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The Harley Quinn Experience:

Retrogenesis and Remediation within a Transmedia Fictional Universe

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PhD

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Abstract

This project examines the transmedia entertainment property of Harley Quinn and explores how the franchise maintains the structure of its fictional universe, despite non-synchronous and contradictory story content.

The study begins with an examination of the canonical theoretical frameworks relevant to contextualising the Harley Quinn property within the landscape of media convergence and differentiates the practices of transmedia and transmodal delivery strategies.

The main body of the study examines recurrent themes within the Harley Quinn storyworlds with an aim of inducing a paradigmatic structural model of the fictional universe and the forces which maintain coherence within it. This thesis argues that the franchise of Harley Quinn - rather than being built on a single synchronised chain of forward moving events - is, instead, built upon the perpetual re-contextualising of previous events. The Harley Quinn property does not provide narrative unity to the consumer but consistently engages in a form of content recycling in which the past traumas of the character - in particular her origin story *Mad Love* (Dini and Timm, 1993) - are interrogated over multiple timelines, tones, and genres in order to achieve thematic unity through a creative process this thesis calls **Retrogenesis**.

Through Retrogenesis, the content creators of Harley Quinn consistently reinforce and articulate the Genesis Principle of Affiliation. Rather than support a single co-ordinated storyline which moves the character forward to achieve goals, this principle, instead, allows the property to meditate upon the bicameral nature of Harley Quinn's morality, sexuality, and sanity, ultimately asking the question: who is Harley Quinn?

Author's Declaration

No component of the work referred to in this thesis has been submitted in support of any other application for another qualification, for this or any other University or institute of learning.

I confirm that the word count of this work is 79,967 words.

Andrew Ross

Statement of Ethics

All focus group participants were informed prior to the commencement of the research activity of its nature and purpose. A statement of confidentiality was made explicit ensuring each participant of their anonymity, with written consent completed and retained for each participant.

Acknowledgements

Abbreviations

BFU	Batman Fictional Universe
BTAS	Batman: The Animated Series
DCCB	DC Comics Bombshells
DCSHG	DC Super Hero Girls
HQFU	Harley Quinn Fictional Universe
LDCCS	Lego: DC Comics Super Heroes

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. The Harley Quinn Experience

This is the story of Harley Quinn.

This is the story of how the Joker's girlfriend, confidante and abuse object transcended her villainous roots to become a DC Comics superhero fighting for the rights of the under-represented and marginalised.

This is the story of how a character created for a throwaway supporting role in a Warner Bros. animated television series rose in popularity to become a major entertainment property and LGBTQ+ icon.

This is the story of how the Harley Quinn property has turned widespread theories of converged media forms on their head and revealed a new methodology for developing multi-platform entertainment brands.

The success of Harley Quinn has been unprecedented in the comic book world. Within twenty-five years, Quinn has grown from a supporting role in an animated television series to what Jim Lee, Chief Creative Officer of DC Comics, described as, "*The fourth pillar in our publishing line, behind Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman*" (Riesman, 2016). In the years 2020 to 2021 alone, Quinn appeared as a lead character in two big budget Warner Bros. feature films, two seasons of animated television and twelve separate DC comic book lines. And yet this success - unlike that of other comic book properties - is built upon a lack of narrative continuity with entirely different versions of Quinn, from perky schoolgirl superhero to deadly amoral supervillain, appearing simultaneously across multiple media platforms and

products with no clear narrative relationship to each other.

Media theorist Henry Jenkins describes three forces at work within an entertainment brand: Franchising or a "*Co-ordinated effort to brand and market fictional content* " (2006, p.19) ; Extension, in which content is deliberately developed across multiple platforms for a variety of different audiences; and Synergy, the resultant economic opportunities of controlling such multi-variant content. However, according to the work of Jenkins and subsequent theorists (described in Section 1.3, pp. 22-33) the synergetic success of the Harley Quinn character should not be possible as the franchise's fluctuating tone, oscillating visual style and lack of narrative synchronicity run counter to the accepted model of brand extension which relies on story cohesion.

This thesis argues that the Harley Quinn franchise, rather than being built on a single synchronised chain of forward moving events, is instead built upon the perpetual re-contextualising of previous events. The Harley Quinn property does not provide overall narrative coherence to the consumer but consistently engages in a form of content recycling in which the past traumas of the character, in particular her origin story *Mad Love* (Dini and Timm,1993), are interrogated over multiple timelines, tones and genres in order to achieve thematic unity through a creative process this thesis calls Retrogenesis. To define and explore Retrogenesis this thesis will: (a) provide a review of the current literature surrounding the subject of transmedia franchise development in order to describe the context of the study (b) identify the main texts within the Harley Quinn property which have deployed Retrogenesis as a remediation strategy in order to illustrate the concept in action (c) induce a methodology, based upon the concept of Retrogenesis, for the purposes of future academic content analysis and media industry development practice. This thesis will

provide, in conclusion, a structural model of the Harley Quinn Fictional Universe (HQFU) to demonstrate how the property deploys Retrogenesis to create a unifying thematic principle dubbed The Harley Quinn Experience. Rather than support a single co-ordinated storyline which moves the character forward to achieve goals, this principle, instead, allows the property to meditate upon the bicameral nature of Harley Quinn's morality, sexuality, and sanity, ultimately asking the question: who is Harley Quinn?

1.2. Introducing Harley Quinn

Harley Quinn first appeared in a network television episode of Warner Bros' *Batman: The Animated Series* - or BTAS (1992-1995) - as a "hench-wench" to the Joker. A red and black clothed partner in crime - both the Joker's subordinate and paramour - Quinn's first appearance in the episode *Joker's Favor* (1992) portrayed her as a ditzy gangster's moll, who pulled a knife on Batman when her sex appeal proved redundant. This first appearance demonstrated a vicious duality to the character and BTAS consistently went on to deepen Quinn's obsessional and self-destructive relationship with the Joker whose violence she abetted. Over the course of the series, however, a compassionate side to the character also emerged, drawn out from interactions with Batman and the villainess Poison Ivy. The latter, from the episode *Harley and Ivy* (1993) onwards, increasingly provided emotional support to Quinn, their suggestive relationship laying down the seeds of Quinn's bisexuality as a central aspect to the character in the future of the franchise. The episode *Harlequinade* (1994) - in which Quinn aided Batman on a mission to find the Joker - then revealed a thwarted heroic side to the character and suggested the potential for Harley Quinn solo adventures beyond the role of villainous sidekick.

In order to define Retrogenesis, this study will regularly deploy new analytical terms - Genesis Text, Genesis Principle and Genesis Platform - which have been created for this thesis. **Genesis Text** refers to the **first media product** in which a media property first appeared, whilst **Genesis Principle** describes the **theme established by the Genesis text**. **Genesis Platform,** meanwhile**,** refers to the **first media form** through which a property is first disseminated. The unique quality and relevance of Harley Quinn to this concept is that, although her Genesis Text (*Joker's Favor)* was related via the Genesis Platform of television, the character's origin story took place on the pages of a one-shot spin off comic book, *Mad Love*. This act of Retrogenesis - or exploration and recontextualising of events prior to the Genesis Text - illustrated an immediate inter-platform approach to the character by her creators. Vital information to understanding Quinn was not made available where her regular audience would have encountered it but, instead, was placed elsewhere to be discovered. This strategy, as described in the literature review section of this chapter, is a key aspect of transmedia practice (Jenkins, 2007) in which unique story material is dispersed across multiple platforms for the purposes of intertextuality. As there was no single platform on which a definitive story of Harley Quinn was rolled out at the beginning of the property, she was therefore a fluent transmedia creation, different to the main DC roster who rose to prominence in the pages of comic books, for she incorporated from the very beginning stylistic story tropes from television.

Chapter three of this thesis examines the origin story *Mad Love* which described how Quinn - the Joker's former psychiatrist Doctor Harleen Quinzel - freed the villain from Arkham Asylum after becoming hopelessly infatuated with him. When published in 1993, this origin story added new layers to Quinn, whose Sisyphean rebounding

between failed attempts at reform, and thwarted attempts to cement the Joker's affections, positioned her throughout the subsequent HQFU in tragi-comic flux. The *Mad Love* storyline also revealed the television roots of Harley Quinn's creators Paul Dini and Bruce Timm for it located her within the domain of Philip Parker's circular narrative form (2003). This strategy, as explored in chapter two, embodied Quinn with the same character arc as the protagonist in a situation comedy show or a Looney Tunes cartoon; a Wile E. Coyote figure doomed to repeat the same mistakes repeatedly in perpetuity.

The DC comics story event *No Man's Land* (1999) - in which Harley Quinn appeared for the first time on the pages of the main Batman comic book series - is also explored in chapter three of this thesis. The relevance of this long running Batman storyline to the concept of Retrogenesis is that by incorporating a flashback retelling of Quinn's tragic origin story into *No Man's Land*, the central concept of *Mad Love* became subsequently reified into canonical - or widely accepted - events within the Batman Fictional Universe (BFU). As the brand maintenance of a large-scale enterprise such as Batman traditionally relied upon story continuity being upheld by ascribing privilege to events which occurred only the pages of the Genesis Platform of the Batman comic books - or else risk narrative incoherence at the centre of the property - this moment of Retrogenesis was significant for it allowed original stories from other platforms to affect the fabric of the overall Batman canon.

Despite *No Man's Land* demonstrating an attempt by DC to synchronise Harley Quinn content around *Mad Love,* further Warner Bros. animated series, *The Batman* (2004 - 2008) and *Batman: The Brave and the Bold* (2008 - 2011) completely rejected story fidelity. Instead, *The Batman* portrayed Quinn as a celebrity TV

psychiatrist who was a source of obsessive fandom for the Joker, whilst *Batman: The Brave and the Bold* surreally depicted her as a wax work of a 1920s flapper girl who was brought to life by magical powers. Chapter three explores how these storylines were examples of thematic - rather than literal - Retrogenesis with the episodes in concord with the *Mad Love* concept of Quinn as a product of the Joker, despite playing out against wholly different story contexts in the BFU.

It was only with the character's own DC comic book series, *Harley Quinn* (Kesel, Dodson and Dodson, 2000 - 2004), and the Harley Quinn/Poison Ivy/Catwoman team up title, *Gotham City Sirens* (Dini and March, 2009 - 2011), that Quinn moved beyond a supporting role to the Joker in the BFU and, instead, become the subject of her own story in the nascent HQFU. This era focused on Quinn's reform and deprogramming from her abusive relationship and, instead, positioned her as an antihero who acted as an antagonist to the Joker.

In 2011, DC Comics relaunched their entire comic book content under the name *The New 52*. Ostensibly a marketing strategy by the company, which provided an entry point for new readers to buy into over seventy years of storylines, *The New 52* produced a re-synchronised canonical (or master) narrative to the DC properties around the storyline *Flashpoint* (Johns and Kubert, 2011). This storyline, in which the superhero Flash accidently re-ordered time after attempting to save his murdered mother, altered previously accepted events in the DC continuity and allowed for the rebooting of legacy characters who no longer needed to be shackled to past storylines. Quinn now appeared in two separate comic book lines under *The New 52* aegis: *Suicide Squad* (Glass, 2011 - 2014) and *Harley Quinn* (Conner and Palmiotti, 2013 - 2016) which both explored a Post-Mad Love concept. *Suicide Squad*, which

added Quinn to the roster of a special forces task force which consisted of imprisoned super villains, repositioned the character as an action lead. *Harley Quinn*, meanwhile, sequestered the character away from Gotham City and placed her in outlandish comedic escapades in Brooklyn, where she was paired with the superhero character Power Girl. As the concept of *The New 52* meant that previous canonicity - or story fidelity - was rejected, neither of these titles maintained any direct synchronicity to previous events in the HQFU timeline. Surprisingly they also held no story fidelity to each other, with the *Harley Quinn* title appearing to exist in its own discrete world and tone to the rest of the DC properties and without any reference to the concurrent *Suicide Squad* adventures.

The lack of story continuity displayed by the Conner/Palmiotti storylines is a unique characteristic of the HQFU, and chapter four of this thesis examines the significant re-calibration of the character which occurred in the five years between DC's *New 52* re-launch and the 25th anniversary of the character in 2017. During this period Quinn appeared as the lead character in several transmedia brands: *Arkham* (2009 - 2016), a series of videogames and comic book extensions which saw Quinn rise through the Gotham underworld following the death of the Joker; *Injustice* (2013 - 2018), a videogame and comic book series examining a post-apocalyptic world in which Quinn acted in partnership with Batman to defeat a malevolent Superman; *DC Comic Bombshells* (2015 - 2017), a web comic based upon a figurine series which portrayed the character as part of an all-female superhero group in a Second World War setting; and *DC Super Hero Girls* (2015 - 2018) whose tie in animated series, films, comic strips and prose novels portrayed Quinn as a much loved and supportive high school classmate of superheroes Wonder Woman, Batgirl and Supergirl in a

world absent of the Joker. Chapter four examines how these transmedia brands remediated Quinn by engaging in simultaneous re-contextualisation of the *Mad Love* storyline so successfully that Quinn could appear concurrently in 2016 - 2017 in all the above, as well as: a film adaptation of *Suicide Squad*; *The Lego Batman Movie;* and a re-launch of her own main comic book titles under the new banner of *DC Universe Rebirth*. None of these products exhibited any form of story synchronicity to each other, with some of them deploying a deliberate strategy of asynchronicity which further cemented the narrative discord in the HQFU.

Since 2017, the HQFU has continued to expand and now includes two feature film follow ups to *Suicide Squad*: *Birds of Prey* (2020) and *The Suicide Squad* (2021), a graphic novel *Harley Quinn: Breaking Glass* (Tamaki and Pugh, 2019) which revisited the *Mad Love* storyline from a teenage perspective; a selection of adult orientated comic books under the DC Black Label which includes *White Knight* (Murphy, 2017 - 2018) and *Harleen* (Šejić, 2019 - 2020); and an animated television series, *Harley Quinn* (2020 - present). Chapter five reaches the conclusion that, instead of a coherent and co-ordinated long form story, the emotional landscape of the Harley Quinn character is the central concern of the property's metanarrative, with the above examples achieving Retrogenesis through consistent repositioning and remediation of the **Genesis Principle**. This guiding concept, codified by the *Mad Love* **Retrogenesis Text**, contextualises all diverging variants of Harley Quinn under the same thematic umbrella and avoids narrative incoherence by rejecting fidelity to specific story events. The Genesis Principle - dubbed by this thesis The Harley Quinn Experience - contextualises the HQFU as a single questing search for affiliation and breaks with the traditional sovereignty of linear story synchronicity by

instead replacing it with a Cubist array of fractured perspectives on Quinn which reflects the disrupted psyche of the character.

1.3. Transmedia Storytelling/Transmodal Forms

This section differentiates the practices of transmedia and transmodal delivery strategies and provides a review of relevant literature to the theoretical foundation of the thesis.

The concept of transmedia was defined by cultural theorist Marsha Kinder as Transmedia Intertextuality in 1991's *Playing with Power in Movies, Television and Video Games, From Muppet Babies to Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles.* In this piece of work, Kinder described the nature of several contemporary creative properties which had become successful through the dissemination of story material across multiple media platforms, whilst relying upon a dialogue being established between each platform to enhance meaning.

Kinder's work is immediately relevant to this thesis as her example of *Muppet Babies* (1984) - infant versions of the Muppet main characters who first appeared in a flashback scene within the live action *Muppets Take Manhattan* (1983), before starring in their own animated series - is a clear example of Retrogenesis. *Muppet Babies* presented previous events to the Genesis Text of the Muppets - the television show *Sam and Friends* (1955) - and used a nursery flashback scene from *Muppets take Manhattan* as a Retrogenesis Text from which to produce new material. That this Retrogenesis Text was drawn from a hypothetical past fantasised by Miss Piggy in *Muppets Take Manhattan* and existed in direct contradiction to a previous

Retrogenesis Text - *The Muppet Movie* (1979) - supports the argument of this thesis. For rather than create narrative incoherence or franchise fracture, the events of *Muppet Babie*s, instead, supported the overall Muppet franchise through fidelity to the property's Genesis Principle of friendship which was first communicated in *Sam and Friends* and therefore remained a fluent addition to the property.

This narrative centred concept of transmedia is closely linked to the ideas of the Storyworld. This was defined by Cheryl Harris and Alison Alexander in *Theorizing Fandom: Fans, Subculture and Identity* (1998) as a fictional space which established the diegetic rules by which a text could operate. Writing in *Transmedia Storytelling: Business, Aesthetics and Production at the Jim Henson Company* (2007) Geoffrey Long furthered this concept by suggesting that the commonality of all storyworlds was an attempt to provide canonicity (a continuity of rules or story), "*To avoid a fragmented sense of the story world, each transmedia extension should follow the rules of their shared universe, and not conflict with any other extensions*" (p.138). Therefore, whether this fictional space was a single text, spontaneously clustered texts which shared content, or deliberate explosions of tailored content across multiple platforms, the unifying feature, according to Long, was a coherent story.

Henry Jenkins named the methodology - in which properties disseminated content beyond their Genesis Platform in an intertextual manner - as *Transmedia Storytelling* and provided what has been consistently referred to as the definitive interpretation of the term in his blog post *Transmedia 101* (2003)*.* In this work, Jenkins described transmedia as,

"*A process where integral elements of fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and co-ordinated entertainment experience. Ideally each medium makes its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story*" (2007).

The importance of this definition is that it provided a viable framework for the Producer's Guild of America (PGA), who codified the term in 2010 for the purposes of trade union recognition regarding the job role of Transmedia Producer. The PGA built upon Jenkin's paradigm and defined transmedia as,

"*A narrative project or franchise [which] must consist of three (or more) narrative storylines existing within the same fictional universe on any of the following platforms: Film, Television, Short Film, Broadband, Publishing, Comics, Animation, Mobile, Special Venues, DVD/Blu-ray/CD-ROM, Narrative Commercial and Marketing rollouts, and other technologies that may or may not currently exist. These narrative extensions are NOT the same as repurposing material from one platform to be cut or repurposed to different platforms*" (2010).

Created for the industrial context of a trade union, the PGA's definition was understandably utilitarian, but by enshrining the purpose of transmedia storytelling as the *"Maintenance of narrative continuity across multiple platforms, and creation of original storylines for new platforms [to] implement interactive endeavours to unite the audience of the property with the canonical narrative*" (ibid), the term also became problematic.

Taken within the context of the HQFU, the PGA's insistence that transmedia content must be co-ordinated, synchronous, unified, and existing in story continuity around a central canonical narrative is irreconcilable with the realities of the franchise. The HQFU is not co-ordinated or unified in any synchronous way regarding story continuity, and whilst elements of the Retrogenesis Text *Mad Love* are referred to in literal terms, other products within the property are metaphorical revisitations of this text, with others communicating through an intertextual understanding that the Retrogenesis Text does not apply to that individual diegesis (a conceit dubbed Anti-Mad Love in Chapter Four).

The term fictional universe becomes of relevance when discussing this point. This term, deployed by the PGA in their definition of transmedia, appeared in the 2006 work of Lisbeth Klastrup and Susanna Tosca, *Transmedial Worlds, Rethinking Cyberworld Design.* In this piece the writers argued, "*What characterises a transmedia world is that audience and designers share a mental image of the "Worldness" (a number of distinguishing features of its universe)*" (p.2). Within the context of this thesis, the concept of distinguishing features is helpful for it aids differentiation of the HQFU from the BFU. Harley Quinn exists in every storyline within the HQFU - and Batman exists in every storyline in the BFU - but the two only crossover into each other's universes at certain points in time. In some post-1992 BFU products, Harley Quinn does not exist and conversely - despite the character being created within the BFU - Batman does not exist in some HQFU products. Therefore, the two fictional universes are different and Klastrup and Tosca's distinguishing features argument supports that observation; namely that the

presence of Harley Quinn is what distinguishes the HQFU as a separate fictional universe, born from (but not housed within), the BFU.

This concept of worldness, however, on further scrutiny is less helpful to this thesis than it may first appear for the work contained astronomical terminology in which the concept of a world and that of a universe were compressed and became the same thing. This concept - and that of Jenkins and the PGA - suggested that everything in the fictional universe/transmedial world took place in the same diegesis or fictional reality. But this cannot be applied coherently to transmedia brands from the Muppets to Harley Quinn who have concurrent non-synchronous diegeses and therefore different versions of reality.

The 2017 work of Rudiger Heinze reconciled these issues in the paper, "*This Makes no Sense at All": Heterarchy in Fictional Universes*, within which the writer described the totality of story material within a franchise as a fictional universe composed of discrete storyworlds. According to Heinze, storyworlds did not have to maintain diegetic synchronicity with each other, and therefore could effectively play by their own rules so long as they maintained fidelity to the central identifying characteristic of the universe. This concept therefore allowed for Klastrup and Tosca's idea of umbrella fictional universes - defined by distinguishing features - to exist alongside the terminology of storyworlds as siloed entities. The HQFU, therefore, is not unique in terms of narrative discord, but is, instead, a sophisticated model of transmedia function and form that the definitions of Jenkins and the PGA were too macro in scope to describe.

The concept of adaptation, or transposition of transmedial work, is key to the understanding of a fictional universe. For whilst the PGA referred to transmedia practice in 2010 as, "*Not repurposing material from one platform to another",* this was not reflective of contemporary academic writing such as Carlos Scolari's work, *Transmedia Storytelling: Implicit Consumers, Narrative Worlds and Branding in Contemporary Media Production* (2009). In this article, Scolari concluded that transmedia was, *"Never just an adaptation from one media to another. The story that the comics tell is not the same as that told on television or cinema; the different media and languages participate and contribute to the construction of the transmedia narrative world"* (p.2). This meant that the transformation of material, through adaptation, changed the emphasis of story events and, therefore, a different version of the story was told every time the material was remediated. This concept of adaptation is discussed in chapter three of this thesis in relationship to the *Mad Love* Retrogenesis Text which has been re-told several times in the HQFU since the publication of the original comic book in 1993. Adaptations of *Mad Love* include: an episode of the BTAS follow up series *The New Batman Adventures* and the *No Man's Land* comic strip in 1999; the *New 52 Suicide Squad* comic book story *The Hunt for Harley Quinn* (Glass, 2012); the video game *Batman - Arkham Origins* (2013); the video game spin off comic book *Arkham Knight - Batgirl/Harley Quinn* (Seeley, 2015); the feature film *Suicide Squad* (2016); the *Lego DC Comics Super Heroes Awesome Guide* (Scott, 2017); and in 2018-20, the prose novel *Mad Love* (Cadigan and Dini, 2018), the graphic novel *Harley Quinn - Breaking Glass* (Tamaki and Pugh, 2019), the DC Black Label limited comic serial *Harleen* (Šejić, 2020), the feature film *Birds of Prey* and an episode of the *Harley Quinn* animated series called *Being Harley Quinn*. In each of these products, the same over-arching Retrogenesis

Text was replayed - the Joker corrupted his psychiatrist - but events within the story were re-organized and re-contextualized to such a significant degree that the emphasis of the material was different (with two cuts of the *Suicide Squad* feature film - discussed in chapter four - containing alternative approaches to the question of Quinn's sanity). Therefore, the idea of a transmedia property being defined – as in the work of Jenkins or the PGA - as one that does not adapt, or transpose stories appears unnecessarily limiting as one of the strengths of the HQFU is its consistent recontextualisation of story material to provide new insight to the Harley Quinn character through the act of Retrogenesis.

A helpful description of transmedia was delivered by screenwriter Tyler Weaver's book *Comics for Films, Games and Animation: Using Comics to Construct Your Transmedia Storyworld* (2013). In this work, the author provided useful terminology for analysing the use of transmedia within a franchise by differentiating two main types: Native Transmedia and Additive Transmedia. Native Transmedia according to Weaver contained, "*Stories crafted from the very beginning to be spread across multiple media forms*" (p.11). Additive Transmedia, meanwhile involved, "*Stories that began life in another medium and had transmedia elements added to them*" (ibid). By deploying the terminology of Weaver, the HQFU can be positioned as an Additive Transmedia fictional universe which - through its origin in another fictional universe (the BFU) - demonstrates the agility of transmedial content to supersede the Genesis Platform. The definition of transmedia by Weaver as, "*The crafting of stories that unfold across multiple media platforms, in which a piece interacts with the others to deepen the whole - but is capable of standing on its own - giving the audience the choice as to how deep into the experience they go*" (ibid, p.8), also rings true in the context of this thesis. As does his summary that the lynchpins of transmedia

storytelling are, "*Fragmentation, interplay, depth and choice*" (p.13). The value of the HQFU is not defined by the number of platforms through which the story material has been dispersed, nor is it differentiated by whether this story material is platform unique. The strengths of the HQFU are instead located in how the worldness of Harley Quinn has been inter-textualised and adapted by the content creators, who have dispersed an in-depth - but deliberately non-synchronous and fragmented - portrait of the character across a variety of different platform choices and, therefore, made contextualised interplay part of the Harley Quinn consumer experience.

The aim of such a fragmented experience at the heart of the HQFU is revealed by exploring Christy Dena's work in the study *Transmedia Practice: Theorising the Practice of Expressing a Fictional World across Distinct Media and Environments* (2009). In this work Dena rejected the traditional story-based approach to transmedia and, instead, positioned the subject within the frame of transmodality in order to create a unified theory which could be applied to the irreconcilable platforms of games and narrative media,

> "*The transmodal element is one way that the primary modes of contemporary entertainment - narrative and game - can be understood as distinct modes that modulate meaning for the entire experience in complex ways. To study transmodality is to resituate the research question outside the current monomodal tenants of narrative and game studies. This approach has methodological ramifications, therefore. A transmodiological approach is potentially a superdiscipline that aligns with the tenants of semiotics, privileging meaning-making in all its guises*" (Dena, 2009, p.339).

Simplified, Dena's concept was that a unifying theory of transmedia could not exist because the different forms of media deployed by a property had such divergent methods of communication. This idea derived from the work of authors Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen in *Multimodal discourse: The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication* (2001) in which they located transmodality as a relevant framework for examining multiple platform works. Transmodality, according to these authors, "*Moved [the subject] from research questions concerned with, "What is a mode?" to questions exploring, "How do people use the variety of semiotic resources to make signs?"* (2001, p.4). Taken in the context of this thesis, the approach of Kress and Van Leeuwen suggested that a media property such as the HQFU was a gestalt entity engaging in multimodal communication with audiences on a semiotic level, and any analysis of the form must first identify the meaning of the property before considering the taxonomic concerns of platform and product. Dena's significance to the transmedia field, and this thesis, was that she extrapolated the abstract concept of Kress and Van Leeuwen into a working systemic model (Fig.1) whereupon the top level contained the guiding semiotic principle, the second level described the mode of transmedial articulation or remediation (ludic (game)/ narrative), and the final level revealed the distribution of remediated content by platform. Dena's model proposed that a transmedia property could be built around any guiding principle or characteristic and remain coherent, so long as the disseminated products of the property remained in fidelity with the transmodal principle. With this breakthrough, Dena provided a workable structure to the previously discussed worldness concepts of Klastrup and Tosca and made a convincing argument for Jenkins' term transmedia storytelling to be replaced with the mode agnostic phrase: transmedia practice.
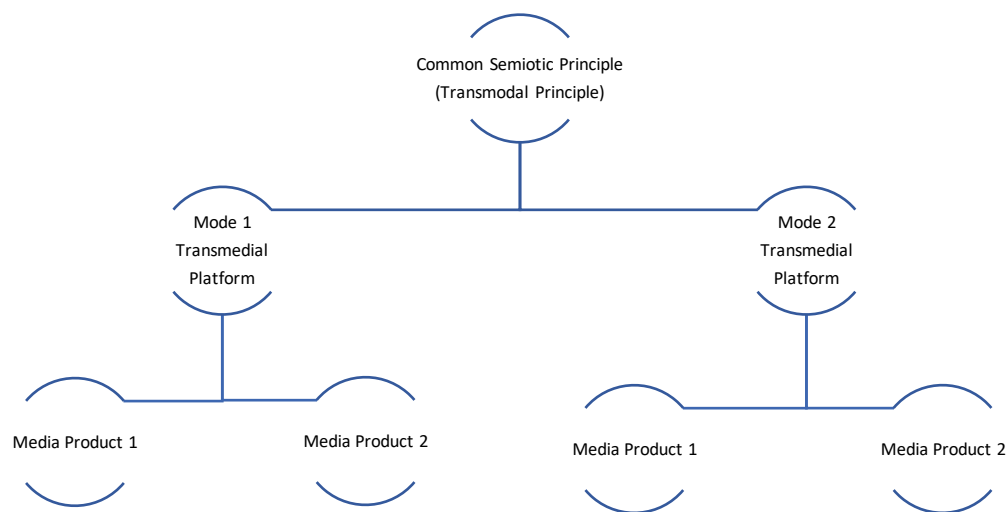
Fig.1: The Transmodal Principle model (Dena, 2009)

This section concludes that Dena's model provides the most coherent method of examining the HQFU for it jettisons any necessity for story continuity or canonical narrative to be present in a transmedia property. This structure, instead. creates a strong entry point to examining the constituent selection of discrete non-synchronous storyworlds within the HQFU as expressions of a transmodal principle and, in doing so, contributes a coherent theoretical underpinning to the next section's examination of Retrogenesis.

1.4. Storyworlds and the Paratext: Retrogenesis in Action

Prequels, reboots, and re-imaginings are some of the terms used by the contemporary media industry to describe Retrogenesis. Batman, James Bond, Star Wars, and the Alien franchise are all examples of successful media franchises which have engaged with the concept. Retrogenesis - an act of remediation in which a

media property describes events prior to its Genesis Text to provide a fresh direction for future developments - is not a new media strategy but, instead, a new way of framing a process whose importance has grown with the expansion of the transmedia industry. In its most basic form, Retrogenesis provides a competitive centring to a property, and a fluent entry point for new audiences, but this creation of a new past also allows for recontextualising of problematic material and a re-examination of a franchise's purpose. The previous section concluded with Christy Dena's structural model of how a semiotic transmodal principle was articulated and remediated into transmedial products. This section explores how that specific remediation occurs and explores the relevant literature to provide terminology for the definition of Retrogenesis.

In 1987, literary theorist Gerard Genette defined the term Paratext as, "*Not THE text, but some text [which] consists not only of an explicit message but of a fact whose existence alone, if known to the public, provides some commentary on the text and influences how the text is received* " (p.7). In the context of the BFU, Harley Quinn's Genesis Platform (BTAS) was a paratext. BTAS was not considered a canonical story artefact which held reification within the BFU, but a brand extension to the core property which used intertextuality to reference and remediate characters and storylines which had appeared on the pages of the comic books since 1939.

The work of Johnathan Gray, in the book *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts* (2010), is key to understanding the relationship of paratexts such as BTAS to the body of the BFU. In this work Gray arranged the selection of texts which operate within a constellation of content into a hierarchy labelled Hype, Promotion, Synergy and Peripherals,

"*All of these terms have their virtues. Promotion suggests not only the commercial act of selling but also of advancing and developing a text. Hype's evocation of images of puffing up, proliferation, and speeding up suggest the degree to which such activities increase the size of the media product or text, even if fleetingly. Synergy implies a streamlining and bringing together of two products of texts. Peripherals, meanwhile, suggest a core entity with outliers that might not prove "central" and that might not even be doing the same thing as that entity, but that are somehow related*" (p.5).

Gray's hierarchy, therefore, placed the peripheral as the second layer of text, subordinate to canonical texts, with hype and promotion below in descending order of privilege, their importance allocated by how much these paratexts furthered the concept of the Genesis Text. In the context of the BFU, BTAS formed a peripheral layer to the main Batman comic book canon, with the *Mad Love* comic forming an additional peripheral layer from the BTAS layer. According to Gray, Harley Quinn's origin story, therefore, was two layers of privilege below the official Batman canon for it was a peripheral of a peripheral and contained very little textual privilege or importance.

Writing in *Strategies of Storytelling on Transmedia Television* (2014), Jason Mittel went on to support Gray's argument by describing the hierarchy of textual privilege as a necessary industrial mechanism,

"*In the most ideally balanced example, all texts would be equally weighted rather than have one privileged as "text" while others serve as supporting "paratexts". However, the financial realities demand that the core medium of any franchise be identified and privileged, typically emphasizing the more*

traditional form over the newer modes of online textuality. We can identify the originating series as the core text with transmedia extensions serving as paratexts" (p.45).

Clare Parody, however, challenged the concept of privilege in her book *Franchising/Adaptation* (2011) where she argued that the previous story-based definitions of transmedia should be modified to include non-narrative aspects such as setting and merchandise. The BFU and HQFU both include toys, and, although toys were situated in Gray's bottom layer of promotional texts, the importance of Parody's work to this thesis was her classification of toys as extensions of the storyworld which also held textual privilege. The use of toys to reinforce and innovate Retrogenesis elements in the HQFU is a consistent franchise strategy - as are attempts to reconcile different storyworlds within the HQFU through the medium of collectables - and to remove privilege from this connective tissue would affect the coherence of the property.

On further examination, Gray's concept of textual privilege is more applicable to the BFU than the HQFU for the Genesis Platform, Genesis Text, Retrogenesis Platform and Retrogenesis Text of the BFU were all situated in the comic book form. The content creators of the HQFU, however, not only situated the Retrogenesis Text *Mad Love* on a different platform to the Genesis Text *Joker's Favor* but - as discussed in the next chapter - have consistently reinvented the Retrogenesis Text since across multiple platforms. This has produced wholly separate and non-synchronous storyworlds which, according to the work of Gray, should jostle for textual privilege within the fictional universe as all they comprise works of paratext, the end result being an imploding property with no coherent centre.

Writing in "*This Makes No Sense at All": Heterachy in Fictional Universes* (2015), Rudiger Heinze provided a solution to this issue. Heinze noted that it would lack consistency to exclude non-narrative elements from the definition of a storyworld and instead furthered the idea that such non-narrative elements or "*Storyworld Constituents*" (p.4.) should be considered as the central defining element of the property instead of story. Fig. 2 shows the original design of Harley Quinn on the right by Bruce Timm. This design is a fundamental storyworld constituent which is referenced throughout the HQFU. Contextualised by her *New 52* re-design on the left, the original design provides a continuity of image throughout the fictional universe, which, as discussed in later chapters of this thesis, is consistently interrogated to produce new meaning.

Heinze's work was an evolution of Czech semiotician Lubomír Doležel's *Heterocosmica: Fiction and Possible Worlds* (1998). In this book, Doležel examined the structures of fictional worlds and concluded that, "*Fictional worlds are not constrained by requirements of verisimilitude, truthfulness, or plausibility; they are shaped by historically changing aesthetic factors, such as artistic aims, typological and generic norms, period and individual styles*" (p.19).

Heinze furthered Doležel's theory by suggesting that storyworlds were discrete creations which were housed within fictional universes, the latter comprised of spaces within which entirely contradictory approaches to the same story material could simultaneously exist without effecting the overall integrity of the universe.

Fig. 2: *Harley Quinn* Volume 3 #17. Artwork by Conner and Sinclair (2016)

This was an elegant solution to many of the issues endemic in the prescriptive definitions provided by Jenkins and Gray which relied on the concept of canonical narrative or privilege, by removing those concepts altogether.

Heinze's work was also a development of the concerns of Marie-Laure Ryan who identified, in 2014's *Story/Worlds/Media: Tuning the Instruments of a Media-Conscious Narratology* that, "*One of the tasks of media-conscious narratology is to describe the relationship between worlds of transmedia systems and to provide criteria for deciding in which cases they represent the same world and in which cases they project related but distinct worlds*" (p.42). Heinze's response to this question was his rejection of the concept of the canonical narrative - or hierarchy of narratives - referenced by Jenkins and Gray and his suggestion, instead, that transmedia franchises were heterarchical with each text operating with equal privilege to the other. This reflected Clare Parody's work on defining the "*Array*" or,

"*Entire franchise multitext*" (2011, p.212), a constellation built, not around a single unified story, but instead, "*Diffuse and unstable versions, origins points, co-existing, overlapping, and [with] contradictory narrative realities rather than a master narrative and stable textual corpus*" (ibid). According to Parody and Heinze, a fictional universe did not have to consist of a single authentic canonical storyworld, and therefore every text which conflicted with privileged canon did not have to be labelled inauthentic. Instead, the selection of discrete storyworlds created their own canon within the storyworld and this rendered the concept of an overall authentic franchise-wide story moot.

Heinze illustrated his theory by crushing the Alien fictional universe into a "*Synchronic and atemporal rendering,*" (p.12) which demonstrated that the Alien fictional universe was developed over time by a selection of different creators and market forces and not a single co-ordinated author. This revealed that the Alien property (Fig. 3) was composed of multiple local and constantly evolving heterarchies, Heinze argued, whose textual privilege and authenticity was determined by the receiver and contextualised by their previous engagement with the property. Applied to the HQFU, this means that whilst one consumer who has engaged with the property since 1992 may consider the *Mad Love* comic book canonical, another consumer who has solely engaged with the HQFU through a text in which these events do not happen - such as *DC Comics Bombshells* or *DC Super Hero Girls* - only grants privilege to those storyworlds and does not recognise *Mad Love* at all. Heinze's work, therefore, concluded that the idea of a canonical narrative was a fluid concept determined at point of consumption and not creation,

"*With every new Storyworld, the question of value of each constituent of the fictional universe - not only of the latest addition - as well as the heterarchical constellation of the entire universe arises anew [depending] both on the syntagmatic and paradigmatic selection and path-dependent constellation of storyworlds [realised by] the person who "assembles" them into "their own" fictional universe*" (ibid, p.12).

Heinze's theory, by determining that the central unifying force in the fictional universe was the storyworld constituent, contextualised Dena's model of transmodality - as described in the last section - against the industrial reality of creative practice. For whilst Dena's model suggested that a transmodal (or semiotic) principle guided the remediation of material, and that no one text held privilege over the other (so long as fidelity was kept with the transmodal principle), her work did not explain how a lack of synchronicity was reconciled at story level. Heinze's work fulfilled this aim and allows this thesis to argue, in chapter five, that the transmodal principle - or Genesis Principle - of the HQFU is the theme of affiliation. This was derived in 1992 from the Genesis Text *Joker's Favor* and was consistently articulated through the Genesis Platform of BTAS until the publication of the Retrogenesis Text *Mad Love* in 1993 which reified the Genesis Principle in a new story form. As explored in later chapters, *Mad Love* allowed the evolving storyworlds to contain non-synchronous content, without the fictional universe suffering incoherence, so long as the storyworlds remained in fidelity to the Genesis Principle and contextualised the Retrogenesis Text.
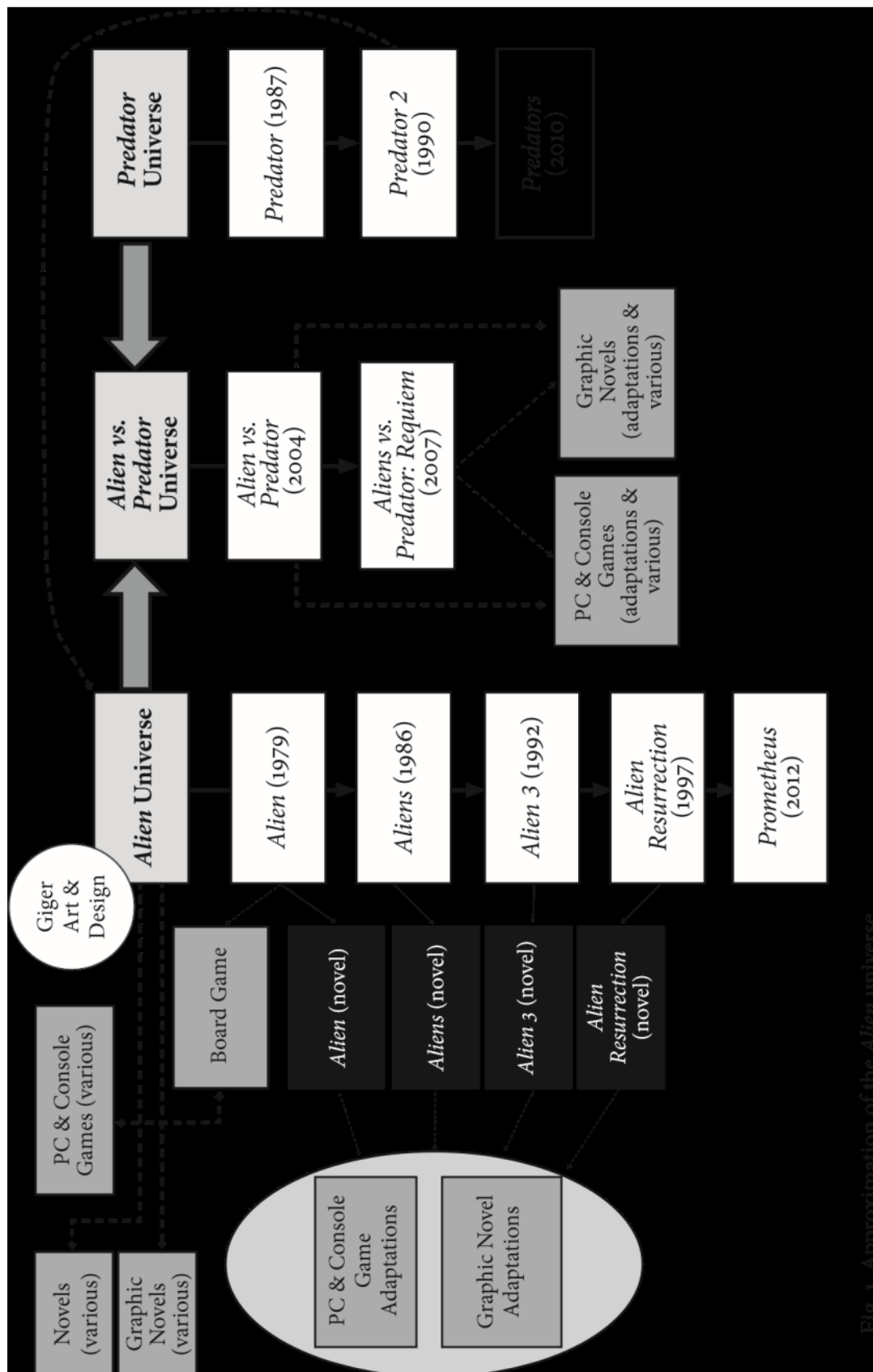
Fig. 3: Approximation of the Alien Universe (Heinze, 2015)

Story theorist Linda Hutcheon wrote in a Theory of Adaptation (2006) that remediation was, "*Less the story itself than the story world that [is] being adapted*" (p. xxiv) and this idea is relevant to the area of paratextual studies which regards the term prequel or reboot. For, although the origin of the term sequel was the Middle English word sequele (meaning events which follow) and can be traced back to John Bunyan's work *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), the sister term - prequel - was a 20th century neologism. Originally used in *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, by critic Anthony Boucher, to describe a James Blish short story, *They Shall Have Stars* (1956) - which examined events prior to his 1955 work, *Earthman Come Home* - prequel has since taken on the contemporary meaning of a story which precedes the Genesis Text and therefore engages in Retrogenesis. However, a prequel such as the Alien franchise's *Prometheus* (2012)*,* exercised this Retrogenesis strategy in a manner which contradicted the established canonical timeline established by the Genesis Text *Alien* (1979), and therefore cast doubt on whether it was set in the same story at all.

Writing in *Prequel: The "Afterwardsness" of the Sequel* (2010), Paul Sutton differentiated traditional prequels such as *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984) - which told a story set before the previous Indiana Jones film whilst remaining in fidelity to the established events of that piece - and works such as Christopher Nolan's *Batman Begins* (2005) which established a new timeline,

> "*Batman Begins may be considered a prequel because it describes events which come before any of the previous four Batman films in the cycle; however, it is also, to a degree, a remake because it remakes aspects of the Batman origin story contained in Burton's 1989 Batman*" (2010, p.141).

Sutton, however, was not interested in the taxonomy of prequels, and preferred to interpret *Batman Begins* through the psychoanalytical framework of Jean LaPlanche. This theory, in which traumatic events become repetitively replayed by the victim as a method of memory re-construction, could be applied to both Bruce Wayne and the audience of *Batman Begins,* Sutton suggested, who were both constructing a coherent through line to make sense of the fragmented events presented to them. Although a digression from an examination of prequels, Sutton's work remains relevant to this thesis for the HQFU focuses on the afterwardsness of Harley Quinn's abuse at the hands of the Joker by consistently interrogating the character's origin story to produce meaning.

Just as the HQFU examines the origin story of Harley Quinn, the BFU is a series of texts which examine the afterwardsness of the murder of Bruce Wayne's parents. This traumatic moment, however, is not mentioned in the Genesis Text of the BFU, *The Case of the Chemical Syndicate* (Finger and Kane, 1939, i) from *Detective Comics* Volume 1 #27. In this story, the young socialite friend of Police Commissioner Gordon is simply revealed to be the Batman, "A *mysterious and adventurous figure, fighting for righteousness and apprehending the wrong doer, in his lone battle against the evil forces of society*" (Ibid, p.1). The origin of why Bruce Wayne decided to take up this mantle was left a mystery until six months later when the series creators engaged in Retrogenesis by presenting a traumatic origin story for Batman in *Detective Comics* #33 with *The Batman and How He Came to Be* (Finger and Kane, 1939, ii). This story presented events prior to the Genesis Text and - as illustrated by Fig. 4 - depicted the act which would go on to contextualise all future content in the BFU: the murder of Bruce Wayne's parents.

Fig 4: *Detective Comics* Volume 1 #33: The Batman and How He Came to Be

(Finger and Kane, 1939)

The relevance to this thesis of Batman's Retrogenesis Text is that it has been recontextualised several times within the comic book form to produce new material - most notably Frank Miller's comic book storylines *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (1986) and *Batman: Year One* (1988) - whilst a selection of film texts in the property have also adapted this material*. Batman* (1989); *Batman Begins* (2005); *Justice League: The Flashpoint Paradox* (2013); *Batman V Superman - Dawn of Justice* (2016); *Teen Titans Go to The Movies* and *Joker* (both 2019), have all recontextualised this Retrogenesis Text in significantly different ways. In the film *Batman*, a gangster called Jack Napier (who later becomes the Joker), is responsible for murdering Bruce Wayne's parents as a young man. In the film *Batman Begins*, the pair are murdered by a low life stick up artist called Joe Chill after an evening at the theatre. In the animated film *Flashpoint Paradox*, it is Bruce Wayne who is murdered by Joe Chill, his mourning father taking up the mantle of Batman, whilst his traumatised mother, Martha, becomes the Joker. In the film *Batman V Superman*, re-contextualisation of the *Dark Knight Returns* occurs with Martha Wayne's murder depicted in the same graphic manner; the killer's gun inserted under her pearl necklace, the impact of the fatal shot scattering pearls on the street*. In the animated film *Teen Titans Go to The Movies*, Batman's companion Robin goes back in time and prevents the murder of the Wayne family. This, however, leads to his erasure from existence and so Robin travels back in time once more to ensure the murder occurs. *Joker,* finally, suggests that an anonymous clown masked copycat of the eponymous villain was responsible for the killing.

In a similar vein, Batman's clown faced antagonist, has also been the focus of Retrogenesis with events prior to his first appearance in the Genesis Text *The Joker* (Finger and Kane, 1940), from *Batman* # 1 recontextualised consistently across the

BFU. Retrogenesis of the Joker first took place in the storyline *The Man Behind the Red Hood* (Finger *et. al*, 1951) from *Detective Comics* #168. In this storyline, the Joker was revealed to be a master criminal, formerly known as the Red Hood, whose disfigured appearance was a result of falling into the chemical vats of the Monarch Playing Card company whilst evading capture from Batman. Joker texts since have either referenced this Retrogenesis Text - such as the graphic novel *The Killing Joke* (Moore and Bolland, 1988), the film *Batman* (1989) and the video game *Arkham Origins* (2013) - or used it as a springboard for either re-examination (the film *The Dark Knight*, (2009) and the comic book storyline *Endgame* (Snyder and Capullo, 2014)), or complete rejection as in the film *Joker*, (2019). The Joker's Retrogenesis Text is returned to in chapter four of this thesis as Harley Quinn's *New 52* re-contextualisation of *Mad Love* involves a drop into the same chemical vat as the Joker. This means that - even though they are products of the BFU - certain Joker texts are essential elements to the HQFU, revealing the connective tissue of shared storyworlds between the two fictional universes.

On first appearance, the term "alternative storyworld" could be easy ontological shorthand for categorising Retrogenesis Texts – such as the above Joker examples - which unfold in contradiction to established events. However, when placed in the context of Heinze's work, the term becomes a misnomer as the term alternative suggests a hierarchy of privilege. The Batman film The *Dark Knight* (2008) and the James Bond film *Spectre* (2015) both contain scenes in which the protagonist meets their major nemesis for the first time, despite these events being previously portrayed in the film series. However, the depiction of Batman's first brush with the Joker and James Bond's first encounter with Blofeld in these films do not contain

alternative events to those portrayed previously in their respective fictional universe but, instead, contain different ones which entirely re-contextualise them. Whether these texts are authentic is not a privilege granted by the makers but is instead one ascribed by the consumer who selects their own canon. So, for those audience members who have only seen *The Dark Knight* or *Spectre,* the original stories in which these meetings first occur are not authentic story events which deepen and contextualise the films but, instead, are merely other versions of events, inessential and adjacent to the experience of the films. In terms of the HQFU, this idea of heterarchy becomes a salient point when the influence of the internet is taken into consideration. Consumers of the HQFU have at times been vocally opposed to the direction taken by the property regarding Harley Quinn's romantic relationship with Poison Ivy and have produced, in response, their own fan artefacts which re-position the Joker back to a central role. This activity emphasises the ability of consumers to determine their own heterarchy online by choosing the story which best pleases them, even if that story is out of step with the officially sanctioned direction of the property.

As previously discussed, Heinze's framework built upon the concept of heterarchy, and the role of the fictional universe as proposed in *Heterocosmica: Fiction and Possible Worlds* (1998) by Lubomír Doležel. This work is the key reference point for this thesis' deployment of story, in which Doležel argued that storyworlds operated using a dual modality, dubbed extensional and intensional (or semantic) structures. In Doležel's model, extensional referred to the replicable elements of story content and plot structure, whilst the author's definition of intensional content referred to the signified concept behind the work. Doležel stated that, "*Intensional functions*

[uncover] the global 'morphology' of texture, its formative principles, its stylistic regularities. Intensional function is redefined as a global regularity of texture that affects the structuring of the fictional world" (ibid, p.139). Applied to this thesis, Doležel's concept provides theoretical language through which the multiple texts of the Wayne family killing, and Doctor Harleen Quinzel's corruption by the Joker, are positioned as different (not alternative) extensional story conceits in service of the same intensional themes. These intensional themes are equivalent to Dena's semiotic principles, which unify the asynchronous storyworlds of the BFU and HQFU into thematic metanarratives which are made coherent through intertextuality. In summary, this means the extensional (or narrative) content - of the HQFU is an expression of an intensional (or thematic) Genesis Principle; this is derived from the Genesis Text and re-contextualised in perpetuity by Retrogenesis of the storyline *Mad Love* across the multiple storyworlds of the property.

1.5. Summary of Research Methodology

The central assumption of this thesis, drawn from the literature in the previous section, was that the HQFU formed a selection of discrete non-synchronous storyworlds, existing under the umbrella of a fictional universe (Heinze, 2015) and unified by a transmodal principle (Dena, 2009) which contextualised the remediation strategy of Retrogenesis.

This thesis' aim, therefore, is to explore the relationship between the transmodal/Genesis Principle and the process of Retrogenesis within the superstructure of the HQFU, in order to derive a professional methodology of fictional universe development and maintenance.

The research period followed an inductive grounded theory model which examined the overall transmodal nature of the Genesis Principle in the HQFU and the interrelationships between the constituent transmedia elements. Designed within the context of a constructivist philosophy, the main research engaged in quantitative content analysis of a zoned sample of HQFU works. This induced individual exemplar texts with commonalities of content which were interrogated using textual analysis. This mixed methodology reflected the approach detailed by Tashakkori et. al in *Mixed Methodology: Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (1998) who wrote that a deductive framework of analysis limits the scope of qualitative inquiry when examining a corpus of works. They instead suggested that an emerged approach to exemplars, induced from the analysis of preliminary quantitative data, is more suitable for it identified sensitising topics and inconsistencies whilst avoiding selection bias.

To provide validity and reliability, content analysis was limited to a zoned sample of every HQFU narrative released between September 11th 1992, and September 11th 1994 (the first two years of the property) and every work released between September 11th 2015 and September 11th 2017 (the two years within the study's data collection phase). This approach mitigated against selection bias, avoided purposive sampling, and was pragmatic for a detailed examination of every text in the constellation since 1992 would involve thousands of works and therefore would have been beyond the scope of this research. This longitudinal approach to the HQFU also revealed similarities and differences in the property over two comparative timeframes, including the first transmedia crossovers in the nascent HQFU and the

property's most successful years in the lead up to the 25th anniversary, which allowed for maximum variation in the sample.

Chapter two of this thesis discusses the results of the 313 sampled HQFU texts being quantitatively coded using a tripartite system (Fig. 5) which was derived from the genre analysis work of Philip Parker (2004) and the Human Motivational Framework of David McClelland (1961).

Genre	Character	Tone
Horror	Achievement	Comedy
Thriller	Affiliation	Tragedy
Romance	Power	Drama
Personal Drama		

Fig 5: Coding Pillars

The first coding pass identified the genre content within the works and contextualised one of Parker's four typologies: Horror; Thriller; Romance; or Personal Drama. This provided an understanding of the text's extensional meaning. The second coding pass then examined the motivation of the Quinn character - as defined by the framework of McClelland - which allowed for narratives of empowerment, achievement, and affiliation to be differentiated. The final coding pass then interrogated the works in relationship to Parker's approach to Tone with the individual story beats assessed in terms of Comedy, Tragedy or Drama. This tripartite approach to the works induced patterns of genre, tone, and character motivation across both samples, after which further textual analysis of individual

texts examined the interplay between extensional and intensional content through the remediation process of Retrogenesis.

According to Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998), an analysis of exemplar texts needed to consider three concerns to authenticate the selected sample and mitigate against any selection bias: External Validity; Construct Validity; and Transferability. The concept of External Validity - does the overall theory considered in this study have merit when applied beyond the selected sample? - is addressed by the sample's proportionate representation of the HQFU. The assumption of the study is that the HQFU in general was expected (extreme or deviant cases aside) to reflect the findings in the sample, and chapter five demonstrates how HQFU texts which have been produced after the sampling period have maintained fidelity to the Genesis Principle and the Retrogenesis Text.

In comparison, the question of Construct Validity concerned the question: was the thesis' theory the most appropriate explanation of the findings? Yvonna Lincoln and Egon Guba argued in *Naturalistic Inquiry* (1985) that a coherent, reliable, trustworthy, and dependable line must be drawn between all aspects of the textual analysis to mitigate against accusations of construct bias. In the context of this thesis, the findings of the preliminary research mitigated against bias of this form, for the data set induced the exemplars for the textual analysis and provided a reliable, valid, and coherent line of development behind their selection.

Finally, as this thesis was focused entirely upon the HQFU, a lack of transferability of research needed to be mitigated against so that the findings of the work did not skew towards the overly specific. The identification of the Genesis Principle, which extrapolated into a comprehensive approach to reading other such works from any

media corpus, evidenced valid transferability beyond the confines of the HQFU, and formed the foundation of future professional development theory based upon the concept of Retrogenesis.

1.6. Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the case study subject of the thesis, the Harley Quinn Fictional Universe (HQFU) and located the theoretical underpinning as the storyworld forces of Lubomír Doležel (1998), the transmodal principle model of Christy Dena (2009) and the fictional universe structure of Rudiger Heinze (2015). The methodology section of this chapter has described how the scope of the study was limited to 313 HQFU texts produced during two sampling windows (1992 -1994 and 2015 - 2017) which underwent quantitative content analysis, from which exemplars were drawn to illustrate emergent themes of genre, tone, and character. The main body of the thesis, therefore, analyses these exemplars to identify the transmodal principle – or Genesis Principle - and explores how the principle provides thematic unity to the HQFU through the remediation strategy of Retrogenesis. The conclusion of the thesis will include the induction of a professional methodology, based upon the Genesis Principle, to aid future transmedia franchise development whilst a further additional section, fittingly for a study of origin stories, returns to the initial focus group research from which the case study of Harley Quinn was originally derived to provide an expanded rationale for the choice of subject.

Chapter 2: Content Analysis

2.1. Introduction

This chapter details the theoretical framework of the project's content analysis instrument, through an investigation of the key literature relevant to an understanding of the tripartite coding pillars: Genre, Character, and Tone.

The chapter presents the results of the content analysis phase and concludes with a selection of induced exemplar texts which are further investigated in the subsequent chapters of the thesis.

2.2. Content Analysis: Summary of Texts

Three hundred and five Harley Quinn narrative-based media products, released between September 11th 1992 - 1994 and September 11th 2015 - 2017, were examined in the content analysis stage of this project. From this overall sample, three hundred and thirteen storylines were isolated for analysis, a disparity caused by seven comic book storylines containing multiple operant versions of Quinn from different timelines.

Below is a brief description of the storylines sampled:

- **Suicide Squad**: Seventy-three sample storylines comprised this selection which featured the exploits of special forces group, Task Force X. Storylines composed of fifteen samples of the *New Suicide Squad* comic book (2015 - 2016) and fifty-four samples related to the *DC Universe Rebirth*: *Suicide Squad* comic books (2016 - 2017). The samples also contained the *Suicide Squad* feature film (2016); comic book spin offs for the characters Deadshot, El Diablo and Katana (2016 - 2017); and appearances of Task Force X in the DC comic book

properties *Deathstroke* (2015), *Action Comics Superman* (2016), *Midnighter* (2016), *The Flash* (2017), and *Killer Frost* (2017). Additionally, the sample included the crossover comic book serial *Justice League vs. Suicide Squad* (2017) as well as a tie in comic book with the Hanna-Barbera animation studio characters, *The Banana Splits* (2017).

- **DC Super Hero Girls**: Sixty-two storylines comprised this grouping. The samples contained the first thirty-seven episodes of the animated web series (2015 - 2017); two animated feature films, *Superhero High* (2016) and *Intergalactic Games* (2017); the animated television special *Welcome to Superhero High* (2016); the novel *Wonder Woman at Superhero High* (2016); five comic strip appearances in the *DC Super Hero Girls Monthly* magazine (2017); the puzzle book, *Harley Quinn's Brain Squeezers* (2017); and seventeen web comic appearances (2016 - 2017).

- **Harley Quinn** : Fifty-nine samples related to the *Harley Quinn* comic book storylines written by Amanda Conner and Jimmy Palmiotti. The grouping composed of forty-two samples of *Harley Quinn* (2015 - 2017) and thirteen samples of spin off titles *Harley Quinn and Power Girl* (2015 - 2016), *Harley Quinn and Her Gang of Harleys* (2016), and *Harley Quinn's Little Black Book* (2016).

- **Injustice**: Forty-three sample storylines of the *Injustice* storyworld were coded. These samples included six web comics in the *Injustice - Gods Among Us Year Four* series (2015); six web comics in the *Injustice - Gods Among Us Year Five* series (2016); and eighteen web comics in the *Injustice - Ground Zero* series

(2016 - 2017). The video game *Injustice 2* (2017) was also sampled alongside twelve issues of the supporting web comic book *Injustice 2* (2017).

- **Batman - the Animated Series (BTAS)**: Twenty-four sample storylines were examined. These samples included seven original episodes of the animated series between 1992 and 1994; three storylines from the spin off comic book *The Batman Adventures* (1994); nine issues of the BTAS revival comic strip *Harley Loves Joker* (2017)*;* the modern BTAS film *Batman and Harley Quinn* (2017); and three issues of the ancillary web comic *Harley Quinn and Batman* (2017).

- **Miscellaneous**: Twenty-four storylines contributed to this sample. These included one gamebook from the property *DC Super Friends* and the Tell-Tale studios video game *Batman: The Enemy Within* (both 2017). In addition, the following were also analysed: five storylines in the DC comic book series *Sinestro* (2016); three storylines in the *DC New Talent Showcase* (2016 - 2017); three storylines in the comic book serial *Poison Ivy - Cycle of Life and Death* (2016) ; two storylines in the comic series *Justice League 3001* (2015 - 2016); and two storylines in the *Grayson* annual (2016)*.* In addition, one storyline featuring Harley Quinn in the comic books *Scooby-Doo Team Up* (2015), *Batman Annual* (2016), *Batman/Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (2016), *Catwoman* (2016)*, Red Hood/Arsenal* (2016), *DC Rebirth Holiday Special* (2016), *All Star Batman* (2017)*,* and *Trinity* (2017) were also examined.

- **DC Comics Bombshells**: Seventeen issues of the web comic (2015 - 2017) were analysed from this storyworld as well as a 2017 crossover storyline with *Harley Quinn's Little Black Book* in which the Conner and Palmiotti variant travelled into the Bombshells' storyworld.

- **Lego:** Six sample storylines produced for Lego products between 2015 and 2017 were examined: the puzzle book *Enter the Dark Knight* (2016); the animated film *Justice League - Gotham City Breakout* (2016) from the *Lego DC Comics Superheroes* storyworld; the *Lego DC Superhero Girls* animated film *Brain Drain* (2017); and the Warner Bros. feature film, *The Lego Batman Movie* (2017) and accompanying book, *The Lego Batman Movie Awesome Guide* (2017).

- **Arkham-verse**: Although the 2015 video game *Batman - Arkham Knight* was not part of the sampling, five sample storylines were taken from the ancillary comic books to this videogame franchise: *Batman - Arkham Knight* (2015)*; Batman - Arkham Knight Genesis* (2015 - 2016); and *Batman - Arkham Knight: Batgirl/ Harley Quinn* (2016).

The coding chart (p.339) demonstrates how the storyline content of the three hundred and thirteen sample texts were coded across the three pillars Genre, Character and Tone to produce clear emergent patterns within the HQFU.

The next sections of this chapter will examine the underpinning theoretical framework for each coding pillar and present a summary of the findings, alongside a discussion of the emergent exemplar texts.

2.3 Film Genre

Western. Musical. Horror. Thriller. The language of the coding pillar's first analytical framework - film genre - is so well ingrained that such labels immediately conjure up their own imagery and provide a contract of expectations for all media products that they are ascribed to. Whether the product in question comes from the world of film, television, comic books, or video games, the terminology of film genre has become so omnipresent in application to moving image media and sequential art that the term has lost its original intent, and now simply provides an analytical framework to all transmedia works (as evidenced by Philips (2012), Ward (2013) and Weaver (2013)). On further investigation, however, the term is nebulous, badly understood and misapplied.

The problem with genre as a global term to describe the narrative experience is encapsulated in the following critical descriptions of the term: "*A varied and flexible structure, a thematically fertile and ambiguous world of historical material shot through with archetypal elements which are themselves forever in flux*" (Kitses, 1970, p.6); "*A familiar formula of interrelated narrative and cinematic components that serves to continually re-examine some basic cultural conflict"* (Schatz, 1977, p.306); and, "*A Multi-dimensional phenomenon, a phenomenon that encompasses systems of expectation, categories, labels and names, discourses, texts and groups or corpuses of texts, and the conventions that govern them all*" (Neale, 2000, p.2). For although the study of genre is the basic examination of shared characteristics within creative works, a large proportion of genre theory - as exemplified by the previous citations - relies upon hyperbole and a constantly changing parameter of what constitutes the term.

French literary theorist Gérard Genette, writing in the 1979 work *The Architext: An Introduction,* deduced that the modern concepts of genre originated in the work of Athenian philosopher Plato, before being applied by his former student Aristotle in the text *Poetics* (c. 335 B.C.E). This collection of writing, in which Aristotle categorised the work of contemporary plays according to structural similarities, was identified by scholar Taneli Kukkonen in *The Classical Tradition* (2010) as the foundation stone of modern story theory and would later influence Ferdinand Brunetiere's 1890 work, *L'Evolution Des Genres Dans L'Histoire de La Litterature* in which genre was viewed through the prism of Charles Darwin. This work, which treated literary genres as constantly evolving entities whose natural selection was derived from their success with an audience, revealed the commercial interests which often still lie in genre theory as a shorthand or blueprint to success; a reputation which became magnified when an influx of educated émigrés from the worlds of theatre and literature entered the script departments of the major Hollywood studios in the 1920s to write dialogue for the newly born talking pictures. These educated figures brought literary theorists such as Aristotle and Brunetiere to the new technical medium of the moving image and in doing so created the second-hand language of film genre, whose body of literature over the twentieth century became swollen with theories from theatre, creative writing, and anthropology without any coherent central concept.

Rick Altman - the most influential modern genre theorist - summarised this Swiss Army Knife approach to the concept as follows:

"According to most critics, genres provide the formulas that drive production; genres constitute the structures that define individual texts; programming decisions are based primarily on generic criteria; the interpretation of generic films depends directly on the audience's generic expectations. All of these aspects are covered by the single use of genre" (1999, p.14).

For Altman, the difficulty of defining film genre came from the descriptor being deployed to discuss every aspect of the filmmaking process from script, production, and distribution, through to exhibition and reception, "*It is as if terms designating phylum, class, order, family, genus and species were all folded together willy-nilly providing little clarity to would-be generic spectator*s" (ibid, p.69). To understand genre, Altman argued, the reader needed to reject the traditional framework of the term which contained the following contradictory meanings:

"Genre as blueprint, *as a formula that precedes, programmes and patterns industry production. Genre as structure, as the formal framework on which individual films are founded. Genre as label, as the name of category central to the decisions and communications of distributors and exhibitors. Genre as contract, as the viewing position required by each genre film of its audience"* (ibid, p.14).

In 1984, Altman addressed the impenetrable and opaque nature of genre in his paper, *A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre*, in which the author lucidly described the term as the inter-textual relationship between style (semantics) and theme (syntactics). This approach was derived from the work of earlier literary theorists René Wellek and Austin Warren, whose system of analysis differentiated between, "*Literary works based, theoretically, upon both outer form (specific metre or*

structure) and also upon inner form (attitude, purpose - more crudely subject and audience)" (1956, p.231). However, Altman's application of Wellek and Warren's literary approach to the field of film genre - by deploying inner signifier to represent structure and outer signifier to represent technique – went beyond translation and introduced a systemic rigour in which the outer stylistic stratum of a film work was no longer the key defining characteristic of the text. Instead, the thematic concept of a work, Altman instructed, was more important for this syntactic core revealed the intent of the author.

Altman's approach is relevant to this thesis for his semantic/syntactic framework contained a conceptual likeness to Doležel's extensional and intensional content layers and the multimodal approach of Christy Dena (as discussed, pp.39-45) which centred upon a guiding semiotic principle at the heart of the text. Altman's framework also helped to locate one of the significant issues at play when analysing a corpus of works dubbed, "comic book", or "superhero", such as those based upon Batman or Harley Quinn. Despite being widely used in popular parlance, on closer inspection these terms are spurious descriptors of genre with "comic book" describing the origin of the property in sequential art, and "superhero" describing the heightened characteristics of the protagonists. However, whilst Altman's genre model allows for commonalities of stylistics to be bisected from commonalities of theme, it is not specific enough to help locate the exact inner qualities from which to base a thematic analysis of a "superhero" or "comic book" fictional universe. Application of the semantic/syntactic framework correctly identifies that there is something deeper below the surface of "superhero" works - which bonds the corpus through purpose instead of style - but this framework does not provide any navigable route to

discovering a meaningful basis for thematic analysis beyond this observation. The following section examines the work of screenwriting theorist Philip Parker, whose systemic framework follows on from Altman and allows for a closer examination of the thematic forces at work in a genre; a framework which formed the theoretical underpinning of the first coding pillar which allowed for commonalities of story content to be located across the HQFU.

2.3 Philip Parker: Genre Theory

With an aim to creating a film industry method of manufacturing new genre works, Philip Parker provided the following rationale for his approach in the 2003 teaching resource for the UK Film Council, *Introduction to Screenwriting,*

> "*The use of labels and its common currency with audiences and filmmakers, desperate to find some common ground on which to identify diverse and often difficult narratives, has led to a confusing and almost useless set of terms which generally go under the term genre. They may sell a film but in and of themselves they do not help a writer identify which genre they are working in and what narrative elements they may wish to keep or use*" (2003, p.264).

Parker's observation was not new. As discussed on p.52, twenty years earlier Rick Altman had identified that the continuous labelling of genres without testable rigour had led to a near meaningless term which could be used to designate either a location (Western), a personal history (Biopic), a mode of address (Musical), an effect on the audience (Comedy), or a director (Hitchcock) and so created his semantic/syntactic instrument to categorise works in a more nuanced manner. However, unique to Parker's work was a re-positioning of the framework of genre

from style and theme onto a key creative aspect which had been previously under-examined: Story.

Parker's definition of Story as, "*A motivational framework for a character, which can be used in a number of different ways within a narrative*" (ibid, p.59) moved the term away from the utilitarian and event-based definitions in critical literature such as, "*The chronological order of all events explicitly presented*" (Lacey, 2000, p.16), and instead positioned the story's dramatic tension as the key signifier. Parker's approach to story maximised the momentum created by the protagonist's desire to fulfil a dramatic want and, in doing so, focused the narrative on the achievement of this want through the overcoming of antagonistic forces. If the story did not create significant enough momentum, through a suitably motivated character and a convincing array of antagonistic forces to overcome, then the narrative would ultimately grind to a halt. The writer's sole purpose, according to Parker, was to therefore generate this story momentum, and his screenwriting framework identified ten stories which created the narrative foundation for the writer to build upon in the pursuit of this aim: Character Who Cannot be Put Down; Debt That Must Be Repaid; Fatal Flaw; Gift Taken Away; Spider and the Fly; Quest; Rites of Passage; Romance; Unrecognised Virtue; and Wanderer. This approach was derived from the work of Aristotle who had categorised story exemplars in his work *Poetics*, as well as paradigmatic structural approaches to screenwriting which had become common following the publication of Syd Field's *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting* in 1979. Parker's unique contribution, however, was the proposition of four genres (Horror, Romance, Thriller and Personal Drama) which were created by the interplay of these ten stories. Constructed by the writer in the early development stages of a film work, these composite genres formed the syntactic spine of the

narrative upon which the screenplay was built. Rather than values derived from textual analysis after the fact, Parker's system placed the genre values of the work in the position of lodestone for the writer, the success of the whole enterprise determined by how fluently the construction of genre was delivered.

The first coding pass of this project's analysis phase deployed Parker's genre framework to examine three hundred and thirteen Harley Quinn texts across two separate sampling zones (1992 - 1994 and 2015 - 2017) in order to induce commonalities of content. The next section will now examine the framework by which Parker constructed these four genres through the interplay of ten story archetypes and discuss the relevance of those genres to the HQFU.

2.4 Philip Parker: Genre Typologies

Defined in 2003's *Introduction to Screenwriting*, Philip Parker's approach to genre bisected genre theory from genre history and in doing so re-focused the framework of the term from style to story. This section will detail how Parker defined each genre in terms of dramatic conflict and examines how the coding analysis of this research project aided the emergence of exemplar texts by focusing on commonalties of content.

The 1989 definition of the Horror genre by influential critic, Andrew Tudor, was antagonist-centric, "*A monstrous threat is introduced into a stable situation; the monster rampages in the face of attempts to combat it: the monster is (perhaps) destroyed and order (perhaps) is restored*" (p. 81). Although derived from nineteenth century Gothic literature, approaches such as Tudor's were mainly influenced by the 1930s wave of Universal Studios films such as James Whale's *Frankenstein* (1931)

and the exotic creature films such as *King Kong* (1933) in which the monster sensationally took centre stage. According to Parker, however, the key defining aspect of the Horror genre was the binary opposition between a protagonist, who was engaged in a Gift Taken Away story, and the antagonist who was described as, The Character Who Cannot Be Put Down. This definition relegated the monster to second player and reduced the denotative horror aspects of traditional genre theory to disposable window dressing by focusing on the challenges faced by the protagonist.

Parker's story archetype, The Gift Taken Away, concerned a protagonist who was granted a privilege - whether beneficial personal circumstances or an object of desire - which was suddenly removed without warning. The regaining of this gift, or the reconciliation that the loss was permanent, therefore formed the resolution of the storyline. The Character Who Cannot Be Put Down, meanwhile, described an invincible protagonist who beat increasingly insurmountable odds and antagonists with aplomb. Although this story was identified by Parker as being most prominent in works where the story premise was rudimentary linking material between action set pieces such as a James Bond film - and appeared to be a thin archetype to promote for a protagonist - Parker's insistence that every character in the narrative should follow one of his stories revealed the true innovation of his approach to genre.

Writing that, "*One of the major mistakes made in the development of screenplays is to ask, "Whose story is it?" and answer the question with only one character's story. No narrative, no matter how short, or long will work based on one story*" (ibid, p.67), Parker demanded that the writer allocate a story archetype to both protagonist and antagonist. This rendered the Horror genre down to the conflict between a

protagonist, whose gift of freedom and the privilege to lead a normal life was taken from them by an unstoppable antagonist from which they needed to escape. This dynamic moved the focus of Horror away from the Gothic stylistics that often swamped the public image of the genre and onto the demand that the writer focus their efforts on making the challenges of the protagonist's escape as engaging as possible. In the HQFU, horror narratives such as these centred upon the abduction and torture of Quinn by the Joker, these moments forming the opening act of longer storylines in the *Injustice* and *Suicide Squad* storyworlds which focused on Quinn's attempts to come to terms with her abuse.

Whilst Parker's definition of the Horror genre centred upon an escape, his formula for the Thriller genre was placed firmly within the bracket of chase. This genre typology engaged the central protagonist in the Quest story archetype, during which the protagonist embarked on a journey to discover an object of desire. According to Christopher Vogler in *The Writer's Journey* (1992), this story formed the Master Story from which all other stories pollinated - a mono-mythic concept derived from the work of Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949) - whereupon every protagonist passed through twelve stages called the Hero's Journey. This character journey was reflected in every story on Parker's list which often resulted (in the Romance and Personal Drama genres) with emotional fulfilment. Parker differentiated the Quest from these other archetypes, however, by positioning this story as the search for a physical item, or specific hidden knowledge (such as the identity of a murderer). This genre, therefore, centred on the protagonist overcoming external obstacles to achieve measurable success. And whilst the antagonist's storyline, as in the Horror genre, was often the Character Who Cannot Be Put Down,

the more sophisticated examples of the Thriller genre followed what Parker called

The Spider and the Fly story archetype. In this paradigm, a character who wished to

carry out a goal they had no power or ability to achieve convinced, seduced, or

trapped the person with that power into aiding them to fulfil their goal. Parker noted,

that in this version of the Thriller genre, the protagonist was the character who was

seduced, only realising their part in the larger plan when they were ruthlessly

discarded and faced with the consequences of their actions. As discussed on p.75,

examples of both forms of the Thriller genre were evidenced during the content

analysis stage by the *Suicide Squad* comic books. The main challenge of Task Force

X was, however, often not the terrorists or supervillains they fought but the

labyrinthine mind games of their own commanding officer, Amanda Waller who

consistently pushed Quinn into the Spider and the Fly storyline as a form of

psychological manipulation.

Although seemingly incongruous at first sight, the Spider and the Fly story archetype

also formed one of the constituent stories feeding into Parker's definition of the

Romance genre. This typology differed from Parker's analysis of Horror and Thriller

by the key indicative feature being the need for two protagonists. Rather than a

single protagonist facing an external antagonist who blocked their pursuit of a

dramatic goal, as described in the previous paradigms, Parker's Romance genre

was based upon a story archetype in which two protagonists (the two halves of the

relationship), realised that they were emotionally lacking, and that the other person

(or object of desire) was a potential solution to fulfilling this lack. However, instead of

settling down in harmony, the two characters acted as each other's antagonist by

thwarting and blocking the other's attempt to reach fulfilment, until they either

discovered the error of their ways or dissolved the relationship irrevocably. The end of the romance was not always happy Parker explained for, "*Whether or not they stay united…being united with the object of desire is the end of a romance story, but not necessarily the end of a romance narrative*" (2003, p.61). But whilst Parker insisted that the usual forms of the Romance genre contained two protagonists in pursuit of his romance story archetype to varying degrees of success, he also noted the darker Spider and the Fly version in which the good will of one protagonist was being exploited by the less altruistic partner for their own ends. This darker version of romance provided connective tissue to the thriller genre, often through the trope of the Femme Fatale or Vamp, in which the protagonist was doomed by the spell of their predatory romantic interest, and the Personal Drama genre in which the protagonist sought to escape an abusive partner. When examined for commonalties of genre content, the metanarrative of the Harley Quinn Fictional Universe was revealed to be a long form Romance in which a naïve Quinn fell for the unrequited affections of the Joker, before escaping his toxic influence through the love of her best friend Ivy. This storyline was found throughout BTAS, *Injustice*, *DC Comics Bombshells,* and solo title *Harley Quinn* storyworlds and formed the central throughline of the HQFU.

Whilst the protagonists of Parker's horror works were escaping antagonists, and the protagonists of thrillers and romances were often chasing antagonists, Parker's final genre form - the Personal Drama - concerned protagonists who acted as their own antagonists due to the contradictory impulses of their nature. Christopher Vogler's 1992 work, *The Writer's Journey*, argued that every successful narrative needed to include a form of personality change on behalf of the protagonist. This moment of

change - the character arc - followed a personal epiphany and became a recurrent motif in story development theory. Described by Parker as the centre of the Personal Drama genre, these story archetypes (Unrecognised Virtue, Debt that Must be Repaid, Fatal Flaw, and Rites of Passage), all involved the protagonist pursuing various forms of self-validation.

Positioned by Parker as a one-sided romance story, the Unrecognised Virtue storyline portrayed a protagonist with a heightened sense of self, who entered a new social landscape and fell in love with a powerful character. The figure of obsession often oblivious to their existence, the protagonist sought to have their affection returned through a variety of attention seeking behaviours until they finally questioned the value of their empty enterprise when they reached an all-time low. This storyline saw a character almost destroy themselves in pursuit of a thwarted wish fulfilment, whilst Parker's the Debt that Must be Repaid archetype formed a mirror image in which a protagonist received the fulfilment of their wish after a bargain with another character. The price of the debt was crippling, however, and the protagonist realised that they were better off in the first place, as the newly found success became a self- destructive mill stone around their neck. As discussed on p.68, both versions of these Personal Drama storylines emerged through analysis in the HQFU, with the Unrecognised Virtue storyline and the Debt that Must be Repaid at different stages forming the underpinning of Quinn's relationship with the Joker in BTAS, Arkham-verse and *Injustice* storyworlds.

More storylines which examined the self-validation of a protagonist were found in Parker's archetypes The Fatal Flaw and the Rites of Passage. These storylines detailed a protagonist with a special quality which marked them out as different from

their peers. This special quality brought the character success and attention, but rather than bringing liberation, this success stimulated the character to become arrogant, self-centred, and oblivious to the damage they caused. The Fatal Flaw iteration of this story climaxed with the character either being destroyed by the effects of their narcissism or being consumed by circumstances ironically put into motion by a positive character epiphany. The Rites of Passage storyline, conversely, positioned the moment of epiphany as a positive moment in which the protagonist received self- awareness of their own weaknesses. The character then exited the story as a transformed person who proceeded to greater success. Although it appeared there was no significant difference between these two story variants, the modulation of tone instead produced the genre values by positioning the work as either tragic, comedic or dramatic (as examined on p.85).

Parker's differentiation of the Personal Drama re-classified Vogler's mono-mythic model (long privileged in screenwriting theory as the Master Story) as a genre of work, rather than a universal archetype. To Parker, the Personal Drama genre was no more a legitimate approach to developing a story than the Horror or Thriller model, in which the protagonists were so busy chasing or escaping that they had no time for internal epiphany. Parker's positioning of Personal Drama, therefore, revealed that all works belonged to a genre and that a character arc was not a defining aspect of story but, instead, a genre choice.

In relationship to the HQFU, the Rites of Passage was the dominant storyline for Quinn in the selection of works which saw her attempt to move on from the shadow of the Joker's abuse and gain agency. These storylines were found throughout the *Injustice*, *Suicide Squad* and *Harley Quinn* solo title storyworlds. These works,

(outlined on p.75), provided a gravitational core to the HQFU during the transitional period of the property between 2012 and 2017, during which time the metanarrative was re-calibrated in order to diminish the influence of *Mad Love* and establish a new equilibrium with Poison Ivy.

The next section of this chapter examines in more detail the representation of Parker's four genre typologies within the content analysis sample and the emergent exemplar texts which typified this shifting metanarrative.

2.6 Content Analysis Findings: Genre

Data produced by the coding exercise revealed that the largest proportion of narratives in the samples belonged to Parker's Thriller genre, which composed of 99 storylines (32%). The samples also contained 96 storylines (31%) which belonged to the Personal Drama genre and 95 storylines (30%) which explored the Romance genre, therefore indicating a tri-partite approach to genre in the constellation. The smallest proportion of works in the sample were Horror narratives whose 24 storylines made up 7% of the samples.

Breaking the sample down by period, Fig. 6, demonstrates how Zone One (1992 - 1994) was dominated by the Romance genre. Within this sampling zone, BTAS was the only operant property, and although Zone One was composed of a small number of works, this period tracked the origin of the Quinn character from the Genesis Text, *Joker's Favor* (1992), through to the Retrogenesis Text, *Mad Love* (1993) and the influential BTAS episode, *Harlequinade* (1994). This meant that each text formed an important step in the evolution of the character. As Quinn's adventures did not take place independently of Batman, however, this meant that Zone One samples consisted of

texts from the BFU; the HQFU only becoming differentiated as a separate fictional universe from 2000 with the publication of the solo strip, *A Harley Quinn Romance* (Kesel, Dodson and Dodson).
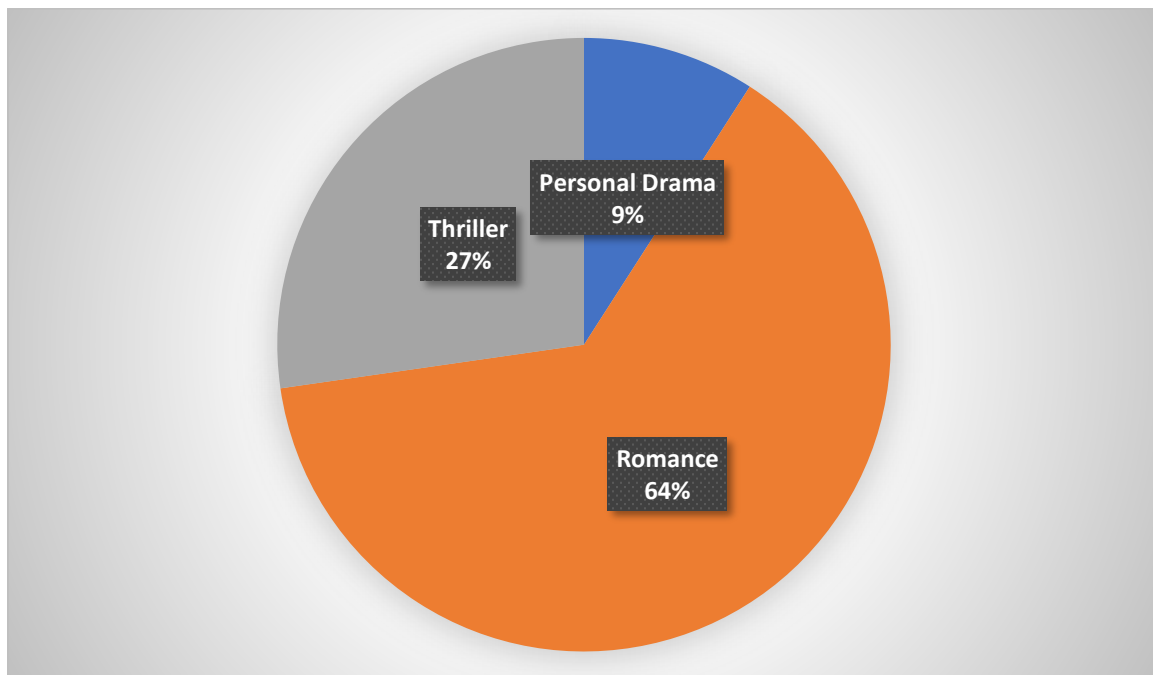
Fig.6: Genre Zone One

Quinn's main storyline in BTAS was a Romance genre variant of the Unrecognised Virtue as the character consistently sought the attention and commitment of her romantic partner, the Joker. As chapter three of this thesis explores on p.99, this attention seeking character trait first appeared in the Genesis Text *Joker's Favor* where it formed the foundation of the Genesis Principle. This attraction and need to affiliate with the Joker were then reified in Quinn's Retrogenesis Text, *The Batman Adventures: Mad Love* (1994) which became the transmedia narrative strategy for the character in the BFU. This placed Quinn within the Romance genre for the duration of Zone One, the Genesis Platform supporting the repetitive cycle of her

tragic one-sided relationship as explored by Parker, "*In one-off narratives [tragedy] it is often quite fatal. In episodic television, the fatal ending is normally avoided by turning it into failure*," (2003, p.64).

Chapter Three (pp.114-154) discusses the variant texts in Zone Two which were derived from the *Mad Love* Retrogenesis Text. These samples included the BTAS revival comic strip *Harley Loves Joker* (2017) as well as the ancillary comic books of the video game extension *Batman: Arkham Knight* (2015), and storylines from the multiple Lego storyworlds. In these works, Quinn made consistent attempts to be romantically validated by the Joker but ultimately remained in a position of relationship stasis, trapped within the circular narrative form which perpetuated her failure. By the time of Zone Two, however, this narrative strategy had been superseded by developments elsewhere in the HQFU, and therefore these storylines felt like retrogressive and dated relics from the BFU, and not representative of a fictional universe whose concerns, as discussed below, had become very different.

Fig.7. illustrates how the dominance of the Romance genre in the BFU samples of Zone One was replaced by a splintering of approach in the HQFU samples of Zone Two to include an almost equal amount of Thriller and Personal Drama works. This reflected the influence of two BTAS episodes - *Harlequinade* (1994) and *Harley and Ivy* (1993) - which deviated from the Unrecognised Virtue storyline to suggest alternative future narrative strategies to *Mad Love*.
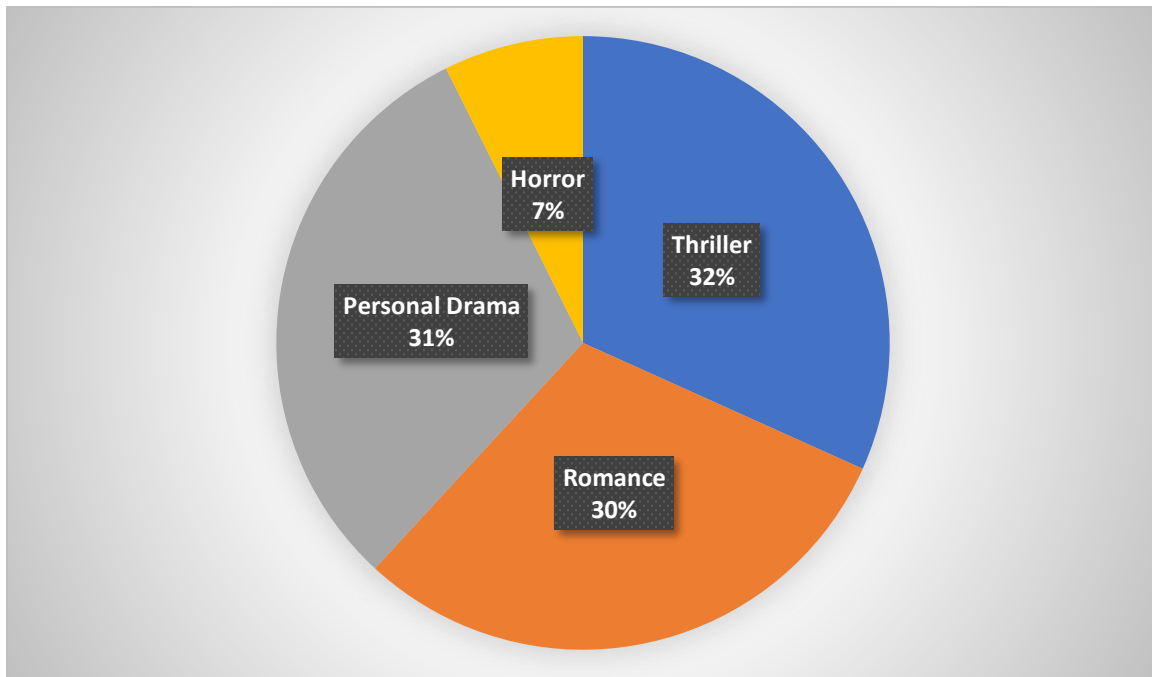
Fig.7: Genre: Zone Two

Harlequinade - an episode from the second series of BTAS, broadcast after the release of the *Mad Love* comic book - contained a narrative approach which became the dominant strategy of the HQFU in Zone Two. This episode saw Quinn placed at the centre of a Rites of Passage storyline in which she partnered with Batman to stop the Joker from detonating an atomic bomb. Confronted by the horrific reality of the Joker, Quinn discovered a sense of her own agency and imagined a future beyond the villain.

In the 1988 work, *Writing Screenplays That Sell*, the author Michael Hague described how the theme of a work could be extrapolated from the protagonist's character arc. This pivoted on the moment when a main character in a story discovered that they were more similar in nature to their antagonist than their thematic twin (which Hague dubbed reflection). Quinn's appearance as a visual homage to the Joker located the villain as her reflection, and the writers of BTAS

consistently reinforced Quinn's obsession to mirror him throughout the storylines of Zone One, no matter how humiliating his actions were towards her. In *Harlequinade*, however, Quinn experienced a personal crisis after concluding that she had more in common with her antagonist, Batman, than the villain she had centred her life around. As discussed in chapter four, Quinn consistently revealed a logical mind and desire to establish an equilibrium in Zone Two, whilst the Joker revealed a commitment to disequilibrium so profound, he thought nothing of killing Quinn and those closest to her. This conflict was made bare for the first time in *Harlequinade,* but the revelation would be ultimately academic as Quinn reverted to the Mad Love strategy by the climax of the episode and returned to her sycophantic BTAS persona. Stronger, less comedic versions of *Harlequinade*, however, dominated the first half of Zone Two where they perpetuated a narrative strategy this thesis dubs **Post-Mad Love.**

Christopher Vogler detailed in *The Writer's Journey* (1992) that a protagonist's story must contain, "*A purifying emotional release which brings about a sudden expansion of awareness, a peak experience of higher consciousness*" (p.234). Quinn experienced this moment of awareness in *Harlequinade* but refused to learn from the moment and was, therefore, doomed to repeat the mistakes of *Mad Love* throughout her later appearances in BTAS and the official *Batman* comic book canon. As explored on p.128 of chapter three, Quinn's crossover to the main BFU title comic book in the story event *No Man's Land* (1999), necessitated creator Paul Dini to write a revised version of Quinn's Retrogenesis Text. The purpose of this re-telling was clear; the readers of main series *Batman* may not have been viewers of the more child-orientated animated series, and therefore could have been unaware of this new

character and their origin story. Whilst crucially not altering any of the main story beats so that the BTAS works remained in thematic fidelity, Dini's new text - simply titled *Harley Quinn* (1999) - translated *Mad Love* to the tone of the less comedic *Batman* main title storyworld. This remediation reified Quinn's Retrogenesis Text as a transmedia narrative strategy for all titles involving the character in the BFU and became the first time that a character from an extension located outside of the main *Batman* comic book canon was allowed to inject original story material into the property; a move which both illustrated the influence of emergent transmedia storytelling processes on the traditionally hierarchical world of the comic book medium, as well as demonstrable confidence in the efficacy of the *Mad Love* narrative. This confidence was well-founded, and *Batman: Harley Quinn* proved so influential that the *Mad Love* strategy remained the dominant approach for the character across all DC storyworlds until the *New 52* re-calibration of 2011.

Noting that significant change in a character was a disruptive process, Christopher Vogler wrote that epiphany involved, "*Something being surrendered, something must be given back. The hero is required to sanctify the story*" (1992, p.234). Quinn's brutal sanctification - which shifted the tectonic plates of the character and broke the *Mad Love* cycle - was not located within the BFU, but instead resulted from the character being absorbed into a wholly new storyworld: *Suicide Squad*. As explored on chapter four p.164, this change in creative direction for the character was provided by the writer Adam Glass who felt that Quinn had a depth which had yet to be explored due to her reliance on the Joker. *The New 52 Suicide Squad* comic strip re-located Quinn to the centre of a long-established thriller based storyworld, which centred upon the exploits of a special forces team composed of super-villains. Glass,

however, still needed to give Quinn the catharsis to move on from the Joker and did so through the establishment of a new Retrogenesis Text. The storyline, *The Hunt for Harley Quinn* (Glass, *et .al*, 2012), fleshed out familiar beats of the *Mad Love* storyline but added a traumatic new scene; Quinn's pale appearance was not white make up, the story revealed, but the result of the Joker tossing her into the same toxic vat which created him. This was a major turning point for the character and, whilst every Quinn storyline which followed *Mad Love* positioned her as a romantic foil perpetually see-sawing in affections towards the Joker, every DC storyline which now followed *The Hunt for Harley Quinn* instead positioned her in the role of abuse survivor.

In *The Definitive Guide to Screenwriting* (1998), Syd Field called the dramatic change in a character that was caused by significant events in the narrative, "*The circle of being*" (p.189), and related it to a character coming to terms with an event in their life, *"Once you've created an experience or an incident that affects the life of your character, then you can base the emotional arc on that incident and have the character confront and resolve (or not resolve) the experience*" (ibid). *The Hunt for Harley Quinn*, in a manner which reflected Paul Sutton's concept of afterwardsness (discussed on p.40), recontextualised the HQFU into a series of stories in which Quinn repeatedly revisited the events of *Mad Love* so that she could confront and resolve the trauma of her abuse. This altered the fabric of the fictional universe so significantly that by 2015, the Post-Mad Love narrative strategy dominated the HQFU. Content analysis of Zone Two samples revealed multiple examples of Personal Drama narratives in the solo title *Harley Quinn* and *Injustice* storyworlds where Quinn demonstrated a clear desire to move onto a new life but found herself

struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder, a dramatic through-line reinforced consistently throughout storylines from all genres during this time.

Due to the significant presence in Zone Two of the *Suicide Squad* comic books, works from the Thriller genre appeared throughout a third of all sampled storylines. Parker's Quest archetype story was typified in this grouping by action-based narratives such as the *Black Vault* (Williams and Lee, 2016) in which Quinn's unit, Task Force X, captured the super-villain General Zod. Although amply demonstrating Quinn's commitment to violent heroism, these stories were large on action and short on reflection, adding little to the progression of the character. Other *Suicide Squad* works, however, such as *Monsters* (Ryan and Briones, 2016) and *Full Mental Jacket* (Williams and Frank, 2016) saw Quinn recognise her capacity for change and explored depths to the character beyond running and shooting.

Screenwriting theorist Blake Snyder structured the character arc, which Quinn demonstrated throughout these stories, into the following rubric, "*Thesis, antithesis, synthesis,*" (2005, p.193). This was an approach to story derived from the dialectical argument of eighteenth-century Prussian philosopher Immanuel Kant (and defined in the later work of Georg Hegel), which Snyder summarised as, "*The hero gains the knowledge to combine what was and it's opposite to form a synthesis of everything he has learned*" (2005, p.193). Academic Robert McKee related the character arc in similar terms to Snyder but, rather than explain the term in the context of an epiphany caused by external forces, instead, defined the term in relation to character revelation. McKee explained that change resulted from an internal contradiction between the character's inner nature and their outside appearance, "*The revelation of true character, in contrast or contradiction to characterisation, is fundamental to all*

fine storytelling. Life teaches this grand principle: What seems is not what is" (1998, p.101). As explored in chapter four, pp.170-179, works such as *Monsters* and *Full Mental Jacket* exhibited a return to innocence for Quinn in line with the transformative approaches of Snyder and McKee, and portrayed the character experiencing personal growth as a result of dramatic conflict. This meant that, although the *Suicide Squad* series was ostensibly Thriller based, embedded within the property were Personal Drama narratives, which allowed the Quinn character to evolve in line with the Post-Mad Love strategy whilst still engaging in violent action.

Whilst Zone Two contained strong illustrative exemplars of Thriller and Personal Drama works, Parker's Horror genre, however, proved the least relevant to the samples analysed through the coding phase. This shortfall reflected Quinn being placed front and centre in the HQFU as the subject of a Rites of Passage story since 2012. For, although the Gift Taken Away storyline was the basis of several encounters where the Joker abducted and attempted to murder Quinn, these storylines proved to be a passing episodic strategy within a larger Personal Drama context. The most powerful of these Rites of Passage stories took place within the series *Injustice: Ground Zero* (Buccellato and Sebela, 2016) during which Quinn was consistently brutalised by the Joker over several comic book issues, in a cycle of Sisyphean violence explored in Chapter Four on p.180. Horrified and reluctant, Quinn was forced to play the role of the Joker's willing accomplice during a killing spree, but instead of dwelling on the horror aspects of the storyline, the writers instead emphasised Quinn's internal dialogue and her eventual empowerment through refusal of the situation. Her escape from this situation of abuse formed the through-line of a liberation story in later issues, and therefore the overall arc became

focused on her long-term personal growth beyond the horrors of the moment, a further reinforcement of the Post-Mad Love strategy.

This section has so far tracked the influence of the episode *Harlequinade* and the emergent Post-Mad Love strategy which dominated the HQFU from 2011 onwards. This was strongly represented in the content analysis samples and contained exemplars from the Personal Drama and Thriller genre which were built around the development of Quinn's character arc. Coding of Zone Two, however, also tracked the HQFU moving in an emergent new direction, signified by a third of all storylines being situated in the Romance genre. The origin of this new direction, dubbed **Anti-Mad Love** by this thesis, was the BTAS episode *Harley and Ivy* (1993) in which Quinn's relationship with the Joker was jettisoned, to be momentarily replaced by a relationship between Quinn and the supervillain Poison Ivy. As explored on p.187, whether the relationship became sexual in this episode remains a matter of conjecture, but the storyline laid the foundations for a developing strand within the HQFU which saw the partnership grow into the singular most romantic relationship in Quinn's life.

Chapter Four examines how *Harley and Ivy* has since become reified as the most important BTAS episode to the contemporary HQFU, so much so that the burgeoning relationship between the characters has seen them christened "*Harl-ivy*" by fans (Shipping Wiki, 2021). Despite queer coding between the characters from *Harley and Ivy* onwards, the couple had their first kiss in 2016 in the *DC Comics Bombshells* storyline, *Love Stories*. This storyline became the Retrogenesis Text for a new narrative strategy pursued by the HQFU based upon the couple. For although the storyline did not present a re-contextualised origin story for the character, such

as *The Hunt for Harley Quinn*, the revelation of Quinn's sexuality allowed for material from Harley and Ivy onwards to be re-contextualised in the light of DC's disclosure. In doing so, this re-positioned Ivy as the long-term romantic partner of Harley Quinn, with the Joker reduced to an interregnum. This moment was remediated one year later, on the 25th anniversary of the character, in the storyline *Surprise, Surprise* (Conner, Palmiotti and Hardin, 2017), when a passionate (cheek) kiss took place between the couple. This moment proved controversial amongst the LGTBQ+ community, when the image was revealed to have been censored by the DC editorial team (Leong, 2021), the original mouth kiss proving too explicit for the publishers who were then accused of hypocrisy after the characters' bisexuality had been so proudly promoted since 2014. Despite these bungled moments, this narrative strategy reached a zenith in 2021, (discussed in chapter five) when the animated series *Harley Quinn* featured Ivy escaping her wedding to be with Quinn, the two lovers eloping in a wedding car.

Whilst the Post-Mad Love narrative strategy focused on Quinn's struggles to move on from the Joker, the Anti-Mad Love narrative strategically removed the Joker from Quinn's storylines and in doing so erased any relevant link between the characters. Within Zone Two of the content analysis sampling, and prior to *Surprise, Surprise* being released on the character's 25th Anniversary, the Anti-Mad Love narrative had become dominant in the *Harley Quinn* comic book series, the storylines increasingly focused on the couple from 2014 onwards. This re-calibration was also reinforced by the *DC Comics Bombshells* (DCCB) and *DC Super Hero Girls* (DCSHG) storyworlds which had been running in parallel with the *Harley Quinn* comic book in this period. Exemplar texts from these storyworlds are examined in chapter four which illustrate how the Joker relationship became entirely side-lined to the point of irrelevancy in DCCB, the

storyworld instead focusing on Quinn's explicit romance with Ivy. DCSHG, meanwhile, posited a world in which the Joker did not exist, Harley and Ivy's friendship - established in pre-school - flourishing uninhibited. Both storyworlds deployed Romance as their primary genre and were positioned in opposition to the Mad Love works of Zone One.

In conclusion, when coded for genre values, Zone One of the content analysis sampling revealed the genesis of Harley Quinn as a devoted acolyte of the Joker whose storylines focused on her attempts to permanently cement a perpetually thwarted romantic relationship with the villain. This narrative strategy was dubbed Mad Love after the Retrogenesis Text which established the tragic origin of the character. Zone Two of the content analysis revealed that by 2015, the HQFU was pursuing a Post-Mad Love strategy in which Quinn was struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder following the near fatal encounter with the Joker in the new Retrogenesis Text, *The Hunt for Harley Quinn*. The Personal Drama and Thriller based storylines of the main *Harley Quinn*, *Injustice* and *Suicide Squad* storyworlds in this period were all informed by the new Retrogenesis Text as they focused on Quinn's de-programming from the Joker cult and her inner conflict with identity. In 2016, the Anti-Mad Love narrative strategy became dominant leading up to the release of a new Retrogenesis Text, *Love Stories*. This storyline positioned Quinn's romantic relationship with Poison Ivy at the centre of the fictional universe. How this complete change of emphasis across the fictional universe was able to occur within five years is examined in the next coding passes, whose pillars of character and tone revealed that the Genesis Principle of the HQFU enabled these fluctuating shifts in genre through the provision of a central thematic through line. This was based upon the concept of Affiliation and maintained by the fluctuating tone of the main title *Harley Quinn* comic book.

2.7. Character and Tone

This section describes the theoretical underpinning behind the coding passes of Character and Tone, which built upon Parker's fluent understanding of genre to examine Harley Quinn's personality and the semiotic intent of the content creators.

In the mid-1980s, author Christopher Vogler worked as a story consultant to Walt Disney Pictures, during which time he wrote the seven-page document which became known in Hollywood history as simply *The Memo*. Written by Vogler in response to the success of *Star Wars* (1977) - whose director George Lucas had openly championed the work of literary theorist Joseph Campbell - *The Memo* revisited Campbell's approach to mythic storytelling from the context of mainstream filmmaking. In essence Vogler presented a formula which he believed could revolutionise Hollywood, a belief also held by Disney chairman Jeffrey Katzenberg and Columbia Pictures producer Laura Ziskin, who employed Vogler to consult on some of the most popular films ever released, such as *The Lion King* (1994) and *Spider-Man 2* (2004). This section explores how Vogler's concepts of personal development, first articulated in *The Memo*, were applied during the content analysis phase of this study and were reconciled alongside the work of David McClelland on human motivation and Philip Parker on tone, to induce a complex and inter-related model of Harley Quinn's character as an articulation of the Genesis Principle.

In 1992, Vogler expanded the concepts of *The Memo* into the screenwriting theory book, *The Writer's Journey*, which detailed a twelve-stage process through which a main protagonist achieved their goal through the overcoming of dramatic conflicts. He dubbed this concept The Hero's Journey in tribute to the work of Joseph Campbell, whose 1949 work, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, proposed the

concept of the mono-myth or master story at the heart of all mythology. Campbell's work examined themes similar to earlier studies of story by Soviet folklorist Vladimir Propp, whose formalist work *Morphology of the Folk Tale* (1928) suggested that every story went through thirty-one stages; from *Initial Situation* and *Villainy* (villain makes themselves known) to *Punishment of the Villain* and *Wedding*.

Vogler's work, whilst inspired by that of Propp and Campbell, however belonged in another tradition of story theory, revealed by his statement, "*Story is a metaphor, a model of some aspect of human behaviour…a thought machine by which we test our ideas and feelings about some human quality and learn more about it*" (1992, p.1). This statement positioned Vogler within a tradition of Hollywood screenwriting theorists whose works, when describing story, adopted the language of motivational speakers such as Anthony Robbins. The much-paraphrased Robbins' quote, "*It's not the events of our lives that shape us but our beliefs to what those events mean*" (1992, p.41) sat easily alongside the philosophy of Vogler or Syd Field who wrote that, "*A man's life is measured by the sum total of his actions; our lives are measured by what we accomplish or do not accomplish*" (1984, p.81). Content development books such as those of Vogler often repeated the same phraseology as therapy, with the thin veil between the two worlds made explicit by works such as *The Soul of Screenwriting: On Writing, Dramatic Truth and Knowing Yourself* by Keith Cunningham (2008) whose epilogue titled, "*Writing Practice is Life Practice,*" inferred writing was a form of substance recovery. This correlation was made even more explicit by the title of D.B. Gilles' 2013 book *Writer's Rehab: a 12-step Program for Writers Who Can't Get Their Acts Together,* described on publisher Michael Wiese's

website as, "*A comprehensive self-help book in the form of a 12-step program for writers dealing with emotional or psychological roadblocks with their writing.*"

The relevance of the self-help movement to this thesis' examination of the HQFU is the link between the phraseology of character in the work of writers such as Vogler, and that of psychiatry. The cross pollination of language between these two worlds, permitted frameworks from the field of human motivation theory to be deployed in this thesis, for the purposes of examining Quinn's character, without appearing aberrant or inappropriate, As the second pass of the content analysis phase deployed psychologist David McClelland's framework of Human Motivation theory from *The Achieving Society* (1961), this could have appeared, on first sight, to be an incongruent application. McClelland's work, however, evidenced a clear thematic continuity from the first coding pass of genre, as his theories had previously provided a thematic under-pinning to the screenwriting movement from which Vogler, and Parker had emerged.

A small disclaimer is necessary here, for any structural theory which attempts to provide a holistic framework to understanding human behaviour is open to criticism from a phenomenalistic perspective, and this thesis makes no claim for the efficacy of McClelland's work in the field of psychology where it has been situated since 1951. McClelland's framework of motivation, however, was appropriate to the content coding of fictional characters, for their actions served a structural purpose within a narrative and were therefore analogues of human behaviour susceptible to predictability and, therefore, categorisation.

Essayist Tzvetan Todorov identified a key phrase - equilibrium - which aided this thesis' contextualising of McClelland's work to the motivation of Harley Quinn. Todorov suggested that narrative structure should be considered as,

> "*A state of equilibrium at the outset.*
>
> *A disruption of the equilibrium by some action.*
>
> *A recognition that there has been a disruption.*
>
> *An attempt to repair the disruption.*
>
> *A reinstatement of the equilibrium*" (as cited in Lacey, 2000, p.29)

Positioning the framework of McClelland against Todorov, Quinn's actions throughout the samples of the HQFU were interrogated by the second coding pass within the context of equilibrium. This allowed Quinn's motivations to either establish, disrupt or maintain an equilibrium to be plotted across the three hundred and thirteen HQFU texts of the samples, the rationale for her intentions drawn from McClelland's three motivational forces: the need for power; the need for achievement; and the need for affiliation. McClelland explained the differences between them as follows and, although his use of gendered language is dated and problematic from a contemporary perspective, his description neatly summarised the contrast between Batman and Harley Quinn as social artifacts which reflected normative values,

> "*Outstanding American men seem to see power as something you use in order to correct someone who's wrong, to change them…Outstanding American women, on the other hand, see power as a resource, something you can use to get people together, to gain commitment*" (McClelland, as quoted in Adams,1997, p.18).

When applied to the BFU, the content creators of Batman have adhered, since 1939, to the concept of correction, the character manifesting power over others in displays of violent masculinity. The results of violence on the self, and the inter-personal relationships Bruce Wayne forms in the context of violence, are examined in Frank Miller's comic book serial *The Dark Knight Returns* in 1986 and have become recurrent themes in Batman works since. In contrast, although violence has been endemic in the character since her Genesis Text, *Joker's Favor*, the journey of the Harley Quinn character has been to evolve away from violence. For whilst Batman strives to create equilibrium through violence, Quinn strives for equilibrium by cementing commitment in her relationships through non-violent means, even if this remains an aspirational target rather than an achievable reality due to her character flaws. The work of Todorov, in defining the importance of equilibrium to the narrative form, therefore, was crucial to the content analysis phase for it helped to contextualise Quinn's inner motivations within the framework of David McClelland.

Todorov's model also succinctly expressed the narrative structure of a television soap opera, situation comedy or long running series, whereupon the characters and situation must be reset at the end of every episode for the dynamic to be repeated the following week(s). This formula, which allowed the series to repeat the format ad infinitum so long as a unique and engaging chaos element could be created for every episode to disrupt the equilibrium, was referred to by Philip Parker as the "*circular narrative form*" (2003, p.64). This stood in contrast with the linear narrative form - whereupon the story information was communicated in a straight chronological manner - and episodic narrative form where the story material was related to the audience through a selection of capsules, episodes, or issues (in the case of a comic book). This choice of narrative

form hence determined which equilibrium Quinn was motivated to return to at the end of the story, and this therefore determined the overall tone of the character.

Using a tonal system which modified Aristotle by arranging works into Comedy, Tragedy or Drama (Aristotle arranged the overall corpus Drama into Comedy, Tragedy and Satyr), Parker defined his typologies as follows:

> *"A tragic character is one whom we expect to fail, and their tragic story ends with the characters failing to achieve what they most desire or being overwhelmed by circumstances. A comedic character on the other we expect to survive whatever befalls them and ultimately to succeed/survive despite the circumstances. The dramatic character, in contrast to the other two, we expect to succeed and fail throughout the narrative, their outcome always in doubt and their story ending in a mixture of success and failure"*
> (2003, p.138).

If Quinn was seeking validation in a circular narrative, failed to do so and then ended up in the same equilibrium that she was in at the start of the piece, then this made her a tragic character, doomed to be returned to this unhappy equilibrium forever. But if Quinn was irrepressible and indestructible and returned to an equilibrium of success at the end of the narrative, then she would be considered comedic. A mixture of the two tones with no certainty of a pre-determined climax would make Quinn dramatic and this would suggest that the character was growing in complexity. The overall form deployed by the content creators in pursuit of a typical Harley Quinn narrative, therefore, expressed the tone of the work, the accumulation of which would contain the dominant tone of the fictional universe.

In order to draw out exemplars of tone from the samples, the third coding pass of the content analysis stage examined the three hundred and thirteen texts of the corpus for evidence of Parker's typologies of Comedy, Tragedy and Drama in attempt to pinpoint a master tone.

The next section of this chapter details the findings of the content analysis stage and the derived correlation of genre, character and tone which informed the emergent Genesis Principle of the HQFU.

2.8. Content Analysis Findings: Character

This stage of the content analysis, as outlined in the previous section, deployed the David McClelland rubric Achievement/ Affiliation/ Power as indicators of character motivation. In summary, no texts were found which focused solely on Quinn being motivated by achievement through the mastery of knowledge or skill. Instead, 96 works (31%) evidenced Quinn's motivation to demonstrate and exercise personal power through violence whilst 217 works (69%) focused on Quinn's desire to establish and strengthen affiliative links with the people around her. Writing in *The Screenwriter's Work Book*, Syd Field, stated that, "*Action is character*" (1984, p.69) and it was Quinn's actions, and how she attempted to reinstate a broken equilibrium through these actions, that the content analysis ultimately tracked through this large proportion of affiliation-based works. This result supported the assumption of the project in the preliminary research stages, detailed in chapter six, that in contrast to Batman's attempts to establish equilibrium through violent demonstrations of power, Quinn's attempts to establish equilibrium in her life would be demonstrated through affiliation; at first in her relationship with the Joker and then with Poison Ivy.

When differentiated for zoning, the content analysis revealed a greater proportion of affiliation-based works in Zone One (Fig. 8). This was illustrative of the Genesis Principle in action as Quinn's first appearance in the Genesis Text, *Joker's Favor*, evidenced a clear need to receive validation through the Joker's attention. This motivation to demonstrate constant affiliation with the Joker was at the heart of all but one of Quinn's texts in Zone One, and was the core theme of the Retrogenesis text, *Mad Love* which saw this obsessive desire to affiliate with the villain portrayed as a form of psychosis.
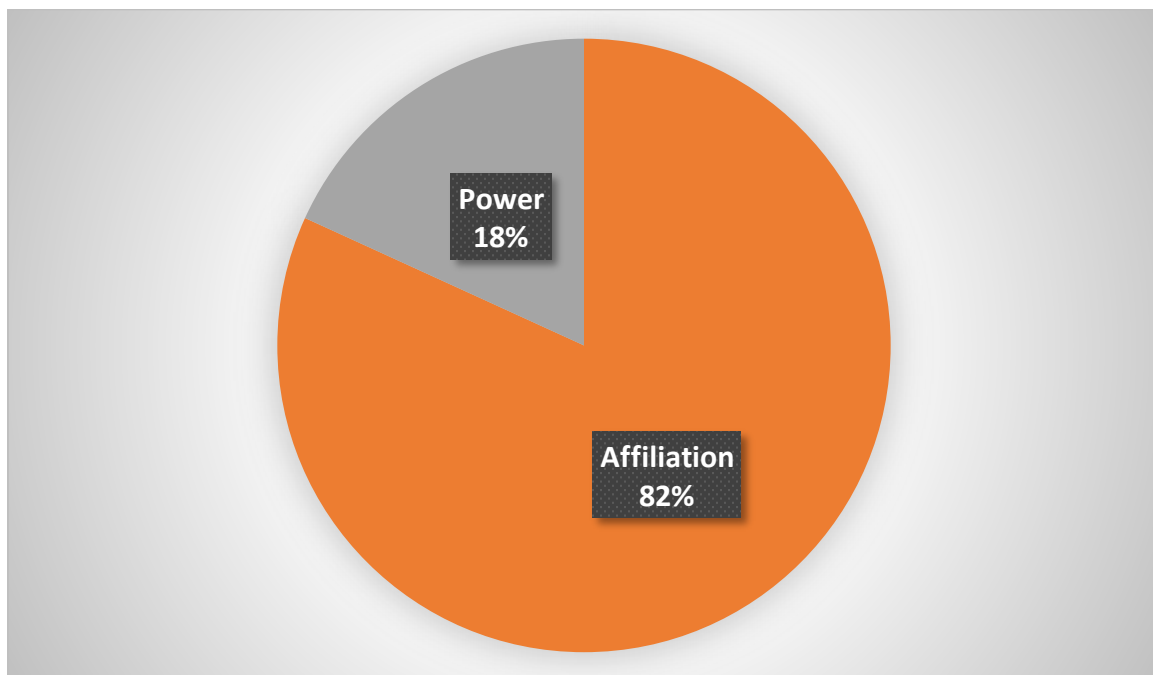
Fig. 8: Motivation - Zone One

It was only during Quinn's first appearance in comic book form in the storyline *Batgirl - Day One* (1993), that her motivation changed from affiliation to power. In this storyline, Quinn was portrayed as a girl thug who attacked the titular super-heroine during a robbery and demonstrated no further characteristics than the desire to win a fight

through escalated violence. This appearance occurred in the BTAS ancillary comic book *The Batman Adventures* and pre-dated the *Mad Love* Retrogenesis Text. This antagonistic variant of the character, therefore, was a part of the development process of Quinn, whose values were yet to be reified by this point. This thesis notes, however, that this variant of Quinn - a sulky, unpredictable and violent foe whose simple motivation was to cause conflict in the lives of the protagonists - emerged across Zone Two in works as diverse as *Justice League 3001* and *Scooby Doo! Team Up.* Wheeled out when a storyline necessitated antagonism, this one-dimensional variant had no more story function than a cipher and could have been replaced by any other DC villain in the story without affecting the fabric of the narrative.

Representative of the large amount of action thriller works analysed during the body of Zone Two, Fig. 9 demonstrates that Power as a motivation for Quinn had increased in the story mix, but still took second place to the motivation for Affiliation. A handful of functional "Villain of the Week" variants aside, Quinn's motivation for Power in the narratives of Zone Two was not exercised in the name of chaos or antagonism but instead directed towards the defeat of evil. Most of these Power motivated storylines were drawn from the *Suicide Squad* storyworld, and so examined that property's theme of using evil to fight greater evil, Quinn's bloodthirsty actions more representative of a form of anti-heroism than genuine altruism.

Amongst the gratuitous displays of excessive violence in the *Suicide Squad* storyworld, a more tender and responsible version of Quinn, however, also emerged. Exemplified by the storyline *Full Mental Jacket* (Williams and Frank, 2016), Quinn's motivations in these storylines centred on her caring for her Task Force X companions. This not only deepened her affiliative ties with the rest of the crew but lent the brutal storylines a

human frailty which was previously absent from this property's more muscular "Boys Own Adventure" past iterations and made them more relatable as a result
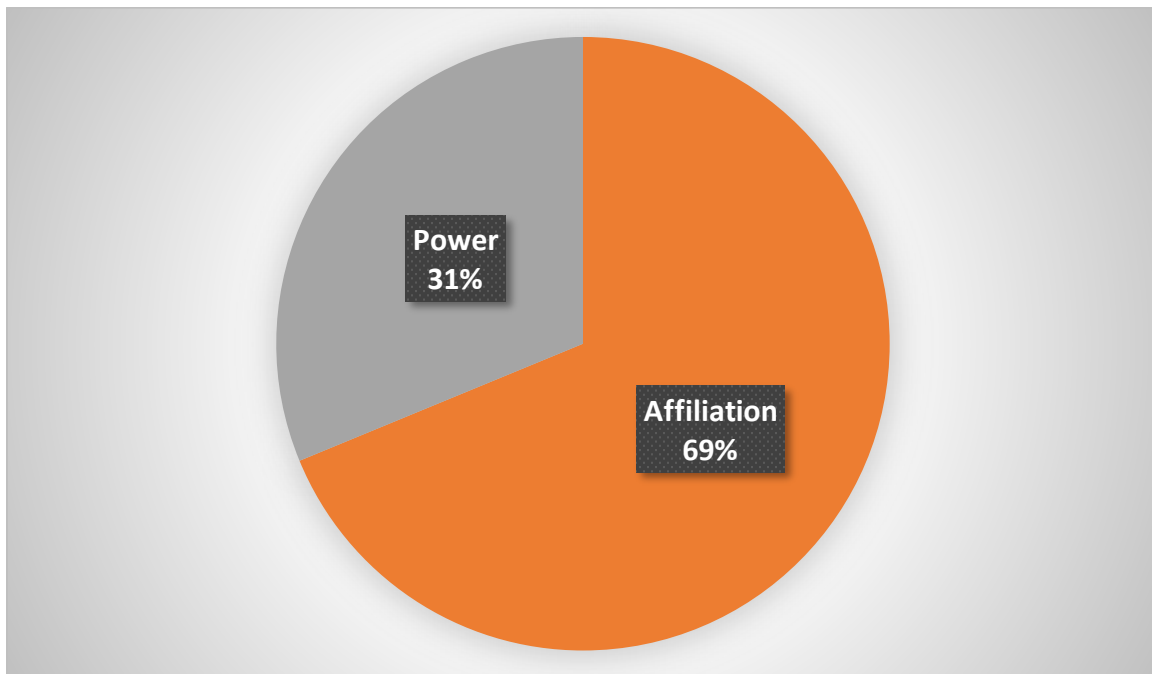
Fig. 9: Motivation – Zone Two

Aside from *Suicide Squad*, other exemplars of Quinn's desire for Power in storylines such as *Twenny Five Big One$* (Conner, Palmiotti and Hardin, 2016) from the *Harley Quinn* solo title and *Such Sweet Sorrow* (Buccellato and Sebela, 2016) from *Injustice - Ground Zero*, were based upon her need to escape the abusive relationship with the Joker. These were strong stories of empowerment, which saw Quinn gathering her commitment to finally stand up against the villain who had rendered her powerless since her seduction. Rectifying the dark side of Quinn's obsessive need to affiliate with the Joker in Zone One, these works demonstrated a depth and grit to the character beyond the hyperactive stereotyping often endemic in the weaker Quinn storylines and reinforced the Personal Drama content of the property.

As examined on p.76, Zone Two of the content analysis samples tracked a change in the nature of the HQFU, emblematic by the *DC Comics Bombshells* storyline, *Love Stories* (Bennett *et al.,* 2016) in which the Sapphic nature of Quinn's relationship with Ivy became explicit. This storyline re-calibrated the HQFU away from *Mad Love*, and towards a wholly separate identity from the property's origin in the BFU, and it was therefore no surprise that a large proportion of Zone Two storylines centred on Quinn's desire to affiliate with Ivy. These included the *Harley Quinn* storyline *Surprise, Surprise* (Conner, Palmiotti and Hardin, 2017) which remediated the intimacy of *Love Storie*s into the mainstream of the property with a coy cheek kiss between the couple.

The warmth of Quinn's relationship with Ivy was not aberrant to the HQFU, however, but indicative of a character trait which saw Quinn strike up an unlikely friendship with the superhero Power Girl and saw her become the centre of a family of diverse characters in the *Harley Quinn*, *DC Comics Bombshells* and *DC Super Hero Girls* titles. This desire to affiliate and form friendships even involved Batman and several Zone Two storylines such as *The Not So Silent Night of the Harley Quinn* (2016) portrayed a fondness between the two which could be tracked back to BTAS episodes such as *Harley's Holiday* (1994) in which Bruce Wayne recognised and respected Quinn's struggle for agency. Not all relationships were platonic, however, and Zone Two also contained multiple examples of Quinn's need for affiliation bubbling over into sexual encounters with Suicide Squad members Deadshot and Rick Flag as well as the former "Boy Wonder" Dick Grayson.

In summary, Quinn's motivations in both zones were focused on the repair of a disrupted equilibrium, whether that equilibrium was being accepted within the Joker's affections (Mad Love), returning to her pre-Joker state of innocence (Post-Mad Love) or

cementing a romantic relationship with Poison Ivy (Anti-Mad Love). And although exemplar texts existed in which Quinn's motivation was the expression of power, the main body of samples portrayed Quinn's consistent desire to maintain her equilibrium through affiliation.

In conclusion the content analysis revealed that the dominant motivation and, therefore, theme of the HQFU centred upon Quinn's maintenance and strengthening of relationships. This was present in the Genesis Text and formed the Genesis Principle which underpinned Zones One and Two. The following final section of the content analysis phase focuses on how a consistent modulation of tone enabled this Genesis Principle to become embedded and sustained within the HQFU on a narrative level.

2.9. Content Analysis Findings: Tone

The third coding pass of the content analysis phase of the project revealed that 169 works (54%) of the samples evidenced Parker's comedic tone. 105 texts (33%), meanwhile, contained a dramatic tone and 41 texts (13%) represented a tragic tone. This pass indicated that the dominant tone of the HQFU was Comedy, although a significant proportion of the samples contained a strong emphasis of dramatic work.

Fig. 10 demonstrates that the BTAS works of Zone One showed a variation to the overall sample when coded for Tone, with Drama content emerging as a dominant characteristic. In these storylines, Quinn's fate hung in the balance, the character evidencing the ability to determine her own fate. Exemplified by the Genesis Text *Joker's Favor*, the Retrogenesis Text *Mad Love*, and the influential *Harley and Ivy* episode, these storylines saw Quinn exert agency. Although ultimately ending in failure, these storylines did not set up Quinn's tragic nature from the start and

contained within them the seeds of her eventual success as a strong protagonist in Zone Two.
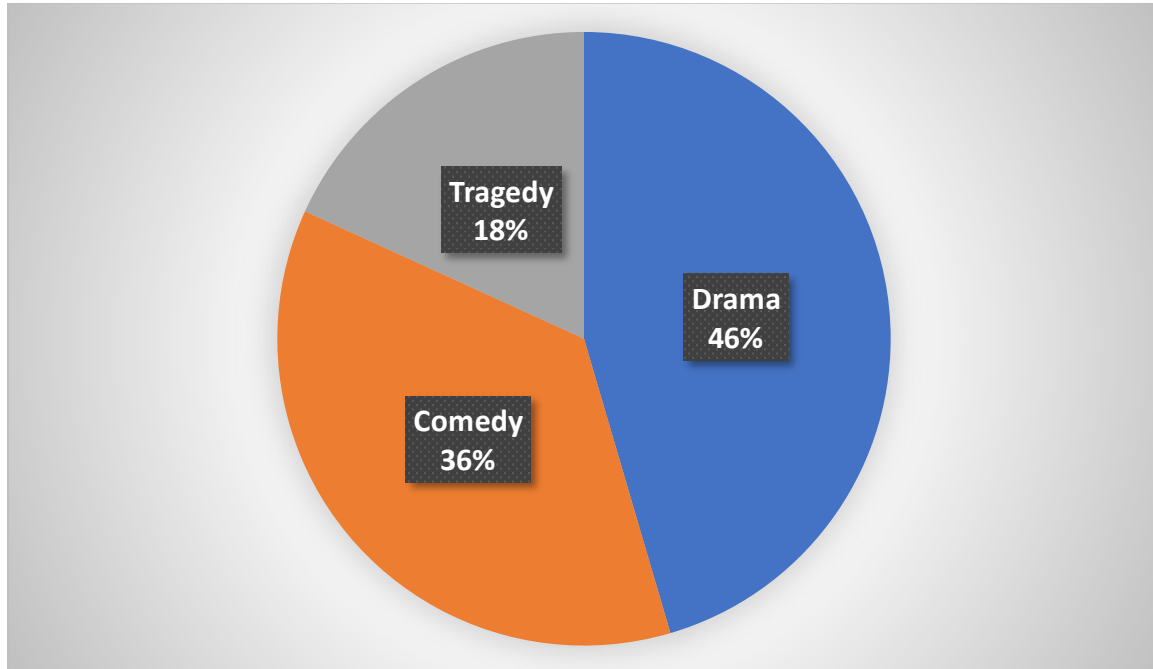
Fig 10: Tone - Zone One

Although the comic book, *Mad Love,* contained in flashback the origin story template for the tragic love-sick caricature of Quinn, the storyline also portrayed a present-day version of Quinn who possessed an intelligent tenacity which would become her hallmark in Zone Two storylines. These scenes of intelligence and independence in the Genesis and Retrogenesis texts would, therefore, inform the Genesis Principle of the character and become reinforced throughout Zone Two as dominant character traits which undercut her constant need for affiliation.

Zone One sampling also revealed storylines which deployed Quinn as a comic foil to the Joker or Batman. *The Man Who Killed Batman* (1993) and *Harlequinade* (1994) both portrayed Quinn as brainless, with the latter - despite its influence on the tough

Post-Mad Love narratives of Zone Two - portraying Quinn for the most part in the vein of a petulant teenage school girl. This juvenile approach to Quinn carried over into Zone Two and could be found superficially sprinkled across the character in all storyworlds, its most natural home being the high-school based antics of *DC Super Hero Girls.*

In addition to the comedic and dramatic storylines which saw Quinn jostled between moments of clarity and inanity, Zone One also contained an element of tragedy which afforded the storyworld a melancholic undertone. This was typified by BTAS episode *The Laughing Fish* and the comic book storyline *24 Hours* (discussed on p.126). These storylines portrayed Quinn's day to day existence as a love sick and abused Joker junkie, trapped in a downward cycle by her own obsessive need to affiliate with the villain, doomed by an inescapable romantic fatal flaw in Quinn's character.

Fig. 11 demonstrates that this tragic undercurrent was also present in the Zone Two sampling texts where it represented 13% of the storylines analysed. This tragic content was mainly found in *Mad Love* variants such as the various Lego storyworlds which featured Quinn, and the Arkham-verse ancillary comic books; the latter a result of creator Paul Dini directly transferring Quinn's more sycophantic BTAS characteristics to the video game storyworld of *Batman: Arkham Asylum* (2009). However, storylines within the Post-Mad Love period also contained tragic tones resulting from Quinn's failed attempts to temper her fatal flaw. This was evidenced in the *Harley Quinn* storyline *Undercover Punker* (Conner *et. al*, 2016) in which Quinn becomes attracted to a girl, who wore a lost memento given to Quinn by the Joker.

The girl is murdered, despite Quinn's inept heroics, the memento now acting as a reminder of how far she still needs to go to atone for her past.
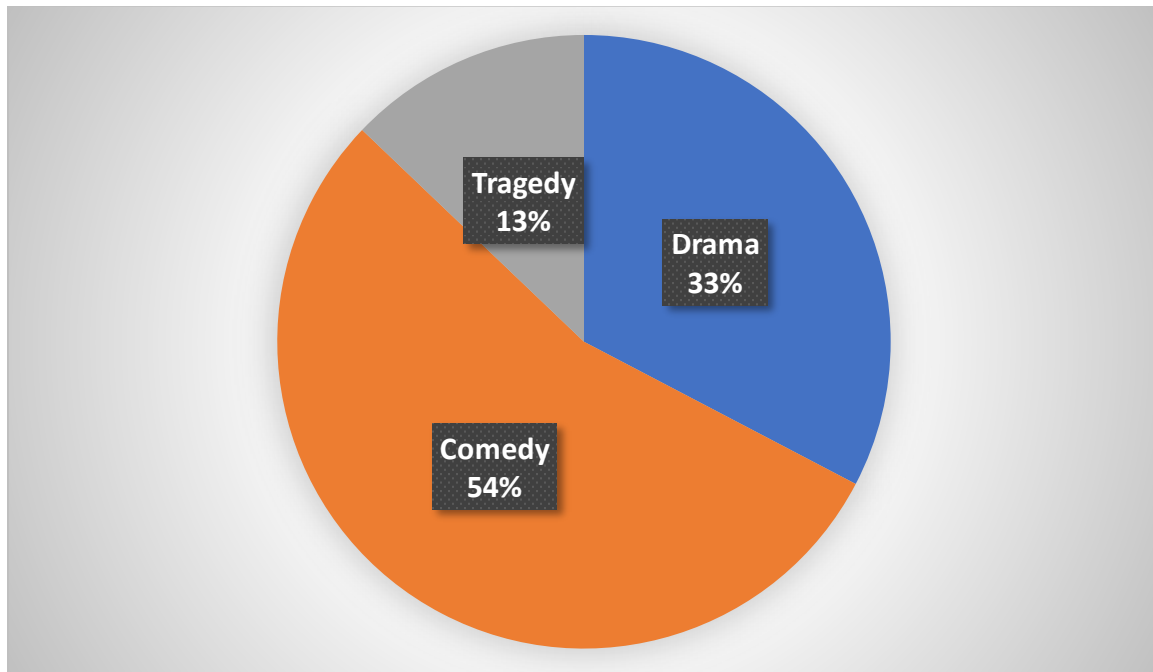
Fig.11: Tone - Zone Two

Although this element of tragedy undercutting the HQFU resulted in the *Harley Quinn* and *Suicide Squad* storyworlds occasionally highlighting irreconcilable flaws in Quinn's character, the majority of Zone Two works fell into clear demarcated tones. *DC Comics Bombshells* and *DC Super Hero Girls* both embraced a comedic tone and portrayed an effervescent Quinn who rose above every situation she faced and returned to an equilibrium of success at the end of every storyline. The Thriller storylines of *Suicide Squad*, meanwhile, were the main contributor to a dramatic tone in Zone Two, as were the brutal Personal Drama storylines in the *Injustice* comic books. At the centre of the property, the Amanda Conner and Jimmy Palmiotti written main solo title - *Harley Quinn* - deployed comedy and drama almost equally in

service of storylines which, whilst appearing glib and satirical, dealt with the trauma of Quinn's past to a forensic degree. This tonal agility allowed for the divergent variants of Quinn to exist simultaneously in the fictional universe across a multiplicity of tones. For whilst the *Harley Quinn* comic book did not adhere to any form of story synchronicity at the centre of the property, its synchronicity of tone allowed fidelity to the Genesis Principle to be upheld, no matter how variant or extreme the material became in the different storyworlds.

2.10: Conclusion

This chapter detailed the content analysis phase of the research project. Three hundred and thirteen HQFU storylines, drawn from two specific sampling zones were coded using a tri-partite instrument to identify commonalities of genre, character motivation and tone derived from the work of Philip Parker and David McClelland.

The sample as whole consisted of equal volumes of romance, thriller, and personal drama narratives. Zone One (1992 - 1994) revealed to be wholly dominated by the Romance genre whilst Zone Two (2015 - 2017), evidenced almost equal proportions of Romance, Thriller and Personal Drama content. This disparity demonstrated a deliberate evolution in the property between the two sampling periods when the character of Harley Quinn evolved from a supporting character into a fully-fledged protagonist.

Whilst the genre framework in which Quinn operated could be seen to have matured between the two sampling periods, the motivation of Quinn's character did not change, the corpus entirely dominated by her need for affiliation. This emerged during the

content analysis period as the biggest commonality across the HQFU and therefore evidence of a Genesis Principle derived from the Genesis Text.

Although Zone Two was dominated by Comedy works, and therefore portrayed Quinn as an irrepressible comedic character who always succeeded, Zone One demonstrated a different aspect. In these early works, the character was portrayed as the protagonist of the Romance genre whose tone was mostly dramatic. The dominant comedic tone to the HQFU, therefore, emerged between the two sample periods, during which time the character was re-calibrated and revisited through several Retrogenesis Texts and placed in the Thriller and Personal Drama genres.

The divergent selection of tones and genres present in Zone Two was controlled by the *Harley Quinn* main title comic book which, although not displaying any form of canonical story synchronicity, exhibited a fluency of multiple tones which allowed for variance in the fictional universe. Quinn's Genesis Principle of Affiliation meanwhile, which originated in the Genesis Text, *Jokers Favor*, and which was reified in the Zone One Retrogenesis Text *Mad Love*, provided a line of continuity between Year 1 (1992) and Year 25 (2017). Although the narrative transmedia strategy of the HQFU evolved from Mad Love (1993 - 2011) through Post-Mad Love (2012 - 2016) and into Anti-Mad Love (2016 - current) - the Genesis Principle of Affiliation remained intact as the centre of Quinn's universe shifted away from the diminishing influence of the Joker and onto a brighter future with Poison Ivy.

The next two chapters engage in textual analysis of key exemplars induced from the content analysis coding to examine how the storyworlds utilised Retrogenesis on a textual level to support the Genesis Principle of Affiliation. Chapter three deals with

the BTAS texts of Zone One and the emergent Mad Love narrative strategy, whilst

Chapter Four examines the Post-Mad Love and Anti-Mad Love narrative strategies.

<u>Chapter 3: Mad Love</u>

<u>3.1 Introduction</u>

This chapter follows on from the broader content analysis findings of chapter two and provides a more detailed narrative-based examination of commonalities, differences, and relationships within a body of emergent works dubbed Mad Love. The chapter will explore how a collection of works in the first year of BTAS, formed and reinforced the Genesis Principle of Affiliation, the gravitational centre to the Harley Quinn Fictional Universe, which bonded the storyworlds into a coherent form. This Genesis Principle was then codified into the Retrogenesis Text, *Mad Love* (Dini and Timm, 1993) whose storyline moulded the dominant transmedia strategy of all Harley Quinn works for the next twenty years.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the BTAS texts of Zone One - which comprised television episodes and comic books - displayed a strong core of Dramatic Romance during the content analysis phase. Throughout these works, Quinn was pursuing an Unrecognised Virtue storyline, expressed by her constant need for the Joker's affections. The more the Joker rejected her, the more Quinn's attention seeking became extreme, and so at this early stage, the character's narratives contained a strong sense of conflict between good and evil as her desire for affection transgressed her moral core. This became crystallised in the Retrogenesis Text and reached an apotheosis in the episode *Harlequinade* (1994) which foreshadowed the narrative strand, Post-Mad Love and contributed to the large proportion of Drama works in Zone Two which examined Quinn's attempt to break free of the Joker.

The most instructive area of analysis in the following chapter regards the examination of works in which Quinn's motivations are the strengthening of affiliative bonds. For although the BTAS sample was dominated by narratives concerning Quinn's relationship with the Joker, a romantic relationship with Poison Ivy also emerged which was both romantic and dramatic as it challenged Quinn's sense of self. The narrative template of this Sapphic romantic strand - which grew to dominate the fictional universe by the end of Zone Two - was the BTAS episode *Harley and Ivy* (1993). This narrative pre-dated *Mad Love* by almost a year and helped form a Genesis Principle regarding affiliation in the first year of Quinn's character. The Genesis Principle was, therefore, established in the Genesis Text *Joker's Favor* (1992), reinforced by the *Harley and Ivy* episode, and then codified in the Retrogenesis text *Mad Love* as a transmedial narrative strategy. The following chapter identifies the origin of this process in the BTAS samples of Zone One and tracks the deployment of the Mad Love narrative strategy throughout Zone Two. (N.B. In this thesis, when the specific 1993 comic book text *Mad Love* by Paul Dini and Bruce Timm is cited, the term is italicised. However, when the thesis refers to the Narrative Strategy derived from this work, there is no italicisation).

3.2 BTAS: Pre-Mad Love

Seven BTAS works introduced and developed the character of Harley Quinn before the appearance of her Retrogenesis Text, *Mad Love*. This group was: two television episodes from 1992, *Joker's Favor* and *Almost Got 'Im* ; three television episodes from 1993, T*he Laughing Fish*, *Harley and Ivy* and *The Man Who Killed Batman*; and the comic strip *Batgirl: Day One* (Puckett and Parobeck,1993). All these narratives revealed that Quinn was still in the character development process with erroneous characteristics and former professions appearing for the only time during this period.

This selection of storylines formed the pre-history of the Harley Quinn character and laid out a collection of traits that became codified by *Mad Love* in December 1993.

The Pre-Mad Love narratives revealed the hopes of Paul Dini, BTAS writer and creator of Harley Quinn, to soften the long-established Joker character through a partnership with a female companion. Interviewed for 2003 documentary, *The Concepting of Harley Quinn,* Dini explained how the arch villain had degenerated into Batman's least human antagonist, storylines involving the character now rendered unengaging by this one-dimensional quality. Harley Quinn was, therefore, developed by Dini to be a combination of tough stooge and glamorous moll; someone who could go head-to-head with the Joker in a physical way or steal a laugh or two on the side. This interplay, Dini hoped, would ground the villain, and make him more relatable as an antagonist.

Although the reasons given above were Dini's overall hopes for a female character, the impetus by the series producers to create the character in the first place were much more mundane. In Quinn's Genesis Text - the BTAS episode *Joker's Favor* (1992) - the producers planned for a pin up girl to burst from a cake and set off a bomb at Commissioner Gordon's party. But when the episode was developed, the creative team decided that the egocentric Joker would not want anyone else to steal his limelight and so would spring from the cake himself. However, the villain still needed someone glamorous to wheel the cake into the room and therefore, from this most workmanlike of origins, Harley Quinn was born: the girl who brought the cake.

In *Joker's Favor*, Quinn is first introduced sat on a desk, painting her nails like a gangster moll. Her first line, "*It is to laugh, huh Mister J?*" (1992, 07:21) is not spoken

in voice actor Arleen Sorkin's baby voice, which later typified the BTAS iteration of the character, but a strong New York accent which immediately grounds her as working class. This line undercuts the moll stereotype, however, for it also encapsulates Quinn's postmodern self-reflexivity. "*It is to laugh,*" was used most famously by television chat show host Johnny Carson and is therefore anachronistic to the 1940s BTAS house style. Quinn is a television character talking about television and, therefore, in the Genesis Text articulates a level of self-awareness and intelligence from her first spoken line.

Within seconds of this first appearance, Quinn's role of the Joker's cheerleader is evident as she whistles and claps at the villain's every pun - a clear female supplicant in a room of jaded male toughs who are too busy reading the newspaper to care what their paymaster is ranting about. This deliberate oscillation of character between child and capable femme fatale is no flaw of tone, however, and reverberates throughout all of Quinn's appearances in the Pre-Mad Love works. In these storylines, Quinn displays both nauseating sycophancy one moment and vicious intelligence the next. This is typified in *Joker's Favor* when Quinn, cornered by Batman, distracts the hero with a baby voiced monologue. "*You are thinking what a shame, a pure innocent like her led astray by a bad companion,*" Quinn whimpers before diving for a knife (ibid, 18:14). An ever-wise Batman is ready for it. "*Right, tell me another,*" he quips before slapping cuffs on her, conscious of her malicious duplicity from the off.

This physically capable side of Quinn runs throughout all the Pre-Mad Love works, with the character frequently taking on both male and female foes without fear. In the episode *The Laughing Fish* (1993), Quinn faces down tough guy detective Harvey

Bullock by channelling every moll she has seen in a vintage movie. "*Freeze Copper! I gots you covered see!*" she yells like James Cagney whilst pointing an oversized cap gun at him (ibid, 13:30). Likewise, in the episode *Almost Got 'Im* (1992) Quinn saves the Joker by delivering a knockout blow to Catwoman, the villainess caught off guard by Quinn's sudden attack from behind (ibid, 18:02). Quinn's physicality, however, is not just used to fight characters who are attempting to foil her crimes but is also used as self-defence from unwanted sexual attention. When Quinn bursts into the party for Commissioner Gordon in *Joker's Favor*, the camera lasciviously focuses on her backside as Bullock mistakes her sexualised police uniform as the dress of an adult entertainer. "*Hey Sugar, wanna read me my rights*?" he purrs with a groping gesture, only to receive a sharp truncheon to the kneecap and a retort of "*Jerk!*" (1992, 19:00).

This battle of the sexes interplay with Bullock - who dubs Quinn the Joker's "Hench-wench" in *The Laughing Fish* (1993, 13.32) - reaches a peak in the episode *The Man who Killed Batman* (1993) where it is revealed Quinn doesn't just have killer kicks in her arsenal. In this episode, Quinn appears at the police headquarters disguised in a red business suit and tied back hair as, "*Harleen Quinzel, Legal Counsel*" (ibid, 10.00). Bullock senses something is wrong and asks if they have met before. "*I seem to remember serving you a subpoena,*" Quinn sniffs*, "I recall it was a small subpoena*". The alpha male Bullock is instantly chastened, never to bother Quinn again.

In the episode *Harley and Ivy* (1993), Quinn appears as a junior league villain in comparison to the super-powered Ivy whose voice is deep, sophisticated, and seductive, reflecting the origin of the character as a dangerous femme fatale.

Quinn's voice, by way of contrast, is working class, high pitched and infantile, lending their interplay a mentoring element. This episode would go on to provide a foundational text to a new narrative strategy in the HQFU called Anti-Mad Love, in which Ivy replaces the Joker as Quinn's love interest and is discussed in greater depth in chapter four in this context. However, at this early stage, it is worthy of note that the "Harl-Ivy" relationship is not just relegated to this single BTAS episode in Zone One, but became a partnership which ran throughout the samples, the 1993 comic strip *Batgirl: Day One* (Puckett and Parobeck) pitting the pair against the titular crime fighter on her first adventure (Fig.12).

Quinn's presence in *Batgirl: Day One* is surprisingly threatening when contextualised against her appearances in the other Pre-Mad Love works and sees her attack the hero with a variety of weapons, including - for the first time - her iconic baseball bat. Prior to this point, Quinn's weaponry had been jokey, but there was nothing clown like about the Magnum pistol deployed in this scene which placed Batgirl in genuine danger (Fig.13).

This antagonistic and violently dangerous version of Quinn did not appear again in any of the further BTAS works in Zone One and was, therefore, an aberrant sample. This variant, however, did appear as a DC "Villain of the Week" in Zone Two storylines such as *Justice League 3001* to provide one-dimensional menace.
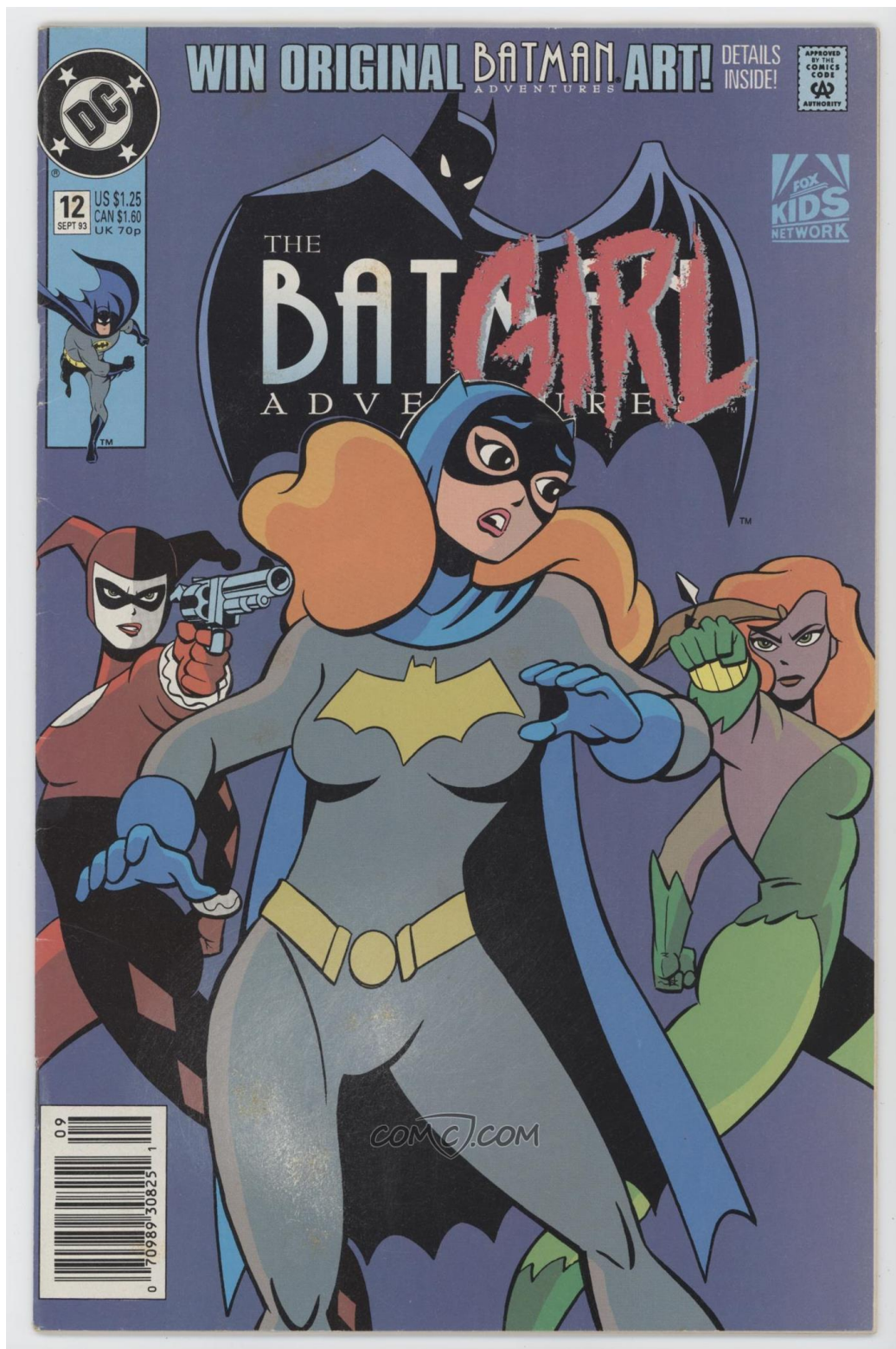
Fig 12: *The Batman Adventures* #12 Cover. Artwork by Parobeck,1993.

Fig. 13: *Batgirl - Day One* (Puckett and Parobeck,1993, p.16)

Quinn's rivalry with Batgirl also formed the central storyline of *Batman: Arkham Knight - Batgirl/Harley Quinn* (Seeley and Clark, 2016) which, as discussed on p.138 of this chapter, contained several commonalities with the *Batgirl: Day One* storyline.

Quinn's relationship with Poison Ivy would develop slowly over the course of the HQFU, and Ivy's appearance in the Pre-Mad Love BTAS texts is only of significant note when contextualised against future developments in the fictional universe. For between 1992 and 1993, Quinn's function as the Joker's girlfriend was her dominant character function and the Pre-Mad Love appearances consistently reinforced this status and her role in

the Joker's gang. However, in these early episodes, there was also something more domestically intimate between Quinn and the archvillain than the usual function of a moll and this differentiated Quinn from just becoming feminine background furniture. A striking scene in *Joker's Favor* (1992) shows Quinn cutting the Joker's hair, the narcissistic villain clearly happy to trust her with his appearance and flattered by her haircut (9:06). The Joker even brims with a form of pride when he introduces, "*Miss Quinn,*" as his associate in *The Laughing Fish* (1993, 04:01), whilst in *Harley and Ivy,* the Joker bemoans Quinn leaving him because she always kept their home tidy and now, without her guidance, he is unable to find his socks (1993, 12:44). This plaintive domestic need is a startling admission from a character usually typified by omnipotence and mystique, and one which demonstrated that the Joker's relationship with Quinn had fulfilled Dini's ambition to ground the monster.

The aim to make the Joker more three-dimensional may have paid off with the introduction of Harley Quinn but it also rooted the character in a real-world evil: domestic violence. For although Dini intended Quinn and the Joker to have a knockabout "Punch and Judy" relationship, the Pre-Mad Love episodes portray this punching as decidedly one way, with the Joker gleefully engaged in tormenting a child-like Quinn.

This objectifying removal of agency from an adult woman is most distastefully manifested in *The Laughing Fish*. Here, Quinn plays the role of housewife, complete with "*Kiss the Cook*" apron, who takes part in a mock TV taste test commercial to promote the Joker's new scheme. During the live broadcast of the commercial, the Joker pushes a spoonful of mushed fish to Quinn's mouth who stammers in reaction that she has, "*This little problem with fish,*" suggestive of an allergy. The Joker,

however, still violently forces the food down her throat, causing Quinn to roll her eyes and run off screen to vomit (1993, 06:53). Later in the episode, the Joker appears to want to make amends for this abuse and promises to make Quinn a mermaid in the next commercial. This elicits a childish squeal of delight from Quinn, only for a fake fish head to be shoved unceremoniously onto her head. "*You're sick, you know that boss*," she gripes in a defeated voice, the shine of the relationship clearly beginning to wear thin (ibid, 14.51). However, when the Joker is believed to be dead at the climax of the episode, Harvey Bullock describes the villain to Quinn as a, "*Demented, abusive, psychotic maniac,*" to which she ruefully notes, "*Yeah, I'm really going to miss him*" (ibid, 21:10). This line foreshadows *Mad Love* and reveals that Quinn is trapped within the Joker's influence, not through force, but by her own romantic fantasies, the character fully aware of her own culpability in the continuation of abuse.

The *Laughing Fish* episode depicts psychological bullying but the first act of true physical violence towards Quinn appears in the episode, *The Man Who Killed Batman* (1993). In the middle of the episode, the Joker gang rob a jewellery store to flush out Batman, but the hero fails to appear. This sends the Joker into a rage, convinced that someone else has stolen the pleasure of murdering his nemesis from him. At this point, Quinn wanders into the scene overjoyed and covered in sparkling necklaces, promised to her by the villain earlier in the episode. The Joker furiously orders her to take them off and when a confused Quinn stammers, "*Oh Mister J, you are such a kidder!*" he pushes her violently to the floor, where she trembles like a terrified child (ibid, 14:15). As this chapter will later explore on p.133, Dini's later BTAS revival work *Harley Loves Joker* (2017) portrays Quinn's abuse in unmediated terms as an expectation and trope of her relationship which Quinn interprets as romantic attention. But in these early BTAS

episodes, Dini is keen to constantly pull back the curtain on the couple and show the stark reality that Quinn's romance is all in her head. This is achieved by contextualising the abusive behaviour towards Quinn, with the critical voices of characters such as Poison Ivy and Harvey Bullock, who are notably absent in later narratives such as *Harley Loves Joker* to provide commentary. In this episode, Quinn's behaviour also oscillates wildly between displays of sharp intelligence and childishness, at one point being used for the outlandish purpose of playing the hymn *Amazing Grace* (Excell and Newton, 1779) on a kazoo as a criminal is dropped into an acid bath (1993, 17:14). The act of violence towards her in the previous scenes, however, gives this playful mood a sour taste which undercuts the slapstick comedy with a tragic undertone, an approach later reified in *Mad Love* but notably absent from some of the later variants.

Although laying down the foundations of *Mad Love*, the Pre-Mad Love episodes also reveal that Quinn's origin story as the Joker's psychiatrist was not the first back story she had on the show. In the Genesis Text *Joker's Favor,* Quinn bemoans, "*Oy, beauty school is looking good about now*!" (1992, 19.00) which invokes a working-class Jewish background - and presumably the source of her hairdressing skills - whilst in the episode *The Man Who Killed Batman* (1993), Quinn displays a confidence of legal practice. These variations are evidence that the character was evolving constantly during the BTAS production window, and her abilities changed according to whatever costume the story necessitated her to wear that week. This was why the *Mad Love* origin story - revealed in comic books in December 1993 and then paraphrased in the episode *Trial* in May 1994 - not only concretely reinforced the relationship between Quinn and the Joker but tied off the aberrant story strands of these first exploratory narratives. Creation of this Retrogenesis Text was, therefore, an act of thematic consolidation which tidied up a selection of ephemeral, contradictory and insensible

characteristics into a coherent form, derived from the themes of Affiliation that had

emerged from episodes focusing on Quinn's relationships with the Joker and Ivy.

As this section has explored, Harley Quinn was created for the functional purpose of re-

contextualising the Joker, a mainstay of the BFU since the 1940s who needed

refreshing for a new audience. As this next section discusses, however, by writing such

a powerful and tragic origin story for Quinn, Paul Dini turned her from a plot device and

object, whose function was embedded in another character, to one of the main subjects

of the BTAS storyworld; a character whose success would ultimately eclipse her lover

and position her at the centre of her own fictional universe.

3.3. BTAS - Mad Love

Mad Love (Dini and Timm, 1993) - a one shot comic book derived from the BTAS

spin off title *The Batman Adventures* – told the story of how Arkham Asylum

psychiatrist Dr. Harleen Quinzel became seduced by the imprisoned Joker and

transformed into the villainous Harley Quinn. Throughout the HQFU samples

analysed by this study, this origin story was found in a remediated form across all

platforms, informing and guiding the character's presence in the property's

associated storyworlds until the present day. This section traces the importance of

Mad Love as a story articulation of Quinn's Genesis Principle, which became the

foundational narrative of the HQFU for almost twenty years until *The Hunt for Harley*

Quinn (Glass *et al.*, 2012).

In the documentary *The Concepting of Harley Quinn* (2003), creator Paul Dini

described the writing of *Mad Love* as a deliberate act of character reification which

he hoped would provide guiding principles to any future creatives who wanted to take

the Harley Quinn character forward. Dini acknowledged that the character's affection for the Joker in the Pre-Mad Love episodes was inexplicably bizarre which made Quinn superficial and unrelatable. By adding her previous profession to the mix, and the Joker's role in her decline, Quinn's story therefore became tragic. This tragic undercurrent ran throughout all of Quinn's adventures from this point onwards in the BFU and was consistently noted as an undercurrent in Zone Two of the HQFU samples.

Mad Love is subtitled, "*Psychotic Mass Murdering Clowns and the Women who Love Them,*" which suggests a comedic piece, but the work is far from that as failure dogs Quinn at every stage. The comic book begins with a failed attempt by the Joker to lure Batman into a trap at a dental office, tipped off too early by Quinn who leaves a set of chattering teeth at a previous crime scene. Batman tells the villain that he is losing his edge which sends the Joker into a frustrated rage. Grabbing Quinn by the head-dress, the Joker screams, "*I give the punchlines around here!*" (1993, p.14), furious at Quinn's constant interference in his schemes.

In these early scenes, Quinn is portrayed as a juvenile figure, but Batman rejects a framing of her as a victim. The hero narrates how her, "*Playful exterior hides an obsessive and dangerous mind*" (ibid, p.18), and recalls how Quinn - whilst an exceptional gymnast at university - was an academic dud who received a high grade for her university thesis after trading sex with a psychology tutor. This undercuts Quinn's later recollections from her past in which she appears as a professional figure; Batman's warning that "*From the beginning Harley Quinn was no angel*" (ibid) highlighting Quinn's role as unreliable narrator throughout the work.

The narrative then continues the sexual theme by cutting to the other side of town where Quinn, still masked but dressed in a skimpy red night dress, is attempting to seduce a disinterested Joker. As she rolls about on the Joker's desk, and suggests that he, "*Rev up his Harley*" (ibid, p.21), Quinn's use of her sexuality to secure advantage is clear. Artist Bruce Timm, in his notes to the deluxe 2015 version of *Mad Love,* recalled that DC comics requested the sexuality of Quinn in these frames to be toned down as his original images displayed Quinn on her back with legs spread. This recollection, when placed in the context of Paul Dini's reminiscences that Timm would show him, "*Sexy poses*" (ibid, p.7) of Quinn during development makes it clear that the character's traits at this stage were directed towards the male gaze and that her creators were objectifying Quinn as much as the Joker.

Angered by her interference in the earlier encounter with Batman, the Joker rejects Quinn's advances and kicks her out on the street with the rebuke, "*Don't call me Puddin*'!" (ibid, p.26). This rejection is a deliberately stinging blow to Quinn, "Puddin'*"* being her oft deployed name of affection for the villain. Although the origin of the nickname is not explained in BTAS, and debated in fan conjecture (Tyler, 2019), the term is clearly designed to display affiliation, and becomes another element of Quinn's Genesis Principle codified in this Retrogenesis Text alongside her unbridled sexuality on display in this scene.

The flashback content of *Mad Love* then begins in earnest as a homeless Quinn reflects back on her life as Doctor Harleen Quinzel and wonders how her life became "*Looney Tunes*" (2015, p.27). Quinzel, in the Arkham Asylum flashbacks which follow, appears conservative and buttoned down, combining a white medical coat with sensible glasses and a tight blonde ponytail in an image of impervious

professionalism. Informed by her superiors that the Joker will, "*Eat you for breakfast*"
(ibid, p.30) Quinzel expects a fearsome reception at their first meeting but is, instead,
wrong footed by the Joker, who shares a story of how his father drunkenly beat him
as a child. With tears welling behind Quinzel's glasses, her empathy becomes her
undoing, summarised by her recollection:

> "*In the weeks ahead, it soon became clear to me that the Joker, so often
> described as a raving homicidal madman was nothing more than a tortured
> soul crying out for love and acceptance. A lost, injured child looking to make
> the world laugh at his antics…yes, I admit it, as unprofessional as it sounds, I
> had fallen in love with my patient*" (ibid, p.37).

As a narrative articulation of Quinn's Genesis Principle of Affiliation, *Mad Love* wholly
revolves around Quinn's attempts to perpetuate a romantic relationship with the
Joker who she sees as a victim of circumstance. In doing so her rage is directed at
Batman who she sees as another tormentor to the Joker, and evidence of the
character's persecution by a hostile world who fails to understand him. This
motivates a deluded Quinzel to break the Joker out of Arkham Asylum as an ultimate
declaration of love. However, when Quinzel goes to free the Joker she is not dressed
in a sensible white coat, nor is her hair tied back in a professional manner. As seen
in Fig. 14, Quinzel is now Harley Quinn.

On first glance, this splash page on which Quinn first arrives in mask and Commedia
dell'arte costume appears to be a triumphant declaration of confident agency, and a
vivid release of a repressed persona. But when contextualised against Quinn's
motivations, the moment is revealed to be the opposite.

Fig 14: Harley Quinn Begins: *Mad Love* (Dini and Timm, 1993, p.42)

For Quinn's costume does not voice self-validation, but instead articulates her Unrecognised Virtue storyline, the whole enterprise an attempt to court the Joker's attention and make him adore her. Designed with the Joker's pleasure in mind, Quinzel's new name even enshrines her as his product and is derived from a previous exchange, when the Joker purrs to her,

> "*I like what I've heard about you, mostly the name Harley Quin-zel. Rework it a bit and you get Harley Quinn, like the classic clown character the Harlequin, the very spirit of fun and frivolity! You can see how I would be attracted to it. A name that puts a smile on my face*" (ibid, p.32).

Quinzel's new identity, therefore, only acts as a signifier of sub-ordination to the Joker, the name Harley Quinn codified by *Mad Love* as a further articulation of the Genesis Principle and an expression of Quinn's desperate desire for affiliation.

When designing BTAS characters, Bruce Timm worked from the premise that the male characters such as Joker, Two Face and Mister Freeze were victims of trauma and, therefore, their appearances were exaggerated in the manner of their pain. The female characters such as Catwoman, Poison Ivy and Talia Al Ghul, conversely, were self-confident vamps and therefore their sexuality was heightened by their feminine appearance. Quinn's trauma in the *Mad Love* storyline, differentiated her instantly from the other female characters because her identity was a construction designed to please a male character. Quite literally Quinzel remade herself in the Joker's image, and so Quinn's costume, whilst playful and allowing for her feminine curves to be accentuated, covers her from head to toe in such an enclosed manner that it suffocates any sense of the person underneath.

Reflective of the erasure of self which Quinn suffered at the hands of the Joker, this iconic costume becomes a storyworld constituent in the HQFU; an element of the fictional universe that every storyworld must reference or contextualise. Chapter four examines how the HQFU re-contextualises the *Mad Love* costume across a selection of storyworlds as diverse as Conner and Palmiotti's *Harley Quinn* series, *DC Comics Bombshells* and *DC Superhero Girls.* In addition, chapter five explores how two texts beyond the sampling period, the animated series *Harley Quinn,* and the comic book serial *Batman: White Knight,* examine the symbolism of the *Mad Love* costume. *Harley Quinn* interprets the costume as an exploitation trope - the kind of clothes an abuser makes the victim wear to display their lack of autonomy - whilst *White Knight* portrays it as a legacy trope which reinforces the longevity of the Quinn/Joker relationship and allows the original Harley Quinn to be differentiated from her copycats.

In his introduction to the deluxe edition of the book, Paul Dini describes the subject of *Mad Love* as, "*When you fall so passionately for a person (particularly the wrong person) that nothing else in the world matters*" (2015, p.7). This all-consuming obsession is articulated in the middle of the story when Quinn imagines herself as an Eisenhower era spouse; a housewife who toils over the oven whilst the Joker reads the newspaper, and twin toddlers cause chaos with a gun and an axe on the rug (1993, p.44). Dini's intent for the storyline to be an expression of the depths to which Quinn's fantasising becomes all-consuming, is made clear as the faces of the toddlers are infantile versions of Quinn and the Joker, her sickness turning her imagination inwards; everything now becoming an expression of her romantic fixation, even the identity of her imaginary children.

As befitting tragedy, Dini's narrative structure is designed so that the deeper Quinzel's backstory reveals the path to her past failures, the more her current story shows her making the same mistakes in the deluded confidence that she can still win the day. Believing herself to be a protagonist in a grand romance, Quinn captures Batman in the third act of *Mad Love* as a twisted attempt to pledge affiliation to the Joker. Rather than kill the hero, however, Quinn confides in him, using the Joker's drunken father anecdote as justification for her love. Quinn is shocked when Batman laughs. This is nothing more than one of the many sympathetic origin stories the villain has used to manipulate his prey over the years, he jibes. The Joker has no feelings for Quinn, Batman taunts, because from the moment he saw her, the villain had Quinn, "*Pegged as hired help*" (ibid, p.53). This revelation surprises and shocks Quinn, but there is no attempt, by the creators of the comic book, to show the Joker as anything other than a psychotic and manipulative killer. One newspaper headline Quinn devotedly holds after the villain's first escape reads, "*Joker still at large. Body count rises"* (ibid, p.38) and later, worried that Quinn's new scheme to kill Batman will end up with him being dubbed, "*Mr. Harley Quinn*" (ibid, p.56), the Joker runs over a pedestrian without a second's thought. Quinn is apparently the only person who does not see the Joker for the monster he truly is, but even that is about to change.

In the final act of *Mad Love*, Quinn delivers the imprisoned Batman to the Joker as a gift, only to receive the villain's full fury for embarrassing him. The scene culminates in Quinn being struck so hard, that she smashes through a window and falls into an alley five storeys below. Shown in Fig.15, the fall is covered in three panels by Bruce Timm (1993, pp.60-61) which illustrates both the violent impact of the act (Quinn's back arches from the force of the blow), and her wide-eyed horror that the man she

Fig 15: *Mad Love* (Dini and Timm, 1993, pp.60-61)

had just earlier defended to Batman with the lines, "*You're wrong ! My Puddin' does love me! He does*!" (ibid, p.54) was now her murderer.

Female police detective Renee Montoya is the first to discover Quinn's body. Smashed in an alley with her mouth trickling blood, Quinn reaches for Montoya and whispers, "*My fault, I didn't get the joke,*" (ibid, p.62); the archetypal reply of an abused partner who believes their lack of returned affection is due to a shortcoming of their own. Dini, however, is keen to discount *Mad Love* as a victim's story but sees the work instead as a cautionary tale about what happens when, "*Someone loves recklessly, obsessively and for too long*" (2015, p.7). The implication is that Quinn chooses her fate and her tragi-comic experiences allow the audience to, "*Catch a glimpse of ourselves in a funhouse mirror, distorted and all too willing to play the fool for someone we'd be much better off without*" (ibid). This description of the character makes a crucial use of the word "Play". Dini's perspective is that the intelligent woman Harleen Quinzel is playing the role of child-like Harley Quinn - not because she has lost her mind - but because, as Quinn explains in the *Man Who Killed Batman*, "*My boss likes me to wear a smile to work*" (1993, 11:07). Quinzel is courting the Joker through a performance designed to reflect his fantasies and desires; her constantly changing tone of voice from vacuous to professional suggesting that beneath the facile exterior of the clown girl act is a mature woman playing baby. On the 2003 Blu Ray commentary for *Harley and Ivy* (1993), Dini explains how he deliberately wrote Quinn's BTAS dialogue as a child would speak. *Mad Love* provides a dark rationale for this apparent arrested development: Quinzel

is frozen by the trauma of her attempted murder and remains in hiding behind the mask of Harley Quinn.

In the final scenes of *Mad Love*, Quinzel is wheel chaired into Arkham in casts and bandages, her body so damaged she is unable to even pull the bedclothes over herself. Quinzel, however, has seen the light and this last encounter has finally shown her the truth of her relationship. "*Never again. No more obsession,*" she narrates, *"No more craziness. No more Joker. I finally see that slime for what he really is*" (ibid, p.71). Quinzel's former boss - Joan Leland - is at the asylum and taunts her, "*How did it feel to be so dependent on a man, that you'd give up everything for him, gaining nothing in return*?" (ibid, p.72). The anguished Quinzel looks away to see a single stemmed rose by her bedside cabinet with the note, "*Feel Better Soon. J,*" and a smile returns to her face. "*It felt like a kiss,*" Quinzel replies in a hushed dreamy tone, her saucer eyes once again the crazed stare of Harley Quinn. The implication is clear. Quinzel has learned nothing from her trial. The Sisyphean cycle of abuse, epiphany and relapse will continue ad infinitum.

In summary, this section has examined the *Mad Love* text and has illustrated how this work reified the emergent Genesis Principle of Affiliation into a coherent story form. The Genesis Principle was derived from the Genesis Text *Joker's Favor* (1992), and other Pre-Mad Love storylines such as *The Laughing Fish* (1993), where Quinn sought the attention of the Joker, despite the heavy cost to her sense of self. This Genesis Principle was then made concrete by the Retrogenesis Text *Mad Love* which detailed how even the Harley Quinn name and costume reflected the erasure of self undertaken by Doctor Harleen Quinzel in pursuit of affirmation.

As later sections of this thesis will explore, this Retrogenesis Text then provided a narrative strategy to Quinn's BTAS (and then BFU) storylines based upon the Romance narrative of the Unrecognised Virtue. Other storyworlds, which then emerged over the lifetime of the HQFU from 2011 onwards, transformed this Romance story into a Personal Drama narrative as Quinn broke the cycle established by Mad Love and ended her relationship with the Joker, eventually consummating a relationship with Poison Ivy. That these storyworlds contained non-synchronous content to BTAS was inconsequential, as they were contextualised against *Mad Love* which was a story expression of the Genesis Principle of Affiliation, and therefore the centre of gravity to the fictional universe.

The next section of this chapter examines how the BTAS texts which followed the publication of Mad Love assimilated and remediated the Retrogenesis Text in order to maintain fidelity to the Genesis Principle.

3.4 BTAS: After Mad Love

The Mad Love narrative strategy, described in the previous section, highlighted the importance of polymorphic content to the emerging structure of Quinn's fictional universe. For whilst BTAS was Quinn's Genesis Platform, her origin story was disseminated by a spin off from a peripheral comic book, *The Batman Adventures*. As influential as it became, the storyline of the Retrogenesis Text *Mad Love* would not have contained canonical content to the BTAS storyworld had it not been remediated back to the Genesis Platform in the form of the episode *Trial* (1994), where it became reified content for the television viewership. This move not only emphasised the importance of the Genesis Platform in the Retrogenesis process of the character but foreshadowed a similar exchange which occurred when Quinn was

absorbed into the core of the Batman Fictional Universe through the comic book *Batman: Harley Quinn* (Dini, Guichet and Sowd, 1999).

Following the publication of *Mad Love*, a polarisation was evident in how BTAS portrayed Quinn. In the episode *Trial* (1994), Batman is trapped in Arkham Asylum and put through a kangaroo court by the inmates. Quinn's official statement, ostensibly in defence of Batman, is nothing of the sort and is just designed to ingratiate her more with the Joker who is acting in the role of judge. "*I just want to say if there was no Batman, there would be no Joker and so I wouldn't have met my lovely Puddin' so thank you Batman*" (ibid, 12.00), Quinn squeaks, seemingly as sycophantic as ever. But when it is revealed that the Joker gave the police information on Quinn to reduce his sentence, she immediately dives for the villain's throat and is dragged from the court kicking and screaming that she is going to, "*Kick the grin off your silly face!*" Compared to earlier docile iterations, this version of Quinn is not afraid to take her fists to her partner and fulfil Dini's ambition for the "Punch and Judy" relationship. This developing streak of independence reaches its zenith in the episode *Harlequinade* (1994) which is analysed in the following chapter as it foreshadowed the Post-Mad Love strand of stories.

As the Harley Quinn character only transferred from the screen to other media halfway through Zone One, this grouping only contained four comic book works. The size of this grouping, however, belied the impact of the works. Analysis of these storylines revealed a split between personal drama and thriller, the works either deploying the character as a violent thug who wanted to cause chaos, or as a doting lover in a tragic romance whose sole wish was to establish and maintain a relationship with the Joker. So, although the Retrogenesis Text reinforced affiliation as the Genesis Principle of Harley

Quinn, the character was still emerging from the BFU and, therefore needed Quinn to partially maintain her role of villain to keep fidelity with this fictional universe.

The four comic book storylines came from the BTAS extension, *The Batman Adventures*. One of the comic book storylines, *Laughter After Midnight* (Dini, 1993) was largely inconsequential to this thesis as it focused on the Joker and treated Quinn as a throwaway character. Another of the storylines *Batgirl: Day One* (Puckett and Parobeck, 1993) was a thriller, discussed in the previous section, which portrayed Quinn as an antagonist to the hero. The remaining two storylines, *Mad Love* and *24 Hours* (Dini and Timm, 1993), however, were romances from the perspective of Quinn which both exercised an influence on the developing fictional universe.

The storyline *24 Hours* best exhibits the representation of Quinn in the BTAS works as a tragic, romantic figure whose undoing is caused by her motivation towards affiliation. This story was published as part of the *Batman Adventures Annual #1* whose publication date of September 1994 made it the last work in Zone One. The work, therefore, formed a totalising text for Zone One as it summarised the character in broad efficient strokes.

The Batman Adventures Annual #1 was comprised of four main stories by Paul Dini: *Going Straight*; *Laughter After Midnight*; *Cruise to Nightmare;* and *Jolly Ol' St. Nicholas. Going Straight* comprised three capsuled mini-storylines - *Going Straight*, *24 Hours* and *Study Hall -* and, although in terms of page numbers, *24 Hours* was a small part of the overall annual (four pages out of seventy-one) the story was the only one of two storylines within the publication to be seen entirely from an alternative perspective to a member of the Bat Family. This was significant for it reinforced Quinn's status as subject status within the animated series and the *24*

Hours storyline continued a trend to focus on Quinn as the centre of her own storylines.

Going Straight begins with Batman's recollection of tackling a jewel thief called Roxy Rocket who, to Batman's chagrin, has just been released two years into her significant prison sentence on parole. Frustrated that the criminals he spends his time chasing and capturing are supposedly rehabilitated and released, only to then fall back on criminal ways, Batman considers three further villains and their chances of staying clean: The Ventriloquist; Harley Quinn; and the Scarecrow. Aside from the linking narration from Alfred that Quinn only had, "*Herself to blame*" (ibid, p.97) for her circumstances, *24 Hours* is dialogue free and therefore relies upon Bruce Timm's succinct artwork to efficiently communicate the storyline over 22 panels. These are described below as they perfectly encapsulate Quinn's Zone One story beats.

Monday 9.30 a.m.

1. Quinzel grins as she packs up a suitcase in her Arkham Asylum cell, having been granted parole. She is dressed in civilian clothes with sensible tied back blonde hair.

2. Quinzel walks past the cell of the still imprisoned Poison Ivy and puts her hand sadly against Ivy's on the glass partition wall.

3. Quinzel stands at the gate of Arkham Asylum and shakes hands with the smiling staff in a good-natured gesture of farewell to her former colleagues.

4. Quinzel approaches a down at heel boarding house.

5. Before Quinzel can enter the boarding house, a loud HONK from the street attracts her attention.

6. Quinzel looks surprised at the source of the noise: a blacked-out limousine on the street.

7. The window of the limousine opens to reveal the Joker grinning.

8. Quinzel jumps with joy and leaps into the limousine, leaving behind a comedic trail of love hearts. Her protruding feet and ankles are the only sign of her.

This first act of the story reinforces Quinzel's powerlessness to remain on the straight and narrow in the face of the Joker, as she instantly returns to crime as soon as the villain smiles at her. This confirms both the motivation of the character to seek affiliation (also suggested by her tender farewell to Poison Ivy) and her role as the protagonist of an Unrecognised Virtue storyline (which is in her head a grand romance). Quinn's return to crime is foreshadowed by a photo of the Joker still being displayed on Quinzel's cell wall in the first panel which suggests that she has still to reject the villain's influence from her life.

Tuesday 2.46 a.m.

9. The word BOOM indicates that a huge explosion has taken place at the Gotham Jewellery Mart, the windows shattering with the impact.

10. Quinzel has now become Quinn who, along with associated goons, loot the broken vault of the jewellery market, her focus entirely fixed on a crown.

11. Quinn poses regally with the crown on her head, whilst the Joker only has eyes for a tray of sparkling diamonds. Both fail to notice the shadow of Batman in the vault behind them.

12. Batman's surprise attack fells the Joker with a single flying kick.

13. Quinn in return high kicks Batman in the face, knocking him to the ground with a BAM!

14. Batman rubs his head stunned as stars twirl around him. Quinn tends to an angry Joker who reaches for a gun in his pocket.

15. Quinn grins manically as the Joker points the gun at Batman.

16. Batman disarms the Joker with an outstretched leg.

17. The Joker pushes Quinn onto the prone Batman as distraction for an escape.

18. The Joker and henchmen escape with the diamonds - laughter lettered across the panel - as an embarrassed Quinn grins at Batman with a conciliatory look.

This second section not only reinforces Quinn as a violent accomplice to the Joker who is capable of felling Batman with a single kick in defence of her lover - as seen in *Batgirl: Day One* - but also highlights the tragic nature of her relationship, as reified in *Mad Love*. Quinn is clearly disposable to the Joker in this sequence and, despite her efforts and allegiance, the stolen diamonds were of more value to him.

Tuesday 9.30 a.m.

19. A police van enters the grounds of Arkham Asylum

20. Quinn - in costume bar head dress - is escorted by guards back down the familiar corridors, the staff dismayed at her return.

21. Quinn passes the cell of Poison Ivy and waves a weak greeting to her friend, stifled by handcuffs.

22. The lettering SLAM and CLICK emphasise Quinn's continued incarceration as she sits disconsolately on her bed; the story's one piece of dialogue, an exasperated "*Oy!*" (Fig. 16).

Fig. 16: Quinzel/Quinn (Dini and Timm, 1994, p.24)

This third and final act of the story reinforces the circular nature of the narrative and represents Quinn's life which is caught in a cycle of rehabilitation and relapse. Alfred may believe that Quinn has nobody else but herself to blame for her continued reoffending, but Dini's writing cuts deeper and suggests that the Joker's affection is a

narcotic to Quinn who is unable to quit crime because she is powerless to quit her attraction to him. Fig. 16 shows that the picture of the Joker has been turned to the wall behind Quinn, suggestive of a hopeful intent to try and kick the habit, but the storyline's circular narrative and tragic tone demonstrate otherwise. Quinn's toxic romance reignites in a single instant because her character is so intrinsically linked to her need for affiliation. Without a replacement for the Joker in this dynamic, Quinn has no purpose and will forever seek him out as he is the only desire which makes sense to her.

Although *Joker's Favor* is Quinn's Genesis text, and *Mad Love* is her Retrogenesis Text, *24 Hours* is her Totalising Text as it summarises all of Quinn's narratives from Zone One. Here is a vicious and capable accomplice of the Joker, whose association with the criminal is based upon an insatiable need for affiliation, her misguided notions of romance fuelling her villainous actions and deepening her Sisyphean futility. For the final image of Quinn in *24 Hours,* with tied back sensible blonde hair in the black and red clown costume, suggests there is no escape for Quinzel. She is now trapped forever inside Harley Quinn.

24 Hours was the last text analysed from Zone One but between 1994 and 2015, several BTAS related narratives were released which remediated the Mad Love narrative strategy in a manner which reinforced the Retrogenesis Text and informed the works of Zone Two. The next section of this chapter briefly details these works and the last BTAS related storyline of the content analysis phase, *Harley Loves Joker* (Dini, Palmiotti and Blevins, 2017).

3.5 Mad Love: Remediation

Between the two sampling periods, there were multiple attempts to remediate the *Mad Love* Retrogenesis Text across diverse transmedia platforms. Some, such as the BTAS episode *Mad Love* (1999) simply adapted the pages of the comic book almost verbatim and so require no further examination. Others, such as the comic book *Batman: Harley Quinn* (Dini, Guichet and Sowd, 1999) and the *Two of the Kind* episode from the animated series, *The Batman* (2007), altered the story to fit the new platform. This section examines these remediation texts and relates them to the Genesis Principle of Affiliation in order to contextualise the Mad Love variants of Zone Two.

In *Batman: Harley Quinn*, the events *of Mad Love* were codified for the pages of the main *Batman* continuity, with Quinn's origin story becoming canon for the BFU. This version of the story, however, spent less time on the Joker's seduction and instead, examined the Quinzel to Quinn transformation, which was entirely absent from the comic book *Mad Love*. This approach was endemic of the other remediation narratives in this section, which addressed (or re-assessed) elements missing from *Mad Love* without altering the thematic fabric of the storyline.

Dini's 1999 revision begins identically to *Mad Love* with Harleen Quinzel working as an intern at Arkham Asylum. Unlike the Retrogenesis Text, however, which spends time on the seduction, Quinzel's attraction to the Joker in the 1999 work is throwaway and summarised by the lines, "*His charm was irresistible. What can I tell ya? The guy just did it for me*" (ibid, p.4). This lack of a convincing seduction makes Quinzel more superficial, but the remediation of the story also gives her far more agency towards the creation of her alter ego. For unlike the Harley Quinn character

appearing in a dynamic flash to free the Joker, it is the intern Quinzel who surreptitiously releases the villain from Arkham Asylum before being caught and imprisoned. By the time of the events depicted in the *Batman* crossover event, *No Man's Land* (1999) - in which Gotham City becomes a post-apocalyptic wasteland due to an earthquake - the captive Quinzel is long forgotten and a footnote in the life of the Joker. This means that nobody is paying attention when she escapes a ruined Arkham and reinvents herself as Harley Quinn, the transformation a private affair which takes place away from the spotlight of public attention.

In the comic book *Mad Love*, Quinn declares her name as she commits her first big crime but in the 1999 revision, Quinzel doesn't use the name Harley Quinn in her first encounters at all. Instead, after a montage in which she chooses her outfit, Quinzel greets her new alter ego in the mirror with simply, "*Hello gorgeous*" (ibid, p.14). The Harley Quinn moniker is only revealed in her first confrontation with Batman, which makes it less of an obvious device to court the Joker's attention and more of a transgressive alter ego Quinzel uses to provoke authority with. The character, however, is no less obsessive in her affections towards the Joker, with Quinn explaining the motivation behind her new costume as, "*I wanted to let the world know I was his and his alone*" (ibid).

After a more extended lead up to reuniting with the Joker in the ruined Gotham City, the 1999 storyline then follows the same beats as the Retrogenesis Text, with Quinn's attempts to win the villain's affections by delivering him Batman, ultimately making the Joker feel threatened and murderous towards her. This revision, however, goes on to contain a significant foreshadowing of the HQFU's future direction when Quinn's broken body is discovered by Poison Ivy. This is the

beginning of the couple's relationship in the canonical BFU, with Quinn's whole origin story being narrated to Ivy in flashback. After taking pity on her, Ivy then supports Quinn's recovery by granting her chemical-based superpowers so she can now defend herself from the Joker. This explains the preternatural gymnastic ability Quinn deploys in her storylines from this point, and her almost bullet proof presence in action-based storyworlds such as *Suicide Squad.* Such abilities were accepted in the more comic BTAS storyworld but would have been fantastical in the more grounded world of the main *Batman* title and so needed an explanation. By making Ivy the source of Quinn's superpowers, this work, therefore, becomes not just a remediation of *Mad Love* but also a remediation of the BTAS episode *Harley and Ivy* (1993) and forms an efficient articulation of the Genesis Principle by exploring Quinn's two major affiliative relationships in one origin storyline.

The 1999 remediation of *Batman: Harley Quinn* proved successful, and this version of the character would go on to appear in the BFU until the Retrogenesis Text, *The Hunt for Harley Quinn* (Glass *et.al,* 2012). During this time, Paul Dini also revisited *Mad Love* for another animated peripheral series, *The Batman* (2007) which afforded him the opportunity to experiment with Quinn's origin storyline in a non-canonical space.

In the episode *Two of a Kind*, Quinzel is the host of a daytime television show where her pop psychology spots are watched obsessively by the Joker. One day the villain invites Quinzel for an interview to save her waning ratings, and she accepts with the hopes that this unprecedented access will help her write a successful book about the supervillain. The Joker suggests she join him on a crime spree for observational research purposes, and when given the choice in his lair, Quinn picks her iconic red

and black outfit from the Joker's costume rack as the most comprehensive way to disguise her celebrity during this trip. The events of the evening, however, spin out of control and make Quinzel an accessory to crime. Rather than hand herself in, she continues to play the role of the Joker's stooge, mutating into Harley Quinn whilst on the run.

Two of Kind is a fascinating revision by Dini of his original *Mad Love* text. The story turns the tables on the couple, with the Joker admiring Quinzel's celebrity instead of her being the naïve ingénue who is in thrall to him (although it is stressed in the episode that she only has an online degree in psychology). The piece also clears up some of the more unrealistic elements to the *Mad Love* comic book such as Quinzel's overnight transformation into a master criminal and, crucially, it also adds a more tragic element to the iconography of Quinn's costume. In this Mad Love variant, it is not an act of self-expression which makes Quinzel don the red and black, but an act of disguise; a disguise she becomes trapped by and calcified within.

Quinn's remediation continued after this point, with the producers of a further animated series, *Batman: The Brave and the Bold* (2010), creating a wholly new and surreal origin story for the character, which bore no resemblance to any previous iteration. In the episode, *Emperor Joker*, the villain receives magical powers which bring his wax museum of classic comedy stars to life. Quinn is not named in this episode but is instead a 1920s flapper girl, a living waxwork complete with jewelled turban and anachronistic turn of phrase. Only named Harley Quinn later in the series, this variant is a fantasy of the Joker who has come to life without any independent agency. Entirely discarding the *Mad Love* concept of Harley Quinn as a pastiche of a movie gangster's moll being performed by Doctor Harleen Quinzel to impress her lover, this variant

renders Quinn down to a literal object and negates the inherent intelligence of the character. But although incongruous in terms of story, this work is congruent to the central theme of *Mad Love* that Quinn is a creation of the Joker which - although surreally contextualised - is still nonetheless present in this episode. This, therefore, makes *Emperor Joker* a thematic revision of *Mad Love* rather than a literal one, with a later film *Scooby-Doo! & Batman: The Brave and the Bold* (2018) revealing that this Quinn variant also ends up at Arkham Asylum where she becomes inseparable with Poison Ivy. Quinn's journey in *Batman: The Brave and the Bold*, therefore, follows the direction of the HQFU in focusing on this relationship, and demonstrates that even the most the divergent storyworlds ultimately maintain fidelity to the Genesis Principle.

The final example of *Mad Love* remediation in this section is the comic strip *Harley Loves Joker* (Dini, Palmiotti and Blevins, 2017). This BTAS revival strip was published as the back-up story to the *Harley Quinn* solo title in the lead up to the 25th Anniversary of the character and involved the couple in slapstick romantic comedy escapades. The tone of the piece was situation comedy which both belied Quinn's roots as a television character and her tragic nature, with the same repeated mistakes being recycled in each storyline of the strip in a circular narrative form. However, whilst the artwork and general tone appeared light, the subtext of abuse was never far from the surface. One example of this saw the Joker sneezing deliberately in Quinn's face (Fig. 17), whilst in another example he threatened to kill her if Quinn didn't stop tickling him. As this abuse went by without comment by any other character and was cheerily accepted by Quinn as the landscape of their relationship, the strip felt particularly distasteful, especially when placed within the context of the concurrent Post-Mad Love storylines examined in the next chapter in which the Joker genuinely attempted to kill Quinn.

As outmoded as it felt, *Harley Loves Joker*, reflected the Genesis Principle of the HQFU by portraying Quinn's obsessive desire to deepen relationships. By mimicking the content of the 1990s television show, in which Quinn consistently accepted the Joker's abuse as part of her relationship dynamic, however, it also perpetuated offensive abuse tropes. A two issue follow up serial, *Harley Loves Joker* (Dini and Blevins, 2018) addressed the abusive content of Quinn's relationship and is examined in Chapter Five of this thesis. The release of this work, however, did not negate any of the comic strips from 2017 in which this material was unmediated.

Fig 17: *Harley Loves Joker* (Dini, Palmiotti, and Blevins, 2017, p.4)

Harley Loves Joker (2017), therefore, highlights the dangers of remediation, in which content recycled from previous periods of time without commentary, leads to the reinforcement of prejudicial values and gender stereotypes, unacceptable to a modern audience. This is a situation avoided by regular Retrogenesis, where the process of re-contextualisation provides an opportunity for creators to update, comment upon and subvert the original text; although such a process - as discussed in the next chapter in the context of the Post-Mad Love and Anti-Mad Love narrative strategies - is not always without controversy and remains part of the negotiation process of a long running fictional universe between content creators and consumers.

In summary, the first part of this section outlined key versions of the *Mad Love* Retrogenesis Text which were remediated in key Batman comic books and texts from 1999 to 2010. These texts maintained fidelity to the Genesis Principle of Affiliation, despite variant story elements and settings, by focusing on Quinn's relationships. The latter part of this section examined the 2017 BTAS revival strip, *Harley Loves Joker* (2017) which was an example of non-variant Mad Love fidelity in the modern HQFU. But whilst appearing out of date, this work operated in thematic synchronicity with the fictional universe due to an emphasis on affiliation.

The following section examines how Harley Quinn was remediated in the world of videogames and how the Mad Love narrative strategy provided a Retrogenesis Text for a whole new storyworld: the Arkham-verse.

3.6. Mad Love in the Arkham-verse

The centre of the Arkham-verse storyworld is a series of Batman based action-adventure videogames from the UK based developer, Rocksteady Studios and the Canadian company W.B. Games, Montreal. The games, which began with *Batman: Arkham Asylum* (2009) and continued with sequels *Arkham City* (2011), *Arkham Origins* (2013) and *Arkham Knight* (2015), serve a similar function to BTAS; the games creating an extension storyworld which remediates the canonical narratives of the BFU into a different platform context. Academic Luke Arnott described the Arkham-verse works as "*Totalising Texts which eclipse competing Batman texts or assimilate those texts into its continuity*" (2016, p.1), due to the large amount of remediation which takes place in the series. But consistent remediation is not the only similarity the Arkham-verse works have with BTAS, for the videogames deploy the same roster of voice talent as the animated series with actors Kevin Conroy, Mark Hamill and Arleen Sorkin reprising their roles of Batman, the Joker and Harley Quinn in storylines adapted by the key BTAS creative Paul Dini. This section examines how this storyworld remediates the Mad Love narrative strategy and examines the ancillary comic books of the final game *Arkham Knight* which were part of the Zone Two content analysis sample.

In the context of Harley Quinn's remediation, the most relevant Arkham-verse videogame is *Arkham Origins* (2013). An interregnum between the epic storylines of *Arkham City* (2012) and *Arkham Knight* (2015), this game recontextualises Quinn's Retrogenesis Text in the Arkham-verse storyworld and portrays events which take place prior to Quinn's first appearance in *Batman: Arkham Asylum* (2009).

Quinn's appearance in *Arkham Origins* is revealed during an audio-visual cut

sequence which portrays an unnamed female psychologist carrying out an

evaluation of the Joker, who has just encountered Batman for the first time.

Throughout the sequence the Joker relates his feeling to the psychologist of meeting

someone who has changed his entire perspective on the world,

> "*You meet someone who changes your life, and you feel you don't even know*
>
> *who you are anymore. I used to think of fate as evil - predetermined not by*
>
> *some higher power but the rule of human nature. Now I understand, there are*
>
> *no chance encounters. It was all meant to be. Everything was leading up to*
>
> *who I met tonight*" (W.B. Games Montreal, 2013).

The scene is structured using dramatic irony. For although the player can see that

the Joker's monologue is about Batman, due to the dialogue being undercut by

frenetic montages of the two characters fighting, the psychologist on the soundtrack

becomes increasingly convinced that the Joker is talking about her, and

subsequently projects herself into the conversation.

The psychologist's line, "*You're someone who has never been afraid to fall,*" and the

Joker's reply, "*And here I am free falling and I didn't pack a chute*" (ibid) directly

reference dialogue from *Mad Love* and sketch the psychologist making an immediate

and needy connection with the Joker. The woman becomes desperate to know who

the Joker is talking about but all he teases is, "*Someone very, very special but I don't*

know their name yet". The cut scene then suddenly jumps back to the prison.

"*Harleen,*" the psychologist interjects, as if she couldn't reply quick enough, "*My*

name is Harleen Quinzel". At this point it becomes clear that this cut scene is a

remediation of the *Mad Love* therapy scenes, truncated and taking place in a

different space (Black Gate Prison) and a different time zone (towards the beginning of Batman's tenure).

The Joker is taken aback by this sudden interruption but quickly smells blood in the water and charmingly asks her, "*Oh what a pretty name. Do your friends call you Harley*?" Quinzel looks down in pain and replies that she doesn't have a lot of friends. "*Well Harley you got one now*" the Joker replies, grinning in self-satisfaction: seduction complete (ibid). Although, the *Mad Love* Retrogenesis Text has been remediated several times since 1993, the Arkham-verse revision is an important addition for it adds loneliness and isolation to Quinzel's psyche as a motivation for gravitating towards the Joker. This moves the story away from the original concept, in which Quinzel was a latently manipulative figure before she met the Joker, into a more tragic narrative where she is an innocent perverted by a desperate need for any kind of affiliation.

The relevance of *Arkham Origins* to this thesis is its foreshadowing relationship to the *Arkham Knight* works sampled in Zone Two. For although *Arkham Origins* contains part of the Arkham-verse Retrogenesis Text of Harley Quinn, it does not complete the storyline between Quinzel's first encounter with the Joker and the first appearance of a fully formed Harley Quinn in the game *Arkham Asylum* (2009). Instead, the events between these two games are covered through a selection of ancillary comic books, designed to support and promote the *Arkham Knight* game.

As will be examined in the next chapter, the events of *Mad Love* were comprehensively recontextualised in Zone Two storyworlds such as *Injustice, DC Comics Bombshells*, *Suicide Squad* and Conner/Palmiotti's *Harley Quinn* through the prism of critique. Any romantic veneer to the abuse storyline was reduced or

removed in these works. However, in the case of the Arkham-verse samples, the *Mad Love* storyline was fully embraced, with Quinn's sexuality and viciousness pushed to the fore in full blooded support of the Joker. Content analysis, therefore, of the Arkham-verse related comic books revealed the same tragic Unrecognised Virtue storyline as Quinn's original BTAS texts and the BTAS revival comic strip *Harley Loves Joker* (2017). Quinn was portrayed as a love sick Joker groupie in these texts, and therefore, during the content analysis stage, was revealed to be Zone Two's direct transmodal equivalent of her BTAS iteration.

The storyline *Caged Animals* from *Arkham Knight: Batgirl/ Harley Quinn* (Seeley and Clark, 2015*)* picks up events a few months after the previously discussed cut scene in *Arkham Origins* and continues Quinn's Retrogenesis in the context of the Arkham-verse storyworld. Quinzel and the Joker are by now fully engaged in a clandestine romantic relationship through the glass of his prison cell, but the authorities are wise to Quinzel's attempts to manipulate clemency and intend to transfer her. Quinzel realises she is powerless to help the Joker inside the institution but can, instead, carry on his work outside the walls. She, therefore, makes a deal with the arch-villain,

> "*If I can't get you out, I can at least make sure someone is putting a smile on Gotham's face in your honour. I mean Batman has Batgirl, and you always liked that my name sounded like "Harlequin". Share your most intimate and diabolical details with me and I'll execute them AND the Bats for you. What d'ya say Mistah J?*" (Seeley and Clark, 2015, #1, p.12).

The following splash page (Fig. 18) shows the skeletal face of the Joker, his hand pressed to the glass, a maniacal grin on his face as he strikes this Faustian Pact with a charming, "*It's a pleasure to meet you - Harley Quinn*" (ibid, p.13).

Fig. 18: *Caged Animals - Part One* (Seeley and Clark, 2015, #1, p.13)

Although this scene positions Quinn's relationship with the Joker in the manner of Philip Parker's the Debt that Must Be Repaid storyline, Quinn's motivations in the narrative are entirely based upon impressing the villain, a desire to affiliate with him so strong that Quinn agrees to make herself culpable for his crimes.

Quinn's positioning of herself as a pseudo-Batgirl figure in this scene is telling as it positions the Joker into a paternalistic and superior role and reinforces her subordinate status. This may seem like the strategy of a skilled manipulator, attempting to navigate around an alpha male through flattery, but later in the narrative it becomes clear that Quinzel sees herself in this juvenile way, when she assumes the Harley Quinn identity. Batgirl and Harley Quinn were both created for television extensions of the BFU and so have negotiated their place in the main canon of the comic books. Whilst Quinn's origin in BTAS, as a method of making the Joker more relatable, has been discussed throughout this thesis, it is also an interesting point of note that Batgirl was created in 1967 to serve a similar function to Adam West's post-modern version of the Batman character in the 20th Century Fox television series.

Batgirl is a teenage character designed to capture the imagination of a young female audience and maintains this function to the present day through *the DC Superhero Girls* storyworld, but unlike Harley Quinn - who injected a whole new story into the BFU - only the name Barbara Gordon and filial relationship with Police Commissioner James Gordon were remediated into the comic book canon from Batgirl's Genesis Platform. The character's Genesis Principle of (Women's) Liberation positions Batgirl as the thematic opposite of Harley Quinn whose existence - in the Mad Love narrative strategy - is entirely based upon securing the attention and affection of a man. Therefore, when the two tangle, as evidenced by several texts in the content analysis samples, the conflict generates genuine friction. The storyline of *Caged Animals* is no different and sees the first encounter between the characters take place when Quinn attacks a carnival.

In the BTAS comic strip *Batgirl - Day One* (Puckett and Parobeck, 1993) Quinn's response on seeing the costumed hero for the first time, was to ask "*Who are you? Batman's Squeeze?*" (ibid, p.6) revealing Quinn's perspective that powerful women are only positioned as such by the status of their sexual partners. The same level of juvenile personal insult is thrown at Batgirl in *Caged Animals* with Quinn snapping, "*No way sister! Only one of us is getting to impress her boyfriend today!*" (2015, #2, p.11). This through line locates Quinn's immature personality as evocative of a high school girl, endemic of the lonely figure the Joker met in *Arkham Origins* whose chance to shine is now stolen by a more popular rival. This scene is impressive for the way in which writer Paul Seeley moves on Dini's *Mad Love* storyline by having Quinzel openly court attention for her actions in the manner of an insecure child. In contrast to the sexually devious Quinzel of *Mad Love*, the Arkham-verse Quinzel is a repressed soul who has never articulated her sexuality before and, therefore, when she explodes like a sexual hand grenade, she wants everyone to know it, doubly so in the case of her crush object, the Joker.

The declaration of Quinzel's new identity, however, is frustrated by Batgirl who winds Quinzel before she can publicly announce the Harley Quinn name and, therefore, denies her the moment which since *Mad Love* has become an important moment of identity positioning. Batgirl punctures Quinn inflated sense of self-importance by describing her new alter ego as, "*Jokerette. A fan girl, a copycat*" (ibid, p.13) and plays a proxy Batman role, challenging Quinn to wake up and smell the Joker's manipulation. Quinn rejects Batgirl's reality check during the heat of battle but, in the final scene of *Caged Animals,* begins to suspect that her paramour is not entirely genuine and that this teenage crimefighter may have a point.

In one of the most lucid encapsulations of her relationship with the Joker in the content analysis samples, Quinzel reaches a moment of clarity and attempts to pull back from the brink. "*Maybe I did fall for your games but at least I'm not the one in a cage!*" (ibid, p.20) she snarls at him, after he chastises Quinzel for her failure at the carnival. Instead of reacting with hostility, the Joker instantly defuses the situation by gifting Quinzel a rose made of playing cards which instantly gratifies her need for positive affiliation. The Joker then plaintively asks if Quinzel would be interested in carrying out any more plans from his journal? Quinzel is shocked. The Joker still wishes to work with her after her failures? "*Of course, my dear,*" the Joker replies. The final splash page of the comic book (Fig.19) shows Quinzel in the same position as the Joker in Fig.18. Except this ironic image is not one of joy, success, or victory. For despite the smile on Quinn's face - validation having been fully received and welcomed - the Joker's speech bubble, "[*Only] one of us is in a cage,*" (ibid, p.22) underlines that some prisons - such as the one Quinzel is happily dancing into - are without walls.

Section 4 of chapter four examines the comic book extensions within the *Injustice* storyworld. As with the ancillary comic books of *Arkham Knight*, these works are designed to promote and explore the world of a videogame extension and are yet so well written that they flesh out Quinn's storyline in a more grounded way than many of the other outlandish works in her fictional universe. The Arkham-verse works provide a transmodal approach to Quinn, which in a fluent remediation of her BTAS works portray her as eminently tragic. This tragic element is positioned in relationship to *Mad Love* by the Batgirl/Harley Quinn storyline and is further typified by Quinn's role in the comic book *Arkham Knight: Genesis* (2015).
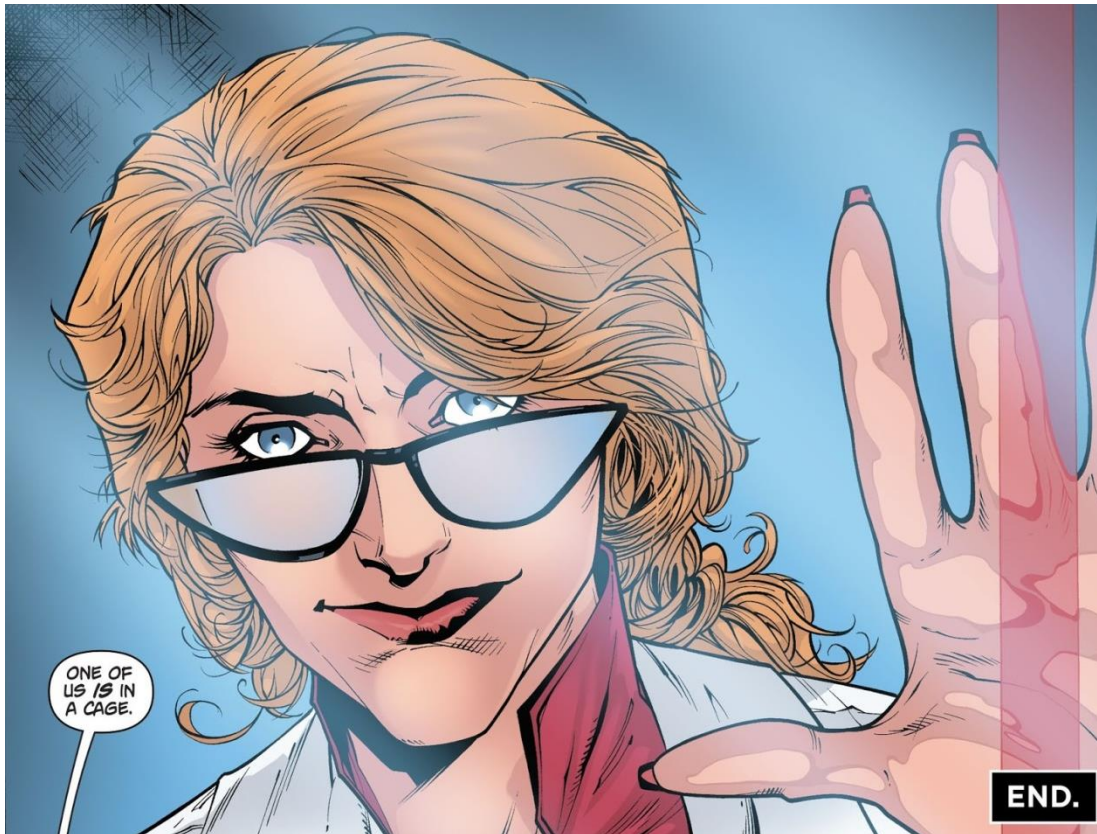
Fig 19: *Caged Animals - Part Two* (Seeley and Clark, 2015, #2, p.22)

The Arkham Knight of the game's title - a mythical super villain who keeps the other villains under control - is the second Robin (Jason Todd) who is believed to have been murdered by the Joker in events prior to the game, and who now plots revenge on Batman for abandoning him. This is a remediation of the Batman story arc *Under the Hood* (Winick and Mahnke, 2004 - 2005) in which the murdered, and then resurrected, Todd returned to Gotham wearing a red hood. A symbol of the Joker's former identity, before he tumbled into the chemical vat which stained his face white, the red hood is now worn by Todd to taunt the villain.

In *Under the Hood*, Todd is tortured by the Joker but the comic book, *Arkham Knight: Genesis* (2015) - which remediates the same events - reveals that it was Quinn who tortured Todd in the days leading up to his murder, for no other purpose than to please

her lover. This portrayal of Quinn, by writer Peter Tomasi, is a crueller version than the Dini iteration, but nonetheless fully embodies the Genesis Principle of Affiliation, her torture and eventual complicity in the murder of Jason Todd entirely motivated by her desire to strengthen her romantic relationship. *Arkham Knight: Genesis* also reinforces the Sisyphean element of Quinn's life - indicated in the BTAS comic book *24 Hours* (Dini and Timm,1994) - as her actions in the comic book instigate Todd's revenge on the Joker for his murder. With the Joker now dead by the time of Todd's return, it is Quinn who now pays the price for her misguided relationship, her past transgressions coming back to haunt and destroy her.

This grounded quality in the Arkham-verse works represents a continuity of depth from BTAS, but their remediation is more adult orientated in nature. This is no more evident than when the works explore Quinn's sexuality; the first two adventures continuing to portray her in the BTAS role of a dangerous and capable supplicant to the Joker, only with the heightened carnal nature of an adult film performer with increasingly fetish-based wardrobe choices. Quinn's introduction in *Arkham Asylum* (2009) reveals that this provocative dress sense is another layer to Quinzel's performance as Harley Quinn. Knowingly solicitating Batman's opinion on her near pornographic nurse's uniform, Quinn displays a more weaponised, yet faithful, expression of the unbridled and powerful sexuality she used to her advantage in *Mad Love*. In the follow up game *Arkham City* (2011), which is set in a giant prison, Quinn wears an inappropriate crop top and tight leather pants, a look which supporting characters make constant reference to on the soundtrack as being too arousing for the locale. As Quinn brandishes these clothes to please the Joker, it becomes an extension of her affection for him, and although the opposite of her BTAS costume - as it reveals a significant amount of Quinn's body – this provocative dress sense performs the same function in deepening

her affiliation to her lover. As previously discussed in this section, this version of Quinn was presented in *Arkham Origins* as a lonely cloying figure and her sexualised appearance is redolent of a frustrated lasciviousness finally given the opportunity for expression. By the series conclusion, *Arkham Knight*, Quinn is wearing a steampunk leather corset which accentuates her bust to large proportions (Fig. 20). At this point in the story, however, the Joker is dead, and Quinn is the head of an underworld gang, so the link between sexualisation and supplication in her clothes has been broken. This is now an empowered and liberated Quinn, who owns her sexuality in a markedly different way to her sycophantic Mad Love variants earlier in the series. Her final storyline in the Arkham-verse storyworld allows videogame players for the first time to control Quinn as she uses her super human abilities to free her soul mate Poison Ivy from Blüdhaven Police Department in the *Harley Quinn Story pack* (2015). This not only evidences the growing popularity of Quinn that she is granted playable character status, but also demonstrates a skewing of the Arkham-verse towards eventual fidelity with the Anti-Mad Love narrative strategy of the HQFU, by placing an emphasis on her relationship with Ivy in a world without the Joker.

In summary, the transmedia approach of the Arkham-verse works remains a cogent illustration of how the Genesis Principle unifies Quinn's role across the transmodal storyworld through remediation of her Retrogenesis Text. For whilst writer Paul Dini had left the property by the time of *Arkham Origins*, the Retrogenesis principle he established with *Mad Love*, and furthered in the videogame *Arkham Asylum* continued to inform the storyworld. This was seen on a story level with events from *Mad Love* remediated across the storyworld in the Retrogenesis Texts *Arkham Origins* and *Arkham Knight: Batgirl/ Harley Quinn*, whilst the overall content of the

storyworld evidenced thematic fidelity to the Genesis Principle of Affiliation in works such as *Arkham Knight: Genesis.*

The next section of this chapter examines how the tragic Mad Love narrative strategy is remediated in works aimed at children, where the more adult orientated aspect of the material is excised on a story level but remediated, instead, through an increased focus on thematic expression of the Genesis Principle.

Fig. 20: *Batman: Arkham Knight - Harley Quinn Story Pack* Cover (2015)

3.7. Mad Love Junior

By 2015, Zone Two of the content analysis phase revealed that the HQFU had moved on from the Mad Love narrative strategy to examine alternative approaches to Quinn's relationships. However, several storyworlds continued to reiterate the *Mad Love* Retrogenesis Text, predominately through works associated with the Lego toy brand. This section examines how these Quinn variants remained closer to her BTAS iteration than other contemporary HQFU media and illustrated the Genesis Principle in action on a thematic, rather than literal, level.

The storyworld which evidenced the greatest fidelity with the Mad Love Retrogenesis Text was the *Lego DC Comics Superheroes* storyworld (LDCS). In the guide to this storyworld - *Lego DC Comics Super Heroes : The World of Lego Batman* (2016) - Quinn was a straight Mad Love remediation; her black and red two-tone outfit and "*I Heart Joker*" car number plate evidencing affiliation without equivocation,

> "*Once upon a time, Dr. Harleen Quinzel was a psychiatrist working at Arkham Asylum - until the Joker became her patient. Falling in love with her "Mistah J" she helped him escape and joined him on his fiendish felonies as the brightly costumed Harley Quinn*" (Lipkovitz, p.49).

The absence of abuse within Quinn's relationship with the Joker is an, understandably, consistent motif of the child orientated *Mad Love* variants. However, in removing this darker element to the relationship, these versions of *Mad Love* become pure romance pieces with the Joker and Quinn in a happy relationship. This therefore negates the Unrecognised Virtue elements of the Retrogenesis Text.

This Harmless Harley iteration also appears in the *DC Super Friends* storyworld. In the *DC Super Friends: My Busy Book* toy set she is portrayed in the familiar red and black BTAS outfit with the following description:

> "*Harley tries to be serious, but life is so much more fun when you're laughing. Unfortunately for this prankster, Batgirl is getting the last laugh in this battle. Better luck next time Harley!*" (Phidal, 2017, p.4)

Quinn's relationship with Batgirl is defined, in this storyworld, as best friends who occasionally fight. This is symbolised in Fig. 21 by the *Fisher Price DC Super Friends: Batgirl City Playset* (2016) half of which is devoted to Batgirl and the trappings of her storyworld such as the bat sign, a jail cell and a police station, whilst the other half is dedicated to Quinn with a bank vault that can be smashed open and a garish apartment. This is reflective of Clare Parody's classification of toys as fictional universe peripherals; storyworld artefacts which hold textual privilege for they reinforce the storyworld. So, although there is an implicit understanding in the text of *DC Super Friends* that *Mad Love* exists - Quinn is partners with the Joker, engages in mild crime whilst the Bat Family attempts to stop her - the lack of sexuality, abuse and psychological trauma are missing. Instead, Quinn's attempts to affiliate with the Joker are through the language of physical comedy and naughty pranks. In a brand aimed at children aged three to eight, Quinn's role in *DC Super Friends* is that of the naughty girl at school who is nice deep down, this friendship element reinforced by the playset which makes the characters share the same space, like sisters sharing a room.

Fig 21. Toy as Storyworld artefact

Parody's thoughts on the importance of toys to a fictional universe become even more relevant to this thesis, when contextualised against *The Lego DC Comics: Character Encyclopedia* entry (2016) for the 2013 minifigure of Dr. Harleen Quinzel,

> "*No-one knew that the Joker had secretly persuaded psychiatrist Dr. Harleen Quinzel to become the villainous Harley Quinn. The double-crossing doctor was then on hand to help her puddin' to escape - along with the rest of the inmates too*!" (Hugo and Scott, p.71).

This outline captures a crucial difference between the Lego and BTAS iteration of

Mad Love: Quinzel in the Lego version still works at Arkham and carries out tasks for

the Joker as Harley Quinn, her make-up table hidden at Arkham with her jester hat

on it ready for her to swap guises. By revising the storyline in this way, Lego have

contributed and furthered the *Mad Love* story through a toy line. This innovation is

further articulated by the Lego minifigure (Fig. 22) having two faces: the buttoned up,

spectacle wearing Quinzel on the front; and the wide-eyed Harley Quinn on the back.

This duality suggests that Quinn is an alter ego of Quinzel, who she can modulate

like Bruce Wayne and Batman. And, although the character wears the buttoned-

down look of Quinzel in *Mad Love*, her black and red costume is just visibly peeking

over the neckline of her doctor's uniform like a secret identity.

Fig 22: Lego Quinzel/Quinn

This version of *Mad Love*, which suggests Quinzel and Quinn can exist at the same

time (as opposed to the original Retrogenesis Text where Quinn erases Quinzel),

was a revision further elaborated upon in *Lego DC Comics Super Heroes : The

Awesome Guide* (2017) in which the secret identity of Quinn is used multiple times

by the Joker as a convenient backdoor into Arkham:

> "*Curiously the Joker always has a smile on his face even when he's captured by the caped crusader and packed off to Arkham Asylum. The Joker has been sent to visit Dr. Harleen Quinzel to cure him of his villainous ways. The treatment seems to be going well but does the crown prince of crime have a trick up his sleeve? Of course, he does. The doctor is really the Joker's accomplice Harley Quinn in disguise! A quick change of costume and she helps him slip out when no-one is looking*" (Scott, p.70).

As this version of the *Mad Love* storyline is aimed at children around seven, it suggests Quinzel is just playing make believe and dress up when she becomes Quinn, and the darker elements of the story - Quinzel's sense of self is replaced by the trauma identity of Harley Quinn - is neutered. Interestingly, she is listed in the *Lego DC Comics Super Heroes Character Encylopedia* (2016) as having a dislike for "*Unrequited love*" (p.71), which suggests Lego Quinzel may have been chasing affiliation and affection in the wrong places, which perfectly chimes with her Genesis Principle.

By 2016, the *LDCS* storyworld had moved Quinn's look on to match the times. In the comic strip *Birthday Trap* from the *Enter the Dark Knight* activity book (2017), Quinn is portrayed as a fully-fledged villainess who now sports red and blue dipped bunches. This hair style references Margot Robbie's appearance in the Post-Mad Love *Suicide Squad* film, but the character continues to articulate the same transmedia strategy derived from *Mad Love*.

Further Lego references to *Mad Love* are also in the separate *Lego Movie* storyworld, derived from the 2013 work, *The Lego Movie*. Zone Two of the content analysis sampling contained the spin off to *The Lego Movie* titled *Lego: The Batman Movie* (2017) which concentrated on efforts by the Joker to force the insular Batman into recognising the co-dependency of their relationship. Although *The Lego Batman Movie* and works associated with it such as *Lego: The Batman Movie - The Essential Guide* (2017), recognise that these works take place in a separate storyworld to the LDCS storyworld, the description and portrayal of Quinn in *The Lego Movie* storyworld is entirely in continuity with the *Mad Love* tradition. The Essential Guide describes her as, "*The Quinn of Hearts, a former doctor who now thinks laughter is the best medicine. She believes the Joker is one funny guy and he relies on his girl buddy to help with all the criminal activities*" (March, 2016, p.29).

Despite being positioned as a *Mad Love* story variant, Quinn's main look in *The Lego Movie* storyworld, however, reflects her appearance in DC's *New 52* texts with roller boots and black and red dipped hair which locates her in the Post-Mad Love narrative strategy (Fig. 23). Criticism has been levelled at the Lego brand for their gendered marketing and branding (La France, 2015; Gutwald, 2017) with attempts to improve the representation of female characters reflected in the *Lego DC Comics Super Heroes Awesome Guide* (2017). The book states that, "*Harley ditched her jester's hat in 2016 after leaving the Joker. Now, she teams up with whoever she wants - even Batman!*" (Scott, p.72). Therefore, in the context of the main Lego brand having revisited Quinn's problematic portrayal in their toys, it is retrogressive for the makers of the big budget film to portray Quinn in their storyworld as the Joker's supplicant.

Fig. 23: *Lego: The Batman Movie* iteration of Harley Quinn

The book *Lego: The Batman Movie - the Making of the Movie* (2017) contains a rich

and detailed section regarding the development of Harley Quinn's look which it

describes as, "*One of the most in-depth in the film*" (ibid, p.120). The depth of this

research is evident in the book, as is the creative team's enthusiasm for the

character. Matthew Ashton, the Lego Vice President of Design, describes how

"*Harley was my favourite character to develop. It's great fun to take a racy DC*

character into the Lego universe, interpreting her design and persona to fit into both

a physical appearance and personality appropriate for minifigure existence" (ibid,

pp.121-125). The personality of Quinn, however, appears to have been secondary in

the studio's mind next to the outstanding design work on display. So, whilst there are

pages of sketches in the book devoted to questions such as, "*What would you get if*

you crossed a punk rocker, a clown, and a roller derby skater?" (ibid, p.122), there is

very little consideration of how Quinn's story should be remediated. Instead, the Mad

Love transmedia strategy is adhered to rigidly which removes Quinn's sense of

agency with statements such as, "*Harley Quinn may be willing to commit crimes for*

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her villainous love the Joker, but she is no simple sidekick" (ibid, p.120). A later

section in the book describes how Quinn is, "A *tough rogue ready to roll with*

whatever cruel missions the Joker chooses to include her in" (ibid, p.196), the

suggestion being that Quinn has no agency at all.

During *Lego: The Batman movie*, the Genesis Principle of Affiliation runs throughout

all of Quinn's scenes. After being told by Batman that, despite their years of enmity,

the Joker means nothing to him, the depressed villain is given impromptu counsel by

Quinn. "*You are too good for Batman, what you need to do is remind him of what it's*

like when you aren't around," (2017, 21:00) she advises. Quinn could be talking

about herself and the Joker in the *Mad Love* narrative, and it is not by accident that

she is twirling around in front of the Joker in a tutu, striking suggestive poses in a

family friendly version of Quinn's night dress scene in that comic book. The

difference, however, is that the *Lego Movie* Joker appears to listen to *Lego Movie*

Quinn. So, although she may be a supplicant without agency, this Quinn is more

valued and less tragic than her BTAS counterpart.

In summary, the *DC Super Friends, Lego DC Comics Super Heroes* and *Lego Movie*

storyworlds all provide a unique opportunity to study the remediation of the Harley

Quinn character for a young audience. In studying the works related to these

storyworlds, a clear strategy emerges which repeats and reinforces the *Mad Love*

storyline. This emphasises Quinn's romantic nature and need for affiliation but

removes the tragic undercurrent of the character, in the process portraying the

Harley Quinn persona as a positive alter ego, similar to a superhero.

3.8: Conclusion

Textual analysis of works collected across both sampling zones, revealed commonalities of approach regarding the deployment of the *Mad Love* Retrogenesis Text.

Zone One works from the BTAS storyworld were entirely dominated by Quinn's need to affiliate through her Unrecognised Virtue storyline. In these storylines Quinn was single-mindedly dedicated to being the protagonist of a romance which - although comedic on the surface - was fuelled by a strong undercurrent of drama in the television episodes, and tragedy in the transmedia works, due to the lack of reciprocity from the Joker. This transmodal need for affiliation percolated across a selection of BTAS works between her first appearance in 1992 and 1993 before being codified in the *Mad Love* comic book as a Retrogenesis Text.

The continued deployment of the *Mad Love* Retrogenesis Text in Zone Two was a further articulation of the Genesis Principle of Affiliation which provided transmedia continuity to the HQFU. In the twenty-five years between *Joker's Favor* (1992) and *Harley Loves Joker* (2017), the Retrogenesis Text was revised and reiterated across animated television, comic books, video games, films, and toys. Despite being non synchronous in story, the Retrogenesis Text kept the fictional universe in thematic synchronicity which provided syntactic coherence despite semantic differences.

The next chapter examines the divergent narrative strategies of Post-Mad Love and Anti-Mad Love which emerged in the HQFU following DC's *New 52* storyline re-calibration in 2011. As further Retrogenesis Texts replaced *Mad Love* as the

dominant storyline, adherence to the Genesis Principle became ever more important

for the storyworlds to follow to avoid the fictional universe fracturing into incoherence.

Chapter 4: Post-Mad Love and Anti-Mad Love

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter explored the development and expression of the Genesis Principle of Affiliation in Zone One BTAS works. This led to the codification of the Genesis Principle in the Retrogenesis Text *Mad Love* and the deployment of the Mad Love narrative strategy. This chapter now examines two further narrative strategies, emergent in Zone Two, which articulated the Genesis Principle through the creation of new Retrogenesis Texts: Post-Mad Love and Anti-Mad Love. Despite containing oppositional content to *Mad Love*, these narrative strategies provided continuity to the constituent storyworlds of Zone Two through thematic fidelity to the Genesis Principle.

At this stage it should be noted that the storyworlds examined here do not correspond with DC's own official designation of their comic book continuity. DC's terms of reference only officially recognise a fictional multiverse which revolves around Earth 0, or Prime Earth, the name given to the storyworld which holds continuity privilege in their comic books, with all other storyworlds considered alternative realities or speculative "Elseworlds".

In addition, the company does not recognise the existence of other non-canonical extension storyworlds related to spin off and merchandising brands such as the storyworld of *Lego DC Comics Super Heroes*. Therefore, the identified storyworlds of this study do not correspond to the constantly rebooted nomenclature of DC continuity such as *The New 52* or *DC Comics Universe Rebirth* but, instead, relate to the various storyworlds of the HQFU available within the media market.

As indicated by Fig. 24, the majority of all narratives, collected by the content analysis sampling, contained storylines in which Quinn dealt with situations related to her life after the Joker (67%). This Post-Mad Love grouping of narratives examined Quinn's fractured psyche and attempts to recover agency following the emotional fall out of the *Mad Love* storyline. Just as the Unrequited Virtue storyline dominated the BTAS works of Zone One through the Retrogenesis Text *Mad Love*, Zone Two was dominated by the Personal Drama and Thriller storylines of the Post-Mad Love narrative strategy.
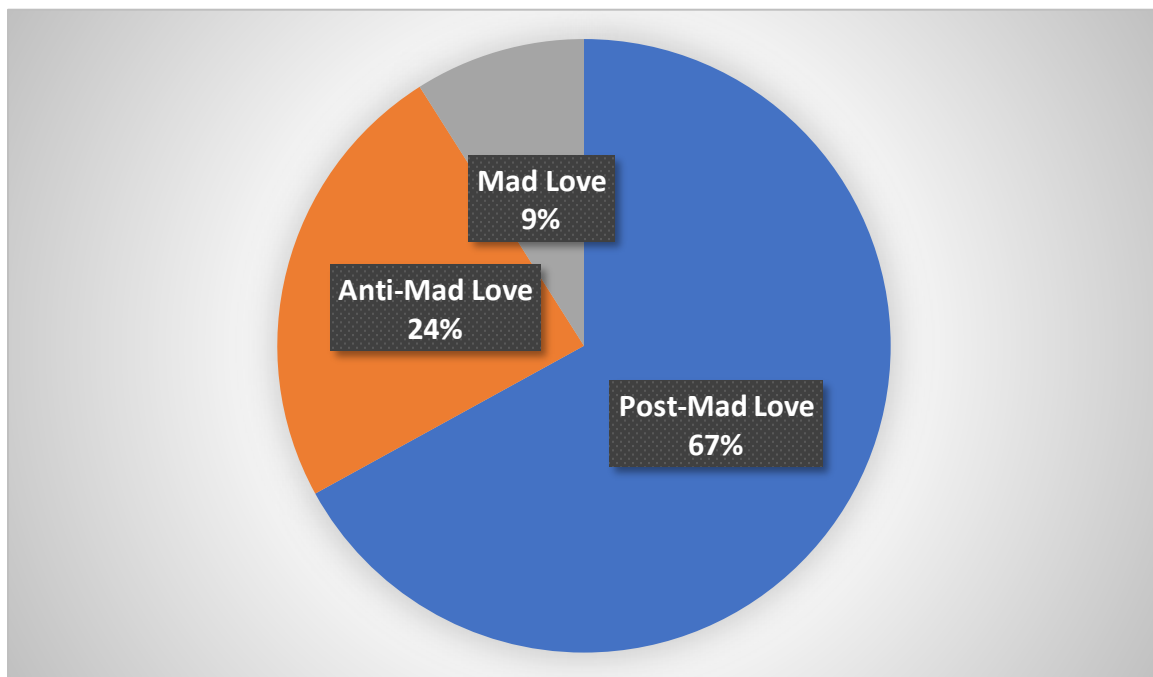
Fig. 24: Breakdown of Narrative Strategies

This chapter examines emblematic texts from the main storyworlds of Zone Two which articulated the Post-Mad Love and Anti-Mad Love strategies. These included *Suicide Squad*; *Injustice*; *DC Comics Bombshells*; *Harley Quinn;* and *DC Super Hero Girls.* Content from these storyworlds illustrated a fluidity of genre and a continuity of theme to

Zone One which resulted in a seamless articulation of the Genesis Principle across the fictional universe despite non-synchronous story content.

4.2 Post-Mad Love: Harlequinade and Suicide Squad

Suicide Squad (2011 - current) tells the story of how Harley Quinn finds a greater purpose to her life after being conscripted into a US government special forces unit, Task Force X. 23% of the narratives of Zone Two involved the *Suicide Squad* storyworld which, in the context of the HQFU, formed a thematic bridge between Quinn's villainous BTAS appearances and the solo title *Harley Quinn* (2012 - current) in which Quinn re-joined society as a rehabilitated anti-hero. This section examines how the *Suicide Squad* storyworld birthed a new Retrogenesis Text - *The Hunt for Harley Quinn* (Glass *et.al*, 2012) - which recontextualised the events of *Mad Love* by highlighting the abuse elements of the storyline, the resultant Post-Mad Love narrative strategy focusing on Quinn's struggle to rebuild her identity and sanity.

The roots of Quinn's presence in *Suicide Squad* lie with the Paul Dini scripted BTAS episode *Harlequinade* (1994). This episode begins with the Joker stealing an atomic bomb, his subsequent plot unusually straight forward and destructive: he simply wants to drop the bomb on Gotham City. Batman - alarmed by this escalation - travels to Arkham Asylum and enlists an imprisoned Quinn to help track down the master criminal before time runs out. The quest sees Quinn act as Batman and Robin's sidekick and begin to harbour doubts that the Joker is the permanent love of her life. Both these firsts are an articulation of the Genesis Principle of Affiliation for they further Quinn's desire and necessity for relationships. However, the relationships posited by this storyline are replacements to the existing Joker relationship, and so the *Harlequinade* narrative is therefore an oppositional one to *Mad Love* which paves the way for Quinn's presence in

other storyworlds whose narratives are based upon her life in this Post-Mad Love context.

For such an influential work, the first half of *Harlequinade* is Quinn's least impressive BTAS outing, with the character infantilised from the beginning. Paul Dini's strategy of writing Quinn's dialogue as if she were a juvenile is in full effect here, with the first scene portraying her hanging over the edge of her bed in Arkham Asylum with blonde bunches, blowing bubble gum as if in high school detention (1994, 03:15). The episode reveals by the end, however, that this heightened element of her persona is a Trojan Horse, a devious performance designed to lure her enemies into a false sense of security. Dini's commentary for *Harlequinade* describes how fangirls relate to the character because of this ability to charm or gag her way out of any situation, and Quinn's rapport with Batman is acutely defined by her ability to punctuate his pomposity. Near the beginning of this episode, the hero plaintively asks for help and Quinn's response, "*I recommend the lobotomy*" (ibid, 03:43), demonstrates both a quick wit and possible experience of such surgeries. In later Zone Two narratives, is often hard to locate Dr. Harleen Quinzel due to the vivacity of her Harley Quinn performance, but in BTAS, the tragedy of the character is never far from the surface, Paul Dini often allowing the mask to slip so that the fallen grown up is glimpsed.

In the later *Suicide Squad* film (2016) Quinzel is tortured with aggressive levels of electrical current therapy by the Joker which provides one explanation for her often inane behaviour in that narrative. In *Harlequinade*, however, Quinn has the self-reflexivity to effortlessly slip between sensible and insensible personas. An example of this comes when the heroes attempt to break into a warehouse. At first Quinn behaves like a Looney Tunes character, knocking herself unconscious with her own grappling

hook and furtively saying the phrase, "*Sneak, sneak, sneak*," out loud as she creeps

around in the dark (1994, 08:08). In the next scene, however, she suddenly has the

wherewithal to knock Batman unconscious and deliver him to a room full of gangsters

so she can bask in their adulation. And although Quinn realises that she out of her

depth with the gangsters and plays for time until Robin can rescue her by singing a

1920s show tune, the character has revealed her true colours. Quinn is not like the

other femme fatale characters in Batman's world such as Catwoman, Poison Ivy or Talia

Al Ghul who display mental togetherness. Beneath that screwball comedy exterior is a

psychological time bomb who constantly switches sides according to her moods,

whether that is for self-parodic villainy or shouting, "*Batgirl, eat your heart out*!" (ibid,

12:30) so exhilarated is she by the thrill of fighting bad guys alongside Batman.

Harlequinade builds to a key climax where, after betraying Batman and Robin to the

Joker, Quinn's personality hardens when the reality of the villain's plan becomes

apparent. "*It's lucky you were here Harley*," Robin informs her, "*The Joker didn't

leave enough time to swing by Arkham and pick you up*" (ibid, 16:50). Quinn is

unmoved - this is not the first time her life has been in danger because of the Joker -

but the final straw is realising the bomb would also kill her beloved hyenas, Bud and

Lou who Quinn dotingly refers to as her "*babies*" (ibid, 17:22). Her declaration, "*I'm

beginning to think Mister J ain't the man for me,*" is a crucial seeding of the Post-Mad

Love transmedia narrative strategy and a rejection of her unrequited romance.

Quinn attacks the Joker's plane with her grappling hook, deployed so ineptly earlier

in the episode and yet so professionally here when it counts. And when the villain

stumbles from the burning wreckage in a daze, Quinn pulls a machine gun on him.

"*Freeze clown!*" Quinn snarls, the red light of the burning plane illuminating the

drama in an infernal glow (ibid, 20:50). "*You wouldn't dare*!" the Joker contemptuously hisses in return, but Quinn does dare and pulls the trigger. Fortunately for the Joker - and not the rest of the world - the gun is a prop and a "*Rat-Tat-Tat!*" flag drops from the end. Dini explains in the commentary that the gun originally just clicked, and the flag was invented to soften the blow of Quinn's murder attempt for the younger elements of the audience. But despite this comedic addition, however, the implication in the scene is clear: Quinn believes the gun is real when she pulls the trigger.

The climax of *Harlequinade* is the first time Quinn draws a weapon on her lover, but it is not the last. This moment sets up a plethora of Post-Mad Love narratives in the HQFU in which Quinn confronts and exorcises the Joker from her life, pulling both metaphorical and literal triggers on him. In *Harlequinade,* Quinn bats her eye lids in a conciliatory gesture and the glaring Joker instantly forgives her (ibid, 21:45), the pair falling into each other's arms inside the heart shaped stencil made most famous by 1950s television show *I Love Lucy.* Quinn's tragic BTAS cycle, therefore, continues as she is unable to escape her sitcom limitations. As this chapter will explore, other versions of Quinn, however, do escape and transcend their "hench-wench" status throughout Zone Two.

Within Zone Two, Quinn appeared in seventy-three unique *Suicide Squad* works. This material was not limited to the *Suicide Squad* title, however, with her presence in this storyworld crossing over to other superhero titles such as *The Flash*, *Deathstroke* and *Justice League.* The *Suicide Squad* version of Quinn, therefore, was the dominant iteration of Zone Two and reflected a burgeoning interest in the

property following the production and financially successful release of the live action film adaptation during the research period.

It was fitting that Harley Quinn would find her new sense of identity within the *Suicide Squad* comic book as the property itself was also no stranger to reinvention. The original *Suicide Squad* comic strip was created in 1959, by the writer Robert Kanigher and the artist Ross Andru, as an experimental format published in the DC anthology title *The Brave and The Bold*. In this iteration the group was composed of scientists and soldiers who had experienced great tragedy in their life, and therefore held a fatalistic philosophy which pushed them to volunteer for the most dangerous missions on earth. This strip was produced during the period in comic book history classified as the Silver Age, which saw science fiction concepts dominate the medium, with *Suicide Squad* being no different with its colourful tales of super intelligent dinosaurs and cosmic rays. In 1964, this short-lived storyline was revisited in the DC "boy's own" comic book *Star Spangled War Stories* with a Retrogenesis Text called *Dead Man's Curve*. This story portrayed the origin of Suicide Squad as a group of the toughest soldiers the government could muster - the Suicide Squadron - who defended Dinosaur Island in the Second World War. In 1985, DC activated the first of their multiverse wide story re-calibrations - *Crisis* - after which the adventures of Task Force X were re-launched contemporaneously with the *Rambo* films under the writer John Ostrander, where they represented a reflection of the Hollywood trend for hyper masculinity.

Harley Quinn's secondment into Task Force X - was the brain child of writer Adam Glass and was first published as part of DC comics' *The New 52* reboot in 2011. In Andrew Farrago's *The Art of Harley Quinn* (2017), Glass described the difficulties of

convincing the DC editorial staff to accept Quinn for this title, the publisher having written the character off in response to an unsuccessful solo strip in the early 2000s. Glass, who had been courted by DC following his work as writer and executive producer of hit television series *Supernatural,* however, believed Quinn was tough enough to go head to head with any super villain and made her inclusion in the series his dealbreaker.

The pivotal figure in the creation of the Post-Mad Love transmedia narrative strategy, Glass deliberately created Quinn's stories in *Suicide Squad* in opposition to her role in BTAS. "*One of the things about Batman: The Animated Series, the thing I never did like was the Joker's treatment of Harley",* Glass explained*. "Lauryn Hill's solo album, that was my approach .The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill. Who does she become? What does she become?*" (ibid, p.108). Glass' choice of Quinn as series lead, not only led to positive sales for the dormant character, however, but the innovation would also significantly alter the tone of the HQFU by introducing action thriller elements to it. Conversely, Quinn's presence in *Suicide Squad* also enriched the dramatic credentials of the action-based property. For although Quinn would go on to display the incredible physical capacity she honed through Task Force X in other comic book strips, she would also use her experiences with the unit to evaluate her state of mind and examine the consequences of her actions. Despite the *Suicide Squad* storyworld often being devoted to displays of large guns and graphic violence, Quinn's narratives concerned her attempts to fit in with others; this desperate desire to connect with the world and find company granting the property a sense of heart and relatability in contrast to other contemporary action orientated franchises such as *Justice League.*

Suicide Squad is primarily an action strip and the sample contained multiple covers and splash pages of Quinn in hand-to-hand fighting poses whilst brandishing a large mallet or standing on the shoulders of squad member Killer Croc with guns blazing. However, the strip also started to drill deeper into Quinn's psyche than previous strips had attempted. "*I feel like we underestimated Harley. She was a doctor, and she was a person before the Joker and that makes her incredibly intelligent. And incredibly dangerous*," Glass explained about this exploration. "*As a side character, she was a joke and a pun, but I really admired her, and I wanted to see her grow up a little and become her own woman*" (Farrago, 2017, p.108). Glass positioned Quinn, therefore, away from Dini's love sick self -infantilising doll figure into a more volatile proposition: an adult who desired agency.

This new independence was, however, hard won, the fight beginning in the 2012 Retrogenesis Text *The Hunt for Harley Quinn* (Glass *et.al*, 2012) which remediated the events of *Mad Love* in a manner which instantly portrayed Harleen Quinzel as tougher than any iteration before. This was a fully qualified and committed psychiatrist, crucially not an intern who slept with a tutor, or a television personality who received an online degree. Her immediate intelligent response to the Joker's manipulative backstories, not empathetic tears but rather, "*The building blocks to your psychosis and murdering mind we both know are all a load of bull. You create mayhem so you can be the eye of the storm. Because in that storm everything gets turned upside down except you. You are a control freak with a sense of humour*" (Glass *et.al*, 2012, p.10).

This variant of Quinzel was also more working class and threatened the Joker in her initial meeting, "*If you think of stabbing me with what's in your pocket, you better hope you don't miss, because if you do, I will kick your nuts up through your mouth and show you how we do it in Canarsie*" (ibid). Fig. 23 reveals that, although Quinzel was attracted to the criminal, the Joker was the most impacted by this meeting; his intention to kill Quinzel with a cut throat razor arrested by the force of her personality.

Fig. 25: *The Hunt for Harley Quinn* (Glass *et.al*, 2012, #6, p.11)

At this juncture, it is interesting to note that this version of the Quinzel character appeared in *Suicide Squad* before the friendless and needy iteration appeared in *Arkham Origins* (2013). This could have led to a fracture in the fictional universe for the two characters lacked story synchronicity and were incongruous to each other. But, as articulated by Heinze, the *Suicide Squad* and Arkham-verse storyworlds were not alternative versions of events to each other. Instead, they were different events with different people, whose stories were still articulating the Genesis Principle of Affiliation and therefore maintaining overall fidelity to the underpinning theme of the HQFU.

During their tenth meeting at Arkham, the Joker plays his trump card and reveals knowledge of Quinzel's back story: her father died in a car crash, caused by a negligent driver. The driver's wealth had allowed him to escape justice, and this had made Quinzel feel bereft and powerless. "*I used to be the same way,*" the Joker soothes her, *"Powerless against those who wanted to keep me down. I finally saw the world for the true hypocrisy it is, which set me free. Because once I didn't care about the rules, I had all the power*" (ibid, p.18). The Joker then reveals his gift for Quinzel: the severed finger of the man who killed her father, the rest of the body off site. "*We all have power inside of us. We've just got to let it out,*" he tutors.

Despite his seductive tone, however, the Joker's promotion of individualistic power in this scene is the oppositional value of the Genesis Affiliation Principle and therefore promotes him as the antagonistic force in Quinzel's life, brought into fruition by the events which follow. Although repelled by his actions, the meeting with the Joker reignites Quinzel's sense of injustice. Reinforced by a confrontation with a bullying boss in the next scene, Quinzel's repressed anger suddenly explodes with shocking

violence. As a counterpoint to the arrival of Harley Quinn in Dini's *Mad Love*,

Quinzel's subsequent freeing of the Joker, revolver in hand - her previously

buttoned-down blouse now ripped open in the struggle to reveal a lacy bra - does not

announce the arrival of a newly formed super villain - but a woman momentarily

empowered by taking control of her life.

Fig. 26: *The Hunt for Harley Quinn* (Glass *et.al*, 2012, #7, p.6)

Quinzel describes this transformative moment to the Joker as, "*Something*

happened" (ibid, #7, p.11), this liberated adult striking a wholly different figure to

previous iterations, for the transformation has taken place inside her mind (although,

as Fig. 26 demonstrates, the sinister reflected light on Quinzel's glasses in the final panel, references Quinn's mask in BTAS, and so physical foreshadowing of other storyworlds is also present).

The "something" which happened, Quinzel soon learns to regret as this Retrogenesis Text does not remediate *Mad Love* events to set up an unrequited romance narrative. Instead, Glass is at pains to sever Quinn from the *Mad Love* storyline entirely and so creates an additional story beat to Dini's Retrogenesis Text which is designed to alienate Quinn from the Joker forever.

Instead of a romantic hideaway, the villain takes Quinzel to Ace chemicals, the scene of his own transformation in the Retrogenesis Texts *Detective Comics #168* (Finger *et. al*, 1953) and *The Killing Joke* graphic novel (Moore and Bolland, 1988). "*This is a special place for me. This is where I was born. What happened here fixed me and it can fix you too,*" the Joker explains, before throwing Quinzel into the chemical tank, ignoring her screams of help as she sinks below the boiling surface with only a limp hand left above (Fig. 27).

Quinzel is dead. But someone else is waiting in the tank for the Joker amongst the bones of his previous victims. In scenes that resemble a Universal horror film, a figure emerges from the shadows: her head bowed; her blonde hair stained red and blue; her skin bleached white; her clothes burned off in provocative places to reveal the curves of her body. Harleen Quinzel has become Harley Quinn: Bride of the Monster.

Fig. 27: *The Hunt for Harley Quinn* (Glass *et.al*, 2012, #7, p.13)

Although these events occurred in 2012, works in Zone Two were consistently contextualised by the mental aftershocks of this event, and the Joker's attempt to murder her once more at Ace Chemicals in the *Suicide Squad* storyline *Running with the Devil* (Glass *et.al,* 2012). In this storyline, Quinn escapes a threatened final acid bath by chewing through her handcuffed wrists, and although she survives bleeding to death from the wounds, remains mental scarred with graphic nightmares and post-traumatic stress disorder. So, whilst Zone One texts portrayed Quinn as a tragic romantic lead in her own unrequited romance storyline, *Suicide Squad* killed the romance. There was no love left for Mad Love. Quinn's story was now a survivor's tale.

Adam Glass' ambition to sever Quinn from *Mad Love* was fulfilled by this Retrogenesis Text as the events of *The Hunt for Harley Quinn* became her definitive origin story in the HQFU. Later works consistently returned to this text, with both the feature film version of *Suicide Squad* (2016) and the animated television series *Harley Quinn* (2020 - current) revising Glass' Retrogenesis Text by portraying Quinn jumping into the tank herself in a bid to demonstrate affiliation with the Joker, an act she needs to reconcile later in life when she attempts to take back agency.

Key to both the success of the *Suicide Squad* property, and to Quinn's personal rehabilitation in the storyworld, are the relationships she holds with the other members of Task Force X. Each is considered a villain in the DC universe and yet Task Force X forces them to work together to forge bonds and understanding. Over time, Quinn is revealed to be the most damaged of the group who realises that she has spent so much time playing the role of villain that she no longer has normative values.

The 2015 *New Suicide Squad* storyline *Monsters,* collected within Zone Two, articulates this tragic dimension to Quinn whose actions, even when attempting to do right, are misguided and evil. In this storyline, a failed Task Force X mission in Turkey results in Quinn being imprisoned by terrorists alongside a group of local children. She bonds with the children and promises to set them free but when the opportunity comes, Quinn butchers the guards so brutally, the children run from her in fear. Squad member Reverse Flash finds Quinn crouched prone on the floor, confused, and broken by this moment, *"The guards kept coming so I kept killing them. It was hilarious. But the kids stopped laughing. I'm always the last one laughing,"* she disconsolately explains, "*This is all I am*" (Ryan and Briones, 2015, p.6). The Reverse Flash attempts to comfort her, "*My dad hurt me when I was young, so I turned into this to hurt him back. My own sister called me a monster*". Quinn asks if the Reverse Flash is still a monster. He answers, "*I don't know but I know I don't want to be. Maybe that is enough*" (ibid). Quinn is not convinced; intent to be good is not enough for people like them as their evil nature will always win in the end.

In the moving conclusion to the *Monsters* story, however, Quinn is proven wrong. As Task Force X escape the enemy base, they discover the defeated terrorists have left behind an enormous bomb which will devastate the town and kill all the children inside. Quinn is bereft at this news but powerless. The Reverse Flash, however, runs back at super speed so he can carry the bomb out to a safe distance, saving the children by being destroyed. As Fig. 28 illustrates, the Reverse Flash's conversation with Quinn is repeated over the panels which show his final act of heroism. "*I know I don't want to be a monster, maybe that is enough*" is juxtaposed with Quinn's

stunned wide eyes as the bomb explodes and rips the flesh from the Reverse Flash's skin. Sacrifice has never occurred to Quinn before and the realisation that heroism is a choice, and not a pre-destined nature, is etched all over her face.

As well as *Suicide Squad* comics, Zone Two also contained the live action film version of *Suicide Squad* (2016). In this work, Quinn's overall sense of heroism is under developed in contrast to her progress in the comic books of Zone Two, partially due to the lack of stakes in the film whose central supernatural antagonists, Enchantress, and the Incubus, are abstract foes who lack the tangible and physical threat of the antagonists usually faced on the page by Task Force X and partially due to a dearth of story. The comic books had years in which to develop the characterisation of Quinn in contrast to the two hours and seventeen minutes of the film. Therefore, although Quinn does make a concerted stand against the apocalyptic forces in the third act of the film, and in doing so demonstrates the values of heroism and sacrifice she discovered over the course of the comic book series, this arc takes place in a compressed and less convincing form.

The most interesting aspect of the film adaptation of *Suicide Squad*, instead, is the remediation of Adam Glass' Retrogenesis Text which operates using different rules according to which cut of the film is viewed. Quinn's back story is narrated by Task Force X boss Amanda Waller and replays Quinzel's psychotherapy sessions with the Joker at Arkham Asylum. Due to the compressed nature of the adaptation, these scenes are throwaway in comparison to the ones shown in Dini's original *Mad Love*, Adam Glass' revision or the *Arkham Origins* versions with Quinzel simply telling the Joker that he can ask her for anything to which he replies, "*A machine gun*" (ibid, 09:48).

Fig. 28: *Monsters* (Ryan and Briones, 2015, p.38)

However, the scenes which follow in which the escaped Joker enforces electric shock therapy treatment on Quinzel as punishment, during which he tells her, "*I just want to hurt you real bad*" (ibid, 10:55) are brutal and believable. During this electro shock sequence, flashes of actress Margot Robbie dressed as BTAS Quinn appear, and it seems - as a way of tackling the character's complicated psyche - that the filmmakers suggest that the Joker simply burns the Quinzel part of her mind away, leaving an infantilised supplicant. This is certainly supported by the next scene in which a pole dancing Quinn is sexually traded by the Joker to another gangster, only for the Joker to become jealous and kill the man instead (ibid, 13:00). In these scenes Quinn is happy to be bartered as a sexual object and this attitude, combined with her signature costume of hot pants, fishnet stockings and jacket bearing the logo, "*Property of Joker*," locates this iteration squarely as a *Mad Love* variant. But over the course of the film a different theme emerges as Quinn - as in *Harlequinade* and the pages of the *Suicide Squa*d comic book - begins to doubt her relationship with the arch criminal, a train of thought which becomes increasingly complicated by the Joker acting like a love sick fool. For in an invention unique to this film, Quinn is not chasing the Joker's affections - he is chasing her.

The extended version of *Suicide Squad* contains a scene more nuanced than the broad strokes delivered in the theatrical cut as it shows Quinzel confronting the Joker after his escape from Arkham. In this scene Quinzel's electro shock therapy has not rendered her infantilised, and she is cogent and articulate as she confronts him with a gun to demand the truth of their relationship. In all other remediations of the *Mad Love* story it is explicitly clear that the Joker has no feelings for Quinzel and only sees her as his ticket out of Arkham. But in the extended cut of *Suicide Squad,* it becomes apparent that the Joker is in love with her, and it terrifies him. The Joker

guides Quinzel's gun to his own head and demands that she let him escape this new

misery. "*How can you be more scared of a human heart than a gun*?" Quinzel yells at

him, shocked to be inside the skin of the unknowable (ibid, 01:07).

Although the next story beat of the Quinzel/Joker relationship takes the film to Glass'

chemical factory revision, the emphasis in the extended cut is now firmly on the

Joker's feelings. He does not push Quinzel into the chemicals, as in the

Retrogenesis Text, but instead demands she do it as proof of their mutual trust and

is taken aback when Quinzel takes the leap of faith. For a moment the Joker seems

to have walked away - it is easier to let this inconvenient threat to his integrity die -

but against his own worst instincts he leaps into the vat and saves the newly born

Harley Quinn, the chemicals around them dyed red and blue as they embrace and

kiss (ibid, 01:16).

In the theatrical cut Quinzel's leap is the act of a woman who has lost her mind; there

is no reason for her to trust the Joker because in their last scene together he was

torturing her. Yet in the extended cut, the extra context makes the chemical wedding

scene the most romantic of any Quinn/Joker scene in the HQFU and therefore

renders the scenes later - when she wonders if he is the healthiest choice for her -

unfounded. Adam Glass invented the acid bath scene in the comic book of *Suicide*

Squad to be a violation which aided his intention to bisect Quinn from the Joker. In

the extended cut of *Suicide Squad* - and backed up by scenes which involve the

Joker pining for Quinn - the chemical wedding reveals a depth of genuine feeling

from the Joker towards her and reverses *Mad Love* entirely by making the Joker the

insecure one. In both cuts of *Suicide Squad*, the Joker appears lost without Quinn

and there is no sense of domestic abuse to their scenes together once their

relationship is established outside the Asylum. In the extended cut of the film, the nightclub scene is even an example of mutually agreed candaulism rather than exploitation as Quinn is fully aware of her actions.

At the end of the film, the Joker - suspected to be dead - rescues Quinn from prison and they embrace. In the theatrical cut this feels out of place as Quinn had doubted their relationship and is now thrown straight back into it, reflecting the sitcom end of *Harlequinade* when Quinn returned instantly to the Joker. However, in the extended cut this climax feels earned as their relationship has been legitimised by a genuine depth of feeling having been demonstrated between them and the Joker's last line "*Let's go home*" feels heartfelt (ibid, 02:03). Therefore, the two versions of the film operate using different transmedia narrative strategies. The theatrical cut, with its emphasis on Quinn re-evaluating a toxic relationship imposed on her, falls into the Post-Mad Love strategy. As this is the strategy of the *Suicide Squad* comics, this fidelity reveals that the film version is a thematically faithful adaptation. The extended version, however, in which Quinzel chooses the relationship and is happy for it to continue, is operating using a fantastical spin on the *Mad Love* strategy where her affections are finally returned. This is, therefore, not a thematically synchronous adaptation of the *Suicide Squad* comic books but instead a potentially new Retrogenesis Text.

The film adaptation of *Suicide Squad* is an interesting and insightful example of where a few minutes of screen time changes the emphasis of a piece of work and in doing so alters its place in the overall constellation of content. The extended version of *Suicide Squad* adheres to a different narrative strategy to the theatrical cut, but does not fracture from the HQFU, as fidelity to the Genesis Principle of Affiliation is

maintained and this, therefore, makes it thematically synchronous to the fictional universe overall.

Quinn's growing sense of heroism and camaraderie to Task Force X appeared throughout the content analysis samples from the Suicide Squad storyworld, the exemplar text for this character change being *Full Mental Jacket* (Williams, 2016)*,* a storyline published at the same time as the *Suicide Squad* film was released.

Full Mental Jacket begins from macho squad leader Rick Flag's perspective as the squad fly out to a mission. Flag narrates that he is a soldier and as such knows discipline and sacrifice and this allows him to look after his team. The next panel reveals his point of view: Quinn attempting to touch her nose with her tongue. "*Harley Quinn is not a soldier*" he rebuffs (ibid, p.15). And, yet, as shown in Fig. 29 the story proves the opposite.

Once they have landed, Task Force X uncover a trap by the Joker to release hallucinogenic nerve toxin and they savagely turn on each other when exposed to the gas. Quinn is immune to the effects but is baited by a ghostly hallucination of the Joker to join the chaos. "*You're a villain remember - time to nasty up and act like one*," he taunts (ibid, p.21). Quinn stands in the doorway of the Black Hawk helicopter and looks through him. Her jaw sets, and her eyes narrow. "*No*," Quinn simply replies before turning away and rescuing her comrades.

Adam Glass's remediation of Harley Quinn in *Suicide Squad* revealed a new agility of the character to be deployed across multiple genres, so long as the new genre content matched the Genesis Principle of Affiliation. This allowed for the Joker romance to be replaced with the thriller aspects of *Suicide Squad,* so long as Quinn's

Fig. 29: *Full Mental Jacket* (Williams and Frank, 2016, p.15 and p.21)

affiliative need in the Post-Mad Love elements of *Suicide Squad* remained the same as her affiliative need in the *Mad Love* narratives of BTAS. This means that, rather than be motivated to care for her lover, Quinn's actions are now motivated by care for her friends. In doing so, Quinn's character matures during *Suicide Squad* and reaches a wider selection of audiences, no longer a supplicant but an independent agent.

4.3 Post-Mad Love: Injustice

Quinn's ownership of the word, "*No,*" and her new found possession of agency in *Suicide Squad*, was also reflected in a wholly different kind of adventure in the Zone Two samples; one which like *Harlequinade* before it, placed Quinn in the company of heroes. *Injustice: Gods Among Us (2013)* is a video game whose backstory, when fleshed out in comic book form, demonstrates such a strong quality of storytelling that it transcends the promotional and peripheral form, and becomes the most fulfilling interpretation of Quinn's character to date.

The story of *Injustice* concerns Superman being tricked by the Joker into murdering his lifelong romantic partner, Lois Lane, who is pregnant with their unborn child. As in *Harlequinade*, the super villain's plan is to deliberately detonate an atomic explosion, but, in this storyworld, the plan succeeds, the nuclear fallout reducing Metropolis and Gotham City into a post-apocalyptic wasteland. Superman, grief stricken and hardened by the experience, becomes dictator of this dystopian world, and lashes out at all who stand against him. Over the course of five years, an insurgency led by Batman struggles against his former Justice League partner. They are aided by Quinn, who is attempting to reconcile her past actions as the Joker's accomplice, whilst struggling with the abduction of her daughter, Lucy.

Zone Two of the content analysis phase collected forty-three works related to the *Injustice* storyworld. These included the latter half of *Injustice: Gods Among Us - Year Four* (2014 - 2015) and the entire run of *Injustice: Gods Among Us - Year Five* (2015 - 2016). The sampling also collected the entire comic run of *Injustice 2* (2016 - 2017) which was the support title to the *Injustice 2* video game released in May 2017. And although all these texts were relevant to the study, the most pertinent work to this project was *Injustice: Ground Zero* (2016) a series uniquely told from the first-person perspective of Harley Quinn. This twenty-four issue series drilled deeper into the character of Quinn than other comic strips in the sample and detailed her step by step fight to rehabilitate herself and move beyond the shadow of the Joker. The Ground Zero of the title did not just refer to the detonation point of the atomic explosion which began the story, but the constantly bleeding wound of Quinn's initial corruption at the hands of the Joker.

This section does not focus on the videogame *Injustice 2.* For although the game contains cut sequences they are, ultimately, throwaway narrative context to a two-player fighting game. When playing Quinn, the player's achievement is measured by the accuracy of combination kicks and punches that the avatar lands on an opponent. And although the Genesis Principle of Affiliation is at play in the introductions to each bout of *Injustice 2*, in which Quinn trades friendly quips with opponents, the game remains an enjoyable but superficial addition to the HQFU. Not so Brian Buccellato and Christopher Sebela's supporting comic book series which, in an unusual move for a video game adaptation of a fighting game, contains more drama than the other HQFU works in the sample.

The struggles of Quinn within the storyworld of *Injustice: Ground Zero* story are best exemplified by the storylines *Let's Have a War*, *Fall Down, Go Boom* and *Such Sweet Sorrow* (2017). In this series of storylines, Quinn decides to kill the imprisoned Joker for all his past abuse, only to lose her resolve at the last minute. Her first-person narration sums up her weakness in the face of his power and the futility of her actions as she instead releases him, fully aware of the pain it will cause her, "*I know. Don't say it. I was an idiot. No matter how many times I burned my hand on the hot stove I had to keep touching it, hoping against all the laws of nature that this time it would be ok*" (ibid, p.17). K. Scarlett Harrington and Jennifer A. Guthrie suggested in the paper, *"That Just Proves He Wants Me Back": Pure victimhood, Agency and Intimate Partner Violence in Comic Book Narratives* (2017), that Quinn cannot be considered a victim of the Joker's violence because she knowingly courts the violence which she interprets as romantic. However, she also cannot be considered to have agency as she seems powerless in the face of the relationship. Therefore, Quinn embodies the contradictory concept of non-victimhood in this storyline, knowingly aware that abuse will follow her release of the Joker but powerless to change her behaviour. The fact that Quinn is on an orbiting space prison during this scene highlights the irrelevancy of semantic superhero tropes to genre syntax; *Injustice* concerns the frailties of human nature, and the fantasy context is just narrative window dressing to the drama.

Powerless for much of the story after the Joker's release, Quinn attempts to lure the villain to his death at the hands of omnipotent supernatural entity Doctor Fate, only for Fate to refuse at the last moment. "*You and the Joker are tethered together across dimensions. Time, even fate bonds you together",* Fate explains.

"There's no escape. No evasion. Weapons are pointless. As are other people. The only thing that can save you is a magic word: No" (Ibid, #15, p.21) This scene reflects the other Post-Mad Love stories (such as *Full Mental Jacket*) where Quinn learns the power of refusal and Doctor Fate's metaphor of Quinn being tethered across dimensions with the Joker is fitting when discussing the storyworlds of the HQFU. Examination of the content analysis samples revealed that Quinn was tortured across the whole fictional universe by the same person, the experiences seemingly tethered together despite their semantic differences in separate storyworlds. "*Mr J and I had been through a lot. We had fought plenty. All in good fun he would tell me afterward when he was patching me up. But he wasn't fun anymor*e," (Ibid, #16, p.22) could be a line of dialogue from any of the Post-Mad Love storyworlds, the setting being irrelevant, the pain being the continuity.

Injustice, however, sees Quinn become more assertive when her new friends are threatened by the Joker, and she holds the villain's knife back during an especially brutal moment when he goes on a killing spree. "*Please don't do that Mister J,"* she meekly requests but it is not enough. This act of defiance instead incenses the Joker, who then ceremoniously makes Quinn choose which friend he murders next. Articulating her Genesis Principle of Affiliation, Quinn stands her ground and instead offers her own life. This prompts the Joker to make a lucid description of how he sees their relationship,

> *"Do you know how long it would take to train a brand-new version of you? Too long. I don't want to kill you; I want to BREAK you…I offer you the world, you offer me disobedience, opinion, THOUGHTS. I hit you, you fight back. So, I'm*

going to punish you. Take one of your toys away whenever you mess up."

(ibid 2017, #18, p.8)

This admission reflects the paternalistic role Quinzel elevated the Joker to throughout the Arkham-verse works: a patriarchal stifling of her identity she now chooses to escape in all storyworlds through the Post-Mad Love narrative strategy. The Joker, of course, knows where to hurt Quinn and understands that her entire way of relating to the world is through relationships. Therefore, to stop further murders, Quinn gives in and sacrifices her own identity once more to become his supplicant, this time not in service of romance but to save her friends. "*Was this the rest of my life? Hiding who I am so Joker won't burn the scraps of my new life? So, he won't hurt me anymore,*" Quinn reflects,*" Yeah it was. Unless I wanted more of my friends to die, I had to put it past me and learn to like it*" (ibid, p.17). Quinn is defeated, futile in the face of the Joker's power.

As Fig. 30 shows, the Joker plays a Trumpian role in these scenes by echoing the former President's campaign language in his offer, "*To make the earth great again*". Academic Kate Roddy wrote in 2011's *Masochist or Machiavel? Reading Harley Quinn in Canon and Fanons*, that Quinn's child-like nature was designed wholly to manipulate the patriarchy around her. In this series of panels, Quinn's fixed grin and

Fig. 30: *Injustice - Ground Zero*. (Buccellato and Sebela, 2016, #18. p.17)

line, "*Can't wait Puddin*'," is pure performance; a pastiche of the BTAS Harley Quinn

deployed by the *Injustice* iteration as a survival strategy.

The narrative of *Injustice Ground Zero* is unrelenting in terms of Quinn's humiliation

until she finally breaks and uses the word Doctor Fate taught her. Fig. 31 shows how

Quinn's moment of defiance has a liberating effect on the character. "*For such a tiny*

little word it had so much power." she narrates. *"I felt stronger, clear headed.*

Everything ached but I didn't mind. The look on his face was reward enough. Being

crazy was fun. Being free was better" (ibid, #19, pp.12-13). This was the most

powerful moment in any of the HQFU works collected for the study. For whilst the

overall Genesis Principle of Affiliation was intact throughout all of *Injustice: Ground*

Zero, the individual story strand of breaking free from the Joker was a rare example

of a purely empowering moment which broke the tragic cycle of futility set up by *Mad*

Love. As mentioned in the previous section on *Suicide Squad*, Quinn
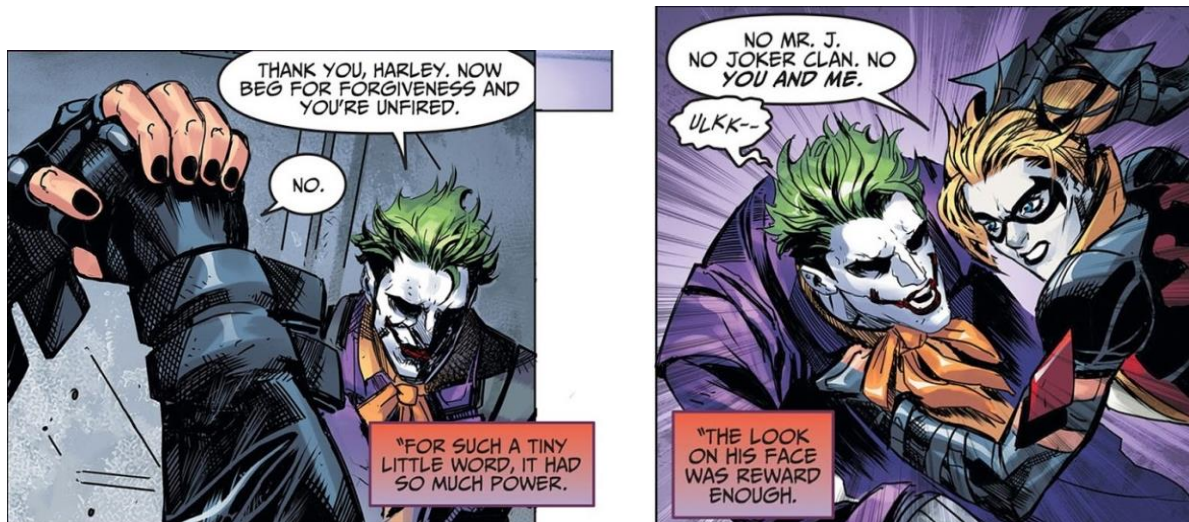
Fig. 31: *Injustice - Ground Zero.* (Buccellato and Sebela, 2017, #19, pp.12-13)

physically escaped the Joker's attempt to murder her, and her defiance in the *Suicide Squad* storylines was directed towards the spectre of the villain in her nightmares but not the actual villain himself. In the *Injustice* works, Quinn faced down the flesh and blood Joker through a strengthening of self-resolve and, in doing so, evolved from anti-hero to hero.

The strength Quinn summoned in this storyline was the result of a focused effort on behalf of the creative team of *Injustice* to consistently stress the personal drama elements of the story over the superhero tropes. This allowed the work to rise above its fourth-tier status, as a spin off from an ancillary comic book extension to a peripheral video game and elevated it to the arena of legitimate human drama. But the success of the piece was not simply due to strong writing, for it evidenced that a character's transmedia narrative articulation within a storyworld was free to develop significantly non-synchronous story content, so long as the work maintained continuity with the Genesis Principle of the fictional universe. Quinn's high levels of affiliation in the *Injustice* series eventually reflect an emergent desire to fix a troubled

relationship with her daughter Lucy, who replaces the Joker as the nexus of Quinn's affiliation in *Injustice 2*, and this cements the Genesis Principle around a wholly new non-canonical dynamic: Harley Quinn the protective Mother. The reason this variant was not counterproductive to the HQFU, however, was because this narrative strand was foreshadowed by *Harlequinade* and the protection of her "Babies". This maternal element was part of the DNA of the Harley Quinn character for it articulated Affiliation. Therefore, it does not matter that *Injustice* is not faithful to any other Quinn variant in terms of story, for it remains faithful in theme.

The next section of this chapter examines a narrative strategy which has grown to become the most dominant in the Harley Quinn Fictional Universe. Based upon the cancellation of the Joker character, and a rejection of the *Mad Love* origin story, this Anti-Mad Love narrative strategy sees the HQFU re-calibrated completely around a romance storyline with Poison Ivy.

4.4 Anti-Mad Love: Harley and Ivy

The Blu Ray commentary for the BTAS episode *Harlequinade* (recorded in 2003), voiced the thoughts of the creative team on a solo Harley Quinn television series. The conclusion from the team was that, whilst they all enjoyed Quinn, there was a sense that she was more a supporting character than a main lead and that she needed the Joker - or another character - to interact with. Paul Dini's thoughts were that Quinn needed a family for this concept to work, but that the writers of such a series would have to be careful that these supporting characters did not outshine Quinn, for they would have to be as equally outrageous as her to hold their own. This conversation can be contextualised against the failure of the *Harley Quinn* solo

comic which ran between 2000 and 2004 and saw the character eventually return herself to Arkham Asylum as a failed protagonist without a central purpose. However, developments in the HQFU since this commentary was recorded have seen the fictional universe becoming increasingly concentrated on the family concept, with the *Harley Quinn* Solo title comic (2011 - current) and animated *Harley Quinn* television series (2020 - current) wholly dominated by this dynamic. This marks the fruition of an emergent narrative strategy called Anti-Mad Love which delineates Quinn's toxic obsession with the Joker and instead replaces it with a supportive environment of friends and lovers.

This family concept is first explored in Paul Dini's BTAS episode *Harley and Ivy* (1993) whereupon the Joker kicks Quinn out, only for her to find a partner in crime in fellow super villain Poison Ivy. Quinn's actions in the episode at first - such as stealing the fabled Harlequin diamond - are entirely centred on winning back the affections of the Joker. However, in partnering with Ivy, Quinn develops a new relationship built on trust and friendship. Much has been written about the potentially Sapphic nature of Quinn's relationship with Ivy in this episode (Liddell, 2017, Owens, 2017) and how the portrayal of the two women lounging around Ivy's trailer in long men's shirts was television shorthand for lesbianism designed to circumvent broadcast standards and practices (Bray, 2017). Certainly, this was not alluded to by the creative team on the commentary for the Blu Ray where Dini simply described the episode as, "*Sexy girls running around in Halloween costumes*". What cannot be disputed, however, is the militant and feminist nature of their activities in the episode, from blowing up a car full of leering youths at a traffic stop, to gate crashing a men only black tie gala.

This episode pre-dated *Mad Love* and, therefore, belongs in a collection of works whose story elements became codified by the Retrogenesis Text. Inevitably, the new equilibrium established with Ivy in this episode does not last and, in the coda, a newly captured Quinn moons over the Joker from the Arkham Asylum garden in a foreshadowing of *Mad Love*; for no matter what alternative relationship was proposed in BTAS, Quinn returned to the Joker at the end of every episode as she was trapped in a circular narrative.

The episode *Harley and Ivy* is unique as it not only fed into the Retrogenesis Text *Mad Love,* but it also set up the Anti-Mad Love narrative strategy whose Retrogenesis Text, *Love Stories,* would codify their romantic relationship in 2016. And whilst *Harley and Ivy* was positioned in BTAS as an oppositional text to the emerging *Mad Love* narrative through the constantly critical voice of Poison Ivy, the final scenes also placed the episode (as with *Harlequinade*) within Quinn's sitcom/tragi-romance context and therefore the episode was not discrete from the Joker. BTAS episodes separate to *Mad Love* did exist, such as *Harley's Holiday* (1994) - the only Quinn based episode in BTAS to not revolve around the Joker - and *Girls' Night Out* (1998) which continued the Harley and Ivy friendship. These episodes, however, were broadcast after the three seminal works of *Harley and Ivy, Mad Love* and *Harlequinade* were released and so reinforced the themes of those episodes instead of foreshadowing new strategies.

The next section examines a DC comics storyworld which pushed the Anti-Mad Love narrative to its natural conclusion by placing Harley and Ivy into an explicitly romantic relationship and depicted the couple's first kiss.

4.5: Anti-Mad Love - DC Comics Bombshells

In 2014, the writer Amanda Conner confirmed that Harley Quinn and Poison Ivy were in a non-monogamous romantic relationship. This announcement, made through DC's official Twitter account, was significant for several reasons. For years fans had petitioned DC to recognise the non-heteronormative nature of the couple's relationship since the original *Harley and Ivy* episode aired in 1993, the romance forming a large proportion of fan fiction and fan art. Due to the growing impact of the internet and fan sites, an alternative storyworld to the official DC canon existed online in which Harley and Ivy were lovers. The production of Fan Canon or "*Fanon*" - as outlined by Juli Parrish in *Inventing a Universe: Reading and Writing Fan Fiction* (2007, p.33) - voiced the consensus opinion that this was the correct direction in which to take the franchise. The decision by DC to reify Quinn's bisexuality now meant the HQFU could absorb user generated content from the alternative fanon to communicate and spread to LGBTQ+ audiences who had become alienated by the property's consistent deployment of the Mad Love narrative strategy as an exercise in toxic masculinity. The Harley and Ivy romance was now codified as the central relationship of the HQFU, with the perpetual abuse of *Mad Love* relegated to the property's history.

Liam Burke writing in *Harley Quinn and the Carnivalesque Transformation of Comic Book Fandom* (2021) explores how DC's recognition of the Quinn/Ivy relationship demonstrated the power of fanon which "*Displaces the privileged position of the comic book and addresses the superhero genre's limited representation of gender and sexuality*" (p.2). This reification of the Sapphic relationship by DC was, therefore, an acknowledgement by the publisher that the web, and the community of the text's

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consumption, was at the heart of content creation and innovation and not the publisher.

DC's decision to move the Harley and Ivy relationship to the centre of the constellation also reinforced the importance of the Genesis Principle of Affiliation as the guiding thematic fidelity of the works. The publisher simply swapped Quinn's romantic relationships over; Mad Love was the past and Anti-Mad Love was the future with the Post-Mad Love narratives forming a bridge between the two. As a result, any works still adhering to the Mad Love narrative strategy - such as *Harley Loves Joker* (Dini and Palmiotti, 2017) - felt outmoded, tone deaf and tasteless at best and misogynistically oppositional at worst. The comic book *DC Comics Bombshells* (2015 - 2019) was the key Anti-Mad Love title in the sample for it contained the Retrogenesis Text, *Love Stories* (Bennett *et al.,* 2016), which re-calibrated Quinn's central relationship from the Joker to Poison Ivy.

DC Comics Bombshells was created for similar purposes to the supporting comics for the *Injustice* series of videogames, as peripheral digital publications which explored the storyworld of a DC media extension. Whilst Quinn's original Retrogenesis Text appeared in a peripheral designed to promote and explore a television extension of the *Batman* comics (BTAS), it was therefore consistent that a further peripheral publication would lay out the future direction for the character.

The storyworld of *DC Comics Bombshells* was based upon a line of merchandise statues, designed by artist Ant Lucia, which portrayed classic female DC characters in the style of 1940s pin up girls. Whilst this concept potentially contained the seeds of parody, kitsch and male gaze, the all-female creative team for the comic strip - led

by Marguerite Bennett – instead used this opportunity to explore multiple narratives of female empowerment. Although the series did not feature Quinn as much as other DC stalwarts such as Supergirl - and frequently relegated Quinn to standing around in the back of crowds - the storylines specifically created for the character were some of the most reactionary and provocative in the entire HQFU, and re-positioned Quinn in an unapologetically sexual relationship with Ivy.

Quinn's romantic relationship with Ivy formed the centre of her storylines in DCCB, but to arrive there she had to negotiate through the wreckage of her former life, navigating a revision of her Mad Love Retrogenesis Text which unusually suggested that the true identity of the character was Quinn ; the Quinzel persona merely being a disguise.

DCCB introduced Quinzel as an English psychiatrist working in Blitz-era London who suddenly became possessed by a voice she fearfully called, "Him", after supernatural forces were awoken by an occult ceremony in Berlin. This version of the Quinzel/Quinn transformation was unusual in that the Joker was not referenced directly but existed through an intertextual flashback of his teeth. Fig. 32 shows how Quinn's love heart eyes in the first panel, and the pink romantic font of her dialogue, parody the obsessive *Mad Love* iteration of the character which has been suddenly activated by the psychic shockwave.

Another unusual aspect to this transformation scene is that the clown make-up of Quinn appears spontaneously when the voice of "Him" manifests which suggests it is a magical transformation as if a spell has been broken. The fact the transformation also instantly makes Quinn more physically agile as she tackles an escaped

psychotic who attempts to murder her, also has connotations of a latent superpower being brought to the fore and the birth of a superhero identity.

Fig. 32: *DC Comics Bombshells* (Bennett *et. al,* 2015, #11, p.12)

Quinn's mission in the narrative becomes the tracking down of the source of the psychic messages so she can be freed from the torture imposed by "Him". This locates this piece at first in the Post-Mad Love narrative strategy, especially when Quinn reveals she believes "Him" to be her former paramour - a gangster she only refers to as "Mistah J."

Fig. 33 shows Quinn's sepia-tinged flashback to "Mistah J," with the look of both Quinn and the Joker a pastiche of Warner Bros. crime films of the 1930s and 1940s. BTAS

Harley Quinn was a self-parodic performance of a film noir moll and her choice to wear

fur coats was a self-reflexive costume decision. The fantasy life of Harleen

Quinzel in BTAS therefore reaches an apotheosis in DCCB with this Quinn being an

actual gangster's moll whose fur coats were not performative costume but contemporary

fashion.

Fig. 33. *DC Comics Bombshells* (Bennett *et. al,* 2015, #42, p.8)

In a reverse of the usual *Mad Love* storyline, Quinn's gangster paramour - in scenes

reminiscent of Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles* - turns to voodoo and black magic

which prompts the terrified Quinn to hide in London with a fake English accent and

new moniker: Doctor Harleen Quinzel. This reverse trajectory - Quinzel is the

disguise performance of gangster Harley Quinn – is a bizarre and unlikely twist but the character anticipates these narrative flourishes with the line, "*Three dimensional characters always come with confusing backstories*" (Bennett *et. al,* 2016 #42, p.21) which encourages the reader to view the story's inconsistencies with irony.

When Quinn reaches Berlin, the Joker visions are revealed as false, being produced instead by a wholly separate supernatural antagonist who preys upon character's psychological weaknesses. But although Quinn has been drawn in by psychic bait, this does not diminish the importance of the Joker as being the catalyst and context for her transformation which therefore still holds fidelity to the *Mad Love* narrative strategy. It may have been a fake Joker who transformed Quinzel into Quinn, but it was still a version of the Joker, nonetheless.

In contrast with the *Injustice* storyworld iteration of Quinn - whose character is defined by internal struggle - the DCCB iteration is a more superficial character. Her two desires - loving Ivy and killing Nazis - fulfilling the fantasy aspect that many DC fans desired; to see Quinn finally consummate and maintain an exclusive relationship with what the fanon community saw as the real love of her life. The kiss between Quinn and Ivy, pictured in Fig. 34, is the first romantic kiss between the couple in the history of the HQFU and, although non-canonical, represented a watershed moment for the fictional universe. This transition for Quinn between romantic partners during DCCB reflected the decision by DC to move the character on from *Mad Love*. However, this decision did not locate DCCB in the Post-Mad Love strategy as - one brief scene aside - Quinn did not spend any time processing the after effects of the Mad Love narrative. Quinn, instead, just moved onto a happier romantic place when she realised the Joker no longer existed, this new romance

becoming the central story of her DCCB narrative, and then - after being remediated in the storyline, *Surprise, Surprise* (2017) - the entire HQFU.

It is not hyperbole to say that this is the kiss which shakes Quinn's universe.
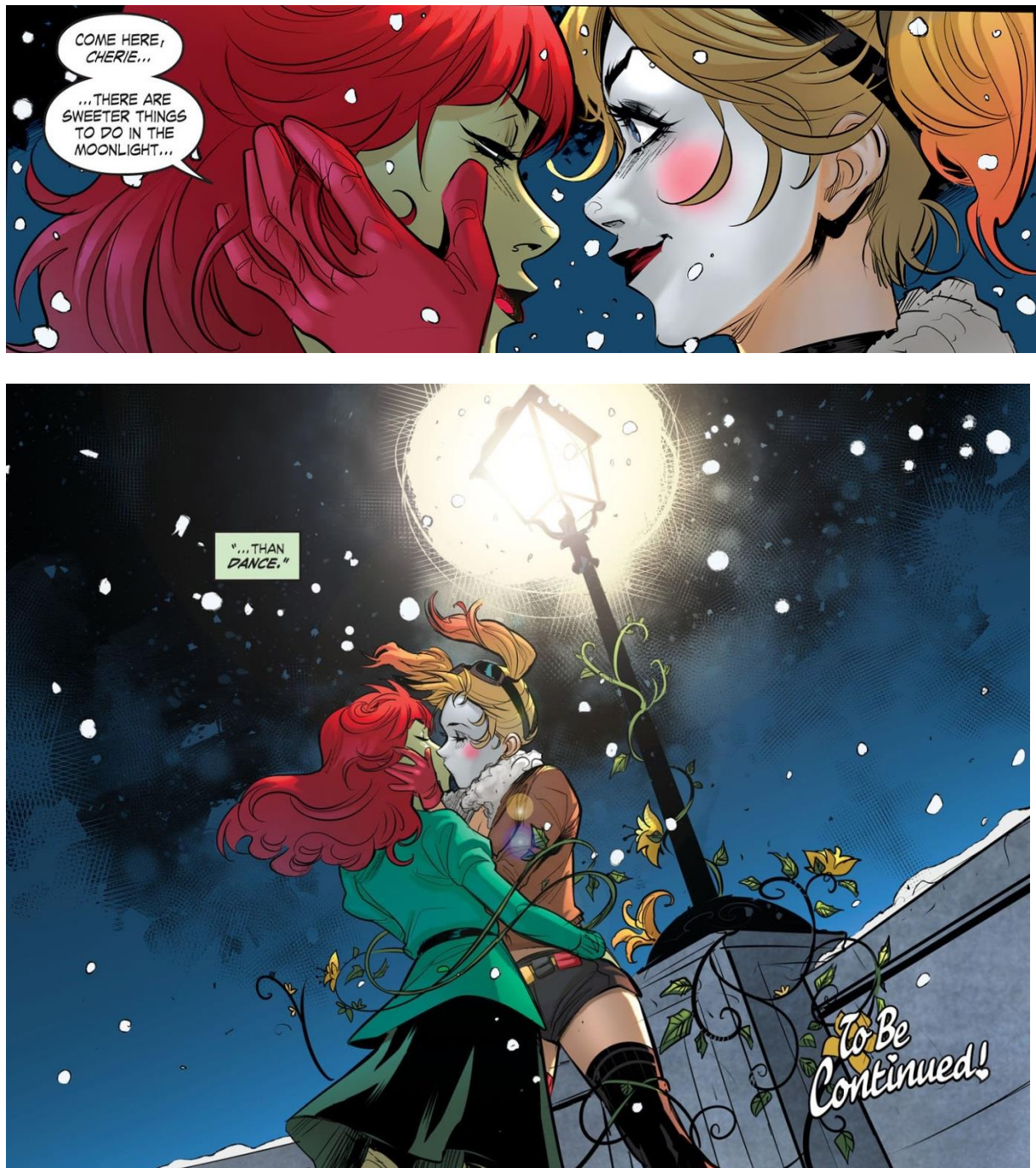
Fig. 34: *DC Comics Bombshells* (Bennett *et.al,* 2016 #42, p.21)

Whilst Quinn was engaged in the most romantic and openly sexual relationship portrayed within the HQFU, the dynamic of the character in DCCB was also significantly more comic in this storyworld than her other titles. This comic tone was expressed by the character behaving as if she was indestructible with seemingly no relationship to reality. This is evidenced by Quinn's riding a bomb dropped from a stolen Spitfire (Fig. 35) whilst wearing a Christmas elf costume in a reference to the fall of Major Kong in the Stanley Kubrick film *Dr. Strangelove* (1964). This iteration of Quinn acted as if she were a superhero and her appearance in Fig. 35 not only references Kubrick and Christmas but contains a fascinating selection of semantic codes which comment on the character's existence in other HQFU storyworlds. These include hold up stockings with white stripes which reference the artist Darwyn Cooke's *New 52* iteration of the character who wore one red and one black stocking with corresponding black and red horizontal stripes. Quinn's bra in Fig. 35 also displays four white diamonds on a red background which references the four black diamonds of Quinn's *Arkham Knight* costume. Finally, Quinn wears a Bat utility belt which references not only the Bombshells baseball team led by Batgirl in DCCB but Quinn's founding franchise, the BFU. In summary, elements in Quinn's clothing which traditionally appeared black, were also now white which suggests overall that this is a more heroic and lighter version of the character.

This heroic quality of Quinn's dress in DCCB reflected a significant amount of heroism in Quinn's storylines. Content analysis of the motivating factors in Quinn's DCCB stories revealed a similar pattern to the *Injustice* series, with the character attempting to genuinely care for other people whilst faced with the ugly realities of prejudice and discrimination. The shadow of the Holocaust hangs over DCCB,

contextualised by Quinn's Jewish ancestry, and given expression in a later crossover

story - *Where Bombshells Dare* (2017) - in which the Conner/Palmiotti variant of

Harley Quinn travels back in time, teams up with her Bombshells counterpart, and

kills Hitler.

Fig. 36: *DC Comics Bombshells* (Bennett *et. al,* 2015, #14, p.4)

Quinn's characterisation in DCCB is a far cry from the villainess of *Mad Love* but still

remains congruent to the Genesis Principle. In DCCB Quinn's intense relationship with

Ivy becomes their dominant storyline in the property. Therefore, whilst *DC Comics*

Bombshells deploys Quinn on the surface as heroic comic relief, this storyline is not

incongruous to the HQFU because the love affair between the two women still

articulates the Genesis Principle of Affiliation.

In conclusion, this section explores how DCCB, like *Injustice*, continues a trend within the HQFU to develop the constellation through peripheral texts of extension; in this case a comic book series designed to promote and further a line of figurines became the vanguard of same sex representation just as a videogame peripheral articulated the most sensitive depiction of intimate partner violence.

In an interview for the *Inverse* website about DCCB, Marguerite Bennett, explained that she developed the romance story for Quinn after being taken by the "*Bedroom eyes*" of her statue (2016). This reflects the work of Clare Parody whose argument, discussed in chapter one, centred upon merchandise and toys being given storyworld privilege; a concept which finds the purest expression in the subject matter of the next section: *DC Super Hero Girls.*

4.6 Anti-Mad Love: DC Super Hero Girls

Whilst previous storyworlds examined in this chapter, such as *Suicide Squad*, *Injustice* and *Bombshells* contextualised their content to the *Mad Love* Retrogenesis Text, and remediated the events to produce new material, this final section investigates a storyworld in which *Mad Love* has never existed to begin with.

Created in 2015, to rival the successful *Disney Princess* brand in the hearts of girls aged six to twelve, *DC Super Hero Girls* (DCSHG) portrays the exploits of canonical DC heroes, such as Wonder Woman and Batgirl, as they attend Superhero High School and combat threats from classic DC villains. A native transmedia brand, the storyworld of DCSHG was innovatively launched with an animated web series, a television film and a toy line which then grew across several direct to video feature films, prose novels, puzzle and sticker books, graphic novels, digital and print

comics, as well as a monthly children's' magazine. A capsule brand *Lego DC Super Hero Girls,* with its own web series, and direct to video feature content, was launched in 2017 which maintained continuity of story content, tone, and genre with the main series.

The President of DC Entertainment, Diane Nelson's aim for DCSHG was to, "*Represent the embodiment of our long-term strategy to harness the power of our diverse character and to offer relatable and strong role models in a unique way, just for girls*" (DC, 2015). The most interesting aspect of DCSHG, in the context of this statement, was how the brand remediated the character of Harley Quinn from canonical villainess and anti-hero to a relatable role model for young girls.

Re-imagining Quinn's role as a class clown, without any of the character's previous baggage or relationships, main creative Shea Fontana managed to reinforce the appealing and attractive qualities of Harley Quinn, yet also tackled some of the darker themes of the character regarding mental wellness in a manner appropriate to the target audience. As regards genre, the sixty-three DCSHG works in Zone Two, focused entirely on notions of platonic friendship and were, therefore, romance storylines. Quinn's role in the DCSHG storyworld was mainly comic relief but she was also given several dramatic storylines in the DCSHG graphic novels and comic books which deepened her character beyond the superficial characterisation of the storyworld's moving image media.

Quinn's persona in DCSHG is the sweet best friend character, who often ends up in zany scrapes, and her actions are always borne from a position of kindness. At first, the character's main fantasy is to become an online celebrity, which reflects her deep-seated need for approval and reinforces her desire for affiliation. This reaches

a peak in the web episode *Quintessential Harley* (2016) in which - echoing the Harley Quinn costume craze that followed the opening of 2016's *Suicide Squad* film - the character inspires a movement of costumed copycats to create a wave of pranks across Metropolis. Quinn feels threatened, however, by this fan-based appropriation of her signature characteristics and so - whilst at first riding high on her celebrity - deliberately bursts the zeitgeist bubble to maintain her uniqueness. This is a rare story in DCSHG (and the HQFU) which centres upon Quinn demonstrating power to nullify over-affiliation, and ultimately leads to a re-positioning of the DCSHG character in line with the *Mad Love* Retrogenesis Text, for Quinn's career replacement for celebrity becomes psychiatry.

DCSHG was the purest expression of Paul Dini's family of friends concept - as expressed in the commentary for *Harlequinade* - the Harley Quinn character crucially being the broadest character in the Superhero High gang and therefore never over-shadowed by a more colourful persona. The character in this storyworld also held no affiliation to the Joker and so remained free of *Mad Love* trauma. A form of the Joker existed in this storyworld - his image was seen in a videogame played by Batgirl - but the character had no interaction with Quinn or Superhero High. This therefore bisected Quinn's diamond-based costume, clownish manner, and name from the Genesis Text, where they were reinforcement tropes of the Joker. Instead, the DCSHG storyworld revealed Quinn's clownish characteristics were personal, self-developed choices, the comic book series *Date with Disaster* (Fontana et al, 2018) even depicting a toddler Quinn wearing the similar blue and red colour scheme alongside her best friend Ivy.

In the DCSHG storyworld, Quinn was never called Quinzel and so a form of reverse Retrogenesis occurred in the series which, rather than show the transformation of psychiatrist Harleen Quinzel into Harley Quinn, developed a teenage Harley Quinn character to the *Mad Love* entry point of being a psychiatrist. This was reinforced by a strategy developed from 2017 onwards to converge some of the canonical imagery associated with the HQFU into DCSHG merchandise. This reinforced the fidelity of the Quinn character and, as seen in Fig. 37, linked DCSHG merchandise with the BTAS black and red colour scheme and three diamond motif. This suggested that DCSHG Quinn may be on the path to her own Mad Love variant. And whilst the strategy of *DC Super Friends and Lego DC Comics Superheroes* to remove Quinn's *Mad Love* storyline from abuse tropes had the effect of producing a Harmless Harley iteration, DC's strategy to incorporate canonical Quinn imagery into DCSHG, instead, produced a Halfway Harley who had not yet reached the *Mad Love* storyline, but whose inclusion within it was being foreshadowed. Clare Parody's concept of toys and merchandise as vehicles which furthered story, was at its most articulate here with the DCSHG property demonstrating that a single key ring - when seeded with canonical imagery - expressed story subtext.

Fig. 38 shows a calligram from the DCSHG calendar for 2018. Here Quinn is summarised as: mischievous, class clown; acrobat; fun; over the top; prankster; agile; super; sweet; hero; and joker. There is clear intertextuality at play here with the last term alluding to Quinn's existence in other storyworlds. The duality of this word both highlighted her DCSHG role as class clown, whilst also furthering the suggestion of a future *Mad Love* variant.

Fig. 37: DCSHG: Mad Love variant items.

Fig. 38: DC Super Hero Girls Calligram (2017)

Quinn's story content in DCSHG was unified by the transmedia narrative of Anti-Mad Love as derived from the *Harley and Ivy* BTAS episode (1993). This promoted ideas of positive and supportive relationships as opposed to dark and abusive ones; empowering values which were consistently returned to throughout this storyworld. This facilitation of the empowerment of others ranged from Quinn's support of school friends to her encounters with key female figures in history in the comic strip *Past Times at Superhero High* (Fontana et. al, 2016). In this complex story - which references Ray Bradbury's *A Sound of Thunder* (1953) - Quinn's purloining of a dinosaur egg during a time-travel based school trip has the butterfly effect of Amelia Earhart and Emily Dickinson's achievements being written out of history. On discovery of this effect, Quinn is given a mission by Batgirl to return to Earhart and Dickinson's timelines and inspire them to fulfil their promise which she succeeds in doing so by challenging their societal values (Fig. 39).
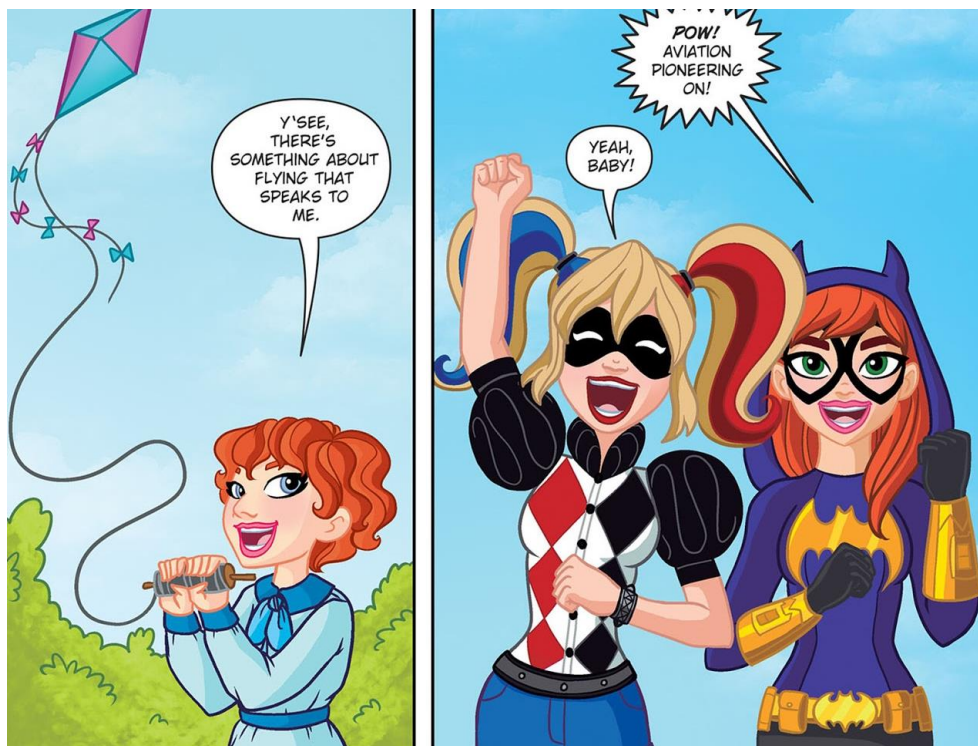
Fig. 39. *Past Times at Superhero High* (Fontana, 2016, #12, p.5)

The DCSHG variant of Quinn was kind hearted and supportive but was also self-conscious about her lack of super powers and, in *Past Times at Superhero High*, took a throwaway comment to heart. Quinn's entire raison d'être in DCSHG was affiliation - her opening panel in puzzle book *Harley Quinn's Brain Squeezers* (2017) directly addressed the reader with "*Hello Friends*!" (p.3) - and this made her characterisation in DCSHG the purest form of the Genesis Principle. For whilst Quinn's activities at Superhero High, such as her blog which collected superhero gaffes in the web episode *Fall into Superhero High* (2015), demonstrated her biggest goal in life was popularity, her biggest fear was losing friends. This was the negative position of the Genesis Principle and demonstrated that the DCSHG Quinn was completely in thematic synchronicity with the rest of the constellation.

Quinn's appearance in DCSHG was also semantically synchronised with the rest of the HQFU constellation by the position of the colours in her hair. In the *Harley Quinn* solo title which formed the centre of the HQFU, Quinn's hair was portrayed as dipped red on her right and blue on her left, but the reverse was true of the DCSHG iteration. This design suggested that DCSHG was a reverse Quinn and therefore not touched by villainy in any way. This concept was reinforced by the DCSHG comic strip *Harley Twin* (Hutchison and Rodriguez, 2017) in which an evil Quinn appeared; her hair coloured to match the main DC continuity. This design detail suggested that the evil Quinn was an exile from another, presumably Mad Love related, storyworld whilst DCSHG Harley was a unique superhero variant.

In the comic strip, *No Shrinkin' Violet* (Hutchison and Rodriguez, 2017) further intertextuality occurred when Quinn and Ivy confronted Killer Croc. In this storyline, Quinn became trapped, and Ivy faced the super villain alone. But before she did so,

Quinn gave her best friend some words of support. "*You're Poison Ivy. Me? I got a big hammer. You? You control plants. You totally got this,*" Quinn enthused, *"You might not believe in yourself, but I do."* This speech was typical of the DCSHG Quinn who often took the role of cheerleader to reinforce the Genesis Principle. However, during this exchange Quinn also called Ivy by the affectionate nickname of "*Puddin*". This term both contained connotations of *Mad Love* ("*Puddin*" being Quinn's codified term of affection for the Joker), and Quinn's Sapphic relationship with Ivy in other storyworlds in which she had replaced the Joker as Quinn's romantic partner. The deployment of this term also led to multiple repercussions for the future of DCSHG for it suggested this variant of Quinn will never become involved in a Mad Love narrative, as Ivy is her one and only *"Puddin"*. However, beyond this speculation, the use of this term also brought a more cogent question to the fore: could a HQFU storyworld be sustained without *Mad Love,* as without this storyline to provide a dramatic character arc, how could the Quinn character grow?

This concept is explored in the DCSHG storyline *Out of the Bottle* (Fontana, 2017)*.* In this storyline, Quinn draws a comic strip which takes place in an alternate dimension where she imagines herself as a villain. The fictional Quinn, however, comes to life and informs her creator that she prefers the term Antihero. Fig. 40 shows how the anti-heroic Quinn begins to play the role of the Joker in *Mad Love* by providing an opportunity for DCSHG Quinn to indulge all her naughtiest schemes as the anti-hero's "*partner in crime.*" Some of the girls at Superhero High - remediated from villainous sources - have retained their wicked ways in this storyworld, such as Cheetah who becomes an antagonist to Wonder Woman. However, DCSHG Quinn is resolutely in opposition to any avaricious or weak iterations of the character, and resists this temptation, erasing the fantasy of anti-heroic Quinn in the process. This

storyline, therefore, presents a revision of *Mad Love* in which Quinn plays both the role of Quinzel and the Joker, the diminishment of the latter allowing Quinn to move into her Anti-Mad Love position.

Fig. 40: Out of the Bottle (Fontana, 2017 #11, p.18)

The climax of *Out of the Bottle* also provides a revision of *Mad Love* in another way, for Quinn uses her knowledge of counselling to rescue their teacher June Moone from the clutches of the evil spirit, Enchantress. Fig. 41 shows Quinn affirming to Moone that she can beat the Enchantress and move on, which applies to every storyworld in the HQFU where Quinn struggles to express herself; stifled and crippled by her desire to seek love and acceptance from the wrong person.

Out of the Bottle is a metaphor for Quinn seizing her own fictional universe from the Joker and, in doing so, changing her own story from *Mad Love,* "*The stories we tell ourselves, 'bout ourselves shape how we see ourselves. When we change the story, we change ourselves,*" Quinn tells Moone, becoming a pseudo-Quinzel in the process. "*You keep tellin' yourself you're not strong enough to fight the Enchantress. Change your story. Tell yourself you can beat her*" (ibid, p.13).

Fig 41: *Out of the Bottle* (Fontana, 2017, #12, p.13)

This storyline was used ostensibly by the producers of the comic strip to promote a message of mental wellness to the junior school readers of the book. Fig. 42 shows a panel from the comic so direct in communicating this message, that it works as a supporting poster for a wellness campaign in line with the stated desire of the Super Hero Girls property to, "*Help build character and confidence and empower girls to discover their true potential*" (DC, 2016)

Fig 42: *Out of the Bottle* (Fontana, 2017, #12, p.17)

Out of the Bottle, also works as a metaphor for the HQFU. Harley Quinn's story, remediated, repeated and examined in detail throughout the fictional universe dramatises several crucial pieces of self-interrogation: Who Am I? What is my contribution to the world? Am I good or evil? And most crucially: can I ever change? All these questions are interrogated by the next, and last, storyworld in this chapter to be examined: Amanda Conner and Jimmy Palmiotti's *Harley Quinn* which explodes the character across multiple tones and genres in search of the answer.

4.6. The Harley Quinn-verse

Whilst *Suicide Squad* often saw Quinn viciously fighting against Eastern European mercenaries, and *DC Super Hero Girls* portrayed the character struggling to find her place in an educational institute dedicated to perfection, *Harley Quinn* (2015 - current), instead, embraced the situation comedy as inspiration. With Quinn at the centre of an outlandish extended family in a domestic Coney Island setting, the series from writers Amanda Conner and Jimmy Palmiotti, deconstructed the meaning of comic books and satirised the nature of superheroes, attacking the very structure of the HQFU with a Situationist zeal.

To the non-initiated, the stories of this title often appear to exist in a zone entirely demarcated by the whims and desires of the creative team; Quinn's attempts to lead a relatively quiet life being interrupted by a selection of outlandish aliens, cannibals, gods, zombies and time travelling vigilantes, with the storylines often random in structure and intent. This would have been a weakness, however, if the series did not also innovatively deploy an over-arching self-reflexivity which frequently broke the fourth wall by locating the action of the comic strip within the tradition of metafiction. Throughout the *Harley Quinn* sample of works gathered, the series consistently engaged in intertextual play with other HQFU storyworlds, ignored any form of story canonicity within its own storyworld and spread across multiple spin off titles and superhero properties such as *Harley Quinn and Power Girl* (2015), *Harley Quinn and Her Gang of Harleys* (2016) and *Harley Quinn's Little Black Book* (2015 - 2017) creating its own alternative capsuled universe to accommodate an array that this thesis dubs the Quinn-verse.

Reflecting a property and character whose values were permanently in flux, the genre of the Quinn-verse was without focus. Within the content analysis sample there were as many thriller storylines, where Quinn acted as a day glo Sam Spade tracking down missing persons in contemporary Hollywood, as there were storylines in which Quinn struggled with post-traumatic stress disorder or went into space and fought aliens in toilet humoured *Mad* magazine fashion.

This clear non-uniformity of content across the Quinn-verse in respect to genre would evidence a fractured title, unable to coalesce meaning, if not for the purpose it held within the overall HQFU. But by being so self-reflexive, the Quinn-verse works spoke to every storyworld within the HQFU, and therefore maintained continuity of tone and intent. This quality therefore demonstrated a fluidity to the Quinn-verse which allowed the solo title to speak to multiple HQFU audiences simultaneously, whilst by frequently thumbing its nose at the concept of story synchronicity.

Fig. 43 shows Quinn-verse variant covers which playfully deploy the character examining the costume tropes of her property, and in doing so provide self-reflexive bridging material between storyworlds. *Harley Quinn Rebirth #17* (2017) shows the Quinnverse iteration (identifiable by her red and blue dipped hair and Dachshund Nathan) posing by the mirror, marvelling that the red and black bodysuit of her BTAS iteration still fits. With a calendar of the Joker on the wall, and a prop joke gun sitting amongst other costume accoutrements, this is an image of Post-Mad Love Quinn remarking on how much she has moved on from BTAS, as if *Mad Love* Quinn was a younger version whose clothes the mature Quinn had re-discovered in storage twenty-five years later.
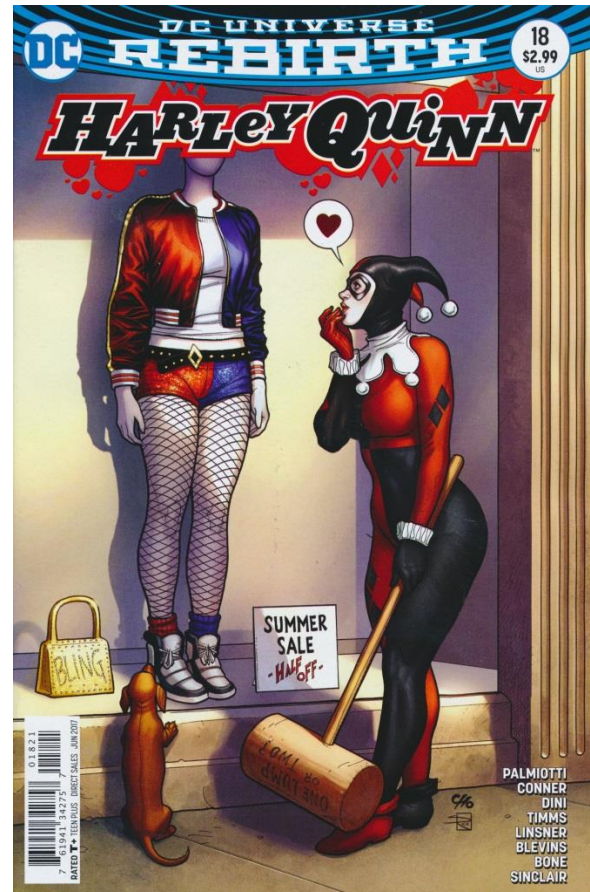
Fig. 43: *Rebirth Harley Quinn #17/18.* Variant Covers by Frank Cho (2017)

Frank Cho's intertextual cover also reflects the narrative content of *Harley Quinn #17*

which includes the first episode of Quinn-verse storyline *Red Meat* (Conner and

Palmiotti, 2017) in which Quinn was hired by the Mayor of New York to investigate a

spate of missing homeless people and the first episode of *Harley Loves Joker* (Dini

and Palmiotti, 2017) which featured BTAS iterations of Quinn and the Joker in a

broad knockabout situation comedy. This potential clash of tones and genres in a

single issue between the Post-Mad Love Thriller *Red Meat* starring a fully

empowered and independent Quinn, and the *Mad Love* nostalgic remix *Harley Loves*

Joker which featured Quinn as a gurning supplicant - was granted coherence by the

cover which portrayed the Post-Mad Love Quinn looking back at the BTAS iteration

as an immature phase. Both are the same person, the cover declares, but one has evolved beyond the other.

The variant cover of *Harley Quinn #18* (Fig. 43) continues the intertextual gameplay of the series by portraying the Quinn-verse iteration (identified once more by the presence of Nathan at her feet) now dressed as *Mad Love* Quinn, admiring the costume of live action *Suicide Squad* Quinn in a shop window. This costume of shorts, satin jacket and fishnet stockings is situated next to a gold handbag which provides further connotation to the *Suicide Squad* film in which Quinn breaks a shop window to steal a similar item and suggests that both versions of Quinn (Quinn-verse and *Mad Love*) are now outmoded by a further iteration. This cover, therefore, provides further fictional universe coherence, as well as a sly commentary on the character's multiple appearances and identities which are portrayed as costumes she swaps impulsively on a whim.

The Quinn-verse works therefore provide a frame of reference for the audiences' relationship with the overall HQFU; the Genesis Principle of Affiliation providing the centre of gravity for this storyworld, which in turn holds the constellation together by balancing Mad Love, Post-Mad Love and Anti-Mad Love narratives simultaneously.

Amanda Conner and Jimmy Palmiotti's 2016 storyline, *Twenny Five Big One$* (*Harley Quinn #25*), demonstrates the Anti-Mad Love narrative strategy operating in tandem with the Post-Mad Love narrative and demonstrates significant textual agility through an interrogation of *Mad Love* in a self-reflexive manner which also references *Harley and Ivy*.

One of the key scenes in *Twenny Five Big One$* pictures Quinn and Ivy in bed together, following a night out (Fig. 44). Ivy is concerned Quinn's attempt to free her boyfriend from jail will also mean Quinn may be potentially facing down the imprisoned Joker. Quinn dismisses this concern as her boyfriend is worth it, which provokes the following compliment from Ivy, "*One of my favourite qualities you have is your total devotion to the people you love and the utter loathing you have for the people that have done you wrong. I find it charming, even sexy.*" Quinn's playful retort that she has goosebumps and wonders if Ivy wishes to feel them, then steers the scene into different waters. Ivy's matter of fact counter comment, "*We both know where that leads and we don't have time for that,*" combined with Quinn being topless for most of the scene, erases the coyness of their previous encounters in episodes such as *Harley and Ivy*. It is clear from these panels that these characters are in a sexual relationship but that this sexuality doesn't define them or create monogamy. Instead, their sexuality is an expression of affiliation.

The story then follows Quinn as she enters the lion's den; her boyfriend's prison cell being, as Ivy feared, Joker adjacent. The Joker taunts Quinn through the cell bars, "*You red and black bimbo. I made you who you are today*!" (p.15), a comment which both attacks her sense of independence in the Quinn-verse storyworld but also references her success as a media product. This iteration of Quinn, however, is more physically capable than previous variants and - rather than cave in - steps into the cell instead to confront the villain

Fig. 44: *Twenny Five Big One$* (Conner, Palmiotti and Hardin (2016, p.7.)

In doing so Quinn reinforces the Post-Mad Love narrative that she, "*Shoulda done this a long time ago*" (p.16), the confrontation a mirror to her jail break of the Joker in *Mad Love*. But this Quinn is a far cry from the wide eyed BTAS fan girl. This is a cool and combat experienced adult who - when grabbed violently by the Joker with the line, "*I see its playtime just like the old days*" (ibid) - stands her ground. "*Oh no. Nuthin' like the old days Mistah J,*" she declares, her jaw set in defiance, the Joker's presence in the panel (Fig. 45) reduced to a predator like maw.

Fig. 45: Twenny Five Big One$ (Conner, Palmiotti and Hardin, 2016, p.16.)

Even by the standards of Teen Plus rated comic books - which frequently display graphic violence - the fight which follows between the former lovers is savage, Quinn matching the Joker blow by blow before biting his lip off in a kiss. Spitting the severed lip to the floor, Quinn curses,

"I hate you fer what you bring out in me. All I wanted to do was talk to you and here we are poundin each other to a pulp as usual cause every time we get together that's all we do. It's not my thing. I don't like it and I'm done with it, so do yourself a favour and for once in your miserable life say nuthin, no chattin', no chortling,' just lie here and bleed" (Conner and Palmiotti, #25, 2017, pp. 20-21.)

This speech is notable for Quinn's summation of the *Mad Love* narrative and the clear rejection of the repetitive tropes that compose it: "*Every time we get together, that's all we do.*"

Quinn's cathartic beating of the Joker is so severe that she leaves him prone on the floor of the cell, semi-conscious, but he continues to bait her. "*You still love me Harley. You can't live without me and it drives you insane,*" he taunts, *"You'll never rid yourself of me. Without me you're nothing*" (ibid, p.22). Quinn snaps and, in a clear reflection of *Harlequinade,* pulls a gun on the villain but this time does not pull the trigger. "*I finally get why Batman never just killed you all these years. It would give you exactly watcha want,*" she spits, throwing the gun to the floor.

This is one of several Joker/Quinn confrontations in the Zone Two samples, but the power of this exemplar is that it comments on the HQFU itself and examines tensions at the heart of the fictional universe regarding the importance of the Joker in Quinn's life and franchise. The storylines of *Mad Love, Harley and Ivy and Harlequinade* are all self reflexively revisited and remediated within the space of a few pages, the James Bond influenced cover (Fig. 46) encapsulating the Post-Mad Love tensions at play in this scene by displaying the polar influences which have defined Quinn since her Genesis. In this final confrontation with the Joker, the

character evolves beyond the Retrogenesis Text *The Hunt for Harley Quinn* and receives Quinn's ultimate epiphany: she is not destined to be the Joker after all but Batman.
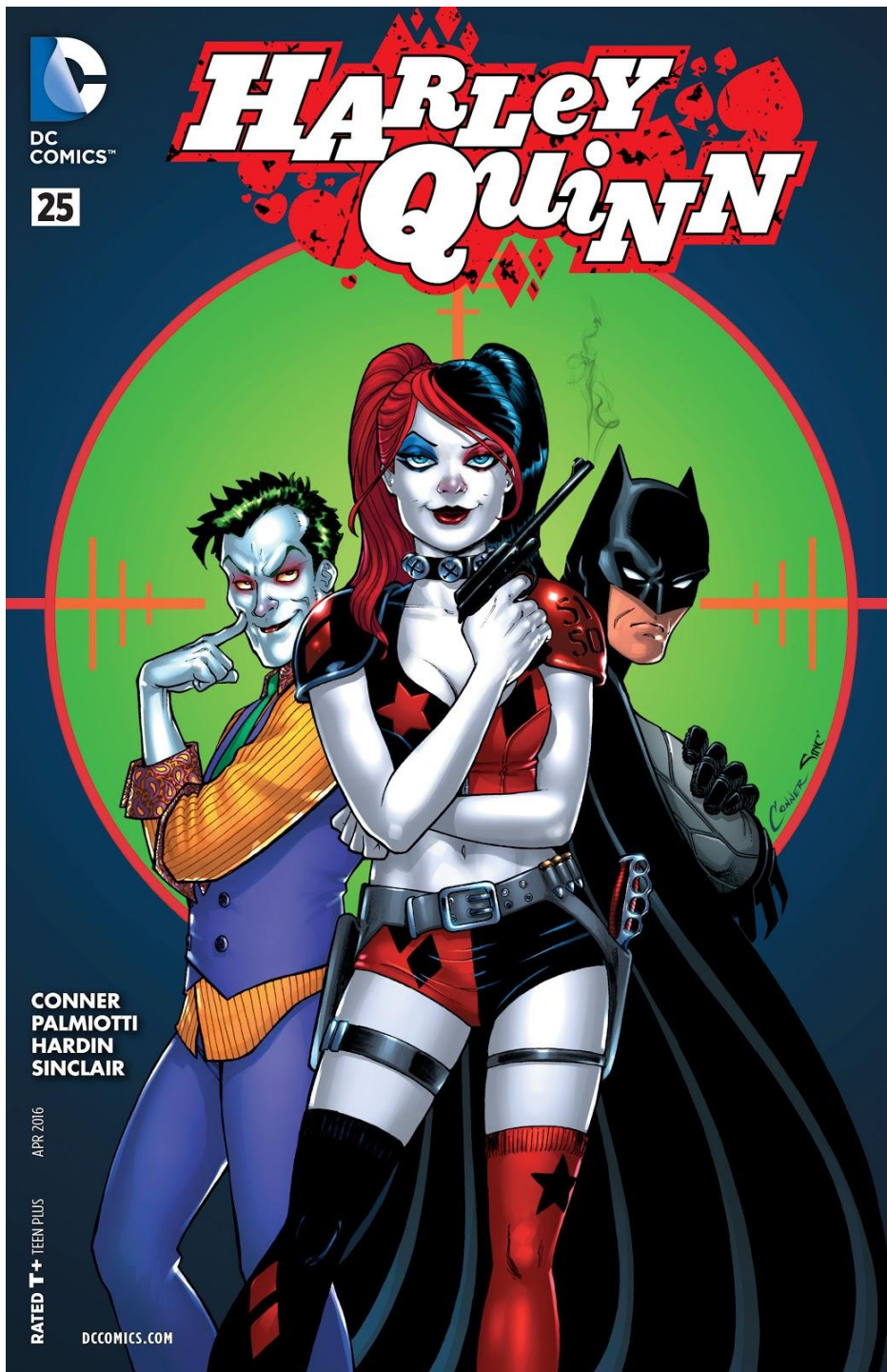
Fig. 46 *Harley Quinn* #25 (Conner and Hardin, 2016)

As a thematic bridge between disparate storyworlds, the Quinn-verse comic books consistently draw attention to their nature as metafiction to emphasise the lack of story synchronicity within the constellation. This self-reflexivity reaches a peak in the series *Harley Quinn and Power Girl* (2015) during which Quinn convinces the amnesiac superheroine (an alternative universe version of Supergirl) that Quinn is her super heroic partner. Written entirely as farce, this series of storylines emphasise, both the ability of the self-aware Quinn to parody the tropes of the classical superhero narrative (unlike the cunning Quinn, Power Girl's imperviousness renders her powerless against threats she cannot defeat with violence) and her consistent need to affiliate with a partner. Quinn's stolen relationship with Power Girl not only brings her a new friend but also reveals a repressed desire on behalf of the character to be heroic which reinforces other storyworlds such as DCC, DCSHG*,* and *Injustice.* This is a re-positioning of the character from antihero to superhero which reflected Quinn's burgeoning popularity and Post-Mad Love independence; the Power Girl storylines within the Quinn-verse providing a thematic continuity to an overall shift in the HQFU.

The Power Girl storylines also allowed the HQFU to explore and satirise the role of female characters in comic books, a theme previously explored in Quinn-verse writer/artist Amanda Conner's work on Garth Ennis' transgressive one-shot comic *The Pro* (2002) which featured a super-powered prostitute in sexually explicit scenarios. Fig. 47 compares Conner's work on *The Pro* alongside her portrayal of Power Girl in the HQFU; the bust of the latter character enlarged to parodic proportions to caricature the trope of the overly endowed and sexualised female superhero. As Quinn has been a figure consistently sexualised from her first appearance in her Genesis text, *Joker's Favor* (1992), the tension between an

objectifying portrayal of the character and an empowering one becomes operant within the *Harley Quinn and Power Girl* stories. Quinn, fixated on Power Girl's breasts, both sees the superhero as a fantasy sexual partner and also representative of a form of independent hyper feminine presence which Quinn feels she lacks.

Fig. 47: Comparison - *The Pro* (2002) / *Power Girl* (2010)

In the storyline, *Be Careful What You Wish For* (2016), Quinn's first request - to a genie unleashed from a magic lamp - is for a bust the size of Power Girl, the weight of which instantly topples her over until the wish is rescinded. This is both self-awareness on behalf of Amanda Conner, regarding the parodic intentions behind Power Girl's proportions, but also an interrogation of Quinn's definition of femininity. Quinn is a character who has acted her whole adult life in a role designed to provoke attraction, who jealously covets Power Girl's effortless ability to do so through her body. Demonstrated by Amanda Conner's cover to *Harley Quinn #11* (2014), in Fig. 48 Quinn is portrayed as a juvenile figure who longs for the body of her more mature older sister

figure, the image satirises notions of the male teenage comic book audience (a superheroine measured by the size of her bust) whilst simultaneously articulating the relatability of Quinn. However, as the cover of *Harley Quinn Rebirth #16* (2017) in Fig. 48 also demonstrates, Power Girl and Quinn are also used by the title to celebrate feminine empowerment, the characters' position next to a suffrage monument locating their roles and dress as liberated. This choice furthers the Anti-Mad Love narrative strategy of DCSHG and DCCB in tandem with the Genesis Principle of Affiliation, both characters portrayed as strong female role models rather than objectified sexual figures.

Fig. 48: *Harley Quinn* #11 (2014) / *Harley Quinn Rebirth #16* (2017)

The textual agility of Amanda Conner and Jimmy Palmiotti's work in the central *Harley Quinn* property, challenges the notion of siloed storyworlds, the Quinn-verse works both celebrating and lampooning the constellation around it, whilst providing

thematic continuity without synchronicity of story. This lack of story canonicity meant that when the much-vaunted kiss between Quinn and Ivy took place in the Quinn-verse storyline, *Surprise, Surprise* (2017) it was a non-event; despite being an officially sanctioned moment designed to re-calibrate the HQFU around the "Harl-Ivy" pairing (Fig. 49). This was because the readership had seen the couple kiss before in the Retrogenesis Text *Love Stories* in the *DC Comics Bombshells* storyworld and, rather than see this storyworld as an irrelevant peripheral, the Quinn-verse storyworld and fanon community had incorporated it into the metanarrative. This was the opposite of the BFU at the time of Harley Quinn's creation, when the siloed storyworlds of BTAS and the main Batman comic book did not engage in dialogue. Twenty-Five years later, all of the storyworlds of the HQFU were in dialogue with each other through the gateway of the Quinn-verse and the fan community, and so the notion of a "canonical" story event in the HQFU, as DC's intent was for *Surprise, Surprise*, was an outdated concept that betrayed a lack of understanding of transmedia and the constellated community of fandom. So, although *Surprise Surprise* officially reified the Anti-Mad Love Narrative strategy into the mainstream of the *Harley Quinn* solo title, it was merely a remediation of story content which had existed elsewhere, similar to the translation of the *Mad Love* comic book into the BTAS episode *Trial* in 1994.
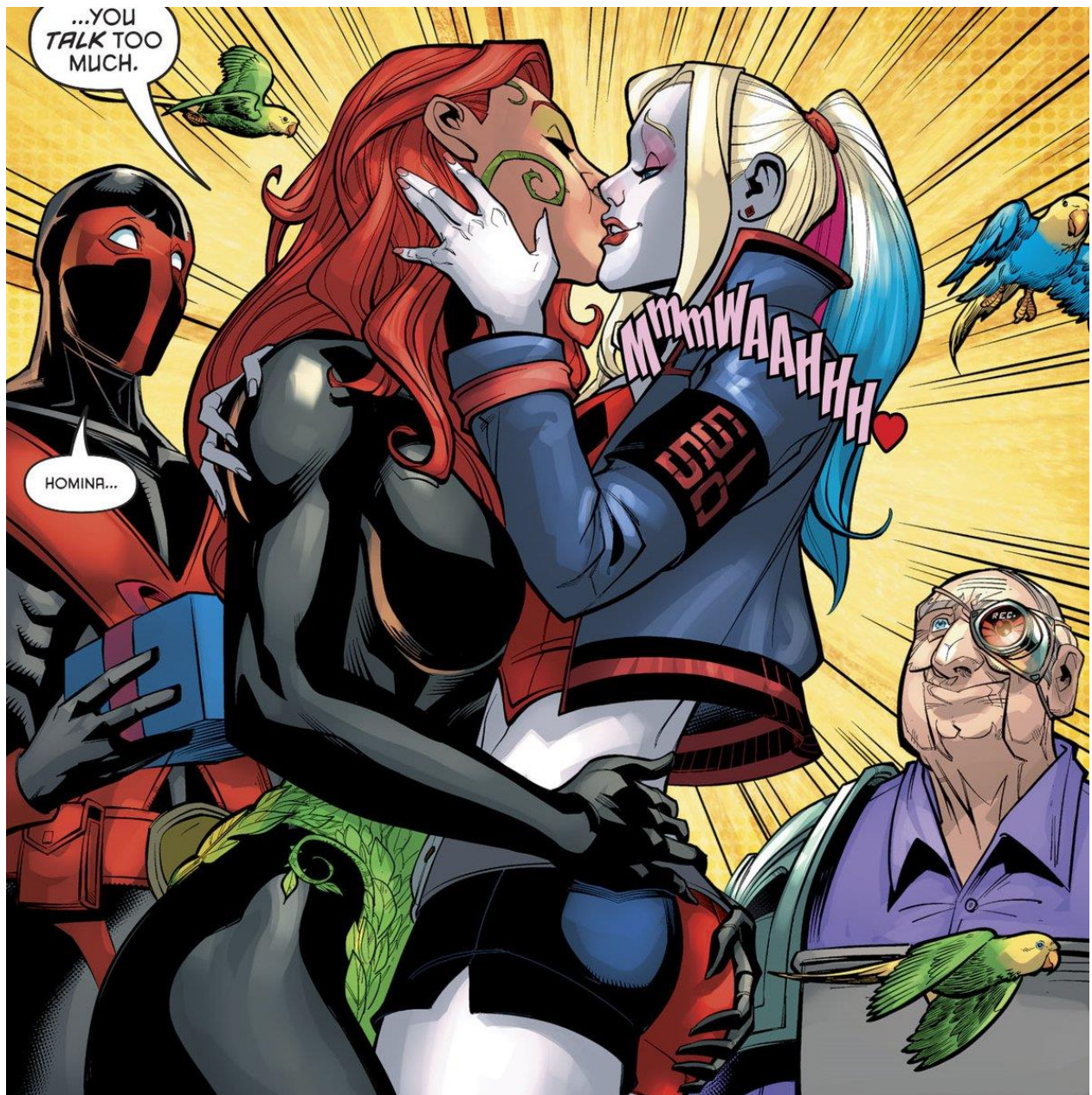
Fig. 49: *Surprise Surprise* (Conner, Palmiotti and Hardin, 2017).

4.8.Conclusion

When the individual storyworlds of Zone Two were interrogated for textual

signification, clear differentiation was evident in the mix of genre and tone between

properties such as *Suicide Squad, Injustice, DC Comics Bombshells and DC*

Super Hero Girls. Whilst the thriller aspects of *Suicide Squad* were pushed to the

front of the property, the *Injustice* storyworld was differentiated by a large proportion

of personal conflict. But despite their semantic differences, both works concerned Quinn's attempts to develop agency following the events of *Mad Love* and so provided a coherent Post-Mad Love narrative strategy.

Quinn's storylines in *DC Comics Bombshells* and *DC Super Hero Girls*, meanwhile, were both light-hearted explorations of romantic and platonic relationships which provided a coherent Anti-Mad Love narrative strategy. The relationships at the centre of this strategy stood in opposition to *Mad Love* and allowed Quinn's world to grow in a positive manner. The HQFU maintained brand integrity and thematic fidelity, as these storyworlds - and the narrative strategies which furthered them - reinforced the Genesis Principle of Affiliation. This was tied together by Amanda Conner and Jimmy Palmiotti's Quinnverse texts whose strategy of deliberate non-synchronicity of story provided an overall guiding continuity of tone for the constellation and allowed a metanarrative to coalesce.

The final chapter of this thesis will examine a range of works released after the sampling period to test the veracity of the Genesis Principle and, in conclusion, induce a methodology for professional storyworld development.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

5.1. Introduction

The previous chapters examined textual examples of intensional forces within the HQFU. These forces derived from the Genesis Principle of Affiliation and were remediated across the storyworlds using the strategy of Retrogenesis. At first this strategy was used to codify the values of a still developing character in the nascent BTAS transmedia world, but it quickly grew to be the key strategy of remediation in the fictional universe for the next thirty years.

This chapter starts with an examination of some of the key works released since September 11th 2017 to test fidelity to the findings of the thesis, and to trace commonalities of content to the previous chapter's exemplars. The chapter will end with an exploration of the thesis's overall conclusion and the presentation of a structural model for fictional universe development.

5.1. New Works

The Retrogenesis Text *Mad Love* continued to be consistently remediated throughout the years following the sampling period, with the storyline recontexualised in several interesting ways.

In 2018, Paul Dini's *Harley Loves Joker* storyline - previously the retrogressive back pages of Conner and Palmiotti's solo *Harley Quinn* adventures - received its own two issue run. As previously discussed in this thesis, *Harley Loves Joker* was a BTAS inspired text in which Quinn and the Joker exchanged blows in a carnival of cruelty which continued to reinforce the *Mad Love* tradition of Quinn as a love sick fool,

whose punchbag existence was perpetually reinforced by her hope that one day the Joker may return her affections. *Harley Loves Joker* - the 2018 comic book - took a different approach, however, and traced a developing sense of independence in Quinn, based upon a recognition that her existence was futile. Fig. 50 shows the expression change on Quinn's face, from the exaggerated and comic BTAS variant to a more realistic, fixed expression, when the epiphany of the Joker's true nature has finally sunk in.

Fig. 51. Harley Loves Joker #2 (Dini and Blevins, 2018, p.11)

This subjectification of Quinn was a brave move for a series which had consistently exploited Quinn's infantile nature and portrayed her as an object of punishment. These panels introduce Quinn's humanity to the storyworld, and therefore make any future abuse, which has been the hallmarks of the title, an especially unsavoury prospect. Dini, however, has no interest in continuing the BTAS stereotype of Quinn as an unmediated figure and, in a surprising moment of intertextuality, introduces

Quinn's *New 52* variant to confront her, "*Cycle of insanity,*" (2018, p.7) via a hallucination. *New 52* Quinn is sick of BTAS Harley and her constant sycophancy towards the Joker, declaring, "*Every time I hope we are walking away from this nightmare, you go running back*!" When challenged by BTAS Harley on how she looks, *New 52* Harley sums up the whole Post-Mad Love philosophy, "*I look like you could be. Someone willing to stand up and move on. I'm not perfect but I am my own woman*".

This moment of self-reflexivity, in which a character from another storyworld crosses over into an unrelated diegesis, would be incoherent without the Retrogenesis strategy of the HQFU in which the past events of the property are consistently recontextualised through agile texts such as the Quinn-verse works. What is surprising about this moment is that it takes place in a series which previously wallowed in BTAS nostalgia and seemed unwilling to acknowledge that times had changed. Fig. 51 cuts to the heart of the *Mad Love* storyline by having *New 52* Harley confront the one presumption BTAS Harley consistently returns to: her belief that the Joker loved her. *"Did he say that? Has he ever said that?"* *New 52* Harley challenges. It is time for BTAS Harley to break from the never-ending Unrecognised Virtue storyline, and instil some independence, but this cause is apparently in vain.

The storyline, however, has one surprise left up its sleeve, and in the final panels, shows BTAS Harley finally standing up the Joker (Fig. 53). It should be stressed, that this is rebellion in the manner of *Harlequinade*, Harley promptly returning to the Joker's arms, but the manner in which the Joker reacts to her in this incident suggests that a new storyworld is being born, a Post-Mad Love BTAS with Quinn taking her first steps towards emancipation whilst still wearing the red and black suit.

Fig 51: Harley Loves Joker #2 (Dini and Blevins, 2018, p.14)

Fig 53: Harley Loves Joker #2 (Dini and Blevins, 2018, p.25)

Remediating *Mad Love* within a Post-Mad Love context was the theme of Paul

Dini's work in 2018 with the writer also penning a novelisation of the Retrogenesis

Text with *Harley Quinn: Mad Love* for the series *Batman Novels*. The work opens

with new material in which a seven-year-old Harleen witnesses the mob beating of

her father and experiences police brutality which colours her experience of authority.

Later, escaping from the same gangsters, Quinzel hides in the Fun House of Coney

Island amusement park until rescued by her mother who is wielding the fairground's

sideshow hammer. This is a stark and grim opening which incorporates Quinn's tropes, such as the hammer and Coney Island, in a fresh and arresting way and introduces a theme of female empowerment in Quinzel's admiration for her mother. Dini's account of the events of *Mad Love* is faithful and relays the central story beats, as discussed in chapter three, in a straight forward manner whilst emphasising the Joker's sexual attraction to Quinzel. These sections of the book are unremarkable in their fidelity but relay a growing feminist subtext,

> *She paid cash and turned down the clerk's offer of help to carry her*
> *purchases to her car. Men always treated women like little babies who*
> *couldn't do anything without help. Harley smiled. Tonight, a bunch of men*
> *were going to need a whole lot of help when she finished with them*.
> (Dini, 2018, p. 24)

Rather than end the story on the final shot of the Joker's flower, as in the original comic book, with the broken and remorseful Quinn bouncing straight back into her romantic obsession, the writer instead continues events beyond *Mad Love* and subverts the formula.

In this version, Quinn begins her journey back to self at Arkham, "*It was still hard not to think of herself in terms of the Joker. Sometimes she wasn't sure she'd ever find her own separate identity again*," which locates the work firmly in the Post-Mad Love domain. And even though the narrative threatens to throw it all away and return to the *Mad Love* tradition of gullible Quinn hanging on the Joker's every word as - in a direct reference to the 1993 storyline *24 Hours* - the Joker's limo pulls up outside Quinn's home and she dives inside, Dini instead jumps perspective to subvert the

scene. This Quinn is not smothering the Joker with kisses but is instead stealing his car, the rejected Joker being thrown onto the road by Quinn. Harley Quinn now has bigger fish to fry, and the climax of the work portrays her taking revenge on the gangsters from the opening scenes before disappearing into the sunset as an outlaw, a vigilante, and a hero,

> *Harleen Quinzel, aka Harley Quinn, vanished and became a folk hero, legend, and role model to aspiring young female criminals everywhere - the days when the best a girl could hope for was being a gun moll or some made guy's goomar were over* (ibid, p.45).

Dini's revision of *Mad Love* is significant for it evidences transmedial Retrogenesis in action. The events of this book are not on the pages of a Harley Quinn comic book or a Harley Quinn film and so continue the strategy pursued by Dini in 1993 of disseminating story across multiple platforms for the audience to discover. This *Mad Love* storyworld - just like the previous *Harley Loves Joker* storyline - is not BTAS but instead a new variant, a storyworld in which the events of *Mad Love* take place but within a fresh context and with a different resolution, creating a new Quinn variant in the process. And whilst academics such as Henry Jenkins reject the idea of direct transpositions of material from one platform to another, Dini's adaptation of *Mad Love* reveals the strengths of this approach in which familiar material is remediated to remain current. The original *Mad Love* now reads like a 1990s relic in its gender politics with the infantile Quinn trapped into an abuse object costume throughout BTAS. Dini remediates *Mad Love* as an empowerment narrative, removing it from the tragic Unrecognised Virtue storyline and parlaying it into the origin story of someone else, someone different. Someone stronger.

This exploration of Harley Quinn as someone different was also explored in *Harley Quinn: Breaking Glass* (2019) a graphic novel from the writer Mariko Tamaki and the artist Steve Pugh. In this revisionist piece of work, Quinn is transposed from Gotham City psychologist to school girl activist, with her whole origin story and relationships re-invented. Quinn's home is now a city apartment above a drag bar, Poison Ivy is an African American student in her school railing against institutional racism, and the Joker an anti-capitalist terrorist. The story, however, follows familiar beats with Quinn directing her anger towards the authority figures of real estate developers rather than the police or Batman, due to the heavy-handed gentrification of her new home.

Quinn's anger at authority, deep seated in Dini's novelisation of *Mad Love*, has been present in the story since the original *Mad Love* comic book when Quinzel became distrustful of Batman following his brutal treatment of the Joker. This provided Quinzel with an energy to harness and direct into her rebellion identity of Harley Quinn. In *Breaking Glass*, this hatred of authority is directed towards the Kane family who are forcing members of Quinn's community to move out and make way for a real estate development.

One night, whilst Quinn is vandalising Kane property in protest for the company's bullying of her landlady, she encounters the Joker, a masked figure who hyperbolically describes himself as, "*The New Justice, the New World Order. I am Chaos*" (2019, p.57). Quinn doesn't appear impressed by this, and repeatedly punctures his pomposity instead of enabling it, "*You seem like you want to say things a million different ways with a lotta extra*" (ibid, p.131). Nonetheless she sees the Joker as a powerful ally in her cause and takes up his offer to work together, in doing so becoming directed towards acts of protest which increasingly cross the line

between activism and terrorism. This relationship is not one of sexual or romantic interest with Quinn showing no feelings towards the Joker beyond an avenue to direct her rebellion. Instead, the narrative portrays a realistic depiction of radicalisation and the exploitation by an older predatory figure of Quinn's undirected anger at society.

Breaking Glass is an interesting recontextualisation of *Mad Love* through its deployment of the Spider and the Fly storyline, rather than the Unrecognised Virtue form. Quinzel is a strong and independent figure whose rebellion moniker, Harley Quinn, is her creation. And whilst the Joker attempts to sexually objectify her through suggestions of dress, Quinn rebuffs these overtures and chooses her own style. This is a revision of 1993's *Mad Love* in which Quinzel designed her new look solely for the purposes of the Joker's approval. However, by still expressing a desire for a rebellion identity, this Quinn still leaves herself open to the Joker's exploitation.

Rather than focus on the romantic elements of the relationship, the writers instead examine the anger and sense of injustice that fuel Quinn's actions. During their second meeting, the Joker blows up the coffee shop of which Quinn has earlier smashed the window. Escaping from the police, Quinn climbs to the top of a neighbouring building and looks down at the flames. Through narration she challenges us to re-address our expectations of her nature, and in doing so attacks the fabric of the *Mad Love* trope,

> "*In case you're sitting there thinkin' maybe this Harleen character is someone she's not, let me clear like the waters of no river I ever lived next to. You know how some fairy tales have a sweet wide eyed princess type who has long hair, wears big skirts, and talks to animals? Yeah well, this story has none of that. This is the story of Harleen Quinzel*" (ibid, p.77).

Fig. 54, shows the final page of this sequence, the last panel showing the fire reflecting in Quinn's eyes. As the Joker says of her, "*Some say the world will end in fire, some in ice. I think you'd like a little fire*" (ibid, p.134).

Quinn's statement that this is the story of Harleen Quinzel is significant for it demonstrates a fluid ability for the character to differentiate Quinn as a rebellion identity. This statement also reminds the audience that Quinzel is independent of this identity unlike other previous *Mad Love* variants. In a reflection of Dini's novelisation of *Mad Love*, this version of events also goes beyond the original Retrogenesis text and shows Quinn leave jail with revenge on her mind. This forms a revised Retrogenesis Text for a *New 52* iteration of Quinn and therefore becomes Post-Mad Love in its final scenes. Fig. 55, compares the visual representation of Quinn within the storyline, and demonstrates how she metaphorically passes through *Mad Love*, from a drag inspired carnivalesque costume reflective of BTAS, into a Post-Mad Love visual identity.

Whilst *Breaking Glass* is an experimental re-contextualising of Quinn within a wholly new space for the teenage market, the period 2018-19 also saw DC experiment with Quinn's image and Retrogenesis Text through their prestige Black Label for adults.

Fig. 54: *Harley Quinn: Breaking Glass* (Tamaki and Pugh, 2019, p.77)

Fig. 55: *Breaking Glass* Variants

This label is deliberately experimental and maintains no fidelity to main DC continuity

and so *Harleen* (2019) which relates the Retrogenesis Text of Quinzel in a more

detailed and adult manner, has an open brief to re-imagine the work in a non-

canonical manner. However, whilst Dini's version of *Mad Love* in 2018 was

progressive in intent, *Harleen* by Stjepan Šejić is a pure *Mad Love* iteration. This

work follows the main tropes of the 1993 comic book almost verbatim, although

informed by the context that the accounts of the Quinzel/ Joker meetings are first

person, the entire enterprise potentially becomes Quinzel's wish fulfilment narrative.

Crucial to this iteration of the storyline is Quinzel stumbling across a crime being

committed by the Joker. As illustrated by Fig 56, Quinzel's life flashes before her in a

double splash page, the Joker's decision not to kill her in this moment, informing the storyline which follows.
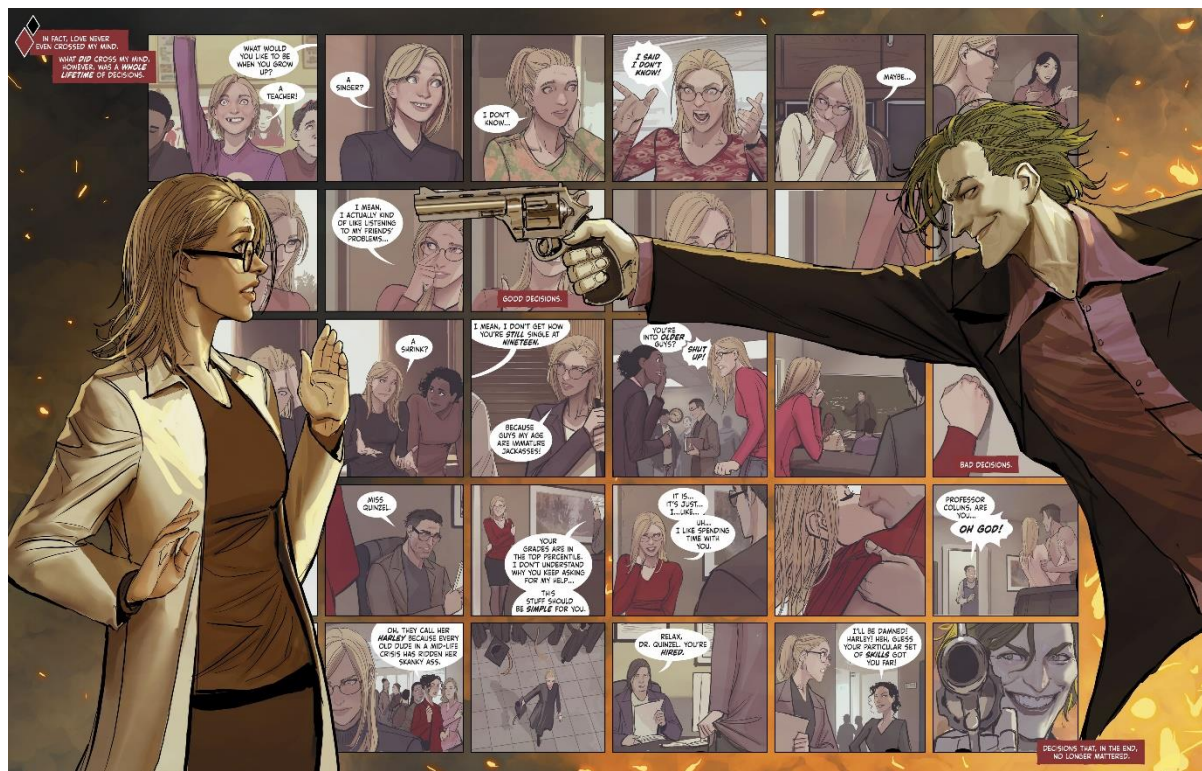
Fig. 56: *Harleen #1* (2019, p.16-17)

Haunted by this experience, Quinzel pursues a chance to counsel the captured Joker in Arkham Asylum and asks him why he didn't shoot that day. The Joker replies,

> "*There are two expressions that I love seeing on people's faces above anything else. Abject horror and an honest smile. You'll understand, the two rarely cross paths. But that night when I stared at your flame-lit face of terror, I thought I wouldn't mind seeing her smile.*" (Šejić, 2019, #2, p.30)

This moment flatters Quinzel. For although the storyline relates her as a brilliant ground-breaking psychologist - who is directly consulted by Batman, Commissioner

Gordon, and District Attorney Dent - it also highlights that she only received her doctorate after delivering sexual favours. And so above all else, Quinn's sexual allure is positioned centrally as the key to her success and - as illustrated by Fig. 57 - it is pride in this sexual allure that begins her descent, "*I was too beautiful to die*" (2019, p.34).
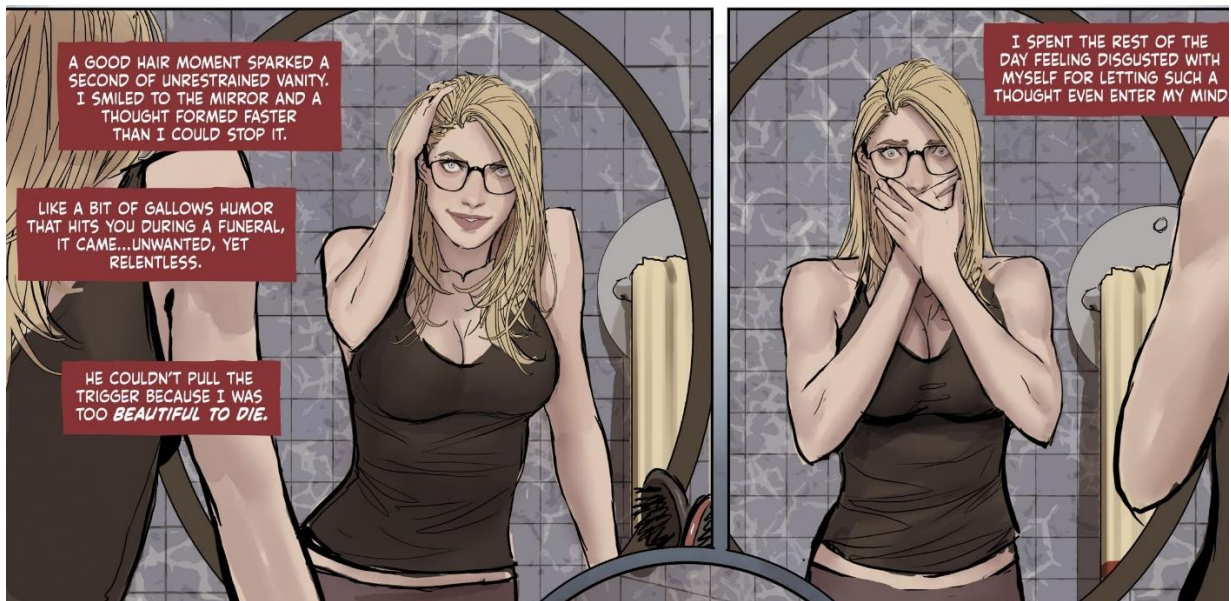
Fig. 57: *Harleen* #2 (Šejić, 2019, p.34)

Throughout this piece of work, Quinzel is portrayed as an ambitious and intelligent woman who wants to improve society, but whose talents ostracise her from social and professional acceptance. Her need to affiliate with others is consistently blocked by their threatened behaviour and, therefore, when the Joker recognises her sexuality and caring nature, she completely lets her guard down.

Three images from *Harleen* cogently summarise the storyline. Fig. 58 is the final image of Harleen #1 which shows Quinzel's vulnerability and distance from the Joker (who is only shown in shadow) and her desire to affiliate to him through repeating his preferred moniker of "*Mr. Jay*". Fig. 59 shows that the Joker's seduction of Quinzel

has been achieved with a simple phrase which cuts to the heart of her Genesis Principle, "*Thank you for caring*" (ibid, p.61). This image is the most tender image in the HQFU of the couple and, although the reliability of both Quinzel's version of events and the Joker's representation of his feelings, are open to questions of authenticity, the narrative consistently positions this version of the Joker as romantically attached to Quinzel. This is, therefore, a potentially different variant to the original *Mad Love* iteration. And although it is revealed in the coda that the Joker has lied, manipulated, and flattered Quinzel - his invented backstory entirely reflective of her doctoral thesis - he gains no advantage from her affection. In this storyworld, Quinzel is not directly responsible for the Joker escaping, which is caused by collateral damage following an attack on the asylum by terrorists. During the attack, the Joker even saves Quinzel from certain murder at the hands of her arch enemy Two-Face. So, there is ambiguity that this love story may be genuine. But this point is academic for Quinzel is still ruined by the relationship. Instinctively defending the Joker from an armed security guard, she sanctifies her Mad Love in blood, spilled with the best of intentions to help the person she cares about. Unable to return to the normal world, as Vogler states, "*Irreparably changed by the choices made*," (1992, p.46), the final image of the series (Fig. 60) shows Quinzel's face screaming in a hall of mirrors, driven mad by the guilt of the murders she has committed, trapped in the trauma identity of Harley Quinn.

Fig 59: *Harleen* #1 (Šejić, 2019, p.59)

Fig. 60: *Harleen* #2 (Šejić, 2019, p.59)

Fig. 61: *Harleen* #3 (Šejić, 2020, p.59)

These three end panels which end each issue of *Harleen* succinctly sum up the *Mad Love* storyline with the questing, vulnerable Quinzel seduced and destroyed. And, whilst Quinzel's summary of her situation in the storyline, *"Here I am, ready to risk it all, my life, my career, getting dolled up because I want to show him that he's needed"* (2019, p.55) is an efficient phrasing of Quinn's affiliative drive, when placed against *Breaking Glass* and Dini's novelisation, *Harleen* seems out of time in providing a detailed and considered re-telling of a Retrogenesis Text that is now out of date.

Dini's *Mad Love* novelisation and *Breaking Glass* evidence a move within the HQFU to re-position Quinn in a permanent Anti-Mad Love position by revising her Retrogenesis Text to reify a rejection of the Joker in the final scenes so she can move on to another relationship. This was also reinforced in the opening scenes of the feature film *Birds of Prey: The Fantabulous Emancipation of One Harley Quinn* (2020). In this piece of work - a sequel to *Suicide Squad* (2016) - Quinn's narration begins the film with the statement, "*They say if you want to tell a story properly then you have to start at the beginning*". This is then followed by an animated prologue which relates the *Mad Love* storyline in a breakneck manner. These Retrogenesis scenes, like Dini's novelisation, go back to the abuse Quinn suffered at the hands of her neglectful gangster father who would trade her for alcohol, and situates Quinn's hatred of authority as being instigated by institutional violence from the nuns of the orphanage in which she was eventually discarded. This sequence sees Quinn state that she has never been an, "*Establishment kind of gal,*" (01:30) and promptly shows her taking revenge on the nuns through violence. This sequence places it alongside the novelisation of *Mad Love* and *Breaking Glass* by adding a motivational backstory

to Quinn, based around a deep-seated hatred of authority which is expressed through violent anger.

The animated opening of *Birds of Prey* also consolidates this Quinn as the totalised variant by compressing all previous BTAS, *Suicide Squad* and Quinn-verse iterations into a single text. Therefore, she is portrayed as a bisexual over-achiever at university who, following the seduction of the Joker at Arkham, rises from the chemical tank at Ace Chemicals in her red and black BTAS costume. The montage then portrays how over time, her transformation from this original BTAS costume into the red and blue pigtailed *DC Universe Rebirth* variant occurred simultaneously to her being increasingly side-lined by the Joker, until he finally kicks her out. There is no mention of the events of the *Suicide Squad* film, although there is a presumption that this storyline takes place after the Joker rescues her from Belle Reve prison at that film's climax as she is still a wanted fugitive. Quinn lives in an apartment, with a hyena and a stuffed beaver for company, the latter a reference to the Quinn-verse's Bernie who acted as confidante to Quinn, despite being an inanimate object.

Once established as the definitive text, the filmmakers then position Quinn in a Post-Mad Love context. Quinn steals a petrol tanker and drives it deliberately into Ace Chemicals, "*The place where it all started*", as images of her fall into the chemical tank flood her mind (ibid, 10:00). Ripping the "J" necklace from her body, Quinn throws herself into the street, the tanker setting off a cataclysmic explosion. The subsequent destruction of the factory is then augmented by animated fireworks to reinforce Quinn's moment of catharsis, "*This was the closure I needed, a fresh start and a chance to be a new woman*," she declares, walking away from the explosion and establishing a position in the Post-Mad Love narrative. However, this is just the

beginning of the film and, just as Dini's novelisation and *Breaking Glass* created new Retrogenesis scenes after Quinn's rejection of the Joker, *Birds of Prey* does the same, suggesting that all three are adhering to an evolving Retrogenesis strategy which uses an emancipated Quinn as the opening equilibrium (Anti-Mad Love) instead of the broken Post-Mad Love Quinn who needs to move on.

This opening sequence also reinforces Quinn's need for affiliation. On breaking up from the Joker she states that she would, "*Like to make new friends*" and joins a roller derby team for this purpose (ibid, 03:16). This provides another Quinn-verse reference, linked to *The New 52* text, *Hot in the City* (Conner, Palmiotti and Hardin, 2015), which emphasises Quinn's social fragility. For after a night out clubbing, Quinn over-hears her roller derby team laughing about her reliance on the Joker, and how she will either crawl back to him the minute he asks or, likewise with, "*Another alpha male with a pulse.*" This - and crucially not an action of the Joker - is what instigates Quinn to destroy Ace Chemicals, and whilst pitched to the audience by Quinn as an empowerment statement, it is also an act instigated by rejection from her peer group and therefore motivated by Affiliation. For whilst Quinn's new peer group - composed of policewoman Renee Montoya and superheroes Black Canary and Huntress is very task orientated - Quinn plays the role of sorority sister, so busy being distracted by planning sleepover parties or buying rounds of cocktails, that she forgets the task at hand is to fight crime.

Margot Robbie, in the Blu-Ray commentary for *Birds of Prey,* describes how she was inspired by the storyline *Harley Quinn: Behind Blue Eyes* (2003) in which Quinn protected a child from bounty hunters. As Robbie summarised, *"Harley was not one of the good guys, but she wasn't evil.*" This differentiation between good and evil is

the key theme of the animated series, *Harley Quinn* (2019 - current) whose first season examined the nature of Quinn within the context of *Mad Love.* This series is a thick text which includes multiple intertextual references to the HQFU, the examination of which could fill an entire chapter of this thesis. Of relevance to the theme of Retrogenesis and affiliation, however, is how the over-arching storyline of Season One forms a distinct Post Mad-Love narrative in which Quinn confronts the Retrogenesis aspects of the HQFU texts as a way of constructing a new identity.

The series begins with BTAS Quinn and the Joker together in a relationship and behaving according to the tropes of *Mad Love*. Quinn is then betrayed by the Joker, arrested, and abandoned in Arkham where she spends her days with the expectation that he will rescue her. She won't entertain any other thought. "*He literally made me,*" she tells fellow inmate Ivy (ibid, 10:00) as a way of excusing her dependency. Ivy is especially critical of the idea that the Joker scarred Harley for life through the act of dropping her into the chemical tank, but Harley throws this away. She prefers to think of the bleach as, "*Clean up sauce,*" a concept that is returned to throughout the season with the Retrogenesis symbolism of Ace Chemicals interrogated for both Harley and the Joker.

For although Quinn escapes Arkham with the help of Ivy, she soon returns to the Joker's side and, in a clear reference to the *Mad Love* comic book, wears a red negligee in combination with her BTAS mask in bed. It is a short-lived harmony for the Riddler kidnaps Quinn, and makes the Joker choose between her and Batman, the loser going into an acid bath. The Joker chooses Quinn for the acid bath, and in this moment, she receives the epiphany that she is value-less to him and psychologically severs the link.

This scenario, its revealed, has been staged by Ivy as a way of confronting Harley with the reality of the Joker's abuse. Now, woke by the experience, Quinn confronts the Joker whilst wearing a combination of *New 52* and *DC Rebirth* elements to signify her intention to move on. The relevance of this storyline is that it joins Dini's *Mad Love* novelisation, *Harley Quinn: Breaking Glass* and the pre-credits sequence of *Birds of Prey* in reifying a new Retrogenesis strategy for Quinn based upon the concept of Anti-Mad Love. The seduction elements of this storyline are nullified, and the tragic element is removed with the emancipation storyline instead taking centre stage.

HQFU texts in the 2015 -17 samples showed a Post-Mad Love narrative in which Quinn was struggling to move on. These samples from 2018-19 show an Anti-Mad Love narrative in which Quinn has definitively moved on, the storyline starting from a position of emancipation.

Season One of *Harley Quinn* also has several episodes which contextualise Quinn's sense of anger and distrust of authority, most notably *Bensonhurst* which reiterates her abusive family relationship and sees her father attempt to kill her to claim a million-dollar bounty. The series also examines the self-destructive nature of Quinn's character, which is explicitly also refenced in *Breaking Glass*. The most notable episode in the series which examines her identity, "*Being Harley Quinn*", revisits Adam Glass' Retrogenesis Text *The Hunt for Harley Quinn* (2012) and examines the complicity of Quinn in the act of bleaching. In this episode, Quinn enters her own unconsciousness and confronts the memory of her descent into the chemical tank. However, a glitch occurs before she falls into the tank which does not allow Quinn to

fully comprehend the meaning of the event. This glitch is revealed to be a defence mechanism of her unconscious, shielding her from the reality that she willingly jumped into the chemical tank which scarred her for life. This knowledge, which confirms Quinn's self-hatred, makes her realise that the relationship she needs to reconcile the most is with is herself. This storyline is entirely based around a recontextualisation of *The Hunt for Harley Quinn* and demonstrates Retrogenesis in action for it also references the film version of *Suicide Squad* (2016) as discussed in an earlier chapter, in which Quinn also willingly enters the chemicals.

Unlike *Harley Quinn: Breaking Glass*, the Quinn variants of *Birds of Prey* and the animated series aren't entirely different people, but they do exist in different storyworlds. For the climactic events of *Mad Love* and the Joker's attempted murder of Quinn have not occurred to either of these Quinn variants. Both storylines, however, consistently refer to Retrogenesis Texts *Mad Love* and *The Hunt for Harley Quinn*. As shown in Fig.61, the animated series references Quinn's wide-eyed fall out of the window in *Mad Love* when the Joker finally attempts to kill her by pushing her out a helicopter whilst *Birds of Prey* shows this fall in animated form in the context of the chemical tank, thereby conflating all abuse into a single act. The *Harley Quinn* animated series also recontextualises Retrogenesis images of the fall at Ace Chemicals for both Quinn and the Joker as seen in Fig 62.
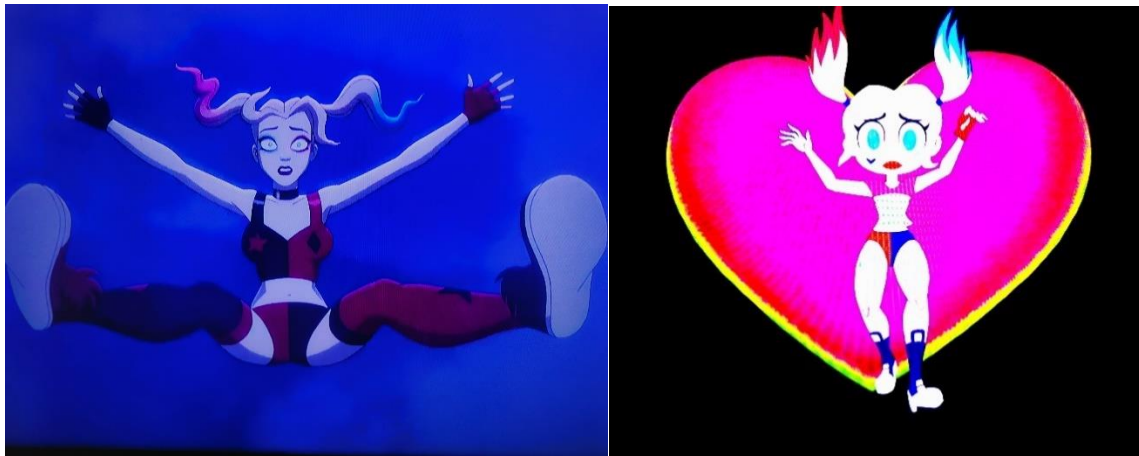
Fig. 61: *Harley Quinn* (2020) / *Birds of Prey* (2020)

Fig 62: *Harley Quinn* (2020) - Harley and the Joker fall

This final image of the Joker falling into the chemicals on the right, takes place in the season finale of *Harley Quinn* in which she drops the Joker into the vat deliberately to remove him from her life after he has attempted to kill Ivy. This climax both subverts and reappropriates the Retrogenesis imagery of The Hunt for Harley Quinn as well as the Joker's 1951 Retrogenesis Text regarding his fall into the chemicals, most notably deployed revisited in the graphic novel *The Killing Joke* (Moore and Bolland, 1988) and the film *Batman* (1989).

This final scene also provides a mission statement for Quinn's Anti-Mad Love motivation, strongly located in the realm of affiliation, "*I have friends that I love and care about me, and I am moving on with my life with the people that matter and that doesn't include you Puddin.*'" (2019,20:00).

This section now concludes with a discussion of the most interesting new work released since the sampling period finished: *Batman: White Knight* (2018) from writer/artist Sean Murphy for DC's Prestige Black Label. This narrative raised an interesting question: if the Joker wasn't evil, and there was no need for a Post-Mad Love Harley, what would their relationship look like? In this storyline, Quinn leaves the Joker after becoming sickened by increasingly violent and desperate behaviour towards Batman. But whilst the Joker abducts a replacement moll, Marion Drews, who to the outside world takes on the role and moniker of Harley Quinn, the real Quinn works on a pharmaceutical to restore the Joker's sanity. The pill works and the Joker is returned to his former identity of Jack Napier and rehabilitated, the couple now able to live a normal and fulfilling relationship. Fig. 63 shows the panels of White Knight #2 which illustrates the apotheosis for Quinn of all her hopes and dreams, the kind of love they "*finally deserve*". At first this appears to be an extreme *Mad Love* variant, for the Quinn which returns to Napier's side is the BTAS variation and her actions are solely aimed at having her affections returned. But it is not the Joker's affections Quinn seeks, it is Napier's.

Fig. 63: *Batman: White Knight* #4 (Murphy, 2018, p.14)

The narrative on closer inspection is not a Post-Mad Love variant, either, for Quinn has not struggled to move on from the relationship. Instead, *White Knight*, presents the storyline as an Anti-Mad Love variant in which Quinn pursues a romantic relationship with another lover, the Joker no longer existing in the storyworld having been transformed by Quinn - in a reverse of Mad Love - into another person.

Although set in an Elseworld, the storyline opens up many avenues of investigation relevant to this thesis. The fake Quinn which the Joker lives with at the start of the story, Marion, behaves at first in an exaggerated and infantile manner calling him, "*Daddy,*" in a reflection of Quinn's iconic *Daddy's Lil Monster* T-shirt from the *Suicide Squad* film. This Quinn is also dressed in a white T-shirt with red collar and cuffs which locate her as this Quinn variant. However, as this is not Quinn, but an imposter which the Joker has even forgotten is not Quinn, her exaggerated manner and costume are reminiscent of someone engaging in cosplay, performing what she believes the Joker wants Quinn to be. When the actual Harley Quinn arrives in her black and red BTAS costume, alongside her two hyenas, she critiques this fake Quinn as, "*A violent cheerleader with a bigger rack*" (Murphy, 2018, #2, p.9). This reflects criticisms of Quinn's portrayal becoming increasingly sexualised and provides meta commentary by the character on the appropriation of her look, "*Don't get me started on the clothes, a kind of a step back for feminism.*" This version of Quinn returns to her Quinzel attire for the rest of the storyline with sensible sweaters, pant suits and large rimmed glasses without a hint of sexualisation; the clown costume and everything it reflects and represents, no longer relevant.

Quinn's relationship with Batman is also deepened by this storyline, with Batman turning to her counsel several times in the work, a deep level of respect evident between them. This is brought to the fore when the fake Quinn, now calling herself Lady Joker brings chaos to the city and Batman seeks Quinn's help to combat her. Batman confides to Quinn that over the years he was deliberately soft on her because he believed that she was the only person capable of keeping the Joker in line, "*Only you and I knew how bad he wanted to be*" (Murphy, 2019, #5, p.10). Quinn confides in return that she kept a dress Batman once bought for her parole hearing because deep down she respects him, *"I know you're a good guy"* (ibid). This exchange reflects Michael Hague's work, discussed in Chapter Two, regarding character arcs, with Batman acknowledging that Quinn is closer in mindset to him than her lover.

The layers of self-loathing present in the Harleen iteration of *Mad Love* are also examined when the two women at the centre of the storyline eventually fight. Lady Joker accuses Quinn of shame, for transforming the Joker into Jack Napier because she feared her feelings for, "*An abusive, loveless, serial killer*" (Murphy 2019, #8, p.20). It's the truth, Quinzel has never been able to reconcile her feelings for the Joker. Napier is not the man she fell in love with.

In the climax, the Lady Joker is defeated, and Quinn receives the love she has always wanted. But on their wedding day, Jack's medication wears off and he returns to being the Joker. This climax is significant for it comes full circle and reveals which aspect of the HQFU it reflects, with Quinn, despite all her efforts, being returned to the Joker's side. Loving Jack Napier was an attempt by Quinn at self Retrogenesis, a new origin story to obscure a weakness in her own character that

she struggles to reconcile that is pointed out by the Lady Joker in their final battle, "*I'm the dirty little reminder of what you used to be*" (ibid). Ironically, Quinn now has what she wanted, her affiliation is complete, but it's too late. Trapped again by her own narcissistic desire to make the Joker better, the sucker punch for Quinn at the end of *White Knight* is that this was a *Mad Love* variant after all.
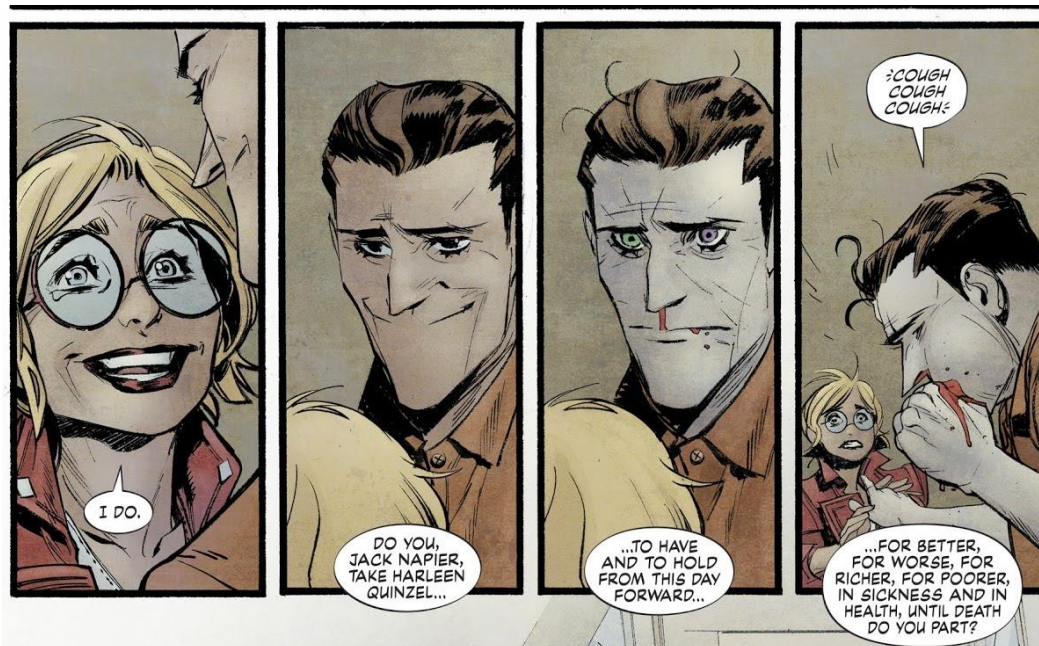
Fig 65: The Nightmare has returned. White Knight #8 (Murphy, 2019, pp.23-24)

In conclusion, the variants released after the sampling period represent a strong selection of Anti-Mad Love storyworlds in which an emancipated Quinn has moved on to claim her place in the world beyond the abuse of the Joker. These texts are typified by Paul Dini's own novelisation of *Mad Love*; the graphic novel *Harley Quinn - Breaking Glass*; the feature film *Birds of Prey*; and the animated television series *Harley Quinn*, which all deploy an evolved revision of the *Mad Love* Retrogenesis Text which contextualises Quinn as a character who has passed through the break up phase of Post-Mad Love and is emancipated. Meanwhile, DC's Black Label continues to explore the *Mad Love* Retrogenesis story with the relatively straight forward tragedy *Harleen* and the fever dream fantasy *Batman: White Knight*. All the texts discussed above engaged in Retrogenesis revision as a strategy to produce new Retrogenesis Texts whilst simultaneously articulating the Genesis Principle of Affiliation which links the storyworlds throughout the HQFU. This is evidence of this thesis' theory still maintaining relevancy when applied to examples outside of the sample.

5.2. Thesis Conclusion

The aim of this research project was to examine the structure of the Harley Quinn Fictional Universe and explore how the constellation maintained its integrity despite non-synchronous and contradictory story content. By deploying a quantitative content analysis tool, which comprised of coding passes identifying genre, character motivation and tone, a purposive sample of 313 Harley Quinn storylines were interrogated in terms of these properties. The theoretical framework of the content analysis phase deployed psychologist David McClelland's work on human motivational forces. Taken within the context of Lyubomir Doležel's work on

storyworlds, and Philip Parker's frameworks of Genre and Tone, these motivational forces were contextualised against story content in order to reveal the intensional or thematic content of the text. Just as the behaviour of an individual was examined by McClelland, so that the unconscious motivation behind their actions could be categorised, the behaviour of Harley Quinn within her storylines was examined in a similar way. This induced a commonality embedded in the fictional universe, a universal and transmodal characteristic which synchronised the variant storyworlds through a consistency of theme, present since the first storyline. This research project dubbed this emergent transmodal characteristic, the Genesis Principle of Affiliation, a canonical centre to the constellation which guided the behaviour of the constituent storyworlds.

Fig. 65 plots the composition of each main HQFU storyworld (as well as miscellaneous texts collected by the sampling) and evidences the consistency per storyworld of genre, character motivation and tone. Drawn from this data, Fig. 66 provides a rich landscape view of the HQFU as regards Genre and Tone. This view revealed high levels of: tragic romance in BTAS and the Arkham-verse; thriller content in the *Suicide Squad* storyworld; personal drama content in the *Injustice* storyworld; and comedy across the *DC Comics Bombshells* and *DC Super Hero Girls* storyworlds. The Lego works inspired by BTAS also scored highly as regards comedic romance which evidenced the removal of the tragic element for the child friendly audience. Aside from the high spike of romance delivered by the BTAS and Arkham-verse works, which illustrated the Mad Love narrative strategy in action between 1992 and 2012, the biggest area of commonality was comedy with Quinn

portrayed as an irrepressible and indestructible source of energy throughout the

storyworlds of Zone Two.
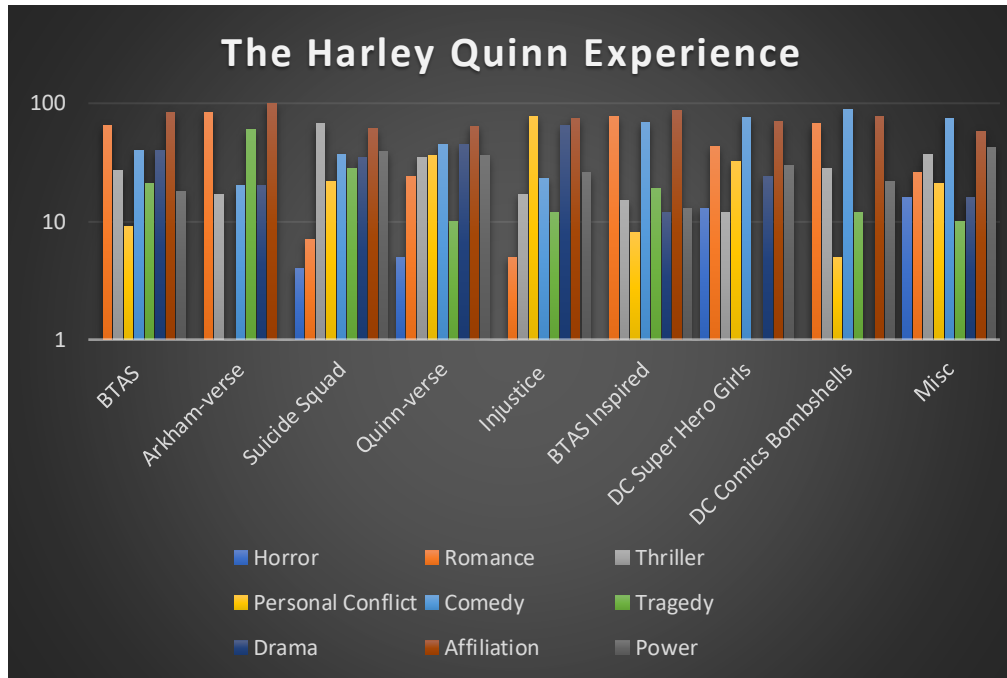
Fig 66: Consistency of the Fictional Universe
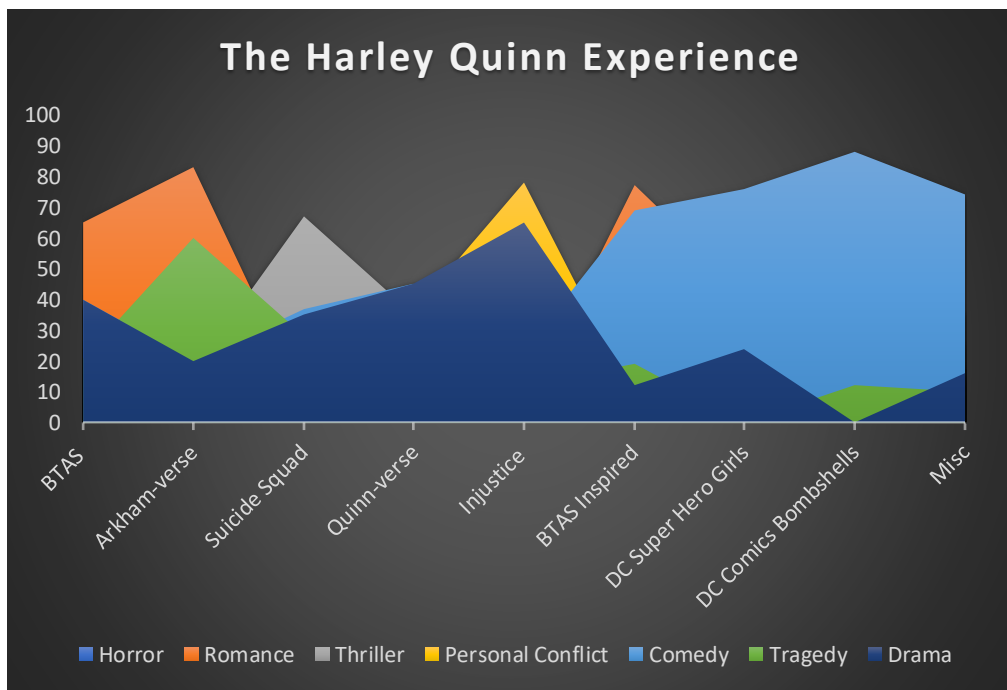
Fig. 67: Landscape view of Genre and Tone

Fig. 68 reveals the landscape view when motivation analysis is added to the data set. This perspective demonstrated how the Genesis Principle of Affiliation was the unifying characteristic in the fictional universe, with only the thriller content of *Suicide Squad*, the personal drama content of *Injustice* and the comedy content of DCCB and DCSHG registering higher individual peaks. The Mad Love narrative strategy which codified the Genesis Principle in 1993 dominates the BTAS and Arkham-verse works up until the crossover point with the 2012 Retrogenesis Text, *The Hunt for Harley Quinn* emergent from the *Suicide Squad* storyworld. At this point, the HQFU turns away from Mad Love and towards the Post-Mad Love narrative strategy and stories of personal empowerment.
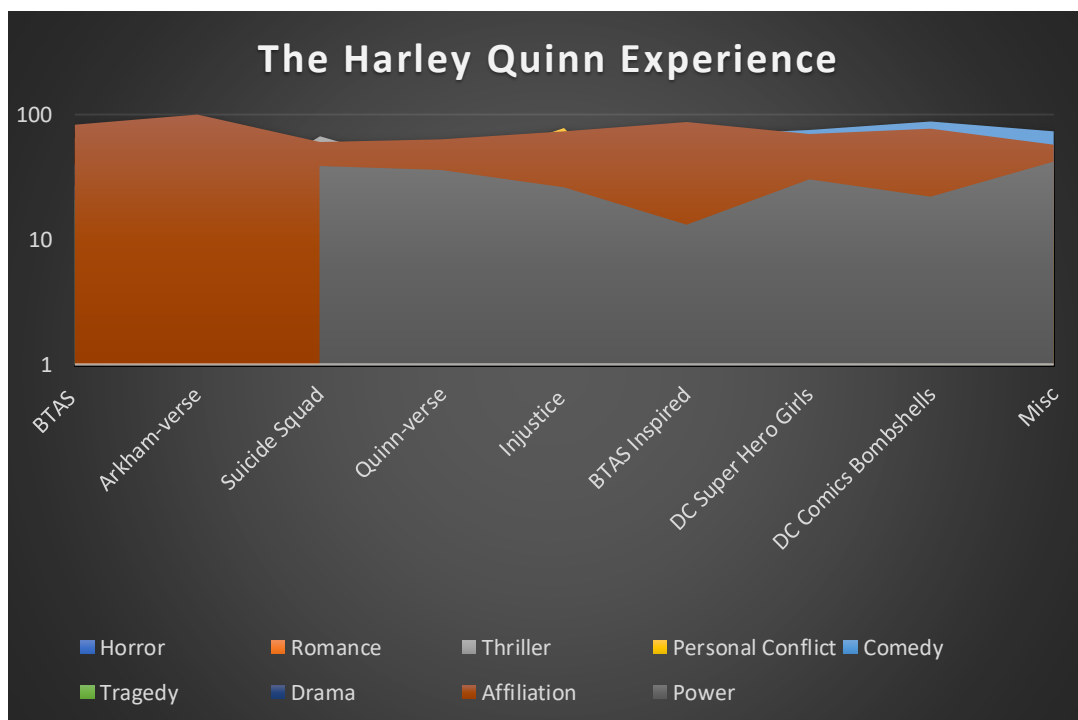
Fig. 68: Landscape view of Genre, Tone and Motivation

In summary the content analysis phase revealed three groupings of storyworlds:

A. Storyworlds which reinforced or continued the *Mad Love* storyline. These Personal Drama works used the Unrecognised Virtue storyline to relate Quinn's desperate attempts to receive authentic affection from the Joker. The tone of these works was tragic due to Quinn being returned to a position of unrequited stasis at the end of the piece, with her efforts to affiliate being in vain. BTAS and BTAS related works, Lego and works belonging to the Arkham-verse were the constituent storyworlds of this grouping which maintained consistent fidelity to the Retrogenesis Text.

B. Storyworlds which examined the impact of the *Mad Love* storyline on Quinn's post-traumatic psyche. These Post-Mad Love narratives were predominately personal drama based and dramatic in tone with Quinn portrayed as the subject of the story. Works from the *Injustice* and Quinn-verse storyworlds contained consistent recontextualisation of the new Retrogenesis Text - *The Hunt for Harley Quinn* - to reinforce Quinn's psychological struggles. Quinn's motivation in these works was the creation and maintenance of an alternative family unit. Although strong thriller content, dramatic in tone, dominated this grouping through the *Suicide Squad* storyworld, Quinn's motivation within this selection of texts was also strongly affiliative towards her new team, Task Force X, and her sexual partners Deadshot and Rick Flag.

C. Storyworlds which examined wholly different events to the *Mad Love* Retrogenesis Text. In these works, the events of *Mad Love* did not happen - or happened in a fundamentally different way - with the storyworld portraying

Quinn as an indestructible superhero who the Joker cannot touch. The genre of these works was romance and the motivation for Quinn affiliative. Within these Storyworlds, Quinn engaged in a sexual relationship with Poison Ivy (DCCB) and a platonic one with Batgirl (DCSHG). The tone was consistently comedic with Quinn portrayed as the irrepressible comic relief who ended every storyline in a position of success. The content analysis phase ended with remediation, (*Surprise, Surprise* (2017)) of the new Retrogenesis Text, *Love Stories* (2016). This codified this Anti-Mad Love narrative strategy by suggesting that the HQFU was never a love story between Harley Quinn and the Joker but, instead. Harley Quinn and Poison Ivy.

This differentiation of narrative transmedial strategy ran throughout all the storyworlds and was unified by a synchronicity of theme. For whilst spikes in tone and genre did appear during analysis, exceptions, such as the high thriller content of *Suicide Squad*, the high personal conflict content of *Injustice*, and the higher than average comedy tone operant within DCSHG and DCCB were always underpinned by Quinn's Genesis Principle - her motivation for affiliation - which allowed the storyworlds to deploy differentiated individual content non-synchronously without losing thematic fidelity.

The new texts discussed in this chapter displayed the HQFU re-shuffling its constituent storyworlds through a re-contextualising of the Genesis Principle. The texts of 2018-20 again displayed affiliation being articulated through the new storyworlds, which had adopted almost entirely a transmedial strategy of Anti-Mad Love and placed Quinn's rehabilitation in the past. Quinn is no longer on the fence about breaking up in the current HQFU, she has definitively broken up with

the Joker and has moved on to the point where he is irrelevant with Mad Love and Post-Mad Love being staging posts to this evolution and emancipation. This is best summarised by two recent works: the episode, *There's No Place to Go but Down* from the *Harley Quinn* television series (2020); and the feature film *The Suicide Squad* (2021), the third film in actress Margot Robbie's Harley Quinn trilogy.

In *The Suicide Squad* Quinn is romanced by the handsome dictator of the island Corto Maltese, who promises her a life of luxury if she agrees to marry him. Quinn enthusiastically does so and then promptly shoots him through the heart when he reveals his masterplan to massacre women and children. She apologises to the corpse that she once had an ex like him but now she has a zero-tolerance approach to evil. She has now recovered from *Mad Love* and has absolutely no desire to go back there again.

In the *There's No Place to Go but Down* episode, Quinn and Ivy are attempting to escape from Bane's prison pit when the villain grabs hold of Quinn's ankle with the admonishment that "*Only Love can set you free*". On hearing these words, Quinn lets go of Ivy to sacrifice herself so that her friend can escape, plunging into the pit with Bane, only to be rescued by Ivy at the last minute. The two women, once free of the pit, then shock themselves by passionately kissing. The repercussions of this event reverberate throughout the television series, eventually leading to Harley and Ivy running away together in the season finale as lovers. This episode is noteworthy, however, for it demonstrates a commitment to the Anti-Mad Love narrative strategy by reinforcing Quinn's history with Ivy. This is a woman who has supported and loved Quinn since the moment they met. Quinn realises that the Joker was just a stage; Ivy is "the One".

This thesis' contribution to the field of narrative analytics is the development and deployment of the term **Retrogenesis** to describe the consistent remediation of origin story material as a method of generating new works. For although the term retrofitting has been used widely to describe the deployment of new content to re-purpose a pre-existing context, it does not adequately account for the consistent repurposing and remediation of Genesis content, and the constant comparative contextualisation of Genesis content, as documented in the HQFU.

The Harley Quinn fictional universe, however, is not unique by deploying Retrogenesis, the strategy being a widely deployed approach to content development across a selection of contemporary entertainment properties. In 2022, two television series have been produced to provide Retrogenesis Texts to the fantasy works of George R.R, Martin and J.R.R. Tolkien. *House of the Dragon* from HBO explores events in the timeline of the Targaryen royal family two hundred years before the events of Martin's Genesis Text, *A Game of Thrones* in 1996, whilst Amazon Prime's *The Rings of Power* explores events one thousand years before Tolkien's Middle Earth Genesis Text, *The Hobbit* (1937). Likewise, J.K. Rowling's *Fantastic Beasts* films examine the lives of key *Wizarding World* characters seventy years before *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (1997). But these examples are overshadowed by The *Star Wars* franchise which has been engaging in consistent Retrogenesis since 1978; the 1999 release of *The Phantom Menace* and the videogame, *Knights of the Old Republic* (set almost 4000 years before the events of the first film) key works in this process. Consistent recontextualisation of previous events in the Star Wars universe has become the hallmark of the franchise's film and television projects with *Rogue One* (2016) and *Solo* (2018) both

engaging in Retrogenesis, and a host of television series from Disney Plus such as the *Mandalorian* (2019-21) and *The Book of Boba Fett* (2021) investigating unexplored events in the series' past timeline. The deployment of Retrogenesis, however, is not limited to the fantasy or comic book epic with *The Carrie Diaries* (2013-14) and *Young Sheldon* (2017- current) exploring the school years of characters from comedy series *Sex and the City* (1998 - 2004) and *The Big Bang Theory* (2007-19) whilst HBO's Retrogenesis series, *Better Call Saul* (2015-22) explored the past history of the drama *Breaking Bad* (2008-13). A fruitful area of further study suggested by this thesis is a similar structural examination of a fictional universe which does not centre upon a single character, the inter-relationships between characters examined in order to induce strategies for content expansion. Just as this study identified the consistency of a Harley Quinn work, such a study could draw out the meaning of a *Star Wars* work and evaluate the efficacy of future narrative developments.

Through correlation of coded data and textual analysis, a map of the HQFU has been constructed from the sample materials (Fig. 70). This map illustrates how the Genesis Principle of Affiliation was derived from the Genesis Platform of BTAS which was then articulated through three operant transmedia narrative strategies which informed the content of the HQFU storyworlds. *Mad Love*, the Retrogenesis Text, is the dominant narrative strategy for Zone One. This was remediated in a Post-Mad Love Retrogenesis context by *The Hunt for Harley Quinn* which revisited themes from *Harlequinade*. Over the course of Zone Two, Post-Mad Love narratives were supplemented by Anti-Mad Love narratives based entirely upon positive relationships and derived from revisitation of the *Harley and Ivy* text such as *Love Stories*. As

these three transmedia narrative strategies, operant within the constellation, were derived from three key products of BTAS, their values were expressions of the Genesis and Retrogenesis principles at source and so the derived storyworlds did not need to maintain story synchronicity or continuity so long as fidelity was upheld to one of these three transmedia narratives. This means that the storyworlds of BTAS, *Lego DC Comics Super Heroes* and the Arkham-verse were able to exist in the same fictional universe as *Suicide Squad* and *Injustice*, *DC Comics Bombshells* and *DC Super Hero Girls* as all were united by the Genesis Principle of Affiliation which superseded everything within the structure of the overall transmodal meta-narrative. This study dubs this meta-narrative, **The Harley Quinn Experience** - a universe wide story articulation of the Genesis Principle.

As a method of examining fictional universes, this thesis suggests the following diagnostic structure for professional development based upon the concept of Retrogenesis. The four points rely on fidelity to the previous point, to ensure fracture does not occur.

1. *What is the **Genesis Principle**?* This is the central theme of the **Genesis Text** and expressed through the three pillars of genre, character motivation and tone. In the HQFU this is Affiliation, first articulated in *Joker's Favor* but also the subject of the property's metanarrative. This is a transmodal principle, therefore so long as fidelity is upheld on a thematic level, works can be explored across multiple forms of communication such as games and films and still maintain coherence.

2. How does the **Retrogenesis Text** articulate the Genesis Principle? This is the central theme of the Retrogenesis text and is induced through the three pillars of genre, character motivation and tone. In the HQFU the three main Retrogenesis Texts are *Mad Love*, *The Hunt for Harley Quinn*, and *Love Stories*. For whilst there have been many Retrogenesis Texts since 1993 which remediated the events of other storylines without alteration, these three works codified the Genesis Principle of Affiliation in a manner which significantly altered the narrative direction of the Fictional Universe.

3. What is the **Transmedia Narrative Strategy**? This determines how the texts within the storyworld will be positioned and contextualised against the Genesis Principle. In the HQFU, Post-Mad Love is an example of a narrative strategy which unifies the texts within the *Suicide Squad* and *Injustice* storyworlds. This was derived from the Genesis Principle of Affiliation which was codified at first in the Retrogenesis Text *Mad Love*. This Retrogenesis text was then recontextualised by a new Retrogenesis Text *The Hunt for Harley Quinn* which steered the subject of the storyworlds away from *Mad Love* and towards Quinn's rehabilitation and recovery. So long as the narrative strategy is adhered to, works can be disseminated across three or more platforms and maintain coherence and fidelity to the property.

4. How does the **Platform Story** express the Narrative Strategy? The theme of each individual text must be derived from the narrative strategy to provide coherence. For example, *Full Mental Jacket* (2016) is a *Suicide Squad* comic strip, whose story is derived from the *Suicide Squad* storyworld strategy of Post-Mad Love which explores Quinn's post-traumatic stress disorder.
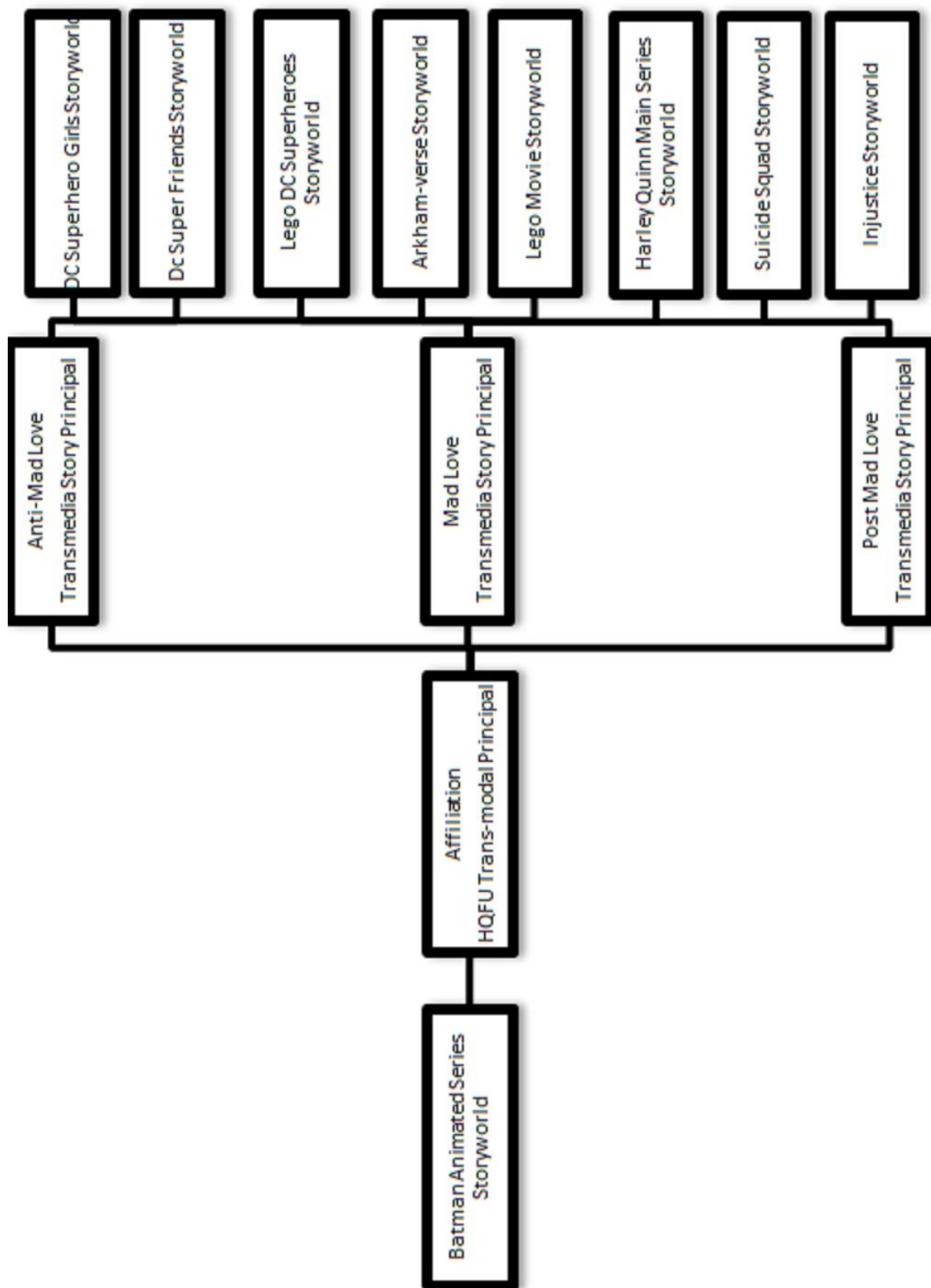
Fig. 70: Model of the *Harley Quinn* Experience

A Retrogenesis Text codifies the Genesis Principle into an origin story form by exploring events preceding the Genesis Text. This allows for a purposeful re-centring of the property so that all future works can maintain synchronicity and coherence through a clear narrative strategy. Whilst the previous five chapters of the thesis operated as a Genesis Text for the theoretical framework of Retrogenesis, the next chapter of this thesis serves as an actual Retrogenesis Text in so much as it reveals the origin story of the thesis. In doing so it revisits the central question of the preliminary research: what is the superhero genre?

As explored in Chapter Six, this question was explored throughout the primary research phase where it was contextualised against the framework of David McClelland's Needs or N-Theory. This framework moved the nexus of genre from construction to consumption and examined if all successful superhero properties were not media subjects but, instead, media objects which the consumer used to fulfil specific needs in the same manner as pornography (Williams, 1989).

McClelland's framework re-positioned the research question from concerns regarding the content of a superhero work to the more reception-based enquiry, what need does a superhero film fulfil? And, as the next chapter reveals, the answers from the primary research phase were surprising; the most obvious conclusion - superhero films fulfilled the need for empowerment - becoming secondary to an emergent need in the audience members for affiliation. But how could a media text be structured in such a way as to fulfil this need? And what was the inter-relationship between this syntactic core and the semantic superhero tropes?

Harley Quinn was chosen as the subject of this thesis because she was popular and relatable. Just as the preliminary primary research highlighted the characters Ant-Man and Deadpool as exemplars of relatability in the popular superhero films released at the time, Quinn was also the same after the box-office success of the 2016 *Suicide Squad* adaptation. However, on paper, the character did not make sense, her media an explosion of divergent personas, tones and settings from the effervescent teen of *DC Superhero Girls* to the action hero of the *Injustice* series and everything in between. She wasn't even a superhero most of the time and oscillated wildly between villain and anti-hero for much of her content.

This research project, therefore, has been a decryption exercise, its challenge to make sense of Harley Quinn, in terms of her property and her relationship with the audience. What is Harley Quinn? was the operant question of this thesis, the multiple genres and tones of the property finally revealed by content analysis, the motivations of the character exposed by McClelland's N-theory framework.

In conclusion, the answer to this question, despite the complexities of the multiple storyworlds of the fictional universe (or perhaps because of their differentiation) is simple: Harley Quinn is a character who lives to affiliate. This need to affiliate is reflected by a fictional universe built upon the concept of affiliation, with each text - which composes a storyworld - focusing on her efforts to affiliate. The net result is a fictional universe which communicates an overwhelming desire to affiliate, the Genesis Text and Retrogenesis Texts codifying this need into story form. Although accurate, this description, however, lacks humanity.

For the Harley Quinn Experience is not one person's story but many. A universe of content produced across twenty-five years by thousands of creative voices, many of

them now gone, who all spoke through the character. A heart beats at the centre of the Harley Quinn constellation, the heart of all the souls whose stories have grasped at connection and delivered meaning to so many through the prism of her struggle. Harley Quinn is a lost spirit looking for unity in world of chaos and darkness, but her experience is universal; the desire to make friends, to make connections, to be counted, and make the kind of burning, passionate, transgressive love that breaks the internet and destroys boundaries. It's therefore no surprise that this need in the fictional universe found a similar need in the audiences and constellated communities of the fans where canon and fanon operate in symbiosis as negotiated expressions of fantasy fulfilment. For that feeling that causes someone to cosplay, write a tweet, read a comic, watch a film, get a tattoo, and engage in the pantheon of other ways to feel closer to Harley Quinn is not just consuming a media product; they are expressing a love. But it's not Mad Love. Because the feeling's mutual, Puddin'.

Part Two:
The Retrogenesis Text

Chapter 6: Origin Story

6.1 Introduction

Before 2015, I did not know Harley Quinn. I had seen images of her promoting the *Batman: Arkham Knight* game that year, and I had a vague memory of her red and black BTAS outfit in the 1990s but that was all. And yet I have now spent seven years of my life intensely in her company. The moment that made a difference was the teaser trailer for the *Suicide Squad* film. Something about Margot Robbie's performance spoke to me. To this day I am still not sure why. Perhaps this thesis attempts to answer that question.

This second part of the thesis explores the origin story of the research project, and the preliminary questionnaires and focus groups which led to the choice of Harley Quinn. As opposed to the preceding academic work, this section is more personal in nature, reflective of an intuitive process which by 2015 had already been going two years. This is of course Retrogenesis, an exploration and recontextualising of events which preceded the original text of Part One, and as such is a thematic experiment in form, expressive of the Genesis Principle of Affiliation. By the end of this chapter, my hope is that further understanding has been reached on the subject of the research project and deeper connections have been made.

The subject of the HQFU emerged during a year long period of preliminary research into the field of superheroes and comic book narratives. This chapter is a detailed narrative account of the investigative process by which the HQFU was identified and isolated as the subject of the study. Although not directly related to the main body of the study in regards the concept of retrogenesis this material is included here for it is

still relevant to the investigation. The conclusions drawn within this chapter informed the overall shape and design of the main study, especially in relationship to the concept of affiliation, which the preliminary research isolated as in the early stages as likability. The methodology of this section utilised a grounded theory approach to the subject. This social science approach was blended, during the main thesis, with an arts and media analysis model to form a unique mixed methodology for interrogating texts through both empirical content analysis data and textual analysis. This produced a comprehensive understanding of the field, evidenced through multiple data sources.

6.2: Initial Concept

This project did not begin with a single study subject in mind. Instead, the initial development stages of the project examined general relationships between the motivations of audience members in their choice of films at the cinema and any inferred legacy values in these works. The aim of this original project was to explore the reception of genre by audiences and any correlation between the origin of the films' genre values and box office success. Put simply were audiences choosing certain films because they were responding to commonalities of genre derived from novels or comic books and were the most successful films at the box office those which clearly exhibited and communicated the adaptation of these genre values?

Anecdotal research into the most successful films at the box office revealed that there was an immediate clear commonality of text which the most successful films at the box office correlated to.

In 2012, the top 20 films at the worldwide box office were:

1   The Avengers

2   Skyfall

3   The Dark Knight Rises

4   The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey

5   Ice Age: Continental Drift

6   The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn, Part 2

7   The Amazing Spider-Man

8.   Madagascar 3: Europe's Most Wanted

9.   The Hunger Games

10   Men in Black 3   (the-numbers.com 2019)

There was no original piece of work in this list with 80% of the list being adaptations of previously existing material from other mediums to narrative cinema. 40% of the list were comic book adaptations: *The Avengers; the Dark Knight Rises; The Amazing Spider-man; and Men in Black 3*. 40% of the list was prose narrative adaptations in the case of *Skyfall, An Unexpected Journey, Breaking Dawn Part 2,* and *the Hunger Games.* The remaining 20% of the works were sequels to previous original films in the case of the sequels, *Continental Drift* and *Europe's Most Wanted.* This data is represented below:
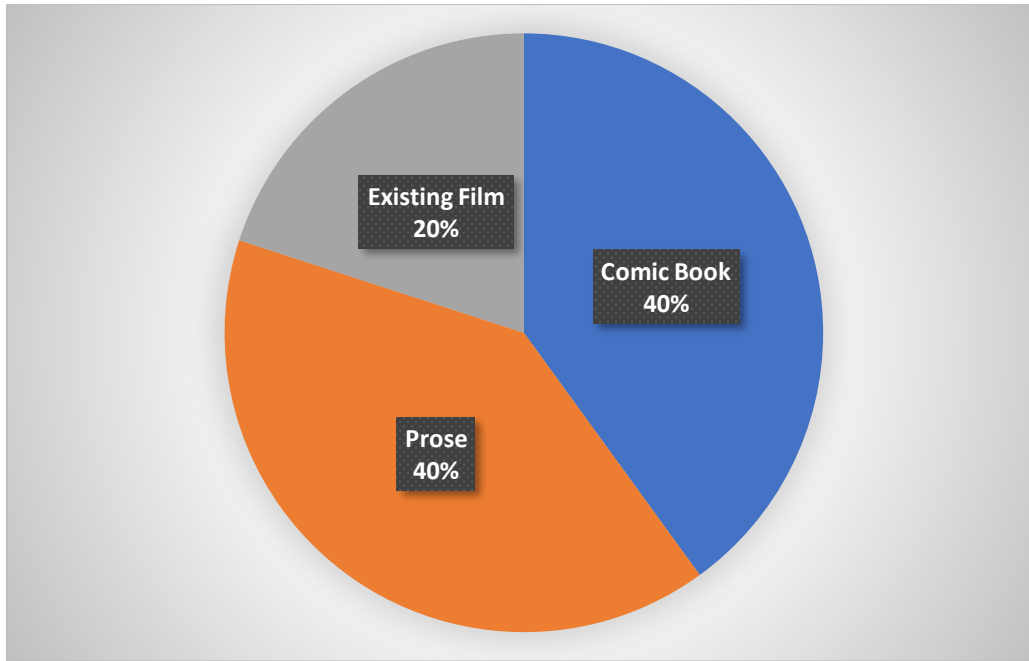
Fig. 71: 2012 Worldwide Top 10 Box Office - Origin of Material

In the subsequent years of 2013 and 2014, the ratio of comic book material to prose derived material continued to remain stable.

2013

1   Frozen

2   Iron Man 3

3   Despicable Me 2

4   The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug

5   The Hunger Games: Catching Fire

6   Fast and Furious 6

7   Monsters University

8   Gravity

9   Man of Steel

10   Thor: The Dark World

1   Transformers: Age of Extinction

2   The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies

3   Guardians of the Galaxy

4   The Hunger Games: Mockingjay - Part 1

5   Maleficent

6   X-Men: Days of Future Past

7   Captain America: The Winter Soldier

8   Dawn of the Planet of the Apes

9   The Amazing Spider-Man 2

10   Interstellar

(ibid)

In both years, 90% of films were adaptations. In 2013, 30% of works were comic book adaptations (*Iron Man 3, Man of Steel, the Dark World*) with 40% in 2014 (Guardians *of the Galaxy, Days of Future Past, the Winter Soldier, the Amazing Spider-man 2*). 30% of films released in 2013 were adaptations of literary material (*Frozen, The Desolation of Smaug, Catching Fire*) whilst in 2014 this figure was 40% through the adaptations, *The Battle of the Five Armies, Maleficent, Mockingjay Part 1* and *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes*. In 2013, 20% of the chart was composed of sequels to previous original films (*Despicable Me 2* and *Monsters University*) with 10% of the chart composed of a wholly original text (*Gravity*) and 10% attributed to a sequel whose original film was derived from a factual magazine article (*Fast and the Furious 6*). In 2014, 10% of the chart was composed of a wholly original text (*Interstellar*) with 10% being derived from a toy source (*Age of Extinction*). These figures are represented below:
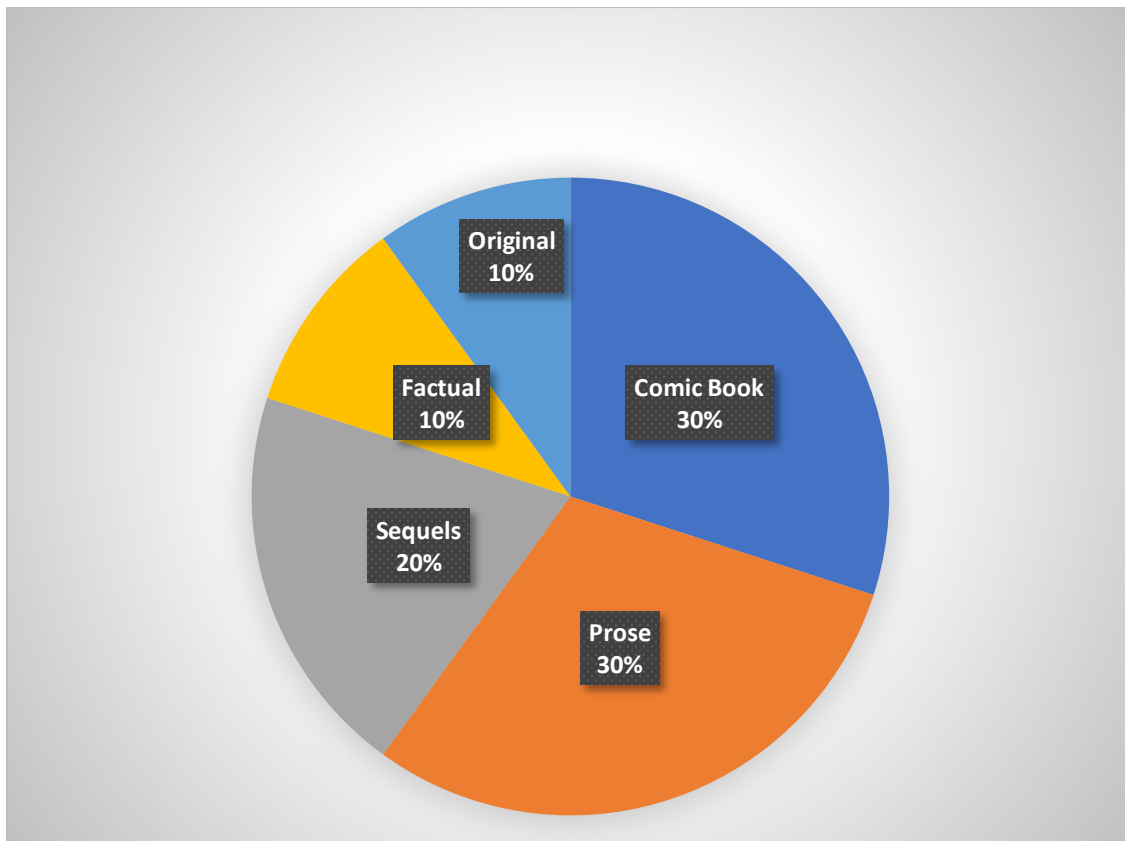
Fig. 72: 2013 Worldwide Top 10 Box Office - Origin of Material
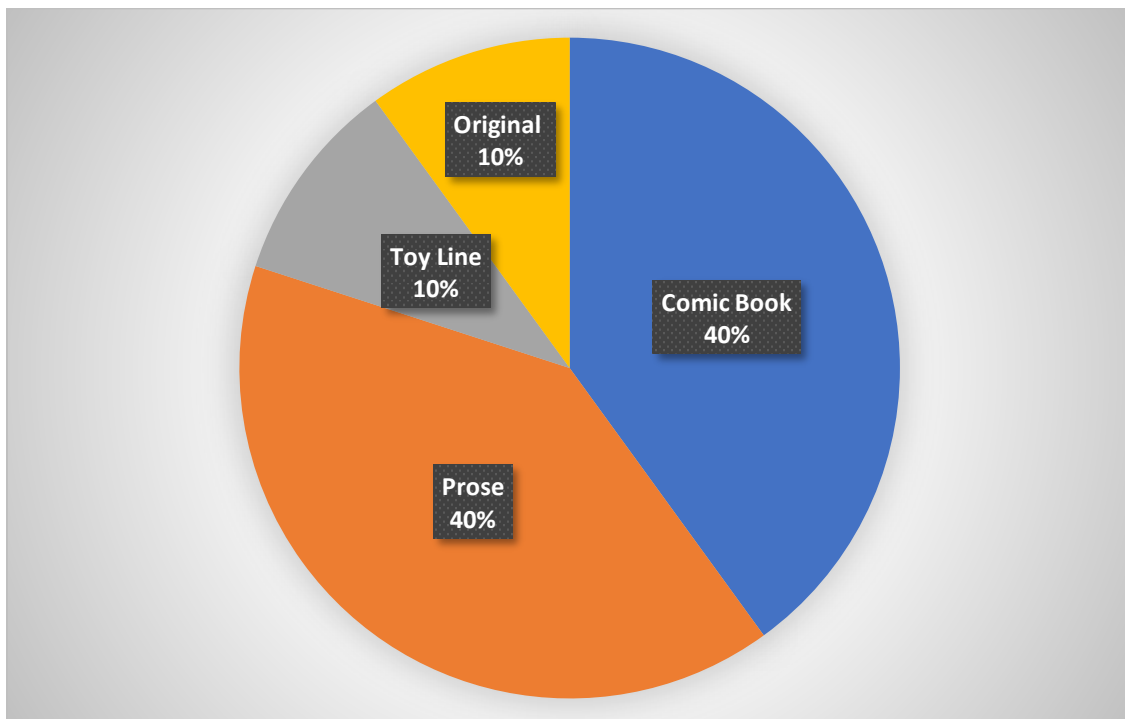
Fig. 73: 2014 Worldwide Top 10 Box Office: Origin of Material

This data was only indicative and longitudinally inconsistent as the box office threshold to enter the list changed with every iteration. However, the list still represented the ten most successful film works that year and, by examining these three years at the worldwide box office, a picture emerged of comic book adapted material and prose adapted material providing the main body of work. In the top 10 charts of these years, there was an almost equal split of 37% between these two sources of adaptation over the three years. Other works derived from such sources as previous films (13%) and work of miscellaneous origin such as toy lines and factual magazine articles (6%) were less populous in the chart as were original works (6%).

When attempting to derive a selection of texts for study, umbrella terms such as prose narrative are misleading for the texts which composed this bloc did not build to a coherent body of work. This was particularly relevant for works classified under the YA (or Young Adult) corpus of literary adaptation. These films, which were derived from Stephanie Myers' *Twilight Saga* and Suzanne Collins' *Hunger Games* series, were very different in content with the former, a vampire-based romance, and the latter a dystopian science fiction based survival horror. Therefore, whilst the overall prose narrative corpus (including Tolkien adaptations and James Bond sequels) represented fantasy literature, the lack of any consistency of content in terms of the individual texts made this umbrella term redundant as a point of origin for a study. In comparison, the comic book adaptation bloc, however, contained a consistency of content with 82% of the texts concerning the activities of superheroes. When *Guardians of the Galaxy* was correlated to other Marvel Cinematic Universe texts, this meant that 90% of the texts in the comic book bloc related to fictional universes in which superheroes existed (the erroneous non superhero comic book text being

Men in Black 3). From this comparison, a decision was taken at this stage of the study to derive a corpus of study of works adapted from comic books to examine genre terms such as "comic book" and "superhero". 2015, however, evidenced very different results in the worldwide Top Ten list:

Worldwide Box Office: Top Ten Films of 2015

1. Star Wars Ep. VII: The Force Awakens

2. Jurassic World

3. Furious 7

4. Avengers: Age of Ultron

5. Minions

6. Spectre

7. Inside Out

8. Mission: Impossible: Rogue Nation

9. The Martian

10. The Hunger Games: Mockingjay - Part 2

(ibid)

As seen reflected in the chart, whilst the proportion of prose narrative adaptations at the box office remained congruous to previous years (40%) - as did the proportion of original work (10%) - the comic book adaptation significantly fell in popularity with only 10% of the chart composed of a single comic book text.
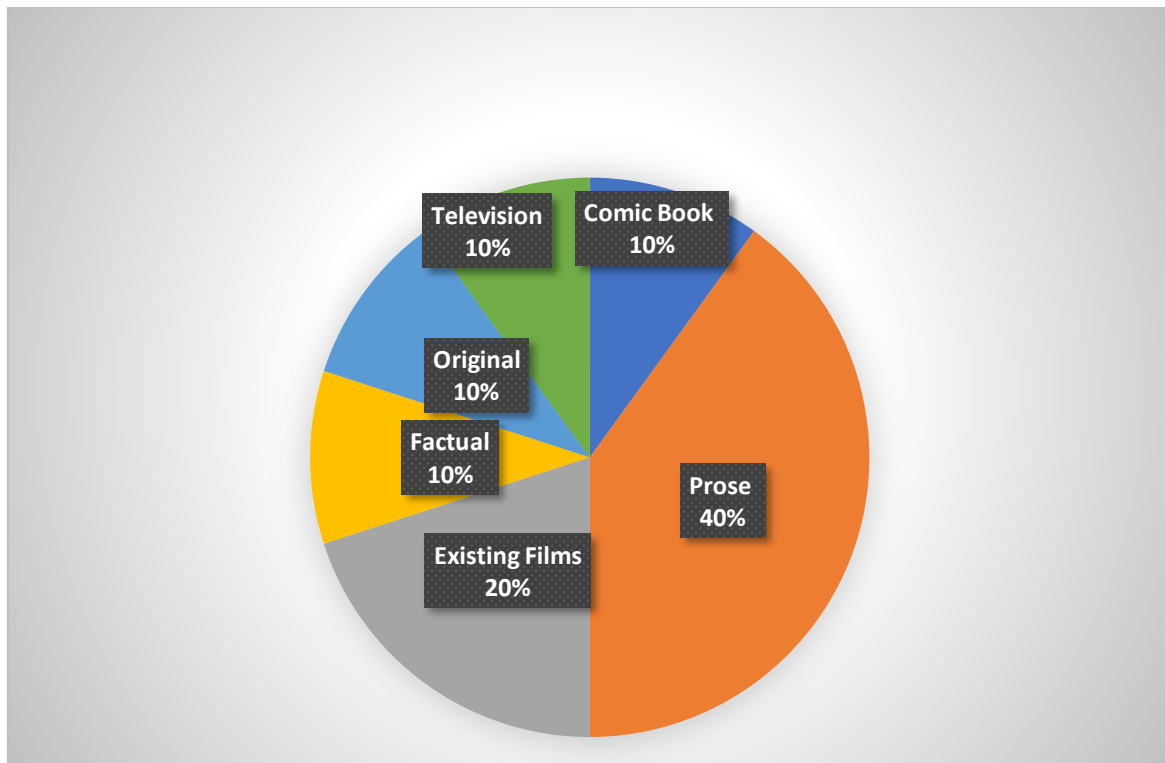
Fig. 74: 2015 Worldwide Top 10 Box Office - Origin of Material

However, the presence of a superhero themed comic book adaptation still differentiated this field from the prose narrative corpus which continued to consist in 2015 of works without any discernible similarities such as *Jurassic World*, *Spectre* and *Mockingjay Part 2*. In addition to this, media reports at the time of study indicated that the nascent superhero boom was yet to peak with forty superhero films to be released between 2016 and 2020. Therefore, despite this momentary dip in the popularity of the comic book adaptation at the box office, focus remained on this area due to the growth potential and consistent content of the corpus. A sidebar worthy of note was that by picking the comic book film there was also the potential to study any texts which failed to connect with audiences during this boom period whose imminent collapse was also predicted in sections of the contemporary press.

6.3: Questionnaire Gathering

Data gathering on the project began with the dissemination online of questionnaires regarding an audience member's expectations of (and then experiences of) a selection of contemporary comic book films released between February and May 2016.

The initial questionnaire format was produced to explore audiences' expectations of *Batman V Superman* (25th March 2016). The format is replicated and annotated below and was designed using the principles of Hennik (2011) and Legard (2003) as a selection of primarily open worded feelings questions supported by a mixture of experience/behaviour questions with opinion/value questions designed to provide additional context.

1. *(a) Your Age*

This question was designed for the purposes of age-based correlation.

(a.i.) Your Gender

This question was designed for the purposes of gender-based correlation.

(a.ii.) The last film you saw at the cinema

This question was designed to provide experiential and behavioural context to the results. Was this audience member a habitual cinema goer or was the decision to see the work, an intervention of non-habitual patronage inspired by the piece (or other factors)?

2. *Why have you decided to see this film?*

This initial behaviour-based question was designed so that the respondent would begin to articulate their feelings towards the work in the context of their cinema going habit.

3. *What are your expectations (both good and bad) for this film?*

Although this question was designed to allow the respondent to begin with the articulation of their feelings, it was phrased as an opinion/value question so that the respondent could produce a qualitative assessment of the piece which could also demonstrate knowledge of the work's industrial context.

4. *Which elements of the film's marketing have influenced your decision to see it? This may include (but not be limited to) trailers, posters, websites etc.*

This question was designed to explore any inferred values brought to the reception experience by the film's marketing. As explored by Barthes (1970) this included the connotations of story, genre and cultural values or inferred values of quality. This question was also designed to support the data gathering purpose of exploring whether cinema texts were being chosen due to the reception of positioned genre values derived from legacy encoding as explored by Hall (1980).

5. *What do you think of the distributor's choice to seek a 12A certificate for this film?*

(a) *Do you feel the choice of certificate will impact positively or negatively on the content of the film? (a) Positive (b) Negative (c) None of the Above*

(b) *Please explain the positive and/or negative impacts you feel this choice of certificate will have on the content of the film? If you answered None of the Above, please leave this section blank.*

(c) *In GENERAL, what influence do BBFC certificates have on your decision to see a film?*

This opinion-based series of questions were designed to explore a notion raised during the explorative stages of the research project that the success of the 12A certificated film at the UK box office (and the tailoring by film distributors of material to match this certificate) suggested that a genre of content was being developed within the 12A corpus.

The following two questions were explanatory probes which asked the respondent to explore their opinions and feelings on the certification of the film and any impact this may have had on the content of the film. The certificate-based line of enquiry was, however, discontinued once the research study area was codified and as such is of no direct relevance to this study.

6. Which of the following describes how you hope to feel whilst watching the film? (a) I will feel empowered (b) I will feel connected (c) I will feel challenged (d) None of the Above

(a.) Why do you think you will feel this way? If you answered None of the Above, use this space to provide an alternative answer to those listed and an explanation of why you think you will feel this way.

(a.i.) Which of the following is the least relevant to how you hope to feel when watching the film? (a) I will feel empowered (b) I will feel connected (c) I will feel challenged (d) None of the Above

(a.i.a.) Why do you think you will feel this way? If you answered None of the Above, use this space to provide an alternative answer to those listed and an explanation of why you think you will feel this way.

These questions began the theory specific section of the survey with terminology supplied to the respondent derived from the motivational psychology work of David McClelland (1988). This question was designed to introduce the terminology of McClelland's Needs Theory to the respondent as sensitising shorthand for the contextualisation of their feelings when they responded to qualitative responses regarding the text. The purposes of questions which utilised McClelland's terminology were two-fold (a) to reduce respondents' anxiety through the funnelling of responses (b) to test the validity of McClelland's work as a potential theoretical framework for non-canonical approaches to the reception of genre. Rather than respond to cultural and commercial notions of genre and story in the superhero corpus, were audiences responding, instead, to psychological needs which the text

fulfilled? Therefore, the questions in this section extrapolated McClelland's terminology and provided a theoretical framework for text reception. As with the 12A line of enquiry mentioned previously, this preliminary research avenue was also discontinued when the research area became codified and so any further questions regarding text reception in the context of McClelland's theories became irrelevant to the wider study. The final section of the questionnaire continued the theme of McClelland's needs theory. This deductive section deployed new terminology devised in order to apply the general framework of McClelland's needs theory (the need for Power/Affiliation/Achievement) - and the previously phrased extrapolation of this framework (*I watch films to feel empowered/connected/challenged*) - in order to create the foundations of a new methodology for developing media work.

In GENERAL, which of the following best describes your main reason for viewing films? (a) I like to feel empowered by identifying with a strong character (b) I like to feel connected and part of a group of onscreen friends (c) I like to feel stimulated by completing an intellectual puzzle (d) None of the Above

(a) What was the last film to make you feel this way? Please explain why.

(a.i.) Which of the following is the least relevant to your viewing of films? (a) I like to feel empowered by identifying with a strong character (b) I like to feel connected and part of a group of onscreen friends (c) I like to feel stimulated by completing an intellectual puzzle (d) None of the Above

(a.i.a.) Why do you feel this is the least relevant to you? If you answered None of the Above, use this space to provide an alternative to the listed answers and an explanation of why you feel this is least relevant to you

(b) Why do you feel this is most relevant to you? If you answered None of the Above, use this space to provide an alternative to the listed answers and an explanation of why you feel this is relevant.

The phrasing, "*I like to feel empowered by identifying with a strong character/ I like to feel connected and part of a group of onscreen friends/ I like to feel stimulated by completing an intellectual puzzle,*" was the first appearance of a hypothesised approach to reading text reception (and therefore the first appearance of a methodology derived from this theoretical framework) based upon the concept that the success of a film could be measured by the work's ability to fulfil audience needs identified by McClelland. These questions were also designed to test construct validity by re-phrasing the previous section's questions in a way that would identify any areas of logical inconsistency in the respondents' answers or any operant misappropriation of McClelland's phrasing. As this deductive approach to the examination of reception was no longer operant once the research area became codified - and remained part of the preliminary stages of developing the research question only - the final remaining questions of the survey were no longer germane to this study.

In addition to the expectations questionnaire, a further exit questionnaire was designed. The purpose of this questionnaire was to plot the fulfilment of an audience need from initial instigation and influence - when the ability of a work to fulfil a need

was suggested by marketing - to the measurement of the work's success during reception by the fulfilment of this need. The exit survey explored the audiences' experience of receiving the text whilst containing several exploratory and explanatory probes designed to induce further understanding of the relationship between genre and reception. In addition to this purpose, the questionnaire also further tested hypothesised terminology derived from McClelland and gauged whether the author's work was a valid operant system for developing new theory.

This exit questionnaire was as below.

1. *Date*

2. *Age*

   (a) Gender

   (b) When did you see this Film?

This question was designed to correlate any longitudinal relationship between viewing and survey content to plot if further external cultural influences could be at play in the response such as discussions of the text in other media such as forums etc.

3. *What did you think of this film? (a) Good (b) Bad (c) Mixed*

This opinion/value-based question used basic qualitative terminology to motivate the respondent. By positioning their response in simple normative terms, the respondent was asked to pass judgement on the text but not - at this stage - engage in deeper analysis. This was a motivational methodology designed to make the questionnaire appear easy at first.

(a) Please use this space to explain why you felt this way. Why was it good or bad? What contributed to it being a mixed experience?

This follow up question was designed to explore the motivations behind the respondents' opinions by asking them to explain their judgement in clear terms but in an open manner without prescribed terminology.

4. Did this film match your expectations? (a) Yes (b) No (c) In Part

At this juncture in the questionnaire, terminology from the study's preliminary framework was introduced in line with the positioning of the previous survey.

(a) Please use this space to explain how the film matched (or did not match) your expectations.

This clear explanatory question required the respondent to examine their pre-viewing conditions which led to their reception experience.

5. Do you feel the distributor's desire to receive a 12A certificate was reflected in the content of the film?

(a) If you answered Yes to the above. Please use this space to explain how you felt the content was affected.

Both questions 5 and 5 (a) explored the respondents' feelings of how classification may have affected the text. As well as display knowledge of the classification system and provoke conjecture on the application of classification, these questions also

examined if the respondents' knowledge of a film's classification affected their reception experience.

As previously noted, the classification aspect of the questionnaires is not relevant to the current study.

6. *How did the film make you feel? (a) Empowered/Inspired (b) Connected (c) Intellectually Satisfied (d) None of the Above*

   (a) *Please use this space to explain your above answer. If you answered None of the Above, please provide an alternative to the list given and an explanation of why you felt this way.*

Questions 6 and 6 (a) explicitly required the respondent to position their reception experience within the framework of McClelland to test construct validity of the terminology and derive commonality of experience from the response pool.

7. *Overall, who was the stronger character in this film? (A) Batman (b) Superman (c) Wonder Woman.*

   (a) *Please use this space to explain why you chose this character.*

Questions 7 and 7 (a) were text specific questions designed to elicit any links between audience reception and genre cues in the text. For example, was Batman considered to be weak in this film by the audience because he did not live up to the norms of a Batman text? This knowledge allowed for construction of theory regarding the norms of specific superhero texts within the corpus.

8. What is the next film you intend to see at the cinema?

(a) What appeals to you about this film?

(b) Has your experience seeing Batman V Superman affected this choice? If so, please describe how

Questions 8, 8 (a) and 8 (b) explored the respondents' pre-viewing experiences of further texts and allowed for relevant additional information regarding the pre-viewing experience to be gathered in a text agnostic manner.

Question 8 (b) was designed to measure any suggestion of viewing effect the respondent may have felt regarding future viewing choices and experiences. The question was not designed to measure actual effect as there was no ability of the researcher to measure if the suggestion of effect mentioned by the respondent was actioned. However, the question was designed to examine if there was any relationship between how successful the respondent felt the text had been in meeting a pre-viewing promise and whether this success was measured by the respondent in terms of genre.

Recruitment for respondents took place on the Facebook page of the undergraduate programme in Media Production at Northumbria University. The choice of media production students was due to an implicit understanding of narratives and genre within this student body, the expectations of which would lead to a richer response in the questionnaires. A link to the survey site was placed in a Facebook post on the programme's dedicated page with respondents asked to provide their opinion in relation to a departmental research project.

The first expectations questionnaire relating to *Batman v. Superman* (BVS) was opened on 21st March 2016 - the week of the film's release (25th March). The exit survey for the film was opened on 31st March.

The BVS questionnaires were followed by a modified expectations survey to *Captain America: Civil War* (CACW) which was opened on 27th April (exit survey 30th April) with *X Men-Apocalypse* opened on 20th May (exit survey 26th May). Modifications were cosmetic changes to character names and a rearrangement of the final questions to place emphasis on which of the McClelland derived phrases appealed to the respondents the most. This modification was the result of the researcher's observation that the initial structure - which identified lack of commonality first - was leading to a negative response towards the theoretical framework in the final section.

In total the BVS expectations questionnaire received five responses with the exit survey's participation increasing to seven after the film's release. Both CACW surveys attracted four responses which indicated a diminished interest in the potential respondent pool which was confirmed by two respondents completing the initial X Men survey and only one completing the exit survey. These responses were significantly lower than expected as the potential reach of the group was approximately two hundred students and therefore demonstrated a lack of viability in the research method. However, as an experimental scoping exercise, some of the results gathered were of interest to the overall field as discussed below.

In terms of age the average age of the respondents to the surveys was twenty which matched the average age of the enrolled students on the course. Whilst both BVS and the initial CACW survey attracted an entirely male response, the CACW exit survey and the initial X Men survey attracted a 50% gender split. This meant that

that the CACW response pool did not grow (as did BVS) following the release of the film but 50% of the initial male respondents did not complete an exit survey and instead were replaced by a new female population who did. Although due to the fluctuating engagement by the student body with the general course Facebook group due to other mitigating circumstances such as assignment pressures and work placements, no hypothesis can be constructed to explain this variance.

When asked why the respondents' decided to see BVS, although one respondent identified a general interest in the "genre" - " *Ever since the boom of the revamp of the superhero genre I can't get enough of these kinds of films*" (ref: 6271) - the other respondents located their interest within a generalised love of DC Comics and the Batman property: "*I have decided to see this movie due to my love of the character and mythos of Batman, I've been a fan of the movies and comics ever since I was a child*" (7355) ; "*Big fan of the Dark Knight trilogy, want to see how it compares. Also, a long-term fan of Bat Man in general, so naturally excited about seeing the movie*" (2533); "*Because I love any film to do with DC comic characters*" (7729). Only one respondent compared this film to the competing Marvel franchise, "*I enjoy superhero movies I prefer those on the Marvel spectrum*" (5296) with one respondent going further in their interest to link it to the emerging DC expanded universe project, "*I'm also interested in seeing how they begin to create this so called 'DC expanded universe' by linking this film with future ones like Suicide Squad in August*" (7729).

These responses suggested an overall interest in Batman and DC Comics was the overarching commonality in the respondents with an interest in the superhero genre being secondary. It was interesting to compare these responses with the expectation survey for the Marvel based CACW. This corpus included fans of the Marvel comics,

"*I'm an avid fan of the comics, and the Civil War story arc was one of the seminal storylines of the early 2000s,*" (0283) and "*I am a huge fan of the Marvel series, and Civil War being a huge theme in the comics it's interesting to see how the play it out on screen*" (5721). However, there were also references to the Marvel works not solely operating as Superhero films: "*The Captain America movies have always been my favourite films as they are more Action movies rather than superhero movies (Winter soldier is my personal favourite of the Marvel movies)*" (2662). This comment located the viewing pleasures of the *Captain America* films as being distinct to the respondent from what they describe as "Superhero movies" with the overall identified genre for *Captain America* being identified as "Action". Although this genre was not part of Parker's genre schema, he noted that that the Action term was used as shorthand for the Action Thriller, a sub-genre of thriller which devoted time during the central quest story to extend sequences in which the protagonist overcame physical peril.

The respondent's identification of *Captain America: the Winter Soldier* (2014) as their favourite of the Marvel films backed up this critical perspective, as this text in particular closely adhered more to thriller story elements than other Marvel texts which surrounded it (*Thor: The Dark World* (2013) and *Guardians of the Galaxy* (2014)). It was also described by the head of Marvel Studios - Kevin Feige - as a "*Political thriller*" (Digitalspy, 2013) when the film was in production, an intent which the casting of Robert Redford, star of iconic political thrillers *All the President's Men* (1975) and *Three Days of the Condor* (1976), gave cultural cues to. The respondent's choice of action to describe the piece suggested that Feige's intentions for the work were therefore successful using Parker's schema and suggested that the superhero genre was an umbrella term used to describe a selection of different

genres adapted from comic book sources. Respondent 8068 explained their reason for going to see the film was due to, "*The previous Marvel films have been a fun watch*", a statement which immediately led to an addition of the term "fun" to the study context to examine if this was a normal response to the Marvel films or an aberrant one?

A comparison of CACW responses with BVS showed the respondents for the DC text had located their intention to see the piece within the context of the wider Batman/DC fictional universe of both previous films and comic books. The Marvel respondents phrased their viewing intention within a similar context but also described differences of genre within the Marvel texts and suggested that the Marvel films were superior to DC ones because of these differences. (No relevant data emerged from this line of questioning on the X Men expectations survey which described social reasons for seeing the film such as: "*My boyfriend said he wanted to see this film* "(4692); "*Because a friend invited me*" (2015).

The following responses which regarded expectations (*What are your expectations (both good and bad) for this film?*) however did not display a marked change of approach between the Batman text and the Captain America one in tone. The BVS comments continued to expand the fandom response to the film such as, "*I expect there to be a lot of fan debate on how the Batman vs Superman fight should've ended, both logical and illogical. The diehard comic book fans will complain about how the movies are not 100% accurate (because you can't easily fit decades of lore and thousands of characters into a feature length*) (6271). Both set of respondents located the expected viewing pleasures of the films in the context of previous comic book antecedents: "*All the trailers for this movie show a Batman we haven't seen yet*

on the screen" (7355); *"I hope this movie sticks to the Captain America stories rather than trying to set up the rest of the Marvel Phase 3 movies"* (2662). And whilst the BVS respondents described the anticipated text as containing, "*a gritty, raw tone,*" (2533) with, "*a lot of hard hits and moral complications*" (6271), one respondent also described their expectations were for a "*fun film with plenty of action and super hero goodness*" (5296). This comment chimed with the CACW respondents who described their hopes for the work to be a "*fun action movie,*" and, "*A solid superhero movie…an enjoyable experience*". So, whilst there were suggestions of tonal difference in the responses, the overall audience expectation for both texts from this answer was that the pieces would deliver "*fun*" which would be located within a superhero context.

Questions regarding pre-viewing responses to the films cued by marketing materials were less illuminating in terms of genre with respondents often taken to using generalised hyperbole such as, "*All of the trailers have been great for the movie. The posters look so cool"* (2662); "*While there have been better marketing campaigns out recently the BvS is nothing short of great!" (627).* Responses also suggested a pre-ordained predilection on the behalf of the respondents to see the film based upon their taste and previous experience with the film series beyond any specific desire for this unique work such as, "*I wouldn't say the marketing has had much of an impact on me. The previous films in the franchise have been consistently enjoyable so I think that is the main influence" (8068); "Being a fan of this genre I was always gonna see it regardless of how well the marketing was done" (5296).*

A clear viewing motivation was also signalled by the respondents which regarded the wider fictional universe that the work connected to such as: "*The biggest selling point*

was the big reveal of Spiderman in one of the trailers" (2662); *"Hyped not only at the movie but the bigger DC universe ready to be explored in the movies"* (7355). Only one response referred to any expectation of pleasure being located in the main character, *"The Final trailer which opened with Batman taking down thugs was great because it sold me on this interpretation of the character"* (7355) although this did suggest vicarious empowerment was at the heart of the respondent's choice.

Although the section regarding certification was irrelevant in intent to this study, the responses in this section also contained interesting content overall. This included a childhood wish fulfilment motivation for viewing the text, *"Who hasn't put a red jumper around their neck to pretend it was a cape"* (6271) and a generalised articulation amongst the respondents that the commercial intents of the filmmakers to reach the widest possible audiences were damaging fans' more adult orientated desires for the films. Whilst this opinion appeared within the CACW responses in passing: *"I always want a dark Marvel film but 12A fits with the whole Marvel mentality that these movies are for kids as well as adults"* (2662); *"It should be higher as the source material delves into much darker territory than we are probably going to see in this film"* (0283) the BVS responses located this disparity as potentially alienating. Responses such as: *"I think that it [12A] is going to take away from a lot of the violence and grittiness that could've been added with a higher rating!"* (6271); *"One thing Batman fans have wanted for a while is a more brutal Batman that I fear we may not fully get with a 12A movie"*; (7355) and, *"a higher one [certificate] would get the more diehard fans to enjoy it I believe"* (7729) articulated that the desire of the filmmakers to reach children with the film was going to have a negative effect on the content of the film. However, the respondents in doing so also demonstrated an understanding of the texts: *"Batman and Superman are characters that kids look up*

to" (7355); "*the film originated from comic books which kids read so it would be wrong to exclude them*" (7729). Therefore, even though respondents noted that content tailoring to reach this audience would limit some of the more mature aspects of the text, they believed it was an important action to take as the work appealed to a wider selection of audiences than just fans. One respondent summed this up as: "*Positive - opening up the wonderful franchise to a younger audience. Negative - potentially neglecting thy older audience*" (2533).

One of the most interesting aspects of the responses in this section was a suggestion that the 12A classification reflected, "*What is expected of a super hero film*" (5296). Whilst the decisions of regulators are not the subject of this study, this comment suggested that the expectations of a superhero film were that it be family friendly. And although the X Men survey did not contain any meaningful responses on the subject of content, one of the respondents noted that, "*When I saw Batman vs. Superman, I was next to a very young boy which I was surprised at - seeing as the film is quite dark, but it shows that parents are happy to take their children to see films like this and they should be enjoyed by the whole family*" (4692). This comment contextualised the BVS comments in an operant setting whilst demonstrating a further implied a priori expectation of a superhero film's audience.

As explored in the questionnaire design section, the main purpose of the surveys was to act as preliminary research when devising a theoretical framework to underpin a new methodology of developing genre works which would incorporate the language of David McClelland's Needs theory. And as such the sections of the surveys in which the terminology of this theory was introduced proved to be the most

instructive when examining the motivations for audience members choosing the texts.

For the BVS respondents, the results of the introductory quantitative question indicated a 40:40% split between the promised experience of empowerment or connection as the main motivator for choosing the work (20% chose challenge and 20% answered none of the above). But whilst there was a clear explanation for why empowerment was chosen through comments such as, "*I always find superhero films empowering, especially the Batman movies as it proves that an ordinary person is capable of extraordinary things!*" (6271) and, "*I feel like I will be empowered because Batman is a normal person and he got to where he is mostly through hard work and not giving up*" (7355) respondents did not give a clear explanation for why connection or challenge was most relevant to them. This was particularly illuminating when the most lucid of the BVS connection comments, "*I expect to connect with either Batman/Superman (more likely Batman) and support their fight, why they're doing it*" (2533) was placed against a respondent's answers to the corresponding question on the CACW questionnaire. 75% of respondents of the CACW questionnaire chose connection as their primary motivator for watching the film and 100% chose *"I like to feel connected and part of a group of onscreen friends"* as their main motivation for viewing films in general (as opposed to 20% of respondents on the BVS questionnaire). On the CACW questionnaire a respondent commented, "*The Marvel hero's (sic) are always having good conversations and banter between them. This helps you feel like you are with a group of friends"* (2662) which was a direct contrast to an answer given by the BVS group, "*I mean I can't connect to a billion dollar play boy or an alien*" (5296). These comments, combined with the quantitative responses of the surveys in the McClelland based section, suggested a

strong received contrast between the experience promised to respondents by the Captain America text and those promised to the respondents of the Superman/Batman text. The framing of that text as relatable informed the entire Marvel respondents' choice of text whilst the BVS respondents in general rejected relatability.

However, whilst the BVS quantitative data indicated the largest predilection for empowerment as a motivator, the group also contained the biggest direct rejection of both empowerment and connection concepts in the qualitative comments. Respondents in their answers - as did those in the other two surveys - often replaced the McClelland framing of the question with their own terminology with responses such as, "*I do hope to feel excitement and enjoyment from the film I don't go to feel empowered or anything I watch films to escape reality and get caught in the moment and just enjoy what I see*" (5296) and, *"I am all for a good, empathetic character - but for me it's not about empowerment. It's more about enjoying how the character is written and performed"* (2533). However, one respondent's responses tracked across their answers in the BVS questionnaire laid out a clear relationship between empowerment and connection. Their response, "*You aspire to be that strong character, its great! It's motivating*!" in the context of empowerment suggested that their previous answer, "*I don't feel like I connect with characters enough to the point where I would look at them as "on screen friends" more just people I know the story behind and look up to but would never expect to meet in real life, like a celebrity*!" (6271) was based upon a halo effect. This meant the respondent felt that they couldn't affiliate to the superhero characters due to them being placed on a pedestal.

Responses to the X Men expectations questionnaire supported the CACW findings with audience members choosing Marvel texts for the received promise of affiliation. This was reflected in example responses such as, "*I like when films have a group of protagonists (Avengers, X-Men, etc) as you want them to all do well and you can see their relationships / friendships, as well as seeing who doesn't get on and there is always a comedy pair!*" (4692). Although the X Men work was not produced by Marvel Studios - and instead was adapted by 20th Century Fox from a Marvel property - a correlation between Marvel derived works in general was drawn here by the respondent with the suggestion that the promise of such material was the attractive element of team work,

Responses to the exit surveys furthered the above findings. Some responses to BVS focused on shortcomings of the story not allowing respondents to engage with the film's received promise (a result of a three-hour final edit being reduced by thirty minutes for cinema release) exemplified by: "*It had some impressive visuals, but story was disjointed. Overall, it didn't know what it wanted to be, and could commit to a specific goal - it didn't know how it wanted to make its audience feel* (0554); and "*I felt it was all over the place and not very succinct. In such a film, there's usually a key scene that gives a sense of empowerment where you route for the main character - in this film however, the plot was too messy for any sense of a dramatic build up to be felt*" (4552). Other respondents, however, also communicated clear elements of empowerment derived from the Batman character. One respondent noted in their responses, "*Batman is the best interpretation of the character that I have seen. The movie got me excited for the rest of the DC Cinematic Universe and I felt empowered from the portrayal of Batman and how it shows that just because you aren't as strong as others it doesn't mean that you can't stand by them*" (7544);

whilst another wrote, "*The fight was great and really empowering with the "an ordinary human can do extraordinary things" ideology. For BVS to have worked better they should've had a Batman stand-alone film! His character was great. He's a much more interesting character*" (1294). These rich responses, contextualised by the respondents within the wider history of the Batman franchise, significantly contrasted to the responses from the CACW and X Men Group who saw the Marvel works separate to the overall Marvel fictional universe.

An interesting anomaly occurred in the CACW exit survey when, in contrast to the respondents of the CACW expectations survey who had all identified connection as their motivating rationale for viewing the piece, only half the exit survey group identified connection as an experience delivered by the work. The most lucid of the positive respondents articulated that this sense of connection was in part due to the previously established relationships laid down in the existing series:

> "*This movie did something that I hoped Batman V Superman did not. It made you pick a side during the movie. Before the conflict you have time to establish the characters and when they stand for, so it makes it more impactful when eventually they start fighting. And from knowing these people well you feel more when close friends fight for conflicting opinions. You know both characters well and you know what each one stands for which makes the conflict more satisfying*" (0047).

However, respondents who brought pre-viewing knowledge of the Marvel properties - unlike their DC counterparts - found the experience of the property's adaptation to be negative. This was in part due to a shift in focus from the comic book which

covered the events of the film from multiple perspectives instead of the singular experience of Captain America,

> "*I was unhappy with the focus, as I feel like they were trying to make the audience only agree with Captain America. This is obviously due to it being in the Captain America Saga, however, it felt like they belittled Tony's perspective, which I found to be the most understandable one*" (2577).

So, whilst 100% of respondents to the CACW exit survey described it as "good", there was dissatisfaction amongst the group when the text was placed within the wider context of the Marvel fictional universe due to a previously established connection with the Tony Stark character in other Marvel works which was an inverse version of McClelland's connection concept. However, this was one point of negativity with the positive attributes of the work being located by one respondent as a, "*Great action movie with great action, political drama*" *(*0047) a sentiment which supported the previous descriptions of *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* as a political thriller and went some way to illuminating why a respondent in the BVS survey stated, "*While Superhero movie fatigue is becoming a real issue, Captain America movies tend to not fit into that*" (0870).

An examination of the questionnaires, therefore, as preliminary research when investigating the subject of adaptation - and the influences behind audiences' choice of films - indicated various motivating factors at play when it came to the comic book work with a clear differentiation of brand identity by audiences between works from DC and Marvel. This therefore suggested the comic book corpus was not as clear a body of works as initially thought which warranted further investigation. This began with identifying the differences of what one respondent described as, "*The same*

formulaic superhero blockbusters" (2015) and those works identified by the respondents as fresh approaches. The two named works by the respondents were the 20th Century Fox adaptation of *Deadpool* - which had been released in February 2016 prior to BVS and CACW - and the Warner Bros. adaptation of DC property *Suicide Squad* which was due to open in August 2016. An exit questionnaire for *Deadpool* was therefore disseminated to examine this further work with an eye on further investigation of *Suicide Squad*.

Deadpool (2016) was an adaptation of a Marvel X Men related property which revolved around a mercenary with regenerative powers whose ability to break the fourth wall resulted in an unusually self-reflexive and ironic tone for a mainstream comic book work. The piece had opened in February 2016 to excellent box office results which were far beyond the expectations of studio 20th Century Fox for a film with an R certificate. The film eventually took a worldwide box office total of $783 against a $58 million budget which made *Deadpool* the highest grossing R rated film unadjusted for inflation, the highest grossing X Men fictional universe film and the ninth highest grossing film of the year (the-numbers.com 2019). In response, the success of the film prompted multiple articles to speculate on whether this new hyper violent and adult orientated direction to the superhero film would become the norm and whether forthcoming works such as BVS and CACW would be able to compete. This very recent success of *Deadpool* - and the debates over content and tone which the piece inspired - were reflected heavily in the questionnaire surveys which suggested that the new direction of *Deadpool* was more to the tastes of the respondents. When describing their expectations for BVS, one respondent noted that Deadpool was the exception to the norm, "*I think most super hero films now have this [12a] classification (other than the recent hit Deadpool) the characters aren't as*

risqué as Deadpool is" (5296). Respondents discussed the appropriateness of the certificate (BBFC 15) for the story - which they felt was fully justified - and the self-reflexive qualities of the character which enhanced their enjoyment of the film. When asked in the BVS exit survey as to which recent film delivered the experience of connection or empowerment, one respondent noted that this was Deadpool, "*Because he gave 0 [expletive] and that was really refreshing*!" (6271). When collecting CACW expectations surveys, Deadpool was again mentioned in relationship to a new paradigm, with one respondent noting that, "*Superhero film makers have now realised (Deadpool) that a higher rating is the way forward*" (5271). The same respondent expanded later in the survey that, "*Deadpool, [is] possibly one of the most loved characters on film of our generation!! He was relatable, to a point. And he was funny, laughter is now the key.*" This response not only located adult orientated comedy as the way forward for superhero films, but also suggested notions of generational values being involved in this sea change, therefore the way to capture the current generation's interest for cinema going was by deploying a postmodern mix of self-reflexive humour and graphic violence. It was interesting to note, however, that despite the revolutionary claims put forward by the respondent for this new paradigm, that they did not negatively compare *Deadpool t*o the CACW text in question. The respondent answered in a previous section that they were, "*A huge fan of the Marvel series, and Civil War being a huge theme in the comics it's interesting to see how the play it out on screen*" (5721). This statement displayed an intertextual understanding of the wider Marvel fictional universe and clearly displayed that the respondent's approach to the self-reflexive *Deadpool* piece was in tandem with the wider texts.

As a result of the respondents' use of the *Deadpool* text to both contextualise and counter the main texts being discussed in the questionnaires, a further exit questionnaire was deployed to further examine the notion of the suggested new paradigm. A link to this questionnaire was deployed within the Facebook group page on 27th June 2016 - four months after *Deadpool* had opened in the UK - and rather than capture the previous suggested enthusiasm, revealed instead a mixed response. For whilst respondents noted, *"I enjoyed the humour of the film and the way it felt like it broke some stereotypes of classic hero films. The romance didn't feel contrived"* (9593) and praised the, "*Witty childish humour that differs from any other comedy/hero film out there*" (8466) there was also a feeling that a lack of substance ultimately led to an unfulfilling experience. "*It was a funny film - but there was not much else to it - you laughed during the film but you left feeling the same as you did before seeing it*" (7947) one respondent noted, with another replying that they left the cinema, "*Satisfied, it tickled my funny bone but it didn't rattle it*" (8466). Another respondent stated that, "*The humour for the most part didn't really work for me and, the film didn't have much to it besides the comedy"* (9973) which was a far cry from the revolutionary paradigm suggested by the previous responses.

Due to this mixed response to the *Deadpool* text, the two main texts of the questionnaires' focus - BVS and CACW - were engaged with to draw out commonalities of approach and differences of execution through a focus group approach. An eye was also kept on the yet to open *Suicide Squad* as a potential third text for examination as the expectation of the piece had been mentioned often in questionnaire responses.

6.4 Initial Focus Group Period

Qualitative analysis expert Monique Hennik (2011) listed a selection of reasons for favouring an interview approach to research, the most relevant replicated below as they also provided a strong rationale for deploying focus groups:

> *"In determining how people make decisions*
>
> *In examining people's beliefs and perceptions*
>
> *In identifying motivations for behaviour*
>
> *In determining the meanings that people attach to their experiences*
>
> *In examining people's feelings and emotions"*
>
> (2013, p.22)

Jamie Harding's *Qualitative Data Analysis from Start to Finish* described the main benefit of focus groups as the "*interaction*" (2013, p.23) between group members and noted the points of research academics Rose Barbour (2007) and Caroline Oates (2000) that, "*Focus groups take some of the burden of interpretation from the researcher because participants themselves can provide insights and commentaries in the course of the discussion. Focus groups force individuals to explain to others why they hold particular views, and this can give a greater insight into the reasoning behind opinions that are held*" (ibid).

The focus groups at this stage in the research project became a fruitful tool. In the words of Michael Bloor in *Focus Groups in Social Research* they revealed, "*Shared values and identifying difficulties associated with norms*" (2001, pp.5-6) and, although small scale and exploratory in nature, provided a valuable through line from the induction of a relevant case study to interpretative approaches to theory.

Following the *Deadpool* questionnaire, research activity was moved from the main Facebook page to an alternative group page dedicated to the project. Recruitment for members of this group took place on the course group page after which all communication to group members became limited to the research group page. The rationale for this was two-fold. The first reason was to create a digital safe space for students to openly discuss works in a confidential manner away from the main site which had become aggressive. The second reason for the closed group was so that official materials such as participant consent forms and dates for focus group activity could be disseminated in an efficient manner. Participation was measured by checking if an individual had seen the post and this mitigated against absenteeism in the focus group activity.

The recruitment of participants to this dedicated research group was supported by the following Facebook message:

> "*Focus Group Members Needed.*
>
> *As part of the department's research into Blockbuster Franchise Cinema, several focus groups will take place between now and the end of the academic year which will give students the opportunity to take part in potentially publishable research. If watching films and afterwards taking part in a group discussion for about an hour on why the film works (or doesn't) and the merits of the DC Cinematic Universe vs the MCU sounds like your kind of thing, please email me and I can get you involved. Sessions will usually run on a Wednesday afternoon space permitting*"

Two focus groups were recruited from the pool of participants after an open call.

Each participant was asked to read the following script which informed them directly

of the study's purpose as part of activity's ethical framework:

"*What is the Purpose of the Research?*

This study explores a corpus of films dubbed Blockbuster Franchises.

Through a detailed series of case studies and focus groups, the genres,

narratives, and marketing strategies of this selection of films will be examined

in relationship to their cultural influence, audience impact and economic

success. Although primarily a study of story, the central issue of the work

regards the formation of new genre forms and in doing so engages with

contemporary debates into the nature of genre and the influences upon the

understanding of the term from emerging media. The study is the doctoral

research of University of Northumbria staff member Andrew Ross and funded

by the university.

What will I have to do if I agree to take part?

You are required to watch a film or no more than 3 hours in length on campus

with other participants from the research group. You will then be required

(after a short break) to take part in a videotaped discussion (led by Andrew

Ross) on campus regarding the film. This conversation will run no more than 2

hours in length and will focus on issues of story, audience impact and genre

relating to the film screened. The overall focus group (screening and

discussion) will not run any more than four hours in total length. Once the

focus group is completed, an exit questionnaire will be supplied via Facebook

for you to add any further comments." Excerpt from RE5 Research

Information (2016)

The subject of the first group which took place on Wednesday 23rd of November

2016 was CACW. The second focus group which took place on Wednesday 30th of

November examined the BVS text.

To provide a variety of responses during the preliminary research the participants in

each group were unique. Each focus group began with a screening of the film in

question followed by a thirty-minute comfort and refreshment break, after which the

discussion began. The structure of the group used the process of funnelling as

described by research academic Abbas Tashakkori (1998) in which participant

responses were funnelled over the course of the activity from a general overview of

the subject to more specific issues the researcher wished to discuss. This exercise

generated qualitative responses which were subjected to thematic analysis under the

guiding principles laid out in *Working with Qualitative Data* by William Gibson and

Alan Brown (2009) which derived commonalities, differences, and relationships

within the data set. The findings of this analysis were then deployed to synthesise

sensitising topics for future examination as described in the following sections.

6.5. Emerged Topic: Relatability

After the generally positive online questionnaire response to CACW and the

excellent box office of the film ($1.15 billion worldwide) the focus group was

surprisingly negative towards the piece and identified a form of fatigue regarding the

repetitive nature of the Marvel works.

Participant L. stated, "*I don't really like Captain America, well as a whole. It just, kind of, bores me… It felt like it was a massive, massive fight scene and the plot was solved in the last five minutes, almost.*" This language was echoed by Participant S. who explained, "*It's just fight scene after fight scene after fight scene…I'm just a bit bored of, like, Tony and Steve, just kind of going at each other a bit, and then just having big fight scenes in like, all The Avengers movies… I feel like they need to calm it down now and do some other stuff.*" When questioned about what this could be, the participants immediately identified the content they had enjoyed recently and why this content overall overshadowed CACW.

Participant S. began this subject by drawing out comparisons between CACW and the previous Marvel film*, Ant-Man* (2015), "*I'm not saying Ant-Man was the best film in the world, but it was quite enjoyable. And it's just something a bit different*." This opinion was furthered by participant M who went beyond identifying the Ant-Man film or character as a source of enjoyment but the on-screen persona of star, Paul Rudd. This recalled Rick Altman's tracing of the historical antecedents of genres being in the schema of stardom: "*I love Paul Rudd. I love anything that he'd ever do. So, I love Ant-Man. And I think Ant-Man would be pretty much unbeatable really*".

This perspective was backed up by Participant S:

> "*That's why I liked Ant-Man. Like, I feel like I liked it more than the generally* (sic) *people liked it, because a lot of people said that they didn't really like it that much or it wasn't very good. But I thought it was - I didn't- I didn't think it was the most amazing film in the world, cos, it doesn't have the budget of Civil War and things like that, where they've got tons and tons of explosions and cool things going on. But Paul Rudd is such a likeable guy anyway.* (cont.)

And the comedy of it just made it better. I'd rather watch Ant-Man again than

watch Civil War again."

Participant M1. also identified Spider-man as their joint favourite character in the film,
an opinion that backed up Participant L. who had located their enjoyment of Spider-
man in the film as, "*He added a lot of humour to the film as well, which is really*

good. And he was always, kind of, chipping in with that, and I like that."

Participant M1. identified Ant-man in conjunction with Spider-man as their favourite
because, "*It's just they were nicer, and they were a bit of comic relief. And then even,*

in their own individual story arcs, it's not like - the scale of the drama isn't as big.

They have individual problems but it's not like the world's ending around them, which

I feel, like, every main Avengers film is the end of the world each time."

This immediate identification of comic tone and likeability as the heart of the
respondents' pleasures within the CACW text was consistently reiterated throughout
the focus group. Participant M1. explained that their enjoyment from the Spider-man
character was due to the way that, "*Spider-man is exactly the way that a fifteen,*

fourteen year old kid would be. If he was introduced to these super-human people he

would talk too much, he would be excited. You can see that even though he has got

these powers, he hasn't completely got hold of them, which I quite like."

Participant A. described the quality of Spider-man as relatable which became the
main theme of the discussion:

"*I liked Spider-man the best. Just cos he got to be the one character who*

wasn't that worried about stuff. His biggest concern was homework, which is

just very relatable and nice to have there. I like the older Spider-man (cont.)

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because even in his own films, like, he is still the comic relief, even when he's dealing with his own problems. He still cracks jokes at villains and that sort of thing. That's nice to have."

Participant L. furthered reinforced this viewpoint on Spider-man:

"He's kind of, just more human, isn't he? He's not this super-human, kind of, all drama, all dark, all the time, kind of guy…He acts the most like a normal kid would in that situation, I think. I think everyone can kind of relate to that."

The consistent return to discussing texts containing humour was a re-occurring behaviour within the first focus group. When asked about other superhero texts, Participant S. noted their favourite comic book film was Marvel's *Guardians of the Galaxy* (2014):

"It's the only one I have on DVD. So, that's why I'm gonna say it's my favourite. Because it's funny. And (CACW) had a few moments of humour in it but a lot of it wasn't that funny. A lot of other superhero films like, other Avengers ones have been funnier. I think that's why I didn't enjoy it as much as some of the other ones. Cos, I think a lot of the enjoyment of these films comes out of some of the laughs that you get. The fight scenes are cool and stuff and it's nice to have, like, a good plot that you're interested in. But I'm all about the laughs."

Deadpool (2016) was mentioned by the participants as another work they especially enjoyed:

"My favourite's probably Deadpool or if we're going away from Marvel, one of The Dark Knight series films. Because I feel like Avengers, it is good but it's very much targeted to that 12A kind of audience, isn't it? It's fair enough because that's how it's gonna make the most money and that's how it's gonna get seen the most. But I think films like Deadpool and the Dark Knight they just don't care about what they're gonna be portrayed as, and they're just films in their own kind of right. They're just loads better, I think." (Participant L.)

Participant M1. also discussed *Deadpool* as, "*I think's just brilliant, because of the humour and the fact that it is a little bit gorier,*" whilst Participant M2. also examined *Deadpool* through the prism of relatability:

"I wasn't sure if I was gonna like Deadpool because most of the superhero films are really serious. And it felt like if it wasn't serious then maybe it wasn't, as legit and stuff. And then when I saw it, it was just so funny, and I found myself liking Wayne (sic) more than Tony or, Steve, because it was just funnier, and he was just so much more likeable. And it wasn't like he was just mad cos he was ugly now. And I get that. So, he's better."

Participant S. also noted that CACW did not contain the necessary Marvel mixture of pleasurable elements due to a lack of relatability:

"I think that chemistry and comedy, it just makes the characters all more likeable, which makes you sort of root for them. You wanna root for one of the characters. Whereas at the minute there's very few of the characters in The

Avengers series that I'm really, sort of, rooting for. Whereas I really liked

Deadpool because he's funny and he's interesting."

Participant S. described how the humorous aspects of texts such as Ant-man and Deadpool had turned them away from the main franchises:

"These ones are just more entertaining. So, I might just not really - cos if you

then compare them, you're like, oh, well this one was much more entertaining

than The Avengers film. So, why am I bothering with that?"

Participant A. noted how this lack of humour was a disappointing aspect of the piece*:*

"I wanted to be entertained. That's what you always get when you see a

movie. You want to have fun. You go to the cinema to have, a good two and a

half hours being, good jokes and lots of explosions and that sort of stuff. And I

didn't feel that as much this time."

Connection and relatability became intrinsically linked by the respondents to McClelland's concept of affiliation when social engagement was hypothesised by Participant M1*:*

"I think the two likeable characters in it were Spider-man and Ant-Man

because you could probably go to the pub with them and have a few drinks

and just be around them and laugh and have a good time and not feel uptight

and uncomfortable. Whereas I think with Captain America and Tony and stuff,

even though, like, Tony Stark is quite comical, I feel like you'd feel very

different from them. Whereas, like, Ant-Man and Spider-man are way more

relatable. And I think if you had these powers, you wouldn't be twenty-four-

seven, so straight. You would have a laugh with it, and you would get things wrong and it would be funny."

Participant L. backed this up humorously with*: "I think if you went to the pub with Captain America, he'd just be a bit depressing, wouldn't he?"* This aside was not without context however as the relatability and comic relief aspect of characters such as Spider-man and Ant-Man stood in direct contrast to the group's perceptions of the main character Captain America who was regarded as unappealing:

> "*When I first watched the film, I thought, well, it's a Captain America film. I'm gonna want to side with Captain America. But I thought that he was just being arrogant and just going out of his way to protect somebody who didn't even necessarily want to be protected really anymore*" (Participant M2).

And whilst both Participants A. and S. were able to sum up the previously relatable characteristics of the character as, "*He's got some brains and heart in there. He's known for being loyal. Which is why he's so loyal to Bucky*" (S.) and, "*I liked him the most because his superpower was, like, being a kind person*" (A.) both agreed that the character's positive characteristics were not maximised in the piece. Whilst Participant L. found the constantly shifting moral ground around Captain America to be the most interesting aspect of the work, *"It's very divisive. It very much depends on your own opinion, who you side with. It was very clever, actually, by the filmmakers to divide the crowd like that, I think*," Participant M2. identified that this impacted their enjoyment of the text. To this respondent friendship and affiliative aspects of the work were the most important:

"*The whole chemistry thing, it's one of the most important things for me. I really liked the first Avengers, and even the second one to a degree. Because they were all getting along. And it probably sounds quite stupid but when in this film when they're just not getting along, I don't like it. I'm just like, 'you're meant to be friends.'*"

Despite participant M2. exploring the concept that villainy was as appealing a prospect as heroism, *"The Joker, he's insane, you kind of do root for him a little bit because he's kind of brilliant. I do like how in Dark Knight that they've got a villain who your kind of do want to kick Batman's arse a little bit*", the group located the X Men franchise as the most relatable of the major comic book franchises.

M2. described the relatability of the X Men characters being drawn from their status as societal outcasts, "*They're first getting used to the fact that they are mutants and just cos they're mutants, they're not superheroes. They are classed as mutants. And that's a negative thing.*"

Participant A. meanwhile outlined the difference in story between the Avengers and X men franchises as:

"*I think the main difference between them is that mutants are already classed as being bad by the core society and then they become better throughout it because they save lots of people. Whereas in Civil War, it's the other way around. They [Avengers] start out as being loved and then they break down as it continues.*"

Participant S. summarised the differences between the franchises as:

> "*X-Men kind of brings more issues of discrimination against race, gender, sexuality. It can all be related to, how they're discriminated against as mutants. And then it's quite empowering when they all come together, and they do good things. Whereas, in Civil War, the stuff that they're going through, it's not that relatable to real life politics. At least not on a sort of personal level of a general audience because people don't really have that sort of decision to make in real life. Whereas the element of discrimination in X-Men is, very relatable to a lot of people.*"

Participant A. however identified the importance of humour in the X Men series as an important element which balanced the socio-political context: "*They're very, very funny. They've got tons of jokes the entire way through. And so, it's so enjoyable while dealing with, kind of, vaguely serious topic.*"

Relatability was also the induced subject of the BVS group whose negative responses to the work were positioned in relationship to a lack of connection. Participant L2. noted that, "*It didn't really do much for me…It felt like a lot of spectacle and a lot of, let's throw graphics in your face. I felt it lacked real character moments to me. I didn't really connect with anybod*y."

This response was reinforced by Participant H. who noted that the piece was, "*Really glum and one note.*" Comparing the works to the previous Christopher Nolan films, the participant differentiated the two approaches. "[Nolan's films] *were still fun, I think they had good scripts, they were still enjoyable. Whereas this, I think, was just dark*

and nothing else. I think the main problem is the writing. Batman, I didn't think, was particularly entertaining or likeable."

This response echoed the response of Participant L. in the CACW group who noted that the Dark Knight series - despite containing dark material - were entertaining as they were leavened by humour.

Participant's C. and P. however disagreed with this perspective: "*I thought you could, connect with the characters* "(C.); "*I really like the characters. I feel like they were quite relatable*" (P.) This response - as with the BVS questionnaire respondents - positioned their experience of the work within their experience of the Batman franchise beyond the Nolan trilogy as exemplified by, "*I really like Batman. I've always really liked the Batman films because I like the way that he doesn't try to dress himself up as a hero. I thought there was good continuity of the character*" (Participant P.)

This difference of opinion between the participants regarding Batman's relatability lay at the heart of this focus group discussion. For whilst the CACW group spent the most time stressing that humour and affiliative elements were the most important elements of a film, the BVS group examined the notion of what constituted a superhero and whether likeability and relatability had any place in that formula at all.

Participant V. summed up their experience of BVS as:

> "*It's supposed to be superhero versus superhero, but I don't feel like Batman's a superhero at all. He's going around killing people, he's branding people. If someone says superhero, you think someone with power or something. I don't*

know, maybe it's a strength or maybe it's some crazy thing they can do with their mind, but somebody who's trying to help people. It doesn't feel like he's [Batman] out to help the people of Gotham City. Just feels like he's just running around breaking things."

This opinion reflected the general sense in the room that the Batman character was displaying a lack of control they would not normally associate with a heroic character. This flawed approach to the character was typified by Participant C:

"*He's more human. So, you think, how can [a] human, with so much influence, with all this money and stuff, do something so awful? I feel like if you're human, you can more control it rather than if you've got powers, you can just maybe lose control a little bit.*"

This more psychologically realistic approach to showing the multi-dimensional aspects of a superhero character also affected the group's perceptions of Superman in the work. Participant L2. positioned their approach to BVS through their understanding of the wider history of the character:

"*I felt as though Superman's representation in this film was extremely dark. Films, they're a representation of our time and what our culture's going through, but in terms of was it an accurate representation of what Superman was originally? Absolutely not. Superman is about doing the right thing, justice, not killing people and I'm pretty sure that in the space of this film, from beginning to end, he killed over a million people*".

The lack of relatability in the central main BVS characters echoed the CACW focus group response. However, whilst the CACW group were able to instead engage with

humorous supporting characters such as Ant-Man or Spider-man, the BVS group felt alienated by a lack of humorous characters in the work. This led to the group differentiating the content of a BVS from a Marvel film which informed a consensus opinion on the difference of creative approach between the content producers.

Participant V. summarised the consensus as: *"I think Marvel film has more comedic moments in it. So, you get more one-liners and little digs at other characters and stuff. Whereas this one's more literally just fighting the whole time."*

This perspective of comedy being central to the Marvel ethos was also echoed by Participant P:

> "*Marvel movies are more family friendly. They take one idea of; this is the hero, and this is the villain and they're gonna fight and then the hero's gonna win. They take that idea and they will use it in all of them. And that's not to say that that's a bad thing because that's the kind of thing that kids can identify with. And there are the comedic moments as well.*"

Within the differences of approach between Marvel and BVS identified by the respondents was the tailoring of material to audiences composed of children. This was summarised by Participant S. as the key difference in approach between BVS and Marvel:

> "*Batman versus Superman: I do think it isolated a lot of children or didn't even regard them. Whereas with Marvel, they do target the family and they do try to keep the humour, the lightness of a comic book and try to translate that on to screen.*"

In summary whilst the BVS group in general articulated that their lack of enjoyment when receiving the BVS text was due to a lack of canonical superhero values being demonstrated by the main protagonists, the group also identified a Marvel formula located in a mix of humour and relatable characterisation which the BVS work stood in opposition to. This Marvel formula - examined in the next section in more depth - furthered the CACW group's contextualisation of the work and allowed for their overall unsatisfactory framing of the text to be understood from the perspective of thwarted formula expectation. This led onto the second main topic of debate in the focus groups which concerned the notion of the superhero genre itself.

P6.6. Emerged Topic: Genre

Discussions of Genre within both groups examined the nature of the Marvel franchise and the way formula was easily identified by the participants. Participant H. gave a generalised overview of this formula,

> "*If you go and see a Marvel film, you know what it's gonna look like, you know what the characters are gonna be like, you know roughly how the plot's gonna go. They're fun, then they can be dark, they have characters that are more enjoyable, the plots are generally easier to follow.*"

Participant A. explored this formula in terms of Marvel's use of humour and how this humour resulted in a general blandness of tone:

> "*In terms of tone there is certainly a formula with Marvel films. Altogether, every single character is this witty, quippy, funny character. And there's nothing to switch from that. So, when everyone's like that, it doesn't make them especially outstanding.*"

However, despite this participant's summary of the light tone of CACW being in opposition to the findings of the CACW group, their description of tonal and formula shift with *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (2014) held merit, especially when placed within the wider context of other participants' observations that the approach of the *Winter Soldier* was an innovative revision of the Marvel formula:

"*Throughout the Marvel cinematic universe, from Iron Man One, everything beyond that was levity and jokes. And Winter Soldier was a fresh film almost, for its time 'cos even though the comic relief characters were still present, they weren't playing comic relief anymore. They were being serious about the situations they were in. It's back to the norm now though, with Civil War, where everyone's joking and laughing at everything. But just the tone shifts it [Winter Soldier] went for. I felt like it took a risk. And I think that's worth commending.*"

Participant H. contextualised the *Winter Soldier* within the notion of the superhero genre and positioned the text as containing the key to their understanding of superhero genre values:

"*I think S. hit upon something really interesting there, where you said Winter Soldier, it's not a light film, it's a thriller and I think it's that element I expect from superheroes It doesn't have to be funny, but it has to thrill. It has to have those big, kind of, triumphant, punching of the air moments.*"

This participant compared this description to the BVS work:

"*I think that might be where Batman and Superman doesn't work for me, is that it's so grim and it's so unpleasant and everyone's kind of getting injured*

and depressed. You can't really enjoy any moment of it. Even the big battles are just unpleasant to watch. So, I think it's that that it's missing. It needs to have something triumphant to it."

Reading a sense of triumph as empowerment, other participants positioned their understanding of the genre within this context. Participant V. had previously described that," *A superhero film, you go in, you expect somebody to save the day. And that's why it's enjoyable*". This participant, however, modified their definition in line with the groups' promotion of triumphalism as follows,

"*I do think that a superhero film doesn't have to be one thing. I don't think it has to be a comedic film or a dark film, a thriller or whatever. I think you described it well before when you said it - it needs that moment of, like, 'YES!'*"

Quite what this "YES!" moment refers to can be traced back to a previous statement by the participant:

"*I think it [the superhero film] needs to have both a combination of the big, exciting moments but it needs to have moments as well, of the characters being relatable. So that you can feel connected to the story. 'Cos if they're not real enough, if they don't seem like they could be people that you might know in real life then you just can't fully connect with the film.*"

This "Yes!" moment could therefore be paraphrased as a moment of vicarious empowerment derived from the triumphant success of a relatable character. This demonstrated two of McClelland's motivations being satisfied by this participant's description of their reception experience.

However other participants indicated differing experiences. Participant P. discussed their love of the Marvel film *Thor* (2011) and the fish out of water comedy elements which occurred when the main character - the Norse God of Thunder - was transplanted from Valhalla to small town America:

> "*I think it's [Thor] quite funny, the situation of Thor coming down to Earth and he has no idea about social conventions or anything like that. I just think it's a really entertaining, enjoyable film and it doesn't, kind of, dress itself up to be super serious or anything. It is just fun. And it doesn't try to be anything else.*"

As this participant had previously described their love of the darker elements of Batman and expressed that they felt the characters in BVS to be relatable, the above description of their enjoyment of *Thor* demonstrated that the participant had a literate ability to differentiate textual intent from convention. This participant was therefore able to enjoy the comedic elements of *Thor* without feeling any sense of genre disparity between this superhero text and the darker texts they also enjoyed. This suggested that the participant's experience was legitimised more by the text and less by pre-viewing expectations.

Conversely whilst the BVS group engaged in discussions regarding the Marvel formula, the group tasked with discussing a Marvel text preferred a broader discussion of which traditional genre nomenclature they most found relevant to the piece.

Participant L. when asked about which genre they would place the work within, described the piece as operating beyond their expectations:

"*I was gonna say 'action,' but it's kind of very dramatic. It felt almost like a drama. If it wasn't superheroes in that, I think that plot could still, be applied in some way to a proper drama film it was quite heavy a lot of the time and people were dealing with a lot of important stuff, I think. So, yeah. I would say drama.*"

Participant S. furthered this definition by pushing into the world of soap opera. They described it as, "*Drama. It's not a film but it just seems like a very big budget, overblown episode of EastEnders really.*"

This above reference located the piece as belonging squarely to Parker's Personal Conflict / Personal Drama genre bracket and his sub-genre of the communal drama whose conflicts were created by societal infrastructures, in this case represented by the Zokovia Accords which regulated the activities of the Avengers. This discussion of genre by the group was most pertinent to the study and Participant L.'s further examination was illuminating on the subject:

"*I feel like action is now too closely linked to superhero because of all the explosions and all the fight scenes and everything. If you had a superhero film that didn't have all that in it, is it really a superhero film? Or is it just a drama with people in capes*?"

This line of investigation was picked up by Participant S:

"*If it's a superhero film, it's an action film too. Cos, what superhero film doesn't have some sort of fight scene or explosion or guns or weapons. I was trying to think, and I was, like, 'no, no, that one's got weapons, that one's got guns,*

that one's got a fight scene." I can't think of any superhero films personally,

right now, this minute, that aren't action films."

Participant M. located the tradition of action within superhero narratives within an historical context. This displayed the participant's contextualising of the various superhero properties was based upon an established cultural practice:

"*I'd probably say action. I feel like there is drama in it, but I feel like that's just*

to lead to more action. I feel like they were made to be action anyway. It

comes from Action Comics."

Both groups were asked to examine their experience of videogames associated with the properties under discussion to identify any commonality of genre and character in the wider constellation of content.

Participant A. differentiated commercial intent as an important element when examining the game extensions:

 "*The reason DC video games grab me more is they take the issues from the*

films and have them in the game as well. Where Marvel don't really hit upon

the issues that they explore within their films, they keep it very good for

children, so the merchandise can get to them."

This point suggested that the intention and content of the wider constellation of content was at play with the DC videogames whilst the Marvel games did not continue a through line of intent between the constituent parts. The Participant located the pleasures of the DC games as thematic inter-textuality whilst the Marvel games were dismissed as solely corporate endeavours. This observation reflected

Jonathan Gray's hierarchy of paratexts; the DC videogames located by the respondents as privileged peripherals with the Marvel games relegated to the lowest tier of hype orientated derivatives.

Participant M3. agreed with the lack of continuity between the Marvel games and the wider franchise but described the pleasures of the Marvel video games for children as the delivery of vicarious empowerment to which a simple formula could be applied: "*My little brother's obsessed with Captain America and he has a costume that he wears all the time and then when he sits down, he plays the game and he gets to be Captain America … And he can save the people and stuff, not lose or whatever.*"

Participant A. continued this strand of vicarious empowerment when discussing the Batman related series of Arkhamverse videogames,

> "*His character's kind of a vessel for you to project on and make you feel like you're there. So, you're beating up all the bad guys, you're fighting all the people.*"

The pleasures of this vicarious empowerment in the open world sandbox environment of the videogame *Arkham City* (2011) were explored by Participant L. as one of the most attractive features of the game,

> "*You're a lot more interactive with it [Arkham City] I think watching the films is good cos you're guided where to think. But when you're controlling this person, it makes it a lot more personal. This was the open world one, where you could just do whatever you wanted as Batman and if you wanted to just*

mess about as Batman - beat up some random thugs- you could. But you

could equally go and hunt the Joker."

Participant A. also noted how their enjoyment of solving mysteries and puzzles was also met by the Batman series of videogames from the developer Tell Tale. Whilst the action-based Arkham series were the source of previous comments regarding empowerment, the Tell Tale point and click game delved more into the detective origin of the Batman character and allowed for Participant A. to fulfil a sense of achievement from cognitive gameplay. The Participant stated that their disappointment with recent works in the Batman film series was because they did not deliver this pleasure:

> "*Mystery films are one of my favourite genres. I like to think in a film. I do also like escapism. That's why I go to superhero films. But they don't have that mystery, or fascinating character elements most of the time. So, I am a bit disappointed by some of the more recent films.*"

The focus group participants were lucid in locating the pleasures of genre and the expectations for receiving superhero works but overall did not appear to enjoy the films shown. When questioned about why the films in question were so successful if they were so unsatisfying, the participants did not locate the works' success in any of the discussed notions but instead positioned their desire to see the film in the form of duty. "*I feel like watching them now is almost like an end to a means. Like, I've watched so much already, I might as well just watch to the end one,*" Participant L. stated. This desire to see a commitment through was also voiced by Participant M. who felt overwhelmed by the process of keeping up with the Marvel series: "*I feel like*

if I don't go and see them in the cinema, then I'm gonna get left behind and there's gonna be fifty new ones out". This viewpoint suggested that the texts were objects to be consumed without artistic merit and the whole purpose of viewing was simply to receive exposition for a final super product within the constellation.

Although the focus groups were illuminating in the context of their overall purpose to provide sensitising topics for further study, the most interesting comment came from Protagonist S. in the BVS group who suggested that the superhero genre was like a costume, draped over other genres and subjects.

> "*My favourite superhero film is Watchmen. It's all about social commentary about the time. And the characters, although they are superheroes, they use the superhero genre to reflect on their role, so it doesn't have to be a superhero film. It just happens to be a superhero film.*"

6.6 Summary of Focus Group Findings

At the conclusion of the focus group, members were directed towards a further online questionnaire which would allow them to solidify their opinions from the session or venture new points. The completion of the survey was voluntary and, although take up from both groups was poor (CACW 2 responses; BVS 4 responses), the comments received were a strong summary of the viewpoints voiced in the room.

The survey questions and selected responses to this questionnaire were as follows: In response to Question 1: Who was your favourite character in the film and why? In line with the CACW group, the responses positioned enjoyment with humour and relatability:

"*Spider-man because he felt like the most relatable character for the audience. He provided a lot of the comedy of the film which makes up the main appeal for me. In a film otherwise concerned with drama and dark topics, he brought fun to proceedings and that made him very likeable*" (2033)

"*Antman because he brings some much-needed comic relief from the intense battling*" (7074).

Echoing the responses from the BVS group, respondents to the BVS questionnaire, expressed that they felt a lack of relatability towards the main characters as they did not match their established canonical values or notions. However, example comments such as, "*I didn't care for Batman. He felt too angsty and psychotic - branding people and wielding a gun was a step too far*" (7695) and, "*Throughout the film from the off I did not like Batman at all. He was presented as the villain of the film. None of Batman's acts made him seem like a hero to me. They all seemed unnecessarily violent*" (4416) when contextualised alongside more positive comments, were reflective of stereotypical notions of superheroes and a misunderstanding of the filmmaker's intention to position the Batman character as in need of redemption.

Participant 8456 description of this perceived intent was,

"*I liked the way in which Batman and Superman were presented. I thought that they were complex and three-dimensional. Personally, Batman was my favourite character in the film as I found him to be relatable. The way that he feels about Superman through most of the film is very human and believable. It is common to dislike someone who seems magnetic to other people, and I*

can really empathise with the alienation that Batman feels when no-one else

sees Superman in the negative light that he does."

This disparity between the respondent's expectations of a superhero piece and the BVS text was further examined in the section of the focus group questionnaires regarding team interaction. In this section, results from focus group questionnaires for both groups reinforced the overall focus group findings that group chemistry was key to their enjoyment of a work.

Participant 4416 wrote, *"I think a team chemistry can be very effective in making a good superhero film when done well. I didn't even really like Civil War all too much but even in that one at least the teams made more sense because the characters personal motivations lined up at least a little."*

This viewpoint was reinforced by Participant 7074 who stated:

> "*I think it's very important and I enjoy a film much more when the characters have chemistry and mesh well together. I think it's so much more entertaining when the communication is clear between them."*

However, the participants also noted that, whilst the group element of the MCU texts underpinned their expectation of enjoyment in the text, it could also diminish this pleasure if given too much emphasis. This could be seen in the responses from both CACW focus group participant 2033 and BVS focus group participant 7695:

> [Group interaction] *is a very important aspect of the Avengers films for me. In the first film, the team work together well, and this makes for enjoyable viewing and a feeling of triumph at the end of the film. In Civil War, the*

divisions between the team - despite being interesting and driving the story - almost become overpowering to the point that the viewer is no longer interested in the different sides and is just essentially watching one long fight scene" (2033).

"Most of the superhero films I love (Spider-Man, Batman Begins) tend to feature characters working alone. X-Men pulls off the group dynamic well by mixing snappy quips with big action, but I dislike the Avengers for focusing too much on group dynamics and nothing else" (7695)

The above Participant located their source of pleasure as not being related to group interaction but personal empowerment and triumph. This quality was not delivered to the respondent by the Marvel or BVS works but was instead located within the Christopher Nolan directed Batman series:

"*The best example of an empowering superhero is Batman in the Dark Knight Rises when he climbs out of the pit and announces his return by torching the Batman symbol, as it makes the final act of the film feel very triumphant and uplifting*" (7695).

Links between the identified sensation of empowerment and the operant relatability of characters were consistently referenced by respondents in the questionnaires for both focus groups as exemplified by,

"I think Captain America's dedication to Bucky was empowering, and I understand his standpoint. But I think Iron Man is very empowering in this film, as he takes a stand against his friends, which is understandably difficult, to do what's right for humanity. I think Spiderman is a very empowering, both in

Civil War and his own films, as he's a very normal character and everyone can relate to being an unpopular high school kid"! (7074)

However, most respondents articulated that a lack of relatability in the BVS characters had hampered their ability to receive empowerment as exemplified by:

"Superman I think is a really fascinating character, but I didn't feel as though this film facilitated the character in the way I personally would have liked to see him. There is a lot of charisma, energy and charm needed play a character like Superman which just wasn't there…he offers an alternative to a lot of superheroes - which is not every problem has to be resolved with violence - but with this particular rendition of the character, I don't feel that it reflects that at all and so for that reason, I don't find him empowering in this film" (3846).

The relationship between relatable characters and enjoyment of the text was further contextualised by Participant 4416 as a potential reason why they responded to Marvel texts rather than the BVS piece:

"*I did not find any character in this film particularly empowering. I didn't find any of them relatable enough to find them empowering. I think I possibly have subconsciously found some characters from other (Marvel) superhero films empowering and this has helped in my enjoyment of the films and wanting to see more of them*" (4416)

However, Participant 2033 in the CACW focus group responded,

> "*I find that the Avengers have become almost larger than life heroes and because of that they are difficult to relate to. I'm not sure I can be empowered by them because I can't see myself in their shoes.*"

These comments suggested that a balance between character relatability and super heroic ability emerged as the nexus point for the participant when receiving empowerment, the potency of which was negotiated by the contextualisation of personal experience.

Participant 8456 was unique by contextualising the empowering actions of the Wonder Woman character through a gendered response:

> "*As a woman I did enjoy the fight scene at the end of the film, where Wonder Woman was portrayed as equally powerful to the two male protagonists. She was at no point represented as a 'damsel in distress' and I especially appreciated smaller, more subtle moments where her strength was explicitly shown. For example, when Superman is killed, he is carried by Batman as well as Wonder Woman, showing clearly that they are as strong and capable as each other. This contrasts with a scene earlier in the film when she tries to leave Lex Luther's party and Bruce Wayne grabs her by her arm so that she cannot leave. He is seen as dominant and by the end they are equal. I suppose you could say that this was an empowering moment for me.*"

This response was interesting as it uniquely linked empowerment to differentiation of self and gender which was not mentioned previously by any of the other female participants.

In a summary of the focus group's discussion regarding videogames, Participant 2033 solidified the suggestion that the immersive quality of superhero videogames may be more successful than films at delivering sensations of empowerment:

"*Playing superhero video games is different because you are in control of the hero. This means that there is a much more personal link between you and their accomplishments, leading to a definite sense of empowerment.*"

And although the wider context of the 12A certificate was no longer directly relevant to this study, the findings from the focus group's questionnaires were instructional in the context of constellation tailoring. Respondent 2033 was lucid when describing the Marvel constellation's strategy of developing content for maximum profit:

"*Marvel know the MCU appeals directly to the 12A age group (purely because this is the largest market available to them). In this case, they will make films tailored to suit that target audience because they will make the most money from that.*"

This was reinforced in the CACW responses by Participant 7074 who phrased the 12A certificate as, "*Very inclusive and would allow younger children to view the film as well as adults. I think that this is the best way for the films to make the most money and reach the largest audience.*"

The respondents were therefore under no illusion that the text on display was anything other than a corporate media product designed to produce maximum profitability by appealing to the widest possible selection of audiences. Where the respondents failed to reach a consensus - as they did in the focus groups - was on the description of any alternative genre values. When asked, "*Moving beyond the*

superhero label what genre would you use to describe this film and why?" the CACW respondents deployed multiple labels which ranged from drama to action cinema:

"*This is because of the difficult issues tackled by Captain America and Iron Man in the film. If the fights and explosions are stripped away, we're left with quite a heavy film that deals with important issues. I think this actually helps the film, although some of the plot points may be diluted amongst all the fighting*" (2033).

"*I would say an action, possibly spy/crime film. The action is clear in the car chases and fight scenes*" (7074)

The BVS group were equally as torn:

"*I would describe it as an action film. There are lots of action sequences, fight scenes and there is a powerful villain*" (8456)

"*I think I would label this film an Action/Political Thriller film*" (3846)

"*Drama - Pretty dramatic scenes at times. Sci-fi - The talk of aliens, seeing the spaceship and big weird monster at the end. Action - lots of fight scenes. War/ Thriller?*" (4416)

The most illuminating response, however, came from Participant 7695 who positioned received genre values within the wider context of the filmmakers' intent:

"*I believe in terms of story and the amount of carnage and explosions; this is supposed to be a big action film. However, while Batman fighting Superman and the two teaming up to face Doomsday was very action-set-piece-orientated, long stretches of the film felt like a dark, gloomy drama about a*

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businessman angry at his friends and employees being killed, and a tech

billionaire trying to cause mayhem. Overall, Batman V Superman is an action

film, but it's an action film with loft ambitions of being a serious, emotional

drama."

The participants' description of the received text and their expectations were

summed up by their responses to the final question: "*What did you expect to get*

from this film as an experience? Was that delivered?" The responses to CACW were

clear regarding their viewing intent and the delivery of this experience:

"*I expected a lot of fighting and a lot of characters, and that's what I got. Going*

Into the film I knew it'd be a kind of stepping stone film to the next phase of

the MCU (almost like an episode in the series rather than a definitive film).

(2033)

"*I expected a lot of action and fighting, which it delivered.*" (7074)

In comparison the BVS responses were positioned by the unsatisfying context of the

fighting:

"*When I first heard about Batman v Superman, I hoped for a big, loud*

spectacle of a film in which both Batman and Superman were built up as

fearsome, exciting superheroes and then clashed in a huge, action-packed

battle. Instead, I got a brooding, hateful Batman and a blandly emotional

Superman clashing in a rather disappointing, and rather short, fight for around

ten minutes of a 150-minute film" (7695).

"Although the film was called Batman V Superman, I expected that the two would come together rather than fight for multiple reasons. The two are both good guys with similar values. Also, they are both main characters in the DC universe. It would not please the audience if one of them died so I doubted that the two would have a fight to the death" (8456).

This last respondent also located the structural tenants of their satisfaction with triumphalism being a factor:

"*I usually look for a storyline in which the superhero starts out as invincible, is knocked down and then comes back at the end of the film to defeat the villain and this was delivered for both Batman and Superman*" (ibid).

6.7: Conclusion to Chapter

Although the participants who took part in the questionnaire and focus group data gathering activities were of such low numbers that the data can only be considered anecdotal and socio-culturally specific (media students studying at Northumbria University), the data set provided a valuable selection of indicative comments which allowed for a sensitising approach to inducing a subject research area for wider study. To return to the words of Bloor (2001), the focus groups were useful in, "*Revealing shared values and identifying difficulties associated with norms,*" (pp.5-6), the norms in this case being pre-conceived ideas of the superhero genre.

Just as the broader subject of genre in commercial cinema had been modified to focus on the comic book adaptation, the preliminary research into this area began to correlate key areas for discussion. The emerged study needed to be based on a

superhero property but one centred on a relatable character whose approach to the tropes of the superhero narrative would be comic or satirical such as the identified characters of Deadpool, Spider-man or Ant-Man. This aspect of the subject would allow the study to examine the modulation of tone within the constellation. The subject, however, also needed to connect with the largest possible selection of audiences to study the modification of multivalent content within the constellation such as that delivered by the Marvel or Batman franchises. The subject also needed to be able to crystallise the debates concerning the nature of genre to examine the construction of texts such as BVS and CACW. This meant the works associated with the subject needed to contain both action orientated thriller works, and personal drama works as discussed in the data gathering. The subject should also ideally introduce more aspects of genre for debate such as the communal drama elements of the CACW text as commentated upon in focus group to examine the existence of micro-genres within the constellation. Finally, the subject's texts should also contain a triumphal element of empowerment delivered across the constellation from film works, comic books, video game platforms and beyond to study transmodal forces of adaptation.

This sensitised rationale - derived from the preliminary research - immediately discounted texts such as *Deadpool* (too adult orientated) and *Ant-Man* (too limited in scope of constellation). Canonical superhero properties such as *Batman*, *Captain America*, *Superman* and *Wonder Woman* were also discounted due to humour not being an essential quality to the franchise. And whilst *Iron Man* and *Spider-man* could lay claim to both humour and relatability as being parts of the property's identified appeal, the lack of transmodal transferability limited the scope of study as the Marvel adapted videogame texts were entirely marketed for children. This

correlation of factors therefore ruled out every popular superhero property with a successful box office adaptation bar one: Harley Quinn.

Enter the protagonist.

CODING CHARTS

Title	Horror	Romance	Thriller	Personal Conflict	Comedy	Drama	Tragedy	Achievement	Affiliation	Power
Action Comics #50 : Resurrection			1			1				1
Batman: Arkham Knight - Genesis #4	1							1	1	
All Star Batman #8: Ends of the Earth Part 3	1					1			1	
Batman: Arkham Knight #12	1							1	1	
Batman: Arkham Knight #9		1				1			1	
Batman: Arkham Knight - Batgirl/Harley Quinn #1: Caged Animals Part 1	1					1			1	
Batman: Arkham Knight - Batgirl/Harley Quinn #2: Caged Animals Part 2	1							1	1	
The Batman Adventures: Batgirl Day One		1			1					1
Batman and Harley Quinn		1			1				1	
Batman Annual #1: The Not So Silent Night of the Harley Quinn	1					1			1	
Batman: The Animated Series 22 - Joker's Favor	1					1			1	
Batman: The Animated Series 34 - The Laughing Fish	1							1	1	
Batman: The Animated Series 46 - Almost Got 'Im	1					1			1	
Batman: The Animated Series 51 - The Man Who Killed Batman	1					1			1	
Batman: The Animated Series 56 - Harley and Ivy					1	1			1	
Batman: The Animated Series 68 - Trial	1					1			1	
Batman: The Animated Series 72- Harlequinade		1				1			1	
Batman: The Enemy Within	1					1			1	
DC Comics Bombshells #4: Combat Part 1	1					1			1	
DC Comics Bombshells #5: Combat Part 2	1					1			1	
DC Comics Bombshells #6: Combat Part 3	1					1			1	
DC Comics Bombshells #32 Free for All	1					1			1	
DC Comics Bombshells #31: L'Icconue	1					1			1	
DC Comics Bombshells #29: Superweapon	1					1			1	
DC Comics Bombshells #33: The Star			1			1			1	
DC Comics Bombshells #30: Winter is Coming	1					1			1	
DC Comics Bombshells #26: All Good Things	1					1			1	
DC Comics Bombshells #3: Enlisted Part 3			1			1		1		1
DC Comics Bombshells #15: Ghost Stories					1	1			1	
DC Comics Bombshells #28: Leningrad	1					1			1	
DC Comics Bombshells #14: Love Stories	1					1				1
DC Comics Bombshells #27: The Illusion of Death				1		1				1
DC Comics Bombshells#17: Uprising Part 1				1		1			1	
DC Comics Bombshells #18: Uprising Part 2	1					1				1
DC Comics Bombshells #16: War Stories	1					1			1	
Catwoman #50: Run Like Hell Part 4				1		1			1	
DC Rebirth Holiday Special: a Very Harley Holiday					1	1			1	
Dc Super Friends: My Busy Book				1		1				1
DC Superhero Girls Magazine# 5: Distance Learning		1				1			1	
DC Superhero Girls: Harley Quinn's Brain Squeezers		1				1			1	
DC Superhero Girls Magazine #6: Harley Twin Story A	1					1				1
DC Superhero Girls Magazine #6: Harley Twin Story B					1	1				1
DC Superhero Girls Magazine #7: No Shrinking Violet				1		1			1	
DC Superhero Girls: Out of the Bottle #1 Story A					1	1			1	
DC Superhero Girls: Out of the Bottle #1 Story B					1	1				1
DC Superhero Girls: Out of the Bottle #2 Story A	1					1				1
DC Superhero Girls: Out of the Bottle #2 Story B					1	1				1
DC Superhero Girls: Out of the Bottle #3 Story A	1					1			1	
DC Superhero Girls: Out of the Bottle #3 Story B					1	1				1
DC Superhero Girls: Out of the Bottle #4 Story A	1					1			1	
DC Superhero Girls: Out of the Bottle #4 Story B					1	1				1
DC Superhero Girls: Out of the Bottle #5 Story A	1					1			1	
DC Superhero Girls: Out of the Bottle #5 Story B					1	1				1
DC Superhero Girls: Out of the Bottle #6 Story A	1					1			1	
DC Superhero Girls: Out of the Bottle #6 Story B					1	1				1
DC Superhero Girls: Past Times at Super Hero High #1					1	1				1
DC Superhero Girls: Past Times at Super Hero High #2					1	1			1	
DC Superhero Girls: Past Times at Super Hero High #3	1					1			1	
DC Superhero Girls: Past Times at Super Hero High #4					1			1	1	
DC Superhero Girls: Past Times at Super Hero High #5		1				1			1	
DC Superhero Girls: Past Times at Super Hero High #6					1	1			1	
DC Superhero Girls: Wonder Woman at Superhero High					1	1				1
DC Superhero Girls: Hero of the Year			1			1			1	
DC Superhero Girls: Intergalactic Games					1	1			1	
DC Superhero Girls 1 : Welcome to Superhero High			1			1			1	
DC Superhero Girls 11: Hero of the Month - Bumblebee			1			1			1	
DC Superhero Girls 12: Saving the Day			1			1			1	
DC Superhero Girls 13: Hero of the Month - Wonder Woman			1			1			1	
DC Superhero Girls 2: All About Superhero High			1			1			1	
DC Superhero Girls 4: Crazy Quiltin'			1			1			1	
DC Superhero Girls 5: Power Outage					1	1			1	
DC Superhero Girls 6: Fall Into Superhero High				1		1			1	
DC Superhero Girls 7: Hero of the Month - Poison Ivy			1			1			1	
DC Superhero Girls 8: Designing Disaster			1			1			1	
DC Superhero Girls 14: New Beginnings			1			1			1	
DC Superhero Girls 25: Hero of the Month - Frost			1			1			1	
DC Superhero Girls 26: Hawkgirl's Day Off					1	1			1	
DC Superhero Girls: 29: The Cheetah Who Cried Wolf			1			1			1	

Title	Horror	Romance	Thriller	Personal Conflict	Comedy	Drama	Tragedy	Achievement	Affiliation	Power
DC Superhero Girls 30: Ring of Mire		1			1				1	
DC Superhero Girls 31: Hero of the Month - Star Sapphire		1			1					1
DC Superhero Girls 15: Hero of the Month: Supergirl		1			1				1	
DC Superhero Girls 34: Hero of the Month: Cyborg and Starfire			1		1					1
DC Superhero Girls 35: Roomies Return - Frost's Bite			1		1			1		
DC Superhero Girls 16: Batgirl vs Supergirl				1	1					1
DC Superhero Girls 17: Quinn-tessential Harley				1	1					1
DC Superhero Girls 18: License to Fly		1			1				1	
DC Superhero Girls 20: Hero of the Month: Batgirl		1			1					1
DC Superhero Girls 22: Frankenivy	1			1	1					1
DC Superhero Girls 50: Day of Funship			1		1					1
DC Superhero Girls 54: a Fury Scorned		1			1			1		
DC Superhero Girls 55: Body Electric		1			1			1		
DC Superhero Girls 56: Techless Tuesday		1			1			1		
DC Superhero Girls 57: Fresh Ares Part 1		1			1			1		
DC Superhero Girls 58: Fresh Ares Part 2		1			1			1		
DC Superhero Girls 59: Fresh Ares Part 3		1			1			1		
DC Superhero Girls 43: Tales from the Kryptomites Part 2		1			1	1		1		
DC Superhero Girls 44: Seeing Red		1				1		1		
DC Superhero Girls 45: Spring Prison Break			1		1			1		
DC Superhero Girls 46: Around Metropolis in 80 Seconds			1		1					1
DC Superhero Girls: Superhero High		1			1			1		
Deathstroke #11: Assault on the Wall			1		1			1		
Deathstroke #12: Blood in the Water			1		1			1		
Deathstroke #13: Serpent's Strike			1		1			1		
Harley Quinn and Her Gang of Harleys #1: The Shady Bunch	1				1					1
Harley Quinn and her Gang of Harleys #2 : Hit 'Em Where it Hurts	1					1				1
Harley Quinn and her Gang of Harleys #3:	1					1				1
Harley Quinn and her Gang of Harleys #4: Isle of Sinn	1					1				1
Harley Quinn and her Gang of Harleys #5: Look Through my Window	1				1					1
Harley Quinn and her Gang of Harleys #6: Bye-Bye Love			1			1			1	
Grayson Annual #3: Who is Agent 37?	1				1				1	
Grayson Annual #3: The Gymnast	1				1				1	
Harley Loves Joker Part 1		1						1	1	
Harley Loves Joker Part 2		1						1	1	
Harley Loves Joker Part 3		1			1				1	
Harley Loves Joker Part 4		1			1				1	
Harley Loves Joker Part 5		1			1				1	
Harley Loves Joker Part 6		1			1				1	
Harley Loves Joker Part 7				1		1			1	
Harley Loves Joker Part 8								1	1	
Harley Loves Joker Part 9: Laugh Clown Laugh			1		1				1	
Harley Quinn #21: Tug A' War			1			1			1	
Harley Quinn #22: Sy Borgman and Harley Quinn Must Die			1			1			1	
Harley Quinn #23: Kingpin Queen		1						1	1	
Harley Quinn #24: You Can't Fight City Hall…Or Can You?			1			1				1
Harley Quinn #25: Twenny Five Big One$					1	1				1
Harley Quinn 25th Anniversary Special: Diva Las Vegas		1				1			1	
Harley Quinn 25th Anniversary Special: Birthday Blues		1				1			1	
Harley Quinn 25th Anniversary Special: Somewhere That's Green		1				1			1	
Harley Quinn 25th Anniversary Special: Bird Psychology			1			1			1	
Harley Quinn #26: A New Day, a New Fray					1	1			1	
Harley Quinn #27: Toolboxed In	1					1			1	1
Harley Quinn #28: Shriek or Forever Hold Your Piece		1				1			1	
Harley Quinn #29: Destroy all Mobsters			1		1					1
Harley Quinn #30: A Tree Blows Up Brooklyn					1	1			1	
Harley Quinn and Batman #1: Batman- Busted		1			1				1	
Harley Quinn and Batman #2: Poison Ivy - a New Leaf		1			1				1	
Harley Quinn and Batman #3: Floronic Man - "The Judgment of the Green"		1			1				1	
Harley Quinn and Power Girl #4: Purity				1	1				1	
Harley Quinn and Power Girl #5: Big Headed Space God		1				1			1	
Harley Quinn and Power Girl #6 :They Part				1	1				1	
Harley Quinn and the Suicide Squad Easter Special: Evil Anonymous					1			1	1	
Harley Quinn: Batman Day Special					1	1			1	
Harley Quinn Rebirth #1: Afterbirth	1					1			1	
Harley Quinn Rebirth #10: Egg Noggin		1					1		1	
Harley Quinn Rebirth #11: Joker Loves Harley Part 1 - Pandora the Explorer					1			1		1
Harley Quinn Rebirth #12: Joker Loves Harley Part 2 - The Good, the Bad and the Hungry					1			1		1
Harley Quinn Rebirth #13: Joker Loves Harley Part 3 - Reality Slapdown					1			1		1
Harley Quinn Rebirth #14 Nether Regions Part 1		1			1				1	
Harley Quinn Rebirth #15: Nether Regions Part 2 - Beware the Tyrant is Sore					1	1			1	
Harley Quinn Rebirth #16: Nether Regions Part 3 - Domination Abomination		1			1				1	
Harley Quinn Rebirth #17: Red Meat Part 1 - Mantra Mix Up			1			1				1
Harley Quinn Rebirth #18: Red Meat Part 2 - Abduction Reduction			1			1				1
Harley Quinn Rebirth #19: Red Meat Part 3 - Sucking the Marrow Out of the Party			1			1				1
Harley Quinn Rebirth #2: The Coney Island of the Damned	1					1				1

Title	Horror	Romance	Thriller	Personal Conflict	Comedy	Drama	Tragedy	Achievement	Affiliation	Power
Harley Quinn Rebirth #20: A Blast From the Future Part 1		1				1			1	
Harley Quinn Rebirth #21: A Blast From the Future Part 2 - Right Back at Ya	1					1		1		
Harley Quinn Rebirth #22: Family Circles Part 1					1	1			1	
Harley Quinn Rebirth #23: Family Circles Part 2 - Manners and Other Matters					1	1	1			1
Harley Quinn Rebirth #24: Family Circles Part 3 -Jump Shot					1	1			1	
Harley Quinn Rebirth #25: Surprise Surprise Part 1			1			1				1
Harley Quinn Rebirth #26: Surprise Surprise Part 2			1			1				1
Harley Quinn Rebirth #3: Going For Takeout		1				1			1	
Harley Quinn Rebirth #4: 108 Million Ways to Die			1			1				1
Harley Quinn Rebirth #5: Undercover Punker Part 1 - Eat to this Beat			1			1			1	
Harley Quinn Rebirth #6: Undercover Punker Part 2 - The Skull Bags Big Snag					1	1	1		1	
Harley Quinn Rebirth #7: Undercover Punker Part 3: Satin Underground					1			1	1	
Harley Quinn Rebirth #8: Relax Undo it			1					1	1	
Harley Quinn Rebirth #9: Butt Maiming					1	1			1	
Harley Quinn: Be Careful What You Wish For					1	1			1	
Harley Quinn's Little Black Book #3: Dispirited Spirits			1			1			1	
Harley Quinn's Little Black Book #4: Where Bombshells Dare Story A			1			1			1	
Harley's Little Black Book #4: Where Bombshells Dare Story B			1			1			1	
Harley's Little Black Book #1 - Black Book		1				1			1	
Harley's Little Black Book #2 - Red and Black is the New Green					1	1			1	
Harley's Little Black Book #5 - No Pain, No Sane					1	1				1
Harley's Little Black Book #6 - Bare Assed and Belligerant		1				1			1	
Injustice 2			1			1				1
Injustice 2 #14 Digital					1	1			1	
Injustice 2 #13 Digital					1	1			1	
Injustice 2 #15 Digital					1	1			1	
Injustice 2 #19 Digital					1	1			1	
Injustice 2 #20 Digital					1	1			1	
Injustice 2 #21 Digital					1	1			1	
Injustice 2 #22 Digital					1	1			1	
Injustice 2 #23 Digital					1	1			1	
Injustice 2 #3 Digital					1	1			1	
Injustice 2 #5 Digital					1	1			1	
Injustice 2 #6 Digital			1			1			1	
Injustice 2 #7 Digital					1	1				1
Injustice: Gods Among Us Year Five #13 Digital			1			1			1	
Injustice: Gods Among Us Year Five #15 Digital					1	1			1	
Injustice: Gods Among Us Year Five #16 Digital					1			1	1	
Injustice: Gods Among Us Year Five #21 Digital					1	1				1
Injustice: Gods Among Us Year Five #22 Digital					1	1			1	
Injustice: Gods Among Us Year Five #23 Digital					1	1			1	
Injustice: Gods Among Us Year Four #19 Digital			1			1			1	
Injustice: Gods Among Us Year Four #20 Digital			1			1			1	
Injustice: Gods Among Us Year Four #21 Digital			1			1			1	
Injustice: Gods Among Us Year Four #22 Digital		1				1			1	
Injustice:Gods Among Us Year Four #23 Digital			1			1			1	
Injustice:Gods Among Us Year Four #24 Digital		1				1			1	
Injustice: Ground Zero #13 Digital			1			1				1
Injustice: Ground Zero #14 Digital					1			1	1	
Injustice: Ground Zero #15 Digital					1			1	1	
Injustice: Ground Zero #16 Digital					1	1				1
Injustice:Ground Zero #17 Digital					1	1				1
Injustice: Ground Zero #18 Digital					1			1	1	
Injustice: Ground Zero #19 Digital					1	1				1
Injustice: Ground Zero #20 Digital					1	1			1	
Injustice: Ground Zero #21 Digital					1	1				1
Injustice: Ground Zero #22 Digital					1			1		1
Injustice: Ground Zero #23 Digital					1	1				1
Injustice: Ground Zero #24 Digital					1	1				1
Injustice Ground Zero #1 Digital					1	1			1	
Injustice: Ground Zero #2 Digital					1	1			1	
Injustice: Ground Zero #3 Digital					1	1			1	
Injustice: Ground Zero #4 Digital					1	1			1	
Injustice: Ground Zero #5 Digital					1	1			1	
Injustice: Ground Zero #6 Digital					1	1			1	
Justice League 3001 #5 : Before the Storm		1						1	1	
Justice League 3001 #6: The Storm		1				1			1	
Justice League of America Rebirth : Killer Frost	1					1		1		
Justice League Vs Suicide Squad #1			1		1			1		
Justice League Vs Suicide Squad #2			1		1			1		
Justice League vs Suicide Squad #3	1				1			1		
Justice League vs Suicide Squad #4			1			1		1		
Justice League vs Suicide Squad #5			1			1			1	
Suicide Squad Rebirth #10: Justice League vs Suicide Squad - The Cost				1				1	1	
The Batman Adventures Annual #1: Laughter After Midnightt	1						1		1	
Lego DC Comics Superheroes: Enter the Dark Knight - Birthday Trap	1					1			1	
Lego DC Comics Superheroes: Justice League - Gotham City Breakout	1					1			1	
Lego DC Superhero Girls: Brain Drain				1	1				1	
Lego Dimensions: DC Comics Team Pack- Joker and Harley				1	1					1
The Batman Adventures: Mad Love	1					1			1	

Title	Horror	Romance	Thriller	Personal Conflict	Comedy	Drama	Tragedy	Achievement	Affiliation	Power
Midnighter #10				1	1					1
Midnighter #11				1	1				1	
Midnighter #12				1		1				1
Midnighter #8				1		1				1
Midnighter #9				1	1					1
New Suicide Squad #13: Freedom Part 1			1					1	1	
New Suicide Squad #14: Freedom Part 2			1					1		1
New Suicide Squad #15: Freedom Part 3			1					1		1
New Suicide Squad #16: Freedom Part 4			1					1		1
New Suicide Squad #17: Ghost Day			1			1			1	
New Suicide Squad #18: A Lunch Lady Named Marlene?			1		1				1	
New Suicide Squad #19: The House of Meat	1				1				1	
New Suicide Squad #20: Double Teamed	1					1			1	
New Suicide Squad #21: Kill Anything	1							1	1	
New Suicide Squad #22: Blank Space				1				1		1
New Suicide Squad: Monsters Conclusion								1	1	
New Suicide Squad #9: Monsters Part 1			1		1					1
New Suicide Squad #10: Monsters Part 2			1		1					1
New Suicide Squad #11: Monsters Part 3			1			1				1
New Suicide Squad #12: Monsters Part 4				1				1	1	
New Talent Showcase 2016: Harley Quinn - Good Morning Gotham		1			1				1	
New Talent Showcase 2017: Poison Ivy - Silent Screams		1				1				1
New Talent Showcase 2017: Red Hood and Duke - Roll Call	1					1			1	
Poison Ivy: Cycle of Life and Death #2				1				1	1	
Poison Ivy: Cycle of Life and Death #3 : Growing Pains				1				1	1	
Poison Ivy: Cycle of Life and Death #6		1			1				1	
Red Hood/ Arsenal #10: May I Have This Dance with the Devil?	1				1				1	
Scooby Doo Team Up #12: Gotham Ghouls			1		1					1
Sinestro #17 : The Pale Legion			1		1					1
Sinestro #18: Drafted			1		1					1
Sinestro #19: War			1		1					1
Sinestro #20: The Fall			1		1					1
Sinestro #21: Turning Yellow			1		1					1
Suicide Squad				1		1			1	
Suicide Squad Meets the Banana Splits			1		1				1	
Suicide Squad Most Wanted: El Diablo and Boomerang #1 : Home Again										
Suicide Squad Most Wanted: El Diablo and Boomerang #1 : What Goes Around Comes Arou			1		1				1	
Suicide Squad Most Wanted: El Diablo and Boomerang #2 : What Goes Around Comes Arou			1		1				1	
Suicide Squad Most Wanted: El Diablo and Killer Croc #3: Knightfall			1		1				1	
Suicide Squad Most Wanted: El Diablo and Killer Croc #4: Bring Out Your Dead			1		1				1	
Suicide Squad Most Wanted: El Diablo and Amanda Waller #5: Down the Rabbit Hole Part 1			1		1				1	
Suicide Squad Most Wanted: El Diablo and Amanda Waller #6: Down the Rabbit Hole Part 2			1		1				1	
Suicide Squad Rebirth #0			1		1					1
Suicide Squad Rebirth #1: The Black Vault Part 1 - I Wanna Be Sedated			1		1				1	
Suicide Squad Rebirth #11: Burning down the House Part 1 - Life Inside			1			1			1	
Suicide Squad Rebirth #12: Burning down the House Part 2 -Those Left Behind			1			1				1
Suicide Squad Rebirth #13: Burning down the House Part 3 - Being Good			1			1			1	
Suicide Squad Rebirth #14: Burning down the House Part 4 - Hit It			1					1		1
Suicide Squad Rebirth #15: Burning down the House Part 5 - The Price You Pay			1					1		1
Suicide Squad Rebirth #16: Earthlings on Fire Part 1 -Heroes and Villains			1					1		1
Suicide Squad Rebirth #17 : Earthlings on Fire Part 2 - Blowing Up			1					1	1	
Suicide Squad Rebirth #18 : Earthlings on Fire Part 3 - Your Future is Dead		1			1				1	
Suicide Squad Rebirth #19: Earthlings on Fire Part 4 - Alone			1					1	1	
Suicide Squad Rebirth #2: The Black Vault Part 2- Blitzkrieg Bop			1		1				1	
Suicide Squad Rebirth #20: Managing People				1		1				1
Suicide Squad Rebirth #21: Kill Your Darlings Part 1- The Entrance Fee			1			1				1
Suicide Squad Rebirth #22: Kill Your Darlings Part 2 - I Escaped			1			1				1
Suicide Squad Rebirth #23: Kill Your Darlings Part 3 -Out of Control			1			1				1
Suicide Squad Rebirth #24: Kill Your Darlings Part 4 - Unworthy				1	1					1
Suicide Squad Rebirth #25: Kill Your Darlings Part 5 - Death Over Slavery				1	1					1
Suicide Squad Rebirth #3: The Black Vault Part 3 - Bad Brain			1		1					1
Suicide Squad Rebirth #4: The Black Vault Part 4 - Beat on the Brat			1		1				1	
Suicide Squad Rebirth #4: Full Mental Jacket				1	1				1	
Suicide Squad Rebirth #5: Going Sane Part 1 - Shock Treatment				1	1				1	
Suicide Squad Rebirth #6: Going Sane Part 2 - Teenage Lobotomy			1		1					1
Suicide Squad Rebirth #7: Going Sane Part 3 -Beat on the Brat 2			1		1					1
Suicide Squad Rebirth #8: Going Sane Part 4 -I Believe in Miracles			1					1	1	
Suicide Squad Rebirth #8: Warm Heart			1		1				1	
Suicide Squad Rebirth: Warcrimes Special			1		1					
Suicide Squad's Most Wanted: Deadshot and Katana #2 - Into the Fire			1			1				1
Suicide Squad's Most Wanted: Deadshot and Katana #3 - Dead Reckoning			1			1			1	
Suicide Squad's Most Wanted: Deadshot and Katana #5 - Dark Passage		1			1				1	
Suicide Squad's Most Wanted: Deadshot and Katana #6 - Death and Redemption		1			1				1	
Batman/Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles #5 - Deadly Mutant Arkham Inmates		1			1				1	
The Adventures of Batman & Robin			1		1					1
The Flash Rebirth #14: Rogues Reloaded Part 1			1		1					1
The Lego Batman Movie		1			1				1	
The Lego Batman Movie: The Essential Guide		1			1				1	
Trinity Rebirth #3 : Better Together Part 3 - Nobody Dies Tonight				1		1			1	

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"Body Electric" (2017) *DC Super Hero Girls*, Season 3, Episode 16, Web, July 6th

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"Clubbing" (2016) *DC Super Hero Girls*, Season 1, Episode 10, Web, January 14th

"Cold Blooded" (2016) *DC Super Hero Girls*, Season 2, Episode 24, Web, December 29th

"Crazy Quiltin'" (2015) *DC Super Hero Girls*, Season 1, Episode 4, Web, October 22nd

"Day of Fun-ship" (2017) *DC Super Hero Girls*, Season 3, Episode 11, Web, June 1st

"Designing Disaster" (2015) *DC Super Hero Girls*, Season 1, Episode 8, Web, December 17th

"Dog Day After School" (2017) *DC Super Hero Girls*, Season 3, Episode 25, Web, November 23rd

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"Drive Me Crazy" (2018) *DC Super Hero Girls*, Season 4, Episode 20, Web, May 31st

"Dude, Where's My Invisible Jet?" (2016) *DC Super Hero Girls*, Season 2, Episode 11, Web, August 25th

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"Finding Mister Right" (2019) *Harley Quinn*, Season 1, Episode 4, DC UNIVERSE, December 20th

"For Art's Sake" (2017) *DC Super Hero Girls*, Season 3, Episode 8, Web, May 4th

"Franken-Ivy" (2016) *DC Super Hero Girls*, Season 2, Episode 9, Web, August 9th

"Fresh Ares Part 1" (2017) *DC Super Hero Girls*, Season 3, Episode 18, Web, July 20th

"Fresh Ares Part 2" (2017) *DC Super Hero Girls*, Season 3, Episode 19, Web, July 27th

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"Gorilla Grodd" (2017) *DC Super Hero Girls*, Season 3, Episode 21, Web, October 26th

"Ha-Ha Horticulture" (2018) *DC Super Hero Girls*, Season 4, Episode 11, Web, March 29th

"Harley Quinn Highway" (2020) *Harley Quinn*, Season 1, Episode 11, DC UNIVERSE, February 7th

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"Hero of the Month: Batgirl" (2016) *DC Super Hero Girls*, Season 2, Episode 7, Web, July 14th

"Hero of the Month: Beast Boy" (2017) *DC Super Hero Girls*, Season 2, Episode 26, Web, February 9th

"Hero of the Month: Bumblebee" (2016) *DC Super Hero Girls*, Season 1, Episode 11, Web, January 28th

"Hero of the Month: Cyborg and Starfire" (2016) *DC Super Hero Girls*, Season 2, Episode 21, Web, November 29th

"Hero of the Month: Frost" (2016) *DC Super Hero Girls*, Season 2, Episode 12, Web, September 6th

"Hero of the Month: Harley Quinn" (2016) *DC Super Hero Girls*, Season 2, Episode 5, Web, June 16th

"Hero of the Month: Hawkgirl" (2016) *DC Super Hero Girls*, Season 2, Episode 15, Web, October 4th

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"Hero of the Month: Lady Shiva" (2017) *DC Super Hero Girls*, Season 2, Episode 25, Web, January 12th

"Hero of the Month: Poison Ivy" (2015) *DC Super Hero Girls*, Season 1, Episode 7, Web, December 3rd

"Hero of the Month: Star Sapphire" (2016) *DC Super Hero Girls*, Season 2, Episode 18, Web, November 1st

"Hero of the Month: Supergirl" (2016) *DC Super Hero Girls*, Season 2, Episode 2, Web, May 5th

"Hero of the Month: Wonder Woman" (2016) *DC Super Hero Girls*, Season 1, Episode 13, Web, February 25th

"It's a Superful Life" (2017) *DC Super Hero Girls*, Season 3, Episode 26, Web, November 30th

"Jetsetters" (2017) *DC Super Hero Girls*, Season 3, Episode 23, Web, November 9th

"License to Fly" (2016) *DC Super Hero Girls*, Season 2, Episode 6, Web, June 30th

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"New Beginnings" (2016) *DC Super Hero Girls*, Season 2, Episode 1, Web, April 21st

"New Perry-Spective" (2017) *DC Super Hero Girls*, Season 3, Episode 24, Web, November 16th

"Power Outage" (2015) *DC Super Hero Girls*, Season 1, Episode 5, Web, November 6th

"Quinn-tessential Harley" (2016) *DC Super Hero Girls*, Season 2, Episode 4, Web, June 2nd

"Riddle of the Heart" (2016) *DC Super Hero Girls*, Season 2, Episode 20, Web, November 17th

"Ring of Mire" (2016) *DC Super Hero Girls*, Season 2, Episode 17, Web, October 10th

"Roomies Return: Frost Bite" (2016) *DC Super Hero Girls*, Season 2, Episode 22, Web, December 1st

"Roomies" (2015) *DC Super Hero Girls*, Season 1, Episode 3, Web, October 9th

"Saving the Day" (2016) *DC Super Hero Girls*, Season 1, Episode 12, Web, February 11th

"Seeing Red" (2017) *DC Super Hero Girls*, Season 3, Episode 5, Web, March 2nd

"So, you need a Crew?" (2019) *Harley Quinn*, Season 1, Episode 3, DC UNIVERSE, December 13th

"Spring Prison Break" (2017) *DC Super Hero Girls*, Season 3, Episode 6, Web, March 9th

"Stealth 101, Part 1" (2017) *DC Super Hero Girls*, Season 3, Episode 13, Web, June 15th

"Stealth 101, Part 2" (2017) *DC Super Hero Girls*, Season 3, Episode 14, Web, June 22nd

"Super Gift Swap" (2018) *DC Super Hero Girls*, Season 5, Episode 22, Web, December 22nd

"Surprise" (2017) *DC Super Hero Girls*, Season 3, Episode 2, Web, February 2nd

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"The Odd Couple" (2016) *DC Super Hero Girls*, Season 2, Episode 23, Web, December 15th

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"Weaponomics" (2015) *DC Super Hero Girls*, Season 1, Episode 9, Web, December 22nd

"Welcome to Superhero High" (2015) *DC Super Hero Girls*, Season 1, Episode 1, Web, October 1st

"Wildside Part 1" (2017) *DC Super Hero Girls*, Season 3, Episode 9, Web, May 11th

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