



Riddle Me This: *The Batman* (2022) as Metaphysical Detective Fiction

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Abstract. This article examines Matt Reeves' *The Batman* (2022) as a seminal, contemporary instance of metaphysical detective fiction (MPDF). In doing so, it explores the extent to which Reeves engages with the genre's history and utilizes its dominant conventions to interrogate notions of identity and the self in Gotham City.

As Batman (Robert Pattinson) picks up a box of files from the lair of the Riddler (Paul Dano) in *The Batman* (2022), an incredulous police officer scolds the caped crusader over the violation of protocol. The man cries, “Put that down! Haven’t you heard of the chain of custody?”. Batman barely blinks in return, while Lieutenant Jim Gordon (Jeffrey Wright) assures the officer that the vigilante has permission to examine the crime scene, noting, after all, “he’s wearing gloves.” It is not the only crime scene that Batman attends in the film. The protagonist’s second appearance in the narrative has him scouring the apartment of the Riddler’s first murder victim, the mayor of Gotham. Batman analyzes the crime scene alongside the GCPD forensics team, much to their chagrin. In fact, the first instance of dialogue uttered by the hero during this scene is to inform the lead examiner that the mayor’s thumb was cut off when he was still alive, noting the presence of ecchymosis around the wound. A few moments later, Batman solves the first cryptic clue left by the Riddler. As Lieutenant Gordon and those around him ponder the riddle “What does a liar do when he’s dead?”, Batman sullenly explains “he lies still.” The double entendre of the riddle’s answer refers to both the mayor’s dead body and the man’s corruption that will continue to filter through Gotham long after his death.

This emphatic presentation of Batman as forensic, interrogative, and even philosophical,

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