

The Reconfiguration of Homme Fatal in The Third Millennium Joker Adaptions

Amira Rihab SAIDI¹

Abstract: The relevance of the Joker as a prominent character in popular culture and the film industry merited tremendous scholarly attention. It has been analyzed through the lenses of various critical theories, *inter alia* the Bakhtinian “carnival”, the Freudian psychoanalysis, and several others. Still, nearly there is no critical development of the Joker as a *homme fatal*. It is thus the novelty of this paper to do so; on the one hand, it aims to reconfigure the conceptualization of the *homme fatal* beyond its classical seductive and inveigling power within women’s world. Here, I endeavor to redefine the fatality of *homme fatal* from the perspective of the Joker, which is centralized more on an outlawed destructive personality far from being a sexually desirable man. I focus on the “fatal men” and “fatal rebel” by Mario Praz in his *Romantic Agony*². This study focuses therefore on the reconfiguration of *homme fatal* in two Joker adaptations: *The Dark Knight* (2008) and *Suicide Squad* (2016). Thereby, I contend that the two jokers share common features with the classical *homme fatal*, most of which contribute to the *comic-ization* of their ‘fatality’.

Keywords: Joker, Homme fatal, The Dark Knight, The Suicide Squad, the Vice.

¹. Institute of English and American Studies, University of Szeged, Hungary. Email: amirarihab98@gmail.com
². Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951).

Introduction

The significance of the Joker as a pre-eminent character in popular culture and the film industry merited tremendous scholarly attention considering the fact that it has been analyzed through the lenses of various critical theories, *inter alia* the Bakhtinian “carnival,” the Freudian psychoanalysis, and several others. However, there is nearly no critical development of the Joker as a *homme fatal*. It is thus the novelty of my research to do so. On the one hand, I aim to reconfigure the conceptualization of the *homme fatal* beyond its classical seductive and inveigling power within the women’s world. Indeed, similar to *the femme fatale*, “the *homme fatal* is often transformed into a sexual spectacle; the buff”, Samantha Lindop argues, especially in cinema noir, “he appears in his most sophisticated form as a greedy, deceitful, but seductive provocateur”³. Here, I aim to redefine the fatality of *homme fatal* from the perspective of the Joker, that is centralized more on an outlawed destructive personality far from being a sexually desirable man.

I have inspired this idea from my doctoral adviser Zsófia Anna Tóth 2011’s book that investigated the changing representation of the “*femme fatale*” elatedly film-noir feminine character in her *The Farcical (Re) Figuration of the Femme Fatale in Maurine Dallas Watkins’ Chicago (1927) and its various adaptations*⁴. In this book, she discusses how these violent and aggressive women could alter their image in the twentieth-century American cinema, theatre and even how they incorporated feminist visual culture revolution. In fact, all female criminals and murderers were commonly epitomized by the figure of the *femme fatale* who always evade punishment and defeat their masculine victims. For me, the Joker movies are very reminiscent to *Chicago’s* silhouette as they give the chance to classical criminal characters to revive.

³. Samantha Jane Lindop, “Femmes, Filles, and Hommes: Postfeminism and the Fatal(e) Figure in Contemporary American Film Noir” (Thesis, The University of Queensland, 2014), 137-140.

⁴. Zsófia Anna Tóth, *Merry Murderers: The Farcical (Re)Figuration of the Femme Fatale in Maurine Dallas Watkins Chicago (1927) and Its Various Adaptations* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011).

After reading her book, I realized there are currently few critical studies about the development of *Homme fatal* compared with the large interests in *femmes fatales*, especially while trying to describe this masculine persona and figure out its features. My attention is then different from trying to understand why the Joker is evil from social-psychological lenses to concentrating more narrowly on investigating the “*Homme Fatal*” persona in the Joker 2000s adaptations beginning with Heath Ledger’s Joker from *The Dark Knight* (2008), Jared Leto’s Joker from *The Suicide Squad* (2016).

The emergence of the *humorous Homme fatal* figure, as Dr. Zsófia Anna Tóth labeled it in her book, has its roots back in the English morality dramas shaping the *Vice* figure. The *Vice* is historically the personification of evil. Replacing the devil during the Tudor and Renaissance periods, the *Vice* character was the prototype of evil and represented almost every villainous action. Based on what A. W Pollard called the “obvious etymology” of the naming; the New Cambridge edition of *Richard III* defines it as: “*Vice*, comic character in the old Morality plays; also called ‘Iniquity’”⁵.

To this end, if we take heed of the notion of “inequity”, which means inequality, unfairness, and unbalance, thus reaching the tacit implication of chaos in law and order that has been staged in the DC universe through the Joker figure. The two characters share the task of spreading anarchy and representing evil. However, the categorization of the Joker character within the *hommes fatals* list is not only linked to his devilish personality but more interestingly, to the appealing aura and magnetism he performs towards his audience that, analogically, has genesis in the characterization of the *Vice*. First, Agnès Matuska argues that the “*Vice* has always been the sense of comedy that makes him, although evil, appealing”⁶. Correspondingly, Daniel Wallace links the allure of the Joker with the nature of his character as part of the spectacle. He argues: “If it is not spectacularly theatrical, it’s boring, and the [Joker’s] audience might fail to see the humor in the horror”⁷.

5. Quoted in Francis Hugh Mares, “The Origin of the Figure Called ‘The Vice’ in Tudor Drama,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (November 1958): 11.

6. Ágnes Matuska, “Haphazardly Ambidextrous. Interpretations of the Vice in 16th-Century English Drama,” *The AnaChronisT* 11 (2005): 2.

7. Daniel Wallace, *The Joker: A Visual History of the Clown Prince of Crime* (New York: Universe, 2011), 105.

This task could not be achieved since the Joker and *homme fatal* nature is entirely distinctive. Here, I endeavor to redefine the fatality of *homme fatal* from the perspective of the Joker that is centralized more on an outlawed destructive personality far from being a sexually desirable man, focusing on the “fatal men” and “fatal rebel” discussed by Mario Praz in his *Romantic Agony*⁸.

My article aims at reconfiguring the *homme fatal* in two Joker twenty-first century selected movies. My theoretical background would be grounded upon the conceptualization of three concepts: *homme fatal*, the *Vice*, and the Joker figure as a clown prince of crime. This step will provide the necessary data to discuss the alteration of the *humorous Homme fatal* representation within the selected movies. Henceforth, I will look specifically at the hazardous impact of the Joker in a way to redefine the “fatal” from being seductive to literally lethal on the other characters.

The Figure of *The Homme Fatal*

The homme fatal is a cinematic figure that appears in early film noirs such as in Alfred Hitchcock’s (1941) *Suspicion*, George Cukor’s *Gaslight* (1944), and other neo-noir productions such as Mike Figgis’ *Internal Affairs* (1990) and Mary Harron’s *American Psycho* (2000). Within these films, all male protagonists share the masculine destructiveness, wealth, physical attraction and strong desire to pursue women, the four essential characteristics of what an *homme fatal* signifies.

To begin with, Spicer underlines the essential features of the *homme fatal* as an “exciting mixture of cunning, cool calculation, manipulative charm, and deep-rooted sexual sadism”⁹. In fact, through his role in *Suspicion* (1941) as Johnnie Aysgarth, Cary Grant seems to be the exemplary figure of the classical *homme fatal* defined in the above quote. In detail, *Suspicion* (1941) explores the marriage of a naïve woman named Lina, who has never been in a serious relationship before, to a charming playboy. They met at a train trip,

⁸. Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951).

⁹. Andrew Spicer, *Film Noir* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2002), 89.

and he tried to approach her but failed. Eventually, failure does not exist in *homme fatals'* dictionary, so this represented a fuel for his engines to keep racing for her. Johnnie Aysgarth is jobless with no stable income, a gambler, and a deceitful person. However, he succeeded in charming many women which is the thing that led Lina not to suspect him at the very beginning. They got married since her family pressed her to do so after reaching marriage time.

Over time, Lina suspects that Johnnie could possibly be a murderer; thinking he is willing to for her life insurance. Here, Johnnie's fatality lies in his womanizing capacities. Barrenetxea said that this kind of *homme fatal* has "positive social connotations, as it usually denotes a successful man", while being "a 'womanizer' refers to men who serially seduce women and then discard them"¹⁰. In this vein, the figure of *the homme fatal* does not necessarily hold womanizing traits, nevertheless, they are very intelligent in their interaction with women. which means not every womanizer could be an *homme fatal* and not every *homme fatal* is a womanizer. Let's take the example of Giacomo Casanova de Seingalt who was an Italian/Venetian explorer and writer and one of the most notorious womanizers of the 18th century and almost all history. In his controversial autobiography, *Histoire de ma vie*, he opens about his love life, and he managed to seduce more than one hundred women, "to a man who has bid farewell to women after having possessed twenty mistresses, and only when he felt himself compelled to acknowledge that he could no longer be accepted by any woman"¹¹. He mentions his adventures with women and how he could not control himself but not in a criminal way when they "had in the fortress a colony of five or six hundred women, with God knows how many children! I felt greatly interested in them all. Happy idleness! I often regret thee because thou hast often offered me new sights"¹². Although he mostly narrates his traveling, his confession

¹⁰. Ane Barrenetxea Gerekiz, "Hommes Fatals: Masculine Destructiveness in Alfred Hitchcock's Rebecca (1940) and Sam Taylor-Johnson's Fifty Shades of Grey (2015)" (Thesis, Universidad del País Vasco, 2017), 10.

¹¹. Jacques Casanova, *The Complete Memoirs of Jacques Casanova de Seingalt 1725–1798*, vol. 12 (Project Gutenberg, 2001), <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2981/2981-h/2981-h.htm>, 57.

¹². *Ibidem*, 107.

about women made his reputation increases as the most cited womanizer, even his name is now an adjective to describe the apex of seduction. However, this does not mean he masculinity is fatal or lethal, still he knows how to deal with women. in this case, Casanova is not *homme fatal*.

In another case, precisely in relation to the *American Psycho* (2000), Patrick Bateman is a rich unequivocal womanizer and a shadowed serial killer. He basically tries to kill anyone who could be superior to him whether a woman or a man. What he ventures for is causing unreasonable pain to others; "I want my pain to be inflicted on others, I want no one to escape"¹³. With his women's approach, his fatality is rather "transformed into a sexual spectacle; the buff", highly-stylized"¹⁴. Indeed, several segments of the film portray the good-looking man but more precisely, how he is keen on being looked at while looking attractive. Patrick has been shot several times taking care of his hygiene. To his end, it seems that the Joker and Patrick share the same mirror but not the same products nor do they have the same objective. The Joker as well tries to make his outfits and face attract the eyesight. In fact, both aim for making a public show to attract others. Whether to infatuate people or engender a spectacularized terror; both seek attention.

Be that as it may, this category of *the homme fatal* is not what concerns this study, however, with my aim to recontextualize the significance of the *homme fatal*, I shall first refer to his classical meaning within the noir/neo-noir films and then define it as the fatal rebel in the comics space. To this end, the *homme fatal* is not a confined character to film noir but has been appearing in even more ancient texts.

His origins are back to the Byronic hero who shares the same fatal fate with noir *homme fatal* but with other characteristics. He does not need to be a wealthy man nor with an erotic aura, but the core term is the fatality. In this, I am referring to Mario Praz's *The Romantic Agony*, through which he expatiates on the fatality of several classic heroes to fall under the label of "hommes fatal". René in *Chateaubriand* is for Praz an *homme fatal* due to the love and suffering he imposes on whoever is close to him.

¹³. Mary Haron, *American Psycho* (Lionsgate Films, 2000), 01h:36min:33sec-01h:36min:39sec.

¹⁴. Samantha Jane Lindop, "Femmes, Filles, and Hommes: Postfeminism and the Fatal(e) Figure in Contemporary American Film Noir" (The University of Queensland, 2014), 157.

To love and to suffer was the double fatality he imposed on anyone who approached his person. Thrown into the world as a great misfortune, its pernicious influence extended to the surrounding beings.... Everything became fatal to him, even happiness.¹⁵

In this sense, the Byronic hero does not limit his damage to others only but to himself as well. There is no strict indication of his relationship with women or his sexuality. What sounds to be important for his portrait is his psychological attitude towards himself and others. For Praz, he is a cynical outlawed figure but for him, what he does is for the sake of law and order;

It seems that he was born jaded, and that he can only truly feel outlawed. Also, when one considers as artificial, as conventional the innumerable portraits that Byron has drawn of himself under the figure of the outlaw, one commits an irreparable misinterpretation about him, for his portraits emanate, all go up from the lowest layer. deeper in his sincerity. In the law, he experiences nothing; outside the law, he feels thoroughly.¹⁶

Besides being fatal to himself and an outlaw figure, Praz cited the qualities of the Fatal man as “mysterious (but conjectured to be exalted) origin, traces of burnt-out passions, suspicion of a ghastly guilt, melancholy habits, pale face, unforgettable eyes”¹⁷. Even though Praz’s reformation of the fatal man may conduct the villain’s “romantic agony”, he insisted on a monster of energy. For Praz, the fatal man was a Byronic hero through which Charles Du Bos, in his essay *Byron et le Besoin de la fatalité*, asserted that his

¹⁵. Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951), 68. Original text : “Aimer et souffrir était la double fatalité qu’il imposait à quiconque s’approchait de sa personne. Jeté dans le monde comme un grand malheur, sa pernicieuse influence s’étendait aux êtres environnants.... Tout lui devenait fatal, même le bonheur.

¹⁶. Ibidem, 70. Original text : il semble qu’il est né blasé, et qu’il ne puisse sentir vraiment que hors-la-loi. Aussi, lorsqu’on envisage comme factices, comme conventionnels les innombrables portraits que Byron a tracés de lui-même sous la figure du *l’outlaw*, on commet à son sujet un contresens irréparable, car ses portraits émanent, remontent tous de la couche la plus profonde de sa sincérité. Dans la loi, il n’éprouve rien ; hors la loi, il se sent à fond.

¹⁷. Ibidem, 59.

nature is constructed out of an innate melancholy that made his heart static and to react his heartbeats. As a result, he needs to accelerate *à la folie*, which means extreme insanity¹⁸. This insanity is, therefore, the fatality of the Joker that shaped his popularity despite the malevolent behavior he operates.

The Vice

The *Vice*, the master of ceremonies, is “a tempter, a mischievous, humorous villain is a real crux: he appears first in morality plays¹⁹. In fact, the character of the *Vice* is a complex character who combines the humorous comic persona and the vicious villainous one. He is an entertainer on stage and tries to break the invisible wall between actors and audiences. However, as Tóth asserts, the *Vice* usually carries an enigmatic persona, a kind of duplicity with cleverness to look artful, shrewd and witty, appealing to audiences. Again, the fatality I am referring to here is not inclusive to the film-noir sexualized men but the appealing fatal men who are hazardous to the social fabric they belong to. His ludicrousness conceals his lethal casualty, which I am attempting to underscore in the following lines. Thoroughly, Tempe E. Allison defines the *Vice* as “the emissary or agent of the Seven Deadly Sins and the Devil,” whose job is “to seduce mankind”²⁰.

I would emphasize the *Vice's* seduction mission in Allison's terms which has a tacit implication of what the *homme fatale* allude to in their destructive masculine persona toward women. However, the distinction lies in the *Vice's* determined asexuality in many of his appearances. This all is relevant to the Joker as well, being the modernized *Vice* character. He is a fool who is often portrayed as the outlaw character *tout court* without any

¹⁸. Charles Du Bos, *Byron et Le Besoin de La Fatalité* (Paris : Buchet Chastel Corrêa, 1957). Cited in Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951), 71.

¹⁹. Ágnes Matuska, “Haphazardly Ambidextrous. Interpretations of the Vice in 16th-Century English Drama,” *The AnaChronisT* 11 (2005): 1.

²⁰. Quoted in Zsófia Anna Tóth, *Merry Murderers: The Farcical (Re)Figuration of the Femme Fatale in Maurine Dallas Watkins Chicago (1927) and Its Various Adaptations* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 144.

indication of his love life; this, is what bound the two; however, he is never portrayed as a sexualized character. Even after Harley Quinn's coupling relationship with his character, he is still the outlaw rebel *par excellence*. As Mares states in his description of the *Vice* character; he assures that he "seems often to be outside the moral law. He is not evil disguised as good as the conventional morality explanation would lead one to expect but does both good and evil 'Haphazardly'." ²¹ Also, since he is not necessarily evil, he does not necessarily have to be punished ²². Again, this supports why the Joker always ends victoriously though he is a vicious villain. Being a comic *homme fatal* grants him immunity to punishment and, in almost all death cases. In each case, I maintain that the Joker being an *homme fatal* is representative of an outlaw, rebel and lethal man, albeit with some sexualized/romanticized aspects within Jared Leto's Joker in *The Suicide Squad* (2016).

The Joker

The Joker is the comic *homme fatal*. A carnivalesque figure in popular culture often aims to gain attention through the disruption of the status quo. He is a maniacally deprived and disturbed character, a "psychopathic, mass-murdering, schizophrenic clown with zero empathy", and a "terrorist" ²³.

His *modus operandi* distinguishes him from other villains. He is originally a clown, a trickster, and a man of spectacle. Joker, of course, defies any attempt at identifying him coherently. He keeps changing his tactics and goals, which is how others, including Batman, perceive him. Hence, my objective is to identify his figure as a fatal man, since setting people in peril for his personal psychopathic deeds puts him in the category of *hommes fatals*. By the same token, Erich Fromm cautioning about evil-changing faces made the Joker

²¹. Francis Hugh Mares, "The Origin of the Figure Called 'The Vice' in Tudor Drama," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (November 1958): 14.

²². Ágnes Matuska, *The Vice-Device: Iago and Lear's Fool as Agents of Representational Crisis* (JATEPress Kiadó, 2017), 48.

²³. Mary E. Camp et al., "The Joker: A Dark Night for Depictions of Mental Illness," *Academic Psychiatry* 34, no. 2 (March 2010): 145-146.

seem to be clever enough with an enigmatic aura than his insane featuring character. He notifies that “as long as one believes that the evil man wears horns, one will not discover an evil man”²⁴. Indeed, His *raison d'être* is the question of several scholars.

In his *How to Read Superhero Comics and Why*²⁵, Geoff Klock brings about the homoeroticism of The Joker's role in *The Dark Knight Returns* (2012) that embodies his relationship with Batman; however the dissonance between the erotic frame of earlier archetypes of *homme fatal* in film-noir and with which the Klock's identifies the Joker here are still not identical and neither I am searching for such similarity to dismantle the Joker puzzling figure. His homosexuality is one probability of numerous speculations concerning his remodeling of the classical *homme fatal* added to his possible asexuality. Nevertheless, neither of these points has been proved cinematically. The Joker is either framed as a total lethal man with a genderless victimization process with a past abusive marriage or as a possessive partner to Harley Quinn.

Results and discussion

1. *Dark fatal*

Christopher Nolan's 2008 Joker's version is perhaps the greatest screening of the Joker from the comics to cinemas. *The Dark Knight* (2008) establishes a visual representation of binary oppositions: light and dark, good, and evil, chaos and order, justice, and anarchy. Evidently, Batman is the good knight in the story, ironically named “dark knight”; however, the real darkness hides between a colorful smiling “white” face who deems to be the villain. His psychopathy renders his character captivating, through which all psychopaths often seem to be more intelligent than the superheroes simply because they are unpredictable, and their mannerisms are so quirky to be considered original. He is committing crimes out of complete awareness of having fun though

²⁴. Erich Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (New York: Open Road Integrated Media, 2013), 432.

²⁵. Geoff Klock, *How to Read Superhero Comics and Why* (New York: Continuum, 2002).

his philosophy of chaos is never explained; he seems to have selfish desires to hurt others and disregard their existence. This in fact, has been further enlightened by Alfred warning Bruce about the tough task of stopping the Joker since he has no stop button nor an objective to reach; "...some men aren't looking for anything logical, like money. They can't be bought, bullied, reasoned, or negotiated with. Some men just want to watch the world burn."²⁶

Calling all the sadism, he showed throughout the movie demonstrated that he is a fatal man who seeks to satisfy his desires. For instance, in the scene when the Joker has been interrogated by Detective Gerard Stephens, he explains why he uses knives instead of guns: Do you want to know why I use a knife? Guns are too quick. You can't savor all the... little emotions... you see, in their last moments, people show you who they really are"²⁷. His ways of pursuing his goals through anarchy are different from what film noir does, Joker denies the existence of gender while selecting victims while the traditional *homme fatal* weaponizes his masculine deeds primarily to pursue his victims. Nevertheless, what they both do is a common thing of a fatal man, proving to their victims their vulnerability.

In the case of the Joker, he frightened, threatened, and killed the general populace, putting Gotham city in the state of anarchy he so desired. He turns Batman's strength into a weakness. Indeed, during Harvey Dent's transfer sequence to the central prison, Batman was chasing the Joker, and unsurprisingly, the latter did not run away but was waiting with a thrilling excitement; he repeatedly uttered, "come on, I want you to do it, come on hit me"²⁸. He was there standing immobile while Batman's motor was approaching him not only because he does not fear death instead, but because he also wanted to change the morality of Batman which does not allow him to people. So, the more chaos the Joker causes, the more people he kills, and the further he proves that Batman's system has a weak point since the only solution to stop the Joker is by killing him, and Batman could never do this thing. This idea is what makes him fatal; he studies his opponents' minds very well and tries to defy their moral convictions.

²⁶. *The Dark Knight* (Warner Bros. Pictures, 2008), 55min:00sec-55min:11sec.

²⁷. Ibidem, 01h:33min:06sec-01h:33min:30sec.

²⁸. Ibidem, 01h:22min:08sec- 01h:22min:17sec.

The series of conundrums he made did not affect Batman only but Harvey Dent as well as several other characters. In this vein, Polidori explained the magnetism *homme fatal* has that affects society; "his character was dreadfully vicious, for that the possession of irresistible powers of seduction, rendered his licentious habits more dangerous to society"²⁹.

The Joker succeeded in seducing Harvey Dent to be on the dark side after the death of Rachel. He made him believe that the only solution is to create your justice, not only your chance. Also, officer Ramirez betrays Harvey Dent for her mother's medical care bills after being threatened by the Joker. Hence, the seduction power that the Joker has is not sexualized but implies power and fearlessness that sets him up as an ominous character.

Moving to the Joker's iconic physicality, though, it looks so messy that it incited a carelessness of his outer image; Ledger's Joker tricks us again by taking care of his makeup and the greasy slicked back hairstyle to look like he is always ready to party and cease attention. He transformed the gentlemen's classy look of the classical *homme fatals* into a carnivalesque outfit that grants him full public notice all the time. Profoundly, the gambling motif in *The Dark Knight* is reminiscent of film noirs *homme fatals* gamblers who seek rich women to pay for their debts.

Cinematically, most of the Joker scenes are framed using low-key lighting from a single source. The key light is set at a 45 degree angle to the character, this creates contrast and lights up the face, leaving some of his faces in the shadow. This is often coupled with a smirking expression, his insolite lips' mannerisms that highlight his arrogance and egoism, emphasizing the dark tone of the film.

Gotham as well participated in the making of the film as a modern comic film noir. The dark city with approximately dark glass skyscrapers, in addition to the train lines and the down below railroads that have shot with low light features; all contributed to the mise-en-scène of the Joker as the twentieth century most eligible *homme fatal*.

²⁹. John Polidori, *The Vampyre: A Tale* (London: Sherwood, 1919) quoted in Samantha Jane Lindop, "Femmes, Filles, and Hommes: Postfeminism and the Fatal(e) Figure in Contemporary American Film Noir" (Thesis, The University of Queensland, 2014), 152.

What is interesting is that the cumulative effect of all these actions did not lead the Joker to his end. He is a fatal rebel but with a vampire twist. He is immortal in contrast to the classical *homme fatal*, who often dies or gets punished by a more powerful entity than his playfulness.

2. *Homme de Suicide*

David Ayer's *The Suicide Squad* (2016) marked the first filmic appearance of Harley Quinn. The complex narrative demonstrates another tumultuous romantic relationship between the Joker and Harley circulated in an atomic space. Before her transformation into Harley Quinn, Dr Harleen Quinzel was a psychiatrist at Harlem asylum, she was assigned to the Joker himself "she thought she was curing him, but she was falling in love"³⁰. During the first sequence of introducing the Joker and Harley, both characters had an insightful conversation about the nature of their relationship,

Dr Quinzel. You know, I live for these moments with you. What do you got?
I got you a kitty.
So thoughtful.³¹

In this scene, his stares were intently trying to catch her empathy and attention as if Harley was resisting how he watches her. Leto's character was vicious with the possession of enticing skills of seduction as Praz states in his description of *homme fatal* "Who could avoid the fascination of his gaze? ... His mouth is bloody and smiles like that of a man asleep and tormented by hideous love"³². He was keen on her falling for him and that she could do anything he asked for, driven by her infatuation and his unusual charm. That's why he demanded a machine gun and eventually had it.

What is still intriguing is what hides in the shadows of his seduction. Was Jared Leto's Joker just a playful man with no serious love interests for Harley? Well, even before her transformation into the Joker's lover, he

³⁰. *Suicide Squad* (Warner Bros. Pictures, 2016), 09min:40sec-09min:45sec.

³¹. *Ibidem*, 09min:31sec-09min:42sec.

³². Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951), 77.

declared his interest, "Dr Quinzel. You know, I live for these moments with you," was a lie or a truth, still part of the plan³³. He maintains selfish decisions to hurt others. In these accounts, Harley's jump into the chemical toxins to answer the Joker's question if she would die for him, then replies, "No, that's too easy. Would you live for me?" incites his manipulation of her feelings, however, his dive after her demonstrates that his disruptive state of mind³⁴.

On the other hand, all the violence he committed was attended to keep her far from him; perhaps the Joker has another psychological weakness; fear of intimacy, which he tried to hide. Hatfield³⁵ explained the concept of a fear of intimacy and how men and women are different in their reactions to intimacy. Intimacy here to be clear, does not incite any sexual intercourse but how one could be close to another.

Elaine Hatfield argued that there are numerous reasons for this fear of intimacy which lies in the fear of exposure, fear of abandonment, fear of angry attacks, fear of loss of control, fear of one's own destructive impulses and a fear of losing one's individuality or of being engulfed.

First, fear of exposure is the deepest level of intimacy when boundaries fell, and all limits are concealed so that the significant other may know profound personal data. Second, fear of abandonment is constant thinking of losing the other or being left behind. To this point, the next calculations may line up with Leto's Joker. Fear of angry attacks and loss of control like what happened with their jump in the chemicals. What clearly happened with this version of the Joker is his fear to change from an *homme fatal* who can play with any woman and kill anyone to someone afraid of losing his lover. He feared his own destructive impulses because he knows that his madness may surpass his love, "that if they ever got in touch with what they are feeling, they would begin to cry....or kill"³⁶. Finally, he feared that his affections for Harley may cost him his individuality or "engulfed" by her³⁷.

³³. *Suicide Squad* (Warner Bros. Pictures, 2016), 09min:31sec-09min:35sec.

³⁴. *Ibidem*, 01h:15min:30sec-01h:15min:46sec.

³⁵. Elaine Hatfield, "The Dangers of Intimacy," in *Communication, Intimacy, and Close Relationships*, ed. Valerian J Derlega (Cambridge, MA: Academic Press, 1984).

³⁶. *Ibidem*, 212.

³⁷. *Ibidem*.

Again, the question I posited above of whether this is love or a master/doll game is without a concrete answer due to the numerous hypotheses that prove both cases. Be that as it may, his testimony to Harley during the motor chase of his car scene: "I am not someone who is loved. I'm an idea. State of mind. I execute my will according to my plan and you, Doctor, are not part of my plan" offers a clear explanation to his sadist *homme fatal* persona and his fear of losing the Joker he is³⁸.

However, after his mad love intensified, his fierce devotion shifted toward protecting his lover. His fatal ending posits another question mark above his intentions. Wager underscores the double-edged fatality of *homme fatal*, "they are, above all, fatal to themselves"³⁹. As they can hurt others, they are responsible for their ill-fated ends. Suicide Squad's Joker turns out to be a *Homme de suicide*, as I propose to label his character. He came to rescue her though he knew it would be a challenging mission. He was fatal to himself, equally to what he ventures to do to Harley and other victims.

Conclusion

I contend that these two characters share common features with the classical *homme fatal*, most of which contribute to the *comic-ization* of their 'fatality'. Their destructiveness appears to be mixed with the comic tone of the genre and the clownish nature of their characters. Still, they are modernized *homme fatals*. Destructiveness, hideousness and rebellion appear to be essential when describing their behavior towards their carefully selected victims, but also towards themselves.

The Joker figure has been depicted as a force of chaos⁴⁰, an evil person with no limits for his actions or external fear to stop his chaotic aspirations.

³⁸. *Suicide Squad* (Warner Bros. Pictures, 2016), 01h:06min:12sec-1h:06min:30sec.

³⁹. Jans B. Wager, *Dames in the Driver's Seat: Rereading Film Noir* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 21.

⁴⁰. Anna-Sophie Jürgens, "Batman's Joker, a Neo-Modern Clown of Violence," *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* 5, no. 4 (October 2014), <https://doi.org/10.1080/21504857.2014.926956>.

Violence is his motive to live, whether it is targeting men or women. He is the ultimate ungendered modern *homme fatal* with the only difference between his unleashing violence and the classical *homme fatals* is their sexual romantic life

In fact, he is mentally ill, so perhaps his love life does not matter within his health conditions that's why he is always muting his emotions and reason and driven by his madness. The Joker is held by internal forces to his criminality, which means that the absence of self-control is the reason behind his crimes. *The Dark Knight's Joker* is a megalomaniac persona with no will to change since he is enjoying it.

On the other hand, *The Suicide Squad's Joker* is the victim of himself, his love and of his Jokerism. he could not find a way out of the two, so he was fatal to himself before killing anybody else. To sum up, I tried to fill the scholarly gap of seeing the Joker character as a modernized *homme fatal* though each version of the films shows a different persona. This did not forfeit the reality that the Joker is indeed an attractive psychopathic criminal that puts him in the same category of film noir criminals.

REFERENCES

- American Psycho*. Lionsgate Films, 2000.
- Barrenetxea Gerekiz, Ane. "Hommes Fatals: Masculine Destructiveness in Alfred Hitchcock's *Rebecca* (1940) and Sam Taylor-Johnson's *Fifty Shades of Grey* (2015)." Thesis, Universidad del País Vasco, 2017.
- Camp, Mary E., Cecil R. Webster, Thomas R. Coverdale, John H. Coverdale, and Raymond Nairn. "The Joker: A Dark Night for Depictions of Mental Illness." *Academic Psychiatry* 34, no. 2 (March 2010). <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ap.34.2.145>.
- Casanova, Jacques. *The Complete Memoirs of Jacques Casanova de Seingalt 1725–1798*. Vol. 12. Project Gutenberg, 2001. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2981/2981-h/2981-h.htm>.
- Du Bos, Charles. *Byron et Le Besoin de La Fatalité*. Paris: Buchet Chastel Corrêa, 1957.
- Fromm, Erich. *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*. New York: Open Road Integrated Media, 2013.

- Hatfield, Elaine. "The Dangers of Intimacy." In *Communication, Intimacy, and Close Relationships*, edited by Valerian J Derlega. Cambridge, MA: Academic Press, 1984.
- Jürgens, Anna-Sophie. "Batman's Joker, a Neo-Modern Clown of Violence." *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* 5, no. 4 (October 2014).
<https://doi.org/10.1080/21504857.2014.926956>.
- Klock, Geoff. *How to Read Superhero Comics and Why*. New York: Continuum, 2002.
- Lindop, Samantha Jane. "Femmes, Filles, and Hommes: Postfeminism and the Fatal(e) Figure in Contemporary American Film Noir." Thesis, The University of Queensland, 2014.
- Mares, Francis Hugh. "The Origin of the Figure Called 'The Vice' in Tudor Drama." *Huntington Library Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (November 1958).
<https://doi.org/10.2307/3816153>.
- Matuska, Ágnes. "Haphazardly Ambidextrous. Interpretations of the Vice in 16th-Century English Drama." *The AnaChronisT* 11 (2005): 1–22.
- . *The Vice-Device: Iago and Lear's Fool as Agents of Representational Crisis*. JATEPress Kiadó, 2017.
- Peaslee, Robert Moses, and Robert G. Weiner, eds. *The Joker. A Serious Study of the Clown Prince of Crime*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2015.
<https://doi.org/10.14325/mississippi/9781628462388.001.0001>.
- Polidori, John. *The Vampire: A Tale*. London: Sherwood, 1919.
- Praz, Mario. *The Romantic Agony*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951.
- Spicer, Andrew. *Film Noir*. Harlow: Pearson Education, 2002.
- . *Suicide Squad*. Warner Bros. Pictures, 2016.
- . *Suspicion*. RKO Radio Pictures Inc, 1941.
- . *The Dark Knight*. Warner Bros. Pictures, 2008.
- Tóth, Zsófia Anna. *Merry Murderers: The Farcical (Re)Figuration of the Femme Fatale in Maurine Dallas Watkins Chicago (1927) and Its Various Adaptations*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011.
- Wager, Jans B. *Dames in the Driver's Seat: Rereading Film Noir*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005.
- Wallace, Daniel. *The Joker: A Visual History of the Clown Prince of Crime*. New York: Universe, 2011.

AMIRA RIHAB SAIDI

AMIRA RIHAB SAIDI is a researcher at the University of Szeged, Hungary. She received her MA degree from University of Saida, Algeria in 2021 in American civilization and politics. Currently, her interests are the reconstruction of American masculinity in Hollywood twenty-first century films.