

“I’m just a dog chasing cars” - An analysis of the
Joker’s rhetorical devices and identity in the movie *The
Dark Knight*

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Pasi Hämäläinen

University of Jyväskylä

Department of Languages and Communication

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<p>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</p> <p>Kieltä käytetään erilaisissa konteksteissa erilaisiin tarkoituksiin. Sillä voidaan viihdyttää, hämmentää tai vakuuttaa kuulijoita. Tavat, joilla puhuja käyttää kieltä kertovat myös väistämättä jotain puhujasta itsestään – suorasti tai epäsuorasti. Kielenkäytön voidaan täten todeta olevan osa puhujan identiteettiä, jota sanavalinnat, lauserakenteet ja retoriset keinot rakentavat ja ylläpitävät. Tämän tutkielman tavoitteena on analysoida Jokerin käyttämiä retorisia keinoja Christopher Nolanin ohjaamassa elokuvassa <i>Yön Ritari</i> ja niiden myötä Jokerille muodostuvaa identiteettiä elokuvan edetessä.</p> <p>Tutkimusmateriaalini koostui viidestä eri kohtauksesta, joissa Jokerilla on keskeinen rooli. Nämä kohtaukset litteroitiin kirjalliseen muotoon ja niissä esiintyviä retorisia keinoja sekä niiden välitöntä vaikutusta Jokerin identiteetin rakentumiseen analysoitiin diskurssianalyysia käyttäen.</p> <p>Tutkimustyöstäni kävi ilmi, että Jokerin hahmo <i>Yön Ritarissa</i> on verbaalisesti taitava puheissaan ja että hän hyödyntää lukuisia retorisia keinoja, erityisesti anaforisia rakenteita puhutellessaan muita. Hän poikkeaa useita kertoja sosiaalisesti hyväksytyistä tavoista käyttäen kieltä erilaisissa sosiaalisissa ja fyysisissä konteksteissa ja rikkoo keskustelumaksiimeja säännöllisesti, mutta usein myös tietoisesti sekä argumentoidakseen että manipuloidakseen läsnä olevia ihmisiä.</p> <p>Analyysi paljasti Jokerin olevan rikollinen mielipuoli, joka on manipulatiivinen ja impulsiivinen, ja joka ei välitä sanojensa välittömistä tai pitkäaikaisista seurauksista. Esiin nousi myös ristiriita Jokerin retoristen keinojen muovaaman identiteetin ja hänen minäkuvansa välillä. Kattavampi tutkimus voisi analysoida useiden eri elokuvissa ja TV-sarjoissa esiintyneiden Jokerien identiteettejä ja niiden eroavaisuuksia ja yhtäläisyyksiä sekä julkaisujen ajankohtien vaikutusta hahmon käyttäytymiseen. Jokerin itsetuhoisen ja välinpitämätön käyttäytyminen <i>Yön Ritarissa</i> voisi myös toimia pohjana tutkimukselle hänen hahmostaan vertauskuvana mielenterveyden ongelmille.</p>	
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1 Introduction

Language is used in varying ways as a tool to convey excitement, draw comparisons between ideas and to make people think. The many constructs used in familiar contexts to convey certain ideas are called rhetorical devices, and the way such constructs are used can also reveal information about the speaker themselves, both implicitly and explicitly. Thus, language use can be seen as an identity-defining factor. This is true in real life interpersonal communication, but especially true in TV-series and movies, where character exposition is often provided through dialogue, because more exhaustive exposition is often not possible due to length constraints. Fictional on-screen character identities are thus heavily affected and co-constructed by the way the characters use language.

The Dark Knight (2008), a sequel to the critically acclaimed *Batman Begins* (2005), depicts the city of Gotham in a dark twisted manner, tackling the themes of corruption, the blurred line between good and evil, as well as human frailty. The movie gave the world a new take on the Joker, a revered villain in the Batman comics, and this version of the Joker, played by Heath Ledger, charmed and terrified audiences worldwide, and the movie became the highest grossing film of 2008. The Joker in the movie works as the counterpart to Batman, and the way he presents himself, both physically and especially verbally, is one of the key reasons his performance is considered by many to be one of the greatest movie adaptations of the Joker thus far.

The present study has two goals: to analyze the Joker's use of rhetorical devices throughout the movie, and how they often deviate from socially accepted expected ways of using language, as well as analyzing how his on-screen identity is constructed as a result, by using discourse analysis as the main method of analysis. Theories on rhetorical devices and their roles in language are exhaustively available (Corbett, 1965; Tindale, 2004; Kelen, 2007), but studies on their effects on fictional character identities in modern blockbusters are scarce or non-existent. Bednarek (2010) has studied the effects of dialogue on character identities in TV-series, but the lack of similar studies on movie characters, even less so on *The Dark Knight*, provides a gap for the study at hand. In addition, the intentionally ambiguous identity of the Joker creates a window of opportunity for discourse analysis that has not been carried out before.

This thesis will first introduce theories on rhetorical devices and character identities supporting my research. I will first discuss rhetorical devices and their varied functions in interpersonal communication, theories on speech acts and pragmatics, as well as previous research on fictional on-screen character identities and identity construction (Section 2). In the third section, I will introduce the selected data for this research, the character of the Joker as well as my methods of analysis. I will then analyze rhetorical devices and language use in seven extracts of five different scenes in the movie, including the Joker as a pivotal character. The effects of his language use on his identity will be analyzed concurrently (Section 4). Lastly, the conclusion will provide a summary of my findings and present possible future applications for this study (Section 5).

2 Background

In this section, I will discuss the key concepts and theories behind my research, and they will be introduced separately in their respective sections. First, I will introduce the theory of rhetorical terms, also often referred to as rhetorical figures and their role as agents of meaning. This first section will focus on the ways different rhetorical terms are used in either spoken or written English to carry implicit or explicit meanings, and how they are typically used in varying, everyday contexts. It will also shed light on rhetorical argumentation, and how rhetorical terms can also serve as arguments. Theories on rhetorical terms were drawn from Kelen (2007), Harris (20014), Tindale (2004) and Corbett (1965) and other scholars.

The second section will approach speech acts in more detail, drawing from theories on the pragmatics of speech acts by Grice, mainly focusing on the Maxims of Conversation and the co-operative principle. The pragmatic approach of this section will aid in understanding the context-bound nature of spoken language, and how interlocutors (the people engaged in the conversation) in any given conversation make both implicit and explicit choices that affect the flow and content of the conversation.

Lastly, in the third section, I will discuss the construction of fictional, on-screen character identities and, for the purpose of this study, the effects of dialogue and language on the

identities of fictional characters will be focused on, drawing especially from Bednarek's study (2010) on fictional on-screen character identities.

2.1 Rhetorical terms as agents of meaning

As stated by Kelen (2007:8), rhetorical devices are often referred to as figures of speech because they are part of the way people use their languages in typical, everyday contexts. In referring to these features of language, *rhetorical figures* is another commonly used term. These intrinsic parts of language Kelen (2007: 8) also describes as “modes of thought or ways of meaning”. By this, he clarifies that there are certain pre-existing constructs of language that are commonly used by people when either speaking or writing. When used in their appropriate contexts, these constructs tend to convey explicit and implicit meanings and ideas in ways that are easily and correctly interpreted by the receiving participant. Consequently, the term *rhetorical device*, which will be used from this point onwards, is accurate, for it carries an implication that language is used as a tool for meaning making. Rhetorical devices, as mentioned by Kelen (2007: 9), can be divided into schemes and tropes: “Schemes involve re-patterning words – that is altering the normal ways in which words would be expected to fall together to make meaning; tropes, by contrast, alter the meanings of words by altering the way in which they mean.” In my study, the use of tropes will be focused on, as it involves using rhetorical devices in contexts where more than what is said is usually implied. Different rhetorical devices will be introduced and defined in this research, as they become relevant. Definitions and contexts for these devices will be drawn from Harris (2002), Kelen (2007) and Corbett (1965) respectively.

On the one hand, according to Kelen (2007), these devices often carry a meaning in a given conversation, which is understood and interpreted by the people involved without a need for deeper analysis, due to the fact that they are so commonplace and fixed in the language. On the other hand, as Tindale (2004: 61) argues, “a specific figure, recognized as such by its structure, may not have the same effect in different situations.” This is to say that it is plausible for rhetorical devices to be used by the speaker either purposefully or accidentally in unfitting contexts for desired effect. This relates to the theory of the Maxims of Conversation by Grice (1969), and how conversational conventions and universal rules can be purposefully violated or flouted. This theory will be discussed in more detail in section 2.2.

In addition to serving as agents of meaning, rhetorical devices, as presented by Tindale (2004), can be used directly as arguments. Tindale describes rhetorical devices as a way to make a striking impression on the audience, and when used in speech, they can be used to attract attention. In *The Dark Knight*, the Joker often makes an appearance when he is addressing multiple people directly or indirectly, thus providing a window of opportunity for analyzing his use of rhetorical figures as arguments, as his words often have consequences.

2.2. Speech acts and pragmatics

Pragmatics is an area of linguistics that focuses on context-bound language, such as interpersonal communication. Language use - speech acts in particular - can be studied from the point of view of what the speakers are trying to accomplish with their utterances and the contexts in which they occur. The context bound nature of interpersonal communication makes it possible for the interlocutors to analyze each situation, and utilize correct conversational strategies accordingly. On the meanings of speech-acts, Hart (1997:40) sees them as activities that serve a function and involve certain levels of decision making:

“By choosing to utter words to another, a speaker makes at least these decisions - to speak to A and not to B; to speak now and not then or never; to speak here and not there; to speak for this period of time, not longer or shorter. These rhetorical decisions contain ‘information’ for us as observers if we are wise enough and patient enough to track these decisions.”

In other words, whether or not a conversation is successful depends on the interlocutors and their level of understanding of the underlying principles of conversation. One of the key theories on this is Grice’s (1969, as cited in Huang, 2007) theory of the co-operative principle. Huang (2007: 25) provides a simplified version of this theory and breaks it down to four key categories, which are (1) Quality (2) Quantity (3) Relation and (4) Manner. These four categories are also known as the Gricean Maxims of Conversation. According to the cooperative principle, it is imperative to “make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged” (Huang, 2007: 25). The Maxims of Quantity and Quality

imply that one should not speak too much or too little, and that one should only speak what one knows to be true. The Maxims of Relation and Manner suggest that one's contribution to a conversation should stay relevant to the context, and that one should present it in a polite way, without risking insulting the other participant(s).

The Gricean Maxims of Conversation are factors that speakers either explicitly or implicitly obey or violate, and even Grice himself acknowledges that people constantly, either accidentally or purposefully violate and deviate from these Maxims. Purposeful violation of the Maxims of Conversation is known as *flouting* (Douglas, 2006: 162). By flouting a Maxim, the speaker appears to break the rules of conversation on the surface level by being irrelevant, insulting or dishonest, but still remains co-operative on the deeper levels of the conversation by conveying some implicit information through their words. Such conversational strategies are used in varying contexts for desired effects. Flouting Maxims is common in naturally occurring and scripted dialogues, as conversations that strictly followed these Maxims would not be very engaging and would lack in character.

2.3. Constructing fictional on-screen identities

The second main focus of this study is to find out how language use in movies affects and co-constructs character identities. Prior research on the connection between language use and fictional character identities are relatively scarce, but Bednarek (2010) provides insight into how language and on-screen identities are inseparably connected. It can be said that movies, and thus on-screen performances, are comparable to real life contexts to the extent that they often involve interactions that on the surface appear authentic; they use real language in contexts that mimic the real world. Although saturated with elements that by standard definition can be considered "unrealistic", even the genre of fiction tends to strive towards authenticity and a certain level of realism in their scripts in regards to language use. *The Dark Knight* is no exception, and although the Joker's character in the movie, as well as the rest of the characters around him, is entirely fictional, he is a carefully constructed character with his individual and unique characteristics in a way that is expected of fictional characters in movies of such status. However, in *The Dark Knight*, as opposed to taking characters from comic books and building a world around them, Christopher Nolan takes the real world and builds the

characters into it. The Joker is based on authentic character traits, which are in turn accentuated by the obvious super hero story narrative of the movie.

However, as Bednarek (2007: 21) mentions, despite imitating real life, movie dialogues are “clearly not the same as naturally occurring dialogue.” This notion resonates with Culpeper (2001: 10-11) who uses characters in literature as an example, which, by extension, can be applied to scripting movie characters. He points out that as opposed to dialogue that is formed spontaneously in the moment, scripted characters are exactly that: scripted. Their words are carefully thought out and the way they use language is a deliberate choice on behalf of the author or scriptwriter. According to Culpeper (2001:10-11), the words of scripted characters are often given more significance, for the very reason that they are carefully chosen, and therefore one can argue that particular word choices or the repetition of certain phrases is a conscious choice made by the writer. Bal (1997: 85) sees repetition as “an important principle of the construction of the image of a character.” Initially separate features of a character start to pile up, which Bal (1997:85) fittingly refers to as “the accumulation of characteristics”, and this accumulation constructs a more complete image of a character than the information that was available upon the character first being introduced.

In addition, certain expectations can also fall on characters based on their presumed roles in the story (for example: hero/villain). Bal (1997: 84) discusses the concept of predictability of characters in narratives. What people expect from certain characters is associated with pre-existing data about the character. Data on the Joker’s character identity and origin are scarce, and for the purpose of *The Dark Knight*, his character was made even more ambiguous than in the original DC comics, and thus such predictability does not define the Joker as a character in the movie. Despite the ambiguity of the character, Kozloff (2000: 44) states that “dialogue lines are explicitly designed to reveal character”, and therefore the discourse analysis at hand is relevant for examining the construction of the Joker’s identity.

Consequently, these ways in which a fictional character uses language can give cues about their identities. Culpeper (2001:163-172) presents both explicit and implicit “cues that give rise to information about character”. Similarly, Vorhaus (1884: 150) points out that the way a character acts at the beginning of a series, or in this case a movie, can give clues about the way the character will behave later on. According to Culpeper (2001: 167-172), explicit character cues include self-presentation and other-presentation. These involve either the character

themselves, or someone else giving explicit information about the character. Implicit cues on the other hand are more intricate, and involve factors such as conversation structure and adherence or non-adherence to the Maxims of Conversation. For a complete list of explicit and implicit character cues, see Bednarek (2007:101-102)

3 The present study

3.1 Research questions:

The aim of the study is to find out how language use can construct a character identity for a movie character, whose actual identity and background is intentionally ambiguous.

The research questions are:

1. How do the Joker's unique ways of using rhetorical devices deviate from socially accepted and assumed ways of using language?
2. What kind of an identity does the Joker's use of rhetorical devices create for a character whose actual identity is unknown?

3.2 Data collection

The present study relies entirely on a single primary source: the movie *The Dark Knight*. More precisely, the data used for this study will consist of scenes in the movie that include the Joker as a central character. He has a total screen time of approximately 33 minutes, but still in order to keep the study precise and concise, I have consequently chosen to include and analyze five different scenes that include the Joker as a pivotal character. Several scenes were omitted due to length constraints, and because the data under analysis needed to be narrowed down into a feasible amount.

The focus of this study is to see how language use affects and co-constructs an identity, and therefore discourse analysis worked as the main analytical framework. Gee (2014: 1) provides a toolkit for discourse analysis and introduces it as the study of not only how language is used

in different contexts, but also how it is used to do things, such as convince, insult or deceive people.

The first scene that reveals the Joker to the audience was chosen due to the fact that this scene sets the tone for the identity of the character that gradually starts to take shape over the course of the movie. His debut appearance is brief and offers little in terms of quantity, but in this study, it is considered the starting point for the analysis. The second scene that was chosen involves the Joker interrupting a daytime mob meeting in the backroom of a restaurant. In this scene, the Joker walks in laughing and proceeds to assume total control of the situation with his physical and verbal presence. The scene includes tense dialogue between the mobsters and the Joker and it is the first that gives him time to present his agenda to his criminal colleagues and the audience.

Next, two different scenes were analyzed in parallel with each other, because they both include the Joker holding a person at knife's end, explaining the origin of his facial scars. These two extremely intimate scenes introduce two different stories, but they are both equally effective in terrifying the people in his immediate vicinity. This scene was also chosen because it shows the Joker employing narratological strategies as a way of falsely convincing the listener about his past.

Thirdly, an interrogation scene between Batman and the Joker was analyzed in two different sections. In this scene the Joker has been taken in by the Gotham City Police Department (GCPD), and after countless attempts at getting him to speak, Batman is sent into the interrogation room, leading to a confrontation between the protagonist and the antagonist of the movie.

The next scene under analysis includes the Joker setting fire to his half of the profits the mob has made under his rule. Unable to understand the motifs behind such reckless behavior, the mob dealers are explicitly given a reasoning by the Joker. Through his words, it becomes even more evident that his motifs are outright anarchy and chaos, and how in his opinion he is the criminal Gotham City deserves.

The fifth and final scene under analysis presents a dialogue between the Joker and Harvey Dent, Gotham City's District Attorney, by a hospital bed to which Dent is bound to, after

suffering severe burn damage on his face, caused by falling victim to one of the Joker's "games". This scene is the turning point for Dent's character, as the manipulative words of the Joker push him over the edge into becoming the Batman villain known as "Two-Face".

3.3 The Joker in *The Dark Knight*

The Dark Knight presents the Joker as the main antagonist of the movie. He is played by Heath Ledger, who received an academy award posthumously for his performance. The character adaptation in the movie differs from previous iterations of the Joker that have appeared on screen. The Joker's character is intentionally ambiguous, meaning he is not bound to a particular time period or a certain location. The Joker in *The Dark Knight* is a much more modern take on the classic DC Comics villain, as opposed to his 1966 television series adaptation, played by Cesar Romero, and his movie debut in 1989, played by Jack Nicholson. Hassoun (2016: 3) accurately writes:

"Clearly there is not one, but many Jokers. Like most enduring popular fictional creations, the Joker has repeatedly morphed his mannerisms, appearance, and *raison d'être* to meet the styles and trends of the time".

Previously portrayed as more of a mischievous jester, Heath Ledger's take on the character is more mature and less comical. The Joker in *The Dark Knight* is defined by his obsession with Batman and his need for chaos and anarchy. Much of this becomes evident in the way he talks, addresses people, and the way he justifies his often psychopathic behavior and the words he uses to describe himself.

4 Analyzing the Joker's rhetorical devices and identity construction

In this section, I have analyzed the Joker's rhetorical devices and identity in reference to theories on discourse analysis by Gee (2014) and theories on rhetorical devices and fictional character identities by Kelen (2007), Harris (2008), Corbett (1965), Bednarek (2010) and other scholars.

The chosen discourse from the movie for this study was analyzed by creating literal transcripts of the dialogues from a selection of scenes that involve the Joker as a pivotal character. These

transcripts are a constant point of reference when discussing the Joker's rhetorical devices and how his on-screen identity is constructed as a result. The transcripts were carefully dissected into smaller parts, individual sentences and phrases. Full versions of the longer transcripts can be found in the appendices.

4.1 The Joker's use of rhetorical devices

Extract 1. This scene gives the viewer the first proper glimpse of the Joker. A group of criminals in clown masks are finishing up a bank heist, and it has become apparent that whoever hired them, has told them that the fewer men there are standing at the end of the heist, the larger the remaining robbers' share of the profit will be. The two remaining robbers, named Bozo and Happy in the movie script, are gathering up bags of cash after gunning down the bank manager, and one of them points a gun at the other:

1 HAPPY: I'm betting the Joker told you to kill me soon as we loaded the cash.
 2 BOZO: No, no, no, no. I killed the bus driver.
 3 HAPPY: Bus driver? What bus driver!? ((A school bus crashes through the bank wall and kills
 4 Happy, Bozo starts loading the bags of cash to the back of the bus))
 5 MANAGER: ((Bleeding on the floor)) Think you're smart, huh? Well, the guy who hired
 6 you's...he'll just do the same to you. Oh, criminals in this town used to believe in
 7 things. Honor, respect. Look at you! What do you believe in, huh? What do you
 8 believe in!?
 9 BOZO: I believe whatever doesn't kill you simply makes you...((Pulls off mask and is revealed
 10 to be the Joker))... stranger. ((Smiles and puts a smoke grenade in bank manager's
 11 mouth))

In the Joker's debut appearance, he is referred to as the man behind the operation multiple times during the scene before the eventual reveal, and this playing with the viewers' expectations accentuates the moment he reveals himself not only to the bank manager but also to the viewer. The way he responds to a threat at gunpoint (line 2) is the first of the many instances in the movie where the Joker flouts the maxim of Relation. The Joker's response seems completely irrelevant and out of context, since no bus driver has been present in the scene. That is until a few seconds later, as the bus crashes through the wall. This immediately gives the Joker's words context, as his carefully orchestrated heist takes its final steps. Knowing the exact moment the bus was going to drive through the wall, the Joker could use his words for confusing effect.

At the end of the scene (lines 9-10) the Joker corrupts Nietzsche's proverb "whatever does not kill you, makes you stronger," which is typically used to express optimism and strength in the face of hardship. By switching "stronger" to "stranger", the Joker manipulates the proverb to imply that things that do not kill you, often leave you scarred, either physically or mentally, and he implies that in his case it has been both. Pausing before uttering the word "stranger", the Joker places emphasis on this word and accompanied by its immediate context, it is the first implicit character cue the Joker gives about himself (Bednarek, 2010: 101-102). At the end of this scene, the Joker is quickly established as a criminal with a morbid sense of humor and who cares little for the consequences of his actions.

Extract 2. (Longer version in the appendices) The Joker's interrogation escalates as he pushes Batman over his breaking point with his manipulative words. Batman grabs him from the other side of the table and lifts him up, bringing him closer to his face, demanding to know where he is keeping Dent and Rachel, whom his men have abducted. The Joker refuses to disclose their whereabouts, until he has had his way with Batman.

1 BATMAN: Where are they?
 2 THE JOKER: You have all these rules and you think they'll save you?
 3 BATMAN: I have one rule.
 4 THE JOKER: Well, then that's the rule you'll have to break to know the truth.
 5 BATMAN: Which is?
 6 THE JOKER: The only sensible way to live in this world is without rules, and tonight you're going to
 7 break your one rule

This short physical confrontation between the Joker and Batman shows how the Joker can get under the skin of his enemies by the power of words alone. Flouting the Maxim of Relation (line 2) by providing a seemingly irrelevant answer to a direct question, the Joker still remains co-operative, by implying that the Batman's attempts at always playing the hero will eventually be futile. He tries to make Batman realize that his non-lethal approach to vigilante justice will fail him, and that people will die because of his actions either directly or indirectly. The "one rule" Batman has is that he indeed does not use lethal force on his enemies, and it is what in his own eyes makes him better than the likes of the Joker. Batman gets aggravated by the Joker's ridiculing words and starts physically attacking him, punching and throwing him around the interrogation room, to the point where it seems that he is indeed going to break his "one rule", but the Joker does not relent:

8 THE JOKER: Killing is making a choice.
 9 BATMAN: Where are they?!
 10 THE JOKER: Choose between one life or the other. Your friend the district attorney or his blushing
 11 bride-to-be.
 12 BATMAN: ((Punches the Joker in the face))
 13 THE JOKER: ((Laugh maniacally)) You have nothing, nothing to threaten me with. Nothing to do with
 14 all your strength.. Don't worry. I'm gonna tell you where they are. Both of them. And
 15 that's the point. You'll have to choose. He's at 250, 52nd Street, and she's on Avenue X
 16 at Cicero.
 17

Even when faced with physical violence, the Joker maintains his ridiculing way of addressing Batman, which manifests in the ever-increasing level of his frustration. In line 13 he feasts on Batman's failure to bend him to his will by repeating the word "nothing" three times in two adjacent sentences. Such structural repetition is a rhetorical device known as *anaphora* (Harris, 2013: 17), and it is used to put emphasis on words or ideas the speaker wishes to convey. Here the Joker uses it as leverage to ensure Batman is well aware that his attempts at making the Joker bend and break are futile at best.

4.2 Rhetorical devices as tools for argumentation and manipulation

Extract 3. In this scene the Joker interrupts a gang meeting in order to pursue his own agenda of disposing of Batman by any means necessary. The Joker's behavior and way of addressing the table of gang members seems point to a total disregard for his own safety and lack of respect for the most feared criminals of Gotham City. However, it becomes evident, that the Joker is well prepared, persuasive and unpredictable in his actions.

1 THE JOKER: ((Enters the room laughing sarcastically)) And I thought my jokes were bad.
 2 GAMBOL: Give me one reason why I shouldn't have my boy here pull your head right off?
 3 THE JOKER: How about a magic trick? (One of the gang members gets up to rough him up, the
 4 Joker grabs the man and drives a freshly sharpened pencil, which he had placed
 5 pointing upwards on the table, through the man's head)
 6 THE JOKER: Ta-daa! And it's gone! Oh, and by the way, the suit? It wasn't cheap. You ought to
 7 know, you bought it!
 8 CHECHEN: Sit. I want to hear proposition.
 9 THE JOKER: Let's wind the clocks back a year. These cops and lawyers wouldn't dare cross any of
 10 you. I mean, what happened? Did your balls drop off? You see a guy like me---

11 GAMBOL: A freak!

12 THE JOKER: ---a guy like me... Look. Listen. I know why you choose to hold your little, ahem,
 13 “group therapy sessions” in broad daylight. I know why you’re afraid to go out at
 14 night. The Batman. See, Batman has shown Gotham your true colors, unfortunately.
 15 Dent? He’s just the beginning. And as for the television’s so called plan? Batman has
 16 no jurisdiction. He’ll find him and make him squeal! I know the squealers when I see
 17 them and...((Points at the television))

18 CHECHEN: What do you propose?

19 JOKER: It’s simple. We, uh, kill the Batman.

20 MARONI: If it’s so simple why haven’t you done it already?

21 THE JOKER: If you’re good at something never do it for free.

22 CHECHEN: How much do you want?

23 THE JOKER: Uh... half.

24 CHECHEN: You’re crazy!

25 THE JOKER: I’m not. No I’m not. If we don’t deal with this now soon... little, ah, Gambol here
 26 won’t be able to get a, a nickel for his grandma.

27 GAMBOL: Enough from the clown!

28 THE JOKER: Ah, ta-ta-ta, let’s not blow... ((Reveals a series of wired hand grenades from under his
 29 coat))... this out of proportion.

30 GAMBOL: You think you can just steal from us and walk away?

31 THE JOKER: Yeah.

32 GAMBOL: I’m putting a word out. 500 grand for this clown dead. A million alive, so I can teach
 33 him some manners first.

34 THE JOKER: Alright, so, listen. Why don’t you give me a call when you want to start taking things a
 35 little more seriously? Here’s... my... card. ((Places a joker playing card on the table
 36 and walks out))

In replying to the threat with “How about a magic trick?” (line 3), as a reason to “not have his head pulled off” (line 2), and then killing one of the gang members in extremely macabre fashion, he displays clear defiance to the co-operative principle. Here, the Joker is presented with an indirect threat, giving him the opportunity to defend himself, as one would in such a situation to avoid being hurt or worse. Instead, the Joker chooses to ignore this threat, and proceeds to kill one of the gang members. According to Huang (2007: 29), such deliberate infringements of the co-operative principle are ways for the speaker, in this instance the Joker, to deliver a message. This flouting of the Maxim of Relation is used by the Joker as a conversational *implicature*, which underlines his unwillingness to do things in a way unfitting to him.

The Joker also uses multiple rhetorical devices in witty and belittling ways, which in typical contexts would be unfitting or unnecessary. The metaphor “did your balls drop off?” (line 10) is an alternative way of asking the mob why they suddenly lack the courage to stand up to the authorities of the city. This is a successful attempt by the Joker to manipulate the mob and

make them realize their diminished status in the city. A euphemism is used by the Joker (line 13) in referring to the organized meetings, one of which he has interrupted. The euphemism here, however, is unnecessary, because it is obvious to everyone present what the meeting is actually about. Instead, the Joker uses the term “group therapy sessions” as a means to ridicule the mob and their failed attempts at trying to have said meetings in secret in the backroom of a public restaurant.

What is more, the Joker utilizes rhetorical devices as an argumentative tool. Prolepsis, or the anticipation of and responding to objections in an argument (Tindale, 2004: 67), is present throughout the scene, as the Joker presents a problem (lines 12-17), which the mob counters (line 18), and to which the Joker presents a solution (line 19). However, the Joker’s approach to convincing the mob of his suitability to run this operation is atypical. On rhetorical devices as argumentative tools, Tindale (2004: 68) points out that “an arguer should begin from premises acceptable to the intended audience”, and the Joker both uses and disregards this notion in his favor. By belittling and addressing the mob as inferior to him, the Joker asserts dominance, but at the same time, he invites them to see the situation through collective eyes to realize they share the same problem: the Batman.

When the Joker provokes Gambol too much, he uses a common idiom as a trope (lines 28-29). Instead of it being just an idiomatic expression suitable for the situation, the Joker alters its meaning from rhetorical, into something very literal, by exposing the wired hand grenades under his coat. This is a side of the Joker that is playful with words, using them in unique contexts, making these words more impactful. In the viewer’s eyes, this transition from an idiomatic expression to something unexpected and literal sticks with the viewer and creates a juxtaposition between the way rhetorical devices are used by him and other characters in the movie.

The repeated disregard of argumentative premises, the non-adherence to the Maxims of Conversation, as well as the Joker’s conversational structure in the scene, are what Culpeper (2001) refers to as implicit character cues. Kozloff (2000: 73-84) discusses the creation of character identity and emphasizes the importance of “conversational structure and verbal competence” as factors that construct character identities. Here the Joker gives the audience the first longer look into his anarchistic view of the world, and the goals he is striving for.

Extract 4. Faking his death and making the Joker believe he is no longer a problem, Commissioner Gordon has managed to take the Joker by surprise and arrest him. The Joker is detained in an interrogation room and after a failed attempt at getting him to reveal his plans, Gordon sends Batman in to intimidate and interrogate him. Batman appears behind the Joker as the lights are turned on and he smashes the Joker's head against the table.

1 THE JOKER: Never start with the head, the victim gets all fuzzy, they can't feel the next—
 2 BATMAN: ((Pounds fist against the top of the Joker's palm))
 3 THE JOKER: ((Not reacting)) See?
 4 BATMAN: You wanted me. Here I am.
 5 THE JOKER: I wanted to see what you'd do. And you didn't disappoint. You let five people die.
 6 Then, you let Dent take your place. Even to a guy like me, that's cold.
 7 BATMAN: Where's Dent?
 8 THE JOKER: Those mob fools want you gone so they can get back to the way things were. But I
 9 know the truth. There's no going back. You've changed things. Forever.
 10 BATMAN: Then why do you wanna kill me?
 11 THE JOKER: ((Laughs hysterically)) I don't wanna kill you. What would I do without you? Go back
 12 to ripping off mob dealers? No, no. No. You... You complete me.
 13 BATMAN: You're garbage who kills for money.
 14 THE JOKER: Don't talk like one of them. You're not. Even if you'd like to be. To them you're just a
 15 freak. Like me. They need you right now, but when they don't...they'll cast you out
 16 like a leper. You see, their morals, their code...it's a bad joke. Dropped at the first sign
 17 of trouble. They're only as good as the world allows them to be. I'll show you. When
 18 the chips are down, these, uh... these civilized people...They'll eat each other. See,
 19 I'm not a monster. I'm just ahead of the curve.

The interrogation scene highlights the Joker's verbal competence manipulation skills. It is a direct confrontation between the protagonist and the antagonist of the movie that showcases the Joker drawing parallels between himself and Batman, and the way he sees them both as "two sides of the same coin." This scene highlights how even Batman cannot bend the Joker to anyone else's will. The Joker's way of addressing Batman and the situation at hand is sarcastic and ridiculing, poking fun at the police force and Batman himself.

Lines 5-6 are another instance of the Joker's words contradicting his previous actions. Having killed numerous people directly and indirectly throughout the movie, calling Batman out for not being able to save the lives of five people paints the Joker as self-righteous, supposedly failing to see the hypocrisy in his words. However, as the scene unfolds, it becomes more evident that he is using this unique moment alone with Batman to get under his skin, taking advantage of his non-lethal ethics. This is also the second instance (line 6) where he uses the

phrase “a guy like”, without providing any exposition, leaving the simile open for interpretation, adding to the ambiguity of his own vision of self. (see extract 3, lines 10 and 12).

The Joker uses a hypophora in lines 11-12. A hypophora works similarly to a rhetorical question, but the rhetor usually answers the question directly to some extent. Harris (2013: 20-21) describes it as a tool to make the other participant see things from a perspective that does not necessarily please them, or one in which they “might not have the knowledge or thought to ask for himself” (Harris, 2013: 21). This hypophora is followed by a simile (lines 14-15) which is the first time the Joker refers to himself as “a freak”. Contrary to previous instances, this time he embraces it and uses it as a tool to make him and Batman appear as equals. In the superhero movie genre, the contrast between the protagonist and antagonist is usually quite stark, and they represent opposing ideologies (Bednarek, 2010: 25), but the Joker attempts to blur this line between good and evil, and convince both the viewer and Batman to realize that, there are always two sides to the same coin.

The Joker also utilizes deixis (lines 14-18) as a tool for drawing a line between the likes of him and Batman on the one hand, and the people in charge, such as the Gotham City Police Department, on the other hand. According to Gee (2014: 18), by omitting exactly whom the speaker is referring to in a given context, they are letting the listener fill in the gap. In this instance, the Joker does not directly refer to any person or group of people, but rather lets Batman figure out the point of reference, which in the given context are the aforementioned authorial figures. Huang (2007: 136) presents personal deixis, in this case the repetition of the third person plural noun “they” in its different forms, as a tool for the speaker to differentiate themselves from other individuals or a group of people with differing ideologies. In this scene the Joker uses this in his favor to differentiate himself and Batman from “these civilized people”, which is yet another instance of the Joker utilizing his verbal competence to deliver unpleasant truths.

The final line of this extract marks a point in the scene where the Joker’s ridiculing and manipulating way of using language is met with physical violence, proving that he is indeed capable of using words as a tool to have a strong impact on others. Having just referred to himself as “a freak,” he still denies being a monster (line 19), and by using a metaphor, claiming he’s “just ahead of the curve” (line 19), he presents himself and his ideologies as superior to

everyone else, once again revealing his failure to see the inhuman nature of his prior actions leading up to the present moment.

4.3 Explicit and implicit character cues

In the movie the Joker is attributed certain characteristics by himself and the people around him. In two of the selected scenes for this analysis (Extracts 5 and 6), he uses a short narrative to present the origin of his facial scars. The first time he does this, the viewer for the moment lacks reason to doubt the truth value of his words, but by the second instance a similar scene takes place, it becomes obvious there is more to the narrative tool than initially expected. The first two extracts were paired and analyzed in parallel with each other to highlight the Joker's rhetorical strategies.

Extract 5. After placing a bounty on the Joker's head, Gambol is informed that a group of bounty hunters has killed him and that they have brought in his body. Gambol reveals the Joker's body in a garbage bag and turns to face the bounty hunters to discuss the prize for bringing the Joker in dead. Behind him, the Joker springs up, grabs him by the head and sticks a razor blade in his mouth

1 THE JOKER: How about alive? Wanna know how I got these scars? My father was a drinker and a
2 fiend. And one night he goes off crazier than usual. Mommy gets the kitchen knife to
3 defend herself. He doesn't like that. Not. One. Bit. So, me watching, he takes the knife
4 to her, laughing while he does it. He turns to me and he says: "Why so serious?" He
5 comes at me with the knife: "Why so serious?" He sticks the blade in my mouth: "Let's
6 put a smile on that face!" And...((Stops to look at Gambol)) "Why so serious?" ((Kills
7 Gambol))

Extract 6. The Joker interrupts a fundraiser in Bruce Wayne's penthouse, looking for Gotham City's district attorney, Harvey Dent. He goes around the room inquiring the party-goers about Dent's whereabouts, failing to receive the information he wants. As he is intimidating an old man at knifepoint, Harvey Dent's girlfriend, Rachel Dawes, interrupts him. The Joker's attention is drawn and he approaches Rachel, combing his hair back with his hands.

8 THE JOKER: Well, hello beautiful! You must be Harvey's squeeze. And you are beautiful. You look
9 nervous. Is it the scars? You wanna know how I got them? ((Grabs Rachel by the head
10 and pulls her closer)) Come here. Hey, look at me! So I had a wife. She was beautiful,

11 like you. Who tells me I worry too much. Who tells me I ought to smile more. Who
 12 gambles and gets in deep with the sharks. One day they carve her face. We have no
 13 money for surgeries. She can't take it. I just wanna see her smile again. Hm? I just want
 14 her to know that I don't care about the scars. So, I stick a razor in my mouth, and do this
 15 ((Gestures to his facial scars)) to myself. And you know what? She can't stand the sight
 16 of me! She leaves. Now I see the funny side. Now I'm always smiling!

These two extracts can be considered as parallels of each other not only in their context, but equally in the rhetorical devices used in the narrative. The Joker starts with a question, which serves as a segue to showcase his verbal wit. The narratives proceed by means of simple and structurally repetitive sentences. According to Harris (2013: 17), these anaphoric structures are closely linked with *parallelism*. Harris (2013: 10) defines parallelism as “syntactical similarity”, which means that multiple sentences within the same speech act or text share syntactical elements that work together to deliver a balanced and focused whole. In both passages he refers to a third person – his father and his wife – using third person pronouns at the start of consecutive sentences (lines 3-5; 11-12) which works as a tool to keep the reader, or in this case the listener focused (Harris, 2013:3). Additionally, according to Corbett (1965:150), anaphora can be used when the user “wants to produce a strong emotional effect”. In both passages the Joker uses the anaphoric structure to deliver a story about his personal, albeit made up past, which has scarred him both physically and mentally, and wants the audience to feel the pain behind his words. The parallelisms in the passages create a sense of continuity in the narrative that builds up to a climax. Harris (2013: 47) describes climax or *gradation* as a rhetorical device that allows the user to create initial interest, and then move on with “ideas of continuing importance”, finishing off with a heavy hitting idea or message, which in both cases is a phrase that works similar to a punchline in a joke, or a moral at the end of a children's story (lines 6 and 16).

The Joker's conversational and syntactic structure in the passages can be seen as both an implicit and explicit character cue, which reveals a part of his identity. He offers self-exposition (Culpeper, 2001: 167), in the form of explicit, albeit contradicting information about himself. The way in which he uses anaphora in order to elicit an emotional response in the listener, maybe even that of empathy, is corrupted by the fact that it is impossible to cipher whether he is lying or telling the truth in either one. Admittedly, it can be argued that both of these are false, if one is familiar with the many origin stories that have been put forward for the Joker in the comics, most notably the one in Moore and Bolland's (1988) *The Killing Joke*. Despite the false exposition, the two scenes can be seen to have a humanizing effect on the Joker, but the

brief glimpse of his human side is quickly overshadowed by his actions, thus making his words seem like just another manipulative tool, underlining his psychopathic character.

Extract 7. In the middle of a cargo hall, the Joker has piled up an enormous pile of cash. The Joker is finishing up tying Mr. Lau, the mob's leader, to a chair at the top of the pile. Chechen enters the hall.

- 1 CHECHEN: Not so crazy as you look!
- 2 THE JOKER: I told you, I'm a man of my word. ((Slides down the pile)) Where's the Italian?
- 3 CHECHEN: Joker-man, what you do with all your money?
- 4 THE JOKER: You see, I'm a guy of simple taste. I enjoy, uh, dynamite and gunpowder and gasoline!
5 ((Joker's men start pouring gasoline on the pile of money, Chechen tries to interrupt
6 them))
- 7 THE JOKER: A-ta-ta-ta. And you know the thing that they have in common? They're cheap.
- 8 CHECHEN: You said you were a man of your word.
- 9 THE JOKER: Oh, I am. I'm only burning my half. All you care about is money. This town deserves a
10 better class of criminal...and I'm gonna give it to them. Tell your men they work for
11 me now. This is my city.
- 12 CHECHEN: They won't work for a freak.
- 13 THE JOKER: "Freak" ((Imitates Chechen's accent)) Why don't we cut you up into little pieces and
14 feed you to your pooches? Hm? And then we'll see how loyal a hungry dog really is.
15 ((Chechen is forcibly dragged away))
- 16 THE JOKER: ((To himself)) It's not about money. It's about sending a message. Everything burns.

This scene works as a metaphor for the development of the Joker's character in the movie. Lines 4-7 once again play with the viewers' expectations. Instead of "cheap", such substances would more often have associations, such as volatile, dangerous or unpredictable. Expressing his fondness of said substances, he can be seen to possess similar characteristics, which he has showcased repeatedly throughout the movie. He is unpredictable, reckless, untrustworthy and hard to contain. The Joker also gives explicit exposition about how he sees himself. (lines 9-10) and acknowledges being a criminal, but elevates himself above the rest of Gotham's criminals by pointing out that he is the criminal the city deserves.

The metaphorical role of this scene is accentuated by the Joker's final line. "Everything burns" can be seen as a direct reference to the burning pile of cash behind him, or as a metaphor for the corruption of Gotham he intends to usher in.

Extract 8. (Longer version in the appendices) After falling victim to one of Joker's games, Gotham City's district attorney Harvey Dent is left horribly burnt and scarred on the left side of his face and he has been hospitalized. Dent's girlfriend Rachel has died in the same incident. Poorly disguised as a nurse, the Joker has entered the Dent's room after shooting a member of the hospital staff. He draws closer to Dent, who is cuffed to his bed. The Joker removes his mouth guard and sits down next to Dent.

- 1 THE JOKER: ((Smirks uncomfortably)) Hi. ((removes wig)) You know...I don't want there to be any
2 hard feelings between us, Harvey. When you and...
- 3 DENT: Rachel!
- 4 THE JOKER: ...Rachel were being abducted, I was sitting in Gordon's cage. I didn't rig those
5 charges.
- 6 DENT: Your men. Your plan.
- 7 THE JOKER: ((Sarcastically)) Do I really look like a guy with a plan? You know what I am? I'm a
8 dog chasing cars. I wouldn't know what to do with one if I caught it. You know? I just
9 do things. The mob has plans. The cops have plans. Gordon's got plans. You know,
10 they're schemers. Schemer's trying to control their little worlds. I'm not a schemer.
11 I try to show the schemers how pathetic their attempts to control things really are. So,
12 when I say... ((grabs Dent's hand)) Ah, come here. When I say that you and your
13 girlfriend was nothing personal, you know that I'm telling the truth. ((scene cuts off to
14 Gordon in a police car and returns back to the Joker and Dent in the hospital room.))
- 15 THE JOKER: It's the schemers that put you where you are. You were a schemer, you had plans and
16 look where that got you. ((Dent tries to grab the Joker, who subdues him and gets
17 closer to him))

The Joker's manipulative power through words alone is the centerpiece of this scene. His monologue provides a window into his own train of thought and how he sees the world around him. He starts his monologue with a rhetorical question (line 7) to set the scene for his following statements, and to obliquely deny that he has a plan (Corbett, 1965: 159). He then proceeds to emphasize the fact that he does not have a plan by saying he is "a dog chasing cars," a metaphor for which he explicitly provides an explanation. This is a way for the Joker to convince Dent that he does things impulsively as he pleases.

In lines 9-11 the Joker uses his typical way of repeating words he wants the listener to pay attention to. "The mob has plans. The cops have plans. Gordon's got plans." is yet another anaphora, immediately followed by an *anadiplosis*, where he uses the word "schemer" at the end of a sentence, and begins the adjacent sentence with the same word. (Harris, 2014: 19) Like anaphora, anadiplosis is used to place emphasis on words or ideas, which in this scene is the fact that the Joker sees himself as the better man in the situation that has unfolded.

The repetition of “schemers” is a motif in the scene which forms what Harris (2014: 19) defines as *conduplicatio*. The word is repeated several times in successive sentences, but in varying places. The more the Joker repeats it, the more negative the association with the word becomes, thus creating a fabricated idea of him as someone to be allied with, instead of the people Dent used to be associated with i.e. “the schemers.”

5 Conclusion

The Joker in *The Dark Knight* is a *tour de force* of fictional on-screen character scripting. The character is the counterpart to Batman, and despite his 30 odd minutes on screen, he manages to make a lasting impression on the viewer. Much of this is due to his language use; the Joker is witty, extremely verbally skilled, and varied in his ways of using language in different physical and social contexts. It requires numerous viewings and detailed analysis to notice the nuances and subtleties in his rhetorical skills, but upon re-watching the movie, an increasing number of instances of carefully planned language use become more apparent.

In many scenes, the Joker is set apart or above the rest of the characters by his use rhetorical devices and more varied language use. These scenes showcase the Joker utilizing different rhetorical devices as tools for argumentation, and more frequently for manipulation. He plays with viewer expectations, breaking the Maxims of Conversation, underlining the unpredictability of his character.

This study revealed that the Joker, as a result of careful scripting, is a character that uses language in a variety of ways that deviate from socially accepted ways of addressing and argumentation. Rhetorical devices are varied and manifold, used for manipulating effect and to have a desired impact on the listener. The Joker utilizes several rhetorical devices, especially anaphoric structures, throughout the movie to achieve his goal of bending people to his will, or to emphasize his ideas.

Through language use, an identity is also created. Implicit character cues, such as conversational structures and unexpected word choices, as well as explicit self-exposition frame the Joker as an impulsive and unpredictable maniac, whose words and ideas of self are constantly contradicted by his actions. By his own definition he is “a dog chasing cars”, meaning he acts on impulse, and that he does things solely because he finds them amusing, and

this definition is a very fitting one. When engaged in conversation, he often deviates from common conversational conventions and hardly ever displays concern for the feelings of others or what is expected of him.

Discourse analysis proved fruitful in revealing how the dialogue and character identity of the Joker are inseparably connected. Prior research into characters in television series was applicable in this study, and differences between Bednarek's study (2010) and *The Dark Knight* were not significant. A more detailed research into the identity of the Joker in *The Dark Knight* might, in addition to revealing how the Joker implicitly and explicitly defines himself, include character exposition from the rest of the characters in the movie and the features that are allotted to him by others. Such study could also analyze the various Joker's that have appeared on-screen before and after Ledger's performance, and draw comparisons between their language use and identities, and how the world of the time reflects on their characters. In addition, an analysis on the Joker as a representation of mental illness could also be worth looking into, as he often displays tendencies that appear suicidal and sociopathic.

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Appendices

Reading the transcriptions:

(()) is used to mark action, speech delivery or non-verbal communication

Extract 2. Longer version:

BATMAN: Where's Dent?

THE JOKER: You have all these rules and you think they'll save you.

BATMAN: I have one rule.

THE JOKER: Oh, well, that's the rule you'll have to break to know the truth.

BATMAN: Which is?

THE JOKER: The only sensible way to live in this world is without any rules. And tonight you're gonna break your one rule.

BATMAN: I'm considering it.

THE JOKER: There's only minutes left so you'll have to play my game if you wanna save one of them.

BATMAN: Them?

THE JOKER: You know, for a while I really thought you were Dent. The way you threw yourself after her.

BATMAN: ((Grabs Joker and slams his body on the table))

THE JOKER: Look at you go. ((Stretches and cracks his own back)) Does Harvey know about you and his little bunny?

BATMAN: Where are they?

THE JOKER: Killing is making a choice.

BATMAN: Where are they?!

THE JOKER: Choose between one life or the other. Your friend the district attorney or his blushing bride-to-be.

BATMAN: ((Punches Joker in the face))

THE JOKER: You have nothing, nothing to threaten me with. Nothing to do with all your strength. Don't worry. I'm gonna tell you where they are. Both of them. And that's the point. You'll have to choose. He's at 25052nd Street and she's on Avenue X at Cicero.

Extract 8. Longer version:

THE JOKER: ((Smirks uncomfortably)) Hi. ((removes wig)) You know...I don't want there to be any hard feelings between us, Harvey. When you and...

DENT: Rachel!

THE JOKER: ...Rachel were being abducted, I was sitting in Gordon's cage. I didn't rig those charges.

DENT: Your men. Your plan.

THE JOKER: ((sarcastically)) Do I really look like a guy with a plan? You know what I am? I'm a dog chasing cars. I wouldn't know what to do with one if I caught it. You know? I just do things. The mob has plans. The cops have plans. Gordon's got plans. You know, they're schemers. Schemer's trying to control their little worlds. I'm not a schemer. I try to show the schemers how pathetic their attempts to control things really are. So, when I say... ((grabs Dent's hand)) Ah, come here. When I say that you and your girlfriend was nothing personal, you know that I'm telling the truth. ((scene cuts off to Gordon in a police car and returns back to the Joker and Dent in the hospital room.))

THE JOKER: It's the schemers that put you where you are. You were a schemer, you had plans and look where that got you. ((Dent tries to grab the Joker, who subdues him and gets closer to him))

THE JOKER: I just did what I do best. I took your little plan and turned it on itself. Look what I did to this city with a few drums of gas and a couple of bullets. Hm? You know what I noticed? Nobody panics when things go "according to plan." Even if the plan is horrifying. If tomorrow I tell the press that, like, a gangbanger will get shot or a truckload of soldiers will be blowing up...Nobody panics. Because it's all part of the plan. But when I say that one little old mayor will die...Well, then everyone loses their minds! ((takes out revolver and puts it in Dent's hand and points it to his own forehead, holding Dent's hand))

THE JOKER: Introduce a little anarchy...upset the established order and everything becomes chaos. I'm an agent of chaos. Oh, and you know the thing about chaos? It's fair.