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The Changing Image of Batman in Comic Books and Movies

Praca magisterska napisana pod kierunkiem dra Piotra Borkowskiego

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Ja, niżej podpisana Joanna Hebda (nr albumu 21031), studentka Wydziału Kulturoznawstwa i Filologii Szkoły Wyższej Psychologii Społecznej, świadoma odpowiedzialności oświadczam, że przedłożona przeze mnie do obrony praca magisterska została napisana przeze mnie samodzielnie.

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Warszawa, dn. . . . .

                                                                        podpis studentki

Pracę tę dedykuję moim rodzicom i Maćkowi,
bez których wsparcia jej powstanie nie było by możliwe
oraz Michałowi Chudolińskiemu
w podzięce za ogromną pomoc.

Table of contents:

PREFACE

Superman is the way America sees itself,
but Batman is the way the world sees America
– Michael Caine (Svetkey, Nolan)

The aim of this thesis is to describe the changes in the image of Batman and to find the reasons behind them, focusing on the influence of political, social, economic, and cultural changes, along with the important historical events in the years 1939 (first appearance of the superhero) to 2013 (the end of Grant Morrison's Leviathan story arc). It will also mention more universal themes and other analytical tropes that appear in the media connected to the Dark Knight.

In Chapter 1, I will analyze the 74 years history of Batman comic books and the evolution of the character in them. In my research, I focused on the *Batman* and *Detective Comics* series, along with other in-continuity, Earth-One/New Earth series, like *World's Finest Comics*, *Batman and Robin*, *Batman, Inc.*, *Shadow of the Bat*, etc. and two most important graphic novels about the character, Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* and Alan Moore's *The Killing Joke*. I have refrained from analyzing numerous spin-off series about other Gotham's vigilantes, villains, and citizens, like *Robin*, *Catwoman*, *Gotham Sirens* or *Joker*, and team-up series, as I am focusing on the character of Bruce Wayne and his relation to the world presented in the stories. I also omitted stories that are set in DC's alternative universes, like Earth-Two, and the ones out of continuity, as they often differ in the interpretation of the character and experiment with him, and they are not relevant to the "official" take on the superhero at the time.

In Chapter 2, I will discuss seven Batman movies, all produced by Warner Bros., and directed by three directors: Tim Burton, Joel Schumacher, and Christopher Nolan. The reason behind choosing live action movies as the second Batman medium to analyze is the fact that they have the biggest potential audience; cinema and TV are still the most massive

media, reaching far more people than the comics or video games. Additionally, the animated TV series and full-length films, artistic and great as they are, have not reached as much audience as the live action movies had. As for the earlier attempts to portray Batman on celluloid (1943, 1949, 1966) are substandard, as they do not contain all of the elements of the character; the 1943 movie series is analyzed briefly in Chapter 1 in the part about WWII propaganda in Batman; 1949 *Batman and Robin* has been basically forgotten; the 1966 movie, along with the TV series, are mentioned in the part about the late 1960s campiness of the comics.

Burton's and Nolan's visions of Batman are both significant, artistic, but very different approaches towards analyzing the character, partly because the drastic changes in the US history in the years separating them; the authors' concepts, although separate from the continuity of the comic books, were inspired by them and had influence on them (Chudoliński 2012, 9). Joel Schumacher's films, although not very artistic, are also signs of some changes in the American society in the late 1990s and are, in some ways, continuations of the series started by Burton.

I have chosen Batman for two reasons. Firstly, he is one of few superheroes who have been appearing without any break since the times of WWII, and the long life of this character enables me to analyze a big part of history of American culture. Secondly, he is a different character from other superheroes, as he is human. Unbelievably rich, trained in all martial arts invented by humans, and with enormous knowledge and intelligence, but still human: traumatized, obsessed, dark. This allows the authors to have many interpretations, bending the character to the times he is supposed to represent and to create an interesting, deep, psychological portrait of him. Moreover, the dark image of the Caped Crusader is the best way to express the nation's demons, such as they are at the time, filling the stories at the same time with universal, symbolic imagery.

The American society, being a young nation consisting of immigrants (Native American culture being practically destroyed and significant to the few remaining descendants), needed its mythology. The superheroes became the American pantheon (Ruzicka, 1). Some of them were directly inspired by Greek or Norse mythology (Wonder Woman, Thor), some were created from other influences, but they more or less consciously copied several mythological motifs. Batman is one of them, although his humanity makes him less of a god, and more of a hero type.

According to Joseph Campbell, for a hero to become one, he must lack something or to have something taken from him; then he sets out for an adventure to get it back or to find a sense of life (196). Moreover, the transformation into a hero very often takes place in darkness, like in the myth about Jonas (231); they need their journey to abandon the old order and find the foundations of a new one (215). His aim cannot be ecstasy, fame, and freedom for himself, but service to others (10); they are giving their lives to causes bigger than themselves (196). When a hero comes back from his journey, the people do not know what to do with the gift he offers them; thus they cast him out; they also recruit apprentices to continue his work (222). All those elements can be seen in the history of Bruce's childhood, his calling for fighting the crime in Gotham, and his transformation into Batman.

Moreover, a hero's development and journey is connected to leaving the mother and trying to find the father (218). In Bruce's memories, the mother is either absent, or she is a silent and insignificant figure; the father is the angel, the perfect human being: kind, wise, strong, charitable (Chudoliński, Czernuszczyk). Bruce perceives his role as Batman as not only a way to avenge his parents or to serve the people of Gotham, but also to live up to the standards his father, idealized in his memories, established for him. As Thomas Wayne cured Gotham's citizens from illnesses, Bruce Wayne cures the city from crime.

A hero is needed to bring order, to integrate the society (Campbell, 211); mythology and ethos help the people to unite, creating rites of passage which mark the transition into adulthood: without them, young people do not feel part of the society, which may result in tragic consequences (27-28). The comic book superheroes are the mythological heroes of modern, urbanized America and beyond: with the expansion of the US pop culture in the 20th century, the country's beliefs and new gods were transported with them. What is more, for the generations born towards the end of the previous century (1970s and 1980s), the comic books became the source of moral rules and life ethics (Chudoliński 2012, 28); thus, it is important to analyze the medium and to understand it.

CHAPTER 1:

The Comic Books

Two shots killed my father. I was ten years old.
The third bullet left a smoking hole in my mother's new fur coat.
It left a hole in me.
− Bruce Wayne, *Batman, Inc.* #13 (September 2013)

1.1. The Golden Age: 1939-1945

Batman, as many of the superheroes, was created at the end of 1930s, during the second wave of the biggest worldwide financial crisis in history, called the Great Depression. This, of course, is not a coincidence: superheroes fought with the evil for ten-fifteen cents a book, which was not much, given that it provided children and teenagers with entertainment and let them forget for a while about the grim world outside.

From the start, Batman differed from other superheroes, as he was not an effect of mutation, medical experiments, nor was he an alien. He has no special superpowers, only the ultimate human strength and intelligence. This, combined with Bruce Wayne's wealth enabling him to use elaborate technology, makes him a great crime-fighter. From his first appearance, in issue #27 of *Detective Comics*, Batman was a dark figure in his gray and black costume resembling one of the scariest creatures of the night and he had the fame of an outcast, an avenger on crime who is not accepted by the establishment.

In the first stages, Bob Kane intended his superhero to be a figure similar to DC's most successful character, Superman, but more down-to-earth, as he was to be featured in the *Detective Comics* series. At first, Batman's outfit was to be similar to the one of the first superhero invented for the comics. After a brainstorm with Bill Finger, however, Kane found new inspirations: the drawing of the Da Vinci's flying machines, Zorro played by Douglas Fairbanks in *The Mask of Zorro* and a then popular play and movie called simply *The Bat*. What is more, people dressed as a bat were often portrayed in pulp fiction

magazines, which were the ancestors of comic books. This, with the outfit and color suggestions from the first Batman scriptwriter, Finger, created the Batman we know (or almost know, as Kane learned to draw on the Batman comics) (Daniels, 16-17).

In the first issues, Batman's origins are not known. In the *Detective Comics* #33 we learn about the classic history of Bruce Wayne: we see his parents killed by a crook who wants to steal Mrs. Wayne's necklace and little Bruce watching it; then, we see briefly that he has developed his body and mind to the highest ability a man can achieve. The last thing for Wayne to do is to choose his disguise. At the moment he thinks that "criminals are a superstitious, cowardly lot, so my disguise must be able to strike terror into their hearts" (*Detective Comics* #33, 4), a bat flies into his room, giving him the idea of what he will become. This sequence would be reprinted in the later comics about Batman which reminded of the origins of the Dark Knight. Moreover, we learn from the story that although Wayne has inherited a fortune, he works as a journalist (like Clark Kent, Superman's human alter ego). In later issues, we do not see Bruce working, he seems to play a rather lazy and dumb figure to cover his night activities.

When it comes to the relations with the police, for the first two years they are not good. Batman has to run away when the police arrives: in *Batman* #6 he explains that "The police aren't as yet exactly too fond of my slightly different way in fighting crime"; he is also suspected of committing the crime he tries to prevent in *Detective Comics* #28. The stigma goes on even until 1942, when in *Detective Comics* #65 he meets a state trooper who thinks that Batman killed his father, who was a crook. Indeed, in the first year and a half of his activity, Batman killed his opponents, not showing any regret, like in his first comic, or showing it, but nevertheless killing, like in *Batman* #1: "As much as I hate to take human life, I'm afraid this time it's necessary!" (24). Since the issue #3 (Fall 1940), Batman got a killing restriction from Whitney Ellsworth, DC's editorial director (Daniels, 42, Brooker, 60). A year later, Batman loses his outlaw status, as in *Batman* #7 (October-November 1941), he receives the title of a honorary policeman from Commissioner Gordon. In issue #12 of the series (August-September 1942) the Dark Knight is a celebrated member of Gotham community: there is a Batman Day with a parade, Batman also receives a statue.

Those changes were caused not only because of the creators' or the editors' views on what should Batman be, but also because the rapidly increasing popularity of comic

books among the young turned the public interest to their contents. In May 1940, literary critic Sterling North published in *Chicago Daily News* a harsh critique of the new medium. The article gained immense popularity: it was reprinted even a year later after its publication, and letters of complaint were sent in large numbers to comic books publishers (Brooker, 61-63). The transformation of the character was summed up by a manifesto in *Batman* #3, in which the avenger underlines that he only fights crime because of his love for America, not because of any personal reasons (Brooker, 65, *Batman* #3, 53). This is nothing surprising, as the sales were enormous: a study in the 1940s showed that 95 percent of boys and 91 percent of girls, along with 41 percent of adult men and 28 percent of adult women read comic books (Kelley, 1).

The change in Batman's morality coincides with the appearance of his teenage sidekick, Robin (*Detective Comics* #38, April 1940). Born Dick Grayson, he was a son of a family of acrobats who got killed by gangsters demanding being paid for "protection" by a circus owner. Dick is taken by Batman to Wayne's mansion and there he learns the superhero's true identity and takes the role of Batman's aide, wearing a colorful, green-red-and-yellow costume. Both his nickname and his outfit were inspired by Robin Hood, another character played by Fairbanks (Daniels, 38).

Making a teenage boy one of the two main characters in a series of comics targeted at children and teenagers was a great idea when it comes to marketing: the sales doubled (42). Robin introduced a lighter and brighter mood to the stories with his enthusiasm and puns (which now sound a little bit cheesy, but were in accordance with the pulp tone of the whole superhero industry). For Dick, investigating crime was not a way of revenge for his family's deaths, but just a big adventure, the best experience a teenage boy can have. He was also Watson to Bruce's Holmes, giving the lonely millionaire an opportunity to talk to him and explain his way of thinking. What is more, even Batman's looks change: he is more muscular, his face becomes wider, the costume's ears shorter – with those changes the superhero loses his devilish or vampirish looks. Kane was not really enthusiastic about the changes introduced to the series, as he liked the dark mood of the first comic books (42). It has to be admitted, though, that Robin in a way fulfilled the character of Batman, whose personality and outfit were then crystallizing after the initial period of confusion. For example, in the comic which introduces Robin, we learn that Batman's actions are supported by people, which was not so obvious at the beginning. Moreover, the action of

every comic turned to much more fighting and less talking, introducing a scheme which will soon be characteristic for Finger's scripts of three fights between the duo and their enemy: first, Batman and Robin lose the fight, in the second there is a draw and in the third they win, catching the criminal or leaving him, believing he died (the times Joker was supposed to drown were countless).

Also, the appearance of Robin introduced a didactic tone to the comics. From time to time, Batman or Robin break the fourth wall, turning to the readers and explaining them what they should or should not do. Moreover, for a few issues of *Batman*, beginning with the first, Robin appeals to the readers to join Robin's Regulars, a group of young people who help others in small, everyday things, like helping an old woman cross the road. Robin is also a walking example that knowledge from school is useful in life, as he often uses it (and underlines it) to solve the mysteries or to help Batman get out from near-death situations. At one point, even Latin and knowledge of Shakespearean English becomes useful for him.

1940 is also the year when the idea of recurring enemies emerged in the stories, with the appearance of Joker and the first version of Catwoman (then called simply Cat) in *Batman* #1. Then the characters of Clayface (*Detective* Comics #40, June 1940), Penguin (*Detective Comics* #58, December 1941), Scarecrow (*World's Finest Comics* #3, Fall 1941), Two Face (*Detective Comics* #66, August 1942), Tweedledum and Twedledee (*Detective Comics* #74, April 1943) and the Cavalier (*Detective Comics* #81, November 1943) were introduced, with variable success. Moreover, some crooks and mad scientists reappeared several times throughout the comics.

Joker's inspiration and origins are as complicated as the character himself, so it is impossible to ascribe him to a concrete person and image. At first, he killed a lot of people using a special gas which produced a demonic grin on his victims' faces. With time, he became a figure which only craved for fame and money, he used nasty tricks, but rarely murdered. He was the first of a later parade of Batman's crazy, traumatized villains who looked like somebody's nightmare. In the years of WWII he was not the superevil character shown in later comics and movies, but at the time he was the only Batman's opponent who was intelligent enough to outwit the Dark Knight, which he has done repeatedly, escaping him or getting out of prison and coming back to Gotham's underworld.

Catwoman was a very different character from what she looks like nowadays. At

first, she was a 1940s femme fatale, a beautiful, intelligent and manipulative woman who used her abilities to steal jewels. She did not wear any costume, although she sometimes used outfits and make up to pretend to be someone else, e. g. an elderly lady. Nevertheless, soon she started wearing a cape and huge cat's head during her jobs. She was a good counterpart to Batman, who, enchanted by her, could not let himself catch her and put her to prison. The sly woman appeared often at the beginning of 1940s, but soon she disappeared to come back after the war, in 1947, looking more like her modern version.

Two Face was one of the most serious and grim villain figures in this time. His story was based on *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson. Two Face was at the beginning Harvey Kent (then changed to Dent to avoid associations with Superman), a handsome District Attorney of Gotham City, a friend of Batman's. After being attacked with acid by a criminal, half of his face becomes hideous and from now on his decisions depend on a flip of a coin. Nevertheless, the Two Face story was too serious and complicated to stay: as Les Daniels has put it, "Greek tragedy disguised in a dime's worth of newsprint" did not fit the simple, rather adventurous tone of the comic book series. Thus, Harvey in *Detective Comics* #80 (October 1943), comes back to his girlfriend, undergoes a plastic surgery, serves time in prison for his criminal activity and reforms completely, of course with big help on the side of Batman, who did not lose faith in his friend.

Penguin, derived either from the posture of emperor penguins or from a penguin from Kool menthol cigarettes advertisement, also appeared on the series frequently, he had not the intelligence of Joker, though, so he was often caught and put in prison. His outfit, based on stiff English gentlemen stereotype – monocle, umbrella, top hat, cigarette holder – could remind of the American privileged class, which had not a very good opinion among the public. This could have made him a popular villain at the time. Les Daniels, claiming this theory (45) writes that Bruce Wayne was also impossibly rich, and was not detested for that, but it has to be acknowledged that he used his wealth to fight crime, which should redeem him in the eyes of the public.

Not all the villains are entirely bad, however. Cat helps Batman to solve a crime; Canary takes him to the hospital after he is shot; the Crime Doctor operates Robin even though the Dynamic Duo fought him moments earlier. Moreover, in the *Batman* #28 (April-May 1945) Batman visits Washington to help to introduce a law which would

enable full rehabilitation of truly reformed ex-crooks, stating that every person needs a chance despite their past. There is also an episode when Bruce Wayne tries to make Cat stop her criminal acts by making her fall in love with him (*Batman* #15, February-March 1943). This proves that the creators were far from showing the world as black and white in their stories, that crime does not pay but there is always a possibility of becoming a good person.

Before the appearance of the recurring enemies, Batman fought mostly gangsters, from petty crooks to the bosses. Those stories were influenced by pulp stories and gangster movies, both very popular at the time. (Brooker, 49) Moreover, Batman did not avoid the influence of expressionism: a few mad scientists (the best known, Karl Hellfern alias Doctor Death) appeared in the comics, and in *Detective Stories* #32 (October 1939) Batman fought vampires and werewolves in Paris and Hungary; nevertheless, this was one of the very few adventures of the superhero with unnatural forces in the discussed period. Although the origin of the strange figures like Penguin or Joker was never explained during the first six years of the comic books, they were not completely unrealistic. What is more, at the beginning, Batman's city was openly New York, Gotham City appeared first in *Detective Comics* #48 (February 1941), but even then names of Manhattan or Brooklyn appeared in the stories (Brooker, 48). Also, concrete dates appeared from time to time, Di Maggio is mentioned in one of the stories.

As for the realism of adding the social and political situation of the times, the comic books were not aiming at it. However, some indications may show that the reality was demonstrated in details and some of the Dynamic Duo adventures. First of all, when Batman was being created, the United States were still suffering from the effects of the Great Depression, but we do not see much poverty and unemployment in the comic books. In contrast, Bruce Wayne mostly meets people of a very good financial position, whom apparently there are many in Gotham City. The only thing indicating the harsh economic situation is the crime rate, which seems to be huge; in fact, the city is ruled by mobs, with few people like Commissioner Gordon, trying to fight them. The gangsters must be earning very good money, as we see that even small crooks can afford to pay Joker hundreds of thousands dollars for a trip in a time machine. This is not surprising, as Gotham has several criminals specializing in stealing gems: until around 1944 most of the crimes in the *Batman* series are jewel thefts.

Both the artwork and the stories in the comics underlined the role of the city in them. The pipes are drawn as carefully as the figure of the main character. Gotham is a huge urban complex, with tall buildings on which the Dark Knight can watch the city; with dark alleys in which crime rises into power. Cars, crowded streets, shops, banks, newspaper sellers are essential parts of the stories. The time in which the superheroes were invented was the time in which the frontier and agrarian life lost its importance in American culture; now the complicated, bustling city was the essence of the country (Kelley 3-4).

In the early stories, some of the Gotham criminals live and act in Chinatown. They are not only Chinese, but overall Asian: Batman fights also Arabs, Hindus, Mongols or even a Cossack. These are the times of strong aversion towards Asian immigrants, when the Immigration Act of 1924, which prohibited the immigration of East Asians and Asian Indians, was still a law. Nevertheless, most of the villains were purely American, some of the apparently Asian thugs were in fact disguised Caucasians. The surprising thing is that after Japanese attacks on Pearl Harbor, Batman fights only German Nazis, the Japanese are almost non-existent in the comic books, contrary to the 1943 Columbia's movie serial.

As for the World War II, it was not a very important event in Batman's life. Both Bruce and Dick stayed in the United States. From the 1940, when the country started to be pressured by Churchill to enter the war, the nationality of both of them is underlined, striking the patriotic chords. But the war itself is mentioned in March 1942, in *Detective Comics* #61. Then, Batman and Robin meet the Nazis in person only three times: in *Batman* #14 (December 1942-January 1943), #15 (February-March 1943) and #19 (October-November 1943). The history from the issue #26 in which Wayne's descendant fights in the year 3000 the Saturnians who conquer the Earth on their way to rule the whole universe, may be seen as parallel to the current political situation. Apart from those four stories, only some accounts of the war appear in some of the comics: for example, one of the reasons Harvey Kent becomes a villain is the fact that Gotham's best plastic surgeon went to Europe and was put into a concentration camp and Harvey cannot be operated; when Two Face decides to reform, the doctor is told to have escaped from the camp and to have come back home. On the other hand, it may be stated that Batman helps the troops in a different way: he takes the weight of some internal affairs from the FBI, sells war bonds, fights criminals who steal tanks and food from the army, and in *Detective Comics* #78

(August 1943) he organizes a "bond wagon": a parade of men dressed as the figures from the American Revolutionary War, who enacted the famous battles from those times to show the society that WWII is also a war for independence and to sell bonds. Moreover, in the *Batman* comic books a series of stories is started, showing the work of various uniformed services, starting from the police and ending with the postal service and night workers, clearly stating that those people serve America, too.

Also, the appearance of Alfred, son of Bruce's father's butler (*Batman* #16, April-May 1943), who arrives from England to work for the young millionaire, may be considered as a political statement. Alfred soon learns Bruce's and Dick's secret identities and becomes their servant as well as friend and help, as he is an amateur detective. Although the butler is a comical figure, with his clumsiness and strange accent, he is portrayed with sympathy and a year later receives his own comic. Alfred, being British and very loyal to Wayne, the "American Superhero", may be a symbol of the alliance between the United States and United Kingdom.

Nevertheless, given that war propaganda dominated the movies, radio auditions, advertisements, other comics and all the possible ways of communication, Batman's three direct fights with the Germans are not an impressive score. Basically, the only propaganda element of the comic books were the covers, in which Batman either helped the troops, appealed to buy the bonds or ridiculed the Axis leaders. As Brooker states:

> What Batman effectively did during 1941 to 1945 was adapt to the wartime
> discourse, but entirely on his own terms. Rather than go to the front, he made
> occasional appeals from Gotham: rather than battle Nazi hordes, he
> campaigned for democracy back in the United States. (79)

In the first of the three Nazi stories, Batman fights Germans who work undercover on American territory. Yet, undercover does not mean that they do not reside in a big room with a huge swastika-shaped chandelier. They are commanded by a man called ominously Count Felix, but they speak English like native speakers; thus, they can blend with the society and pretend to be Americans. Their job is to sabotage the American army and prepare the White House to be Hitler's headquarters. Batman and Robin discover their mission and beat them, crushing them with the swastika chandelier, saving not only Gotham, but the whole country.

In the next issue, the Dynamic Duo tries to answer the question: what if Hitler wins the war? Gotham is ruined, the Americans who oppose the Japanese are executed, and the rest is imprisoned in concentration camps. The Nazis speak bad English, think only of looting and are incredibly stupid: when Batman attacks them, they think he is a Martian. The oppressors are quickly defeated by Batman and Robin and a small boy. This is a great propaganda piece: nobody would want to be ruled by stupid, greedy, weak and ruthless people.

In the third story, the plot is incredible: Nazis have a base under the sea (most probably the Atlantic Ocean, near the U.S. coastline), on the sunk island of Atlantis. It turns out that the citizens of the lost island have predicted a big catastrophe on the future Earth so they decided to isolate themselves, using the oncoming flood. They built a construction which covers them from water and provides them with oxygen. Of course, at one point in history an Englishman finds the island and teaches them English, which they prefer to use over their own language. Then, they are found by Germans and they believe the story that the Nazis are the good side. As one can predict, the Dynamic Duo also finds Atlantis and they persuade the prince and princess that they are the better ones. The story is clearly inspired by the ruthless U-boot attacks on American ships near the USA coastline in 1942 (Zyblikiewicz, 184), which caused a lot of anxiety in the first months of the war.

In the 1943 Columbia film serial, Batman and Robin fight a Japanese spy, Dr Daka, who wants to steal radium: this is the most anti-Japanese story of the Batman ones, breaking the rule of the comics' rather mild resentment towards Asians. Moreover, a pilot for a radio show was prepared, according to which Dick's parents, apart from being circus acrobats, were also FBI agents killed by Nazi spies. It was never aired (Daniels, 59).

According to Brooker, there are a few reasons why the Batman creators did not involve him into battle, in contrast to other superheroes. One of them is that by the time of the Pearl Harbor attack, his brand and characteristics were already established, and there was no reason to turn Bruce Wayne to a soldier killing on the front (79-81). The superhero, who underwent drastic change under the pressure from media and society, now could afford to stay aside from the general trend. In addition, the comics were obviously created by those artists who have not been drafted, all of them because of weak health, so there was no perspective to serve their country (82). In my opinion, it has to be also considered that the war propaganda being everywhere, the public could just be enlightened that there

is one superhero who simply fights gangsters: the incredible sales of the comic books during the war (the assumed amount of readers: 24 million) are a good support of this theory. We also have to remember that the stories were also sent to the troops and for them lack of war in the comics may have been even more comforting than to those who stayed in the country.

In conclusion, the first years of Batman's existence were dedicated to establishing his brand among the enormous potential market of readers. To do that, the creators had to change their vision of the character, as the media and the parents opposed to the dark vigilante, who ruthlessly killed his opponents. Some of those changes have set the standard for the whole, now lasting for seventy years, series. When the United States entered the Second World War at the end of 1941, Batman was already a stable character, so the editors decided not to change him under the pressure of the omnipresent war propaganda. He was one of the oldest superheroes, and he was not created, as, for example, Captain America, solely for the purpose of raising society's enthusiasm for fighting Nazis. Nevertheless, the Dynamic Duo fought them and helped on the home front, dealing with criminals and selling war bonds. Moreover, we may see shifts in the tone of the stories as the war was developing, with rather brutal and grim comics in 1942, where many good people die heroic deaths (until the success of the landing in Normandy no one could be sure how the war would end) and brighter mood in 1944 and 1945, when for example Batman puts all Gotham crooks in prison in *Detective Comics* #95 (January 1945): of course, crime soon comes back, so that Bruce and Dick have something to do.

1.2. The Decline and *Seduction of the Innocent*: 1945-1956

The end of World War II brought significant changes to the USA's situation. Despite the initial period of inflation and strikes (Zyblikiewicz, 219-221), the post-war times were a period of huge economic and technological growth (Michałek, 232-244). This, paradoxically, led to an economic crisis in the comic book industry (Kelley, 10-11, Daniels, 64).

In 1946, the year after the war, the comic book sales were still good, but it soon occurred that this was just a post-effect of their tremendous popularity during the war (Kelley, 10). However, the war ended, taking away America's enemies: Japan and Nazi Germany; the new conflict with USSR was still to escalate. Moreover, other forms of

entertainment, such as cinema and television started being more accessible for the average US citizen. Comic book creators and publishers had to find new opponents for their heroes and had to do this quickly.

In the search of the new identity for Batman, the creators in DC Comics decided to go into a more science-fiction angle. For example, from the mid-1940s, Bruce and Dick take advantage from their friendship with Professor Nichols, the time machine inventor. The Dynamic Duo repeatedly goes back in time to take part in historical events: among others, they visit ancient Rome or Arthurian England. This works the other way round: in *Batman* #67 (October-November 1951), Robin is asked for help by Batman from the future; in *Batman* #59 (June-July 1950), Professor Nichols sends the Dynamic Duo to the future, and in #66 (August-September 1951), we see Gotham in a few years, when Bruce becomes the Commissioner, Dick is Batman II and his son, Dick Jr, a Robin. In *Detective Comics* #220 (June 1954), Roger Bacon, having read legends about Batman's and Robin's visits to the past, sends out his two assistants to the twentieth century to meet them. There are even contacts with aliens, e.g. in *Batman* #41 (June-July 1947) and #78 (August-September 1953), the superhero meets Martians.

The authors also tried to attract readers with solving mysteries from Bruce's childhood or showing new facts from his pre-Batman life. In *Batman* #47, the death of his parents is shown once again, but now Batman meets the killer, now an owner to a truck company and a high-ranked mobster, and takes revenge on him. Joe Chill is not killed by Batman himself, but by his own employees, furious that their boss is responsible for the origin of the greatest crime-fighter on Earth. From *Detective Comics* #226 (December 1955), we learn that Bruce was Robin in his childhood. In the issue #235 (September 1956) there is even a more surprising story: that Bruce's father, Thomas Wayne, was in fact the first Batman. However, those three plots are not in any way continued or referred to in the following comic books. In addition, the story of the origin of Robin is retold in *Batman* #32 (December 1945-January 1946), where the source of the name is changed (from Robin Hood to the bird) and in which Dick discovers that the gangsters killed his parents after the tragic show; he does not witness the previous blackmail, thus has no regrets of not preventing their death, as he did in the first version. There are also more details about him being taken by Bruce to the manor and being trained to become Batman's aide.

The unstable political situation and the huge tension between the two empires

during the Cold War had its reflection in pop culture. Stephen King, in Chapter I to his *Danse Macabre,* describes how the fear of Communists created a whole subgenre of science-fiction and horror movies in the 1950s. Batman comics were mostly free from the Red Scare, but the tension was still visible in other ways.

Firstly, after the Second World War, Batman dies repeatedly: of course, the death is faked for several reasons, mostly saving his true identity; the superhero comes back triumphantly at the end of every story to defeat the enemies. Also, there are a few comics in which Bruce or Dick have injuries preventing one of them from going into action. Secondly, in this period there is always someone wanting to discover Batman's true identity, using many ways to achieve it. Very often they almost succeed, but they are stopped just before taking off the mask from Bruce's face. Those who manage to discover it, die. Nevertheless, Batman is clever and seems to wear disguising make-up under the mask most of the time. Even Commissioner Gordon feels tempted to discover who Batman really is (in *Batman* #71, June-July 1952). The only person who is near discovering that Bruce has a secret identity and is not threatened by it is his new girlfriend, smart journalist Vicki Vale. Moreover, in *Batman* #48 (August-September 1948), a criminal finds and enters the Batcave, becoming a lethal threat to all the three inhabitants of the Wayne Mansion. In *Detective Comics* #228 (February 1956) Batman, hypnotized, becomes a criminal and is stopped by Robin in the last moment; in #234 (August 1956) Bruce and Dick lose their memory, being exposed to a special ray used by the criminals, forgetting their masked identities. Other villains use special anti-Batman weapons or a similar technology of the Dynamic Duo's (Joker in *Batman* #37 and Catwoman in *Detective Comics* #122), depriving Batman and Robin from their safe technological distance they used to have and which saved their lives numerous times. Also, in *Detective Comics* #121 (March 1947) Commissioner Gordon, the biggest supporter of Batman's among the city officials, loses his position and becomes one of the lowest-ranked police officers. His successor is not friendly towards the superhero. In the same episode, the Dynamic Duo discovers that the degradation of Gordon is a part of a conspiracy and restores him to his position. Moreover, in the stories of the discussed period, Batman is blind, has amnesia, and is even closed in an asylum. There are also numerous attempts by other volunteer crime-fighters or even machines to replace Batman in his task.

It may be argued, however, that all those stories were invented just to attract the

declining public's attention and make them buy new issues. After all, what could be more exciting in a Batman story than the threat of Bruce and Dick being identified and suffering all the possible consequences or losing the city authorities' favor? However, looking closely, the authors' obsession with the endangered secret of the Dynamic Duo and the fact that it somehow answered the public's taste are revealing: after all, the 1950s is the era of McCarthyism and the Red Scare (Zyblikiewicz, 233-234), when many people believed in the Communist conspiracy and feared that the Soviet spies lived amongst them (Michałek, 288-289). These fears were being expressed in various forms in pop culture: e. g. Don Siegel's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (King, 12-13). They can be also seen in the fear of the most popular superhero being wheelbound (*Batman* #61, October-November 1950), dead, discovered, or becoming outlaw and thus finished; just as the USA could be somehow infiltrated and destroyed in some part or as a whole by the USSR's weapons and espionage. The fact that the Gotham's villains' technology caught up with Batman's may also be interpreted as an allusion to the arms race between the two empires: in this period, it was close to a draw.

The "Atomic Age" is also barely represented in the Batman comic books. Other superheroes (Superman, Wonder Woman and the Marvel ones) had to face the atomic bomb and realize that it could be stronger than them (Szasz and Takeichi, 733). Batman, having no real superpowers on him, would also not be able to win with the nuclear threat directly. The only direct acknowledgment of it may be found in *Batman* #68 (December 1951-January 1952), when the Dynamic Duo looks for thieves who rob the so-called "atom caves", places organized to enable people survive the nuclear war.

Attachment 1: Batman #68, page 3

The arms race of the Cold War was happening not only in the field of nuclear weapons but also in other branches of technology. As none of the empires wanted to attack the other, the competition was realized in other ways, such as the exploration of space. The new inventions and the development of the old ones also brought rapid progress in civil technology. This was highly beneficial, but many people did not understand the new machines rapidly appearing in their surrounding and felt anxious about this.

This is the most visible public fear in the Batman comic books of the time. The Dynamic Duo constantly opposes various technological inventions, and we witness the comeback of Doctor Death. Apart from Professor Nichols' time machine, which generally is a benefit to the crime-fighters, there is much modern or even science-fiction technology visible, mostly threatening the security of Gotham. In *Batman* #42 (August-September 1947), they fight the "Robot Robbers", giant machines at the services of dangerous criminals. In the following issue, Professor Nichols invents a time machine which is able to bring items from the past. The machine is stolen and used by crooks. In *World's Finest Comics* #31 (November-December 1947) Batman meets a man with the X-ray vision (and it is not Superman), who receives it after absorbing radiation in an aeroplane crash; in *Detective Comics* #48 (June 1949) he fights a scientist who minimizes people; in *Batman* #52 (April-May 1949) (which is one of the "Bruce Wayne is dead" series) the Dynamic Duo, together with Alfred, confront criminals who use enormous computers to invent perfect crimes and to discover Batman's true identity. In *Batman* #70 (April-May 1952), a machine becomes the superhero's competition as an indestructible and purely logical robot policeman is invented. The machine, though, has its flaws, and Batman does not lose his

18

job. In the issue #75 (February-March 1953), a man's brain is transplanted into a giant ape's head, causing many perturbations; in #77, we have a situation like from Philip K. Dick's *Minority Report*: a machine predicting crimes is used by the Gotham police, and it foresees Batman's murder. Fortunately, this time the technology fails also. In #80 (December 1953-January 1954), huge machines attack people; in #87 (October 1954), a mad scientist creates Synthetic Man, a man with synthetic tissues, who has superhuman powers and is trained to become a supercriminal. Even the Batplane gets out of control in issue #91 (April 1955), being taken over by the criminals and used for their wrongdoings.

As one can see, the Batman authors showed various technological developments misused by criminals. The reader is presented with computers, robots, time machines, effects of radiation, or even with synthetic materials. They also show that relying too heavily on the newest inventions may prove to be even fatal: all the criminals using them to achieve their goals fail. The only people who use it with success are Professor Nichols, Bruce and Dick, who are skeptical about it and use it only for good deeds. This could be translated simply into the lives of the early 1950s public: the USA, being the good power, knows how to use technology so that it benefits humanity; the USSR, being the evil power, can use technology against human interest. It may also be read, as I have stated before, in terms of the anxiety of the rapidly changing world of the post-war era.

The last case of a clear historical and political allusion to the recent events (apart from occasional allusions to the last war) to discuss is the story of Wingman presented in *Batman* #65 (June-July 1951), in which Robin breaks a leg and is unable to help Batman for a while. Being asked by a European government to train a former citizen of theirs to become his aide, Batman finds the suitable man and makes him a Wingman. The man, being a great partner for the superhero, makes Dick afraid of losing his "job", although he is told that the new aide is being trained to become a Batman for a foreign country. However, at the end of the story, Wingman is to leave soon for Europe, to become a superhero who can protect the Old Land. This kind of plot, presented during the realization of the Marshal plan, is not a coincidence: again, Batman stands for America, now helping Europe to restore itself.

As for the recurring villains (in this period: Joker, Penguin, Catwoman, and Two-Face), they seem to appear less often than during the war, and their interest shifts from stealing to become more concentrated on catching and killing Batman, or at least

discovering his true identity. The stories including Joker and Penguin, however, become less interesting and rather schematic. When it comes to Catwoman and Two-Face, the case is more complex.

Selina Kyle, a.k.a Catwoman, reappears after a break, in *Detective Comics* #122 (April 1947) in a completely new costume, which makes her more sexy and in the femme fatale type, of course only to the extent approved by the conservative post-war public. For some time, she pursues the path of crime. Nevertheless, five years later, in *Batman* #62 (December 1950-January 1951), she reminds herself of her pre-Catwoman times (it appears she had amnesia) and becomes an undercover detective for a short time. Then she retires and establishes a zoological shop. She is an upright citizen for three years: she comes back to being a criminal in *Detective Comics* #203 (January 1954).

There are only two prominent female figures in the series during the decade: the Catwoman and aforementioned Vicki Vale (first appearance: *Batman* #49, October-November 1948). Both of them are strong, independent characters, who achieve their goals. Moreover, the relationship between Vicki and Bruce is more of a flirt or flame than of a stable, official relationship. Catwoman turning into an upright citizen and a plain shop owner was unnatural for her feline character, thus she came back to her original ways. Still, such character choices for female characters in the beginnings of the 1950s were unusual. They could be assigned to the types of women portrayed by pop culture (pulp magazines, film noir) in the years of Batman's origins: this would be the last remnant of the Golden Age of comic books. This would soon change, however, with the appearance of the more motherly figure of Batwoman in *Detective Comics* #233 (July 1956).

When she appears for the first time, Batman and Robin treat her as an intruder, someone they have to compete with, which is disturbing to them. The Batwoman uses feminine props to catch criminals: her bracelets are handcuffs, she throws her powder to disorient her opponents, etc. In her case, there are more chauvinistic undertones: the crooks, who definitely would trust the Catwoman as their boss, do not believe Batwoman can catch them; Robin considers the idea that a woman will save Batman's life ridiculous; Batman himself sees crime-fighting as too risky a task for a "girl", as she is called by them (although she did capture some criminals in front of him and saved his life). Referring to her as a "girl" in a rather patronizing tone, when she is an adult woman, also does not show much belief in the equality on their side. Her successes are sheer luck, theirs are the effects

of hard work; it does not matter that she is better prepared to do the job than Robin was at the beginning, being a trapezoid artist and a motorcycle stuntwoman. In the end of the first story, they prove to her that they can find out her identity and so can the criminals. She meekly quits her job, but not for long.

As for the other recurring villains, Two-Face as Harvey Dent almost does not exist in the comic books of the analyzed decade. The character was still too dark and horrifying to be allowed a more permanent appearance in the series. Still, the authors seemed to try to introduce him somehow. There are comebacks of the villain performed by other men. In *Batman* #50 (December 1948-January 1949) Harvey Dent's valet impersonates his master's former evil role, almost driving the District Attorney mad, as the latter thinks that he does it while sleepwalking. In issue #68 (December 1951-January 1952), an actor who plays Harvey Dent in the Batman TV series is treated with a real acid on the set instead of a fake one. In effect, he believes he is the person he played and becomes a real Two-Face for a while. In the issue #81 (February 1954), it is finally Dent who, after being in place of an explosion and being hurt in the face again, resumes his villainous character. He does not reappear, though, until 1971, as Comics Code prevented the authors from including him in the series (Daniels, 69).

In this period, we see Batman as a well established character and the stories having their scheme. However, the declining post-war sales pushed the authors to seek more thrilling stories, trying to draw the readers' attention, which sometimes resulted in ridiculous events in Bruce Wayne's life (like fighting giant bees or almost-marrying Vicki) and in putting more focus on action, forgetting about the simple psychology of the characters or any moral undertones for the young audience the comics used to have previously. But the worst period for Batman and Robin was yet to come.

> 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. Bruce is sometimes shown in a dressing gown. As they sit by the fireplace the young boy sometimes worries about his partner... it is like a wish dream of two homosexuals living together.

This paragraph (quoted after Brooker, 112), written by Frederick Wertham, a psychologist, in his famous book *Seduction of the Innocent* (1954), was almost a death sentence for the superhero. It is needless to remind that the mid-1950s were the times of

Senator McCarthy, who wanted to "purge" the government from Communists and homosexuals (Brooker, 119), the times of the obsession of identifying and labeling (117) and of fear of the "contamination" (118), the times of religiousness (Zyblikewicz, 264-265, Michałek, 249) and, as a result, conservatism. Showing parents that a comic book series has homosexual undertones in such times is equal to nailing the coffin.

Wertham's passage on Batman, the result of his sessions with young homosexuals, patients of Quaker Emergency Service Readjustment Center, mainly showed the insecurities caused in young people by the stereotypes imposed by the comic books (Brooker, 113-117). The book gained much fame, the comic book sales dropped dramatically (Daniels, 83) and was one of the causes to establish the Congressional inquiry into the contents of the comic books, which put 24 of 29 comic book publishers out of business (Brooker, 143) and which established the Comics Code, similar to the Hollywood's Hays' Code. In fact, comic books were inspected since the mid-1940s as they had an aura of indecency about them (119) and Wertham's work set afire something that was already highly inflammable.

Attachment 2: The first Comics Code stamp on Batman (issue #90, March 1955)

Bob Kane dismissed the idea of any homosexual allusions included in the stories. Still, the young men interviewed by Wertham saw their dreams realized in the stories about Bruce and Dick. From the modern point of view, the stories indeed have some undertones, whether it was the purpose of the authors or not. Two men, spending most of their time together, living together, exercising together now can easily be seen as a gay couple. In the 1950s, however, the times of America's innocence, it may not have been perceived as such until someone wrote about it and someone else took it up. Moreover, Wertham's criticism of the fact that pop culture increases young people's complexes by using stereotypes, idealized images of manhood and womanhood, violence, and too much sexuality is something that is popular criticism of the same part of our culture nowadays: movements protesting against anorectic models, mocking the "sex sells" marketing principle,

criticizing the fact that violent films and computer games are easily obtained by children, etc. are something that is a part of every-day debate in our society. As Brooker argues in his chapter on the *Seduction of the Innocent*, Dr Wertham's work, although not really affirmative, can be hardly seen as homophobic; his critics, however, show many signs of homophobia, as their main argument is that a man who saved America during WWII cannot be a homosexual.

Soon after Wertham's book is published, the readers meet Batwoman for the first time. A month earlier, in *Batman* #92, the Dynamic Duo receives a new aide: the Bathound. In *World's Finest Comics* #71 (July-August 1954) Batman and Robin join Superman and from now on the stories in this edition will include all three of them in one story, saving on paper and bringing a refreshment which may make the readers stay. Soon there will be a whole "family" of Bat-something figures, which will deny any possible homosexual practices happening in the Wayne Manor.

1.3. Post-Wertham and the New Look: 1956-1969

The Batman series entered the Silver Age as a science-fiction comic book, simple and naïve in its content, construction and art. It left it, however, as a grim, brutal and depressing set of stories. Batman has lost his innocence in 1960s, and so did America.

In the second half of 1950s, Batman was put, alongside with other DC characters, into the science-fiction genre (Daniels, 94). It was visible, as I have described it in the previous part, since early years of the decade, but in the post-Wertham era it became the only theme of Batman's adventures. The Dynamic Duo faced numerous meetings with aliens and strange creatures, visited other planets, and survived many transformations. Some of those episodes reminded less of the dark vigilante figure from the previous decades, and more of the absurd grind house movies which were fashionable at the time. This might have been powered, especially in 1960s, by the space conquest, a new field of rivalry between the empires. The first, vampirish, brutal Batman from 1939 was a completely different character.

It is clear that young people's fascination with aliens, space travels and strange, lethal rays was not just a pop cultural trend. Although at this period, after Stalin's death, the meeting in Geneva, and during Eisenhower's presidency, the Cold War was less tense (Michalek, 322, Zyblikiewicz, 256-257), there was fear of nuclear war, the space race was

still on, and the "Red Scare", despite the fact that McCarthy's era was coming to an end, was still pervasive in the society. Aliens were a simple metaphor for Communists; the rays were standing for the effects of the nuclear war.

A shift in tone might be seen at the beginning of 1960s, the years which brought much tension between the USA and the USSR. The military confrontation was at the reach of the hand between 1961 and 1962, with the Berlin crisis, the failed invasion in Cuba and the missile crisis (Zyblikiewicz, 300-303). In this period, although the tacky science-fiction themes do not disappear, the tone of them gradually changes; there are more murders, people close to Bruce or Batman die, making him perform more acts of personal vengeance; there are more confrontations with brutality and more plots to destroy the human race or Earth. In *Batman* #178 (February 1966) so-called Rocket Men capture American rockets, load them with a nuclear device and threaten to destroy Earth; as we can see, although the peak of the atomic fear was over, it lingered in public psyche. This trend peaked in two episodes: in June 1963 in the *Batman* series, the story "Robin Dies at Dawn", in which Batman, after taking part in a scientific experiment, hallucinates Robin's death; a year later, in *Detective Comics* #328 (June 1964), Alfred dies, this time for real, and Bruce establishes a foundation in his name.

The death of Alfred was a part of another pattern realized in the comics of the time: trying to drop the accusations of Wertham, which were still circulating in the public opinion (Brooker, 188). Alfred was replaced by Dick's aunt, called Aunt Harriet, whose appearance changed the all-male Wayne Mansion and brought new worries of being discovered to Batman and Robin.

Other elements of that pattern were, already mentioned, Batwoman and Bat-Girl. The two started to appear regularly in the comic books of late 1950s, becoming clear love interest for Batman and Robin. Bruce Wayne, in his civilian form, starts dating Kathy Kane and marriage between them is mentioned in several stories, as themes of Alfred's futuristic novels (in which Dick becomes Batman and Bruce's and Kathy's son replaces Robin) or of Dick's nightmare. In *Batman* #153 (February 1963) Batwoman and Batman, facing death, pledge mutual love; Batman denies his feelings as soon as the danger is over.

Alfred's death and the appearance of Aunt Harriet were a part of another important event in the history of the superhero. In the early 1960s both DC titles lead by Batman sold dramatically bad; cancellation of the series was seriously considered (Daniels, 95). The

stories about strange, ray-induced transformations of the Caped Crusader (including Zebra Batman, Batman Baby, etc.) and regular encounters with aliens were not something the readers of the time were looking for. The Atomic Age was over, and the science-fiction angle has always been something that was not corresponding with the Batman concept. In 1964, DC's editor, Irwin Donenfeld, decided to change the staff to refresh the series (Eury and Kronenberg, 8); thus Julius Schwartz and Carmine Infantino became assigned to redesign Batman.

They decided to start the story from the scratch, getting rid of the reminiscences of the late 1950s-early 1960s style which was introduced by the previous Batman editor, Jack Schiff (23). Alfred was killed; Batwoman, Bat-Girl, Bat-Hound, and Bat-Mite disappeared into oblivion. Old villains, like Joker, Penguin or even Riddler, came back. Aliens stayed away from Gotham. The series got more serious and realistic, yet maintained Robin's puns and some of the tacky, comical atmosphere that was characteristic of the series since early 1940s.

Not only did the story and the characters change; Batman's looks were improved and the Batcave was renovated. The superhero became more muscular and well built, the bat ears on his mask grew longer, and the bat symbol on his chest gained a yellow oval, corresponding with the Bat-Signal and giving the world the symbol we all know today; Batmobile was changed from a huge sedan to a more compact sports car, the Batcave gained an elevator, and a hotline was established between this place and Commissioner Gordon's office. This last feature was inspired by the historic event of establishing the hotline between White House and Kremlin after the Cuban missile crisis (48). The sales went up very soon (20), but the real Batmania was still to begin.

When reading about the 1966 Batman TV series, one sees the word "camp" in almost every sentence. This was the time of the Pop Art craze, when Warhol and Liechtenstein were artistic gurus, and Susan Sonntag wrote about the new trend in culture, called camp: a trend of picturing kitschy, absurd content with such a serious manner that it becomes funny. This is what the creators of "Batman" show decided to go for (Daniels, 111).

The comics influenced Pop Art. Pop Art and its offspring, camp, influenced the Batman TV series. The show influenced the comic books. The circle was closed. The first major contribution of the show to the comics was the revival of Alfred, who survived the

seemingly deadly events and, being an object of medical experiments, became briefly Baman's most dangerous foe, the Outsider (Daniels, 102, Eury and Kronenberg, 63). The second effect of the TV show was the fact that the comics also explored their campiness to a bigger degree: although puns and comical situations were part of the stories since the early 1940s, the pressure to be more campy was bigger than ever. As Brooker states in the "Pop and Camp" chapter of his book, this period is usually disregarded by the fans (171). Moreover, the show gave to the comics two new ladies: Batgirl and Poison Ivy (who did not appear on TV, but was created by Infantino at the producer's request) (Eury and Kronenberg, 23).

Batgirl, although at first she might have been seen as a potential introduction of another romance storyline, was portrayed differently than the Batwoman. First of all, she was not instantly ridiculed by the Dynamic Duo for being a woman: after her first action Batman and Robin appreciated her and did not tell her to stay home because fighting crime is a man's job. Still, some of the plotlines show a chauvinistic attitude towards the character: in one of the stories, Batwoman, rather than fighting criminals, distracts them with her beautiful legs. In addition, in *Batman* #197 (December 1967), Batgirl clearly states that the superhero is not her romantic interest, which is something completely opposite to her predecessor.

The second half of 1960s was a very troublesome time in America's history: the war in Vietnam, social tensions, racial movements, hippie subculture. The society's focus shifted from the Cold War to the problems at home. Nevertheless, it is hard to find any of those issues in Batman comic books. The 1940s Batman helped America in their war effort; in the 1960s Gotham the war was non-existent. The only signals of the times that could be fished out of the stories were the changing fashion, some beatnik cameos in the first New Look story (*Detective Comics* #327, May 1964) and few hippie-like types, who were mostly shown as troubled teenagers or small crooks. The TV show and bright comic books were rather a form of escaping the troubling reality around than of exposing it to the audience. Of course, it did not escape some of the activists' attention and the counter-culture criticized Batman strongly for that (Brooker, 229-230).

In 1967 the Batmania, an enormous Batman craze induced by the show, started to decline (Daniels, 115). The TV series was cancelled, the comic book sales dropped instantly. Moreover, at this time, Bob Kane, Batman's creator, whose name has appeared on

almost every Caped Crusader comic book since 1939 (although for most of the time he did not draw it nor write it), decided to retire; shortly earlier, Carmine Infantino became DC's main editor. This was the perfect time for another change for Batman.

In August 1968, Batman becomes darker with a grim, realistic story "Operation Blindfold" in *Batman* #204 (Eury and Kronenberg, 109). This would be the prelude to the Bronze Age Batman of the 1970s: the superhero going back to his dark roots.

1.4. Through the Bronze Age to the Crisis: 1969-1986

In 1968 a team-up Batman comic book series, *The Brave and the Bold,* decided to give a chance to a young penciller, Neal Adams. Adams, who grew up on Batman stories, had his own vision of the superhero and sought for a chance to show it. He wanted to cut back to the roots, come back to the Dark Knight, an obsessive, solitary crime fighter of the night. His idea of Batman was so definite that he even changed the script, drawing the daylight scenes into night ones (Eury and Kronenberg, 114, 133). The stories gained enthusiastic reactions from the fans (114) and the Batman editor, Julius Schwartz, agreed to put Adams on the main titles, *Batman* and *Detective Comics*. One has to mention other names connected with the Bronze Age: writers, Denny O'Neil and Frank Robbins, and artists, Irv Novick and Dick Giordano.

This period sets the mark of the modern Batman, continued by famous Frank Miller comics in the next decades, rewriting the main characters and old villains and adding new, important elements to the mythos, like Ra's Al Ghul and his daughter Talia, Arkham Asylum, Lucius Fox or Man-Bat. It also finally took up the subjects connected to the world outside the comics, exploring social and political issues, contrary to the stories in the 1960s.

When Batman stories finally caught up with reality, the Americans were heavily traumatized by the assassinations of John Fitzgerald Kennedy, his brother Robert, and Martin Luther King. The anti-Vietnam protests were at their peak, the cities were deteriorating due to suburbanization (Michałek, 426-427), criminal rates were going up (440). The year 1973 would bring the end to the Vietnam war, but also the oil crisis (which brought the already bad economy down) (428-430) and the Watergate scandal, which scarred the society's trust towards the government and special forces (462); the Congress corruption affair a few years later would not make the situation better (441). Those issues,

together with the ones already loudly voiced in the previous decade (racial segregation, feminism, sexual revolution), brought serious tensions among the society, resulting in events like the Stonewall massacre (478); the case of Zodiac killer also put its mark on national psyche. The USA entered 1970s in a very grim tone, which influenced pop culture (447); among it were the comic books.

The next decade, although superficially remembered as the decade of success, was in fact the period when the most complex issues began to appear. Reagan's economic reforms brought financial crisis in 1981, which ended in 1983, but brought significant changes to the economic structure, bringing USA to the postindustrial period (Michałek, 510-514, 537). Moreover, the government's attitude towards social issues was at its best indifferent, at worst meant cuts in many social programs (541). In effect, the disparities between the poorest and the richest grew bigger, homelessness became a plague (514). Additionally, the development of medicine meant new ethical issues: euthanasia, in vitro, and surrogate mothers; the discovery of HIV and AIDS among people meant that another group of social outcasts emerged (519-520).

The society of late 1960s and the whole of 1970s felt threatened and alarmed by the state of the country. These feelings and the mistrust towards the administration brought figures like Dirty Harry (solitary vigilantes, not afraid to bend the law their way, mercilessly fighting the villains) to life. Such was also the new Batman.

The first move of the new team of Batman authors was separating the superhero from his sidekicks. Dick goes to college in *Batman* #217 (December 1969) and Bruce decides to close the Wayne Mansion and to move to the Wayne Foundation building downtown. This will give the millionaire the opportunity to participate more actively in the organization, becoming an even more important figure among Gotham's elite. Batgirl stays in Gotham, but very rarely pairs up with Batman, mostly working on her own cases in a separate comic book series.

The first solo Batman story, which appeared a month later, was the return of Gothic elements to the comics. In this one, the Darknight Detective inspects the case of Muertos, a married couple who found the secret of immortal life, but had to pay an awful price. Later on, Batman encountered more horror creatures on his way, for example vampires (him and Robin even become ones) in issues #349-#351 (July-September 1982) or a werewolf. Even Wayne Manor in itself, now abandoned and several times "haunted" (mostly by villains),

was presented similarly to the houses from Gothic stories.

Another element of the Batman mythos added in that period, which contained such elements, was the Arkham Asylum. Its name derived from the H. P. Lovecraft publisher, the Asylum was a sanitarium where most of the old Batman opponents (Joker, Two-Face) were put, as the new team decided to change their image from strange, but "normally" functioning criminal bosses to a more ominous one: very intelligent, but completely mad and evil people.

Not only the dark, grim atmosphere was transferred from the first Batman comics to the Neal Adams' ones, but there were also many allusions to the plots of the early 1940s. For example, the vampires that attack Batman and Robin in the above mentioned story, were the ones that kidnapped Julie Madison, the forgotten first girlfriend of Bruce (she herself is mentioned by him once); Catwoman uses her 1940s outfit; Vicki Vale comes back to Gotham to reignite her relationship with Bruce; Kathy Kane reappears for a short moment (being soon kidnapped and killed by Ra's Al Ghul's men); early villains like Hugo Strange and Professor Milo reappear as important characters. Moreover, Batman is stripped from most of the gadgets which he gathered during 1950s and 1960s: he uses only Bat-rope, Batmobile and his utility belt (occasionally, Whirly-Bat appears). His cave, however, becomes equipped with computers, whose popularity grew during this period (Michałek, 434-435, 517).

Although social issues were to more extent covered in Green Lantern/Green Arrow stories (which were created by the same team) and Robin's solo comics (mostly the troubles of teenagers and young adults Dick meets in college), Batman's series were not free of them. First of all, African American characters appeared: until late 1960s, Gotham was seemingly all-white, with some Asian mobsters. Now, several storylines include non-whites and their troubles. In *Detective Comics* #464, Batman fights the Black Spider, an African American man with a drug history; in *Batman* #318 (December 1979) he is challenged by Firebug, a villain who sets fires to buildings in slums. In the story, the reader learns that he does it because the severe conditions of living in such places: peeling paints, weak construction, non-working elevators, killed his family. But the most important person of colour appeared in Batman's world several months earlier, in issue #307 (January 1979): Bruce Wayne's personal assistant, Lucius Fox.

Lucius becomes Bruce's closest co-worker, helping him run the company, and

eventually taking it over from his boss, as daytime work was interfering with Batman's nightly obligations and numerous travels. He is a single father, he has a son and a daughter. The former gets involved with the Gotham mob, financed by Wayne's business rival, Gregorian Falstaff. This background story conveys several issues connected to the youth gangs, problems of racial minorities in big cities, but also more universal troubles of father-son relationship (mirroring the arising conflict between Batman and Robin).

At the same time, a long story arc evolving around the crime boss Rupert Thorne and Dr Hugo Strange, an old enemy of Batman, emerges. Starting in *Detective Comics* #469 (May 1977), it would eventually end in *Batman* #356 (February 1983). Set in the background, it gradually built the picture of the terrible state of Gotham's elites and then emerged as the main storyline, in which Batman, together with Robin, Alfred, Commissioner Gordon, Vicki Vale, and Jason Bard, would reestablish the order in his city.

The story began with "Boss" Thorne trying to get rid of Batman, using many means: running for city's mayor, influencing his powerful friends to banish the vigilante from Gotham, and learning the Darknight Detective's real name. He failed, however, at every attempt: even when he tried to get out Batman's identity from Strange, torturing him, he got nothing, and the doctor died. Later, Hugo's ghost haunted him up to the point of madness, and he was admitted to Arkham.

In *Detective Comics* #507 (October 1981) he is released and comes back to Gotham to finally rule the city. He manipulates both of the candidates running for mayor: one of them wants to banish Batman, the other to send Gordon to retirement. Thorne desperately wants to learn who his main enemy is, influencing Vicki Vale's boss to steal her materials (in which she deduced that Bruce Wayne, her boyfriend, is Batman). The latter candidate wins, Gordon is made to resign and starts his own investigation with Jason Bard. All of them together find out about Thorne's (who is again going mad, as Strange's ghost reappears) role in the election. In *Batman* #354 (December 1982) the new police commissioner is killed by Thorne, who is sentenced for it in the next issue. Gordon comes back to his old position and Strange, who turns out to be alive, after attempting to become Batman, is killed in a self inflicted explosion in *Batman* #356 (February 1983).

This long, complicated story about the ties between politics, police, business and criminal underworld, was of course the effect of the political affair that shook the society in the 1970s: the Watergate scandal (Eury and Kronenberg, 173). Moreover, there were

other cases, for example corruption in Congress or the affairs in Reagan's entourage, which did not improve the image of people of power. The role of media in those scandals (it was at this time when they were called "the fourth power") is also portrayed by Vicki and the newspaper she works in.

The new approach also, inevitably, brought changes to the characteristics of the villains. The old ones are changed, and new ones, more appropriate for the times, are introduced.

The beginning of 1970s is the time in which many of the classical Batman enemies: Joker, Two-Face, Riddler, Catwoman, Scarecrow, and Penguin are gradually brought back to the stories. Also, the newer one, Man-Bat, starts to appear, sometimes being on the superhero's side, sometimes attacking him. Some of them are not kept in prison, but in the "state hospital of the criminally insane" (*Batman* #251, 2), which would later on become Arkham Asylum. Thus, authors created more ominous, dangerous types for Batman to confront with.

Although psychological issues of the characters like Two-Face, Scarecrow or Man-Bat are given a background, the villains having traumatic past, the Joker's madness is not given any explanation. He does not pursue Batman for any personal revenge, he kills with pleasure and makes a show of any crime he does. His object is not to kill his main enemy, but to engage him in a sick kind of hide-and-seek game. Even when the villain has the chance to kill Batman, he does not do it: he needs the Darknight Detective to exist, and it seems that this relation is mutual. In Adams's and O'Neal's version of the comic books they are the sides of the same coin, opposites who need each other to have a reason for their actions and their lives.

One of the most important additions to the Batman mythos at the time is another villain, Ra's Al Ghul: a Middle Eastern crime genius, who dreams of creating a new, ecologically friendly, world, of which he would be the ruler. This character, inspired by the legendary Fu Manchu, introduced in June 1971, in *Batman* #232, is a product of the times he was created: the ecological issues were important for the public at the time (Michałek, 436, 447) and the Eastern symbolism, connected to the hippie culture, which was then at its end. Moreover, the oil crisis also reminded the public of the Middle East. Al Ghul was a villain with no comparison to previous enemies of Batman: his intelligence, power, and wealth are far greater than Bruce Wayne's, making him an opponent almost impossible to

win with. The villain deduces Batman's real identity, fights with him not only by force, but also by hurting Wayne's business, he even cannot be killed: he can be revived in a place called Lazarus Pit. As a result, Batman's attempts to win with Al Ghul become a truly James Bond-like adventures: full of fake deaths, identity changes, more or less accidental helpers, and exotic travels.

Bruce Wayne and Ra's Al Ghul have the same soft spot: Ra's daughter, Talia. The problematic relationship between her and Batman is one of the most engaging plots in the comics at the time. She is the first woman Bruce admits to be in love with, and the feeling is mutual. There is a possibility for them to be together, but to do that, Batman would have to join Al Ghul's organization and support his revolution, which the superhero discards immediately. Talia, being loyal to her father, helps him in his illegal operations, but at the same time, saves Batman from death from the hands of Al Ghul's employees.

The complicated relationship between the two is not the only Batman's romance at the analyzed period. In 1977, Bruce meets a beautiful socialite, Silver St. Cloud, with whom he will have his most serious romantic relationship in history (also, the first clear allusion to Bruce having sex life is hinted by Silver in *Detective Comics* #471 (August 1977)). Unfortunately, Silver recognizes that Batman is Bruce and breaks off the relationship, as it is too hard for her. Their break-up will influence Batman's behavior, causing him to lose his temper when fighting villains in *Detective Comics* #478 (August 1978).

Bruce's next girlfriend would be... Selina Kyle, the reformed Catwoman. In 1979, the old flirt between Catwoman and Batman would finally evolve into something more serious. After leaving prison, she decides to live according to law and to invest in Wayne Enterprises, also pursuing Bruce as her love interest. The couple gets closer, but a year later Selina leaves the millionaire and Gotham (*Batman* #326, August 1980) as she feels Bruce does not trust her when it comes to her new life. She would come back and try to get Bruce back from Vicki Vale in *Batman* #355 (January 1983).

Vicki reappears in *Batman* #344 (February 1982) and the flame between her and Bruce is reignited. She also becomes a much more important character than in 1940s and 1950s: she is often portrayed on her own, doing her work as a journalist, working on the mayoral election case and figuring out the identity of Batman (which she does, but is made to believe she is wrong by Alfred). Their relationship would essentially last, although

interrupted by Selina's, Talia's and Nocturna's appearances, until the beginning of the Crisis: she gives him an ultimatum in *Batman* #384 (June 1985), which is the tie-in Batman story of this story arc.

The last woman of Batman in this period is much more unusual than the rest. Natasha Knight, a.k.a Nocturna, a jewel thief, falls in love with Batman when he fights her and her stepbrother. When Natasha, claiming to have abandoned her criminal career, adopts Bruce's next ward and the second Robin, Jason Todd, they try to form a relationship. For a brief moment she helps Batman (whose true identity she discovers along with Jason's), but then Robin discovers a stash of stolen jewelry and the relationship is ended.

The amount of significant, deep, and complex relationships with women in the comics of the period may be a result of changes in viewing women in the society at the time. The 1970s is the period of strong feminist movement, so called second-wave feminism (Michałek, 475-476) and women were treated more equally at the time than it is even today. What is rare in the comic books and pop culture as a whole, some of the Batman stories in the early 1980s even passed the Bechdel test: Vicki Vale and Julia Remarque, working together at the newspaper, set their rivalry over Bruce aside, and work on their material together, not even mentioning the millionaire. Moreover, Batgirl, who is the hero of her own stories, teams up with Batman in *Batman* #311 (May 1979), coping with the trouble completely on her own while the superhero is unconscious. It is worth reminding that at this period, Barbara Gordon is also a Congresswoman.

Those storylines are also the effect of the authors' more serious approach towards the characters' psychology. All of them, even the supporting ones, are written as separate, complex personalities, whose motivations and experiences influence their actions. It is no longer a simple effect of drastic events, like the attack on Harvey Dent; there are also more subtle factors playing major roles.

Batman, or Bruce Wayne, up to this point very often an objective hand of justice, is now often influenced by his personal feelings. While in pain after the break-up with Silver, he not only takes it out on criminals, he also starts to question the influence of being Batman on his personal life; until this time, the character was mostly Batman, and to a less degree Bruce Wayne. Now the two personas balance each other, leading inevitably towards internal conflict. When being pressured by both his enemy, the Killer Croc and his friends:

Vicki, Selina, and Dick, Bruce snaps out in *Batman* #359 (May 1983), showing that the weight of saving Gotham is sometimes too much. Also, on many occasions, the reader is reminded of the death of Bruce's parents and his motivations standing behind his war on crime. This, with the more dark, sinister portrayal of the superhero, creates the image of an obsessed, deeply troubled person. Even when seriously ill or extremely tired (which is in itself an unusual portrayal of the character), the millionaire puts on his costume and prowls in the night. To Alfred and Dick he explains that crime in Gotham does not take leave of absence, but the reader sees that his senses enhance, his strength and quickness grow, that this is the thing he thrives in, his passion. He will do what he thinks is right, even at the price of being an outcast: from the city's officials, only Commissioner Gordon seems to believe in Batman. But he also turns his back on him, when the superhero is accused of being a murderer.

In *Detective Comics* #444-448 (January-June 1975) Batman is accused of shooting Talia Al Ghul and her father. Although all evidence is against him and he is wanted by the police, he hides as an outlaw and tries to prove his innocence with the help from the Creeper. Still, he prefers to fight the representatives of the state until he himself does his investigation and throws the evidence (together with the very much alive Talia) at Gordon's feet. This kind of attitude reminds of other then popular characters functioning at the verge of law: Harry Calahan (similarities between him and Batman discussed earlier) and Dr Richard Kimble, the main character of popular late-60s TV series, *The Fugitive.*

In addition, some of the background characters are given more space and psychology than before. Alfred is given a daughter, a fruit of his relationship with French Resistance heroine, Marie Remarque, adding a romantic angle to the character. Even Harvey Bullock, a police officer sent by Mayor Hill to destroy Gordon's career, first undergoes a character transformation, coming to the Commissioner's side, and then is shown as a big movie fan, who makes frequent analogies to film classics to understand what happens in Gotham.

But the most important psychological transformation applies to a character which until 1970 was as important as Batman: Robin. Having gone to college, Dick meets more people of his age, who are now engaged in political issues and are a part of the counter-culture. He himself grows to become an adult and his meetings with Bruce when he comes back to Gotham very often are sources of quarrels. Dick, as Robin, demands more

influence and independence in his work with Batman, which is denied to him, as Bruce still considers his ward too young and immature. This can be clearly visible in *Batman* #331 (January 1981), when Dick opposes to Bruce's relationship with Talia, to which his guardian answers that the young man has yet a lot to learn about life. Robin gets engaged in the Teen Titans and the duet grows apart. In 1984 Dick resigns from being Robin and gives the identity to Jason Todd, who already has replaced him as Batman's sidekick, and assumes the identity of Nightwing. Thus the 44-year-long history of the Dynamic Duo comes to an end.

The new Robin, Jason, is in a way a copy of his predecessor. A 12-year-old boy, the youngest in a family of circus aerialists, becomes an orphan when his parents are killed by the Killer Croc (they were helping Dick/Robin in his investigation) in *Detective Comics* #526 (May 1984). As an effect, the boy is taken to the Wayne Manor (to which Bruce and Alfred came back in *Batman* #348 (June 1982)) and taken care of. While wandering around the house, he discovers the Batcave, finds some clothes and starts helping Batman, to the superhero's dismay. After a brief conflict, which included Jason running away to the circus, he is accepted as the new sidekick and collaborates with Batman even during his stay at Nocturna's house.

In 1985, DC decided to make a revolution in all of its comics. By this time, the Multiverse has expanded widely, with numerous single-hero series, team-up series, series about alternative worlds like Earth-Two and Earth-Three. This caused troubles with logic and consistency. So, a big story arc, engaging all the DC superhero titles, which would help to simplify the plots and to get rid of some of the characters, was created. A wave of antimatter swept the Multiverse, a huge battle between Monitor, several superheroes and Anti-Monitor, who wants to destroy everything takes place. Only the primary Earth stays, though not intact, and only the strongest ones survive.

1.5. From Frank Miller to Grant Morrison: 1986-2013

The situation of the USA in late 1980s and 1990s was good: steady economy, low unemployment rates, no direct threat to the country, especially after the fall of the USSR, and the demilitarization of the country during Clinton's presidency (Michałek, 537, 594-595). Still, there were important internal issues which did not let rest the society. The gap between the rich and the poor was widening since Reagan and his reforms, which meant

turning the federal back on social issues, did not help to reduce it (541). Moreover, the migration of middle and upper classes from the city centers towards the suburbs was at the time at its greatest, making the downtowns dangerous, poor, slums-like neighborhoods (592). Changes in culture and the sudden progress in science, especially medicine, posed new moral and ethical questions and shook the traditional set of values: new debate around euthanasia and assisted suicide emerged with the case of Dr Jack Kevorkian (called by media Dr Death, like the Batman villain) (608-609); the rapid development of genetic research and first successes in cloning raised the fear of human clones and gene manipulating (607); additionally, the debate around abortion heated up, which resulted even in bombing the clinics and killing their staff members (608). What is more, the traditional model of family was in decrease, with the rising number of divorces, single parents, concubinages, and single people (593).

The last decade of 20ᵗʰ century meant a huge growth of population, especially the non-white people, Latino in particular (589-590). At the same time, Afro-American movements gained again more power (615). The idea of the melting pot, meaning that numerous cultures and minorities will melt into a larger whole, became outdated, and now the ideology of a multicultural society was adequate (614); this was also linked with the onset of the political correctness era (613). The rapid civilizational and cultural changes, which meant a more liberal and individual approach towards minorities, together with the remnants of the "conservative revolution" of the previous decade resulted in strong clashes between the conservatives and the liberals (616).

The internal tension in the society caused outlets like the Stockton massacre in 1989, in which the shooter aimed particularly at Southeast Asian children (640), national racial riots in 1992 (641), or the attack on the federal buildings in Oklahoma City, the strongest outburst of so-called Fed Scare: the fear that the federal government manipulates and hurts the citizens, triggered by the declassification of several Nixon-era documents and conspiracy theory-based shows like "The X-files" (619-620).

Due to the poverty in the centers of the cities, the crime rates were on the rise and the mobs became a plague. In New York city mayor Rudolph Giuliani announced his "zero tolerance" program: punishing even for the smallest breaches of law and strengthening the New York Police Department (617); soon, many other cities followed. With the Democratic majority in Congress, the Clinton administration passed laws limiting the

access to weapons (653).

Meanwhile, the millennium was coming to an end and the fears concerning such an important date were a significant experience of the people of the time. The media talked of the Y2K problem: the possible crash of the computer systems at the coming of the year 2000, as most of the older computers used two-digit date format (589). The fear, however, was a more metaphysical one. As early as 1986 Tony Kushner wrote his most famous play, *Angels in America*, in which the main characters' fear of the new millennium was one of the most important motifs. Some even believed that the year 2000 would mean the end of the world (610), which sometimes had its tragic consequences, like in the case of the Waco siege. For most of the people it only meant a symbolic point of transgression and worrying about future of the world in the 21st century after the atrocities of the 20th; still, the genre of catastrophic movies, showing a dystopian world of the 2000s, was reborn and thriving (625).

The fall of the USSR in 1991 was a shock to the society and to the federal administration (674). Although in the end of 1980s Reagan and Gorbachev managed to achieve a rather warm relationship, the Soviet Union was still the enemy. However, the democratization of the region did not mean relief for the Americans; on the contrary, it was the end of a black and white world, and international politics became more complicated. In South America, the USA's focus shifted from the Cold War confrontation to fighting drug cartels (686-687); even before the Spring of People, the events in Tiananmen Square in China caused tensions between the two countries (680). Moreover, the American administration decided to be the negotiator between Israel and Palestine (684). The last US strictly military action was the 1990 intervention in the Persian Gulf, a quick and successful operation (682). In political fiction literature, Iran, Iraq, North Korea, the corrupt governments of China and Japan, and international terrorist groups became the main opponents of America (628).

In Batman comic books, the year 1986 was not only notable for the Crisis on Infinite Earths crossover (which, in fact, did not change much in Earth-One Batman's continuity), but also for DC's bold move to commission a graphic novel on Batman from Frank Miller, a young comic book creator, who was noted for his work on Marvel's *Daredevil*. The effect, an out of continuity story about aging Bruce Wayne taking on his cowl after years of retirement, changed the whole attitude towards the new, Post-Crisis

37

Batman, to an even more realistic, gritty tone than it was before.

The Dark Knight Returns, although an out of continuity story, has to be analyzed in any text describing this period in comic books. In Gotham of the future, middle aged Bruce Wayne, now retired from the Batman cowl after a painful death of Jason, puts on his suit again, as America faces potential nuclear war and Gotham is ruled by crime and a mob of mutants. Helped by a new Robin (a girl named Carrie Kelley: a innovative solution in the all-male Batman world), he faces his old foe, Joker, then he pursues the leader of the mutants, drawing them on his side, and cleanses the city from criminals. The final battle is staged between him and his former friend, now a government agent, Superman. After winning with the Man of Steel, Bruce dies from a heart attack, but then comes back from the grave and literally goes underground with his own alternative army to plan a private war.

Despite being set in an undefined future, Miller's novel touches upon very current issues. In the background of the main events, a TV debate on the rightfulness of vigilantism takes place. The conservative experts and citizens are supporting the hero, the liberal ones (including Carrie's hippie parents, drug users lost in their memories of JFK and marches) call him a fascist. Miller does not take sides in this conflict; he does not want the novel to be a political one (Daniels, 151). He shows the Kelleys' obviously pathological treatment of their daughter, but on the other hand, in a brief commentary on the famous Bernard Goetz case (Dubose, 921), he shows a wealthy man pushing a crippled beggar, who asked him for money, under an oncoming subway wagon and claiming it was just self-defense, as he did not know whether his victim was not carrying a gun.

Moreover, the President of the United States, who sends Superman after the now outlaw Batman (after Gordon retires, the new Commissioner strongly condemns the superhero's methods), is clearly Ronald Reagan, portrayed in a not much favoring light: old, rambling, ruling the country from his farm. Reagan, during his campaigns and presidency, portrayed himself as a cowboy, a person who comes from outside the corrupt establishment to reform it, using whatever it takes to do it; a true political vigilante (916-917). This image helped him to deny any connections to the affairs the members of his administration were involved in and to maintain a good opinion among the public even years after the end of his cadence.

Still, Miller's and the reader's sympathy stands rather on the side of Batman.

38

Superman, who joins the government, is presented as pathetic (the main character calls him "a joke" during their fight), the crusade against the crime, even with the morally dubious use of the former terrorists, is highly effective, and even Commissioner Yindel eventually changes her opinion about the vigilante. According to Tim Blackmore, the novel also voices the public's concern about the rising amount of the rights of criminals, which resulted in the popular opinion that the muggers are more privileged than their victims (quoted in Dubose, 920). Nevertheless, since *The Dark Knight Returns*, Batman's mission will be accompanied by the Gotham society's doubts about the righteousness of his mission.

Another important graphic novel, this time included in the continuity, was Alan Moore's and Brian Bolland's *The Killing Joke*. This groundbreaking story, in which Joker, as Barbara Gordon puts it, "takes it to the limit", explores the relationship between Batman and his most important foe. Outstanding both for its violence (Darius, 39) and artistry (2-3), the novel decisively destroyed Batman's innocence: later years will only be harder for the superhero.

The story opens with Batman meeting Joker in Arkham and trying to talk about their mutual fate. Unfortunately, Joker is not there: the person he talks to is an impostor, the villain has escaped and (what the detective does not know) is heading to Commissioner Gordon's house. There, he shoots his daughter Barbara, takes naked pictures of her, bleeding and in pain and kidnaps the policeman to a deserted amusement park. Babs is not killed, only crippled and thus ends her career as Batgirl: this brutal event was shocking, unprecedented in the Batman mythos. Joker's motivation, however, is not harming Gordons: it is proving to Batman that a single day, like in his case, may drive anyone mad, even a person like the Commissioner. But Batman arrives, Gordon is freed, and the superhero pursues the villain.

The main event of the story, the fight between the two main characters, delves deep into their psychology and symmetry between them. Both of them had a "bad day", which made them who they are, but they chose different ways to survive the trauma: Joker thrives in utter madness, trying to spread it like a disease; Batman tries to prevent similar events, fighting crime. But are they so different? The final joke and Batman's reaction to it shows that there is more resemblance than the hero would like to admit: Batman is a madman who got away; Joker is the one who stays behind. The thin line between the hero and the

villain is now blurred; Batman becomes a postmodern character (18-19).

In this atmosphere of fin-de-siecle decadence, Batman enters a new continuity. As I have stated before, not many changes were applied: the most significant ones concerned Robin and Catwoman; Jason is now an orphan from the Crime Alley, Dick is fired by Batman, Leslie Thompkins is a doctor and knows Batman's identity, Selina was a prostitute taking revenge on the system, which favors the rich. This introduction to the Post-Crisis world was also made by Frank Miller in his Year One stories. In his two storylines, along with Moore's novel, Miller created the setup for the Batman in postmodernity: focus on the Dark Knight's psychology, his fears and obsessions, him being essentially a scared, lonely child all his life with serious attachment issues, estranging and pushing away anybody who cares for him.

When comparing the early 1940s Gotham with the one in the late 1980s, they are two different cities. At the first beginning of his career, Batman protected mainly the rich citizens of his city, fighting the numerous jewel thieves. In 1986, all the streets we see are the copies of the infamous Crime Alley, the road which was once a beautiful promenade, but slowly degraded into a murder and drug infested center of poverty; and it all started with the murder of Bruce Wayne's parents. Gotham's architecture is an ominous mixture of Gothicism and art deco, shown most of the time at night (Bruce barely functions during the day since he nominated Lucius Fox to be the CEO of all his companies), which makes the metropolis a mysterious, ominous, ancient (for American standards), horror-like place. Numerous depictions on splash pages and covers of Batman crouching on demonic gargoyles, like a vulture waiting for its prey, remind the reader of the Gothic literature, and underlining the character's primitive, almost animal motivations.

Although vigilantism is an institution more in accordance with the Republican ideology, both Batman and Bruce now help the weak, the poor, the social outcasts, becoming socialist figures. Batman inspects murders in the back alleys, chases drug dealers, helps orphaned children, poor families and addicts. Bruce funds hospitals and other facilities in the most poverty-stricken neighborhoods.

One of the first major Post-Crisis plots was a confrontation between a supervillain bearing the name of KGBeast, who, as one may deduce, is a Soviet agent trained to kill (*Batman* #417-#420, March-June 1988). He is sent by his mentor, a Soviet general who is not happy with the warm relations between the USA and the USSR, to kill people

responsible for the famous Star Wars program, including Ronald Reagan. Batman goes to Washington and becomes the President's personal bodyguard: for the first time since WWII does he claim the responsibility for the nation. KGBeast would reappear later on as an angry outcast of the fallen empire in the early 1990s. Earlier in that year, in *Detective Comics* #582 (January 1988) in a story which is a part of a crossover about aliens invading and infiltrating Earth, the creators rather humorously end the episode with an allusion that the beloved Nancy Reagan is now replaced by an alien.

Despite the Batman editor's creating Batman as a more detective type than a hero fighting colorful madmen characters (Daniels, 157), Joker soon reappeared in the Post-Crisis continuity, in rather unpleasant circumstances: with the still lingering infamy of the *The Killing Joke* events, the madman in a brutal and sad conclusion of Robin's escapade in search of his biological mother beats the boy up with a crowbar and then leaves him, half-dead, in a building filled with explosives. Batman arrives too late to save his sidekick. This story, called "Death in the Family" (*Batman* #426-#429, December 1988-January 1989) was significant not only because of one of the most shaking event in the superhero's history; the death of Jason was a result of the reader's voting and was decided by a small margin (160). In the conclusion to the story, Joker is offered by Ayatollah Chomeini himself to become the ambassador of Iran at the UN. This choice is not accidental: the USA was in bad relations with the country ever since the Iranian Revolution and overthrowing the Shah Pahlavi. As the Ambassador, Joker cannot be punished for Jason's murder. While giving a speech in the United Nations he tries to poison everyone; the tragedy is averted by Superman; Batman chases his opponent, but he has to stop when Joker's helicopter explodes. Angry, he concludes: "That's the way things always end with Joker and me. Unresolved."

In the months following "Death in the Family", Batman grows reclusive, obsessive, violent and refuses to acknowledge Jason's death. Bruce shows the darker corners of his psyche, almost killing criminals and pushing Alfred away. Fortunately, a new candidate for Robin, Tim Drake, appears at the end of 1989 and, after a thorough training and becoming a half-orphan, joins Batman as his new sidekick. Tim, son of wealthy, but absent parents, was gifted with great computer and deduction skills. By the age of nine, he deduced Batman's and Robin's real identities; the character became more popular than Dick and Jason and soon received his own monthly series, which would run for sixteen years

(Daniels, 170).

This period, however, is not only about Batman's personal tragedies and fighting aliens or monsters created by KGB: it also addresses more down-to-earth issues. The superhero fights drugs, which are a plague in his city, helps people who are so poor that they turn to crime or sell their lives to gangsters (*Detective Comics* #579, October 1987); ecstasy appears in *Detective Comics* #594 (January 1989); two issues later, he fights the authors and the enthusiasts of snuff films.

Moreover, the technological and demographic changes in America are immediately realized in the comics. Tim is the modern Robin, using computers to detect crimes and teaching Alfred to play video games (*Detective Comics* #635, September 1991); Batcave is by now equipped with lots of machines, gathering and processing data for the Duo. Additionally, crippled Barbara uses her computer skills and librarian knowledge to become the Oracle, a support center for all the DC superheroes. This, of course, is the effect of the technological boom of the late 1980s and early 1990s, the introduction of Internet, cell phone technology, and GPS (Michałek, 517, 527, 596-598, 606). The technological progress made Batman a less science-fiction and a more current character.

The changes in the racial structure of American society are reflected with the new additions to the background characters. Renee Montoya, a Latino policewoman created for the animated TV series, debuts in *Batman* #475 (March 1992). Later on, she would become one of the most important characters among the GCPD representatives. In the same issue, Vicki Vale, who was Bruce's girlfriend again after the Crisis, kisses her African American co-worker. In later books, she breaks off her relationship with Wayne and dates her new love.

The 1990s will prove a hard time for Batman. Crushed by the hardships of the previous years, he starts feeling weak in the late fall of 1992. In *Batman* #488 (January 1993) the situation is so hard that Robin recruits a stand-in for Bruce, as the millionaire is burned out. His choice is Jean-Paul Valley, a descendant of a long line of assassins called Azraels. In the same issue the readers could see one of the most memorable Batman opponents, the supervillain Bane, for the first time.

Bane, although huge, muscular, and using a substance that makes him a superhuman, is not only an abnormally strong man: he is also well-educated and intelligent. Having grown up in prison, he escapes and comes to Gotham to destroy

Batman and take over the control over the city. To weaken the superhero, he arranges a mass breakout from Arkham Asylum in *Batman* #491 (April 1993). Batman, already deadly tired and depressed, is put on a huge strain, fighting its inmates for several weeks. In issue #496 (Late July 1993) they finally meet in a battle; Bane wins easily over the superhero. The Dark Knight, half-dead, unconscious, with his back literally broken, is shown to the public and Bane announces that he takes over the city. Bruce is taken back to the Batcave and operated by Alfred, and Jean-Paul puts the cowl on again. Bruce Wayne is paralyzed and unable to come back.

By the time he would restore his previous strength (with some help from unconventional medicine), Jean-Paul would go insane, ruthlessly fighting crime in a Transformers-like armor (and defeating Bane) and Alfred would resign from his job (only to come back a year later). Soon after, in *Batman* #511 (September 1994), strange things start happening, as crisis in time, the Zero Hour takes place, causing changes to the continuity: Batman has never caught Joe Chill and prefers to stay out of public view, being more an urban legend than a real character for the common Gothamite; also, Catwoman is not a prostitute, but simply a woman living in a poor area of the city. Then, Bruce takes a brief break from vigilantism and gives the costume to Dick, only to come back in an even more grim, dark outfit, which matched his attitude.

Jean-Paul Valley's violent tenure in the Bat-suit and the quick shifts between Bruce and Dick in the cowl made Commissioner Gordon wary and distanced to the superhero. Especially that his new wife, Sarah Essen, has always been skeptical of the character. Without his butler, with lesser support from GCPD, with Tim living in a separate house with his father, Bruce shuts himself in the Batcave and becomes an even more lonely, obsessed figure, almost forgetting his civilian identity.

After a year and a half of quite normal (to the Batman standards) life of chasing criminals and Arkham Asylum runaways, a new tragedy hits Gotham: in two story arcs, "Contagion" and "Legacy", a mysterious plague of an unknown ebola virus reaches the city in *Detective Comics* #695 (March 1996). The city is decimated, many important figures are dead, even Tim falls ill. In *Detective Comics* #700 (August 1996) it is revealed that the disease was created by Ra's Al Ghul, who again attempts to realize his ecological dreams and sees Bane as the new perfect son-in-law. The antidote is invented and the crisis is averted (with the help of Oracle, Huntress, Batwoman, Azrael, Nightwing, and Alfred)

three issues later.

However, this is not the end to the troubles of the city. After barely having risen from the plague, Gotham is hit by a 7.6 earthquake in *Batman* #553 (April 1998). As a result, almost all buildings (apart from the ones built by Wayne Industries) are destroyed (including Wayne Manor), hundreds of people die, and the criminals and madmen escape. Chaos and crime overtakes Gotham, with just few vigilantes and police officers trying to repel it. Despite their efforts, and Bruce's declarations to invest all it takes to rebuild the city, the federal government decides to cut the city off from the rest of the country, abandoning it and declaring it a no man's land in *Batman* #562 (February 1999). Still, the now-formed new Batman Family (consisting of Batman, Robin, Nightwing, Huntress, Spoiler, Oracle, Catwoman, and later on a new Batgirl), and GCPD (although not in cooperation, as Batman has fallen out of Gordon's grace), stay in the separated area, fighting for the city to survive.

A difficult truce is set with Poison Ivy, who revives a park, gives shelter to orphans, and produces food for the city in exchange for freedom and peace on her territory. Bruce's huge investments in the city infrastructure and Batman's vital role in restoring the order in the city make Wayne possessive of Gotham; he starts treating it like his property; in *Batman* #566 (June 1999) Superman comes to help the city, but the Dark Knight is not happy with this appearance and gives the Boy Scout 24 hours to do what he can and leave. In *Batman* #572 (December 1999), the law stands on its head when the former Arkham inmates establish their own court and prison. In the next issue, Lex Luthor arrives to invest in the city, but he is quickly chased off when it is proven that he wanted to take it over. The end to the no man's land policy is brought in *Shadow of the Bat* #93 (January 2000), when the Congress lifts its previous resolution. During the countdown to the day Gotham would be reunited with the rest of the country, Joker goes on rampage, almost killing Huntress, kidnapping babies; when Sarah Essen Gordon confronts him in *Detective Comics* #741 (February 2000), he kills her; thus harming Commissioner even more. In *Shadow of the Bat* #94 (February 2000) citizens of Gotham greet the year 2000 and the end of the ordeals of the previous years; James Gordon welcomes it on his wife's grave.

Those long, epic, multithreaded crossover stories of the 1990s mirrored numerous issues the American society had to face. As I have stated before, the fall of the USSR rather than relief, caused tensions and fear of the new, non-binary world. This, together with the

liberalization of morals, rapid progress in computer technology and medicine, troubles of the big cities, and the fear of the new millennium caused a rather schizophrenic situation: the USA, outside an economical and political leader of the world, was troubled and torn inside.

Nothing is more telling than one of the main superheros being depressed and crippled and incapable of saving his beloved city. One has to remember that when Batman confronted Bane, at the same time the Superman was dead. Those plot solutions of course were used to increase sales, but it tells a lot when the editors take such harsh steps.

The plague and earthquake that touch Gotham remind of biblical disasters, ones sent by God to punish the sinners or to announce the end of the world. Indeed, their closeness to the much feared year 2000 give them an Armageddon-like feeling. In fact, in between the "Legacy" and "Cataclysm" story arcs, in the issues #69 and #70 of *Shadow of the Bat* a story called "The Spirit of 2000", filled with Gothic and Biblical symbolism appeared, in which Batman confronts a wizard trying to bring on an apocalypse. Moreover, the federal government's decision to abandon Gotham in "No Man's Land" arc may be interpreted as the echo of the Fed Scare, as it very much harmed American citizens. Ra's Al Ghul's and Poison Ivy's reappearance in full strength mirrors the once-again popular ecological issues, with the ozone layer being one of the main themes of public debate in 1990s.

The complicated, numerous plots of the time are an expression of the complication of the postmodern world. The comic books of 1990s focus on the individuals, exploring their psychology and relationships between them, showing that there is no black and white distinction. Batman very often acts like the villains he fights, at moments he is on the verge of insanity; thus, Joker's theory of one bad day from *The Killing Joke* almost proves true. Ironically, the villain proves to be better in relationships: during the "No Man's Land" appears Harley Quinn, his girlfriend, whom he treats very seriously; at the same time, Bruce is unable to keep a stable, romantic relation with a woman, or, in fact, any kind of bond with other person. Gradually, he becomes a reclusive, emotionally cold, obsessed person, focused more on his Batman persona than on Bruce Wayne.

The year 2000 brought neither apocalypse nor crash in computer system. It brought, however, a burst of the speculative "internet bubble", which threatened the USA with recession and one of the most troublesome presidential elections in history. The former

broke the optimism and belief in the new technologies, the latter divided the country (Michałek, 749) and raised questions about democracy in America. Moreover, the newly elected President, George W. Bush, was instantly faced with the issue of power shortages (753-754). Still, the worst was yet to come.

In September 2001, New York was a rich, cosmopolitan metropolis. The crime wave was tamed by the successful "no tolerance" policy of Rudy Giuliani. The Mayor himself was at the end of his last term in office, waiting to pass his position to a successor. In the morning of September 11th the face of the city, the country, and the world was changed. The beginning of the 21st century from now on was to be marked by the "War on Terror" staged by the American government.

The immediate attack on Afghanistan, and later operations in Iraq and other Islamic countries soon lost the support of American and international public. Accusations that the US government is more interested in oil than in introducing democracy in those countries appeared. The feeling of failure of those operations (Taliban troops still being in hold of several Afghan provinces, terrorist attacks in the occupied and occupying countries) caused comparisons to the tragic Vietnam war.

This, together with the huge, often compared to the 1929 Great Depression, economic crisis that marked the end of Bush's second term and a rather unfortunate choice of the Vice-President candidate, Sarah Palin, by the Republican candidate, John McCain, caused the US citizens to look for a new hope in the Democratic party. Its presidential candidate, an eloquent, youthful, witty, intelligent Mulatto Barack Obama quickly gathered support of the young, non-white, and female electorate. His socialist, to the American standards, approach and the hardships of the recession made his term a tough one, but at the same time it was marked by the withdrawal of the US troops from Iraq and the successful operation of catching and killing the American demon, Osama bin Laden, in 2011. In 2012, he was chosen for the second term.

The recession, which reminded American society of the vast economic gap between the richest and the poorest, and the feeling that big corporations and banks own their lives; the attempts to pass the SOPA act, which would limit the freedom of the Internet, now a basic communication platform; the controversies around the privacy policies of major Web companies like Google and Facebook, and the recent Snowden affair, together with the failure of the "Occupy" movement, caused the young generations to feel helpless in the

face of the stronger, manipulative, controlling forces of the corporate America. Moreover, the division between the conservatives and liberals grew even wider, with serious clashes over the issues of immigration, healthcare reform, taxes, abortion, same-sex marriage, and the availability of guns. The frustration, in recent months, brought tragedies like the mass shootings in a movie theater in Aurora, Colorado and in a primary school in Newtown, Connecticut. In addition, the nation was brutally reminded of the 9/11 in the Boston terrorist attacks.

Although Obama's administration is decided to focus more on the internal affairs, the international issues are not without relevance. Apart from the traditional involvement in Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, and Israel, the US government was faced with the violent outcomes of the 2010 Arabian Spring in Libya and Syria. In the first case, cruise missiles were sent in a quick reaction to the regime actively opposing the revolutionaries; the subject of the intervention in the latter country, at the moment of writing those words, is to be decided by the US Congress.

After rebuilding Gotham, Bruce Wayne becomes even more aloof when in the beginning of 2001 Tim is sent off to a boarding school (his father does not know about his son's second identity) and Alfred leaves with the boy, with the intention to butler for him. This coincidences with the only Batman's ally in the non-vigilante world, Gordon, being shot, almost killed, and retired from duty.

A year later, Bruce Wayne is framed into the murder of Vesper Fairchild, his former lover; Batman simply escapes from prison, getting rid of the "false" (according to him) persona, and becomes only Batman, refusing to do anything to solve the case and clearing his civilian identity's name (*Batman* #599-#600, March-April 2002). Alfred, who comes back to help his friend in need, is shocked and worried to see him in such a state and tries to push him back to normal life. It takes him almost half a year, until in *Batman* #604 (August 2002), after rethinking his past, Batman realizes that he is Bruce Wayne in the first place. Soon, he proves that the murder was ordered by Lex Luthor in vengeance for Wayne pushing him out of Gotham in "No Man's Land".

Two years later, a new Robin would appear, with disastrous effects. In 2004, Jack Drake learns that his son is Robin and orders him to retire from the cape. Tim's girlfriend, another teenage crime-fighter working under the alias of Spoiler, Stephanie Brown, puts it on and fills in as Batman's sidekick. As the Dark Knight is skeptical of the girl's abilities,

she attempts to prove her worth, trying to realize one of his plans to bring peace among Gotham gangs. The plan backfires painfully, causing a long and brutal gang war in the city, starting in *Detective Comics* #797 (October 2004). In its tragic aftermath, Stephanie and Jack Drake die, Oracle and Batgirl leave Gotham, the public opinion learns that Batman really exists and is not happy with this fact, Leslie Thompkins breaks off her friendship with Bruce, and Black Mask takes over the criminal underworld, making the crusade against it even more difficult. Meanwhile Tim is adopted by Bruce. During a sad epilogue in *Batman* #644 (Late October 2005) it turns out that Leslie has withheld from treating Stephanie, hoping that her death would bring end to vigilantism in the city. Batman, who visits her in Africa to get this testimony, calls her a murderer and warns her to stay away from him.

Leslie is not the only person close to Bruce who betrays him and turns to crime. Throughout the years, Batman fights his former childhood friend, Thomas Elliot, a brilliant surgeon (they freshen the old friendship when Elliot operates Wayne's fractured skull), who turns to crime, appearing under the alias of Hush. During the years, Hush would attempt on numerous occasions to destroy Bruce and to take over his place, resorting to such methods as plastic surgery (which makes him look like Wayne), using other Gotham villains to his convenience, and cutting out Catwoman's heart. Still, he will not be the most diabolical of the 21st century Batman adversaries.

Professor Pyg is a surgeon who, with the help of lobotomy, plastic surgery, and a drug which enables to control people, creates legions of deadly dolls. Another figure which reminds the reader of David Fincher's "Se7en" is the Dollmaker, a son of a cannibal, whose hobby is cutting off people's faces and sewing masks from human skin. In one of the most bizarre moments in Batman's history, the villain cuts off Joker's face (*Detective Comics* #1, November 2011). In June 2008, in *Batman* #673 an ominous person called Doctor Hurt appears. He attempts to convince Gotham's public that he is in fact Bruce's father and to discredit the Wayne family. As it turns out, he is an immortal ancestor of Bruce, also named Thomas Wayne, and a leader of a satanic organization called the Black Glove.

Most of those bizarre and dark figures are inventions of Grant Morrison, a brilliant comic book writer, who was invited in 2006 (after the Finite Crisis story arc) to take care of several Batman titles. Morrison, Batman's huge fan, who had previously worked on several stories about the Dark Knight, had much freedom to reform the character and to set

new standards for the 21st century (Chudoliński 2013, 1). He decided on a bold move to pack all Batman's past stories from 1939 into continuity (thus reintroducing several characters and events to the story), and created new characters; apart from the villains just mentioned, he dusted off the idea of Batman and Talia having a son and created Damian Wayne, a human genetically destined to kill; he decided for Batman to be less realistic, less on the verge of insanity, and more complicated. The whole mood of his comics is a more symbolic and grotesque, less down to earth, darker, "Blade Runner" like science fiction.

In 2009, during the Final Crisis crossover (another one of DC's attempts to straighten the complicated mythology of its universe), Batman... dies. The year is important, as it is the first year of one of the biggest financial crises in history, a period in which the whole capitalist system began to be questioned and the future of the world in the next months or years was unpredictable; people, especially the young ones, who were hurt by it the most, lost hope and started doubting the relevance of the current socioeconomic system.

Soon, the DC superheroes agree that although Bruce is dead, Batman is not, an the battle for the cowl between all the past Robins (with the exception of Stephanie, but including Jason, who was reintroduced as Red Hood, a villain helping Hush earlier on). In its outcome, Dick puts on the Bat-suit, Damian helps him as Robin, and Tim dones a new identity, the Red Robin; Jason remains in his Red Hood costume and uncertain status. Soon, they learn that Bruce is not dead, but most surely lost in time. Indeed, Wayne travels through time, learning the details to the symbolism of the bat and gaining more confidence about his mission. He returns to present-day Gotham in *Batman* #704 (January 2011) invigorated, admitting that he financed Batman's mission (but not that he is Batman) and announcing the establishment of so-called Batman, Inc., a mission to provide every country with its own vigilante in the face of a new criminal organization, the mysterious Leviathan.

The decision to create a Batman international franchise and selling it like any other brand was a daring step for Morrison, as the public opinion around grew more and more critical about big corporations, which were now seen as exploiting, manipulative, inhuman, and serving only the richest classes. Bruce Wayne, without doubt, has always been the representative of this system, on numerous occasions called the "idle rich", but his Batman persona and his constant involvement with social issues (foundations, donations to

hospitals and schools, finally rebuilding the whole city) excused his unimaginable wealth and huge house full of antics; the friendly, or in the later years father-son relations with Alfred pushed away any accusations of him using poorer classes to serve him. Still, turning the Batman logo into a merchandise at such point in American history raises eyebrows and compels to ask "how would Occupy movement react to this?". From another point of view, the desire to help the world may be interpreted as the emanation of America's still seeing itself as a world leader, an attempt to help other countries damaged by economy.

In following issues, Bruce leaves Gotham to Dick (who is still a Batman, the local version) and the rest of the Bat-family, and goes abroad to train the new vigilantes. Morrison's plan for Batman was broken by the complete reset of DC continuity in November 2011, after which he had to retell much of Batman's story; Bruce was again the only Batman, Dick was back to being the Nightwing, and Barbara Gordon is again the Batgirl. Still, Batman Inc. operates, but Batman focuses more on Gotham, as new, stronger villains appear.

Just after winning with his grand-grand-grandfather Thomas Wayne, Batman has to fight another strange opponent: an ancient organization called the Owl Court, which apparently has always ruled Gotham from the back seat and tried to eliminate the Wayne family. In the background, a bigger menace is preparing to attack.

The Leviathan, an international terrorist/criminal organization specializing in cloning, brainwashing and mutating people to serve its purposes, is the strongest foe of Batman in modern era. Soon, it turns out that it is run by Bruce's ex-lover, Damian's mother, Talia Al-Ghul. Talia, who has rebelled against her father, pursues Batman and attacks Gotham with the help of Professor Pyg (who is her creation) and Dr. Dedalus, a Nazi scientist. The war between Bruce and Talia, bearing the stain of personal conflict over their son, almost destroys the city and takes a tragic toll with the death of Damian, who is killed by his own clone in *Batman, Inc.* #8 (April 2013). In their final battle in *Batman, Inc.* #13 (September 2013) Bruce is severely hurt and poisoned and admits that Talia is stronger than him. In the last moment he is provided with the antidote, but has no chance to capture his opponent; the woman is killed by another Batman's ex-girlfriend, Kathy Kane, now Mistress of Spyral. When the astonished vigilante tries to put a sentence together (Kathy was supposed to be dead), he is quickly informed to stick to Gotham, as some of the matters of the world are beyond his comprehension and abilities. Humiliated by the two

women, Batman is left alone with a cow and a cat in the Batcave in a rather pathetic conclusion to the epic, years-long story arc.

Attachment 3: Batman and his friends (Batman, Inc. #13)

One has to have in mind that just before the final confrontation with Leviathan, in a crossover story with a telling title "Death of the Family" (October 2012-February 2013), Joker pursues all the vigilantes in Gotham: Batman, Nightwing, Red Robin, Robin, Batgirl, Catwoman, and Red Hood and gathers them on a bizarre romantic dinner to which Batman is invited. Fortunately, nobody dies, but the family falls apart as Bruce endangered its members by not trusting them and not giving them information. Thus, after the end of the affair with the Leviathan, Batman is once again left alone, broken, and unsure of himself, with Robin dead and only Alfred supporting him. Still, in the end the hope is restored, as Batman follows Kathy's advice and "sticks to what he does best": fighting crime in Gotham.

The Batman of the 21st century is lonely, dark, depressive, cynical, in constant search of identity: a perfect character to identify with in the times of financial crisis and the feeling of endangerment. The fact that one of the opponents proves to be too strong for the always invincible character, tells a lot about the condition of America: the failing economy and the loss of influence on the international stage; the tensions with Russia and China in UN, the threats from North Korea, and the still constant fear of terrorism broke the American spirit in the recent years. Announcing modernization of Gotham in *Batman* #1

(November 2011), Bruce speaks of overcoming inner demons; in *Batman, Inc.* #13 one has the impression that the demons overcame Batman.

The more psychological, even psychoanalytical, approach towards the characters and improving relations between them (father-son relationships between Alfred and Bruce and Bruce and Damian) is a standard approach in the times focused on individualism and on overcoming generalizations and stereotypes; and such are the times in America, with the third wave of feminism, the louder voice of the LGBTQ community, stronger attitude of the ethnic minorities. Pop culture and Gotham follow these trends: Renee Montoya and the new Batwoman, Kate Kane, are lesbians; Cullen Row, the brother of a potential new Batman's sidekick, Harper, is openly gay, and faces intolerance and bashing until the Dark Knight scares his bullies stiff.

Grant Morrison's period is over: with the end of the Leviathan plot, he finishes his adventure with Batman; his dark, crazy world is not easy to continue and the readers will have to see where his successors pick up the plot. America is at the dawn of attacking another country and in a slow recovery from depression. Future is open for both of them.

CHAPTER 2:

The Movies

The times are darker so you've got to make your character darker.
<div align="right">–   Daniel Waters (Robinson, 105)</div>

2.1. Tim Burton's *Batman* (1989) and *Batman Returns* (1992)

For *Batman* to be created, several factors had to meet. First of all, Frank Miller's and Alan Moore's achievements in the field of comics in the end of 1980s (*The Dark Knight Returns*, *Watchmen*, *The Killing Joke*) have changed the way this medium was perceived and renewed the public interest in it (Robinson, 52). Secondly, the producer duo, Jon Peters and Peter Gruber, who had agreement to shoot a Batman film with the owners of the rights, Michael Uslan and Benjamin Melniker, started working for the owner of DC Comics, Warner Bros. (54-56). Thirdly, the 50th anniversary of the character's first appearance felt like the perfect opportunity to honor it with a movie (54).

The choice of Tim Burton as the director was not accidental: his dark imagination and two quite successful films (*Pee Wee's Big Adventure* and *Beetlejuice*) made him a great choice to create a film about the dark, pre-"no killing" policy, back-to-roots Batman, as the producers wanted it to be. Moreover, the themes of feeling lonely and unfitting the society since early childhood was a prevalent theme in his stories, as well as his life (60-62).

The choice of the actor to play Batman was unusual and controversial. Michael Keaton, a rather average-looking, average-built man with experience mainly in comedy sparked hot discussions and protests (Marriott, 16, Brooker, 282). Moreover, casting Jack Nicholson as Joker, although the actor had a previous experience in playing homicidal madmen and his trademark was a sinister grin, also caused some uproar, but still a smaller one (Brooker, 282).

Nevertheless, *Batman* proved to be a good and a commercially successful production (Robinson, 79, Chudoliński 2012, 20). Michael Keaton's interpretation of Bruce Wayne as a mild, laid-back, intellectual millionaire by day, and a dark, ruthless crimefighter by night, was a great one, and his physical appearance helped to create it. Nicholson used the whole spectrum of his talent to portray Joker. Additionally, the actors portraying the supporting characters did their job well.

With the second film, *Batman Returns*, Burton was given full control, thanks to the success of the previous one and his growing role as a cinema author (Robinson, 90-91). This allowed the artist, much dissatisfied with his previous encounter with the superhero, to introduce his own vision of the Dark Knight, with a lot more Burton trademarks stamped in its scenes, characters, and plot. In *Batman Returns*, Bruce Wayne is once again played by Keaton, thus creating a feeling of continuity (although the set and most of the actors have been changed), and he fights in fact three villains: the Penguin (Danny DeVito), his partner in crime, and Wayne's rival businessman, Max Schreck (Christopher Walken), and Schreck's shy-turned-femme fatale assistant, Selina Kyle, a.k.a. Catwoman (Michelle Pfeiffer).

In both of Burton's films, Gotham is a dark, grim place, with huge crime rates and the mobs essentially ruling the city, with few honest public figures trying to change its reality. The director created the city as an out-of-time place. The inspirations were mainly Chicago and 1940s New York, but also sets from other movies: *Metropolis*, *Brazil*, and *Blade Runner*, combining gothicism, art deco, and Brutalism (Robinson, 73). This, together with the fact that most scenes are set after sunset, and all the day scenes are with an overcast weather, presents Gotham as a ominous place, a city perfect for breeding crime. In *Batman Returns* the sets were rebuilt, saving the atmosphere, but adding a grotesque touch of a grim fairytale to it.

The allusions to Batman's first year are also shown in fashion: several characters, especially the wealthy citizens, but also the gangsters and the police officers, wear clothes clearly in the 1940s style. Still, Bruce, Vicki, and Selina are dressed more modernly, and the latex cat-suit is very much late 1980s. In addition, Batman's costume and gadgets, resemble the viewer of the 1950s grindhouse science-fiction productions (one has to remember that Ed Wood is one of the favorite artists of Burton's).

Despite the turmoil of references to different decades, Gotham in Burton's films is

at heart a very much late 1980s-early 1990s American city: the homeless are seen everywhere, petty crime is an everyday thing, the police is corrupt, and the mobsters are rich and shown as respected citizens. Batman enters this world, trying to fight crime, and causes great confusion among the very elite he theoretically belongs to. The hopelessness of the D.A. Harvey Dent (not shown as Two-Face in this case), the Commissioner's lack of control (his own lieutenant is on mob king Grissom's payroll), and the fact that the city is cleansed only when a masked vigilante, an outsider, kills half of the criminals in town, shows that the mistrust toward the government and the law is great among the society the film addressed at the time.

As I have stated at the beginning of this chapter, the main inspiration for those movies were the comics from the first year of Batman's life on the pages of *Detective Comics*. Thus, the lack of Robin (who dispersed the grim atmosphere of the first books with his bright costume and wide smile) and the fact that Batman is, in fact, a killer. Yet, this aspect of his personality is not explored much, even when it turns out that his reluctant attempt to save Jack Napier's life effected in the creation of Joker. It is rather treated as a part of the job description, and the psychological elements of those stories focus on Bruce's duality, the problems with them agreeing (in *Batman Returns* Bruce has troubles with differentiating between the two personas in the civilian life; in *Batman* he bursts out with anger and aggression known only for his vigilante side when Joker interferes with his meeting with Vicki), the burden such a life brings on a person (the lift to the Batcave hidden in Iron Maiden is one of the brightest symbols of that), and the connections between Batman and his opponents. In addition, Burton, who has never read comic books in his youth, fell in love with *The Killing Joke*, insisting, that the first movie would be like the graphic novel (Robinson, 72). This inspiration helped to add a more modern and adult undertones to the movies.

In *Batman* the storyline plays on the circle of good and evil: Jack Napier kills Martha and Thomas Wayne, creating Batman, and many years later Batman drops Jack into chemicals, creating Joker. This background story plays on the themes similar to the ones in *The Killing Joke*: the strange relationship between Batman and Joker, in which one cannot exist without another. Yet, in the movie, Joker dies, and Batman still operates. In *Batman Returns* the relationship is more subtle. Both Bruce Wayne and Oswald Cobblepot are orphans and the heirs to large fortunes; both are outcasts who hide their real faces behind

conventional society roles (Bruce plays a playboy millionaire to hide the fact he is the Batman; the Penguin pretends to be an unfortunate, but honorable citizen and a good candidate for future mayor to mask his criminal activities); they both are judged on the basis on their looks (Batman because of his outfit, Penguin because of his physical appearance); they are both, in fact, typical Burton characters.

Despite the fact that *Batman Returns* has made a big profit worldwide, it received much critique for its tone and violence, seen as unsuitable for children (and the movie was advertised as a family motion picture) (Robinson, 103-105). Burton's vision was good artistically, but the Warner Bros. did not dare to give the next part to the director. Instead, they chose Joel Schumacher, an artist who is brighter and more politically correct, which would guarantee a more family atmosphere.

2.2. Joel Schumacher's *Batman Forever* (1995) and *Batman and Robin* (1997)

As they were issued after Burton's movies, Schumacher's versions of Batman were constantly compared to the ones made by the predecessor (Brooker, 294-297), and, there is no way to hide it, they did not look well upon the comparison. Yet, the director gave the company what they wanted: lighter, child- and teenager-oriented, brighter version of the superhero, the "Batman of the MTV and Backstreet Boys era" (Chudoliński 2012, 23). The hate of the reviewers and fans focused on the second film, which is considered one of the worst movies in history (23). The first step to make the movies more interesting for the younger viewer was the same thing Bob Kane and Bill Finger used back in 1940: adding Robin (Chris O'Donnell, in both parts).

In *Batman Forever*, Val Kilmer, although square-jawed and physically strong, like the comic book version of Bruce Wayne, basically continued Michael Keaton's line (he did not level with his predecessor in terms of the quality of acting, though). He is disturbed, reflective, makes Freudian slips and talks with his love interest, psychologist Chase Meridian (Nicole Kidman) about the dark corners of his mind. When he takes the just-orphaned teenage Dick Grayson under his roof, he tries to work on his pain and to explain to him the differences between good and bad. Moreover, whereas Tommy Lee Jones as Two-Face does not create a much talked-about role, Jim Carrey as Riddler intrigues and seems a perfect casting. His acting techniques add a lighter tone to the story without

necessarily making it bland, as it will happen in the case of the next episode of Batman adventures.

Batman and Robin's camp inspirations are evident from the very first minutes of the film. What is more, the director admitted inspiring himself with the despised 1950s and 1960s version of the Caped Crusader (Chudoliński 2012, 23). In one of the scenes, Robin calls something "Holly...": Burt Ward's catchphrase; the settings ooze with tackiness; the fights are accompanied by cartoon sound effects; the dialogue is full of punch-lines and corny humor. This, together with poor acting of the whole cast, bad screenplay, and other small things, gave something that is hard to watch even through the lens of irony.

Joel Schumacher was not the only one at fault. In fact, the producers' intention was to create a movie directed at a young audience, and a contract with Mattel, the famous toy company, was signed to ensure it, making the movie a giant advertisement of the merchandise produced around the premiere of the production (23). The effect was, unfortunately, less than poor, but the movie earned its money. Yet, Warner Bros. did not dare to release the next Batman picture until 8 years later.

The case of Schumacher's movies showed a significant change in the American society. Only few years earlier, creators like Burton or David Lynch, who presented the public with dark, oneiric, weird visions, full of metaphysical angst and intertextual allusions, were the ones who gathered large groups of people in cinemas and in front of TVs. This was the effect of the feeling of decadence and fear of the new millennium, coupled with the hard situation around. Paradoxically, towards the end of the 20th century, when the technological progress made a leap, introducing the era of Internet and cell phones, making good economy even better, when consumption has also risen, resulting in the growing amount of shopping malls (Michałek, 620); such times caused less need for existential pondering and more for a less engaging, more superficial entertainment, providing the consumer with gadgets. Ironically, the fear of such a society reverberates in *Batman Forever*, in which Riddler invents a machine which sucks intelligence from people watching TV and gathers it for him to become the most intelligent man on Earth: a rather unrefined commentary on the influence of TV on our everyday lives. Still, one may see some subconscious pattern in the choice of the villains for *Batman and Robin*, as the perseverance of the natural environment and global warming were highly discussed issues at the time.

2.3. Christopher Nolan's *Batman Begins* (2005), *The Dark Knight* (2008), and *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012)

The choice of Christopher Nolan, known previously for dark and realistic crime projects, with rather alternative, arthouse connotations (*Memento*, *Insomnia*) to author the new Batman film was a sign of a new take on the character. Casting Christian Bale, who was considered one of most skilled young actors, having proven it in dark movies deeply exploring human psyche (*American Psycho*, *The Mechanic*) was just a confirmation: the new Batman was to be psychological, dark, and realistic.

Indeed, *Batman Begins* was that kind of movie. The whole series is often called "the Batman of the times of war and crisis": the movies itself had a stroke of real-life death following it, especially the two last ones with Heath Ledger's death and Aurora shooting connected to them. Nolan created three long (no shorter than 2 hours and 20 minutes, *The Dark Knight Rises* lasts almost 3 hours) shows, full of special effects, but also deeply exploring the characters' psychology and motivations, and packed with more universal messages, psychoanalytical elements, and allusions to mythology and literature.

Nolan's movies are clearly influenced by the later comics from 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Using their themes and styles, the director pushed the realism and darkness to an even higher level. The suit and the gadgets are thoroughly described and explained, creating the image that a Batman could really exist in our times; all it takes is money and owning a company with some abandoned prototypes for the army in the cellar. Moreover, the Batcave is still a cave, a space barely adapted to the needs of the superhero, making it believable that one person was able to do such work. Bruce himself is the 1970s detective, who uses his deductive skills first, then physical force. Still, some of his opponents are much more clever than him.

Gotham City is clearly inspired by New York, with its skyscrapers, dark alleys and neoclassical architecture of the government buildings. It looks just like a normal American metropolis, with its problems and its criminal underground. It is also clearly racially diverse, as the Mayor has Latino features and the first Commissioner is African American.

In Nolan's trilogy, Bruce Wayne is an obsessed loner, just as he is presented in the modern comics. He is more Batman than Bruce; he is told that by his childhood friend and love interest. The millionaire, arrogant, spoiled, always with a woman on his arm, is just a

facade behind which he hides his nocturnal activity; he tries to push the few people around him away. This also, just like Burton's, is the Batman without a Robin, lonely in his cave, with only Alfred and Lucius Fox as allies.

Batman Begins, issued in 2005, was created in the lingering aura of 9/11 and its aftermath in the form of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The fear of terrorism was still strong, or even enhanced by 2004 Madrid and 2005 London subway attacks, which were a form of al Kaida's payback for the intervention in Afghanistan. Thus, the choice of Ra's Al Ghul (Liam Neeson), the head of a terrorist organization called League of Shadows, who, with the help of Dr Jonathan Crane, a.k.a. Scarecrow (Cilian Murphy) wants to spread chaos and fear in Gotham, is not a coincidence. Ra's with Arabian name, was a perfect character from Batman's gallery of villains. Changing him from an ecoterrorist to a man obsessed with destroying the decadent Western world, of which symbol he considers Bruce Wayne's hometown, Nolan perfectly expressed the current state of American public's psyche.

One has to remember that 9/11 has put a stain on American pop culture (Chudoliński 2012, 24). The first trespassing of American territory since Pearl Harbor, the first attack on civilians, and the almost 3000 victims caused a strong trauma among the society. The outburst of superhero movies soon after (Walker) and their more or less direct addressing of current problems is not a coincidence: America truly needed superheroes, but not in the Superman, god-like type, but rather in human, heroic fashion (Poniewozik).

However, the American reality has been changing rapidly in the recent years. The next part of the trilogy, *The Dark Knight*, had its premiere at the verge of economic crisis and towards the end of the Bush era. In this movie, Batman faces the thing Gordon (Gary Oldman) feared at the end of *Batman Begins*: escalation. After capturing the boss of the underworld, Falcone, the rest of the mobsters form a pact. Yet, there is a new person in town: Joker (Heath Ledger). The classical villain is even more horrifying than in the comic books; he is pure evil, trying to introduce chaos and anarchy to the world. At the same time, Batman finds an ally in the new D.A., Harvey Dent (Aaron Eckhart), Gotham's "white knight" (to oppose the one in the title), who uses law to fight the same enemies. In *The Dark Knight*, much like in *The Killing Joke*, Joker tries to prove to Batman that anyone's character can be broken: killing Rachel, Bruce's love interest and Harvey's girlfriend, and causing burns to the D.A.'s face, the clown makes the white knight a villain,

who avenges his tragedy.

Ledger's great creation, made legendary by his tragic passing shortly before the premiere, and the confrontation between Joker and Batman, are the core of the movie. The villain, a person from nowhere, who appeared in Gotham as if in the answer to the superhero, seems a part of the same person, the embodiment of the evil Bruce tries to wipe out from himself and from the world (Chudoliński 2012, 95). Although Joker claims not to be a schemer, his intrigues are so carefully planned that Batman's every decision becomes a tragic choice; in the culminating moment of the movie, he has to choose between his love and the only chance to retire; he saves neither. The only optimistic scene of the movie is Joker's second social experiment, in which people on two boats are challenged to blow each other off and they do not decide to do it.

Nolan's Joker is the epitome of the 21st century world's state of mind: financial crisis, the gap between the poorest and the richest, hunger, wars, terrorism: all of those stories, although maybe not unique for our times, are louder because of the expansion of the Internet and the news channels seeking more shocking content to chase the on-line rivals. He is, in fact, as Janusz Wróblewski has stated it in his article on the Aurora shooting, "the symbol of our times". Moreover, to chase the villain, Batman breaches the trust and privacy of Gotham's citizens: he turns every mobile phone into a sonar, enabling him to observe the whole city; an infringement similar to the tools used under the Patriot Act: a bill passed to fight terrorism, enabling invigilation of regular citizens by several federal agencies. In addition, Batman also fights a Chinese accountant, who worked for the Gotham gangsters: at the time, China's economical expansion was astonishing and it showed its muscle during the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing; still, the Communist regime and the exploitation of people made people wary of the country's regime and its possible influence on the world.

Although many reviewers accused the movie of pure Bushism (Walker), it is at heart a contrary statement. Batman's war on crime, similarly to the President's war on terrorism, leads only to the escalation of violence and to further deaths. The machiavellian use of mobile phones, although applied in extraordinary circumstances, is still at least morally dubious, which is immediately voiced by Fox, one of Bruce's father figures in the movie. Finally, as one of the attendants of Harvey Dent's press conference shouts, "things [in Gotham] are worse than ever!": previously it had only Falcone to worry about, now an

anarchist madman terrorizes it, leaving numerous casualties, including the police Commissioner, behind.

When *The Dark Knight Rises* had its premiere in 2012, the economic crisis has dominated public debate and the lives of many for a few years now. Many people lost hope in their futures, being jobless, not being able to pay mortgage. As I have stated in the previous chapter, capitalism itself was questioned. Movements like Occupy were pacified, their demands unfulfilled, their ideals quickly forgotten, the government helping the banks instead of people. Pessimism was even deeper than before.

The movie, although alluding to Frank Miller's graphic novel, rather uses the themes if *Knightfall* and *No Man's Land*, the dark crossover stories from 1990s, which fed on the millennium scare. Bruce Wayne, after the events of the previous movie, shuts himself in his manor and Batman disappears for eight years. He has to put his uniform on again, however, when a new force of evil emerges from Gotham's sewers: Bane.

Bane (Tom Hardy), whose only noted place of living is a prison in the middle of a desert, a place full of despair and impossible to run away from, is a child of war, a dictator born out of America's wars in Middle East and Africa (Chudoliński 2012, 115). Both Bane and Batman were created by the same man, the ominous Ra's Al Ghul and were the members of League of Shadows; thus, although standing against each other, they are very similar. Both of them want to change Gotham, getting rid of the evil lurking in the city; but Bane's methods and motivations can only produce pain and destruction, whereas Batman's goal is to introduce law and order (114).

The villain continues the goal of his predecessor: destroying Gotham as the source, core, and symbol of the decadence of the Western world. In his speeches he underlines that the city, now separated from the world, is in the hands of people; yet his first move is to set free the prisoners and appointing former Scarecrow as the judge in his Kafkaesque court. This reminds the viewer of a Communist-like regime, a tyranny built on the slogans of freedom to the people. In his first fight with Bane, Batman is defeated, broken, and sent to prison. In those parts of the film, based on the themes of hero's journey, fighting fear, and overcoming the influence of father, he prepares to free the city he failed by losing with the villain. Similarly to *No Man's Land*, upon his comeback, Batman fights for the city with the help of a small family: Commissioner Gordon, Lucius Fox, a young orphaned policeman Blake and Selina Kyle. He learns to trust people and to allow them to help him.

Thanks to their teamwork, the city is saved from the dictator and from an atomic bomb: a hopeful message to the public. It is also optimistic for Bruce: finally, he can retire, handing over the cape to Blake (whose real name is... Robin), and spend his life at peace with Selina.

The last part of Nolan's trilogy shows Gotham in an even worse state than it was before; the negligence of city's authorities leads to it being cut off from the rest of the country and ruled by a violent dictator. Yet, it finally has a happy ending, showing that at the end of the day even a superhero needs the people, their hope and strength. It is like a filmed speech of a politician governing during the times of crisis.

Nolan, creating his vision of Batman, was inspired by the reality around him (Chudoliński 2012, 82). His movies clearly comment on it, exploring the fears, demons, and hopes of the public, the thing that Batman, with his humanity and darkness, is perfect for. The dark reality of war, terrorism, and corruption needs its superhero: a rather conservative approach. Yet, Nolan does not give easy answers: his Batman, although his intentions are good, is, in a way, his opponents' accomplice. The trilogy shows that any kind of ideological extremism does not do any good. Batman's mistakes and blindness in several moment of his life cause much trouble to his city later; at the end of the day, it is not only him who saves Gotham, but also the more scrupulous and ordinary Gordon or much less strict to the "no killing" rhetoric Selina. The latest Batman movies, just like the modern comics, are not based on the binary relation of white and black, good and evil. All the people function in he grayscale, including their vigilante, their "watchful protector", as Gordon puts it.

CONCLUSION

Maybe every ten years Batman has to go through
an evolution to keep up with the times.
– Bob Kane (Daniels, 17)

The aim of this thesis was to prove that the changes in Batman comic books have been influenced by the social, economical, political, and cultural changes in the American society. Its goal was also to prove that the different visions of the superhero in the movies, starting with 1989 *Batman*, also were caused by the very different state of the country in the periods they were shot and premiered.

In the first chapter, I have analyzed Batman comic books from the superhero's first appearance in *Detective Comics* #27 (May 1939) to the end of Grant Morrison's six-years-long epic crossover about the Dark Knight's battle with Leviathan in *Batman, Inc.* vol.2 #13 (September 2013). Between the two points in time, Batman has evolved from the dark vigilante of the Depression era, through the patriotic detective of the wartime and post-war period, the bland and ridiculous character of McCarthyism, campy Caped Crusader of 1960s, again the dark detective of crime and trouble-ridden 1970s and 80s, the broken, decadent figure on the Millennium Scare era, to the complicated, abandoned loner of the period of terrorism and crisis.

What is more, the live action Batman films produced by Warner Bros. I have analyzed in Chapter 2, which were high-budget productions with the ambition to become pop-cultural events of their years and blockbusters, have touched more or less directly upon the current day issues, or were the effects of them. While Burton's vision was essentially timeless, its darkness and grotesque were appealing to the public overwhelmed by the fall of the USSR, the internal problems, and the year 2000 on the horizon; Schumacher's movies were tacky, campy, and badly-made, but they achieved success with the consumption-oriented, MTV-influenced public of the late 1990s; and Nolan's trilogy

63

straightforwardly based on the hard times of terrorism, wars, corruption, inequality, and bad economy.

The pop culture, although very often disregarded as shallow, commercial, and not thought-provoking, does not exist in a vacuum. To appeal to a large public, it has to address its needs, hopes, fears, and inner demons. It is also very often used to provoke discussion, to convey a message to the audience, to cross some barriers and set up new standards. To achieve those goals, it has to address the current socio-economical situation, the politics, the morality, the attitudes towards issues like religion, tolerance, or diversity. It also has to derive inspiration from higher art. Very often, especially in the recent years, it tries to transgress the boundaries between the high-brow and the low-brow, and to get a little ahead of its times. The first interracial kiss on TV occurred between Star Trek characters, teenage shows like "Glee" or "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" change the public's view on homosexuality and gender, the new superhero movies portray the dark vision of the world in the first decades of 21st century and give hope that someday, it all would end.

The same goes for Batman. As he is a part of modern mythology, he is here, for over 74 years, for us to process the world outside, to set rules and boundaries, and, at times, to provide entertainment and escape. He has changed so often and so drastically that it is hard to claim that it is the same character the world met in 1939. In fact, there are many Batmans, with different motivations, moral codes, approaches, and symbolisms. They share the same background story, the same name, and the same symbol on the chest, but they are, essentially, different people for different times.

Batman, with his complicated history, and with the many visions of different artists, may be analyzed in many ways. He can be interpreted as a pop-cultural phenomenon, a man in tights fighting criminals; as a mythological hero, with his classical journey to heroism; as a source of moral code of the times he lives in; he can be analyzed through the lens of psychoanalysis, which would explore his double personality and the relationships with his villains; he can be seen as a conservative vigilante and a liberal charitable persona. The many facets to his image and the fact, that he is a human being with gadgets rather than a victim of experiment or god-like alien, makes him exceptional and vulnerable to new interpretations as the world goes on.

In my thesis, I have managed to show that the hardships, fears, hopes, moral attitude, etc. of the public have influenced the portrayal and understanding of the character.

Usually, the harder, darker times, invoked the more complicated, grim Dark Knight, whereas the rather calm and conservative audience of the pre-counter culture, McCarthyist times preferred their heroes to be less horrifying, more entertaining, and providing with lots of merchandise; the situations repeated itself with the brief stabilization of late 1990s, when Schumacher's campy vision of the Caped Crusader gathered millions of viewers in the cinemas. The good economic situation of late 1940s and 1950s created a more bright character, but the image was clouded by the fear of nuclear war as soon as the Cold War has become a real threat; the tragic events of late 1960s and the rise of activism in many areas created the demand of a more realistic approach to the character; the internal troubles of late 1980s and 1990s, added with the symbolic dimension of the year 2000 pushed Batman even deeper into darkness. The early 21st century stories, similarly to Nolan's movies, are full of pain, despair, with little hope; Batman fails the people he swore to protect more often and with more tragic consequences than ever.

In this thesis, I have also touched upon many other interpretation tropes that can be applied to the character and the stories told about him, especially in the later years, when with the appearance of Alan Moore and Frank Miller in the late 1980s, the comics started to be treated more as works of art, revolutionizing their perception among the public and the editors' attitudes towards their products. Yet, the many levels of interpretation, the symbolism, and the many possible ways of analyzing it, from classic mythology, Eastern symbolism, Freudian and Jungian psychoanalysis, to Western philosophy, were, sadly, impossible to convey in the work, given the page and time limit.

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Zmieniający się wizerunek Batmana w komiksie i filmie

Abstrakt

Celem tej pracy jest opisanie ewolucji przedstawiania postaci Batmana w komiksie i filmach produkcji wytworni Warner Bros. oraz przeanalizowanie przyczyn owych zmian. Praca skupia się na wpływie przemian społecznych, politycznych, ekonomicznych, historycznych oraz kulturalnych na popkulturę, a szczególnie na postać Mrocznego Rycerza.

W pierwszym rozdziale analizowane są przede wszystkim serie komiksów skupiające się na postaci Batmana oraz jego relacjach z otoczeniem (*Batman*, *Batman and Robin*, *Batman, Inc.*, *Shadow of the Bat*, itd.), mieszczące się w nurcie głównego continuum i mające miejsce w świecie opisywanym jako Earth-One, a później New Earth. Nie uwzględnia on komiksów spoza głównej narracji o bohaterze, mających miejsce w światach alternatywnych, dotyczących innych postaci ze świata DC lub będących jednorazowymi eksperymentami z postacią, jak np. w serii Elseworlds. W rozdziale opisywana jes 74-letnia historia oraz ewolucja bohatera, ukazując mnogość osobowości Batmana, zależnych od mód, wizji redaktorów i artystów, oraz od wymogów czytelników oraz opisując elastyczność tego superbohatera, który przechodzi zupełną metamorfozę co około dziesięć lat, by dorównać szybko przeobrażającej się współczesności.

Drugi rozdział analizuje filmy nakręcone przez trzech reżyserów: Tima Burtona, Joela Schumachera oraz Christophera Nolana, opisując procesy ich powstania, powody stojące za decyzjami o wizji bohatera w danej serii, reakcje krytyków i publiczności, oraz mniej lub bardziej bezpośrednie wpływy wydarzeń historycznych oraz ogólnej kondycji Ameryki w czasie ich powstawania. Wcześniejsze filmy i seriale, z racji ich niewielkiej wartości dla mitologii Batmana, są omówione w rozdziale pierwszym w kontekście ich wpływu na komiksy.

Postać Batmana, będącego jednym z niewielu komiksowych superbohaterów cieszących się nieprzerwanym życiem od czasów drugiej wojny światowej, jest bardzo dobrą podstawą do analizy przemian społeczeństwa amerykańskiego i ich wpływu na popkulturę. Co więcej, fakt, że jest zwykłym człowiekiem, oraz mroczna aura

towarzysząca mu, z przerwami, od momentu powstania, sprawia, że jest ciekawszym obiektem interpretacji niż jego koledzy i koleżanki będący potomkami bogów i kosmitów, przez co są mniej związani z ludzkimi dylematami i bolączkami. Ponadto, dzięki swojemu człowieczeństwu, traumatycznej historii oraz podatności na zmiany wynikające z potrzeb czasów, może być on przedmiotem interpretacji przez wielorakie perspektywy. Uniwersalny i artystyczny wymiar takich dzieł jak "Mroczny Rycerz Powraca" Franka Millera czy "Zabójczy żart" Alana Moore'a czynią z niego jedną z najważniejszych fikcyjnych postaci naszych czasów.

Słowa kluczowe: *Batman*, *Komiks*, *Film*, *Superbohater*