



Superman, Power, Otherness and Violence in the Golden Age of Modern Comics

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Coal and Diamonds: Introduction

Within the remit of contemporary Occidental superhero/masked crime-fighter comics books, DC Comics flagship character Superman is almost univocally viewed as an archon of moral probity, civic-mindedness, and true altruism. However, due to three fundamental aspects of the character (being Clark Kent, Superman, and Kal-El simultaneously, the character's supra-human powers/abilities, and the Otherness of the aforementioned), the character's engagement with morality has, since its inception, been more complicated than a dialectic of good contra evil, the lodestar ideology for superhero/masked crime-fighters in Western comics more generally. Using Superman as a case study, this paper will discuss the history of the relationship between violence, morality, and Superman in what is commonly known as the Golden Age of comics (late 1930s to late 1940s/early 50s). What this paper seeks to stress is that during Depression-era America, Superman's power and Otherness had less to do with morality than they did with a simple, albeit raw, socialist revenge fantasy of the proletariat. Early Superman was characterized as the nemesis of corrupt bureaucrats, industrialists, and politicians, dispensing 'justice' on those responsible for the hardships of those who were experiencing the worst of the nation's socioeconomic trials. The point here is that the type of justice Superman administers in its early adventures is indistinguishable from vengeance. Within the aesthetic and narrative remit of the DC hyperdiagnosis (and its orrery of diageitic earths that reflect extradiegetic sociopolitical and cultural reality), Golden Age Superman's violence was untempered by clemency. The character paid little heed to due process, human rights, or established order decreed by the strictures of State justice. Superman was not smiling and reassuring, but actively dangerous, remorseless, destructive, and violent. In so doing, the character used its power in a self-consciously active and socio-politically disruptive way. In the character's early narratives, ardent retributive justice predicated on power was the whole of Superman's law. It used its power for what it 'felt' was active social reform, not a reactive maintenance of the status quo. Referring primarily to Greg S. McCue and Clive Bloom's *Dark Knights: New Comics in Context* (1993), this paper will use examples from *Action Comics* and *Superman* titles to show how power, including terrorization and



intimidation, not moral probity, were the primary solutions to the dilemmas early Superman faced. This paper will also briefly discuss Batman and Wonder Woman as a way of contextualizing how the concepts of power, the body, and Otherness were also represented in other prominent DC Comics figures during the Golden Age.

At this early point, I would like to acknowledge that while the analysis to come will focus on early Superman stories (mainly from 1939 to 1941), I agree with Ian Gordon who in *Superman: The Persistence of an American Icon* (2017) suggests that the presentation of Superman as a violent being was a character trait or narrative aspect that was already undergoing many publisher influenced changes during the early 1940s. Therefore, this paper does not hold with the idea that Superman is a monolithic character, nor seeks to present such a notion here. This paper's focus on the burgeoning days of the character and the foundations of the Superman mythos is intended to draw attention to the fact that Superman, despite the character's contemporary avuncular status, was, from its beginnings in print, prone to excessive displays of violence that were often disproportionately deployed to curtail comparatively simple crimes. In this way, this paper is interested in drawing attention to the *primacy* of violence as a problem-solving technique, as well as the lack of pause or compunction in its use in early Superman comics.

Seduction of the Innocent and the Comics Code

The early depictions and characterizations of power, the body, and Otherness in numerous characters, including Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman, were, from the days of their earliest adventures in print, condemned for the violent and psycho-sexual (sodomasochistic) use of superhuman power. Even as early as 1940, comic book critics, both foreign and domestic, regarded the popularity of the medium as a malignant threat to the morals, ethics, and psychological well-being of America's youth. After World War II, where juvenile delinquency was at an all-time high, Batman, Wonder Woman, and Superman were openly indicted by various moralists for the rise in juvenile delinquency in America. For example, the literary editor of the Chicago Daily News Sterling North stated that "unless we want a coming generation even more ferocious than the present one, parents and teachers throughout America must band together to break the 'comic' magazine" (North 1940: n.p). Similarly, the Christian publication Catholic World asked, "What's Wrong with the 'Comics'?" to which the answer it offered was that "the influence of these comics over the popular mind is one of the most striking – and disturbing – phenomena of the century." Concerning Superman, the article claimed that "in a vulgar way this fantastic character seems to personify the primitive religion expounded by Nietzsche's Zarathustra. 'Man alone is and must be our God,' says Zarathustra, very



much in the style of a Nazi pamphleteer” (Doyle 1943: n.p). Commensurate allegations even came from as far afield as Moscow. The children’s novelist Korny Chukovsky stated that “the word superman, as is known, comes from the ideological inspirer of the German fascists, Nietzsche” and that “mass fascisization of the children fully corresponds to the perspectives of the present bosses of America” (Chukovsky 1949: n.p). In 1949, the cultural critic Gershom Legman added that “the Superman formula, is essentially lynching” whereby Superman “invest[s] violence with righteousness and prestige...fists crashing into faces become the court of highest appeal... really peddling a philosophy of hooded justice in no way distinguishable from that of Hitler and the Ku Klux Klan” (Legman 1949: 39).

In an attempt to pre-empt and mitigate further accusations, many comic book companies, including DC Comics, assembled their own teams of specialists to legitimize their products. This created an Inquisition atmosphere which, in 1948, even led to children being encouraged by parents, pedagogues, and clergy to pile their comics in schoolyards and set them on fire (McCue & Bloom 1993: 29). On March 2, 1948, ABC Radio’s *Town Meeting on the Air* ran a special issue show titled “What’s Wrong with the Comics?” in which James Mason Brown of *The Saturday Review of Literature* inflamed the institutional attack on comics. His arguments had a pervasive effect on the concerns of American parents and guardians, chiefly as a result of his famous statement that comics were “the marijuana of the nursery; the bane of the bassinet; the horror of the house, the curse of kids and a threat to the future”, literally driving home the point (Brown 1948: n.p). That same year, the Association for the Advancement of Psychotherapy held a symposium in which the now infamous Dr. Frederic Wertham, senior psychiatrist for the New York Department of Hospitals, gained notoriety and acclaim. Wertham basically charged comics as corrosive in their undermining of morals, their glorification of violence, and allegedly abnormal sexual aggressiveness. Wertham’s attacks rallied community guardian groups, PTAs, and other mass media to his cause. He even toured the nation giving presentations on the topic, as well as publishing fear-mongering articles like his 1953 “What Parents Don’t Know About Comic Books” featured in popular and influential publications such as *The Ladies Home Journal*.

Wertham’s *Seduction of the Innocent* (1954) presents his most concerted attack on comics. While now regarded with ardent criticism, specifically regarding how Wertham did not employ proper scientific research methods, manipulated and even went as far as fabricated evidence in support of the remonstrations compiled in the text, it nevertheless was taken seriously at the time of its publication, even becoming a minor best-seller. *Seduction of the Innocent* claimed that there were direct correlates between comics and “every kind of social and moral perversion imaginable, including sadism, drug abuse, theft, murder and rape” (McCue & Bloom 1993: 30). While Wertham’s



tenuous and often spurious connections mostly spearheaded attacks against crime and horror titles, many superheroes were also aggregated in his incriminations. Concerning superheroes, Wertham wrote, “what is the social meaning of these supermen, superwomen, super-lovers, superboys, supergirls, superducks, super-mice, super-magicians, super-safe crackers? How did Nietzsche get into the nursery? Superheroes undermine respect for the law and hardworking, decent citizens” (Wertham 1954: 15). To Wertham, Superman was nothing but a super-fascist. He states,

Superman (with the big S on his uniform – we should, I suppose, be thankful that it is not an S.S.) needs an endless stream of ever-new submen, criminals and “foreign-looking” people not only to justify his existence but even to make it possible. Superman has long been recognized as a symbol of violent race superiority. The television superman, looking like a mixture of an operatic tenor without his armor and an athlete out of a health-magazine advertisement, does not only have “superhuman powers,” but explicitly belongs to a “super-race” [...] It is this feature that engenders in children either one or the other of two attitudes: either they fantasy themselves as supermen, with attendant prejudices against the submen, or it makes them submissive and receptive to the blandishments of strong men who will solve all their social problems for them – by force. (Wertham 1954: 34; 97)

Similarly, for Wertham, Bruce Wayne and Dick Greyson were nothing but a catamitic fantasy, and Wonder Woman a sadistic lesbian (Wertham 1954: 193). Despite the convenience Wertham serves as a scapegoat for the industry’s troubles during this period, one must keep in mind that Wertham was a product of the paranoid spirit of the McCarthy era. At the time, the entire industry, let alone its engagement with ideas of superhuman power wielded by mercurial pseudo-American beings, was viewed as having un-American tendencies and immoral agendas. The resultant State reaction would be considered extreme by contemporary standards. 1954 saw the establishment of series of Senate Committee hearings, the State against the comics industry, in which notable figures like head of EC Comics William Gaines and legendary illustrator Milton Caniff stood trial. At the close of the hearings in September of the same year, most of the companies in the comics industry banded together to form a voluntary body called the Comics Magazine Association, followed by the creation of the Comics Code Authority; a self-regulating body intended to prevent external agencies controlling comics’ economic and artistic interests. In essence, The Code “prohibited the portrayal of kidnapping, concealed weapons, nudity, vampires, smut and seduction, while encouraging respect for parents, the sanctity of marriage, good taste, decency and established authority” (McCue & Bloom 1993: 32). The combination of Wertham’s crusade and the establishment of the CCA resulted in American comics’ most prohibitive era, marking the end of the Golden Age of experimentation and expansion of ideas concerning power, the body, and Otherness. I argue that Wertham and other puritanical moralists of his time were not disquieted by comic book superheroes because these characters were



exceptionally or explicitly immoral in any kind of entrenched way, but because they represented a celebration of an uncontrollable, transgressive type of power: be it transcendent power as it is with Superman, the obsessive power of the will as it is with Batman, or the power of sexuality as it is with Wonder Woman.

While the views elaborated in this section can be read as latently antithetical to Wertham and his claims, I would be remiss if I did not, even briefly, here point out that there are other ways of reading Wertham and his now infamous position on the socio-economic and cultural effects of comic book superheroes and crime fighters on the psychology and subsequent behavior of youth and mass culture. While I have explored the merits of Wertham's ideas in terms of their theoretical implications in the Superman mythos as opposed to the methodologies he employed and fabricated in manufacturing his widely criticized conclusions elsewhere, perhaps one of the most interesting alternate views in this regard can be found in Bart Beaty's *Fredric Wertham and the Critique of Mass Culture* (2005) (cf. Tembo 2017). In it, Beaty makes some very important observations concerning Wertham's congressional testimony, its legacy, and Wertham's own attitudes toward comics and the controversial comics code his testimony and work helped instantiate. Beaty argues that while *Seduction of the Innocent* was successful in capitalizing on "a cyclic and recurrent moral panic about youth behavior and mass culture that focused for a brief period on comic books before dissipating and taking Wertham with it", this argument, despite its salient historico-cultural aspects, often overlooks Wertham's broader engagements with antebellum issues and debates surrounding mass media and scholarship into its psych-emotional effects (Beaty 2005: 7). In the conclusion of the text, Beaty points out that "Wertham's work on fanzines in the 1970s represented a complete, unacknowledged one-eighty from his earlier writings because Wertham demonstrated that not all comic book readers became delinquents", further claiming that a close examination of the fragmentary scatterings of Wertham's work reveals that "he never suggested that they would" (Beaty 2005: 198). The implications of Beaty's work here are at once poignantly ironic and, it could be argued, rather tragic for Wertham. Being that numerous critics of Wertham throughout and following his career "ignored [his] ongoing claims that comics were only one of many factors contributing to juvenile delinquency by suggesting that he argued for monocausation even when he explicitly stated that he was not doing so", Wertham's entire scholastic output, clinical and theoretical, has been subject to a similar reductive erasure that many view him as having applied to the concept of comic book superheroes, and the broad philosophical, sociopolitical, and cultural implications inherent in their power and Otherness (Beaty 2005: 123).



Paper Tiger: Variations on the Theme of Power, Violence, and Destruction in Early Superman

There are clear examples of Superman's ruthlessness and violence from the very beginning of the character's history. *Action Comics* Vol. 1, No. 2 (July, 1938) features a vehemently anti-militaristic Superman. This would strike the modern reader as uncharacteristic of the same Superman who would later come to be identified as the ur-icon of American jingoism. In the story, Superman learns that a powerful munitions magnate named Norvell has been financing a corrupt lobbyist who has been attempting to establish a market for Norvell's arms in the war-torn South American republic of San Monte. As the narrative progresses, Superman confronts Norvell and is fired upon by machine-gun wielding guards. Superman dispatches them easily, adding the further humiliation and terror of wrapping the barrels of their weapons around their necks (Siegel 1938: 19). Threatening to "tear out [Norvell's] heart with [its] bare hands," Superman coerces him to board a steamliner and make for San Monte to witness and gather evidence of the horrors of his criminal enterprises. While Superman ultimately ends the conflict, there is one notable moment in which Superman is returning Lois to the safety of their ship after saving her from a nefarious scheme that put her in front of a San Montean firing squad. Superman interrupts a soldier torturing a prisoner and decides that the best way of handling the cruelty and injustice it witnesses is to raise the torturer above its head and, after promising to "give [him] the fate [he] deserve[s]," throw the man beyond view, apparently killing him (Siegel 1938: 27). This scene underscores the inextricable link between Superman's sense of fairness and ruthlessness, intimidation, and even murder in its earliest adventures. As with this and numerous other examples, the latent implication here is that these early displays of ruthless violence that might seem ambiguous to modern readers gesture to a fundamental aspect of all superpowered comic characters. As vehicles for reader (and initially youth) wish-fulfilment, the implication here is that the most important aspect of a character like Superman's power is not its moral or immoral use, but power itself *in principium*. While ostensibly contained within a moral code, however idiosyncratic, the ambiguity of Superman's early displays of power inheres in the darkly jocular, taunting, and humiliating undercurrent running through them.

Superman's early displays of retributive justice are also deeply ironic due to the fact that character is shown to use its power immorally (that is, being prone to displays of *excessive* violence) in pursuit of moral ends (preventing crime). Consider the image below taken from *Superman* No. 2 (September, 1939) "Superman Champions Universal Peace!", written by Jerry Sigel, illustrated by Joe Shuster. In the story, one Professor Runyan develops a deadly toxic gas that is able to bypass safety measures such as gas masks. Ryman demonstrates the efficacy of the gas on a monkey, its instant death impressing Clark Kent. In the midst of the interview/demonstration, thugs lead by one



Bartow break in and steal the gas and its formula in order to be sold to one Lubane, an arms dealer profiteering from a civil war in the fictitious country of Boravia. While Superman certainly acts decisively to end the conflict in the last instance, it does so by destroying a munitions factory and allowing a begging man, albeit guilty of war crimes and the manufacture and sale of chemical weapons, to die excruciatingly by drowning in his own lungs. Furthermore, in order to vouchsafe the treaty, Superman destroys the pillars of the summit building in which negotiations are being held to *force* the compliance of the recalcitrant representatives of the two warring nations to make accord. Superman's method of 'championing universal peace' at this point in its history leaves either no survivors, or little time or room for compromise. The irony and ambiguity here inheres in the image of arguably one of the greatest fictional humanists being so liberal with doling out judgements, violence, as well as being seemingly so mesmerized by death and the power to instantiate it.



Page from *Superman Vol. 1, No. 2* (1939) written by Jerry Siegel, illustrated by Joe Shuster

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Page from *Superman Vol. 1, No. 4* (1940) written by Jerry Siegel, illustrated by Paul Cassidy

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Page from *Superman Vol. 1, No. 6* (1940) written by Jerry Siegel, illustrated by Paul Cassidy

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Page from *Superman Vol. 1, No. 7* (1940) written by Jerry Siegel, illustrated by Wayne Boring

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Consider "Superman versus Luthor" appearing in *Superman Vol. 1, No. 4* (March, 1940), a narrative which, among other things, presents one of the earliest contests between Superman and its arch-nemesis Lex Luthor. In the story, Superman uncovers Luthor's involvement in experimental weapons development whose malfunctioning causes a devastating earthquake in Metropolis. In turn, Luthor discovers that Superman has managed to uncover his attempts at subterfuge and misdirection and responds by dispatching a plane armed with a bomb to be dropped on Superman's location. Superman's response is not to dispel the danger by disposing of the bomb in a remote, uninhabited region, but to retaliate, throwing it back at the plane, destroying both it and its pilot with little effort, remorse, or forethought. While Superman attempts to justify this recklessness by claiming its chosen method protected innocent civilians on the ground, it gives no consideration whatsoever to the fact that the falling wreckage from its ill-thought retaliation will present the exact same peril to those it claims to be acting in the best interest of. What are we to make of this? Indeed, at this point in the character's mythos, attributes like a superbrain did not yet exist. However, are readers supposed to conclude that based on the lack of common sense and idiocy inextricable from a vast number of Superman's methods and execution that the character simply is



not that bright? Or, perhaps, there is something more sinister taking place here. Is it possible that Superman simply does not care about collateral deaths, bystander danger, and innocent injury?

The second page of Siegel and Cassidy's text shows Clark Kent employ underhanded tactics in the story "Luthor's Undersea City" featured in the same issue. In the story, two of Luthor's thugs ambush and kidnap Lois and Clark at gunpoint during their investigation of Luthor's involvement in the earthquake. Clark endangers all the lives of its fellow passengers by brashly tearing off the vehicle's steering wheel and crushing its emergency brake with one hand. After the thugs open fire on Clark, it knocks them unconscious by smashing their skulls together, takes Lois underarm, and consciously leaves the roadster to plummet off the cliff-side to be destroyed with the thugs in it. What, if any, is the *moral* lesson or message to be drawn from Clark's methods here? Is there any didactic merit to the narrative's central superpowered character using said power to endanger human lives, guilty or not, while seemingly being completely negligent of the problematic tension between a superpowered alien dispensing idiosyncratic justice and human law both judicial and moral?

Similarly, Siegel and Cassidy show Superman faced with a dilemma of two vehicles simultaneously falling off a cliff in the story "Terror In the Trucker's Union". One of the trucks belongs to The Daily Planet, containing printing presses while the other is full of criminals. Not only does Superman elect to save the presses over human lives in spite of its prodigious speed, it states that the horrible bone-breaking and fiery deaths the criminals suffer is well deserved while scanning the wreckage. In contrast, the second page of the same text shows a disturbing Machiavellian example of Superman's violence. In the story "Mission To San Caluma", a cunning thief witnesses Clark Kent's transformation into Superman (the first time this happens in the character's history up to and including that point). The thief extorts Superman, offering it a choice to either pay an annual sum of hush-money, or have its secret revealed to the world. In response, Superman does not negotiate or even attempt to reason with the man. Instead, it threatens the thief, telling him that it could snap his neck and rid itself of the problem. Frightened, the thief flees from the room before Superman changes back into Clark and gives chase. The thief arrives at a flight of stairs and declares to know Superman's secret identity. Somehow, perhaps with the assistance of superspeed, Clark manages to arrive at the bottom of the stairs ahead of the thief to 'witness' the thief 'mysteriously' fall and subsequently die before being able to reveal Superman's secret. While the thief's death may seem coincidental, I argue that the combination of the ambiguous panel evidence and Superman's powers suggest that the thief's death was deliberately orchestrated by Superman itself. The ambiguity of choosing to display such a critical moment in the story in this non-definitive way places any moral certitude concerning the righteousness and



justness of Superman's actions under erasure. Implied here is the unconfirmed possibility that Superman, in short, killed an eye-witness to what it values most, namely anonymity, before said witness, regardless of his moral standing, is able to expose and destroy its complex inner workings. This is quite radical in terms of character establishment when one considers how early in the character's mythos this disturbing albeit fascinating amoral use of power appears. Instead of endeavoring to firmly establish their flagship character as one wherein which purity, reserve, and dignity are essential aspects and lodestars to both the aesthetic and narrative features of its narratives from the beginning, Siegel and Shuster present a deeply ambiguous figure from its beginnings, particularly in terms of the early relationship between Superman, morality, power, and violence.

The second page of *Superman* Vol. 1, No. 7 (1940) written by Jerry Siegel, illustrated by Wayne Boring shows perhaps the most overt example of Superman deliberately using its power to kill innocent people. In the story "The Gay City Plague", a plague ravishes Gay City causing its citizens to literally disintegrate, whether struck by a slight touch or a full collision. A wave of panic ensues, leaving the citizens of Gay fearful of leaving their homes. Clark is dispatched to cover the story where, upon its arrival, Gay's commissioner Jim Stanley informs it that an anonymous tip received led him to believe that the cause of the plague is centered around a site called Gargoyle Towers. Superman investigates, but the building explodes as it arrives, catching it in the blast. Unharmed, Superman attempts to 'protect' the innocent bystanders in danger of being crushed by falling debris. However, there is a discrepancy between what the caption in the sixth panel *describes* Superman doing and what the image in said panel actually *depicts* Superman doing. Clearly, Superman does not throw the I-beams into an empty lot but directly and consciously on top of the pleading bystanders below, crippling or killing them. No ancillary reason or adjunct support is given for why it would inexplicably and casually crush to death people it acknowledges as innocent. Here, there are two important things to note in these initial examples. First, while seen as a staunch humanist, early Superman was extremely cavalier about causing or allowing the loss of human life, innocent and guilty alike. Second, Superman's early type of murderous violence was not limited to its Superman persona in that the above examples, four of many, clearly illustrate that *both* early Superman *and* early Clark made recourse to lethal violence as a problem-solving method. These above examples are problematic because they ultimately show that while there are thousands of still exiting ways in which Superman could have used its powers to stop greed and corruption, to save innocent lives, it *consistently* employed violence, death, intimidation, and other unethical means in pursuit of allegedly ethical goals.



To modern readers, Superman is typically characterized as a smiling, cheerful, and idealized protector of capitalist socioeconomic ideology. A paradoxically benevolent Big Brother figure who uses its power to ensure that the moral structures and apparatuses of Western civilization are safeguarded and reproduced. Valued in this way, Superman serves to placate the undeniably disruptive and dangerous nature of its being. However, this reading of Superman only comes into prominence *after* the Golden Age. From its debut and throughout its early adventures in *Action Comics*, Superman bears little resemblance to the reactive and morally static archon it would later become. Rather, from the beginning, Superman's power was unambiguously depicted as dangerous, lethal, destructively and actively disruptive. It is shown to be prone to anger, where intimidation and violence are essential methods in its problem-solving repertoire. In *Superman: The Unauthorized Biography* (2013), Glen Weldon describes this Golden Age Superman as "a tough guy in an unnamed city who beat up bullies gleefully, with no compunction about roughing up criminals if it meant getting his way" (Weldon 2013: 25). From *Action Comics* No. 1 to *Superman* No. 1, Superman, as Weldon suggests, is essentially a super-powered Nemesis, an agent of revenge, using its power to enact swift and often cruel retribution against the corruption of the power elite on behalf of the disenfranchised and alienated proletariat.

In this sense, early Superman is not a particularly good representative of the punitive apparatuses of the State, in so far as respecting the rigor of due process and the various protocols that protect its procedures are concerned. As its early adventures attest, Superman was a truculent agent compelled by bullish violence in both *Action Comics* and *Superman* titles. Peter B. Lloyd's essay "Superman's Moral Evolution" (2005) similarly draws particular attention to the fact that Golden Age Superman's methodology bypassed the very constitutional rights that are central to the idea of the American way of life, which it ostensibly serves and protects. In enacting its destructive brand of retributive justice, it simultaneously, and often mistakenly, defaced the legal rights of its targets with the same laissez-faire attitude that it destroyed vehicles, firearms, and infrastructure. In the Golden Age, Superman never arrested a perpetrator or suspect in anything close to a legally acceptable fashion, making its distinction from the State's ethos and process of a fair trial abundantly clear. As Siegel's early portrayals of Superman show, its procedure for arresting American citizens was to often punch them in the face, which it refers to with satisfaction as "a good old-fashioned sock in the jaw" in *Superman* Vol. 1, No. 11 (July, 1941), "or to throw them with concussive force, or knock their heads together, or throw guns at them" (Siegel 1941: 169; Lloyd 2005: 186).

I argue that the combination of Superman's frequent errors of judgment and single-handed and powerfully violent approach to justice are both frightening and dangerous. Keep in mind that Superman is neither a citizen – let alone a *man*, or fundamentally



Terran – nor an official public servant. It is an obsessively civic minded volunteer, acting with the impunity its multiple identities (their anonymity) and power afford it. In view of this, its violence cannot be remanded as malfeasance. Lloyd rightly notes that

Even where a suspect is guilty, the legal code of America does not permit arbitrary ill-treatment. The law dictates that a person must be presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty; and, when found guilty, subject to the specific punishments laid down by law and sentenced by a judge. The early Superman inflicted whatever pain he deemed appropriate on suspects, and he saw nothing wrong with it. These were not one-off aberrations, done in the heat of the moment. Superman's violence toward suspects was consistent. Almost every arrest he made in the Golden Age involved assaulting the suspect. (Lloyd 2005: 187-8)

When one considers the relationship between the concept of State-determined justice and Superman's power, the character's deliberate and systematic violence is deeply problematic for both the State's own sense of proportion, due process, and the authority of its judicial apparatuses. Moreover, it is problematic for those in the diegeis of the narrative determined to be criminals by Superman because regardless of whether one is a youth petty criminal or a hardened racketeer, excessive trauma and violence are applied univocally as part of the character's superheroics. During its early adventures, it acts independently of any legislature, or any national or international coordinating or governing body. Its super-activities were kept firmly under its own retributive, idiosyncratic, and unconstitutional control. In the last instance, whether right or wrong, guilty or innocent, human beings were at its mercy when it came to both disputed and basic elements of democratic law. The question here is whether or not this aspect of the character is a necessary outcome of its power or not. If yes, then the implication is that radical power and Otherness cannot be held in check by the auspices, traditions, and laws of humanity. If no, then the problem of Superman's early violence is far less easy to solve. I suggest as an answer a rather radical conclusion: Superman is violent in the ways described above because it *enjoys* it. In the numerous sarcastic and arguably morbid jokes Superman offers up to its victims, as if assaults of excessive force are a children's game, is a disturbing sense of joy-in-power, in destruction, in causing trauma in the exercise of a powerful Otherness the character latently understands to be beyond human ideology and morality to fully control. Therefore, ultimately what is most disturbing in my suggestion here is the idea that Superman's avuncular status as a protector of the helpless is in fact a paper screen, a translucent veneer overtop a deeper phenomenon taking place, namely the joy of being dangerously powerful and Other. I hold that this suggestion is necessary if one would like to understand the construction of power in Superman.



“In Time, They Will Join You In The Sun”: Power, Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman in the Golden Age of Contemporary Comics

In his ‘The Roots of Magic’ introduction to *The Greatest Golden Age Stories Ever Told* (1990), Mike Gold describes the Golden Age as follows:

The Golden Age. A time of exploration, an era of growth, a land of magic. For the comic book medium, like the television medium that came into our homes a decade later, ‘The Golden Age’ signifies that initial period wherein young creators were flying by the seat of their pants, oblivious to rules that could not exist the week before. It was a period of magic by month, without precedent. (1990: 10)

Despite such Romantic descriptions of expansion and growth, Superman stood mostly alone during its early developmental stages. In 1938, only two other costumed heroes stood beside it: The Arrow, who followed in the Robin Hood tradition of vigilante bowmen, and the Crimson Avenger, a copy of The Green Hornet of radio fame, albeit with an altered color scheme. Simply put, Superman stood alone because neither of its contenders were as powerful or appealing as a direct result thereof as it was. Most obviously, they lacked superpowers. Aesthetically, they lacked the spectacular flair attributed to Superman’s cape, nor were their costumes generally ground-breaking in any way (McCue & Bloom 1993: 21). By 1939, there were more heroes appearing on the newsstands. These included DC’s the Sandman, Timely Publication’s the Human Torch, and Prince Namor, the Submariner. These were the figures of the first wave of the Golden Age. They were followed by a deluge of heroes the following year in 1940, where the concept of the comic book superhero came to dominate the popular consciousness and, by extension, the aesthetic of the medium. Aesthetically, palettes and costumes now came in increasingly vivid combinations. In addition, basic illustrative principles such as perspectives, elevations, and pictorial space were exaggerated to match the insatiable appetite of youthful readers for exponentially more spectacular stories. From 1939 to 1940, there were approximately sixty superhero titles on the newsstands. By 1941, the number had more than doubled to one hundred and sixty-eight.

Inevitably, demand pressed for more supply. New companies, characters, and publications emerged. One of the most prolific of these new creators was M.C. Gaines. With close ties to the DC parent company, Gaines created a subsidiary comics line titled All-American Comics published under DC’s logo. Gaines was shrewd enough to see that in order to rival Superman and its almost all-encompassing range of powers, any new character would have to either be a specialist in a very unique area of expertise, or present a particularly attention-grabbing gimmick. Furthermore, it was also no longer enough to present an otherworldly figure of power serving the principles of ‘truth’ and ‘justice.’ The quality of the work is what determined its longevity. In terms of longevity, Gaines was preeminently successful. He introduced seminal figures and later recurring



Justice Leaguers such as The Flash, Green Lantern, and Wonder Woman to the newsstands (McCue & Bloom 1993: 26). The continuing partnership between Gaines and DC resulted in the earliest establishment of what is now commonly referred to as a comic book 'universe', a diegetic and/or hyperdiegetic world(s) in which interconnected narratives are bound by internal rules of logic and continuity. Gaines's All-American line produced the first comic book superteam namely, The Justice Society of America. This was followed by the emergence of even more superheroes from the writer/creator teams of early DC Comics and its All-American Line including Sandman, the Spectre, Dr. Fate, Hourman, Hawkman, and the Atom. Before rules of internal logic and continuity were rigorously enforced, the initial excitement of these developments was based on the fact that these superbeings were now able to share a page, a world, a conversation, and their experiences, good or bad. By the end of 1941, *Superman* and *Action Comics* were selling a combined total of two and a half million copies per month. In this way, Superman was the first in a massive and unprecedented comic book boom. By the close of 1941, Superman was still targeting petty crooks, corrupt politicians, and any who exploited the honest working man.

Batman

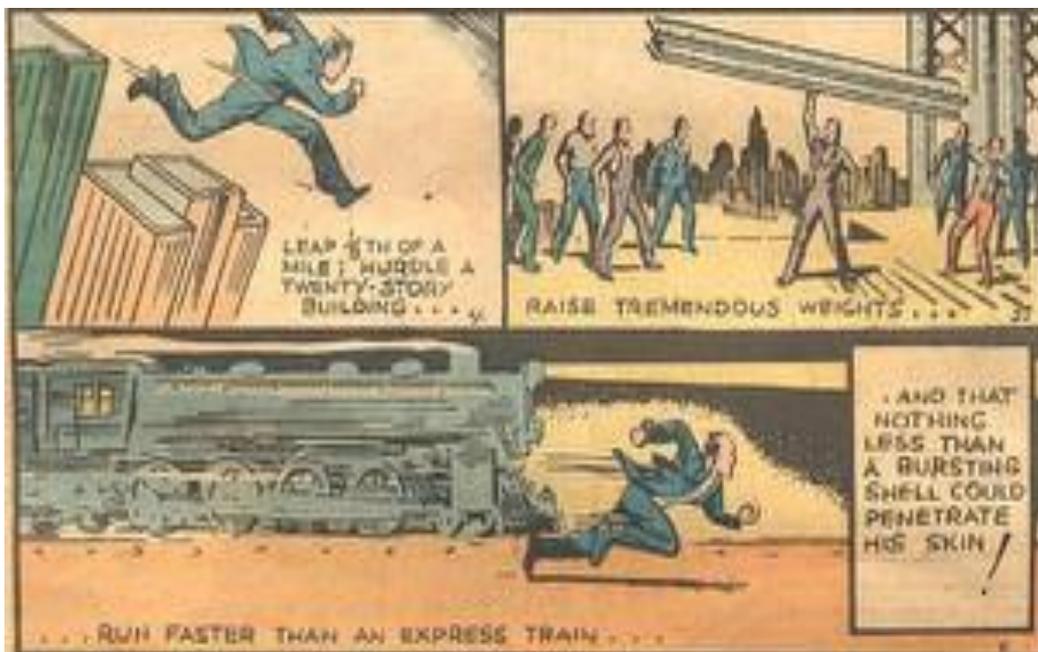


Page from *Detective Comics* Vol. 1, No. 33 "Legend: The Batman and How He Came to Be!" (1939) written by Bill Finger, illustrated by Bob Kane

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In May 1939, Detective Comics debuted a character called The Batman. With regard to power and the body, Batman presented many reversals of Superman. While Superman's power is a passive result of being on Earth, as involuntary as photosynthesis is to a plant, Batman's power emerges from the active pursuit and strengthening of the human body in the face of its own weakness. While the reader is intended to identify with the seemingly weak and graceless Clark Kent in Superman's narratives, Batman is a figure of emulation, an example of the near-miraculous possibilities of the human will. Batman communicated these potentials to youthful readers who may have found it easy to desire the godlike powers of Superman, but difficult to fathom the existential consequences of commanding such power in the world in which they lived. Despite the attraction of the dream of flying Superman represents, being able to train one's mind and body to the peak of human performance, in defiance of the unavoidable hazards of death, hunger, and fear, appears, ironically, more tangible by comparison. While both Superman and Batman present an extreme and far-fetched skill-sets, it is easier to imagine becoming a master scientist, tactician, strategist, and detective than it is to imagine becoming the wielder of godlike powers and abilities. In terms the power of the mind and body, Batman embodies the fulfillment of the potential of human limits. Superman explodes them. It is this primary distinction between the two characters, transcendent power contra the potentials of the human will, that not only makes Batman such an interesting and enduring character, but what makes the pairing of the two almost equally inextricable (McCue & Bloom 1993: 23).



Detail from *Action Comics* Vol. 1, No. 1 (1938) written by Jerry Siegel, illustrated Joe Shuster

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Batman is compelling because he and his rouge's gallery are dedicated to the articulation and examination of the various 'dark' aspects of the human psyche and its experience of being. Superman offers the opposite, not only in terms of a respite or momentary escape, but an intimation of the possibility of overcoming such traumas and strife entirely through the radical power of Otherness and the Otherness of power. Batman's narratives, even from an early date, were far more 'serious' in tone than Superman's narratives, which often contained many insertions of humor. Even the addition of Robin did not dissolve the shadow permeating Batman's stories. In this way, Superman and Batman represent two ways in which the figure of supra-moral/legal power reflected the national mood of the American zeitgeist in early modern comics. Batman's saturnine atmospheres and unflinching realism reflected the America's two most pressing fears; more economic downturns of the Depression, and the threat of global war, both threats to not only the sovereignty of the nation but its global sociopolitical and economic standing and power. This can be noted in the targets of Batman's early 'justice,' who were the same as Superman's: agents of corruption and crime, from street-level thugs to arms dealers. Superman's hopeful, albeit retributive, tone refracted these fears into a fantasy of overcoming (McCue & Bloom 1993: 24).

The two examples above exemplify this thematic duality and aesthetic bifurcation expressed by Superman contra Batman. Both images depict the process of the realization of power in each character. Notice how the portrayal of the development of Batman's power shows that it is a process of rigor, one which involves serious scholarship and scientific research as well as strenuous physical training. In this sense, Batman's power requires the active and persistent training of both mental and physical faculties. Moreover, notice how this process is portrayed as potently personal to the point of semi-solipsistic, deeply and tragically emotional, retrospectively contemplative, and psychologically calculated; all which occurs in the extremely insular, fortified, palatial yet saturnine environment of Wayne Manor's interior. Nobody, not even Wayne's trusted mentor, guardian, and butler Alfred, is depicted as bearing witness, let alone being involved, instrumentally or peripherally, in the process of the development of Batman's power. In contrast to Batman's noticeably nocturnal development, Superman testing and acclimating to its power occurs in the diurnal and public space of Metropolis; the suggestion here being that the extremity of its power necessitates it using the city itself as an experimental apparatus, as both laboratory and gymnasium. Unlike Batman's clandestine self-analysis, notice the presence of awed witnesses in the second panel of Superman's exploration of self and power. Furthermore, while Batman is depicted to take great pains to not only increase both his physical but and mental aptitude in a measured curricular manner, Superman's self-discovery is depicted to be in seemingly reckless, constant, and extreme motion in a way that emphasizes its physical indomitability: be it raising I-beams overhead or outpacing locomotives. In this sense,



the procedure by which each character comes to develop and understand their power and body are as contrasted as the liveries that cover them.

There are marked differences in the motivations of each character as well. While impressive, Batman's prodigious physical and mental acuity are not what compel him. They are necessities of his obsessive, and arguably pathological, pursuit of hunting down and punishing criminals. His motivation is unrelenting and severe vengeance. Unlike Batman, Superman comes from a very unique and special set of circumstances and grows up in the bucolic idealization of the concept of home, characterized by the placidity and removedness of Smallville, Kansas. Within this milieu, the possession and use of power is determined by rustic necessity, not ethical imperatives or moral probity. By contrast, the wholesomeness and safety of the domestic scene is violently defaced in Batman as a young Bruce Wayne is forced to watch his parents gunned down by Joe Chill in Gotham's epicenter of urban decay, Crime Alley. The most severe psycho-emotional resonances of this formative trauma orbit what Batman feels is an incurable void, a black hole of powerlessness at whose center is a penetrating sense of lack that neither his prodigious will nor seemingly infinite resources can ameliorate. In addition, Superman inherits its problematically rigid moral ideals from its rustic upbringing and the pedagogy of the Kents. This provides Superman with two identities 'Superman' and 'Clark Kent' which both facilitate 'legitimate' outlets and motivations for its immense powers. Batman, however, is motivated by revenge, but more penetratingly, the trauma of powerlessness and the types of searing psycho-emotional losses and lack-mentality that necessarily result even in the face of fortune, fame, and privilege. In this way, the psychological profiles of each character are construed as very different, assuming that as Other, Superman can accurately or definitively be said to possess anything resembling a human psyche. While both characters experience loss on different scales, they are both fundamentally traumatized by it, both are orphaned by it, and both are obsessed with using their respective powers and abilities to prevent it from happening again. In addition, both show that power is not a *de facto* curative for or inviolable precaution against loss and its traumas. With Superman, the collective technological power of the entire Kryptonian race could not forestall the scale of the loss of an entire planet, Superman's parents included. Similarly, despite the sociopolitical and economic influence of the Wayne dynasty, this power could not prevent the Batman's loss predicated on the murder of his parents.

The manner in which they react to this trauma, like their opposing aesthetic of dark and light, differs as well. In comparing the aesthetics of early tales of the two figures, Mark Cotta Vaz states, "Batman as a feature, was infinitely better plotted, better villained, and better looking than Superman. Batman inhabited a world where no one, no matter what the time of day, cast anything but long shadows – seen from weird



perspectives. Batman's world was scary, Superman's never" (Vaz 1989: 31). Batman uses the resultant psychosis from his childhood trauma as the foundation of his strength and skeptical/investigative prowess. In fact, Batman's trauma is consciously transformed into a method of inflicting more trauma for the understandable yet immoral purpose of personal vengeance. Here, through technology, wealth, will, and obsession, the trauma of powerlessness is alchemized into the power to traumatize. Batman could even be accused of being short sighted in the face of what many assume is Superman's idealized heroic praxis of perfect altruism and selflessness. However, as early Superman comics show, this is not the case. While Batman is always seeking to develop new means and techniques of increasing his efficacy as an avenger of crime, in essence is powers of 'just vengeance', Superman must always be mindful of not allowing the maximum amplitude of its power to manifest. It must stifle its power, not increase it lest it threaten more than the guilty or the innocent, but the entire species.

Wonder Woman

Making her debut in *Action Comics* No. 8 (December, 1941), Wonder Woman of Paradise Island, daughter of the Amazon Queen Hippolyta, became the third member of the triumvirate known affectionately, if not reverently, as 'The Trinity' (Superman, Wonder Woman, and Batman respectively). Thematically, the Amazonian stronghold of Paradise Island is often depicted as an Elysian enclave which is starkly contrasted to the turbulent, violent, and unloving alternative of retributive justice found in the world of man. In this way, Paradise Island is thematically cognate with Superman's Fortress of Solitude and Batman's Batcave. All three locations function heterotopically; that is, as representations of the spaces of Otherness. Wonder Woman was created by the psychologist and inventor Dr. William Moulton Marston under the pen name Charles Moulton. Marston was also the psychological consultant on DC's publishing board during the Golden Age. He took it upon himself to challenge the pejorative views of Gaines and others that a heroine could not be the lead protagonist of a profitable superhero comic book. Marston's work on Wonder Woman can be described as a mixture of Greco-Roman mythology and sadomasochistic imagery and themes. Wonder Woman's early stories are infused with a direct examination of power and the body that is, unlike Superman or Batman, dramatized in overtly sexual terms. This made Marston and his work of particular interest to Feminist critique then and now, and characterized Wonder Woman herself a somewhat complex icon (or traitor) of many women's suffrage movements throughout the twentieth century.



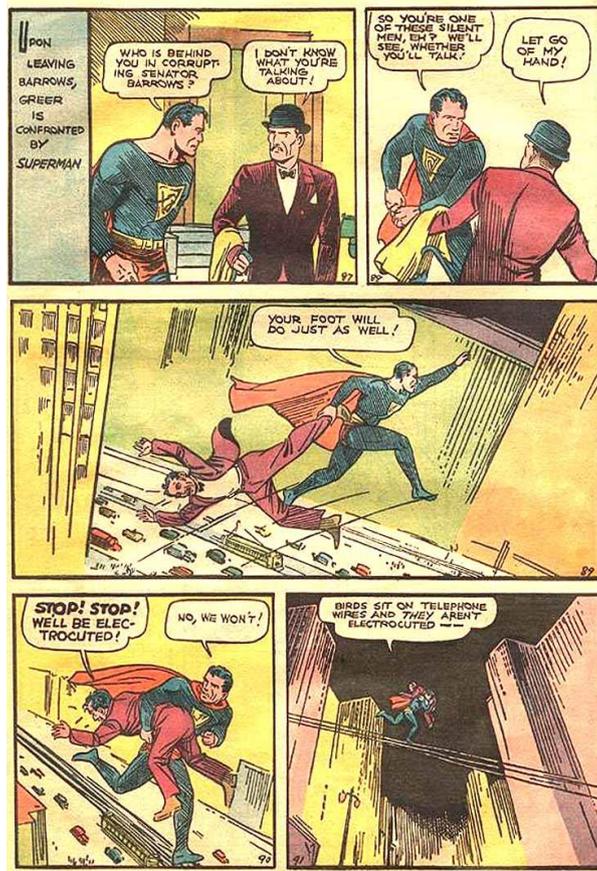
Detail from *Sensation Comics* Vol. 1, No. 35 (1944) written by William Moulton Marston, illustrated by Harry G. Peter.

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Detail from *Wonder Woman* Vol. 1, No. 13 (1945) written by Joye Murchison, illustrated by Harry G. Peter

©DC Comics



Detail from *Action Comics* Vol. 1, No. 1 (June, 1938) written by Jerry Siegel, illustrated Joe Shuster

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Physical submission and power-play were often thematically and aesthetically included in Marston's work. In most of his twenty-eight-issue initial run on Wonder Woman beginning in January 1942, either Wonder Woman or her enemies were frequently depicted as bound or restrained in some way. This also applied to her countrywomen of Paradise Island, who were often shown engaging in strenuous wrestling contests and bondage play (see *Sensation Comics* Vol. 1, No. 35 and *Wonder Woman* Vol. 1, No. 13 above). While Marston depicted Wonder Woman's method of crime fighting as being inextricable from overcoming foes by ensnaring or binding them into submission, early Superman's method of overcoming its enemies was that of direct and extreme psycho-physical violence or intimidation (see *Action Comics* Vol. 1, No. 1 above).

Marston openly acknowledged the relationship between power and eroticism and was deliberate in his inclusion of these images and themes in his creation of Wonder Woman. He did so as a way of suggesting to readers that submission to fair, strong, loving, and beautiful authorities could be an enjoyable and rewarding experience. The concept of abdicating the often-destructive striving of the will to a strong and alluring



woman was intended not only to seduce the reader into revaluing the nature of power, domination, submission, resistance, and authority, but also to suggest that willful submission itself possessed utopian potential. In addition, Marston used Wonder Woman as a vehicle to present various other themes including transformative and restorative justice, as well as concepts such as rehabilitation, assimilation, and (re)integration into human civilization, the last two of which are exploded in Superman being a super-powered alien superficially indistinguishable from a human man (McCue & Bloom 1993: 26). It is always important to bear Superman’s Otherness in mind. When it comes to the character’s relationship with power, morality, and violence, the question always stands: what right does an alien have to use its extraterrestrial power to enforce/influence the ideological apparatuses of State that determine life for humanity on earth? Equally and opposing is the question: what right does humanity have to superimpose its comparatively limited ideological and repressive power over the power and Otherness of an alien, impelling it to turn itself into an embodied State apparatus engaged in repressive judicial activities (cf. Tembo 2017; 2018)? This paradox also applies to Wonder Woman. It should be noted that while Wonder Woman, being the offspring of the Hellenic gods, expresses extreme physical power much in the same way Superman does, the primary distinction between the two concerns the nature of their Otherness. With the terrestrial presence of Paradise Island being both intact and sovereign, Wonder Woman always has a unique socio-cultural community of sisters and a parent to return to for comfort or council. In contrast, with the destruction of Krypton, Superman does not.

The Phantom & Black Terror



Page from *The Phantom* “The Sing Brotherhood” (1936) written by Lee Falk, illustrated by Ray Moore

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12 Nov 1936, panel 3



13 Nov 1936, panel 4



16 Nov 1936, panel 4



25 Nov 1936, panel 4



18 Nov 1936, panel 3

Page from *The Phantom* "The Sky Band" (1936) written by Lee Falk, illustrated by Ray Moore

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As aforementioned, there existed a plethora of what we could accurately describe as first edition superheroes/costumed crime fighters in 1939. These included Captain Marvel (Fawcett Comics), Bozo the Iron Man (Smash Comics), Human Torch (Marvel), Namor the Sub-Mariner (Marvel), and Sandman/Wesley Dodds (New York World's Fair Comics), for example. Other characters during this period also expressed a discursive regularity with Superman in terms of the truculent and violent use of power in the pursuit of justice. Consider The Phantom created by Lee Falk, and Black Terror created by Richard E. Hughes, the former who had his debut in 1936 and the latter in 1940. The Phantom appears as a prototype modern costumed crime-fighter in an adventure comic strip at the dawn of the Golden Age. Operating in the fictional African nation of Bangalla, The Phantom originally had no superpowers. The success of his various missions depended on his own strength, intellect, and the myth of immortality surrounding The Phantom mantle, an effect captured in the character's theatrically evocative epithet "The Ghost Who Walks". The Phantom's Oath of the Skull which outlines a rudimentary ethics/mission statement as follows: "I swear to devote my life to the destruction of piracy, greed, and cruelty, in all their forms, and my sons and their sons, shall follow me" (Falk 1936: n.p). In this regard, The Phantom shares fundamental thematic similarities with his descendent, Batman, who operates on a similar level, through similar means (the Wayne fortune to develop equipment and weaponry, being the greatest detective,



an expert martial artist, and the fear-mongering neo-mythic device of the Batsignal). In the first Phantom story titled “The Singh Brotherhood” (Falk 1936), the character’s propensity for and liberal use of violence is announced immediately. As shown in The Phantom “The Sing Brotherhood” (1936) above, after saving an innocent bystander named Dianna from the collateral danger of his encounter with the narrative’s eponymous villain Achmed Singh, The Phantom says to the terrified woman “all I could do was punch him” (Falk 1936: 2). In the action depicted in these early Phantom narratives, there is no discourse between criminal and vigilante. At the core of these early stories is a diegesis always propelling itself by and toward decisive and clear use of violent measures to resolve the narrative. In the twenty-three pages of the story, each initially limited to just four panels, there simply is no time for ethics. What are the implications here concerning violence, power, and morality in the Golden Age? The sense of narrative exigency that precludes any meaningful and/or extended meditation on the morals of the violent actions portrayed on the page in Superman is also evident in The Phantom. In “The Singh Brotherhood–Part 2” (1936), The Phantom refuses to comfort and inform the *victim* of the broader fight against evil in which he is engaged and into which she accidentally stumbled. This display of casual moral negligence compounds the notion that with active superheroes, there is no time for a deliberate contemplation let alone critique of the ethics of their methods, as well as their psychological and physical effects on the lives and bodies of the innocent caught in the crossfire. Perhaps what is most troubling here is the idea that while figures like The Phantom, Batman, and Superman ostensibly function as morally corrective agents using their skills and power to locate and attack reprobates as complex as criminal occult leaders like Achmed Singh and megalomaniacal mad scientists like The Ultra-Humanite, to comparatively as simple as racketeers and gunsels, the methodology of decisive action predicated on hard violence is univocally applied to *all* levels of criminal infraction. The latent tyranny and undercurrent of fascism here suggests that at their beginning, the ethics of superheroic/crime-fighting activity were already deeply problematic on account of the primacy and vehemence of violence brought to bear in their respective expressions.

This sense of the primacy of speed and violent action over and above moral questioning continues in the second Phantom story titled “The Sky Band” (1936). The above excerpt shows four moments in the story’s twenty-two-week, forty-four page long complete run in which The Phantom mentions haste, speed, time, and the lack thereof on five separate occasions. The effect engendered as a result is one in which psychology, ethics are seemingly secondary to the violent actions that the psychology and ethics of superheroism would later explore in seminal works considered masterpieces of the genre. Examples include Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons’ *Watchmen* (1986), Frank Miller’s *The Dark Knight Returns* (1986), Alan Moore and Neil Gaiman’s *Miracleman*



(1982-1990), and other controversially incisive satirical critiques such as Pat Mills and Kevin O' Neill's *Marshal Law* (1987), and Garth Ennis and Darick Robertson's *The Boys* (2006).

The morally questionable use of increased power is also inextricable from the wish-fulfilment aspects of Black Terror. In the Black Terror's debut in "Nemesis of Evil" (1940), meek pharmacist Bob Benton formulates a chemical elixir called formic ethers which, when inhaled, grant him various superpowers including super-strength and near invulnerability. He and his child sidekick Tim Roland use their powers to thwart crimes familiar in the period's superhero/costume crime-fighter comics, namely racketeering and extortion. The pair achieve this primarily through violence, bludgeoning goons and their bosses without hesitation or consideration of their violence after the fact. Handing the story's numerous thugs who are responsible for destroying Black Terror's civilian alter ego's drug store to the police, the notion of due process, its authority and importance only emerges *after* dispensing his own brand of justice and revenge. Moreover, in the same issue, Black Terror, like Superman in its early appearances, is shown to take a gleeful pleasure in exercising his might-equals-right form of justice, seen in the character's taunting insults to his victims. Another aspect of this fascistic joy-in-power is rather uncomfortably apparent in a panel in which Black Terror uses his new found strength to force himself on his alter ego's unrequited love Jean Starr (see below). While both Black Terror and Superman use their power violently in their respective pursuits of justice, Black Terror taking physical advantage of Starr contrasts radically with the total lack of sexuality, let alone abuse, in Superman and Action Comics during the 1940s.



Detail from *Exciting Comics* Vol. 13, No. 9 (1940) written by Richard E. Hughes, illustrated by David Gabrielsen

© DC Comics



Detail from *Exciting Comics* Vol. 13, No. 9 (1940) written by Richard E. Hughes, illustrated by David Gabrielsen

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Conclusion: Red Cape, Red Fists

The 1930s and 40s were periods of national and global instability and crisis that both incubated and catalyzed the emergence of a decidedly modern vengeful, powerful, and active Savior/avenger figure. However, what differentiates Superman from the messianic figures of myth and religion in its early stories is that it offered salvation in the form of vengeful and radical sociopolitical restitution and socialist requisition as an imminent, that is tangible, and unambiguous event. In this way, the early use of Superman's power was a method of redressing imbalances of socioeconomic power, using its radically disruptive abilities to re-arrange the power dynamic and socioeconomic praxes that prevailed in the miasma of the Depression. The need Superman satisfied in its early adventures should not be thought of as that of moral dissemination or the valorization of a Judeo-Christian ethic of 'goodness.'¹ Instead, early Superman addressed the anxiety and need for restitution on behalf of the powerless against the exploitative actions and institutions of the powerful, primarily in socioeconomic terms. Superman's brand of justice, from its beginnings, was clearly a mixture of retributive and restorative rather than abstract and moral in which extortion,

¹ I acknowledge the fact that Superman is, in many seemingly overwhelmingly definitive ways, a Jewish neo-mythological figure. For a good analysis in this regard, see Martin Lund's *Re-constructing the Man of Steel* (2016).



greed, racketeering, and various other types of injustices were seen to have a direct effect on individual victims and their communities, as opposed to violating ideal principles enshrined in the legal apparatuses of the State.

This sense of transgressiveness applies to Golden Age figures who possess Otherworldly power, like Superman and Wonder Woman. That latter integrates, from a very early stage in the burgeoning mythosphere of American superhero comics, the transgressive image of female Otherness – that is the pejorative ideas of the time concerning women as second-class citizens – and sexuality as equally seductive and binding, albeit simultaneously redemptive, manifestations of power. In contrast, when power is sexualized in early male superheroes like Black Terror, the manifestations thereof are often as much examples of non-consensual violations of/against female bodily sovereignty as they are violations of basic civilian rights of the male perpetrators he and his sidekick engage. In the last instance, we must be aware of other sinister implications inherent in the dream of the power of Otherness and the Otherness of power embodied by the likes of Superman and The Black Terror. While these enhanced individuals take a latently fascistic glee in their power, those not possessed of these abilities but other capitalistic means of power often express that power in an equally supra-legal, amoral, and indeed often *immoral* manner. Therefore, while The Phantom and Batman can be said to be commendable examples of perseverance and will-power, they are also supra-legal agents acting out highly idiosyncratic and, dare I say potently *resentful*, psycho-emotional traumas and obsessions. Therefore we, as critics and consumers of these respective worlds and their still powerful narratives, must not let the seductive aspects of power and Otherness, our admiration of the various triumphs of will, and/or our sympathy for the agentially disadvantaged and psycho-emotionally traumatized to obfuscate the fact that power in service of morality is never benign.

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