

Ultimate Villains in Anglophone Comic Books and Movies: The Joker

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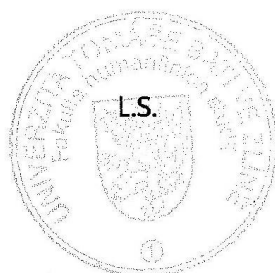
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ABSTRAKT

Tato práce analyzuje literární postavu Joker v komiksech a filmech. Teoretická část obsahuje teorii vztahující se k literární postavě, její charakterizaci a analýze, dále stručnou rozpravu o archetypu Šprýmaře a teorii vztahující se ke komiksům. V praktické části pak následuje samotná analýza komiksového a filmového zloducha Jokera. Analýza je rozdělena do tří částí: Joker jako samostatná postava bez spojení s ostatními postavami; Joker ve spojení s jeho heroickým protikladem, Batmanem; Joker ve spojení s Harley Quinn. Výsledkem této práce je charakteristika postavy Jokera a jeho vztahům k okolí.

Klíčová slova: Joker, analýza literární postavy, komiks, film, zloduch

ABSTRACT

This thesis analyses the literary character of the Joker in comic books and movies. The theoretical part comprises the theory related to literary character, its characterization and analysis, a brief discussion of the trickster archetype and the theory related to comic books. In the practical part, the analysis of the comic book and movie representation of the villain the Joker is offered. The analysis is divided into three parts: the Joker as an independent character without relation to other characters; the Joker in relation to his heroic counterpart, Batman; the Joker in relation to Harley Quinn. The result of this thesis is the characterization of the character of the Joker and his relationship to his surroundings.

Keywords: Joker, literary character analysis, comic book, movie, villain

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I hereby declare that the print version of my bachelor's thesis and the electronic version of my thesis, deposited in the IS/STAG system, are identical.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	9
I THEORY	10
1 LITERARY CHARACTER	11
1.1 CHARACTERS IN FICTION	12
1.1.1 Characters in Comic Books	12
1.2 CHARACTERIZATION	13
1.3 CHARACTER ANALYSIS	15
2 ARCHETYPES	17
2.1 THE TRICKSTER	17
3 COMIC BOOKS	19
3.1 SHORT HISTORY	19
3.2 FEATURES	21
3.3 THE SUPERHERO GENRE	22
3.4 DC AND MARVEL	23
II ANALYSIS	25
4 THE JOKER IN COMIC BOOKS AND MOVIES	26
4.1 THE JOKER	26
4.1.1 Origin	26
4.1.2 Personality	30
4.1.3 Mentality	32
4.1.4 The Criminal Career	35
4.2 THE JOKER AND BATMAN	38
4.2.1 The Symbiotic Relationship	38
4.2.2 Joker's Love and Obsession	40
4.2.3 The Similarity	43
4.2.4 The Importance of the Secret Identity	44
4.3 THE JOKER AND HARLEY QUINN	45
4.3.1 The Joker as the Reason for Harley's Existence	46
4.3.2 The Relationship	48
4.3.3 The Abusive Nature of the Relationship	49
4.3.4 Romanticizing the Relationship	50
CONCLUSION	52
BIBLIOGRAPHY	54

INTRODUCTION

Villains have always been popular among readers and viewers of all ages. It is not unusual that villains gain more popularity than their heroic counterparts since they are often just cooler than heroes and more interesting for the readers and viewers. In the world of comic books, the fascination with villains and their twisted minds is quite common.

This bachelor's thesis focuses on the analysis of one of the most known comic book villains – the Joker. The theoretical part of this thesis begins with explaining the term literary character and its different conceptions. This part also includes the topic of characterization and the theory of character analysis. Subsequently, the archetypes are briefly mentioned with special attention paid to the trickster archetype. Lastly, the theory of comic books is discussed. This chapter comprises the brief history of comic books and their typical features as well as an outline of the superhero genre and its two major representatives on the comic book market.

Moving on to the practical part of this thesis, it contains the character analysis itself. In the first chapter, the analysis of Joker's personality and mentality is provided. The focus is also set on his crimes and their nature. The second chapter concerns the analysis of the Joker in relation to his heroic counterpart, Batman. Lastly, Joker's relationship with Harley Quinn is analysed and the abusive nature of the relationship is focused on.

The aim of this bachelor's thesis is to provide analysis of the Joker supported by evidence. The evidence includes examples of Joker's speech and behaviour from both comic books and movies.

I. THEORY

1 LITERARY CHARACTER

A character is a necessary component of a narrative story and it falls within a section called existents. Seymour Chatman offers a simple definition of a character, he states that characters are “people captured somehow between the covers of books or by actors on stage and screen.” Despite this simple definition, a character is more complicated than that, as there are several theories concerning characters.¹

Aristotle’s theory of character suggests that agents, people who perform actions, are necessary to the story but characters are added later, and they are not essential. According to him, agents may or may not have a character. By character, he means personality features and traits which arise from actions.²

Another view on the theory of character is the formalist and structuralist conception. They suggest that characters are products of plots and their status is “functional.” They argue that it should only be analysed what characters do in a story and not any of their outside psychological or moral aspects. Both Aristotle’s theory and formalist and structuralist’s theory subordinate character to plot and make it a function of plot. Some structuralist also argued for more open notion of character. Especially, Tzvetan Todorov and Roland Barthes shifted from the narrow functional to more of a psychological view of characters.³ Chatman argues that character is a paradigm of traits. He defines traits as “relatively stable or abiding personal qualities.” He also points out that traits must be distinguished from other phenomena such as feelings, moods, thoughts, temporary motives or attitudes because they may not coincide with traits.⁴

Forster suggests that characters can be generally divided into flat and round. Flat characters are usually constructed around a single idea or quality. The advantage of flat characters is that they are easily recognized and also easily remembered afterwards because they can be typically summed up in a single sentence. Flat characters are often used for comical effect, otherwise, they would bore readers. On the other hand, round characters are more complicated and there are more than one factors in them. Forster points out that a round

¹ Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1978), 108.

² Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 109-10.

³ *Ibid.*, 111-13.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 126.

character is capable of surprising in a convincing way, while flat characters cannot do that convincingly.⁵ Since round characters have more than one trait, their behaviour is not predictable. They usually possess a variety of traits, some of them can even be conflicting or even contradictory. Chatman argues that round characters can be more easily seen as real people because they seem familiar to the readers and may evoke a stronger sense of intimacy.⁶

1.1 Characters in Fiction

Different genres can perceive and treat characters in different ways. While in poetry characters might often serve only as a symbol for other notions such as feelings or thoughts, in fiction, they play much more important roles. In fact, Fernando Ferrara suggests that fiction may be described as “communication through characters.” He also proposes a definition of character in fiction, “a partial or total, stylized, rationalized, and interpreted reconstruction of a human being capable of fulfilling itself in a story.” For the reconstruction of human being part, he notes that there are no characters which are not human. Non-human creatures such as animals or demons can be considered as characters only when they are humanized. They can be humanized through human-like appearance, a human-like set of traits or modes of behaviour.⁷

Ferrara further explains that in fiction, the character serves as the structuring element. In fiction, the existence of the objects and the events is, in one way or another, connected with the character. This way Ferrara proposes that the character is the central notion of the structural study of the field of fiction.⁸

1.1.1 Characters in Comic Books

Characters in comic books have a special feature – there are essentially no limits for their depiction since anything is possible in the world of comic books. Characters in comic books are represented both verbally and visually, therefore verbal and visual elements of the narrative need to interplay. This means that the cognitive process by which readers

⁵ E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1927), 103-18.

⁶ Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 132.

⁷ Fernando Ferrara, “Theory and Model for the Structural Analysis of Fiction,” *New Literary History* 5, no. 2 (Winter 1974): 250-51.

⁸ Ferrara, “Theory and Model for the Structural Analysis of Fiction,” 252.

identify an entity as a character is cross-medial. Frederick Luis Aldama points out that the depiction of the mental life of characters in comic books depends also on panel and gutter size and placement as well as the degree of presence of the verbal elements.⁹

Moreover, Aldama explains that characters in comic books must have agency – they must be capable of self-initiated actions and a sense of responsibility for their actions. Actions and responsibility are recognized as the basis for identifying a character because that is how humans are identified. In comic books, the self-initiated action of a character is usually represented by some type of movement in the space. Characters can move or they can perform actions which cause others to move. The movement also includes movement of the character in time – from birth to death.¹⁰

In comic books, the gaps between panels which separate one panel from the next play an important role in the perception of characters. Aldama claims that the gutter lets the readers imagine the character in certain ways. The authors choose which gaps will lead the readers to imagine the character and his world (a great example of this can be found at the end of *Batman: The Killing Joke* (1988), when Batman captures the Joker, he tells him a joke, they laugh together and in the next panel the laughter just stops and the comic book ends – the readers are left to imagine what Batman did or did not do). This way, authors do not have to supply all the details.¹¹

Written-only storytelling media use a variety of devices and require the reader to build the image of the character through statements and descriptive details given by the narrator or other characters. Conversely, in comic books, character's emotions or attitudes are often implied through the visual depiction (facial expression, gestures) rather than written narrative.¹²

1.2 Characterization

Every character needs to be characterized to help the reader imagine him/her as a real person. Characterization is the act of revealing aspects of a character and it is used to

⁹ Jens Eder, Fotis Jannidis and Ralf Schneider, eds. *Characters in Fictional Worlds* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2010), 318-19.

¹⁰ Eder, Jannidis and Schneider, *Characters in Fictional Worlds*, 319-20.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 321.

¹² *Ibid.*, 322.

create images of the imaginary persons.¹³ These images are usually created by a network of character-traits. However, the traits may not have to directly appear in the text, but various character-indicators distributed throughout the text can be used instead.¹⁴ Since the topic of this thesis addresses comic books, description of characterization in fiction will be sufficient.

According to Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, there are two basic methods used for characterization in fiction – direct definition and indirect presentation. As the name suggests, when characterizing through direct definition, the traits are named directly. It can be done using an adjective (e. g., “she is a generous person”), a noun (e. g., “she is such a sweetheart”) or part of speech (e. g., “she lives for her work”).¹⁵

The second type of characterization, indirect presentation, does not mention character traits directly but rather displays them using examples. A trait can be implied by actions, both one-time actions and habitual ones. One-time actions often play a part in a turning point in the narrative, while habitual actions reveal character’s unchanging or static aspects.¹⁶

Another way to indicate a trait is character’s speech, both through its content and its form. For instance, what one character says about another may reveal character-traits of the one spoken about as well as the one who speaks. The style of speech is also a common means of characterisation, it might indicate character’s origin, social class or profession.¹⁷

It is common that character’s external appearance implies some of the character traits. In this case, it should be distinguished between those external features which the character cannot influence (eye colour, voice) and those which he can control (haircut, style of clothes). Of course, this is also where stereotypes step in. Stereotypes should be confirmed or disproved by character’s actions.¹⁸ Here, the Joker can be used as an example. His colourful clothes and green hair imply that the character is extravagant and chaotic.

¹³ C. Hugh Holman, *A Handbook to Literature* (3rd ed.) (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1972), 91-91.

¹⁴ Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (2nd ed.) (New York: Routledge, 2002), 61.

¹⁵ Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 61.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 65-66.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 67-68.

Environment, meaning both physical surrounding (room, house) and human environment (family, friends), can also be a source of possible character-traits. For instance, when a character's house is always tidy, and everything is in its place, a possible conclusion would be that the character likes order. In contrast, a character whose house is dusty and smelly probably does not mind chaos and is possibly lazy to clean up. However, the environment can also indicate character's background. So, in the case of the dusty and smelly house, the character could also be poor or physically unable to clean the house.¹⁹

Lastly, characters' main trait or traits are sometimes suggested by their names. They can be suggested indirectly or directly. Character's trait can be suggested indirectly for example visually – the letter O is associated with fat characters and the letter I with tall and thin characters. The direct implication of character's trait can be done by using surnames or nicknames.²⁰ Again, the Joker's name implies his character-trait, he is a trickster.

It is important to note, that in comic books, the external appearance of a character plays a bigger role than in other genres. Readers can see how the characters look like and may connect them with various character-traits. In this manner, comic books are similar to movies where appearance, gestures and mimics are also common sources of implied characteristics.

1.3 Character Analysis

Character analysis is the process of analysing a literary character with the aim of describing his specific traits or patterns of behaviour. According to Fernando Ferrara, the structure of a character is divided into three levels and each of them should be analysed. The levels are deep structure, middle structure and surface structure. Together, these levels form the story of the character.²¹

The surface structure is “the story of a character that develops in time and space.” Ferrara suggests that the surface structure of a character consists of smaller elements which he calls *figurae*. He describes the *figura* as “a self-contained and meaningful set of information relevant to one or more characters.” These segments can be further divided into propositions – series of “moments” of time, and even further to traits. Traits are the

¹⁹ Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 68.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 70.

²¹ Ferrara, “Theory and Model for the Structural Analysis of Fiction,” 253.

elemental units of information which constitute the character. Two types of indications can be extracted from them – intrinsic (about the physical or mental characteristic of the character) and functional (about character's relation to its surroundings and other characters).²²

The middle structure is “the personality of the character itself.” It consists of selected elements and important characteristics which constitute the incidents that make up its life story. The middle structure also includes the social personality of the character. This social personality contains two levels of data: connotations which are related to the psychophysical and social identity of the character itself and connotations which are related to its attitude towards society. Ferrara argues that the aim of the analysis the surface structure and the middle structure is to trace backwards the operation of the character's structuring.²³

Furthermore, according to Ferrara, the deep structure is composed of values. He explains that every society forms a system of values – rules for social behaviour. Those values are then usually proposed through the exemplary story of a character (positive or negative).²⁴

²² Ferrara, “Theory and Model for the Structural Analysis of Fiction,” 254-59.

²³ *Ibid.*, 254-65.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 266-68.

2 ARCHETYPES

Archetypes are motives and images among different mythologies which tend to have a common meaning, tend to elicit comparable psychological responses and serve similar cultural functions.²⁵ Psychologist Carl G. Jung advanced the concept of psychological archetypes in his book *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. The archetypal hypothesis is widely accepted; however, some people reject it and point out that archetypes can be explained by human migration and cultural diffusion. Nevertheless, Jung emphasized that the same themes and images have also been appearing in dreams, hallucinations and delusions of people who had previously never encountered them.²⁶ Some of the archetypes are for example the mother, the hero, the wise old man or the trickster.²⁷

2.1 The Trickster

The trickster as one of the archetypes is probably the most relevant one to the topic of this thesis since the Joker is often being connected with this archetype. It can be called by several names such as jester, clown, prankster or joker, but the characterization stays the same. Wheelwright describes the trickster as “an image of mischievousness, unexpectedness, disorder and amorality.” She also points out that this archetype functions as a reminder of humankind’s primitive origins.²⁸

The trickster tends to practise malicious pranks and jokes and he can also have shapeshifting powers. However, in myths and folklore, the character of the trickster is dual. The trickster may do things which benefit people, nevertheless, he is also impulsive, selfish and even grotesque character. According to Esther Clinton, the trickster may be clever but sometimes also pays for his mischief by falling for deceptions of others. She also points out that tricksters are often associated with animals of some type, usually coyotes, hares, ravens or spiders.²⁹

²⁵ Wilfred L. Guerin et al., *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature* (5th ed.) (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 184.

²⁶ Anthony Stevens, *Jung: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 55.

²⁷ Guerin et al., *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*, 187-88.

²⁸ Jane Wheelwright, *Death of a Woman* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), 286.

²⁹ Jane Garry and Hasan El-Shamy, eds., *Archetypes and Motifs in Folklore and Literature* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2005), 472-73.

There are numerous examples of the interpretation of the trickster archetype in modern literature and television. Clinton mentions the cartoon character Bugs Bunny as the best illustration. She explains that Bugs Bunny is a hare, one of the animals associated with the trickster, with considerable appetites who often dresses as a woman. He is also very clever but regularly get himself into tight spots.³⁰ Another example could be the comic book character Loki who is based on the Norse god of mischief.

³⁰ Garry and El-Shamy, *Archetypes and Motifs in Folklore and Literature*, 479.

3 COMIC BOOKS

Comic book is a form of sequential art which is usually, alongside with other forms such as manga or comic strip, covered by the general term “comics”. However, the word “comics” refers only to the medium whereas “comic book” is a specific object. The most significant definition of comics would probably be the one from the American cartoonist and writer, Will Eisner. He suggests that comics are “an arrangement of pictures or images and words to narrate a story or dramatize an idea.”³¹ Scott McCloud offers another definition of comics and perceives it as: “juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence”. He also admits that in most cases, the term “sequential art” is sufficient.³² However, it is also essential to mention the definition of comic books. Shirrel Rhoades presented a definition of a comic book in his book *A Complete History of American Comic Books*. He explained that a comic book is “a stapled magazine [...] that contains sequential panels of four-colour art and written dialogue that tell an original story for entertainment purposes.”³³

Recently, a lot of authors started using the term “graphic novel” to describe more ambitious works in the art form. The reason for this is that the authors want to distance themselves from the, often negative, connotations which are associated with comic books in commercial media. Even though graphic novels might be longer and mostly feature self-contained stories, they meet criteria for the definition of a comic book.³⁴

3.1 Short History

Comics have a long history in many countries, thus at least short outline should be provided. However, it is necessary to distinguish between the history of comics and the history of comic books. The history of comics dates back a long way, whereas comic books, as we know them, originated in the early 1930’s. Rhoades introduces one of the divisions of the history of comic books which is widely accepted. He suggests that there

³¹ Will Eisner, *Theory of Comics and Sequential Art* (Tamarac, FL: Poorhouse Press, 1985), 5.

³² Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), 9.

³³ Shirrel Rhoades, *A Complete History of American Comic Books* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2008), 2.

³⁴ Randy Duncan and Matthew J. Smith, *The Power of Comics: History, Form and Culture* (New York: The Continuum International, 2009), 4.

are five ages of comic books: the Platinum Age, the Golden Age, the Silver Age, the Bronze Age and the Modern Age.³⁵

The Platinum Age of comic books started in 1933 during the Great Depression and ended in 1938. This era began when Maxwell C. Gaines invented the comic book format. Before this invention, comics appeared mostly in newspapers and magazines in the form of comic strips. The first comic book called *Funnies on Parade* (1933) looked like a modern-day comic book, but the superhero genre was not yet introduced in it.³⁶

The Golden Age of comic books represents the era from 1938 through mid-1950's and it is marked by the first appearance of Superman.³⁷ In 1938, the first issue of *Action Comics* (1938) was published by Detective Comics Inc., nowadays known as DC Comics, and Superman became the first comic book superhero. Later he was used as a model for creating a wide range of new superheroes. A year later, DC introduced another very successful superhero, Batman. Moreover, first elements of propaganda were used in comic books during this era. A great example is patriotic Captain America, published by Marvel, whose first enemy was Hitler. After the end of the WWII, the superhero boom ended.³⁸

The Silver Age of comic books began in 1956 when DC brought the superhero The Flash back to life in *Showcase* (1956). Flaws like jealousy, self-doubt or angst were typical for superheroes in the Silver Age. One of the most significant comic book artists of this era was Jack Kirby, creator of the *Fantastic Four*.³⁹

The year 1970 is considered to be the beginning of the Bronze Age of comic books. This era is characterised by the appearance of social problems in comic books. Topics unusual for superheroes such as racial discrimination, social injustice or drugs consumption gained the interest of the readers.⁴⁰

The Modern Age of comic books began in 1986 and has not ended yet. The Modern age is characterised by darker and more psychologically complex heroes and villains. A great example of this trend is DC bringing Batman back to his dark, shadowy roots in the comic

³⁵ Rhoades, *A Complete History of American Comic Books*, 5-6.

³⁶ Ibid., 10.

³⁷ Ibid., 21.

³⁸ Milan Kruml, *Comics: Stručné dějiny* (Praha: Martin Trojan-3-JAN, 2007), 102-16.

³⁹ Kruml, *Comics*, 149-53.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 161.

book *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns (1986)*.⁴¹ Independent comics became more popular and larger publishing houses became more commercialized. Comic books slowly started to be viewed as a literature and not just entertainment for children.⁴²

3.2 Features

Comics typically use two major communicating devices – words and images. Therefore, the readers have to use both their visual and verbal interpretative skills.⁴³ Authors usually present selected word and images which form a story using panels. A panel is considered to be the base unit of comic books. It can be isolated and presented separately. However, in most cases, a panel is given meaning by the context, meaning other panels on the same page. Panels typically include frames which create borders between single panels. Besides dividing function, frames can also indicate narrative levels. Several consecutive panels which are interconnected by their content then create a sequence. A sequence is considered to be a key feature of comics.⁴⁴

Another typical feature found in comic books is a bubble. Even though bubbles often appear outside the world of comic books, they are mostly perceived as an element of comics. A bubble is a place for the verbal part of comics. It is usually placed inside a panel and it might carry lines of the characters or comments of the narrator if there is one. Bubbles are an important element which indicates the direction and order in which the page should be read.⁴⁵

Onomatopoeic words are not rare in the vocabulary of comic books and they are their distinctive element. Since there is no other way to express sound which is often important to the story, authors of comics commonly use words such as “bang”, “boom” or “splat”, which help them create the atmosphere of the story. Use of symbols is connected to this function. Symbols rather than speech or facial expressions are often used to express

⁴¹ Alan Cowsill et al., *DC Comics Year by Year: A Visual Chronicle* (Hong Kong: Leo Paper Products, 2010), 2019.

⁴² Rhoades, *A Complete History of American Comic Books*, 124.

⁴³ Eisner, *Theory of Comics and Sequential Art*, 8.

⁴⁴ Pavel Kořínek, Martin Foret and Michal Jareš, *V Panelech a Bublinách: Kapitoly z Teorie Komiksu* (Praha: Akropolis, 2015), 177-85.

⁴⁵ Kořínek, Foret and Jareš, *V Panelech a Bublinách*, 185-86.

characters' emotions or thoughts. Frequently used symbols are for instance “??”, “!” or “\$”.⁴⁶

3.3 The Superhero Genre

The superhero genre is often confused with other genres or marked as a subset of other genres, mainly science fiction. As Peter Coogan suggests, this confusion may arise from the misperception of the genre's distinctiveness and definition. Despite the misconception of the superhero genre, he argues that it is a genre unto itself which has its own definition and prehistory.⁴⁷) Moreover, despite many examples of critically acclaimed non-superhero comic books, the superhero genre dominates the field of comic books.⁴⁸

The most important element of the superhero genre is a superhero, as the genre takes its name from the character. One of the definitions of a superhero states that superhero is “a heroic character with a self-less prosocial mission; with superpowers [...]; who has a superhero identity embodied in a codename and iconic costume.”⁴⁹ Another definition comes from Roz Kaveney and he perceives a superhero as “a man or woman with powers that are either massive extensions of human strengths and capabilities, or fundamentally different in kind, which she or he uses to fight for truth, justice and the protection of the innocent.”⁵⁰ Furthermore, Coogan points out that mission, powers and identity are the three elements which establish the core of the superhero genre. If a character meets these three criteria and cannot be easily placed into another genre, the character is a superhero.⁵¹

Another significant element of the superhero genre is a supervillain, even though it is not unique to the genre. A supervillain in the superhero genre can be described as a villain who commits evil acts in a way which is superior to other villains and common criminals. However, a supervillain can be also perceived as a reversed superhero, in which case a reversed definition of the superhero can be applied. In other words, a supervillains'

⁴⁶ Eisner, *Theory of Comics and Sequential Art*, 18.

⁴⁷ Peter Coogan, *Superhero: The Secret Origin of a Genre* (Austin, TX: MonkeyBrain Books, 2006), 23.

⁴⁸ Nickies D. Phillips and Staci Strobl, *Comic Book Crime: Truth, Justice and the American Way* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 4-5.

⁴⁹ Coogan, *Superhero*, 30.

⁵⁰ Roz Kaveney, *Superheroes! Capes and Crusaders in Comics and Movies* (New York: I.B.Tauris & Co, 2008), 4.

⁵¹ Coogan, *Superhero*, 24-40.

mission is selfish and anti-social, they use their powers and extraordinary abilities for evil purposes and they often do not maintain secret identities. Coogan emphasizes that identity is the weakest part of the definition since it is not necessary for every supervillain but mostly just for inverted-superhero supervillains.⁵²

The relationship between the superhero and the supervillain usually shapes the whole story of superhero comic books. As a rule, villains are proactive, and heroes are reactive. However, it is true that villains are reactive in the sense that they are created in reaction to the hero's ability to easily take down ordinary criminals. Nevertheless, in a narrative sense, the heroes react to villains' threats and acts. Yet, they should never become proactive themselves. The reason is simple, if heroes were proactive they would essentially become villains. For instance, proactive heroes would take justice into their own hands and simply kill their foes without handing them over to the criminal justice system or contacting the authorities. Similarly, the villains should always stay proactive so that the heroes have something to react to.⁵³

3.4 DC and Marvel

Even though DC Comics and Marvel Comics are not the only publishers of comic books on the market, they are undoubtedly the most significant ones, since they helped to create the genre itself. DC and Marvel have a strong duopoly on the costumed-hero concept, which is secured by the fact that they share a trademark on the word "superhero." Douglas Wolk points out that another reason for their dominance on the market is the importance of particular characters and their histories. DC and Marvel have piled these histories up over decades, they have their own established universes and cultures, and that is a significant advantage compared to potential new publishers.⁵⁴

DC Comics published their first comic book in 1935 when the company was still called National Allied Magazines. However, their journey to success started in 1937 when they published the first issue of *Detective Comics* (1937). This series was published till 2016 and it became the longest-running comic book series ever. Moreover, Batman's first

⁵² Coogan, *Superhero*, 61-96.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 110-15.

⁵⁴ Douglas Wolk, *Reading Comics: How Graphic Novels Work and What They Mean* (Philadelphia: Da Capo Press, 2007), 91-92.

appearance was in *Detective Comics* (1937).⁵⁵ Nowadays, DC falls under a company called DC Entertainment which works with entertainment companies to get their comic book characters to other media such as film, television or interactive games. Most popular DC characters include Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, The Flash or Green Lantern.⁵⁶

The first issue of *Marvel Comics* (1939) was published in 1939 by a company called Timely which adopted the name Marvel Comics in the 1960s. Their first highly successful superhero was Captain Marvel created in 1940. The character was so popular among readers that he outsold Superman. The face of the company is a comic book writer and editor Stan Lee who has also appeared in all of the Marvel superhero movies.⁵⁷ Marvel Comics have a library of more than 8 000 characters and the most popular ones include Captain America, Thor, Iron Man, Hulk or Spider-Man.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Rhoades, *A Complete History of American Comic Books*, 258.

⁵⁶ “About DC Entertainment,” accessed March 20, 2018, <https://www.dcentertainment.com/>.

⁵⁷ Rhoades, *A Complete History of American Comic Books*, 259.

⁵⁸ “Company Info,” About Marvel: Corporate Information, accessed March 20, 2018, <http://marvel.com/corporate/about/>.

II. ANALYSIS

4 THE JOKER IN COMIC BOOKS AND MOVIES

The Joker which is often referred to as the Clown Prince of Crime is one of the most infamous and notorious villains of the DC Universe, as well as from comic books in general. As indicated by his name, The Joker excels in all kinds of mischievous jokes, pranks, cracks and tricks. Due to the nature of his crimes he is most often perceived as the archetype of the trickster. First, the Joker will be analysed as an independent character without relation to any specific characters. This part will be focused mainly on his origin, personality and mental state. Subsequently, the Joker will be analysed in relation to his nemesis, Batman, and the only person who has ever gotten somewhat close to him, Harley Quinn.

4.1 The Joker

The Joker is undoubtedly a complicated character; however, he shares some characteristics with other villains and supervillains, therefore, he can be classified. According to Coogan, there are five types of supervillains: the monster, the enemy commander, the mad scientist, the criminal mastermind and the inverted-superhero supervillain. He also points out that these types are non-exclusive, meaning that one supervillain can fit into more than one category. Coogan classifies the Joker as the inverted-superhero supervillain. He describes this type of a supervillain as being able to switch from a villain to a hero.⁵⁹

4.1.1 Origin

In the world of comic books, villains usually have established stories of their origin. For instance, it is known that another DC villain Two-Face used to be a district attorney called Harvey Dent. He started his criminal career when half of his face got scarred with acid and he became crazy after seeing his own face (2, D/2).⁶⁰ However, when speaking about the Joker, his origin is not so clear.

⁵⁹ Coogan, *Superhero*, 61.

⁶⁰ The parts of comic books which are cited or analysed are additionally referred to by the following key: the first capital letter specifies the panel (the top left panel is marked as "A", the panel next to it on the right is "B" and so forth) and the number refers to the analysed part (1 is for text, 2 is for picture).

⁶¹ Bill Finger, Bob Kane and Jerry Robinson, "The Crimes of Two-Face!", *Detective Comics* vol. 1, #66 (Burbank, CA: DC Comics, 1942), 2, retrieved from <http://readcomiconline.to/Comic/Detective-Comics-1937/Issue-66?id=5255>.

When the Joker first appeared, no explanation for his madness and bizarre appearance was offered to the readers. Then, during the years several authors offered several versions of the Joker's origin. While the details of his origin vary, the story which is probably the most popular one and most of the fans accept it as the Joker's true back-story was introduced in *Batman: The Killing Joke* (1988). In this comic book, several flashbacks are used to tell the story of the Joker's creation. From the flashbacks, the readers learn that the Joker used to be a lab assistant at a chemical plant who quit his job to become a stand-up comedian. In order to provide for the family, he decided to engage in a crime using his knowledge of the plant's layout and security policies. Before committing the crime, he was told by the police that his pregnant wife Jeanie had an accident and died. Wearing a costume to look like an infamous criminal The Red Hood, he went to the chemical plant and while desperately trying to escape from Batman who arrived to capture him, he jumped over a rail into a vat of chemicals. When the man got out of the chemicals, it was no longer an ordinary man – the Joker was born. His appearance changed completely, the chemicals turned his hair green and his face chalk white. Moreover, his mind was also affected which is obvious from the typical crazy grin which appeared on his face.⁶²

The mentioned origin story has been supported in several following comic books. For example, in *Batman: Death of the Family* (2012), when the Joker decides to reenact the whole history of him and Batman, he makes Batman come to the chemical plant where they were supposed to meet for the first time. Then Harley Quinn, dressed in the costume of the Red Hood, awaits him there (20, A/1).⁶³ Another issue which supports this back-story is *Batman: Gotham Knights #54* (2004), where the readers get to know that the Joker's real name, or rather his former name, is Jack (13, A/1). There is also one slight change related to the death of his wife Jeanie. In this issue, Jeanie dies after Joker's transformation, meaning after his fall into the vat of chemicals and the Joker suspects that she did not die in an accident but was killed by his accomplices as an act of revenge (20, A-B/1).⁶⁴ This seemingly unimportant change of the events' order may have had a big impact on the Joker's sanity. This impact will be analysed later in this thesis.

⁶² Alan Moore and Brian Bolland, *Batman: The Killing Joke* (DC Comics, 1988), 15-32.

⁶³ Scott Snyder and Greg Capullo, *Batman: Death of the Family* (Burbank, CA: DC Comics, 2012), 20.

⁶⁴ A. J. Lieberman et al., *Batman: Gotham Knights* vol.1, #54 (Burbank, CA: DC Comics, 2004), 13-20.

The Joker's origin is also blurred partly due to the fact that the Joker himself sometimes changes some aspects of the story or creates completely different stories about his past. He may do this intentionally or it may be the result of him not remembering his past or what made him like this. In *Batman: The Killing Joke* (1988), the Joker admits that his memories of this event are blurred. When talking about the reason why Batman became Batman, he states: "Something like that happened to me, you know. I...I'm not exactly sure what it was. Sometimes I remember it one way, sometimes another...If I'm going to have a past, I prefer it to be multiple choice. Ha ha ha!" (39, B/1)⁶⁵ This suggests that he does not remember not only the incident that led to his transformation but also his past. The memory loss is highly probable. Since the chemicals which changed his appearance affected his mind, they could also affect his memory.

However, there were also moments which showed the Joker being aware of his past and even telling the story of the incident in the chemical plant. In *Batman: Gotham Knights #51* (2004), the Joker is shown remembering his wife Jeanie and even looking at her photos in a photo album (27, B-E/2).⁶⁶ In another issue of this title, he himself tells the back-story which was mentioned above.⁶⁷ This means, that the Joker does remember his past. Therefore, it is questionable whether he just tried to manipulate Batman when saying that the memories of his past are blurred. Another explanation could be connected to the flow of time. *Batman: Gotham Knights* (2004) was published much later than *Batman: The Killing Joke* (1988) so the reason why later the Joker remembers his former life could be that more time has passed since his exposure to the chemicals.

When speaking about the chemicals that caused the transformation, it is important to note that the substance should have killed the Joker. In *Batman: Death of the Family* (2012), Batman mentions that he has analysed the chemical mix multiple times and even knows its components by heart. Then he states: "I look for something I've missed, some secret ingredient, the thing that made him. [...] There's nothing in this mixture but death." (34, D-E/1)⁶⁸ According to Batman's analysis, there is no logical explanation for the Joker being created or even being alive. The mixture was supposed to kill him. This

⁶⁵ Moore and Bolland, *The Killing Joke*, 39.

⁶⁶ A. J. Lieberman et al., *Batman: Gotham Knights* vol. 1, #51 (Burbank, CA: DC Comics, 2004), 27.

⁶⁷ Lieberman et al., *Batman: Gotham Knights* vol. 1, #54, 13.

⁶⁸ Snyder and Capullo, *Death of the Family*, 34.

unexplainable anomaly in the origin of the Joker is probably a part of the mysterious way in which he is pictured.

The origin of the Joker is slightly different in movies. In Tim Burton's 1989 *Batman* movie, the Joker portrayed by Jack Nicholson is transformed in the vat of chemicals. Even though the main story of his origin is the same as in comic books, the movie provides information about the Joker which are not consistent with the story in comic books. In the movie, the Joker used to be a criminal called Jack Napier. The most important change in the backstory of the Joker is that in the movie, he killed Bruce Wayne's parents and therefore, is responsible for the creation of Batman.⁶⁹ This information has never been mentioned in comic books related to the Joker. In fact, it conflicts with the backstory which was mentioned above since according to *Batman: The Killing Joke* (1988), before his transformation the Joker used to be a comedian who was only once forced into crime.

In Christopher Nolan's 2008 *The Dark Knight* movie, no story of Joker's origin is offered, except for those which the Joker himself tells. In the movie, the Joker portrayed by Heath Ledger has scars on his face and he explains the story behind them in two different stories. The first story is about his wife whose face has been scarred. The Joker says that he wanted to make her smile so he also scarred his face. The second story is about his drunk abusive father who cut his face while saying the two well-known sentences: "Why so serious? Let's put a smile on that face."⁷⁰ The fact that he tells two different stories about the origin of his scars suggests that he either does not remember how he got them or that he intentionally lies about them. Either of these two options would correspond with the comic book representation of the Joker since it is not clear how much he remembers about his past and also he often lies to manipulate people.

In conclusion, it is obvious that the authors purposely leave the Joker's origin and his past shrouded in mystery. This way, the readers can only imagine what the Joker actually used to be like and the authors have enough space for the possible future development of the

⁶⁹ Michael Keaton and Jack Nicholson, *Batman*, DVD, directed by Tim Burton (Burbank, CA: Warner Bros., 1989)

⁷⁰ Christian Bale and Heath Ledger, *The Dark Knight*, DVD, directed by Christopher Nolan (Burbank, CA: Warner Bros., 2008)

back-story. As Weiner and Peaslee suggested, this mystery makes the character of the Joker more attractive.⁷¹

4.1.2 Personality

The Joker's personality requires a complex analysis. It is hard to say if he has several personalities or no personality at all. His personality has also been evolving with the flow of time. When the Joker was first introduced in 1940, he was depicted as a mass murderer. Later his personality was changed to make him look less scary and he was called the Clown Prince of Crime. And nowadays, the Joker is back to his old self, being depicted as a psychopathic killer.⁷²

One of Joker's characteristics is that he craves attention and he is capable of unimaginable things to gain it. According to Carter, this is the key to understanding Joker's motives. The Joker is not motivated by the desire for money or power or similar things – he wants attention, especially Batman's attention. However, he also enjoys publicity and the attention of the people of Gotham. In fact, he is even willing to die for the attention. Supporting evidence for this claim can be found in *The Joker: Devil's Advocate* (1996). The Joker is charged with a crime which he did not commit, and he is sentenced to death. He denies the crime and demands his release. However, when he discovers that the crime which he has supposedly committed got him on first pages of newspapers, he decides to accept the death penalty and even demands earlier date of execution. He states: "I want the fast lane to the hot seat. [...] Can't let my story get stale." (58, B, D/1) He is even more pleased when being told that his execution will be broadcasted live on television (78, C/2).⁷³ This would probably be Joker's ideal way of dying – being watched by millions. With this in mind, the Joker walks to the electric chair with a smile on his face only to be told that the broadcast of his execution had been turned down (87, C/1).⁷⁴ This information disrupted Joker's plan. He wanted to die as a star because he feeds on publicity and

⁷¹ Robert Moses Peaslee and Robert G. Weiner, eds., *The Joker: A Serious Study of the Clown Prince of Crime* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2015), 19.

⁷² John Goodwin and Izzat Tajjudin, "What Do You Think I Am? Crazy?": The Joker and Stigmatizing Representations of Mental Ill-Health," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 49, no. 2 (April 2016): 388.

⁷³ Chuck Dixon, Graham Nolan and Scott Hanna, *The Joker: Devil's Advocate* (Burbank, CA: DC Comics, 1996), 58-78.

⁷⁴ Dixon, Nolan and Hanna, *Devil's Advocate*, 87.

attention. This character trait has most probably been formed by Joker's insanity but the fact that he was a comedian before becoming the Joker may also contribute to it.

The Joker is not only a psychopathic mass murderer but also a genius. However, he uses his geniality for creating wicked, evil plans and manipulating people to do what he wants. His high intelligence is the reason why he can be called the number one villain of Gotham since he does not have any real superpowers. His geniality is best explained through the Joker venom, which will be discussed later in more details. As a former lab assistant in a chemical plant, the Joker has been able to come up with his own venom to kill people in an artistic way. It is surprising that despite his apparent insanity he has preserved the knowledge of chemistry to create a new lethal substance. Moreover, in *Batman: A Death in the Family* (1988), the Joker demonstrated his chemistry skills when he mixed up a version of his laughing gas using only common cleaning agents (7, C/1). He then used the gas to escape from the Arkham Asylum.⁷⁵ Based on Joker's high intelligence, he could be also classified as a criminal mastermind in Coogan's classification of villains.

It was previously mentioned that it is hard to identify Joker's personality. The reason for that is obviously his unstable mental state which will we analysed later. The changeful mental state, however, also causes his personality to change. In *Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on Serious Earth* (1989), a psychotherapist, Ruth Adams, who is in charge of Joker's treatment in the asylum explains a possible way to interpret Joker's personality. She suggests that the Joker has no real personality because "he creates himself each day." (27, A-B/1) According to the psychotherapist, the Joker is not able to cope with all the sensory information which he is receiving from the outside world (26, E/1). The only way for him to control the chaotic input is to go with the flow (26, F/1). She then adds: "That's why some days he's a mischievous clown, others a psychopathic killer." (27, A/1)⁷⁶ In fact, this theory could explain the whole evolution of the Joker. As previously mentioned, Joker's personality has changed significantly since his first appearance. In accordance with this theory, the Joker has been changing alongside with the society and the people which he confronts. He changes according to the input from the outside world. That is the reason

⁷⁵ Jim Starlin, Jim Aparo and Mike DeCarlo, *Batman: A Death in the Family* (Burbank, CA: DC Comics, 1988), 7.

⁷⁶ Grant Morrison and Dave McKean, *Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on Serious Earth* (Burbank, CA: DC Comics, 1989), 26-27.

why the Joker does not exhibit consistency and also why there are sometimes seemingly random changes in the character.⁷⁷

4.1.3 Mentality

If there is something obvious about the Joker, it is that he is certainly not sane. Before his transformation, he used to be an ordinary man, however, the chemicals affected his brain and changed him into something highly extraordinary. From his first appearance in 1940, it was clear that the Joker is a crazy man. He went live on the television and told everyone that he was going to kill a certain billionaire and steal his diamond. And so he did.⁷⁸ The Joker has never been officially and canonically diagnosed, but he has been casually diagnosed with schizophrenia, dissociative identity disorder (DID) or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).⁷⁹

PTSD could be a possible diagnose for the crazy clown since he has experienced a very traumatic event, meaning his fall into the vat of chemicals. This event was most probably a part of the process during which the Joker lost his sanity. This can also be supported by his claim in *Batman: The Killing Joke* (1988). He states: “All it takes is one bad day to reduce the sanest man alive to lunacy. That’s how far the world is from where I am. Just one bad day.” (38, C/1)⁸⁰ In this example, the Joker describes his traumatic event as “one bad day”. However, people suffering from PTSD experience distress related to cues that resemble the traumatic event. The Joker has not been shown experiencing such a distress. In fact, he has seldom been shown experiencing any distress at any time.⁸¹ Thus, it is not probable that the Joker suffers from the post-traumatic stress disorder.

When speaking about Joker’s “one bad day”, it is arguable which of the events was actually the cause of the transformation from a sane man to the killing lunatic. As previously mentioned, apart from the fall into the vat of chemicals which caused his skin to

⁷⁷ Eric Garneau, “Lady Haha,” in *The Joker: A Serious Study of the Clown Prince of Crime*, ed. Robert Moses Peaslee and Robert G. Weiner (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2015), 39.

⁷⁸ Bill Finger, Bob Kane and Sheldon Moldoff, “The Legend of the Batman - Who He is, and How He Came to Be”, *Batman* vol. 1, #1 (Burbank, CA: DC Comics, 1940), 1, retrieved from www.readcomiconline.to/Comic/Batman-1940/Issue-1?id=17555.

⁷⁹ Goodwin and Tajjudin, “What Do You Think I Am? Crazy?” 388.

⁸⁰ Moore and Bolland, *The Killing Joke*, 38.

⁸¹ Goodwin and Tajjudin, “What Do You Think I Am? Crazy?” 393.

turn white and his hair to turn green, the Joker also lost his wife and his unborn child on the same day. The version of the origin story pictured in *Batman: The Killing Joke* (1988) suggests that the chemicals caused the insanity. In this case, the Joker had found out the sad news about his wife before he went to the chemical plant. Until the accident with the chemicals, he appeared sane. However, a different order of events is introduced in *Batman: Gotham Knights #54* (2004). In this version, the Joker falls into the vat of chemicals and then finds out about the death of his wife and an unborn baby. When the transformed Joker arrives at the building in which his apartment is, sees the fire and realizes that his wife is probably dead, the pain is apparent in his eyes (20, D/2).⁸² The fact that after his physical transformation he went to see his wife suggests that he was still sane. Only after discovering that the person whom he loved the most was dead, he snapped and became insane.

During his stays in the Arkham Asylum, the Joker has been examined by several psychiatrists and psychotherapists. His mental state and possible mental disorders have been discussed frequently. Nevertheless, one of the theories about his mental state stands out from all the others. In *Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on a Serious Earth* (1989), a psychotherapist, Ruth Adams, points out that the Joker may not be insane. She states: “In fact, we’re not even sure if he can be properly defined as insane. [...] It’s quite possible we may actually be looking at some kind of super-sanity here. A brilliant new modification of human perception.” (29, A, D/1)⁸³ This is a new perspective on the case of the Joker. It suggests that all the mental problems that the Joker has can be parts of a larger concept which is referred to as “super-sanity”. However, this term is not further explained in the text, so it can only be speculated that it relates to Joker’s unstoppable will to power and his ability to remove feelings of guilt and remorse.⁸⁴

Although it has been suggested that the Joker may not be insane, the general opinion in the comic books is that he is an insane man. This is supported by the fact that after being captured the Joker is always taken back to the Arkham Asylum which is a psychiatric

⁸² Lieberman et al., *Batman: Gotham Knights* vol. 1, #54, 20.

⁸³ Morrison and McKean, *Arkham Asylum*, 29.

⁸⁴ Ryan Litsey, “The Joker, Clown Prince of Nobility,” in *The Joker: A Serious Study of the Clown Prince of Crime*, ed. Robert Moses Peaslee and Robert G. Weiner (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2015), 185.

hospital for the criminally insane. The Joker is usually portrayed as a psychopath or a sociopath. According to Goodwin and Tajjudin, the Joker demonstrates signs of all the criteria for a diagnosis of psychopathy. Some of these criteria are for example pathological lying, a need for constant stimulation or lack of guilt and empathy.⁸⁵ Moreover, the Joker seems to never learn from his bad outcomes which is another characteristic of a psychopath.⁸⁶ However, there are criteria which the Joker has probably never exhibited such as many short-term relationships and sexual promiscuity. Despite this, Goodwin and Tajjudin conclude that psychopathy is the most suitable diagnosis for the Joker.⁸⁷

The Joker's psychopathy is also evident from some of his extremely abominable crimes. In *Batman: A Death in the Family* (1988), he beats Jason Todd, Batman's second Robin, nearly to death while grinning from ear to ear and then states: "My! But that was fun!" (38, D/1) He consequently kills Jason with a bomb.⁸⁸ Moreover, in *Detective Comics #741* (2000), the Joker kidnaps several babies with the intention of killing them. When Sarah Gordon, the wife of Gotham's police commissioner, finds him and attempts to arrest him, the Joker throws one of the babies at her. She is forced to drop her gun in order to catch the baby. As soon as she drops the gun, the Joker shoots her in the head (23, E-F/2). He then leaves her corpse in the room full of babies.⁸⁹ These are just two of Joker's most horrible crimes to demonstrate his psychopathic behaviour.

When speaking about the Joker beating Jason Todd with a crowbar and then stating that it was fun, an important question raises – does the Joker enjoy hurting people and making them suffer? Roy F. Baumeister suggests that most people enjoy the pleasure of watching others suffer and even die. This fascination with violence has ancient roots when people used to come watch public executions or bloodthirsty gladiators. However, he points out that most people enjoy watching other people being hurt only when they are not taking part in the process. Those who enjoy causing the suffering themselves are usually considered to

⁸⁵ Goodwin and Tajjudin, "What Do You Think I Am? Crazy?" 395.

⁸⁶ Kent A. Kiehl, *The Psychopath Whisperer: The Science of Those without Conscience* (New York: Crown, 2014), 41.

⁸⁷ Goodwin and Tajjudin, "What Do You Think I Am? Crazy?" 395-96.

⁸⁸ Starlin, Aparo and DeCarlo, *A Death in the Family*, 38.

⁸⁹ Devin Grayson et al., "End Game: 3", *Detective Comics* vol. 1, #741 (Burbank, CA: DC Comics, 2000), 20-23.

be sadists.⁹⁰ Even though the Joker is sometimes described as being sadistic, this characteristic does not quite fit him. It will be advanced further in this thesis that the Joker primarily enjoys the reaction that follows after he hurts or kills someone, not the act itself. This also applies to the mentioned case of beating and killing Jason Todd. The Joker did it because of the reaction that would come from Batman. Baumeister argues that psychopaths get some amusement when watching their victims suffer but is usually not the driving force.⁹¹ Hence, this further supports Joker's diagnosis of psychopathy.

4.1.4 The Criminal Career

The Joker is not an ordinary criminal, he is creative, meticulous and dedicated. He manages to find new ways how to terrorize the city of Gotham and mainly to draw attention to himself. The Joker seldom commits a crime without a reason. However, his reasons are usually not logical at all. He is a wildcard and enjoys unleashing chaos.⁹²

The Joker often does unimaginable things just to prove his point. One of the most disgusting and cruel things which he had done to prove his point was illustrated in *Batman: The Killing Joke* (1988). He and his henchmen showed in front of Barbara Gordon's⁹³ apartment and at the moment she opened the door, the Joker, smiling from ear to ear, shot her to the spine (13, D/2). When Joker's henchmen took down Barbara's father, the Joker proceeded to undress bleeding Barbara and take pictures of her (14, E-G/2).⁹⁴ It has been suggested that he might have also raped Barbara, even though it is not explicitly stated in the comic book.⁹⁵ The Joker then humiliated James Gordon by undressing him (19, A/2), strapping him to a funfair ride (21, E/2) and showing him the pictures of his shot and naked daughter (25, C/2).⁹⁶ The Joker did all of this in attempt to drive James Gordon crazy. He wanted to prove his point that any sane man can be driven crazy by just one bad day. He explained that when a man faces the fact "that human existence is mad, pointless and

⁹⁰ Roy F. Baumeister, *Evil: Inside Human Cruelty and Violence* (New York: W. H. Freeman, 1997), 216-26.

⁹¹ Baumeister, *Evil*, 221.

⁹² Peaslee and Weiner, eds., *The Joker*, 16.

⁹³ Barbara Gordon is the daughter of James Gordon, Gotham's police commissioner and Batman's ally, and also a former Batgirl.

⁹⁴ Moore and Bolland, *The Killing Joke*, 13-14.

⁹⁵ Coogan, *Superhero*, 86.

⁹⁶ Moore and Bolland, *The Killing Joke*, 19-25.

random”, (35, F/1) he just becomes insane as the Joker did.⁹⁷ Furthermore, by proving his point the Joker also wants to demonstrate that there is no difference between himself and anyone else.⁹⁸

Joker’s crimes are often characterized by their irrational nature. The reason behind them usually makes sense only in Joker’s mind. An example of this seemingly irrational crime can be found in *Detective Comics #475* (1978). In the well-known story “The Laughing Fish!”, the Joker used his venom to infect fish which caused that every fish had the unique Joker grin. The Joker then insisted on filling copyright forms for the fish because his face was on them and wanted to get cut of every fish-sale in America (9, F/1). When asked about the aim of this crime, Batman answers: “[...] Joker’s mind is clouded in madness! His motives make sense to him alone!” (6, E/1)⁹⁹ The absurdity of this crime is obvious but it is creative and that is what the Joker is all about. Furthermore, the absurdity of Joker’s crimes makes him even scarier since the people of Gotham do not know what he wants and what is about to follow.

As Coogan has suggested, “the Joker sees his crimes as art”. In his view, the murders and crimes which he commits are creative and artistic. Crime is his artistic medium.¹⁰⁰ He considers himself to be an artist or an actor and Batman is the only critic that matters to him and from whom he wants the critical validation.¹⁰¹ The desire to make his crimes somehow different and creative also reflects in the choice of weapons and tools for committing the crimes. Most of his weapons have a comedic form and are designed to look like practical joke devices. The comedic weapons are probably connected with Joker’s former career as a stand-up comedian. Joker’s typical weapons include squirting flowers filled with acid, strong electric buzzers on his palm or sharp playing cards made from steel. Although most of Joker’s weapons are deadly his most dangerous and most typical weapon is the Joker Venom. The Joker Venom was first introduced alongside with the Joker himself in *Batman #1* in 1940 and the Joker has been using it and improving it ever since.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 35.

⁹⁸ Coogan, *Superhero*, 86.

⁹⁹ Steve Englehart, Marshall Rogers and Terry Austin, “The Laughing Fish!”, *Detective Comics* vol. 1, #475 (Burbank, CA: DC Comics, 1978), 6-9.

¹⁰⁰ Coogan, *Superhero*, 78.

¹⁰¹ Daniel Wallace, *The Joker: A Visual History of the Clown Prince of Crime* (Milford, CT: Universe, 2011), 105.

The Joker Venom is a toxin created by the Joker which he uses to kill people in his signature way. Since the Joker used to work as a lab assistant in a chemical plant, he is capable of creating such a toxin. The toxin leaves corpses with deadly pale skin and with a “rictus grin” on their faces.¹⁰² However, the Joker Venom has been introduced also in a non-lethal form. When the Joker used his venom on his first victim it was described as follows: “Slowly the facial muscles pull the dead man’s mouth into a repellant, ghastly grin, the sign of death from the Joker!” (2, I/1)¹⁰³ It is also typical that the victims of the venom die while laughing uncontrollably. This venom can be transmitted in various ways. The most common way is transmitting through the air but it can be also injected or consumed. In *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* #3 (1986), the Joker poisons a reporter by kissing her on the lips (22, F/2).¹⁰⁴ Since the Joker is immune to his venom, he was not affected.

The Joker is by no means ashamed of his crimes and most of the times he does not try to keep them secret or cover them up. He is proud of the crimes he commits and he likes to boast about them. He also refuses to take credit for someone else’s crime so when the Joker states that he is not guilty of a crime, it is usually true. In *The Joker: Devil’s Advocate* (1996), the Joker was charged with a crime of poisoning stamps with the Joker Venom and he was taken to the court. When asked if he was responsible for the fatal poisonings, the Joker got offended. He angrily responded: “You’re looking at the Einstein of crime! Sticking some poison on the back of some postage stamps, lady? Amateur night in Dixie.” (26, A - C/1)¹⁰⁵ From his answer, it is obvious that he would never degrade himself to such a crime. There is nothing exciting about this for him. To point out, the Joker does not deny he is a criminal, he even calls himself “the Einstein of crime”. He only denies this crime because it offends him that people connect him with it.

Besides the creative element, there is another reason why the Joker marks his victims in this hideous way. Coogan argues that Joker’s use of the venom shows the way he deals

¹⁰² Johan Nilsson, “Rictus Grins and Glasgow Smiles,” in *The Joker: A Serious Study of the Clown Prince of Crime*, ed. Robert Moses Peaslee and Robert G. Weiner (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2015), 170.

¹⁰³ Finger, Kane and Moldoff, *Batman* vol. 1, #1, 2.

¹⁰⁴ Frank Miller and Klaus Janson, *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* vol. 1, #3 (Burbank, CA: DC Comics, 1986), 22.

¹⁰⁵ Dixon, Nolan and Hanna, *Devil’s Advocate*, 26.

with the insanity which according to him operates the world. The Joker stamps his unique face onto others to transform the world into his image. He is not able to comprehend the world as it is. In order to understand the people, he wants to transform them into a sick parody of himself.¹⁰⁶

4.2 The Joker and Batman

Every superhero needs a supervillain, not just for the sake of an interesting story but also, because the villain makes the hero look good. In fact, the existence of supervillains can be justified by the assumption that they give superheroes a reason to exist and to function in the given community.¹⁰⁷ There is no need for a hero if there is no evil to be defeated. In this case, the Joker's nemesis and the force going against him is Gotham's vigilante and the Dark Knight, the Batman.

In this case, Batman plays a significant role in the story of the Joker's life, since he is partly responsible for his creation. As mentioned when talking about the origin of the Joker, Batman was present when the man supposedly called Jack fell into the vat of chemicals and consequently transformed into the Joker. Obviously, Batman is not responsible for Joker's acts, but the man jumped into the toxic water because he feared Batman and wanted to get away from him. Therefore, there is a possibility that if Batman was not in the chemical plant that evening, the Joker would never see the light of day.

4.2.1 The Symbiotic Relationship

As Verano suggested, superheroes often coexist in somewhat symbiotic relationships with supervillains and they dance around the thin line which separates a hero from a villain.¹⁰⁸ It is obvious that the Joker serves as Batman's foil from the beginning. Batman represents the order that is necessary for living in Gotham, while the Joker represents the chaos which disrupts his order.¹⁰⁹ Although these two characters have been fighting and trying to kill each other since their first encounter, they have not done that yet, despite many

¹⁰⁶ Coogan, *Superhero*, 109.

¹⁰⁷ Frank Verano, "Superheroes Need Supervillains." in *What Is a Superhero?*, ed. Robin S. Rosenberg and Peter Coogan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 85.

¹⁰⁸ Verano, "Superheroes Need Supervillains," 83.

¹⁰⁹ Daniel Moseley, "The Joker's Comedy of Existence," in *Supervillains and Philosophy: Sometimes, Evil Is Its Own Reward*, ed. Ben Dyer (Chicago: Open Court, 2011), 128.

opportunities on both sides. One of the reasons for that is offered in *Batman #663* (2007) after the Joker kills most of the people who have ever worked with him, and at the end of the issue, Batman stops him from killing Harley Quinn. After a fight with Batman, the Joker states: “You can't kill me without becoming like me. I can't kill you without losing the only human being who can keep up with me. Isn't it IRONIC?!”¹¹⁰

The Joker has a point. Due to Batman's belief that killing the criminals would make him as bad as them, he has never seized the opportunity to kill the Joker. As a result, Joker has escaped the asylum many times and has killed dozens of people.¹¹¹ However, despite several opportunities, Joker has not been able to kill Batman either. He enjoys their relationship and it may be the most important relationship in his life.¹¹² The nature of Joker's relationship with Batman will be analysed further in the following chapter.

On the other hand, even though the Joker has claimed that he cannot kill Batman, as mentioned in the previous citation, he has also stated that he does want to kill him. In *Batman Cacophony #3* (2009), the Joker stays in a hospital after being stabbed to the heart and saved by Batman. When Batman visits him and admits that he did not want to let him die, Joker states “I do want to kill you” (21, D/1) and continues “When you're gone I'll stop hurting people I don't know. I'll stop with the mayhem and murder” (22, D/1).¹¹³ This statement suggests that Joker considers killing Batman to be his primary goal and mission. Therefore, after Batman's death, the Joker can abandon his criminal career and stop terrorizing Gotham City. Additionally, in the same dialogue Joker even implies that Batman is the very reason for his insanity and lunatic behaviour when he states with a grin on his face: “But here's the cold hard truth, Bats...I don't hate you 'cause I'm crazy, I'm crazy 'cause I hate you” (22, C/1).¹¹⁴ Thus, it is possible that if there was no Batman there would also be no Joker because according to this statement, Joker's insanity is dependent on Batman.

¹¹⁰ Grant Morrison and John Van Fleet, “The Clown at Midnight”, *Batman* vol. 1, #663 (Burbank, CA: DC Comics, 2007), 11.

¹¹¹ Mark D. White and Robert Arp, eds., *Batman and Philosophy: The Dark Knight of the Soul* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2008), 6.

¹¹² Moseley, “The Joker's Comedy of Existence,” 135.

¹¹³ Kevin Smiths and Walt Flanagan, *Batman: Cacophony* vol. 1, #3 (Burbank, CA: DC Comics, 2009), 21-22.

¹¹⁴ Smiths and Flanagan, *Cacophony* vol. 1, #3, 22.

Supporting evidence for this theory can also be found in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* #2 (1986). When Batman retired and disappeared, the Joker stopped escaping the Arkham Asylum, he lost his typical grin and fell into a nearly comatose state (29, D/1).¹¹⁵ This lasted for ten years until it was announced on the television that the Batman had returned. The Joker was watching a TV and when he heard the news, a grin appeared on his face and his eyes sparkled with pleasure.¹¹⁶ Shortly after the discovery of Batman's return, The Joker escaped and killed 206 people on his way out (26, F/1).¹¹⁷ It is obvious that Batman's presence alone provokes a reaction in the Joker. He has no desire to commit crimes when Batman is not around to see them.

While it is true that Joker has expressed his desire to see Batman dead, by saying that, he contradicts himself. As Moseley stated in *The Joker's Comedy of Existence*, Joker wants to kill Batman, but he also wants to fight with him forever. According to him, the Joker has "an irrational set of desires".¹¹⁸ This issue is most probably connected to his mental disorder. He wants to have both of these things when obviously they are mutually exclusive. However, before the Joker claimed that he wanted Batman dead, he admitted that he was under morphine, mood stabilizers and antipsychotics (17, C/1).¹¹⁹ It is possible that his thoughts and utterance were influenced by the medication. Therefore, the Joker may actually want to kill Batman and end the criminal career when his mind is more or less clear and not affected by his lunatic thoughts.

4.2.2 Joker's Love and Obsession

Even though the Joker and Batman have been at war from the beginning, the Joker has always had a special place in his heart for his nemesis. However, the nature of their relationship is not clear since the Joker tends to express his feelings towards Batman in rather odd ways. In *Batman: Death of the Family* (2012), the Joker spends a whole year transforming the Arkham Asylum, torturing and humiliating the personnel so that he could

¹¹⁵ Frank Miller and Klaus Janson, *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* vol. 1, #2 (Burbank, CA: DC Comics, 1986), 29.

¹¹⁶ Frank Miller and Klaus Janson, *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* vol. 1, #1 (Burbank, CA: DC Comics, 1986), 32.

¹¹⁷ Miller and Janson, *The Dark Knight Returns* vol. 1, #3, 26.

¹¹⁸ Moseley, "The Joker's Comedy of Existence," 135.

¹¹⁹ Smiths and Flanagan, *Cacophony* vol. 1, #3, 17.

play with Batman in his sick way. He then calls the place “a love letter to him”.¹²⁰ It is obvious that the Joker spends a lot of time preparing his jokes for Batman. In this case, however, the Joker did not torture and humiliate the people just for the sake of torturing and humiliating, he did it for Batman. The Joker is obsessed with Batman and the obsession controls him. The fight and struggle with Batman imbue Joker’s life with value and purpose.¹²¹

Another aspect of Joker’s obsession with the vigilante is that he sometimes acts just to be noticed by Batman and to get a reaction from him. An example of this behaviour can be found in *Batman Cacophony #1* (2009) when the Joker talks to one of his allies about the order the Joker gave him before being taken to the Arkham Asylum. The Joker asks him to repeat the task and the man answers: “You asked me to randomly jokerize Gothamites on April first so that Batman would puzzle over whether you were at large or not and be forced to come to Arkham to see you....At which time you were gonna say “April fools” to him”, (27, E/1).¹²² This example shows that the Joker wants Batman to think about him even when he is locked up in the asylum. He wants Batman’s attention and he wants to keep him busy. The fact, that he delegated the work to one of his henchmen just confirms the theory that the Joker takes a lot of the criminal action not for the joy of the crime but rather for the joy of Batman’s reaction.

Another important thing to realize is that the Joker as many other supervillains seeks the approval of the hero. He wants “the confirmation [...] of the reasonableness of his decisions”. If the Joker could gain Batman’s respect and approval, his life and villainy would be justified.¹²³ Probably the most known of Joker’s attempts to get Batman’s approval has been previously mentioned in different context. In *Batman: The Killing Joke* (1988), the Joker explains that the world is just one bad day away from where he is (38, C/1), and later compares himself to Batman saying: “You had a bad day, and it drove you as crazy as everybody else. You only won’t admit it!” (38, E/1).¹²⁴ By stating this, the Joker implies that if Batman stopped denying his own madness he would become as insane

¹²⁰ Snyder and Capullo, *Death of the Family*, 101-11.

¹²¹ Moseley, “The Joker’s Comedy of Existence,” 134.

¹²² Kevin Smiths and Walt Flanagan, *Batman: Cacophony* vol. 1, #1 (Burbank, CA: DC Comics, 2009), 27.

¹²³ Coogan, *Superhero*, 89.

¹²⁴ Moore and Bolland, *The Killing Joke*, 38.

as the Joker. Therefore, he wants Batman to admit that his lunatic actions are reasonable because everyone, Batman included, would act the same in his mental state. Ultimately, the Joker suggests that he is not at fault for his actions. He wants the approval but as a rule, the hero never gives it, so this leads to the Joker coming back to Batman over and over again. According to Coogan, this approval would heal the supervillain's wound, especially when Batman is partially responsible for Joker's wound – his fall into the vat of chemicals.¹²⁵ While it is obvious that the Joker is obsessed with Batman, there is a thin line between obsession and love. According to Robert G. Weiner and Robert Peaslee, the Joker loves Batman whether Batman admits it or not. They further explain that it is not a love of the romantic kind but rather a dysfunctional friendship. But even though it is dysfunctional, it gives Joker's life a meaning.¹²⁶ In *Batman: Death of the Family* (2012), Batman actually admits that it is possibly a love what the Joker feels toward him. Batman's internal dialogue gives information about the movements of human pupils in reaction to certain emotions. As he continues in the dialogue he mentions Joker's pupils and the fact that they enlarged during their eye contact, he says to himself: "Ignore the fact that what you saw those black points expand with...was love", (82, D/1).¹²⁷ It is also important to note that Batman's conclusion is based on a real research and experiment. In 1975, a biopsychologist Eckhard Hess described his experiment which included showing pictures to his assistant. Among those pictures, there were also pictures of nude women. After the experiment, he suggested that "attraction to a stimulus resulted in a pupillary dilation and that pupillary constriction was the outcome of viewing stimuli that were "distasteful or unappealing".¹²⁸ However, even though Batman claimed that it was love what caused Joker's pupils to expand, it did not necessarily have to be love to Batman. It could have been caused by the love of the excitement which the Joker feels when fighting with Batman.

¹²⁵ Coogan, *Superhero*, 86-89.

¹²⁶ Peaslee and Weiner, *The Joker*, 21.

¹²⁷ Snyder and Capullo, *Death of the Family*, 82.

¹²⁸ Robert Morris Stern, William J. Ray and Karen S. Quigley, *Psychophysiological Recording* (2nd ed.) (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 126.

4.2.3 The Similarity

Despite the fact that the Joker is Batman's archenemy and on the first sight they may look completely unlike, they share several characteristics. After all, it was mentioned that Coogan describes the Joker as the inverted-superhero supervillain.¹²⁹ It can be assumed that under other circumstances the roles of the superhero and the supervillain could have been swapped.

The origin of Batman is similar to the origin of the Joker – “one bad day”. In *Batman: The Killing Joke* (1988), the Joker speaks about his belief that one bad day can make a person crazy. He asks 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. Why else would you dress up like a flying rat?” (38, D/1).¹³⁰ By “a bad day”, the Joker refers to the day from Bruce Wayne's childhood when his parents were killed by a criminal on their way home from a movie theatre (1, C/2). Young Bruce witnessed the tragedy and later swore to avenge the death of his parents and fight criminals for the rest of his life (2, C/1).¹³¹ This was the moment when Batman was born in the mind of Bruce Wayne and he came to life several years later.

Coogan points out that the message of *The Killing Joke* (1988) is that both heroism and villainy emerge from confrontation with absurdity. The world suddenly becomes meaningless when the person's loved ones are killed. However, dealing with the consequences determines whether the person becomes a villain or a hero.¹³² Naturally, not every person reacts to a traumatic event by becoming an evil murderer or swearing to defeat the evil but in the world of comic books, it is usually the result of such a situation. The Joker was driven crazy by his bad day, while Batman became a vigilante dedicated to fighting crime.

Even though the Joker and Batman stand on the opposite sides, the force which makes them go is the same – the revenge. In the case of Batman, it is obvious that he wants to revenge the death of his parents, however, it is not that simple in the case of the Joker. In *Batman: The Man Who Laughs* (2005), the Joker's motives are explained in Batman's

¹²⁹ Coogan, *Superhero*, 72.

¹³⁰ Moore and Bolland, *The Killing Joke*, 38.

¹³¹ Bill Finger, Gardner Fox, Bob Kane and Sheldon Moldoff, “The Batman Wars Against the Dirigible Doom”, *Detective Comics* vol. 1, #33 (Burbank, CA: DC Comics, 1939), 1-2, retrieved from www.readcomiconline.to/Comic/Detective-Comics-1937/Issue-33?id=5141#1.

¹³² Coogan, *Superhero*, 106.

inner monologue. Shortly after the incident in the chemical plant which led to his creation, the Joker decides to poison Gotham's water supply and kill everyone. In his inner monologue, Batman suggests: "I was right about Joker's motives, I just didn't understand the full nature of his desires. [...] He'd get personal revenge on the people who made him what he is. And then the whole city would "follow his fall". (65, B/1) Then he adds: "In his sick mind, we're all to blame just for being alive." (65, D/1)¹³³ This proves that the Joker was, at least initially, also driven by revenge. His first motive was to revenge his old self by killing the people connected with the chemical plant and subsequently killing the whole city for not being like him.

Another factor influencing whether a person joins the good side or the evil side is, of course, the social situation. Verano argues that superheroes often arise from socially advantageous situations such as economic stability and loving family. If the superhero was not blessed by fate, he could as well be a supervillain.¹³⁴ According to this theory, if the Joker was a billionaire he could have become a crime-fighting vigilante dedicated to revenging his possibly murdered wife. On the other hand, if Bruce Wayne had not inherited billions of dollars, he could have become a supervillain like his nemesis, the Joker.

4.2.4 The Importance of the Secret Identity

It is usual that the villain desires to reveal the hero's secret identity, the identity behind the mask. The Joker would also profit from uncovering Batman's true name and identity and exposing him to the public. It would destroy Batman's life and his career as the Gotham's vigilante. However, the Joker does not desire to do such a thing.

In *Batman: Death of the Family* (2012), Bruce Wayne tells the story of how he visited the Joker in the Arkham Asylum. He was not wearing a costume of Batman, he was just Bruce Wayne. Bruce showed the Joker his play card, which he had found. The Joker looked at the card but not at him. (146, B-C/1) Bruce then stated: "It was then, that I knew...knew that he didn't care who I was behind the mask, and never would. Knew that he was incapable of even broaching the subject of Bruce Wayne. It would ruin his fun." (146, D-E/1)¹³⁵ The

¹³³ Ed Brubaker and Doug Mahnke, *Batman: The Man Who Laughs* (Burbank, CA: DC Comics, 2005), 65.

¹³⁴ Verano, "Superheroes Need Supervillains," 84.

¹³⁵ Snyder and Capullo, *Death of the Family*, 146.

reason behind this is that the Joker does not want to play with Bruce Wayne, he wants to play with Batman and he is not interested in his true identity.

Another example supporting this theory can be found in *Batman Cacophony #3* (2009) when Bruce Wayne visits the Joker in the hospital. However, he is not wearing the Batman costume, only black sunglasses. It makes the Joker so uncomfortable that he asks Bruce to put on the Batman costume in order to be taken seriously (18, A/1).¹³⁶ It could be described as their little game. The Joker has his costume on – he has it on permanently – so he requires Batman to also wear his costume. It is probable that in Joker's mind, their fighting is like a game of "cops and robbers". He is the robber, so he needs Batman to be the cop, not a billionaire.

Not only the Joker does not want to know Batman's identity, but he also refuses to learn his own identity. In *Batman: Death of the family* (2012), Batman holds the Joker above a deep drop and threatens to reveal him the identity – the real name of the Joker (140, E/1). When Batman is about to say the name, the Joker shouts "shut up" and attempts to silence him by giving him an electric shock from a small electric device on his palm (141, A/1). As a result, Batman loses his hold of Joker's arm and the Joker falls into the darkness (141, B/2).¹³⁷ Assuming that the Joker knew that his action would lead to Batman dropping him down, it is obvious that he would rather choose to die than then to learn his real name. The reason is probably the same as with learning Batman's identity – the fun would be over. Everything would become real and he would be forced to try and recall his old life and his old self.

4.3 The Joker and Harley Quinn

Romance is a common element often added to stories to make them more interesting. However, it is usually the hero who gets to meet someone special, not the villain. In the case of the Joker, there is Harley Quinn. Once a respectable psychiatrist, Harleen Quinzel, met the Clown Prince of Crime and got dragged into his twisted world. When people hear about Harley Quinn, the Joker is usually the first thing which comes to mind.

¹³⁶ Smiths and Flanagan, *Cacophony* vol. 1, #3, 18.

¹³⁷ Snyder and Capullo, *Death of the Family*, 140-41.

4.3.1 The Joker as the Reason for Harley's Existence

Harleen Quinzel was an independent character but this significantly changed after her confrontation with the Joker. As a psychiatrist in the Arkham Asylum, she wanted to examine him and fix him but instead, she became as damaged as he is. In *Batman Adventures: Mad Love* (1994), the Joker is shown manipulating Dr Quinzel during his psychiatric sessions by telling her fake stories about his harsh childhood and abusive father (24, F/1). The false nature of these stories is later confirmed by Batman (45, B/1). However, Harleen is influenced by them and starts thinking that the Joker is just a misunderstood soul who needs help. The Joker manipulates her into thinking that he is the victim. Dr Quinzel even states the Joker is “a lost injured child looking to make the world laugh at his antics.” (28, A/1) She starts to develop a crush on him and later steals a costume of a harlequin to match the theme of the Joker (33, B/2).¹³⁸ Thus, the Joker was the reason why Harley Quinn was born because if Dr Harleen Quinzel never met him, she would probably never lose her mind and never transform herself into Harley Quinn.

It is obvious that Harley Quinn is not a sane person. This is proven by the fact that after being captured she is always taken to the Arkham Asylum, same as the Joker. But the key point is that her sanity was stolen by the Joker. There are two major stories of Harley Quinn's origin and the Joker plays the main role in both. The first one, which is mentioned in *Batman Adventures: Mad Love* (1994), suggests that Dr Quinzel was inspired by Joker's insanity and since she was in love with him, she wanted to be like him. She helped the Joker escape the asylum, started to paint her face white to match his face and also used comical weapons similar to Joker's weapons. Even though the Joker played a rather passive role in this story of Harley's origin, he was the stimulus to which she reacted.

In the second story of Harley's origin, the Joker is to be fully blamed. In *Suicide Squad #7* (2012), Harley tells a slightly different backstory. According to this one, after Harley helped the Joker escape the asylum, he took her to the chemical plant where he experienced his transformation. At this point, Harley was still relatively sane since she showed signs of regret when talking about the people which they hurt in the asylum (12,

¹³⁸ Paul Dini and Bruce Timm, *Batman Adventures: Mad Love* (Burbank, CA: DC Comics, 1994), 24-45.

D/1). Consequently, the Joker pushed Harley into a vat of the same chemicals which made him.¹³⁹

Because of the exposure to the chemicals, Harley's blond hair turned red and blue, her skin became pale and the typical Joker grin appeared on her face (15, A/2). She also started calling the Joker "puddin'" (15, C/1).¹⁴⁰ Based on the change of her expression and her behaviour, it is highly probable that the chemicals had a similar effect as in the case of the Joker and as a result she became insane. Moreover, before pushing her into the vat of chemicals, the Joker told Harley: "It's your birthday. Not Harleen Quinzel's birthday, your new birthday." (12, B-C/1)¹⁴¹ This symbolizes the death of Harleen Quinzel and the birth of Harley Quinn. To conclude, it is obvious that the Joker caused the transformation of Dr Quinzel to Harley Quinn, both physical transformation and psychological.

Furthermore, it seems that the Joker did not mean to harm Harley Quinn by giving her the new identity. In the chemical plant, he told her: "What happened here...fixed me. And it can fix you too." (12, E/1)¹⁴² This suggests that the Joker wanted to help Harley to see the world the way he sees it. He probably wanted her in his life and this was the only way to make it work. From his statement that the chemicals "fixed" him, it can be assumed that he is grateful for his new self and he wants to do the same favour to Harley.

Another aspect of the Joker creating Harley Quinn is the creation of her name. Harley Quinn adopted her name on a suggestion of the Joker. Both in *Mad Love* (1994) and *Suicide Squad #7* (2012), the Joker was the one who came up with the name. Joker's interest in the name comes from its similarity to the word "Harlequin" which refers to a clown character. He told Harley that he would like the name and he would be attracted to it (23, H/1). Harley Quinn then adopted her name because she wanted to impress the Joker and wanted to "put a smile on his face." (23, I/1)¹⁴³

¹³⁹ Adam Glass, Clayton Henry, Ig Guara and Scott Hanna, "The Hunt for Harley Quinn: Conclusion", *Suicide Squad* vol. 4, #7 (Burbank, CA: DC Comics, 2012), 12.

¹⁴⁰ Glass, Henry, Guara and Hanna, *Suicide Squad* vol. 4, #7, 12-15.

¹⁴¹ Glass, Henry, Guara and Hanna, *Suicide Squad* vol. 4, #7, 12.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁴³ Dini and Timm, *Mad Love*, 23.

4.3.2 The Relationship

The first question which needs to be answered is “what relationship is there between the Joker and Harley Quinn?” The Joker and Harley are generally seen as a couple because of their matching clown theme. In addition, in most cases when Harley appears in comics the motif of her relationship with the Joker is present. Most of her stories include the Joker in some way, either in flashbacks or in present-day conflicts. The Joker is perfectly capable of existing without Harley, however, she does not have such autonomy.¹⁴⁴

The nature of the relationship between the Joker and Harley Quinn depends on which point of view is analysed. Harley loves the Joker and believes that he loves her too. In *Mad Love* (1994), she was even shown planning their future together including their children (35, A/2).¹⁴⁵ She tells herself that the Joker cares about her and sometimes lies about his actions so that it would look like he appreciates all the things she does for him. In *Batman: Harley Quinn* (1999), Harley tells a story about how she transformed a cave into “a love nest” for her and the Joker. She states that when the Joker saw her masterpiece “he was overcome with delight” and he raved about her work. However, the Joker just said “doable” (14, E/1).¹⁴⁶ In short, Harley is deeply in love with the Joker, which is of course influenced by her non-stable mental state, and she believes that their relationship has a future.

In contrast, the Joker views their relationship quite differently. For him, Harley Quinn is something like a toy. He knows that she is willing to do almost anything for him and he often takes advantage of it. For instance, in *Batman: Harley Quinn* (1999), Harley helps the Joker escape the Arkham Asylum, but she is caught by guards and committed to the asylum. She is convinced that the Joker will return for her, but he never does.¹⁴⁷ He just used her as a part of his plan. He often lies to Harley Quinn and pretends to care about her to give her false hope. Again, in *Batman: Harley Quinn* (1999), after Harley went to get rid of Batman for the Joker, he is shown running away not caring what will happen to Harley and even suggesting that he is aware of the fact that Batman might hurt her (20, C/1). However, when Harley appears in front of him, he claims that “he was just going to look

¹⁴⁴ Tosha Taylor, “Kiss with a Fist,” in *The Joker: A Serious Study of the Clown Prince of Crime*, ed. Robert Moses Peaslee and Robert G. Weiner (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2015), 82.

¹⁴⁵ Dini and Timm, *Mad Love*, 35.

¹⁴⁶ Paul Dini, Yvel Guichet and Aaron Sowd, *Batman: Harley Quinn* (Burbank, CA: DC Comics, 1999), 14.

¹⁴⁷ Dini, Guichet and Sowd, *Harley Quinn*, 6.

for her.” (20, E/1)¹⁴⁸ He uses her for things which he does not want to do himself and also for protection because he knows she would never let anyone hurt him. In fact, for the Joker, Harley Quinn serves more like a sidekick than a partner or a target of romantic interest.

4.3.3 The Abusive Nature of the Relationship

It is obvious that the relationship of the Joker and Harley Quinn is far from ideal, but it is important to realize that it is an abusive relationship. There were numerous times when the Joker slapped, punched, kicked, humiliated and even attempted to kill Harley Quinn. Nevertheless, she always comes back to him. He controls her and both characters seem to be aware of it. According to Tosha Taylor, the Joker exercises this control to assure himself of his own powers. He uses Harley as a means through which he can witness the powers.¹⁴⁹

The reason why the Joker gets new and new chances to hurt Harley Quinn is that she allows him to do it. Travis Langley argues that she might suffer from a dependent personality disorder. This means that Harley is willing to make all the sacrifices and tolerate the verbal and physical abuse from the Joker because she does not want to risk having him leave her.¹⁵⁰ In *Mad Love* (1994), the Joker attacks Harley Quinn because he is angry that she wanted to kill Batman when he is the one who is supposed to do it. He slaps her, insults her and then punches her so she falls out of a window from fourth floor (51, E/2). When she is found by the police down on the street covered in blood, she states: “My fault...I didn’t...get the joke...” (53, A/1) She blames herself for what the Joker did to her. At the end of the story, Harley is wrapped up in bandages and lies in bed back in the Arkham Asylum. She is determined to get healed peacefully and get out of the asylum (63, A/1). She is asked by a doctor what it felt like to be dependent on such a man. She looks broken and starts “It felt like...” (63, F/1) and then she notices a rose and a note saying: “Feel better soon – J.” (63, H/2) After reading the note, a smile appears on her face and she

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 20.

¹⁴⁹ Taylor, “Kiss with a Fist,” 82.

¹⁵⁰ Travis Langley, *Batman and Psychology: A Dark and Stormy Knight* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2012), 147.

finishes the sentence with "...it felt like a kiss!" (63, I/1)¹⁵¹ The Joker attempted to kill her but as soon as she saw a little sign of concern in him, she forgave him.

Moreover, this was not the only case of Harley forgiving the Joker for trying to kill her. In *Batman: Harley Quinn* (1999), the Joker sets a death trap for Harley, but she survives. She decides to get a revenge on him. When she finds the Joker, she attacks him and wants to kill him. However, when the Joker says: "Would it help if I said I was sorry?" (43, D/1), Harley drops her weapon and hugs him.¹⁵² It is only in times when the Joker knows that he has truly crossed the line when he shows any sign of affection. He needs to do it occasionally to give Harley something to support her illusion of a happy relationship.

Even though the Joker is rarely seen having any feelings, except the obsession with Batman, there was a moment when he admitted that there is something between him and Harley Quinn. In *Batman: Harley Quinn* (1999), when the Joker attempts to kill Harley, he gives the reason why he is doing it. He tells her: "...since you entered my life I've been reminded of what it's like to be part of a couple, to care for someone who cares for me. It's the first time in recent memory I've had those feelings...And I hate having those feelings! They're upsetting, confusing and worse, distracting me from getting my share of Gotham..." (22, F/1; 23, A-B/1).¹⁵³ It is obvious that the Joker is afraid of having any romantic feelings because it could make him weaker and distract him from being the fearsome supervillain that he is. Furthermore, Taylor points out that the Joker feels emasculated by becoming the object of Harley's gaze because normally he is the one who objectifies others through violence and his deadly pranks. As a homicidal psychopath, he feels the need to destroy the source of his emasculation – Harley Quinn.¹⁵⁴

4.3.4 Romanticizing the Relationship

As abusive as the relationship of the Joker and Harley Quinn is, it tends to be romanticized by readers and cosplayers but also movie directors. A great example of this phenomena can be found in the 2016 film *Suicide Squad*. In the film, the Joker, played by Jared Leto, and Harley Quinn, played by Margot Robbie, re-enact the previously mentioned comic book scene of Harley Quinn's birth in the chemical plant. However, the movie version differs

¹⁵¹ Dini and Timm, *Mad Love*, 51-63.

¹⁵² Dini, Guichet and Sowd, *Harley Quinn*, 43.

¹⁵³ Dini, Guichet and Sowd, *Harley Quinn*, 22-23.

¹⁵⁴ Taylor, "Kiss with a Fist," 86.

significantly from the comic book version. In the comic book *Suicide Squad #7* (2012), the Joker pushes frightened Harley into the vat of chemicals while she screams for help – she is transformed unwillingly. Conversely, in the film, Harley willingly jumps into the vat of chemicals as a proof of her love for the Joker. But the essential moment is when the Joker prepares to leave but then changes his mind and jumps to the vat to save Harley and subsequently, they kiss in the vat.¹⁵⁵ This implies that the Joker cares for Harley's life since there is probably no benefit for him which would explain the life-saving behaviour. In the film, there are more examples of the Joker caring for Harley Quinn which can be rarely found in comic books, if at all. For instance, in the final scene of the movie, Harley Quinn is in jail and the Joker arrives to release her. The movie ends after he says to Harley: "Let's go home love."¹⁵⁶ The comic book version of the Joker would most probably never do that since he has had many opportunities to free Harley from Arkham Asylum and has never done that. To conclude, the relationship of the Joker and Harley Quinn is romanticized in the movie probably because their story is more appealing and attractive when it is delivered as a classical love story.

¹⁵⁵ Jared Leto and Margot Robbie, *Suicide Squad*, DVD, directed by David Ayer (Burbank, CA: Warner Bros., 2016).

¹⁵⁶ Leto and Robbie, *Suicide Squad*.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this bachelor's thesis was to provide a detailed analysis of the character of the Joker supported by evidence. The analysis concerns three main directions – the Joker as an independent character without relation to any other character; the Joker in relation to his nemesis, Batman; the Joker in relation to a woman, Harley Quinn.

In the first part of the analysis, Joker's personality and mentality were analysed in relation to the story of his origin. It was concluded that the events leading to his transformation but also the transformation by the chemicals itself are to be blamed for his unstable mental state. Furthermore, the unstable mental state also affects his personality which changes frequently. It was also suggested that the most probable diagnosis for the Joker is psychopathy. Examples of some of his horrible crimes were provided to support this diagnosis.

The second part of the analysis focused on the relationship between the Joker and Batman. The way in which Batman influences the Joker was examined and it was concluded that he is probably the most important person in Joker's life. The Joker often contradicts himself while desiring both killing Batman and fighting him forever. However, the evidence suggests that he commits all the crimes just to get Batman's attention. Moreover, it was concluded that the Joker and Batman are quite similar since they both transformed after a traumatic event but one of them became a hero and the other one a villain. In the last part, it was pointed out that the Joker perceives their fight as a game, therefore he does not want to know Batman's identity since it would ruin the game.

The last part of the analysis concerned the Joker in relation to the only woman who has ever gotten somewhat close to him – Harley Quinn. In the first place, it was established that the Joker is the reason why Harley Quinn even exists since she went insane because of him. Subsequently, it was analysed whether the Joker cares about Harley Quinn and whether he has any romantic feelings for her. Concerning this point, it was concluded that his psychopathic nature does not allow any romantic feelings since once he started having them he immediately attempted to kill Harley. The analysis also focused on the abusive nature of their relationship and the way Harley allows the Joker to commit violence on her. In the last part, their relationship was compared to the movie version of it and it was suggested that the relationship is romanticized in the movie.

The supporting evidence for this analysis included examples from *Batman: The Killing Joke* (1988), *Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on a Serious Earth* (1989), *Batman: Death of the Family* (2012) or the movies *Batman* (1989) and *The Dark Knight* (2008).

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