

# Hero and Anti-Hero in the Batman–Joker Narrative: A Phenomenological and Intertextual Analysis

## Batman–Joker Anlatısında Kahraman ve Anti-Kahraman: Fenomenolojik ve Metinlerarası Bir Analiz

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### Abstract

*This article examines their narrative relationship through phenomenological and intertextual analysis, arguing that their opposition is not merely a battle between good and evil but a unity in which both characters define and sustain each other. While Batman embodies the pursuit of justice and order, Joker represents chaos and anarchy, yet both emerge as products of Gotham's systemic decay and their own traumatic pasts. Their contrasting ideological perspectives lead them to adopt different methods: Batman works within the boundaries of law and morality, whereas Joker challenges and undermines these structures. However, despite their apparent opposition, both characters resort to violence as a means to achieve their respective goals, blurring the line between hero and anti-hero. By analyzing films such as *The Dark Knight* (2008), *Joker* (2019), and *The Batman* (2022), as well as key graphic novels, the article explores how their interdependence is constructed narratively and thematically. Ultimately, the research finds that Batman and Joker are not just adversaries but reflections of the same social contradictions -two mirrored images revealing the instability and moral ambiguity at the heart of Gotham's corrupt order.*

**Keywords:** Narrative, Character, Hero, Anti-hero, Batman, Joker.

### Öz

*Bu makale, fenomenolojik ve metinlerarası analiz yöntemleriyle onların anlatısal ilişkisini incelemekte ve aralarındaki karşıtlığın sadece iyi ile kötünün mücadelesinden ibaret olmadığını, aksine birbirlerini tanımlayan ve varlıklarını sürdüren bir bütünlük oluşturduklarını öne sürmektedir. Batman, adalet ve düzen arayışını temsil ederken; Joker kaosu ve anarşiyi yüceltir. Ancak her ikisi de Gotham'ın sistematik çöküşünün ve kendi travmatik geçmişlerinin birer ürünü olarak ortaya çıkar. Farklı ideolojik bakış açıları nedeniyle zıt yöntemler benimserler: Batman yasalar ve ahlaki sınırlar içinde hareket ederken, Joker bu yapıları yıkmaya ve değersizleştirmeye çalışır. Fakat yöntemleri ve hedefleri ne kadar farklı olursa olsun, her ikisi de amaçlarına ulaşmak için şiddetli bir araç olarak kullanmaktadır ve bu durum kahraman ile anti-kahraman arasındaki sınırları da bulanıklaştırır. *The Dark Knight* (2008), *Joker* (2019) ve *The Batman* (2022) gibi filmler ile önde gelen çizgi romanları inceleyen çalışma, iki karakterin anlatısal ve tematik düzeyde nasıl birbirine bağımlı kurgulandığını araştırmaktadır. Çalışmada, Batman ve Joker'in, yalnızca düşman değil, aynı zamanda aynı toplumsal çelişkilerin yansımaları olduğu ve Gotham'ın yozlaşmış düzeninin içindeki ahlaki belirsizlikleri açığa çıkaran birer aynaya dönüştükleri ortaya konmaktadır.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Anlatı, Karakter, Kahraman, Anti-kahraman, Batman, Joker.

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## Introduction

To the extent that people describe the world, they also shape it by making sense of it through narrative. Narrative, the most fundamental form through which people construct their existence and experience, serves as a bridge between individual and collective consciousness. Throughout its historical continuity, various narrative forms, such as epics, myths, theater, and cinema, reveal the dreams and fears of the collective consciousness. Undoubtedly, the central figure of a narrative is the hero. Since antiquity, the hero has served as an idealized model representing the social order and exalting shared values. Whatever form it takes, the hero archetype constitutes the defining essence of narratives; their existence is a reflection of the collective consciousness and reflects a society's shared ideals and fears.

In this respect, the hero figure is certainly dynamic. From ancient Greek tragedies to medieval chivalric romances, from Romantic literature to modern cinema, the hero has undergone a constant transformation (Tilbe, 2019: 143-145). While Aristotle's Poetics defines the hero as an ethically superior and virtuous figure, the concept of the tragic hero emerged in Shakespeare's era, incorporating flaws, internal conflicts, and mistakes as integral parts of the narrative (Tütüncü, 2021). With 19th-century literary movements, the hero gained more human dimensions, and the once rigid boundaries between absolute good and absolute evil became increasingly blurred (Kadiroğlu, 2012: 9-10). In the 20th century, cinema, comics, and popular culture led to an even more radical transformation in heroic narratives. The hero was no longer a virtuous figure representing only goodness; he became a much more complex being shaped by personal traumas, moral conflicts, and inner darkness (Öz, 2022).

This transformation defines the essence of modern narratives, where social roles give way to individual existence, inner struggles, and moral ambiguity. The hero has transformed from an idealized protector of society to a being confronted with personal dilemmas and existential uncertainties. This shift marks both an evolution in narrative structure and a profound rupture in the concept of heroism, ultimately giving rise to the anti-hero. Unlike the ideal hero of classical narratives, the anti-hero is a figure who clashes with societal norms, lives in moral gray areas, and at times rejects traditional heroic values. Precisely for this reason, he has become an increasingly compelling character. In modern storytelling, the anti-hero frequently takes center stage as the protagonist.

Even when not at the center, the anti-hero plays a crucial role in defining the protagonist's identity, and from this point on, the dramatic conflict within the narrative cannot be reduced to a traditional struggle between good and evil. The relationship between the hero and anti-hero begins to carry a deeper meaning, revealing how one complements, even creates, the other. This dynamic and dialectical relationship is worth examining as it offers a more layered understanding of human nature.

## *Methodology and Data Analysis*

Within this framework, the article argues that the relationship between Batman and the Joker should be examined beyond the traditional hero-antihero dichotomy. This study aims to explore how the hero/antihero distinction is reconstructed by offering a phenomenological and intertextual reading of the narrative relationship between Batman and the Joker. In this context, the study offers an analysis drawing on select comic book texts as well as cinematic examples and suggests that Batman and the Joker should not be viewed as absolute opposites, but rather as two similar figures shaped by the same societal collapse and manifesting their existence in different ways (See Appendix A).

Guided by an interpretive phenomenological and intertextual framework, the study examines the Batman-Joker duo through films, comics, and selected episodes to determine how their relationship reconfigures the categories of hero and antihero in contemporary narrative. Intertextual reading is used to map intertextual motifs and structural echoes, while phenomenological attention is directed to each character's lived experiences and ethical decision-making processes (Allen, 2000: 209).

## *Research Questions*

The article's research questions are as follows:

RQ1. In the analyzed corpus, how do narrative structures and recurring motifs reconstruct the boundary between hero and antihero in the context of Batman and Joker (e.g., reflection, interdependence, symmetrical moral tests)?

RQ2. What aspects of Batman and Joker's internal experiences constitute their ethical stances?

RQ3. What is the contribution of Gotham's socio-economic order to the formation of the characters of Batman and Joker?

RQ4. How are specific scenes and themes used to reveal the fragility of the moral order and test collective ethics, and how does Batman's response reconstruct or disrupt this order?

## Hypotheses

The study's hypotheses can be listed as follows:

H1. Doppelgänger Hypothesis: Throughout the texts, Batman and Joker are constructed as co-constitutive identities. Scenes of mutual recognition and testing demonstrate that each character's narrative function presupposes the existence of the other.

H2. Socio-economic Mediation Hypothesis: Batman is associated with the preservation of property and institutional balance, while the Joker is associated with the disruption that makes systemic contradictions understandable.

H3. The Legitimacy of Violence Hypothesis: Batman's violence maintains order, while the Joker's exposes its corruption. However, both forms of violence converge in practice, blurring the moral line between hero and antihero.

H4. The Intertextual Convergence Hypothesis: The independent texts jointly perpetuate the blurring of all boundaries between Batman and Joker.

The study draws on a selected corpus of films, comics, and animated works that highlight the complex interdependence between Batman and Joker. It focuses on three cinematically significant contemporary films: *The Dark Knight* (2008, Christopher Nolan), *Joker* (2019, Todd Phillips), and *Batman* (2022, Matt Reeves). In terms of comics, the oeuvre includes canonical and influential texts that have significantly shaped the representation of the Batman-Joker duo: *The Dark Knight Returns* (1986, Frank Miller; DC Comics), *Batman: The Killing Joke* (1988, Alan Moore and Brian Bolland; DC Comics), *Batman: Death of the Family* (2012–2013, Scott Snyder and Greg Capullo; DC Comics), *Batman: White Knight* (2017–2018, Sean Murphy; DC Comics). The animated medium is also represented by the *Batman: The Animated Series* episode "The Man Who Killed Batman" (1993, Bruce Timm), which offers an original variation on the mythology.

## 1. The Pillars of a Story: Narrative and Character(s)

Narrative is a fundamental tool for conveying and giving meaning to human experience. Through narratives, individuals and societies construct their identities, share values, and interpret the world (Fludernik, 2009: 40-41). Various definitions of the concept of narrative across disciplines reflect its multifaceted nature (Derviřcemalođlu, 2014: 50). In its broadest definition, narrative is any communication process in which one or more individuals convey real or fictional events, along with related objects, actions, structures, and processes, to a small or large audience (Prince, 1982: 1-5). Fundamentally, a narrative presents events, characters, and settings within a specific linguistic coherence and structure (Chatman, 2009: 21). This structure, while highlighting the cause-and-effect relationships between events (Thompson & Bordwell, 2006: 75) and legitimizes the actions of characters, creating a sense of meaning because it emerges as a whole of real or fictional situations (Genette, 2020: 14-15).

Naturally, such a significant phenomenon has become a subject of thought and research. In ancient Greece, Aristotle's analysis of the structure of tragedy in his *Poetics*, defining elements such as plot (mythos), character, and catharsis, is seen as the beginning of systematic research on the form and function of narrative. Developments such as allegorical interpretations of religious texts in the Middle Ages, the human experience-centered approach of literature during the Renaissance, and the rise of the novel in the Age of Enlightenment deepened the evolution of narrative, while an independent field of narratology emerged in the 20th century as an interdisciplinary field informed by linguistics, structuralism, and semiotics (Fludernik, 2009: 1-4).

Monika Fludernik emphasizes that the goal of narratology is to define and clarify the constants, variables, and their combinations specific to narrative (2009: 8). In this context, at first glance, a narrative appears to have two constant components: The story (content) and the chain of events (actions). While every narrative conveys a sequence of key events, it does much more than that -it creates meaning (content) (Topçu, 2011: 109). Characters are undoubtedly the carriers of the narrative chain of events. The narrative also reveals the internal and external journeys of the individuals around whom events unfold. Characters are crucial elements that both drive the actions and deepen the narrative's meaning as the story unfolds.

Each character creates a microcosm within the narrative's world, and this microcosm enriches the story by reflecting themes and conflicts at both the individual and societal levels. As Barthes (1991: 109–110) noted in his analyses of cultural myths, characters often function as semiotic nodes that condense broad ideological conflicts into a single figure. In this context, characters are not merely tools of storytelling but also actors who integrate with the essence of the narrative and shape its meaning. The fundamental characteristic of a character in a narrative is that they possess a unique psychology (Nutku, 1990: 179). Characters stand out through their individual traits, creating differences that

capture the attention of the audience. Characters stand out with their individual characteristics and create differences that capture the audience's attention.

Cinema, as a distinctive form of modern narrative, magnifies this semiotic and psychological depth by mobilizing its audiovisual resources. Through image, sound, and performance, the medium renders the ideological and emotional tensions embodied in characters directly perceptible. The intensity provided by these elements simultaneously reveals the physical, psychological, and sociological dimensions of character. As Bordwell observes, one of the crucial functions of cinematic narration is to make the character's perceptual and emotional processes legible within the dramatic construction (1985: 34–36). By foregrounding both the individual and the collective dimensions of experience, cinema highlights the inseparability of the personal and the social in the construction of character, which leads directly to the question of how these dimensions are constituted.

Humans, as social beings, possess three important dimensions: physical, sociological, and psychological. The fundamental components that constitute character are comprised of these dimensions, and none of them can be separated from the other. When a character's physical, psychological, and sociological depths come together, their place within the story is solidified as a multidimensional being. Each character is shaped not only as an individual identity but also as an entity intertwined with their environment and social structure. Indeed, the formation and development of a character plays a significant role in the societal structure they are part of. Social structure is one of the primary factors that determines a character's worldview, values, and behaviors. The elements that make up this structure are shaped by factors such as the individual's social class, upbringing, economic status, family arrangement, circle of friends, and religious beliefs. A character's perspective on the world is directly related to their position in society; in other words, a character's position within society also influences their emotional and intellectual makeup (Giddens, 2002: 34).

In fact, the psychological dimensions of a character are also determined by the aspirations, desires, thoughts, and passions shaped within the societal structure they inhabit. The character's intellectual and emotional world is formed not only by their individual experiences but also by the influence of their social environment, cultural norms, and economic conditions. This means that the impact of society on an individual is not limited to external pressures; internal conflicts, self-perception, and the sense of self-worth are also reflections of the societal structure (Beck, 1992: 88).

A character's physical structure is also incorporated into these dynamics. The body is the interaction space between psychological and social structures; in other words, the boundaries of the body determine the character's relationship with their inner world and their social environment. In other words, the character's psychological structure is also shaped by the influence of their body. While the body provides clues about the character's emotional and intellectual depth, the social structure determines how the character experiences and lives these depths (Foucault, 1975: 132).

However, no character can create a sufficiently powerful impact within the narrative on their own. In fact, a character's depth and emotional power emerge from their internal conflicts and transformations as well as through their relationships with other figures around them. Especially the interactions or struggles of the protagonist with opposing characters or secondary figures whose goals contradict theirs deepen the character's meaning and role within the narrative. As Greimas points out, narrative functions are organized through oppositional roles such as subject versus opponent, and helper versus sender, which establish the dynamic tensions that sustain storytelling (1983: 174–176). Opposition creates conflict and tension, which drives the plot forward and nourishes the evolution of all characters in the narrative, providing justification for their actions.

While Greimas's agential model analyzes the interrelationships of the characters in the narrative at a structural level, Todorov's narrative disequilibrium model complements the dynamic dimension of these relationships. According to Todorov, every narrative begins with a state of equilibrium, then conflict arises as this equilibrium is disrupted, and finally, it culminates in a search for a new equilibrium (1969: 70–76). This schema, by transcending the conflict between the protagonist and his antagonist from a purely personal struggle, reveals the workings of forces that constantly disrupt the entire social and ethical order of the narrative universe. Thus, this duality becomes one of the fundamental axes in the narrative, constantly disrupting the equilibrium and revealing the fragility of that order.

## **2. The Doppelgänger and the Blurred Boundaries Between Hero and Anti-Hero**

A narrative can feature many characters, each of whom contributes uniquely to the story; however, among these characters, the hero holds a singular importance. The hero is the focal point of the narrative, the driving force of the plot, and the character with whom the audience forms the strongest emotional connection. Their actions, decisions, and transformations determine the direction of the narrative and embody its themes. Other characters may enrich the narrative, support the hero, or oppose them, but the hero is the central figure that carries the meaning of the story and

propels the audience into the adventure. Therefore, in a narrative, the hero holds a special place, standing above the other characters.

In his work *Poetics*, Aristotle defines the hero in its simplest form as "someone superior to the ordinary person" (Aristoteles, 2010: 23). According to this definition, the hero is a figure who is brave, honorable, and ready to undertake a difficult task. Campbell, in his seminal 1949 work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, provides a new perspective by categorizing heroes into two types. The first type is the hero at the microcosmic level, belonging to their own region. These extraordinary heroes fight against evils on an individual scale and often serve a tribal or local community. The second type is the macrocosmic hero, who achieves a victory that will mark world history. These heroes bring tools that will renew society as a whole and are recognized as universal heroes (Campbell, 2000: 49-50).

Whether local or universal in scope, the hero has two distinct characteristics. Firstly, their story is not a narrative that gains meaning solely within an individual and historical context. In the hero's adventure, passed down from generation to generation, one can find a collective and universal dimension/meaning. "The hero is the man or woman who, by conflicting with and overcoming local and personal historical limitations, has reached universal and ordinary human forms. This is why they are capable, not of the existing, disintegrating society and spirit, but of the inexhaustible source from which society is reborn" (Campbell, 2000: 30-31). Secondly, every hero's story is a journey; a story of change and transformation. Whether the hero appears in a fairy tale, in ancient Greek mythology, or in Eastern narratives, from the beginning to the end of their adventure -whether physically or spiritually- they travel, stray down different paths, and ultimately reach a new form of existence. Both of these characteristics can be explained by Campbell's concept of the monomyth. Although myths may contain regional differences, they exhibit a similar structure on a universal level, and the hero expresses this universality (Tecimer, 2005: 107-108). This is the meaning of the monomyth.

In all mythic narratives, heroes fight solely for the loyalty to the values they hold and the people they love (Üçer, 2020: 59) and they never give up on their struggle. It is precisely this aspect that inspires admiration; their adventure is listened to and retold countless times. Indeed, inspiring admiration and drawing the audience/viewer to their side is a common trait of all heroes. Even when the hero has undergone significant transformations, it can still be said that the quality of inspiring admiration persists unchanged (Law, 1983: 390).

As mythological narratives shape the hero archetype, the question of how the hero has undergone transformation in the modern era inevitably comes to mind. In the modern age, the emergence of distinct social classes, rapid social changes, and the consequent transformations in human relationships have led to changes in some of the hero's traditional traits (Bröckling, 2019: 127-129). Most importantly, as modernity emphasizes individualism, the hero, who has largely lost its collective value and meaning, has been pushed toward individuality (Watt, 2014), and, at times, has reached the point of becoming completely passive, dissonant, and dysfunctional.

Along with modernity, it is also important to note the emergence of a new character in narratives: the Anti-Hero. The figure of the hero primarily reveals itself and its collective function during times of crisis. Their actions offer a moral model for everyone to overcome the crisis, thereby creating collective meaning. But what happens when collective structures rapidly dissolve within the experience of modernity, and existential crises, stuck at the individual level, become chronic? What becomes of the hero? They undergo the greatest transformation, experiencing a kind of "meiotic division" (Tracy, 2012: 112). The anti-hero is a result of this meiotic division, emerging as a consequence of the new socio-cultural structure.<sup>3</sup> They are both a new figure and an element that will reintroduce meaning to the hero. However, this new and strange hero type in the narrative is entirely distant from the traditional heroic traits. They no longer represent those who want to establish a connection with life, but rather individuals who have partially or entirely lost this connection and struggle to survive within the system they inhabit (Neimneh, 2013: 75-76). For this reason, they stand out as a figure who consciously embodies all the anti-heroic traits (Klein, 1995: 88).

The term anti-hero, which first emerged in Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* (2020: 99), has gained popularity today, yet it remains difficult to define. This is because the concept refers to a contradictory and complex structure. Therefore, the anti-hero is often defined not by what they are, but by what they are not, adopting a post-modern attitude. First and foremost, it should be emphasized that the anti-hero is not an opposite or contrasting hero. The opposing or contrasting hero is a character who tries to thwart, wear down, or divert the hero's path, and these characters are

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<sup>3</sup> Philosopher Jean-Françoise Lyotard defines the postmodern condition, which has dissolved the grand legitimacy narratives of modernity, as "disbelief in meta-narratives" (Lyotard, 1994: 7). This approach can be directly linked to the loss of trust in the heroic figure. In classical narratives, the hero is the bearer of meta-narratives such as progress, reason, and justice. However, in postmodern conditions, the absoluteness of these values is questioned, and the heroic figure loses its credibility. Instead, the anti-hero comes to the fore because, with his conflictual, fragmented, and contradictory nature, the anti-hero better represents the pluralism and uncertainty of the postmodern condition. In this context, the blurred boundaries between Batman and the Joker can be read parallel to the dissolution of meta-narratives identified by Lyotard: the hero's absolute representative power disappears, and ethically and politically ambiguous anti-hero narratives emerge.

typically of lesser importance in the story (Huyugüzel, 2018: 272-268). However, the anti-hero refers to much more than this.

The anti-hero is of a much deeper and more layered nature, offering an in-depth exploration of societal norms, individual moral understanding, and inner human conflicts (Neimneh, 2013: 82). The actions of the anti-hero cannot be reduced to a simple good-versus-evil dichotomy, as they often experience inner conflicts as much as they clash with the hero. Interestingly, these conflicts, while distinguishing them from the hero, also allow the audience or reader to form a genuine empathy with them. The anti-hero's actions typically take place in morally gray areas, making it impossible to define them simply as a villain or the opposite of the hero (Klein, 1995: 94). Unlike the "good" traits coded in the hero, the anti-hero usually represents "humanity" with their flaws, vulnerabilities, and moral uncertainties (Fraser, 2016: 47). Precisely for this reason, the anti-hero, while questioning the conventional understanding of heroism, contributes to the creation of a much more realistic, more layered narrative by revealing the complexities, contradictions, and weaknesses of human nature.

In fact, there is a kind of symmetrical relationship between the hero and the anti-hero, and sometimes even a complete duality. This situation between the hero and the anti-hero is often grounded in the reflections or parallels that can be sensed between them (Campbell, 2004: 56). The symmetry between them can be read not only through opposites but also through their internal similarities. While the hero often remains loyal to moral values to achieve a specific goal, anti-heroes may use very different methods to achieve the same objective. However, both characters share a kind of quest for salvation, a desire to reach a personal or societal goal. Although these two figures perceive the world differently, they share the same motivations in their actions (Booker, 2004: 214).

The duality we claim to exist between the hero and the anti-hero sometimes operates like a reflection in a mirror. What the hero represents as "right" can be perceived as what the anti-hero represents as "wrong" -and vice versa (Campbell, 2004: 78) However, both figures actually represent different aspects and tendencies of society. This situation reveals how ambiguous individual identities, ideals, and social expectations can be. The anti-hero is the dark reflection of the hero; while heroes are often seen as the guardians of social order, upon closer inspection, anti-heroes are more successful at identifying the flaws of the current situation. The anti-hero presents the weaknesses, contradictions, and sometimes the entirely corrupted nature of the system -something that is expected to demand numerous sacrifices for its continuation- as a stark truth (Booker, 2004: 229).

At this point, the relationship between the hero and the anti-hero intersects with the concept of the *doppelgänger* (double-soul, shadow-self), which is frequently discussed in literature and psychoanalysis. The *doppelgänger* can be seen as a dark/malevolent reflection representing the repressed aspects of the individual, desires not accepted by society, and the deepest fears. However, as Sigmund Freud pointed out, it does not only create unease; it also manifests as an outward expression of the repressed aspects of the individual's unconscious (Freud, 2003: 236). In the same vein, this ambivalent phenomenon can be associated with Carl Jung's shadow archetype. As a manifestation of the aspects of the self that the person cannot accept and represses, it is both a threatening and complementary aspect of the self (Jung, 1951: 146-152).

As expected, the *doppelgänger* not only symbolizes the fragmentation of individual identity, but also brings with it a societal and cultural critique. This is because the concept of the self cannot be considered separately from the social context. Therefore, the hero's inner struggle is often shaped by conflict with the moral and social values of the external world. This duality exposes the tension between how the individual sees themselves and how society defines them. Especially in modern narratives, the *doppelgänger* figure is also shaped as a result of social pressures and identity politics. Since the 19th century, the *doppelgänger* has been seen as a reflection of the individual's struggle to adapt to the new social order shaped by the industrial revolution and modernization processes, as well as the alienation this creates.

In literature and cinema, the *doppelgänger* figure is frequently employed in the portrayal of hero narratives, especially in the presence of anti-hero characters. It has been previously mentioned that the anti-hero often represents the opposing side of the main character. While the hero embodies the values and moral truths approved by society, the anti-hero is a *doppelgänger* figure who remains in the shadows created by these very values, exposing the cracks within the system (Rank, 1971: 67). In this context, the boundary between the two characters is actually quite permeable, revealing that the hero can sometimes transform into their own anti-hero, or conversely, the anti-hero may evolve into a hero.

Most importantly, the anti-hero, as a *doppelgänger*, is the dark side that the main character must confront in order to mature or complete themselves. If we consider that the self can never have a fixed identity and is always shaped by the "Other," we reach the conclusion that the *doppelgänger* figure symbolizes "the subject's uneasy encounter with themselves, internalizing the gaze of the Other" (Žižek, 1991) In this sense, the *doppelgänger* becomes the true shaper

of the hero. However, in the same way, the hero is also the shaper of the anti-hero. Their relationship creates a dichotomy where neither can exist without the other, rather than being a mere opposition (Demir, 2024: 411-413).

Although the doppelgänger often emerges as an alter ego or false self that creates inner conflict or chaos for the hero in many narratives, it can sometimes manifest as a completely external/physical rival. For instance, in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), the monster created by Doctor Victor Frankenstein is an outward manifestation of his repressed desires and aspects that contradict societal norms, and it serves as an actual physical rival standing against the Doctor. In contrast, in Darren Aronofsky's *Black Swan* (2010), the protagonist Nina, while obsessively seeking perfection in her career, sees her spiritual darkness and repressed demonic sides embodied in the form of an imaginary rival ballerina.

### 3. Batman and Joker in Terms of the Narrative Unity of Hero and Anti-Hero

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the duality between hero and antihero is that both figures undergo an internal transformation over time. Heroes generally evolve toward goodness, while antiheroes descend deeper into darkness. However, these transformational processes involve the same psychological and moral dilemmas. While the hero struggles to find a solution in the face of a threat, the antihero approaches these threats differently. While the hero relies on their opposite to define themselves, the antihero questions the hero's very existence, leading both to continually rebuild their identities. Therefore, within the fundamental structure of the narrative, rather than viewing Batman and the Joker as two conflicting figures, they should be treated as two aspects of the same identity. The narrative of the Batman universe has framed the hero and antihero not merely as conflicting figures, but as elements that construct and transform each other's identities.

Batman, whose real name is Bruce Wayne, has cultivated himself as an extraordinary warrior through years of intense combat training, and his sharp intellect and detective skills distinguish him from others. Thanks to the technological power and personal wealth of Wayne Enterprises, which he inherited from his father, he continues his fight against crime by producing advanced equipment, costumes, and vehicles (Manning, Wiacek, Scott, Jones, & Walker, 2021: 28). In contrast, the Joker emerges with his mysterious persona and unpredictable nature, characterized by a clown-like appearance, a twisted sense of humor, and a passion for chaos. In the Batman universe, the Joker is positioned as a formidable opponent to the superhero or law enforcement; he challenges their moral values and pushes their boundaries (Skryabin, 2021: 329).

To initiate the analysis, it is essential to foreground the structural asymmetry underlying the Batman-Joker dialectic, as their apparent moral oppositions only gain coherence when situated within Gotham's socioeconomic order. As Pearson and Uricchio argue, Gotham City functions as an ideological apparatus that normalizes capitalist power relations within the narrative. Within this scheme, Batman emerges as the protector of property and hegemonic stability (1991: 202-203). His immense wealth, derived from inherited capital and the corporate empire of Wayne Enterprises, ties him closely to the ruling class, making his injustice an extension of the systemic order rather than a mere act of justice. Wolf-Meyer reinforces this claim by defining Batman's ultimate goal as the preservation of "hegemonic stability" and the maintenance of Bruce Wayne's socioeconomic privilege (2006: 193). In this context, both Bruce Wayne and his masked alter ego represent an ideological commitment to an unquestionable capitalist hierarchy.

Conversely, the Joker's rebellious policies weaponize Gotham's fissures and dramatize the "urbanization of class struggle" under neoliberal regimes (Harvey, 2005: 25). The film *Joker* (2019) vividly portrays this rupture, for instance: Austerity policies, social insecurity, and disinvestment, which have been ongoing since the 2000s and have particularly negatively impacted low-income earners, have led to a mass uprising that transforms the Joker from an isolated subject of pathology into an icon of systemic dissent. Rather than representing chaos in a metaphysical sense, the Joker mobilizes an aesthetics of disruption that seeks to expose the contingency and violence of the social order. As John Fiske (1989) observed in his analysis of the energies of resistance in popular culture, such figures articulate a "semiotic guerrilla war" that destabilizes dominant codes. In this framework, the Batman-Joker duo becomes a dialectical theater in which law and anomie are moral absolutes rather than competing strategies for coping with structural crisis.

However, in various narratives spanning from comic books to cinema, the Joker, whose origin is often ambiguous or variable, is frequently depicted as a character shaped by psychological traumas, often pushed to the margins of society. In Todd Phillips' 2019 film *Joker*, for example, the character introduced as Arthur Fleck (Joaquin Phoenix) is an individual struggling with economic inequality, social exclusion, and mental illness, who gradually transforms into an anarchist figure in response to Gotham's indifference. In the comic books, he is often portrayed as a character who, after suffering a physical deformity due to an accident, develops a distorted identity. Yet, regardless of which narrative is followed, the Joker's primary motivation is not simply committing crimes or fighting Batman; much more profoundly, it is to dismantle the order, demonstrate the inevitability of chaos, and prove how fragile moral values truly are (Skryabin, 2021: 335).

Superficially, Batman is seen as a hero who represents order and justice, while the Joker is an anti-hero who glorifies chaos and anarchy. However, these definitions do not fully capture the complexity of both characters and their relationship with one another. First and foremost, it should be made clear that, although Batman is portrayed in most narratives as a figure fighting crime and seeking to enforce justice, his ethical structure significantly differs from that of classical heroes. He is not an *absolute* good figure, like Achilles in Homer's epics or Superman in modern superhero narratives. On the contrary, he is a character driven by a desire for revenge, using violence as a tool, and existing in an ethically gray area within Gotham's corrupted system (Wolf-Meyer, 2006: 193-195).

Although Batman is evaluated as a hero in his fight to rid Gotham of crime, his struggle serves not the radical transformation of the system, but the continuity of the existing order. In Gotham, the source of crime and corruption lies not in individual wrongdoers, but in systemic injustices, class inequalities, and institutional corruption. However, Batman's methods aim not to transform this structure, but to establish a stable balance within it. While he hunts down criminals and enforces the law, he does not directly question the socio-economic inequalities or the collapse of the justice system in Gotham. Thus, the presence of corrupt bureaucrats, managers intertwined with criminal organizations, and the decay within the police force continues unabated. The role of the Wayne family in the development of Gotham and the shaping of its urban fabric further complicates Batman's position. Wayne Enterprises has significant investments in the industrial and financial sectors, and it has had both direct and indirect impacts on the city's transformation processes and the reproduction of urban poverty (Pearson & Uricchio, 1991: 201).

Thus, when Batman's efforts to protect Gotham equate to maintaining a deeply flawed and unequal system, the question of who is the hero and who is the anti-hero becomes a problem that is not easily resolved. Although Batman appears to be an external savior, he fundamentally ignores Gotham's corrupt structure and class disparities. Batman's sense of justice is typically focused on individual punishment and the enforcement of penalties. In reality, Batman's actions only lead to superficial changes in the social order, and his existence is only made possible by the continued existence of this broken system. Furthermore, Batman's obsession with punishing criminals functions as both the cause and the effect of his ignorance of Gotham's fundamental problems. Although the social injustices within Gotham's structure are indirectly justified through Batman's actions, he does not propose any radical changes to the system. This situation can even be interpreted as Batman, on some deeper level of consciousness, supporting Joker's criminal acts, as he is fully aware that this is the means through which his own legitimacy is maintained.

It is true that Joker's chaotic nature, which advocates for anarchy, forms a contrast to Batman's efforts to maintain order; however, it also reveals Batman's repressed aspects. Joker is a figure who seeks to disrupt the established order, doing so without adhering to any ethical norms. For him, the distinction between good and evil has lost its meaning. These traits give him typical antagonist qualities. However, Joker is also an anti-hero. In most narratives, he is portrayed not only as a criminal but also as an agent of chaos who forces others to question their ethical boundaries (Skryabin, 2021: 330). For instance, in the 2008 film *The Dark Knight*, Joker fills two boats with explosives and gives the people on each boat the option to blow up the other. Joker's goal is to demonstrate that the moral order believed to exist among Gotham's citizens is an illusion. In this sense, Joker's evil does not arise merely from individual ambition. Joker's chaotic actions are not only acts of personal violence but also actions that expose Gotham's inequalities and moral corruption.

In *The Dark Knight* (2008), Joker (Heath Ledger) orchestrates a series of manipulative games to challenge Batman's (Christian Bale) hero identity and push him to his limits. Particularly through the moral collapse of District Attorney Harvey Dent (Aaron Eckhart), Joker's plans create a tension that makes Batman's hero status questionable, even to himself. Batman is not only tasked with preventing crime but also with resolving this tension, while Joker's statement, "What would you do without me? I'm your complement," suggests that the true identity of the hero cannot fully take shape without Joker's existence. This is a typical doppelgänger narrative: it hints to the audience that one cannot exist without the other, offering a vision of existence in which one is incomplete without the other.

As expressed in the previous section, the doppelgänger relationship between Batman and Joker carries deep significance not only as a narrative contrast but also from a psychoanalytic perspective. According to Freud's concept of the uncanny, something that is both familiar and foreign evokes a disturbing feeling in the individual (Freud, 2003: 236). The relationship between Batman and Joker can be understood in this context. Carl Jung's theory of the shadow archetype also suggests that an individual's unacceptable, repressed aspects manifest as a shadow self (Jung, 1951: 146-152). While Batman fights crime in Gotham by setting rigid ethical boundaries, he keeps himself under control; Joker, on the other hand, constantly tries to transcend these boundaries. Joker is a figure who externalizes the chaotic nature that Batman represses, and for this reason, Batman cannot destroy him. To eradicate Joker would destabilize the very foundation of his own identity. The reverse is also true; without Batman, Joker would have no meaning for his existence.

For instance, in Frank Miller's graphic novel *The Dark Knight Returns*, after years of conflict, the Joker comes to realize that his existence holds no meaning without Batman. A similar narrative unfolds in the Batman: The Animated Series episode titled *The Man Who Killed Batman*. In this episode, upon believing that Batman is dead, the Joker experiences an overwhelming sense of emptiness and ceases his attempts to create chaos in Gotham. The Joker's primary objective is to incite disorder and engage in a perpetual game with Batman. Without Batman, the Joker himself becomes devoid of purpose.

Similarly, in *The Batman* (2022), the anti-hero Riddler conveys a parallel sentiment through the letters he sends to Batman, asserting that they are working towards a common goal. This reflects the dynamic in which the Joker has often expressed to Batman, "I am your other half," underscoring their interdependent relationship. Furthermore, in the 2017 graphic novel *Batman: White Knight*, the Joker undergoes medical treatment and regains his sanity, adopting the identity of Jack Napier. He attempts to become a hero for Gotham. Interestingly, in this narrative, Batman's aggressive and controlling behavior begins to cast him in a villainous light. The Joker's recovery accentuates Batman's darker tendencies, highlighting the symbiotic and often precarious balance between the two characters.

Although Batman's principle of not killing grants him ethical superiority over the Joker, it simultaneously ensures the Joker's continued existence. Killing the Joker would mean acknowledging Batman's own dark nature. Perhaps for this very reason, in the 2012 animated adaptation of *The Dark Knight Returns*, Joker and Batman engage in a deadly confrontation at an amusement park. However, Batman is unable to kill the Joker. Instead, the Joker ultimately breaks his own neck, committing suicide. Here, we witness the point at which the Joker seeks to surpass Batman: from the Joker's perspective, forcing Batman to kill him would mean pushing Batman beyond his moral boundaries. The Joker's goal is to drag Batman into his own darkness.

In this context, Batman's struggle with the Joker should be read not merely as an external battle but as an internal reckoning. Eliminating the Joker is not just about ridding himself of an enemy; it is also about confronting his own inner darkness. Why, then, can he never bring himself to do it? Because doing so would destabilize the very foundation of his identity, perhaps even bringing it to an end. Consequently, Batman's hatred for the Joker is, in reality, a manifestation of his effort to escape the potential for chaos within himself. The same can arguably be said for the Joker. In graphic novels such as *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* and *Batman: Death of the Family*, the symbiotic relationship between Joker and Batman is further explored in depth. In both works, the Joker's line, "Who will I play with if I kill you?" succinctly encapsulates their mutual dependence.

Joker's created anarchy also exposes Batman's moral limitations. In *The Dark Knight*, during the scene where Joker (Heath Ledger) holds people hostage on two ships with explosives, Batman's inability to actively come up with a solution and the decision being left to ordinary citizens questions his moral superiority. Batman's fundamental principle of the "no kill" rule often becomes irrelevant when he teeters on the edge of violence. Joker exploits this principle to provoke Batman, wishing for him to become entangled in the very chaos he seeks to combat. When Batman approaches Joker's methods to defeat him, he risks positioning himself as a morally corrupted anti-hero. This shows that Batman's ideals are dependent on Joker's anarchic vision. But there's something more: perhaps Batman is not as different from Joker as he believes.

In fact, the claim that Batman is not so different from Joker is based on the reality that both operate with similar methods but with different motivations. Both characters seek to redefine justice and order in Gotham City according to their own understanding. While their methods and the intentions behind these methods seem to determine their moral differences, they share a deep common foundation: both are products of traumatic pasts and use violence as a tool to impose their own realities.

This narrative bears a striking parallel, even a shared connection, with Bruce Wayne's traumatic past. Bruce witnessed the brutal murder of his mother Martha Wayne and father Dr. Thomas Wayne during his childhood. This tragic event led him to dedicate his life to fighting crime and seeking justice. However, it is worth noting that the very thing that killed Bruce's parents is also the root cause of Joker's birth. Bruce's parents were murdered during a mugging which happens as a result of socio-economic inequality.

It is also important to consider the murder Arthur commits on the subway. He does not kill rich people but instead targets the "system men" who manage the wealth of the rich, i.e., the brokers. This act of murder marks a turning point in the Joker narrative. The murders, culminating in the live broadcast of television host Murray Franklin's (Robert De Niro) death at the hands of Joker, provoke a societal outrage, signaling the transformation of Arthur's individual tragedy into a social rebellion. The protests that follow, clearly organized by the lower class, signify the shift of Arthur's chaotic ideology into a symbol of a societal movement. The poor individual, Arthur, has transformed into Joker, a symbol of societal ideals, through these two murders. His statement to Murray just before the killing, "You called me here because people

want to see someone like me. Now you're seeing a real one," must be understood in this context. Joker's individual anger has evolved into an anarchistic impulse that stands against the system and the existing order.

On the other hand, Batman's approach to this social corruption is quite different. While Bruce Wayne attempts to fix Gotham's corrupt structure, he chooses to do so within the framework of justice and order. However, it must be said that Wayne has the means to do this because the mentioned framework is always shaped under the shadow of the class privileges provided to him by the Wayne Enterprises group. Batman's effort to defeat criminals, on the one hand, emphasizes his understanding of heroism, but on the other hand, it also shows that he is part of the system. Rather, Bruce, who paints a typical conservative portrait, tries to save Gotham by making certain corrections, using the material and spiritual legacy left by the Wayne family, but unlike him, Joker, who has no choice but to be revolutionary, has no such opportunity. As someone marginalized by society, Arthur seeks to radically change the system, even to destroy it entirely.

While fighting criminals in Gotham, Batman often uses violence as a tool. He scares, intimidates, beats, and even, though unwillingly, sometimes causes fatalities. Therefore, to a certain extent, the violence Batman uses to maintain order is not fundamentally different from the violence Joker uses to create chaos. Their similarity becomes especially evident in situations where Batman's "no kill" rule is tested. At this point, Matt Reeves' *The Batman* (2022) film addresses Bruce Wayne's (Robert Pattinson) ethical boundaries and pursuit of justice from a darker perspective. In the film, Batman's urge for revenge frequently contradicts his understanding of justice. Once again, Gotham's corrupt structure and systematic injustice are key elements shaping both Batman's and his antagonist Riddler's actions in this film. It's not surprising that at moments when Batman acts on his urge for revenge, he adopts a level of violence comparable to that of the Riddler.

Moreover, at the end of the film, although Batman succeeds in thwarting Riddler's plans, he cannot completely erase their impact on the people of Gotham. The anarchy created by Riddler calls into question the effectiveness of Batman's conception of justice in Gotham. In this process, Batman confronts how dark his own methods can be. The film pushes the boundaries of Batman's ethical values, making his parallels with Joker and Riddler more visible. In this context, the relationship between Batman and Joker is not only based on conflict but also on the condition of being two parts of a whole. Both characters are reflections of Gotham's dark side, and no matter how much they try to distance themselves from each other, they struggle with the same fundamental problems.

As it is mentioned above, the graphic novels previously cited are also important sources for exploring the depth of the relationship between Batman and Joker. Alan Moore and Brian Bolland's *The Killing Joke*, Joker's idea that "One bad day can change a person's life" elegantly intertwines the origin stories of both Joker and Batman. This idea is also echoed intertextually in *The Dark Knight* film, where Joker manipulates Harvey Dent by planting the idea that "All it takes is one bad day." Indeed, after losing Rachel, Harvey is transformed into Two-Face under Joker's influence. However, Prosecutor Dent is the character whom Batman has placed his trust in throughout much of the film; Dent is seen as the lawman who, because of his honesty and incorruptibility, will fight criminals. Dent's sudden switch of sides thus highlights the unpredictability of being either Batman or Joker.

It is also worth noting that, from a phenomenological perspective, the interdependence between Batman and the Joker is not only symbolic but also embodied in lived experience. Firstly, characters' inner worlds often become phenomenological through bodily experience, creating a symmetrical opposition. The Joker's bodily weakness, involuntary laughter, and clumsy movements render him constantly vulnerable. The fits of laughter he experiences, especially during moments of social interaction, are a clear physical manifestation of the Joker's alienation. By contrast, Batman is always an athletic, handsome, and controlled figure. Bruce Wayne's heavy strides, breathing, fight choreography, and the ritual movements of donning his costume shape his body like armor. Physical discipline becomes the phenomenological foundation of his identity.<sup>4</sup>

Besides, in *Joker* (2019), Arthur Fleck's dance in the bathroom after the subway murder exemplifies what Merleau-Ponty (2017: 247-248) calls "the body's deliberate curve": the reorganization of meaning through posture, rhythm, and sensation. The spasms and alienation triggered by the murder gradually transform into an unexpected choreography of balance and harmony, where bodily movement becomes a medium of self-constitution. The slow, fluid gestures convey a

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<sup>4</sup> In the Batman universe, there is a close parallel between the characters' internal psychological structures and their external physical appearances. One of the clearest examples of this duality is Harvey Dent's transformation into Two-Face; the burning and decomposition of one half of his face directly embodies moral corruption and ethical division (Miller, 1986/2015). Similarly, the Penguin's deformed body represents his social exclusion and lust for power (Brooker, 2012: 156), while Catwoman's feline-derived agility renders visible both sexual desire and the freedom associated with crime (Kane, 2014: 88). Poison Ivy's body, integrated with nature, transforms the human-nature relationship into an obsessive passion through an ecofeminist politics (Cocca, 2016: 53). Mister Freeze, with his body confined to a cold environment, physically stages both traumatic loss and emotional dullness (Pearson & Uricchio, 1991: 202). The physical deformity or excess seen in these characters is not merely an external manifestation from a phenomenological perspective, but rather the staged manifestation of internal conflict and psychological rupture.

shift from fragmentation to coherence, signaling that the Joker identity is not simply a psychological mask but a corporeal emergence. Accompanied by the haunting music, this bodily metamorphosis invites the audience to inhabit Fleck's altered sensorium, making his passage into the Joker perceptible not only as a mental rupture but as an embodied transformation that fuses perception, affect, and physicality.

The Joker's interrogation scene in *The Dark Knight* (2008) is a striking example of a phenomenological analysis of the character's internal experience. Batman's interrogation of the Joker in a dark room reveals not only the ideological opposition between the two figures but also their bodily and perceptual experiences. While Batman's harsh physical interventions foreground the character's bodily existence, the Joker's insensitivity to this violence, and even his seeming enjoyment of it, demonstrates the radically different way he perceives the world. In this scene, the Joker's laughter transforms pain from an ordinary sensation into an existential pleasure. Thus, violence becomes not a fear or threat in his phenomenological experience, but rather an element that reinforces his existence. For Batman, the body becomes an ethical testing ground: his use of violence constantly threatens both his heroic identity and his ethical position. This scene reveals how the hero and anti-hero figures oppose and complement each other not only on an ideological but also on a phenomenological level.

The amusement park scene in *The Killing Joke* reveals the Joker's phenomenological understanding of the world. Taking Commissioner Gordon captive and subjecting him to naked and humiliating images in an abandoned amusement park demonstrates the Joker's practice of transforming space and the senses into instruments of torture. The amusement park's grotesque lights, distorted mirrors, and distorted rides disrupt Gordon's perceptual world. This environment reflects the Joker's mental universe: a realm of experience where reality and illusion intertwine, where perceptual boundaries dissolve. Gordon's struggle to maintain his sanity in the face of this sensory siege represents, on a phenomenological level, the physical and perceptual test of heroism. The Joker's goal is not merely to break Gordon's heart, but to question the absoluteness of "reason" by disrupting perceptual experience. This scene is significant because it demonstrates that, in the Batman universe, evil is not merely an ideological position but also a form of sensory and bodily experience.

From a phenomenological perspective, Batman's inner experience emerges most intensely in the ritual of costume. Each time Bruce Wayne dons his armor, dons his mask, and undergoes a series of preparatory processes, it goes beyond simply concealing his identity; it is an existential repositioning. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, "the body is the first door to the world and the primary horizon of experience" (1962: 94). The act of donning the mask transforms this horizon; gaze, movement, and even breathing are altered. As Smith, Flowers, and Larkin emphasize in phenomenological analysis, experience can only be grasped through close observation of bodily practices (2009: 52). Every time Batman's masked body enters the streets of Gotham, it assumes a new mode of being; while Wayne appears as a businessman in public, behind the mask he merges with the city's dark memory (*Batman Begins*, 2005).

Interestingly, the Joker also has a similar bodily experience. Rather than concealing his face, the Joker reveals it with grotesque paint; he suppresses his bare face, transforming it into an exaggerated mask. In Moore and Bolland's *The Killing Joke* (1988), the Joker's makeup embodies his identity, driven to madness by "one bad day" (39), as a theatrical reinvention. In Nolan's *The Dark Knight* (2008), when he removes his mask after a bank robbery, the paint on his face demonstrates that the Joker does not conceal his identity but, on the contrary, constantly reconstitutes it. Thus, Batman's armor ritual and the Joker's makeup ritual are read as two different bodily experiences: one shaped by discipline and control, the other by chaos and disintegration. When supported by visuals, these scenes make visible not only the plot but also the bodily and perceptual intensity of the characters' internal experiences.

## Conclusion and Evaluation

This study set out to investigate the Batman–Joker relationship through a combined phenomenological and intertextual analysis, guided by the four research questions articulated in the introduction. The findings demonstrate that the hero and the anti-hero are not isolated entities but mutually constitutive figures whose confrontation illuminates deeper cultural, ethical, and political tensions.

RQ1 asked which narrative structures blur or redefine the hero/anti-hero boundary across the corpus. The analysis revealed a consistent recurrence of motifs such as mirroring, doubling, and deferred resolution. In *The Dark Knight* (2008), the interrogation room scene stages Batman and the Joker as mirror images, each testing the other's limits, while in *The Killing Joke* (1988) the "one bad day" motif dramatizes their shared fragility. Such structures undermine fixed moral categories, instead highlighting the fluidity of identity and morality.

RQ2 explored the phenomenological themes that constitute the inner experience of both figures. Close readings of *Joker* (2019) and *The Dark Knight Returns* (1986) showed that despair, alienation, and bodily vulnerability are central to both

Batman and the Joker. Their embodied experience of trauma and rage operates not as opposing registers but as overlapping affective states. From a phenomenological standpoint, the boundary between hero and villain collapses in the lived experience of suffering and compulsion.

RQ3 examined how Gotham's socio-economic structures shape their respective uses of violence and legitimacy. Across the corpus, Batman appears as the guardian of property and institutional order, whereas the Joker exposes systemic fractures by orchestrating crises that reveal the fragility of governance. In *The Batman* (2022), Bruce Wayne's vigilantism is directly tied to class privilege, while the Joker's disruptive acts dramatize the city's institutional breakdown. Violence, therefore, emerges less as a moral category than as a political language negotiated through class and institutional failure.

RQ4 focused on the Joker's ethical "set-piece" scenarios and Batman's responses to them. The ferry dilemma in *The Dark Knight* and the carnival torture in *The Killing Joke* both stage collective moral tests. In each case, Batman's intervention does not decisively resolve the ethical crisis but rather re-inscribes the tension between order and chaos. These recurring set-pieces confirm that the Joker's role is not simply to destroy but to destabilize, forcing Batman to confront the contradictions of his own justice.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that the Batman–Joker dyad functions as a dynamic system of narrative and phenomenological reciprocity. Each character's existence depends upon the other, and their interactions continually unsettle conventional distinctions between heroism and villainy, order and disorder, justice and violence.

Building on these findings, the academic contribution of this study can be located in its original approach. By combining phenomenological close reading with intertextual mapping, it reframes the hero/anti-hero duality as an experiential and relational process rather than a fixed structural opposition. While much of the existing scholarship emphasizes psychological interpretations or ideological critique, this research underscores how embodied experience and intertextual recurrence together define the mutual dependence of Batman and the Joker. In doing so, it advances a more nuanced framework for analyzing narrative dualities in popular culture.

Beyond this contribution, the study also opens up new directions for reflection and inquiry. Future research could extend this approach to politically charged narratives such as *Watchmen* (Moore & Gibbons, 1986) or *V for Vendetta* (Moore & Lloyd, 1988), examining how the hero–anti-hero dialectic intersects with broader allegories of surveillance, resistance, and state power. Comparative analyses might likewise explore other comic-book or cinematic pairings that exhibit similar dynamics, thereby situating the Batman–Joker relationship within a larger genealogy of political myth-making in contemporary popular culture. Taken together, these insights suggest that Batman and the Joker are less adversaries than mirror-images whose ongoing struggle dramatizes fundamental questions about justice, legitimacy, and the use of violence. Such questions remain unresolved within the narratives themselves, ensuring the continued cultural resonance of their confrontation across media, genres, and historical contexts.

Ultimately, hero and antihero are essentially entities hidden in each other's shadows. Similarly, the Batman-Joker narrative demonstrates that the line between heroism and evil is often maintained through interdependence and a blurring of boundaries, rather than a stable opposition. This uncanny relationship between the two characters essentially embodies our unresolved tensions surrounding justice, legitimacy, and violence. The dichotomies we often construct solipsistically in our daily lives affect us so deeply because, in the encounter between these two characters, they are redefined as a complementary -and sometimes even supportive- form of relationship.

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Appendix A. Intertextual Motif Matrix: Batman and Joker Across Media

Motif / Theme	Graphic Novels	Films	Interpretive Note
"One bad day"	<i>The Killing Joke</i> (Moore & Bolland, 1988): Joker's speech on madness.	<i>The Dark Knight</i> (2008): Interrogation scene, Joker's taunt to Batman.	Both stress fragility of sanity; Joker as mirror of potential collapse.
Doppelgänger / Mirror	<i>The Dark Knight Returns</i> (Miller, 1986): Batman and Joker locked in fatal symmetry.	<i>Joker</i> (2019): Arthur's rise as distorted reflection of Gotham's order.	Hero and villain shown as two sides of same coin.
Ethical Limit ("No kill" rule)	<i>Death of the Family</i> (Snyder & Capullo, 2012–13): Joker forcing Batman to confront rule.	<i>The Dark Knight</i> (2008): Batman refuses to kill Joker despite chaos.	Joker exploits Batman's ethical rigidity; limit defines identity.
Carnival / Chaos Space	<i>The Killing Joke</i> (1988): Abandoned carnival torture site.	<i>The Dark Knight</i> (2008): Ferry dilemma staged as social experiment.	Both use liminal space as theater of ethical testing.
System Critique	<i>White Knight</i> (Murphy, 2017–18): Joker turns into politician to expose systemic corruption.	<i>Joker</i> (2019): Arthur's rebellion against economic precarity.	Villain reframed as critic of institutions, blurring good/evil.