

## **Natty Bumppo and Batman at the Crossroads between Canon and Popular Culture**

ناتي بومبو وباتمان على مفترق الطرق بين الأدب والثقافة الشعبية

### **Natty Bumppo et Batman à la croisée des chemins entre canon et culture populaire**

Tegaoua Kenza

Études et Recherche Phonétiques et Lexicales

جامعة الجزائر 2 Université d'Alger 2

## **Introduction**

The present paper investigates the relationship between Natty Bumppo in Cooper's *The Leatherstocking Tales* (1823-41), and Batman in Tim Burton's *Batman* (1989), Christopher Nolan's *Batman Begins* (2005) and *The Dark Knight* (2008) respectively. The former is a character of the 19<sup>th</sup> C literature while the latter is a Comic character adapted in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century movies. Furthermore, Natty Bumppo is part of canonical literature and is considered as the archetypal American hero, while Batman is a popular hero of popular culture. In other words, both characters seem utterly different from each other. Nonetheless, a close scrutiny of the novels and movies under study proves that those characters are part of the same mythology, more specifically, the American myth of the Western Frontier. In fact, both rely on its spirit in their adventures. Hence, the current article aims to unveil the relation between these two characters and where they do intersect.

For this purpose, I have opted for two distinct, yet interrelated approaches: the first is the American Studies and the Myth and Symbol School that deal with the American Myth and focus on canonical works; the second one is Popular Culture and Popular Studies that widen up to include Intermediality and Transmediality. From a theoretical viewpoint, I will rely on the works of two American scholars, Richard Slotkin and John G. Cawelti. In accordance to their insights, I plan to lean on the former's conception of the Myth of the Frontier in my analysis of Cooper's hero Natty Bumppo; then, I will implement the latter's concept of popular Formula on Batman. The aim is to prove that Batman represents a symbolic transition of the archetypal hero from canon to popular culture. The objective is then to assert unity and fusion between the two protagonists despite some disparities.

I have divided the article into two main sections: a theoretical one where I introduce the academic field of American Studies which includes basic insights on the Myth and Symbol School and the Myth of the Western Frontier. This part stands for the basis from which studies on the American myth develop. Then, I present the field of Popular Studies, Popular Culture and the concept of Intermediality. These are ineluctable for in this article I will deal with the popular hero as depicted in different movie adaptations that intertwine since they focus on the same character. On the one hand, Batman, as a comic and movie character, originates from, and reflects, Popular Culture. On the other hand, Intermediality explains the crossing of different media and genres; in this case, canonical texts with popular culture and movie adaptations. Then, I will elaborate Richard Slotkin's Myth of the Hunter, as conveyed in his *Regeneration through Violence the Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (1973) and John G. Cawelti's concept of Popular Formula that he introduces in his *Mystery, Violence and Popular Culture* (2004). The second section is practical and is divided into three sub-sections. The first one sets Natty as the embodiment of the Hunter in accordance to Slotkin's vision; the second one applies Cawelti's concept of Formulaic conventions on Batman who embodies the persistence of the traditional representation of the Hunter; the last one, presents him as the instigator of newness, as part of Formulaic inventions.

## 1. Theoretical Background

### 1.1. American Studies

In *The Power of a Myth*, Joseph Campbell writes, "Civilizations are grounded on myth" (Campbell 53). This means that each civilization needs to have its own myth which is a prerequisite for the development of the culture, history and identity of a given people. Studies in mythology are as wide as the number of myths in the world. I focus on the American Myth of the Frontier and American Studies is the adequate academic field and angle to which I approach this myth. These appeared in U.S universities and were meant to focus solely on American Culture, History, Mythology and Literature (Dallmann, Boesenberg, et al., editors, 13). This approach evolved to a specific branch called the Myth and Symbol School with famous academic figures such as R. W. B. Lewis, Leo Marx and Henry Nash Smith (Dallmann et al. 15) who were interested in the process of the creation of the American myth which ushers various academic analyses and studies. The Myth and Symbol School is a pluralistic, comparative and multidisciplinary field (Schlereth 65); it comprises a piling up of various findings, angles and perspectives, all related to the American Myth.

Scholars of the Myth and Symbol School owe a great deal to Henry Nash Smith, one of the first American scholars who have identified the Western Frontier as a central asset of the national myth, culture and identity (Dallmann et al. 15). His book *Virgin Land: the American West as a Symbol and Myth* (1950) is considered as a milestone in American Cultural Studies. Smith was profoundly influenced by Frederick Jackson Turner's *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* (1893); this asserts the pluralistic feature of the Myth and Symbol School. Smith affirms that Turner was the first to attribute a mythological notion for the American Frontier as he linked it to regeneration, rebirth and rejuvenation within the enchanted wilderness (Smith 253). Hence, both American scholars have contributed to the creation and elaboration of the national mythology that centers upon the Western Frontier. Much work has been carried out on the latter in literature namely, James Fenimore Cooper's *The Leatherstocking Tales* and in academia with Richard Slotkin and John G. Cawelti who elaborated their views on the American myth relying on Turner's and Smith's findings. On the one hand, Slotkin explains his vision of the archetypal Western Frontier myth in his *Regeneration through Violence*. On the other hand, Cawelti's *Mystery, Violence, and Popular Culture* creates a shift from Canon to Popular Culture, thanks to his concept of Formula.

After the Myth and Symbol School, there developed studies on Popular Culture which were typically American (Dallmann et al. 63). They emanated from the Americans' desire to be distinguished from Europeans. Many U.S scholars started to deal with canonical and popular works at the same time (Rowe 376); hence, they widened the scope of their studies to include marginalized popular works which have been neglected in the academic world, being deemed as a low inauthentic form of art destined for mass consumption. Nonetheless, from the 1970s on, many academic scholars, among them the fervent advocate Cawelti, are shifting towards Popular Culture as a field worthy of investigation.

## 1.2. Popular Studies

John G. Cawelti defines Popular Culture as "an attitude ranging between neutrality and enthusiasm for the same kind of cultural products which would have been condemned as garbage by many earlier intellectuals and artists. This new attitude has influenced many (...) intellectual and artistic trends which would have puzzled most artists, critics, and academics of the 1950s" (Cawelti, 1976 : 166); hence many Popular Culture scholars attempt to break down the barrier between 'high' and 'low' forms of Art, resulting in the spread of popular studies that were once depreciated and even rejected. Cawelti claims that the

old tradition of quality or excellence is no more relevant to art's function and cultural expression. He adds that it is necessary to support various levels and types of culture within society because they are its important subgroups (Cawelti, 1976:167). Hence, it is essential to include Popular Culture and works within the world of the academia.

For the scholar, one aspect of Popular Culture's maturity is the fact that its artifacts develop awareness and self-consciousness of traditions, along with criticism of these traditions. He adds that it is beneficial for its dynamic feature when juxtaposed to traditional art and heads towards rich and complex works (Cawelti, 1976: 172). This asserts the depth of Popular Culture as opposed to the traditional criticism that deemed its nature shallow and ephemeral. It piles up with traditional works and enriches them with other perspectives and scopes. In other words, Popular Culture rests upon conventional bases, which it expands and reshuffles. As Cawelti explains, it is "the quest for a new synthesis between elements of elite and popular traditions (Cawelti, 1976: 175). As he proceeds in his defense of the academic and cultural values of Popular Culture, he refers to movies which go beyond the simple fact of being entertainment for the masses. According to him, as a considerable asset and aspect of Popular Culture, they are engaged with the mythical tradition of a given culture (Cawelti, 1976: 170). Therefore, despite being an artifact for the masses meant to entertain, a movie may reflect and convey the national myth of a given culture. This asserts the wide scopes of Popular Culture as it tackles a topic that was exclusive to the academic field.

The concept of "Intermediality" is defined as "a direct or indirect participation of more than one medium of communication in the signification of a work" (Lodato, Aspden et. al, editors, *Intermediality* 17). Intermediality is an approach where various means of communication analyze and interpret a given work. Hallet Wolfgang clarifies that it implies "interrelations between literary texts and other medial forms of all kinds" (Rippl, editor, *Handbook* 834). This means that a written novel and a film (which is a form of media) can intersect as they convey several similar features and precepts. Intermedial studies and analyses concentrate "on the way in which the occurrence of another medium is connected with the genre-specific constituents and dimensions of the literary text" (Rippl 837). In other words, this field of research relates to the crossing of media and literature, and by extension canon and popular culture. This implies a wide scope of studies as they combine literature and media. Wolfgang adds that intermediality involves a comparative approach (Rippl 839). In the present

paper, the comparison is between Cooper's *The Leatherstocking Tales* and the aforementioned *Batman* movie adaptations.

Intermediality comprises various studies including film adaptations for which Staumann shows a keen interest. She writes that they are an intermedial form of expression because they digest literature in order to render it wider and accessible, in a popularized form for a mass audience (Rippl 355); hence film adaptations go beyond entertainment as they intersect with literary texts through their intermediality. She adds that they allow readers to extend their encounter with a certain text as they provide them with "a sense of play" for they are "works of art in their own right" (Rippl 358). She goes further by claiming that "adaptations can support the creation of cultural and national myths" (Rippl 359). This justifies my choice of intermediality in this article which aims to compare the archetypal myth of the Frontier found in canonical texts with the film adaptations within popular culture.

Staumann explains, "Media are in constant exchange with other media" (Rippl 360); therefore, the three movie adaptations I have opted for in this study intersect and intertwine around the same protagonist, Batman. This asserts their interdependence. Staumann suggests the term 'transmediality' which she defines as "'across media' [that] is used to refer to textual elements such as plots and characters that appear in a variety of different media" (Rippl 362). In this case, Batman is both a character from the comic books and the different movie adaptations. On this multidisciplinary approach of media and literature, a scholar comments that "the interrelationship between literature and television became emblematic during the postmodernism of the 1970s and the 1980s when distinction between high and low culture fell apart" (Rippl 433). This further legitimizes popular studies and intermediality as adequate approaches in the present comparison between Natty Bumppo and Batman.

### 1.3. Richard Slotkin's Archetypal American Frontier Hero

In his *Regeneration through Violence*, Richard Slotkin provides an extensive study of the American Myth of the Frontier and its evolution from the early 17<sup>th</sup> until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. His vision of the myth focuses on the figure of the Hunter who prospers within the Western Frontier. He explains that his journey stands for an initiation that includes a communion with the external powers of the frontiers (the wilderness). As a result, he gains a "new moral character" along with "new powers" and "a new identity." He adds that the Natives embody the spirit of the wilderness which is dormant within the Hunter's consciousness. According to him, the hunter responds to the same spirit because it stands for

his own “dream life.” Furthermore, Slotkin explains that the hunt is his way of interacting with the spirit of wilderness. He follows the trail of his prey and then studies Natives’ skills which allow him to connect with them revealing his latent sympathy to them. However, he clarifies that the Hunter’s intentions are to turn the learned skills against his teachers whom he kills in order to confirm his dominance (Slotkin 551). Hence, for Slotkin, the myth rests upon the archetypal wilderness and the frontier as presented by Turner and Smith. The hero is a hunter whose coping with the dark forces of the forest allows his regeneration; the latter being the result of the violence he uses against his teachers, the Natives.

Regardless of violence, Slotkin mentions the Code of morals that redeems the hunter. For it to be efficient, he has to convey certain features. First, he must rely on self-restraint. As the scholar explains: “he will kill only and only so much as practical necessity requires” (Slotkin 552). Therefore, his violence is disciplined because the hunter controls his killing urges. Moreover, he has to rescue female captives which will bring him back to the civilized world (Slotkin 552). Hence, liberating imprisoned women, though relying on violence, further redeems the Hunter. Finally, the moral code of violence stipulates that the hunter must limit his killing to Indians only. As Slotkin clarifies, they are subject to “physical removal, or (if necessary) extermination” (Slotkin 294). The Indians stand for the archetypal enemy of the American hero (Slotkin 558). Thus, his purge rests upon his ability to dominate and to destroy the Indian foes. In other words, the American Myth of the Frontier allows killing and violence as long as they are disciplined, restricted to the Indian Other and to rescuing female captives.

#### **1.4. John G. Cawelti’s Popular Formula: Convention vs. Invention**

Moving to Popular Culture, Cawelti presents his theory of Popular Formula which he defines as “a variation of the idea of myth” (Cawelti, *Mystery* 6). Due to the ambiguity behind his concept, he suggests the dichotomy of convention and invention to clarify his idea of Popular Formula. He explains, “Conventions represent familiar shared images and meanings and they assert an ongoing continuity of values; Inventions confront us with a new perception or meaning that we have not realized before.” He adds, “Conventions help maintain a culture’s stability while Inventions help it respond to changing circumstances and provide new information about the world” (Cawelti, *Mystery* 7). In other words, the concept of Popular Formula swings back and forth between tradition and innovation; the former asserts continuity, while the latter introduces

changes and promotes innovations. Such dichotomy makes of Popular Formula a dynamic and wide concept that encompasses both stability and change.

## 2. Natty Bumppo and Batman between Myth and Popular Formula

To proceed in the practical part of the paper, an introduction of both heroes under study is a prerequisite. On the one hand, Natty Bumppo is a hunter and warrior who courageously ventures in the wilderness for the sake of securing White settlements and rescuing female captives from Indian attacks during the Frontier Wars. Although he claims and advocates his Christianity, Natty stands as the embodiment of the man of the wilderness who, like Indians, is highly devoted to his beloved nature and hunting. Throughout his adventures, he swings back and forth between the White Christian world and the Native one. When following the chronological order of the life of Cooper's hero, we notice his maturing from a young unexperienced hunter into an old and wise one who dies and is buried in the middle of a prairie. On the other hand, Bruce Wayne, also known as Batman, is a wealthy businessman who inherited Wayne Enterprise. After witnessing the tragic and brutal death of his parents, Bruce becomes concerned with justice and fighting criminals. As a result, he decides to create the Batman persona to cleanse Gotham City of its vice and villainous criminals. During his adventures, he fights them; he secures his beloved city and rescues females in distress. Both protagonists work for the sake of establishing justice and security in their respective surroundings, namely the Western Frontiers and Gotham City.

### 2.1. Natty Bumppo: The Archetypal Hunter and his Code

Before dealing with formulaic conventions and inventions, we need to present Cooper's protagonist as the Hunter in accordance with Richard Slotkin's vision. The setting of *The Leatherstocking Tales* involves the archetypal Western frontiers and the American wilderness. Natty Bumppo ventures in the dark forest which he communes with throughout the ritual of the hunt. As conveyed by his sobriquet 'Deerslayer', he is a renowned and a skilled hunter. Hurry Harry, a frontiersman, introduces him as "a noted hunter among the Delawares, and Christian-born, and Christian-dedicated, too (...) should we have occasion to defend our traps, and the territory, he'll be useful in feeding us all..." (Cooper, *Deerslayer* 66). Based on Harry's description, one easily relates Natty Bumppo to Slotkin's conception of the archetypal Hunter: he masters the art of hunting which he acquired from his Delaware upbringing. Besides, he stands as the

helper of Old Tom Hutter and Hurry Harry throughout their journey in the wilderness. In another instance, Natty conveys his communion with the forest through hunting. In *The Pioneers*, he trails a deer for the sake of the hunt. The narrator describes him as follows: “The dark eye of the old warrior was dancing in his head with wild animation and the sluggish repose in which his aged frame had been resting in the canoe was now changed to all the rapid inflections of practiced agility” (Cooper, 1823: 170). This passage depicts the extent of Natty’s communion with the forces of the wilderness throughout the process of the hunt. The deer hunting awakens the dormant spirit of the hunter within the old Natty. This stands for a communion with the wilderness that Slotkin refers to.

As portrayed by the scholar, the archetypal Hunter is a man of violence, a violence he acquires from the Natives against whom he turns. Following this, Natty Bumppo abides by these attributes: his upbringing is Indian like; nonetheless, he turns against it. Even though they taught him his hunting skills and the art of trailing, Natty does not hesitate to turn his back on his educators; therefore, he directs his violence against them. In other words, he sides with the White settlers, such as Tom Hutter and Commander Munro who are settling along the western frontiers and fighting the Indians. In fact, throughout his adventures, his victims comprise Natives only. For instance, in *The Deerslayer*, Natty kills two natives from the Iroquois tribe; in *The Last of the Mohican*, he kills various Indian men, including Magua. Therefore, Natty’s list of victims asserts the scholar’s claim about the hunter’s targeted violence.

Slotkin also mentions a moral code of violence that redeems the hunter: violence is considered as a necessity for the sake of the hunter’s or the White settlers’ safety. In accordance with this, in his adventure, Natty’s violence, which includes killing, is framed within such limits. In *The Deerslayer*, when confronted to his Indian enemy whom he shoots, Natty confesses: “but you left me no choice between killing or being killed” (Cooper, 1841: 134). Besides, during their confrontation, Natty waits for him to attack first. He says, “Let the miscreant charge and then we’ll take it out as men” (Cooper, 1841: 123). This conveys and asserts the condition that Slotkin mentions in his code which Natty respects and abides by. Moreover, as stipulated by the code, the hunter must display self-restraint. In Natty’s case, such attribute is noticeable in his refusal to take his victims’ scalps. During his initiation in killing, he reassures his fallen victim about the safety of his scalp. As he claims: “A man of white blood and white gifts is not to be expected to boast of his exploits, and to flourish scalps” (Cooper, 1841: 144). His words convey his allegiance to White attributes; therefore, he does not resort to scalping despite his Indian upbringing. This also



stands for self-restraint whilst resorting to violence. Even though he succumbs to its whims, Natty manages to control and to discipline his wild impulses by refusing to take scalps. Hence, he further complies with Slotkin's vision of the archetypal Hunter of the wilderness.

The ultimate condition of the Hunter's violence is the compulsory rescue of female captives from the villainous Indians. Conforming to Slotkin's vision, Natty spends his life liberating women from captivity and imprisonment. In *The Deerslayer*, he protects Judith from a Mingo attack. When held captive, Old Tom Hutter charges Deerslayer with the protection of his daughters, Judith and Hetty. In *The Last of the Mohicans*, Natty escorts Alice and Cora Munro and provides them with a safe passage in the wilderness. When they are taken captives, he succeeds in liberating them. In *The Pathfinder*, he escorts Mabel Dunham throughout wilderness, therefore securing a safe route to the garrison. Adding to other instances of rescue in the remaining tales, Natty Bumppo asserts his position of the Hunter, as conceived by Slotkin. He is the liberator of women in distress. Such status further redeems his resort to violence and killings. Hence, Natty Bumppo conforms to the moral code of violence which allows him to regenerate as the archetypal Hunter of the Western frontier.

Hence, Natty Bumppo embodies the archetypal Hunter of the Western frontier as presented by Richard Slotkin. He is the hero of wilderness whose violence is framed within the bounds of morality. Even though he is a killer, he abides by self-restraint and he is the savior and rescuer of female captives. As the incarnation of the archetypal American Hero, Natty stands as a source of inspiration for the coming generation of heroes. In fact, he is the modal form from which other protagonists emerge and develop. Batman conforms to certain characteristics which convey the set of conventions within the popular formula, as presented by John G. Cawelti. Hence, the following paragraphs underline similarities between the two protagonists as parts of formulaic conventions.

## **2.2 Batman: The Enforcer of Natty Bumppo's Conventions**

Regardless of the divergence in setting and contexts, Natty Bumppo and Batman share numerous similarities. The first one concerns their respective childhood and past. On the one hand, as mentioned before, Natty was adopted by the Delaware Tribe, which implies that he is an orphan. He seldom mentions his Christian family or his early life in the settlement. In *The Deerslayer*, when he enters the Hutter's hut, he vaguely recalls his mother and sister (Cooper, 1841: 33). This is one of the rare instances where Natty refers to his past life in the settlement. Most of our knowledge about him comes from his life

among the Indian tribe. In other words, Natty's background regarding his life revolves around his foster family the Delawares who made him a noble warrior. Besides, during his adventures, he is always accompanied by his lifelong mate Chingachgook who symbolizes his foster Indian upbringing. Similarly, Bruce Wayne, also known as Batman, grows up as an orphan, for he lost his parents when he was only a child. It is his butler, Alfred Pennyworth, who kept an eye on him and raised him. He always guides him in his life as Mr. Bruce Wayne or during his night adventures as the Batman. Hence, Alfred stands for Bruce's foster family and his henchman as well. The main conclusion that can be drawn is that Natty and Bruce share a similar family background as both grew among a foster family whom the acolytes, namely Chingachgook and Alfred, represent. Therefore, these common points between the archetypal hero and his popular counterpart epitomize the conventions that the formula upholds.

Moreover, Natty and Bruce have experienced a traumatic event that had an impact on their adult life. On the one hand, in *The Last of the Mohicans*, Natty recalls a bloody war scene: when he was only an infant, he had to bury several bodies, in the aftermath of a violent confrontation between two tribes (Cooper, 1826: 148). On the other hand, Bruce Wayne witnessed the murder of his parents at the hands of a cold killer. Therefore, both our protagonists underwent traumatic events that influenced their lives as heroes and ushered them to the path of violence. Natty's witnessing of the blood scene has, potentially, triggered his violent and bloody crusade against Indians. Likewise, Bruce's traumatic event prompted his vehement battle against the vile criminals of Gotham City. In other words, the past events of both heroes predisposed their violence and their pursuits of enemies for the sake of the welfare of the settlement or the city. Hence, eventful and bloody childhood memories, which lead to violence, are other common points between Natty and Batman. Once more, they convey the conventional aspects of the archetypal myth that the formula carries on.

In Cooper's tales, Natty seldom goes by his Christian name 'Nathaniel Bumppo'. In fact, he is known by various sobriquets he acquires throughout his adventures in the wilderness. The most symbolic one he gains is Hawkeye. In *The Deerslayer*, he experiences his first warpath. During a confrontation with an Indian foe, from the Iroquois tribe, Deerslayer shoots the latter and kills him. The dying Indian re-baptizes him Hawkeye (Cooper, 1841: 132). Thus, after his violent act of killing, Deerslayer regenerates to become Hawkeye, the fierce Indian killer. Departing from his initiation into a warrior life, in *The Deerslayer*, Hawkeye acquires further sobriquets, including Pathfinder in *The Pathfinder*, Leatherstocking in *The Pioneers* and the Scout in *The Prairie*. Therefore, for

each of his adventures, he develops a regenerative persona conveyed through a specific nickname. Bruce Wayne also chooses an alias to symbolize his identity as a hero. He becomes the Batman who ventures into the dangerous streets of Gotham city to save innocents and to fight criminals. He creates the Batman persona to lead his adventures in Gotham. In other words, when Bruce wears his costume and mask, he regenerates as the Batman whose violent deeds rescue citizens. Therefore, like Natty, Bruce goes through a persona in order to achieve his heroic task. From a formulaic perspective, having a persona and a sobriquet stands for the convention within the archetypal myth that Batman carries on in his adventures.

All of Natty's adventures in *The Leatherstocking Tales* represent a series of pursuits of Indian enemies. He fights them in order to rescue captives and to secure the Whites' settlements. For instance, in *The Deerslayer*, after his first kill, he shoots another Indian. His resort to violence escalades as Hawkeye. *The Last of the Mohicans* is the narrative where the number of Natty's fallen victims is the highest, for he kills stabs and shoots eight Indian foes. Hence, as Slotkin asserts, the Indians constitute the archetypal enemies that the archetypal hero fights and vanquishes (Slotkin: 558). Departing from such conventions, Batman also pursues the descendants of the archetypal enemies: criminals and killers. The most famous one is the Joker, Batman's lifelong nemesis. In Tim Burton's movie, the Joker, previously known as Jack, was at the head of a vast criminal mob. Then, after a violent confrontation with Batman, he becomes the Joker and tries to retaliate by poisoning the city. (Batman) [Film]

In Christopher Nolan's *Batman Begins*, Batman confronts Ra's al Ghul and the League of Shadows, an old and powerful secret society which fights decadence, corruption and injustice. The movie opens with Bruce Wayne in Bhutanese prison, amongst various prisoners who attempt to kill him. Then, Henry Ducard presents himself as an associate of Ra's al Ghul. He offers Bruce a path towards the League of Shadows that is preparing him to join the league. During his apprenticeship, Bruce becomes highly skilled in martial arts and fighting. By the end of his training, Ducard, who turns out to be Ra's al Ghul himself, asks Bruce to destroy Gotham, which he refuses. Departing from this moment, Bruce sets the League's temple on fire and runs away back to Gotham. (Batman Begins) [Film] What is remarkable is that he turns against his masters who taught him his skills in combat and agility. Like the archetypal hunter, Natty who turns against the Indian teachers, Bruce goes after the League of Shadows in order to rescue Gotham. Hence, abiding by formulaic conventions, Batman/Bruce follows the conventions that Natty ushered.

The final instance of Batman's abidance by conventions is his adherence to the moral code of violence, as presented by Slotkin. Like Natty Bumppo, Batman restrains his violence and vehemence to preserve his status of savior and rescuer of Gotham city. Even though he concedes to violence, he makes sure to set a barrier between his deeds and the criminals'. In *Batman Begins*, when he is asked whether he pitied criminals after he left his fancy mansion to lead a vagabond life, he explains, "I lost many assumptions about the simple nature of right and wrong...when I traveled, I learned the fear before a crime and the thrill of success but I never became one of them [criminals]" (*Batman Begins*) [Film]. This reminds us of Natty's refusal to take scalps when he attacks Indians. Both heroes indulge in violence, which is respectively associated with Indians and criminals, but they set boundaries that secure their status as saviors and rescuers of innocents. In other words, such limit conceals and "legitimizes" their violence within these conventional moralistic frames. Furthermore, like Natty, Bruce disciplines his violence. On the one hand, the first never indulges in killing except when he is under attack or for the sake of saving his friends. On the other hand, the second refuses to kill without a valid reason. In fact, for his ultimate test in his training in the League of Shadows, Ducard commands Bruce to execute a man who was accused of murder. Not surprisingly, he refuses such order because he is not a criminal, nor an executioner (*Batman Begins*) [Film]. Though he is violent, he sees it irrelevant to kill without a valid reason. Thus, Bruce abides by the moral code of violence that stipulates that killing is allowed only when necessary.

As another rule of the Code, the hero must rescue and save female captives. Once more, Batman abides by such convention. Like Natty, he is the valiant savior of poor women in distress. In Tim Burton's *Batman*, the Joker holds Vicky Vale captive in a museum. He wants to disfigure her; however, he fails because Batman immediately comes to her rescue. Thanks to his heroic act, Vicky is safe in her apartment. In the final scenes of the film, the Joker captures Vicky and takes her to the top of Gotham Cathedral. Unsurprisingly, Batman follows them. After a long confrontation, he rescues Vicky once more (*Batman*) [Film]. In Christopher Nolan's *Batman Begins*, Batman stands by the same tradition of saving females from captivity. He interrupts an assassination attempt on his beloved Rachel Dawes; then, he saves her from the poisoning of a villainous Doctor by procuring her the antidote. Finally, when confronted to psychotic criminals in the streets of Gotham, Batman manages to save Rachel again (*Batman Begins*) [Film]. In *The Dark Knight*, he also succeeds to rescue her, after the Joker attempts to abduct her during a fund raising party (*The Dark*

Knight) [Film]. Hence, like Natty, Batman maintains the conventions of the moral of violence by rescuing female captives.

Beyond saving female captives, Batman follows Natty's path by securing Gotham City. Like the former who helps Tom Hutter and Munro safeguard their settlements, Batman helps the citizens of Gotham to fight criminals and corrupt mobsters. In Tim Burton's film, he foils the Joker's plan of poisoning the citizens of Gotham. By the end of the movie, he delivers a message to them, claiming that they are free from the shadow of crimes. He adds that they can call him for their rescue, were it to happen again (Batman) [Film]. Hence, he stands as the devoted savior of the city. In Nolan's *Batman Begins*, he refuses to destroy Gotham City, as ordered by the League of Shadows; on the contrary, he runs back there to cleanse it from criminals and corruption instead of wrecking it. By the end of the movie, he defeats the League of Shadows and Ducard and he rescues Gotham from their plan of destruction (Batman Begins) [Film]. In *The Dark Knight*, after a long series of climactic events, the Joker is captured and Gotham city is safe from his devious plan. Furthermore, Batman proves his commitment to the accomplishment of the welfare of his city. He accepts to take the blame for Harvey Dent's death in order to preserve his reputation of Gotham's White Knight (The Dark Knight) [Film]. Hence, like Natty Bumppo who looks for the safety of his fellow White settlers and their settlements, Batman secures the modern urban frontiers of Gotham City from the danger of corruption and criminals. He does not hesitate to risk his life and his reputation for the sake of the well-being of Gotham citizens.

Similarly, Batman carries on the same conventions set by the archetypal Hunter of the western frontier as presented by Slotkin to ensure their perpetuation. These resemblances reinforce the traditional American perspective on heroes; they strengthen the public perception of the ideal and archetypal hero. As Cawelti explained, conventions convey the audience's familiarity with shared representations. In other words, Batman's reliance on them allows the audience to recall Natty Bumppo, the archetypal American hero. They also ensure his preservation throughout different times and contexts. However, Cawelti also mentions a set of inventions that allow the formula to develop and to present newness in accordance to the flux of time with Batman's set of inventions that each film comes with.

### 2.3 Batman: The Instigator of Inventions and Newness

Despite the above-mentioned similarities, Natty Bumppo and Batman are different on many levels. The most striking difference concerns the setting of

each narrative. On the one hand, as mentioned before, Cooper's tales revolve around the American western frontiers; they occur in the wilderness and the vast prairies. The natural environment provides the reader with images of lakes, streams, mountains, valleys, hills, trees and various wild animals. Even though in *The Pioneers* the wild setting includes early villages with their roads, lodgings, schools and churches, the scenery of the tales remains rural, pastoral and rustic. On the other hand, Batman's events occur in the urban setting of Gotham City, a metropolitan modal par excellence. Nolan admits that it is an exaggerated modal of New York City (YouTube). In his movies, we notice huge glass skyscrapers, suspended trains, modern cars, monumental bridges, traffic lights and a limitless number of streets and freeways. The city includes modern hospitals, banks and business towers. These stand for city structures that reflect contemporary and modern times. Hence, Gotham as the urban frontier stands for the invention that Batman brings to the convention in the archetypal myth of the western frontier.

Gotham City is crippled with various criminals and mobsters who threaten the safety of its citizens. They came to replace the Indian Natives who posed as a "threat" to the establishment and flourishing of settlements during Frontier times. In other words, they substitute for the Indians. Throughout his adventures, Batman confronts various criminals. In *Batman Begins*, Carmin Falcone is the head of a mob criminal organization that stains Gotham with corruption and spreads terror among its citizens; Dr. Jonathan Crane "The Scarecrow" is an evil doctor who attempts to destroy Gotham city and he is an associate of the League of Shadows and Ra's Al Ghul (*Batman Begins*) [Film]. In *The Dark Knight*, he is faced with the Joker, a thief and a killer who implants chaos and fear in Gotham. As mentioned before, he is Batman's personal nemesis, as he is responsible for the death of his parents. The film starts with the Joker's successful and nonetheless violent robbery of Gotham Bank. As the plot progresses, it becomes more of a personal fight with Batman as he abducts Rachel Dawes (Assistant district attorney and Bruce's childhood sweetheart) and Harvey Dent (Gotham's District Attorney). The Joker is responsible for the death of the former and the disfigurement and corruption of the latter (*The Dark Knight*) [Film]. Hence, these city criminals stand for the modern versions of Indians that the archetypal Hunter must fight, as stipulated by the archetypal myth of the western frontier. In fact, like the parallel between the City and old frontiers, these criminals are analogous to Indians: the archetypal enemies. As ex Nickerson explains, the city is "a labyrinthine world of dark and mysterious powers and, at the same time, [is] an urban frontier, where the rule of law came into confrontation

with disorder” (editor, 44). By juxtaposition, Batman is the enforcer of Law and Order against the chaos that criminals spread. Hence, in formulaic terms, the city and criminals, as new elements, represent the inventions within the conventional frontiers.

Among the other inventions Batman brings to the archetypal hero are his panoply of gadgets and weaponry to fight criminals. As opposed to Natty's moccasins, hunting shirts and deerskins, Batman's attire seeks sophistication and modernity throughout Nolan's trilogy. In fact, Bruce Wayne fashioned the “Batsuit”, which is a disguise he wears when crusading against criminals. It is all black with a Bat mask that only reveals his mouth and chin. The Batsuit's thread is made of Nomex diweave with Kevlar plating and reinforced joints that shield Bruce from a knife or bullet wound. Then, in the second movie, he improves his Batsuit to a lighter one made out of titanium-dipped tri-weave fiber. While Natty Bumppo solely relies on his rifle ‘Killdeer’ and his five senses against the Indians, Batman displays a collection of sophisticated tools. He has “Gauntlets” ornamented with sharp blades. His Bat mask's ears are high-powered antennae that allow him to overhear on the city from a distance. He also has a “Memory-cloth cape” made of normal fabric which stiffens thanks to electrical charge; this allows him to fly. Finally, as a means of transportation, the Batman relies on several highly developed vehicles. For instance, he has the “Batmobile” that can transform into a motorbike; he also drives the “Tumbler”, a super rapid and extremely armored bridging vehicle which is able to jump over rivers. Hence, these various gadgets stand for the newness that Batman brings forth to the archetypal Natty. They also convey the producer's creativity and imagination, besides fitting to the 21<sup>st</sup> century technology. In formulaic terms, they constitute a set of inventions within conventions.

The last invention Batman comes with is the reversed journey in the archetypal myth of the Hunter. As conveyed in Cooper's narratives, Natty Bumppo emerges from the darkness of the wilderness into the bright daylight to the rescue of captives. This implies that his journey suggests a getting away from darkness towards light. Besides, the notion of moral violence, installed by the Code, reinforces the bright-side of the archetypal American hero's journey. However, in these Batman movies, there seems to be an inverted journey. In fact, Batman stands somehow for darkness more than for light. At the beginning, he was only Bruce Wayne, a rich businessman who has nothing to do with violence or crimes. Due to the loss of his parents and the high level of criminality in Gotham, he decides to get rid of vile criminals. He leaves his daylight suits of Bruce Wayne, wears his black Bat Suit and acts out mostly by night. His place

of retreat and headquarter is a gloomy cave: the Batcave. Hence, the movies convey a shift from bright sunlight scenery toward the dark moonlight set. In this process, there is an ascendancy of violence. Unlike Natty Bumppo, Batman relies more on violent and vehement ways to succeed in his quest of saving innocents, liberating captives and protecting his city. Natty, though violent on several occasions, never forgets God and the Bible. He constantly reminds us that he is Christian and not an Indian. Such discourse embellishes his violence and redeems it; for it sets it within the moral code. Hence, his stand towards killing is somehow blurry. On the contrary, Batman's position towards violence is firmer and less ambiguous as he embraces it and openly resorts to it. In other words, the last invention he brings to the archetypal myth is the predominance of –and openness to– violence. Hence, Inventions respond to a changing context and confront new perceptions. Batman's adoption and acceptance of violence reflects the 21<sup>st</sup> Century American zeitgeist. In fact, contemporary American Popular Culture relies on violence, as opposed to canonical works which embellish it within morals. There are many modern heroes, either in movies or narratives, who openly display violence for the sake of the welfare of the majority.

## Conclusion

In this article, we have juxtaposed Canon to Popular Culture, as embodied by Natty Bumppo and Batman; the national myth of the Western Frontier, Popular Culture and movies stand as their meeting point. In the elaboration of the analysis, we have presented Natty Bumppo as the crystallization of the archetypal American Hunter, as conceptualized by Richard Slotkin. Then, we have compared and contrasted Natty to Batman in terms of Cawelti's formulaic conventions and inventions. Based on the former, we notice various similarities between the two protagonists: both are orphans, adopted by a foster family and both have a henchman. Furthermore, both have witnessed a traumatic event that ushered them to the path of violence. The two heroes rely on a sobriquet and a persona in their pursuits of enemies for the sake of the rescue of female captives. Moreover, they rely on the moral code of violence to secure the welfare of their respective surroundings. This allows the conclusion that Natty Bumppo and Batman abide by the archetypal myth of the western frontier and of the hunter as presented by Richard Slotkin. Overall, we have shown that the two protagonists are not very different. Batman indeed ensures the perpetuation of the archetypal representation of the mythical American Hunter and Natty



Bumppo is the ancestral literary modal from which Batman was born to ensure the continuity of traditions set by his ancestor.

Through their differences, conveyed in the inventions, we notice that Batman simply evolves and adjusts to the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. The archetypal frontiers and wilderness are replaced by the urban city with its modern buildings and superstructures. Criminals and mobsters stand as parallels to the archetypal Indian enemies that the Hunter fights. Batman relies on a set of sophisticated gadgets and weaponry to replace the Hunter's old rifle. Finally, the popular hero reverts the archetypal journey. Instead of getting out of darkness towards light, Batman moves from the latter towards the former. This may be considered as an aspect of the ascendancy of violence in American culture. Throughout these inventions, we notice that American Popular Culture does not break from traditions. On the contrary, it parallels the past conventions which it supplies with inventions that fit contemporary times. In conclusion, it would appear that Natty Bumppo and Batman meet at the crossroads between the conventions of the archetypal myth of the frontier and the inventions of Popular Culture.

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## Abstract

The present paper deals with the juxtaposition of Canon to Popular Culture intertwined within American mythology. Specifically, it confronts James Fenimore Cooper's protagonist Natty Bumppo of *The Leatherstocking Tales* (1823-41) to the popular character Batman, as adapted in Tim Burton's *Batman* (1989), Christopher Nolan's *Batman Begins* (2005) and *The Dark Knight* (2008) movies. The aim pursued in this study is to show where these two characters intersect despite the time gap and genre that separate them. To carry on the investigation, the paper is divided into two main parts; the first one includes the approaches upon which the study relies, namely the Myth and Symbol School of the American Studies that rests upon the archetypal myth of the Western Frontier and Popular Culture and Popular Studies that comprise Intermediality. As for the theorists, Richard Slotkin's vision of the Hunter of the Frontiers seems to fit Natty Bumppo and John G. Cawelti's concept of Popular Formula's Conventions and Inventions applies to Batman. The second part depicts Natty Bumppo as the embodiment of the archetypal Hunter with whom Batman shares many common features. It also portrays the latter as the instigator of new characteristics that Natty lacks. The results of this investigation show that the two heroes' paths intersect and converge at the crossroad of the unifying American myth

of the Western Frontiers; they also assert the unity of the canonical image of Natty Bumppo with the popular representation of Batman.

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## Keywords

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Batman, Canon, Convention, Formula, Hunter, Invention, Moral Code, Natty Bumppo, Popular Culture, Violence, Western Frontiers.

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## Résumé

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L'article traite de la juxtaposition du Canon à la culture populaire, dans le cadre de la mythologie américaine. Plus précisément, il compare Natty Bumppo de James Fenimore Cooper dans « *The Leatherstocking Tales* » au personnage populaire Batman, tel qu'adapté dans les films de Tim Burton « *Batman* » et Christopher Nolan « *Batman Begins* » et « *The Dark Knight* ». Le but de cette étude est de montrer où ces deux personnages se croisent, malgré l'écart temporel qui les sépare et le différent genre auquel ils appartiennent. Nous avons divisé la recherche en deux parties principales : la première comprend les approches sur lesquelles l'enquête s'appuie, notamment l'École des mythes et des symboles – une branche des études américaines– qui virevoltent autour du mythe archétypal des frontières de l'ouest et la Culture populaire – et études populaires– qui incluent l'intermédialité. Quant aux théoriciens, la vision de Richard Slotkin du Chasseur des frontières semble s'appliquer sur Natty Bumppo, et les concepts des conventions et des inventions des formules populaires de Cawelti s'accordent avec Batman. La deuxième partie présente Natty Bumppo comme l'incarnation du chasseur archétype, une incarnation que l'on retrouve chez Batman qui est également présenté comme l'instigateur de nouvelles caractéristiques absentes chez Natty. Les résultats de cette étude montrent que les deux héros convergent à la croisée des chemins de l'unificateur mythe américain des frontières de l'ouest. Ils affirment également l'unité de l'image canonique de Natty Bumppo avec la représentation populaire de Batman.

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## Mots-clés

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Batman, canon, chasseur, code moral, convention, culture populaire, frontières de l'ouest, Formule, invention, Natty Bumppo, violence.

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### مستخلص

يتناول هذا المقال تقارب الأعمال الأدبية مع الثقافة الشعبية المنسوجة في الأساطير الأمريكية. بتعبير أدق، يحلل المقال شخصية «ناتي بامبو»، بطل رواية *The Leatherstocking Tales* (1841-1823) للكاتب الأمريكي جيمس فينيمور كوبر، بالتوازي مع الشخصية الشعبية «باتمان» كما تم اقتباسها في فيلم «باتمان» لتيم بيرتون (1989) و«باتمان قد بدأ» لكريستوفر نولان (2005) وأفلام «الفارس الأسود» (2008). تتعلق هذه الدراسة بكيفية تقاطع هاتين الشخصيتين والتقاءهما على الرغم من

فجوتي الزمن والنوع اللتين تفصلان بينهما. سوف يتم تقسيم المقال إلى قسمين رئيسيين؛ يتضمن الأول المقاربات التي سوف يتم الاعتماد عليها؛ وتتمثل في مدرسة الأسطورة والرمز في الدراسات الأمريكية التي تستند إلى نموذج أسطورة الحدود الغربية؛ والثقافة الشعبية والدراسات الشعبية، التي تشترك كلها في فكرة الوسطية. بالنسبة إلى المنظرين فإن رؤية ريتشارد سلوتكين حول «صياد الحدود» تبدو مناسبة لـ«ناتي بامبو»، وتصور جون كوالتي عن اتفاقيات واختراعات الصياغة الشعبية تنطبق على «باتمان» أيضاً. أما القسم الثاني من المقال فيتطرق إلى «ناتي بامبو» كنموذج لتجسيد الصياد الذي يشترك «باتمان» معه في العديد من الصفات. كما يعرض هذا القسم «باتمان» باعتباره المُبادر إلى الخصائص الجديدة التي يفتقر إليها «ناتي». هذا وأظهرت نتائج البحث أن البطلين يتقاطعان ويلتقيان في الأسطورة الأمريكية الموحدة للحدود الغربية، كذلك أكدت وحدة الصورة الشرعية لـ«ناتي بامبو» مع الصورة الشعبية لباتمان

#### كلمات مفتاحية

باتمان، اتفاقية، صياغة، صياد، اختراع، قانون أخلاقي، ناتي بامبو، ثقافة شعبية، عنف، حدود غربية.