

A Tale Of Two Menaces

Mark Hibbett, m.hibbett@arts.ac.uk

This document refers to the data contained in the Excel Spreadsheet *A Tale Of Two Menaces*.

This dataset was collected in order to test the validity of a unified catalogue of transmedia character components by using it to compare the British and American characters who share the name 'Dennis The Menace'.

Both characters are young boys and, in one of the comics world's greatest coincidences, both first appeared on the same day, 12 March 1951. DC Thomson's character Dennis The Menace is the star of the UK's longest running comic *The Beano*. *The Beano* remains a British institution, first published in 1938 and a part of British cultural life ever since. The American Dennis was created by Hank Ketcham, based on his own son, and has been a popular syndicated newspaper strip as well as being adapted into comic books, a TV sitcom and several movies.

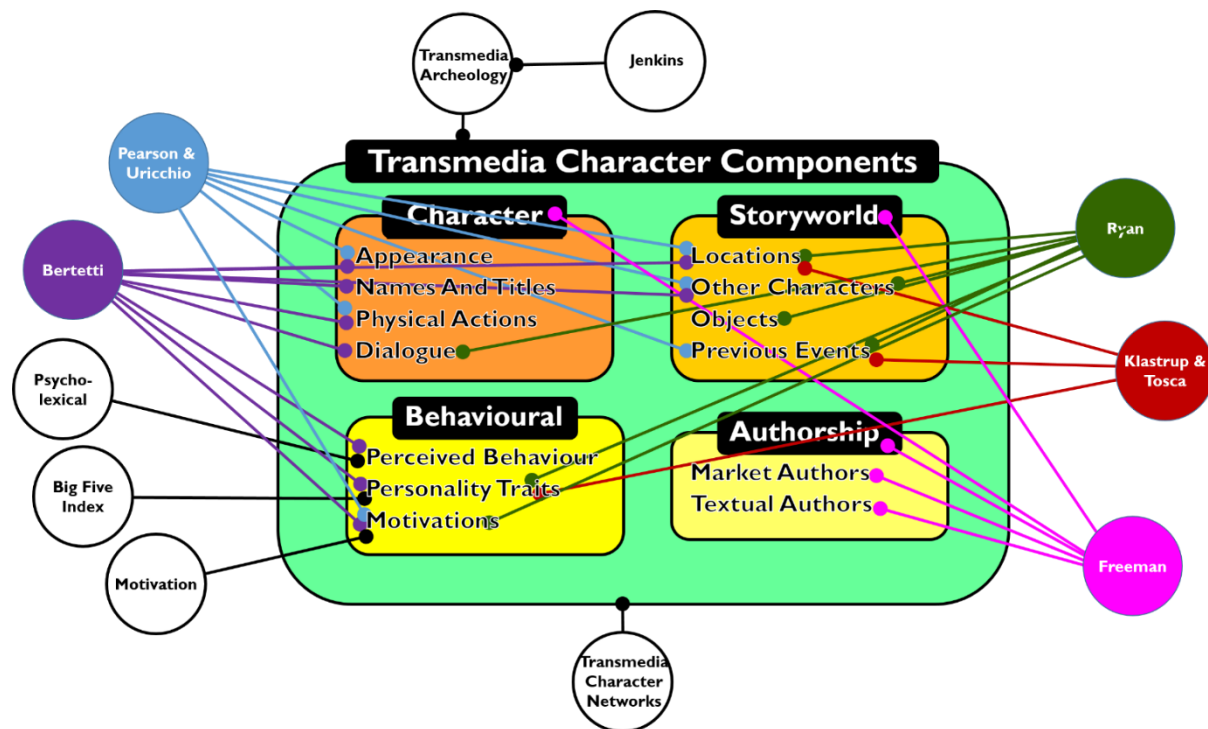
The catalogue was originally developed as part of an analysis of the Marvel Comics character Doctor Doom. The results of that analysis can be found at <https://doi.org/10.25441/arts.c.6140805>. The analysis of Doctor Doom showed that the catalogue could be used as a tool for mapping the coherence of this character as they moved across time and media. The analysis of the two menaces was conducted firstly to see whether the tool would work for other characters, and secondly to see whether it could be used for different purposes - in this case, comparing two characters within similar media types, rather one character across different media.

A total of 16 texts were selected for this analysis, eight for each Dennis. Texts were selected by choosing random dates at seven yearly intervals and then identifying the strips closest to that date. For the UK Dennis strips were taken from the closest weekly issue of *The Beano*, while for the American Dennis the closest Sunday strip was analysed. The Sunday strip was used because it featured a narrative over several panels and so was closer in style to the British series than the single panel daily version.

Each text in the sample was examined for signifiers to do with the main character. The data was recorded using a unified catalogue of transmedia character components which brought together aspects of the models devised by Pearson and Uricchio, Klastrup and Tosca, Marie-Laurie Ryan, Paolo Bertetti and Matthew Freeman within a framework based on Jan-Noël Thon's ideas of Transmedia Character Networks that extends Henry Jenkin's formulation of 'transmedia' in line with Scolari, Bertetti and Freeman's Transmedia Archaeology. Where gaps were identified within these definitions, specifically around the area of 'behaviour', additional definitions were brought in using the psycholexical approach, the Big Five Index, and the idea of character motivations from creative writing practice. Where necessary the components were re-named for clarity, and finally were placed into groups based on Matthew Freeman's classification of transmedia, with 'behaviour' extracted into a group of its own.

The relationship of the final model to the sources is shown in the diagram overleaf.

Transmedia Character Components



Description of components

Character Components

These components are concerned specifically with the character themselves.

Appearance

This concerns the visual appearance of the character. In the case of the British Dennis his appearance component would include signifiers such as a red and black striped jumper, short trousers and spiky hair.

Names And Titles

As the name suggests, this records the names and titles used to refer to the character within the text. For both characters here this is usually simply 'Dennis'.

Physical actions

These are the physical actions particular to the character which occur within the text itself. Examples for the American Dennis include watching television or hiding from someone.

Dialogue

This component contains the frequently used phrases which are associated with the character and appear regularly in their own speech. For the British Dennis this includes phrases such as 'Urk!' or 'Har-Har!' and also his habit of speaking directly to the reader.

Storyworld Components

These components are the aspects of the overall storyworld that appear in the same text as the main character. For many of these components the variable 'INTERACTS' records whether the main character interacted with them.

Locations

This component contains all of the settings which appear in the text, including both time and space. Examples for the American Dennis would be his bedroom or the Wilson's house.

Other Characters

This component contains other characters who appear in the text. For the British Dennis this includes characters such as Gnasher, Walter The Softy or Dad.

Objects

This component is used to record all of the physical items which appear in the text that are part of the plot and which are not otherwise categorised as part of settings. For example, if the American Dennis walked down the street there might be a bicycles in the background, but these would be part of the street setting, rather than objects that take part in the story. However, this would change if he, or any of the other characters, used the bicycle. Examples of objects for this version of Dennis include cookie jars, baseballs and newspapers.

Previous Events

This component contains all previous events which are directly mentioned within the text. Within the corpus analysed there were almost no previous events mentioned for either character, but possible examples could include past Christmases or summer holidays.

Behavioural Components

These components describe the way that the character interacts with the other aspects of the storyworld.

Perceived Behaviour

This component contains the way that the character is perceived, gathered empirically by recording all of the descriptive words applied to the character within the text. Examples of perceived behaviours for the British Dennis include 'horrible', 'horrid' and 'dangerous'.

Personality Traits

This describes the way that the character's personality is perceived by the consumer of the text, using the Big Five Inventory. The Big Five Index is calculated in various ways depending on what tool is used, but gives results in terms of five factors, so that we might say that the British Dennis rates highly for neuroticism whereas the American Dennis scores very low for this measure.

Motivations

The component is what drives the character's overall behaviour. British Dennis is often motivated by causing harm to others, whereas the American version is often driven by a search for information

Authorship Components

This final grouping of components is slightly set apart from the others as it is to do with the non-fictional world, although still expressed via information in the texts. It concerns the people, or organisations, that are noted as the creators of these texts.

Market Authors

This refers to named authors or corporate owners who are used to guide the reader, listener or viewer's expectations of what they will find within the text. For the British Dennis this is usually 'DC Thomson'.

Textual Authors

This includes all those creators who are credited within the text itself. Textual authors for the American Dennis include Hank Ketcham, Ferdinand and S Ketcham.