Eastern Michigan University
DigitalCommons@EMU

Master's Theses and Doctoral Dissertations

Master's Theses, and Doctoral Dissertations, and Graduate Capstone Projects

3-3-2014

The damned, the bad, and the ugly: Our society's bad (and occasionally sinister) habit of using villains to label, deter, and other

Lacey Danielle Hoffman

Follow this and additional works at: http://commons.emich.edu/theses

Part of the American Film Studies Commons

Recommended Citation
Hoffman, Lacey Danielle, "The damned, the bad, and the ugly: Our society's bad (and occasionally sinister) habit of using villains to label, deter, and other" (2014). *Master's Theses and Doctoral Dissertations*. 572.
http://commons.emich.edu/theses/572

This Open Access Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Master's Theses, and Doctoral Dissertations, and Graduate Capstone Projects at DigitalCommons@EMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses and Doctoral Dissertations by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@EMU. For more information, please contact lib-ir@emich.edu.

The Damned, the Bad, and the Ugly: Our Society's Bad (and occasionally sinister) Habit of Using Villains to Label, Deter, and Other

by

Lacey Hoffman

Thesis

Submitted to the Department of English Language and Literature

Eastern Michigan University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

Children's Literature

Thesis Committee:

Ramona Caponegro, PhD, Chair

Annette Wannamaker, PhD, Second Chair

March 3, 2014

Ypsilanti, MI

Dedication

To every villain in every story I ever read.

Acknowledgment

In spite of the fascinating characters I was able to evaluate, this effort would not have been possible without the enormous amount of help that I received from a number of people. First and foremost, I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Ramona Caponegro, for pointing out the things that needed changing, humoring my obsessions, and tolerating the chaos. I feel that your guidance has challenged me and has made me a better writer (and a little less rhetorical). To my second reader, Dr. Annette Wannamaker, I would like to say thank you for your honesty, mentorship, the incredible opportunities you have given me, and the reminder that "Done is good." In addition, I would like to thank Dr. Amanda Allen for always adding a bit of humor to the situation and listening to me vent and Dr. Ian Wojcik-Andrews for explaining some of the Marxist concepts and other theories as I worked on the earlier chapter of radical children's literature which influenced this thesis.

Over the last two years, I have had the wonderful opportunity of working in Eastern Michigan University's Honors College. I am indebted to the entire Honors staff for their support and allowing me to bounce my ideas off of them. A big thank you to Dr. Rebecca Sipe and John Feldkamp for their mentorship, encouragement, and pushing me to pursue opportunities. I consider myself very lucky for having had the opportunity to work with and learn from you.

Last of all, a big thank you to my friends and family for listening when I needed to talk and understanding when I was preoccupied with Oz and Gotham. I would not have been able to finish this thesis if not for Aaron Carey who tolerated the madness, provided some balance, and was the only person who really understood my Batman obsession. And to Peeta, for lying on my laptop when he decided thesis writing had exhausted him and for reminding me that many villains (and tiny dogs) are more bark than bite.

Abstract

As the most dynamic characters within a plot, villains have the ability to initiate change. To demonstrate the effect a villain can have, I have chosen two very different villains of popular culture—Theodora of *Oz the Great and Powerful* and the Joker of *The Dark Knight*—because these characters have a wide reach among the American audience. Theodora is a one-dimensional villain whose lack of depth fails to prompt the audience to think critically and perpetuates the patriarchal issues portrayed in the film. The Joker, however, is captivating because he is complex and pushes the reader to think critically about Gotham's issues. By completing an in-depth analysis of each character through a variety of lenses—such as religious, psychological, sociological—I will demonstrate that these characters provide the audience with very different experiences which have the ability to change or stunt social progress.

Table of Contents

Dedication…….....ii

Acknowledgment……....iii

Abstract……...…iv

Introduction—The Damned, the Bad, and the Ugly:

Our Society's Bad (and occasionally sinister) Habit of Using Villains to Label,

Deter, and Other……...1

Chapter I—Oz, the Great and Impotent (and the Witches We Love to Hate)…….....19

Chapter II—"Wanna Know How I Got These Scars?":

The Dark Knight's Denial of a Psychological Narrative for the Joker……..58

Conclusion—And the Villain Saves the Day:

Ambiguous Villains and Why It's Good to be Bad……..…101

Works Cited……104

Introduction—The Damned, the Bad, and the Ugly: Our Society's Bad (and occasionally sinister) Habit of Using Villains to Label, Deter, and Other

The long history of villainy is demonstrated in all aspects of culture and, in many ways, plays a determining role in society. The literary villain's presence persists for purposes other than presenting a character foil so that a protagonist may become a hero. Rather, the villain's function is just as, if not more, important than that of the hero in creating or passing on ideology for he/she is symptomatic of those traits or values which we most fear. Indeed, some villains are evidence that our society, in its practice of vilifying individuals or groups, often becomes a villain itself.

The significance of the hero in culture and his/her ability to represent the ideals of hegemonic society is demonstrated by the large body of scholarship on heroes, the hero's journey, and the hero's function in our society; however, comparatively little research exists on the complete body of literary villains. While there is a great deal of scholarly analysis concerning various types of villains, they are grouped according to the labels we use to identify them, and divided according to those traits seen as counterproductive or as dangerous to our society (e.g. trickster, tyrant, etc.). Unlike heroes, there is little research that connects the various villain-types and considers them as a body of characters, but there are a few sources that focus on the archetype of the villain, stressing his/her importance and function as an obstacle to the hero.

John Mortimer, editor of *The Oxford Book of Villains*, splits up his anthology of villains into the following categories: master crooks, minor crooks, murderers, seducers and cads, con men, hypocrites, traitors and spies, and tyrants. In his introduction, Mortimer makes the valid point that,

> the difficulties of preparing a book of villains is that the field stretches towards infinity. The world may be short of many things… but the supply of villains is endless. They are everywhere, down narrow streets… dominating family life, crowding prisons and law courts, and providing plots for most of the works of fiction that have been composed since the dawn of history…To represent the world's villainy adequately would be impossible. (Mortimer vii)

Perhaps the wide variety of villains and the difficulty such a body of diverse characters presents would offer some explanation for this lack of scholarly research. There is, though, also a great variety of heroes. In addition, if villains are truly endless and invade all aspects of life, their presence should be significant enough to warrant further consideration. This is particularly important because villains are so significant both to their plots and the societies in which their works are read. A part of their significance, as I will examine in future chapters, is that they possess the ability to challenge or perpetuate dominant ideology. Evidence of such influence is provided, Mortimer argues, in the significance of the villain to the plot:

> All that can be said is that, so far as writers of fiction are concerned, the serpent's presence was an unmixed blessing, as was the gift of free will and the power of the individual to choose the path of unrighteousness. If villainy hadn't existed it would have been necessary for the creators of the world's literature to invent it. In most stories villains provide the plot and make virtue interesting. *Hamlet* without the Prince would be difficult, but *Hamlet* without Claudius would be impossible. Imagine the tedium of *Snow White* without the witch or *Little Red Riding Hood* without the wolf… If God, as Malcom Muggeridge once suggested, is the great

> dramatist, he knew that the serpent and his descendants were essential characters, and the cast list would be incomplete without them. (Mortimer vii-viii)

In this section, Mortimer makes several assertions that are vital to any sociological study of a body of villains and their functions. First of all, he explains that villains are necessary to make the plot interesting. They can also be connected to religion, culture, and our opinions of free will, the free will often exercised by both characters and human beings, solidifying the connection between the villains and ourselves. Villains, therefore, play a vital role in portraying our temptations to follow free will, our desires to defy and our compulsions to conform to societal expectations. It should be noted that an individual's desires may not always lead to nontraditional action; however, when it does, that individual runs of the risk of being vilified. Such individuals only become villains based on their actions in particular cultures; over time, as those cultural norms change, the villain may become the rebel hero in the same way that the hero may become the villain.

Mortimer's argument is that villains in many ways define the heroes and, rather than being an accident/misfortune of a sinful nature, have intrinsic value in literature and society. Therefore, we know that the villain has not been ignored as a subject of scholarly inquiry because he/she is unimportant or deserving of less attention than the hero; rather, the villain's role in demonstrating and driving conflict in both our lives and our literature makes him a source of contention and concern. In fact, according to Mortimer, the villain, like Claudius, is more important than the protagonist in works of literature. While Mortimer was not talking about children's literature, the same could be said for its villains. It is my aim to support this claim, demonstrating that this importance is because, in his ability to drive conflict, the villain has the

power to initiate change and this change, depending on the way the villain is utilized, can result in either positive or negative sociopolitical change.

In terms of social impact, the functions of the villain and her ability to initiate change or reinforce prejudice in society are those same functions that Joseph Campbell attributes to the hero's myth. Campbell outlines the hero and explains why we write and rewrite the same pattern, or monomyth, arguing that we do so because we have a social and psychological need for the hero. He explains that the hero's journey serves as a metaphorical representation of "the journey within," which leads both the hero and the reader/listener/viewer on a journey toward self-knowledge (Campbell). This involves seeing the hero grapple with his flaws, struggle with a problem, face the decision to act, and then use the knowledge he has learned on his journey as he returns to his former life. While Campbell's argument may be valid, it fails to acknowledge the psychological depth and social significances of the villain in most such narratives. Furthermore, many journeys feature a descent into the underworld or a labyrinth, which, Campbell argues, is primarily symbolic and psychological. It is a symbolic journey into the unconscious. The fact that many heroes take a journey through hell that Campbell calls psychological attention to the psychological component of the villain as well. While the hero journeys to hell, the villain has taken up residence there. Campbell explains that this journey forces the hero to look inward and to struggle with his own shortcomings. Typically, hell is often depicted as the territory of Satan, Mortimer's first and most essential villain. As a result, if the villain's territory is a psychological exploration for the hero as he ventures through it, the villain is constantly locked in that psychological state. The villain and hero, both human, possess and are plagued by unconscious desires. We are just more focused on what the villain does as a result of those desires rather than

his struggles with them. It is surprising, then, that the villain, who is enigmatic of unconscious desires made into actions, is not given more consideration.

Although Campbell outlines several functions of the hero myth, the two that are most significant to this study are the sociological and pedagogical. By defining the villain in respect to these functions and how he affects ideology and behavior outside of his fictional realm, we can determine the significance of the villain as a reflection of societal issues. Therefore, an examination of these functions and how each villain works in respect to them, will demonstrate how we use literature and how it affects our culture. According to Campbell, myth both supports and validates a particular social order, or, I would argue, cultural hegemony (Campbell 31). In spite of the relative lack of scholarship of the patterns of villainy, villains play a significant role in both reflecting and perpetuating hegemonic values. Most often, the one-dimensional villain does so by creating a marked separation between the reader and the villain in order to make visible those behaviors that will result in ostracism. By illustrating the danger of ostracism and presenting a villain as less than human, we reduce the risk of the reader identifying with and possibly emulating the actions of the villain. In the same way that we use the hero to demonstrate those values society most prizes—a demonstration that helps the reader to acknowledge the rewards and positive interactions that are a result of exhibiting such traits—we use depictions of this one-dimensional villain to influence readers' behaviors outside of the fictional realm by teaching them that emulating such characters or exhibiting similarities to these villains will be met with negative social consequences. In this way, one-dimensional villains play a significant role in shaping and reinforcing the hegemonic social values and behaviors deemed acceptable.

At this point, the function of the villain correlates with one of Campbell's other functions of the myth: pedagogy. He explains that myths teach us "how to live a human lifetime under any

circumstances" (Campbell 31). In doing so, myths teach us what it is to be a human being within a particular society and, through the hero's example, how to be a better human and citizen. In opposition, the villain teaches us how *not* to be human and how *not* to live. Writers or filmmakers who, more often than not, have internalized cultural hegemony, consciously or unconsciously use the villain as a pedagogical tool to reinforce certain behaviors and values. As a result, behavior is taught and the villain, a particular type of scapegoat, is central to that lesson, possibly more so than the hero. While the villain is not always a scapegoat, she may be used in the same manner, providing an outlet for society's fears and frustrations. In this sense, the pedagogical and sociological functions have a mutual relationship in which the pedagogical function teaches the particular ways to be a citizen, ways that support and validate the social order. As a result, within literature's ability to teach particular values is the ability to use those lessons to secure particular social customs and class systems.

For instance, one of those behaviors perpetuated by these pedagogical and sociological functions is the ability to label characters according to where they fit within the established social order portrayed in a work. This behavior of labelling is an issue and may potentially damage society and the individuals within it. As sociologists have recognized, this damaging potential to reinforce stereotypes is being realized and exists. I would argue that our habit of labelling others is strongly related to the ways we use labels to depict moral and immoral or acceptable and unacceptable behavior in society. Although he completed many of his studies in the 1950s, sociologist Orrin E. Klapp's research remains relevant to this discussion, providing a background of the types of villains that are constants in our society. Klapp explains that there are multiple villainous archetypes that continue over time. Such villains are types and can be divided into two broad classes: highly visible villains who are "overt, [and] flagrant" and villains of low

or delayed visibility who are "underhanded, treacherous, subtle, and usually require detection or a period of time before being revealed" (Klapp 337). These two classes of villains with high and low visibility are then divided into archetypes—notably the same archetypes often used in scholarly analysis to compartmentalize and examine villains—which, depending on the culture, are identified by various labels or behaviors which that society thinks illustrates that particular archetype's behavior.

For example, in Klapp's 1950s study, many subjects responded to the highly visible archetype of "Authoritarian" with the following identifiers: fascist, bigot, fuehrer, and dictator (Klapp 339). Given the relatively recent events of World War II and actions of Adolf Hitler, it is clear that these identifiers were determined by the recent political and social climates. Participants in Klapp's study also had interesting responses to the label, "Corrupter," which Klapp categories as having limited visibility. Klapp defines this archetype as "a poisonous or demoralizing influence, especially through close relationship. Often hard to detect. His presence is considered a threat to character and social organization" (Klapp 339). In spite of the fact that Klapp refers to this archetype as male, most of the identifiers for the archetype refer specifically to females, and, even more specifically, to sexually active females who challenge and are a danger to the social order and imposed rules of femininity. Such identifiers include: corrupter, bad apple, seducer, debauchee, degenerate, pusher of drugs, reefer-man, fast crowd, fast woman, vamp, siren, masher, Fagin, and Rasputin (Klapp 339). From these examples and others Klapp provides, we can determine that, in spite of the constantly changing social mores, it is our definitions of archetypes and not the archetypes themselves that change. Klapp argues that while these labels change, the importance rests in the ways that society's changing morals dictate the nature of villainous behavior: "classifying villainous names gives a picture of the kinds of

behavior people respond to with a moral concept of the ideally evil person—one set off by inherent depravity and malice toward mankind. Words like these tend to impute a villain-type and put a person in such a category" (Klapp 337).

While his research seems to focus on villains, it is really about the social behaviors we use to label others. In other words, Klapp's research demonstrates the existence of these behaviors that echo literature's one-dimensional labels so often used in order to classify characters according to moralities of "good" or "bad." In fact, as I identify one-dimensional villains in Chapter II—such as the representation of females as villains and witches—Klapp's argument will become increasingly relevant in terms of the labels we use to identify and condemn particular feminine behaviors. In this respect, as Klapp explains, labelling becomes a villain-making function, a "societal reaction to certain kinds of deviance" (Klapp 340). Note that labels can make heroes as well. Regardless of whether the label determines that a subject is a hero or a villain, it creates dangerously high or low societal expectations for the individual. In this case, however, Klapp is primarily concerned with the labelling as a villain-making function; this does not mean that the label causes an individual to act in a certain way; rather, it calls attention and additional scrutiny by creating a label for the behavior.

By calling attention to and classifying the terms used to identify particular types of villainy such as "Authoritarians" and "Corrupters"—Klapp argues, we are able to gather a picture of the behaviors/threats to social norms to which dominant culture responds with "a moral concept of the ideally evil person" (Klapp 340). As a result of this villain-making function, humans take part in a primitive process that impedes rationality and causes some individuals to be treated with "unrealistic severity." I would argue that we are taught to accept the unrealistic severity of labelling and ostracizing individuals in our daily lives because it is familiarized and

made comfortable to us through the one-dimensional villains depicted in literature and popular culture. As a sociologist, Klapp is primarily concerned with the way labeling functions in society and the ways we label humans who, by the very nature of being human, are much more complex than the labels that we force onto them. The same can also be said for the literary villain or icon of popular culture. These labels, which were provided by subjects of the study—a sample of adult groups who were mainly college students—demonstrate that social and political events and thoughts dictate our perceptions of particular roles of villainy. Such labels identify those behaviors of which a society does not approve and also function as a deterrent for those roles. Often, literary villains may be classified in the same way, an argument that I will be demonstrating in future chapters.

Although Klapp's research is more than fifty years old, its significance is increased, rather than lessened, with advances and differences in technology. As he argued in 1956, the issue of labelling has not gone away as a result of advancements in technology in the media; rather, "mass communications seem to have created new opportunities in this direction, e.g., comic books, televised investigations, psychological warfare, press sensationalism" (Klapp 139). I would agree with Klapp and add to this statement, arguing that villain-making has always been one of the functions of literature and, as long as we represent one-dimensional villains grappling with heroes in simplistic conflicts, labeling will continue to be utilized in this manner. One-dimensional villains are those whom we deem to be inherently evil and to whom we can attribute few if any human qualities. They are marked specifically by their actions rather than their personalities, feelings, or origins. The one-dimensional villain I will examine, the wicked witch, Theodora—demonstrates the various ways the media's representation of villains are informed by social prejudices. This villain also represents how, as Klapp explains, human beings are much

more complex than their labels ; if a villain's label is so restrictive that it renders her one-dimensional, it also robs her of her humanity.

In spite of the support provided by Klapp's argument, it is not enough to solve the issue that there are not enough morally ambiguous villains to combat the negative effects of the one-dimensional villain; rather, Klapp's research has merely identified the nature of the problem. As I move to Chapters 2, 3, and 4, I will be exploring how this problem works specifically in Children's Literature and how we teach these labelling and villain-making functions to children at young ages. Primary support for this argument can be found in an onslaught of one-dimensional villains in both films and novels (regardless of whether or not they are written specifically for children). A brief examination of Disney villains, to whom many children are introduced over and over again, shows that they are force-fed a steady diet of inhuman, inherently evil villains. The issue is the reverse of the issue demonstrated by Klapp's research. His study shows that individuals *absorb* social norms and then, *apply* labels to individuals based on their behaviors in respect to hegemonic society. On the other hand, one-dimensional villains in literature for children *teach* them through labels which behaviors are unacceptable in society so that they can go on to label and police others' behaviors. In future chapters, I will be examining villains who are characters from children's literature, as well as pop culture icons. As a result, I will show that villains are not one-dimensional because they are written for children's books or films but because there are specific functions of one-dimensional villains which filmmakers wish to use in order to teach specific behaviors.

Often, female roles and behaviors are policed in literature for children and adults. For example, the reasons for a female villain's evil behavior, as well as her actions, are often gendered. In my first chapter, I will be exploring the ways that gender norms are policed through

the one-dimensional female villain, resulting in the dangerous promotion of everyday sexism in our society; however, I will also note that such portrayals are strictly *choices* made consciously or unconsciously by authors and filmmakers. A filmmaker's choice to create a morally ambiguous female villain can positively affect society. If the villain is complex, she can be used to identify and address those very behaviors we use to label and prohibit particular qualities. On the other hand stereotypical depictions of femininity remove the human qualities of the character so that we can ostracize her for those characteristics which go against cultural norms. As a result, by distancing ourselves from the "bad" characters, we convince ourselves that we are "good." Works with morally ambiguous villains curb our tendency to do this and make us aware that even villains are more complex than we often assume. On the other hand, if the villain is one-dimensional, the strict policing of gender norms, especially in relation to sexuality and power, is not only enforced but recommended to the audience.

While there is certainly no shortage of such one-dimensional characters, I will be limiting my exploration to one female villain, Theodora, the wicked witch from the film, *Oz the Great and Powerful*. The three witches in this film—Glinda the good witch, and Evanora and Theodora, the wicked witches—symbolize the angel-monster and Madonna-whore dichotomies, a significant issue since they represent limited options for feminine behavior in our society. While the Madonna-whore complex is rampant throughout contemporary and historic media and society, making it fairly common and generally unquestioned, it demonstrates that concepts or depictions that are widely accepted are not necessarily acceptable. From childhood, we are made comfortable with the one-dimensional labels forced onto characters who defy cultural norms; as a result, such depictions become common and we are less likely to question them. For example, we rarely question the limited representation of female roles in society, especially in regard to

moral behavior. The terms “wicked” and “good,” which are often used to identify the characters, clearly demonstrate the divisive binary which offers the choice between a life of deviance and despair, or compliance and complacency (neither of which is all that appealing).

A comparison between Theodora, who is one-dimensional, and Oz, who is allowed the privileges and liberty of moral ambiguity, makes it clear that this is not a stylistic choice but an ideological one. If all characters in this film were one-dimensional, it would merely be a problem of quality. Because they are not and because their moralities are gendered, it is clearly an issue of ideology and misogyny. The issue, however, is not merely that the audience is presented with a double-standard for the moral capacities of men and women. While this is problematic, the misogyny is made all the more effective by the fact that she is one-dimensional. Theodora is not a human being; she is a witch and is therefore othered and separate from all audience members who do not consider themselves to be witches—and presumably, that is likely to be nearly, if not the entire, audience. Because Theodora is a cardboard cut-out who serves as a character foil in order to make Oz a hero, she is necessary only to further the plot. In order to understand the story, we need to focus on Oz’s moral development rather than Theodora’s moral descent into evil. As a result, we are more likely to be distracted by the more interesting moral ambiguity of Oz and are more likely to ignore the blatant sexism being portrayed. Through this film and others, we are habitually taught to ignore the sexism until we no longer notice it, a custom that prevents us from questioning and changing the established order. If, however, Theodora were complex, we *might* be more interested in her and more likely to question Oz and, as a result, *might* develop a habit that would lead us to question other scenarios.

The positive effects of a morally ambiguous villain further prove the dangers of the unquestioned one-dimensionality of other villains. Many academics in media and film studies

explain that morally ambiguous villains are more human and therefore more interesting; as a result, we are more willing to give them our attentions. For example, Lynn Elber explains that it is normal if not beneficial to be fascinated by villains within the safe confines of film. The first sentence of her article, "Oh, How We Dearly Love Those Villains," demonstrates that the morally ambiguity may prevent us from othering an individual: "Call them nasty. Churlish… But call them ours" (Elber). Similarly, Stuart Fischoff, an editor of the *Journal of Media Psychology*, demonstrates great disdain for the simplistic villain, using psychological theory to call attention to the undeniable value of the complex villain. Fischoff reviews the ways in which such villains can be psychologically complex, arguing that this complexity makes the villain more human. Because he is more human and we seek to find ourselves in the films we view, the villain allows for a more interesting story and a safe space for viewers to evaluate those psychological and environmental factors that might break any character. As a result, I would argue, one-dimensional villains like Theodora are othered by their lack of human traits.

In the second chapter, I focus on morally ambiguous villains, highlighting the psychological depth of such characters. Fischoff explains that a memorable, disturbing villain is one who is "drawn from what we all know is real life, the real life of miserable, angry people who have a chance of elevating themselves at the expense of others in a system that is uncaring or too busy to notice" (Fischoff). This particular statement is fascinating because it sets up an exploration of two popular DC villains, the Joker and Two-Face, or Harvey Dent. Given that these characters are portrayed in many different ways across many mediums, I will be specifically examining how they are depicted in Christopher Nolan's film, *The Dark Knight.* I will be supporting some of my claims by referencing patterns in the ways these characters are depicted and calling attention to the differences presented by Nolan's depiction.

In *The Dark Knight*, the Joker and Two-Face show us that villainy is much more complex than we often realize and that almost any character, even the Batman or an ordinary citizen, can become a villain if the conditions are right. The latter is an example of an upstanding, fully functional human being who, after one terrible day, snaps and has a psychological break down, resulting in a plummet into villainy. Dent is the epitome of a miserable, angry person confronted with the harshness of corruption and reality. In addition, the Joker, who creates social experiments in order to evaluate human nature, seeks to show that if human beings have the choice between their prosperity and survival, or sacrifice and principles, they will choose the former, even at the expense of other individuals and society. The Joker's popularity, aside from superb acting, is also a result of our inability to restrict the character to a one-dimensional label, heightening our fascination. Once we know a character is simply "bad," we feel that we have done our work and turn our attentions elsewhere; however, characters like the Joker raise questions not only about themselves but also the systems against which they rebel, leading us to think critically about those systems that are comparable to our own.

Exploring a one-dimensional character and two morally ambiguous characters through various lenses—such as sociological, psychological, and philosophical—will demonstrate the various ways the villain-making function operates in our society. It also demonstrates that not only can authors and filmmakers choose between morally ambiguous and simplistic characters but also that they may choose varying degrees and types of evil. A demonstration of the choices they have puts further weight on the choices they make, especially when they choose to depict a character like Theodora. While it is of utmost importance to demonstrate that these individuals have these choices, it is more significant to evaluate the effects of these choices. Often, the consequences of such depictions are wide spread because, in spite of a number of complex

villains, there are not enough to outnumber the badly-drawn one dimensional villains; as a result, there are not enough to lead us to oppose the direct absorption of hegemonic values rather than introducing critical consideration. Given their young ages and less solidified views of particular individuals or cultural values, it is all the more important that the ambiguous villain becomes more common in children's and YA literature and films. Children's Literature is not a focal point for reversing the dominant usage of the one-dimensional villain because children are naïve, inferior thinkers but rather because they have had less time to absorb cultural values, norms, prejudices, and other stubborn frames of reference. As a result, they may be taught to think critically so that when they encounters prejudice in society and rash judgments, they may evaluate them and may be less likely to echo such troublesome beliefs.

This dominant usage of one-dimensional villains is absorbed by each generation and becomes a habit with which we are comfortable. This habit of denouncing an individual's humanity and focusing on the consequences of his/her actions rather than on the context of those behaviors is an issue which can easily be found in the media. Klapp's argument that we use villain-type labels to scapegoat becomes increasingly relevant as we see media representations of individuals, particularly politicians, becoming more and more polarized. Paulette D. Kilmer's research on the representation of political figures as archetypes demonstrates that our use of one-dimensional villains—often left unchecked as a result of the absence of the complex villain—results in a lack of critical thinking and our compliance in scapegoating behaviors which affect our judgments in political and social matters. Kilmer begins by explaining C.G. Jung's theory that archetypes are deeply embedded patterns in the universal psyche which we use in order to interpret and understand the world around us (Kilmer 1). Kilmer explains that this is an important tool in making sense of events: "no doubt, the internal library of archetypes in [the

public's] brains will connect the momentary news with the timeless body of associations crucial for human beings to understand the world and their place in it" (Kilmer, 4). The problem, Kilmer argues, is not that we use these archetypes to initially understand the world; it is that this first classification is often the end of our evaluation, that these symbols appear and reappear in the news, our literature, and conversations and, as a result of our failure to question them, remain unchecked and invisible without further analysis. As a result, such archetypes are used to form judgments that will influence important decisions made by both individuals and the public as a whole.

The use of these archetypes can be dangerous and may have played a large role in the bipartisan split between Democrats and Republicans, a split reinforced by ideologically motivated media outlets who label particular individuals as villains and others as heroes. I would agree with Kilmer that dualistic thinking is self-validating. The more we feature one-dimensional, archetypal villains in our literature and films, the more likely we are to be entertained by and to support the labeling and ostracizing such characters. The archetypes we use to interpret the world are as flat as the one-dimensional villains in our texts. While they are a starting point, we must expand on these one-dimensional archetypes in order to have a more defined and accurate perception of the world around us.

Clearly, one-dimensional villains are an issue that affects more than the quality of the stories—through literature, films, and popular culture—we hand to children; the problems they present also affect the value of those works and our willingness or unwillingness to respect child readers' abilities enough to trust them to interpret morally ambiguous characters in literature. In a sense, incorporating morally ambiguous villains is very radical because it assumes that the child reader is just as capable of negotiating the hazy lines between right and wrong, an

assumption that directly violates the plague of the constructed Romantic Child. It is also radical in the sense that, by assuming this, it gives children the power to define right and wrong for themselves. While to some—especially those who want to vehemently police the ideologies their children will follow—this is dangerous, it is dangerous and unethical to do anything but allow children to read such works. If, judging from school curriculums, education is partially about teaching children to be citizens, we must, if we want a productive society with shared responsibility, give them the opportunities to practice to be good citizens, effective in their ability to contribute their own insights rather than those that have been forced upon them.

In order for such literature to exist, we need to identify the issue of the overpowering presence of the one-dimensional villain as compared to the morally ambiguous villain, in literature for children, and create radical works which, rather than forcing propaganda or specific political messages on children, give them the tools to develop their own views. For Jack Zipes, rather than an extremist political or ideological endeavor, "radical" implies the following: "a radical person is someone who endeavors to understand the world by going to the root of a phenomenon, issue, or problem" (Zipes VII-IX). In this sense, a radical writer is someone who uses her work as a means of examining issues she sees in the world around her and a radical reader is someone who, when reading such works, evaluates them in comparison to what he also sees and thinks critically about the problems at hand. As a result, radical literature, for children or others, "wants to explore the essence of phenomena, experiences, actions, and social relations and seeks to enable young people to grasp the basic conditions in which they live" (Zipes VII-IX). Part of those basic conditions includes the stereotypes and labels we use to unify and divide particular groups and individuals in American society. Ideally, we want villains and conflicts in literature to lead children to question the events that create a separation among an individual, the

villain, and the group. If these questions are initiated, children can begin to understand the conditions of society and the behaviors which cause those conditions; as a result, children will be better equipped to question those conditions. In doing so, they can begin to understand the behaviors which precede those conditions and then consider adjusting behaviors which might alter the negative conditions in their social and political environments as current and future citizens.

Chapter II—Oz: the Great and Impotent (and the Witches We Love to Hate)

In terms of female villains, the witch is one of the most visible and problematic monsters. She has quite a lineage which includes the incredibly popular and grotesque wicked witches from *The Wizard of Oz*. The wicked witches are symbolic of the angel-monster dichotomy that represents women in patriarchal society, a dichotomy closely connected to the Madonna-whore complex which is often influential in the characterization of the female villain. Often, the presence of the "whore" or "witch" stereotype results in a one-dimensional villain. Given the constant and enduring battle over our perceptions and definitions of what it means to female, such one-dimensional depictions are significant; they both reflect the culture/ideologies in which the filmmakers are immersed or indoctrinated and, by representing women in such ways, perpetuate those beliefs as young viewers absorb them, ensuring their presence in society until they are questioned or amended by the majority.

By evaluating the presence of the Madonna-Whore complex in current films, we can evaluate not only how women are portrayed in the films but also how this may result in regressive or progressive views within American culture, helping us to determine if the danger/villain is truly the witch or the film as it perpetuates dangerous and destructive ideologies. This binary has once again, and to no surprise, resurfaced in *Oz: the Great and Powerful*.

Disney's *Oz: The Great and Powerful* debuted in 2013 as the prequel to the highly revered and coveted *Wizard of Oz* (produced in 1939). An evaluation of the contemporary film will not be possible without an understanding of its predecessor. L. Frank Baum, author of the children's books upon which the latter was based, was a man of the Great Depression era as well a feminist. As a result, many critics have pointed out that, despite the fact that he claimed he was

not writing with a political agenda, much of his writing offers key insights into the social and political cultures in which he lived. Many critics argue that Dorothy is a feminist heroine while others claim that she is repressed by a patriarchal society. Complex and ambiguous in a variety of ways, the novels as well as the 1939 film have created a lot of debate.

Dorothy and her red shoes are more than iconic images. They also are a focal point of literary analysis of the original works and film. Linda Rohrer Paige, author of "Wearing the Red Shoes: Dorothy and the Power of the Female Imagination in *The Wizard of Oz*," proposes a new reading of the film's symbols that is at odds with the messages MGM originally intended for its audience. She writes, "The screen adaptation returns to the original text; importantly, however, the silver shoes of Baum's classic are repainted a bright ruby red. Crucial to our understanding of Dorothy and her insistence on returning home are those slippers" (Paige 147). Aside from the ability to make the shoes a vibrant color, what other reasons would the filmmakers have for making this change and what does it say about their interpretation of the text? Paige's reading of Dorothy is as an archetype seeking self-realization as a woman in a patriarchy and, as a result, the red shoes are "a sign of the female imagination—capable of signaling life (imagination) or death (repressed imagination) for those who walk in them" (Paige 147). For Dorothy, a young woman who has stepped into the fantasy world of Oz, these shoes signal life and imagination. Of course, they must then signal death or the repressed imagination for the Wicked Witch of the East from whom Dorothy inherits the shoes. Paige's insight is valuable in making note of the fact that Fleming, director of the film, allows for two different types of women to have different fates illustrated by the same symbol.

Further, a kinship or association is established between the two because Dorothy, a character who is human and capable of both good and bad, is tied to rather than strictly separated

from the witches of the film. Strictly separating Dorothy from evil would be to restrict her to the other extreme of the spectrum of morality often given women, the spectrum explored in *Oz*. Simply by association, Dorothy is allowed more moral complexity. It should be noted that, in this case, the silver shoes Baum depicts in his work also establish a connection between the characters because, on these particular grounds, it is the object and not the color that allows us to associate Dorothy to the witches. While, as we will find, the red color is important to this analysis, the power of the shoes—in the book or the film—establishes this relationship as well. Just as the shoes give the witch power, the shoes give Dorothy the power of choice—to go home or not—and this is a very powerful choice given the time period in which the work was written. Dorothy is not required to return home but does so of her own accord.

Dorothy and the witches share another kinship, that of womanhood and daughters of Eve. The ruby slippers are physical symbols of this relationship. Paige writes, "More than any other image associated with women in literature and film, the ruby slippers represent woman's 'inheritance' from members of her own sex" (Paige 147). Dorothy inherits these shoes after the Wicked Witch of the East is flattened by the house. Considering the shoes pass from woman to woman, this inheritance is "exclusively woman's symbol" (Paige 147). Because they are red, they could be compared to the apple, most often used to symbolize Eve's forbidden fruit, or lust, also often associated with the color red. They could also be empowering since, with their ability, Dorothy can decide for herself when to use them to go home. True feminism, rather than stereotypical feminism, respects a woman's right to choose between the home or the workplace, etc. True empowerment, regardless of the choice made, is actually being able to make the initial decision. Dorothy, as inheritor of the shoes, is a daughter of Eve and therefore must inherit original sin. Theodora, the first to encounter the promiscuous and unprincipled "wizard" in *Oz*, is

a daughter of Eve as well; however, her status as a witch and, ultimately, a villain, attributes more negative connotations to her relationship with Eve. In his adaptation, Fleming allowed Dorothy a bit more moral ambiguity. A lot of this ambiguity is created by her conflicting desires to leave home, pursue adventure, and to return home to those she loves. While Dorothy is ambiguous, we are connected to that ambiguity through some of the traits that make her a good character. For example, Dorothy is a very compassionate and empathetic person (something which we see primarily through her choice of friends); also, she loves her dog, Toto, and is willing to sacrifice her own happiness and leave home in order to protect him. Empathy and love are traits we often attribute to the qualities of being human. These traits also forge positive connections between characters and prevent the social isolation we see so often in the cases of one-dimensional villains. In spite of this very effective character—with whom audiences can identify due to her traits and desires—some contemporary films have regressed, giving Dorothy's sister (as a fellow daughter of Eve), Theodora, limited choices.

Paige is not reluctant to point out both the feminist and patriarchal elements in the 1939 film, not only adding to her credibility but also preventing readers from assuming that Dorothy is a radical feminist heroine *or* a slave to patriarchy. Neither would be a true or realistic depiction of womanhood and would be of little to no value to viewers. A Dorothy who, like a woman of the 30s, functions as a strong female character in patriarchal society, is more complex and also sets the bar higher for the characters of the 2013 prequel. In the following quote, Paige explains that Dorothy becomes a feminist the moment she disturbs the patriarchal order by imagining a life for herself other than the one imposed upon her. She is the most ambiguous character, whether in the novel or in the film, because she looks like the ideal female—youthful, beautiful, and innocent—but thinks like the active female in her desires for a more active, interesting life:

> Symbolically, Dorothy, who dreams of lands beyond the rainbow… inadvertently divulges that hers is a rebellious spirit. In her desire for adventure—to soar beyond the ordinary and the mundane—and in her attempt to escape the boring, drab, and painful existence of home, this normal, Kansas farm girl threatens the patriarchal order… Dorothy's nature is truly dichotomous: on one level, she appears almost angelic in her innocence, beauty, and willingness to sacrifice for others; yet, on the other hand, she appears self-assertive, determined, desirous of experience. She has a marvelous imagination—if she chooses to use it. Not just a dreamer, Dorothy is willing to act—which makes her somehow 'monstrous.' In her desire to leave home, to soar beyond the ordinary and mundane, Dorothy becomes a potential rebel to patriarchy. Patriarchy would wish women to be content with staying at home, happy with their lot. (Paige 150)

It would be unrealistic for the director, Fleming, even in a fantasy world like Oz, to depict a rebellious female in a world in which she is unrestricted. While it might seem oddly liberating in theatres, it would have little connection to the culture for which it was produced. Rather, Fleming shows a rebellious spirit in conflict with patriarchal society which, in the 30s as well as in the present, is far more realistic. It is also more effective because it shows that all women—even those who appear to be the innocent, youthful females whose choices and behaviors are influenced by patriarchal society—can want more than the roles expected of them.

Dorothy also challenges the established order by being complex; she demonstrates that, in order to exist within patriarchy, a woman does not have to be one thing or the other. Rather—instead of being stifled by patriarchy—she can recognize those feelings and desires that may not be considered acceptable for a woman of her role (e.g. anger, the desire to leave home, the desire to return home, frustration with an incapable male with fraudulent powers). Dorothy is a bit more complex; a human being, she can be both evil and good. By being evil *and* good—or just a bit of both—she breaks patriarchal depictions of women by showing that they are unrealistic portrayals of human beings. She is given access to a whole range of human emotions including, happiness, anger, doubt, resentment, pain, frustration, and courage. This is because Dorothy, unlike *Oz*'s witches, is neither in the gutter nor on a pedestal and is not chained to either negative or positive expressions of emotion as are Theodora and Glinda; therefore, she is an empowered female figure not merely because she yearns for a life outside of her own circumscribed role but because those who have created the character have not limited her to a minimal range of emotions. As I will discuss, Dorothy's range of emotions is divided into three parts, one for each of the three witches in *Oz*.

Dorothy's kinship with the witches also extends beyond the ruby red slippers. "Like Dorothy, the 'bad' witches of *The Wizard of Oz* share a common bond of rebellion, a kind of subversive sisterhood. Self-absorbed, self-centered, and powerful, the witches subvert societal order" (Paige 150). The wicked witches in *Wizard of Oz* are still depicted negatively and are less complex than Dorothy; however, by being associated with a more complex being based on mutual subversive desires, the witches are slightly more accessible because the main character is their link to the audience. This link does not make them any less intimidating but they are not alienated quite as much as they are in *Oz the Great and Powerful*, especially when Theodora

turns wicked as well. Theodora will become the wicked witch of the west but when we first meet her, she is a vampy, presumably innocent female and the first to welcome Oz to the land of Oz—a land, notably, which is his before he has even come to it. This is all the more notable because Oz is not destined to lead this land through any sort of power or ability; rather, we are first introduced to him as an incompetent, fraudulent magician who has seduced the women he plants in his audience to convince people that his tricks work.

While attempting to escape a very burly, animalistic man who is angry because he finds out that Oz has slept with his significant other, Oz is carried away in a hot air balloon. After enduring an awful storm, he crashes into Oz and meets Theodora at his landing. Theodora instantly admires Oscar/Oz—who goes by the name of Oscar throughout the first half of the film—because she believes he is a powerful magician who has come to save Oz from a wicked witch. Her assumptions are aided by a pre-existing prophecy and Evanora's claims that the wicked witch whom Oz must destroy is Glinda. After doing a cheap magic trick to produce flowers for Theodora—notably an act intended to manipulate a woman the protagonist finds attractive— Theodora comes to the assumption that Oscar is Oz of the prophecy: "I knew it! Oh, the King's prophecy was true! He said that a great wizard bearing the name of our land would descend from the heavens and save us all, and here you are. Here to claim your throne… you will be our king" (*Oz the Great and Powerful*). When Theodora meets Oz, she makes this assumption clear; she also gives herself a reason for admiring Oz, a man she thinks will save her and her sister from the nasty plight of a wicked witch.

He spends the evening with Theodora and comes to find the next day that he took her virginity. The two travel the Yellow Brick Road to the Emerald City where he will take what, supposedly, is rightfully his. Once there, he gives in to the sexual provocations of Theodora's

sister, Evanora, who we come to find is really the evil witch and has fabricated a lie about her sister, Glinda, in order to take control of Oz. It should be noted that Evanora is the most active of the female characters and the only one who wants any sort of power; naturally—as a *woman* pursuing political power—she would be depicted as the only purely evil character. When Oz goes to kill Glinda, as the prophecy foretells that he will, he fails and instead tries to seduce her. Meanwhile, Evanora shows the scene to Theodora and explains that Oz will marry Glinda instead because, after all, Theodora cannot compete with her charms. Heartbroken by Oz who, she finds out, does not want her, Theodora is lured by her sister into taking a bite of a magical apple:

> Evanora: One bite is all it takes. One bite, and your world will change forever. One bite, and your heart will become impenetrable. One bite, and you and I will finally share the throne. Unless you'd rather see Oz and Glinda there.
>
> [Theodora quickly grabs the apple from Evanora's hand and takes a bite. As she eats the apple, she feels the atmosphere in the room change and looks at Evanora.]
>
> Theodora: You're the wicked one! Not Glinda…Sister, you lied to me.
>
> Evanora: It's nice, isn't it? How clear everything becomes.
>
> [Theodora keels over in pain, she rises and stumbles across the room.]
>
> Theodora: What is happening to me?

Evanora: It's just your heart withering away. Fear not, Theodora. Soon you will feel nothing at all, except beautiful wickedness.

[Theodora screams in pain again and stumbles around, finally falling to the ground behind a large table.]

Evanora: Sister?

[Suddenly, a green hand with long nails comes up from behind the table and scratches the top of the table with her nails. Then we see a large silhouette rising.]

Evanora: Oh, sister, you're hideous. I can cast a simple enchantment and have you looking just the way you were before.

Theodora: No! This is who I am now! I want him to see me like this. I want him to know that he was the one who made me this way!

[Theodora grabs a black brimmed hat and laughs maniacally]

Evanora: Oh, dear. (*Oz the Great and Powerful)*

While Evanora convinces Theodora that this apple will cure her heartbreak, it turns Theodora into a hideous, green, dragon-like monster with uncontrollable rage. At this point, all of Theodora's ties to human beings—with the exception of her sister who we tend to think of as an evil witch—are severed and she becomes the film's primary villain.

It should be noted that while Theodora becomes the film's primarily villain, she is not inherently evil because we see her at a time when she is naïve and neutral in the power struggle between Evanora and Glinda. We know this because when Theodora is confronted by her inherently evil sister—who, notably, accuses her of being wicked—Theodora explains what she

really wants: “I am on no one's side. You know that. I simply want peace. That's all I ever wanted and the wizard can do that. He's a good man” (*Oz the Great and Powerful*). When Evanora says that Theodora knows nothing of peace because she is wicked deep down, two problems emerge. First of all, if Theodora is good up to the point of her transformation into a monstrous witch, we know that she is not innately evil; however, because her form changes and her heart withers away, she changes states from human to nonhuman and, at that point, is inherently evil. This transformation shows that she at one point did have a heart and therefore was not always purely evil. If Raimi had continued in another direction, it would have been possible for him to create some sort of ambiguity; however, this restrictive change— in which Theodora is both internally and externally altered— makes her a one-dimensional villain and conveys the idea that there is something emotionally and fundamentally different between women like Glinda and women like Theodora who challenge social order.

There are also other key differences between the wicked witches and Glinda, the good witch. We find that rather than the status of witch, it is a witch’s relationships to others that indicate her moral and social states. Both Theodora and her evil sister, Evanora, are completely isolated without any sort of human contact or relationships. This implies that they are sub-human or something removed from the human condition. Of course they have guards but this is a power relationship in which one *group* controls the other; it is hierarchical but far from personal. We know little of the relationship between the sisters in *Wizard of Oz* but we do know that one sister is attempting to avenge the death of the other. If it was not for being jilted by Oz, Theodora would not have so easily sided with her sister and, from the manipulation which takes place in the film, we know that Evanora’s concerns are for anything but her sister’s happiness or wellbeing. Because these sisters cannot even share a true bond with one another—as

demonstrated by the lack of trust between the two of them—we see that they are not capable of any personal or emotional connection, further alienating them and making us less likely to sympathize with them. Of course, Theodora is capable of personal relationships *before* becoming a monster but this is also before she becomes sexually active and is labeled as the Eve/whore.

In spite of the fact that Oz has wronged Theodora, director, Raimi, and his team portray Theodora in such a way that we instinctively side against her as soon as she is identified as the antagonist; this moment occurs when she tries to attack the people, Glinda, and Oz in the safety of Munchinland, breaking a boundary that magic is supposed to protect. When we first see her this way, her cruel behavior—directed to innocent bystanders and Oz—as well as her remarkably different appearance, permanently severs the audience's empathetic relationship with the character:

> Theodora: Don't you recognize me, Wizard… have I changed so much?
>
> Oz: Theodora?
>
> Theodora: May I have this dance?
>
> [She bows her head mockingly then uses her powers to move Oz like a puppet and float him above the ground. Oz screams out in terror. Theodora makes him dance as he floats in the air.]
>
> Oz: I get it! You're a little upset!
>
> Glinda: Theodora, stop. You're hurting him….
>
> Oz: Theodora, what happened to you?
>
> Theodora: You happened to me!

> [Theodora produces a fireball in her hand, but Glinda quickly extinguishes the fire using her wand.]
>
> Glinda: This isn't you, it's your sister. She's worked her magic on you. I'd hoped you'd be able to see through her.
>
> Theodora: Oh, Glinda. So naive, just like your father. That's why it was so easy for my sister to kill him.
>
> Glinda: She only killed a man, not what he believed in…
>
> Theodora: And as for you, my pretty one. When I return with my sister and her army, the Yellow Brick Road will be red with the blood of every Tinker, farmer and Munchkin in your kingdom. (*Oz the Great and Powerful*)

This act makes the moment all the more shocking and is heightened when, for the first time, the people see her as a purely green, rigid beast. While she still retains the physical shape of a human being, her makeup makes her skin look incredibly abnormal. Her aggressive behaviors and off-putting appearance—especially in a world where the women we see are beautiful—lead us to see the villain as the other. Of course her beastly claws, which make her look even less human, do little to help us.

In this scene, the people of Oz immediately take Oz's side, telling Theodora to get lost before Oz makes "mush" out of her. Given that humans are social creatures, we are likely to be swayed by the majority in the film, especially if we do not take the time to critically think about the conflict. This scene is the most pivotal because it persuades the audience to accept Theodora as a one-dimensional villain and to label her as such. Once the audience sides with Oz, it becomes an us-versus-them, hero and observers/audience-versus-villain conflict. Our emotions

are drawn in, stunting any sort of contemplation or potential for ambiguity or critical thought about the society and its inhabitants. It is essential to note that, by making the villain so physically and emotionally inhuman, we are less likely to consider her feelings or any injustices against her. Because of this, we are more likely to accept the film's social order, the male hero's actions and her role as villain without identifying with her feelings or motivations. For example, when we side with the male protagonist, we are more likely to overlook the moments in which he dismisses the villain's feelings, making it that much easier for us to do the same. Oz responds to Theodora's rage, saying "I get it! You're a little upset" (*Oz the Great and Powerful*). In doing so, he is belittling her feelings and placing emphasis on Theodora's response to his actions rather than the actions themselves, making her anger seem all the more out of place and dangerous. Our inability to identify with Theodora and our fear of her makes us fear and instantly regret her power. We label her and, as a result of her new status as wicked, are distracted by her actions so that we do not shift our attention to the more worthy issue of Oz's actions. The danger is that this behavior carries over into our society. For example, we have more derogatory labels for the female who engages in sexual behavior than her male partner; as a result, our negative focus on the female's dangerous promiscuity (e.g. Theodora's interactions with Oz that inevitably lead to her bitter downfall) lead us to vilify and police the female and leave the male unrestricted.

Given that it is a contemporary film, there is no excuse for this one-dimensional and judgmental portrayal of feminine power and sexuality; however, if *Wizard of Oz* lacked complexity, perhaps we would be able to see it as an influence for Raimi's choices. It is quite an issue when a film made in 1939, even if based on a work written by Baum, is leaps and bounds ahead of a film made in 2013 in its depictions of women. The former—due to the connection established between Dorothy and the witches as well as having a potential rebel and feminist for

a hero—is progressive, whereas the latter is incredibly regressive. The filmmakers, however, whether consciously or unconsciously, took a complex work and made it into a one-dimensional, flat conflict that reinforces gender stereotyping. Is *Oz* the only case in which this has happened? Did the filmmakers miss the women's rights movement or are sexism and misogyny still the white elephants in American culture? Both the feminist movement and psychological studies provide evidence that, while this is an extreme and limited depiction, it is not radically different from other contemporary films (e.g. Disney's *Little Mermaid*, where beautiful, young, innocent Ariel is seduced by the magic of the evil sea witch, Ursula, who wants to gain power over King Triton).

Misogyny is still present in American society; these depictions may even go unnoticed by a majority of viewers because misogyny is accepted and because biological impulses still guarantee its presence (these biological impulses and their role in perpetuating misogyny will be explained later in the chapter). Such a presence, however, does not excuse the fact that Raimi promotes it or that we unconsciously accept such depictions. Rather, these depictions of characters like Evanora and Theodora as one-dimensional villains, along with the distractions employed to shift blame from Oz to the wicked witches, fail to initiate the questions that would develop critical thinking skills. Evanora and Theodora each want one thing. Evanora desires power and is willing to employ any means to get it. Theodora wants revenge and is willing to hurt anybody who stands in her path to Oz. Humans, their desires, and their interactions with one another are very complicated; however, Evanora and Theodora—after turning green—lack this complexity. We do not see them struggle with moral reservations and, because of this, they are one-dimensional. Evanora, for example, only exhibits negative traits, behaviors, desires, and relationships with others; if she exhibited *any* positive traits, we would need to use critical

thinking to reconcile her negative qualities with her positive ones, forcing us to think more about her motivations and whether they are not, in some ways, understandable. A film's lack of characters or conflicts which require readers to employ critical thinking skills to understand them is the greatest failure of all; it not only teaches young viewers of this family film to accept such depictions; it also fails to challenge them to think critically so that they will be able to form more educated and rational opinions when they encounter such depictions in the media and reality.

In spite of the obviousness of the misogyny in this film, some might be afraid that others will claim that they are nitpicking or being overly sensitive by pointing out these examples; however, there is a lot of evidence that one would have to ignore in the desire to avoid controversy. Theodora, for example, goes straight from innocence to evil. She is at one moment the innocent, naïve character who is seduced by the powers and lies of both Oz and Evanora and, after being convinced of Evanora's lie, instantly transforms into a monster. While Evanora is directly responsible for the chemical process that makes Theodora wicked, Oz is responsible to the manipulation and heartbreak that led to Theodora's desperation for her sister's help. This immediate transformation implies that there are only two moral states for women and that women are in some ways dangerous due to their abilities to transform into evil witches so quickly. Also, many women in the film are very naïve, making it easy for Oscar/Oz to seduce them—the change from "Oscar" to "Oz" does not signify a moral change; rather, Oscar's stage name in Kansas is Oz and he gradually begins to go solely by Oz upon entering the land of Oz. Women in both worlds are wooed by feminine, material objects—such as music boxes—which Oscar/Oz uses to establish an emotional connection that will help him to seduce them. Sometimes this naiveté is connected to a lack of intelligence. One of his beautiful, female assistants, May, is so unintelligent that she forgets her job and causes embarrassment to Oscar

during his show; when he calls out the cue for her to raise her hand in the audience to volunteer for a trick, she is so entranced and convinced by the magic—although she has been hired because it is fake—that she forgets to play her part. Regardless of whether they are morally "good" or "bad" characters, the film provides negative portrayals of femininity that contribute to female stereotypes—e.g. the "dumb blonde," the "bitch," the "psycho ex-girlfriend."

Although these stereotypes are so embarrassingly apparent in the film, not all viewers notice them. Others, who may notice them, may argue that it is "just a movie" and ignore what they do see. These stereotypes are methods of boundary policing and one of the reasons feminism has been described as "militant" and "man-hating." Jackie Stallcup, in her article "Feast of Misrule," explains that one of the primary means of boundary policing is disgust. If something provokes disgust or disapproval by the majority, the minority is less likely to digress from the norm, reinforcing the already established boundary. This is of course the response to feminism by a patriarchal society that both rejects feminism and makes it socially risky for feminists, especially women, to express disgust in response to films like *Oz* and its implications that women must choose between two restrictive moral states. We learn this lesson primarily from the case of Theodora who—in her despair and, later, disgust—is turned into a villain and is separated from the good people of Oz.

In spite of her wicked nature, Oz offers her redemption at the end of the film, saying, "Theodora, I know your wickedness is not your doing! And should you ever find the goodness within you, you are welcome to return" (*Oz: the Great and Powerful*). While we initially may have pitied Theodora because of her heartbreak and blamed Evanora's trickery for her initial heartlessness, we see that Theodora does not agency when she refuses Oz's offer of redemption because she has finally made her own choice to live a life of villainy in opposition to the life of

good led by the people of Oz. At this point, it has become a choice rather than a reaction to mere pain, removing the final traces of the wicked witch's humanity and creating an even wider boundary between the villain and the audience. Because the once good Theodora becomes more evil than Evanora—a fact made visible by her sharp claws, monstrously green skin, and power greater than even that of her wicked sister who tempted her into evil—we see that even the good can become the villain and that villainy results in defeat and ostracism. The demonstration of ostracism in *Oz* makes it seem all the more possible in our society, resulting in the fear of being ostracized. Just as the Grimms used depictions of bodily punishment in fairy tales to persuade children to adopt particular moral behaviors, we use one-dimensional female villains and their isolation as examples to deter females from adopting such behaviors and to convince males (and other females) to avoid such individuals. Seeing cases such as Theodora's reinforces the boundaries of which Stallcup writes.

Furthermore, we learn that a female's pain and bitterness as a result of being jilted can turn her into a psychotic, dangerous monster whose actions are an inappropriate response to the socially accepted behaviors of the male (anyone with any doubt of this can take a glance at widespread public opinion of Taylor Swift). Females in our patriarchal society are considered incapable of controlling their emotions and, therefore, dangerous when they become powerful (and Theodora is the perfect example of this). The fact that Theodora is not innately evil is all the more powerful because we, as viewers who think of ourselves as primarily benevolent, are more able to conceptualize our own downfall if we do not regulate our anger. It is not this moral downfall, however, that scares us; it is that, as Theodora's case teaches us, we will be isolated and defeated as a result of our villainy and that, if we give in to our rage, there will be no other way out. Rather, we should learn from the example of Glinda the good, a name which makes the

ideological purpose of the character all too evident, and become emotionally reserved. If we do not, we learn that we may reach the same terrible fate of the wicked witch who is cast out from her home. Therefore, we begin to fear ourselves and our destructive potential; because this is a truth all too frightening, we rid ourselves of our fear by projecting our desires and disgust onto the villain. Such disgust makes us want to rid ourselves of any association with the one-dimensional wicked witch and those forbidden parts of ourselves, preventing us from wanting to think further about the film's/society's misogyny or question it; such choices not only reinforce the boundary but protect it.

Evidently, this boundary policing exists both for the viewers and the characters within the film. Ellen Willis, author of "Villains and victims: 'Sexual correctness' and the repression of feminism," explains that such boundary policing in our culture has social and political repercussions. She explores society's distortion of feminism, explaining that feminism can be tolerated if it is angry or personal but not if it is lustful or political. Willis explains that the anti-feminist reaction has been incredibly successful in stifling feminists' attempts to communicate these issues; "there is at present no socially legitimate public language in which women… can directly and explicitly express anger at the 'mundane kinds of sexism,' or what I've called the sexism of everyday life… men's ubiquitous, culturally sanctioned, 'normal' expressions of dominance" (Willis 70). Many antifeminists might claim that calling out the sexism of the film is nitpicking because the sexism of the film is not the type of sexism or violence (e.g. rape or sexual harassment) society recognizes; rather, it is the sexism of "everyday life." Yet, as we see from Theodora's culture, this sexism of everyday life contributes to our ignorance and acceptance of greater violence and injustices towards women. The film begins with everyday sexism carried out by Oz—e.g. seduction, use of women as sexual objects, and preying on

women's stereotypical emotional reasoning—and, eventually, such sexism makes us more numb to and accepting of Theodora's awful end.

In spite of the fact that she chooses to refuse redemption, Oz has created a society which gives her no other choice; Theodora is primarily driven by the anger she feels because of Oz's wrongdoing. Given the language that he uses, he shifts blame to Evanora, saying that he knows Theodora's blame is not her doing. Because Oz has never admitted any wrongdoing, accepting redemption from him would mean to be chained by the social conventions of patriarchal society and to overlook Oz's actions. By refusing redemption, Theodora is doing the bravest thing by refusing to live in a society that requires repentance of the woman and none from the man. Oz must simply change his behavior and all is forgotten; society, however, requires Theodora to apologize for her actions in response to those of Oz and to grant him the control of allowing her to return to his society. She must, like Glinda, accept the sexism or rebel; however, rebellion results in ostracism. Because of this threat and because we see Glinda accept Oz's patriarchal role, we learn to accept the everyday sexism and be disgusted by those who, as Willis explains, have no acceptable means of changing the conditions of their society.

On the other hand, we learn that men, like Oz, have a wider array of choices. Men in our society, like Oz, are allowed ambiguity and sex with a number of women without being plagued with the labels forced upon their female partners (e.g., "whore," "slut," and "skank"). Oz is permitted to follow his desires rather than, as Glinda and good women do, police them. When Oz is finally ready to be moral— according to the definition of Glinda, who, notably, is accepting of patriarchal rules and power—he is considered deserving of the beautiful, good virgin; he does not harbor a second thought or regret for any of those women of whom he has taken advantage. Yet, women like Theodora, after naively having sex with a man they think they will stay with

them, are vilified and, like Oz, the audience is unlikely to take a second look at the character. Granted, she makes a decision to bite the apple because Evanora convinces her that it will remedy her heartbreak; however, this could also be seen as the stereotypical bitter ex-girlfriend. In these cases, a stereotypical, bitter ex-girlfriend poses a danger to the man after he has made it clear to her that he is no longer interested. She becomes clingy and dependent on his presence. Driven by rage, rejection, and longing for the man, the psychotic ex-girlfriend cannot accept that their relationship has ended. She stalks him—following him to Munchkinland, for instance—begs him to return to her, and, inevitably, becomes a physical danger to the man and any women of his interest. Regardless of what the man has done, this ex-girlfriend becomes both a spectacle and the guilty party. In this way, all blame is shifted from Oz to Theodora. Once she has sex with Oz, Theodora is a villain, like a woman who becomes a "slut" when she has premarital sex. Men like Oz, however, have no negative title for similar behaviors. Because this is everyday sexism, it is unlikely to ruffle the feathers of most viewers; they are socially conditioned to not only accept but ignore it. There is, however, something to be said for the fact that Theodora does not instantly become a witch after having sex with Oz and this might be seen as an improvement in American culture's response to women having premarital sex; rather than being corrupted, Theodora seems to retain her naiveté. On the other hand, Theodora is also more emotionally invested in Oscar after having sex with him and, in a way, is blinded by his reactions to what she has to say (almost as if she has become a silly, lovesick girl). It is this sexual act and the rejection that follows that eventually results in her becoming a wicked witch. Because of this, any progression exhibited by the premarital sex the film portrays is lost because it depicts the dangers of premarital sex. Men are cautioned to avoid it because they may have to deal with all of the drama the women will then bring into the relationship whereas women are cautioned to avoid the

expectation of romantic attachments in sexual relationships. Furthermore, frustrations regarding these stereotypical depictions are dismissed as the difference between male and female perceptions of sex. Willis explains, "they are presented as neutral cultural differences that hinder communication between the sexes—not as strategies, however, reflexive or unconscious, for preserving male power" (Willis 70).

Focus on sexual violence rather than sexism is what allows Oz and his real-life counterparts to fly under the radar. If this was about sexual violence, it would not be rated for children. Because it is about sexism, which is not culturally taboo but rather socially cultivated, it is acceptable. The stakes in creating such a film and allowing children to see it are much higher when a one-dimensional villain is the target of such disgust. A brief gaze at any Facebook conversation in response to a woman's ill-fate after a sexual transgression demonstrates the repercussions of the media's perpetuation of our toleration of everyday sexism. The crimes committed against these labeled characters go unnoticed. Many might use the witches' powers and Oz's lack of magical ability to dismiss concerns of male dominance and/or guilt within the work. This is a valid point; however, a response to that would be that this lack of magic makes Oz more accessible. If he was an infallible, all-powerful god, he would appear to be less human. By being incredibly flawed, we see Oz as an ordinary man. Therefore, his male dominance and actions are less noticeable than if they were exhibited by a character who is more powerful. His flaws and lack of magic make him appear less threatening, so his sexual dominance is less threatening. If Oz were this formidable being and physically threatened Theodora, however, there would be outrage. The exercise of the power in the latter case is fully recognized while the use of power in reasserting social norms is an entirely different case. This is possibly more

dangerous because viewers are less likely to focus on the sexism initiated by an "everyday" man rather than a monster and are more likely to unconsciously accept it.

While Oz's behaviors are misogynistic, they are largely dependent on his views of women. Rather than identifying and breaking misogynistic impulses, Oz sees the women through the Madonna-Whore dichotomy. This dichotomy is one of the most troublesome obstacles for Feminists and is woven into much of patriarchal society because it is propelled by religion, culture, and biological or psychological impulses. Vladmir Tumanov's article "Mary Versus Eve: Paternal Uncertainty and the Christian View of Women," gives a history of the development of the fears which propel the psychological complex, possibly offering an explanation for its presence in *Oz*. For Turmanov, Christianity and other religions have endorsed this form of misogyny. "The Virgin Mary and Eve constitute two opposite sexual poles in the way Christian discourse has approached women since the time of the church fathers" (Turmanov 507). These fears are the result of biological impulses and the need to procreate, "a predicament faced by the human male throughout hominid evolution, namely, paternal uncertainty. Because the male is potentially always at risk of unwittingly raising the offspring of another male, two (often complementary) male sexual strategies have evolved to counter this genetic threat: mate guarding and promiscuity" (Tumanov 507).

These strategies of mate guarding have resulted in the Madonna-whore complex. The Madonna is the mate who is guarded by the male—who demands her fidelity in order to ensure his progeny—and that is why it is important to have the good, wholesome virgin. Who fits this description more than Mary? "The Virgin Mary is the mythological expression of the mate guarding strategy. Mary is an eternal virgin, symbolically allaying all fear of paternal uncertainty. Mary makes it possible for the male psyche to have its reproductive cake and eat it

too: she gives birth (so reproduction takes place) and yet requires no mate guarding effort or jealousy" (Tumanov 507). Annie/Glinda is Oz's Madonna. Annie is the wholesome, country girl who comes to see Oz at the circus. Oz's assistant goes to withdraw one of the many uniform music boxes Oz uses to woo various females under the false pretenses of a romantic attachment. For Annie, however, Oz says not to carry out the charade, primarily because he has put her on a pedestal. He treats all other women in the film as sexual objects, but Annie is an object of affection. The film and sentimentality lead the viewer to believe that Annie is on a pedestal because he loves her and this may very well be true. Yet, Oz seems to be sexually interested in one type of woman (all brunettes) and romantically interested in only one woman (a blonde).

It should be noted that the women negatively depicted in the film—whether they are wicked witches or unintelligent and naïve assistants—are brunettes whereas Annie is a blonde. Interestingly, women's roles in contemporary Madonna-Whore complexes are indicated by hair color. For example, in a current Taylor Swift music video—"You Belong with Me"—both parts are played by Swift; yet, the moral state of each character is indicated by whether Swift is blonde or wearing a brunette wig. The blonde is the intelligent, kind best friend who is deserving of the male character's love, and the brunette is the materialistic, slutty, selfish girlfriend/drama queen. At the end of the film, blonde Swift appears at the prom in a beautiful, white ball gown, and her friend, the male object of affection, ignores the sexual advances of his now ex-girlfriend and brunette—who is notably wearing a fiery red dress that crisscrosses her body and leaves revealing gaps—and dances with the innocent, less sexual, blonde princess. These very strong separations—in both the film and the music video—could be motivated by more than just love, which is particularly interesting because Freud says men who have this issue have had some hindrance in their sexual development. Granted, hair color may not be the reason Oz treats the

women as he does; however, these similarities and the ways we represent these stereotypes in literature are very interesting. They seem to be visual cues so that the reader, rather than Oz, picks up on these roles and labels the characters without really needing to think about it. By doing this, we make it easier for ourselves to dismiss the ways that Oz treats these characters because we see him as abandoning a stereotype rather than a human with emotions.

Freud calls the Madonna-Whore complex "psychical impotence," or "sexual dysfunction caused by an inhibition due to an unresolved neurotic fixation leading to an arrest of the libidinal development. The result is a splitting of the tender and the sensual dimension of sexuality, most notably in the so-called Madonna-whore complex" (Hartmann 2332). This sexual dysfunction and the need to split attraction from affection create the binary/complex which has led to the creation of various female villain-types. One of the side effects of this impotence is that the individual cannot reconcile his sexual desires with the virgin on the pedestal, forcing him to act out these desires elsewhere. Yet this, for Freud, is not merely sexual. The remedy is not quite as simple as having Oz fall in love with those women with whom he has sex. As Freud explains, "This is not only specific to the sexual act (before or after the attempt the man may be fully functional), but this failure may also happen only with certain women. Consequently, this inhibition seems to be due to some quality in the sexual partner…. In Freud's view, psychical impotence is essentially a disturbance of the capability for love" (Hartmann 2335). Freud argues that this is an issue all individuals face and those who are able to be both sexually and romantically interested in a woman have come to term with these issues. Oz, for reasons unknown, has developed this disorder and it is the reason he is promiscuous yet never seems to form a romantic attachment; he is searching for something he will not find because any physical

encounter with a woman serves only as a band-aid for his psychological issues regarding sexual activity.

> Freud pointed out that, in order to be fully capable of love, 'two currents have to unite,' which he describes as the 'tender' and the 'sensual' current. In the ideal development, the adult man still chooses his partners… after the pattern of the infantile ones, but confronted with the obstacle of the incest barrier that has in the meantime been erected, tries to shift his feelings to partners with whom a satisfying sexual life can be realized. Subsequently, he can attach his tender feelings to the new object, thus enabling a unity of tenderness and sensuality… two factors can obstruct this success: (i) the degree of frustration encountered in reality with the new object choice, and (ii) the degree of attraction that is still exercised by the infantile objects. If these two factors are sufficiently powerful, an unresolvable intrapsychic conflict emerges, and the general mechanism of neurosis formation will come into operation. (Hartmann 2335)

This "intrapsychic" conflict could possibly explain why Oz has few stable friendships as well. Due to his frustrations, he is unable to have personal relationships. An interesting reading would be to consider the Land of Oz as the protagonist's fantasy or journey into his own psyche so that he can work out some of these issues. This interpretation could be supported by the fact that Oz, unlike many of the characters in the fantasy, experiences psychic growth. Initially, he cannot have a stable relationship with any woman. In reality, he cannot have a relationship with Annie

and gives her his blessing to marry another man, John Gale. It is very clear that Annie and Oscar/Oz have feelings for one another and, calling him Oscar rather than Oz, it is clear that Annie is the only character who knows the man and not the performer. In spite of this, Oz cannot tell her not to marry John Gale and, presumably, this makes her the mother of Dorothy Gale (except we never see her in a film as the mother, making her the ultimate Madonna who has given birth and is no longer around once she has become sexually active). Because of this inability to overcome his ideal image of Annie and his own desires for power and greatness—which derive from the weakness and failure he feels from his career, emotions that undoubtedly also contribute to sexual dysfunction— he must deal with these emotions internally as he interacts with Annie in his fantasy. In this fantasy, Annie, played by the same actress, is transformed into Glinda. While she is much the same—challenging Oz to be the man he can be—the fate of the couple is much different. His relationship with Glinda slowly develops as Oz comes to terms with his own issues, a result of him working through his impotence via the good girl/bad girl binary.

As wholesome as Annie/Glinda is, Oz will never be satisfied with her if she remains as she is in the film's beginning. Theodora, who does not face this disorder, is able to both love and be sexually attracted to Oz, creating a foil between herself and Oz and further demonstrating that it cannot be love that is preventing Oz's relationship with Annie. The protagonist cannot act out his sexual desires with Annie/Glinda because he has placed her off-limits by perceiving her as the Madonna, subconsciously making it taboo for him to pursue her. Because Annie is on the pedestal, is good, and cannot be the subject of his sexual desires, he *needs* Theodora to serve as that subject; however, because he can be attracted to her rather than Glinda, it is evident that he is incapable of being both attracted to and in love with the same woman. Because Theodora

confirms that he is capable of sexual desire towards a woman and Glinda is the ideally pure woman, Theodora is symptomatic of his psychological obstacle and plight, making her also a target of frustration and anger. Both sexually and morally, Theodora is placed into opposition with Glinda and by default, becomes the villain. This case is of course, as Freud has pointed out, not limited to the Land of Oz:

> Above all, the erotic life of these men remains dissociated and divided between the two currents, which brought Freud to the famous formula: 'Where such men love they have no desire and where they desire they cannot love.' In this 'solution' of the developmental conflict, the principal compromise is the degradation of the sexual object: As soon as the sexual object fulfills the condition of being degraded, sensual feeling can have free play, considerable sexual capacity, and a high degree of pleasure can be developed. Here, Freud alludes to the so-called Madonna-whore-complex as the principal form of compromise emerging from this dissociation… sexual arousal is only possible with a sexual partner who has in some way been degraded (the whore) while the adequate and respected partner cannot be fully desired (the Madonna). (Hartmann 2335)

There is no doubt that Freud's formula applies to Oz. The females for whom he has an attraction are degraded in one way or another. For example, the first unnamed brunette with whom he attempts to have sex in the film is depicted as incredibly unintelligent when she is hired to be planted in the audience in order to be called upon to affirm Oz's magical abilities and forgets

during the performance. May also exhibits lust for Oz as she interacts with him. While Theodora is also sexually innocent, her vampy appearance and Oz's beliefs about witches, make it possible for him to overcome his dysfunction without having to degrade her. Both of these individuals have already been degraded and are therefore accessible. On the other hand, Glinda has not yet been degraded and, as a result, Oz cannot act on his attraction. One of the most obvious ways of degrading the object of sexual attraction is by making her inferior, sexual, or evil, a means which has contributed to the development of a number of female villains (e.g. Ursula, Snow White's Stepmother, Regina George of *Mean Girls*, Bellatrix Lestrange, and Cat Woman). If a woman is innately evil or already sexual, the man does no wrong in having sex with her because she cannot be corrupted. While Theodora is not innately evil, she explains that she is a witch, something that has very negative and different connotations in our and Oz's society. Oz asks her where her broom is, demonstrating that he has internalized these beliefs about witches, including their evil nature; as a result, it does not matter that the audience knows that Theodora is innocent and naïve. Because it is Oz's complex, it only matters that he thinks that she is not. On the other hand, there is a danger in corrupting an innately good woman who is a virgin (if she is unmarried). A woman, who is innately evil, like Evanora, is already sexual.

Yet at the film's end Oz is able to kiss Glinda and, presumably, have both a romantic and sexual relationship with her. There are several issues here: First of all, the development of the relationship, like the character development of all of the women, is very flat. The sudden relationship between the two seems as if it was a tie-in to check romance off of the film's list of objectives. It is also very insulting because we know that Oz is promiscuous and, it seems, aside from this complex, not very selective. Yet the good, chaste Glinda is willing, without any doubt or discussion, to enter into a sudden relationship with him (in much the same way as Theodora

did). She does not expect Oz to offer any guarantees that he is no longer promiscuous or restless in relationships and the film implies that—now that Oz has finally decided that he wants Annie/Glinda—there is no need for an explanation. This implies that every man has a right to search through the "whores" until he is ready to accept the Madonna and each woman must choose which label she wants to define her. The danger of this implication is that it gives the male the right to explore his sexuality, vilifies his female counterpart for doing the same, and rewards the chaste female with a somewhat less than honorable male. There is also, notably, the attitude in which much of society sees teenage girls and women who remain virgins as cold, distant, heartless, hideous, or lesbians. If women do not exhibit sexual desires by a certain age, society begins to question them because women are expected to follow a prescribed timeline that determines when they should and should not be having sex.

Oz does not have a realization about this dichotomy or his own perceptions of women. Perhaps he has changed in terms of his decision to help the people of Oz but personal growth is not to be given credit for his later relationship with Glinda, who is not vilified because she never stands in opposition to Oz. He has not overcome this dichotomy because he cannot have a relationship with her *until* he can see her as a sexual object. Glinda, unlike Theodora and Evanora, does not seduce him into "immoral" behavior yet she also fails to create conflict for Oz when he does decide to act out his attraction for her. As a result, Glinda is the perfect female because she is accepting of the social order. Theodora is just the opposite; Oz is tempted by her and, while she offers little resistance sexually, she creates conflict for Oz when, as a result of their sexual interaction, she expects a relationship. This is not what Oz wants and is a great inconvenience to him as she rambles, portrayed as a silly, naïve, girl. Because she is an inconvenience, does not automatically conform to the male-dominated social order and

expectations, and calls attention to Oz's deception, it is she, rather than Oz, who will inevitably be vilified. Therefore, with or without the apple, Theodora must become wicked. The apple is simply a means of distracting us from the real cause of her change into a villain: the need to reinstate the patriarchal social order by ostracizing any who do not conform. Because of this, Oz and society have created the conditions of Theodora's villainy. While she has some agency in choosing to take a bite of the apple, Oz creates the necessity and Evanora creates the means.

The patriarchal domination has been strengthened when Oz becomes ruler of a land that should have been inherited by one of the three daughters and sisters. Yet, primary power must go to a male in the absence of a son. This, like much of the film's misogyny, is blatant yet unspoken. No character ever says that a *man* must rule but, in the absence of a king, the kingdom has been in turmoil, implying that a man must restore balance by taking control. This is why Oz is seen as a savior upon his arrival to Oz; the people are so desperate for a savior from the turmoil created by a wicked female in power that they are willing to accept a fraudulent, weak, unworthy, and questionable man such as Oz. Oz has chosen Glinda for his queen because she is truly his only option. She is the only Madonna figure in the film and, once she is degraded, is the only female character who can entertain him both sexually and romantically. As Freud explained, a man who has the Madonna-whore complex cannot overcome the issue until the Madonna, or his partner, has been sexually degraded. In order for Oz to be aroused by Glinda, she needs to be seen with less respect. Part of this is because he does not see himself as good enough for her. When she asks him whether or not she should marry John Gale, Oz tells Annie that she could do a lot worse and that Gale is a good man. She replies, saying that Oz is also a good man; this implies that, by these standards, Annie could just as easily marry Oz, something that the audience infers that she wants to do. While we can see from the way he looks at her that

Oz loves Annie, he feels that this is not possible because he is not moral enough, making the entire moral quest of the film in part to become moral enough to be with Annie: "No, I'm not. I'm many things, but a good man is not one of them" (*Oz the Great and Powerful*). Oz shows that he does not care about protecting the people of Oz and attempts to bail from his mission multiple times. If, from this, we could infer that he really does change to be worthy of Annie/Glinda, the film might be seen as less misogynistic; however, it is not because instead of becoming a better person, Oz must also tear Annie/Glinda down from the pedestal he has placed her on and degrade her so that he can have sexual attraction for her without feeling guilty.

This is the greatest service the witches do for Oz when they conveniently chain Glinda up on a stage for the crowd to see. She is tied by the wrists to two posts and her head hangs down, evoking both the European and Salem tradition of stockades and a sado-masochistic pose in which she is sexually degraded. Her sisters, rather than Oz, tie Glinda up, removing blame from any masculine character while also serving the sexual needs of a male. This spectacle and the embarrassment in front of her people that it causes, presumably, are enough to remove Glinda from her pedestal for Oz. Yet, conveniently, as a victim of the witches, she has not expressed any sort of sexual desire so she still can be seen, in some respects, as the Madonna which Oz needs in order to love her. Because she can be the ultimate object of love and sexual attraction, she is the ideal woman; therefore, any woman who cannot do so is considered unworthy of our attention, and, as a result, we are less concerned with her fate than that of the ideal female. This is further demonstrated by the fact that Theodora flies off into the abyss while we close the film with Glinda's much less interesting but more acceptable end.

If Glinda is the Madonna, it is evident that Evanora and Theodora, like the witches of *The Wizard of Oz*, are the daughters of Eve, "the inventor of female sexuality [who] is repeatedly

viewed by the church fathers, e.g. Augustine and Origen, as Mary's opposite. Thus, Eve becomes the embodiment of the whore: both attractive in the context of the promiscuity strategy and repulsive in terms of paternal uncertainty" (Tumanov 507). As a daughter of Eve, Theodora is also labeled by association. Like Oz and the women of Oz, there is a double standard working in the Christian church; Augustine of Hippo, who played a role in labeling Eve as Mary's opposite, was not always a good Christian. His father was a pagan and his mother was a Christian; as a result, he struggled between the two influences and left the church in early adolescence. He was promiscuous as a young man and had affairs with a number of women, including one from Carthage whom he left after he decided to convert to Christianity and leave his sinful nature behind (something for which he is praised). This creates an interesting parallel between Oz and Augustine. Like Augustine, Oz has sex with a number of women, including Theodora, and then abandons them. He does not have a second thought for Theodora and there is no explanation for this; furthermore, as an audience, we require no explanation because it is simply accepted. We also require no explanation for why he has suddenly decided to change. Rather than taking orders as Augustine did, Oz has taken the responsibility of a throne and its queen, turning his back on his former life and all those affected by it. While Augustine's personal history is well-known, it is given as little regard as we give to Oz's promiscuous beginnings because both are erased once the men elected to change their behavior. Theodora, however, is evidence that these changes are not made without collateral damage.

Possibly one of the reasons this treatment of Theodora is ignored by the people of Oz and, likely, much of our society is because it is not culturally abnormal. Historically, men have had a fear of paternal uncertainty in which their partner may be carrying a child that is not their own without their knowledge. As a result, there has been an "evolutionary reaction" in which

men respond with two approaches: "(a) promiscuity which allows the male to maximize his chances of reproduction by seeking as many partners as possible… and (b) mate guarding whereby the male seeks to reduce the chances of extra-pair mating on the part of the female" (Tumanov 508). These strategies may be reinforced by the scene in which Theodora reveals her hair—previously hidden underneath her hat—to Oz, evoking tropes of the sexy librarian removing her glasses and letting down her hair. He is sexually aroused by this sight and begins to notice Theodora's sexual nature, the nature denied Glinda. As a result, he subconsciously begins to perceive Theodora as the whore in the dichotomy and, culturally, the whore is always left for the "good" girl.

Because he labels Theodora as the whore, he is able, according to Freud, to be attracted to her without guilt. This lack of guilt however, is not free of the fear and urgency caused by the unconscious and biological desire to procreate (for, after all, a man who calls himself "the great and powerful Oz" surely has an issue with not leaving a child behind should he cease to exist). These conflicting feelings between the comfort and security of the Madonna and the attractions to the Eve are, some psychologists believe, a part of misogyny. Kurt Lewin calls this attraction to women and anxiety of paternal uncertainty an *approach-avoidance* conflict in which "the anxiety experienced by someone who is 'caught by being attracted, and repelled by the same goal or activity. Attraction keeps the person in the situation, but its negative aspects cause turmoil and distress" (Tumanov 510). In other words, Oz is conflicted because he is sexually attracted to Theodora, but his reproductive impulses pull him toward a more maternal individual like Glinda, who, notably, takes care of an entire people. It prevents him from staying with Theodora but also, because she is the source of this anxiety, makes it easier to vilify her as a witch. Because we follow Oz throughout the majority of the film, much of what we learn comes through his

perspective. Therefore, it is quite possible that Theodora is one-dimensional because, as a source of his anxiety, he would want to avoid contemplating her character more than necessary. Since she is only ever shown or portrayed in relation to Oz and he would prefer that she is one-dimensional, we have little opportunity to see her as a more complex being. It is easier for us to vilify Theodora if we know that she is taking revenge on a man who jilted her after they had premarital sex. Seeing her choose to bite the apple Evanora offers, rather than suddenly seeing her as green, makes her even less ambiguous because we have a very concrete reason for her transformation; if she had suddenly appeared as a monster, we would spend time trying to figure out exactly what happened and, as a result, begin to contemplate Oz's behaviors. The former saves us the energy of attempting to find other catalysts for this sudden evil behavior. Our lack of knowledge of Theodora as a human being reinforces the boundary between the character and audience, making us less likely to question her treatment and, therefore, Oz's actions, a character who is symbolic of paternal order.

Historically, this is how women have also been vilified as sexual beings. "It is this obsessive concentration on a single aspect of female sexuality… that eventually led to the witch hunts of the late Middle Ages and beyond… Tens of thousands of women were tortured and/or killed in Europe on charges of witchcraft whereby a key accusation was sexual misconduct, i.e. female sexuality outside of masculine control" (Tumanov 513). In addition, these witches have always been associated with Eve. The word "maleficia," of which *Maleficarum* is the genitive case, is split into the two base words in Latin: "mal," meaning "bad" and "ficio," derived from "factus," meaning to do. Together, these words mean "evil doer," the word used most often to refer to witches in the Middle Ages. During these times, given what we know about the Madonna-Whore complex, what could be the greatest evil a woman could commit? Having sex or expressing

sexual desire outside of marriage. This is why, after Theodora has sex with Oz and is hurt, she turns into a witch. She claims that he turned her but because we see her make the active choice, blame is placed on the witch just as it is on Eve and witches throughout history and literature.

Because the female expression of sexual desire is terrible, it is considered threatening or even destructive. This tension is best illustrated in Jerome's quote: "Death by Eve, life by Mary." This is why the daughters of Eve, the Wicked Witches, attack Oz, and Glinda must be there to save or support him. In addition, Glinda's weapon is bubbles. She uses her bubbles to protect her people and also uses them against the other witches. While Glinda is a witch, she is a good witch, demonstrating that witches are classified as either good or wicked and are placed at one of two extremes on a spectrum of morality. On the other hand, Oz is simply a magician, a title which applies to a male who is capable (or in his case incapable) of magic; the male's title does not need to be defined by a moral state. If Glinda was simply a witch, and not a good witch, she might make witches more ambiguous rather than making the definition of a wicked witch more concrete. In addition to her title, Glinda's magical abilities further draw a divide between good and bad witchcraft. Glinda's bubbles are made primarily of water which is considered to be spiritually connected to life and cleansing (and also allude to the protection and shape of a womb). It would make sense then that Glinda is the maternal figure and the clean or virginal witch. Theodora, her opposite, uses fire. Fire is considered to be a symbol of both passion and destruction, implying that her sexual desires could both destroy her and lead her to destroy Oz and innocent bystanders. This connection heightens the importance of Glinda as savior and ideal mother, in spite of the fact that she has no biological children of her own.

Glinda, however, is not the only one to become a mother without engaging in sexual behaviors. This is yet another way in which she fits the Madonna role. "Because Mary remains a

virgin when she conceives Jesus in the Gospels of Luke and Matthew, she allows the male psyche to have its reproductive cake and eat it too... by bearing offspring without the ability to cuckold the male—a fact beyond any doubt because its veracity is guaranteed by the highest (divine) authority" (Tumanov 514). In other words, Mary is a super-virgin, able to procreate and give God the child he desires without becoming sinful or sexually active. The china girl in *Oz* is Mary's Jesus. She is a young doll from a village in which all the houses, roads, and dolls are made of china. One of the wicked witches, Evanora, destroys this village and, caught in the wreckage, the china girl's legs are crushed underneath a cabinet. Oz repairs her legs and, unwillingly, takes her under his wing, gradually finding himself in a paternal role. As they spend time with the young girl, Glinda begins to fulfill the maternal role, helping to take care of the china girl and tuck her into bed at night. Like Mary, without needing to engage in a sexual activity, Glinda has fulfilled the fantasy of the male psyche because she can mother Oz's adopted child. This is problematic in itself without considering the film's conception of childhood; the china girl is obviously very fragile, and innocent, with blonde hair, blue eyes, pale skin and rosy cheeks. It seems the female is not all the film has set back as it is depicting a Victorian child. This Romantic child provides further proof that Glinda is not only a successful mother but also furthers the false notion that women who are not sexual can give birth to ideal children. Oz does not need to overcome his Madonna-Whore complex in order to have sex and children.

Given that Oz has this sexual anxiety, and, based on previous patterns, knows that he will sleep with these women only to leave them, it would almost seem as if his unwillingness to sleep with Glinda's counterpart in reality is a merit to him, right? Or is it? Knowing she has feelings for him and his unwillingness to hold a relationship, it would appear as if he is a good man, sparing Annie's feelings. But he also knows Theodora has feelings for him and he chooses not to

spare her feelings. So rather than giving credit to Oz, we have to take this evidence of how broken his psyche is (in addition to his morals); his perceptions of various women, not chivalry or a moral code, are what lead him to sleep with the rest and to abstain from Glinda. Rather than seeing Glinda as a human being with feelings he does not want to hurt her, he objectifies her. He sleeps with others because he sees them as representations of the whore in the Madonna-whore dichotomy. It is because Glinda is the Madonna—not because she has feelings for him—that he cannot act on his attraction; potentially his could be because Glinda has not been degraded and, as a result, she is still respected and only her feelings count. Although he sees her as the Madonna and not the whore, Glinda is just as objectified and receives no better treatment. She is robbed, in his eyes, of her need as a human being to have sexual desires and is instead chained to this one-dimensional definition of human sexuality. Because the Madonna is to represent Mary, a woman who can satisfy a man's (God's) need for her to procreate while also remaining a virgin who cannot cheat, Glinda as a Madonna must be impossibly good. As a result, she is set up for inevitable failure and disappointment to herself, Oz, and society. Although not the whore representation, she is still doomed to failure. It is delayed but it is failure nevertheless.

Director Sam Raimi has done a great disservice to Theodora and Evanora, an undeserved treatment in the case of the former. The restrictions placed on Theodora and Evanora cannot be dismissed as one-dimensional portrayals of villainy (which would be a problem in itself). Rather, the film and its seemingly powerless protagonist have exercised a great deal of power in dominating the society of Oz. In this respect, the land really is the Land *of* Oz (in spite of the fact that he has occupied it for the least amount of time). Oz rules because—among the witches at least—he is the only human being in the conflict. He is the only character given the right to and the luxury of moral ambiguity. In the film's resolution, after he has used technology to mislead

the witches into thinking that they have lost, he offers Theodora one last choice: to return to Oz if she should ever be willing to change. This, like Oz's pyrotechnics, is dangerously misleading. It implies that, because Theodora is given a choice and does not take it, Oz is gracious and willing to grant forgiveness and that the witch is so evil that she will not accept it. Distractions have been either consciously or unconsciously employed in the final step of a gradual shift of blame from Oz to Theodora so that we as an audience can feel better about dismissing her as a villain. After all, from Oz's perspective and our own as a society, it is much easier to judge and to dismiss the Madonnas and especially the whores as being true to their natures when we can forget our own role in stripping them of their complexities and human natures in favor of one-dimensional and unforgiving stereotypes.

Unfortunately, it is our unwillingness to recognize our participation in perpetuating the whore stereotype that allows it to reappear again and again as the one-dimensional, sexually active, and physically powerful female villain who is depicted as a danger to her society. Rather, it is the depiction of the villain that is a danger to our society; it allows us to become much too comfortable with one-dimensional depictions and, due to our increased exposure to them, more likely to accept biased and unfair depictions of women in the media. These visible and ever-present depictions become the norm so that we do not question them when we unconsciously use them to interpret events in our everyday lives, resulting in our willingness to tolerate the ill treatment of females because we see them as one-dimensional archetypes rather than as human beings. Films like *Oz*, which reinforce boundaries between the audience and the troubled female, fail to help the young viewer to establish critical thinking skills and a sense of empathy. Both a lack of critical thinking and our inability to empathize with our fellow human beings allow us to see them as inferior, evil, and villainous, which allows us to ignore any injustices against them.

The wicked witches are symptomatic of this issue, and, like many other villain-types, are a key place to initiate change.

Chapter III—"Wanna Know How I Got These Scars?": *The Dark Knight*'s Denial of a Psychological Narrative for the Joker

The Joker, also often referred to as the "Clown Prince," has reigned supreme over DC villains and comic characters in general. In fact, the Joker was the first of the DC villains to receive his own comic. He was created in 1940 by artists Jerry Robinson, Bill Finger, and Bob Kane. Since then, he has filled various roles in opposition to Batman, including the "goofy prankster" in the 1960s and his original and present characterization as a "homicidal maniac" (Wolk 48). While he has evolved over time, changing to appeal to the social climates in which he is written, he has maintained a role as one of the most fascinating comic book characters, a quality renewed by Heath Ledger's 2008 performance in *The Dark Knight* (a title that fails to recognize its most notorious and popular character). At the time it was written and released, *The Dark Knight* was the second highest grossing movie of all time (Camp et al. 145).

As a result of its wide reach and appeal to the masses, the various issues *The Dark Knight* explores have proven to be highly influential; researchers, such as Camp et al., have evaluated the film in order to demonstrate how various aspects—including the portrayal of madness—have positively or negatively influenced the ways we interact with others. This recent portrayal that influences social interactions is both original and borrows from the pre-existing history of the Joker. Ledger's portrayal is similar in many ways to the comics which precede it, including *The Killing Joke* and *The Long Halloween*, both of which Christopher Nolan, director of *The Dark Knight* and the other films in its trilogy, cites as his inspiration for the film. It should be noted that the basis for the Joker's madness is derived from *The Killing Joke*, a comic that follows previous portrayals of the villain's psychological state. The popularity of these comics and Nolan's reason for choosing them is evident: both their heroes and villains are ambiguous, complicated, and wonderfully drawn. They contribute to, rather than depend on, the canon of

Batman and Joker films, comics, and memorabilia, leading readers to consider the Joker from new perspectives. I would argue this is also the reason that *The Dark Knight* and its Joker have renewed the popularity of the character and series; Nolan has taken a look at various depictions of the Joker and, after considering them, has added a contemporary spin to update the character and put him into dialogue with contemporary political and social issues, an important quality given the trickster's ability to disturb the social order.

While my intention is to focus primarily on the film, I will be looking at these comics and others in order to determine how the Joker captivates rather than repulses his readers. In spite of all of his gruesome and incredibly disturbing behaviors and qualities, he represents a trend in which the villain is more popular than the hero. Part of this popularity may be Heath Ledger's stellar performance. Another factor might be a quality that readers and viewers consistently bring to the Joker: a fascination with the Joker's ability to break free from the social contract by which we are tightly bound. I will be showing how Nolan both borrows and breaks from previous depictions of the Joker in order to call attention to the uncomfortable topics and issues that we need to explore as a society. We crave this complex, fascinating, ambiguous villain because he is a fresh break from the morally shallow villains so often depicted in American society. Ledger's edgy and daring portrayal also comes dangerously close to those relatively unspoken topics which pique our interests. As viewers, we live vicariously through the thrill of breaking the rules and the institution. While we may not want to adopt the Joker's methods, we are fascinated by the message his character presents (more so now than ever). This particular message holds our attention because it is complex and open to interpretation. In fact, the Joker tells so many lies and is so contradictory that it is impossible to determine the exact message he is attempting to send; however, this ambiguity is, as I will explore, his greatest strength because our curiosity and

inability to thoroughly understand this character lead us to take a more in-depth look into our own society and those questions he poses.

One of the primary questions Ledger's Joker poses is whether or not he is a psychopath. The Joker is often described as psychologically disturbed by both critics and fans. It is my intention to explore these claims and to determine their validity and effects. His mental status is important because of the ways that American society views psychological disorders in relation to criminality. When we are outraged by particular behaviors that go against accepted social behaviors, we angrily describe individuals as "psychos." Therefore, it is vital that we determine not only whether the Joker is simply psychotic or whether sometimes the issue is more complex and our categorizations fall short of the reality being presented. While I will be attempting to determine if the villain is simply psychotic or more complex than a label, I will not be attempting nor will I be email to affirm that he has a psychological disorder. Rather, it is my intention to demonstrate that it is entirely possible that the Joker has a disorder and that there are grounds for public debate over whether or not he does; however, the fact that he could or could not have a disorder is my primary focus. By demonstrating that he could be a psychopath *or* an anarchist, I intend to show that there are more nuances to the current debate regarding his psychological state and these nuances will be where we find the Joker's value as an ambiguous character.

An in-depth evaluation of the character leads us to question whether he is psychologically disturbed or if this is a label used by a society which cannot and does not want to attempt to understand him. In spite of the complexity of his psyche and political views, most people—including the filmmakers and actors—instantly label him as a psychopath. The question is why exactly we do this. Christopher Nolan and Heath Ledger both label him as a psychopath and *perhaps* this is true (but not necessarily). Ledger, who spent weeks locked up in a hotel room

in order to get to know and become the character, described the Joker as a "'psychopathic, mass-murdering, schizophrenic clown with zero empathy"' (Camp et al. 145). Ledger and Nolan have undoubtedly been influenced by the Joker's legacy as a lunatic, supported by the president and publisher of DC Comics who explains the appeal of the character: "'I keep coming back to the way he [the Joker] physically incarnates madness'" (Camp et al. 145). Their views are certainly not without reason. There are indications—both in the history of the Joker as a comic villain as well as his actions in the film—that he may be psychologically disturbed; however, this is not definite and we do not have enough evidence from the film alone to issue a diagnosis that will influence how we see the character and, ultimately, those in our society who may have the same disorder.

We receive the façade of an answer in the film in which various characters label him as a psychopath, including Christian Bale's portrayal of Batman who calls him "a murdering psychopath" (*The Dark Knight*). Camp et al., completed a study in *Academic Psychiatry*, "The Joker: A Dark Night for Depictions of Mental Illness," in which they made note of the various devices the filmmakers used to portray the character as mad in order to "create an understanding that could inform destigmatization efforts" (Camp et al. 145). One of these devices was language; they noted that characters, including the Joker himself, labelled the villain in pejorative terms: "'freak' (four times), 'clown' (four times), 'terrorist' (twice), 'strange' (once), 'mad man' (once), 'mad dog' (once), and 'a dog chasing cars' (once)" (Camp et al. 146). He was also described as an individual "'who cannot be reasoned with' and… 'agent of chaos'" (Camp et al. 146). Campbell et al. argue that these pejorative terms about madness, directed toward a supposedly clinically insane individual, create a negative portrayal of what it means to have a psychological disorder. This portrayal, they argue, contributes to the stigmatization of mental

illness. On several levels, I would agree, especially if—as in the case of a simplistic villain—the audience accepts the label of "freak," etc. and thinks no further about the issue; however, the Joker, in spite of what some viewers and critics would like to believe, is not a simplistic or shallow character. Rather, his portrayal of madness is stereotypical but the Joker subverts and plays on this stereotype, leading us to further evaluate the implications of this performance.

Through a comparison of the character in both *The Dark Knight* and *The Killing Joke,* I will demonstrate why these claims are possible but will also complicate them. Ledger's Joker, who refuses to divulge any reliable details and also explains his social and political musings and motivations, is a bit more difficult to label as a psychopath because we do not know enough about him to feel comfortable with this label. As a result, we have to pay him more attention in our need to determine his psychological state, raising an important question: why do we so often automatically want to attribute villainy and criminality to psychological dysfunction? The characters and society of Nolan's Gotham are unable to construct a linear rather than fragmented narrative of the Joker, making it impossible for us to take that narrative and understand the Joker's acts through a psychological rather than sociopolitical framework. This issue calls attention to our media's efforts to construct psychological narratives of mass murderers and those who upturn the established order, creating a habit in which we often treat villainy and psychological disorders as if they are synonymous. The Joker refutes this tendency by forcing us to move beyond that crutch and demonstrates that this tendency is damaging both to our understanding of negative behaviors and psychological dysfunction. While our inability to understand Theodora, as previously discussed, leads to negative effects, our inability to wholly understand this villain functions in an entirely different way and, as the Joker does, challenges some of our social conventions.

Nolan's depiction of the Joker is different from many other popular villains explored in various films, including films done by both DC and Marvel. These differences demonstrate that there are other options for the depiction of comic villains and, as a result any differences in the portrayal of Nolan's Joker were choices rather than reactions to formulaic means of adapting comics. The primary difference is that characters like Marvel's Magneto and DC's Bane and even various depictions of the Joker have origin stories. Whereas Magneto acts from pain and previous experience and Bane acts from a relationship with a woman and strong, radical views of the world around him, the Joker does not have the same ties. In many comics that feature the villain, he has no origin story (with the exception of a few cases, including *The Killing Joke*). Origin stories are important because they offer further insight into the villain and, often, explain the motivations of his/her criminal behavior. The lack of an origin story provides us with fewer opportunities to understand the character and it is important to consider how these absences affect our perception of his psychological state.

Douglas Wolk, author of "The irresistible lure of the Joker," argues that this lack of an origin story indicates that "He's always and forever evil clowns, one who can never take his makeup off or break character. He is the inexplicable cruelty of someone who not only does terrible things, he finds them amusing" (Wolk 48). Wolk's description, however, may not be an entirely valid evaluation of the effects of the Joker's lack of an origin story. While I concede that the Joker has no origin story in the film, I would not agree that the Joker is inherently and inexplicably evil. By saying that he can never break character, Wolk is arguing that the Joker is only the madman who terrorizes Gotham and cannot deviate from his destructive behaviors. For Wolk and others, the Joker's allure is that he is other, a madman who thinks and behaves in ways that we can only imagine. What we see, however, and what Wolk and others use to justify their

arguments about the Joker's character and lack of conscience, does not automatically solidify our assumptions about his psychological state. There are strong *indications*; however, this merely means that we are dependent on the perspectives of other characters, which are also limited given that they know relatively little about the Joker's motivations. The Joker's cruelty may be inexplicable partially because we have limited and unreliable knowledge of the Joker. Also, it is not entirely true that the Joker can never take off his makeup. Simply because we do not *see* him take off his makeup does not mean that he does not do so. In fact, in many of the film's scenes, he *does* take off some of his mask (or it is taken off of him after the Batman slams his head into a table in the interrogation room). His organic makeup hinders this argument, proving that he can and does have a face behind the mask, also implying that there is an individual behind the persona.

One of the potential reasons that we cannot understand the Joker's motivations—note motivations and not means—is that he does not have any close ties to other characters who might provide some insight on his character. The Joker's loner status does not confirm that he is psychologically disturbed. It means that characterization of the villain is incredibly limited. We rarely see him with other characters and he almost never divulges personal details (at least not details that appear to be truthful). He is completely alone, demonstrated by his role as a John Doe; as Lt. James Gordon tells the Mayor when asked if they had found any evidence that might lead them to the Joker's identity, "Nothing. No matches on prints, DNA, dental. Clothing is custom, no labels. Nothing in his pockets but knives and lint. No name, no other alias" (*The Dark Knight*). The Joker has no records which connect him in society. In addition, he schemes entirely alone and only works with others when he uses them as means to various ends. In the bank heist scenes, all of the clowns/hired gunmen are shown with other members of the

operation. The Joker is the only one who is shown alone twice: the first time in the opening scene where he faces away from the camera and holds his mask, and the second time after he shoots the bus driver/clown and drives from the bank on his own.

The Joker is seen by the mobsters for whom he works as a freak and is socially isolated by them. When the Joker first enters the mobsters' meeting and offers to catch the Batman for them, he is met with harsh scrutiny, even from some of Gotham's most notorious and immoral criminals. The Joker says "a guy like me…" and Gambol, one of the mob bosses, interjects, saying, "a freak." The Joker ignores him and continues with his sentence but this first label isolates the character from this group, demonstrating the effects that such a label can have in our society. After the Joker tells them his purpose in interrupting the meeting and that he will demand half of their stash of money, Gambol tells him he is crazy; the Joker says he is not, only to be met with mocking laughter. He insists, saying, "No, I'm not" but this assertion is notably different from the last and all others in the film; the Joker responds more softly and with less edge to his voice, drawing attention to a potential vulnerability regarding his psychological state. Later, the Batman interrogates mobster Salvatore Maroni, asking him who the Joker's friends are as a means of finding him. Maroni's response is incredulous: "Friends? Have you *met* this guy?" (*The Dark Knight*). While the leaders of various mob families want to use the Joker as a tool for reinforcing their power in Gotham, a power that allows them to break laws for their own benefit, he is a social outcast among the criminals. It should be noted that there is a major difference between criminals like the Joker and those like Maroni. While labels of psychopathy and criminality can isolate characters—and they do in the case of the Joker—there are certain types of criminals who work not simply using one another but act as groups. These are organized criminals, like the mobs, and are, by very nature, *social* criminal organizations. Because of this,

we are more likely to look for a psychological catalyst in a criminal who acts alone rather than a criminal who is a member of an organization; a criminal does not have to have a psychological disorder to break the law and a criminal for whom we can imagine another motivation—like being a part of organized crime—does not present us with the problem of finding a direct cause for his behavior. This is primarily what sets the Joker apart and is demonstrated by the isolation between him, criminals who are really Arkham patients, and mob men. Both ordinary citizens and organized criminals fear the Joker as an unhinged, dangerous "freak" and, as a result, he is isolated. This loner status leads to a limited, often unreliable characterization of the villain and, as a result, we have an inability to put together his background story.

Unlike Bane, Magneto and many of the comics in which he is a character, the Joker has no origin story, a point which some critics consider especially significant and tied to the film's purpose. In many ways, the lack of an origin story in a film in which the villain is so significant, directly affects the impression the film is going to make. In this case, the lack of an origin story creates a gap of information which the reader attempts to fill and, in doing so, plays a role in determining the film's message. In giving the audience no reliable history of the character, Nolan has made a statement. For Anthony Kolenic, author of "Madness in the Making" it is a denial of the narrative so often—in fact, too often—given to society; Kolenic's article explores parallels between media narratives of criminals in our media and those of villains in fictional media. He evaluates Cho, the Virginia Tech shooter, to explain that society often jumps immediately toward constructing a narrative, or even origin story, of the criminal, that includes a foray into the individual's psychological history as a means of explaining his actions. This, rather than evaluating his motives on political or other grounds, is often the media's go-to for explaining and dismissing particular behaviors as outside of the realm of normal human behaviors. In this case,

Kolenic would argue that the psychological narrative Nolan believes he is giving to the Joker is negative—because it contributes to a cultural tendency to look for a psychological catalyst for seemingly inexplicable criminal behaviors—and, in my opinion, a reflection of our tendency to use such narratives in everyday life. Nolan sees the Joker as a psychopath and attempts to depict him as one. Given that he primarily drives the film's conflict, Nolan's depiction of the Joker as a psychopath is going to appear to be the reason for his actions, On the other hand, given Nolan's tendency to put his work in dialogue with contemporary issues, this portrayal of the Joker also parallels 9/11 terrorists. An exploration of these theories reveals that they are in dialogue with one another, sometimes complementing the critics' arguments and Nolan's statements and other times contradicting them. Regardless, they can be used as a viable tool for attempting to piece together even an abstract definition of the Joker. This definition reveals not only how the Joker functions as a villain but also how our society conceptualizes the villain relative to our perceptions of psychology and terrorism.

Current trends show that the best way of observing our culture's definition of the villain is by examining comics. Their history as a subversive medium has freed them to challenge our ways of thinking both as individuals and as members of a society serving as a "'viable vehicle for subversive and even incendiary political messages'" (Crutcher 55). Of course, there are doubts that comics and, subsequently, their film adaptations can accommodate such explorations. Paul A. Crutcher, author of "Complexity in the Comic and Graphic Novel Medium," argues that the complexities of comic narratives do not lend themselves to media adaptations. He writes that "it is difficult to fathom how the sophistication in *Miss Remarkable*, *Dark Knight Returns*, or *Arkham Asylum* (or any number of the Batman graphic novels) could possibly be captured by either traditional literature or film" (Crutcher 68). While Crutcher's concerns are warranted,

especially given some of the previous adaptations of Batman comics, Nolan achieves this by retaining the general spirit of Batman and a number of the comics (e.g. *The Killing Joke* in *Dark Knight*). He does this by grounding comics in reality, politics, and psychology, creating an ambiguous film that does more than any previous Batman adaptation by challenging the audience as much as it entertains them. The featured characters and themes are riveting yet difficult to pin down or determine, mirroring the media's tendency to bombard citizens with a variety of contradictory statements about politicians and, most particularly, criminals, as well as our need to reconcile those contradictory statements through one-dimensional labels.

Jordi Serra, author of "Batman versus Al-Qaeda," explores Frank Miller's plans to write a Batman comic in which the villain is not a metaphor but in fact, overtly, is Al-Quaeda. Serra would disagree with the view that comics can adequately treat realistic and political topics. He writes, "Super-hero comic books are a genre that pretend to be loosely based on reality but can only work under a very specific condition" (Serra 768). This specific condition requires a suspension of disbelief, or "leap of faith," which is also required in much of Gothic literature. This is because comics is a genre that "operates on a constructed coherence, an ad hoc reality, that replicates the ordinary world while being one of the most bizarre and illusory fictions imaginable. Such constructed coherence can be exceedingly attractive and immersive as long as the reader plays along" (Serra 768-769). While he concedes that a comic can replicate ordinary life, Serra believes bringing reality too close to the medium will lead to a collapse in the comic because comics as a medium are not able to contemplate or develop many of the issues and conditions of reality while also featuring a super-hero. Serra's argument, like Crutcher's, can be disproved with Christopher Nolan's *Dark Knight Trilogy*; although this trilogy is not a comic, it is rooted in comics, adapted from several of them, and possesses some of their conventions. A

surface evaluation of the series will reveal echoes of many contemporary issues while a more detailed and thorough explanation will show how the film adaptations of the comics not only mirror many social and political issues but also critique them. Both the Joker and Batman, terrorist and hero, face many moral dilemmas as they attempt to construct or protect their idea of what Gotham should be. For example, in order to stop the Joker—a terrorist who, coincidentally (or perhaps not), prefers bombs, gasoline, knives, and the manipulation of the media to terrorize citizens—Bruce Wayne must decide between an absolute, Kantian moral code in which it is immoral to infringe on civil liberties and privacy, even to protect the people whose privacy he invades in order to find the terrorist, and a more flexible code of morality in which the ends justify the means. While Serra argues that comics can only function properly as long as distance is kept from reality, it is very evident that Nolan has treaded dangerously close to this line as he parallels many contemporary issues like terrorism, the Patriot Act, and the role of the media.

In exploring reality through comics, it becomes essential to explore the grip social mores have on what we define as normality and abnormality, or innocence and criminality. Psychology and psychological disorders are often defined according to social mores. Therefore, psychology is a significant topic of discussion when a villain critiques, challenges, and rebels against the very norms that determine a citizen's innocence, belonging, and functionality. The Batman comics and their adaptations not only use psychology to tell their stories but also play with the psychological states of their characters, testing them and portraying the same hero or villain with different psychological disorders in various comics. For example, one of the most unique psychological states offered by a Batman comic is that of the Joker in *Arkham Asylum: A* Serious *House on* Serious *Earth* by Grant Morrison and Dave McKean. In this comic, Batman is forced by the inmates of Arkham to face his own psychological traumas in the cursed asylum, a place

where most of the inmates are patients because of him. Illustrations portray the Joker as especially insane, possibly more so than in other comics, and, due to this insanity and our inability to understand him, his character is very abstract and difficult to follow. As I will discuss later as I evaluate the Joker's behavior in *The Dark Knight*, this depiction of the Joker does not, as one of the psychotherapists points out, necessarily mean that the character is insane. Dr. Ruth Adams, the psychotherapist who works with the Joker in *Arkham Asylum*, tells Batman that, contrary to popular opinion, the Joker is not insane:

> The Joker's a ***special*** *case*...in fact, we're not even sure if he can be properly defined as ***insane***… ***We're*** beginning to think it may be a neurological disorder… it's quite possible we may actually be looking at some kind of super-sanity here. A brilliant new modification of human perception. More suited to life at the end of the twentieth century. ***That's*** why some days he's a mischievous clown, others a psychopathic killer. He ***has*** no real personality. He ***creates*** himself each day. He sees himself as the Lord of misrule and the world as a theatre of the absurd. (Grant)

In other words, Adams is saying that the Joker is not insane; rather, his thought process is unsuited for contemporary society and the 21st century. Instead, the cognitive processes that determine the way he thinks and behaves, are a century ahead of where they should be. The Joker cannot filter what he sees and rather, constantly absorbs information. This affects his behavior, and, as a result, he acts in ways that place him outside the norms of society; often, when we cannot understand these thought processes or when particular behaviors clash with socially accepted values, we assume the character has a psychological disorder. In our society of

restrictive labels, there is little room for difference. This particular case shows that there is a broad spectrum of psychological states of the Joker as he is depicted by various writers and illustrators in various contexts. This spectrum and history undoubtedly have played a role in the creation of the Joker in the *Dark Knight* and also demonstrate that perhaps there are other factors in the villain's behaviors and that he is more complex than we are inclined to believe.

There are also other portrayals of the Joker, many of which do depict him as psychologically unhinged. Undoubtedly, these comics have also contributed to Nolan's film and explain why there are aspects of the Joker's personality which make viewers want to assume that he is a psychopath. In order to explain some of the Joker's behaviors, many of these comics offer origin stories, parts of the narrative which depict how the individual became the villain and how, if at all, previous events and pre-disposition led to the development of a particular psychological disorder. As Crutcher writes, "these graphic novels engage psychology in complex ways that are at least equitable to the methods used in literature and film. For instance, *Dark Knight Returns*, *Arkham Asylum*, and *The Killing Joke* are all rather sinister and work with deep-seated psychological issues in compelling ways" (Crutcher 66). These origin stories often suggest causes for psychological issues that do not excuse the villainy but rather explain it. On one hand, the lack of an origin story for the Joker in the film makes his behaviors less explicable; one the other hand, it allows much more room for interpretation and prevents us from easily labelling the Joker based on a presumed history of the character.

Extra room for interpretation leads us to look to other sources in order to understand the villain, including his opposite, the hero. The complexity of the villain is mirrored by the moral complexity of the hero. Heroes and villains often form foils or binaries which we use to better define and label both characters. The fact that the Batman, more often than not, is depicted as

more psychologically vulnerable or troubled than other heroes, demonstrates that such a binary, in which both the villain and hero have potential psychological disorders, is less stable. If Bruce Wayne has a disorder like PTSD or antisocial personality disorder, the Joker's depiction is not quite as extreme or radically different and, as a result, it is more difficult to blame his actions on a psychological disorder because Wayne's possible disorders and traumas are those very things which also influence his actions. For example, in *Batman Begins*, Wayne is terrified while watching a play in which some of the actors move like bats. He begs his parents to leave and when they leave, they are approached by a man with a gun who shoots his parents and robs them. The trauma from watching his parents die and the guilt over the fear that he thinks indirectly caused their deaths has motivated him to overcome his fears and has sent him in search of a life that will help him to overcome the guilt and anger with which he struggles. These feelings and desires motivate him to act in ways that make him a hero. Because we are provided with this example, the Joker does not appear to be the only character with psychological issues and it cuts down on the character's isolation.

The divisiveness of this binary and how we define the Joker depend on the psychological state of the Batman being portrayed. In many comics—like *The Killing Joke* where the Batman seeks and battles a deranged Joker who has been turned into a villain by a very bad day of his own—neither character is completely emotionally stable and both seem to operate as half of a whole psyche. This complementary arrangement makes the villain a necessity to heroism, establishing relevance between the hero's sanity, or questionable sanity, and that of the Joker's insanity. The film *The Dark Knight* inspired by a number of comics including *The Killing Joke*, makes sure to show this in the appearances, statements, and actions of the villain and hero. The Joker's makeup is white with black circles around the eyes. These black circles are shaped

similarly but not identically to the openings in Batman's mask. The Batman has a black mask but obviously white where there are holes for his eyes. In a way, the Joker's face appears almost as a negative of Batman's mask, symbolizing the extremity of the Batman's own troubled, psychological state and issues in society. This connection—highlighted by their appearances—makes it more difficult for us to write the Joker off as a mere psychopath (even if Nolan labels him as one in interviews).

Nolan's Joker, it seems, is well aware of the connection between his social state and Batman's. After issuing Batman an ultimatum—to take off his mask or indirectly sacrifice the people the Joker will kill each hour that he does not—the Joker changes his mind, saying "I had a vision, of a world without Batman… And it was so... boring. I've had a change of heart. I don't want Mr. Reese spoiling everything, but why should I have all the fun? Let's give someone else a chance. If Coleman Reese isn't dead in sixty minutes then I blow up a hospital" (*The Dark Knight*). The Joker has many reasons for changing his mind. He realizes that he does not want the Batman revealing himself because until he does, the hero and villain share a bond of anonymity. If Batman reveals himself, people will know his identity, constructing the origin story for the hero that Nolan denies the villain. People will be able to scrutinize Bruce Wayne's history and make rash assumptions about his behaviors which the media will then use to label him. The Joker, a constant observer of society and social behaviors, remarks that exposing Batman will mean his end because he will be subject to the definitions and labels of society; being labelled by society would then make him more concrete and subject to various institutions, leaving him unable to challenge the Joker (something that the villain enjoys). As men, rather than ideas and figures, both would be more accessible to society and, as a result, more likely to be judged by the very norms that dictate the definitions of psychological disorders. The Joker

recognizes that both are outcasts and needs this condition to continue just as he creates "social experiments" in order to show himself and others that anybody can be driven evil by desperate conditions.

Possibly, Nolan's ideas for the Joker's social experiments derives from his experiments involving individuals in comics. He does this in *The Killing Joke* by attempting to drive Gordon mad as a means of proving to himself and others that one bad day can drive anybody insane just as he was the day his wife died. This is also the reason the Joker never kills the Batman in the film: "Oh, you. You just couldn't let me go, could you… 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*). Part of this is a reference to the never-ending battle between the characters in various Batman lines, especially *The Killing Joke* in which Batman struggles to stop the fighting, explaining that it will continue until one of them eventually kills the other. Nolan has clearly retained this duality and incorporated it in his films; however, for every similarity in the depiction of psychology, there is also a monumental difference that puts the film in dialogue with contemporary society. Because of this, those traits of the comics which Nolan retains are used in new ways.

A large part of contemporary society is the media and the distorted reflection that it provides on current events, a reflection that controls perceptions of various individuals and groups, thereby influencing social behaviors. The American media is no stranger to mass shootings and terrorism. Shootings in movie theatres, elementary schools, hospitals, malls, and college campuses are, scarily, becoming the norm in American culture. While terrorism, like 9/11, is less common, the magnitude of such events also leaves its mark on the American

consciousness. This consciousness is then not only reflected in news stories but also in contemporary film. American directors naturally harbor American anxiety of this recurring violence and, as a result, contemplate it as citizens and as filmmakers, creating a dialogue among their thoughts, films, and current events. Although it is inspired by comics and Serra thinks comics cannot handle the blending of superheroes and such stark realities, Nolan's trilogy shows that at least films based on comics incorporate terrorism and violence that mirrors American and global issues. *Batman Begins* explores the origin, views, and aims of extreme global terrorist Ra's al Ghul and the League of Shadows, an echo of Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda. *The Dark Knight* explores a post-post-9/11 world in which the threat is domestic. In addition, while the Joker serves as a symbol of terror, domestic or otherwise, the film also uses him to evaluate the media's treatment of the terrorist. The trilogy as a whole, it seems, is in tune to the current sociopolitical climate. Ironically, *The Dark Knight Rises*, a film in which the antagonists explore and upturn socioeconomic privilege, came out in the same summer as *Les Miserables*, a film about the French Revolution in which the poor and starving revolted against the devastating restrictions placed on them by the privileged. Both demonstrate that films are often in tune to contemporary and longstanding social tensions and grapple with them in their own ways. The *Dark Knight*, as Kolenic explains, is no exception to this rule. Whether a work perpetuates or challenges social behaviors and values plays a large role in determining its value and ability to inspire critical thinking needed by citizens.

Kolenic's main concern, however, is a slightly different contemporary issue: the media's role in making psychological disorders synonymous with criminality. It is his argument that is at odds with that of Camp et al., showing that there is more to the film's portrayal of mental illness and that it is not entirely negative. Kolenic uses the case of Virginia Tech shooter, Seung-Hui

Cho, as a comparison for the Joker's story in Nolan's film. He begins by explaining the media's role in responding to criminals/terrorists like Cho as of means of showing how Nolan does the opposite. The media insists on constructing a narrative of the criminal, and similar narratives are incorporated into a number of comics and their adaptations (e.g. Magneto in the *X-Men* film adaptations or the Joker in *The Killing Joke*). Kolenic writes:

> Narrative, key to understanding flows and departures—as well as genre—in popular culture also has a manifestation in American news coverage, and the construction of Cho after the shooting is the creation of such a narrative. It is this narrative that *The Dark Knight's* Joker denies the viewer. Perhaps a more conventional reading would align an action narrative that does build a narrative for the villain, like the many iterations of Joker before this one, with Cho, but the absence of such a narrative in a popular culture product in this contemporary global amalgam proves to be far more telling. (Kolenic 1025-6)

As Kolenic explains, as soon as Cho carried out the VT shootings, and, in other cases, as soon as the criminal carries out a mass shooting, there is a mad scramble among the media to construct a narrative of the criminal, primarily in terms of a psychological history which will explain his actions. This is an attempt to snatch the criminal from anonymity, and "to understand who or what the perpetrator of this act of violence was, various governmental authorities and media outlets necessarily dug through his history and, most importantly, his health records, for these appeared to be the actions of a madman, at least as madness is institutionally defined in the

contemporary United States" (Kolenic 1024). This is connected to our heavy focus on the villains in superhero films and our fascination with them.

We live in a society that seeks to understand criminal behavior. Therefore, the longer it takes for us to find an explanation, the longer our interest is held. While Kolenic is demonstrating a problem, that we immediately use psychology as a means to understand criminal behavior, there are some positives. It is negative that we automatically use psychological disorders as a crutch; however, our interest in criminals and criminality shows that we are willing, if given the opportunity, to look deeper into the understandings and lives of others. The lens, then, is what determines what we see. If we look almost solely at one-dimensional villains and all of them are depicted as psychopaths, we are not challenged to think about their opinions; rather, we write their motivations off as psychological issues; however, if we have characters who we cannot simply label as sociopaths, and so on, we are forced to consider, temporarily, their points of view in order to attempt to understand the origins of their actions. In doing so, we may find ourselves considering our society and its problems, especially in terms of our willingness to ignore problems and think those who do not ignore them are abnormal. Therefore, it is the psychological narrative promoted by the media—and not our interest in criminality itself—that is detrimental.

While the media may try to justify this as informing citizens of the situation and attempting to construct some sort of explanation for why a man would act this way, Kolenic believes otherwise. Building off of that, we have a need to explain villainy in our culture by looking for some psychological catalyst for cruelty. Note that this catalyst does not always need to be psychological; however, often, when we do not understand particular behaviors, even if we do not initially deem them as the products of a psychological disorder, we see a disorder as the

underlying cause. For example, we may view terrorists' actions as extremist and we often view extremists as individuals who have been manipulated by psychopaths or as individuals who ascribe to particular doctrines because of emotional and mental factors; at other points, we view terrorists as simply evil, protecting our views of international policies and our culture rather than attempting to find out more about their perspectives. This is supported by the common evaluation of the Joker's actions in *The Dark Knight*: the Joker threatens to blow up a hospital because he is a terrorist and wants to manipulate people into acting in particular ways. He wants to manipulate people to cause chaos because he is psychologically unhinged and a sociopath who does not care about the effects his actions have on others. Whether or not this is the case is another matter and it is our uncertainty, rather than a diagnosis, that is the most powerful; however, when individuals exhibit symptoms of various disorders—for example, PTSD from experiences of violence or abuse, schizophrenia, and so on—even if there is evidence that there may also be other factors in their criminal acts, our first instinct is often to explain these behaviors by assuming that the villain and not society is deranged. In many cases, an individual may commit crimes due to a psychological issue. For example, addiction is considered a psychological issue and in some cases, leads an individual to steal in order to support his habit. It would be wrong to say that the criminal *never* acts based on a psychological disorder; rather, it is more accurate to say that, in spite of the media's claims, this is not always the case. Kolenic's insight is unbearably sharp when he says that this association between psychological issues and criminality is connected to show how American society defines madness, but he is careful to not validate this definition.

There has been a common American custom to label that which it does not understand as a psychological disorder. This is of course why so many of the Jokers and other villains are in

some way "mad." It also explains the focus on "madness" in *The Killing Joke*. It is possible that many of the Jokers are sociopaths or have been driven to insanity, but does this mean that every villain must have a psychological disorder? No. We *want* that disorder to be present so that we can dismiss the doubt and confusion brought on by such actions. Labeling a criminal with a psychological disorder is a quick fix in lieu of attempting to understand any kind of innate evil beyond our comprehension. It also prevents us from having to undertake the effort of evaluating our own society and the roles we play as citizens in that society. If somebody, as the Joker does, presents a negative view about the ways that we function, it is much easier for us to label him as disturbed rather than to begin to consider the possible problems and make changes. In some cases, an individual may have a disorder which prevents him/her from living a functional life. In other cases, like homosexuality which was considered a mental disorder by the DSM IV until 1973, this diagnosis is symptomatic of a larger issue, our need to equate psychopathy with villainy because we do not have a framework for understanding the latter. As a result, like in an allegory, the exchange is mutual. We do not only see villainy in a different way when we see psychopathy as its cause; our perspective of psychopathy is also changed into something that is seen as more violent and threatening, contributing to the enigma of all psychological disorders.

Camp et al., authors of "The Joker: a Dark Night for Depictions of Mental Illness," evaluate the portrayal of insanity in the film and the overall portrayal of madness in the media, both of which, they argue, have negative influences on society's perception of psychological disorders. They explain that media portrayals of mental illness are mostly grounded in lay understandings of madness; presumably, we can also assume that these lay understandings paint inaccurate pictures of madness and must therefore be questioned. While Nolan's Joker often contributes to these dangerous depictions, as Camp et al. explain, it is also significant that we

cannot quite determine which psychological disorder the Joker has. The political discussions that the character has provide just enough of a case for his sanity. Granted, the Joker acts in extreme ways but these may be reactions to the horror he has witnessed in everyday society (e.g. loan sharks cutting up their victims' faces, corruption of the police force and government, citizens' willingness to accept any injustices which are not directed at them). Jim Walsh, author of "Anarchy, Law, and the Joker," explains that the Joker, rather than being an unhinged lunatic on the loose, is actually a political philosopher. He explains that the Joker's rants are not rants at all; rather, they are founded in both current and classical political thought, including the Marquis de Sad, Nietsche, and classical anarchists. Walsh even calls his status as a criminal into account: "then again, you might ask whether Nolan's Joker even is a criminal. He kills. But most of the people he kills (on-screen anyway) are other bad guys. After that, he kills law enforcement agents in pursuit of him—arguably 'soldiers' in his war against order. He has contempt for the motive of most criminals, i.e. money" (Walsh 44). If it is a crime to murder, then the Joker is breaking laws; however, if motive is taken into account—and it often is when we revere revolutionaries who have killed in the name of "justice" and "liberty"—then the Joker is potentially no different than Batman; he simply has a different ideal version of the world. Granted, this argument falls apart when you begin to consider that it could be used as a justification for any action made on account of how a person thinks things should be. That cannot be denied; however, it does open up the Pandora's Box of possibility and ambiguity which will allow for critical thinking of the issue (regardless of what conclusions we come to).

In fact, our constitution and the philosophies which inspired it—including those of John Locke—loosely justify Batman and the Joker's behaviors if they are truly responding to what they consider are the ills of society:

> What is a vigilante, anyway? The popular definition is an ordinary citizen who 'takes the law into his own hands.' This is a statist's take, however. In fact, the law is always in the citizens' own hands. The citizen merely loans the law to the state because the state promises to enforce it more efficiently than any individual could. If the state fails to keep its end of that bargain, the citizen is well within his rights to take the law back. (Walsh 45)

By applying pressure to the system, the Joker has demonstrated that the state has broken the social contract by inefficiently enforcing laws. In fact, it cannot even keep its people safe; police officers are bribed to break the laws *for* criminals, a very inefficient enforcement. They cannot be trusted and hand over Rachel Dawes and Harvey Dent to the Joker's men. This occurs when Commission Gordan fakes his own death. He was aware that there were informants, cops who had turned, but did the best with what he could. When he "dies" and Rachel is with the cops at the station, Harvey Dent calls her and says that she is not safe with them; she responds, arguing that it is fine because they are Gordon's men. Dent replies that Gordon is dead, implying that the only thing that made his men trustworthy was Gordon's presence. This of course makes the institution very unstable and unreliable, a truth the Joker proves when he manages to arrange for both Rachel and Harvey to be kidnapped while he is still in a cell, explaining that it was possible because those men belonged to Maroni and not to the state. The Joker has created his own justification for rebelling against a state that has not and cannot perform the duties it must in order for the social contract to be a fair trade-off of citizens' liberties.

The Joker remains ambiguous on both political and psychological fronts; he forces us to explore this depiction of madness and whether or not we agree with it while also forcing us to

consider his justifications for rebelling against the government and whether or not we agree with those reasons. As previously discussed in the case of Theodora, characters which are not ambiguous are simply labelled and therefore othered by those labels. We lose interest in them and, because they lack the complexity of humans, we see them as something other than human. This works the same way when a character is psychologically disturbed rather than morally bankrupt; "recent analyses of media show that depicting someone as mad positions the person as 'other than human'" (Camp et al. 145). The Joker's lack of human relationships and normal functionality is directly at odds with our inability to label him with a psychological disorder. While there are means we could use from the film to label him, he is morally ambiguous enough that he is still other yet he initiates discussions about the lines between political behaviors and psychological disorders. This depiction is especially important because, as Camp et al. also explain, analysis of mass media depictions often show that there is a link between the portrayal of madness and it being a perceived factor in crime and violence. Camp et al. argue that the Joker has a negative impact on destigmatization efforts and, on some levels, I would certainly agree. They catalog the amounts of times and terms in which he is described as mad and how his behaviors validate this description. Suggestive behaviors which indicate the Joker's madness include the following: "laughing when threatened with death, being unconstrained by social rules and expectations, cavalierly disregarding the consequences of his behavior, absence of fear, and destructive, animalistic actions" (Camp et al. 148). These behaviors *are* certainly symptomatic of various psychological disorders and, if that is the case and individuals simply attribute his behaviors to madness, then I would agree that the Joker serves as "an intertextualizing resource for other stigmatizing portrayals" (Camp et al. 148).

On the other hand, a thorough examination of the Joker's political actions and the society in which he acts might complicate society's desire to make a diagnosis; it is this complication, not the verdict itself, that allows for social progress and inspires us to contemplate the Joker's views and a society which labels him as a psychopath and fails to understand him because he sees the world differently. While the Joker constantly tells people, including Harvey Dent, why he behaves in particular ways, the people of Gotham never ask why he acts the way that he does because they are not interested. Granted, his means are incorrect; however, people are socially conditioned to use labels as a substitution for thought. This behavior often preserves the status quo, whether or not it is morally right. By calling attention to this tension between the Joker's views—that the government and its citizens are corrupt, selfish, and cannot be counted on to uphold any sort of moral order when their own interests are concerned—and Gotham's media's need to label him, we can begin to consider the behaviors of the media and individuals in our own society.

While Nolan's handling of psychology and the media narrative is a bit different from other contemporary adaptations of comics, he is not isolated in his incorporation of these issues. Kolenic writes:

> a virtually countless number of artistic representations of—and reactions to—the anxieties of this historical moment have cropped up, including changes and shifts in long-standing popular culture forms… Perhaps the greatest achievement of *The Dark Knight* was not its staggering box office figures or eye-popping special effects, but rather its layered story in which the classic paradigm of order versus chaos is played out on the surface, and the unconscious

> logic of both sides of that dichotomy merge with viewers on a more profound and troubling level. (Kolenic 1024)

The Joker has been essential to this effort. One of the reasons for the heightened popularity of this villain is that the film's plot and purpose center much on the Joker. He is the most dynamic character because he is the most in dialogue with contemporary issues and is that character, the psychotic criminal, which in our media is the center of our morbid fascination with violence. The Joker is very aware of the workings of power in Gotham and how that power contributes to both chaos and order; in some cases, he notices, horror is used as a means of order. Perhaps his preference for chaos is due to this awareness of what goes on in his society; because of that, we would rather see him as a psychopath or extremist instead of contemplating those horrors which we so conveniently ignore. One of these horrors is the way that we accept the death of certain individuals as part of the plan. The Joker explains this to Harvey: "You know what I've noticed? Nobody panics when things go 'according to plan.' Even if the plan is horrifying! If, tomorrow, I tell the press that, like, a gang banger will get shot, or a truckload of soldiers will be blown up, nobody panics, because it's all 'part of the plan'" (*The Dark Knight*). This plan is the very thing that the Joker is questioning and, because we are so invested in our plans, we have little tolerance for anybody who points out their flaws. Regardless of whom the subject is, a death is a death; but, we are more willing to overlook the deaths of some individuals. It is part of the plan for soldiers to protect civilians and so we are more likely to return to our lives after reading news stories about truckloads of soldiers getting blown up. The Joker is demonstrating that the plan has brought a degree of accepted normalcy to these actions because we see the deaths of the soldiers as necessary deaths in the battle to secure order; if a hospital is blown up, it is a result of a lack of security and order, which disturbs us more than the identities of the victims. As a

society, we are afraid of those things which upset order; as a result, acts of terrorism are even more effective because they are psychological as well as physical.

Kolenic explains that through the Joker:

> *The Dark Knight* taps into the tensions and fears noted above. Indeed, just as Batman and other comic icons adapt to the historical circumstances they both reflect and help shape, so too is the case with their villains. But the most unsettling and efficacious characteristics of this Joker, as opposed to others, throughout the Batman franchise, is that the unwanted logic behind the character taps into something the audience cannot completely write off as psychosis. It is this danger—this attraction to the chaos he represents—that institutes temper, control, segment, and attempt to defuse. Institutions, in this calibration, refer to schools, churches, governmental authorities and their auxiliaries, media, hospitals, and many other communal bodies identified and analyzed within Michel Foucault's calibration of governmentality. (Kolenic 1024-5)

It is interesting then that those very sites which the Joker attacks are symbols of the institution. The Joker, like Cho, is a threat to the institution due to his willingness to deviate and attack it yet only in the case of the Joker is it difficult to dismiss his actions as a result of psychosis. This is because it is very *possible* that he is a "murdering psychopath." On the other hand, he has a very clear perception of what is going on in reality and makes very valid points about sociopolitical issues. Given what he demonstrates, the Joker has reason to be disturbed by Gotham's citizens

and government. While his *means* may point to psychosis because they are quite extreme, his views do not necessarily warrant writing off the character's views as the result of an illness which can be medicated. As the Joker demonstrates, this is not merely his problem—it is also Gotham's problem—and medicating him will not solve the issue; because of this, we see that the problem exists *outside* of the Joker and because of that, we cannot dismiss his reactions to that problem as something which is occurring within his mind.

The depiction of Cho is of course the opposite. This is primarily due to his actions. In addition to the shooting on the college campus, Cho also sent a tape, a number of photographs, and writings to the media. Immediately after the shooting, the media began to show an inappropriate amount of footage combined with as much medical history as they could construct. This is the narrative of psychopathy forced upon Cho as a means of explaining the institutional breech that occurred when he, the individual, abandoned the unspoken contract of the group (Kolenic 1025). The Joker's actions also function as an alarming institutional breech; however, Nolan strictly deviates from the example of Cho and many others in his depiction of the Joker. Nolan does not offer the narrative of psychopathology, as Kolenic is quick to observe. Not only does he deny us this narrative but he also snubs the media's need to construct this narrative by having the Joker offer a number of stories to explain his scars, changing the story based on the environment and to whom he is telling it. He adjusts the cause of his pain and trauma—whether from an abusive parent or a sacrificial act to please an ungrateful significant other—so that it will resonate with the listener and also allow for the most significant emotional response, a common trick of the media when choosing between integrity and overwhelming the audience to elicit the most sensational emotional reaction.

By doing this, the Joker is both calling attention to and criticizing the lack of the media's reliability. For example, when he encounters Rachel, he instantly identifies her as Harvey Dent's significant other, creating a parallel relationship between him, the Joker, and his wife, the gambler. He then explains that he got his scars when he took a razor blade to his mouth as a means of making his wife feel better about the wounds inflicted by loan sharks. That wife eventually leaves him because of those scars and at this point, his speech has reached its emotional apex. The pattern within the film is for the Joker to then kill the listener by sticking a knife in his/her mouth. Because the story is inspired by some role which is occupied by the listener, it creates more tension. It also functions as the Joker's intention to confuse society about his identity and to cater to his listener. Because he offers so many narratives, we cannot truly grasp his identity; yet, the Joker acknowledges that this is just what society is attempting to do and therefore subverts the attempt by giving them multiple psychological narratives, which cannot be trusted. This change is especially important because it is one which Nolan has chosen rather than adapted; *The Killing Joke* and those comics which inspired Nolan offer origin stories for the villain. For example, the Joker in this comic chooses to become the villain after losing his wife, being forced to comply in a crime, and then falling into a chemical. In this case, the death of his wife presumably drives the character into madness; Nolan's Joker's tale about his own wife leaving him for the scars draws an interesting parallel to the *The Killing Joke* and, through intertextuality, could be considered a trace of an origin story if he did not subvert the story with others. Rather than dogma or ideology, anger and madness motivate this comic's villain. Because we cannot know the origin story of Nolan's Joker, an individual who has custom made clothing and no sort of legal identification, we cannot simply label him with a psychological disorder because we have been given some evidence but nothing which is definitive. Note that

professional psychologists may not need an origin story to diagnose real patients; however, readers who are not trained and are not equipped with the same knowledge of psychological disorders may be more or less likely to label a character on little information. Therefore, it is important that the little information they are provided is contradictory enough to warrant further evaluation of the character.

By denying a narrative, Nolan requires his audience to give more consideration to the Joker as anarchist villain rather than psychopathic villain. This denial also calls attention to and focuses as a critique on the media's role. "Providing a case in this world where a narrative is created—that of Cho—and the photonegative, so to speak, that is Gotham City and the un-narrative behind this particular Joker—where a narrative is denied—allows for a more complicated examination of the role the creation of a narrative plays both within media coverage and other institutional rituals as well as within popular culture phenomena like *The Dark Knight*" (Kolenic 1026). The institution's use of the narrative is both to separate—to show the divide between the criminal or the viewed, and the citizens or the viewers, the insane and the sane—and, Kolenic explains, to hold the criminal accountable. Our inability to pin a narrative on the Joker prevents us from holding hold him accountable because, without a narrative, we cannot quite understand what gives him pain. While we *can* incarcerate him and hold his body hostage, the Joker, by avoiding a narrative, has remained an abstract idea and is unaffected by detainment. Courts cannot hold *ideas* accountable because they are intangible; they can only hold people accountable for actions *based* on ideas. Because the Joker does not care what happens to him physically and is not invested in his body or actions—and is instead invested in his beliefs and ideas—we cannot punish him in any effective way.

In fact, he actually enjoys being incarcerated because he knows that he, unlike other men, is more fluid and can leave as he pleases. Part of this stems from previous comics in which the Joker is constantly escaping from Arkham. Nolan, however, consciously or unconsciously adapts this quality to comment on the Joker's place within the criminal justice system, an individual whom we have no idea how to handle, contain, or rehabilitate. When we first see him in a cell, he sits mockingly on a bench and claps in the face of the camera, seemingly congratulating an act which promotes the false sense of security that we are safe from madmen and have systems in place to remove them from "normal" life; however, the Joker abruptly subverts this notion when he manages to take the police officer, a symbol of the law and order that we think protects us from madmen, hostage and to escape from Gotham. He makes a phone call and the police station explodes, literally and metaphorically putting a hole in the institution. In doing so, the Joker is calling attention to the limits of the justice system and the social order that it protects.

Another limit to the justice system is the border between criminal and criminally insane. Traditionally, the Joker is generally locked up in Arkham in many comics; however, Nolan has chosen to place him in a cell. Perhaps this might have changed if he was held long enough to go to trial for his crimes but the key is that we only ever see him treated like an ordinary prisoner, not a homicidal maniac who cannot be controlled. This is a comment both at the institution's lack of preparation for dealing with such individuals and the amount of mentally ill people who do wind up in prison rather than in a mental hospital where they can be properly treated. Because there is no room in the plot for the Joker to go to trial, Nolan sidesteps the issue and instead makes the audience the jury. It is our responsibility to determine whether or not he is insane but, due to a lack of narrative and mixed evidence, it is difficult for us to show. Without a label, such as criminally insane, we cannot feel comfortable with placing him within the confines of a

mental institution *or* a jail—or, perhaps, we *should not* feel comfortable in doing so. Any hasty action on our part might call attention to our willingness to confine people to prison or asylums without adequate understanding of them and their crimes. In spite of plays like *The Exonerated* and constant updates in the news about individuals who have been wrongly charged, there is often a public outcry to "off" or "put away" individuals when they are suspected of a crime. By making it difficult for us to make a judgment one way or another, Nolan is calling attention to this tendency and making us question our own feelings as these stories appear in the media. If we know nothing about the Joker, can we justify that he is insane and feel comfortable with sending him to Arkham Asylum instead of jail? On the other hand, if a prosecutor was to prove his sanity in a trial, would we feel comfortable sending him to prison knowing that it is equally possible that he is insane? By denying us a narrative, Nolan shows us how uncomfortable we are with this uncertainty and, in our discomfort, we struggle between the desire to act on uncertainty or to attempt to piece together our narrative.

In terms of punishment, Nolan once again shows that we cannot grasp the Joker in order to understand or to punish the villain. He also makes us question the true nature of punishment. We know, based on his interactions with others, that the Joker is unaffected by Batman and the police officer in the interrogation room. In fact, he mocks and antagonizes both of them, unafraid of any physical consequences. If we know that he is unaffected by any sort of physical pain or incarceration, we then begin to consider why we punish individuals. If it is in retaliation to reclaim the losses we have felt by causing the perpetrator to experience the pain he inflicted, then the punishment of the Joker has been ineffective and requires us to find a new means of punishment. While it is difficult to think of how we would rehabilitate the Joker, the other option, prevention of crime, is just as difficult to envision. If it is prevention of further crimes

and removing him so that he is no longer a danger to society, we again find ourselves unsuccessful as he escapes only to wreak more havoc. Because he is an idea, corporeal punishment and confinement do not affect him in the same way; as a result, the strength of the law is nullified by the Joker. This is why Batman's physical attack does nothing. As the Joker says, "You have nothing, nothing to threaten me with. Nothing to do with all your strength" (*The Dark Knight*). This could also reflect the anxieties and frustrations of the American people in punishing terrorists whose motives are unclear or those who appear unremorseful. In addition, by not giving the Joker a narrative and by showing that the law enforcement does not threaten him, Nolan may be consciously or unconsciously pointing out a flaw in the American institution: its inability to and lack of preparation for dealing with such individuals.

As a result, we are forced to evaluate the motivations of punishment and its effectiveness. If bodily punishment and containment are ineffective, we must find another alternative, making it all the more important for us to develop an understanding of the individual. This situation creates more pressure and magnifies our frustrations in being refused the normal narrative. While this seems unproductive, it is really very significant because this ambiguity leads us to think about the systems we have in place in more depth. It also requires us to give the criminal more consideration than we wish to give; often, unless we are motivated by morbid fascination or, in less common cases, consider the rights of the accused as an equally important element of justice, we are very comfortable with holding a trial, sentencing an individual, and locking him away so that we can safely go on with our lives. The Joker, however, calls this practice into question by forcing us to give individuals who are society's problem more consideration. Because we cannot metaphorically or physically lock him away, he will keep escaping and causing problems.

This discussion of punishment inevitably warrants a discussion of the struggle for power between the criminal and the institution. In many cases, the law exercises power over those who have deviated by ordering a prison sentence in which the individual's body is confined and, in many ways, his soul as well. The institution is reasserting the power which was taken when the individual decided to act against the group; however, by refusing to respond or be affected by this assertion of power, the Joker cannot be punished and as a result causes chaos. This is symbolized by the police department's inability to keep him confined in the cell. He takes a police officer hostage and uses his one phone call to trigger an explosion, causing chaos that in turn symbolizes the institution's response in these rare cases. It is in this chaos that the Joker has found ultimate power. Further, the Joker, a believer and distributor of chaos, is at his very root, especially without a backstory, simply the mask he represents. This mask represents an idea, chaos and, therefore, the Joker is chaos. As chaos, the villain becomes an abstract concept, an idea. As an idea, corporeal punishment or containment does not work. Even within the cell, the Joker has distributed this idea, has infected Gotham with it, and therefore cannot be contained. He does not mind being locked up, in fact, he treats it as another opportunity to play with his captors, asking more questions and issuing more challenges than he answers, playing with the power he has in his ability to evade understanding.

In a metaphorical sense, he can never truly be caught without a way for the institution to bind or label him. The reason he breaks out of the asylum so often in the comics is for this very reason, as somebody who is an idea, not a psychopath, he cannot be contained as such. Alfred's discussion with Batman in the film metaphorically explains this. Batman, like the institution Nolan is suggesting, thinks a simplistic definition applies to the Joker as well because he cannot understand the villain's nature: "Criminals aren't complicated, Alfred. Just have to figure out

what he's after" (*The Dark Knight*). Wayne is operating from a very general idea of villainy and criminality that pervades much of the American media and society, the idea that all crime is motivated either by psychosis or by pursuit of some object or material possession (e.g. money—which, coincidentally, the Joker rejects and sets ablaze—lust, love, and revenge). This belief is what naturally sends us searching for a narrative to determine which of these two causes explains the behavior. Alfred, however, a much wiser and, notably, British as opposed to American, individual, is more aware of his lack of understanding of the Joker. He tells a story in order to draw parallels to the villain and it seems is even speaking to the audience in addition to Wayne: "With respect Master Wayne, perhaps this is a man that *you* don't fully understand, either…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*). Nolan's suggestion then, with Alfred's story, is that the Joker, like the jewel thief, cannot be caught. Rather, the captors must burn the forest around him, killing him, something that in the comics Batman has struggled with and continues to struggle with in *The Killing Joke*.

Alfred is not the only individual speaking to the viewer; it appears as if Nolan is attempting to show the viewers that they have as little control over the Joker as the characters do. In spite of the fact that the members of the audience see everything shown to them that is not necessarily shown to the legal arms of the institution, including Bruce Wayne's secret life, they are equally as powerless as the institution, further driving the divide between those who follow and those, like the Joker, who digress. As those who abide by the institution, viewers are subject to and affected by its wellbeing. Therefore, the same frustrations the audience feels as Gotham's police force struggles to stop the Joker are the same frustrations it feels while watching as crimes are reported on our news. In spite of Alfred's efforts to contextualize the Joker, Kolenic

observes, the character is still "intentionally enigmatic, supported by his many other denials of governmentality throughout the film…This origin story—the detailed branding of Batman—allows the viewer to intimately know Bruce Wayne/Batman through these films, making the denial of this origin in the Joker character all the more powerful, distancing viewers from the Joker as viewers draw closer to the origins and developing narrator of this Batman" (Kolenic 1028). In this sense, knowing the hero becomes more of a priority than knowing the villain. Here, it almost seems as if Nolan is using the denial of narrative to not only frustrate and subvert, but also to divert the public's attention to subjects which he thinks are more worthy. Attempting to create a bond to the hero and distance the audience from the villain is of course what is also done in *Oz the Great and Powerful;* if Nolan effectively diverted our attention, we may have been less likely to notice the Joker's ambiguity and have stunted our evaluation with a label.

Nolan, however, is successful without meaning to be—at least, he is not successful as he intends to be. In many ways, he views the Joker as a psychopath and does not seem to be attempting to portray him as otherwise; however, he also effectively and brilliantly incorporates many new or repurposed elements of comics so that the Joker is more complex than Nolan seems to indicate in interviews. Because of this, he is unsuccessful in terms of distracting viewers from the Joker at the film's resolution yet successful—whether consciously or unconsciously—by establishing ambiguity and allowing us to benefit from such a villain. Given that he provides no resolution, we might assume he was intending to distract us from the Joker—and he may have been doing this—but we might also see that, in conjunction with the lack of an origin story, it was intentional, making us as uncertain of the director as we are of the villain. By omitting a resolution for the Joker, Nolan leaves him literally left hanging as he is suspended from a building awaiting apprehension from the cops, while the Batman runs to stop Harvey Dent. The

film does not end with the Joker because, while he is fascinating and creates chaos, it is the Batman who restores balance to the institution. By creating such an ending, he does not rob the villain of his ambiguity but he also does not shatter the illusion of labelling and villainy behind which society hides. Nolan has played with this balance but, at the very moment when it seems that he could tip it over, he backs away, creating a film which intrigues but does not shatter the institution. He will go on to do the same in *The Dark Knight Rises* where he plays a great deal with ideas of Marxism and capitalism but, inevitably, restores balance. A former independent filmmaker, Nolan is edgy but in these blockbusters, he is careful to avoid completely toppling over that edge, in spite of the fact that, as the Joker says, "all it takes is a little push."

Nolan is not, however, too passive to avoid inserting a bit of critique not only of the media's need to construct the narrative but also the role it plays in aiding terrorist agendas, particularly that of 9/11. Aside from the tragedy of the event, one of the most intimidating aspects of 9/11 involves the media. Like the use of photography in the Civil War and the changes it brought—as well as the advances in technology which allowed the media to produce and distribute photographs of the war in Vietnam—a new development occurred that took the horror of 9/11 to a new level. Because the media was focused on the World Trade Center following the first attack, the footage of the second plane flying into the towers was shown in real-time. In this sense, the majority of America was watching the terrorist attack as it unfolded. Following these collisions, Americans were able to watch, helplessly, as individuals jumped from the buildings and fell to gruesome deaths, making the attacks all the more jarring. Because the media had caught this footage on tape as it happened, the videos were widely distributed and played again and again, forcing Americans to relive the tragedy not just by listening to news developments but also by watching the same jarring footage continually. The increased visualization of the attack,

not just the aftermath, became a part of American consciousness and anxieties. Fritz Breithaupt, quoted by Kolenic, states that,

> ‘the media themselves responded to the attack by creating that which they perceived as the outcome of the attacks: “a trauma.” At the same time, the media recommended themselves as therapist as the agent of national healing. Obviously the impulse behind this staging of therapy is something other than therapy’ (67). The media, according to Breithaupt, create, diagnose, and provide the cure for events such as these as a ritualistic response: one that serves over and over to bolster and reify institutional and political strength” (Kolenic 1033).

Breithaupt, Kolenic, and Nolan, as we will find, note and expose the media’s true motives.

The result of the media’s decision to act as therapist is detrimental, especially given that its true purpose is to flex political strength. After a moment such as this, many might say the media’s role is beneficial, if not necessary, to a reeling America; however, this is an institutional effort to manipulate, to make a very overt distinction between the Americans (the innocent) and the foreign terrorists. This is commonly said to have increased patriotism but at the expense of cultural acceptance of many Middle Eastern individuals who had already become American citizens. This is the sacrifice of reasserting that institutional strength and it is a lesson Nolan has adopted. He portrays the effects of the media in creating a mob mentality meant to protect one side from the other. For example, when Coleman Reese is on television and is going to expose Bruce Wayne as the Batman, the media allows the Joker to voiceover the program and speak directly to the audience so that the effect is felt in real-time as well. He delivers an ultimatum

that creates fear and chaos, saying that if Coleman Reese is not killed within an hour he will blow up a hospital. By airing this, the news has clearly helped to establish the people from the other, Reese. A mob mentality is created in which people line up outside the station and attempt to attack Reese. One man even brings a gun and another tries to drive his truck straight into the police convoy used to protect Reese. Without the media, the Joker would not have reached such a broad audience; the media, in its great desire to create a narrative of the Joker and to increase ratings by airing the largest news stories, aids and abets terrorism.

It cannot be denied that the Joker is an anarchist or terrorist or even that there is ambiguity regarding his psychological state. It must be noted that in interviews, Nolan makes it a point to explain that psychology is a significant part of the film. He has attempted to create a darker version of the Batman that is also grounded in reality. Part of this reality, especially contemporary reality, is the psychological. Nolan says that they wanted to create a "flesh-and-blood-psychopath" (Jesser 47). This may have been his intention but the issue of the narrative complicates and possibly changes the final product. It is true that the Joker's aims are abnormal but does this mean he is psychologically abnormal or just outside of our framework of understanding? The Joker is convinced that if you push a man's psyche enough, you can corrupt him and make him insane. The reason the Joker goes for Dent is Dent is so far from corruption and poses the greatest challenge to his theories and, at least according to Dent's actions, the Joker's efforts and views are validated. He is proved wrong when he tries to pit two boats of people against one another for their lives but he also does not expose them to the personal psychological trauma he employs with Dent. His aims are still extreme and far from being morally justified but effective all the same. Possibly, it is our fear of the truths about society and ourselves that the Joker reveals, not the actual villain, that makes us as an audience and society

desperate to label such views as psychotic; after all, it is much easier than looking into the abyss. Nolan says, "The theme that you either die a hero or you live long enough to see yourself become the villain is really the theme of the movie for me" (Jesser 49). Those of us who choose to rule out the evil as psychopathic at least attempt to hold onto our innocence by refusing to seriously contemplate the villain's arguments while those of us who "live long enough" risk villainy by association if we open ourselves up to the thoughts inspired by such characters.

In spite of our refusal to acknowledge this, the Joker is scarily sane but far from *insane*; if insanity is to have lost connection from reality and to have an affected perspective of the world, the Joker—who is highly in tune to the sociopolitical climate, is not insane—yet, because he notices things about society which scare us and which we prefer to ignore, he is scarily sane, thinking critically about issues which cause discomfort. Nolan does say, "To me, it was about creating a psychologically credible anarchist, a purposeless criminal, a psychopath. The most frightening enemy is the one who has no rules, who's not out for anything, who can't be understood" (Jesser 97). The Joker is very frightening because those of us who submit to the institution are governed by rules; because we cannot understand one who is not governed by institutional rule, we cannot see him as anything other than a psychopath because we cannot process such an extreme difference that shatters the reality built and enforced by that very institution which governs us. We see individuals like the Joker as dangerous not only to our well-being as individuals but also to our institutions which, to prevent more villains like the Joker, govern our mentality and therefore profit by our tendency to write off anything said by these individuals as psychotic rather than rational. Otherwise, we would see that the Joker is far from purposeless but is only seen as such because we cannot understand and are not asked or even in some instances permitted to understand his purpose of calling attention to a broken system.

Possibly it is not as Nolan says—that the Joker is abnormal because he has no rules—but rather that we are only normal or civil as long as we are strictly policed by the laws norms which we think are evidence that we are civilized this however, is also an issue as the Joker tries at length to show that humans are not as civil as they like to think they are. In spite of later failures, he proves this with the case of Coleman Reese in which people, out of fear and desperation, contemplate and even attempt murder. The Joker tells Batman, "You see, their morals, their code, it's 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 civilized people, they'll eat each other. See, I'm not a monster. I'm just ahead of the curve" (*The Dark Knight*). While *The Dark Knight* inevitably proves this wrong in the end of the film—when people in two boats are given an ultimatum, to blow up the other or for both to be blown up in an hour, and neither act—there are a number of other cases in the film which support his statement, contributing to a more ambiguous, observant yet frighteningly and *potentially* sane and perceptive individual.

By mirroring contemporary terrorism, media, and institutional motives in employing the narrative, we gain a more complex perspective of the Joker and those most fascinated by him, ourselves. This particular Joker has eclipsed all former film interpretations because Nolan is the first to both abandon the origin story and give us the freedom to contemplate the form's political complexity and ambiguity. We are captivated by the Joker because he eludes us, drawing our curiosity. Granted, Nolan has attempted, through both direct and indirect characterization, to label the Joker as a psychopath but he has also provided enough contradictory evidence to render Batman's and other characters' testimonies as prematurely made and unreliable. As a result, Nolan, unlike the media, has not forced a psychological narrative of the Joker on the audience and has offered the valuable opportunity so rarely afforded to construct one's own understanding

of the villain (in spite of the incredible frustration in doing so). While we may never truly understand the Joker, the man behind the mask, or even the actor behind the character, we still profit from this exploration. In fact, we learn more from ambiguity than uncertainty; it is the Joker's very rebellion and rejection of the institution and society that we both deny and crave within ourselves. We are enticed by the Joker both because we are not him and because we cannot easily understand him. By calling attention to this, *The Dark Knight* offers us the opportunity to not only evaluate the Joker's mental state and his behavior but also the dangerous tendency to treat villainy and psychopathy as if they are synonymous. By being morally and psychologically ambiguous, the Joker has forced us into the uncomfortable territory of confronting a number of social issues, ranging from institutional and societal problems and the ways that we see other individuals. While the Joker and Theodora are similar in the respect that both disturb the social order, the Joker does society a favor capturing its interest and leading it to critical discussion, demonstrating his own value not only in terms of pointing out what is wrong with Gotham but also in helping us to develop the ability to point out and amend what is wrong in our society.

Conclusion—And the Villain Saves the Day: Ambiguous Villains and How They Save Us from Ourselves

The most obvious difference between an ambiguous villain and a one-dimensional villain is depth; this depth makes our villains more interesting and echoes the complexity of a human being. Ambiguous villains are more interesting to consider because there are more questions than there are answers. Theodora and the Joker were chosen because they either offer a problem or a solution. Theodora is one-dimensional, especially in comparison to our other villains, because we never really have to question her motivation. It is simple, we know it, and it can be easily defined in both abstract and concrete terms. Theodora wants revenge against the man who seduced her and then rejected her. On the other hand, in spite of what most people *think*, we cannot exactly determine the Joker's motivations. The Joker may be wreaking havoc because he is a sadist, a terrorist, a psychologically disturbed individual, a political activist, or all of the above. The key is not whether the Joker has a psychological disorder or political motivations; it is that he leads us to ask questions. In doing so, we gain a better idea of the characters, the villain, and any stereotypes he may represent. Stereotypes do not leave room for complexities and, because this character is certainly complex, he helps us to see the limitations of stereotypes and their inability to define human beings (e.g., the stereotyping and stigmatization of mental illness). Characters like the Joker get us in the habit of questioning the things we view—and, through the films, questioning ourselves and our societies—and once we are finished, he makes us more likely to be able to question other films and instances which we will encounter in our daily lives. Yet, there are too many Theodoras and too few Jokers to stimulate critical thinking.

This danger is and will be constant until we provide children and adolescents with works which give them the opportunity to think about what is presented. We should place more emphasis on evaluation of what we see than on plot summary and until this is the case, students

and citizens are only going to be able to repeat and adopt what they are told rather than come up with their own opinions. Radical children's literature is that which stimulates critical thinking and evaluates the individuals and societies of a text. As Jack Zipes writes on the subject, "Radical children's literature will not guarantee a better future for American children, but it will certainly challenge them to think critically and creatively about their choices, and this can only have a positive impact on the future of American society" (*Twists and Turns* ix). The trick to radical children's literature is not giving children the right answers; rather it is giving them the right questions. Ambiguous villains can be used to give them these questions. For example, the Joker raises questions about how we view psychological disorders in relation to political and criminal behaviors. Ambiguous villains, as the most dynamic characters within a text, can also be the most radical and certainly draw the most attention. Children who think critically about them may develop the ability to think critically about other complex issues as well. In doing so, children—and, later, adults—will not be at the mercy of what they read, see, and hear.

As we expose children to complex works that require more of them, we will begin to see improvements both within their lives and society. This is an investment because children who think critically about texts are more likely to be able to think critically about situations they encounter. If they are taught to accept labels, they are more likely to label others and treat them according to those labels; because we cannot control who dictates labels, this is very dangerous and leaves children as the recipients of harsh treatment or as participants in doling out that treatment. Works which require more of children require them to be direct participants rather than passive bystanders, engaging in rather than merely absorbing what they see. When children develop the courage and abilities to engage in these complex questions and conflicts, we will find that they are more prepared to think and act in similar moments in their own lives. This does

not mean that every child will become Batman; rather, it means that children will be more capable of determining what they think is right and then acting on it.

Works Cited

Batman Begins. Dir. Christopher Nolan. Perf. Christian Bale, Michael Caine, Morgan Freeman, Katie Holmes, Cillian Murphy and Liam Neeson. Warner Bros. Pictures, 2005.

Camp M. D., Mary E., et al. "The Joker: A Dark Night for Depictions of Mental Illness." *Academic Psychiatry*. 34.2 (2010): 145. Web. 9 Jan. 2014.

Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. 3rd ed. Novato, California: New World Library, 2008. Print.

Crutcher, Paul A. "Complexity in the Comic and Graphic Novel Medium: Inquiry Through Bestselling Batman Stories." Journal of Popular Culture. 44.1 (2011): 53-72. Web.

The Dark Knight. Dir. Christopher Nolan. Perf. Christian Bale, Heath Ledger, Michael Caine, Aaron Eckhart, Maggie Gyllenhaal, Morgan Freeman and Gary Oldman. Warner Bros. Pictures, 2008.

Elber, Lynn. "Oh, How Dearly We Love Those Villains." *The Columbian* (1996): November 15. Web.

Fischoff, Stuart. "Villains in Film: Anemic Renderings." *Popular Culture Review*. 6.1 (1995): 45-52. Web. 9 Oct. 2013.

Hartmann, Uwe. "Sigmund Freud and His Impact on Our Understanding of Male Sexual Dysfunction." *Sexual Medical History*. 6 (2009): 2332-9. Web. 6 Apr. 2013.

Kilmer, Paulette D. "A Crisis in Archetypes: How Framing U.S. Elections as Heroes versus Villains Promotes Two-Valued Orientations, Encourages Corruption, and Erodes Public Trust." *Forum on Public Policy*. (2007): Web. 1. Oct. 2013.

Klapp, Orrin. E. "American Villain-Types." *American Sociological Review*. 21.3 (1956): 337-340. Web. 1 Oct. 2013.

Kolenic, Anthony J. “Madness in the Making: Creating and Denying Narratives from Virginia Tech to Gotham City.” The Journal of Popular Culture. 42.6 (2009): 1023-39. Web.

Morrison, Grant. Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on Serious Earth. Art by Dave Mckean. New York: DC Comics, 1989. Print.

Mortimer, John. *The Oxford Book of Villains*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992. Print.

Oz: the Great and Powerful. Dir. Sam Raimi. Perf. James Franco, Mila Kunis, Rachel Weisz, Michelle Williams, Zach Braff, Bill Cobbs and Joey King. Disney, 2013.

Paige, Linda Rohrer. “Wearing the Red Shoes: Dorothy and the Power of the Female Imagination in The Wizard of Oz.” *Journal of Popular Film & Television*. 23.4 (1996): 146-153. Web. 6 Apr. 2013.

Serra, Jordi. “Trajectories: Batman versus Al-Qaeda.” Futures. 39. (2007): 768-72. Web.

Stallcup, Jackie. “The Feast of Misrule: Captain Underpants, Satire, and the Literary Establishment.” Genre. 2008. Web. 13 Feb. 2013.

Tumanov, Vladimir. “Mary Versus Eve: Paternal Uncertainty and the Christian View of Women.” *Neophilologus*. 95 (2011): 507-521. Web. 6 Apr. 2013.

Walsh, Jim. “Anarchy, Law, and the Joker.” Liberty. 22.9 44-46. Web. 9 Jan. 2014.

Willis, Ellen. “Villains and victims: ‘Sexual correctness’ and the repression of feminism.” *Salmagundi: a quarterly of the humanities & social sciences*. 101 (1994): 68-78. Web. 13 Apr. 2013.

Wolk, Douglas. Irresistible lure of the Joker. 418.26 (2012): 48. Web. 9 Jan. 2014.

Zipes, Jack. “The Twists and Turns of Radical Children's Literature.” Trans. Array *tales for little rebels: a collection of radical children's literature*. Julia L. Mickenberg and Philip Nel. New York: New York University Press, 2008. vii-ix. Print.