

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides the introduction to the study, consisting of the background of the study and the research questions of the research. Moreover, this chapter also includes the aim of the study, scope of the study, significance of the study, clarification of the study, and brief elaboration of the research method and data collection and analysis used in the study.

### 1.1. Background of the Study

Films are artistic forms of documents which record many representations in everyday life (Heintz & Stracey, 2006). Since its first creation, film has become one of the most common parts in our everyday lives, which leads to the increasing demands of film (Mazdon, 2013). Mazdon states that the need to meet the growing demands of films makes the acts of adapting and remaking become common practices in Hollywood.

As film and its production have rapidly developed throughout the century, many famous films are created and based on plays, novels, even poetry (Heintz & Stracey, 2006). Hutcheon and O’Flynn’s (2013) statement saying that “adaptation is everywhere today” (p.2) strengthens Heintz and Stracey’s (2006) argument. Hutcheon and O’Flynn (2013) state that the theme of the original story is perhaps the easiest part to adapt, but they also add that character is an obvious part to be transported from the original to the adapted versions. It means that there are many versions of a character created and consumed by the audience.

The comic book *Batman*, first published by Detective Comics in 1937, is one of the many examples of comic books that have been regularly adapted into film versions. There are roughly nine film adaptations of *Batman*, and this does not include the direct-to-video animated films, animated series and television series versions. According to Box Office Mojo (2016), *Batman* franchise holds

one of the most watched films in the history of cinema. As one of notably the most famous adaptation franchises, there is an issue in how the adapted versions present the portrayal of the characters of *Batman*.

Batman, the main protagonist, is portrayed rather similarly in his many adapted versions. Batman's clear origin, his established real name, and his well-defined characterizations do not give the filmmakers flexibility in shaping different portrayals of Batman. From his earlier creation in *Detective Comics #27* (Finger & Kane, 1939) until the *Batman v Superman* motion picture (Snyder, 2016), Batman keeps being depicted as a melancholic super hero whose past created who he is (Carter, 2015). Carter (2015) further emphasizes that Batman has always been depicted as the same character who dons similar costume in his every appearance.

However, different from Batman, Carter (2015) states that it is surprising that there are so many variations of the character Joker throughout the adaptations. Carter further elaborates that in 70 years of the character's life, from his creation in *Batman* (Finger, Kane, & Robinson, 1940) to the newest *Suicide Squad* motion picture (Ayer, 2016), Joker has been presented in different portrayals. Carter (2015) states that Joker has been portrayed as a serial killer, a psychopath, a gangster, a comic trickster, and even a master criminal. Although he is always depicted as a mentally instable person, his other traits have been delivered in different portrayals.

As elaborated above, *Batman* has been adapted into approximately nine films, from *Batman* (Martinson, 1966) to *The Dark Knight Rises* (Nolan, 2012). *Batman v Superman* (Snyder, 2016) is the last addition to the franchise, sharing it with the *Superman* franchise. It is worth highlighting that out of the nine film adaptations of *Batman*, two films have included Joker as the main villain of the story: *Batman* (Burton, 1989) and *The Dark Knight* (Nolan, 2008). Other villains such as Catwoman, Bane, Mr. Freeze, and Poison Ivy, on the other hand, are shown in only one film, making only one adapted version of the character within the motion picture franchise. Meanwhile, there are two versions of Joker regulated and consumed by the audience.

A number of film observers point out that *Batman* narratives seem to be more interesting when Joker is around (Peaslee & Weiner, 2015). In their views, Joker's ways of confronting Batman are 'unique', in the sense that they are mostly illogical and are often unable to be understood immediately. According to them, the Clown Prince of Crime is able to plunge into the audience's insecurities, making him one of the most successful villains of comic book history. While Batman, Superman, and Spiderman battle each other for the *Best Superhero in The World* title, Joker has already triumphed above other super-villains (Peaslee & Weiner, 2015). With thousands of comic books, numerous animated series, and three major blockbuster films featuring Joker as the main villain of the story, the character Joker has therefore established himself as one of the most memorable super villains in the history.

To the best of my knowledge, the issue of portrayals of Joker in different *Batman* films has not gained much attention in the academic field. Most of the literary scholars are drawn to Joker's psychological issues rather than the different versions of his portrayal, despite the fact that there are fan websites throughout the Internet attempting to discuss them. For instance, Camp, Webster, Coverdale, Coverdale, and Nairn (2010) analyzed how the character Joker depicts mental illness in the film *The Dark Knight* (Nolan, 2008). They further figured out how the features of film language construct Joker's own mental illness. Another study, which was conducted by Choe (2011) elaborated that the characterization of Joker in the film *The Dark Knight* (Nolan, 2008) is actually caused by war symptoms. Choe (2011) further analyzed that his violence nature is a product of his own anxiety and paranoia of the society of America.

Considering the discussion above, this study aims to analyze how Joker is portrayed in two different film adaptations of *Batman*. It also investigates the similarities and differences between the portrayals of Joker. Since *Batman* (Burton, 1989) and *The Dark Knight* (Nolan, 2008) featured Joker as their main villains, these two films will be chosen.

## **1.2. Research Questions**

This study focuses on the portrayals of the character Joker in two different *Batman* films, namely *Batman* (Burton, 1989) and *The Dark Knight* (Nolan, 2008) to answer the following questions:

1. How is the character Joker portrayed in the film *Batman* and *The Dark Knight*?
2. What do these portrayals of Joker signify?

## **1.3. Aim of the Study**

This study aims to investigate the following problems:

1. To explore the portrayals of Joker in the film *Batman* and *The Dark Knight*, including their similarities and differences; and,
2. To examine the signification of the portrayals of Joker in the films.

## **1.4. Scope of the Study**

The analysis of the portrayals of Joker in *Batman* (Burton, 1989) and *The Dark Knight* (Nolan, 2008) will be limited around the character Joker. Other characters such as Batman, Alfred Pennyworth (Batman's butler in *The Dark Knight*), Gotham City attorneys Harvey Dent and Rachel Dawes (from *The Dark Knight*), Maroni (a mob in *The Dark Knight*), and Vicki Vale (Joker's love interest in *Batman*), may be presented briefly to support the analysis of the portrayals of the character Joker. However, they are not to be included as the main focus.

## **1.5. Significance of the Study**

Generally, the result of the study is expected to give a contribution to critical literary analysis especially in the field of film studies. The study is also expected to broaden research on characterization in films. Moreover, the study is expected to provide more in-depth analyses regarding *Batman* and its characters.

## 1.6. Research Method

This study uses a qualitative approach because it aims to investigate the portrayals of the character Joker in two *Batman* films, and reveal how film techniques such as *mise-en-scene*, camera shot and angle, and sound construct the portrayal of the character Joker. As is generally known, qualitative method is descriptive in nature, containing open ended question, and textual data source (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005). Qualitative descriptive method is chosen because it can provide complex textual descriptions regarding the issue in the research (Mack, et al., 2005).

## 1.7. Data Collection and Data Analysis

The data for the study are collected through watching the films entitled *Batman* (Burton, 1989) and *The Dark Knight* (Nolan, 2008). After thoroughly watching the films, screenshots containing the appearances of Joker that support the theme of the films are taken and reselected according to the context of the film. The screenshots are categorized into several tables according to the types of Boggs and Petrie's (2008) characterizations in film. They are analyzed using Boggs and Petrie's (2008) framework of characterization in film and strengthened using some of Bordwell and Thompson's (2010) cinematic techniques (i.e., *mise-en-scene*, camera shot and angle, and sound) to investigate the portrayals of Joker. The analyses regarding the portrayals of Joker are used to reveal the signification of two characters of Joker in *Batman* and *The Dark Knight*.

## 1.8. Clarification of Terms

1. **Cinematic Techniques:** Ways in cinematic world that allow us to experience and understand the principle by which a film is put together (Bordwell & Thompson, 2010).
2. **Character:** The most human element from a literary work, which seems real, understandable, and worth caring about. It is one of the most important aspects because if the readers are not interested in the

characters, then they will not be interested in the whole story. (Boggs & Petrie, 2008)

3. **Characterization:** An ensemble of indicators in a character scattered along the text and, when in need, gives a reference of the character's traits. (Rimmon-Kennan, 2002).
4. **Film Studies:** An academic discipline, deals with various theoretical, historical, and critical approaches to films (Dyer, 2000).

### **1.9. Organization of the Paper**

This paper will be composed in this following organization:

#### **1. ABSTRACT**

This section functions as summary of the paper presenting brief information about the content that will be elaborated further in the next sections.

#### **2. CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION**

This chapter will deal with background of the study explaining what drives the writer to analyze the chosen topic, the purpose or personal intention of the writer in writing the study, the significance of the study describing what will be the study's contribution in an individual or a society, and presentation of research questions.

#### **3. CHAPTER II: THEORETICAL FOUNDATION**

This part of the study will examine the bases of theories (theoretical framework) used in the study and also what other researchers have found in the earlier studies.

#### **4. CHAPTER III: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This section presents the methods used in the study and also the details such as: who are involved, where the data are obtained, and how the data are collected.

#### **5. CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

This chapter deals with the findings when the study or analysis is finished. The findings will be transcribed, analyzed, and finally discussed to answer the research question

## 6. **CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

This section will sum up all the information from the chapters and conclude an idea as the result of the analysis. In this section, recommendation for further research is also presented.