BATMAN AND *BATMAN RETURNS*

ADAPTING A COMIC BOOK SUPERHERO TO THE SILVER SCREEN

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DEDICATION

THIS THESIS IS DEDICATED TO MY MOM, REBECCA ROBINSON,

AND MY GRANDPARENTS, IRVIN AND SHEILA ROBINSON,

WHO HAVE ALWAYS SUPPORTED ME IN THE PURSUIT OF MY DREAMS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

to *batmanmovieonline.com* where it can be read by all the Batman fans of the world for a long time to come.

ABSTRACT

Batman and Batman Returns: Adapting a Comic Book Superhero to the Silver Screen functions as an example of a deliberately "faithful" mainstream Hollywood studio adaptation of a comic book film, *Batman* (1989), and a "freer" auteur director's reinterpretation of the character, *Batman Returns* (1992). These films were chosen because they illustrate a complex negotiation between several different, equally important elements: the body of work (Batman comic books and graphic novels), fans (both of the comic books and the 1960s television show), and lastly studio producers (Peter Guber and Jon Peters) and an auteur director (Tim Burton). These ingredients serve to shape and mold any given Batman film, yet the amount of control exerted by the elements changes from film to film.

Batman illustrates that it was producers Guber and Peters' intention to create a very faithful adaptation of the Dark Knight, and that their perception of "faithful" was to adapt the original character of his first year in the comics (Spring 1939 - Spring 1940). I examine where they succeeded and failed in this task, and more importantly why, by looking at the character as he appeared in the first year in comparison with what was captured in the finished film. While the producers had hand-picked Tim Burton to direct *Batman* based upon his dark, original and creative works of the past – namely *Pee-Wee's Big Adventure* (1985) and *Beetlejuice* (1988) - this thesis will show that distinctive stylistic traits were all they wanted from him.

Lastly I illustrate that after the phenomenal critical and financial success of *Batman*, coupled with Burton's rising influence and popularity as a director, he was able to get more creative control to create his own individualistically interpreted Batman in its

sequel, *Batman Returns*. Even though this was a personalized vision of Batman, it is argued that Burton's vision was nevertheless in the "spirit" of Batman (in his first year in the comics) due to Burton's innate understanding of the character, which comes more from his similarity to the character than from his knowledge of the comics or any attempt to adapt them directly.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

<u>Focus of the Research</u>

This thesis serves as an analysis of the adaptation of a comic book character to the movie screen using Warner Bros. *Batman* (1989) and *Batman Returns* (1992) as specific case studies. For *Batman*, I will demonstrate that it was the producers' - executive producers Michael Uslan and Benjamin Melniker and producers Peter Guber and Jon Peters - intention to create a very faithful adaptation of Batman, and that their perception of "faithful" was to adapt the original character from his first year in the comics (Spring 1939 - Spring 1940). The producers relied on the fact that by making a film adaptation of this time period in the character's existence, they would be capturing a portrayal that would satisfy not only comic book fans, but also the general movie-going public. This thesis will thus examine this attempt at fidelity by examining the character of Batman as he appeared in that first year in the comics, in comparison with what was captured in the finished film. While the producers had hand-picked Tim Burton to direct the film based upon his dark toned, original and creative works of the past – namely *Pee-Wee's Big Adventure* (1985) and *Beetlejuice* (1988) - this thesis will show that his specific, distinctive stylistic traits, such as his gothic expressionism, were all they wanted from him. This thesis will reveal that producers Jon Peters and Peter Guber took the young, up-and-coming director and told him how **they** wanted Batman done. I would approximate that *Batman* was roughly 70 percent controlled by the film's producers and only 30 percent formed from the imaginative mind of director Tim Burton.

This thesis will also illustrate that after the phenomenal critical and financial success of *Batman*, coupled with Burton's rising influence and popularity as a director, he was able to get more creative control to create his own individualistically interpreted Batman in the sequel, *Batman Returns*. Thus, if *Batman* was 70 percent dominated by the films producers, *Batman Returns*, contrarily, will be argued to have been 90 percent Burton with only 10 percent of the input coming from the studio. Even though *Batman Returns* is a personalized vision of Batman, it will nevertheless be argued that, Burton's particular vision is still within the "spirit" of Batman (in his first year in the comics) due to the director's innate understanding of the character, which comes more from his personal similarity to the character than from his knowledge of the comics or any attempt to adapt them directly.

To summarize, this thesis functions as an examination of a deliberately "faithful" mainstream Hollywood studio adaptation of a comic book (*Batman*) and a "freer" stylistic director's reinterpretation of the character (*Batman Returns*) in order to illuminate the challenges and pitfalls of adapting a comic book character to the silver screen.

<div align="center">Significance of the Research</div>

This thesis is significant to the field of Film Studies, because to date, most of the work that has been done on adaptation has revolved around the adaptation of literature, in the form of novels into film. This thesis will be a first attempt to talk about adaptation in terms of comic books to film in a sustained academic way. The character examined in this study is one of the most popular and iconic figures in literary history.   He has been

in existence for over 65 years and just like James Bond and Mickey Mouse, Batman is a cultural icon.

Adapting a figure such as Batman to the silver screen is not, and was not, an easy task, due to the sheer volume of ever-changing source material and his loyal fan base. In this thesis readers will gain an understanding of the difficulty there is in adapting 50 years of comic book history into a two-hour film marketed to the general movie going population as well as to comic book fans, with the entire culture split on whether they see Batman as "serious" (as he was portrayed originally) or "campy" (as he appeared in his popular 1960s TV show).

Batman and *Batman Returns* illustrate a complex negotiation between several different, equally important elements: the body of work (Batman comic books and graphic novels), fans (both of the comic books and the 1960s television show), studio producers and an auteur director. Each one of these ingredients shape and mold any given Batman film. *Batman* illustrates how studio producers wanted to satisfy fans by looking to the body of work, particularly the original year, and how this was achieved through hiring a young, up-and-coming director whom they could impose their will on. *Batman Returns* illustrates a situation where studio, producers and fans were all but sidelined in favor of a singular vision from the films director.

Methodology

For this thesis I am going to apply the concepts of fidelity found in adaptation theory to comic-to-film adaptations of Batman. In order to do so, I have divided this thesis into two sections: The first section (Chapter Two) serves as a general overview of Batman's history leading to his 1989 film adaptation. It is here where his key traits, as

illustrated in his first comic books, will be laid out for later use in understanding how the character was adapted onto film. This section also explains how the Batman character, as he was originally laid out and executed for one year in the comics, changed, through discussing several distinct events. These were the key events in the Dark Knight's historical journey leading up to his 1989 film that altered him from the dark, lone vigilante that he was created to be in 1939. These events will prove that Batman was a character that constantly changed to fit the public's needs and that after being shaped and molded so many times, there was very little of the original/core character left, promoting a return to the character's roots in the comics, which in turn inspired *Batman*'s producers to go that direction for their film.

The second section of this thesis will discuss the actual adaptation of the character using the films *Batman* (Chapter Three) and *Batman Returns* (Chapter Four) as specific case studies, each time noting their portrayal of the character based on his source material. These two films were selected because they have much in common yet, due to their execution, are also very different. Both films are similar in that they feature the character of Batman, as portrayed by Michael Keaton, and are each directed by Tim Burton, yet they differ due to Burton's increased personal involvement in the second film.

To aid in discussing the adaptation of Batman from comic book to feature film, adaptation theory will be examined and applied, most notably the concept of fidelity. The following literature review will explain that the notion of fidelity is an extremely problematic term in the study of adaptation. Due to the difficulties that the term "faithful" introduces to the issue of adaptation, this thesis is not concerned with the

fidelity or accuracy of the representation of the Batman comic books in either *Batman* or *Batman Returns*. As such, this thesis will not be arguing that any specific Batman film is "correct," but rather it will make observations involving the types of adaptations that they are, allowing readers to make up their own minds.

<div align="center">Review of Literature</div>

The sources that made this thesis possible fall into three distinct categories: Adaptation texts, Batman texts, and Batman filmmaker texts: consisting of director Tim Burton and producers Jon Peters and Peter Guber. This literature review will start with the adaptation texts. This section will also lay out the history of adaptation, the concept of adaptation theory and how it will be applied to this thesis. The following adaptation sources focus primarily on the adaptation of novels to the screen, yet most of their premises are also applicable to comic books.

<div align="center">

I. Adaptation Texts

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To define adaptation for this thesis I turned to Dudley Andrew, author of "Adaptation,"[1] who says that the word means: "…the appropriation of a meaning from a prior text."[2] Andrew further comments that the model typically used in cinema adaptations is one that is "already treasured as a representation in another sign system."[3] In *Batman*'s case, the titular character represented is already a treasured character from comic books and his 1960s TV show. Taking note of what Andrew considers the term "adaptation" to be, it is important to think of adaptation as re-presentation, such that the adaptation re-presents the original work in a new medium, and in turn, a new way, as every adaptor will appropriate different meanings from a source text.

History

        Joy Gould Boyum, author of *Double Exposure: Fiction into Film*,[4] offers many insights into why and how film adaptations began. Boyum notes that film adaptations began as a result of the once perceived "high art" of literature and the "low art" of the early days of the motion picture. During its early years, film held a position of inferiority to the other arts, because many believed it to be too popular to actually be considered an art. Due to this, filmmakers were always looking for ways to make film more respectable. One of the strategies employed was to have films borrow their stories from literature; as Boyum notes, "to adapt a prestigious work was to do more than merely borrow its plot and characters, its themes: in the eyes of the movie industry, it was – and in fact still is – to borrow a bit of that work's quality and stature."[5] Since this practice began more than half of every film ever made has been an adaptation of some sort.

        One reason filmmakers chose to adapt novels was because they supplied films with a source of plots and characters, and further provided what has come to be known as the "proven property."[6] A proven property is something that has proven itself successful in another medium, and thus already has a built-in audience that a film financier can bank on. The hope of the Hollywood studio is that a pre-sold property's success in one medium might transfer to another. In the case of comic book characters, it has been seen from the outstanding grosses from their films that there is a large fan base that goes to see any film that features their hero, and they take their friends and family. *Superman*, *Batman*, *X-Men* and *Spider-Man* are just a few of these films that were amongst the highest grossing films of their respective years. This has made comic books fertile

ground for adaptation in contemporary cinema, yet these films have not yet been studied in academia in any sustained and serious way.

A superhero's film debut is often the pinnacle moment in the history of that character. Bob Kane, creator of Batman, noted just prior to the release of *Batman* (1989) that "[t]he film will be the highlight of Batman's long career. The topper of the whole mystique."[7] What Kane is referring to is the fact that the film version of a comic book hero often represents the period in history where the general public is made most aware of his or her existence; for example, the summer of 2005 was a high water mark point in public awareness for the Marvel super-hero team the Fantastic Four, due to their recently released film. A motion picture can have a dramatic effect on a comic book character. For example, a film can increase a comic book character's popularity, as it did with Superman and Spider-Man, or it can serve as a continuing reminder of the gradual downfall of a once popular character, such as *The Shadow* (1994) or *The Phantom* (1996). The irony, as will be illustrated in Chapter Two, is that the title characters in each of these original comic books helped to define the character of Batman, and after the poor critical and box-office reception of both films, each fell out of existence. Influential 1980s graphic novel artist and writer Frank Miller cites that, "time and time again, the best superhero films are those that were adapted closest to their original source material" (that is, the very first comic book issues to feature the given character). Indeed, he further notes, comic book films usually only suffer when they attempt to go in new directions.[8] Building upon this foundation, the well-received and highly regarded *Superman* (1978) and *Spider-Man* (2002) consist largely of events from their very first appearances in the comics in which they appeared (Superman lands on Earth to avoid his

home planet's destruction and Spider-Man is bit by a radioactive spider and loses his

Uncle Ben due to his own negligence – all events from these characters first comic book

issues). *Catwoman* (2004), on the other hand, pays little to no attention to the character

as she appears in Batman comics, in the film she is named Patience Phillips, not Selina

Kyle (her name in the comics), and works to expose the cosmetic company she used to

work for, and was universally panned by critics and comic book fans alike as a result.

It was not until 1957 that the first full-scale academic analysis of film adaptation

in America took place: George Bluestone's *Novels into Film: The Metamorphosis of*

Fiction into Cinema.[9] In the book, Bluestone argues that certain movies (he uses *The*

Informer, *Wuthering Heights*, and *The Grapes of Wrath*) "do not debase their literary

sources; instead they 'metamorphose' novels into another medium that has its own formal

or narratological possibilities."[10] Most theorists and thinkers that followed Bluestone did

not share his optimism that a film does not debase its source material; instead, the

concept of what came to be known as "fidelity" came to dominate the discussions on the

subject of adaptation.

Many theorists and writers have had varying interpretations regarding the issues

of adaptation. Of those who have written about adaptation through the years, two distinct

camps have emerged: those who consider the original source as something to be held up

as a worthy source or goal from which to be adapted, such as the work of George

Bluestone, and those who see adaptation as a process that invariably involves change.

This thesis examines two Batman films, one that attempted a faithful adaptation (*Batman*)

and one that was freer to adapt and change the source material (*Batman Returns*).

As *Batman* sought to portray an adaptation that was intended by its producers to be a "faithful" rendering of the first year of Bob Kane's original comic book (to capitalize on the proven success of 1980s graphic novels that went back to this time period's traits), it becomes important to first analyze the problematic concept of "fidelity." Perhaps if *Batman'*s producers Peter Guber and Jon Peters had had the advance work of adaptation theorists at their disposal before they produced *Batman*, they would likely have never attempted to be faithful to the character as he appeared in the comic books, knowing that they would inevitably fail in their task.

Many contemporary adaptation theorists have dismissed, or at least attempted to dismiss the concept of fidelity. Brian McFarlane, author of *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation*,[11] defines fidelity as a single, correct "meaning" which a filmmaker either adheres to or in some sense violated or tampered with.[12] McFarlane describes the fidelity approach to adaptation theory to be both a "doomed enterprise" and "un-illuminating," because it ultimately revolves around individuals arguing over highly subjective, individualized readings of a text.

Robert Stam, author of *The Dialogics of Adaptation*, recognizes this problem as well and notes that when an individual reads a novel, they naturally fashion their own imaginary mise-en-scene, interjected with personal desires, hopes and utopias.[13] Together, these elements create a conceptualization of the world to which the film adaptation must be "faithful" – or risk disappointing its audience. Stam notes that fidelity is impossible to achieve since a change in medium automatically changes any given source material.[14] Stam also finds fidelity problematic because it assumes that a source contains an extractable "essence" which as he believes is very difficult to come by. It is

also challenging for a filmmaker to be faithful when many times, not even an author will

know his or her own deepest intentions, which has informed the phrase, "trust the tale,

and not the teller."[15] Thus *Batman* producers' act of hiring Bob Kane in order to ensure

that the film accorded with his perception of his creation, did not necessarily make their

film an accurate adaptation of the source material; as Stam would insist, Kane himself

might not have been able to accurately identify the true, definable "essence" of the

original comic books.

Fidelity is a particularly difficult concept to apply to Batman comic books, since

the sheer volume of constantly changing texts makes it literally impossible for a Batman

film adaptation to be faithful. Batman has been in continuous publication for nearly

seventy years; he began in *Detective Comics #27* in 1939, and May 2006 saw the 819th

issue. In addition to *Detective Comics,* Batman has also appeared in the monthly comic

Batman since 1940, in which May 2006 marked its 653rd issue. Throughout this time, the

character has been both written about and drawn by hundreds of different talents at DC

Comics, each with a slightly, even radically different takes on the character. If Batman's

Bat Cave were real, there would be literally hundreds of different bat-suits hanging in it,

presenting virtually limitless possibilities to filmmakers trying to adapt the character onto

film. This leaves the adaptor to choose a version of Batman to be adapted or add to the

many personal visions of the character.

To make the process of adaptation even more difficult, Batman comics and his

media spin-offs have always contained a great deal of cross-pollination. In other words,

Batman comics have shaped his TV and film adaptations, and those adaptations have in

turn influenced the source text. For example, the first appearance of Alfred (Bruce

Wayne's faithful English butler) and the Bat Cave (Batman's secret base of operation, hidden underneath Wayne Manor) in the first Batman film serial (1943) ultimately found themselves in the comics, while the campy nature of the 1960s TV show crept its way into the comics of the same era. *Batman: The Animated Series* (1992-1995) invents such a rich history for a villain named Mr. Freeze, that the back-story is borrowed for Joel Schumacher's *Batman and Robin* (1997).

As the preceding has illustrated, the fidelity approach to adaptation is an extremely difficult way to go about adapting any given source material; thus many theorists and authors who have written about adaptation have offered up alternative terms that can more accurately describe the adaptation processes. I will now take a look at these alternative terms and see how *Batman* and *Batman Returns* can be applied to them.

Alternative Terms

Brian McFarlane (*Novel to Film*) makes the distinction between films that attempt to be "faithful to the letter" and those that attempt to be "faithful to the spirit" or "essence" of the original source material. McFarlane makes this distinction with terms that he coins "transferred elements" and "adaptation proper." McFarlane's "transferred elements" refer to the elements of the original text that are taken from the original and put into the adaptation as is. "Transferred elements" include what McFarlane calls "cardinal features" which are elements of the original that are transposed intact to their film adaptations (in Batman's case these "cardinal features" include his "Five Key Components" as established by Uricchio and Pearson in their essay "I'm not fooled by that cheap disguise" in their book *The Many Lives of the Batman*[16] as traits/attributes, events, recurrent characters, settings, and iconography which will be discussed in greater

detail in Chapter Two). "Adaptation proper" refers to adaptations that are changed or altered to fit within the parameters and constraints of the film medium, or changed entirely by the filmmakers.[17] Using McFarlane's terms it can be argued that Guber and Peters planned to "transfer" Batman's early comics from page to screen as much as possible in *Batman,* while Tim Burton simply "adapted" the early comics in *Batman Returns*, while adding his own unique twist to the material. Even Guber-Peters would have difficulty in "transferring" Batman to the screen without taking some liberties in the adaptation.

Robert Stam ("*Adaptation*") follows in McFarlane's footsteps by providing two alternative terms and interpretations. Stam uses the terms, "Translation" and "Transformation." Stam is essentially duplicating McFarlane's argument but substituting what he calls "translation" and "transformation" for "transferred elements" and "adaptation proper" respectively.[18] To put my case studies into Stam's model: *Batman* "translates" the original source comic books and *Batman Returns* "transforms" them.

Geoffrey Wagner, author of *The Novel and the Cinema* (as mentioned by Joy Gould Boyum in his book *Double Exposure: Fiction and Film*) divides adaptation into three "modes": 1) Transposition – in which a novel is directly put onto the screen with a minimum of apparent interference (fidelity); 2) Commentary – where an original is taken and either purposely or inadvertently altered in some respect; and lastly 3) Analogy – which is where a film adaptation represents a considerable departure from the original material for the sake of making another work of art.[19] I would say that both *Batman* and *Batman Returns* are, to use Wagner's "modes," Commentaries. In *Batman*'s case the original comics were inadvertently altered due to the unraveling script (more on this in

Chapter Four) and *Batman Returns* was purposely altered by its director (more on this in Chapter Five). It may be tempting to consider *Batman Returns* an "Analogy" due to where the film has fit into other authors' terminology, but the film does not "considerably" depart from the Batman mythos. *Batman Returns* still features the character of Batman, in Gotham City, fighting a supporting cast of criminals.

  Linda Seger, author of *The Art of Adaptation: Turing Fact and Fiction into Film*,[20] presents an interesting way to look at the adaptation of an original text into a film. Seger is not a film theorist, but a screenwriting practitioner who helps fellow screenwriters in the adaptation process. Nevertheless, her work is useful because she presents the idea that a film adaptation need not follow the original material. Seger offers a viable alternative to the fidelity approach by suggesting that one way to look at film adaptation is to think of it as a "New Original" or "Second Original." This term advocates that filmmakers may in fact utilize original source material simply as a jumping-off point, and then subjectively interpret the remainder of the narrative from that there. Alfred Hitchcock frequently, though inadvertently used this concept in his films, citing that: "'I read a story only once, and if I like the basic idea, I just forget about the book and start to create cinema'."[21] Orson Wells had a similar way of working as he said, "'If one has nothing new to say about a novel… why adapt at all?'."[22] In light of this idea, Seger would likely approve of Tim Burton's work on *Batman Returns*, for he takes the original source material and incorporates his own interpretations into the adapted film version.

Comic Book Verses Novel Adaptations

There are several key differences between adapting novels and adapting comic books into films and each have their own advantages and disadvantages. Novels use words to tell their stories, describe characters and build ideas whereas film uses images and action. Seger observes that novels and films "are essentially different mediums that resist each other as often as they cooperate."[23] It may take a novel 50 to 100 pages to get what one page of a comic book, or three minutes of film could accomplish. Yet a novel could describe a characters inner feeling and turmoil far better than a comic or film. Films and comic books must choose a specific visual representation for what a novel can simply describe; for example, the word "beautiful" in describing a woman can be used to describe a character in a book, allowing the notion of what beautiful means to be interpreted by the reader. A comic book artist must draw a beautiful woman and a film must cast and portray one.

Comic books are unusual in that they are not like novels which must tell their stories with words. Comics have the benefit of pictures and words to tell their stories which makes them arguably, inherently more cinematic than the most vivid of novels. As will be revealed, much of Batman's world and characters came from the movies, thus these comics made for great material to be adapted back into film. Bob Kane further examines comic and film similarities when he says, "[c]omic books and films are both highly visual media, the comic book panel a condensed version of the film frame."[24] Rather than have avid readers argue that they saw a three-headed dog from the novel, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* for example, differently than the way it appears in the film adaptation, in the case of comics, the picture is right there telling the reader and

the filmmaker how it should look (if they choose to adapt it directly). Novels are very difficult to adapt into films with any degree of fidelity largely due to the fact that every reader creates his or her own individualized version of the novel as they read it. With comic books it is less possible to let the imagination run wild while reading, as it only can do so in the action that takes place between each panel, everything else is illustrated quite clearly.

To reiterate the differences between novels, comic books and films: novels have only words; comics have words, pictures and can simulate action and film has words (both written and spoken), theatrical performances, music, sound effects and the moving photographic image. All three are actually on a continuum of reality with each one arguably being able to produce "the real" more accurately. A novel is usually produced by a single individual (who may have an editor), comic books require more than one (usually at least a writer and an artist) and film is the most collaborative of them all, requiring as little as four or five people, up to hundreds for films like the studio productions under examination here. Another difference between these media is that novels and comic books are relatively unaffected by questions of budget whereas films are deeply immersed in material and financial contingencies.[25] It costs a novelist nothing to write a scene and a comic book writer and artist simply the cost of the materials, but the process of making a film can costs a film studio millions.

At first glance comic books seem more amiable to film than novels because they are both visual mediums, however, comics can be harder to adapt than novels. A novel, at least, has a beginning, middle and end with a specific, limited number of pages whereas a comic, at least in the case of Batman, has no discernible middle or end (since it

is ongoing). All that is definitive is a beginning, and that could be why *Batman*'s

producers chose to adapt a Batman from his first year in the comics. By doing this, there

could be a very definite window to deal with. This thesis is designed to illuminate the

fact that comic books, despite their similarities to film, are equally difficult to adapt into

film as novels have traditionally been. Batman is perhaps the best comic book character

to illustrate this difficulty in comic book adaptations. Batman has gone through so many

changes throughout the years that adapting him to the screen was a huge undertaking.

After having discussed adaptation, let us now take a closer look at the texts used to

understand this thesis' research subject, Batman.

II. Batman Texts

Of the texts used for this thesis about Batman, some are "scholarly" while others

are more "popular." While most theses tend to stick to scholarly sources, this particular

thesis benefited greatly from what has been traditionally referred to as "coffee table

books." Official movie books and comic book collections proved most valuable in

researching this study because they are some of the very few behind the scenes accounts

of what went on during the production of these films.

The Batman Filmography: Live-Action Features, 1943-1997[26] by Mark S.

Reinhart truly walks the line between a scholarly and popular text. Reinhart is the only

author to have written a book exclusively about Batman films which features a very

detailed examination of live-action Batman features from the first time the character

appeared on screen in his 1943 film serial, through 1997's *Batman and Robin*. Reinhart

divides Batman on film into three distinct live-action time periods: 1.) "The Serial Era of

the 1940s," consisting of *Batman* (1943) and *Batman and Robin* (1949), 2.) "The Camp

Era of the 1960s," including the television show and film *Batman: The Movie* (1966) and

lastly 3.) "The Warner Bros. Summer Blockbuster/Action Film Era," which includes

Batman (1989), *Batman Returns* (1992), *Batman Forever* (1995) and *Batman and Robin*

(1997). These divisions helped to frame my work as this study will be focusing on

Batman and *Batman Returns*, but will be taking a brief look at the ways in which the

previous Batman filmic endeavors dealt with the character (the serials and TV show and

movie) and how they effected public perception of the character to that point. *Batman*

Forever and *Batman and Robin* have been excluded from this thesis as they mark a

historical shift back to a campy Batman.   Reinhart does a march through history of

Batman in both the comics and on film. He provides a great deal of valuable information

in very succinct ways. He offers great behind the scenes information on the production

of the films yet escapes into "fan language" in discussing them, where he tends to argue

for his personal preferred version of Batman.

     Batman and Me[27] by Bob Kane and Tom Andrae is an autobiography by the man

credited with the creation of Batman and was a vital work for both my discussion on the

establishment of the Batman character (Chapter Two), and for exploring the creators'

involvement/lack of involvement in all the film adaptations of his character up to and

including *Batman* (1989). In the autobiography Kane confesses that he stole from

numerous pop culture elements to create Batman, revealing exactly what they were, and

is quite frank about additional help garnered from his friend, Bill Finger. This borrowing

from his surrounding was noting new as Shakespeare, and many other creators of popular

culture, stole from others in the creation of their work.

The Many Lives of the Batman: Critical Approaches to a Superhero and his Media,[28] edited by Roberta E. Pearson and William Uricchio, was the first serious academic exploration of the character of Batman. Pearson and Uricchio teach mass communication at Penn State University and thus the book was written in the Cultural Studies/ Communications vein, but is still very helpful for film studies purposes. This book helped to lay the groundwork for analyzing Batman in a serious academic way. The best essay of the collection for the purpose of this thesis is the one by Uricchio and Pearson, "I'm Not Fooled by That Cheap Disguise." Here they argue that the character of Batman depends upon the presence of five key components: 1) Traits and Attributes, 2) Events, 3) Recurrent Characters, 4) Setting, and 5) Iconography. These five key components are crucial to Chapter Two of this thesis, which looks at the basic tenets of Batman which prove vital later in determining the most critical elements to be included in a film version of the character.

As this thesis deals with the adaptation of the character of Batman from comic book to the screen, an analysis of several key comic books, including: *The Batman Chronicles: Volume 1, Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, *Batman: Year One* and *Batman: The Killing Joke* will be provided. Due to the fact that the original Batman comics are so rare and difficult to come by, yet still highly sought after, *The Batman Chronicles* is a collection that re-presents the earliest adventures of Batman in chronological order. *Volume 1*[29] of this collection contains the reprints of the original pages from *Detective Comics #27-38* and *Batman #1*, which is exactly the first year of Batman in the comics from the spring of 1939 through the spring of 1940. These stories reveal "the Bat-Man" as he was originally conceived, and it is from these texts that it will

be argued that executive producer Michael Uslan and producers Peter Guber and Jon

Peters drew from in creating their first Batman film in 1989.

The other comic books that are of importance to the films analyzed here emerged

in the mid-1980s, and became known as graphic novels. A graphic novel is different

from a regular comic book in that it is typically of a much higher quality in that they are

printed on better quality paper and are much longer than typical comic books; they are

aimed at a more adult audience and can be purchased not only at comic book shops but

also regular book stores. Frank Miller's *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*[30] and

Batman: Year One[31] were crucial for bringing a fragmented Batman (as will be illustrated

in Chapter Two) back to his roots. These graphic novels were so successful that they

made Warner Bros. stop and notice that there was a market for a Batman done in a dark,

serious way. Though these graphic novels are often what *Batman* (1989) is thought to be

an adaptation of, through a close analysis of these seminal books, it will be argued that

they were extremely important in getting the film made, but that the film itself was in no

way an adaptation of any of them.

Film Studies has reached an era where sources used by academics need not

include just books, newspapers and magazines. The rise of the Digital Versatile Disc has

enabled movie fans a glimpse inside the making of the films that they purchase. The

Batman: Motion Picture Anthology 1989-1997 is a box set that contains the four Batman

films produced by Warner Bros. during what Reinhart defines as the "Summer

Blockbuster Era." Until recently it can be convincingly argued that DVDs were not the

best source for academic research as they have been known to stretch the truth and

romanticize the behind the scenes world of moviemaking. Oftentimes DVD

commentaries and interviews feature actors, directors and producers not wishing to aggravate any of their superiors who may happen to be watching and listening (so that they may keep their jobs). With the coming of these Batman DVDs, that time period can be seen as beginning to become a thing of the past. The commentaries and interviews for these films are very frank and honest. Every major figure who worked on these films is now secure in their jobs and are not worried about losing them. Joel Schumacher, for example came right out and apologized for how awful his *Batman and Robin* is.

Batman and *Batman Returns* Two-Disc Special Edition DVDs in particular were of great assistance in writing this thesis. Each DVD features a commentary track by Tim Burton, who talks candidly about his experiences making the two films. This resource goes above and beyond the information that can be gained from a book as these DVDs also contain interviews with the actual people involved in creating Batman comic books and the Batman films under examination. *Batman* contains a documentary entitled *Legends of the Dark Knight: The History of Batman* which once again takes a look at Batman's history in comic books as he was reinvented and reinterpreted over nearly seven decades, as told by those who wrote, illustrated and edited DC Comics. The DVDs also feature a documentary entitled: *Shadows of the Bat: The Cinematic Saga of the Dark Knight* which is spread out between both DVD's. *Batman* contains the first three parts, "The Road to Gotham City," "The Gathering Storm" and "The Legend Reborn" which discus getting the first Warner Bros. Batman film made, through its production, promotion and eventually its release. Part four, "Dark Side of the Night," located on the *Batman Returns* DVD, focuses on the production of that film. Each DVD also contains a "Beyond Batman Documentary Gallery" which features short documentaries covering

specific areas of the production of the film involving production design, props, costumes, visual effects and music. The DVDs go so in depth into these two films that they even contain the film's music videos and original theatrical trailers.

Having discussed the texts used to gain a greater understanding of the Dark Knight, I now shift over to the texts about the filmmakers who brought him to life in 1989 and 1992, starting with director of both films, Tim Burton, then shifting to *Batman*'s producers Peter Guber and Jon Peters.

III. The Batman Filmmaker Texts

A director can have a tremendous impact on a film. Often the recruitment of a director can be as important as the casting of actors or a screenplay for a film. Tim Burton was literally cast into directing *Batman* because of the very personalized and uniquely different stamp that he had put on all of his previous works, *Vincent* (1982), *Frankenweenie* (1984), *Pee-Wee's Big Adventure* (1985) and *Beetlejuice* (1988). Warner Bros.' *Batman* producers took notice of this very stylized, young director when they expressed an interest in bringing a dark, gothic Batman to the screen. The following are the most influential sources on Tim Burton that helped in understanding this unique director, seemingly tailor made for helming a film about the Dark Knight.

As it is not wise to make generalizations or assumptions about a director's intentionality in the films they have made, among the best sources on Tim Burton were those opinions provided by the director himself. *Burton on Burton*,[32] edited by Mark Salisbury is a great source for the director's own words regarding his opinions and intentions behind his films. Burton discusses everything from his take on the Batman character including the TV show's representation, to his opinions of comic books in

general. Through this book I really got the impression that Burton was never a big comic book fan and was rather uncaring as to "bat-fans" opinions of his take on "their" character. Burton talks about the stressful shoot of the first *Batman,* and his initial reasoning for not wanting to make a sequel to the film.

Tim Burton Interviews,[33] edited by Kristen Fraga, is also useful in compiling Burton's thoughts on his films. The section on *Batman Returns* was particularly valuable because it also dealt with Burton's thoughts on why he did not want to make a sequel to Batman and what finally convinced him to do so. Through this reading several traits that made Burton and the character of Batman very similar individuals are pointed out; these similarities made Burton an ideal choice in bringing the character to the screen.

Hit and Run: How Jon Peters and Peter Guber Took Sony for a Ride in Hollywood[34] by Nancy Griffin and Kim Masters is really the only book that has been exclusively written about *Batman* producers Peter Guber and Jon Peters. Though it should be disclosed that the book does not paint a flattering picture of the producing team (citing that Jon Peters was raised by wolves), it is a vital source in showing that they held far more creative control over *Batman* than young director Tim Burton. Griffin and Masters note that even before *Batman*, the producing duo had earned themselves quite a reputation. They reveal that when director Steven Spielberg made *The Color Purple* (1985) he had a provision in his contract explicitly barring them from the set.[35] Additionally, *Witches of Eastwick* (1987) director George Miller also tried to warn Burton that Guber and Peters were a "nightmare" to work for.[36]

The book is called *Hit and Run* to illuminate the fact that Guber and Peters constantly had hits for studios, collected their money and ran away from them, starting

with their first company, Casablanca, and continuing to their shift over to Sony after *Batman* was a hit at Warner Bros.. The book shows that Guber and Peters made a habit of appropriating others' ideas and elbowing those who deserved credit aside in favor of taking it all themselves.[37] Griffin and Masters claim that they only visited the set of *Rain Man* once, yet can be seen at the academy awards with an Oscar statue that they borrowed from the writer, posing as if they had won it. *Batman* stands out as the best example of this. Chapter 14 of the book covers *Rain Man* and *Batman* and is appropriately titled "Hit Men" as Griffin and Master compare Peters and Guber to hit men who attempted to downplay those who envisioned and or created the films while taking on credit for themselves. In the case of *Batman*, Guber and Peters craftily promised those who brought them the idea and the rights the character only to switch production studios and renege on their original deal, which will be covered in Chapter Three.

This concludes the relevant texts used to write this thesis. The section to follow will summarize what can be found in the upcoming chapters.

<div align="center">Chapter Outlines</div>

Chapter Two sets up the framework of this thesis for talking about adapting Batman to the screen. First, this chapter will set up the character of Batman as he originally appeared in his first year in the comics. To do so, Batman's creation will be discussed, as well as the many cultural influences (intertexts) that informed it. Here it will be proved through a close reading of Batman's first several comic book issues that he was created as a dark, lone, vigilante, one much more likely to strike fear into criminals than anything else, especially laughter. This discussion leads to the key

characteristics and components that made up the core Batman character before he was altered through time. It is important to establish Batman in his first year early on; because this is the Batman asserted as the one that Warner Bros.' *Batman* producers wanted to bring to the screen in 1989. Chapter Two will then carefully examine the key events in the history of the Batman character that can be seen as altering him from the way in which he was created. These events are not designed to discuss every time Batman was altered from the way he was created, but to highlight the major ones. Each of these events, in their own way, can be seen as having robbed Batman of his essence and altered the character from the way in which he was first envisioned and executed. It is important to discuss these events because these were the stigmas attached to the Batman character in 1989 and 1992 that would have to be addressed by Guber and Peters, and then Tim Burton in their respective adaptations.

Chapter Three illustrates how Batman was retuned to his original "Dark" Knight status with the rise of the graphic novel, particularly those by Frank Miller, sparking renewed interest from Hollywood (Warner Bros. Studio) to make a Batman feature film. Finally this thesis will be primed to make its first main argument, that Warner Bros.' *Batman* producers were aiming for a representation of Batman that was in keeping with the character from the first year of the comics, as well as the mood and tone of the recent graphic novels – while defining itself against the altering events laid out in Chapter Two. Chapter Three will also note the ways in which Tim Burton's visual stamp was kept in check by the omnipresence of Peter Guber and Jon Peters on the set, hand holding him through the process of making the film to ensure that it was their vision of the character that arrived on screen, not his. Guber and Peters wanted Batman fans to be as happy as

possible with the film, and thought the best way to do so would be to emulate the Batman from his first year in the comics before he was tainted by outside influences. Little did they know that Burton would have quite a different plan for the sequel that was not so fan-satisfaction oriented.

Chapter Four analyzes what will be referred to as Tim Burton's Batman (*Batman Returns*). This chapter will make this thesis' second main argument that for "his" sequel to *Batman*, Burton himself had reached a status where he was being sold as a commodity due to the success of *Beetlejuice, Batman* and *Edward Scissorhands* which made him one of Hollywood's most sought after young directors. With full creative control, *Batman Returns* is very much Burton's vision of the character that departs from Guber-Peters' vision, yet it will be argued that *Batman Returns* is still in keeping with the "spirit" of the original Batman comics.

CHAPTER ONE

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CHAPTER 2
WHO IS BATMAN?
THE ORIGINAL CHARACTER AND THE EVENTS THAT ALTERED HIM

In order to properly adapt a character onto film it is important to know where that character came from, how and why he emerged. This chapter begins by locating the elements that inspired Batman's invention. By understanding where the character came from allows for a better understanding of what he was intended to be. Who is Batman? What is he? In 1989, the Warner Bros. Studio lead by producers Peter Guber and Jon Peters attempted to adapt a Batman of his first year in the comics, and this chapter will lay out what that Batman was and how he came to be, followed by the events that changed him from this original form.

Invention and Early Influences:

The man credited with creating Batman is comic artist Bob Kane. Kane was just eighteen years-old kid when he created Batman and as a kid his creation was little more than grand-scale thievery of the pop culture that surrounded him. Little to nothing about Batman was initially original. Batman was created to be the polar opposite of the superhero that preceded him, Superman.

Superman, the first comic book superhero, debuted in June 1938 in *Action Comics #1*. In the issue, Superman wears the bright primary colors of red, blue and yellow while fighting for "truth, justice and the American way." After National Publications' (later renamed DC Comics) success with Superman, the publisher was on the prowl for more characters to fill their pages. Kane was hired to create another superhero as quickly as possible, and he did so just to put food on his table. The following discussion briefly documents the influences Kane drew upon in the creation of his comic book character.

Les Daniels, author of *Batman: The Complete History* asserts that Kane set out to create a superhero that would rival Superman by actually beginning with a figure similar to Superman (complete with the tights and trunks that he felt were mandatory), then he simply overlaid a piece of tracing paper and began to experiment with variations on the costume.[1]   Kane ransacked his memories for ideas from his past that he could incorporate into the superhero composite. Kane's modus operandi for the creation of Batman was to be influenced by an established character, then embellish and bring his own individuality to it.[2] Kane essentially pieced the character of Batman together from existing pop-culture material and refined him just enough that he could stand as a separate entity.

After sketching a basic superhero frame, Bob Kane remembered an invention that had fascinated him in his youth: Leonardo da Vinci's drawing of a bat-like flying machine.[3] This flying machine was actually a glider with large bat-wings attached to it that Leonardo had named the "Ornithopter." Leonardo left a quote on his sketches of the ornithopter that stuck with Kane for years: "And your bird shall have no other model but that of a bat."[4] Kane put these wings onto his basic superhero frame.

The second influence in creating Batman, according to Bob Kane, was a film he loved as a kid, *The Mark of Zorro* (1920), starring his childhood idol, Douglas Fairbanks, Senior.[5] In the film, Zorro is a wealthy, bored Spanish count in a California of the 1820s by day, who dons a mask by night to conceal his identity. Kane credits Zorro for giving him the idea to give Batman a duel identity[6] as he applied this concept of a hero (a seemingly idle socialite by day and a vigilante by night) to Batman. Zorro, with his cape, trusty sword, and horse Toronado became a mysterious crusader for justice. *The Mark of*

Zorro also influenced the creation of Batman through its star, Douglas Fairbanks Senior, who was famous for his ability to do his own amazing stunts and proved to Kane that a human being could be a superhero without having any super-powers. Knowing that National Publications would not be interested in a hero too close to Superman Kane made Batman an ordinary human being with the physical prowess of Douglas Fairbanks Senior.[7]

The third major influence on Batman was another movie seen by Kane, *The Bat Whispers*. In the 1930 film, star Chester Morris has a dual role: he is a detective trying to track down the mysterious "Bat," yet is revealed to be the killer himself at the end of the film. Morris wears a bat costume to frighten people out of an old mansion so that he can find stolen money hidden there. One of the most vivid memories Kane retained from the film was the shadowy outline that is cast on the wall to strike fear into the Bat's victims.[8] This shadowy outline inspired Batman's costume and his tendency to project his image onto walls to frighten criminals. To give Batman greater depth and complexity than his predecessor, Kane used this image of a human bat, which has a stigma of evil attached to it, and turned it into the hero.

At this stage in the development of the character, Bob Kane turned to a friend, writer Bill Finger, for help. Finger played an enormous role in the creation of Batman. When Kane showed Finger his crude sketches of this new character they were far from complete; in fact, Batman looked very little like a man dressed up as a bat. Batman had a small mask concealing his identity and a red suit with black wings and trunks. Finger suggested making the hero more like an actual bat by giving him a hood and replacing the human eyes with white slits to make him look more mysterious.[9] Finger also pulled out a

dictionary and called Kane's attention to the ears of a bat illustration found inside.[10] With Finger's aid, Kane's simple mask was transformed into a black cowl that incorporated long bat-ears. Finger also thought that the costume was too bright and suggested making it darker, to make it look more ominous.[11] Kane agreed that Batman should be as dark as possible yet slight tweaking of the color scheme had to occur because comic conventions demanded that black objects be highlighted in blue; thus, Batman's uniform became blue and grey.[12] Finger also helped Kane develop Batman's cape, and gave him gloves so that he would not leave fingerprints.

While discussing what went into the creation of Batman and the events that altered him, this thesis will occasionally relate the material back to the Batman case studies. This discussion of Batman's suit relates to the fact that *Batman*'s (1989) bat-suit occasionally received flack for being non-authentic because Batman wears all black from cowl to boots with the exception of a yellow utility belt. This does seem to be inaccurate based on the fact that Batman's creators wanted the suit to be as dark as possible but they were held back because of the demands of comic printing abilities in 1939.

Bill Finger, who also penned Batman's early stories, never really received the fame and recognition he deserved though it is clear that he was instrumental in the creation of this enduring figure. Without his help Batman would not have been given many of his iconic elements that have come to define his character and Batman most likely would have been just another in the long line of tried and failed superheroes throughout history. Kane made a deal with National Publications on his own; Finger became merely Kane's employee.

Batman's world evolved from many different elements including "…movies, pulps, comic strips, and newspaper headlines – in which both Kane and Finger were fully immersed."[13] Both Kane and Finger saw Batman differently, and both visions can be seen in the final form of the character. Kane saw the hero as a vigilante while Finger saw the character of Batman as a combination of one of *The Three Musketeers* (1844) and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's detective Sherlock Holmes (1887).[14]

Aside from Batman's major inspirations in drawing up the character, he also had several others along the way. Finger looked to pulp fiction in writing Batman, and from there he drew heavily from the Shadow. The Shadow was a hero, explained by Daniels as: "Clad in a black cloak and a wide-brimmed hat, the Shadow was a take-no prisoner crime fighter who frequently arrived with guns blazing, and his secret identity was so secret that readers could never quite figure it out."[15] Another pulp figure was The Phantom, a precursor to the superhero, who was created in 1936, and like the eventual Batman, he wore a black mask with no visible human eyes and a purplish-grey suit with a hood and a slim black mask to conceal his duel identity. Kane explains that "Batman's oath to avenge his parents by becoming a crime-fighter may have been inspired by a similar pledge the Phantom made on the skull of the pirate who murdered his father."[16] Chester Gould's comic strip Dick Tracy (1931) also influenced Batman. The major inspiration that came from it was his spectacular array of bizarre villains such as the Blank, the Mole, Pruneface, Flattop, and the Brow.[17] To some extent Batman followed Tracy's lead with his eventual rogue's gallery, including, but not limited to, the Joker, the Penguin, Catwoman, the Riddler, Two-Face, Poison Ivy, Mr. Freeze, the Scarecrow, Ra's Al Ghul, Man-Bat, Clayface, Killer Croc, the Ventriloquist, Bane and many more. Now

that Batman's influences and conception have been discussed, this thesis now turns to Batman's debut into comic books.

First Appearance of Batman: Establishing the Character

Batman first appeared in *Detective Comics #27* in May of 1939 in a six page murder mystery called, "The Case of the Chemical Syndicate" which, like many, was inspired by a story appearing in the Shadow. Reinhart notes that, "Remarkably from his very first appearance much of the Batman mythos that would endure for generations was already firmly in place."[18] On the cover of *Detective #27*, the Bat-Man is shown swinging from a rope with one arm, while strangling a criminal with the other, with two other henchmen in the foreground looking on in frightened amazement. This cover is so in keeping with contemporary ways of drawing the character that it could stand to open any Batman comic published today.[19]

The first panel of this premier issue is an image of a silhouetted Batman (cape held out like bat-wings as inspired by *The Bat Whispers*) on a city rooftop at night against a full moon with a caption reading: "The 'Bat-Man,' a mysterious and adventurous figure fighting for righteousness and apprehending the wrong doer, in his lone battle against the evil forces of society… his identity remains unknown."[20] This single caption that introduced the Bat-Man character to the world gives a description of his essential behavior and the iconography - winged cape, cowl with pointed ears, a noir cityscape. In this introductory caption it is revealed that Batman is fighting a personal, "lone battle," which immediately places him outside of institutionalized crime-fighting, but the reasoning for his motivation is not given.[21] Like the opening image of the comic book,

this image of a silhouetted Batman, wings outstretched is also used to introduce the character in *Batman* (1989).

The second panel of this first issue introduces Bruce Wayne. He is drawn lounging with Commissioner Gordon with a pipe in his mouth. Wayne is established (on the surface) as a young, lazy, millionaire socialite. As the issue progresses, Bruce Wayne/the Bat-Man is not only portrayed as a strongman but also as a detective who uses his deductive mind and resourcefulness to fight crime (the insertion of Finger's desired Sherlock Holmes).[22] The Bat-Man deduces who the mysterious killer is and by the end of the issue serves as his judge, jury and executioner. Bat-Man's secret identity is withheld from the reader until the very last panel of his first issue when it is revealed that Wayne is in fact the Bat-Man.

The original Batman went above the law to get what he wanted and like the criminals he fought, operated outside the law and on his own terms, yet did so on behalf of the status quo. As Batman himself once put it, "If you can't beat them 'inside' the law, you must beat them 'outside' it… and that's where I come in!"[23] The Bat-Man of his early issues was not opposed to killing evil doers, in fact he seemed to relish in it most of the time. During his first ever encounter with hoodlums, in a rooftop battle in *Detective #27*, Batman grabs one into a headlock and, with "a mighty heave sends the burly criminal flying through space," presumably to his death.[24] This disregard for human life and taking the law into his own hands shows that Batman works independently from the official police force and that he is considered an outlaw. When the police arrive on the scene Commissioner Gordon tells his men, "It's the Bat-Man! Get him!" as his officers shoot at the silhouetted form of a bat on a rooftop.[25] In

Detective Comics #35 Commissioner Gordon tells Bruce Wayne, "I tell you Bruce, if I ever catch the Batman!"[26] This is also how Commissioner Gordon is portrayed in the 1989 *Batman*.

Even when villains met their ends by mistake, Batman is decidedly unsympathetic, for example, after the villain of *Detective #27* accidentally falls into an acid tank Batman comments, "A fitting end for his kind."[27] In *Detective #29*, when Batman tries to get information out of two goons he threatens, "Your choice gentlemen! Tell me! Or I'll kill you!"[28] In subsequent issues Batman dispatches evildoers by strangling then with his lasso and even delivering neck-breaking kicks to the head.[29] There is certainly a high body count in Batman's first year in the comics which made Batman seem like a more terrifying figure than the villains he fought.[30] This concept is applied to *Batman* (1989) as the citizens of Gotham City are made to question who the real "bad guy" is: Batman or the Joker. The fact that Batman was a cold-blooded killer in his first year in the comics was important to establish here because it will be later illustrated that the Batman of both *Batman* and *Batman Returns* kills his foes, proving once again that these film are more adaptations of Batman's first year in the comics more than any other time period.

Origin

A typical comic book series usually begins with an elaborate explanation of the given superhero's background. Batman is introduced into *Detective Comics #27* without explaining much about who he is or where he came from – and absolutely no explanation is given as to what motivated him to fight crime. The origin story did not come about until six issues (half a year) later. Kane and Finger provided Batman with an origin in the

two page "Legend- The Batman and How He Came to Be" which served as a preface to *Detective Comics #33* in November 1939. This origin story reveals that the Bat-Man was born from a horrific event: the murder of Bruce Wayne's parents by a common criminal right in front of his eyes when he was just a boy. This event so traumatized young Bruce that he dedicated himself to seeking vengeance on all criminals to make sure that what happened to him never happened to anyone ever again. Batman's origin story, which has defined the character's origin and motivations to the present day, was conveyed in only twelve comic book panels. The events of the murder are illustrated in the comic as follows: Bruce, Thomas and Martha Wayne walk home from a movie when a robber approaches them and demands their valuables. As the robber goes for Martha's necklace, Thomas Wayne tries to stop him and the robber shots them both, leaving Bruce an orphan.[31] The remaining panels of the origin story feed directly into defining the five key components to the character of Batman:

Defining the character: Five key components

The five key components that constitute the core character of Batman, according to Pearson and Uricchio which they list in their book *The Many Lives of the Batman*, are: 1) traits/attributes, 2) events, 3) recurrent characters, 4) setting and 5) iconography.[32] These key components prove absolutely vital in any film or television adaptation of the character. Person and Uricchio argue that omitting too many of them has dire consequences to the fidelity and even the spirit of the character:

1.) Traits/Attributes:

The four central traits and attributes for Batman can all be seen in the remaining panels of the origin story: obsession, deductive abilities, physical prowess, and wealth.

- 1.) Obsession – Following the "terror and shock" of his parent's death Young Bruce prays and made a vow by his bedside, "I swear by the spirits of my parents to avenge their deaths by spending the rest of my life warring on all criminals."[33]

- 2.) Deductive Abilities – portrayed years later dressed as a scientist in a smoke filled laboratory Bruce peers into a test tube, honing his intellect.[34]

- 3.) Physical Prowess – demonstrated in the next panel as Bruce, lifts a massive barbell over his head with one arm.[35] This physical prowess allows Batman to perform tasks that seem almost impossible for a normal human being (with the exception of Douglas Fairbanks Sr.), but still remain in the world of believability.

- 4.) Wealth – In the next panel, Bruce sits in front of a huge portrait in Wayne Manor which hangs above a giant fireplace. He says, "Dad's estate left me wealthy. I am ready… But first I must have a disguise." Bruce says to himself, "Criminals are a superstitious and cowardly lot. So my disguise must be able to strike terror into their hearts. I must be a creature of the night, black, terrible… a… a…" As if to answer Bruce's question a giant bat flies in through an open window. "A bat! That's it! It's an omen. I shall become a <u>bat</u>!"[36] Due to his wealth, Bruce Wayne financed Batman's elaborate and fantastic array of gadgets and gizmos to help him in his war on crime. He constructed a yellow combat style utility belt outfitted with a tool for every situation. This belt contains such items as: climbing gear (known as the Batrope) a boomerang (known as the Batarang) and many other detective items such as an infrared flashlight, smoke pellets and knock out gas.[37] He also built a vehicle for every travel condition from a Batmobile and Batsub to a Batplane (all established early on in the comics). In *Batman* (1989) the Dark Knight gets around in his Batmobile and Batwing and uses his batarang and speargun to ensnare goons, smoke pellets for discrete getaways and gauntlets to help rescue Vicki Vale causing the Joker to ponder, "Where does he get those wonderful toys?"

2.) Events:

The second of Batman's five key components falls into two categories: Fixed and

Accruing:

- 1.) Fixed Events - The central fixed event that defines Batman and drives everything that he does is the origin story. The origin explains the character's continuous crime-fighting and establishes his four central attributes/traits discussed above.

- 2.) Accruing Events - Batman's accruing events are those events that stand out as important milestones in the character's existence, such as the introduction of the Joker and Catwoman in *Batman #1* and Alfred, the butler and the Bat Cave in *Batman* (1943) (which have both been in nearly every comic book, TV and film

incarnation since). Many of the new events that have appeared in Batman comics and films through the years have proved to be not particularly important and are not carried through to the rest of the Batman world - such as Bat-Mite and Bat-Woman in the comics and the villains of Batman's 1940s film serials, Dr. Daka and The Wizard.

3.) Recurrent Characters:

Batman's interaction with the characters around him also helps to define him.

Batman's first year in the comics saw the introduction of many of Batman's regular

supporting cast including Commissioner Gordon, Robin, the Joker and Catwoman.

Batman, popular in his own right, became equally well known for his villains. Most

superheroes can only boast one or maybe two arch foes, even Superman's gallery gets

lean after Lex Luthor and Brainiac, but Batman has dozens who are equally interesting

and as well thought out as he is.[38] Batman villains are the most bizarre and unique in

comics, which explains Tim Burton's understanding of them.

Batman's recurrent characters are very important; Pearson and Uricchio suggest

that Batman is not himself without the inclusion of at least some of them. In other words

Batman can not function properly by himself. At the very least he needs someone to

fight against, or his job as Gotham City's masked avenger would be complete.

Essentially Batman fights to make himself obsolete, a task he will never be able to fully

accomplish.

4.) Setting:

Batman/Bruce Wayne lives in Gotham City, which has the same symbolic

relationship to him as the recurring characters.[39] Batman is Gotham; Gotham is Batman.

Both are dark and mysterious, and both will never be pure and perfect. Batman will

forever fight crime, as the city will forever produce it. A fictitious city was used (though

it was based on New York City) so that any comic reader, in any city could identify with it.[40] Films of the era inspired Batman's world by giving Gotham a dark, mysterious atmosphere found in such films as *Little Caesar* (1931) and *Public Enemy* (1931).[41] Kane notes his filmic inspirations for the look of Batman's world, "I was a real movie buff and as a kid. Movies like *Dracula* [(1931)], with Bela Lugosi – with the fog swirling up around the moors and the evil old castle – left an indelible impression on me. The first year of Batman was heavily influenced by horror films, and emulated a *Dracula* look."[42] Kane tries to recreate the atmosphere of these films by utilizing long, dark shadows and weird camera angles in his Batman comic art.[43] Finger's stories were also film inspired, drawing from lurid pulp fiction, Universal horror films and Warner Bros. gangster movies.[44] Having been originally inspired by films of the era, it was natural for filmmakers to take up Batman's mythology due to its dark premise and atmospheric look.

5.) Iconography:

Iconography is imagery or symbolism relating to a subject. Oftentimes super-heroes will wear a symbol on their chest that defines who they are. Superman wears a giant "S," Wonder Woman has two golden "W's," The Flash has a lightning rod (symbolizing his speed) and, finally, Batman has a black bat-symbol (which became encased in a yellow oval after 1964).

Batman's iconography consists of his costume, his devices and his environment. The costume helps to serve the war on crime, as it was meant to strike terror into his opponents. The colors of his costume allow him to remain hidden. The costumed has been slightly redesigned and reinterpreted depending on artist throughout history, but the

basic elements of the cape, cowl, gauntlets and logo have remained easily identifiable throughout.[45]

Batman's gadgets and gizmos all fit with the pictorial representation of the hero. "The batmobile, the batcopter, the batarang and the bat-ecetera's all serve as repositories of the bat-look: black, shiny, with a bat-wing design incorporated where possible."[46] Each device is black (and looks as much like a bat as possible) to fit with the overall theme and gothic style of Batman's world. The Bat Signal is another key element to Batman's iconography. The Bat Signal is a giant spotlight outfitted with a bat silhouette, which is often located on the roof of Gotham City Police Headquarters. It is used by Commissioner Gordon to summon Batman when he is needed. *The Bat Whispers* pioneered a prototype of the bat-signal when the Bat projects an image of a bat which appears on the wall whenever he announces his next victim.

The original Bat-Man stories, as Chip Kidd asserts are, "eerie, nocturnal, joyless but nonetheless beautifully weird little affairs that featured our hero (looking like the devil himself) dispatching his foes off the tops of tall buildings at the slightest provocation."[47] The Bat-Man of the first year can be further described as, "a dark avenger, who was fearless and sometimes ruthless, he was a playboy by day and a detective by night, fighting to help rite the wrongs in… Gotham City."[48] Uricchio and Pearson stress that, "[w]ithout the presence of all five key components in some form, the Batman ceases to be Batman, yet the primary series nature of the character permits fairly wide variation in the treatment of these components across time and media."[49] One of the most amazing things about the character of Batman has been his ability to adapt and change with the times. The five key components allow for great changes and freedom in

adapting, but not unlimited freedom. Uricchio and Pearson explain, "The elasticity of these components allows for great stretching, but in this moment of extreme character refraction, the Batman may be stretched thin to the point of invisibility."[50] The remainder of this chapter will look at the times were Batman's key components were stretched to their absolute limits through various screen and comic adaptations of the source material that made a mockery out of the original conception of the character.

The Altering Events

In the decades following Batman's premiere year in the comic the character went through a number of changes, both in the narrative of the comics themselves, and also through his adaptations to the screen (which in turn influenced the narrative and style of the comics). Many writers and artists contributed to the Caped Crusader since his creation and shortly after Batman's first year he actually began to take on a life of his own that his creators seemed to have little control over. Batman's changes and fluctuations in character throughout his long history can be seen as reflections of changing historical climates and shifts in public tastes. The following are the major events that changed Batman from the way he was originally created and intended. These changes are important to note because they would present several options to Warner Bros.' producers in the adaptation of the character to the screen in 1989. Due to the fact that each of these events changed and altered Batman's character, Guber-Peters decided to go back to the original conception of the character before any of the following happened, which was inspired by the same phenomenon in the comics of the time. The film was, in fact, defined against all of the following events. Even though these events were not the ones being adapted they could not be ignored by Guber-Peters and they can

not be ignored by this thesis. Each of these events left a lasting impression on the way

the public saw and perceived Batman and each would have to be directly dealt with by

the filmmakers even though they would not show up in the final film.

I. Introduction of Robin, the Boy Wonder

The first major change to alter Batman from his original form in the comics was

the introduction of a child partner. The character of Robin is a great debate in the

Batman universe. Reinhart observes that, "[m]any Batman fans feel that the character

works best when he is a lone vigilante, while others have argued that Robin's bright

costume and sunny disposition serve as an effective contrast to Batman's dark persona."[51]

Robin came into being because Bill Finger told Bob Kane that Batman needed someone

to talk to, as it was getting tiresome having him always thinking to himself. In creating a

sidekick for Batman, Kane once again turned to his love of film and Douglas Fairbanks,

Senior for inspiration, as Robin evolved from Kane's own fantasies of fighting alongside

his childhood idol. Robin was created to emulate Robin Hood, (another character

portrayed on the screen by Fairbanks). Kane even dressed Robin in the tunic, cape, and

shoes of Robin Hood's era, and drew his trunks to look like chain mail.[52] Finger came up

with Robin's alter ego name, Dick Grayson.

The debut of Robin in *Detective Comics #38*, April 1940 sold almost double what

Batman had sold as a single feature and explains why the character returned again and

again.[53] Robin, unlike Batman, was introduced with an origin story in his very first

appearance. Robin's origin was made to parallel Batman's: Dick Grayson was a circus

performer who witnessed his parent's murder at the hands of an arsonist. Thus, each hero

was inspired by the trauma of witnessing his parents' murder and sought to avenge them.

The difference lies in the fact that the character of Robin was far more resilient to the death of his parents that Bruce Wayne had been. Dick Grayson's enthusiasm helped bring a smile to Batman's face and made crime-fighting fun.[54] The back cover of *Batman #1* features Batman and Robin, "two people who, despite personal tragedies of a devastating magnitude, are beaming with cheer."[55]

Robin may have increased sales of the book, and proved to be a character that the comic's target audience could relate to, but his presence changed the Batman comics drastically. Robin's outfit altered the comic visually as his "full-frontal blast of colors certainly handicapped his boss from sliding through the shadows."[56] Shortly after Robin's emergence the Batman character found himself fighting crime more and more in the daytime, which is a concept at war with the original premise of the character. The original Batman stories were grim and lacking in humor, but the coming of Robin completely changed the tone. Two opposing visions of Batman formed: Batman as dark loner as he was originally intended and Batman as benevolent father-figure, with the latter quickly beginning to take over.[57]

When Warner Bros. filmmakers set out to make *Batman* (1989), Robin's inclusion in the film was considered due to the popularity and longevity of the character. Robin was in many drafts of the screenplay, but as Guber-Peters narrowed in on adapting Batman's first year in the comics, he could never be fit into the film until the last portion, as he does not appear until the last two issues of that first year. Eventually, it became apparent that wanting to make a dark, serious Batman, the number one culprit in the lightening of Batman - Robin - had no place in the film. According to Burton, "I think almost everybody across the board, just was happy with no Robin. I can't recall one

person that was going, 'we've gotta have Robin in this'."[58] Burton continues by saying,

"I just went back to the psychology of a man who dresses like a bat; he's a very singular,

lonely character, and putting him with somebody just didn't make sense."[59] The timing

for not including Robin could not have been better as in 1989 comic book fans had voted

to kill off the most recent Robin incarnation in the comics.

Robin's presence in Batman comics sparked a domino effect of events that

lightened and brightened the series. Many of the changes made to Batman next were in

fact motivated by the fact that he now had a child partner.

II. Killing the Killing: The Honorary Member of the Police Force

As illustrated earlier, the Bat-Man of his early years in the comics was not

opposed to seeing criminals killed; he had been a grim vigilante who operated outside the

law. In several early issues of *Detective Comics* he even carries a gun. Kane and

company had their first brush with censorship in *Batman #1* due to a scene where Batman

battles a gang of monstrous giants in his Batplane. At the climax he guns them down

explaining, "Much as I hate to take human life, I'm afraid this time it's necessary!"[60]

This scene recalls a similar one in *Batman* where the Dark Knight uses his Batwing to

fire on the Joker and his goons. Despite the fact that nearly every pulp hero carried a

gun, Batman's readers found his use of weapons deplorable. To protect tainting the

character DC Comics started a new editorial policy to move Batman away from his

vigilantism and to bring him over to the side of the law.[61]

As discussed earlier, Police Commissioner Gordon originally distrusted Batman

and considered him an outlaw, ordering his men to apprehend him in *Detective #27* (this

is similar to his portrayal in the 1989 film, *Batman*). Commissioner Gordon eventually

changed his mind about Batman by *Batman #7* in October-November 1941. In the story "The People vs. Batman," Gordon appoints Batman and Robin honorary members of the Gotham City Police Department, stating, "From now on, you work hand in hand with the police."[62] The consequences inherent in making Batman a sanctioned police officer resulted in a further watering down of Batman's original character layout.[63]

The Dark Knight certainly kills in *Batman* (1989): He allows Jack Napier to fall into a vat of acid, creating the Joker; he bombs Axis Chemicals with his Batmobile, when it is full of the Joker's goons, and guns down more of the Joker's men in his Batwing. He then goes after the Joker himself with every intention of killing him. Batman is portrayed in the film as a masked vigilante, who is just as dangerous as the Joker. By the end of the film, Gotham City and its police department lead by Commissioner Gordon, come to trust Batman and are given a bat-signal that can be used to call him should evil ever threaten again.

III. *The Seduction of the Innocent* and the Comic's Code

Comic books were an important part of children's lives in Batman's early years. Comics were a source of entertainment for kids, providing, according to Vaz, "an escape to fantastic worlds of warriors and superheroes, ghosts and crime busters."[64] Comics taught kids right from wrong and good from evil.[65] The vast majority of comic book readers in the forties and fifties were grade school boys. To most readers the life of Robin, the Boy Wonder, represented the kind of life they wanted to live and Batman represented the ultimate mentor, protector and father figure.[66] Yet not everyone saw the Dynamic Duo as a crime-fighting team who solved mysteries in the Bat Cave, for comic books did not escape the anti-communist hysteria of the period.

Comic books had their very own Senator Joseph McCarthy in Dr. Fredric Wertham. Reinhart describes Wertham as "a psychiatrist who believed that comic books, with their stories featuring elements of crime, violence and sexuality, were extremely damaging to the mental heath of young readers."[67] The comic industry suffered a substantial setback with the 1953 publication of Wertham's *The Seduction of the Innocent*. It is in this book that Wertham lays out all his arguments against the comic book industry. Nearly every superhero is subjected to Wertham's criticisms, but none as much as Batman, who is directly attacked due to his perceived homosexual relationship with his junior partner. Wertham devotes four pages trying to convince his repressed 1950s audience that Batman and Robin are gay and that exposure to their adventures would send readers down the same path.[68] Daniels explains that Wertham's only evidence for his claims came from "'overt homosexuals' treated at the sinister-sounding Readjustment Center (Wertham's clinic devoted to the psychotherapy of sexual difficulties), where some individuals occasionally imagined trading places with Batman."[69] The following passage from *The Seduction of the Innocent* illustrates Wertham's argument:

> Sometimes Batman ends up in bed injured and young Robin is shown sitting next to him. At home they lead an idyllic life. They are Bruce Wayne and 'Dick' Grayson. Bruce Wayne is described as a 'socialite' and the official relationship is that Dick is Bruce's ward. They live in sumptuous quarters, with beautiful flowers in large vases, and have a butler, Alfred. Batman is sometimes shown in a dressing gown… It is like the wish dream of two homosexuals living together. Sometimes they are shown on a couch, Bruce reclining and Dick sitting next to him, jacket off, collar open, and his hand on his friend's arm.[70]

Wertham continues by describing Robin as "a handsome athletic boy, usually shown in his uniform with bare legs. He is buoyant with energy and devoted to nothing on earth or in interplanetary space as much as to Bruce Wayne. He often stands with his legs spread, the genital region discretely evident."[71] Wertham notes the lack of females in the stories as further proof of the Dynamic Duo's homosexuality. He points out that that the only females that ever appear in the books are "evil" and stand no chance of courting Bruce Wayne against Dick Grayson.[72]

The Seduction of the Innocent was successful at persuading the American public that comics were corrupting their children, luring them into acts of sex and violence. The book led to public and eventually Congressional hearings regarding the comic book industry held by the Sub-committee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency in the United States. As a result of the hearings the Senate determined that a standards code needed to be developed for the comic book industry in order to eliminate the objectionable material found there. In order to appease the Senate, the comic book industry formed a self-regulating committee called the Comics Code Authority in September 1954, which was designed to function as an independent regulator, examining the content of all new comic books before they were published. If these new comics met with the standards of the committee, they were printed with a Comic's Code Authority logo on their covers, which signified that they were "safe" reading material for children.[73] The Comic Code had distinct shades of the Hayes Code that had been brought in to clamp down on Hollywood in the 1930s.[74] Some of the Comic Code's precepts are as follows: "In every instance good shall triumph over evil and the criminal punished for his misdeeds. Criminals shall never be presented in such a way as to promote distrust in the forces of the law and

justice… All lurid, unsavory, gruesome illustrations shall be eliminated."[75] Without the ability to be "lurid," "unsavory" and "gruesome" Batman would be effectively stripped of his identity, as all three were words that could be used to describe the original intention of the character. According to Medhurst, the Comic Code made the Batman of this time period, "lose any remaining edge of the shadowy vigilante of his earliest years, and became an upholder of the most stifling small town American values."[76]

Wertham's book had a devastating effect on the comic industry and Batman was nearly destroyed and forever altered due to its publication.[77] *The Seduction of the Innocent* saw comic companies driven out of business, careers wreaked and the Comic's Code introduced. As a result of the code many writers and artists of the eras to follow claimed they felt very restricted and stifled creatively in terms of what they could do. As a result, the fifties became a rather bland era for comic books which caused many readers to loose interest by the mid-sixties.[78]

As a result of the Code and science's ever accelerating pace during the period, Batman comics transitioned from real-life crime and detective work in a world of dark alleys and rooftops, to other dimensions and solar systems.[79] The gangsters and madmen of Batman's past gave way to an assortment of outlandish-looking space aliens and mad scientists who continually passed through Gotham City in their quest for world domination.[80] Reinhart notes the consequences this turn to science fiction had on Batman:

> The increased sci-fi/fantasy content found in Batman comic stories during this period had the effect of basically stripping the character of his identity – he was not so much Batman, but 'Superman in a Batman costume'. Most everything Batman did in his mid – 1950s – early 1960s

adventures was far more suited to Superman than it was to Batman.[81]

In this era Batman travels into outer space, and goes back and forth through time. The Dark Knight was so severed from his dark roots that he himself is subject to periodic bizarre transformations assuming many different forms including a giant, a baby, a merman, a zebra, a human fish, a phantom, a human buzz saw, a mummy, a genie, a gorilla-like monster and even invisible. Most of these transformations are triggered by deadly atomic-altering rays devised by aliens or mad scientists. In short, Batman might be almost anybody but himself.[82] Batman lost so much of his credibility due to these bouts of silliness that by 1964 Kane recalls that the character was in danger of being recalled.[83] Batman became less and less popular with readers due to the fact that, as Daniels puts it, "there was nearly no core character left, just a hollow man being battered from place to place by whatever gimmick could be concocted."[84]

The Seduction of the Innocent was a hugely altering event in Batman's history because it attached a stigma of homosexuality to Batman and Robin's relationship that would follow them wherever they appeared, and thus would have to be dealt with in every screen adaptation of the characters. *Batman* (1989) goes to such great lengths to avoid the controversial subject that it eliminated Robin from the film entirely, and has Bruce Wayne/Batman sleep with a woman (Vicki Vale) to dispel the belief that he is homosexual.

IV. The Campy Batman

Before *Batman* (1989), the character was adapted to the silver screen three times. Twice in serial form in the 1940s: *Batman* (1943) and *Batman and Robin* (1949), and again as a spin off of his popular 1960s television series in *Batman: The Movie* (1966).

Though enjoyed by the general movie-going public these films are all substandard adaptations of the Batman character, as the five key components define him, which either ignore most of the mythology or purposefully make fun of it. The first film serial, *Batman* (1943) produced during World War II, uses Batman as a blatant vehicle for war propaganda. The serials each use Batman in name and costume only and make no effort to incorporate his origins or much of his core elements such as any of his usual comic book villains or equipment such as the Batmobile.

As explored in the preceding "altering event," the Comic's Code forced Batman stories into a science fiction realm to which readers were losing interest. Another reason for the decreased readership of comics was the invention of television. In an ironic twist, TV, the device that caused a sharp decline in all types of reading, was what made Batman popular again.[85] The TV show *Batman* (1966-1968) originated in an unusual way. Hugh Hefner often showed the two forties Batman serials at his Playboy mansion in a campy gesture. One screening happened to have an ABC executive in attendance who thought the approach would be a great idea for a television show.[86] Inspired by the 1940s Batman serials and getting an unexpected boost by their re-release in 1965, the TV *Batman* did borrow a trick or two from the serials as it uses cliffhanger endings and melodramatic dialogue. Thus, the 1960s *Batman* TV show is an adaptation of previous film adaptations of the character that are far from faithful to the original Batman in their own right.

The Batman character probably would not have survived beyond 1965 without the help of the ABC television series.[87] Though fans should respect the Batman TV show for saving the character from near death, the show ranks a close second to Wertham's accusations of Batman as fans most despised moments in the character's history.

Brooker notes that, "Just as Wertham is detested by fans for his role in bringing the 'gay

Batman' reading into public circulation, Adam West's TV show is disliked for its part in

playing up the interpretation."[88] TV has the widest audience of any entertainment form,

thus the popularity of the 1960s Batman popularized a campy version of the character for

the general public (an audience far larger than those who remembered Batman of his

debut in the comics).

The TV *Batman* was an improvement over the Batman serials of the 1940s. The

show was given a big budget; Batman and Robin wear well designed costumes that were

faithful to the comics of the time, as well as such bat-iconography as the Bat Cave,

Batmobile, Batcycle, Batboat, and dozens of crime-fighting bat-gadgets. Plus, Batman

squares off with many of his most memorable comic book adversaries such as the Joker,

Penguin, Riddler and Catwoman portrayed by top stars.[89] Unfortunately, the downside to

this treatment, at least for fans of Batman comics, was that the character is intentionally

comedic in nature. The word Camp is defined as an irreverence of some sort, usually

done in a humorous way. The TV Batman is:

> Played strictly for camp, the show was a parody of comic
> book superheroes. It poked fun at every convention of
> superhero comics, from the sheer absurdity of the
> characters themselves to the goofy 'sound effects' (Pow!
> Bam! Zap!). And uncomfortably for comic book fans, it
> also seemed to be making fun of the people who read
> them.[90]

Batman premiered on January 12, 1966 and was an overnight sensation. The

secret of the show's success is that it can be enjoyed on two levels: as camp for adults

and as an adventure for children. The show appeals to children because it is acted as a

straight drama with the utmost seriousness. The 1960s Batman bore less resemblance

than ever to his somber 1939 image.[91] Despite overwhelming popularity, the show

generally derides its source. In the show most of Batman and Robin's crime-fighting

takes place in broad daylight, where they are constantly spotted with the Gotham City

public with whom they commonly stop to have conversations. The success of the TV

show brought Batman to the big screen once more in *Batman: The Movie* (1966). The

film plays like a super-sized TV episode where Batman and Robin face off against four

super-criminals.

The TV *Batman* influenced the comic books, causing sales to go up dramatically

due to its success, so much so that "...the first issue of *Batman* published after the TV

show's debut sold a phenomenal 98% of its 1,000,000 print run."[92] The style of the show

exerted a strong influence on the comic books as the TV Batman and the comic book

Batman began to mirror each other. Though it increased sales of the books, the Batman

TV show did no favors for the comic book industry in the long run, according to

Bradford Wright, author of *Comic Book Nation*, "[w]atched by millions at the time, and

millions more over subsequent years in syndication, the show reinforced in the public's

mind the silliness and irrelevance of superheroes – and, by implication, comic books – in

contemporary culture."[93] Reinhart explains the demise of the *Batman* TV show:

> Like most crazes, Batmania began to die out just as quickly
> as it had caught fire. By early 1967, at the end of its second
> season, the Batman television show had drastically slipped
> in the ratings. Much of Batman's initial popularity was
> attributed to its novelty and now that novelty had worn
> off…The show seemed so fresh and original when it first
> premiered, but once audiences knew what to expect from it,
> its format and humor had become downright predictable.[94]

Batman's cancellation came from the show's overexposure, and shortly after the

last of *Batman*'s third season episodes aired in March 1968, the show was cancelled.[95]

Even though the show was short lived it would have a dramatic effect on the character and his perception for a long time to come. The TV show created a new category of Batman fans. Now, not only were there comic book aficionados, but also fans of the television show. This would cause a problem for later adaptations because the Batman fan base now had two very different sides to it that were increasingly moving away from each other. Comic book fans – who generally preferred their Batman dark and mysterious and the TV show fans that preferred their Batman light, obvious and funny.

The years after the cancellation of the TV show were eventful ones for Batman in comics. Many new writers, artists and editors attempted to give Batman back his dignity by bringing him back to his roots and to pull the comics out of their financial slump, such as: Carmine Infantino, Denny O'Neil, Neil Adams, Steve Englehart, Marshall Rogers and Terry Austin. Their efforts lead to a renaissance in Batman comics in the 1970s. Yet while Batman was being returned to his roots in the comics, the campy perception of Batman held by the public proved a very difficult image to sever. The TV show continued to win new fans, because even though no new episodes were being produced, the series almost immediately went into syndication.[96] Re-runs of the show kept the campy Batman lodged in the public's minds for years, and it took until the mid-eighties for Batman to truly return to his roots with the help of a new comic book form known as the graphic novel, spearheaded by writer/artist Frank Miller, which renewed Hollywood's interest in bringing Batman back to the big screen – in a dark and serious way.

CHAPTER TWO

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CHAPTER 3
THE DARK KNIGHT RETURNS
WARNER BROS.' *BATMAN*

The previous chapter laid the groundwork for the state of the Batman character heading into the 1980s and set the stage for the case studies of this thesis: *Batman* and *Batman Returns*. 1989 marked the fiftieth anniversary of Batman's debut in *Detective Comics #27* and the Warner Bros. film studio thought that the perfect way to celebrate would be with the release of their motion picture *Batman.* The studio's producer's Peter Guber and Jon Peters at the request of executive producer Michael Uslan attempted to portray the hero the way he was originally intended: as the dreaded avenger of the dark streets of Gotham – a faithful approach. As discussed in Chapter One, fidelity is extremely difficult to achieve in an adaptation. Noting that the producers of the film wanted to be as "faithful to the letter" (as McFarlane put it), as possible, this chapter will look at whether or not they succeeded in their goal.

The following is a pre-history of how and why *Batman* went back to his Dark Knight status found in his original comic books. The story of what it took to get *Batman* into production is like a saga unto itself.

Pre-Production

Michael Uslan, executive producer of *Batman*, is really the man who made the Warner Bros. Batman film industry possible, and much like Bill Finger, who aided Bob Kane in the creation of Batman, rarely gets the credit he deserves. In the early 1970s, Uslan convinced the Dean at the University of Indiana that comic books hold a worthy place in society as modern-day folklore by comparing the story of Moses with the origin

of Superman, and was allowed to teach the first college-accredited course on comic

books. When Uslan saw *Superman: The Movie* in 1978, it planted the seeds in his head

for producing a representative Batman film. After his success in teaching a course on

comic books, and seeing Superman brought to the screen, Uslan had a new dream for

himself and for Batman, as he puts it:

> I always regretted that as my favorite character in comics,
> he had not ever quite been portrayed the way I thought that
> Bob Kane and company really intended it to be. And I
> really wanted to see that creature of the night emerge and
> let the world at large see that there is more to Batman than
> *POW*, *ZAP* and *WHAM*. And for about twenty years
> whenever anyone mentioned the word Batman or wrote
> about it in print *POW*, *ZAP* and *WHAM* were always
> attached to the name. I wanted to detach it and get back to
> the heart of the character.[1]

More than anyone else who would work on *Batman*, Uslan knew the character as

he appeared in the comics and laid the groundwork for adapting the character in this way.

It was Uslan's singular vision to create a Batman franchise that would go back to the way

the character was first portrayed. On October 3, 1979, Michael Uslan formed Batfilm

Productions, Inc. with Benjamin Melniker. Subsequently, they acquired the rights to the

Batman character and optioned it as a film property. Every studio in Hollywood

continuously turned down the project, not wanting to make another TV show-like version

of the character. Uslan and Melniker could not get the film project up and running until

they met the producing team of Peter Guber and Jon Peters at their small production

company Casablanca. Guber and Peters were younger and "hipper" producers who really

understood what Uslan wanted to accomplish with Batman. The pair was also hungry for

an opportunity and their youth made them more malleable than older producers would

have been.

In November 1979 Uslan and Melniker entered into a joint contract with Casablanca (Guber and Peters), where they were guaranteed forty per cent of whatever profits Guber and Peters received and they were also told by the duo that they would receive producer credit on the film.[2] This is where the forward momentum on the project stopped and *Batman* would linger until the late 1980s to get made, with much turmoil for Uslan and Melniker to come. Unfortunately for Uslan and Melniker, Guber and Peters never stayed in one place for long. First they were at Casablanca, then PolyGram pictures and finally Warner Bros.. Guber and Peters made it all but impossible for Uslan and Melniker to get a hold of them. According to Griffin and Masters:

> When Guber and Peters affiliated themselves with Warner [Bros.] in 1982, they kept the original producers in the dark about the terms of the new deal on the [*Batman*] project. Melniker and Uslan were never permitted to see documents and they assumed that the terms of their original deal would still apply. Later, they would find out Warner [Bros.] did not consider itself bound.[3]

Uslan and Melniker were forced to find out that a film called *Batman* was going into production from industry trade papers and that Gubers and Peters were taking credit as producers.[4] When Uslan and Melniker contacted Warner Bros. they were informed that the studio had breached the Casablanca contract and that they needed to sign an amended contract or be completely removed from the film's credit list. On September 8, 1988, Uslan and Melniker signed a new contract that gave them "nominal credit as executive producers, stripped them of creative involvement and consulting rights, and granted them 13 percent of net profits [generally thought to be rather worthless]".[5] Melniker and Uslan were told by Jim Miller, head of business affairs at Warner Bros., "'If you don't like it, you can bring a lawsuit'," for which they later did.[6]

The preceding examination of Guber and Peters sheds light on how they seized control over the Batman franchise out from under the very people who brought it to them. Once theirs, Guber and Peters had decisions to make on how to adapt the comic book character known as Batman, should they do it the way Michael Uslan wanted them to: a Batman more in line with his first year in the comics, or should they go with the more popular version of Batman loved by millions from his television show of the 1960s. The recent popularity of graphic novels which were bringing Batman back to his dark roots convinced Guber and Peters to go, as Uslan originally suggested, with the Batman character of his roots.

Graphic Novels

Making a dark, serious Batman made a great deal of sense in the late 1980s due to the ground being broken by the graphic novels of the time. The preceding chapter discussed the altering events in Batman's historical timeline that changed the character from the way in which he was created. The graphic novels of the 1980s were what returned him to his dark roots in a way that got noticed by more than just frequenters of comic book shops. These graphic novels helped to raise the image of comic book beyond mere children's entertainment.

Of all the talent involved with Batman comics, one stands out as particularly important. Frank Miller is the writer/artist most identified with the resurgence of Batman's popularity.[7] His 1986 four-part graphic novel *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* allowed the Caped Crusader to regain his original stature and is seen as a direct descendent of Kane and Finger's initial conception.[8] Though the tone is very much in

line with Batman's original portrayal, Miller did a radical re-interpretation of Batman, deconstructing the superhero while revitalizing him in the process.[9]

     Batman: The Dark Knight Returns tells a story set in the future that shows what might happen to Bruce Wayne as an old man. It portrays Wayne as a troubled, suicidal alcoholic in his mid-fifties who tries to repress the urge to become Batman again. The worsening scene in Gotham forces him into one last battle to retake the city.[10] Miller was able to cast Batman into a new role due to his complete creative freedom that was in large part due to the fact that he was not restricted by the Comic's Code that had stifled creativity in previous decades. The reason the Code does apply to graphic novels is due to the generally better-educated and older readership of them. Miller's creative freedom with *Dark Knight* allowed him to do what Burton did with *Batman Returns*, create his own vision of Batman that was divorced from anyone else's. Miller knew the kind of character that Batman used to be before he was altered through time, and he wanted to get back to that for his work. According to Miller, "'…Batman only really works as a character if the world is essentially a malevolent, frightening place'."[11] Miller took Batman's surroundings and made them match the darkness and scariness of the original Bat-Man character. Chip Kidd encapsulates Miller's contribution to Batman by saying:

> In just four 32-page issues, released in the summer of 1986,
> the books single-handedly revived worldwide interest in
> Batman and enticed people who normally wouldn't be
> caught dead reading a comic book to do just that. It could
> be convincingly argued that its success made Hollywood
> realize that a new Batman movie could have a mass
> audience.[12]

     The Dark Knight Returns series did so well that DC Comics issued them together as a paperback for sale in bookstores. "In this format it became the first original

superhero work to be reviewed seriously, and often favorably, in the mainstream press."[13]
Miller's graphic novels are important because they helped to get *Batman* (1989) made,
but ultimately, it was not adapted much into the film. Aside from the film's dark tone the
titular character in *Batman* is not old, nor an alcoholic; furthermore, there is neither a
female Robin nor battle to the death with Superman, as can be found in *The Dark Knight
Returns*. *Dark Knight* is nevertheless important to mention because it sparked a major
resurgence in Batman's popularity which made the 1989 film possible.

It could be convincingly argued that the campy fan base of Batman's 1960s TV
show far outweighed that of any other Batman fan group in 1989, and that the Warner
Bros. studio could have made a campy Batman film that would have made them money,
and made millions happy. What convinced Guber-Peters not to go the campy route with
their Batman film, aside from Uslan's initial suggestions, was the great fan response
garnered by Miller's returning the character to his roots in *The Dark Knight Returns* and
his next Batman effort, *Year One* (1986-1987). The success of Batman graphic novels of
the 1980s were influential because they made Warner Communications realize that a
"serious" Batman could be a highly marketable property and since Warner
Communications owned both Warner Bros. Pictures and DC Comics, it made sense for
them to helm the project themselves.[14] Miller's books were used as a jumping off point
and rather than adapting them directly; the Guber-Peters decided to go with Uslan's
suggestion and go back to the very beginning of the Batman comic books. Film critic
Roger Ebert notes as much in his review of the film, "*Batman* discards the recent cultural
history of the Batman character – the camp 1960s TV series, the in-joke comic books –
and returns to the mood of the 1940s, the decade of film noir and fascism."[15] Many

directors and creative talent were attached to the film but the project never really got going until the producers found the right director.

Tim Burton

To fully understand why Guber-Peters found Tim Burton to be the perfect director for their film requires taking a look at the man starting from his childhood through getting offered the job of directing *Batman*. Burton's childhood is important to discuss because much of what makes him a unique director formed in his early years. Burton grew up feeling like a misfit, whose only real friends were his dog and old horror and science fiction films. Burton has a brother and two parents from whom he has always felt distant.[16] These elements of Burton's childhood may not be any different than most boys his age, but what was unique about Burton was that he often took sanctuary in the confines of his own imagination; for him drawing was a refuge. Burton honed his skills in drawing and attended the California Institute of the Arts on a Disney fellowship and soon after joined Disney studios as an animator. There he worked (uncredited) on such films as *The Fox and the Hound* (1981) and *The Black Cauldron* (1985) while helming two of his own short films, *Vincent* (1982) and *Frankenweenie* (1984).

Vincent is a "claymation" tribute to Burton's childhood idol, actor Vincent Price (who also narrates the film). *Vincent* is about the miserable life of a disturbed suburban boy whose liberating fantasies provide a release (just like Burton's childhood).[17] *Frankenweenie* is a story of a boy whose dog is killed in a car crash, only to be resurrected in ways that evoke the classic horror film *Frankenstein*. The film is semi-autobiographical as Burton went through the death his dog as a child.[18] As can be seen by his first two short films, whether it involves a childhood hero or a lost pet, Burton

prefers to make films that are personal (more on this in the next chapter). Though wildly

imaginative, these shorts were not exactly what the Disney Studio had hoped for from

Burton. His animation and live-action proved too odd and dark for the "Disney image."

Frankenweenie was not even allowed a release by the Disney Studio due to its PG rating.

The film was buried in the Disney archives until the spring of 1992 when it was released

on home-video due to the popularity of the director's subsequent work. The tousle-haired

Burton did not enjoy his time at Disney, as he recalls:

> 'I couldn't handle it. At Disney, I almost went insane. I
> really did…I was not Disney material. I could just not
> draw cute foxes for the life of me. I couldn't do it. I tried,
> I tried, I tried. The unholy alliance of animation is you are
> called upon to be an artist, but on the other hand, you are
> called upon to be a zombie factory worker.'[19]

Burton explains his transition from animating to feature filmmaking as a very

easy one. An executive at Warner Bros., Bonnie Lee, saw Burton's short films and

became very supportive of him, helping to get him his first feature film job, *Pee-Wee's

Big Adventure* (1985). Burton claims getting hired at a restaurant was more difficult than

becoming a feature film director.[20] *Pee-Wee* cost six million dollars and made forty-five

million, proving that Burton was a great find. Burton took the children's television

character of Pee-Wee Herman and infused him and his world with his personal style and

the result was something that stood out a markedly different than anything ever made –

an animated live-action film. Burton's previous work as an animator infused his live-

action films with a style that was very different than any director trained in film school.

Animation is "a realm in which the creator's imagination has no limitations" and having

been trained as an animator, Burton's turn to live-action filmmaking saw him

continuously stretch the boundaries of what a live-action film could do.[21] For the

adaptation of a comic book character to the screen, Burton, a graphic artist already,

seemed a perfect director as he came from that milieu. With a second consecutive hit in

Beetlejuice for Warner Bros. *Batman* producers took notice of Burton as a director with

an amazing visual imagination, a cartoonist's sensibility and a macabre taste with an eye

for the bizarre that made him a perfect director for the project, and his youthful naiveté

could also play to their advantage.

With the rare exception of his directorial duties in *Batman,* Tim Burton can be

defined as: "a unique phenomenon in the film world – a man with a singular and very

personal vision who translates his wildly imaginative and wholly unexpected concepts to

the screen without any compromise."[22] *Batman* was Burton's first big-budget studio

film, and ultimately inhibited his ability to translate his vision to the screen since he

would have to answer to the tastes of the producers Guber and Peters. Burton did have

two weaknesses as a director heading into *Batman*: 1) he had no experience directing an

action film and 2) he had directed only two feature films before that time which were

both low-budget comedies: *Pee-Wee's Big Adventure* and *Beetlejuice*. Many Batman

comic book fans were initially scared that after Michael Uslan and the *Batman* producers

Peter Guber and Jon Peters determined the film would be a dark, somber portrayal of

their hero, that hiring a comedy director would undermine the intentions and cause the

film to imitate camp again. Fans fear was perhaps justified as Burton's knowledge of

Batman derived from the TV show.

Burton was introduced to Batman in the same way many kids of his generation

were, through the television show. Burton was a big fan of the show and recalls running

home from school when he was seven years old just to watch it.[23] Burton's knowledge of

Batman came from the TV show, as he never read comic books. Burton explains that he never liked comic books because, "I could never tell which box I was supposed to read."[24] Though he did not read the comics, Burton always liked the character of Batman more than any other superhero because he felt he could relate to him. "I loved Batman, the split personality, the hidden person. It's a character I could relate to. Having those two sides, a light side and a dark one, and not being able to resolve them – that's a feeling that's not uncommon."[25]

Burton often makes movies about outsiders or "freaks." As he felt like an outsider his entire life, the outsider hero permeates all of his work. Burton's protagonists are "mentally and often physically different than those who make up the 'normal' world."[26] Each film centers on characters ostracized from "normal" society. "Freaks"/Outcasts can clearly be seen in every film he had made leading up to *Batman Returns* and continues throughout his career: Pee-Wee is an overgrown child who wears lipstick and says to his would-be girlfriend, "There are a lot of things about me you don't know anything about, things you wouldn't understand; things you shouldn't understand." Lydia, of *Beetlejuice*, dresses all in black, wants nothing to do with her parents and communicates with the ghosts in her attic. Edward Scissorhands stands out as markedly different, physically and emotionally, from the world that surrounded him, yet he is the kindest and gentlest at heart. In Burton's latest live-action film *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, Charlie is an outcast for being poor. He shares a small, one room house with his mother, father and two sets of grandparents. He does not even have the luxury of enough money to buy a candy bar. Tim Burton's regular producer (*Edward Scissorhands*, *Batman Returns*, and *Ed Wood*) Denise Di Novi says:

"Tim is unique in that he's a commercially successful
director who doesn't make mainstream movies. There's a
simplicity and underlying sweetness to his work that
embraces the outcast and differences in people. I think
that's why his films are so accessible to moviegoers, and
that certainly attracted me to working with him."[27]

The Batman comics are full of characters that would be regarded as "freaks" if they existed in real life, which obviously makes Burton relate to them fully. *Batman* is no exception to Burton's pre-established freak theme, and can be seen as why Guber and Peters wanted to bring the director onto the project. Burton refers to *Batman* as "a duel of the freaks," in reference to Batman and the Joker.[28]

Executive producer Michael Uslan and producers Jon Peters and Peter Guber went into *Batman* with the best of intentions about being faithful to the original source material, yet these aspirations became derailed at several points in the pre-production and production of the film. There were many problems that plagued the production of *Batman* even before it began. Among the biggest problems was the screenplay, both in creating a workable shooting script and then through daily rewritings once the filming began.

The Screenplay

Tom Mankiewicz, who was the creative consultant and wrote the screenplay for *Superman,* was hired to repeat that success by writing the first treatment for *Batman*. The problem with the original script, to Mankiewicz's later admission, was that it was too much of a clone of *Superman*, "It had the same light, jockey tone, and the story structure followed Wayne through childhood to his genesis as a crime fighter."[29] The script did not address or explore the characters psychology and why he would dress up in a bat suit.

Sam Hamm wrote the next draft of the screenplay. Hamm, a self-professed fan of the comic books, knew what needed to be done with the script.[30] In the following quote Hamm describes his indoctrination into Batman comics and describes how Batman's initial representation in the comics influenced his writing:

> 'I was a reader of Batman [comics] when I was a kid,' he recalls. 'It was during the time travel and pink aliens phase when they were treating him like just any other superhero of the Justice League. I think the comic writers ran out of inspiration on what kind of stories to do, so the stuff was getting pretty wild and wacky. But what really caught my fancy as a kid were the reprints from the late forties and early fifties which had the more pulpy and nourish Batman with the disfigured villains'.[31]

Hamm's inclination of which Batman comics to draw from was directly in line with how *Batman*'s producers wanted to adapt the character (and could explain why he was hired). Hamm proves that it was the intention of everyone involved to adapt the film's Batman from the pages in the original comics:

> The idea that interested us most was to go back to the original Bob Kane notion, and we thought that that was the version that gave us the most entree into the story that we wanted to tell. To go kind of dark, myserioso meant that we could also say that we are going back to the roots of the character. We're kind of pairing away all the detours the character has taken over the years and trying to zero in on what this original concept was, and what made it stick around for fifty years.[32]

As a result of going with the roots of the character, the script for *Batman* begins with a description of Gotham City that reads as follows, "stark angles, creeping shadows, dense, crowded, airless, a random tangle of steel and concrete, as if Hell had erupted through the sidewalk and kept on growing."[33] Hamm's script wastes no time with an origin story at the opening, but rather features Batman, fully formed and in action right

away. This, as mentioned in Chapter Two, is how Batman really came into being; his reason for existence did not come along until later. *Batman*'s script moves backwards by treating Batman as a mysterious character for whom the audience does not know his agenda or what motivates him until the last act. Until then his reason for being is a mystery with only a few clues along the way: Bruce tells Vicki that Alfred is his only family, Bruce leaves two roses outside a theatre and there is a painting of Bruce's father in Wayne Manor.

When Hamm was sidelined by a writers strike, noted "script doctor" Warren Skaaren was brought in to prepare the film's final shooting script. A number of changes were made to the screenplay, such as an alteration of the Bruce Wayne character to have less self-doubt about his resolve than he did before, and the idea that the Joker was the murderer of Batman's parents. During the production of the film, Peter Guber says that the screenplay for *Batman* was just a "blueprint;" it was constantly being changed and revised due to their wanting to make the best film possible.[34] In his interview with *Rolling Stone*, just after the release of *Batman Returns*, Burton reveals the ways in which *Batman* got away from him and suffered due to the changes to the script:

> '…what happened on *Batman*, and I let it happen, is that the script unraveled. Here we started out with a script that everybody – again, it's classic Hollywood – everybody goes, 'Oh, it's a great script, it's a great script.' But at the end of the day, they basically shred it. So it went from being the greatest script in the world to completely unraveling. And once it unravels, it unravels. You're there, you do it. I remember Jack Nicholson going, 'Why am I going up the stairs?' I was like, 'I don't know, Jack, I'll tell you when you get up there'.[35]

The development of the screenplay was not the only problem that the production of *Batman* faced. One of the biggest controversies involved the casting of Batman himself.

Michael Keaton as Batman

Traditionally portrayed as a serious, muscular, athletic man in the comics, Batman's producers backed what seemed at the time to be a very strange actor for the part of Batman, Michael Keaton. Fans criticized the casting because they thought that Keaton was too short, scrawny and "weak chinned" to pull off the part; in fact Keaton was seen as the physical antitype of Batman.[36] Keaton began as a stand-up comedian and as an actor he was best known for his roles in comedies such as *Mr. Mom* (1983), *The Dream Team* (1987) and Burton's precursor to *Batman, Beetlejuice*, where he played a goofy, obnoxious character. Thus, his casting as a serious actor caught even Keaton by surprise: "'I wasn't surprised that they would think of me to play Batman, because I assumed at first that they were talking about the TV version or something like that,' Keaton recalled."[37] Once again comic book fans worried that by casting a comedian the franchise would return to the camp of the 1960s TV show. Casting Keaton had produced such widespread disappointment that the *Wall Street Journal* ran a front page article on the subject with the heading, "Batman fans fear the joke's on them in Hollywood epic: They accuse Warner Bros. of plotting a silly spoof of the Caped Crusader."[38] 50,000 protest letters poured into Warner Bros over Keaton and Burton's involvement with *Batman*.[39] "'Nobody wanted Keaton', Peters recalls. 'We were ostracized by the Bat-community. They booed us at the Bat-conventions'."[40]

Burton often received the flack for casting Keaton, when in actuality the choice

was producer Jon Peters'. "In early casting discussions Burton considered square-jawed

heroic types such as Tom Selleck to play Batman. Jon Peters favored Michael Keaton,

arguing that the actor had the right edgy, tormented quality."[41] Though he was not

Burton's first choice, the director came to whole-heartedly support Keaton as Batman.

Reinhart notes the reasons Burton supported Keaton:

> "Burton responded to these criticisms by stating that there
> might have been actors who were more physically suited
> for the roll, but he could not imagine any of them actually
> putting on a Batman costume. He felt that the role would
> have a psychological complexity that a muscle-bound,
> dead-pan, action hero-type of actor would not be able to
> pull off."[42]

Being Batman, for Burton, is all about transformation, because Michael Keaton

does not look or act like Batman while he is Bruce Wayne promotes the fact that putting

on the suit serves as a transformation. The bat-suit makes Keaton's Wayne into

something that he is not. In the suit he becomes tall, menacing, and muscular. The

filmmakers believed that Batman could not be a strapping macho man because in the film

Bruce Wayne is portrayed as though he *feels* he needs to be Batman; he does not

necessarily want to be. Bob Kane, creator of the character, was not happy with the

casting of Keaton as Batman. The following is how Kane says he originally pictured his

character:

> I had envisioned the movie Batman to be similar to my
> comic book character. Whereas my hero was a muscular,
> six-foot-two and granite jawed. Keaton was a mere five-
> ten, had a slight build, and lacked chiseled features. He
> was far from the classically handsome and debonair image
> of a young Cary Grant or Robert Wagner I had envisioned
> for Bruce Wayne.[43]

With the creator of the character not happy, Tim Burton performed an amazing feat and called the comic artist on the telephone and explained the notions behind why he and the producers thought Keaton was perfect for the part. After hearing out Burton, Kane says, "I began to reevaluate my own concept of Batman and came to accept the movie adaptation as a valid and correct image."[44] Tim Burton had such a grasp on the character that with one short telephone conversation he was able to change Batman's creator's mind about the very core of his own character.

Jack Nicholson and the Joker

If Keaton was a casting controversy, the casting of Jack Nicholson to play the part of the Batman's arch nemesis, the Joker, was heralded as a stroke of casting genius. Bob Kane could not have been happier with this choice saying, "Jack Nicholson was always my first choice to play the nefarious Joker."[45] Initially, Nicholson was less than enthusiastic about playing the part, and needed to be convinced. The story behind getting Nicholson on board for the film is an excellent example of how Burton was working to fulfill Guber-Peters' vision of Batman. According to first-hand accounts recorded on the *Batman Two Disc Special Edition DVD*, Nicholson wanted to meet the director of the film on a horseback riding expedition. Burton, who was terrified of riding horses, was reluctant. Burton told Guber, "I don't ride," to which Guber responded, "You do today." Nicholson and Burton got to know one another while horseback riding and Nicholson signed on to play the Joker.[46]

The Oscar-winning Nicholson added credibility to the film in the same way that Marlon Brando and Gene Hackman did for *Superman*. His involvement in the film was a turning point in the production in that it ensured that it would be taken seriously by critics

and the general public.[47] As with his previous projects, Nicholson took his new role very

seriously. Bob Kane reveals that he was invited to dinner with Nicholson, simply so that

they could discuss how the character should be portrayed, to which Kane told Nicholson:

"straight, not campy, a maniacal killer bent on destroying Gotham City and his nemesis,

Batman."[48] From that moment Nicholson was determined to be accurate to the character,

as initially developed by Kane and Finger in the character's debut issue, furthermore he

did not want to, in his own words, "brighten it up for the kids."[49]

Like Batman and Robin, the Joker was also inspired by the motion picture

medium. Kane recalls that Bill Finger brought him a photograph of German actor,

Conrad Veidt from the film *The Man Who Laughs* (1928). In the film Gwynplaine

(Veidt) has a permanent wide grin carved onto his face.[50] The original Joker who

debuted in *Batman #1* in 1940 is a direct copy of Veidt from this film. In *Batman #1* the

Joker appears fully formed, looking just like he would for the next fifty years, up to and

including the film *Batman.* In the issue the Joker has a white face, red lips and green

hair, making him look just like the grinning court jester on the Joker card in many

playing card decks. He dressed in a bright purple suit and was completely insane.

Much of what defined the Joker in *Batman* (1989) can be seen in *Batman #1*

(which marks the final issue of Batman's first year in the comics). In the issue the Joker

interrupts a radio broadcast to announce his next crime. Later he uses his own mix of

deadly "Joker venom" to contort his victim's facial muscles into a hideous grin. The

Joker's comic book threats proved that he had no problem killing as long as it added a

beautiful tone and texture to a successful heist.[51] This tactic of altering chemicals to

render his victim's faces into a grin is carried over to the film, as is the theatrics of

advertising his crimes through the media. In *Batman,* the Joker taps into television airwaves to advertise his new "Joker products." In his debut issue, the Joker is as fully formed as Batman in his first issue. The Joker is intelligent, theatrical and ever the showman. His arsenal would come to include not only gas, but squirting flowers and electrocuting joy-buzzers, which are also used in *Batman*. The Joker emerged as the complete opposite of Batman. In their initial appearances, the Dark Knight wears a dark costume and resembles the devil himself (which physically resembles the common perception of the bad guy), while the Joker wears a colorful purple overcoat and hat making him seem like a harmless clown; essentially their physical roles were and still are reversed.

In conjunction with Batman's history, the Joker was also lightened through the years. The Joker's initial homicidal nature was shortly abandoned as he gradually became an almost lovable egomaniac clown who wanted to be the world's greatest crook. He could eventually be seen in comic books in such campy veins as driving a Jokermobile and wearing a utility belt with sneezing powder and exploding cigarettes.[52] In the 1960s Batman TV show, the Joker is not particularly threatening at all. Latin heartthrob Cesar Romero refused to shave his trademark mustache, which can be clearly seen through the white make-up in many shots. As with Batman before him, the graphic novels: *The Dark Knight Returns* and especially *The Killing Joke* (1988) returned the Joker to the madman he began as, and inspired Warner Bros. to go that direction with the character in their film.

Until 1951 Batman comic books never attempted to explain the Joker and his appearance. Though one issue, in 1951, provided a brief description of the Joker's origin,

The Killing Joke[53] (by Alan Moore and Brian Bolland) provides a much more detailed, three-dimensional exploration of the characters creation. *The Killing Joke* explains that the Joker came into being due to acts motivated by tragedy, adding a link to Batman. In *Killing Joke*, the Joker remembers himself as an unsuccessful comedian, who, out of desperation, agrees to help criminals pull off a robbery in order to obtain money for himself and his pregnant wife. Even after his wife's accidental death, the gangsters force him to go through with the crime. Batman breaks up the robbery attempt and the Joker tries to escape by jumping into a vat of acid, turning his skin white and his hair green.[54] This incident is used to explain how the Joker went insane.

Burton, as explained earlier, never really liked comic books, but *The Killing Joke* was the one exception. Burton loved *The Killing Joke* because the story was told with very minimal dialogue and he thought it read like storyboards for a film.[55] Janette Kahn, former president and editor of DC Comics says, "Actually, I do remember when we started work on the Batman movie, that Tim Burton would go to meetings to get potential licensees excited and he would hold up *Killing Joke,* and he would say, 'This is what I want the movie to look like'."[56] Though Burton would have liked to have made a full and complete adaptation of *Killing Joke*, there were really only two elements from the story that transferred over to the film: the first involves the Joker's creation through acid and the second is the bat-symbol on Batman's chest. The Dark Knight's costume in *Batman* has a bat-symbol on the chest that resembles the one seen in many drawings in *The Killing Joke* where there is an extra scallop on the bottom of the bat. This detail seems minimal but for a superhero the symbol on their chest defines who they are. For

the symbol to have looked different than the way it appeared in the comics is a departure worth mentioning as this also seems to be one of Burton's few inputs into the film.

Production Design

The character of Batman was initially defined by his environment. Batman was very different from other comic book characters because he dwelled in a world of the urban gothic. Looking back to 1939, *Batman*'s filmmaking team knew that Gotham City was a key element in creating a representative Batman film. The Gotham City appearing in the 1940s serials and 1960s TV show is not threatening at all, oftentimes it is just rural back roads of Los Angeles shot in the daytime. In order to produce a bleak, foreboding environment, production designer Anton Furst knew that it was crucial that nothing be bright and that nothing look new in Gotham City.[57] Because the character of Batman, as originally conceived was so dark, Gotham City was designed to be a city without many day scenes. Even when it is daytime, there is often an overcast atmosphere. To create Gotham, Furst fused a number of different architectural styles together, some of which openly clashed with one another. This clash is similar to the way the architecture has been laid out in New York, and also further emphasized the clashing characters of the film. Furst's designs for Gotham alluded to Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927), Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1991) and Terry Gilliam's *Brazil* (1985), while nevertheless appearing unique to itself. The set's architecture combines gothic and art deco with a slight forties New York feel (both the time and the place Batman was created). The forties flair can be seen in the fedoras worn by the characters as well as the thick-rimmed glasses, zoot suits, flash bulb cameras and typewriters. The filmmaking techniques also invoke forties films, with its swirling newspapers used to convey important information

and the sheer lack of blood when characters get shot (including Eckhardt, Grissom, Bruce's parents and Bob the Goon). This production design element was important because it really made *Batman* feel like it was made at the same time Batman first appeared in the comics. Though *Batman* had a slight period feel, it also has a very timeless quality. No product placement is used to contextualize the story within a specific time.

As mentioned in talking about Batman's key components, Batman is Gotham City, and Gotham City is Batman, thus Batman's costume needed to blend into the environment. Costume designer Bob Ringwood had twenty-four weeks to create the bat-suit. Due to this large chunk of time set aside, the producers clearly understood the importance of the suit and getting it right. The suit was be far more grounded in reality than the comic book uniform as it was solid black, opposed to the blue and dark grey. Trying to define itself against camp, the filmmakers were not about to put underpants over a pair of tights and a leotard to dress their hero. Using a black suit was in keeping with the way in which Kane and Finger wanted the character to be originally, only to be inhibited by the comic book printing rule that the color black had to be outlined in blue. The suit proves very important to the film and the character of Bruce Wayne, as it gave him the ability to intimidate and frighten criminals. With all of the elements of pre-production together *Batman* was finally set to go into production.

Production

The key word on the production of *Batman* was to be as "authentic" as possible to the first year of the Batman comic books. Batman creator Bob Kane served as the film's creative consultant, keeping the filmmakers true to the Batman traditions as he saw them.

This was the first time that Kane was able to give input into the adaptation of his

character to the screen. Kane was allowed to visit the sets of the other Batman screen

adaptations, but this was his first opportunity to be involved in the actual production. In

order to aid the filmmakers, Kane drew up what came to be known as the "Bat-bible,"

which was a set of rules for the screenplay to follow.[58] Kane's "Bat-bible" illustrated the

key components which that could be found in Batman's first year in the comic books.

Kane admits his allegiance by saying: "…if I had my druthers, I'd rather have the dark,

profound, mysterioso Batman rather than the comedic one."[59] The decision to bring

Kane into the filmmaking process helped Guber-Peters give the impression that their

adaptation was an accurate one. Making their product sanctioned by its creator made it

much more difficult for the public to complain, after all, "[i]f Kane goes on record saying

his concept has been brilliantly interpreted, the ardent fans buckle down. He must also

have a massive copyright merchandising deal so it's also in his interest."[60]

Guber-Peters kept a close watch on Burton during the filming. *Batman* was the

most expensive film of all time and there were a lot of careers riding on its success.

Thus, Burton was not allowed to direct the film without opinions from the production

team. This assertion is supported by Reinhart who says:

> Warner Bros., still concerned over the Keaton controversy,
> kept a very close watch over the production via producer
> Jon Peters… In the studios eyes, Tim Burton simply did not
> have all that long of a track record to be handling such a
> tricky and expensive project. As a result, Peters attempted
> to do no small amount of 'hand holding' of Burton while he
> was making *Batman*.[61]

According to Michael Besman, VP of production for Guber/Peters, "Tim was

under a lot of pressure. He hadn't had that big blockbuster yet, so it wasn't like

'whatever you want Mr. Burton.' So there was definite pressure between the studio, and the producers, and Tim, just to get it all done and get it all good."[62] Burton admits to being under pressure during the filming noting that he was nervous because he had never really done a big film before.[63] Peter Guber lets this information slip in an interview: "…we had a balancing act, we had to keep him [Burton] in, and keep him very aggressive and active on the project, and yet we didn't want to let the project run away with itself.[64] Burton recalls his grueling six-day shooting schedule, which he found counter-productive. Keeping Burton on a tight leash and always out of the know was the best way to accomplish not "letting the project run away with itself." To ensure that his mission of seeing a dark, serious Batman brought to the screen was accomplished, Michael Uslan says, "I only let Tim see the original year of the Bob Kane/Bill Finger run, up until the time that Robin was introduced…My biggest fear was that somehow Tim would get hold of the campiest Batman comics and then where would we be?"[65] Most of the production photographs from the film portray the cast with not only Burton but more often than not with the producers (Peters and Guber) as well, proving that they were constantly on the set, looking after "their" film. "As the hands-on producer of *Batman*, Jon Peters pushed director Tim Burton to incorporate more action and romance into the film, making it [in his mind] more commercial."[66] During one night of shooting Griffin and Masters claim that Peters had pushed Burton so far about the film needing more pathos and romance that, "Burton ran of the soundstage crying."[67] In his review of the film Roger Ebert caught on to the fact that the *Batman* filming was not the most pleasant of work environments as he wrote, "The movie's problem is that no one seemed to have

any fun making it, and it's hard to have much fun watching it. It's a depressing experience."[68]

Another example of corporate domination and control of the *Batman* film project was the film's soundtrack. Prince, a Warner artist at the time of *Batman*'s production, was contracted to write and perform songs for the film that could be marketed in simultaneous conjunction. Cited as being out of place in the film, these contemporary songs were almost universally panned by critics and audiences alike. Burton, however, had no choice but to use the music in the most effective means possible; consequently, Burton uses the music as the voice of the Joker. Many similarities can be drawn between Burton's time spent at Disney with his experience with Warner Bros. during *Batman*. Burton does not look back fondly on his experience with either. He calls *Batman* "'Torture – the worst period of my life'."[69] Burton found the production conditions for the film far for ideal as casting decisions were changed without warning, Kim Basinger replacing Sean Young who was injured just before production, and whole scenes being turned upside down from one day to the next.[70] Kim Basinger had a romance with Jon Peters during the filming of *Batman*, and according to Griffin and Masters, Peters made sure Burton shot plenty of close-ups of the actress. Peters also imposed his will onto the ending of the film (an ending that Burton and Hamm both liked but he did not). Without telling Burton, Peters rewrote the ending to the film and at the last minute and made Burton shoot it.[71] The following quote from Burton really illustrates the extent to which he had lost control on the production to the point of not even remembering much of it:

> '*Batman* was the toughest job I've ever had to do…It was
> tough from the point of having no time to regroup after the
> script revisions,' he continued. 'I never had time to think
> about them. I always felt like I was catching up. I worked

> six days a week and exhausted myself because I feared I
> wasn't doing a good job. I was afraid my mental condition
> wasn't right for me to be making this movie, and even now
> I have amnesia about certain times during the shooting'.[72]

Not only was the production of the film intense, so to was the hype and desire to see it.

Debut and Reception

Batman premiered on June 23, 1989, backed by an enormous advertising campaign. Michael Uslan's initial vision of creating a Batman that was more adult and sophisticated than any other previous live-action incarnation was successfully carried out by producers Peter Guber and Jon Peters.[73] This success was largely due to the fact that *Batman*'s producers tried to distance themselves from the 1960s TV series in the marketing and positioning of the film and in the production itself. Adam West's (1960s TV Batman) public complains that he was not considered for the role of Batman in the new film went unanswered[74] and *Batman*'s contingencies went to such great lengths to try to make people forget about "campy Batman" that lawyers for DC Comics forbade Adam West from wearing his home-made Batman outfit for public appearances; for fear that his performance would be confused with the forthcoming Batman film.[75] *Batman*'s opening credits immediately set out to change the public's preconceived notions of Batman. It was important to set the tone of the film right away, and to immediately announce during the credits that this was not the TV show. The credits for any film are meant to set the mood and the tone of the film and to act as a clue of what is to come. *Batman* opens with a camera that swoops in and out of dark cave-like gorges, as though it were exploring the dark recesses of the mind, to reveal in the end that the stone-like structures make up the bat-symbol.[76] Much like the way it is unclear where the circling

camera is going and why, *Batman*'s plot is also a puzzle, which reveals Batman's origin in sections, rather than at one time.

The film also succeeded in its ability to make money and earn acclaim, *Batman* became the first film in history to sell $100.2 million worth of tickets in just ten days, and went on to become the fifth-highest-grossing film of all time, earning over $400 million worldwide. It won Oscars for art direction and costume design, and set a standard for comic book film adaptations to follow; but the real question at hand is, did executive producer Michael Uslan and producers Peter Guber and Jon Peters succeed in the "faithful" adaptation they wanted to achieve?

Few would know better if *Batman* was a successful adaptation better than those who are familiar with the comics, namely comic book fans. Though the producers of *Batman* had every intention of staying true to the comics, comic fans were shocked by liberties taken by the film. The Batman of the comic books is tall, athletic and seemingly celibate – rarely having girlfriends and never having sex - where the one portrayed in *Batman* is short and skinny, and sleeps with Vicki Vale on their very first date. Numerous account of the film note that fans were even angered that Alfred allows Vicki into the Bat Cave, revealing Batman's true identity (and the fact that she has virtually no reaction further angered them). Batman's use of lethal force, in scenes such as those where he destroys Axis Chemicals with many of the Joker's henchmen inside, and subsequently fires on the Joker from his Batwing, also stunned fans who, for 49 of 50 years, were accustomed to a hero who had taken a vow never to take a human life.

At the end of *Batman* (1989) the Dark Knight intends to purge his anger toward the murderer of his parents by killing the Joker. As *Batman* was intended to be an

adaptation of the Dark Knight's first year in the comics, it is interesting to note that if the Joker's debut in *Batman #1*, 1940 had gone according to plan, the Joker would have been killed also. The Joker was going to die accidentally, by stabbing himself while lunging at Batman. Early comic books rarely to never had recurring villains, for they usually died by the end of the issue. Thus, it was largely unheard of for a villainous character to continuously return. The editor for DC Comics thought that the Joker was such a great character, that he had Kane redraw the last panel to suggest that the Joker would live.[77]

Jack Nicholson is, for many fans, both a strength and a weakness in the film. Nicholson was thought to have been born to play the part of the Joker, but by the time he got around to playing him many thought he had become "too old, doughy-faced and balding."[78] Also, in the comics the Joker has always been portrayed as tall and skinny, with no name and no origin, whereas in *Batman* the Joker is short and stocky, has a name – Jack Napier – and has a definite origin story. Finally, the biggest disappointment among fans was that the script altered Batman's origin by depicting the Joker as the murderer of Bruce Wayne's parents. In *Detective Comics #33* it is just an average street thug who murders Bruce's parents. This change was made by script re-writer Warren Skaaren who made the change to make the Batman/Joker bond that much more personal. The change may work within the world of the film as a separate entity but did not represent the Batman mythos.

Due to the scale of the production and the pressures imposed on him from the producers, Burton was forced into adopting an attitude of caring more about his continued career as a feature film director than with what fans would think of the film. Of the accused inaccuracies in the film, Burton says, "'[t]here might be something that's

sacrilege in this movie… But I can't care about it… This is too big a budget movie to worry about what a fan of a comic would say…'."[79] At the time of its release, Burton knew there would be people who would not like the film, he just hoped that there would be more who did.[80]

The filmmakers have defended *Batman*'s liberties with its source material in the following ways: the Batman costume with its fake muscles is explained as an attempt to humanize the character, he dresses like a bat for theatrical effect in order to strike fear and terror into his opponents from the moment they lay eyes on him. By making Batman more "humanized" the producers effectively made the character more realistic for a live-action character on film, but also blunted some of his comic book edges. By sleeping with a woman and killing evil doers the film's Batman tries to advance a hero that is a grim and vengeful whose heterosexuality is rarely called into question.[81] Bruce Wayne's description in *Detective Comics #27* reads, "millionaire playboy socialite" and the Batman seen in that issue does, like it or not, kill. Unlike the virtuous and all-American Superman, Batman was conceived as a dangerous vigilante bent on destroying his enemies by any means possible and *Batman* portrays <u>that</u> Batman.

These changes to Batman's essence (the short skinny sexually active Batman, the pudgy Joker who murders Bruce Wayne's parents), were "not, to a fan of the comic Batman at least, minor changes."[82] Why was *Batman* a disappointment to Batman fans? This question is problematized when considering that the 1980s graphic novels introduced the notion of creative authorship into comic books. As *Batman* was released in 1989, comic book readers were plenty used to seeing personal visions played out in such graphic novels as *Gotham by Gaslight*, in which the Batman characters and

locations are set in the late 1800's, or when he encounters Jack the Ripper. In another

personal vision Batman marries a reformed Catwoman and they have a child. One

version has Batman is a swirling wraith, Moores' Joker of *The Killing Joke* is originally a

stand-up comedian with a pregnant wife, Frank Miller's Catwoman is a prostitute in *Year*

One, and in his *Dark Knight Returns* Batman is a fifty year-old man who takes on a

female Robin.[83] Knowing about all of the fluctuations in the character throughout

history, why then should *Batman*'s departures from the comic book mythos invoke

feelings of disappointment, rejection and betrayal for fans? Will Brooker, author of

Batman Unmasked: Analyzing a Cultural Icon, offers an intriguing answer to this

question:

> For comic book fans… the movie [served] one vital
> purpose: it [represented] them to the outside world. It was
> *Batman: The Movie*, a supposedly definitive representation
> and the world was watching it. Tim Burton's *Batman* had
> become, as far as the wider audience was concerned, 'the'
> Batman, and all the movie's idiosyncrasies and infidelities
> to the comic text - the sex life, the stocky Joker, the skinny
> Bruce – were now considered gospel in the eyes of the
> viewing public. Batman now belonged to a multi-national
> conglomeration and the global audience who bought tickets
> and the merchandise, rather than to the dedicated comic
> readers and community of writers, artists and editors who
> had themselves emerged from the ranks of fandom.[84]

Comic book fans, though they may have wanted the world to know about their

hero, did not like to share him. In the summer of 1989 Batman was no longer a character

for comic book fans, but for everyone, and fans were a bit jealous. Batman's bat-symbol

permeated the culture as the image representing the film. It could be seen everywhere

from billboards to T-shirts. The film promoted itself as there were countless people

walking around with a bat-symbol on their chests. Uricchio and Pearson observe that

"The bat-logo's omnipresence diffused its meaning, reducing the wearing of a black bat in a yellow oval to a mere gesture of participation in a particular cultural moment."[85] The logo carried with it the connotation of "Batman," and thus indicated "the purchaser's acknowledgement, however minimal, of the character."[86] Batman comic book fans were likely annoyed by the fact that people with no real knowledge or understanding of what they saw as "their" character, were wearing his symbol as if they did. *Batman* screenwriter Sam Hamm puts a comic book character's film into perspective by saying:

> 'What you wind up doing when you're putting an existing
> character in a major Hollywood film is you're essentially
> defining that character for a whole generation of people;
> and most people have certainly heard of Batman but they
> are probably not familiar with it'.[87]

Far fewer people read comic books than go to the movies. *Batman* was made for the general public and would come to define the character of Batman for society in a more pronounced way than in the comic books.

Conclusion

Though fans may not have been happy, DC Comics and the general movie-going audience flocking to see the film, seemed to be. Janette Kahn, president and editor of DC Comics at the time says, "We couldn't have been happier in the summer of '89. It was so wonderful to see another DC comic book character on the big screen in a way that did things that movies did that we couldn't do in the comics, and yet at the same time was true to the underlying material."[88] Kahn was also happy due to the huge spike in sales the film produced for DC Comics. Just like in 1966, when comic sales skyrocketed thanks to the *Batman* TV show, 1989 saw DC Comics in a situation where they could not print enough copies of Batman comics to satisfy the demand for them.

Whether *Batman* is considered a brilliant retelling of the first year of the Batman comic books, or a travesty, Reinhart notes that the film's biggest achievement is that "it brought the character back to the attention of the general public in a manner that finally moved beyond the silliness of the 1960s Batman TV show and film."[89] *Batman* solidified that a "comic book film" could be a force to be reckoned with. Not only could the film be entertaining, it could also be artistic and in the end make a lot of money. The film changed Hollywood's perception of what a comic book film could be.

Warner Bros.' producers Peter Guber and Jon Peters under the goals laid out by Michael Uslan, were in control of *Batman* in order to build a Batman movie franchise that could be taken into successful sequels, a franchise that could satisfy fan and general movie-goer both. After laying the groundwork the way they wanted it, the producers allowed Tim Burton to continue the franchise on his own in the next film. Guber and Peters were downgraded to the position of executive producers on *Batman Returns*. The next chapter will examine the sequel to *Batman* and how it became quite a different film from the original. *Batman Returns* would prove to be, as Linda Seger coined a "new original" which was not anywhere near as concerned as *Batman* at preserving fidelity to any original.

CHAPTER THREE

[1] *Batman Two-Disc Special Edition(Widescreen)*. Perf. Jack Nicholson and Michael Keaton. DVD. Warner, 2005.

[2] Griffin and Masters, 165.

[3] Ibid, 165.

[4] Ibid, 165.

[5] Ibid, 166.

[6] Ibid, 166.

[7] Sharrett, Christopher. "Batman and the Twilight of the Idols: An Interview with Frank Miller." *The Many Lives of the Batman*. Ed. Roberta E. Pearson and William Uricchio. New York: Routledge, 1991. 33-46., 33.

[8] Boichel, 16.

[9] Wright, 267.

[10] Sharrett, 33.

[11] Oricchio and Pearson, 206.

[12] Kidd, 199.

[13] Wright, 267.

[14] Reinhart, 140.

[15] Ebert, Roger. "Batman." *The Chicago Sun Times* 23 June 1989.

[16] Breskin, David. "Tim Burton: The Rolling Stones Interview." *Rolling Stone* 9-23 July 1992.

[17] Ibid

[18] Hanke, 81.

[19] Breskin.

[20] *Batman* DVD.

[21] Singer, 10.

[22] Ibid, 9.

[23] Jones, 19.

[24] Burton, 71.

[25] Ibid, 72.

[26] Hanke, 82.

[27] Singer, 12.

[28] Burton, 80.

[29] Jones, 18.

[30] *Batman* DVD.

[31] White, 42.

[32] *Batman* DVD.

[33] Daniels, 164.

[34] *Batman* DVD.

[35] Breskin

[36] Kidd, 216.

[37] Daniels, 164.

[38] *Batman* DVD.

[39] Spillman, Susan. "Will Batman Fly?" *USA Today* 19June 1989.

[40] Barol, 72.

[41] Griffin and Masters, 167.

[42] Reinhart, 142.

[43] Kane, 145.

[44] Ibid, 147.

[45] Ibid, 147.

[46] *Batman* DVD.

[47] Reinhart, 142.

[48] Kane, 147.

[49] *Batman* DVD.

[50] Ibid, 105.

[51] Vaz, 165.

[52] Daniels, 41.

[53] Moore, Alan (writer), and Brian Bolland (illustrator). *Batman: The Killing Joke*. New York: DC Comics Inc., 1988.

[54] Reinhart, 42.

[55] *Batman* DVD Commentray.

[56] Ibid, Commentary.

[57] Jones, Alan. "Batman." *Tim Burton Interviews*. Ed. Kristin Fraga. Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi/Jackson, 1989. 16-30., 24.

[58] Kane, 144.

[59] *Batman* DVD.

[60] Jones, 25.

[61] Reinhart, 144.

[62] *Batman* DVD.

[63] Ibid, DVD Commentary.

[64] *Batman* DVD.

[65] Ramey, Bill "Jett." *An Interview with Michael Uslan*.

[66] Griffin and Master, photo insert.

[67] Ibid, 168-169,

[68] Ebert, Roger. "Batman." *The Chicago Sun Times* 23 June 1989.

[69] Merschmann, 112.

[70] Ibid, 112.

[71] Griffin and Masters, 171.

[72] Jones, 30.

[73] Ibid, 151.

[74] Reinhart, 143.

[75] Brooker, 176.

[76] *Batman* DVD Commentary.

[77] Kane, 107.

[78] Reinhart, 153.

[79] Uricchio and Pearson, 184.

[80] Spillman.

[81] Medhurst, 162.

[82] Brooker, 290.

[83] Ibid, 293.

[84] Ibid, 293.

[85] Uricchio and Pearson, 182.

[86] Ibid, 182.

[87] Ibid, 183.

[88] *Batman* DVD.

[89] Reinhart, 151.

CHAPTER 4
TIM BURTON'S BATMAN: *BATMAN RETURNS*

Batman was a film that attempted to be "faithful to the letter" of the Caped

Crusader's early comic books. The filmmakers discovered along the way, that with many

different talents and opinions collaborating into one film, deciding upon any one "true"

version of the character was impossible. The film suffered from internal problems every

step of the way, from the screenplay, to the casting, to constant revisions and alterations

in the middle of shooting. For the sequel to *Batman*, *Batman Returns*, the Dark Knight

would no longer be shaped by the desires of numerous creative talents, but rather would

be envisioned through the mind of one man, Tim Burton. This chapter will reveal that

Burton, unlike the producers of the first film, was not interested in being "faithful to the

letter" of Batman comics. His only desire was to put a Batman onto the screen that

accorded to his personal preferred Batman. Tim Burton created a "new original" that

stands out as unique when compared to other Batman films in the franchise and is unique

to anything in the comic books. In so doing *Batman Returns* became what McFarlane

calls "faithful to the spirit" of Batman. *Batman Returns* does portray Batman. Burton

did not completely change the world of the Dark Knight; the key components laid out in

Chapter Two are still there, he just filtered Batman through his unique imagination.

After his professed "tortured" experience with first film, this chapter begins by

examining what got Burton back to direct the sequel to *Batman*, and will begin the

argument that *Batman Returns* is "A Tim Burton Film" in a way that the first film is not.

This will be illustrated by identifying the director's unique stamps that he puts onto his

films and show how *Batman Returns* contains them all.

Getting Burton Back: Green Lighting "A Tim Burton Film"

     Batman was an undeniable success and the Warner Bros. studio badly wanted to

make a sequel to the film to continue to cash in on their good fortune and the popularity

of the character. "*Batman* earned more than $406 million in worldwide ticket sales, $150

million on video and $750 million in merchandise, including, bat-pajamas and bat-

vitamins. It was more than just a movie, it was an industry."[1] When this chapter refers to

Warner Bros. it is referring to the corporate entity that is the studio, as Michael Uslan,

Benjamin Melniker, Peter Guber and Jon Peters played a far less important role in the

shaping of this film.

     Warner Bros. bought the $2 million *Batman* Gotham City set on Pinewood's back

lot to use on two future productions, and protected their investment behind well-guarded

fences. Warner Bros. did this so that they could save money on the *Batman* sequel

without having to rebuild sets from scratch. The set was reported to cost them $20,000 a

week to keep up.[2] Even though Warner Bros. was ready to begin, Tim Burton was

reluctant to direct the sequel, feeling burnt out from the first film and not knowing what

he could bring to the project.[3] Burton looks back on *Batman* as,

> It's the one movie that I feel more detached from that the
> others. I think any director will say that the first big movie
> you do is a little bit of a shock… I never walk into anything
> without feeling close to it, but it got away from me a little
> bit…I think every movie that I've done has lots of flaws,
> it's just that I don't mind the flaws in the others as much as
> I mind the ones in *Batman*.[4]

     Batman is Burton's "least personal film."[5] After its release Burton directed what

would become, next to *Vincent,* his most personal film, *Edward Scissorhands* (1990).

Edward Scissorhands is an excellent example of Burton's distinctive vision. Burton

conceived the character when he was a teenager making *Scissorhands* "nothing less than Burton's spiritual autobiography – a fairy tale of the 'otherness' felt by every outsider."[6] With several shorts and four feature films to his name, *Scissorhands* solidified Burton's film stamps. Every film he had made could now be seen as a fish-out-of-water tale with misunderstood, outsider protagonists.

Burton is one of very few directors in the history of Hollywood – post *Batman* - who is allowed almost total freedom over his films; others have included Alfred Hitchcock, Stanley Kubrick, Martin Scorsese and Steven Spielberg. Burton's films are "uniquely recognizable and consistent, thematically as well as visually."[7] From his first short, *Vincent*, up to and including his most recent features, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (2005) and *The Corpse Bride* (2005), "there have been a number of recurrent themes, making his name a sort of trademark for a certain style and content."[8] The name "Tim Burton" stands for stylized, gothic films about outsiders. There are several visual cues that can be used to identify "A Tim Burton Film:" one of which is the director's use of models and miniatures. They are featured heavily in *Pee-Wee's Big Adventure, Beetlejuice* and *Edward Scissorhands* but were not so prevalent in *Batman*. For *Batman Returns* models and miniatures are once again used frequently. The entire credit sequence in which the Penguin's discarded bassinette floats through the sewers of Gotham City is done in miniature and the Penguin's lair located in an old abandoned marine land amusement park is also made up entirely of miniatures. Wayne Manor is a real location in the first film, this time it too is a model. *Batman Returns* was shot almost entirely on stages at Warner Bros. and Universal and most of the backgrounds were faked through the use of miniatures. Finally the climactic scenes of the film feature a penguin

army that marches onto a miniature Gotham Plaza while Batman sails through Gotham sewers in his (miniature) Bat-skiboat.

Growing up in Burbank, California, Tim Burton did not get to observe much weather beyond beautiful sunny days, so he admits that his films involve weather every chance he gets.[9] Snow is utilized in *Edward Scissorhands*, *Batman Returns*, his brainchild *A Nightmare before Christmas* and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*.

Burton's films revolve around motifs of death: his characters are either literally dead, such as the title characters of *Frankenweenie, Corpse Bride* and *Beetlejuice*, emotionally dead, or dead-in-appearance; Max Shreck and the Penguin of *Batman Returns* have make-up that makes them look like carcasses and Shreck wears human molars as cuff links. Other than the Joker talking to a mob boss that he fries with his joy buzzer, Burton's death obsession is kept at bay in the first Batman film. Again Burton electrocutes Shreck to death and we see his body charred with his eyes sticking out of his head, which recalls Large Marge of *Pee-Wee* and Beetlejuice of that film.

Kristen Fraga, editor of *Tim Burton Interviews*, has three distinct traits that pervade Burton and his work: 1) he works in defiance of the studio system; 2) his films have a genre-bending nature; and 3) he utilizes a unique narrative structure.[10] As for the first trait Burton admits, "'I'm for anything that subverts what the studio thinks you have to do'."[11] This attitude can be seen as a direct result of his experiences with the Walt Disney Studio and Warner Bros. on *Batman*. Secondly, Burton's films do not fall into any one genre, but are unique to him and him alone. Burton has never been a fan of telling a coherent, linear story in his films and with his complete control over *Batman Returns*, the story was far from linear or coherent. "Max's power plant gets forgotten

about halfway through, and the Penguin's threat to turn the town against the Caped

Crusader never amounts to much."[12] Catwoman blows up Shreck's office building, and

then later in the film Shreck hosts a masquerade ball there. This does not make sense,

and Burton does not care as he wanted *Batman Returns* to take his audience to, as he puts

it, "'another place, another plane with its own reality'."[13]

Burton illustrates how his films are very much a part of who he is: "'I feel like I

lucked into filmmaking. I never studied for it. My movies just sort of ended up being

representative of the way I am… That's the danger of me making big budget movies. I

just get interested in things that I relate to that don't necessarily have anything to do with

anybody else'."[14] Burton says that he treats his films like they are his "mutilated

children," in that he knows they have flaws, but he still loves them.[15] For Burton his

films are a form of therapy.[16] In a sense Burton would make *Batman Returns* as a form

of therapy for his bad experience on the first film.

What finally got Burton back into the director's chair for *Batman Returns* was his

perfectionist nature: upon subsequent viewings of *Batman*, he was brought to the

understanding that (in his mind) he hadn't done a perfect job.[17] Burton says of the first

Batman film:

> 'I would just keep looking at it and think it could have been
> better. I saw the first movie as being flawed. I didn't like
> the tone… I felt like I hadn't done 100 percent of what I
> wanted to do with that picture, and part of me felt that I
> wanted another chance at it…There was a feeling I had
> hoped to get by doing the first Batman that I didn't get. I
> wanted another chance at capturing [that feeling]'.[18]

Burton wanted to prove to himself that he could make a good Batman film, yet in

order to do that would require him to be able to do it his way. Reinhart explains how the

Warner Bros. studio was able to get Burton to direct the film: "The only way the studio was able to get him to change his mind was to promise him far more creative control over the project than he was allowed to have over *Batman*."[19] This said, Warner Bros. allowed Burton to have the reins to *Batman Returns* because he had become just as big of a name for the marquee as any of its stars, in other words, "In an industry in which every possible angle is used to sell a product, a director can thus turn into a marketing concept, a brand name that is instantly recognizable and that has a guaranteed audience as long as certain distinctive elements are presented in the product."[20] Thus, "A Tim Burton Film" with all that it entails, is created in the minds of audiences.

After *Edward Scissorhands,* Tim Burton found himself a very hot commodity in Hollywood. Now, Burton had made four films and they all were successful, creating quite a different situation in his relationship with Warner Bros. This time, if the studio wanted Burton to direct the film, they would have to treat him with the respect of the sought-after, cutting-edge young director he was. To get Burton on board, Warner Bros. promised him enough money to create his vision and a script that he was satisfied with.[21] As discussed in the previous chapter, the key word on the production of *Batman* was "authenticity," with Burton in complete control over *Batman Returns* came his mantra that: "'Sequels are only worthwhile if they give you the opportunity to do something new and interesting'."[22] Burton's desire to make a completely different film came with the desire for a completely different Gotham City, thus the set used on the previous film, that Warner Bros. had paid $20,000 per day for, proved a waste of their money. Citing this example makes clear that Warner's really wanted Burton attached to the project to have made this sacrifice.

Of the directors in Hollywood at the time, Tim Burton was a choice director for

Batman yet he faced a no win situation in directing his Batman film, as he puts it:

> 'Batman is the property of two whole generations,' he
> argues. 'And he's gone through so many different
> interpretations that I knew I was always going to offend
> someone. There are those who liked the TV series. Those
> who like the comic books. Those who like him lighter.
> Those who like him darker. So I decided early on that I
> might just as well not worry about it at all, and just get on
> with doing my thing'.[23]

As it would turn out Burton's "own thing" would align quite well to the "spirit" of

Batman. Janette Kahn, president and editor for DC Comics during *Batman* and *Batman*

Returns, says: "Tim has an incredible visual imagination and a wonderfully dark, twisted

sensibility. So I think his own sensibility was very, very much in line with Batman as we

at DC Comics saw him."[24] According to *Batman Returns* screenwriter, Daniel Waters,

"More than any other person who has interpreted Batman I really think that Tim Burton

has the most in common with Batman."[25] The following are reasons why Burton was an

inspired director for bringing Batman to life.

Tim Burton is a very similar person to the tortured/confused character of Bruce

Wayne/Batman. Batman and Burton share many similar traits: they both like to wear

black, and they both have split personalities (to Burton's admission). Bruce Wayne feels

that he must continue to be Batman because "no one else can," and Burton reluctantly

returned to directing Batman because he felt he wanted to do it right. Both have feelings

of being alone and isolated from the rest of the world. Burton and Wayne had lonely

childhoods, Burton worked alone and isolated as an animator for many years at Disney,

while Batman fights a daily battle against his will. Burton admits to having felt more at

home on the Warner Bros. *Batman Returns* sets at Warner Bros. than he did outside its

gates in his home town of Burbank.[26] It was Burton's idea to have Bruce enter into the

Bat Cave through an iron maiden torture device, as he sees the character much like

himself - a tortured soul.[27] They are each tortured in this case due to ones his obligation

to eliminate crime and the other because of his obligation to direct the film. Like Bruce

Wayne, Burton seems to be scatterbrained and lost most of the time, but both know what

they are doing. In *Batman* Bruce Wayne does not remember who he is when Vicki Vale

asks if he knows, "Which one of these guys is Bruce Wayne?" and in *Batman Returns* he

mistakes himself with Batman when he meets Selina Kyle for the first time, not

remembering that they are two separate identities. Bob Kane makes similar observations

of Burton on the set: "'Tim is all over the place! Tim doesn't relate to you as a very

serious director…He's running around doing things, he's got rips in his pants and his

wallet is ready to fall out of his pocket. You wouldn't think he's on top of things. But

he's right there, and he's got his fingers on it'."[28]

      The Warner Bros. studio did finally convince Burton to direct the film as *Returns*

story writer Sam Hamm explains: "the way they finally got to him, was to say, 'what if

the second movie is just a Tim Burton movie', and that kind of got his attention and got

him thinking about what he could do with it again…what if you didn't have to worry

about you know, sort of the fidelity to the mythology, all that kind of stuff like that."[29]

This time around Warner Bros. or its producers would not be calling the shots, but rather

Burton would be. The studio put their faith in Burton's ability to make compelling,

successful films in his own right. Burton began the task of adapting Batman by ignoring

the fidelity issue altogether, as he says, "Knowing the history [of Batman comics] was

sort of meaningless to me, even though I knew there was one."[30] Burton's attitude

toward faithfulness to the character is expressed as he says, "If you look at the Batman encyclopedia, the fucking thing changes every fucking week… there's no such thing as a bible [where Batman is concerned]."[31] For *Batman* there was a Bat-Bible drawn up by the character's creator himself noting what to do and what not to do in the film, for the screenwriter of the film. For *Batman Returns* there was no Bat-Bible to follow, only the rules that govern "A Tim Burton Film."

According to *Batman Returns* screenwriter Daniel Waters: "'When you're working on a Tim Burton movie you're dealing with a completely alternate reality. You're given the freedom to do just about anything. You can't be too operatic, too baroque, too unusual. The only rule going into *Batman Returns* was that there were no rules'."[32] Waters also explains that he and Burton were not concerned with the source Batman comics, "Tim and I never had a conversation about what are fans of the comic book going to think, what are the people going to think, what are the sponsors who have promotions connected to the movie gonna think of this movie? We never had those conversations, we never thought about it. We were really just about the art."[33] This coupled with the fact that Warner Bros. stayed more of less out of the filming process opened *Batman Returns* up for creativity.

For *Batman Returns*, it can be argued that Burton made "A Tim Burton Film" disguised as a Batman film. Burton reveals this intention in an interview with David Aldridge appearing in *Film Review* where he says, "I felt I could do the material more justice the second time around. But it's an odd thing. You mustn't give the studio the impression that you just want to make a multi-million-dollar tone poem for yourself. That's not what a studio wants to hear."[34] It can be confirmed that *Batman Returns* was

much more of a Tim Burton film than the first one by taking a look at the opening credits

for each film. *Batman'*s credits are as follows: "Warner Bros. Presents; Jack Nicholson;

Michael Keaton; Kim Basinger; A Peter/Guber Production; A Tim Burton Film;

Batman." In *Batman Returns* the credits read as follows: "Warner Bros. Presents; A Tim

Burton Film; Michael Keaton; Danny DeVito; Michelle Pfeiffer; Christopher Walken;

Batman Returns." For the first film, Burton's credit appears in the sixth place after

Warner Bros., the producers and even the actors, whereas in *Batman Returns*' credits he

is listed right away.[35] On their date in *Batman*, Vicki Vale asks Bruce Wayne about his

mansion, because she does not think it seems like it fits his personality. Wayne exclaims,

"Some of it is very much me, and some of it isn't." The same could easily be said of the

film and Tim Burton.[36]

     Batman Returns gave Burton "a tremendous opportunity to fulfill his very

particular vision of Batman, and the bizarre world and characters which surrounded

him."[37] According to Burton, *Batman Returns* was the film he wanted to make the first

time around.[38] Burton did not even care to acknowledge the first film in the sequel, "I

wanted to treat this like it was another Batman movie altogether… there's no point in

doing the exact same thing again'."[39] Copying the source comic books was of no interest

to Burton when adapting Batman to the screen, because he always wanted to bring

something new and different. When looking at Burton's career he has a tendency to do

remakes, or "re-imaginings." *Pee-Wee's Playhouse* was originally a children's television

show, *Batman* and *Sleepy Hollow* from existing literature, *Planet of the Apes* and *Charlie*

and the Chocolate Factory from preexisting films and, in *Charlie'*s case, books, while

Vincent and *Ed Wood* were based on real people. Many directors remake existing

properties, but when Burton does it, he does so to bring something new to it. Burton,

believing there is a deficiency in an original, re-imagines a film attempting to do his take

on the existing property. In every case, Burton is not interested in simply copying what

has been done; he always seeks out projects that he wants to make into "Tim Burton

Films." *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, for example was already made into a

respected film, but Burton wanted to remake it to be truer to the actual book of which he

says, "I remember the story. It was, in a way, my story: misfit boy has a dream, sticks to

it and gets lucky."[40] Tim Burton only takes on projects that interest him, and this need

for personal attachment started with *Vincent* with its references to his childhood hero

Vincent Price and *Frankenweenie* which exposed Burton's own loss of a dog when he

was growing up and continues through the rest of his films. Burton's stated attraction to

Pee-Wee's Big Adventure was that he "… immediately identified with Pee-Wee's

obsessive behavior toward something (a stolen bicycle) no one else cared about or

understood."[41] Thus it can be said that: "Burton is a filmmaker whose modus operandi is

based almost entirely on his innermost feelings. For him to commit to a project, it is

necessary for him to connect emotionally to the characters."[42] This kinship is what got

Burton interested in Batman to begin with (as discussed in the previous chapter).

Where Burton was admittedly nervous on his first big-budget film, *Batman*,

Edward Scissorhands gave Burton much needed confidence in his own work.

Scissorhands and *Batman Returns* producer Denise Di Novi says of Burton after making

Scissorhands: "'He connected with himself.' she says 'and his art became much more

intimate.' Now, without *Batman* producers Peter Guber and Jon Peters lingering (they

were downgraded to executive producers on the film), Burton would make his own film.

'You see glimmers of Tim in *Batman*.' Di Novi says, 'but this is all his'."[43] Michael

Keaton makes a similar observation of Burton's involvement with *Batman Returns* and

further bolsters that *Batman* was not a film where Burton had the control he may have

wanted, when he says:

> '…this one [*Batman Returns*] I really follow him [Burton]
> much more, because it was so clear that he felt good about
> having this in his own hands, whereas in the first one, the
> bat was – no pun intended – taken out of his hands a few
> times. And now they [Warner Bros.] said, Okay, we're not
> going to pinch-hit for you anymore, this is pretty much
> your vision.' I just decided, 'I trust him, so I'm going
> down with him if it doesn't work'.[44]

As previously mentioned, Burton likes to personalize his films and he was given

the opportunity to personalize *Batman Returns* in a way he was never allowed with

Batman. As Burton himself says, "'I feel like *Batman Returns,* for me, has a lot of every

movie I've made in it'."[45] The Penguin's parents in the opening of the film are played by

the actors who portray Pee-Wee and Simone (Paul Reubens and Diane Salinger) from

Burton's first feature *Pee-Wee's Big Adventure.* The shot of the Penguin's bassinette

taking its first plunge into the sewer is inspired by the first drop in the *Pirates of the*

Caribbean ride at Disneyland which Burton loved growing up.[46] Burton also reveals in

his commentary for *Batman Returns* that he is a fan of the Siouxsie and the Banshees

musical group and that that was why he uses their music in the film during the

masquerade ball sequence. This is a sharp contrast when compared to Guber and Peters'

insistence on Prince for the first film.

Ken Hanke makes the observation that when given the opportunity Burton's

preferred color palate for his films is blue. In the first Batman film, Burton had to go

along with Anton Furst's preferred design colors which are predominantly brown and grey.[47] For *Batman Returns* Burton's preferred blue color palate is there.

For *Batman Returns* Burton assembled all new writers, designers and actors to ensure he would not make the same film again. Like Burton, his collaborators were also given free rein to do whatever they pleased on the film. Everything was slightly or even completely redesigned or rethought for the film.[48] Rather than use the Production Designer chosen for him for the first film, Anton Furst, Burton utilized Bo Welch, who he had collaborated with on *Beetlejuice* and *Edward Scissorhands* to make the film more his own. Tim Burton explains *Batman Returns* in his forward to *Batman Returns: The Official Movie Book* as "'*Batman Returns* is not really a sequel to *Batman*. It doesn't pick up were the first film left off. The sets for Gotham City are completely new. There are lots of new elements in the visuals and storyline that haven't been seen before. Even Batman's costume has been revised'."[49] The bat-costume was changed to a more structural/art deco look to fit with the new sets. On top of these changes, the Bat Cave and Wayne Manor were also completely remodeled for the film. Burton's personal touches can perhaps be seen best in the characters appearing of the film.

Batman Returns' Burton Characters

Burton's films tend to bear the same name as the title character of the film: *Vincent, Frankenweenie, Pee-Wee's Big Adventure, Beetlejuice, Batman, Edward Scissorhands, Batman Returns, Ed Wood, Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *The Corpse Bride*. This is because all of his films are essentially character pieces. In order for Burton to have made these films he had to be drawn to and intrigued by the characters in some way. The only input Burton and his team got for *Batman Returns* from Warner

Bros. was that the studio wanted to have the Penguin in the film (as they saw him as the second most popular villain).[50] Without having to deal with an origin for Batman, the filmmakers thought that the film could have time to explore two villains, which wound up being the prescribed Penguin and Catwoman. Burton and screenwriter Waters completely made up origins for Catwoman and the Penguin that were specific to the film.

Catwoman originally came into Batman comics to add sex appeal and to be a romantic interest for Batman.[51] Both she and the Joker premiered in *Batman #1,* 1940. In that issue, Catwoman is one of the few characters to show up in a premier Batman issue as a work in progress. Her name is Selina Kyle and she is called simply, "The Cat" and is a jewel thief who wears normal street clothes, opposed to a costume. Batman is immediately attracted to her, even though she is a cat-burglar. By the end of the issue Batman allows her to escape. By *Batman #3* the Cat is given the name Cat-Woman and wears a cloak and a mask that looks like a real cat. Reinhart notes that, "[o]ver the years her appearance would vary more than any other major Batman adversary. She would eventually be depicted in no less than half a dozen completely different costumes."[52] In *Batman Returns* Catwoman, played by Michelle Pfeiffer, is created when secretary Selina Kyle's villainous boss Max Shreck pushes her out of her office window for getting too suspicious of his power plant activities. Kyle is resurrected by ally cats and goes home and creates a cat costume out of skin-tight leather. Somehow *Batman Returns*' unique origin for Catwoman does not seem like a move of infidelity as it would be rather impossible for the film to have been faithful to the character as she was constantly changing and evolving, and had no origin story. *Batman Returns* does get the major elements of Catwoman right. She adds sex appeal to the film and creates a romantic

interest for Batman that makes it very hard for him to ever bring her to justice, which is exactly what she was in her first appearances in the Batman comic books.

Burton loves the character of Catwoman, but the Penguin, as he appeared in the comics and the 1960s TV show, he does not like:

> 'I always felt that Catwoman was a strong character, but the Penguin presented a bit of a problem. For my money, he was the least interesting character in the comic books, and I could never figure out what the character was all about. But it seemed like a real challenge to take a character I basically didn't care for and make something out of him, which, as the script developed, we did'.[53]

Bob Kane created the Penguin after he saw a little penguin on a Kool Cigarette pack. Kane thought that the penguin always looked like a little fat man in tuxedo.[54] The Penguin was introduced in late 1941 as a short, portly aristocratic-type criminal that smoked cigarettes and wore a top hat and tuxedo in order to resemble his namesake. He also carried an umbrella, but not an ordinary umbrella as it served as his weapons, often concealing guns and knockout gas dispensers. Historically, the Penguin, like most major supporting characters in Batman, with the exception of Catwoman, debuted in the comics fully formed in *Detective Comics #58* (December 1941). The Penguin is a thief who answers to the name Oswald Cobblepot, who often uses birds to help him in his crimes and his crimes often revolve around birds. The Penguin may have been a successful villain when he first debuted because he represented a privileged class that an audience of the early 1940s, during the Great Depression, might have resented. Of course the same could be said of Batman's alter ego Bruce Wayne.[55] Wayne, on the other hand, was a philanthropist, giving money to those less fortunate and used his money to fund his war on crime. The Penguin was given an origin in the comics in *Detective Comics #58* in

1941. In the issue it is revealed that the Penguin suffered the teasing from his schoolmates due to his resemblance to a bird. After this, Oswald Chesterfield Cobblepot dedicated his life to vengeance and, after attaining a degree in Ornithology and a knack for umbrella-engineering, uses his knowledge and skills for evil-doing.[56]

Jack Nicholson made it desirable for big-name Hollywood stars to play the parts of Batman villains and just like Nicholson and the Joker, Danny DeVito seemed by many to be born to play the Penguin. Also, like Nicholson and even Bob Kane, DeVito signed on for *Batman Returns* after just one meeting with Burton.[57] For *Batman Returns*, the design for the characters was modeled after Burton's sketches of the characters rather than referencing comic books. Fascinated by the tag line: "The Bat, The Cat and The Penguin," Burton played up the idea that the Penguin was a real penguin-man and went from there. Burton gave DeVito a painting he had done of the Penguin as a baby, which DeVito describes as being his entree into understanding the character. The painting showed a rotund baby, with flippers for hands, behind the red and white bars of a crib with the caption, "My name is Jimmy, but they call me the hideous penguin boy."[58]

The Penguin of *Batman Returns* in some ways looks and acts very little like the one found in the comic books as Reinhart illustrates, "DeVito's Penguin oozes inky black mucus from his nose and mouth, eats raw fish entrails with his shark-like teeth, makes sexual innuendoes about every woman he sees, and wants to murder as many children as he can get his hand on."[59] Even though Burton changed the Penguin character considerably for *Batman Returns* he, like Catwoman, still contains many of his classic elements. Burton's Penguin is thrown into a sewer by his parents as a baby due to his monstrous appearance, to be raised by penguins. The Penguin of *Batman Returns* had a

long penguin nose and dresses much like he did in the comics, complete with aristocratic dress and speech patterns, and a top hat with a cigarette and holder sporadically in his mouth. He uses umbrellas which also hide weapons such as knives, machine guns and help him to fly. At the end of the film the Penguin uses his "family" of penguins as an army to destroy Gotham City. Essentially, Burton took a two-dimensional comic book character and made him a three dimensional character for film.

Max Shreck, played by Christopher Walken, is another major villain in the film and never appeared in Batman comics at all. Having loved old horror films as a child, Burton named Max Shreck after the German actor who portrayed the villainous vampire in the 1922 silent film classic *Nosferatu.* Named after a vampire, Shreck is a corporate vampire who drains the very life and spirit from Gotham City. Burton describes Shreck as "the catalyst of all the characters, which I liked. He was the one who wasn't wearing the mask but, in some ways he was."[60] For a character not in the comics, Shreck is given a lot of screen time in the film, which is likely due to how much Burton likes the character. Shreck made much more sense in earlier drafts of the film as screenwriter Daniel Waters points out, "[o]riginally the Max Shreck character is the golden boy son of the Cobblepots and it turns out that he and Penguin are brothers and there was that kind of dichotomy in the movie of the saintly brother who runs the city and the black sheep who was thrown into the sewer and how they come up together."[61] Of the characters Burton created for *Batman Returns*, Reinhart observes, "…they are not so much 'Batman' characters… as they are 'Burton' characters."[62] Burton's films being character pieces made the character of *Batman Returns* in Ken Hanke's opinion "more complex, appealing, and real than in the first film."[63]

Reception and Fallout

Burton's ultimate goal for *Batman Returns* was not to make a well-reviewed film, but to satisfy the way he wanted to portray Batman on screen. He reveals in his commentary for *Batman Returns* the fact that all of his films have gotten "at best, mixed reviews."[64] Burton cared far more about making a work of art than satisfying critics, or Batman comic book fans, yet *Batman Returns*' initial reviews and opening box office numbers were very good. Critics approached the film from an art perspective and from that lens they liked the surreal images and bizarre characters. "*Batman Returns* garnered some of the directors best reviews"[65] as *Time* reviewer Richard Corliss praises *Batman Returns* when he says, "*Batman Returns* is a funny, gorgeous improvement on the original and a lesson on how pop entertainment can soar into the realm of poetry."[66] David Ansen of *Newsweek* says:

> This darker, weirder sequel is easy to find fault with –
> seamless storytelling has never been Tim Burton's thing.
> But I wouldn't trade ten minutes of it for *Lethal Weapon 3*,
> *Alien3*, and *Far and Away* put together. Burton couldn't
> play it safe if he wanted to, and he doesn't want to.
> Entrusted with one of the most valuable franchises in
> movie history, he's made a moody, grotesque, perversely
> funny $50 million art film (50).

A phenomenon rare for Hollywood, *Batman Returns* was actually better received by critics than it was by its audience. According to Reinhart, "[a]udiences were put off by the films darkness and mean-spiritedness, so it did far less box office than the 1989 *Batman*."[67] Reinhart, who detests the film, offers several reasons for why this could have been: "In the film, Burton seizes on every opportunity he could to destroy anything that appears benign, cute or cuddly. Stuffed animals are torn to shreds, dollhouses are smashed to bits, beauty queens are brutally assaulted and murdered, pets are abused and

Christmas decorations are riddled with machine gun fire."[68] To add to this list,

Catwoman uses up, literally, a total of eight of her nine lives, one from Shreck pushing

her out an office window, one from Batman, another from the Penguin, four more of

which come from being shot by a gun at point blank range by Shreck, and finally the

eight from electrocuting herself and Shreck in a good-bye kiss.

In defense of the film, *Batman Returns* is rated PG-13, just like the previous film,

which should have alerted parents that the film would contain unsuitable material. In

fact, Warner Bros. should be faulted for marketed the film as a kid's movie. An example

of this comes from the trouble Warner Bros. found themselves due to their *Batman*

Returns tie-in with McDonalds. Parents thought that it was wrong for such a dark,

violent film to be advertised in their kid's Happy Meals and the tie-in was canceled

shortly after it began.

Batman Returns was also criticized for having too many villains that, like the first

film, Bruce Wayne/Batman/Michael Keaton had to take a back seat to. For Burton, it is

the villains who are just as, if not more interesting, than Batman himself. *Returns* also

may seem to spotlight the villains due to Burton's perception of the character of Batman

as a character that does not want to be seen. Burton's opinion of Batman is "[t]his guy

wants to remain as hidden as possible… so he is not going to eat up screen time."[69]

Again, like the previous film, Burton's *Batman Returns* was criticized for having

Batman kill people. In *Batman Returns*, the Dark Knight is shown as a cold-blooded

killer as he sets a thug ablaze using the Batmobile's afterburners; he stuffs dynamite

down the pants of another thug and pushes him into a sewer where he explodes. In the

comics, post his debut year Batman has had a vow never to take a human life, yet in

Batman Returns he "callously slaughtering human beings in ways that make him practically indistinguishable from the criminals he fight."[70] *Batman Returns'* screenwriter, Daniel Waters, defends his actions by saying that "…we don't live in a time where you can drop criminals off with a net in front of city hall [as Batman did in the 1943 movie serial]. The times are darker so you've got to make your character darker."[71]

Critics of Burton as a director fault him because he is not an action director and because he tends not to tell coherent stories. He is often accused of sacrificing the narrative for the sake of the visuals. Burton has had no problem agreeing with both criticisms but stands firm on the type of director he is:

> Some people are really good at narrative and some people are really good at action. I'm not that sort of person. So, if I'm going to do something just let me do my thing and hope for the best. If you don't want me to do it, then don't have me do it. But if I do it, then don't make me conform. If you want it to be a James Cameron movie get James Cameron to do it. Me directing action is a joke; I don't like guns. I hear a gunshot and I close my eyes.[72]

Even though he did not like them, Burton went ahead and put several action scenes into *Batman Returns* for which he says, "'The action sequences were like several trips to the dentist'."[73]

Batman Returns cost at least three times as much to make as *Batman* with an estimated budget of $80 million.[74] Warner Bros. looks at the movie as a failure because it made less money than they expected (*Batman* made $251 million domestically and *Batman Returns* took in only $163 million domestically in comparison[75]). In actuality "*Batman Returns* made more its first weekend than any film in history – over $47 million – which is more than most films gross in a lifetime."[76] The film would go on to become the third highest grossing film of the year after *Aladdin* and *Home Alone 2: Lost in New*

York. Looking back Burton realizes that Warner Bros. was not pleased with the movie.[77]

Burton set out to make a Batman film that would make himself happy, and in the end he

accomplished that goal. Burton says, "I feel pride in this movie, I feel close to it. Lots of

aspects of it that I love"[78] and "I like it better than the first one."[79] After directing

Batman Returns, Burton was on a high that made him want to direct another Batman

sequel, as he explains:

> I remember toying with the idea of doing another one, and I
> remember going into Warner Bros. and having a meeting
> and going, we could do this, we could do that – and they
> go, 'Tim, don't you want to do a smaller movie now?' And
> about a half-hour into the meeting I go, 'You don't want
> me to make another one do you?'…And so we just stopped
> it right there.[80]

Like the film or not (there seems to be a 50/50 split of those who love it, and

those who hate it), *Batman Returns* serves as an excellent example of adaptation form

that Linda Seger calls a "Second Original." Burton and his collaborators made a free

adaptation of the source material and the film stands out as a uniquely different

adaptation of the character because of it. *Batman Returns* did not suffer from the many

different individual's opinions of how to be "faithful" to the character and rather focused

on one man's vision of the character, a man who as illustrated here, has much in common

with the character of Batman.

CHAPTER FOUR

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[40] Fraga, xxi.

[41] Hanke, 85.

[42] Salisbury, xiv-xv.

[43] Corliss, 70.

[44] Schruers, Fred. "Bat Mitzvah." *Premier* July 1992: 56-64., 58.

[45] Aldridge, 37.

[46] *Batman Returns* DVD Commentary.

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[48] *Batman Returns* DVD.

[49] Singer, 6.

[50] *Batman Returns* DVD.

[51] Kane, 107.

[52] Reinhart, 11.

[53] Shapiro, 91.

[54] Kane, 112.

[55] Daniels, 45.

[56] Boicel, 8-9.

[57] Resner, 74.

[58] *Batman Returns* DVD.

[59] Reinhart, 174.

[60] Burton, 113.

[61] *Batman Returns* DVD.

[62] Reinhart, 177.

[63] Hanke, 94.

[64] *Batman Returns DVD Commentary*

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[66] Corliss, Richard. "Battier and Better." *Time* 22 June 1992: 69-71.

[67] Reinhart, 48.

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[72] Burton, 114.

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[74] Resner, 73.

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CONCLUSION

This thesis was designed to illuminate the fact that comic books, despite their similarities to film, are equally difficult to adapt into films as novels have been. Batman is perhaps the best of all comic book characters to illustrate the difficulty in comic book adaptations, because the character has been shaped and molded so many times throughout his existence. Through the years Batman has earned countless followers who all prefer one version of the Caped Crusader over another, making the judgment on of which Batman is the definitive one a very difficult and ultimately impossible task. Thus when the Warner Bros. film studio took on a Batman movie franchise in 1989, it would find adapting Batman to the screen to be a very complex negotiation between not only strong Hollywood producers, but also a visionary young director and fans of Batman in both the comic books and the dramatically different 1960s TV show. *Batman*'s producers Jon Peters and Peter Guber decided that the most faithful representation of Batman, for the time (and the representation that would make them the most money), would be to adapt the Batman of his first year in the comics with the tone of the hugely popular graphic novels of the time.

It is the conclusion of this thesis that even though on the surface a comic book, with its employment of visual aesthetics, may seem more cinematic in nature than a novel, and thus more easily adaptable, this is in fact a deceptively simple approach. It is equally difficult to adapt into the film medium. Batman has been adapted many times, into several different media such as film serials, radio programs, TV shows, books, and feature films, and from the beginning has been a conglomeration of different elements from popular culture. Batman is an extremely flexible character who has been in a

constant state of evolution since his very first appearance. With every new comic book story and live-action or animated depiction of the character, something new has been brought to the character's ever-growing mythos. They each contributed to the huge canvas that made, and continues to make Batman an interesting and complex character.

This thesis contributes a theoretical and historical examination of adapting comic books to the silver screen to film studies. It has also exposed a topic as seemingly trivial and child-like as Batman and shown that the character is not only sophisticated but also touches on a wealth of important, even scholarly concern. Just because something is popular does not mean that it is below being studied. Not just Batman, but Spider-Man, X-Men and many other superhero film franchises have been underappreciated. Spider-Man deals with a teenage boy coping with his adolescent problems and X-Men deal with racism and bigotry in a way that both edifies and entertains.

This thesis examined only two of the Batman feature films because *Batman* and *Batman Returns* best exemplified the negotiation that takes place between a studio, producers, a director and fans. There are openings for further study within the rest of the Batman motion pictures and especially the Emmy award-winning television show, *Batman: The Animated Series* (1992-1995) and its motion picture, *Batman: Mask of the Phantasm* (1993). It would be insightful to look at the concepts of fidelity when applied to this series, as it could be convincingly argued that to fans of the Batman comic books, *The Animated Series* is the most faithful of all of Batman's media incarnations. *The Animated Series* could be argued to be closest to the core of the character due to the fact that the creators of the series were comic book fans themselves and have a tremendous respect and love for the material. Both *Batman*'s (1989) producers and director were not

Batman comic book fans. In addition, the animated nature of the show also most

approximates the look and feel of a comic book as both are hand drawn images. Finally,

unlike a live-action feature film, the animated series was able to do whatever its creators

could imagine, without budget restrains.

Readers of this thesis should walk away from it with a new respect for the

character of Batman, realizing that the character is a cultural phenomenon and the

difficulty in adapting any "proven property" into a feature film.

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