



Facultade de Filoloxía

Grao en Lingua e Literatura Inglesas

Intermedial Joker: the evolution of the character from comic to film and TV

Graduando: Antonio Reboiro Martínez

Director: Anxo Abuín González

Curso académico: 2016/2017



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1. What is transmedia storytelling?

In this first chapter of my work I will explain, by the use of different examples and quoting different experts in the matter, what is transmedia storytelling, which is the foundation of my work as a whole. I will base my approach fundamentally in the work of both Henry Jenkins (2006, 2009, 2013) and Carlos Alberto Scolari (2010, 2014) and I will complement it with the work of other authors.

The concept *transmedia storytelling* was first introduced by Henry Jenkins in a column for *Technology Review* in January of 2003. This expression was used by Jenkins to explain the phenomenon of a story being told in different channels of media. Later on he expanded on this idea in the chapter “Searching for the Origami Unicorn: The Matrix and Transmedia Storytelling” in his book *Convergence Culture* (2006). But before going any further, the term *transmedia storytelling* should be defined. This is the definition Jenkins himself gives: “stories that unfold across multiple media platforms, with each medium making distinctive contributions to our understanding of the world, a more integrated approach to franchise development than models based on urtexts and ancillary products” (2006, 283). With that being said, Jenkins points out the difference between transmedia storytelling and transmedia branding. A tie-in *Star Wars* (1977-) novel, for example, should be considered transmedia storytelling because the events depicted in it expand upon the premise of the movie, while a *Star Wars* candy bar would be transmedia branding, because even though it contains the franchise’s name in it, it has nothing to do with the story presented. Jenkins also draws a distinction between *adaptation* and *extension*. An adaptation reproduces the original story in a new medium in the most faithful way, while an extension tries to expand the original story by, for example, adding new elements that help our understanding of the original.

As the title of his essay indicates, Jenkins defines the seven core principles of transmedia storytelling, which I will explain now.

“Spreadability vs. Durability”: Jenkins explicates spreadability in his book alongside Sam Ford and Joshua Green *Spreadable Media* (2013). In this book, Jenkins uses the example of *Britain’s Got Talent* (2007-) participant Susan Boyle, who became an international phenomenon just a couple of days after her performance in the program. Jenkins explains how the visits of videos of said performance dwarfed record-breaking audiences in television (in fact, the first video that pops out if you search her name on Google accumulates more than 207 million views as of April 2017) and how this was done without help from the media, simply by word-to-mouth, the video is shared via social media and it ends up becoming a global phenomenon. Jenkins defines those who share media this

way as “grassroots agents” and comments on the unpredictability they possess, that is, it is sometimes impossible to know if something is going to go viral, which ends up affecting the program itself, that is not able to capitalize on it. Basically spreadability is “the technical resources that make it easier to circulate some kinds of content than others, the economic structures that support or restrict circulation, the attributes of a media text that might appeal to a community’s motivation for sharing material, and the social networks that link people through the exchange of meaningful bytes” (Jenkins 2013, 4). The concept of drillability was created by Jason Mittell as an answer to spreadability, Jenkins quotes the definition in its entirety and so will I:

Perhaps we need a different metaphor to describe viewer engagement with narrative complexity. We might think of such programs as drillable rather than spreadable. They encourage a mode of forensic fandom that encourages viewers to dig deeper, probing beneath the surface to understand the complexity of a story and its telling. Such programs create magnets for engagement, drawing viewers into the storyworlds and urging them to drill down to discover more...The opposition between spreadable and drillable shouldn't be thought of as a hierarchy, but rather as opposing vectors of cultural engagement. Spreadable media encourages horizontal ripples, accumulating eyeballs without necessarily encouraging more long-term engagement. Drillable media typically engage far fewer people, but occupy more of their time and energies in a vertical descent into a text's complexities. (Jenkins 2009, 3)

An example of this would be TV shows like *Lost* (2004-2010) or *Twin Peaks* (1990-1991), that keep the audience engaged by adding constant mysteries to the story. This makes it more difficult for the show to attract new viewers, as the plot grows too complicated to be followed by new viewers by creates and audience that remains loyal to the show. It also helps to spread fan theories and discussions that serve to pass time between episodes and seasons.

“Continuity vs. Multiplicity”: Continuity refers to a single story being followed, like it happens in comic books, where there is a single storyworld and every story is part of it. On the other hand, multiplicity is “the possibility of alternative versions of the characters or parallel universe versions of the stories” (Jenkins 2009, 3), for example, *Spider-Man India* (Devarajan, Kang, Seetharaman, 2004-2005) a comic series in which the superhero is reimagined in India and that happens in a parallel universe to the mainstream Marvel comic book continuity. Multiplicity can be used to explore new stories and ideas that could not be done if the mainstream continuity was followed or that could ruin said continuity if done.

“Immersion vs. Extractability”. Both refer to the relation between fiction and the real life of a fan. Immersion refers to the possibility that the fan has of accessing a fantasy world. An example of this would be the DisneyWorld theme park, in which everything is made to resemble different Dis-

ney franchises. Extractability is quite the opposite, to take something from the fictional world into the real world. For example, buying a *Harry Potter* (1997-) Hogwarts uniform or Darth Vader's helmet from *Star Wars*.

“Worldbuilding”. As the name indicates it means to create a world in which the stories take place. In *Star Wars*, for example, there is far more going on than what we see in the movies and the introduction of a new character can potentially lead to solo stories of said character. With this, the focus of the narration moves from the story or the main characters to the world itself. This is related to drillability as it gives the fan more depth in everything that is going on and can lead to multiple stories being told at the same through different media, each with a different focus but located in the same continuity. Klastrup and Tosca defend that these worlds “are abstract content systems from which a repertoire of fictional stories can be actualized or derived across a variety of media forms” (2014, 296). According to these authors, the transmedial world is a mental image shared by the fan community that they refer to as “worldness” that is formed by three different dimensions: “mythos”, the current struggle of that world that gives a meaning to the narration; “topos”, the setting of the world in both time and space; and “ethos”, the moral code of the characters in that world. Any disruption of this dimension, would be seen negatively by the fan community and create backlash against the story.

“Seriality”. This one is nothing new as it has been done since the 19th century by authors like Charles Dickens, who divided their stories in chapters released periodically in order to spike reader's interest.

Before defining it though, we need to establish the difference between ‘story’ and ‘plot’. The story is what happens, while the plot refers to the sequence in which the information of the story is available to us. Seriality consists of, instead of making the entire story available at the same time (like a traditional book), making it available little by little through different installments (like the episodes of a television series). In order to keep the audience hooked the use of cliffhangers at the end of installments is very common. The difference between traditional seriality and transmedia seriality is that, of course, the transmedia one occurs through different media. Normally, the seriality in transmedia happens in a non-linear way, so it can be consumed by the audience in any specific order. For example, the events depicted in a *Star Wars* novel may take place between movies, but it is not necessary to read said novel to understand the events in the next movie, the only thing necessary is to watch the previous one. There is of course a linear seriality in transmedia, but even today it is more difficult to find because it depends on the audience following the story through those different installments, something not everyone is willing to do.

An example of this is explained by Jenkins in “Searching for the Origami Unicorn: The Matrix and Transmedia Storytelling”. *The Matrix* franchise was definitely ahead of its time when it comes to transmedia narrations. Not only is it three movies (1999, 2003, 2003), is also an animated series, a comic book and a video game. And all of those are necessary towards understanding the entirety of the story. Jenkins comments on the example of the animated short *The Last Flight of the Osiris* (2003); in it, the main character, Jue, sacrifices herself to deliver a letter to the crew of the Nebuchadnezzar. To retrieve this letter is also the first mission in the *Enter the Matrix* (2003) video game and finally, the Osiris’s last transmissions are referenced at the beginning of *Matrix Reloaded* (2003). He explains how this kind of storytelling hurt the movie’s reception by the critics, who considered it was too confusing for audiences, who would not understand many of the plot points as they were not explained in the movie itself and some of the critics even qualified it as more of a marketing strategy than anything else.

“Subjectivity” refers to how transmedia content of a story often involves secondary characters as the main focus, which gives the audience a glimpse of events they may already know, but from a different point of view. Jenkins compares this with the traditional epistolary novels, in which the author refuses to acknowledge that the work was written by him or her or with more modern examples, like *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), a movie that disguises itself as a documentary. Another example would be how transmedia projects rely on mock websites that are supposed to be real in the context of the movie. The reason why secondary characters are usually involved in this kind of promotion is because first, it is usually more difficult to get the main characters to do things like ‘webisodes’, and second it may help said characters to become more relevant in the eyes of the audience.

“Performance”. To explain this one, Jenkins uses two terms: cultural attractors (concept created by Pierre Lévy) and cultural activators. “The artwork will be what Lévy calls ‘cultural attractor’, drawing together and creating common ground between diverse communities; we might also describe it as a cultural activator, setting into motion the decipherment, speculation and elaboration” (Jenkins 2006, 101). Basically, the cultural attractor draws the audience into the story, while the activator motivates them into getting more involved with it. For example, a couple of weeks ago the first trailer of the new *Star Wars* movie came out and, within seconds, fan communities all over the world were analyzing every single frame of it trying to find something that could shed some light into the plot of the film. Another example, by Jenkins, is centered on the “HP Alliance” an activist group that uses situations from the Harry Potter book series to spark social change, according to their web they “turn fans into heroes”. In the end, fan creations can contribute to the product as whole if, for exam-

ple, the author notices a lot of interest in one of the main characters he/she may put more focus into developing it.

Even though Henry Jenkins is by far the most recognizable figure in transmedia studies he is not the only one, and he is also not the only one to make his own principles as to how transmedia works. In fact, in an article for the web blog *Hipermediaciones*, Carlos Scolari summarizes the fifteen principles of transmedia, the first seven are Jenkins' while the other eight correspond to Jeff Gómez. They go as follows:

1. Content is originated by one or a very few visionaries. 2. Cross-media rollout is planned early in the life of the franchise. 3. Content is distributed to three or more media platforms. 4. Content is unique, adheres to platform-specific strengths, and is not repurposed from one platform to the next. 5. Content is based on a single vision for the story world. 6. Concerted effort is made to avoid fractures and schisms. 7. Effort is vertical across company, third parties and licensees. 8. Rollout features audience participatory elements, including web portal, social networking and story-guided user-generated content. (Scolari, 2010)

Even though Scolari agrees with them in general he, for example, disagrees in the first principle, that he sees as a variation of the criticized “heroic theory of invention”.

Jeff Gómez is, by the way, the CEO of Starlight Runner Entertainment. In *Getting Started with Transmedia Storytelling* (2011), Robert Pratten mentions a talk Gómez made in the StoryWorld conference in Los Angeles in 2012 titled “The 10 Commandments of 21st Century Franchise Production”. Those commandments go as follows:

1. “Know the brand essence”, basically, understand what the audience likes about the franchise. It is not uncommon for different reboots of films, for example, because they fail to convey this, like the *Star Wars* prequels or the current DC Comics movie franchise.
2. “Storyworld rules all”, as in it should be the main focus of the development team.
3. “Put up tent poles”, it is necessary for all the members of the team to know where the story is headed.
4. “Hire the best”, self explanatory.
5. “Organize resources for canon and assets”, this includes the creation of a ‘bible’ that contains the key points of the plot to ensure consistency in the story.
6. “Establish a clearing house”, “a steering group of representatives from the major stakeholders must meet regularly to guide the franchise and the plot forward – recommending, sharing, discussing new initiatives and heading off potential conflicts of interest” (Pratten 2015, 9).

7. “Incentivize stakeholders”.
8. “Validate audience participation”, as discussed before, the participation of the audience is crucial in transmedia storytelling.
9. “Licensing, marketing and merchandise”, like Jenkins’ extractability principle, to give the audience the ability to insert the story into their daily lives.
10. “Be accessible and additive”, so it is easy for new fans to approach your product.

This ten commandments are interestingly different from the principles of Jenkins in the sense that he takes a more ‘academic’ approach to transmedia storytelling while Gómez’s approach is more on the commercial side of things.

Continuing with Pratten’s book, after he explains this two points of view he comes up with his own, that are different from the other two, with the idea of his being used in favor of creating a transmedia universe from scratch (in fact, that is more or less the purpose of the book). He calls them “7 Tenets of Transmedia Storyworlds” (Pratten 10). This are those characteristics:

“Pervasive”, the story will be built around the audience – connecting with them across devices. “Persistent”, the story evolves over time, reacting to audience engagement. “Participatory”, the audience interacts with characters and other audience members. “Personalized”, the story remembers decisions and conversations and becomes tailored to each audience member. “Connected”, the experience connects across platforms and to the real world – allowing the story to be contextual such as integrating current weather conditions, tides, air quality and such. “Inclusive” a range of devices and engagement modes are accommodated so that as many people as possible are allowed to enjoy the story even if at different levels of depth and sophistication. “Cloud-based” a network intelligence controls the story and the experience from a central core – able to see all content and all the audience. (Pratten 2015, 11)

Pratten is also the author of the approach “Transmedia as a Tool for Audience Building” (2010). This is basically a combination of Jenkins’ first principle “spreadability vs. drillability”, make the audience care for the story and let them be the main force of marketing. An example could be how when a new Netflix show comes out it is immediately trending topic on Twitter simply because of the people talking about it, which leads to more people wanting to check it out.

Speaking about Scolari, he is also one of the leading forces in transmedia studies and in his book alongside Paolo Bertetti and Matthew Freeman *Transmedia Archaeology* (2014) he defines transmedia as this: “Media Industry (canon) + Collaborative Culture (fandom) = Transmedia Storytelling” (Scolari 2014, 3). Scolari also points out that from a semiotic perspective there is no real difference between works by the original author and works by the fan community and that, in the end, they all combine in the creation of a fictional universe.

He also gives another possible equation for transmedia storytelling in this: “Narrative Expansion + Media Expansion = Transmedia Storytelling”. For Scolari, narrative expansion refers to how the storyline expands in the same medium by introducing both new characters and events, for example the introduction of Robin in the *Batman* (1939-) comic series. Media expansion, on the other hand, refers to how the storytelling spreads from one media to another, like *The Walking Dead* (2003-) comic book series becoming a television show.

Also, Scolari explains “transmedia narrative strategies” (Scolari 2014, 2391). These strategies are four: addition, that expands the original text. It includes webisodes, prequels, sequels or alternate endings. Omission is the opposite, the subtraction of elements. An example would be trailers, in which information is omitted in order to hype the audience. Transposition is the change of order of different elements like flashbacks and flash-forwards. And lastly, permutation, the substitution of elements, which means parodies, mashups and also alternate endings.

In conclusion, it is obvious that transmedia storytelling is the future, if not the present of storytelling as a whole. It uses the advance in technology and social media to bring the experience of being an audience to a new level, making the spectators part of the action themselves.

2. The transmedial character

In the previous chapter I introduced the idea of transmedia storytelling. In this second one, I will go deeper into one of the main aspects of that topic, the character. Even if the focus nowadays for narrations is the creation of worlds, it can not be denied that one of the most important parts of any story are the characters. I will explain the concept of transmedial character and deal with the idea of if it is even possible to consider that the same character can be faithfully represented in different media.

We should start from the beginning, asking what is a transmedial character. That is simple, a transmedial character is one that appears in different media, be it television, film, books or video games. But do these kind of characters really exist? That is the question Brian Richardson (2010) asks, so he launches himself into a little investigation to find out. First, he agrees that the existence of such characters is entirely possible from a logical point of view because any author has the power to create a world for a story and to later on bring it back for another one. We can use as an example the *Harry Potter* (1997-) franchise by J.K. Rowling. The second book of the series, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (1998) uses the same setting as the first book, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (1997) and has as its main character a boy that shares both the name and characteristics of that of the first book, so it would be safe to say that the Harry Potter from the first book is the same as the one from the second. Richardson also points out a problem with this and it is the existence of different characters that share the same name. He exemplifies this with the character of Clarissa Dalloway by Virginia Woolf. The character does appear in many works of the author, but in her first novel, *The Voyage Out* (1915), a Clarissa Dalloway appears, but she does not share many characteristics with the other iterations of the character. According to Richardson, when a character is radically changed from one medium to the other without any logical explanation, it is safe to say that it is a different character that just shares the name with another one.

With all of that being said it is clear that characters can, in fact, exist outside of the original works they were born into. The next question Richardson poses is who has the right to write a character. Many times throughout history, different authors have tried to capitalize on other's successes by trying to recreate their characters in different stories. For example, Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (1605) was followed by an apocryphal sequel in 1614, a year before the official one was published. It was done by an anonymous author under the pseudonym Alonso Fernández de Avellaneda supposedly to poke fun at Cervantes as it is believed that Avellaneda was an admirer of Lope de Vega, rival of Cervantes. This sequel is considered non-canonical as it was done without Cervantes's con-

sent. So, can someone other than the author write a character? The answer is no and Richardson uses a quote by Roland Harweg that illustrates this:

contents underlying the summaries of fictional texts are the result not of acts of genuine reporting (judgeable as to truth or falsehood) but of creation, and that such products of creation - specially, as in our case, by different authors - are hermetically separated from each other. The creator of a later world is not allowed to intrude into, and thereby modify a prior work by another author (Richardson 2010, 530)

Basically, a different author can not expand what we know about a character, just create new characters that may be based on the originals. So, it does not matter that Avellaneda calls his character Don Quixote and claims that his book is a continuation of the original, because Cervantes is the only author that can write him.

Richardson also mentions that many authors write a character from a different author for the sake of 'updating it' or to correct mistakes the original author may have done. This is a typical excuse in this kind of field, the claim that the new version is superior to the original and that should give it the right to be considered canonical. But again, this is his response: "To this claim we may respond that the later text may well expose the mimetic failures of the earlier text, but this in itself does not alter an earlier character or its ontological status, it only shows that the character and/or its social setting is not as realistic as it had been presented or assumed to be" (Richardson 2010, 532).

It is fairly obvious then that apocryphal versions of a character do not constitute the real character, but what if the author gives his/her permission for another one to write the character? Well, that works. In fact, there is nothing that really proves that only one author can write one character. For example, episodes of television series are written sometimes by different people and that does not affect their continuity. Also, there are times when another author can even improve an original work. Richardson uses as an example of this the play *Love's Last Shift* (1696) by Colley Cibber. In the story, a polygamous man ends up regretting his lifestyle and becomes a good husband. John Vanbrugh did not like the way the main character repented and decided to write a sequel *The Relapse* (1696) in which the man goes back to his cheating ways only to end up regretting them again, but this time with a more valid reason. This sequel was more successful than the original and even Cibber himself got a part in the play.

Of course, when it comes to authorizing the continuation of a character, the author himself/herself does not need to be the one that gives permission. After the death of Sir Ian Fleming, his family estate were the ones to choose a new author to continue the *James Bond* (1953-2015) series of novels.

One of the most important points of this part, though, comes when Richardson asks if a character moved to different media can be considered the same character. His point is simple: there are many kinds of media and not all of them offer the same resources to a character. For example, a novel will probably explain more of the character's personality than a painting would, so if the painting leaves aspects of the character out, can the painting really convey the character for what it is or should we say that, even if transmedia storytelling is something real, that there are mediums that can not represent a character. Richardson concludes that even if it is true that not all media can represent the same character with the same accuracy, it can be considered a good representation as long as the representation is as accurate as the medium allows it to be.

But we continue the trend of this essay by raising another question: what about the representations that change or eliminate characteristics from the original? Think about children's versions of books in which depictions of violence and such can be eliminated. Richardson considers this matter simple: changes can be made, but it depends what you change. We could say that each character in fiction has a set of personal traits that makes them who they are and, as long as those are not changed, we can consider the character the same. Take for example the character of Superman. There are a number of characteristics that make the character who he is. Not only does he fly, has super strength and shoots laser beams from his eyes, he also possesses a moral code that makes him protect everyone at all costs, he is always on the side of justice and he is so righteous that he has earned the nickname 'The big blue boy-scout'. We could say that this are the traits any Superman adaptation should follow to portray an accurate depiction of the character. One of the main complaints about the Superman movie *Man of Steel* (2013) was that the character was very different from the original, an example would be the scene in which he fights General Zod in the city of Metropolis causing a lot of destruction that he does not seem to care about. On the other hand in the *Superman II* (1980), he also battles Zod, but asks for the battle to take place at his Fortress of Solitude so the city will be safe. With this information we could say that the *Man of Steel* depiction of the character is not very accurate and even put in doubt that the main character is the real Superman. But we should remember that the character has been around since 1938 and has gone through numerous changes over the years. In fact, it could be argued that the original Superman also had little regard for human life as there is a comic in which he destroys a poor neighborhood so a new one can be constructed not caring about the families that are now homeless because of him. To make matter worse, in order for characters to remain consistent, DC Comics created a multiverse in which different versions of their characters exist, so it could be argued that the *Man of Steel* Superman comes from an universe in which he acts that way. In my opinion, when it comes to this characters (this is

not limited to comic books, as it also happens with James Bond, for example) the convention should be followed, that is, unless it is stated otherwise, the version of the character that is adapted is the better known one, the one mostly related to the character itself.

In Clare Elizabeth Parody (2011) uses a term by Bennett and Woollacott, 'popular hero'. The popular hero is a fictional character that has transcended its original textuality and has become a part of popular culture. Superman could be an example of this as it is not necessary to have been in contact with any specific narration that has him as a character in order to recognize him. Parody distinguishes between two types of popular heroes, though, basically the 'classical' ones and the 'modern' ones. The difference between a classical hero, like King Arthur for example, and a modern one, is copyright. The figure of King Arthur is not copyrighted and therefore anyone can use it and so the character appears in many fictional stories. But a modern popular hero is different in the sense that it does belong to a company and it can only be used with that company's permission. But Parody points out that exerting total control over a character's use is close to impossible and we can see an example of this in fanfiction.

Fanfiction refers to stories written by fans about a certain storyworld. Imelda Whelehan sees fanfiction as this:

The activity of fans in relation to cult texts reminds us that these readers/viewers automatically set themselves up as critics who feel that part of their critical activity is best expressed in a rewriting or reframing of the 'original'. In this they mimic the function of scholarly critics who always find more to add to their analyses of the text, until our academic understanding of a classical literary work becomes in more ways than one the sum of its commentaries (Whelehan 1999, 20)

But even if fanfiction is 'trespassing' the cultural property of a company, there are still limits to it:

fan productions are subject to pressures of their own – the anxiety of complicity in structures of economic and cultural power that comes with participation in major entertainment brands, that qualifies subversive or transgressive textual appropriations; a persistent concern with "canonical" interpretation that perhaps speaks to a degree of self-consciousness about the marginal, subordinate status of fan creations. (Parody 2011, 63)

Henry Jenkins (2006) talked about this when pointing out how some Star Trek fans reject Kirk and Spock love stories because they believe that the behavior of the characters onscreen does not support the possibility of such a romance.

Parody conceives that characters of transmedia franchises as 'extensible' that is, characters that are not finished and that are in continuous production because a transmedia world is always

growing and characters are not established from the beginning, as they develop through the stories depending on many different factors, like fan acceptance. This concept is also flexible, as she points out, the nature of the character's extensibility may vary, like in extensibility a posteriori, in which a character that was set for a single appearance becomes so popular that more stories for him are created, stories that were not created during the original development of the character.

According to Parody, when studying transmedia characters, there are three important points of focus. First, how the character adapts itself to the continuously changing world it is in. That is, how it changes with the times to adapt to what audiences want as the growing of a character in popularity exposes it to new audiences like 'racebending', a practice in which the ethnicity of certain characters is changed as to appeal to larger audiences.

The second is the creation of a world that a character can interact with. This was mentioned previously in this work as the storyworld. It is important to note, though, how the parts of the world that may be left untouched in one installment may be left unused in exchange for developing them further in another one. Basically, the way the character interacts with its environment is driven by how the story is told.

The third and last one is how the character develops through the story. However, Parody disagrees with the classical conception of that as a 'character arc', a term she does not see fitting in the current transmedia world. This is because transmedia blends together different types of narrative extension, like or serial form, adaptation or even the retelling of a story from another character's point of view. Also, the different ways in which the creation of transmedial worlds are organized (many times the organization may suffer changes for a number of different reasons, from fan reception to economic situation) makes it far more difficult to pinpoint an specific way of developing a character.

In conclusion, I would define a transmedial character as one that is able to transition from one medium to another, either because the character was conceived to be that way or because its success led it to transition to different media. But regardless, a transmedial character should be one that entices the audience enough to make them follow it through the different media it appears in.

3. Send in the Clown. Who is the Joker?

In this chapter I will introduce the character that this work analyses, the idea is that in order to understand the representations it has on different media and to judge them, it is necessary to have some knowledge on the character and its main traits, based on Richardson's (2010) analysis of transmedia characters.

Before I start with that, though, I would like to differentiate between what I think are the two types of transmedial characters that can be found. In my opinion, these two types are extensions and adaptations.

An extension character would be one who remains the same through every medium it is present in. That is, there is one story that is told across different media and therefore every character remains the same in every portrayal they have. The *Star Wars* (1977-) character Luke Skywalker is a good example of this. *Star Wars* is a single story that is told across different mediums like movies, books, video games or television series; and all the happenings are part of the same story. With that in mind, it is safe to say that the Luke Skywalker we see in the original *Star Wars* (1977) film is the same character we see in the *Star Wars Rebels* (2014-) or the *Star Wars: Heir to the Jedi* (2015) novel and that all the events that happen in those different examples form what we could call the biography of Luke Skywalker as a character.

On the other hand, an adaptation character is quite the opposite. When a character is adapted, even if the character itself remains, its story in the original medium is not, giving said character a new life. In the movies, Harry Potter does not point out that his adventures in Hogwarts have already happened before because the novel and the film are two separate universes. Both tell the same story, but remain parallel one from the other.

Basically, the difference between the two types of transmedial characters is the storyworld. The extension characters pertain to just one that spreads through different media, while the adaptation characters pertain to different ones independent to each other.

The character I am working with, the Joker, belongs to the second category, that of the adaptation characters. Each version of the Joker in its many iterations in media belongs to a different universe and there is no connection between them from a plot standpoint.

The Joker's first appearance in comics was in *Batman #1* (1940), the first Batman solo comic. Originally, he was supposed to be killed at the end of the story, but then Whitney Ellsworth decided against it, so an extra panel was drawn in which the Joker was shown in jail. This led to the Joker

becoming Batman's nemesis, with the character appearing in nine of the first twelve issues of the *Batman* (1940) comic.

Eric Garneau (2015) does a brief summary of the character's publication history:

Originally he was portrayed as a ruthless killer, in his first appearance he uses a special venom (normally referred to as 'Joker venom') that kills its victim of laughter and leaves them with a permanent grin. And as the icing of the cake, he announces who he is planning to kill over the radio and even with this information, the police is unable to stop him. This liking of the theatrical would become over the years one of the character's defining traits.

Just two years after his debut the story, "The Joker Walks the Last Mile" (1942) would become a turning point for the character, going from killer clown to simply clown and engaging a more child-friendly direction. This era of the character also brought another of his defining traits, his obsession of besting Batman. In "The Joker's Utility Belt" (1952) as the name implies, the Joker creates his own belt à la Batman, but instead of containing gadgets, it had practical joke devices like sneezing powder or Mexican jumping beans.

In the 1970's, the character returned to his homicidal roots. The story that is commonly pointed as this new starting point for the character is "The Joker's Five Way Revenge" (1973) in which the Clown Prince of Crime assassinates five ex-associates of his and also leaves his trademark joker card to let Batman know is him, to attract him and kill him too.

The eighties cemented the Joker's iconic status in comic books as many of his best stories were written in that decade including Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* (1986), Alan Moore's *The Killing Joke* (1988) and Grant Morrison's *Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on Serious Earth* (1989). This stories helped to establish the character as the complete psychopath he is considered nowadays.

With that brief introduction to the character being made, I will proceed now to enumerate the traits that I consider are defining to the character: his origin, his look, his personality and his relationship with his nemesis, the Batman.

3.1 One Bad Day

One of the things that make the Joker so attractive to readers is his origin or, better said, his lack of one. Even though the character has existed for almost eighty years now, it still does not have a definite origin. But the keyword there is "definite" because the fact that there is not an official origin for the Joker does not mean that some writers have not tried to write about it.

I will explain the most famous origin of the character, the one that was devised by Alan Moore in *The Killing Joke*. In this comic, it is explained that the Joker's origin was due to what he describes as "one bad day". A failed comedian, the Joker (his real name is not mentioned) accepts to help some mobsters with a robbery to get some money. When the time comes, he tries to back down after finding out that his pregnant wife has died in a home accident, but is unable to. During the heist, both the police and Batman show up and, trying to escape, he accidentally falls into a vat of chemicals that disfigure him, leaving his hair green, lips red and skin white. His new appearance, combined with his personal tragedy, makes him go crazy.

This origin is shown in flashbacks through the story, but it should be noted that the Joker is an unreliable narrator as he himself states: "Sometimes I remember it one way, sometimes another... If I'm going to have a past, I prefer it to be multiple choice!" (Moore 1988, 41).

The Joker's origin holds similarities to that of Batman, as both are the product of a traumatic event (Batman's parents were killed in front of him when he was a kid), with the main difference being the response of the characters. In the comic, the Joker himself illustrates this similarity to Batman:

You had a bad day once, am I right? I know I am. I can tell. You had a bad day and everything changed. Why else would you dress up as a flying rat? You had a bad day, and it drove you as crazy as everybody else... Only you won't admit it! You have to keep pretending that life makes sense, that there's some point to all this struggling! God you make me want to puke. I mean, what is it with you? What made you what you are? Girlfriend killed by the mob, maybe? Brother carved up by some mugger? Something like that, I bet. Something like that... (Moore 1988, 40-41)

While the Joker goes mad and embraces nihilism to the extreme, Batman becomes the opposite as he decides to give his life a meaning by fighting crime.

3.2 The Look

The Joker is one of the most recognizable comic book characters in history and part of that is because of his look. Interestingly enough considering the topic of this work is transmediality, the design of the character came from a movie: *The Man Who Laughs* (1928). In it, the main character, Gwynplaine (portrayed by Conrad Veidt) is disfigured so that he has a permanent grin, much like the Joker. He also had his hair combed back, another common thing in the Joker.

If a physical description of the character needed to be made, I would say the main points that

would need to be covered are: green hair, red lips, white face. Also the character is usually quite tall (he is normally portrayed as being a bit taller than Batman) and lean. Starting in the 1970's it became common to draw him with with very sharp face features including an elongated chin. There are



Photo 1

of course exceptions to this: the most famous would his portrayal in *The Dark Knight Returns*, in which he has a broader jaw and a normal sized mouth, in contrast with the enormous grin the character usually has.

The Joker usually wears the color purple the most, normally in form of a suit with a long-tailed padded-shoulder jacket, a string tie, gloves, striped pants and spats on pointed-toe shoes. Although again there are exceptions to this like in the arc "Death of the Family" in which the character is seen with a more disheveled appearance, wearing janitor's clothes.

3.3 The Method to the Madness

The Joker is insane. That may seem like a given but it was not actually introduced in the comics until 1973 by writer Dennis O'Neil, to explain how the character was able to execute so many crimes and avoid the death penalty. The explanation was that he was legally insane, so he was always found innocent and sent to Arkham Asylum.

But it was not until 1989 when Grant Morrison would explain what condition the Joker suffered from which was explained like this:

In fact, we're not even sure if he can be properly defined as insane. . . . We're beginning to think it may be a neurological disorder, similar to Tourette's syndrome. It's quite possible we may actually be looking at some kind of super-sanity here. A brilliant new modification of human perception. More suited to urban life at the end of the twentieth century. Unlike you and I, the Joker seems to have no control over the sen-

sory information he's receiving from the outside world. He can only cope with that chaotic barrage of input by going with the flow. That's why some days he's a mischievous clown, others a psychopathic killer. He has no real personality. He creates himself each day. He sees himself as the Lord of misrule, and the world as a theatre of the absurd. (Morrison 1989, 26-27)

This idea of the Joker reinventing himself each day was given in pursuance of explaining the changes of personality the character suffered through the years (from killer to prankster to psychopath) and it also gives the Joker a blank card to act however he likes. If we are to believe this diagnostic, every possible personality the character could have in any adaptation would be valid.

But if we go a little bit further, the Joker is typically portrayed as a nihilist as I showed in the previous quote from *The Killing Joke*. According to the Joker, life is pointless and proving that is one of the things that drive him.

In many of his appearances, the Joker simply tries to prove a point. In the aforementioned comic book, for example, he kidnaps James Gordon in the interest of torturing him with the goal of making him go insane just to prove that "there's no difference between me and everyone else! 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" (Moore 1989, 41). In *The Dark Knight Returns*, the Joker goes as far as to break his own neck (thus killing himself) just to make it look like Batman killed him so his non-killing oath would be broken.

Another important characteristic is his love for the theatrical. For the Joker it is not enough to commit a crime, it should be done his way. In *The Batman Adventures: Mad Love* (Dini, Timm, 1994) the Joker laments that he is unable to come up with a plan to kill Batman. His original idea was to throw him into a tank full of piranhas, but he rejects the idea simply because piranhas can not smile, so the killing would not be appropriate.

3.4 Ying and Yang

When it comes to his relationship with Batman, the Joker works as his antithesis. What Batman is to order, the Joker is to chaos and, while Batman dresses in black, the Joker wears bright colors.

Throughout the years it has been shown that the Joker actually has a dependence on Batman. In the comic "Going Sane" (Kane, 1994) after believing that Batman is dead the Joker goes sane and

does not return to his homicidal tendencies until he discovers that Batman is still alive. In “Emperor Joker” (Loeb, 2000) he gains omnipotence and kills Batman every day reviving him each time.

But not only does the Joker need Batman, he believes that Batman needs him too. In “Death of the Family”, he decides to kill every person Batman relies on because he believes he has gone “soft” and he wants to help him because he is convinced that he is the only person capable of making him better. He also thinks that Batman thinks the same of him and that that is the reason why he never kills him.

In some stories it has even being hinted a possible sexual attraction of the Joker to Batman. In both *Dark Knight* and *Arkham* he acts seductively towards Batman calling him “dearest” and even saying that he loves him, although these things could also be seen as simple mind games.

In the end, while other villains motivations are things like money and power, the Joker’s only reason to be is Batman himself.

In my opinion, these are the fundamental characteristics of the Joker as a character, the ones every adaptation should try to adhere to in order to be faithful to the original. In the next chapters, I will analyze different adaptations of the character through different media and I will use these characteristics as the base for the analysis.

4. Clowning around. The Joker as a child friendly character

Through the almost eighty years of his existence the Joker has had many different adaptations. Even though nowadays the character is referenced as a nihilist and many people reverence him as some kind of counterculture icon, we should not forget that the Joker started as a character for kids, because comic books were originally made just for children, even if the advent of the graphic novel changed that. With that in mind, it should come to no surprise that many of the character's representations through media have been aimed at children. There are a lot of different versions of the character that have followed this trope through the years, but it is not possible to cover them all, either because they are too many to be covered in this work or simply because they are not important enough.

In this chapter I will cover two of this 'kid friendly' adaptations, the ones I feel are the most important and celebrated. The first is the Joker from the the 1960's *Batman* TV show and the movie of the same name based on that show. The second will be the one from the 1990's animated TV show, *Batman: The Animated Series*.

4.1 *Batman* (1966-1968)

The 1960's *Batman* show was not the first live action appearance of the Dark Knight, but it was the first one of his nemesis. In this adaptation the Joker is portrayed by Cesar Romero. Now, Romero was an actor who became famous for his appearances as the stereotypical 'latin lover' kind of character, so he may not seem at first sight as the kind of actor that would portray a character like the Joker, but for all intents and purposes, I would say that Romero was a great casting choice.

We need to keep in mind that this is the 1960's Joker and, as it was mentioned in the previous chapter, the character at this point was more or less comic relief. Romero was an actor trained in the Broadway style of acting, he was a very physical performer, and he brought that physicality to the character.

In fact we could take Dan Hassoun's (2015) analysis of the Joker's first appearance in the *Batman* movie to see how the whole character worked. First of all, it should be noted how filming worked during this time, specially on television. The most common type of shots were the wide and the medium shots, shots that show the majority of the actor's body. This causes the actor to use his full body more than, for example, would be used nowadays considering that the norm now are closer shots.

So, this first Joker scene starts at the headquarters of the United Underworld (a super villain group), the first shot is the logo of the group, followed by the appearance of the Joker in a long shot.



Photo 2

The Joker does not simply stand there, though. Like I pointed out before, Romero uses all of the ample space he knows he has to move around wildly in the set showing off what his character is all about, even performing a magic trick by making a bouquet of flowers appear. As Hassoun him-

self puts it:

Romero allows almost all of his actions to take on a broad theatricality: instead of walking, he prances, emphatically bending his knees and kicking one leg in front of the other; when electrocuting Penguin and Riddler with a trick hand buzzer, he stresses it with a slap down on each of their hands; and when reciting a line, he tends to raise his hands and arms outward for added emphasis. Romero gives all his gestures a feeling of controlled rapidity, enacting motions with a high degree of energy but letting them linger in space like cartoonish poses. (Hassoun 2015, 9)

Now that we have established how Romero's Joker acts on-screen, we should analyze is his version of the character can be considered a good adaptation at that.

The origin of the Joker is never an important point in the show. In fact, it should be mentioned that the only moment something like that is mentioned in the entire show is an episode in which Batman says that the Joker used to be a hypnotist. Now, I should also point out that at this point of his story, the Joker was not the character it is today, that is the ultimate Batman super villain. Even though he was definitely in the upper echelon of foes of the Caped Crusader, he had not a cemented status as the greatest one, so it is understandable that there was not a lot of interest in dedicating an episode to his genesis.

When it comes to his look, this version covers all the important points: purple suit, green hair, white skin and red lips. In fact, the character uses lighter colors than his printed counterpart, with the suit's color being closer to pink than to pure purple. This color scheme helps the character stand out more among the rest of the cast in any of his scenes and, combined with the exaggerated acting by

Romero, helps to establish the character as the eccentric villain the show portrays him to be. As a side note, it should be mentioned that this is the only version of the character to sport facial hair, in a way, at least. Cesar Romero was famous for his moustache and refused to shave it for the part so the make up artists needed to apply an extra layer under his nose to cover it, but, even with that, it is still noticeable in close shots.

Eccentric is in fact the best word to describe him, as ‘criminally insane’ still falls short. The Joker is sent to prison every time Batman captures him, so is safe to say he is considered to be sane. Still, the character boasts one of the most recognizable tropes of the Joker: his style. The Batman television show is remembered nowadays for its extensive use of camp humor (that is, a style that makes fun of its absurdity without explicitly acknowledging it, for example, many of Batman’s gadgets are completely absurd, but are treated as serious in the series setting, like the Bat-Shark Repellent) and the Joker’s style fits perfectly in that world. The character uses throughout the show a vast array of personalized gadgets like a giant Jack in the Box in the movie, with the idea being that Batman will step on it and be thrown out of a window (it did not work). The Joker maintains his ‘showmanship’ in this version, for him it is not enough to commit a crime, it must be done in his own way. For example, in the episode “The Joker Goes to School” (S01, E16) he is able to strap both Batman and Robin to an electric chair connected to a slot machine. If the three reels match in liberty bells, not only would they go free, but they would earn 50,000 dollars, if they matched in oranges they would simply go free, but if they matched in lemons they would be electrocuted with 50,000 volts. This is an example of the seriality principle Jenkins talks about. The end of this episode is a cliffhanger that has as its goal make the audience tune in for the next episode to find out about the fate of the two main characters.

The last and more important characteristic of the character is his relationship with Batman. At this point in his story, this relationship was not as fleshed out and deep as it would develop in later years, but we can see its seeds. When it comes to criminal acts the main difference between the Joker and the rest of Batman’s rogue galleries is that for him crime is a means to an end, with that end being Batman himself. Romero’s Joker is not fully consistent with this aspect throughout the show, but we see some glimpses of it. David Ray Carter (2015) mentions as an example the episode “The Joker Trumps an Ace/Batman Sets the Pace” (S01, E25), which itself is an adaptation of *Batman #53* (1949). In it, the Joker plots to steal 500,000 dollars, but the money is secondary for him, the main reward is to humiliate Batman in the process.

Speaking about David Ray Carter, he makes an interesting point about kid friendly adaptations of the Joker. He maintains that, despite the fact that the Joker is connected to very violent acts (two

of the most important moments of the character's history were the crippling of Barbara Gordon and the assassination of the second Robin, Jason Todd), the character is better adapted when this part of his personality is ignored. According to him, even though the character has committed a lot of heinous acts, any of those could have been committed by any of Batman's other villains. When it comes to the Joker, what matters is not not the *what*, but the *why*. By centering the attention on his murderous side, the rest of his characteristics as a character, that are more important in order to understand it, tend not to be as highlighted. On the other hand, if those acts are eliminated from the equation, there is more room for the character to show its most important aspects, the ones that truly define him.

With that being said, we should move on to the next adaptation of the character to analyze, the one from *Batman: The Animated Series*.

4.2 *Batman: The Animated Series*



Photo 3

This version of the character is a great example of the point raised by Carter, because of the show being for kids, murder and any kind of atrocity the Joker would usually be identified with are off the table. It is true that the show, broadcasted by Fox, was given more leeway than usual (for example, the depiction of handguns was allowed), but it still posed limitations. Limitations that at the time could be considered to put in peril a correct depiction

of the character because, after it went back to his murderous ways in the 1970's, those were the crimes he was mostly identified with. Because of this, one could have expected the show to feature the more clownish version of the character à la Romero, which had been the one used in every appearance on the character on television.

But that was not the case. Not only is this version of the character considered to be faithful to the source material, but it is considered by many the best portrayal of the character ever. The reason for this is the way every characteristic of the character is perfectly balanced. The character maintains a clownish side, but it is combined with a cerebral aspect and to add to that, he is seen as a legitima-

te threat, not the nuisance he was seen as in previous incarnations. All of these traits work perfectly together, without overshadowing each other:

This is a Joker who makes bad puns while attempting to poison all of Gotham City to distract from a series of robberies. The Joker's villainy is neither mitigated to be more palatable, nor is it played up for shock value. Here, the Joker is a mixture of Bob Kane, Bill Finger, and Jerry Robinson's original madman, Cesar Romero's campy scene-stealer, and the ruthless criminal the Joker became in the hands of writers like Alan Moore, Denny O'Neil, and Steve Englehart. (Carter 2015, 55)

Unlike the previous incarnation I analyzed, the Joker's origin is explored in this version. It happens in what is actually the last appearance of the character in the show, in an episode titled "Make 'Em Laugh" (S03, E07). In it, the Joker is shown as a man that once participated in the Gotham Comedy Competition and, after being tossed out, promised revenge on the judges, which is the plot of the episode. The idea of the Joker as a failed comedian is surely adapted from the character's origin in *The Killing Joke*, the difference being that in the comic his comedy failure was just one in a group of misfortunate events that led him into madness, while in the show we are not really told is that was all that it took or if there is more to it.

The Joker maintains his criminal style in this version, too. In the episode "The Last Laugh" (S01, E15), the Joker floods Gotham City with his own laughing gas to keep the citizens distracted while he performs some robberies. The use of this gas is a good example of the way the Joker was still seen as a real threat even though nobody ever dies by his hand. In the comics, his laughing gas is a poison and, even though this is not explicitly mentioned in the episode, it is assumed that the citizens of Gotham are in peril. The same happens in "Christmas with the Joker" (S01, E38), in which he attempts to blow up a train full of passengers, takes three hostages (which he also tries to kill) and tries to dispose of both Batman and Robin with machine guns and cannons. Even though he is unsuccessful, it is made perfectly clear that, as a villain, he is far more dangerous than any other in Batman's list.

Speaking about Batman, he was the reason why the Joker orchestrated all of the previous events, because in this version, he is the Joker's main motivation. The best example of this is the episode "The Man Who Killed Batman" (S01 E49). This episode features Sidney "The Squid" Debris, a small time and almost good hearted criminal that becomes famous after he apparently kills Batman. Even though it happened by accident, he becomes an instant celebrity in the underworld getting him the attention of the Joker, who can not believe his nemesis is dead. To test this, he robs a jewelry store, but when he sees that Batman is not coming to stop him, he tells his goons to drop

everything and just leave. When asked why, he simply answers: “Without Batman, crime has no punchline” (Timm, 1993). In fact, he goes on to explain how their whole dynamic works: “WHERE IS HE? He's never been late! There's a certain rhythm to these things: I make trouble, he shows up, we have a few laughs and the game starts all over again!”. This is probably one of the best examples of the relationship between Batman and the Joker, as it perfectly shows how Batman is the Joker’s only motivation to be a criminal and that he does not even see a reason to continue his ways without him.

Also, many of the episodes of the series were directly inspired by comic book stories, like “The Laughing Fish” (S01 E46), with the story being taken from the comic of the same. This is also considered one of the defining Joker stories as it proves his complete insanity: the Joker develops a breed of fish with a grin and tries to copyright them, just to then try to murder the men at the copyright office because he is unable to understand that an animal can not be, in fact, copyrighted. This episode in particular also combined elements from two other stories, “The Joker’s Five-Way Revenge” and “Sign of the Joker!”.

Interestingly, the character is part of a storyworld within a storyworld. *Batman: The Animated Series* is part of an animated universe among other DC Comics properties like Superman and the Justice League of America that includes movies and TV shows. So, this Joker is a transmedial adaptation within the Batman story as a whole, but a transmedial extension within the animated story.

Finally, when speaking about this version of the character the man that voiced it should be mentioned and that would be Mark Hamill (better known for portraying Luke Skywalker in the *Star Wars* film franchise). Hamill’s voice acting is so iconic that it has actually become the measuring stick of how the Joker should sound in media. Other Joker voice actors, like Troy Baker, do actually base their performance on Hamill’s as he is considered the ‘voice of the Joker’. This fame has led to some interesting crossovers of the Joker in media, for example, Hamill has been getting some attention on social media by recording himself reading tweets from United States President Donald Trump in the Joker’s voice.

In conclusion, the Joker is, at the end of the day, a character from a superhero comic book made for children so it is a natural fit for him to be adapted into child-friendly materials. Of course, no one can deny that the murderous, more adult, traits of the character are an important part of it (in fact, murder was the first crime the Joker ever committed), but that does not it is integral. These two adaptations are the best examples of how the character does not need to be connected to its murderous roots for it to work and in fact show how, even though the Joker is usually identified as a killer

there is much more to the character than that, which can get ultimately lost if too much effort is put into showing the audience how much of a homicidal maniac the character is.

5. No Laughing Matter. The Joker in a more mature setting

In the last chapter, one of the main topics of discussion was how the Joker does not need to be portrayed as a ruthless killer to work as a character and how relying too much on this aspect of the character can sometimes produce a deluded version of it. Even though that argument is true, it does not mean that an adaptation of the character should stay from killing, even if it is not an integral part of the character, it is still a part of it and therefore there is nothing wrong in showing it when necessary.

In this chapter I will focus on that, two adaptations of the character that are situated in a more mature setting and can therefore show aspects of the character that were not possible in the two previous examples. These two adaptations are from the movies *Batman* (Tim Burton, 1989) and *The Dark Knight* (Christopher Nolan, 2008).

5.1 *Batman* (1989)

Starting with *Batman* it should be noted that, at the time, superhero films were not the box-office smashers that they are today. And to add to that, Batman as a character was not at the height of its popularity, to say the least. The idea for a movie spent around ten years in developmental hell and the only studios interested in the idea wanted to recreate the campy style of the 1960s TV show. Luckily, the commercial and critical success of *The Killing Joke* and *The Dark Knight Returns* comic books, known for their darker approach to the character, led to the film being given the green-light.

In the film, the character is portrayed by Jack Nicholson. Nicholson took the character very seriously, even going as far as to co-writing his own dialogue. As a childhood DC Comics collector, Nicholson wanted to do justice to the character. This clashes with Romero's approach to the role, as he did not see it as anything serious and there are even anecdotes about how he would take naps between shots.

But there is more difference between the two portrayals than the work the two actors put into them. The way the two actors move in the set is also very different. This is because of the difference between shot types. In Romero's movie, there was a bigger emphasis in long shots while in Nicholson's medium shots are more common. This means that the character is usually shown from the waist up which limits the movements he has to do. If Romero needed to move his entire body to give life to the character, Nicholson puts more emphasis in the arms and the face, rendering his cha-

racter more 'still' than Romero's. Another difference is in the lighting, with Burton's movie being more dark than the 1960s TV show. This abundance of darkness serves to put the Joker's white face as the focus of his shots.

That is again taken from Hassoun's (2015) analysis of the performance and, again, he analyzes a scene (in this case the introductory scene of the character, in which he kills his former mob boss):

The scene (ASL: 6.29 seconds/shot) begins with Nicholson cloaked in silhouette, but when he eventually walks forward into a key light illuminating his face, the camera rapidly zooms into a low-angle close-up of his head, as if presenting it as the epitome of the character's transformation. After cracking, "As you can see, I'm a lot happier," the Joker's smile widens and his eyebrows rise into a look of devilish self-amusement, the prelude to a murderous outburst (he begins frenetically shooting Grissom directly afterward). (Hassoun 2015, 10)

With that out of the way, we should put our focus in seeing if this Joker works as the Joker.

Burton's movie is the only one that truly puts an emphasis in the origins of the character, explicitly showing the transformation of Jack Napier (his real name in the movie) to the Joker. This origin is again heavily influenced by *The Killing Joke* a comic that Tim Burton apparently loved. As in the comic, Napier goes mad after falling in a vat of chemicals during a failed robbery in which he confronts Batman. The main difference from the source material is the identity of Jack Napier. In the comic, the Joker is a failed comedian that accepted to help with the robbery in order to feed his family, but in the movie, Napier is a full fledged gangster and among his criminal acts he has the distinction of being the killer of Bruce Wayne's parents. This feature of the character is unique to the movie and gives the relationship between Batman and the Joker a whole new meaning.

Normally, when speaking about the relationship between the two characters, the main point is how the Joker needs Batman to work, as he is his main motivation. But in this movie, Burton makes the 'quid pro quo' relationship between hero and villain far more literal by stating that the Joker is responsible for Batman's existence and vice versa; as the Joker himself puts it: "I mean, I say "I made you" you gotta say "you made me." I mean, how childish can you get?" (Burton, 1989).

Beyond that, the relationship between the two characters is more simple than in the comics. In this film, the Joker fancies himself "the world's first fully functioning homicidal artist" and his goal is to have his "face on the one dollar bill". This serves as an explanation to his weird homicidal antics. For example, this version uses the Joker poison (named 'Smilex' in the film) and he believes that he is making people works of art by killing them that way. He even has a scene in which he presents a 'commercial' for his products and introduces as if he were talking about normal beauty pro-

ducts, with the part about them being deadly being just a small nuisance in the grand scheme of being beautiful, which could be seen as a satire of the heavily criticized beauty industry.

With those desires of greatness in mind, the Joker's quarrel with Batman is based on his belief that the Dark Knight is taking the attention he deserves for himself, something the Joker can not tolerate.

The Joker's grand scheme in this film consists in poisoning all of Gotham's citizens with Smilex during a parade celebrating Gotham City's anniversary. Even though the Joker has appeared on television shown as a killer people go anyway, because he promises to through free money. During the parade he shouts: "And now, folks, it's time for "Who do you trust!" Hubba, hubba, hubba! Mo-



ney, money, money! Who do you trust? Me? I'm giving away free money. And where is the Batman? HE'S AT HOME WASHING HIS TIGHTS!". We can use this as an example on how the Joker sees

Photo 4

Batman in this adaptation. He sees himself as an artist and strives for fame and notoriety, for him, Batman steps in the way of those goals. Not necessarily because he wants to stop him, but because he is taking away the attention he believes is rightfully his.

One final difference is that the movies ends with the Joker dead after falling from a building, something that differs a lot from the comic books since the Joker, being Batman's ultimate nemesis, never dies.

The success of that movie sparked the beginning of a new Batman cinematic franchise with three sequels. The first one, *Batman Returns* (Burton, 1992) received even better reviews than the first, but the next two, *Batman Forever* (Joel Schumacher, 1995) and *Batman & Robin* (Schumacher, 1997). Both films ditched Burton's darker approach to the characters in favor of a return to a more campy style, as Schumacher thought it fitted the character better. After this, the character would not

return to the big screen until 2005's *Batman Begins* (Christopher Nolan). The movie not only had a more serious approach to the character, but also more realistic and was a box office success along with receiving critical acclaim.

The movie ends with a cliffhanger for a sequel, with Commissioner Gordon giving Batman a Joker card. This sequel was 2008's *The Dark Knight*, the movie that features the most popular portrayal of the Joker ever.

5.2 *The Dark Knight*

The man in charge of giving life to the Joker was Australian actor Heath Ledger. Ledger's casting as the iconic villain was met with controversy since the beginning, with many fans seeing him as too much of a 'Hollywood pretty-boy' to portray the character correctly.

To prepare for the role, Ledger stayed in a hotel room for a month, keeping a diary on the Joker to better understand the character. This particular form of method acting sparked some controversy, as the actor's death by a drug overdose shortly before the release of the movie led some to believe that his approach to the character was responsible for this.

Urban legends aside, Ledger's acting method paid off, as he won a posthumous Academy Award for his performance. According to Hassoun, Ledger's Joker is "all face" (2015, 10) because of the vast amount of close shots the character is in. This means that, unlike his two predecessors, the majority of the movement the character has is concentrated in his face. More specifically his tongue, that is always flickering in his mouth, and his eyes, with Ledger himself saying that his Joker was "less about his laugh, more about his eyes" (Hassoun 2015, 10). An example of this proximity the camera has to his face is seen in the first major dialogue scene the character has, in which he meets with Gotham's crime lords:

Taking advantage of his intimacy with the camera, Ledger slides between signifiers of extreme control and compulsiveness by strategically varying the intensity of his stare and tightness of his lips. When conveying nonchalance, Joker's eyes tend to rove from side to side, his composure is loose (relaxed shoulders), and his mouth appears slightly unfastened, with the tongue darting in and out at unexpected intervals. When perturbed or angered, however, his eyes harden into a deadly glare, his lips tighten, and his head tilts forward. The extremely short shot length of the film (only 3.16 seconds/shot in the "pencil trick" scene) also means that Ledger's movements are not only close, but also quick. This propensity for rapid facial motions may in part explain why Ledger's Joker comes across more as a compulsive psychotic than do Romero or Nicholson. (Hassoun 2015, 11)

This version of the Joker is also considered the ‘deepest’ one, as it is also the more realistic. The main theme in the movie is that of duality, with the Joker and Batman being presented as polar opposites one of the other. In the story, the different crime bosses of Gotham accept to work with the Joker in destroying Batman because, even though they do not fully trust him, are desperate to end the reign of law and order Batman has imposed in the city. Basically, Batman’s appearance has upset the moral scale of Gotham and the Joker appears to level it again. In this sense, the Joker is shown more as a force of nature than as a conventional villain. Even he is aware of his condition as he tells Batman: “you complete me” (Nolan, 2008). But the Joker also has a purpose. Like in *The Killing Joke* the Joker wants to prove that the morals that uphold society can be easily destroyed and that, when that happens, people are reduced to being like him as he sees himself as just being “ahead of the curve”. To do this, the Joker rigs two boats with explosives, one is full of ordinary people and the other of prison inmates. Each boat has a device to make the other one explode and if none of the two have blown up by a scheduled time limit, the Joker himself will make both explode. Unluckily for him, just like in the comic, morals prevail and Batman stops him before he can blow up the boats.

But the Joker does not suffer complete defeat. One of the main plot lines in the movie is Batman’s desire to eventually retire, as he believes that his vigilante style of justice can not prevail. He sees Gotham’s district attorney Harvey Dent as his perfect substitute until the Joker abducts him and his girlfriend Rachel Dawes. Rachel dies and Dent is disfigured in an explosion, leaving half his face scarred. Even though he was originally seen by Batman as a just man, Dent is now unable to process any sense of justice and needs to flip a coin to make any decision. This duality puts him in the middle of the Batman and Joker/order and chaos spectrum and effectively gives the Joker a small moral win by corrupting Gotham’s “White Knight”.

What *The Dark Knight* does better than any other adaptation is explaining the origin of the Joker, because they do not. During the film, there are a couple of situations in which he explains where he got the scars in his face, which form an smile. One time he says his father was a drunk and that he disfigured him to make him smile after he abused his mother. On another instance he claims that his wife was disfigured by loan sharks she owed money to and he scarred himself in favor of showing her that he did not care about her scars. Not having an exact origin not only plays into the quote from *The Killing Joke* “if I’m going to have a past, i prefer to be multiple choice!”, but it also plays into his status as an opposite figure to Batman. Bruce Wayne became Batman after his parents were murdered, without that there is no Batman. He needs an origin towards explaining why he does what he does. The Joker, on the other hand, is a nihilist. He does not see any meaning in life and,



Photo 5

therefore, he does not see a reason to have an origin. He does not need an explanation as to why he is what he does and why he does what he does because, at the end of the day, everything is meaningless to him. This contradicts a little the idea of the comics of showing both characters as different reactions of a traumatic event, but it could be said that it does because

it goes deeper than that by proving that the Joker does not need that kind of backstory in the first place.

Despite these ideas that may show this Joker as more serious character than his counterparts, this portrayal is still faithful to some of the more traditional Joker tropes.

His look is more rugged than the rest, but he still follows the color scheme and dressing style with the main difference being in his face (which is also his more highlighted part). The character has in this sense a more realistic look for example, by wearing greasepaint instead of having his face white.

As Eric Garneau (2015) points out he:

incorporates various Joker tropes from across his publication history—he makes outrageous, timed demands that threaten murder using mass media; leaves Joker cards on victims; creates elaborate traps; has ludicrous vehicles (“slaughter is the best medicine”); does things just for fun; and wants to kill a city in the process. He dresses like a clown, a cop, and a nurse. It’s as though every important Joker story ever told collides in this screenplay. (Garneau 2015, 43)

With that in mind, we can say that this version is then also faithful in a more aesthetic way.

As a side note, I would like to comment on the advertisement campaign this movie used, as it shows a great use of transmedia using the character. This was the first movie featuring the character in the age of the Internet and the advertisement company 42 Entertainment took full advantage of it, with Kimberly Owczarski (2015) summarizing the entire campaign.

A number of webpages were created simulating real Gotham City webpages. One of them was ibelieveinharveydent.com, the fictional page promoting Harvey Dent's campaign for District Attorney. Soon after, a number of joker cards were given to different comic book shops with another address, ibelieveinharveydenttoo.com. The page showed a vandalized version of a Harvey Dent campaign poster. By entering your email address into the page, a pixel of the image disappeared until it revealed the first image of the Joker. The Joker, indeed, served as the main driving force of the entire campaign playing on the desire fans had of seeing what the character was all about. The next major event was during the 2007 San Diego Comic-Con, in which fans participated in a giant scavenger hunt following the trail of the Joker. The hunt ended with the Joker being apparently taken down by the police until a couple of months later, when the webpage whysoserious.com reappeared on the Internet after being taken down by Gotham's police department. These kind of events continued through the promotion of the movie, until its release. These were a great example of Henry Jenkins' immersion principle, as they let the audience somehow participate in the events of the movie, generating more interest in it. The audience itself, for example, was entirely responsible for the unveiling of the first image of the Joker and the scavenger hunt put them in the setting of the movie itself.

This iteration of the Joker also fits into the cultural attractor category by Jenkins. His image has become an icon in a way to represent anarchy in modern society, as this is the version of the character that better exemplifies it.

Concluding, the Joker is a character that fits perfectly into a more mature setting and when his bloodlust does not overshadow any of his other characteristics, can work perfectly well. Nicholson's Joker is considered by many the most faithful adaptation of the character on the big screen, feeling like the comic version come to life. Ledger's is by far the most iconic, *The Dark Knight* went on to become the highest grossing movie of 2008 and the main reason for this was the interest that Ledger generated. Nowadays, this Joker is the most well known version of the character in popular culture. His catchphrase, "Why so serious?" is the most iconic even if it is never used in the comics.

Also, it should be noted how the character shines when given a big platform. One of the main criticisms of *Batman* was how Nicholson's Joker stole every scene he was in and even film critic Roger Ebert had to say that the audience needed to remind themselves to cheer for Batman. The same could be said about *The Dark Knight*, even if the characters are better balanced, the Joker is the one that better catches the eye.

6. Virtual Trickster. The Joker in video games

In the two previous chapters I have analyzed adaptations of the Joker in both film and television, animated and live action. It is undeniable that those are the most common ways to adapt a literary character because it allows to tell a story the same way, even though the medium changes, we still have the role of spectators whether we are watching a movie or reading a book. Because of that, I have decided to dedicate a chapter to a different form of adaptation, one that gives more freedom and makes us something more than spectators, the video game.

Video games are a little complicated when it comes to transmedia adaptations. In the second chapter dedicated to the transmedia character I pointed out Brian Richardson's idea of how each character has a set of characteristics that are necessary to understand it so as long as those are covered, the character remains faithful to its original. The problem in video games is that the character is controlled by a player and the player may not want to respect those guidelines. In order to assure that the player complies, the game has to establish a number of rules that have to be respected in order for the game to work.

Let's take for example a hypothetical Spider-Man game. One of the missions in the game consists in the Spider-Man (the player) rescuing Mary Jane, Spider-Man's love interest, from a super villain. Spider-Man as a character would always rescue Mary Jane, but there is no assurance that the player would. Maybe the player dislikes her or maybe just does not care about her. To assure that Mary Jane will be saved and therefore the character arc of Spider-Man will be respected, the game establishes rules to make the player comply. The simplest is to do not let the player advance the story unless the mission is completed. Basically, if the game is to be played, the player must accept to follow the rules because if compliance is refused, the game can not be played.

Kristin M.S. Bezio (2015) explains how a video game is composed of both a narrative and a 'ergodic' engagement. The narrative is, of course, the story the game tells. It would comprise the elements the player has no control over, like cutscenes. The 'ergodic' engagement refers to the moments in which the player is in control of the game, like fighting opponents. In this case, the player is given some freedom, but with limits.

Bezio also makes an analysis of the Joker in one video game in particular: *Batman: Arkham Asylum* (Rocksteady, 2009). The game is loosely based on the comic *Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on Serious Earth* (Morrison, 1989). The changes in the plot occur to give the story more playability, as the original comic does not have a lot of action.

In the comic, Arkham Asylum falls under the control of the inmates, who demand Batman goes there to meet them. The Joker acts as Batman's guide as he moves through the place. During the story, the Joker questions Batman's own sanity and, when Batman leaves at the end, he tells him that he is always welcome whenever he wants.

In the game, the Joker himself orchestrates the take over. The game starts with Batman driving him to Arkham after catching him and, the moment Batman enters the asylum, the Joker traps him inside. During the game, the Joker challenges Batman to find him and stop him before he unleashes a drug through Gotham that will turn the citizens into monsters. Of course, being the Joker, this is only an excuse to drive Batman, as his real goal is to make Batman drop his ideals and accept his own insanity.

In both the comic and the game, the Joker has the role of guide. Arkham Asylum, a place populated by insane people, represents the chaos Batman fights. The Joker is like a personification of chaos itself, so it is fitting that he is the one that helps Batman through his quest.

Even though the player only encounters the Joker a couple of times before the game's final showdown, he is always present, usually communicating with Batman through the loudspeakers or televisions. This creates the idea that he is always watching and that, no matter what the player does, the Joker is always in control. This advantage illustrates the Joker's goals perfectly because, even though he can use it to destroy Batman at any moment, he chooses not to. He even encourages him, as he needs him alive for their final showdown.

Bezio explains how the Joker acts like the game designer. In furtherance of keep Batman away from him until the end of the game, the Joker creates a number of 'side quests' to keep him busy until the right time comes. For example, Batman spends a large portion of the game looking for the antidote of the Joker's drug.

During the game, the player can obtain different tapes from sessions the villains have with their doctors in the asylum. The Joker's play with the idea also seen in *The Dark Knight* of the his origin being secondary to him:

Dr. Young: I thought I'd skip back to our previous conversations about your family.

Joker: Of course. I was born in a small fishing village. I always wanted to join the circus, but my father wouldn't really let me.

Dr. Young: I don't believe you.

Joker: My father was a cop, one week from retirement when the mob . . .

Dr. Young: I've seen the movie. (Rocksteady Studios, 2009)

By joking about that (including the use of movie clichés) the character trivializes that part of his persona, that in any other case would be fundamental to understand it. Likewise, when speaking about his mental illness, Dr. Young points out that no doctor has been able to identify the Joker's and each has a different theory about it, probably insinuating that the Joker behaves differently with different people just to confuse them.



Photo 6

At the end of the game, Batman is invited to the party the Joker has been preparing the entire night. The entrance to said party is a door shaped like the Joker's head, entering through the mouth, symbolizing the real intentions of the Joker, to make Batman enter his mind to understand the way the Joker behaves. In the final moments of the game, the Joker injects Batman with TITAN (the drug that turns people into monsters) so he would lose his humanity and finally embrace insanity, but Batman resists the change, to which the Joker complains: "I just wanted to bring down your grim façade and let you see the world as I see it. Giggling in a corner and bleeding" (Rocksteady Studios, 2009). This statement illustrates how the Joker sees the Dark Knight: by referring to his behavior as a 'façade', he is again expressing his idea of how Batman is really insane like him, but is unable to admit it, masquerading it with his actions. The fact that the Joker is trying to help (in his own way) Batman embrace his real side is similar to the idea shown in the comics of how he appreciates him in a way and is simply trying to help him. Since that does not work, he injects himself with TITAN, so that Batman would have to become also a monster to stop him, but he uses the anti-

dote on himself, refusing to accept the Joker's challenge and, once again, maintaining his position as the referent of order against chaos.

In the sequel to this game, *Batman: Arkham City* (Rocksteady, 2011), the Joker reappears, injecting Batman with his poisoned blood to make look for an antidote to save both. This act proves again the Joker's mindset: even though he is his biggest enemy, he trusts Batman enough to choose him as the person who could save his life. When Batman says he would gladly die if that means the Joker would also die, he informs him that he has shipped his blood to different hospitals in Gotham, so if Batman does not do his bidding, innocent people will die. The fact that the Joker is one step forward from Batman illustrates how well he knows him, a lesser enemy would not have thought of that. At the end of the game though, attacks Batman to take the cure from him, making it fall to the ground and break. As the Joker dies, Batman tells him that even after everything he has done he would have still given him the antidote. The Joker, realizing he has basically killed himself, laughs at the irony and dies. This moment is charged with symbolism, during both this game and the one before it, the Joker had had an advantage over Batman based on the fact that he knew him better than anyone, but, in the end, by attacking him believing that that was the only way to get the antidote he showed that he did not really know the Caped Crusader. His death is both literal and metaphorical, as he has failed his own premise by not being able to read his opponent. He has failed him in a way. Like in the last game, Batman reassures his humanity by admitting he would have saved anyway, because that is what Batman would do. The Joker does not leave empty handed, though, by laughing at his own demise, he maintains his life's philosophy, rejecting one last time Batman's order and embracing chaos.

The third game of the franchise is 2013's *Batman: Arkham Origins*. The game serves as a prequel to the two previous installments and has as the main story the beginning of the relationship between Batman and the Joker.

The Joker appears at first as a terrorist who wants to create chaos for the sake of chaos, when he learns of Batman he hires a group of assassins to kill him as he sees him as only a nuisance in his plans. His point of view changes when Batman saves him from falling from the top of a building; as the police is arresting him, he has this exchange:

G.C.P.D. Det. Harvey Bullock: [arresting Joker] Where'd he go?

The Joker: Who?

G.C.P.D. Det. Harvey Bullock: The Bat. Your partner!

The Joker: Partner?

G.C.P.D. Det. Harvey Bullock: Who else would jump off a building to save your sorry ass?

The Joker: You know, Officer, I was wondering the same thing myself. (WB Games Montréal, 2013)

Right after this, we get a long cut scene in which the Joker is being treated in prison by Dr. Harleen Quinzel. The Joker starts to explain his story and we see similarities with the ever popular *Killing Joke* origin, more specifically the failed comedian aspect. The Joker explains how his life was devoid meaning until he met a special person that same night, a person he identifies with and thinks that is finally someone that can understand him. This person is of course Batman (whom the Joker sees in his mind as a giant monster-bat), but the catch is that Dr. Quinzel believes the Joker is talking about her, specially after he ends his speech by saying that, even though that person is so important to him, he does not know its name. The fact that the doctor mistakes the Joker's statements for a declaration of love towards her, indicates how close the Joker's relationship with Batman is to a romantic one.

Later on, the Joker escapes from prison and sets his mind in Batman, more specifically in breaking his moral code. He straps himself to a electric chair that will be charged with the heartbeats of Bane, one of the hired assassins. If Batman wants to save the Joker, he must kill Bane and if he does not do it, the Joker dies. Any way, Batman would be responsible for a death. Of course, this is Batman we are talking about, so he finds a way to avoid this by stopping Bane's heart long enough to make the Joker believe he is dead. When he leaves the chair, Batman reanimates him.

When the Joker finds out, he is enraged. The fact that Batman has not broken his moral code goes against the idea Joker had of him being a kindred spirit. Even though Batman proceeds to give him a beating, Joker laughs, telling him that the only way to stop him for real is to kill him. This would therefore start their relationship, with the Joker being obsessed with making Batman kill him just to prove him wrong. Until the end, when he ended up dying, but unable to break his opponent.

7. Fifty Shades of Mr. J. The Joker as a romantic interest in *Suicide Squad*

In all the previous chapters, I analyzed a variety of adaptations of the Joker in different media and with different potential audiences. I analyzed films, television shows and video games and adaptations of the character that were supposed to be funny, scary, unsettling... But all those iterations of the character had one thing in common, they had the Joker as the main focus. As I already said numerous times, the Joker is Batman's main villain, so it should come as no surprise that, whenever he is used, he shares the spotlight with the Dark Knight and that even sometimes, he takes away from him. But in this last chapter I will analyze a version of the character in a movie in which he was not only not the main character, but his role can even be labeled as a glorified cameo.

The movie in question is *Suicide Squad* (David Ayer, 2016) and the total time the Joker is on screen is about seven minutes and twenty seconds. Now, on one hand it should be surprising that a character that is so popular does not have a bigger role, but on the other one could say that it makes sense considering that he does not have anything to do with the plot. But then why is he in the movie? I believe this question has two different answers.

The first one is for marketing purposes. The cast of characters of *Suicide Squad* is mainly unknown to the general audience and therefore the movie needed a big name to sell the movie. Even though the character does not have a big role in the movie his appearance in the movie received a lot of promotion, in fact, if someone sees the general advertisement campaign for the movie it would be easy to think that he is, indeed, one of the main characters considering how prominently he is featured. And it makes sense. Heath Ledger's previous work as the Joker was universally praised and many fans believed that he would never be surpassed, in fact, an online campaign was even started asking Warner Bros. to retire the character from future movies because no one would be able to do it better. So, of course, the news of a new version of the Joker would spark controversy and it could be said that generating that controversy was the plan all along. On April 25, 2015 David Ayer shared on a Twitter post the first look at the new version of the character, which was met with general displeasure. The character, even though it had the basic Joker features like pale skin, green hair and red lips had new elements that were met with criticism, mainly the fact that his body was covered in tattoos. To this day, the image has been retweeted forty thousand times, showing this unveiling as a great example of the spreadability principle by Henry Jenkins: the image did not need mainstream coverage, as it was shared by the fan community itself.

Of course, it was not difficult to imagine that, no matter how good Jared Leto (the actor portraying the Joker) could be in the movie, a first look so drastically different would not be very ap-

preciated, so maybe the first reveal should have been something more tame, like just a shot of the face. But again, the idea was to stir controversy. Almost everyone was convinced that Ledger's per-

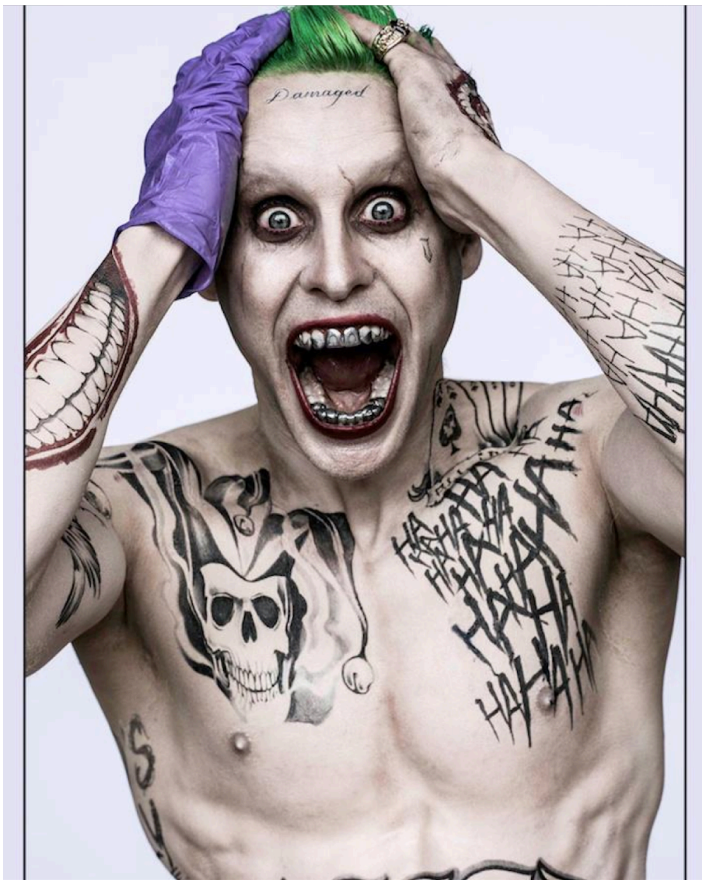


Photo 7

formance was perfect so the best way to generate interest was to offer something radically different. When the movie came out, people were not interested in the Joker because they thought he was good, like Ledger's, but because they wanted to see how this new version worked on screen. Going back to the question I posed, the second answer would be that the character is indeed needed because, even though he is not the main focus of the movie, another character is. Harley Quinn, portrayed by Margot Robbie, was definitely one of the main focuses of the movie and the character can not be understood without the Joker. That is because Harley Quinn is the Joker's girlfriend, a psychiatrist that fell in

love with him while she was his doctor and that ended up becoming her sidekick. So, if you introduce Harley Quinn to the audience, you need to explain her origins and you need the Joker for that.

Now, the main theme of this chapter is the Joker as a romantic interest because that is his main role in the movie, everything the Joker does revolves around her girlfriend, whether it is their unconventional love story or his attempts to rescue her during the main plot. This motivations, though, clash from the typical attitude the Joker has towards his 'henchwench'.

Harley Quinn was first introduced as a character in *Batman: The Animated Series*, making her one of the few characters to jump from adaptation to comic canon. This jump happened in 1994's *Mad Love* (Dini, Timm 1994). The story shows in flashback form how Dr. Harleen Quinzel was seduced by her patient the Joker and after helping him escape, becomes her sidekick Harley Quinn. The story also shows the nature of their abusive relationship, with the Joker constantly hitting and berating her. Of course, being an abusive relationship, Harley does not blame the Joker for his actions, but Batman, who she sees as the reason why his lover is unable to focus on her. So she decides

that she is going to kill him and almost succeeds, but when she calls the Joker to tell him she is about to end their nemesis once and for all, he gets mad and throws her out of a window (not even stopping to see if she is alive or dead) because he is the only one that can have the right to kill Batman. Later on, while she is recuperating in the hospital, Harley tells herself that her relationship is over, until she sees that the Joker has sent her a 'get well soon' note, so she forgives him.

For Tosha Taylor (2015) their relationship works in a way that both characters need each other. Harley Quinn is, at the end of the day, a reflection of the Joker, her harlequin costume and her antics are borrowed from the Joker's clown persona, so she needs him in order to work. Basically, her character can not exist without the Joker as a role model. It does not work that way with the Joker, though, whose existence can be independent to Quinn's, but he also needs Harley:

Alluding to Lacan, Butler (1990) identifies the female subject as the symbolic phallus through which the literal phallus is reflected; the male subject, then, "requires this Other to confirm and, hence, to be the Phallus in its 'extended' sense." If Harley represents the Joker's phallic power, her presence is not expendable, as the Joker would appear to believe, but necessary; likewise, to embody her beloved criminal persona, Harley requires the Joker. Butler further explicates phallic juxtaposition with attention paid to relationships based in subjugation, ending a "failed reciprocity" in which the dominant, empowered party comes to depend upon the one who is typically disempowered and subjugated, for the latter serves as a "reflection" of the former's self and agency. Even while subjugating her through ritual abuse, the Joker relies on Harley as a means through which he accomplishes his criminal work and appraises his own demonstrations of power. (Taylor 2015, 84)

So, in a way, both characters depend from each other. Harley Quinn needs the Joker as her entire persona is based around his, so she would not exist without him. But the Joker also needs Harley, because she is a representation of the Joker's own power. No matter how things are going for him, he always has Harley below him, which keeps his own position of power and self-confidence.

One important element of Harley Quinn's origin story in *Mad Love* and present in other stories like *Batman: Harley Quinn* (Dini, 1999) (which situates her origins in comic book canon during the *No Man's Land* story arc) is the fact that she becomes a villain per her own choice. It is true that the Joker seduces her with the idea of manipulating her, but it is never explicitly stated that he wants her help, it is something she decides on her own. In *Mad Love* she helps the Joker escape Arkham Asylum and in her eponymous comic, she is the one that escapes Arkham to meet with the Joker, something that surprises the Joker himself.

This changes in the new origin given to her in 2012, in the *Suicide Squad* comic book. In it, she helps him escape the asylum and, afterwards, the Joker takes her to the chemical plant in which

he supposedly became the Joker after falling into a vat of chemicals. He asks her to jump and, when she refuses, he throws her himself.

Now, how does their relationship work in the movie? It is difficult to say. Apparently the movie was cut numerous times changing its tone, because the studio did not like it originally. Jared Leto himself complained that many of his scenes were cut from the movie, particularly those that showed the more abusive side of the main couple's relationship. An example of this is a scene in which the Joker saves Harley Quinn and escapes with her in a helicopter, the helicopter is shot down and he pushes her out to save her. Originally, he pushed her out after they got into an argument and the helicopter was shot afterwards, changing the entire scene that went from him trying to kill her to him trying to save her.

In their first scene together, we see how the Joker seduced so she could help him escape. On the next, right afterwards, we see the riot in Arkham Asylum generated by the Joker's escape. During it, the Joker is about to give her electroshock therapy as vengeance because she, according to him: "you helped me by erasing my mind (...) you left me in a black hole of rage and confusion" (Ayer, 2016). So, apparently, while he was manipulating her, she was also manipulating him. That phrase is never explained so there is no way of knowing. Also, it should be noted that the phrase belongs to the extended Blu-Ray version of the movie, and not the theatrical release, in which there was no explanation whatsoever for the Joker's actions.

Later on, we see how Harley follows the Joker to make him accept her love, with him rejecting her because he claims he is not supposed to be loved because he is "an idea, an state of mind". Then we see a scene taken from the *Suicide Squad* comic in which the Joker asks Harley to jump into the vat of chemicals. The difference is that in the movie she jumps voluntarily and the Joker jumps right after to save her, supposedly.

In general, the movie eliminates every instance of the Joker being abusive towards Harley and paints him like actually a pretty good boyfriend (as good as an insane gangster can be, anyway). The reason for this may be the fact that, with Harley being the main character, there is a need to show her in a positive light and she being the abused half of a relationship does not work well for that. Also, it could be argued that there is an economic interest, by adding those more risqué scenes the age rating of the movie may have gone up, lowering the expected box office.

When it comes to see how this Joker works it is important to know that, since he almost does not appear in the movie, it is difficult to cover some important points of the Joker persona. For example, his relationship with Batman, which is a crucial part of the character, is completely absent. We know that these characters know each other and there is a hint in *Batman v Superman: Dawn of*

Justice (Zack Snyder, 2016) that he killed Batman's sidekick Robin and he makes a few allusions to the Caped Crusader: he has a tattoo of bat killed with a knife and wears leggings with the Batman symbol in one scene, but nothing apart from that. We also do not know anything about his origin, other than the scene in the chemical plant may be a hint of the traditional Joker origin.

His physical appearance was the most talked about aspect of the character, because of how radically different it was from all its predecessors. He is covered in tattoos, has his teeth capped and has a vast amount of jewelry, which gives him a look kind of like a rapper of sorts. In an interview with *Vanity Fair*, Alessandro Bertolazzi, the man responsible for the make-up in the movie (which earned him an Academy Award) claimed that his main inspirations were the character Gwynplaine from *The Man Who Laughs* (Paul Leni, 1928), which inspired the Joker initially and David Bowie. He also said: "I wanted it to look really dirty and really sick—with the pale skin, the veins, and a wound. This is a guy who hasn't ever taken a shower" (Julie Miller, 2017). The main problem I would say the design of the character has is the fact that it lacks the timeless aesthetic the other versions had. This look in particular would only work in our current setting, while the others feel more timeless.

Another interesting point is the fact that this is probably the only version of the character that can be described as being physically attractive. Heath Ledger, for example, was known as a Hollywood 'pretty boy', but the way he was characterized took that away from him. Leto, on the other hand, is in pretty good shape and it is difficult not to see it due to the amount of scenes in which he is not wearing a shirt. But again, this does not come as a surprise. The Joker's role is that of a love interest and the audience is supposed to root for him in that (in fact, the closing scene of the movie shows him finally rescuing Harley), so, in typical Hollywood fashion, we have a good-looking boy for a good-looking girl. This was probably influenced by the fanfiction phenomenon. Even if their relationship is usually not portrayed as a romantic one, it tends to be romanticized by certain portions of the fan community, more specifically the teenage portion to whom the movie was mainly intended. So, in a way, we can say that this is an example of the fan community influencing the official product itself.

When it comes to the character itself, how he behaves and such, we find that he is rather void. We know he shares a penchant with his counterparts for showmanship as his henchmen are shown wearing strange costumes (one of them dresses like a panda bear), but we do not know if he shares any of their life philosophies too. Throughout the movie, he says a number of phrases that feel like they are supposed to be charged of meaning, but are ultimately meaningless like: "if you weren't crazy, I'd think you were insane", sounds cool, but we do not really know what he means. There is

also the line in which he says that he can not be loved because he is “an idea, a state of mind”, it is interesting because it feels like this Joker is somehow self-conscious, like he knows he is playing a character he is supposed to adhere to, instead of just being himself. According to director David Ayer the Joker is “a poet. He’s in love—sick love, but still love”.

In conclusion, I will not deny that it is interesting to see the character lose his position in the spotlight in favor of a more supporting role, but it does not work. Compared to the rest of the iterations I analyzed, *Suicide Squad* does not give him enough room to shine, which undermines the character considering how iconic it is. One could argue that with the movie being one in franchise that will very likely see the character reappear in the future, there is no need to reveal everything yet, but in general, everything that is revealed feels underwhelming.

The romantic relationship between the Joker and Harley Quinn is changed from the original sources to both give Quinn a more leading role (she initially follows him against his own wishes) and is also far more tame, for the sake of not alienating the audience. It is kind of a reversal of roles because even if Harley’s persona is based around the Joker, the entirety of the Joker’s character is based around her, considering she is the only reason he is in the movie at all.

8. Conclusion

Using as basis the theory of transmedia storytelling laid down by scholars like Henry Jenkins and Carlos Scolari, I have tried to analyze the fictional super villain the Joker as a transmedial character.

The reason behind me choosing this character in particular that probably strays from the traditional idea of literary character, as it was not originated in a novel or a play, but in a comic book, comes from the mutability of the character itself. If I had chosen, say, Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, it is true that I could have probably found many different adaptations in media, but the main difference does not come from the adaptations, but from the source material itself. With texts like those, there is usually just one source, the original and only story. Therefore, when analyzing them, all adaptations answer to the same source.

But with comic books is different. Normally, depending on its success, a comic book character will not die and its adventures will continue for as long as people are willing to spend their money on them. For example, the Joker himself first debuted in 1940 and, 77 years later, is still one of the most popular fictional characters of all time. Because of the longevity of this kind of characters it is almost compulsory for them to change with the times in order to adapt to new audiences. This leads to a number of different ways a character can be adapted, depending on which era is chosen. For example, the campy Batman television show of the 1960's has recently been adapted into an animated series, even if logic would say that that kind of show would be passé.

But another important factor is that these mutability typical of these kind of characters because of the nature of their source material, is also part of the Joker himself. As I explained earlier, part of the character's mental illness is his ability to change his own personality. It is very interesting how that change of personality which is indirectly part of every successful comic book character overtime was made part of the character itself.

This of course means that every possible iteration of the character could be considered faithful to the source, which, in theory, could make the entirety of my work worthless. Because if any possible version of the character can be considered correct, then where is the merit in adapting it? As I pointed out using Brian Richardson's (2010) ideas, every character has a series of defining characteristics that have to be respected in order for the adaptation to be considered faithful to the source material, but if one of the characteristics of my character is that any set of traits could be valid, where is the point?

Well, first of all, as I proved with my various analysis, even if different versions of the character can be different from each other in many different ways, there are number of them that are always being kept, like the physical appearance and the somehow clownish persona.

But the most important of all is that is this trait of the character the one that makes it more capable of being adapted. Because of his own mutability that goes beyond the traditional one in his genre, the Joker is a character that invites to different adaptations and interpretations. Some of them see him as clown, others as an extravagant gangster and others as an inexplicable force of chaos. And none of them are wrong. When asked about if he thought that Heath Ledger's portrayal of the Joker was the definitive one, Mark Hamill said that there is no definitive version of the character, because there are always new interpretations to be made.

That is the great advantage comic books have in the transmedial field, the vast amount of source texts that can be found in order to adapt a character. Many people claim that Jack Nicholson's version is the superior one because it is the most faithful to the comics, while others give this honor to Ledger's, because even though his portrayal strays from the source material, it represents better than the rest what the Joker should and would be. Even the much criticized version of Jared Leto was given some praise because of how different it was from the rest and offered a different take on the character.

And at the end of the day that is what people want to see with the Joker. While other characters have a blueprint they usually have to adhere to, the Joker does not. Even if Ledger's was the most popular, nobody wanted Leto to try to emulate it, they wanted him to do something new. Because that is what the character is about, reinvention. If one of the characteristics of the character is his reinvention of himself, the best way to show this is to have every version be different from the other one. So, for the an adaptation of the character to be faithful it does not only need to look at the source, but at other adaptations and try to be different from them.

Another interesting thing in comic book adaptations is how they can influence the source material, something that usually does not happen with other adaptations as the original text has already being written. But because comic book stories never end we can see how the success of *The Dark Knight* led to the *Joker* (Azzarello, 2008) graphic novel basing the character in its film counterpart, or the previously mentioned *Mad Love* comic being set in the *Batman: The Animated Series* world and not the comic book one.

At the end of the day, transmedia storytelling is based on the idea of different mediums participating together in creating one story and comic books and one of the best examples of this, as they have been doing since day one. Comic books are always adapting their stories to every possible me-

dium that can be successful and taking what they can from them in order to keep on going. Is a retroactive effect that was transmedia before transmedia was a thing. So that was the reason why I chose a character from this medium, because I believe it is the best way to illustrate transmedia storytelling as a whole.

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10. Filmography

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11. Appendix

Photo 1: The Joker in his first comic book appearance and Conrad Veidt as Gwynplaine in *The Man Who Laughs*. <http://www.ebaumsworld.com/pictures/10-real-life-inspirations-for-comic-book-characters/84480323/>

Photo 2: César Romero as the Joker in *Batman* (1966). <http://copycateffect.blogspot.com.es/2013/02/Hugo-Joker.html>

Photo 3: The Joker as in *Batman: The Animated Series*. [http://batman.wikia.com/wiki/The_Joker_\(DC_Animated_Universe\)](http://batman.wikia.com/wiki/The_Joker_(DC_Animated_Universe))

Photo 4: Jack Nicholson as the Joker in *Batman* (1989). <https://uk.pinterest.com/pin/33988172164111907/>

Photo 5: Heath Ledger as the Joker in *The Dark Knight* (2008). <http://screencrush.com/heath-ledger-joker-rumors/>

Photo 6: The Joker as in *Batman: Arkham Asylum* (2009). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BXapChUOcX0>

Photo 7: Jared Leto as the Joker in his first photo unveiled for *Suicide Squad* (2016). <http://www.dccomics.com/blog/2015/04/24/first-look-suicide-squads-joker>