

Batman Returns [1992] & Batman [1989]

by

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Directed by Tim Burton, produced by Denise Di Nove & Tim Burton, written by Daniel Walters and Sam Hamm, Screenplay by Daniel Walters, based on characters created by Bob Kane, Photography by Stefan Czapsky, Edited by Chris Lebenzon, Production Design by Bo Welch, Music by Danny Elfman. Warner Bros., 1992.

Oswald Cobblepot (Danny DeVito), a deformed baby is thrown into a river to die, but he survives in the sewers raised by penguins. As Penguin, he gathers an army of circus freaks and, as an adult, wants to reenter society. He is manipulated by Max Shreck (Christopher Walken) into running for mayor of Gotham. Shreck wants to build a power plant that will, in fact, suck the power out of Gotham. His plot is discovered by his secretary, Salina Kyle (Michelle Pfeiffer) whom he kills. She is brought back to life by Gotham's cats to become Catwoman. Batman (Michael Keaton) battles Catwoman, Penguin, and Shreck. During the battles, Batman falls in love with Catwoman, but she rejects him. Catwoman kills Shreck and Batman kills Penguin.

Allusions are fashionable. Cynicism is fashionable. *Batman Returns* [1992] is inundated in both. And while I love the homage to Orson Welles' *Touch of Evil* [1958] in *Batman* [1989] and the homages to F. W. Murnau and Todd Browning in *Batman Returns*, I am beginning to believe that many of these references may be allusion for allusion's sake. Is a sleigh in the background really a reference to *Citizen Kane* [1941]? And Tod Browning's *Freaks* [1932] is also about a woman who is transformed into an animal, a chicken – close enough to a penguin to allude. The masked ball is a reference to both Edgar Allen Poe and Lon Cheney in the *Phantom of the Opera* [1925] when he makes his entrance as the Red Death. And in *Batman*, the horrific tools with which the surgeon puts Jack Napier back together to form the Joker seem to be straight out of *Dead Ringers* [1988]. Joker, on seeing his new face, smashes a swinging light bulb that once hung in the basement of the Bates Motel in Hitchcock's *Psycho* [1960]. Finally, the ending sequence in the church tower is almost a quote from *Vertigo* [1958].

Batman Returns is a post-Modern filmic comic book that probably holds the world's record for quoting Orson Wells' films: The corrupt Lt. Eckart is lifted from *Touch of Evil* [1958]. Much of the final battle strongly resembles the final confrontation in *The Stranger* [1946]. The breakfast table scene is a quote from *Citizen Kane* [1941]. And Bruce Wayne is often lit to resemble a baby-faced Harry Lime – played by Orson Welles – of *The Third Man* [1959].

It is not only films that are the subjects of allusions in these films but opera, too. For instance, there are references to the "flying bat" (from Johann Strauss' *Die Fledermaus*) and Penguin rides in a Duck Boat like some quacking Lohengrin riding in his swan boat from Richard Wagner's *Lohengrin*. On the other hand, Penguin searches for his origins rather than hiding them as did Wagner's Lohengrin.

But *Batman Returns* goes much further than simply mentioning other films. Many other contemporary films have done this. With *Star Wars* [1977], for example, it could be argued that there is not an original scene in the film; everything is quoted from somewhere. What *Batman Returns* does is to take the post-Modernist idea of reference/allusion to the next level of complexity: it is mythologically post-Modern. And this brings me to the downside of all these post-Modernisms. If it goes out of control, it can get you into trouble. If there is a major flaw to *Batman Returns*, in my opinion, it is that it attempts too much. There are just too many myths running around: The Dark Hero, The Dark Moses, the Vampire, Frankenstein's Monster are the most obvious.

Unfortunately, the filmmakers seem so enthralled with their own cleverness that they did not seem to consider the implications of playing with these enormously powerful symbols. For instance, Penguin is dumped into the river in a closed wicker baby carriage, he floats down stream only to be rescued and brought up by sewer-dwelling penguins. These Biblical references are made even more obvious later in the film when Penguin sends his minions out to capture the first born of all the important citizens of Gotham City. Do they really mean us to see the Biblical children of Israel as a herd of penguins carrying out Penguin/Moses' remote-control commands, and Moses a crackpot (Cobblepot, actually) dictator?

Even the scenery is given the post-Modern treatment. For instance, concept of the city. In *Batman*, Gotham was a factory, its buildings melted upward into smokestacks, girders, and pipes. Jack Napier is transformed into Joker in an industrial plant. Joker's attempt to take over the city was based on production and consumption. But in *Batman Returns*, Gotham City has become a jungle, its canopy so thick that we never see the tops of the buildings. Not a single ray of sunlight penetrates Tim Burton's wintry Gotham City. Its central focus is no longer the factory and the office building, but the zoo and the sewer. It is now inhabited by cats and bats and birds and two-faced creatures yet undeveloped. Gotham Plaza is a caricature of Rockefeller Center in the midst of decay: it has a central tree, a skating rink, a department store, and a heavy-handed feel of the wealthy but isolated. Nearby is Gotham Cathedral. The Gotham zoo is a decadent New York's 1938 World's Fair. In the Post-Modern sense, Gotham City is related to the cities of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* [1920] and *Metropolis* [1927] and Fritz Lang's *M* [1931] especially in the underground scenes.

This is the artistic background on which *Batman Returns* rests. Just as Gotham City and the overall mythology of the film is a series of references, so are the characters. Let us look at them one at a time. Villain first.

As a villain, Max Shreck is a very interesting character. For instance, Max wears turn-of-the-century clothes. This "out-of-time" aspect gives the film a fairy tale – once upon a time – feeling. His name is an allusion that works brilliantly but is, unfortunately, quite obscure. Film vampires have always been such charming creatures – Bela Lugosi, John Carradine, Peter Cushing, Christopher Lee, Gary Oldman, and all. They tend to stress the romantic aspects of the Gothic. But it has not always been so. In the (almost) earliest, and still one of the scariest vampire films, *Nosferatu* [1922], the vampire is a distorted, rat-like living dead devoid of personality or passion; a simple humanoid hulk bent on survival and carnage. He was the invention of the brilliant German director F. W. Murnau. And to play the role Murnau recruited an extraordinary actor by the name of Max Schreck!

The myth of the vampire has recently expanded beyond the sexual and the social implications into the areas of economics and politics. We have seen economic vampire stand-ins in movies like the Sheriff of Nottingham character in Kevin Costner's *Robin Hood* [1992]. In *Batman Returns* it becomes literal. Max Shreck is also a vampire, but not one of flesh and emotion as in the days of German Expressionist filmmaking nor one of sexuality as in the '40s and '50s. Shreck is a vampire of electricity, a technological vampire. He attacks not single beings, but whole cities. And Max Shreck's attempt to take over Gotham is an animalistic, vampiric act of

literally sucking out the city's lifeblood, its power. (Of course, like all comic book villains, his ending must be ironic: he gets what he wants in excess and is electrocuted.)

Despite his modernity, Shreck is still a traditional vampire for his "bite" not only transforms his victim from human to non-human, but also brings eternal life and sexual awakening. Perhaps his murder of Salina Kyle contributed as much to her transformation into Catwoman as the cats of Gotham.

The inclusion of a vampire in a Batman film is striking. I feel it is another example of the psychological disease that permeates these films: split personalities. In movie lore, vampires have always been associated with bats. In past vampire films, the vampire, to a greater or lesser degree, has been a suffering, partially sympathetic character. In *Batman Returns*, however, the two aspects are separated into two characters: the bat in the form of Batman is the suffering, sympathetic side of the vampire while the actual vampire, Max Schreck, has been stripped of all his sympathy.

Let us now turn to the central character of the film – Batman. The dominating illness of both *Batman* and *Batman Returns* is multiple personality syndrome as mentioned above better exemplified in the character of Batman than in Shreck. This is a rare disease in which a single person exhibits several personalities, each independent, autonomous, and apparently existing as a separate and competes self. It begins as a child tries to adjust to the demands of its world and he or she experiences unacceptable feelings. Rather than expressing them, the child walls them off in an apparently safe place. These form the second personality which is usually quite different from the major

self in terms of feelings, attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors. Typically, during adolescence, the energy needed to keep the two apart is too much, and one becomes aware of the other. The previously hidden and dissociated second personality periodically takes over the individual's mental and behavioral processes.

In *Batman*, Bruce Wayne's parents were murdered before his eyes. Not dealing with these emotions gave birth to Batman. His nemesis was his multiple personality opposite – Jack Napier/Joker. This continues in *Batman Returns* where another sufferer of multiple personality syndrome is added: Salina Kyle/Catwoman. They are linked through their mutual diseases just as were the Batman and Joker. All show pronounced changes in style, behavior, and reactivity as they move between different social situations and different social roles. They both exhibit drastic and alternating changes in personality. In *Batman Returns* their interactions are much more complex than in *Batman* because Catwoman is a combination of nemesis and ally.

Accordingly, Catwoman influences Batman more deeply than Joker. Their closeness is symbolized in many ways. For instance, there is only one letter difference between "bat" and "cat" and even that difference is only one step on either the alphabetic or the musical scale. Catwoman and Batman exchange wounds. Catwoman penetrates where bullets cannot: both Batman's physical armor and his personality armor. She opens him to emotions he never could experience before. Her nemesis/ally role indicates her deep psychological meaning, as I shall show shortly.

In this sense, Batman is a reworking of a very old psychological assumption that was explored in such films as *The Snake Pit* [1948] which assumes that during the normal course of development of a young child there comes a time that the child's anger against one or both of his or her parents is expressed in an unconscious (or occasionally voiced) wish for their death. Should this death occur, the child then blames him- or herself for that death. The resulting guilt can affect the normal functioning of that individual through the rest of his or her life.

Young Bruce Wayne, no matter how idyllic his young life is portrayed in the few moments we see him with his parents in *Batman*, must have followed a course no different from other children. The difference, however, is that his parents were actually killed. The killer (in the child's mind) was a projection of Bruce's own death wishes toward his parents. His subsequent life-long search for the killer, Jack Napier, a.k.a. The Joker is a search for relief from his unconscious guilt. This guilt is evident in several ways, for instance, his compulsive transformation into Batman, his obsessive drive to find Joker, and his inability to have a functional relationship with Vicky Vale . . . until the Joker is brought to justice.

This is symbolized nicely in the movie theater before which the murder of his parents takes place. A movie theater is a place where reality (screen reality, that is) is brought about by a "projector." Thus, a movie theater is an apt symbol of Bruce's "projection" of his own anger and guilt onto all the criminals of Gotham. There are other projections of Batman's problems: He lurks in caves, *a la* Plato searching his unconscious for answers to his

problems. Only by donning the materialization of his disease, the bat suit, can he function.

Let us now turn to look at some of the interactions between the characters. Sometimes in the course of a film, there is a single event or line of spoken dialog that, when considered carefully, seems to unlock a whole level of deeper meaning in the film. For instance, the one that struck me in *Batman* was when Bruce Wayne enters Vicky Vale's apartment as observes, "Nice apartment, lot's of space." A few moments later, The Joker walks in and says, "Nice apartment, lot's of space!" It is funny, but it is also much more. First, this brings to mind other instances where Bruce and the Joker do very similar things. For instance, they have the same very caustic opinion of Vicky Vale's photography. Her work, expressing raw emotions dealing with war and death, impresses both men. Another interesting similarity between them is that they are both fascinated with Vale herself. This indicates that, at some level, there must be a strong relationship between The Joker and Bruce Wayne. Since we know full well that Wayne is also Batman, we must include Batman in this triangle of identity. But I must point out that this identity, whatever it is, does not exist at the beginning of the film; it is developed during the course of the events we see taking place in Gotham. We see the origins of all three characters: Bruce Wayne's personality is born of his parent's death with Batman as the twin in this birth of death. The Joker is born from the immersion and "death" of Jack Napier.

The structure of both films consists of two triangles with an authority figure on top and the multiple/unresolved personality elements below. In *Batman*, at the top of the Jack Napier/Joker base is Boss Grissom. At the top

of the Bruce Wayne/Batman base is Alfred. Into both these structures enters Vicky Vale, the feminine. Both desire her, both need her to resolve their conflict and become whole.

Bats are very symbolic. In the western world, primarily because of the Vampire myth, bats have a bad reputation. However, this is not true in the Orient. In China, for instance, bats are associated with good luck. The association is one of homophones and puns, but it is there, nevertheless. In Mandarin, bat is *Pian Fu*. While it is a different written character, this *Fu* is homophonic with the *Fu* in *Xin Fu*, or good fortune. Thus, bats are drawn and carved into various objects bringing the owner luck. Incidentally, the *Fu* of *Xin Fu* is often hung in a doorway upside down because of another homophonic relation. *Dao* means both to come and inverted. Thus, hanging *Fu* upside down is causing luck to come into the house.

Let us now turn to Batman's nemesis/ally – Catwoman.

At the center of this tempest of power, politics, magic, and transcendence is Catwoman. Perhaps she is Tim Burton's apology for the screaming, fainting, passive and ineffectual Vicky Vale of the first *Batman* movie. Catwoman must be analyzed in two distinct ways: social and mythological. Catwoman = the feminine side, devouring in her cat suit, and more positive outside it.

Salina Kyle is a victim of the vampire. Like the traditional vampire victim, she comes back to life in an altered form. The difference here is that she is a feminist vigilante bent on destroying her tormenter, and not the passive pawn under the vampire's control. This is a good example of how mythologies

evolve to fit the needs of the culture. This is the vampire's victim in the late 20th century.

The growth from wimpy secretary to powerful Catwoman continues in ordered stages. Secretary Salina's tenuous link with her internal feminine power – her regard for her cat – returns after her death to resurrect her and infuse her with a new power – the power of Catwoman. For a while Catwoman exercise her newfound powers in avenging wrongs done by men to other women – thus the slashing of the mugger. Salina Kyle as Catwoman is polarized into the grotesque feminine (the super cat) and the grotesque masculine (cutting whips and penetrating claws). Separating the two, it seems she can more effectively utilize the power of each. The reborn Salina Kyle now fills the middle recognizing both powers within her and becomes a functional, powerful woman.

Above all, Catwoman is a critique of the repression experienced by many women in a patriarchal society. Most obvious are the degradations she suffers at the hands of Max Shreck and the other men in the worlds of business and politics. But more subtly, when Salina Kyle turns into Catwoman, she destroys those objects in her apartment that traditionally imprison women in eternal childhood: dolls and doll houses – the manipulated, passive woman and the idealized, ineffectual wife. She also destroys her answering machine on which her mother turns her into a child and on which her boyfriend turns her into an object. When Salina Kyle destroys the machine, she is getting rid of the loop of repeated outgoing messages and thus freeing herself from endless repetition. In addition, she destroys the incoming messages, that is, messages from the past, messages of outside influence. Again, this is a

gesture of attaining freedom. The smashing of her neon from "Hello There" to "Hell Here" is obvious, but more subtle are the letters she extinguished: O.T. – a common abbreviation for Old Testament, a major source of justifications for the disenfranchisement of women.

She then progresses in taking on wrongs done against people regardless of gender. And in her final step upward in this progression she deals with the damage done to depths of the psyche of all humans – the loss of freedom. She helps Batman unmask himself opening the door to curing the multiple personality syndrome from which he suffers. Yet as a goddess or a symbol, she must transcend the material world and enter the spiritual. At the end of the film, she leaves Bruce Wayne with a projection of her feminine power – a pet cat to remind him of both the healing and destructive powers of the feminine – and herself opts for total freedom.

This last act is shocking. In Hollywood formula films a woman is abused by various bad men and when the good man comes along, it is he who she chooses as her partner. Not so in *Batman Returns*. Salina chooses total freedom, total independence from all men, good and bad alike. Can you imagine as similar situation in, say, *Pretty Woman* [1990], where Julia Roberts would turn down Richard Gere and go back to hooking because it offered more freedom? Catwoman's act further violates another Hollywood tradition: it is the man who reject woman but not vice versa. It is now Scarlet O'Hara that walks out on Rhett Butler! This is quite a revolutionary statement for a mainstream Hollywood film.

There is another layer to Catwoman, just as powerful and just as fascinating as her social implications: the symbolic relation between women, cats, sexuality, and the moon. Just consider movie titles like *Cat Girl* [1958], *Cat Women of the Moon* [1953], *Sex Kittens Go to College* [1960], *The Cat People* [1942, 1982] (the “people” of that title are both actually women), and *Curse of the Cat People* [1944] (again women only). The roots of these beliefs stretch to ancient Egypt and beyond. The Egyptian cat goddess Bast was benevolent; her festivals were joyful with music, dancing, jokes, and sexual rites. She was also the goddess of marriage. Killing a cat was a capital offense. Later the Greek Artemis-Diana often appeared in cat form and was often identified with the Egyptian Bast.

But there was a darker side to the cat goddesses also: The Sphinx, who said, "By my life, when I slay men my heart rejoices." The Teutonic Freya rode a chariot drawn by cats. Cats, along with rabbits, were the totemic animals of the ancient British moon goddess (more on her shortly). The Inquisitor Nicholas Remy said all cats were demons. In 1387, Lombard witches were said to worship the devil as a cat. Christians sometimes exposed cats to torture and fire along with witches. On the other hand, in the non-Christian tradition the cat was sacred to Libertas, the Roman divinity of freedom.

Ancient ideas, especially if they are psychologically important, have a habit of popping up in the most unexpected places. The sexual power of the ancient cat goddess is expressed in a couple of contemporary vulgarisms. The moon goddess had two totemic animals: hares and cats – and each has a yonic vulgarism. It is only recently that "rabbit" refers to the young and the old; previously the word for an adult rabbit was "cunny" (1720). Tracing this

backward to about 1500 we first see the word "bunny." However, even older is the word (first recorded in 1230), "cunt," referred to rabbits but now is a vulgarity for a woman's genitals and even women in general, making obvious the connection between the moon goddess and contemporary female sexuality.

Words describing cats have a parallel history. By 1715 a rabbit could be referred to as a "pussy." But even earlier, 1583, the term was applied to women. The most common non-vulgar use, however, is to describe a cat. Again, we have a strong linguistic connection between the moon goddess, sexuality, her totem animals – cats and rabbits – and thus Catwoman.

The relation between Catwoman and the ancient moon goddess is brought out in the film in two very important ways. First, Catwoman's human name, Selina, is derived from Selene, the Greek Moon Goddess. Her connection with her totem animals, the cats of Gotham City, is clear. In one of the film's many double entendres, Penguin calls her a "pussy." While the bats are a projection of Batman and the penguins are a projection of Penguin, Catwoman and the cats of the city have a different relationship. It is almost as if Catwoman was a projection of the feline animal nature of the city/jungle itself. Secondly, at the end of the film, after Catwoman has cleansed herself of lesser earthly concerns like dealing with crime and human relationships and death, after leaving Bruce Wayne the totemic animal through which he may worship her, after achieving final purity, she is shown in the film's final image superimposed over the full moon.

The cats of Gotham are symbols of feminine power at a basic, primitive level. This is what brings Salina back to life. Whether she is a monster or not depends on your point of view. Just as men make monsters in their own image – big, muscular, hulking, mute, and desperately desiring a mate – so Catwoman is a manifestation of the feminine power of Gotham. And this brings us to Happy Cat and the plot hole regarding the destruction of Shreck's Department Store. The transition from Salina Kyle to Catwoman is the transition from a female wimp to a self-actualized and angry female juggernaut. In her transition, she destroys a series of objects that symbolize the oppression of women by the patriarchy.

Another way of measuring Catwoman's power is to compare her to her television predecessor. The Batman TV series from 1966 to 1968 was campy to the extreme and a sendup that the likes of Andy Warhol must have enjoyed. But, in its day it also served another interesting function: it was one of the few homes of an active, aggressive woman – Catwoman. Look at her competition: there was the anorexic Laurie Partridge, the helpless and whining Ginger and Mary Ann stranded on *Gilligan's Island*, and the white-bread-bland Brady girls. Looking at those TV programs again, I realize the Catwoman was the most alive character on the small screen – she certainly outshone Batgirl, who was just that, a girl.

At one point in the film, Salina attacks Shreck's Department Store with its gigantic Happy Cat surveying the city from atop the building. While it may at first seem to be nothing more than a humorous touch added by a clever designer, the Happy Cat atop Shreck's Department store is important to the film's symbolism. It relates to Catwoman just as strongly as the stray cats of

Gotham. It, too, is a symbol of feminine power, but not the dark, dangerous, and destructive side represented by Catwoman. It is the happy, satisfied side – and that is why it is so menacing. The Happy Cat is the tallest thing in Gotham City – it rules the city. And beneath Happy Cat is what keeps the feminine of Gotham happy: consumption of material goods. It represents another way the patriarchy keeps women in eternal childhood. Enslaved by controlled consumption, women will never exert themselves in a world of uncontrolled production. This is why Catwoman, after destroying her dolls and dollhouse, goes to destroy the department store. And one of the first things to go in Catwoman's wrath-filled rampage is the Bible's Old Testament – she knocks out "O.T." from her neon sign.

But there is a glaring plot hole here, for the day after Catwoman blows up the department store, Shreck hosts a plush costume ball in the very same place. I see two possible meanings here. The first is that while Catwoman may be successful in destroying the symbols of her enslavement on a personal level – dolls, answering machines, etc. – she is ineffectual in dealing with the greater, well-entrenched aspects of our culture that repress women. In this case, the idea of consumption as slavery has rooted itself too deeply in our society to be changed. Second is the idea of a costume ball. After the destruction of the merchandise, what occupies the department store are all the disguises the culture dons to hide its true self. They come from history, from mythology, from every part of the imagination. This is the true foe Catwoman must fight if she is to be truly free. This is a daunting and seemingly impossible task, yet with all the feminine power of Gotham gathered within her, she has a chance. Let us hope so.

As a final note on Catwoman: It may be purely coincidental, but the name Selene, a variation of Salina, has vampiric implications. In the novel *La Ville Vampire* by Paul Féval published in Paris in 1875, describes a vampire city north by north-west (Hitchcock?) of Belgrade name Selene. It is built of various architectural styles – Assyrian, Chinese, and Indian – perhaps predicting post-Modernist architecture. In appearance, Féval describes it as a dazzling succession of column large and small, of pinnacles, spires, abaci, epistyles, and architraves. Sounds a lot like Tim Burton's version Gotham City.

The fourth major character in this complex symbolic battle is the Penguin, "a hook-nosed runt, a Humpty Dumpty reborn as a decaying Victorian Ghoul." Birds typically symbolize spirit. Think of all the Christian paintings with the Holy Spirit represented by a dove. By contrast, a Penguin is a bird that cannot fly, and so a spirit that cannot rise, unable to ascend to the higher regions of consciousness. one that dwells at the pole end of the earth in the coldest possible regions. (It is only after contact with the feminine power of Catwoman that Penguin finally flies.) To us his dwelling place is the underworld, the anti-pod, the inverse of our own world. He represents that which is hidden. He is from the unconscious. And here the unconscious wants to dominate the whole personality as evidenced in Penguin's run for mayor.

As an amphibious bird, the penguin is a strange combination of positive and negative implications, a possibility of growth by establishing a relation between the watery underworld of the unconscious and the consciousness of the land, and yet has overtones of clumsiness and triviality. This is made clear in Penguin's funeral: the king penguins take him back into the water, return

him to the unconscious. Ashore penguins are clumsy, silly little birds, but in the water paragons of grace and agility. Typically, water symbolizes the unconscious and land consciousness. Thus, amphibians link the two worlds and represent the opportunity for positive growth by achieving communications with the deeper levels of the psyche. Just think of the fairy tale frog that brings treasures from the deep to the deserving prince or princess. This is exactly what Penguin does for Batman. Through Penguin's search for his parents, he activates Bruce Wayne's repressed feelings about his own parents – part of what caused his multiple personality disease. While he suspects Penguin of various nefarious activities, Batman nonetheless gives moral support to the search. By supporting Penguin's search – something Bruce himself has been unable to do, albeit on an emotional not physical level – Bruce seems to be healing of his own wounds. The symbolic connection between Batman rebirth and Penguin's birth is shown by the bats flooding the sewer at the beginning of the film. Bruce is no longer, as he says, "the only lonely man-beast in Gotham." It is this contact with Penguin that makes Bruce Wayne ready for a functional relation with a woman after his failure with Vicky Vale in *Batman*. Unfortunately, as I discuss below, this time he picked a woman far too powerful for him. Better luck next time Bruce.

And there is a religious side to Penguin. Consider: He is born and then discarded, he is adopted by a second set of parents, he experiences a second birth, he leads his "people" in revolution. Penguin is a dark Moses. He is a savior to his people and has many of the mythological characteristics of the savior/hero of mythology.

In the end, Batman and Catwoman suffer quite different fates. Batman is an almost tragic figure. By the end of the film Bruce's problems are still unresolved. He does all the right things: he rips off his mask, he finds someone with whom he can identify, he has destroyed the Penguin putting his childhood loneliness behind him, he offers to share his life and his pain with someone else. Yet all this is not enough. Faced with a truly powerful feminine all he has to take home in the end is a symbolic cat from the city jungle – hopefully it will empower him the way it has empowered Salina Kyle.

Catwoman fares better. It seems it is the fate of powerful women to be single, but Catwoman's singularity is by choice. In many recent films, possible mates are either killed off as in *The Terminator* [1984], or they are left in a wounded limbo as in *V.I. Warshawski* [1991] or *Aliens* [1979] (only to be killed off in *Aliens³* [1992]). The choice given to Catwoman is a breakthrough in the political ideology of popular film.

This film is not only dark and melancholy, it is also cynical about almost everything: politics, big business, rioting, religion, and so on. It is filled with diseases of the psyche and the magical evil of the big city. And yet through this dark journey, through a Gotham where not a ray of light could penetrate, there is hope and growth – at least for some.

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