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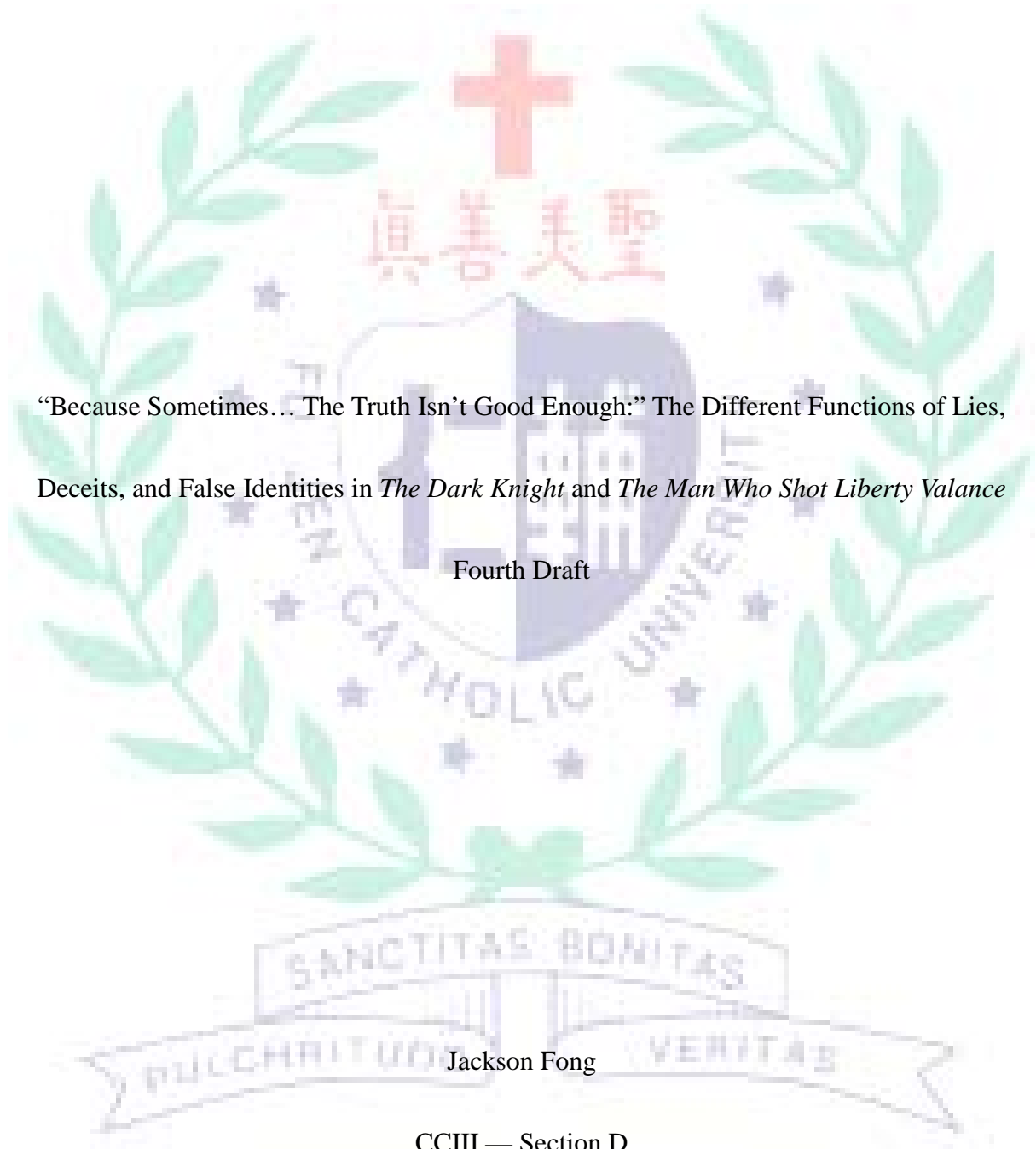
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**“Because Sometimes... The Truth Isn’t Good Enough:” The
Different Functions of Lies, Deceits, and False Identities in
The Dark Knight and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance***

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“Because Sometimes... The Truth Isn’t Good Enough.” The Different Functions of Lies, Deceits, and False Identities in *The Dark Knight* and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*

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Abstract

In Hollywood films, there are often portrayals of the use of lies, deceits and false identities by the films' protagonists. These examples of mis-leading and untruths, however, could not altogether be reflective of the protagonists' dishonesty and immorality. Rather, they sometimes commit deceitful acts out of compelling and justifiable reasons. The 2008 superhero film *The Dark Knight* and the 1962 western film *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* are two good examples of Hollywood films that explore the legitimacy and the benefits of being deceitful. This paper aims to discuss, to compare and to contrast the reasons and the purposes behind the lies, the deceits and the false identities constructed by the protagonists in both *The Dark Knight* and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*. The paper will look at several journal articles and law reviews that discuss the two films in terms of legality, of ethics, and of politics. As a result, *The Dark Knight* and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* suggest that the protagonists' lying and truth-hiding speak to embodiments of consequentialist thinking, to counter-interpretations of necessary extralegal violence, and to political nostalgia.

Outline

I. Introduction

A. Identify the primary texts

B. Thesis Statement: The multiple uses of lies, of deceptions and of false identities in both *The Dark Knight* and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* serve as embodiments of consequentialist thinking, of counter-interpretations of necessary extralegal violence, and of political nostalgia.

C. Research Paper Summary

II. Textual Analysis

A. Embodiments of consequentialist thinking

1. *The Dark Knight*

a. The deceptions and the false identity constructed by Bruce Wayne, the Batman, function as good examples that reflect consequentialist thinking.

i. Bruce Wayne disguises himself by a wearing bat-like costume to hide his true identity in front of the public, and devotes himself to fight against criminals in Gotham city.

ii. At the end of the film, Batman and Commissioner Gordon conspire to hide the truth about Harvey Dent.

iii. Timothy Peters asserts that “a willing and necessary wrongful conviction” (436) could prompt the government in *The Dark Knight* to reinforce the legal system.

2. *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*

a. *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* also shares the same perspectives about prioritizing the more acceptable consequences rather than the more acceptable means.

i. One can observe this perspective from the deceit that Tom Doniphon at first uses to not let Ransom Stoddard know the fact that “the man who shot Liberty Valance” is not Stoddard but Doniphon.

ii. The most famous line in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, “when legend becomes fact, print the legend,” also represents consequentialist thinking.

3. Summary paragraph

a. Fictional stories sometimes outweigh the facts when stories bring more consequences to people and their society.

B. Embodiments of counter-interpretations of necessary extralegal violence

1. *The Dark Knight*

a. One may recognize the necessity of extralegal violence and how the Batman in *The Dark Knight* counter-interprets his violent acts through deceptions.

i. The role of Batman is not merely given birth by Bruce Wayne himself but the people in Gotham and even their government.

ii. After witnessing the death of Harvey Dent, the “White Knight,” Batman settles for the fact that there is no hero that could survive “without a mask—more specifically, without a mask of evil” (McGowan 142).

2. *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*

a. The need of exerting extra-legal violence by figures who are “infused with fabrication” (Ryan 23) is also depicted in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*.

i. Cheyney Ryan claims that the tone of *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* is “consistently ironic in suggesting that the false identifications that pervade the public order are somehow integral to that order” (23).

ii. Nazarian and Lubet both provide a different angle to view *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, and contend that what audiences see on the screen is doubtful.

iii. Steven Lubet also suggests that Ransom Stoddard in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* is likely to be an unreliable narrator.

3. Summary paragraph

- a. Both *The Dark Knight* and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* depict how the two protagonists use their lies, their deceits and their false identities to re-interpret the violent acts they have committed.

C. Embodiments of political nostalgia

1. *The Dark Knight* and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*

- a. Cynthia Nazarian argues that *The Dark Knight* and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* both “politicize nostalgia, idealizing a premodern past in order to criticize their contemporary politics” (205).
 - i. Self-sacrifice is a form of heroism significantly described in both *The Dark Knight* and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*. That is, both Batman and Tom Doniphon self-sacrifice through lying to the public.

2. *The Dark Knight*

- a. Batman also shows his nostalgia for conservatism in contrast to the democratic society where Batman’s narrative is set.
 - i. Foy and Dale also suggest that conservatism agrees with the equilibrium between good and evil that is required to exist within a state (66).

3. Summary paragraph

- a. Some senses of political nostalgia have been presented via the two protagonists and their intentions and actions in *The Dark Knight* and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*.

III. Conclusion

- A. Restatement the thesis statement: The multiple uses of lies, of deceptions, and of false identities in both *The Dark Knight* and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* serve as embodiments of consequentialist thinking, of counter-interpretation of necessary extra-legal violence, and of political nostalgia.
- B. Main arguments of the analysis
 1. The deceitful acts committed by the protagonists in the two films seem to suggest that sometimes there is only one option—telling a lie—that could result in the best consequences for a society
 2. The protagonists in the two films also necessitate the violation of the law. In order to defend the protagonists from being accused of illegal and unlawful actions, lies are needed.
 3. One may infer a sense of political nostalgia that lies in the deceptions and in the false identities constructed by the protagonists in the two films.

1. Introduction

“Because that’s what needs to happen. Because sometimes... the truth isn’t good enough” (*The Dark Knight*), is said by Batman when he explains why he has to make himself the scapegoat for Harvey Dent’s murder. In 2008, one of the best film adaptations of the fictional superhero Batman, *The Dark Knight*, — the second part of *The Dark Knight Trilogy* directed by Christopher Nolan— was given birth. The most impressive scene in *The Dark Knight* is (besides those with The Joker as performed by Heath Ledger), the ending when Batman (performed by Christian Bale) willingly takes the blame for the crimes which Harvey Dent (performed by Aaron Eckhart) has committed. Batman conceals the truth, and leaves by saying “sometimes people deserve to have their faith rewarded”, is wanted and has to run for his life. This line is significantly reminiscent of another famous line, “when the legend becomes fact, print the legend,” from a black-and-white western film *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* directed by John Ford in 1962.

The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance depicts in the end that Ransom Stoddard (performed by James Stewart) tries to uncover the truth of the past to reporters, the truth which he intended to be misrecognized about the man who shot Liberty Valance (performed by Lee Marvin), but it is in fact Tom Doniphon (performed by John Wayne) who did. However, the reporters decide not to let the truth become fact, and instead, they “print the legend” (*The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*). These types of untruths seen in the two films seem to

suggest that they are not reflective of the protagonists' untrustworthiness. Rather, the multiple uses of lies, of deceptions and of false identities in both *The Dark Knight* and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* serve as embodiments of consequentialist thinking, of counter-interpretations of necessary extralegal violence, and of political nostalgia.

This research paper offers a textual analysis of two films, *The Dark Knight* directed by Christopher Nolan and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* directed by John Ford. The paper is divided into the following sections: the introduction, the literature review, the textual analysis of the films, and the conclusion. In the first section of the paper, I provide an introduction with a clear thesis statement. I then include my research questions and a discussion of the methodology I use to discuss the films. The following section consists of a critical analysis of the films by referring to secondary sources, including scholarly books, chapters from book, to several journal articles and to law reviews, to support my claims. I conclude my paper by restating my thesis statement, and by offering a summary of the main claims of my textual analysis.

2. Literature Review

In Todd McGowan's *The Fictional Christopher Nolan*, the author suggests that a superhero and his heroism must be concealed by a mask, that is, to create a false identity which gives the superhero power and enables him to operate beyond the limits of the law, so that the superhero could fulfil his goals. McGowan also argues that the lie in *The Dark Knight* embodies a consequentialist morality, which describes the pursuit of an outcome that is good for the greatest number of people of the city and its political and legal system. In Joseph J. Foy and Timothy M. Dale's "'They Turned to a Man They Didn't Fully Understand': *The Dark Knight* and the Conservative Critique of Political Liberalism," the authors argue that Batman's deceit of the public is necessary for the city in that it sustains the belief and the confidence of the people in the government and therefore reinforces the city's political and social order. Foy and Dale also contend that Batman's actions are conservative in nature since Batman aims to pursue law and order in Gotham as a whole rather than to protect the rights of the individuals.

In "Beyond the Limits of the Law: A Christological Reading of Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight*," Timothy Peters also agrees with the argument that consequentialist thinking is embedded in the narrative at the basis of *The Dark Knight*. He compares the ending of *The Dark Knight*, when Batman willingly takes the blame and becomes a criminal, to the Passion story in the gospel, when Christ willingly accepts to be sentenced to death. These two

examples in *The Dark Knight* and in the gospel represent a need of “willing and necessary wrongful conviction” which prompts the government to reinforce its legal system. In other words, Batman’s decision at the end of the film could lead to a more desirable outcome for society. In Cheyney Ryan’s “Print the Legend: Violence and Recognition in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*,” the author recognizes the significance of creating false identities, through which to establish authority and power to sustain the state and its social order. Ryan also suggests that fictions can sometimes outweigh truths when fictions bring more consequences to people and to their society. This perspective embodies consequentialist thinking, which fits in with the ideas of my other secondary sources.

In “The Outlaw-Knight: Law's Violence in *The Faerie Queene*, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, and *The Dark Knight Rises*,” Cynthia Nazarian identifies Batman in *The Dark Knight* and Tom Doniphon in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* as “outlaw-knights” and compares and discusses the two films in terms of political nostalgia. Political nostalgia is a perspective that utilizes a figure to unfold a fundamental indeterminacy at the heart of state-sanctioned law and violence through a reification of idealized forms of feudalism to modern statehood. Nazarian also argues that the whole story which audiences see in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, namely, the flashback told by Ransom Stoddard, may not be the truth but a rewriting of his past, which Stoddard is trying to justify for the violence he has committed. Similarly, the article “*The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*: Truth or Justice in the

Old West” by Steven Lubet seems to suggest that Ransom Stoddard is likely to be an unreliable narrator. In the confrontation between Ransom Stoddard and Liberty Valance, Valance is not intentionally murderous of Stoddard. Instead, it is Stoddard who is seemingly more likely to be the aggressor. Lubet elaborates on this claim by demonstrating a series of non-murderous actions of Valance toward Stoddard.



3. Research Questions

This paper aims to address the following research questions:

1. What are the lies, deceits, and false identities utilized by the characters in *The Dark Knight* and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*?
2. In what ways do the protagonists of *The Dark Knight* and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* resemble one another? In other words, what are the goals and the pursuits of the protagonists and how are they similar?
3. How do the lies, deceits, and false identities help the protagonists in *The Dark Knight* and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* to fulfil their goals and pursuits?
4. What kinds of philosophical, moral, and/or political theories are reflected by the characters' decisions in *The Dark Knight* and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*?

4. Research Methodology

This research paper is based on two Hollywood films from two different cinematic generations: a 2008 superhero film *The Dark Knight* and a 1962 American western film *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*. The textual analysis is based on scholarly journal articles, books, and law reviews with regards to legal, moral, and ethical studies of the films and of the directors, Christopher Nolan and John Ford. These studies offer insights into perspectives on the justifications for the lies, the deceits, and the false identities that one can observe from the two films. The commonality between *The Dark Knight* and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* is that protagonists in both films utilize lies, deceits, and false identities, whether intentionally or under compulsion, to fulfil their goals.

The first section of the textual analysis of my research paper explores how the lies, the deceits, and the false identities depicted in *The Dark Knight* and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* reflect consequentialist thinking. The second section of the textual analysis of my research paper looks at how the characters in *The Dark Knight* and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* counter-interpret their intents to commit violence by telling lies and creating false identities. The third section of the textual analysis of my research paper discusses the political theories which the characters' lies, deceits and false identities allude to *The Dark Knight* and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*.

This research paper draws a comparison between two films: *The Dark Knight* and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, in terms of both films' characterizations, the characters' uses of deceitful acts, and their goals and pursuits. Through a textual analysis of the two films by referring secondary sources, one may argue that the lies, the deceits, and the false identities depicted in *The Dark Knight* and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* function as embodiments of consequentialist thinking, of counter-interpretations of necessary extra-legal violence, and of political nostalgia.



5. Textual Analysis of: *The Dark Knight* and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*

In *The Dark Knight*, the deceptions and the false identity constructed by Bruce Wayne, the Batman, function as good examples that reflect consequentialist thinking and conduct. Consequentialism is an ethical theory that aims to pursue outcomes that are good for the greatest number of people who are, in this case, the people of Gotham city and its governmental and its legal system. In *The Dark Knight*, Bruce Wayne disguises himself by wearing a bat-like costume to hide his true identity in front of the public, and devotes himself to fighting against criminals in Gotham city—where the greatest legacy of Wayne’s family is left to Bruce and to the state. Wayne treasures the city and its people more than his own life, and this is why all that he does is out of the interest of Gotham.

However, in the film, Gotham is a prosperous city in the United State, but also a hotbed of crime with a corrupted government. For instance, one of the insiders working for the police allows a foreign mobster to sidestep the jurisdiction of Gotham and to flee to Hong Kong. McGowan concludes that “the superhero’s false identity is the source of both power and truth . . . the superhero’s guise is clearly a deceit, but it points toward a truth of the subject that would otherwise remain completely obscured” (7). Consequently, the only way for Wayne to protect his home city from criminals and corruption is to assume an identity which criminals fear, as well as which can enable him to operate beyond the limits of law.

As a result, at the end of *The Dark Knight*, Batman and Commissioner Gordon conspire to hide the truth about Harvey Dent, the District Attorney. They bury the fact that “The White Knight of Gotham” has fallen to “Two-Face,” a murderous criminal with evil intentions.

Batman also accepts all the blame in order to preserve the image of Dent. Foy and Dale agree that the preservation of the image of Dent as “The White Knight of Gotham” is needed, because this is “an incorruptible symbol that will unify the people and help maintain a faith in the established political and social order” (71). Rather than recognizing Dent’s transformation from an agent of justice to an agent of corruption, Batman tells lies “for the greater good” (McGowan 171) to protect Gotham’s vulnerable law and order. This is reflective of consequentialist thinking in which “ends count more than means” (McGowan 171).

Furthermore, Timothy Peters asserts that “a willing and necessary wrongful conviction” (436) could prompt the government in *The Dark Knight* to reinforce the legal system.

Batman’s story is structurally similar to the Christian Passion story in the gospel narratives of a wrongful conviction that of “a man sentenced to death for crimes that could either not be identified or, where they are pointed to, were not committed” (Peters 437). Since Christ was sentenced to death, willingly and non-violently, “it is this non-violent act that forms the foundation of a new type of community . . .” (Peters 438). Peters also argues that “Batman embodies a typology of Christ in this form of exclusion” (438). Merging the Batman with Christ suggests that Batman’s non-violent commitment to the crimes he did not commit

would have a positive impact on the people of Gotham. By offering himself as the scapegoat for Dent's murders, Batman ensures that Gotham would see Dent's death as the sacrifice for justice instead of the failure of justice. The people in Gotham would therefore maintain their confidence in their government.

Following *The Dark Knight*, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* also shares the same thoughts about prioritizing the more acceptable consequences rather than the more acceptable means. To illustrate, one can observe this perspective from the deceit that Tom Doniphon at first uses to not let Ransom Stoddard know the fact that "the man who shot Liberty Valance" is not Stoddard but Doniphon. This decision by Doniphon leads people in Shinbone to regard Stoddard as the one who kills Valance and therefore can rescue them from the violence of Valance. This intentional misrecognition of Stoddard by the citizens of Shinbone helps Stoddard to accomplish "his quest to bring the law to Shinbone . . . to be one who speaks for the people with legitimacy" (Ryan 30).

In addition, the most famous line in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, "when legend becomes fact, print the legend," also represents consequentialist thinking. This line is said by one of the reporters at the very end of the film, when the old senator Ransom Stoddard reveals to the reporters the truth about "the man who shot Liberty Valance." The reporters may think that it is the legend of "the man who shot Liberty Valance" that brings the west to statehood, whereas the fact, whether or not it is true, has nothing to do with what has actually

happened. In the old west described in the film, what people require are not facts but legends, “like a myth, if it is to be cohesive” (Ryan 38). That is to say, a legend or a myth is needed to exist within a community if that legend or myth can unify the people with the same belief. As Ryan suggests, “what MSLV presents us with is not a true story set against a false one, but two different kinds of truthfulness” (32), because facts are composed of how the facts represent themselves to people rather than what the facts are and what really happens.

Fictional stories sometimes outweigh the facts when stories bring more consequences to people and to their society. The line in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* “when legend becomes fact, print the legend” may relate to the conclusion in *The Dark Knight*. The narrative of the film *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* seems to suggest that “societies require legends” (Ryan 39), because Ransom Stoddard, Tom Doniphon, and the reporters, allow the false identity, which is “the man who shot Liberty Valance,” to transform into a legend which provides the owner of this name with authority. Similarly, at the end of *The Dark Knight*, the result of the deceit constructed by Batman may imply that it is not a matter of what crimes Dent has committed; rather, it is a matter of the preservation of an incorruptible symbol of “The White Knight of Gotham” that can sustain people’s faith in the “legend” fabricated by Batman. Overall, the lies and the deceptions seen in both *The Dark Knight* and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* do achieve desirable outcomes which are beneficial for a majority of the citizens in their respective settings.

Additionally, one may recognize the necessity of extralegal violence and how the Batman in *The Dark Knight* counter-interprets his violent acts through deceptions. In *The Dark Knight*, Bruce Wayne, the Batman, has suggest himself to be a representative of necessary extralegal violence. From the very beginning Bruce Wayne decides to disguise himself with another identity, which is that of Batman, to apprehend criminals. Batman, the false identity, creates a power for Bruce Wayne to be able to operate beyond the restrictions of the law. To illustrate, in *The Dark Knight*, Batman can ignore international law, if he is willing to, and forcibly brings criminals back to Gotham, specifically, the international mobster Lau who has fled to Hong Kong. As Todd McGowan avers, in the genre of superhero, the protagonist does not necessarily have to possess any superhero's power, but "it is difficult to imagine a superhero without this false identity" (5). McGowan then adds, to accomplish what the law cannot do, it "requires an exceptional figure who operates outside or on the periphery of the law" (123). In order words, the superhero himself is a necessary lie, on which the people of the society require to have faith in and they hope that this fictional identity can rescue them from crimes, injustice and evil.

The role of Batman is not merely given birth by Bruce Wayne himself but the people in Gotham and even their government. In addressing Gotham's crisis while the government is being corrupted, Batman is the only one who can do what other governmental persons cannot do, for example, arresting Lau from Hong Kong. In *The Dark Knight* Lau is an international

mobster who is a major source of funding for Gotham's crime syndicates, and flees to Hong Kong to be protected by international law. Harvey Dent, the District Attorney, and James Gordon, the police commissioner, have no jurisdiction in the case of Lau since Lau is not extraditable under the international laws. Batman, however, as Foy and Dale maintain, "is in a position to assume a role analogous to that of the sovereign in addressing Gotham's crisis" (68), and thus Batman can violate the laws, ignore their restraints, and forcibly return Lau to Gotham. Once Lau is prosecuted, the funding sources of Gotham's criminals are cut off, which effectively deter the crimes in the city for a period of time. Batman is acquiesced to act as an individual who can resolve the crises that Gotham encounters under the suspension of the governmental and legal institutions. As a result, an extra-legal "villain" is needed who is responsible for dirtying his hands "in order for proper order to be restored in Gotham" (Foy and Dale 68).

After witnessing the death of Harvey Dent, the "White Knight," Batman settles for the fact that there is no hero that could survive "without a mask—more specifically, without a mask of evil" (McGowan 142). At the beginning of *The Dark Knight*, Bruce Wayne considers Dent to be a perfect representative of justice and heroism. As the film progresses, Dent has morphed into a murderous villain "Two-Face," who flips a toss of a coin to determine what actions to commit next, namely, to kill or not to kill. Dent lets the results to be chosen by chance, which he calls "fairness," in that Dent has lost his faith in law and order. When Dent

holds James Gordon's son as hostage, Batman says, "you don't want to hurt the boy, Harvey." Dent replies, "it's not about what I want, it's about what's fair. 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. Unbiased. Unprejudiced. Fair" (*The Dark Knight*). Dent, "a would-be hero" who tried to appear in clean and pure form of heroism to crack down evil, is in the end swallowed by evil. In contrast, Batman is the true hero "who accepts evil as his form of appearance, sustains the only possible path for heroic exceptionalism" (McGowan 145). Granted that Batman is willing to be identified with criminality in order to let the fake "fact" that made up by Batman, which is Dent's heroic death, overshadow Batman himself.

Similar to *The Dark Knight*, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* depicts the need of exerting extra-legal violence by figures who are "infused with fabrication" (Ryan 23). Ryan claims that the tone of *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* is "consistently ironic in suggesting that the false identifications that pervade the public order are somehow integral to that order" (23). Ransom Stoddard in the end of the film attains a huge reputation for he takes the role of "the man who shot Liberty Valance"—though he did not in fact—and becomes the senator of Shinbone. Although killing Valance is illegal, citizens in the old west believe that this is Stoddard's heroism, which helps to established a safe community with law and order for them to live in. They do not see the fact of killing Valance as a kind of crime which compromises law and order, instead, Stoddard is highly respected as "a great champion of

law and order.” (*The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*) To illustrate, at the statehood convention in the film, Stoddard is challenged by a rival candidate with “Who is this Ransom Stoddard? And what qualifications has he that entitle him to aspire to such great office? . . . The blood on his hands? The hidden gun beneath his coat? . . .” (*The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*) Almost every attendant at the convention then stands up and starts booing loudly at the candidate. Without giving up his false identity of “the man who shot Liberty Valance,” Stoddard can justify himself for his extra-legal violent act, which is his murder of Valance, and manages to fulfil his initial goal, and that is to bring law and order to the lawless frontier.

However, Nazarian and Lubet both provide a different angle to view *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, and contend that what audiences see on the screen is doubtful. Since the whole story is a flashback told by Ransom Stoddard from the very beginning of the film, it may not be the truth but a rewriting of his past, that Stoddard attempts to exclude himself from extra-legal violence. He re-interprets his past to the reporters declaring that he is in fact not the man who shot Valance but it was Tom Doniphon who did. As Nazarian suggests, “Ford’s film deliberately and repeatedly raises the possibility that Stoddard’s retelling is a lie” (218). Since the narrator in the film is Stoddard himself, there is a possibility that the narrative is an artificial “fact” that Stoddard attempts to counter-interpret the violence that he used to found his authority.

Along with Nazarian, Steven Lubet suggests that Ransom Stoddard in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* is likely to be an unreliable narrator. Liberty Valance in the film is not intentionally murderous of Stoddard in their confrontation, instead, it is Stoddard who is more likely to be the aggressor. Lubet supports this claim by demonstrating a series of non-murderous actions of Valance toward Stoddard in the film, for example, Valance fires a warning shot above Stoddard's head, Valance fires near the gun on the ground which Stoddard tries to pick up, Valance shoots at Stoddard's shoulder instead of killing him, and Liberty finally says, "the next shot goes right between the eyes" and waits until Liberty himself is shot. All of these are actually "warning Stoddard . . . hoping to make him flee" (Lubet 361). These clues in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* might suggest to audiences that Stoddard is actually lying throughout the film, because he wants to "rewrite the murder as justice," and "wipe his hands clean of the brutality that propelled him to power" (Nazarian 219).

Both *The Dark Knight* and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* depict how the two protagonists use their lies, their deceits and their false identities to re-interpret the violent acts they have committed, either in the interest of society or of their own. Through the alternative or contradictory interpretations of their extra-legal acts by lying to the public, the protagonists in the two films succeed to accomplish their purposes. Therefore, they are able to defend themselves with justifiable reasons and intentions.

Last but not least, Cynthia Nazarian argues that *The Dark Knight* and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* both “politicize nostalgia, idealizing a premodern past in order to criticize their contemporary politics” (205). In other words, a film is considered politically nostalgic because it invokes other political ideologies that are different or opposed to those in modern statehood. Nazarian also identifies the two characters, Batman in *The Dark Knight* and Tom Doniphon in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, as “outlaw-knights.” The “outlaw-knight” is

A curious hybrid who reappears from the early days of modern statehood to uncover a fundamental indeterminacy at the heart of state-sanctioned law and violence. The outlaw-knight is a fantasy of political nostalgia, one that reifies the processes and problems of modern state formation by turning to an idealized form of feudalism. (Nazarian 204)

Simply put, an “outlaw-knight” in modern statehood performs heroic acts of those chivalric or aristocratic individuals in the past to reveal the conflict between law and violence.

Therefore, political nostalgia is incorporated in the “outlaw-knight” and his actions. Nazarian then elaborates that an “outlaw-knight” is required to be honor-driven and also willing to in the end sacrifice himself, if necessary, in order to preserve the law, or to uphold justice (Nazarian 207).

Self-sacrifice is a form of heroism significantly described in both *The Dark Knight* and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*. That is, both Batman and Tom Doniphon self-sacrifice through lying to the public. On the one hand, Batman in *The Dark Knight* dedicates himself to be an “outlaw-knight” by deceiving the people in Gotham and scapegoating himself. He is eventually wanted by the police because he put the blame of Dent’s killing on himself in exchange for the preservation of people’s trust in Dent. On the other hand, despite the fact that in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* Ransom Stoddard brings a democratic state formation to the western territory in the U.S., it is Tom Doniphon who is the “outlaw-knight” and whose deeds invoke individual heroism in a feudal age. Doniphon gives up his fiancée, Hallie, abandons his social standing that of the dominant rancher in Shinbone, and loses his own way of life. Such sacrifice leads Stoddard to succeed in politics and enables the territory to win statehood.

In addition, in *The Dark Knight* Batman shows his nostalgia for conservatism in contrast to the democratic society where Batman’s narrative is set. Foy and Dale contend that Batman’s actions are conservative, which in some ways challenges the theories suggested by liberal democratic societies with regards to individual rights (64). Batman’s political perspective seems to suggest that the welfare and the order of society can override the rights of individuals when it is necessary. This idea is obviously contrary to the classical liberal thinking that of John Locke’s (Foy and Dale 65).

Conservatism also agrees with the perspective that equilibrium between good and evil that is required to exist within a state (Foy and Dale 66). Foy and Dale borrow ideas from a conservative philosopher Leo Strauss that “the ultimate foundation of the Right is the nature evil of man . . . men can be unified only in a unity against — against other men. Every association of men is necessarily a separation from other men” (qtd. in Foy and Dale 66). Specifically, humanity tends to divide others into two groups, friends and enemies, setting them against one another for the sake of the political and military advances in a country. Therefore, at the end of *The Dark Knight* after the two biggest villains, the Joker and the Two-face, have been eliminated, Batman has to end up an enemy of Gotham by deceiving the public, in that, “the presence of an enemy is the very condition for the emergence of a political order that the state—or, in this case, Batman—is charged with defending” (Foy and Dale 67).

Overall, some senses of political nostalgia have been presented via the two protagonists and their intentions and their actions in *The Dark Knight* and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*. Both Batman and Doniphon are portrayed as “outlaw-knights” who are deceitful, and are willing to self-sacrifice to restore the social order and to reach a better political situation in a state. These two figures, Batman and Tom Doniphon, highlight “a backward-looking critique of modern statehood” (Nazarian 204) in both films.

6. Conclusion

The multiple uses of lies, of deceptions, and of false identities in both *The Dark Knight* and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* serve as embodiments of consequentialist thinking, of counter-interpretation of necessary extra-legal violence, and of political nostalgia. In the 2008 superhero film *The Dark Knight* and the 1962 American western film *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, both film narratives have offered their distinctive points of view regarding the functions of lies, deceptions and false identities. These deceitful acts committed by the protagonists in the two films seems to suggest that sometimes there is only one option—telling a lie—that could result in the best consequences for a society, either to deter crimes, to reinforce political and legal order, or to keep the people's faith. The protagonists in the two films also necessitate the violation of the law. In order to defend the protagonists from being accused of illegal and unlawful actions, lies are needed, and these lies help the protagonists to counter-interpret their necessary acts of extra-legal violence. Furthermore, one may infer a sense of political nostalgia that lies in the deceptions and in the false identities constructed by the protagonists in the two films. In other words, the protagonists in the films manifest their political stances through the employments of their deceptions and of their false identities.

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