AMERICAN *ARETE*: THE MAN OF STEEL AS A RHETORICAL MODEL

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DEDICATION

For my wife, Allie, and my daughter, Annabelle,
thank you for your love and support.

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ABSTRACT

JONATHAN C EVANS

AMERICAN *ARETE*: THE MAN OF STEEL AS A RHETORICAL MODEL

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There have many criticisms and explorations of Superman throughout his 75 plus year history. The character has become so engrained in the American psyche and culture that he is almost instantly recognizable. However, through all of this, he is a character who is rarely fully understood. Much of this stems from failures to understand “what” Superman is or what he potentially really and truly represents. Superman’s continued endurance in American culture is the result of his embodiment and function as a model of American cultural excellence, of what the Greeks called *arête*. In all the treatments of Superman there has never been a true exploration of the character that has sought to connect, rhetorically, the persuasive power of Superman as a model to the promotion of an American conception of Greek *arête*.

Superman’s function as a model, as a rhetorical model, according to the definition given by Chaim Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca in *The New Rhetoric*, operates as a guarantee, in a archetypal level the very best qualities, of virtues that have taken root in America since its conception as a nation. Superman is no mere comic book character, but rather the amalgamation and embodiment of classical concepts of excellence and virtue evolved and refined through the lens of the American immigrant experience, and given form. By understanding or beginning to understand how this came to be represents a

potential point for understanding what America is as well. This dissertation does not propose to fully answer this question as much as it wishes to draw critical attention to how powerful and impactful a character like Superman can be on a culture at large. By doing this it is hoped that greater recognition and understanding of fictional superheroes as epidictic expressions can be better appreciated and studied by a culture at large as it continues to accept such heroes already as entertainment.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"Superhero comics are . . . larger than life, and . . . provide bold metaphors for discussing ideas or reifying abstractions into narrative fiction"- Douglas Wolk[1]

In the introduction to his book, *Superman: An Unauthorized Biography*, Glen Weldon points out that when seeking to understand why Superman™ has endured, there are many possible answers. Weldon notes that his book seeks to provide "an answer," but in reality, "there are many [answers], some more inherently worthy of exploration than others." Because Superman has "entered [in] our planet's collective consciousness," he therefore has formed "in our minds and hearts, our own unique idea of Superman" (1-2). This assertion of Weldon's is part of the starting point for this dissertation. To present a possible answer to Superman's endurance, this dissertation aims to bring an understanding of just how Superman, as a rhetorical model, can come to embody and inspire emulation of the American excellence. This "excellence" in Superman has always been there, just beneath the surface, right in front everyone. However, sometimes one has to encounter a stumbling block, in the Greek, a *skandalon* (*σκάνδαλον*), to realize that there is something there in Superman, something important that has gone unrealized all these years that is waiting to be critically explored and understood.

[1] Wolk, Douglas. *Reading Comics: How Graphic Novels Work and What They Mean*. Philadelphia: Da Capo Press, 2007. Print.

At the end of his book *Superman: The High-Flying History of America's Most Enduring Hero*, Larry Tye points out that there are two types of heroes that exist in our world–those that are dated and those that continue to be relevant. Many are dated, according to Tye, but some "still resonate, tapping into something primal. Superman defines that archetype" (300). Tye, like Weldon, asserts that there is something deep within our cultural unconscious that allows characters, Superman being the paradigm, to become timeless and continue to be relevant no matter when they were conceived. Tye speculates that some of what makes Superman continue to be relevant is the "allure" that comes from the desire to fly, the "love triangle" or the "secret" identity, or just perhaps the wish to "be ten years old again" (300). Tye and Weldon's speculations present an interesting opening for where this dissertation wishes to proceed: to investigate what might be that "primal" element that Superman represents. Many say that Superman is the greatest superhero. Many say he is an American superhero. This is what most Americans might say about Superman. However, one often says all this and never stops to wonder, to qualify, "Why?" (It is to this idea, the qualification of Superman as an American superhero, which this dissertation wants to examine Superman's as virtue.)

It is worth knowing that Superman does not represent a way to solve America or the world's problems, but rather represents a model to show America how it can solve its own problems. This dissertation argues that Superman represents and projects a rhetorical model–that is a model serving in a persuasive form via their prestige, behavior, and actions–for what is best about American culture and potential. He is the embodiment of what the ancient Greeks called *arête*. According to the *Greek-English Lexicon*, *arête*

implies the "excellence of any kind," as well as defined as "moral virtue" (Liddell and Scott 238). At different times, from its beginnings in classical Greece to the modern era, the exact meaning of *arête* has shifted. However, there has been a constant element to *arête*. From the ancient Greeks to the humanists and into the modern times there has been the standing belief that *arête* is something that can be taught and passed on to others. An attempt to examine Superman, rhetorically, as a model, through the lens of Greek *arête* has never been done before. This examination is original in that it is attempting to not only explore the character of Superman as a model worthy of emulation, but bringing to light the assumptions that Superman promotes emulation of American excellence or *arête*. Superman's ability to function as a model, worthy of emulation, relies rhetorically upon his embodiment of American ideals of *arête*. If we accept this premise, and accept Superman as an identifiable, persuasive model of American *arête*, one has to ask the question: what can Superman teach us?

To answer that question, this dissertation will explore Superman as he was born and depicted within the comic book medium. This choice of examining Superman, a multi-media figure who at times has traversed the comic books, comic strips, radio, television, and motion pictures just to name a few, is one of scope. To focus on Superman in the comic books is to examine the character in his "native" environment. It is in this environment that Superman has consistently and persistently existed in a continuous narrative for over 75 years. If one truly wishes to understand how this fictional character can come to embody the very best of American culture, to see him in the comic books is

essential. Comic books are a quintessential American medium. The actor Ryan Reynolds, narrating a documentary about the beginnings of DC Comics, notes:

> Once there was a world without comic books. Like jazz and like baseball like so much that is distinctly American, the comic book was born on the country's margins: cheap, slight, juvenile. An orphan child that would transform over time into something vital and strong [with an] ambition . . . to entertain, to challenge, to captivate, to enlighten . . ." (*Secret Origin: The Story of DC Comics*)

To say then that comic books have evolved is an understatement. Comic books may have come from the margins, from immigrants or those lacking a voice in American culture, but what those on the margins created helped promote and shape American culture.

When approaching the idea of dealing with what, for many, has been relegated to the realm of children and people who fail to grow up, one should keep in mind that comic books, like any other art form, have value that often goes unseen. Douglas Wolk asserts in the opening of his book, *Reading Comics*, that "comics have grown up. A form that was once solely the province of children's entertainment now fills bookshelves with mature, brilliant works . . ." (3). Wolk is pointing out the modern reality that comic books have evolved into a medium in which talented artists and writers ply their trade in telling wonderful stories that are smart, incisive, and accessible to a wide range of audiences. Understanding this kind of value often requires that one account for the ways that those

who write and draw comic books approach them. In brief, Grant Morrison offers a perspective on two ways one can approach comic books:

> as a missionary or as an anthropologist. I chose to see some writers as missionaries who attempted to impose their own values and perceptions on cultures they considered inferior–in this case, that of the superheroes. Missionaries liked to humiliate the natives by pointing out their gauche customs and colorfully frank traditional dress. They bullied their defenseless fantasy characters into leather trench coats and nervous breakdowns and left formerly carefree fictional communities in a state of crushing self-doubt and dereliction. Anthropologists, on the other hand, surrendered themselves to foreign cultures. They weren't afraid to go native or look foolish. They came and they departed with respect and in the interests of mutual understanding. (*Supergods* 218)

Morrison is asserting that sometimes there is a distain that some writers bring to comic books that often has a negative impact on how people interpret comic books. Morrison's model of approaching superheroes, like Superman, in the environment they exist in, and doing so with respect and appreciation for their ability is one this dissertation will follow. Of course, this dissertation will also aim to extrapolate, interpret, and analyze elements found within Superman comic books in order to quantify the assertions and arguments to be made; however, this analysis will not be done without the utmost respect for the material at hand.

The ultimate aim of this exploration of Superman is to argue that he is a rhetorical model of American *arête*, in order to further a critical understanding of just how

important the model of Superman is as a form of persuasion and cultural value. To discuss Superman in parallel to American culture seems even more appropriate when considering the strange interconnections between America of nearly the past decade and the America that witnessed the birth of Superman. This is not to say that America of 2014 is just like the America of 1938, but rather it is worth noting an important element or trend pertaining to the popularity of superheroes in times of crisis. The Greeks and Romans had Hercules, Perseus, Achilles, Odysseus, Romulus and Remus, Aeneas, even Alexander the Great. Medieval cultures of Europe had Roland, King Arthur, and Robin Hood. Every culture has had its heroes. At most times there has always been a blend of fictional (quasi-fictional) and real heroes found in Western culture. When Superman appeared in 1938, there was also President Roosevelt, Clark Gable, and Errol Flynn for people to look up to. However, whereas "real" heroes, like Charles Lindberg, and others might eventually be exposed for their human frailties, "fictional" characters tend to remain more constant.

Heroes and superheroes are always potential models, some better than others. Typically, they represent the ideal of the culture that gives birth to them. Russell Kirk asserts when making a case for the instruction of virtue in our modern day being as crucial in one's early development, asserts that, "boys and girls will model themselves, if they can, upon exemplars." He then asks the important question, "But what sort of exemplars?" ("*Virtue*" 346). Of course, as will be seen, public figures such as Fredric Wertham dispute the idea that Superman can be any kind of exemplar other than a

"fascist" one[2]. The misinterpretation of Wertham and many other critics results from missing the point of Superman. Many times they only see the surface, only look at an other-worldly, imaginary, fantasy figure who possesses and uses great power to accomplish things that men and women only dream about. The reality is that Superman is so much more than just what is on the surface. There is something deeper and more important than how Superman does things is why he does what he does. This is the definition of Superman's excellence, his *arête*.

Superman is the signifier of a signified idea (to use, as according to Roland Barthes, the "Saussurean" terminology) of American culture. Simply, Superman is what is ideal and best about American culture. This ideal flows from the realization that America is, deep down, an immigrant society. This implies that Superman then holds a semiotic connection with American culture. According Umberto Eco, semiotics is "the 'grammar' of a particular sign system [that] proves to be successful insofar as it describes a given field of communicative phenomena as ruled by a system of signification" (*Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* 5). For Eco, the idea of grammar here is representative of a set of guiding principles or rules. The "sign system" offers up a way to express and understand, that which is often abstract or hard to define. Therefore, Superman provides his audience with a best approximation of American *arête*, giving the abstract and complex value system a kind of physical representation.

[2] Fredric Wertham, who will be discussed in more detail in Analysis Part A, was a prominent psychoanalytical psychiatrist in the 1940s and 50s. He took a particularly hard line and criticism against major comic book superhero characters such as Superman, Batman and Robin, and Wonder Woman in his most notable published work *The Seduction of the Innocent*.

It is important to understand the ways that Superman, as the archetype of the modern American superhero, represents a system. In the medium of the comic book format, Superman provides a means for exploring and expressing, via a modern narrative form, the communication of the abstract ideas that make up American culture. More so, he is a representation one can view American culture through. Superman serves as a "constant," a standpoint of representing the very best ideals, "habits," and desired modes of behavior. Superman is (as will be defined in more detail) the guarantor of those "ideals." It is through his demonstrations that he upholds those ideals, promotes them, and ultimately strives via the telling of his stories to generate emulation in those who read them. Superman's narrative gives new life to the classical ideals of epic poetry. As C M Bowra points out:

> Heroic poetry is essentially a narrative and is nearly always remarkable for its objective character. It creates its own world of the imagination in which men act on easily understood principles, and, though it celebrates great doings because of their greatness, it does not overtly by praise but indirectly by making them speak for themselves and appeal to us in their own right. (4)

Superman is the return of a long form narrative, by way of the comic books, which recreates an imaginative version of our real world to present to us stories of one man who stands up and for his principles. As Americans, we recognize and understand these principles. Superman performs great deeds as a means of demonstrating his own ability and intention, and this expression is what attracted and continues to attract audiences today.

In order to shed light on Superman and draw out a greater critical understanding of how he models American values, this dissertation will begin by examining and exploring, in brief, the evolution of *arête* from its roots in classical Greek and Roman cultures to its modern incarnations. This discussion will be followed up by laying down exactly what a rhetorical model is and how this model functions, or can function, as an expression of *arête*. Once this is established, three analysis chapters, Analysis Parts A, B, and C, will introduce compatible theories that lend themselves to the development, alteration, and ultimate re-appropriation of Superman's place as a rhetorical model of American *arête* from a chronological examination of his narrative history. The first of these chapters, Analysis Part A, will focus on the use of Stephen Greenblatt's concept of "self-fashioning" (*Renaissance Self-Fashioning* 9) and role of myth to try and understand the construction of Superman as a character, as well as the challenges to and adaptation of his character and narrative during his first decades of existence. Analysis Part B will examine the role of Kenneth Burke's theory of identification and consubstantiality, along with the use of his dramatic pentad to analyze attempts to alter Superman in the 1970s and 1980s, as well as extreme attempts to remove aspects of Superman's own identification with humanity and the consequences of that result. Finally, Analysis Part C will focus on Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of reaccentuation and attempt to examine how more modern attempts to reinvigorate and understand Superman's place as a model have turned to and relied upon appropriating elements, images, and ideas from his classic stories and elements of his own narrative past.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

"Comic books are the dreams and aspirations of human beings." – Neal Adams[3]

"Feed men, and then ask of them virtue!" – Fyodor Dostoevsky[4]

How does one create an iconic hero? Not just an iconic hero, but how does one transform the idea of the iconic hero by folding the idea back upon its origins in concepts of myth while tempering it anew from the raw metal of American values? Making an iconic hero representing a culture is much like the forging of a sword: complicated, time consuming, and plagued with potential failure. One answer is that sometimes things just happen to come together. Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster happened upon this kind of "spontaneous" answer. They conceived, nurtured, and molded–borrowing often from other characters and times–a modern American (immigrant) character who possessed what the ancient Greeks called *arête*. In the original Greek, *arête* (*ἀρετή*) is defined as "goodness, excellence, of a kind, in Hom [Homer]. Esp. of manly qualities" (Liddell and Scott 238). When one speaks of *arête*, one is often talking about a set of values that a culture holds up as ideal or worthy of praise. Transliterated, modern conceptions often define or conceive of *arête* as virtue. According to Russell Kirk, "In its classical signification, 'virtue' means the power of anything to accomplish its specific functions; a property capable of producing certain benefits; strength, force, potency" (343). Kirk's

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[3] *Secret Origins: The Story of DC Comics*. Dir. Mac Carter, Perf. Ryan Reynolds, Neal Adams, Neil Gaiman, Paul Levitz. DC Entertainment. 2010. DVD.

[4] Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *The Brothers Karamzov: A Novel in Four Parts with Epilogue*. Trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1990. 253. Print.

definition correlates with Liddell and Scott's by providing, specifically, some of those "manly qualities." Kirk's definition of "virtue" gives what one would view as an amoral quality to *arête*, and this is a complication that, particularly in Homeric epics, is "challenged" as the meaning is refined over time.

Homer's epics, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, provide a rich textual point to begin considering *arête*. According to Kirk, early ideas of virtue centered upon or actually "meant in [their] beginning some [kind of] extraordinary power. The word was applied to the sort of person we might now call 'the charismatic leader.' By extension, 'virtue' came to imply the qualities of full humanity: strength, courage, capacity, worth, manliness, moral excellence" (343). This is a fuller expression of Kirk's earlier assertion of the classical perception of virtue. There is room for "moral excellence" in this classical idea; however, that is not, as it appears, the primary view of classical virtue by ancient Greeks. Instead, as Kirk notes, *arête* ultimately did develop and come "to signify . . . moral goodness: the practice of moral duties and the conformity of life to the moral law; uprightness, rectitude" (343). However, this is a limited or modified view on the original meaning of *arête*. This evolution or modification of *arête* began for the ancient Greeks in Homer's epic.

Most people know the general premise of Homer's epics, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. The *Iliad*, the first chronologically, begins in the tenth year of a Greek siege of the city of Troy following the kidnapping of the beautiful Helen, wife of Menelaus, by Paris, prince of Troy. The narrative eventually ends with the death of heroes and fall and sack of Troy by the Greeks after the Greeks resort to trickery and deceit to gain access to

the city and end the war. The *Odyssey* picks up the story of Odysseus, the mastermind of the Greek's "trickery and deceit," who in his pride claims greatness over even some of the gods. He angers them and is forced to spend another ten years trying to get home to his wife, Penelope, and son, Telemachus, as punishment. Along the way Odysseus is forced to rely on his wits and cleverness to journey through perils in order to get home.

Between these two epics, the definition of classical ideas of *arête* begins to alter and evolve. Beginning with the *Iliad*, it is important to see what parts of Kirk's earlier assertion of classical forms of virtue were present. A major character who lies at the heart of the *Iliad*'s notions of *arête* is the warrior Achilles. In Homer's *Iliad*, Achilles, on many occasions, is described as "the best of the Achaians" or Greeks[5]. Nicholas Smith, in fact, is rather critical of this picture of Achilles. The idea of the absence of morality in *arête* exists in the warrior mentality of Achilles as it appears in the *Iliad*. The *Iliad* actually begins with Achilles and Agamemnon in the midst of a petty dispute. Smith, after pointing out Achilles' character, notes: "One is left with the strongest possible impression that this is no way to settle a dispute [Achilles' dispute with Agamemnon], and that neither of these so-called 'heroes' merits anything close to our *moral* admiration" (6). Smith's entire argument makes it clear that the *arête* found in Homeric epics is not really tied in any way to excellence as a form of moral virtues, as later espoused and argued over by Greek philosophers. In fact, Smith asserts: "Homer wanted to call his readers' attention to the limitations inherent in this notion of *arête* [one that covers excellence in

[5] Nicholas Smith notes that references to Achilles and a description of him as the "Best of the Achaians" comes from a footnote where he points to the "*Iliad* 1.244, 2.412, 26.21, 16.271, 16.274, 19.216" and points to as reference that "a careful discussion of this description of Achilles [one should] see Gregory Nagy, The Best of the Achaeans" (5).

non-moral domains],” and ultimately he used the *Iliad* as a means, “at least in part, to problematizing the most ancient concept of *arête*” (7). Richard Enos points out that this is Homer applying persuasion upon his audience in his attempt to shed light upon a certain kind of perception of *arête* (*Greek Rhetoric Before Aristotle*). So, if we accept Smith’s interpretation of Homer’s epic, we are left with the realization that the author himself is perhaps “hyper-accentuating” Achilles and placing him, a traditional model, in more of an anti-model role to illustrate a problem in the Greek’s view of *arête*.

In a variation on the Achilles’ problem, Superman represents a problemization of American *arête*. Glen Weldon notes in the introduction to his work, *Superman: An Unauthorized Biography*, that Superman is himself a fluid creation. He specifically states “Superman changes as our culture changes” (3). More importantly, though, Weldon lays down the “essence” of Superman’s values when he states that his “two most essential attributes, the elements that make a Superman story a Superman story” are that Superman “puts the needs of other over those of himself [and] never gives up” (3). It is easy for some to recognize these qualities in Superman, but this is essentially also a stripping down of the character to his fundamentals. This is what Scott McCloud would call “amplification through simplification” (*Understanding Comics* 30). Superman is a simple creation that is able to communicate large and abstract ideas. At times, because of his ability to adapt to American culture, Superman has often contradicted some of his principles and values in order to remain identifiable with “that” America at “that” time. However, as Weldon notes, there nonetheless remains something at his core, the two “essential attributes” that are always part of his *arête*.

Viewing Achilles in a negative light is not unreasonable in light of the textual material recorded from Homer's originally oral poems. The very opening lines of Book I do not exactly paint a picture of Achilles as being worthy of emulation or praise when it states: "Sing, O Goddess, the ruinous wrath of Achilles, / Son of Peleus, the terrible curse that brought / Unnumbered woes upon the Achaeans and hurled / To Hades so many heroic souls . . ." (1). Someone associated with "ruinous wrath," a "terrible curse," and "woes," is not necessarily a hero worthy of our admiration or emulation. These lines set the scene for Achilles' prideful conflict with King Agamemnon over a woman. If the picture is not clear enough yet, the editors of the *Iliad* provide tiles to each book, such as that of Book I being the "The Quarrel." Achilles' actions hardly seem worthy of emulation. The type of virtue valued during the time of Homer is focused mainly on the acquisition of "wealth, prestige, and political power" (Smith 8). These types of virtues were characteristic of ancient Roman culture as well, but here they represent rather selfish or personal ends.

Smith continues his analysis and interpretation of the idea of *arête* as found in the *Iliad* by highlighting the lack of "responsibility" found in this form of virtue as it applied to any larger sense of social good. He states that:

> The ancient concept of the hero depends upon an assessment of *arête*, but the *Iliad* could hardly make clearer that fact that such *arête* does not guarantee that those possessing it will be just, or do what is best for society. Quite the reverse, as the story of the *Iliad* and the insanity of the "best of Achaians" makes abundantly

> clear, the *arête* of killers creates a normative basis for social chaos and an endless cycle of deadly human conflicts. (Smith 7-8)

The excellence in a hero is wrapped up, in the *Iliad*, less in any kind of objective form of justice or acting in the best interests of society, than in a highly competitive and chaotic form. Margalit Finkelberg notes that when it came to "The value of honour [it] is . . . interwoven into the very core of the *Iliad* plot [for] it is generally assumed that honour is a competitive value" ("'Time' and '*Arête*' in Homer"). On display again here, as was noted by Smith, is the element of competition that is wrapped up in notions of *arête* or excellence/virtue. This competition is between the heroes themselves. One might argue that modern superheroes or heroes in different ages continue to promote this idea in the ways that many try to be "better" than others before or contemporary to them. A classic trope found in superhero comic books, even today, is to have the heroes meet up and fight amongst themselves. This could be argued as promoting that more ancient conception of the heroes need to be better than his peers found in the competition of the ancient Greeks and Romans.

Debra Hawhee goes further in discussing this connection between virtue/excellence and competition in her article, "*Agonism* and *Arête*." Hawhee refers to this kind of "competition" in Greek culture by the term *agon*, which is generally defined as "the contest" and refers to it in terms of athletic contests (186). This idea of *agon* is important because in classical societies it was highly interconnected with *arête* (as Hawhee's article's title implies). Hawhee specifically points out that "*arête* was associated with the goodness, courage, and prowess of a warrior [and that one] of the best

examples of early *agonistic* manifestations of *arête* can be found in Homer's Achilles" (187). Of course, the example of Achilles is problematic, as many of the previous authors have taken note. More importantly, it is worth noting that some of these notions of *arête* and competition do make their way into the conception of Superman. However, Superman's application of the *agonistic* and applying *arête* in a manner worthy of emulation and admiration is more modern and different than Achilles'.

Returning to Hawhee it is noted that for the ancient Greeks, particularly those in line with Homeric works, "Conceptually, *arête* was tightly bound with *agathos* (good), *kleos* (glory), *time* (honor), and *philotimia* (love of honor)" (187). As is usual with Greek terms and words, their meaning varies and is often interconnected to others. The idea of excellence then relies on a culture's values to provide it with examples of that excellence. This assertion returns us to Kirk's assertion of ways of defining *arête* in the Homeric Greek conception. Hawhee further defines some of the "characteristics of *arête*," as found in the Homeric epics (particularly the *Iliad*), as such things as: "glory, honor, courage, and bodily strength and swiftness to succeed in battle" (191). Again, the values here continue to be tied to those of martial prowess. By these values, then, Achilles, as the model, and as found in the *Iliad*, does possess and model this form of *arête* to the audience. Achilles, as warrior, demonstrates his *arête*, which as Hawhee notes, is itself an "external phenomenon" that requires an outward, performative demonstration (187). This ability is in full display for the audience when Achilles fights and then slays Hector in Book 22 of the *Iliad*.

The performative ability of *arête* links it to epideictic rhetoric, particularly in the Homeric Greek sense of *arête*, as well as in later incarnations (such as Superman). Michelle Zebra recognizes those epideictic qualities when stating: "Deeds in Homeric epic are most fully realized only when they are publicized and memorialized in words, initially in words of the agents themselves, then those of the communities that pass them on for posterity, and finally, or sometimes contemporaneously, those of the bard" (317). Therefore, the first and foremost promoter of Achilles' own *arête* would be Achilles himself, followed by those who served with him or were in communities he had saved, liberated, and then finally, of course, from Homer. Homer's role in recounting Achilles' *arête* can serve and be interpreted either, as some traditionally do, with him as a tragic hero or, as Smith points out, as a lesson of the destructive and chaotic qualities found in *arête* of Homer's own time. In "Agonism and Arete," Hawhee asserts that "one cannot *be* virtuous, one must *become* virtuosity by performing and hence embodying virtuous actions in public" (187). In other words, virtue, *arête*, requires performance and action to qualify as such. This performance reinforces Zebra's earlier assertions when referring to the levels of such expression or promotion. For Superman, this epideictic part of *arête* finds its place in his own narrative continuity. Superman is a kind of "slave" to his own epideictic nature that places demands upon his narrative, a constant narrative in the present tense of agelessness. Additionally, his appearance, powers, and actions all generate what Aristotle might see as worthy of praise and a "noble thing," for, as he notes, "they praise Achilles because he championed his fallen friend Patroclus [and] yet while to die thus was the nobler thing for him to do, the expedient thing was to live on"

(*The Rhetoric* 33) [6]. Aristotle is here drawing the distinction between what one typically praises in another and distinguishes it between what is praiseworthy and what is simply expedient.

Of course, in the end, there is a lesson to Achilles' reckless pursuit and promotion of his *arête* as demonstrated by his fate in Homer's *Iliad*. Achilles, after the death of his companion Patroclus at the hands of the Trojan Prince Hector, turns his wrath from his quarrel with Agamemnon and unleashes it on Hector. Achilles's wrath leads to his slaying Hector and then, in arrogance and chaotic rage, dragging the body around the walls of Troy behind his chariot. This defiling of the body of an enemy, this "blameworthy action," leads to the wrath of the gods being focused on Achilles, and Prince Paris slays him using his only weak point, his heel (*The Rhetoric* 33). Of course, Troy eventually does fall to the Greeks, but not by the might of Achilles, but rather by the cleverness of Odysseus. This resolution helps set up a transition for Homer because Odysseus is himself to be the main protagonist of his second epic, the *Odyssey*, but also it represents a shift in the perception of *arête*.

There is a change in the perception of virtue or *arête* that occurs between Homer's *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. One can recognize Odysseus, who played a role in the *Iliad* but is the main character in the *Odyssey*, is not praised for being a warrior but for his "audacity and cleverness" (Kieffer 42). This is one of the first shifts in the perception of the kinds of values foreseen as important in what makes up excellence. Richard Enos, when discussing the development of rhetoric, points to Homer's Odysseus as a "model of

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[6] Patroclus is actually killed by Hector who mistakes him for Achilles when Patroclus dawns his armor to rally the Greek troops in battle.

discourse" (*Greek Rhetoric Before Aristotle* 9). Enos notes that Odysseus "is viewed not only as wily but eloquent," and that this eloquence is held as a kind of "divine gift" from the gods (9). So, not only is Odysseus leading the evolution and development of *arête*, but he is helping to develop the importance of *arête* within a persuasive and rhetorical context as well. This was not a minor evolution, either, but rather the beginning of one that would have far-reaching consequences. *Arête* in Homer's *Odyssey*, as noted by Zebra, "emerges in the poem as a kind of virtuosity with qualities akin to what Machiavelli will call *virtu*, a performative excellence involving practical intelligence; speaking ability, including the uses of dissimulation; and the courage to act in the heat of the moment where fortune prevails" (318). Of course, there remains no real mention of the connection of virtue in the any form related to morality or justice. The performative element remains interconnected with the application of courage, but added to them are the use of intelligence and the ability to dissimilate, to act politically expedient in a manner that applies delays and the buying of time as a weapon of the politician to the warrior.

Machiavelli's conception of *virtu* combines the characteristics of Homer's Achilles with qualities found in Odysseus. In perhaps their own ways, Homer's two creations, Achilles and Odysseus, and their two narratives, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, represent two halves of the later compilations of political values of *arête* that Machiavelli is concerned would be concerned over. Returning to the classical, Homeric notions of *arête*, Zebra ultimately notes that Odysseus is "canny and [adopts a] skeptically motivated rhetorical posture [that] becomes the paradigm for social and political action,

reminding us that speech requires a space in which the relative freedom of agents looking to assert themselves in the world can be realized" (318). Homer's Odysseus utilizes his brain and the application of his speech to persuade others and to gain advantage. To find the still lacking elements of justice and morality one needs to look to the seekers of truth, the philosophers during the later classical Greek period.

Nicholas Smith points out that "Classical Greek philosophical theories all converge on the assessment that one cannot be just without having *arête*, and one cannot have *arête* without being just," and this ultimately changed the nature of *arête*, seeing it become "moralized" and having added to it "justice is transformed from a social norm to being an *arête* of human character" (8). Here begins the modern habit of viewing virtue in terms of values such as justice and ideas of morality. Philosophers began to ask how many virtues were there. What are the "chief" virtues, the most important ones? Kirk points out that Plato had Socrates ask the question: "When we say that a man or a woman is virtuous, what do we mean?" and for this "Plato declared that there are four chief virtues: justice, prudence, temperance, and fortitude" (343). This is Plato attempting to define *arête* by asserting that are four "chief" virtues to be held above all others. These four virtues would later be modified by "Saint Paul [who] added the theological virtues: faith, hope, and charity" to Plato's original four "chief" virtues (343). By adding ideas of morality, of truth and of "rightness" to the definition of *arête*, philosophers such as Socrates and Plato contributed to the ongoing evolution of how virtue was presented or understood by the audience.

Plato (like Socrates) espoused that virtue and wisdom were interconnected. This connection has been a debatable ever since. This debate, according to the article "Sophistical Wisdom," has served to highlight the "connection between philosophy and rhetoric [and] has been the focus of intellectual interest in the West [from] the time of Heraclitus of Ephesus (ca. 500 BCE) . . . Gorgias, Socrates, Plato, Isocrates, Aristotle, Cicero [on down to] Augustine, Bacon [and] Vico (Johnstone 265). Ultimately, this debate boils down to an intellectual inquiry about what and how philosophy (lovers of wisdom) is linked to the instruction of wisdom. In particular, this link, itself, focuses on "the role of rhetoric in the creation or exercise of [that] wisdom" as it is perceived (265). The discussion of virtue and wisdom, of whether or not it could be taught publically or not, became one of the first battlegrounds between philosophy and rhetoric, between Socrates and Plato on one side and the Sophists on the other.

In ancient Greece, there was an influx, beginning around 5th century BCE, of rhetoricians who offered themselves as teachers for pay. These men have been collectively referred to as sophists. Sophists, such as Gorgias, claimed that they sought to teach *arête* (*An Introduction to Classical Rhetoric* 24). Philosophers such as Socrates and Plato found fault with such claims because they felt that there was a lack of truth to be found in sophistic teachings. Gorgias, in his *Encomium of Helen* (*In Praise of Helen*) begins by noting that, "For a city the finest adornment (*kosmos*) is a good citizenry, for a body beauty, for a soul wisdom, for an action *arête*, and for a speech truth [and that] A man, woman, deed, city, or action that is worthy of praise should be honored with acclaim" (*The Norton's Anthology of Theory & Criticism* 38). The *arête* that Gorgias

points out attempts to relates a new understanding of *arête* to the classical Homeric *arête* found in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

Within the understanding of history, this shift in *arête* represented a consolidation towards exhibits of altruistic excellence and virtue worthy of praise as Gorgias denoted in his *Encomium*. According to W. Guthrie, in his work, *The Sophists*, "*Arête* when used without qualification denoted those qualities of human excellence which made a man a natural leader in his community, and hitherto it had been believed to depend on certain natural or even divine gifts which were the mark of good birth and breeding" (25). This "communal" understanding of *arête* allows for the realization that what a culture would deem as excellent and virtuous was now more meritorious in its conception versus older aristocratic conceptions. One might very well argue that such changes, as they occurred in ancient Greece close to the events that saw the arrival of the sophists there, could serve as a tension point not between teachers of rhetoric (sophists) and those of philosophy, but rather between authority and alien outsiders. Many of the sophists were foreigners who came among the Athenians and self-fashioned identities as teachers for themselves while also assisting in the promotion of upward mobility and greater opportunities to immigrant outsiders.

Gorgias originally came to Greece as part of an ambassadorial mission from the colony of Syracuse (Sicily). Much of what we know about the conflict between these two parties, the sophists and philosophers, however, comes from Plato (a philosopher) and his dialogues as well as some surviving excerpts of sophistic works. In Plato's dialogue, *Protagoras*, Johnston points out "civic excellence (*politike arête*) is at the heart of

Protagoras' teaching" (268). What is or defines what "civic excellence" is then? The answer is provided by Protagoras who states that civic excellence is made up of certain qualities: "respect for others (*aidos*) and a sense of justice (*dikaiosyne*) [as well as] moderation (*sophrosyne*) . . . holiness of life (*hosiotes*) [and] courage (*andreia*)" being the foundation of it (Plato 322c). Protagoras is putting forth, in some ways, a modern view of *arête* in his assertion. Here are the ideas of justice in relationship to others: moderation, religious adherence, and courage. Hawhee, in addition to Johnston, also notes Protagoras's defining of the sophistic view of *arête*. She states that sophists, "particularly Protagoras . . . held wide repute for [the] controversial claim to [be able to] teach *arête* to young men" (195). The sophists and philosophers main argument centered upon their debate over whether *arête* could be taught or not.

When discussing the roots of the liberal arts in classical Greece, Charles Ess notes that in his dialogues, Plato depicts Socrates and in particular "Socrates' teaching as a foundational element of liberal learning, the recognition that the pursuit of human excellence (*arête*) or virtue must always come first" (120). This idea, for Ess, describes the nature of liberal arts at its core. He states: "Socrates argues at length in *The Republic*, the sacrifice of human excellence is ultimately self-defeating" (120). Kirk concurs and holds up that instruction of *arête* can best transpire in the household, the home, rather than in the classroom. The idea that learning began in the home was a common element of ancient Roman tradition, as one debated in ancient Greece.

In examining ancient Greece, it is worth noting where Aristotle comes down on the issue of *arête*. According to Lesley Brown:

> when Aristotle [in the *Nicomachean Ethics*] comes to discuss the individual virtues, there is no sign of any doctrine that they are relative to, and different for, different agents. Aristotle has a lot to say about the myriad ways of falling short (or going beyond) the various excellences; indeed it has seemed to many that his emphasis on the many possible ways to go wrong is hard to reconcile with the idea that each excellence of character lies between just two vices, on of excess and one of defect. (81)

Smith also notes Aristotle, as Brown does, with regards to discussing *arête*. He notes that according to Aristotle's "*Nicomachean Ethics*, virtue is to be understood as the mean between the extremes of two distinct vices: one of deficiency, and one of excess. Hence, according to Aristotle, courage is defined as the mean between the deficiency of cowardice and the excess of bravado" (18). Aristotle's "golden mean," the idea of balance and moderation to the notions of all things also exists when examining virtue/*arête*. Smith further asserts that for Aristotle, "Human virtue . . . is the product of a fulfillment of what is the distinct function of human beings" (18). Therefore, human *arête* is the natural point of attainment, the pinnacle of humanity. When considering Superman to be acting as a model, worthy of emulation, but also as an archetype of human possibility–the man of tomorrow, so to speak–one can imagine how important a figure Superman can be. One can recognize Gorgias' assertion of action representing a form of *arête* via the epideictic qualities already noted as possessed by Superman. Aristotle calls

this “fulfillment” but to fulfill something requires action. Action is often inspired by emulation.

Even more so than defining *arête* as a mean and aim of human achievement, Aristotle points out that individualism is a key component of virtue. According to Aristotle, when discussing the distinctions and pitfalls of individuals, he states: “We must also examine what we ourselves drift into easily. For different people have different natural tendencies towards different goals . . .” (*Nicomachean Ethics* 113). This is to say that, though he is rather prescriptive towards how virtue is applied generally, Aristotle is able to account for individual variation. Looking to Superman, a declaration of his goals is an essential requirement. And though these goals tend to vacillate and change over time, there is an essence that always remained constant. Of course, ultimately, Aristotle distinguishes between moral and intellectual virtue. This distinction does in some ways further cloud the issue of how he defines virtue and how and where it applied in some degree.

To help focus the issue and avoid this differentiation introduced by Aristotle–away from a universal and towards particular points of understanding virtue–it will help to focus on the way that Superman embodies these notions of *arête* so far discussed. Superman can be seen in terms of a modern embodiment of classical Greek *arête* via the realization that “in ancient Greece, one *is* what one *does*–or better, what one is perceived as doing” (Hawhee 190). Hawhee’s assertion about *arête* in ancient Greece provides a key point about Superman’s essence: he is what he does. Superman embodies this form of Greek *arête*, the one offered by Hawhee above, rather than the kind of *arête* found in

Homeric representation. *Arête* for the Homeric Greek was intrinsically linked to "A person's identity [because one's] interactions with others, and perceptions by others" presented an external shaping of identity (190). This aspect of *arête* carried over and was retained in ancient Roman culture.

For the ancient Romans, virtue was not something one was taught; particularly not something one was "taught in schools. Rather, the sprig of virtue is nurtured [to promote the development of] healthful and valorous habits" and such a place for this to "form" were within the unit of the family (344-6). Kirk takes sides with Aristophanes and the Romans (in many ways) against Socrates, and to some extent Plato and Aristotle, in his view of the debate over virtue. He states, "If good moral habits are acquired at all, they are ordinarily [acquired] within the family, within the neighborhood, within the circle of close associates in youth" (346). This statement contains an implicit note about the presence of models as a key component in child development. This presence of the role model is where the idea of model and its important role in the nurturing of *arête* begins to really take shape and will become important in later discussion of Superman. For if the promotion or nurturing of virtue begins at such a young point in an individual's life, then understanding Superman's important role in this development is a crucial point of examination.

In Adrian Goldsworthy's biography, *Caesar: Life of a Colossus*, a clear reference is made to the fact that it was tradition in ancient Rome for "Children" to learn "to admire such quintessentially Roman qualities as *dignitas*, *pietas*, and *virtus*, all words with a far more powerful resonance than their English derivatives, dignity, piety, and virtue" (37).

Looking back to Kirk's earlier arguments on how virtue should be taught today, he is modeling that idea on how the Romans approached it. The Romans practiced home education early on as a way of nurturing qualities or virtues they held important. The Romans, in many ways, culturally emulated the Greeks, particularly during the later years of 1st century BCE and during much of the first two centuries CE. When looking at the Roman term *virtus*, their equivalent of *arête*, one can (primarily through its military and competitive nature during the Republic) recognize a return to some of the Homeric ideas of competition and individual pursuits that Smith argued Homer wished to problematize, such wealth, prestige, and political power. Anyone who examines the lives of many Roman politicians/generals (to be one often meant to be both)–Marcus Antonius (Mark Antony), Scipio Africanus, Scipio Aemilianus Africanus, Sulla, Gaius Marius, Marcus Agrippa, Gnaeus Pompeius (Pompey), Marcus Licinius Crassus, and Gaius Julius Caesar–witnesses an attempt to gain and demonstrate publically the virtues that Smith noted were found in Homer. Goldsworthy points out that a key "virtue" for many Romans, besides competition, which existed and was part of political life and the attainment of positions such as *quaestor*, *aedile*, *praetor*, and consul (*cursus honorum*)[7], was *auctoritas*. In trying to define *auctoritas*, a concept that he notes is "hard to translate," Goldsworthy asserts that it is a kind of combination of "authority, reputation, and influence with sheer importance or status" (18). Like the Greek *arête*, *auctoritas* was a kind of value but also a general *ethos* that was closely related to one's *arête* or *virtus*.

[7] The *cursus honorum*, or course of honors, is a "tripartite progression through stages of a Roman political career, as practiced most famously by Cicero and Julius Caesar" (Cheney and de Armas 8). During most of the Roman republic this was part of a competition for prestige among the noble classes. According to the *European Literary Careers*, "Eligibility for these offices, or *honores*, came in a strict sequences, the *cursus honorum*, which was defined by law and [was] very seldom violated (35).

For the Romans, as noted above when discussing the close relationship of Roman political and military life, the term "*Virtus* had strongly military overtones, embracing not simply physical bravery, but confidence, moral courage and the skills required by both soldier and commander" (37). These are all separate values, but ones that represent martial qualities that were expected of Romans in the military arena. By demonstrating these qualities and values, a Roman general could hope to enhance his personal *auctoritas* and wealth, while also enhancing the *auctoritas* (covering ideas of prestige and political power) of Rome. The Roman concept of *virtus* was so prevalent that it has been asserted as a major contributor to Rome's very survival in the face of conflicts with other cultures, such as the Etruscans, the Greeks, and the Carthaginians. In fact, "Young aristocrats were raised to aspire to *virtus*, an important part of which was the absolute resolution never to give up in even in the face of defeat" (515). This idea of never giving up, for the Romans, was part of why they won the Second Punic War against Hannibal and Carthage. Despite countless and disastrous defeats, the Romans refused to give up. Typically in ancient warfare of the time, when you lost, you surrendered. The Romans chose a different course because of their *virtus*. For Superman, there is the same notion of "never giving up" that will be noted by Glen Weldon later, that is quintessential to his own *arête*. Again, Superman, like the modern world itself, borrows from the classical one.

In the medieval world, the four classical virtues laid out by Plato and the three "theological virtues" espoused by St. Paul formed a total of "seven virtues" for the Christian doctrine that held sway in a great deal of Europe. These "seven virtues" of the

Christian religion were set in opposition to the "Seven Deadly Sins: pride, avarice, lust, anger, gluttony, envy, and sloth" (Kirk 343). This symmetry existed from early on in the birth and development of the Christian religion in the early first-century of the Common Era. Kirk continues, stating that the medieval world had an even "more specific . . . list of 'the sins that cry out to heaven for vengeance': oppression of the poor, willful murder, sodomy, and defrauding a laborer of his wages" (343). It is interesting that to understand what constitutes virtue or the values that define culture, a particular cultural virtue needed to be understood in relationship their opposite. This idea is expressed in a quotation from Frank Herbert that states to attempt to understand something without encompassing its opposite "is to attempt seeing Truth without knowing Falsehood. It is the attempt to see the light without knowing Darkness" (*Dune* 13). In many ways, the Christian doctrine of *arête* and *virtus* helped influence the creation of Superman. It is not a major leap to try and compare Superman to Jesus Christ. In many ways, Superman borrows from the idea of Christ. Superman does model his behavior on some of the same *arête* as Christ. In doing this, Superman increases his spectrum of identification with his audience.

Moving into the Renaissance and towards the modern era, there was a great re-discovering of classical Greek and some Roman texts. From these texts, Western Europe slowly re-discovered the source material of the ancient Greek *arête*. For Machiavelli, the great political thinker of the late 15th and early 16th centuries, these discoveries helped him develop what he called *virtu*. Machiavelli's *virtu*, as a concept, represents a kind of precursor to some ideas of "modern" political thought and expedience. According to Michael Palmer, for Machiavelli, "Hannibal's 'inhuman cruelty' is one of his virtues . . .

indeed, his paramount virtue! Machiavellian *virtu* consists of being ‘virtuous’ (in the traditional sense) when it is politically expedient” (368). What Palmer asserts about Machiavelli is that he believed that for one within the political arena, any concept of virtue as connected to morality only existed when it was convenient. This cynical departure or re-accentuation of Roman *virtus* tends to veer away from the classical philosophical and rhetorical understandings of *arête*.

Attempting to define *arête* within a modern context requires an understanding of the changes the idea underwent during some of its earliest incarnations and just how fast such changes (in what short time) could occur. For a character like Superman, who has continued to exist within a narrative format continually for almost eight decades, such a shift in the understanding of his *arête* or the *arête* he exemplified has developed along with the culture of America that he has emulated it for as a model. As Gorgias noted in the *Encomium*, *arête* fits best with action. Superman is a figure of action. His *arête* develops from the decisions he makes. With his actions he becomes a model.

Action, as Gorgias denotes in his *Encomium*, operates primarily with a present tense, in what Aristotle would come to call epideictic rhetoric. Gorgias says: “For it is equally error and ignorance to blame the praiseworthy and praise the blameworthy” (38). He is of course attempting to provide a defense of Helen in the *Encomium*. His aim is to persuasively promote the idea that Helen was not to blame for the Trojan War. Aristotle would pick up on this thought, of pointing and illustrating what is praiseworthy and blame worthy later in his *The Rhetoric*. There, Aristotle makes it part of a system to serve as one of “three divisions of oratory” (32). Of these three divisions, epideictic is most

concerned with passing praise or blame upon a party and operates within the present tense. He states that "those who praise or censure a man do not consider whether his acts have been expedient or not, but often make it a ground of actual praise that he has neglected his own interest to do what was honorable" (33). This notion of self-sacrifice for the sake of others is a central quality of Superman's character and one of the pillars of his *arête* as well.

Being an "American" hero and adherent to American *arête*, Superman represents an expression of abstract American values in concrete form. Sometimes it helps to gain perspective on a culture's values looking at them from the outside. Superman, being himself an immigrant from another world came to our American values from somewhere else, makes an excellent expression of those values. More specifically, to try and address an attempt to qualify or put some concrete expression to often abstract concepts, it helps to look at things, as will become common with Superman, from an immigrant or outsider point of view. The University of Missouri at St. Louis, reprinting excerpts from the University of Iowa's *1994-1995 Handbook for Foreign Students and Scholars*, points to such values as Individualism, Equality, Change and Progress, Goodness of Humanity, Action, and Assertiveness among a few ("Key American Values"). Not only must Superman adhere to these values to be considered virtuous, but to really apply *arête*, to demonstrate American *arête*, Superman must do so via his actions. For the American author Frank Herbert, looking at the idea of virtue via the lens of science fiction, asserted that if one is "To be truly at one with virtue, uncorrupted in all ways, full of goodly honor, a man must permit his deeds and his words to agree" (*Children of Dune* 49). This

is the advantage that Superman, as a fictional character, is able to achieve. His deeds and words do agree and for this he is best placed to be a rhetorical model for others to emulate.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

"Argumentation by model is intrinsically appeal to speakers and writers, for it enables them to highlight relevant aspects of the model–even when it is unique or ideal–and draw a suitable application from it" – Alan Gross and Ray Dearin[8]

Plutarch, in his *Plutarch's Lives*, compares the place of Alexander the Great with Julius Caesar. He begins by apologizing to his audience that he "chose rather to epitomize the most celebrated parts of their [Alexander and Caesar] story" to discover a clearer vision of their "virtue or vice [as] men" (801). Alexander the Great, one of the youngest conquerors and for a short time ruler of the largest empire of the known world, was a model for many in the ancient world–Caesar among those who admired him. However, the model he set was like that of Achilles in his *arête*. To see Alexander as a negative kind of model one only has to look at his final words as he lay dying at the age of 32. Robin Fox recounts: "When they asked to whom he left the kingdom, he is said to have replied, 'To the strongest'" (*The Search for Alexander* 410). In the wake of his death, Alexander's kingdom fell apart in civil war and death. The idea or legend that developed around Alexander came less from his acumen and wisdom as a ruler than as a result of his dying young and victorious. The model of his life, right or wrong, served to inspire other great men and generals such as Pyrrhus (from whom the term Pyrrhic victory is named), Pompey the Great, Julius Caesar, and the Emperor Trajan among a few. These were powerful men and their adherence to Alexander the Great as a model

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[8] Gross, Alan and Ray D. Dearin. Eds. *Chaim Perelman*. Albany: State U of New York P, 2003. Print.

demonstrates just how powerful and persuasive a model can be to those who wish to emulate it.

The model is an essential form of argumentation from authority (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca). Chaim Perelman and Laurie Olbrechts-Tyteca in *The New Rhetoric* points out that “the argument of authority is of extreme importance” and, influenced by “prestige”, “uses the acts or opinions of a person or group of persons as a means of proof in support of a thesis” (305-6). For the purposes of this dissertation, it is being argued that Superman serves as a highly persuasive model of American *arête*. Superman’s ability to be a model comes from his essence and its connection to myth, but above all that from his prestige as an icon in American culture. He embodies and accentuates, via his amalgamation and creation, many aspects of classical heroes and myths. The place of heroes and myths are important in a culture because, as Thomas Frentz notes, Joseph Campbell helped “show that myths, properly understood [serve as] accurate . . . accounts of a culture’s unconscious” (“Memory, Myth, and Rhetoric” 244). Superman is a modern re-imagination of classical myth, and it will be argued that his power stems directly from his ability to tap into some “unconscious” essence of American culture–its *arête*–and inspire imitation by his action. Campbell, in his *Myths to Live By*, points out that it is through connection to our cultural unconscious we allow ourselves to “learn to know and come to terms with the greater horizon of our deeper and wiser, inner self” (13). Through an investigation of these elements in relation to Superman, this dissertation will attempt to analyze just how the formulation of such classical elements of Greek myths and ideas manifest in Superman the ability to project American culture.

The power and influence of Alexander the Great existed as a model over the classical world for over five hundred years after his death. Part of the ability to act as a model relies on perspective, the identification that later generals and leaders had with Alexander. Particularly in Roman culture where ceremonial or epideictic rhetoric was important. As Chaim Perelman puts it, the aim of

> the epideictic genre is not just to gain a passive adherence from his audience but to provoke the action wished for or, at least, to awaken a disposition so to act. This is achieved by forming a community of minds, which Kenneth Burke, who is well aware of the importance of the genre, calls *identification*. ("The New Rhetoric: A Theory of Practical Reasoning" 1388)

In other words, rhetorical persuasion in the present tense of the epideictic genre requires a common and accepted form or character to which the audience can identify with. This identification often can fall upon certain virtues or beliefs, or even better, they can be found in a character that professes and practices those virtues. *Arête*, particularly with Superman, specifically functions in an epideictic manner. Epideictic rhetoric exists by reinforcing and expressing the present tense and values. Superman then, as a model, exists in what Umberto Eco refers to as "static" form. Eco's concept of the static form of Superman points out that the "content [Superman stories] sustains itself and functions communicatively thanks to the narrative structure [while] on the other hand, the stories help define their expressive structure as the circular, static conveyance of a pedagogic message which is substantially immobilistic" ("The Myth of Superman" 162). Eco is being critical here of Superman from his post-modern point of view. However, when one

considers the epideictic quality of Superman, this kind of criticism can be answered. Often, men such as Alexander the Great, John Lennon, and James Dean (all who die young) end up becoming myths consisting of all their talent and potential locked away in their own perpetual form of "present"–society often views them as "forever young." Existing constantly in the present, as many superhero or classical heroes do, there is a need for the static form of Superman because it helps maintain his adherence to the current cultural values.

The primary lens for this examination will focus on the ability of Superman to function as a rhetorical model. This ability is an epideictic extension of Superman's embodiment of modern and borrowing from classical notions of *arête*. Kenneth Burke's concepts of "identification" and cooperation allow for an examination of Superman by looking at how the character is recognizable to American society. How individuals identify with Superman is what allows him to properly function as the kind of rhetorical model as Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca define it. All of this will fall within a larger exploration of the differences between classical and modern notions of *arête*. Superman, and the superheroes he inspired, have had an overlooked but still profound impact upon the lives of young people and serve as creative vehicles of the expression and excavation of complex ideas. The idea that this dissertation particularly wishes to excavate is, through the lens of the rhetorical model, why we should want to understand how classical notions of *arête*, and their re-imagining through American culture, are found in Superman.

Trying to understand what a rhetorical model is and what it does, one must turn to Chaim Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca who laid out this approach in *The New Rhetoric* when they discuss "The Relations Establishing the Structure of Reality" in argumentation. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca were looking to modernize and expound upon Aristotle's classical text, *The Rhetoric*, and reestablish the importance of rhetoric and argumentation in a post-Descartian and scientifically logical world. Alan Gross and Ray Dearin point out that most

> knowledge and experience, whether from history or science or even the realms of myth and creative imagination, practitioners of argument spin out altered world views. Examples, illustrations, and models for emulation, if chosen, can bring about an entirely new way of looking at things. (*Chaim Perelman* 74)

When considering these three approaches to the structure of reality as perceived by an audience, Gross and Dearin point to Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's work to reason out just how powerful and useful examples, illustrations, and models can be in helping shape perception.

In *The New Rhetoric*, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca specifically assert that arguments of authority have three forms, either "as an example, [where] it makes generalization possible; as an illustration, [where] it provides support for an already established regularity; [or] as a model, [where] it encourages imitation" (350). Superman could be applied to of all three of these forms. As an example, Superman represents American's *arête* by providing a benchmark or, to borrow from Scott McCloud, "amplification through simplification," of what America stands for (*Understanding*

Comics 30). As an illustration, Superman helps provide visual support for the kinds of heroic deeds that audiences expect from those who assert themselves as hero, forming the stereotype or archetype of those actions. These actions then in turn provide the basis of Superman as a model, where his behavior, and to a degree his actions, others look to and are inspired by (such a specific example), and generating an emulation of that behavior in others.

For Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, the idea of the model falls within a realm of conduct, a way of conducting and behaving, because, within this realm, "behavior may serve, not only to establish or illustrate a general rule, but also to incite to an action inspired by it" (362). So, the idea is meant to represent and "illustrate" (according to this argument) American excellence or virtue. By his actions then, Superman is meant, as a model, to inspire similar behavior in others. This interpretation of him through his actions rather than his powers is a point where many misread or misinterpret Superman as a character. This misinterpretation comes from a failure to realize that it is his choice of actions and behavior toward others that demonstrates and gives examples of the values he represents. (It is these values that Superman really inspires emulated action.) Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca point out that the imitation of a model is not always "spontaneous" but can be accomplished by "One person" who wishes to "induce it [imitation] in another. Argument can be based either on the rule of justice or on a model that one will be asked to follow . . ." (363). Superman serves as a model intentionally designed to induce emulation and inspired action by his example in others. This can be seen and heard in a speech given in the movies when Superman (Christopher Reeve) listens to a

parting message from a hologram of his father, Jor-El (Marlon Brando). This message declares: “They [humanity] can be a great people, Kal-El [Superman’s birth name], if they wish to be. They only lack the light to show the way. For this reason above all, their capacity for good, I have sent them you . . . my only son” (*Superman: The Motion Picture*). There of course is a basic identification here with Western religious conceptions of a messiah, particularly Christian doctrine. Additionally, there exists here the idea that Superman was specifically sent to Earth in the hopes that he would become a model for others, to be a means of showing others a better way. The purpose of Superman then is intentional with imitation specifically encouraged.

When it comes to how Superman can function as a model, one needs to give consideration to the prestige that character has with his audience. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca write: “Persons or groups whose prestige confers added value on their acts may be used as models. The value of attaching to the person, which is previously recognized, is the premise from which will be drawn the conclusion encouraging some particular behavior” (363). One can think about Superman as “attaching” himself to the values of America. One only has to think of the often-conferred catch phrase or mantra of Superman, that he stands for “Truth, Justice, and the American Way” and see this. These are not necessarily highly concrete ideas at work here, but abstract ones. Perelman points out that “Universal values, insofar as they are abstract, such as justice, have most often the defect of being vague: their use, however, must assume that they be precise” (“How Do We Apply Reason to Values” 800). Values like justice may be abstract for individuals, but when given to being applied they must have the precision of a razor to

maintain adherence by society as a whole. Superman, applying his above mantra[9] can be seen to operate within an expression of classical Greek philosophy. As seen in the previous chapter, philosophers such as Socrates and Plato were particularly interested in ideas of truth and virtue. Superman readily promotes such philosophical concepts of truth and justice, and while doing this he presents himself as a model of an ideal "American way." Superman's role here is one that communicates abstract values through an American perception of universal values and by his actions serves as a concrete example and illustration of those values.

To expound upon this idea of the enforcement of values by a model, one must consider: how does one demonstrate adherence to values, even abstract ones? The answer comes again from Perelman who notes that "Values are appealed to in order to influence our choices of action," and it is by action that values "supply reasons for preferring one type of behavior to another, although not all would necessarily accept them as good reasons. Indeed, most values are particular in that they are accepted by a particular group" ("The New Rhetoric: A Theory of Practical Reasoning" 1394). This then means that Superman, as a model, espouses certain values that aim to promote action among a

[9] His most commonly associate mantra did not come from the comic books but from his radio show but was eventually amalgamated into the comic books years afterwards.

certain group, Americans, and are most appealing to that same group. Perelman restates this same idea in the article "Act and Person in Argument" by stating:

> All audiences accept values as well, whether abstract values, such as justice, or concrete values, such as one's country. These values are generally accepted only by a particular audience. Some of them are considered universal values, but it could doubtless be shown that they are so regarded only on condition that their content is not specified. ("Act and Person in Argument" 252)

Regardless of Superman's more specific and tailored American audience and values, his adherence to universal values of truth and justice provide wider avenues for him to present an emulatable model to a wider audience. If one takes into account the ways that both Superman and America (in its governmental structure) borrow from classical ideals, a wider acceptance of depicted values is possible among more than just Americans. America often sees itself as a model to the world in our modern era. Superman helps reinforce that idea for us and for others by turning the abstract, again, into a concrete symbol.

To argue that Superman is a model worthy of emulation, one must be aware that "A model shows what behavior to follow and serves as a guarantee for an adopted behavior… [and therefore] Close adherence to a recognized model guarantees the value of the behavior" (*The New Rhetoric* 364). So, in order for Superman to be a model, he must display the behavior of model. To do this he must embrace the values likely to be embraced by Americans. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca help reinforce the argument of Superman as model through their assertion that a "person to whom prestige attaches will

be described in terms of his role as model. In order that people may be more easily inspired by his conduct, emphasis will be laid on some particular characteristic or act of his, or even a particular slant may be given to his image or situation" (365). This applies to Superman in a number of ways. To begin with, his prestige in American culture makes him highly and immediately recognizable. His recognition and associated behavior grants him prestige and creates an image of the character as one who acts for good. To quote Glen Weldon, again, Superman "puts the needs of others over those of himself… [and] He never gives up" (3). These are admirable qualities in any person, but Superman, with his power and abilities, represents an act that in turn generates prestige that confers upon him the status of model.

When discussing the lines of argument involving examples and models, Alan Gross and Ray Dearin note that examples often show "that models held up for imitation need to be heedfully chosen or else when they are used to tip the scales of reality in one direction, counterexamples or *antimodels* can quickly redress the balance in the other" (72). This means that if one chooses poorly, a model can become a hindrance or even be used as antimodel. Superman, being a fictional character, has the luxury of being "crafted" and "shaped" in order to avoid this pitfall. Superman holds up as a model today because of his adaptability. In the 1930s he was social crusader. In the 1940s he was a super-patriot, telling people in *Action Comics* #58 (March 1943) "You Can Slap a Jap with War Bonds and Stamps!" In the 1950s he became a patriarch of a family and developed a quasi-chauvinistic manner. The 1980s witnessed depictions of Superman as champion of Reagan conservatism. To cast judgment on Superman from our present

cultural standing in the 21st century at these different periods of Superman's evolution without realizing his place as a mirror of the times in which he functioned would be anachronistic. Understanding his epideictic function allows for the audience to realize how Superman has been and remains a model of emulation and imitation.

The point made above is itself an attempt to explain the varying iterations of Superman over the decades by noting his epideictic nature and present tense. Eco sees such an idea in a negative, self-consuming light. However, as Superman is a model in this argument of American *arête*, and such *arête*, as seen in the literature review, is not static. By this realization one can argue that Eco's assertion about Superman as static is only half true. Yes, Superman functions within a static epideictic mode, but he, like *arête* itself, evolves to stay in line with American cultural perceptions of excellence. This assertion of Eco's is what Chaim Perelman referred to as arguing by use of a model, because, "Argumentation by model is intrinsically appealing to speakers and writers, for it enables them to highlight relevant aspects of the model–even when it is unique or ideal–and draw a suitable application from it" (*The Realm of Rhetoric* 72). By attempting in this dissertation to draw attention to Superman as a model, the argument here aims to highlight the qualities of Superman that portray excellence, as well as adaptability, to the shifting values of American culture available and possible in a fictional character.

As will be discussed further in Analysis Part A, there is a required performative aspect to models. In *The Realm of Rhetoric*, Chaim Perelman expands upon his work *The New Rhetoric* with L. Olbrechts-Tyteca and points out, in the case of the model and antimodel, that "not just any action is worth imitating; people imitate only those they

admire, who have authority or social prestige because of their competence, their functions, and their place in society" (110). To find this kind of model, in such a form, is rare. Perelman is asserting that to be a model requires a sense of greatness, which is something that is often fleeting or only bestowed after such a model has passed on. F. H. van Eemeren, R. Grootendorst, and T. Kruiger in their work, *The Study of Argumentation* state: "The model may consist of a historical figure or being represented as perfect" (242). To find such a model in existence in our world today without whitewashing the mistakes of historical figures is nearly impossible. Because of this, to find such a model, turning to fiction and to Superman makes sense.

Looking to fiction for a "perfect" model, one might wonder, why turn to a comic book superhero like Superman? An answer to that one is that Superman is more than just a comic book superhero. He is an American cultural icon. Yet, in our modern world today, where superhero popularity and acceptance in the mainstream is on the rise, often times no one bothers to ask the questions: What drives our current *zeitgeist* to admire, to praise, and to seek out superheroes who have often times existed at the fringes of our modern American culture? Grant Morrison speculates:

> Could it be that a culture starved of optimistic images of its own future has turned to the primary source in search of utopian role models? Could the superhero in his cape and skintight suit be the best current representation of something we all might become, if we allow ourselves to feel worthy of a tomorrow where our best qualities are strong enough to overcome the destructive impulse that seek to undo the human project? (*Supergods* xvii)

Superman, in particular, is able by both his cultural popularity and narrative actions to hold the kind of immediately recognizable prestige that even the current president of the United States, Barack Obama, early on was readily willing to identify with, and why not? ("US Elections") What better way for one to gain stature and prestige than to emulate or wish to imitate one of the greatest models of the 20th-century. Superman's ability as a model comes from his position as a fictional character but also because of his constancy, deep down in his essence, that comes from, as Glen Weldon points out, the fact that, "He puts the needs of others over those of himself… [and] He never gives up" (3). These are Superman's key virtues, the ones that have always been with him, and they are ones many Americans would look at and admire.

The aim of this Methodology has been an attempt to lay down just how important the function of the model is as a persuasive tool. By understanding just how important the model is for arguing from authority, for simply helping make an argument (along with example and illustration), this dissertation asserts that Superman fits this idea of the model. In particular, Superman, as a fictional character, (like other fictional heroes) is ideally suited to stand alongside other heroes of history, but, more importantly, alongside those of classical myth and literature. It is from these heroes that cultures draw their greatest inspiration of *arête*. From this *arête* they can aspire to heights of imagination and inspiration. Understanding this profound impact of the model in communicating arête provides a vital and powerful outlook, examination, and even reexamination of just how important conduct and behavior have not only on our own lives, but also on the lives of those who look up to us and imitate us.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS PART A

"The superman exists and he's American" – Alan Moore[10]

Introduction to Social Construction and Self-Fashioning

When looking at the idea of comic books, particularly of comic book superheroes, one needs to begin with Superman. To begin with Superman is natural because his appearance in 1938 was the beginning of what we know today as the comic book superhero genre. Superman's emergence was like a bolt of lightning out of a clear sky. In reality, however, Superman is really an amalgamation, a coming together of ideas that already existed and were floating around in early twentieth-century America. Like classical myths and social conventions, Superman represents an evolution, an emergence of ideas at the right time and in the right place. Another way of looking at it is to say that Superman was just as much "fashioned" as he was created.

One place to begin thinking about forging the identification and the amalgamation of Superman can come from Stephen Greenblatt's idea of "self-fashioning." Greenblatt asserts in his work *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* that the idea of "self-fashioning" was conceived to examine sixteenth-century England and the development of "both selves and a sense that they could be fashioned . . . a sense of personal order, a characteristic mode to address the world, a . . . deliberate shaping in the formation and expression of identity" (1). Self-fashioning, in other words, involves the social construction of identity,

[10] Moore, Alan and Dave Gibbons. *Watchmen*. New York: DC Comics, 1995. Print.

the perception of it by an audience and creation of a persona. Self-fashioning is an expression of rhetorical choice. This notion of identity also ties in closely with Kenneth Burke and his rhetorical expression of the value of identification being essential to persuasion. Burke asserts that "identification" is as important to persuasion/communication as any form of available means[11]. When it comes to Superman, one has to look at his creators, Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, and how they came to project their immigrant orientated and hopeful perception of the world through Superman. What they created, or rather fashioned, was identifiable to the Americans of the 1930s as an expressible symbol of hope and excellence in a time of hopelessness and lost faith.

This chapter will examine the idea of the shaping of the self and persona, the self-fashioning, as extrapolated through a fictional character: Superman. This examination will look specifically to the concerns of Superman's development as a model of American *arête*. The idea of fictional characters as conveyers of self-fashioning cultural models or personas is not so far removed from what Greenblatt examines when looking at sixteenth-century England. In fact, he states that expression of this idea of self-fashioning often emerged and found its clearest voice in literature–fiction. He names Marlow, More, Tyndale, and even "Wyatt and Shakespeare [who] express in literary works more powerful [ideas] than any produced by their contemporaries [in regards to] the historical pressure of an unresolved and continuing conflict [of identity]" (*Renaissance Self-Fashioning* 8). These writers were engaged rhetorically with their audience and they

[11] More on Kenneth Burke's theory of identification will be discussed in Analysis Part B.

wrote for a wide variety of audiences. Men like Wyatt and More wrote for court audiences, fellow writers, and intellectuals–humanists and the like. Tyndale's life work was to be the translation of the Bible into English. Finally, Shakespeare, considered now one of the greatest playwrights that ever was, wrote his plays for the everyday man. Today's modern culture has elevated and "fashioned" Shakespeare's works–primarily for their great literary references, rhetorical style, mythological references, and beauty of language–into some of the greatest works in the Western Canon. Yet, when Shakespeare wrote, according to Greenblatt, "[his] plays were always decisively out of the closet [not a closet drama]: they were, and are, in the world and of the world" (*Will in the World* 12)[12]. He wrote for all Englishmen from the lowly groundling to the high courts of Queen Elizabeth and later King James I. Shakespeare had to be able "to engage with the deepest desires and fears of his audience" (12). He had to speak to his audience, and the endurance of his plays to this day is the measure of his success in that endeavor.

Shakespeare's endurance to this day has relied, rhetorically, upon his ability to use language to create imagery and characters that continue to speak to us four centuries on, to engage our fears, desires, aspirations, short-comings, triumphs, and ideals. This same rhetorical ability to "speak to us" exists in Superman as well. Superman, as fashioned by his creators and those who came after them, has endured because he has evolved into the American ideal of potential. He has spoken and taken on the fears,

[12] Greenblatt points out that there was in Shakespeare's time "a type of drama . . . that did not show its face in public; known as closet dramas . . . were plays never meant to be performed or even printed. They were for silent reading in the privacy of small, preferably windowless rooms" (12). Closet Dramas, according to a Karl Sherlock of Grossmont College, "is a script intended to be read rather than produced, because it presents itself as a work of literature" and if performed as "A closet stage drama [contains] elements more of thought of as cinematic" with limited characters, scope, and simply enjoyable (Sherlock).

desires, and shortcomings of America while also championing (projecting) our aspirations, triumphs, and deeply held ideals. He is the rhetorical model and expression of American *arête* of that potential. Just has Shakespeare pulled together old plays and ideas and gave them new life, Superman is himself created from pulp heroes like Doc Samson and the Shadow, Biblical heroes like Solomon and Samson, and mythical heroes like Hercules–into a representation of an American ideal hero. This hero, like America, is the amalgamation of immigrant ideas woven together to form a greater whole.

For Superman, being American makes sense. According to Morrison, Superman represented an answer to the challenges that the world was facing in the late 1930s, among those, the rise of fascism, economic depression, and loss of faith in the future. Morrison notes: "With the arrival of the first real-life global supervillain [Adolf Hitler], the stage was set for the Free World's imaginative response" to combat this new menace. It was from the underdogs that the challenge was accepted by "two shy, bespectacled, and imaginative young science fiction fans from Cleveland . . . Jerry Siegel and Joseph [Joe] Shuster" (*Supergods* 4). It was from these two unlikely young men that one of the greatest superheroes ever created emerged. How American is that? It is very American.

Early in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, Greenblatt establishes ten "governing conditions common to most instances of self-fashioning–whether of the authors themselves or their characters" (8-9). These governing conditions form the core of Greenblatt's theory. With regards to Superman, this argument will attempt primarily to focus on the character of Superman as it was molded and created by a series of writers, artists, and editors (including his initial creators, Siegel and Shuster) and transformed

over the decades to address changes in culture, censorship, and demographics. For Greenblatt, the idea of self-fashioning requires the presence of those "governing conditions" and several of them specifically fit well with an examination of Superman. For instance, "2. Self-fashioning . . . involves submission to an absolute power or authority situated at least partially outside the self–God, a sacred book, an institution such as church, court, colonial or military administration" (*Renaissance Self-Fashioning* 9). In other words, there has to be an acknowledgment or adherence to some kind of higher authority or calling. For Superman, as Glen Weldon would argue, this could be seen in Superman's "motivation," to put "the needs of others" above all else. This motivation could be seen as a kind of adherence to a higher moral code.

Superman's adherence to his own moral code, in turn, offers a rhetorical point of persuasion between him and his audience. Superman's position as a model in fact relies on audience identification with him as an acceptable model as well as his ability to maintain that identification by keeping the adherence of his audience to his code of conduct. Chaim Perelman points out that "The strength of an argument depends upon the adherence of the listeners to the premises of the argumentation [and] how close or distant [the] relationship which they have with the defended thesis" (*The Realm of Rhetoric* 140). Adherence depends then quite heavily on the audience and thereby influences the effectiveness of an argument. For Superman, then, his adherence stems from the mirroring of his own personal code with that of his audience. This rhetorical identification is what helps make him a model.

Though this idea of a "moral code" can be ambiguous in some respects, it ends up resembling a kind of secular version of religious devotion or faith. Grant Morrison, speaking of superheroes (Superman being archetype), notes: "In a secular, scientific rational culture lacking in any convincing spiritual leadership, superhero stories speak loudly and boldly to our greatest fears, deepest longings, and highest aspirations" (*Supergods* xvii). Morrison sees superheroes and Superman as an answer to our problems. Superman possesses a strong sense of optimism, holding it up as a bulwark to the cynicism of the world. There is an irony in this, because Superman's emergence, as will be noted below, was an optimistic response to the cynicism and pessimism of America in 1938.

Greenblatt continuing with the governing principles, writes that "3. Self-fashioning is achieved in relation to something perceived as alien, strange, or hostile. This [is the] threatening Other [that] must be discovered or invented in order to be attacked and destroyed" (*Renaissance Self-Fashioning* 9). In order for one to fashion a public persona one must offset their identity against some kind of "Other." For Superman, this could be argued as his struggle against injustice, oppression, or other abstract concepts as well as supervillains (who often embody those abstract concepts). Superman is also an "Other" because of his "immigrant" status.

Greenblatt continues in his conditions, noting: "5. One man's authority is another man's alien . . . 6. When one authority or alien is destroyed, another takes its place . . . 7. There is always more than one authority and more than one alien in existence at a given time" (9). Greenblatt recognizes multiple perspectives (condition 5), changes in what

perception is the dominant one (condition 6), and that there are multiple perspectives in existence within a given time and place (condition 7). One can connect this to the formation of the idea of Superman, his creation, and his narrative in several ways.

Looking at condition 5, one can, and this chapter will attempt to examine this idea that there are multiple perspectives. With regards to Superman, there is the immediate recognition that Superman stands apart from the common man. This is implied, to start, in his name. He is an alien both in the fact that he is from another world but also because his powers and identity set him apart from humanity. Early Superman stories, when Siegel and Shuster (his creators) offered up their character as a social crusader, contain many examples of Superman challenging or coming into conflict with the perceived cultural and social authority. Under the Comic Code Authority (CCA)[13] established after the Senate hearings and attacks by Fredric Wertham (to be discussed later in this chapter), Superman would have to give up his challenge to authority. Censorship of the comic book medium/genre forced Superman to change, to evolve and conform.

Condition 6 can be summed up as the idea that the dominant perspective can and does change. Superman in 1950s and 60s changed. He went from being the alien outsider to becoming part of the authority. Superman left behind his role as social crusader and became a champion, under the CCA, of the status quo. This was part of a survival move,

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[13] Comic Code Authority (CCA) was established by the comic book industry following the Senate sub-committee hearings on Juvenile Delinquency of 1954 as a way of preserving the industry through self-imposed censorship.

one that was being made by many comic book characters of the era. Superman changed, because, as Larry Tye notes, he

> had an image problem. During World War II, the Nazis had denounced him for being a pawn of the Jews and poisoning the minds of America's youth. In the Cold War that followed, the Jewish psychiatrist [Fredric Wertham] was accusing him of being a Nazi out to corrupt the adolescents of America. (127)

Culture shifted, and in order for the character of Superman to survive, he had to find a way to "refashion" himself–this will be discussed further in this chapter. All of these changes are themselves rhetorical as well as cultural moves to reposition Superman in the *zeitgeist* of the time. Additionally, Superman by the 1950s represented a major moneymaking, multi-media commodity. The rhetorical moves of self-fashioning made by Superman's handlers to preserve him were as much attempts to apply Aristotle's definition of rhetoric[14] as moves to continue Superman's identification with American culture and *arête*.

Ultimately, Greenblatt "sums up" his conditions regarding self-fashioning as occurring "at the point of encounter between an authority and an alien, that what is produced in this encounter partakes of both the authority and the alien that is marked for attack, and hence that any achieved identity always contains within itself the signs of its own subversion or loss" (9). In other words, self-fashioning is a point of conflict, a rhetorical decision being required to navigate it. What will be argued in this chapter is that Superman, as a form of American *arête* and identifiable with American culture and

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[14] According to Aristotle, in *The Rhetoric*, "Rhetoric may be defined as the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion" (24).

therefore rhetorically persuasive as a model because of it, demonstrates as a fictional character an ability to adapt and self-fashion to fit in with the cultural shifts that developed after his creation in 1938. This ability to adapt himself, fostered by a need to survive, was a response to the changing culture of America following WWII. The purpose of this chapter will specifically attempt to look at Superman's emergence as a rhetorical model (his fashioning into a new kind of "challenge" to a perceived inept authority) and how, under cultural pressures, the idea of Superman's place and identification as an American exemplar developed as America evolved and changed after WWII and into the modern era.

Coming Down from Olympus: Superheroes as Modern Myths

In the article "Self-Fashioning in Society and Solitude," Nannerl Keohane asserts that one can, according to the background and ideas of self-fashioning, "think about society not as a kind of zoo or curiosity shop where you can pick up a persona that suits you, but as a source of inspirational exemplars, diverse possible ways of shaping yourself, fascinating models" (7). This notion of self-fashioning presented here is, rhetorically, the idea and choice behind the conception of every comic book superhero. They choose to take on a secret identity, a persona, to create "inspirational" models that stand up to injustice. This is what Superman did. To understand how the idea of self-fashioning in Superman works requires as an examination of the comic book medium or genre (depending on how one feels about it) that Superman helped spawn. Often with a medium such as superhero comic books, one has to start with the misconceptions first.

Superhero comic books often suffer from the misconception or stereotype that their material is fit only for children. People often assume that comic books, particularly superhero comic books, are made up of hyper-realized masculine heroes, exaggerated female heroines and fatales who have breasts perfectly formed and bigger than average, and stories filled with hyperbole and onomatopoeia, such as: POW, BOOM, and WHAP! This is not completely false, but nor is it always true. One has to remember that one is dealing with stories of fantastic and unreal adventures, sometimes comical story plots, and endings that defy the imagination at times. These are stereotypes for a reason, because they happened and continue to transpire in comic books today. However, this is not all that comic books and comic book superheroes are. Superheroes are not static creations. Stories and characters evolve. Grant Morrison, when discussing his entrance into U.S. comics (in the 1980s), notes that he came upon the scene when the "stories [were getting] smarter, artwork became more sophisticated, and the superhero began a new lease on life in books that were philosophical, postmodern, and wildly ambitious" (*Supergods* xvi). To know that comic books and comic book superheroes are ever evolving is the first step in understanding why comic books took root in 1938 American society. Superhero comic books emerged at a time and place where they were most needed. Superheroes also represented an evolution of their own, an evolution of the mythical narrative that has remained with humanity since its earliest days.

Richard Reynolds is quick, as are many who seriously study and look at comic book superheroes, to point out that the superhero is a modern myth (*Superheroes: A Modern Mythology* 7-8). They are a continuation of the myths of the ancient past born

again today. Just as comic books are evolving, comic book superheroes are an evolution of the classical heroes of ancient tales. In *The Myth of the Superhero*, Marco Arnaudo asserts that the first "commonality" between classic myths and superhero stories "lies in the strength and extraordinary abilities that superheroes and mythological heroes share. On the narrative level, there is a similar strong focus on conflict [and] thematic archetypes such as the voyage or the test" (12). Arnaudo's comparisons of the superhero to the classical notions of the hero are not isolated. Reynolds, attempting to define the superhero as its own genre, specifically uses Superman, the first modern superhero, as a kind of template. He begins by making clear connections between Superman's story and Joseph Campbell's characteristics of the mythical hero (*Superheroes: A Modern Mythology* 12-6). Reynolds, and others, asserts that if one wishes to understand how the modern myths of superheroes truly emerged, one needs to look at the prototype for that modern emergence of the evolution: Superman. Superman is recognized as the standard, the point of origin for the modern explosion of the comic book superhero. One might make the assumption, then, that he was some kind of out-of-the-blue phenomenon of originality. However, as hinted at earlier, the reality is that he is not.

Looking more closely at Campbell's formula, Arnaudo continues by pointing out that "Considering this formula, the similarities between the superhero and genre and classical myth are truly remarkable–and, most important, more remarkable than they are between myth and any other popular contemporary genre" (13). Arnaudo is asserting here that superheroes have a stronger connection to myths and mythology than any other form (genre) or type of heroic narrative. In fact, it is specifically when a character makes the

choice to become a superhero that one undertakes a kind of journey. This decision is itself a form of self-fashioning, a choice to embrace, as Keohane notes (quoted earlier): a persona. Focusing on Superman, where Arnaudo points out that "Just like the hero myth, after temporarily leaving behind the community familiar to the reader and the other characters, the modern superhero returns, mission accomplished, his common identity (Clark Kent, Peter Parker) restored, and the community rewarded with greater security" (12). In other words, Superman, the model of the modern superhero fits the basic layout of Joseph Campbell's idea of the heroes' journey (what Campbell refers to as the monomyth) with its initiation, separation, and return.

Before moving on, it is worth noting that John Lawrence and Robert Jewett, in their work *The Myth of the American Superhero*, point out the existence of an American monomyth[15] that deviates from Campbell's. Their notion focuses on the shortfall that comes at the end when the hero, in a sense, leaves (think Clint Eastwood Westerns or Rambo) and does not return to the community "to bestow boons on his fellow man" (30).

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[15] Joseph Campbell defines the monomyth, at its nucleus, as "The standard path of the mythological adventure the hero" undertakes. This adventure or journey is itself "a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: *separation–initiation–return*" and it follows that "*A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with power to bestow boons on his fellow man*" (*The Hero With A Thousand Faces* 30). According to Lawrence and Jewett, "Whereas the classical monomyth seemed to reflect rites of initiation, the American monomyth derives from tales of redemption" (*The Myth of the American Superhero* 6). This represents then a secularized version of the classical monomyth ideal. The basic formula of the American monomyth follows the formula that "A community in harmonious paradise is threatened by evil; normal institutions fail to contend with this threat; a selfless superhero emerges [to] carry out the redemptive task; aided by fate" and then ultimately leaves (6). The key division is the role of the hero in the community. The classical monomyth centers upon aiding the community as the goal, while the American monomyth lacks this completely.

Instead, Lawrence and Jewett refer to an American version of the hero cycle. They assert that:

> Whereas the classical monomyth seemed to reflect rites of initiation, the American monomyth derives from tales of redemption. It secularizes the Judeo-Christian dramas of community redemption that have arisen on American soil, combining elements of the selfless servant who impassively gives his life for others and the zealous crusader who destroys evil" (6).

What is interesting, and Lawrence and Jewett note this, is that the "American monomyth" ultimately focuses on personal redemption and the actions of a lone, crusader hero aimed at destroying evil. This version of the monomyth tends to leave behind the initiation, feminine, and community elements found in the classic, Campbellian monomyth. Though one could see Superman, particularly early in his narrative, fitting into this conception of the "American monomyth," to simply label him in that way, as Lawrence and Jewett do, fails to take into account what Superman actually does. He also does not abandon the community he saves as found in the American monomyth. Instead, he stays and lives among them (as his alter-ego Clark Kent). Over his narrative history he has also recruited friends and allies to assist him. Though he often appears to go it alone, Superman needs his allies. As a fictional character, Superman is acting in a rhetorical manner to appeal to his audience. As we shall see, as that audience evolved, so did Superman's role within both a cultural and mythical framework as a rhetorical model.

Taking the idea that Superman represents, as a superhero, a modern mythological figure (as Arnaudo asserts), one is dealing with the actual prototype of all superheroes

that have emerged since 1938. These superheroes, on different levels, embody, continue, and extend the classical myths and stories by retelling and reinventing them in the modern context. Moving, briefly, beyond Superman, one can find actual mythical heroes, such as Marvel Comics' Thor, as well as archetypal analogues of other classical gods, like Batman as Hades (as Grant Morrison asserts, in tangent, in *Supergods* 15-26), or Captain Marvel's power word: SHAZAM, which is an acronym for the wisdom of Solomon, the strength of Hercules, the stamina of Atlas, the power of Zeus, courage of Achilles, and the speed of Mercury (Hermes) (33).

Captain Marvel was himself an analogue (one of many) of Superman that emerged in the years after 1938. Superman, himself, according to Morrison, "was Apollo, the sun god, the unbeatable supreme self, the personal greatness of which we all know we're capable. He was the righteous inner authority and lover of justice that blazed behind the starched-shirt front of hierarchical conformity" (15). Morrison and others, among them Sharon Parker, Richard Reynolds, Marco Arnaudo, assert that modern comic book superheroes, beginning with Superman, represent a modern re-accentuation of classical mythological heroes and myths. In particular, Sharon Parker goes so far as to point out that Superman and other superheroes represent a positive evolution from the deities of the ancient world. She notes that though "The antics and escapades of the Greek and Roman deities are superficially similar to superheroes–except that superheroes act benevolently on behalf of society . . . Superheroes are comforting in comparison because of their predictability" (*Superheroes and Superegos* 88-9). She is pointing to their (superheroes') constancy as something comforting–the idea that they will always be

there for us. It is then that fact, the constancy, of the comic book superhero that provides them with ability in the "real" world of providing a sense of stability in chaotic world. Superheroes can serve, like the stories of all heroes throughout human history, as reassurance and reinforcement of the ideas that good can and does prevail over evil. They are the *arête* of humanity. Considering then the era that gave birth to Superman, this kind of reassurance was what the world, and particularly America, needed.

Myths of Creation and Myths of Amalgamation

To begin with any myth of the creation, particularly with Superman, one must take into account two major factors that helped determine Superman's fashioning. These factors generated Superman's initial identification for his audience, primarily, in the first, in contrast to the external reality faced by his audience, and secondarily in comparison to other fictional characters that pre-dated his creation. The first, external factor was the Great Depression. The second internal factor derived from other mythical figures of the past, pulp characters, and other comic strip characters of the early twentieth century that made up the "cloth" of which Superman was created. From a rhetorical standpoint, one must keep in mind that what is at stake, particularly with the external factor of the Great Depression, is an understanding of how the audience was going to respond to Superman's emergence. This reception and perceived experiences that went in to his creation by Siegel and Shuster during the 1930s helped determine the kind of character (as a social avenger, outside traditional law and order) or persona Superman first dawned. Even more so, the audience perception or identification with the character developed from both the already established characters and traits that Superman "borrowed" from but also by the

way the character tapped into long established mythic and folk characteristics accepted within American culture.

One needs to take into account the first, external factor, the Great Depression in how it helped prepare the ground for Superman's emergence and initial cultural success. The Great Depression was, in America and the world at large, a tragic and unique event of the modern era. Superman came to life when America was in the midst of economic and social turmoil. According Thomas Andrae's article "From Menace to Messiah," "The Great Depression raised questions not only about the ethics of capitalists but about the viability and legitimacy of capitalism itself" (124). This time period opened up the floodgates of doubt in America. People were questioning everything they had taken for granted. Though much has been discussed about this period, there appears to be little "known about the matrix of cultural forces that helped contain potentially oppositional and disruptive elements [that helped bring about the] collapse [of the] Horatio Alger ethos of individual success to the collectivist ethic of the 'totally administered society' of the corporate welfare state" (124). In other words, it is hard to pinpoint what were the exact "cultural forces" that brought down the old order of ideas of perpetual wealth and "taken for granted" ability of the individual to rise above his circumstances to achieve greatness. The Great Depression smashed this and other myths. It was an event that changed the landscape of America and the world. Barry Eichengreen, in his book *Golden Fetters* assert that ". . . the great economic catastrophe of modern times . . . the Great Depression was so severe precisely because so many countries were affected simultaneously. No national economy was immune. All suffered financial difficulties and

many experienced debilitating financial crises" (3). What was really destroyed by the Great Depression was the American identification with systems such as the banks and governments. Institutions and the identification with them created a crack through which something new could emerge–something that could unite Americans again in their faith.

According to Andrae, that uniting factor was Superman. Superman's popularity, as Andrae recognizes, relies on the fact that Superman has been canonized "as an archetypical representative of the nation's highest ideals, the defender of 'truth, justice, and the American way'" (124). Superman, according to Andrae, is American *arête* incarnate. However, despite this accepted nature of Superman, Andrae notes that many often overlook the fact that he had to work to gain and then maintain this position. In fact, considering the criticisms of Wertham and the era of Superman's emergence, the idea behind the Superman theme must confront its own-mirrored distortions. Andrae points out "The idea of the superman was in the air during the early thirties, oppressively evident in the Nazis' distorted use of the Nietzschean concept of the *Ubermensch* to glorify Aryan racial superiority and justify their program of totalitarian domination" (125). This impression came in great part from the science fiction theme that Superman emerged from. However, when Superman broke onto the scene in 1938, his appearance was "an innovative break with science fiction tradition . . . by being neither alienated from society nor a misanthropic, power-obsessed menace but a truly messianic figure" (125). Instead, Superman was the champion of the downtrodden masses. He helped those in need rather than repressing them.

Not only was Superman a product of his times, of the wider world events going on around him, but he also embodied and mirrored very specific frustrations of individuals of the time. Andrae, again, give voice to this idea, noting that

> The bitterness and frustration caused by the Depression and the desire to gain power and mastery over a chaotic economic situation provided the focus for the superman's character . . . Superman stories like Siegel's revealed both the attraction and disillusionment Americans felt toward the success myth during the Depression . . . (127)

Andrae is again highlighting just how great the level of frustration was during the Great Depression. For decades many Americans had been fed a Puritanical message that hard work would be richly rewarded and now they had woken up to discover it was a lie, a myth dispelled. Siegel and Shuster's early Superman stories tapped into this disillusionment with the old myth by helping to craft a new one in its place. This was the myth of social avenger and crusader who did not simply promise to look out for the "little man" but actually did so. It helped foster a powerful and strong identification in the audience with this self-fashioned hero. This was a hero looking out for everyone, not simply the rich "fat cats," and he demonstrated this in his actions and deeds.

In many ways, the new myth that Superman helped promote was simply a new version or take on the old myth. Superman stories also "helped keep alive America's fantasies of upward mobility by showing that success was still possible, but only by going outside the law and established institutional channels" (Andrae 127). This was the departure point between the old myth of upward mobility and the new one. Siegel and

Shuster provided a frustrated public with the image of a hero who was outside the establishment (for now), “who is wanted by the police, who freely resorts to violence and threats of violence to extort information or confessions from suspects . . .” (130). He is all of these things, and yet, at his core he retains one central and unique quality not found in similar and preceding characters: he is “selflessly dedicated to the public good” (130). Superman was the Jack Bauer of the popular television show *24* before there ever was a Jack Bauer. This was the promise of Superman; he worked for the common man, the public good, at all times. This was what helped foster his popularity and his strong identification with those who were and had been suffering most throughout the Great Depression.

According to Henry Jenkins, who recounts the evolution of superhero comics, “The superhero comic, in fact, undergoes this process of recreation not once but multiple times: first, in the early Golden Age, when the superhero genre takes shape from elements borrowed from pulp magazines and second, in the early Silver age, when superhero comics re-emerge from the generic soup which characterized comic production in the post-war era (“Just Men in Tights? [Part 2]”)[16]. Looking to the Golden Age, a now slightly outdated term in comic book scholarship but covering 1938 to roughly 1954, one notes the idea of borrowing. Superman, the progenitor of the modern superhero is himself a borrower.

[16] Of course, Jenkins is ultimately looking to argue that superheroes, such as Superman and others, derive from and operate within multiple genres. To try and pin them down to just one, as Richard Reynolds does attempt, really is not possible.

Moving past the external factor of Superman's emergence, and to continue to understand his identification, one needs to understand from what material Siegel and Shuster fashioned their character. Arnaudo points out that Superman was the amalgamation in many ways of other "Avenging 'Lone Wolf' heroes [who] abounded in [the] popular narrative of the 1930s and 40s on both sides of the Atlantic: from Doc Savage to Philip Marlow, Rick Blaine in *Casablanca* to Captain Midnight of the radio serials" (18). This kind of amalgamation of recognizable characters is important to note with regards to Superman, not only as an identifiable character, but also as part of a kind of mythic narrative. Superman's ability to convey an American *arête* and represent an identifiable rhetorical model is a debt to those other heroes who came before him. As Arnaudo writes, Superman was the fashioning together of these other heroic and fictional characters into "A new kind of popular hero . . . the self-reliant individualist who stands aloof from any of the humdrum concerns of society, yet is able to operate according to his own code of honour, to take on the world on his own terms, and win" (18)**.** The hero that Siegel and Shuster created, molded, was not a member of the establishment or any existing authority, but rather was like the cowboys of Western movies who fought by their own "code" to help those in need.

In addition to the "lone wolf" characters mentioned by Arnaudo, Lawrence and Jewett make the argument that Superman's most complete "pre-creation" model came from "Philip Wylie's novel *Gladiator*, written in 1930, which depicts the prodigy son of scientist parents who proves invulnerable to machine-gun bullets. It was this figure who provided the model for Siegel and Shuster's Superman" (*The Myth of the American*

Superhero 36). This was a story that very closely mirrored the story of Superman. Additionally, looking again at Doc Savage, one can find the idea of an artic retreat (Superman's Fortress of Solitude) as just another element Siegel and Shuster appropriated for their new hero. "The Pulps," slang for pulp magazines must be noted for its influence on Siegel and Schuster's Superman as well. The popularity of Pulp magazines[17], along with many of their characters, were precursors to the comic books and comic book superheroes. Les Daniels, quoting an interview with Jerry Siegel notes: "Joe and I enjoyed the pulp magazines and we two wanted to come up with some sort of heroic character" (*Superman: The Complete History* 12). "The Pulps" provided Siegel and Shuster with the building blocks that eventually became Superman. Daniels highlights that "Pulp protagonists of note included a dark avenger called the Shadow and a scientific mastermind called Doc Savage; even the comic strip favorites Tarzan and Buck Rogers had first appeared in prose form in the rough paper pages of the pulps" (12-3). The influences of these superhero precursors provided the threads that Siegel and Shuster eventually pulled and sewed together to make Superman. Additionally, the pulp magazines were themselves a precursor to the comic books that helped bring Superman to life. Characters like Doc Savage, The Shadow, Tarzan, and Buck Rogers were characters of the time that Jerry Siegel read and served to heavily influence his creative ideas that lead to Superman.

[17] According to Les Daniels, the term "pulps" was "originally applied to magazines printed on cheap, coarse paper made from wood pulp" and that the format "really came into its own during the decades between World War I and World War II" (13). The stories inside contained colorful characters and, cheap, often had "Lurid, full-color drawings on the covers [that] made the magazines memorable" (13). The titles of these cheap and exciting materials focused on action stories and represented the birthplace of characters such as Doc Savage, Tarzan, Buck Rogers, and the Shadow who would all have a place in influencing the creation of Superman (13).

Larry Tye, in his work *Superman: The High-Flying History of America's Most Enduring Hero* gives perhaps one the most comprehensive and encompassing descriptions of the "DNA" of Superman. Tye writes: "Superman may have been a product of the 1930s and Jerry Siegel's teenage imagination, but his DNA traces back twenty-five hundred years to the age of the Tanakh, the Hebrew Bible" (7). One should recall that Superman and his creators were Jewish. Siegel may have borrowed ideas, some perhaps subconsciously, that were interlinked with his cultural heritage[18]. Tye continues by drawing a direct parallel between Superman and "the Book of Judges [and] Samson" as a specific example of his Hebraic origins (7). This connection with Samson, this identification, emerges in another form in Kenneth Burke's example of identification between author (John Milton) and his work (*Samson Agonisties*) in his *Rhetoric of Motives*[19]. What Samson comes to represent, then, is the early model, as Tye asserts that Siegel viewed it, of how masterfully "the Hebrews were at fashioning powerful and noble warriors, [but noting that] no one outdid the Greeks [in this department because] The very word 'hero' comes from the Greek *heros*, meaning 'brave' and 'self-sacrificing'" (7). What one can take from these influences are a tradition, a history of "heroes" and the "essence" of a hero–noble, powerful, brave, and self-sacrificing–that Superman was and

[18] More on Superman's "Jewish" origins can be found works such as Harry Brod's *Superman is Jewish?: How Comic Book Superheroes Came to Serve Truth, Justice, and the Jewish-American Way* and Arie Kaplan's *From Krakow to Krypton: Jews and Comic Books* just to name a few.
[19] This idea of Burke, Milton, and Identification will be viewed in more detail in the opening of Analysis Part B.

is the inheritor of such a tradition or legacy. Tye continues this tracing of Superman's classical past by noting other "heroes" such as:

> Perseus, famous for slaying monsters from the sea and land. There was Jason, who led the heroic Argonauts on a quest for the golden fleece . . . Caeneus, who was invulnerable to swords, spears, or any weapon known in his day; and Hermes, speediest and cagiest of the gods [as well as] The ultimate exemplar of the Greek ideal of heroism . . . Herakles, the defender against evil and tamer of beasts . . . Like Superman, Herakles signaled his special powers in infancy [and] devoted his days to recuing ladies in distress, battling a shifting cast of villains, and searing a place in the public imagination as an embodiment of virtue. (7)

Tye's classical conceptions and relations of Superman conclude by noting the idea of the "embodiment of virtue," which is telling and important to understanding Superman. As the archetypal template of the modern superhero, Superman is the model for the kind of behavior other modern heroes are defined against. To be a hero or superhero in the modern age is to be measured up against Superman. Tye goes further in his history, noting the influences of the early science fiction of Voltaire and his tale of "Micromegas" and Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, as well as Friedrich Nietzsche's theory of the "*Ubermensch*" upon the creation of Superman as well (7-8).

When considering whether a modern superhero "measures up," one is measuring that superhero against Superman. Superman is the template for the modern superhero, but what about the age that gave birth to Superman? How did he measure up against as a hero in his own times? As noted earlier, Superman was also part a product of his time, the

1930s. Superman's creation then was a response to the Great Depression. In this response, Siegel and Shuster were rhetorically fashioning a character that would speak to the downtrodden American populace and show them a new ray of hope by giving them a new myth to embrace. To do this they turned to contemporary and classical heroes to amalgamate and reinforce the power of their superhero creation in order to provide that "hope" and help "shape" the new American myth.

Superman: The Early Narratives of the Golden Age

Robin Rosenberg, writing for the *Smithsonian Magazine*, recounts that when the recent *Man of Steel* movie came out, critics such as Ada Markovitz of *Entertainment Weekly* appeared cynical about the need to tell a superhero origin story (again). Markovitz feels that the reason for origin stories in superhero movies serves to promote the identification that the superhero transforms from "being Just Like US" to something more ("The Psychology Behind Superhero Origin Stories"). However, Rosenberg disagrees with this perception or reasoning. Being a clinical psychologist, she asserts that "origin stories show us [society and audience] not how to become super but how to be *heroes*, choosing altruism over the pursuit of wealth and power" ("The Psychology . . ."). Rosenberg is in fact pointing out that critics, like Markovitz, are missing the point.

Larry Tye, in the opening of his book *Superman: The High-Flying History of America's Most Enduring Hero* writes: "Superman has evolved more the fruit fly [from] the crime fighter we needed to take on Al Capone [in the 1930s, to defending] the home front [in WWII, to] the Cold War [when] he stood taller than ever for his adopted country" (*xiv*). Superman's story is and has been one of evolution, change, with the

American culture he came and continues to stand for. Superman exists in a symbiotic relationship to America. Because, as Tye continues and asserts: "Each generation [gets] the Superman it need[s] and deserve[s]. Each change offer[s] a Rorschach test of that time and its dreams [and throughout] Superman, [as] always [remains] a beacon of light [as well as] a work in progress" (*xiv*). In order then to begin to see Superman as a "beacon of light," we must examine his earliest appearances in print.

As noted earlier, the Superman who appeared in 1938 was not a member of the establishment. In fact, in early Superman stories, he was "clearly the champion of the underdog, displaying a sense of class consciousness virtually absent from later comic book stories" (Andrae 130). Superman was the hero of those who had been hit the worst by the Great Depression. This Superman was also "outside" the law, and this was evident from his very first story.

In *Action Comics* #1, Superman made his first appearance, and it was a first appearance that was engaging, provocative, and ambiguous. The very cover of *Action Comics* #1 set the tone for the ambiguity of the story. The story within gave a brief, one page explanation of "where" Superman comes from and his powers, along with a scientific explanation of his powers, before launching right into what appears to be the middle of a narrative already in progress (Siegel and Shuster 4-5). With almost no real context or set up, the audience witnesses Superman leaping out of the sky with a woman under his arm. It's not a woman he's rescued from some nefarious crime, but, rather, someone who is perhaps a criminal. Over the next 3 pages, after Superman deposits the woman on the lawn, declaring as he dashes away, "Make yourself comfortable! I haven't

the time to attend to it" (6). This scene on page 3 is immediately followed by the depiction of Superman forcing his way into the governor's mansion. Inside, he manhandles the butler, breaks down a steal door, harmlessly absorbs a point-blank gunshot, and provides evidence that saves a woman from being executed in the electric chair (5-7)[20]. Only four pages into the story, one can imagine some young kid being completely engrossed in what they have just read and viewed. Still, we (the audience) really are not one hundred percent sure who this "Superman" figure really is yet.

On page 7 and continuing to page 8, the audience comes to meet Superman at his "day job" and his alter ego Clark Kent. Kent is a reporter, making him the ideal person to stay on top of troubled situations. Later on page 8, he uses his connection to beat the cops to the scene of domestic violence, throwing the wife-beating husband into a wall, having a knife broken on his chest, and, after the wife-beating husband faints from shock, quickly changing back into Clark Kent in time for the cops to arrive. On page 9 we see that though Superman is confident and determined, Clark Kent, is shy, stammering, and not too keen with the ladies. This is revealed when he asks fellow reporter Lois Lane out on a date. Lois, annoyed, replies: "I suppose I'll give you a break . . . for a change" (9). This exchange, preceded by Clark Kent's stammering attempt to ask her out, provides the audience with a contrasting picture of Clark Kent and Superman as personas. While Clark Kent appears to be a good reporter, he is not very assertive or confident, or perceived as

[20] Just to add to the potent atmosphere of a "close call" Siegel and Shuster include a depiction of a clock approaching midnight on page 7 during Superman's attempt to convince the governor to call off the execution.

even being very masculine. In contrast, Superman is the opposite: assertive, confident, and the pinnacle of masculinity.

This distinction, the contrast, between Clark Kent and Superman personas is further revealed on pages 8-10. Here, while on their date, Clark and Lois are confronted by gangsters while out at a club. When one attempts to take Lois from Clark, it is Lois who stands up for herself and disgusted with Clark's "whim-like" behavior in the altercation leaves via a taxi. Of course, the gangsters do not let it go; they run down the taxi, kidnap Lois, and it is only via Superman's intervention that Lois is saved (12). Page 12 also finally brings the audience into the full understanding of the context behind the cover page as well. Now the audience can clearly see why Superman was slamming a car into a rock as depicted on the cover. The audience can now assume with some certainty that the figure of Superman is in fact a hero because of his actions and the context. More than that, this is a superhero, obviously imbued with superpowers such as invulnerability, strength, speed, and the ability to leap long distances.

Rhetorically, this Superman demonstrated a self-fashioning not only that of a strong man, but one who lived by his own creed of justice. This form of justice, the choice Siegel and Shuster make in the crafting of the stories, shows a figure who not only is fantastical in his origins and abilities, but even more so in his code of behavior. Superman is a figure who does not ignore the crime, injustice, or even corruption that some felt was rampant in the era. Instead, this Superman represents a parallel authority, one that does not necessarily attempt to challenge the established authority itself, but does offer up a better model of what the authority (government, police, etc.) should be doing.

Action Comics #2 picks up right where *Action Comics* #1 left off. At the end of issue #1 Superman witnesses a weapons lobbyist bribing a U.S. Senator. Superman, acting outside the law, kidnaps the lobbyist, terrorizes him, and gets him to confess what he is up to (18). Superman eventually then kidnaps the Senator himself and drops him into the "war zone" of a foreign country he has been helping to providing weapons. Superman forces the corrupt politician to witness the horrors he is helping to cause before eventually saving Lois (who is there on assignment), again, and then kidnapping both opposing generals and forcing them to come to a peace accord. Throughout these initial narratives Superman is the primary persona on display. His persona is one that challenges the authority of the establishment that is depicted as doing nothing or too little, too late to make right the wrongs of the world. Superman by turn comes along and speeds up the process. Considering the attitudes of America in the Great Depression and cynicisms towards government, this kind of behavior and action must have been very appealing.

To analyze *Action Comics* #2 rhetorically, one is witnessing a streamlined and continual evolution or development of Superman's creed or code of conduct. This was in part because the initial stories of Superman's adventures were created for publication as syndicated strips, and only after they were accepted for publication were they altered to fit the comic book format (Tye 29; Daniels 22-3). *Action Comics* #2 also helped push Superman into the realm of becoming a model for the whole world. Superman behaved the way that his creators wanted to see America behave with regards to helping the world. One only has to again look at the issue of *Look Magazine* #7 entitled "How Superman Would End the War" to see this idea play out. In the issue, Superman is depicted

singlehandedly ending the war by apprehending Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin. He then takes both men, as recounted by Grant Morrison, “to the League of Nations headquarters in Geneva [where both are pronounced] GUILTY OF MODERN HSITORY’S GREATEST CRIME – UNPROVOKED AGRESSION AGAINST DEFENSELESS COUNTRIES” (*Supergods* 37). This depiction was itself the beginning of Superman’s own evolution into patriotic defender of America and American values.

Superman’s stories were very appealing to his audiences, which continued to grow during the 1930s and 40s. When Superman burst onto the scene, Reynolds quickly points out that he and his “stories were a resounding success [and] The superhero market boomed. By 1942, several dozen superhero titles were on the American market forming the largest share of the 150-odd individual comic-book titles on sale” (*Superheroes: A Modern Mythology* 17). Siegel and Shuster stories tended to depict Superman acting as social crusader. This self-fashioned social crusader had the flair to appeal to the average kid audience as well. Tye makes note that “Jerry’s stories [similar to Joe’s admittedly “primitive” artwork] had his superhero racing up the sides of buildings and jerking getaway cars off the road: just the thing for ten-year-olds and for a nation tortured by self-doubt” (34). Despite its primitive and simplistic rendering, the character of Superman launched a phenomenon. His creators, Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, ultimately were writing and drawing “what they knew–which is why Superman embraced the vigilante justice that Jerry longed to mete out on his father’s robbers . . .” (34)[21]. What

[21] Jerry Siegel’s father died as the result of a heart attack while trying to prevent three young men from trying to make off with a suit they had not paid for from his second-hand clothing store. As Larry Tye recounts it, “Michel Siegel was ready to head home to his family when three men who the police describe as ‘colored’ entered his secondhand clothing store . . . One man asked to see a suit, then walked out with it

Siegel and Shuster "knew" was something that spoke to American public at large, a public yearning for someone to take action to solve the poverty and in-action of the civil authorities. It was a time of individualism, of self-fashioned personas in the likes of fictional characters from Zorro and the Lone Ranger to the Shadow and Flash Gordon (33-4). What Siegel and Shuster created and launched, with the faith and purchase of the character by Jack Liebowitz and Harry Donenfeld's National Periodicals Publication, was a true cultural phenomenon.

When discussing "The History of the Comic Books" in their work *The Power of Comics*, Randy Duncan and Matthew J Smith point out that there are different eras of comic book development as they define them. Superman and his creation represent the major flashpoint in what Duncan and Smith refer to as the "Era of Proliferation" (1934-1939). They note: "the first issue of *Action Comics* introduced Superman, a character who single-handedly established the American comic book" (31). Siegel and Shuster gave life, going all the way back to their high school days in Cleveland, Ohio to an idea that eventually became Superman (32-3). After rejection by the newspaper syndicates that controlled the publishing of comic strips, Siegel and Shuster finally got a break when "DC [Detective Comics, owned by National Publication] editor Vincent Sullivan decided to purchase the feature for *Action Comics*. The pair was paid ten dollars a page for their first thirteen-page story. So, for $130 split between them, Siegel and Shuster sold all rights to Superman" (32). To modern eyes this might appear to be a meager sum, but in

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without paying; another blocked the owner's path. Michel, a slight man whose heart muscle was weaker than even he knew, fell to the floor . . . he stopped breathing before medics could get him to the hospital" (6).

terms of 1938 money this was a fair deal. However, this payment was not for a single issue or two, but in fact the two young men were selling the rights to a gold mine to National Periodical (DC) Publications in this transaction. This deal was akin to someone selling his or her nice piece of property to a developer who then discovers oil or natural gas under it. Duncan and Smith point out, in an extension of the earlier Reynolds' earlier notation on the success of the character, that

> Superman was both the triumph and the tragedy of the comic book medium. Within a few years, Action Comics and its spin-off title, Superman, was each selling over a million copies a month. Superman assured the financial success of the new industry. Unfortunately, he also assured that the comic book medium would be forever . . . associated with adolescent power fantasies of muscular men in tights. The legion of "long underwear" imitators that followed Superman cemented this image in the popular imagination. (32)

The consequence of the success of Superman was one that would be measured up and attacked in the post-war (WWII) years for just that reason–the idea of "adolescent power fantasies." The creation of Superman did unleash the creation, as Reynolds and Duncan and Smith point out, of a new and powerfully persuasive medium upon the minds of the youth of America.

Appearance, Expansion, and World War

Returning to Greenblatt's points concerning self-fashioning, one of the key elements Greenblatt points to in how Renaissance figures crafted their personas came from how they dressed. Baldassarre Castiglione, in the second book of his highly

influential work, *The Book of the Courtier*, notes the importance to dress in general, saying (in a dialogue): “a man ought to follow the custom of the majority” (102). Castiglione goes on to provide examples and details of the importance of dress and success. This highly influential work was a central reference for courtiers in understanding the importance of how one dressed when engaging in the public arena of a royal court. The assertions of this book were set upon the idea of dress as rhetorical choice. This idea of rhetorical choice was an expression of the times, as Greenblatt notes. This was an era that witnessed the reemergence of rhetoric as a “tool” in the creation by which “old feudal models” were replaced as “men created new models, precisely as a way of containing and channeling the energies which had been unleashed” (*Renaissance Self-Fashioning* 162). This era, the Renaissance, that Greenblatt is referring to was itself an age of transition throughout Europe. The role then of rhetoric and rhetorical expression sought a “common ground” and “offered men the power to shape their worlds . . . master the contingent, and it implied that human character itself could be similarly fashioned, with an eye to audience and effect” (162). Rhetoric, particularly if one applied it to appearance, in a theatrical nature in a theatrical society (the society of Wyatt, Marlowe, and Shakespeare), could offer a means to shaping one’s own reality. This kind of appearance as a persona, of shaping one’s reality, was of such a concern to authorities that new sumptuary laws had to be enacted to curb it. One such law, decreed by Queen

Elizabeth I from Greenwich on the 15 June 1574, entitled "Enforcement Statutes of Apparel" decreed:

> Which great abuses, tending both to so manifest a decay of the wealth of the realm and to the ruin of a multitude of serviceable young men and gentlemen and of many good families, the Queen's majesty hath of her own princely wisdom so considered as she hath of late with great charged to her council commanded the same to be presently and speedily remedied both in her own court and in all other places of her realm, according to the sundry good laws heretofore provided. (*elizabethan.org*)

The idea behind such laws as these was aimed at controlling and carefully maintaining hierarchy. As Greenblatt recounts, "Elizabethan society was intensely, pervasively, visibly hierarchical [and] Woe betide anyone who violated the rules" and ultimately, as noted above by the sumptuary laws, the very application of certain "fabrics" was limited (*Will in the World* 76)[22]. With a culture that was defined in many ways by hierarchy, a hierarchy fashioned around wealth that was recognized by dress, this kind of enactment was aimed to provide order to chaotic forces such as those who might dress "above" their station. However, how does this then have anything to do with Superman?

The answer comes in understanding that Superman set the trend, he fashioned the appearance by which one recognizes a superhero. Superman's "wearing his underwear on the outside," the subject of so many jokes in popular culture. Grant Morrison points out that this appearance really comes from "circus strongmen in the 1930s . . . Underpants on

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[22] One might, in making another argument, could point out that Superman and Clark Kent to Kal-El is not too different in matters of "persona" to the myth of Gloriana and the Virgin Queen to Queen Elizabeth I.

tights were signifiers of extra masculine strength and endurance in 1938" (*Supergods* 14). Additionally, the entire outfit that Siegel and Shuster gave Superman came from the performance, the theatrical nature, of the circus. Morrison, continuing his discussion of Superman's outfit, states: "The cape, showman-like boots, belt, and skintight spandex were all derived from circus outfits and helped to emphasize the performative, even freak-show-esque, aspect of Superman's adventures" (14). This leads itself to the fashioning of the persona around the performative nature of playing, of being a superhero as a form of choice.

This notion of Superman as theatrical, or performative character helps distinguish him from others, it particularly causes him to stand out from the "ordinary man," and in some ways, become an "other." Here one sees the distinction found in Greenblatt's third condition of self-fashioning that notes "Self-fashioning is achieved in relation to something perceived as alien, strange, or hostile. This [is the] threatening Other [that] must be discovered or invented in order to be attacked and destroyed" (*Renaissance Self-Fashioning* 9). In other words, Superman and his initial appearance are distinctive because by standing out from the crowd. Superman has, in fact, painted a bulls-eye upon himself–literally, if one imagines the chevron "S" upon his chest as such. He has made a choice to standout, and if it was not already made clear by what he wears, the colors of what he wears make his distinction clear and yet ambiguous as well. It is a clear contrast and distinction by his use of the bright primary colors of red, blue, and yellow. The choice of colors also clouds the clear "alieness" of Superman by rendering him also slightly familiar symbolically. As Grant Morrison again makes note, "The red and blue

contrast [of Superman's outfit] added a patriotic touch of Stars and Stripes Americana to the character" (*Supergods* 15). So, is Superman friend or foe, hero or other? This is something, as noted earlier, one had to read his first appearance to *Action Comics* #1 in order to discover.

Reflecting on the earlier conditions of self-fashioning offered in this chapter and defined by Greenblatt, one might assume that the earlier accounts of Superman's emergence into the popular imagination represents an example of Greenblatt's sixth condition, the notion that "When one authority or alien is destroyed, another takes its place" (9). However, as time and this examination will bear out, the reality was that Superman's initial success was a reflection of Greenblatt's conditions 5 and 7: "One man's authority is another man's alien . . . There is always more than one authority and more than one alien in existence at a given time" (9). Superman existed in contrast to the establishments' of law and order and civil society, operating outside of it, but, though "alien" to parental and older perceptions of authority, was in fact championing the kind of authority and action that Siegel and Shuster and younger generations were longing to see. Additionally, the existence of this parallel authority of Superman's popular success created a state, though somewhat generational in nature, of parallel authorities. One could perceive it in many ways as an extension of traditional "youthful rebellion" or desiring to fix the problems created by older generations by those who are younger. However, for Superman, this self-fashioned "dual" situation was not to last and eventually, new authorities, even ones "alien" (like Superman), often come to be absorbed into the mainstream over time.

Superman #1, published in July 1939, represented a milestone in the comic book medium because it was the first time a comic book character had ever been considered capable of having his' own title. It also gave audiences the full "context" or back-story of the events found in the opening pages of *Action Comics* #1. Siegel and Shuster made use this opportunity to elaborate Superman's origin story by filling in more detail and information over two pages compared to the one page format of the original.

In the opening pages of the story, Superman prevents a mob from lynching a prisoner. Additionally, the audience is provided with the additional information that Superman, after he has dispersed the mob and returned the prisoner to his cell, is told by the prisoner who the real criminal is as he pleads his own innocence. It's worth noting here that this depiction of Superman appears more in line with a "law abiding" citizen at heart. Siegel and Shuster's hero is revealed that though he bends the law and operates outside of it, this elaboration of his original story allows them to also more firmly establish him as a "hero" and model. This action on their part, the creator's, is more overt than the opening sequence than *Action Comics* #1. Superman may have operated outside of the law at this time, but as noted earlier, he did have his own code and operated in respect (parallel) to it.

The prisoner Superman rescues from the mob, for having his life saved, offers to give him "a red-hot story!" and states that he is being wrongly held "for th' murder of Jack Kennedy" ("Superman" 198-9). He goes further than merely his own defense by speaking to the innocence of one Evelyn Curry who is the one audience witnessed Superman saving from being executed via electric chair in *Action Comics* #1. The

prisoner also reveals to Superman the real killer, a nightclub singer who Superman confronts, "kidnaps," and whisks off to governor's mansion. These events bring the audience full circle to the events found at the beginning of *Action Comics* #1. In fact, the cover of *Superman* #1 specifically states that contained within are "64 Pages of Action!" However, after the initial six pages of the issue, including the origin, the remainder of *Superman* #1 is in fact, a repeat. In the collection, *Superman Chronicles Vol. 1*, it is established that "The original SUPERMAN #1 comic reprinted ACTION COMICS #1-4" (200). In other words, the rest of *Superman* #1 was really just made of reprinted stories from *Action Comics* #1 tacked on and made to continue the story after presenting a new "starting point." This could seem a bit like cheating on the part of the publisher, and to a degree it was. National/DC Comics primarily used *Superman* #1 as a means of re-envisioning the superhero of Superman again and providing him with his own title in order to pull his stories from previous issues. It is worth noting that his previous stories in *Action Comics* were short and part of issues that had several stories other than Superman's. What was at work in *Superman* #1 as well was a slow beginning of the evolution of Superman from social crusader into something more in tune with being a member of American society.

Thomas Andrae, in his article "From Menace to Messiah," notes that entering into the 1940s, Superman's evolution begins to shift from class-conscious fights for social justice with a highly charged political agenda, to, as Andrae quoting Umberto Eco:

> Superman has a civic conscience, not a political one ("The Myth of Superman"). His struggle against evil becomes confined to the defense of private property and

> the extermination of criminals; it is no longer a struggle against social injustice, an attempt to aid the helpless and oppressed. (131)

The Man of Steel was becoming part of the mainstream of American culture during the war (WWII) and post-war years. Particularly with the advent of World War II, Superman was and needed to become a patriot. During the years of WWII (America's involvement being 1941-1945), the idea of the superhero and the superhero comic book "spread like wildfire" (*Supergods* 52). The audience for the comic book superhero evolved as well, from just kids to G.I.'s serving overseas in the war itself. This popularity and increase in readership bear out in an article by Vanderbilt Sanderson in the *Yank Weekly* magazine in 1945. In this article, Sanderson points out that "the Market Research Company of America estimated that 70,000,000 people, or just about half the population of the U.S., are addicted to comic magazines" ("The Comics" 1). The data Sanderson uses is interesting for two reasons: one, that almost as much as half the population of the United States was reading some form of comic book or comic magazine in 1945 and, two, that he uses the word "addicted" in describing the medium. This notion, this wording of the obsession, is something to be further explored later in this chapter with regards to the backlash to comic books following WWII.

During WWII, Superman stayed on the home front, because, as many made quick note, any involvement by a being as powerful as Superman would have resulted in the war ending in a heartbeat[23]. Morrison accounts for the fact that when America's involvement in WWII began in 1941, "the idea of the revolutionary working-class hero

[23] This was made obvious, as noted earlier, by the issue of *Look Magazine* #7 (1940).

was already [a] suspect [idea, and] In a time of war, patriots were heroes and so the ultimate hero became a superpatriot" (*Supergods* 38). For Superman, WWII began his road of transformation from the menace or threat of this alien outsider, of this parallel authority, to an integrated member of mainstream of American authority and culture.

Following WWII, nothing was quite the same anymore, not for the world, and especially not for America. The country was now a major world power, a superpower in the ever growing and developing "Cold War" with the Soviet Union. Thomas Andrae points out that "During the late 1940s and the early 1950s superhero comics began to mirror the changes in American society . . ." (73). As the country changed, so did the feeling towards the comic book industry. The popularity of certain genres, like the superhero genre, waned, and new genres like Westerns and Romance comics became more popular.

This shift was a national one, but it was in response to growing criticisms of the medium, as well as changes in the tastes of audiences. Carol Tilley points out that "literary and cultural critics such as Sterling North and Stanley Kunitz objected to superhero themes because their perceived violent and Fascist elements [and, as a result] publishers introduced new genres such as romance, jungle, horror, and true crime [that now] flourished" in post-war America ("Seducing the Innocent" 283). As a result, superhero comics, to keep up, became more reliant on gimmick-driven stories and quality declined. Ultimately, in the wake of WWII and as a result of changes in American culture, "Superheroes [who had] once been agents of change morphed into agents of the state. The most obvious character change was Superman [who now fought] in order to

protect the status quo and often praises law enforcement and elected officials" (Andrae 73-4). This was, besides the gimmicks, a survival move in the wake of both criticism and development in the popularity of the other genres such as Romance. Superman the social crusader now transformed in the post-war years into the ultimate law-abiding citizen. This transformation had begun during WWII but was completed in the post-war years. Superman became less the freelance social champion of the oppressed and instead was now the punisher of those who "break the rules" (74).

This was the age of the family, and Superman morphed from orphan of a dying planet into the head of an oddball family with adventures told of him as a baby, Superbaby, and as a boy, Superboy, and collected a cousin, Supergirl, and pets such as Krypto the Superdog (75). Superman was settling down, becoming more predictable, and ultimately, "Although Superman was 'a strange visitor from another planet,' he also was quickly becoming the quintessential American" (75). This assimilation of Superman represented a change, a new fashioning of the character into the identifiable mainstream of American culture. Rhetorically, this assimilation allowed Superman to become a more "socially acceptable" model for children to look up to and emulate as well.

According to Jeffrey Johnson, by the time of the 1950s, many Americans had come to so identify and accept Superman as a kind of assimilated, naturalized American character that many stopped seeing as fantastical and more of a real person (*Super-History* 69). Superman was one of us more and more, but the idea of him being "real" was to return to haunt him as the 1950s wore on. In many ways, by the time of "the early 1950s, the nation appeared to have made a choice to embrace a consumer-based culture

that venerated the nuclear family . . . Many Americans desired quiet and constancy . . ." (70). Considering what the world had just experienced over the past few decades, from boom to bust to world war, it's hard to imagine how anyone would not want some "real" stability. In this new "consumer-based culture," Superman too was "swallowed up." Morrison quite poignantly remarks that "so it came to pass that our socialist, utopian, humanist hero was slowly transformed [beginning with WWII] into a marketing tool, a patriotic stooge, and worse: the betrayer of his own creators" (*Supergods* 16). Though Morrison appears quite critical in his remarks, Mark Waid, in an introduction to a collected volume of Superman stories from the 1950s, is a bit more generous. Waid, after discussing Superman's "outside the law" and social activist conception in the 1930s and early 40s, notes that

> following World War II–Superman's natural patriotism practically forced him to transform his approach to problem solving" because in the wake of the end of WWII, a war in that "we [as a nation] had just validated the concept of the American way not only by leading–and helping to win–the greatest battle mankind had ever witnessed . . ." (*Superman in the Fifties* 5)

America was a new superpower with a superhero champion: Superman. In this transition, Superman was becoming a symbol of America's pride, of the fact that we, as a nation "were [now] justifiably proud of ourselves and believed more than ever in the ideals of order and virtue" (5). Again it comes back to the ideas of American virtue, of *arête*, and Superman was front and center as the model of that virtue.

Superman was everywhere now, permeating through American culture but there was an old and lingering weakness. That weakness, as noted above by Duncan and Smith, was the idea of "adolescent power fantasies" that developed into an even greater tragedy for Superman. This new "villain" of Superman was not a mad scientist, alien invader, or wife beater but rather a psychologist by the name of Fredric Wertham. This figure, more than any other before him, attempted to challenge and in fact "expose" that Superman was not a model one wanted to emulate, but secretly a fascist (as other critics has declared) intent on destroying the youth of America.

Superman and Dr. Fredric Wertham

Entering the early 1950s Superman was everywhere, not just in the comic books. He, of course, appeared in comic book titles such as *Action Comics*, *Superman*, and other titles, as well as daily comic strips in the newspapers, cartoons, on the radio, and in his own television show, *The Adventures of Superman* starring George Reeves. All of this did not completely protect the Man of Steel from the backlash comic books were about to experience.

In the early 1950s, critics like Sterling North and Wertham began making headway in the public arena by attacking comic books as the source of illiteracy, juvenile crime, and general juvenile delinquency[24]. This led to Senate hearings on the issue and what began as an attack on the comic book medium, particularly the violent and graphic

[24] Many of the criticisms made by those against comic books appeared to ignore the reality and upheaval (perhaps because America had avoided much of the chaos) that had resulted from a major world war (WWII).

horror comics of EC Comics spilled over onto superheroes[25]. Wertham, in his book *Seduction of the Innocent* (published in 1954), concluded that "Superman [was] a symbol of Hitler's despotic fantasies of [a] master-race supremacy, [and] With that big S on his uniform–we should, I suppose, be thankful that it is not an S.S.'" (34). This is not the first or the last time that a comparison is made between Superman and Nietzsche's *Ubermensch* (that Hitler had perverted for his own purposes) as a means of connecting Superman and Nazi fascism. David Hajdu, in his work *The Ten-Cent Plague*, points out that Wertham had "reserved a specially toxic venom for National/DC's popular trio of heroes, Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman, who Wertham saw, respectively, as exemplars of fascism, homoeroticism, and sadomasochism" (235). In addition to attacking Superman for his likeness to similar ideas that the Nazi Regime had appropriated, Wertham attacked Superman for his fantastical abilities as well. He notes that

> Superman not only defies the laws of gravity, which his great strength makes conceivable; in addition he gives children a completely wrong idea of other basic laws. Not even Superman, for example, should be able to lift up a building while not standing on the ground, or to stop an airplane in midair while flying himself. (34)

To be quite honest, this kind of attack appears overtly trite and almost silly today. Wertham appears, as an adult, to be trying to act as an over-protective father figure for children by implying that they are incapable of realizing that Superman and his powers

[25] The U.S. Senate held hearings on Juvenile Delinquency in the early 1950s to investigate dangers of comic books to children.

are “fictional.” As noted earlier, this was part of that problem of Superman being perceived as “real.” If one looks at Superman’s costume and pays attention to the origin, that he is from another planet, or even remotely realizes the science fiction qualities of the character, most people will quickly realize that Superman is not remotely a threat to real science. In fact, many of Wertham’s assertions about comic books and comic book superheroes reveal that his evidence is based purely on anecdotal stories of his patients–more on this to be addressed shortly–translated through his own personal lens of objection to the medium.

In attacking Superman, Wertham makes three points that must be addressed with regards to Superman as a rhetorical model. First, Wertham asserts, “Children seek a figure to emulate and follow. Crime comic books undermine this necessary ingredient of ethical development” (94). Now, Wertham is specifically here attacking the main, culturally perceived, threat of horror and crime comics; however, this does attack Superman as a major model and figure to kids across America. Wertham’s attack, though indirect, reflected the perception of the times that eventually completed Superman’s assimilation into the defender of the status quo as a matter of survival. Wertham himself, as noted earlier, specifically targeted Superman for tearing down.

This “targeting” of Superman can be seen in the second point that more specifically bears upon Superman as a form of ideology. Wertham states that Superman represents something “psychologically most unhygienic” (97). By “unhygienic” Wertham is referring to something, in this case comic books, as detrimental to the good health of individuals, especially children and adolescents. Wertham states: “The superman conceit

[which Wertham refers to as an ideology] gives boys and girls the feeling that ruthless go-getting based on physical strength or the power of weapons or machines is the desirable way to behave" (97). This attack on Superman as being unworthy of emulation because he provides some kind of power trip by demonstrating super strength ignores many aspects of the stories as they appear in the comic books. In many ways and many points, Wertham appears to shy away from taking on the real issue of comic books as providing depictions or issues with juvenile behavior. Instead, he focuses on the outsiders and outliers of comic books.

Even more so, Wertham potentially skips over the fact that young people are growing up in a generation after a world war (WWII) where many of them may have lost fathers and that America has undergone shifts in culture in the wake. A study published by for the National Institutes of Health entitled "Jewish and non-Jewish World War II child and adolescent survivors at 60 years after the war" has the authors hypothesizing "that the level of posttraumatic symptoms, depression, and social isolation of survivors who were at least 5 years old (but younger than 18) in the last year of WWII would be predicted by the extent of traumatic loss, (i.e., death of parent[s]) and age at the end of WWII" (Lis-Turlejska et al.). Regardless to the fact that this study was conducted by members of the University of Warsaw in Poland, it highlights the impact of WWII on children carried with it a strong, often negative psychological impact. This impact is one

that Wertham appears to fail to account for in his research. Wertham specifically states that he wished "to prescribe psychotherapy" to children he saw as being

> nourished (or rather poisoned) by the endless repetition of Superman stories. How can they respect the hard-working mother, father, or teacher who is so pedestrian, trying to teach common rules of conduct, wanting to keep your feet on the ground and unable even figuratively speaking to fly through the air? Psychologically Superman undermines the authority and the dignity of the ordinary man and woman in the minds of children. (Wertham 97-8)

Of course, Wertham appears in many ways to have never read or even looked at a Superman story. A glance at the early Superman stories reveals a man performing feats in order to save lives and avenge injustice. Despite this, Wertham appears fixated upon merely the fact that Superman somehow, via his powers stands above the normal person in the real world (like the Nietzsche's *Ubermensch*). Hajdu notes that Wertham "virtually ignores the relationship between comics and their creators. Wertham was unwilling or unable to see comics as positive works of creative expression, products of the minds and the hearts of their writers and artists" (*Ten Cent Plague* 236). Hajdu is pointing out what is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to Wertham's shortcomings in addressing comic books. However, Wertham's work rather exploited an atmosphere towards comic books that was becoming ever more hostile. Grant Morrison provides perhaps the most graphic and hard hitting analogy for what it was like to profess a love for comic books during the 1950s attacks on the medium. He asks the audience to imagine going to a dinner party, and while there announcing a "passion for hard-core kiddie porn. As

difficult as it may be to believe today, in 1955 the kind of outrage that would reasonably greet your twisted confession was directed towards artists, writers, editors and anyone else involved in the business of comic books" (*Supergods* 54). This is extreme, but also terribly realistic with regards to how many felt toward and looked at those working in comic books. It was, however, a fantasy, created by Wertham and others.

Wertham's research was quite different than what he actually published. As Tilley uncovered during her research into Wertham's papers on *Seduction of the Innocent* that many of them "included numerous falsifications and distortions" of the case studies and anecdotal stories from his patients, as was noted above, that Wertham used to make his arguments ("Seducing the Innocent" 386). In an examination, with no ulterior motive to try and discredit Wertham, Tilley stumbled across disturbing patterns in Wertham's research and material. After taking these into account, and by comparing case studies that Wertham used, Tilley reached the conclusion, that: "Wertham manipulated evidence to persuade readers of the ill effects of comic book reading on children's behavior" (396). This was Wertham's objective and, according to Tilley's empirical research, it appears to have led Wertham to slant his research to fit his hypothesis. Tilley notes that Wertham's habits did get the attention of some of his contemporaries. She states "Wertham often played fast and loose with the data he gathered on comics, even leading some of his contemporaries to raise concerns about the way in which he marshaled evidence in support of his assertions" (402). This goes to show that even in his own time Wertham was considered by some to be overreaching in his assertions. In fact, as Tilley makes clear, Wertham's book, *Seduction of the Innocent*, though taken in its time as a

groundbreaking study in the dangers of comic books to children, was in fact, " . . . an attempt at cultural correction rather than an honest report of scientific inquiry" (404). A "perfect storm" of resentment and fear in the late 1940s and early 1950s from nuclear war to the Cold War to the Red Scare, America was an eager audience for Wertham's scathing and slanted assertions.

In this climate of change, fear, and hostility, Wertham ultimately played upon the growing public paranoia and fear. The result was damaging then and remains so even today. Tilley again points out that Wertham's "falsifications" caused people, even to the present day, to remain "influenced–often unknowingly–by Wertham's popular rhetoric [and] continue to view comics as childish, violent, and over-sexed trash" (405). This damage is still being undone, but even more so, it did untold damage to Superman and other comic book characters. However, Superman, being the Man of Steel, forged on as a model, regardless of Wertham's assertions.

Consequences and Aftermath: Superman and the Silver Age

Perhaps the greatest consequence to befall Superman and the comic book industry in the wake of Senate hearings and Wertham and others attacks was the creation of the Comic Code Authority (CCA) in 1954. Under this code, created by the industry as an act of self-preservation through self-censorship, comic books were forced to conform to socially acceptable standards. The Comic Book Code of 1954 developed out of attacks by critics such as Wertham and ultimately a Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Comic Books and Delinquency. The CCA was established specifically to help enforce this code,

adopted by the comic book publishers, and to prevent any comic book not adhering to the code from being sold on newsstands.

The Comic Book Code of 1954 (adopted officially on October 26, 1954) created rules for the depictions of authorities and guidelines for comic books to follow. The preamble of the code, which is a bold statement emphasizing responsibility, states: “The comic-book medium, having come of age on the American cultural scene, must measure up to its responsibilities” (“History Matters”). This opening sentence, along with those that follow do not initially appear to sound like censorship, but rather as rational and responsible requests that, as an American medium, comic books live up to that cultural responsibility implied in American culture. However, the code itself took an open and free medium and tied its hands. For Superman, who was already by this time moving away from his “social justice” roots, the code made any return to those roots impossible.

Under General Standards – Part A, the code states “Policemen, judges, Government officials and represented institutions shall never be presented in such a way as to create disrespect for established authority” (“History Matters”). Even though it predated the code, many of Superman’s early stories, including his adventures in *Action Comics* #1, 2, 3, and 9 violated this code. In fact, the early Superman of Siegel and Shuster, matching the climate of pre-WWII Great Depression America actively opposed authority figures that were depicted as ignorant, corrupt, or uninformed. The code even went as far as to dictate, in General Standards – Part C, issues regarding dialogue, religion, marriage and sex in detail that left no doubt that the comic books should become “wholesome” and “middle-America” in their values (“History Matters”).

Glen Weldon compares "The new Comics Code was to comics what the Hays Code had been to movies – an attempt to ensure that content was wholesome and above reproach"[26] and that this was the death nail for certain comic book genres, like horror comics. However, "For DC and *Superman*, it simply extended and solidified the trend toward increasingly kid-orientated stories" (*Superman* 99). Superman was one of the lucky superheroes. Thanks in large part to his popularity and commoditization Superman was one of the few superheroes to survive.

The self-fashioned Superman of the 1930s and 40s either had to change or face becoming divorced from his cultural connections and thereby extinct. Looking again at Greenblatt's conditions of self-fashioning, Superman faced the real problem of becoming the "alien" again under Condition 5 laid out by Greenblatt (*Renaissance Self-Fashioning* 9). The attacks of Wertham and other critics, and the introduction of the CCA in the mid-1950s, as noted earlier by Weldon, moved Superman stories towards the "safe waters" of kid friendly material. Superman became fashioned more and more, with his expanding popularity across multiple mediums, into a responsible and wholesome American cultural model.

According to David Hajdu, "the Comics Magazine Association of America" or CMAA, the body put in charge of implementing the CCA, was "far more rigid and puritanical than" any earlier attempts by publishers to deflect critics of its content as

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[26] The Hays Code, named for the overseer and "former postmaster Will Hays" was created in 1922 in the wake of "high-profile scandals involving Hollywood celebrities [and was a] self-defense [move made by] motion picture producers [creating] a succession of moral rules or codes meant to guide the content of motion pictures" ("The Production Code of 1930"). This code was eventually replaced in 1930 by the Hollywood Production Code to regulate movies.

being unwholesome or dangerous to kids (*The Ten-Cent Plague* 291)[27]. The CCA represented a new, external "authority" for comic books and Superman was by now too valuable a commodity to his owners to risk his being seen as the outside threat to that authority. This was the new status quo, and the CCA was, according to Hajdu, "a wholesome abrogation of the authorial prerogative, which [deprived] something precious to many comic-book creators, especially artists" removing their freedom and self-authority over the content of their creations and work (308). This was for many creators "Big Brother" sticking his nose and hand in their world[28]. Hajdu's work, *The Ten-Cent Plague*, contains many anecdotes about how creators were forced out of the business because of the new regulations. Reflecting back on the earlier passage from Grant Morrison on just how hostile it was socially to be involved in comic books during the early 1950s and the persecutions of Wertham, Hajdu actually opens his book with the anecdote of one Janice Valleau Winkleman as a stirring example. She had worked as an artist in the early days of comic books and left following all of uproar in the 1950s. Hajdu records her interview as an opening to his book by quoting her reluctance to go back after things died down, saying: "My God . . . I couldn't go back out there–I was scared to death. Don't you know what they did to us?" (5). Hajdu uses this as a setup for his entire discussion of his book, which is itself subtitled: *The Great Comic-Book Scare and How it Changed America*. The comic books had snubbed their noses at society and authority,

[27] Most comic book publishers set up review boards with prestigious members to defray and deflect content criticisms prior to major attacks of the 1950s (Tye, Hajdu).
[28] Hajdu points out that for a long time comic books acted as creative havens for minorities and women. With the application of the CCA to the industry, that refuge disappeared and many groups permanently left and never came back.

from Superman onward, and after Wertham and creation of the CCA; it was obvious that the authority was fighting back.

The consequences of Superman's surrender to the authority were that many of his stories following the adoption of the code became predictable, obvious, and uninspired. As Mark Waid notes, "By the late 1950s, then, Superman had fallen into a rut. His adventures had become surprisingly pedestrian to the point of seeming repetitive and recycled" (*Superman in the Fifties* 8). Mort Weisinger took over editorial control of Superman in 1957. His approach was to add new elements every few months and then "interweave" these new features in "the Superman mythos" (8). As editor, Weisinger helped revive Superman stories, having worked on the *Adventures of Superman* television show, by aiming to have Superman stories become a "spectacle that couldn't be duplicated on film or TV" and under Weisinger's guidance, "Superman reached levels of power previously enjoyed only by Hindu gods" (*Supergods* 61). Morrison's comments here point out that Weisinger was the right man at the right time to revive Superman's lagging narrative. He did this by launching Superman and his titles into the stratosphere and seeing just how far they could go. Weldon points out that with "The Space Age . . . just around the corner [and this move] helped ensure that Superman was ready for it by infusing his adventures with rocket ships, flying saucers, monsters, aliens, and exotic planetscapes" (105). Since the CCA made it rather difficult to deal with stories and situations on Earth, Weisinger decided to take Superman beyond it.

The Superman of the "Silver Age" was also the new, more conservative, exemplar of American culture. As Morrison points out, this was a "Superman [who] was now

grown-up, a mature patriarch, drawn in the clean fifties of an artist with the unfortunate name of Wayne Boring [who] slowed [the Superman narrative] all down, crystallizing single moments into myth" (*Supergods* 62). Superman, like his audience (and the CCA's declaration noted above), grew up and became more responsible[29]. Superman, in order to be an effective model now, had to stop being a power fantasy and become a responsible adult for kids to look up to and admire. He needed to act as an authority figure, to take responsibility, in order for others to wish to emulate him. This in itself was not necessarily a negative thing but the execution of it, particularly for a character as powerful as Superman, lent itself over time to farce, parody, and pantomime.

These changes were rhetorically significant to the character of Superman because these alterations changed his relationship with authority. Modern notions of Superman as being "American as apple pie" and the very idea of him standing for "Truth, Justice, and the American Way" spring from the changes made to him during the 1950s and 60s. By developing into an authority figure, Superman's handlers were making a decision, as the commodity he was to them, to preserve the character's viability with the audience. By doing this and committing Superman to this path, they also engrained the character even more into the cultural fabric of America and American identification.

Glen Weldon points out that for plots of Silver Age stories there was a "formula" to the kind of storytelling being produced. He notes that on "a plot level, the mechanics are those of situation comedy [with] the humor of misdirection and misapprehension [with all of it eventually] revealed to be a misunderstanding [or] lesson" (111). This was

[29] Superman was like Peter Pan and it was time for him to leave Never-Never Land.

an era where Lois Lane, along with other Superman cohorts, received her own title: *Superman's Girlfriend Lois Lane*. Many of the stories in this line dealt with Superman and Lois's often strange, elastic, and up and down relationship. Stories might involve Lois Lane being told she could marry Superman if she showed up at the right time and always was somehow prevented in order to convey some lesson or with a purpose saved to the end.

Additionally, Silver Age Superman stories presented "Each issue [as] a new puzzle to solve" and the cover was often used to tease the puzzle so that the reader to buy the issue and read it in order to solve the puzzle (111). Finally, underneath all of this, and particular to any Weisinger story, was the attempt to get "in touch with . . . feelings" (111). This inclusion of feelings also had to deal with, in great part, with place of family in the narrative. As pointed out earlier by Andrae, this era was one where the idea of family, particularly with men as the "head" of a family, was very appealing to audiences, even more so to those who were looking over the audience's shoulder: parents.

When looking at the place of family and emotions in Superman's (Weisinger and Silver Age) stories, Weisinger decided that Superman should not be alone. For one, Captain Marvel of Fawcett Comics had had an entire family to aid him, so why not Superman? There was Krypto the Superdog (*Action Comics* #210), Superboy (the adventures of Superman actually before he left Smallville and conceived by his creator Jerry Siegel), and Supergirl. The first appearance of Krypto is actually a Superboy story that finds a young Clark Kent helping out a "dog-catcher" after Krypto burst out of his truck unleashing the other dogs. After discovering the dog has powers identical to his, he

is lead to a pod and Superboy remembering that this is his pet dog and that he was also sent from Krypton by his father (this is revealed in note found in the pod). After reading the note from his father, Superboy gushes “Krypto . . . my very own dog! Kind fate bought us together again, after all these years!” (*Superman in the Fifties* 79). The story ends with Krypto, like any exuberant dog, “running off” but the story ends with a promise that the character would return, and he did.

Supergirl first appeared in *Action Comics* #252, which was entitled “Supergirl from Krypton,” in 1959. On the opening page she is depicted emerging from her space pod and declaring to Superman: “Look again Superman! It’s me . . . Supergirl! And I’m real!” (93). Like Krypto and others, Supergirl is another survivor of Krypton. In her first appearance, she recounts for Superman that her father, Zor-El was one of many survivors who escaped on a large junk of Krypton that escaped destruction (95). The fragment was eventually poisoned by radiation from the destroyed Krypton and after discovering Superman on Earth, Kara, Supergirl's real name, was sent, like Superman, by her parents to Earth to save her (96). Supergirl, along with Krypto, became part of an expanding Superman family. This was part of Weisinger’s plans that not only boosted Superman’s popularity, as well as made him appear (fashioned) as a strong authority figure that was identifiable to kids and parents alike, but also changed and evolved his mythology. No longer was Superman “the only survivor of Krypton when it exploded” as he states to Supergirl when she arrived on Earth (94). Instead of a unique, lonely hero, Weisinger and his writers were turning Superman into a model that parents and kids both could identify with by making him wholesome and part of a family unit.

Summing up his analysis of the changes that emerged in Superman's narrative under Weisinger, Weldon sums it up by stating that Superman now had "Three [new villains], a dog, an ape, a monkey, and the population of an entire city" to contend with and manage (114) [30]. This was Superman as now leader of his own family (114). This narrative of his expanding family continued and carried over into the 1960s as well. Weisinger's editorial control was such that he was building an elaborate and interconnected universe and family for Superman.

Weldon recounts that "When he [Weisinger] met a new writer" he would refer to "the burgeoning, interconnected network of characters and gimmicks and history he had set into motion in 1958 [as] 'The Superman mythology'" (115). Weisinger felt that it was his job to build up a narrative universe for Superman to exist in. In fact, as Weldon clarifies, what "Weisinger called . . . mythology . . . really was, of course . . . a family (116). The purpose of this "family" or new "mythology" was in many ways a two-part strategy employed by Weisinger. On one hand it preserved Superman as a viable character, allowing him to grow and evolve without appearing to be a threat to kids, or American values (being like social crusader was now to be too much like a Communist), or violating the CCA. On the other hand, the expanding and changing of his mythology–the introduction of the family elements and new stories focusing on boyhood, outer space, and adventure–helped make Superman more appealing to both parents and kids (as

[30] Weldon recounts that the three villains were King Krypton, Titano the Super-Gorilla (also from Krypton, and Koko "Brainiac's space monkey" (113). All of these villains were apes or monkeys. Superman even got a monkey of his own as well. He now had a dog, Krypto, his name own ape from his father's laboratory, Beppo, and the entire City of Kandor, the once capital city of Krypton miniaturized by Brainiac and preserved, introduced in Action Comics #242 in June 1958 (Weldon 108-113).

pointed out earlier). In addition, this initial strategy had the effect of enlarging Superman's status as an American cultural icon.

The article "What Makes Superman So Darn American," points out "The core of the American myth in Superman consists of a few basic facts that remain unchanged throughout the infinitely varied way in which myth is told . . . Superman is an orphan" (Engle). More than simply an orphan, Superman is a native of another world, an alien, an illegal alien sent here (Earth) in the hopes of a better life. He is raised and "adopted by Jonathan and Martha Kent, who inculcate in him their American middle-class ethic" (Engle). Superman, at his heart, is an immigrant. Weisinger's attempt to build a Superman family also helped reinforce that idea of the immigrant in Superman as well. Superman as a result became a model for the newer "immigrants" like Supergirl. He offered her a depiction of opportunity, which both her and her parent's realized was a chance for Supergirl to survive (*Superman in the Fifties* 96). The model that Superman now fashioned into was one that was part of the authority, assimilated, rather than challenging it. In many ways Superman now began to embody the evolution of the American identity, or rather a return of those values that the Great Depression had temporarily pushed aside. This old/new identity held that:

> Upward mobility, westward migration, Sunbelt relocation–the wisdom in America is that people don't, can't, mustn't end up where they begin. This belief has the moral force of religious doctrine. Thus the American identity is ordered around

> the psychological experience of forsaking or losing the past for the opportunity of reinventing oneself in the future. (Engle)

Where Superman had once challenged the notion of the old American identity and myth in his early narratives, he now, a model of the assimilated immigrant, became the champion of American identity.

One of the best examples of this immigrant identity and leaving the past behind was both challenged and reinforced when Jerry Siegel returned to his creation in 1960. Siegel, after falling out with DC over rights to his characters had sued the company in copyright lawsuits that were settled without Siegel ever regaining his rights to the Superman character (Tye 116-20, 122, 215-17, 241-2, 289-94) [31]. Though he had been humbled in his return to DC Comics and writing Superman again, Weldon points out that Jerry Siegel's return to writing Superman saw him write "Some of the most important, signature stories of Silver Age Superman and added to the continuity several elements that still endure" (120). His first major alteration was the creation of Superman's past exploits as Superboy (*Adventure* #271 in April 1960), but it is even more important, and as Weldon points out as being "one of the most elegiac, emotional epics of Superman" came from *Superman* #141 in November 1960 (121). In a three-part story entitled "Superman Returns to Krypton," the audience witnesses Superman as he returns to his home world of Krypton before its destruction. The story has Superman, using his super-

[31] Tye, in the index of his work, has referenced nineteen pages in his book that are dedicated to the many attempts by Jerry Siegel to fight the copyright laws for rights to Superman (his creation) and settlements. The first major lawsuit was in 1947 and ended with National Periodicals winning ownership of Superman (118-9). Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster ended up settling in 1948 and sold "the rights to Superboy and other related characters . . . for $94,013.16" (119). More lawsuits would ensue. In 1976, in the wake of publicity that lead up to the release of *Superman: The Movie*, Siegel and Shuster won a massive settlement from DC Comics owner, Warner Bros. (216-7).

speed, accidently break through the barriers of time and space. The result is that he ends up on Krypton before its destruction. Here Superman "falls in love with movie actress Lyla Lerroll and befriends his parents while doing his best to keep his surging emotions in check" (Weldon 121). Siegel, ultimately, besides presenting an emotional narrative in defiance of the notion that "one can never go home again," is able to further define Krypton's identity in relation to Superman. The emotional ending, which has Superman thrown back through time to his own time at the end, notes: "I'll always treasure my return to Krypton, seeing my parents again, and meeting . . . and loving . . . Lyla! . . . But already it seems like a . . . dream" (*Superman in the Sixties* 63). Superman openly admits a sense of relief at being home, his second home of Earth.

Returning to Engle's earlier statement, this Superman, though he cherishes his past and the experience he received in returning home, is firmly an American at heart. He has, and in viewing his return to Krypton as "a dream," forgotten his past in the quest to, as he has already done, reinvent himself as an American. This is Superman as metaphor for the immigrant experience. Superman's return home has the feel of a reminiscent-like story one immigrant might refer to as a story of "the old country" or for Superman, pardon the pun, "the old world." This thread is similarly found in Supergirl's narrative of 1959 (noted earlier) when coming to Earth. In fact, coming to Earth is what allows these "immigrants"–Superman and Supergirl–to find a new life and purpose.

It might be a bit confusing to figure out all the information the creators were throwing at the audience in the fifties and sixties. *Superman in the Sixties* contains a summary of the changes made in the Superman mythology and notes the changes to the

continuity of the Superman narrative as a way to help. Particularly, it points out that "Superman's birth planet became the centerpiece for the myth" and though we knew it was his home planet, we were now treated to depictions of "The long and proud history of the El family" (10). To help with all of the new information and new background, maps and imagery was created. *Superman in the Sixties* contains images of the flag of Krypton from the end of *Superman* #146 (1961) (24). Additionally, at the end of *Superman* #141 (1962) and the Siegel penned "Superman's Return to Krypton" there was an actual map of Krypton itself (64). There was a description of "How the Super-Family Came to Earth from Krypton" at the end of *Action Comics* #289 (1962) and "Guide to the Secrets of the Fortress of Solitude" at the end of *Superman* #156 (1962) that all aimed to help and interest readership in the new and expanded Superman mythology Weisinger created (88, 113-4). It was designed to help the audience follow all the changes rapidly taking place to Superman.

Besides the stories that centered upon Krypton, Superman stories continued to play with twist endings, puzzles, and emotions. As noted earlier in Superman's return to his home world, there was a distinct play up of the emotions as a major factor in the story. Other stories that played or attempted to play on the *pathos* of the audience included often used "imaginary stories." There were many of these stories, and it was a major trope of the Weisinger era. One such story, found in *Superman* #156 (1962), entitled the "Last Days of Superman" played on the emotions of the audience by utilizing the quasi-imaginary and twist-ending tropes of the era. The inside title page of the issue depicts Superman, lifted by miniature Supermen from the Bottle City of Kandor into the

Fortress of Solitude and declaring “Superman is dying from Virus X . . . and not even our great Kryptonian science can save him! The universe will mourn his loss forever!” (*Superman in the Sixties* 89). The story follows how a virus, from Krypton, following Superman to his new world is accidently unleashed, from a kryptonite encased capsule that fell to Earth[32]. After being infected, Superman begins to lose his powers and it is only by Supergirl traveling back in time and preventing the situation from occurring that actually saves Superman from dying (89-113).

“The Last Days of Superman” is, again, a play on the immigrant identity. The story of *Superman* #156 depicts the idea that something from his past and his “homeland” returns, as kryptonite does in the Superman narrative repeatedly, to haunt the now “assimilated” immigrant. Even though Superman was now firmly an “American,” and even more so, an American cultural icon, the idea of dealing with the immigrant past remains a constant present. It can and has been often asserted that “From this nation’s beginnings Americans have looked for ways of coming to terms with the immigrant experience;” that “so much of American literature and popular culture deals with the theme of dislocation” (Engle). The idea of dislocation is highly prevalent in the Superman narrative of the 1950s and 60s. Returning to Greenblatt’s conditions of self-fashioning, the Superman of the 1950s and 60s, in the America of the CCA, represents the alien, referred to throughout and in comparison to an “authority” and has become the figure who has submitted “to an absolute power or authority at least partially outside the self . . . an institution [the United States of America]” (*Renaissance Self-Fashioning* 9).

[32] Superman in fact acts very carelessly and rather reckless in this story because it is he, using the brute force of a large rock, who breaks the case open while trying to destroy it (*Superman in the Sixties* 91).

Superman, by submitting to the authority of American culture in turn became the model of that authority, in fact, the model of its *arête*. No longer is Superman the "threatening other" because the CCA left no room for him to exist as that, no way to destroy the authority and replace it. Superman, instead, submitted to the authority and by doing so was transformed into its champion.

Whatever idea remained of Superman as "alien threat" tended to reemerge in stories where Superman faced off against Lex Luthor. Superman as model, Luthor as anti-model is often the assumption perceived when looking at the Superman and Luthor relationship[33]. Greenblatt's conditions 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 10 of self-fashioning all pertain, in a fashion, to dealing with the idea of an authority versus that of an alien (*Renaissance Self-Fashioning* 9). A bit of this conflict is first found on display in *Superman* #164 entitled "The Showdown Between Luthor and Superman" (1963). Typical of the Luthor "complex" is that he does not view himself as an anti-model. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca point out that "Whereas reference to a model makes it possible to encourage a particular kind of behavior, reference to an anti-model . . . serves to deter people from it" (*The New Rhetoric* 366). In this particular showdown, Luthor as anti-model is assumed by anyone who is a fan of Superman; however, for those unfamiliar, Luthor establishes his anti-model credentials immediately by beginning the issue in a jail cell.

To add to these "credentials" Luthor's opening thoughts appear to be obsessed with Superman, who he refers to as "the man who put me here [jail] because he's really

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[33] This relationship of the model and anti-model existing between Superman and Luthor will be more fully explored in Analysis Part C.

jealous of my scientific genius, which I use for crime" (*Superman in the Sixties* 151). Luthor freely admits to his application of intellect to crime in the same breath (or thought) as claiming that Superman is jealous of him (delusional?). Luthor, as he often is depicted, operates under that childhood act of denial, "Superman made me do it." Luthor predictably plans to find a way to "deal" with Superman in some nefarious way and get his "revenge." This all leads to him escaping prison and then challenging Superman to a "fair fight." This is again a three-part story that has Superman, playing fair, accepting Luthor's challenge that leads them to go to a planet like Krypton (where Superman's powers will be negated). What follows is a situation where Luthor and Superman face off; Luthor ends up using his intellect to help the people only to give in to his obsession with Superman and turns the technology against him. It ends rather anti-climatically with Superman winning. Luthor, who requests that Superman help the people get water, extends the strange ending. The narrative actually ends with Luthor and Superman working together to help the people of that planet obtain water (with Superman throwing them a giant chunk of ice). Perhaps Luthor learned something from Superman as a model after all, though he would probably never admit it.

The stories of the Silver Age Superman are very entertaining and inventive. It is a credit to Weisinger's talent and willingness to try and build Superman's mythology within the environment imposed by the CCA that helped save Superman. However, over time, this new approach eventually became stagnant. Mark Waid, in his introduction to *Superman in the Sixties*, point out, that "it may have been that unwillingness to adapt to the times [this will be born out in Analysis Part B] that brought about a slide . . . a bust

[after] the boom [to] Weisinger's inventiveness turned . . . into maintenance" (9). Superman was losing his edge and by 1965, with the beginnings of cultural change and upheaval throughout America, fell behind the times. The decade of the 1960s was one that saw the emergence of superheroes that did not avoid the emerging social issues but tackled them instead[34].

Farwell to the "Old" Superman

Any real goodbye to the "old" Superman, the Superman of the Silver Age, had to wait until DC Comics decided to re-launch its entire comic book line in 1986[35]. This "goodbye" came in the form of Alan Moore and Curt Swan's *Superman: Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow*. The narrative was a sendoff to a certain version of Superman, to the one fashioned in the years following WWII, and was a goodbye to the Superman of the Silver Age and the mythology of Mort Weisinger. Weldon summarizes that the basic plot setup behind "Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow": an interviewer who has come to speak to Lois Lane, now former reporter for the Daily Planet as part of a memorial edition "Ten years after Superman's disappearance and presumed death" (221). This story was originally conceived and printed in *Superman* #423 and *Action Comics* #583 (1986). In the tradition of the Silver Age, this story was hailed in an opening prologue as "an Imaginary Story . . . about a perfect man who came

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[34] Superman was falling behind because there was a "new family" in Marvel Comic's Fantastic Four, teenage angst in Spiderman, and social outsiders in the X-Men. In reality, this was of science and its impact in creating monsters. Monsters had returned in a new form. At DC Comics there was the more pristine use of science with figures like Barry Allen's the Flash, Ray Palmers the Atom, and from outer space Hal Jordan received the calling to be the Green Lantern and become an inter-galactic policeman. All of these were now relegating Superman to the out-of-touch end of the comic book spectrum. Times were changing and he had to keep up. This will be addressed more in Analysis Part B.

[35] The decision that lead to DC Comics rebooting Superman and other titles in 1985-6 will be noted in more detail in Analysis Part B.

from the sky and did only good. It tells of his twilight [and] of how his enemies conspired against him and of that final war in the snowblind wasters beneath the Northern Lights" that led to his death (Moore and Swan 11). This opening appears like a eulogy upon a page with a Superman statue that has the inscription of "In Memoriam" (11).

The story itself recounts, through Lois's tale "the deaths of Lana [Lang], Jimmy [Olsen], and Krypto, as well as those of Luthor, Brainiac, and Mxyzptlk" (Weldon 222). The story concludes when, in order to end the situation, Superman ends up killing Mxyzptlk to bring it all to an end. When it is done, Superman declares to Lois: "I broke my oath. I killed him" to which Lois Lane replies, ". . . You had to! You haven't done anything wrong . . ." (Moore and Swan 56). Superman does not accept this attempt to justify his action. For Superman, this deontological act, this moral choice, cannot stand up to any utilitarian attempt to justify the consequences[36]. He replies to Lois's attempt to justify his actions by stating: "Yes, I have [done something wrong]. Nobody has the right to kill. Not Mxyzptlk, not you, not Superman . . . Especially not Superman!" (56). Superman is affirming that as a model he must remain on an emulatable level, a moral high ground, which he has, in this narrative's conclusion, violated. Even Superman is not above morality[37]. The sequence ends him with him entering a room marked as "Gold Kryptonite" (which removes his powers forever)[38]. As he does, Lois recounts that

[36] Deontological ethics boils down to the ideal that one makes the right choice regardless of consequences, while utilitarian ethics reflects operating and doing whatever one needs to do to ensure the best consequences.

[37] It is like he is saying the words found on Thor's hammer, presented to audiences in Thor the comic book character's "first appearance" in 1962 as written by Stan Lee and drawn by Jack Kirby: "Whosoever holds this hammer, if he be worthy, shall possess the power of . . . THOR" (*www.norsemyth.org*).

[38] This is one of Mort Weisinger's many colors and versions of Kryptonite. Grant Morrison makes note: "The prismatic splintering began with the invention of Red K, the cool Kryptonite, possibly because it

Superman, "as he walked into the blinding golden light and looked back over his shoulder. He smiled at me . . . I never saw Superman again" (56). This final sequence, the looking back and smiling is important to the actual end of the narrative. The story ends with the revelation that Lois's child can turn coal into diamonds and her husband, as he closes the door, smiles at the audiences and winks.

The story is circular in nature, but with the intent of having a kind of happy ending was that Superman becomes a human in the end, or does he? The Mr. Elliot, who Moore is hinting is really Superman now retired, ends the story by saying, in reply to his wife's suggestion of dinner, ". . . What do you think?" This question exactly mirrors the question put to the audience at the beginning of the narrative following the eulogy on page 11 (11, 59). This parallelism poses a kind of "what if" to the audience and leaves it up to them whether or not they believe Superman is still alive living in retirement or if he is really gone. Weldon helps sum up the narrative by noting "Once again, Moore finds, in this silly tale of flying dogs and leprechaun-like villains, a haunting power located in the tiniest of moments between its characters [that] serves as a satisfying emotional finale to a story forty-eight years in the telling" (222). This was itself the end of the "Superman family" as Weisinger had created it. What Alan Moore was able to do, according to Weldon, was provide "a beautiful, mournful melody to play them off the stage" (222). This last narrative of the Silver Age Superman was a fitting goodbye for an era that made Superman into a patriarchal future, a nostalgic goodbye to one version of Superman.

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made literal [the] them of bodily transformation. It was mineral LSD for Superman [and] No two trips on Red K were the same . . . Other Kryptonite variants were created as plot mechanics demanded rather than with any eye to longevity. That's why gold Kryptonite removes Superman's powers permanently, blue Kryptonite affects only Bizarros, and white Kryptonite is deadly to plants" (*Supergods* 73).

Conclusion: Fashioning *Arête* and a Model

So, what does make Superman "So Darn American?" as Gary Engle asks in his article? The beginning of the answer comes from understanding the influences that inspired his creators Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, as well as recognizing the characteristics and popularity the character generated in the imaginations of the public, and perhaps most important how cultural development of America pre-WWII and post-WWII helped create and fashion changes in the character. All of these elements played a role in self-fashioning Superman into an iconic representation of American culture and *arête*.

A key element to understanding American cultural icons requires recognizing how and what influences their creation. Additionally, these "cultural icons that manage to tap the national religious spirit are of necessity secular on the surface and sufficiently generalized to incorporate the diversity of American religious traditions" (Engle). In a country as diverse as America, Superman comes to represent a kind of "secular" version that amalgamates America's many religious traditions and expressions. These same traditions are the result of America's own immigrant history. This in many ways mirrors Grant Morrison's thesis in *Supergods*, as partially quoted already in this chapter but worth recounting again, which asserts, "We live in the stories we tell ourselves. In a secular, scientific rational culture lacking in any convincing spiritual leadership, superhero stories speak loudly and boldly to our greatest fears, deepest longings, and highest aspirations" (*xvii*). Morrison, like Engle, is not necessarily demeaning religion, but rather acknowledging the current shift in our culture and realizing, as Engle does, that

Superman can reach across such divides and adapt to evolutions in culture along the way. This ability of Superman is part of his identification and in turn, his persuasive ability as well. Ultimately, "Superman doesn't have to be seen as an angel to be appreciated, but in the absence of a tradition of national religious iconography, he can serve as a safe, nonsectarian focus for essentially religious sentiments, particularly among the young" (Engle). Superman thus is unifying because he does not lay claim to any particular ideology or religious iconography, and because of this is able to offer a unified cultural "quilt" of American culture as a result.

In the end, though this chapter is but the beginning of the analysis of Superman and his rhetorical influence as American *arête*, there are and will remain some key realities to Superman throughout that began with his birth. Looking back on the pains of birth and trials of Wertham that Superman underwent in his first three decades of existence, one can realize

> Superman is the great American hero. We are a nation rich with legendary figures. But among the Davy Crocketts and Paul Bunyans and Mike Finks and Pecos Bill and all the rest who speak for various regional identities in the pantheon of American folklore only Superman achieve truly mythic stature, interweaving a pattern of beliefs, literary conventions, and cultural traditions of the American people more powerfully and more accessibly than any other cultural symbol of the twentieth century, perhaps of any period in history (Engle)

Engle's statement and assertion here is a powerful one. It speaks to just how American Superman is. Superman is also a vessel of that the immigrant lifeblood that has fed America's past, present, and future.

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS PART B

"Superman is a very primal character . . . He's the granddaddy of all the superheroes. Everybody descends from Superman" – John Byrne[39]

Introduction to Kenneth Burke and Identification

One of the strongest and most persistent accusations discussed about the relevance of Superman derives directly from his near infinite powers and abilities. Recent debates surrounding the new Zack Snyder directed Superman movie, *Man of Steel* (2013) kicked up this decades-long accusation once again. A recent *esquire.com* article, "Why Superman Sucks," asserts that Superman is in fact "a fascist" (Marche)[40]. This article actually reveals a level of misconception surrounding the character and his complex representation over the past 75 years. Not only do Americans strongly admire his ability to embody and project moral beliefs about right and wrong. Some of the–let us call it "mistrust"–of Superman does stem from his god-like abilities. Though it is these abilities that help render him iconic and a worthy model, they can also serve to hinder full character identification with the audience. The need for the audience to identify with Superman represents a key component in his ability to be a model for his audience and

[39] O'Neill, Patrick Daniel. "John Byrne: New Tomorrows for the Man of Steel." *Comic Scene* 1 (1987): 6-9, 84. Print.
[40] Marche's article is part of a series of articles recently published in criticism of Superman. There are many others responding to Marche's original in *Esquire*, which discusses the accusations of whether Superman represents an American or an American fascist.

project the principles and values that Americans uphold as ideals[41]. The need for identification reveals the fundamental question that many critics pose but never seem to really answer: how can an ordinary person identify with a man who can fly? This chapter will try to answer that question.

Criticisms of Superman are not a new phenomenon. Major criticisms of the character have existed since his earliest days, dating back to the 1940s, and particularly in the years after World War II. Superman was explicitly a target in the 1954 publication of Fredric Wertham's *The Seduction of the Innocent*[42]. Wertham's criticisms focused on the elements of Superman he viewed as "un-American," such as fascism, as well as how these negative elements derive from his "superpowers." When examined closely, the dilemma of Superman's powers does affect his identification with his audience and does play a part in limiting Superman's ability to be a model. Additionally, it is Superman's powers that create another major challenge for him: how do you sustain the narrative of such a character that is this powerful? In Analysis Part A, we established how Superman originally had "built in" points of identification for his young audience of boy readers. What is at stake here in Part B is the realization of having to ask the follow up question: What happens when that audience grows up? All of these questions require an understanding of what Superman really is as a model in order to begin finding answers. In addition, examining attempts to update and alter Superman's narrative reveals how

[41] These were established in Analysis Part A and the idea that Superman is an American creation and representation.
[42] More detail on this issue is discussed in Analysis Part A

important the role of identification plays in allowing Superman to function as a model for his modern audience.

First, we must recognize internal requirements facing a character, like Superman, over decades of existence. We must understand how a character functions in the present. Second, on an audience level, there is a need for Superman to evolve with his audience maintaining his status as a model over the decades. Updating and refining his identification with an audience requires change as well as being able to attract new audiences to his narrative. In order to answer the challenges of Superman's powers, the role that they play in his audience identification and his ability to function in a long-term narrative with regards to his position as a model, two things must be understood. One, how does Superman function as a form of epideictic persuasion? Two, how do Superman's particular powers function as a form of analogous or metaphorical expression for the purpose of creating and maintaining audience identification? Central to all of this is the understanding of how and by what means does Kenneth Burke's concepts of identification and consubstantiality help draw out the reality of Superman. Umberto Eco points this out when he refers to Superman's character as static. How can Superman still maintain his ability to provide something worthy of emulation, constant, for his audience to recognize?

Change of any kind leads to the creation of division. For Burke, notions of change, as presented in the *Rhetoric of Motives* (referencing Milton's work on *Samson Agonisties*), point out that: "the *killing* of something is the *changing* of it, and the statement of the thing's nature before and after the change is an identifying of it" (20).

Change then can be viewed as a kind of death of what already exists. The function of identification here occurs both before the change has occurred and afterwards, in order to understand that there has been a change at all. The audience must be able to recognize both what it (whatever was changed) was and what it has now become. To complicate the situation more, identification serves a larger purpose, when persuading others, to help unite different groups, positions, or divisions by offering them something larger to relate to and unify them. Burke specifically quips that "If men were not apart from one another, there would be no need for the rhetorician to proclaim their unity" (22). To see this in a different way, one identifies his or her self as an individual, but also as part of a group of friends, member of a community, citizen of a town, state, country, or even species. Burke refers to this as the hierarchy, or "move by a sense of order" (*Language as Symbolic Action* 15). All of these progressively upward, larger groupings represent points of larger identification that can offer a way of overcoming the previous "division" in the pursuit of a larger sense of "unity."

If one is to view identification as a means to overcoming division and possible isolation, one must account for what it is that overarching elements and substances have to offer and share to create unity via identification. Any discussion of identification tends to lead to another, and connected, element that Burke discusses in conjunction with identification that he calls consubstantiality. Burke states that one is

> consubstantial with [one's] parents [but at the same time] apart from them. In this sense, there is nothing abstruse in the statement that the offspring both is and is not one with its parentage. Similarly, two persons may be identified in terms of

> some principle they share in common, “identification” that does not deny their distinctness. (21)

The sharing of a common “substance” or unifying agent, agency, purpose, scene, etc. is at work here. Another way to see it is that a person’s is connected by substance to their parents, but remains an individual, and an individual remains himself or herself even though the person may find identity via shared values or notions with others–common ground. This is to say that one is a person, unique, but also tied in ways to others through shared “substances” and this is what allows then identification to take effect. Superman represents, as it is argued here, a substance for the formation of identification. Superman, by expressing and embodying American held values and ideas (*arête*), serves as a consubstantial element that facilitates identification among the diverse facets of humanity, not simply Americans exclusively. He is also consubstantial with mythical traditions as well[43]. Understanding Superman as an identifiable and model of ideal excellence and virtue provides a new way of understanding just how important this fictional character has become to American culture.

Now, there is a big problem here for Superman to overcome: American culture does not remain static. The passage of time places a constant strain upon Superman’s presence. As a work of fiction, there is a luxury afforded to the character concerning a kind of immortality, but to account for Superman’s ability to remain a relevant cultural model the character must have some kind of permeable, adaptable structure. Superman’s position ~~as~~ serving as a form of epideictic rhetoric, as well as his place as a rhetorical

[43] See Literature Review and Methodology chapter.

metaphor for American *arête* (one that acts to provide a consubstantial means of relation), requires that Superman maintain his core substance while shedding outdated elements that might dampen his audience identification.

Chaim Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, in their treatise *The New Rhetoric*, point out that "epideictic oratory [operates as] a central part of the art of persuasion" (49). The idea of ceremonial expression of praise and blame are core rhetorical forms of expression functions a form of persuasion in the present tense, as Aristotle denotes, whereas forensic looks at the past and deliberative the future (*The Rhetoric* 32-3). Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca add though that there are some misconceptions about epideictic oratory, the common misconception about the value of epideictic oratory stems from its long and common association with stylistic presentations of persuasion. This negative interpretation goes all the way back to Plato's criticism of Sophists, like Gorgias, to Peter Ramus and members of the Royal Society. However, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca state that "the object of the theory of argumentation is the study of the discursive techniques allowing us *to induce or to increase the mind's adherence to the theses presented for its assent*" (4). In other words, argumentation is less about truth and more about inducing adherence in an audience. This notion of adherence, not relying on "truth," anticipates how audiences respond to persuasion. Epideictic rhetoric's effectiveness relies, ultimately, on "The intensity of adherence, aiming at effective action [which] cannot be measured by the degree of probability . . . but rather by the obstacles overcome by the action and the sacrifices and choices it lead to and which can be justified by the adherence" (49). Present action therefore is measured by results. In order for an

argument to be effective, an audience must have need for identifying and relating to what is expressed.

The metaphor provides an important tool, along with the role of epideictic rhetoric, for uncovering and communicating perceptions of Superman. In *The Rhetoric*, Aristotle states “Metaphors, like epithets, must be fitting, which means that they must fairly correspond to the thing signified: failing this, their inappropriateness will be conspicuous . . .” (168-9). In other words, one must apply the appropriate metaphor to the appropriate situation in order to achieve adherence, not to mention appropriateness and perhaps even understanding. This application requires awareness and perhaps also framing. Aristotle elaborates, noting: “Metaphors must be drawn . . . from things that are related to the original thing . . .” (191). By seeking to draw out the metaphor one allows for familiarity between what one is attempting to communicate in relation to what is already known by the audience. In relation to Burke, one is seeking to find the right substance that is consubstantial to generating identification. All four sources that will be under investigation in this chapter rely upon the audience maintaining recognition of the character and (recognizable) essence of Superman. This requirement is a point of identification writers and artists must maintain while they engage in fostering division between old and new perceptions of Superman. The idea of Superman and his *arête* (what kind of excellence he represents) are “drawn” out but core aspects are maintained. There is something different being done to the character, but as will be discussed momentarily, that the audience must be able to still identify with the “original” character in order for the metaphor and identification to work.

Building on the idea of the metaphor again, Kenneth Burke notes that Oswald Spengler's application of Nietzschean theory relies on the "incongruity" of two unlike things being juxtaposed together (*Permanence and Change* 90). These two unlike things are joined together in order to create, against this "incongruity," analogous understanding or likeness. Burke views metaphors as a form of perspective. This perspective is itself an expression of consubstantiality, in this case a way of seeing past the division of incongruity to see points of connection. Burke specifically defines ". . . the metaphor [as] always [having] about it precisely [the] revealing of hitherto unsuspected connectives . . . It appeals by exemplifying relationships between objects which our customary rational vocabulary has ignored" (90). Here metaphors function as a means to bring together things not always considered in relation to each other, to generate or promote consubstantiality, and by doing so reveal relationships that were until that point undiscovered. It is via the discovery of these kinds of relationships, or common grounds, which allow a new way of viewing or conceiving of what was not fully understood before. In other words, it helps to foster a sense of identification among incongruous objects, aspects, or things.

Burke's concept of consubstantiality and the identification of it describe how adherence can be gained in praiseworthy or epideictic fashion. Burke points to identification, more specifically, as a key aspect of real persuasion. Simply put, he notes "You persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his" (*Rhetoric of Motives* 55). Burke is saying here that the more you project elements and concepts that the

audience relates and identifies with (consubstantial), the more likely you are to have that audience accept what you are trying to convince them of in turn. This is in agreement with Aristotle, writing in *The Rhetoric* and recounted by Burke in his own words, that "For purposes of praise or blame [epideictic rhetoric], the rhetorician will assume qualities closely resembling any of these qualities [Aristotle's virtues of nobility that are discussed more in the next chapter] are identical with them" (*Rhetoric of Motives* 55). Burke uses Aristotle to ground his assertions that epideictic rhetoric helps foster identification between a speaker and audience. This interconnection helps promote adherence to qualities acceptable and admirable to his audience. Hence, Superman is held up as praiseworthy in many forms because he represents an ideal (immigrant) view of American *arête*. For some, though, the same can be said for Lex Luthor. More on this topic will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

When seeking to understand the application of Burke's identification to Superman, one must consider how a creation like Superman generates such a connection between character and audience. In other words, the symbolic elements that Superman represents help generate a consubstantial nature that then makes Superman even more attractive and identifiable[44]. Even understanding this does not completely account for how Superman came to embody symbolic elements that Americans identify with. However, one attempt to find those answers, with regard to the "timing" of Superman, emerges in an article by Shane Barrowman and Marcia Kmetz. In their article "Divided We Stand: Beyond Burkean Identification," Barrowman and Kmetz point out that "The

[44] See Analysis Part A

conversation about identification and division is particularly challenging and important during times of major crisis such as war and economic recession," and it was "During the period of the 1930s and 1940s [when Burke's writings developed and called out] that 'now was the time for action, not isolation' (Wesier 41)" (279). The 1930s was a time when the need for identification, for something to pull America together, was more crucial than at any time since perhaps the American Civil War. This era gave birth to Superman. In many ways, Superman developed as a kind of consubstantial metaphor of hope and excellence to fill the needs of the country and serve as a means of identification for that country to rally around.

One way to try and get at the heart of Superman as a character and the ways that different creators have attempted to change him is to apply Burke's dramatic pentad. In his *Grammar of Motives*, Burke refers to the five terms of the dramatic pentad, pointing out how they have a "role as attributes of a common ground or substance" and that there is overlap between them contributing to clarification of distinctions (xix). The pentad helps uncover the motives what is driving or propelling the action. In another scenario, one of many he lists, Burke highlights the idea of "The hero (agent) with the help of a friend (co-agent) outwits the villain (counter-agent) by using a file (agency) that enables him to break his bonds (act) in order to escape (purpose from a the room where he has been confined (scene)" (xx). To this scenario, Burke draws out possible ~~ways of~~ interpretations as it regards to how or what elements of the pentad are given emphasis. B. Cohrs, in his article "Kenneth Burke's Dramatism" notes that Dramatism (of which the dramatic pentad is part) consists of "two parts: action and motion" and that "Action is

something that people do on purpose in way of their voluntary behavior" (1). Action implies the understanding of intentional, deliberate choice. The act is the beginning of dramatism because, as Burke put it, this is the starting point of the analysis, "for there to be an act, there must be agent [and this requires a] scene in which the agent acts. To act in a scene, the agent must employ some means, or agency. And it can be called an act in full sense of the term only if it involves a purpose" ("Dramatism" 446). In all attempts to revamp, reinvent, or generate alterations in Superman's narrative or perspective of that narrative, the creators involved make deliberate choices.

To find the answer to how Superman has adapted and remains today, one needs to analyze what Superman was and what and how he has changed and evolved. The application of Burke's dramatic pentad in this chapter is aimed at navigating those changes generated by creators such as Denny O'Neil ("Kryptonite No More"), John Byrne (*Man of Steel*), Mark Waid and Alex Ross (*Kingdom Come*), and Mark Millar (*Superman: Red Son*) to update and alter Superman. We will attempt to uncover the motivations of these creators within their alternations to Superman. Through the updates and alterations, there remains the core substance of whom and what Superman is. The transformations rooted out as they are applied to Superman ultimately either ~~to~~ reaffirm identification for a new audience or update Superman as metaphor in order to maintain his epideictic role. Examples where elements of Superman's identification are disrupted, in order to explore a "what if" type scenario, typically rely on elements that are constant and important to Superman's character and role as a model.

Change and "Kryptonite No More"

Updating or trying to reinvent an iconic character is never an easy task under any circumstances. However, this was exactly the task that editor Julie Schwartz faced when he became Superman's editor in 1970. To tackle the problem, he turned to writer and friend Dennis "Denny" O'Neil to take on a herculean task. This task was Superman. Glen Weldon points out that "Having spent much of the previous decade [1960s] merely observing from the cultural sidelines, the now thirty something Superman was hit hard by the disillusionment that seized the country in the 1970s" (145). The culture and world were changing and Superman needed to change too. Superman's adventures and stories, after WWII and into the 1960s, had become more bizarre, more science fiction and "less" in touch with America and its growing cultural challenges. A great deal of Superman's narrative by the 1970 was the result of attempts to operate within the Comic Code Authority (CCA). In his book *Supergods*, Grant Morrison points out that

> The socialist power fantasies, the jingoistic propaganda and gimmick adventures that had defined the previous twenty years of *Superman* adventures, gave way to cataclysmic tales of love and loss, guilt, grief, friendship, judgment, terror, and redemption, biblical in their scale and primal purity. And always, Weisinger's [Superman's editor in the 1950s and 60s] godlike Superman became more like us than ever before. He was fifties America with its atom-powered fist, its deadly archenemy, its brave allies. Like America, he was a flawed colossus, protector of

> Earth from the iron-walled forces of tyranny and yet, fears of change, and a terror of conformity. (63)

Superman changed to meet the times as the 1950s progressed. He, as usual, morphed to represent America writ large–the status quo. However, as time pressed on into the 1960s, Superman's own presence and position, along with his stories, began running behind the times, rather than out in front. How could "the man of tomorrow" take on the future when he appeared to embody a slowly decaying past? One might say this was an early on-set of a kind of "midlife crisis" for Superman (Weldon 145).

Much of the problem came from the ways that America and comic books were changing entering the 1970s. Marvel Comics, DC's major rival, took the lead in the 1960s by selling comics and creating characters that tackled social issues, and piloted comic books as a medium into a major platform for a narrative form of "activism." The 1970s, sometimes called the Bronze Age of Comics, have become known in comic scholarship circles as "age of 'relevance in comics'" (145). *The Power of Comics* recounts at length how the 1960s and Marvel Comics' introduction of characters like Spiderman and the X-Men turned comic books into platforms to voice social issues and change. In the 1970s, this led to the introduction of greater diversity in characters (more prominent African-American characters for start) as well as open discussions about drugs and other threats facing kids in America. These threats had gone unspoken of for decades in large part due to the CCA (Duncan and Smith 58-60). The 1960s and 1970s represented a period of time when comic book stories began emerging into vehicles for

exploring challenging social issues that were important to their readers[45]. This change in the landscape of comic books ultimately meant that in order to keep up in this "age of relevance" Superman stopped dealing CCA approved aliens and missions in outer space, and instead "returned" to Earth to take on "issues such as pollution, famine, gang warfare, and racism" (Weldon 145). Superman had remained static while America had not and it was time to adapt or die.

Superman needed to adapt. He needed to refresh his metaphor in order to overcome the gap between himself and the audience[46]. Without this change, Superman might have eventually failed to represent any kind of consubstantial element Americans identified with at all. He would simply become a relic of another age. Aristotle, in *The Poetics* notes, as it would become clear, that ". . . a good metaphor implies an intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilars" (255). Superman as a metaphor, as he was, was falling behind and becoming less able to generate similarities and overcome differences with his aging audience. He was, in fact, becoming one of those "differences" within American culture. He had become one of the "Establishment." Superman was out of touch, and there was a need for tinkering with the character to allow it to connect again with a new audience.

These issues were the kind that O'Neil had already proven were ones he could handle. O'Neil, who had had success reviving characters such as Wonder Woman and Green Lantern/Green Arrow, seemed ideal for revamping Superman. In April 1970, in

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[45] Often this was done in defiance, or finding creative and sneaky ways around the restrictions of the CCA

[46] A recent example came when I went to see Snyder's Man of Steel in theaters with my friend Megan. I asked Megan (who is about 8 years younger than me) why she liked the movie. Her response was that this was the first Superman movie that spoke to her, to her generation. She had a point. Snyder's Superman update was aimed to "refresh" the Superman metaphor.

Green Lantern/Green Arrow #76 (Green Lantern was sharing his title with Green Arrow), "O'Neil introduced the comic book world to the idea of 'relevance' [by combining his] journalism background with his fiction writing. [He asked this question:] 'What would happen if we put a superhero in a real-life setting dealing with real-life problems?'" (Kohl 103-4)[47]. This is the primary "idea" needed to update Superman. O'Neil aimed to ground Superman for the modern audience in order to help re-establish his relevance and re-connect to his audience.

The result was the storyline "Kryptonite Nevermore." The first issue of this storyline, *Superman* #233, had "Kryptonite No More" splashed on the cover when it appeared in January 1971. The cover, as rendered by artist Neal Adams, depicts Superman posed with chains of kryptonite shattering from their position of restraint around his chest[48]. The title itself was actually more deceptive than one might think. Having Superman's greatest weakness, kryptonite, rendered inert and harmless, created the impression of "making the Man of Steel seemingly unstoppable." But in actuality this was "part of a grand scheme to depower him [Superman]" by Schwartz and others (Cowsill, Alan et al 144). It was not an easy task for O'Neil, though it was a necessary one, and had mixed results.

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[47] This issue, #76, was groundbreaking for it's beginning of a narrative that would tackle many of the major social issues of the days. Green Lantern is confronted by an elderly African-American man who says: "I been readin' about you . . . How you work for the blue skins . . . and how on a planet you helped out the orange skins . . . Only there's skins you never bothered with--! . . . The black skins! I want to know . . . How come?!" (O'Neil and Adams 11). Of course, he cannot answer the accusation. This helps set the entire tone of the adventures between Green Lantern and Green Arrow that followed.

[48] In what might be deemed ironic, Neal Adams recently admitted that this iconic cover he drew is one of his least favorite. He specifically notes that Superman's feet are too far apart and thinks he could have done a much better job ("Neal Adams: Neal With the Deal").

Part of the necessity for changing Superman came from the fact that his expansion of powers and abilities had ballooned over the years since WWII. Superman's editor, Mort Weisinger, according to Grant Morrison, had decided on bringing kryptonite (which already existed in the radio serials) into the comic books to counter act the fact "that the Man of Tomorrow had achieved near-divine heights of omnipotence [and that] the need for some kind of convincing physical vulnerability" (72). The expansion of powers post-WWII had rendered the character nearly and completely invisible–another way of saying it was Superman had become almost impossible to write for because how could one challenge a being who was practically a god? Even more so, how can one identify with a character that is so far above oneself? In addition, Superman had in more than three decades become a major commodity as well as a character. As a result, according to Glen Weldon, "O'Neil shared his editor's [Julie Schwartz's] ambivalence [towards Superman] because such a high-profile character would come with too many corporate strings attached. O'Neil found it particularly difficult to get excited about working on a character, such as Superman, that could "see through time and blow out a star" (146). This difficulty and reluctance by O'Neil ultimately hindered the project from the very beginning. It strained the existence of the character. Weldon points out ~~that~~ the result ~~was~~:

> O'Neil lasted less than a year on Superman, during which time he threw everything but the kryptonite sink at the Man of Steel. He turned the public

> against him [and] Despite [his] ambitions to humanize the Man of Steel by bringing him low [the experiment failed]. (151)

Much of this failure stemmed from the fact that there were too many hands in the Superman character, too many creators. Such a large number of people failed to cohesively adhere to the new "status quo" that O'Neil and Schwartz were trying to create to make it last. The consequence was confusion among readers and a loss of vision about what Superman was supposed to be. Ultimately, according to Paul Krohl, O'Neil brought about three major changes to the character, and his "mythology: The transformation of all earth's Green Kryptonite into iron, the evolution of Clark Kent from print journalist to TV Newsman, and the introduction of a mysterious sand creature" (104). Most of these aspects stuck around in one form or another, in the background. Superman's evolution to TV was really the only lasting change to stick outright. O'Neil did manage, however, to alter the Man of Steel because, for "the first time [he called into question] assumptions about 'The American Way'" came to light (104). In many ways though, this questioning of the establishment was part of the times in American during the 1970s. Superman was a character who existed in that "present tense" of epideictic expression and supposedly represented American *arête*. Questioning America was becoming part of a cultural trend. Despite this, O'Neil's attempt lacked the *Kairos* needed to alter Superman, coming at the wrong time, and lacked a true central vision to make it successful.

How creators deal with Superman's greatest "constant"–his character–is the toughest challenge any of them face. Though tinkered with, elements of Superman's character have remained fairly consistent and have always provided the key point for

identification between Superman and his audience. Applying Burke's theory of identification serves here as an important tool in seeing how Superman's core is maintained as it moves through phases of reshaping the character from top to bottom. When attempting to change Superman, the challenge involves the construction of a division between the character and the audience who already identifies with the character. In order to overcome the division this process causes, the alterations made to Superman, certain core aspects, particularly for Superman's character, must remain consubstantial in order to facilitate identification for the audience once the process is completed.

Keeping intact Superman's character is crucial to any successful attempt to update, alter, and transform a character. Kenneth Burke noted that "In pure identification there would be no strife [and vice versa] But put identification and division ambiguously together, so that you cannot know for certain just where one ends and the other begins, and you have the characteristic invitation to rhetoric" (*Rhetoric of Motives* 25). Without realizing it in Burkean terms, this was what Denny O'Neil and Julie Schwartz tried to do with Superman. They tried to remove or play down any sense of over-identification an audience had with the character, without losing that audience, in order to break out of certainty (Superman at that point) and introduce or foster ambiguity for the sake of generating plot and stories.

It could be argued that Superman's audience was not ready for the changes that O'Neil and Schwartz imposed upon him, or perhaps that the changes made did not go far enough to truly reinvigorate the character nor draw in any kind of new audience. O'Neil's own reservations and apprehensions about taking on Superman bleed through into his

writing and helped undo the attempt made to update Superman. O'Neil's reservations, one could argue created a situation where the speaker (O'Neil) was unable to translate his talents to building a "rapport" with the Superman audience. Or, perhaps, O'Neil may be seen to have not gone far enough to really "reinvent" Superman in a new and dynamic way for the audience.

Superman, then, returned in many ways to where he had always been–the most powerful character in the comic book universe. His appeal remained in a "stagnant" position as the 1970s wore on. The realization that Superman was to star in a major motion picture in 1978 did help the characters appeal some. However, as Larry Tye notes,

> The truth was that real fans of Superman didn't need a short-lived gimmick . . . or Christopher Reeve's shifting his hair part–to buy into Superman's disguise as Clark Kent. They loved all that he stood for, from his idealism to his unflinching heroism. Too many of their flesh-and-blood heroes were gone now. Assassins got Jack Kennedy, then Martin Luther King and Jack's brother Bobby. Drugs took Elvis and Marilyn . . . They were all gone, but Superman endured, seemingly forever, and all those who looked to him as an archetype were grateful. (208-9)

Superman's "existence" hinges on the idea that there is someone out there who would never give up or abandon us. This reality is also what makes Superman so difficult for creators to capture and shape. It is a paradox of sorts, what Burke might refer to as a paradox of substance. When discussing the paradox of substance in *A Grammar of Motives*, Burke writes that, "the word 'substance,' used to designate what a thing *is*,

derives from a word designating something that a thing *is not* . . . though used to designate something *within* the thing . . . the word etymologically refers to something *outside* the thing" (23). With regards to Superman, this concept places a heavy requirement upon the character to fulfill, intrinsically, a vast array of expectations and desired outcomes that, extrinsically, place an incredibly difficult mandate on creators who work with the character. One who attempts to work with Superman's character in a narrative takes on the task of really trying to mold sand into solid objects.

Superman once again transitioned into a star in popular culture with the success of Richard Donner's *Superman: The Movie* in 1978 and the subsequent sequels that followed, particularly *Superman II* (1980). These films put the Man of Steel back in the view of Americans, center stage, for the first time since the 1950s, and his forays into radio, newspaper strips, and George Reeves' television depiction. Superman was now on the big screen, and in full color. As the movie caption line promoting the first film read, "You'll believe a man can fly." America, for the first time, saw an iconic champion of their ideal values standing bright and center in front of them, and America realized just how much it needed Superman.

***Man of Steel* Reboot: Superman Redesign**

It took DC Comics fifteen years to really return to the idea of modifying or changing Superman again after O'Neil's 1971 attempt. In fact, it took DC shaking up and compressing its entire narrative universe in a twelve-issue saga known as *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, written by Marv Wolfman and illustrated by George Perez, to serve as the

precursor[49]. In fact, "In 1985 DC Comics Celebrated its fiftieth anniversary" and Crisis… was "intent[ed] to tidy up the continuity–the inter-relationships among previously published stories–and ideally make DC titles more accessible to new readers" (Duncan and Smith 78). In order to make Superman "more accessible," DC brought in "fan favorite" John Byrne to captain a six-issue mini-series entitled *Man of Steel*[50]. All of Superman's titles were suspended, temporarily, and replaced with the mini-series that aimed to remake Superman, "to scrape off the barnacles" of time (Tye 219). The result was *Man of Steel* #1 which hit newsstands in October 1986–as the boldest move to "makeover . . . an icon" attempted (Cowsill, Alan et al 221). This was no easy task, as Tye also points to, this was a risky move, for "Recasting the sacred Superman legend was as perilous as trying to jazz up the Bible or formulate a New Coke" (219). Superman is a commodity, as well as an American icon. When one tries to tamper with something like that and gets it wrong, one could end up destroying it. Superman as a commodity is a needed and recognizable element of what Superman developed into in American culture. Licensing and merchandise was a major moneymaker for the character, even when his comic books were not.

For John Byrne, who was brought in to help carry out this makeover, the idea was about "stripping away of the barnacles–the additional super characters, the 425 billion survivors of Krypton [Kandor]. I think the fans in general like it now–that Superman is

[49] Crisis on Infinite Earths was DCs attempt to try to streamline its comic book superhero universe, or what they called the "multiverse." The purpose of the 10 issue maxi-series, written by Marv Wolfman and illustrated by George Perez, was to, according to Wolfman, "in its purest form [existed] to bring DC back to an easy-to-read beginning . . ." (*Crisis on Infinite Earths*).
[50] Byrne had already had huge success in helping propel the X-Men to its greatest heights of popularity that it has remained at to this day.

again the sole survivor of the doomed planet Krypton" (O'Neill 7)[51]. Ideas such as Superboy, Krypto the Superdog and the idealist depiction of Krypton disappeared from the narrative again. Byrne states that his ultimate aim, by removing these older elements of Superman's narrative, for cutting things down was "to make him [Superman] more accessible and more human . . ." to the modern audience (7). Superman could be more identifiable again by simplicity. This was bringing Superman back to first principles, to where he was when he was first created. Unlike O'Neil's revision, there was no need to work all of this into continuity. Byrne was in fact presented with the complete freedom to rewrite the character and create new continuity in the aftermath of DC's *Crisis on Infinite Earths*. Byrne's also had the advantage, as he admitted in an interview from 2000, to reshape Superman to mirror Richard Donner's highly successful Superman movies (*Superman: The Movie* and *Superman II*). Those films helped Byrne make "important insights . . . into the character of Superman" ("John Byrne: The Hidden Answers"). All of these developments allowed this new incarnation of Superman to take a stronger hold and represent an updated and identifiable Superman both in his comic book form and in relationship to his audience as well.

Beyond simply reinventing the Man of Steel, Byrne's remake tapped into elements in American culture that were emerging in the 1980s. Daniel J O'Rourke and Morgan B. O'Rourke, in their essay "'It's Moring Again in America': John Byrne's Re-Imagining of the Man of Steel" open their discussion of Superman's reinvention by

[51] The Bottle City of Kandor was formerly the capital of Krypton now reduced, shrunk down to miniature. It was an introduction of Weisinger's tenure as editor and involved a villain named Brainiac capturing, miniaturizing, and preserving Kandor until Superman rescued it from him after a fight. Unfortunately, Superman was unable to restore it to size.

comparing it to President Ronald Reagan's "'Morning in America' campaign." This was "a classical example of epideictic rhetoric" that aimed to undo the uncertainty of politics of the late 1970s and early 1980s "by celebrating traditional American values" (115). To ride the wave of Reagan's epideictic expression in American culture, Byrne aimed to promote America's "immigrant story" ideal via his new Superman. In "a 1988 interview" Byrne stated, "that the Man of Steel is the 'ultimate American success story–a foreigner who comes to America, and is more successful here than he would be anywhere else'" (O'Rourke & O'Rourke 119). This was the immigrant success story amplified to super-heroic levels. This was the vision that Byrne attempted to bring back, the core of Superman's story that dated back to 1938.

As O'Rourke and O'Rourke highlight in their essay, as we shall see more in the next chapter, Byrne attempted his own re-accentuation of Superman's narrative origins (119). However, instead of simply expanding or embellishing the origin, Byrne opted for an entirely new take on Superman's origin. According to Glen Weldon, Byrne began by "unceremoniously toss[ing] out any vestige of the familiar Krypton that had first been glimpsed in a newspaper strip in 1939; this was no Disneyfied Tomorrowland" and depicts Superman being "actually 'born' on Earth" instead of Krypton (223-4). This change put a definite new spin on old origin, moving away from Siegel and Shuster's original vision and towards a vision that offered up a dystopian view of Superman's home world Krypton. This new revision helped establish the idea that Earth was the "better place" to go to, as it was for many immigrants. In addition, Byrne helped initiate changes to Superman's powers and their development as well.

Byrne's attempt to remake Superman ultimately focused less on character and more on issues surrounding his powers and abilities as a means to revitalize the character's relevance after nearly forty years of heterogeneous development. His attempts to "decalcify" Superman blended efforts to update, and trim, Superman's powers and abilities. It is noted that the original "Siegel and Shuster's [source of Superman's powers as based in a] 'super-race/lesser gravity' exegesis for superpowers [was out]. Byrne instead put all of his narrative weight behind the 'ultra-solar-ray' reasoning that Otto Binder had introduced [to the Superman narrative] back in 1961" (Weldon 224). These changes helped to redefine his origins by lending a more scientific and updated conception of his powers to the narrative. In addition, Byrne's Superman did not have these powers all at once. Instead, his powers develop gradually, as he grows up, and grows stronger, another element found in the recent movie adaptation (225).

One way of attempting to bridge the gap is to recognize what has changed by comparing and contrasting it to the original, known, narrative work through Burke's theory of dramatism. As mentioned in the opening of this chapter, in his work *A Grammar of Motives*, Burke laid down his five key terms, the dramatic pentad, that put in practice his theory of dramatism. These key terms are Act, Scene, Agent, Agency, and Purpose (xv). Applying Burke's dramatic pentad to John Byrne's *Man of Steel* #1, one can conduct a simple analysis of what was at work in this "remodeling" and modification of Superman's motives emerges. For Burke, this is in particular a matter of ratios. Burke relates that the rations are pairing between five different terms of the pentad. They are all "principles of determination" (*The Grammar of Motives*16). This holds to account the

fact that “The agent does not ‘contain’ the act, though it results might be said to ‘pre-exist virtually’ within him” and that to “The agent is an author of his acts, which are descended from him, being good progeny if he is good, or bad progeny if he is bad . . .” (16). Burke appears to offer the idea of how intent plays within the approach of the ratios carries a great deal of consequence in the product produced, as noted above by agent-act ratio. Byrne, then, as agent, bears a great deal of weight in the outcome of the act, as well as the scene (the entire reboot of the DC Universe) in helping to make the transformation of Superman in 1986 a “progeny” of good.

The first characteristic of the pentad is the “Act.” In this case, the Act was, on Byrne’s part, a remake of Superman: his origin, his backstory, his powers, and relationships (including the positions and identities of his supporting cast). All of the changes were implemented to try and “update” or align Superman’s own “present tense” with the actual present of the 1980s. The role of Agent in the narrative, though still Superman has a slightly different take on the dual identity concept. Whereas past narratives hinged upon the concept or implied idea that Superman was the “primary” identity, Byrne opted to flip this paradigm and have Clark Kent be who Superman really is and let Superman be the “put on.” This shift of the primary identity in many ways helped bring Superman back down to Earth. Making Clark Kent the primary identity also allowed ~~for~~ the audience to share in a greater consubstantiality with Superman, particularly that audience who was not as familiar with his complicated history of Superman or who had become alienated as his powers had increased over the decades.

The Agency of Superman's powers were refined in Byrne's narrative. Byrne made Superman less powerful and made it so his powers developed over time rather than all at once. Early on in *Man of Steel* #1, Jonathan Kent, Clark's adopted father, explains how they first came to realize Clark was special when he survives a trampling by a bull without any harm. There is some irony to Jonathan's statement, resulting from when he and Clark's adopted mother, Martha, brought him home. She states that Clark "seemed in every way to be the baby we'd so often prayed for. Beautiful, bright…Perfect" (15). To "seem . . . perfect" is a highly optimal way of phrasing it here. The irony here comes off almost like a pun in how this phrasing above works in regards to what the audience knows Superman will become. To say Clark was "perfect" here is particularly ironic considering also that he is in fact not human, but an alien from another world. Clark's invulnerability–as demonstrated by being trampled by the bull–is followed by Martha's discovery of his super strength when she witnesses him lifting a tractor off the ground in order to retrieve a ball that had rolled under it. Finally, a scene depicts Clark falling off a cliff only to discover that in fact he can fly (16). These powers come to form the basic "core" powers of Byrne's Superman: invulnerability, super strength, flight (speed too), ability to breath under water and in space, x-ray vision (*Man of Steel* #3), heat vision (*Man of Steel* #4), and eventually super breath and super-hearing. These were essentially the same powers he possessed during the Golden Age of Comics (1938-1952). Gone were some of his more ridiculous and absurd powers: telepathy and miniaturization–that had developed in the 1950s and 1960s[52]. All of Byrne's modifications and alterations helped

[52] Previous powers ranged from things such as super intelligence, multilingualism, and eidetic memory to

render the character more identifiable (again) by making Superman more human and established that Superman's powers emerged over time rather than instantly. In spite of all of this change, Superman's Agency as a force for good and right did not change at all, remaining intact and a point of identification that remained constant.

The primary Purpose, as noted earlier in this section, was to update Superman and attempt to render him "more" identifiable without alienating what originally made him popular. Byrne quite adamantly recognized that "Superman is a very primal character . . . He's the granddaddy of all the superheroes. Everybody descends from Superman" (*Comics Scene* 7). Byrne ~~is~~ acknowledges that there are things one cannot mess with in a character like Superman, but that from time to time there is a need to update or modernize them. This helps set up Byrne's motives and motivations in terms of Superman. He set out to restore Superman by accomplishing what O'Neil was unable to do. The result of this near complete RetCon of Superman was that it stuck. The Purpose was successful, despite those who did not like the removal of older elements, and the lasting impact of this change can be seen to have taken root.

It was Byrne's flipping of who was the primary personality of Superman, Clark Kent or Superman, that perhaps warrants more attention with regard to identification between audience and character. Byrne inverted the tradition of Superman's identity. Rather than having Superman be Superman as the primary identity and Clark Kent be the false identity, Byrne made Superman be the "secret" identity and Clark Kent the primary identity. Additionally, this change helped draw a stronger sense of identification between

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mental powers, super ventriloquism, and super hypnosis.

the hero and his audiences in doing so. In Byrne's retelling, it is "Clark Kent the Kansas farm boy [who] is the real man, while Superman the powerful hero is the pose" and this was specifically meant to address the question of "why *would* anyone assume Superman had a secret identity, anyway? If he wasn't around, wouldn't they simply imagine that he was off somewhere else, saving lives?" (Weldon 226). Questions regarding Superman's "real identity" have always been a point of contention surrounding the character, particularly when considering the character as model. It had been tackled during Julie Schwartz's tenure as editor of the Man of Steel during the 1970s. Larry Tye points out that Schwartz's tinkering and challenging of Superman's identity, as to what part of him was the real him, carried a lot of appeal with traditional "Marvel [Comics] readers [because] Superman's internal struggle over which of his identities–the human reporter or the alien superhero–was the real him. The verdict: Both were indispensable" (207). This question of identification developed out of a simple trope that became a staple of every superhero: the secret identity. It's part of what often defines a superhero and typically is adopted for the purpose of protecting both the superhero's civilian identity (real life) and those with whom he associates (family, friends, co-workers, etc.) from the harm of those who oppose the superhero.

As the first modern comic book superhero, Superman helped codify the idea of the Superhero identity versus the secret identity. Richard Reynolds, in his book *Superheroes: A Modern Mythology*, postulates that his idea of a superhero genre begins with "some of the features of the story" originating in *Action Comics* #1(12). The fifth feature of the seven that Reynolds lists is "*The secret identity*," and he asserts that it is a

crucial element to any superhero. Reynolds points out that "The Clark/Superman duality needs a constant supply of new dramatic situations to reveal new facets of the hero's split personality" (14). Reynolds asserts that the secret identity operates as a dramatic device for superhero narratives. In some ways, the superhero secret identity and its protection could be seen as a kind of Agency for the Agent. Superheroes have to act with a certain caution not merely to protect themselves, but those around them as well. Reynolds also points out that Superman, in *Action Comics* #1, gives "explicit reasons" for why he has a secret identity, saying, speaking of his enemies, that "'They could use my friends to get at me,' reasons which have become common throughout the genre, and do not need to be spelt out when establishing a new character" (14). To put it another way, Superman established a trend that all other superheroes follow today.

Regarding Superman's need for a secret identity, there is raised a question of why he needs one. He is invulnerable, so any idea of having a secret identity to "protect himself" really does not work. However, the fact that he does have a secret identity casts some doubt on whether Superman can serve as a "model" of worthy and emulate-able behavior. First, if Superman represents honesty and truth, then why does he lie about his identity? Is it a lie to do it to protect others? This could lead one to a philosophical debate over utilitarian vs. deontological notions of morality[53]. The question of secret identity is one that kids take for granted; they simply accept the "superhero logic" of it. It is a cool or real fantasy to become someone else. However, as one gets older, and sees deeper

[53] In terms of moral ethics, this is a philosophical debate where one is faced with a decision and chooses to make the choice based on the consequences of that choice, thereby holding them as most important (utilitarianism) or disregards the consequences and simply acts on what is right regardless (deontological).

meanings in Superman other than a child's wish fulfillment, one seeks out a more complex explanation. In his short story, "The Gesture," John Updike writes, when speaking through his character Richard, that he "had taken ideals of behavior from dime movies and comic books - coolness from Bogart, debonair recklessness from Errol Flynn, duality and deceit from Superman" (572). In other words, Superman taught Richard how to lie to be quite blunt. This assertion expressed here presents a bit of conundrum for viewing a character, or any superhero for that matter, such as Superman, as worthy of emulation and serving as a rhetorical model for others.

What does it say about superheroes in their need to keep secret identities[54]? It tends to lead to questions of trustworthiness when one has to live a dual identity. Barbara Brownie and Danny Graydon address these concerns, particularly in regards to Superman, stating that "Duality, and the struggle to negotiate the relationship between two different identities, helps define the superhero genre [as] a deliberate act of construction" (2). The "struggle" of identity casts ambiguity on the superheroes' *ethos*. Brownie and Graydon offer up a new spin on this struggle as an attempt to answer the problem. The authors point out that traditional discussions of Superman's identity have often centered around Jungian ideas of the "main personality" (Superman) and the idea that Clark Kent functions as "Superman's Shadow" (*Man and his Symbols* 171). This theory places Superman in an ambiguous position that hinders his overall *ethos*. In fact, left unanswered, it damages his ability not only as a model, but also as a pure force for fostering identification as well.

[54] A subject covered in many ways in different comic book narratives.

This traditional placement of Superman's identities, of which one is the "real" identity, has always been at play in his narrative. John Byrne's *Man of Steel* reboot helped give it new birth and brought it back to light via his "flip-flop." Glen Weldon points out Byrne's change was to not just to make "Clark was the real self," but to turn "Superman [into] 'just a fancy pair of long johns that lets [him] operate in public without losing [a] private life'" (Weldon 227). This change was aimed at helping to aid and reestablish Superman's identification with the audience. Weldon highlights the fact that Byrne's contribution was to invert the character dynamic to achieve this identification. Byrne reestablished the consubstantial elements already present in the character. This move served to help further identification with Superman by placing him within a more "human" and more "everyman" kind of construct. He was Clark Kent, your everyman, who just happened to also be Superman, your *Ubermensch*.

Brownie and Graydon ultimately offer up a completely different answer to the "duality" of Superman. They propose that both figures, "Clark Kent and Superman . . . are constructed identities" noting that "few cultures believe in any kind of fixed identity" (2). The fact of the matter is that Superman is both Superman and Clark Kent, but his real identity, as the authors assert, is Kal-El of Krypton. This is who he really is, because this "character existed before both of his alter-egos came [ever] into being" (2). Kal-El is in fact who Superman really is, and what develops through the application of Clark Kent and Superman is less about deceit than it is about an attempt to both assimilate into a culture as well as become (self-fashioned) a model or champion for that culture as well.

One might think about the ways that immigrants change~~s~~ elements of their own identity in order to “fit in” in their new society or country. Brownie and Graydon point out that

> At the moment when his two personas are constructed, Kal-El’s identity is split into two. Clark Kent is refined and reduced to a mask of ordinariness, and Superman is created to contain the alien aspects of his identity. From this point onwards, the character exists in a perpetual state of incompleteness. The example of Superman shows that neither the Superman nor Clark Kent are a complete or genuine character. Both identities are constructions. Both are incomplete. (3)

Both characters are expressions of Kal-El, who is the complete and genuine figure. Those who are closest to the character, who know him and his real identity, “refer to him as ‘Kal’, with the understanding that he is both . . . Superman and Clark, and yet neither” (3-4). This struggle with identity, of understanding why Superman has constructed these personas, casts a light upon not only what one may see as a psychoanalysis of the superhero, Jungian or Freudian or even Lacanian grasping of identity formation, but also recounts a kind of higher and nobler self-fashioning of identity for a purpose. Kal-El makes the choice to be Superman and to be Clark Kent. These choices represent aims not only at a self-fashioning, but also identification for Superman, himself as well as his audience.

In reaching out to that audience, as a model, Superman functions as a metaphor as well. As a metaphor, as representing something that is something else, there is the risk that after so much time the metaphor of Superman has lost its’ potency–hence the need for Byrne’s revamp. Perelman specifically points out “Metaphors become worn out by

repetition . . .” (*The Realm of Rhetoric* 122). Superman, as a metaphor, then faces the issue of becoming worn out over time and through repetition (75 years of it). Since continuity places limits on metaphors, requirements demand that in order to refresh and restore the metaphor, new life has to be “breathed” into them. To achieve this, creators often have to go outside the limits of tightly controlled comic book continuity. The narrative stories like *Kingdom Come* and *Superman: Red Son* both represent extreme pushes and pulls on Superman’s identity. These narratives have the freedom to challenge Superman’s metaphorical ability of embodying American *arête* by inverting and altering the Superman we know in order to “breathe” new life into the character by way of new perspective. More importantly, both stories bear witness to the consequences of the absence of the secret identity. This is important, because, as Morrison points out, Clark Kent is “the man behind the *S* . . . [he is] the soul, the transcendent element in the Superman equation. Clark Kent is what [has made Superman] endure” (9). What Waid and Millar, in *Kingdom Come* and *Superman: Red Son*, respectively, deal with is Superman when he loses touch with himself, with his soul. The aim is to bring out new revelations about Superman and his place as a model and *arête* of the American icon by taking him to places he could not or would not go within his traditional narrative.

***Kingdom Come*: Identification of Failure (Character)**

Where one can see implicitly the motives behind attempts to generate new identification for Superman with an audience in “revamps” such as O’Neil’s “Kryptonite Nevermore” storyline (1971), and the more successful John Byrne *Man of Steel* mini-series (1986), later explorations of identification developed from what DC Comics refer

to as “elseworlds.” Many of these “elseworlds” attempt to present variations of characters and narratives as a means to explore (temporarily) the superheroes’ core essence rather than generate permanent continuity changes. Stories such as *Kingdom Come* and *Superman: Red Son* exist outside Superman’s primary narrative, or what is referred to as “outside continuity” in the comic book community. They are the equivalent of “parallel universes.” Where previously discussed “revamps” exist within continuity and are considered “RetCons” of the Superman narrative, the following source material under discussion operate as stand-alone narratives. These stories present creators, such as Waid and Millar, the opportunity to play out in dramatic form “alternative” or “what if” stories involving mainline continuity characters, such as Superman.

Kingdom Come is a 4-issue non-continuity miniseries, written by Mark Waid and illustrated by Alex Ross. “Non-continuity” means that this narrative does not affect the normal (traditional) and continuous Superman narrative. However, within a non-continuity story like this one there is a freedom for creators to push and explore the limits of a character. One the central elements lurking at the heart of *Kingdom Come* is the element of failure, as well as the limitations of a superhero, and in particular, and the limitations of Superman. Glen Weldon states: “*Kingdom Come*, with its epic sweep, seemed like a story big enough for the first and best superhero and its explicit critique of the ‘new model’ characters helped remind readers why Superman mattered” (263). The narrative essentially fosters the conflict between Superman’s model of a superhero and power pitted against the newer, more dangerous models that spring up after Superman withdraws into exile. The point of all of this debate aims to remind the audience of

Superman's relevance by introducing a world devoid and absent of his leadership. This narrative operates as a vehicle for comparing and contrasting, generating unity and division, between Superman and the "new vogue" characters in the story (as well as a clash of ideologies with older heroes as well). The attempt here, a radical attempt told on an epic level, aims to demonstrate and create identification for Superman with the audience again. This is less than ever about Superman's powers, as it was in his earliest days. His powers have come and gone, changed and diminished, as has already been seen, but what remained was how Superman functioned as a model, a guarantor of behavior. However, there is a twist here that pushes Superman into uncomfortable territory. Waid and Ross

> crafted a tale of biblical proportions . . . In [a] DC Universe of the near future, Superman had retired from the life of fighting crime after the death of Lois Lane, and a new generation of superpowered beings had risen to prominence. Without the guidance of their elders, the younger characters spent their days in a series of violent skirmishes rather than protecting the innocent. This was Ross and Waid's commentary on the modern state of violent anti-heroes prevalent in the comics of the time, and the chaos of this dystopian future spoke to the reader. (Cowsill, Alan et al 273)

This narrative presents a world devoid of Superman's guidance, leadership, and restraint. Like *All-Star Superman* and other, what might be called "grand narratives," Superman's character and ability to function as a model is what is under the microscope. The narrative reveals a familiar stranger. One first encounters Superman, not dressed in a

costume as Superman or suit and tie as Clark Kent, but merely as a rugged farmer dressed only in overalls. The audience through his manner, his poise, and most certainly his powers (not to mention the fact that Wonder Woman calls him "Clark" when she appears to speak to him) recognizes that this is an aged Superman. No longer is this Superman the one we know or knew. As stated above, this is a foreign Superman, living in a dark and alternative future from "our" universe.

In order to help orientate the audience to this "alternative" Superman that Waid and Ross have crafted, an analysis of the narrative itself is needed to understand and better identify this Superman, as well as the intent of the creators. Again, one can apply Burke's theory of dramatism and the dramatic pentad here. To begin an analysis of *Kingdom Come*, one may first start by applying the elements of the dramatic pentad to the character of Superman found there in order to understand its contrast to traditional narrative views.

To begin, there is an Act. Superman's primary "Act" in *Kingdom Come* is to undo a previous Act he committed before the current narrative began. This Act is the realization that "this" Superman gave up. In this act, Superman violates one of Glen Weldon's key tenants that form Superman's identity[55]. This narrative develops around Superman's "Act" to undo that mistake, to return to humanity, and put back the wrong and error he made in walking away. When Superman walked away from his role as model he left humanity in the hands of the "new superheroes." These were the children of the older heroes, young, inexperienced, and lacking in all discipline and restraint. The

[55] Weldon notes that Superman "puts the needs of others over those of himself [and] He never gives up" (3)

result was chaos. With no more villains to fight, the “new superheroes” fight each other with reckless abandon and have nearly zero concern for collateral damage. When he returns, Superman believes that all of this chaos and damage is his fault. There is a sense of hubris that drives Superman’s actions in the story. It is the hubris of his failure in walking away that brings him back, and it is the hubris that his way of doing things cannot simply be imposed that helps drive the plot and eventual climax of this narrative. The Act here is Superman’s deliberate return and mission, very authoritarian in nature, to correct and instruct new superheroes as atonement for his lack of conviction.

This new “Act” is best illustrated in Superman’s first public speech to the press in front of the United Nations headquarters. With the aid of other DC heroes such as Green Lantern, Hawkman, Wonder Woman, and Flash (to name a few) Superman speaks to a crowd gathered before the UN. Instead of sounding like a savior, Superman’s words resemble a father’s lecture. He tells the gathered press that, “Many of you may remember us. We have been away for a while. That was our mistake. In our absence, a new breed of metahumans has arisen…a vast phalanx of self-styled ‘heroes’ unwilling to preserve life or defend the defenseless” (68). This depiction is Superman as an authoritarian. He is willing to make the minor admission that he made a mistake in leaving, but he casts it within a “group” idea that he was one of many and not alone in the mistake. However, it is obvious that the other superheroes take their lead from him. He is their model as well. Continuing, Superman states that “We have returned to teach them [the self-styled ‘heroes’] the meaning of truth and justice [and] guide this new breed with wisdom . . . and if necessary with force. Above all, we will restore order” (68). This is Superman as

politician and authoritarian figure. Ross's art captures Superman's unease in having to say these words, as Superman appears on the page to be obviously discomforted, but it also denotes a sense that this is the "only" way to right the situation. Superman feels he has to atone for his mistake of leaving with this new act that colors the rest of the narrative for both good and ill. This narrative is driven by Superman's own desire to regain the connection with humanity that he lost when he walked away. However, it is a connection he cannot regain by merely becoming Superman again.

Noting the "Act" that sets the narrative into action, one must examine next the Agent who commits this act. One might question the necessity. This is Superman, is it not? There are many identifiable characteristics in this Superman, but there is also something twisted and warped in him. Here, he is a "familiar stranger" as noted earlier. From the beginning of the narrative, there is doubt over who this Superman is anymore. When the audience first witnesses him and Wonder Woman calls him "Clark . . ." he quickly meets this word with a glance of displeasure. Wonder Woman corrects herself by calling him ". . . Kal" (33). Returning to Brownie and Graydon's article, the audience might infer here that this is no longer Superman, or Clark Kent, but someone else entirely. Kal-El is who he has returned to because he has, when found at the beginning of the narrative, completely withdrawn into a simulation of a Kansas farm within his Fortress of Solitude[56]. He is no longer seeking identification with humanity other than in a perhaps a shadow, simulated, version of it in isolation. However, the world calls him

[56] Superman has retreated to his arctic refuge at the North Pole. Here he has locked himself away within a holographic simulation of rural Kansas. He has become a hermit, locked within a cave within a cave far away from humanity.

back via the messenger of Wonder Woman (playing the part of the Greek god Hermes here) to tell him of a catastrophe. The world appears to need Superman even if it does not need Clark Kent, but it needs both, as Superman needs both, though neither quite realizes it yet.

Superman is being called back to "identify" with humanity again, something he has not done in years at the opening of the narrative. Bernard Brock in his article "Kenneth Burke in the 21st Century," points out that Burke

> defines identification as a simultaneous unity and division (1950, p. xiii). This unity and division follow from the 'ambiguities of substance.' Unity occurs as individuals' interests are joined, while at the same time they remain unique–they are 'both joined and separated' (Burke, 1950, pp. 20-21). (95-6)

Superman acts as one of us and yet not one of us as well, straddling this same divides as before. However, here in this narrative, Superman has lost his identity as "one of us" and it shows through in the narrative that he has lost this ability by putting aside his identity as Clark Kent. This element of his forgotten "identification" with humanity plays into the hubris of power and authority that Superman exerts both here, and again in *Superman: Red Son*.

The Scene, where the Act (quest for redemption and identification) and Agent (Kal-El, Superman) function in *Kingdom Come* is a dystopian future version of Earth[57]. In this Earth Superman walked away and abdicated his place as a model for both superheroes and for humanity. He did so after the death of Lois Lane at the hands of the

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[57] In official continuity records, this is referred to as Earth 22 of the DC multiverse

Joker, when public opinion chose to support another metahuman, Magog, who murders the Joker rather than put him on trial[58]. Again, Superman's demonstrates restraint, but world rejected him because he would not kill. The audience learns about this first Act and abandonment of humanity after Superman returns and his Justice League finally tracks down Magog. After a brief confrontation, Magog breaks down, recounting how Superman left, and declares that this is "Your fault . . . You bastard. The world changed . . . but you wouldn't. So they [the people] chose me. They chose the man who would kill over the man who wouldn't . . ." (100). This Scene is set against the radioactive backdrop of what has become of Kansas. This is ironic because at the beginning of the narrative Magog and his superhero team were involved in an incident that catastrophically "went south," rendering much of Kansas a radioactive wasteland. This event set off a world crisis that drew Kal-El out of his exile to don his identity as Superman once more.

Agency in *Kingdom Come* takes on several forms. One can see it in Superman's powers, in the powers of his comrades and fellow heroes, but more importantly, it emerges in the quest for redemption and re-identification of Kal-El's lost humanity. This is the "true" Agency of Superman's character. Character plays into the implicit Agency of Superman and in his ability to be a model. Superman has surrendered his means to affect the world when he lost out to Magog via public opinion and instead of staying, retreated into solitude and isolation. When Superman attempts to reassert this mantle as model, he does so in the extreme sense by calling the world to emulate an out of date model without realizing how the world has really changed in his absence. This is a

[58] Metahumans is DC Comics term for superheroes that have superpowers.

metaphor for Superman's own place in the world and with his audience. This act to regain his status of model creates a tension that pushes Superman towards highly authoritarian modes of coercion and force in order establish and return "order" to a world that will not take heed of his example. The notion of "order" by force noted in *Kingdom Come* sounds quite fascist and totalitarian in its nature. Superman's earlier words before the UN come to sound like the words one would hear from the mouth of Adolf Hitler rather than Superman. In fact, Superman's choice of actions lead to him to lock up all those who will not adhere to "his" rules in a gulag that looks idyllic inside but is no more than an internment camp one might have seen in Nazi Germany or Stalin's Soviet Union. His notions of progress drives a wedge between him and other "human" superheroes like Batman who choose to oppose his autocratic approach.

The primary Purpose to all of this demonstrates both the relevance of Superman but also explores the mistakes that come when such a character loses sight of his own identification with humanity. Superman's single-minded approach ends up creating the "reckoning" that occurs in issue #4 when the "gulag" Superman created to house those metahumans (superheroes) who are out of control "explodes" into chaos and war (*Kingdom Come*). This conflict at Superman's gulag provokes (out of fear) a sidelined humanity to "eliminate the threat" the "superheroes" as their only option for freedom and safety. Wonder Woman, battling Batman in the final confrontation at the gulag, lifts both of them above the clouds of the battlefield, declaring, "We [Superman and others] tried to hold order -- but it's too far gone! Our only option now is war! Our only answer is --" to which she cuts herself off (173). At this moment she and Batman witness the price of

losing touch with humanity, of losing its trust, which is annihilation. Humanity has, in fact, sent warplanes with mega-ton nuclear weapons to wipe them out and end the chaos once and for all.

The aftermath of this Scene is the death of nearly all the superheroes on the battlefield, except Superman and a few others. The massacre of his fellow superheroes finally breaks Superman and shatters any remaining identification he holds with humanity. As a result, he lashes out. He is about to pull the roof down on the United Nations and the gathered leaders, the same leaders who sent the warplanes against the superheroes, when Norman McKay, who has observed all of the events, intervenes[59]. McKay calls out to Superman by his human name "Clark?" and appeals to him, saying, "Clark, don't. You blame yourself for Captain Marvel [who died trying to save the superheroes from the bomb] . . . for Magog and Kansas . . . for ten years that ended today" (192). McKay appeals to Superman's identification with humanity that he has forgotten in all of what has transpired. McKay's appeal attempts to get at the heart of what Superman once was and remind him of it. He tells Superman that "Yes, you're angry, but in that anger you're forgetting once more that humans feel. What they fear. They won't forgive you for this, Clark. Forgive yourself" (192). McKay's words cut to the heart of what Superman has lost during the narrative. The true loss of Superman here is his shared identification with humanity and that it goes both ways.

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[59] Norman McKay is a minister who has lost his faith at the beginning of the story. It is he who is taken, by the creature known as the Specter (another Jerry Siegel created character) to bear witness to the events of *Kingdom Come*. McKay and the Specter are like Dante and Virgil of *The Divine Comedy*, or other examples of the helper or guide trope throughout mythology. To reference the fact that much of Kingdom Come relies on allusions the Biblical book of Revelation, one might even see Norman McKay as a version of St. John the Divine.

McKay's appeal succeeds, a promise of hopeful redemption made possible in the conclusion. In this moment, the Purpose of this narrative is achieved by restoring to Superman his identification as both a superhero (above humanity) but also as one among humanity (as like us). This is a return of what Brownie and Graydon pointed out as "constructive" identities that together, within Kal-El, render him complete. With his identification returned, Superman can finally commune with humanity by pulling back from his earlier authoritarian stance. Addressing the United Nations in the aftermath, Superman's tone has humbled by his lack of foresight. He declares, "The problems we face still exist. We're not going to solve them for you . . . We're going to solve them with you . . . Not by ruling above you…but by living among you" (195). This is Superman returning the promise present in both his identity and his identification with humanity. Waid and Ross are expressing that the true "purpose" of Superman has always been aimed to inspire humanity but also be one who can be worthy of emulation. To do this, he has to be one of us well as Brock noted earlier.

Ultimately, in one way, this is a story about Superman returning to an identifiable position as a model. He is human in that he makes mistakes, but what makes him a model of emulation is that in the end he admits his mistakes, seeks to correct his errors, and finds another way to help point the world in a better direction. This Superman returns to his mantle as model for audience once more. Superman's character and ability to function as a model is part of his identity, (in Burkean terms) as an Agent, engaged in a Purpose (an agent-purpose ratio). Perelman makes note that there is "richness" when one is using a model to make an argument, as Waid and Ross are doing with Superman in *Kingdom*

Come. He states, "even when the model is unique [Superman surely is unique], it [argumentation via model] allows us to accentuate one or another of its aspects and to draw each time a lesson that is adapted to the circumstances" (*The Realm of Rhetoric* 133). One might make the argument that this characterization is what makes Superman so "super" when applying him as a model. Superman functions in "parallel universe" stories because as a model he is flexible and adaptable. If he were not, then his role as a metaphor and as something identifiable to the audience would fail to communicate any form of message other than at a surface level. There is a lesson found in *Kingdom Come* that reveals itself as a kind of never-ending battle common for the superhero–an endless hero's journey. Superman is seen to abandon his place as a model and then, through painful lesson of his own, reassert that he too has to "adapt to the circumstances" in order remain a model for others to emulate.

***Superman: Red Son*: Identification of Tyranny (Power)**

In the same year, 2003, that Mark Waid (of *Kingdom Come*) and Leinil Francis Yu conceived *Superman Birthright* (to be seen in the subsequent chapter), Mark Millar, along with artists Dave Johnson and Kilian Plunkett, brought to life a very different exploration of the character of Superman. Tom DeSanto, in his introduction to *Superman: Red Son* entitled "Mom, apple pie, Chevrolet, and Superman" describes "shock" at the notion that Superman could represent anything other than America. It's hard to "imagine [a] Superman [who] wasn't red, white, and blue . . ." (*Superman: Red Son*)[60]. Millar's

[60] Superman is American, right? Of course, that is what everyone accepts. However, Millar asks what if he was not?

Superman was one seen through a different lens. This Superman was something different, and yet, something anyone might recognize too. DeSanto easily points out that

> Even if you have never read a comic before, you can pick up RED SON and follow the story and enjoy the great ride. But don't be fooled; it is much more than that. RED SON is a sharp social commentary on capitalism and communism and current American foreign policy. (*Superman: Red Son*)

This is an easy narrative for one to enter, a narrative both recognizable (identifiable) and yet challenging to the status quo in its layers of interpretation. Thankfully, DC picked the correct man of the task. Mark Millar is "a writer never to shy away from [the] controversial" (Cowsill, Alan et al 309). *Superman: Red Son* is controversial because Miller takes an American icon, Superman, and speculates about what would have happened if he had been a Soviet icon instead. The ultimate aim of this reversal of Superman's typical positioning persuades readers of Superman's fallibility of will in order to expose his true humanity and his human weakness. It is his humanity that makes Superman so identifiable and allows him, normally, to channel American *arête* into a concrete representation. The Superman of *Superman: Red Son* challenges those preconceptions of what Superman stands for in order to make a larger point about the dangers of power and single-minded drive.

Central to Millar's persuasion in *Superman: Red Son* is the application, noted by DeSanto, of a quotation by Benjamin Franklin: "Those who would sacrifice their freedom for safety will find they inherit neither." Millar takes this quotation, and the Orwellian perception that it connotes and applies it to the state of America in the early 21st century.

He communicates a metaphorical and identifiable statement about what American culture takes for granted. This is Millar's primary motive in this narrative. What Millar does in *Superman: Red Son* is to invert this as a kind of test to see if the idea of Superman still holds up when detached from "America."

Millar's *Superman: Red Son* provides an alternative metaphor of Superman. Additionally, Bernard Brock points out that metaphor are "central to identification [as] used to unify what could be considered as a paradoxical and chaotic" elements (96). Identification therefore is required in order to bring unity to what might be a divisive form of expression created by Millar's shift.

To draw the maximum attention to this inversion of Superman, Millar turns Superman into a communist superhero and icon. The use of an American icon, such as Superman, creates a strong presence for an identifiable yet challenging metaphorical expression. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca point out: "Presence acts directly on our sensibility" in order to communicate, and persuade the audience to what is placed before them (*The New Rhetoric* 116). Presence plays an important role in argumentation, and Millar's case a key way of "re-imaging" Superman in a new light. This strange example draws out the fact that Americans often take Superman for granted. More importantly, presence allows for "the displaying of certain elements on which the speaker wishes to center attention in order that they may occupy the foreground of the hearer's consciousness" (142). *Superman: Red Son* repositions the audience's perception of a highly identifiable American icon within the framework of America's Cold War antagonist, the Soviet Union. This serves as a means to metaphorically explore the

dangers of power at the expense of freedom, playing on Franklin's quotation, while additionally tapping into the missing presence of Superman's human equation: Clark Kent.

In order to analyze this Superman narrative, the application Burke's dramatic pentad again serves to help draw out the elements at work and reveal Miller's motives. The narrative, unlike those of *Man of Steel* or *Kingdom Come*, relies heavily upon the inversion of Superman. This story expresses the potential threat that a character like Superman might represent if placed within a different social framework or moral development. Finally, again, this is a Superman without his "soul" of Clark Kent, and Millar's interpretation goes further than Waid's in showing Superman as authoritarian tyrant by design, rather than by reluctance or ignorance. To begin, there is the "Act" of the narrative. The "Act" of *Superman: Red Son* lies within a dystopian conception of Superman as a world conqueror. Of course, he does not see himself as a "conqueror," he sees himself as the audience has more clearly conceived him previously: as savior. Instead of standing up for American *arête*, this Superman embodies communism and a Stalinist totalitarian will to change the world.

The Act in *Superman: Red Son* centers upon Superman's attempt to take over the world, or, in his mind, unite it under communism. This is itself a kind of nod to his social activism past found in Superman's early narrative history. Here, though, this "social activism" is amplified and twisted in order to bring order and peace via force of will rather than justice. His actions in many ways operate not from a lack of intelligence, but from an ideological upbringing in Soviet Russia rather than rural Kansas, U.S.A. In "Red

Menace in the Mirror…" it is noted "*Superman: Red Son* takes us directly not simply to a debate about capitalism versus socialism [that's the simple allegorical approach] but to a far more profound discussion; that of nature versus nurture in the role of humans and superhumans alike" (McAuley). The narrative in *Superman: Red Son* operates as a conduit into a deeper discussion, one similarly found Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* between Dr. Frankenstein and his monster. Then, one has to ask, is the creator and who is the monster here? In a way, Superman himself is both. However, this narrative is more than simple allegory. Instead, it is a probing examination of society's own fears played out through the metaphor of a fictional character that is traditionally identified as quintessentially American. Superman may not quite be Frankenstein's monster, but he might be Stalin's

The Agent in this equation is again Superman, but, as in *Kingdom Come*, this is a Superman who is a familiar stranger yet again. Unlike the Superman of *Kingdom Come* though, this is an ideologically altered Superman who grows up in a Soviet commune before being adopted by Joseph Stalin. To the audience, this Superman straddles a strange fence of foreign and familiar. What are familiar are examples of the symbolic action of Superman's heroism. These are prominent in the early narrative, and ultimately reemerge at the end as well. There are depictions of Superman saving a woman from a train (*Superman: Red Son* 18), wishing to help those who are standing on a bread line in Moscow, and desiring to champion them in order to make their lives better (53-5). This scene in particular might remind the audience of photos of Americans standing in breadlines during the Great Depression, when Superman was originally conceived in

America. However, one is visually reminded, that this Superman is the champion of the Russians who are standing in the breadlines, not Americans.

This is still Superman as Agent for the people. He is depicted as being raised in a commune and used to a simple life. In fact, when there is a party thrown in his honor, he appears to care little for the trappings of a comfortable life. He even speaks to this when, in response to Stalin's chiding him for caring about someone who is absent from a party in his honor, he says, "I care about everybody, sir" (30). This is not some cold, heartless all-powerful alien come to Earth and bent on domination (that comes later in Brainiac[61]) but rather a noble figure that over the course of the narrative is slowly blinded and corrupted by single-minded aims. Unlike an American immigrant version of Superman, who demonstrates openness to ways of making the world better, this Russian Superman as immigrant, comes to see only one way of saving the world–his way. Even with the differences stated above, the single-minded nature of Superman to cause him to lose his way serves as a warning about power. It could be directed, allegorically, towards America (the American invasion of Iraq in 2003 as one example) and warns of the consequences of believing in only "one" way of proceeding to solve a problem and just how much power actually blinds him to the consequences of doing so.

When looking to find identification with this foreign incarnation of Superman, one looks for the familiar. The image of Superman saving a little boy while his mother looks on in shock stands out as one that is readily and easily an excellent example of creating needed recognition and identification. This is an overcoming of division via

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[61] Brainiac is a hyper-intelligent creature and villain of Superman. He operates out of cold logic and tends to "collect" artifacts from civilizations he believes worthy of survival.

unity by depicting Superman as representing the familiar superhero. The image is iconic in the way that Superman is posed, holding *The Daily Planet* globe he has just prevented from crushing the boy and his mother in one hand as he returns to the boy, with a joyful face, his "red" balloon[62]. This splash page contains only one line, stating what Superman, even as a Communist champion could come to represent. The line states, following a line from the previous page: "Just for a single moment" and finishes on the splash page with: "They realized I was here to save them" (21-2). The scene is not foreign, but highly identifiable to any Superman audience. This Superman, in this moment, is "our" Superman. The only exception here is his familiar "S" across his chest, this Superman bears a sickle and hammer instead (22).

Another familiar example of Superman's identifiable qualities is his reluctance to take power[63]. After Superman fails to save Stalin, Superman is asked to assume power in the Soviet Union. At first, Superman attempts to refuse this call (41). This action is less about outright refusal, but rather about "reluctance." When addressing his comrades, Superman states: "The very idea of this [being leader because of his powers] is in complete contradiction to everything we were ever raised to believe in" (41). Superman clings to his nurtured ideology here, but in a naïve, propaganda-inspired way. Superman's eventual choice to assume power is brought on by the fact that his very existence and awareness of it has created a sense of antagonism with the United States and has ignited a new "super" arms race between the countries. There is a touch of irony

[62] In Cold War symbolism, made popular by Nina in their song "99 Red Balloons," one can see the balloon as a reference to Nuclear War.
[63] This reluctance, however, only exists at the liminal edges of the narrative.

here in the sense that Superman's existence forces him to accept the *realpolitik* of the world and embrace the mantle of leadership he is reluctant to take up[64]. It is this, and Superman's naïve belief, after seeing people in need (53-5) that pushes him towards power, towards the ideology that he begins to feel is his calling. It is the belief, the idea, that forms the model (noble in intentions) that "Superman is here to rescue them" those who are scared, hungry, and downtrodden, from their misery (55). This is his mantra; this is what defines him as an Agent going all the way back to the kids who read his comic book in 1938 America. It is what continues to make Superman a model even today. However, in Millar's hands the mantra of optimism is distorted and corrupted in order to drive what develops in the rest of the narrative.

What is quite striking about this Superman narrative is what kind of emulation Superman creates in it. Mill transforms Superman's traditional "anti-model" in most narratives, Lex Luthor, into something of an American model in *Superman: Red Son.* This Lex Luthor emulates the old, familiar Superman. Though sharing an antagonistic relationship, Luthor adopts a similar position, juxtaposed to that of Superman with the purpose of opposing him. Luthor, slowly and methodically over the decades of confrontation gathers power to himself. This single-willed nature, like Superman's aim to bring peace to the world through domination, proposes more simplistically to find any means to save America, and less so, turn the world against Superman (110-11). Luthor, of course, believes that he is the only one who can save America. Luthor is the mirror

[64] This is also a superhero trope. The idea that the existence of a superhero creates an escalation in the Cold War is also found in Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' *Watchmen* via their Dr. Manhattan (an out of touch superhero himself).

reflection of Superman. Whereas most depictions of Luthor often find him as the “dark” reflection of Superman, this time Luthor’s role as a “mirror” reflects back at Superman the very reality of what he himself is doing. Superman is on a basic level trying to take over the world, filled with initial good intentions, but ultimately corrupted over time and blinded by his own will, power, and propaganda. He is unaware of the kind of monster he has become. Luthor, by contrast, has no compunctions about the “monster” he is or has to be. In fact, his actions are those of a sociopath with no regard for anything but his own single-minded agenda. In many ways he is exactly like Superman, minus the noble intentions. Luthor wears his intentions on his sleeve and in a way more honestly, or at least more self-aware, than those of Superman. His intentions are simple: stop Communism, stop the Soviet Union, and stop Superman. Other than the obvious (though slightly inverted) antagonism usually found between Superman and Lex Luthor in a traditional Superman story, there is a strange and profound “awakening” of Superman’s own failure in *Superman: Red Son*. This failure comes in the climax of the narrative.

It is during Superman and Luthor’s final confrontation that hubris catches up to Superman. Luthor lays a trap for him. However, it is not some complex contraption or death machine, but rather simply a note in an envelope left for Lois Lane Luthor (his wife) for Superman to discover. When Superman uses his vision to look through Lois’s jacket and reads the letter (one that Lois has not read herself) he immediately breaks down. Here is the moment, the “tear in reality” to borrow a Lacanian term for Superman (Harari 97). He falls upon his knees and, realizing his mistake, says “Oh my God! What have I done? All I wanted was to put an end to all the wars and famines! I only wanted

the best for everyone. You've got to believe me…" (*Superman: Red Son* 136). The audience does not know yet what the letter says, but something in it has caused this Superman to snap out of whatever fantasy or propaganda he has encapsulated himself in for decades. He has lost touch with his humanity in his single-minded quest to make the world better. Within this moment of hubris, another liminal space of clear identification is made possible with Superman because this is a moment of weakness, a moment of regret, for him. This previously denied moment of self-realization is a moment of humanity for Superman.

In that same panel where Superman breaks down, one sees Lois opening the letter, the next panel reveals its text: "Why don't' you just put the whole WORLD in a BOTTLE, Superman?" (136). It is here that the audience, who has followed the story, realizes that this is a reference to the villain known as Brainiac[65]. Earlier in the narrative, Brainiac teamed up with Luthor and captured Stalingrad rather than Moscow in an attempt by Luthor to stop Superman. Superman in turn defeated Brainiac and, "reforming him," employs him as an ally. This decision is a mistake. Brainiac is a creature of cold logic, with no emotion. The note suggests that Superman and Brainiac are same or that Superman is no better than a known villain. Brainiac reaches out to Superman, who is in pain but responds by saying: "I'm just as bad as you were, Brainiac. I'm just another alien bullying a less developed species and its morally unjustifiable" (137). Superman here realizes that he has allowed power to corrupt him. He has wrapped himself in a cocoon and lost touch, lost his identification (his Clark Kent) with the world. The absence

[65] See footnote 51 on Bottle City of Kandor

of his “Clark Kent” alter ego is quite striking in this story because without it, and trapped within an ideological power structure, this Superman has lost his grounding and become the monster he always sought to eliminate.

The ending returns Superman to the role as a superhero after his revelation of his mistake. He manages to remove Brainiac and in doing so appears to “die” in the act of saving Earth. His death paves the way for Luthor to step in and put the world on a better, united footing. Superman, though, is in fact not dead. Superman has narrated the entire narrative’s climax and became what the character had lacked throughout the narrative: an identifiable member of the humanity he sought to help. Superman is there when Luthor is buried, a hero, in Metropolis in a world he has turned into a utopia decades later. Superman is no longer Superman; he has dawned the guise of what the audience would recognize as Clark Kent. With his glasses as a disguise, he now mingles among the people of Earth as just an ordinary man, rather than a super-man (146-7).

The lesson or Purpose of *Superman: Red Son* plays upon, in a simplistic form, the application of the idea that “might makes right” or in Burkean terms this is an expression of “the purpose-agency (or end-means) ratio” (*Grammar of Motives* 228). This ratio signifies a means to expand, as an abstraction of the possibility of what would happen if Superman were party to this kind of temptation as presented in *Superman: Red Son*. More so, Millar’s extrapolation serves as a kind of secular parable or analogy (as hinted at earlier and referred to as a “meditation”). It is a story told in order to convey a message, like a parable. According to David Gowler, referencing John Sider’s *Interpreting the Parables*, “every parable is [in fact] an analogy” (18). Though there does not appear an

overt “moral or spiritual argument” present in Millar’s *Superman: Red Son*, there is a lesson of comparison at work (84). Looking at this narrative as an analogy, one can find that Gowler’s assertion that “The analogy compare the author’s *tenor* or theme . . . with the author’s chosen *vehicle* [and that] The meaning of the comparison depends on some specific point of resemblance between the *tenor* and *vehicle*” (*What are They Saying…* 98). In this light, one can view how Millar’s *Superman: Red Son* uses Superman as a vehicle for conveying the author’s purpose (subtle tenor) of exposing one of the major criticisms of Superman. This criticism is in fact the idea that Superman is all-powerful or too powerful. If he is, then why does he not simply solve all the worlds’ problems? This is a common criticism that has been laid at not only the feet of Superman, but also practically any “all-powerful” being ever created. In fact, this chapter has already made note such as Denny O’Neil’s reluctance to even take on the responsibility of writing for Superman.

Though inverted as a model in *Superman: Red Son*, Superman serves to highlight a danger of the model as tool of argumentation that Chaim Perelman writes in his *The Realm of Rhetoric*. There he states, “Being a model, one can inadvertently provide the model of something else . . .” (111). Here Superman “inadvertently” sets himself up as the “wrong” kind of model for the world (*Superman: Red Son* and *Kingdom Come*). In fact, in *Superman: Red Son*, it is Lex Luthor who adopts Superman as his model, and ultimately helps remind Superman to be a better man, a better model himself. It is Superman’s overt application of power (in a way a reversal of their traditional relationship) that allows Luthor to play a “long game” that eventually lets him get the

upper hand by exposing to Superman just how "detached" he has become from his own professed ideals.

These narratives of *Kingdom Come* and *Superman: Red Son* are examples held up to provide an undesirable alternative to what is the reality of Superman. Perelman points out that "argumentation by example is used to establish either a prediction or a rule [and to] illustrate the rule [in order] to give it a certain presence in consciousness" (*The Realm of Rhetoric* 108). *Superman: Red Son* presents the inverse of this idea. Instead of an example aimed to "illustrate the rule" and give it "presence" this example demonstrates the example of the exception. Giving presence to those criticisms and fears of Superman's power reveals a kind of absurdum to how this is not, in fact, "our" Superman. Even so, it illustrates the importance of the alter ego of Clark Kent to the Superman identity, providing a strong justification for its need in grounding Superman while also illustrating Superman's continued "good intentions" that remain even though he is a Communist and not an American hero. It, in fact, helps demonstrate just how meaningless such labels actually are in the end, despite those who would hoister them up in an ideological contest that is itself nothing more than "pure imagination."

Conclusion: Change, Identification, and *Arête*

The first moment of division for the reader and audience comes from the realization that Superman is not human. He is also not real, and he possesses powers that no normal human obtains. This sets the character apart from us, as the audience, and puts us in a position of "awe" at what this fictional character, this metaphor, can do. Superman is standing in, in fact, for the idealization of human potential. More importantly, and what

helps unify him with the audience, is that the values espoused by the character, the values Superman "metaphorically" signifies, represent the idealized values, the best, the *arête*, of America.

In order for Superman to maintain his connection to his audience, but also to remind us of the principles and values he is meant to metaphorically embody, the character needs to adopt. These alterations, whether to update or modify a character of epideictic rhetorical expression to meet new decades and cultural shifts or to transport the audience to parallel dimension, all require identification. By looking closely at the elements at work in a handful of attempts to revamp and explore Superman in variation, what emerges clearly are both how delicate it is to alter an iconic figure but also how alteration helps foster a reminder of what Superman has always meant to America. Ultimately, what is also worth noting, particularly in Superman's identification, is that interaction with the character exists as a two-way street. The audience must trust in Superman, recognize the model in him (or anti-model in variations), and understand through seeking to overcome this fresh division what is truly important, at the core of Superman. Additionally, for Superman to have a place, with his audience, the role of his alter ego Clark Kent is more important than many people credit. Could it be a put-on? Yes. Could it be a deceit? Perhaps. More important is the fact that Clark Kent and Superman, together, represent something exceptional about America. They represent the promise of what America can be by willingly walking among us, as one of us, rather than towering above.

CHAPTER VI

ANALYSIS PART C

"Strap yourselves in. Brace yourselves . . . Prepare to become fictional." – Grant Morrison[66]

"Before it was a Bomb, the Bomb was an Idea. Superman, however, was a Faster, Stronger, Better Idea." – Grant Morrison[67]

Introduction to Reaccentuation and Retro-Continuity

Superman's ability to retain his core *arête* while allowing it to adapt over time has always represented a challenge for the character within the comic book medium in particular. The primary challenge comes from finding a way to keep Superman relevant without dismissing his decades of progressive evolution and change. Reinvention or re-imagining of a character after decades of construction, deconstruction, and RetCon (short for retro-continuity) presents a near-Herculean challenge. This difficulty is particularly true with a character whose best fit is within a grand narrative format often out of tune with our post-modernist world, and one that represents a reaccentuation of classical and mythical heroes. The term "RetCon" is familiar to those within the comic book medium and scholarship. It presents a way for understanding the changes made within comic book narratives over time. *The Oxford English Dictionary* online defines RetCon, as a noun, as "a piece of new information that imposes a different interpretation on previously described events, typically used to facilitate a dramatic plot shift or account for an

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[66] Morrison, Grant and Frank Quitely. *Flex Mentallo: Man of Muscle Mystery Deluxe Edition*. New York: DC Comics, 2012. Print.
[67] Morrison, Grant. *Supergods: What Masked Vigilantes, Miraculous Mutants, and A Sun God from Smallville Can Teach Us About Being Human*. New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2012. xv. Print.

inconsistency.” RetCon as a verb is a form of revision that is done “retrospectively,” looking back and changing what has occurred in the narrative and altering it to fit the changes to made to inconsistencies (*oxforddictionaries.com*). Superman has undergone many “RetCons” over his 75-year history. Superman’s origin and back-story have undergone numerous shifts, insertions, and deletions during his long narrative history. This fact is significant because the life of a character, such as Superman, often requires moments aimed at reminding the audience of just how iconic a figure he is and just how intricately intertwined he is with American culture and *arête* as well.

From roughly 2000 to 2010, several attempts to re-imagine Superman emerged. These attempts aimed to generate a new or renewed understanding of Superman’s purpose and identity by drawing upon classic and iconic elements of his own narrative past. These attempts had the effect of reasserting Superman’s *arête* and amplifying it in the post-modern world. Ultimately, what is generated through these RetCons and reaccentuations is a reminder to the audience of why it admires Superman as it has for generations.

Many of the complex aspects of Superman’s own continuity–his narrative story traced from modern times all the way back to his first appearance–is the result of different writers, artists, and editors who entered into the production of Superman after his creators, Siegel and Shuster. These include writers such as Denny O’Neil, artists such as Curt Swan and Neal Adams, and editor Mort Weisinger. Weisinger is credited for his attempts to bring elements of science fiction to Superman’s character during his tenure from the 1940s until the 1960s. During this time, many new elements and aspects, some

imported from other mediums the character of Superman had branched into (radio, cartoons, daily newspaper strips), helped produce and introduce these elements (such as a deadly radioactive metal Kryptonite) to the narrative. These new developments amalgamated, over time, into the official comic book continuity/narrative. These new developments and information both added to the complicated Superman narrative, representing development and maturation within the character's appeal, as well as caused a kind of "calcification" to form around the basic structure of Superman's *arête* and hindered change and adaptation as a result (as touched upon in more detail in the previous chapter).

These developments lead new writers to try ever more drastic and radical attempts to change Superman in different ways, to tell new stories, and to generate new relevance by removing those elements that calcified the character. These changes lead, themselves, to new complicated alternations within Superman's narrative in turn. Elements, plots, and supporting characters that were cast off and removed still remained popular (floating in the orbit of Superman's official narrative but not included as part of it–like space junk), while other elements remained simply confusing. Were Superman's adoptive parents, Ma and Pa Kent, alive or dead now? Depending on the creative team or a need to update, Superman was often in flux. Did Superman, as Clark Kent, know Lex Luthor when they lived in Smallville? Again, this innovation within the story was sometimes accepted or done away with based on narrative need. In fact, this element had not even been part of the original mythos of Superman and was actually "RetCon" itself from a later creation. The same was true of Superman's early adventures (a later creation of his original

creator, Jerry Siegel) as Superboy, when he was still growing up in Smallville. In some forms of the narrative, Superman did not reveal himself as Superman until he left Smallville (*Superman: Birthright*) after growing up, while other forms included his childhood adventures (*Superman: Secret Origin*).

All of these variations and expansions (even contradictions) within Superman's narrative history, though removed or altered, do not always stay forgotten by those who were fans of the hero growing up. Mark Waid said that when growing up, "nothing in this world . . . held the same fascination for me as . . . the Man of Steel" ("The Real Truth About Superman" 3). This feeling and idea is one often expressed by fans who get the opportunity to write for the character as well. Those who took inspiration from the Man of Steel growing up, who themselves became writers and creators of Superman, remembered these elements. Particularly with the advent of the first decade of the 21st century, many creators, such as Grant Morrison, Waid, and Geoff Johns, along with Frank Quitely, Leinil Francis Yu, and Gary Frank, sought to re-explore those sometimes contradictory and forgotten elements. However, their works are not merely fan-fiction, but attempts to bring together and offer up retrospective clarity to the contradictions and elements once considered calcifying to the Man of Steel and to use them to weave understanding and appreciation of what Superman has always been, his *arête*, as it remains relevant even today.

These creators who take inspiration from Superman and look to his past to reinvigorate his future are engaged in a highly rhetorical exercise. Writers such as Morrison, Waid, and Johns, along with the artists they work with, rely on Superman's

iconic recognition and status, his prestige, to help promote their vision of him to their audience. One way they do this is to borrow from his familiar past narrative stories and imagery to persuade their audience. This kind of action is what Mikhail Bakhtin referred to as reaccentuation. In his work *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, Bakhtin conceived of the "process [of] reaccentuation" (419). The reality at work here is that the idea of reaccentuation notes the distance between an original incarnation of a concept, say Superman's first appearance in *Action Comics* #1, and its transplanted application 60-plus years later in a near-identical scene in *Superman Birthright*. With regards to Superman: if Superman is a conceptual embodiment of classical *arête* in a modern American interpretation, one must acknowledge that time has put distance between what *arête* meant for ancient Greeks (it even evolved for them) and what Superman has come to represent based on the application of such ideas when conceived Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster in 1938 America. The *arête* Superman was imbued with by his creators in 1938 has changed over time. His *arête* today is not exactly the same as it was in 1938, but it does serve as a thread connecting what he was to what he is today.

With the idea of Superman, one is dealing with both the written word and the visual image in tandem. Bakhtin is primarily focused on the written word, stating that,

> For the word is, after all, not a dead material object in the hands of an artist equipped with it; it is a living word and is therefore in all things true to itself . . . but its meaning–once realized–can never he completely extinguished. And under changed conditions this meaning may emit bright new rays, burning away the reifying crust that had grown up around it and thus removing any real ground for

a parodic accentuation, dimming or completely extinguishing such reaccentuation. (419)

Bakhtin speaks of "emit[ing] bright new rays" and that under changed conditions, something like classical Greek *arête* may lose its original meaning based on its fixed and "anachronous" ideas, but this does not prevent the idea of virtue, of *arête*, being extinguished completely. Rather, it may require a form of constant revision and reinvention instead. In terms of comic books, this is where RetCon comes into play and reaccentuation facilitates the impact of reinterpretations of Superman.

This chapter will specifically seek to explore how notions such as Bakhtin's idea of reaccentuation and its aim to find "bright new rays" of light, as well as retro-continuity (RetCon) function within recent Superman narratives (419). Through examining three major works of the past decade: *All-Star Superman*, *Superman Birthright*, and *Superman: Secret Origin*. Because Superman functions best within a grand narrative form, all of the works chosen above represent "stand-alone" or self-contained stories that can better embody narrative forms within the grand and epic style. These texts represent a reaccentuation of Superman's own narrative and *arête*, and even more particularly, the way that Superman's impact has traveled out into the real world and then how that impact has folded back into his own narrative. Morrison and Quitely's *All-Star Superman* places Superman specifically within the construct of the grand narrative and helps reaccentuate his mythic and epic nature for audiences. Waid and Yu's *Superman Birthright* tackles head-on the model/anti-model relationship of Superman and Lex Luthor while helping re-accentuate Superman's struggle with identity, beginning with his time in Smallville

growing up. Finally, Johns and Frank's *Superman: Secret Origin* simplifies some of the same ideas of *Superman Birthright* while directly re-accentuating the Superman of the motion pictures and the struggle of the immigrant outsider.

***All-Star Superman*: Superman's Return as Epic**

In their 12-issue epic of *All-Star Superman*, Grant Morrison and Frank Quitely attempt to navigate the many deviations and interpretations of Superman in order to reveal the mythic-like expression of Superman's essence. In many ways, Morrison and Quitely aim to portray Superman in his natural state, as an archetype and paradigm of human ability and achievement. To do this, their narrative focuses heavily on Superman's core: what makes him who he is and why he does what he does. Glen Weldon, in his work *Superman: An Unauthorized Biography*, asserts that every Superman story has always had two constant elements that are always present: that "he puts the needs of others over those of himself [and] never gives up" (3). This kind of selfless determination represents an epic hero's noble actions. Thomas Carlyle, in his first lecture discussing the hero and hero worship, points out that heroes are themselves "Great Men," that "They [are] the leaders of men . . . the modellers, patterns, and in a wide sense the creators, of whatsoever the general mass of men contrived to do or obtain (*Hero and Hero-Worship* 5). These heroes as great men embody the ideal, the most excellent potential a culture might wish to obtain. Carlyle speaks of both classical and contemporary figures. In a somewhat parallel fashion, Joseph Campbell provides a definition or understanding of the hero in the mythic or somewhat fictional vein. Campbell, in an interview with Michael Toms, noted that there were "two aspects of the hero [as being] somebody whom you can

lean on and who is going to rescue you [are the] ideal" (*An Open Life* 109). These "aspects" are exactly what Weldon asserts about Superman. The overture that established Weldon's elements and set the tone found in Campbell's aspects of a hero emerged from Superman's beginnings in *Action Comics* #1 (June 1938). These same elements, in turn, form the core of what Morrison and Quitely re-accentuate in their narrative as well.

The narrative begins with Superman learning that he is dying. He is over-exposed to the sun's radiation in the opening pages of the narrative, and as a result, his powers have increased. The consequence is that as they increase, he grows closer to death (*All-Star Superman* 25). He has become a dying star in a sense; he will reach pinnacles of power that were once beyond him and then burn out. Superman literally faces his own mortality in this narrative. In spite of this fact, he refuses to stop looking out for others and simply give up. What makes this narrative an epic derives from two places. The first comes from part of the narrative that centers on the fact that Superman is dying. The other major part of the plot centers upon how Superman faces death. He does so like a classical "dying" hero, by performing his last labors in the service of humanity. The second comes from the nature of the format of this 12-issue maxi-series (being outside traditional continuity and having a clear beginning, middle, and end). This narrative and format allow Morrison to craft a true epic tragedy of Superman that relies upon his mythic nature to propel it.

For Aristotle, the epic tragedy is focused around a single action, "one that is a complete whole in itself, with a beginning, middle, and end, so as to enable the work to produce its own proper pleasure with all the organic unity of a living creature" (*The*

Poetics 256). What is crucial to note here is the idea of a distinct beginning and ending. Unlike traditional comic book continuity/narrative, in which Superman represents a continuing and ongoing story in a distinct "present tense," the 12-issue maxi-series of *All-Star Superman* affords the opportunity for the heroic figure of Superman to take advantage of the limitations. Full expression emerges from the confines set by the format. Morrison specifically stated that he wanted *All-Star Superman* to "deal with Superman's mortality, depicting his final days, and the twelve heroic labors he would perform for the benefit of all humankind" (*Supergods* 405). This narrative represents an opportunity to revisit Superman's past continuity and RetCon it by re-accentuating certain elements in a narrative and utilize those same elements to craft an epic tragedy. The result is that *All-Star Superman* is one part Herculean labor and one part Arthurian (Judeo-Christian) death of a king and promise of his return all wrapped up in the character, (Superman) these same myths helped inspire.

Aristotle, in *The Rhetoric*, lays out what is noble and praiseworthy in relation to persuasion. He cites examples of what is base or blameworthy to fill in as implied counter-examples to the noble. *The New Rhetoric* by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca tackles the idea of the noble vs. base idea in a more explicit fashion via its argument by model. Within the discussion of the anti-model, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca point out that "Because the anti-model turns us away from his course of action [ideally], adoption by him turns [his] behavior, whether he intends it or not, into a parody" or as the point "that represents a minimum below which it is improper to go" (*The New Rhetoric* 367-8). This is not only an accurate notion of Lex Luthor's role in almost every Superman story,

but the idea of the anti-model helps provide a counter-demonstration, an opposite side, to what Luthor and Superman represent: different sides of American values. One might point out that Superman and Luthor's struggle is just the latest incarnation of the noble vs. base struggle Aristotle mentions. Perelman, in his work *The Realm of Rhetoric*, writes that "The role of model and anti-model is best seen when one is certain of having found their unquestionable incarnations, as in God and Satan" (112-3). Superman and Luthor are locked in a struggle for humanity's trajectory towards the future. They are in a kind of fight for humanity's soul, like God and Satan (perhaps). However, Superman, unlike Luthor, does not intentionally impose his values on those around him. Rather, Superman provides an idealized American *arête* by promoting his values via deeds without overtly imposing them–aiming in fact to "rise above" in order to inspire similar emulation of openness that is part of what America wants to stand for with regarding its identity.

Morrison, in his work *Supergods* (part autobiographical, part exploration of comic book superhero history), notes that *All-Star Superman* aimed to position "Superman as the Enlightenment ideal paragon of human physical, intellectual, and moral development that Siegel and Shuster had originally imagined" (410). Morrison seeks to re-accentuate Superman's early narrative and highlight or draw out its own mythic roots. What helps make this story both new and nostalgic at the same time the reaccentuation of old and classic elements of Superman narrative effectively deployed to remind the audience of Superman's core principles and continued relevance in a modern world. Morrison's Superman is positioned to bear "the soul of an indestructible hero so strong, so noble, so clever and resourceful, he had no need to kill to make his point . . . He would never let us

down because we made him that way" (410). Superman, for Morrison, is really humanity. Morrison portrays Superman in *All-Star Superman* as a personification of human excellence. He is humanity at its very best and what it could be. In the documentary by Morgan Spurlock on the pop-culture phenomenon of Comic-Con San Diego, Morrison is quoted as saying that "The Superhero [like Superman, the modern template] is the kind of last, small, unbroken ideal of what we might all become one day if we just get it together and stop being arseholes" (*Comic-Con Episode IV*). Morrison believes in this idea, and it is reflected in the way that he, along with Frank Quitely, approach Superman and accent all that is best in him. They highlight in their narrative what makes him a model worthy of imitation and emulation and do so by providing a reaccentuation of Superman's *ethos*, amplifying his original and core elements. Ultimately, Morrison and Quitely breathed new life into Superman's past by revisiting it visually and vividly for a modern audience.

The narrative of *All-Star Superman* is direct, to the point, and though not quite "action," it certainly moves towards that as the narrative progresses. The narrative has a clear beginning. Superman's origin stems from his Un-Earthly parents, who sent him into space to save his life, and the Earthly parents who take him in and raise him. There is a miraculous quality, something extraordinary about Superman. Superman, in many respects, has always possessed Western culture's notions of a messiah. He is sent by his father (and mother) to a foreign place (cast out) with the goal of preserving his life but also setting him (Superman or hero) up a means of redemption (in this case humanity) via his extraordinary powers or gifts. These are mythological tropes found in Superman and his narrative that help render and form his story as one recognizable to the audience.

According to Joseph Campbell and his study of the “hero cycle” or “monomyth” of mythology, the hero typically embodies a series of characteristics. Chief among these is the fact that he is male, raised in lowly birth conditions but secretly an heir to a great birthright, his parents are often dead, and he is judged by his deeds and actions (*The Hero with a Thousand Faces* 37-8). The opening page of *All-Star Superman* lays out some of these characteristics. We know Superman is male, by his name, but the sequence notably provides us with a preview that Superman is heir to a dead world (Krypton) where his parents perished, and raised by a “kindly couple,” the Kents, who are Kansas farmers (somewhat lowly or not-exactly-prominent individuals). Morrison’s aim with Superman in *All-Star Superman* is to highlight that one should judge Superman by his deeds and actions, by how he interacts with others, as an essential element in understanding him.

Morrison and Quitely are able, with the opening page, to “throw down the gauntlet,” so to speak, with clear assertions about who Superman is for the audience. Gone is the ambiguity the audience encounters when looking at the cover of *Action Comics* #1. Superman is a hero. Even more so, he is a superhero because he has powers and abilities above those of normal men. These powers allow him to champion great deeds, extraordinary achievement, and hold a demi-god-like status. This is part of Superman’s prestige, as well as his persuasive ability as a model. Superman is in many ways, like other superheroes, the reaccentuation of classical Greek gods and heroes. He is like a figure pulled straight from myth. Norman McKay, who bears witness to the events found within Mark Waid and Alex Ross’ *Kingdom Come*, describes the return of Superman and his fellow heroes to public stage as the return of “Angels.” In fact, he says,

“No. Not angels. Gods themselves. Superman had returned [and] in doing so, drawing from seclusion the titans of yesteryear . . .” (64). The hero McKay speaks of in *Kingdom Come* and Campbell discusses represents classical conception of the hero. This hero is ideally held up as champion to the classical notion of *arête* that is reborn here in an American superhero. Superman is mythological and bigger than real life. This same assertion could be argued for America itself. America is vast and open. America is, for many around the world even today, viewed as a land of opportunity. For some it even remains a kind of moral compass. It is a “big” country filled with many ideas. In his novel *American Gods*, Neil Gaiman points out that an “important thing to understand about American history . . . is that it is fictional” (92). Fiction itself is a vast frontier. The idea of America, to outsiders, is often fictional and therefore infinitely expansive, even today, as it once was for those who first came to the land when it was yet unexplored.

This reinforcement of Superman as a rhetorical model rests upon his ability to embody both classical and mythological concepts of the hero, *arête*, while integrating these concepts through the filter of an understanding of American *arête*. Campbell, again from his interview with Michael Toms, laments the lack of these kinds of models in the 1980s, saying:

> . . . the models for life don't exist for us. In a traditional society—the agriculturally based city—there were relatively few life roles, and the models were there; there was a hero for each life role. But look at the past twenty years and what has come along in the way of new life possibilities and requirements.

> The hero-as-model is one thing we lack, so each one has to be his own hero and follow the path that's no-path. It's a very interesting situation. (*An Open Life* 109)

Campbell laments the lack of real, tangible heroes as models in modern American society. Perhaps, as has often been the case, he should have looked harder toward the power of fiction, and of Superman's power to serve as a model. Interestingly, though, one of Superman's greatest powers is mentioned at end of Campbell's statement above. Superman is the fictional model who empowers the individual to become "his own hero" (109). Morrison, in *All-Star Superman*, attempts to return to his own ability to model an epic hero, but does so by having Superman embrace his mythological roots. In fact, the very structure of the story from beginning to end centers on a "dying hero" who is engaged in performing good deeds, labors (Hercules), before he mysteriously dies in battle but without a body to be recovered (King Arthur, Romulus)[68]. His model is one that is translatable and shareable within everyone's imagination, and this is perhaps his greatest power of all. Superman inspires imagination through his simplicity and straightforward nature.

This ability to inspire has to start somewhere because every hero has an origin, and so does Superman. In the opening of pages of both *Action Comics* #1 and the first issue of *All-Star Superman* offer a demonstration of reaccentuation, as well as a kind of re-simplification of Superman's origin. In the beginning, Superman's creators, Siegel and Shuster, got their big break with Superman when they were offered a chance to have their

[68] King Arthur is taken the Isle of Avalon with the potential promise that he will one day return. Romulus, the founder of ancient Rome supposedly disappeared during a storm. At the end of *All-Star Superman*, Superman, Lois Lane declares: "I know he's up there, building a artificial heart to keep the sun alive. He'll be back when he's done Jimmy. And when he does. He knows where to find me" (151).

character appear in the premier issue of National Comics and Periodical's (eventually to become DC Comics') new title, *Action Comics*. The title itself was part of the selling point. "Action" was what Siegel and Shuster aimed to deliver, and what those who offered them this chance to publish their stories wanted, too. What this meant for Superman's origin, in a title meant for action, was that his backstory was confined to only a one-page spread. As Weldon notes, "This is bare-bones, just-the-facts storytelling, with no room for proper nouns – names such as Krypton, Smallville, Metropolis, Jor-El, Lara, Ma and Pa Kent–all of that would come later," and it would, piecemeal (17). Weldon goes on to break down, panel by panel, the images that Siegel and Shuster decided to use to convey, in minimalism, what would develop into an epic story that would later be embellished and expounded upon many times over. It started as a small, simple story and grew to become something so much more in time.

For the most part, Siegel and Shuster's original origin story presented scant details and only minor background to set up Superman's character and powers. Weldon recounts these opening panels from the one-page introduction of Superman's origin in *Action Comics* #1, noting the use of primarily four main panels of the nine that fill the page to get the audience "up to speed" on "who this 'Superman' guy was" (*Action Comics* #1; Weldon 17-8). These images, particularly of Superman's ability, as measured against a train and a plane in speed, stronger than other men, would evolve. Weldon points out: "As years passed and those machines [man made machines that Superman was superior to] got even stronger and faster, so did Superman. Yet the image of Superman racing a train became one that future writers and artists would return to again

and again" (18). Weldon makes the inference that despite the continual evolution of Superman's narrative, it always tends to eventually return to its first principles. Superman, particularly in the texts under examination in this chapter, draws some of his greatest creative strengths directly from his own past and, by re-accentuating them, reinforces the *arête* and essence he has always possessed for his audience.

In the opening page of *All-Star Superman* #1 (November 2005), Morrison and Quitely, like Siegel and Shuster did, devote a one-page spread to Superman's origin. They have the benefit that by 2006, when Morrison began writing this narrative, Superman was no longer some mysterious strong man as he had been in 1938. Interestingly, though, in only four panels, Morrison and Quitely find a way to re-accentuate what Siegel and Shuster did in *Action Comics* #1 and apply minimalism to encapsulate Superman's origins into four panels and just eight words: "Doomed Planet. Desperate Scientists. Last Hope. Kindly Couple" (11). Most people know enough about Superman's origins, and comic book fans certainly do, thanks to its repetition (from Siegel and Shuster's depictions to later RetCons by the likes of John Byrne in *Man of Steel* #1 and Mark Waid and Leinil Francis Yu's *Superman Birthright* #1). To try to tell Superman's origin again, in any real re-interpretation for the purposes of *All-Star Superman*, is unnecessary. However, that being said, what Morrison and Quitely do offer up represents a wonderful application of both a reaccentuation of the original origin and format as found in the opening page of *Action Comics* #1 (1938) and an offering of a near-perfect and succinct summary that serves to simply remind the audience, as a little refresher, of where the character came from.

Moving forward from re-accentuating his origin, another major component of Superman's narrative often hinges on his relationship with Lex Luthor. Every hero has a nemesis, a kind of doppelganger or dark visage, who he must contend with. Superman's ability to convey behavior worthy of emulation and communicative of value, and to be called a hero, develops a great deal in contrast to Luthor. Luthor operates as the anti-model to Superman's model. Superman's power as a model comes not through his superpowers but through his choices and values.

In *All-Star Superman* #5 (September 2006) and again in #12 (October 2008), Superman faces two unique situations where he is placed in juxtaposition with Luthor directly. Luthor and Superman's relationship has always hinged on many different distinctions, but primarily, it comes down to the fact that whereas Superman thinks primarily of the welfare of others, Luthor, by contrast, looks out for himself above all else. The juxtaposition between Superman and Luthor touches upon a contradiction one can argue within America's perceptions of itself. In some ways, Superman's act of selflessness reaches out toward an idealized conception of what America should aim for, a virtuous conception. This conception can come into conflict with notions of individual freedoms, which are often, in the sake of self-interest, held above those of the group. Superman's actions in this case are more in tune with a reality, a logical conception of it, where the needs of the individuals may better be subordinated to the group.

One could argue that this perception of Superman's purpose, an assertion of the rights of the group favored over the individual (in, let's say, a Marxist sense), develops from having access to power that allows him to act selflessly. Superman stands in

contrasts to the everyman without power. If this is the case, is Superman really selfish? The answer is no. A more accurate assertion is that the reason Superman acts in a selfless manner, as a hero, is because he has the power to do so, yes, but also because he was instilled with the beliefs and values (from his middle-class, rural upbringing). If one possesses the kind of power he has, one should apply to it to helping others rather than acting in a self-serving manner. This selflessness is itself an ideal and value America does hold, though it is not always found in the leaders who claim to model American values for the nation.

In contrast to Superman, there is Lex Luthor and his selfishness and greed. Luthor believes his intelligence and abilities entitle him to a better status than others, and justify (for him) the acquisition of power. Luthor does this to get ahead but not for anyone else's sake. Morrison and Quitely clearly draw this distinction in *All-Star Superman* during two episodes, as noted earlier, in which Superman encounters Luthor. Luthor meets Superman once as Clark Kent and once as Superman. In *All-Star Superman* #5, Superman, as mild-mannered Clark Kent, visits Luthor in prison in order to interview him, while Luthor awaits execution for his many crimes. This scene stems from the opening action of the narrative, when it is revealed that Luthor sabotaged a mission to study the Sun in order to overexpose and kill Superman (*All-Star Superman* #1). After this plot is exposed and defeated, Luthor is captured and put on trial. In the panels found on page 108, he is found guilty of crimes against humanity, being compared to men such as Hitler and Attila. The judge pronounces that Luthor is "a human monster . . . an amoral, sociopathic predator, driven by jealousy, greed and a grandiose self-delusion" (*All-Star Superman, Vol. 1*).

This pronouncement comes on the heels of Luthor being asked if he has anything to say for himself, to which he responds: “Superman made me do it. He should be on trial here” (108). Luthor’s response is pathological, narcissistic, and even sociopathic, with no empathy or regard for responsibility for his own actions. He sees everything he does only in response to or connection with his position vs. Superman. Luthor even smiles when faced with a sentence of death, giving a final demonstration of his lack of remorse or care for his actions or their impact on other lives.

This background, which leads to Luthor’s imprisonment, also leads back to Clark Kent, in issue #5, who comes to visit Luthor in prison in order that he might conduct one last interview with him. Here is Superman, as Kent, offering an opportunity of expression to the man who has “killed” him. It is a quality of mercy many a normal “man” might find hard to overlook or express. Throughout this entire episode, Superman (as Kent) appears clumsy and incompetent. Quite cleverly, he is able to make use of his superhero powers to thwart Luthor’s own machinations. When a prison riot breaks out, Superman manages to save both his (as Clark Kent) and Luthor’s lives without giving his secret identity away, thanks to his feigned clumsiness. Here he (Superman) is saving the life of the man who has sentenced him to death, and yet his nobility and virtue allow him to let justice serve as the sentence upon Luthor rather than acting on his own. In fact, he goes out of his way to make sure Luthor stays alive, despite attempts by other prisoners to stab, shoot, beat, and in the case of one, devour him.

Whereas Superman, even without giving away his secret identity, still risks his exposure to protect his nemesis from harm, Luthor, in arrogant obliviousness, shows no

indication of gratitude, remorse, or sympathy. In fact, (thanks to Superman) although he is able to get his hands on the creature, Parasite, who started the riot by seeking to devour him, Luthor displays only vicious contempt. He acts with malicious self-interest and narcissistic compulsions of aggrandizement as he mercilessly finishes Parasite off in order to project to the other prisoners that he is superior, always superior.

However, in spite of this lack of remorse, Luthor does show some compassion for Kent (Superman), not because he knows Kent is Superman (that would make him less inclined) but because he thinks of Clark Kent as a means to have the world hear his words. Luthor, even on death row, refuses to see himself as anything less than "a born dictator," the rightful leader of mankind, and to view Superman as the hindrance to that goal (127). Kent, confronting Luthor about this statement, meets the response, saying he "used the sun itself . . . the source of his powers–to overload his cellular batteries and destroy him from within" and then declares: "I killed Superman" with a sinister smile and raised eyebrow of satisfaction on his face (127). Luthor's pretentions are depicted as selfish to the point of monstrous, just as the judge who sentenced Luthor declares him to be. His choice of values stand in direct contrast, direct parallel, to those espoused by Superman, allowing Luthor to act as a perfect example of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's notion of the anti-model to Superman's model. Ultimately, Luthor, like Superman, does embody certain aspects of what some might view as a kind of American arête, though perhaps more as a certain set of values. Aristotle would see Luthor worthy of having the opposite of *arête* or nobility.

Morrison's depiction of the contradiction between Superman and Luthor becomes very explicit in the climax and conclusion of *All-Star Superman*. In issue #12, the audience encounters a Superman who is weakened because of his nearness to death. In contrast, Lex Luthor now has, through an injection of a formula, obtained Superman's own powers. One can witness here the distinction that really sets Superman apart from Luthor–how the two apply power based on the values they hold. For Superman, power is something one uses to aid others, an attribute he learned from the nurture of his adoptive parents. In contrast, and as demonstrated throughout *All-Star Superman* and particularly in issue #12, this is not an attribute held by Lex Luthor. Luthor sees power through his own narcissistic lens. For, as he says when he addresses the staff of *The Daily Planet* while floating next to an opening he has made in the building, "You're the ones who sent me to the electric chair! Me, the future savior of the Earth" (*All-Star Superman, Vol. 2* 136). Luthor applies power to aims such as selfishness and delusions of grandeur, which are fed by his narcissism and resentment of being constantly upstaged and outshone by Superman. How can he rise to be the first citizen of Metropolis, or the world, when he can never equal Superman in power? Answering this question is Luthor's obsession. During the fight that ensues between Superman and Luthor, when Luthor acts with power mad ferocity, Superman does his best to protect the innocent, and even though he himself is weakened, while attempting to outmaneuver Luthor. Superman needs to buy time, particularly because the formula Luthor stole was one he created as a gift for Lois Lane (back in issue #2), and he knows that it only lasts 24 hours. Superman's stalling manages to force Luthor to burn out his powers in a quicker-than-normal time.

Luthor's experience of having Superman's powers reveals to him how Superman sees the world. This is the profound climax of the narrative of *All-Star* Superman, which here is why Superman, even as he is dying, still tries to do good for humanity. Morrison uses Luthor's experience at the end of the series as an example of why Superman uses his power to help others. Luthor, in a moment of clarity before the formula runs out, sees the world as Superman sees it: interconnected. He declares, with tears in his eyes, "This is how he sees all the time, every day. Like it's all just us, in here, together. And we're all we've got" (147). Morrison asserts here that not only is Superman blessed with great powers, like X-ray vision or flight, but he also has the greater ability to see reality and how we are all intertwined. Morrison applies to the Superman story a Communitarianism[69] or Eastern philosophical view, in which everyone is connected to everyone else, in order to draw out the mythic qualities of this Superman narrative. Here is Luthor, the enemy, the nemesis of the hero, sharing in "the boon" (as Campbell would state it) that has always been within the heroes' ability to share with humanity (*The Hero With A Thousand Faces* 37). Superman's method of sharing, since he really cannot give everyone his powers, has been to apply those powers toward the betterment of humanity. Though we cannot see what he sees, through his actions, Superman attempts to share this unseen reality with all of "us." After Luthor screams at Superman that he "could have saved the world if it wasn't for you!" Superman responds: "You could have saved the world years ago if it mattered to you, Luthor" (*All-Star Superman, Vol. 2* 148). This

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[69] Communitarianism, or a community of individuals derived there of, is asserted to be "more than a mere association; it is a unity in which the individuals are members. This membership is neither artificial nor instrumental . . ." (Avineri and De-Shali 4). This helps set up a contrast to philosophical theories promoting individualistic ideals, though they both start from the same place.

closing bit of banter between these two figures, the model and anti-model, helps illustrate one last time, the difference between Superman and Lex Luthor, which lies in how they perceive the use of power. Whereas Luthor makes excuses, placing blame on Superman like he is some sort of evil or dark twin to Luthor because he is not of Earth, Superman instead offers up what he has learned as an outsider, as an immigrant, who did not take what America had to offer for granted as perhaps Luthor has.

Toward this application of power–through him as part of his place as a model–that Superman embodies, Morrison and Quitely's *All-Star Superman* provides a quintessential examination of Superman's real power. It is not his super-strength, or heat vision, or power of flight, but his compassion and willingness to help others because of his selfless nature that matters most. A singularly profound demonstration of this power appears in *All-Star Superman* #10 when Superman commits the simple act of saving a young woman's life. This one-page scene cuts to the very "essence" of Superman as Morrison and Quitely portray him. The scene is simple and yet powerful because Superman functions as an effective model of an adaptive, almost universal, *arête*, but it provides an example that crosses the bounds of fiction to the real world. It does this because it puts the reader in a profound state of understanding Superman's greatest power and achievement: to affect our own reality.

Morrison himself, quite openly, speaks of Superman's power in the opening of his book *Supergods*. When speaking of his childhood in 1960s and 1970s Scotland (living near a nuclear submarine base), he vividly recounts his fear of nuclear war and of the nuclear bomb. One day, Morrison read Superman and had a realization that "Before it

was a Bomb, the Bomb was an Idea. Superman . . . was a Faster, Stronger, Better Idea. It's not that I needed Superman to be 'real,' I just needed him to be more real than the Idea of the Bomb that ravaged my dreams" (xv). Morrison points directly at Superman's greatest and hidden power. It's a power that only children often fully recognize. It is the power of imagination. Morrison continues, stating that Superman is "a product of the human imagination . . . a perfectly designed emblem of our highest, kindest, wisest, toughest selves . . ." (xv). Overwhelming, perhaps? Yes, but Morrison in fact postulates the idea that Superman does in fact represent an incredibly powerful and highly American form of excellence as well. More than that, Superman is an American creation who has the ability to model the best America has to offer the world (as perhaps "the bomb" was the worst).

Returning to the example of Superman saving the young girl on page 96 in *All-Star Superman*, the page opens with a long shot of a young woman on the edge of a building. The obvious implication presented visually here is that she is thinking of jumping to her death. There is no need for text here; the audience can clearly see and interpret the scene visually of a young girl in distress, with tears in her eyes. Rather than seeing Superman swoop in and save her after she jumps (a stereotypical and expected superhero trope) the audience witnesses something new and even more powerful. In a series of vertical panels (running parallel to the original long shot), Superman lands behind the young woman, puts his hand on her shoulder, and reassuringly tells her that her doctor really was "held up" and that "It's never as bad as it seems . . . You're much stronger than you think you are. Trust me" (*All-Star Superman, Vol. 2* 96). Superman is

letting this girl, who obviously appears to suffer from some form of mental illness, that suicide is not the way out, she is stronger than her pain. Superman demonstrates his ability as a messenger of hope here. Superman not only models strength that can be seen by others, but he also attempts, as Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca note, "to incite to an action inspired by it" (*The New Rhetoric* 362). Superman could have saved the young woman after she jumped, while she was falling, and then imparted to her the lesson, like some father figure "wagging his finger" at her telling her "now don't do that again" (also an argument of authority), but he does not. Instead, Superman provides a concrete demonstration of his own abstract principles of his excellence. In fact, he does more than model it; he shares it with someone, as an equal, rather than "lording it over" them in some form of superiority. Superman is indicating to the young woman, and to the audience, that he is like us. More so, he imparts his belief of the greatness and good we are capable of and expresses his wish, by his example, to help us see it for ourselves.

This page and its depiction are actually a re-interpretation or reaccentuation from an earlier Superman story. In *Action Comics* #9 (February 1939), written and drawn by Siegel and Shuster, there is a particular scene in which a mentally ill, suicidal man leaps from a building ledge. Superman, of course, swoops in and saves him just in time. The juxtaposition of this earlier story with that of Morrison and Quitely's draws the emphasis of not only Superman's own evolution and reinvention from a simple, straightforward model into a more complex, intricate model, but it also points to an evolution within Superman's own *ethos* too. *Action Comics* #9, titled "Superman: Wanted," shares the elements of Superman saving an individual who suffers from mental illness like the one

found in *All-Star Superman* #10. However, where *Action Comics* #9 overtly tells the audience the man is mentally ill, in *All-Star Superman* #10, the depiction at best merely implies depression or perhaps something more, but the manner in which that "saving" is conducted has changed[70].

The juxtaposition of these two similar but distinct depictions of Superman's powers presents an opportunity to explore the way that Superman's own audience has evolved. The Superman found in *Action Comics* #9 (February 1939) is a character in narrative infancy as well as one who is also aimed more directly towards an audience of children. In the issue, the man who leaps from the ledge of the building is described by the narrator specifically as a "lunatic" (*Superman Chronicles, Vol. 1* 118). Here the explicit nature carries over to Superman himself. He is appearing in a title billed to be full of "action" and his stories, written and drawn by Siegel and Shuster, speak in direct, overt language and actions that leave no mystery to what he is out to do—save people's lives via physical action. This kind of character works for the audience he appeals to. In contrast, when examining the reaccentuation in *All-Star Superman*, one is presented with the question of time: what happens to characters like Superman after decades of time and changes in the audience?

Part of the answer comes through the process of RetCon. Particularly with the comic book medium, RetCon exists to help generate (refresh) internal evolutions within long narrative lifetimes. The process of RetCon keeps properties like Superman viable

[70] Mental illness and its depiction, or rather obvious alterations in perceptions of it, between *Action Comics* #9 (1939) and *All-Star Superman* #10 (2008) are distinctive when examined closely. There is its own and entire discussion of this alteration in reflection to cultural perceptions of mental illness, its treatment, and perceptions.

(for they are commodities). This process allows new creators in new eras to revisit and evolve the character as time passes. For a character like Superman, with an eight-decade lifespan, RetConning is not just something desired but essential. Superman has had plenty of RetCons—most recently in DC's complete re-launch of its entire comic book universe in *The New 52*. Morrison and Quitely utilize Superman's many different and divergent elements created over eight decades of history to weave a magnificent epic RetCon of Superman facing his own mortality. More than that, this is a story of how Superman decides to face death. In the face of his imminent death, Superman's *ethos* does not give out. In fact, Morrison and Quitely are able to capture and highlight the essence of Superman into a 12-issue series with a distinct beginning, middle, and end as required in an epic narrative.

If one examines Superman within his narrative timeline from *Action Comics* #9 (February 1939) all the way to *All-Star Superman* #10 (May 2008), what is revealed is essentially the same character with different levels of complexity. In *All-Star Superman* #10 and *Action Comics* #9, there exists a parallel that interlinks the stories and sheds light not only on Superman's evolution but also the evolution of his narrative as well. First, there is the depiction of mental illness. To begin, the man who jumps in *Action Comics* #9 is seen outside the window of a sanatorium or mental hospital and is referred to by the narrator as a "lunatic" (*Superman Chronicles, Vol. 1* 118). The depiction here of mental illness, though not specifically identified, presents a dangerous impression of cultural social stigma. This scene contrasts with the young woman in *All-Star Superman* #10, who can be assumed to be in a form of outpatient care with a psychiatrist and appears to suffer

from depression, to which Superman appears sympathetic. Though mental illness remains stigmatized in both the early and later depictions, the audience, along with culture, has evolved some. Morrison's depiction aims to generate sympathy, compassion, and understanding over the previous idea that mental illness was just a stand-in trope for Superman to show off his super powers.

Second, and most importantly, in the original story, Superman catches the mental patient after he has jumped (*Action Comics* #9). With regards to the young woman, Superman her decide not to jump at all (*All-Star Superman* #10). Most interesting is the contrast of Superman's overt and covert, explicit and implicit powers. In the former, Superman demonstrates his powers openly and without any particular complication or subtext, with no message to pass on other than that "someone" might save you, too. The latter is a more powerful demonstration because of its complexity and almost covert presentation. This scene is a moment of revelation for the audience who pays close attention. One is shown a Superman who has evolved. Not only has Superman evolved, but also so has the comic book medium. Together, Superman and the medium he helped begin provide the audience with stories that showcase Superman's more implicit and inspirational powers than the traditional, overt ones. It is a masterful encapsulation and reveals the essence of Superman, an essence that existed even in the *Action Comics* #9 of 1939 but over time has finally been allowed its full expression via maturity.

The beauty of this scene in *All-Star Superman* #10 comes from just how complex and complicated superheroes really have the power to be. They are not static creations, but rather are ever evolving, continually RetConed characters who have the power to

accentuate or re-accentuate elements of the real world as "living myths" that convey deeper needs and truths. Central to the entire narrative found within *All-Star Superman* are the core principles Weldon notes: that Superman strives to help others and refuses to give up (3). In *All-Star Superman*'s case, it's a refusal to give up even though he is dying. At a time when Superman could expect to be perhaps a bit selfish, he instead continues to strive to live by his own principles. *All-Star Superman* serves as an opus to Superman's place within epic narratives, and particularly the expression of his core essence, as it serves as a model of prestige and one worthy of emulation by others.

***Superman Birthright:* Superman's Return to Nobility**

Mark Waid recounts that he was stumped when DC's Executive Editor Dan Didio asked him the question "'Why does he [Superman] do what he does?'" ("The Real Truth about Superman" 4). Waid was left with no answer. When he did try to answer, all he came up with was a response based in circular logic, noting that Superman did the right thing because it was "the right thing to do . . ." (5). He was then informed by Didio that

> I'm hiring you to re-imagine harder than that" [and] he had a point. Because I grew up with Superman, because I took his fictional presence for granted, I was falling back on an easy, childlike–and knew-jerk–answer. The truth of the matter was, I hadn't any real clue, and if I was going to do my part to revitalize the character's impact on a post-9/11 world . . . well, Superman deserved more than that from me. (5)

This was the challenge that Waid and Yu faced when they attempted to "reimagine" Superman in *Superman Birthright*. It was a challenge that required going deeper into

Superman's background and understanding what made him stand out from the crowd, other than his powers, and what motivated him as well.

When Stephen Greenblatt describes the first principle of his concept of self-fashioning in his book *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, he makes clear that self-fashioning "is achieved in relation to something perceived as alien, strange, or hostile. This threatening Other . . . must be discovered or invented in order to be attacked and destroyed" (9). This expression and challenging of an alien "other" is at the core of the *Superman Birthright*'s narrative. The narrative is an intentional exploitation of these self-fashioning notions, demonstrated in contrast to the character of Lex Luthor, to define Superman as "alien, strange, [and] hostile" in order to paint himself as the "hero" and turn human society against Superman (9). The result, as predicted, does not favor Luthor. However, the lesson (though predictable) serves to help make a point about what Superman stands for and how he conducts himself as crucial to his character and identity, not only within his narrative, but also to the larger audience of fans and devotees.

Whereas *All-Star Superman* represents an overall examination and reaccentuation of Superman's essence in a grand mythic narrative, *Superman Birthright* looks at Superman's nobility as a character by closely examining his history and origins. This narrative re-imagines, like John Byrne was asked to do in 1986 in his *Man of Steel* re-launch of Superman, Superman's past: in a small Kansas town, a large metropolis, and on a distant world called Krypton. In fact, Waid and Yu attempt to reimagine and re-accentuate the complex and complicated "origin" of Superman during his early years of

existence while exploring the idealized and noble aspects that define him as a hero through their narrative and in turn a worthy model.

Within the very first issue of the series, as in the opening of *All-Star Superman*, *Superman Birthright* appropriates elements of *Action Comics* #1. Touching base with his narrative past serves for dramatic effect in helping remind the audience of who Superman is. This effect is visually pointed and provides, in a near full-page splash, Superman's explosive power. This power is barely compressed within an impactful one-page scene that is itself a re-imagining of the cover of Superman's first appearance. Specifically, Waid and Yu chose to draw upon the cover page of *Action Comic* #1. The original scene involves, very basically, the depiction of Superman, with a car lifted above his head, slamming it into a rock as men run away in fear. The original cover scene provided no context for the situation on it. It was simply a hook, a way to entice young boys in 1938 to pick up the issue and open it up in order to find out "what happened next." One had to read on in order to satisfy the provoking and mysterious scene found on the cover page.

Waid and Yu's interpretation of the same cover, the depiction of Superman slamming a car into rock, is both a retelling and alteration of the scene. Unlike the cover of *Action Comics* #1, this "smashing" of an automobile (an SUV this time) takes places directly in context, but without the ambiguity of the original. Superman, not yet really Superman but still Clark Kent, is engaged in the act of saving lives. The audience is provided with a modern conception of the classic Superman, not yet fully devoted to his cause, but one who faces the world and all its cynical and complexity while trying to find his place and way in it.

This reaccentuation serves less as a hook for young boys as the original, but it is a touchstone moment of Superman revisiting part of his own narrative past. The reference to Superman's original cover plays out in *Superman Birthright* with less ambiguity for the audience because one already knows this iconic scene. The audience is able to recognize the reaccentuation of the cover of *Action Comics* #1 in the narrative and connect the point of reference from the new to the original, while noting also what changes as well.

In examining and comparing the cover of *Action Comics* #1 with the comparative scene found in *Superman Birthright*, one can perform a rhetorical analysis and show that an interesting juxtaposition that emphasize and reaccentuates the evolution of the Superman narrative emerges. In his novel *Supergods*, Grant Morrison himself attempts to specifically examine the original scene found on the cover of *Action Comics* #1, and his analysis provides a good starting point to try to understand the parts at play in that original image. Morrison's analysis of the cover page begins with the assertion one might have found in the mind of a 10-year old boy as he viewed the cover for the first time. One can potentially recognize that the image itself was "a powerful, at once futuristic and primitive image of a hunter killing a rogue car" (5). Morrison lends an interpretation to the image of this now-iconic cover by elaborating, in detail, the elements that form the cover, noting the minimalism and succinct message conveyed through what was billed as "action" (5).

Morrison dedicates the next two pages of his novel to describing both the different elements of the cover, broken down and analyzed, for how they cast an effect on

an audience, both then and now. He specifically highlights the idea that what one is viewing on the cover is the middle of a narrative already in progress: it "is a snapshot of the *climax* of a story we've yet to see. By the time the world catches up to Superman, he's concluding an adventure we've already missed! Only by reading the story inside can we put the image in context" (8). The enticement here calls upon a reader to invest, to open up, and look inside in order to come to an understanding, a context, for what occurs on the front cover. We, the audience, have to "catch-up" to Superman–in a sense–who is already way out in front of us in the narrative action.

Waid and Yu's reaccentuation of the cover of *Action Comics* #1 in *Superman Birthright* is far more complicated than the original cover or Superman story contained. Those who read along witness the fact and can foresee that Superman faces a terrible choice, in which he must abandon his promise to protect a progressive tribal leader. This friend is a leader in an African country on the verge of reform. Superman has to choose the greater good and save his friend's tribe from an attack in the midst of violent reprisals by the government. Superman's choice is both utilitarian and logical in that it will save "the many," but the cost is that the tribal leader he befriended is assassinated following a speech, while Superman is elsewhere (*Superman Birthright* 47). This is, in some ways, a robbing of Clark's (Superman's) innocence about the possibilities of the world, and it awakens him from his previously naïve conceptions of justice.

In our modern context, regardless whether one thinks of Superman as some outdated boy scout or the paradigm of virtue, his first appearance did not immediately communicate those facts. For "Readers in 1938 simply had no idea what was going on

[and that] Based on first appearances alone, this gaudy muscleman could be friend or foe, and the only way to answer a multitude of question [was] to read on" (8). This being the case for Superman's first appearance, the ability of decades of hindsight presents anyone attempting to reinvent Superman or retell his origin less room for ambiguity in their own depiction of that first appearance.

Whereas the scenes found in *Action Comics* #1 depicts Superman in costume, slamming an empty vehicle into a boulder as what appear to be its former occupants scatter in terror from the scene, *Superman Birthright*'s reaccentuation of this scene is both more kinetic and raw. For starters, this is Clark Kent before he has donned the mantle of Superman. This is Superman in the early stages of looking for himself in the world. He also appears exposed. He risks exposure of who and what he is when an onlooker, a tribal member who he knows utters in confused bewilderment: "Clark…?" (*Superman Birthright* 50). Clark reveals his powers to others for the first time–until this point he had acted with stealth and kept his powers a secret–and does so without costume. Additionally, this scene is more kinetic in its depiction than the original. This kinetic aspect derives from the context behind those in the vehicle. It is demonstrated by the violence of the smashing of the vehicle into a boulder, even while the passengers remain inside it. The audience is clearly shown one of the men in the vehicle flying through the windshield glass, while another flies from the backseat into the front seat upon impact.

What was originally a showdown with gangsters who forcibly took Lois Lane on an unwilling ride in *Action Comics* #1 is transformed in *Superman Birthright* into a far more complex, moral scene based on expedience in the name of the greater good (as

Clark sees it). This move is representative both of the evolution of Superman over the decades and the sophistication of his audience of adolescent boys to young men and adults. It is also an acknowledgment that superheroes are now part of the larger world culture. The world itself grew more complicated since 1938, and if Superman's narrative is to have meaning, he must be able to confront these changes and complications of those tougher choices.

After losing his friend to assassination and revealing himself to everyone, both in the village and the capital where Kobe (his friend) was killed, Clark realizes people are now afraid of him (one reason he previously kept his abilities a secret). Even those with whom he had been close are now fearful of his powers. When asked by his dead friend Kobe's sister Abena "Why…Why couldn't you have s-stopped this…?" Clark responds that he "had no choice . . . I had to save the people he [Kobe] wanted saved…" (*Superman Birthright* 58). In fact, he did have a choice, and he made it. Superman chose to protect the weak, which is what his friend Kobe was, politically, trying to do. Kobe was his model. He sought to emulate what he saw Kobe doing. He acted both out of respect for his friend's ideals and in the manner he was himself attempting to enact: to bring peace and security to those he represented. The lesson here is a harsh one for Clark, one that causes him to return home to his family in Kansas, having seen the ugliness of the world and the limitations of his own powers to do everything. Even more importantly, Waid and Yu construct these events within the narrative to push Clark Kent down the road to become more involved in trying to make the world better place and to adopt a persona, Superman, by which to facilitate that mission.

Besides appropriating and re-accentuating Superman's past stories, or elements of those stories, *Superman Birthright* provides an examination of Superman and Lex Luthor's relationship as well. Unlike *All-Star Superman*, this is a relationship that begins when Superman is still Clark Kent, and when both were growing up in Smallville. Waid and Yu revisit elements of the Superman past narrative, particularly the popular Silver Age (1956-1971) assertion, first floated in a Jerry Siegel scripted *Superboy* (in which Clark dawned the mantle as a young man in Smallville) story, that Clark Kent and Lex Luthor grew up together. In fact, here is the idea that their relationship was not always an antagonistic one, but in fact, for a time, both men were even friends. This shared childhood element has been deleted and returned to the Superman narrative/continuity from time to time depending on those in charge creatively. It has also found quite a bit of popularity in the television program *Smallville*, which began broadcasting around the same time as *Superman Birthright* was published in 2004. This relationship establishes, early on, how Superman (Clark Kent) and Lex Luthor are ultimately different and yet interconnected. They share background and some upbringing, but their values are not the same in the end. Nature here has a role to play in pushing them towards their roles as model and anti-model as much as nurture does.

This "friendship" evolves into antagonism and, by the end of the narrative, leads to the final confrontation at the end of the story. The fake alien invasion found in the climax of *Superman Birthright* helps accentuate a specter of xenophobia that emerges when the two meet again in Metropolis. However, before they get to that point, Clark Kent and Lex Luthor are depicted as having a strange friendship growing up in

Smallville. The primary attraction that lends itself to making Kent and Lex "friends" centers on the abilities and goals they both share. Both young men possess a high intelligence as well as a desire to leave Smallville (Lex more profusely) behind. What then drives them is apart is their application of their abilities and choices: how and what both boys choose to do with that intelligence and ability in the pursuit of "leaving" Smallville.

As in other Superman narratives, Lex Luthor represents the obvious anti-model to Superman's model for the audience. Many times the model/anti-model relationship of Superman and Luthor centers heavily on how both view and apply their influence and power in the narrative. Waid and Yu establish this difference early and overtly when Superman meets up with Luthor (again) in Metropolis. Superman Birthright utilizes flashbacks to set up a context for their relationship in Smallville. One particular scene comes from their high school years, when Lex applies his intellect to selling out Smallville's football team to a rival school. He does this by predicting the plays and selling the information to the opposing coach for no other reason than that he can. Kent witnesses this transaction, with the help of his powers, and confronts Luthor. Instead of turning him in, Kent attempts to reason with Luthor, even pleading with him "as [his] friend–don't ever do that again" (182). For a brief moment, this "plea" appears to have done the trick. The narrator confirms the success of Kent's warning to Luthor when noting: "Smallville went undefeated for the rest of the season" (182). This confrontation pointedly reveals less the close nature of Kent and Luthor's friendship, but rather, visually, how much the two are different.

The "truce" that appears to emerge after Luthor and Kent's confrontation at the football game does not last long. Luthor is driven by an obsession to discover alien life. His quest is aided by the use of a meteorite he found that crashed to Earth the same night Kent arrived from Krypton. Although Luthor and Kent do not know it, this Kryptonite is causing Superman to become weak and sick from exposure. Through the application of his intellect, Luthor is able to use a machine to channel the Kryptonite as a way to open up contact with Krypton of the past. However, in the process of this experiment, there is a terrible accident. This accident is much like the one found in the original Silver Age *Superboy* story (*Adventure Comics* #271) of a lab accident that causes Luthor to lose his hair and be horribly burned. The accident in *Superman Birthright* accomplishes the same feat as the Silver Age story and leads many, including Kent, to believe that Luthor perished in the accident.

It is how Clark Kent (Superman) and Lex Luthor apply their "gifts" that establishes for the audience the differences between the two. Superman's powers are extraordinary and include flight, heat, vision, invulnerability, and the ability to see through almost anything (except lead). Lex Luthor, on the other hand, remains more human, without powers, but is blessed with an extremely high intellect and obsessive drive to succeed. This is, for the most part, standard in many of the narrative depictions of Clark Kent/Superman and Lex Luthor's relationship. What Waid and Yu introduce in *Superman Birthright* is the addition of a small window in which both men are nearly, as strange and awkward, as it seems, friends. This friendship is based upon the fact that both feel themselves to be a bit like outsiders (because of their respective gifts) and are both a

bit “too big” for their small home town. Both characters form a line that connects the model and anti-model, a thread that intertwines them like two sides of the same coin. What sets them apart, what helps illustrate Superman as the model and Luthor as the anti-model, emerges from how they apply their gifts and they treat others around them.

The model or anti-model roles primarily derive, as seen in *Superman Birthright*, from how Superman and Lex Luthor behave in ways that are considered (in epideictic fashion) as worthy of praise or blame. This idea centers upon cultural ideals of virtue and *arête*, and for Aristotle, this would tie in his discussion of virtues and vices in *The Rhetoric*. In that work, while discussing ethical elements of persuasion, Aristotle notes that it is important

> to consider Virtue and Vice, the Noble and the Base, since these are the objects of praise and blame [and in] The Noble [one sees] that which is both desirable for its own sake and also worthy of praise [and that] If this is a true definition of the Noble, it follows that virtue but be noble since it is both a good thing and praiseworthy. Virtue is, according to the usual view, a faculty of providing and preserving good things [and] The terms of Virtue are justice, courage, temperance, magnificence, magnanimity, liberality, gentleness, prudence, wisdom. (56-7)

To then uphold Superman as a model of virtue, one can judge him by how well he preserves the “good things” Aristotle notes above.

These last two virtues are ones that Superman comes to full expression of by the end of the narrative of *Superman Birthright*. Superman demonstrates justice at all times.

He is willing to concede (it's a painful lesson) that killing one who kills, such as the politician who kills his friend Kobe early in *Superman Birthright*, does not make anything right in the end. Justice is not the same as revenge, and Superman is capable of knowing the difference. Central to any Superman story, and prominent in *Superman Birthright*, is Superman's willingness to demonstrate courage. In spite of the risk of exposure to Kryptonite, which might lead to his death, Superman demonstrates that he is willing to help others even at a risk to himself. With temperance, Superman comes to realize that there are limits to what he can do.

Superman is not willing to give up, but he also has to understand and accept that he cannot do everything alone. This desire to help others demonstrates the virtues of magnanimity, liberality, gentleness, and magnificence. Superman is open-handed and does not discriminate against anyone he wishes to aid, even when dealing with those who are or might be his enemy. He shows restraint and respect for life at all times. All of these qualities, his magnanimity, liberality, and gentleness (and to a degree his temperance, courage, and justice) all help illustrate the perception of his magnificence. Within this magnificence is an intellect that sees the world and comes to understand that difficult times require shrewd, planned action and this in turn helps establish Superman's prudence and wisdom. This expression comes when he earns for himself a distinct and "noble" place among humanity, which he seeks to protect. It is because these "noble" characteristics are prominent in any Superman narrative that Waid and Yu include them, almost unconsciously, in their narrative. These qualities form the core of what makes

Superman a model, and it is Luthor's abject rejection of these virtues that makes him an anti-model.

When Lex Luthor and Clark Kent meet again in Metropolis, the first time Kent does so as Superman, their antagonism picks up right where it left off in Smallville. Luthor immediately attempts to "spin" the malfunction of his technology, which has put people's lives in danger, as an intentional opportunity for Superman to "save the day." Luthor even attempts to "thank" Superman for his assistance. However, Luthor's real aspiration is to accumulate power, and in this process, he imagines early on that co-opting Superman's prestige to add to his own might be a smart move. Superman rejects this attempt. The rejection helps Luthor decide to paint Superman as the "other" as Plan B. He attempts to render Superman as an enemy of humanity by manufacturing, from images of Krypton's past, evidence that an alien fleet is coming to invade Earth.

Luthor's attempt to assume Clark's revealed position as an alien and exploit it for personal gain is a common trope in the superhero comic book genre. Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons used a similar trope in their critically acclaimed graphic novel *Watchmen*. There a "retired hero" attempts to unite the world via deceit and becomes a super villain the process (*Watchmen*). Luthor's plan mirrors science fiction tropes as well, particularly one found in Kurt Vonnegut's novel *The Sirens of Titan*. In that novel, the primary antagonist, Winston Niles Rumfoord, brings about world peace by manufacturing a fake alien invasion from Mars. This invasion is designed to fail and be destroyed by Earth. Rumfoord then manipulates humanity, through its guilt over Earth's actions (wiping out a fictional Martian invasion made up of people from Earth who were taken to Mars by the

antagonist) to take power and unite humanity (Vonnegut). In many respects, Luthor follows a similar course by trying to manipulate humanity's fear of alien invasion. Luthor appropriates Superman's chevron "S," his symbol of nobility and hope, and tries to change its symbolic meaning into one of fear and threat.

Luthor's aim is similar to that of Rumfoord in Vonnegut's novel, to unite humanity, but unlike Rumfoord, Luthor's purpose, as always, is his own self-promotion. Luthor aims to exploit Superman's existence to paint him as the "other" and attempts to drive public opinion and popularity away from him by asserting that he is not a savior but rather the vanguard of an alien invasion. To this same end, Luthor manufactures this crisis and has prepared his own band of "new soldiers" to step in at the last moment and "save the day." Luthor attempts to position himself as the true model the people of Metropolis should look up to and wish to emulate. Luthor's actions only further portray and accentuate his position as the anti-model.

On another level, though, this introduction of the "alien" invasion from outer space represents an expanded, a reaccentuation of classic xenophobic narratives concerning cultural perceptions towards outsiders. It can be easily asserted that Superman, being from another planet, easily qualifies as an outsider. Going back to Superman's creation in 1938, during a period of American isolationism, and the fact that he was created by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster (sons of Jewish immigrants to America), it is important to note that Superman is, in fact, an illegal alien himself. As previously established, Superman's story is really an immigrant story. What Lex Luthor attempts to do is exploit built-in xenophobic elements that exist within most cultures toward

outsiders in order to scapegoat Superman. Luthor, through manipulation and his low opinion of humanity, attempts to flip positions with Superman regarding their roles (Superman becoming the villain and Luthor becoming the hero), but the understanding of the model and anti-model concept exposes just how such methods can fail in the end, particularly in superhero stories.

Luthor's attempt to paint Superman as a villain fails. Specifically, it fails because even when Superman is down, when he is painted as the other and the villain, he refuses to concede and give up or not do the right thing. This failure is particularly illustrated in the final confrontation between Superman and the "fake" Kryptonian invaders who Lex Luthor has created. This encounter represents the definition of Superman and Luthor as model and anti-model, but also shines a light on exactly what is at the heart of Superman's essence. His essence remains focused on the appropriation of his power to help others and to never give up in that pursuit. It is also in this final confrontation that Superman is able to fully display the virtues, as articulated by Aristotle, their complete expression.

The final confrontation between Luthor and Superman covers 65 pages of images and words. Contained within the climax of *Superman Birthright* is a scene of Superman coming face-to-face with not only humanity, who at one point views him as one of the invaders, but also mortality, when he is exposed to Kryptonite. When Superman is wounded by the Metropolis Police Department, in a true moment of mortality (a moment pregnant with fear for Superman), the way he ultimately comes away from moments like this, when he, too, is almost human in his fragility, demonstrates his courage. For, as

Aristotle notes, “virtue is a faculty of beneficence, the highest kinds of it must be those which are most useful to others, and for this reason men honour most the just and courageous, since courage is useful to others in war, justice both in war and in peace” (*The Rhetoric* 57). Superman, up until this point in the story, has primarily concerned himself with justice because he is, by virtue of his abilities, in the best position to honor and perform it in the aid of others. However, when confronted by this “fake” army supposedly from his home world, Superman comes to realize, even though he tries to run from it in weakness, that he must commit himself anew. Even if it is against his own people, justice calls him to action. He must also demonstrate courage to others, as well as justice, and to do this, he must set an example for them to see and to follow.

This notion of justice and courage emerges on pages 234-5 and 237-40 when Superman reaches his moment of decision. He decides he cannot and will not run from this fight. He will not violate the tenants of his essence (to never give up and to help others) (*Superman Birthright*). Waid and Yu strategically maneuver Superman into this kind of choice to help illustrate just the kind of virtue, *arête*, Superman possesses. These choices are not merely some kind of imperative, but a conscious and deliberate choice. He might die. Exposure to the Kryptonite might kill him or allow him to be killed. He knows that, and still he chooses to stand by his principles.

Superman, specifically as Clark, seeks his parent’s advice via email, during his moment of crisis. His father, who earlier is seen to be overprotective, tells him “COME HOME while you still CAN. If Luthor really is behind this [the invasion], he’ll call it off long before he levels the city. If he just wants to be the ‘hero’ instead of YOU, then LET

him. Don't put yourself THROUGH this" (*Superman Birthright* 234). Jonathan Kent's advice appears to demonstrate prudence and wisdom. Aristotle notes "Prudence is that virtue of the understanding which enable men to come to wise decisions about the relation to happiness of the goods and evils [of the world]" (*The Rhetoric* 57). Though Clark/Superman appears inclined to agree with this interpretation of the situation, his mind is not completely made up. He is still in his "moment of crisis and decision" when he encounters Lois Lane. Clark tells her he is quitting the Daily Planet. Lois responds to Clark by calling him a "spineless worm" for perceiving to give up in the face of the crisis. The audience is actually left "hanging" for a moment, as if it is about to witness Superman run away while he hovers above Metropolis (*Superman Birthright* 235-7). However, Superman makes the choice to take a stand. It is as if he remembers what Aristotle says about courage, that it "is the virtue that disposes men to do noble deeds in situations of danger" (*The Rhetoric* 57). Superman is certainly in danger. He knows it, and he makes the choice to face that danger, to return, and embrace not only justice, which he has already demonstrated, but courage as well.

This moment of decision, a moment when Superman makes the choice to demonstrate and embrace courage for perhaps the first time in his life, comes on pages 239-240 of *Superman Birthright* and represents a profound moment of identification for Superman and audience. On page 238, Superman's iconic chevron "S" is seen, burned in fire and proclaimed by the leader of the fake Kryptonian invasion force as "the symbol by which Krypton shall be forever remembered by the human race" (237). Superman, high above, witnesses this pronouncement. Here is the symbol he wears upon his chest

proudly, the symbol of his heritage and family, his chevron “S,” wreathed in fire on the ground. It has been appropriated, now, as a scar, a mark of dominance and oppression upon the people of Earth. This appropriation is in direct contrast to the message of justice and hope that Superman, while he wears that same symbol, seeks to project via his own actions and deeds. On page 239, Superman is shown, dressed as Clark Kent, holding in one hand his glasses and in the other his cape. In a close-up panel, it appears as if he is looking at both objects in contemplation of a choice–glasses for Clark Kent (the coward who wants to run away) and the cape for Superman (who does not run away). This decision here is a dualistic and internal choice between actions. Clark Kent and Superman are two halves of the same person, and each person makes choices that define who they are. The choice here comes when a following panel reveals Clark’s glasses free-falling. The consequence of this choice–to be Clark Kent, the mild-mannered, timid everyman, or to be Superman, the hero who helps others and never gives up–emerges on the next page of the narrative. This is also a choice that puts Superman within the persona that must, even at the risk of his own death, do what he can (and perhaps only what he can) to save lives, and if he can, expose the conspiracy concocted by Luthor to vindicate himself (239). This is Superman embracing Aristotle’s virtue of magnanimity, as he is not merely seeking to do good, but demonstrating “the virtue that disposes us to do good [for] others on a large scale” (*The Rhetoric* 57). This is not simply Superman attempting to save a few people; this is Superman seeking to save an entire city, perhaps an entire world, from harm as part of his very nature.

Superman swoops into action. However, this does not simply resolve the situation outright. These soldiers Luthor has dressed up to play Kryptonians bent on conquering Earth are armed with weapons that emit Kryptonite radiation that can render Superman weak, sick, and vulnerable. These weapons can kill Superman. The situation forces Superman to rely on the help of his friends, such as Lois Lane, to help carry him (spiritually and morally) and keep him going through the fight. In a one-on-one fight with the leader of this mock invasion, Superman is told it is Luthor who has staged all of this, and those who are participating in this invasion are not "frauds" or paid actors, but men who have sided with Luthor out of fear of Superman. The leader puts it bluntly when he says, expressing the deepest fears about someone like Superman, that "It's only a matter of time before you turn on anyone weaker than you. That's how it works" to which Superman replies, "Not . . . Not Always" (*Superman Birthright* 252). This is Superman at the pinnacle of his virtue, which clearly divides and separates him from Luthor. Base things such as power, fame, and money are what motivate Luthor. Superman acts with liberality instead. Liberality here is not, as Aristotle defines it, the quality that "disposes us to spend money for others' good" (*The Rhetoric* 57). Rather, this is liberality in conjunction with magnanimity, which aims to give freely to help others, to give of itself (Superman) for others. Superman demonstrates this when he immediately breaks off his confrontation with the invasion's leader to the rescue of people in distress (*Superman Birthright* 252-3). All of this, all of his noble acts and decisions are what lend Superman the virtue of magnificence, which "is a virtue productive of greatness" (*The Rhetoric* 57). This greatness is born in final confrontation with Luthor's "fake" Kryptonian army.

The climax reaches its peak on pages 254 and 255. It is a scene filled with power and intensity that it draws the eye right to the action. At this point in the story, Superman has taken quite a beating, thanks to his exposure to Kryptonite, which has resulted in his costume becoming ripped and his chest emblem, his symbol, which he is seeking to re-appropriate from the fake invaders from Krypton, torn away. While saving civilians, Superman faces a moment of high tension when taking note of a child in imminent danger. In one panel, readers witness the child about to become, as it appears, a casualty of the fighting. In another panel, one sees Superman in the act of rescuing civilians but becoming aware of this even-greater danger to the child. Time here separates Superman and the child into parallel moments that are simultaneous and locked in time. The third and final panel unlocks time and shows Superman ripping his Superman emblem off a fake Kryptonian vehicle (*Superman Birthright* 254). What follows, on page 255, is a full-splash page that can barely contain the image of Superman on it. Superman is shown holding the child secure and protected in one arm, and with the other, holding up this oversized emblem of his identity to use as a shield.

As noted earlier, the image of Superman here, holding a young boy in his protective arms, helps re-accentuate the personal pain Jerry Siegel must have experienced as a child after the death of his father. What Waid and Yu bring to life on page 255 acts as a fulfillment of the "wish" that Superman may have been for Siegel when he dreamed him up–someone who saved Siegel from his loss and pain. Thinking back to Larry Tye's description of how the original artwork portrayed Superman saving a man from a robber, one might argue that this was Jerry Siegel's tragic loss of his father revised, but with a

happier ending. Superman was, for Siegel, was a wish fulfillment–a fantasy hero who could have prevented the tragedy of his father's untimely death. The image on page 255 acts as a kind of layered metaphor for Superman. On one level, found in the minds of young boys growing up, there is the boy Superman shields. It could be asserted that this is Waid and Yu inserting a fictional incarnation of Jerry Siegel into their narrative. Perhaps even more than that, the boy depicted in Superman's arms might be every little boy who has ever lost someone. This is a stand-in for every boy who has ever been in danger or afraid, which imbues Superman with ready identification. He is the one watching out for us. He is the friend and savior, the conveyer of hope, that things can be all right and that tragedy does not have to be the only outcome. Superman can be this for the imagination of any and every kid and even for some adults as well.

The image of the boy in Superman's arms has symbolic layers to it. It represents more than a simple heroic act when rhetorically analyzed. Where Superman's chevron "S" is missing, ripped from his chest by the "fake" Kryptonian invaders, he has replaced and amplified it. In place of "S" on his chest he uses a massive version of it, ripped from one of the vehicles being used to impersonate his dead race, as a shield. Not only does this shield protect him and the boy, but it also is an amplification of what Superman stands for. This scene spotlights why Superman wears that symbol on his chest. It is a sign of hope, one of protection, and here it is, transformed in this image in to something larger than life–just like Superman.

This is an illustration that projects, both via Superman's holding of this enhanced version of his own symbol and the image of him defending a helpless child, the nature of

Superman's essence by generating presence. Chaim Perelman, his work *The Realm of Rhetoric*, expounds upon the idea of presence that he laid out with L. Olbrechts-Tyteca in *The New Rhetoric*, by noting that "Choosing to single out certain things for presentation in a speech [this case an image] draws the attention of the audience to them and thereby give them a *presence* . . ." (*The Realm of Rhetoric* 35). Waid and Yu, throughout *Superman Birthright*, just as Morrison and Quitely did in *All-Star Superman,* act rhetorically to try and persuade the audience of the meaning they see in Superman.

Waid and Yu, like others before them, have embraced the possibility of Superman and found ways to express his essence and give presence to what he means to them in order to share that with others–as *The New Rhetoric* states, "to promote understanding" in their vision of Superman (360). In the aftermath of defeating Luthor's "fake" alien invasion, Superman finally confronts Luthor one-on-one. Superman finds Luthor, desperate, trying to appeal to echoes of the real Krypton to help him and validate his superiority. As Superman puts an end to this deception and chaos Luthor has created, he catches a glimpse of Krypton's final moments. In that glimpse, Superman sees his parents placing him in the ship that brought him to Earth (*Superman Birthright* 283-5). This moment overlaps, circling back to scenes found on page 17. In these initial scenes, the point of view is that of Superman's parents "flinging" their son into space with no idea of whether this act will actually save his life or simply doom him to a slower death. This moment is punctuated because it allows Superman to speak to his dead parents from the future. He recognizes them, and speaking across time and space, says "Mother . . . Father . . . I made it" (286). The final page shows his parents, in tears of joy, embracing one

another and panels tighten in until all that can be seen is Superman's chevron "S" upon his father's chest. Projected here, embedded, is a potent image of hope. This idea of hope is what Superman himself projects when he wears that symbol on his chest. Again, this moment also plays out as a form of posthumous, and perhaps eulogic, homage to Jerry Siegel's purpose in the creation of this character. Here is Superman, able to share in one last communication with his parents, one Siegel never had with his father, but a communication that fills both them and Superman with a sense of fulfillment. It is a moment of identification that allows the audience to have a point of connection with a character who possesses near god-like powers. Even so, he is just like us. This is the image of a superhero as an ordinary man who had a mother and a father and a home. He is like us, but not like us at the same time. It is the similarities that connect Superman to us and the differences that set him apart that allow him to be identifiable and relatable to an audience while allowing him to rise above and function as a model for inspired emulation and aspiration.

***Superman: Secret Origin*: Superman's Return to Immigrant**

In their 6-issue mini-series, *Superman: Secret Origin* (2010), Geoff Johns and Gary Frank attempt to further understand Superman. This series does parallel what Waid and Yu undertook and accomplished in *Superman Birthright* (2004); however, though the story traces similar themes of other Superman stories, the actual narrative itself offers up its own unique and compact expression of the idea of Superman by re-accentuating Superman with his more recent physical incarnation within motion pictures. Whereas Waid and Yu centered their narrative on Superman's confrontation with Lex Luthor as

one involving a near-interstellar and exponentially enlarged struggle between natives and immigrants (otherness), Johns and Frank simplify things. They strip down their message and focus on a more personal story of a boy becoming a man and a man becoming a superhero. Their narrative's protagonist is an outsider, but one who is capable of embodying and expressing the *arête* Americans admire and remind us of when we have forgotten it ourselves.

A central element in Johns and Frank's narrative is the visual homage and reaccentuation of Richard Donner's vision of Superman in his films: *Superman: The Movie* (1978) and *Superman II* (1980). In particular, Geoff Johns, who worked for Richard Donner before becoming a writer at DC, along with Gary Frank, craft their Superman in the likeness of Christopher Reeve, the actor who played Superman in the Donner films. Within the realm of television and movies, there have been actors who have become, for certain generations, the iconic embodiment of how people imagined Superman. For people growing up in the 1950s, it was George Reeve, TV's first Superman. For many born in the 1970s, and even beyond, it was Christopher Reeve (no relation to George Reeve) as motion pictures' first Superman. The connection of an actor to a character such as Superman is, in some ways, part of Superman's greater ability of identification. It's a two way street that often allows the character to become identified with an actor because the larger-than-life elements often overshadow that actor as well. A case in point can be found in the fact that Christopher Reeve is almost solely identified (at least for an entire generation) with Superman and Superman alone.

The rendering of Superman in Reeve's likeness clearly identifies and interlinks Johns' conception of Superman with Donner's interpretation of Superman in his films. This depiction hints at the relation that Johns has with "his" Superman, his image of Superman (Reeve) being also the first Superman of motion pictures. Reeve, in an introduction to a compilation of Superman's past adventures, titled *Superman in the Seventies*, notes "It was [his] privilege to play Superman–or perhaps more accurately, to be the custodian of the character–in the 1970s (7). Reeve goes on to point out that his appearance of Superman in *Superman: The Movie* helped show audiences how "spectacular" Superman was than any depiction before (7). Reeve, as one of the most recent and identifiable figures to portray Superman, notes that his depiction in the Donner Superman films helped capture and bring to life to this iconic character for the first time in the movies. It made Superman feel and seem even more real for audiences. Hence the promotional posters for the movie, which Reeve recalls reading, stated: "You'll believe a man can fly," and his portrayal made audiences believe just that (7). This connection between Superman and Reeve's recognition to the audience as Superman provides a point of reaccentuation for the character in *Superman: Secret Origin* as well.

The recognition of Christopher Reeve's Superman serving as the model for Johns and Frank's interpretation fully emerges in issue #3 of the series. Here is where the audience sees Superman as an adult for the first time, and Frank's rendering is obviously modeled on Reeve himself. The original cover page of issue #3, inserted as a splash page that precedes the issue in the graphic novel form, depicts Superman embracing Lois Lane above the skyline of Metropolis. Here, clearly, Superman appears almost identical to

Christopher Reeve's Superman. This does though beg the question: what purpose does this serve? The purpose appears to be primarily one of recognition and identification on the part of the audience. For anyone who grew up after 1978, Reeve was Superman. Even until quite recently, Reeve represented what many imagined Superman would look like in real life. Burke states clearly in his *Rhetoric of Motives* that "Aristotle's *The Rhetoric* deals with the possibilities of classification in its *partisan* aspects" and that puts people into groups that "identification [attempts] to confront [as part of] the implications of *division*" (*Rhetoric of Motives* 22). Identification, then, is meant to help confront "divisions" and classifications that exist and that are created. To borrow from the previous chapter, "Identification is affirmed with earnestness precisely because there is division" and only through the division can recognition for the need for unity emerge (22). What Christopher Reeve did by acting as "the custodian" of Superman, bringing him to life on the big screen, was to help bridge some of those divisions by crossing mediums. The representation of Superman in the motion pictures helped project Superman the character by promoting his identifiable qualities in the wider world in 1978. Johns and Frank are able to redraw this same identification and help bring the audience into a unity with their depiction of Superman in *Superman: Secret Origin*.

The reaccentuation of Reeves' Superman offers an opportunity to play up the character's ability in motion pictures to persuade the audience that this is a Superman they know. This is still Superman: powerful and daring, but he is also, thanks to Reeve, disarmingly charming, optimistic, and inviting at the same time. Johns and Frank's Superman, in *Superman: Secret Origin*, reaccentuates Reeve's image in portraying of

Superman as a way to grant easy, ready-made awareness for the audience for connecting "their" Superman with an actor who much of the public already identifies with Superman. Additionally, it shines a distinct light of contrast against the cynical nature of humanity (embodied in Lex Luthor and Metropolis, as well as other characters) to which Johns and Frank place in the way of their Man of Steel.

The first cynical "roadblock" Johns and Frank craft for their "boy scout," a naïve and innocent Superman/Clark Kent (with his boyish, Midwestern stereotype manner), occurs the very moment Clark Kent arrives in Metropolis. The audience witnesses a re-accentuated Christopher Reeve Clark Kent persona, the helpful and polite man (like some modern Jimmy Stewart), bumping into an elderly woman when he reaches Metropolis. Clark, turning to the woman declares, "I'm terribly sorry, miss." To this, the woman replies, as he stoops to pick up her purse, "What are you doing?" He replies back: "Helping you pick up your…" to which the woman cuts him off, screaming, "Give me that!" as she yanks the purse away (*Superman: Secret Origin*). Clark tries to explain that he was looking up at the skyline of Metropolis, to which the woman eventually concludes, as she storms off, that people in Metropolis have more important things to do than indulge in idealistic and trivial pursuits (*Superman: Secret Origin*). This exchange, as well as many more of Clark's early encounters in Metropolis, pits the idealistic, kind, and good-natured Clark against an environment that views his kindness and optimism as something to be exploited or simply distrusted. This misunderstanding and exploitation contrast not only with Clark Kent/Superman's inherent view of the world, but is rendered even more distinct by having this Clark Kent modeled on Christopher Reeve.

Despite this disparity, this scene helps the audience recognize, without ambiguity, what this Superman stands for. Anyone reading this series would be able to reach a quick identification with this interpretation of Clark Kent/Superman and immediately grasp that this pairing of him with the cynical Metropolis renders him an alien outsider in many ways–not just that he was born on another planet. Superman is always, to some degree, an outsider. However, here is Clark Kent, the supposed "every man," who is out of step with his own time and location. Clark's real function in this narrative is to help expose the gap that can often exist between the professed ideals of his society and what happens when those ideals meet a harsh and pessimistic reality. This same notion of ideal vs. real, of the better selves and the worst selves, exists within the model and anti-model relationship as well. For every Clark Kent/Superman one may wish to aspire to, there are always more than a few Lex Luthors. One wishes, though, that there might perhaps be more Clark Kent/Supermans in the world.

Superman's relationship with Lex Luthor, as noted earlier, represents the model and anti-model relationship. As the narrative unfolds within *Superman: Secret Origin*, the position of the model and anti-model is established early between Clark Kent (and then Superman when he assumes that identity) and Lex Luthor as opposites. This "establishment" traces its way back to their childhoods in Smallville.

As in *Superman Birthright*, Superman and Lex Luthor are depicted as knowing each other in Smallville, Kansas. And as in Waid and Yu's narrative, Lex Luthor demonstrates an unparalleled selfishness and narcissism. Unlike in *Superman Birthright*, Johns and Frank do not attempt to create a friendship between Clark and Lex during their

time in Smallville. Instead, *Superman: Secret Origin* creates a narrative in which the two boys know each other and are of similar age, but dynamically different. The narrative depicts Clark as the image of wonder, of someone with a desire to learn, to be a child, and to (with his powers) help others. In contrast, Lex acts with a seriousness that shows no desire to be a child, and he operates in a driven manner that focuses on one thing: getting out of Smallville. Though some may see the notions and ideas expounded by Lex to be perhaps desirable in an adult, there is a feeling of unnaturalness in his behavior for a child, even behavior some might term sociopathic. When informed at the end of issue #2 that his father has died, Lex fakes tears for the authorities, only to laugh with the joy of a perverse freedom that he can now begin achieving his dreams without parental hindrance.

Lex's behavior is positioned to provide the audience with an anti-model, with a clear feeling of repulsion created by his example. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca note in their description of the anti-model, "The repulsion may even be such that it brings about change of a previously adopted attitude for no other reason than it is also the anti-model's attitude" (*The New Rhetoric* 367). Though the audience recognizes Lex Luthor as an anti-model, he does not see himself that way and tries to convince others he is more the model. The idea of "repulsion," occurs for both the audience reading the story and the citizens of Metropolis by the end when they stop showing up to "buy" what he is selling them.

Within this exchange between the model and anti-model, Johns and Frank help establish a serious clash of idealism vs. cynicism within the narrative. More importantly, this exchange also helps establish the trope of the native (authority) vs. the alien (other).

Returning to aforementioned splash page at the beginning of issue #3, in which Superman holds Lois Lane above Metropolis, one can see an illustration of the principles of Greenblatt's self-fashioning at work. Superman's likeness, the drawing of that reaccentuation, serves as the identifying element for the audience. Looking more closely at Lois in this image, a division occurs. More important in this scene of Superman embracing Lois Lane is the expression found upon her face. The expression appears to be filled, in contrast to Superman's calming face, with mixed emotions: anxiety, surprise, astonishment, and even a little fear. Considering that the third governing condition laid out by Greenblatt for self-fashioning notes that it "is achieved in relation to something perceived as alien, strange, or hostile," one must consider that Superman's appearance to Lois represents quite a shock (*Renaissance Self-Fashioning* 9). Superman comes off as definitely alien and strange by the manner of dress (his costume), but also through the display superhuman powers. The same knee-jerk reaction can be construed all the way back in Superman's first appearance in *Action Comics* #1. Here, the cover of the issue provided no context for the perceived damage and chaos Superman inflicted by slamming a car into a boulder. One had to read the issue to uncover the context. For without it, one might easily misperceive Superman as a hostile threat or even a criminal. That same sense of ambiguity and tension emerges here via Lois' response and expression.

Superman's very presence, his appearance and powers combined, constitute a threat to the established authority when he arrives in Metropolis. First, here is a being that is more than human, a threat of power as the fake Kryptonian leader noted in *Superman Birthright*, because "That's how it works" (*Superman Birthright* 252). Fear is an expected

reaction to the unknown, as hinted in Lois Lane's expression. Second, these elements come to life prominently with Johns and Franks' narrative as a kind of immigrant vs. native story in scaled-down version. Without losing any of the potency found in *Superman Birthright* and its conception of an "alien" invasion, *Superman: Secret Origin* rather redirects this conflict towards a more specific interpersonal conflict of the model and anti-model.

In contrast to Superman, Luthor is not merely the cynical incarnation, but in many ways the dark and fearful example of that ideal gone wrong. Luthor, throughout the narrative, gives the impression of himself (to the public at least) that he cares, that he is willing and able to use his wealth and intellect to provide "lucky" individuals with better lives. This is a façade. In reality, Luthor often takes these downtrodden individuals who no one cares about, to whom he promises false hope and opportunity, and turns them into guinea pigs for his technological and genetic experiments (*Superman: Secret Origin*). Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca note that when it comes to the model, often "imitation of behavior is not always spontaneous. One person may seek to induce it in another" (*The New Rhetoric* 363). What Luthor does by playing out a kind of perverse *Willie Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* scenario of dangling a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity in front of a cynical society (with him perceived by that society as the model) in fact promotes his own view that individual self-interest, getting ahead, and being "special" over others (those not selected) is what one should aspire to be and act like. Luthor as model within the narrative, while appearing to be philanthropic, in fact seeks to "induce" a social-Darwinist-like ideal in the people of Metropolis. They should look out for themselves,

they should want to fit in, and they should be mistrustful of anyone who is not like them. These are the ideas Luthor promotes in the people of Metropolis to emulate. This is, itself, illustrated earlier in the narrative and mentioned above in Clark Kent's first encounter with the elderly woman upon arriving in the city.

The crystallization of the model (Superman) and anti-model (Luthor) for the audience in *Superman: Secret Origin* already exists. An internal form of self-fashioning occurs when Superman, in his first appearance (specifically drawn out), challenges the authority in order to win a place in society for himself. He, in fact, operates to remove the old values and perceptions in order to generate a new version of authority to take the place of the old one embraced and promoted by Luthor. Greenblatt, again notes, "When one authority or alien is destroyed, another takes its place" (9). In the case of *Superman: Secret Origin*, it is Luthor's position as the authority that collapses. Throughout the narrative, he has worn the persona of the champion while never truly deviating from his self-interest driven and narcissism.

Luthor's reversal and change in position with Superman is not one that occurs without conflict. The struggle of the alien to become the authority is not a path that is made easy for Superman by Johns and Frank, nor should it be. Superman's struggle is not unlike an expanded and applicable variation on the struggles faced by any immigrant in a new country. However, Superman is an immigrant. During the high points of the conflict between Superman and Luthor, greater elements of authority, such as the military, enter into alliance against Superman because he is perceived as an alien threat with superpowers outside the authority's control.

Superman is ultimately able to, via his willingness to maintain his values and their place as correct and the better option, withstand both Luthor's attempts to publically "smear" him and government attempts to take him out as an alien threat. This stalwart ability of Superman demonstrates what Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca note as a caution: "A model must keep careful watch on his behavior, for the least deviation will be the justification for a thousand other deviations" (*The New Rhetoric* 365). Superman is able to maintain his behavior in a consistent manner by standing fast to his principles. From this achievement, rewarded in the end, his prestige is enhanced so "that [the] people [of Metropolis become] inspired by his conduct [with] emphasis [and by his] particular characteristic[s and] acts" (365). Superman's consistency is what grants him prestige and the eventual acceptance by the people of Metropolis, unlike Luthor; he believes in the things he says and does. His motives, words, and actions all align in a consistency that others can witness as example. In contrast, Luthor's words and appearances do not align with his motives, and ultimately, his actions. When revealed, Luthor's lack of sincerity causes him to lose *ethos* with his audience, and by loss he loses his ability to manipulate the people of Metropolis as well.

The idea of Superman helping others, part of what Weldon noted as two of the primary elements found in every Superman story (with *Superman Birthright* really emphasizing the "never giving up" element), shines through in Johns and Frank's narrative. Their focus helps show how Superman holds up a way of seeing the world in an optimistic fashion. This is not just seeing the world a new way. Superman seeks to bring this new way to life via action. This "new way" is found throughout the narrative as

Superman, cast as the immigrant outsider, showing a willingness and restraint in his application of force to affect change for the better in Metropolis. This is not a new concept or a new aspect in Superman's narrative. From his showdowns with Lex Luthor to his flying with Lois Lane above the skyline, these images and motifs are all found in Superman's narrative history, from the comic books to the movies and back again. These are essential elements of Superman's essence folded back on the comic book narrative from other mediums throughout all of Superman's existence. What is perhaps the single most striking element that Johns and Frank add to this narrative, one that feels like it could have been pulled from some B-roll scene in *Superman: The Movie*, is the way Superman helps out in with the ordinary things as well as the extraordinary and just how powerful those small actions can be.

Superman: The Movie informs Johns and Frank's *Superman: Secret Origin*, as noted earlier, in how they re-accentuate Donner and Christopher Reeve's Superman. In *Superman: The Movie*, there is a simple but moving scene early in the film. The scene depicts Superman helping a little girl rescue her cat from a tree. The scene is not extraordinary, epic, or even remotely sci-fi in its character. It is simply an act of kindness. However, in this "simple" act, a profound revelation of what Superman ideally stands for–human kindness toward one another–emerges (*Superman: The Movie*). If one is to accept, as an audience, Superman as a model, then one has to accept his action as worth emulating. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca lay out in *The New Rhetoric*, and Perelman clarifies in *The Realm of Rhetoric*, that a model is one whose "action is worth imitating [and that] people imitate only those they admire, who have authority or social prestige

because of their competence, their functions, and their place in society" (*The Realm of Rhetoric* 110). Superman's simple act of kindness toward the young girl, however simple or ordinary, communicates what he wants others to emulate: the demonstration of kindness to one another. This is part of the essence of Superman. Other than saving worlds and defeating evil, Superman has the ability (though one cannot fly or lift cars with one hand) to convey, via his iconic place in American society and display of *arête*, an example anyone and everyone can emulate to some degree.

This same simple act of kindness found in *Superman: The Movie* (that resonates with Superman's essence and stands as a model) finds a parallel in *Superman: Secret Origin*. Immediately following his first major confrontation with Luthor in Metropolis, after defeating the Parasite, Superman returns to the roof of *The Daily Planet* and sits in contemplation. As he does so, his super hearing allows him to take in that many people view him with distrust and think Luthor is right about him. After some time, Superman comes to realize that he is not alone on the roof. Jimmy Olsen, the newspaper's struggling photographer who was one of the few who treated Clark Kent with any respect when he first arrived, is seen standing on the roof looking off the edge. In a strange twist on Morrison and Quitely's scene from *All-Star Superman*, where Superman saves the depressed young girl from jumping to her death (discussed earlier in this chapter), Superman sees Jimmy Olsen and assumes he intends to jump. Superman shouts to him not to jump. This scene is turned sideways from the one in *All-Star Superman* because it is revealed when Superman reaches him that Olsen has no such intention of jumping; in fact, he turns as Superman is approaching and says "Jump? Are you cra—zy," in a

manner dripping with sarcasm that is only cut short when Olsen realizes who is speaking to (*Superman: Secret Origin*).

Superman in *Superman: Secret Origin* is acting to reaccentuate the Superman Richard Donner depicted through Christopher Reeve in *Superman: The Movie*. This is itself a deliberate act. The process of reaccentuation, with its connection to language, according Gary Morson and Caryl Emerson, is as "in the psyche and everywhere else in culture . . . never complete and always requires work" (*Mikhail Bakhtin* 139). This connection of expression, of an intentional expressive act, though never complete, represents a key aspect of Superman. Superman, when created, intentionally (through his creators) drew upon previous oral, linguistic, and visual expressions of excellence, of the hero's nature, in his formation. This formation created continuous and complex forces of interaction that continue perpetually. When discussing Bakhtin's *heteroglossia*, Morson and Emerson point out those heteroglossia languages arise "from a vast array of social and psychological experience. Its' sense of the world has been shaped by the accentuation and reaccentuation of contingent evaluations and perceptions of the world over time . . ." (309). This idea of language proposed by Bakhtin and related by Morson and Emerson in their work also speaks to Superman, or more specifically, the idea of the hero he represents and its evolution. Superman is an output of social (the Great Depression) and psychological (Jerry Siegel's loss of his father) experiences. Superman really is the latest reaccentuation of the world's reliance and desire for heroes "shaped" via the immigrant American experience of the early 20th century.

This reaccentuated Superman serves to express Johns and Frank's desire to further understand of Superman by centripetally reaching back to his central, core elements. One of those core elements is Superman's relationship with his colleagues at *The Daily Planet*, such as Jimmy Olsen. This encounter is the first between Superman and Jimmy Olsen. Olsen confesses that he is afraid of losing his job and is down on himself for not being a better photographer. The whole situation is turned around by Jimmy asking Superman to pose for a photo to help him out. In an empathetic but reversed way, as Superman remembers his parents, the Kents, wishing him luck, he realizes how lucky he is (*Superman: Secret Origin*). By helping out Jimmy, he is paying forward that love and kindness he experienced in his upbringing and passing some of it on to Jimmy in turn. As Clark Kent, he is not too much unlike Jimmy Olsen, but as Superman, he provides a role model not only for one person, but an entire city and even the human race. Superman fulfills a function of the model by conveying behavior he wants to see in others, to share with them and help them see the world as he does. In *All-Star Superman*, Morrison and Quitely have Luthor actually physically experience that perception when he injects himself with a formula of Superman's powers (*All-Star Superman*, *Vol. 2* 110). In *Superman: Secret Origin*, this same sharing of an idealistic world view develops more slowly within the narrative through Superman's actions and conviction to stick to the values and beliefs he has and the way he sees the world.

While he is posing for this photo, Jimmy looks and tells Superman "There's something missing. Maybe, uh, could you put your hands on your hips?" to which Superman replies "What?" with a slight bit of good-humored confusion. Jimmy insists,

and Superman does it for him (*Superman: Secret Origin*). Anyone with even the smallest knowledge of what Superman is about or anyone who has seen an iconic image of him knows what has just transpired. Jimmy Olsen has gotten Superman to make one of his most iconic poses, the image of him standing as if he is striding the world with his hands placed on his hips in posture that displays both power and confidence. It is not only a confidence for Superman. He really does not need it, but rather it is a sense of confidence and security for others who see it. It is a projection of that confidence and sense of self-worth that Superman wants to show the world exists within them as well. Unlike Luthor, this is not power to be hoarded or controlled; this is self-worth, self-esteem, and confidence in oneself that anyone can have and feel about himself or herself.

The entire narrative of *Superman: Secret Origin*, in addition to re-accentuating the Donner vision and Christopher Reeves' embodiment of Superman and exploring self-fashioning conceptions of the struggle of authority and alien (an immigrant story) within the model/anti-model relationship, offers up the essence of Superman after decades of existence. The message, though evolved, remains true to the core ideas of Siegel and Shuster, and of every Superman story: to always help others and never give up (Weldon 3). At the close of *Superman: Secret Origin*, Superman's efforts to establish change and alter the atmosphere of Metropolis succeed. Luthor's false hope finds no more takers, no more people cramming at the gates to his Metropolis office dying for his favor. Even more profound, and adding symmetry to narrative of issue 3 of the series, is a revisiting of Clark Kent's arrival scene in Metropolis. As seen previously, he had bumped into an elderly woman while staring up at the skyline with idealistic and quasi-naïve awe at a

strange new world, and her reaction was cynical, rude, and abrasive. The closing scene witnesses another newcomer to Metropolis imitating what Clark Kent had done earlier. Again, he bumps into who appears to be the exact same elderly woman. However, instead of overreacting as she did before, as the young man apologizes, she finishes his sentence, saying "You weren't watching where you were going . . . Don't you worry yourself, young man. You'll fit right in here" with a smile on her face (*Superman: Secret Origin*). This bit of symmetry suggests the fact that Superman's presence and values have taken root in Metropolis.

Conclusion: Reaccentuation and *Arête*

Beyond the application of reaccentuation and the model and anti-model relationship as informed by self-fashioning, *Superman: Secret Origin* (like *All-Star Superman* and *Superman Birthright)* demonstrates and visually reinforces the qualities of Superman that make him so appealing today. For *Superman: Secret Origin*, Johns and Frank center a great deal of their entire narrative around doing what all the works noted in this chapter do: re-accentuate and revisit the essence of Superman as a model. *All-Star Superman* attempts to do this on the level of mythic narrative, while *Superman Birthright* approaches it within a science-fiction motif that contains demonstrations of Aristotle's virtues of nobility, and finally, *Superman: Secret Origin* attempts to simply capture the story of an idealist immigrant looking for acceptance by wanting to help others and doing what is right. Each of these Superman narratives present not only reaccentuation of Superman as model but also the potential and impact that the character has had on the real world. Superman may be a fictional character, but the ideas and values he has come

to embody and project reach far beyond the pulp paper and storyboard pages on which he was created. Each of the creators–Grant Morrison, Frank Quitely, Mark Waid, Leinil Francis You, Geoff Johns, and Gary Frank–has had their life shaped by Superman. These stories are their homages, their own return to what it was about Superman that inspired them that they share in turn with a new audience.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

"Comprehension of an image requires a commonality of experience" – Will Eisner[71]

So, what is the point of trying to understand Superman as a model of American *arête*? Comic books are just kid's stories, right? Yes, they are, but that is not all they are. They can represent something much more. The assumption that comic books are children's stories overlooks the real power of both superheroes and the comic book medium. The power of comic books is wrapped up in the way it directs a reader in complex forms of interpretation. Will Eisner writes that "The format of comics presents a montage of both word and image, and the reader is thus required to exercise both visual and verbal interpretive skill [combining] The regiments of art . . . the regiments of literature" (*Comics and Sequential Art* 2). Eisner, a legend in the comic book and illustration community, asserts that one of the most often overlooked requirements placed upon comic book readers: the ability to interpret complex material. This power of interpretation relies heavily on the "regiments" required by both those who interpret art and those who interpret literature. Douglas Wolk states that comic book superheroes are "the closest thing that exists right now to the 'novel of ideas'" and creators of comic books "present narratives whose images and incidents are unlike our own sensory experience of the world . . . but can still be understood as a metaphorical representation

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[71] Eisner, Will. *Comics and Sequential Art: Principles and Practices from the Legendary Cartoonist*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2008. Print.

of our world” (92). Essentially, as I hope one will see in Superman here, there is a power of communication in comic books that lends itself to the imagination, to dreaming of what is possible. Here are ideas that children recognize and appreciate that most adults often cynically forget or dismiss.

Superman, as a child of the comic books, is the first and ultimate exemplar of that imagination. He has the positioning and ability to mirror the very best aspects of America and humanity. Superman, accepted by those most open to optimism (children), is perfectly aligned and positioned to instruct by example. Part of this power comes from his archetypal nature, as well as from within the comic book medium. Scott McCloud argues that through the process of “amplification through simplification” and renders it in abstract, by “stripping down an image to its essential meaning, an artist can amplify that ‘meaning’ a way that realistic art can’t” (*Understanding Comics* 30). Both literature and artwork provide a means for “stripping down” reality in an attempt to understand something about that reality. Superman being the combination of, in the comic books, a work of art and literature, straddles aspects of both the mediums representation of reality.

As we have seen, Superman has had many “creators. The alterations made by editors (Mort Weisinger and Julie Schwartz) and creators (Jerry Siegel, Joe Shuster, John Byrne, Denny O’Neil, Curt Swan, Alan Moore, Grant Morrison, Frank Quitely, Mark Waid, Alex Ross, Mark Millar, Leinil Francis Yu) continually help refresh the Superman narrative, keeping it in its epideictic, present tense for the audience, and dealing with variations and changes in values. Along the way the core elements of what define Superman, his essence, remains intact. This maintaining of his essence while allowing for

its adaptability is what helps make Superman rhetorical. Like any great form of epideictic rhetoric, Superman celebrates and promotes values, in this case American ones, emulating for his audience by his actions and deeds the *arête* of American culture. More importantly than anything, it is Superman's deeds and actions that define him. In this way, Superman is very much a mirror to the past casting its reflection on the present. He is the classical hero, the archetype of what humanity has often culturally longed to emulate or admire given new form in an American icon. In many ways, Superman is an extension of classical ideals of heroic poetry. As noted by C M Bowra, heroic poetry

> is inspired by the belief that the honour which men pay to some of their fellows is owed to a real superiority in natural endowments [that] he must realise . . . in action. In the ordeals of the heroic life his full worth is tested and revealed [an] honoured because he has made a final effort in courage and endurance, and no more can be asked of him. He gives dignity to the human race by showing of what feats it is capable; he extends the bounds of experience for others and enhances their appreciation of life by the example of his abundant vitality. However much ordinary men feel themselves to fall short of such an ideal, they none the less respect it because it opens up possibilities of adventure and excitement and glory which appeal even to the most modest and most humble. . . Heroes are the champions of man's ambition to pass beyond the oppressive limits of human frailty to a fuller and more vivid life, to win as far as possible a self-sufficient manhood, which refuses to admit that anything is too difficult for it, and is content even in failure, provided that it has made every effort of which it is capable. (4)

In reading this passage, discussing the ideas and merits often found in classical heroes of epic poetry, all I could think to myself was: "This is Superman." Part of the assertion made in this dissertation is that Superman acts a model of something, something unique. That unique "something" for this argument has been the idea of American *arête*.

This dissertation has sought to provide a beginning for attempts to critically understand the ways that Superman reflects and models a particular form of excellence that derives from classical ideals shaped in an American fashion. The aim has been to open the door for closer examinations of Superman and other superheroes as potential models of American values. As well, the hope has been that a greater realization of the rhetorical potential and implications of Superman might develop. To do this, this dissertation has analyzed those elements and ideas that helped fashion Superman as an American icon, to recognize what makes Superman as identifiable a character that he is, and to understand how such a character continues to function and draw upon his own narrative as a means to refresh and re-accentuate his essence and purpose for new audiences.

In particular, it is worth noting from Analysis Part B, that the sometimes ridiculed idea of Clark Kent in the Superman/Clark Kent duality (or as Graydon and Brownie point out that they are both constructed identities). In rhetorical terms, Clark Kent is the *communes loci*, the common ground that connects Superman to humanity and provides humanity a doorway to Superman. Is it any wonder that John Byrnes' chose to re-invert the identity by making Clark Kent the primary personality? That move readily made Superman more identifiable by highlighting him as an American citizen, just like those in

his audience. Superman's values, his belief in how he conducts himself as a model, comes in large part from his middle-America upbringing and values. Therefore, Clark Kent is that part of Superman connects him not only to American ideals of *arête*, but to humanity itself[72]. The secret identity as part of the superhero narrative can be seen as a means of protecting those who a hero loves and holds dear within the narrative. As a rhetorical means with his audience it acts as a doorway to the superheroes' world. Whether it be a child seeking an escape the toils of his everyday world to the teenager looking for an outlet to his frustration to an adult who appreciates the richness and depth of the stories, the fiction superhero comic books have much to offer the real world just like any other form of literature.

[72] Reflecting back on Analysis Part B and the examination of what happens when the Clark Kent alter-ego is ditched in *Kingdom Come* and *Superman: Red Son* provide examples for how important Kent is to Superman and how intricately that duality plays in keeping Superman from turning into a power control tyrant.

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