

The Joker

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insightful film of how Dylan managed to hide his *self* in the roles he played, the *masks* he wore, always slipping out of each *persona* to remain an enticing enigma, a real life example of the rich conundrums in his music.³

A knowledgeable audience brings this understanding to a viewing of *The Dark Knight*, where Ledger plays a joker similar to those Dylan sang about, and Bale plays his nemesis, Batman, the “superhero” without any inexplicable super-human powers, who has always held the allure of a “dark” side, a more complex psyche than those other super-heroes that found an audience in America as it was about to replace Europe at the cutting edge of civilization.⁴

Batman was born in the May 1939 issue of *Detective Comics*, the same month Hitler and Mussolini signed their Pact of Steel; Hitler announced his intention to take over Poland, and Churchill signed an anti-Nazi pact with Russia. It was the beginning of WWII, a conflict bringing all the complex and intricate truths of European civilization to a dramatic finale, when its progeny dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, signaling both literally and symbolically the death of the old, the birth of the new.

Originally called “Bat-Man,” he was conceived by artist Bob Kane and writer Bill Finger, and proved himself a popular character; by the following year, he was featured in his own comic book series.

The basics are as follows: He is the secret identity of Bruce Wayne, an American billionaire, industrialist, and philanthropist who witnesses the murder of his parents as a child and swears revenge on criminals, an oath tempered with the greater ideal of justice. Driven to this, he trains himself both physically and intellectually and dons a bat-themed costume in order to fight crime. It all takes place in fictional Gotham City, and a cast of supporting characters soon appear, including his crime-fighting partner, Robin; his butler, Alfred Pennyworth; the police commissioner, Jim Gordon; and the heroine, Batgirl. He fights an assortment of villains, often referred to as the “rogues gallery” – featuring the Joker, the Penguin, the Riddler, Two-Face, Ra's al Ghul, Scarecrow, Poison Ivy, and Catwoman.⁵

Beyond these basics, through the decades Batman will undergo reinventions, in much the same manner that Bob Dylan/Zimmerman will reinvent his persona. While Batman's origins and dual identities combine obvious Freudian and Jungian suggestions to match the views of the first half of the century, after WWII, things have changed. The old verities, the fixed lights that guided civilization for centuries are in shambles, and there are no new guiding lights to replace them. Instead, there only remain relative truths, truths dependent on often clever, complex and useful

premises, but not on claims of being more than that. Indeed, not only have the past truths lost their luster, the very disciplines supporting them have reversed their stances, supporting the logic of illogic and exhibiting an energetic joy in storming the mental Bastilles that had seemed impenetrable for over two millennia.⁶ As The Joker in *The Dark Knight* says “everything becomes chaos.”⁷

At the same time as logic in the form of math, science and philosophy is shattering barriers recently thought axiomatic, artistic disciplines are shaking off the shackles of Europe’s established views of Christianity and theories that art is a connection to the invisible, spiritual world – a means of connecting humans to a Christian God, at least as that God has been previously understood.

Contemporary theories of evolution, consciousness, and neurology distinguish humans from pre-humans and other living things based on “higher order consciousness” – the ability to perceive an invisible world, where physical actions either literally connect humans to the spiritual or take on symbolic meanings of such a connection. Assuming the basic premises are correct, the definition of a human is entangled in believing there is more than mere physical existence and that it is possible to influence physical existence through some form of interaction with that existence beyond what the senses can perceive. Thus, by drawing and then tracing over the wall paintings found in caves in Lascaux or Indonesia, humans believed they were influencing the hunt – making it successful, protecting the hunters, and justifying the killing and eating of animals. Accordingly, it is not the making of weapons or tools that distinguishes humans, as other animals do and did both, but the making of objects that have no practical value *unless there is some reality beyond immediate, physical existence.*⁸

As science in the disciplines of archeology and paleontology finds ever better ways of rediscovering and analyzing the past, it becomes easy to see how the impractical objects unearthed had such purposes, clearly meant to influence the invisible powers to in-turn influence the physical world. Furthermore, the majority of such impractical objects are aimed at life after death, which, if not necessarily true in the beginning, soon is clearly seen as more important than life before death, often reducing life to little more than a prologue for what is to come.⁹

Perhaps the most powerful expressions of this are the pyramids of Egypt, where untold thousands of men spent their entire lives slaving to haul huge stones through extreme desert heat for the sole purpose of building monumental graves for their kings and queens, who were then buried with living servants and ostensive collections of expensive,

impractical objects (sacred works of art) that had little purpose other than to accompany them to that other, spiritual world.¹⁰

Recorded European history is commonly thought to begin with Classical Greece, especially that Golden Age of Athens, generally applied to “the period from about 500 B.C. to the death of Alexander the Great in 323 B.C.”¹¹ Of course, there are the two great epics attributed to Homer and there are other writings prior to this period, but this is when there is an impressive leap forward in all forms of human thinking. Yes, all of the spiritual, religious writings and temples and works of art aimed at the gods are still important, are in fact also making a leap forward (Dionysian rituals are considered the beginnings of theatre, and this is when the first great tragedies and comedies appear, some of them still acclaimed as the greatest ever written), but even more dramatic is the establishment of logical, scientific thinking that forms the foundation for philosophy, mathematics, medicine, architecture, history and other intellectual disciplines out of an unknown, almost nonexistent past, and there is a burst of brilliant thinkers, such well-known names as Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Pythagoras and Euclid, rapidly establishing the foundations of European civilization. William and Ariel Durant, awarded the Pulitzer Prize for General Non-Fiction in 1968 and the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1977, offer the standard view that, “excepting machinery, there is hardly anything secular in our culture that does not come from Greece,” and conversely “there is nothing in Greek civilization that doesn’t illuminate our own.”¹²

It is the moment when the fire Prometheus stole from the gods and gave to humans suddenly flairs into a glorious flame. Humans realize the power of their own minds, and instead of submitting to imagined forces in the dark unknown that surrounds them, raise their fists in defiance, just as Odysseus does to Poseidon after outwitting his son, Polyphemus.¹³ Indeed, it is the shift from denying to embracing the human mind. Even the *pronaos* (forecourt) of Apollo’s Temple at Delphi is inscribed with the famous aphorism *know thyself*.¹⁴ Plato puts it at the center of Socrates and the Socratic Method, mentioning it in six of his dialogues.¹⁵

It is also the focus of Sophocles’ famous *Oedipus Rex*, a tragedy about the struggle between free will and fate represented in Oedipus’ journey to self-knowledge, the knowledge of who and what he is. It is not surprising that the famous Riddle of the Sphinx he solves is the riddle of man, for that is the riddle the Greeks put at the center of human existence, and when Oedipus completes his “father’s quest” of self-discovery, he finally gains a bit of free will, a chance to choose, to rely on his own intelligence. It is a hard choice, seems unfair. Nevertheless, it is a choice. When he

chooses to sacrifice himself to save Thebes (thus demonstrating the human capacity for heroism and nobility), it is a choice that brings meaning and value into human existence. Moreover, the chance to make such a choice is only possible by gaining the knowledge of self.¹⁶

For Socrates and Plato (it is hard to separate one from the other as most of what is known about Socrates comes from Plato's dialogues) the means to self-knowledge is the Socratic Method, a form of philosophic inquiry beginning with an admission of ignorance and then proceeding through a series of questions, a form of logical dialectic, to knowledge. While Plato most certainly believes in a spiritual world, and while he weaves well-crafted "stories" into his philosophic dialogues, he does not believe that artistic expressions are the best means to the higher truths, the truths of the spiritual world. They are, at best, imperfect attempts at recreating or representing those perfect truths. It is a curious irony, such a good storyteller misunderstanding his own art, but he states that fiction should only have good people doing good things, because, according to his views, humans gain higher knowledge by contemplating representations of good, not representations of bad.

While Plato is not rejecting the spiritual world, just the opposite, he is establishing a logical basis for approaching it. Aristotle will take this further, and after they both disappear with the collapse of Rome, they will reappear as the two poles of human knowledge, Plato representing the belief in a spiritual world (a world beyond sensual perception – a perfect world we experience between lives – the very world of the arts that he logically misunderstood, yet intuitively embraced for his own philosophic discourses), and Aristotle representing the logical, scientific counterpart.

When Europe rediscovers Plato and the rest of Classical Athens in its Renaissance (generally referred to as the beginning of the Early Modern Period), Plato's views get mixed with Christianity, and if art is the attempt to recreate or visualize the perfect world (as in drawing an imperfect circle to try and lead us to better grasp the perfect circle), then Christian art should do its best to visualize, to lead us to the Christian spiritual world. Connecting this logically to the belief that humans are God's greatest creation, made in His own image (even the angels were expected to bow down to humans), the conclusion is that viewing the human nude is the best means for art to lead us to contemplate God.

Of course, this causes a problem, as it is clear that viewing nude humans also causes one to think about and desire sex, and interpretations of the Bible at the time see sex as the original sin, the original temptation, or the result of and punishment for it.

However interpreted, sex is a punishment for disobedience to God. Indeed, all of life is a punishment for the original sin of eating the forbidden fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, man condemned to toil in the soil and woman condemned to submit to man and to bare children. With this interpretation in place, only in death, only in the afterlife is it possible to achieve redemption from the original sin, and that only through absolute faith in Christ as God's gift to humans in the form of a son. The endless attempts to interpret all this, which generally refer to the Bible as the authority (as God's word or voice) demand blind faith (perhaps most clearly expressed in the story of Abraham and Isaac). God is in charge, and those who have submitted to Him and allowed Him to speak through them (authors of the Bible; the Pope) are the embodiment of God.

This is not necessarily as condemning as it might appear. If it is understood in terms of contemporary neurology, it can be understood as an embracement of the kind of knowing that takes place in the right lobe of the cerebrum, a type of intuitive knowing. Of course, it is dangerous and easily abused. Yet, if humans do not know beyond logic, then ultimately life is nothing more than mathematical principals working their way through science, nothing more than living out patterns established before humans even existed, so humans have no free will and cannot either be blamed or praised for their actions. They have no choice.

For the purpose here, this theory of art is a *sensual* aesthetics. Art is a means to truth because it speaks to us through the senses. We *perceive* truth as beauty (the right lobe senses truth and sees it as beautiful). Thus, the later Romantic Movement's "poet as prophet" and John Keats' famous quatrain, "'beauty is truth, truth beauty,' – that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know," are ways of justifying artistic knowing by connecting it to God. In a sense, art is a window between physical and spiritual worlds, and by looking through that window, it is possible to experience the truth on the other side.¹⁷

However, by the end of the 1800s, art is ready to break away from religion. If art is a means of connecting with a higher truth beyond the pedantic truths of science, it is no longer necessary to connect that truth to a god, at least not as the smothering volumes of European discourse have represented god. The shattering disconnect is most noticeable in a ragtag group of painters living in the "red light district" of Paris who have since been grouped under the vague and misleading term *Impressionists*. While the complex and richly textured art that comes out of this world still claims to express truths beyond logic and serve as a means to "seeing beyond the illusions of physical existence," it is no longer defending itself

in the European tradition, is instead looking for ways to get outside of the cages of the European vision (thus, embracing such things as Oriental Art, Primitive Art, and even the Art of the Insane). Traditional “Renaissance” perspective and other “realistic” illusions are debunked as misrepresenting how art works. If art is meant to lead the viewer beyond the meaningless literal truths of physical existence to the truths of meaning and value (not just the look of a tree, but the essence of tree, not just a particular visual appearance of a person, but the essence of a person) then the idea isn’t to strive for the illusion of literal reality, but just the opposite, to find a way passed that illusion.¹⁸

In the beginning, this is still similar to the Romantic Movement’s views from 100 years previous with a form of “poet as prophet” concept in place. Joseph Campbell explains:

Moyers: Who interprets the divinity inherent in nature for us today? Who are our shamans? Who interprets unseen things for us?

Campbell: It is the function of the artist to do this. The artist is the one who communicates myth for today. But he has to be an artist who understands mythology and humanity and isn’t simply a sociologist with a program for you.

Moyers: What about those others who are ordinary, those who are not poets or artists, or who have not had a transcendent ecstasy? How do we know of these things?

Campbell: I’ll tell you a way, a very nice way. Sit in a room and read – and read and read. And read the right books by the right people. Your mind is brought onto that level, and you have a nice, mild, slow-burning rapture all the time. This realization of life can be a constant realization in your living. When you find an author who really grabs you, read everything he has done. Don’t say, “Oh, I want to know what So-and-so did” – and don’t bother at all with the best-seller list. Just read what this one author has to give you. And then you can go read what he had read. And the world opens up in a way that is consistent with a certain point of view. But when you go from one author to another, you may be able to tell us the date when each wrote such and such a poem – but he hasn’t said anything to you.

Moyers: So shamans functioned in early societies as artists do now. They play a much more important role than simply being –

Campbell: They played the role the priesthood traditionally plays in our society.

Moyers: Then shamans were priests?

Campbell: There’s a major difference, as I see it, between a shaman and a priest. A priest is a functionary of a social sort. The society worships certain deities in a certain way, and the priest becomes ordained as a functionary to carry out that ritual. The deity to whom he is devoted is a deity that was there before he came along. But the shaman’s powers

are symbolized in his own familiars, deities of his own personal experience. His authority comes out of a psychological experience, not a social ordination.¹⁹

Nevertheless, the explosion of artistic movements at the turn of the century, all trying to fill the void opened by the collapsing European religious, philosophic and political cages, cannot withstand the onslaught. As Europe's Imperialism turns on itself (dramatically fracturing and destroying Europe in two world wars), its theories of art shift from claims of expressing higher, spiritual, ethical truths, perhaps Christian, perhaps not, but nevertheless truths of meaning and value, to a more blunt view that such truths do not exist, and the arts are *not* meant to deal with *perceptual, sensual truths* but to be the *artifacts of conceptual truths*. (A good example of this debunking of art as a vehicle of meaning is the Dada movement that embraces the logic of illogic and is more of an emotional protest against meaning and value than a means to it.)²⁰

T. S. Elliot's *The Wasteland* (also sometimes titled *The Waste Land*), using esoteric references to Europe's history, expresses these negative views. Its title comes from a central concept of Europe's great Romances, especially the Arthurian Romance that "the land and the king are one." If the king is spiritually sick (has lost his Christianity), the land is also a wasteland, and now the European Christian King is most certainly sick.²¹

William Butler Yeats says much the same thing in *The Second Coming*:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.²²

However, Sigmund Freud has opened a possible door, giving that "beyond logic" kind of knowing a modern twist. His "soft" science of psychology offers a convincing possibility in the human mind, that unconscious kind of thinking that has its feature productions in the form of dreams. Yes, it is a rich world, and it is a world that places knowing in the human brain. It does not need to deny God, but it does need to redefine how God and Man interact. Moreover, Carl Jung takes it to another level. All humans think in similar ways (archetypal patterns), and the important thoughts are the ones taking place in symbols, a language beyond literal,

physical existence (the language of the dream). Such artistic movements as *Magic Realism*, *Metaphysical Art*, and most famously *Surrealism* are firmly based in these theories.²³

If meaning and value exist, they exist in the human mind. Somehow, the human brain (physical organ) holds a mind that maps out meaning and value. If it is a matter of *discovering* meaning and value, then there is the assumption that there is some form of good and bad and salvation outside the human mind (perhaps some kind of ethical order to the cosmos), or if it is being created by the human mind, then, if there is some kind of god, he/she/it is working through the human mind to effect the physical world, and in a real sense humans are god in action. This might lead to a cleaner explanation by simply removing discussions of god as being redundant and confusing the issues. This doesn't mean that there is nothing more than logic and science; remember, the human mind is thinking, knowing, and creating in ways beyond explanation. All of the arts are mapping out their meanings not by filling in spaces, but by creating them (as in the pregnant spaces of metaphors; and symbolic thinking is thinking beyond literal thinking, thinking in spaces).

Furthermore, stop and realize the obvious. If humans cannot know God then humans cannot know God. If God does not exist for humans then God does not exist for humans. God can only exist for humans if God exists for humans. While it is possible that a God exists that humans are incapable of knowing, all that leads to is another paradox, because humans cannot know what humans cannot know.

As art moves rapidly through a number of new theories, two seemingly opposite views are sparring. On the one hand, if the human mind thinks and knows in some variation of Freudian/Jungian dream symbolism, then the idea is to figure out how to get the conscious mind out of the way so the truths of the unconscious can emerge, and there are many variations on how this can be done (from experiments with automatic writing and the aforementioned art of the insane to Jackson Pollock's splattered paintings and John Cage's improvisations with music). On the other hand, in a wonderful irony, while the idea is to eliminate conscious thinking, what is happening is that the *concepts of conscious thinking* come to be the basis for art. No longer is *perceptual* truth embraced, but now the key is the underlying *conceptual* truth, which *ironically* quickly evolves into ever more complex and clever puns (understood *perceptually*!). As the clichés go, all humor is ultimately based on puns, and if one has to *explain* a joke, it hasn't worked. In many ways, Marcel Duchamp leads the way, and the way into understanding his art is exactly this fun, trickster-like undermining of the traditional views through a web of puns. By the time

the American Pop Artists come to the forefront (Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg, Robert Indiana, Roy Lichtenstein, Claes Oldenburg, Jim Dine and the like), satire reigns. It is a world of verbal and visual conundrums – pregnant spaces of all kinds. That’s the key. People who study Pop Art should be laughing at the clever puns, or more accurately groaning as one groans over a pun. The hushed, serious, church-like atmosphere standard in museums doesn’t apply. It is purposely undermined, and those who obey the established rules of behavior in museums are being laughed at by the artists (it has been said of Andy Warhol that he is laughing all the way to the bank).²⁴

As this fun, colorful, creative world of puns flourishes in the mixing of both “high” and “low” art during the 1960s, a *Batman* television series gives him that same Pop Art, camp aesthetic, a form of postmodern satire of all the truths of the past. It fits the wave of shows sweeping television, not shows attempting to create or flesh out meaningful genres, but shows meant to make fun of those that once did: *The Flintstones*, *The Jetsons*, *The Monsters*, *The Adams Family*, *Gilligan’s Island*, *The Beverly Hillbillies*, and on and on. Even the major variety shows exhibit it. *The Smothers Brothers Show* is centered on two folksingers whose whole shtick is to undermine the very songs they sing (or start to sing), and they feature Pat Paulson running his tongue-in-cheek campaign for President (and garnering a noticeable number of votes in the real election). *The Carol Burnett Show* is a series of sketches satirizing traditional movies (her satire of *Gone with the Wind* skit is a perfect example, and almost impossible to watch without laughing), traditional professions, traditional characters, and the traditional family (especially in its popular sequel, *Mama’s Family*). And what about *The Monkees*? This is a completely faux rock band put together in a silly comedy to satirize the Beatles. But it is so popular its music actually displaces the Beatles’ music on the charts! A fluke? Well, it has companions – *The Partridge Family*, a pretend family band that has its hits on the music charts, and even that classic series, *The Brady Bunch*, which forms its own family band and has some success in the “real” world music charts. This world of camp satire fills the networks, and show after show can be mentioned in genre after genre – *Get Smart* (James Bond), *The Robinsons* (science fiction), *Sonny and Cher* (variety), *The Dating Game*, *The Newlyweds*, and ultimately, *The Gong Show*, the final three created by Chuck Barris, who ironically claimed later in life to have been a *real life* undercover agent.²⁵ Barris is a perfect example of the postmodern embracement of *relative truth* (truth *relative to context*).

If truth is relative, not absolute, then the process shifts from discovering the truth to creating the truth. There are many ways of saying

this. For a Christian, one way is to put God into the human mind. When He breathed life into that lump of clay, He was breathing His essence into it, so God is within each human, and the human mind is God at work. A possible take on this is to think of humans as participating in Creation, the human mind (and by extension, the entire organism) being God in action, as mythologist Joseph Campbell says, being the voice and the eyes (the mind) of existence.

There are many ways to tell (or create) the truth, and thus many personas one can wear. The key is to not get caught in any particular one and deny the *self* behind them, to use the personas to empower the individual behind them, rather than lose the individual in any one of the personas (a very Jungian view here, though not meant to be chained by his theories). This is what people such as Bob Dylan and Chuck Barris realized. Barris' 1984 autobiography *Confessions of a Dangerous Mind* was subtitled *An Unauthorized Autobiography* (notice immediately the duality here, the play on the *truth* of an autobiography, and the denial of responsibility or a public self, a slippery self/non-self all at the same time), and it claimed that while he was creating game shows like *The Newlywed Game* and *The Dating Game* and hosting *The Gong Show*, he was a contract CIA assassination – a claim he maintained throughout all of the attacks on it; and it is a clever one, as it cannot be proven wrong; even a statement by the CIA would not be believed (a strong denial was made by them), as the CIA justifies itself as an agency that works through a huge network of lies, purposely reinventing people (Hitchcock's *North by Northwest* comes immediately to mind as a commentary on this). In other words, the CIA couldn't operate unless it *denied* its "secret" agents were its agents. In other words, this powerful agency, tasked with preventing such possibilities as nuclear war and the annihilation of the human race is expected to create false or alternative realities. Commenting on the movie that was made of his life based on this unauthorized autobiography, Barris continued the mask, saying of Charlie Kaufman, who wrote the script for it and included things not even suggested in the book: "He wrote stuff out of nowhere. My mother never dressed me like a girl. I was never on drugs. The part about my father being a serial killer? That's Charlie. He writes such *good* stuff." (That's my stress on the word *good*.)²⁶

To emphasize, the point is not to be "true" to some perceived literal truth, but to be true to the truths of the human mind, capable of escaping the perceived truths of the physical world. Barris' entire adult life was centered on creating personas. He created a fake resume for NBC, peddled game shows he didn't especially like, went through three marriages (would be interesting to know what personas he presented to his wives).

And in the end, he gave the world an enigma that it continues to try to unravel. One group of theories is that he created this persona in his autobiography in an attempt to get out of his previous persona. When he was the “reality TV” of his day, he was condemned for doing something he considered harmless. It was a fun ride, not meant to hurt anyone, not meant to be more than a means to success and a way to give the public what it wanted. But at the same time, it gave him an image, a persona he needed to escape. In a real sense, his persona was too successful and he was stuck with it. For a time, he dropped out of public scrutiny – he *disappeared* (a word ripe for lengthy commentary). But then he found a way to reinvent himself and reappear. It was an outrageous reinvention, typical of him. This new persona is a Barris radically removed from the conman, game show, reality TV huckster, a Barris who all the time was involved in the most serious and dangerous activities on the planet. If believed, his first assignment in this other persona was to collect intelligence on Martin Luther King, Jr. “People forget the point of the book,” he says. “Here I was, getting crucified by critics for entertaining people and getting medals for killing them. That just didn't seem logical.”

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Jay Thomas is an American actor, comedian, and radio talk show host with numerous television roles, including a co-starring role on the second season of *Mork and Mindy*, Eddie LeBec in *Cheers*, Jack Stein in *Love & War* and Jerry Gold in *Murphy Brown*, for which he won the Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Guest Actor in a Comedy Series in 1990 and 1991. In 1997, he starred in the television film *Killing Mr. Griffin*. He co-starred in the movie *Mr. Holland's Opus* and portrayed The Easter Bunny in *The Santa Clause 2* and *The Santa Clause 3*. At the time of writing this, he is hosting *The Jay Thomas Show* on Sirius Satellite Radio. However, whether he likes it or not, his main claim to fame is his stretch of Christmas show appearances on *The Late Show with David Letterman* (2005-2015), where he tells a story about how he met Clayton Moore, who portrayed the self-titled character in *The Lone Ranger*.

The story concerns a time when Jay Thomas (very much a hippie at the time, even smoking marijuana at the event) appeared at a used car dealership with a friend to help promote it, but the biggest star there was Clayton Moore as The Lone Ranger. After the event, they gave Clayton Moore a ride home. On the way, the car in front of them backed into them, breaking one of their headlights. In anger, Thomas followed the car until he was able to pull ahead of it and force it to stop. The driver of that car was rude and pointed out that the police were not going to believe the

word of a hippie anyway. That's when Clayton Moore got out of the car dressed as the Lone Ranger and said, "They will believe me!"

This one story has become Jay Thomas' persona, and he will never shake it. More dramatic is the intertwining personas of Clayton Moore/The Lone Ranger (his birth name was Jack Carlton Moore).²⁸

He had been a minor Hollywood actor for some ten years when George Trendle spotted him in the *Ghost of Zorro* serial in 1949 and hired him to play the role of *The Lone Ranger* that had been a hit radio show but was going to be launched on television in 1950.

This was his big break. He trained his voice to sound like the radio version of *The Lone Ranger*, lowering his already distinctive baritone. Roussini's distinctive *William Tell Overture* that became far better known as the theme for this show, Clayton Moore's portrayal of the Lone Ranger riding rapidly across the land, and actor Gerald Mohr's voice over, beginning "Return with us now to those thrilling days of yesteryear . . ." quickly gained iconic status. Jay Silverheels, with his stereotype, almost humorous (and certainly by future views racist Indian dialect), was his Indian companion Tonto, and the two of them made history as the stars of the first western written specifically for television. It soon became the highest-rated program on the fledgling ABC network and its first true hit, earning an Emmy Award nomination in 1950. Moore starred in 169 episodes of the series.²⁹

In standard Hollywood politics, after two extremely successful years presenting a new episode every week, 52 weeks a year, Moore was fired, for reasons he never knew, being replaced for the third season by actor John Hart. However, he would have the final laugh here, as the audience wanted the original and ratings fell off, resulting in the studio rehiring Moore, and he retained his role until the series ended in 1957. He and Jay Silverheels also starred in two feature-length Lone Ranger motion pictures.

Moore embarked on what would be forty years of personal appearances, TV guest spots, and classic commercials as the legendary masked man. On occasion, Jay Silverheels joined him for reunions and a few commercials employing the characters during the early 1960s, and they remained friends.

Then a curious thing happened where *contexts* collided. In 1979, the *owner* of the Lone Ranger character, Jack Wrather, obtained a court order prohibiting Moore from making future appearances as The Lone Ranger. Wrather was planning a new film of the story and did not want the value of the new version of the character being undercut by Moore's appearances,

and he didn't want the public to think Moore (now 65 years old) would be the star. This move proved to be a public relations disaster.

Clayton Moore *was* the public's Lone Ranger. They knew nothing of the real Clayton Moore, but they loved his public persona. Moore was quoted as saying he had "fallen in love with the Lone Ranger character" and strove in his personal life to take The Lone Ranger Creed to heart. This, coupled with his public fight to retain the right to wear the mask, linked him inextricably with the character. Indeed, Moore was so identified with the masked man that he is the only person on the Hollywood Walk of Fame to have his character's name along with his on the star, which reads, "Clayton Moore – The Lone Ranger." In addition, he was inducted into the Stuntman's Hall of Fame in 1982 and in 1990 was inducted into the Western Performers Hall of Fame at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, and he was awarded a place on the Western Walk of Fame in Old Town Newhall, California.

In response to Wrather's suit, he changed his costume slightly and replaced the Domino mask with similar-looking Foster Grant wraparound sunglasses. Then he countersued Wrather, eventually winning the suit, and was able to resume his appearances in the original costume, which he continued to do until shortly before his death.

Wrather's new motion picture, *The Legend of the Lone Ranger*, was released in 1981 and was a critical and commercial failure.³⁰

What is real and what fictional? Clayton Moore (who had already changed his name from Jack Carlton Moore) had taken both the name and the entire persona of The Long Ranger, a character created in the early 1930s by a man he didn't know. And the public supported him in this. Clayton Moore was an actor, not a cowboy. Yet . . .

Clayton Moore wasn't the only one.

William Lawrence Boyd was born in Hendrysburg, just east of Cambridge, Ohio, to day laborer Charles William Boyd and Lida Wilkens. After his father's death, he moved to California and took odd jobs as an orange picker, a surveyor, a tool dresser, an auto salesman, and an extra in such films as *Why Change Your Wife?* He enlisted in the army during WWI, but was exempted because of a weak heart. Thus, he was available to continue his acting, and he became a leading man in silent films, eventually starring in Cecil B. DeMille's *The Volga Boatman* in 1926, and appearing in such other Radio Pictures films as *The King of Kings*, *Skyscraper*, and *Lady of the Pavements*. However, his successful contract with Radio Pictures ended in 1931 when his picture was mistakenly used in a newspaper story about the arrest of another actor, William "Stage"

Boyd, on gambling and liquor charges. As a result, he was broke and without work.³¹

Then he found his alter ego, his public persona. In 1935, he was offered the supporting role of Red Connors in *Hop-Along Cassidy*, a movie based on the rough, hard-drinking, swearing, smoking wrangler, Hopalong Cassidy, a character created by Clarence E. Mulford for a series of pulp fiction books. Instead of taking the supporting role, Boyd went for the lead, and got it.

It was to become his new role in life. Though he never branded a cow or mended a fence, could not bulldog a steer, and even disliked Western music, he now took on the persona of what was to become one of the most famous cowboys of all time, the rival of the likes of Roy Rogers and Gene Autry. Over the next twelve years, he made 66 films as this character, producing the final twelve films himself. Helping to create the whole genre of Hollywood Cowboys, in an interesting example of the entertainment industry establishing a false (or especially for a study such as the one in this book, an alternate) reality, a version of history that has only slight references to the real history.

Realizing the potential of television, Boyd purchased the rights to the Hopalong Cassidy character, books, and films for \$350,000 and, in 1949, released the films to television, where they were very successful. He also saw the potential in merchandising Hopalong Cassidy watches, trashcans, cups, dishes, Topps trading cards, a comic strip, comic books, radio shows and cowboy outfits. America loves success stories; in 1950, Boyd/Hopalong appeared on the covers of both *Look* and *Time* magazines.

When the character was transferred from pulp fiction to film, he was modified and reinvented. No longer the rough, un-American villain, he became the Upright American Cowboy, fighting in the most honest ways against the bad guys. Moreover, just as Clayton Moore identified with his character, William Boyd took on his creation, often dressing as a cowboy in public. As with all of the other successfully created cultural cowboys, Boyd became wealthy from his new persona, emphasized his Hopalong Cassidy ethics by refusing to license products he thought were unsuitable or dangerous and insisted his fans could attend his personal appearances free.

He knew the persona held a double-edged reality, and when Cecil B. DeMille offered him the role of Moses in *The Ten Commandments*, Boyd turned it down, realizing his identification with Hopalong was so strong that no viewing audience could ever accept him in another role. However, he was glad to have a cameo as Hopalong in the 1952 circus epic, *The Greatest Show on Earth*.

In real life, Boyd married five times (to Laura Maynard, Ruth Miller, Elinor Fair, Dorothy Sebastian and Grace Bradley). Elinor Fair bore him a son, but the boy died at nine months. After retiring from the screen, Boyd invested in real estate, settled in Palm Desert, California, and refused interviews and photographs, knowing that they would only disillusion his millions of fans. He died in 1972 from complications of Parkinson's disease.

November 5, 1911, Leonard Franklin Slye was born to Andrew Slye and Mattie Wolmack Slye in Cincinnati, Ohio, in a tenement on 2nd Street. Unhappy with their jobs and life in general, Leonard's dad and his dad's brother, Will, built a 12-by-50 foot houseboat from salvage lumber and, in July of 1912, the family headed down the Ohio River to Portsmouth, where they purchased land. A serendipitous flood, they enabled them to float their barge onto the actual property, about twelve miles north of Portsmouth, where they built a six-room house. Since this farm could not support the family, Leonard's father Andrew took a job at a shoe factory in Portsmouth, living there during the week and only returning home on weekends with gifts for the family following paydays, one of which was a horse that Leonard immediately began learning how to care for and ride.³²

When Leonard was 17, the family moved to Cincinnati, where his father again got a job in a shoe factory. However, finances remained tight, and Leonard quit school to join his father in the factory. He tried to finish high school at night, but found he could not stay awake and gave up the attempt. In 1929, Leonard's older sister Mary moved to Lawndale, California with her husband, and soon the entire family followed. Their first visit lasted only four months, but in the spring of 1930, they moved there permanently. Father and son quickly found work as truck drivers for a construction project, but one morning upon reporting for work, they found their employer had gone bankrupt. It was the time of the Great Depression, and the family now found themselves living among the masses of refugees who travelled from fruit picking job to fruit picking job, living in the makeshift worker campsites.

All during this time, Leonard, now referred to simply as Len, entertained himself, his family, and the other workers by playing his guitar and singing. One night his sister Mary suggested he try out for the Midnight Frolic radio program amateur talent contest. Reluctantly, he did, and dressed in a Western shirt she made for him, he performed—singing, yodeling, and playing his guitar. It resulted in an invitation to join a local country music group, The Rocky Mountaineers, which he did in August of 1931.

Events never predicted were happening. In 1932, Len met Lucille Ascolese while on tour. In the same year, a palomino colt named Golden Cloud was foaled in Santa Cietro. In May of 1933, Len, now 21, proposed to Lucille on a radio broadcast. Then he went on tour with the O-Bar-O Cowboys, and in June of that year met Grace Arline Wilkins, who traded him a lemon pie for singing *Swiss Yodel* on the local radio station. In 1934, he formed Sons of the Pioneers with Bob Nolan and Tim Spencer. This group hit it big with such songs as *Cool Water* and *Tumbling Tumbleweeds*, resulting in Len's first film appearance in 1935, after which he got steady work, including a large supporting role (still under the name Leonard Slye) in a Gene Autry movie.

Len and Lucille divorced in 1935, and the following year he married Grace Arline Wilkins. By 1938, Republic was having contract disputes with its major Western star Gene Autry and wanted to be ready to replace him, so they held auditions. Len snuck into one and got signed to a seven-year contract. He appeared as Dick Weston in *Wild Horse Rodeo*, where he sang one song. Then Gene Autry failed to report for the beginning of his next film. Republic was ready and put its newly renamed replacement Roy Rogers into the lead role in *Under Western Stars*. It was an immediate hit, and a new star was born.

Before filming began, Republic had given Roy his choice of their best horses, and the third one he tried was a "beautiful golden palomino" that turned "on a dime and gave you some change." Smiley Burnette, Roy's sidekick in his first two films, suggested the horse was quick as a "trigger," and the name stuck.

After the success of *Under Western Stars*, Republic starred Roy in a series of Westerns—*Rough Riders Roundup*, *Days of Jesse James*, *Frontier Pony Express*, and *Young Buffalo Bill*. He immediately established himself as a major Western star. In addition to his string of Western movies, early in 1940 he received excellent reviews for his role as Claire Trevor's younger brother in the film *The Dark Command*, which also starred John Wayne and Walter Pidgeon.

In the same year he got a clause into his contract with Republic allowing him to own the rights to his likeness, voice and name, and as with Hopalong Cassidy, he began to make a fortune from merchandizing – action figures, cowboy adventure novels, play sets, a comic strip and a Dell Comics series. At the same time, his group, The Sons of the Pioneers, continued performing, and as of this printing, still do (though the original members have long since died).

In 1941, Roy and Grace adopted Cheryl Darlene. In 1943, they had a daughter, Linda Lou. In 1946, they had a son, Roy Jr. (Dusty), but Arline

died of complications from the birth. Roy had met Dale Evans in 1944, when the two performed in a movie together, and now that Roy was no longer married, they reunited and married on New Year's Eve, 1947.

His movie career was stunning. For fifteen consecutive years from 1938 to 1955, he appeared in the Motion Picture Herald Top Ten Money-Making Western Stars poll, holding first place from 1943 to 1954. He appeared in the similar Box Office poll from 1938 to 1955, holding first place from 1943 to 1952. Also, he appeared in the Top Ten Money Makers Poll of all films in 1945 and 1946. Moreover, he was a television idol for children, with most of his postwar films done in Trucolor, a far superior technique to the general black-and-white B-movies of the time.

In 1950, Roy and Dale had a daughter, Robin Elizabeth, but she had Down syndrome and died from complications of the mumps shortly before her second birthday. (Dale Evans wrote about this in her book *Angel Unaware*.) Both Roy and Dale were outspoken Christians, and they actively worked for various children's charities, always intent on establishing a high ethical and spiritual image of the Hollywood Cowboy. Consistent with this, while Roy appeared in numerous shows as his Roy Rogers alter ego and on rare occasions took on other cowboy roles, he avoided taking any roles that went against his created persona.

This alter ego is perhaps the most famous of the many *Cowboy Heroes* created by Hollywood in the process of creating an entire *other reality*, the imagined world of the Western. Certainly, in a sense, this reality created by pulp fiction, radio, television, and Hollywood films is real and informs the conscious and unconscious understanding of the historic cowboy world of Western America.

Furthermore, it is a world that carries a clear ethical and spiritual center, a pattern of values and meaning that the real, the historic Wild West did not, at least not on such a precisely evident map. We might well ask if reality has any ethical and spiritual form or shape, or if it only takes on meaning because the human mind shapes it into a reality with meaning. Does God provide meaning and value through the human mind? Or is it already there and the human mind simply a somewhat ineffective organ trying to grasp it? In other words, which is more real, the historic wild west or the wild west filtered through the human mind?

There were many Western alter egos created, from Tom Mix and Gene Autry to perhaps the most iconic Cowboy of all, John Wayne. In fact, some of the early celebrities, movie stars and consultants were the actual historic figures recreating themselves on film.

Tom Mix (born Thomas Hezekiah Mix, January 6, 1880) was Hollywood's first Western megastar, making a reported 336 films from

1910 to 1935. He was perhaps the only Cowboy Star who really was a cowboy. He learned to ride horses by working on a local farm as a child and on a variety of cowboy jobs in the Oklahoma Territory, including the Miller Brothers' 101 Ranch. He stood out as a skilled rider and expert shot, winning the 1909 Riding and Rodeo Championship. Apparently, he was interested in entertaining from a young age, and there is a story that he was caught by his parents practicing a knife throwing, in hopes of joining the circus. He enlisted in the Army in 1898 for the Spanish-American War, but deserted, perhaps a result of marrying Grace Allan in 1902. (He was never court-martialed for his desertion). However, his marriage only lasted one year, the beginning of a pattern. In 1905, he married Kitty Jewel Perinne, getting divorced within a year. In 1909, he married Olive Stokes, divorcing within a few years. In 1918, he married Victoria Forde (a co-star in several of his westerns), his longest marriage, but one that also resulted in divorce in 1931, to be followed by marriage to his fifth wife, Mabel Hubbard Ward in 1932. As is normal with these larger-than-life personas from Hollywood's studios, truth and fiction get mixed. For example, he claimed to have been the son of a cavalry officer and to have attended the Virginia Military Institute, neither of which is true.³³

He began his film career as supporting cast member for the Selig Polyscope Company in 1910 with the film *Ranch Life in the Great Southwest*, where he demonstrated his skills as a cattle wrangler. The film was a success, making him an immediate star. He made over 100 films with Selig before they went broke, then signed with Fox Film Corporation, where he made more than 160 films, these having more of a storyline than his previous films, and provided the initial Hollywood image of the good, clean-cut cowboy who always "saved the day" from the obvious villains. As also became custom, he had his intelligent and handsome horse, in his case named Tony, who also became a celebrity. Unlike other future Hollywood Cowboys, Tom Mix always did his own stunts – and was frequently injured. Meanwhile, other Cowboy standards are put in place: glamorous cowboy costumes, movie sets comprised of a town with saloon, jail, bank, doctor's office, surveyor's office, and hotel, on one dusty main street with hitching posts and water troughs for the horses. Indian villages are always outside of town, in semi-inclusion. The countryside comprises a simulated desert, mountains, a large corral, and a ranch house on the prairie.

In 1929, Mix worked his final year of silent pictures for Film Book Office of America (FBO), a studio run by Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr., and coincidentally served as a pallbearer for Wyatt Earp. During the early thirties, he acted in nine talking pictures for Universal Pictures, but his

injuries had caught up with him, and his last picture, *The Miracle Rider* was in 1935. After that, he finally fulfilled his childhood dream and began appearing in the Sam B. Dill Circus, which he eventually purchased.

Texas governor James Allred named him an honorary Texas Ranger, and he took his show on a promotional trip to Europe. His daughter, Ruth, who had also appeared in a few of his films, managed the circus while he was out of the country, but it quickly failed, and they had a falling out. It is estimated he made over six million dollars in his career. His image had become so popular that Ralston-Purina produced a Tom Mix radio series, *Tom Mix Ralston Straight Shooters*, which ran for nearly twenty years, indicating how much his alter ego had taken on a life of its own, because he never appeared on it, and, of course, a radio show could not demonstrate any of his rodeo skills. In other words, it was a show based on a character that had taken over the real man. The alter ego was a creation with a different past and lifestyle than the real Tom Mix (though both had some similar cowboy skills).

On the afternoon of October 12, 1940, Tom Mix drove his 1937 Cord 812 Phaeton off Arizona State Route 79, where it rolled into a gully, pinning him underneath. A large aluminum suitcase filled with money, traveler's checks and jewels flew forward from the back, striking him in the head, shattering his skull and breaking his neck. So the real life Tom Mix had a dramatic death, but certainly not the kind of death his cowboy alter ego might have experienced (mythic cowboys don't drive cars). However, because of his famous persona, a stone memorial marks the site of his death, and the gully has been named Tom Mix Wash.

He was the original Hollywood Cowboy, designated as the "King of the Cowboys," and he would help football player John Wayne get a job moving props in the back lot of Fox Studios when John Wayne's injury ended his athletic career. Accolades abound. He has a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, his cowboy boot prints, palm prints, and even his horse Tony's hoof prints in the famous Grauman's Chinese Theatre sidewalk, and he has been inducted into the Western Performers Hall of Fame. In addition, there are Tom Mix museums in Dewey, Oklahoma and Mix Run, Pennsylvania. The Beatles even included him on the cover of their famous *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* album.

He has been played by Bruce Willis in the 1988 film *Sunset* (where James Garner played another iconic Cowboy, Wyatt Earp), and referred to in the Beverly Hillbillies television show, where Jed Clampett wanted to go to Beverly Hills because he wanted to live in the same place as Tom Mix. In his movie *Zelig*, Woody Allen even included film footage of Tom Mix attending a party at Hearst Castle. Daryl Ponicsan reconfigured him in

the novel *Tom Mix Died for Your Sins*; Clifford Irving offered a pseudo-autobiography of him in *Tom Mix and Poncho Villa*; James Horwitz visits Tom Mix Wash (where he died) and leaves his childhood cowboy boots at the foot of the monument in his book *They Went Thataway*; Philip Jose Farmer resurrects him in *The Dark Design and The Magic Labyrinth*; and Father Mulcahy even uses a Tom Mix pocket knife to perform emergency surgery in the television show *MASH*. Philip K. Dick names an underground blunder the Tom Mix in his science fiction novel *The Penultimate Truth*; the ghost of Tom Mix haunts a Hollywood couple in *The Ghosts of Edendale*; and in *Batman/Houdini: The Devil's Workshop* Tom Mix is a high profile figure in Gotham society.

The list goes on. He is mentioned as a pallbearer for Wyatt Earp in the end credits for George P. Cosmatos' film *Tombstone*. *Doctor Who* has an episode titled "The Gunfighters" where the Doctor wonders why everyone wants to dress like Tom Mix. The United States Postal Service has commemorated him on a postage stamp. In the television series *Bewitched*, an episode titled "Serena's Youth Pill" has Darin telling his boss Larry Tate that a magic drink will help him grow up to be more like Tom Mix.

The grandson of a Methodist preacher, Orvon Grover Autry was born September 29, 1907, to Delbert Autry and Elnora Ozment near Tioga, Texas. In the 1920s, the family moved to Ravia, Oklahoma, where Orvon worked on his father's ranch. During these years, he often played guitar and sang at the local dances.³⁴

After graduation, he continued his performing while working as a telegrapher for the St. Louis-San Francisco Railway, where famous humorist Will Rogers heard him and encouraged him to pursue a professional career. Once he had enough money to travel, he headed to New York to do just that, auditioning for Victor Talking Machine, which became RCA Victor. The owner, Shilkret turned him down because he had just hired two other singers and had no need of a third. Shilkret suggested he go sing on the radio to get some experience and gave him a letter of introduction to do just that.

By 1928, he was billed on Tulsa radio station KVOO as "Oklahoma's Yodeling Cowboy," and by 1929, he was recorded by RCA Victor. That same year Columbia Records offered him a recording contract, and he does work for WLS-AM radio in Chicago, Illinois, performing a number of "hillbilly" prohibition songs such as *Do Right Daddy Blues* and *Black Bottom Blues*. His first hit, *That Silver-Haired Daddy of Mine* is in 1932, the same year he marries May Spivey.

In 1934, he begins his film career with his singing partner Burnette in *Old Santa Fe* as part of a singing quartet, and then takes on a starring role

the following year in a twelve-part serial, *The Phantom Empire*. By 1940, he's made forty-four B-grade Westerns for Republic Pictures under his own name, with his horse Champion, and his friend Burnette as his sidekick. These are all films featuring him as a "singing" Cowboy. He would be the top Western Star through the later thirties, and vie with Roy Rogers for that position through the forties and fifties (except 1943-5, when he was serving in the U.S. Army Air Corps). In addition, his *Gene Autry Flying "A" Ranch Rodeo* CBS radio show debuted in 1940 and would continue until 1956. His horse Champion even had a show, *The Adventures of Champion*. In 1950, he produced and starred in his own television show on CBS, and began a number of guest appearances on such other shows as *Jubilee USA*. In 1951, he formed his own production company and in 1953 purchased Monogram Movie Ranch, renaming it Melody Ranch after one of his movies, using it for location shooting for his future movies. He would eventually sell it, and it has since become a museum.

Most significantly, for the concerns of this book, he was important in establishing the Hollywood Cowboy image, even creating the Cowboy Code:

1. Never shoot first, hit a smaller man, or take unfair advantage.
2. Never go back on his word or a trust confided in him.
3. Always tell the truth.
4. Be gentle with children, the elderly and animals.
5. Do not advocate or possess racially or religiously intolerant ideas.
6. Help people in distress.
7. Be a good worker.
8. Keep clean in thought, speech, action and personal habits.
9. Respect women, parents and the nation's laws.
10. Be a patriot.

The real Gene Autry, as with Tom Mix, did have some legitimacy as a Cowboy, owning a string of rodeo stock in Ardmore, Oklahoma, owning part of and later all of the World Championship Rodeo Company, purchasing Montana's top bucking horses in 1954 and supplying the livestock for most of the major rodeos for the next twelve years. These activities as an owner resulted in him being inducted into the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association Pro Rodeo Hall of Fame in 1979. Owning, however, is not the same thing as being, and Autry's professional persona as the Cowboy was clearly and consciously a fictional creation.

When he retired from show business in 1964, he had made close to 100 films and recorded over 600 records, many of the songs ones he had written himself, and interestingly, the biggest hits not Cowboy songs but ones that have become Christmas classics: *Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer*, *Here Comes Santa Claus Right Down Santa Clause Lane*, and *Frosty the Snowman*.

His business acumen (and huge celebrity) also allowed him to be involved in many things the Hollywood Cowboy would not. He purchased the California Angels baseball team in 1961, and served as vice president of the American League from 1983 until his death. He also owned KTLA, a television station in Los Angeles, and several radio stations. He was listed in *Forbes* famous 400 richest Americans for many years.

His celebrity status is unquestionable, and he is the only celebrity to have five stars on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, one for each of the five possible categories (motion pictures, radio, recording, television, and live theater).³⁵

These cowboy personas were positive and gave those who took them extraordinary lives. However, many of the personas from the *camp* shows of the 1960s worked in negative or at least mixed ways for the real people who played them.

In 1962, without having to say a word in his audition, Max Baer was hired to play Jethro Bodine in the smash television series *The Beverly Hillbillies*, and he became an immediate celebrity. How lucky could one be? But he got stuck in the role and could not find work as an actor in Hollywood for three years after the *Hillbillies* went off the air. There was no way to separate his real self from the persona. It's hard to feel sorry for him. Not many get the perks he got. Also, he found a way to make millions by writing and producing his own movie, *Macon County Line* in 1974, so all-in-all, his complaints, and he did complain, are not likely to bring him much sympathy. Still, his situation raises basic questions about identity and how much control humans have. Those Cowboy Stars embraced and profited from their screen personas. But Max Baer fought against his and lost.

Adam West was an upcoming star, enjoying moderate success in films and television appearances, but his big break came when he landed the role of Batman in the camp television series. It premiered in 1966 to high ratings and equally impressive critical acclaim and it quickly made West a household name. The following summer, West starred in the full-length feature *Batman*, fighting against an all-star cast of villains, including Frank Gorshin's Riddler, Burgess Meredith's Penguin and Lee Meriwether's Catwoman.

However, after two successful seasons, the Batman craze wore off, and midway through its third season the series was cancelled. Then the downside of being Batman ended West's promising career. He couldn't get beyond his role; instead of moving into the starring movie roles he desired, he was reduced to making guest appearances as Batman at county fairs and rodeos. He took what roles he could find, low-budget embarrassments like *The Happy Hooker Goes to Washington*, *Hellriders*, and an amateur horror movie *Zombie Nightmares*.

Ironically, the most famous of those who took on the role of Superman, George Reeves (George Keefer Brewer), who starred in the well-known television series, grew despondent about being trapped in that iconic role, and might have committed suicide. Once again, though he didn't embrace it as much others did, he felt it necessary to maintain a clean public image in line with his Superman persona for the children who looked up to him.

The Lone Ranger, Superman, Roy Rogers – these were serious roles, not satires. Nevertheless, whether or not they wanted it, the real people who performed them got swallowed up by their stage personas (literally referred to as their alter-egos). The satiric roles of *Batman*, *The Beverly Hillbillies*, *Gilligan's Island*, *The Monkees* and the like put the actors in less enviable situations.

The innocent America was gone, but the generation that fought WWII and returned wanted it to remain. That's the kind of television show that begins the era of television. The 1950s and early 60s gave Americans an innocent world. But the world *had* changed, and television slid into a new irony that at least for the moment managed to have it both ways – *Camp*.

Irony upon irony for an American middle class far from accepting the gay community, the term originates with the gay community from the French term *se camper*, meaning "to pose in an exaggerated fashion" The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives 1909 as the first print citation of camp as "ostentatious, exaggerated, affected, theatrical; effeminate or homosexual; pertaining to, characteristic of, homosexuals. So as a noun, *camp* behaviour, mannerisms, et cetera. (cf. quot. 1909); a man exhibiting such behaviour."

It is an *attitude* more than a style, one centered on *swish*, which means an exaggerated use of superlatives (going "over-the-top" to the point of ridiculousness), in this context of homosexuality, it connects to *drag* and means exaggerated female impersonation.

By the 1950s, the term's meaning is spreading beyond this gay community and being applied to such exaggerated performances as those of Carmen Miranda. Certainly, in this newer context Liberace is a connecting link. While he is not doing female impersonations (is denying

he is gay), he is both effeminate and over-the-top, very consciously doing self-parody meant to be taken seriously.

In 1954, Christopher Isherwood writes in his novel, *The World in the Evening*, "You can't *camp* about something you don't take seriously. You're not making fun of it; you're making fun out of it. You're expressing what's basically serious to you in terms of fun and artifice and elegance."

³⁶ In 1964, Susan Sontag wrote in an essay, "Notes on Camp," that it is an embracement of artifice, frivolity, naïve middle-class pretentiousness, and shocking excess, including such things as Tiffany lamps, the drawings of Aubrey Beardsley, Tchaikovsky's ballet *Swan Lake*, and Japanese science fiction films such as *Rodan*, and *The Mysterians* of the 1950s.³⁷

In his book *Camp*, Mark Booth says it is "to present oneself as being committed to the marginal with a commitment greater than the marginal merits," distinguishing *genuine camp* from *camp fads* and *fancies*, things that are not intrinsically camp, but display artificiality, stylization, theatricality, naivety, sexual ambiguity, tackiness, poor taste, stylishness, or portray camp people, and thus appeal to them.³⁸

Here is that collision, the superficial *camp* sweeping the country, the fun conundrums, the clever satires of any and all beliefs of the past (and present), and the dark realities that continue beneath that colorful, energetic explosion of expression. If one thinks about it, the original use of camp by gays did the same thing. It held the superficial appearance of a grandiose display of self-confidence in cross-dressing and being gay, but beneath it was the dark realization of what the world in general thought of such people.

The "free" world was being led by an America that had lost any claims to innocence, and it was careening wildly, filled with exuberance and confidence in its new power, seemingly capable of anything, while frightening fears of this new "unknown" world swept in waves through the land. Think of it. On one very simple level, America had figured out how to create a weapon so powerful it could conceivably destroy the entire human race, and the "bad guys," those Communists, especially the ones in the Soviet Union (or even closer, that "mad" leader of Cuba) also might just decide to use these weapons. All it would take is one person having a bad-hair-day to push the button that would send a bomb powerful enough to destroy an entire city, and that would ignite more and more and But it wasn't just a simple morality tale of the white hats against the black hats. The entire "American Way," with its strict ethos firmly anchored in the Puritan tenants of Christianity based on and given legitimacy by a European history that stretched back to the beginnings of modern civilization, had lost its power. Sure, there were still many who believed in

exactly this system of morality and way of life (how sincere they are and their motives might be questionable, but the current Tea Party continues to give it a platform). Europe had literally imploded, and so had its supporting religious and ethical systems. Furthermore, America by its very nature had established a system bent on embracing new ideas, new beliefs – progress.

The Industrial Revolution that swept through Europe was going to get a second wave in America, and it was going to change everything. “Modernism” was originally meant as a very positive term – the new explosion of uses for the new sources of energy and ways of bending the raw materials of nature to serve human desires. The Eiffel Tower was a perfect proclamation of it. In truth, it is hard to absorb how quickly America went from that frontier and cowboy world of log cabins and cattle drives to one of cities filled with skyscrapers. The world of the cowboy in reality was centered on herding cattle from Texas after the American Civil War, but by WWI (some thirty years later), Americans had electricity, cars, trains, even planes, and the cowboys on horses had already become more of a once upon a time world than reality.

By the end of WWII, a new form of economy was ready to explode on America (and by extension the rest of the world), and it was an economy that needed consumers, needed a “middle class” that could purchase an endless supply of disposable goods. This was not the result of one person or one event, but certainly Henry Ford’s whole system of not just the use of assembly lines, but of creating entire communities of workers who lived in his houses, obeyed his rules and made enough to purchase his products (automobiles), was the new reality. It was not driven by religious or ethical verities (though he did his damndest to include those), but by an economic system that could thrive under the form of government in place. Furthermore, WWII had taken women out of their traditional homemaker roles and put them to work in factories (as represented in the famous Rosie the Riveter sign). The programs put in place mainly by President Roosevelt to get the United States out of the Great Depression following the economic collapse of Wall Street (especially the G.I. Bill) welcomed home the victorious soldiers with a completely new economic world, one where a middle class could serve as the producer and consumer of goods. No longer were children expected to transform into adults without going through a lengthy transitional time (that teenage, young adult world that centered on and was carefully controlled by a school environment). Now, as the middle class world was being embraced, teens were depicted as obedient (perhaps exploring some forbidden desires, but not standing up to adult authority). Yes, they did smoke cigarettes, drink alcohol, act on their

sexual drives, and do some careless things with their new toys (cars and even motorcycles), but that was about it. The bad boys and girls were in the minority, and *Father Knows Best*, *Leave it to Beaver*, *The Ozzie and Harriet Show*, *The Danny Thomas Show*, *The Dick Van Dick Show*, *The Andy Griffith Show*, and on and on and on – all depicted a happy middle class with a clear social structure based on simple, straight-forward ethics – exactly what Americans wanted after the horrors of WWII. A general protestant form of Christianity was in place, and there were endless references to it, but on the whole, it was not emphasized or bluntly imposed. The economic world was more interested in customers than in preaching religion. Besides, it didn't need to be preached because "middle-class" America fully believed in a form of morality that was far more naïve and strict than most any time previous or since. When Elvis shook his hips on the Ed Sullivan Show, it sent shock waves across the land! (Check it out on YouTube. This is shocking behavior?)³⁹

René Descartes and his famous phrase *Cogito ergo sum* (French: *Je pense, donc je suis*; I think, therefore I am) is generally seen as the beginning of modern philosophy. While he followed previous philosophers in referencing an external God to explain some of the mysteries of life (and claimed to be a devout Catholic), his insistence on using reason and logic rather than trusting perceptions (the unreliable *senses*), shifted philosophic discourse from "what is true" to "what can I know for certain?," thus shifting the arbitrator of truth from God to humanity (i.e., while the traditional concept of "truth" implies an external authority, "certainty" instead relies on the judgment of the individual.) In this way, each person is defined as a reasoning adult, expected to "think," as opposed to a child obedient to God, expected not to "think," but to accept the will of God, generally to be known through some kind of intuitive experience, a revelation or vision beyond logic. The highest truths are all in the sacred writings (the Bible), and those humans who wrote them down in the Bible did so through divine connections. Thus, the Bible is God's word. Those who wrote it and those who interpret it did and continue to do so as intermediaries, as agents or messengers of God, not as thinking beings. In fact, this approach denies individual thinking. That is exactly the wrong thing to do.⁴⁰

Of course, Descartes ultimately runs into problems, things that cannot be explained. So what does he do? He attributes them to God. In fact, somewhat ironically, his original realizations, his famous formulation of analytical geometry and his idea of applying mathematical logic to philosophy, he attributes to visions, visitations from God.