

CHAPTER THREE

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, some conclusions can be drawn from my analysis of the portrayal of the protagonist in Todd Phillips' *Joker* in the previous chapter. The protagonist in this novel, Arthur Fleck, also known as Joker, is portrayed as a delusional person who is reserved and gentle; but then, undergoes changes and becomes expressive and cold-blooded.

In the beginning of the film, Arthur Fleck is portrayed as reserved. In the situations wherein normal people would have reacted, Fleck keeps his emotions to himself and does not react accordingly. Where he should have been mad and fought back, Fleck stays silent and accepts the onslaughts of either verbal or physical abuse. He forces himself to smile despite feeling sad; despite being berated by his boss; despite being betrayed by his co-worker and fired from his job at the same time. Fleck is unwilling to show his true emotions or express his opinions in front of others. At times he actually shows emotions, those emotions are forced out of him, such as the single tear that he sheds unwillingly or acting out in a self-

destructive measure—for instance, kicking the garbage bins and banging his head on the telephone booth.

Not only reserved, Fleck is also portrayed as a gentle person. Despite the mistreatments he gets from people around him, Fleck has shown tender temperament several times. He tries to make people around him smile and happy. He takes care of his mother in every aspect of her life. He forgives and excuses a group of teenagers who beat him up. He shows gentleness despite the hard life he has, having to survive in Gotham city as a mentally and poor person, to other people around him.

Throughout the film, Fleck is seen to have delusions. Fleck's delusions can be assumed to be what he wishes his life to be if it is better. He daydreams of him being in the Franklin Murray show. He wishes people notice and see his gentleness like the dream-Murray does. He wishes to have the acceptance and pride from his own missing father like the dream-Murray does. Fleck uses Murray in those daydreams because Fleck looks up to Murray, and if his idol sees him, the rest of the world will follow. He daydreams of being in a romantic relationship with his neighbor, Sophie, as if he wishes he has someone that loves him for he is and does not care about his flaws. Last delusion to be shown is when he becomes a stand-up comedian. In his delusion, the audience laughs at his jokes whereas in reality, they either boo him or do not laugh at any of his jokes. It can be assumed that Fleck really wants to make people smile and hopes people can smile because of his jokes.

Over time, Fleck gradually undergoes changes in his characteristics. The first trigger is the lack of effective medications. During the first seen visit to his counselor, Fleck asks for more medications despite having been under 7 prescribed

medications. It implies that despite having been under prescribed medications, the medications do not work on him as they are supposed to be. It means he does not get better and his mental illness still bothers him. On the second visit to his therapist, he realized the social worker never listens to him. It means that despite the counselor being provided by the government, the counselor does not work as good as the paid psychiatrist who actually works for the patients and their mental illness. During the same visit, it is revealed that the government cuts the funding for social services including the counseling for mentally ill people. For Fleck, it means that he will not have a way to prescribe medications which are supposed to help control his mental illness (00:41:23-00:42:02).

The second trigger is when he finally finds his identity. At first, Fleck has a hard time understanding his life. During his second visit to the social worker, he says that he feels like nobody sees him. He does not know if he truly exists—whether he is real or not; however, it changes when he is beaten down on the train by three men. He finally snaps and decides to fight back. He uses the gun from Randall and kills two of them on the train. When the train stops, he chases the other one and kills him too. After the murder gets coverage from the news and media, Fleck starts seeing people wearing clown masks as an act of support for the murder he has committed. Seeing that, he feels seen by the people and that his action is justified; therefore, he gradually opens himself more, becomes expressive and cold-blooded.

As a result of those triggers, Fleck gradually changes from reserved and gentle to expressive and cold-blooded. He mostly expresses himself to show his defiance against the corrupted and broken system of Gotham city. The first time he

expresses himself is when he dances in the public restroom. The song and the dance tell the story of Arthur Fleck freeing himself from the system that fails in helping him to get better yet forces him to obey under its authority. Later on, he shows his defiance through his clothing. He starts wearing bright and eye-catching clothing in the society where its people wear dull clothing. He makes a glaring statement that he will no longer conform to the systems' rules. Another way to show his defiance is when he is on the Murray show. Through the live television program, he tells the public how the system is made against people like Fleck who are poor and mentally ill. He tells them how the society will not care if people like him are dying on the sidewalk; how the society only cares when the impactful, wealthy, and powerful people are the ones dying, and how they get the media coverage.

The last characteristic of Fleck is cold-blooded. Fleck feels no remorse for murdering the people because he feels the murders can be justified as the victims deserve it. For Fleck, his act of murdering people in the train station is justified because the men abuse their power to harass people around them; such as harassing the girl on the train and beating Fleck for laughing uncontrollably. Fleck's cold-bloodedness can be seen when he is emptying his gun on the last guy even though the guy has already died from the first two bullets. He kills his co-worker, Randall, yet lets Gary be alive and unscathed. He brutally kills Randall with no remorse but frees Gary because Randall lies and betrays him; meanwhile, Gary has always been such a nice and kind friend to Fleck. At last, he kills his own idol, Franklin Murray, in Murray's own live television show because he feels Murray deserves it. He sees how Murray makes fun of his stand-up routine. He hears how Murray is always against his opinion and refuses to understand why Fleck commit the murder. Fleck

feels Murray lives in a bubble where people live happily ever after when in reality, the people are protesting outside because of the unfair system. He feels Murray deserves to be killed, so Fleck shoots him and shows no remorse by smiling.

The cinematography and mise-en-scène showcase Fleck's being delusional and how the system in Gotham is broken and corrupted. With framing and lighting, the distinction between reality and Fleck's delusion can be conveyed to the audience. In his delusion featuring Franklin Murray, the only source of light is the spotlight pointed to Fleck and Murray whereas in reality, the only source of light is the dim blue light from the TV. The difference in source of light can be interpreted as Fleck's desire to be seen and noticed by people, the reality of which nobody cares about Fleck's existence. In Fleck's stand-up routine, a few shots are taken from behind with the only source of light being the spotlight pointed to Fleck. In taking the shots from behind and the lighting, the audience's real reaction is hidden, instead it is covered with a soundtrack and a laugh track. In the delusions with Sophie, wide shots are used to give the distinction between reality and Fleck's delusions.

In showcasing Gotham's rotten and broken system, Todd Phillips uses lighting, properties, and framing. In the scene in the alley with all the dumpsters, there is a contrast of light between the sky and the earth. The sky is so bright; yet, the dumpster and Fleck are in the dark. The sky represents the upper-class people living in prosperity meanwhile people like Fleck who are poor and mentally-ill are trapped in poverty. Other than that, the dumpster surrounding Fleck can be a metaphor for the system that towers over Fleck and forces him to obey the system. Throughout the film, most scenes are using dark blue lighting to show that the

people who live in Gotham are living in poverty. The rare scenes where the lighting is light is when Fleck is in the presence of a wealthy or powerful person. In the scene where Fleck is dancing on top of a police car, the police car is a synecdoche for the government. His dancing on top of the police car conveys that Fleck does not care about the system anymore.

In conclusion, the reason Todd Phillips creates such a character like Arthur Fleck is to show that when the system ignores the needs of a mentally ill person, the person will feel justified to do whatever they want because the person feels rejected by the system. In this case, the systems are the government and the society. He is shown as a mentally ill person with him being delusional. At first, Fleck obeys the system. He is being reserved and gentle; he does not act out and keeps his real emotions to himself but still is gentle to others. After Fleck loses his access to his prescribed drug and understands that the society, he lives in is rotten, he gradually becomes expressive to show his defiance against the broken system and cold-blooded. In an interview with *NPR*, the director, Todd Phillips, shares, “The whole M.O. of the film was, let’s make a comic book film where we run everything through as realistic a lens as possible. I think, like a lot of people, the system’s broken, and why not use a film to make a comment on that?” (Gross) Through the ‘realistic lens’, Phillips brings Fleck to live as close to reality as possible. Phillip eloquently shows that the system is made to be against the people with mental illness by showing how the social services do not really help the mentally ill people—before and after it being cut—and how the society does not acknowledge the mentally ill person by pretending they do not exist and forcing them to be normal.

From this film, I am reminded that there is quite a big gap between poor and/or mentally-ill people and middle-upper class people. Whilst the system is made to keep the peace and balance, it heavily favors one side rather than both sides. The poor and mentally-ill people do not have the resources or the capacity to live their life in peace despite the government promising to free them from poverty. Fleck's characteristics prove that the society and government have a big influence in shaping a person's life, a mentally-ill one in particular. Fleck's journey of self-discovery is an example of when the system treats poor and mentally-ill people like they do not exist. After analyzing this film, I am in the opinion that this film is worth watching. The hyperbole aside, the film is relevant with the real-life condition. People who are at the bottom of the society class will be treated unfairly the most by the system. Just like in the real world, even though a lot of people are protesting for equality and a better life, things rarely change because the people with the wealth and power do not want the system to change.