

Batman had a Weapon: socio-political influences of the construction of archetype morals in the 1930's

Abstract: This paper aims at historically analyzing the development of a comic book fictional character's moral conduct development and its relationship with arms policy in the United States of America in the 1930s. In the archetypal construct of the superhero Batman, created in 1939, there is a transition element: there is an element in transition: the use of firearms by the hands of the fighting crime protagonist. This paper refines the relationships between the socio-cultural dynamics of the United States related to public security and civil liberties regarding giving firearm license to citizens through historical contextualization, the introduction of narrative excerpts from their original sources, and historiographical criticism of the investigative process. This scholarly work reflects on the editorial stance regarding the character-product that was rising in the market of the entertainment-culture industry: to avoid using firearms — moral conduct related to romanticized combating of crime. This narrative process belongs to a discourse network related to the changing imaginary that took place in the United States in face of the growth of organized crime and several news reports about crimes that have dismayed the population

Keywords: History of crime, comics book, firearm policy.

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Introduction

Ideological stances interfere with the construction of the fiction entertainment characters' discourses. The experience of such a character – an entertainment product and protagonist of several diverse narrative – can only take place if it follows the changeovers and modifications required by the social dynamics themselves. The Cultural Industry, in its historical trail, elected a pantheon of imaginative beings that survived as they were adapted to ongoing new times, their discourses were adjusted, and they attended to the social imaginaries and their countless expectations.

Comic books act perfectly as symptomatic records of a dynamic social imaginary. Far from producing perfect reflections of what is real, they are representations of a range of structures, whether they are inspired by materiality or by the ideas and desires of the society that produce and consume them, stimulating expectations and criticisms, allowing the imaginary and the discourse to be constantly present, whether they are readings of historical reality by means of allegories and metaphors. The increasingly massive experience, in issues found in newsstands and specialized stores, of products that emerged as ventures of a handful of creators to the big companies they have become.

Thus, the superheroes reproduce reassertion of moral values and ethical conduct discourses praised in the liberal Western contemporaneity. With the narrative product within the Entertainment Industry at its peak, commonly low-cost and within reach in the United States post 1929 crisis, the attitude and sayings of the idealized protagonists are traces of the hegemonic social imaginary (BACZKO, 1985). Such signs are not permanent, they undergo changes according to the sets of changes in the tide of history, so a rightly accepted attitude may cease to exist later.

Among several discourses, it is sustained that the superhero Batman does not use firearms to fight crime. This discourse gained momentum in the 1950s and it was reinforced in 1980, developed as one of the moral elements within the many narratives of the product-character, along with moral superiority linked to the tragedy that took the life of his parents in his fictional mythology.

However, in its origin these elements were not as essential, for there were times when the use of firearms did not cause discomforts to its creators. The reasons for this provide us with the safe understanding of symptomatic value that comic books possess for historical research.

A direct symptom of the North American social dynamics of the first half of the twentieth century: this imaginary is a symptom for us. Comic books, their constant issuing, availability and affordability, and the *mea culpa* of living much more in the lands of fiction and fantasy, had a great deal of dialogue with the reality in which they were produced, with their creators' clear political stances. In addition to the fictional narrative tract, we not only have the story of an archetypal Batman imagery development and its disapproval of firearms, but also social and political disputes over crime scenario, individual rights and the gun license in the United States in the first half of the 20th century.

Story amid triggers and bats

Often, small discursive tracts go unnoticed, especially in the entertainment area. They could be understood only as fleeting eventualities that could provide us with little or no information, perhaps seen as little as allegorical curiosity. However, we can dialogue with the past and understand in it the depths of certain nuances without opposing interdisciplinarity or even to the large-scale possible traces, as well as the efficient crossing of sources. Fiction reacts to reality not as a reflex, but as several records of representations that are embedded in imaginaries and their discourses networks.

To work on this very useful set of concepts is very exhaustive, since it demands the historian to be singularly sensitive to the sensitivity of the past. The historian Sandra Jatahy (2010, p.20) writes in short words not only the difficulties, but also the potential opportunities in the possible reading of the past through the careful analysis of its traces. This work is carefully removed from any fascination or attachment that the entertainment narrative may trigger, or even from its superficial reading or less careful analysis of the useful data for this investigation in the field of history. Batman, the famous superhero and product of more than 70 years of existence, vows to repudiate the use of firearms in his archetypal construction. Similarly, to other fictional protagonists of periodical adventures, Batman does not give up on violence, however, it has its limits.

Thus, the discourse that children's heroes moralize violence by means of justifying its use persists. Whether in the tradition of fiction from ancient times and the Middle Ages, in the records from Greek tragedy to chivalry romances, or even in the romanesque structure of the eighteenth century and the emergence of the *noir* police novels, urban violence originates from a latent criminogenic nature of contemporary society, firearms and the use of combative violence is the mindset of protagonists of several of the narratives of the first half of the twentieth century (CASSUTO, 2008).

Even though the North American moral imaginary is linked to Protestant religiosity, this did not challenge the discursive network of the moralization of violence. This violence was justified in the North American non-consensual doctrinal concept of Manifest Destiny, in which its followers justified violence against indigenous populations of the West since the nineteenth century through belief in the moral duty of fortunate progress by the Protestant religiosity (MOUNTJOY, 2009, p.9). This conception of a people chosen by God entitled the use of violence, even though it was not a well-accepted social-political doctrine, it entered the social imaginary in discourses that communicated as a bridge to work as the basis for the American revolution and the development of an ideal North American individual.

It was not a problem to use weapons, especially firearms, when the moral discourse agreed with the prevailing ideal in the first half of the twentieth century. A formal or informal law representative could use a pistol if his intentions were noble and his targets were criminal or other kind of social threats. It was given positive feedback to the romantic tradition of moral dualism between the hero of fictional literary narrative and the villain, representing the outcast of society, the criminal, the enemy of the state or nation. In the narrative construction of antagonism, heroes could freely shoot non-virtuous men (and women) for achieving a common good.

With no martial tradition, comprised of traditional weapons that can be traditionally manufactured, the United States' ideal individual was the cowboy and his gun. The United States of America has built its national archetype surely far from the native indians and black captives, validating the cowboy (white, Christian, heterosexual) – the great pioneer – as the one who expands the nation to the West, confronts all adversities of the locations (including the peoples considered "savages") and fights the opportunist criminals that appear in his way. The utopian myth of the Western and the ideal built on the fundamental American archetype was born (HOBBSAWM, 2013, p.411).

Soon in the first periodical productions of comics, the heroes of the adventures appeared with guns in their hand. In the editions of New Fun¹ magazine, since its first issue in 1935, cowboys like Jack Woods have used guns and other firearms to fight the most formidable types of criminals. Firearms were the instruments of power of Manichean duels and conflicts of the Western genre, better known in Brazil as the *Velho Oeste* or *Bang-Bang*. In the wake of literature, such as of Conan Doyle's 1887 book *A Study in Scarlet*, the genre was also enjoyed in the movies, such as in movies like *Stagecoach*, directed by John Ford and released in 1939. It was not long before it reached the comic books and it found in them rich space to multiply itself, with characters like Buffalo Bill³, Lone Ranger and Zorro.⁴

In comic books, considerable icons of narrative romanticism used firearms. Within a huge list of characters-products, we can safely point to some who have gained notoriety and were engraved in popular memory by their media and trans-media success, such as Dick Tracy and the Phantom. The first, Dick Tracy, a combative detective in the violent city of Chicago, created by Chester Gould in 1932, spared no bullets against the organized crime of gangsters in Sunday North-American newspapers.⁵ In turn, the Phantom, a mysterious adventure hero created by Lee Falk in 1936, protected the fictional African country called Bangalla from overseas thieves with pistols in their holsters. Obviously, we are dealing with two narrative typologies that were fundamental to the development of the superhero mythology: detective and adventure.

The superhero genre kept up with the regular narratives already existing in the media, even though it had its own allegories. The exotic outer-world scenarios were moved to North American urban centers and adapted to their social problems, adding the city on as a structural feature in the concept of superheroes, without the obvious bait of the superpowers, once several superheroes do not need extraordinary abilities (LIMA, 2011).

¹ North American issue from the National Allied Publication, that after undergoing several changes in business, structure and name, became DC Comics in 1977.

² Originally titled *Stagecoach*, it was an adaptation of a short story written by Ernest James Heycox in 1937 titled *The Stage to Lordsburg*.

³ The comic book artist Harry O'Neil created a series of stories about the real adventurer of the same name, but taking on full artistic freedom to completely escape William Frederic Cody's record, that marked history with the extermination of the buffaloes in the North American territory and with his circus entertainment venture using indigenous groups in the human zoo style (BANCEL; BLANCHARD; LEMAIRE, 2011). This whole allegory popularized the Western myth and its individual ideal: the cowboy (HOBSBAWM, 2013, p400).

⁴ The known misunderstanding among Western comic book researchers: these two characters were once released in Brazil with the same name: *Zorro*. The Lone Ranger, created by Fran Striker in 1938, appeared in Brazilian periodicals, such as *Globo Juvenil*, *O Gibi*, *O Guri*, among others, as well as in newspaper strips since the beginning of the 1940s. *Zorro* from the writer Johnston McCulley in 1919 for novels in popular magazines known as *Pulp* literature.

It is still the narrative style of Manichaeism: the idealized protagonist with praised moral values and who faces opponents loaded with ethical flaws according to the liberal Western world. Morality is divided between right and wrong, like any myth and its educational function and reaffirmation of values (LIMA, 2014).

Batman was a timely investment, within a secure universe of successful references. Batman's creator Bob Kane sought success, including financial success, moving from humorous narratives made to Jerry Iger's studios to police drama, along with Bill Finger on several ventures. Finger and Kane followed the mythical craze Superman's arrival provoked and soon they developed a character to rival as a product (GOIDANICH, 2011, pp. 251-252). However, unlike the shining alien, Batman took over through grim features, a balanced mixture of a gallant physical fighter against bad guys with the terrifying figure of a bat. There is a clear and direct closeness between Batman and the protagonist of the movie *The Mark of Zorro* and the serial killer of *The Bat*, both 1920 silent movies (REINHART, 2013, page 6). However, the closest relation was between Batman and the character *The Shadow*.

The Shadow was the most direct influence on the construction of the character Batman as a crime fighter archetype in fiction. *The Shadow* – the mysterious crime and fiction revenge character of the *Detective Story Hour* program, airing in 1930 – was so successful that it reached franchise beyond the US, arriving in Brazil in the when the relationship between the two countries became closer with the development of World War II.⁶ *The Shadow* was a millionaire who secretly had double identity to hunt criminals, who were commonly found in the great North-American metropolises after the crisis of 1929, mainly due to beverage trafficking. An astonishing archetype of a ruthless crime fighter was then built, who used guns to end criminal careers.

Firearms are part of the aforementioned characters as their resources in the crusade against crime. *Zorro* is most commonly associated with the bird of prey and the whip, but in the 1920s film production, he used a flintlock pistol. *The Shadow* to his two noisy pistols in the radio soap-opera – that were changing according to the narrative support. The thief bat in *The Bat* movie also had two guns in the pockets of his black bundle, even though he conversely used them considering the previous examples, once he is a criminal and not a vigilante. However, far from being a simple attitude transfer, the fact that firearms are legitimate for both ends of an antagonistic balance between heroes and villains in the first half of the twentieth century is latent.

⁵ In Brazil, it was published as of the 482 edition of the journal *Suplemento Juvenil* in 1938 as an integral part of the newspaper *A Nação*.

A crime fighter like The Shadow certainly did not carry any burden due to the fact the used a gun, for his audience was mostly adult. The immediate success of the radio soap opera (VAN HISE, 1989, p.52) confirms that the use of weapons and violence to combat crime by means of capital punishment did not cause discomfort. The cowboys perpetuated a sanitized and justified violence in Western comics, for “This instantly recognisable narrative is enriched with a set of recurrent themes, such as rugged individualism, the conflict between the savage wilderness and civilization, the quest of violence and so on” (GRADY, 2016, p.165). The topic makes it essential that there is a protagonist controlling violence.

In the first comic books, Batman followed the *modus operandi* of his fictional work colleagues. With no extraordinary abilities like Superman and Mandrake, the bat-dressed vigilante guidelines are closer to the ones of other humans, fighting fire with fire, as one would expect and accepted from police authorities. With good writings in the *noir* genre, with narrative adaptations for more action in the comic strips in the first half of the twentieth century, Kane had his character published in the issue No. 27 of Detective Comics in May 1939. Investigating Mysteries and Fighting Criminals in an urban setting, Batman became a success.

In these first stories, the narrative and the audience were in experimentation field. Aesthetics and narrative attuned to what was in the similar editions of Detective Comics in a regular basis. Killing was never a problem for the adventurous city heroes, which can be observed long before gun license. In the 30th issue of Detective Comics, originally in August 1939, Batman kicked criminal while swinging on a rope in outside area of a building.⁸ On the same page,⁹ Batman's speech suggests that the fate of the man resembles the one of the criminal he defeated in the previous edition. Antagonists, before they are killed, need to hover over the social imaginary as major threats; their deaths are unwanted, but necessary, according to narrative expectations.

The record of batman using a firearm was soothed by being an extreme measure against forces beyond human control. Seeking to save his romantic pair from the control of a vampire monk, Batman uses a firearm in the 32nd issue of the Detective Comics, dated November 1939.¹⁰ For the reason to be clearer, a piece of silver is melted by the superhero, so he manufactured lethal bullets to kill supernatural beings. On the last page of the issue, Batman kills the legion of creatures while they sleep in their coffins.

⁶ In the United States, Orson Welles voiced the character, while in Brazil he was voiced by the announcer Saint-Clair Lopes on *Rádio Nacional* in 1943. The opening title of the Brazilian version can be listened at: <http://www.radionors.jor.br/2013/07/quem-sabe-o-mal-que-se-esconde-nos-coracoes-humanos.html>.

This situation is tied to the common sense that vampires are inhuman beings and must be extinguished for the welfare of the living beings.

The narratives seemed to easily guide Batman figuring as a very common archetype to the adventure genre. Like the Phantom, a character of Mandrake's creator Lee Falk, and published in strip format since 1936, Batman was on the cover of the next issue of Detective Comics, number 33, wearing a holster on his waist. This issue introduced the superhero's myth, featuring the death of his parents in a robbery and his oath to fight crime.¹¹ The gun within the narrative is used to damage deadly machines used by terrorists¹² and nothing more. The first page of issue number 35 highlights an image of Batman with a smoking gun in his hand,¹³ what seems to be a .45 caliber semi-automatic pistol, but as in the many issues, it prioritizes the body combat.

Then, the gun is meant to be one of the many resources used by Batman in his crusade against criminals. Not just the handgun, but others such as the machine gun, which appears in the Batplan, used against criminals who were planning to take a monstrous creature to the town center, as in Batman Magazine No. 1 issued in 1940. In the scene's text box, it is said "coming from the sky, Batman brings death!" and this is followed by the speech of the character himself: "Much as I hate to take lives, I think this time it will be necessary!"¹⁴ The killing is justified by inevitability, but ensuring that it is not the result of emotional factor, but still a conduct doomed by morality within the discourse constructed for the character

With no structured guidelines during the first decades of publication of the character, the use of firearms was low, and it was only highlighted during the Second War. During the conflict, the moral justification of violence was once again loosened to support the use of force – mainly with bullets – as the final resort in the defense of democracy.

⁸ The issue was first published in Brazil in a special edition of *Abril* publisher called Detective Comics: As Quatro Primeiras Histórias de Batman in March 1995. The issue was part of a special promotional package with facsimile copies of the four first issues featuring Batman: the numbers 27, 28, 29 and 30 of the Detective Comics magazine. Recently, in August 2007, the *Panini* publisher, which owns the publishing rights of the DC Comics characters in Brazil, released the bound book series *Batman: Chronicles*, which included in the first volume the aforementioned editions.

⁹ On page number 38 of the bound book *Batman: Chronicles*.

¹⁰ In 1996, a Do It Yourself-style venture, registered as the *Gibizada* publisher, translated this edition in the fanzine format for the *Álbum Juvenil* magazine number 17. It was the longstanding task of making it available made by a comic book enthusiast named Lieutenant Colonel Valdir de Amorim Damaso during the Golden Age of Comic Books. This specific underground publication was the only one published in Brazil until it was officially published by the *Panini* publisher in volume 1 of *Batman: Chronicles*.

For this reason, it was considered another moralizing achievement, conditioned to a differentiated reality in which "inter silent weapon leges: in times of war, the law falls silent" (WALZER, 2003, p.4). Batman was in the 15th issue of Batman magazine in February 1945, using a Maxim gun (interestingly, a machine gun used by the German and Russian military since the 19th century) on the cover of the magazine.

In a different cover, Batman offers a rifle to a soldier and mentions the so-called War Bonus, given by the United States at the end of the war. It was a clear war propaganda:¹⁵ the superhero gives the M1 Garand rifle to the soldier communicating it is sponsorship from his North-American compatriots on the so-called "domestic front", to which his young partner, Robin, follows announcing it is the 7th War Loan on the cover of Batman magazine's 30th issue between August and September 1945. This set of loans made by US citizens was a means to keep up with the costs of war after the German defeat in 8 of May 1945, raising funds through the sale of equities. A strong advertising campaign was launched, through patriotism discourse, to request loans of the population for the war's military and political maintenance, something rather expensive (HOBSBAWM, 1995, 53). To counteract the morality of use and presentation of weapons was a patriot duty for Batman's producers and a very profitable business maneuver for the publisher.

Such cases, less and less significant and more isolated, did not change the continuous process of the Batman's disarmament. As the issues came out and their teen target audience was formed, pistols and revolvers left the gloved hands of the heroes to be held only by the trembling hands of outlaws. However, behind this disarmament practice there was a social and political movement for firearms-control legislation taking place in the North American society. The so-called National Firearms Act of 1934, which took place in the wake of the dread and popular outcry after the 1929 Saint Valentin Massacre, caused discontent resulting in the National Rifle Association and it introduced a long-running quarrel on gun possession and public safety in the United States.

The media has a strong role in the construction of imagery and discourses on moral postures and political decisions. The San Valentin Massacre left 7 dead; they were disfigured after being hit by volley of machine-gun bullets on February 14, 1929.

¹¹ Between the first and second pages of the story, corresponding to pages 64 and 65 of Batman: Chronicles – Volume 1.

¹² In page number 71 of the mentioned volume.

¹³ Page 88 of the same volume.

¹⁴ Both speeches are in the last pictures of page 163 of the issue of Batman: Chronicles.

The violent crime scene was a clandestine auto shop at 2122 North Clark Street in Lincoln Park, north of Chicago (DICKIE, 2004, p.282). One of the wounded individuals died a few days later in the hospital, without detailing who was responsible for the attack, even though witnesses reported four men escaping – two of them dressed in police clothes. The ill-fated gang meeting made George "Bug" Moran and Al Capone rivals, fueled popular dismay over the news outbreak.¹⁶ We should not forget that Al Capone kept police officers and journalists on his payroll (CAWTHORNE, 2012, p.73-74).

It was a fuss that took root in the North American memory: a violent crime that was not the motivation of the arrest of the individual who possibly ordered it. In the years of 1967 there still was a rather significant criminal narrative, with the launch of the movie *The St. Valentine's Day Massacre*, directed by Roger Corman. The following years were marked by the rise in organized gangster crime, still under the effect of the haunting economic crisis of the stock market crash in 1929 and the latent political extremism. The purpose of the Valentine's Day Massacre was to give birth to the fear necessary so public opinion would not disturb the enactment of the National Firearms Act, on June 26, 1934, which would regulate the registration of weapons of great destructive power, such as the machine guns used in the Saint Valentine's Day Massacre. This form of control obviously bothered the National Rifle Association of America,¹⁷ and all the growing war industry business community (LEORE, 2015, p.183).

Such groups that were affected by the registration law had a chance of reversing the situation through a legal case concerning weapons. The case became known as "*United States vs. Miller*."¹⁸ Two contumacious Oklahoma bank robbers, Jack Miller and Frank Layton, were detained by the Arkansas police and arrested for possession of unregistered weaponry under the National Firearms Act still in force, on April 18, 1938. Their lawyers followed the practice of those who defend individual right that is guaranteed in the Second Amendment. The stand of Miller and Layton defenders corroborates the idea that "opponents of gun control generally endorse an individual right theory, claiming the Second Amendment protects an individual right to possess and use firearms" (FRYE, 2008, p. 51). The North American Second Amendment is amidst the individual right and collective rights, even though regulations do not restrict the right to carry and use weapons, including when there's militia formation.

¹⁵ As there were so many, including the building of a robust and iconic collection of images of the period. From the female participation in manufacturing war goods in 1942 with Rosie the Riveter (visit: <https://www.wdl.org/en/item/2733/#q=woman+world+war+II&page=2>), to the development of a sense of patriotism in the image of the soldiers raising the flag named "Now... All Together," May 1945 (visit: <https://www.wdl.org/en/item/19/>).

This was the trigger for the dispute between political extremes about gun license in order to find a solution for the growth in crime shown by the media. The solution found by the United States Supreme Court was to agree on the unfeasibility of the theory held by Miller and Layton's lawyers, for the weapon they were bearing – a sawed-off shotgun – could only have this change in shape if their goal was self-defense or lawful militia formation, aiming at concealing it and, thus, not going against the Second Amendment (FRYE, 2008, 67). Then, the Federal Firearms Act was established in 1938, which prohibited the firearms marketing sectors from giving gun access to individuals with criminal record. This story obviously did not end in the first half of the last century: there have been discussions and debates on American soil up to present days, but they were in this analysis the legal bases of the changes in the social imaginaries.

The two laws sprouted debates that reached the comic book productions and their links with violence back in the 1930s. The publisher that owns the Batman rights, the National Allied Publication – that many years later would become DC Comics – disregarded several accusations that newspapers like the Chicago Daily News made about the comics. Criticism from the media was not enough to cause them problem at first, as the 1930s boom gave birth to an exponential increase in Cultural Industry production. The popularity of comic books and their characters, along with other popular culture expressions, such as the radio and film series, secured them, but only up to a point (COWSILL, 2010, 29).

The political discussion scenario about gun possession and registration became strongly present in the public opinion, in every-day conversation between people, and it was surely discussed by the publisher's staff. When Whitney Ellsworth became Chief Editor of the National publisher, at one of the meetings to review the publisher's comic magazine scripts, he came across Batman issues in which he used a gun to stop criminal careers. Then, he negatively shook his head and told them to put an end to the guns (LEPORE, 2015, p.183).

¹⁶ The list of names of the deceased in the February 15, 1929 issue of the Chicago Daily Tribune (visit: http://chicagotribune.newspapers.com/clip/17444154/feb_14_1929_seven_killed_in_gang/)

¹⁷ Its main goal is to ensure the citizens' Second North American Amendment right to freely keep and bear arms, as the basic element for individual freedom. Founded in 1871, it still acts as a non-profit organization to control and regulate establishments regarding arms and their trade.

¹⁸ Available at: <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/307/174/case.html>.

With so many concerns related to narratives, ethics, education and the several age groups of the readers – which were increasingly teens –, editorial boards comprised of pedagogues and psychologists became common. Under Ellsworth's editorial supervision, *Batman* magazine's issue No. 4, 1941, featured in its fourth story an "editor's note" stating that "Batman never carries or kill with a gun!"¹⁹

Even though *Batman* switched back to using firearms for a brief period during the increased American participation in Europe, he eventually dropped it out for good. The bat's mythology development was lengthy and ongoing: periodic issues that went through decades and historical moods, which made the product-character an icon, filling him with features such as disgust at firearms. The key motivation within the fictional narrative, which at one point made sense, was that the trauma of his parents' double murder regulated his code of conduct. Over the next few decades, *Batman*'s comic scriptwriters have given voice to debates related to firearms use and morality.

Since then, coherent speeches about the chances the superhero uses firearms have been developed. In the 27th issue of *World's Finest* magazine, 1947,²⁰ *Batman* grabs a pistol when fighting criminals and Robin, who was astonished, uttered: "No! You said you'd never use a weapon, *Batman*! Do not do it!". However, similarly to *Detective Comics* issue number 33,²¹ his goal was to damage objects, and not to harm people. The resounding discourse appears in *Batman* magazine issue number 57 in February 1950.²² In order to prevent dolphin-bombs from doing what they were trained to, *Batman* painfully shoots them in the issue number 404 of the *Detective Comics* magazine, in October 1970.²³ These examples help us understand the constructions of ethical stances and the flexibilities of moral discourses when the line is crossed.

However, there were moments that *Batman*'s narrative drama readers were no longer juvenile and immature in their majority. From *Detective Comics*²⁴ issues 575 to 578, originally published in 1987, *Batman* swings between the line that separates him from a vigilante to a crime fighter who uses guns to kill his opponents: The Grim Reaper. Then, he improves his shooting ability.²⁵ Even with a gun in his hand, *Batman* backs down and doesn't shoot the Grim Reaper nor the man he just discovered to be the one who killed his parents. One of the magazine's shock-and-awe covers shows *Batman* with a semiautomatic gun in hands and a chest holster. Another one featured a striking image of *Batman* bearing a gun: the 710th edition of *Detective Comics* magazine, 1997. The publisher *Abril* launched the same story and the same cover in the *Batman* magazine number 28 in February 1999. An automatic machine gun – a heavy weapon – stands out in the picture.

¹⁹ *Batman* magazine number 4 page 75, released in Brazil in the *Batman Chronicles* bound book in its third volume, by the publisher *Panini* in August 2014.

Nonetheless, in the character's official mythology there were few times in which he used a gun to kill, what is acceptable in alternative series. It is the case of *The Dark Knight Returns*²⁶, a 1986 four-issue comic book miniseries written and illustrated by Frank Miller, supported by Klaus Janson and Lynn Varley – that deliberately tells an alternative story: Batman is older and openly more violent. In the story, Batman retired from fighting crime in the city of Gotham and, without him, the city had been taken by an intense wave of crimes linked to the formation of organized crime that is alluring for young offenders. In a scene where a child's life is at risk, Batman uses a machine gun to kill the criminal, justifying his action saying he did not doubt the man's threats.²⁷ The morality of the action is once again justified by a threat and the use of a firearm as last resort.

Some factors are crucial to understanding every example, a necessary work when one uses fiction as historical source: the analysis of the nature of the discourse, the social space and period of its utterance, and the reverberation of the imaginaries (guiding parameters) expressed in it. When the use of firearms becomes undesired, this factor needs to socially comply with morally supportive discourses, even if these discourses are not supportive of individual freedoms regarding the possession of firearms for self-defense or to fight the individuals who refuse to follow social rules. Even though they come from a fictional persona, Batman's speeches and actions carry the North American society's sayings and knowledge, and he assuredly conveys them to societies that enjoy him as a form of entertainment.

²⁰ Unique edition in Brazil.

²¹ Published in Brazil by *Ebal* in the magazine *Origens dos Super-heróis* number 1, in March of 1975. Later, in commemorative editions, as in the already mentioned *Batman Chronicles* bound book, and the number 6 of the *DC 70 Anos* collection, both issued by the *Panini* publisher in August 2007 and October 2008, respectively.

²² Unique edition in Brazil. He says: "Batman never fires a pistol nor uses a knife".

²³ In Brazil, it was issued in the *Batman* magazine number 22, in 1971, by *Ebal* publisher. In *Almanaque do Batman* magazine, in 1975, also by *Ebal*. More recently, in the *Lendas do Cavaleiro das Trevas: Neil Adams*, number 3, in December 2015, by *Panini*.

²⁴ In Brazil, it was issued in the *Batman* magazine number 7 by *Abril* publisher in 1988. And by the same publisher, in December 1996 in the *O Melhor do Batman* special edition bound book number 1.

²⁵ Na página número 29 da edição brasileira *O Melhor do Batman*, supracitada. In page number 29 of the aforementioned Brazilian edition: *O Melhor do Batman*.

Conclusion

As time-situated symptoms, comics are the board of movements of the imaginary and discourses. In this game of tales, victory is never an untouched certainty and for this reason, it can undergo changes according to the yearns of society, whether producing discourses, or receiving and accepting (or not) those discourses. As a historiographic tract, the existing perspective provides us with more elements to understand not only the way of thinking of that society, but also the alignment chosen by the Cultural Industry itself.

This analysis allows us to understand how a venture undergoes often seemingly silent interferences of its environment. Batman is safely crated, inserted as a product of the Cultural Industry, carrying weapons and following mannerisms of other protagonists of the comic books' romances. Its success increased its consumption, and this clearly caught society's attention, making its producers to see sensitive issues that could change this successful course. The decisions taken must be part of narrative logic, so that the chosen values are validated by the superhero's discourse: Batman does not use firearms.

Firearms have always been troubling issues, and the history of the United States has been filled with debates about the carrying of guns. Batman's previous narrative products, such as Zorro and The Shadow were not as bothered, first by the resilient moral imaginary about the use of guns and means of fighting crime, and secondly by being part of different product areas. Zorro is an imaginative reflection of historical reality in compliance with the moral expectations in the construction of the North American national identity. In turn, The Shadow aimed at a more mature audience, who followed him along with other radio soap operas that allured adults and haunted children. However, reality's dismay was great enough to justify changes.

It was the peak of gangster activity and fetishistic popularization of the media about crime pictures. Newspapers and radio newscasts satiated popular curiosity and fueled fears of urban violence and crime, especially regarding organized gangs and crimes involving guns and killings.

²⁶ The Dark Knight is perhaps one of the most re-edited comic books for its cult status in the Cultural Industry. In addition to the editions of 1987, 1988, 1989, 1997 and 2002 by *Abril* publisher in Brazil, it had been republished in several formats by *Panini* publisher between 2006 and 2015.

²⁷ Sequence on pages 10 and 11 of the second edition of the 1987 miniseries, by *Abril* publisher. Second chapter or volume, according to each republication.

This vivid scenario had become source of inspiration for fiction, accompanied by social fascination with criminal figures and scary narratives of daring crimes. Far from Zorro's genuine romanticism, *The Shadow* and *Batman* were closer to the ongoing events that peppered US public safety issues in the early twentieth century. As children's comic book consumption became more significant, and as it was easier for the parents to control them listening to radio soap operas, the risk of juvenile crime and the legal or illegal possession of firearms as fuel for the rise in crime cases was put in question.

Then, the use of firearms had become not only undesirable, but morally unpleasant in a turbulent period for public safety. Many groups and the media highlighted the influences of comics in setting attitude, thoughts and sayings, and they were in favor and against the comics' narrative freedom in the North American socio-political scenario (LEPORE, 2015, p. 184). The publisher's stance on *Batman* carrying and using firearms was a loud and clear repudiation against the use of firearms, and its discourse was necessarily exhaustive in catchphrases uttered by the character, his allies, and lastly in editor's notes.

It was the story of establishing moral boundaries respected by the hero archetype, therefore the superhero in *Batman*'s image. The direct and objective rejection towards firearms in his crusade against crime began to be incorporated into his own mythology, fruitfully rooted in his personal trauma that was the pivotal element in his decisive stance as a crime fighter. A seemingly fleeting, basic element is loaded with history; the prognosis of a conflicting North American imaginary in the face of individual freedom and the carrying of firearms for self-defense before a scenario that several medias highlighted: heinous crimes and the social threat of growing criminality depicted in daily newspapers, which intended to make themselves public opinions in the basis of the opinions they published (MAFFESOLI, 2010). There is a long, reflective and historical path between the finger, the trigger and the firing.

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