

PROJECT WORK CATEGORY 2A

ANALYSING HOW

SOCIAL PARADIGMS SHAPE THE PORTRAYAL

THE JOKER

Written Report

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background Information

Superhero films have been one of the most sought-after genres in the 20th and 21st centuries. *DC Comics*, being one of the most vogue brands in the superhero film-making industry apart from *Marvel Comics*, has been the centre of attention for several decades, adapting comic-book stories from the company of the same name into feature films which appeal to all. This is especially true in the past decade, with *DC* having just released its latest film this year, *Shazam!*, among many others. Other films that have been released by *DC* include *Wonder Woman*, *Aquaman* and *The Dark Knight*, which have also been welcomed generously by audiences.

Throughout the history of the development of such a genre, the increase in the romanticisation of villains in these films has become undeniable. Villains are no longer the one-dimensional antagonists whose spotlights are taken away by the heroes. They are now more fleshed out characters, having given clearer motivations and more distinct character traits.

Thanks to the hype and popularity over superheroes and supervillains, there has been much past research done on the paralleling influence between society's values and the representations of characters in these films. This paper seeks to provide insights on the evolution of villainy by linking it to the trend of societal mindsets and the portrayal of a *DC* villain in media.

1.2 Rationale

In the past, villains in films have been commonly portrayed as simply having “evil intentions”, or to put it simply, having a villain for the sake of having a villain. However, in the modern era, there is a rising trend in which antagonistic characters are given more depth and story. Romanticised villains have started a vogue over the past few decades.

However, many movie-goers and readers fail to understand or even see this change in villainy. They do not understand why such a trend is happening. This research thus intend to provide an explanation for this vogue by providing a bridge between the social paradigms of villainy and the presentation of villains in films. This paper aims to achieve this through highlighting and explaining the evolution of the Joker, one of the most infamous villains in *DC*. By applying theoretical frameworks such as the New Historicism Theory, this project aims to guide people to realise that there is indeed an evolution in villainy and find out the reason behind this

evolution, allowing them to empathise and identify with some of the villains. This explores the boundaries and essence of evil and disputes the topic of what makes an antagonist a villain. To support the New Historicism framework, we would also be applying corpus linguistics to uncover the differences and evolution of the Joker through the analysis of dialogue and choice of words.

The subject of collateral influence between media and reality has been constantly traversed upon, but the idea of villainy being included in this relationship is much more complex and turbid and requires further exploration.

1.3 Thesis Statement

DC movies accurately portrays the Joker as a reflection of our societal paradigms towards villainy and historical events during different time periods.

1.4 Research Questions

This research aims to analyse how evolutions of societal paradigms of villainy in our world are represented by the portrayal of villains in media. It seeks to do so by answering the following questions:

- i. How is the Joker represented in *DC* films?
- ii. How has the portrayal of the Joker evolved over time?
- iii. How is this evolution in portrayal linked to the evolution of society's impression towards criminals and villainy?

1.5 Scope / Delimitation(s)

In this research, we will only be examining villains in a total of 2 *DC* films.

This paper only focuses on films as the ideas of the copious comics of the colossal powerhouse are often overlapping. Films from *DC Comics* are mostly adapted from ideas in comics, and this provides a clearer perception of ideas.

The villains this research will analyse are from the movies 1989's *Batman (DC)* and 2008's *The Dark Knight (DC)*. These films were chosen as a significant amount of time has passed between each film's release date (19 years), ensuring there is a clear difference in how villains are portrayed. The villains from these films are the same character: the Joker; yet both of them have

very different traits and motives in their particular movies. They are also chosen as their villains, the Joker, are prominent and well known for making revolutionary breakthroughs in how villains are defined.

1.6 Significance

Comic-book films have been exploding in the film industry over the past decade, and with it comes the booming evolution of the portrayal of villains. This paper serves as an in-depth aid to these movies in explaining villainy. It helps to build an appreciation for complex villains and plot, generate greater understanding of the characterisation process of villains and allow readers to be able to identify with villains.

1.7 Limitations

In this research, we are only focusing on a certain villain from *DC* who has undergone one of the biggest evolutions in accordance to our society's mindsets. Other villains from other companies may not have undergone similar evolutions and has character traits which are not in tandem with our current societal mindsets, and we may hence be overgeneralising. We would hence like to emphasise how this trend only applies to most villains but not all.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Existing Research and Gaps in Literature

Throughout the past few decades, research has been done on the portrayal of villains in both media and real life, thanks to the popularity of the study of criminology itself. In *Villains: (re) presentations of the bad guys* (Orgain, year unspecified), Orgain examined the stereotypes held against antagonists, where most of these villains are labelled and perceived as purely nefarious. Through this research, Orgain has further explored the perimeter of good and evil and managed to reveal the negative effects of prevalent stereotypes (being old, looking queer/ agitated etc.) against antagonist. However, in this research, the reciprocal influence between real life and media/films was not accentuated. Therefore, in our research, we aim to unveil this relationship through this paper.

In *The Historical Development of Criminology* (Jeffery 1959), Jeffery focuses greatly on the development of the field of criminology throughout history as well as the definition of criminals and villains. Jeffery did a wholesome cover on the study of criminology, and this research would be using his paper as a reference. By applying the societal definition of criminals Jeffery mentioned, we aim to discuss how this shaped the portrayal of villains in movies.

Owing to DC's many films, there are many research on its comics and movies. However, in most of these research, there is little acknowledgment on the evolution of villains, let alone establishing the correlation between the evolution of villains and the societal paradigms towards evil. In *Heroic moments: a study of comic book superheroes in real-world society* (Russell, year unspecified) , Russell demonstrated that comic books deliver to readers a staging ground from which they can take away something by comparing the comic world and the real world. He also established paralleling correlations between the comic world heroes and what characteristics and traits society believes a superhero should have. In this research, we would be doing the opposite: comparing villains in films against criminals in the real world.

All in all, earlier research on the portrayal of villainy and criminal behaviours has seemed to exclude the correlation between the portrayal of villains in movies and the societal mindset of criminal offences as well as the societal perception of villains. This provides a bountiful domain that has been left to explore: analysis on how the social dogma of villains affects the portrayal of

these villains in DC, which is essentially one of the biggest comic-book companies.

2.2 Plot Summaries

Found below are synopses of the films this paper looks into.

2.2.1 *Batman* (1989)

Directed by Tim Burton, the 1989 *Batman* film follows the adventures of Batman (Michael Keaton), a crime-fighting vigilante whose alter-ego is billionaire Bruce Wayne, in the fictional Gotham City. The origin of Batman's archenemy Joker/Jack Napier (Jack Nicholson) and the conflict that ensues between them is what drives this movie. Nicholson was nominated for his role as the Joker for the Golden Globe Award for the Best Actor (Comedy or Musical).

2.2.2 *The Dark Knight* (2008)

The Dark Knight, the second installment in Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight* Trilogy, follows Bruce Wayne/Batman (Christian Bale) as he meets a mighty new enemy: the Joker (the late Heath Ledger). This iteration of the Clown Prince of Crime is hard bent on introducing anarchy into Gotham City and challenging the ethics of Batman and his fellow allies. As a result of his brilliant acting, Ledger had received a posthumous Oscar award for Best Supporting Actor.

2.3 Literary Theories/Frameworks

2.3.1 New Historicism Theory

"The New Historicism Theory attempts to understand authors in the context and as the product of the time in which they lived "(Cantor, 1993). New Historicism, first drawn up in 1980 by Stephen J. Greenblatt, acknowledges and embraces the idea that, our idea of literature will differ and evolve as times change. "New Historicism stands as a new (the first recorded use was in 1972) interpretive strategy" (Hickling, 2018) and is "characterised by a parallel reading of a text of its socio-cultural and historical conditions" (Mambrol, 2016).

The definition and portrayal of villains has undergone multiple evolutions throughout the years, which, according to the New Historicism Theory, is due to the social conditions of the writer's or director's time. Hence, by applying New Historicism onto existing superhero films, a reason for the evolution of villainy in films could be derived in the form of events that took place during the film's release and impressions of criminals and villains at that time.

2.3.2 Corpus Linguistics Approach

Corpus Linguistics is described as the “study of language based on large collections of ‘real life’ language use stored in *corpora* (or *corpuses*)--computerized databases created for linguistic research.” (Nordquist, 2019) It is said to be a “method to obtain and analyse data quantitatively and qualitatively” (Muller & Waibel, 2019) and “involves computer-based empirical analyses...of actual patterns of language use.” (English Linguistics, 2019) In simple terms, corpus linguistics looks for patterns in text files which contain a huge set of human dialogue. “Analyses are usually carried out with specialised software programmes on a computer,” (Muller & Waibel, 2019) such as Antconc, which is the software we will be using in this research. Antconc “works only with plain-text files with the file appendix .txt.” (Froelich, 2018) It would be able to run through the corpus to provide specific information such as the frequencies of words in the corpus and “show you every time the word appears in our corpus of movie reviews, and some context for it.” (Froelich, 2018)

This research will utilise the Corpus Linguistics approach to analyse the dialogue of the Jokers from the two films. Specifically, the Wordlist function in Antconc will be mainly used to find out the frequencies of the words the different Jokers use; thereafter we will look into the significance of the results.

2.3.3 Mcguire's *What Disney Villains Can Tell Us About Color Psychology* (2017)

An article by Sara Mcguire titled *What Disney Villains Can Tell Us About Colour Psychology* was uploaded on Venngage.com on 28 July 2017. It claims that “color affects our perception of character and personality” (Mcguire 2017) and provides infographics assigning Disney heroes and villains to their respective colours and explaining what the

colours mean. The article then goes on to reaffirm that the traits represented by these colours are indeed present in the Disney characters.

This paper will apply the information provided by this article when analysing the costumes of villains, hoping to identify what their get-ups connote about the characters.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 General Process

After reviewing existing research papers on villainy, we realised that there indeed has been research done on the evolution in villains, yet these research do not link this trend with societal paradigms. We then looked into theories and frameworks that connect real-life situations to media portrayal, such as the New Historicism theory.

This paper will review the Joker from *Batman* (1989) and the Joker from *The Dark Knight* (2008) through analysis of plot elements, using *What Disney Villains Can Tell Us About Color Psychology* (Mcguire, 2017) where applicable, and through the Corpus Linguistics method. By finding out how the villains are characterised differently in the two movies, we aim to show how there has been in evolution in the portrayal of the Joker; by applying New Historicism and linking the portrayal to real-life events and societal paradigms towards villainy, we aim to show that there is an accurate connection, that media representations of the Joker have evolved together with the world's concept of villainy.

3.2 Sourcing for Data

The basis for the actual cinematographic analysis of the films will be sourced from clips of the movie found on Youtube. These clips, together with other prior knowledge of the movie, would be analysed to show the characterisation of the 2 Jokers.

To find the dialogue of the Jokers from the two films to acts as the corpuses for our Corpus Linguistics method, this paper took the scripts for *Batman* (1989) (Hamm, 1986) and *The Dark Knight* (2008) (Nolan & Nolan, n.d.) from online sources and manually picked out all the lines spoken by the Joker. These corpuses were then filtered through the Antconc program.

3.3 Analysis of Data

Specific scenes from these movie clips were chosen to be analysed. Through the analysis of the Joker's physical appearance, which will be done with *What Disney Villains Can Tell Us About Color Psychology* (Mcguire, 2017), Joker's soundtrack, and Joker's actions, we come to

conclusions on the two Joker's portrayal. In the application of the Corpus Linguistics framework, we analysed and compared some of the most frequent words used by the two Jokers and how they used these words using the Word List and Collocation functions respectively, hence deriving the evolution and difference between the two.

We used the intersection between the results of both analytical scope (corpus linguistics and cinematographic analysis) and compared it to the social paradigms and events that occurred during the 1980-90s as well as the social mindsets and incidents that happened during the 2000s. We then compared the differences between the two time periods, therefore arriving at a conclusion.

Chapter 4: Discussion and Analysis

4.1 Joker *Batman* (1989)

4.1.1 Overall Characterisation of Joker

In *Batman* (1989), the character Joker (played by Jack Nicholson) was first introduced as mobster Jack Napier, the right-hand man of Gotham City's crime boss Carl Grissom (Jack Palance). The duo had a fallout and Jack fell to his apparent death in a vat of chemicals. He soon reappears as the Clown Prince of Crime, Joker, and starts a reign of terror in Gotham City.



Fig 1: The Joker makes his speech to Gotham City.

This version of the Joker is mainly portrayed as a silly, comedic and sadistic gang member. Below, we will be analysing how certain scenes bring out these character traits in him.

4.1.2 Physical Appearance

In the movie, the Joker maintains a jester-like appearance, creating a dramatic aspect and staying true to the comics. After falling into a chemical vat at Axis Chemicals, Napier's skin was bleached white, with his lips coloured red and hair dyed green. Presented as a clown wearing a purple coat, he wore a permanent smile that was resultant from his injury and failed plastic surgery.

From his physical appearance which is so similar to that of a clown, we can immediately pick out the attribute of silliness in the Joker's character. According to Tim Burton, the director of the movie, in an [interview](#) uploaded by Eyes of Cinema, he was trying to keep the Joker "on the comic book level". The "comic book level" can be defined as "comical" or rather "surreal," which means the portrayal of the Joker by Tim Burton was meant to be a comedic, flamboyant villain; a source of entertainment for the audience, and thus the clown-like features of the character. The "surrealism" of this version of the Joker's appearance is a contrast to the real world, where real-life villains and terrorists are depicted as non-comical, and portrayed such that they radiate fear and terror.



Fig 2 and Fig. 3: Joker in *Batman*, 1989

The Joker is also seen with a purple get-up and neon green hair. According to Mcguire's *What Villains can tell us about Colour Psychology*, purple is associated with power, ambition and luxury. This connotes that the Joker sees himself as superior to all and has certain goals, though unspecified and seemingly insane. Another interesting point to

note is that purple and green are common colour choices for villains' costumes. Take for example the Green Goblin and Maleficent. This could suggest how the Joker is no different from other villains we know, equally insane and power-hungry.

4.1.3 Joker's Soundtrack

To show cinematic aspects, in the scene when Joker reveals his new look to his former boss Carl Grissom and murders him in cold blood, upbeat music is played in the background, the type that is usually heard in circuses. This same cheery music is played again in the scenes where Joker breaks into the museum with his gang, where he parades into the streets to distribute free money and where he dances with Vicky Vale.

By utilising this genre of music whenever Joker enters the picture, the movie is once again suggesting how the Joker view all his ploys as mischief and fun and drilling in the fact that this iteration of Joker is supposed to be comedic and all about laughs.

4.1.4 Joker's Actions

When we are first introduced to Jack Napier (Joker), it was shown that he was having an affair with Alicia Hunt, the girlfriend of his mob's boss Carl Grisso,. Later on, after finding out about a reporter named Vicki Vale, he became infatuated with her, and resorted to extreme means in order to make her dance with him.



Fig 4: Joker forces Vicki Vale to dance with him

From this, it is hinted that Joker perceives himself as an alpha-male and is a male chauvinist, seeing women as mere objects to satisfy his sexual desires.

Halfway through the film, it was revealed that the Joker has an extremely twisted view on art. Joker revealed to Vicki in the museum that he had carved his other girlfriend's face with a knife, calling it art. It highlights his sadistic and maniacal side, bringing his warped personality into spotlight, and once again portrays the Joker as constantly objectifying women.



Fig 5: Joker displaying his work of “art.”

The twisted and dark hobby of the Joker helps to further pile up the viewers' disgust against him, in turn establishing Batman's heroic persona as Batman swoops in and challenges Joker. This champions the argument that the 1989 version of the Joker is merely a tool for concreting the popularity of Batman, nothing more than a boring antagonist who must be overthrown in order to save the world.

Another scene shows the Joker and his goons dancing and playing cheerful and light music while vandalising a museum. The purpose of this scene was to bring in a cinematic aspect that creates a lighter tone for a few minutes, and allow Nicholson to define his Joker, thereby showing the creativity of Tim Burton while Nicholson brought the Joker to life. This scene, once again, shows the comical side of the Joker from 1989.



Fig 6: Joker and his goons dancing while breaking into and vandalising a museum.

In the third-act of the movie, the Joker plans to unleash toxic gas on Gotham City. To achieve this, he lures people towards him by throwing out large sums of money. Once enough people had been smitten by the Joker and gathered around him, the Clown Prince wore a breathing mask and flipped a switch, unleashing deadly and toxic gas on the crowd.



Fig 7: Joker releasing toxic gas into the crowd through parade balloons.

It appears that the Joker's motive behind this scheme of his was simply to kill to satisfy his lust for blood. This once again hints that the Joker is a cruel, sadistic gangster who just has a fondness of murder and wants power; however, this is a very cliché villain motive and suggests that the Joker is doing evil just because he's "evil."

4.1.5 Reflection of the Real World in 1989

In this section, this research would be driving the New Historicism theory into action by linking our analysis of the 1989 Joker's traits to the happenings of 1989 and the world's paradigms of villainy at that time.

Firstly, it has been noticed, as stated previously in 4.1.4, that Joker was portrayed as somewhat of a male chauvinist. A quick research shows that this idea may have been influenced by the famous second wave of feminism, which prevailed from 1960-1980. It was during this wave where ideologies against pornography, prostitution and female oppression began flourishing. Moreover, the third wave of feminism started one year after the release of the *Batman* film. Under the residual effects of the second wave and the hype that led to the third, a small element of sexism could be scented from both the villain and the overall film itself. Additionally, it could also be affected by the Bronze Age of Comics, which was from 1970-1986. During this period of time, comics started to reflect social issues such as racism and sexism. There is also the probability of the film being influenced by the trend of the decade. Whichever the case, the Joker, being portrayed as a mobster who is also a sexual predator, could be a reflection of how the world believed that chauvinistic and oppressive men were the true villains of the world at that time. It also goes to show how it was common to associate gangsters with sexual offences.

Next, the overall idea of the Joker was also portrayed in a less serious shade as shown in the previous sections, giving Joker a slightly comical facade in this film, perhaps to appeal to the audience of that time. This proposes that the world of 1989 still did not take villains seriously, seeing them as mere entertainment. The Silver Age of Comics may have some influence in this aspect. Many may still have not adapted to the Bronze Age and are still revelling in the jokey, light-hearted Silver Age. This may also be because the mindset during the 1980s was that criminals were below the morally upright and should not be thought highly of.

Lastly, Joker's main motives in this movie, as brought out above, appear to simply be to kill, take over Gotham and gain power and popularity, though it is not specifically mentioned in the film. There is some form of revenge driving him, but this dissipates early on after Napier has transformed into the Joker. As such, the Joker's goals appear to be that of most other villains in media: kill and become powerful. This reduces the Joker in this film to a stereotypical villain who is "evil" and because of that, commits evil. Paradigms towards criminals of the world at that time would thus include mob bosses committing crime because of their desire for chaos and authority, and people who have horrible intentions and as such perform bad deeds, highlighting people's one-sided understanding and lack of empathy for criminals at that time.

Overall, the 1989 Joker reflects how the world saw oppressors of women and gangsters who cause chaos as villains, and brings to light how the world has yet to learn how to empathise with criminals and looked down on them.

4.2 Joker *The Dark Knight* (2008)

4.2.1. Overall Characterisation of Joker

The Dark Knight presents the Joker to be a mysterious, psychopathic terrorist whose seemingly sole aim is to bring chaos and corruption to Gotham City. He is highly manipulative and cunning despite appearing insane, forcing Batman, Harvey Dent and many others of Gotham to make difficult ethical decisions. It is hinted in many parts of the film that the Joker has a troubled past and a military background, and this paper will be discussing how this is portrayed in the movie.



Fig 8: The 2008 version of the Joker.

4.2.2 Physical Appearance of The Joker

Although the Joker indeed appears like a clown like all his other incarnations, the origin of his look is unlike that of his 1989 counterpart. This Joker did not fall into a chemical vat which altered his look and twisted his mouth into a permanent smile; in fact, this Joker does not smile most of the time. This Joker's appearance is mostly makeup.

In *The Dark Knight*, the Joker has his face powdered white and hair dyed a yellowish-green. His eye sockets are coloured black and red paint traces his lips and along his Glasgow scars, forming a smile. Overall, the colour palette used for this Joker has been toned down in comparison to the 1989 version, and the makeup is done in a messy manner where it is slowly peeling off, highlighting a darker iteration of the Clown Prince of Crime.

It is clear from the wide grin and the illusion of deep-set eyes that the purpose of this Joker's clown face is not to entertain but to strike fear. It is more of a "war mask" than an "accident" or "entertainment piece." This helps to convey how the Joker is a terrorist, and the overall unkemptness portrays him as mad and unpredictable. According to an interview with IGN, makeup artist John Caglione Jr. said that the lack of precision in makeup application was intentional to "give The Joker an organic appearance that matched director Christopher Nolan's realistic take on Gotham City and a crazed style that reflected the character's unpredictable nature."

Meanwhile, the Joker's "Glasgow" scars or "Chelsea smile" hints at a troubled background. He gives several contradicting stories about how he got injured, though none of them seem to be the truth. One theory on the Internet which has risen in popularity would be that he got his scars from a military accident, suggesting his past as a former soldier.



Fig 9: Joker's smile in *The Dark Knight*

4.2.3 Joker's Soundtrack

After listening to the Joker's theme on YouTube, we realised that it was a stark contrast to that of the Joker from the 1989 film. This Joker's soundtrack is eerie, as if it was out of a horror movie, immediately telling viewers that this Joker is a darker iteration of its comic-book self. There are some parts of his theme which are fast-paced. This gives a sense of action and the feeling that a heist is going on, giving the impression that this Joker is very serious and a strategist.

4.2.4 Joker's Schemes

The film begins with a bank heist. The Joker's lackeys carry out the job well, but with each of them murdering the other once their role was complete so they had one less person to share the money with, as per the Joker's orders. At the end of it all, it is revealed that the last henchman was the Joker himself.

This introduction draws us in to the fact that the Joker is an extremely cunning criminal. He makes use of others, playing on their greed so that they were tricked into

helping him rob the bank and getting rid of all the lackeys for him. He was also present during the infiltration, ensuring that everything went to plan and there were no betrayals.



Fig 10: Joker pretending to be one of his henchmen before his robbery.

“Do you want to know how I got these scars?” The Joker asks this question multiple times in this film, and each time he voluntarily provides a backstory different from the previous. He first tells criminal Gambol that his drunkard father, who was abusing his mother, had sliced his mouth into a smile; then, he tells Rachel Dawes that in order to convince his ex-wife who was scarred while dealing with gamblers that he would stay by her side, he gave himself his own scars (around the mouth as his wife always asked why he does not smile more), which sadly scared his wife away.



Fig 11: *“Do you wanna know how I got these scars?”*

As shown, the Joker changes his story according to his audience: an abusive, drunk father for Gambol the mob boss and a wife who does not spare a thought for his husband’s feelings for Rachel, a lady who is stuck in a love triangle between Bruce Wayne and Harvey Dent. The Joker is clearly very observant and is a cunning manipulator, knowing how to gain the attention of the listener in an instant. At the same time, the often evolving tale he tells suggests that what the Joker shares is fake, suggesting that this is a man with a hidden past, or maybe no past at all; this is what makes him so like terrorists in our world: mysterious men who simply want to bring about chaos to the world.

The iconic interrogation scene involves the Batman trying to get information out of the Joker. The Caped Crusader explicitly stated that he has “one rule,” which is never to kill, but the Joker managed to drive the Batman to the point where he almost broke his rule in just a split second. He casually mentions that he has taken Batman’s love interest Rachel Dawes hostage, causing Batman to lose his nerve and start beating the clown up violently. It is amazing how the Joker knows how to cleverly find his way into his enemy’s heart and drive him to betray himself.



Fig 12: The famous scene where Batman interrogates the Joker.

In a particular scene, the Joker crashes a meeting with numerous mob bosses. When the bosses intended to take down the clown after being enraged by him, he pulled open his waistcoat revealing multiple hand grenades strapped to it ready to blow. This simple act of self-defence has long ramifications. The Joker has no qualms committing suicide in his journey to achieve his long-term goal of introducing anarchy. This is not unlike terrorists of our world who willingly give up their lives in suicide missions just to bring about chaos.

Besides simply wanting to introduce chaos, another of the Joker's goals was to prove that deep down every man is corruptible. He was able to persuade Harvey Dent, Gotham City's "White Knight," to turn against his morality after half his face burned off in an accident which proved the incapability of the current law and order. Dent, now known as Two-Face, went on a killing spree to "set things right." Not only does this bring out the inner manipulator in Joker, who was so apt in turning Harvey down the dark path in just a matter of minutes, but it also mirrors the act of a terrorist, corrupting the supposedly incorruptible and drawing them into their regime.



Fig 13: Harvey Dent after becoming Two-Face.

The Joker pulls off a similar trick near the end of the movie. Two boats, one containing civilians and the other containing police officers and criminals, both with bombs planted on them. Each boat was given a trigger to the other boat's bomb, and if no one presses the trigger when the time runs out, the Joker himself will blow both boats up. His scheme was so carefully planned that the victims fell right for it at first, almost making unethical decisions and blowing up the other ship. It was without a doubt a clever experiment. Yet he was so sure that it would work that he was startled when both groups of passengers refused to blow each other up. The Joker is portrayed as a stubborn man who believes he is always right and his plots will always come to fruition, just like real life terrorists.

4.2.4 Reflections of Real Life Villainy

"Some men just want to watch the world burn."

~Alfred Pennyworth

This comment was targeted at the Joker, highlighting his deranged motivation for instilling chaos into the world. This bears a largely similar resemblance to terrorism in the modern-day society. By applying New Historicism and doing some quick research, we realised that the inspiration of the film might have come from one of the most infamous terrorist attacks in history, which happened to occur in the decade *The Dark Knight* was

released: the 9/11 terrorist attacks of 2001. On 11 September 2001, followers of Al-Qaeda, an Islamic extremist group led by Osama bin Laden, hijacked 4 planes and carried out suicide attacks in the USA. The first two planes hit the World Trade Center's twin towers in New York, while the third crashed at the Pentagon and the fourth at Pennsylvania. This incident, together with many other global terrorist attacks in the following years, could have influenced *The Dark Knight* to portray its Joker as a terrorist which reflects how the world at that time viewed terrorists as a major evil. And as discussed above, it is true that the movie's Joker is an accurate adaptation of a terrorist.

With reference to *The Dark Knight and The National Security State* (Payne 2014), he not only has the military skills and intelligence typical in militant terrorists, but also the warped mindset of them. "Joker's political purpose seems to be something akin to anarchy as he aims to destroy the fiber of organized society and instill mass fear," (Payne 2014) as shown in how the Joker unleashes havoc on Gotham, corrupts politicians and heroes and tempts citizens to make unethical decisions. This is similar to the aims of real-life terrorists who bring about chaos not because they are simply power-hungry but because they want to see society topple (Payne 2014). Corrupting politicians is interesting as it the "duty" of a terrorist to get rid of all social stability in the country. The Joker did so by manipulating Harvey Dent to become Two-Face and almost pushing Batman into breaking his no-killing rule by instigating him during the interrogation scene. His actions to carry out his aims are also reminiscent of an actual terrorist's wherein goals prevail over life, whether it is his own or others'.

At this particular period of time, America was also engaged in multiple conflicts in the Middle East, leading to terror, fear and unrest amongst the Americans. Furthermore, the film came at the end of George W. Bush's second term at a point where the safety of domesticity was being eroded. The threat for Americans- both physical and emotional - loomed large. The Joker was shown explicitly preying on those fears, striking at the heart of Gotham with acts of not just extreme violence, but randomness. Upon reviewing the ending, which showed the Joker's death, although it was quite abrupt and sudden, after applying what we have analysed, we believe that the fall of the Joker was intentional in a sense where it symbolises the pause to the reign and terrorism in order to give the viewers hope and motivation after the recent 9/11 terrorist attack.

4.3 Corpus Linguistics on the Jokers

The corpus linguistics approach will now be utilised to pick out unique patterns in the two Jokers' dialogue. We had sourced for the scripts of *Batman* (1989) and *The Dark Knight* (2008) online, with that of *The Dark Knight* being one that was compiled by viewers of the film since the late Heath Ledger had improved greatly for his role as the Joker.

After manually picking out just the Jokers' dialogue from the two scripts and compiling them into two different text files for the two movies, we ran them through the Antconc 3.5.8 programme. The results were interesting.

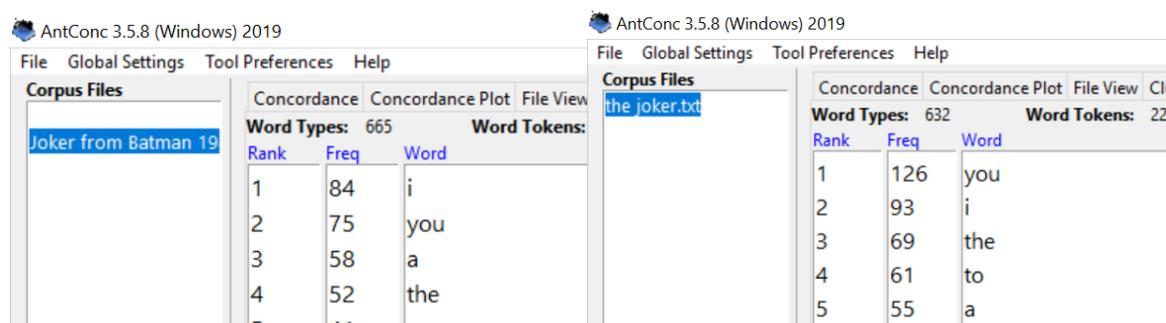


Fig 14 and 15: The results of the word frequencies in Antconc for Joker's dialogue in *Batman* and *The Dark Knight* respectively.

For starters, through the Word List function, we found that the most frequent word the 1989 incarnation of Joker says is "I," while that of the 2008 incarnation is "you." These two words are direct opposites of each other when it comes to their meaning. "I" is normally used to refer to oneself while "you" refers to others. This suggests that the 1989 Joker is more self-centred and is a maniac who only kills to satisfy his own sadistic nature. The 2008 Joker, on the other hand, is decorated as a terrorist with extreme and violent ideologies, since "you" shows how his goals are less for himself but more for the society around him.

Furthermore, the Concordance Hits function shows that when it comes to "I," the older Joker most frequently uses it in "I'm." The phrase "I'm" or "I am" strongly hints how the Joker believes that he should be the main character of the party. The old Joker also uses "I'm gonna/going" to express his idea, implying that the Joker thinks that the world revolves around him and that nothing is going to stop him. Interestingly, the old Joker uses "my" pretty frequently too. The word "my" is a strong indication that someone or something belongs to a certain

individual. In the old Joker’s case, “my” could possibly suggest that the joker is overly possessive and self-centered.

In the usage of “you,” the newer Joker uses it most frequently in “you know” and “you want”. The phrases “you know” and “you want” on the other hand gives the impression of a manipulative persona of the Joker, since the words “know” and “want” connotes desire and knowledge, which is something many pursues. This suits his identity as a terrorist who is trying to change the world by proving and convincing everyone of a deranged ideology.

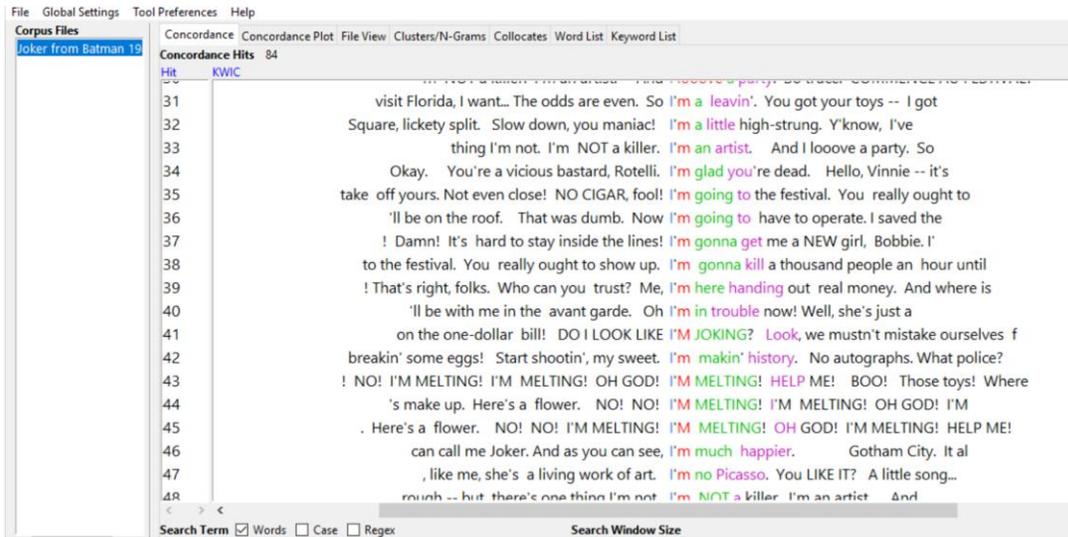
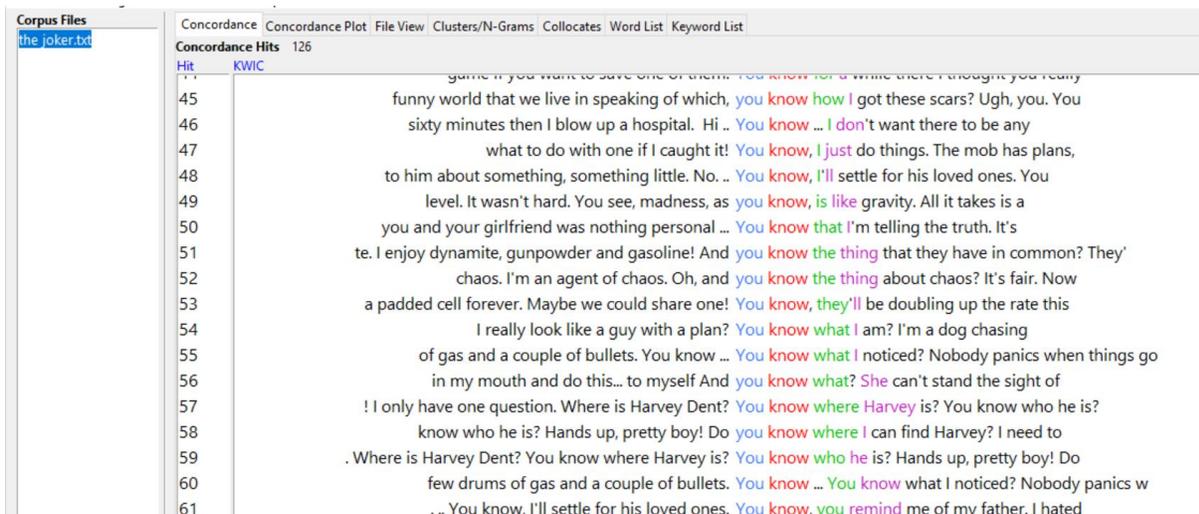


Fig 16: Results of the most frequent phrase the Joker uses “I” with, which is “I’m”, in *Batman* (1989)



... Come on ... Come on ... Come on ... I want you to see ... Come on ... I'll hit me.
 we cut you up into little pieces and feed you to your pooches? Hmm? And then we'll see
 my city. A freak? Why don't we cut you up into little pieces and feed you to your
 I know the truth. There's no going back. You've changed things ... Forever. I don't want to
 . Why don't you give me a call when you wanna start taking things a little more seriously
 more seriously? Here's my card. How about alive? You want to know how I got these scars? My
 are beautiful. You look nervous. Is it the scars? You want to know how I got them? Come here.
 . How many of your friends have I killed? Do you want to know why I use a knife? Guns
 this is how crazy Batman has made Gotham. If you want to order in Gotham the Batman must take
 's not good! Now there is the Batman. Oh, you want to play! Come on. Come on ... Come on ...
 're gonna have to play my little game if you want to save one of them. You know for
 's the schemers that put you where you are. You were a schemer. You had plans. And look where
 cops and lawyers wouldn't dare cross any of you. What happened? Did your balls drop off? You see
 changed things ... Forever. I don't want to kill you! What would I do without you? Go back to
 the world allows them to be. I'll show you. When the chips are down these civilized people,
 your strength. Don't worry. I'm gonna tell you where they are. Both of them. And that's

Fig 17 and 18: Results of the most frequent phrases with “you” in *The Dark Knight* (2008)

From another perspective, this research has also analysed the phrases that contain the word “little.” This particular word was chosen as it was one of the very few words ranking high on the word frequency list that had a proper meaning for both Jokers’ dialogues. In the 1989 *Batman*, the Joker uses phrases such as “little dance,” “little present,” “little high-strung,” “little song,” etc.. The words used together with “little” such as “dance,” “present,” “high-strung” and “song” all connote a more light-hearted mood. On the other hand, the Joker from 2008 uses phrases like “little mask”, “little gamble”, “little anarchy” and “cut you up into little pieces”. These phrases gives a darker perspective to the 2008 Joker as they all seem to symbolise a darker nature. The varying ways of the usage of the word “little” suggests that the Joker from 1989 has a more “clown-like” air around him, while the 2008 version of Joker has a more serious and dark facade. This result intersects with the point mentioned previously in this research, that the Joker from *Batman* 1989 is portrayed in a more comical way than the Joker in *The Dark Knight* 2008.

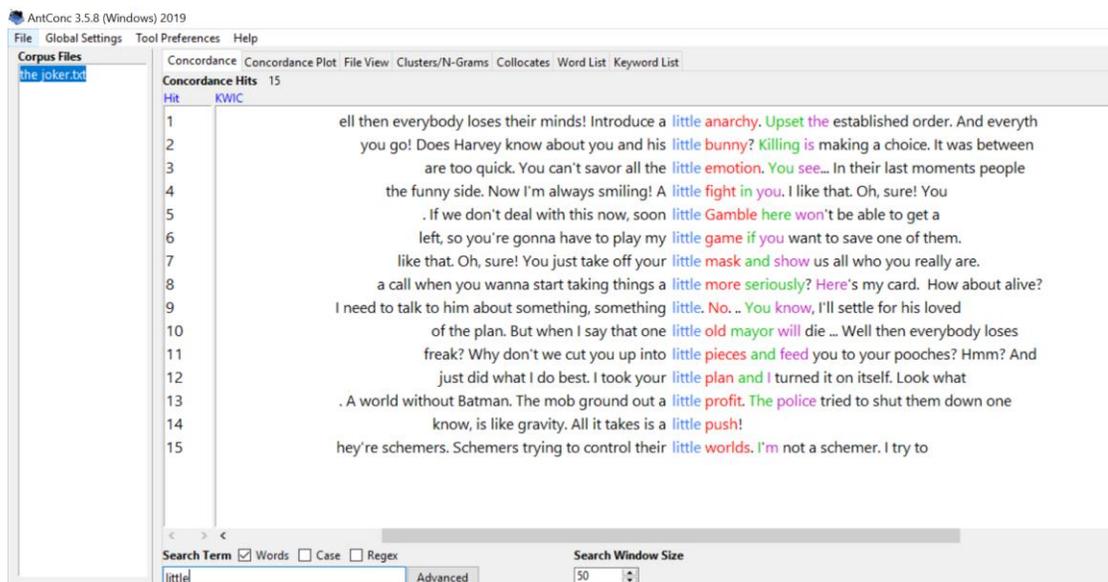


Fig 19: Results of the phrases with “little” in *The Dark Knight* (2008)

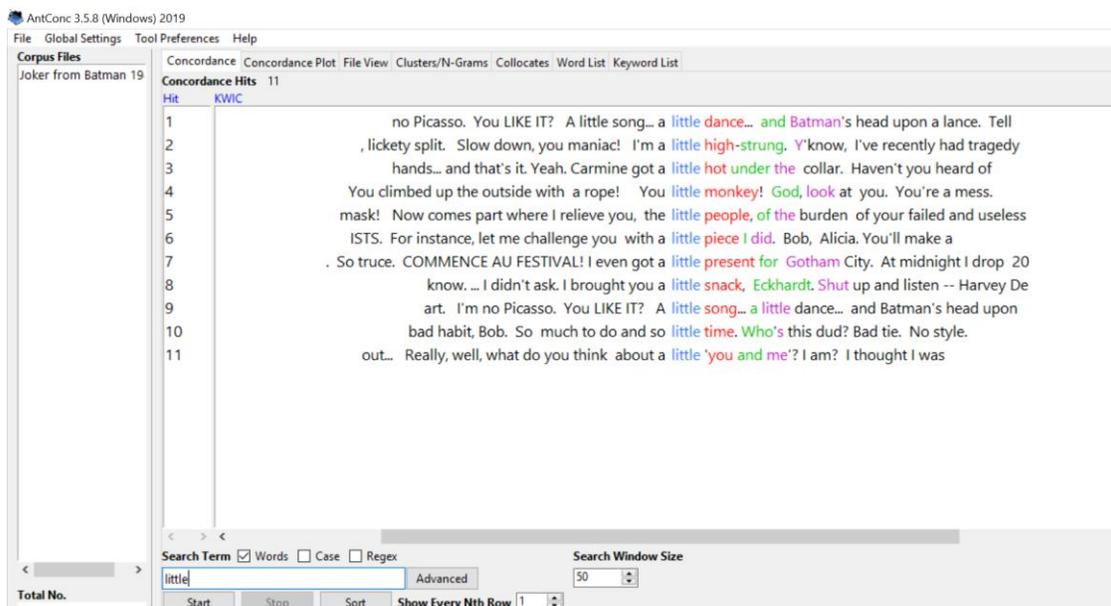


Fig 20: Results of the phrases with “little” in *Batman* (1989)

4.4 Comparison between 1989 Joker and 2008 Joker

One of the most evident contrasts between the two versions of the Jokers would probably be in the way they are presented. While the 1989 version of the Joker was represented in a more comical manner, the 2008 film shows a more serious and dark depiction of the supervillain. The older version of Joker was characterised as a deranged supervillain who kills to satisfy his own desires by striking openly in front of large crowds. On the other hand, the newer version was rendered as a terrorist who plans everything in the dark and strikes fear into people by not only acting with extreme ideologies, but also with randomness, causing chaos and terror. One could say that the older version of Joker is somewhat of a supervillain and the newer one is more of an antagonist who opposes our hero and sees one's goals as correct, rather than just a simplified version of a killing machine. In *The Dark Knight* 2008, the Joker also provided several scopes and lenses where we can have a glimpse at his past and the reason to which he turned insane. Although these "tickets" to his past contradict each other, it cannot be denied that these stories provides a more in-depth view of our supervillain. The film *Batman* 1989 however, put little effort to provide explanations into the Joker's past, only labelling Joker as a servant of the evil at the start of the film.

The variations in the depiction of Joker in the two films is no doubt, due to the change of times (application of New Historicism), which prompts for different societal dogmas and different historical events. A possible explanation for the change of the comical facade of the old Joker to a more serious, philosophical new Joker may be due to the Bronze Age of Comics, which is also often referred to as the prelude to modern superhero stories. Stories influenced by the Bronze Age of Comics, which was the period of comics often have a darker facade and reflects real life issues such as racism and terrorism. Hence the more serious depiction of Joker in *The Dark Knight*.

Next, this research will postulate an explanation for the change in the way the two Jokers shed blood. Firstly, as mentioned previously, this difference could be influenced by the rise of terrorism during the 2000s. They strike with extreme violence and adventitiousness, which is reflected in the actions and schemes of the newer version of Joker. Furthermore, this could also be associated with the revamping dogma of the presentation of villains. Starting from the early 2000s, many films in the cinema has started to turn to romanticising villains or giving villains more depths and backstories. The human side of these villains are being brought into light, the weaknesses of these antagonists are put to test, and the past of these malefactors are given attention. People start to turn towards complex stories, where the villain is not served as a stepping stone for the heroic

persona of the superhero. This vogue probably played a huge part in affecting how the 2008 film *The Dark Knight* portrayed the Joker, seeing that the directors took effort to establish the Joker's background, rather than just dismissing the Joker as a maniac in the film *Batman*.

The application of corpus linguistics advocates the idea that the older version of the Joker is a self-centred, sadistic psychopath while the newer version of this villain is a terrorist with a more “revolutionary” and extreme ideology for the world. In the usage of this framework, we can see that a societal image of a criminal in the days of 1989 was reflected by the 1989 Joker, who is typically spurred on by his own personal motivations. Contrary to the 1989 Joker, the 2008 Joker reflects that the society in 2008 views the villains of their time as terrorists who have “big ideas” for the society. This result is on par with the assumption that part of the terrorist perspective of the 2008 Joker is a result of the 2001 9/11 attacks, which could be a reason as to why Joker is portrayed as a terrorist in the 2008 *The Dark Knight*.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The Joker has been a prominent and distinct villain in the history of *DC* films. A killer clown that has gone mad, the main basis of the Joker has been most of the time unchanged, yet specific details such as his motivations, his ideologies and his beliefs have evolved throughout the films over time.

Through the length of this research, our team has realised several significant changes in the societal mindset towards villainy which was partly resultant from incidents at the different periods of time. The silhouettes of these evolution could be seen in the way the Joker is portrayed in these films that we analysed. This allowed us to come to a conclusion: that the evolution of society's impression towards criminals and villainy is constantly and accurately reflected in the different portrayals of the Joker. The Joker in 1989 was represented as a male chauvinist and a one-dimensional maniac who sheds blood to satisfy his own desires which was partly due to the influence from the second wave of feminism. Joker in 2008 however, was portrayed as a terrorist with extreme and violent ideologies, which was highly likely to have been influenced from the rise of terrorism (highlighted by the 9/11 attack).

Therefore, we have answered the following research questions:

- i. How is the Joker represented in DC films?
- ii. How has the portrayal of the Joker evolved over time?
- iii. How is this evolution in portrayal linked to the evolution of society's impression towards criminals and villainy?

In conclusion, societal paradigms towards villainy and historical events indeed inspire the way the Joker has been portrayed in the media. The same can possibly be inferred for other comic-book villains, but more research to prove this would have been done if we had more time. If offered an opportunity to further extend on this research, we intend to look into analysis of other *DC* villains and possibly even *Marvel* ones.

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