

The Psychological Complexity of Batman, the Joker and their Relationship in the Dark Age of Comics

LARS VAN AMERONGEN-KRUISSELBRINK

MICHAEL JOHN PRINCE

University of Agder, 2020

Faculty of Humanities and Education

Department of Foreign Languages and Translation

Master

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Introduction

Batman and the Joker have been iconic characters ever since their creation merely one year apart 80 years ago.¹ Making their debut in the comics - the duo have since been adapted to cartoons, tv-series, videogames, and movies. This has led to a franchise rivaled only by few. Equally iconic is perhaps the relationship between the two, whom one can arguably claim to be the most well-known arch enemies in comic book history (possibly history in general), surpassing even DC colleagues Superman and Lex Luther.

Modern comic book history starting with the Platinum Age in 1897, is divided up into several ages due to a variety of characteristics that set the comics of their time apart.²

The comics I have chosen to focus on belong to what is referred to as the Modern Age (1986-) and most of them specifically to the Dark Age (1986-) a sub-age of the Modern Age. Arguably starting in the late 70s and early 80s, there is a general consensus that the Dark Age of comics began in 1986 with Frank Miller's *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* and Alan Moore's *Watchmen*.³ The two dark, gritty and complex works took the superhero genre and massively deconstructed it, providing much of the direct inspiration for what followed. Comics would now contain more graphic sexual and violent content and be infused with greater political and psychological complexity aimed at a more mature audience. The two comics would also ignite a trend that would portray superheroes more complex and "human" than had previously been done. The time of the flawless, perfect heroes with their accurate moral compasses was over. Now came the time of flawed, neurotic and tormented anti-heroes with violent methods and a variety of deep psychological issues. This new "depth" in comic books would achieve something previously unheard of within the industry: widespread mainstream attention as well as acclaim within intellectual circles. As a result, it briefly turned comics into a "hip" and "rebellious" medium.⁴

One could claim that elements from the Dark Age of comic books have been infused to such an extent into recent comics such as *Batman: White Knight* (2017-2018) and *The Batman Who Laughs* (2019), that this age is still going on. However, Geoff Johns who is an American comic book writer and the president and Chief Creative Officer at DC Comics, believes that at

¹ DCE Editorial. 2014

² Rhoades, Shirrel. 2008:4

³ Tvtropes.org. Read 09.05.2020

⁴ Tvtropes.org. Read 09.05.2020

least the DC Comics' Dark Age ended with the DC Rebirth in 2016. DC Rebirth was a relaunch of DC Comics, and their first significant rebranding since the New 52 in 2011. However unlike the New 52, DC Rebirth was not a continuity reboot of the DC Universe, but had notable status quo shifts and new creative teams taking over certain titles, as well as some books being renumbered and others getting new #1s.⁵

For this thesis I will attempt to illustrate and exploit the psychological and general complexity of Batman and the Joker and their relationship in the Dark Age. I will do this by applying Carl Jung's theory of "the shadow", the literary concept of the doppelgänger, as well as comics analysis and general close reading. The reason I chose to focus on the Dark Age is due to the added depth, and particularly a more flawed protagonist. This is one of the several things that separates it from previous ages.

The content of this thesis will be as follows: In Chapter 1 I will discuss the history of comics, the definition of what is a comic, and how it functions as a medium. As we enter Chapter 2, I will explore the world of Batman in comics, and explain what characterizes the different ages. While Chapter 1 will function as a base and an introduction into comics, Chapter 2 will function as an introduction to Batman and the Joker in comics. This chapter is also going to work as a foundation and background information for Chapter 3, which discusses Batman and the Joker in the Dark Age and will be the core of the thesis. It is also here that I will introduce Jung's "shadow" and the literary motif of the doppelgänger, and particularly the "monster double". I am going to use Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* and *Year One* as well in this chapter because of their relevance.

To illustrate the use of the shadow and doppelgängers I will start by comparing two graphic novels from the very beginning of the Dark Age: Alan Moore's *Batman: The Killing Joker* from 1988, and Grant Morrison's *Batman: Arkham Asylum – a Serious House On Serious Earth* from 1989 in Chapter 4. I will continue with comparisons in Chapter 5 where I will compare two works from more recent times: Sean Murphy's *White Knight* (2017/2018) and Scott Snyder's *The Batman Who Laughs* from 2019.

The reasons why I have selected these four comics and not others are for several reasons. One, is that all four have different authors and artists, offering the discussion interesting points of comparison. Two, they are spread out in time in terms of when they came out. Two were published at the beginning of the Dark Age, and two within the last three years. Third, and most importantly they contain vital, defining and highly significant moments to the two

⁵ Tvtropes.org. Read 09.05.2020

characters both as individuals and as a pair. These three reasons will present a clearer image of the characters and the development in their relationship from the 1980s until now.

As part of the conclusion, I will also briefly go through the representation of Batman and the Joker on screen through analyzing their roles in three selected film adaptations: Tim Burton's *Batman* (1989), *The Dark Knight* (2008) from Christopher Nolan's The Dark Knight Trilogy, and Todd Phillips' psychological thriller *Joker* (2019). My reasons for choosing these are similar to those when selecting the comics. They are from different decades within the Dark Age, have different directors/cast, and they are portrayed differently just as they can be in the comics. I have chosen to exclude going into depth into movies and series like Leslie H. Martinson's *Batman: The Movie* (1966) due to the time it came out; David Ayer's *Suicide Squad* (2016) for its lack of Batman and the Joker; and Bruno Heller's *Gotham* (2014-2019) because it lacks relevance.

The reason I chose this topic is because I always enjoyed reading comic books (especially Batman) as a child. However, when I rediscovered this passion as an adult not only did I realize that it is a completely different reading experience, there is also a lot of things you see that you otherwise would have missed through the eyes of your child self. As a boy limited by age and access to comics, series, movies it was simple: Batman is good, the Joker is bad. The Joker is crazy, Batman is not. As a man with a matured mind and the ability to order any comic book, TV series collection or movie at the click of a button, I find myself reevaluating my childhood hypotheses. After watching an animated movie adaptation of Alan Moore's *The Killing Joke*, starring Kevin Conroy as the voice of Batman, and Mark Hamill as the voice of the Joker, I started to revisit my standpoint on the roles of the two. When I then heard it was possible to write about comics for my master's thesis this instantly came to mind. With psychology being another interest, it seemed like a perfect idea to combine the two, and by doing so learn more about both in the process.

Chapter 1) Comics as a Medium

When it comes to comics, most of us have a specific image or idea in mind. However, there does seem to be a slight debate to what exactly “comics” are, and even how and when it originated. In his book *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, Scott McCloud defines comics as following:

“com.ics (kom'iks)n. plural in form, used with a singular verb. 1. Juxtaposed, pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer”. (McCloud, Scott. 1993:9)

Scholar Karin Kukkonen on the other hand, has a different view on the matter. In her book *Studying Comics and Graphic Novels*, she writes:

“comics are a medium narrating through images, words, and a panel sequences, and they emerge from the production context of popular mass culture of the twentieth century”
(Kukkonen. Karin 2013: 102)

These two definitions differ somewhat. Whilst McCloud’s definition seems to focus on the comics itself as an art, Kukkonen considers it more historically and related to mass production. The authors’ points of view do most certainly also influence their thoughts on the origins of comics, although they both do consistently mention mostly the same examples all though debate why, and why not they should be regarded as comics.

McCloud is fairly open when it comes to what could be regarded as comics throughout history. He starts with a pre-Columbian picture manuscript discovered by Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés around 1519 - then goes back to the French Bayeux tapestry illustrating the Norman conquest of England in 1066 - before showing a nearly completed scene painted pre-1200 B.C. for the tomb of Menna, an ancient Egyptian scribe.⁶ The author admits that he himself is unsure about the when or where comics originated, but states that the comics we call comics today began to appear as the 19th Century ended,⁷ crediting a lot of the evolution to the printing press.

⁶ McCloud, Scott. 1993:10-15

⁷ McCloud, Scott. 1993:18

Despite claiming comics to have originated in the 20th Century, Kukkonen does not completely disregard the examples McCloud has given. Instead, she refers to them as “proto-comics.”⁸ She gives several examples of “comics elements” that recurs before the 20th Century; such as the sequences of visual narration, and the combination of word and image in the Bayeux tapestry. The reason for her arguments against this being a comic is the lack of the image sequences not being segmented into panels, and the written languages not being integrated in speech bubbles and captions. She follows up by arguing that comics are printed and reproduced on a large scale, while the hand-embroidered Bayeux tapestry is one of a kind.⁹

Kukkonen also gives an example of what she calls “proto-panels” in the Memorial Portrait of Sir Henry Unton of 1596, because the canvas is divided up into separate, sequential images.¹⁰ She even talks of “proto-speech bubbles” in medieval illuminated manuscripts; like in a biblical illustration of the Annunciation, that shows Gabriel greeting Mary whilst holding a scroll that says “*Ave Maria*”.¹¹ However, she disregards both of these examples as well due to her opinion that comics should be reproduced in large numbers through printing and distributed widely. The two mentioned examples like the Bayeux tapestry are hand-crafted and are alone in their existence.¹² These examples once again show what the author believes to be a vital link between comics as a medium and the production of the popular mass culture of the twentieth century.

Even though McCloud and Kukkonen disagree with the each other’s definition of comics, and thus also the other’s interpretation of comics in history, the two do not dismiss each other’s points of view all together. While Karin Kukkonen believes comics to be a fairly recent thing in a historical perspective, she acknowledges the elements in “early comics” or in her words “proto-comics.” The same goes for Scott McCloud, who states that the comics as we know them today, started around the same time Kukkonen believes they “originated”.

The third scholar I am using for this thesis has a definition as well that does not coincide with the two previous. Will Eisner says: “*Comics: a form of sequential art, often in the form of a strip or a book in which images and text are arranged to tell a story*”¹³

The reason for these differs in definitions can be found in McCloud’s *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. Here he explains that the attempts to define comics is and on-going process

⁸ Kukkonen, Karin. 2013:102

⁹ Kukkonen, Karin. 2013:100

¹⁰ Kukkonen, Karin. 2013:100

¹¹ Kukkonen, Karin. 2013:101

¹² Kukkonen, Karin. 2013:101-102

¹³ Eisner, Will. 2008:xvii

that he does not see ending anytime soon, and which he calls the “Great Debate.”¹⁴ Since these three definitions are spread over twenty years, it would seem that he is right.

It is important however to take into account the role these three have within the world of comics. Karin Kukkonen is a comic theorist, scholar and works at a university, Scott McCloud is a comics theorist as well but also a renowned cartoonist, and Will Eisner is regarded as a legendary cartoonist. On the cover of Eisner’s book *Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative* there is a quote from Scott McCloud that says: “*There isn’t a comic artist alive who hasn’t benefited from Will Eisner’s masterful work and formidable wisdom.*”¹⁵ Even if McCloud and (especially) Kukkonen as comic theorists have proven to be more relevant for this thesis, one has to mention Will Eisner and cannot overlook the vast contribution he has made to comics.

While Eisner’s book is focusing more on graphic storytelling and visual narrative, McCloud is sort of typifying the genre on the way it is read, while Kukkonen is focusing that comics in some shape or form are mass produced. Her focus and book are the most relevant for this thesis, due to the fact that Batman first entered the scene nearly halfway into the 20th Century. During this time (and still today) mass production had a big role in comics, making them available to children (and adults) world-wide.

As the title of this chapter indicates comics are a medium. In order to explain what the criteria are for something to be called a medium, and how comics fulfills these, I refer to Karin Kukkonen’s *Studying Comics and Graphic Novels*. In the book the author says that a medium consists of three criteria:

1. It is a mode of communication.
2. It relies on a particular set of technologies.
3. It is anchored in society through a number of institutions.¹⁶

She continues by illustrating how these three criteria apply to comics:

“Comics work as a mode of communication in that they tell stories or present jokes in a particular manner using images, words, and sequence. Comics also rely on the technology of print and the format of the book. With the increasing digitalization of comics and the rise of

¹⁴ McCloud, Scott. 1993:23

¹⁵ Eisner, Will. 2008

¹⁶ Kukkonen, Karin. 2013:4

web comics, a new set of technologies might be introduced for comics, but as for now, most comics are printed and bound in various formats. Comics are institutionalized; in the United States for example through the MAINSTREAM COMICS publishing houses such as DC and Marvel. Independent and ALTERNATIVE COMICS, when they are self-published or (re)published and distributed through smaller publishers of comics, are tied to institutional infrastructures particular to comics as well.”¹⁷

With this Kukkonen shows us how comics work as a medium and again stresses the importance of the technology of print. She also further brings up the mainstream comics publishing houses DC and Marvel. The two have since their creation produced an unparalleled number of superheroes - that have entertained several generations in the shape of comic books, video games – and have today (especially Marvel) reached an all-time peak on the big screen. Throughout the next chapters we will however be focusing almost solely on DC; more specifically two of its most famous heroes and villains; Batman and the Joker.

¹⁷ Kukkonen, Karin. 2013:4-5

Chapter 2) The World of Batman in Comics

As I mentioned in the introduction; modern comic book history is divided up into several ages due to the major characteristics that set the comics of their time apart. This is something that goes for both Marvel and DC. From the research that I have conducted, there seems to be a general consensus that they can be divided into the Platinum (or Victorian) Age, the Golden Age, the Silver Age, the Bronze Age, and the Modern Age. There seems however to be a disagreement on how these ages are divided in forms of when one ends and the next starts, but according to former Marvel publisher Shirrel Rhoades many historians outline the so-called comic book ages as following:

- Platinum Age: 1897-1937
- Golden Age: 1938-1955
- Silver Age: 1956-1972
- Bronze Age: 1973-1985
- Modern Age: 1986-Present¹⁸

The starting point of the Platinum Age (ca 1897-1937) was according to the article *Comic Books: Origin, Evolution and Its Reach* the famous comic book *The Yellow Kid in McFadden's Flats* in 1897. The 196 pages long book launched the term "comic books" by being the first to utilize the term, having it written on its back cover.¹⁹ Richard D. Olson however, proposes in his paper "*Say! Dis Is Grate Stuff: The Yellow Kid and the Birth of the American Comics*", that the origins of comics (and thus the Platinum Age) started two years earlier on 17 February 1895, with the first appearance of the Yellow Kid in the newspaper.²⁰

It would however take almost half a century before comics as we know them today would arrive. Regardless of the discussion on when one age started and ended, there is an undisputed consensus that the Golden Age (ca 1938-1955) started with the debut of Superman in *Action Comics #1* in 1938, and with it came the creation of the superhero genre. For the very recently established National Allied Publications (Later DC), Superman became the first of a long list

¹⁸ Rhoades, Shirrel. 2008:4

¹⁹ S, Manoj. 28.02.2018

²⁰ Olson, Richard D. 1993:28

of famous superheroes such as Wonder Woman, the Flash, Aquaman, Green Lantern and perhaps most importantly Batman. Although Superman was a crucial factor in the birth of the comic magazine industry that developed during 1936-1939, two other factors were equally important. The increase in number of themed magazines, and a simultaneous increase in the number of publishers.²¹ In 1939 the National Allied Publications' biggest rival till this day, Marvel Comics, opened its doors. The company had already existed for six years but the owner Martin Goodman originally formed it to sell cheap magazines.²² Together with famous artists such as Jack Kerby and Steve Ditko, and star editor Stan Lee, Marvel created an equally famous set of superheroes including: Spider-Man, Captain America, the Incredible Hulk, Thor, the Fantastic Four, the Avengers and X-Men.

During the Golden Age, which saw the birth of the superhero genre, the popularity of comic books reached its peak in terms of commercial success and cultural significance. This happened undoubtedly due to it occurring at the same time as the Great Depression and World War II. Besides filling a constantly evolving need for cheap entertainment, comics reflected the cultural visions of its creators and were often used to advance specific visions.²³

After the war, comic book sales started dropping and readers gradually seemed to want a different type of material in the comics. Added to this a well-known American psychologist, Dr. Fredric Wertham published the book *Seduction of the Innocent* in 1954 - two years before the start of the Silver Age (ca 1956-1972) - where he claimed that comics negatively affected the minds of its readers, especially children.²⁴ Some scholars claim that this led directly to the formation of Comics Code Authority the same year. However, Paul Williams and James Lyons claim in their book *The Rise of the American Comics Artist: Creators and Contexts*, that the exact reasons for its creation is still a topic of debate. Nonetheless, The Comics Code Authority (CCA) was formed in 1954 by the Comics Magazine Association of America (CMAA) as an alternative to government regulation. The CMAA was formed by several major comics publishers, and once a comic book met the codes and standards of the CMAA it received the Comic Code Authority seal and was deemed fit for distribution.²⁵ Some of these rules included:

- *Crimes shall never be presented in such a way as to create sympathy for the criminal, to*

²¹ Gabilliet, Jean-Paul. 2005 :14

²² Bell, Blake & Vassallo, Michael J. 2013:7

²³ Kelley, Mark. 2009:1-2

²⁴ Wilson, Matt D. 19.04.2016

²⁵ Williams, Paul & Lyons, James. 2010:3

promote distrust of the forces of law and justice, or to inspire others with a desire to imitate criminals.

- *No comics shall explicitly present the unique details and methods of a crime.*
- *Policemen, judges, Government officials and respected institutions shall never be presented in such a way as to create disrespect for established authority.*
- *If crime is depicted it shall be as a sordid and unpleasant activity.*
- *Criminals shall not be presented so as to be rendered glamorous or to occupy a position which creates a desire for emulation.*
- *In every instance good shall triumph over evil and the criminal punished for his misdeeds.*
- *Nudity in any form is prohibited, as is indecent or undue exposure.*
- *Suggestive and salacious illustration or suggestive posture is unacceptable.*
- *All characters shall be depicted in dress reasonably acceptable to society.*
- *Females shall be drawn realistically without exaggeration of any physical qualities.*
- *No comic magazine shall use the word horror or terror in its title.*²⁶

These rules highly influenced comics during the Silver Age, putting restrictions on writers, artists and editors. In many ways the CCA sets off, defines and marks the end of the Silver Age of comics. In 1971, one year before the Silver Age is generally agreed upon to have ended, Marvel Comics broke the rule of Comics Code Authority by dealing with the issues relating to drug abuse in *The Amazing Spider-Man #96-98*. The success of the comics book series helped spread social messages, resulting in the CCA relaxing its stringent rules and eventually becoming merely symbolic.²⁷ Even though one cannot point to one specific incident that marks the end of the Silver Age and the start of the Bronze Age, one cannot disregard the monumental effect the change in the CCA had.

Once the restrictions of the CCA loosened and the Silver Age ended, there was the Bronze Age (ca 1973-1985). The Bronze Age ensured a continuation of popular characters who now returned to darker plots. These darker plots brought back real-life issues seen in the early Golden Ages such as drug use, poverty and pollution.²⁸ One of the most iconic of these darker plots was the shocking death of Spiderman's love interest Gwen Stacy in *The Amazing Spiderman #121* (1973). The death would go completely against the Silver Age CCA rule of good always having to triumph over evil, especially since it was Spiderman's effort trying to

²⁶ Gabilliet, Jean-Paul. 2005 :314-315

²⁷ S, Manoj 2018:249

²⁸ MQUITMANN. 2016

save her that killed her. Gwen Stacy is also one of few characters that was never revived. The Bronze Age would also introduce social progress in the sense that black and female protagonists started to play larger roles in mainstream titles. Most notably among these come from Marvel and include characters such as Sam Wilson/The Falcon who is considered the first African-American superhero. Other famous female characters that came from Marvel that were either created or reinvented, were X-men's Jean Grey/Phoenix and African-American Ororo Munroe/Storm, the Invisible Woman from Fantastic Four and Avenger's Wasp.

The transition from the Bronze Age to the Modern Age (ca 1986-present) is perhaps more fluid than the previous transitions between ages. Some even argue that the later years of the Bronze Age overlap with the early years of the Modern Age. One may arguably say that even if there were no specific moments to separate one age from the other there are things that influenced the transitions. The transition from the Platinum Age to the Golden Age came with the creation of the superhero genre headed by Superman. Between the end of the Golden Age and the start of the Silver Age there were dropping sales and censorship. Marvel breaking that very censorship paved the way for the darker Bronze Age. The shift from the Bronze Age to the Modern Age is according to some scholars the result of commercialization of comic book publishers, more psychologically complex characters (especially anti-heroes) and twisting plots.²⁹ During approximately the first 15 years of this period, many comic book characters were redesigned, creators gained prominence in the industry, independent comics flourished, and larger publishing houses became more commercialized.

According to Adam Schlesinger the major genre effect of the stories was to deconstruct the idea of the superhero. In the earlier ages superhero deconstructions were merely a minor part of the genre, due to character-focused stories examined the motivations behind their title heroes.³⁰ This idealism was largely replaced with deconstruction and a dystopian narrative. The *Crisis on Infinite Earths* series (1985-86) also gave DC the opportunity to revive most of its major characters. This meant that they had a whole new stall of superheroes whom they could give the same new "realism" Batman had been given in *The Dark Knight Returns*. Together with Marvel's *Secret Wars* (1984), the series also brought the era of the major crossovers.³¹

The Modern/Dark Age also gave birth to new comic book publishers in the early 90's. Most

²⁹ MGUI TMANN. 2016.

³⁰ Schlesinger, Adam. 2010:87

³¹ Schlesinger, Adam. 2010:87

notably among these was Image Comics, which included famous characters like Spawn and Savage Dragon. These new comic book publishers, free from any sort of corporate control, boasted a darker, sarcastic and more mature approach to superhero storylines. Spawn and Savage Dragon were two characters that came from Todd McFarlane and Erik Larsen, who were among seven high-profile creators that left Marvel due to wanting to retain the copyrights to their own work. This would be one of many problems that Marvel would face throughout this age, including a distributor war with DC, Image and Dark Horse, and a filing for bankruptcy in 1996.³² The distributor war came as a result of Marvel deciding to distribute its own books and bought a distributor called Heroes World in 1994. In response to this, the other major comic companies (DC, Image, and Dark Horse) all signed exclusive contracts with Diamond, effectively putting all other distributors out of business.³³ Eventually Marvel was forced to sign with Diamond as well, and after several other problems declared bankruptcy.³⁴

Like the Batman TV-series, Batman in cinema would also have huge influence on comic books. After the enormous success of Tim Burton's 1989 Batman film, the character would be in the national spotlight again ensuring a string of movies continuing till this day. The film is very much a product of, and reinforces, the Dark Age (1986-) of comics. The Dark Age of comics which I will be focusing for the most part on, is a "sub-age" of the Modern Age. Despite that some people claimed it started in the late 70s and early 80s, there is a general consensus that the Dark Age of comics began in 1986 with Frank Miller's Batman *The Dark Knight Returns* and Alan Moore's *Watchmen*.³⁵

Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* depicted an older and far more darker Batman than ever seen before. Terrence R. Wandtke goes as far as saying in his book *The Amazing Transforming Superhero!: Essays on the Revision of Characters in Comic Books, Film and Television* that: "*The Dark Knight Returns* started a new era of superhero comics dubbed as 'grim and gritty,' a treatment of Batman that made him more realistic and less subject to the concerns of the moral majority."³⁶ This "new" Batman stood out from his previous portrayals during the Golden, Silver and Bronze age.

Batman was created one year into the Golden Age in 1939 by illustrator and cartoonist Bob Kane and writer Bill Finger. Although there has been dispute over exactly how much each of

³² Schlesinger, Adam. 2010:89

³³ Schlesinger, Adam. 2010:96

³⁴ Schlesinger, Adam. 2010:97

³⁵ Tvtropes.org. Read 09.05.2020

³⁶ Wandtke, Terrence R. 2007:88

them contributed to the creation of the character and the backstory. The idea of Batman started when DC Comics expressed interest in a superhero that could rival the massive popularity of Superman. They gave the assignment to Bob Kane, who influenced by Leonardo DaVinci's ornithopter as well as movies such as *Bat Whispers*, *The Shadow* and *The Mark of Zorro* came up with a new character he named "The Bat-Man" during a weekend in early 1939³⁷ The same weekend, Bob called his sometimes-writing partner Bill Finger and after showing him his early drawings, the two worked out the character we now know as Batman.³⁸ Making his debut in *Detective Comics #27* the character started out as a lone avenger, but after a year the publisher decided that he needed someone to talk to while he solved crimes. Thus in 1940 the first Robin (Dick Grayson) also known as "The Boy Wonder" was created. Robin's addition to Batman became the start of the tradition of superhero sidekicks,³⁹ and turned Batman into more of a father figure.

Contrary to some of the other superhero comics (especially Captain America) that depicted stories directly taking part in WWII, Batman proved to be remarkably immune to the wartime "recruitment process."⁴⁰ However, the 1943 August issue of "Batman" was an example of what Mark Kelley calls "voluntary propaganda", in this case the purchase of War Bonds and Stamps. This particular comic combines the cartoonish approach to the Axis forces while including a plea: "*Insure the Fourth of July! Buy War Bonds and Stamps.*"⁴¹

In the years after the war, comic book sales started dropping, followed shortly by the Comics Code Authority and censorship. Batman adapted and survived by entering a sci-fi phase in the 1950's, where he and Robin fought aliens and travelled through time and other dimensions. Indeed, Batman books now turned more into fantastic adventure storylines and away from old-fashioned crime fighting.

In the 1960's during the Silver Age, DC decided to go from Bob Kane's cartoony version of Batman and give him a new more realistic art style. Something which became all the more popular with the 1966 *Batman* television series. Despite having been called a pure mockery and walking a fine line between an adaptation and a parody, there is no doubt that the 1966 television series had a great impact. Joseph McCabe explains in his book *100 Things Batman Fans Should Know & Do Before They Die*, that the success of the TV series resulted in a

³⁷ Wainer, Alex M. 2014:3

³⁸ Birzer, Bradley J. 2019

³⁹ Wainer, Alex M. 2014:5

⁴⁰ Brooker, Will. 2001:34

⁴¹ Kelley, Mark. 2009:8

renewed rise of comic book purchases as well as merchandise.⁴²

The series also brought back a lot of the villains that had not been in the comics for decades prior, and helped keeping the Joker in the comics after risking being excluded and forgotten (which I will expand on later in this chapter). Despite its varied reception, the portrayal of Batman and the Joker by Adam West and Cesar Romero have remained iconic to this day. As the Silver Age's censorship declined and the darker Bronze Age approached, DC editors wanted to recreate Batman's image once more. A collaboration between artist Neal Adam and Dennis O'Neil brought the character back to his grim vigilante roots of the early Golden Age, with a renewed focus on "realistic" crime stories and stress on Batman's obsessive quest for justice.⁴³ Batman became once again a creature of the night. In the 1980s *The Dark Knight Returns* we see an even darker and grittier Batman who is more anti-hero than hero, thus marking the end of the Bronze Age, and the beginning of the Dark Age. DC later tried to relaunch its entire line with *The New 52* in 2011, which they ended soon after when they tried a second relaunch named *DC Rebirth* in 2016. They ended the Rebirth branding at the end of 2017, choosing instead to include everything under a larger DC Universe.

The Dark Knight Returns and Frank Miller's other works show the importance and influence of writers (and equally important artists, editors and publishers) throughout comic book history until present day. A collaboration between the three created Batman in the first place by DC giving the task to artist Bob Kane, who then in collaboration with writer Bill Finger designed the character and started the story.

The writer and illustrator in comic books are according to Scott McCloud "different breeds" and their work "separate disciplines".⁴⁴ He further states in his book *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* that "good" comics are ones where the two very different forms of expressions are thought to be harmonious.⁴⁵ As the writer writes and the artist illustrates, it is the editor's job to go between the main people in comics production. For example, by going back and forth between the writer and the publisher to discuss content. The publisher's job is to eventually put out the best possible product for the brand.⁴⁶

According to Devin Larson nine stages to creating comics:

1. Ideation/Concept: It starts with a great idea where the central concept is typically

⁴² McCabe, Joseph. 2017

⁴³ Wainer, Alex M. 2014:6

⁴⁴ McCloud, Scott. 1993:47

⁴⁵ McCloud, Scott. 1993:47

⁴⁶ Jennerall, Allyson, 2018

developed off of a writer or editor's idea for a storyline.

2. Plot Development: The basic concept for the comic is then expanded by the writer into a workable story outline.

3. Script: The writer, by using the plot outline as a guide, writes the script for the comic. Two of the most common/famous ways of scripting comics are the Marvel Method developed by Stan Lee (plot style) and full script (sometimes referred to as "DC style"). Whilst the Marvel Method includes a very individually free yet cooperative relationship between writer and penciller, the "DC style" involves is a very thorough style of script-writing that leaves little ambiguity for the artist.

4. Art Production: After the script-writing stage, multiple artists produce the comic based off the writer's script.

a) Pencils: The penciller is often viewed as the primary contributing artist and determines the look of the comic.

b) Inks: The inker is responsible for taking the rough pencils provided by the penciller and using them as a guide to produce the final lineart of the comic in ink.

c) Colors: The final lineart of the comic is handed off to the colorist who uses a computer (in most cases) to color the black and white images.

5. Letters: After the comic art is complete a letterer inserts dialogue balloons/boxes into the panels of the comic and places all of the text.

6. Editorial: While active throughout the comic-creation process, at this phase the comic's editor gives it a last-minute check-over in order to fix or resolve any remaining content issues prior to publication. Digital comics (including webcomics) may not have an editor or be intended for release in print. Because of this some or all of the following steps may be combined or skipped.

7. Printing: If the comic is being sold as a physical product, it is submitted to a printer where a certain number of copies are printed based off of sales estimates, which can take several weeks.

8. Marketing: This is an ongoing process that happens parallel to the production of the comic.

9. Distribution: Once the initial order of your comic is printed, it needs to be delivered in some way to the buying public. The distributors — Diamond Comics primarily — have a network in place for shipping comics to local retailers.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Larson, Devin. 16.01.2014.

Despite that, it is the writers and artists that often get the credit, it is the publisher's final word that gets them printed. An example of the role's importance was when *The Amazing Spider-Man* #96-98 which violated CCA restrictions was published. The list above illustrates this, and shows that one single person alone would not have been able to violate any form of censorship.

In addition to creating Batman, Bob Kane and Bill Finger in collaboration with artist Jerry Robinson created another arguably equally iconic character in 1940: the Joker. The inspiration for the character came when Jerry Robinson made a drawing of a joker playing card, which reminded Bill Finger of the character Gwynplaine in the 1928 American silent film *The Man Who Laughs*, based on the Victor Hugo novel *L'Homme Qui Rit* (The Man Who Laughs"). However, Bob Kane claimed that only Bill Finger and himself created the Joker.⁴⁸

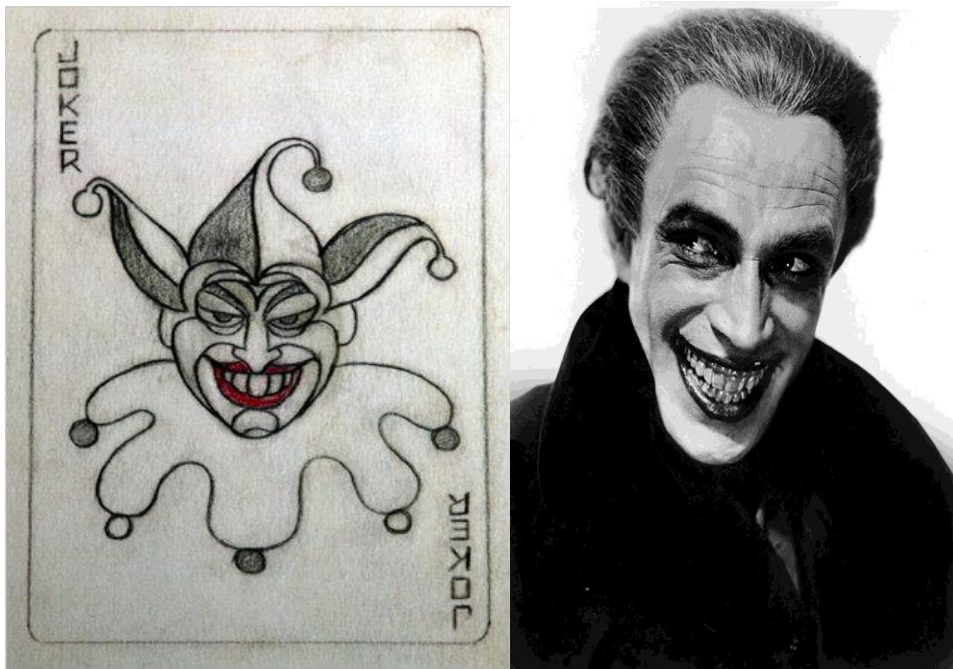


Figure 1. Jerry Robinson's original sketch⁴⁹ & Conrad Veidt as Gwynplaine in *The Man Who Laughs* (1928)⁵⁰

Like his archnemesis, the Joker made his debut in the Golden Age in 1940s *Batman* #1⁵¹. The character was originally meant to be killed off at the end of the issue, however the editor saw

⁴⁸ Gustines, George Gene. 2010

⁴⁹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/05/books/05robinson.html>

⁵⁰ <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0019130/mediaviewer/rm1129005824>

the potential of the Joker and drew and added a panel showing he was still alive.⁵²

At the start of the Golden Age the Joker was a robber with a sadistic sense of humor, who killed his victims because he could and constantly outwitted the police.⁵³ One of his weapons of choice included his deadly gas that left the victim with a grin, which he still uses until this day. *Batman #2* (1940) would also see the start of the Joker's long rivalry with fellow villain Catwoman that would last for decades.⁵⁴

In 1942s *Detective Comics #42* the Joker would commit his last murder until the Bronze Age, when the censorship restrictions loosened significantly, by killing several of the city's comedians. In his next appearance in *Detective Comics #64* the same year, the Joker turns himself in and confesses to his crimes. He is then sent to the electric chair and executed. The Joker's gang retrieves his body and revives him. When Joker returns, Batman cannot arrest him because he has already legally paid for his crimes. The storyline symbolically illustrated a now reborn Joker, with a new personality. Nonetheless, the Joker remained the Dynamic Duo's (one of the many nicknames for Batman and Robin) flamboyant opponent until 1954.⁵⁵

During the Silver Age, as a result of the CCA's censorship the Joker's role diminished and the character was gradually being replaced with alien threats and sci-fi monsters. There was even a brief period where the Joker virtually disappeared. Julius Schwarz, who was the editor of the so-called "New Look" era, when the Batman books were revamped in 1964 hated the character. The editor would most likely not have included him in the books of this era at all if it weren't for Cesar Romero's popular portrayal of him on the 1966 *Batman* television show. The show ensured the Joker's permanent return and the character starred in more episodes than any other villain.

Upon the arrival of the Bronze Age and the easing of the CCA's rules, new authors were able to make a radical change to the tone of Batman's stories. The Joker returned in 1973 to his darker roots from the Golden Age when he (at least at the very beginning) still committed murders simply because he could. However, instead of being a master criminal like in the Golden Age, they emphasized his insanity, thus creating the nihilistic mentally ill psychopath we are familiar with today. The character now even flew solo without Batman in a nine-issues series from 1975-1976. In the series the Joker meets (and manipulates) among other villains

⁵¹ Lapin-Bertone, Joshua. 2019

⁵² Cereno, Benito. 2015

⁵³ Lapin-Bertone, Joshua. 2019

⁵⁴ DC Comics. 2014:6-7

⁵⁵ DC Comics. 2014: 48

Two-Face, Catwoman and Lex Luthor, as well as heroes Green Arrow, Black Canary and The Creeper (his own vigilante equivalent). As a result of this new “insane” Joker, Dennis O’Neil who is also largely responsible for the grittier Batman comics of the Bronze Age, introduces us to the infamous Arkham Asylum in 1974s *Batman* #258. Before this the villains usually went to prison.

When comics entered the Dark/Modern Age the Joker, like Batman and many other characters, simply became even darker and grittier. We can see examples of this in *The Dark Knight Returns* (1986) as well as Moore’s *The Killing Joke* (1988) and Morrison’s *Arkham Asylum* (1989) to mention a few. The relationship and dynamic between Batman and the Joker is often a reflection of the time it took place in. From starting out as an archenemy to the dynamic duo in the Golden Age, to having a more and more complex relationship with the Dark Knight (a nickname Batman had a little after he was created but was popularized by *The Dark Knight Returns*⁵⁶), especially from the Dark Age on. Miller’s take on Batman and his world in a dystopian future, as well as the cruel and fatalistic account of the relationship between Batman and the Joker, long defined the characters and influenced other DC writers,⁵⁷ on top of that making the last clash all come symbolically to an end in the “Tunnel of Love”.

Despite the Joker’s crimes over the years, it was in the Dark Age that he truly started crossing lines that had not been crossed before. It started with the Joker paralyzing Commissioner Gordon’s daughter Barbara in *The Killing Joke*, and murdering Jason Todd (the second Robin) in *A Death in the Family* (1988). Although having been a significant villain prior, it was in the Dark Age that he took his place as Batman’s greatest enemy and reminder of most crushing defeats. One example would be the after-effect of Jason Todd’s murder. In 1993’s *Batman: Knightfall*, as Batman is taking on the villain Bane, we see that Batman is still struggling heavily with Jason Todd’s death. This psychological trauma would prove to be a significant factor in Batman eventually being defeated by Bane, which ended in the villain breaking Batman’s back.

The reason I chose the Joker and not any other infamous DC villain such as Two-Face, Bane, Catwoman or Ra's al Ghul, is due to his fascinating character and unique and bizarre relationship with the Batman. Contrary to any character in comics, TV, film or otherwise, the Joker seems to not have any relatable motivation like money, power, revenge etc... This lack of “understandable motives” makes him truly pure evil, in the sense that this is someone who

⁵⁶ Cronin, Brian. 2018

⁵⁷ DC Comics. 2014:138-139

does what he does for no reason and therefore cannot be reasoned with. He is a madman who is less interested in the fruits of his crimes than the wave of terror they cause.

However, in spite of this the Joker seems to have a special bond with (and feelings towards) Batman, having had multiple chances to kill The Dark Knight, but in the end never seizing them. This in combination with Batman's moral code of not killing, has led to a complex relationship and battles that have endured since the Joker's first introduction in 1940.

In the next chapter I will discuss Batman, the Joker and their complex relationship from the beginning of the Dark Age (1986) until present day. I will do this through analysis as well as using theories such as Carl Jung's "the shadow" and the literary concept of the doppelgänger. I will continue building on this by comparing Alan Moore's *Batman: The Killing Joke* (1988) and Grant Morrison's *Batman: Arkham Asylum - A Serious House On Serious Earth* (1989) from the beginning of the Dark Age in Chapter 4, as well as comparing the more recent *White Knight* (2017-2018) by Sean Murphy with Scott Snyder's *The Batman Who Laughs* (2019) in Chapter 5.

Chapter 3) The Dark Age, the Shadow and Doubles

Two themes seem to become more and more relevant for Batman and the Joker in the Dark Age: Carl Jung's "the shadow" and the literary concept of the doppelgänger. In Carl Jung's *Aion: Phenomenology of the Self* he describes the shadow as following:

*"The shadow is a moral problem that challenges the whole ego-personality, for no one can become conscious of the shadow without considerable moral effort. To become conscious of it involves recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real. This act is the essential condition for any kind of self-knowledge, and it therefore, as a rule, meets with considerable resistance."*⁵⁸

"The shadow" is an unknown and unconscious side of the personality that according to Jung everyone carries. Because one tends to reject or remain ignorant of the least desirable aspects of one's personality, the shadow is largely negative, mostly due to it being instinctive and irrational. Nonetheless, unlike Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung believed that the shadow could contain positive aspects especially in people with low self-esteem, anxieties and false beliefs.

Doppelgängers on the other hand involves according to Gry Faurholt "*a duality of the main character who is either duplicated in the figure of an identical second self or divided into polar opposite selves.*"⁵⁹ She continues by stating:

*"These two modes of doubling have since the earliest studies of the doppelgänger motif been categorized as distinct types: firstly, the alter ego is an identical double; the 'duplication' of a protagonist who seems to be either the victim of an identity theft perpetrated by a mimicking paranormal presence or subject to a paranoid hallucination ". . ." Secondly, the 'divided' or split personality features a monster double; the dark half of the protagonist, an unleashed vengeful fiend that acts as a physical manifestation of a dissociated part of the primary self."*⁶⁰

⁵⁸ <https://www.carl-jung.net/shadow.html> Article read 09.05.2020

⁵⁹ Faurholt, Gry. 2009

⁶⁰ Faurholt, Gry. 2009

We can find examples of the first mode of doubles in Dostoevsky's *The Double* or Edgar Allan Poe's *William Wilson*, and examples of the second in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* or Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

According to Dimitris Vardoulakis' paper: *The Return of Negation: The Doppelgänger in Freud's "The 'Uncanny'"*: "The Doppelgänger" as a motif arose within German Romanticism (Late 18th – early 19th Century), after the term was coined by Jean Paul in his novel *Siebenkäs* (1796).⁶¹ The word "doppelgänger" (German for "double goer") originally derived from the superstitious belief that seeing one's double is an omen of death and the motif fuses supernatural horror with a philosophical exploration regarding personal identity and a psychological investigation into the hidden depths of the human psyche.⁶² However, the concept of doppelgängers/doubles in literature did not originate in the Gothic, but as far back as ancient Greece.⁶³ Heather Duerre Humann claims in her book *Another Me: The Doppelgänger in 21st Century Fiction, Television and Film*, that doppelgängers can even be found in stories from early Egypt and ancient Mesopotamia.⁶⁴

The difference between Jung's "the shadow" and doppelgängers as a literary motif may sometimes be blurry and hard to separate, and even flowing into one another. Indeed, where does the unconscious part of one's personality end and a double start? The line is arguably when that part that is the shadow starts operating independent of the primary conscious self. Carl Jung's "the shadow" (as well as the use of other literally illustrated shadows), and the doppelgänger motif are evident throughout the Dark Age of comics. They illustrate the new complexity that arose once the less dark and complex Bronze Age that ended.

When Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* was published in 1986, it not only started a new age in comics (together with Alan Moore's *Watchmen*), but also changed the way we would view Batman, the Joker and their relationship. Together with Alan Moore (*The Killing Joke*) and Grant Morrison (*Arkham Asylum*), Frank Miller would spearhead the beginning phases of the new adult graphic novel. DC's Batman franchise would now exploit the psychology of the Joker in order to explore and exploit the psychology of Batman. Through contrast, comparison and other various tools, the authors of the Dark Age showed us not only a more flawed and darker Batman, but also a more "human", "realistic" and arguably at times relatable Joker. Perfect examples of these are the two character's origin stories; Batman's in Miller's *Year One*, and the Joker's in Moore's *The Killing Joke*. Despite that there have been

⁶¹ Vardoulakis, Dimitris. 2006:100

⁶² Faurholt, Gry. 2009.

⁶³ Raynor Memorial Libraries

⁶⁴ Duerre Humann, Heather. 2018:2

several origin stories over the years (often resembling one another), there is a consensus that these two are the most “authentic”.

In *Year One* we meet a 25 years old Bruce Wayne who just returned to Gotham City after twelve years abroad.⁶⁵ Upon his return he is well-trained and fully committed to fight criminals but does not yet wear the suit nor the name “Batman”. He even makes mistakes showing that he in a way is still “too human”. After being stabbed, shot and nearly taken into custody by the police,⁶⁶ a wounded Bruce Wayne pleads to his dead father for a way to make the criminals afraid of him. We then see Thomas and Martha Wayne’s murder spread over a page, before we go back to a bleeding Bruce as a bat crashes through the window (an animal that frightened him as a boy), and he decides to become a bat to frighten the criminals.⁶⁷

In *The Killing Joke* we meet an unnamed failed comedian, struggling to support his wife. In order to change his situation, he agrees to guide two criminals through the chemical plant where he previously worked so that they can rob the playing card company next to it. However, on the day of the robbery, the police inform him that his wife and unborn child have died in a household accident. Struck with grief and with no reason to continue he tries to withdraw from the plan, but the criminals strong-arm him into keeping his commitment to them. Upon the arrival at the plant, the criminals make him wear the infamous Red Hood which according to them they use to disguise any accomplice as the mastermind to divert attention away from themselves. Once inside, it is revealed early to them that the security changed since he worked there, and the two criminals are killed during a shootout with the security personnel. As the unnamed man flees from the security personnel, Batman who has been investigating the Red Hood gang, shows up. As Batman confronts him the man jumps out of fear into a chemical plant’s waste pound lock which leads outside via a pipe. Once outside, he removes his hood and discovers that the chemicals permanently bleach his skin white, made his lips red and dyed his hair green. After a few moments he starts laughing uncontrollably, thus the Joker is born.⁶⁸

Despite the fact that the Joker admits to Batman that he does not precisely know how he became what he is, and that he prefers his past to be “*multiple choice*”⁶⁹; he does clarify

⁶⁵ Miller, Frank. 1987:3

⁶⁶ Miller, Frank. 1987:12-13

⁶⁷ Miller, Frank. 1987:20-22

⁶⁸ Moore, Alan & Bolland Brian. 1988

⁶⁹ Moore, Alan & Bolland Brian. 1988:39

further that it happened because of “*one bad day*”⁷⁰, which he also recognizes is what must have happened to Batman. The pair bonding over their traumas, which are pretty similar if we are to believe this origin version, could arguably be a key factor to their complex relationship during the Dark Age. It could further explain why despite being arch enemies, and the Joker doing horrendous things, the two are still reluctant to kill each other. On the contrary the two have on multiple occasions saved one another and at times even teamed up. I say this even though Batman does set out to “kill” the Joker in *The Dark Knight Returns*. In the graphic novel Batman breaks the Joker’s neck until he is paralyzed, but is unable to finish him, so a disappointed Joker continues to twist and breaks his own neck thus framing Batman for murder. An important fact here is that in spite of this taking place at the very beginning of the Dark Age, it takes place a lot later story wise where a fifty-five-year-old Bruce Wayne takes up his mantle as Batman after having retired ten years prior.

Indeed, the main difference between Batman and the Joker when it comes to their shadow is the way in which they co-exist with it. Whilst the Joker seemingly does not have a shadow, lives it out or simply is his shadow (something I will discuss further later), Batman regularly and obviously struggles with his. We see an example of this at the very beginning of the Dark Age in *The Dark Knight Returns*. At the beginning of the graphic novel we see an older Bruce walking through Gotham City after a casual drink with Jim Gordon as he reflects within himself:

*“As we part, Jim squeezes my shoulder and grins. ‘You just need a woman,’ he says. ... While in my gut the creature writhes and snarls and tells me what I need... I leave my car in the lot. I can’t stand to be in anything right now. I walk the streets of this city I’m learning to hate, the city that’s given up, like the whole world seems to have. I’m a zombie. A flying Dutchman. A dead man, ten years dead...”*⁷¹

⁷⁰ Moore, Alan & Bolland Brian. 1988:38

⁷¹ Miller, Frank, Janson, Klaus & Varley, Lynn. 1986:3



Figure 2. from *The Dark Knight Returns*⁷²

In Figure 2, like in the quote we can see that the older Bruce Wayne feels separated from the crowd, especially being the only one dressed in black. On the right side of the image we can see that as he arrives at the spot where his parents were murdered, he looks up for the first time after leaving James Gordon. Under the iconic streetlight that has been depicted so many times he is looking at the light, as if looking for hope or some light in the otherwise black and grey Gotham. What is interesting here is that he has no actual shadow cast from the streetlight, and his black jacket has now lighted up while his pants are still black. One interpretation can be that there is no shadow because there is no more Batman. Another could be that his shadow has merged more with his human side, which could explain his bitterness. A more artistic interpretation is that his pants are blacker because he feels Batman snarling in him from his toes to his gut. Either way this scene strongly implies that Batman is a

⁷² Miller, Frank, Janson, Klaus & Varley, Lynn. 1986:3-4

personification of Bruce Wayne's shadow, or at least a way for him to channel it. The actual act of being Batman works in a way as a coping mechanism for dealing with his childhood trauma, and at the same time one often gets the expression that "Bruce Wayne" is the suit/mask he puts on to blend in in society.

He takes control over what happened to him by actively seeking it out, and trying to prevent similar things to happen to other people. In order to do this, he quite literally "wears" his shadow by putting on the costume of Batman. The same goes for when the police need him, they simply turn on the bat signal which casts a large shadow figure of a bat in the sky.

Indeed, the reason why I argue that Batman is Bruce's shadow and not his double is because he feels "Batman" (an inner voice) calling to him after he retired and let's his darker side take over at times, but they function as two parts of the same identity working together, not a completely split personality. However, there is an episode a little later in the graphic novel where Bruce Wayne has seemingly been sleepwalking and shaved off his moustache without knowing it.⁷³

As Carl Jung stated the shadow may contain positive aspects. In Batman's case it may be the fuel in the unknown parts of him, which he is partially aware of. However, Jung also said that it contains the least desirable aspects of one's personality and that it is mostly negative, largely due to it being instinctive and irrational. Regardless of his questionable methods and/or if what he does is for selfish reasons (beating criminals could be a form of vengeance for what happened to him), Batman believes that what he is doing is out of good intentions. He knows that there is a part of him that is chaotic, destructive, instinctive and irrational. By keeping this unknown shadow part of him in check and cooperating with it, he allows himself to stay "good", while fueling the animal natured part of himself. However, just because Batman has found a seemingly positive way of coping and co-existing with his shadow, there have been several episodes where his shadow was on the edge of taking completely over, or at least clouded his judgement.

After the Joker killed Jason Todd in 1988s *A Death in the Family* Batman lost his way and became violent. This proceeded until a boy by the name of Tim Drake asked the first Robin, Dick Grayson (now Nightwing) for help to get him back on track. This eventually lead to Tim Drake becoming the third Robin. The aftermath of the death of Jason Todd is but one of many examples where the "human" side of Batman entered a power struggle with the shadow part. This struggle often seems to be a uniquely direct result of the actions of the Joker. The Joker,

⁷³ Miller, Frank, Janson, Klaus & Varley, Lynn. 1986:11

not unlike Frankenstein's monster, has a tendency to attack Batman indirectly by targeting the people around him (Barbara Gordon, Commissioner Gordon, Robin etc..). However, unlike Frankenstein's monster, the Joker seems to do this not to punish Batman, but often to prove a point. By looking at the similarities between the Joker and Frankenstein's monster, we may arguably state that the Joker is Batman's monster double. This becomes even more clear after examining and applying Faurholt's second mode of doubles (the monster double), which I presented at the beginning of the chapter:

*"Secondly, the 'divided' or split personality features a monster double; the dark half of the protagonist, an unleashed vengeful fiend that acts as a physical manifestation of a dissociated part of the primary self, such as the monster in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein"*⁷⁴

If one regards Batman's shadow to be the dissociated part of the primary self, the Joker could be considered a natural monster double. Even if Batman was indirectly responsible for the Joker being born (as it is insinuated in *The Killing Joke*), he is still responsible for the Joker still being active. In addition, the Joker seems to feel linked to Batman's trauma or sees Batman as someone equally different to everyone else like himself. This means that the Joker works as an *"unleashed vengeful fiend that acts as a physical manifestation"* of Batman's actions, perhaps even of Batman himself.

Another argument for the two being doppelgänger is the old folklore beliefs that seeing one's double was an omen of death, the question is whose death? Like in Poe's *"William Wilson"*, Batman is plagued mentally and intellectually by his rivalrous double, that will always be there as long as he continues being Batman. The only way he can get rid of him is by killing him. This brings us to another slightly different similarity. When the main character in *William Wilson* stabbed his rival, he discovers he stabbed and kills himself. Metaphorically this would be the same case for Batman if he killed the Joker. He either kills the human side of himself and becomes his alternate version *The Batman Who Laughs*, or he breaks his number one rule and crosses a point of no return. This illustrates that as long as there is a Batman there is a Joker and vice versa. The consequence of this is an endless battle between polar opposites, between two characters that are linked to the point of co-dependency. After Batman hung up his mantle in *The Dark Knight Returns*, the Joker went dormant until Batman returned once

⁷⁴ Faurholt, Gry. 2009

more. When the Joker believed he killed Batman in the mid-90s *Batman: Going Sane*, he retreated back into sanity.

A third example of doubling that can be applied to Batman and the Joker is the component of doubling in the Greek mythology, meaning the myth of the “split human soul”. If one observes the argumentative and twisted romantic/obsessive nature between the two, it resembles one half of a doubled pair is seeking its lost other half. This may not be farfetched considering all the romantic gestures and insinuations the Joker has made towards Batman as well as his obsession with The Dark Knight. This is something I will look closer at and analyze in *White Knight* in Chapter 5.

Batman and the Joker’s relationship and the eternal chess match that comes with it, is very evident in the four works I have selected. In *The Killing Joke*, Batman struggles throughout with the belief that eventually it will come down to either him killing the Joker or the Joker killing him. This belief seems to magnify when the Joker paralyzes Barbara Gordon and kidnaps Commissioner Gordon. However, once he defeats his nemesis his “human” side wins and he reaches out to the Joker wanting to rehabilitate him. Something that could also be due to Batman’s shadow who recognizes and relates to the Joker’s trauma. This could raise the question to if the Joker is Batman’s shadow as well as his double, as Jung said: “*The shadow is a moral problem that challenges the whole ego-personality,*” which the Joker clearly is and does.

Darren Marks claims in *In the Face of Anomie: Batman from Golden Age to Modern Combinard* that “*the Joker from his inception in 1940 throughout present manifestation has always been the shadow self of Batman.*”⁷⁵ I would concur to this to the extent that there were elements. The Joker was often a villain who suddenly showed up and then somehow disappeared like an actual shadow, but he was also a character that Batman could never understand and figure out, like parts of his own subconsciousness. However, due to the lack of psychological depth and “bonding” in the ages before the Dark Age, as well as the status to which the Joker rose in this age, I would say I strongly disagree. An argument for Marks’ claim could be the Joker’s first origin story: “*The Man Behind the Red Hood*” (which Moore’s *The Killing Joke* drew inspiration from) in *Detective Comics #168* from 1952⁷⁶. In the story the Joker was a lab worker until he decided to steal one million dollars so he could retire. After evading Batman several times, the pre-Joker was cornered by Batman and the police after another crime near a chemical plant. In order to escape he jumped in a pool of

⁷⁵ Marks, Darren. 2009

⁷⁶ DC Comics. 2014:76

chemical waste and because the red hood was equipped with an oxygen tube he managed to escape by swimming under the surface of the pool of chemical wastes.⁷⁷

Despite Batman's indirect actions ultimately leading to the pre-Joker becoming the Joker, the only way it changed him was physically. Indeed, we cannot say for sure that he would not have retired after he would have his million dollars, but there is no guarantee he would have. With this said it was after his physical change that the Joker in his own words: "*Realized my own face could terrify people!*"⁷⁸ Nonetheless, I would say that there is no substantial evidence in Batman "creating" the Joker, he merely gave him a new identity. Even though he may have indirectly given him the motivation to spread terror, I would argue that he potentially could have done this otherwise as well. In addition to this, there is also a lack of familiarity between Batman and the Joker. So perhaps we could say that the Joker function perhaps as a shadow to Batman, the unknown coming out of nowhere and always returning in the pre-Dark Ages. But that the he did not truly become a monster double until the Dark Age.

In *Arkham Asylum* this triangle dynamic between Batman, his shadow and Joker occurs differently. By having Batman come to Arkham Asylum, the Joker forces him to confront his fears of belonging in the madhouse. In this graphic novel we also first encounter the theory of the Joker's "super-sanity". In *Arkham Asylum* the Joker's super-sanity is described as a unique potential neurological disorder that modifies the human perception to the point of the Joker seeming to have no control over the sensory information he's receiving from the outside world, making the only way of coping to go with the flow. As a result, he is described as having no real personality, re-creating himself each day. The Joker's super-sanity is arguably the main reason why he visually does not have a shadow nor is struggling with one, simply to the fact that he constantly changes his personality and goes with the flow contrary to Batman who has moral codes to keep himself in check.

Just as his roles differ between *The Killing Joke* and *Arkham Asylum*, the Joker has a different role in *White Knight* and *The Batman Who Laughs*. In *The Killing Joke* the Joker functions as the main villain whereas in *Arkham Asylum* he is one of several villains. In *White Knight* and *The Batman Who Laughs* on the other hand the Joker has a more "positive" role. In *White Knight* the Joker turns "normal" as a result of medication and becomes the "good guy" to some extent. As atonement for his actions as the Joker (now Jack Napier) goes into politics and wages a legal war against a violent Batman and anyone helping him. As result of this, the

⁷⁷ DC Comics. 2014:79 & 88

⁷⁸ DC Comics. 2014:88

second Harley Quinn (now Neo Joker) goes to war against Gotham in order to get the Joker back, and so Jack Napier (who's medication is now starting to lose its effect) has to team up with Batman in order to stop her. In this story we see an example of Batman having to deal with being viewed as the villain, but also the Joker being the hero. This is also one of the rare times we see a "sane" Joker and the complications that follow, especially for himself. In addition it also raises the question if the Joker has a shadow, which is something I go into deeper into in Chapter 5.

In *The Batman Who Laughs* we encounter a character called The Batman Who Laughs and who is an evil alternate version of Batman. This version of Batman killed the Joker, who had booby-trapped Joker toxins in his heart, so that the person who killed him would become the next Joker. Hence, this version of Batman became a hybrid version of both Batman and the Joker, one with Batman's intelligence and physical strength and the Joker's psychopathy and warped, sadistic sense of humor.

In this graphic novel Batman is outmatched at every turn by a version of himself that does not share his humanity. The Joker, well-aware of this, shoots himself in the heart (but survives) with a reversed gun, forcing the Batman from our universe to become The Batman Who Laughs too, because as the Joker says: "*The only way you'll beat him... is to become him. Heh*".⁷⁹ As the toxins are released from the Joker's heart, Batman gets infected and will now inevitably turn into his evil alternate version: The Batman Who Laughs. Uncomplying and in order to slow down the inevitable spread of the toxin, Batman uses every Joker toxin antidote he has to buy time. Unlike in the other comics where Batman is co-existing and struggling with his shadow, in *The Batman Who Laughs* Batman is facing his human side gradually being eradicated permanently without a cure. Another evil alternate version of Batman we meet in this graphic novel is The Grim Knight. This character is a result of what would have happened if a young Bruce Wayne took up the gun his parents' killer dropped after murdering them, and shot and killed him. The Grim Knight is in a way Batman without his no-killing rule as well as his no-gun rule, killing every criminal he encounters and having no moral code to keep his shadow in place.

⁷⁹ Snyder, Scott & Jock. 2019:25



Figure 3. The Batman Who Laughs⁸⁰ & The Grim Knight⁸¹

Above in Figure 3. we see a the recently created characters The Batman Who Laughs (left) and The Grim Knight (right). The Batman Who Laughs originates from a place called the Dark Multiverse, making him able to see people’s dark urges and fears. However, he needs to wear a visor out of “Dark Metal” (like the one he is wearing in Figure 3.), in order to focus his senses and pinpoint what he is searching for. Another of his notably visual features is his grin, which resembles to that of the Joker. The grin contrasts tremendously to the Batman from our universe and The Grim Knight who rarely laugh or smile. As we can see to the right on Figure 3. The Grim Knight looks exactly like the Batman from our universe, except that he is strapped to the extreme with deadly weapons, which Batman has a strong policy against. In regarding to doppelgänger motif, one could debate whether or not both The Grim Knight and The Batman Who Laughs could be considered Bruce’s monster doubles. In this case I would disagree with the first and partially disagree with the second. The Grim Knight is an alternate version of Batman that uses both guns and kills people, making him not necessarily a villain nor a hero, but on the boarder of anti-hero and villain depending on your point of view.

⁸⁰ <https://i.pinimg.com/originals/ae/41/9d/ae419d1a2d1116ea732a3ba352820264.jpg>

⁸¹ https://pm1.narvii.com/7276/c10cf06c6692ce1f38c1534b9a8689ade60fa247r1-669-1024v2_00.jpg

The same cannot be said for the Batman Who Laughs. As a hybrid version of Batman and the Joker, The Batman Who Laughs is arguably the most dangerous foe that Batman has ever faced. However, despite being an evil counterpart to The Dark Knight, The Batman Who Laughs is a result of a Batman that was poisoned by Joker toxins, a threat that is ever present to the Batman in our universe as well should he one day kill the Joker. This fact in *The Batman Who Laughs* storyline may have a further impact on Batman, potentially functioning as a mutually insured destruction in future comics. One may mention that Batman did not turn into The Batman Who Laughs when the Joker dies in Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns*. However, this may be due to several reasons like that Batman did technically kill the Joker and that The Batman Who Laughs is a very recent concept. Nonetheless, in the end, the fact that The Batman Who Laughs could be a possible future outcome for Batman and that he is just one of several evil Batman's (though undoubtedly the most evil), makes him less of a "natural" double.

The Joker is in our universe Batman's natural monster double in the sense that he is linked to his shadow and is a natural part of his universe. By "natural part of his universe" I mean in the sense that he does not arrive from another alternate reality. The Batman Who Laughs and The Grim Knight are on the other hand batmen from different universes who in one way or another took a different path without any connection to the Batman from our universe. Indeed, this could however leave open the question to whether or not they are monster doubles to someone else in their own universe in some way.

The focus on exploring the dualism within the characters, doubles and doppelgängers has created more personal intrigue, rather than the classical superhero good vs. evil scenario. Indeed, it has made the characters even more relatable in the terms of sociological relevance. It puts Batman and the Joker in a new perspective and especially their ambiguous dynamic and relationship parallel with modern times. The psychological depth that started being explored in 1986 has undoubtedly created a new way of writing comics that resembles a hybrid version of novels and cinema. Thus, a few years into the Dark Age this dynamic started to be explored on screen starring with Tim Burton's *Batman* (1989), followed by Nolan's *The Dark Knight* (2008), and the most recently *Joker* (2019). Three cinematic films that all reflected their time and which I will discuss at the end of this thesis.

In 1992, fifty-two years after Batman was assigned his sidekick Robin, the Joker got one too. Supervillain/antihero Harley Quinn was first introduced merely as a backup lackey of the

Clown Prince of Crime in *Batman: The Animated Series: "Joker's Favor"*.⁸² After becoming popular with the fans her character developed as the love interest of the Joker, their relationship ranging from romantic to abusive. Harley Quinn is an example of the expansion of the Batman universe from comics unto screen, as her first appearance was on television and her debut in the comics did not come until a year later in 1993.⁸³ The character's origin story describes a psychologist at Arkham Asylum by the name of Dr. Harleen Quinzel, who after numerous sessions with the Joker starts falling in love with him. As her love turns into obsession she turns into her own form of madness. When the Joker escapes Arkham she devotes herself to him and takes on the name of Harley Quinn. The complex character and fan favorite would over the years switch between being a villain and an antihero, often depending on her relationship with the Joker. The character plays a central role in *White Knight*, which I will analyze further in Chapter 5: Snyder vs. Murphy: Batman and the Joker in *The Batman Who Laughs* and *White Knight*.

Over the next two chapters I will compare two works from the beginning of the Dark Age and two that are more recent. In addition, I will illustrate the use of the shadow, doppelgängers as well as apply close reading and comics analysis, in order to illustrate the psychological depth and realism that came with the time.

⁸² Hall, Richard A. 2019:162

⁸³ Hall, Richard A. 2019:162

Chapter 4) Moore vs. Morrison: Batman and the Joker in *The Killing Joke* and *Arkham Asylum*.

To illustrate different interpretations and changes in Batman and the Joker as characters and their relationship, I will first start by comparing two of the most famous and iconic Batman (perhaps comics in general) comics of all time. Released merely one year apart, Alan Moore's *Batman: The Killing Joke* from 1988 and Grant Morrison's *Batman: Arkham Asylum – A Serious House On Serious Earth* (*Arkham Asylum* in short) from 1989 are perfect representatives of the early Dark Age. The two graphic novels are dark, explore psychological aspects of the characters, and contain a flawed protagonist. This new Batman would come to resemble a damaged anti-hero more than the knight in somewhat shining armor from the previous ages. Despite these common traits, Moore and Morrison still have significantly different presentations of Batman and the Joker. In *The Killing Joke* we find a highly determined, calm and self-assured Batman trying to save his friend James Gordon. In this graphic novel Batman is desperately trying to convince the Joker that he can help him, and that the final outcome between them does not have to result in one killing the other. In this comic we also find an equally determined, but ruthlessly cunning Joker who wants to prove that any person can be driven mad like him after just “one bad day”⁸⁴. The Joker attempts to prove his point by shooting and paralyzing James Gordon's daughter Barbara, in front of him, before taking pictures of her in an undressed state. The Joker then uses the pictures to further psychologically torture her father at an amusement park ride in the attempt to drive him insane.

Morrison's portrayal of the two characters in *Arkham Asylum* is in many ways the complete opposite. The story in Morrison's *Arkham Asylum* is divided in two: one follows the diary of Amadeus Arkham the founder of Arkham Asylum, and the other one where the inmates of Arkham Asylum have taken over the asylum. After the takeover, Batman is asked by the Joker to come inside the madhouse, in exchange for them letting all the workers who are held as hostages go. The unwavering Batman from *The Killing Joke*, is here replaced with one that is damaged and on edge. Already before he enters the psychiatric hospital, he tells Jim Gordon:

⁸⁴ Moore, Alan & Bolland Brian. 1988:38

*“Batman’s not afraid of anything. It’s me. I’m afraid. I’m afraid that the Joker may be right about me. Sometimes I...question the rationality of my actions. And I’m afraid that when I walk through those asylum gates...When I walk into Arkham and the doors close behind me...It’ll be just like coming home.”*⁸⁵

Once inside the madhouse, Batman is then forced into a game of hide and seek by the Joker. He runs through the asylum encountering several of his enemies before coming face to face with the mastermind of the breakout: Dr. Cavendish, Arkham’s administrator. Prior to the breakout Dr. Cavendish had found the diary of the founder of Arkham Asylum, Amadeus Arkham. In the diary it is revealed that Amadeus’ mother suffered delusions of being tormented by a supernatural entity, one that Amadeus later also claims to have seen and said to be a bat. After a series of traumas Amadeus Arkham descends into madness himself, and vows to bind the evil spirit, which he believes inhabits the house and that haunted his mother and now him. Eventually Amadeus himself becomes a patient at Arkham and continues his mission to trap the bat spirit by scratching the words of a binding spell into the walls and floor of his cell with his fingernails until the day he dies. Dr. Cavendish believed that he was destined to continue Amadeus’ work after finding his diary and thus orchestrated the riot in order to lure Batman (whom he believed to be the bat Arkham spoke of) to the asylum. Although the Joker’s role is important in *Arkham Asylum* and we get a significant insight in his character, he is as I previously mentioned not the main villain, nor the only one. Notable other villains in the graphic novel include Two-Face, Scarecrow, Clayface, Mad Hatter, Maxie Zeus and Killer Croc. The Joker in *Arkham Asylum* is almost the opposite of the one *The Killing Joke* in the sense that he does not seem to have a particular objective or elaborate plan. Whilst he has some form of logical and philosophic string of thought in *The Killing Joke*, he seems very incoherent, erratic and manic in *Arkham Asylum*. In *The Killing Joke* the Joker elaborately escapes Arkham, acquires an amusement park and step by step works towards his goal. In *Arkham Asylum* on the other hand the Joker is neither methodical nor seems to have any plan. As he is blackmailing Batman into coming to the asylum, he threatens to pluck out the eyes of one of the hostages, but as Batman arrives, he explains he did not because of “April fools”. He then forces Batman into a hide and seek with no particular endgame but the chase. When Batman does not comply, the Joker shoots and kills a

⁸⁵ Morrison, Grant & McKean, Dave. 1989:10

guard, and threatens to do the same to a psychotherapist at Arkham by the name of Dr. Adams. He later changes the hiding the time from one hour to ten minutes on a whim, and even lets Two-Face's coin decide if Batman is allowed to leave the asylum or has to die in the end.

The major differences are also to be found in the artwork done by Brian Bolland in *The Killing Joke* and Dave McKean in *Arkham Asylum*. Whilst the illustrations in *The Killing Joke* are realistic, clearly and habitually divided into separate panels, the illustrations in *Arkham Asylum* are very abstract with varying “gutters” (spaces between the panels) and sometimes none at all. This could be explained through the name and content itself. In *The Killing Joke* the Joker is trying to make a point, and in order to make a point one has to make an argument that has to be set up logically and in a specific, clear order. This applies to a joke as well, which in addition needs timing. By structuring the panels and the spaces between as they do, Moore and Bolland are able to illustrate clearly what the text intends to say. In *Arkham Asylum* there is the opposite. There is no point and no argument, thus no need for structure or order. There is merely Batman being tested in a maze in a madhouse trying to discover something he may or may not like.



Figure 4. from *The Killing Joke*⁸⁶ and Figure 5. from *Arkham Asylum*⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Moore, Alan & Bolland Brian. 1988:45

⁸⁷ Morrison, Grant & McKean, Dave. 1989:19

Originally Morrison wanted Brian Bolland to be the artist for *Arkham Asylum*, and a more realistic approach. However, McKean was tasked with the job and made the novel more abstract to Morrison's protest. The clash between the creators was later according to Morrison the story's greatest weakness.⁸⁸ Despite Morrison's critique, McKean's abstract artwork in the comic that mostly takes place in the madhouse, visually grasps the madness of, and in *Arkham Asylum*. This also contrasts visually, and in a sense symbolically to the more realistic illustrations in *The Killing Joke* where the plot for the most part takes place in the outside world.

The short part at the very beginning in *The Killing Joke*, where Batman goes to Arkham Asylum to plead with the Joker, is also portrayed very differently compared to his entrance in *Arkham Asylum*. Indeed, both seem to captivate the general mood of Batman's psyche.



Figure 6. from *The Killing Joke*⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Jeffords Jr, Jason. 2019

⁸⁹ Moore, Alan & Bolland Brian. 1988:1

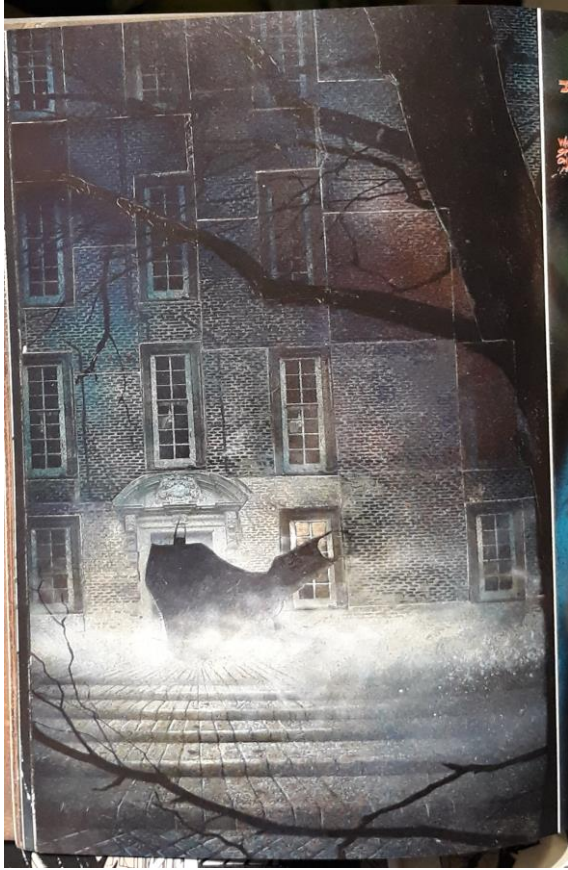


Figure 7. from *Arkham Asylum*⁹⁰

In Figure 6. from Moore's *The Killing Joke*, Arkham Asylum is clearly more divided into several parts which we can see from top to bottom as to create distance. Batman who despite being dressed in black (with several shades) stands in contrast to the bright surroundings, but also automatically to the place where he finds himself. This illustrates a form of distance between himself and the madhouse. The gates he enters through show us that he is entering something that either needs to keep people in or out (or both), meaning that it is no ordinary place.

In Figure 7. from Morrison's *Arkham Asylum* there is the contrary. The zoom on the building gives the impression that it could be any building, even a house or a "home". Unlike the first picture there is no one waiting for Batman at the entrance, which makes it seem as if he is very familiar with the place. Although the picture can be interpreted as being very sinister and dark, Batman himself is one black shadowy figure, indicating that he belongs in these surroundings. Indeed, the fact that Batman is mostly drawn completely black like a shadow, could indicate that his shadow and not his human side that is drawn towards Arkham and the

⁹⁰ Morrison, Grant & McKean, Dave. 1989:17

madness. Like Arkham Asylum, the shadow is filled with uncertainty and chaos making the place compelling in a dark twisted way. Jung stated that a person's shadow is largely instinctive and irrational, which could explain a lot of his unusually brutal and animalistic behavior throughout the graphic novel. By that I mean the abnormal behavior for the otherwise calm and collected Batman. He is becoming more like the inmates who have also let their shadow taken more over their "good" sides. Unlike in Figure 7. in Figure 6. Batman is there merely as a visitor and does not "belong" there, and by not belonging I am not stating that out of a potential reader's point but Batman's own.

Throughout *The Killing Joke* we get glimpses of Batman knowing that he is not normal, but by him wanting to "help" and "rehabilitate"⁹¹ the Joker he clearly states that he himself should not be in a psychiatric hospital like Arkham. In Figure 7. however, he states early on that he is afraid he will feel like he belongs in Arkham, that it will feel like coming home. This difference is perhaps the most "obvious" between Figure 6. and 7. I use quotation marks because it may not look like a home to us readers, but if one looks at all the facts, I mentioned above it cannot be anything else. Another symbolic difference is in the way that leads up to Arkham Asylum in both pictures. In Figure 6. it is a simple driveway up without details, while in Figure 7. there are layered bricks leading up like a staircase welcoming him. Despite the different portrayals of Batman in the two comics, he still keeps many of his key features from the Dark Age. He does not talk much, he is serious, resourceful and violent with questionable morals. In *The Killing Joke* Batman offers to help, rehabilitate and work together with his arch enemy, even after the Joker kidnapped and psychologically tortured his friend and paralyzed his daughter for life. A major reason for this also being that he wants to avoid "the final solution": being killed by the Joker or breaking his own number one rule (to never kill) and kill the Joker.

However, in *Arkham Asylum* Batman at one point condones someone being murdered in his presence. When Dr. Cavendish, Arkham's administrator and the mastermind behind the riot, almost chokes Batman to death during their struggle, Dr. Adams picks up a knife Cavendish had preciously dropped and slits his throat from behind, saving Batman. When Dr. Adams realizes what she has done Batman simply replies: "*He got what he deserved.*"⁹² This drastically goes against the well-known superhero code where "the bad guy goes to jail at all cost and nothing more, or we are no better than them".

Batman's psyche also manifests itself in his physical attributes. In *The Killing Joke*, Batman is

⁹¹ Moore, Alan & Bolland Brian. 1988:44

⁹² Morrison, Grant & McKean, Dave. 1989:93

drawn clearly and defined, and is relentless in his pursuit of the Joker, and once Batman finds him he beats him with relative ease. In *Arkham Asylum* not only is Batman mostly drawn as a sort of a shadow without distinctive feature, but he is also fleeing from his foes, indicating he is currently just a shadow of his normal self.

First, he encounters Clayface who is suffering from some sort of skin disease, which he tries to infect Batman with by touching him. Batman escapes by breaking his leg and tearing past him. He then encounters a wheelchair-bound Doctor Destiny, whom he pushes down a flight of stairs. During his journey through Arkham he also meets Scarecrow, The Mad Hatter and Maxie Zeus, all whom he escapes before coming face to face with Killer Croc. During the struggle, Killer Croc ends up throwing Batman out of a window unto a roof. As he lands, Batman grabs onto a statue of an angel clasping a bronze spear, which he tears loose. Clutching the spear, Batman climbs back through the window and impales Croc before casting him out of the window. In the end he barely overcomes the encounters and almost gets killed by an ordinary man (Dr. Cavendish).

Batman's encounters with his foes can arguably be interpreted as various tests and struggles to different degrees. It starts with the Joker trying to jab at his psyche (and continues to do so throughout). Then comes a broken down Two-Face, who has lost all sense of order (which in a sense Batman has too) by the doctors switching his coin with a die, and then tarot cards, gradually magnifying his options for action. As to his encounter with Clayface there may be a far-fetched argument that he symbolizes Batman himself who is currently not feeling comfortable in his own skin. Another point of view could be that house itself is trying to get under his skin by giving him an actual skin disease (or literally just illustrating the madness under his skin). This way Batman would also be forced to stay in the asylum, or at the very least isolated so that he will not infect anyone else. Pushing Doctor Destiny down the stairs proves as a moral test, and Killer Croc tests Batman by attacking him physically after he is already weak mentally and emotionally. Scarecrow, The Mad Hatter and Maxie Zeus only serve as minor psychological tests.

It is important to note that Batman overcomes some of these tests with great morally questionable violence (as he is known for during the Dark Age). Breaking Clayface's leg may have been a precaution but could perhaps have been unnecessary, Doctor Destiny was neither a threat nor in his way, so he had no reason to incapacitate him. Only the attack of Killer Croc could arguably have been considered appropriate self-defense. Despite this, all of Batman's actions are also what get him through everything and perhaps proved that his methods "work" (something I will discuss further in the next chapter). He survives the attacks Arkham and its

physical representative Joker throws at him, and by showing kindness to Two-Face by giving him his coin back (which also “restores” order as is his mission) he survives and is allowed to leave.

However, the storyline in *Arkham Asylum* also shows that despite Batman’s questionable actions and morals, there is also a human element to him, which is what ultimately saves him. When we first meet Two-Face in the story he is a complete mess due to all the alternative choices the doctors have given him by replacing his coin with a dice, then tarot cards etc... At the end of the story Batman gives Two-Face his coin back and leaves him with the choice to whether Batman goes free or dies in the asylum. The coin lands on the side that would mean Batman’s death sentence, yet Two-Face lies and says it landed on the side that meant Batman could go free. However, with this said there is no guarantee that Batman did it out of kindness. Batman could have taken a calculated risk and took a chance that the coin would either land on the good side or Two-Face would spare him by lying. Regardless of motive, the action in itself was “good” and made Two-Face return to his former self, just as the experience in Arkham did Batman.

Although the portrayal of Batman is fairly similar in the two comics when it comes to characteristics outside of what I have previously mentioned, the portrayal of the Joker is a different matter entirely. This difference in personalities, however, can be explained via a statement made by Dr. Adams in Grant Morrison’s *Arkham Asylum*.



Figure 8. from *Arkham Asylum*⁹³

According to Dr. Adams the Joker might not be insane at all but instead suffers from a neurological disorder which she only labels as “some kind of super-sanity”⁹⁴. She tells Batman:

“The Joker’s a special case, some of us feel he may be beyond treatment. In fact, we’re not even sure if he can be properly defined as insane. His latest claim is that he’s possessed by Baron Ghede, the voodoo loa. 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 sensory 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

⁹³ Morrison, Grant & McKean, Dave. 1989:27-28

⁹⁴ Morrison, Grant & McKean, Dave. 1989:27

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."⁹⁵

This of course explains why the Joker in *The Killing Joke* is so different from the Joker in *Arkham Asylum*, we are talking about an almost completely different person. Morrison again used this theory on the Joker's sanity later in *Batman #663* and suggested that each time the Joker escaped from confinement he developed a new personality.⁹⁶ This does not limit the explanation to the difference between the Joker in *The Killing Joke* and *Arkham Asylum* alone, but clearly shows why the Joker manages to be so different with every encounter over the years. However, two key factors remain the same in both comics, his unpredictability and his relationship to Batman. If we follow Grant Morrison's theory of "super-sanity", which is not an actual psychological term, we can explain his unpredictable schemes and behavior by the simple fact that he is a "new" person each time we as readers encounter him. I say each time we encounter him, because I do not believe that he changes personalities within the same comic, but rather between comics or episodes.

His relationship with Batman on the other hand is more of a mystery. If we are to take the Joker's origin story in *The Killing Joke* as fact, then Batman is an indirect cause for the Joker being created. If Batman had not interfered with the police's attempted capture of the Red Hood, he may not have had to jump over the rails and into the barrel of acid. This could be the actual starting point where Batman created his monster double like Dr. Frankenstein created his. Regardless of whether it actually happened, and if the Joker is even aware of it, their relationship has recurring elements. An example of this in *The Killing Joke* and *Arkham Asylum* is that the characters mirror each other. In *The Killing Joke* the two are equally determined, one to stop and plead with the other, and the other to prove a point. The pair are also arguably on a same "sanity level" (a topic I will discuss in the conclusion), in the sense that neither seem to have psychotic tendencies and seemingly know exactly what they are doing, good or bad. The same thing seems to be happening in *Arkham Asylum*, though perhaps less obvious. Like the abstract drawings, unpredictability and uncertainty play a big role in this graphic novel. An otherwise strong and determined Batman is here afraid, fragile and insecure. His "objective" (if one may say so) initially is to be traded for the hostages at Arkham and once there has to join in for a hide and seek.

⁹⁵ Morrison, Grant & McKean, Dave. 1989:27-28

⁹⁶ Hunt, Matt. Read 09.05.2020

The chaos and uncertainty of the story are in many ways a reflection of Batman as well as the Joker. The Joker mirrors Batman by being labeled as something new, “unknown”, and constantly changing like a shadow. The same goes for his actions, he changes his hide and seek rules, and agrees to put Batman’s fate in a coin toss after using hostages to even get him to Arkham. In *The Killing Joke* there is a sense of order, and they are able to communicate on a deep self-reflective level. In *Arkham Asylum* on the other hand there is chaos and the conversations between the two consist of Joker speaking incoherently and without sense and Batman reacting briefly and agitated.

Both Batman and the Joker share the fact that they both experienced a significant traumatic experience, “one bad day” if you will. This is something both recognize and in a bizarre way bond over. This is clearer in Moore’s *The Killing Joke*, especially at the end when Batman tells the Joker he wishes to help him, and the Joker responds by telling Batman a highly reflective joke. In the joke there are two lunatics who one day decide to escape the insane asylum they are in. Once they reached the roof, they realize there is a gap between them and the rooftops that lead them into freedom. The first man jumps without any problem, but his friend is afraid of falling and thus hesitates. The first man suggests he can shine across the gap with his flashlight so that his friend can walk on it across, but the second man replies: “*Wh- What do you think I am crazy? You’d turn it off when I was half way across*”!⁹⁷

As the Joker is telling his joke at the edge of the broken amusement park, him and Batman are both faced towards the city, until the last sentence when the Joker turns around and smiles at Batman. Batman is obviously the first lunatic who “easily” jumps back into society while the Joker is the second lunatic who is afraid of falling (perhaps he just knows he cannot return to society because he is too far gone). His reluctance could also symbolize a lack of trust.

Despite of all their similarities, at the end of the day Batman and the Joker are enemies and on opposite sides of what is considered “good and evil”. Nonetheless, the Joker who is highly intelligent also knows that even if Batman would not kill him, there is a possibility that there is nothing else he would not be capable of doing. Indeed, this is an ironic fact, being that the Joker would be the “bad” and unpredictable one. The Joker further illustrates through his joke that Batman is crazy by suggesting he could actually help him and insinuates that they are both the same but different kinds of crazy and that he cannot be helped. When the always serious Batman starts laughing uncontrollably together with the Joker, it further proves that not only is Batman crazy in a way, but that he knows it as well.

⁹⁷ Moore, Alan. 1988:45

In *Arkham Asylum* this “bond of trauma” is perhaps less obvious. Nonetheless, one can interpret it from the way Batman is behaving towards the Joker. In the graphic novel Batman finds himself enclosed in Arkham Asylum, while dealing with the fear that he might belong there as well. As a result of this fear and a wish to distance himself from the place and its inmates, Batman ends up acting agitated, nervous and hostile almost throughout.

Despite his erratic and manic behavior, the Joker is in some ways very flirtatious towards Batman, one could even claim sexually. This could be due to several reasons: one reason could be that the Joker like Batman feels a longing for a companion, in the sense that no one understands him. Another interpretation could be that the Joker represents Arkham and its madness trying to drag Batman in. One could say that the bond between Batman and the Joker in *Arkham Asylum* is largely unspoken, contrary to in *The Killing Joke* where it is quite literally written.

Nonetheless, despite being “mad”, it would seem that madness and the Joker are also what keeps Batman in check. At the start of *The Killing Joke*, Batman comes to plead one last time with the Joker to avoid a final deadly showdown. When he faces off with the Joker at the end, he wants to help him, thus keeping his number one rule (not to kill). By killing the Joker Batman would have become even more like him. He would either trigger the joker toxins the Joker booby trapped within himself and become The Batman Who Laughs, or he would perhaps start normalizing killing like The Grim Knight. By showing an example of a madness greater than Batman’s own, the Joker sets a standard of a line that shows a point of no return. The Joker, the other patients, and Dr Cavendish in *Arkham Asylum* have this function as well. By guiding Batman deeper and deeper into the madhouse, the Joker functions as a twisted version of Virgil in Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. In *The Divine Comedy*, Beatrice sends Virgil to guide Dante through Hell and Purgatory. In *Arkham Asylum* the Joker in a way guides Batman through Hell and Purgatory showing him different kinds of damned souls suffering. The world outside may symbolize a form of Paradise to which the Joker cannot enter. In *The Divine Comedy* Virgil cannot enter Paradise because he is a pagan soul, one may draw parallels to Joker by saying he does not truly belong in the outside world, or he does not share the same beliefs as Batman (in goodness). If one were to follow this allegory further there is possible argument for Beatrice being the good side of Batman. Dante knew Beatrice from when they were young, and it is Beatrice that eventually guides him through Paradise. Batman and the Joker’s soul are doubles, intertwined and the two are linked like Dante and Virgil, Batman knows this and perhaps his human side (Beatrice) was what sent the Joker (Virgil) to guide him to becoming completely himself again. As the Joker guides Batman through Hell

and Purgatory, Batman who as I have illustrated earlier is perhaps more his shadow part at this point, becomes more and more in touch with his human side again. Once his human side helps him into Paradise by being kind to Two-Face, his human side and his shadow are balanced once again. By giving Two-Face his coin back Batman also symbolically show that his human side coincides with his sense of purpose and order. An important factor that separates Batman from the Joker is his choice to go against the chaos by forcing order. Without purpose and order Batman would be just as tormented as the inmates of Arkham Asylum, and in order to maintain and rediscover his order and purpose he needed the presence (and “guidance”) of the Joker throughout this hell/purgatory. Without it he would have been lost in the asylum, his shadow forever locked up in the madhouse.

Indeed, after Batman enters a series of test running from, and defeating other villains he arrives at the center, where an ordinary man (Dr. Cavendish) has been driven mad. After facing these tests, a “reborn” Batman decides to go back to show them that he is “*stronger than them. Stronger than this place*”⁹⁸. He calmly gives Two-Face his coin back, much more confident in facing the madness and the unknown then before and is allowed to leave the asylum. As he leaves the Joker tells him:

*“Parting is such sweet sorrow dearest. Still, you can’t say we didn’t show you a good time. Enjoy yourself out there. In the asylum. Just don’t forget—if it ever gets too tough... There’s always a place for you here.”*⁹⁹

This indicates that the Joker may not be as crazy he appears to be and that like in *The Killing Joke*, he shows that madness is also partially a choice (an action of surrender), as he tells James Gordon before torturing him: “*Madness is the emergency exit*”¹⁰⁰. As I mentioned earlier this is a crucial thing that separates Batman from the Joker. Batman has the potential for madness and destruction and is well-aware of it, but via determination and rules he avoids going down that path, while at same time longing for and/or fearing it. Indeed, with his message, the Joker also shows Batman that he cares for him in his own twisted way. Like in *The Killing Joke*, the Joker is once again recognizing Batman as a kindred spirit. Though the two characters are enemies in a constant battle, *The Killing Joke* and *Arkham Asylum* show that the two mutually care for one another and that the “good guy - bad guy” relationship is

⁹⁸ Morrison, Grant & McKean, Dave. 1989:94

⁹⁹ Morrison, Grant & McKean, Dave. 1989:101

¹⁰⁰ Moore, Alan. 1988:21

not all black and white.

As I illustrated in the previous chapter, the shadow is linked to the monster double. By comparing *The Killing Joke* and *Arkham Asylum* we can even see that the shadow at times can pose a bigger threat than the monster double. In *The Killing Joke*, Batman is taking on his monster double the Joker. However, in *Arkham Asylum* despite all the villains, Batman's main adversary is the dark side of himself, his shadow. Indeed, his main objective is to save the hostages from the inmates at the asylum and defeat them, but as we have seen through this chapter the main fight has been for Batman's "soul". To further this argument, I will bring up another point from the previous chapter: what will happen if Batman lets his shadow take over? The main concern in *Arkham Asylum* is what would happen to Batman personally if he were to surrender to his own "madness". What would arguably be the biggest concern is what consequences it would have for the rest of Gotham, the world, or even the multiverse(s). Perhaps Batman would merely go mad and stay in his cell, or he would become more like his evil alternate versions and create mayhem. If one were to assume that the role of the Joker as Batman's monster double is to keep Batman's shadow in check, one could arguably state the Joker is a necessary evil, and Batman's shadow is overall the real monster. Over the next chapter I will continue using Jung's shadow and the literary motif of the doppelgänger in the comparison of two works from more recent times, nearly 30 years after *The Killing Joke* and *Arkham Asylum*.

Chapter 5) Murphy vs. Snyder: Batman and the Joker in *White Knight* and *The Batman Who Laughs*

In Murphy's *White Knight* and Snyder's *The Batman Who Laughs* we follow two storylines in which Batman and Joker's roles are in some ways reversed, and where both to a various degree end up working together against a common foe. In *White Knight* the Joker becomes sane with the help of medication and tries to make amends for his past while waging a political war on Batman and his allies. This paradigm shift not only leads to the Joker (who takes on the name "Jack Napier") to become the new hero of Gotham but ends up in Batman becoming the villain. Indeed, Jack Napier deliberately tries to make Batman look bad, but it does not take much. Part of this may be due to the "villain vacuum" the Joker left. As I mentioned earlier there is a possibility that the Joker works as a symbol and reminder for why Batman has his rules. Over the course of this thesis we have seen that Batman at times functions more as an anti-hero rather than a hero, and that his motives are often questionable. This is something the Joker is aware of in Murphy's graphic novel and during a struggle before he becomes Jack Napier, he tells Batman:

"After all these years, you still have no idea what I am capable of? I could have beaten you at any point, turned this city completely against you whenever I wanted. But I chose to hold back – Giving you only what you could handle – because I didn't want to wreck what we had. Admit it – I gave you Gotham City! This corrupt war zone we created together. The only reason Gotham allows you to exist is because they are terrified of me! Admit it! I'm the only one who really knows you, Batman! Your vigilantism isn't about justice – It's about control: fixing this city is your pathetic way of salvaging the broken bits of your anima. But you're too stupid to see that it hasn't worked – crime has become your therapy, and Gotham your victim. You've dragged us all into your perpetual Halloween! Admit it. You can't even build a family because the very thought of one terrifies you! How many innocent children will you ruin with your nightmare? Is that Nightwing or Robin? I've lost track because they keep disappearing. Even Gordon is fed up, watching his men turned into cannon fodder on the front lines of a war they didn't ask for. It's all falling apart and you are incapable of stopping it! Admit it!"

Face it. The greatest villain... in Gotham City...is You!”¹⁰¹

This quote interestingly again shows without his monster double (the Joker) working as “an unleashed vengeful fiend”, Batman could potentially become a much larger threat. In the *White Knight* storyline, we see glimpses of Batman’s dark side, especially once the Joker turns “good”.

Eventually Jack Napier is successful to the point that Batman is temporarily (and ironically) placed in Arkham Asylum. The paradigm slowly starts shifting back once Jack Napier’s ex-girlfriend, from when he was still the Joker, threatens to attack Gotham in order to get the Joker back and off medication. It is also during this time that that Napier’s medication starts losing its effect and he switches between himself and the Joker. In order to defeat this new foe, Jack Napier/Joker makes a deal with Batman and the two team up. After they win Jack Napier who is now almost completely the Joker again goes back to Arkham Asylum, while Batman continues fighting criminals. Now that the Joker once again fills the monster double role and “the greater of two evil”, Batman can return to his role as hero/anti-hero.

While Sean Murphy’s *White Knight* portrays a Joker that has become “good”, Scott Snyder’s *The Batman Who Laughs* introduces us to two evil alternate versions of Batman. In the graphic novel we encounter a hybrid version of Batman and the Joker (The Batman Who Laughs) as well as a version of Batman who has neither a no-killing rule nor a no-gun rule (The Grim Knight). The Batman Who Laughs is an evil alternate version of Batman from the Dark Multiverse, and a result of what Batman would become if he kills the Joker. As a “safety measure” the Joker has booby-trapped his heart with joker toxins, so that the person who kills him becomes the next Joker. In the Batman Who Laughs’ universe, the Joker discovered Batman’s identity and started killing his allies one by one, until Batman killed him. This released the toxins making Batman into The Batman Who Laughs. The Grim Knight is another alternate version of Batman, but who picked up his parents’ killer’s gun and used it on the killer as a little boy. Since then he functions like a vigilante like the Batman from our universe, except he kills all the criminals and has Gotham completely under surveillance and control.

In *The Batman Who Laughs* the Joker takes on himself the role of the person who does the things nobody can or wants too. By taking on this role he completes Batman in the sense that he becomes what Batman needs, even if it is not necessarily always what he wants. After the

¹⁰¹ Murphy, Sean. 2017-2018: 9-10

Joker avoids being killed by The Batman Who Laughs, Batman lets him in his Bat Cave. The Joker then shoots himself in the heart so that Batman would be infected with joker toxins and become The Batman Who Laughs. He does this out of belief that Batman has to become like his foe in order to defeat him. Despite sacrificing himself, the Joker survives thanks to Alfred's surgical skills. Another example is around midway during the graphic novel, as Batman is testing a water reservoir for poison, and the Joker (who is now awake) comes to talk.



Figure 9. from *The Batman Who Laughs*¹⁰²

- Joker: *Because! I came to say--*
- Batman: *Say what? "Haha?" To laugh?!*
- Joker: *To say...*
- Batman: *Say what? You got what you wanted!*

¹⁰² Snyder, Scott & Jock. 2019:123-124

- Joker: *No I didn't.*

- Batman: *What are you talking about? You put that damn toxin in your heart yourself. It was always your final trap.*

- Joker: *You and I...we'll always be at war. You think we matter, I think life is a bad @\$#!\$& joke. I believe that one day I'll win. That I'll watch you scream at my feet as this city dies, and on that day I will laugh at you. But just once, and never again, here and now...I...I want you to know...that's not what I want.*

- Batman: *So what then? You want me to **win**?*

- Joker: *No.*

- Batman: *What then?*

- Joker: *I want neither of us to win. Ever. Heh.*

- Batman: *So you're here to say good-bye?*

- Joker: *No, Bats. I'm here to say good luck.*

- Batman: *...Joker, listen to me my friend, my aide... If I turn into that monster, he won't do - what needs to be done. I know it. He won't be able to. But you...if I turn into him--*

- Joker: *Oh, I'll blow your *\$@%\$#%# head off. Heh.*

- Batman: ***Heh...** Cross your heart?*

- Joker: *And hope you die.*

**It was the scariest sound, the laughter... *¹⁰³*

In this dialogue (like the one in *White Knight*), it is implied that the Joker in his own twisted way cares for Batman. He turned Batman into The Batman Who Laughs not because he wanted to, but it was the only way he knew he could beat him.

Figure 9. illustrates the two as doppelgängers by mostly either viewing the two from the distance, creating a sort of “two against the world” feeling, as well as close-up individual captions indicating they are the same or at least two sides of the same coin.

The Joker then literally draw a “cross” over his heart (an “X” and not an actual cross) with the blood from his wound, possibly to symbolize a target, arguably that he will be targeting his metaphorical heart which is Batman. The two then start laughing making the “scariest sound”. Laughing, which is notoriously uncharacteristic of Batman and another thing that makes him differ from the Joker who laughs all the time. The two of them laughing together shows that they are becoming more similar to one another. Another scenario when this happened was at

¹⁰³ Snyder, Scott & Jock. 2019:123-124

the end of *The Killing Joke*, after the Joker had finished his joke indicating how similar they actually are.

The dialogue also shows that the Joker is willing to kill Batman if he turns completely into his evil alternate version. One argument for this could be that the Joker is simply afraid of The Batman Who Laughs and knows he has no chance against him alone. Another and more plausible argument is that he would kill Batman out of mercy, knowing that one of Batman's biggest fear is to become evil. However, once The Batman Who Laughs is defeated and the Batman is on the point of becoming him, the Joker turns up and shoots Batman in the shoulder. If it had not worked and bought the time for making and using the permanent cure, Batman would have turned completely. This could indicate that the Joker was not able to kill him, possibly out of care, or he was able but willing to gamble it for the sake of their game. I say this based on the interactions between the two over the years both verbal and non-verbal. I would argue that the Joker needs Batman and his shadow just as much as Batman needs his monster double, and although it being mere speculation, I would say that the Joker is more aware of this symbiosis. Either way the Joker would have had strong feelings for Batman, the game, or both, since he decided not to kill him with great risk. From what data and research, I have gathered, I would argue that the Joker would have had absolutely no chance against The Batman Who Laughs, who does not share Batman's empathy.

One could say that the Joker works as Batman's shadow in this graphic novel. He is not as present as in *White Knight*, *Arkham Asylum* or *The Killing Joke*, but when he shows up it is as if he had been there all along. When he is waiting to enter the Bat Cave in the beginning, he had already been there waiting under water before Batman was even aware of it.¹⁰⁴ The same applies for when the Joker appears out of nowhere, and shoots Batman in order to save him. This could provide us with another explanation for why the Joker did not kill Batman. As Batman's shadow, the Joker would disappear once Batman does, something we see happening in *Going Sane*. Thus, he risks Batman transforming into The Batman Who Laughs who would be more than willing and able to kill him.

In Figure 9. we can also see how the artist has used to illustrate the ongoing transformation of Batman. Unlike all the other characters, who have normal white speech bubbles with black writing; The Batman Who Laughs has black speech bubbles with red writing in them. From the moment Batman is infected by the Joker toxins, the letters in his speech bubbles become more and more red (as seen in the dialogue), until the end where all the letters are red. His

¹⁰⁴ Snyder, Scott & Jock. 2019:22

speech bubbles, however, stay white, as to illustrate that he still has not transformed completely. This may also be seen as the “good” Batman (white speech bubbles) taking on the “bad” Batman (dark speech bubbles).

The doppelgänger motif, and shadows which I talked about in Chapter 3, and illustrated further in Chapter 4, are also very present and relevant in *White Knight* and *The Batman Who Laughs*. In Murphy’s *White Knight* we have two pairs that function as doppelgängers/doubles: Batman and the Joker, and Harley Quinn and Marian Drews/Neo Joker. In Snyder’s *The Batman Who Laughs* we merely have one: Batman and the Joker.

Marian Drews is a character who made her debut in *Batman: White Knight*, and functions as a doppelgänger to Harley Quinn. She was slicing her wrist at the bank she worked in, when the Joker came in to rob it. Once the Joker entered her office, he put a gun to her head, and she decided then and there that she wanted to live and help him. During the robbery he started calling her Harley and she went along with it. As the medications take effect and the Joker becomes Jack Napier he returns to Marian Drews, who he still believes is Harley Quinn and proposes to her. Outraged by his transformation and proposal, Drews believes the Joker has (ironically) lost his mind and starts beating him. The beating only stops once the actual Harley Quinn appears and kicks her in the face, before taking Jack Napier with her. It is then that Marian Drews decides she need to bring the Joker back to his “insanity” and takes on the name of Neo-Joker. As she says while putting on her new costume:

*“He’s a liar. Taking too many of those pills. Damn drug addict. Destroying the Joker legacy. And she’s enabling him. Anything for her desperate romance. She’s just another prison. Holding him back, thinking he won’t break loose. But the Joker’s more than just a man. He’s a riot”.*¹⁰⁵

Harley Quinn and Marian Drews function differently as doppelgängers in comparison to Batman and the Joker, in the sense that Marian Drews and Harley Quinn physically look alike and have in this case the same function. Unlike the Joker who is Batman’s monster double and connected through his shadow, Marian Drews is a (close) physical duplication of Harley Quinn. This is the original and oldest idea of the doppelgänger and is again enforced by the fact that they are in the eyes of the Joker the very same person. Unlike Batman and the Joker, the two are not tied directly to each other, but indirectly through another person, the Joker. In

¹⁰⁵ Murphy, Sean. 2017-2018:53-54

addition to this the two are not direct enemies either and throughout the story both seem more fixated on Jack/Joker than eliminating each other.

Marian Drews is a pitiful character in the sense that she seems to have no personality but the one she adapted to fit the Joker's needs. Through her self-harming, and despair one could say she functions like a ghost, or a shadow (of a person), and by pretending to be Harley Quinn she is merely a shadow/ghost version of her. A similar thing occurs later in the story when she takes up the role of Neo-Joker. Although the plan is to "free" the Joker, not permanently become him, Marian Drews adapts and transitions into a shadow version of him. A new but still lesser Joker.

The reason for her taking on a new persona is most likely due to Harley Quinn being back in the Joker's life again, as well as the Joker being "missing", so she goes from duplicating one persona to another and filling their void. Indeed, Marian Drews devotion would mean that as well as being Harley Quinn's physical doppelgänger and a shadow of her persona, she also functions a shadow of the Joker, like the Joker functions as a shadow for Batman in *The Batman Who Laughs*. Nonetheless, she still seems to be the only one who knows the Joker; because despite Harley Quinn keeping the Joker contained within Jack Napier with the use of medication, he started rioting and eventually broke free. In *White Knight* we also learn why Harley Quinn initially left the Joker:



Figure 10. from *White Knight*¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Murphy, Sean. 2017-2018:38



Figure 11. from *White Knight*¹⁰⁷

Figure 10. and 11. depict the course of the Joker and Harley Quinn's relationship in a few segments. The first panel in Figure 10. captures the time she treated him in Arkham Asylum and fell in love with him. The second and third panels illustrate their carefree criminal career and the fourth and fifth show the Joker's growing obsession with Batman. The story ends with Figure 11. where Harley Quinn is in her underwear waiting for him, and the Joker is in significant emotional duress surrounded by Batman artifacts. However, despite leaving the Joker years prior, she still proves that she is in love with him by having created the medication that made him "sane" and help him take over Gotham.

¹⁰⁷ Murphy, Sean. 2017-2018:39

Indeed, Harley Quinn proves to be quite a complex character in this graphic novel. Despite having seemingly done everything for the Joker out of love, in a conversation with Batman she reveals it was not just for her love for the Joker, but also to break the stalemate between Batman and the Joker before they tore the city apart.

In *White Knight* one may also arguably make a case for a third doppelgänger: the Joker and Jack Napier. The Joker may act as physical manifestation of a dissociated part of the primary self (which would in this case would be Jack Napier), like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. However, this “monster double” could also be Jack Napier. Despite the Joker’s grand claims at the beginning of the graphic novel, it was Jack Napier who turned everyone against Batman and would have kept him in prison if it was not for Neo Joker. The Clown Prince of Crime is an agent of chaos and mayhem, and apart from a speculative past and a few times he has gone sane that is his normal. It is not illogical to think that his monster double would be a righteous (to some degree) man who settles down with a woman and becomes a politician to save a city. The Joker may indeed be right when he claims that Gotham only allows Batman to exist because they are terrified of him, thus Batman may in his own mind be much more afraid of Jack Napier. With both the Joker and Batman being afraid of Jack Napier, this could mean Jack Napier could be a/the monster double, especially since he is not afraid to do illegal things. This would mean that who functions as the monster double depends on one’s point of view.

Nonetheless, I believe the evidence to consider Jack Napier and Joker to be doubles to be insufficient. Despite of Jack Napier and Harley Quinn claiming that a good man was buried within the Joker the whole time, this is seemingly the only time he has come forth in this manner. Thus, one has to raise the question in which way, and to what degree the medication affects him. The medication could affect his “insanity” meaning it works as a cure, or it could be the medication itself that turns him into Jack Napier. Indeed, Harley Quinn tells him after she saved him from Marian Drews:

“You’re a narcissist who suffers from dysthemia and a schizoid personality disorder likely made worse by a chemical imbalance, which is why the medication is working. You’re probably not cured but with the right support you could be”¹⁰⁸

However, this contradicts other times the Joker has become temporarily sane. For example,

¹⁰⁸ Murphy, Sean. 2017-2018:37

when he was thrown into the Lazarus Pit (*Batman: Legends of The Dark Knight #145*) and the Martian Manhunter reordered his thoughts (*JLA #15*), he became extremely remorseful.

In *Going Sane*, after believing he killed Batman in *Going Sane*, the Joker simply becomes an ordinary man, not charismatic or anything like Jack Napier. In addition to this the medication ultimately failed.

One explanation may be that the Joker was exactly like Jack Napier before his “one bad day”. The trauma could potentially have completely suppressed/altered his personality as well as made him super sane, Morrison’s theory that suggested that the Joker’s personality would frequently change completely. Both the Joker and Jack Napier are highly intelligent and charismatic, so there may be possibility that his trauma could have involved what we now know as joker toxins. The toxins then took his personality and twisted/suppressed it, just like they did to The Batman Who Laughs. Like Batman explains to Gordon:

*“He’s not the Joker, Jim. He’s Batman. He’s me. Joker has points to prove—to me, to the world. The Batman Who Laughs...He’s not here to prove anything. He’s here to win, to kill anything and everything that’s a threat.”*¹⁰⁹

When it comes to Batman and the Batman Who Laughs, one can say that Bruce’s shadow, his drive and all unconscious parts of his psyche, that he has channeled into becoming Batman can function as a tool for good or for bad. The Bruce Wayne from our universe tries to use it for good but has a constant inner struggle not to let that part take over in fear of the havoc it would raise.

Once the Joker toxins alter the humane and empathic parts of Batman’s personality into something/someone as psychopathic as the Joker, there is no fear left of the shadow part, thus “erasing” the problem of having to contain it. This is something that might also have happened with the Joker when he became the Joker. Like the toxins the Batman Who Laughs planted to use on Gotham it turned the Joker into the worst part of himself.

The Grim Knight does not seem to have an inner struggle with his shadow either. The difference with the Grim Knight, however, is that he seems to have embraced the darker aspects of his personality, an acceptance that was triggered after killing his parents’ murderer. This way he lets his shadow take over (unlike Batman) by not making the no-killing rule, allowing himself to be free to eliminate everyone in his path without

¹⁰⁹ Snyder, Scott & Jock. 2019:20

remorse.

In *White Knight*, Jack Napier has a literal shadow shaped like the Joker that could be a physical manifestation and reflection, or possibly a literal foreshadowing that Jack Napier is not completely rid of him. One may also argue that Jack Napier is metaphorically living in the Joker's shadow. On one hand Jack Napier will always be associated with the Joker and even if this could result in something positive, that form of stigma will always follow him. On the other hand, one could argue that Jack Napier was part of the Joker's subconsciousness, his shadow. Even though I do not believe that Jack Napier and the Joker are doubles, Jack Napier could be the Joker's shadow, or at least partially. Perhaps the medication allows certain parts of his unconsciousness to be let in and merge/take over parts of his consciousness. This would also explain why he is different every time he goes "sane".

According to Jung one tends to reject or remain ignorant of the least desirable aspects of one's personality, but these could also be generally positive things. Thus, it would be understandable for the Joker to push any positive and moral thing into his unconsciousness, to the point that he may not even be aware of them. So, whenever he changes personalities his shadow could potentially be a constant invisible companion.



Figure 12. from *White Knight*¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Murphy, Sean. 2017-2018:27



Figure 13. from *White Knight*¹¹¹

In Figure 12. we see that the medication has changed the Joker physically as well as mentally. Nonetheless, artist/writer Sean Murphy has on several occasions in this graphic novel drawn Jack Napier’s actual shadow in the shape of the Joker. Two examples are in Figure 12. and 13. above. Figure 12. depicts Jack Napier in court, while Figure 13. depicts a shadow shaped like the Joker before Jack Napier enters Batman’s cell to ask him for help. The shadow also seems to have grown significantly from Figure 12. that depicts a scene early in the comic book, and Figure 13. that depicts a scene further along. The illustration of difference in size between Figure 12. and Figure 13. may indicate that Jack Napier is struggling with containing the Joker within him, and that the medication is failing him.

As we are presented with a “good” Joker in *White Knight*, and two “bad” batmen in *The Batman Who Laughs*, there are grounds for arguing that Joker makes a more efficient hero and Batman a more efficient villain. This also applies to the battle between the two. It is worth noting that Batman is highly intelligent and is often referred to as “the world’s greatest detective” in the DC world. In addition to this Batman is a master in numerous martial arts. Nonetheless, In *White Knight* Jack Napier is able to outmaneuver Batman and beat him with

¹¹¹ Murphy, Sean. 2017-2018:161-162

relative ease in a fist fight, before locking him up in Arkham Asylum. If it had not been for Napier's medication losing effect and the threat of Neo-Joker, Batman might even have stayed imprisoned permanently.

In *The Batman Who Laughs* Batman once again has to take on his worst nightmare and arguably the most terrifying villain in the Batman multiverse(s). In his own dark universe, before coming to the standard universe we follow in comics, he had already killed most of the superheroes and supervillains. He had done this despite having no superpowers of his own. He proves his terrifying nature in the graphic novel by scaring the Joker into sacrificing himself in order for Batman to beat him. Whether this is the Joker actually fearing him or just fearing losing Batman, thus ending their eternal game is up for debate. It is safe to say that the Joker is very aware that in a battle between Batman and the Batman Who Laughs, Batman would always lose. As Batman explains to Alfred after they locked The Batman Who Laughs up in the dungeon of the Hall of Justice:

*"No, the Joker says that to accept that there's no meaning in your actions is to win. I say, to believe there is meaning in all your actions is to win. That demon [The Batman Who Laughs], what he says is that there is no meaning in your actions, therefore the only meaningful act is to win. He is the fear that we're both right, Joker and I. The fear that without any grander meaning, at heart we are cold, animalistic, selfish things"*¹¹²

Another example of Batman's potential efficiency is the other| evil alternate version we encounter in the graphic novel: The Grim Knight. In The Grim Knight's universe within the Dark Multiverse, all the villains are either dead (like the pre-Joker Red Hood) or have turned law-abiding out of fear like mayor Harvey Dent (Two-Face). These are of course two of the examples. In *Going Sane* the Joker merely becomes an ordinary citizen after believing that he killed Batman, and we get several examples of other alternate versions of Bruce Wayne in *The Batman Who Laughs*. These versions of Batman are the Bruce Waynes who gave up being Batman, because of love or greater ambition for change. These versions also turned out to be happier as well as more effective in changing the city than the Batman in our universe. From what I have illustrated in this thesis one may also conclude that neither Batman nor the Joker would be better off killing the other, or the other potentially dying (an exception may be in *The Dark Knight Returns*). If Batman kills the Joker, he could become the Batman Who

¹¹² Snyder, Scott & Jock. 2019:210

Laughs or potentially turn into a villain like The Grim Knight. If the Joker kills Batman, he would have no one to challenge him and turn back into sanity and be ordinary, become dormant or potentially self-destruct.

Indeed, the first option where Batman dies and the Joker becomes normal might not be great for them, however it would perhaps be better for Gotham City. Unlike in *The Killing Joke* and *Arkham Asylum*, Batman's efficiency in his war on Gotham's underworld is highly questioned and discredited in the more recent *White Knight* and *The Batman Who Laughs*. It is so to the point that it questions whether Gotham is even better off without Batman. In *White Knight* it is shown to us through the actions of, and battle between Batman and Jack Napier. In *The Batman Who Laughs* however, it is clearly expressed by Batman himself to Alfred at the end of the graphic novel:

- "Batman: I meant every word. What I saw when I stood here and stared into the dark. All those versions of me...The ones who impress their will on the city, on the people...The ones who give up Batman for love or ambition or grander plans of change...They are more effective in changing this city. And they're happier.

- Alfred: Sir--

- Batman: No, the hard truth is they're likely better Batmen than me for Gotham, a city that was built on secret plans for conquest, for winning. I thought Gotham was one thing...But it's just not. Maybe everyone would be happier with them heroes. Happier under that serum, with the whole burden of goodness just...gone."¹¹³

The Batmen described in this quote sound very similar to Jack Napier in *White Knight*. Indeed the difference is that Jack Napier does what Batman says Batman is supposed to do: "To be better than you are supposed to be."¹¹⁴ and "Batman isn't about knowing who you are but who you want to be."¹¹⁵ We can interpret from these quotes that Batman is about selflessness. Now even though we cannot be a hundred percent certain that Jack Napier's motives were completely self-less, we can see that Batman's seemingly are (though arguably not). Nonetheless, we can deduct from this that despite Batman's good intentions and selflessness, that these traits are ineffective. Unlike the focus and debate on Batman's true nature and questionable morals, which was already present at the start of the Dark Age, the question of

¹¹³ Snyder, Scott & Jock. 2019:209

¹¹⁴ Snyder, Scott & Jock. 2019:213

¹¹⁵ Snyder, Scott & Jock. 2019:213

Batman's efficiency seems to be a more recent thing. This is one of several things I will discuss further in the conclusion, mostly by looking at three Batman and Joker movies that were made in almost each their decade of the Dark Age (1989, 2008, 2019).

Conclusion

The link between comics and television/cinema has been undisputedly important. We saw examples of this in Cesar Romero's portrayal "reviving" the Joker in comics in the 60s, which arguably saved the character from oblivion. The character was further developed by getting his own sidekick Harley Quinn in 90s *Batman: The Animated Series*. The birth of Harley Quinn showed us new sides of the Joker and opened up creative as well as psychological possibilities for both of the characters. Over the years and especially since the start of the Dark Age, there have been different portrayals of Batman and the Joker on screen. The three I have chosen to discuss are Tim Burton's *Batman* (1989), Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight* (2008) and Todd Phillips' *Joker* (2019). The reason that I chose these three, and have them as part of my conclusion, is because they show that the prevalent doppelgänger/shadow themes are resilient enough for the big screen.

Like the humorous, simplistic morality *Batman* the television series from the Silver Age, an age where the Comics Code Authority and their censorship of everything "harmful to children" dominated, Tim Burton's *Batman* contained the characteristics from its time as well. The cinematic film was released merely a year after Moore's *The Killing Joke* and drew huge inspiration from the graphic novel, with slight alterations. In this movie Batman (Michael Keaton) is fairly new to Gotham City as the public still believe him to be a fairytale, while the street criminals are starting to fear him. The Joker (Jack Nicholson) on the other hand starts out as an arrogant and sociopathic gangster named Jack Napier (a name later reused in Murphy's *White Knight*), who after an altercation with Batman trips and falls into a barrel of acid at a chemical plant.

Even though we see that Bruce Wayne is still very much dealing with his parents' death, there is not much trace of him having a shadow in the Carl Jung sense. I argue this mostly due to Batman's seemingly lacking a no-killing rule. Over the course of the film he blows up the Joker's factory well knowing there are people (the Joker's henchmen) in it, he later guns down more of the Joker's henchmen in his Batwing aircraft, and eventually (intentionally or not) indirectly kills the Joker as well. He does all this without a sign of remorse. As Alex M, Weiner say in his book *Soul of the Dark Knight: Batman as Mythic Figure in Comics and Film*: "*Batman has killed at least five people by the movie's end: a dark knight indeed. The*

comics Batman, whose code prevents him from taking life, is subverted by a movie hero out for vengeance."¹¹⁶ This very much changes the doppelgänger dynamic in the sense that it becomes merely "good vs. evil". True, we are dealing with a Batman who kills but ultimately, he (tries to) only kill the bad guys.

Apart from their "good vs. evil" war the two also fall in love with the same girl, Vicki Vale (Kim Basinger), making the fight personal. An important factor to the Batman-Joker doppelgänger motif is the possibility that Batman was indirectly responsible for the creation of the Joker. Unlike in *The Killing Joke* where it might be true, it is stated as fact in the film and Batman is aware of this. Tim Burton takes the connection even further when Batman learns it was Jack Napier who killed his parents in the alley when he was a child. This means the Joker created Batman just as much as Batman created the Joker.

Like the comics, this film is very much a reflection of its time and depicts a time that saw major socioeconomic change due to advances in technology. A few examples that show this self-centrism and materialistic behavior are the Joker's schemes to terrorize Gotham. The Joker puts toxins in hygiene products (vanity) that leave the victims dead with a grin on their face, and later proceeds to lure Gotham's citizens to a parade with the promise of free money (greed). On top of this, as a product of the Dark Age and its dark and grittiness the film very much portrays a Gotham City moldering decay. A smoke-filled urban nightmare, with deep shadows and gargoyles looking down from every building, After the Joker's death the officials of Gotham unveil a newly made Bat signal. A light in the dark city that is to inspire hope. a light that ironically enough has a shadow in it. Symbolizing that perhaps like The Grim Knight, a Batman without a struggle with his own shadow and a no-killing rule is what Gotham needs.

Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight* is the second movie in his Dark Knight trilogy, but the only one featuring the Joker. The movie was made in a time of a post 9/11 chaos, terror and wars. Unlike *Batman* from 1989, the internet and social media had also grown exponentially. The film portrays a Batman (Christian Bale) in his prime, winning the war on crime. As the end seems near Bruce Wayne is considering giving up the suit and let the new district attorney Harvey Dent (Aron Eckhart) continue his mission publicly and within the law.

However, Batman's growing success causes fear and desperation within Gotham's organized crime, to the extent that they call in the new and unknown Joker (Heath Ledger) to help them. This version of the Joker is seemingly more realistic. Unlike his predecessor this Joker merely

¹¹⁶ Wainer, Alex M. 2014:131

has two scars next to his mouth (creating a smile) and the rest of his face and hair consist of make-up and dye.

However, despite its modernly adapted realism, Ledger's Joker has a stronger resemblance to the Joker from the early Golden Age than the Dark Age. In his early years the Joker had no real identity nor any origin story. In fact, after his debut in 1940, it would take more than a decade before the Joker even had something resembling an origin story. Another resemblance between the two is that both kill their victims seemingly just because they can, and they constantly outwit the police. The portrayal of this Joker within a modern society could potentially in ways represent the invisible enemy the U.S now faced with terrorists. Like Gotham, the U.S was now under attack and one did not know what could happen next and from where and who.

This emphasis on realism regarding the Joker as well as Batman in *The Dark Knight* was highly intentional. Weiner quotes Christopher Nolan from a 2004 *Variety* article in his book where he says: "*Ours will be a recognizable, contemporary reality against which an extraordinary heroic figure rises.*"¹¹⁷ He further states when describing executive producer Michael Uslan point of view on Nolan that: "*In his opinion, Nolan 'realized the way to make Batman work again, would be to make him real. The audience had to believe that Bruce Wayne could be a real person in a real city in a real world.'*"¹¹⁸ This worked in contrast to Tim Burton's visions that were idiosyncratic and unreal.

In *The Dark Knight* Bruce Wayne's struggle with his shadow is more evident, mostly due to the reflection of his no-killing rule, which the Joker eagerly tries to make him break throughout. In the movie, unlike often insinuated in the comics, he has this rule to separate himself from the villains he is fighting and be better, not because he is afraid of what it will do to him if he does. Alex M. Wainer says in his book: *Soul of the Dark Knight: Batman as Mythic Figure in Comics and Film*: "*Those involved in fulfilling Nolan's vision of Batman often resorted to the comics depiction to evoke the character's dual nature, balancing human intellect with animal ferocity.*"¹¹⁹. This depiction of "animal ferocity" coincides well with Jung's theory of the shadow being largely negative, often due to it being instinctive and irrational (like an animal). By maintaining his human intellect and balancing it with his animal ferocity/shadow through not killing, and letting his shadow take over, he is able to maintain the balance.

¹¹⁷ Wainer, Alex M. 2014:143

¹¹⁸ Wainer, Alex M. 2014:143

¹¹⁹ Wainer, Alex M. 2014:149

The doppelgänger motif between Batman and the Joker that often seems to be connected through Batman's shadow, is in this film is portrayed not largely through creation, (like in Burton's *Batman*) but rather through a twisted relationship. It has a strong resemblance to the beginning of *White Knight*, and Batman and the Joker's conversation in *The Batman Who Laughs*. We see this for instance in part of this dialogue from the interrogation scene in *The Dark Knight*, after they captured the Joker:

"- Joker: Those mob fools want you dead so they can get back to the way things were. But I know the truth: there's no going back. You've changed things. Forever.

- Batman: Then why do you want to kill me?

Joker: Kill you? I don't wanna kill you. What would I do without you? Go back to ripping off mob dealers? No. No. No! No you- you complete me.

- Batman: You're garbage who kills for money.

- Joker: Don't talk like one of them, you're not. Even if you'd like to be. To them, you're a freak. Like me. They just need you right now. But as soon as they don't they'll cast you out. Like a leper. Their morals, their code; it's a bad joke. Dropped at the first sign of trouble. They're only as good as the world allows them to be. You'll see- I'll show you. When the chips are down these, uh, civilized people? They'll eat each other."¹²⁰

The same applies for a scene near the end of the movie after Batman has managed to defeat the Joker and saved him from falling out of a building:

- Joker: You just couldn't let me go, could you? This is what happens when an unstoppable force meets an immovable object. You truly are incorruptible aren't you? Huh? You won't kill me out of some misplaced sense of self-righteousness. And I won't kill you because you are just too much fun. I think you and I are destined to do this forever.

- Batman: You'll be in a padded cell forever.

- Joker: Maybe we can share one.¹²¹

These two dialogues in many ways sum up the relationship between the Joker and Batman through the Dark Age. The Joker shows exceptional insight by telling Batman that he has changed things to the point that Gotham will never be the same. Batman has shown the

¹²⁰ Nolan, Christopher. 2008: 1:27:43 - 1:28:54

¹²¹ Nolan, Christopher. 2008: 2:13:23 - 2:14:07

citizens of Gotham that one man can make a major difference and will function as a symbol long after his death. This is illustrated clearly after he faked his death at the end of the following movie *The Dark Knight Rises*, when the city's officials raise a statue of him in city hall, and Robin John Blake (notice the first name) takes up the mantle of the Batman.

In several of the origin stories we have looked at Batman had either a hand in creating the Joker, and in Tim Burton's *Batman* they even created each other. Those doppelgänger relationships started a connection already from creation, or in a way "birth" (of the characters). In *The Dark Knight* the two have seemingly no connection or encounter prior, but still end up as doppelgängers. In this case the Joker becomes Batman's monster double not through creation but cause and effect. By Bruce Wayne channeling his shadow to become Batman he attracted the Joker, and by making the mob of Gotham City desperate enough to hire the Joker he was indirectly responsible for his unleash.

Like in Scott Snyder's *The Batman Who Laughs* this makes us once again wonder whether Batman has a positive impact on Gotham City if not make it worse. Even if he did not necessarily create the Joker in this film, he is indirectly responsible for him being unleashed on Gotham. The same goes for Bane in *The Dark Knight Rises*, and Ra's al Ghul in *Batman Begins*. If Bruce had not accepted being trained by Ra's al Ghul, Gotham might not have been a target by The League of Shadows in *Batman Begins*, implying that Ra's al Ghul's daughter Talia and Bane would not have come for revenge in *The Dark Knight Rises*. As often as Batman saves Gotham, it seems that most of the problems would not have been there to begin with if it was not for him. This raises again the question to whether Batman is truly helping Gotham or not, despite his best intentions.

The Joker continues by revealing he does not wish to kill Batman, on the contrary he feels that Batman completes him. We have seen that this is something that is also stated in *The Batman Who Laughs* eleven years after. He goes even further by comparing Batman to himself. "Don't talk like one of them, you're not. Even if you'd like to be. To them, you're a freak. Like me." This shows once again the complexity of the two characters and their relationship that grew exponentially during the Dark Age. Two characters that are doppelgängers on opposite sides yet share many similarities. As we have seen Batman tends in the eyes of the law to be on the same side as the Joker, although not to the same extreme. The Joker even seems to slightly insinuates he cares for Batman in this dialogue through his comparison, by stating they are different from the rest and warning him that one day they are going to turn on him and each other.

In the second dialogue we receive a deeper insight in the two characters and their struggle that in the comics has been going on since 1940. The Joker says: “*This is what happens when an unstoppable force meets an immovable object.*” By looking at this quote and as previously illustrated this very much symbolizes chaos versus order and the choice both (seemingly) made after their trauma. The Joker chose to go with the flow and enforce chaos and mayhem, while Batman turned against it and chose to fight it.

An insightful observation and remark by the Joker is that he believes Batman refuses to kill him “*out of some misplaced sense of self-righteousness.*” This coincides with that we often see in the comics during the Dark Age. Batman has his no-killing rule not necessarily out of kindness but not to go too far and basically become a villain. Indeed, it is also what largely illustrates and coincides with his shadow. In *The Dark Knight* Batman’s no-killing rule is heavily tested by the Joker, leaving Bruce with a constant inner struggle throughout. One could argue against Batman’s moral dilemma by mentioning Burton’s *Batman* or the graphic novel *The Dark Knight Returns* as well as many other deaths Batman is responsible for. However, Batman is technically not directly killing people, merely indirectly setting up the circumstances for people to die or choosing not to save them. Now many would claim this is no different from murder, nonetheless these are things that could be justified, especially by a not completely “sane” mind. The question of insanity is what the Joker brings up at the end of the second quote. When Batman claims the Joker will be “*in a padded cell forever,*” the Joker suggests that they could share one. This perhaps shows that the Joker believes Batman is not completely sane himself, or at the least not in the eyes of society.

Todd Phillips’ *Joker* from 2019, differs substantially from the two previously mentioned motion pictures, in the sense that it is mainly about the Joker and his road to becoming the Joker. The story of the movie takes place in Gotham City in 1981. The main character Arthur Fleck (Joaquin Phoenix) works as party clown and is an aspiring stand-up comedian (like in *The Killing Joke*) with a medical condition causes him to laugh uncontrollably at times to the point of physical discomfort.

Joker is in many ways a tragic story about a struggling person being pushed over the edge by society through a series of serious setbacks. He gets beaten up several times and fired from his job. The social services that provide his medication shut down. His mother who may, or may not, have lied about Thomas Wayne being his father ends up in the hospital, and he is invited to one of his favorite TV shows not because they liked his comedy but because they want to make fun of him. Interestingly it is also through these episodes that he “finds himself” or at least accepts himself, good or bad. By shooting and killing three Wayne employees who

beat him up, he learns to stand up for himself, Thomas Wayne rejecting him sets him free from having to impress someone, by killing his mother he cuts all ties to people (and avenges what may or may not have happened in his childhood), and by killing the tv show host (Robert DeNiro) he proves a point to the world. One could state that Arthur is living/hiding in the shadows but wants to be seen and have recognition. I would not necessarily say he is struggling with his own shadow, because as he does not seem to have any problems with his conscious nor shows any form of remorse, but rather embraces his demons.

It is during all this and by killing the Wayne employees (who are defended by mayor candidate Thomas Wayne) that he also manages to indirectly cause an uproar in the city against the rich. The rioters all wear clown masks as it was said the killer was a clown (Arthur was still in his clown make-up) and Thomas Wayne responded by calling the people jealous of the rich and privileged for “clowns”. After Arthur shoots the tv host on live television and the riots are out of control, we follow Thomas and Martha Wayne and their little son Bruce hurrying out of a movie theater towards an ally. In the ally they are met by a man in a clown mask who shoots and kills Thomas and Martha Wayne.

In the end it is never revealed if Arthur is really Thomas Wayne’s illegitimate son or not. If he is it would mean that not only is the Joker indirectly responsible for creating Batman, he is also his older half-brother. If his last joke at the end of the movie which we never hear regards him creating Batman, it would also mean he knows his identity. This would create a doppelgänger relationship on an even deeper and more complex level. It would mean he met the Joker as a child before he was the Joker and he was Batman. It would mean that Batman’s monster double indirectly created Batman’s shadow (or at least the traumatized part of it that made him Batman) and which binds them and not the other way around (hinted in comics) or both created each other (*Batman* 1989). In addition to Bruce’s childhood trauma, his blood relation with Arthur could also make him predisposed to other mental illnesses. Indeed, at the end of the film Arthur is sitting in a mental hospital (arguably Arkham Hospital since it is shown earlier), talking to a woman before he murders her. The last scene is somewhat ambiguous and makes one question everything. One theory suggests that everything just happened in his mind. Another one suggests that it was a different inmate’s story, and that Arthur tells it as if it is his own. Perhaps he is not the Joker that fights Batman but an inspiration to him. Or it could all be true, and the Joker could be indirectly responsible for creating Batman, making that fact the joke he would not share at the end.

The emphasis on, and importance of, origin stories in both the comics and the movies is largely because they give us an explanation and help us relate to a character. Over the years

Batman's origin story has remained fairly consistent (except the details around the parent's murder) to the point that it is near impossible to alter it. It is a direct symbol of who he is and how he became Batman. His parents were murdered by a criminal with a firearm, so he vows to fight criminals without killing them or using guns. Equally important is the Joker's origin story, or rather lack of, over the years. The character was introduced eighty years ago, yet we cannot for sure say who he was or how he became the Joker. Indeed, some of his origin stories have shown us that that is how it was or happened, and yet those have been accepted as mere variations to us. In the most acclaimed origin story from Moore's *The Killing Joke* where a version is presented to us before the Joker explains that he remembers it differently from time to time. In the doppelgänger relationship between Batman and the Joker, the uncertainty of not only the Joker's actions but the origin and character himself works perfectly in contrast to Batman's unwavering background and personality. Chaos and uncertainty versus order and certainty.

Arguably an important tool for explaining the Joker's various depictions (in both comics and films) could be the super-sanity theory from Grant Morrison's *Arkham Asylum* which I mentioned before. As the theory states:

*"The Joker seems to have no control over the sensory 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."*¹²²

This could lay an explanation for why there is a general acceptance that there are so many different versions/interpretations of the character. The theory binds all the different Joker's together with and explanations and at the same time leaves character the freedom it needs for future reinventions. It also leaves the question to whether he is truly insane or a special case that separates him from the rest of humanity, making him Batman's ultimate archenemy:

"The Joker's a special case, some of us feel he may be beyond treatment. 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

¹²² Morrison, Grant & McKean, Dave. 1989:27-28

looking at some kind of super-sanity here. A brilliant new modification of human perception.”

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Just like the two previous films I discussed *Joker* is very much a reflection of its time, despite it being depicting as taking place in the early 80s. The portrayal of the pre-Joker as an awkward social outcast with mental health problems that goes through a series of bad events (“one bad day”), could be related to many of the problems in society today, mass-shootings and gun control being big ones. While *Batman* shows a link to crime, *The Dark Knight* a link to terror, *Joker* shows the danger of an average citizen (with mental health problems), not getting the help he/she needs and who goes over the edge. At the same time, it shows a city in chaos where its lesser privileged citizens fall through the cracks, and the privileged, connected and wealthy get the needed attention. If one wants to go even deeper one may look at it from a conservative point of view and arguably include the issue rise of single parents (Arthur) versus two parents at home (Bruce).

The evidence of this theory suggests that with every decade the relationships between Batman and the Joker grows more realistic, complex and sinister, with Batman staying fairly constant and consistent but revealing more and becoming more realistic and the Joker constantly changing (towards psychological realism as well). Indeed, realism is highly applicable to the world of Batman, most importantly because he has never been a “typical” superhero like for example Superman, nor has he or many of his villains have superpowers. A good example of this is the highly successful movie *Joker* from 2019. It has an infamous and beloved comic book character, which they made a realistic movie about to the point that it is believable. This kind of new take and independent film could also be possible for Batman himself and other villains like Two-Face, Penguin, and even the Grim Knight and The Batman Who Laughs. Both Heath Ledger and Joaquin Phoenix won an Oscar for their Joker portrayals, Ledger for Best Supporting Actor and Phoenix for Best Actor (in leading role). Heath Ledger won his Oscar posthumous, after an accidental prescription drug overdose a little over a year prior.¹²⁴

Comics through the Dark Age also seem to make us question the sanity of not only the Joker, but Batman as well. As I mentioned in Chapter 3, before Arkham Asylum was created in the Bronze Age the Joker usually went to prison and was even sentenced to death very early in the Golden Age. However, with the increased focus on his madness one might argue that he

¹²³ Morrison, Grant & McKean, Dave. 1989:27-28

¹²⁴ Serjeant, Jill. 23.02.2009.

indeed does belong in an insane asylum such as Arkham, and it would be a way to keep the character alive in the comics and ready to return at any time. Still one might question whether the Joker is actually “insane” at times. If one takes a closer look at the word “insanity” one may be surprised to know that it is not a psychological term, but a legal one.¹²⁵ Ryan Howes PhD explains in his article in *Psychology Today*:

“To be clear, insanity is a legal term pertaining to a defendant's ability to determine right from wrong when a crime is committed. Here's the first sentence of law.com's lengthy definition:

‘Insanity. n. mental illness of such a severe nature that a person cannot distinguish fantasy from reality, cannot conduct her/his affairs due to psychosis, or is subject to uncontrollable impulsive behavior.’

Insanity is a concept discussed in court to help distinguish guilt from innocence. It's informed by mental health professionals, but the term today is primarily legal, not psychological. There's no "insane" diagnosis listed in the DSM [Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders].”¹²⁶

Now, having studied thoroughly the Joker’s actions and behavior over the ages, I would argue that the Joker is not suffering from any kind of psychosis (except perhaps in the movie *Joker*), but rather something closer to psychopathy. It is true most of his actions do not make sense to anyone but himself, but most of them always seem to be well thought through and planned, and he does not seem to suffer from hallucinations or delusions. Another argument may be the theory of super sanity from Grant Morrison’s *Arkham Asylum*; where it is stated that: *“In fact, we’re not even sure if he can be properly defined as insane.”¹²⁷* However, this is merely a theory, and the doctors believe that he is a unique case, making the diagnosis speculative or simply a personality trait at most.

According to the article *The Insanity Plea: A Futile Defense for Serial Killers* at HeinOnline the insanity plea is rarely used as well and even less successful.¹²⁸ A character like Two-Face, who has arguably a psychotic disorder, would be much more likely to be deemed insane and

¹²⁵ Howes, Ryan. 27.07.2009

¹²⁶ Howes, Ryan. 27.07.2009

¹²⁷ Morrison, Grant & McKean, Dave. 1989:27-28

¹²⁸ HeinOnline. 1993

succeed with an insanity plea. The Joker on the other hand would in all likelihood be imprisoned and executed (depending on the laws of the country).

Indeed, as one may question the Joker's insanity, one may equally question Batman's sanity. Batman may arguably be suffering from delusions, sometimes seemingly hearing and seeing things that are not there (hallucinations). In addition to this he regularly dresses up like a bat and taking on every criminal in Gotham together with a teenager/child for an assistant. He is unable to function normally, has severely emotional issues and hardly ever laughs/smiles. Not to mention having horrifying safe plans for each of his Justice League friends in case they go rogue. Perhaps the reason criminals have it so easy turning Gotham against him is because he is on the boarder of being a villain himself, and the Joker is keeping him on the right side. After what we have seen throughout the thesis the two started becoming more and more similar in the Dark

Age. An important factor that separates them, however, is that Batman has rules to stay on one side, whilst the Joker choses to go with the madness. As Darren Marks states: "*Batman, like the Joker, is insane but his insanity exists in attempting to order the chaos whereas the Joker simply gives into it and perhaps is the hyper-sane amongst us all.*"¹²⁹ Marks is here referring to the Joker's "super sanity" theory from Morrison's *Arkham Asylum*, that suggests the Joker may have no control over the sensory information he's receiving from the outside world and can only cope with it by going with the flow. The theory further states that the Joker has no real personality and that he creates himself each day. *He sees himself as the lord of misrule, and the world as a theatre of the absurd.*"¹³⁰

Perhaps it is choice that defines and separates them or more specifically, actions. This is more emphasized in the Dark Age unlike prior when they good vs. bad factor was clearer.

Nonetheless, it is important that despite having a moral code of not killing he does often instead of killing someone simply choose not to save them. In the 2005 movie *Batman Begins* (the first in the Christopher Nolan trilogy), Batman literally tells Ra's al Ghul: "*I won't kill you, but I don't have to save you.*"¹³¹ Even though this is not technically the same as murder, it is not far from it. Batman is perhaps not pulling the trigger, but he is condemning them to die, which from a moral standpoint could be arguably worse. He works as judge and jury but lets someone/something else be the executioner not to get his hands/conscious dirty. This anti-heroic behavior once again proves why he could be easily mistaken for a villain, and perhaps

¹²⁹ Marks, Darren. 2009.

¹³⁰ Morrison, Grant & McKean, Dave. 1989:27-28

¹³¹ Nolan, Cristopher. 2005

would have been even if it was not for the Joker's presence.

Over the course of this thesis I have illustrated the psychological complexity of Batman, the Joker and their relationship in the Dark Age of comics. By applying Carl Jung's "the shadow" I have shown that Batman has beyond questionable morals, unresolved issues due to early childhood trauma, and a constant inner battle that can have universally catastrophic consequences. My use of the literary motif of the doppelgänger, as well as close reading and comics analysis, highlights the fact that the relationship between Batman and the Joker is tremendously complex. Over the course of the Dark Age the characters have in many aspects become more human and realistic. Concepts like "good" and "evil" have become blurrier, variable and arguably replaced with characteristics like "better than" and "worse than". As the Dark/Modern Age is still ongoing and has been quite consistent since its beginning one may wonder how it is going to end, and what will define the next age. Is it even possible to add more psychological depth to the characters, while at the same staying true to the character? Between the Bronze Age and the Modern/Dark Age there were merely distinctions such as commercialization of comic book publishers, more psychologically complex characters (especially anti-heroes) and twisting plots. Some even claim that part of the Bronze Age overlaps with the Modern/Dark Age. Even if it is hard to imagine any major differences in the years to come now, one possibility is that the ages will be redefined later in the future. Nonetheless, one thing is for sure: the eighty-year-old relationship of Batman and the Joker will survive and thrive through any future ages as well.

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