



*Araştırma Makalesi • Research Article*

**The Reimagining of The Western-Centric Savior Myth as a Superhero: The Use of Masks in The Dark Knight Film**

***Batı-Merkezli Kurtarıcı Mitinin Süper Kahraman Olarak Yeniden İnşası: Kara Şövalye Filminde Maskelerin Kullanımı***

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**Abstract:** Masks have been used throughout human history as objects with significant symbolic value, despite their simple materials such as fabric or wood. Masks have the ability to convey meanings beyond what is visible, allowing the wearer to assume a second identity represented by the mask, which can be independent from their own human identity and even drastically different. This study examines the use of masks as a means of expression, focusing on the superhero film *The Dark Knight* (2008), using a mixed methodology approach. As evident from the article, the film features three primary masks: Batman's mask representing global power and authority employed by capitalism, Joker's mask representing chaos and anarchy, and Dent's mask symbolizing the ordinary human. While the first two mask uses are elevated in the film's language, the utilization of the mask representing the human face is portrayed as insignificant. Consequently, the film implies that to be accepted as a savior, one must transcend their humanity and assume a transhuman form.

**Keywords:** Mask, Superhero, Identity, Ideology, Power

**Öz:** Maske insanlık tarihinin en eski zamanlarından beri kullanılagelmiş bir nesnedir. Maskeler görülenin ötesinde anlamlar taşımaya kabildirler ve bu sayede maskeyi takan kişi kendi insani kimliği dışında başka maskenin temsil ettiği ikinci bir kimliği daha taşıyabilir. Bu ikinci kimlik maskeyi takan kişinin kimliğinden bağımsız ve hatta oldukça farklı olabilmektedir. Bu çalışmada maskenin bu türden ifade aracı olarak kullanılması bir süper kahraman filmi olan *Kara Şövalye* (2008) filmi üzerinden karma yöntem kullanılarak incelenmiştir. Makaleden de anlaşılacağı üzere, filmde Batman'in, Joker'in, Harvey Dent'in olmak üzere üç temel maske vardır. Bu maskelerin her biri özel anlamlar taşımaktadır. Batman'in maskesi kapitalizm tarafından kullanılan küresel güç ve iktidarı, Joker'in maskesi kaos ve anarşiyi, Dent'in maskesi sıradan insanı temsil etmektedir. İlk iki kullanım insanüstü formlara aitken, Dent'in maskesi insanlığın yüzünü simgelemektedir. İlk iki maske kullanımı film dili tarafından yüceltilirken, insan yüzünü simgeleyen maske kullanımı filmin dilince küçük görülür. Böylece insan, insan kalarak

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kurtarıcı olarak kabul edilmez. Kurtarıcı olabilmesi için insanlığından kurtularak daha üst bir forma geçmelidir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Maske, Süper kahraman, Kimlik, İdeoloji, İktidar

## Introduction

The word "mask" is defined in the dictionary as "a fake face made of painted cardboard, fabric, or plastic, worn over the face to avoid being recognized by others" (TDK, 2021). Another meaning provided in the same dictionary is "a deceptive appearance or behavior that hides true emotions or the real appearance of something." Ulrich defines masks as objects that partially or completely cover the face (Ulrich, 1989). As Güner expresses, masks conceal the person behind them and give them a new identity by presenting a new portrait (2006:3). In terms of their purposes, masks aim to provide an illusion, appearance, or face in place of the hidden face (Güner, 2006:4).

As observed, the word "mask" is inherently associated with the act of concealing something. In this context, a mask is first and foremost an object that covers and hides. Consequently, the mask, which is placed instead of the concealed human face or body, carries a new meaning as a new object. This meaning reveals the unique identity of the mask itself. Therefore, when examining the history of masks, it becomes apparent that masks derive their power from the ability to embody an identity.

The potential of masks to embody an identity and thereby gain power has been recognized since the earliest human societies. As a result, mask usage can be observed even in the oldest tribes. In Güner's thesis, which examines these uses in detail, it is stated that masks symbolized supernatural powers in primitive tribes. These initial uses of masks were related to hunting, aiming to transform the hunter into an animal. The person wearing the mask gains an advantage over the animal they intend to hunt and engages with it as an animal (Güner, 2006:10). In ancient beliefs, masks were one of the ways in which humans fought against nature. Those who harness the power of the mask would try to gain an advantage in combating the threats they encounter in nature by presenting themselves as a part of nature itself (Gezgin, 2008:23).

During this early period, masks also emerged as an integral part of rituals. Rituals performed with masks were believed to ward off evil, defeat enemies, control seasons, and heal illnesses. Ancient masks served various purposes: some were for protection, while others were for aggression. People resorted to masks with the belief that they could derive power from them (Güner, 2006:13). Tribes performing dances in the guise of animals and imitating animal movements in religious ceremonies felt as if they had transformed and become the animals (Gombrich, 2007:43).

Another historical use of masks is to represent the deceased individual. Masks of this nature elevate the deceased person to a state of immortality (Güner, 2006:16). In a sense, these masks bestow immortality upon the deceased and include them in eternity. In this type of mask usage, the function of concealment is once again employed. The mask worn by the deceased person conceals their physical death and replaces their mortality with the presumed immortality hidden within the mask. Similarly, in the context of entertainment, masks serve a similar purpose. By concealing a person's true identity, masks provide comfort in carnivals and other similar social games (Güner, 2006:17).

Since ancient times, masks have also been used for artistic purposes to depict various emotional states. Masks were used in theater performances, balls, and certain ceremonies. This tradition of mask usage has persisted until modern times. Similarly, face painting, which was initially done to cope with nature and survive in natural conditions, has evolved into an aesthetic pursuit known as makeup in contemporary times. Mask usage is prevalent in various professions today, such as doctors, nurses, who use masks for protection. Firefighters, police officers, astronauts, and athletes also use masks when necessary.

In this study, the focus is primarily on mask usage in cinema, which can be considered as a continuation of early mask usage. When examining mask usage in the context of superheroes, particularly through the lens of Batman, it can be observed that masks are used as a means of expression.

Mask, as mentioned above, by concealing the face behind it, bestows a new face upon the wearer.

This new face is essentially a new form of communication, a new language in the sense of Staurtis (2017, p.25). By interacting with the person or people it presents itself to, it conveys something through both what it hides and what it reveals. As Yasan (2011) extensively explores in her work, the transformative power of the mask lies here. It transforms the old into the new without eradicating the former. It offers the wearer a dual existence, presenting a mysterious continuation of their underlying identity while manifesting the self-embodied in the mask. In this regard, the mask provides a narrative that is both concealed and apparent, offering a new and layered storytelling experience. While the mask serves its fundamental function, what it hides shifts into subtext. However, the possibility of displacement is always maintained. The physical distance between the identity behind the mask and the concealed identity is as short as the thickness of a curtain. Yet, there may be chasms between the expressions held by the two identities. Due to its ability to transform the ordinary into the extraordinary, the fearful into the courageous, and the mortal into the immortal, the mask possesses a narrative language that can bridge all distances.

Mask, on one hand, is an object that merges humans with nature, turning them into hunters, and on the other hand, it is an object that transports humans to the transcendent and allows for the imitation of the transcendent. This is why masks have been widely used throughout history. The use of masks grants individuals powers and levels that they cannot achieve through their individual efforts alone. From primitive humans to modern times, people resort to masking, to covering. An important point to note here is that the power of the mask derives from its act of concealing something. Indeed, the implied animal or figure represented by the mask alone does not carry much meaning. It is the human who assumes the mask that empowers it. Thus, individuals can be more than themselves through their own expression as well as the expression conveyed by the mask. In fact, art derives its power from a similar approach. From a broader perspective, all forms of art can be seen as masked narratives.

Art is seen to employ indirect means to reach implicit or explicit meanings. Every artistic activity, whether theater, novels, architecture, sculpture, or music, requires representation. They are representatives, not the actualities themselves. This representative status implies that they are masks or means of expression for a kind of truth. Therefore, all art moves with a mask. What artists do is express meanings by embodying them in a specific object or concreteness. Every work of art signifies the masking or encryption of a truth. The allegories and images in poetry are equivalent to masks. The artist, who cannot attain the bare truth, tries to obtain it by masking it. Each sculpture is a masked representation of an expression.

Cinema, as a form of art itself, utilizes masks both in terms of embodying meanings and in a concrete sense. Being the inheritor of literature and other arts, cinema also inherits the use of masks in those arts. Film directors serve as modern storytellers, creating myths. The transformative power of masks is also applicable to the myths in cinema. Just as, according to Malinowski, myths in early cultures deepen beliefs by encrypting them, thus preserving and strengthening established morality, cinema resorts to mask production and usage in a manner similar to that of primitive humans (2000:147). Masks are imbued with specific meanings, and they impact both the audience within the film and the viewers. Particularly in science fiction, fantasy, and horror films, the use of masks is prevalent. Vampires, werewolves, mummies, ghosts, aliens, demons, and witches are often depicted wearing masks. Superheroes, in particular, wear masks with their own special meanings.

In these films, masks hide the characters' faces and give them new faces. In this way, the mask acquires personality and transforms into a character (Nunley and McCarty, 1999:247). This embedded character within the mask also serves as a special and implicit representative of a worldview and a hierarchy. When these films are examined more closely, these implicit meanings concealed within the mask can be discovered.

### **Methodology**

In this article, a mixed method approach is employed, combining discourse analysis, descriptive film analysis, and ideological film criticism, drawing on Stuart Hall's theory of representation. The initial

method utilized is discourse analysis, which is employed to examine texts with layered narratives such as films, and decode both explicit and implicit messages within these texts. According to Tonkiss, this type of analysis is grounded in discourse and draws upon various disciplines such as psychology, sociology, history, philosophy, and literature for its evaluation (2004:367). Since it is based on concrete data from the text, it is not considered a subjective interpretation (Sözen, 1999:81-82). Similarly, discourse analysis provides the opportunity to reveal hidden ideologies embedded within the implicit layers of the text, thereby exposing how the dominant discourse is constructed (İrvan, 2001:81). The aim of discourse analysis is to reach hidden ideological structures beyond explicit linguistic structures (İnceoğlu and Çomak, 2009:12). Therefore, in this study, discourse analysis is primarily employed to access the layered messages within the examined film.

Additionally, descriptive film analysis is utilized to examine and evaluate the findings within the film. The objective of descriptive analysis is to describe and interpret the data systematically. Accordingly, the data is first systematically described and then explained and interpreted. Similar to discourse analysis, researchers can form their own interpretations and make inferences based on the descriptive analysis, using their own observations (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2018, pp. 239-240)

Another method used in this study, alongside these two methods, is ideological film criticism. This type of analysis, as expressed by Özden, takes a broad perspective when examining films and draws support from theories such as structuralism, semiotics, and psychoanalysis. It aims to reveal how films are used as a means of ideological reproduction. Through this approach, the social functions of films are exposed from an ideological deconstructionist perspective, and these functions are examined in various areas related to the film. In order to achieve these goals, the ideological approach examines how films position cinema audiences, the ideological conditioning contained within them as cultural texts, and their contributions to the creation of dominant ideology. This examination also reveals how films internalize cultural representations for the viewers (2004:165-169). The ideological approach also exposes the impression of reality reflected in films. According to Ellis, this illusion produces identification as a viewer stance rather than generating critical activity (Ellis, 1997: X). Cinema, which presents the impression of reality, strengthens and exploits the ideology it reflects, thereby manipulating the conscience of the audience (Atam and Görücü, 1995:8).

Furthermore, the concept of "representation" used in this study is based on Stuart Hall's theory of representation. According to Hall, representation systems are the meaning systems through which we present the world to ourselves and to others (Hall, 1997:6). As seen, representation carries the meaning of standing in for something, similar to a mask, and Hall also uses representation in this sense (Hall, 2017:23). In this sense, representation prefers to convey concepts through visual imagery instead of words. These visual signs, as images, reside in the mind and enable communication among people through shared coding. Objects can also have similar functions of producing meaning, and in fact, all cultural objects function as language-like meaning transmitters (Hall, 2017:25-45). The representational value attributed to objects by Hall aligns with the representational value attributed to masks in this study, and therefore, this study is based on this conceptualization.

In cinema, superhero films provide the best trace of ideological dominance through the impression of reality. Indeed, superhero films address power relations and the issue of "power" both explicitly and implicitly. In this study, discourse analysis and ideological film criticism will be used separately to reveal such relational networks in *The Dark Knight* film, in connection with the use of masks.

### **Superheroes and Masks**

Heroism, like masks, is a phenomenon that emerged in the earliest periods of humanity. Throughout history, people have needed heroes. Every society has its own heroes in every era of history. As Campbell expresses, a hero resolves an issue that society cannot overcome, thereby bringing relief to the community. While the hero engages in this external struggle, they also engage in an internal battle, confronting themselves in the depths of their soul, completing their evolution, dying, and being reborn (2013:31).

The masks of superheroes are the source of their most effective ability in resolving dilemmas. That is why all superheroes, especially those originating from Hollywood, wear masks. When carefully examined, these masks have a direct relationship with the superheroes' powers. Superman derives his power from being able to conceal his true identity. If exposed, he will become a "weak" individual and lose his superpowers. Spider-Man can activate his superpowers only when he takes on the form of a spider and utilizes his webs. Iron Man transforms into a superhero only when he wears the Iron Man suit. Similarly, as detailed below, Batman, the specific focus of this study, becomes super powerful only when he wears his mask. Although Batman's mask is supported by a super-technological costume, he actually derives his power from his identity that he hides behind his mask. As it will be seen in the movie, Joker tries to reveal Batman's identity by removing his mask, thus showing that his costume's other technological super-equipment would lose its meaning if his identity was exposed. In all these examples and others, the mask elevates the superhero to a "higher" class by concealing their true identity.

As can be seen, what is actually concealed by the mask is "humanity," and through the mask, a superhuman entity, a superior being, a transhuman entity is obtained. In a sense, this is the answer to Nietzsche's question, "Man is a being that must be overcome, what have you done to overcome him?" (2010, p. 3). In the film *The Dark Knight*, which is the subject of this study, Joker's statement, "What doesn't kill you makes you a stranger," is a reference to aphorism (1888), "What doesn't kill you, makes you stronger," from the 19th century German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche.

Superheroes, like primitive humans, strip themselves of their humanity and enter the realm of the divine. Furthermore, in superhero films, with few exceptions, all villains, and anti-heroes, are also masked. By wearing masks, villains also strip themselves of their humanity. The battle takes place, in a way, between gods, between superhuman beings, just as it did in ancient Greece. As Canetti notes, a mask conceals more than it expresses, and one of its primary functions is to create separation, and distance (2010:378). By placing a distance between the person wearing the mask and their true identity, in other words, between the human and the superhuman, it distinguishes them from each other.

This situation, as will be examined in detail below, is also a manifestation of the insurmountable distance that Western culture places between man and God. In the East, the boundary between God and man is vague and internal. Therefore, as mentioned above, in the East, when masks are worn, gods are imitated and sanctified, thus establishing a hierarchy that transcends the boundaries between god and man. In Western mask usage, however, the hierarchy is established between man and the superhuman. Therefore, while the mask serves as a representation tool in the East, it turns into an instrument of domination in the West. People are trapped between masked superheroes and masked anti-heroes, with no free will. This divergence is exemplified also in Greek mythology (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2023), where gods are portrayed as distant and powerful entities, creating an insurmountable gap between them and humans.

The myth of Prometheus, a Titan who defied divine order by stealing fire from fellow gods to bestow upon humanity, exemplifies the gods' reluctance to share their privileges with mortals. This act of benevolence incurred the wrath of Zeus, resulting in Prometheus being perpetually punished, chained to a rock, and subjected to the torment of an eagle incessantly devouring his liver. This punishment serves as a stark reminder of the gods' punitive stance against those who endeavor to bridge the chasm between divine and mortal realms.

The narrative of Apollo, the god of crops and herds and primary deity of the Delphic oracle, further illuminates the capricious nature of divine intervention in human affairs. Apollo's oracular powers, wielded to communicate the will of the gods, often led to ambiguous, misleading, or conditional prophecies. An illustrative instance is Apollo's counsel to King Croesus, predicting the destruction of a great kingdom if he waged war against the Persian Empire. This prophecy, though favorably interpreted by Croesus, resulted in the unintended destruction of his own kingdom. The tale underscores the gods' enigmatic communication, reinforcing the idea of an insurmountable divide.

In the story of Philemon and Baucis, the gods Zeus and Hermes, disguised as humans, test the

hospitality of a humble elderly couple during their journey. The couple, unaware of the divine nature of their guests, wholeheartedly extend their generosity, transforming their humble abode into a temple. This narrative emphasizes not only the gods' reward for piety and humility but also their deliberate concealment until the genuineness of human character is tested. The transformation of Philemon and Baucis into trees, growing side by side, further underscores the gods' intricate engagement with mortals.

These mythological narratives, deeply ingrained in Western cultural consciousness, provide profound insights into the complex dynamics between gods and humans. The intricate portrayal of divine distance and the consequences of attempting to breach it elucidate the Western perception of masks as tools of dominance rather than representations. In contrast to Eastern cultures, where masks serve to imitate and honor accessible gods, the Western narrative perpetuates a hierarchical separation between mortals and superior beings. The exploration of these mythological nuances enriches our understanding of the profound impact these cultural representations have on the symbolism and function of masks in diverse societies.

This understanding directly permeates cinema as well. To become a superhero, a mask is necessary because first and foremost, one must strip oneself of humanity. A savior cannot remain an ordinary human. An ordinary person does not have the capacity to save others. The representations of good and evil are not entrusted to ordinary individuals. Therefore, the super-powerful good and evil characters who enter the realm of superhuman beings by wearing masks fight for the fate of humanity. The mask serves as a ladder for ascending from the status of an ordinary human to the realm of goodness or evil. The person wearing the mask becomes a demi-god and becomes capable of doing anything. It is a saviorhood that has been taken away from humans.

This kind of understanding recalls the story of the deification of Jesus. Jesus, as a human, cannot assume the title of savior; he is crucified in order to save humanity and is bestowed with a semi-divine status. Similarly, in cinema, a similar understanding prevails. Ordinary people cannot decide their own destiny. Superhuman forms, such as angels and demons, who have separated themselves from the masses by wearing masks, must fight against other superhuman forms who have also separated themselves through masks, and determine the fate of humanity. In this battle, both sides derive their power from being "masked," i.e., by concealing their humanity, their human selves. One of the best examples of this can be seen in Christopher Nolan's 2008 film, *The Dark Knight*.

In this film, the superhero Batman has his mask, the Joker character has a two-layered mask, and the character Harvey Dent has a mask known as the "two-faced" burned side of his face. These examples exemplify the points discussed in this article.

### **Masked Power in the film *The Dark Knight***

In the film "*The Dark Knight*," the theme of masked power is explored through the three main characters: Batman, Joker, and Harvey Dent. Each character utilizes a mask that becomes crucial in defining their identities and exercising their authority.

Joker's mask, in particular, is composed of a white face paint with a red smile drawn over it. Throughout the film, Joker's face is never fully revealed. He constantly offers different explanations regarding his mask, claiming that he cut his father's face to always appear with a smiling expression to one of his henchmen while telling Rachel that he cut his own face to make his sister feel better. Joker's mask represents his identity as the embodiment of pure evil, deriving power from uncertainty and chaos. It signifies his detachment from humanity and transforms him into a superior form by concealing his true identity. The film never discloses Joker's real identity and misleading information is provided regarding his past life. Joker remains an enigma in every aspect. The mask turns him into a mystery, and everything regarding his past, motivations, and impulses is hidden behind it. Unlike other crime bosses who have recognizable faces and still retain their ordinary human nature, Joker is a faceless villain, devoid of a genuine identity. He burns his share of money, believing that "this city deserves a better class of criminals." Joker possesses consistent power and influence everywhere he goes because his mask is not removable; it has become his identity. The mask has merged with what it conceals, making

him inaccessible. He no longer lives a dual life; he has become nothing more than the mask itself. By transforming into a mere mask, he has assumed the full power of the unknown, making him almost godlike and invincible.

Joker's invincibility lies in the fact, as Canetti describes the impact of a mask, that "nobody knows what will emerge from behind it" (Canetti, 2010, p. 379). Joker's mask has obliterated the identity it conceals to such an extent that he becomes a complete mystery, erasing two identities and leaving behind an uncatchable, elusive figure composed solely of chaos. While masks can transform individuals into someone else, Joker's mask turns him into nothingness. This nothingness takes the form of chaos, which he directs toward others. Due to the visibility of his face, unlike other crime bosses who are vulnerable to attacks, Joker, thanks to his mask, attains immunity. This mask, which entirely erases his past and personal history, renders him both untouchable and somewhat immortal. In the film, Batman fails to apprehend Joker because he perceives him as an ordinary criminal. However, as Alfred says, "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." Joker cannot be captured or comprehended for this reason. He has "no name, no connections," as Joker himself describes it. Batman lacks anything that can threaten him, as all his power proves futile in the face of Joker's statement.

James Gordon's question about Joker, "What's hidden beneath that makeup," finds a similar response in the film "V for Vendetta," (2006) but in a different context: "There's more to this mask than flesh. Beneath this mask, there's an idea, and ideas are bulletproof!" As expressed here, Joker's mask transforms him into an idea that is impervious to bullets. The concept of chaos materializes and comes to life within this mask, without any other embellishments. Joker has "painted makeup on as if to scare people" and, in doing so, has become a warrior capable of erasing his own identity. "Burn it all," says Joker. He compares himself to "a dog chasing cars, not knowing what to do when he catches one." While the mafia and the police have their plans, they are obsessed with control. Joker, on the other hand, shows them the futility of trying to control something. For Joker, his face is a tangible embodiment of the dark side of humanity. There is nothing else left in him besides that. Behind his mask lies the dark and unknowable nature of humans.

In Batman's case, the situation is reversed. Bruce Wayne, who is primarily a businessman, gains power and becomes a superhero only when he puts on his mask. Wayne carries the Batman identity as a second identity and tries to escape from the responsibilities of the future when he assumes the Batman persona. Because the most challenging thing for a person is to be isolated from their humanity and experience the transcendent within the human body. This is what is referred to as the suffering of Jesus. Wayne also goes through a similar experience when he puts on the Batman mask. He remains human in flesh, bone, and skin, but he becomes detached from humanity in action and ability. However, while the mask conceals his true identity, his real identity continues to exist behind the mask. This makes Wayne a dual identity. Wayne has to simultaneously experience divinity and humanity. However, they are very different in terms of their abilities and emotions. This is emphasized in the dialogue between Alfred and Batman. After returning to his normal human state following injuries sustained as Batman, Alfred warns Wayne about his limitations and says, "Know your limits," to which Bruce Wayne responds, "Batman has no limits." Alfred points out, "But you do," emphasizing that outside of the Batman persona, Wayne possesses all the abilities of a normal human being. Wayne replies, "Knowing my limits doesn't help me," indicating that by wearing the mask, Wayne transforms into Batman and surpasses the limitations of ordinary individuals. In the film, this is expressed elsewhere as "Batman has no jurisdiction." The distance between humans and superhumans is underscored by the presence of the mask. When Wayne puts on the Batman mask, he becomes a superhuman without limits, but when he removes the mask, he becomes an ordinary wealthy individual, devoid of any authoritative power.

Wayne needs a mask to become a superhero, and Joker is aware of this, attempting to remove Batman's mask and expose him. Removing Batman's mask also means destroying his powers. At this point, the mask symbolizes the sacrifice Wayne, a wealthy businessman, makes for the benefit of humanity. Batman's mask is the greatest burden a fan can carry because it requires giving up personal

happiness, just like Jesus.

In light of the commentary that Wayne sacrifices himself akin to Jesus for the sake of humanity, an additional explication of the act of sacrifice may be offered. Wayne's sacrificial commitment, as later elucidated, resembles that of Jesus, not only in terms of self-sacrifice for the betterment of humanity but also in the profound psychological and emotional toll incurred. The anguish and sorrow experienced by Wayne, distinct from the aspects of death and physical pain, may stem from an inherent inability to fully disclose his true identity and the resultant isolation, paralleling Jesus' sense of loneliness. As the comment states, Joker tries to remove Batman's mask and expose his true identity, which would also destroy his powers. This implies that Wayne's mask is not only a burden, but also a protection, a way of hiding his vulnerability and emotions from the world. Wayne's mask prevents him from being himself, from forming meaningful relationships, and from finding peace. Therefore, his sacrifice is not only physical, but also psychological and emotional. This aspect of sacrifice can also be related to Jesus, who, according to some interpretations, suffered not only from death and torture, but also from the feeling of abandonment and betrayal by his followers and his Father ("Jesus in Comparative Mythology", 2023). Thus, both Wayne and Jesus sacrifice their selves for the greater good, but also experience the agony of isolation and despair. In this context, the act of wearing the Batman mask becomes emblematic not only of relinquishing personal happiness but also of bearing the profound emotional burden associated with maintaining a concealed identity and enduring the solitude intrinsic to such a sacrifice.

While Joker tries to remove Batman's mask, Batman tries to replace him with Harvey Dent as an overt hero who represents the face of Gotham. In this regard, the character of Harvey Dent signifies being caught between good and evil. Batman prepares him as "Gotham's white knight," while Joker tries to lure him to the dark side. Initially, Dent is a candidate for this position, appearing as the bright face of Gotham as a hero with a visible face. He claims that Batman is a necessity and that when the people of Gotham reach the maturity to provide justice themselves, Batman will relinquish his role as a savior. To support his argument, he cites Rome as an example. According to him, just like in Rome, Batman is a "hero assigned to protect the city when an attack occurs, suspending democracy. It is not a favor; it is a public service." On the other hand, Rachel opposes this with the argument that "Caesar, the last man assigned in Rome, did not return the power." The symbol of power mentioned here is the mask. When Batman finds someone to replace him, will he be able to let go of his mask and power? Dent's answer is yes, according to him, "Batman is looking for someone to take over his responsibilities."

At this point, Batman, Dent, and Gordon agree. Batman's project is to transfer the power symbolized by the mask to someone with a visible face, Dent. Dent is ready to fulfill this project. He will transfer the power carried by Batman's mask to his own human face and become the representative of justice, the judge of criminals, and a hero with a human face. Wayne expresses his belief in this project by stating, "I believe in Dent. I believe Gotham will be a little safer, and more optimistic during his watch. Look at this face. This face is Gotham's bright future." Although this project achieves partial success at the beginning, Dent's face being known brings trouble to him. Just as Batman's and Joker's masks make them invulnerable, Dent's human face makes him vulnerable, "weak." Batman's statement to Dent, "You symbolize hope more than I ever could. You're the only man standing up to crime with his face revealed," is ultimately contradicted by the language of the film. Indeed, Dent cannot protect himself with his human face. He becomes defenseless against Joker's attacks. In fact, the vulnerable and pitiable entity attacked here is the "face" of a human. As mentioned earlier, while Batman's identity is boundless, Wayne's identity experiences all the limitations of ordinary individuals. We see this again in the incident where the mayor, despite being informed in advance, cannot be protected. Whether it's a district attorney, a mayor, or even a mafia leader, anyone with a human face is helpless and cannot stand in the battle between superhumans like Batman and Joker.

Indeed, as mentioned before, the "human face" representing the human race cannot achieve salvation. In this regard, it is striking that Dent's nickname is "Two-Face." After the explosion in the warehouse, half of Dent's face remains human, while the other half turns into a "mask" by burning. Dent, who has not achieved anything with his human face, thus assumes a masked identity and faces two

options: either choose to represent the human face or switch to the dark side represented by the other side of his face. Due to the death of his girlfriend and Joker's manipulation, Dent turns to the dark side. Thus, the "impotence" of the human face is once again confirmed. Moreover, this power taken from humans is independent of good or evil. Even to choose evil, humans must go beyond their own kind and enter the battlefield by donning a mask.

Contrary to this, Rachel, who carries her own face without a mask until the end of the film, pays the price by dying in an explosion in a warehouse. The human face is defeated once again. Moreover, in the same incident, Joker gives Batman the opportunity to choose between Dent and Rachel. Batman can save one of them. Rachel symbolizes her true identity, and her personal happiness, by being without a mask, while Dent represents the goodness and justice that Batman embodies, symbolizing the meanings represented by the mask and the salvation of the people. Batman wants to choose his personal happiness and go to save Rachel, but this is the biggest mistake for a hero appointed for the people. He finds Dent where he goes. He learns the news of Rachel's death elsewhere. Batman is punished for choosing his personal happiness. Like Jesus paying the price for Adam's sin, Wayne pays the price for Batman's mistake. He is destined to become a hero; he cannot give up his mask. He cannot choose personal happiness over societal salvation, the human face over the mask, or heroism.

For this reason, Joker tries to make Batman an ordinary person by removing his mask; in this battle, whoever loses their mask will be rendered defenseless and lose without even fighting. Joker attacks Batman's mask because it is what makes him a symbol of great heroism.

Joker's claim is that people do not deserve a savior. According to him, chaos is what they deserve because none of them have a sense of justice. This mass is driven by self-interest and can destroy each other for their own gain. Joker conducts some social experiments to prove his claim. One of them is the ship experiment mentioned above. In the ship experiment, people do not detonate each other, but Joker turning the symbol of justice, prosecutor Dent, into a vengeful criminal completes the equation. Dent's burned face turns into a mask, and thus, Dent is also stripped of his humanity. However, he positions himself not with the higher good but with the villains. In this regard, Joker's claim finds support. Supporting this, in the film, ordinary people are generally coded with evil. Police betray the prosecutor, people attack Batman at the first opportunity, and Wayne's employee blackmails him when he learns that he is Batman. All of these support Joker's claim that for people, "madness is like gravity, all it takes is a little push."

On the other hand, Wayne is already waiting for an opportunity to remove the god-like mask, tired of the superhuman form of salvation that comes with being Batman. Throughout the film, he waits for the right moment to reveal his true identity. Wayne wants to remain human, but since he cannot be a savior in human form, he waits for the moment when Gotham will no longer need a savior or can settle for a savior with a human face, planning everything around prosecutor Dent. Batman's claim is that Gotham can now manage with a hero who is the face of the city. However, as mentioned above, the film does not justify Batman's claim. Dent, who has a human face, loses his face and turns into a villain. The salvation of Gotham is once again determined by the outcome of the battle between Joker and Batman.

The masked versions of the superhero and the anti-hero and their deviance from society unite them in some way. Joker tells Batman, "I don't want to kill you, you complete me." Because both wear masks and both have non-human identities and powers. Despite helping them, Batman is wanted as a criminal by the society he comes from, and Joker is called a "freak" by the mafia leader who is on the same side as them. Both are isolated from society, even expelled from their own sides. The biggest difference between them, as described by the mafia leader Maroni, is that "Batman has rules, Joker does not." Despite being teammates, they continue their struggles. One represents absolute evil, the other represents absolute good. As Joker expresses it, they fight for the "soul" of Gotham. The universe of the film is divided between these two masks, these two identities. Therefore, in the film, people wearing imitation Joker or Batman masks cannot succeed. Because they try to exist as an extension of Joker or Batman's mask, they cannot build a new self. Joker and Batman share a universe completely different

from ordinary people with the identities they have constructed through masks. As expressed by Yin, Batman's actions are aimed at ending the moving chaos, while Joker's direction is to sustain the chaos (2011:97).

The representative of absolute evil, Joker, has no qualms about using everything for his own purposes and cannot be captured because he has no interests. The dialectical relationship between Joker and Batman is fully reflected in Joker's statement: "I'm like a dog chasing cars. I wouldn't know what to do with one if I caught it. You know, I just do... things." Here, the event of Jesus sacrificing himself for the redemption of humanity's sins is repeated from the perspective of the anti-hero. Similarly, for Batman to have a possibility of existence as a superhero, he needs Joker's evil. Additionally, their similarities are not limited to feeding off each other; their distance from people is equal. The only difference is that Batman believes humanity is worth saving, while Joker believes they are so inherently bad that they are not worth saving. Batman believes he owes it to people to do good, while according to Joker's belief, the only thing he owes them is evil because "innocence is a bold word to throw around Gotham." Batman represents Jesus, who sacrificed himself for the good of humanity, while Joker represents the devil, who seeks to corrupt people. Both are non-human and superhuman. Joker tells Batman that he is a monster for people and that he can only be as good as they allow him to be. Indeed, superheroes are extraordinary beings that society turns to in times of need and discards after defeating evil. While Joker serves as an ambassador of chaos, Batman is a symbol of absolute good. People are mere pawns in this battle between superheroes and anti-heroes. There is no human face in this battle.

Looking at the outcome of the fight, Joker actually emerges as the winner. Just before his death, Dent declares to Batman, "You thought we could be decent men in an indecent time, but you were wrong. The world is cruel, and the only morality in a cruel world is chance." Batman fails to replace himself with a hero who has a human face and denies Gotham's need for one by turning Harvey Dent into an anti-hero. After half of his face is burned, Dent wears a mask and undergoes a complete transformation, no longer being the guardian of justice but becoming the representative of evil.

Thus, the winner of the battle between Joker and Batman is actually Joker. Batman cannot successfully remove his mask and strip himself of his powers, but he also cannot fulfill Gotham's need for a hero who represents its face by turning Harvey Dent into an anti-hero. Batman tries to deceive the public by turning Dent's remaining human face towards them and saying, "Gotham needs a true hero." He takes on Dent's crimes, presenting himself as a superhero to society while becoming a notorious criminal hunted by society. At this point, Joker's claim that "they'll cast you out when they don't need you anymore, like a leper" is once again proven true. Furthermore, Rachel's claim that Gotham doesn't need Batman, but rather Wayne, is further evidence of this. The goodness of people, as expressed by Joker, is "as good as the world allows them to be, when the chips are down, these civilized people will eat each other." However, Batman, as a hero dedicated to people, does not care about this. Because he has come close to the experience of Jesus, he says, "I'm whatever Gotham needs me to be," and at that moment, Gotham needs deception and manipulation. Batman fulfills this by presenting Harvey Dent, who has turned into a kind of serial killer, as a symbol of justice and the ultimate judge of the villains. Because, as Batman says, "Sometimes the truth isn't good enough, sometimes people deserve more."

### **Conclusion**

In this film that depicts the battle between good and evil between Batman and Joker, the masks they wear convey messages with their associated meanings. The first finding that emerges in the context of this film is that in superhero movies and more broadly in Western thought, a person in their human state cannot attain the status of a savior. If a person is to be a good person and a savior, they must wear a mask and strip themselves of their humanity. If a human face claims to be a savior, they will be crucified, they must exalt themselves as God and return. In other words, they must manifest as a superhuman being by wearing a mask. Joker tries to make Batman remove his mask, that is, his power, his authority. When Batman removes his mask, he will become nothing. He will become an ordinary person and lose all his powers. For this reason, representatives of the human face, such as Rachel, die, and Dent, by losing his human face and becoming the "Two-Face," turns into an anti-hero, and then he

dies as well. It is thus confirmed that the human face cannot be a symbol in the battle of goodness and justice and cannot stand firm.

In this context, Batman's mask also represents global power. The mask is the encoded face of power. The body belongs to the individual, but the face is encoded with sacrifice. When all of this is deciphered, it becomes apparent that the power of transformation and change of the mask is used to endorse the global system. Wayne sacrifices his individual happiness by wearing a mask because the welfare of humanity is vested in this system. Joker's mask symbolizes chaos, and although he attacks capitalism by directly burning money, this mask is encoded with disorder and unhappiness. Ordinary people have no power or place in this fight. They are the poor masses devoid of power and sanctions, waiting for the results of the gods' battle at the foot of Olympus. They have a face, and this face symbolizing the human face is encoded with weakness.

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