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Channeling Libidinal Instincts in Christopher Nolan's Dark Knight Trilogy

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CHANNELING LIBIDINAL INSTINCTS IN CHRISTOPHER NOLAN'S *DARK KNIGHT*
TRILOGY

A Thesis

by

DAVID S. SANTOS

Submitted to Texas A&M International University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 2016

Major Subject: English

Channeling Libidinal Instincts in Christopher Nolan's *Dark Knight* Trilogy

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ABSTRACT

Channeling Libidinal Instincts in Christopher Nolan's Dark Knight Trilogy (May 2016)

David S. Santos, B.A., Texas A&M International University, 2015;

Chair of Committee: Dr. Jonathan Murphy

This thesis examines Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theories and applies them to Christopher Nolan's *Dark Knight* Trilogy. The primary text used from Freud is *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930), as well as other works that help supplement the theories he poses. Freud's psychoanalytic model is being applied to understand how civilized societies operate by repressing certain anti-social drives and re-channeling them into socially acceptable outlets. The characters and storylines from Nolan's films are derived from the Batman comic book series created by Bob Kane in 1939. *Batman Begins* (2005) introduces the duality of the Batman character and the unique development that Bruce Wayne undergoes as a result of the father figures in his life. *The Dark Knight* (2008) represents a back-and-forth between the id and the superego, symbolically brought to life by the Joker and Batman, respectively, as well as examines the tragic figure of Harvey Dent giving in to the id. Finally, *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012) continues to depict this struggle as Nolan provides a resolute finale that encapsulates two alternatives Freud posed to escape the guilt one undergoes from the superego's suppression. This psychoanalytic analysis of the *Dark Knight* trilogy serves to define the inner struggle every human faces and the many ways one can overcome it.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Sigmund Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930) has garnered critical attention for its diagnosis of the central tensions that persist between a civilization and the individuals that inhabit it. Freud asserts that this tension stems from the individual's desire to fulfill primitive instincts and the opposition presented by civilization's conflicting demand to repress or sublimate these drives in order to avoid social chaos. The greater good demands that laws and regulations must be instilled in order to ensure societal continuity. Regardless of how individuals feel about these sacrosanct laws, these rules must be obeyed or violators of the laws risk the chance of punishment within their respective communities. In turn, the inability to act out on instinctive demands restricts the opportunity for satisfaction of the prohibited impulses and perpetuates discontent among individuals. As a result, the libidinal energy that is repressed must be re-channeled, or sublimated, into socially acceptable activities. At the center of this restlessness lies Freud's renowned psychic topography of the id, ego, and superego, which are the three operate parts in each individual's psyche. In essence, the id is the set of primitive instincts present in every human, and the ego is the conscious self susceptible to outside forces and factors. The superego acts as the overseeing voice of reason that filters and restricts dangerous instincts by weighing the consequences of acting on dangerous thoughts. Freud's theoretical model explains how humans learn to mediate their desires in order to play their part in continuing the human species by becoming compliant members of a functioning civilization.

This thesis follows the style of *Arizona Quarterly*.

The Batman character first appeared in *Detective Comics* in Issue #27 published by DC Comics in 1939, created by writers Bob Kane and Bill Finger. Batman's introduction into the world of comic books and popular culture reflects the era of the 1930s-40's. Much of the 1930's was spent dealing with what is known as the Great Depression, an economic slump that dealt disastrous results to currency values, both of which interfered in the efficiency of the global market. There was a significant spike in crime and mob activity as people, desperate after losing their jobs, turned to illegal activity out of survival. Aside from this, the early 1940's was plagued by an air of uncertainty as America and other countries around the world became embroiled in the global conflict known as World War II. Fear and anxiety were heightened across the world as the Allies and the Axis Powers fought for dominance. Batman's portrayal as a dark and brooding character mirrored much of that anxiety, as audiences became enthralled in fictional wish-fulfillment, when a vigilante crime fighter not only used his wealth to help others but also led the fight against criminality. His impregnable moral values also rendered him insusceptible to outside forces of corruption or evil impulses that threaten to overtake him. Batman's original story does not stray from contemporized, modern versions of the character. Unlike Superman, who made his first comic book appearance one year prior to that of Batman's, the man behind the Batman mask does not possess any form of superhuman powers. He is merely a very wealthy individual who has experienced an extraordinary amount of trauma.

The story begins when a young child, Bruce Wayne, witnesses his parents being shot and killed by a criminal named Joe Chill. Bruce grows up struggling to cope as an orphaned boy under the care of his butler, Alfred. Using his anger and wishing to strike back at criminality, he learns to reach high levels of intellectual and physical human capacity. He

adopts the Batman alter-ego after successfully conquering his childhood fear of bats; as an adult, he dresses as a bat while operating as a vigilante crime fighter. Having inherited billions of dollars from his parents, Bruce uses his technology and resources for the benefit of Gotham City and its citizens. By dressing in a mask and cape he protects his identity to ensure the safety of those he cares about, while simultaneously striking fear in the hearts of criminals.

The Batman character has previously been examined through a philosophical lens, as is the case with *Batman and Philosophy: The Dark Knight of the Soul* (2012). Multiple authors weigh in on Batman's existence by examining the many moral and ethical conundrums he must solve throughout his existence. They bring in concepts and examples presented by thinkers such as Plato, Aristotle, and Immanuel Kant to serve as theoretic models. Psychological methods have also been used to analyze Batman such as psychology professor Travis Langley's *Batman and Psychology: A Dark and Stormy Knight* (2012). Among the psychoanalytic perspectives Langley uses for the study of Batman are Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung, whose theoretical ideas are used to better understand the rationale behind Batman's actions. The approaches taken by both of these works take into account multiple incarnations of the character such as his portrayal in comic books, television, and film. While the crux of everything that characterizes Batman stays intact throughout these portrayals, several things are also shifted such as his origin story, personality traits, and confrontations with villains. Therefore, Batman scholarship analyzes the Batman mythology by incorporating multiple versions of the overarching Batman canon.

The approach taken by this thesis is to concentrate on one specific incarnation of the Batman mythos in order to gain a much more thorough and definitive psychoanalytic

perspective on the character of Bruce Wayne. The specific incarnation of the Batman story chosen for this analysis is the *Dark Knight* film trilogy co-written and directed by Christopher Nolan. A recipient of widespread critical claim, the trilogy consists of *Batman Begins* (2005), *The Dark Knight* (2008) and *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012). These films separate themselves from previous Batman film lore by taking a departure from the cartoonish, family-friendly approach in Batman's last film outing that Joel Schumacher portrayed in *Batman & Robin* (1997). Instead, Nolan's reimagining of the character is set in a grounded, contemporary reality where Gotham City could easily substitute for real-world urban areas such as New York or Chicago. Nolan presents Gotham as a metropolis embracing dystopian and neo-noir qualities, plagued with unbridled crime and corruption. Nolan's cinematic interpretation of Batman stands as the most believable portrayal of a man whose broken psyche has become too burdensome to bear and who, consequently, tries to come to terms with his life and fit into civilization as best he can.

Batman Begins, as a film, is an accurate depiction of its title. The film explores various aspects of Bruce Wayne's life such as his childhood, adolescence, and tenure as an adult crime-fighter. The film plays heavily upon the theme of fatherhood, which makes Freud's psychoanalytic theory of the Oedipal complex particularly relevant. Bruce's father, Thomas Wayne, and his mentor, Henri Ducard, serve as the figures of instruction that guide Bruce into securing his place in civilization by helping him develop his superego and as a result sublimate his destructive desires. Bruce's father instructs him about the importance of helping those in need, providing the rule of law that Bruce learns to respect and uphold despite any hindrances that try to intervene between him and keeping his city safe. Under Ducard's apprenticeship, Bruce learns to sublimate his rage and fully develop his superego, a

voice of reason that he will carry with him throughout his life. Ducard teaches him the importance of learning how to control his inclination towards uncivil thoughts and desires. Ducard helps Bruce cultivate an internal moral agency that now tempers the engine of anger inside him, ensuring Bruce's safe return to Gotham. Once there, Bruce realizes that the state of the city has not changed since his departure. The figures that civilization trusts to subdue the uncivilized, such as elected officials and law enforcement officers, are ineffective. As a result, Bruce works to fill the void left by a broken law enforcement system. Bruce adopts the Batman persona by dressing in advanced body armor accompanied by a mask and cape tailored to mirror the characteristics of a bat. His rationale for appearing as half-man, half-animal is to induce fear into Gotham's criminal element. The image he disseminates across the city causes mystery and an uncanny trepidation among the wrong-doers he pursues. His staunch moral compass to never kill and to always do what is right is tailored after the words and example set by his late father. When Ducard returns to Gotham and reveals his plans to eliminate the city by engulfing it in a panic-inducing hallucinogen, Bruce dons the Batman costume to protect and uphold what his father stood for: the betterment and progress of his community.

Whereas *Batman Begins* serves as an origin story, the second installment in Nolan's film narrative, *The Dark Knight*, resumes one year after Bruce's return to Gotham as the Batman. Now an established and seasoned crime fighter, Bruce Wayne has spurred a wave of hope in the citizens of Gotham who thought their city was beyond saving from the trenches of venality. Batman meets his match with the appearance of the Joker, a man wearing clown make-up whose aim is to instill chaos by means of anarchy and terrorism. Since the Joker's introduction into the *Batman* comic series in 1940, he has proven to be

Batman's most formidable adversary. He is chaotic, sadistic, and acts upon his darkest, most disturbing impulses without any sign of remorse. The Joker thoroughly embodies the Freudian id, as he acts on the immediate gratification of his desires to invoke panic. He attempts to strip away civilization's moral and sociopolitical artifices in order to reveal everyone's true natures. The fact that civilization clings to law and regulation in order to exist bothers him; instead, he wants humanity to abandon this façade and show its true nature, just as he does. Despite the Joker's taunts for Bruce to abandon his superego, he never gives in to his now domesticated id so long as he is wearing the Batman costume. Aside from the tumultuous conflict between Batman and the Joker, another key figure in the film is Gotham's district attorney Harvey Dent. He is the city's shining example of honesty and virtue. Unlike Batman, Dent is an elected city official instead of a masked vigilante. Dent figures into the events of the film as a tragic hero whose adherence to his superego is gradually stripped away to reveal the id, which is symbolized by the facial scarring he endures that turns him into the villainous Two-Face. The film's conclusion results in Batman taking the blame for Harvey's actions in order to keep Gotham from losing hope and faith in the future and to ensure that the prisoners that Harvey has put behind bars remain there.

The Dark Knight Rises takes place eight years after the events of *The Dark Knight*, revealing a battered and cynical Bruce Wayne who has lived as a hermit since the events of the previous film. He is soon forced to come out of retirement with the introduction of the film's villain, a masked mercenary named Bane. Each villain in the franchise has tried to dissolve Thomas Wayne's rule of law that Batman upholds, and Bane is no exception. He plans to pick up right where the Joker left off, exposing the lie that Batman and Commissioner Gordon (Gary Oldman) had used to keep Gotham City from collapsing under

chaos. After a brutal beatdown that Batman endures at the hands of Bane, Bruce is forced to rehabilitate himself and come to Gotham's rescue in one last, heroic feat. A critical battle takes place in which Gotham's law enforcement and the inhabitants of Blackgate Prison fight for control of the city, which serve as two large representations of the id and the superego. Batman returns to Gotham and appears to sacrifice his life in order to save it. However, it is later revealed that Bruce has taken refuge in Florence, Italy, and has thereby rid himself of the responsibility of being both Bruce Wayne and Batman. Nolan and co-writer David S. Goyer provide Bruce with two alternate escapes that Freud poses in *Civilization and its Discontents*, that of isolation and of sexual love through companionship. Bruce has relieved himself of the burden of being Batman; yet, he leaves his technology and resources behind in Gotham for someone else to take his place and continue to lead the fight against criminality back home.

This thesis examines several characters and scenes from the *Dark Knight* trilogy that provide filmic representations of Freudian ideas that can help audiences understand the internal logic of the movies. The narratives of each film are discussed, along with commentary from the trilogy's director, screenwriters, cast members, and published sources. The renunciation of anti-social instincts and their sublimation is a thematic quality present in the Batman character. The same way that Batman embodies the superego, the Nolan films embody Freud's psychic topography. The films also help to expand Freud's often abstract and pragmatic ideas by attaching romanticized values of morality, justice, and faith. Moreover, Nolan and co-screenwriter David S. Goyer portray an overarching theme of faith and hope in human nature as they demarcate the need for a substantive moral law necessary for societal harmony.

CHAPTER II
FREUD'S REPRESSED AND ITS THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR A STUDY
OF BATMAN

At the beginning of *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930), Sigmund Freud addresses anti-social instincts, which are violent and sexual in nature that human civilization works to repress. Despite the controversial nature and implications of many of his theories, they have helped shed light on what it means to be human within the boundaries of society. In order to understand the institutions humans have created, Freud believes it is imperative to first understand the nature of human psychology. For centuries, humans have abided by institutional paradigms, dependent on government and law to instill order and avoid disorder. The inception of these civil structures acts like a mask that shields humanity not from outsiders, but from itself. Society shuns destructive behavior and punishes those who give in to primal impulses that lead to illicit criminal acts. What lies beneath the order that humanity imparts, and what would happen if humanity chose to embrace and welcome this obscure side of itself? Freud asserts that these impulses are always there just beneath the surface, welcoming the opportunity to exhibit what humanity must constantly repress. Freud believes that the “essence of repression lies simply in turning something away, and keeping it at a distance, from the conscious,” and internalizing these instincts is dealt with by a “reversal into the opposite or turning round upon the subject’s own self” (569-70). In order for repression to be successful and to keep destructive thoughts from coming to fruition, one must cater to these impulses in socially acceptable ways. In *Civilization and its Discontents*, *The Ego and the Id* (1923), *Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning* (1911), and *The Uncanny* (1919), Freud lays out different facets of his psychical topography.

This energetic model comprised of three different organizing faculties, the id, ego, and superego, is a spatial map that deals with instinctual energy circulating through this system. These anti-social impulses that antagonize the id call for society to be structured in ways that bear witness to the id. Freud lends his unique psychoanalytic perspective to this matter, where he presents the superego as an act of sublimation that moderates these desires and re-channels these destructive energies so they remain within the established parameters of society.

Freud divided the human psyche by using a libidinal model separated into three distinguishable parts. The id is the unconscious part of the self that possesses an instinctual strength; it contains libidinal impulses that all humans are naturally born with (770). When Freud describes the id as an “unconscious” self, he means that individuals are not necessarily aware that they contain libidinal instincts. Humans possess these natural impulses, whether they be for sexual or destructive tendencies. These uninhibited impulses could be the desire to kill, rape, or participate in mindless, chaotic destruction. The id acts to fulfill a principle Freud coins as the pleasure principle, which is the main aim of the psychological apparatus. As he puts it in *Civilization and its Discontents*: “In the developmental process of the individual, the programme of the pleasure principle, which consists in finding the satisfaction of happiness, is retained as the main aim. Integration in, or adaptation to, a human community appears as a scarcely avoidable condition which must be fulfilled before this aim of happiness can be achieved [...] the development of the individual seems to us to be a product of the interaction between two urges, the urge towards happiness [...] and the urge towards union” (768). Freud’s pleasure principle ties into his belief that the purpose of life is to attain pleasure and avoid displeasure; however, that happiness must be reachable within the

boundaries of the law and in the eyes of the common good. The urge for union, such as love, is the need for assembly and the establishment of cultures and communities combining into larger units. Because the community is not intended for individual happiness and instead focuses on the needs of the common good, frustrations arise in individuals who are unable to fulfill their own individual pleasures. For some, committing acts of violence and destruction may bring them pleasure; however, they must refrain from them because these actions go against the establishment. Therefore, these individual ids must be controlled in order to maintain regulation in civilization and to protect the established order. The impulses the id brings about channel themselves through the conscious self, defined as the ego. The body serves as the vehicle through which these libidinal instincts can manifest themselves.

Freud describes the ego as “ultimately derived from bodily sensations, chiefly from those springing from the surface of the body. It may thus be regarded as a mental projection of the surface of the body [...] representing the superficialities of the mental apparatus” (“The Ego and the Id” 637). This means that the body and the cognizant self serve to reflect the intentions of conscious thoughts residing in the brain. The ego is a conscious awareness that serves as a channel through which humans have the possibility of acting upon the instincts of the id all within the context of reality. An example may consist of an individual deciding to hit another out of anger. The need for such action arises from the mental apparatus, while the body is necessary in order to carry out such an action. The conscious self has the human body and brain ready to act upon these instincts. At its core, the ego is someone’s personality and demeanor and everything that makes them who they are. A second Freudian principle that works in unison with the ego is the reality principle. This principle weighs the positives and negatives of an action, ultimately deciding whether or not it is savvy or

intelligent to indulge in said action (“Formulations on the Two Principles...” 302). When mediating or addressing our wants within reality, gratification can be momentarily delayed. Humans are forced to observe these principles through logical and realistic inquiry. Adding to the previous example, a person wishing to act out on the impulse to hit someone must assess an action that would give them great pleasure. The reality principle forces the individual to think about the repercussions they will face within a civilized society, making them feel guilt or fear about what may result from such action. The id, acting through the ego, needs to be controlled for there to be order in society, hence the creation of the superego.

Freud’s Oedipus complex theory consists of a child being in love with his mother, thus sparking a feeling of competition with his father for his mother’s love. Freud hypothesized that all men dealt with these emotions and subconsciously worked to suppress their love interest towards their mothers. This process of suppression originates as the young “boy’s sexual wishes in regard to his mother become more intense and his father is perceived as an obstacle to them; from this the Oedipus complex originates. His identification with his father then takes on a hostile colouring and changes into a wish to get rid of his father in order to take his place with his mother” (“The Ego and the Id” 640). The infant experiences his father as an imposition from the outside, separating it from its gratification and pleasures. This intrusion comes in the form of the infant’s father, who represents the law in Freud’s model. As the bearer of the law, the father rewards the infant with his love but at the same time threatens the infant with punishment for feeling this love and bond towards the mother. This threat of punishment is what Freud refers to as castration anxiety. Eventually, the child develops “an ambivalent attitude [towards] his father,” which ultimately results in “an

intensification of his identification with his father” (640). While this model may seem absurd from a literal standpoint, it makes much more sense interpreting it from a metaphorical perspective. The father acts as the law, which says that you cannot act on certain types of prohibited pleasures and instincts encompassed by the pleasure principle; instead, the child must act rationally within the reality principle. If these prohibited thoughts persist or are continually accessed, then the father will deprive the child of the ability to enjoy. Through this castration anxiety, the child then internalizes the law, and it polices itself the same way the father used to. The individual’s ego must then undergo a modification: “The modification of the ego retains its special position, [Freud writes] it confronts the other contents of the ego as an ego ideal or super-ego. The super-ego is, however, not simply a residue of the earliest object-choices of the id; it also represents an energetic reaction-formation against those choices” (641). The “reaction-formation” that Freud discusses is the cause and effect progression of an instinct and its restriction. Unconscious thoughts that produce anxiety upon the ego are repressed and in turn manifested as their opposite. This mediation between the ego and the id causes the ego to produce insincere feelings for the sake of keeping one’s place among humanity: “[The ego] pretends that the id is showing obedience to the admonitions of reality [...] it disguises the id’s conflicts with reality and, if possible, its conflicts with the superego too [...] it only too often yields to the temptation to become sycophantic, opportunist and lying, like a politician who sees the truth but wants to keep his place in popular favour” (“The Ego and the Id” 656-57). For example, someone with rage and hate will manifest an overabundance of care and love. As a result, the id is satisfied because the ego is left channeling repressed feelings into a socially acceptable action, regardless of whether or not the emotions are sincere. A trademark characteristic of

reactive emotions is when a person is over-affectionate to the point where others can soundly assume a dishonest attitude from the individual undergoing this reaction-formation. An example of these include “cleanliness, orderliness and trustworthiness [that] give exactly the impression of a reaction-formation against an interest in what is unclean and disturbing and should not be part of the body” (“Character and Anal Erotism” 297). This penchant for contrasting tendencies serves as a defense mechanism that masks the original temperament. However, the original feelings of hatred continue to unconsciously persist and are not destroyed. Therefore, reaction-formation is not a process that substitutes suppressed feelings for their opposites; rather, they are hidden so that the ego is not made aware of them and is tricked into producing a friendly exterior.

The superego keeps libidinal instincts in check and keeps the individual from acting out on them. The child feels anger against the father for both having what the child lacks and from preventing the child from getting what it wants; therefore, the child wants to hurt the father. The child copes with the anger and frustration felt once the superego is successfully developed. In essence, “the super-ego retains the character of the father, while the more powerful the Oedipus complex was and the more rapidly it succumbed to repression (under the influence of authority, religious teaching, schooling and reading), the stricter will be the domination of the super-ego over the ego later on—in the form of conscience or perhaps of an unconscious sense of guilt” (642). At the same time, the child also desires the love of the father and is afraid of the father’s potential fury. As a result, the child adheres to the father’s law out of love or fear of the father. This exemplifies an internal conflict that the child struggles with, torn between exerting anger but at the same time desiring affection. The father’s rule becomes engraved in the child’s mind, developing the super-ego as a means to

preserve the child's welfare within the context of the father's household (640-41). This model of the father-figure occurs in relationship to society. Just like the child must obey the father, one must also obey man-made laws.

Another psychoanalyst who followed in Freud's footsteps, Jacques Lacan, presents the psychoanalytic experience of what he calls the Mirror Stage in his 1936 publication, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience." In it, Lacan reinterprets the Freudian "ego" as dependent upon the child's surroundings. Lacan proposes that both male and female infants, as early as six months, undergo a stage where an external body image reflected by a mirror produces a unique, psychic response. Up to that age children are a bunch of chaotic drives, emotions, and feelings without a sense of organization and lacking an all-embracing identity. "This fragmented body" can then manifest "a certain level of aggressive disintegration in the individual" (506). This aggressive disintegration comes because they have yet to reach, or are on the cusp of reaching their identity. Their identity is still incomplete at this stage as partial objects, similar to an organ without a body. When infants look at themselves in a mirror, they see themselves as a complete image. They recognize themselves as the "I," which is something they will one day strive to reach. The imperative factor behind this "is that this form situates the agency of the ego, before its social determination, in a fictional direction, which will always remain irreducible for the individual alone, or rather, which will only rejoin the coming-into-being [...] of the subject asymptotically" (Lacan 503). What infants see in the mirror is a total, consistent identity along with a complete body image. The infant identifies with something that it has yet to become. The mirror aids the infant by helping it separate from an immediate immersion of inexperience to then postulate its own

identity as a subject referring to itself as an object. They see themselves as an object separate from the rest of the objective world. They will then strive to approximate this image of completeness that represents the end of all chaos. With this image comes the birth of an identity with defined boundaries and organized drives. A child will then seek this “coming-into-being” as the search for their identity. This complete form of themselves is what Lacan calls the “ideal-I” (503). This is a complete version of the self that does not correlate with the infant’s present reality. All forms of identity are built upon the primary moment of misrecognition of alienating oneself in the process of identifying with oneself. The “I,” the subject, is objectified and turned outside of itself. Identity is a process of objectifying oneself only to come back to oneself as something not yet there. Infants then strive to become this ideal self-image since they feel that they are not living up to their ideal, their parent’s ideal, or society’s ideal. Because infants are unable to find this and are at permanent discord with the idealized self-image, they are then plagued by mental anguish. Lacan further describes the ideal goal of the Mirror stage as something that culminates with the subject’s mature social identity: “The mirror stage is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation—and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality [...] and, lastly, to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject’s entire mental development” (505-6). The ideal-I is an important function of the superego because the superego is the internalized sensor that dictates which drives, instincts, and feelings are permitted. By doing so, the individual is censored. When the infant realizes that it is not living up to the ideal-I, the superego becomes displeased.

Freud presents the superego as “the ethical standards of mankind,” which supervise and censor the potential actions and thoughts of the id’s pressure on the ego (“An Autobiographical Study” 37). Ethical standards of mankind are whatever rules society establishes that all citizens must live by in order to maintain the greater good. The necessity to thwart instincts of destruction and aggression causes pain and tension to the individual. For example, an individual intent on killing someone they dislike is stopped by their superego. The superego prohibits them from committing this action because the laws set by mankind will bring serious repercussions. Therefore, the superego makes the individual feel guilt and anxiety as its form of violence. Freud also describes another conflict that the superego presents to the individual. This conflict can cause great misery and unhappiness by instilling guilt and/or pain: “In the severity of its commands and prohibitions [the superego] troubles itself too little about the happiness of the ego, in that it takes insufficient account of the resistances against obeying them [...] Consequently we are very often obliged, for therapeutic purposes, to oppose the super-ego, and we endeavor to lower its demands [...] What a potent obstacle to civilization aggressiveness must be, if the defence against it can cause as much unhappiness as aggressiveness itself” (“Civilization and its Discontents” 770). The defense that Freud alludes to is the superego, as it sets upon containing the aggressiveness of the id and internalizes aggression back upon the ego. Furthermore, the individual may experience guilt for having their superego constantly watch over them so that they do not act upon these impulses. The superego’s job is to contain the id without caring if the individual is happy with the process and its end result. Freud asserts that “the development of civilization imposes restrictions on [the id], and justice demands that no one shall escape those restrictions” (741). The judicial system is what comes in between the ego

and freedom. These elements of justice lie within the eyes of the community, and this justice does not care for the individual's own perception of impartiality and imbalance. The tension that the id places on an individual to relieve destructive impulses causes reaction-formations that attempts to hide these desires from awareness. These impulses can then be filtered or sublimated into acceptable social activities, such as the very invention of the superego itself.

The Hollywood film industry has made billions of dollars from the horror genre. However, it is not necessarily ghostly or demonic figures that draw audiences to these cinematic experiences, but more the element of surprise and anxiety an audience gets from the unpredictable frights. Among his psychoanalytic criticism, Freud's essay on "The Uncanny" (1919), focuses on themes that remain prevalent in today's mainstream media, and discusses the philosophical branch concerned with visual arts known as aesthetics. He explains that the term "aesthetic" is commonly associated with all that is positive such as the beautiful, attractive, and sublime; however, he asserts that modern times have forced scholars to focus on aesthetics that deal with the "opposite feelings of unpleasantness and repulsion" ("Uncanny" 1). As opposed to positive aesthetics that are pleasant to look at such as a portrait of a sunny meadow, negative aesthetics bring about painful experiences. These negative aesthetics invoke both fear and fright in the beholder because of the grotesque qualities that produce anxiety.

Freud introduces the uncanny by first unpacking the word's semantical and philological implications. He observes the German word *Heimlich* which means "belonging to the house, not strange [...] comfortable, homely [as well as] intimate, homelike; the enjoyment of quiet content" (2-3). The second, or alternate, definition is that which is "concealed, kept from sight, so that others do not get to know about it" (3). The negation of

“heimlich” then turns to the word “unheimlich,” which is the opposite of “heimlich.” Yet it is too similar to the second definition. Therefore, while on one hand “unheimlich” means to be unhomey and unfamiliar, it also means “the name for everything that ought to have remained... hidden and secret and has become visible” (4). Anything that should have remained private and is unintentionally exposed brings an undesirable sense of unwanted exposure. The repressed memory that inflicts pain on an individual caters to this definition. Freud describes both words as things that come full circle: “Thus, ‘heimlich’ is a word the meaning of which develops towards an ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, ‘unheimlich’” (4). This overlap strengthens the point that the uncanny is both hidden from the public and hidden from the self, and its startling revelation marks the return of the repressed. When Freud refers to something that “should have” been hidden he is referring to anything that becomes public knowledge that would upset an established order. These are hidden desires and beliefs that may disrupt what is believed to be true within the realm of societal and human existence. For example, a common perception of mankind is that humans are unable to fly. If a human is born with and produces this unfamiliar ability, then it embodies the uncanny because flying was thought impossible for centuries. Along more psychoanalytic lines, the resurfacing of a repressed desire or a surpassed infantile complex evokes a similar uncanny response.

Freud references E.T.A. Hoffmann’s “The Sandman” (1816) to further examine and illustrate the Oedipal complex. In “The Uncanny,” Freud describes Hoffman as “the unrivalled master of conjuring up the uncanny” (Freud 9) in comparison to other literary authors. Freud uses Hoffman’s narrative to focus on the imagery and incidents that evoke the uncanny, such as the dread of losing one’s eyes which in this case symbolizes the dread

of castration. “The Sandman” is a story about a young child named Nathaniel who is haunted by a bedtime story. On nights that Nathaniel and his siblings were up late, his mother would warn them about a figure called the “Sandman” who would come if the children did not go to bed. Nathaniel’s nurse then provides further details about the Sandman: “He is a wicked man who comes when children won’t go to bed, and throws handfuls of sand in their eyes so that they jump out of their heads all bleeding. Then he puts the eyes in a sack and carries them off to the moon to feed his children. They sit up there in their nest, and their beaks are hooked like owls’ beaks, and they use them to peck up naughty boys’ and girls’ eyes with” (qtd. in Freud 5). Nathaniel witnesses his father argue with a frequent visitor to his household, Coppelius, who practices alchemy with Nathaniel’s father. Due to his eccentric personality and repulsive appearance, Nathaniel associates the Sandman with Coppelius. One day, while he is caught spying on Coppelius and his father, Coppelius threatens to burn Nathaniel’s eyes out. Nathaniel is left traumatized by the experience and shortly afterwards his father passes away in an explosion that occurred during another session of alchemical experiments with Coppelius.

The story then transitions to an older Coppelius who purchases a spy-glass from an optician named Coppola. When Coppelius looks into the spy-glass he sees an automaton named Olympia, whom he immediately falls in love with. The traumatic experience Nathaniel had as a child is momentarily relived when he witnesses Coppola (Coppelius’s double) and Spalanzi fight over Olympia, just as Coppelius and Nathaniel’s father once fought over him. Consequently, Olympia’s eyes are pulled from her head. Nathaniel falls into another, deeper state of post-trauma, bordering on insanity. “The Sandman” comes to a conclusion after Nathaniel seemingly recuperates from the trauma and is close to marrying

his girlfriend, Clara. However, as he sees Clara through Coppola's spy-glass once more, he goes into another state of frenzy. Nathaniel then commits suicide by jumping off the balcony, as the final vision brought about his repressed memory of the automaton Olympia as well as his initial incident with Coppelius as a child.

Freud draws several conclusions from his analysis of Hoffman's story, among the most important being the specific fear that the element of the uncanny draws upon. Freud concludes that "the feeling of something uncanny is directly attached to the figure of the Sandman, that is, to the idea of being robbed of one's eyes [...] we know from psychoanalytic experience, however, that this fear of damaging or losing one's eyes is a terrible fear of childhood. [...] No bodily injury is so much dreaded by them as an injury to the eye" ("Uncanny" 7). The fear of losing his eyes is what haunted Nathaniel since the beginning of "The Sandman," from his nanny's initial description of him to the clash between his father and Coppelius. Freud further asserts that in psychoanalytic experience, the loss of one's eyes, "and with going blind is often enough a substitute for the dread of castration [...] which excites a peculiarly violent and obscure emotion" ("Uncanny" 7). Freud makes this connection by establishing Nathaniel's fear of losing his eyes to his relationship with his father figures in the narrative. Not only is the Sandman present when Nathaniel's father (who is the first to protect Nathaniel's eyes) is killed, but he also comes in between the love he develops for the automaton, Olympia, as well as his love for his fiancé, Clara. The Sandman, who was categorized by his ability to blind people, was directly responsible for the loss of love Nathaniel experienced throughout the narrative. Once the fear of being blinded is substituted for the dread of castration and the Sandman is replaced by the father, "the story becomes intelligible" (Smith 136). Furthermore, what makes this

connection uncanny is a recollection in Nathaniel's psycho-sexual development which was thought to have become overcome and repressed. The superego has to deal with Oedipal culpability because of the constant pressure the id applies on the individual. The guilt stems from the inclination to want to stray from social norms. In this instance, the infant's desire for the mother is prohibited by the father who threatens to castrate him with the threat of the loss of his love.

Freud also outlines the importance of sublimation, which is "the employment of the displacements of the libido which our mental apparatus permits of and through which its function gains so much in flexibility. The task here is that of shifting the instinctual aims in such a way that they cannot come up against frustration from the external world" ("Civilization and its Discontents" 731). Turning something innately anti-social towards an acceptable vehicle of relief is what, to Freud, makes the world function. Sublimation "is what makes it possible for higher psychological activities, scientific, artistic or ideological, to play such an important part in civilized life. If one were to yield to a first impression, one would say that sublimation is a vicissitude which has been forced upon the instincts entirely by civilization" (742). Sublimation comes through several different outlets which are acceptable to the external world and to the rules imposed by the majority for the greater good. When sublimating dangerous sexual energy such as rape or incest, instead of releasing this energy through the act of sex, the energy converts into intellectual or creative energy. The fact that these sexual desires "can thus be influenced and diverted enables them to be employed for cultural activities of every kind, to which indeed they bring the most important contributions" ("An Autobiographical Study" 24). When observing figures in history considered to be at the pinnacles of their profession, one can conclude that it is these

individuals who have the greatest amount of pent-up libido to exert. These cultural activities are then utilized for the greater good of society, and humanity is protected from potential destruction.

While sublimation is ideal to help alleviate the violence that the superego exerts upon the id, Freud also grants possible escapes to this struggle. Freud's escape resembles that of a Buddhist principle recounting that all of man's suffering is caused by their desires. Therefore, if nothing is desired, then a person will never have to suffer. Miserableness ensues from desperately wanting something and the inability to attain it. Freud leaves open the possibility of escaping this tension and finding what he believed is the ultimate goal for every human: happiness derived from the absence of anxiety. Freud acknowledges that there are many influences that cater to our mental apparatuses, and "just as a satisfaction of instinct spells happiness for us, so severe suffering is caused us if the external world lets us starve, if it refuses to sate our needs" ("Civilization and its Discontents" 731). Therefore, social environments are an immense factor that contributes to happiness or unhappiness. If the world around an individual lets that individual "starve," or is unable to fulfill a person's wants, then suffering may ensue. In *Civilization and its Discontents*, he outlines methods for achieving alternative freedoms, one of which is the rare possibility of killing off the instincts as well as what its effects may cause: "The extreme form of this is brought about by killing off the instincts, as is prescribed by the worldly wisdom of the East and practiced by Yoga. If it succeeds, then the subject has, it is true, given up all other activities as well—he has sacrificed his life; and by another path, he has once more only achieved the happiness of quietness" (731). Giving up one's instincts means to give up something that constitutes individual humanity. The happiness that comes from this is, as Freud alludes to, the

happiness obtained from solitude: “Against the suffering which may come [...] from human relationships the readiest safeguard is voluntary isolation, keeping oneself aloof from other people. Against the dreaded external world one can only defend oneself by some kind of turning away from it” (730). This radical extreme means that a human must remove him or herself from society and safeguard themselves against human relationships. The individual is then left in a state of “quietness,” as Freud describes. Naturally, the implications are that the individual will sacrifice the company of a community for a quiet and secluded life, but by turning away from a society that invokes pain and suffering, one can successfully preserve his or her private welfare and happiness. Freud says that “one can try to re-create the world, to build up in its stead another world in which its most unbearable features are eliminated and replaced by others that are in conformity with one’s own wishes,” (732) and separating oneself from their current reality. This is a desperate choice because the downside to this hermitage is the illusory inhabitation of a make-believe fantasy land, in which the separation between oneself and reality can lead to insanity. Aside from succumbing to delusion, Freud also outlines other possibilities for achieving alternate freedoms such as embracing religion and the usage of narcotics.

Finally, Freud mentions what he believes to be the alternative that can most closely and assuredly grant an individual protection against human suffering and the culmination of happiness. While it is impossible to account for one solution that is applicable to a diverse range of humans and wide range of personalities, Freud describes sexual love as the most ideal solution to defend oneself against misery: “I am, of course, speaking of the way of life which makes love the centre [sic] of everything, which looks for all satisfaction in loving and being loved. A psychological attitude of this sort comes naturally enough to all of us; one of the

forms in which love manifests itself—sexual love—has given us our most intense experience of an overwhelming sensation of pleasure and has thus furnished us with a pattern for our search for happiness” (733). Love, which Freud asserts as the center “of everything” is a natural answer for indulging in happiness. While romantic relationships can be easily broken and the repercussions of that can cause hurt and misery upon an individual, it is a natural process present since the dawn of humanity. The intense emotions and feelings of happiness one can derive from love can compensate for or at least alleviate any discomfort being experienced.

Christopher Nolan’s interpretation of the Batman character deals with the development of Bruce Wayne. Bruce learns to successfully channel the rage he undergoes as a result of early traumatic events and negotiate the tension that the id places upon the ego. He sublimates his instincts and becomes the “Batman” persona, a physical manifestation of the superego. The following chapters highlight several instances from the *Dark Knight* trilogy that exemplify many of Freud’s theories. In doing so, audiences can better grasp Freudian theories when placed within the context of filmic representations. Likewise, these theories also provide another scope of analysis for the themes that these films portray.

CHAPTER III

CONQUERING THE ID: FORMATION OF THE BATMAN SUPEREGO

While Freud asserts that maximum pleasure is granted to an individual when he or she gives in to the id, he acknowledges that if everyone did so, civilization would cease to exist due to the destructive actions carried out. However, through the Oedipal complex and development of the superego, these destructive impulses are kept at bay and successfully sublimated in other socially acceptable ways. *Batman Begins* shows how Bruce Wayne (Christian Bale) overcomes his primal instinctual drive and sublimates it through the Batman persona by undergoing the Oedipal complex. Because Bruce's father is murdered when Bruce is still fairly young, Bruce is not able to completely identify with his father and learn whatever else is necessary to undergo and complete this complex. He has not learned to sublimate, and he has not learned to side with the law; therefore, he is prone to depression, guilt, and murderous vengeance throughout his life as a teenager and young adult. Shortly after almost committing murder, Bruce realizes that he must learn to temper his impulses and leaves Gotham to seek an answer to his problem. In his travels he meets Henri Ducard (Liam Neeson), a highly skilled assassin and member of a society called The League of Shadows. Ducard takes the young Bruce under his wing and teaches him how to sublimate his rage so that Bruce can successfully serve a function in society. When it is revealed that Ducard and the League of Shadows are not all they appear to be, Bruce decides to separate himself and embrace an alternate persona by becoming an agent of justice that sustains his father's rule of law. It is because of Bruce's guilt for wanting to exert his pain and anger in a destructive action that Bruce develops and effectively utilizes his newly established persona, Batman, as a living, breathing superego. The Batman alter ego also allows Bruce to

sublimate his desires and to complete his identity by providing a channel towards self-preservation needed for Bruce to acclimate to civilization's standards. The film demonstrates how the renunciation of certain freedoms can grant security within a civil state. While the presence of Batman may not fit within the boundaries of the law, the law accepts him because he is needed.

The movie opens with a young, eight-year-old Bruce Wayne playing with his friend Rachel Dawes (Katie Holmes) at his luxurious home owned by his parents, Thomas and Martha Wayne (Linus Roache and Sara Stewart). As he hides from Rachel playing hide-and-seek, he inadvertently tumbles into a hidden, empty well and fractures his leg in the process. As a result of the noise, sleeping bats wake up from a cavern connecting to the well and begin fluttering and screeching throughout the condensed space. As a result, Bruce is terrified and covers his face in an attempt to protect himself from the bats. Rachel runs to alert Bruce's parents of his accident and Bruce's father comes to his rescue by lowering himself down the well. The bats have flown away, and Bruce lies there with a traumatized and frightened look on his face. Nolan points out the integral part this scene plays when developing *Batman Begins*, as it was a "fascinating connection between Bruce's early childhood trauma [...] falling down this well and being attacked by these bats and then the persona that he then develops in order to use people's fear against them" ("Making Batman Begins"). The fear that Bruce experiences as a result of his encounter with bats is the same fear that the adult Bruce will try to instill in the criminals he pursues.

Later in the day Bruce's parents decide to attend an opera event to celebrate their anniversary. As they ride on the train Bruce asks his father whether he had built the train, and his father lays out the groundwork for what Bruce will learn to embrace: the rules and

regulations that the father imposes as a paternal role model. Bruce's father outlines the purpose and necessity of his aid to Gotham City: "Gotham's been good to our family. But the city's been suffering. People less fortunate than us have been enduring very hard times. So we built a new, cheap public transportation system to unite the city [...] I work at the hospital. I leave the running of our company to much better men" (*Batman Begins*). Bruce's father has chosen to use his wealth to help people less fortunate than them get to where they need to go more affordably. Bruce's father contributes to society by providing an infrastructure that helps ensure the survival of the city's less fortunate. Aside from helping fund this, Bruce's father reveals that he also works at a hospital. Bruce will develop "his role in Gotham as somehow analogous to his father's role as a physician" (Jensen 89), by helping the city's less fortunate through his resources and by saving lives. Bruce will successfully undergo the development of his social conscience as he adopts Thomas Wayne's rules of law.

Once seated and inside the opera house, Bruce witnesses actors dressed in black leotards personifying bats that dangle from the ceiling, swinging from ropes, and flapping their large wings. Bruce is immediately reminded of his previous traumatic incident with bats and turns to his parents, asking them to leave. Noticing the disturbed look on his son's face, Bruce's father obliges. As they exit the theater, a man emerges from the shadows and asks Bruce's parents to hand over their valuables. In the process of doing so the man shoots both Bruce's father and mother and then runs away from the scene of the crime. Bruce is left crying at the sight of his parents laying on the ground in front of him. In the aftermath, Bruce is left under the guardianship of the Wayne Estate butler Alfred (Michael Caine), who takes care of the broken, guilt-ridden Bruce from then on. Bruce's guilt stems from making

his parents leave the theater early. He believes that if he had not been scared of the actors dressed as bats, his parents would have never entered the alleyway and been shot. Bruce never overcomes his grief and his guilt, and these feelings will later be accompanied by a great sense of rage as he heads off to college.

In his transition into adulthood, a much older Bruce returns to Gotham in order to attend the legal proceeding against Joe Chill (Richard Brake), the man responsible for murdering Bruce's parents. Alfred insists that Bruce stay in the room that once belonged to his parents, while Bruce insists that he would rather stay in his old room. As Alfred reminds him that Wayne Manor belongs to Bruce, Bruce responds in an angry tone: "No Alfred, it's my father's house [...] This place is a mausoleum, if I have my way I'll pull the damn thing down brick by brick" (*Batman Begins*). Bruce continues to mourn the deaths of his parents, and his feelings of abandonment and guilt are now accompanied by a strong sense of rage. The death of Bruce's father causes a serious developmental issue obstructing the successful completion of Bruce's Oedipal complex. Through the Oedipal complex, one learns to temper libidinal instincts and to abide by the father's rule of law and moral example. The end result of this complex is to develop the superego and identify with the law through a form of sublimation. Bruce has yet to realize how to fit within society's mold and will realize that he must find a way to temper his impulses. He already has his father's rule of law as an example and now Bruce must seek an adequate manner in which to sublimate his desires.

Bruce learns that the man who killed his parents will be released on early parole in exchange for testifying against another mob boss. He attends the hearing with his handgun concealed underneath his jacket, finger on the trigger, ready to avenge his parent's death, but a powerful crime leader sends an accomplice to murder Chill just before Bruce pulls the

trigger. With his revenge plot foiled, Bruce accepts a ride home from Rachel. In the car, they have a discussion about revenge and justice. Whereas Bruce believes that sometimes both concepts mean the same, Rachel lets him know that “justice is about harmony. Revenge is about making yourself feel better. Which is why we have an impartial system” (*Batman Begins*). Rachel tries to convince Bruce that in order for civilization to thrive, the governmental system imposed by society has to endorse harmony. The government and the people cannot live by a system that focuses on pleasing and catering to everyone’s desires because sooner or later clashes involving personal self-interests may ensue. To this, Bruce replies “Your system is broken” (*Batman Begins*). By Bruce acknowledging what he believes to be a broken system, he asserts that the justice and order civilization has imposed is useless and severely fragmented. The regulations that society has set to induce harmony have not worked to rid Bruce of his pain, and they did not work when bringing Joe Chill to justice. Rachel responds by taking a detour and driving through an impoverished section of Gotham, wanting to show Bruce that injustice is everywhere, and the rage that this injustice causes him is also felt in a large majority of Gotham’s population: “You care about justice? Look beyond your own pain Bruce,” she tells him. “This city is rotting [...] Things are worse than ever down here [...] What chance does Gotham have when the good people do nothing?” (*Batman Begins*). Rachel wants to prove that Bruce should look beyond his own anger and see the conditions in which Gotham’s less fortunate live, a product of drug trade and governmental corruption. She believes that Bruce, just like his parents, is a good person who, if dissatisfied with the justice system, should do something about it. Bruce reveals to Rachel what he had planned on doing: “I’m not one of your good people, Rachel. All these years I wanted to kill him, now I can’t” (*Batman Begins*). He proceeds to show her his

concealed handgun, the weapon he was planning to use to commit murder and satisfy his desire for vengeance. Bruce's instinct to kill derives from his id; he felt the need to commit murder and act upon his desires. Whereas Rachel points out the clear distinction between revenge and justice, Bruce's inability to see beyond his own self-gratification, his investment in revenge, and his disbelief in corrupt judicial procedures poses a clear threat to society. He did not care about the repercussions of his actions nor who was affected because of them. He is fully conscious of his potentially murderous instinct, regardless of whether it fits in with societal laws or not.

After Bruce parts ways with Rachel, he has a final defining moment that leads him across the world to seek knowledge about the criminal mind and to understand how to properly manage his anger. Bruce defiantly walks in to a secluded area of town where Carmine Falcone (Tom Wilkinson), Gotham's most revered mob boss, is known to reside and where he headquarters his illicit operations. After being patted down by Falcone's security, he sits down across from the mob boss and divulges the purpose of his visit: "I came down here to show you that not everyone in Gotham is afraid of you" (*Batman Begins*). Bruce's rage blinds him from the possible consequences his actions could entail by letting the mob boss know that he does not fear him. Falcone educates Bruce by letting him know about the stupidity of his visit and that all actions have consequences, especially blind rage: "No gun? I'm insulted [...] you haven't thought it through. You haven't thought about your lady friend down in the D.A.'s office. You haven't thought about your old butler. Bang! People from your world have so much to lose [...] don't come down here with your anger trying to prove something to yourself. This is a world you'll never understand. And you always fear what you don't understand" (*Batman Begins*). Bruce, guided by his fury, shows up

defenseless to the most dangerous part of town, with no real plan in mind except what he thought to prove, which is that he does not fear organized crime. Falcone's speech lets Bruce know that he is not thinking through his actions. He illustrates his point by informing Bruce that he is an easy target for the mob, letting him know that the two individuals he cares about the most, Rachel and Alfred, are easy targets he can hurt to get to Bruce. He further states that because Bruce is a monetarily privileged man, having inherited his parent's fortune, he will never understand why poverty-stricken people must resort to crime in order to survive. Similar to Bruce's fear of bats, until Bruce understands what he is facing, he will never be able to overcome it. This leaves Bruce no other choice but to find a solution for this rage, in order to adequately integrate into society.

Bruce Wayne's travels lead him to Bhutan, a country in Southeast Asia. He is first shown to be locked in a prison. As he proceeds to get breakfast, other inmates pick a fight with him and he fends them off like a wild animal, savagely punching and kicking any opposing inmates. The fight is soon broken up by a group of soldiers who place Bruce in solitary confinement. Nolan asserts that at this point in the story, Bruce has been reduced to finding a sense of direction and leadership out of anger and desperation: "Bruce is in terrible shape. He has endured the horrific experience of his parents' deaths, and he carries within him this very powerful sense of rage against the world. We wanted to start our story showing the true depths of despair that Bruce Wayne would be reduced to in his search for how to use that rage" (qtd. in Jesser and Pourroy 38). Despite his travels across the world, his anger is still too much to bear, and he has become an individual who has become lost in his quest to obtain stability in his life. Bruce's travels have still not provided an answer to his problem, as he continuously poses a danger to himself and to those around him in his brash, violent

actions. While in solitary confinement, he is approached by a man who introduces himself as Henri Ducard, a representative who speaks for Ra's Al Ghul, "a man who is greatly feared by the criminal underworld, a man who can offer [Bruce] a path" (*Batman Begins*). Bruce is skeptical at first regarding his prison visitor, but Ducard captures Bruce's attention by not only knowing his name, but by telling him that "someone like you is only here by choice. You have been exploring the criminal fraternity, but whatever your original intentions, you have become truly lost" (*Batman Begins*). Ducard adequately explains why Bruce is in Bhutan, thousands of miles away from home. Bruce's anger and destructive impulses became unbearably strong in Gotham. As a result, Bruce commenced his quest to seek a satisfactory containment and outlet for these compulsions. Ducard tells him that he will be released from prison next morning, and if he is "bored of brawling with petty thieves and want[s] to achieve something," then he must pick a rare blue flower and carry it to the mountains of the eastern slopes to find what he is looking for. In their book, *The Art and Making of The Dark Knight Trilogy* (2012), Jody Duncan Jesser and Janine Pourroy describe Ducard as a father figure and mentor who "arrives at the prison to offer Bruce an outlet for his rage," (39, 41) so that he no longer has to suffer at the expense of this emotion that has haunted him for so long. Bruce becomes convinced that this is the path he must take, and with no other alternative left, he decides to accept Ducard's offer. Sure enough, Bruce makes it to the top of the mountain where the monastery that Ducard mentioned is located. Once there, he is informed that he will learn to master his fears in order to manipulate the fears of others.

At the monastery, Ducard tells Bruce what he hopes to accomplish as he takes Bruce under his guidance: "You have learned to bury your guilt with anger. I will teach you to

confront it and to face the truth” (*Batman Begins*). Ducard asserts that Bruce is an engine of anger, and the guilt and responsibility that Bruce feels for his parents is buried underneath the great rage that he feels. The mission behind Bruce’s training is to make him confront his anger and to face the truth behind it, which is that if he succumbs to it, he will not survive in civilization. Ducard proceeds to teach Bruce hand-to-hand combat and how to properly use elements of mystery to his advantage. He describes what he wants Bruce to become: “You know how to disappear, we can teach you to become truly invisible [...] A ninja understands that invisibility is a matter of patience and agility [...] Theatricality and deception are powerful agents. You must become more than just a man in the mind of your opponent” (*Batman Begins*). Ducard begins planting the seed of what Bruce would later learn to become as Gotham’s self-anointed protector. Ducard tells Bruce that he recognizes the conflict within him, and that if he does not work to manage or deal with this conflict, then it will consume him and potentially destroy or take over his life. Ducard informs Bruce that he joined the League of Shadows because of his desire to avenge his wife, who was taken from him by criminals: “I know the rage that drives you. That impossible anger strangling the grief, until the memory of your loved one is just poison in your veins. And one day, you catch yourself wishing the person you loved had never existed, so you would be spared your pain [...] I was forced to learn that there are those without decency. That must be fought without hesitation, without pity. Your anger gives you great power. But if you let it, it will destroy you. As it almost did me” (*Batman Begins*). Ducard asserts that Bruce’s anger could end his life if he allows it, but it can also serve as a vehicle for power that can ensure Bruce’s survival.

The purpose of Bruce's training is to control this anger and be able to remain calm and collected during combat. Ducard tells Bruce that criminals are not difficult to understand, and that what is most important is for Bruce to recognize and properly handle the destructive drive within him: "What you really fear is inside yourself. You fear your own power. You fear your anger. The drive to do [...] terrible things. Now, you must journey inwards. You are ready" (*Batman Begins*). Ducard instructs Bruce that he must look inside of himself and understand that he must properly temper his id. Bruce is instructed to breathe in a powerful hallucinogen that distorts his vision as Ducard hides himself among other men in order for Bruce to find him using his non-visual senses. Ducard tells him the purpose of this process: "You have to become a terrible thought. [...] You have to become an idea [...] Feel terror cloud your senses. Feel its power to distort, to control. And know that this power can be yours. Embrace your worst fear. Become one with the darkness [...] master your senses" (*Batman Begins*). Ducard instructs Bruce that the power he obtains from his anger is his to control and master. He is put to the test to see if he breaks under the pressure of not using his vision and relies on everything he has learned since his arrival at the monastery. Bruce then tricks Ducard into believing he is caught when he suddenly appears behind him. Ducard is impressed, and Bruce has realized that even if he becomes a terrible thought, the power to control it lies in his hands.

The final test that would grant Bruce membership into the League of Shadows is to see how far he is willing to go to fight injustice, all while in the presence of Ra's Al Ghul (Ken Watanabe). A man, revealed to be a thief who has murdered his neighbor, is brought into the room. Ducard hands Bruce a sword, insinuating that Bruce must decapitate this man, but Bruce refuses. At this moment, Bruce has fulfilled a transformation that is necessary for

his survival. Thomas Wayne and Henri Ducard both help Bruce reach his potential and assert his place within Gotham, both playing key roles in Bruce's Oedipal complex. Thomas Wayne asserts the law and Ra's teaches Bruce how to productively act on and sublimate his anti-social desires. Bruce goes from readily planning to murder Joe Chill back in Gotham to refusing to murder the thief kneeling before him. In their article, "Cracking the Superhero's Moral Code," Peter DeScioli and Robert Kurzban describe Bruce's choice as demonstrating "impartiality [...] in response to a moral violation" as Bruce "refuses to execute the helpless prisoner" (255). After Bruce's training his previous desire to kill is now guided by his voice of reason that gives him the capability to understand that murder is wrong and is not accepted in a civilized society. Ducard tells Bruce that his compassion "is a weakness [his] enemies will not share;" to which Bruce replies: "That's why it's so important. It separates us from them [...] this man should be tried" (*Batman Begins*). Bruce has come to realize that what separates a chaotic society from a civilized one are the choices that its citizens must make.

Nolan explains that "Ducard and the League of Shadows offer him one way to deal with criminality," and although it "involves many positive things" such as "combat skills, theatricality, and deception," the League's insistence on Bruce murdering "is questionable, and Bruce must decide whether to follow it or go his own way" (qtd. in Jesser and Pourroy 40). Bruce's training leads to this final moment in which Bruce decides to act on what he believes to be the right choice. Bruce decides to embrace the positive qualities he has learned from Ducard as he reveals how he plans to sublimate his destructive desires. He tells Ducard that he will return to Gotham and "fight men like this but [he] will not become an executioner" (*Batman Begins*). Bruce outlines his plan to use the skills and the combat techniques he has learned during his training to fight injustice, instead of giving into his id.

Using the sword he is given by Ducard, Bruce uses it to throw a piece of burning coal out on to the monastery, sparking a fire that quickly begins to spread. Bruce knows that there is no way out of the League's presence unless he commits murder, which forces him to disrupt his initiation. He sees his decision not to commit murder as necessary for his survival because that is what separates those with a voice of reason and those who act on instinct. He knocks Ducard unconscious and proceeds to have a swordfight with Ra's as the room is quickly consumed by flames. Moments later Ra's is killed by falling debris, leaving Bruce free to grab Ducard and take him outside to safety before the monastery explodes and collapses.

After Bruce leaves the ruined monastery he is picked up by Alfred on a private plane. Bruce explains to Alfred that his seven-year absence from Gotham has given him the tools to return a different individual who will embrace a perpetual ideal: "People need dramatic examples to shake them out of apathy and I can't do that as Bruce Wayne. As a man I'm flesh and blood. I can be ignored. I can be destroyed. But as a symbol... as a symbol I can be incorruptible, I can be everlasting [...] Something elemental. Something terrifying" (Batman Begins). In order for Bruce to temper his everlasting destructive desires, he needs to embody an everlasting symbol. Using what he has learned from Ducard, he knows that returning to combat as just a man would not suffice in his pursuit of justice. This foreshadows the costume he will wear to become a "functioning entity" that is beyond one man and can surpass generations ("Making Batman Begins"). As this entity, he can operate in ways that assure his place in Gotham.

Upon landing, Bruce proceeds to educate himself on the current state of the city. He spends hours in his living room examining and reading newspaper clippings regarding the city's crime rate as well as looking for the few law enforcement officials who can be trusted.

One thing he discovers is that his childhood friend (and love interest) Rachel Dawes continues to work in the District Attorney's office and is among the few good people in Gotham. As she sees rampant corruption in the justice system she asks her boss why he is not doing anything about it. Her boss replies, "Falcone has half the city bought and paid for. Drop it." (*Batman Begins*). The district attorney openly knows that Falcone runs the city through his power and influence, and cares more about Rachel's well-being than he does about doing the right thing. Another scene shows Flass, a Gotham Police Officer, accepting bribes from a local store owner. Sergeant Jim Gordon, whom Bruce recognizes as one of the few remaining trustworthy officers, watches Flass from his car in disgust. When Flass tells Gordon that he worries that his staunch morality may get the rest of the corrupt police force in trouble, Gordon angrily responds, "I'm no rat! In a town this bad, who's there to rat to anyway?" (*Batman Begins*). The crime rate in Gotham is so bad that it has made Gordon believe that even if he wants to divulge who the corrupt law enforcement officers are, there would be no higher position of unfaltering moral authority that has not already been infiltrated by the mob. The corruption that engulfs Gotham's streets makes Bruce realize that his presence and newly acquired skills are necessary in order to help substitute for the ineffectiveness of Gotham's law enforcement. Nolan asserts that "the core of Bruce Wayne's drive to become Batman [...] is his frustration with the corruption of Gotham City, and his inability to reconcile his desire for revenge through conventional police work or within a legal framework" (qtd. in Jesser and Pourroy 40). Because civilization's laws have failed in giving Bruce, or anyone else, justice, he will have to operate in a way that will allow him to inspire society to take back their city from criminality and corruption. Leading this charge

towards justice, Bruce hopes that Gotham's citizens will follow suit and that Gotham can once more fully enact the laws that it needs to ensure its survival.

While Bruce is in his study, he notices a bat that has been trapped inside his mansion flying in every direction across the ceiling in an attempt to escape. Reminded of his childhood incident, he goes back to the well where he had once fallen and descends back into it. He discovers a cave that leads deeper inwards, and as he walks a large flock of bats emerges from the caverns and begin flying around Bruce. Instead of cowering in their presence as he did when he was a child, he stands straight up, takes a deep breath, and closes his eyes. The bats fly around him as he stands in their presence, knowing that he has conquered the fear he had developed of bats as a child. Inspired, Bruce resorts to his resources to acquire the tools he will need to become a symbol. Using the resources available from his company, Bruce amasses an array of gadgetry and body armor that he then tailors to mirror the shape of a bat. Nolan asserts that throughout this process, Bruce "looks for the most intimidating symbol that he can think of, and he naturally gravitates toward the thing that has frightened him most since he was a child—bats" (qtd. in Jesser and Pourroy 41). By embodying this symbol, Bruce stays true to what he told Alfred on the plane ride back to Gotham. He will not be identified as a man in the eyes of his opponents; instead, he will become an unidentifiable entity that will subdue criminal minds and inspire the good people of Gotham to take back their city. This bat persona that Bruce adopts is what allows him the chance to act out his rage in a subdued manner. In the process, Bruce stays true to his father's rule of law by helping the people of Gotham that have been terrorized by criminals for many years.

Bruce's first appearance dressed as Batman takes place at the Gotham docks where Carmine Falcone's men are loading up drugs onto a convoy in order to disperse them to Gotham's population. Seen as a giant bat, Batman operates swiftly and gracefully, invoking uncanny responses in the men he combats. He either comes across as a shadow or is seen in flashes as he takes out Falcone's men one by one. Christopher Nolan explains why Batman's fight scenes are portrayed as fleeting glimpses on film: "I had always looked to a representation of Batman that would be more from the criminal's point of view. You would see less of him. You would see him as more frightening. There would be more suspense as to what he was doing and where he was. And that meant showing less of him" ("Making Batman Begins"). Bruce embraces the aura of theatricality and deception that he learned from the League of Shadows and engrains within the minds of his victims that an uncanny, fantastic creature is attacking them. Batman is a mysterious entity in the minds of his opponents, often viewed in disbelief. Ultimately, the last man standing is Falcone himself as he hides in the back of his car, frantically putting ammunition into his rifle. As he does so, he asks, "What the hell are you?" Batman breaks through the car's ceiling, grabs Falcone, and menacingly replies, "I'm Batman" (*Batman Begins*). This marks the first time that Bruce acknowledges an identity for his new, masked persona.

In *Batman and Psychology: A Dark and Stormy Knight* (2012), Travis Langley describes this first encounter as Bruce having "launched his assault on all criminals—every thug he slugs [is] a pitiful substitute for his parents' killer" (73). Bruce can now "recognize that justice is bigger than vengeance and that he can inspire much more" (73). Every time Bruce fights a criminal, he imagines the criminal as a substitute for his parents' murderer. As a child he watched his parents being gunned down before his eyes and was unable to do

anything about it. Now, Bruce has learned to do what is necessary for his survival and to help him come to terms with the anger and grief that resulted from witnessing that traumatic event. This allows him to partly please his reckless impulses of taking revenge on the man who took his parents from him at an early age. However, he is no longer at risk of crossing the boundary that would have taken him down the irredeemable path of murder.

In the aftermath, Police Commissioner Loeb is upset that a masked man who does not work for the police force has taken to vigilante justice. One police officer remarks with a chuckle of disbelief that “they say it was just one guy, or a creature” (*Batman Begins*). When later figuring out how to convict Falcone of his crimes, Rachel remarks that “even if these guys testify in court to being thrashed by a giant bat, we’ve got Falcone at the scene” (*Batman Begins*). Falcone and his men are stupefied by the appearance of Batman and have made law enforcement believe that they have gone crazy when describing what seems like a bat in human form. Bruce succeeds in creating a persona that transcends that of an ordinary human in the eyes of the public.

After the night’s events, a tired and worn out Bruce is woken up by Alfred at three in the afternoon. As Alfred notices the bruises covering Bruce’s body, he advises Bruce that his nightly escapades as Batman may sooner or later trace back to Bruce in one way or another. Therefore, he advises Bruce to adopt a lifestyle, even if it’s fake, to help mask his Batman persona. Alfred advises Bruce to adopt the personality and lifestyle of a common playboy billionaire. Quite the opposite from the sad and serious Bruce Wayne, Bruce engages in embodying the attitude of an egotistical womanizer who takes advantage of his status as a billionaire to flaunt his wealth and participate in ostentatious displays of power. This will be

the second persona Bruce adopts to display to the public, and it will serve to mask the brooding vigilante beneath the playboy surface.

The first time the trilogy shows this side of Bruce is when he arrives at one of Gotham's most elite and expensive hotel restaurants in a Lamborghini sports car with two female models as passengers. In a flamboyant display of wealth, Bruce ends up buying the hotel later in the evening so that he and his dates can bathe in the lobby's decorative pool. Upon leaving the restaurant Bruce bumps into Rachel, which marks the first time he has seen her since his return from Bhutan. Ashamed that his childhood friend witnessed the persona he put on for the public, he attempts to explain himself, stammering and making several pauses in his explanation: "Rachel [...] all this. It's not me [...] inside I am [...] I am more" (*Batman Begins*). Bruce hints to Rachel that he is much more than the man he appears to be at face value and that he has something of worth to contribute to Gotham, a subtle reference to his Batman persona. Rachel responds to Bruce's explanation by telling him that the side of himself he chooses to exhibit to Gotham is what asserts his status in society: "Bruce, deep down you may still be that same great kid you used to be. But it's not who you are underneath. It's what you do that defines you" (*Batman Begins*). Whatever Bruce Wayne's true inner intentions may be, his exterior actions define his place in society as well as the type of person he is. Who Bruce is underneath is a troubled individual who is coping with his rage. His dual roles as Batman and playboy define him within the scope of Gotham.

In a later scene, Bruce, dressed as Batman, successfully rescues Rachel from her death. Afterwards, Bruce engages in a conversation with Alfred, who is in disbelief at the destruction and mayhem Bruce had caused in his rescue mission as images of the Tumblr going through detours, jumping rooftops, and destroying public property are shown on

television. Alfred tells him about his worry for Bruce's physical and mental safety as he tells Bruce that he is "getting lost inside this monster" (*Batman Begins*). Alfred believes that Bruce's pursuit of justice is going too far as he witnesses the amount of danger Bruce had just put himself through. Bruce responds by telling Alfred that he is "using this monster to help other people just like [his] father did" (*Batman Begins*). While Bruce does not dismiss the concept of Batman as a monster, he asserts that the "monster" is being used in a positive manner by helping others and putting them out of harm's way. He is sublimating the rage that results from the id by channeling his destructive energies into something for the betterment of his city and for the protection of innocent people. When Bruce was still a child his father had explained to him how he had funded a cheap transportation system to help Gotham's less fortunate, and Bruce has adopted his father's philanthropic vision. While Bruce's methods operate outside the law to help him cope with his rage, he is emulating his father's mindset of helping other people. Goyer points out that among the themes in *Batman Begins*, "living up to the legacies and expectations of fathers" (qtd. in Jesser and Pourroy 41) is one of them, as Thomas Wayne sets the standard for how Bruce should live his life. Through the Oedipal complex, the father represents the law and how one should behave, just as Bruce's father represents how Bruce should use his wealth and resources to establish his place as a watchful guardian overseeing Gotham.

After his discussion with Alfred, Bruce enters his own birthday party in his mansion's dining area at which he encounters the once-thought-to-be-dead Henri Ducard. Ducard reveals himself to be the real Ra's al Ghul and lets Bruce know that he has come to Gotham in order to exterminate it and rebuild a better city in its place. Bruce immediately thinks of the safety of the people in attendance at his party and as Ra's watches Bruce engages once

more in his appearance as a reckless, irresponsible playboy persona. He asks for the attention of his guests while speaking in a slow, condescending dialogue, drinking small spurts of alcohol: “I want to thank you all for coming here tonight and drinking all of my booze. No really, there’s a thing about being a Wayne that you’re never short of a few freeloaders like yourselves to fill up your mansion with, so here’s to you people [...] To all of you phonies, all you two-faced friends, you sycophantic suck-ups who smile through your teeth at me, please leave me in peace. Please go” (*Batman Begins*). While Bruce never initially thought to kick everyone out of his house, his dialogue can ironically be seen as carrying volumes of truth. He speaks to people that he thinks are attending his party and acting nicely towards him only to later ask for monetary favors. Bruce uses his acting skills to appear as a condescending billionaire who in reality is trying to put his guests out of harm’s way. Bruce’s need to protect others while donning the persona of the billionaire playboy and not Batman demonstrates that both “the Dark Knight’s cowl and Bruce Wayne’s public façade” (Langley 171) act as the two masks that Bruce Wayne adopts to pursue his own vigilante brand of justice.

After the guests leave, Ra’s informs Bruce that he continues to pursue his plan for Gotham that Bruce had disagreed with earlier in the film. Over the years the league has specialized in destroying cities they believed to be beyond hope of saving. Ra’s plans on dispersing a toxic hallucinogen into Gotham’s water system, and then proceed to watch “Gotham tear itself apart through fear” (*Batman Begins*).¹ In the eyes of Ra’s, Gotham is a city beyond hope of saving, and by building a new city in the ashes of Gotham, the League of Shadows can exterminate all forms of corruption. Bruce does not want innocent people to suffer and become casualties in Ra’s’s plan. He pleads, “Gotham isn’t beyond saving. Give

me more time. There are good people here” (*Batman Begins*). Bruce has developed a belief in civilization, and he does not agree with radical purging that will cost millions of lives.

Despite their contrasting ideologies, Ra’s tells Bruce that he is impressed with what Bruce has accomplished in his pursuit of justice. Ra’s tells Bruce that because of his mentorship and guidance, Bruce has productively sublimated his rage. While Bruce does not argue with the League’s desire to provide harmony and restore balance to society, he does not agree with their methods. Bruce responds to Ra’s by saying, “I’ll be standing where I belong. Between you and the people of Gotham” (*Batman Begins*). While Bruce is grateful to Ra’s for helping him channel his rage in a productive manner, he demonstrates that he now holds his father’s ideals as his example for what is right and wrong. Christian Bale asserts that Bruce carries with him “the great philanthropy of his father [...] talking in his ear all the time, reigning him in and stopping him from going too far and becoming a force of great destruction which he’s capable of” (“*Batman Begins* ... Interview w/Charlie Rose (2005)”). Bruce’s father believed in the good people of Gotham and his code of helping others is what Bruce chooses to follow. Despite Ra’s providing the path towards sublimation, Bruce sticks to the ideals of his true father. This demonstrates the successful completion of Bruce’s Oedipus complex as he abides by his father’s rule of law by helping the people of Gotham at all costs. After a brief scuffle, Bruce is knocked unconscious by falling debris and Ra’s leaves him to die in the burning mansion. Alfred arrives just in time to rescue Bruce and Bruce then proceeds to don the Batman costume to save the city. He reaches Ra’s who is on board a speeding train heading to the city’s water supply, which he plans to use as a conduit through which he can spread his toxin. Bruce successfully defeats Ra’s in combat and with the help of Sergeant Gordon veers the train off course, thereby saving the city.

After Bruce successfully thwarts the plans of Ra's Al Ghul, he returns to the ashy remains of his home and begins the long process of cleaning up what is left of his mansion. As he does so he is approached by Rachel, who is aware of Bruce Wayne's costumed alter-ego. Bruce thanks her for trying to talk sense into him the day he tried to commit murder. "I was a coward with a gun," he says, and he now realizes that "justice is about more than revenge, so thank you" (*Batman Begins*). Bruce acknowledges that his inability to control his rage once made him a coward because he was scared to confront and understand the deep-seated hatred that inhabited him ever since the death of his parents. Bruce has since been able to understand this rage and successfully sublimate it, thereby saving not only the city, but himself. Rachel confesses her romantic feelings for Bruce and talks about the mask that is Bruce Wayne: "But then I found out about your mask [...] This is your mask, your real face is the one that criminals now fear [...] The man who vanished. He never came back at all" (*Batman Begins*). Rachel believes that when Bruce Wayne returned from his seven-year departure from Gotham, the Bruce that had returned was no longer the Bruce she once knew. The Batman costume is what is needed to prevent Bruce from falling back to his old, untempered self. Rachel recognizes that Gotham needs Batman in order to slowly regain a more stable form of social order. As Rachel leaves, Bruce tells Rachel that he will rebuild his father's house, "just the way it was, brick for brick" as it once stood before (*Batman Begins*). This scene is a stark contrast to when Bruce had returned home from college and expressed his wish to tear down the house that once belonged to his father. As Bruce underwent the successful completion of the Oedipal complex, he has learned to adapt his father's rule of law as his own and has gained a newfound respect for the justice system and the law.

The movie's final act culminates in a conversation between Batman and James Gordon, who since the foiled plans of Ra's Al Ghul were stopped, is upgraded from Sergeant to Lieutenant. As Gordon flashes the Bat signal and Batman arrives, Gordon lets him know about an important theme that will play a significant role in the next movie, the theme of escalation: "You really started something. Bent cops running scared. Hope on the streets [...] What about escalation? [...] We start carrying semi-automatics, they buy automatics. We start wearing Kevlar, they buy armor piercing rounds [...] and you're wearing a mask, jumping off rooftops" (*Batman Begins*). Gordon acknowledges that Batman's establishment in Gotham and his heroic actions saved the city and inspired the good people of Gotham to fight back against criminality and corruption. Gordon points out that despite Batman's heroic actions, he foresees that Gotham's criminals will respond to this new threat that menaces their existence. Whatever weapons or strategies or types of order that the good people will use to temper criminality will only force criminals to look for new ways to operate. Gordon "worries that Batman's example might inspire criminals to try to top him, criminals like a theatrical newcomer who killed guards and left a Joker playing card behind" (Langley 65). Setting up the events for the sequel, Gordon predicts anything Batman or law enforcement does will either be matched or outdone by the criminal element. As Batman leaves, Commissioner Gordon tells him, "I never said thank you;" to which Batman responds, "you'll never have to" (*Batman Begins*). Gordon feels indebted to this masked vigilante for making his job as a law enforcement officer much easier. But Bruce does not seek gratitude or a reward from anyone for doing what he does. His actions spark a wave of change that successfully assert his place in Gotham as billionaire playboy Bruce Wayne and more importantly, as Batman.

CHAPTER IV

THE BATTLE FOR GOTHAM'S SOUL: THE REPRESSED ID STRIKES

Freud asserts that it is important that the superego preside over the id in order for civilization to operate as smoothly and effectively as possible. Christopher Nolan raises the stakes in the trilogy's second installment, *The Dark Knight*, with the introduction of the Joker (Heath Ledger). Just as Batman is the living, breathing manifestation of the superego, the Joker is the living, breathing embodiment of the id. He embodies the id by acting out on and promoting a chaotic energy accompanied by lawlessness. The film introduces him as an insane yet incredibly cunning personality, representing an anti-social version of humanity that constantly seeks to fulfill his destructive impulses. In *Batman and Psychology: A Dark and Stormy Knight* (2012), Travis Langley asserts, "the Joker is the Joker, no alter-ego," and that despite the purple suit and heavy clown make-up, "under the surface there's only more Joker" (76). The Joker lacks the superego, or voice of reason, and chooses to embrace his id instead of trying to temper or sublimate it.² The Joker asserts that regulation and laws are meaningless, an argument that Batman will refute as he continues to uphold the rule of law he once learned from his father by insisting that a moral rule of law will always be present. Both Batman and the Joker engage in a high-stakes battle where the victor would decide whether or not Gotham is enveloped by chaos or saved by regulation. Finally, much lies in the hands of Gotham's district attorney, Harvey Dent (Aaron Eckhart), the face of morality and righteousness in Gotham, who leads by example by always performing his duties as a prosecuting attorney in impartial and equitable ways. He is the object of admiration by many people in Gotham because he is an elected official who always demonstrates the best of society and fights to exterminate crime and corruption. Always regulated by his voice of

reason, his superego, Dent is confronted with the possibility of losing control and giving in to his inner id. This culminates in a definitive, final fight between the Joker's chaotic nature and Batman's moral rule of law. Ultimately, the film poses that faith in humanity must remain intact to insure a civilization's longevity.

A night-time sequence of events demonstrates that Gotham City is on the mend since the events of *Batman Begins*. Commissioner Gordon flashes the Bat signal in the sky, visible throughout the entire city. A police officer on the streets looks up at the signal and gives a warm, approving smile. As a young man buys drugs from another individual in his car, he looks up at the signal and decides against it, quickly walking away from the scene, simply saying, "Nah man, not tonight" (*The Dark Knight*). From policemen to street drug suppliers, Batman's presence is felt from opposite ends of the law, instilling a sense of security among law enforcement and fear among wrongdoers. Newly elected mayor, Anthony Garcia (Nestor Carbonell), participates in a television interview, voicing his apprehension on whether or not Batman can be trusted. Batman's vigilantism has made law enforcement's job easier by helping deter and prevent crime. Batman's presence is also felt at the top of Gotham's criminal hierarchy as a drug transaction begins within the confines of a parking garage. The Scarecrow (Cillian Murphy), having successfully escaped from Arkham Asylum in *Batman Begins*, continues selling drugs on the black market to anyone willing to buy. The Chechen (Ritchie Coster), who works as a conduit for the Scarecrow by selling his hallucinogens, expresses his displeasure at the drug's effects. He brings with him a consumer of the drug who yells random words and has apparently lost his mind. The Scarecrow is aware of what Batman has done to Gotham as he tells the Chechen that his options for conducting business with alternative drug suppliers are scarce. The Batman has

either helped lock up the majority of other drug dealers or has scared them off from conducting business. The repression that Gotham's common criminals and mob bosses have undergone is something new to them. As a result, they are pushed to the brink of desperation and seek any alternative that could work to stifle or get rid of their oppressor, Batman.

The introduction of Gotham's district attorney, Harvey Dent, is vital to the film's narrative. An astute prosecutor, he displays incredible bravery when confronting the mob several times in court, and by doing so, he has successfully incarcerated many of Gotham's criminals by using the law.³ Commissioner Gordon, who has grown fond of Harvey, tells him that "everyone knows [he is] Gotham's White Knight" (*The Dark Knight*). In medieval times, knights were known to don shining armor and stand for honor and justice when defending their land. Harvey's position as an elected official grants him this moniker because he wants the same goal as Batman: the elimination of crime and corruption and the concrete establishment of peace and prosperity in Gotham. He is the "face of honor and hope in corrupt Gotham City" (Langley 77), and he always does the right thing and stays true to his morals and virtues. The difference is that while Batman operates outside the law as a vigilante, Harvey operates within the boundaries of a civilized society using the law as his weapon. More importantly, Harvey does not hide behind a mask. As a result, he is the poster child of always doing the right thing and the hero with the face that Gotham can definitively trust.

While Bruce and his date dine at a fancy restaurant with Harvey and Rachel, the prospect of Batman's intentions is brought up as well as whether or not his actions are justified. Once again, Bruce Wayne shows up in his other alter ego, hiding under the

confidence and bravado of a playboy billionaire with a sensuous model at his arm, very similar to the first appearance of this disguise in *Batman Begins*.

This attitude is on display as he dines with Harvey, Rachel, and his date. While Bruce's date questions the prospect of a masked vigilante operating outside the law, Harvey sympathizes with the Batman's actions: "Gotham is proud of an ordinary citizen standing up for what's right [...] when their enemies were at the gates, the Romans would suspend democracy and appoint one man to protect the city. It wasn't considered an honor; it was considered a public service" (*The Dark Knight*). Bruce ironically questions who it was that appointed the Batman to a position of influence in Gotham. Harvey responds, "we did, when we let scum take control of our city" (*The Dark Knight*). While Batman's status as a vigilante may not be the most idealistic solution, Harvey acknowledges that it was ordinary citizens who did nothing to stop Gotham's ascension into corruption that ironically led to the birth of Batman. While a vigilante does not fit within the scope of a civilized democracy, Harvey proudly supports the Batman's actions and stands behind the costumed vigilante. Batman, along with Harvey and Commissioner Gordon, have successfully kept Gotham's criminal elements at bay, setting the stage for the Joker's inevitable interference.

The movie transitions to a meeting held during the day in an abandoned restaurant kitchen of Gotham's most notorious mob bosses. The Joker soon interrupts the meeting and tells them that killing Batman is the obvious and most straightforward solution to their problem: "Let's wind the clocks back a year. These cops and lawyers wouldn't dare cross any of you. What happened? [...] I know why you choose to have your little group therapy sessions in broad daylight. I know why you're afraid to go out at night. The Batman. See, Batman has shown Gotham your true colors, unfortunately" (*The Dark Knight*). The Joker

ridicules the mob for their decline within Gotham. These criminals who once chose their hours of operation at the time of their liking are now forced to operate at a time when they are less likely to be apprehended by Batman or the police. The Joker tells them that since the Batman's emergence in the past year their illegal activities have become severely restricted, and he is willing to help them recuperate their former methods of operation. By getting rid of the Batman, they can continue to act on their anti-social impulses and do whatever makes them happy with little to no interference from prosecutors or the police. The Joker thus initiates what will become a fight for the soul of Gotham, caught between the id and the superego. Because the mob realizes that the Joker is telling them the truth, they turn to his services and allow him to operate on their behalf as they have a common goal: to get rid of the Batman, who constantly monitors and polices their impulses and activities.

The Joker's origin remains a mystery throughout the film, as he offers different versions of the story behind the long scars on the edges of his mouth. The scars on his face form a grotesque, widened grin, with the smeared blood on his cuts visibly heightening the appearance of his smile. In one scene, the Joker fakes his own death to get close to mob boss, Gambol, and then proceeds to tell him a story of how he came to be: "My father was a drinker. And a fiend. And one night he goes off crazier than usual. Mommy gets the kitchen knife to defend herself. He doesn't like that. Not one bit. So, me watching, he takes the knife to her, laughing while he does it. He turns to me, and he says: Why so serious? He comes at me with the knife: Why so serious? Sticks the blade in my mouth. Let's put a smile on that face" (*The Dark Knight*). As soon as the dialogue comes to a close, the Joker slashes Gambol's mouth with a knife, recreating the story about his father. This is the first insight the Joker gives in regards to his childhood, a bloody tale about how he and his mother

were psychologically and physically mistreated by his father. His disdain for his father is also demonstrated in a later scene when the Joker crashes Harvey Dent's fundraiser and tells a guest, "You know, you remind me of my father. I hated my father" (*The Dark Knight*). The Joker's embodiment of the id is further strengthened as it is shown that he never got past the hate he had developed towards his father. Unlike Bruce Wayne in *Batman Begins*, who learns to appreciate his father's legacy and embody his father's beliefs by holding them as a moral guide, the Joker never accomplishes the same in the relationship with his father. Given the nature of his father – who himself never completes the Oedipal complex—the Joker's character fits the Freudian narrative. Therefore, the Joker's superego never came to fruition as his Oedipal complex is still unresolved.

The Joker begins his plan to induce chaos in Gotham by announcing in a hijacked television feed that he will kill people every day until Batman takes off his mask and reveals his true identity. Staying true to his word, the Joker gets away with murdering several elected officials and slowly spreading hysteria and anxiety among Gotham's citizens. However, despite the Joker's previous insistence to the criminal mob that they must kill Batman, the Joker reveals that he is much more interested in knowing the man behind the mask. Batman soon experiences the Joker's chaotic agenda in his first confrontation with him. At a fundraiser that Bruce Wayne throws for Harvey Dent's re-election campaign, the party is interrupted by the Joker and his henchmen as they look for Harvey Dent. Bruce momentarily leaves the setting only to return as Batman in order to fight off the Joker. At one point during the skirmish, the Joker grabs Rachel Dawes and threatens Batman by holding her at gunpoint. Batman commands him to drop his gun, to which the Joker jeeringly replies, "Oh sure, you just take off your little mask and show us all who you really

are” (*The Dark Knight*). He continues to threaten Batman’s existence by insisting that Batman take off his mask because he knows that what lies underneath is not the vigilante that has helped inspire hope in Gotham. The Joker “wants a Batman who has no other self, a Dark Knight whose only deeper layer is further darkness” (Langley 66). The Joker senses that what lies beneath the Batman mask is a representation of a tempered id that still yearns to break free. By Batman unmasking himself, not only would it stop him from being able to continue protecting Gotham, but it could possibly reveal the side that Bruce had tried to end many years ago in Bhutan.

After the confrontation, Bruce sits at his home computer, with video of the Joker on replay, attempting to rationalize or decipher the Joker’s motives. He believes that the key to stopping criminals is to figure out what they are after. Once the Joker begins operating on behalf of the mob in order to get rid of Batman, he realizes that the mob has gone to extreme measures in hiring an anarchist; however, Alfred points out that it was Bruce’s presence as Batman that has led them to such extreme measures: “You crossed the line first, sir. You squeezed them, you hammered them to the point of desperation. And in their desperation they turned to a man they didn’t fully understand” (*The Dark Knight*). Gotham’s criminals were used to operating as they pleased since they knew that law enforcement feared their power and resources. Out of desperation, the mob readily accepts the Joker’s anarchist ways without fully understanding who he is or what he stands for. Alfred continues to tell Bruce an anecdote about his days in Burma, where he and his friends worked for the local government. They went searching for a bandit who was stealing precious jewels, only to find out that the bandit was carelessly throwing the jewels away, not caring about their value or worth. Alfred ends his monologue by telling Bruce that he is dealing with a criminal unlike

any other: “Some men aren’t looking for anything logical, like money. They can’t be bought, bullied, reasoned, or negotiated with. Some men just want to watch the world burn” (*The Dark Knight*). The difference between the Joker and the common criminal is that the Joker is not interested in anything of material value because his actions go beyond self-interest. Christopher Robichauld uses Alfred’s dialogue as an example that demonstrates that the Joker “lacks a healthy sense of self-preservation” (73). Whereas the superego works to preserve someone’s existence by forcing him to exist within the context of a healthy civilization, the Joker does not care whether he lives or dies. The Joker’s desire to watch the world burn inevitably means that he will burn along with it. Nolan, who also serves as the co-screenwriter of the film, details the unique challenge the Joker presents in his conflict with Batman: “To me it was creating a sort of psychologically credible anarchist, a force of anarchy, a force of chaos. A purposeless criminal. A psychopath. To me that is the most frightening form of evil, the enemy who has no rules, the enemy who is not out for anything, who can’t be understood. Can only be fought” (“Christopher Nolan Interview, *The Dark Knight*, Batman”). The Joker’s psychological credibility lies in his unapologetic behavior. He willingly embodies his id and is set on not only displaying it but acting out on it. For an anarchist like the Joker, the promise of insanity and unbridled destruction are enough to fulfill his ego. No amount of money can buy the Joker, and no outside ideologies can dissuade him from his chaotic ways. As Alfred describes him, the Joker wants to watch the world burn by exposing everyone’s id without attention to laws or rationality.

After another assassination attempt by the Joker during a funeral procession for Commissioner Loeb, Harvey finds out that Rachel is next on the Joker’s murderous rampage. As a result, he kidnaps Thomas Schiff, one of the Joker’s accomplices, and takes him to an

abandoned alley. This is the first time the audience sees a different aspect of Harvey Dent. Despite Harvey's insistence on always taking the high road, the Joker almost succeeds in pushing Harvey to the brink of desperation. The handsome, boyish charm that personifies Harvey is no longer there, leaving an almost unrecognizable figure in his place. A vehement and desperate Harvey stands before Schiff, prodding him to reveal how the Joker will carry out Rachel's murder so that he can prevent it. He threatens Schiff's life with a gun and fires off one round before putting the gun's barrel at Schiff's temple. Despite Schiff's insistence on not knowing the plan's details, Harvey begins flipping a coin, leaving Schiff's life in the hands of chance. Nolan describes the duality behind Harvey's personality, revealing that despite Harvey's initial appearance in the film, he also possesses a side that is the polar opposite of control and level-headedness: "We were looking for somebody who could embody that all-American charm, a heroic presence [...] but would also have this edge, would also have this undercurrent of anger and darkness to him that Harvey Dent needs so that where he goes in the story isn't to cheat. You have to really believe that this guy has lengths he'd go to that are questionable" ("Christopher Nolan Interview, *The Dark Knight, Batman*"). Up to this point, Harvey embodies charm and heroism; however, he also demonstrates this undercurrent of anger and ferocity at the thought of his love interest being the target of a murder plot. Fortunately, Batman confronts Harvey before he goes any further and explains to him the repercussions of his actions and what it could mean for Gotham's future: "You're the symbol of hope I can never be. Your stand against organized crime is the first legitimate ray of light in Gotham in decades. If anyone saw this, everything would be undone. All the criminals you pulled off the streets would be released" (*The Dark Knight*). Ironically, the masked man who operates outside the law, Batman, tells the elected official,

Harvey, how to behave. The living embodiment of the superego tempers Harvey's brash actions of acting on a dangerous instinct. Batman's insistence on Dent preserving the sanity of his public image further reinforces the Joker's anarchist plot to unmask the Batman by revealing his residual id.

Meanwhile, Batman tries to find the Joker and begins by capturing and confronting crime boss Salvatore Maroni. Maroni insists that he does not know the Joker's location and warns Batman, like Alfred did earlier in the film, that who he is dealing with is unlike the common criminal: "Stay wise to your act. You've got rules. The Joker? He's got no rules. You want this guy, you've got one way. But you already know what that is. Just take off that mask. Let him come find you" (*The Dark Knight*). The mob wants to know Batman's true identity so that they can personally attack his loved ones as leverage, whereas the Joker wants Batman's identity revealed in order to see the destructive person that lies underneath. The Joker pushes Batman's limits and tempts him into releasing his id each time he murders someone or threatens someone else's life.

The next day, Bruce decides to give in to the Joker's demands and unmask himself at a press conference that Harvey would hold later that day. He tells Alfred that he cannot allow for more people to be murdered, leaving him without a choice. Alfred responds by telling Bruce to "endure, Master Wayne. Take it. They'll hate you for it, but that's the point of Batman [...] He can make the choice that no one else can make. The right choice" (*The Dark Knight*). The Batman costume aids Bruce in tempering his instincts and not giving in to his primal impulses, always guiding the man under the mask to think about the repercussions of his potentially uncivilized actions. Bruce must endure being Batman, just as the individual must undergo the suppression of the superego, no matter the amount of guilt or

burden he may feel because of it. At the press conference, Harvey questions why Gotham's citizens want Batman arrested: "The Batman has offered to turn himself in. But first let's consider the situation. Should we give in to this terrorist's demands?" (*The Dark Knight*). Displaying a level-headed demeanor, Dent argues that Gotham should not give in to the Joker's wants. Despite Batman operating outside the law, Batman has provided a widely accepted civil service for the city. Harvey tells the citizens of Gotham that they should endure the present battle between Batman and the Joker no matter the amount of guilt or pressure that Gotham's citizens may face to help turn in Batman to the authorities or to unmask him. Harvey closes his remarks by lying and telling everyone that he is the Batman. As Rachel watches the televised press conference and voices her anger to Alfred, Alfred lets her know why Harvey is taking the blame for Batman: "Perhaps both Bruce and Mr. Dent believe that Batman stands for something more important than the whims of a terrorist, Ms. Dawes. Even if everyone hates him for it. That's the sacrifice he's making" (*The Dark Knight*). Alfred continues to reaffirm and defend the necessary existence of Batman. Despite the guilt that Bruce feels, or the anger and frustration that the citizens of Gotham feel, it is important that Batman never give in to the Joker's threats. Batman and the good people of Gotham, such as Dent and Gordon, are what stands between the Joker's plans for terror and a civilized, disciplined society. Harvey knows that when he is transferred to prison, the Joker will be lured out and the real Batman will hopefully interfere and apprehend the Joker.⁴

Sure enough, everything goes as Harvey predicts. The Joker is enticed to chase after Harvey as he is being transferred to county jail, only to have Batman appear and thwart his plans. At one point, the Joker walks down the street, erratically firing off a machine gun as

Batman drives towards him. As Batman inches closer to running over the Joker, the Joker taunts Batman to go through with it. Batman draws dangerously near the Joker before swerving the Batpod off to the side. The Joker does not care about his life or his safety; rather, he cares about making Batman lose control and cross the line he had drawn in *Batman Begins*, which was to never kill. Thankfully, the Batman costume symbolizes control for Bruce and so ensures that he always rationalizes his actions before committing them.

After a lengthy chase scene, the Joker is finally apprehended and put behind bars. With Harvey Dent missing and the police unable to find him, they turn to Batman to interrogate the Joker and hopefully draw the information out of him.⁵ The Joker continually avoids answering where Harvey has been taken, and instead resorts to verbally toying with Batman. The Joker reveals that he knows the importance of Batman's existence in Gotham: "Those mobsters want you gone so they can go back to the way things were. But I know the truth. There's no going back. You've changed things forever" (*The Dark Knight*). Despite the suppressed criminal element of Gotham wanting Batman gone, the Joker believes that the Batman's arrival in the city has permanently changed the city's morale and outlook on life. Batman gives the citizens of Gotham reassurance that they are receiving protection from Gotham's outlaws, resulting in a successful coalition against crime. However, to Batman's surprise, the Joker is not looking to kill Batman but rather enjoys the back and forth sparring sessions they have endured: "I don't want to kill you. What would I do without you? Go back to ripping off mob dealers? No, no, you—you complete me" (*The Dark Knight*). What stands between the Joker and the destruction of Gotham is Batman. However, it is something about this conflict that fulfills the Joker and brings him great joy. For him, he and Batman must forever engage in a battle for control of the city. The Joker admits that Batman's

presence in his life has become entertaining because he derives great joy from engaging in battle with him. He proceeds to let Batman know that the society he so honorably defends and fights for is full of hypocrisy. The Joker knows that the revelation of this hypocrisy is what sustains civilization from collapsing: “They need you right now. But when they don’t, they’ll cast you out [...] See, their morals, their code, is a bad joke. Dropped at the first sign of trouble. They’re only as good as the world allows them to be. I’ll show you. When the chips are down, these, uh, these civilized people, they’ll eat each other. See I’m not a monster. I’m just ahead of the curve” (*The Dark Knight*). The Joker believes himself to be smarter because he can see beneath the facades humanity has established.

In his article, “American Heroes,” J.M. Tyree explains that the Joker “is theorizing on the death of humanity” (32) by insinuating that the world’s morality can easily undergo a paradigm shift. Man-made rules exist to make people feel like they are part of a productive and functioning establishment. Citizens resort to presenting the most convenient model of self-control, always regulating their innate desires in order to preserve order and justice. If everyone resorts to the Joker’s destructive behavior and stops hiding behind their figurative masks, the end of civilization soon follows. The Joker believes that any values, rules, and codes of ethics are only adhered to because they are needed for civilization to function. Societal constructs that include laws, rules, and proper behavior/etiquette are all poor attempts at keeping instinctual desires at bay. The Joker believes that drastic events can occur that will force society to give up the rules by which they are governed. This is exemplified when the citizens of Gotham are calling for Batman’s arrest to stop the Joker’s killings despite Batman aiding in their fight against criminality for so long.⁶ Therefore, when put to the test, the Joker believes society crumbles because humans are all selfish creatures

acting on behalf of self-interest. Dr. Benjamin R. Karney, UCLA psychology professor, describes the philosophical concept that lies at the heart of the Batman-Joker conflict: “The Joker says the presence of random injustice means that there is no justice. The fact that innocence can be destroyed, means there is no innocence. So your life is a joke. Now when someone says your life is a joke, that’s a challenge. It’s not just a physical challenge, it’s a moral challenge, it’s an intellectual challenge, and Batman can’t let that go. Because the Joker isn’t just threatening him physically, he’s threatening the presence of Batman’s existence” (“Batman Unmasked: The Psychology of the Dark Knight”). After struggling for so long to find and achieve his purpose, what the Joker points out is that Batman’s incarnation of a living, breathing superego is purposeless because beneath the Batman mask and underneath the regulations that society has in place, lies a figure and an energy as destructive and chaotic as the Joker. The Joker asserts his point as he proceeds to tell Batman that he has kidnapped both Harvey and Rachel, Bruce’s love interest. At this point Batman loses his temper and in desperation slams the Joker against the interrogation table, begins hitting his head against the glass wall, and continually punches him as he yells “Where are they?!” (*The Dark Knight*). During Batman’s fit of rage, the Joker seems to be enjoying Batman’s desperation, laughing hysterically and telling him that “Killing is making a choice [...] you have nothing, nothing to threaten me with, nothing to do with all your strength” (*The Dark Knight*). Batman has nothing to threaten the Joker with because of his rule to never kill, and if he does kill the Joker, the Joker wins because he made Batman lose control by giving in to the id.

Eventually, the Joker tells Batman the coordinates of both Rachel and Harvey, forcing Batman and Commissioner Gordon to race to their locations before the bombs planted

detonate. This leads to an unsuccessful rescue attempt, as Commissioner Gordon is unable to save Rachel in time, resulting in her death. Batman is able to save Harvey just in time; however, as they escape they are both knocked down by the bomb's explosion, with Harvey suffering a severe facial mutilation. Back at the police station the Joker carries out an ingenious escape. In the wake of Rachel's death, Alfred opens a letter that Rachel had left behind for Bruce. He reads its contents and comes across a section that explains Rachel's observation of the relationship between Bruce Wayne and Batman: "When I told you that the day Gotham no longer needed Batman, we could be together, I meant it. But now I'm sure the day won't come when you no longer need Batman" (*The Dark Knight*). Rachel states her faith in that one day the city could be safe enough to not need Batman. Despite this, she believes that Bruce's sanity and survival is undeniably dependent on the Batman persona and what it represents for him. Bruce embodying this symbol is what helps him cope with his anger, sublimate his desire for revenge, and merit his place inside Gotham's jurisdiction.

In the hospital Commissioner Gordon visits the badly maimed Harvey Dent who is recuperating from his severe facial damage. Harvey asks Gordon to remind him of the nickname the police had given him when he worked in Gotham's Internal Affairs Department, to which the Commissioner responds, "Two-Face, Harvey Two-Face" (*The Dark Knight*). The police had given Harvey this nickname, insinuating that he had an alternate side of himself that wasn't an honorable, elected official. Travis Langley asserts that "though we never hear why, it may mean they'd glimpsed some hypocrisy, a malevolent potential" (67) that hid underneath the image of the do-good district attorney. Harvey turns, revealing the side of his face that is badly scarred as he presents Gordon with the following question: "Why should I hide who I am?" (*The Dark Knight*). Harvey declares that there is

no point in hiding beneath the façade of a man who upholds society's laws and always does the right thing. At the heart of his anger lies the death of the woman he planned on marrying. The events that have unfolded have ironically fit his previous nickname. The mask of the honorable district attorney, his face since birth, has now deteriorated. The worst side of himself, the hazardous id that was always held at bay, will permanently be on symbolic display to society through his mutilated face.

The Joker's escape from prison only guarantees further chaos. His first mission is to blow up Gotham General Hospital unless a citizen takes it upon his or herself to murder Coleman Reese, a man threatening to reveal the identity of the Batman on national television.⁷ As a result, Gotham's law enforcement is forced to evacuate all hospitals, with disorder erupting in the streets as citizens with relatives in the Gotham Hospital frantically looking for Reese in an attempt to kill him. During the disorder, the Joker sneaks into Harvey's hospital room. As Harvey begins to blame the Joker for putting him in the state that he is in, as well as for Rachel's death, the Joker tells him about his purposeless methods: "Do I really look like a guy with a plan? You know what I am? I'm a dog chasing cars. I wouldn't know what to do with one if I caught it, you know I just do things [...] The mob's got plans. The cops have plans. Gordon's got plans. They're schemers. Schemers trying to control their little worlds. I'm not a schemer. I try to show the schemers how pathetic their attempt to control things really are [...] It's the schemers that put you where you are. You were a schemer. You had plans. And look where that got you" (*The Dark Knight*). Dogs chase cars because they enjoy the thrill, just as the Joker commits crime and societal disruption because it fulfills him and causes him pleasure. By down-playing his involvement in the maiming of Harvey and death of Rachel, the Joker tries to shift the culpability to other

people such as Commissioner Gordon and Batman. He calls everyone who abides by civilization's rules as "schemers" who live their lives according to careful organization and provisions. The Joker is "out to inspire anarchy and coax everybody into revealing their darkest sides" (Langley 65-6), and the Joker knows that making Harvey turn will destroy Gotham's morale. The Joker ends his speech by handing Harvey a gun and telling him to "introduce a little anarchy. Upset the established order and everything becomes chaos. I'm an agent of chaos" (*The Dark Knight*). The Joker prods Harvey to choose anarchy over the legal system he has so arduously striven to defend throughout his life. Harvey's previous life did nothing but land him in his current condition, leaving him no other choice but to become an agent of chaos like the Joker. The Joker instills in Harvey that it is only fair that Harvey go after everyone involved in Rachel's death, no matter the consequences. The Joker's strategy successfully works, as Dent lets go of everything that made him Gotham's "White Knight" and proceeds to go on a murderous rampage using the element of chance through a coin flip as his method of operation.

Harvey's first victim is Michael Wertz, the first corrupt cop involved in Rachel's death. When Wertz first lays eyes on Harvey, he exclaims, "Dent, Jesus, I thought you was dead," to which Harvey responds, "half" (*The Dark Knight*). The part of him that is gone is the part that thought about the morality of his actions, his superego, and which guided Harvey into living his life as virtuously as possible. What is left is his id, the part of him that does not care about committing murder. After killing Wertz, Harvey's second victim is the mob boss, Salvatore Maroni, who Dent confronts inside his limousine as the car departs from its destination. Maroni tries to shift the blame to the Joker; however, Dent responds by furthering the analogy that the Joker provided by describing the Joker as "a mad dog," and

that he wants “whoever let him off the leash” (*The Dark Knight*). The Joker’s rampant quest for producing chaos, Dent believes, is possible due to the complicity of those involved and who made the Joker’s actions possible from a logistical level. That included the mob’s acceptance of the Joker to help get rid of Batman, and the payoffs accepted by several law enforcement figures in Commissioner Gordon’s unit. Whereas Maroni wins the coin toss, Maroni’s driver loses it. Dent shoots the limousine driver, sending the car crashing down the road.

During Dent’s murder spree, the Joker presents the ultimate challenge to Gotham City. The Joker informs Gotham through a televised event that the city’s citizens should evacuate Gotham because it is no longer safe. Civilians are all loaded onto one ferry while the convicts of the Gotham prison are loaded onto another ferry. Once everyone is on board their respective boats, the Joker reveals that a bomb is on board each boat and that he has exclusive access to the detonator. He announces how his social experiment will work: “Through the magic of diesel fuel and ammonium nitrate I’m ready right now to blow you all sky high [...] Anyone attempts to get off their boat, you all die. Each of you has a remote to blow up the other boat. At midnight, I blow you all up. If, however, one of you presses the button, I’ll let that boat live. So who’s it gonna be? Harvey Dent’s most wanted scumbag collection, or the sweet and innocent civilians? You choose. Oh, and you might want to decide quickly because the people on the other boat may not be quite so noble” (*The Dark Knight*). The Joker leaves the fate of Gotham City’s residents in their own hands. The best and worst that the city has to offer must decide who survives, that is unless both groups want to die. Meanwhile, Batman is able to zero-in on the Joker’s location by utilizing a sonar imaging system. After a quick physical confrontation, the Joker gains the upper hand and

pins Batman under a construction beam. Keeping the Batman under submission, the Joker eagerly waits for one of the ferries to explode. To the Joker's surprise, both the boat with Gotham's civilians and the one with its convicts decide against killing one another, preferring that the Joker kill them both before they kill each other. The Joker, demonstrating his first sign of confusion in the film, questioningly glances between the clock that had struck midnight and the ferries which remained intact. Batman tells the Joker that his plan is pointless and futile: "What were you trying to prove? That deep down, everyone's as ugly as you? You're alone" (*The Dark Knight*). Before the Joker can secure his promise and press his detonator, Batman gains the upper hand and is able to throw him off the building. As he falls, he laughs maniacally, believing that he finally made Batman break his rule to never kill. Batman swiftly fires a grappling cable, catching the Joker's leg and successfully pulling him back up to safety.

The Joker then proceeds to deliver an analogy that describes the relationship between the two: "You just couldn't let me go, could you? This is what happens when an unstoppable force meets an immovable object. You truly are incorruptible, aren't you? You won't kill me out of some misplaced sense of self-righteousness and I won't kill you because you're just too much fun. I think you and I are destined to do this forever" (*The Dark Knight*). The Joker's analogy between an unstoppable force and an immovable object adequately symbolizes what the Joker and Batman mean to each other. Their rivalry will always exist as long as they stand for different things. The Joker, as the id, is an unstoppable force because his life is devoid of rules, and his lawlessness makes him stand for nothing.

Ryan Indy Rhodes and David Kyle Johnson discuss Batman's virtuosity in "What Would Batman Do?: Bruce Wayne as Moral Exemplar," labelling the Batman persona as an

entity that “can forever represent indefatigable virtue” (122), assuring Bruce never fall victim to the id or destructive ideologies. Batman represents an immovable object because of his staunch moral compass that defiantly rejects any forms of outside corruption. Thus, this results in a constant stalemate or equilibrium. Bruce’s sense of self-righteousness is constantly being supervised by the Batman superego. Batman tells the Joker that “this city just showed [him] that it’s full of people ready to believe in good” (*The Dark Knight*).

Whereas the Joker tries to lure everyone into revealing their id and engaging with their inner selfish desires, Batman lets him know that humanity will continue to exist as long as people who always look to do the right thing exist. This is proven when neither boat’s passengers chooses to blow the other one up. Although this proves to be a defeat for the Joker, it is not the Joker’s final plan. Batman tells the Joker that Gotham’s citizens have just proven that they will embrace civil actions when put under pressure; however, the Joker reveals that Gotham’s future hinges on a scapegoat of his choosing: “Until their spirit breaks completely. Until they get a good look at the real Harvey Dent, huh? And all the heroic things he’s done. You didn’t think I’d risk losing the battle for Gotham’s soul in a fistfight with you? No, you need an ace in the hole.⁸ Mine’s Harvey [...] I took Gotham’s White Knight and I brought him down to our level. It wasn’t hard. See, madness, as you know, is like gravity: all it takes is a little push” (*The Dark Knight*). Harvey Dent was instrumental in providing hope and stability to Gotham by means of the law, except he is not embroiled in controversy as is the Batman’s vigilantism. Despite the Joker’s chaotic ways, he targets the absolute example of righteousness and virtue and reveals to Batman that his intention of altering Harvey has prevailed. The conversion of Harvey’s principles would then convince Gotham that no one is beyond incorruptibility. In turn, this would lever a serious moral dilemma within the city of

whether or not it pays to restrict one's chaotic instincts and whether or not righteousness is permanent or pays off in the long run. The Joker knows that once Gotham realizes that Harvey was stripped of his voice of reason, the city will lose hope for the future.

Batman leaves the Joker to be apprehended by a SWAT team and goes to confront whatever damage the now tainted district attorney has caused. During Batman's confrontation with the Joker, Harvey had kidnapped Commissioner Gordon's family and is holding them all hostage. Holding Gordon's son at gunpoint, he continues his random action of flipping a coin and leaving the fate of his victims in the hands of chance. Harvey finds out that Gordon has dispatched police around the building to create a perimeter. This infuriates Harvey even more, as he points to his disfigured face and exclaims: "You think I want to escape from this? There is no escape from this" (*The Dark Knight*). Harvey acknowledges that things could never go back to the way they were, and the crimes he has committed so far cannot be forgiven in the eyes of society. His facial deformity is emblematic of this, as the change that his appearance has undergone is irreversible. Harvey has given in to his dangerous instincts, and the damage he has committed can never be repaired. Harvey has gone from a strong defender of the law to having a complete disregard for it.

Batman arrives at the scene and attempts to dissuade Harvey from going any further in his murderous rampage. Harvey tells Batman that his attitude of always combatting evil is misguided: "You thought we could be decent men, at an indecent time. Well you were wrong" (*The Dark Knight*). Despite Harvey, Commissioner Gordon, and Batman leading the fight against organized crime, the joint forces of the Joker and the deep-seated corruption within the city prove too overwhelming for Dent to combat. Jody Duncan Jesser and Janine Pourroy both assert in *The Art and Making of The Dark Knight Trilogy* that Harvey

“succumbs to insanity and rage and becomes the Dark Knight’s archenemy” (48). Harvey’s transformation into a living, breathing id is now at complete odds to and at opposite ends of Batman’s own ideals. There is no going back for the district attorney, and his confrontation with Batman is neither friendly nor welcoming. He has transformed into a man who has succumbed to primal rage. Harvey tells Batman that the Joker had chosen him as his main target to damage; as a result, the love of his life was murdered and his face disfigured. In “The Politics of Batman,” Slavoj Žižek justifies Dent’s actions by noting that Dent “draws the conclusion that the system is unjust, so that, to fight injustice effectively, one has to turn directly against the system and destroy it. Dent loses his remaining inhibitions and is ready to use all manner of methods to achieve this goal” (10-11). Harvey lets go of everything he once embodied and resorts to murder. Because civilization had failed to provide justice to his situation, he concludes that the law does not always work and so takes matters into his own hands. Still attempting to talk sense into Harvey, Batman explains the Joker’s motive: “You were the best of us. He wanted to prove that even someone as good as you could fall” (*The Dark Knight*). By the Joker targeting Harvey, he aims at the morale of Gotham City. By the Joker proving that Harvey was susceptible to corruption and committing crime, he would prove that the entire city was prone to this behavior as well.

Before Harvey has the chance to murder Commissioner Gordon’s son, Batman pushes Harvey off the side of the two-story building but rescues the young boy. After pulling Gordon’s son up to safety, Batman falls down the two-story building as well, badly hurt. As Gordon rushes down the building’s stairs to check on Batman, he realizes that despite his injuries, he is still alive. A hopeless Gordon looks down at the lifeless Harvey Dent and tells Batman that impending doom will soon fall over Gotham when Harvey’s recent actions are

made public: “Whatever chances we had of fixing our city dies with Harvey’s reputation. We bet it all on him. The Joker took the best of us and tore him down. People will lose hope [...] Five dead, two of them cops. You can’t sweep that over” (*The Dark Knight*). As a result, Batman refuses to let the Joker’s agenda of corrupting the best that Gotham had to offer win and decides to pin Harvey’s crimes on himself. Despite Gordon’s initial resistance to Batman’s idea, Batman tells him that he is “whatever Gotham needs [him] to be,” refusing to let the Joker’s successful corruption of Harvey poison the morale of the city. The film’s ending caters to an idea that “elevates lie into a general social principle, into the principle of organization of our social-political life [...] as if telling the truth [...] embodied in Joker means [...] disintegration of the social order” (“Slavoj Zizek analyses”). Batman asserts that he will go to whatever lengths necessary to prevent the dissolution of Gotham, embodying this principle of organization. Even if this organization must be bolstered by a lie, to Batman and Gordon it is preferred over Gotham’s disunion. A funeral procession is held for Harvey Dent, and the bat signal is taken down from the police commissioner’s rooftop. “After spending so much time trying to make criminals cower and to help citizens have faith,” both Batman and Gordon decide that the Batman persona “cannot embody both chaos and order” (Langley 69). The movie ends with Batman riding off into the night being chased by police after Gordon orders Batman to be arrested.

The film’s final dialogue is Gordon, watching Batman disappear into the night, describing Batman as “a silent guardian. A watchful protector. The Dark Knight” (*The Dark Knight*). Batman’s guardianship and services as protector of Gotham serve to keep Gotham running and to ensure it does not fall into chaos. The battle between the Joker and the Batman signifies the ongoing strife an individual goes through as the superego works to

suppress the id and sublimates the id's desires through acceptable outlets. Gotham was always labelled as a "corrupt, crime-riddled, mob-run Sodom, dirty and almost worthless, but also fragile and deserving of protection" (Tyree 32). Regardless of whether or not Gotham would continue to revere him with only Batman and Gordon knowing the truth behind Harvey's actions, Bruce believes that Gotham should always continue to prosper and move forward. Even as Batman chooses to label himself a murderer and pins Harvey's crimes on himself, he is aware that he will provide a positive service to Gotham by instilling his moral agency of faith in humanity. Batman is aware that humanity has the potential to embrace evil actions but acknowledges that faith is something that must be rewarded for those that believe in this idealist notion. The film conveys that even if the faith that people have is based on a lie, an example of a substantive moral law is necessary for people to choose the right path. In this case, a lie that ensures societal continuity, Batman, presides over the harsh and ugly truth, Harvey Dent.

CHAPTER V

THE RETURN OF THE ID: BRUCE'S ESCAPE FROM ANXIETY

The Dark Knight Rises, the final film in Nolan's trilogy, concludes the journey Bruce Wayne set upon in *Batman Begins*. The film also ties several loose ends together and confronts the ramifications of *The Dark Knight*. Whereas the previous film deals with a battle between two individuals embodying the id and the superego, the Joker and Batman, respectively, this film also deals with this battle on a much larger scale. When Batman and Commissioner Gordon use the Batman's image as a scapegoat to cover for Harvey Dent's crimes, Bruce is also affected by the consequences of that decision. He becomes an isolationist, an alternative Freud attests to in *Civilization and its Discontents* that serves as a possible escape from the strain experienced when the superego suppresses the id. Because this escape is non-ideal, as Freud asserts, Bruce is convinced to don the Batman costume one final time. The film's antagonist, Bane (Tom Hardy), is presented as a man whose brute nature and physicality are reined in by a destructive revolutionary ideology. Screenwriter David S. Goyer acknowledges the importance of Bane's name, since "the definition of the word 'bane' is 'source of harm or ruin; a curse,' and he functions as all of those things in the movie" (qtd. in Jesser & Pourroy 54). The actor who portrays Bane on film, Tom Hardy, describes Bane as someone who has "come to pull the pin on the grenade" (*The Dark Knight Rises* Extensive Featurette) waiting to detonate in Gotham City. Bane takes it upon himself to expose the lie that has eradicated organized crime in Gotham in order to exterminate the city and destroy people's faith in the process. Bruce's return as Batman to combat Bane's threat proves ineffective as he has lost the fear of consequence and as a result proves to be self-destructive in his actions. After suffering a brutal defeat at the hands of

Bane, Bruce must retrain himself to experience the fear of consequence in order to continuously uphold the moral agency derived from his father. Batman confronts the city's newfound exigencies and continues to uphold his father's rule of law by learning to re-embrace the Batman superego in order to help sustain civilization. The film presents that the fear of failure is something that drives the optimistic notion of faith forward, and the moral agency that comes with one's superego must advocate communal sustainment.

An event is held at the film's beginning on the grounds of Wayne Manor commemorating the life of Harvey Dent and what his tenure as Gotham's district attorney once meant. Gotham has thrived off the legacy that Harvey's image left, ensuring that all the criminals he helped place in Blackgate Prison remain there as a result of passed legislation, the Dent Act. As a result of Harvey's death, the Dent Act has supplemented Gotham's law enforcement with more authority and power in their fight against organized crime. Commissioner Gordon is among those in attendance and is the only person, aside from Bruce Wayne, who knows about the people that Harvey murdered eight years prior. Gordon bears an enormous amount of guilt for hiding this lie from the public and plans on revealing the truth but ultimately decides against it. Instead, he further details the good that has come from the Dent Act by telling those in attendance that all they "need to know is that there are one thousand inmates in prison as a result of the Dent Act. These are violent criminals, essential cogs in the organized crime machine" (*The Dark Knight Rises*).⁹ Those who once terrorized and corrupted Gotham have now been removed from civilization. The city's collective id has been tamed and has forced criminals to discontinue their illicit acts or face incarceration without parole. Jesser and Pourroy describe Gotham as having "cleaned up its act and is now a shining example of urban functionality—on the surface" (51), exemplifying a society with

little to no crime. However, under this exceptional operational surface lies the criminal element that has waned in the past eight years, ready at a moment's notice to exert destructive impulses.

Inside Wayne Manor the audience is introduced to Selina Kyle (Anne Hathaway), a stealthy jewel thief posing as a maid in order to steal the late Martha Wayne's jewels. When Bruce interrupts the robbery Selina responds to Bruce's appearance by telling him that he does not have "long nails, or facial scars" (*The Dark Knight Rises*). Whom Gotham once knew as the lavish and extravagant billionaire who loved to show off his cars and various dates is now a recluse who is never seen in public. The alternate superego created in Bruce Wayne the billionaire has also suffered the consequences of isolation.

The film introduces John Blake (Joseph Gordon-Levitt), a young police officer whose adherence and dedication to law enforcement makes him a vital contribution to the Gotham City police force. Blake is trusted by Commissioner Gordon due to his astute investigative abilities and adherence to inculcating order and regulation. Despite being brushed aside as a rookie by his superior officers, he gains Commissioner Gordon's trust after saving his life in what would be the moment that Gordon realizes that Batman must return to Gotham. That moment soon comes when a shootout brings both Blake and Commissioner Gordon to the scene at a Gotham restaurant. Gordon follows the shooters into an underground tunnel, where he is subsequently knocked out by Bane's henchmen and abducted. As Gordon is being dragged through the tunnels he realizes that an army of men resides underground, all following Bane's orders and working on different projects. Gordon regains consciousness and throws himself into a nearby sewer with the current flowing outwards as he is simultaneously shot in the leg by one of Bane's men. Blake comes to the Commissioner's

rescue, as he drags the unconscious Commissioner out of the water. With Gordon recuperating from a close brush with death, Blake takes it upon himself to reach out to Bruce Wayne for help.

Blake soon arrives at the Wayne mansion and convinces Alfred that he needs to talk to Bruce. Blake tells Bruce that Commissioner Gordon was shot after confronting Bane and his henchmen underneath the sewers, and that Gordon “needs [him], he needs the Batman” (*The Dark Knight Rises*). Bruce is both confused and taken off guard by the fact that Blake would think or suspect he is Batman. Blake claims that he himself deduced Bruce’s alter identity because he feels the same rage that he recognizes in Bruce. Blake identifies himself as a believer of what Batman stands for in Gotham City:

We’ve met before. It was a long time ago. I was a kid in [...] an orphanage. My mom died when I was small, it was a car accident. I don’t really remember it. But, uh, my dad got shot a couple years later over a gambling debt, and I remember that one just fine. Not a lot of people know what it feels like [...] to be angry, in your bones [...] Then they want the angry little kid to do something he knows he can’t do, move on. So after a while they stop understanding. They send the angry kid to a boy’s home. I figured it out too late. You gotta learn to hide the anger, practice smiling in the mirror. It’s like putting on a mask. (*The Dark Knight Rises*)

Blake’s upbringing is very similar to Bruce’s past. Blake claims that moving on from his childhood trauma is something society wants but is a daunting and difficult task. Blake states that masking the anger and despair is a way to deal with traumatic incidents. By donning this figurative mask and pretending to hide the anger, one can better adjust to civilization’s regulations. Blake continues by describing the day Bruce visited the orphan’s home when Blake was still a young child: “We were so excited. Bruce Wayne, billionaire orphan? I mean, we used to make up stories about you man, legends [...] I’d seen that look on your face before. It’s the same one I taught myself.” He concludes, “I’m still a believer in the Batman, even if you’re not” (*The Dark Knight Rises*). At some point during Bruce’s previous

tenure as Batman, Blake had experienced the other “mask” that Bruce would wear in public, that of the suave billionaire. While the other kids fell for this luxurious and grandiose appearance, Blake saw through this persona because he could tell that Bruce was using this appearance to mask his rage. The mask that Bruce exhibited at that moment was the same look that Blake had adopted over the years to hide his anger. Whereas Bruce once adopted the Batman persona and costume as his superego to temper his rage, Blake takes a more conventional route and tempers his anger by wearing the uniform of a police officer. Both had to pretend that everything was okay, despite the contradictory emotions that lay underneath their respective facades. For Blake, learning how to mask one’s true emotions is a necessary mask that ensures the individual’s survival and establishes the individual’s place in society.

Before making his return as Batman, Bruce first returns as the billionaire playboy. He arrives at a charity event in his Lamborghini and proceeds to dance with Selina Kyle and find out why she had made an effort to steal his mother’s necklace. As they dance, Selina asks him who he is pretending to be, to which Bruce replies: “Bruce Wayne, eccentric billionaire” (*The Dark Knight Rises*). Bruce and Selena discuss the state of Gotham, and Selina gives Bruce an ominous warning about the city’s future: “You think all this can last? There’s a storm coming Mr. Wayne [...] when it hits you’re all gonna [sic] wonder how you ever thought you could live so large and leave so little for the rest of us” (*The Dark Knight Rises*). Selina notes that this newly thriving economy leaves no room for under-privileged people. Underneath the image of an idealistic city lies “something rotten at the city’s core, an undercurrent of criminality and suffering” (Jesser and Pourroy 51). Selina warns him that it will not be long before the inevitability of a revolution happens where the suppressed will

be forced to counter civilization's rules. The fact that this organization is built on a lie makes the possibility of such a revolution much higher as the energy from the underclasses will call for a fairer, more equitable law.

After his conversation with Selina, Bruce returns to Wayne Manor and prepares his return as Batman. Alfred informs Bruce of the immense danger that Bane presents, as well as his ambivalence towards Bruce making his return to the world as Batman. Bruce retorts by telling Alfred that if Bane "is everything that you say he is, then this city needs me [...] you're afraid that if I go back out there, I'll fail" (*The Dark Knight Rises*). Alfred fears that Bruce wants to fail on purpose and tells him that Gotham needs Bruce's "knowledge and resources," instead of his body and life, implying that Bruce only sees "one end to [his] journey" (*The Dark Knight Rises*). While Bruce may not willingly be on a mission to kill himself, the danger that he puts himself in every instance he operates as Batman is a risk that could lead to deadly consequences. This time the level of jeopardy is much higher since the passing of time combined with inactivity has led Bruce to be past his physical and mental prime. However, the anger that Bruce needs to sublimate needs the physical outlet that the Batman superego provides. Bruce makes his return as Batman as he chases after Bane and his accomplices who have stolen information from the stock market. While Bane and his men still manage to get away thanks to police intervention, Batman is successful in safely rescuing the hostages Bane's men had taken with them. After succeeding in his reappearance as Batman, Bruce equips himself with sufficient confidence to take on and impede whatever plans Bane has for the city.

The narrative continues by having Bruce Wayne appear in Gotham more frequently, and after learning that his funds have become exhausted due to a mismanagement of his

company, he leaves Wayne Enterprises only to be bombarded by paparazzi. John Blake offers Bruce a police ride home and prods him during the drive about his Batman persona, asking him why he chose to wear the Batman mask in the first place. Bruce tells him that the mask is essential in order “to protect the people closest to [him] [...] there are always people you care about. You don’t realize how much until they’re gone. The idea was to be a symbol. Batman can be anybody” (*The Dark Knight Rises*). Bruce reaffirms that Batman is beyond the identity of just one man. He attests that Batman can be “anybody,” as long as that person is willing to temper their destructive drives and believe in just ideologies that sustain civilization.

Eventually, Bruce’s wishes to find and confront Bane come to fruition. After helping Selina Kyle escape Bane’s henchmen, she returns the favor by leading him to Bane’s lair in the underground tunnels. For the first time since his return, Bruce feels the consequences of being inactive for eight years. Despite wearing the Batman armor and using its gadgetry, Bruce realizes he is much slower and less effective than before. Not only is Batman ineffective from a physical standpoint, but his usual barrage of uncanny tricks to use against Bane, such as smoke bombs and turning off the lights, also prove useless. Bane tells Bruce that the tricks Bruce acquired from the League of Shadows and Ra’s Al Ghul are ineffectual because he too was disciplined in using and recognizing this skillset.¹⁰ Bane does not see Batman as an incarnation of a man-bat, nor does he feel the fear that the uncanny is supposed to manifest: “Theatricality and deception. Powerful agents for the uninitiated. But we are initiated, aren’t we Bruce? Members of the League of Shadows. And you betrayed us [...] I am the League of Shadows. I am here to fulfill Ra’s Al Ghul’s destiny [...] You think darkness is your ally. You merely adopted the dark. I was born in it. Molded by it. I didn’t

see the light until I was already a man, and then it was nothing to me but blinding. The shadows betray you because they belong to me” (The Dark Knight Rises). Bruce took his training from the League of Shadows and used his acquired knowledge to effectively sublimate his desires while staying true to Thomas Wayne’s rule of law, which is to help those in need. Bane, on the contrary, went through the entire process of training and goes to whatever lengths necessary to complete it, even if it means murder. Despite being excommunicated, he still feels the need to carry out the wishes of Ra’s Al Ghul, affirming that he will fulfill his mentor’s destiny: the destruction of Gotham. Nolan characterizes Bane as someone whose “past very much mirrors Bruce Wayne’s [...] from his training and with the League of Shadows background. Bane represents the wrong path of Bruce Wayne almost back to *Batman Begins*. So Bane is the return of that danger. The wrong side for Bruce Wayne” (“The Playlist Interview: Christopher Nolan”). If Batman had chosen to decapitate the thief in *Batman Begins*, he would have embraced his destructive libidinal instincts he so adamantly tries to suppress. Bane symbolizes this “return” of the wrong path, a man who embraces his id by murdering people and terrorizing cities. The fight culminates in a brutal beat-down for Batman.

Bruce’s broken body is then transported to the same prison where Bane was born, located on the other side of the world, far away from Gotham. The prison serves as a constant tease because it is not completely enclosed. The only opening and possibility of escape lies by climbing an upward tunnel and making a long jump from one ledge to another to ensure freedom. Bane explains to Bruce that he plans on torturing Bruce’s soul by taking the city of Gotham hostage and terrorizing it while Bruce helplessly watches from his cell: “As I terrorize Gotham I will feed the people hope to poison their soul. I will let them

believe that they can survive so that you can watch them clamoring over each other to stay in the sun. You can watch me torture an entire city. Then when you truly understood the depth of your failure [...] We will destroy Gotham. And then, when it is done, and Gotham is ashes, then you have my permission to die” (*The Dark Knight Rises*). A television set is placed inside of Bruce’s cell with the channel set on Gotham City News. Bane plans to carry out the same practice that Ra’s Al Ghul had once set forth to accomplish: the destruction of Gotham City. It is important to note that Ra’s Al Ghul’s plan in *Batman Begins* was to destroy Gotham in order to rebuild it. While Bane states that he plans to destroy Gotham, he never offers any further reasoning behind it. Regardless, with a broken Bruce Wayne halfway across the world, Gotham is left without its protector to suppress those who readily embrace their inner id and the consequences that inevitably follow.

In *The Dark Knight*, the Joker was intent on seeing the world burn itself to the ground by destroying civilization and releasing everyone’s id by demonstrating the futility of ideological structures. A key part of his plan was to make Harvey Dent give in to his id and make Gotham City know that its most exemplary public figure had resorted to a life of murder. This would kill the city’s hope for the future and by default simultaneously release all the criminals Harvey helped incarcerate. What Batman and Commissioner Gordon had stopped from occurring is soon undone. Bane announces that an anonymous citizen in Gotham holds the detonator to a nuclear bomb he has planted somewhere in the city. If anyone attempts to leave Gotham, or if anyone attempts to enter, the nuclear bomb will be detonated. Bane lures Gotham law enforcement into the underground tunnels and then closes all entrances, trapping the majority of Gotham’s police aside from Blake and Commissioner Gordon. With both Batman and the overwhelming majority of Gotham’s law enforcement no

longer present, Bane lets the city and world know of his plans for Gotham. He drives the film's narrative by spurring "the eruption of that underworld" that lies beneath the city's urban functionary, and it surfaces "with all the violence of a volcanic explosion" (Jesser and Pourroy 51). Bane stands in front of Blackgate Prison and proceeds to read the letter he stole from Commissioner Gordon that states the truth about Harvey Dent's murderous rampage. He delivers a monologue encouraging Gotham to embrace a world without rules in which no one, even those with vile intentions, would have to suppress their desires:

Behind you stands a symbol of oppression [...] Where a thousand men have languished under the name of this man, Harvey Dent, who has been held up to you as the shining example of justice. You have been supplied with a false idol to stop you from tearing down this corrupt city [...] The oppressors of generations that have kept you down with myths of opportunity and we give it back to you, the people. Gotham is yours. None shall interfere, do as you please. We'll start by storming Blackgate and freeing the oppressed [...] spoils will be enjoyed, blood will be shed. (*The Dark Knight Rises*)

As he speaks, Bane's men use a tank to shoot down the entrance to Blackgate Prison, resulting in the freedom of thousands of inmates. The representatives of law and restraint have now switched places with the criminals that represent anarchy and disorder. The criminals that were once underground now inhabit Gotham, and those willing to uphold the law and their superego are now trapped at the city's surface. Bane exposes the lie that had maintained these men in prison, calling those that had worked to remove them from civilization as "oppressors." The possibilities of happiness that the men in Blackgate had tried to act out on are stifled by the law, and Bane unleashes the suppressed onto Gotham in an every-man-for-himself gesture. In "The Politics of Batman," Slavoj Žižek asserts that Bane's position as a revolutionary "is accompanied by a vast politico-ideological offensive," in which he punishes the rich and leaves "the streets surrendered to crime and villainy," so that Gotham suffers "under popular terror" (2, 3). Bane dictates that Gotham's legal system

is broken because it is based on the lie that is the legacy of Harvey Dent. Therefore, because the legal system has failed, he believes there is no other alternative left for Gotham but to see chaos and lawlessness erupt from the unjust constraints that have subdued them for so long.

As Bane unleashes his reign of villainy on Gotham, a distraught and broken Bruce watches on the television from his cell across the world. A great sense of anger arises in Bruce, as he helplessly watches Bane terrorize his city. After months of waiting for his spine to heal, Bruce regains his mobility and tirelessly trains to build up his body in order to escape. Bruce makes several unsuccessful attempts to climb out of the prison and make the long jump from one ledge to another but always fails in the process. Each time he scales the walls and does not complete the jump he is rescued from falling to his death by a rope fastened around his waist. A prisoner who has been watching Bruce explains to him why it is he fails to escape: “You do not fear death. You think this makes you strong, it makes you weak [...] How can you move faster than possible, fight longer than possible, without the most powerful impulse of the spirit: the fear of death?” (*The Dark Knight Rises*). Bruce’s path towards self-destruction was because of his loss of fear, especially the fear of consequence. Bruce had embodied this fear when he donned the Batman costume many years ago, afraid that if he did not learn how to domesticate the id, he could cause great pain on himself and others. Upon realizing that he needs this fear in order to propel his father’s moral agency forward, Bruce sets upon making the jump without the rope as a harness. Sure enough, Bruce successfully makes the long jump and escapes from the prison. It is in his escape that Bruce learns to “reconcile with his own creation, the Batman, as crime-fighter, symbol, and the truest part of himself so the hero can rise to the occasion” (Langley 87). Bruce’s previous actions, even while donning the Batman costume, were driven by the drive

towards death as his many years of inactivity led to a less stealthy and agile Batman.

However, by embracing fear and using it to his advantage, Bruce combines it with hope and productively structures his anger in order to make the climb and escape the prison.

Bruce returns to Gotham and leads the charge against Bane and his men. He frees Gotham's law enforcement officers trapped underground, and an all-out war is fought between them and the criminals that had taken control of the city. Batman puts his faith in Selina and Commissioner Gordon to help him defeat Bane and locate the nuclear bomb minutes away from detonation. Batman attaches the bomb to his aerial machinery and flies it away from Gotham. The city watches the bomb detonate in the middle of the ocean, where it is presumed that Batman has sacrificed his life to save the city. A small funeral is held for Bruce Wayne at the Wayne Manor where Lucius Fox, Gordon, Blake, and Alfred are in attendance to honor him. Commissioner Gordon delivers a eulogy that surmises the purpose of Bruce Wayne's sacrifice: "I see a beautiful city and brilliant people rising from the abyss. I see the lives for which I lay down my life, peaceful, useful, prosperous, and happy. I see that I hold a sanctuary in their hearts, and in the hearts of their descendants, generations hence. It is a far, far better than that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to, than I have ever known" (qtd. in *The Dark Knight Rises*).¹¹ Bruce's sacrifice would ensure the survival of his city, even if it meant giving up his life. Bruce's steadfast conviction to defend and protect Gotham was a notion engrained in him as a child, a codex that he cared so deeply about that he would die before betraying his father's rule of law. A giant statue of Batman is unveiled in Gotham City Hall, a symbol of gratitude for the man who had lay down his life to ensure his city's survival. The "far better rest" alluded to is the

path that Bruce has chosen to go as an alternative to escape the pain he undergoes as Batman, the constant vigilance that the superego must exercise towards the id.

Earlier in the film when Bruce chooses to return as Batman, Alfred lets Bruce know of a fantasy he had back when Bruce left on his journey for answers to control his anger. Alfred believes that Bruce's Batman persona is not a definitive answer for happiness: "You hung up your cape and your cowl but you didn't move on, you never went to find a life [...] I had this fantasy that I would look across the tables and I'd see you there with a wife, maybe a couple of kids. You wouldn't say anything to me. Nor me to you. But we'd both know that you'd made it. That you were happy. I never wanted you to come back to Gotham. I always knew there was nothing here for you except pain and tragedy and I wanted something more for you than that. I still do" (*The Dark Knight Rises*). Alfred's goal for Bruce was for him to find happiness. By re-establishing himself in another city with a family Bruce would hopefully remedy or satiate his feelings of revenge and guilt. To Alfred, Bruce returning to the city where his parents were murdered would not solve his distraught emotions that serve as a constant reminder of his tragic past.

At the movie's conclusion, the alternative that Bruce has chosen is demonstrated as Alfred's vision for Bruce comes to life. Alfred goes to the same café in Florence where he had imagined Bruce would one day be, away from the agony Gotham has caused him. Sure enough, looking across the café, Alfred sees Bruce sitting down with Selina Kyle. The scene transpires just as Alfred had thought it would. They both do a curt nod and brief smile towards each other, as Alfred proceeds to leave the café, happy that Bruce has finally escaped the pain of being Batman. Back in Gotham, it is revealed that Bruce has donated his house to be used as an orphanage and refuge for Gotham's at-risk youth. He also leaves

behind a duffel bag containing GPS instructions for John Blake. To Blake's surprise, they lead to the Batcave from which Bruce would operate as well as access to all the technology and gadgetry Bruce would use in his nighttime crusades as Batman. The implication is that Blake inherits the mantle of the Batman, Gotham's new protector. Nolan explains why he allows Bruce Wayne an escape from the Batman persona as it resonates with an important theme he used since *Batman Begins*:

Batman [can] be anybody [...] the only way that I could find to make a credible characterization of a guy transforming himself into Batman is if it was as a necessary symbol, and he saw himself as a catalyst for change and therefore it was a temporary process, maybe a five-year plan that would be enforced for symbolically encouraging the good of Gotham to take back their city. [...] for that mission to succeed, it has to end, so this is the ending for me [...] the open-ended elements are all to do with the thematic idea that Batman was not important as a man, he's more than that. He's a symbol, and the symbol lives on. ("Cinematic Faith")

Alfred's fantasy coming to fruition means that Bruce Wayne has finally found happiness from the constant push-and-pull between Bruce's anger and the Batman superego. Ideally, Bruce's tenure as Batman would not have to last a lifetime in order to spare him his pain. Not only has he isolated himself from the environment that induces his misery, but he does so in the company of romantic love interest Selina Kyle. This is much different from Bruce Wayne's original isolation depicted in the film's beginning, where he lived in solitude in the upstairs wing of his house with only his butler as company. Nolan uses two concepts that Freud wrote about in *Civilization and its Discontents*, which is a combination of both hermitude and love. While Freud asserts that neither alternative is of much use independently, Bruce is granted alleviation from his tenure as Batman with a combination of both in his life.

Bruce has effectively removed the existence of both Bruce Wayne and Batman from Gotham, and Bruce rids himself of the responsibility of protecting Gotham. In his place,

John Blake will continue what Bruce Wayne started, ensuring that Gotham never return to its abysmal, crime-ridden state. His return is met with disappointing results, forcing him to re-evaluate why he lived by the Batman superego in the first place. Despite the grand threat Bane presents to Bruce in this film, Bane forces Bruce to re-assimilate into his prime, crime-fighting persona for one final rescue mission that for once, results in a happy ending for the trilogy's protagonist. Bruce's trust in Blake, Gordon, Selina, and Gotham's law enforcement is rewarded when they help him save the city from destruction. In turn, the city of Gotham rewards Bruce's faith in them by honoring and respecting his legacy and by embracing the Batman symbol as a constant reminder of Gotham's good nature.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Batman Begins serves as Bruce Wayne's origin story and shows the process he undergoes in becoming Batman. Before Bruce's father is killed, he talks about the moral code that Bruce will learn to follow in his future as a crime-fighting vigilante. At the core of this message lies the importance of helping others and the necessity for faith in human nature. Witnessing the death of his parents at a young age, Bruce is then engrained with feelings of guilt, depression, and anger that prove too overwhelming to subdue. The absence of Bruce's father leads Bruce to have an incomplete Oedipal complex and so he searches for further guidance after almost committing murder and giving in to the id. In meeting Henri Ducard and becoming his apprentice, Bruce is taught to sublimate his anger effectively in order to yield productive, life-affirming results. By establishing himself as Batman, a physical manifestation of the superego, Bruce succeeds in surpassing his Oedipal complex and in sublimating his instinctual energy. As Batman, Bruce supplements Gotham's societal structure, the ineffectiveness of which once stemmed from a massive amount of corruption. Gotham City accepts Batman within its society not because his presence is ideal, but because he is needed. Batman serves as a catalyst for the people of Gotham to have faith in their good values in the same way that Batman does. Batman's public service is met by both gratitude from the general public, and by escalation on behalf of the criminal underworld. The more Batman represses the criminal element, the more momentum the criminals begin to gain. In the following film, the hope that Batman instills in Gotham is embodied by elected public official Harvey Dent and will look to be destroyed by the Joker.

In *Batman Begins*, Bruce's greatest enemy was himself as he fought to temper the libidinal instincts that had him on the verge of committing murder. In *The Dark Knight*, Batman's greatest threat comes in the form of the Joker, a physical manifestation of the id. The conflict that the Joker presents to Batman is his insistence that there is no real law. He asserts that everyone is a selfish, instinctual animal with morality being an invention of fiction. As an engine of chaos, the Joker looks to undo what Batman started in *Batman Begins* by spreading his message of destruction and hysteria among Gotham. Batman's insistence to the contrary is that moral laws do exist, and that ultimately, morality is a question of faith. Ever since Bruce first donned the Batman costume he hoped to inspire people to embrace righteous values. While Batman's vigilante justice aids law enforcement in its fight against criminality, it was never Bruce's intention to operate as Batman for the rest of his life. Bruce hoped that in his tenure as Batman he could inspire Gotham's citizens into putting a definitive end to the rampant crime and corruption that characterizes Gotham. Humans often follow moral examples in order to provide structure to their lives, and the moral example in this film is Harvey Dent. Harvey, who serves as the city's district attorney, makes a name for himself as a result of his honesty, honorability, and excellence in public service. This serves as a reward for the people of Gotham, as Harvey's tenure demonstrates how Gotham's citizens made the right choice when electing him. The Joker ultimately succeeds in driving Harvey insane; as a result, Batman is left with no choice but to become the city's true moral example that insists on people's faith being rewarded. By taking the blame for Harvey's death and downfall, Bruce assures himself that order and regulation will preside over Gotham. Batman masks the ugly truth symbolized by the Joker and cements a lie that would benefit Gotham in the long run. The film's ending promises a bright future for

Gotham under the promise of this lie's sustainment, something that will be interrupted in the film's sequel.

The Dark Knight Rises forces Gotham to face the repercussion of believing in the false hope that was Harvey Dent. The film's beginning demonstrates how the lie that surrounds Harvey has helped people have faith in their society. Crime is at an all-time low as a direct result of the Dent Act, and Harvey continues to serve as the city's moral example long after his death. In those past eight years Bruce has retired as Batman, no longer needed after sacrificing his image at the expense of prosperity in Gotham. However, the false image upheld by the late Harvey is soon exposed upon the introduction of Bane, whose presence in Gotham forces a retired Bruce Wayne to don the Batman costume once more. However, the years of inactivity that Bruce has endured leads him to lose the fear of consequence, a crucial element that Bruce had adopted ever since his resolution of the Oedipal complex in the first film. When operating as Batman, Bruce no longer cares about whether he lives or dies and carries himself more hastily, letting himself be predominantly driven by anger instead of calculated and precise control. After suffering a brutal defeat at the hands of Bane, Bruce is placed in a prison on the other side of the world while Bane terrorizes Gotham. This serves as an integral process for Bruce's true return to form as he learns to reassess what makes the Batman superego an important part of him. He escapes the prison once he understands that the fear of failure is necessary in an individual's drive forward. Upon Bruce's return to Gotham he dons the Batman costume one final time. He successfully defeats Bane and takes the nuclear bomb on the verge of detonation out into the ocean, where it soon explodes. It is presumed that both Bruce Wayne and Batman have died in the eyes of Gotham's citizens. Bruce finally accomplishes true happiness and harmony when it is revealed that he faked his

death in order to re-establish himself in Florency, Italy, accompanied by Selina Kyle. With both the playboy and vigilante personas behind him, Bruce removes himself from the area that has caused him great pain and does so through isolation and the accompaniment of love, two alternatives Freud discusses in *Civilization and its Discontents*. Thomas Wayne's rule of law is not disregarded, as Bruce assures himself that Gotham will always be secure as he leaves behind his resources and technology to Officer John Blake, Gotham's new protector.

This thesis examines the *Dark Knight* trilogy as a filmic embodiment of Freudian ideas that go beyond an abstract theoretical model and provides a more romanticized layer of analysis. The films highlight many issues that a civilization faces and the discontents that come with being a member of society. The trilogy's overarching theme is the constant battle between the id and the superego, symbolized in figures of hope versus figures of terror and fear. Batman, an embodiment of the superego, tempers that which symbolizes the id and identifies with his internal law that polices the id. Bruce first conquers the battle within himself by renouncing his anti-social instincts and becoming an agent of justice by embodying the Batman persona. His successful resolution of the Oedipal complex allows him to continue his life as Batman by promoting the memoral law that his father leaves behind, which stresses the significance of helping those in need along with the importance of having faith in righteousness. Batman is a symbol of moral agency that goes beyond Bruce Wayne; instead, the Batman symbol serves as a reminder of the potential for self-discipline that every human has in promoting and championing good, life-affirming actions and renouncing chaotic, death-driven actions. Bruce's tenure as Batman offers him many chances at failure. However, Bruce always chooses to embody what is right out of sheer willpower and out fear for what might happen if he chooses not to. Until now, our

civilization continues to endure wars and global catastrophes; yet, it is the devotion of those who push past pain and believe in humanity that ensures the security of the human race.

Bruce makes a gamble every time he trusts in the good nature of people. His leaps of faith can either reinforce his belief in humanity or prove him wrong. However, it is better to believe in the potential that humanity has for good than to imagine the repercussions of a city that makes death-driven choices. Despite the setbacks and roadblocks he endures in each film, Bruce's belief in Gotham's good nature never falters. In turn, Gotham always rewards his faith. Faith in good nature and fear of potential evil will continue to drive the fictional city of Gotham, and our realities, forward.

NOTES

1. The film's other villain, serving as a conduit for Ra's Al Ghul's plans, is Dr. Jonathan Crane a.k.a Scarecrow. Dr. Crane works and operates as a psycho-pharmacologist in Arkham Asylum where he treats patients who experience mental health issues. However, Dr. Crane uses his position as a respected psychiatrist to conduct his own experiments outside of what his license allows him to do. He puts on a mask resembling a scarecrow and then studies the different reactions each patient gives after he sprays them with fear gas. He is responsible for creating this fear-inducing hallucinogen that Ra's later uses in his attempt to eradicate Gotham City. Scarecrow later goes on to appear in *The Dark Knight* and *The Dark Knight Rises* in minor roles.

2. Not only is the bank robbery that opens the film successful, but the Joker manages to pit his entire team against each other. Before the heist takes place the Joker had told each of his men, who were operating in groups of two, to eliminate the partner they had been designated to. After the heist is complete the Joker is the last man standing, assuring that the money stolen goes only to him. Before he kills a bank employee, he proclaims that "whatever doesn't kill you, simply makes you stranger," (*The Dark Knight*) implying that he has been through several events in his life that have alienated him from societal standards.

3. Harvey is first introduced in a court scene in which he is trying to prove the guilt and still current existence of the Falcone crime family. In the middle of the proceeding, the man on trial takes out a gun and points it at Harvey. Acting quickly, Harvey hits and disarms the man. This scene is paramount in demonstrating what Harvey's role will be in the remainder of the film, that of a brave attorney who is not afraid to stand up to hostile members of the mob.

4. Harvey's reasoning behind revealing himself to be Batman, an obvious lie, is to lure both the Joker and the real Batman into a confrontation. Harvey knows that the Joker will try to intercept Harvey's transfer to county prison, and he hopes that Batman will come out and stop the Joker. Luckily for Harvey, the events unfold exactly as he predicts.

5. Gotham Major Crime Unit officers Wertz and Ramirez are both accepting bribery money from the mob, and are the two officers responsible for the kidnapping of both Harvey and Rachel. Ramirez later justifies her actions by telling Harvey that she needed the money the mob was giving her to help pay off her mother's hospital bills. Harvey kills Wertz but spares Ramirez's life after she wins the coin toss Harvey makes each time he sets his sights on murder. Harvey knocks her unconscious, but it is very much in the realm of possibility that Harvey still ends up murdering her. Commissioner Gordon tells Batman at the end of the film that out of the five people Harvey had killed, "two of them [are] cops" (*The Dark Knight*). While Wertz is one officer that died, none of the other people confronted by Harvey, aside from Ramirez, were police officers.

6. At the press conference held by Harvey Dent, angry citizens and police officers call for Batman to turn himself in and face punishment by the law. The Joker calls attention to this hypocritical action in the interrogation scene later in the film. Gotham's citizens had let Batman operate in the city to their benefit by eliminating crime. Now that his presence is detrimental, they call for his arrest because his presence is now hurting them. They are not loyal to the man who had helped rid their streets of crime. This lack of loyalty and behavior guided by convenience is what the Joker sees as the biggest problem with humanity.

7. Coleman Reese is an employee at Wayne Enterprises who finds out that Bruce Wayne is Batman after he comes across plans and layouts describing the machination of the Tumbler, Batman's vehicle. After witnessing the Joker terrorize Gotham, he goes on the Gotham City News channel to reveal the identity of the Batman, but the Joker calls into the channel and stops him from doing so. The Joker does not care about Batman's identity; he is more concerned with destroying the city than he is with destroying the Batman superego.

8. By the Joker calling Harvey his "ace in the hole," he makes reference to a poker term that describes having a hidden ace card facedown that assures the cardholder's victory whenever he or she decides to reveal the card. It is not clear at what point in the film the Joker starts focusing on Harvey, or if Harvey was the Joker's target all along.

9. Gordon intends to divulge the truth about Harvey Dent's true nature that night at the fundraiser. He has a handwritten letter in his pocket and when getting ready to read it to the public, he decides against it at the last minute. This letter will later be stolen by Bane and read to Gotham in order to destroy the city's morale and release the prisoners from Blackgate that the Dent Act helped put there.

10. Bane's background with the League of Shadows involves him being a protector to Talia Al Ghul, the daughter of Ra's Al Ghul. Talia is revealed at the film's climax as the mastermind behind Gotham's planned demise. However, her reveal does not come with a bigger, more intricate plan for Gotham; instead, she echoes the sentiments that Bane has been making clear throughout the film.

11. This excerpt is from Charles Dickens's three-part novel, *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859). These are Sydney Carton's unspoken thoughts before he is guillotined, sacrificing his life for the sake of Charles Darnay. Unlike Carton, Bruce survives the events of the film, but the sentiment of the monologue is one and the same.

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