



MARGINS MARGES MARGINI

Rivista Multilingua
di Studi Letterari, Linguistici e Culturali

Trauma and Transformation in Batman

Bogdan-Alin Imbri

(West University of Timișoara, RO)

Abstract

Trauma makes people better or worse than their original selves. A system of values crumbles. The individual is re-defined and re-invented. Sometimes the 'new man' is so transformed that he/she is completely different from the initial person. The lesson offered by the Batman stories is that the traumatized individual takes either of the following paths: he/she is motivated by the tragic experience to do good (Batman's model), or he/she is embittered by it and, considering the whole world guilty for his/her personal misery, channels all the energies to make everybody else suffer indiscriminately in the same way (the villains' path). Trauma, however, does not engender transformation on its own. As a matter of fact, it rarely provokes extreme reactions whatsoever; therefore, the question 'What turns people into heroes, and what turns others into monsters?' is justified, and the response is more complex than only taking trauma into consideration. In this article, we aim to provide an answer to this question by analysing the transformation undergone by three characters in the Batman mythos, such as the Dark Knight himself, Catwoman, and the Joker, set against the background of their respective traumas. In our approach, we seek to investigate how trauma is reflected and refracted in the cultural and artistic form of comic books, animations, and films, specifically within the Batman imaginary. Our purpose is to examine the ways in which these products of popular culture articulate and model responses to trauma, as well as the forms of guidance they can offer for real-life experience. Our point of focus is the *Batman* mythos because personal tragedy fundamentally shapes the destinies of all its characters, whether heroes or villains.

Keywords: Batman; Catwoman; Joker; trauma; family.

1. Introduction

Traumatic Essence: “Sometimes it's only madness that makes us what we are.” (Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on Serious Earth, November 1989)

Although very freely used as a concept, trauma is not discussed anywhere in terms of definition and description in the official document issues of the American Psychiatric Association, the world's leading authority in this field. The latest edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (referred to as DSM-5-TR from now on), issued by the American Psychiatric Association in 2022, only refers to it in the context of the consequences it produces on the human psyche. Most notably, we infer from the diagnostic criteria of PTSD (Posttraumatic Stress Disorder) what trauma actually is: “Exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence” (DSM-5-TR 2022, 302) This is practically the only explicit description of trauma in psychiatry's main and official instrument, although one does get more than other 1,000 pages on the disorders that trauma engenders. But even with that little, we deduce that trauma is an assault – or a threat thereof – on a person's life, bodily integrity, and sanctity, or exposure thereto.

The rationale behind the choice of these particular characters – Batman, the Joker, and Catwoman – to illustrate the reconfiguration of the self under the pressure of severe emotional impact or existential shocks is that they represent three manifestations through which trauma functions in the *Batman* universe. Batman exemplifies the sublimation of trauma, the Joker embodies its aggressive corruption, while Catwoman is the limbo where the aspiration for the ideal of the normality of happiness (or the happiness of normality) meets the entrapment in a history of iniquitous struggle to survive.

The main focus of this study will be the effects of personal tragedy on their psyche and the transformations it engendered in their lives and personalities as fictional characters and cultural constructs. The choice to pay direct attention to a representational universe comes from our opinion that the complexity of the characters that comprise it

allows us to analyse them from such a multitude of perspectives that they could be regarded as life lessons in personal development as well. In this respect, we have resorted to a source-based analysis and reconstituted these characters' profiles from comics, films, and animations in which they play central roles. By no means do we consider our investigation exhaustive, especially given the limited scope of the essay. A leading authority in the field of superhero psychology is Professor Travis Langley, author of *Batman and Psychology: A Dark and Stormy Knight* (2012), which served as a critical reference for our interpretation, but from which our examination differs in its more applied and specific analysis of character trauma. A more comprehensive exegesis is further developed in our ongoing doctoral research, which addresses archetypal configurations in character construction in the Batman imaginary.

2. Traumatic family: "A home of stolen happiness..." (*Catwoman* #39, 1996, 20)

The overarching Batman mythos is fundamentally rooted in family trauma. In Gotham, both heroes and villains are shaped by formative, often devastating events that occurred within their families during childhood. Batman's parents were murdered in front of him when he was just a little boy (the origin story in *Detective Comics* #33), and his traumatic story appears the simplest and most undisputed. The Joker, on the other hand, is either an abused orphan (Dini et al. 2010–2011¹), a struggling comedian who loses his pregnant wife

¹ When it comes to comic books, which form the essence of this article's corpus, the rendering of the in-text references becomes more problematic than the usual book and article citations for several reasons. First of all, there is never a single person authoring the comic book. While it is true that there is a writer who crafts the story linguistically and narratively, an equal credit also goes to the artist who conveys the story visually, as well as to the inker, colorist, and letterer. That is why we have mentioned all the names of the people involved in authoring a comic book story in the bibliographical list at the end of the article, and we have kept only the writer – followed by the phrase *et al.* – when making the in-text references for the sake of space economy and avoidance of the accumulation of many names that would otherwise be difficult for the reader to follow. Secondly, a great many comic books do not number their pages, which made it impossible for us to indicate the page number where there was none. The absence of such an indication when quoting characters' lines was not an oversight on our part; the page numbers were not present in the comic book from the outset. And thirdly, words and phrases in comic books are often highlighted for stylistic reasons with bolded or italicised formats of lettering by the writers and artists of the story. If such situations



in an explosion (Moore et al. 1988/2019), or a destitute individual battling mental illness, with a harrowing history of neglectful and abusive foster parenting - a man whom poverty and ill health have condemned to a precarious existence on the margins of society and reason (Phillips 2019).

The Catwoman, although not a villain in the traditional sense, cannot be considered a heroine either. Her constant walk along the thin line between law and lawlessness - a waitress/escort (Reeves 2022), a prostitute (Newell et al. 1989), a madam (Miller et al. 1986), or a cat burglar (in the 1992-1995 *Batman: The Animated Series* and Christopher Nolan's 2012 film *The Dark Knight Rises*) - is deeply rooted in a childhood scarred by familial trauma and foster care abuse. Her parentage is uncertain. In some versions, Selina Kyle's mother is psychologically unstable and eventually dies by suicide (Lustbader et al. 1994); in others, she is a bar girl working for mafia boss Carmine Falcone, who arranges her murder when Selina is still a child (Reeves 2022). In this latter narrative, Falcone is also Selina's biological father - something that does not prevent him from trying to kill her too when his power is threatened. Selina's father is variously portrayed in multiple ways as well: as an abusive alcoholic who drinks himself to death, leaving a teenage Selina to discover both her parents' corpses (Carlton et al. 2000), as Carmine Falcone (Loeb et al. 1996-1997), or as another mob boss, Rex "The Lion" Calabrese (Snyder et al. 2014). Yet no matter the version, a background of familial abuse is always present, and she carries the burden of a traumatic past seemingly forever and inescapably. The most benign role Selina has been assigned is that of a quiet, insipid secretary working for a corrupt, ego-maniacal tycoon (Burton 1992). Yet even this incarnation transforms into the most violent and vengeful version of Catwoman, returning from death to get back at those who exploited her.

occurred when quoting from comic books, the author of this present article did not alter this style but kept it as such.



3. Traumatic Love: “Half the bat is *man*, just as half the cat is *woman*.” (*Catwoman* #4, 1989, 16)

The parents represent the child’s first contact with life and the world. These are made known to the child through the mediation of the parents, who are the infant’s first determinant influences and models. And, if one of them is missing, the child (future adult) looks for a substitute in the people met throughout life to compensate for the handicap of not having either the masculine or the feminine side of personality sufficiently developed. But what happens when the individual is deprived of both parents, especially as a consequence of a tragic act, as in Bruce Wayne’s case?

The warmth, nurture, and love of Bruce’s parents towards him, the intensity of the pain caused by their loss, trigger the need for the loved son left behind to reconnect with them and with that lost childhood paradise. For this reason, Bruce subconsciously searches for parental figures who would replace, rectify, make up for, or, at least, attenuate that loss. He, too, as it normally happens in such cases, finds surrogate parents in the persons of Leslie Thompkins and Alfred Pennyworth. They make up Bruce’s family circle of intimacy, and the relationship they have with him is that of a mother and father, respectively, to a son. Leslie and Alfred are the people to whom Bruce turns when his natural parents are taken from his life and who care for him and his personal and educational development. (O’Neil et al. March 1976, Grant et al. Oct. 94).

The individual, throughout his life, looks for close, or personal/intimate, relationships with people who resemble the model of his childhood parents. In some cases, it becomes pathological and, in such situations, we speak of the mother (or father, respectively) complex (Jung 1959/1969). In boys, the mother complex (the pathological aspect of the mother archetype) produces homosexuality, Don Juanism, and sometimes impotence. In girls, the mother complex has two opposite effects: either a hypertrophy of the feminine instinct, or an atrophy of it. The former instance is characterized by either an “overdevelopment of Eros” (Jung 1959/1969, 88) or an exaggeration of the maternal



element, as part of an “intensification of all female instincts” (Jung 1959/1969, 87). The overdevelopment of the feminine *eros* comes hand in hand with an unconscious incestuous projection of the relation with the father as the first male presence in a girl’s life and world, and, hence, with jealousy of the mother with whom she is in a life-long competition for the father. In Jung’s view, this type of woman is characterized by utter unconsciousness, as it favours exalting and passionate relationships for their intense romantic substance and nothing else. They lack the maternal instinct, a reminder of their mother, and they are especially fascinated with married men for the thrilling pleasure of breaking marriages (as they would do with their father’s relationship with their mother). When they reach this goal, their interest rapidly fades away once they have separated the father from the mother. They are particularly appealing to men with very limited sexual life who find in such women the projection of their own anima (the feminine part of their psyche) (Jung 1959/1969, 106-107).

In Batman’s world, this type of woman is represented by Catwoman. Rapturously beautiful and sensual, she is uncontrollably drawn to the inaccessible Batman and to stealing as a *modus vivendi*. She never has any intention of being a spiteful criminal but ends up on the wrong side of the law because of her total, and quite ingénue, oblivion of any ethical or moral prescriptions. This is what actually makes her intensely feminine and attractive to Batman and other men. Catwoman is instinctively good, but instinctually bad. She knows theft is a crime, yet she still does it even when her means are more than enough for a good life. Such life becomes uninteresting to her eventually, so she finds herself unable to resist the constant temptation of spicing it up. She can never reform; any such attempts fail all the time because her nature is always stronger than reason (represented by Batman and the law). One of her symbolic images is the cat, a highly independent feline who is characterized by mystery, agility, grace, versatility, curiosity, but also by selfishness and attention-seeking. Since the cat meets all the attributes of the unconscious, it is also considered a traveller between two worlds: the known and the unknown, the



conscious and the unconscious, life and death, which explains Catwoman's (literal) acrobatics between the two sides of the law with the desire of being part of both but actually belonging to neither. The cat is Selina's totem of strength. It is empowering just like the bat is for Bruce, not simply to scare others: "A long time ago, before I put on this mask, I was afraid of everything." (Grayson et al. July 1998)

To Batman/Bruce Wayne, Catwoman/Selina poses an inexplicable attraction since she operates in the world of the criminals against whom he has committed his lifetime to fight, and since she inspires him absolutely zero trust. In the Golden Age, Batman is totally smitten with her wild femininity (Finger et al. June 1940) and often lets her get away (Finger et al. March 1940) while Catwoman, too, has reveries of the mysterious, testosterone-filled Dark Knight who exerts upon her his saviour complex (Finger et al. September 1940, 13). In the subsequent eras, the two have frequent amorous encounters on the rooftops of Gotham and eventually mature and manage to get married and have a child. Their daughter, not in the least surprising at this point of our discourse, takes up her father's crime-fighting mission and is in irreconcilable conflict with her mother over the father: [Selina to her daughter:] "Soon I'll be dead. You'll have everything. But I'll have your father, so I'll be fine." (King et al. August 2022).

Catwoman's penchant for stealing, although becoming quite obsessive-compulsive at a certain point ("I could steal the world blind, from alleys to penthouses, and it still wouldn't be enough. I am a thief -- and stealing is what I do. Not so much for the prize or the possession or even the profit... but for the art of doing it..." - Moench et al. Oct. 1996, 2), is not an inborn impulse, but an instrumental modality of ensuring basic needs, about which people like Bruce Wayne, for instance, do not have to worry (Langley 2012, 264). It is the element which, more than crime, separates Batman and Catwoman's worlds incorrigibly and aggravates their perception of such respective spheres: "But we've been at odds from the start [...] Because my world is all just shades of grey, Batman. That's why you'll never really understand me. It's about good people being forced into bad situations.

That's my territory... In between right and wrong. Which is a place you can never go. And we both know it." (Brubaker et al. January 2002, 13-14).

We cannot help but notice in her evolution the repercussions of a troubled childhood: the preference for living the moment although that unconscious unbridled instinct most often leads her to trouble, or worse – in prison, after witnessing the fragility of life with the discovery of her parents' corpses; the impossibility to be part of a structured social system as a result of a long record of maltreatment in foster institutions; the inability to form bonds and relationships because of her aggressive self-sufficiency and chronic mistrust in people; and the repeated failure to remodel as a law-abiding citizen on account of her incapability to follow reason to the detriment of impulse despite conscious positioning on the side of good nearly all the time. Just like in Batman's case, the costume enables her to fight back at the cruel world and its merciless unfairness: "I can't take it. But she can. The Catwoman -- she can stand it all. Everything crummy that life can throw at her, she just throws it right back -- and it doesn't even faze her -- Nothing hurts her -- It's like she's dead -- Oh, Maggie -- it's so much easier being dead!" (Newell et al. 1989, 9)

Nevertheless, Batman falls in love with her, both for her neurotic sexuality (a reminder of his mother) and her good nature (consonant with his hope in people), and, after constant fruitless efforts to have her reformed, he accepts her for who she is. Surprisingly, that is the moment Catwoman starts operating exclusively within the law, or at least in its interest, which is an indicator of both her and Batman's maturation. To anthropologist Joseph Campbell, the acceptance of womanhood is the prerequisite for veritable manhood and heroism, and meeting with the feminine principle is finding love, life, and eternity (Campbell 2004, 106, 109).

4. Traumatic Joy: "Why be a disfigured outcast when I can be a notorious Crime God?" (*Batman* #663, April 2007)

Ever since his first appearance in *Batman* #1 (March 1940), the Joker has been redefined through multiple personas and biographical frameworks. Despite the myriad complex origin stories surrounding the Joker, a core theme emerges from them all: family trauma as the catalyst for the destiny of an individual with a fragile psyche, one who, moreover, does not grow up in a healthy social environment. According to the *DSM-5-TR*, pre-, peri-, and post-traumatic factors – including here a person’s moral and educational background, familial and community support, access to medical care, and the spiritual or cultural traditions they are accustomed to – are decisive in shaping the individuals’ response to tragedy. In the absence of these protective factors, a trauma victim may struggle to cope with PTSD symptoms, which are likely to persist for a very long time, potentially for life. This can result in severe depression (“All I have are negative thoughts,” Arthur tells his therapist in *Joker*, Todd Phillips’ film from 2019) bordering on suicidal ideation, with more than half of such cases ending in suicide², or may lead to the development of undesirable personality traits and inclinations, including violent behaviours such as serial killing (Simpson 2017).

Taking all of these factors into consideration, the course that the life of Bruce Wayne and of the persons who became villains – and who undertook similar traumas – have taken can be understood in a much clearer light. If Bruce Wayne transformed his grief – thanks to his family wealth, and to the warm encouraging support from Alfred and Dr. Leslie Thompkins – into a powerful and meaningful mission of fighting crime and protecting the innocent, the others, who did not benefit from appropriate medical or social support and, moreover, were economically forced to live a precarious marginal life, became Gotham’s most vicious criminals and Batman’s most ruthless villains.

The multitude of backstories and identities with regards to the Joker, and his own inconsistencies about his past (“If I’m going to have a past, I prefer it to be multiple choice!

² 54% of the people suffering from PTSD commit suicide because of the psychological condition and no other comorbidities (Gillette 2022). The statistics are for the USA in the absence of any other scientific data at a global level.



Ha Ha Ha!" – Moore et al. 1988/2019) do confuse us, but, at the same time, are indicative of his mental lability and his own take on reality. Ultimately, the matter of Joker telling the truth is not that important after all, simply because truth is so relative and subject to so many influences. Although many might label his perception of the world as insane, there is nothing in his arguments that we could exclude as crazy. It is just different from long-established mainstream dogma: "I'm not mad at all! I'm just differently sane!!" (Morrison et al. Aug. 2010). On the contrary, the Joker's popularity among real-life fans owes a great deal to the lucidity with which he expresses his philosophy of life as a new kind of enlightenment. Dr. Ruth Adams, a psychiatrist in Arkham Asylum, actually considers the Joker as the next (superior) link in the evolution of humanity, one which displays a developed form of sanity, which she calls "super-sanity": "It's quite possible we may actually be looking at some kind of super-sanity here. A brilliant new modification of human perception, more suited to urban life at the end of the twentieth century." (Morrison et al. 1989)

As fictional as Dr. Adams as a character in a graphic novel might be, and as unreliable her statement might therefore seem, psychopaths are not necessarily the heartless serial killers that people see in the mass media. They are also the modern individuals who, given the new dynamics and innovations, have developed certain adaptive mechanisms. These psychological and behavioural adjustments ensure them not only survival, but also success in the contemporary world by being less immune to empathy, emotion, risk, danger, fear, and doubt than other people (Dutton 2020).

Legally, the Joker is not a serial killer because, although he kills people, there is rarely an established pattern that would make up for a series of related obsessive-compulsive murders. If there is anything similar about the killings that the Joker performs is the fact that many die at the same time, either from explosions or his laughing gas. He would more arguably count as a mass murderer, responsible for terrorism, than a serial killer.



And medically, the notions of psychopath or a sociopath – which we might feel inclined to use in connection with the Joker – do not, as perplexing as that might appear, even exist in psychiatry! At least one will never find them in the *DSM*, psychiatry's official manual. Since psychopathy does not carry an entirely negative load (Dutton 2020), the *DSM-5-TR* advances the term “Antisocial Personality Disorder” (APD) which can get closer to the notion of criminally insane that Arkham Asylum is built for, but with the same reserve that even this condition – which would justify the Joker's confinement in the Asylum – rarely manifests itself in criminal behaviour or even insanity whatsoever.

Antisocial Personality Disorder is, according to the *DSM* diagnostic criteria, “a pervasive pattern of disregard for and violation of the rights of others,” which manifests itself in: “failure to conform to social norms with respect to lawful behaviors,” (proven by repeated actions that are susceptible for arrest), “deceitfulness” (attested by compulsive lying, use of different identities, and manipulating others for personal gains), “impulsivity or failure to plan ahead,” “irritability and aggressiveness,” “reckless disregard for safety of self or others,” “consistent irresponsibility” (indicated by constantly being in and out of work, or inability to uphold economic responsibilities), and “lack of remorse” (evidenced by indifference, superficiality in justifying reprievable acts, lack of empathy and regret) (*DSM-5-TR* 2022, 749).

Everything the Joker does (from theft to murder) is in disregard and violation of the rights of others (even if only for people's right to make a personal choice), he exists as “an agent of chaos” (Nolan 2008) and as a rule-breaker, and that is the crux of his philosophy: “the only sensible way to live in this world is without rules. And tonight you're going to break your one rule.” (Nolan 2008) The Joker is a mythomaniac, a compulsive liar; he assumes different identities and multiple – most, if not all of them, bogus – origin stories, either as a strategy of escape and survival, or as an elaborate plan of deceit. He is a master manipulator; he does not love anybody, not even Harley Quinn, treating her as a slave subjugated to his will, useful only inasmuch as she serves his interests, such as helping

him to escape from Arkham and carrying out his plans. Yet, right after he does not need her any longer, he either abuses her verbally and physically: “We’re not equals; I’m always your superior, and you do as you’re told!” (Dini and Cadigan, as cited in Kusko and Husmann 2025, 203), or even tries to kill her, such as *The Final Joke*, season 1 of *Harley Quinn* (2020).

He has mood swings that qualify him for bipolar disorder (*DSM-5-TR* 2022, 140-160) as well, his state often shifting from mania (hyper-excitability and ego-eccentricity) to major depressive episodes, like the one described in *Lovers and Madmen*, when he genuinely wants to die out of boredom and loss of interest for anything in life (Green et al. 2007-2008). He does display expressions of impulsivity, irritability, and aggression in the form of violence and abuse (physical, psychological, and verbal), but, in the Joker, they seem to be more of a deliberate manifestation, rather than a natural one.

In what job irresponsibility is concerned, it is true that the Joker does not have one, and he is repeatedly in and out of prison, which would make him unfit to hold a job, provide for a family, or honour financial obligations. Even as ‘Jack’, he changed workplaces and had not been doing well in any of them, losing interest as soon as drawbacks came into sight or monotony settled in. But, once he has become the Joker, he is past those responsibilities that do not bother him anymore, and has become extremely skilled at devising plots to destroy Gotham. The matter of financial accountability eludes him as he places no value on money. In *The Dark Knight* (2008), he robs the mob’s bank simply to burn the loot shortly afterward. To him, material gain is not important: “It’s not about the money. It’s about sending a message.” (Nolan 2008)

Empathy evades the Joker, as it probably did the people who caused the tragedies that created him. Similarly, the Joker is unfazed by any human feelings, except, probably, selfishness. But, in the case of psychopaths, the drive takes precedence over feelings for other people, even over the self, as a matter of fact (Dutton 2020). The Joker does not laugh only when he kills other people, he is laughing even when *he* is dying, such as illustrated



in the 1986 *The Dark Knight Returns* comic-book miniseries where, after Batman beats him to near death, the Joker finishes himself off by twisting his own spine laughingly simply for Batman to be accused of murder and publicly defamed. Given this understanding, the explanation for the Joker using toxic gas that makes people laugh themselves to death suddenly makes a lot more sense. Laughter is not happiness to the Joker; his broad grin is definitely not jolly. At best, it is oblivion, and, in its most frequent occurrence, it is death.

He feels no remorse for what he does to people, be they guilty or innocent. If faultless people have to die along with the ones he intends to kill just to prove a point, he has no problem with it. They are simply collateral damage, meaningless statistics sacrificed for an utterly senseless personal revenge. "They [psychopaths] do emotions by numbers," a senior forensic psychiatrist tells Dr. Kevin Dutton (Dutton 2020, 51). And they like playing games with people, just like the Joker loves to juggle with innocent lives to prove that civilization is actually a dark place where people "are only as good as the world allows them to be", whose morals are "dropped at the first sign of trouble," and who, "when the chips are down, [...] they'll eat each other." (Nolan 2008) To prove that "these civilized people" are no better than he is and that they can be "brought down to [his] level", the Joker orchestrates several criminal plots centred around illusory moral choices: between the life of one person or another (Rachel or Harvey), or between a ferry full of ordinary citizens and one carrying convicts. These gambits are, in fact, the kinds of games psychiatrist Kevin Dutton suggests are devised *by* psychopaths *for* psychopaths (Dutton 2020).

The Joker easily meets all the "symptoms". Out of all seven enumerated for the diagnosis of APD, the *DSM* states that three are enough... However, there is one sub-criterion that does not apply to the Joker, and that is the "impossibility or failure to plan ahead". Although it might seem, based on his mood swings and his making it all sound like a big joke ("Do I really look like a guy with a plan? You know what I am? I'm a dog chasing cars. I wouldn't know what to do with one if I caught it." – Nolan 2008), that the



Joker does everything on the spur of the moment driven by whatever is going through his mind at the moment, a closer look at his actions show quite the contrary: everything is very carefully planned and sorted out, including the backup plans for potential contingencies. Think only of the many times he escapes when Batman and the police foil his murderous conspiracies using a back or trap door, a secret vehicle or small chopper close at hand, or a hidden underground passage.

In *The Dark Knight*, the Joker has a thorough plan of corrupting the essence of Harvey Dent, Gotham's fearless prosecutor, and he goes through with it even when he is captured. Moreover, when he tries to show Batman and Gotham that, given the occasion, all people abandon the civilization polish and turn to survival animal instincts, as he did with Harvey, but his ferry experiment to prove it fails, he has a detonator himself at hand to blow up both ferryboats: "You can't rely on anyone these days, you got to do everything yourself, don't we? But that's ok, I came prepared. It's a funny world we live in." (Nolan 2008)

Damian Wayne, Bruce's son and third Robin, being trained as an assassin in his grandfather's League of Shadows, therefore knowledgeable of all the tricks of the trade and perceptive of all the subtleties of human emotions, reads the Joker perfectly: "You say you're a force of chaos and you don't plan anything. It just happens. But I've read your files and everything's a plan." (Morrison et al. Aug. 2010) So, taking the *DSM's* criteria, applying them to the Joker, and then analysing the result, we can draw the conclusion that he is criminally antisocial, not that he is criminally insane. Internment at Arkham is therefore unjustifiable in his case.

5. Conclusions: "There are no innocents in the dark city." (*Detective Comics* #673, 1994, 11)

We have chosen these three characters in particular, Batman, Catwoman, and the Joker, for our analysis of the effects of trauma on the individual's psyche and life, because we



consider them representative of the transformative force of trauma. The conclusion, after briefly examining their biographies, psychological profiles, and behaviours, is that people evolve differently after one or more episodes of tragic challenges in their lives. Batman sublimates suffering and becomes a hero for fellow sufferers, the Joker is crushed by anguish and projects it onto the world, finding some sort of alleviation in inflicting the same pain on others, while the Catwoman walks on the very thin thread between good and evil that neither saves her from her past, nor allows her the peace of a lawful existence. Their life stories are case studies not only for popular fiction aficionados but also for psychologists, philosophers, and sociologists. It is certainly a theme for more in-depth research since popular fiction, such as comic books and films, has had multiple creators and re-creators over time. Each of their respective contributions illustrates the connection between trauma and biography from several perspectives and in various contexts. According to our personal research, to be further developed in a doctoral thesis, the evolution of these characters under the impact of trauma proves that tragedy is not enough to shake the individual to the core, but, combined with socio-economic factors and psychological history, it has the potential to transform destinies in unimaginable ways – crafting heroes, or birthing monsters.

Bibliography

Books and articles

- American Psychiatric Association. 2022. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5-TR*. 5th revised edition. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association Publishing.
- Campbell, Joseph. 2004. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Novato, CA: New World Library.
- Dutton, Kevin. 2020 (2012). *The Wisdom of Psychopaths: What Saints, Spies, and Serial Killers Can Teach Us About Success*. London: Penguin Random House.
- Jung, Carl Gustav. 1969 (1959). *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. Collected Works Vol. 9, Part 1. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.



- Kusko, Elizabeth and Caleb McGee Husmann. 2025. ““Puddin’” Her Place: Harley Quinn as Joker’s Enslaved Lover.” In *Joker and Philosophy. Why So Serious?*, edited by Massimiliano L. Cappuccio, George A. Dunn, and Jason T. Eberl, 199-206. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Langley, Travis. 2012. *Batman and Psychology: A Dark and Stormy Knight*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Simpson, Paul. 2017. *The Serial Killer Files*. London: Robinson / Little, Brown Book Group Limited.
- Hope Gillette (Medically reviewed by Bethany Juby, PsyD). 2022. *The Link Between PTSD and Suicide*. <https://psychcentral.com/ptsd/ptsd-suicide>.
- World Health Organization. 2024. “Post-traumatic stress disorder.” <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/post-traumatic-stress-disorder>.

Comic Books and Graphic Novels

- Brubaker, Ed (writer), Darwyn Cooke, Michael Allred (artists), Matt Hollingsworth (colors), Sean Konot (letterer). 2002. “Anodyne.” *Catwoman* 3, no. 1. DC Comics.
- Carlton, Bronwyn (writer), Staz Johnson (penciler), Wayne Faucher (inker), Roberta Tewes-Jamison (colorist), Albert DeGuzman (letterer). 2000. “It’s a Wonderful Life.” *Catwoman* 2, no. 81. DC Comics.
- Dini, Paul (writer), Dustin Nguyen (penciler), Derek Fridolfs (inker), John Kalisz (colorist), Steve Wands (letterer). 2010–2011. “The House of Hush.” *Batman: Streets of Gotham* 1, no. 16–21. DC Comics.
- Dixon, Chuck (writer), Graham Nolan (penciler), Scott Hanna (inker), Adrienne Roy (colorist), John Costanza (letterer). 1994. “Losing the Light”. *Detective Comics* 1, no. 673: 1-22. DC Comics
- Finger, Bill (writer), Bob Kane (penciler), Jerry Robinson and George Roussos (inkers), George Roussos (letterer). 1940a. “The Batman vs The Cat-Woman.” *Batman* 1, no. 3. DC Comics.
- . 1940b. “The Joker Meets the Cat-Woman.” *Batman* 1, no. 2. DC Comics.
- Finger, Bill (writer), Bob Kane (penciler), Sheldon Moldoff (inker and letterer). 1940. “The Cat.” *Batman* 1, no. 1. DC Comics.
- Finger, Bill (writer), Gardner Fox (writer), Bob Kane (penciler), Sheldon Moldoff (penciler), Bob Kane (inker), Sheldon Moldoff (letterer). 1939. “The Batman Wars Against the Dirigible of Doom.” *Detective Comics* 1, no. 33. DC Comics.
- Grant, Alan (writer), Bret Blevins (penciler and inker), Adrienne Roy (colorist), Todd Klein (letterer). 1994. “Zero Hour: The Beginning of Tomorrow.” *Batman: Shadow of the Bat* 2, no. 0. DC Comics.



- Grayson, Devin (writer), Jim Balent (penciler), John Stanisci (inker), Roberta Tewes (colorist), Albert DeGuzman (letterer). 1998. "Only Happy When It Rains: Fight or Flight." *Catwoman* 2, no. 59. DC Comics.
- Green, Michael (writer), Denys Cowan (penciler). 2007–2008. "Lovers and Madmen." *Batman Confidential* 1, nos. 7–12. DC Comics.
- King, Tom (writer), Clay Mann (penciler and inker), Tomeu Morey (colorist), Clayton Cowles (letterer). 2022. "The Bat & The Cat, Chapter 12: O Holy Night." *Batman/Catwoman* 1, no. 12. DC Comics.
- Loeb, Jeph (writer), Tim Sale (artist), Gregory Wright (colors), Richard Starkings and Comicraft (letters). 1996–1997. *Batman: The Long Halloween*. Deluxe edition. Burbank: DC Comics.
- Lustbader, Eric (writer), Don Maitz (cover artist), Lee Moder (penciler), Scott Hanna (inker), Lovern Kindzierski (colorist), Todd Klein (letterer). 1994. *Batman: The Last Angel*. DC Comics.
- Miller, Frank (writer, penciler), Klaus Janson (inker), Lynn Varley (colorist), John Costanza (letterer). 2016 (1986). *The Dark Knight Returns*. 30th anniversary edition. Burbank: DC Comics.
- Moench, Doug (writer), Jim Balent (penciler), Mark Pennington (inker), Buzz Setzer (colorist), Albert DeGuzman (letterer). 1996a. "Year 2, Part Two: Night Moves." *Catwoman* 2, no. 39. DC Comics.
- . 1996b. "Grey in the Dark." *Catwoman* 2, no. 38–39. DC Comics.
- Moore, Alan (writer), Brian Bolland (penciler, inker), John Higgins (colorist), Richard Starkings (letterer). 2019 (1988). *Batman: The Killing Joke*. Deluxe edition. Burbank: DC Comics.
- Morrison, Grant (writer), Dave McKean (penciler, inker, colorist), Gaspar Saladino (letterer). 2020 (1989). *Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on Serious Earth*. New edition. New York: DC Comics.
- Morrison, Grant (writer), Frazer Irving (penciler, inker), Alex Sinclair (colorist), Pat Brosseau (letterer). 2010. "Batman and Robin Must Die, Part One: The Garden Death." *Batman and Robin* 1, no. 13. DC Comics.
- Newell, Mindy, J.J. Birch, Michael Bair. 1989. "Catwoman: Her Sister's Keeper." *Catwoman* 1, no. 1–4. DC Comics.
- O'Neil, Dennis (writer), Dick Giordano (penciler), Dick Giordano and Terry Austin (inkers), Ben Oda (letterer). 1976. "There Is No Hope in Crime Alley!" *Detective Comics* 1, no. 457. DC Comics.
- Snyder, Scott, James Tynion, Tim Seeley, Ray Fawkes, Kyle Higgins (writers), Dustin Nguyen (penciler), Derek Fridolfs (inker), John Kalisz (colorist), Steve Wands (letterer). 2014. "Lioness." *Batman Eternal* 1, no. 23. DC Comics.

Films



MARGINS MARGES MARGINI
Rivista Multilingue
di Studi Letterari, Linguistici e Culturali

Batman. Directed by Tim Burton. Burbank, CA: Warner Bros., 1992.

The Dark Knight. Directed by Christopher Nolan. Burbank, CA: Warner Bros., 2008.

The Dark Knight Rises. Directed by Christopher Nolan. Burbank, CA: Warner Bros., 2012.

Joker. Directed by Todd Phillips. Burbank, CA: Warner Bros., 2019.

The Batman. Directed by Matt Reeves. Burbank, CA: Warner Bros., 2022.

Animations

"The Cat and the Claw, Part I and II." *Batman: The Animated Series*. Directed by Kevin Altieri and Dick Sebast. Aired September 5 and 12, 1992.

"Cat Scratch Fever." *Batman: The Animated Series*. Directed by Boyd Kirkland. Aired November 5, 1992.

"Catwalk." *Batman: The Animated Series*. Directed by Boyd Kirkland. Aired September 13, 1995.

"The Final Joke." *Harley Quinn*. Directed by Brandon McKinney. Aired February 21, 2020.



MARGINS MARGES MARGINI
Rivista Multilingue
di Studi Letterari, Linguistici e Culturali

Bio-bibliographical note

Bogdan-Alin Imbri is a doctoral student in Humanities at the West University of Timișoara, carrying out a thesis on Batman. He is a 1st degree tenured teacher of English at the “General Dragalina” High School in Oravița, and edits the *Jurnal de Liceu* magazine of his school. He participated in conferences in Timișoara, Brașov, Cluj-Napoca, Bucharest, Rome, and Kraków. Besides publishing didactic materials and articles on Batman and history, he authored a course on *British and American Culture and Civilization* for secondary school students and a book on the American Mafia: *All In The Family. A History of The Five Mafia Families. From Sicily to New York* (2025).

Email address: bogdan.imbri87@e-uvt.ro