted the vigilantism of Batman in operating outside of the law of both the legal system as well as the cosmic system. While it is plain to see how Batman’s escapades strayed from the socially constructed legal system of Gotham, the hero’s break from cosmic law is less readily apparent. Peters defined the cosmic law as a system rooted in balance, in which a punishment proportionate to the transgression must be delivered to restore justice in the universe. In *Batman Begins*, Peters cited the cases of murders in Gotham City as well as the remote mountains where Wayne received his training as instances in which Batman was presented with the opportunity to deliver justice in accordance with cosmic law. In both scenarios, the cosmic law called for Batman to deliver capital punishment to restore balance. However, in both instances, Batman steadfastly refused to do so, citing his one rule: no killing. Batman’s refusal to kill ultimately led Peters to conclude that the Dark Knight’s rule was a subversion of the cosmic law. As Peters wrote, “As such, his life, his constitution as a subject, comes from beyond the law.”

While Peters views the Dark Knight’s actions as a complete subversion of both the cosmic and legal systems of law, his views fail to consider Batman’s role in preserving a core tenet of functional legal systems: the separation of the legal powers to judge, sentence, and punish a crime. Batman’s conscious decision to refrain from imposing unilateral justice to the criminals he apprehended demonstrated a firm

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80 Peters 2007, 256
81 Peters 2007, 256-257
commitment to this core tenet. While Batman identified and stopped crimes in progress, he never unilaterally sentenced a criminal nor punished them. Rather, Batman left sentencing and punishment to others, thus reflecting his commitment to the model of separated power. This was also reflected in Batman’s steadfast commitment to non-lethal weapons and restraint from using deadly force. If Batman were to kill the criminals he apprehended, he would act as judge, jury, and executioner. In doing so, he would therefore fail in his mission of delivering unbiased justice grounded in serving the public interest. Thus, while Batman disrupted Peters’ definition of cosmic law by refusing to deliver proportionate lethal punishment, he nevertheless reaffirmed his commitment to delivering an unbiased justice that neither Gotham’s legal system nor cosmic law could.

Batman’s complex relationship with the law in *Batman Begins* thus provided a useful canvas for Christopher Nolan to explore social issues surrounding security and civil liberties that dominated American society after 9/11. The heightened focus upon combatting terrorism deeply divided lawmakers in Washington as well as the American public. One question central to the debate was how to balance the constraints of the rule of law with the desire for greater latitude to undertake clandestine and extrajudicial counterterrorism activity. Some, such as former Vice President Dick Cheney, argued in favor of extrajudicial activity, insisting that such activities were effective and necessary.82 Others, such as Senator Patrick Leahy, argued against such an approach, noting the dangers and potential for human rights violations in extrajudicial activities.83 While Nolan did not give a direct answer to this debate, Batman’s complex relationship with the law and the public interest provided an interesting and nuanced model to

82 Cheney 2014
83 Leahy 2018
understand the debate that raged within American society. Those who felt strongly about the necessity of operating outside of the law to achieve counterterrorism objectives may have gravitated toward Batman’s success in achieving his objectives when unburdened by the constraints of law. Conversely, those who opposed extrajudicial activity by the American government may have pointed to the dangers of granting power without proper legal oversight. While Batman’s moral code prevented him from abusing his role as a vigilante, viewers in this camp may have been concerned with the potential consequences of granting similar powers to those who may not have shared in the hero’s restraint. Thus, the conversation around Batman and the law provided a useful proxy for audiences to discuss the tension between law and counterterrorism activities in the real world.

While Batman was deployed in *Batman Begins* to probe the relationship between vigilantism and the law, the hero was used to interrogate the balance of civil liberties and pursuit of security in *The Dark Knight*. This tension was illustrated in several key moments in *The Dark Knight*, beginning with Batman’s extrajudicial extradition of Lau, an accountant for the major mob families of Gotham and a prime target of Gotham’s law enforcement. In control of millions of dollars gained from illicit activities, the mob families found themselves directly in the crosshairs of the trio of Batman, Lieutenant Gordon and Harvey Dent, the city’s District Attorney. Feeling the pressure of the trio closing in upon their fortunes, Lau unilaterally moved the entirety of the funds offshore to Hong Kong in order to evade both Gordon and Dent’s jurisdiction. Frustrated at the escape of Lau to Hong Kong and therefore outside of their jurisdiction, Gordon and Dent furiously lamented their powerlessness. As Dent noted, “We need Lau back, but the
Chinese won't extradite a national under any circumstances.” It was then left up to Batman, who was unconstrained by legal jurisdiction, to kidnap Lau back to Gotham. While Lau was skeptical of Batman’s ability to conduct an such an extradition, the Joker sneered that “Batman has no jurisdiction. He'll find him and make him squeal.” The Joker’s words later proved to be remarkably prescient, as Batman successfully engineered a daring extraction of Lau by pulling him directly into a low-flying cargo plane from the top of a skyscraper. While both Gordon and Dent were constrained by the limits of jurisdiction in accordance with the legal system, Batman’s vigilantism afforded him the ability to deliver the results that the duo sought, albeit at the expense of Lau’s civil liberties.

Another notable example of the balance between delivering security and defending civil liberties came in Batman’s decision to wiretap the entirety of the unwitting civilian population of Gotham in a ploy to locate the Joker, who had instigated a hostage crisis. Feeling trapped and powerless to stop the Joker, Wayne turned to his close aid and butler Alfred for assistance and support. To help Wayne understand the Joker’s psyche and provide possible inspiration on how to combat him, Alfred relayed a story of his time in Burma. During his stay, Alfred and his partners attempted to buy the loyalty of local tribal leaders through bribes of precious stones. However, they were ultimately unsuccessful as a bandit repeatedly raided the caravans carrying the stones, foiling the bribes in the process. After realizing that the bandit had been simply stealing the gems for sport and throwing them away, Alfred concluded that some individuals

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84 Nolan 2008, 0:26:52 to 0:26:58
85 Nolan 2008, 0:24:44 to 0:24:49
simply could not be bullied nor reasoned with.\textsuperscript{86} To resolve the situation, Alfred resorted to extreme measures to combat the bandit by burning down the entire forest the thief had been hiding in.\textsuperscript{87} Taking the allegory to heart, Wayne came to understand the unpredictability of the Joker’s methods and thus escalated his own methods accordingly. To confront the Joker, Wayne then created a mass surveillance software that would allow himself to unilaterally wiretap every citizen in Gotham, effectively allowing him to see and hear everyone and everything in the city in order to locate the villain.\textsuperscript{88} Recognizing the vast array of violations of civil liberties in Wayne’s deployment of the surveillance software, Lucius Fox, his close ally, roundly criticized the software. Characterizing such software as immoral and unethical, Fox attempted to distance himself from the project. However, Batman’s insistence at the severity of the situation paired with a promise to destroy the software after capturing the Joker eventually assuaged Fox’s concerns, bringing Fox onboard. Batman’s surveillance program once again highlighted the tension between security and civil liberties, as the hero’s plan successfully delivered enhanced security but at the grave cost of Gothamites’ rights to privacy. By paralleling concerns in America over surveillance technology, Nolan once again placed Batman in a thought-provoking moral quagmire ripe for debate and discussion.

Mridual Bordoloi unpacked the effectiveness of the Joker’s methods in the article “Re-packaging Disaster Post 9/11 and Christopher Nolan’s \textit{The Dark Knight Trilogy},” by astutely articulating the fundamental reasoning behind the Joker’s ability to strike fear into the citizens of Gotham.\textsuperscript{89} As Bordoloi noted, “The Joker appears to be the bringer of

\textsuperscript{86} Nolan 2008, 0:54:16 to 0:55:14
\textsuperscript{87} Nolan 2008, 1:39:07 to 1:39:16
\textsuperscript{88} Nolan 2008, 1:55:44 to 1:57:02
\textsuperscript{89} Bordoloi 2012
anarchy as chaos for the sake of chaos. The rational state apparatus and its plans…are openly flouted by the ‘irrational’ villain whose motiveless malignancy does not seem to have much logic in terms of the structure of rational dimension”. ⁹⁰ This characterization clearly illustrated the foundation of the effectiveness of the Joker’s tactic as they left citizens feeling powerless, anxious, and desperate for someone to rise up and stop the Joker, regardless of the cost. In the article “The Dark Knight: Constructing Images of Good vs. Evil in an Age of Anxiety,” Nickie Phillips built upon Bordoloi’s analysis of the Joker by drawing parallels between the film and attitudes of the Bush administration. ⁹¹ Phillips noted the clear parallels between the Bush administration’s characterizations of terrorists with the Joker’s depiction in the film, as both were depicted as irrational enemies hellbent upon undermining civilized society. ⁹² Furthermore, Philips noted the similarities between the extrajudicial methods used to counter the Joker and “special” tactics proposed by the Bush administration to combat terrorism. As Philips wrote, “The Bush administration described terrorists as enemies that are ‘different from the conventional enemies’ than we have battled in the past, an enemy ‘without conscience,’ and therefore requiring special countertactics and strategies.” ⁹³

With the similarities between the characterizations of the Joker and real-life terrorists clear, it is important to note that these parallels extended to the methods Batman used to combat the unprecedented threat of the Joker and the “special countertactics” deployed by the Bush administration as well. Batman’s extrajudicial extradition of Lau from Hong Kong mirrored the controversial extraordinary rendition missions utilized as a

⁹⁰ Bordoloi 2012, 93
⁹¹ Phillips 2010
⁹² Phillips 2010, 35
⁹³ Phillips 2010, 35
tactic to combat terrorism. Designed to circumvent the restrictions surrounding extradition enshrined in international law, the usage of extraordinary rendition spiked dramatically in the War on Terror. The advanced sonar apparatus used by Batman to surveil the entirety of Gotham paralleled the additional powers granted to American law enforcement by the PATRIOT Act, which was passed in 2001 in response to the September 11th attacks, with the intention of increasing national security. 94 Title 2 of the Act expanded the powers of surveillance granted to federal agencies, allowing them to intercept and surveil various forms of communication, including oral and telecommunications. Both controversial tactics have been utilized extensively in the War on Terror, again deeply dividing public opinion in the process. Critics of the PATRIOT Act, such as former Senator Russ Feingold, have emphasized the human and legal rights violated by its usage. 95 However, supporters of the PATRIOT Act, such as Senator Mitch McConnell have argued that it was necessary to protect national security. 96

With the parallels between Batman’s actions and counterterrorism activities in the real world abundantly clear, it is plain to see how Nolan effectively transformed the film into a sandbox for audiences to debate the virtues and drawbacks of such tactics. Those who felt strongly about the need to protect national security would likely be much more willing to accept the consequences of extralegal approaches, with the justification that the benefits afforded would outweigh any violations of civil liberties. By contrast, those who held the protection of civil liberties as a critical priority would likely be much more sensitive to the negative consequences of such operations. As a result, Nolan’s portrayals

95 Feingold 2021
96 Goitein 2015
of controversial real-world tactics in the film transformed the film from merely a well-crafted piece of entertainment into a thought-provoking piece for viewers to meditate upon the balance of civil liberties and security.

While Nolan did not provide a definitive endorsement of either view, several key moments in the resolution of Batman’s dilemmas sparked questions for further debate. One such moment came during the destruction of the surveillance software used by Batman after the defeat the Joker. Batman’s moral code led to him set a definitive time limit on his usage of the surveillance system and avoid abusing the vast power afforded by the system. By the end of the film, the system was permanently destroyed. With Batman guided by his morality and Nolan by the need to remain true to the fundamental tenets of the character, the surveillance system was guaranteed to be free from potential abuse. However, there were not parallel, iron-clad guarantees when considering the real-world counterparts to Batman’s sonar-powered panopticon. As Alexander Wills noted in his article “Dystopia in The Dark Knight Trilogy: How Utopian Ideas Are Warped and Corrupted in Their Application,” a more realistic character and one with weaker moral convictions than Batman would likely find it difficult to restrain themselves from abusing such a system.  

Thus, the question remains: What would result from the operation of mass surveillance systems without strong checks on the abuse of power?

Finally, in The Dark Knight Rises, Batman was deployed to illustrate the consequences of obfuscating the truth in exchange for social stability. At the conclusion of The Dark Knight, Gotham was teetering on the edge of chaos. With Harvey Dent held up as a messianic figure to the citizens of Gotham for his unrelenting crusade to combat

97 Wills 2018, 158-159
corruption in Gotham, Dent’s murderous turn after experiencing the trauma of losing his girlfriend Rachel Dawes to the Joker left Batman and Commissioner Gordon trapped in yet another dilemma. Harvey’s falsified pristine reputation in the minds of Gothamites became the unstable foundation of Gotham’s social stability and any possibility of Harvey’s true actions coming to light threatened to obliterate the progress Batman, Gordon, and Dent had made in restoring order to Gotham. Unwilling to risk Gotham’s social stability, Batman shouldered the responsibility for Harvey’s crimes, razing his hard-earned reputation to the ground in order to protect Harvey’s. Batman’s obfuscation of the truth was adopted by Commissioner Gordon and the legislative body of Gotham, which passed the Harvey Dent Act. Under the terms of the Dent Act, the government of Gotham was granted unprecedented power. With the power to deny parole to all the mobsters Dent convicted, Gotham’s government effectively dismantled the entire mob. While the Dent Act resulted in the virtual elimination of all organized crime, the newfound stability it afforded Gotham was fragile, as the Act’s legitimacy rested entirely upon the noble lie propagated by Batman. The peace brought to Gotham was built on a foundation of lies, which would mean that Gotham’s stability would inevitably come crashing down. This came to bear as the villain Bane exposed the truth about Dent and the Dent Act, effectively shining a light on the lack of transparency in Gotham in the process. As a result, Gotham’s newfound stability was razed to the ground, plunging the city into chaos once more.

Just as elements of *Batman Begins* and *The Dark Knight* paralleled the real world, so too did *The Dark Knight Rises*. In Houman Sadri’s article “Mass Surveillance and the Negation of the Monomyth,” Sadri noted the uncanny resemblance of the Dent Act with
the PATRIOT Act.\(^8\) As Sadri wrote, “Batman decides to accept blame for the crimes of the late Harvey Dent… in order to enable Gotham City to remember the dead man wholly as a hero (and as a result allow the passing of draconian detention laws with more than a passing resemblance to the Patriot Act).”\(^9\) Sadri’s parallel of the Dent Act with the PATRIOT Act exposes further considerations of US governmental actions in the War on Terror. The obfuscation of truth in service of strategic objectives in *The Dark Knight Rises* likely calls to mind similar actions undertaken by the Bush administration and Blair government with regard to assertions about the presence of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) in Iraq. In conjunction with the Bush and Blair governments, media members and legislators actively asserted that WMDs were present in Iraq based upon intelligence reports. These claims sparked a hotly contested debate at the time over their veracity, with even intelligence experts divided on the truth. The claims ultimately served as the basis for the Iraq War, which further enflamed the division in American public opinion.

However, as the war progressed, more information about WWDs in Iraq came to light, casting increasing doubt upon the veracity of the claims made to justify the war. Various independent inspectors ultimately concluded that usable WMDs were not present in Iraq as originally alleged. Scott McClellan, the deputy White House Press Secretary at the time, later provided an insider’s perspective on the administration’s information campaign in his memoir *What Happened*. As McClellan noted, “In the fall of 2002, Bush and his White House were engaging in a carefully orchestrated campaign to shape and manipulate sources of public approval to our advantage.”\(^10\) The parallels between the

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\(^8\) Sadri 2018  
\(^9\) Sadri 2018, 25  
\(^10\) McClellan 2008, 125
narrative surrounding WMDs in Iraq and the noble lie surrounding Harvey Dent thus represented another infusion of social commentary by Nolan. Nolan’s clever presentation of the issue again provided aspects for audiences from different perspectives to gravitate towards, helping the film to serve as a litmus test for their own politics. Individuals who defended the Bush administration’s narrative may have pointed to the increased security of Gotham achieved through the noble lie about Dent as an adequate justification for the obfuscation of the truth. Conversely, individuals who were highly critical of the administration’s claims may have focused upon the loss of trust Gothamites felt in their officials as a result of the lie about Dent.

In summation, Nolan’s placement of Batman in situations with clear parallels to the War on Terror provided an opportunity for American audiences to grapple with the dualities behind both Batman and the American government’s War on Terror. As illustrated in *Batman Begins, The Dark Knight, and The Dark Knight Rises*, the extreme dilemmas confronting Batman often forced him into actions that had achieved their objectives but violated trust and civil liberties in the process. In *Batman Begins*, Bruce Wayne adopted the identity of Batman to deliver justice to the citizens of Gotham as a vigilante. While successful in his mission to do so, his vigilantism disrupted the established legal and social order within Gotham. The complexities behind the situation revealed themselves as it was evident that any attempts at reform would ultimately fail, thus leaving the socially disruptive path of vigilantism as the only viable path to successful reform. In *The Dark Knight*, Batman extrajudicially extradited Lau and wiretapped the entire city of Gotham, violating international laws and civil liberties in the process. However, these actions paved the way for greater security within Gotham.
Finally, in *The Dark Knight Rises*, Batman propagated a noble lie to obfuscate the truth about Harvey Dent in a bid to preserve social order. While the lie provided temporary stability in Gotham, the revelation of the truth behind the lie ultimately led to tumult and instability in Gotham. With the backdrop of an America wrestling with the consequences of the War on Terror, Nolan’s deployment of Batman in thought-provoking moral quagmires paralleling those in the real world allowed *The Dark Knight Trilogy* to not only become a powerful catalyst for American introspection, but also a useful platform for discussion and debate.
Conclusion

As exhibited by the examples of Odysseus and Batman, it is evident that humans in at least two points in history have turned to archetypal heroes and characters in their literature as a way of understanding and processing the world. As a result, these heroes occupy a unique position in the consciousness of their audiences. They are just familiar enough for audiences to see parts of themselves in the heroes, while distant enough to be capable of achieving heroic feats out of reach for ordinary individuals. In turn, both Sophocles and Christopher Nolan have deployed Odysseus and Batman in service of this purpose, as both characters provided useful platforms for audiences to work through their own hopes, fears, desires, and anxieties about contemporary social issues.

Odysseus clearly embodied the phenomenon of a familiar yet distant hero. His distinct lack of superhuman powers helped Odysseus’ status appear more attainable, especially when compared with the mythical powers granted to heroes such as Achilles or Heracles. Furthermore, Odysseus’ relatively modest power and wealth when compared to extremely powerful and wealthy figures such as Agamemnon also served to provide Odysseus a more grounded image for most audiences. In comparing Odysseus to other Homeric heroes, this phenomenon remains true. Odysseus’ comfort with deferring kleos, adopting anonymity as a tactical ploy to secure greater kleos, and ability to control his own kleos ran counter to the traditional paradigms that defined contemporary Greek heroes, thus setting him apart from most Homeric heroes. However, in spite of Odysseus’ departure from aspects of heroic paradigms, he shared the core trait that defined all Greek heroes: an accumulation of kleos. As a result, Odysseus’s characterization effectively carved out a niche in the pantheon of Greek heroes in the minds of audiences. By virtue
of his portrayal as a relatable yet aspirational or reprehensible hero, depending upon one’s views of Odysseus, he thus became an effective conduit for the delivery of social commentary.

Sophocles leveraged this human connection between Odysseus and members of the audience to imbue his tragedies with poignant and relevant social commentary. Amidst the backdrop of an Athens in the 5th century reckoning with the growing importance of rhetoric and its ability to reshape Athenian society, Sophocles utilized Odysseus, whose speaking ability was a well-established part of his mythical character, to illustrate the views on both sides of the debate. Those who embraced the growing power of rhetoric in Athens would likely gravitate toward the Odysseus of the Ajax, as it clearly illustrated the potential for oratory to be deployed in a socially beneficial manner. Conversely, those who felt threatened by rhetoric’s rising power would have likely pointed to the Odysseus of the Philoctetes as an illustration of their fears as the Ithacan utilized his oratorical mastery to both upend conventional ethical norms. In this manner, Sophocles’ deployment of Odysseus thus created a useful platform for ancient Athenians to debate and discuss important societal issues, making the Ithacan a valuable tool in understanding the world.

In a similar vein to Odysseus, Batman was simultaneously recognizable yet esoteric. Batman’s characterization in Christopher Nolan’s The Dark Knight Trilogy as a master combatant and detective with access to an unimaginable amount of wealth placed him in a mostly inaccessible and esoteric strata for most audiences. However, Batman’s humanity and shared experiences with ordinary audiences, such as frustration with the corruption and impotence of established institutions, provided windows of accessibility
into the character. Furthermore, Batman’s lack of superpowers and human physiological limitations allowed for a greater sense of relatability for audiences, especially when compared to other heroes such as Superman. The duality of Batman’s characterization as both distant and familiar holds true when examining Batman’s relationship with other heroes such as Iron Man as well. While Iron Man was an impactful hero for the citizens around him, his impact was restricted to the results of his heroic interventions as ordinary citizens felt no motivation to join in his defense against world threatening threats. By contrast, Batman was able to impact Gotham through both his heroic actions as Iron Man did in addition to his capacity to inspire hope in the city. Bruce Wayne’s intentional decision to shape the Batman into a symbol for justice allowed for a far greater impact beyond Wayne himself, as ordinary Gothamites became inspired to adopt Batman’s ethos and joined in the fight against corruption. In doing so, Wayne succeeded in his original quest to reform Gotham, as he transformed the population of Gotham from the passive bystanders seen in *Batman Begins* to watchful guardians defending against future corruption at the end of *The Dark Knight Rises*.

Just as Sophocles’ tragedies were heavily influenced by key social issues within Ancient Athens, Nolan’s *The Dark Knight Trilogy* was influenced by the social issues within contemporary America. The trilogy was imbued with references to the complex debate around security and civil liberties that gripped and deeply divided Americans in the aftermath of the September 11th terrorist attacks. While most Americans agreed about the need to protect innocent civilians from further harm, there was not consensus on how to balance granting increased governmental power to combat terrorism with the need to preserve and protect civil liberties. In responding to this tension, Nolan deployed Batman,
whose vigilantism was an iconic component of his characterization, to illustrate both sides of the debate. Those who supported the War on Terror would have likely focused upon Batman’s success in achieving greater safety in Gotham, accepting the violations of civil liberties that resulted as a necessary evil. Conversely, those who were critical of the War on Terror would likely have emphasized the severe consequences of the moral and ethical violations that resulted from Batman’s vigilantism. While Nolan did not provide an endorsement of either side of the debate, his portrayal of the debate around security and civil liberties on screen transformed the movies of *The Dark Knight Trilogy* from merely entertaining pieces of entertainment to an effective platform for Americans to process the complexities of the War on Terror.

Thus, while it is clear that Nolan’s deployment of Batman shared many similarities with Sophocles’ usage of Odysseus, Batman cannot be simply classified as a modern reincarnation of Odysseus. One key distinction between the two characters lies within the fundamental attitudes towards heroes in Ancient Greece and contemporary America. Ancient Greek conceptions of heroism included elements of religious worship while modern American conceptions of superheroes lack such components. Furthermore, while modern American notions of heroism often include a commitment to serving the public interest and acting for the greater good, Ancient Greek notions did not. Thus, while Batman is not a perfect analogue for Odysseus, comparing the depictions of the two heroes by Sophocles and Nolan is still a useful pursuit as it offers a rare and informative glimpse into their contemporary societies and psyches of their audiences. The continued relevance of both characters clearly illustrates the value ancient audiences placed and modern audiences continue to place upon utilizing archetypal heroes to
understand and process the world around them. As a result of this fundamental human
trait, various authors have employed such heroes as Odysseus and Batman and their
stories as platforms to spark debate and discussion. Thus, it is clear that these iconic
heroes and their mythologies are not merely pieces of entertainment as one might
conclude from a simple, cursory examination. Rather, they have been and continue to be
key forces in driving societal progress and innovation. By serving as a platform to help
humans in both the past and present gain a deeper understanding of the world, it is
evident that mythical heroes and their authors have played a critical role in shaping our
societies.
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