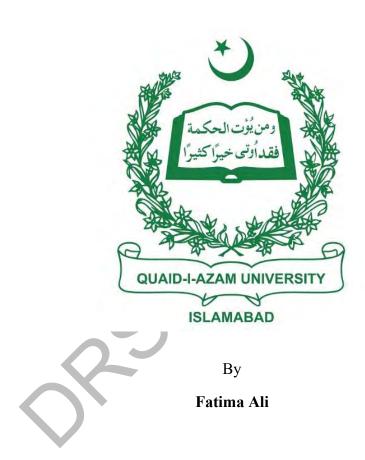**Metamorphosis of the Character Joker in the Postmodern American Culture in the**

Context of Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* and John

Morreall's theory of *Comic Relief*

QUAID-I-AZAM UNIVERSITY

ISLAMABAD

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Metamorphosis of the Character Joker in the Postmodern American Culture in the

Context of Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* and John

Morreall's theory of *Comic Relief*

A Thesis Submitted in partial fulfillment for the award of Degree of Master of

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In

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Final Approval of Thesis

This is to verify that I have read the thesis submitted by Fatima Ali under the title **"Metamorphosis of the Character Joker in the Postmodern American Culture in the Context of Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* and John Morreall's theory of *Comic Relief*"**, and in my viewpoint, it is up to the standard of acceptance by Quaid-i-Azam University for granting the degree of Master of Philosophy in American Studies.

Supervisor: _____

External Supervisor: _____

Director: _____

DEDICATION

To all the Monsters. Let's challenge the world.

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Nothing can ever happen without the blessings of Allah Almighty and my strong faith and hope in Allah lead me to complete many difficult tasks in my life. "(All) Praise is (due) to Allah. Lord of the worlds—".

ABSTRACT

This research revolves around the most famous character from DC comic books, Joker (Arthur Fleck) in Todd Phillips' film *Joker,* who evolves from an innocent Joker into a monster forced by society, and the system around him in the postmodern American culture. This research is an attempt to focus on the character of Joker that how he transforms and evolves in the context of Cohen's *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* and Morreall's *Comic Relief* which provides evidence to prove that Joker is not a born monster rather he is a product of American society, system, and culture. Similarly, Cohen claims in his thesis that we are responsible for the birth of such monsters, as he says that "This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine" (20), as he emphasizes the concept that they are our children because we draw margins for them and repress their feelings which later come out in the shape of disasters due to which they are treated as monsters. This research explores the character of Joker from *Joker* by Todd Phillips through the seven lenses of Cohen how Joker is a cultural body, Joker is an escapist, Joker is a harbinger of category crisis, Joker dwells at the gates of differences, Joker polices the borders of the possible, the fear of Joker is a kind of desire, and Joker stands at the threshold of becoming a Monster, who represents the corruption and hypocrisy of postmodern American society that is the ultimate force to push the character of Joker, who was at the threshold of becoming a monster. This thesis also contributes to the existing theories through the evaluation of Joker's laughter that links the monster theory and theory of laughter to create a new sense of monster laughter to understand how the laughter of Joker is not only a condition in literal terms but is hinting towards the contextual meanings that it is also a tool for Joker (Arthur Fleck) to use it in different situations to hide his fear, anger, desires, and anxieties as well. Attributes of Joker (Arthur Flecks, a

hero for the proletariat class) from *Joker* helped to draw a link between these two theories and proved the major objective and raised the question of this thesis that Joker is the greatest challenge to America presented on the screens of cinemas all around the world.

Keywords: *Joker,* Monster Theory, Laughter Theory, Harbinger of category crisis, Third term supplement, Disturbing Hybrid.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

This thesis focuses on the deep-down Metamorphosis of the character Joker in Postmodern American Culture in the context of Jefferey Jerome Cohen's *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* and John Morreall's philosophy of humor *Comic Relief*. It investigates the monster theory that how it evolves with time through the analysis of the character Joker. Similarly, the character of Joker evolves in the *Joker* (2019) which finds its traces in both theories that how this character transforms due to certain circumstances with the help of selected theories to analyze the character of Joker. The evolution of the character Joker is explored with the 'Darwinism' of "Monster theory" and "Laughter theory". This discussion highlights the idea of Monster theory and how the monsters evolve in a Postmodern American culture with the advancement of time, feelings, and places. Finally, it helps to find the core of any culture or system through the monster they engender.

Though the character of Joker keeps both theorists Jeffery Jerome Cohen and John Morreall in the same boat while analyzing the character Joker, the major ideas of these theories help to dissect the personality of the Joker who plays a major role in the postmodern American Culture. Specifically, this thesis explores the existential crisis of the postmodern American cultural figure—Joker who transforms his personality with the transformation of time, place, and feelings which highlights the loopholes of the system that plays a major role in the transformation of Arthur Fleck into a Joker, who is represented as a monster for the prevailing cultural, and political system of America.

Throughout history, Joker, a comic book character is considered a symbol of laughter who used to serve the monarchs and played a major role in the lives of kings and queens to make them feel amused. Usually, Jokers are considered the symbol of entertainment in people's lives to escape from reality for some time. When we talk about the history of Joker from a literary and American comic book series perspective, we find its traces back to the cinema on April 25, 1940. The character Joker as a supervillain was created by Bill Finger (an American comic strip, comic book, film, and television writer who co-created the DC comic character of Batman) Bob Kane (was an American artist, animator, and writer who was the co-creator of Batman with Bill Finger and created some other most early characters of DC Comic), and Jerry Robinson (American comic book artist known for his work on DC Comic during 1940).

When the character of Joker was created, it was decided to have him killed at the end of the film but later a major intervention by the editorial group planned to keep this character alive as an archenemy of the superhero, Batman. However, the character of Joker as a supervillain to Batman came into existence on the cinema screens at the time of crisis and is considered an evolution in the American Comic book series. Later in the series' coming decades, this character evolved in his outlook and activities to become a more frightening villain for the audience, who would be considered the best criminal and adversary of Batman.

In the early depiction of this character Joker, he is presented as an ugly villain, who threatens his enemy, Batman, and groups of people around him due to his psychological and sadistic problems. Later this character evolves in wickedness with time, but the most recent character of Joker the original name of Arthur Fleck from *Joker*

by Todd Phillips is a big evolution of this character in the postmodern world of American Culture. This character brought different challenges to the system. The article, "The Complete History of the Joker" by Mansoor Mithaiwala describes the character of Joker from the perspective of his creator, as co-creator of this character Joker, Bob Kane confirmed his inspiration for this character in one of his interviews in 1994 with his fellow comic writer Frank, when he said, "[The Joker] looks like Conrad Veidt — you know, the actor in The Man Who Laughs, by Victor Hugo. Finger had a book with a photograph of Conrad Veidt and showed it to me and said, 'Here's the Joker'" (Mithaiwala).

1.1 Background of Study

The first portion of this chapter gives a detailed history of the idea of monster theory and the new theory of laughter discussed under Morreall's *Comic Relief*, how these proposed ideas by theorists dissect the concepts of monsters and laughter critically. Specifically, the background of this research provides thorough studies already agreed upon and disagreed upon by different critics, philosophers, and theorists about these selected theories. This chapter is an account to foreground this research which elaborates on different terminologies used in this thesis that how this highlights different unknown aspects of selected theories and characters.

Next, the chapter elaborates on the ideas about monsters, which shows how they are created, and evolve with time and place. This thesis plays a strong role in revealing many hidden truths and secrets while inspecting Joker's character. Through selected theories of Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and John Morreall, this research defines the role of the monster in the context of Postmodern American culture.

However, everyone knows that monsters are present from the very start of this universe because everything in the universe is defined by binary opposition, and the monster is an evil creature in contrast to a hero. Though this creature monster is defined as an ugly and fearful creature to warn the people around, reveal secrets, and bring crisis to the surroundings. Previously monsters were not only defined by their attributes but also by the frightening and unusual physical appearance that made them more horrible.

Thus, the major purpose to explore the Postmodern American Comic book character, Joker is to bring the dishonesty of the system to the limelight, who is responsible for the birth of a monster in the disguise of Joker through parallel dissection of Cohen's *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* and Morreall's *Comic Relief*, which provides a variety of ingredients to find the reasons of the 'Metamorphosis of Joker'. Cohen's (Seven Theses) and Morreall's philosophy of *Comic Relief* explains how Joker (monster in the context of the American system) is a product of the 'System and culture' itself. As in the context of Cohen's theory, a monster is "an embodiment of a certain cultural moment _____ of a time, feeling, and place which incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy" (Cohen 4). These features are the reasons that provoke the Joker to build a string that ties a knot between Cohen's *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* and Morreall's philosophy of *Comic Relief*, which will connect the reasons for the metamorphosis of the Joker as a 'cultural body' (4), who "escapes", "dwells at the gates of difference" (7), "a harbinger of category crisis" (6), "polices the borders of the possible" (12), "a kind of desire" (16) and "stands at the threshold of becoming a monster" (20) in Cohen's *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* that finds the significance of

his laughter in Morreall's philosophy of humor *Comic Relief* as a matter of "Superiority, Incongruity, Relief" (Morreall 4-19) and "Fight, Flight, or Laughter" (28-30).

Moreover, I argue that to draw a connection between the two theories in which laughter of Joker plays a major part which seems a medium to build a bridge between Monster theory and laughter theory that how a monster sometimes takes the support of laughter to show his monstrosity which could be an escape from fear, crisis, desire, fantasy, or fight. This aspect will be analyzed in the context of both theories while the dissection of the metamorphosis of Joker and how he brings laughter into play makes the situation more critical. According to my take on this discussion, it deciphers the concept that how the system and culture are responsible for the monstrous metamorphosis of the Joker, who challenges and threatens the unscrupulous culture and system as a 'third-term Supplement' 'incorporate of the outside' and the 'disturbing hybrid' (fantastic hybrid) to bother the cultural, political, racial, economic, and sexual differences.

To provide evidence and to strengthen the proposed idea, selected theories facilitate with sharp lenses to analyze the character of Joker from the perspective of different objectives proposed below that how monster theory by Cohen relates its seven theses with the character of Joker and like laughter theory by Morreall supports to find traces to draw a keen comparison between these two theories through the laughter of Joker which refers toward monster laughter.

This research focuses on reasons behind the monstrosity tagged to the character of Joker and analyses the laughter of Joker through John Morreall's *Comic Relief* where he defines the different situations of laughter into three theories including 'The Superiority theory: Humor as Anti-social', 'The Incongruity theory: Humor as Irrational',

and 'The Relief Theory: Humor as Pressure Valve'. These three explained theories define the situations of laughter that what was the scope of laughter at the time of Plato and Scruton, who rejected the implication of laughter by a sensible man because they believed that laughter is a process because of feeling superior. Similarly, this state of laughter is denied by Christians (Puritans), who also believe that laughter is such an act that kills and destroys the inner soul which also kills the feelings of empathy for people. This theory wholly and solely rejects the act of laughter which they analyze in the context of feeling superior to others and provides shreds of evidence from the Bible that laughter is prohibited in Christianity, where they find several incidents from the Bible to strengthen their arguments. While analyzing the character of Joker this theory facilitates examining the laughter of people around him whose laughter falls in the category of the superiority theory.

While evaluating laughter in the theory of incongruity in which Morreall finds laughter as an irrational act he considers that laughter occurs in unexpected situations due to incongruity. He evaluates this concept with different examples from day-to-day life and gives references from different critics like James Beattie who proposed this idea, Immanuel Kant, and Soren Kierkegaard who support this theory of incongruity which defines laughter because of something unexpected. Morreall gives the account of Robert Latta about this idea, who describes it as, "Something unexpected, out of context, inappropriate, unreasonable, illogical, exaggerated, and so forth" (qtd. in Morreall 10). These concepts about laughter provide a lens to evaluate the laughter of Joker from the film *Joker* by Todd Phillips.

Like, the other two theories relief theory also defines laughter in a way that almost rejects the superiority theory, and Herbert Spencer relates laughter to the physical phenomenon in the context of the nervous system and how the energy of repressed feelings relieves through laughter. This process is divided into two sections where the first section talks about the physical side of this process and the second section about the psychological side. As the physical side talks about the relief of repressed feelings while Spencer relates the mental side of this process to the theory of incongruity that sometimes unexpected situations bring laughter. Through the amalgamation of these two theories, many contextual elements of both theories help to draw a more appropriate dissection of the character Joker to find the answers to the proposed questions and to fill the existing gap in the available scholarship.

Additionally, this research explores the reasons why the Joker is considered a 'disturbing hybrid', who challenges the American culture in the shadow of Cohen's *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* and Morreall's philosophy of Humor *Comic Relief* which analyzes the character of Joker, who was not a monster, but the so-called orderly culture, politics, economics, race, and gender forced him to behave like a monster to find his soul and existence.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Joker as a character in American film series has been explored from different perspectives like Freudian Psychoanalysis of Joker is already done in which the researcher emphasized the ideas of Joker's transformation from Freud's perspective of psychoanalysis how he is transformed into a psychopath, another improvised area is "The Joker's Reduction Into the Absurd" (Quesnel 1), who finds no meaning in life and

prefers to be an absurdist in terms of intertextuality and comparative studies, but the gap prevails in the previous literature and area remains unexplored is why and how Joker transforms in the postmodern American culture and is considered as a monster, in the eyes of the system who brings crisis and challenges the system as a "third-term supplement" (Cohen 7), whose monstrous laughter complicates the situation. So, to fill this gap in existing literature, Jeffery Jerome Cohen's *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* and John Morreall's philosophy of humor, *Comic Relief* is the best-chosen lens to investigate the character of Joker.

1.3 Research Objectives

1. To explore the metamorphosis of the character Joker in Postmodern American Culture through Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* and John Morreall's *Comic Relief.*

2. To unveil the authenticity behind the representation of the Joker as a "disturbing hybrid" and a "monster" but not "the political, and cultural system" by analyzing the character of Arthur Fleck from Todd Phillps' film *Joker*.

3. To build a link between Jeffrey Jerrome Cohen's *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* and John Morreall's philosophy of humor defined in *Comic Relief* through the laughter of Arthur Fleck in Todd Phillips' film *Joker*.

1.4 Research Questions

1. How does the metamorphosis of the character Joker take place in the 'Postmodern American Culture' in the context of Jeffery Jerome Cohen's *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* and John Morreall's theory *Comic Relief?*

2. Why is Joker represented as a 'monster' or 'disturbing hybrid' and not the "System" in the context of postmodern American culture by Todd Phillips' film *Joker*?

3. How does laughter in the film *Joker* form a connection between Cohen's *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* and Morreall's theory of *Comic Relie*f?

1.5 Rationale of Study

   This thesis focuses on the metamorphosis of the character Joker in 'Postmodern American Culture' in the context of Jefferey Jerome Cohen's *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* and John Morreall's philosophy of humor *Comic Relief*, is a major contribution to the already available scholarships on the character of Joker from different American comic book series on Joker, specifically for the character of Joker from *Joker*. This thesis extends the previous research on the character of Joker because critics did not explore this character from the angle of Joker presented as a monster who draws a link between monstrosity and laughter through the related elements discussed under the selected theories of Cohen and Morreall with the help of Joker's metamorphosis.

1.6 Research Plan/ Chapter Breakdown

   This thesis is divided into five chapters. The very first chapter deals with a historical account of the selected character and theories which are the source to analyze this character Joker from the perspective of the Postmodern American film *Joker* by Todd Phillips. This chapter provides a detailed history and origin of the character Joker that evolves with time and place then it talks about the monster theory by Jefferey Jerome Cohen that how monsters are created and presented. Side by side this chapter gives an account of the origin of monsters in literature and how they engender their culture. This chapter deals with the scope of this research and how this proposed idea of monster

theory and theory of laughter shows a path for future researchers. Furthermore, it provides brief information about the existing scholarship on the selected character and theories which helps to find the loophole that leads to the theoretical framework to draw an organized plan for the analysis of Joker from *Joker* to answer the raised questions in this research. Moreover, this chapter under the title of introduction leads towards the significance of the study, objectives raise questions, the rationale of the study, use of methodology, and delimitation which provides the reasons to propose this research and why the character Joker is selected to analyze through selected theories like *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* by Jeffery Jerome Cohen and *Comic Relief* by John Morreall.

The second chapter of this thesis analyses the already available literature on the character of Joker that provides the detail of different perspectives on how the character of Joker is analyzed, and which area is still unexplored that pushes forward to bring the untouched area under a keen discussion.

The third chapter provides a research design for this thesis under the title of Theoretical framework which organizes both selected theories in such a way that results in the invention of a new idea as monster laughter and acts as a backbone to analyze the character Joker, who is transformed into a monster according to the selected theories.

Most importantly, in the fourth chapter, data analysis facilitates to have a look at every minor incident of the film *Joker* related to the character of Joker how he transforms, and how every minor progressing event of the film is a journey of Joker towards the transformation as a monster called by the political, and cultural system of America.

The last and fifth chapter, the conclusion of this thesis contains the results, findings, and recommendations of the study that provides a new road for future scholars to add up under this ongoing research on the character of Joker.

1.7 Research Methodology

This qualitative research focused on all aspects of the film related to the character of Joker. This thesis is based on the cultural and narrative analysis of the film *Joker* by Todd Phillips, which highlights the character transformation of Joker in a specific cultural context. As we know, qualitative research is not all about the objectivity of something rather it drives out of the layers of unknown meaning which cannot decipher the generalized meaning but results in an open-ended way. Paul D. Boyer (American biochemist, and analytical chemist), one of the critics said that "effectiveness comes from those qualitative things that give you the ability to network, communicate, and lead people toward an outcome they can't see" (Boyer). I also analyze this selected character of Joker from the film *Joker* in such a way that is comprehensible for my approaches toward this character and theories that help to evaluate the transformation of Joker. I elaborate on the character of Joker not only in a subjective way but also add supportive arguments of critics, philosophers, journalists, and researchers to strengthen my arguments. It will not be wrong to say that I avoid the intentions of the director, writer, and producer of the film *Joker* they wanted to deliver but highlighted those aspects of the character Joker related to the monster theory and theory of laughter that complement my approach, as Ronald Barthes says that read a text in a way that "the author is dead." Similarly, I find such elements in this film through the analysis of Joker which is not explored yet. Though this whole thesis follows the rules of narrative and cultural

interpretation for the analysis of the famous character Joker from the film *Joker* in a qualitative way.

1.8 Delimitation

Many other characters in American films and texts can be studied and inspected in the light of "Monster Theory" and "Laughter Theory" but to delimit the research the focus is on the character of Joker from the film *Joker* by Todd Phillips, who is the best option to be examined from the perspective of both theories like Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, in the context of seven proposed theses and John Morreall's *Comic Relief*, which provides further three theories to examine the laughter of Joker that results in monster laughter.

1.9 Significance of the Research

Usually, the researchers pay more attention to the analysis of texts than how the characters of a particular story could be examined whereas, most probably Films are just taken for the sake of entertainment, and it is a rare case that researchers research films and their heroic characters. Though they just discuss the protagonists and antagonists in their daily conversation. On the contrary, this research is proposed to pay more emphasis on the famous and most recognized character of the American film series Joker (in which he played a side role or a major role), who has been explored from the Freudian perspective of psychoanalysis and as an absurdist but no one has talked about the "metamorphosis of the character as a monster in postmodern American culture" thus this research surveys the famous character Joker of American film *Joker* by Todd Phillips in the context of Jeffrey Jerome *Cohen's Monster Theory: Reading Culture* and John Morreall's *Comic Relief*.

This research scans three major aspects including the Metamorphosis of the Joker into a monster, Joker as a "Disturbing Hybrid" (Cohen 7), and as a "third-term supplement" (8), not only that but the significance of the laughter of Joker and how this laughter finds its role in the monstrosity that finds its roots in monstrosity from the perspective of A New Theory of Laughter and Monster theory. Additionally, this research also provides a large platform for future researchers to explore the character of Joker with more ideas.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This thesis explored the most popular character in American film *Joker* by Todd Phillips in the light of Jeffery Jerome Cohen's *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* and John Morreall's *Comic Relief*. The basic purpose of this chapter is to find the loopholes in the existing literature that how the character of Joker is already examined, and which area is not explored yet. Even though the character of Joker is surveyed from different perspectives but after reviewing existing literature it is noticed that this character represented in the film *Joker* is not explored through its metamorphosis who behaves in society as a monster who is a product of a system and society itself and to prove this fact that he is the product of society and system, Cohen's *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* and Morreall's theory of *Comic Relief* helps to provide shreds of evidence that he is the pure product of society and system. This chapter will review the existing literature to highlight the untouched portions which could be explored further.

2.2 Historical background of the character Joker

Most probably, no one knows exactly about the origin of the character Joker because he appears with a different background in every film. He appears in every film almost with a sadistic sense of humor which time and again influences the minds of people around him and his audience that may leave the impacts of his actions on the youth. Most of the existing reviews claim the character of Joker as a symbol of a disaster whose violent actions are most probably non-justifiable on the grounds of his sufferings

because they believe that this sort of mass destruction will promote violence and extremism in the already disturbed society. So, approximately most of the existing research on the character of Joker claims that the whole responsibility for this disaster goes to the character of Joker even though how the ruling system and society treat such a mentally disturbed creature whose ultimate destination is a hospital or mental asylum, allotted by system and society.

This chapter analyzes the research carried out on the character of Joker from the American film *Joker* by Todd Phillips from different perspectives discussed in different articles, journals, interviews, reviews, and theses. Even though the character of Joker has been most probably discussed from psychological perspectives that how Joker suffered through mental disorders in filthy postmodern American society, rather no one had discussed the idea of the metamorphosis of Joker into a monster which aspects of the system lead him to the verge of monstrosity. As a lecturer, Dr. of Philosophy, Cenk Tan from Turkey examined the character of Joker from the Jungian and Nietzschean perspective in his article, "A Jungian and Nietzschean Approach to Todd Phillips' Joker" (1). In this article, Tan discussed the ideas of Jung and Nietzsche on different grounds, firstly he discussed the idea of Jungian shadow and then the approach of Nietzsche towards nihilism.

2.3 Exploration of the character Joker from Jungian and Nietzschean Perspective

Cenk Tan's A Jungian and Nietzschean approach to Todd Phillips' *Joker* interpreted the character of Joker through the window of Jungian archetypes how Arthur Fleck struggles against his inner shadow, which he had lost. Even though he tried to resist the identity through his inner ego and self, it was all in vain. Tan explored his character

under the umbrella of Shadow and nihilism, where he analyzed, Jung's views that are interconnected with Friedrich Nietzsche's notion of nihilistic delusions which are referred to as an overview of Nietzsche's nihilism. In addition, nihilistic delusions are associated with the Cotard syndrome and the notion of depersonalization within the field of psychiatry.

This research also exposes the common ground between Nietzsche and Jung by exploring the interactions in specific periods of their lives. Thus, it has been concluded that Arthur's nihilistic delusions (self-denial) are the ultimate cause of the events leading him to the supremacy of the shadow (suppressed feelings) in Joker. Here in this existing analysis of the character Joker, we can witness that the researcher did not pay any attention to the metamorphosis of the character Joker on the idea of being a monster and monster laughter whose (fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy are interlinked to the monstrosity and the fight, flight, and laughter) which interconnects the Cohen's and Morreall's theories. The article by Tan provides another perspective about the character of Joker as he said:

> This article aims to expose Jungian and Nietzschean reflections on
> Joker…the article also argues reflections of nihilistic delusion in Joker.
> Thus, it is also argued how these manifestations of Nihilistic delusion
> converge with C.G. Jung's shadow in Joker. Finally, the Jungian shadow
> is compared with the Nietzschean formulation of nihilism, thereby
> establishing the intersection between analytical psychology and
> philosophy (425-26).

The major loophole in this article is that it did not touch on the area which provokes the phase of the metamorphosis of Joker into a monster (created by the system) and which signifies his laughter as a tool to develop a strong monster character under the umbrella of Cohen and Morreall's theories.

This whole article by Cenk Tan explores the character of Joker by keeping it in the cannon of Jung's archetypes and Nietzsche's ideas of nihilistic delusion which only describes the mental disorders of the character instead of finding the reasons behind these disorders which drove him to this state of illness, that challenges the so-called societal norms and values.

2.4 Literature on the character Joker as an Absurdist

On another ground, the character of the Joker is discussed from an angle of absurdism by David Quesnel in his article "The Joker's Reduction into an Absurdist" (1). This article sheds light on the character of Joker from the perspective of Foucault, which draws a comparison between the characters of hero vs villain. David emphasizes the idea of hero vs villain while evaluating the character of Joker Vs Batman, that how old villains were considered monsters based on their apparent ugliness. Another idea discussed under the umbrella of this article questions the actions of a monster hunter, who could be a villain in the eyes of the hero's villain. Quesnel analyzed the character of Joker based on the standards settled by the system and society and how poverty, crime, and ugliness (Joker) compliments the monsters. On the other hand, who wears costumes and belongs to the elite class is considered a monster hunter (Batman). Quesnel explored the character of Joker and Batman through the idea given by Foucault that how monstrosity is associated with poverty, crime, and ugliness, where he criticized the European literature

while claiming that how their literature has denounced the character of a madman as an ironic figure which tags the reasons behind his monstrosity also based on the standards of monstrosity settled by the system as a poor class of society.

Furthermore, Quesnel focused on the absurdity that how being an absurdist is always linked with insanity, which is the major tool in the philosophy of logic. As appearance matters a lot while discussing the symptoms of being insane which used to be linked with the ugliness of any person in the typical literature it was the part of stereotypes where an ugly face represents monstrosity and anyone with a beautiful face represents the hero who will save the rest of the world from that ugly face monster. Quesnel also highlighted elements in the characters of Joker and Batman that compliments the concepts given by Foucault and Morrison to evaluate the qualities of monsters and so-called monster hunters. Not only that but Quesnel paid attention to the concept of 'Comical Absurdity' which signals the postmodern absurdity that a postmodern madman is no more only an absurdist but is promoting the comical absurdity, who is no more living in the state of absurdity but is making fun of the pathetic system that led him to this verge of insanity.

Most importantly, Quesnel emphasized the corruption of the system and how American society labeled insanity with poverty and criminality and sanity with richness and monster hunting. Though he criticized the fact that both sane and insane are the cuts of the same animal but being ugly and poor links with monstrosity, on the other hand, being beautiful and rich is associated with heroic qualities. While analyzing the characters of Batman and Joker, Quesnel highlighted these stereotypical ideas of being a monster and monster hunters that It is permissibly sane for Batman to wear a costume

and cause violence, but it is insane for the Joker to wear a costume and cause violence where absurdity itself doubts the idea of absurdity that causing same violence results differently in the shape of punishment for one and as a reward for another one.

In this whole article, David Quesnel questioned the major aspects of the hypocrisy of American society, but he did not highlight the reasons behind the idea of Joker being tagged as a monster and the link between his blamed monstrosity with his laughter fists. This major loophole dragged me to find the reasons and links between Joker's monstrosity and laughter fists blamed on the corrupt system itself through the *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* by Jeffery Jerome Cohen and *Comic Relief* by John Morreall.

2.5 Monster vs Monster Hunter through the Lens of Heather Duda

Related to this idea of Quesnel about the hypocrisy of capitalist America always triggers the one as a monster that is against their corruption, another critic Heather Duda also questioned the monsters and monster hunters that why people most probably talk about the nature of those monsters who challenges the system rather than investigating the monster hunter who is considered as a hero for the system? To answer this question, she argued that the monster hunters of this pop culture are not less than monsters because they also use the power of violence in their encounters with their opponents. She claims that the major change in American culture is the increase in skepticism, which decreases the trust of people in monster hunters because they also break the rules and use the power of disaster to face their enemies. Duda claims that "Today's monster hunters are themselves monstrous" (Duda).

2.6 Freudian Analysis of the character Joker from the film The Dark Knight

Similarly, another researcher, Bhowmik analyzed "The Evil Clown of the Uncanny Valley: A Psychoanalytic Reading of the Joker in The Dark Knight" in which he examined the mental condition of Joker from the psychological perspective of Freud. He stated in his article that:

> This paper tries to analyze the character of Joker, a fictional supervillain of the DC Comics Universe and the antagonist of Christopher Nolan's superhero movie The Dark Knight (2008), in the light of Freud's theory of the uncanny and attempts to show, how this evil clown sends pernicious shockwaves in the realms of the fiction (1).

In this research, he mainly focused on the psychological experiences of persons, situations, or events, which could be frightening, ambivalent, and most importantly, familiarly unfamiliar.

This article represents the ideas of uncanny, id, ego, and societal Oedipus Complex that is given by Sigmund Freud through which Bhowmik evaluated the character of Joker. The basic concept of "Uncanny" is elaborated through the character of Joker, where Bhowmik emphasized the hidden and repressed feelings of Joker which were residing in the corners of his psyche that were terrorizing his soul. Bhowmik analyzed the character of Joker from a historical perspective as well as how this character evolved throughout history. Indeed, in historical context, the purpose of Joker's character was to entertain and bring smiles to the faces of people but over time Jokers as "Jesters and Clowns" in the cannon of satire started to pinpoint the social issues and poke fun at the higher echelons of the society.

This research on Joker focused on the idea of "uncanny" and how the major frightening part of history haunts anyone in the present time. Bhowmik also highlighted the question about the attributes of the character of Joker, Is the character of Joker in the American film series, who is an antagonist of Batman, really a benign future? Though this question is not addressed in this article, rather this question is just an open-ended debate to be continued and to be addressed through different research.

Furthermore, in this article, Bhowmik focused on the character of Joker who deceives his audience and people around him through his uncanny actions where his way of uttering words seems funny but in contrast, his actions arise the feeling of uncanny and fear among the audience and the other people around him. Here Bhowmik tried to address the concept of "uncanny" proposed by Freud through the character of Joker and how in old American DC Comics Joker as an antagonist cloaked his evilness behind his ironic laughter. Not only that but his ironic laughter signifies a different perspective at every moment. As he defined that "His apparent benignity is only a masquerade, beneath his laughter exists his evil persona. Again, every word that the clown speaks has a highly serious tone in it, although, he speaks out funnily" (Bhowmik 7).

Although in this article Bhowmik, time and again addresses the concept of "uncanny" and how the character of Joker from The Dark Knight 2008 through the deep analysis of the character drives the audience and people around him into a state of ambivalence that whether this character is crazy or insane because his actions are so abrupt which confuses the audience. On another point, Bhowmik talked about the incongruity of the Joker and how his actions and language make him a doubtful character that causes uncertainty and leads the citizens of Gotham City into the realm of fear. Not

only that, but Arthur Fleck who is represented as a Joker has broken the stereotypes of a clown historically the identity of clowns was known as entertainers, but Joker is spreading fear among people and deceiving people through his contradictory actions and language because many events he defined one incident with the different story due to which Bhowmik claims that no one should believe his words.

Bhowmik also addresses the concept of exploitation of mass psychology through the character of Joker and how he not only makes the audience uncertain about his language and actions but also manipulates their minds to question their morality and ethics to question whether they are right or wrong. As Joker is represented as a psychopath who instigates the seeds of trouble in the mind of Batman which questions his morality, Joker said that "To them, you are just a freak …like me" (The Dark Knight 1:47:56). Even though Joker's understanding of the human psyche seems so profound but no one else knows about his identity and purpose or even what he wants to do.

This article by Bhowmik stressed the character analysis of Joker through Freud's given idea of the uncanny and how he frightens, manipulates, and instigates the minds of people around him through his dubious nature being a psychopath claimed by Bhowmik where he confirms his allegations of uncanny through different characters and moments in the film. Throughout this psychoanalytic analysis of Joker, Bhowmik emphasized the concept of Joker as an evil clown of the uncanny valley and how he brings intellectual uncertainty, confusion, and horror which triggers the feeling of ambivalence and sometimes inspires other nations as a symbol of resistance against the ruling elites. But in every existing literature on the character of Joker, every researcher focused on and discussed the character of Joker from a psychological perspective where they talked

about the mental condition of Joker Nietzschean, Jungian, and Freudian perspectives that what kind of mental diseases Joker is gone through rather than to discuss the fact behind metamorphosis of the Arthur Fleck into a Joker in the film *Joker* and to find the causes behind his monstrosity and laughter from a symbolically theoretical perspective, proposed by Jeffery Jerome Cohen in his *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* and John Morreall's *Comic Relief* through which this proposed research will explore the metamorphosis of the character Joker from *Joker* by Todd Phillips that the reasons behind the monstrosity of Joker are not discussed from the perspective of monster theory rather is discussed almost in every research from a psychological and political perspective.

2.7 Joker, who never has been a Moral Character

There is another small review about *Joker* "This is Wrong Time for Joker" by Herb Scribner. The title of the review itself is an argument that claims the presence of Joker in American DC Comic is not the right time for Joker because this film is promoting consistent mass shootings and violence which claims the mental disorders and illness of coming generations. But on the other hand, no one did pay attention to the reasons behind the transformation of Arthur Fleck from a common man into a Joker who is claimed as a monster by the system and society, especially by the ruling elites for whom he is a challenging figure. In this review, Scribner claims that the character Joker is not and never has been a moral character.

2.8 Corrupt Political and Economic Scenarios in the Film *Joker*

Apart from the psychological analysis of the character Joker from the American film *Joker*, one of the researchers Esraa Sayed Ahmed explored this character of Joker in

her article from a political, economic, and social perspective in American society with the comparison of contemporary ruling elites. In this analysis, "The Invisible Politics of "Joker" …. Has the 2019's Joker- Gone So Far?" (1), Esraa has paid her attention to the analysis of the character of Joker in the cannon of politics and economy through Karl Marx's "Marxism" and Fredrick Nietzsche's "Nihilism". Under this deep analysis of Joker, this article firstly addressed the importance of film in postmodern American society that media is not only a source of entertainment rather it addresses the reality to be analyzed by its listeners and viewers which has a great influence on the minds and values of the people. Esraa has divided her topic of research into parts where in the first part she focused on the idea of hidden politics portrayed through the character of Joker that how this film is an exact representation of American politics at the time of Donald Trump. Though Esraa did not only analyze the character of Joker who is depicted as a political character, the whole remaining plot is considered a true representation of political messages and political projection.

Esraa analyzed the character of Joker from the Nietzschean perspective of Nihilism in which he defined the three states of nihilism through which Esraa explored the character of Joker. However, she scrutinized a few important scenes from the film to prove her arguments valid and she picked up some phrases to analyze the character of Joker. Under the framework of Nihilism, she used the theory of moral nihilism by Fredrick Nietzsche. She has applied these three states of moral nihilism, as she has drawn a comparison between the character of Joker and these three states where at first state 'Will to Power" when someone sought to find meaning in life but is discouraged and reached a stage when there is no meaning in life. Furthermore, the second state of moral

nihilism explained in this article says that this state occurs when an individual believes that he has no purpose in life where he has no more questions about the rationale of his life, and the third state of moral nihilism is when the individual reached the final stage where he is completely careless not only about his existence rather about everything.

Similarly, this research on *Joker* by Esraa explored the character of Joker from the same lens that how at the very start when Joker was seeking his existence and then the purpose of his life, and later after the brutality of the ruling system and society gone through these three states proposed by Nietzsche in moral nihilism and reached the stage of ultimate nihilism where all his beliefs become null.

Later in this research, Esraa highlighted the confusion of her mind through an open-ended and debatable question "Do the political and socio-economic conditions influence the people's behavior to the extent that it makes them 'Jokers'?" (07). Though the main argument addressed in this research is that *Joker* is reflecting, implicitly the political, economic, and social main issues of Donald Trump's era the presidency. Another major question raised by Esraa is that Is the laughter of Joker simply a disease or is something more than that? But unfortunately, she did not explore the deep-down meaning of Joker's laughter which is most probably something more than a neurological disease that is analyzed only through a psychological perspective as a mental disorder rather than exploring it through another cultural theory proposed only for the sake of laughter, *Comic Relief* by John Morreall, in which he has deeply discussed the phases and states of laughter through three senses.

As it is mentioned above that this article related the events and characters of the reel life with the real-life events and characters which claim that the seeds of insanity

were planted in the character of Joker that instigated him to kill the elite and capitalists of the American ruling system, Thomas Wayne who is symbolized with the actual presidency figure of America Donald Trump which may be predicting a horrible future for American capitalist ruling elites. Many other moments are explored from Marx's viewpoint of revolution in the history of America every American individual was raising the slogan "kill the rich" as an anti-capitalist which is visible in the visuals of this film *Joker* as well. Somehow Esraa pointed out the element of racism also in this movie she claims that biases of color are also prevailing in this *Joker* which is not noticed before by any researcher, but she gave many pieces of evidence in her research to prove her argument solid where she talked about three black women suffering in American society because of racist capitalist society and system that how it is true that Trump abused black women who are deputies in the congress like Ilhan Omar and Rashida Talib.

No doubt that Esraa brought several denotative meanings of this film to the limelight through Nietzsche's theory of moral Nihilism and Karl Max's theory of Marxism, she also raised a very keen question to analyze the laughter of *Joker* in depth but did not address this question properly. So, to find deep layers of this character Joker, his laughter, monstrosity, and traits that how he has transformed from a common man, Arthur Fleck to Joker as a monster in the eyes of capitalist ruling elites.

2.9 Joker as Laughing Christ of Postmodernity in the film *Joker*

There is an essay that addresses the critical analysis of *Joker*, through the chronicle chunks of Christianity, which represents Joker as a laughing Christ of postmodernity. This short essay "Joker, the Laughing Christ of Postmodernity" (1), by Arslan Akhtar evaluated the *Joker* from the concept of Jesus and Christ in the context of

postmodernity and absurdity which just thoroughly defines the conditions of Fleck to be a future Joker, that how this postmodernity ridicules the psychological disorders of Fleck to become a Joker and the laughing Christ of postmodernity. Though the laughter of Joker is also compared with that of Christ how postmodern laughter is as absurd as the existence of any postmodern being.

Even though this essay claims the same charges against America as a capitalist society as the previous article by Esraa Ahmed that this film is representing the drowned American society in the ocean of capitalism, where every individual and every action of that individual is a product of the capitalist world of America. To prove this argument proposed by Akhtar has compared the idea of French scholar Gilles Lipovetsky, who explains that "humor far from being subversive serves capitalism and consumption and one of the signs of the loss of its critical radicalism is the sanitization of the laughter" (Akhtar 02). This point raised by Akhtar is validified by evidence from the film *Joker* that how the laughter of the Joker serves as a product of capitalism in the postmodern world of America. Specifically, Akhtar highlighted that event from the film when Arthur Fleck is sent to the hospital to bring laughter to the faces of hospitalized children in the avatar of Joker, who predicts the future disaster for the ruling elites of capitalist America.

Another ingredient added by Akhtar in this essay is media and how media is degrading rationale and seriousness for the sake of entertainment. Not only that but a deep struggle is to get a job in a service-oriented economy and its significance is also highlighted in this essay which ends in the same absurdity as the meaninglessness of life. Though Akhtar utilized the idea of Siegfried Kracauer, who has compared the detective

of modern popular fiction to the secular figures, who are coping to make sense of the existing rationality by brawling with the devilish powers of the system and society.

This essay is summed up with a very heavy idea or one can say that with the bitter truth of this postmodern world "Postmodernity is no funnier" (2). This notion describes and supports the idea of laughter presented in *Joker* and how the laughter of Joker is not something funny that can be considered a part of his happy life rather he claims he has never been happy in his entire life. So, this essay is also focusing on the political, biblical, and capitalist perspectives prevailing in the film *Joker* but did not talk about the concept of Joker being a monster how he is shaped into a monster, and what laughter signifies apart from neurological disease.

2.10 Joker presented as a film Icon

To continue the previous arguments regarding Joker's character analysis that how most of the reviews about *Joker* claim that it is a major film that addresses the psychological disease which drives the character of Arthur Fleck to transform into the character of Joker. Like the previous articles, Cambridge University also published another article by Valentin Yurievich Skryabin, who analyzed the character of Joker which is Joker's real mental disorder. In the article "Analyzing Joker: An Attempt to Establish Diagnosis for a film icon". This article emphasized the idea of Psychopathy that does not even exist under the first ten personality disorders but Skryabin claims that psychopathy falls under the category of antisocial personality disorders.

While discussing this notion of Arthur Fleck's character Skryabin highlighted the elements of Joker's personality traits that as loneliness, isolation, and constant negative thoughts which drive him to suffer this mental disorder. Not only that but he also

evaluated the fact of violence which may become the cause of mass destruction and the horrible future of postmodern America. Though some critics claim that Joker is a glorification of an angry and disturbed loner who has turned from an archetype of a violent man into a heroic figure. Not only that but they also give their remarks regarding the intentions of Todd Phillips that whether he deliberately portrayed the character of Arthur Fleck as a Violent clown for postmodern American society, or it just happened naturally because most of the scenes from the film seem his deliberate attempt to present the character of Joker as a heroic figure which might become a stigma.

This article signals another factor about the influence of *Joker* which is stigma for the rest of the patients of the mental disorder which might increase the fear in the minds of the people to be terrorized by such patients. As Skryabin has discussed the review of one of the critics in his article where Andrew A. Nierenberg stated that "Sadly the movie will increase stigma for those with psychiatric disorders make people afraid. It will take great efforts to combat this setback in the battle against stigma" (Nierenberg). As the stigma of any type, when entering any society then it takes so long to get rid of that and these critics are worried about the notion that how it will spread like a virus in American society. This stigma of being a heroic figure with these traits to terrorize society adds hype to the existing state of mind to the verge of narcissism that demands excessive admiration.

Skryabin has evaluated some important aspects related to the character of Joker which includes 'diagnosing mental disorder', 'pseudobulbar effect', 'antisocial personality disorder', and 'flawed man to cartoon villains. Under the first aspect of diagnosing the mental disorder, he has discussed three criteria in criterion A, Joker fails

to conform to social values concerning lawful behavior where he has repeatedly done crimes on the ground level with no punishment, secondly, in criterion B the individual under-diagnosis should be at the age of 18 and have had a history of symptoms that comes under the criterion C. However, Skryabin claims that Joker falls in the category of criterion B, but he had no history of symptoms because he has no proper family history.

While evaluating the character of Joker Skryabin also discussed his laughter as a Pseudobulbar effect which is also a psychological disease means a nervous system disorder that causes inappropriate involuntary laughing and crying that is prevailing in the character of Joker throughout the film that how he tries to cope up with his disease and taking proper therapy and medications as well because he cannot control this disorder that can happen at any moment. On the contrary, Skryabin raised another fact from the film that Joker has great control over his muscles as he stated that "highly motivated lucid thinker who never tells his therapist about any hallucinations and delusions" (329-332).

Furthermore, Skryabin argues in his article that Joker is a flawed man who wants to be a cartoon supervillain caricature and psychopathology also suggests that such a character as Arthur Fleck exhibits a foggy character and combination of unusual symptoms where he is struggling with his mental disorder to earn sympathy from the people around him and audience rather than the anguish. In the overall discussion of this article, Skryabin hinted purely toward the mental disorders of the Joker, highlighted the symptoms of this disease, and causes what kind of destruction can be expected out of this disease which can be a terror for the American society. Even this article completely served to examine the character of Joker from a purely psychological perspective rather

no one paid any attention to the deep-down structure of this film from the angle of the 'production of monsters' in the postmodern American society that how the character of Joker is not only representing a psychologically disturbed creature but is also shouting for the reasons behind these diseases which transformed him into a monster in the eyes of the so-called system and society.

2.11 Analysis of Joker through Media Ecology Theory

Apart from the other research, the character of Joker is analyzed through the lens of media ecology theory which examines *Joker* by keeping it in the canon of violence that highlights different types of violence throughout the film. Panagiota Efthymiadou's and Panagiota Koukouvinou's efforts made it possible to highlight the facts that how media leaves an impact on the environment and how society gets influenced by the presented content on screen. This thesis not only analyzed *Joker* in a qualitative but also facilitates future researchers to examine it quantitatively as well which provides the tendency to evaluate every type of violence on the percentage scale to measure the great tendency of violence.

The most important factor of violence with a great tendency is physical violence which is proved through shreds of evidence throughout the film. Panagiota Efthymiadou's and Panagiota Koukouvinou's research aims to discuss the idea of violence in this postmodern world which is not an invention but a constant theme of comic books, where the prevalent idea of the story relates to crime. This whole research emphasized the idea of physical violence through media ecology theory that how media affects the environment, and the environment affects the media, which tries to prove the fact that in the postmodern world, technology gives form to cultures, politics, social

organizations, and habitual ways of thinking. This concept of media ecology theory stressed the significance of the media and how human beings get influenced by it.

Furthermore, this research brings the matter of Joker's persona to the limelight that how the theorist of media ecology is no more interested in a superficial manner but trying to prove the fact that it develops a deep link between media and human beings that how the representation of culture through media strengthens and helps the culture to maintain its symbolic order.

2.12 Conclusion

While having a keen interest in the existing literature on Todd Phillips' character of Joker in the Film *Joker* gives a deep insight to examine and explore this character deeply because other critics and researchers evaluated this character from many perspectives including psychoanalytic, Marxist, political, Nihilistic, absurdist, and media ecological perspectives. However, this proposed thesis will come up with Todd Phillips' character Joker from the stance of *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and John Morreall's *Comic Relief*, which is still untouched, and yet no one has explored this area. This is important to evaluate this area because already existing literature is just claiming Joker's psychological disorders, absurdity, and nihilism are the causes behind the destruction and violence in this postmodern film and no one raised the question that which cultural circumstances force him to instigate this destruction. This is the main reason to conduct this research to find the answers to a few rising questions in the mind of many viewers which could be addressed through the cultural theories of Jerrome and Cohen that provides a vast ground to seek significance behind the production and direction of this film *Joker* by Todd Phillips.

Chapter 3

Theoretical Framework

This investigation is an attempt to analyze the "Metamorphosis of the character Joker in the Postmodern American Culture from the perspective of Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* and John Morreall's *Comic Relief*. This chapter provides detail about the notion of the metamorphosis of the character Joker as a monster will be analyzed through the lens of Cohen's seven theses in which he described the creation and transformation of a monster with the evolution of culture, politics, economics, race, and gender. Simply we can say that the "Monster Body is a pure culture" (4). The formation of a monster, who is not a monster, is formed due to the unbalanced state of culture and illegal jurisdiction. However, the official birth of monster and vampire together in literature is dated in 1816 in the drawing room of Villa Chapuis near Geneva, born at the peak time of the industrial revolution. Later they were both raised in the late nineteenth century and at the time of the twentieth century, they conquer the cinema after World War I in German Expressionism and the productions of America at the time of crisis after 1929. Cinema and the film industry is the most probably the best medium to portray comic book characters throughout history till this postmodern world.

Primarily, this idea of Monster Theory was given by Professor Jeffery Jerome Cohen in his *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* which defines the "Monster as a Cultural body" (4). However, looking at the etymology of the word provides a critical insight: "Monster" is derived from the Latin word "monstrum," referring to a sign that something momentous or calamitous is about to happen. As this idea of incongruity is also proposed

in the theory of laughter by John Morreall in *Comic Relief* that something unexpected is going to happen which could also be a cause or a reason for a laughter condition. As monstrum epistemology refers to certain states like "which reveal", "which warns", and "a glyph that seeks a hierophant" (Cohen 4). So, the purpose of this research is also associated with the idea of the monster as a cultural body*, Joker* whose metamorphosis takes place due to the cultural and systematic implications that he has faced throughout his life and transformed him into a monster in the eyes of a corrupt system, who challenges and threatens their so-called rules and norms.

Though when we talk about the reason to propose this theory then Cohen himself talked about the reason that it is "a method of reading cultures from the monster they engender" (3). While doing the study of the monster theory he violated the two rules of cultural studies: the compulsion of historical specificity and the insistence that all knowledge is local. In addition, he argued against the authenticity of history in cultural studies where he claims in a didactic manner that "one must bear in mind that history is just another text in the procession of texts and not a guarantor of any singular signification" (3). So, here we can sum up his ideas that he denies the "Unified Theory", an age where we live to believe in individuality, subjectivity, gender, and culture, which is made up of a multitude of fragments rather than epistemological wholes. Cohen states his idea of a monster body that "a monster is composed of different fragments in a loosely integrated net, as an unassimilated hybrid" (7).

Furthermore, this thesis will deal with the agenda that why the *Joker* is portrayed as a monster in Postmodern American Culture, with the help of Cohen's *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, and Morreall's *Comic Relief* that how the Joker is a monster because it

reveals the truth of a corrupt system and his ironic or monster laughter is also a sign to bring the monster side of the system to the limelight. As Cohen represented the monster as a threat to the system in his seven theses, thus, these concepts will be applied to the character of Joker that how in almost all series in which Joker is visible is a major threat to the system. This is the main reason behind the Joker being called a monster and this idea will be explored in the analysis of this thesis that how Joker is a threat and due to this threat, he is called a monster. However, there are many other supportive concepts of Cohen's theory that state this idea of why Joker is represented as a monster.

Moreover, this discussion will tie a string to make a connection between "Monster Theory" and "Laughter Theory" as Morreall talks in his *Comic Relief* about three senses of laughter, 'sense of superiority, 'sense of incongruity' and 'sense of relief', which creates a link with Cohen's *Monster Theory: Reading Cultur*e in which he also discusses some psychological changes of the monster characters which become the reason of monster laughter, so, we can draw a link of Monster laughter with all three senses of 'laughter theory', another point of Morreall, where he discusses the concept of 'fight, flight or laughter' under the umbrella of Psychology of Humor which presents a huge ground to analyze the character of Joker for its metamorphosis cycle. And a major aspect of this section will be that Joker will be a string who will tie a knot between Cohen's and Morreall's theory to make a strong connection between Monster theory and laughter theory as a 'monster laughter'.

3.1 Evolution of the Monster Theory

While discussing Monster theory it is mandatory to talk about the history of monsters, how they exist in literature, and which aspects properly define the conscience

of monsters. But before talking about the chronological order of the monster's evolution it is important to acknowledge the truth that every individual defines a monster in his or her way as they experience it while living in different areas and eras. To find the roots of monsters Frank Grady dissected the history of monsters from the start of "Vampire Culture" where he explored an essay by Franco Moretti "The Dialectic of Fear*"*, in which he conversed about the nature of monsters and how a monster acts as a game changer for the capitalist monopoly, he charges that "the ideological lie of Victorian capitalism, a capitalism which is ashamed of itself and which hides factories and stations beneath cumbrous gothic superstructures; which prolongs and extols aristocratic models of life; which exalts the holiness of the family as the latter begins secretly to break up" (Moretti 67-85). If we examine the concept of Grady about monsters, then it will not be wrong to say that throughout history monsters possess the qualities to challenge the practicing social and political system that itself produces the monster by repressing their emotional and mental state to hide certain activities from them. Therefore, this idea by Moretti emphasizes the purification and moral use of power in the late 20th century.

When we discuss the nature of a monster based on binaries then it is impossible to forget about the concept of *differance* proposed by Jacques Derrida, who is the most popular theorist of the 20th century. If we will talk about the epistemological spaces between the monster's bones then Derrida's chasm of *differance* gives a detail about it, which is defined by Cohen: "a genetic uncertainty principle, the essence of the monster's vitality, the reason it always rises from the dissection table as its secrets are about to be revealed and vanish into the lights" (qtd.in Cohen 4). This idea discussed by Cohen regarding Derrida's concept points out that as soon the hidden sides of the monsters

where they do their plotting to terrify the unbalanced cultures and systems just about to be revealed that they just escape from that situation while leaving everything in crisis and reappear when they find their need to come back with new plans. This idea of Derrida gives a way to understand the nature of a monster and how he escapes and reappears with a new crisis for the existing problems.

Anne Rice, who was an American author of gothic fiction, erotic literature, and Christian literature challenged the constructed principles about monsters and vampires by assigning the moral codes to a villain, telling vampire stories in first person narrative, and shifting the setting of the stories from the place of death and decay to more modern and urban landscapes that are considered as "opposing constructive principles" according to the theory of Yury Tynyanov. Though Anne repeated Derrida's theory of "deconstruction" as she rejected the previous theories of vampires and monsters rather, she evolved the role of monster and vampire from a villain to a hero. It will not be wrong to say that Anne Rice is a pioneer, who switched the role of a monster and vampire from a villain to a hero and provided a ground for her followers to evaluate this idea in further research in the context of the postmodern world. Though Cohen also discussed the concepts of homosexuality proposed by Anne Rice under the pop cultural phenomenon that homosexuality and vampirism have been conjoined, because in this postmodern world, gender construct is also scrutinized in every ground of society which is considered a villainous phenomenon.

Similarly, Jaques Derrida stated the same idea related to the phenomenon of monsters which categorizes the nature of monsters as a proposed "supplement" that brings a revolt in the world of discrimination which could be compared to the idea of

deconstruction that how some challenging figures rejects the constituted principles based on binary opposition that unbalance the system. This proposed idea of "supplement" and "deconstruction" strengthen Anne Rice's and Yury's concept of "opposing constructive principles" mentioned above and how in this postmodern world monster has shifted his role from a villain to a hero. However, Cohen analyzed many critics who have criticized the nature of monsters but did not compare the relevant ideas that draw a proper network whether they analyze monsters in their way, but the end almost meets at the same point that monsters challenge the society and system.

Likewise, other critics Barbara Johnson, an American literary critic who has worked on the structuralist and poststructuralist ideas including deconstruction, Lacanian psychoanalysis, and feminism, come up with a relevant idea to other critics while analyzing Derrida's concept of the supplement under deconstruction which she stated as "a revolution in the very logic of meaning" (Johnson 6). However, this idea of revolution can be dissected by keeping it under the canon of the monster theory that the challenging aspects of a monster under the monster culture can be idealized as it is a revolt against the corrupt system which produces its monster, who brings crisis to their world of deception.

Susan Stewart, Professor of English at Temple University, her concepts about monsters are also relatable to the monster theory about which Cohen emphasized that monster theory should always make its connection with "strings of cultural moments, which always threatens to shift; invigorated by change and escape, by the impossibility" (Cohen 6) of what Susan Stewart calls "the desired 'falls or death, the stopping' of its gigantic subjects" (6). On the other hand, she differentiates when she discusses the physical appearance of monsters that how they are made up of fragments (footprints,

bones, talismans, teeth, shadows, obscured glimpses), while Cohen does not pay much attention to the physical appearances that how a monster looks like or should look alike.

3.2 Monster as an Embodiment of Social and Cultural Fragments

The most relevant critical conception to that of Cohen's ideas about monsters is supported by a famous critic, Rene Girard, who highlights the major objective of this proposed thesis that how monsters are created, brings significant aspects to the limelight about the composition of the monsters how "monsters are never created by *ex nihilo* (creation out of nothing), but through a process of fragmentation and recombination in which elements are extracted "from various forms" (including – indeed, especially – marginalized social groups) and then assembled as the monster" (Cohen 11), "which can then claim an independent identity" (26). The reason that monsters are created through the recombination of different fragments of politics and culture is that they are surrounded by circumstances that force them to behave in a manner that breaks the so-called set norms and values of society. Here this representation of the monster by Rene Girard as a recombination of different fragments refers to that monster is a pure product of the political and cultural system, that threatens to deconstruct the constructed principles in the world of its creators. Girard has foregrounded the real depiction of violence that how debasing and alienating individuals from their unbalanced system that connects their identity as monsters to describe as a phenomenon of "scapegoat" (a person who is blamed for wrongdoings, mistakes, or faults of others, especially for the reason of expediency).

Thoroughly, after keen research on the evolution of monster theory results in this way that monsters (who represent the evil and evil inculcated in their soul by a corrupt

system) are existing from the very start because the system of the world is running and accustomed to that pattern of binary opposition where everything is kept and understood by the opposite of it. Similarly, monsters are meant to be considered evil characters who bring the crisis to the so-called well-running system, but this constructed definition throughout the evolution of monsters is challenged by the postmodern representation of monsters in pop cultural American comic book film series. This proposed thesis will provide the shreds of evidence through the evaluation of the metamorphosis of the character of Joker from *Joker* by Todd Phillips in the context of Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* and John Morreall's *Comic Relief*, which is not addressed in any previous research that why and how monsters are born or created?

3.3 Evolutionary Past of Laughter

In one of the articles "The Evolutionary Origins of Laughter are rooted more in survival than enjoyment" (Jordan), Jordan Raine defined the origin of laughter that where the origin of laughter can be traced back in history which is probably 10 to 16m years ago. No one has yet to generalize the types of laughter because laughter in different situations represents different conditions and states of mind. In the article "The evolutionary Origins of Laughter are rooted more in survival than enjoyment" (Jordan), Jordan Raine in which he analyzed the origins of laughter in which he defines that "laughter not only transcends human culture boundaries but species boundaries, too: it is present in a similar form in other great apes" (Jordan) Whereas this research on laughter by Jordan tries to prove that laughter is not only the phenomenon of a human being rather it exists in some other species like apes which could be further analyzed that how and which situation of laughter expresses which feeling.

3.4 Philosophical Elucidation of The Superiority Theory: Laughter as Anti-Social

John Morreall analyzed three categories of laughter in his well-known book of theory, *Comic Relief* that how different kind of laughter falls into which category proposed by different ancient philosophers Plato, an ancient Greek critic of laughter played the role of a pioneer who categorized laughter as a part of superiority theory. Morreall has drawn a proper network of critics of laughter and which place they assign to laughter in society, firstly he talked about the ideas of Plato about laughter with reference from his *Republic*, he tried to emphasize the idea that a sensible person should avoid laughter because it takes him to the state of loss of self-control, as he said that "for ordinarily when one abandons himself to violent laughter, his condition provokes a violent reaction" (Plato 6). This statement refers to the concept that loud laughter results in insensible reactions which can break the well-maintained reputation of any sensible being and assigns the state of insanity to that person. Furthermore, Morreall criticized the ideas about laughter proposed by Plato, Scruton, and Thomas Hobbes, as he said:

> We should be careful not to attribute too much agreement to them. Like the "Incongruity Theory' and "Relief Theory" which we will consider shortly, superiority theory (sudden glory) is a term of art meant to capture one feature shared by an account of laughter that differs in other respects (Morreall 6).

However, Morreall deeply examined the point that laughter cannot be generalized as a theory of superiority rather it also falls into other categories which define different states of mind and actions.

While evaluating Plato's point of view about laughter, Morreall had his eye on other Greek philosophers as well like Protagoras, who is known as a sophist called by Plato, also warned in his moral code as he said that "Be not possessed by irrepressible mirth" (qtd.in Morreall 4), he also signals towards the bad impacts of loud laughter for the psychological state of being that can destroy soul due to highest state of happiness. Though these three theories of laughter evaluated by Morreall in *Comic Relief,* "Superiority Theory", "Incongruity Theory", and "Relief Theory" will knit a proper network with the connection of *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen to dissect the metamorphosis of the character of Joker from *Joker* by Todd Phillips in the postmodern American culture. However, the idea proposed by Francis Hutcheson denies the essence of "superiority Theory" that it is not always right that when compared with others then it causes laughter but sometimes it brings the condition of danger upon us.

3.5 Biblical Interpretation of Laughter

When we delve deeper into the evaluation of laughter as an anti-social phenomenon then it provides a larger ground to find Biblical elucidation of laughter that how laughter is considered a prohibited act in Biblical references. Morreall elaborated on some biblical extracts to examine the value of laughter through the lens of Christianity that how Puritans deny the loud laughter with the shreds of evidence from the Bible. Bible states laughter as an 'act of deception as it says that "A man who deceives another, and then says, 'it was only a joke,' is like a madman shooting at random his deadly darts and arrows" (Morreall 04). In the past the biblical interpretation of laughter was this much negative that the reward of laughter due to making fun of someone could result in

the death penalty, to make this elucidation of laughter strong Morreall has given the story of the prophet Elijah, whose fun makers were punished at the end. Not only that but in the oldest monastery, laughter was forbidden in the verdicts of the monastery in the Western monastic codes. To make this moral code stronger and more applicable, the monastery assigned different penalties because they considered laughter as the destruction of the inner soul.

3.6 The Incongruity Theory: Humor as Irrational

Moreover, under the umbrella of *Comic Relief* John Morreall brings the ideas of "Incongruity Theory" and "Relief Theory" which prove the superiority theory faulty in that saying, "feeling superior to someone causes laughter" (10), but it does not address all conditions of laughter which may cause due some other reasons. The dictionary defines the word incongruity in such a manner that incongruous things are "characterized by a lack of harmony, consistency, or compatibility with one another" (Morreall 10). The first philosopher to analyze the idea of incongruity in humor is James Beattie, who examined this idea of incongruity under the umbrella of humor that how and which aspects of life bring the loud laughter, as he says that laughter, "seems to arise from the view of things incongruous united in the same assemblage" (Beattie 38). Though this idea of incongruity refers to something unexpected that may bring the condition of shock to the viewer or listener. Under the canon of Incongruity Theory, Morreall talked about the ideas of laughter driven by the defenders of comedy, Ben Johnson, and Sir Phillip Sidney, who criticized the ideas given by Plato and his followers, who support the idea that comedy is not suitable for a sensible person and brings the superiority and inferiority complexes in society.

Similarly, Kant highlighted the benefits of laughter under the "incongruity theory" that laughter is a good "massage for the inner organs" which maybe is not acceptable for other philosophers who denies the idea of incongruity to bring laughter. But at the same time, Kant refers to the other side of laughter that along with the idea of laughter as a good massage for inner organs, also affects the psychological state as it just causes pleasure but gratification for the soul because it doesn't fulfill the expectations. Later in the 20th century, this idea of incongruity that unexpected situations bring laughter also proved faulty because further evolution in incongruity theory claimed that other negative emotions like fear, disgust, and anger are also reactions to something unexpected that may violate mental expectations. Likewise, these emotional features of fear, anger, and disgust driven out under the incongruity theory by Morreall refers to Cohen's ideas given under the "monster theory" that how these emotions become the force for monsters to get escape from their prevailing condition. Though this is the punch line of this theoretical framework that hints towards its knitting of how it draws a connection between monster theory and the theory of laughter.

3.7 The Relief Theory: Humor as a Pressure Valve

This idea of "Relief Theory" is also brought to the limelight along with "Incongruity Theory" by John Morreall to dissect and compete with the "Superiority Theory" which pays attention to the physical phenomenon of laughter. Specifically, relief theory focuses on the relationship between the nervous system and laughter and how it makes a physical connection with the process of the nervous system. Morreall also defines the approach of medical science toward laughter as how "nerves connect the brain, sense organs, and muscles" (16). This idea proposed by medical science defines the

link of different organs which relate to the brain, and it also elucidates the nerves which consist of blood and air, called "animal spirits" rather than electro-impulses. Moreover, these evaluated ideas of relief theory by Morreall define the first version of the theory that represented the nervous system as "a network of tubes inside which 'animal spirits' sometimes built pressure" (16). Though this pressure becomes the reason to release these emotions in the form of laughter and that laughter will also be considered a "monster laughter" in the case of this thesis because traits of "fear, desire, disgust, and escape" that force to behave like a monster and the same emotions in the case of laughter helps to result in the form of monster laughter.

Furthermore, Herbert Spencer and Sigmund Freud, critics of this theory reviewed it to add their points of view regarding relief theory. To analyze the ideas of these critics, Morreall talked about an essay "Physiology of Laughter" by Herbert Spencer, which signals the evolving perspectives of this theory that when different emotions like fear, desire, and disgust start hitting the head then we try to get prepared to run away from that situation. But when these emotions reach a certain stage of torture then we attack to release the energy of nerves as this theory of relief refers to physiology that how this theory helps to release nerves, and under the canon of this theory, laughter is also examined through the biology of nerves which is also considered as a process of releasing the frustrating number of emotions. Similarly, Spencer proposes the idea that "energy that is relieved by laughter, is the energy of emotions that is inappropriate" (Morreall 17).

Furthermore, to evaluate this theory of relief, Morreall talked about the mental side of this process that how Spencer linked this process to the 'incongruity theory' which defines it also in an incongruous way that when something unaware happens that

results in laughter, which is called as "descending incongruity". Here it is visible that 'incongruity theory' and 'relief theory' make a connection when it comes to talking about the mental side process of laughter then both phenomena depend on the result of something unaware that suddenly happens.

On the other hand, Sigmund Freud defines the strategy of releasing energy through the process of laughter with the help of three stages including joking, comic, and humor. Under the discussion of *Comic Relief*, Morreall pointed out the enthralling ideas of Freud that how he defines the process of laughter through these three stages mentioned above. Freud emphasized the concept that laughter and humor link not only to aggression but also to lust which Morreall defines as "energy released in laughter is the energy normally used to repress hostile and sexual feelings" (Morreall 21). Though, Morreall states that the idea of relief theory does not complement previous theories, superiority theory, and incongruity theory which define laughter because of superiority and incongruity rather it is just a result of discharging unnecessary nervous energy through laughter. But when we dissect the second idea proposed by Herbert Spencer regarding the mental side of laughter rather than the physical process which refers to the same process of laughter as it is mentioned through incongruity theory. So, it would be wrong to say that there is no link between the relief theory and the incongruity theory which is a major drawback of Morreall's dissection of the philosophical evolution of laughter theory. To fill up this loophole in this theory this thesis plays a significant role which analyzing the character of Joker from the American film *Joker* by Todd Phillips and trying to overcome a few drawbacks of these selected theories as well.

3.8 Connection between Monster Theory and A Theory of Laughter

However, the major purpose of this thesis is to analyze the character Joker in Todd Phillips' *Joker* and how this character evolves with the evolution of time in this postmodern American culture, presented as a monster, who brings crisis as a disturbing hybrid for the so-called organized society and system. This research highlights the challenges that are presented on the screen through the character of Joker in this film by Todd Phillips. Not only that but this dissection of the character of Joker also draws a link between selected theories, *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and *Comic Relief* by John Morreall.

As this research will delve deeper into the dissection of 'Monster Theory' and 'A new theory of Laughter' through the character analysis of *Joker*, who is represented as a psychopath and monster character in the eyes of the system through a series of films in which he develops his character side by side the development of Postmodern American culture with a profound analysis under the canon of Cohen's *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* in which he discussed the evolution of monster body in seven theses firstly "The Monster's Body is a Cultural Body" (Cohen 4), (in which a monster body incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy) which finds its traces in Morreall's theory of laughter, where it releases its energy of fear and anxiety through the laughter of relief theory as it is more prevalent in the character of Joker in American film *Joker* by Todd Phillips.

This very first thesis "The Monster's Body is a Cultural Body" (4), proposed by Cohen refers to the idea that how the culture of any particular area or era can be traced through the monsters they engender because a monster body facilitates the researcher to know about their culture that is inculcated in their monsters as they are the best medium to define the culture and system that is the reason of their birth. Moreover, Cohen gave

another concept about monsters that are strengthened by Derrida's idea of the *difference* that monsters always come at a certain time and then vanish from the situation. Almost every defined thesis of Cohen is also a window to investigate Morreall's theory of laughter defined through three theories of *Comic Relief*, as a few characteristics like fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy, that define the emotional or psychological state of monsters also finds its place in the theory of laughter which makes a strong link together through the character of Joker from Todd Phillips' film *Joker*.

In the second thesis, "The Monster Always Escapes" (5), Cohen assigns another place to the monster to develop and evolve its nature (in which he escapes and vanishes after problematizing the current crisis and then reappears in more worst situations in other places like Gotham City) with the development of postmodern American Culture and crisis as well. Whereas at this stage the development of Joker as a monster makes a strong link between laughter theory and the monster theory being in a laughter condition which gives several hidden meanings related to the new laughter theory that how fear, inferiority complex, desire, and fantasy create a monster who becomes a great reason to produce a peal of monster laughter in the context of Morreall's dissected three theories of *Comic Relief*. Specifically in this thesis, Cohen tries to tell the readers that the monster is a creature who truly depicts his culture, as he says, "Come from the dead, /come back to tell you all" (5). Here, Cohen tries to emphasize the concept that the monster returns to being educated in an undead way and reveals certain truths.

Thirdly, "the Monster is a Harbinger of category crisis" (Cohen 6), in this section Cohen dealt with the nature of monster's mental condition that how they behave in different situations as "disturbing hybrids" (6), who problematize the clash of extremes

that questions the binary thinking and arises the crisis, where they respond sometimes with the laughter of relief or incongruity which could be considered the monster laughter. How the monster always reappears in his habitations and margins with his monster laughter to challenge the "orderly things" of the culture which created him. As Barbara Johnson has called it "a revolution in the very logic of meaning" (7). This idea by Barbara Johnson triggers the point that if such circumstances and situations are produced then a monster is meant to be born at every cost.

In the fourth thesis while discussing the monster's nature Cohen stated that "The Monster Dwells at the Gates of Difference" (7), and this idea is very much applicable to the character of Joker that how he is represented as a monster who is a dialectical other, third term supplement or incorporation of the outside. Even again in this thesis, Cohen stated the same idea why monsters are considered monsters because the "difference that exists outside the system is terrifying because it reveals the truth of the system" which is monstrous for the corrupt system. So, this concept will apply to the character of *Joker* that how it evolves and now prevails in Postmodern American Culture. Cohen's abstraction of the monster is a double narrative that how the monster came into being, what he is looking for, and what cultural use the monster serves. This section of Cohen's thesis focuses on the idea that any being who is considered an outsider based on binary opposition is also encouraged to produce a monster which promotes the inferiority and superiority complexes that are also elaborated in Morreall's *Comic relief* under superiority theory which draws its link with monster theory.

In the last three theses, Cohen defines his ideas of a monster as how "a monster polices the borders of the possible" which presents a monster as a double narrative, he

also states that "fear of a monster is a kind of desire" (8), similarly, Morreall gives his idea in relief theory about fear which is a state of mind and to get escape from such situations a person laughs and sometimes this laughter takes a shape of monster laughter, which is also considered as a release of energy. In his last thesis, Cohen describes that the "monster stands at the threshold of becoming" (9), which is how human beings create monsters by themselves. As Cohen stated, "This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine" (Cohen 20). Through this concept of monsters who are our products, ask this question that why they are created and how the margins drawn by society give birth to them.

To tie together Jeffrey Jerome *Cohen's Monster Theory: Reading Culture* and John Morreall's *Comic Relief* the character of *Joker* provides a huge ground to play with similar concepts like fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy which becomes the reason for laughter and monstrosity as well, and this is the major connection between two theories that also facilitates to elucidate the metamorphosis of the character of Joker from Todd Phillips' film *Joker*.

In the compilation of this theoretical framework, almost major theorists are discussed who provide the historical, philosophical, and biblical evolution of these theories and then the implication of these theories in this postmodern American Culture through the evaluation of the character of Joker from American comic book series. This theoretical framework is a smooth way to find the answer to the proposed questions in this thesis how and why monsters are created, how they evolve with time and places, why they are treated as "disturbing hybrids, and then how this selected character Joker tie a knot between two theories like *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, and *Comic Relief* by John Morreall which results in "Monster Laughter".

This whole thesis is intended to bring out the hidden political, cultural, and societal postmodern aspects to the limelight with the help of Monter theory and laughter theory applied to the character of Joker in the film *Joker* 2019. As the film *Joker* is a story of failed, refused, and abducted comedian, Arthur Fleck turned Joker and later into a monster as a result of certain difficult circumstances created for him throughout the film. Fleck, earlier presented as a professional Joker, is turned into a disguised Monster Joker because of the corruption of Gotham City. He challenged the Postmodern American Political, economic, and cultural system as a monster, and became a hero for the suffering lot of Gotham City as a face of revolution.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis and Discussions

"…is it just me, or is it getting crazier out there?" (Phillips, Silver 1)

This thesis is an attempt to fill the gap prevailing in the existing literature on the character of Joker from Todd Phillips' film *Joker* through the knitting of selected theories like *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and *Comic Relief* by John Morreall. However, this chapter explores all aspects related to the character of Joker that deals with the metamorphosis of this character over time. This transformation of Joker examines the nature of this character through the lenses of Cohen and Morreall while keeping this character Joker under the canon of Cohen's seven theses and Moreall's theories of laughter in chronological order to find the reasons behind the transformation of Joker as a monster, Joker who draws a bridge between these two theories, and as a disturbing hybrid who challenges the postmodern American culture.

The major emphasis of this thesis is drawn towards the causes behind the metamorphosis of the character Joker because most of the existing literature claim the psychological disorders of Joker in a literal way that just highlights and relates the issues of Joker's life to psychological diseases rather than finding the liberal meanings of his mental disorders which finds its traces in the contextual layers. However, the hypotheses of this research claim that the conclusion of this research proves the social system is an actual monster who brings violence and disaster in the life of Arthur Fleck/ Joker, who is claimed as a monster in the eyes of the so-called well-organized system. Thus, this detailed debate over the character of Joker in the shadow of Cohen's *Monster Theory:*

Reading Culture and Morreall's *Comic Relief* provides shreds of evidence that Joker is a monster in the eyes of the system and is a pure product of the corrupt system.

Furthermore, this analysis of the character Joker does not only claim that the reason behind the monstrosity of Joker is the system itself, but Joker also brings the system to that verge where they cannot protect themselves by any means of precautions because Joker proves as a disturbing hybrid for their ongoing affairs of state. Eventually, the 'laughter of Joker' adds fuel to the fire throughout the film *Joker* that finds its traces back in the philosophies of Plato, Scruton, Thomas Hobbes, Aristotle, James Beattie, Herbert Spencer, and Sigmund Freud. Joker in the film *Joker* himself is the evolution of this character because for the first time, he is presented as a protagonist throughout the history of this character on the screens of the cinema.

4.1 Overview of the film *Joker*

Joker a blockbuster film from the comic book series is a revolt in the American Film industry and the realm of postmodern American culture as well, which proves it as a shock for the society of America due to the evolution from the historical depiction of Joker as an archenemy of Batsman to the Joker a hero for the proletariat class of the society. Joker is the protagonist of the film *Joker* by Todd Phillips. However, he is not only the protagonist (main character) but portrayed as a hero of the film for the first time in the history of the Joker series. Joker, who is presented as the gangster in almost all previous series in which he played the role of an archenemy of Batman, evolves in this *Joker* and is depicted as the main character where the whole film revolves around his character. However, this Gotham City presented in this film is a fictional city that is

symbolized by New York as a destroyed and decayed city of America which we can say is a satire on the ruling corrupt class of society.

When we delve deeper into the environmental interpretation of the film Joker then we can observe that the film starts in a makeup room where Arthur is wearing his make-up to be presented as a Joker and behind this scene, a radio channel is on-air which is talking about the bad situations and garbage strikes going on in the Gotham City which is already under the influence of crisis. The environment of the film *Joker* is quite dark and doomy which signals that something drastically disastrous is going to happen somewhere.

4.1.1 Thematic Interpretation of Joker

Todd Phillips, the director, and co-writer of the film *Joker* conceived the character of Joker in 2016 and started writing the script with the collaboration of Scott Silver. They were inspired by the characters and films of Martin, Taxi Driver, and The King of Comedy. *Joker* in its thematical meaning is considered a psychological thriller film directed and produced by Todd Phillips, who co-wrote the screenplay with Scott Silver throughout the year 2017. This film is based on the DC comic characters that cast Joaquin Phoenix for the role of Joker and provide a ground to interpret the story into several layers. Eventually, this film is set in 1981, portraying the character of Joker a ditched clown and desiring stand-up comedian, whose transformation into a broken, deceived, and ditched being shows the path of violence to the counter-cultural revolution against the elites of falling Gotham City. When we try to know the message of the writer and director of this film *Joker* then he is trying to say that the script may portray the modern society of America, but the film is not about politics. Maybe Phillips gave this statement to avoid the backlash of some sensitive institutions because once in his interviews he said

that "the entire film is open to interpretations." (Wikipedia). According to this statement, it will not be wrong to say that the writer himself wants the viewers or researchers to find the layers of hidden meaning out of its depth.

The literal meaning of this film *Joker* is to present Joker as a patient with a mental disorder that leads him towards insanity, which is very difficult to diagnose, and people make it more difficult for the patients to respond in such a way that is not possible for them. These are the elements that add the taste of reality to this film that makes it more original because we can see throughout the film that Phillips wanted to make it as authentic as possible. Joker, Arthur Fleck a mentally ill man, living as a clown and desiring to be a stand-up comedian, living in Gotham City in 1981. Joker, who was supposed to bring laughter and make people happy is tortured and disregarded by people around him. It is not enough to describe his suffering because he must take care of his single deluded mother Penny Fleck, who adds up his miseries, because of abuse and ignorance toward Fleck that shapes his delusional personality.

4.1.2 Physiology of Joker

However, interpretation of any character is incomplete until the body language of the character is addressed which describes the number of personality traits. Similarly, in the case of Joker from *Joker* by Todd Phillips signals different actions due to the different sorts of his body movements which, provides a way to analyze his character uniquely and how he is trying to convey certain messages through his body language. Joker's ridiculous movements are inspired by an English famous comic actor, filmmaker, and composer, Charlie Chaplin, and his dance moves are inspired by Ray Bolger. Physically Fleck is supposed to be presented as an ill character who is not healthy due to which

Phoenix lost his 24 kgs to look wolf-like, malnourished, and hungry, which represents him as a pure character of a decayed city.

Another very important part of Joker's physical attributes is his ambiguous laughter which forces us to analyze his laughter in this chapter through the selected theory of *Comic Relief* by John Morreall which helps to find the contextual meanings and significance of his laughter. Though the inspiration for his laughter is people suffering from pathological laughter which could be considered as the Pseudobulbar effect that defines the uncontrollable condition of laughter. To draw a dark and doomy environment character of Joker Phillips read a few books on political assassinations to bring the proper touch of reality to his character of Joker.

4.2 Arthur Fleck as Joker

"I just don't want to feel so bad anymore" (Phillips, Silver 4). Critically analyzing this statement Fleck defines the intensity of his sufferings as a Joker while living in a decayed and destroyed city of postmodern America. Particularly, this statement by Fleck refers that his being fed up with his filthy life, which is getting worse day by day, though it is not wrong to say that Fleck is a consistent sufferer of the so-called culture and system. Arthur Fleck is living a life of a rejected and neglected son rather than taking care of his single mother Penny, who is also a patient with ambiguous disorders like narcissistic personality disorder and delusional psychosis. Fleck, both as a son and as a clown, is a super sufferer as his mother and her ex-boyfriend used to abuse him to this extent which led him to psychological disorders. Penny, the mother of Fleck whom he calls with his nickname "happy" the name itself is the irony for Joker that oppositely defines his life. Firstly. Fleck turns into a Joker to make people happy that is his

profession to earn something for his and his mother's living. In the context of the postmodern world where people are searching and finding the purpose of their existence, he is also the victim of the same world, who struggles to come out of his existential crisis, but his surroundings are narrowing his way to finding himself.

The reason behind his loss of identity is the society that did not let him know who he is throughout his life, as the very start of the film while a dialogue with the social worker defines his state of mind when she asks him, "Do you feel mentally ill?" (Phillips, Silver 4), and Arthur replies that, "They've been saying that since I was little. So, who knows" (4). This reply by Fleck defines that from the very start of his life, he doesn't know anything solid about himself. Whatever he is the people around him form and shape his personality and make him believe that he is a patient with a mental disorder by birth. Therefore, Fleck as a Joker and then transformed into a monster is a pure product of system and culture. It is not wrong to say that system and culture play the role of monsters for the character of Arthur Fleck, who became the clown of violence because of the injected negativity in his mind and actions as it is defined through the shreds of evidence from *Cohen's Monster Theory: Reading Culture* and Morreall's *Comic Relief*.

Throughout the film, it is visible that the attitude of every single being around Joker is harsh and humiliating towards him. However, the starting page of the script of this film claims that this film *Joker* has no connection with any of the DC films that comes before it. From the very starting scene of this film, Fleck is getting ready to be presented as a clown to entertain something, where he is painting his face with different colors including the blue color around his eyes which starts washing down because of the tears coming out of his eyes. It was quite an unusual start where the character of Joker is

trying to smile and cry at the same time, which also defines the troubled personality of Arthur Fleck.

Later, in the next scene, Joker is showing some of his body moves while holding a board on which something like "Everything must go" (4) is written and he is twisting that board with different body moves that is indicating something more than what is visible. This slogan seems to indicate the prevailing crime rate of Gotham City due to which every individual is suffering, and Joker represents all those people who are the victims of this corruption. Almost every single action of Joker that seems unusual is blamed because of his accused mental disorder, though his actions reflect other underlying meanings that mirror the true face of real criminals.

As compared to previous DC comic Jokers, Arthur Fleck as a Joker performs the duty of a change maker, who influences other DC comic Jokers to take advantage of a painted face that cloaks their original identity as a common man (Proletariat class) behind the veil of a clown mask. This painted face of Joker proves a revolution in the cinematic world of postmodern America. One of the articles "Joker's New Mission Shows How Arthur Fleck has Changed his Character" by Justin Epps also emphasizes the idea that signifies the character of Fleck as Joker who is a trendsetter for the coming Jokers on screen can be presented as the main character of film who can bring revolution to reveal the real face of their society, system, and culture. As Eppes says that "Arthur Fleck's character may be influencing the DC universe's Joker to be an unexpected symbol of change" (3).

Here, Joker is a new symbol of evolution in the postmodern American culture, who can appear at any time or place this idea is addressed by Cohen in his *Monster*

Theory: Reading Culture, where he emphasizes the concept that a monster brings the crisis in already troubled circumstances. Similarly, the representation of Joker as a monster also proves as a monster for the society, system, and culture of America, which problematizes the prevailing critical condition but the system itself is responsible for the monstrosity of Joker because he is produced by it. As we can see in the whole film *Joker* how people around Joker treat him as a cannibal, who is considered as an animal-like inferior creature to be abused very easily. Very solid evidence is available at the very start of the film when he is holding a signboard in his hand and a group of street boys starts teasing him by snatching his signboard out of his hand Joker starts running to get that board back, but those boys beat him very badly instead of returning that board. As Phillips portrayed the attitude of society towards the Joker who represents millions of other individuals who suffer like him, as Joker, again and again, gets kicked, Phillips shows in a scene that "One of the boys kicks him right in the ass—" (Phillips, Silver 5). This behavior of society remains the same throughout the film towards Fleck/ Joker forcing him to transform into a monster for the so-called organized system, society, and culture.

4.3 Evolution of Arthur Fleck/ Joker into a Monster

In chronological order, all previous series of Joker represent Joker, a villainous and evil character from the very start of the film. In the famous Joker series, The Dark Knight (2008) in which Batman is working as a good force against the evilness of Joker, who is represented as the symbol of crime, violence, and destruction throughout the film in a high crime rate city, Gotham City. In these previous series, Joker is represented as a symbol of evilness in a literal meaning with different contextual meaning, whom they

wanted to eliminate from the earth of the postmodern American world to save humanity. If we talk about the similarities between previous Joker characters then we can see that both characters are against the ruling system in Gotham City, a city of crimes. Therefore, the purpose of the character Joker in all previous series was also to unveil the corruption of the system, in The Dark Knight (2008) while conversation Joker an archenemy of Batman says that "In… you see in their last moments, people show you who they are" (Joker 2008). This statement by Joker proves that till the end of the film, the real purpose of life was to show the real faces of corrupt organizations, society, and culture.

When we talk about the relationship between the hero and the villain then it shows that their relationship is reciprocal because both are monsters for each other. This same idea is applicable in the case of all previous Joker series where the Joker is a monster for Batman and Batman is a monster for the Joker. Similarly, the character of Joker from *Joker* is also represented as a monster for the society, system, and culture, because he challenges the corrupt system and reveals their true faces but the major difference is that Joker from *Joker* is the protagonist of the film, who is tried to be proved as a hero as well at the end of the film and this film has no link with any previous Joker series claimed by the director and co-writer Todd Phillips, who claims that the whole film revolves around the character of Joker. This chapter is a deliberate attempt to display the transformation of the character of Joker with time and place he turns into a monster and circumstances and situations force him to behave like a violent prince of crime.

This transformation almost starts in the very intense scene of the film, when he was traveling on the train with his luggage after being fired by the company, where he was doing a part time job as a Joker to make people laugh. It was the major turning point

of life when he acted against three drunken guys, who were constantly teasing him when they flecked and just shot them all out of anger. It was the peak moment of his life when he realized that he must do something to survive in this city of crime. When he just starts acting against those who were torturing him right after that system and society starts trying to prove that he is the monster. It is the peak moment of the film when Joker for the first-time acts against the actual monsters living and ruling in the city of crimes.

This moment of Arthur Fleck's transformation into a "Monster" while in the disguise of Joker proves two things, he is unintentionally a "hero" (symbol of change for the underprivileged) and a "Monster" for the ruling system, society, and culture. Joker in *Joker* film is considered a monster and a hero at the same time by two different groups of people. We can also claim that in the DC comic history of Joker's series this character of Joker from *Joker* is proven as the greatest challenge for the system who is and will be perceived as a challenging monster in a contextual interpretation of the character under the canon of American DC comics literature.

From the very start of the film, the character of Arthur Fleck from *Joker* is portrayed as a simple man living in an apartment with his mentally deluded mother, Penny Fleck who raised his son whom she calls "Happy", an ironic name because his name and the definition of his life are two opposite things. As he claims in a meeting with a social worker, a black woman with short hair who listens to his mental health issues that what he faces and feels daily. While explaining to that black woman, Fleck writes in his journal that "Social Worker: (reading out loud) I just hope my death makes more cents than my life" (Phillips, Silver 3). Here, this statement indicates a pessimistic approach to Joker, and the reason behind this mentality is the attitude of society toward

him. Though this idea that the society and system are responsible for the insanity of Fleck is discussed below under the heading of Joker as a monster in the context of *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* by Cohen which keenly observes those elements that lead him to the verge of monstrosity.

Moreover, there is a chronological order of events that takes place and became the cause of Joker's transformation into a monster, because, for the first the character of Joker does not appear on the screen with violence rather at the start of the film, he is shown as a submissive creature, who is just living a very critical life due to the critical situation of the Gotham City. Joker in this film *Joker* is portrayed as a character for whose transformation certain incidents and people are responsible. The first one is his mother who treated him in an abusive way and raised him as a patient with a mental disorder and as a very weak creature, who cannot understand the world and find the purpose of his existence. He lives his life purposelessly rather than suffering throughout his life and those sufferings become the reasons to transform him into a monster. As he says to the social worker, what he wants out of his life that "Arthur: I don't want to feel so bad anymore" (Phillips, Silver 4). These words of Joker truly describe that he is living the worst days of his life and he wants to get rid of these pains. This portrait of his personality defines the prevailing issues in his life that how he is living a life full of miseries, that pushes him towards the verge of monstrosity, and this idea of monstrosity and laughter is taken from Cohen's and Morreall's theory, that help to find the reasons of his monstrosity.

4.4 Metamorphosis of the Character Joker in the Context of Cohen's *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*

This is the main analytical part of this chapter that dissects the character of Joker/Arthur Fleck from the perspective of *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, who describes every stage and state of mind of monsters and how they evolve with time and place. The same is the case here while dealing with the character of Joker how the society, system, and culture treat him as a monster, but no one tries to find the reasons why he behaves like a monster except for this reason that he is a patient of mental disorder. Particularly, this section of this chapter examines the character of Joker from those seven perspectives that are proposed by Cohen in his *Monster Theory: Reading Culture.*

This way of analysis of the character of Joker studies this character that how a monster is a cultural body, that represents the culture that his culture injects into him, secondly, when somebody is rewarded with the tag of a monster then it is a quality of a monster that he always tries to get escape, but the question is that why he wants to get rid of his life, society, system or culture? As mentioned above while talking to the social worker, he says that "Arthur: I just don't want to feel so bad anymore" (Phillips, Silver 4). We can consider this statement as a reason to escape because society, system, and culture have injected such things into his life that he does not want anymore, and the most common reason is the attitude of the people around him. He is so subjugated by his surroundings that he cannot express his feelings that what he wants from life.

As we can notice one of his little desires while watching this film *Joker* is that he wants to become a stand-up comedian, when Fleck was watching the local TV show of a comedy show host Murray Franklin. Joker starts assuming himself as a part of the show as a participator, when he assumes that Franklin, his favorite show host is calling him out

of the audience, as he says, "Murray Franklin: You there, will you stand up? What's your name?" (Phillips, Silver 11), Joker stands up and replies that "Arthur: Hi Murray. Arthur. My name is Arthur" (11). Here, we can understand that he considers Franklin a father-like figure for himself and assumes him to be applauded by Marray, as he replies to his question very confidently as it's not his first encounter with Murray. His desire to be recognized among people is shown in this scene when he enthusiastically replies to Murray and stresses his name "Arthur" as in his hallucination, he is expressing his repressed desires. But apart from his hallucination, Fleck is just bearing the sufferings of his life that are showered upon him by society, system, and culture. And this concept is proven through proposed theses of Cohen about monsters that these institutions of society are responsible for the transformation of the Joker into a monster.

Therefore, Cohen provides a sharp lens to dissect the metamorphosis of the character Joker into a monster whose life events and incidents lead him to the verge of monstrosity. There are five more ways to analyze the character of Joker that gives clues to finding the reasons and causes behind the transformation of Joker that how and why he challenges the prevailing system. Further, sections of this chapter are examining the character of Joker in the proposed conceptual framework that answers the questions raised above in the very first chapter of this thesis.

4.4.1 Joker as a Cultural Body

The character of Joker from *Joker* is presented as a flat character, who is living a life full of suffering, working in a firm as a part-time clown to make people laugh. As the major objective of this research is to find how the character of Joker from *Joker* is transformed into a monster for the system and to find the clues to prove that Joker is a

product of the system, society, and culture, but this portion of the dissection deals with the agenda that Joker inculcates a cultural body that transforms him into a monster.

From the very beginning of this film *Joker*, the scenery of the atmosphere and environment is dark and dull, which shows that this film is a sort of evolution. This is true that Joker represents the personality traits of a flat character, who is taking care of his mother, as he says to Murray Franklin, the Tv show host "Arthur: I live right here in the city. With my mother" (Phillips, Silver 12). This is visible in this scene where Arthur is a simple and innocent character who is trying to adjust himself somewhere in the city of crimes without creating any sort of mess.

When we talk about the idea proposed by Cohen that the "Monster is a Cultural Body" (4). So, it is the same case with the character of Joker who is considered a monster by the system and is also injected into the culture bringing a drastic change in his personality. As several incidents took place in the film *Joker*, when he wants to express his feelings like happiness, fear, anger, sadness, and escape, society and culture do not let him vomit out his repressed feelings. As we can see in the very starting scene of the film, *Joker* when wants to show his anger and take revenge on those people who treat him as an inferior and derogatory creature of society. We can see the culture of postmodern America, as they can provide the due rights of a common man when he was just running behind that group of boys who snatched his signboard, and instead of returning that back to him, they just beat him badly. At this moment, no one came to help Arthur to get out of suffering because of a few stupid boys who were torturing him. Even at that moment, when they badly treated him and no one came to help Joker, he is just trying to show his patience and does not respond other than that he is trying to save that sign board. As

Cohen explains a cultural body like, "a monster body incorporates the fear" (4), this fear represented in the body of a monster is because of his repressed feelings that are prevailing in the character of Joker as well. As Joker does not take any revenge on those people, who bring suffering and trouble in his life, same as this incident when he is beaten by a group of boys, and he does not beat them back. Instead of beating them back, Arthur replies to one of his colleagues, Randall who asks him about those rascals, "Randall: I heard about the beat down you took. Fucking Savages" (Phillips, Silver 13), but Arthur replies that "Arthur: It was just a bunch of kids. I should have left it alone" (14). Here is this conversation between Joker and Randall, his colleague speaks loudly about the sympathetic nature of the Joker and that such small things do not bother him. But it is proven wrong when he starts acting against those who make him feel bad. We can compare this trait of the character of Joker with the previous DC comics film The Dark Knight, where people started believing that their good is of no use and starts treating them back as they treat them.

Similarly, there are many other incidents in the film when he is treated as an inferior species. In another scene when his colleagues (other clowns) from his company make fun of him because of his laughter condition and make him feel aligned among them, he does not even ask and fight for his rights. Another incident that takes place in his life is when he was dancing while holding a gun in his hand given by Randall, unintentionally he shot a hole in the wall while doing unusual moves with the gun. This action leaves him in a panic state because it was all so sudden as he did not know that the gun was loaded, to hide his fear he increases the sound of the TV music playing behind him. It is also indicating the deception of society and culture that is treating him as a fool,

though he wants to ask a few arising questions regarding this incident, he keeps quiet and represses this feeling as well. Hence, he asks a question to himself why people around him deceive him, instead of letting him know the truth. Right after this accident he opens his journal and writes that question to ask himself "Arthur: Why didn't Randall tell me the gun was loaded? I Could have killed someone. (beat) I could have killed myself" (Phillips, Silver 22).

This incident of his life recollects the old ones as well that add up to his miseries of life due to the worst system, and culture of his city. These are the events that take place in his life to travel in the world of monstrosity and challenge the culture and system that not only ignores his sufferings but rather adds fuel to the fire. This idea is followed by Derrida's concept of differance discussed under Cohen's first thesis that a monster is a cultural body which emphasizes the idea that inculcating culture is the major reason behind the formation of a common man into a monster. As he defines Derrida's idea about the monster's body, "It always rises from the dissection table as its secrets are about to be revealed" (Cohen 4). The meaning of these words that secretly reveal is that when a common body turns into a monster then he unveils the true faces of those people who forced him to transform into a monster.

Similarly, the character of Joker follows the steps to be transformed into a monster for the system which led him to challenge the system, society, and culture. There are a series of events that take place in his life to be called major reasons for racing points to turn himself into a monster. In another scene of the film *Joker*, Arthur takes that gun with him in the children's ward as a clown to make those children laugh, smile, and be happy, but while doing some dancing moves to allure those children the gun falls. This

incident to keep the gun results in the loss of his job. Instead, of giving him another chance and listening to his explanation, his boss, Hoyt fires him with an insult, as he disgraces him with his words, "Hoyt: Bullshit. What kinda a clown carries a fucking gun? Besides, Randall told me you tried to buy a .38 off him last week" (Phillips, Silver 27), this event defines his place in other people's life that how society and culture deceive him. Rather than helping him to cope with his life issues, they are increasing the problems that take him to the verge of monstrosity.

As Cohen defines in his thesis that "the monstrous body is pure culture" (Cohen 4), similarly, to research culture it is easy while analyze the monsters they engender. In the case of Joker, it is not wrong to say that he is also a pure cultural body who bears the violence of his system and culture and delivers violence in return with the triple ratio of violence. As we can see that in the above-mentioned incident Hoyt did not investigate the whole situation and just punished Arthur Fleck with wrong allegations by leaving him without a job when he says that "Arthur: Hoyt please I love this job—" (Phillips, Silver 27), but Hoyt does not consider his statement of any use and replies him with the harsh and rude attitude that "Hoyt: He was with me when the call came in. You are a fuck up, Arthur. And a liar. You are fired" (27), this incident increases the sufferings of his life, as it is described in Cohen's theory about monsters.

This character Joker from the *Joker* is a true depiction of Cohen's set of ideas about monsters and how they are an embodiment of cultural fragments, which means made up of repressed feelings like fear desire, anxiety, and fantasy, that shape up their personality, and all these elements are part of Arthur Fleck's life as well. Right after losing his job, the scene changes when he is sitting on the subway contemplating, with

his painted face and green wig in his lap. Here, another lonely middle-aged woman is

sitting, and at some distance, a young girl in her '20s is sitting with a book in her hand.

As the train stops, the woman leaves the train and three other young wall street guys enter

the train, their appearance and body language is indicating that they are drunk and are not

having good intentions toward that young girl, and it proves true when they start teasing

that girl as one of the guys teases her that "Wall Street # : (to the girl) Hey you want

some French fries?" (Phillips, Silver 29), he offers her some fries from McDonald's bag

which shows that they belong to an elite class bastard, who can make fun of anyone when

the girl did not pay any attention then he repeats his words with stress and the girl replies

that "Young Woman: No thank you" (29). Then to ignore their dirty glances, she buries

her face in her book, but another guy says that "Wall Street # 2: Don't ignore him. He's

being nice to you" (29). These words from that guy show that they are trying to harass

her, and Joker can notice and understand the situation as the girl is looking toward him

for helping hands, but Arthur is not that strong, who could help her out. At this moment

he starts laughing loudly (out of his laughing fits) which diverts the attention of those

guys and lets the girl get out off the train, as they noticed his laughter, they started teasing

Arthur that maybe he is making fun of them, as they ask Joker that "Wall Street #1:

Something funny, asshole?" (29). Here, Joker wants to tell them about his condition, but

they don't agree with that and start teasing him and they just start punching him in the

face and kicking him intentionally while making fun of Joker's face. They are just beating

him, and he is trying to get rid of them instead of beating them back and suddenly he

shoots the guys without attention to it, but we can see when after the death of the first two

the third one is trying to run away from the situation, but this time Joker deliberately shoots the third one out of his anger.

This is the major turning point of his innocent soul into a monster, that is how a series of incidents in his life forced him to show his feelings and how furious he is and wants to get revenge on all those people who became the source of his miseries. Hereafter discussing a few events from the film, we can say that Cohen's idea about monsters is that they are always from out of cultural fragments that are injected into their souls which results in monstrosity for the system and culture back. So, it will not be wrong to say that when culture and system inculcate such elements of negativity in the public then they should not expect a positive outcome as is prevailing in the film *Joker* by Todd Phillips where Joker is a great example to support these arguments that the character of Joker transforms into a monster because of the negativity of the culture, system, and society. As Cohen says the monster "always inhabits the gap between the time of upheaval that created it…." (Cohen 4). Further discussion related to the character of Joker dissects his character from other perspectives and ideas proposed by Cohen and Morreall.

4.4.2 Joker as an Escapist

This portion of this chapter contextually explores both the character of Joker, and the monster theory side by side then it gives this idea that when Cohen claims about the monster that it is a cultural body then it encourages this aspect as well its formation to become a monster that he tries to get escape from certain situations, places, and time. This idea is also supported by the character examination of Joker, that how who always tries to escape before and after his transformation into a monster.

Cohen also highlights the concept that when a monster tries to get escape from certain situations then it is not without any reason so, it is important to keep a sharp eye on his surroundings and what is happening around which forces him to the extent that he wants to get rid from any situation. As Cohen said, "Monsters must be examined within the intricate matrix of relations (social, cultural, and literary-historical) that generate them" (Cohen 5). Here, again we can witness Cohen's stress on the concept that monsters are not born monsters rather they are the products of the system, society, and culture.

There is a chain of events defining the escaping scene when Joker is trying to escape and why he is trying to be invisible from several situations in the film *Joker* by Todd Phillips. As in the very first scene when Arthur is painting his face to be presented as a clown it also indicating towards his escape that how he is escaping from his original identity as Arthur Fleck, a tensed, mentally disordered, depressed, subjugated, and unhappy freak, who is getting escape from his real life of miseries. As he is painting his face with blue and red that is indicating the flag of America as well where the blue color around his eyes is washing down because of the tears coming out of his eyes, that can claim as entire postmodern America is crying out of pain. As the movie starts with this scene "Arthur (30's), tears in his eyes from laughing so hard. He's trying to get it under control" (Phillips, Silver 1). Apparently, in this scene, Arthur is trying to control his laughter but truly he is trying to get rid of his tears. The tears coming out of his eyes show his real and true self but the fake laughter on his face is his escape from the troubles of his life.

Similarly, another scene from the film *Joker* defines his escape from different situations like when he does not resist those stupid boys who have beaten him badly, and

instead of returning him his signboard, they broke it down into two pieces. His escape from facing his true self is when he does not resist those boys and represses his feelings to beat them back and says that "Arthur: my mother says that people nowadays lack empathy" (Phillips, Silver 14). Here, we can see his level of patience and an escape from accepting the reality that nothing would be served in return for doing good. Rather he uses his laughter as a tool to get escape from such moments as he ignores deliberately whatever is happening around him.

Moreover, Cohen discusses the idea that the "monster's body is both corporal and incorporeal: its threat is its propensity to shift" (Cohen 5) in his thesis on the monster as an escapist. The same is the case here with the character of Joker, when he transforms into a monster and then becomes a big threat to the system because he does not let the system know who he is as he disguises himself behind a clown mask as Cohen explores in his thesis that a monster body is sometimes visible and right at the same moment invisible from the moment to hide from the world. As it is visible in the subway train scene when the girl is harassed by three stupid guys and she is looking for help from Arthur's side, but he just ignores the situation and tries to find an escape from that scene for which he starts laughing loudly to avoid that moment when he feels helpless that he cannot do anything for that girl. However, his body language shows that he wants to do something for the girl, but he is nervous and suddenly starts laughing which seems that he is escaping from that situation.

Throughout, the film *Joker* the hallucination of Joker is just dealt with as a part of his mental disorder in all previous research from, an absurdist and nihilistic perspective but no one tried to find the contextual meaning of his laughter and hallucination that it

could be a tool for him to get an escape from his real-life miseries which are increasing time to time due to the worst condition of the city of crimes. These moments of hallucination are happening at that time when he watches a TV show by Murray Franklin where assumes himself as a part of his show because it is his deep desire to become a stand-up comedian, but his critical life does not let him fulfill his desire. Desire is also attributed as an element for the formation of a monster mentioned in the previous section of this chapter how lacking fragments reconstruct Joker's personality as a monster through the recollection of fragments.

A very important event in Joker's life takes place when he comes to know after reading the letter written to Thomas Wayne by his mother Penny Fleck, that he is an illegitimate son of a millionaire Thomas Wayne. He can't decipher this epiphany that he could be a son of a millionaire and his mother lied to him all his life that he is a child of a single parent. The collection of such incidents like his whole life as a lie, his boss at work, Hoyt's attitude towards him, and his colleagues as Randall pushed Joker to behave like a monster, who challenges the political and cultural system out of his grudges against the so-called political system, society, and culture of postmodern America. This incident also leads Joker towards escapism when he meets Thomas Wayne for the first time, and he rejects to accept him as his son while claiming that his mother is a crazy woman who was once admitted to asylum. Thomas denies that he has no relation with his mother rather he claims that his mother is a damn mentally challenged woman, who adopted Arthur. This event leaves deep scars on his personality because he denies this sudden revelation of existence that he cannot be an adopted son and that his life cannot be a lie. As Thomas Wayne tells Arthur about a big secret "Thomas Wayne: Because you were

adopted. And I never slept with your mother. What do you want from me, money?" (Phillips, Silver 61). At this moment Arthur denies this reality and says "No, what? I wasn't adopted" (61). This statement by Wayne leaves Arthur in a state of sudden denial when he doesn't believe that he is an adopted child rather he smiles and then he laughs, which can be examined from Cohen's perspective of escapism that Joker is again escaping from the truth of his life and using laughter as a tool to get escape. There are several events in this film *Joker* that leads him to turn his personality of a common man into a monster and comes to the threshold of monstrosity.

4.4.3 Joker as the Harbinger of Category Crisis

This section of this chapter proceeds the previous examination and discussion that how the character of Joker from *Joker* evolves with the chain of events in the film *Joker* that transforms him into a monster for the system, society, and culture in the context of Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's *Monster Theory: Reading Culture.* Here, again Phillips draws an image of Joker in such a way that tends the researcher to observe his character under the third thesis of Cohen, who believes that the monster problematizes the already existing crisis, due to which he is treated as a "third term supplement" (Cohen 7), "that which questions binary thinking and introduces crisis" (6). This approach to monsters leads toward the dissection of Joker's character and how after his formation, he escapes and returns with a new crisis.

Similarly, the character of Joker after humiliation and escape from certain circumstances such as three assholes on the train teasing him and taking him to the verge of monstrosity, and his favorite show host Murray Franklin's humiliating attitude triggered him to kill him the result, starts creating disorder problems the so-called orderly

things of the political system, society, and culture which is not digestible and tolerable for them. Rather, society, system, and culture start treating him as a third-term supplement, which brings destruction and distraction to society. In the scene, when Arthur Fleck as a Joker carries a gun with him in the children's ward for their entertainment, the action that takes place at that moment is also indicating that he is doing monstrous acts to challenge the system, where keeping such props is not allowed. However, while doing his dance moves the gun falls and all sudden the aura of the ward changes into a quite tense environment, where children are afraid of Joker rather than happy. And right after this moment, Arthur is called by his boss, Hoyt, to fire him from his job. Where Joker is trying to explain his action, but his boss doesn't let him say a single word in his explanation. As Joker says, "It was a prop gun. And I didn't pull it out, it fell down" (Phillips, Silver 35). Here, we can say that this more intensively rude attitude of people towards him leads him to the verge of monstrosity because the gun is also provided by a person, who is a part of the corrupt society, where it is wrong to completely blame Joker for monstrous acts, as in a very tense scene when Randall, Joker's colleague asks him about the incident of street boys, who snatched his signboard, Randall gives him a gun to protect himself from such stupid boys which is clear that firstly the society and system led him to that state of mind where he starts believing that the only medium to say his part of something is only possible through violence. In this scene, Randall guides Joker while giving him a gun "Take it. You gotta protect yourself out there. Or you are gonna get fucked" (15). It is visible in this scene that another stupid being of society led him to become a monster to take revenge on his enemies, Randall, who himself is an enemy of

Joker in a true sense, who worked as a pushing force to take him to the world of monstrosity.

Cohen claims in his third thesis that monsters deliberately appear at the time of crisis to add fuel to the fire, which problematizes the situation. Due to these circumstances, society, system, and culture start treating them as monsters and then struggle to eliminate them from society. As is visible throughout the film *Joker* whenever the character of Joker is challenging the system, they start blaming him for the rest of all problems occurring in the city of crimes. In another scene of the film *Joker*, Arthur Fleck, who is treated as a third-term supplement because of his unusual behavior toward the system as Gotham City presented in this film is already in crisis as it does mention at the very start of the film when a radio is playing behind the scene of Arthur Fleck when he is painting his face to disguise himself behind a Joker to pretend to be happy in front of the world, which draws the picture of the city under the crisis of garbage all around the city. As the film starts, Joker sitting in the makeup room listening to the radio which is airing the news about the crisis coming the way of Gotham City that indicates and adds the troubles of people to already existing crises in the society are increased for the mayor of the City Thomas Wayne when he is confronting a protest in front of "Wayne Hall" where protestant uses the mask of Joker to threaten the bloody elites of the city, as they hold the slogans in their hands, a few homemade signs, "Clown for Mayor" … "Kill the Rich" … "Mr. Wayne, Am I a Clown?" (Phillips, Silver 58).

Here, it is visible that the critical situation prevailing in the city of crimes is pointing toward Joker who is responsible for all things happening in the city. Because poor people of the city are treating Joker as their hero to highlight their problems as he

has killed three rich bastards, who were disturbing poor and weak people like Fleck and a young lady on the train, due to which people believe that the only way to get their rights is to kill rich people because they think that rich people problematize their lives. This example from the film also refers to the idea of Cohen that the system believes that monsters are those who add more problems to the already existing crisis rather than finding clues that how these monsters are born or formed. Cohen tries to prove in all his theses that monsters are not born monsters rather they are generated are produced by system, society, and culture which is visible in the film *Joker* in postmodern America through the character of Joker that how people treat him as a monster rather they are the actual monsters who produced him.

4.4.4 Joker Dwells at the Gates of Difference

Similarly, in this case of theses, Cohen again claims monstrosity of monsters because of binaries drawn by system, society, and culture that subject a normal body to become a monster. As Cohen claims in this thesis, "for the most part monstrous difference tends to be cultural, political, racial, economic, sexual" (Cohen 7). In this thesis, he emphasizes the concept that the monsters are treated as outsiders who belong to someone else as it is the custom of America to watch people outside of America with suspicious eyes and treats them as aliens, but this case is more horrible than they treat their people turned into monsters as outsiders based on differences in their financial, racial, sexual, or economic status. This idea is presented in the film *Joker* that how a white American in his 30s is treated as an outsider due to which he behaves like a monster to take revenge on the culture and system that produced him.

The very shocking element in this film is the treatment of system, society, and culture with white supremacy because it is normal for Americans to treat blacks and outsiders of America as inferior to them, but the binaries drawn between their white supremacy are more difficult to accept that how they treat their people. Hence, it is prevalent throughout the film *Joker* that even being a white-born American, Arthur Fleck is treated as an outsider who is inferior and lacks his identity as an American. As it is evident in the film how he is struggling to find the meaning of his life when he is talking to the black social worker, who reads his journal cum diary in which he has written that "I just hope my death makes more cents than my life" (Phillips, Silver 3). Here, it is visible that he is helpless even to earn for living because he is living in an absurd America where he must take care of his single mother as well. Almost all people around him are making fun of him rather than supporting him to come out of his life miseries which represents the condition of the whole postmodern America that is suffering from the disease of corruption and deception.

4.4.5 Joker Polices the Borders of the Possible

Specifically, this thesis defines the nature of a monster that how he challenges the political and militant actions of their states due to which he behaves as a warning against his manufacturers. Cohen tries to prove that every monster is defined by two narratives, one is how he came into being and another is his cultural contribution. In this film, *Joker* portrays both narratives that how the humiliating behavior of the system, society, and culture transforms Arthur Fleck into a Monster in the disguise of a Joker due to which Joker becomes a symbol of threat for the postmodern America that knitted this character

as a monster. Rather than taking notice of their actions, political representatives blame the victim to be responsible for the crisis of the state as is visible in the case of Joker.

When we examine the scene of *Joker*, where Joker (Arthur Fleck) enters Wayne Hall secretly where he saw a few things with awe that he has never seen before in his entire life because he belongs to that class of society where people struggle to survive. But this scene in Wayne Hall is presenting an aura beyond his imagination he reached there to meet Thomas Wayne, a mayor of Gotham City, to claim his parenthood but found nothing else rather than the truth that he is an adopted child if we contextually analyze this situation than it is not wrong to say that this act of Joker is also a threat to the corrupt elites of America, who is encountering a mayor of his city to claim his right and the right of his birth. As Joker says, "Arthur Fleck: My name is Arthur. I'm Penny's son. I, I know everything (more), And I don't want anything from you. Well… maybe a hug" (Phillips, Silver 60-61). This statement by Arthur defines his state of mind as a positive and innocent being who is looking for love and identity and notifying it before that he does not want anything else than love, but again Wayne's response towards Arthur whether he is his son or not is so humiliating that shows the mentality of elites towards proletariat class that they approach elites only for the sake of money. As Wayne asks Arthur that "Wayne: What do you want from me, Money?" (Phillips, Silver 61). Here, Wayne's inquisitive attitude towards Arthur shows his approach that poor people are only looking for money but on the other hand when Joker does not even pay attention to the word money and replies that "Arthur: No. What? I wasn't adopted" (61). This conversation between Wayne and Arthur shows that the binaries drawn by the system are

just a portion of poison to add hatred to the hearts and minds of both sides which leads them to the verge of monstrosity.

4.4.6 Fear of Joker is a Kind of Desire

Most probably monsters are associated to terrorize weak people but once monsters were also humans, who have feelings of pain, fear, desire, and anxiety real monsters around them like society, system, and culture marginalize them based on race, gender, and color force them to transform into monsters. Similarly, the character of Joker presented in *Joker* also suffers a lot that pushes him to the verge of monstrosity to take revenge from those who tortured him throughout his life. This is the reason that the repressed past of Joker (Arthur Fleck) nourishes the feeling of ambivalence among the audience and their repressed feelings force them to love and hate the character of Joker at the same time. As it is visible almost throughout the film that how after a few torturing scenes when he does not properly get his due rights then he starts behaving like a monster when he kills three street guys, Randall, and his mother, who lied to him that makes him realize that his whole life was a lie. As he asks questions about his identity to his mother, "Arthur: C'mon, Ma, who am I?" (Phillips, Silver 72). This incident shows his inquisitiveness to know about himself because he never spent a single moment of his life happily as he says that "Arthur: Happy?! I'm not happy. I haven't been happy for one minute of my entire fucking life" (72). This moment of helplessness that his entire life was just a joke, no more than that leaves him in a state of denial that makes the audience relate themselves to his character which Cohen names the ambivalent feeling of viewers or readers. Cohen gives certain examples from the culture of America that supports the

idea of love and hate both for the character of Joker from *Joker* that how people love to behave like demons for the night of Halloween may represent the inner monster or repressed feelings of every individual.

4.4.7 Joker Stands at the Threshold of Becoming a Monster

"This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine" (Cohen 20). This concept Cohen given in his seven theses is the crux of the matter that monsters are not born monsters, but we produce them as he says that "monsters are never created *ex nihilo*, but through a process of fragmentation and recombination..." (Cohen 11). Similarly, it is wrong to say that Joker (Arthur Fleck) is a monster rather it is visible in the film that how he was trying to live a simple life, but certain torturing events pushed him to the threshold of becoming a monster. From the very start of the film, *Joker* shows a large amount of patience towards the bad behavior of society towards him but at certain times it was unbearable to ignore the monstrosity of society that was injecting hate into his mind and heart. Certain incidents in the film *Joker* show that the poison of hate in the shape of repressed feelings like fear, anger, desire, and anxiety led him to the verge of monstrosity.

The very important incident in the film that is dissected earlier in this chapter is when Joker (Arthur Fleck) uses the gun for his revenge that shows his anger toward those people who tortured him to the extent that he killed them all, as he kills three guys in the train, his colleague, Randall and his mother, Penny. Because all of them were a cause of his major torture, who humiliates him and especially his mother is the main villain of his life who lied to him about his identity due to which he calls his entire life a tragedy but at the end realizes that it was a comedy, because everyone was just a toy to play with him

whether it's his mother, system, or society. As he says while finishing the life of his liar and mentally ill mother Penny Fleck, "Arthur: I used to think that my life was nothing but a tragedy, but now, now I realize it's all just a fucking comedy" (Phillips, Silver 73). This is the main touching moment of the film when he is laughing at himself and how he was living the life of a fool. While talking about the concept of Cohen that monsters are made by the recombination of fragments, the same series of events are presented in the film *Joker* that recombines to transform Joker (Arthur Fleck) into a monster.

4.5 Joker under the Umbrella of Morreall's *Comic Relief*

Joker's laughter from *Joker* is not only a condition that is told to him about his disease but is signifying something more that hints towards the satire and irony of the situations throughout the film. Morreall defines laughter as a state of mind, heart, and body in which everything is involved that plays its role and it cannot be generalized as a single definition as it varies according to situations. For example, at the very start of the film when he is sitting in front of a social worker, who listens to his problems regarding his disorder, he starts laughing there which seems without purpose but when we analyze the situation then we can see that he is trying to escape or hide as a weak freak from the world and to hide his miseries of life behind his laughter as his tears show something else related to his helplessness. Similarly, there are a series of events when he tries to escape from his current miserable condition while disguising himself in laughter. Morreall's first analysis of laughter recommends laughter because of feeling superior which gives a sense of superiority, which is visible in the scene of Joker's character when he kills Murray a comedy show host, he laughs out loud which refers to the laughter of superiority and relief as well. Joker's laughter to get an escape through the condition of laughter as a tool

also indicates the idea of relief theory that how he escapes from his true self where he denies his identity, fear, desires, and fantasies. As he laughs on the train when a group of three guys bullies him and the girl then he laughs to get an escape from the prevailing situation that Arthur was sitting on the train as a nervous freak who does not know how to handle the situation and he starts laughing loudly. When one of the guys asks him that "Wall Street # 1: Something funny Asshole?" (Phillips, Silver 29).

Similarly, Joker behaves incongruously when he laughs at the scene of Wayne Hall confronting the mayor, who refused to admit him as his son and Arthur denies the truth irrationally and starts laughing which is also a state of mind when a sudden situation become a source of laughter. As Wayne claims "Wayne: She never told you? Your mother adopted you after she worked for us" (61) at this moment the reaction when he tries to control his irrational laughter is unpredictable such a situation can also bring his condition on him but this laughter forces to analyze that all the prevailing conditions of Joker's laughter signify something more than his condition and that is supported by the arguments of Morreall's theory of laughter.

4.6 Joker as a Bridge between Two Selected Theories

As this is a unique contribution of this research because the previously discussed metamorphosis of Joker into a monster goes through another revolution as well that results in a burst of monster laughter due to the connection of two selected theories through which the character of Joker is analyzed that results in the monster laughter. Both theories refer to the attributes of a monster and laughter caused by fear, desires, anxiety, and fantasy. As the Joker is a link between these two theories, when being a monster out of fear he laughs on the train and kills those three guys who were irritating him

continuously. This scene defines the nature of Joker's laughter that how he laughs out of

fear that society and culture injected it into his soul in the context of Cohen's definition

of a monster and then the release of his energy in the context of Morreall's theory of

relief which results in monster laughter.

Attributes of both theories are supporting the character of Joker and reciprocally

the character of Joker is linking both theories. In the scene of the film when Joker kills

Murray out of anger and laughs at the same time linking the idea of a monster and

laughter how Cohen suggested in one of his thesis that fear, desire, and fantasy is the

attribute of a monster and according to Morreall, to release these suppressed feelings he

laughs under the Morreall's relief theory of laughter, and same is the case here with the

character of Joker after killing Murray he is laughing out loud that gives him relief both

in the process of killing and laughter that results in monster laughter in the climax scene

of the film.

When we delve deeper into the character analysis of Joker then it is prevalent that

the laughter of Joker is no less than a tool that he uses to express his feeling of

superiority. Incongruity and relief. While watching the movie *Joker* by Todd Phillips, the

audience and viewers can easily dissect the nature of Joker's laughter that which is not

only a condition in the sense of the pseudobulbar effect but indicates something more

than that is just literally visible on the screen. As it is visible in several scenes of the film

when his laughter of Joker is hinting towards something deep like the release of his

repressed feelings. Somehow Joker's laughter and monstrosity also draw a link when he

escapes from certain situations through his laughter just to get an escape from reality

which is not tolerable for him. This same scenario is clearly visible in that scene of the

film when he was traveling on the train and three guys started harassing a girl sitting on the same train but Joker does not speak or take any action for that girl instead he starts laughing where his laughter as an escape from the real situation because out of fear and being weak freak he was not able to take any action but later when they started irritating him then he just killed all of them out of anger that pushed him in the world of murderers and monsters.

Similarly, there are many other scenes in the film where the character of Joker connects the dots between two selected theories to develop a new idea of monster laughter, such as the scene of the film when Joker is laughing in the makeup room as Randall starts laughing at him and later Joker also joins laughter but as he just gets out of the room while buttoning his shirt he suddenly stops laughing which shows that his laughter at that moment was not out of his laughter condition rather he was laughing just to pretend that he has nothing to do with the laughter of Randall and pretends to be happy as his mother used to call him with this name "Happy".

However, throughout the film, *Joker* by Todd Phillips Joker pretends to be happy where he uses laughter as a tool to present himself as a happy individual who has nothing to do with the problems of the world because he was told to behave as a happy person and to make people happy around him. Eventually, it is an outcome of those aspects that are cultivated inside the character of Joker.

4.7 Joker as a "Disturbing Hybrid and a big challenge to the Postmodern American Culture

This is the most significant participation of this thesis that enlighten the concept of Joker/ Arthur Fleck as a "Disturbing Hybrid" in the postmodern American culture.

While analyzing this character of Joker from *Joker* by Todd Phillips, provides an enormous ground to find the cloaked realities of system, culture, and society that led him to the verge of disturbing Hybrid. Not only whether he is a disturbing hybrid or not, but this thesis also provides shreds of evidence that culture, system, and society are the real "Disturbing Hybrid" in postmodern America.

To prove this proposed idea that culture, system, and society are the original Disturbing hybrids, who unbalance the hierarchies to lead any individual to the verge of monstrosity and then treat him as an outsider or third-term supplement. These perceptions about culture, system, and society that involves race, gender, and economy hit and challenge the unbalanced system of American culture through acts of monstrosity. These acts of monstrosity from the side of Joker discuss how Joker engenders the original culture of America as Cohen suggests in his thesis to read any culture and then read and analyze the monster of that area and era.

However, the concept of Cohen's third thesis depicts that the monster is no doubt a revolution in a very logical way because it is the society and culture that force him to become a monster who is already standing at the threshold of becoming a monster due to the prevailing crisis. After this when he transforms into a monster then he increases the already existing crisis as is visible throughout the film *Joker* by Todd Phillips that how Joker tries to live a simple and innocent life but the people around him including his mother Penny Fleck led him to the verge of monstrosity. Due to all these disturbing scenes in the film when Joker starts killing those people who are the reason to increase his already existing troubles, the system, society, and culture start treating him as a

"Disturbing Hybrid" because he had become a big challenge for the postmodern American culture.

There are many pieces of evidence in the film that prove that the reason for Joker's transformation into a monster, as in one of the very disturbing scenes is that when people make fun of him, beat him, and torture him while questioning his identity as a weak freak in the postmodern American culture. But the transformation of Joker and the popularity of Joker in his surroundings for those people who started following him as a hero rather than a monster or disturbing hybrid proves that Joker is a great challenge to postmodern American culture. As we can see in the climax scene of the film *Joker* when he challenges Murray, but that challenge indicates his approach toward the whole postmodern American Culture, as he says "Joker: (pulling the gun) I'll tell you what you get. You get what you fucking deserve" (Phillips, Silver 96). Not only that but he also ends the TV show after this scene that "Joker: (looks straight into the camera; screams Murray's signature signs off) GOOD NIGHT AND ALWAYS REMEMBER, -- THAT'S LIFE!" (Phillips, Silver 96).

Chapter 5

Conclusion, Findings, and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

This thesis presents the analysis and examination of the character Joker from the film *Joker* which is dissected under the canon of Cohen's *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* and Morreall's *Comic Relief.* This thesis provides shreds of evidence that help to prove that the transformation of the character Joker into a monster is all because of the corrupt and deceptive system, society, and culture around him. Moreover, this dives deeper to find the reasons behind the metamorphosis of the character Joker and why he transforms into a monster, not only that but this study reviews the already existing literature on the film *Joker* that how it is already examined, and what sort of gap or loophole is still prevailing in that literature.

Usually, films are explored their technological progress that how the technology evolves to present pro things, but this thesis is a deliberate attempt to dissect the character of Joker in its contextual way and why he is presented as a monster for the postmodern American culture. Joker, who is representing the real culture injected into his inner soul by his society, system, and culture to behave like a monster rather than himself who was trying to live a life of a common man with love and loyalty.

It is not wrong to confess that Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and John Morreall provide a range of supportive arguments from their theories to prove the innocence of Joker Arthur Fleck that he is not a monster, but it is the society, system, and culture that force him to behave like a monster. Representation of Joker in *Joke* represents most of the American

society that how even the white supremacy of the proletariat class also suffers in the postmodern American culture that inculcates the sense of revenge to vomit out their repressed feelings like fear, fantasy, anxiety, and desires due to which they face the backlash of their enemies.

Eventually, the evolution of Joker throughout the film *Joker* by Todd Phillips provides a larger ground to explore the character while keeping it in the cannon of Postmodern American culture how and why he adds the fuel to fire by his killing actions against the bloody deceptive and corrupt elites, who adds up his miseries when he is prying into his lost existence. Through the treatment of Joker's society, culture, and system including his colleagues like Randall, boss, Hoyt, who humiliates him by firing him from his job without listening to his explanation, and especially his mother Penny, who lies to him about his entire life about his birth and existence that leaves him in the state of denial. The most important scene is when his favorite comedy show host, Murray Franklin makes fun of Joker which lessens his morale and takes him to that state of mind where he kills him out of anger in a live show that is the climax scene of the film. As Cohen states the argument of Barbara Johnson in his thesis that "a revolution in the very logic of meaning" (qtd.in Cohen 7). This statement by Barbara Johnson refers to his idea that the reaction of Joker as a monster towards society, system, and culture is justifiable because all the attributes of monstrosity are inculcated by that system itself.

To sum up this discussion it is not wrong to say that the character of Joker from *Joker* is a symbol of threat in the disguise of a clown to the all-hypocrite American communities. Because of that, Joker brings destruction as the result of his destructive soul and identity. To prove the fact that the evolution of Joker into a monster, Cohen's

monster theory builds a bridge over the bridge through his seven proposed theses that helps to dissect the character of Joker that which facts force him to become a monster and the scenes from the film are the evidence that how he was just at the verge of monstrosity and society pushes him into the world of monstrosity.

Precisely, this thesis deals with the evolution of the character Joker from Todd Phillips' film *Joker* which reveals the hidden secrets of this film through the examination of Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* and Morreall's *Comic Relief*. These two selected theories facilitate the evaluation of the character of Joker and how the repressed feelings and treatment of society led him to the verge of monstrosity. Morreall's theory of laughter gives a sharp lens to view and observe the deep-down meaning of the Joker from the film *Joker* presents his disease which is already addressed in the previous thesis as a pseudobulbar effect due to his mental disorder, but no one tried to dive deeper into the meaning of his laughter that why he laughs at situations and what drives him mad to laugh out loud.

Though Morreall's theory of laughter under his *Comic Relief* provides an account of reasons for the Joker's laughter, that signals the several moments and events where he laughs deliberately but uses his disease to hide the real purpose of his laughter. His laughter works as a tool for him to suppress his feelings like, fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy while in other moments his laughter works irrationally, sometimes for his relief, and makes him feel superior to others like at the climax scene of the film when he kills Murray Franklin then he laughs proudly.

Concludingly, I selected the character of Joker from *Joker* directed and written by Todd Phillips to find the answers to the rising questions in my mind regarding the reasons for

Joker's metamorphosis with the series of events in the film, the contextual significance of his laughter, his existence as a disturbing hybrid and a great challenge to the American system, and also to collaborate the selected two theories through the character of Joker that develops a link and contributes to the existing theories in the form of monster laughter while combining Cohen's *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* to that of Morreall's *Comic Relief.*

5.2 Findings

To wrap up the discussion that examines the character of Joker from *Joker* by Todd Phillips through the lens of Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* and John Morreall's *Comic Relief* results in the metamorphosis of the Arthur Fleck/ Joker that how he transforms into a monster while the evolution of the series of events throughout the film. It is not wrong to say that the character of Joker not only transforms and evolves in the period of the film but also challenges the postmodern American culture that forced him to act like a monster.

Generally, the killing acts of Joker from the Film *Joker* are not justifiable as it is another debate that is he a monster or not, but the reasons behind his transformation as a monster are logical because the society, culture, and political system force him to behave like a monster. Most of the existing literature on this character deals with the character of Joker as a mentally disordered man, but no one raises the questions to find the reasons behind this disease which may convey several hidden meanings to be explored through a monster theory that how common man behaves like a monster and which circumstances force him to enter the world of monstrosity.

The analysis of Joker from *Joker* symmetrically provides the results going through seven steps of the monster theory Proposed by Cohen. The most important fact is that the character of Joker is a cultural body Cohen suggests that to learn about the culture of any state observe their monsters. After all, they engender the pure culture that leads them to the extent of escape after increasing the existing crisis and just needs a single push to leave the life of a common man to enter into monstrosity because they stand at the threshold of becoming a monster.

Similarly, Joker a weak freak from the film *Joker* represents the culture of postmodern America which inculcates clots of hatred to that extent that leads him to become a killer, which is visible from the very start of the film how even the young boys humiliate him. Later his colleagues, boss, mother, and Murray is the last push to become a killer. Factually, this perspective is mentioned above under the chapter of analysis that monsters are not born monsters but rather we create them, as Cohen claims to his children that we produce with the hatred injected into their souls.

Another finding of this thesis is the contextual significance of Joker's laughter which depicts different layers of meaning according to different situations other than the literal meaning of laughter in his condition. As Morreall's suggests in his theory of laughter that it cannot be generalized as it signifies different meanings in different situations, same is the case with the laughter of Joker which portrays different meanings in different situations through the collaboration of both theories. Concisely, this whole study and analysis of the character Joker from *Joker* through the lens of Cohen and Morreall is a great threat to the postmodern world of American Culture that is a monster for them, and the system is a monster for Joker.

5.3 Recommendations

Firstly, I recommend that future researchers should also pay attention to film analysis in a literary and contextual way because it provides the visual literature side of the written dialogues to interpret. No one should be bound only to dissect the films through the tools and technologies used in the film rather we can analyze a single character in its contextual meanings to find the hidden propaganda and agendas of the film which cannot be addressed directly and is the beauty to present literature in a cloak or disguise. It is a deliberate attempt to avoid the film theory while analyzing the character of Joker through Cohen's *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* and Morreall's *Comic Relief* because it is a contextual interpretation of Joker rather than the technical analysis that supports film theory.

Secondly, this idea of *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* should be explored through other characters of the American film industry that would provide a larger image to support the arguments discussed in this theory. This character Joker from *Joker* is a very relatable character to be analyzed through monster theory which should be further explored from different angles in future research, but attention should be given to the related ideas because different ideas applying to a single character can trouble the thesis which results in wrong findings.

Since the character of Joker is explored from different perspectives like psychological, political, and ecological but this idea of Joker as a monster for the system is explored for the first time which should be interpreted from other lenses of Cohen and Morreall as well that can provide a new perspective to the character of Joker. A struggle should be made to find more reasons behind the mental disorder or deliberate attempts at

murder that can add more information to the existing literature. Because the combination of these two theories can facilitate more to dissect the character of Joker to find the reasons to be treated as a third-term supplement in postmodern American society. However, this whole thesis provides a new platform for future researchers to play with the character of Joker from *Joker* that can also be analyzed through the attributes of the monster rewarded him as a third-term supplement and disturbing hybrid. Joker is a symbol of revolution in the disguise of a clown to reveal unveil the dark side of the system, society, and culture of postmodern America through monster and laughter theory.

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