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JASON'IN KARA ÇİZGİROMANLARI

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ÖZET

Kara film, yozlaşmış bir dünyada geçen suç öykülerinin anlatıldığı filmleri tanımlayan bir sinema terimidir. Kara filmler, Amerikan sinemasında ilk kez 1940larda ve 1950lerde görülmüştür ve 1930ları şekillendiren *Büyük Depresyon'un* ardından ortaya çıkan sorunları yansıtmışlardır. Her ne kadar kara film terimi, açık bir biçimde açıklanamıyor olsa da, 1940'larda ve 1950'lerde Alman Dışavurumculuğunun etkisinde Amerika'da çekilen filmlerde bu anlatım tekniğinim izleri, görülmektedir. Kara filmler, yabacılaşma, yozlaşma, kadercilik, şüphecilik ve varoluşsal umutsuzluk gibi bir dizi temayı, karanlık sokaklarında tehlikenin kol gezdiği, yozlaşmış kentlerde yaşayan anti kahraman olarak nitelenebilecek, ana erkek karakterler, baştan çıkarıcı kadınlar (*femme fatale*), servetlerini kötülük uğrunu kullanan, nüfuslu kötü adamlar gibi arketipler üzerinden işlemektedir. Kara filmler döneminin büyük bir hayranı olan Jason, bu anlatım tekniğini, kendi zamanın gerçekliğine uygun bir şekilde, kendi çizgi romanlarında yansıtmaktadır. Norveçli çizer, sinema, edebiyat ve tiyatro gibi farklı disiplinlere ait öğeleri, kara çizgi roman türündeki eserlerine uyarlamakta istik öğeleri incelemektedir. Bu açıklaması güç anlatım tekniğini yansıtan bütün dır. Bu tez, Jason'ın çizgi romanlarında bulunan, kara çizgi romanlara ait karakter özellikleri tek bir çizgi romanda ortaya koymak mümkün olmadığından, bu tez, Jason'ın, kara çizgi roman anlatımın en belirgin özelliklerini sergilediği hikâyelerle sınırlandırılmıştır. Çizer, karakterlerini, yozlaşmış bir dünyaya yerleştirmektedir. Jason'ın renkli ve temiz çizgilerine zıt olarak çizgi romanlarında yer bulan karakterlerin arasında, sudan sebepler uğruna başkalarının öldürülmelerini isteyen insanlar, parasız kaldıklarında banka soyan yazarlar, eşini hayata döndürmek için masum kadınların canına kasteden bir doktor bulunmaktadır. Bütün bu karakterler ise kara çizgi roman evrenine oldukça uyumlu gibi görünen kaotik bir sahne oluşturmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sinema, Çizgi Roman, Kara Film, Kara Çizgi Roman, Jason

JASON'S COMICS NOIR

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ABSTRACT

Film noir is a cinematic term that describes crime movies which set in a corrupt world. Film noir first appeared in American cinema in the 1940s and 1950s and reflected the problems that arose in the wake of the Great Depression, an era which shaped the 1930s. Although the term, film noir, cannot be explained clearly, traces of this narrative technique can be seen in American films, shot in the 1940s and 1950s under the influence of German Expressionism. Film noir deals with a series of themes such as alienation, corruption, fatalism, scepticism and existential despair, through archetypes such as anti-hero protagonists, a lethal femme fatale and an influential villain, employing his wealth for evil purpose, all of whom live in corrupt cities where danger lurks in the dark streets. As a big fan of the film noir era, Jason reflects this narrative technique in his comics, in accordance with the reality of his own time. The Norwegian cartoonist incorporates elements from different disciplines such as cinema, literature and drama into his work of comics noir genre. This thesis examines the characteristic elements of comics noir found in Jason's comics. Since it is not possible to reveal all the features reflecting this elusive narrative technique in a single comic book, this thesis is limited to the stories in which Jason exhibits the most distinctive features of comics noir narration. The cartoonist places his characters in a corrupt world. Contrary to Jason's colourful and clear lines, the characters featured in his comics include characters such as people who want other people to be killed for trivial reasons, writers who rob banks when they're broke, and a doctor who takes the lives of innocent women to resurrect his wife. All these characters build up a chaotic scene that seems to be quite compatible with the comics noir universe.

Keywords: Cinema, Comics, Film Noir, Comics Noir, Jason

TABLE OF CONTENTS

JASON'S COMIC NOIR

CONFORMITY TO THE SCIENTIFIC ETHICS ..... **i**

ORIGINALITY PAGE ..... **ii**

SUITABILITY FOR GUIDE ..... **iii**

ACCEPTANCE AND APPROVAL PAGE ..... **iv**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT ..... **v**

ÖZET ..... **vi**

ABSTRACT ..... **vii**

TABLE OF CONTENTS ..... **vi**

INTRODUCTION **1**

CHAPTER ONE

GREAT DEPRESSION AND FILM NOIR

1.1. Great Depression and the Birth of Film Noir **4**

1.2. Definitive Struggles: What is Film Noir? **8**

CHAPTER TWO

JASON AND COMIC NOIR

2.1. Comics Noir **12**

2.2. Jason's Comics Noir: A Self-Reflexsive Adaptation **17**

2.3. For the Love of Intertextuality: Jason's Multisource Adaptations **22**

2.4. Far From Victorian Values: A New Femme Fatale by Jason **24**

CHAPTER THREE

NOIR ELMENTS IN JASON'S COMIC BOOKS

3.1. *I Killed Adolf Hitler* **31**

3.2. *The Left Bank Gang* **35**

3.3. *The Last Muskeeter* **47**

3.4. *Lost Cat* **55**

3.5. *If You Steal* **62**

3.6. *New Face* **64**
3.7. *Polly Wants a Cracker* **67**
3.8. *So Long Marry Ann* **70**
3.9. *Athos in America* **72**
CONCLUSION **76**
REFERENCES **78**

FIGURE LIST

Figure 1.1. Barbara Stanwyck as the *Femme Fatale* 6
Figure 1.2. The use of light and shadow in film noir 10
Figure 1.3. Surreal setting in *Metropolis* 10
Figure 2.1. First issue of Batman 13
Figure 2.2. The Spirit and The Femme Fatale 14
Figure 2.3. Frank Miller's Batman *Noir* 15
Figure 2.4. Frank Miller's Outcast Characters 16
Figure 2.5. Herge's influence on Jason 17
Figure 2.6. Jason's anthropomorphic characters 18
Figure 2.7. Popular culture icons in Jason's comics 19
Figure 2.8. Lucy Westenra's Transformation 26
Figure 2.9. Van Helsing protects Mina from Dracula's brides 27
Figure 2.10. Frail male protagonist sobbing on her knees 29
Figure 3.1. Chaotic streets in Jason's comics noir 31
Figure 3.2. The seductive femme fatale 32
Figure 3.3. The Literary Gang 34
Figure 34. Sylvia Beach's bookstore 36
Figure 3.5. Zelda Fitzgerald as the *femme fatale* 37
Figure 3.6. Conflict between Scoot and Zelda 38
Figure 3.7. Athos asks for a drink from a stranger 47
Figure 3.8. Athos calls Aramis for duty 48
Figure 3.9. Athos feels trivial in the universe 51
Figure 3.10. Athos is in the presence of Ming the Merciless 52
Figure 3.11. The princess tries to lure Amir 53
Figure 3.12. Jason's protagonist resembles Humphrey Bogart 58
Figure 3.13. The private eye drinks excessively 59
Figure 3.14. Dan Delon is obsessed with Charlotte 60
Figure 3.15. Two accomplices break into a house 61
Figure 3.16. The fugitive disguises himself 64
Figure 3.17. Frida Kahlo conducts an assassination 66

Figure 3.18. Frida Kahlo is rescued by the Parrot man 68
Figure 3.19. Frida Kahlo and Her Pets 68
Figure 3.20. Mob leader orders an execution 69
Figure 3.21. Final moments of Jake..... 70
Figure 3.22. Athos saves a woman 72
Figure 3.23. Athos saves a woman 73

INTRODUCTION

World War I brought about significant changes in the United States of America. Men, who had been enlisted for the war, were replaced by women as the growing economy demanded a shift in gender roles. During the 1920s, American society enjoyed controversial prosperity as a result of consumerism, which was largely based on credits. The automobile industry peaked up after Henry Ford's assembly lines were copied by other companies. In addition to the large portion of domestic sales, these companies started to grow overseas. The dollar as a currency became common in trade interactions. There was immense progress in other industries, as well. Countless new products from electronics to chemicals were presented to American society. Nevertheless, the overproduction lowered the prices and the profitability decreased. American Industry which had been built on loans could not afford to run properly. This led bank investments from funding the commercial efforts to different resources: stock market and real estate which were bought with loan money. As the banking system back then largely consisted of individual investment, the large scale of panic in society during the 1930s caused depositors to take out their money and put these enterprises in jeopardy. Banks began to fail one by one because their reserves were insufficient to survive, so they decided to collect debtors' money and sell their assets. This triggered a perilous deflationary process that resulted in a high unemployment rate. Bankers who were not aided by the Federal Reserve were unable to lend to business owners, and business owners were unable to pay their employees. Businesses went bankrupt and more people became unemployed. *Roaring Twenties*, as it is called, during which non-regulated capitalism created a fragile prosperity, were long gone.

The American film industry also benefited from the prosperity in the 1920s, as the prospered society, who reduced the time they used to spend on household chores by buying electrical wonders such as domestic appliances, were left with more leisure time for amusement. The technological breakthrough also contributed to the development of the studios which had become bolder with the extraordinary expanse in the industry. Hollywood produced nearly 700 films per year, significantly impacting everything from consumption habits to social interactions. During the 1920s, films were mostly silent and comedies; however, with the introduction of sound-on films, the art form changed dramatically. New camera angles in films gave the American audience a sense of involvement.

After a non-regulated economic growth, the *Great Depression* era began in 1929. People lost their jobs and homes. A whole nation was mobilized to travel across country in search of a decent life but poverty dominated the land. During this period, Hollywood followed the social trends and a vaguely-handled social criticism found itself in the core of film production. Storylines became darker, mirroring social reality. On these terms, *film noir* emerged in its earliest form in crime films; however, it was not a new genre but a set of narrative and technical approaches. *Film noir* would be re-visited and re-invented by some directors who sought an experimental novelty in their narratives during the 1980s and 1990s and become a descriptive term. In accordance with the social realism of the era, characters who are morally and psychologically alienated from society found themselves in chaotic settings and desperate circumstances. To design a threatening ambience in crime movies, which could represent the social reality, studios applied the visual technicality brought up by *German Expressionism* which required the use of high contrast and extravagantly designed sets to represent the inner-conflicts of characters, living in a dark world. These new techniques, which were brought by German artists and intellectuals, who emigrated or exiled from Germany, dominated the crime genre and became popular as the American society saw their own reality in them.

John Arne Sæterøy, also known as Jason in comics society, is a renowned Norwegian cartoonist who found out that he could employ the characteristics of *film noir* in his comics with an intertextual effort, as he is keen on adaptations. Jason did not use any colours at the beginning of his career. His favourite films were black and white, so were

his first graphic novels in which he followed the tradition of *la ligne claire* (the clear line), encompassing strong lines with minimal shading to provide clarity and readability. Jason had adopted clear lines to draw his cartoonish and anthropomorphic characters in order to achieve a clear technique of visual representation through a plain narrative; however, he chose not to use any colours in his comics. Later, with the initiative of Jérôme Martineau, a French publisher, Jason met Hubert Boulard, a prolific colourist, who convinced him to publish his first fully-coloured comic book, *Why Are You Doing This*? Later, his works became coloured adaptations of major elements, found in *film noir*. This approach had already been adopted by, the pioneers of *comics noir*, such as Will Eisner and Alex Toth, but Jason differed from the tradition since he chose to employ a cartoonish style which graphically contradicts the detailed drawings in *comics noir.* Moreover, Jason, as a means of self-reflectivity, employed different constructs of intertextuality such as parody, satire, and pastiche to represent his own stance in an old tradition he chose to alter. This thesis attempts to explain how a film tradition is incorporated by a cartoonist into his comics with an intertextual endeavour to create an up-to-date version of *comics noir* by transforming ideas of the past and according to them with the reality of today's social agenda in the light of a post-modern approach. In this thesis, the word *noir* is used as an adjective to connote the elements specific to *film noir and,* hence *comics noir,* since the terms *film noir* and *comics noir* are used to describe two distinct but closely related narrative styles in crime fiction.

CHAPTER ONE

GREAT DEPRESSION AND FILM NOIR

1.1. Great Depression and the Birth of Film Noir

Flory states that, as a genre, film noir has a functional tool of social criticism which can be accessed by everyone.[1] Its power to raise questions about social structures and make people think about the issues of power and privileged classes in society is rather special and unique. In this sense, technicality aside, to understand this style well, it is a key endeavour to scrutinize the era it was evolved in.

World War I brought drastic changes in America. The society went under a serious turmoil during which young American men, roaring engine of labour force in any economy, were enlisted to fight overseas and they were replaced by women who had to take on two distinct responsibilities: home and office. The demand for war-related production in various industries from agriculture to shipbuilding brought a rapid growth, accompanied by new job opportunities. The leading industries of economic growth were automobiles, electrical appliances, chemicals, leisure industries such as movies, radio, sport, and advertising.[2] The demand for labour was immense. The first American automobile was built in 1892, but the automobile industry cherished a rather rapid growth owing to mass production, led by Ford's assembly lines and techniques which would later be spread to other companies.[3] America became financially strong as

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1 Dan Flory, *Philosophy, Black Film, Film Noir* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008), xi-xii.

2 Neil A. Wynn, *Historical Dictionary from the Great War to the Great Depression* (Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2003), xxxiii.

3 Wynn, *Historical Dictionary from the Great War to the Great Depression*, 14.

they financed the European countries that engaged in the war. However, American society had to endure a terrible loss of life during World War I.

The post-war era offered different conditions. The US government, as the financer of the war, was in a large debt. Global trade almost ceased as a consequence of the destruction in Europe. In a response to the post-war inflation, production expenses went higher and employment rate started to decline. Moreover, trade was a non-regulated activity and banking system was independent and local, which constantly caused financial crisis until the Federal Reserve was introduced in 1914[4]. Eventually, the *Great Depression* (1929-1939) struck American society. Whole nation found themselves on the roads to find a decent job to make a living. The Unites States became "the land of lonely drifters, homeless and perpetually on the move."[5]

> *What happened when the men came home from war? They returned to a world transformed into an alien landscape, something they didn't understand and didn't recognize as home, a place full of new and strange social customs, in which the fabric of prewar society had been torn asunder by massive social, economic, and political change. And a new kind of film was waiting for them, as well; the film noir, or 'black film,' which documented better than anything else the realities of this new social order.*[6]

Apart from the devastating impact of the *Great Depression on economy*, there was also a social disruption. The veterans of the war returned their home and found themselves in a different country. Women, who had been excluded from employment before, became the major part of labour force and they did not want devote themselves back to household chores.[7] Families were restless. It was hard for American men to accept shifting gender roles.

In the 1930s, tensions escalated in Europe. As the United States had already been weakened by World War I, American government took an isolationist stand not to involve in European conflicts and passed a number of Neutrality Acts. However, The United States still provided military aids to the Allied countries. Meanwhile, Nazi

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4 Wynn, 18.

5 Mark T. Conard, *The Philosophy of Film Noir* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2006), 152.

6 Wheeler Winston Dixon, *Film Noir and the Cinema of Paranoia* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 9.

7 Wynn, *Historical Dictionary from the Great War to the Great Depression*, xxxvi.

Germany in Europe and Japan in Asia adopted a threatening expansionism. The United States, particularly trouble by Japan's conquests in Asia, imposed economic sanctions and embargo which created a rising tension between two countries. On December 7, 1941, Japan launched a surprise attack on the American naval base at Pearl Harbour and the United States formally declared war against Japan and its allies, Germany and Italy, which ended up in the United States' entry into World War II.[8]

After the United States entered World War II, a massive cultural process started with the introduction of a new ideology, rejecting the isolationist doctrine that preceded in the 1930s, imposing non-involvement in European matters.[9] This new perception offered a new struggle that would eliminate the class divisions for a greater purpose: a national unity to stay strong. After the new ethos was initiated, inequalities in American society were forgotten for a while. These attempts temporarily re-eradicated the conventional gender roles. A great number of men were drafted by the U.S. military, and women, who had to limit their devotion to their families once again to overcome the problems led by the war-time economy, became the biggest part of the workforce with a patriotic sense of duty. These dutiful female figures would later appear in *film noir*, opposing the ever-playful femme fatale (see figure 1.1)

Figure 1.1. Barbara Stanwyck as the *Femme Fatale*

Source: *Double Indemnity* (1944)

8 Wynn, 18.
9 Dixon, *Film Noir and the Cinema of Paranoia*, 41.

Hollywood served the consolidated ideology of wartime America by presenting semi-documentaries, a hybrid form, combining traditional documentary filmmaking with fictional plots, based on Hollywood formulas[10] but also focused on the social changes of the period simultaneously with *film noir*. The post-war era offered totally different conditions. Married women, who became a major part of labour force, were instructed to re-devote themselves to their homes[11] as a "cure" for unemployment.[12] On the other hand, Men who returned their homeland could not adapt themselves to the new reality that surrounded them. Consumerism took control of American society. Although rapid economic expansion, along with a relative level of prosperity, was supposed to bring peace to the country, individuals faced serious alienation. Crime rates were peaking. There was a steady increase of homicides and all kinds of violent acts. American society became desperate about their country's future because the law was not functioning anymore. Especially alcohol prohibitions triggered illegal financial activities of dealers with the help of the mafia. In such crisis, many sought their own justice, bending traditional values for their own interest, which is also another element to be seen in *film noir*. The most crucial faculties of the *American Dream* such as hard work, respect, or dignity, were diminishing.[13] It seemed the *Dream* came to an end. Economic crisis hit the society so hard that they had to seek refuge in films, magazines, radio, and games. By "marrying entertainment to the revelation of technical advance,"[14] cinema became the most popular leisure activity "as a source of escapism"[15] in this period. In accordance with these experiences of the post-war era, some certain elements concerning *film noir* started to appear in the films shot in the era, but not always in the same way in all movies.

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10 Rebecca Prime, "Cloaked in Compromise: Jules Dassin's Naked City" in *Un-American Hollywood: Politics and Film in the Blacklist Era*, eds. Frank Krutnik, Steve Neale, Brian Neve and Peter Stanfield (United States: Rutger University Press, 2007), 143.

11 Frank Krutnik, *In a Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre Masculinity* (London: Routledge, 2001), 57–61.

12 Murray N. Rothbard, *America's Great Depression* (Alabama: Mises Institute, 2000), 244.

13 William H. Young and Nancy K. Young, *The Great Depression in America* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2007), 112-113.

14 John M. Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 69.

15 Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion*, 73.

According to Conard, as a style, the main elements of *noir* films are based on cynicism, pessimism and alienation:[16] "the dark side of Western self."[17] These elements are functioned by the "inversion of traditional values" and the "loss of the meaning of the things" and unlike the conventional protagonists, main character in *noir* films has a questionable moral attitude which seems to confront long-held, traditional values[18]. This questionable state of mind is often mingled with alienation, paranoia, and cynicism in stories based on crime and violence. These characteristics of *film noir* served the men who returned to their homeland after World War 2. The problem was the country they fought and died for had undergone a series of massive social traumas, caused by the *Great Depression*. In this new social setting everything seemed strange to them.[19] The new reality was so hard to digest; they had to learn about this new social order they had not been familiar with and adapt to it. There was no better teacher than *film noir* which included crime, injustice, and a big moral deadlock, everything that defined the new American society; *film noir* questioned the *dream* for the first time. In a way, *noir* films became a *dark mirror* in which the optimism offered by the American Dream was put on trial.[20] In the 1940s and 1950s, American cinema dealt with the unseen and dark aspects of new America, representing characters who were in despair due to the social struggles[21] and represented anger and demands of the low-class Americans who had been marginalized and demeaned.[22] However, *film noir* had to depict these conflicts in an implicit fashion. The cloudy nature of *film noir's* social representativeness is quite tolerable due to the fact that films had served as "an instrument for manipulation of the masses" because of its propaganda power in war times,[23] and it was not feasible to make a fast transition from a jingoistic agenda to an explicit criticism.

16 Conard, *The Philosophy of Film Noir*, 17.
17 Eric Lott, "The Whiteness of Film Noir," *American Literary History* 9, no. 3 (Autumn 1997): 543.
18 Conard, *The Philosophy of Film Noir*, 2.
19 Dixon, *Film Noir and the Cinema of Paranoia*, 9.
20 Geoff Mayer and Brian McDonnell, *Encyclopedia of Film Noir* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2007), 3.
21 Gene D. Phillips, *Out of the Shadows: Expanding the Canon of Classic Film Noir* (Plymouth: The Scarecrow Press, 2012), ix.
22 Andrew Spicer, *Historical Dictionary of Film Noir* (Plymouth: The Scarecrow Press, 2010), 41.
23 Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion*, 74.

1.2. Definitive Struggles: What is Film Noir?

According to Andrew Spicer, defining the term *film noir* is a problematic quest as it is a retrospective definition of the films produced in an era when there was no such categorization as *film noir*.[24] Moreover the characteristics of *film noir* are not "as obvious as comedies or Westerns" and some commentators insist that it must be defined as a part of the crime genre.[25] As Arthur Lyons states the *film noir* was defined as a genre after the attempts of some directors in the 1980s and 1990s to re-discover and re-use certain elements of the crime films, produced during the 1940s and 1950s.[26] What is *film noir*, then? This very question has been the main interest of critics who endeavour to come up with a brief and solid definition to it; however, the only answer they managed to find is that it covers a number of movies, filmed during the 1940s and 1950s, a desperate era during which American society had undergone serious struggles due to the heavy stress and tension caused by the Great Depression.

Film noir is a hardboiled detective story, filled with existentialist and Freudian ideas which emphasize the absurdity of existence, depicting the impact of one's past over his/her choices and actions, along with patriarchal forces that govern a society. In this sense, an ever-haunting past and a series of lethal events experienced by a masculine character, [27] who is marked by a strong feeling of otherness that *noir* characters, driven by crime, obsession, and "guilt of Western individual"[28], are morally and psychologically supposed to experience, establish an essential ground for *film noir*.

Conard states that *film noir* can technically be defined by the use of light and shadows in contrast, tilting camera angles with innovative and untraditional use of frames, and positioning characters which had never been tried before (see figure 1.2).[29]

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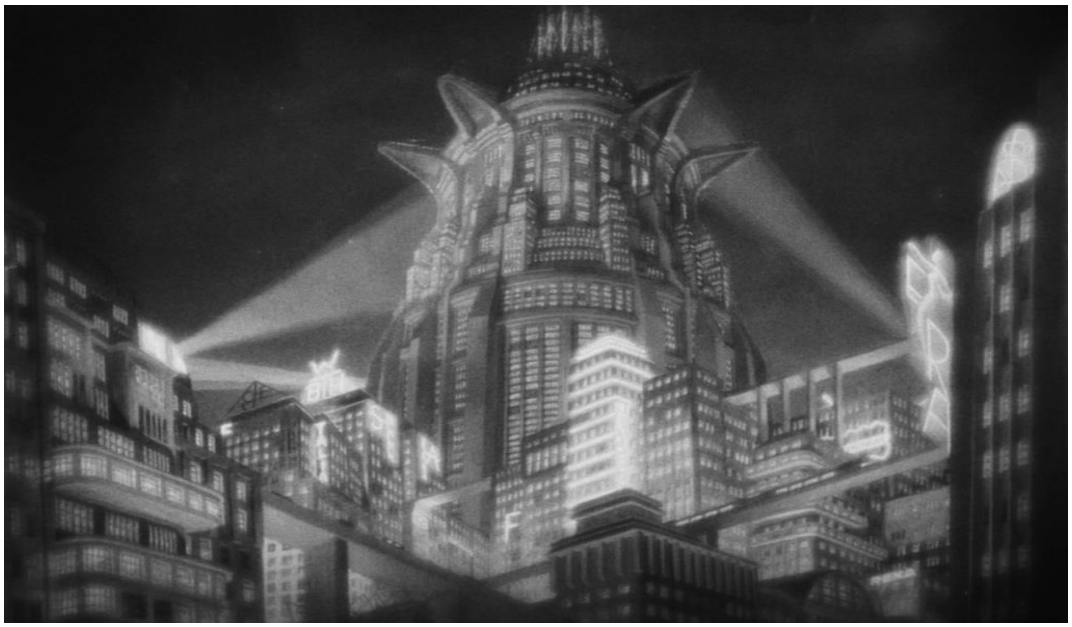
24 Spicer, *Historical Dictionary of Film Noir*, 37.
25 Spicer, 39.
26 Arthur Lyons, *Death on the Cheap: The Lost B Movies of Film Noir* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2000), 7.
27 Mayer and McDonnell, *Encyclopedia of Film Noir*, 4.
28 Lott, "The Whiteness of Film Noir," 543.
29 Conard, *The Philosophy of Film Noir*, 1– 2.

Figure 1.2. The use of light and shadow in film noir

Source: *Maltese Falcon* (1941)

This is linked to the sharp camera angles, dramatic shadows and high contrast, obtained by the use of harsh lighting techniques, adopted by *German Expressionism*, as employed in the film *Metropolis* (1927), which introduced surreal settings (see figure 1.3), unusual camera angles, montage techniques, boosted graphic designs and technical innovations.

Figure 1.3. Surreal setting in *Metropolis*



Source: *Metropolis* (1927)

With these technical improvements in the film industry, viewers who had already cherished the dialogue-based films, replacing visuality-based ones, had more intimate encounters with films by almost finding themselves in them with the help of new camera angles.[30]

Another characteristic of German film production, through which *film noir* can be identified, was the main interest of German filmmakers in the analysis of characters psychology.[31] It is clear that these directors deployed the anxieties they experienced in Nazi Germany. Therefore, *film noir* included a great variety of people with uncertain psyche, trying to make their way out of chaotic settings by bending moral values the society had long held. All of these factors played an important role in the development of *film noir* as a narrative style.

30 Paul Buhle, "History and Comics," *Reviews in American History* 35, no. 2 (June 2007): 320.

31 Paul Duncan, *Film Noir: Films of Trust and Betrayal* (Great Britain: Pocket Essentials, 2006), 17.

CHAPTER TWO

JASON AND COMICS NOIR

2.1. Comics Noir

Film noir gained great popularity when it first emerged in the 1940s, and its influence on various narratives, such as comics, was immediate and immense owing to "an awareness of cross-fertilation across forms".[32] Hence, *noir* style and themes accompanied by moody atmosphere, morally ambiguous characters, and crime-based narratives, which were essential to *film noir*, started to beset comic strips during the *Golden Age of Comic Books*. As there was no such style named as *film noir*, crime comics pioneered the zone what would turn into *comics noir* in the years following its emergence. *Batman,* which appeared on the first volume of *The Detective Comics* (1937) can be considered as the earliest example of *comics noir* (see figure 2.1*)* since Batman, marked by its grim tone and nourish use of bold blocks of black ink", was "a gothic figure: a tortured soul", lurking in the shadows of a urban jungle with an ultimate objective: revenge.[33]

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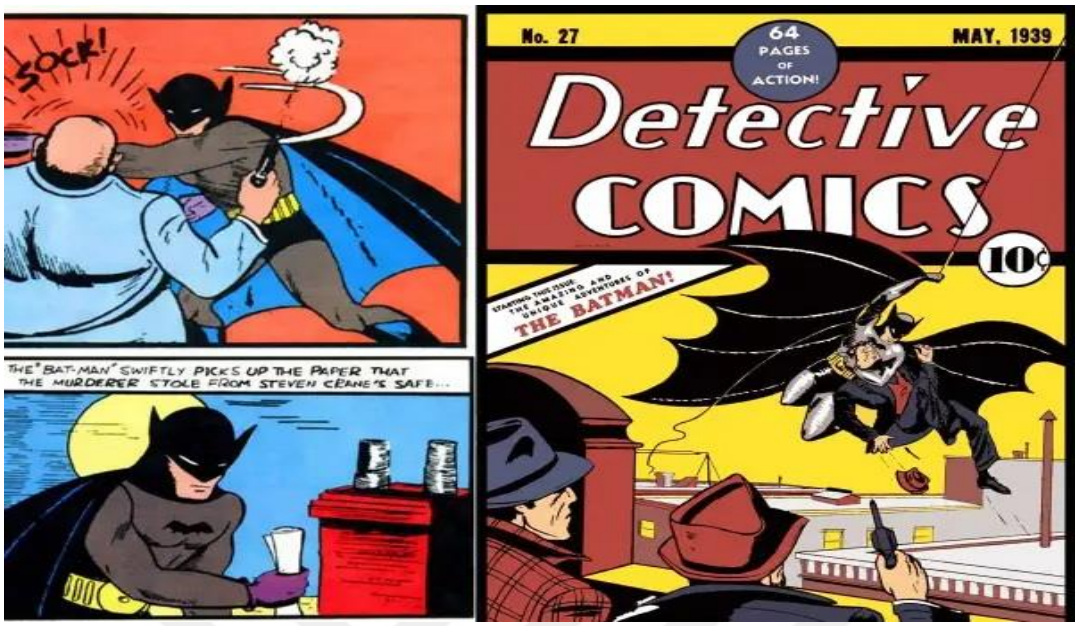
32 Lyons, "It Rhymes with Lust: The Twisted History of Noir Comics," in *A Companion to Film Noir* eds. Andrew Spicer and Helen Hanson (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell: 2013), 460.

33 Roger Sabin, *Comics, Comix and Graphic Novels: A History of Graphic Art*, (London: Phaidon, 1996), 61.

Figure 2.1. First issue of Batman



Source: *Detective Comics*, 1939

The first Batman, which was allegedly created by Bob Kane, was "a psychologically scarred hero", dwelt in a "terror filled-background."[34] As a masked vigilante, his first case was the murder of Lambert, a chemical magnate. He follows the leads to the remaining partners of *The Chemical Syndicate,* who are to inherit Lambert's share upon his mysterious death. Batman takes on the mission to deliver justice in his own fashion. He collects evidence on each partner who may have a motive for the murder and reveals that the last remaining partner of the Syndicate is behind the murder. Batman brings him to justice and vanishes in the darkness of Gotham city. First Batman was a true *noir* hero. Although his storyline started to change in the 1950s in a response to issues that concerned violence, he set the stage for the others, such as Will Eisner's *The Spirit* (1940), which depicted "femme fatales, adult humour and settings involving beautifully rendered shadowy cityscapes"[35] (see figure 2.2).

34 Lyons, "It Rhymes with Lust: The Twisted History of Noir Comics," 462.
35 Mila Bongco, *Comic Books* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 148.

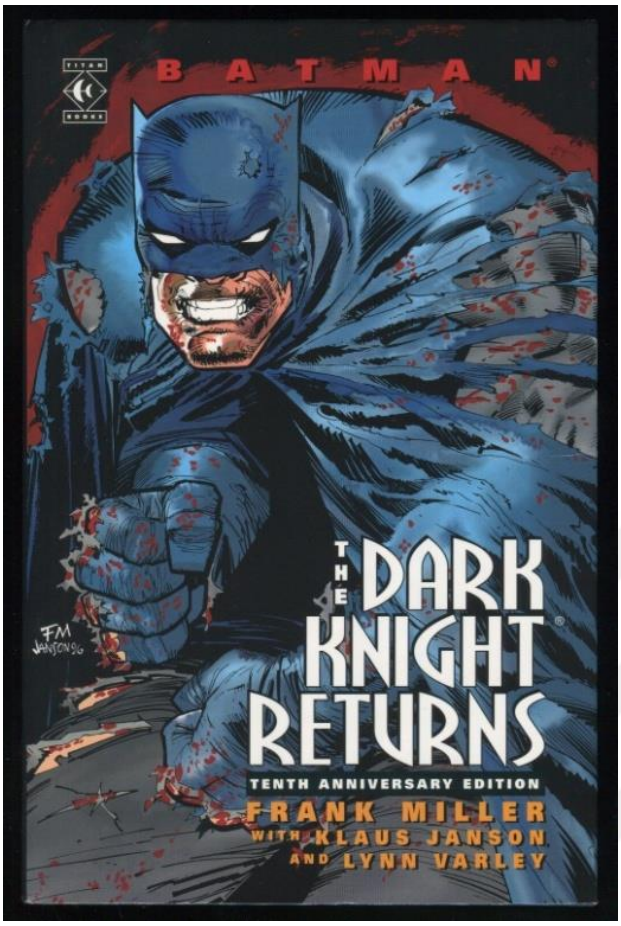
Figure 2.2. The Spirit and The Femme Fatale

Source: The Spirit, July 1946

According to Roger Sabin it was Eisner who "took the crime genre to new artistic heights"[36] He was an artist who was quite influenced by film noir, incorporating the camera angles of it into his panels and *The Spirit*, which would be re-discovered by underground artists such as Frank Miller, set the standards in *comics noir*.[37] In 1986, Frank Miller, who had already gained recognition for redefining the mood and identity of Daredevil into a darker aspect, introduced a *noir* Batman story (see figure 2.3), filled with intricate issues concerning morality and justice "scrutinizing its ideological involvements and escapism as well as reflecting on its nature as fiction."[38]

36 Sabin, *Comics, Comix and Graphic Novels: A History of Graphic Art*, 54.
37 Bongco, *Comic Books*, 148.
38 Karin Kukkonen, *Contemporary Comics Storytelling* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), 87.

Figure 2.3. Frank Miller's Batman *Noir*



Source: *The Dark Knight Returns*, 1986

Miller's bold touch on Batman was set in a dystrophic Gotham, which is "unrecognizable in its desolate atmosphere with the duskiness and melancholy distinct to Miller's illustration."[39] Miller's re-interpretation embodied "a cynical and twisted Batman, driven by his inner demons"[40] whose story was set in "a more lifelike, sordid reality."[41] In later years, Miller's talent in *noir* construct gradually into his probably the most cherished plot, *Sin City* (1991) which set in Basin City, a corrupt urban landscape which hosted morally distorted and ambiguous characters (see figure 2.4).

39 Bongco, *Comic Books*, 152.
40 Sabin, *Comics, Comix and Graphic Novels: A History of Graphic Art*, 162.
41 Sabin, 160.

Figure 2.4. Frank Miller's Outcast Characters

Source: *The Sin City,*1991

Miller perfected his anti-heroes, who are "class conscious resisters authority",[42] and his readers embraced these "societal outcasts like prostitutes, strip dancers and hired killers who live in the margins of residential suburbia, and fight against atrocities which are organized by the police."[43]

Comics noir is an artistic style of illustration which originates from *film noir*. As an inspired endeavour, *comics noir* incorporates a great deal from *film noir's narrative and visual style*. As in *film noir*, *comics noir* deploys a black-and-white style based on high contrast through the use of light and shadow. They both share a pessimistic and oppressing atmosphere of urban landscape. In both mediums, narrative is based on crime stories with themes such as alienation, ambiguity, and cynicism. Atmosphere in *comics noir* is also dark and urban. Society is morally questionable and corrupt. Individuals suffer from a deep alienation. Protagonists are complex antiheroes who are constantly seduced and manipulated by *femme fatales.* Villains are wealthy and powerful.

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42 Dennis Broe, *Film Noir, American Workers, and Postwar Hollywood* (Florida: University Press of Florida, 2009), xxii.

43 Bongco, *Comic Books,* 144.

Although both *film noir* and *comics noir* share a mutual zone, *comics noir* differ as a medium. *Film noir* consists of moving sequences, based on performance and *mise-en-scènes*, lit with low-key lighting. *Comics noir*, on the other hand, consist of juxtaposed images in static panels, heavily relying on artistic capability to create a visual atmosphere and using a limited colour palette; however, *comics noir* takes its narrative beyond physical and financial constraint film production suffers, and aesthetically offers a much deeper narrative with a more complex visuality.

2.2. Jason's Comics Noir: A Self-Reflexsive Endeavour

John Arne Sæterøy who is better known as *Jason* is a renowned Norwegian cartoonist and masters a medley of surrealism, (macabre) humour, popular culture, and themes that we are all familiar with, such as love, solitude, desperation, separation, and longing. His works have been translated into many languages in various countries. As a teen, he was first influenced by *Tintin* (see figure 2.5) and this very influence paved the way for his quest in comics.

Figure 2.5. Herge's influence on Jason

Sources: *Tintin in America by Herge*, 1945 and *Athos in America by Jason*, 2012

He was still in high school when he began writing short stories for the magazine *KOnk*. Although it can be understood from his works that Jason is mainly inspired by movies, not the cartoons or comic books, he still chose to cartoonize his characters, which offered a good chance for him to simplify his graphics and focus the attention of his

readers on the main idea.[44] In this sense he achieved a well-portioned mixture of both films and comics. Another technique which defines Jason's graphic art is the use of anthropomorphic animal characters, which differs his works from film and keeps them closer to cartoons. There may be a couple of reasons behind his enthusiasm of using anthropomorphic characters. Firstly, it is easier for readers to bond with these characters as we all loved cartoons when we were children. Secondly, their mostly blank expressions make it possible for readers to foster their own imagination to understand how characters feel. Thirdly, it is also possible that by stripping his characters of certain identities Jason wants to eradicate the problems caused by ethnic representation.[45] One cannot be certain about a character's nationality or skin colour (see figure 2.6).

Figure 2.6. Jason's anthropomorphic characters

Source: *Jason Conquests America*, 2011

The representation of mental states in comics has been based on three basic models of expression: words, images and sequence all of which function together to make meaning in the story. A single way of expression will not be cognitively successful[46] and Jason seems to have adopted this approach**.** His minimalistic style has no excessive verbiage. However, his graphics are clear and plain, and his panels are well-designed. In

44 Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics :The Invisible Art* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1994), 31.

45 Derek Parker Royal, "Introduction: Coloring America: Multi-Ethnic Engagements with Graphic Narrative," *MELUS* 32, no. 3 (Fall 2007): 9.

46 Karin Kukkonen , "Navigating Infinite Earths: Readers, Mental Models and the Multiverse of Superhero Comics," *Storyworlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies* 2, (January 2010): 43.

some of his comics, there are even no speech bubbles; in others, the use of text is rather minimal. However, Jason adapted the common film narrative and started to use speech balloons in later days of his career.

Jason uses *ligne claire*, a Belgian drawing style, characterized by "simply drawn characters against a minimal background."[47] The use of clear and strong lines with vivid colours salutes *The Adventures of Tintin* (1929), created by *Herge*, who has a great influence on Jason. Popular culture icons Jason seems to ridicule, such as mummies, aliens, or even vampires, are also a part of his narrative (see figure 2.7).

Figure 2.7. Popular culture icons in Jason's comics

Sources: *Lorena Valazquez,* 2015 and *The Last Musketeer*, 2008

Even Frida Kahlo, a true icon in popular culture, ends up being an assassin in his stories. Jason's enthusiasm about employing his all-time favourites in his comics may be a key factor to understand his motivation to adopt *noir* narrative and create his own *comics noir*.

Jason's enthusiasm for the *noir* narrative can easily be traced in his works such as *I Killed Adolf Hitler* (2006) and *The Last Musketeer* (2008). It can even be assumed that he is obsessed with *noir* style. Jason openly explains the reason behind this concrete tendency in an interview,[48] admitting that he is a great fan of *film noir*. This enthusiasm

47 Pierre Assouline, *Herge: The Man Who Created Tintin*, trans. Charles Ruas (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 22.

48 John Arne Sæterøy, "Jason – J is for Jason!", interview by Gašper Rus, Stripburger, May 2013, https://www.stripburger.org/en/jason-j-is-for-jason/.

led Jason to incorporate elements of *film noir* into his stories and created his own *comics noir.* Jason affiliated with this vague genre and decided to deploy a *noir* story of his own in a key period (1980s and 1990s), "non-conformist" comics, which dealt with untouched issues, adopted an alternate narrative, ignoring "artistic expectations."[49] In 1995, Jason published his first *comics noir*, *Lomma full av regn* (*Pocket Full of Rain*) which consists of various stories. The story that gave the book its name is a hard-boiled crime plot, which tells the story of two lovers, who find a suitcase full of money. They are chased by lethal ex-boyfriend who is an assassin. We can find this kind of script in a Quentin Tarantino movie, like *Reservoir Dogs* or *Pulp Fiction*, in which ordinary people experience a series of unordinary events which leads to a deadlock. Jason's stories are not different and violence is also available in its deadliest forms.

Comics noir, as an artistic style, has its own tradition. Even though it is hard to locate its origin, American artist, Alex Toth and Will Eisner have been a source of inspiration for many other comic book artists such as Frank Miller, David Mazzucchelli, and Ed Brubaker. In this sense, Jason is not the first *comics noir* artist; nevertheless, he is a voracious member of the tradition with his own cartoonish style which technically differs from the others. Jason's simplistic style and Will Eisner's detailed scenes are poles apart. However, dark and chaotic atmospheres Jason uses in his plots, which are full of unlikely heroes with moral paradoxes, remains in *comics noir* domain .

In Jason's *comics noir*, characters are far from being the constant centre of his stories. Even a villain like Hitler serves only as a MacGuffin – an object which "seem to be of vital importance to the characters", but actually they're of no importance."[50] He is not significant. The only that matter for Jason is the story itself. During an interview, the Norwegian cartoonist explains his perception, reckoning himself as "*a pessimist person"* and states that "*humanity will always find a way to mess up things somehow"*[51], so no one is of great significance in his narrative. As *I Killed Adolf Hitler* suggests, with or without Hitler it would be the same. This pessimistic and fatalistic approach is very compatible with the nature of *comics noir,* which stands on an existentialist basis. This

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49 Sabin, *Comics, Comix and Graphic Novels: A History of Graphic Art*, 177.

50 Michael Walker, *Hitchcock's Motifs* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005), 296.

51 John Arne Sæterøy, "Jason – J is for Jason!," interview by Gašper Rus, Stripburger, May 2013, https://www.stripburger.org/en/jason-j-is-for-jason/.

way, *comics noir* serves as a good tool for Jason to escape from popular culture as well. Just like in *film noir,* his protagonists have the characteristics of a villain but also qualities of a hero, making them anti-heroes who blend right in the dark and gloomy atmosphere of *comics noir*. They can kill, but they can love as well. Sooner or later, this yin-yang philosophy provokes Jason's *noir* characters to confront a moral conflict but filled with anxiety and frustration, they are generally destined to resolve it at the end.

Jason's comics noir is easy to read. The first sentiment one may have is that his comic books consist of cartoon-like stories through which we can travel back to our childhood memories. In fact Jason's surreal and anthropomorphic anti-heroes, who are unlike the heroes in "popular imagination that possess superior powers to those of the common man has,"[52] find their root back in a period which traumatized a society deeply and brought up a chaotic order, an order which can clearly be seen in the films of 1940s and 1950s. These films are named as '*noir*' which is the word in French that stands for '*black*' because of the dark themes they handled. Considering the 1940s and 1950s, a period marked by crime, injustice, and moral corruption, this narrative style could not bear an optimistic name. The stories, which are told by "odd camera angles, low-key lighting, the inventive and sometimes surreal use of shadows"[53] is a reflection of the American mind after the Great Depression, an era of economic and political instability, and despair. When criminals like Al Capone dominated the streets in real life, protagonists turned into scarred individuals, heavily masculine anti-heroes who were capable of both good and evil. These unusual heroes are uncertain about the way they do things yet still bend the rules according to their will for self-interest. They were accompanied by lethal women who usually led them to a fatalistic end. This moral conflict gave the film narrative a new and more realistic twist under the influence of innovative techniques brought by *German Expressionism* and represented the society it had emerged with a critical approach.

Jason remasters *film noir* in his *comics noir*. In a way, he embraces the past by employing the same themes, presented by *film noir,* and makes it clear that history

52 Umberto Eco and Natalie Chilton, "The Myth of Superman," *Diacritics* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1972): 14.
53 Lyons, *Death on the Cheap: The Lost B Movies of Film Noir*, 39.

always repeats itself. Nothing can be changed. This fatalistic view may raise questions about the cartoonist's perception about the way things happen, but the world is still driven by chaos and ambiguity. However, by using colourful scenes, Jason still positively suggests that all that one must seek is to find a little peace of mind in either solitude or love.

2.3. For the Love of Intertextuality: Jason's Multisource Adaptations

Julie Sanders defines the term "adaptation" as a generic effort to forge a given genre into another one by starting a process "to move from one communicative situation to another"[54], which bears a certain resemblance to "an editorial practice."[55] This process makes artwork more perceptible to a different generation by enabling a revision in the original material "via proximation and updating."[56] According to Richard J. Hand, this can be possible only if one can liberate oneself from tradition and start a "revolt" against it.[57] In a modernist frame, this rebellious act is, of course, not to destroy a well-constructed paradigm but to revitalize it with an innovative and creative touch on the tradition to make it new as Ezra Pound suggested. Any being or cultural construct needs to adapt to new circumstances in order to survive[58], and so does an art form. Every artistic material is in connection with previous ones and functions as an "intertext"[59] in this context as the theory of intertextuality suggests.

Linda Hutcheon reckons adaptations as "deliberate, announced, and extended revisitation of prior works"[60] which is a "creative and interpretive" tool of transcoding which requires "a change of medium"[61] that comes with certain complications, related to the nature of different mediums. In order to cope with the challenges of adaptations, imposed by the nature of different art forms, Jason, on the other hand, minimizes his

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54 Francesco Zasetti, "Adaptation and Mis-adaptations: Film, Literature, and Social Discourses" *in A Companion to Literature and Film*, ed. Robert Stam (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 85.

55 Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (New York*:* Routledge, 2006), 18.

56 Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, 19.

57 Richard J Hand, "Adaptation and Modernism" in *A Companion to Literature, Film and Adaptation*, ed. Deborah Cartmell (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 64.

58 Andrew Dudley, "Adapting Cinema to History: A Revolution in the Making," *in A Companion to Literature and Film*, ed. Robert Stam (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 190.

59 Robert Stam, *Film Theory: An Introduction* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2000), 201.

60 Linda Hutcheon and Siobhan O'Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation* (New York: Routledge, 2013), xvi.

61 Hutcheon and O'Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 34.

efforts and adapts mostly fragments from his favourite films into his stories as comic books and films both consist of juxtaposed scenes. In addition, Jason uses literary figures as his characters but he avoids a full-length adaptation of literary works. This way he manages to limit his boundaries in story telling in a reasonable fashion by ruling out a struggle to create "extended engagements".[62]

A comic artist, who aims at telling a story beyond his personal experience, in a way, takes over a historian's effort [63] to portray the fact that shapes an era. It can be argued that a story should be handled as a tool of social representation rather than just a personal encounter. On this term, storytelling becomes a part of *social saga* which requires rediscovering and scrutinizing.[64] In search of such social reflexiveness, adaptation, as a functional tool, has been utilized in all forms of art to meet the expediency in the sense that art materials are everlasting and provide a historic account of collective memory. In accordance with such endeavour, Jason functions themes of *film noir* which were engendered by the insecurities, caused by the Great Depression; nevertheless, he prefers to present them in his *comics noir* with the social reality of his own time. This way, his intertextuality illustrates a sense of timelessness. As a movie fan, Jason benefits from the visuality of successful film scenes by renowned directors. In addition, he employs dramaturgic and literary constructs, deploying various aspects of adaptation such as parody, pastiche and satire in order to achieve a "new utterance,"[65] not to "consume" the original source.[66] Jason employs a story which has its roots in real history but creates a new layer of reality in his stories, and this parodic layer functions as a mirror, conveying a duality in the narrative which can be "implicitly measured and understood".[67] On these terms, Jason's parodic narrative demands a deep understanding of the background layer which is hidden underneath the surface layer. To achieve such comprehension, his readers must be acknowledged about the context of the events that took place in real-life characters so as to grasp how duality of layers functions in his stories. Although parody is commonly described as "an opposition or contrast between

62 Hutcheon and O'Flynn, 9.
63 Buhle, "History and Comics," *Reviews in American History*, 317.
64 Buhle, 316.
65 Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, 17.
66 Sanders, 25.
67 Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teaching of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (New York: Illinois Press, 2000), 31.

texts" with an intent of mockery,[68] Jason does not always aim at ridiculing the original source. It is very clear that Jason deploys parodic elements in his narrative such as irony to represent the complex nature of human interactions and construct a different frame around the borrowed story; however, his craftsmanship lies in the fact that he achieves to create a fun-based story without demeaning the original source he incorporates from. As in modern parody, his narrative does not "prevail, surpassing the original source,"[69] but presents a new layer which brings a fresh look into the original source. This way, Jason's adaptations make the original source comprehensible to a new audience by "providing specific clues" to its "possible meanings and cultural impact,"[70] and this way, he enables a reinterpretation process.

Jason's comics adaptations mainly serve as homage to the writers, playwrights, or directors he admires. Therefore, his comics linger between pastiche and parody. On the one hand, Jason "remains in the same domain" without altering the original course of o actions, on the other hand, he "ventures into new possibilities"[71] to come up with a concrete adaptation with "relocation of the cultural and temporal setting."[72] Both approaches seem to be distinct; however, they co-exist in Jason's *comics noir*. In this sense, Jason's adaptations stand on a more productive ground, purified from parodic destructiveness.

2.4. Far From Victorian Values: A New *Femme Fatale* by Jason

The emergence of "femme fatale" derives back to the late Victorian era, a period marked by consequences of an expansionist policy of the British Empire, whose spirit is explained with words such as "defensive", "fearful", or "preservationist".[73] While the British Empire was obsessed with expanding to the far-edge poles of the world, British society had become weak and insecure. While the upper-class member sought an "imperial adventure" in exotic lands,[74] the lower-class had to find a way to disinfect

68 Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teaching of Twentieth-Century Art Forms*, 32.
69 Hutcheon, 31.
70 Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, 19.
71 Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teaching of Twentieth-Century Art Forms*, 38
72 Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, 19.
73 Rebecca Scott, *The Fabrication of the Late-Victorian Femme Fatale* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 1992), 4.
74 Patrick Bratlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914 (New York: Cornell University Press, 1988)*, 12.

themselves from "the plague of poverty."[75] The population went up drastically with the increased number of emigrants. Moreover, unemployment had become a serious issue due to the outcomes of the Great Depression as exportation lost its pace and industrial regions, consequently, were driven into poverty. As a part of an escapist propaganda, fuelled by popular press through jingoistic elements, society became engaged with external villains and found itself in a chauvinist militarism. Individual identities were replaced by a collective one. Once again, the dutiful mothers were enlisted to raise strong male individuals for the defence of the Empire. Public schools became pre-militarist institutions in the sense that children were educated in accordance with the 'new' imperial agenda which declares the enmity of the foreign and heroism of the domestic. As Patrick Brantlinger points out imperialism substituted Christianity and apart from being an ideology became a "political faith".[76] In this context, late Victorian literature was in harmony with imperial ethos based on the "pessimistic", "defeatist", and hence "fatalistic" spirit of the era.[77] Themes such as adventures in exotic lands, cultural clash across the imperial borders, and implicit idealization of imperial paradigm which dignifies a racial superiority were present in literature, poetry, and drama. In such context, female characters were defined through Victorian values which prioritized marriage and motherhood as the most significant duty. As gentle beings, these female characters had limited roles as loyal, self-sacrificing and thus virtuous citizens of the empire as the real-life British women were in the public sphere, whose status in the society was solely based on the marriage bound. The imprisonment of British women can be described as "anxiety of possession."[78] Whoever stays outside this limited sphere and revolts against such societal norms were portrayed as marginalized figures who would lead to the emergence of *femme fatale*.

These morally deviant female figures can be seen in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* as antithesis of the Imperial perception of eligible woman. While Mina Harker, soon-to-be dutiful wife of a middle-class husband, tries to remain as a loyal fiancée by avoiding the exotic villain, Dracula's telepathic interest in her, Lucy Westenra, who is depicted to have more liberating ideas due to the privileges, provided by her social standing as a

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75 Bratlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914*, 116.
76 Patrick Bratlinger, 228.
77 Scott, *The Fabrication of the Late-Victorian Femme Fatale*, 4.
78 Scott, 27.

member of an aristocrat family, turns progressively into a seductive *femme fatale* after she is bitten by the evil count; thus, she must be "reabsorbed into the Known" only by a masculine force as women are "weak, naturally immoral, and untrustworthy"[79]. The contrast between Mina and Lucy seems to be a covert act by the author to point out to the consequences of deviating from societal expectations of Victorian values as Lucy's risky entanglement with Dracula becomes "a threat posed by the New Woman's insistence on sexual autonomy."[80] It is also notable that Stoker's representation of Lucy's transformation (see figure 2.8) and downfall leads to a glorification of middle-class values, keeping Victorian ideals alive.

Figure 2.8. Lucy Westenra's Transformation

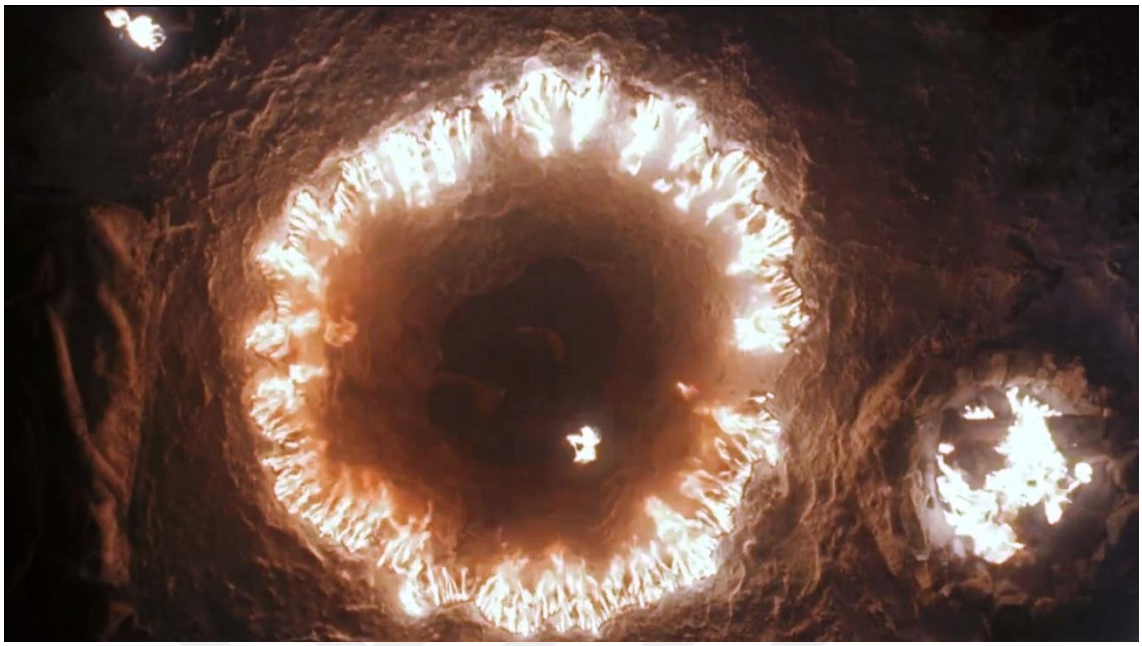
Source: *Bram Stoker's Dracula* by Francis Ford Coppola, 1992

In a chapter, Dr. Van Helsing places holy wafers around Mina's room to protect her from Dracula's brides who are demonic *femme fatales*. This symbolic narrative uses sacred objects as a representation of Victorian values, protecting ideal Victorian woman. Francis Ford Coppola, who carefully scrutinized the text makes this correlation graphically even more striking by using a circle of fire around Mina in the film version (see figure 2.9).

79 Scott, 58

80 Alison Case, "Tasting the Original Apple: Gender and the Struggle for Narrative Authority in Dracula," *Narrative* 1, no. 3 (October 1993): 3.

Figure 2.9. Van Helsing protects Mina from Dracula's brides



Source: *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, 1992

Times are changing so is the society**.** Thus, it is not surprising to see dramatic changes in modern narrative with alterations in themes such as a transformation of *femme fatale* into a new and stronger figure, pursuing her own goals. It does not necessarily suggest that marginalised female characters of the late Victorian novel were criminalized by all authors and there were no approaches opposing such discrimination until recent time. While Bram Stoker's *Dracula* implicitly favours the dominance of male characters over female characters, George Eliot's *Middlemarch* portrayed female characters that challenges the restrictive norms in society and seeks an intellectual satisfaction such as *Dorothea Brooke*. Nevertheless, it is possible to point out that the struggle to equalize gender roles in a society is a gradual process which has became more fierce and explicit in the mid-twentieth century:

> *The femme fatale is a provocative agent of her own desires, shredding the lives of those around her, including the male protagonist she even, on occasion, loves, to ensure the fulfilment of her own nefarious, neurotic desires.*[81]

The cold-blooded women in *film noir* who becomes the darkest force in a plot are represented as the agents men must preserve themselves from whose female power is

[81] David Greven, *Representations of Femininity in American Genre Cinema: The Woman's Film, Film Noir, and Modern Horror* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 68.

seen as the very crime to be renounced and destructed[82] by a masculine force in the end. The reason lies behind this approach derives from the fact that *film noir* introduces a chaotic world whose "locales, situations, iconography, violence are conventions connoting the male sphere."[83] Jason, on the contrary, establishes his own noir plots by transforming one of the major element in *film noir*; the *femme fatale*. He rejects a re-validation of Victorian despotism over women and dignifies the deeds of these condemned female characters, usually depicting them as the key agent for a story to unfold when a protagonist finds himself in a perilous situation he cannot avoid or escape. The social reality has changed a great deal since the 1940s and 1950s. In this context, Jason favours the social realism of his own time in which a society can be classified as egalitarian only if all individuals have equal access to resources, status and prestige regardless of their sex, race or age.[84] This is where Jason uses satire as a constructive tool of adaptation, solely to achieve a solid social criticism on gender discrimination, which can "restore a lacking morality" concerning the gender equality and "encourage positive attitudes towards a better society."[85] Samantha Lindop explains the conventional *femme fatale* figure of film noir:

> The *spider woman of classic noir is the product of anxieties over felt masculine impotence and the disintegration of patriarchal order, especially in relation to defined gender boundaries and traditional conventions associated with romance and marriage.*[86]

In Jason's adaptations, on the other hand, *femme fatale* is built on a new layer which entails a generic shift in accordance with the political and legislative shifts concerning gender dynamics by the 1980s and 1990s, a period where second-wave feminist activism emerged in Western culture, prompting a new set of discourses.[87] In this sense, Jason presents his narrative with a new definitive approach to *noir* themes, an endeavour which can be epitomized by the ethos of neo-noir comics sphere which

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82 Lott, "The Whiteness of Film Noir," 544.

83 Christine Gledhill, "Klute 1: A Contemporary Film Noir and Feminist Criticism," in *Women in Film Noir*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan (London: British Film Institute,1998): 27.

84 William Jankowiak and Angela Ramsey, "Femme Fatale and Status Fatale: A Cross-Cultural Perspective," *Cross-Cultural Research* 34, no.1 (February 2000): 62.

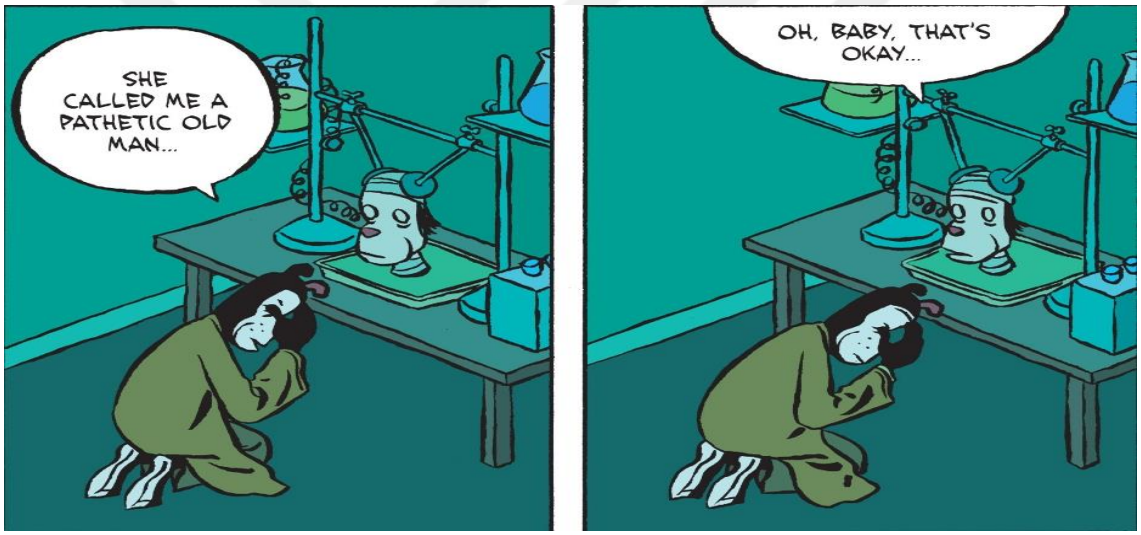
85 Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teaching of Twentieth-Century Art Forms*, 43.

86 Samantha Lindop, *Postfeminism and the Fatale Figure in Neo-Noir Cinema* (United Kingdom: Palgrave, 2015), 44.

87 Lindop, *Postfeminism and the Fatale Figure in Neo-Noir Cinema*, 57.

demand a revival of *film noir* through an updated comprehension of current social realism. The desire to remain in the noir zone does not seem to wane,[88] however, times we live in makes it necessary to portray a new perspective, compatible with the spirit of 21st century. On these terms, Jason deconstructs *femme fatale* by empowering her as with a more complex individualism following a self-determined agenda. The archetype is still in the centre of male interest but not driven by it. Another aspect of Jason's *femme fatale* is that she usually shares the burden of the main male character, acting as a co-protagonist. The plots in Jason's narrative mostly calls for a woman's touch when the male protagonists mess up. So, it is not surprising to see them on their knees before female characters in Jason's strips (see figure 2.10).

Figure 2.10. Frail male protagonist sobbing on her knees



Source: *The Brain That Wouldn't Virginia Woolf*; 2012

The portrayal of *femme fatale* as a hardboiled archetype has been changed as a *neo-noir* endeavour in the film industry. In this context, Jason's *comics noir* offers a new *femme fatale*, equivalent to the characters in neo-noir movies, such as Natalie in Memento (2000). Jason's femme fatales are not submissive in the sense that they have their own goals and desires, shaping the flow actions. They are multidimensional characters with depth and cannot be regarded as purely evil. These female caracters refuse to accept the societal expectations based on traditional gender roles. Instead, they generally work with Jason's male protagonist as an equal partner towards common goals, facing same challenges.

88 Mark T. Conard, "Introduction" in *The Philosophy of Neo-Noir*, ed. Mark T. Conard (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 2.

CHAPTER THREE

NOIR ELMENTS IN JASON'S COMIC BOOKS

3.1. *I Killed Adolf Hitler*

The story takes place in a modern city with the same elements a *noir* film may have: "money", crime and violence."[89] Although Jason's clear lines and vivid colours seems to be in contrast with noir films, the atmosphere is as dark and unforgiving as one can see in *comics noir*. Readers becomes witnesses of the crimes by typical but efficient use of closures and became a part of the story as "an equal partner or a silent accomplice" in the crime[90] This way, Jason invites his readers to participate in the story by using one of his most powerful elements in any medium: imagination which has constantly appealed to filmmakers.[91] Reading through pages of Jason's story, one may find the future possibilities the anthropomorphic protagonist will experience and make deductions about what comes next. This is the general expectation in all comic books.[92] The meaning in a story is not reproduced by the visual elements offered by the artist. It is all about how readers interpret and then understand the course of events in the narration.[93] Jason differs from the classical comics narration by distracting his readers from the very suspense which is the essence of his book. He makes them forget what the characters were after for a while and put readers back in the game after a few pages. As comic books with *noir* elements do, Jason uses flashbacks a lot to unfold a mystery,

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89 Spicer, *Historical Dictionary of Film Noir*, 41.
90 McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, 68.
91 McCloud, 69.
92 Kukkonen, *Studying Comics and Graphic Novels*, 24.
93 Kukkonen, "Navigating Infinite Earths: Readers, Mental Models and the Multiverse of Superhero Comics," 46.

however, he does not retcon by employing any false memories to retell the story.[94] This way he helps his readers gather the missing parts.

Kukkonen states that a well-planned fiction avoids a use of excessive verbiage[95], another trait which Jason can be identified with. Jason steps back from his own story and implicitly asks his readers to participate in the story and guess what is next. One cannot see speech bubbles popping up from every corner of a page. This simplicity makes his comic books easy to read.

In *I Killed Adolf Hitler* (2007), Jason's protagonist is an assassin living in a world where more values are inverted and people are haunted by their *uncertain psychology*[96], similar to the reality American society went through after the Great Depression which had been the main interest of *film noir*. Being an assassin is no different than being a teacher or an engineer and people (anthropomorphic animals) desire to have other people killed for lame reasons and the protagonist does not bother to question their morality or logic. This chaotic setting fits perfectly in film noir universe. Killing people is just a job which Jason's hitman performs without any second thoughts. The streets are chaotic (see figure 3.1). So the tone of the story is rather dark, and cynical as in any *noir* plots.[97]

Figure 3.1. Chaotic streets in Jason's comics noir

Source: *I Killed Adolf Hitler*, 2007

94 Orion Ussner Kidder, "Useful Play: Historicization in Alan Moore's 'Supreme' and Warren Ellis/John Cassaday's 'Planetary," *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 21, no. 1 (2010): 79.
95 Kukkonen, *Studying Comics and Graphic Novels*, 31.
96 Spicer, *Historical Dictionary of Film Noir*, 38.
97 Lyons, *Death on the Cheap: The Lost B Movies of Film Noir*, 8.

Among all these familiar characteristics, we are introduced with the *femme fatale* of the story on the first page who tries to seduce the anti-hero after a while (see figure 3.2). Despite the moral turmoil they are in, together they are set to venture into a quest to save the world from an absolute evil. At this point it is not very odd to say that the protagonist experiences an awakening similar to the one that, Tarantino's infamous character, Jules, who survives a salvo and decides to 'walk the earth' to become a better man as his survival implies a higher purpose in life.

Figure 3.2. The seductive femme fatale

Source: I Killed Adolf Hitler, 2007

In *I Killed Adolf Hitler,* most characteristics and principles of the *comics noir* can be detected: "a crime, a criminal, a fallible protagonist, a contemporary setting, a misadventure, a femme fatale who is a conventional girlfriend figure, a psychopath, corruption, a villain, lethal obstacles"[98] and of course a mystery to be solved. These characteristics, which defines the *noir* narrative, can easily be seen in *I Killed Adolf Hitler*. The story has many flashbacks which is also one of the main components of the *noir* narrative.[99] However, one of the most distinguishing features of the *comics noir* is that not all the components are available to be seen in all stories. In other words, there are no strict patterns or rules about using all types of elements in a single comic book. The same circumstance can be applied to Jason's story, as well. For instance some key components lack in the plot such as a detective, a corrupt politician or police officers.[100] Instead of a law enforcement officer, Jason's protagonist is an assassin and this is not something unheard of. In *Scarface* (1932), the story is about a grim gang leader

98 William Park, *What is Film Noir* (Maryland: Bucknell University Press, 2011), 26.
99 Spicer, *Historical Dictionary of Film Noir,* 38.
100 William Park, *What is Film Noir* (Maryland: Bucknell University Press, 2011), 26.

(Antonio 'Tony' Comonte) whose sister has a secret affair with his own hitman, who is known to seduce the mistress of his bosses'. Just like in a noir film, it is not necessary to portray the protagonist as an absolute symbol of goodness in *comics noir*. Jason also makes small alterations about how to apply a generic shift to the *noir* narrative in his work. Instead of using a completely playful *femme fatale* who just poses "a dangerous feminine glamour"[101], he transforms his female character, merely a figure of sexuality, into a key element in the plot and she does not turn into a duplicitous and treacherous force.[102] Page by page, she takes over the job her ex-lover could not fulfil and does what is necessary to put an end to all their troubles. At this point, it can be said that Jason creates his own version of *comics noir* that is more compatible with the 21st century.

In *neo-noir stories,* the elements of sex and atrocity are applied more explicitly than the classical crime genre in the 1930s[103], which only "envisaged a male sphere of action and control, where female agency is expressed in terms of transgressive desire."[104] However, neo-noir offers a liberation and identity through the new *femme fatale*. Jason is one of those artist who chooses to put his heart into change and gender equality. That is reason he constructed a new archetype for his stories.

Femme fatale means *lethal woman* in French[105] who generally contribute to the downfall of the protagonist, but Jason's *femme fatale*, on the contrary, dutifully takes necessary actions to undo the mistakes made by the male protagonist when he messes up. Although traditional gender structure of "male strength and female weakness" is not completely reversed in the story, [106] Jason's effort is notable. Jason's *femme fatale* who seems to "figure a projection of male desire"[107] is not *a* "lure at the centre of a seductive shell"[108] but still quite lethal and at this point Jason's narrative differs from classical

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101 Kathatrine Farrimond, *The Contemporary Femme Fatal: Gender, Genre and American Cinema* (Oxon: Routledge, 2018), 23.

102 Spicer, *Historical Dictionary of Film Noir*, 41.

103 Geoff Mayer and Brian McDonnell, *Encyclopedia of Film Noir*, 3.

104 Helen Hanson, Hollywood *Heroines: Women in the Film Noir and the Female Gothic Film* (New York: Tauris, 2007), 4.

105 "Femme fatale" https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Femme_fatale last modified July 05, 2023.

106 Megan E. Abbott, *The Street Was Mine: White Masculinity in Hardboiled Fiction and Film Noir* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 29.

107 Julie Grossman, *Rethinking the Femme Fatale in Film Noir: Ready for her Close-up* (Palgrave Macmillan, New York), 2009.

108 Abbott, *The Street Was Mine: White Masculinity in Hardboiled Fiction and Film Noir*, 39.

comics noir and resists to a Freudian male subjectivity.[109] Jason's female character corresponds to the profile of war-time American women in the sense that she has two identities: a supportive spouse and a professional partner. In some aspects she also becomes a suitable profile for *femme fatale*, as well because she become manipulative and seductive, role-playing in erotic ways which distracts the protagonist from what he is supposed to accomplish.[110]

3.2. *The Left Bank Gang*

Jason is known to incorporate from literature and cinema. That is, he uses any elements he appraises in his stories whether it is a scene from a cult movie, a character from a book, or even his favourite writers and actors. All these distinct elements are united in Jason's comics for one concrete purpose: a powerful story. *The Left Bank Gang* is one of those stories. In the story, Ernest Hemingway, Ezra Pound, James Joyce and Scot Fitzgerald, who, in Jason's imagination, become the members of a literary gang who plan to rob a bank when they start to have financial issues (see figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3. The Literary Gang

Source: *The Left Bank Gang*, 2006

It is known from history that these literary figures are indeed connected with each other. They were American expats, a literary Diaspora, settled in Paris where nothing was

109 Frank Krutnik, *In a Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre, Masculinity*, 75.
110 Paul Duncan, *Film Noir: Films of Trust and Betrayal* (Great Britain: Pocket Essentials, 2006), 12.

familiar. They travelled from the *New World* to the *Old Continent*, an existential oxymoron which emphasizes an inverse migration. In addition, Paris was a cultural centre during the 1920s. Many expatriate writers, who lost their ideals after World War I, moved to Paris as the cost of living in Europe was low. In addition, a big circle of the artisan community welcomed them. The writers, which establish the characterization of Jason's comic book, all met in this circle, named as *The Lost Generation*, which is a referential name for American writers who lived in Europe between *The World Wars*[111]. Especially, Hemingway and Fitzgerald were so close. They first met in the *Dingo Bar* on *Rue Delambre* where Hemingway had to sit with "some completely worthless characters"[112] before Fitzgerald and his friend, Dunc Chaplin fortunately intruded. Hemingway even admits that he preferred Chaplin to Fitzgerald in this first encounter. Later, their friendship grew stronger but they had a complex relation which is marked by instability,

Another American expatriate in Paris was Ezra Pound. As a literary editor, he asked for James Joyce's assistance to submit his work. Deeply charmed by Pound's work, Joyce even stated how thankful he is for being introduced to Ezra by Yeats. In 1922, Pounds also met Hemingway in Paris and became close friends. Already a close friend of Scott Fitzgerald who also settled in Paris, Hemingway introduced him to Pound. Finally, Fitzgerald met Joyce at a dinner party at Sylvia Beach's bookstore which is represented in *The Left Bank Gang*, as well (see figure 3.4).

111 Craig Monk, *Writing The Lost Generation: Expatriate Autobiography and American Modernism* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2008), 1.

112 Ernest Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 149.

Figure 3.4. Sylvia Beach's bookstore

Source: *The Left Bank Gang*, 2006

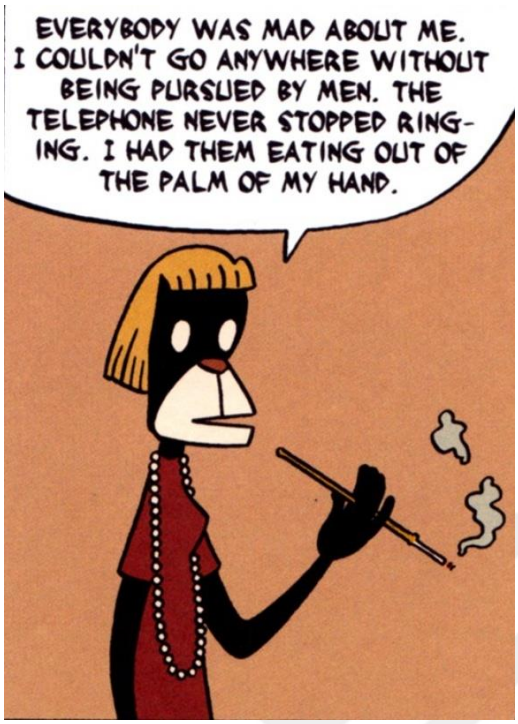
They all spent time around *The Left Bank,* the cultural area of Paris, where Sylvia Beach's bookshop, *Shakespeare and Co.* is also located. American critic Samuel Putnam describes *Shakespeare and Co* as "the shrine of literary pilgrims" where famous literary figures including the ones mentioned above spend a lot of time but only the true worshippers were "admitted to the presence" of the owner [113]. Hence the title "*The Left Bang Gang*" conveys referential humour.

Jason builds his storylines humorously around the private lives of these four figures. In order to achieve a sense of reality, he shows the readers where they live, how they spend their time or what sort of problems they deal with. This way Jason achieves to tell an autobiographical story even though his characters are less realistic and more cartoonish. This way he suggests "a curious return to history as experienced" [114] As in real life, they spend time at the bookstore owned by Slyvia Beach, who has a sort of cameo appearance in a couple of panels in the book; Fitzgerald fails to please his wife, Zelda, who is portrayed as a femme fatale (see figure 3.5), as she is fed up with Paris.

[113] Samuel Putnam, *Paris was our Mistress: Memoirs of a Lost and Found Generation* (New York: The Viking Press, 1947), 96-97.

[114] Buhle, "History and Comics," 320.

Figure 3.5. Zelda Fitzgerald as the *femme fatale*



Source: *The Left Bank Gang*, 2006

Readers are also introduced to Hemingway's wife Elizabeth Hadley Richardson and their son Jack Hemingway whose name is not mentioned in the book. Hemingway's friendship with Gertrude Stein is portrayed as well; her name is not mentioned, either. Readers may still recognise her as Jason drew Stein as a heavily built woman with ordinary clothes in accordance with her real appearance. She instructs Hemingway about how to become a better storyteller; however, Hemingway has his own problems. His comics do not sell and he is almost broke and constantly dreams about the times at war which was the case in real life.

Scott has problems with his wife. Zelda is not content with their life in Paris. Moreover, Scott spends most of his time with Hemingway while Zelda, wants to attend parties in Paris, which keeps Scott away from drawing his comics. This inevitably creates a financial crisis Zelda blames Scott for. Annoyed by the attitude of Zelda, Scott reminds her of the fact that she is married to a cartoonist and he needs to draw if they want to be paid (see figure 3.6).

Figure 3.6. Conflict between Scoot and Zelda

Source: *The Left Bank Gang*, 2006

This part of the story is a clear reflection of Victorian values Scott Ftizgerald is known to have adopted. The man is responsible for earning money and what he does for a living is unquestionable. Zelda is fed up with their life in Parisbecause of Scott's inability to make enough money to live a delightful life. She wants to return home. The real story was a bit different. Zelda was born into a wealthy family and became a socialite in her early years. She was beautiful, intellectual and clever. Zelda fell in love with Scott Fitzgerald and married him. Although an ideal marriage is supposed to built on "blissful coming together of equal voices speaking in unison"[115], Scott did not want Zelda, who is a prolific writer herself, to be superior to him in the society so he tried to impose the role of dutiful wife. He wanted Zelda to keep in patriarchal Western culture in which a women's position in the society was related to their relation to men. A woman who was strong, sexually appealing with "wealth, fame, and independence", all of which actually describe Zelda, was seen as a threat to "male domination." [116] The *New World* was built on old values. This was the reason why Zelda was unhappy as she was not appreciated by Scott Fitzgerald in any means that she deserved. Instead, Scott Fitzgerald spent most of his time in literary circles as he was more concerned with his writings. That's why she had a semi-open relationship with Scott and they were both claimed to have secret affairs. One of them was a French officer, Edouard S. Jozan with

115 Nell Furman, "Politics of Language: Beyond the Gender Principle," in *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism* eds. G. Green and C. Kahn (New York: Routledge, 1985), 36.

116 Lindop, *Postfeminism and the Fatale Figure in Neo-Noir Cinema*, 26.

whom Zelda is claimed to have a secret affair. Jozan was a flight instructor who works nearby Fitzgeralds' villa on the French Riviera. Zelda was attracted this handsome naval pilot. Scott did not realize the fact that they were having an affair which almost led Fitzgerald to divorce because Zelda was ready to abandon Scott. Jozan did not want to ruin his bright career and left Zelda [117]. Zelda started to feel insecure about her life in Paris. It is even claimed that she took therapy sessions to become loyal to his husband and her chores as a dutiful wife. Zelda had difficulty controlling her own life with Scott's intrusions. The pressure she went through ended up in psychological disorders. Zelda had mental breakdowns accompanied by massive hysteria and hallucinations and eventually accepted to be institutionalized in Switzerland where she was diagnosed as *schizophrenic* with homosexual symptoms which was a common conclusion led by Freudian perception during those times.[118] Jason can be claimed to have sympathized with Zelda's imprisonment with a supportive approach and turned her into a femme fatale who has a strong and ill-intended influence over the men surrounding her with the most common traits of a femme fatale in *comics noir*, "presented in textures of retro glamour: sequins, shining hair, rippling silks, furs, sleek tailoring and the type of makeup that might be understood as grownup" [119] in the centre of men's interest.

Scott, on the other hand, is tutored by Hemingway throughout the story. For instance, Hemingway suggests he should learn French in order to be respected and better understood. According to Scott, it is Europeans who need to learn English like everyone else in the world. Unlike Zelda who has the ultimate feminine charm and intelligence, Jason portrays Fitzgerald as a fragile and easily-broken man. While portraying Scott Fitzgerald, Jason avoids a biased look and sticks to the reality by representing him as a devout cartoonist who tries to balance his financial status to make a decent living for his family. The conditions of real life Scott was not different. Scott wanted to marry Zelda and proposed to her countless times. Zelda rejected him until he published successful books such as *This Side of Paradise*. Zelda was born into a wealthy family and she wanted to feel financially secure. She had to be sure that Scott can afford a socialite's

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117 Kendall Taylor, *The Gatsby Affair: Scott, Zelda, and the Betrayal That Shaped an American Classic* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), xiii.

118 Linda Wagner-Martin, *Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald: An American Woman's Life* (New York: Palgrave, 2004), 239-130.

119 Farrimond, "The Femme Fatale Who Wasn't There," 23.

life and provide for her. These concerns caused ups and downs in their relationship and tensions in Scott's mind. Martin claims that Scott Fitzgerald was obsessed with the idea of marrying a "top girl" which he saw essential to his future and "he invested everything in his courtship of Zelda" whose flirty behaviours with other men constantly distracted Scott as he did not want to lose her.[120] S. Rachman points out that "struggling against obsessions is a lonely, private battle."[121] In this sense, Scott Fitzgerald's psychological instability can be justified. His fear of losing Zelda constantly dominated their relation. No matter how much he failed to control Zelda, Scott could not give up on her.

In contrast to the fact that these famous writers who are characterized by Jason in a way that they all represent hints from their real personalities, Jason chooses to employ them with new roles in a fictitious set of events. For instance, they are not authors but cartoonists and bookstores sell only comic books. So, they have to write comic books to make a living, not just for themselves but also for their families. Zelda constantly demeans her husband and cheats on her with her boyfriend Eduardo who looks like a street performer. As an essential element of *comics noir*, Zelda, a true *femme fatale*. mobilizes men with confused minds for her own interest and leads to their doom in "a dark maze".[122] Another example is Hemingway's participation in the war which is also represented in the story. As a man who saw battlefields, Hemingway is hardened by life. For instance, he beats a writer when he confronted Hemingway on the street for receiving a negative critic. Then, Hemingway instructs Scott that fighting is ok when it is needed. As Hemingway, himself, stated that he had "a very bad, quick temper"[123], his comic depiction by Jason just seems quite valid.

Jason depicts a humorous approach to his characters in an effort to make these famous literary figures more ordinary like common people. Hemingway can beat up a writer simply because he daringly states that he despised Hemingway's critics. Fitzgerald believes in Goblins who steal away the pens of cartoonists. Jason even uses an anecdote which was documented by Ernest Hemingway, himself. In *A Moveable Feast* (1964), Hemingway openly states how Fitzgerald becomes agitated to hear from Zelda that he

120 Linda Wagner-Martin, *Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald: An American Woman's Life* (New York: Palgrave, 2004), 29-30.
121 Stanley Rachman, *The Treatment of Obsessions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 5.
122 Conard, *The Philosophy of Film Noir*, 69.
123 Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast*, 157.

has a serious problem concerning his genital measurements. Hemingway adds he even checked Fitzgerald's genitals in order to comfort him and advised him to visit *Louvre* to observe the genitals of old statues to find out similarities with himself.[124] Jason plainly depicts Hemingway's hyper-masculine act in *The Left Bank Gang* but with slight alterations as an adaptation requires. Hemingway checks Scott's genitals in a toilet and says it is ok. They are seen by other people and misunderstood. Later he takes Scott to a museum to show the genitals of a statue which has exactly the same measurement. Apart from conveying a macabre sense of humour, this scene also hints at a significant characteristic of *comics noir*. A noir plot cannot plainly reveal socio-economic and political circumstances which drove the society into poverty and despair; however, it can freely focus on female sexuality through a *femme fatale* who is able to establish a strong dominance over weakened masculinity[125]. Jason deploys this humorous anecdote from Hemingway's memoir, seemingly, in order to ridicule gender discrimination. Zelda's harsh critic on Scott's manhood ends up in a psychological frailty her husband has to endure. Jason does not seem to have preferred representing other encounters of Hemingway in *the Left Bank Gang* which point out to a harsher reality such as war. On the other hand, this is understandable as Jason is more critical about gender-based issues.

Jason tells the story using the exact technique in *Reservoir Dogs* by Quentin Tarantino. After the story is presented in a certain construct, readers re-encounter the same story through the eyes of each character. This way the story is completed bit by bit with several flashbacks, another "*noir* convention",[126] which offers a "narrative closure", mirroring "the inherent fatalism" in *comics noir*[127]. Maureen Turim gives defines the flashback element and explains how it functions:

> *The flashback is a privileged moment in unfolding that juxtaposes different moments of temporal reference. A juncture is wrought between present and past and two concepts are implied in this juncture: memory and history.*[128]

124 Hemingway, 190.
125 Gledhill, "Klute 1: A Contemporary Film Noir and Feminist Criticism," 28.
126 Conard, *The Philosophy of Film Noir*, 7.
127 Conard, 98.
128 Maureen Turim, *Flashbacks In Film: Memory & History* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 1.

A flashback is essential to unfold a story when the end is bound to parallel events encountered by different characters in different settings: a bridge which connects the past to the present by leaving no gaps and providing a solid clarity for readers. This technique also aligns with the nature of dark fatalism in Jason's comics which points at the fact that the end is always inevitable. No action can change the course of a predestined event. As *I Killed Adolf Hitler* suggests even if the bad guy is eliminated, there will always be another one to replace him.

The first flashback in the story is based on Ernest's perspective. The plan works out well at first. They put on their masks. James Joyce distracts the police watching the bank. Inside, Scott kills the clerks in a Mexican stand-off and tries to get rid of Hemingway, as well. Somehow Hemingway saves himself and with Ezra, they flee from the window as Scott gets away with the money. On their way, Ezra leaves Hemingway for a while to buy cigarettes. When they reach their headquarters to meet James Joyce, they are frustrated by Scott's whereabouts. Joyce returns home wounded.

The second flashback presents James Joyce's side of the story, He pretends to be blind and asks for help from a police watching the bank. Together they walk into the nearest pub to call a cab so the gang easily enters the bank without being spotted. When he rushes to the bank, he finds out that Scott is in fact Eduardo. James follows him to the apartment where Fitzgeralds live. While trying to enter, he was shot. Fatally wounded, James checks inside and sees Eduardo and Zelda lying dead on the floor and the apartment is on fire. He finds the money bag and walks home where he sees Ezra and Ernest arguing. When they notice him, James falls to the ground and his sight slowly fades away as it must be in a *noir* film by Hitchcock.

In the third flashback presenting Scott's perspective, he is hit in the head with a club and passes out. When he wakes up, he finds himself alone at the bank. When he gets out from the backdoor, he sees the cops running after Ezra and Ernest. When Scott comes closer to Ernest's apartment, a rain of newspaper clippings begins. Confused by what he sees, he walks upstairs and finds James lying dead on the floor. He walks back to his own apartment and Finds out Zelda is nowhere to be found. In desperation he begins to sob.

In the fourth flashback presenting Eduardo's perspective, he knocks Scott out and disguises himself as Scott. When they enter the bank, clerks deliver them the money but Eduardo kills them. He flees and rushes to Fitzgeralds' where he sees Zelda talking on the phone. Eduardo believes he is framed by Fitzgeralds and gets angry. He moves onto Zelda but she shoots him.

In the fifth flashback presenting Zelda's perspective, she talks on the phone with Ezra who was seduced by Zelda previously in the story, and learns what happened in the bank. She is convinced that Ernest and Scott are in cahoots to get way with the money. (Zelda's real discomfort about their real-life friendship is portrayed in a different way by Jason). Eduardo walks in, she shoots Eduardo. Just as she was about to leave, she tries to set the apartment on fire so that police cannot understand what really happens. With a last effort, Eduardo shoots Zelda. She is on her knees, close to death, she sees a shadow in the doorway (angle is twisted and the contrast is high in accordance with *noir* style and German expressionism). Believing she is tricked, Zelda shoot at the shadow. In contrast with the real story, Zelda is represented as a powerful and cruel woman who can do anything to achieve her goals in the sense that a true *femme fatale* would do in a *noir* plot. Unlike his other stories, in which women takes control and saves men from destruction, Jason does not change the concept of *femme fatale*. He presents Zelda as a mastermind who fools all the men in the story yet she cannot escape her doom in the end, just like in her real life.

In the sixth flashback presenting Ezra's perspective, it is found out that Ezra does not buy cigarettes but phones Zelda, the powerful *femme fatale*, blaming her to be the mastermind behind what seems to be a scheme. They reach the headquarters. While they are in a fierce atgument about what has just happened, James walks in wounded and dies. Ezra insists that James is not their concern and they should get away with the money. Ernest thinks it is not the righteous thing to do. He is reluctant to leave James behind but they are surrounded by the police and they have no chance but to flee to the rooftop. Ernest follows Ezra. Suddenly his moral compass prevails and he is disgusted by what they have done. Ezra wants the money for himself. In mayhem to take the money, the bag tears apart and money pours down onto the people, walking on the street. Readers are aware of the fact that in fact the bag is full of newspaper clippings.

The gang are deceived by the clerks, a proper doom for *noir* amateurs. In the last and the shortest flashback Jason presents Ernest's perspective again. Hemingway returns home to Hadley, his devoted wife, finding her in the bed with their son. He sits down beside her with sorrow and tells her not to leave him.

In the last two flashbacks, Jason salutes Hemingway in the sense that in his own fashion, Hemingway had a strong but questionable moral compass about what is right and wrong. He had a confused state of mind. Hemingway took part in the *Spanish Civil War* as an ambulance driver to contribute to his fellow Spanish counterparts against the fascist Franco regime. He stood by the underdogs for a higher purpose but he had a terrible drinking habit which leads to the downfall of his marriage. Headley left him and married another man. On the rooftop scene, his values are represented but in the last panel Jason foreshadows Hadley's departure even if the story ends with two lovers standing side by side after all that happened in the sense that Hemingway begs her not to leave him.

The Left Bank Gang is a well-constructed story, based on solid reality, combined with characteristic *noir* elements. The characters are portrayed with a chronologically realistic approach. They live an ordinary and bohemian life. They spend time at *cafes*, visit bookstores, play ping pong, even bet on horses. They have to live an expatriate life which is hard to effort. Jason brings a colourful touch into their story as every *noir* story needs a thrilling twist, a well-designed crime in Jason's case. *The Left Bank Gang* is no different. Four writers live away from their home in a foreign land where "they share the inversion of values, the alienation and pessimism"[129], especially Fitzgerald, and they have huge financial problems. In despair, Hemingway suggests they should rob a bank to provide for their families but later it turns out Zelda, *the femme fatale*, secretly manipulates the operation by luring all the men into her own sinister plan. This can be seen as an artistic and fictional revenge for Zelda over real-life Hemingway and Fitzgerald as Zelda, unlike in her real life, turns into "a self-determining transgressive woman who challenges male authority"[130] by luring all the men around her as a part of her sinister plan and covertly mobilizing them into her own agenda. Scott participates

[129] Conard, *The Philosophy of Film Noir*, 2.
[130] Lindop, *Postfeminism and the Fatale Figure in Neo-Noir Cinema*, 26.

in the plan to make his peace with Zelda. Meanwhile, Zelda mobilizes Ezra Pound to help him with her plan which is to get money for herself. Later it is found out that Eduardo is also seduced by Zelda to knock Scott out before the robbery and disguise as him to steal the money before the other members of the gang gets away with the prize. In this context, The Left Bank Gang offers a highly complex plot.

Jason achieves the embodiment of his *femme fatale* through the characterization of Zelda as a "phallic woman" who threatens patriarchy with a charming feminine "autonomy" which introduces violence into men's world and "destabilizes" it.[131] This way, Jason revisits the conceptualization of classical *femme fatale* by emphasizing the frailty of *women* in *noir* narrative, marked by patriarchal culture which depends on a biased-look into the gender issue, emphasizing "the establishment of normative gender values which are internalized by both sexes."[132] Therefore, in a conventional *noir* plot, "the more powerful women are imagined to be, often, the more violent is the male reply,"[133] no matter how seductive and dangerous they might be, even as *femme fatales*. Zelda, likewise, is doomed to lose her life in the end even if she manipulates men around her and lure them into their demise. After all "the culture of noir, of death, of 'kill or be killed' must inevitably lead to violence"[134] It might seem that Jason follows a conventional, thus conformist, pattern of *noir* narrative in the *Left Bank Gang*, especially with his *femme fatale*; nevertheless, the cartoonist transforms real life Zelda, who was institutionalized by men with self-righteous male ethics of the era, into a sinister and powerful woman, sneaking around men who are driven by their desires, and the violence, in the end, is shared almost equally by all male characters.

The Left Bank Gang is a prominent and unique sample of *comics noir*. Jason uses the most distinct elements of *noir* narrative: confused individuals, complex relations, paranoia, cynicism, fatalism and a dangerous femme fatale. What differs him among other *comics noir* artists such as Frank Miller, Will Eisner and Brian Azzarello is the fact that his stories are fun-based and colourful in contrast with the dark and malice

131 Mary Wood, "Chiaroscuro: The Half-Glimpsed Femme Fatale of Italian Film Noir," in *The Femme Fatale: Images, Histories, Contexts* eds. Helen Hanson and Catherine O'Rawe (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2010), 161.
132 Krutnik, *In a Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre, Masculinity*, 75.
133 Grossman, *Rethinking the Femme Fatale in Film Noir: Ready for her Close-up*, 105.
134 Dixon, 157.

atmosphere of classical *comics noir* stories such as Sin City, A Contract with God, or 100 Bullets. It is a powerful retro story in the sense that Jason incorporates real-life literary figures to "shuffle through history"[135] and represents a new look into their lives, even the most vaguely lit edges, by putting forward his own political stance, no matter how controversially it may be received. Jason's retrospective approach points out to a feeling of nostalgia, as a term, which has always been in a tense relationship with politics as such endeavours may lead to controversy and harsh accusation. Considering the fact that lives of famous literary figures attracts less concern compared to a disputatious political issue, Jason may yet avoid such criticism.

3.3. *The Last Musketeer*

Jason employs parody in his comics adaptation to "add new layers to the meaning of a construct."[136] These layers, which are gathered from various mediums (books and films in this case), are combined in a single body. With *The Last Musketeer* (2008), Jason ventures into an already surveyed territory since *Three Musketeers* (1844) by Alexandre Dumas is a novel which has been revisited numerously to be adapted into various mediums. In this sense, Jason takes up a tedious mission as an adapter, risking himself to be "haunted by the adapted text" as readers are likely to feel its presence "shadowing" the newer version.[137] As a cartoonist, Jason also has to deal with the infamous "seven-seconds rule"[138] as his story has to appeal to short glancers who might lose their interest, allegedly, in seven seconds. In order to avoid such criticism, Jason girds up his parodic tools to "explore the roads untaken"[139] in an already over-handled material, and re-focuses on Athos, who overcomes his solitude by mobilizing himself into a new adventure to save the world. Athos is dislocated from his original setting and beamed up to 400 years forward in time by Jason. He is a veteran musketeer who still holds on to the ideals of the old times. It is hard for him to accept the truth that the times he fought for justice are long gone. No matter how nobly he does it, Athos has to beg people to buy him a drink or give him some money (see figure 3.7). He is no longer a

135 Elizabeth Guffrey, *The Culture of Revival* (London. Reaktion, 2006), 14.
136 Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teaching of Twentieth-Century Art Forms*, 31.
137 Hutcheon and O'Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation* (Oxon: Routledge, 2013), 6.
138 Don L. F. Nilsen and Alleen Pace Nilsen, *The Language of Humor: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 31.
139 Farrimond, 25.

respected hero in the society and has to endure a terrible loneliness in an infernal city which leads to his alienation, a key theme in *noir* narrative.

Figure 3.7. Athos asks for a drink from a stranger

Source: *The Last Musketeer*, 2008

Jason takes a novel character out of his original time and setting and places him in a modern and chaotic world, aiming a parodic irony in the story as parodic reinterpretations of well-known materials in new generic context can relocate "the cultural and temporal setting" of the preceding source material[140]. In this context, Athos finds himself in a time he normally does not belong to. It has been roughly 400 years since he last fought in the name of the king. That is the reason why Athos turns into an individual who is alienated from society and suffers from an existential crisis, subject to "nihilist isolation"[141]. On the one hand, he tries to cling on the past, during which he was a member of a respected community as a musketeer, on the other he is confronted by the fact that those times are long gone. His comrades are not with him anymore, a familiar experience the enlisted men felt when they returned from World War I since

140 Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, 19.
141 Dixon, *Film Noir and the Cinema of Paranoia*, 137.

they had to experience the same alienation in American society. The country they had left to defend was a new world in which they totally feel as outsiders.

As his service is not required, Athos either has to beg or be aided by old friends to survive financially. This creates a deep hole in his morality in the sense that he has to put his honour aside to live on just like the unemployed Americans drifters during the 1930s. Athos feels a deep solitude as "an outsider", lacking confidence, who is alienated from the mainstream society.[142] Unlike him, Aramis seems to have accepted the gravity of his reality and adapted himself to new circumstances (see figure 3.8).

Figure 3.8. Athos calls Aramis for duty

Source: *The Last Musketeer*, 2008

He does not fight battles for his country anymore. This contrast between two old comrades puts another theme any *noir* plots would demand in place: "betrayal by a colleague"[143]. Athos, on the other hand, has post-war syndromes after leaving his glorious battles behind. Any soldier who leaves his country to fight overseas has similar existential traumas owing to a loss of identity, finding themselves back in a country where they no longer seem to belong. Likewise, Athos cannot find tranquillity in peace after years of fighting battles as he refuses to be re-identified as a common individual. Nevertheless, his "masculine achievements" are no longer glorified by society.[144] In a way, Jason follows the pattern Ted Kotcheff did in *Rambo: First Blood* (1982).

142 Krutnik, *In a Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre, Masculinity*, 90.
143 Duncan, *Film Noir: Films of Trust and Betrayal*, 48.
144 Krutnik, *In a Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre, Masculinity*, 91.

The difference between Athos and Aramis is meaningful to understand the circumstances American society had to experience during the *Great Depression* era. While Athos's moral compass struggles to point him in the right direction, Aramis sees it as a futile attempt. Athos blames Aramis for forgetting the values which make a noble musketeer, but society does not require them anymore. As a man who tries to hold on his ideals, Athos is subject to" alienation and irrationality of modern life", which torment and destabilize him.[145]

When all hopes of regaining a position in society are about to diminish for Athos, Martian troops attack Paris. Laser blasts ruin the city. Such an attack serves a unifying factor when a nation feels themselves threatened by a foreign conflict, caused by an exotic rival force whose cause is "less solidly based both historically and morally"[146]. This is a long-needed opportunity for a proper hero. Hence, Athos seizes the opportunity to regain his title and rushes to the apartment of his old brother-in-arms, Aramis who has managed turn himself into a wealthy and modern man. Athos desires Aramis to join him to save the city. However, his heroic call is not accepted by his old comrade. Aramis reminds Athos of the fact that Athos is a dreamer who cannot see the world he lives in which has changed immensely and they no longer fight battles. At this point, it surfaces out that Porthos died in a battle and this parted their ways a long time ago. Frustrated by what he has just heard, Athos decides to go on a single-man mission to cease the extraterrestrial attacks from Mars. He finds alien troops, disarms them and sets off for Mars in their vessel. When they land on Mars, Athos is captured by enemy forces and taken to the cruel emperor of Mars, Ming the Merciless, a character from *Flash Gordon* (1934) who is dislocated from his original universe as an output of Jason's parodic approach, which derives from multiple sources rather than consisting of a single "imitative approach."[147] The emperor orders his imprisonment and reports the incident to his hooded ally. Athos uses his unique force to make or rather perforce acquaintance in jail, and befriends his Martian cellmate. Athos makes a plan to escape. He pretends to have passed out. This simple trick works out and he wards off the guards. Athos fights all the guards, even robots, who get in his way and finds a secret

145 Spicer, *Historical Dictionary of Film Noir*, xli.
146 Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion,* 71.
147 Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teaching of Twentieth-Century Art Forms*, 31.

passage to the room of the princess who keeps trying to convince his father to cease his attacks on the world. She even seduces one of the emperor's trusted men, General Amir but fails to mobilize him for her cause. Exhilarated to see a hero before her, the princess explains to Athos that the real mastermind behind the attacks is actually an earthling like him, taken residence in a tower, conspiring with the emperor. After all, no terrain can be captured without a domestic help.

Athos makes his way out of the castle by using a map given to him by the princess. He manages to find the laser canonry and destroys it. He is recaptured but with the help of the Princess and General Amir, Athos is set free again. They take refuge outside the capital in the desert where Athos has many adventures. He even meets Martian aborigines and shares his story about his affair with Catherine Deneuve and leaves them a photo of her in which they seem to be rather interested. With the help of his jail mate, a native scientist, who found a way to boost oxygen levels on Mars but was prisoned by the emperor.

The fugitives return to the castle where the princess and General Amir will confront the emperor and kill him. Then, Athos figures out that it is his adversary, Count Rochefort who was supposed death, and is the mastermind of the plan to invade the world. After an epic battle Athos kills the count; however, the count shoots him with a last effort, as well. Athos dies in the arms of the princess in a poetic fashion, declaring that his last wish was to die in France. His body is taken to the world by the princess and General Amir. They report his heroism on Mars to save the world to the press. Athos dies a hero. Hearing about the story of his comrade, Aramis regretfully puts on his old musketeer uniform that he has kept in his wardrobe and visits Athos' grave where he recites the musketeers' oath: "All for one and one for all."

Protagonists in film noir are commonly constructed as private eyes; however it is not a *sine qua non*. Anyone who is socially an outcast can serve a *noir* plot. In Jason's comic book, it is a musketeer who needs to find himself a purpose in life. Usually, the trouble an anti-hero has to deal with is brought up by a femme fatale but in Athos's case an alien attack provides what he craves for in a timely fashion. Like a bored private eye sitting aimlessly in his office, who is desperately in need of a sharp twist in his fate to rediscover meaning in his life, Athos vigorously takes over the mission to save the

world. Finally he finds himself a real challenge to test if he still fits into the "extensive standards of masculine competence."[148] Trusting his verbal power, Athos tries to persuade Aramis to join his cause but fails. In a sense Aramis implicitly reminds Athos of his loneliness but Athos insists on remaining amnesiac to his reality.

Athos is on his way to Mars in an enemy vessel. He looks at the world and suffers the same existential disillusionment. He is shaken by the fact that the world, thus his existence, is insignificantly small compared to the vastness of the universe. This first scepticism is handled poorly in a rush, though. According to him, it is "not time for philosophy" now (see figure 3.9).

Figure 3.9. Athos feels trivial in the universe

Source: *The Last Musketeer*, 2008

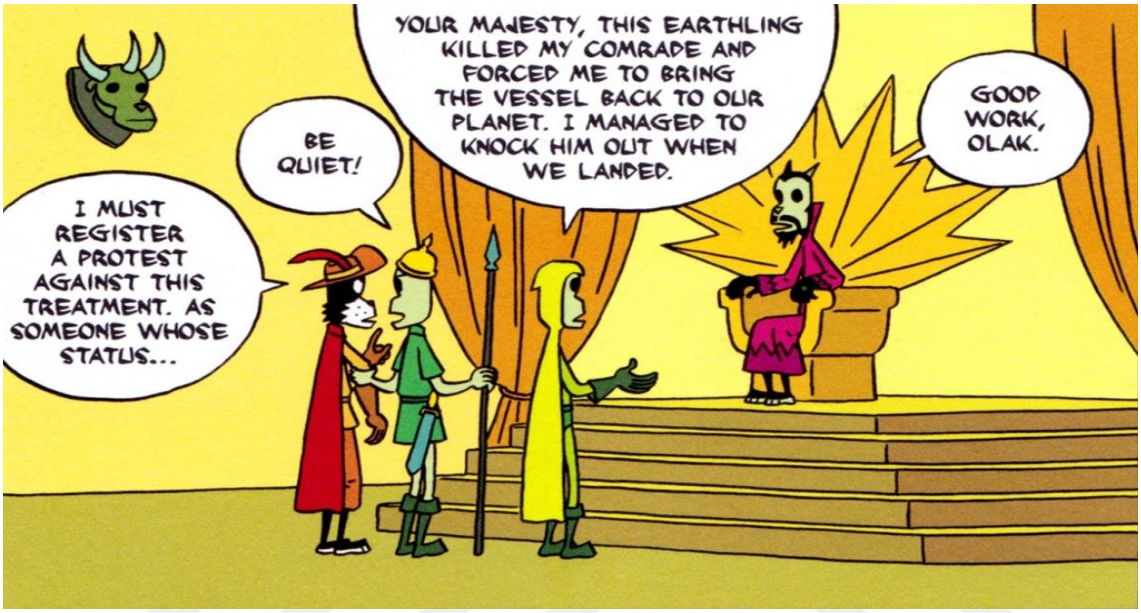
There is no room for it as there is a higher purpose he fights for. A confused mind filled with doubts is a trademark for a protagonist in *comics noir*. Athos shows his scepticism by asking questions to the Martian troop in the vessel. The soldier does not respond. His solitude surrounds him again.

Athos lands on Mars and he is captured by the enemy forces as a *noir* protagonist who is supposed to find himself in a series of perilous circumstances. He is taken to the

148 Krutnik, *In a Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre, Masculinity*, 86.

emperor who looks exactly like Ming the Merciless. Jason incorporates a character from the *Flash Gordon* (1934) universe into his story as Ming has basic qualities of a *noir* villain: he is wealthy and powerful (see figure 3.10). Athos, on the other hand, finds himself in jail which is one of the many troubles he gets into as a doomed character.

Figure 3.10. Athos is in the presence of Ming the Merciless



Source: *The Last Musketeer*, 2008

It is known that a noir protagonist always has his way with words. Athos makes a new friend out of his Martian cellmate and encourages him to smoke. It does not seem that Athos is a good conservationist; rather he speaks his thoughts out to ease his troubled mind. Athos manages to flee from his cell and makes his way to the room of the princess, the *femme fatale* of this space adventure. The princess desires to talk his father out of destroying the world and uses her feminine power to enlist men to her cause, even if it leads them to their doom. The princess first tires to lure General Amir into her plan, but he is too hesitant. The moment she meets Athos, the princess understands he will serve her purpose. It is known that the *femme fatale* in *the noir narrative* is either cunning and calm as a silent force or overtly rebellious and destructive. In this sense, Jason's *femme fatale* is a little different than the *noir narrative* presents as she is not stable. She both tries to mobilize a male to accomplish her objectives, and acts as an

independent agent threatening the male dominance.[149] The princess is bold, beautiful and playful, yet she is not evil. While men try to destroy the world, she tries to save it (see figure 3.11).

Figure 3.11. The princess tries to lure Amir

Source: *The Last Musketeer*, 2008

The princess moves into the centre of the plot and then moves back out. This way she becomes a dynamic force. As of his custom, Jason chooses to dignify his female character. This way, he interprets a literary material, "taking a position on it."[150] With her help, Athos finds the laser canon which is used to attack the world and destroys it. Then, he finds himself captured once again; however he is set free by the princess and General Amir who has been finally mobilized by the *femme fatale*. Apart from being an essential part of *noir* story, Athos's successive imprisonments can also be reckoned as a reference to the famous aphorism: "Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again" which was attributed to Samuel Beckett. It is not a far-fetched idea considering the fact that Jason's *Waiting for Bardot* is a parody of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*.

149 M. A. Katovich and M. Haller, "Film Images of Violent Females as Criminal Justice Types: From Femme Fatale to Retro Fatale and Beyond," *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice* 12 no. 2 (May 1996):190.

150 Hutcheon and O'Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 92.

In the second phase of the story, Athos figures out the real villain whom readers are introduced to as a hooded man behind the scheme. It is Coumte de Rochefort, the real antagonist of the story. Jason creates suspense, which is an essential tool for *noir* narrative, by presenting the real villain at the end of the story. After an epic battle, Athos manages to wound his old rival Rochefort but the cunning antagonist also shoots Athos before he dies, which can be seen as a proper end for a *noir* protagonist. The quest he has taken eventually leads Athos to his doom.

According to John A. Dane, "the targets of parody can be trivial or monumental"[151] by serving either as a mere imitation of a classic, relying on the positive responses of an audience, or a solid interpretation of a preceding material on a critical ground, offering a revitalization of a tradition in accordance with current social and historical situations. Jason's comics may seem as cartoonish stories, written merely to entertain readers; however the intertextual depth in his comics is of intellectual significance in the sense that they offer a wide array of topics, such as gender equality, existentialism, and popular culture, on a critical ground. On these terms, *The Last Musketeer* is a well-designed parody which functions through two levels: a plain "surface" and an implied "background".[152] Therefore, the intertextuality it offers immensely relies on "readers' awareness" as there is already an "explicit relation" to the novel, [153] which can be instantly grasped by a similar but altered title, hinting at a generic shift in the story. Therefore, Jason's parodic narrative demands a deep scrutiny of what is hidden underneath the surface. To achieve such a vast comprehension, readers must be acknowledged about the context of the events that are meticulously embedded in Jason's comics.

3.4. *Lost Cat*

Jason's *comics noir* starts with the introduction of the archetype protagonist of *noir* convention. Dan Delon is a private eye who hardly pays his office's rent and can only afford to employ an old lady as a secretary. He is an excessive drinker and a smoker. Dan is introduced as a typical protagonist who is economically instable and prone to

151 Joseph A. Dane "Parody and Satire in the Literature of Thirteenth-Century Arras, Part I," *Studies in Philology* 81 no. 1 (Winter 1984): 10

152 Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teaching of Twentieth-Century Art Forms*, 34.

153 Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, 18.

alcoholism, coping with his inner conflicts. Delon is a "fallen hero"[154], trapped in the urban maze. He lives in a city which is a source of "constant peril and paranoia", stuck in a vicious circle to "repeat the same tasks and run the same risks."[155]

On a rainy day, Delon finds a black cat on the street. When he checks around, he sees a lost-cat notice on a wall. He calls the number and writes down the address of the owner. The *noir* chain of events which will "unravel the web of misfortunes"[156] starts at a phone booth. He takes the cat home. The lady, who owns the cat, invites the detective to drink a cup of coffee, which functions as the first temptation by the *femme fatale*. Her name is Charlotte and owns a bookstore Delon occasionally visits. Dan also has seen the Kitty the cat before, but did not notice Charlotte. At this point, it is revealed that the protagonist has unknowingly been entrapped long before he stepped into the domain of *femme fatale.* Charlotte starts to appeal to Delon. The conversation does not seem to stop. Delon starts to be acknowledged about some details Charlotte has chosen to share. For instance, he learns about Charlotte's co-worker, Celine, who has serious problems with her boyfriend who is prone to violence. As in any *noir* plot, Delon also receives information which will mislead him in his future venture to reveal the truth. A spouse who constantly hurts a woman easily becomes a usual suspect, especially for a private eye, in the sense that there is already a crime, a criminal and a victim. Delon's masculinity prevails and offers to have a word with him, even roughing him up. Charlotte finds out Delon is a private detective. Although she finds it exciting, Delon, who wanted to be a cowboy but ended up a detective, thinks it is a boring possession. All he does is to gather intel and take photos of cheated spouses. What Delon implicitly points to is a web of routines which consume him daily. He has simple daily activities. Pouring some wine in his glass, listening to old records and lying on the couch. Later, it turns out that they are both divorcees so they understand each other's feelings. Their long conversation finally comes to and Delon leaves to embrace his solitude again.

The next day, Delon is humiliated by an angry client who saw his wife's photos of cheating on him. The client threw the money on Delon's face and he has to collect it from the floor as a clear sign of *noir* detachment: an absence of moral compass. He

154 Park, *What is Film Noir*, 23.
155 Dixon, *Film Noir and the Cinema of Paranoia*, 29.
156 Park, *What is Film Noir*, 25.

thinks it might be a good idea to go on a date with Charlotte who, as a *femme fatale*, promises an exciting and adventurous haven for Delon, "the flawed hero."[157] However, he is stood up by her at the restaurant. Delon tries to reach her a couple of times but he cannot. It seems strange to Delon and, alerted by her sudden disappearance, he visits Charlotte's bookstore to find out that she has been for a couple of days. While being informed by Celine, Delon suspects she might be lying. Then, he decides to pay a visit to her apartment and learns from her neighbour that she has two brothers, which makes him even more suspicious of the case as Charlotte has claimed to have no family. Delon investigates her apartment but cannot find any clues about her whereabouts. Then, he makes some phone calls which leads him to nothing. As a necessity of the *noir* convention, suspense starts to grow.

While Delon investigates, two suspicious men visit Celine who does not understand why Charlotte wants to vanish. She knows Charlotte is not missing. Celine tells the men about Dan's inquiry. They feel uneasy but it seems time is of the essence to them. In this scene, Jason provides a revelation. It is understood by the weird way they communicate that they are not humans. In the *noir* narrative, it is an important touch to the story as *noir* landscape implores xenophobic doubts, yet Jason does not address a nationality as a foreign rival. Instead, he deploys alien characters to achieve parody in his story. Later, Celine brings a suitcase with her and they are ready to leave. Later, she finds herself at a hospital suffering from a strong amnesia, which is "an extreme form of an identity crisis" in the *noir* narrative.[158]

Unable to reach Charlotte, Delon seeks distraction and takes a case to find an old painting of a woman with whom his client had a big romance but they had to marry other people. The only way for the old man to be together with his love again is to find the painting which claimed to be in her son's possession. Jason's craftsmanship reveals itself here as he manages to distract his readers from the main story and create a sub-plot. This way, he entangles his readers with a love story, making them, with an alteration in rhythm, forget for a while that the main plot escalates to a climax. This is also a *noir* attempt in the sense that readers find themselves in a world, presenting

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157 Cory K. Creekmur, "Cinephilia and Film Noir," in *A Companion to Film Noir* eds. Andrew Spicer and Helen Hanson (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell: 2013): 68.

158 Spicer and Hanson "Introduction," 10.

multicity: one that offers a love story, an alien invasion. In this context Delon, the anti-hero, has to conduct two inquiries he can "neither fully escape nor fully embrace."[159] Exhausted by what he has experienced, Delon starts to see hallucinations, a *noir* manifestation of his psyche. Charlotte's image talks to him, giving ideas, and asking questions. Delon questions people but it becomes harder to get to the truth because everybody somehow lies, which triggers "the underlying paranoia" of the noir protagonist from a Freudian perspective.[160] Delon cannot get Charlotte out of his head. To avoid his obsession, Delon tries to date another woman but he leaves her because the woman has no books in her house. Dan is visited by the spectre of Charlotte again and again. Charlotte tries to make him understand that she is not his salvation. At this point, Jason achieves a duality in the *femme fatale*'s function. While the real Charlotte is away somewhere, pursuing her own goals, her hallucination seeks to save Delon from his downfall. In this sense, Jason gradually transforms the *femme fatale* in his story. Meanwhile, Delon kept conducting his inquiry to solve the case, searching for clues, but it becomes much more complicated. Delon talks to alibis but it is very hard to distinguish the truth when he is surrounded by lies. This ambiguity is coherent with the general structure of *comics noir* in which society is corrupt and people take Machiavellian ways to act in their own interest. His inquiry seems to be going nowhere.

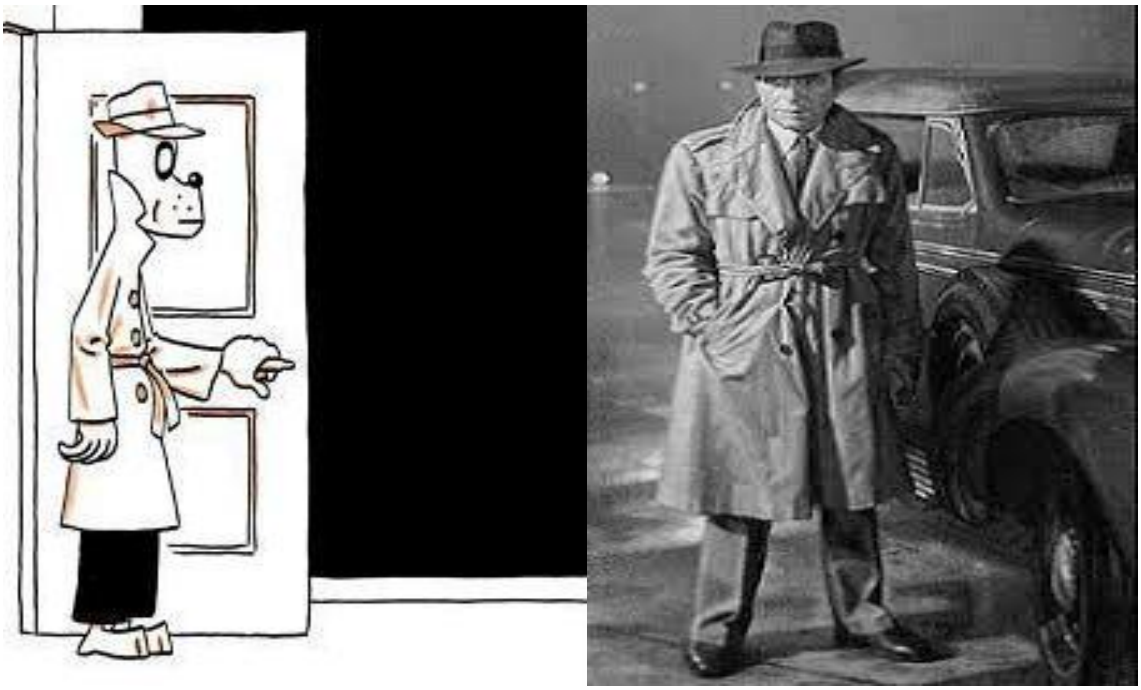
In the finale, No matter how many times he is misled, Delon succeeds to solve the case. He manages to find the painting and returns to his *noir* world. In this context, the painting becomes a Macguffin object which distracts him from the grave danger. he has to face. The world is about to be destroyed by a gigantic robot which actually guards Charlotte. Indifferent to everything out in the world, Delon makes his way home to watch what happens outside from his window. He is tired and ready to fall. The *femme fatale* who is sympathetic to Delon pays a final visit to him. Delon finds out the truth about Charlotte that she is actually an alien officer and the robot follows her orders. Charlotte is commanded to destroy the world but she wants to see Delon for the last time. Delon has become so delusional that he thinks she is not Charlotte. He tries to kill Charlotte but she manages to stop him. Charlotte tells him about the mission she has to fulfil. She gives him a book as a gift and bids farewell. While the city is destroyed,

159 Conard, *The Philosophy of Film Noir*, 3
160 Conard, 223.

Delon returns home. His downfall is complete. The story has an ambiguous, thus, *noir* end. Dan embraces the Charlotte he created in his mind and it is not certain if the world is destroyed.

Dan Delon is a typical *film noir* protagonist who is both socially, financially, and psychologically in jeopardy As Charlotte describes him, Delon exactly looks like Humphrey Bogart in *Maltese Falcon* (1941), which is one of the pioneering productions of *film noir* (see figure 3.12)

Figure 3.12. Jason's protagonist resembles Humphrey Bogart

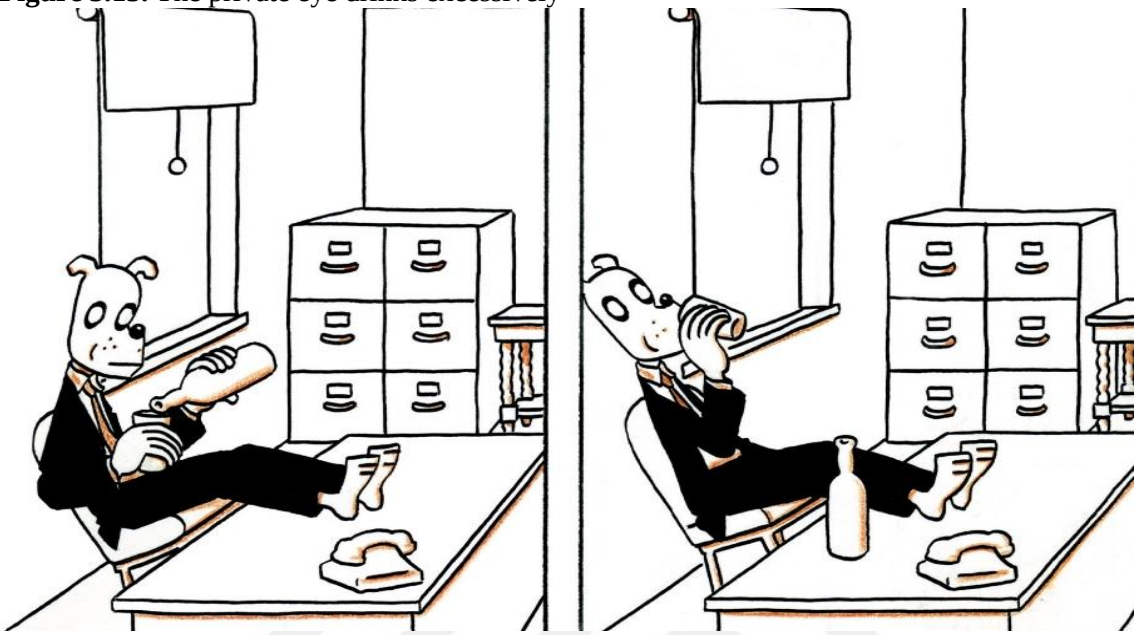


Sources: *Lost Cat*, 2013 and *Casablanca* (1942)

Delon is not different than any other *noir* characters. He feels alienated from the society and is not psychologically stable. Moreover, he is financially in a dire condition which distorts his morality. In order to make a living, he has to endure the ill treatments of his customers. Like many directors who did not plainly present the unemployment and poverty in their films, Jason follows the same *noir* patterns and does not give any hint about character's past to explain what happened to him, or how he ended up in his current position in society. The only thing, made clear by the cartoonist is that Delon has to survive. He has to make his peace with a corrupt society. No matter how lousy or boring a case is, he has to take it and endure his client's demeaning attitudes, a familiar *noir* condition which represents the class tensions and struggles in the post-war

American society.[161] There is only one way to repress his anger, disappointment, and his disgust: chain smoking and excessive drinking (see figure 3.13).

Figure 3.13. The private eye drinks excessively



Source: *Lost Cat*, 2013

All these elements stage the appearance of Charlotte, the *femme fatale*, who will provide a warm space for the protagonist to ease his mental breakdown and remobilize him to live for a purpose (see figure 3.4.3). Charlotte is actually a space officer from another planet, who has been sent to destroy the world. She is accompanied by a giant robot. Charlotte is not a typical *femme fatale* in the sense that she does not willingly manipulate Dan to fall for her. Nevertheless, she plays a key role in Delon's downfall. Delon serves as a distraction for Charlotte, as well; however, she manages to stick to her plan. As it is of his perception of sexual equality, Jason draws another strong-willed female character while the male protagonist is physically enduring but emotionally fragile. Although Charlotte forges minor bonds with the worlds such as having a pet and meeting Delon, she does not hesitate to carry out her mission. Delon, on the other hand, finds himself totally obsessed with Charlotte who is out of his reach (see figure 3.14).

[161] Broe, *Film Noir, American Workers, and Postwar Hollywood*, xviii.

Figure 3.14. Dan Delon is obsessed with Charlotte

Sources: *Lost Cat*, 2013

At this point, her pursuit of Charlotte poses a great danger which may end up in various problems ranging from humiliation to death,[162] but Delon cannot get her out of his mind. He even has a hallucinative affair with her spectre. He takes a new case to live on and his burden becomes even heavier. Then he runs from one danger into another like a typical *noir* protagonist in the maze would do. In this sense, Delon becomes a true *noir* anti-hero who takes over multiple responsibilities with a certain level of tragedy lying under them[163]. He tries to find an old painting of a woman who is held very dear by his old boyfriend. Just like Delon, the old man is obsessed with a woman whom he lost long time ago. In a way, by introducing an old man who comes up with this seemingly trivial case, a macguffin object, Jason foreshadows what Delon will go through in the future.

Jason, like Quentin Tarantino, makes use of a familiar story and adapts it to his own storyline. In this case, Jason instrumentalizes the movie *The Day The Earth Stood Still* (1951) in which the elements of *film noir* are present. He also seems to refer to Ernest Hemingway's *Cat in the Rain* by using the lost cat, lurking in the rain, to initialize the

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162 William Jankowiak and Angelina Ramsey, "Femme Fatale and Status Fatale: A Cross-Cultural Perspective," *Cross-Cultural Research* 34, no.1 (February 2000): 64.

163 Tyler Weaver, *Comics for Film, Games, and Animation Using Comics to Construct Your Transmedia Storyworld* (Burlington: Focal Press, 2013), 70.

main construct. In addition, the colour of the cat can be reckoned as a symbolic salutation to *Le Chat Noir* as the story takes place in France which is not mentioned clearly by the cartoonist but can be understood by the names that are used in the story such as Delon, Dupont, Jacques, Pascal, and Pierre. By using known establishments from France, Jason connects the roots of his fiction with real world as he does in *The Left Bank Gang* (2006) with Sylvia Beach's *Shakespeare and Co.*

3.5 *If You Steal*

Jason deploys a *noir* plot, whose main theme is similar to the one, functioned by the *film noir* directors in the 1940s and 1950s in order to construct their *noir* plot, which embodied desperate individuals in society, who has to cope with the financial and psychological aspects of the *Great Depression* by conducting illegal activities. Jason's protagonist, Paul, is a gambler who has lost a serious amount of money to someone he cannot refuse to pay. One of his friends introduces him to a burglar to help him out with the debt he owes. The robber plans to rob the house of an old man In desperation, Paul agrees with the plan (see figure 3.15).

Figure 3.15. Two accomplices break into a house

Source: *If You Steal*, 2015

The protagonist, who has to disregard the last remnants of his morality, makes the "major mistake" that precipitates his downfall [164]. During the robbery, the helpless old man is shot dead.

A noir protagonist who has to make a difficult decision, "mixes innocence and guilt" for a noble purpose.[165] Paul's main motivation for gambling or stealing is to fulfil Jane's dreams, a direct reference to the *noir* construction of *femme fatale*, under whose influence "men, already struggling because of the Depression, were forced to steal, kill, or otherwise disobey the law in order to fulfil their role as providers."[166] Likewise, Paul decided to commit crime but becomes traumatized after the incident of old man's murder. He starts to see hallucinations. "The inevitable and complicated corruptibility" of noir protagonist manifests itself.[167] His consciousness is seen to Paul in the shape of a man whom he saw in a portrait at a museum. This face constantly haunts Paul. Just as he starts to take medication. Jane, who has tried to talk him out of his plan, is kidnapped by his accomplice. They beat her up pretty badly. Jane leaves the town. Out of vengeance Paul kills his accomplice. In the finale, he finds himself institutionalised.

Jason narrates his story in a complex series of flashbacks, a *noir* convention, through which the past, the present and the future are told consecutively to fill in the memory of his readers with "temporal occurances"[168] which brings the complete comprehension of the plot through a "dual temporality".[169] Paul loses his hope to lead a decent life by working hard and being honest, but considers gambling his only way out in the end. The circumstances during the 1920s and 1930s were no different since the American government had not regulated trade in favour of the working class. Moreover, they had not let unions function properly. This approach brought up low wages or unemployment. The prior prospect of the *American Dream*, working hard and decent, seemed to have failed. Politicians were bribed by business owners, and those who conduct illegal operations so that they would be acquitted on trials. People reckoned illegal activities to earn money as a final resort. *Film noir* dealt with the society created

164 Conard, *The Philosophy of Film Noir*, 174.
165 Conard, 174.
166 Dixon, "Precursors to Film Noir," in *A Companion to Film Noir* eds. Andrew Spicer and Helen Hanson, 81.
167 Dixon, *Film Noir and the Cinema of Paranoia*, 65.
168 Turim, *Flashbacks in Film: Memory & History*, 1.
169 Turim, 10.

by this chaotic order. In this context, *film noir* offered "the obverse of the *American Dream."*[170]

Paul loses a great amount of money to a formidable man. It is a desperate situation. He has no chance but to figure out a *noir* way to solve the situation. One bad decision brings another one. The *noir* protagonist is drifted to a series of dangerous acts and moves toward a tragedy, the same route the poor people had to take during the *Great Depression*. Morality is pointless and temptation is inevitable. In absence of *the femme fatale*, Jason assigns another good-hearted female character to stop Paul but it is too late for a doomed character to quit, but he did not comply with her. The murder of the old man haunts Paul in his own conscience. Once again, the morality issue becomes the main topic to be questioned in Jason's *comics noir*. Paul is drowned in his remorse so much that he has to take medications. When his girlfriend is beaten up by the criminal and his gang, to make things right, he kills his ex-murderous partner. His morality is damaged even more and he cannot keep his sanity. At this point, Jason's story turns into a *noir* story by Bergman whose films obsessively focused on "the dark times of the soul" during which their intricate taint ends up in pessimism and cynicism.[171] Paul starts to see hallucinations. He cannot make a distinction between what is real, what is not just as he cannot understand what is right or wrong. Another character with a terribly confused mind is led to his doom. The story ends in ambiguity, and so do most *noir* films.

3.6. *New Face*

One of the prominent motives in the *noir* narrative is a relentless race against time.[172] Jason fulfils this necessity with a fugitive story which starts with the presentation of a headline about a man who is at large (see figure 3.16).

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170 R.Barton Palmer, *Hollywood's Dark Cinema: The American Film Noir* (New York: Twayne, 1994), 6.

171 Jesse Kalin, *The Films of Ingmar Bergman* (New York: Cambridge, 2003), 8.

172 Duncan, *Film Noir: Films of Trust and Betrayal*, 56.

Figure 3.16. The fugitive disguises himself

Source: *New Face*, 2015

Leo, who is reported to have stabbed his wife to death, has to stay in shadows not to get caught and prove his innocence, a desperate circumstance making him a typical "outside-the-law fugitive protagonist"[173], a commonly-used *noir* element which aligns with the post-war psyche in the 1930s, representing the huge gap between the government and the society. Leo disguises himself and finds the woman, Suzanne, who attended the trial and sent him letters in jail as she thinks Leo is innocent even though the evidence is against him. Suzanne takes Leo to her apartment to keep him safe. She insists that Leo should surrender to the authorities but Leo desires to prove his innocence. He also plans to have a plastic surgery to become completely unrecognisable. He finds an unorthodox and unregistered doctor for the operation, just like in Stephen Spielberg's blockbuster *Minority Report* (2002). While his face is in bandage, he continues to stay at Suzanne's apartment where they spend time like a married couple. After a while Leo removes his bandages. He is a new man now, free and safe. He constantly spends time out with Suzanne; however, he thinks about his revenge all the time. It seems they are just thoughts because he finds himself having a great time with Suzanne.

[173] Broe, *Film Noir, American Workers, and Postwar Hollywood*, xvii.

Jason's story is very much alike with 1960s TV show *Fugitive* and Jason's narration is based on *Sin City* in the sense that the protagonist narrates what he experiences as an outsider. Jason deploys voice-overs, representing Leo's inner conflicts while "female autonomy" gradually grows, disrupting his plans[174]. Leo, who is framed by the murderer of his wife and finds himself in jail, complies with the characteristics of *noir* narrative in the sense that he is in grave danger and desperate to do anything necessary to redeem himself. Both his decisions and morality are questionable. Suzanna, on the other hand, serves as a Jasonesque *femme fatale*. Although Leo's sole purpose is to avenge his wife, Suzanne who attends the trials, distracts him into her own love web and resets the game. Suzanne gives Leo the money she has saved so that he can have a plastic surgery to disguise himself and be with her for the rest of his time. In this context, Suzanne becomes "a middle-class ally"[175], sharing what she has with Leo so that she can liberate Leo from oppressive force in the formal hierarchy of a corrupt order. At this point, Leo is very much aware that he is driven into Suzanne's plot but cannot help enjoying his life with her. The feeling of vengeance becomes pointless. Suzanne's unconditioned support turns into a resurrecting element.

Jason's *femme fatales* are emotionally stronger than male characters in his comics. While the male protagonist seems to be the key factor in the story, he always finds himself in an existential crisis which almost leads him into jeopardy. For instance, an innocent man is convicted of his wife's murder, for which he wows vengeance and escapes from prison. He is aided by a determined woman. As the time goes by, he starts to find himself in a serious relationship with his rescuer which seems odd to him. No matter how hard he tries to refocus on his mission, the *femme fatale* tricks him into a happy relationship he cannot make sense of. He becomes ambiguous. Jason deploys another *femme fatale* whose intentions are rather vitalizing than destructive. Suzanne uses her manipulative skills to save the male character when he is lost in his quest to find a meaning in life. However, she still serves as a *femme fatale* in the sense that she

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174 Gaylyn Studlar, "The Corpse on Reprieve: Film Noir's Cautionary Tales of Tough Guy Masculinity" in *A Companion to Film Noir* eds. Andrew Spicer and Helen Hanson (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell: 2013): 360.

175 Broe, *Film Noir, American Workers, and Postwar Hollywood*, 43.

challenges social norms, running the risk of a punishment for her transgression.[176] Suzanne has no personal gain except for a long-lasting romance.

3.7. *Polly Wants Cracker*

Jason places Frida Kahlo right in the centre of his *noir* comic as a reckless assassin. The story begins with a fast-moving opening. Frida kills a man without hesitation and then turns back to her ordinary life. She buys crackers for her parrot, Polly, takes a bath, and visits record stores. Then, she stops at a cafe for a cup of coffee, visits museums and smokes in a park. One day her phone rings. She is hired to kill a high-profiled person (see figure 3.17).

Figure 3.17. Frida Kahlo conducts an assassination

Source: *Polly Wants Cracker*, 2015

After a cautious recon mission, Frida jumps into the residence which is protected by bodyguards. She disposes of a couple of them, but she is captured in the end. Frida is beaten up badly by her target. Then her parrot which has become a man comes in and

[176] Creekmur, "Cinephilia and Film Noir" in *A Companion to Film Noir* eds. Andrew Spicer and Helen Hanson, 73.

kills everyone. Parrotman carries Frida, who has passed out, in its arms. Frida finds herself in the bathtub, unaware of how she ended up there. Polly is perched up at the edge of the bathtub.

Jason employs another famous figure in his story and transforms her into an "enduring figure of femininity."[177] This approach of transformation has already been adopted in some *neo-noir* films which is a re-visitation of *film noir,* offering a new look into the new world. This new look demands a broader perception of social issues such as race, class and gender.[178] With this new objective in his narrative, Jason comes up with a more challenging female character; capable of conducting operations, which is exclusively supposed to be run by male protagonists. It does not seem like a random choice to choose Frida as the ultimate *femme fatale* since she suffered both physically and mentally in her life. She lost a leg, suffered endless pain due to an accident and endured a disloyal husband. She has a deeper influence on popular culture.[179] Jason undoes what life has taken from her and Frida becomes an executioner of men, who looks like a sophisticated intellectual during her leisure time. The world she lives in is both chaotic and beautiful. In the last part of the story, she is trapped by men but her parrot turns into a hero and saves her. This is quite a symbolic scene in which Frida gets help from her pet, not a man (see figure 3.18), hinting at instability in Kahlo's health, career and personal life.

177 Farrimond, "The Femme Fatale Who Wasn't There," 27.

178 Jerold J. Abrams, "Space, Time, and Subjectivity in Neo-Noir Cinema" in *The Philosophy of Neo-Noir*, ed. Mark T. Conard (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 8.

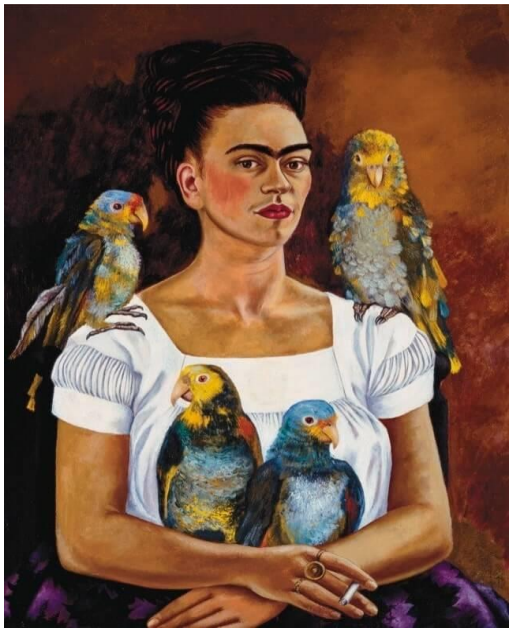
179 Katovich and Haller, "Film Images of Violent Females as Criminal Justice Types: From Femme Fatale to Retro Fatale and Beyond," 188.

Figure 3.18. Frida Kahlo is rescued by the Parrot man

Source: *Polly Wants Cracker*, 2015

Real Frida had ups and downs, "alternating between healing and setbacks" [180] and she actually had pet parrots that she painted her self-portrait with[181] (figure 3.19).

Figure 3.19. Frida Kahlo and Her Pets



Source: *Me and My Parrot by Frida Kahlo*, 1941

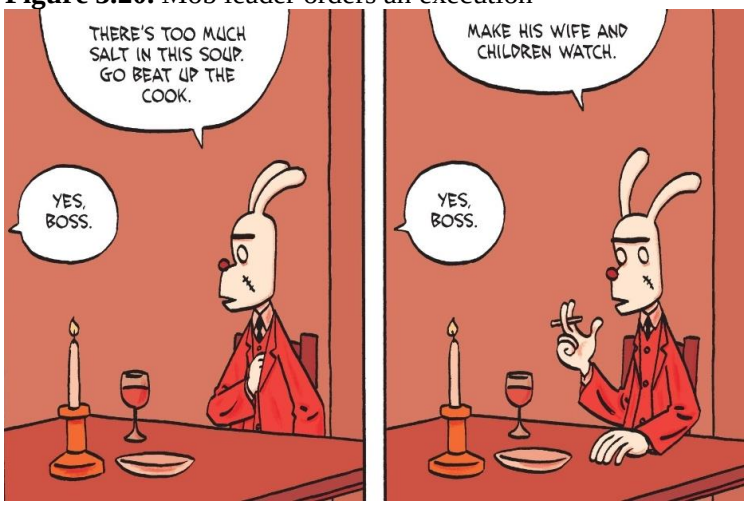
180 Claudia Schaefer, *Frida Kahlo: A Biography* (Connecticut: Greenwood, 2009), 59.
181 Morrison, *The Great Hispanic Heritage: Frida Kahlo*, 86.

Jason might have deployed parrotman either as a reference to popular culture icons (Frida Kahlo's self-portrait) or to her unstable relation with her husband, Diego Rivera as their marriage had a complex nature. Diego and Frida "shared a kind of magnetism." Even if they had romantic affairs with other people, leading up to their divorce, they could not live without each other and reunited.[182] In this context, the parrot's transformation aligns with Diego's absence and reappearance in Frida's life when the need arises. When the fictional Frida is near her demise, parrotman (Diego) shows up to rescue her, then transforms into a parrot again and Frida finds herself alone in the bathtub.

3.8 *So Long Marry Anne*

So Long Marry Ann is a prison break story. Jake, a convict, escapes from prison and meets his dutiful girlfriend, Marry Ann, who has been waiting for him outside. They get in the car and hear his story on the radio. While driving out of the city, they see a woman by the road and Jake offers her a ride to use her at the police barricade. The woman becomes quickly submissive and helps them to get through the check point. They take refuge at a cottage where they are both manipulated by their victim. The submissive hostage turns into a *femme fatale* with a strong will. Jake is framed by his accomplice whose name is Samson, a cruel mob leader, who beats up his cook because the meal is too salty (see figure 3.20), kills his servant's mother over a drop of wine on his sleeve or burns his mother's house down.

Figure 3.20. Mob leader orders an execution



[182] Morrison, 10.

Source: So Long Marry Ann, 2012

Meanwhile, things start to work out differently. Hostage plays mind tricks on the couple and persuades Jake to leave his girlfriend behind. Jake agrees with the femme fatale and he supposedly sends the dutiful girlfriend to town to buy coffee. They settle in a hotel where the femme fatale turns out to be in cahoots with Samson, the mob leader. She drugs Jake. Readers see through the eyes of Jake, fading out to death. One last word: Marry Ann (see figure 3.21).

Figure 3.21. Final moments of Jake

Source: So Long Marry Ann, 2012

Typically, a private detective is the protagonist in film noir but this is not always the case. Jason incorporates a *film noir* classic, *Raw Deal* (1948) into his *comics noir*. In order to venture into new possibilities in search of the most solid adaption possible, "seeking differentiation in its relationship to its model"[183], replaces specific elements in the film in a way that his story becomes, may be not "incongruously", but reasonably different than the film version in his parodic plot.[184] He chooses to put a criminal in the centre of his story. The other characters accord with the requirements of the *noir* narrative: a formidable antagonist, a dutiful and loving girlfriend with unshakable values, and a lethal femme fatale.

183 Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody:The Teaching of Twentieth-Century Art Forms*, 38.

184 Susan Stewart, *Nonsense: Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 185.

Jason places two characteristically different women in the core of his story as a male character in the *noir* narrative typically has to make a choice between these two types of women: a reliable and loving one, "any man would dream about", and a gorgeous, beautiful but unreliable and irresponsible one, who has "all the things a man needs to get him excited about a woman."[185] While Marry Ann is a gentle lover who can do more than her best for the man she loves, the *femme fatale* is playful and seductive. The protagonist must choose one of them. He finds himself in a paradox, which is a functional tool in Jason's comics. Jack leaves Marry Ann and decides to be with the *femme fatale* who leads him to death. It may seem contradictory to Jason's enthusiasm of creating new *femme fatale*; however, Jason functions parody in order to pay homage to a *film noir classic*. In *So Long Marry Ann*, he uses an archetype *femme fatale*, a destructive female character, leading Jack into jeopardy, along with a faithful woman to display a lethal irony which is essential to achieve a successful adaptation. The *femme fatale* serves as a punishing force as it is the protagonist, who also chooses personal gain over a loving woman. The ambiguity, which is one of the main characteristics of a *noir* protagonist, prevails owing to the fact that it is not possible to blame the *femme fatale* for his demise.

3.9. Athos in America

Athos is a veteran musketeer who settled in Gotham-like New York where streets are dangerous and full of bad guys. The story opens with a scene, in which a woman walks out of a pub and gets attacked by a snatcher. Athos saves the woman (see figure 3.22) and walks into the very same pub.

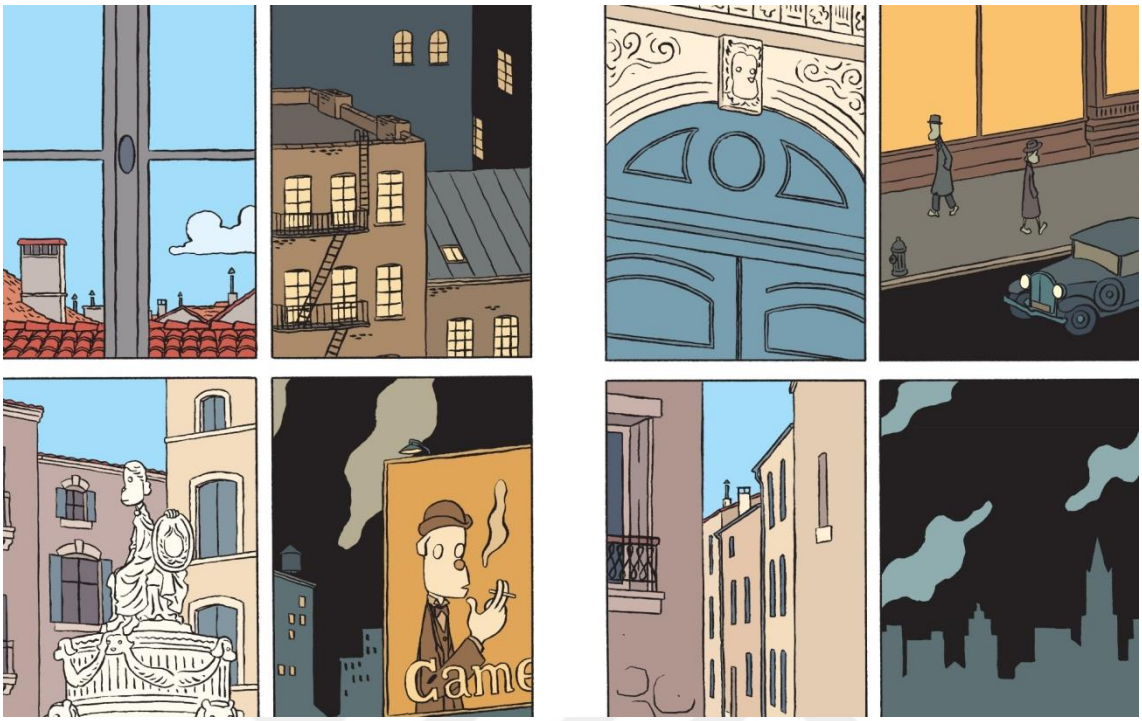
[185] Duncan, *Film Noir: Films of Trust and Betrayal*, 12.

Figure 3.22. Athos saves a woman

Source: *Athos in America*, 2012

He starts a conversation with the bartender and makes comparisons between America and Europe. According to him, the buildings are unnecessarily enormous; the food is strange; people talk loudly and everything moves so fast; however he finds Americans friendlier than the French. Athos came to America to make movies but he had an affair with Louise Brooks. Later he finds out she is the girlfriend of the head of the studio and this led to the termination of his contract. After he was left by Louis, he headed up to the desserts where he will become friends with an Indian tribe. There Athos marries an Indian woman but she died while giving birth to their child. Athos finds himself empty without a goal or reason to carry on. So, he decides to return to Paris. In the finale, Athos calls Aramis, his old friend, but cannot speak. Aramis knows it is Athos. The story ends with comparative images of New York and Paris (see figure 3.23).

Figure 3.23. Athos saves a woman



Source: *Athos in America*, 2012

Jason revisits his Athos story which was first published in 2007 to conclude the story of *The Three Muskeeters* with an ironic touch. On these terns, Jason's narrative achieves to "create a new layer of reality as a result of an artistic and parodic craftsmanship"[186] which adds another meaningful construct into a widely-known literary work by Alexandre Dumas. In Jason's adaptation, Athos moves to New York where his alienation -an essential element to *film noir*- chases him. Although he has made a lot of friends in the United States, he still cannot adapt himself to the new world he seems to reject. In *film noir*, protagonists who suffer post-war syndromes of any veterans is likely to go through when they return home have the same symptoms. Dixon points out how a *noir* protagonist is embodied in the *noir* narrative:

> *He exists in a dimension all his own, and his life, and eventual death, are that of an isolated man, cut off from the places and people that surround him. He doesn't really exist in any dimension.*[187]

186 Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teaching of Twentieth-Century Art Forms*, 31.
187 Dixon, *Film Noir and the Cinema of Paranoia*, 73.

Athos finds Americans friendlier, yet he wants to reunite with his comrades. Besides, he is confused owing to the fact that America is totally different from France. He is not just out of time but also out of place so he constantly compares two countries and continents. It can be said that Jason puts forward the fact that New York is a better choice to host a *noir* plot as France is led by traditions not by trends. In a dark and moody ambiance, Jason manages to "recontextualize"[188] Dumas' protagonist respectfully without any intention of creating a pulp copy of the original text. Instead, Jason aims at depicting a 'what if' circumstance in a historical context. While the parodied background is based on themes such as loyalty, honour and comradeship emphasizing bravery, Jason aligns his story with the concrete reality of his own time, emphasizing *noir* elements such as solitude, alienation and scepticism.

[188] Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody:The Teaching of Twentieth-Century Art Forms*, 33.

CONCLUSION

Film noir, which cannot be defined as a genre, illuminated an era of discomfort, insecurity, fear and solitude by employing characteristic elements offered by German Expressionism. American audiences, who found relief in leisure activities, felt the familiarity of looking into a mirror. This intimacy kept growing with the introduction of technical advancements in the film industry which grew rapidly with the help of the prosperity after World War I, fuelled by post-war economy. Although there was a significant influence of masculinity in *noir* plots, they certainly managed to represent the disrupted psyche and moral ambiguities of the whole American society, caused by social traumas of the Great Depression and post-war conditions.

During the same era, comics artist, aware of the potential of *noir* plots, incorporated the visual techniques of *film noir* into their comics and gave a new twist to the crime comics. Combined with the endless possibilities that comics medium offered, noir themes created a stronger narrative. Based on pure artistic craftsmanship, *comics noir* could exceed the physical limitations of film production and dodge censorial scrutiny as a less controlled medium. First *comics noir* artists, such as Will Eisner, constructed such an influential sub-genre that the popularity of *comics noir* echoed throughout history and a Norwegian cartoonist became mesmerizingly interested in it.

Jason, who also started with colourless panels, found the spirit he needed for his comics in *noir* plots as they provide the same fatalism and existentialism he wanted to embed in his stories. Jason's *comics noir*, which can be addressed as comics adaptations of *film noir*, are shaped by the spirit of his own time. Although Western mediums had not been completely successful in their endeavours to handle an inherited issue of masculinity, liberating ideas, offered by *comics noir*, gained solid ground in younger generations. In this context, Jason transformed one of the most specific archetypes of the *noir*

narrative, the notorious *femme fatale*, an indispensable character for a *noir* plot, and gave a new philosophical twist to the tradition. A character, which had only been described by masculinity, turned into a powerful agent, seeking self-agendas and not necessarily victimized by a male protagonist at the end of a story. Jason humorously investigates the complex issues of our time in an existential frame and tries to work out themes such as love, loss and solitude, equally via both genders. His character shares mutual moral dilemmas as *noir* characters.

These anthropomorphic characters experience a similar anxiety to find a purpose in life and suffer the same alienation. The fatalism, which is implicitly portrayed in Jason's panels, perfectly matches not only with the conditions in the 21st century but also with what conventional *noir narrative* presents. Jason's storylines are filled up with scenes and characters from his favourite movies and books. However, he relocates them in unlikely settings to create irony which is essential to a concrete parodic adaptation. On these terms, Jason successfully reinterprets old plots and introduces them to a different audience or readers in a way they can easily fathom. These famous figures from history serve as a mash-up for new generations who wants to be affiliated with them through the reality of their own world, experiencing a fun journey in time. Anthropomorphic characters, drawn with clear lines of a tradition bestowed by Herge make Jason's stories contradict the dark and gloomy atmosphere of *comics noir*; however, they still manage to remain in the *noir* convention as the content always prevails, no matter how important technicality is. Jason is a prolific cartoonist who can establish an easy bond with his readers as they were all once children and watched cartoons and still love comic books.

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