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***A Study of Psychological Collapse and Recovery in *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*
by Betty Smith (1943) and *The Killing Joke* by Alan Moore (1988)***

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Dedications

To my dear parents.

To my dear sister and her husband.

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Abstract

This dissertation intends to be a comparative study of *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (1943) a novel by Betty Smith, to the comic book *Batman: The Killing Joke* (1988) by Alan Moore and illustrated by Brian Bolland. We intend to examine identity collapse, where characters experience psychological fractures leaving them to struggle between rationality and delusion. The analysis delves into how language and meaning dissolve. Despite the differences between both literary works, yet they share similarities. Our borrowing of the main theoretical frameworks of Julia Kristeva including the concepts of: semiotic and symbolic, abjection, melancholia and revolt, and Carl Jung's concepts: persona and shadow. Along with our reading and investigation of both works *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* and *The Killing joke*. Leads us to find convergence as concerns the themes: identity collapse, madness, rationality, redemption, in addition to leading processes like: Subjectivity and trauma by analysing these two works that contain different styles and cultures, this dissertation puts in question that both works demonstrate the persisting human struggle to keep order and rationality rather than chaos and madness. Through the analysis of the characters' behaviours and relationships, we have understood the extent to which mental stability and being on the borderline between the semiotic and the symbolic is a complex process, in which the melancholic person should confront his shadow in order to achieve revolt and finally redemption and happiness.

Key words: identity collapse, rationality, redemption, Subjectivity, trauma.

I. **General Introduction**

Psychology is the academic study of the human psyche. It is a study that delves into the human conscious and unconscious as well as behaviour, feelings and thoughts. When people think of psychology many tend to think of Sigmund Freud, Lacan, Jean Piaget, and so many others. Hence, our interest is one of the contemporary psychoanalyst, philosopher, and literary critic the Bulgarian French Julia Kristeva and Carl Gustav Jung, a Swiss psychiatrist, a psychoanalyst, and one of the founding figures of analytical psychology. Psychoanalysis has proved an insightful way to engage with the complexities that shape the human psyche. Between rationality and delusion, writers had emphasized the multiple ways in which people realise, respond to, and sometimes lose their sense of self. In particular, literature has often been a site to reflect upon how identity gets fractured because of failure, loss and trauma. Moreover, trauma does not just affect meaning, trauma can reconstruct and demolish it too alongside with identity and values. Moreover, the healing process is a complex and transformative journey in which an individual confronts what he represses and denies.

In addition, during the nineties, a period shaped by economic instability and changing social ideals, writers and artists increasingly explored narratives that centred on the collapse of identity; fragmented characters who experienced alienation, loss, and interior chaos through either the real or the surreal. This era, in all its literature and visual culture was marked by a significant interest in the study of how humanity exists upon the borders of order and chaos, delusion and intellect, hope and despair. This analysis aims to examine how the literary works articulate the collapse of identity as an existential theme. Through a comparison of the mental journeys of the characters in *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (1943) by Betty Smith as a comparative study to *The Killing Joke* (1988) by Allan Moore, this dissertation explores the outcomes of trauma, poverty, past memories, and social pressure that contribute to the collapse of the self.

Ultimately, psychoanalysis in literature is an open window onto society, and it demonstrates how people live at the limits of reason, and how fragile the human psyche is, when life threatens our sense of identity. Julia Kristeva, who is known for her work on language, subjectivity, and the human psyche, argues that the study of language is inseparable from the study of the speaker. Her theory on subjectivity distinguishes between the semiotic and the symbolic, two distinct poles of language. In *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, the protagonist Francie embodies this duality. The semiotic, which concerns with bodily drives, rhythms, tones, and impulses, emerge in her sensitivity, art, imagination, and love for music and books, due to her attachment to her father Johnny. In contrast, her symbolic understanding of language, law, and social structure developed by her mother. Francie and her family confront abjection in spite of harsh living conditions and her father decline. After that Francie experiences melancholia, the state of mourning, the sadness caused by the loss of her father. Finally, Francie undergo a form of revolt, a transformative journey that occurs by confronting both psychological and social obstacles by using education and imagination.

Carl Gustav Jung argued that understanding the human psyche requires an examination of factors beyond conscious ideas, and the deeper layers of the unconscious mind were required in order to obtain a complete understanding. Both *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* and *The Killing Joke* demonstrate Jung's contention that the psyche is best understood by looking beyond conscious intentions to the unconscious forces that motivate behaviour. In *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, Francie's persona, the self she carefully manages with sufficient propriety, ambition, and composure to function in the world, often masks her feelings of shame, anger and insecurity. As such, important themes emerge about the challenge of sincerity when a persona limits or misrepresents the self. In *The Killing Joke*, the Joker refuses all forms of persona and tries to prove that only by abandoning the disguise of the persona could anyone truly be themselves, even if the self was chaotic. The shadow holds both the Joker's and Batman's

repressed fears and painful emotions, and when those fearful feelings are suppressed, it manifests in paradoxical displays of behaviour such as Francie's sudden swings into emotional crises or the Joker's complete descent into violence. Their behaviour highlights Jung's warning of the individual risks a psychological crises and projections that risk destruction when the persona or the shadow are fully denied. Furthermore, the analysis demonstrates how the unresolved tension between shadow and persona can cultivate chaos and identity collapse.

1. Review of the literature

The study of psychoanalysis has been widely explored in literature, however little attention has been paid to trauma and the healing process, the reconstruction of identity, examining how power and subjectivity emerge from psychological fractures. in the novel *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* by Betty Smith (1943), and the comic book *Batman: The Killing Joke* (1988) by Alan Moore. which has been a subject to wide criticism. *A tree grows in Brooklyn* is a novel by Betty Smith has been reviewed and studied by literary critics. Such as B. O'Leary Anish, the author of *Irish American Fiction from World War II to JFK*, where he dedicated a chapter entitled "*ON Why This Book Should and Not Begin with Betty Smit's A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*". The chapter highlights stereotypes, especially about the American Irish man that struggle with alcoholism.

Charol Simi Johnson in her essay *the Hungry Artist: Rereading Betty Smith's A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, argues that the book whose impact is so deep and so wide, deserves more than cursory dismissal by scholars and critics of literature. Moreover, as Joyce Zonana states: "Johnson calls *Tree* a "bildungsroman of the American Dream," an "empowering representation of the immigrant and working-class myth." Yet ... the novel is less concerned with material escape from poverty than with spiritual freedom; less with the acquisition of wealth than with a new way of looking upon poverty" (Zonana, 2021, p. 453). The essay by

Joyce Zonana refers to Johnson's dissertation (by name), asserts that the novel holds deep meaning and considered a familiar icon of American culture, and how people could escape poverty through spirituality.

The comic book *Batman: The Killing Joke* (1988) by Alan Moore. who has been a subject to wide criticism. The Joker a famous character in fiction that has attracted considerable interest as it puts the reader into the traumatic jump from sanity and order to mass destruction. Moreover, Alan Moore dehumanizes Batgirl, and used her as a plot twist to provoke her father and Batman and transform her character from an agent of power to a victim. And he also sexualizes the father-daughter relationship when the Joker assaulted Barbara photographed her and showed the photos to her father, as a way to mentally abuse him in order to traumatize him and transform him into a lunatic.

Alan Moore the writer of *Batman: The Killing Joke* was the first to criticize his book, and, later, he expresses regret for objectifying Batgirl. The writer declared in many interviews that he regrets writing it saying that it is his worst work: "probably the worst thing I've ever written" (December, 2022). Multiple reviewers in the WordPress.com criticized it, in an article saying; "why no one should ever read *Batman: The Killing Joke*; because it is not funny". They called it bizarre and a "brutal carnival", and claimed that it did not add meaning to the characters.

George L Thomas in his essay *Batman; The Killing Joke; The deluxe Edition* by Alan Moore and Brian Bolland. He discusses the struggle between Batman and the Joker between understanding and vulnerability turning into revenge and ambiguity, and Barbara Gordon as a victim. George L Thomas argued that the violence against Batgirl a loved character was choking and not expected, but he also mentioned that the outcome or the transformation of batgirl to Oracle is 'great'.

2. Issue and Working Hypothesis

This research paper is a comparative study of *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* and *Batman: The Killing Joke* from a psychoanalytical perspective. However, this dissertation looks closely at how these two works portray the different outcomes of trauma through the characters' sense of self, how they respond to this breakdown, and healing process. Therefore, this dissertation's major interest is to analyze the reconstruction of the characters' identity using the concepts developed by Kristeva; semiotic and symbolic, Abjection, Melancholia, Revolt. Our purpose is to look into the way both authors and works reflected deep exploration of the healing process, the reconstruction of identity, examining how power and subjectivity emerge from psychological fractures, highlighting the fragility of the human psyche. Although these works differ greatly in style, purpose, form, audience, and cultural background, they share thematic similarities, like mental stability and being on the borderline between the semiotic and the symbolic.

In addition, the concepts developed by Carl G Yung. Which are: the persona which is the mask or role that an individual show to the outside world, and the Shadow is the often the repressed, dark aspects of people's psyche that they deny. My hypothesis centers on identifying the fractures of the human psyche and how the characters confront their shadow through various ways. In *Batman: The Killing Joke*, the Joker turns to crime and mass destruction and falls in despair, which leads to self-destruction. Moreover, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* shows resilience and enduring difficulties through lecture and survival mechanism. The story is about finding beauty even in the harshest and most difficult turns in life. To support our analysis, We kept my focus on the character's origin story and how did they endure their traumatic journey, continuous loss, that eventually led to a loss of meaning and collapse of identity.

In addition to the previous hypotheses, we aim to shed light through Julia Kristeva's theory, and how the novelists depict the concepts through the characters' behavior, language, and psychotic states. The last attempt is to show the necessity of revolt that may often help the characters to get out of their complicated situations and fulfill their personal desire of attaining a unique and stable subjectivity. On the surface both works seem different, yet our borrowing of the main theoretical frameworks of Julia Kristeva and Carl Jung. Along with our reading and investigation of both works. Leads us to find convergence as concerns the themes: identity collapse, madness, rationality, redemption, in addition to leading processes like: Subjectivity and trauma.

The central hypothesis is that trauma deeply disturbs the subject's identity and language, and that healing requires a confrontation with the repressed self. This journey may lead to resilience and growth, as in Francie's case the protagonist in *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, or to chaos and self-destruction, as seen in the Joker the protagonist in *the killing joke*. In addition, this analysis highlights the two different ways of resistance and confrontation; both protagonists are so different yet share similarities. *Batman: The Killing joke* indicates a collapse of meaning and no revolt through the protagonist. Unlike the ending of *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, the protagonist finds meaning and ultimately using intellect and survival mechanism to revolt. The last attempt is to show the necessity of Revolt that may often help the characters to get out from their complicated situations and fulfill their personal desire of attaining stability, subjectivity and happiness.

3. Methodological Outlines

Methodologically speaking, this dissertation begins with an introduction, which states the different reviews of literature done on both literary works. Then, it raises the issue and the working hypotheses. As to the 'methods and materials', it affords a brief explanation of the concepts from both theories, the biography of the two authors Betty Smith, and Alan Moore,

and summaries of *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* and *Batman: The Killing Joke*. Additionally, it affords a result section, that provides the findings of the analysis. The ‘Discussion’ is divided into two main parts. The first chapter deals with the notions of semiotic and symbolic, Abjection, Melancholia and revolt as seen through *Batman: The Killing Joke*’s characters on the borderline of psychological balance, and *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* in their process of reconstructing meaning and identity.

And the second chapter intends to be a study of the comic book *Batman: The Killing Joke* by Alan Moore, and *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* by Betty Smith, as a profound exploration of identity collapse, facing trauma, and redemption, using concepts from Carl Gustav Jung, Persona and Shadow. In *The Killing Joke*, Joker and Batman both represent the extreme end of this lack of balance: the Joker gives in completely to his Shadow and essentially destroys his stable self-identity, while Batman cannot get past the tension between his Persona and unavoidable angst. Their battles show the pain of inevitable decoupling that occurs when a person refuses to integrate the unseen and seen aspects of their psyche. Comparatively, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, places the struggle for identity in a more grounded human experience, but similarly depicts the difficulty of recognizing trauma and the pursuit of self-discovery. Overall, the chapter proposes that these literary works together analyse the human struggle to confront the masks people wear and the repressed shadow they hide, suggesting bodily and psychological integrity is attainable only through confronting the Shadow.

II. Methods and Materials

To achieve the purpose of this dissertation, this section of the dissertation relies on analysing the characters, narrative styles, and themes in both works using psychoanalytical theories, developed by two important figures in psychoanalysis, Carl Gustav Yung: in his books *The Relations between the Ego and the Unconscious* 1953, and *AION: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self*-1951, and Julia Kristeva in her books: *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1974), *Powers of horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1980), *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (1989), and *The Sense and the Non-sense of Revolt* (2002).

By comparing a classical novel and a comic book, showing how different storytelling styles still reveal common psychological struggles with trauma and identity. We focused especially on the characters' backstories and how their past traumas affect their present selves. In *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, Francie and her family face many hardships; poverty, hunger, neglect, and loss. However, she uses her imagination, intelligence, and sensitivity to face her shadow and eventually achieve revolt. Her story is slow and detailed, showing a gradual rebuilding of identity. On the other hand, *The Killing Joke* resumes trauma into a single terrible day for the Joker. This sudden trauma causes his identity to collapse rapidly and eventually be consumed by his shadow.

1. Methods

1.1. Julia Kristeva's Theory

The Semiotic and Symbolic

Julia Kristeva in *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1974) argues that the study of language is inseparable from the study of the speaker which she views as a part of a signifying process that operates through two modes of significance, offering a distinctive way to analyze entire

literary texts. She associates the semiotic with the maternal and the unconscious. In contrast, the symbolic is the structured system of language, rules and social norms. It represents order, identity, and the way people interact with the world through established signs and meanings. She believes that the symbolic is the "phenotext" and the semiotic is the "genotext". The genotext is connected to the semiotic and includes unconscious feelings, rhythm, sound and emotion, which are non-apparent in language. The phenotext refers to the symbolic and is about the apparent and structured parts of language, such as syntax or form. Although genotext and phenotext are different, they depend on each other.

Abjection

Abjection as defined by Kristeva in her Book *Powers of horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1980), a concept that explores the origins of subjectivity. Specifically explores how an individual sees himself and his own borders that separate the self from the other. Moreover, abjection explores how individuals interact and respond to what is foreign or threatening, named "the other" to "the self. Kristeva's conception of abjection includes not merely disgust, but a horror of the collapse of the boundary between self and other. Abjection is not an outside threat, it is what we once were, and what we are dangerously close to become. It is a collapse of meaning, an instance of encountering blood and corpses and anything that violates the clean and proper body. For Kristeva, abjection begins with the maternal: the maternal body that the child must reject in order to access language therefor to access the symbolic order.

Melancholia

Kristeva describes melancholia as a breakdown in signification, in her book, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (1989). The melancholic person is not simply sad or grieving, he is rather in an unidentifiable pain which lies beyond language. The melancholic cannot symbolize or identify the lost object; therefore, language fails to structure meaning. As a result,

the ego begins to crumble which leads to the collapse of identity. The melancholic does not say, "I have lost something" but says, "I am lost." The self is dissolved into the shadow of the lost "Thing" a term introduced by Kristeva to indicate the object of desire that is ultimately inaccessible and non-representable. Kristeva's approach matters because it ties psychological suffering to the structures of language and identity, rather than reducing depression to a clinical disorder.

Revolt

Kristeva's concept of revolt, in her book *The Sense and The Non-sense of Revolt* (2001), refers to turning in time, space, and kind which is often tied to her understanding of the individual's struggle against societal norms and the repression of desires. Kristeva views revolt as not merely political but as existential and psychological, it arises from the person's necessity to challenge social norms. According to Julia Kristeva happiness occurs at the price of revolt by confronting obstacles, authorities and suppression through a complex and a long journey of quiet endurance and rational steadiness, a journey that not all people can endure. Furthermore, revolt is not a sudden moment of break or simply an act of rebellion or rupture, but a continuous, fluid way of questioning and transformation both psychologically and socially.

1.2. Carl Gustav Yung's Theory

Persona

Carl Gustav Jung, a Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, one of the founding figures of analytical psychology. Carl g Yung suggests that understanding the human psyche requires understanding the unconscious. Through deep examination and exploration of the deepest layers of the unconscious is also needed for full discovery of the human psyche. The Persona is a Latin word that means "the mask", according to Yung in his book *volume 9, part II of the collected works of C. G. Yung AION Researches into The Phenomenology of the Self* (1951).

Persona is the role that a person shows to the outside world; it is shaped by societal expectations, norms, and our desire for integration. Jung named this socially adapted aspect of the personality “persona”. The origin of this Latin word goes back to the masks worn by actors in antiquity. The mask, or persona, looks like ourselves, but it is largely influenced by the outer world. Therefore, it is a sort of a compromise between the individual and society. Persona is our appearance facing other people and how we want to be seen by them. Jung describes the persona as a sophisticated communication system between our individual consciousness and society, and exists as a type of mask to enable the attempted management of others' perception of us, while hiding our true selves.

Shadow

The Shadow, according to Carl Gustav Jung in his book volume 7, *The Relations between the Ego and the Unconscious* (1953) is a central concept that represents the aspects and the traits of the unconscious, which we deny, suppress, or disown because they do not fit our vision of who we want to be, or how we want to appear to others. However, the shadow goes beyond just the “dark” emotions; it also holds our strengths and capacities, desires and aspirations and creative, and unrealized potential that we have learned to suppress but do not know how to express because of fear or shame. Jung viewed the shadow as having both a personal and a collective aspect. On a personal level, the shadow holds our memories, feelings, and impulses that we have individually repressed physically or psychologically. On a collective level, the shadow contains the patterns of rejection and darker tendencies that are universal to humanity. In this way, the shadow can be seen as a reflection of our inner darkness, but it is also a portal to different self-awareness and beginnings of transformation, if we have the courage the embodiment of the shadow.

2. Materials

2.1. Biography of the authors

Betty Smith's biography

Betty Smith was born on December 15, 1869 under the name of Betty Wehner. Betty's life story is similar to Francie's life in her first novel *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (1943). For instance, she lived in Brooklyn with her family that were immigrants, and due to her family's struggles with poverty she had to work in many low paying jobs, and many other events, settings and characters are similar to her life. She was able to attend the University of Michigan from 1927 to 1930, where she studied playwriting and won the Hopwood competition, which encouraged her to continue with her writings. From 1930 to 1934, she studied at the Yale University Drama School. Betty Smith wrote many very successful books like *Murder in the Snow* (1938), *Tomorrow will be better* (1948), *Maggie-now* (1958) and much more. Smith died in Shelton, Connecticut, on January 17, 1972.

Alan Moore's Biography

Alan Moore, born in November 18, 1953 in Northampton, England. a British writer whose works include some books of great influence in the comics history. Alan Moore started publishing in early 1970 as an artist and comic book writer. However, in 1982 that he stepped in the superhero realm and truly showed his talent. Moore brought classics that made comics more about adults, like: the classic British hero *Marvel Man*, and his later stories delve deep into the complexities of how someone with extraordinary abilities would navigate in the human society. Like *V for Vendetta* (1982-1988), *Watchmen* (1985), *From Hell* (1989), which helped him became wide world known and one of the most influential comic books writer ever. His works kept inspiring films, like *Watchmen* (1985), and *Batman: The Killing Joke* (1988). A long career finished in 2022, when he decided to quit writing comics.

2.2. Summaries of the two books

Summary of *Batman: The Killing Joke*

Batman: The Killing Joke is a graphic novel written by Alan Moore and illustrated by Brian Bolland, originally published in 1988 by DC Comics. The story tells about the origins of the Joker through flashbacks, his transformation from a working man and a husband to a criminal with a grotesque philosophy about society and life. The story begins in an Asylum, where Batman discovers the Joker's escape. After that, the Joker visits the Gordon's house for an attempt to drive Commissioner Gordon insane by targeting and shooting Barbara Gordon in the spine to paralyze her, kidnapping her father and torturing him both physically and psychologically. Just to prove his point that life and rationality are absurd, and anyone could become mentally unstable after just one bad day just as if it happened to him. After that, the narration shifts to the Joker's backstory, where it tells about his own bad day. After that, Batman saves Gordon and tries to seek reason from him but fails to help him. The last scene of the comic book is an open end where we do not know if Batman and the Joker shared a laugh or one of them was choking the other.

The summary of *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*

A Tree Grows in Brooklyn is a novel written by Betty Smith. The novel is a coming-of-age story that tells about the life of Francie Nolan, from age 11 to about 17. Moreover, her family, who lives in extreme poverty, the father John was a dreamer and an unreliable alcoholic father, the mother Katie who worked hard. To endure the harsh realities of life, Francie finds her remedy in her imagination, books, education, intelligence and sensitivity. Francie loved her father, and his death due to pneumonia caused by alcohol, was a major turning point for her, not only because she lost her beloved father but also because now she had to work even harder. Katie finds herself obliged to marry a financially stable officer especially after giving birth to a

third child months after her husband's funeral. Finally, as a recognition for Francie's efforts and intellect, her stepfather offered to pay for her university fees, and she eventually gets accepted into Michigan University and left Brooklyn. Francie is just like the tree of Heaven in the yard, it grew up from the cement and although many people cut her many times, but it kept growing back each time, just like Francie's spirit, although her harsh childhood, extreme poverty, the death of her charming beloved father, and a toxic relationship, she kept rising through the cement just like her father's favourite tree. In *A tree grows in Brooklyn*, Betty Smith highlighted resilience and enduring difficulties through learning and imagination. The story is about finding beauty even in the harshest and most difficult turns in life.

III. Results

This section presents the key findings of the analysis of *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (1943), as a comparative study to *Batman: The Killing Joke* (1988 and illustrated by Brian Bolland through the theoretical lenses of Julia Kristeva and Carl G. Jung, both novels are analyzed and explained using concepts from each theory. The analysis revealed significant understanding of the representation of individual trauma, highlighting a profound exploration of identity collapse, where characters undergo a healing process in which they confront all the traits that they repress or deny. This research highlights how language and meaning dissolve due to traumas from experiences, leaving characters with deep psychological fractures and a sense of imbalance.

Despite notable differences in narrative structure, setting and the fragmented journey of the characters, both authors effectively delve into the past and its psychological outcomes. *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* pictures trauma in a slower more detailed way through Francie and her family, who endured many unfortunate traumatizing experiences. Francie experiences poverty, hunger, neglect and shame from a very young age, in addition to the loss of her beloved father and leaving school. These experiences reinforced her resilience and psychological development, so instead of falling into meaninglessness she channels her pain and bad memories to kindness, imagination and intellect. In contrast, the Joker that passes through a series of bad events in just one day the loss of his job, the brutal death of his pregnant wife, the betrayal of his friends and leaving him for Batman to catch him and eventually falls into a pool of chemicals and gets disfigured, leading him to his psychological breakdown, the collapse of his identity under the weight of trauma and the emerge of the Joker.

The Joker is a character that is fully embraced by his psychological ruptures, without any moral restraint, he accepts and surrenders to the chaos, madness, and cruelty inside him and

he embodies it. Furthermore, this analysis discusses different forms of narration of fictional literature; a graphic novel *The Killing Joke* (1988) and a classic novel *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (1943), but resemble each other in the shared experience of trauma, characters from both works experienced poverty, loss, abandon and shame. Ultimately, the comparative analysis demonstrates how characters overcome trauma; confront their shadow, whether through madness, chaos, resilience or rationality. Confrontation is a difficult psychological path yet an essential part of the healing process but cannot always result in healing. Overall, the findings indicate that both authors provide a nuanced examination of the psychological and emotional consequences of trauma, emphasizing its lasting implications on the individual level. Through their respective narration, both authors contributed to a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding the human psyche and the healing process.

IV. Discussion

1. Chapter One: Trauma and the reconstruction of identity in *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* and *Batman: The Killing Joke*.

This chapter intends to be a study of the comic book *Batman: The Killing Joke* as a comparative study to *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* as a profound exploration of identity collapse, where characters are violently torn between chaos and rationality, through the critical lenses of Julia Kristeva. The analysis delves into four concepts: Semiotic and symbolic that explain language as a signifying process. Abjection is where all boundaries break down, manifesting in disgust and horror. Melancholia is a perpetual state of grief that traps characters in their trauma preventing redemption and revolt is defined as the process of confronting the abject body and the repressed dark side that disrupts meaning.

a. *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*

Semiotic and Symbolic

According to Kristeva, the study of language is inseparable from the study of the speaker. Unlike many intellectuals, she provides insight into how language shapes our understanding of others, and ourselves describing language as a signifying process in which “the speaking subject makes and unmakes himself” (McAfee, 2004, p. 14). According to Kristeva it is not simply communication that is transmitted through language but a process of signification, of identification, of the affective, and of the subject. In *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, as a speaking subject Francie “makes and unmakes herself” with language. Kristeva sees language as a part of a dynamic signifying process, even though she never defines it. However, Kristeva explains it as: “the ways in which bodily drives and energy are expressed, literally discharged through our use of language, and how our signifying practices shape our subjectivity and experience”. (McAfee, 2004, p. 14). The signifying process operates through two modes:

the semiotic as the discharge of the person's inner energy and instinctual drives and the symbolic as an expression of clear and orderly meaning.

Francie Nolan is the protagonist in *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*. According to Kristeva identity is shaped between the tensions of the semiotic charges and the symbolic logical order which are simultaneously at work and never fixed. "the speaking being is a subject in process because her identity is never fixed in place" (McAfee, 2004, p. 105). Through the two modes of signification, the semiotic as the discharge of the person's inner energy and instinctual drives and the symbolic as an expression of clear and orderly meaning, we understand how language operates. The source of Francie's semiotic chora emerge in her sensitivity, art, imagination, music and books, due to her attachment to her father Johnny, a dreamy, romantic, gentle spirit and a sweet singer that sing sweet songs, loved by every person he meets, this made her develop a deep connection and response to her surroundings. Johnny took Francie to the pre-language, non-material and where laws and order does not exist, he enriches her imagination and her sensitivity.

In contrast, her symbolic traits that subconsciously were copied from her mother Katie, which are order and law opposes what she copied from her father. Katie represents the paternal structure of the house, she provides, keeps the order of the house, and insists on her children to get an education as a solution to improve their life conditions. Katie is strict and a bit hard on everyone even her sister Sissy. Nevertheless, she suppresses the semiotic charges to keep the order of the house, because despite the fact that Johnny is the father but he lacks symbolic traits. Which results in Francie's closeness to her father in her early ages but shifts to the symbolic order with years into the independence, intellect, logic and literature. In Kristeva's words, shifting to the symbolic does not imply leaving the semiotic. Clearly shown in: "as the child takes up the symbolic disposition it does not leave the semiotic behind" (MacAfee 24).

In the Christmas Eve, Francie and her brother Neeley manage to get a quite big tree for free, when Johnny saw them he was so happy so he started singing, their Mother kept saying:

they think it is good the tree they got for nothing their father playing up to them and the singing and the way the neighbours are happy. They think they're mighty lucky that they're living and that it's Christmas again. They can't see that we live on a dirty street in a dirty house among people who aren't much good. (Smith, 1943, p. 206).

Katie comment strictly within the symbolic order, unlike the rest of the family, she is aware of how bad is their situation, she follows the symbolic rationality, order and logic and does not let dreams and sensitivity in her view of life. She navigates within the symbolic order, her tone is emotionless and realistic, and she consciously judges her family's semiotic impulses, like her dreamy husband, her irrational sister, and their pitiful situation.

After Johnny's death the Nolan's life conditions became even harder, especially that Katie was expecting a child. It is true that Johnny did not contribute much but his Sunday tips made a huge difference, now the Nolans lost that and lost Johnny too. The mother worked more and her symbolic traits became more intense, the children had to work in factories and even one of the two had to quit school, few weeks before graduation, they were all in deep grief but no one showed any sensitivity or chaos, the Nolan's fully embodied the symbolic laws and order, and fully repressed their grief, sadness, missing Johnny and all what signifies the semiotic chora. After that, Katie marry with Mr McShane, a rational, unromantic policeman who symbolises the financial stability and the patriarchal law, exactly what Katie and the children needed.

Furthermore, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, the Francie embodies this tension between the genotext and the phenotext. On the surface, her language, politeness, quite appearance follow a recognizable symbolic structure: a tragic backstory, and a philosophical argument about rationality and sensitivity under hard conditions copied by the symbolic order of Katie, her mother with her survival mechanism and making useful things from nothing. In

contrast, the phenotext, Johnny and his influence on his children, dreamer and a romantic singer, that wears a black tuxedo and a laugh on his face. However, beneath this lies the disappointment, failure, and deep grief; semiotic energy that disrupts meaning, identity, and coherence. These elements resist fixed interpretation, operating like the genotext, where trauma, desire, and disappointment erupt through the cracks of language. When he said: “I drink because I got responsibilities that I can’t handle.” (Smith, 1943, p. 22). The genotext shapes Johnny’s very subjectivity. Thus, his addiction to alcohol used as an escape of his failure, becomes a semiotic disturbance for the symbolic realm.

Abjection

Abjection by Kristeva is a one of the most fundamental processes of the subject in process: the state of rejecting what is other to the self. It explores how an individual sees himself and his own borders as separate. In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1980) Kristeva takes the reader back into the first months of a child to investigate the creation of subjectivity, how a new-born sees himself as a separate being from his mother with his own borders. Indeed, In *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, poverty, hunger and death function as abject. It explores how individuals like the Nolans and their neighbor’s interaction and response to what is foreign or cause disgust to “the self”. Abjection is not merely an outside threat; it is what we once were, and what a human could never eradicate.

For Kristeva, abjection begins with the maternal: the maternal body that the child must reject in order to access language and the symbolic order. According to the theorist, abjection is a way of denying the primal narcissistic identification of the subject, although it is never fully detached from the mother’s body. In Kristeva’s words: “the abject is what one spit out, rejects, almost violently excluded from oneself” (McAfee, 2004, p. 46). Abjection is what we reject, what we do not adjust to and keep pursue us during all our life time. For the Nolan’s, poverty

is their abject, the hungry children, the fighting for all what is free and with a discount, out deep down the Nolans felt shame and disgust. The Nolans had a complex narcissistic union with poverty, even if they draw borders with their environment and try to reach subjectivity, abjection would help to get detached from their origin “the mother body”, but it would still hunt them.

For instance, in the Christmas eve when Francie and Neeley managed to get a big tree for free, their father was very happy; he started to sing, but the mother said: “Johnny and the children can’t see how pitiful it is that our neighbours have to make happiness out of this filth and dirt”. (Smith, 1943, p. 206). Francie romanticises her environment and uses her imagination as a survival mechanism, but her mother judges it being filthy an “abject” that they should not be happy about, love or romanticise; she is realistic, and sees it as a sign of poverty, knowing that her lost hated work is charity, and she made it the most hated word for the children too, a disgust that creates border between the Nolans and poverty.

Kristeva explains that a cadaver or another form of death presents the abject; forms of death are a direct collapse of borders between life and death, the livings and the death. In: “if dung signifies the other side of the border; the place where I am not and which permits me to be, the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border, that has encroached upon everything. It is no longer I who expel, ‘I’ is expelled” (McAfee, 2004, p. 47). Death, the collapse of borders between life and death and the link between them, the expulsion of “I” and the place where there is no subjectivity nor borders. The death of Johnny was tragic and marked a turning point in the life of all characters; he was sick because of his addiction to alcohol that led to his decline, but Katie disapproved writing alcohol in the death certificate as a death cause, the abject that caused “infect” to the body, and she asked the doctor to write pneumonia only. The children were in denial and did not want to see their father in a coffin, another ‘infection for the body that causes disturbance, as shown in the following quote:

“Francie and Neeley remained out in the kitchen all the time the coffin was in the front room. They didn’t want to see their father in the coffin” (Smith, 1943, p. 184). Death, makes the human body wasted alongside with the borders of the self, it breaks the borders between life and death and makes an end to ‘I’ and subjectivity.

Through her childhood, Francie copies her father’s semiotic mechanism, but after his death, she became more like her mother. Moreover, as she grows she becomes conscious about her flaws and began to reconstruct her personality and borders. After, that she experiences puberty and discovers the taboos about women’s bodies in a patriarchal society where a son is preferred over a daughter, all forms of birth control is forbidden and did not even had the right to vote, despite their influence in society. Francie flees all these problems through using her imagination and intellect to set borders and to construct a female identity in a world fold by masculine energy, rather than falling into grief, shame and incapacity. Francie uses books and writings to revolt; she writes about her struggle, shame and poverty, she prefers writing about honest ugliness rather than beautiful lies, even though that put her in troubles with her teacher Miss Gardner, who ends up giving her bad grades, that asked her to write beautifully. Books were the source of Francie’s power, she wrote about her roots and used that to confront

abject.

Melancholia

Kristeva articulates melancholia as a loss of meaning, where the subject is trapped in a cycle of self-denial, and in a state of mind of alienated subject, notably in *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (1989). It provides a rich interdisciplinary study that encompasses psychoanalysis, art, literature and philosophy. Melancholia as a Discourse and not Just Pathology, crystalized by an unreconciled loss that will never be grieved or symbolized. For the melancholic subject,

there is no mourning. Rather, the melancholic subject is stuck, endlessly repeating their trauma in an unbroken chain of signification devoid of meaning. Kristeva explains melancholia as: “Melancholia is a non-communicable grief; the melancholic is wrapped up in her sadness; it is hers alone, something she cannot share in the social/symbolic realm.” (McAfee, 2004, p. 61). This quote defines melancholia as a condition in which the melancholic does not simply surrender to his destruction. Instead, he covers himself with a shield of sadness and isolation. In the novel *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, each character experience various struggles and emotions that are associated with Melancholia and depression.

Kristeva explains melancholia as a maternal pre-lingual loss, she gave an example of a child that loses his mother even before he realises that he is his own self and his mother is another, the child suffers from a loss that cannot explain nor articulate. Francie the protagonist suffered from that loss because of her mother and father. Francie’s mother Katie is a lawful housewife and the main provider of the family, she loves her husband and both her children but she always had a preference for Neeley which made Francie often sad, and a bit jealous, like when Katie went into labour and needed Francie and not Neeley because she is a girl and sent Neeley to call Aunt Sissy and his grandmother. Seeing her mother’s suffering, she said:

I'm sure. Mama, even if Neeley is a boy it would've been better if he stayed with you instead of me.
Why?
Because he's always such a great comfort to you. She said it without malice or jealousy. It was a simple statement of fact. "While I ... I ... just don't know the right things to say to make you feel better. (Smith, 1943, p. 215).

The distance between the mother and the daughter gives Francie a silent wound, and becomes the ‘thing’ ‘la chose’ a pre-oedipal pain that cannot be articulated. During this scene Francie confronts her shadow, her repressed feeling and her melancholia showing to surface, when she directly tells her mother that Neeley is such a comfort to her, and while she does not find the right words to comfort her mother.

The death of Johnny Nolan was a turning point in the Nolans family, his wife Katie that deeply loved her husband, and losing him was a painful loss because not only that she lost the unexpected three dollars tip in Saturdays and became the only provider of the house, but she lost Johnny her beloved husband that knew how to fix any situation. After his death she fell in what Kristeva calls ‘an unspeakable grief and unsolved mourning’, she could not cry nor show sadness, she tried to ignore the pain because of the responsibilities that lay on her shoulders, which emotionally isolate her. “Katie hardly realized what she was saying. She was missing Johnny so terribly and thinking so, to rationalize his not being there. Besides, there is this: If you love someone, you'd rather suffer the pain alone to spare them” (Smith, 1943, p. 215). Katie tries to be rational and practical after Johnny’s death and becomes silent about it instead of confronting her pain, as a defence mechanism, which isolate her from her family, which aligns with Kristeva’s ideas that the melancholic subject cannot express his loss. She rather faces the pain herself and she barely speaks because she finds no point in that. In Kristeva’s words, the melancholic is like an orphan that lost his mother, his ‘thing’ in the semiotic realm.

Melancholia and deep sadness is shown through Katie, Johnny, and Francie, characters in *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* reveals itself to be intense, yet submissive battle with the pain caused by loss. Katie insists that “If you love somebody you’d rather suffer the agony alone, than let the one you love suffer” (Smith, 1943, p. 69). Resonates with a melancholic structure one in which grief is not openly mourned as much as internalized and disguised as a type of resilience. Her silent suffering and her enduring spirit are not only maternal obligation but a means of struggle with Johnny’s distraction. In Kristeva’s view, it is considered as an inability to fully symbolize loss, choosing silence to repress it. Johnny who is melancholic in his own right is passive and fond of living in romantic illusions. Unlikely and unengaged by the demands of reality, he is forced into keep trying to fake believe and self-delusion.

Kristeva argues that depression stems from an unresolved loss of an early attachment (often maternal), where the depressive individual lies on a "lost identity" and struggles to reconstruct a sense of self. Clearly demonstrated in:

Sadness... is a kind of sign or representation not a verbal one, but one inscribed by one's whole character. As is the case with all moods or affects (including anguish, fear, and joy), sadness signals to any observer that some kind of energy displacement, stimulation, conflict or transfer has occurred within the subject. (McAfee, 2004, p. 62)

Caught in between these two types of melancholia, Francie unintentionally inherit their emotional waste. Her journey becomes one of learning to obtain the very losses that her parents were incapable of maintaining. When Katie due to her survival mechanism managed to get rest and financial stability that she needed to get back her femininity and softness, and where Johnny her father surrenders to his shadow and falls to his self-destruction due to his irresponsibility, Francie eventually finds meaning, employing imagination, speech and storytelling to overcome the pain and tragedy and turn it into growth.

Revolt

In her writings on revolt, Kristeva's tied her ideas to her understanding of the individual's struggle against the law and the repression of desires. Revolt for Kristeva is linked to her value perceptions regarding one's conflict with social rules and suppression. This means, in her view, political and social revolt stems from an intimate form of revolt against society, including the critically important elements: language, norms, and identity that society socializes the person into. It is a rejection of given meanings and a possibility for new forms of expression and freedom.

Francie's revolt is a quiet internal one; she resists the constraining situation of poverty and the circumscribed emotional existence of her family by retreating into books, writing, and the life of the imagination. In a bleak world of repressed feeling and silenced suffering, Francie

will insist on naming her pain. In the act of writing, she finds a revolt of sorts a refusal to be silenced, a protest against the debilitating melancholy she has inherited from her parents. Revolt for Kristeva is to reach the balance between the two poles of the speaking being/ the semiotic and the symbolic which keep shifting, in other words it should be kept intact, balanced and in touch with both of them.

While all the entourage of Francie suffers in silence, she uses language, words, she uses her writings to speak the unspeakable pain. According to Kristeva: “The subject in revolt is a subject who questions the established structures and dares to imagine new ones” (Kristeva, 2022, p. 14). Francie manages to face loneliness and harsh living conditions as soon as she starts a new book, clearly demonstrated in: “she was the books she reads in the library” (Smith, 1943, p. 14). Books became a significant part of Francie’s like and identity because of her devotion to reading, which increased balance between rationality and sensibility, which made her dare to imagine a better life for herself.

Moreover, Katie’s revolt is one of quiet endurance and rational steadiness. She does not allow herself to be consumed by her love for Johnny, even though it causes her deep inner suffering. Her revolt is not loud nor visible, she chooses survival over emotions and sensitivity, logic over collapse. Yet, in choosing to suffer silently alone and choosing to spare others, as Kristeva might say, Katie embodies a melancholic subject one who internalizes pain and turns it into function . Katie symbolises the rock of the house, she has developed survival mechanism to endure the responsibility of the house and the burden of an unreliable husband. She has been often judged for being hard even from herself, but behind that was repressed sensitivity and a desire for love and beauty.

Additionally, in *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, the characters portray survival, redemption, and finding peace is possible although poverty and hard conditions along with societal expectation and gender role, shown in what Francie's grandmother Mary Rommely used to say: "Look at everything as though you are seeing it for the first or the last time, this is your time in earth filled with glory" (Smith, 1943, p. 231), as a revolt against the nightmare of the modern society of the spectacle that shifts living into a presentation. In Kristeva's words: "The spectacle is the nightmare of the imprisoned modern society which ultimately expresses nothing more than its desire to sleep" (McAfee, 2004, p. 108). In the novel Sissy is the loved aunt of Francie and Neeley, she was for too many people scandalous, rebel, and a free soul, even for her sister Katie. Unlike her sister, Sissy rejects societal norms, she considers her physical and emotional relationships as pure and nature and not something to be ashamed of, she follows her own rule and never takes into consideration other people. But when we take off the mask, we see a sad, gentle, loving woman that craves children and being a mother due to her multiple miscarriages which was a tragedy for her. But manages to not be consumed by her pain and loss, rather she uses them as a phase in her life to learn from it and move on.

As a conclusion, Katie's permanent positions works as a defence mechanism from which she draws resistance; Johnny's self-decline conceals deep internal shame; beneath Francie's reserved façade lies an empathic and innocent nature; behind Sissy's bold and scandalous acts lie deep sadness. The characters repressed feelings manifest through different behaviours that shape their interactions and responses to others. Through the novel, Smith demonstrates that living in Williamsburg means seeing these dark sides. Like the tree breaking through the road, growth does not come from hiding the dark side, but from turning its force into ways that keep meaning. Katie's anger turns to endless work, Francie's bitterness makes her art and imagination sharp, Sissy's sadness makes her caring deep. The dark side, in its real form, turns into the push that keeps them strong.

b. Batman: The killing Joke

Semiotic and Symbolic

According to Kristeva, the study of language is inseparable from the study of the speaker. Unlike many intellectuals, she provides insight into how language shapes our understanding of others, and ourselves describing language as a signifying process. However, Kristeva explains: “the ways in which bodily drives and energy are expressed, literally discharged through our use of language, and how our signifying practices shape our subjectivity and experience”. (McAfee, 2004, p. 14). The signifying process operates through two modes: the semiotic as the discharge of the person’s inner energy and instinctual drives and the symbolic as an expression of clear and orderly meaning.

In Kristeva’s terms, the semiotic and the symbolic refer to two interdependent aspects of language. Although the semiotic and the symbolic aspects of language oppose one another in their nature, they complete each other in language. The speaker’s speech is meaningful when both the semiotic and the symbolic operate together. To clarify the distinction, Kristeva explains:

to help understand the distinction between semiotic and symbolic, the reader could imagine mapping the dichotomy onto more familiar dichotomies: such as the distinction between nature and culture, between body and mind, between the conscious and the unconscious, and between feeling and reason (McAfee, 2004, p. 16).

In her book *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984), Kristeva introduces the Genotext and the phenotext, which are used to describe two aspects of literary text. The distinction between the genotext and the phenotext mirrors the distinction between the semiotic and the symbolic. To illustrate this, Kristeva gave examples, for instance:

the other example Kristeva offers is the difference between written and spoken Chinese. Written Chinese, analogous to phenotext, represents and articulates the signifying process; but only spoken Chinese, like the genotext, provides the elements necessary for an exchange of meaning between two subjects. (McAfee, 2004, p. 12).

In *Batman: The Killing Joke*, the Joker embodies this tension between the genotext and the phenotext. On the surface, his language, laughter, appearance and unpredictable actions follow a recognizable symbolic structure: a tragic backstory, and a philosophical argument about madness. In the phenotext, the Joker appears as a villain, a comedian and a lunatic with unique looks. However, beneath this lies the genotext, the chaotic, semiotic energy that disrupts meaning, identity, and coherence. His laughter, fragmented memories, and contradictory statements such as: "If I'm going to have a past, I prefer it to be multiple choice" (Moore, 1988, p. 50), reveal deep psychological instability. These elements resist fixed interpretation, operating like the genotext, where trauma, desire, and madness erupt through the cracks of language. The Joker's very subjectivity is shaped by the Genotext. Thus, the Joker's chaos becomes a semiotic disturbance for the symbolic realm.

Batman's character is the symbol of justice, rationality, order and the symbolic law. He embodies the symbolic and the patriarchal law and order. He confronts the semiotic abject: The Joker with rationality, logic and law-bound terms and repression of chaos of the Joker. Batman imposes order and law through a rational conversation, saying: "Maybe it all hinges on tonight. Maybe this is the last chance to sort this bloody mess. If you don't take it... then we're locked onto a suicide course." (Moore, 1988, p. 42). In this scene Batman is the guardian of Kristeva's symbolic patriarchal law, structure, rationality and order against the Joker's chaos and irrationality.

Another character who embodies the symbolic patriarchal law is Commissioner Gordon. The Joker, humiliated and forced to witness the assault of his daughter, his only family, tortured him. He said: "We have to show him that our way works! We have to show him that our way is right!" (Moore, 1988, p. 42). Despite his trauma, he insists on following the symbolic order. He also defends the legitimacy of the symbolic system itself. In this way, he illustrates how the

symbolic imposes itself when faced with the abjection and the collapse of meaning that the Joker represents. Although he tried to drive him mad, Gordon proved him wrong. Moreover, eventually, when he was rescued, he told Batman to bring him by the book, “Bring him in... by the book.” (Moore, 1988, p. 42). This proves that their way works and that madness and chaos are not a solution.

In the scene of the Gordon’s assault, the Joker does not merely commit a crime. He re-signifies meaning through language; he uses the semiotic to destabilize the symbolic order in both Barbara’s assault scene and the park amusement scene. “Please don’t worry. It’s a psychological complaint, common amongst ex-liberarians. You see, she thinks she’s a coffee table edition...” (Moore, 1988, p. 14). The Joker dehumanizes Barbara and reduces her to an object as a reminder of the fragility of humanity, which makes the symbolic meaning collapse under the semiotic meaning. In this scene, the Joker destroys meaning, he attacks and mocks the Gordons in their house that symbolizes privacy and makes it a crime scene; transforming Batgirl from an agent of power into a victim or a weak paralyzed patient. Barbara’s body from an active subject into an abject, stripping her of her clothes to take pictures and show them to her father to torture him, re-signifying the meaning of a picture from an object into a tool of horror and shock, especially for male characters like Batman and Commissioner Gordon.

The scene of the amusement park where he takes symbolic places and corrupts them with semiotic meaning like the parka place of amusement that becomes the Joker’s stage in which he tortures commissioner Gordon. the symbolic is how everything is staged for a specific purpose like: the disturbing noises, the images of his daughter’s assault wounded and stripped from her clothes, the lights to disturb him more and the twisted use of place that is supposed to be a happy place and turned to be the place where the Joker imprisoned commissioner Gordon and tortured him both physically and psychologically. The semiotic emerges in the Joker's

statements and actions, which become irrational, chaotic and instinct driven rather than rational as the Joker proceeds with his thoughts, language grows less rational and more instinct-driven.

When the Joker said: “memories are what our reason is based upon. If we can’t face them, we deny reason itself! although, why not? We aren’t contractually tied down to rationality! There is no sanity clause!” (Moore, 1988, p. 38). These words are not meaningless but symbolize an escape from an unbearable psychological pain. The rhythm in the Joker's speech, and intensity of emotional trauma - all signals of genotext, where language approaches the unconscious. This balance of structured thoughts, memories and internal trauma illustrates Kristeva’s key theme: meaning is not explicitly bound with the logic of the symbolic but it is always charged by the energy of the semiotic.

Abjection

Abjection by Kristeva is a concept that explores the origins of subjectivity. Specifically, it explores how an individual sees himself and his own borders that separate him (the self) from the other. Moreover, abjection explores how individuals interact and respond to what is foreign or threatening “the other” to “the self”. Abjection was figured most importantly in her later book, *Powers of Horror* that was first published in 1980. Kristeva's conception of abjection includes not mere disgust, but a horror of the collapse of the boundary between self and other. Abjection is not an outside threat, it is what we once were, and what we are dangerously close to become. Abjection is a collapse of meaning, an instance of encountering blood and corpses and excrement and anything that violates the clean and proper body. According to Kristeva, abjection begins with the maternal: the maternal body that the child must reject in order to access language, therefore, to access the symbolic order.

The thin line and the tension between good and evil have always an interesting topic for the theorists of literature, particularly when characters embody moral boundaries. In the realm

of American fictional literature, few works exemplify this duality as powerfully as *Batman: The Killing Joke* by Alan Moore and Brian Bolland. This comic book presents a complex and different relationship between Batman and the Joker, exploring the fragility of sanity and testing the limits of a person before crossing the line to evil and crime life. By employing Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection, this study aims to uncover how the characters portrays the psyche after we push it, often and what results of that some characters, like the Joker, fall into madness and chaos. On the other hand, there is Batman that keeps order and justice and Commissioner Gordon that has insisted on working by the book despite his assault, demonstrating how protagonists reflect and confront the abject.

Like when the Joker declares: "I'm not exactly sure what happened. Sometimes I remember it one way, sometimes another... If I'm going to have a past, I prefer it to be multiple choice!" (Moore, 1988, p. 32). The Joker collapses into the abject because of his trauma and unbearable burden that now follow him through memories; Alan Moore showed us a series of unfortunate events from the Joker's past that drove him to crime, madness and chaos, shown when he declared: "Memories can be vile, repulsive little brutes. Like children, I suppose. But can we live without them? Memories are what our reason is based upon. If we can't face them, we deny reason itself!" (Moore, 1988, p. 45), he describes memories of the past as dreadful and intense viewing the past as a source of pain and suffering. In addition, with the refusal of a fixed story or past, he escapes his pain and avoids a confrontation with his trauma. He becomes the embodiment of chaos and disorder because of his failing to form a solid identity and get over his traumatic memories. In Kristeva's words he is a case of failed abjection, the maternal is missing so the symbolic self never fully forms. Throughout his many different origin stories, he refuses to tell a consistent original story.

The Joker is a subject who has not only failed to reject the abject, but has fully embraced it. His grotesque face, a pale and unnatural rictus grin that bleaches out all colour, stretched and

deformed, a face that performs bodily death, a corpse that laughs. He is not dead nor entirely alive, but rather somewhere in-between. The Joker is sunk in the sense of abjection demonstrated in his dialogue in several scenes, for instance, in the first scene Batman goes to Arkham Asylum to speak with the Joker hoping to reach some kind of resolution before one of them kills the other saying: “hello, I came to talk. I have been thinking lately about you and me. About what’s going to happen to us, in the end. Where’re going to kill each other, aren’t we?” (Moore, 1988, p. 7).

This scene explores themes such as death drives and the break of boundaries; it discusses their complex relationship and violence for them eventually one of them would be a killer or a murdered man so Batman made the initiation to talk things out and honestly saying that he does not want the Joker’s death on his hands. However, the Joker unusually kept his calm and silence so Batman discovers that the man in the cell is an imposter and the Joker has already escaped. The situation starts to become ambiguous, awkward, and even cruelly funny. It generates disgust, because the symbolic order breaks down words are wasted, identity is muddled, The Joker’s escape from Arkham reflects the return of the repressed, the breakdown of boundaries and order and chaos.

Later in commissioner Gordon’s house, he shows his concern about the Joker’s escape from the asylum to his daughter Barbara Gordon and says: “whenever we jail him, I think please god, keep him there. Then he escapes and we all sit rolling hoping he won’t do anything too awful this time.” (Moore, 1988, p. 9). Barbara did not want to ruin the chill afternoon, so she tells her dad to leave the work talk at the door. While having a father and a daughter quite moment of warm conversation, she gave him a drink and mentions that the Joker used to give her nightmares as a child just before the knocking at the door broke it, she opened the door thinking it was her friend, she opens the door and sees her nightmare in front of her precisely targeting her spin to permanently damage her. The Joker used the body as object in his attack

upon Barbara Gordon to hurt Batman and commissioner Gordon. Barbara's body is not only shot, it is stripped, photographed and shown not only to humiliate Barbara, but to annihilate and completely destroy Commissioner Gordon's dignity. While Barbara was shot bleeding on a broken table she fell on and watching her father being beaten up by three men the Joker humiliates her more by making jokes on her being Barbara Gordon and her being batgirl.

frankly she won't be walking off the shelves in that state of repair. In fact, the idea of her walking anywhere seems increasingly remote. But then, that's always a problem with softbacks. You know, it's such a shame you'll miss your father's debut, miss Gordon.

Sadly, our venue wasn't built with the disabled in mind. But don't worry... I'll take some snapshots to remind him of you. (Moore, 1988, p. 17)

In this scene, the Joker did not only use violence, he violently ruptures the boundaries of self and reduces the body into an object of horror. The damage and the suffering of violence within the work is not only physical, it carries out a structural dissolution of Barbara's subjectivity, where she is in the end violated, sexualized, and is reduced entirely into a non-human object. The Joker is the embodiment of the abject, which signifies the found-meaning in the repressed, the unspeakable, that disturbs the reader's stomach and mind, so to speak, as a deep rupture of bodily-psychological integrity. Another scene in which the abjection was clearly demonstrated the "freak show" Funhouse where the Joker got a flashback about his last day as an ordinary man and the birth of the iconic character of the Joker that he calls "His bad day", saying:

How does this poor, pathetic specimen survive in today's harsh and irrational world? The sad answer is "not very well." Ladies and gentlemen! you've read about it in the newspapers! now, shudder as you observe, before your very eyes, that most rare and tragic of nature's mistakes! Give you the average man! Most repulsive of all, are its frail and useless notions of order and sanity if too much weight is placed upon them... They snap. (Moore, 1988, p. 36)

Though the Funhouse sequence continues this collapse, it is further than a carnival-based environment, it is a symbolic space of chaos and disorder. The mirrors deform Gordon's image, lights disorient him and sounds disturb him. He enters a space where he can make no sense of his experience, trapping him in a space that is neither conscious nor unconscious,

neither inside nor outside, left incapable of signification. The Joker re-tells this horror with an absurd combination of parody and theatrics, but beneath the performance is an attack on the symbolic order itself. He attempts to demonstrate that if humans were pushed far enough, they would simply break down into chaos, that the abject is not outside of us, but within, waiting to emerge. In Kristeva's description of abjection explained in: "what makes something an abject is not and not simply repressed is that it does not entirely disappear from consciousness. It remains as both an unconscious and a conscious threat to one's clean and proper self. The abject is what does not respect boundaries. It beseeches and pulverizes the subject". (McAfee, 2004, p. 46). The Joker does not reason or argue; he tells jokes, or does a monologue.

This scene where commissioner Jim Gordon was kidnapped, stripped from his clothes, caged him like a powerless animal, psychologically tortured in a large tunnel of horrors showing him big images of his daughter Barbra shot, bleeding stripped naked as a sort of humiliation and to destroy him mentally, emotionally and morally, just to prove that no one is immune against madness and to become as monstrous as him and to break loose the sense of symbolic order like reason and morality and drag him into the realm of the object. Gordon maintains his sanity and demands that the Joker be held accountable "by the book" (Moore, 1988, p. 42). In spite of the severe physical and psychological harm, "we have to show him that our way works! We have to show him that our way is right!" (Moore, 1988, p. 42). His refusal to spiral into insanity serves as a potent contrast to the Joker's pessimistic outlook. The Joker's shocking acts, full of brutality and cruelty, only lock in his status as someone truly abject.

The two protagonists share a complex relationship, Batman cannot help being pulled toward the Joker's insanity, and there is a constant tension hinting; they actually share something deep down. You see this whenever Batman battles to keep his own head straight as he faces off with the Joker's madness. It is almost as if the Joker holds up a grim mirror, forcing Batman to see his own fears and weak spots. Their bond suggests that abjection is not something

you just shove away, but it is also tangled up in what makes them. The storyline digs even deeper into the messiness of abjection by showing how the Joker's madness took root. The background story in the graphic novel makes it clear: deep trauma had a massive impact on who he became.

After, Batman confronts the Joker at the end of the story, the Joker uses sarcasm and unexpectedly tells a joke that tells a lot of facts about both characters. Moreover, the Joker rejects any type of healing due to his immense suffering. He refuses to recall the terrible things that made him who he is, that led to his transformation. He just spent the entire story trying to prove that all people are just one bad day away from being as far gone as him. Only to be proven wrong in the end. The Joker recognizes that Batman is crazy as well. A different kind of crazy, but crazy all the same. According to the Joker the thought that someone thinks that they can help him, is the equivalent of them thinking that he can walk across a light.

Melancholia

Kristeva describes melancholia as a breakdown in signification. The melancholic person is not simply sad or grieving. We cannot say the melancholic person is sad, because they cannot identify their pain, which is beyond language. The melancholic cannot symbolize the loss, so the melancholic is also stuck in the loss. Language cannot articulate the loss: without language, their structures of meaning and identity fail. Unable to get past the lost object, the ego begins to crumble. The melancholic does not say, "I have lost something" but says, "I am lost." The self is dissolved into the shadow of the lost (Thing), as explained in the following quote: "the lost object is not an actual person but an "internal object". The object feels both hate and love toward this object, love because he cannot do without it, and hate because he has been undermined by its loss" (McAfee, 2004, p. 60). In melancholia, the subject is not mourning about an actual lost "thing", like a dead person. Rather, it is a symbolic loss, a lost that we

cannot keep nor overcome because it is within us. The Joker after his “bad day” did not just lose his family, but he lost the chance to have a stable life, to be recognized, and to have an identity.

Kristeva's articulates melancholia as a loss of meaning, where the subject is trapped in a cycle of self-denial, failed mourning and in a state of mind of alienated subject, notably in her landmark *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (1989). It provides a rich interdisciplinary study that encompasses psychoanalysis, art, literature and philosophy. Melancholia as a Discourse and not Just Pathology, crystallized by an unreconciled loss that will never be grieved or symbolized. For the melancholic subject, there is no mourning. Rather, the melancholic subject is stuck, endlessly repeating their trauma in an unbroken chain of signification devoid of meaning. Explained by McAfee in: “Melancholia is a non-communicable grief; the melancholic is wrapped up in her sadness; it is hers alone, something she cannot share in the social/symbolic realm.” (McAfee, 2004, p. 61).

Batman: The Killing Joke is not about good and evil, but about how trauma becomes an identity, it discusses complex themes like: madness, tragedy, the sane and insane and the deep grief hidden behind laughter which is not a sign of joy nor a relief from pain, it explains that melancholia is not as a simple sadness but a profound, pathological state of mourning that consumes the person and prevent him from healing, scars from a past that never let go, a nameless loss that disrupts identity. As in the interpretation of Julia Kristeva on melancholia: “The melancholic subject is not able to represent the loss; instead, she identifies with the lost object itself and turns the aggression inward.” (McAfee, 2004, p. 61). The Joker serves as a perfect embodiment of such a condition, not only becoming a character that is stuck in a moment of suffering from the past, but one that is unable to narrate or transform his pain into any cognitive resource.

The Joker's transmutation begins with the death of his pregnant wife and unborn child, a loss so tremendous that it deconstructs his sense of self. Moore used flashbacks to show the Joker's origin, a failing comedian who is not able to provide for his family before being betrayed by some bad friends and taunted into committing a crime, just after he gets word of his woman's death, a very bad chain of unfortunate circumstances that were enough to make a man out of his sanity. a bad day when grief encompasses all meaning. The scene in which he emerges with bleached skin represents the externalization of his psychic breakdown. Then a new appearance came out, a ghastly mockery of laughter that echoes his emptiness within.

The narrative structure in Alan Moore's *Batman: The Killing Joke* parallels Kristeva's idea of the opposition of melancholia and sublimation. The Joker's origin is restored in greyscale flashbacks. The use of the greyscale is a visual metaphor of the stagnation of grief's melancholia, while the violence in the present time bursts forth in grotesque colours, emphasizing his incapacity to transform pain into anything other than chaos. For Kristeva, art (or sublimation) is an escape from melancholia, emphasizing that suffering can only take shape when articulated creatively. Even the last scene, in which the two protagonist have shared a laugh, shows the futility of the world. Their laugh is not a moment of reconciliation, but a moment of surrender and recognition.

Kristeva argues that depression stems from an unresolved loss of an early attachment (often maternal), where the depressive individual lies on a "lost identity" and struggles to reconstruct a sense of self. The Joker sees the world as a meaningless and an absurd place shown in his quotes from *Batman: The Killing Joke*. "This is a joke, isn't it? This is all a joke" (Moore, 1988, p. 33). The Joker's laughter and jokes are strongly related to his madness and his deep grief, he sees no meaning in life, nothing but a monstrous, demented joke and no real value or worth in human principals and morals because life is too chaotic that no one can survive following some type of rules. He shows the gap between how seriously people take life and

how absurd it actually is which leads to madness. According to Kristeva the melancholic person remains non stopping in what she refers to as the 'zero degree of meaning,' and even humour, that is, laughter, is aa highlight of the despair of a person caught in this trauma and find no meaning in words.

As Julia Cristiva explained: “The melancholic lacks motivation to engage in the symbolic realm- that is, to speak or to write. Words seems pointless, for they are not connected to the subject efforts, desires – into shorts, to the semiotic chora. The depressed person is like an orphan I the symbolic realm. (McAfee, 2004, p. 63). The Joker's jokes are a sign of his own radical inability to escape his experience of trauma. For Kristeva, however, this is not in any sense a healing but is surrendered to the absurd, a still grieving refusal to grieve. The sudden cut-off to silence till the end keeps the fate of the Joker in a state of suspension, repeating the infinite darkness of his heart. He sees himself as an outsider from the cruel chaotic world and his madness as an emergency exit. Shown in many scenes and demonstrated in many famous quotes, like his infamous line: “So when you find yourself locked onto an unpleasant train of thought, heading for the places in your past where the screaming is unbearable, remember there’s always madness. Madness is the emergency exit...” (Moore, 1988, p. 24).

Kristeva describes the melancholic subject as living in a time that does not progress in a world without significance. His trauma that is implied via his tragic backstory that can never really be named or work through. Instead of mourning, he recreates the pain onto others to almost force them to feel his own emptiness. He does not accept order or meaning, he reacts with chaos and violence. His "one bad day" taught him that morality or reason are nothing but illusions and his laughter is his way of responding to that truth and his way of mocking the world. He plays with the concepts of truth and reality, being unable to clear his trauma into a stable or coherent identity.

The melancholic does not process or heal from his experiences or any form of meaning, but remains stuck to his trauma. As Kristeva points out, Language collapses under melancholia, and the subject cannot seem to express what they have lost. *Julia Kristeva* offers several insightful quotes that describe the Joker as a melancholic: “the melancholic does not simply give in to his self-destruction. She attempts to protect herself with a shield of sadness” (McAfee, 2004, p. 64). The Joker’s endless displacement through humour and irony and performance masks his failure to articulate a loss and his abuse of Commissioner Gordon and Barbara (Batgirl) is his effort to draw them into his realm of melancholy.

This scene with Commissioner Gordon kidnapped, debased of his clothes, caged like an animal, and subjected to the semiotic horror of massive, dehumanizing projections of his wounded, naked daughter enacts the Joker's imposition of his own melancholic logic onto another. Kristeva writes that the melancholic is caught in "an unspeakable grief," which disconnects them from the symbolic order; for example, the Joker attempts to reproduce his own collapse of the mind to break Gordon's understanding of reason, and morality and meaning. Through this calculated humiliation of Gordon is not just cruelty but an attempt to objectify Gordon, pull him into the same meaningless void where language falters, and only abjection remains. By dismantling Gordon’s ability to rely on moral or rational frameworks, the Joker attempts to drag him into the same realm Kristeva associates with melancholia. In *Batman: The Killing Joke*, the Joker embodies Kristeva's concept of the melancholic as "an orphan of the symbolic, remaining trapped in unconscious and untold grief” (McAfee, 2004, p. 47). Rather than speak about his loss in words, he displaces it, dragging others, such as Jim Gordon, into his own realm.

The conclusion of the comic *Batman* was ambiguous and open to interpretation; the Joker tells a joke about two patients who escaped from the asylum is symptomatic of his own futile attempts to escape from his trauma in the last scene of the comic book. The laughter in

the last scene is an instant of shared acknowledgement, that they are not so different from each other. But for Kristeva this is not healing but a giving in to the absurd a mournful refusal to enter into mourning. Kristeva sets melancholia against transmuting suffering into art. Moore's narrative structure (flashbacks intercut with present violence) mirrors this tension. The author did not create just an origin story of a villain, but a psychic state of being a criminal.

According to Julia Kristeva, a collapse of meaning due to a loss that happens on such a profound level, that it cannot be symbolized. In the last scene Batman and the Joker's confrontation is not a struggle between good and evil, it represents two different responses to loss. Batman channels grief into code, justice and order. The Joker collapses under it to fall into crime and chaos. and yet, they reflect each other. Both defined by trauma. Moore's text teases this reflection, suggesting they are doubling two sides of the same coin. The reader is also absorbed into this melancholic circuit. There is no closure, no moral victory within the story.

Revolt

According to Julia Kristeva, revolt is not a moment of break, simply an act of rebellion or rupture, but an ongoing, fluid process of questioning, transformation, and renewal (both psychologically and socially). The act of revolt is one of movement and return, of disrupt and re-found the whole Self. This revolt is not simply about rejection, resistance or destruction, but is vital to the growth of individuals and societies. Kristeva in her book *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt* describes revolt as an intimate movement, entailing a return to origins, an encounter with inner contradictions, and a re-founding of meaning. This process, called intimate revolt, is more than rejection or destruction; it is an essential mechanism for psychic and cultural regeneration. The act of revolt, for the subject, is to constitute itself by dismantling the symbolic structures that limit expressing while reconstituting itself, and formulating new ways to signify, in the process of seeking new ways to be.

While Kristeva recognizes that revolt may be losing its status as a practice, she claims that it is still a necessity to individuals and society as a whole. She argues that we must restore our sense of questioning and resistance because, as Kristeva says, "happiness should exist at the price of revolt" (McAfee, 2004, p. 113). In order to Achieve Happiness in Kristeva's Perspective is through embracing it as a journey in our deep self as a movement of the soul, a confrontation with our deep self, raising questions about deep desires, beliefs, traumas, failings and all that is lost or was taken from us leaving behind repressed feelings and inner struggle. According to the theorist to revolt is to return incessantly to the origin, to the beginning of one's own questioning, in order to break the stasis of identity.

Julia Kristeva holds that being human is about being full of contradictions and uncertainty. "The subject in revolt is a subject who questions the established structures and dares to imagine new ones" (Kristeva, 2002, p. 14). For Kristeva, revolt is not about amelioration or solving problems, but rather about transforming the contradictions of life into ongoing growth and keeping balance by staying on the borderline between the semiotic and the symbolic, as Kristeva states: someone who lacks any semiotic energy might as well be, perhaps must already be dead. Yet someone who is governed exclusively by semiotic charges is psychotic, thoroughly out of touch with meaning and identity" (McAfee, 2004, p. 105). The characters in *Batman: The Killing Joke* are unstable, and in order to reach balance and happiness, they should question, allow themselves to feel lost and accept it, engage in difficult realities and truths, and make space for inner freedom. Happiness, in this sense, is not about living a perfect life or having a peaceful life, but rather about claiming meaning when you do not know the next step. The Joker, who is too connected with the semiotic (chaos, instinct, desires), and Batman, who is too connected with the symbolic (laws, order, justice), represent the two extremes of the human psyche.

Revolt, according to Kristeva is a turning back to face trauma, to work through it and re-new the meaning. It is a psychic need by which the subject resists symbolic death (depression, psychosis, nihilism), and also resists the symbolic prominence, in Kristeva's words it would be disastrous for either side to triumph completely. *Batman: The killing Joke* discusses how trauma does not affect a person temporally but it forms their identity as a response to the pain and suffering, especially for the Joker and Batman. The Joker is unable to work through his trauma, he is consumed by it, he embraced it and it became his identity. Although Batman's attempt to offer him help saying: "Let me help you. I don't want your end. I don't want anyone's end."(Moore, 1988, p. 45). This quote highlight Batman's use of the symbolic law (rational communication, logic), as a last try to reach the Joker's humanity, offering understanding and empathy to prevent destruction and death.

The Joker answers with: "no, it's too late for that. Far too late" (Moore, 1988, p. 45). This answer reflects his submission to his trauma and his denial to confront his past and to move on. For Kristeva getting on the borderline between the semiotic chora and the symbolic law is the only way to reach happiness and mental stability, and she explains it in:" In Kristeva's view, the two poles of the speaking being, the semiotic and the symbolic, simultaneously at work. Even though the symbolic mode is usually more prominent, it would be disastrous for either side to triumph altogether" (McAfee, 2004, p. 105). According to Kristeva, a balanced psyche depends on the balance between the semiotic and the symbolic; the Joker refuses the symbolic law and stays trapped in the semiotic chora, overwhelmed by pain, suffering, and isolation despite Batman's attempt to help.

This last encounter is simultaneously open-ended and unfinished, and is profoundly melancholic. After the Joker tells his last joke, both men start laughing and then, suddenly, one of them stops maybe one of them killed the other and maybe not. The ambiguity of the ending means that there is no return to order from chaos. The story ends in the same indeterminate

chaos space it opened in. Kristeva explains how abjection is never removed completely it continues to return, tempting the ego's coherence. The comic does not offer redemption. The comic leaves us dangling, implicated in, and uncomfortable, yet fascinated not just with the Joker's madness, but also with the realization that madness is not so far from our own. When Batman said: "We're all just one bad day away from being like him." (Moore, 1988, p. 40). Even though Batman represent symbolic order, he shows empathy toward the Joker, he understands that he is inn pain, and does not spread chaos out of evil, but out of deep inner pain. Batman refuses to let trauma determine his identity. From Kristeva's perspective, this is a process of revolt, an engagement of meaning, intersubjective connection, and possibility of symbolic re-birth.

Commissioner Gordon got both physically and mentally tortured, and was forced to see pictures of his daughter's suffering, which was also an attack on his symbolic stability. The Joker's main purpose for the assault on the Gordons is to destabilize their symbolic stability, by making them go through hell to traumatise them and make their identity collapse like just it happened to him, and to prove that "one bad day" is enough to make anyone fall into madness. Although the torture and suffering, he insists on bringing back the Joker to the asylum by the book, after Batman saved him, telling him: "I want him brought in.... and I want him brought in by the book! By the book, do you hear? We have to show him! We have to show him that our way works!" (Moore, 1988, p. 42). Even though the Joker attacked Barbara Gordon as a woman, daughter, and batgirl (an agent of power), she does not collapse. Rather, she revolutionizes herself in other comic books as Oracle, a brilliant hacker and intelligence analyst who provides strategy and support to Batman and her father.

conclusion:

The present chapter demonstrate the thin line between rationality and delusion in *Batman: The Killing Joke* and *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, analysed through Kristeva's theoretical framework, highlighting themes, such as: identity collapse and the tension between chaos and order. The chapter illustrates the various ways in which language structures, and pulls apart the characters' psychological stability, by examining their semiotic and symbolic sides. Abjection reveals moments in which boundaries are violated and the characters' encounter horror and disgust. Their melancholia also displays how uncommunicable grief has trapped the characters in trauma, preventing redemption, healing and happiness. The analysis used revolt to demonstrate not only each character's confrontation with the abject, but confronting the repressed shadows in their psyche. The two works, despite their differing narrative forms, demonstrate that identity is not only unstable but continuously shaped by trauma, desire, and internally contradictory. This chapter ultimately clarifies that these texts articulate the persistent and human effort to locate meaning amid trauma and fragmentation.

2. Chapter Two: The Archetypes of the Shadow and Persona in *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* and *Batman: The Killing Joke*

This chapter intends to be a study of the comic book *Batman: The Killing Joke* by Alan Moore, and *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* by Betty Smith, as a profound exploration of identity collapse, facing trauma, and redemption. Using concepts from Carl Gustav Jung, we will discuss two primary facets of the human mind- the Persona and the Shadow. The persona is the mask or role that an individual show to the outside world, the Shadow is often the repressed, dark aspects of people's psyche that they deny. *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* is a novel that shows how people wear social masks as a compromise to adjust to society's expectations, to survive in hard situations and keep their dignity despite of their shadows. In *Batman: The Killing Joke*, each character grapples with the dark truths inside. The Joker surrender to the Shadow and denies any consistent identity. Batman tries to hold onto his Persona, but is tormented by his Shadow. Theoretically, both characters illustrate what it looks like when the components that make a whole person break down. Their inner conflicts are a source of confusion, grief, and chaos, illustrating the difficulty of becoming a completely self-actualized individual.

a. A Tree Grows in Brooklyn

Persona

Persona is a concept by Carl G Yung that is defined as a worn mask that looks like ourselves, but it is largely influenced by the outer world as a sort of a compromise between the individual and society. Persona is our appearance when facing other people, and how we want to be seen by them. Carl G Jung describes the persona as a sophisticated communication system between our individual consciousness and society, and exists as a type of mask to enable the attempted management of others' perception of us, while hiding our true selves. Jung refers to the persona as an "outer attitude," which stands in contrast to the "inner attitude". We develop our personality not only so that it becomes rooted in our nature but also so that it is adequate to

the social and environmental demands around us. Jung named this socially adapted aspect of the personality “persona.

As is shown in this quote: “consciousness that is purely personal stresses its proprietary and original right to its t with a certain anxiety, and it this way seeks to create a whole. (Jung, 1953, p. 215). Francie defines her identity in a firm way. For instance, she does not tolerate her name being misspelled because it is her property. Francie’s self is built by being different from her surroundings but she kept all that to herself, like she kept imagining people looking just like their pets, she looks at a pet and knew exactly how its owner looked like, and the fact that she wanted to read all the books in the library in a chronological order but one day in the week, she chooses a book out of the order just for her entertainment. Francie feels anxiety toward all what threatens her ‘personal proprietary’ of her personal traits.

A Tree Grows in Brooklyn is a book that shows how people wear social masks as a compromise to adjust to society’s expectations, to survive in hard situations and keep their dignity. Johnny Nolan is the father of the protagonist, a charming singer that spares no one from admiring his spirit, but behind all of this hides a deeply shamed alcohol addict that cannot provide for his family. Whenever Johnny wears his suit, he puts a smile on his face and goes to make everyone joyful. Shown through the story, like in: “women smiled at him until they noticed the little girl clinging to his hand. Johnny looked like a handsome, devil-may-care Irish boy instead of the husband of a scrub woman and the father of two children who were always hungry”. (Smith, 1943, p. 24) In Yung’s words, he wears his mask or persona, to hide his shame and deep disappointment with his life, which made his disconnect from reality and escape his responsibility.

Johnny was a good man and Francie loved him so much, more than her mother, but he was a dreamer who fled his responsibilities both as a husband and a father, and he knew that he could provide more as an ordinary waiter more than a singer, “It’s not steady work. I’d be better

off if I was just a plain waiter. That's why I drink, he finishes illogically". (Smith, 1943, p. 22). This quote shows high self-awareness, that he drinks to avoid confronting with his shame. His irrational statement at the end was a collapse of the persona, he took off his mask in front of his prima donna, his daughter, exposing his self, the shame with broken masculinity because of the dominance of the anima (the gentle, dreamy and sensitive soul), in his unconscious, which led him to his destruction.

Katie Nolan is the mother of the protagonist Francie; Katie is a beautiful woman with fair white skin and long black hair, her primary persona is a strong woman that keeps the house from falling apart, a loving and caring wife and mother, the perfect housewife inside the house and a strong hardworking woman in the outside. After her marriage with the love of her life Johnny and having two children, she manages to keep the order of the house, to navigate the harsh living conditions due to poverty, and the burden of the responsibilities: her two children, and her dreamy husband that does not offer much. According to Yung: "when we analyse the persona we strip off the mask, and discover that what seemed to be individual is at bottom collective; in other words, that the persona was only a mask of the collective psyche. Fundamentally the persona is nothing real" (Jung, 1953, p. 216). Therefore, she adopts a mask to tolerate her reality, as a tool for surviving. Katie said: "I work so hard sometimes I forget I am a woman" (Smith, 1943, p. 19). Under that mask hides a soul craving rest, love, beauty, vulnerability and fair. People around Katie get influenced by her energy, especially Francie, she suppresses her good features because of her mother like her imagination, love for nature and music and even her feelings.

As Yung states about wearing the persona as a mask in order to face society: "It is, as its name implies, only a mask of the collective psyche, a mask that feigns individuality, making others and oneself believe that one is individual, whereas one is simply acting a role through

which the collective psyche speaks” (Jung, 1953, p. 216). While Johnny’s manifestation is flawed and destructive, he completes Katie psychologically in her early life. Her fierce loyalty to him, despite his failures, is partly because he carries the romantic, feeling side she buried. His death forces a painful reintegration of these animus qualities into her own psyche.

According to Yung, poverty and hard conditions along with societal expectation and gender role can result to survival persona, in the novel Sissy is the loved aunt of Francie and Neeley, she was for too many people scandalous, rebel, and a free soul, even for her sister Katie. Unlike her sister, Sissy rejects societal norms, she went through multiple failed marriages, relationships out of marriage and sometimes while she was still married and children yet unwed, she sees sex and love as pure and nature and not something to be ashamed of, she follows her own rule and never takes in consideration other people. However, when we take of the mask, we see a sad, gentle, loving woman that craves children and being a mother due to her multiple miscarriages which was a tragedy for her.

It is clear that Flossie and Sissy are similar yet so different. Clearly shown in this quote:

Flossie was always running after men and they were always running away from her. Francie’s aunt Sissy ran after men, too. But somehow they ran to meet her halfway. The difference was that Flossie Gaddis was starved about men about Sissy was healthy hungry about them. And what a difference that made (Smith, 1943, p. 19)

Both are pressured by society, and both express physical attraction toward men. Sissy is an independent soul, complete by her own self, she integrated her sexuality with her identity in a healthy way without being consumed by it, which signify a healthy relationship between her persona and unconscious. On the other side Flossie, the daughter of Sissy’s man, dependent, desperate to get men’s affection, sees marriage as an opportunity to escape poverty, pretending to be a desirable woman made her persona needy and so starved for relationships with men, her over identification of the mask made them run away from her.

As the novel progresses, especially after Johnny's death and the family's slightly improved circumstances with McShane, Katie's persona starts to soften, indicating movement towards Individuation (Jung's term for psychological integration and self-realization): She lets Francie go to high school and eventually to college, accepting her daughter's different path and intellect. She reconciles with Sissy, accepting her sister's unconventional life and inherent goodness. Her marriage to McShane suggests an opening to security and maybe a less desperate way of living. While her core resilience remains, the armour of the "Strong Woman" persona cracks slightly, and she allows space for the previously suppressed aspects of her Self (vulnerability, acceptance of beauty/help) to integrate more fully.

Betty Smith's novel, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, shows how Carl Jung's idea of Persona works through the minds of main folk who live hard lives in early 1990 Williamsburg. Each one in the Nolan family, put on a social face needed to live and keep pride during hard times. Katie Nolan acts out the strong mom Persona with firm rule. Her way of turning small bits into "meals" and her tough way with hard times are her mask of home skill. This Persona hides her soft side from sadness, shows a face of control that her kids need to feel safe, and she needs to keep up her mental strength under the eyes of others. Francie Nolan uses her Persona to protect her intellect—the smart girl lost in books and libraries became her shield against the tough parts of being poor. This Persona keeps her thinking and imagination as a shield against the world, softening the hard outside world and making room for her real writer's self. The Nolans persona are masks made in tough times to keep a deep sense of self, pride, and an opportunity for growth, much like the strong tree that grows through the cement in the street, even though they tried 'to kill' her by cutting her but it manages to grow again.

Shadow

The shadow holds our memories, feelings, and impulses that we have individually repressed physically or psychologically. On a collective level, the shadow contains the patterns of rejection and darker tendencies that are universal to humanity. In this way, the shadow can be seen as a reflection of our inner darkness, but it is also a portal to different self-awareness and beginnings of transformation. Katie Nolan hides her true self under a hard, calm look. Deep inside, she is burning with hidden anger and cold hate. She favours Neeley over Francie and sometimes thinks that Johnny her husband is not a providing husband, all because her exhaustion and hard living conditions, her husband's keeps his spirit and dreams while she loses hers. This inner darkness gives her strength but hurts her ties with others. It shows in her lack of warmth and need to control everything at home, trying to manage a life that's out of control. Her mean way with Johnny's flaws and Francie's soft side shows a dark side due to suppressing too much inside, keeping her safe from hurt but alone even between her family members.

Johnny Nolan's dark side is his collapse into alcoholism and fear for confrontation. His "singer" act barely hides his deep hate for himself, fear of failure and his fear of taking charge. His drunk scenes in public are just melancholic performances. As shown in his words: "I drink because I got responsibilities that I can't handle. There was another longue pause, then he whispered I am not a happy man. I got a wife and a children and I don't happen to be a hardworking man. I never wanted a family." (Smith, 1943, p. 22). In Jungian words this is called projection, Johnny unconsciously blame fatherhood and manhood for his failure and irresponsibility, the shame with broken masculinity because of the dominance of the anima (the gentle, dreamy and sensitive soul), in his unconscious, which led his to his destruction. His drinking is not just a weak point; it is him slowly killing himself, letting his dark side consume him before he finally collapse, leaving his family in deep pathological grief.

Francie's refusal to call her father drunk and instead calling him sick, her imitation of his drunk walk shows deep sadness turning to anxiety because of the threat toward her 'self' clearly shown in the story: "there was a pain around Francie's heart but when she saw how the men standing around her father liked him, how they smiled and laughed at what he said and how eagerly they listened to him, the pain lessened. Those two men were exceptions. She knew that everyone loved her father" (Smith, 1943, p. 21). Francie projects a better version of her father due to her immense love for him, she sees him as a better father than he truly and unconsciously idealizes him. In Yung's words: "Projections change the world into the replica of one's own unknown face" (Jung, 1953, p. 9). This idealized view of her father creates a layer of protection keeps pain hidden but may result in isolation. But, Francie's gift lies in turning this darkness into words: her writing changes hidden bitterness and shame into stories, unconsciously copying her mother's survival mechanism that manifests in making tasty meals out of bread and seasonings.

Aunt Sissy lived in a time when women were expected to be reserved and obedient, but she challenged the societal norms. In Yung's words: "He must be convinced that he throws a very long shadow before he is willing to withdraw his emotionally-toned projections from the object" (Jung, 1953, p. 9). For too many people she became an object, in which people project their own shadow. She was judged being scandalous, rebel, and a free soul, she went through multiple failed marriages, relationships out of marriage and sometimes while she was still married and children yet unwed, she sees sex and love as pure, natural and not something to be ashamed of, she follows her own rule and never takes into consideration other people. However, when we take off the mask, we see a sad, gentle, loving woman that craves children and being a mother due to her multiple miscarriages which was a tragedy for her. Her many weddings and bold acts pull eyes away from the pain of losing babies, a gap she tries to fill by caring for her sister children Francie and Neeley.

As a conclusion, behind Katie's order and resilience hides exhaustion and fractured femininity; Johnny's self-fall hides deep shame; Francie's calm observing appearance hides great imagination; behind Sissy's bold acts hides a soft heart and deep sadness. The story demonstrates that living in Williamsburg means seeing these dark sides. Like the tree breaking through the road, growth does not come from hiding the dark side, but from turning its force into ways that keep life up: Katie's anger turns to endless work, Francie's bitterness makes her art and imagination sharp, Sissy's sadness makes her caring deep. The dark side, in its real form, turns into the push that keeps them strong.

a. *Batman: The killing Joke*

Persona

The persona is the social mask or the role that an individual represents to the outside world, it is shaped by societal expectations, norms, and our desire to fit in. Jung saw the Persona as necessary for functioning in society, but warned that identifying too strongly with it can lead to a loss of true self; we develop our personality not only so that it becomes rooted in our nature but also so that it is sufficient to the social and environmental demands around us. Jung named this socially adapted aspect of the personality “persona”. The origin of this Latin word goes back to the masks worn by actors in antiquity. The mask, or persona, looks like ourselves, but it is largely influenced by the outer world. So, it is a sort of a compromise between the individual and society. Persona is our appearance facing other people and how we want to be seen by them.

Carl G Jung describes the persona as a sophisticated communication system between our individual consciousness and society, and it exists as a type of mask to enable the attempted management of others' perception of us, while hiding our true selves. Jung refers to the persona as an "outer attitude," which stands in contrast to the "inner attitude." Jung further comments

that the persona is not a personal process, but is it rather something that we hold collectively. We develop our personality not only so that it becomes rooted in our nature but also so that it is adequate to the social and environmental demands around us. Jung named this socially adapted aspect of the personality “persona. We have various persona during our lifetime, according to each developmental phase, our gender identity, social status, and so on. A major task in acquiring self-knowledge is to understand the relationship between who one is and how one presents oneself to the world. For adapting, behaving in a suitable manner, and knowing how to navigate situations that life presents to develop a healthy persona.

In *Batman: The Killing Joke*, the Joker serves as a powerful illustration of the collapse of the persona from a Jungian perspective. Jung defined the persona as "a compromise between the individual and the society concerning what a man should appear to be," (Jung, 1953, p. 190) and suggested the persona is the public personality that exists between the individual self and the social (and collective) world. Jung observed that the persona may likewise be lost if someone becomes too identified with the mask or rejects it entirely for a new external reality. Throughout the story, we see flashbacks of the Joker's potential past; as a hard-up comedian, husband, and expectant father. In these flashes, we witness a man who struggles in poverty and tries to belong to society.

The Joker's attempt to fulfill the role of provider, entertainer, and citizen reflects Jung's notion that we create our personality in line with our social structure: “We develop our personality not only so that it becomes rooted in our nature but also so that it is adequate to the social and environmental demands around us” (Jung, 1953, p. 164). But this persona is inadequate when confronted with such overwhelming misfortune. The unexpected death of his wife and unborn child burnt, and his disfiguring chemical accident, all combine to destroy the mask he tried to maintain. At this point, the Joker does not stop with just throwing away his

persona but simultaneously declares war on every notion of identity, morality, and order. In Jungian terms, this is an absolute rejection of the persona and any possibility of individuation the integration of the conscious self with the unconscious self. By refusing to accept even one version of his own origin, the Joker turns his back on personal history, personal identity, and personal growth.

He has allowed the chaos inside him to win, and rather than being repressed to face it and grow from it, he literally becomes it. He does not perform a role on behalf of society; rather, he exists to show others precisely how their roles are nothing more or less than a shared illusion. It is no longer a mask, but a vacuum, a mirror pointing back to society's assumed stability. This ideology is expressed again in his monologue to Batman: "You had a bad day once, am I right? I know I am. I can tell. You had a bad day and everything changed" (Moore, 1988, p. 39). In this scene, the Joker seeks to break down the Batman persona in the same way his own was broken down. The Joker elaborates that sanity, morality and justice do not actually exist, but are merely masks that humans wear to keep themselves from facing the truth that the world is chaotic and devoid of meaning. The Joker accuses Batman of holding a role, pretending that "life makes sense, that there's some point to all this struggling" (Moore, 1988, p. 39). According to the Joker, Batman's heroism is simply a performance sanctioned by society, an act of desperation that attempts to create purpose where there is none to be found in the face of brutal and senseless trauma.

From a Jungian perspective, the Joker is pushing Batman to wrestle with his shadow the dark side of all creatures, which includes those parts of ourselves that we push underground, such as pain, rage, and madness. The Joker is not merely an agent of chaos that erases life outright; he is intending to destroy persona and unmask the world. Persona is a to face the hypocrisy of society Batman has developed two personas: one as Bruce Wayne a mask made

by society a billionaire playboy, philanthropist, and businessman. This social face Bruce wants to show Gotham and society, a superficial act to deflect suspicion around his truth. In addition, as Batman by contrast, which is also a persona but it represents the mission and the psychological existence of the Batman. Therefore, both are roles and covers to his true self and shadow one (Bruce Wayne) is the cover of a wealthy extravagant young man and Batman as the protector of Gotham city and a symbol of justice.

The assault of Barbara Gordon was about not only her and her persona it was rather an attack on her father's persona and Batman's persona. Before the assault, she had two personas or a double life on the outside, one as batgirl symbolises power and other as a hard working independent young woman, a simple civilian and a daughter. The second persona as the daughter and the simple civilian. The Joker intentionally targeted her spine to make her persona collapse. "frankly, she won't be walking off the shelves in that state again. In fact, the idea of her walking anywhere seems increasingly remote." (Moore, 1988, p. 14). Her father gets beaten, assaulted and kidnaped to torture him more, after that she asks him: "why.... why... are you.... Duh.... Doing this....?" (Moore, 1988, p. 14). Moreover, he just answers with "to prove point. Here's to crime." (Moore, 1988, p. 14). The Joker's violence not random but rather symbolic, it was a targeted attack on the persona. He just wanted to prove that sanity, rationality, order and justice are illusions, and by attacking her persona, he makes her fall deep in her shadow, as it happened to him.

The Joker takes Gordon as an example of a sane man, to make an experience and prove his point to that even a man as strong and principled as Gordon can be broken, and that the symbolic realm is fragile and the law and order are an illusion. "All it takes is one bad day to reduce the sanest man alive to lunacy." (Moore, 1988, p. 39). He wants to prove that the sanest man on earth is not far from becoming like him. Yet Gordon, unlike the Joker, survives the

experience without losing his moral compass. He insists that Joker be brought in “by the book,” (Moore, 1988, p. 42). indicating that it is possible to meet the shadow, without losing the self. This moment coincides with Jung's statement that while the persona is needed to operate in society, to grow psychologically one must move toward the unconscious and be on the borderline to balance between the self and the persona.

Another key moment that illustrates the Joker's rejection of the persona is when he declares, “So I finally went crazy. I admit it. Why can't you?” (Moore, 1988, p. 39). In this passage, the Joker is challenging Batman, and by implication, everyone else, to confront their own darkness, drop their social masks and recognize irrationality, as truth, and rationality, as pretending. He values madness as truth, and sanity as a performance. He wants to show that only by abandoning the disguise of the persona could anyone truly be themselves, even if the self was mad. In Jung's opinion, radical break with the persona is inherently dangerous; the individual, without even a drop of the function of the persona, is thrown fully into the chaotic rush of the shadow and the unconscious. Therefore, *Batman: The Killing Joke* positions the Joker in a way that is not only a villain, but rather as a psychological figure who represents the risks of a disconnected self and society. His rejection of both persona and sanity, along with his attempts to destroy the social roles of others is a terrifying embodiment of the warning provided by Jung: we risk becoming a hollow imitation of ourselves when we cease the continuous attempt to balance our social roles with the truth of our individual selves or, worse yet, act as agents of destruction.

The Shadow

The shadow, according to Carl Gustav Jung is a central concept that represents the aspects and the traits of the unconscious, which we deny, suppress, or disown because they do not fit our vision of who we want to be or how we want to appear to others, in other words, with our persona. Moreover, these aspects are considered undesirable or even negative, such as anger, jealousy, pride, selfishness, or shame. However, Jung explained in his book *volume 9, part II of the collected works of C. G. Jung AION Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self* in: “those rather rare cases where the positive qualities of the personality are repressed, and the ego in consequence plays an essentially negative and unfavourable role” (Jung, 1951, p. 8). The shadow goes beyond just the “dark” emotions; it also holds hidden strengths and capacity, desire, aspiration, creativity, and unrealized potential that we have learned to suppress, but do not know how to express because of fear or shame.

Jung viewed the shadow as having both a personal and a collective aspect. On a personal level, the shadow holds our memories, feelings, and impulses, which we have individually repressed physically or psychologically. On a collective level, the shadow contains the patterns of rejection and darker tendencies that are universal to humanity. This way, the shadow can be seen as a reflection of our inner darkness, making considerable moral efforts, to become conscious and recognize the dark aspects of the personality, that we should challenge. This confrontation is important to get self-awareness and beginnings of transformation, if we have the courage the embodiment of the shadow.

The shadow is dual, which is powerfully illustrated in *Batman: The Killing Joke*, where the characters have different confrontations with their shadow. The Joker is fully embraced by his shadow, without any moral restraint, he accepts and surrenders to the chaos, madness, and cruelty inside him and he embodies it. In contrast, Batman controls his dark, repressed self with

discipline, and strict moral code. The story shows that both characters are too different, yet they mirror each other's inner darkness in different ways. Yung argues, that recognizing and confronting our repressed self is not an option, but a necessity to get happiness.

Yung's shadow manifests in many characters of *Batman: the killing Joke*, Batman is just a mask, a disguise that resulted from deep trauma, that followed him from young age, more precisely from the night he witnessed the murder of his parents. An accident that marked him, and was buried deep in his unconscious, and from that day, Batman was created not for helping people but to take his vengeance from all criminals. Through years Bruce was filled with pain, anger, loneliness and his deep thirst for violence, but eventually controlled by his laws and rigid code, and his desperate attempt to help the Joker is actually to control his repressed shadow that keeps threatening to consume him.

The Joker mirrors Batman's shadow. Everything he represses, all the pain, chaos, thirst for violence with restraint, despair and his trauma. In Yung's words:

No matter how obvious it may be to the neutral observer that it is a matter of projections, there is little hope that the subject will perceive this himself. He must be convinced that he throws a very long shadow before he is willing to withdraw emotionally toned projections from their object". (Jung, 1951, p. 9)

This quoted refers to Batman fights the Joker because he embodies all what he represses (his own shadow), he does not fear for his life or for the Joker's. Rather, Bruce fears becoming like him, if he ever loses control. Projection is a reference to how we attribute to the unacceptable. Batman instead of recognizing his shadow, he sees it in the Joker and fight it through the Joker as an escape from his trauma. Batman explains in this line: "We're all just one bad day away from being like him." (Moore, 1988, p. 40). That the Joker is not so different from a sane man, there is no sane man that is immune to fall in his shadow, this is a profound moment of recognition,

Batman knows that they both share the same traumatic origin (one bad day). And the Joker acknowledges that too, as he states:

You had a bad day once, am I right? I know I am. I can tell. You had a bad day and everything changed. Why else would you dress up like a flying rat? You had a bad day and it drove you as crazy as everybody else... only you won't admit it! You have to keep pretending that life makes sense, that there's some point to all this struggling. (*Moore, 1988, p. 38*)

Batman and Joker both acknowledges their similarities, that they are two faces of the same coin, traumatic origin. And both of them were re-shaped by falling for their shadow, each one in his own way. The Joker represents the shadow fully embraced, he does not repress his shadow, but he falls for it, for chaos, violence, and vengeance against society that did not accept him and failed him as a comedian.

Throughout the story, the Joker spreads his chaos and disorder just to show that the shadow is within everyone, and no one is so far from breaking to his shadow, even the sanest and lawful like commissioner Gordon. "I proved my point. Gordon's been driven mad... just like me" (*Moore, 1988, p. 45*). The Joker brought Commissioner Gordon just into his realm, he made him face all the brutality, chaos, terror, and humiliation, as an attack on his persona, he made projections about the collapse of meaning and breaking into the shadow. In Yung's words: "The projections change the world into the replica of one's own unknown face". (*Jung, 1951, p. 9*). The Joker attempted to project his shadow onto Commissioner Gordon but failed, only to be proven wrong by Batman, who said: "No. You're wrong. Gordon's fine. He didn't crack. He's still sane". (*Moore, 1988, p. 45*). After that, Batman offers to help the Joker as a final try to confront the shadow and get redemption and happiness, but the Joker refused and the story ends with a laugh shared by both protagonists in a moment of identity and meaning collapse.

Conclusion:

The presented chapter demonstrates that *Batman: The Killing Joke* and *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, when examined through Carl Gustav Jung's concepts of the Persona and the Shadow, reveal deep tensions between the mask that individuals present to the world and the repressed darkness they deny and refuse to confront. Through this lens, the analysis shows how identity collapse emerges, when these psychological component fall out of balance. In *The Killing Joke*, Joker and Batman both represent the extreme end of this lack of balance: the Joker gives in completely to his Shadow and essentially destroys his stable self-identity, while Batman cannot get past the tension between his Persona and unavoidable angst. Their battles show the pain of inevitable decoupling that occurs when a person refuses to integrate the unseen and seen aspects of their psyche. Comparatively, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, places the struggle for identity in a more grounded human experience, but similarly depicts the difficulty of recognizing trauma and the pursuit of self-discovery. Overall, the chapter proposes that these literary works together analyse the human struggle to confront the masks people wear and the repressed shadow they hide, suggesting bodily and psychological integrity is attainable only through confronting the Shadow.

V. General Conclusion

This master's dissertation entitled *A Study of Psychological Collapse and Recovery in A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* by Betty Smith (1943) and *The Killing Joke* by Alan Moore (1988), which explained the way both authors and works reflected deep exploration of the healing process, the reconstruction of identity, examining how power and subjectivity emerge from psychological fractures, highlighting the fragility of the human psyche. To reach my goal, I have relied on the psychoanalytic theory, developed by Carl Gustav Jung: in his books *The Relations between the Ego and the Unconscious* 1953, and *AION: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self-1951*. As well as Julia Kristeva in her books: *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1974), *Powers of horror: an essay on Abjection* (1980), *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (1989), and *The Sense and the Non-sense of Revolt* (2002).

Throughout our analysis on the novel, and the author's portrayal of the characters' behaviours and relationships, I have concluded that mental stability and being on the borderline between the semiotic and symbolic is a complex process, in which the melancholic subject should confront their shadow in order to achieve revolt and ultimately redemption and happiness. The first chapter, we explored identity collapse, where characters were violently torn between chaos and rationality. By developing the concepts of the Semiotic and Symbolic, language was explored as a signifying process in which the speaking subject makes and unmakes himself. Abjection where all boundaries break down, manifesting in disgust and horror. Melancholia as a perpetual state of grief that traps characters like the Joker and Johnny in their trauma that eventually leads to destruction and revolt is defined as the process of confronting the abject body and the repressed dark side that disrupts meaning.

The second chapter focused on analysing the characters facing identity collapse. Using concepts from Carl Gustav Jung, I discussed two primary facets of the human mind- the Persona

and the Shadow. The persona is the mask or the role that individuals show to the outside world, while the Shadow is the repressed, dark aspects of people's psyche that are denied.

The used concepts have helped to reach the conclusion that growth and redemption do not come easily in one day or two nor from ignoring or repressing the dark side (anger, jealousy, sadness, loss), but from confrontation and turning its force into ways that keep meaning and mental stability. Throughout my analysis on the novel, and the author's portrayal of the characters' behaviours and relationships, I have concluded that psychology is a universal field which analyse different societies and different cultures from different eras, through literature which is an open window on society. In Addition, despite the fact that the theories are not linked into the same time line, we were able to conclude that mental stability and being on the borderline between the semiotic and symbolic is a complex process, and persona is a sophisticated mask worn to face the hypocrisy of society and it does not reflect the reality of a people and what they hide nor about their psychological and mental state. Furthermore, in order to achieve redemption and happiness a person should confront his shadow and bypass the process of self-discovery like Francie, who managed to change her harsh life conditions with her sensitivity, imagination and intellect, which led to growth, while the Joker failed because of his refusal to try to confront his shadow that led to destruction.

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