Article

Schema Theory and Contemporary Literature: A Stylistic Study of Christopher Nolan's The Joker

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Abstract: This paper aims to analyze the effects of discourse deviations in contemporary literature on the schema of readers/viewers, and on other characters in a certain literary work. The paper explains how certain characters in literary works can be compelling, challenging, and intriguing due to the different schemata they possess and project on their readers\viewers, and on other characters in the literary work as well. Christopher Nolan's The Joker character in his screenplay, The Dark Knight, is a significant sample of how these effects take place. This paper discusses what makes The Joker a challenging character to the audience and the protagonist, and the ways in which The Joker creates schema refreshments. The paper concludes that through constant discourse deviations, The Joker allows the audience and the protagonist to make constant schema refreshment by altering language schemata, text schemata, or both of them. Thus, allowing the world schema of an individual to change consequently. These deviations, and the resulting schema refreshments make The Joker an intriguing, challenging, and compelling character to the audience.

Keywords: Christopher Nolan, Schema Theory, Discourse Deviation, The Joker

1. Introduction

In any play or screenplay, the creation of a suitable antagonist plays a vital role in its success. Robert McKee states that "a protagonist and his story can only be as intellectually fascinating and emotionally compelling as the forces of antagonism make them" (1997. P. 317). In other words, the more challenging the antagonist is, the more powerful the play or screenplay. According to Cook, this challenge might not come from the physical action of the characters but from the schemata they possess and project on character-to-character level and character-to-audience level (1994). Indeed, many literary works are designed to challenge our schemata, allowing us to make certain assumptions from our own experiences in life and then betray them. This form of challenge allows us to make schematic refreshment, through discourse deviations, either to add knew experiences to the ones that we already have or to change our entire view of a certain experience (Cook, 1994).

Schemata have been represented as relatively fixed structures acting upon text to create discourse. There is, however, another side to this process. Texts may change schemata. The interaction may not be one-way, but reciprocal and dynamic. While any interaction with new experience or text may be of this kind, and may effect changes in schemata while simultaneously using them in processing, there may also be experiences

and discourses whose primary function is to alter schemata, making the mind better equipped for processing in future (Cook, 1994, P.183).

Christopher Nolan, a well-known film maker and screenplay writer, released a blockbuster movie in 2008 entitled *The Dark knight*. In his movie, which is based on characters in DC Comics, the character of The Joker appears to be challenging to both the protagonist in the screenplay and to the audience as well. Much of this challenge arises from the discourse deviations, and the different schemata that this character projects, which makes it difficult to both the protagonist and the audience to expect. Batman, the protagonist, assumes that The Joker, like any other criminal, is motivated by wealth and social gains. These assumptions will appear to be false over the course of the screenplay, and both the protagonist and the audience will have to make schematic refreshment to reach equilibrium.

This paper aims to investigate how Christopher Nolan's The Joker character challenges the assumptions of both the protagonist and the audience, and betray their expectations. This investigation will be based on analyzing samples from the published screenplay *The dark knight Trilogy* (2012).

Schema theory will be used as a methodology of analysis, depending, mainly, on the works of Guy Cook (1994), Elena Semino (1995), and Mick Short (2013). This paper focuses mainly on answering the following questions:

What makes The Joker a challenging character to the audience and the protagonist?

In what way does The Joker character create schema refreshment?

2. Materials and Methods

Schema theory

Schema theory can be identified as the process through which we sum up similar previous experiences stored in our minds in order to comprehend new experiences. In his book *remembering,* the psychologist Bartlett, the father of modern schema theory, states the following "an active organization of the past reactions, or past experiences, which must always be supposed to be operating in any well-adapted organic response." (2003. P. 201). Emmott and Alexander (2014) state that "Schemata are cognitive structures representing generic knowledge, i.e. structures which do not contain information about particular entities, instances or events, but rather about their general form." (P. 756). Semino further explains that:

we make sense of new experiences – and of text in particular- by relating the current input to existent mental representations of entities and situations that we have experienced in the past. This is what the notion of schema tries to capture: a portion of background knowledge containing generic information about a particular type of object, person, setting or event. (1995. P. 3)

Thus, meaning does not constitute itself in the text, but constitutes itself in the interaction between the text and the reader's/viewer's prior knowledge. If the reader/viewer is unable to activate his/her appropriate schemata, s/he will face misunderstanding or lack of comprehension. Moreover, different interpretations for the same text may depend on the selection of a certain schemata or the availability of one (Samino, 1995). Mick Short tries to explain how schema operates by comparing it to a filing cabinet. Whenever we come across a new experience, we reach a certain file, that contains all the information related to the target experience, in order to comprehend, make sense, and interact with it (Short, 2013).

Over the course of time, the schemata of an individual updates itself through exposure to new experience. This update happens in two ways: either the new experience corresponds with the previous information stored in the mind, in this case the update will

be schema reinforcing or schema adding, or the new experience does not correspond with what is stored in the mind which will lead to schema disruption followed by schema refreshment. The following figure suggested by Cook explains how discourse affect schema, and how schema refreshment is constituted.
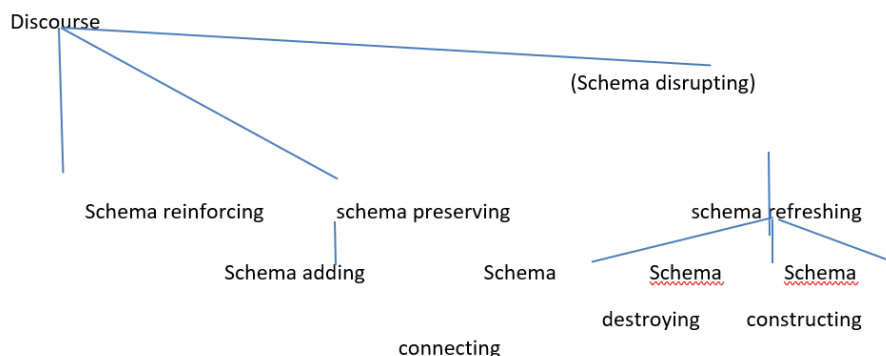

Figure 1. Discourse effects on schemata (Cook, 1994. P. 191)

Cook explains that written language and other experiences, such as watching a film in cinema, give freedom to individuals to experiment. This is because these experiences hold no immediate practical or social effect on the reader\viewer (Cook, 1994). Cook also divides experiences into three types:

that which is perceived directly without the mediation of language (though it may also include language); that which comes to us entirely through language, but we believe represents an independent reality; and that which exists only through language, with no accessible corresponding reality in the world, though it creates an illusion of one (Cook,1994. P. 190).

According to what is mentioned above, literature, in general, appears to be of the last type. It provides the opportunity to undergo an experience the effect of which is not immediate or delayed. It functions mainly to a make change in the schemata of the targeted individual (reader, or viewer). Literary works that fail to achieve this change are considered to be boring and even harmful (Cook, 1990).

Literary discourse deviation

According to Cook, there are three levels of discourse in terms of literariness. These levels are language, text structure, and world knowledge (world of the text). In literary discourse, most of which has the primary function of effecting schemata, the level of world knowledge is a product of language and text structure. It is the deviation in one or both of these levels and the interaction with the reader's existing schemata that creates schema refreshment. On this phenomenon, Cook comments the following:

Where there is deviation at one or both of the linguistic and text-structural levels, and this deviation interacts with the reader's existing schemata to cause schema refreshment, there exist a phenomenon which I term ' discourse deviation' (1994. P. 198).

schemata, in general, is also divided in the same sense. Text schemata, language schemata, and world schemata. World schemata contains the other two levels and is affected by them. Thus, when a refreshment occurs in text schemata or language schemata, or both of them for that matter, a refreshment will occur on representations of the world. (Cook, 1994).

Due to what is mentioned above Cook suggests the following:

the task of a theory of discourse deviation must therefore be to show how schema refreshment is effected through language and text structure, to relate linguistic and text structural features to particular changes in schemata (1994. P. 199).

Schema theory provides a useful methodology for the analysis of literature. In the following pages, an application of schema theory will be conducted to analyze how The Joker managed to become such a challenging character, and how it is able to create schema refreshment. Before moving on to analysis, there are two concern that should be bared in mind. First is the process of re-reading and the change of schemata (many people like to watch their favorite film or re-read their favorite book). Some might argue that changes already happened in the first reading or the first viewing in case of a film. The logical response to this argument would be that each reading brings up new interpretations to the discourse. Thus, repeated readings might bring the same results as the first reading. Also, the degree of change depends on the schemata that the reader\viewer employs in interpretation and the ability to accept change (some readings are better understood after undergoing certain experiences in life) (Cook, 1994). The second concern that worth mentioning here is the quality concern. Cook explains that the quality of schema refreshment is reader-dependent:

Though change in general may be desirable, there is nothing inherently commendable in accepting a particular change. For these reasons, my claim that certain discourses are 'schema refreshing' can never specify the quality in a particular text. The quality of schema refreshment is reader-dependent. Nevertheless, a given text may possess this quality for a large number of people. We may contrast schema refreshing discourse with discourse which is 'schema preserving', leaving existing schemata as they were, and discourse which is 'schema reinforcing' leaving existing schemata stronger than before. (Cook, 1994. P. 192).

Previous studies

Many researchers have found Christopher Nolan's The Joker character to be an interesting material for academic analysis. In her article *Identity Construction and Ambiguity in Christopher Nolan's Films*, Erin Hill-Parks (2011) explores the identity connections and the ambiguous relations amongst the three main characters (Batman, The Joker, and Harvey Dent) in the screen play. She claims that "The three men form a triangle of specific ideals, forming doubles of each other as well as each performing individual dual personas" (Hill-Parks, 2011. P. 14).

Larrie Dudenhoeffer (2011) explains in his article *Masks of Infamy: The About-faces in Christopher Nolan's The Dark Knight* that The Joker, unlike Batman, wears masks with no psychological or autobiographical depth underneath them. While Batman's mask functions to hide his identity, shield him, and terrify his enemies, The Joker uses a superficial mask (War-Paint) as "a stylistic contrivance rather than some conceivable outcome of a near-fatal accident." (Dudenhoeffer, 2011. P. 3).

In his MA thesis *Channeling Libidinal Instincts in Christopher Nolan's Dark Knight Trilogy*, Santos (2018) describes The Joker as living embodiment of the id. A character that promotes chaos and lawlessness. The Joker is "an anti-social version of humanity that constantly seeks to fulfill his destructive impulses." (Santos, 2018. P. 47). Thus, the Joker is in constant clash with Batman who is the embodiment of superego.

Despite the existence of many academic studies regarding the subject above, none the previous studies managed to analyze Christopher Nolan's The Joker depending on schema theory and discourse deviation as a methodology of analysis. Thus such a study can be considered as a good addition to the body of academic research.

3. Analysis

Christopher Nolan's The Joker character appears to be challenging and an intriguing one to the audience from its first appearance. The Joker deviates on the levels of language and structure to achieve a deviation in world of the text. Thus, creating a schema refreshment on the audience's language schemata and structure schemata, and consequently on their world schemata (Cook, 1994). This first appearance of The Joker, in the opening scene, takes place during a bank robbery run by him and other bank robbers dressed as clowns. A linguistic interaction occurs between The Joker (who is wearing a Bozo mask) and the Bank Manager after a brutal gun fight in which The Joker wins.

BANK MANAGER. Think you're smart hah? The guy who hired you'd just do the same to you…

Bozo slowly shakes his head.

Shure he will. Criminals in this town used to believe in thing…

Bozo turns back to the Bank Manager. Crouches over him

Honor. Respect. What do you believe, hah? What do you bel-

Bozo slides a grenade into the man's mouth. A purple thread is knotted around the pin.

BOZO. I believe that what doesn't kill you…

Bozo pulls of his mask. The Bank Manager gasps. In the reflection of the glass debris behind the Bank Manager we see glimpses of a scarred mouth and clown make-up The Joker.

THE JOKER. Simply makes you stranger. (Nolan et al., 2012. P. 172).

In this interaction, The Joker clearly defeats the assumption and betrays the expectations of spectators. The obvious assumption is that the second part of the globally well-known idiom "what doesn't kill you" would be "simply makes you stronger". Yet, The Joker defeats expectations and creates a schema refreshment. The Joker challenges the language schemata, and the previous experiences that the spectators summon in accordance to this idiom (Short, 2013). Following Cook's figure, this discourse deviation, on language level, effects the spectator's language schemata. Schema refreshment takes place (schema destroying, schema constructing, and schema connecting), thus the spectator's world schemata is changed. In other words, the spectator's entire view (experience) of the well-known idiom is changed (Cook, 1994).

On a structural level, the opening scene also deviates to challenge the structural schemata. Although the majority of people never happened to participate or be involved in a bank robbery yet, because of what we see in movies, news…. etc. we have a general idea about what might happen during a robbery. Thieves enter somehow with guns and threaten everyone, every thief involved is responsible for a certain task, and at the same time they work as a team and protect each other until they get out safely from the bank. The deviation that occurs in this scene is that: with the end of every task, the performer of that task is killed immediately by another member. The Joker had convinced every member in the group, separately, that the less shares the more money they can get. Thus, he creates a plan within a plan to rob the bank and get rid of all the members of the bank robbery. The structural deviation in this scene defeats assumptions, and betray the expectations of spectators. It allows the spectators to make schema refreshment by challenging their previous knowledge of what a bank robbery might be (Short, 2013).

As mentioned before, the world of the text is composed of language and text structure. Any deviation occurring on one or both of these elements would deviate the world of the text. In return this deviant world of text would affect the world schemata of the spectator, by affecting language schemata, or structure schemata, or both. The opening scene of this screenplay appears to be affecting both language and structure schemata, and allows refreshment to take place (Cook, 1994). By these deviations that he makes, The Joker becomes a challenging and intriguing character to the audience.

The second appearance of The Joker happens to be in the middle of meeting where all the mob leaders are gathered. The Joker interrupts the meeting which is held to discuss how a part of their money, which was in the bank that he robbed, got stolen. In his attempt to demonstrate power and control over the other participants in the meeting, The Joker performs what he calls 'a magic trick'.

From the back of the room comes laughter. It grows and grows, until it fills the room. All eyes turn:

The Joker. Sweaty clown make-up obscuring the awful scars which widen his mouth into a permanent, ghoulish smile.

THE JOKER. I thought *I* told bad jokes.

GAMBOL. Give me one reason I shouldn't have my boy here pull your head off.

The Joker pulls out a freshly sharpened pencil.

THE JOKER. how about a magic trick?

The Joker slams the pencil into the table, leaving it upright.

I'll make this pencil disappear.

Gambol nods. His Bodyguard moves at the joker – who sidesteps – grips his head – slams it, face down, on to the table…

The Bodyguard goes limp and slides off of the table. The pencil is gone. Magic The Joker bows. Grins at Gambol. (Nolan et al., 2012. P. 195).

In this scene, the expectations from a man wearing clown make-up attempting to perform a magic trick holding a pencil would be to perform a magic trick. As spectators, we do not expect a clown to use a pencil as a murder weapon in such a brutal manner. The Joker allows the spectators to assume something, depending on their schemata from previous experiences, and then betrays their expectations (Short, 2013). The deviations in the world of the text, in this scene, are deviations on language and structure levels. These deviations challenge the spectators' schemata allowing them to make schema refreshments on the meaning of a magic trick. According to Cook's figure, on a language level, The Joker destroys the notion of a magic trick (it is not a trick at all, it is a murder). The second step of the refreshment would be schema constructing. The Joker constructs a new understanding for the notion of a magic trick, which is quick and unexpected murder. The third step of the refreshment is schema connecting. The newly constructed notion of a magic trick being an unexpected murdering of a person is connected, in the spectators refreshed language schemata, to clowns and jokers in general and to The Joker in specific (1994).

On a structural level, The Joker also allows the audience to assume something and betrays their assumptions and expectations. Affirming again that although the majority of people never been involved with a bank robbery, or getting deep with the mob, but from our experience in books and movies we realize the followings: if you steal from the mob, they become your enemy. Consequently, you must run away and disappear never to be found. Knowing that if they catch you, they will kill you, you must avoid confrontation with them at any given rate. The structural deviation that occurs in this scene betrays all the assumptions that have been mentioned above. The Joker immediately confronts the mob leaders. He interrupts the meeting that is held because of him. He demonstrates a show of power over them (killing the Bodyguard). Finally, he attempts to strike a deal with them, convincing them that he is an ally and not an enemy. The Joker convinces the mob that Batman is the true problem and not the law enforcement. He offers his services in exchange of half of their money.

This deviation in the world of text on structural level challenges the spectators' structure schemata (what we learned from books and movies as a previous experience), allowing refreshment to take place (the way The Joker confronts and handles his trouble

with the mob). It is clear at this point that the screenplay in general and The Joker in particular has the primary function, like many literary works, of altering schemata and making it better equipped for future experiences (Cook, 1994). It is also worth mentioning here that these new experiences that spectators undergo while being exposed to The Joker and the way it behaves (deviations on language and structure level) holds no immediate practical or social effect on them (Cook, 1994).

The third, and fourth appearances of The Joker are interesting in terms of this analysis, since they not only relate to each other, but also dependent on each other. In the third appearance, The Joker manages to hold Gambol, the only mob leader who refused to do business with him, and inserts a blade into his mouth. The Joker starts to explain, to Gambol and to the spectators, how he got the scars that give him a ghoulish smile.

The Joker gets a switchblade in Gambol's mouth – sharp metal pulling the cheek taut. The bounty-hunters subdue the remaining Bodyguards

THE JOKER. Wanna know how I got these scars? My father was a drinker and a fiend. He'd beat Mommy right in front of me. One night he goes off crazier than usual, Mommy gets the kitchen knife to defend herself. He doesn't like that. Not. One. Bit.

The Joker tugs Gambol's cheek with the blade.

So, me watching, he takes the knife to her, laughing while he does it. Turns to me and says 'why so serious?' comes at me with the knife – 'why so serious?' sticks the blade in my mouth- 'let's put a smile on that face' and…

*Th*e Joker looks up at the ashen faces of the remaining Bodyguards. Smiles.

Why so serious?

The Joker flicks his wrist. The Bodyguards flinch as Gambol goes down. The Joker turns to them. (Nolan et al, 2012. P. 203).

In this scene, The Joker provides information that is necessary to the spectators. He explains the origin of his character as a psychologically traumatized child abused by his father. This background story of his, although he is an antagonist, might give reason and logical justifications to his actions and behavior, and even allow spectators to feel empathy towards him (as a mentally ill person, and a victim of brutal abuse). Yet, in the fourth appearance The Joker presents a totally different origin story that contradicts with the first one. He breaks the expectation that was allowed to the spectators to assume in the first place. The Joker, in this scene invites the spectator to connect him with previous experience that are logical and can explain the reason behind his criminal behavior, and then betrays these assumptions to create suspense and challenge.

THE JOKER. Hello, beautiful. You must be Harvey's squeeze. *(runs his knife across her cheek.)* And you are beautiful. You look nervous – it's the scars isn't it? Wanna know how I got them? I had a wife, beautiful like you. Who tells me I worry too much. Who says I need to smile more. Who gambles. And gets in deep with the sharks. One day they carve her face, and we've got no money for surgeries. She can't take it. *(press knife into her cheek)* I just want to see her smile again. I just want her to know I don't care about the scars. So I put a razor in my mouth and do this to myself… And you know what? *(starts laughing.)* she can't stand the sight of me…*(or crying.)* she leaves! See, now I see the funny side. Now I'm always smiling. (Nolan et al, 2012. P. 225).

Through these two scenes, The Joker successfully manages to summon the spectators' schema in an attempt to understand his character, and create a schema refreshment afterwards. In the fourth scene the spectator assumes that further details would be revealed about the origin of the character. Thus, more understanding, and even empathy, would take place. Instead, a deviation, on a language level, takes place, challenging their language schemata. In the third appearance, a spectator might consider The Joker's confessions about the scars as a cry for help, or a personal justification to criminal actions…etc. As soon as a spectator moves to the fourth scene, a schema

refreshment takes place, and the spectator comes to the understanding that this is a manipulative, deviant, and a cleaver character that is able to defeat all expectations. The word Joker, in the refreshed language schemata of the spectator does not mean someone who smiles and makes jokes, but rather it means something very different.

In the first confrontation between the protagonist and the antagonist (Batman and The Joker), The Joker holds Rachel (Batman's long-life love) as a hostage and hangs her from the window. Initially, The Joker demands that Batman must take off his mask and reveal his identity in exchange of her release. At the end of the confrontation, The Joker deviates in discourse, using literal meaning, to fail the expectations of both the protagonist and the spectators.

The Joker has another knife pressed to Rachel's neck.

BATMAN. Drop the knife.

THE JOKER. sure. Just take off your mask and show us all who you are…

Rachel shakes her head at Batman. The Joker raises his shotgun to the side and blows out the pane of glass next to him. The Joker dangles Rachel out the window.

BATMAN. Let her go.

THE JOKER. (*laughs*) very poor choice of words…

He lets her drop .Rachel falls onto a sloping glass roof, sliding towards the edge. Batman dives after her- (Nolan et al., 2012. P. 226)

Indeed, in such a context the sentence 'Let her go' would take the meaning of 'release her' or 'set her free', yet The Joker, deliberately, chooses to understand the literal meaning of the sentence as 'drop her'. This deviation on language level is challenging the expectations of both the antagonist and the spectator. In their language schemata, assumption of further negotiations would take place. The spectator summons previous experiences from different movies and books read before in which there is a hostage situation. The protagonist, famously known for fighting crime every night, summons previous experiences in which there is a hostage situation and attempts a negotiation. The Joker manages to betray these expectations, abandons the negotiation, and literally lets his hostage go off the window (Short, 2013). The Joker's discourse deviation, on language level, creates a refreshment in the language schemata of both the spectator and the protagonist. For both of them, hostage situations are not demands-based, hostage situations do not require a failure in negotiations to lose a hostage, and most importantly poor choice of words can lead to catastrophic consequences (Cook, 1994).

The second confrontation between the protagonist and the antagonist occurs when The Joker is captured by the police with the help of Batman. The Joker is taken into custody, and an interrogation is attempted by the commissioner after realizing that Dent (The District Attorney) had gone missing. The commissioner fails in gaining any information from The Joker, therefore he leaves. Batman attempts to interrogate him yet; The Joker behaves as if he is in control. Even when the interrogation takes a physically violent turn, The Joker remains in control as the dominant character in the conversation although he is physically the weaker character. From the beginning of the scene and up to the end of it, discourse deviations in structure level can be noticed. The Joker is able to defeat and manipulate other characters by inverting text structure. Unlike the protagonist who uses physical power to intimidate his opponents, The Joker uses language to dominate the scene and turn the table around. He is the one who asks the real questions, provides the information that he wants to provide, and manipulates the Batman in accordance to his plans. It should be noted that the following scene is divided into three parts in order to be analyzed appropriately. The first part involves Commissioner Gordon (using language only), the second part involves Batman (mainly using language), the third part involves Batman (mainly using physical violence).

The Joker, in near darkness. Gordon walks in sits.

THE JOKER. Evening, commissioner.

GORDON. Harvey Dent never made it home.

THE JOKER. of course not.

GORDON. What have you done with him?

THE JOKER. *(laughs)* me? I was right here. Who did you leave him with? Your people? Assuming, of course, that they are your people not Maroni's… *(off looks.)* does it depress you Lieutenant, to know how alone you are?

Gordon can't help glancing at the mounted camera.

Does it make you feel responsible for Harvey Dent's current predicament?

GORDON. Where is he?

THE JOKER. what time is it?

GORDON. What difference does that make?

THE JOKER. depending on the time, he might be in one spot. *(smiles.)* Or several.

Gordon stands. Moves to the Joker. undoes his handcuffs.

GORDON. If we're going to play games, I'm going to need a cup of coffee.

THE JOKER. The good-cop, bad-cop routine?

Gordon pauses, hand on the doorknob.

GORDON. Not exactly. (Nolan et al., 2012. PP. 260-261).

In a typical interrogation, according to what we learned in movies, theatres, and T.V. shows, it is the officers who initiate the conversation. Officers usually tend to ask questions that they already know the answers to, or at least have an idea about what the answer might be. Officers tend to psychologically manipulate the interrogated person to get a confession. Officers in these situations dominate the conversation, being the powerful turn-taker, and deliberately show the interrogated person that he is alone, weak, and unable to act. Officers tend to show and tell the interrogated person that the best thing for him\her is to be cooperative and give all the information that s\he possess. These are the experiences that the spectator might summon upon witnessing any interrogation taking place. This is the structural schemata of a typical interrogation. Thus, the spectator's assumptions and expectations are betrayed in The Joker's interrogation scene from the beginning. The spectator's previous experiences regarding the structure of an interrogation are challenged. It is due to this structural deviation, this challenge, that a schematic refreshment takes place. A spectator's refreshed schemata would include an interrogated person who is able to manipulate the officers, become the dominant turn-taker, and provide, only, the information that he wants to provide.

Gordon steps out. The overhead lights come on. Batman is behind him. The Joker blinks in the harsh white light.

Wham! The Joker's face hits the table – comes up for air. Crack! Crack! To the head. Batman is in front of him. The Joker stares, fascinated. Bleeding

THE JOKER. Never start with the head… victim gets fuzzy. Can't feel the next –

Crack! Batman's fist smacks down on the Joker's fingers

THE JOKER *(calm).* See?

BATMAN. You wanted me. Here I am.

THE JOKER. I wanted to see what you'd do. And you didn't disappoint… *(Laughs.)* you let five people die. Then you let Dent take your place. Even to a guy like me… that's cold-

BATMAN. Where is Dent?

THE JOKER. Those mob fools want you gone 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?

The Joker starts laughing. After a moment he's laughing so hard it sounds like sobbing.

THE JOKER. kill you? I don't want to kill you. What would I do without you? Go back to ripping off mob dealers? No, you…*(points.)* You. Complete. Me.

BATMAN. You're a garbage who kills for money.

THE 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.

He regards Batman with something approaching pity.

But as soon as they don't, they'll cast you out like a leper.

The Joker looks into Batman's eyes. Searching.

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 civilized people… they'll eat each other. *(Grins.)* See, I'm not a monster… I'm just a head of the curve.

Batman grabs the Joker and pulls him upright.

One of the detectives moves to the door. Gordon stops him.

GORDON. He's in control. (Nolan et al., 2012. PP. 261-263).

Moving to the second part of the interrogation, The Joker is still the dominant turn-taker. Although the confrontation begins with The Joker's face being hit against the table, he reacts, calmly, by stating an advice about how to torture people in an interrogation. It can be noticed that instead of answering the main question (where is Dent?), The Joker deliberately, and successfully opens another subject regarding his relation to the Batman. He lectures the protagonist about human social nature and how they don't belong to it. He emphasizes that they both belong to each other (complete each other), and not to the community. He warns the protagonist that as soon as he is no longer needed, he will be cast out (considered a freak like The Joker). Thus, The Joker is in complete control of the conversation (interrogation), unlike what Gordon and other officers think.

In this scene, the structural level of the text in completely inverted. Typically, what a spectator would assume and expect in such a situation, according to what he already read in books and watched in movies and other previous experiences, is the opposite of this scene. When violence is implied or insinuated, the person in captivity would react in fear and pain. Thus, when a specific question is asked, a suitable answer would be provided (not necessarily the truth, but a suitable answer relating to the question). The person in captivity would remain silent as much as possible and would not elaborate about anything that would inflict any violence towards him. A person in captivity would not attempt a comparison between him and his investigator stating that they complete each other. A person in captivity, simply, would not dominate the conversation as the powerful or controlling turn-taker. Therefore, the structural schemata of the spectator are challenged by the deviation of the text on a structural level. As a result, a schema refreshment takes place (regarding what might happen in an interrogation and who controls the other, and has more power over the other). The spectator is left better equipped for future experiences regarding interrogations with no immediate practical or social effect (Cook, 1994).

Batman hoists the Joker up by the neck.

BATMAN. Where's Dent?

THE JOKER. you have these rules. And you think they'll save you.

BATMAN. I have one rule.

THE JOKER. Then that is the one you'll have to break. To know the truth.

BATMAN. Which is?

THE JOKER*(smiles)*. the only sensible way to live in this world is without rules. Tonight you're going to break your one rule…

Batman leans into the Joker.

BATMAN. I'm considering it.

THE JOKER. there are just minutes left – so, you'll have to play my little game if you want to save…*(with relish)* one of them.

BATMAN. Them?

THE JOKER. For a while I thought you really were Dent, the way you threw yourself after her –

Batman drops the Joker – rips up a bolted-down chair.

Gordon moves to the door.

Batman jams the chair under the doorknob, picks up the Joker and hurls him into the two way glass. The glass spiders.

The Joker, bleeding from nose and mouth, laughs at Batman.

THE JOKER. look at you go… does Harvey know about you and his - ?

The Joker smashes into the wall – slides to the floor. Batman stands over him, a man possessed.

BATMAN. WHERE ARE THEY?!

The Joker feeds off Batman's anger. Loving it.

THE JOKER. …You choose one life over the other. Your friend the District attorney. Or his blushing bride-to-be.

Batman punches the Joker again. The Joker laughs.

THE JOKER. You have nothing. Nothing to threaten me with. Nothing to do with all your strength… *(spits a tooth.)* But don't worry, I'm going to tell you where they are. Both of them, and that's the point – you'll have to choose.

The Batman stares at the Joker…

THE JOKER. he's at 250 52nd Boulevard. And she's on avenue X at Cicero.

Batman drops him. (Nolan et al., 2012. PP. 263-265).

Moving to the third part of the interrogation scene, The Joker remains the dominant character in the interrogation. Although physical power is used against him, The Joker remains in control of the conversation and manipulates the protagonist. It can be noticed that once the main question is brought up again in the interrogation, The Joker intentionally deludes the protagonist by opening a subject regarding him and the protagonist. He only reveals the location of the District Attorney, willingly, when he is sure that the time is ripe and his advantage is guaranteed. During the third part of the interrogation, although being heavily beaten by the Batman, The Joker shows unexpected reactions to the beating (torturing) process. Normally, people tend to avoid anything or anyone who would inflect pain on them. In cases of heavy beating or torturing, people would ask (beg) the person who is inflecting pain on them to stop. Sounds and reactions of pain would be evident during and after the process. Games and schemes would not take place, at least not from the side of the person who is subjected to torture, during the process. Relevant, suitable, short answers would be provided by the subjected person in order to stop the pain from being inflicted, even if the answers are not the truth.

On the contrary of what is normally assumed and expected in such a situation, The Joker provides a completely different (deviated) text structure. The Joker continues to delude Batman despite the physical violence. He presses on Batman to break his own rule in order to tell him where Dent is, which is a form of power and dominance over the protagonist. He then decides to play a game in which batman has to choose who to save. The Joker reveals that he not only abducted Dent, but Rachel (the beloved of both Dent and Batman) as well. He confesses the locations to Batman not due to the torturing that he

received, but because it was the time to confess as he planned. During the physical torturing of The Joker, the reactions that he demonstrates are not those of pain and fear, but of enjoyment, thrill, and laughter. At the end, he explicitly states to the protagonist the following: "You have nothing. Nothing to threaten me with. Nothing to do with all your strength." (Nolan et al., 2012. P. 264).

Indeed, the protagonist in the above case has nothing to do with all his strength. This is due to the fact that The Joker's power does not come from a physical source like that of Batman. Rather it comes, mainly, from his ability to create discourse deviations on both levels (language, and structure). these discourse deviations create a misunderstanding of the character of The Joker on character-to-character level, and on character-to-audience level as well. This misunderstanding or inability of understanding the character creates a challenge to both the spectator and the protagonist, allowing schema refreshment (schema destroying, schema constructing, schema connecting) to take place in order to attempt an understanding of the character, and be better equipped in future instances. In the above case, discourse deviations on the structural level of the world of the text betrays all the expectations and assumptions of the spectator and the protagonist. These discourse deviations allow schema refreshments to take place in structure schemata of the spectator. The spectator is left with refreshed view (experience) of a brutal interrogation, one that does not include investigators being in charge or violence as an effective tool of forcing confessions (Cook, 1994).

In a foreshadow provided by Alfred, Batman's trusted Butler, Christopher Nolan reveals what type of character The Joker really is. Alfred states that "some men aren't looking for anything logical, like money… they can't be bought, bullied, reasoned or negotiated with. *(Grave.)* some men just want to watch the world burn." (Nolan et al., 2012. P. 229). Indeed, throughout the screenplay, The Joker proves to be of this sort of men. He betrays all logical and reasonable assumption and expectations. He provides language and structure in the world of the text that is completely deviant from any experience the spectator, and even the protagonist, have ever came across. Thus, he affects the world schema of the spectator by forcing a schema refreshment on language schema, structure schema, or both of them. In the hospital scene, The Joker explicitly states to Dent " I'm an agent of Chaos" (Nolan et al., 2012. P. 287). To The Joker, a world of chaos is a world of no previous experiences to be regarded, no previous assumptions, and no expectations. Seeking to accomplish such a world in the screenplay allows The Joker to become an agent of schema refreshment (schema altering) in the spectator's world schema. The constant discourse deviation that The Joker uses throughout the screenplay allows him to challenge the protagonist, and to a certain extent win. It is the protagonist's failure to cope with these deviations, that makes The Joker an intriguing and challenging character able of creating constant schema refreshments.

4. Conclusion

In literature, some works, and some characters, main function is to alter the schema of an individual. It is through discourse deviation that the process of altering takes place. Deviations on language level, or structural level, or both levels can affect the schema of individual allowing him/her to make schema refreshments that hold no immediate practical or social effect. In Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight*, The Joker appears to be a challenging character to both the audience and the protagonist due to his constant discourse deviations. The character is capable of betraying all the assumptions and expectations of both the audience and the protagonist alike. Due to the constant discourse deviations, The Joker allows the audience and the protagonist to make constant schema refreshment by altering language schemata, text schemata, or both of them. Thus, allowing

the world schema of an individual to change consequently. It is these deviations, and the resulting schema refreshments that make The Joker an intriguing, challenging, and very interesting character to analyze.

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