UP IN THE SKY: LITERARY TYPOLOGY AND *ALL-STAR SUPERMAN*

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Using the discussion of Biblical typology from Northrop Frye's *The Great Code* as a starting point, this paper proposes a typological lineage of fiction growing from the foundational *kerygmatic* stories of Western culture. After briefly proposing canonical texts that would fit into this lineage, there is an analysis of the graphic novel *All-Star Superman* which demonstrates this contemporary text's place in the typological line and its status as a prime example of the sorts of texts that would fit this lineage. Specific characteristics of the graphic novel and of superhero fiction are discussed that demonstrate *All-Star Superman*'s place in the typological line, and this placement also argues for the consideration of superhero narratives as worthy parts of the American literary canon. The final chapter discusses some of the ramifications arising from the analysis of both the form and the text, pointing to ways in which critical frameworks for both the typological lineage and the critical elucidation of the graphic novel format can move forward.

With thanks to my supervisor, Dr. Jeffery Donaldson, my readers Dr. Anne Savage and Dr. Joseph Adamson, and, as ever, to Tara and Sage.

Table of Contents

List of Illustrations

It's not about making sense. It's about believing in something

and letting that belief be real enough to change your life."

- Shepherd Book, from *Firefly*

Chapter 1: Theory

Partway through *Final Crisis*, a tale of dark gods falling to Earth and inhabiting human beings, a tale of the end of the world, Superman is pulled from his dying wife's bedside on an urgent mission to save all of reality. He inhabits an archetypal machine of heroism, one fashioned in his own image, by an immense, conscious void that is infected with narrative by its contact with worlds of time and space. As he battles the ultimate evil, a force that is the template for all the evils besetting myriad universes, a person, a splinter of the immense consciousness, screams at this archetypal villain "[Y]ou're using us to believe you into existence! But deep within the germ-worlds I found a better story; one created to be unstoppable, indestructible! The story of a child rocketed to Earth from a doomed planet…" (Morrison, *Final* n.p.). For over two decades, Grant Morrison has been investigating in his graphic fictions the idea that a story can be something more than just an entertainment. While it may seem somewhat flippant to begin a scholarly paper with the drama and bluster of this scene from *Final Crisis*, it is vital, right from the start, that we recognize the way in which the superhero story, and specifically the elevated sort of superhero story we will consider, is represented. *Final Crisis: Superman Beyond* is a series within a series, one that turns tale into metatext, or tries to explain through meta-narrative what the ramifications are of creating sacred stories from our fictions. The immense consciousness that is infected by narrative is, in truth, ourselves, and the crisis taking place within it the effect that stories and myth have not only upon the individual, but on the species as a whole. Zillo Valla, the splinter-person of the void, is our voice in the narrative, our acknowledgment that it is we who give stories their power. In the

graphic novel, during her aforementioned exclamation, we are looking over her shoulder, sharing the physical and philosophical space of her two-dimensional depiction. If this is the case, what then do we make of the "germ-worlds," which within the narrative are the source of the inspirational story of the dying planet, and which are also the universes that are at stake? They are, evidently, our fictions, germs that get inside us and multiply, for where else could one find the tale of the child rocketed to Earth but in our stories?

The tagline for the *Final Crisis* series, prior to its release, was "The Day Evil Won," and the story truly is that: dark gods conquer the Earth and almost sink reality into non-existence. But if *Final Crisis* is the day evil wins, then its counterpart, *All-Star Superman*, is something quite different. The two were published, and potentially composed, by Grant Morrison during the same period, but *All-Star Superman* stands alone from the fictional universe within which *Final Crisis* takes place. It is called a "non-continuity" story, in that it shares history but not coexistence with the greater DC comics universe. Such tales are common enough, generally executed when a creator has an idea that editorially does not fit with the shared narrative universe within which the character normally exists. This separation from the shared narrative is an important factor in our consideration of *All-Star Superman*, and one that we will return to as we investigate the qualities that make this work stand apart from the thousands of other superhero tales that have been written and published, and enjoyed, for the last seven or so decades. It is merely one of the factors that separates this work from others of the

superhero genre[1], even, like *Final Crisis*, other works composed by Morrison. So much of our civilization, our laws and literatures, is organized around principles found in ancient fantastic tales, yet we ignore the ones that surround us now, and treat them as nothing more than entertainment.

As noted, Grant Morrison has spent the better part of his career in comic books investigating the ramifications of the human propensity to create mythologies. From his early days in *Animal Man*, in which the superhero meets Morrison within the fictional world and has his identity as a comic book character revealed to him, to his *magnum opus The Invisibles*, a text specifically engineered to change the perceptions of the reader, Morrison looks to the place where stories cease to merely entertain and begin to effect real change in the reader. He is not, of course, the first to attempt such an investigation, nor is it likely he will be the last, but his fictional investigations mesh well with scholarly work in the same area.

In the twentieth century, few scholars had more impact on the investigation of literature and myth than Northrop Frye. His treatment of the Bible in *The Great Code* and *Words With Power* is one explicitly of literary, rather than religious, interest. Though an ordained minister Frye, in these works, is more concerned with the way the Bible reflects our literary heritage than our moral or ethical one, or rather, how a literary text can convey such powerful concepts. In the introduction to *Words With Power*, he notes some of the negative reactions to *The Great Code*, scholars of religion decrying the

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[1] "Superhero genre" is the accepted term, but a misnomer in my opinion. Superhero narratives veer into the romance, the satire, and numerous other traditional genres. It is bizarre that in this particular case we say that a particular kind of character defines the genre that that character inhabits.

literary bent, and scholars of literature the religious (*Words* 6 – 7). Frye, wisely, ignores

all of this, and gets on with a presentation of why the Bible is literature, why it is a source

of literature, and why that is a good thing. It seems to me, however, that the anxiety over

his arguments needs a brief consideration. From the viewpoint of the theologians, the

conflation of holy book with literature detracts from the authority of such a work. If we

can ascribe to such moral works the term "literary," how far off can the term "fictional"

be? I, myself, do not hold this viewpoint, nor do I think that the term fictional is

necessarily derogatory. There are thousands, if not millions, of examples of literary

works that are not fictional (the letters of Henry VIII, or Pepys's diary, for example), and

the appellation of literary has not harmed their credibility. But, if we are using terms

such as "myth"[2] and "narrative" in regard to holy books, especially the intentionality of

these ideas in such books, then the relationships those words have with fiction must be

acknowledged, even if they are not taken as applying to holy works. On the other hand,

the literary scholar, or at least contemporary literary scholarship, comes from an

ostensibly humanist background. To apply too much of the theological to the literary, to

ascribe to literature a status approaching holiness, echoing the *kerygmatic*, makes it into

something greater than ourselves. I can imagine this to be a problem for some literary

critics. Frye coins the axiom "Criticism can and should make sense of literature" (*Words*

14)[3], but such an axiom runs the risk of placing the critic above the critiqued. If we make

that which we critique greater than ourselves, by ascribing to it a sacredness, then how far

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[2] We will use the term "myth" in the same way Frye defines it "to anchor the word in its literary
context…in general [as] the sequential ordering of words" (*Great Code* 52).
[3] Frye notes that this is a goal, and perhaps an unachievable one, rather than a reachable finish line.

can our understanding truly reach? The thing we study will always be bigger than we are. Perhaps I am making too much of an assumption here, but it is my feeling that in many cases, once one claims an understanding of something, one sees oneself as greater than it, as having conquered it. And as such, to make the literary holy places it forever outside of the grasp of the conqueror.

I wish to propose that there is a middle ground, that we can have agreement between the literary and the theological without detriment to either. This can be achieved through what I would like to term "literary typology." Much of Frye's Biblical criticism revolves around ideas of typology, a way of reading that recognizes the revelations in later parts of the book of the prophecies in the earlier parts. As an illustration, he offers the following conundrum:

> How do we know that the Gospel story is true? Because it confirms the prophecies of the Old Testament. But how do we know that the Old Testament prophecies are true? Because they are confirmed by the Gospel story. Evidence…is bounced back and forth…like a tennis ball. (105)

He concludes that

> [t]his typological way of reading the Bible is indicated too often and explicitly in the New Testament itself for us to be in any doubt that this is the "right" way of reading it…as the way that conforms to the intentionality of the book itself…" (*Code* 106)

In *The Great Code* Frye states that "[f]or Judaism [one of] the chief antitypes of Old Testament prophecy [is], as in Christianity, the coming of the Messiah" (83). For Judaism the first coming is still being awaited, while the Christians await the second coming. From outside of these two viewpoints, one might be inclined to pose the question of how long these two faiths will wait for a saviour, though I propose to ask the more interesting question of whether or not a saviour has already come? Typological thinking and analysis propose that a "type" prophesies and an "antitype" fulfills. Biblically, the best example is that of Moses and Christ. Where Moses is a saviour figure for Israel, Christ, in Christian thought, is a saviour figure for all of humanity. The promise of Moses is borne out by the actions of Christ. The awaiting of the second coming by Christians is a further example, one that supposes that Christ is the type, and that the coming saviour will be the antitype. What one must bear in mind, however, is that these types and antitypes are illustrated through stories.

While there are those who take the Bible as literal truth, there are also many who take it as metaphor, as teachings and morals written as fiction, myths that concentrate "on the primary concerns that human beings share" (*Words* 136). If this is the case, does the next Messiah (or the first one, depending on your faith) necessarily have to be real, or can he or she be fictional? Further, are the distinctions between a fictional and a real Messiah necessarily mutually exclusive? As a test case, we will consider the graphic novel *All-Star Superman*. In *The Great Code*, Frye focuses upon the resonances within the books of the Bible that point to the way in which it was constructed, a predication upon a series of "if this..then this" arguments or prophecies. If Moses led the nation of Israel out of

enslavement, then Christ led humanity out of enslavement, and the fact of one demonstrates the veracity and importance of the other. For my purposes, it is the way that this demonstrates a "right way" of reading that is important. We can apply typological theory not only outside of the bounds of the Bible, where it has its genesis, but also outside of religious works in general. What if we were to apply it to literature, to the body of literature that survives and is extant? Is there something of a lineage that can be traced, something that indicates a "right way" of reading particular literary works? I am not interested in demonstrating Superman as an antitype of Jesus, not solely, at least. I am interested in demonstrating Superman and his narrative body as antitypes of the stories of the Bible, which are themselves antitypes of earlier stories, the lineage a literary typology of ethical or moral works. There are certainly resonances with the Biblical figures, ones that we will consider shortly, in which the intersection of archetype, type, and antitype will be more fully expressed. A comparison of Superman to both Moses and Christ, and a consideration of his qualities as fictional character teaching primary concerns, will show how he is both an archetypal descendant and an antitype of the Biblical saviour, perhaps only one of many. What I am most interested in is how the actual texts, and a selection of those that come between them, demonstrate this literary typology. Is there a promise in the earlier *kerygmatic* work of the later works that will follow it? Or rather, is it inevitable that there will be an antitype of the earlier *kerygmatic* work? And, most importantly, what is the ramification of such antitypes being unabashedly fictional? By applying to *All-Star Superman* an analysis similar to the one Frye applies to the Bible, I will demonstrate that there is a "right way" of reading certain fictions, and that the

typological facets and underlying *kerygmatic* echoes move the work out of the solely entertaining and into a more instructional and proclamatory space.

In order that we might discuss the works in consideration, we must understand what it is about them that makes them special. Frye uses the word *kerygma*, a proclamation of primary concern, to differentiate a particular kind of literature. Early in *The Great Code*, he says

> [i]n general usage this term is largely restricted to the Gospels, but there is not enough difference between the Gospels and the rest of the Bible in the use of language to avoid extending it to the entire book. (50 – 51)

To make this claim in a book that is an exercise in demonstrating the literary qualities of the Bible opens up an interesting potential for literature. If the book that is the font of all Western literature is itself both literary and *kerygmatic*, then what of the literature that the Bible has inspired? Can it, too, not have something of the *kerygmatic?* The answer, of course, is yes, that some, if not potentially all, Western literature that follows the Bible echoes the *kerygma* of this founding text. .

As to what the term actually means, we can turn once again to Frye, who says of it that it is a "mode of [rhetorical] language that takes account of the mythical and literary qualities which cannot be separated from the Biblical texture…a mode of language on the *other side* of the poetic" (*Code* 102, emphasis in original). But what is *kerygma*? The OED tells us that it is "[p]reaching; proclamation of religious truth," but this seems wholly inadequate considering Frye's description above. There must be something to the

literary that is also *kerygmatic*, and the ascription of the literary to a religious work is fraught with problems, at least to those to whom the religious work is a holy work. But Frye places the *kerygmatic* on the other side of the poetic. His ordering of linguistic modes, then, is descriptive, dialectic, rhetorical, imaginative (or poetic), and *kerygmatic* (*Words* 17-39, 102). If, as we see above, both the rhetorical and poetic modes are elements of the *kerygmatic*, we can also fold the descriptive and the dialectic in, so that *kerygma* seems to be a form of speech and writing through which all the other modes are focussed.

No work of fiction can get away from some small proclamation of morality or ethics, even if it is just one sentence. And such a proclamation will stand out both for its content and for the style of language it uses. There will be a folding in of the rhetorical, the imaginative, the dialectic and the descriptive. Chances are, due to the work that surrounds it, the sentence will simply seem to have a resonance that the rest of the work does not[4]. This is a resonance of the *kerygmatic* mode, the style and substance within a literary work that speaks to a level that is deeper than the solely entertaining. We will leave *kerygma* and its definition here, as a foundation in the past and an echo in the present that makes particular pieces of literature stand apart from the rest.

I have, over the course of preparing this paper, been called upon to defend my use of Frye's work as a primary theoretical underpinning, both due to its age and to some undefined anxiety that seems to exist around Frye. As to the former problem, considering

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[4] Something like Yoda's "Do or do not, there is no try" (thanks to Glenn Gill for pointing this out), a phrase that stands apart from the fiction it is within.

the subject matter of both *The Great Code* and *Words With Power*, I find the age of the

work to be a non-issue. Frye's two books deal with a piece of writing that has been in

existence for thousands of years, yet it still carries an inordinate amount of weight in

Western culture. As academics, we are advised not quite to disregard, but to look with

jaded eyes upon, criticism that is more than one or two decades old. Sidney's *The*

Defence of Poesy, or Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry*, maintain their critical weight, despite

the temporal distance between them and our contemporary moment, and also despite their

current status as pieces of literature (as opposed to pieces of criticism). Such

foundational texts as Plato's *Republic*, a piece of writing of similar age to the Bible, or

Nietszche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, while also considered as historico-literary works,

are still regarded as sound theoretical works as well. Part of my concern in this paper is

that we do not apply such strictures to the works that continue to be a source of guidance,

or at least a foundation of morality, for so many the world over. In my own work, then,

as it will deal in part with the Bible and works of its ilk, Frye's treatments of the Bible are

sound pieces of theory, and can easily be adapted to consider a contemporary

philosophical fiction. In fact, if, as I have suggested, the majority of our fictions echo the

kerygmatic myths, then we should be revisiting Frye's analysis of the Bible as a

framework with which to examine such stories. Critical theory is rife with outside

frameworks through which we are invited to analyse literary works. Frye's perspective,

and my own, is that literature, while it can be critiqued from outside perspectives, must

also be considered solely from the literal[5] (i.e., literary-based) point of view. If we are

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[5] In *The Great Code*, Frye states that "[i]t is only when we are reading as we do when we read poetry that

considering certain pieces of literature not only as imaginative works, but also as ones echoing *kerygma*, it is vital that we dissociate those works from any outside critical apparatus that might carry with it a moral or ethical influence. The removal of these critical apparati inevitably leads to primary concerns, more of which later. This removal also calls two positions into question: the first, if literature is not a place of support for said outside frameworks, then what is it for? The second is, again, if literature is removed as a support, what can we, as literary critics, use to support these external critical apparati? I can imagine that these questions, stemming as they do from some of Frye's best-known writings, as a source of the aforementioned anxiety. My feeling is that this anxiety is completely unfounded. To address the latter question, if beauty is in the eye of the beholder, then so too criticism is in the eye of the critic. We, as readers, overlay our own interpretations and associations on everything we read. If I read a book from a literalist (again, literary-based) point of view, there is no reason that the same book cannot be read from a feminist, or a post-structuralist, point of view. As to the former question, it is here that we need to revisit Frye's question from the beginning of *Anatomy of Criticism*: "What follows from the fact that [the study of literature] is possible" (10)?

It seems to me that from this question, Frye is opening up consideration of the thing that is literature, the body of work and the conceptual space that it creates. What we must also bear in mind is that "literature" is a constructed denotation. If it weren't for

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we can take the word 'literal' seriously" (86). Rather than assuming the word connotes a connection to "real" things, Frye uses it to draw attention to the truth of a structure of words, without trying to form explicit connection to the world outside of the literary work.

critics, and the universities that create them, we would have no literature; we would

simply have the stories of our culture(s). We study history because it is a thing that has

happened, and continues to happen. We have various proofs of it. We study science

because it, too, is a thing that has happened, and is happening. The facts of history or

science are conveyed to us by experts in those fields, much as the facts of literature are

conveyed to us by literary scholars. The divide that is drawn between disciplines like

history or science, and literature, is that the former are fact, and the latter is fiction. But

fiction is fact. It is a factual representation of a fictional truth. It has existence just as

much as a mathematical theorem. What is possible from the study of literature is the

eventual realization that it is not a series of fictions that one is studying, but a series of

imaginary truths. Here we can return to literary typological theory. What if we were to

rephrase the question, accepting for the moment that the fictions we study are another

form of truth, and that the body of truth that is literature is just as valid a body of truth as

that of history or science? Instead of "What follows from the fact that [the study of

literature] is possible?" we can ask "What follows from the recognition that the truth of

fictionality is possible?" Or is this the answer to Frye's question? If we study literature

long enough, and hard enough, can we find fundamental truths in something that is,

outwardly at least, false?

      The middle ground I have meandered towards, then, between the theological and

the literary, is an understanding of literature, or specific types of literature, to have the

echo of *kerygmatic* myth, of "being charged with a special seriousness and importance"

(*Words* 54). This is not to denigrate any of the currently accepted moral myths that

influence much of the world, nor is it to elevate literature to a level at which the critic cannot interact with it for fear of heresy. It is a conceptualization of literature as having philosophical elements that encourage a reader's emulation. And not just having the elements, but actively professing them. This particular argument, or hypothesis, will lead us, amongst other things, into considerations of the fictional versus the factual, and of the proliferation of moral works and how we can choose amongst the many we are offered. Most fundamentally, however, it will lead us to consider the story, the power of the story, and the inevitable inconsequentiality of whether something did or did not happen.

I have twice mentioned the idea of primary concerns, so it is appropriate to briefly describe what is meant by this term. As with so many things, Frye says this best:

> The axioms of primary concern are the simplest and baldest platitudes it is possible to formulate: that life is better than death, happiness better than misery, health better than sickness, freedom better than bondage, for all people without significant exception. (51)

For Frye, the primary concerns are communicated through *kerygmatic* stories, and they resonate through most, if not all, literature. These stories are not trying to elucidate

> any type of obscured history or veiled ideology, but rather the universal experience of having had these four essential physical needs satisfied, and the anxiety of not having them satisfied. (Gill 126)

As we proceed into the analysis of the text of *All-Star Superman*, I will point to some specific places where the work is addressing primary concerns, but these are only a few examples. As with major *kerygmatic* works of the past, the whole of Superman's mythology, and its essentialised form in *All-Star*, address these concerns throughout.

Though not a major concern in this paper, the notion of translation needs minor address. We will be considering fictions, and a translation, from a particular point of view, is an accepted fiction. No translation will ever be perfect, given the fundamental differences between semiotic systems of different languages. As such, a repeatedly translated work, like the Bible or the Odyssey, is, due to semiotic difference, at least a partial fiction. *All-Star Superman*, on the other hand, is presented in its original languages (English and pictorial), and though differing artistic styles are also a variation of translation, the semiotic systems within which the work exists are undiluted. We are given a far closer view of the intended meaning of the text than we might receive from older works. The problem of translation will enter our reading of *All-Star Superman*, and bring up considerations of whether archaic texts can actually speak to contemporary audiences.

A further consideration, before moving on is of the difference between antitype and archetype. At this point I hope it will be plain that I am not arguing the archetypal nature of Superman. To me, this seems plainly obvious. If from nothing else but his origin (the fictional one, at least, which we shall deal with in detail later), Superman fulfils the role of archetype. In the words of Carl Jung, the archetype "is a tendency to

form…representations of" "mythological images or motifs" "- representations that can vary a great deal in detail without losing their basic patterns" (67). These basic patterns include such concepts as "birth, rebirth, death, [and] power," and figures like "the hero, the child, the trickster, God, [and] the demon" (Hall 41), to name but a few. Of these, Jung says there are "many representations of the motif…but the motif itself stays the same" (67). It is beyond doubt that Superman embodies "the hero" archetype, and a mythic one at that. "If superior in *kind* both to other men and to the environment of other men, the hero is a divine being, and the story about him will be a *myth*" (Frye, *Anatomy* 33, emphasis in original), though Superman complicates this with his aspirations to de-mythologizing himself, the result of which is his identity as Clark Kent. Though definitely (or definitively) the mythic hero, and emblematic of the hero archetype, Superman takes great pains to be "one of us." Later, as we delve into the particulars of his myth, perhaps we can consider Superman as a kind of re-imagining of Frye's mythic level, a story where the hero seems to strive for the "*low mimetic* mode" and where we "respond to a sense of his common humanity" (34, emphasis in original), regardless of the hero's mythic status. It is a part of not only the reconsideration of the divine that is occurring in Superman's myth, but also of the lessons that his myth imparts. For now, though, let us acknowledge and set aside the fact of Superman's archetypal nature. There is still a troubling relationship between the archetype and the antitype. It seems that an antitype, Christ, for instance, as antitype of Moses, is an archetype, embodying whatever characteristics we may ascribe to the hero or the saviour that swirls about in the collective unconscious. But an archetype, when we recognize it in a fiction, does not always

represent a fulfillment of something earlier, and so is not always an antitype. Unless we consider that the incarnation of any archetype is fulfilling the promise, or prophecy, of what that archetype originally meant. Thus, as example of the hero archetype, Superman is the antitype of which the original archetype is the type. And the reasoning becomes more complex as we consider texts, rather than characters, as antitypes. It seems, from the above, that the recognition of archetypal features in a character or story demonstrates said character or story as an antitype. But in my proposed literary typology, can we say that there is an archetype of the major *kerygmatic* work of which the particular kind of texts with which I am concerned are antitypes? What are the attributes that we would ascribe to the type of such a work, the archetypal *kerygmatic* book (the Bible, by Frye's reckoning)? The primary concerns are a good place to start, as far as both content and mode, but how would those things be presented in this archetypal work? It could be sets of laws and prescriptions (or proscriptions) for living, or, knowing human beings, it is more likely that such a work would be a collection of stories.

What this brief consideration of Frye's analysis of the Bible allows is for us to apply his theory to purely fictional works. As noted above, Frye approaches the Bible as a piece of literature, albeit a piece of literature with many unique qualities. However, if we can apply literary theory inflected with theological theory to the Bible, why not to a work that is unabashedly fictional? As such, we come to the crux of the *All-Star Superman* question: the Bible, both Hebrew and Christian Testaments, along with the mythic epics and stories that came before and after, teach moral lessons, lessons of the primary human concerns, through stories of individuals with remarkable powers.

Gilgamesh "destroyed Humbaba…slew lions in the mountain passes…[and] grappled

with the Bull that came down from heaven" ("Tablet X" 84). Moses wields a rod that,

when dipped into the waters of the Nile, turns the river to blood (Exodus 7:20). Christ

demonstrates his unearthly power by reviving the four-days dead Lazarus (John 12:43-

44) in front of a crowd of people. None of these ancient heroes is shy of using his gifts in

public and in service of the greater good. For Moses, the greater good is primarily the

welfare of the nation of Israel; for Christ, it is the welfare of humankind's immortal souls.

How, then, is the case of Superman any different from these stories? He demonstrates

remarkable powers of flight and strength, but also of wisdom and compassion. Where an

everyday person might turn from suffering, Superman uses all the gifts at his disposal for

its alleviation. The question then becomes, does it matter that Superman and his mythos

is fictional? For all intents and purposes, the Bible is a fictional work. Regardless of

whether or not the events within the Bible actually happened, they are so far removed

from us temporally for them to be nothing more than stories to contemporary audiences.

This is not to say that they are not important, even necessary, stories, but they are stories

nonetheless. So is it reasonable to say that, seventy years ago, when Jerry Siegel and Joe

Shuster created the "Man of Steel", they created a saviour, a fulfillment of the promises

that earlier works had made? As we will see, at least one of their more literary

contemporaries had similar ideas. Superman is a mythic figure whose deeds and words

can be read as proclamations on the proper behaviour of a human society. He is the

fulfillment of the Christian metaphor, the individual who enriches and teaches the

community, who embodies the primary concerns that join all humans. As Morrison says,

"We're running out of visions of the future except dystopias…The superhero is Western culture's last-gasp attempt to say there's a future for us" (Morrison, qtd. in Edwards "The Super-Psyche" 78). If this is the case, does it even matter that Superman is "just a story"?

Chapter 2: History

Any attempt to trace a lineage of moral texts from Biblical, or pre-Biblical, times to our own would take up more space than this paper is afforded. I have selected only a few "literary" examples of moral works, ones that have direct bearing on the argument at hand, and we will then move on to contemporary graphic novels that participate in this lineage. It is impossible for me to be comprehensive here, but I hope that the brief selections I do make will demonstrate the existence of this typological lineage of fictional sacred texts of which *All-Star Superman* is a superlative example.

In a lecture[6] early in my undergraduate career, Dr. Anne Savage described to our class the virgin martyr texts as the "Marvel comics" of their time. I think it appropriate, then, that one of the few canonical literary examples I will use to demonstrate the lineage of moral fiction is the story of "St. Katherine," composed sometime between 1200 and 1220 C.E. (Savage 259). In their introductory notes, Savage and Watson state that "Katherine of Alexandria…almost certainly never existed in fact" (260), but the fictionality of her existence makes her no less authoritative. Katherine's is a fiction that was used "as a model and inspiration for anchoresses" (260), and within the tale, there are "long speeches in which the protagonist confounds her opponents…[with] summar[ies] of the central tenets of the Christian faith" (261). Within the realm of fiction, then, we see demonstrations of commonly accepted religious truths. Savage and Watson also note that there are many different versions of the tale, and that their version is pulled from one of the Latin versions, or a "yet-undiscovered version" (261) that they

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[6] The specific date of which I sadly do not have recorded.

conjecture may exist. This resembles in some ways the genesis of *All-Star Superman*, its

distillation from many different sources, and Savage and Watson refer to the author of

"St. Katherine" as a compiler (261), much as I will argue Grant Morrison's role in the

Superman text. The story itself has similarities to facets of *All-Star Superman* that we

will consider. Notably, there is an overt critique of older systems of belief. Though this

is certainly not unique to fictional moral texts, this one is interesting in that the defense

offered by the heathen king Maxentius is not quite as condemnatory as we might expect.

The narrator tells us that "[l]ike a mad wolf he at once began to wage war on Holy

Church and to entice Christians…into heathendom" (262), and later Katherine herself

describes Maxentius's beliefs as "utterly irrational and windy wisdom" (265). However,

when asked if he will accept Katherine's faith should she prove his wise men wrong, he

answers "No!...you have nothing to do with my faith, whether it be well-founded or

foolish" (269). This hearkens to the epigram at the beginning of this paper, in the idea

that a faith, a belief, does not necessarily have to be, as Katherine might claim, rational,

but that it just needs to "be real enough to change your life."

Another aspect of Katherine's story that resonates with my primary text is the

inclusion of "factual truths" within the fiction. In justifying her faith, Katherine quotes

(in Latin, no less) both 1 Corinthians 1:19 and Psalm 115 (266). Though one of the

considerations of this paper is the fictional (or highly-embellished factual) nature of these

founding documents, the truths that they espouse are taken to be fact. The insertion of

these facts within the narrative lend credence to the overall moral framework being

demonstrated in the story of St. Katherine. Similarly, in chapter 10 of *All-Star Superman*

we see such "facts" inserted into a fictional narrative. Some are matters of record, as in Count Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's one panel of speech, though the visual aspect of this oration is a fictional creation. So too when we witness Nietzsche sitting at his writing desk composing *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (Morrison, *Absolute* n.p.). We must acknowledge that this thing happened, so in that way it is true, but the specific depiction can be nothing but speculation, and therefore fiction. Further, in one of Katherine's speeches, this fictional character actually disparages factual writers, as she rejects Homer, Aristotle, Aesculapius, Galen, Philistion, and Plato as "full of vain boasts and empty of that blessed and life-giving teaching" (Savage 269). Similar, though less vitriolic, disparagement also occurs in *All-Star Superman*, and when we reach those particular sections of the book, we will analyze those critiques in more detail. For now it will suffice that there is this connection between fictional moral texts.

We will jump centuries now, much as the superheroes often do, to consider John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*. In the mid-nineteenth century, the book was "acknowledged on all sides as one of the foundational texts of English literature and of the Christian faith and [was] second perhaps only to the Bible in readership" (Black 32). What is fascinating in this account of the work is that, even by its own author's admission, it is a fiction:

> And thus it was: I, writing of the way

And race of saints in this our gospel day,

Fell suddenly into an allegory

About their journey and the way to glory (Bunyan 7-10)

For an allegory, an acknowledged fiction, to become one of the foundational texts of the
Christian faith is nothing short of astonishing. It recalls us to the question of whether
something need be narratively factual in order for it to be seen as true. *The Pilgrim's
Progress* certainly answers that question in the negative. Bunyan goes on to state
explicitly this notion, and one cannot help but wonder if there is a subtle sub-text in his
writing that is concerned with the fact or fictionality of the Biblical tales, and whether or
not that dichotomy is an important one. He asks

> Art thou for something rare and profitable?
>
> Wouldest thou see a truth within a fable?
>
> Art thou forgetful?
>
> …
>
> Then read my fancies; they will stick like burrs,
>
> And may be to the helpless comforters.
>
> This book is writ in such a dialect,
>
> As may the minds of listless men affect.
>
> It seems a novelty, and yet contains
>
> Nothing but sound and honest gospel strains. (143-152)

With such lines as "truth within a fable," and "a novelty" that contains "sound and honest gospel strains," Bunyan is acknowledging that, though his work is not strictly true in the sense of factuality, it is true in the sense of revelation. And, if such a work was so popular, can we not give veracity to fictions that owe so much less to the Bible that these two we have considered? If fiction can echo the truth of a *kerygmatic* text such as the Bible, cannot it also enfold the truths of the primary concerns that Frye posits are the fundamental source of *kerygma*? To understand the genesis of such a work, we must once more leap the centuries, and look to the origins of the superhero in the early twentieth century, and the concomitant poetic works of Wallace Stevens.

Of the superhero, Morrison has this to say: "They came to save us from the existential abyss, but first they had to find a way into our collective imagination" (*Supergods* 4), and he is speaking here of that moment in 1938 when Superman burst onto the comics page. The heroes were buried so deeply in our history that they had to reassert, and reinvent, themselves in our imaginations. And, this being the case, they did not do it solely in the pages of comic books. As the superheroes rose to prominence in popular culture, so too did they begin to manifest (or re-manifest) in literary culture[7]. In the writings of many modern authors and poets, mythic and archetypal forces rear their heads. Writing in, and reacting to, the same era, poet Wallace Stevens evokes such mythic forces in a number of his poems, most explicitly in "Notes Toward a Supreme

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[7] This is in some ways a problematic distinction. While the superhero comics were definitely aimed at popular audiences, many heroes, Superman prominent amongst them, championed social causes. Their stories dealt with distinct problems of the culture, much as those of the writers of modernist sensibility did. In differentiating popular from literary, we must see it solely as a matter of audience and distribution, not one of theme.

Fiction." In considering Superman, the progenitor of all superheroic myths, alongside cantos viii – x, the "major man" cantos, of the "*It Must be Abstract*" (Stevens 386 – 89) section of "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," we can see a similarity not only of description, but of purpose in these two archetypal figures. There is, as far as I have been able to find, no evidence that Wallace Stevens read, or even knew of, the Superman comic books and their ancillary media. There are no references to either comic books or the Man of Steel in his collected letters[8]. However, by 1942, when "Notes" was published in a limited edition (Cook, *Reader's Guide* 18), Superman was a national and cultural phenomenon. In 1940, in the midst of Superman's cultural profusion, critic William Slater Brown said of him that "besides affording entertainment for the romantic young, [he] seems also to fill some symptomatic desire for a primitive religion" (Brown, qtd in Jones 173). "Symptomatic desire for a primitive religion" is a description that could certainly be applied to "Notes." Eleanor Cook says that an oversimplified way of considering "Notes" is that it "rewrites 'supreme' writing, that is, our sacred scriptures; or points toward ways of rewriting them" (*Poetry* 215). "Notes" is an intentional work, much as Frye describes the New Testament, and much as I would describe *All-Star Superman*. It asks us to consider the qualities a sacred text must have, and in some small way becomes such a text. It does not pretend to offer answers about the primary concerns of human beings, but asks us to consider how we think about those concerns, and the scaffoldings within which we frame them. What places this work within the typological lineage is that the considerations it raises are not ancillary, but are the point.

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[8] The letters, it must be noted, are edited for content. I am planning a more thorough examination of the originals that might turn up some evidence.

The second and third stanzas of canto ix give what appears to be quite a concrete link between major man (the saviour figure of "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction") and Superman. After denying the godly major man, Stevens tells us that "he [major man] comes / Compact in invincible foils, from reason, / Lighted at midnight by the studious eye, / Swaddled in revery" (Stevens 388). *Action Comics* #1 tells us that "[a]s a distant planet was destroyed by old age, a scientist placed his infant son within a hastily devised space-ship, launching it toward Earth!" (Siegel). Reading these two passages in tandem reveals some remarkable similarities (See Fig.1). Both the terms "he comes compact" and "swaddled" point toward an infant, the "invincible foils" to the durable metals of the space-ship, and "from reason" to the scientist father who sends his child to Earth. The second panel of *Action* depicts the discovery, by truck headlights at night, of the craft in which the infant Superman arrives. The third panel depicts a baby, not swaddled, per se, but in the garb of an infant, hoisting a crib. He is surrounded by people in awe of his power, "reveling" in what he can do.

Fig. 1: The first origin of Superman.

Furthermore, on the same page of *Action Comics*, a scientific explanation for Superman's powers is offered through comparisons with Earthly creatures (Siegel). Reason, a cornerstone of the humanism Stevens was trying to rewrite, is with Superman from the very beginning. In a

letter to Henry Church, Stevens draws the distinction between the kinds of major man, stating that "[w]e are confronted by a choice of ideas: the idea of God and the idea of man. The purpose of NOTES is to suggest the possibility of a third idea: the idea of a fictive being" (Stevens, qtd in Cook, *Poetry* 214). In this quotation, Stevens seems to disregard the possibility of Christ, or other divinities, as fictional beings, in that he separates God, man, and fiction into separate possibilities of major man. Considering that his project is to rewrite the supreme fiction, and if sacred texts are the supreme fictions that he wishes to rewrite, are not the inhabitants of those texts fictional? Perhaps here we are being confronted with a fiction that is so ingrained in culture as to become real. If this is the case, what then is the fate of the rewritten supreme fiction? Must it always eventually be rewritten? The likely answer is yes, this being the eternal prophecy and fulfillment of literary typology. We come then to Stevens' third option: the fictive being, and it is singularly important that the idea of major man be included in the *Abstract* section of the poem. Stevens' salvationary figure is the fictive being, and this being, who must be abstract, is an idea from the mind of humankind. To begin, major man is "abler / In the abstract than in his singular" (388). The next line, "More fecund as principle than particle" (388) reasserts this idea. Stevens goes a step farther, perhaps realizing that a completely abstract salvationary figure must have some defining qualities, lest he be so abstract that he, or the idea of him, accomplish exactly nothing. Major man is "part…of the commonal," and moreover, "an heroic part" (388). Further into our analysis of *All-Star Superman*, we will investigate the "commonal" aspect of Superman, as demonstrated through his alter ego, Clark Kent. It would be sheer speculation to say

why at this particular juncture of history that two disparate individuals (and Joe Shuster too, to be fair) realized the need for so remarkably similar myths. The modernists were steeped in 2000 or more years of mythology, and Superman and major man are reactions to the baggage these figures and legends carry with them. However, as Morrison notes, "it's as if he's more real than we are…something persists, something that is always Superman" (14). We must move further now, closer to our own time, to understand what it is that persists, and why.

Comic books have a long, if somewhat unrecognized, link to Biblical narrative and to traditional Biblical typology. As Frye notes, "a student of English literature who does not know the Bible does not understand a good deal of what is going on in what he reads" (*Code* 5-6). This holds no less true for superhero comic books than it does for any other kind of English literature. As the Bible is a source of imagery and narrative throughout the history of literature, so too is it a source of tales in which to place elements of the superheroic. Indeed, the miracles performed by various characters in the Biblical tales, and their ilk, are nothing if not the precursors to the superpowers of modern mythology. In the late nineteen-seventies, comics auteur Jack Kirby penned two stories in the pages of *Devil Dinosaur* called "Eev!" (sic) and "Demon-Tree!"[9]. These stories retell events from the beginning of Genesis, though tempered with ape-like proto-humans, giant red dinosaurs, and alien computers that are mistaken for talking trees (Kirby, "Eev!" and "Demon-Tree!" 1 – 22). Though not strictly a fulfillment of any kind

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[9] Kirby is well-known for his rampant use of exclamation marks, hence me including them in the titles. On titles that he himself edited (such as *Devil Dinosaur*), it was not uncommon for every character's speech to terminate in that particular punctuation. Much as he is lauded for his artwork and his stories, his dialogue often leaves much to be desired.

of prophecy, this link allows us to consider not only the Biblical typology in comic books, but also the literary typology. The example of the *Devil Dinosaur* stories demonstrates a revision of earlier moral tales through a contemporary lens. In the mid-nineties, the critically-acclaimed series *Kingdom Come* re-wrote the Revelation of John in a superheroic manner. The book opens with a quotation from Revelations chapter 8, accompanied by some unclear pictures of a great battle (Waid 1). Over the course of the tale we come to understand that the foretold apocalypse of John will be the result of a war amongst the superhumans. Unlike Kirby's adaptation of Genesis, this story adapts an event in the future, which opens the door for us to consider it typologically. Within the superhero universe, the story is set an undisclosed number of years in the future, thereby placing it also within the typological narrative lineage of the superheroes. Furthermore, it offers fictional commentary and reinterpretation of John's Revelation, taking the archaic, and often confounding, imagery and recasting it in contemporary language and contemporary mythos. Similarly to Kirby, then, this adaptation paves the way for such mostly free-standing literary antitypes as *All-Star Superman*.

From May 2006 to May 2007, DC comics embarked upon a publishing experiment. Gathering their top writers (Grant Morrison amongst them) and artists, they published a weekly, year-long series called *52.* The interweaving stories told of superheroes and their world picking up the pieces in the wake of a universe-altering crisis (these things seem to happen quite often in superhero universes). One of the storylines follows an investigation into something called the "Crime Bible." This antithesis to the ostensibly loving and peaceful Christian Bible professes a religion based around Cain and

the first murder, invoking commandments of theft, of rape, and, of course, of murder. Though wholly pessimistic and deplorable, the insertion of this text into the shared universe of the modern DC mythology represents a step away from the adaptations previously discussed, and toward the typological ramifications that are pertinent to the current argument. From the type in the Biblical mythology of Genesis chapter 4, an entire fictional antitypology is created in the DC universe. Throughout *52*, the goal of the religion of crime is the sacrifice of Batwoman, an act which the adherents to the religion of crime believe will usher in the era of their faith. In the follow-up to this tale, *Crime Bible: Five Lessons of Blood*, writer Greg Rucka and
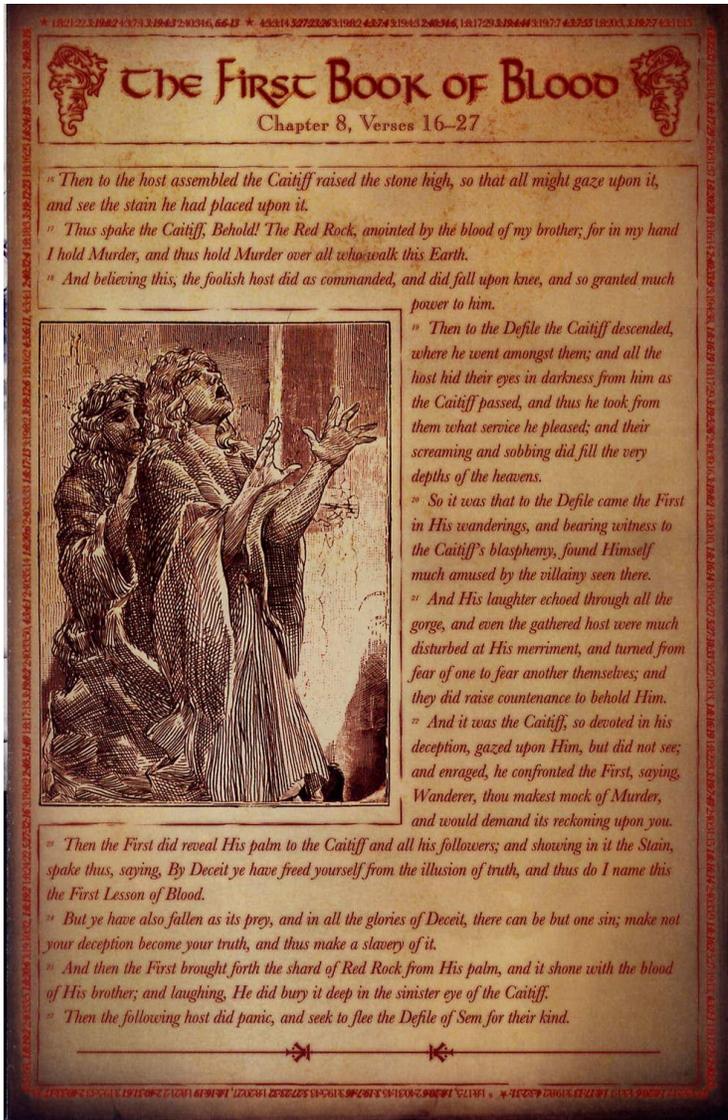
Fig. 2: A page from the Crime Bible.

artists Steve Lieber and Eric Trautman make the inspired choice of including pages from

the Crime Bible as illustrations of the lesson to be addressed in each chapter (See Fig.2).

Written in King James-esque prose, and, appropriately for the medium in which we read

it, appearing to be an illustrated Bible, these pages are the antitypes of Cain's story in

Genesis. The antitypology of the Crime Bible presents some challenges to that critical

framework. Though certainly an antitype of Cain's story, within its fictional setting it is

considered by the academic community to be "[a] hoax…An elaborate one, to be sure,

complete with mysterious cults and tomes of forbidden knowledge, all created to prey

upon our fears" (Rucka, "Deceit" 7). An interesting observation about academia, to be

sure, as the book and its following are anything but a hoax within the fictional universe.

However, it is an antitype of Cain's story, a story in our own universe that is considered

to speak, if not to be, truth, though there is little historical evidence for the veracity of the

tale. So it is a story that gains its veracity through its duration through time. To

summarize, then, we have an antitype that is considered, within the fictional universe, to

be false, but is actually true, and is, again within the fictional narrative, the fulfillment of

a story in the real world that is fiction that has gained truth purely through duration.

Though it is hardly a creed one could be expected to follow, it is a further setting of the

stage for such a work as *All-Star Superman*. It reinforces Frye's assertion earlier in the

chapter; anyone unfamiliar with the Bible would find this story, and this antitype, utterly

confounding. The tale of the Crime Bible continues into the events of the

aforementioned *Final Crisis* with the graphic novel *Final Crisis: Revelations*. As with

Kingdom Come, this is an attempt to fold John's Biblical mythology into the superheroic

mythology. Set during the incarnation of dark gods on Earth, the story is less a direct

adaptation, as with *Kingdom Come*, and more an interpretation of the Revelation of John

based on events within the narrative universe. In this universe the Bible obviously exists,

and the events of *Final Crisis: Revelations* are the antitype of John's type. Cain returns

in this story, revealed to have always been the immortal supervillain Vandal Savage

(Rucka, *Final* n.p.), thus proving the tale not only an antitype of the Biblical Revelation,

but also of the "Crime Biblical" religion of crime. Thus *Final Crisis: Revelations* fulfills

that which is prophesied not only in our foundational literary text, but also within the

fictional foundational literary text of the contemporary mythology. This paves the way,

then, for fictional antitypes that have less and less explicitly to do with the foundational

text, and thus sets the stage for literary, rather than Biblical, typology.

Before moving on from the various tales of the Crime Bible, there is one more

aspect to the story that is fascinating, though it is an aspect that is perhaps less pertinent

to the current investigation than it would be to further work on the subject. Renee

Montoya, the hero known as The Question, is the primary protagonist involved with the

religion of Crime through *52, Crime Bible,* and *Final Crisis: Revelations*. While

confiding in a close friend about her researches, she says

> [w]e had two copies of the Crime Bible…and I read them cover to cover. They
>
> were different, you see, the ones we had….Every true copy is different in one way
>
> or another…Some have codes buried in the text, others rituals, maybe even spells.
>
> The words, the pictures, it's…it's hard to explain…it's terrifying,

> even…evil…but it's also seductive, and sometimes…you can see the beauty in it.
>
> (Rucka, "Greed" 10-11)

I will not spend a long time on this section, evocative as it may be. For our purposes, Renee's assertion that "every true copy is different" is pertinent. This brings us back to Platonic ideals, that there must be a true morality which is reflected, and occasionally distorted, in all the different *kerygmatic* texts that inform our cultures. If we are to accept such ideal morality, then the fictionality or factuality of a text means very little if the moral holds true. The other pertinent factor is the idea of the seductive nature of a such texts, a factor that perhaps accounts for the longevity of the Superman character and mythos.

Alan Moore's *Promethea* is less a superhero story than it is a textbook on magic wrapped thinly in a superheroic coating. Moore's tale begins as an exploration of the imagination, in that the main character, Sophie Bangs, is able to transform herself into the mystical Promethea, avatar of the human imagination. Over the course of the series, Moore explores the ramifications of history's gods and devils, and specifically addresses the conundrum of their fictionality versus their factuality. His conclusion is that if, as it is an element of the human psyche, the imagination is real, then we must also class that which emerges from the imagination as real. He asks his readers to reconceptualise what it is they think of as real. Though certain events in *Promethea* allude directly to the Bible, the story does not offer us any typological fulfillment of that text's narrative[10]. Instead it shows how the stories mesh themselves into our collective unconscious,

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[10] There is an apocalypse in the narrative, but in the end it has little to do with John's Biblical one.

synonymous for Moore with the imagination. Not far in, the series abandons "any

pretense of being a traditional superhero book and [takes] its heroine on a journey

through…the kabbalistic Tree of Life, the Hebrew mystical system appropriated by

Western occultists" (Kraemer 271-5). There is, then, a link to the Biblical era thought,

but not one that specifically embraces the narratives of either Jewish or Christian Bibles.

Instead, Moore uses the ancient framework as a way of exploring a newer belief system.

As such, we can place *Promethea* even further along the path toward literary typology, in

that it espouses its own moral code, or that of its author and his influences, while still

utilising an archaic framework. In the literary typological sense, early Jewish mystic

tomes on kabbalah are the types of which *Promethea* is the antitype. We can further

cement this claim by considering the twelfth chapter of the book, in which Promethea is

taken on a metaphysical journey that explores the Major Arcana of the tarot deck (Moore

n.p.). Not so much the content as the form is pertinent in this particular section. Each

page is a full illustration with a poetic elaboration and explanation on what each of the

cards represents. It is, in comic book form, the image of the emblem books of the

sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Amongst other subjects, some of the most famous

emblem books offer elucidation on particular aspects of the Bible, be they the cardinal

virtues or the cult of Mary, and they do so in a combination of pictures and poetry for the

most part identical to *Promethea* chapter twelve (See Fig.3).

Fig. 3: An emblem from Geffrey Whitney, and a page from *Promethea*

That Moore sets up a chapter of his work to mirror these older works, while infusing the

early-modern form with modern moral principles brings us one step closer to the literary

antitype exemplified by *All-Star Superman*. *All-Star Superman* does not overtly

demonstrate fulfillments of particular stories, nor does it utilise the forms of ancient

moral texts. What it does is take the fundamental elements of a moral text, the elements

that give such texts an air of the *kerygmatic*, and places them within a wholly

contemporary myth.

The popularity of the superhero comic has long been a detriment to its acceptance

as anything more than what Scott McCloud calls "crude, poorly-drawn, semiliterate,

cheap, disposable kiddie fare" (3) [11]. Is such a condemnation of popularity fair or

productive, though, or does it blind us to a fundamental aspect of sacred stories? In an

article entitled "Irredeemable: Dave Sim's *Cerebus*," Tim Krieder casually mentions that

he "stopped reading mainstream comics when it was age-appropriate" (351). It is an

interesting assertion to make that mainstream comics have appropriate ages, one at which

one should be reading them, and one at which one should stop. This stems, I think, from

assertions like McCloud's, and this same sort of conception has kept mainstream comics

from being scrutinized academically in equal proportion to their independent or

underground cousins. Here we must pause and note that the term "mainstream" in this

context is all but synonymous with "superhero." Superhero comics have dominated the

popular market since their inception, and are the most often targeted by critics of the

mainstream market. But both McCloud's and Krieder's assessments fail to take into

account that mainstream comics are not always necessarily written by "mainstream"

writers, whatever that term may signify. And furthermore, the mainstream is necessarily

linked to the popular, not in terms of quantification, but in terms of being somehow tuned

in to the populace. All successful religious works (whether they be celebrated or

notorious) are popular. We have only to consider the Qur'an, or the Bible, or the

aforementioned *The Pilgrim's Progress*, to see that religious works, necessarily in order

for them to accomplish the work they set out to do, must be popular. In which case, for a

fiction that one might consider an antitype of a religious work (or of religious works in

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[11] To be fair to McCloud, the word preceding this description is "usually," but it is the derogatory description that is bolded in the caption box. This is the idea we are supposed to take from this particular panel, not the "usually."

general), popularity, and the mainstream status that follows such popularity, is not a negative appellation. In fact, without such a qualifier attached to a work, it could not be an antitype.

Let it not be thought, however, that all mainstream and popular comics are to be exempted from this assertion of age-appropriateness and the negative connotations associated with it. There are hundreds of titles that are released every month that have nothing in them for the critical reader, unless one is studying the idea of comics as "cheap, disposable kiddie fare." There are myriad problematic issues that inundate all superhero comics, but this is not a failing that can be regarded as particular to either the genre or the form. When we look at a Jane Austen novel, regardless of the accepted classism in the texts, we still consider them great works of literature. The Bible is profoundly problematic, especially earlier sections of the Old Testament, but it is still the basis of one of the most popular religions the world has seen. Great literature should be problematic. Otherwise it does not challenge us, and so is not worthy of the title.

We noted earlier that Frye considers that the typological resonances in the New Testament pointed to an "intentionality" in the text. We do not have records to corroborate such a claim, but there seems ample evidence in the book itself to uphold the assertion. In the case of *All-Star Superman*, the intentionality behind the work is a matter of record. In the back matter of the Absolute edition, Morrison states that he and Quitely decided

> to tell the story of Superman as star, or solar 'deity'…[T]he structure of the
>
> story…traverses one epic 'day' – dipping below the horizon in issue six so that
>
> Superman, like all good solar myth heroes, can journey through midwinter's
>
> longest Night and the upside-down underworld before rising again in issue nine.
>
> (*Absolute* n.p.)

There is an intentional insertion of the solar divinity story, an appropriate connection due to Superman's powers being fueled by the Sun. Further to this, the story is broken into twelve parts, twelve chapters, which conforms, either intentionally or no, with the structure of traditional epic. Both *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* of Homer are certainly works that evince *kerygma*, so this epic structure and "[t]he spine of the story…the idea of the '12 Labors of Superman', [that echo] the 12 labors of the mythical Hercules" (Morrison, *Absolute* n.p.) intentionally place *All-Star Superman* within a larger literary framework. Even the title, *All-Star Superman*, though a happy accident of this particular publishing enterprise, points us to the sun-god aspects of the hero. He is not just a sun god, he is all of them, a compilation and amalgamation of all such characters, and a re-framing of their stories.

Another part of this intentionality in the text is its disconnection from its foundational canonical works, the idea of "non-continuity" mentioned earlier. This notion is in contrast with "in-continuity" stories, a phrase that implies that the stories share both a spatial narrative location and a history with other stories in the shared-narrative universe. "In-continuity" implies that the stories acknowledge the official

histories of both the character about which the story is written, and the universe in which the character lives. The opposite of "in-continuity," "non-continuity," is generally a story that takes place in its own universe. The story is considered spatially distinct from an "in-continuity" story, but can share a history, as is the case with *All-Star Superman*. This tale of Superman is not connected to the DC universe proper, but shares the basic history of Superman in order to establish a context.   The creators of the shared universe tales agree upon what is, and what is not, a part of the shared narrative. While not a constraint on the kinds of stories that can be told, it is an agreement that a particular set of parameters, a mythology, is acknowledged and adhered to, and that anything that falls outside of those parameters cannot under any but the most extreme circumstances (the recreation of the universe, à la *Crisis on Infinite Earths*) have any effect upon the "in-continuity" stories. The placement of *All-Star Superman* outside of this shared narrative universe makes its ability to effect its readers, our "continuity," if you will, far easier. There are one or two references to Batman and the Justice League in the text, but no appearances by those characters. This story could easily be the story of the only superhero on the planet, the only saviour, a point of view that lines up well with the New Testament stories. The removal of this tale from the shared narrative universe within which it gestalted allows it to be placed within the larger narrative structure of literary typology, inspired by, but not constrained by, seventy years of fictional history.

If, given the theoretical and historical contexts we have established in these two preferatory chapters, we are to consider *All-Star Superman* as an antitype, as distinct from Superman himself as an archetype, then what is required is a reading of the work as

a sacred text. Our historical framework began with the Bible, and works of its ilk, fantastical myths that nonetheless have informed, and continue to inform, the spiritual and moral development of billions the world over. Resonances of these texts echo up through the ages and into contemporary times, prominently in imaginative works. These allegories and parables endeavour to echo the lessons of our founding *kerygmatic* works, and they do so through the vehicle of fiction. Indeed, the foundational works themselves, being so far removed from us temporally and culturally, might as well be fictions themselves. This is not to denigrate their importance, or the importance of their lessons, but it is to acknowledge the distance travelled, the progress (if we can use that word) made by humankind in the intervening millennia. Even *All-Star Superman*, as of this writing, is four years old, but the unique treatment of the Superman character allows him to be a constant touchstone for contemporary issues. It is this serialisation of a character, prominently the superhero but not always, that lends itself so well to antitypical reading. The character and the work are not only antitypical with regard to older spiritual works, but also have the internal typology that Frye describes as "a sequence of phases" "each…being a type of the one following it and an antitype of the one preceding it" (Frye, *The Great Code* 106). In fact, within *All-Star Superman*, we see these phases, as well as the resonances to earlier incarnations of the character.

As we proceed into the text, both the internal typology of the text and its external typological precedents must be recognized. As well, the lessons, or commandments (though Superman would likely balk at such a term) of the text must be acknowledged. A *kerygmatic* text speaks to fundamental human needs, and attempts to teach the ways in

which we might fulfill those needs. If, as I argue, *All-Star Superman*'s antitypology is founded on echoes of this *kerygma* that is profuse in works of fiction, these lessons are of paramount importance. We must also acknowledge the appearance and treatment of prior systems of belief in the text, and puzzle out both what is being lauded and what is being criticised in each. These systems are represented by not only symbolic appearance, but also interactions by specific fictions. Chapter 3, "Sweet Dreams, Superwoman…" features characters from Egyptian, Greek, and Biblical myth, presented as realities within the fiction of the Superman universe. By bearing in mind these three aspects of typology, *All-Star Superman* emerges as a contemporary spiritual work, one that fulfills the promises of so many fictions before it.

I would like briefly to address the format of the book under consideration. It is a graphic novel, and as such has numerous structural features that are different from prose, poetry, or drama. Though I will address some of the structural and visual components of the work, I will not be focussing on this element in great detail. For the argument in question, it is the story and the structure of the story that is pertinent. The medium in which it is presented is of secondary importance. That said, there is a case to be made that iconic figures such as Superman only become iconic because of the visual element in their tales. We see this too in most major religions, in that there are visual symbols that encapsulate for the faithful the tenets of these faiths. A full investigation of the iconography of *All-Star Superman* would, I fear, take up an entire thesis by itself, so I will address it briefly in the concluding chapter, and concern myself instead with the story that is presented, the structures within it that point to its identity as an antitype in a

lineage of moral fictions, and the ramifications of such a reading. The small part that the visual components will play in my analysis is by no means reflective of their importance in the text, but of my own focus of analysis.

Chapter 3: *All-Star Superman*

D.C. Comics' "All-Star" line debuted in 2005 with *All-Star Batman & Robin*[12]. The "All-Star" moniker serves two functions, highlighting both the featured characters and the well-known creators producing the series. The mandate of the series was to tell iconic stories of the greatest superheroes without being constrained by the volumes of history and continuity those heroes carry with them. As such, *All-Star Superman* kicks off with a one-page synopsis of Superman's origin (see Fig. 4), a story firmly entrenched in the Western imagination, and, on the very next page, drops the reader *in media res*, with Lex Luthor having finally succeeded in his plan to destroy Superman. The series, which ran from 2005 to 2008 and lasted 12 issues, chronicles Superman's final weeks as he sets his affairs in order and takes care of last-minute tasks. Of course, for Superman, those last minute tasks involve renegade Kryptonians, dinosaur invasions from the center of the Earth, and living planets from the "Underverse." The stripping away, or rather the subsuming, of the previous seventy years of Superman's history allows the story told in *All-Star Superman* to achieve a mythological tone akin to the ancient myths. What is important in the stories is left in, that Superman never kills, that he cares about each and every person on the planet, and that he will always do his best to help when it is required. While the bulk of the series deals with super-powered adversaries, there are interspersed amongst these titanic tales brief glimpses of everyday people, of commuters and suicides, of reporters and cancer victims, all of whom Superman goes out of his way to help.

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[12] Batman presents an interesting case of typology, perhaps harkening back to Job.

The introduction by Chip Kidd to the absolute edition[13] of *All-Star Superman*, which, though at the book's beginning, we must regard as an exegesis of the text, calls attention to the fact that Superman is "one of the most familiar and endlessly chronicled folk heroes of the last seven decades" (Kidd n.p.). Kidd calls attention here to both the popularity noted earlier, and to the constant reinvention that the character has undergone over the course of the twentieth, and early twenty-first, century. This attention to the longevity of the character hearkens to the idea of an internal typology within the Superman mythos. If we can consider the preceding work an earlier testament, then, to paraphrase Frye, in *Action Comics* (Superman's first appearance), *All-Star Superman* is concealed; in *All-Star Superman, Action Comics* is revealed. *All-Star Superman* is the fulfillment of all that the earlier adventures of the character have prophesied, and "the characters are now the very essence of what makes them great" (n.p.). This essentiality is paramount in considering a text as an ethical book. As I have noted earlier, Superman follows archetypally in the footsteps of many great heroes of literature. *All-Star Superman* is populated by archetypes. We can look at the preceding histories of all of the integral characters (i.e., Lois Lane, Jimmy Olsen, Lex Luthor), and consider the versions in *All-Star Superman* as the archetypal, and antitypal, versions of themselves. Each represents an aspect of the overall lesson of the book. Much as the apostles of Jesus have particular roles to play in that story (Thomas doubts, Judas betrays), the various supporting cast of Superman's story have their roles. Jimmy Olsen is our everyman.

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[13] DC Comics' "absolute editions" reprint collections of individual comics in an enlarged hardcover format that beautifully highlights the artwork. They include production information and commentary from creators in their appendices, but, infuriatingly, have no page numbers.

Lois Lane is our prophet. And though these roles have wavered and shifted over seven decades, they, as is Superman, are distilled, through character traits, appearance, and narrative arcs, to their essential forms in *All-Star Superman*. Later in the introduction/exegesis, Kidd notes that "Morrison has said that his Superman is a metaphor for America at its best. He is the embodiment of basic human goodness despite the fact (or because of it) that he isn't even human" (n.p.). This is certainly not all that Superman is in the text. Whether or not America at its best is an embodiment of basic human goodness is debatable, but perhaps we are to take these as separate ideas. These are two of the things that Superman represents in the text. And, as with all good religious works, what the central figure or figures represent will be contingent on what expectations and prejudices we, as readers, bring to our interaction with the text. Where *All-Star Superman* defies this projection of reader prejudice is also where it ascends beyond mere moralising, and becomes truly moral. The archetypes in the text elucidate "the concern to make and create, the concern to love, the concern to sustain oneself and assimilate the environment… and the concern to escape from slavery and restraint" (Frye, *Words With Power* 135). The final noteworthy moment from the introduction is in Kidd's summation of the story's end, with "the promise of a second coming" (Kidd n.p.), a blatant nod to the notion of Superman-as-Christ. What we must concern ourselves with, however, is not this accepted archetypal resonance, but the antitypal resonance of the actual text of Superman.

…Faster…[14]

What I must emphasize to begin is that this reading must be understood to be preliminary. The constraints of the size of this paper do not allow for the exhaustive commentary that a work like *All-Star Superman* requires. That said, it seems to me that there is no better way of beginning such a reading of *All-Star Superman* than to look back to the text that we are considering as our foundational literary work. In Exodus we are told that "Pharaoh then ordered all his people to throw every new-born boy into the Nile" (Exod. 1.22), an apocalypse (in the non-revelatory sense) for the people of Israel. In the wake of this action, Moses' mother (oddly, along with his father, unnamed at this point) "got a rush basket for him, made it watertight with clay and tar, laid him in it, and put it among the reeds by the bank of the Nile" (Exod. 2.3). Pharaoh's daughter finds the child, and "[w]hen the child was old enough…[she] adopted him and called him Moses" (Exod. 2.10). This is a very familiar story, and likely was for young Siegel and Shuster when they created their hero. In comparison, then, here is the first page of *All-Star Superman:*

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[14] In the interest of organization, I will head each of my analyses with the titles of the individual chapters of *All-Star Superman*.
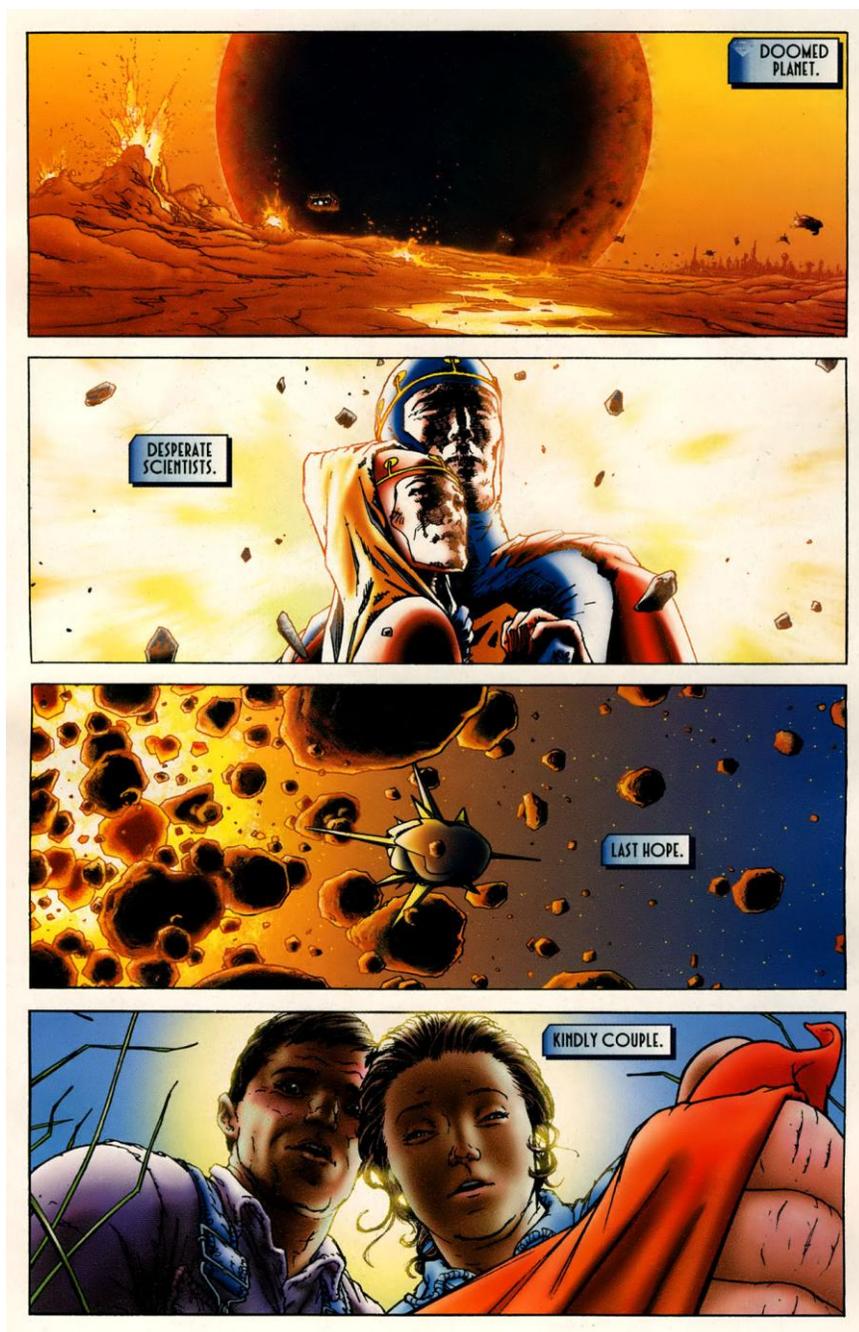
Fig. 4: The iconic origin of Superman.

As we can see, these four panels that depict the fundamentals of Superman's origin story could very easily be lined up with the four Bible passages that tell of Moses's origin. Exodus 1.22, 2.2, 2.3, 2.5, with a bit of editing, become the origin of Superman. It is important to notice that our comparison begins with Exodus, the second book of Moses. As an ostensibly secular sacred story (if such a term is even possible), Superman relies on the accepted scientific creation myth of the universe[15], so already we can see the fiction of Superman enfolding two of our primary cultural myths into a contemporary one.

A significant aspect of this first chapter is its treatment of Lois Lane. In accepted Superman mythology (the "in-continuity" tales of the last 70 years), Lois has been variously Superman / Clark Kent's colleague, rival, girlfriend, and wife. In her first appearance in *All-Star Superman*, she is given another role to play, one that becomes more and more significant as the story progresses: She becomes his prophet. Lois's answer to Steve Lombard in Fig. 5 is the first inkling of this role. In her role as prophet, Lois is also demonstrative of the way
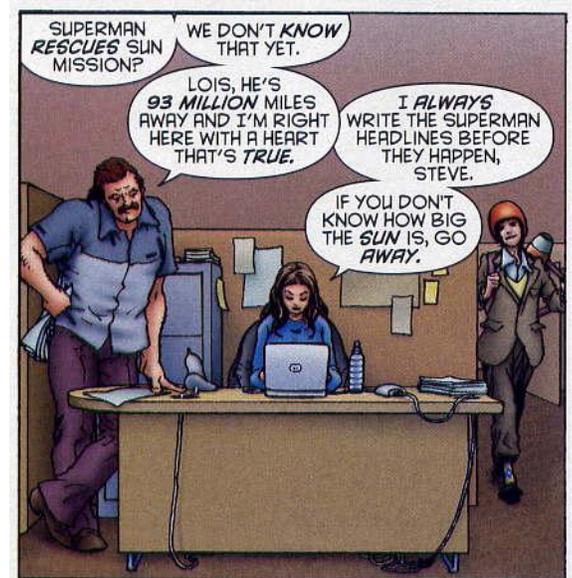

Fig. 5: Lois prophesies.

we, as readers and potential believers, can immerse ourselves in such *kerygmatic* tales, and the way in which one who is a prophet can become part of prophecy, and the

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[15] That said, the DC universe within which he exists is host to numerous different creation myths. All of them, however, or at least the ones that the characters within the stories acknowledge as some kind of truth, bear some resemblance to our own current scientific myth of the Big Bang.

fulfilment of prophecy.

As a genesis of philosophy, so to speak, this introductory chapter also gives indications of some of the lessons that Superman's story will impart to the reader. During his rescue of the first manned mission to the Sun, Superman has to prevent a living bomb from exploding within the helionauts' capsule (Fig.6).

Fig. 6: Superman helps the bomb fulfill its purpose.

"I'm here to help you with that" says Superman, as he pulls the living bomb from within the capsule and allows it to explode harmlessly in the Sun's corona. This is the fundamental lesson of *All-Star Superman*, so it is of course the first one he teaches; Superman, both in his heroic and mundane guises, is beset with an almost compulsive need to help his fellow creatures, but it is a compulsive need that he chooses. He does it not only because he has to, but because he wants to, and this is a distinction that is primary to the teachings of the book. Superman wants to help to such an extent that it becomes an intrinsic part of himself. Though we know him as the powerful, muscular

hero, it is significant that he seems only to apply his strength to violence in the defence of others, a fact best demonstrated in the following sequence:

Fig. 7: The compulsion to save lives.

A further significance of this chapter is its revelation of the guiding impetus of the story, Superman's inevitable death. Leo Quintum, billionaire genius and leader of the ill-fated sun mission, gives the unfortunate news:

> Your trip to the sun exposed you to critical levels of stellar radiation, more raw
>
> energy than your cells are able to process efficiently. Apoptosis has begun. Cell
>
> death. There can be only one outcome, even for you" (Morrison, *Absolute* n.p.)

Quintum is an anomaly in the series[16], being the only major character who has never appeared in prior Superman stories. Evidence grows throughout the tale for Quintum to be symbolic of the reader. He is the apex of the human desire to know, ostensibly something that is antithetical to the sort of faith we might expect to be linked to works in this typological lineage. He tells God, in the form of Superman, that his time is done, but works tirelessly to develop a cure or a replacement for the Man of Steel. If we have a god that is transmitted to us through stories (either in conjunction with, or as opposed to, perhaps, fictions), that god must eventually be moved aside as stories age and human consciousness evolves. But this is not to say that we must reject or forget the lessons that such gods have to teach. Superman is going to die, and it is up to Leo Quintum, and the readers by proxy, to synthesize his essence, his lessons, into ourselves. He points to another type of middle way, this time between the scientific and theological, and one that serves the way between the literary and the theological to which I earlier referred. Quintum, then, is also, in some ways, the voice of the book, potentially the voice of the author, explicitly stating the purpose of the text we are reading, and that Morrison and Quitely are writing:

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[16] And one upon whom I will speculate more when we arrive at chapter 10, and Earth-Q.
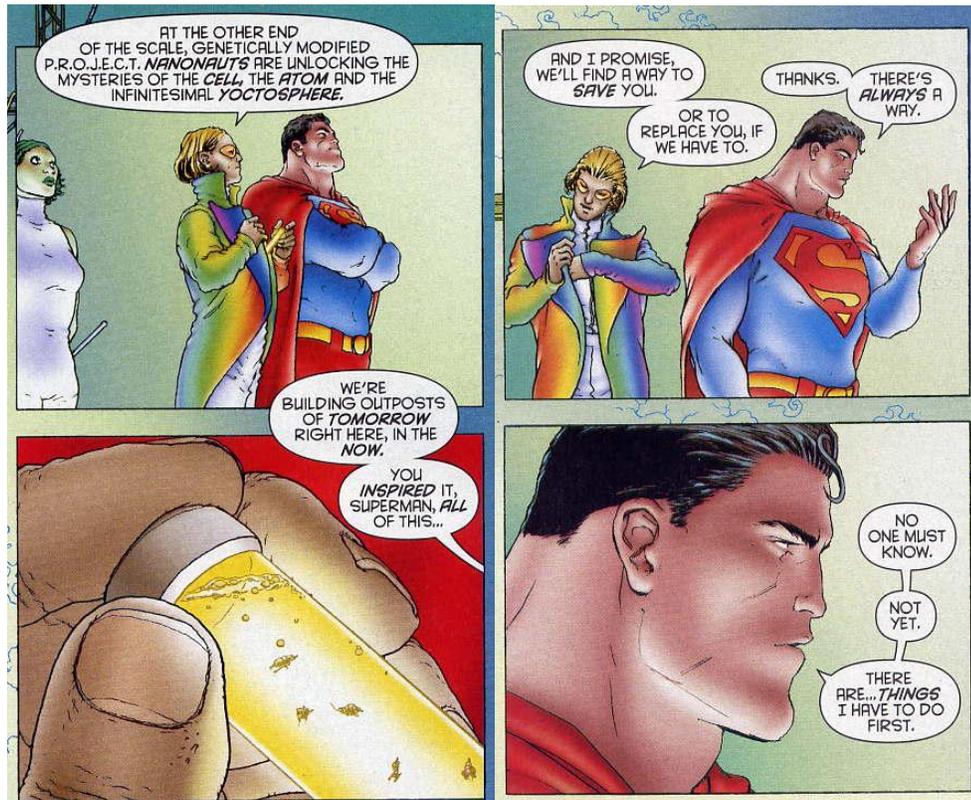
Fig. 8: Quintum's, and perhaps *All-Star Superman's,* purpose.

This statement of purpose, to build "outposts of tomorrow," is resonant of Milton's

Paradise Lost, itself a part of my proposed literary typology. The speaker of that epic

poem tells his readers he will "justify the ways of God to men" (I.25), much as, at the

beginning of this Superman epic, Morrison tells his readers he is going to build the

outposts of tomorrow, the places that are "not afraid to be hopeful, not embarrassed to be

optimistic, and utterly fearless in the dark" (Morrison, *Supergods* xvii). It is the

construction of these outposts, both in and out of the narrative, the "things [Superman

has] to do first," that occupies the eleven chapters that follow.

Superman's Forbidden Room

Lois Lane's journey as prophet is intensified significantly in this second chapter. After his revelation at the end of the previous chapter, Superman takes Lois north, to his Fortress of Solitude, in order that they might spend some time together. Lois begins the trip by asking "And you've always been Clark Kent? Sorry. I just don't *believe* you, Superman" (Morrison, *Absolute* n.p., emphasis mine). The problem of belief is the one that is solved over the course of this, and the subsequent, chapter. Travelling north, to the mountain hideaway of the Man of Steel represents the "intensifying of consciousness" (Frye, *Words* 145) of Frye's Mountain variation. The fortress is, significantly, buried within the mountain, so we have a combination of the mountain and cave variations, both representing the imparting of knowledge to an initiate. The pre- and post-romantic *Axes Mundi* are represented, the visitor from above who imparts his knowledge in the sacred cave. Superman explicitly states that this is a place of knowledge (Fig. 9):
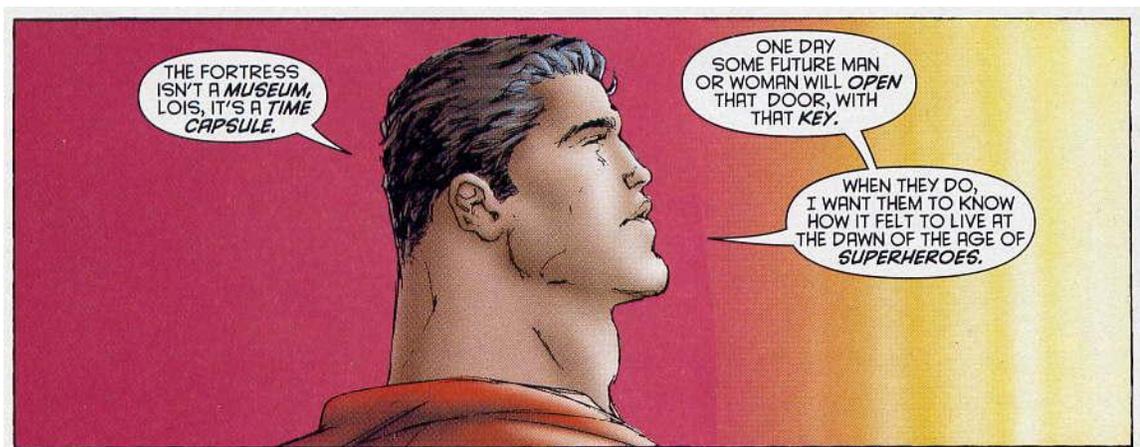

Fig. 9: The declaration of the time capsule.

This declaration is important in two distinct ways for our reading of the text. The fortress
stands in symbolically for the text itself. If Superman is a sacred mythology, one that
echoes the original *kerygmatic* ones , then the 70 years of texts we have so far are the
record of the "dawn of the age of superheroes" (Morrison, *Absolute* n.p.). The distillation
of these 70 years is *All-Star Superman*, the time capsule that "some future man or woman
will open." This particular story is the one of the skeptic (Lois the journalist) becoming a
believer (Lois the Superwoman). The time capsule metaphor, and the Fortress itself, also
stand as critique of the belief systems of which *All-Star Superman*'s is the antitype.
When Superman says he wants the projected future man or woman "to know how it felt
to live at the dawn of the age of superheroes," he is acknowledging that those people who
discover his fortress, or the people who open this book in some future time, will have
radically different perceptions of the world. His interaction with future incarnations of
the Superman archetype (Fig. 10) imparts to him the knowledge that cultures change, as
do their needs and frames of reference. So too, then, should the repositories of their
cultural morality, hence the typological arc of sacred literatures.

Fig. 10: Cryptic messages from the future.

Superman is aware of the lineage of which he is the progenitor. He has accepted his place in history, accepted his role as type, not antitype, within his personal future mythology. This is a second lesson, one that supports the first lesson, of helping above all else. For Superman, he, and we, are only forerunners, types that will beget antitypes whom we can only glimpse in "cryptic messages," or speculations, about the far future. As Superman does, one must make peace with the notion of being a forerunner, and make sure that what is to come has the best foundation possible. In this, we see the critique of the ancient *kerygmatic* texts, that books written thousands of years ago cannot possibly speak to us in the way they spoke to the original believers of such texts. We can only acknowledge them as are forerunners to the antitypes of our new mythologies. This critique is explicit throughout the text, and recognizing it points us to the "right way" of reading *All-Star Superman*.

Lois Lane spends much of this chapter under the influence of an element that gives her "visual distortions and extreme paranoid reactions" (*Absolute* n.p.). She is in the process of shedding her old system of belief, as must the reader of *All-Star Superman* be, and, in

Fig. 11: Lois receives communion.

the final pages of the chapter (Fig. 11), receives her manna from God, her Holy Communion.

Lois's subsequent transformation, and this moment of Superman's reading her genetic code, is part of the internal typological phases of the work. If Lois has understood the Law of what Superman is, it is now time for her to advance into the Wisdom that "begins in interpreting and commenting on law" (Frye, *Words* 153). This phase is also the type of a latter revelation, in the apocalyptic final days of the story, which we will come to in its time.

Sweet Dreams, Superwoman…

The iconography of Superman comes to the fore in this third chapter, and on the very last page of the prior one. Superman constructs a super-suit like his own for Lois, and presents her with the gift of his powers for the space of 24 hours. The gift is wrapped in a box that is red, blue, and yellow. Lois's costume, as is Superman's, is also these three colours. Graphic literature distinguishes itself from other forms of literature by having a visual element that is equal in its importance to the narrative as the verbal element. In a picture book, the illustrations will generally depict a moment of action from the text. In graphic narratives, the pictures are part of the narrative flow. Those who read a comic book and only pay attention to the words, under the assumption that the illustration is merely depicting the verbiage, will miss a vast part of the narrative. There are iconic sequences in superhero graphic novels. Superman's origin at the beginning of this book is one such. In *Flex Mentallo,* the titular character watches a news report of a farmer in the Midwest who has constructed a homemade rocket within which he hopes his infant son will escape the peril that besets the planet Earth. Though no specific

mention is made of Superman, this sequence is iconic of his story, and so carries with it the ramifications of the "child rocketed to Earth from a doomed planet." The young Bruce Wayne kneeling over the bodies of his slain parents is another such iconic sequence, as is the spider that falls onto Peter Parker's hand. But even more refined icons are associated with characters whose mythic resonance is particularly strong. Of all the superheroes, Superman and Batman have probably the most recognizable icons, the S-shield and the Bat-symbol.

Fig. 12: Variations on the S-Shield from *Superman Wiki*. 31-05-2012.

Though quite different, each interpretation of this icon (Fig. 12) carries with it the weight of the moral standpoint of the character. Each is, for the most part, instantly recognizable as the "S" worn by Superman, and therefore each carries with it the resonances and ramifications of his existence. The pattern of red, blue, and yellow is part of this iconic resonance, so when Lois takes her communion with Superman, it is only fitting that she wear his colours. As Lois streaks through the sky with Superman, Steve Lombard asks "Is that woman out of her mind? (Morrison, *Absolute* n.p.), and the answer is categorically yes. She is out of her own mind, and, clad in his colours, is achieving communion with not just the individual who is Superman, but the idea, which we will address in the notion of the royal metaphor in the final parts of this analysis. If Lois is passing through the phase of Law to the phase of Wisdom, she echoes Paul in

Galatians: "For through the law I died to law – to live for God…the life I now live is not my life, but the life which Christ lives within me" (*NEV* Galatians 2.19-20).

Lois's adventures as Superwoman are dominated by the appearance of two other mythic strongmen, the Biblical Samson and the Classical Atlas. Here the two are cast as heroes in Superman's mold (or should that be the other way around?), though they are lacking somewhat in his wisdom and compassion. Typologically, if we consider the myths of the classical world and the Biblical within the narrative of *All-Star Superman*, the two are types of which Superman is the antitype. He exhibits their strengths, but none of their weaknesses, thus fulfilling the promise hidden in each of them. Outside of the story, the introduction of two characters from prior *kerygmatic* myths is significant. Lois's prophet / herald status comes into question, as the two men attempt to sway her from Superman's side:

Fig. 13: Atlas and Samson, the Classical and the Biblical, challenge Superman.

While the story within is the "challenge of the ages," a contest of super-feats for the honour of Lois Lane's company, the subtext is the battle between prior systems of belief

and the one being espoused by the text. In the Old Testament, the conflicts between

Israel and its various oppressors is the type of *All-Star Superman*'s textual confrontation.

Israel is beset by Egypt, including its systems of worship, among others. The text of the

Old Testament acknowledges the existence of other systems of belief, and then proceeds

to demonstrate why the new system is better. This chapter of *All-Star Superman*

accomplishes the same task. This commentary of older systems of belief is somewhat

propagandistic, but if a text is indeed part of a typology, and takes part in both a forward

and upward momentum, then part of this momentum is to proclaim both what is and what

is not in the best interests of the people to whom it is speaking. Numbers 33.4, depending

on the version consulted, either depicts God striking down the first-born of Egypt "as a

judgment on their gods" (New English version 190), or taking action against the gods

themselves: "[U]pon their gods also the Lord executed judgments" (King James version

182). Either way, this is an example of a text espousing one system of belief

demonstrating its power over another system of belief. *All-Star Superman* is both as

explicit as this example, and more subtle. While there are physical contests between the

heroes, the words the text actually places in the mouths of the representatives of the old

ways is more damning:

Fig. 14: Samson suggests drinks at the crucifixion.

Here, then, we see Samson, as representative of the Judeo-Christian philosophy treating with great casualness one of the key events of the Christian faith. While in-story we have Superman eventually overpowering and outwitting the two ancient heroes, the text is commenting on how archaic systems of belief have fallen almost into self-parody. Samson's offer to take Lois for "drinks at the crucifixion" is a demonstration of this commentary.

At the chapter's end, yet another belief system enters the playing field, the Egyptian, in the form of the Ultrasphinx, who holds Lois between life and death while waiting for an answer to his question. Again, Superman triumphs, answering the question and saving the day. The avatars of earlier belief systems retreat to their own times and places, and Superman flies Lois to the moon for perhaps the best kiss in the history of comics:

Fig. 15: Lois and Superman, the human and the divine.

This union of the divine and the human contrasts to the treatment Lois has received at the hands of the other avatars of belief, who were the cause of all the danger she faced during her adventures. When Lois asks Superman "Why me?" Superman responds "Well…I guess there has to be one thing I just can't help, Lois" (Morrison, *Absolute* n.p.), that his

need for the human as avatar of a new system of belief, is as strong as the human need for the mythic and divine. Why such a system needs the human is the focus of the next chapter.

The Superman/Jimmy Olsen War!

This chapter focusses on a character who has long been known as "Superman's Pal," and it is worthwhile to take a moment to consider this appellation. What does it mean to be the friend of a divinity? Olsen is so close to Superman that he is among only a few people within the fictional universe to have the ability, via his signal watch, of summoning Superman personally. However, Jimmy's role in the story speaks to much more than him being simply the chosen of Superman. His claim to journalistic fame in *All-Star Superman* is his "For a day" feature, with such titles as "I Was Down and Out in Medieval England[…For a Day]," "I Was America's Sweetheart…For a Day," and, in this particular chapter, "I Was P.R.O.J.E.C.T. Director…For a Day" (*Absolute* n.p.). The feature paints Olsen as an everyman, literally, and thus his interaction with Superman is philosophically everyone's interaction with Superman. This will become more plain as we proceed.

The first part of the chapter takes place on the Moon, in the base of scientific thinktank P.R.O.J.E.C.T. In chapter 1, during the ill-fated sun mission, we are introduced to P.R.O.J.E.C.T.'s director, Leo Quintum, a super-scientist who, not coincidentally I would suggest, wears a coat of many colours. This overtly explicit link to the Old Testament Joseph is a similar usage of such characters as those of the previous chapter,

though a more optimistic one. When explaining metaphor in *The Great Code*, Frye describes the A is B type of metaphor, and explicitly states one about Joseph (78) that will elucidate why Quintum wears this unmistakable garment. "Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well" we are told in Genesis 49.22. In the mythic framework of *All-Star Superman*, Quintum and his think tank represent the other site of faith, often set against divinity, the contemporary religion of science. If Quintum is a Joseph stand-in, then perhaps the pursuit of science is a "fruitful bough" for humankind, and Quintum fulfills within a contemporary mythic framework the same role Joseph does in the archaic. But Olsen asks a question that leads us into his story, and purpose, in the book:

Fig. 16: Jimmy asks the metaphorical question.

We are never given an answer to Jimmy's question. The acronym P.R.O.J.E.C.T.

remains mysterious, but what something stands for is not solely a question of literal

definition. Jimmy's question places the burden on the reader to ask "What does science

stand for?" or, perhaps, "What should science stand for?" and to apply the same

question to the more theological aspects of the book.

One of Jimmy's first encounters at P.R.O.J.E.C.T. base is with a scientist / poet

who has "dedicated [his] existence to explaining the Unified Field in the form of a perfect

haiku" (*Absolute n.p.*), and it is here that we receive another explicit reference to the

composition of the book itself. This P.R.O.J.E.C.T. scientist is combining science with

art, enfolding , we must assume, philosophy, in order to express a fundamental truth.

Superman, as per Stevens' suggestion, comes "from reason," from a scientific culture, but

embodies moral truths through his actions. The book is rife with such meta-moments,

reminders of what the true project of compiling and distilling Superman's mythos is all

about. That this particular moment is revealed to the everyman is of great significance.

The crux of this chapter revolves around the discovery of Black Kryptonite,[17] the

effect of which is to reverse all that Superman stands for. This event is the type for an

antitype we will see in chapter 8, "Us Do Opposite." Important to note here is that from

the benevolent heaven of Krypton, both the beneficent and the corrupt can come. As

Superman rampages through downtown Metropolis, Jimmy demonstrates his importance

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[17] Kryptonite is a fictional element composed of pieces of Superman's home planet. Various different-coloured isotopes exist, each having a different effect on Superman. Green Kryptonite weakens, and eventually kills, him, Gold Kryptonite removes his powers permanently, etc. The use of different colours of Kryptonite goes in and out of style in the comic books. Green is the only isotope that is continuously acknowledged throughout the 70-year history.

not just to his "pal," but to the narrative and the philosophy it espouses. He discovers, within the depths of P.R.O.J.E.C.T.'s base, an emergency plan just in case Superman ever goes rogue. But he does not implement it with the intent of defeat, but of compassion (Fig. 17).

Fig. 17: The human saves the divine.

Under the influence of an element (and we can read that word through the lens of "elemental," or "fundamental"), Superman, and thus the philosophy of the book, becomes corrupted, only to be saved by the everyman Jimmy Olsen, who stops the rampaging divinity through scientific augmentation. Olsen, as Doomsday-Olsen[18], is stopped short of killing the corrupted Man of Steel by a signal from his watch, the very device gifted to him by Superman for the purpose of communication. Science stops corrupt divinity from rampaging, but divinity stops science from slaying divinity. This chapter demonstrates that corruption in religion can stem from exactly the same places that redemption in religion stems from, and that the human is the moderating influence. It is, or should be,

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[18] Doomsday is the creature that, in the mid-90s, famously killed Superman. Morrison folds this part of the mythology into *All-Star Superman* in the guise of a weapon to stop Superman should he ever become evil.

up to us how much influence a moral philosophy has, be it religion or science-based, rather than the other way around.

The Gospel According to Lex Luthor

It is no mistake that this chapter directly follows the Jimmy Olsen chapter. In Jimmy we see a human being, like Lois, who allows the inspiration of the divine Superman to infuse him. Lex is his direct opposite. The OED tells us that "gospel" is "a thing that is absolutely true." Therefore, we must note that the title of the chapter is not the gospel "of" Lex Luthor, but "according to." In this section we have revealed to us the truth the way Lex, Superman's ultimate foe, sees it. First, however, we are treated, through the lens of a courtroom, that bastion of secular truth, to the perspective of society, the gospel about Lex Luthor, so to speak (Fig. 16). Lex Luthor is evil. There seems, at least in the mind of the judge who speaks, no
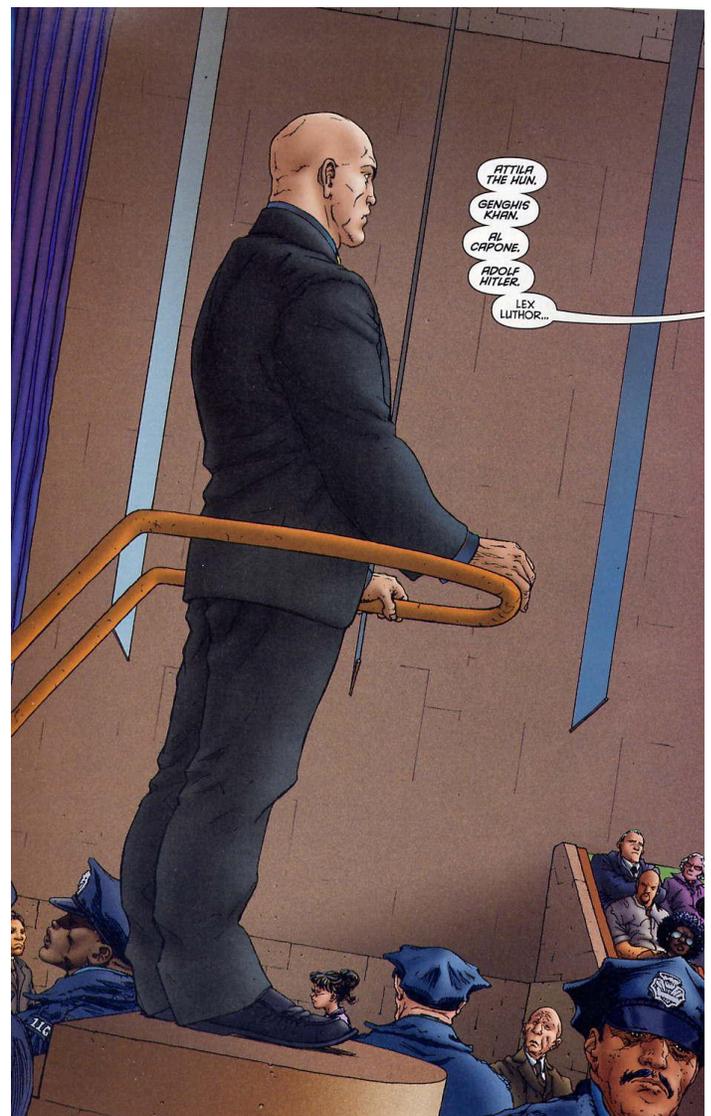
Fig. 18: Lex Luthor faces justice.

doubt about it. He is lumped in with some of the most vicious individuals in history. What should we make of the fact that within this fictional narrative, Lex is included with individuals who had a factual existence in the real world? Surely within the fictional universe there are worse evils than our factual ones, but Lex is instead included with real, human evils from our world. We could perhaps posit an opposite to the historical / mythological dichotomy that surrounds Christ in the histories and myths that surround these notorious figures, something like the aforementioned *Crime Bible*, perhaps.

Having been found guilty, and sentenced to death, Lex is provided the opportunity to tell his story to (of course) Clark Kent. The interview takes place throughout the high security prison in which Luthor resides. In the opening moments of the interview, two significant occurrences take place. First, as Clark walks into Lex's cell, he trips on a wire, unplugging it and saving Luthor from electrocution. Once more we have a moment of interior typology, as the penultimate chapter, and Superman's final challenge, are instigated by the execution of Lex Luthor by electric chair, and by Superman, indirectly, saving him. More pertinent to our perception of Lex's gospel is that he utterly fails to recognize the divinity behind Clark Kent's stumbling save. Much is made in discussions of the character of the thinness of Superman's mundane disguise. Some artists simply draw Superman with glasses, but others, such as Frank Quitely in *All-Star Superman*, show that the disguise is a complete change of everything about Superman's physicality. Note in the following panels (Fig. 19) the depiction of Clark Kent, how different it is from Superman, and Lex's comic / pathetic obliviousness. If the disguise fools one of the smartest men on the planet, it must be quite convincing.
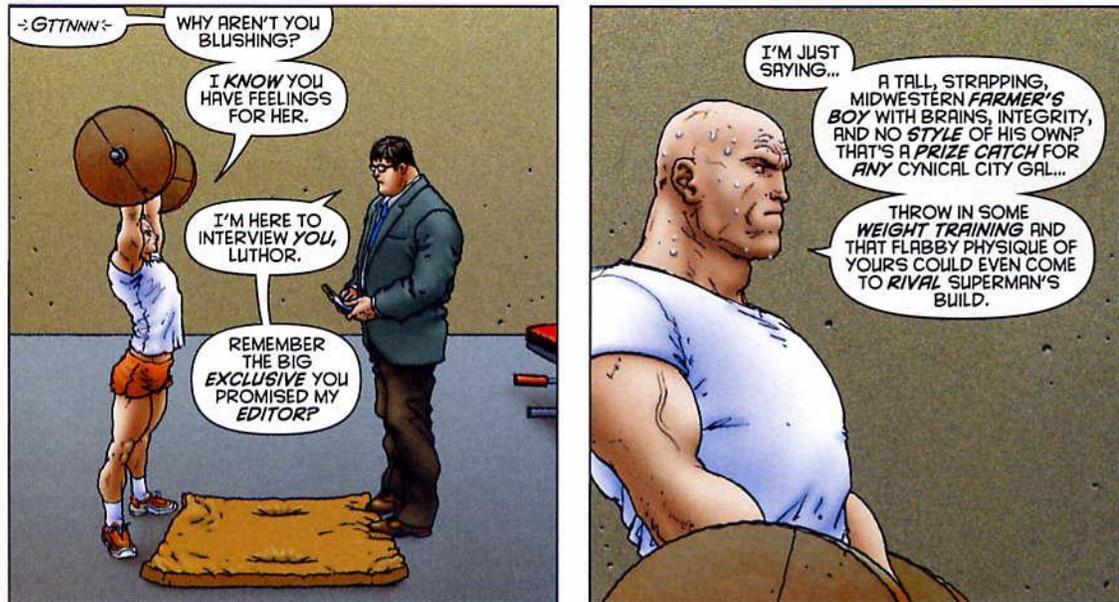
Fig. 19: Superman's disguise, and Lex's obliviousness.

Superman's desire to pass for human is an important part of this chapter, though it will have to wait until we have properly analysed Luthor. Near the end of this same weight-training portion of the interview, in reference to Superman, Lex says "We all fall short of that sickening, inhuman perfection, that impossible ideal" (*Absolute* n.p.). It would be easy to read this as yet another critique within the text of earlier belief systems, and we can certainly accredit this to the aspects of sacred stories that my proposed literary typology is tracing. It could also be said, though perhaps in not such disparaging terms, that what Lex says is a foundation of many popular religions. Falling short of something often inspires one to improve. However, Lex Luthor is a fundamentally egotistical person. We see here, in the comparison between Lex and Clark, a comparison of what Frye calls royal metaphors (*Code* 115), a fundamental aspect of sacred stories. In the

final moments of his interview, after having shown Kent an escape tunnel created using "*Moby Dick…*recited at frequencies so high…[it] becomes a sonic drill capable of carving through solid rock," Lex reveals his fatal flaw: "I'm a born dictator" he tells Kent, screaming after him as he sails away "If it wasn't for Superman, I'd be in charge on this planet!" (Morrison, *Absolute* n.p.). Lex uses a great work of literature to build himself an escape tunnel that he never uses. From a particular perspective, this is a fiction providing salvation, and he chooses to ignore it. Where the salvation in *Moby-Dick* might come from the recognition of Ahab's destructive obsession, Lex provides an example of the dangers of ignoring the fictions we create. He uses the physical existence of the text as a tool without paying attention to the contents of the myth. Here is a critique of one way that the writers feel that archaic systems of belief have come to be used. Claiming to have God on one's side in an armed conflict ignores the lessons of non-violence in the body of the text. In some ways, Lex's ignorance of fiction could also be part of the reason he never recognizes Superman in disguise. He just does not believe that a fiction could have so much power, and focusses only on the physical container before him. (We should also take note that at the bottom of the escape tunnel, a boat awaits Clark Kent in an underground river. The walls and the water are the colour of blood. Kent has travelled down into the underworld here, following Morrison and Quitely's intentional path, and the following chapters move into this underworld, both of the past, and of a cold and dying universe that exists below his own.)

Lex's declaration allows a more complete understanding of Superman's disguise as Clark Kent. Frye describes the Antichrist as "the effort to conceive the state as a

single body incarnate in its leader, the 'Ein Reich, Ein Volk, Ein Fürher' of Hitler's Germany" (*Great Code* 125), and from his assertions, this is Lex's ultimate goal. It is interesting that Lex is compared to Hitler at the chapter's beginning, and that Hitler is the negative aspect of the royal metaphor for Frye. Superman, or rather, Clark Kent, then, is the positive aspect, and more, he is the royal metaphor turned into the Christian metaphor that "unites without subordinating," that "achieves identity *with* and identity *as* on equal terms" (*Code* 131, emphasis in original). What Lex fails to realize is the extent of Superman's devotion to the people he protects, an extent that bears out Frye's assertion that, when the royal metaphor is applied to a saviour figure, "the notion of a socially detached individual is an illusion" (*Code* 129). This idea is borne out by Paul's words "not I, but Christ liveth within me" (Gal. 2.20), and also affirmed by the ritual of the Eucharist. This is the saviour whose individuality teaches unity, whose personality helps a community become compassionate persons. Thus, in his guise as Clark Kent, Superman demonstrates the subsumption of the divine into the mundane as a way of bridging the divide between the divine and the mortal, of being the divinity that is also part of the community, and vice versa. Like Lois, and like Jimmy, Clark Kent is the human infused by the divine, the presence of Superman in the form and community of humankind. As further evidence of this, the next chapter gives us a genesis of sorts.

One last significant aspect of this chapter to note is that, during a riot in the prison, whenever Lex's life is in danger, Superman still finds a way of saving him. Even after discovering that his inevitable death is due to Luthor's machinations, Superman saves him again and again. The first, the primary lesson, that life is sacred, is reiterated

over and over throughout the text. Superman does not call for retribution on his enemies, but shows them compassion. Though there is no explicit link, here, too, we can see a critique of more archaic systems of belief.

Funeral in Smallville

This chapter, though situated in the center of the text, is in many ways our Genesis analogue. It is one of a number of instances throughout the text in which we are invited to consider the origin of Superman, both within and without the fictional universe. The elements of Superman's factual origin (i.e. in our "real" world) resonate significantly with chapter 10, in which the character's creation is explicitly explored.

As Clark Kent is ferried through the underworld at the end of the last chapter, so now are *All-Star Superman's* readers ferried through the historical depths that underlie Superman's story. In essence, on the very first page (Fig. 4), we are given the genesis of Superman, but not his creation, so to speak. We witness the events that placed the infant Kal-El into the care of Martha and Jonathan Kent, but not the circumstances under which he becomes a force of good. This chapter gives ample evidence that the force for good that Superman eventually becomes is a direct result of the intervention of mortal humans, that his divinity is sourced in the mundane. This conception can, of course, be applied both to the events of the story we are witnessing, and to the aforementioned creation in 1938 of the character by Siegel and Shuster. We see a reaction to the human source, and humanness, of the young Clark Kent through the eyes of Calvin Elder, the Superman of A.D. 85250, witnessing his progenitor for the first time (Fig. 20). This reaction of a

fictional character is symbolic of the way we, as readers, must react to Superman in the *All-Star* iteration. That such a force for good, one so infused with morality, could come from such humble beginnings is, as Calvin Elder whispers, "incredible." It illustrates for us one of the fundamental lessons of both Superman and the text, that the human being is capable of anything, regardless of beginnings. Kal-El,

Fig. 20: Calvin Elder meets Clark Kent.

when he fell from Krypton, did indeed have an advantage physically over the human population within which he found himself, but mentally, morally, he came from exactly the same place that everyone does, and as such, he demonstrates what we can become. This is a vital aspect of our literary typology. The sacred stories we are tracing, regardless of faith-tradition, are deeply concerned with what their readers can, and will, become.

The final pages of this chapter offer some challenges in our interpretation of the book. The end of this section is the very center of the text and the narrative that it contains. At the funeral of Jonathan Kent, Clark stands and delivers a eulogy. We are dropped into it partway through, in time to hear Clark's acknowledgement that it was from his adoptive father that he learned all the lessons that eventually make him into Superman. It is a section worth considering as a whole:

>…Jonathan Kent taught me that the strong have to stand up for the weak and that
>
>bullies don't like being bullied back. He taught me that a good heart is worth
>
>more than all the money in the bank. He taught me about life and death. He
>
>taught me that the measure of a man lies not in what he says but what he does.
>
>And he showed me by example how to be tough, and how to be kind and how to
>
>dream of a better world. Thanks, Pa. Those are lessons I'll never forget.
>
>(Morrison, *Absolute* n.p.)

We are given not only the physical and narrative center of the text, but the moral one

also. Here, over the coffin of his father, we learn the primary lessons that compel

Superman to do what he does. And while the action of the funeral is set in a church,

there are no crosses in evidence in the background, nor any mention of God or the

Christian faith. We are meant to see that the moral compass of Superman comes from

humanity, not divinity.

Another of the final images of this chapter is something that introduces an

element to literary typology that requires some attention. After the revelation that one of

the mysterious Supermen is actually Superman of the twenty-first century, "the leader of

the Superman Squad" (Morrison, *Absolute* n.p.) makes an appearance, a shining golden

champion who looks suspiciously familiar. In a previous Superman story, set over

800000 years in the future, Morrison created this character as the original Superman,

returned from his time within the sun (see chapter 12). As such, this interaction, coupled

with the appearance of a young Clark Kent in this chapter, demonstrate an interaction of

type and antitype that is only possible in the non-linear worlds of fiction, specifically

those that deal with time travel. Typological reading, though different from historical

reading, still relies on a linear direction of history. Though the type foretells, it does not

exist, in most cases, concurrently with the antitype. Here, though, we have the existence

of the type and antitype (young Superman and twenty-first century Superman), and then,

again, the type and antitype (twenty-first century Superman and the leader of the

Superman Squad). Does this negate the typological reading, in that type and antitype

have the ability to exist at the same time? I think not, but only demonstrates that such a

fiction reinforces the proof of the type / antitype relationship. It returns us, far more

concretely, to the Old Testament / New Testament framework, where one is true by virtue

of the other. We see here, through interaction of the types and antitypes, that the

prophecy of Superman is inarguably true. These glimpses of antitypes (as we do not get

all of future-Superman's story) are proof of the inevitability of his eternal nature.

Being Bizarro

Earlier in the book, as Jimmy Olsen takes the reins of P.R.O.J.E.C.T., he is shown

a portal into the Underverse, a universe that neighbours our own, vaguely described as

being below, though what significance such a term of directionality can possibly have

when speaking of neighbouring universes is debatable. This sense of vertical alignment

is more usefully considered in terms of the post-Romantic Axis Mundi[19], and Superman's

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[19] At various points through the text, the Axis Mundi seems to flip. Wisdom and knowledge are variously depicted as being sourced in both higher and lower realms, so perhaps we are looking at an Ironic Axis Mundi, in which we can see the value in knowledge from all levels, and thus that there are really no levels at all.

eventual descent into the Underverse presents us with a type to the later antitype of his

ascent into the Sun. We should also note that the idea of neighbouring universes

corresponds to the brane-world model of spacetime. A brane is "[a]n object…that can

have a variety of spatial dimensions" and a brane world is "[a] four-dimensional surface

or brane in a higher-dimensional spacetime," (Hawking 202), such that "we would live

on one brane but there would be another 'shadow' brane nearby" (184). We do not need

to investigate this concept any further than to note that it reinforces the Genesis-style

creation of the universe that is absent in chapter 1. Again, Superman's universe is based

fundamentally on the scientific myths we accept as true.

Moving now into the second half of the book, carrying with us the fundamentals

of Superman, and his nemesis, we are given two stories about the misinterpretation of a

divine message. Chapters 7 and 8 depict the incursion of a foreign system of belief into

Superman's world, and his

subsequent journey into that world.

The bizarros, arriving on their

cube-world from the underverse,

attack Metropolis and take the

forms of the people in the city.

Once again it is our "fruitful

bough" who provides a key to

understanding the behaviour of the

Fig. 21: Quintum explains the Underverse.

75

bizarros, and how we might parse them in comparison to Superman (Fig. 21). We could say that one of the functions of Superman's Clark Kent guise is "to mimic…to appear less threatening," much as the Bizarro-World planet eater does. Further, the "highly contagious infra-material" could very well be another way of talking about the sorts of sacred stories that comprise our literary typology. Recall Renee Montoya's description of the Crime Bible as "seductive." Are we then seeing in the existence of the text of *All-Star Superman* a "highly contagious infra-material[20]," seductive in its charms? Perhaps.

The desire of the bizarros, and Bizarro-Superman in particular is to change everyone into bizarros. In this way their mission is a misinterpretation, or perhaps misrepresentation, of the meaning of the morality espoused by *All-Star Superman*. As we saw Lex Luthor misinterpreting the royal metaphor into the Antichrist totalitarian metaphor, so now we see the communal aspect of the Christian metaphor misinterpreted by the bizarros. Superman also attempts to infuse himself into everyone, but through a doctrine that embraces individuality, rather than the homogeneity of the bizarros. Such a misinterpretation harkens to some of the more notorious organizations that have developed under the framework of Christianity, where ostensibly positive moral values, from a humanistic moral point of view, disastrously misinterpret religious doctrine. The Branch Davidians are a good example of "how a religious movement can go seriously awry" (Barrett 119), in that the church began as an off-shoot of the Seventh-day Adventists, but was ostensibly perverted by David Koresh, "a powerful and probably

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[20] The OED defines the adverb "infra" as below or further on. In the case of the story, it is a material from a universe below the primary one, but in the context of the narrative, an infra-material is something that is further on from the material. A work that explicitly and intentionally echoes *kerygma* seems to be a more material immateriality, being morality contained within a material frame.

unscrupulous leader looking for a following" (120). The ensuing tragedy at Waco that

forever sealed the Branch Davidians in infamy demonstrates what can happen when the

Christian metaphor of the communal messiah is appropriated by someone who wholly

misinterprets the positive messages of a holy work. And so it is with the bizarros. They,

in their strange backward speech, "[w]ant all you am no become bizarro!" (Morrison,

Absolute n.p.). I have called the bizarros foreign, and perhaps that appellation requires

some explanation; they are, after all, humanoids that seem to think like we do. Foreign in

this sense is connected to the title of chapter 8, "Us Do Opposite." Perhaps rather than a

foreign system of belief, it is a foreign interpretation of belief, an opposite one, which is

about as foreign as we can imagine without something becoming unimaginable. Further,

perhaps opposite is the worst we can imagine of ourselves. But as Superman flies off,

having forced the bizarros off Earth, he finds himself upon Bizarro-World. And though

they seem opposite, he comes to realize that this does not mean that the bizarros are

incomprehensible. In chapter 8, we witness the ubiquity of Superman's benevolence, and

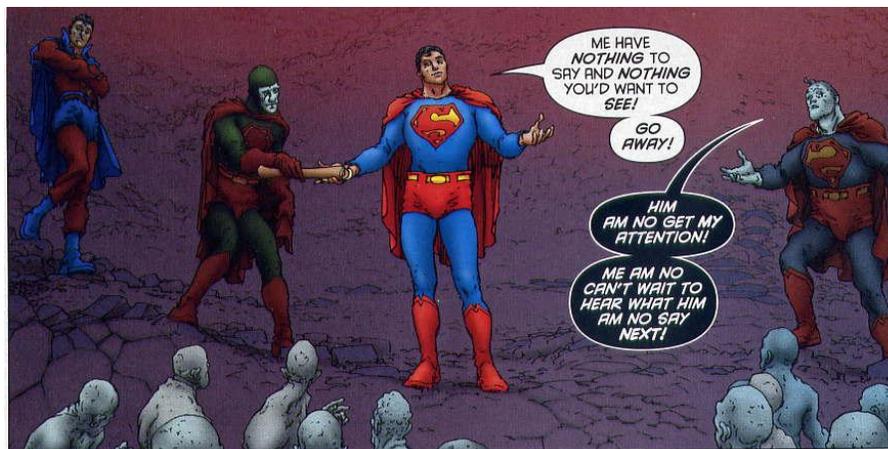his own story writ small in the character of Zibarro.

Fig. 22: Superman adapts to the Bizarro world.

Us Do Opposite

While trapped on the retreating Bizarro-Home, Superman's interactions with both Zibarro and the bizarro clones demonstrate yet another of the lessons of the Man of Steel. In trying to elicit help from the backwards-speaking bizarros, Superman takes on their strange way of speaking (Fig. 22), and in doing so, makes himself understood to the inhabitants of the backwards world. Later in the chapter, Zibarro, the only free-thinking inhabitant of the cube-world, tells Superman "I can't bear to hear you talking like that. Superman, please…don't sink to their level" (*Absolute* n.p.). What Zibarro fails to understand is that Superman is not sinking, but raising himself constantly to a level of both understanding and being understood by whomever he is addressing.

As the bizarros prepare to send Superman home, the internal typology of the Superman myth is brought to the forefront. Strapped to a rocket on a dying world, Superman tells Zibarro, whom he earlier refers to as "proof that Bizarro-Home is getting smarter" (*Absolute* n.p.) to tell his myth, thus proliferating the ideals for which he stands.

Fig. 23: Superman's last instructions to Zibarro.

If we can consider the bizarros as an example of the misinterpretation of

Superman's myth by those who have heard the story, we must also consider, ironically,

the opposite. In the next chapter of the book, we see the Superman ethos untempered by

his human upbringing, in the form of two lost Kryptonian astronauts.

Curse of the Replacement Supermen

Upon his return from the Underverse, Superman is greeted by a Metropolis

enhanced by Kryptonian architecture. Jimmy Olsen is wearing "Kryptonian overpants"

(*Absolute* n.p.), a wry acknowledgment of the age-old question of why Superman wears

his underwear on the outside[21]. Lost Kryptonian astronauts Bar-El and Lilo have landed

on Earth, and are determined to turn the planet into a new Krypton. As with the earlier

chapter that dealt with Egyptian, Greek, and Hebrew belief systems, this chapter is

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[21] The contemporary reinterpretation in both the comics and the upcoming film have done away with the red trunks, much to the consternation of many fans.

investigating the imposition of, or providing a reflection upon, older systems of belief

and whether or not they can exist in the contemporary world. Further, though, this

chapter is investigating the necessary human influence upon systems of belief, and sets

the stage for the next chapter's foregrounding of this idea. Upon his first meeting with

his Kryptonian cousins, the difference between their points of view is made plain (Fig.

24).

Fig. 24: Superman meets Bar-El and Lilo.

The critiquing of older systems of belief seems to be a fundamental part of holy books.

In earlier chapters we saw a comparison of type to antitype in the conflict between Atlas

and Samson, and Superman. Here, we have the Kryptonians who are types to

Superman's antitype, so the text now deals explicitly with the typology of the fictional

history of Superman. This intentional investigation and refinement of ethical frameworks

is a fundamental aspect in considering whether or not a work fits into our literary

typology. Returning to the Bible, the Egyptians are cast quite villainously in the Old

Testament. Frye points out that "[i]n the time of Ezra and Nehemiah all the returning

Jews married to foreign wives were compelled to get rid of them" (*Words With Power* 198), a movement toward keeping the spiritual sanctity of Judaism pure. Bar-El and Lilo advocate just such a course of action on Earth. As Superman confronts the two about their devastating plans for the planet, Bar-El casts an accusation: "You betrayed your heritage. You went native" (Morrison, *Absolute* n.p.). Once again in the Old Testament, Jeremiah speaks of "the destruction of an older generation and a granting of the promise to a new one…of a new covenant or testament…to be made with a new generation of Israel…[that] will be more individualized and 'spiritual' than the old one" (Frye, *Code* 226). Such a prophecy could be applied to the problem of Superman and his returned kin. We are faced with the application in contemporary times of a system of thought that is archaic. Bar-El and Lilo become literal representations of this problem as the elements in their bodies begin to convert to Kryptonite, and they are poisoned from within. Thus the chapter metaphorically represents the literal poisoning of contemporary thought by frameworks that are no longer useful, but also the poisoning of those frameworks themselves through a reluctance, or an inability, to adapt. Superman tempers his Kryptonian heritage with human wisdom and knowledge. His is an adapted revelation, a mixture of that from the old which works and that of the new which is necessary.

This fusion of belief is encapsulated in a term that is first used as an accusation against Superman, and then as a confirmation of his identity. Bar-El, in an obligatory fist fight with Superman, calls him "[a] soft wee[22] scientist's son!" (Morrison, *Absolute* n.p.)

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[22] Both Morrison and Quitely are Scotsmen, and very often the influence of that country will find its way into even their American work. In this case it provides some suggestion of differing dialects, and perhaps cultures, on the planet Krypton.

This is meant as an insult to Superman, the implication being that a scientist stands around and observes, and is not the man of action that Bar-El feels is necessary for the situation. Moses, too, could be called a man of action, but as we see in the transition from Old to New Testament, the man of action ceases to be fundamental in the dictums of Christianity, and the contemplative man, in the person of Jesus, replaces him. As the poison in their bodies begins to kill the two astronauts, Superman reverts to his most basic motivation, telling Bar-El "Let me help. There's always a way" (*Absolute* n.p.). While helping, Superman explains the combination of old Kryptonian and new human morality that informs his existence (Fig. 25 and 26).
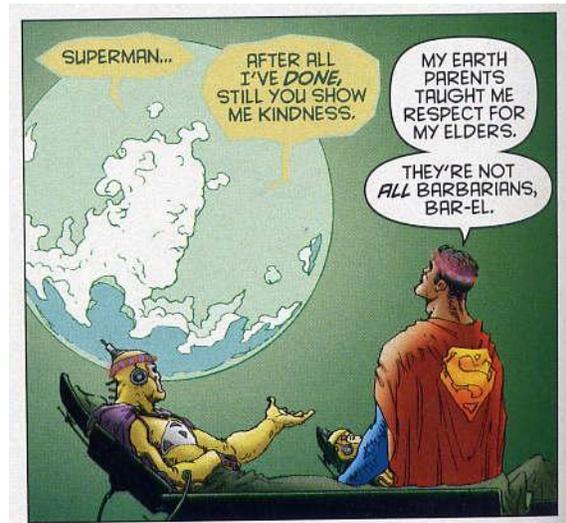

Fig. 25: Superman explains things to Bar-El.

Fig. 26:Superman further explains things to Bar-El.

Here, where Superman repeats the "scientist's son" accusation as a mark of pride, he both reiterates and gives new insight into the book's purpose. These moments of almost-address to the reader culminate in the next chapter and are signs that a work is echoing the *kerygmatic*. The works in this literary typology are adept at calling attention to their lessons while maintaining the suspension of disbelief that a successful fiction requires. This particular moment also resonates with the critique and acknowledgment of earlier systems of belief. Jesus, too, was a scientist's son, if we consider God as a scientist of sorts. But he was also a carpenter's son, and so, in his stories, is able to discern the need for practical applications of theoretical principles. Superman is the son of Jor-El and Lara, scientists on Krypton, but also of Kansas farmers Martha and Jonathan Kent. He, too, understands the importance of not just thinking about things, but doing them too. We are also witnessing here the influence upon a celestial moral framework of the human mind. Superman is about adaptation and flexibility, necessary aspects in redeemers and, importantly, in redemptive literature. Bar-El and Lilo bring the morality of Krypton, untempered by the human morality Superman has received, so we see the power of the redeemer, and the attendant literature, without the human morality needed for the contemporary context. This chapter is, in part, about the reliance on old values versus the reinterpretation for contemporary contexts. By asserting his identity as a scientist's son, Superman reinforces that his myth grows from a scientific age. If the Bible were to address its readers in this way, it might say "I'm a theologian's son," though the divide between theology and science was far more blurry at the time of its composition[23].

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[23] Some might say, given the belief we place in science, that the divide is still blurry.

Superman's words and actions in this book seem to be re-building the bridge between theology and science, blending the two in ways with which parties on both sides might be very uncomfortable. But science is our mythology now, and Superman, as Stevens put it, "comes / …from reason."

Before moving on to the lynchpin chapter of the book, we must momentarily jump back to the beginning of this chapter. At the end of the Underverse adventure, Superman is tossed by his bizarro counterpart, while strapped to a rocket, back into his own universe. The rocket in the opening pages of chapter 9, crashes in a wheat field. Though there is no statement as such, we can assume that he lands again in Kansas, thus becoming his own antitype. And, as we will see, and indeed have seen in the time travel adventure of an earlier chapter, in demonstrating this cyclic nature of his myth, he also becomes his own type.

Neverending

This chapter is the point at which the book begins to address itself as a moral text, taking on a sentience, almost, saying "This is where you've been, as a reader and as a species, and it has led to the very book you are reading." The chapter follows three stories that interweave to demonstrate the effect that the book is having in the real world. We see Superman in his fortress, writing his last will and testament, but also follow him through various adventures that do not involve the typical superhero brawls (there is one, but this is, after all, a superhero comic). A third narrative is set on a version of the planet

Earth that Superman constructs in a baby universe in order to ascertain what will happen to the planet once he dies. He wants to see what a world without Superman will look like. This world is, of course, our own, and as we will see and, indeed, as we know, it does not have to endure without a Superman.

The first clue to the importance of this chapter is that, on the second page, it is referred to specifically as a "testament." Once again this is a reference to earlier religious works, but not one of a critical perspective. Instead, it is using familiar religious language to direct us to the importance of not only this chapter, but the work as a whole. What we might take from this is that the whole work is a testament, a new one, which places the work as an antitype of the more famous Testaments that have preceded it. This is not to say that it is carrying on the Judeo-Christian tradition, but that it is being situated within that continuum of moral stories that inform, or have the potential to inform, our culture.

Rather than attempting a summary of the chapter followed by analysis, I will work through both simultaneously. Also, I will not attempt to faithfully cite every instance from the book that I mention, but will trust that the reader understands that all of this information, unless otherwise noted, comes from chapter 10 of *All-Star Superman.* We open with Superman having taken a busload of young cancer victims on a trip to the pyramids in Egypt, which is juxtaposed with scenes of Superman composing his will. This then is followed with a trip by Leo Quintum into the bottle city of Kandor[24] in an

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[24] Kandor is a Kryptonian city that was shrunk by the villainous robot Brainiac, and now exists in a small glass case in Superman's fortress. The shrinking process is permanent. Though this might take something

attempt to solve the problem of their size. Here we see another application of the human influencing the Kryptonian, or the divine, as it comes to be seen in the text. Quintum proposes a solution to the Kandorians' problem that no one has thought of before, and demonstrates the same lesson that the previous chapter espouses. The human influence is vital to the continued relevance of an ancient dictum, and can lead to reinventions that revolutionize what was once revolutionary thought.

Quintum's journey is followed by perhaps the most important page in the book (Fig. 27). While the argument has been made for Superman as a Christ-figure, and I myself have argued his

Fig.27: The creation of Earth-Q.

lineage with both Moses and Jesus, here he becomes the antitype of all creator figures.
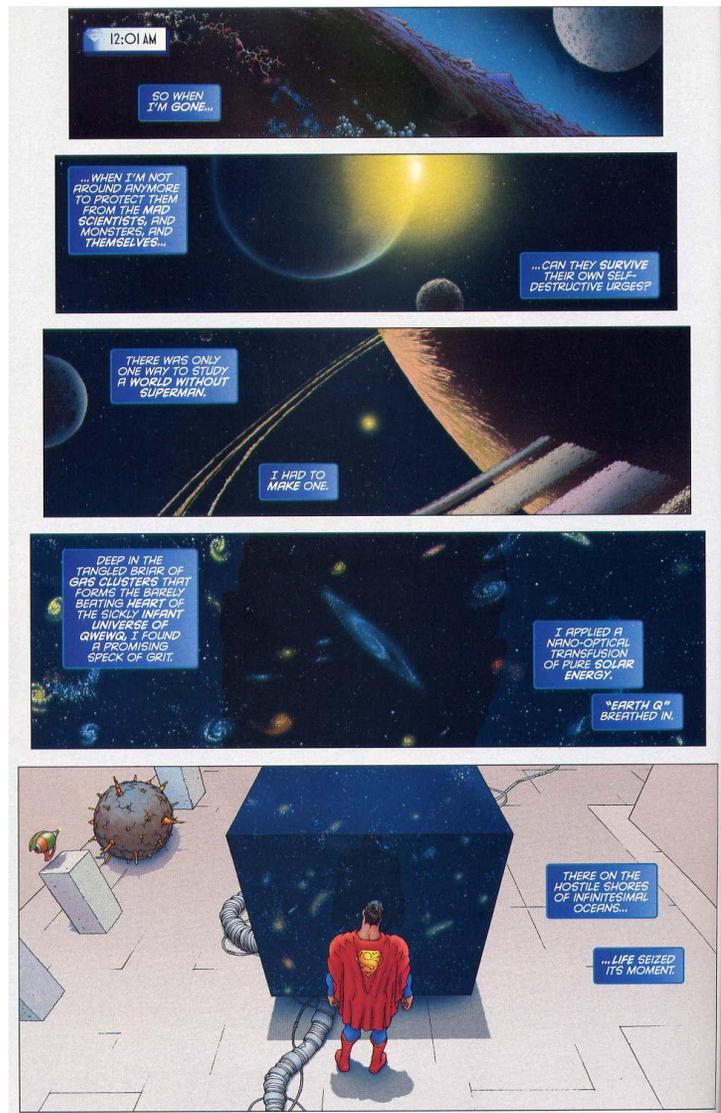
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away from Superman's status as the last son of Krypton, the Kandorians are microscopic compared to regular-sized humans, and as such have been ineffectual for most of their existence in the mythos.

What if we were to apply such a notion to accepted religious creators? When God, in the Judeo-Christian myths, created the universe and the Earth, was it because he wanted to see what an existence without his direct presence would look like? This "sickly infant universe" and the Earth within it we will return to, but there is a structural factor of which we should take notice. The universe within which Superman conducts this experiment is called "Qwewq," and the Earth within it is designated, later in the chapter, "Earth-Q." I have already pointed out that the one new character in this work is Leo Quintum, and I have already suggested that Quintum is a cipher for the reader and for humanity's impulse to curiosity. We talk of rhythms in works of poetry, of drama, and to a certain extent, of prose. Much as an alliterative line pulls our attention in a work of poetry, I would suggest this letter "Q," an uncommon letter in our language, pulls our attention to the important details of the text. We might also consider that, in general, the letter "Q" is invariably followed by the letter "U" in English, or "you," speaking phonetically. If Quintum is a reader-analogue, and Earth-Q our own world, then it follows that references to these aspects of the story should be followed by "you," the reader. Morrison plays with this kind of rhythm in an earlier work, *The Doom Patrol*, by inserting images in the background that recur through the early stages of the series. Rhythm in a fusion medium like comic books is complex, and well worth extended study, but not here. What is pertinent is that the notion of rhythm and its use in drawing our attention to important aspects of a work, is fundamental to our canonical literature, and is here being demonstrated in marginal superhero literature. After introducing Earth-Q, the story moves on to the obligatory fight scene, in which Superman rescues Lois from a giant

robot. Afterwards, Lois reveals that Quintum has told her of Superman's imminent demise, and when called on this, Quintum says "It seemed wrong that you should bear this alone" (Morrison, *Absolute* n.p.). Again, Quintum stands in for the human, the reader, influencing the decisions and the existence of the divine Superman. He demonstrates that we can bring our own points of view to the moralities that are supposed to govern us, and indeed that we must in order for those moralities to be of any use whatsoever. Moving on, as Superman and Lois try to deal with this revelation, Superman overhears a desperate conversation and rushes away to stop a young girl from throwing herself from a building. This girl believes her therapist has abandoned her, though we see him in an earlier panel being held up by an emergency that Superman prevents. Though this chapter does dwell heavily on the metatextual resonances of

All-Star Superman, it also demonstrates what

Fig.28: Saving Regan.

we could call another of the lessons of the text, the interconnectedness of everything. The whirlwind of adventures that we witness, and

the way in which they are presented, demonstrate that everything affects everything else, and that no one thing is more important than another. When Superman stops the girl from committing suicide (Fig. 28), it is no less epic, no less affective, than his rescue of the sun mission at the book's beginning.

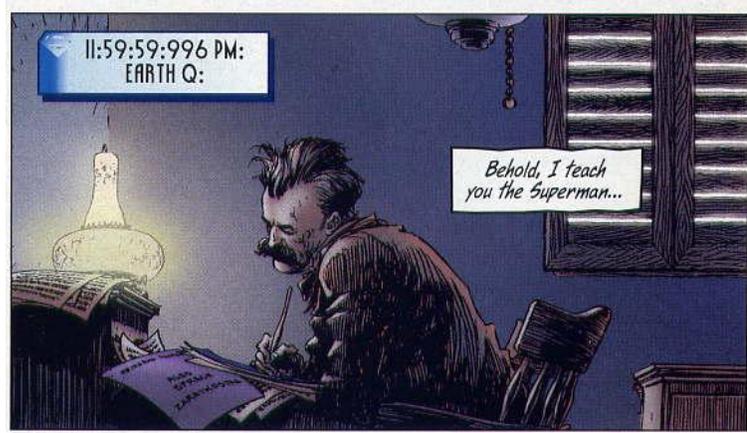Earth-Q now begins to make a number of appearances (Fig. 29).
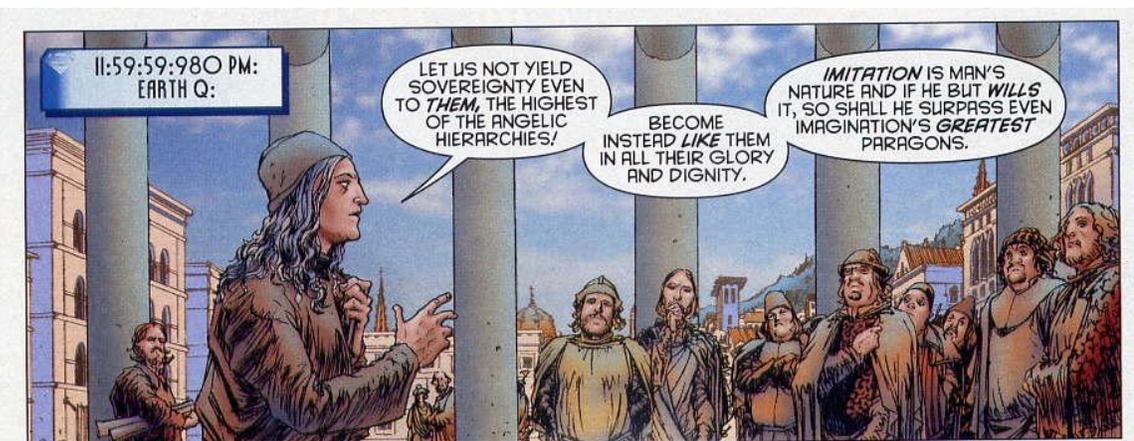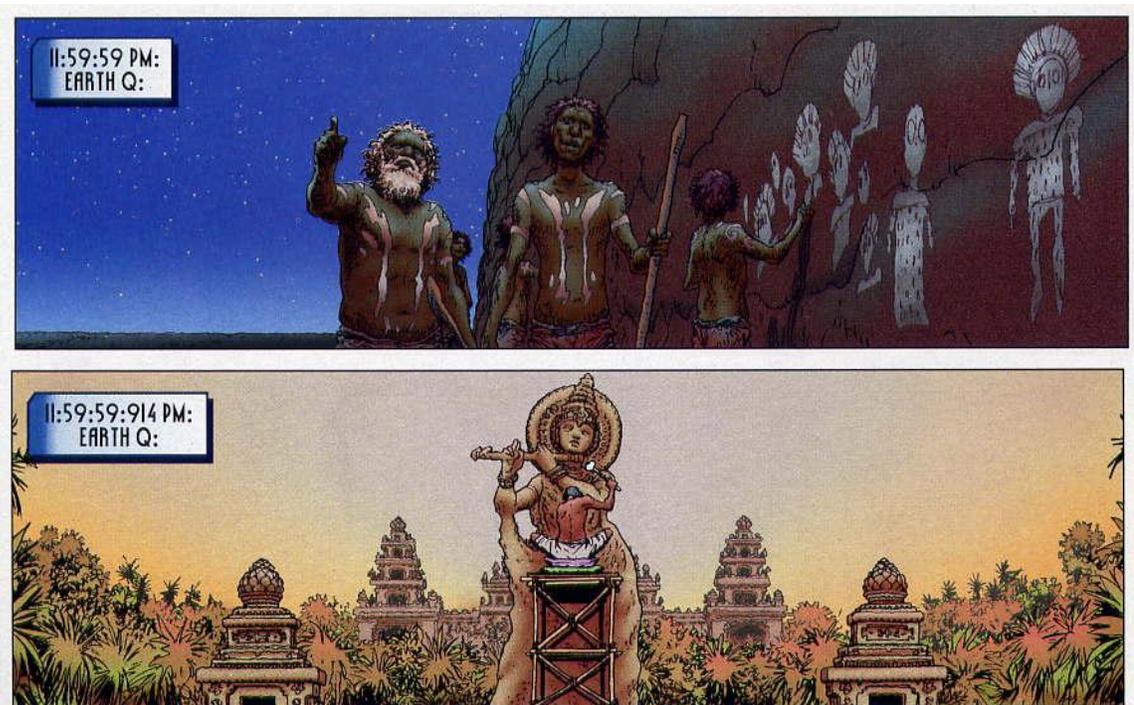
Fig.29: Four moments from the history of Earth-Q

Our first look at the planet shows Australian aboriginals painting on a rock wall, Uluru, perhaps. The second is a sculptor carving a Buddha in what appears to be the jungles of Indonesia. Next we see Count Giovanni Pico della Mirandola "seizing his moment in the piazza" (*Supergods* 413), followed by Nietzsche's coining of the term that is yet another form of genesis for the text. This is not the last we see of Earth-Q, but it becomes evident from these scenes, scenes of our own history, that the history of a world without Superman is much the same as our own. The humanist trajectory that Stevens addresses in "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" is the one that is celebrated by these glimpses of the development of Earth-Q. There is one more glimpse that solidifies everything, but we must view it in relation to Superman's final act in this section, and his return to the cancer ward in which chapter 10 begun.

The microscopic Kandorians attempt a mission inside the Man of Steel to halt the disintegration of his cells from within. The mission is ultimately unsuccessful, but it gives Superman an idea. He carries the Kandorians within him, and returns to the

hospital ward he visited at the beginning of the chapter. As he releases the Kandorians to

cure the childrens' ailments (Fig. 30), notice the tiny figure at the right of the panel.
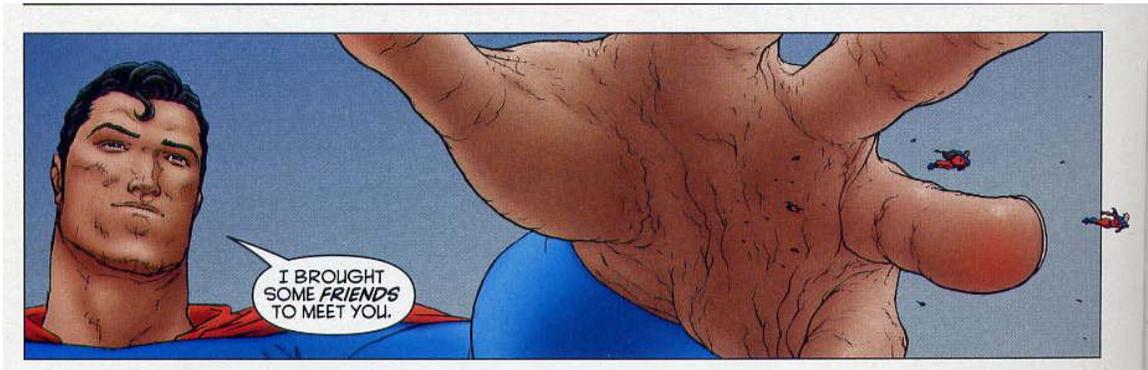

Fig. 30: The Kandorians leave the page.

This is another structural moment that is singularly important. This tiny figure is

flying into what is called "the gutter," the space between panels. Scott McCloud

describes it as "the limbo…[in which] the human imagination takes two separate images

and transforms them into a single idea" (McCloud 66). Let us consider then the

significance of this small Kryptonian, influenced by Superman's ethos, flying into the

space normally reserved for actions of the human imagination. We must then couple this

image with the one that follows, our last look at Earth-Q, in a tenement building in New

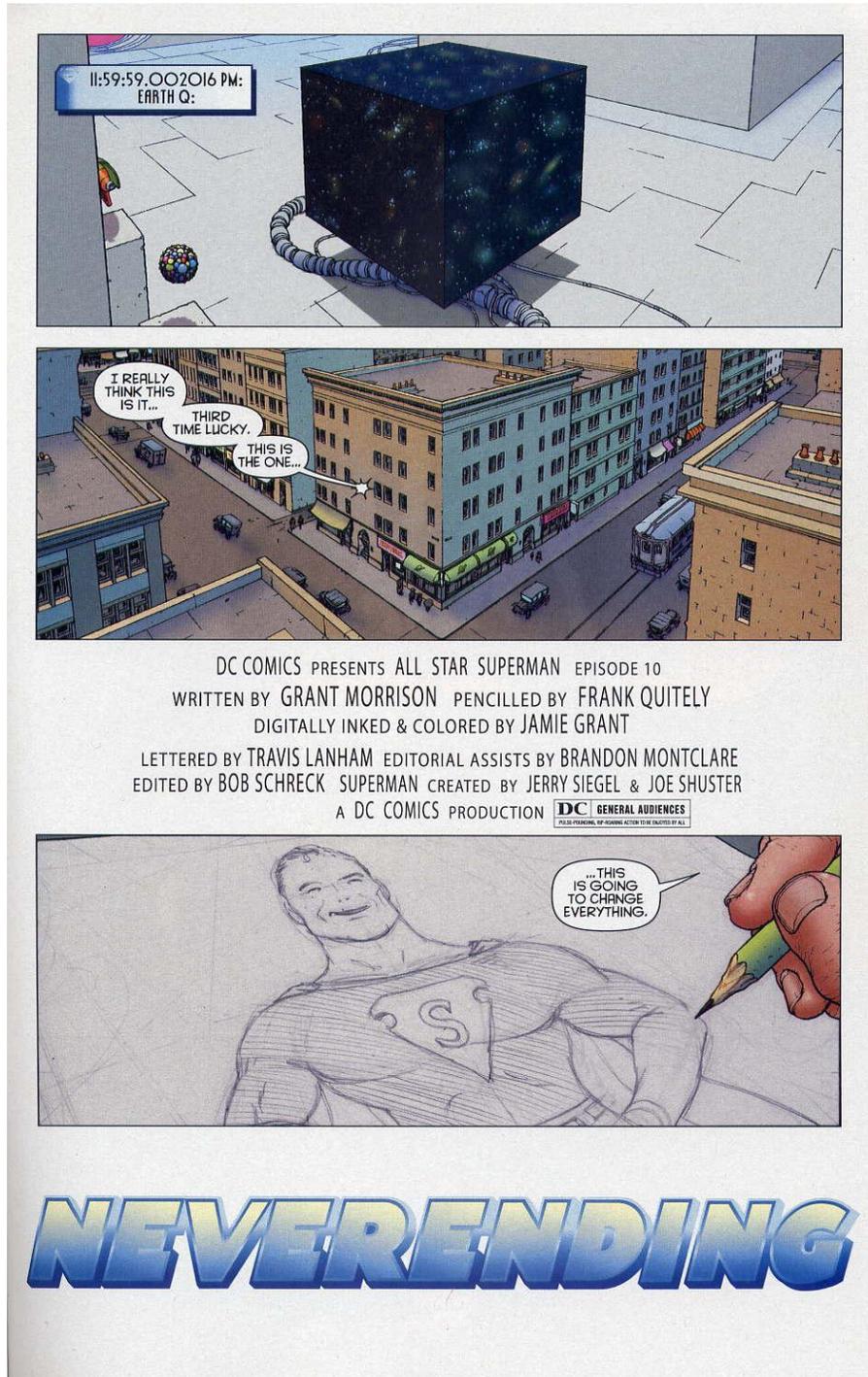York city. Here we are truly given our missing genesis:

Fig. 31: The origin of Superman.

Earth-Q, the world without Superman, is our own world. In a world lacking a benign alien being who cares for us all, we take the obvious step of creating him. And though I am specifically referencing Superman here, it could be any benign alien being. In a wonderfully circular fashion, as we are gazing at the creation in our own world of the Man of Steel, his representatives on the previous page fly from their own world and into the space of the human imagination. If we couple this with the previous glimpses of Earth-Q, the artistic, philosophical moments of definition, Superman's creation becomes much more than simply a young man's doodle; it becomes the creation of an idea that wants to save us all and, by implication, a culmination of the vast literary and artistic typological narrative. As if to further reinforce this notion of salvation, a page earlier, Superman hands to Leo Quintum, our reader analogue, a serum that enables the combination of human and Kryptonian DNA, a scientific way of synthesizing the combination of ethic and philosophy that we are witnessing unfold on the page in front of us, and it is these very pages that are our own Super-Eucharist. Much like Christ, when Superman realizes he is dying, he finds a way to impart this knowledge of unity to humankind before he departs. This knowledge takes the form of a serum that fulfills the type of the Eucharist with a super-powered antitype. Similarly, after the Last Supper and his resurrection, Christ tells his disciples that those who believe in what he preached will be able to "cast out devils" (Mark 16:17) and "drink any deadly thing [and], it shall not hurt them" (Mark 16:18). Believers will even be able to "lay hands on the sick and they shall recover" (Mark 16:18). These amazing feats, if put into contemporary language, could easily be called super powers, making both Christ's and Superman's legacies

amazing abilities that will foster peace amongst humankind. All that remains now is the revelation, the apocalypse, the fulfillment of Superman's story.

Red Sun Day

The last two chapters of *All-Star Superman* are something of an anticlimax, at least in terms of the present analysis. Superman's final adventure reiterates all of the lessons that have been previously elucidated. It does provide an exciting and poignant ending to the book, but as far as our analysis of the text as a work of moral fiction is concerned, it seems, for the most part, to be just repeating itself. This is not surprising, though, if we consider the departure point of our literary typology, the Christian Bible, and something Frye has to say about the last chapter in that work. Of John's Revelation, Frye notes that "starting with the fourth chapter, there follows an incredible *tour de force* single-handedly working out the entire *dianoia* or metaphor-cluster of the Bible along with its demonic parody" (*Words* 104). If this is the case, we can consider the final adventure with Solaris and Lex Luthor as a reiteration and repetition of the lessons and symbols of the previous chapters, an apocalyptic revelation that summarises the previous 10 chapters.

The final tale of *All-Star Superman* begins with the execution of Lex Luthor, who, as is so often the case with super-villains, is one step ahead of everyone. Using the electricity as a catalyst to activate a stolen super-serum, Lex gains the powers of the Man of Steel, and intiates Superman's final, apocalyptic battle. We here have the antitype of Luthor being saved from electrocution by Kent in chapter 5. This, however, is merely

prologue for the events of the following chapter. In "Red Sun Day," Luthor's secret accomplice is revealed, the tyrant sun Solaris, a living solar computer that wishes to replace the sun. Over the course of these two chapters we see two antitheses to Superman's benevolent solar deity, and both function as cautions against the scientific myth uninflected by human emotion, or human connection. Solaris is a computer gone mad, convinced of its rightful place in the sky in place of our Sun. Solaris is introduced late into the text, and I would posit that this is because he is mainly used as a comparison with Lex Luthor in the next chapter. Where, in chapter 5, Luthor claims he would be in charge on the planet if not for Superman's presence, so too does Solaris feel it would be in charge if not for the presence of the Sun. This paralleling of the characters is another instance of the reiteration of doctrine in these final revelatory chapters.

Of more use to us, perhaps, are the metafictional elements that appear in this final story. As Superman prepares for his battle, he tours the fortress, leaving instructions with his robot caretakers. At one point, Superman makes the claim that he has "seen and done things beyond imagination" (Morrison, *Absolute* n.p.). If we consider that all of Superman's adventures are imaginary, that his entire existence is a product of the imagination, then how can he possibly have had adventures beyond imagination? The answer is that beyond imagination lies reality, and Superman's adventure beyond his imaginary existence is his entrance, through the vehicle of his moral fiction, into our world. In the previous chapter the microscopic Kryptonians flew into the imaginal space between panels, and so too does Superman, the idea of Superman and the primary

concerns he carries with him, fly into the minds of those who read the text, and from there into the real world.

A later panel depicts the final signature on the last will and testament of Superman (Fig. 32), and the choice to compose this document in a long-dead language (Kryptonian) is another metatextual moment that we might consider.
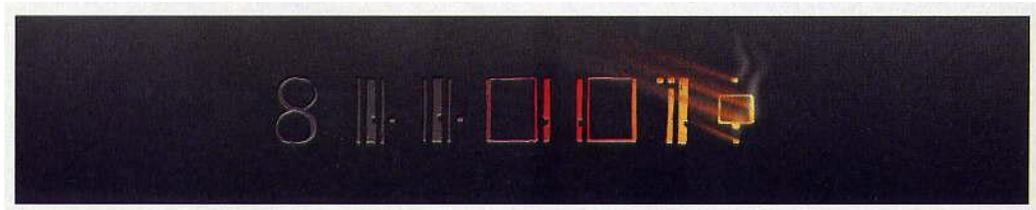

Fig.32: The lost language of Krypton.

Very early in the book, as Superman is educating both Lois and the reader in the purpose of his fortress, he calls it a "time capsule." He wants "some future man or woman…to know how it felt to live at the dawn of the age of superheroes," but for some reason leaves his testament in a language that, once he is dead, no one else on Earth will have the ability to read. Though this seems a conundrum, if we read metatextually, it makes perfect sense. Throughout the book there have been critiques of earlier systems of belief, and here we have a critique of an early recording of sacred stories. The earliest versions of the Bible, along with even earlier texts (*The Epic of Gilgamesh,* Homer's *Odyssey*), are written in dead languages, spoken and understood solely by scholars, and not the people to whom those works might be trying to speak in contemporary times. We are not meant to try to decode the Kryptonian language that we see, though it is almost certain that somewhere on the internet, someone has done so. We are meant to take the text of *All-*

Star Superman as Superman's last testament, not the record he leaves in a dead language in his fortress. One imagines that the future man or woman who opens that fortress will know all about Superman and what he represented from the popular histories that will undoubtedly follow his death. The artifact that we see him composing is left in a cave, to be discovered, and marvelled at solely as an artifact, rather than as a guidebook for people whose frame of reference is fundamentally different than that of the composer. So, too, with the Dead Sea Scrolls, or the Laurentianus manuscript of *The Odyssey*. What is meant to be transmitted from those texts are the fundamental ideas, not the strict law of the letter.

These two instances of metatextuality come in the midst of a super-brawl between Superman and Solaris, one that appears to result in Superman's death. Solaris reveals that he has poisoned the Sun just before Superman shuts him down, and then Clark Kent rushes into the Daily Planet offices, clutching a laptop upon which is the story of Superman's death. Here, on the computer screen, is the antithesis to the dead language he leaves behind in the fortress. The hero leaves behind his personal testament, but the man that the hero becomes makes sure to tell the story for all to understand. As the divine filters down into the mundane in the person of Clark Kent, so too should the divine in our moral texts, be it this one or the ancient books, filter down through the humans who must try to make sense of the lessons they contain. At the chapter's end, as Clark dies and Luthor hovers at a gaping hole in the office wall, we should note that Superman chooses to die as a human, surrounded by those closest to him, as "the mild-mannered reporter who never let [him] forget how it feels to be a downtrodden, ordinary man"

(*Absolute*, n.p.). At the end of this reiterative chapter, the lesson of the filtration of the divine through the mundane comes to the fore, and is possibly the most important thing that the text teaches.

Superman In Excelsis

The final chapter of *All-Star Superman* opens on Krypton, but a Krypton that could not possibly exist. Superman, or Kal-El in this case, is called to accompany his father, Jor-El, on a trip. This is the adult Kal-El that we see on Krypton, Superman grown on his own planet. Or so he thinks. Jor-El reveals to his son that he, and all of Krypton, died years ago, and that Kal-El himself is dead. Jor-El offers him the choice of staying where he is, or going back to "face down evil one last time" (*Absolute* n.p.). Superman does not understand, but Jor-El explains to him the death process of Kryptonians, and introduces something of a conundrum in this closing chapter. Jor-El tells Superman that his "body is undergoing a mutation, a conversion to solar-radio consciousness" (*Absolute* n.p.). This is apparently a common Kryptonian reaction to bodily death, but it is also knowledge that, up until this point, Superman has had no access to. The question then becomes is he actually in some sort of afterlife, or is all of this happening in his head, and if so, where is the information coming from? The idea of independently flowing information is primary in this chapter, and this interaction with his dead father is the type of an antitype that steps out of the pages, and reiterates the message of the influence of the text upon the reader.

Lex Luthor's acquisition of super powers once more lets us consider Frye's ideas of the royal metaphor, the Christian metaphor, and the totalitarian metaphor. Luthor takes on Superman's powers, assuming the totalitarian aspect of the royal metaphor, the individual who forces his identity on his society. He fulfills his earlier claim that "[i]f it wasn't for Superman, [he]'d be in charge on this planet." As noted earlier, Lex fails to realize the extent of Superman's powers, and the significance of what is transmitted by the Christian metaphor. In this final chapter, Lex comes to understand the full extent of this illusion of the separate individual. Frye says that the reformulation of the royal metaphor into the Christian metaphor "unites without subordinating," that it "achieves identity *with* and identity *as* on equal terms." And so Lex realizes that Superman is the saviour whose individuality teaches unity: "It's all just us, in here, together" he cries. "This is how he sees all the time, every day" (Morrison, *Absolute* n.p.). His appropriation of Superman's powers comes with an appropriation of Superman's morality. He understands how a redemptive figure must see the world at all times.

It is ironic that one of the last messages of the text comes to us through our antichrist antitype, Lex Luthor. As his senses expand, Luthor's understanding of his place, and Superman's place, comes into focus. Note specifically the order and syntax of the sentences in the following panels (Fig. 33):

Fig.33: Lex begins to grasp the truth.

      As Lex realizes that it is thought that fundamentally links everything together, his niece asks how the helmet he has given her works. His response of "It's thought-controlled" seems to make sense, until we realize that he is not talking to her, and not responding to her question. He is realizing the thought-controlled nature of the universe. In the next panel (Fig. 32) he comes to understand the interconnectedness of all things, and we see a startling transformation as the way Superman sees the world enlightens the most notorious criminal mastermind who ever lived.

Fig.34: Lex grasps the truth.

Recall the comparisons made earlier in the book to Hitler and Genghis Kahn, amongst others. Superman's power has transformed a sinner into a saint, and if it can change Lex, then surely it can change everyone. This moment is another of the metafictional moments in the last two chapters of the book. We can consider the idea of a thought-controlled universe (which is not too far off from ideas in contemporary physics about the observer and the observed) Morrison's insertion of his own system of belief into the text. We see much of this sort of thing in all holy works, written as they are by fallible human beings. However, Luthor's pronouncements of "it" being thought-controlled, and of everyone being "in here, together" could also apply to the graphic novel format itself. As a work of art, it is thought-controlled, in that thought controls the way that it is composed, and, in the space between panels where we imagine the connectivity, our thoughts control the actions. Luthor is looking directly out of the panel when he says "it's all just us, in here together. And we're all we've got" (*Absolute* n.p.). Is this fictional character realizing his fictionality, and further is he realizing his importance in the fiction? The answer could be yes or no, but the salient point is that, if he is realizing such things, then so should we too, in the ordinary world, realize that we are all in this world together, much as the fictional characters are all in *All-Star Superman* together. There is no one outside of the work, and there is no one outside of the world. We make this realization of perspective with our thoughts, thus Lex's reality is thought-controlled, and so is our own personal reality.

This seems again an insertion of knowledge from outside of the framework of the text. Superman receives his knowledge of his transformation, Luthor of either the interconnectedness or the fictionality of his reality. It makes sense then that at the end of the story, Superman transforms into "pure energy, pure information" (*Absolute* n.p.). He flies into the Sun, a living streak of information, and constructs a new heart in the middle of the star (Fig. 35).
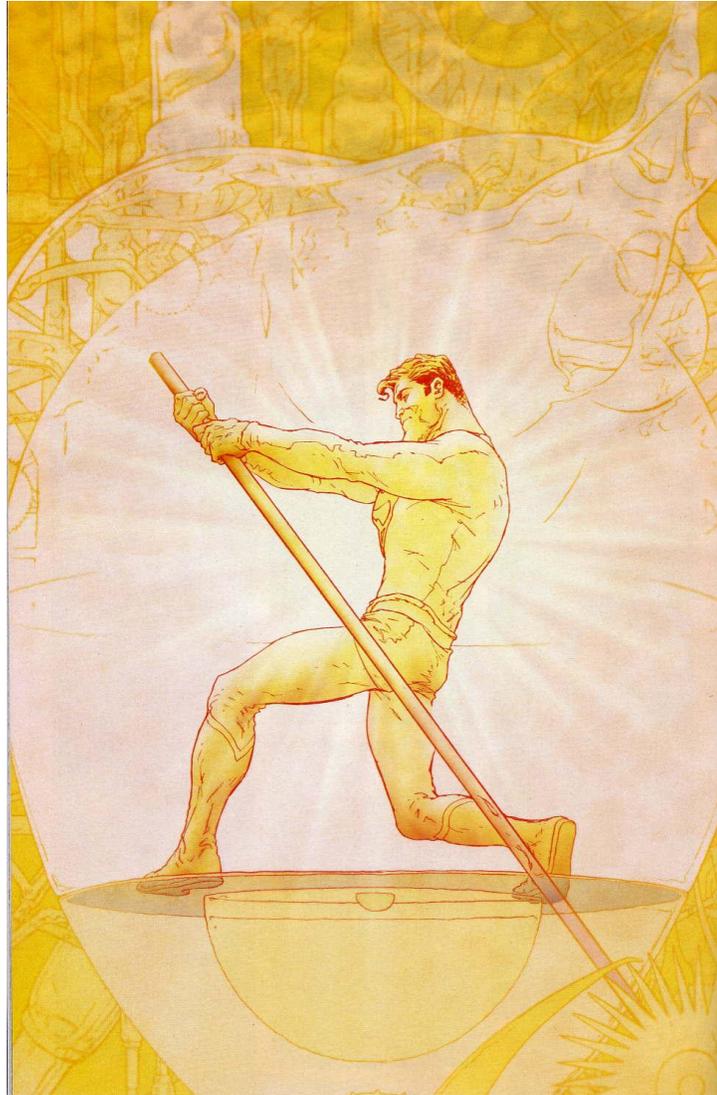
Fig.35: Superman saves the Sun.

As Lex comes to realize, reality is thought-controlled, and so too is moral reality. And what is Superman, if not a thought? Superman completes his transformation into pure information, though information is really all that he has always been. All along in the stories we have told and read of him, he has been information and, in the context of our literary typology, as we have seen during this analysis, he is also comprised of information from outside his

fictional reality, the information of his types. In this story, the essential Superman story,

he becomes information that saves everyone, both narratively and figuratively.

As we have noted, Morrison himself has stated that his intent in writing *All-Star Superman* (or should we now refer to he and Quitely as compilers, more than a writers?) was to chronicle a sun-deity's journey through the mythological day. We also said that he gives *All-Star Superman* twelve epic chapters, and twelve labours to perform before his death, hearkening back to Heracles and classical myth. The resonance of Superman, the character, to these archetypal figures, is, once again, obvious. What is less obvious to begin with, and is hopefully less-so now, is the resonance of the actual book, of the compilation of this archetypal character's exploits, to earlier sacred stories, and its identity as a literary antitype, albeit one that resides purely in the realm of the fictional.

Chapter 4: Ramifications

While the popularity of the Bible as a moral text can in part be attributed to its treatment of primary human concerns, one must also consider that it was also one of the first books to be printed in a popular edition, and did not suffer from the kind of competition that modern works do. In considering *All-Star Superman* as part of a typological lineage, the argument can be made that the second coming, the new Messiah, comes again and again in our fiction. This goes against Frye's assertion that "the doctrines of Christian theology form the antitypes of which the stories and maxims in the Bible...are types" (*The Great Code* 85), and I would suggest that these kinds of moral fictions provide new saviours all the time. The stumbling block for these salvationary tales is that there are so many to choose from in our media-saturated environment that no one text gets the same kind of attention that the Bible and its attendant saviours did when Gutenberg began printing. In order to assess the power, and the potential, of these texts, one must look to their longevity. Superman debuted in *Action Comics* #1 in 1938, and has been continuously in print for the last seventy years. He has become, as Chip Kidd noted, one of the most popular characters in Western culture. *All-Star Superman* has taken that seventy years of history and turned it into mythology, into a text by which lessons may be taught and, more importantly, learned. Such longevity is rare in any of the other popular characters of the last 100 years or so, and, in the specific case of the superhero, only Superman's mythological compatriots Batman and Wonder Woman come close to both his duration and his typological resonance. For this reason Superman deserves a far closer look, and his attributes and teachings a far closer consideration, than

just a brightly coloured costume in the pages of a disposable periodical would seemingly warrant.

Is Superman the new Messiah? Is *All-Star Superman* the holy book that tells his story? He certainly evokes the qualities of the saviour types chronicled in both the Hebrew and Christian Testaments. Regardless of their fictional genesis, his stories, through the ages of his existence distilled down to their essence in *All-Star Superman*, have taught moral lessons through the tool of fiction. One can easily imagine that, had his stories somehow been the first to roll from Gutenberg's press, that there might be temples in some corners of the world flying the iconic "S" shield that he proudly bears upon his chest. The teachings of Gilgamesh's story, of Moses and Christ, of St. Katherine and of Bunyan's Pilgrim, come down through the ages to contemporary times as a series of stories, stories that are given great importance by virtue of the lessons they teach. Superman hasn't been around quite as long as Moses or Christ, but to have survived seventy years in a culture that embraces new fads seemingly every few seconds speaks of the power and significance of the character, of the lessons he teaches, and of fiction itself. What remains for us is to trouble out some of the ramifications of the assertions of this paper, and to ask what such fictions mean to contemporary society.

An interesting place to begin considering why such a typological lineage of fiction appears in our culture is the concept of meta-content. Developed in part by R.V. Guha as a way of speaking about electronic data, "[m]eta-content is anything about…content. The information presented to us by the Macintosh Finder is a very

simple (almost trivial) example of meta-content. On the WWW, Yahoo and other hierarchical organizations of pages around topics is an example of meta-content" (Guha). As a concrete example, he states that "[a] book review is a piece of meta information about a piece of content - the book being reviewed" (Guha). Guha's project was to create a language with which to uniformly communicate meta-content, "a common language to represent the myriad forms of meta-content we might want to use. This meta-content language is, at its core, just a representation language" (Guha). While Guha was developing this concept in relation to electronic data, John Lily moved the idea into the realm of consciousness.

In his book *Programming the Human Biocomputer*, Lily discusses the mind as analogous to a computer, in its use of programs and metaprograms. Metaprogramming he defines as "an operation in which a central control system controls hundreds of thousands of programs operating simultaneously in parallel" (Lily 15). His contention is that a human mind is capable of not only harnessing these programs under a metaprogram, but that we in turn can create a self-metaprogrammer, the "I" of our consciousness, that organizes and utilizes the metaprograms. Further, he asserts another level, the supra-self-metaprogrammer, which may be "many or one depending on current states of consciousness…[and] may be personified 'as if' entities…a concept labeled God – the Creator, the Starmaker – or whatever" (16). Lily's concern is with these levels of organization within our own minds, but the concept can be widened to encompass cultures, and to encompass the texts we have been considering. If we return to Frye's concept of primary concerns, we can view these general needs as metaprograms in the

culture. Each of the primary concerns encompasses myriad smaller tasks that make that concern possible. The need for sex or companionship folds into itself such smaller programs as meeting (or pursuing) a viable mate, wooing that mate, navigating a relationship of some sort that will lead to the intended end, and other actions that are part of that particular concern. If this is the case, then the texts that elucidate such concerns, and especially the ones that treat all four of the primary concerns, are the self-metaprograms of the culture. The collective "I" of the culture, through the vehicle of the writer or the artist, compiles and revises such texts so that our metaprograms maintain a level of contemporaneity. Stories that do not make claims to historical factuality can, in fact, function far more effectively as cultural metaprograms, in that they, in general, lack the widespread popular investment and doctrinal authority of religious myth. The transient nature of the superhero story, however, allows for myriad perspectives on cultural metaprograms to be overlaid on one another. Not only does the current version of a particular hero exhibit the contemporary version of the cultural metaprogram, but it also carries with it all the historical versions. The contention could then be made that the myths that get left behind by cultures are ethical meta-data, or meta-content. The transient and authorially-transferred nature of the superhero means that the older the hero becomes, the more iterations of metaprogram through which he or she passes, and the closer said hero comes to exemplifying a fundamental metaprogram. In religious myth, as in superheroic, such fundamentals come to be encapsulated in the icon (Fig. 36), about which more shortly.
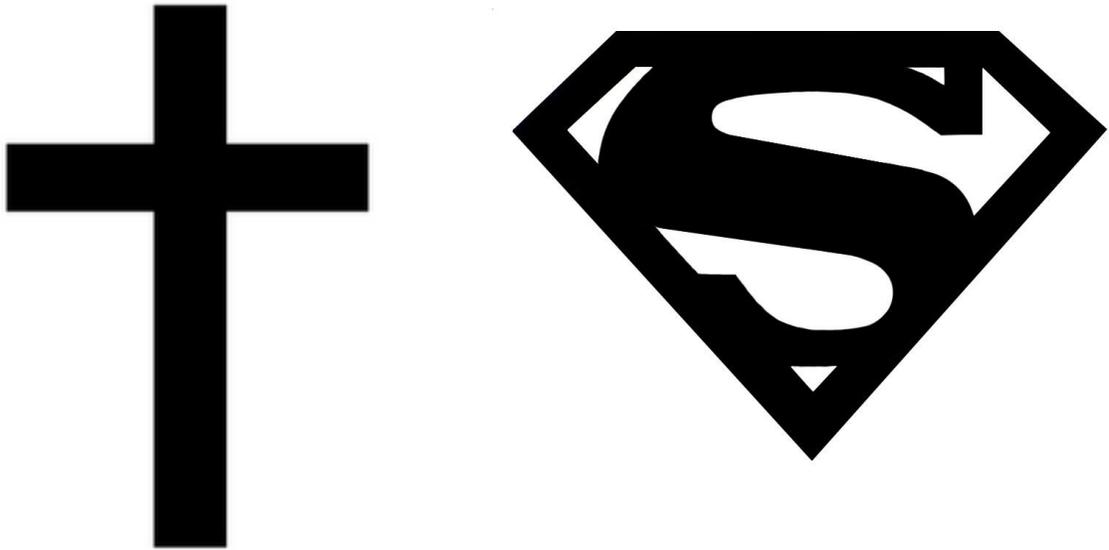
Fig. 36: Popular icons.

(Cross from *johnvoelzblog.blogspot.ca*, S-Sheild from
forums.superherohype.com. 06-07-2012)

For Lily, we are "general purpose computers that can program any conceivable model of

the universe inside our own structure" (17), and as a result we are able to inhabit these

models, consider their pros and cons, and then implement them in our daily lives. If

moral fictions are our cultural metaprograms, then fiction itself must be considered our

general purpose computer, the place in which we can inhabit and assess various different

moral universes before adapting one to our own particular circumstances. Even more

specifically, the Superman metaprogram produces its own different iterations, ones that

speak to many different experiential modes.

Though I have focussed almost exclusively on the work of Grant Morrison, he is hardly the only writer to be producing treatments of the Man of Steel that have such resonances. It does seem that he is the one who is most openly and explicitly concentrating on this aspect of Superman, and superheroes in general, but there are others. Indeed, Superman produces his own antitypes as various writers attempt to understand this iconic figure by producing other versions of him. In the Marvel comics universe, there is The Sentry, a solar-powered character whose existence is erased from the memories of the entire world, including his own, because he also houses within him The Void, his arch-nemesis. The Sentry's story culminates in the revelation that he is the Biblical Angel of Death that is sent to kill the first-born of Egypt. Again we see a typological resonance between the Biblical and Superman in this unfortunate character. Comics luminary Alan Moore produced a Superman pastiche of sorts called *Supreme*, a brilliant piece of writing that investigates the revision of superhero universes through the lens of a Superman story. Moore's Superman proxy is aware of this revision, aware of his status as a story whose pieces are being filled in as he goes along, but he still does what any Superman ought to do, the right thing. Moore's particular revision of Supreme grew from an original version of the character by Rob Liefeld that was constructed to trouble out what a Superman-style character would do without the moral framework that is built into the Man of Steel. Predictably, the series was not a huge success. It seems that the morality of Superman is fundamental not only to his critical success, but also his popular success. He is speaking to us in a way that is deeper than simply narrative. Further antitypes include Ellis and Hitch's Apollo from *The Authority*, and Jim Lee's Mr.

Majestic, as well as older characters, most notably C.C. Beck's Captain Marvel, whose publication by Fawcett comics would eventually lead "DC…to completely destroy Fawcett in court" (Morrison, *Supergods* 35), but who would continue to be published by DC once they secured the rights. In many ways, Captain Marvel is even more emblematic of the typological connection of the religious to the superheroic, in that the magic word he uses to transform into the world's mightiest mortal (SHAZAM!) is an acronym

> derived from six gods and heroes of legend. He was endowed with the wisdom of
> Solomon, the strength of Hercules, the stamina of Atlas, the power of Zeus, the
> courage of Achilles, and the speed of Mercury. (*Supergods* 33)

Yet somehow, despite this concrete connection to earlier mythic structures, it is Superman that is the more popular and resonant. I would suggest that the reason for this is the same as the reason for Superman's defeat of characters such as Atlas and Samson in *All-Star Superman*, that we are no longer looking for ways of applying ancient moral frameworks in the contemporary moment. Superman, despite his roots deep in our cultural archetypes, presents something new, something endlessly adaptable on a subjective level.

The Bible presents, in both the Old and New Testaments, miraculous occurrences that happen to ordinary people. A common question is why such occurrences have ceased in contemporary times, why examples of such powers are no longer in evidence. In Corinthians 13.8, Paul asks "Are there prophets? their work will be over. Are there

tongues of ecstasy? they will cease. Is there knowledge? it will vanish away" (New

English version), a passage that has been held up as proof that, with the completion and

revelation of the Christian Testament, there is no longer a need for the miraculous in the

world. Were the entire planet and its population joined in such unity, perhaps that claim

would have some veracity. But it is not, so people continue to search for the miraculous.

There is one place in which we are guaranteed to find such wonders. In *Flex Mentallo*,

one of Morrison's lesser-known works, the superheroes of the world embed themselves

in the collective imagination of humanity in order to escape an all-consuming threat.

They become fictional in order to save themselves and us. Within such fictions as I have

discussed here, the miraculous happens every day. If we can take a brief leap of faith, it

seems that our heroes and gods of the age of miracles, be they demi-gods or apostles,

have fled the real world, and inhabit now the world of fiction and romance, the world of

the imagination.

Morrison's in-continuity follow-up to *Final Crisis* was, and continues to be, an

acclaimed run writing Batman. Only recently, as of this writing, has he returned to

Superman, and is currently chronicling the Man of Steel's earliest days in a universe-

wide narrative reboot in DC comics. The Batman stories are more traditional superhero

narratives (whatever that may mean), but Morrison's penchant for investigating myth still

crops up from time to time. In the series *Batman: The Return of Bruce Wayne*, a time-

displaced Batman, revealed not to be dead in the final pages of *Final Crisis*, weaves a

mythology from stone-age to modern-day, through his family's history and, textually,

through American literature, in many ways, in order to leave his colleagues clues as to his

whereabouts. Within the mythology of Batman's 70 years of publication history, the fictional character himself creates another level of myth within the narrative. The fictional myth, the type, is revealed in the returned Batman, the antitype, who in turn is a type of the sort of person one might become from allowing the ethical and moral aspects of the myth to affect one in real life. The persevering, rational, ultimately optimistic figure of the Batman is antitype to his own type, and type to his readers.

With the spate of real-life superheroes who have appeared in the last decade or so, be they costumed heroes who help the homeless to shelters or mixed-martial artists who don a mask and fight crime, it seems that the antitype of the superhero myth is beginning to manifest in the mundane world. A recent article in *Wired* details the advances in technology that are being put to use by real-world superheroes, but sums up the overall superheroic trend nicely in this passage:

> [Though] [s]ome real-life superheroes really do fight thugs...mostly, real-life superheroes perform civic-minded services like painting over gang graffiti, helping the homeless and… protecting Zuccotti Park during Occupy Wall Street. Out in Portland, Oregon, the adventurer known as Knight Owl is training to be a paramedic. (Ackerman)

Though I fear it may be too far into the speculative, with the advances in understanding of the human genome and rapid developmental pace of technology, can the full-fledged superhero be far off? Or perhaps "superhero" is too optimistic. Super soldier, more likely, though the lessons of Captain America might also serve well in such

circumstances. Morrison tells the tale of his meeting, at the 1999 San Diego Comic Convention, with what he describes as "a visitation" (*Supergods* 403). He met Superman.

> He was dressed in a perfectly tailored red, blue, and yellow costume; his hair was slicked back with a kiss curl; and unlike the often weedy or paunchy Supermen who paraded through the convention halls, he was trim, buff, and handsome…looking somewhat like a cross between Christopher Reeve [the actor in the *Superman* movies] and the actor Billy Zane. (403)

Morrison and an editor from DC proceeded to question the man, who responded to all their questions about Superman's life completely in character, and provided Morrison the apocalyptic revelation that led directly to *All-Star Superman*. After this story, Morrison also relates the unfortunate story of a fellow comic book creator who encountered his own Superman, albeit one dressed as that imperfect clone of the Man of Steel, Bizarro. And true to the stories of Bizarro within Superman's mythology, the man was "belligerent, raucous and true to character" (405). While we may have antitypes in the costumed social workers and vigilantes that patrol certain city streets, perhaps there are also avatars, true antitypes of the characters we read about in the superheroic myths. Perhaps occasionally, the supergods walk amongst us. Then again, perhaps the antitype of the superhero in the corporeal world need not be such flamboyant or frightening characters. The myths we individually embrace teach us the primary concerns, the need for freedom and for food, for shelter and for sex (or love and companionship). They do

not (or should not) teach us to oppress our fellows, to live lives of decadence and greed. The myths of the superheroes, in the words of their most vocal prophet, show us

> how they can help us change the way we think about ourselves, our environment, and the multiverse of possibilities that surrounds us. Get ready to take off your disguise, prepare to whisper your magic word of transformation, and summon the lightning. It's time to save the world. (Morrison, *Supergods* xvii)

The devout Christian does not don a robe and a crown of thorns in order to do and be good. He or she wears an icon, a reminder of the myth that empowers the spirit. So too with all religions, the world over, until the icon is imbued with such potency and potential that it is all that the religion stands for, boiled into one symbol. Now consider how many people display the S-shield, or the Bat-Symbol, or Green Lantern's badge, Captain America's Sheild, the Flash's (or Captain Marvel's) lightning bolt, Wonder Woman's Aegis. The supergods' influence is vast and subtle, but undeniably there. The real question is whether or not we are paying attention to them.

On the way to concluding, I will invoke another iconic fictional character, a trickster god who, like Superman, teaches lessons of a better way to be, and who, like Superman, has continued to exist long after those who created him have passed away. In the *Doctor Who* episode "The Time of Angels," River Song, archaeologist, reads the following from an old and musty scholarly work:

What if we had ideas that could think for themselves? What if one day our

dreams no longer needed us? When these things occur and are held to be true, the

time will be upon us…the time of angels. ("The Time of Angels")

In the television episode, the "time of angels" is the awakening of an army of brutal

creatures that only move when they are not observed, and that are totally unkillable.

Minus the brutality (occasionally), this sounds to me much like a superhero. The

characters move only in the gutter between the panels, the place where we do not observe

but imagine the connective tissue between the sequential images. Scott McCloud calls

this closure (63), and tells us that this is one of the most important features of the graphic

medium. And, as far as being unkillable, Superman has, as have many of his ilk, literally

beaten death, to say nothing of the fact that, almost 80 years into his existence, he shows

no signs of slowing or disappearing. In the *Doctor Who* episode, the "time of angels" is a

decidedly bad thing. What if, for us, in the mundane world, it is not? What if, in order

for us to evolve not only as physical creatures, but as reasoning and moral ones, our ideas

must outlive us, must think for themselves, and in turn, in the form of a literary typology,

help us to think for ourselves?

In the final pages of *The Return of Bruce Wayne*, Batman's friends, superheroes

all, gather to help him defeat the enemy that has hitched back through time with him to,

as usual, destroy the Earth. Of these heroes, Batman has this to say, and these seem good

words with which to finish this paper: "Whatever they touch turns to myth. Understand

this much" (Morrison, "The All-Over" n.p.). *Kerygma* suffuses myth. And myth, or

mythos, is story. The stories of the superheroes are not old, but the lineage within which they exist is. They have much to say to us, and will likely continue to do so.

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