

THE MYTH APPEAL: STUDIES IN CULTURAL NARRATIVE

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ABSTRACT

Though Aristotle is famous for defining three persuasive appeals in his treatise *On Rhetoric*, I argue that a fourth appeal exists in the pages of *The Poetics*. In addition to character (*ethos*), logic (*logos*), and emotion (*pathos*), the fourth appeal is to narrative (*mythos*), or the substantive body of values contained within the socio-cultural elements of a given culture. Using the works of Joseph Campbell, Kenneth Burke, and Roland Barthes as touchstones, the goal of this dissertation is to offer a systematic analysis of this appeal. Because human beings at once function with attention to the whole of lived experience, the myth appeal touches on social norms (the assumed reality), ideology (the lived and presumed reality), and hyperreality (where symbols become a reality unto themselves). The substance of the myth appeal is narrative, or undercurrents of stories used in the place of argument. Here, I offer four examples to display these tensions; the first is an “action-figure” toy line to illustrate how an existing mythology from comics conveys ideological values; the second is a post 09/11 comic book series which used hyperreality to critique social norms; the third is Alan Sokal’s academic hoax , which showed a cultural tension across all three areas; and finally, a survey of U.S. Supreme Court decisions on privacy to discuss the emerging mythology of abortion. I conclude with a systematic approach to myth, and a brief discussion of additional persuasive appeals.

PREFACE

Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.

(James 1:16)

This project began with a simple question: “what if some arguments are won because someone tells a better story rather than makes a better argument?” From this emerged a study into various permutations of this theme all leading back to the same series of key words: myth, narrative, culture, ideology, and rhetoric. Of these, the central, organizing principle is myth. The reason for this is because all too often, human beings are led into mistaking the *perception of reality* for reality. What seems to be true often is not, and persuasion frequently depends less on arguments and more on faulty perception, assumption, habit, or unquestioned tradition. The word “myth” as it applies in this project covers and refers to all uses of the term in a rhetorical context. It can mean a fictional story represented as the truth, as is the case with classical mythology, though it can also, by extension, apply to the modern sense of myth as a *mythos*, or the aura of *ethos* surrounding various individuals and institutions that give them *gravitas* and presence. In some academic circles, especially semiotics, the word “myth” also covers the realm of linguistic systems as it applies to social norms, relying on the general argument that the modern myth is a heavily constructed system, which only appears to be naturally occurring. Like entropy, myth is a force of nature, which requires more energy to dispel than to propagate.

And yet, a myth can be useful. Idealized versions of reality can inspire people to rise above the material conditions of their existence in hope. In the right hands, a good myth can shake individuals out of apathy through the experience of epiphany. It is with this idealism

that I approach the topic of myth here, warts and all, as one of the most misunderstood concepts within the humanities. In part due to the enlightenment project, whereupon “myth” became the enemy of knowledge and truth, the concept of myth has generally slipped into pejorative contexts as an easily dismissed set of illusory facts, or worse, as the substance of false consciousness in the literal Marxist sense: a set of beliefs that enslave people to a manufactured set of ideals created by men rather than a philosophical birthright derived from material conditions. This kind of default disparaging of myth is largely borne out of the domination of this movement (the enlightenment, not Marxism), and the setup of myth being the opposite of fact often shuts down any serious attention to the usefulness of myth as an organizing principle. It is with this purpose in mind that this dissertation is focused on reviving the use of myth as a rhetorical principle.

Due to rhetoric’s predisposition with dealing in topics of uncertainty, myth is a useful conceptual framework to deal both with the “truth” of perceived realities and the persuasiveness of fiction. My overall argument for the dissertation is that a rhetorical approach to myth cultivates arguments as parts of a flexible semiotic system, which manifests as a series of cultural, as opposed to purely literary, narratives. In other words, some arguments are won by the use of a particularly persuasive story that is, in fact, a nurtured myth; this myth is so ingrained in culture that it is simultaneously believed to be true and false at the same time, with people mentally acknowledging that they are impossible, yet living as though they were not. For example, “true love” may be an imagined concept that a sophisticated audience would be wary of, yet the public still shows up in droves for romantic comedies that perpetuate the myth precisely because they *want* to believe in it. These myths are useful abstractions that provide daily life with a sense of efficacy by giving

it a narrative structure with a clear objectives, protagonists, and rewards for overcoming obstacles. Studying these myths rhetorically shows how persuasion can be a function narrative mapping, or the ability of a skilled rhetorician to apply these familiar narratives to real events.

The main problem that the revised mythological conceptualization this addresses is not social, but semiotic. Looking at any system, whether cultural or social, of any sufficient complexity reveals that any framework of analysis eventually falls short in the ability to analyze due to the inherent conflict of nominal analysis against real world diversity; where analysis seeks to break elements into constituent parts that are irreducible for the purpose of seeing how they fit together, the fullness and complexity of a changing real world always outstrips the analytical framework. In short, the universe is simply too complex to be easily subdued by a single line of thinking. As such, my goal, in addition to my argument, is to develop an answer to the poststructural dilemma, in narratology as well as semiotics. Loosely stated, the cultural processes of lived experience were always going to be richer than the models used to explain them. As such, Russian formalist Yuri Lotman's resolution was to avoid explaining the phenomenon in favor of focusing on the cultural meaning of its creation (x, 270). In this way, I hope to address this problem directly rather than tangentially. Myth may be the most useful conceptual abstraction for embracing the fullness of the natural world conceptually and for rhetoric because it can refer to events that are objectively true and false as well as subjective events that are *believed* to be true or false. For the purpose of understanding cultural forms, myth allows the researcher to focus on the persuasive appeal of cultural forms rather than their inherent truth. With the shifted locus of meaning from actual truth to *belief* in reliability, the connection to rhetoric is clear: the persuasive appeal of any

object or cultural form exists independently from its specific, verifiable nature in as much as it is either believed to be true or a rhetorician can persuade people into believing that it is.

Toward an Ecology of Mind, Not an Economy of Theory

This deference to the complexities of the real world in comparison to the shortcomings of theory has necessitated an unconventional theoretical framework and approach. While this could broadly be defined as an interdisciplinary work, it would be more accurate to call it a disciplinary synthesis. Whereas traditional approaches to interdisciplinary discourse involve translating the insights of one field into another, for example, using an evolutionary theory of cellular mitosis to explain the separation and development of European and American semiotics, this project seeks to merge theories at their points of connection. This generally contrasts the traditional philosophical trajectory of moving toward an economy of the theoretical perspectives; once defined as a feminist or Marxist scholar, it is generally taken for granted that the academic will specify the chosen theoretical approach and continue to build on it. Like athletes trying to conserve energy by focusing on the efficiency of motion, the economy of theory allows an academic to continue pushing toward an area of expertise, eventually developing increasingly internally consistent analyses along a specified methodology. Yet, the connections between the major theorists that I draw on are not immediately apparent; Aristotle, Gregory Bateson, Roland Barthes, Kenneth Burke, James Boyd White, and Joseph Campbell were disparate theorists separated by major gaps of time and theoretical approaches. Moreover, their works have been built upon and specified, so why pay tribute to a series of theorists who are seemingly unrelated to one another?

When pressed with this question, my best answer only arrived through hindsight. I have always considered myself an interdisciplinary student and found their works to be representative both of the open-mindedness necessary to make daring connections and that their works are highly inflected with a sense of adventure in this discovery. In a sense, each of these scholars represented a major shift in theoretical perspectives and findings because of the way that they avoided an economy of theory in favor of the ecology of mind (as Bateson might say). Though I will spend more time throughout the analysis to explain their particular usefulness within each chapter, I wanted to make a note up front that I have always hoped that my own scholarship would parallel the kind of intuitive leaps mad through their own. Aristotle framed the field of rhetoric through the lens of philosophy, Gregory Bateson merged semiotics with psychology, Roland Barthes meshed structural linguistics with cultural systems, Kenneth Burke created identification theory through an intertwining of language theory and social practice, James Boyd White tied legal theory with Athenian drama, and Joseph Campbell testified to the relationships between comparative religion and Jungian psychology. In short, they were scholars who looked for insights synthetically as well as analytically. Moreover, they succeeded in large part because of their indifference to being tied to any particular discipline or theoretical approach.

Take, in comparison, the case of Ray Williams who was instrumental in creating the neo-Marxist school of thought as it applied to literature and the foundation of British cultural studies as a discipline. Near the end of his career, Williams wrote his retrospective on British cultural studies, life in the academy, and his most personal opinions on virtually every topic that he had felt his hands tied throughout his career. For Williams, *What I Came To Say*, became the last chance to set down, for the record, his deepest thoughts in the most

accessible prose available. Straightforward, approachable, and often filled with poignancy his overall regret is that his most influential work, which tied together Marxist philosophy into the study of literature, had cut off more theoretical and professional ties than it made (22). Though he was widely regarded as an expert in the emerging field, his reputation came at a heavy cost. The development of new terminology often made it difficult to communicate with colleagues, the devotion to Marxist principles often branded him as an anti-authoritarian rabble-rouser, and his dedication to making cultural studies an independent discipline more often required burning bridges rather than building them (56). It was clear in his painful recounting that the effort to continuously draw professional boundaries to establish cultural studies as a discipline was both rewarding and troublesome; though he succeeded in creating and leading his cultural studies program, it eventually alienated him from his home discipline in the English departments that he felt loyal to after graduate school. In the end, *What I Came To Say* acted as an extended argument about what he would have changed in hindsight, starting with his justifications of cultural studies. Instead of stating, “‘cultural studies’ *is*...” he would have offered, “this is what ‘cultural studies’ *means*...” In hindsight, I believe that this profoundly affected me during my initial graduate school studies because of my own devotion to interdisciplinary thinking.

Williams had, in effect, conveyed the basic myth of the academy. This myth could be summarized as, “working hard, specializing, and becoming an expert in your field is the surest way to both tenure and longevity within the academy; moreover, in an institution that respects knowledge, recognition and fulfillment will follow this diligent pursuit.” This myth is echoed in Richard Rodriguez’s *The Hunger for Memory*, where he describes a very similar process of alienation; as he increased his expertise in the English language, his sense of

connection and fulfillment once derived from sharing common values with his family dried up, and he found that he was under constant pressure to specialize his scholarship at the expense of his interests in Latin studies (119). The lament of both authors demonstrates that the myth is internally problematic because success within the academy creates alienation outside, and specialization within a discipline makes it more difficult to relate to non-members. The myth belies several underscored points: continued expertise creates a continually smaller group of other experts with which to relate to, professional success does not always equate to personal success, and expanding knowledge by specializing actually narrows academic vision in the same way that focusing a lens blurs the periphery. The myth of academia is both true and false at the same time; what is missing from the picture is the entirety of the whole system, due to the fact that the promises of reward that come from success also include a hefty drawback in potential social isolation both personally and professionally.

The Value of Myth to Studies in Rhetoric

The “myth of academia” mentioned above is the first of several examples of what I refer to as “cultural” narratives, or a set of cultural values replete with a narrative structure, which gives efficacy to action. Despite the various conflicts that both Williams and Rodriguez faced, they persisted in pursuing the myth, partly because they were already invested in the system that perpetuated it, and partly because the myth itself has power. In each of their cases, they were encouraged to continue with the argumentative equivalent of, “it will all work out in the end,” and their retrospectives described a general resolution that the successes outweighed the sacrifices.

Still, I did not realize until nearing the end of this project how profoundly Ray Williams' work had affected me. In retrospect, my devotion to maintaining an unusual set of theoretical perspectives and the attention to interdisciplinary synthesis is rooted in the desire to embrace the connections between theories. Simply put, I wanted to be like the scholars I was reading. The main keystone figures (Kenneth Burke, Gregory Bateson, etc.) generally refused to be boxed into an academic corner, and generally remain unclassifiable or reputed to be the inventor of a specific brand of analysis.

With this in mind, I hope it will be clear to any reader of this dissertation that the goal was to create links between theories and disciplines rather than entrench this project in a particular line of thinking. Asking what things *mean* is at the heart of the humanities and in the constant battle to define "*this is what we do*" to administrations often creates a tension between the aspirations to make connections and the necessity of putting up boundaries. The method to this "madness" is a lingering hope that there is as much to benefit from connecting theories together as there is in subsuming all phenomena under an existing theoretical umbrella. Rather than thinking of this as a theory-building exercise, it would be more appropriate to think of it as a theory-expanding effort.

Toward this end, my major theoretical point of reference is Aristotle, and specifically, his definition of rhetoric as a method of seeing the persuasive elements inherent to any given situation. Though I give a more thorough definition of rhetoric in the first chapter, it is from this idea that everything else is connected and has been the central line throughout each section of the argument. I am indebted, strangely enough, to martial artist Bruce Lee for his treatise on Jeet Kune Do because his initial insights on winning street fights became the epiphany I needed to really open up Aristotle's interpretation of the existing sophistry of his

day. As a student of several martial arts disciplines, Lee became frustrated with the fixed-form approach to fighting endorsed by the more traditional fighting styles; resetting back into a starting position or attack stance used valuable time and energy. His innovation in Jeet Kune Do was a simple word of advice: take what works and ditch everything else (11-14). His goal was to encourage the martial artist to be fluid and adaptable to any situation. While Aristotle's own method stresses the formal strengths and weaknesses of sophistic rhetoric as it might apply to students of philosophy, my belief is that his initial definition of rhetoric implies the same fluid adaptability of Lee's Jeet Kune Do philosophy: when it comes to argument, read the situation and use what works. Seeing the persuasiveness inherent to any situation becomes the blanket recommendation to students to remember that any system, no matter how thorough, cannot account for the individual variations of real life. As such, a systematic approach assists with the initial training, but a gifted artist knows when to break the rote application of principles in favor of improvisation.

Under this general rule, virtual any discipline of study has something to offer rhetoric as long as it contributes some definition of meaning to the complexity of real life. Moreover, it suggests that disciplines are tools ready to be employed for specific jobs rather than all-purpose fix-it devices. As such, rhetoricians who confine themselves to a particular kind of interpretation will eventually be at a disadvantage in discourses that are remote from their area of expertise. With training and care, a rhetorician could theoretically be a master of any number of disciplines and employ them with situational appropriateness. While I do not consider myself a feminist, I find that feminist methods of analysis are useful in critiquing the James Cameron's film *Aliens* due to the fact that the main protagonist, Ellen Ripley, was generally well received as an empowered female figure, yet was originally written as a male

character. Similarly, the social construction of knowledge in Christopher Nolan's *Memento* lends itself to a postmodernist review. Herein lies the dilemma. Each branch of study and knowledge can be infinitesimally specific, so is it the rhetorician's responsibility to be an expert in the field prior to asserting enough authority to interpret with its methods?

Unfortunately, this question has not been resolved since Plato's dialogues between Socrates and Pollus in *Gorgias* were first established in the ancient world. My hope is that the answer, even in this day and age, is that a responsible rhetorician does not need to assert expertise in order to make a claim. Because every discipline is infinitely expansive the humbling fact is that no one can be an expert in their field, only a specialist. If specificity, not clarity, is the goal of an analysis, then the art of rhetoric as a persuasive tool is lost. However, if expansiveness and systemic thinking are the goal of rhetoric as a method of understanding, then any discipline is valuable in this pursuit.

In the end, myth is just a concept until it matches a will. Due to its unique relationship and frequent attribution as the opposite of truth, virtually every discipline has allowed for its usage within the scope of its study. Asking, "what is a myth?" is a bit like asking, "what is a fact?" in that every discipline develops idiosyncratic definitions for determining the burden of proof. Social facts are not the same as scientific facts; legal facts are not the same as historical facts; and ultimately, if postmodernists like Jean-François Lyotard are correct, even facts are not really facts because they only exist as "factual" based on a system that is itself a myth (15). For the remainder of this project, I urge readers to keep in mind that this is not designed to be a definitive collection of essays on various myth appeals that I found as the subject of analysis; rather, they are a series of experiments designed around a research question: "if a myth appeal exists, what does it look like and how would I recognize it if I

found it?” The resulting answer is that a rhetorical approach to myth elicits a series of cultural narratives in virtually every text, which, in turn, demonstrates an ideological backbone of subtle, unconscious persuasion constantly at work in us, around us, and through us. As such, myth takes on the characteristics of a force of nature, it precludes an argument as a part of culture, is employed in an argument through ideology and language, and is motivated rhetorically toward persuasion.

CHAPTER ONE: THE MYTH APPEAL

Whenever I look back on the best days of my life I think I saw them all on TV. I'm so homesick now for someone that I never knew; I'm so homesick now, for someplace I will never be.

- The Bravery

Myth is a particularly powerful concept for studies in rhetoric. While there are numerous investigations into fiction, narrative, and discourse, the word “myth” has become somewhat pejorative in modern academic circles, but has never ceased to be valuable in describing the unique state of being where an individual believes in something regardless of whether or not it is factually true.¹ This zone exists outside the realm of known and unknown, and because it deals in possibilities, expressly invokes the sentiments of uncertainty. Another possibility is that due to the efforts of the Enlightenment, fear and fact have been placed in opposition to one another; as reason and rationality take shape in the scientific method to master the unknown universe, mankind is “liberated” from the oppressive fears of the unknown (Adorno 26). The other possibility is that modern rhetoricians have been careful to define rhetoric as a discipline devoted to persuasion as an honest process, whereas myth carries the connotation of deception behind it. Stating that someone believes an argument invokes ideas of evidence and proof, whereas being persuaded by a myth generally sounds as though there is something disingenuous going on behind the scenes.

However, the ethics of rhetoric belie an underscoring problem that has never quite been solved in the dominance of reason and rationality: the desire to persuade toward truth

¹ This pejorative status is unofficial, of course.

implies that people are either frequently or inherently deceived. As the discipline that deals in uncertainty, approaches to rhetoric are varied and diverse, and rarely do two authors coincide on an exact definition of what rhetoric *is*. Depending on the source, rhetoric can be:

- The use of language to persuade, often associated with politics (“Rhetoric”)
- Seeing the persuasiveness inherent to any given situation (Kennedy, *Rhetoric* 37)
- A mental organizing principle that helps to set priorities (McKeon 24)
- An act of engaging with the world by sending or receiving signals (Kennedy “Hoot” 1-21)
- The *meaning* of these symbols, shared collectively (Barthes “Introduction” 82)
- The degree to which a person *identifies* with another (or can be made to) through symbolic action (Burke *Language* 229)

This list is neither exhaustive nor comprehensive, yet it does show the peculiar range of the term. In some cases rhetoric is an ability, in others it is an event, and in the more complex versions, a way to subdue and construct reality through language. Rhetoric, then, is a process and not an event; it is a meaning-making faculty that both processes and interprets the world in the ecology of mind in the environment. With this in mind, it is possible to alter the traditional perception of deception as it applies to rhetoric; in addition to deliberate deception, the process of rhetoric may in itself be complicit in promoting illusory beliefs.

What is of interest here is the way in which this meaning-making version of rhetoric can be tied to non-traditional forms of persuasion. As any debater knows, the better argument does not always win due to the fact that argument and rhetoric exist in this complex process

with a multitude of interfering factors that can sway an audience. In addition to the argument, communication involves non-verbal cues, cultural signs (such as gestures, clothing, patterns of speech), and social norms that are processed in layers along with the verbal text and content of the message. The actual process of motivation includes combinations of dozens of factors being processed simultaneously; as such, it is fair to say that the process of rhetoric is best understood alongside these other communicative processes, such as semiotics and psychology, which individuals routinely access to varying degrees during communication. Though this is the more accurate way to view human communication (as an ecology of analytical processes taking place constantly to process non-discrete units of information), as a general rule, trying to apply structure to complex communication systems is a dead-end task; the fullness and richness of the real world processes always outstrips the structural model used to describe it (Lotman 38-48). Unless a structural model is flexible enough to change to incorporate increased complexity and dynamic enough to be applied intuitively, the model ceases to be useful when understanding the model itself detracts from the ability to apply the model.

With this in mind, the goal of this dissertation is to kill two birds with one proverbial stone. In the real world, the process of persuasion takes place on too many levels to be easily translated systematically, and there is no single model that can accurately represent the strategies used in creating motivation without losing a sense of the original. Instead, I propose that myth is useful precisely because it is a term that implies a heuristic approach to complex problems. **My overall argument for this project is that a rhetorical approach to myth cultivates arguments as parts of a flexible semiotic system, which manifests as a series of cultural, as opposed to purely literary, narratives.** These narratives are unique in

that they exist as unwritten values that are believed to be true without empirical backing; in other words, they are ideological in the purest sense in that they allow the individual to operate with a sense of efficacy within “normal” culture. Myth, as the “unproven variable believed as truth” is the most useful abstraction to reach theoretical equilibrium. The structure itself is malleable, allowing for the examination of a complex system without absolute certainty.

Within this chapter my priorities are twofold. The primary goal is to begin with the inspiration for this work, namely a reading of Aristotle’s work on rhetoric that opens up the possibilities for a persuasive appeal through literary narratives. These extended appeals are not persuasive in the same sense as the dialectical arguments that he preferred; they instead operated on a level of cultural familiarity and critique by engaging an audience to use dialectical processes in their thoughts without the Socratic method of dialectical interlocution. The secondary goal of this chapter is to expand this persuasive appeal’s theoretical backing as it applies to other theories of myth. *Here, I argue that Aristotle implies more than three appeals, though avoids naming them due to their inability to be easily classified; moreover, the foremost of these appeals (the appeal to myth) cultivates a dialectical interaction with ideological values by appropriating familiar cultural values.*

Aristotle’s Choice

The title of this project owes itself to the work of Aristotle and alludes to the three appeals of persuasion that he attributes to rhetoric, namely, *logos* (logic), *ethos* (character), and *pathos* (emotion). In an ironic twist of fate, the third philosopher in a line of eminent thinkers (preceded by Plato and Socrates) is one of the few ancient authors to have produced

a lengthy text on the art of rhetoric that survives to this day --despite the fact that he held serious reservations about its practice during his time.² Aristotle more likely considered himself a student and teacher of dialectic, or the practice of formal logic consisting of a series of exchanges posed in the form of questions and designed to form an irrefutable proposition or expose faulty thinking during the interactions of the speaker and the audience (Kennedy 26). The key to philosophical dialectic is that both the speaker and the audience are transformed during the process. Because the discourse is based on logical argumentation, and the process is aimed at understanding, any mistaken assumptions (once exposed) can be corrected, thus paving the way for enlightenment. However, this is also the source of Aristotle's anxiety when it comes to genres devoted to long exposition.

In Aristotle's philosophy, nothing is more detrimental to truth than leaving the mind to its own devices; moreover, long expositions (rhetorical speeches, public addresses, epic poetry, and theatrical dramas) were all suspect because neither the speaker nor the audience were accountable to each other as they were in the dialectic process. In *On Rhetoric* he expresses this skepticism of rhetoric as an art designed for transformation by completely redefining what it takes to meet the standards of intellectual rigor set by dialectic--starting with putting more burden for philosophical analysis on the speaker--by synthesizing a new definition of rhetoric which shifted the focus of *doing* rhetoric to *seeing* the persuasive elements of a given situation (Kennedy 13, 36). His concern for audiences is largely contained in the third book of *On Rhetoric*, as he instructs the students of rhetoric to pace

² These reservations should not be confused with disdain. His mentor, Plato, was far more outspoken in his criticisms, saving his most scathing rebukes for his dialogues. Using Socrates as his mouthpiece, Plato's critique of rhetoric (and those who professed expertise in it) ranged from derogatory (calling it a branch of "flattery") to moral self-deception, stating that rhetoricians espouse for the sake of "gratification and pleasure" whereas he only speaks for "moral improvement"--the truest goal of a real politician (34-37,127).

themselves during delivery, setting enough time to deliver the systematic portions of the text with as much logic and brevity as possible; in addition, during his recommendations on narration, he explains that the *diegesis* (or “leading through”) of a speech should be evenly paced and short enough to describe actions and events without long exposition (Kennedy 258-71). This is more than a courtesy; it is a necessity if the audience is to do the mental work normally encountered in dialectic. Aristotle makes these demands even clearer in *On Poetics*, by stating that tragedy (Athenian dramas) were far superior to the epic (e.g. epic poems) due in part to their brevity (1486-87).³ The main problem is rooted in the basic appeals of *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*. Assuming that dialectic wholly relied on logical proofs (the disagreement to which is a matter for another discussion), the skepticism in longer presentations seems likely a fear of the ways that the appeals from *ethos* and *pathos* can become obscure the process of transformation in the mind. It comes as no surprise, then, that his major discussions of these longer works relegate rhetoric to a productive art, or method, which is firmly rooted in an analytical way of perceiving the world, and that the larger narratives of theater and epic poetry are neatly parsed into forms conducive to emphasizing the dramatic content rather than the spectacle.

This approach certainly preserves Aristotle’s rhetorical purpose, namely to preserve the integrity of the emerging discipline of philosophy and to direct students of this discipline to a principled approach to a competing art, but is nonetheless a bit too aggressive in its approach. It is clear that Aristotle enjoyed the tragedies, and even took up the cause of defending some of the more controversial authors, such as Euripides, by arguing that his

³ It is worth noting that Aristotle also praises the fact that tragedy can touch more senses in less time. He praises tragedy because it everything that an epic has, that “its reality of presentation is felt in the play as read, as well as in the play as acted,” and that epic poems are generally too long since they contain enough material for several tragedies (1487).

version of *Medea* is certainly the most tragic of its rivals and exemplifies the soul of tragedy—that a single, avoidable mistake brought about by insurmountable social forces seemingly conspiring against a character morally incapable of dealing with it (1467).⁴ The magic of the theater is that it *can* achieve the desired effect of dialectic, which is why Aristotle is careful not to condemn the entire corpus of performing arts. A performer, through the act of analyzing, interpreting, and performing a script can inspire the audience (and be inspired) through the process to the point where both the performer and the audience touch upon the realm of enlightenment. It is not that Aristotle believes that theater, epic poetry, and rhetoric are *incapable* of achieving these intellectual ends, he just distrusts that there is a rigorous and systematic method in place to pull all parties out of the default setting--being passive observers or selfish speakers without a thorough interrogation of the overarching motives and purpose of the presentation.

What is most interesting about Aristotle's definition is that it implies a fourth appeal connecting the systematic versions of longer exposition with their unsystematic (manipulative) counterparts. This is, perhaps, the one area where Aristotle's rigor may have blinded him to the benefits of interdisciplinary study. By narrowly constraining his worldview with the Socratic and Platonic philosophical lens where purposes generally steer toward or away from "the good," the longer expositions (rhetoric, tragedy, and epic) are then beasts to be mastered. They must be broken and trained so that they may carry the ignorant upon their backs when led by the philosophers.

⁴ This "moral" failing is not due to vice. As Aristotle elaborates, the protagonist is generally full of integrity (regardless of whether the character is a nobleman, woman, or slave), but becomes overwhelmed by a series of events that a hero would otherwise overcome and a villain would exacerbate (1467).

While there is a degree of truth in this,⁵ it is something of a clever sleight-of-hand on Aristotle's part; by naming three appeals for philosophy students who would like to study rhetoric as an intellectual process, it conceals that there may be other appeals otherwise "unsuitable" for the goals of Aristotelian logic. In other words, there may be appeals that are not easily classified, do not act as direct proof, and are not guaranteed to be useful. This problem, briefly summed, is one of assumption. For Aristotle and the positivist discipline that he helped found, reality is stable and discovering it is akin to Michelangelo shaving off chunks of marble to "reveal" a statue underneath. In this case, meaning is an inherent property that precludes its own discovery. The alternative is that meaning is *made* and not found. For Aristotle, rhetoric is an architectonic and productive art⁶ but only as long as it retains the aims toward a narrowly defined set of objectives. This introduces an interesting opportunity: what are the other appeals and how do they function?

Defining an Appeal from Myth

Aristotle's works in *On Rhetoric*, *On Poetics*, and *On The Soul* imply that there is an additional creative appeal that exists as a series of tenuous comparisons of the self to a work of fiction. Like his definition of rhetoric as a way of seeing the persuasive elements inherent to a situation, the primary faculty of mind is the ability to differentiate between contexts and form judgments. This faculty is fully defined in *On The Soul* as a merger of "speculative thinking" (or the faculty of mind that distinguishes right from wrong) with "imagination" (the activity that lies "within our own power" for calling up memories and responding to

⁵ Assuming that there are no doubts to the nature of truth and that it can be *taught*.

⁶ That is, an art that helps construct ideas like blueprints and produce them (Kennedy 13).

situations) to create “thinking” (587). This latter faculty (of thought) is the process that takes perceptions from the senses, evaluates them, and categorizes the formulated responses with the discourse of reason (587). The similarities between Aristotle’s “thinking” in the soul and his definition of rhetoric (seeing the persuasiveness inherent to a given situation) are eerily similar and counterbalance each other; human beings are both the critics of the world and its interpreters. In the most philosophical form, the mind perceives the world dialectically, interrogating the truth or untruth of situations and events; in rhetoric (when it is done “right”), the mouth reproduces the product of this mental dialectic and the poetic functions (theater and epic) display in imitation the actions and conditions of the world sincerely or “as they are,” where through this imitation the audience touches enlightenment (Roberts 1345, *Poetica* 1461).

The topic at hand is the first of these alternative appeals, namely *mythos*. Whereas *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* appeal to character, emotion, and logic, respectively, *mythos* appeals to “the story,” or, at the basic level, the sense of right and wrong that stems from a narrative reality rather than a material reality; essentially, it is an argument from metaphor that matches events as they happen in lived experiences to related pieces of fiction. Take, for example statements like, “Things will be OK, *in the end*,” “The guy *had it coming*,” and “True love *conquers all*.” Each of these, in a limited fashion, appeals to a cultural narrative, or sense of right and wrong based on cues from fiction.

What follows in the body of this dissertation is an expansion of this foundation. Prior to moving to the main discussion of the myth appeal and what it implies, this attention to Aristotelian history is one part homage and one part apology. While there is potential for narrative to transform, these transformations are not always going to match “the good” as

Aristotle understood and advocated. The aspects of homage are invested in Aristotle's attention to ethics and systematic approach in defending marginalized arts and faculties of mind to skeptics, while the aspects of apology are for the ways in which this argument occasionally hijacks his version of appeal to mean something different from what Aristotle originally intended. However, with respect to one of the first interdisciplinary scholars, the myth appeal must be "true" to its subject matter, namely narrative, and in doing so means following the creative tracks of interpretation. The argument and core of this discussion means accepting the wild, uncontrollable aspects of storytelling with balance; trusting in an appeal to "the story" means accepting that transformative faculties of mind include a deep sense of play in addition to formal logic and reason.

What is crucial to understanding this theory though, is that Aristotle was specifically suspicious of this as a strategy because it could so easily be flipped into deception. A completely passive audience member enjoys the experience without necessarily interrogating it. Like *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*, what separated the appeal from just "information" about a person's character, the display of emotion, or an arrangement of logic was the purpose of both the presentation and the interpretation. Unless the audience was somehow engaged with the context of communication beyond "just" watching, there is no difference necessarily between paying attention and analyzing.

Transformation and The Lesson of the Mask

However, if the audience was really engaged, they became immersed in the presentation as a cultural narrative. When I refer to the concept of "cultural narratives," I am referring (in part) to the conceptual framework suggested by Joseph Campbell's studies of

myth; in them, he argues that a myth is a unique narrative structure for being an inherited (yet continuously developed) series of value-tropes compacted into a plot structure. In this vein, myth tends to deal with four realms of the consciousness: (1) the mystical or metaphysical; (2) the cosmological; (3) the sociological; (4) and the psychological, which he states is the foundational realm from which the others spring (“Mythological” 220-22). Of these functions, the closest relative to traditional studies of rhetoric seems to be the sociological function. In this instance, the idealized forms contained in a myth (for example, gods, heroes, monsters, and actions) are extensions of social values concerned with “validating and maintaining some specific social order, authorizing its moral code as a construct beyond criticism or human emendation” (220-21). In this way, the gods of Mt. Olympus are just another link in the authoritative chain. For example, when Zeus (Jove/Jupiter) philanders with mortal women, he disseminates the culture and power of the gods among mortal men (in the form of demigod heroes) but the reverse is not tolerated when Actaeon even looks upon the goddess Artemis (Diana) while she is bathing; the sociological lesson is clear: it is fine to go down the class ladder for dalliances, but social climbing will bring swift judgment for the mortal who dares to encroach the domain of the gods (Ovid 203-04, 78-79). For sociological purposes, the narrative is an idealized form of reality--a symbolic gesture to elucidate everyday activities.

When combined with the other three functions, the myth has a different kind of rhetorical power as a function of transformative play.⁷ Where Aristotle narrowly defines the

⁷ By “transformative play” I refer to the process where the individual becomes immersed in the narrative, both to interrogate the ideas within as a method of critique, but also to engage the story with the imagination. This can include imagining the self as a character or to see the connections in the way that the narrative’s values ought to be reflected in real life. Campbell implies that there is a correlation (though no direct causation) with

scope of extended exposition (whether it is a speech, play, or poem) as one that *may* lead the audience toward an essential truth, Campbell argues that these systems are inherently more complex in performance and operate at multiple levels of abstraction. In *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology*, he elaborates that the audience is not passive in performance; rather, they are relied upon for the suspension of disbelief (at minimum) and the active imposing of meaning into the situation. Using the example of ritualistic masks he explains,

The mask in a primitive festival is revered and experienced as a veritable apparition of the mythical being that it represents--even though everyone knows that a man made the mask and that a man is wearing it. The one wearing it, furthermore, is identified with the god during the time of the ritual of which the mask is a part. He does not merely represent the god; he *is* the god. The literal fact that the apparition is composed of A, a mask, B, its reference to a mythical being, and C, a man, is dismissed from the mind, and the presentation is allowed to work without correction upon the sentiments of both the beholder and the actor. (21)

The lesson of the mask, simply put, is that the reality of the experience is more than the sum of its parts. On one level, there is a priest wearing a mask in the performance of the ceremony, but the mask and ceremony both imply a narrative in action, while the character of these actions are meant to stand in the place of the deity. The last two transformations occur in the mind of the audience and willingly. Fully engaged in performance, the suspension of disbelief allows the individual to connect with a personal illumination, and while this

the degree to which an individual accepts this level of narrative immersion and a desire to see these values maintained in the real world.

experience is not necessarily uniform, the implication is that it is shared at the corporate level. The audience, the performer, and the signs work together in collusion with a willful ignorance of the immediate trappings in order to reach an illumination of the divine.⁸

In this way, myth resists classification due to the transformative properties that it conveys, namely a deep sense of play. While rhetoric as a whole is the art that deals with probabilities or determinations of uncertainty, the specific endowments of myth include provisions that affirm the possibility of impossibility. In one case, Campbell actually attributes the function of temple guardians (such as statues and totems) to serve a function of protecting the inner world of play from the “gentile, the positivist, the spoil sport” or

[t]he advocates of Aristotelian logic, for whom A can never be B; for whom the actor is never to be lost in the part; for whom the mask, the image [...] cannot become God, but only a reference. (*Primitive 25*)

The clear opposite to Aristotle’s philosophy, Campbell’s work reflects as much resistance to the application of logic-only models to myth in the same way that Aristotle expresses hesitation to any philosophically productive outcome. Still, of the two, Aristotle’s works are the more generous since he does not rule out the possibility of the longer expositions being useful. Campbell would suggest that these limits would probably ruin the fun.

What makes this rivalry useful is that it demonstrates the breadth of myth as a persuasive process; on the one hand, the steady, principled application creates a reality aimed at enlightenment, while the creative process is aimed at inspiration.

⁸ Campbell’s explanation of the divine is unique in that he firmly denies the existence of the supernatural. The function of any religious transformation is to reconcile the human mind to the imperfect world that precluded it. See Joseph Campbell and Bill Moyers, *The Power of Myth* for a summary on Campbell’s attribution of the human spirit reconciling psychological issues as the root of all divine action (28).

Where Aristotle assumed that both the speaker and the audience requires a level of analytical sophistication for a transformation to occur, Campbell's lesson of the mask implies that there is a more complicated analysis that unconsciously underscores the viewing. This part, at least, might have made the positivists incredibly happy. Kenneth Burke defines this element as the "scene" in his theory of dramatism,⁹ and it implies that human beings are contextual by nature. For example, the general historical account of Julius Caesar's death is that the officials of the republic colluded and stabbed him to death on the floor of the senate; however, if this had actually taken place on the steps outside the senate building, it would change the symbolic value of the act. Senators murdering Caesar on the senate floor symbolically seals the laws of the republic with blood, whereas the murder on the senate steps indicates that tyranny dies on the way to the center of law and justice. Even now, these two interpretations do not contain all the possibilities of the symbolic significance included by changing the setting. What remains is the sense of the elements working together with cross-referencing signifiers. The steps are a path, but the floor is the center of spoken authority. Caesar was a great leader, but he brought about the end of the Republic. The events themselves (a man dies from stab wounds) are subordinate to the symbolic values attached at a nearly unconscious level.

In some ways, this is what Campbell refers to as the "best" parts of language, which cannot be shared.¹⁰ Gregory Bateson offers a similar conclusion, though with more modern examples in his theory of play and fantasy; he adds the extra qualification of the linguistic

⁹ Defined thoroughly in *A Grammar of Motives*, Burke identifies a "pentad" of terms to characterize any rhetorical event: Act, Agent, Scene, Purpose, and Agency. Briefly, the act corresponds to events, agents are the motivated protagonists, the scene "contains the act" by providing context in time and place, the purpose is the motive, and the agency is any mechanism used to achieve the purpose (xv-20).

¹⁰ In his own words, "the best things cannot be told, the second best are misunderstood. After that comes civilized conversation; after that, mass indoctrination; after that, intercultural exchange" (*Creative* 84).

sign as an action. These actions can accumulate in significance across three levels of abstraction: the denotative, connotative, and metalinguistic perceptions (178). These aspects, using Campbell's mask once again, would roughly correspond in the following fashion. At the denotative level, the mask and its bearer are more or less literal; it is a human priest wearing a disguise. When the interpretation broadens to include what the mask symbolizes, i.e., a god or goddess, the individual is realizing the connotation, or implied meaning. Finally, the metalinguistic level distinguishes the transformative backdrop, as the suspension of disbelief extends to interpreting the actions of the priest while wearing the mask as corresponding to the attitudes of the god. Simply put, in the same way that children at play can punch one another in the arm without implying that this aggression is rooted in malice (literally, *this* punch does not denote what a punch ordinarily implies), suggests that the mind is capable of instantaneous analyses of nearly infinite complexity (179-184). In modern contexts, this explains the reason that audiences still occasionally jump in their seats during a horror movie or flinch when seeing a spear thrown at them during a film with gladiators--the same suspension of disbelief that requires the willful forgetting of the film's contrivances is thorough enough in context to create a "real" experience despite the fiction (184). A "fake" spear is persuasive enough to cause a reaction, and in that reaction there is evidence of a mental transformation going on. The movement from myth to enlightenment does not define this transformation; rather, it implies a shift from awareness to enlightened myth. This new myth is a persuasive oxymoron: the "real" fiction.

Jean Baudrillard's discussion of hyperreality actually furthers the level of abstraction one additional level. In his own words, there are "phases of an image" where the image is

[t]he reflection of a profound reality; it [then] masks and denatures a profound reality; it [further] masks the *absence* of a profound reality; [and finally,] it has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum. (6)

In the final case, the simulacrum is the symptom of the hyperreal, or the “liquidation of all referentials” (7). The term, as he uses it, is complex, but roughly translates to an evolution of the state of play where the conventions of performance mask (and then replace) reality. In his example, he begins with a critique of the “phantasmagoria” of experience surrounding a trip to Disneyland in America, where the reality of the park is a representation of play that

[i]s neither true nor false, it is a deterrence machine set up in order to rejuvenate the fiction of the real in the opposite camp. Whence the debility of this imaginary, its infantile degeneration. This world wants to be childish in order to make us believe that the adults are elsewhere, in the “real world,” and to conceal the fact that true childishness is everywhere--that it is that of the adults themselves who come here to act the child in order to foster illusions as to their real childishness. (13)

Like Disneyland and Campbell’s mask, the state of play implies a degree of suspension of disbelief (at best) and a denial of complicity in culture-wide distraction (at worst).

However, this critique is not necessarily limited to modern depictions. Going back to the example of the mask, this may actually imply the worst of what Aristotle fears. The priest with the mask serves only to reinforce the myth that there is a separation between the performer and the audience; in “reality,” the audience members themselves wear the mask of a god, the god of self, and are the reflection of the belief in the deity in a day-to-day existence. The use of ceremony to locate the worship in a particular time and place and the

mask to conceal the face of the priest detracts from the reality that the place of worship is actually the whole world and that human beings are always wearing the metaphorical masks of deities in the countenance. In Campbell's terms, the performer with the mask may be interpreted as being god, but this reality is the subordinate illusion to the audience, which is in collusion to make it so.

In each case with Campbell, Burke, Bateson, and Beaudriallard, there is an indefinable moment when the work takes on a life seemingly independent of the author's intent or the audience's interpretation. While this is not literally the case, in the mind of the audience it becomes the only moment that matters because the information (through the suspension of disbelief, the appeal of the content, or the conventions of drama) ceases to be a display and instead becomes an appeal. The audience is drawn, almost magnetically, to engage the fiction as though it were the sincerest form of reality.

Myth as a Script

The task of the rhetorician, then, is to reverse engineer the conditions of this collusion of audience and text, and in the case of production, reproduce/modify its conditions. With this a different function of myth comes into prominence: that of the shared story. Myth, if it is to serve the sociological function (or for that matter exist as the externalized symbols of internal psychological pressures) must be communal. This, of course, hinges on another level of complex interaction, namely cultural. An amorphous term at best, culture has come to mean anything from the means in which political institutions preserve their labor force to the shared values conveyed by signs and symbols held in common with one or more individuals

(Eagleton 13-31).¹¹ A second track of culture implies that it is not a “thing” at all, but rather a process, which, by necessity, begins with the differentiation between symbolic patterns (Mechling 15-16). Yet another version argues in favor of an event approach; despite the idea that culture is independent of the individual as a reality in itself, where culture only “exists” during the act of communication where these forces are at work with/against one another (Carey 13-68).¹² This creates the first, expansive definition of culture as it applies throughout; culture is a system of shared values, a process of symbolic differentiation, and a dialectical interaction that produces shared beliefs organically as a part of lived experience.

It would also be remiss to completely omit the work of figures within rhetoric and composition who have discussed the persuasive features of culture. One school of thought is founded in the Frankfurt school projects, specifically the work of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s arguments in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*. In this case, they argued that the modern version of dialectical engagement does not exist between individual persons, but rather between the philosophical tensions of enlightenment (freedom from the unknown through reason) and myth (the unknown and uncritical assumptions of what is “normal”). Once the methods of enlightenment reach a threshold of common practice, the methods and results become a myth, where the authority vested in the practices of enlightenment are treated as metonymical extensions of truth itself (2-34). The “culture industry” (of mass production and mass communication) exists to regress enlightenment back into this kind of

¹¹ While comprehensive definitions of culture are beyond the scope of this paper, Terry Eagleton provides a nearly exhaustive study in *The Idea of Culture*.

¹² John Carey represents a third-generation viewpoint from cultural studies. In an effort to change the conception of culture from specific texts to something more inclusive, Raymond Williams defined culture as a thread through all social practices where human energy expends itself creating commonality and discontinuity in *The Long Revolution* (Hall “Two,” 36-38). Furthering this, Stuart Hall suggests that once the cultural studies embraced semiotic approaches, the longer units of narrative helped create a more “open system” giving room for the production of social knowledge (*Representation* 42).

mythology (120-67). Richard Ohmann's concern with the uses of mass culture parallel Aristotle's fears of the unrestrained art of flattery; advertising, movies, film, television, and consumer products are made by a highly motivated industry to additionally inculcate desires--literally creating "needs"--that are mostly unethical due to their constant surveillance of potential consumers and the predatory relationship that they have in trying to separate them from their money (224).

A second school of thought follows the work of Pierre Bourdieu; here, the salient factor of culture is the idea of *habitus*, which is alternately defined as the "cultural unconscious" and the "set of basic, deeply interiorized master-patterns" (qtd. in Swartz 101).¹³ Rhetorician Barry Brummett sees rhetoric as a means of deconstructing these deeply sublimated cultural patterns by bringing these to the surface. The evaluations of signs as they are used to persuade others, as well as their use as group signifiers create the merger of the two disciplines at the core of his project, namely critical studies and rhetorical criticism. In general, his method begins with an acknowledgement of issues pertaining to critical studies (power, representation, ownership) and then meshes it with the concerns of rhetoric (persuasion, influence, social dynamics) (68-101). While this is not a comprehensive list of rhetorical method, it does serve to add two dimensions to the discussion of culture so far. First, the individual is both passive and active within cultural processes; while the individual cannot choose the material conditions of their inherited culture the advent of rhetorical criticism can be empowering from the standpoint of transformation. With a critical mind, the

¹³ In addition, Dick Hebdige's pre-eminent work on youth cultures in *Subculture* argues (in part) that the resistance to this pattern and its inculcations through cultural institutions is a cultural form of its own; by resisting the normalized versions (the "taken-for-granted landscape of cultural forms") the subculture is a culture that acts as a symbolic violation of the social order (19).

cultural rhetoricians can mitigate the impact of a sign's influence on their individuality, while taking and appropriating these signs as part of meaningful exchanges.

These ideas of culture are not incompatible with one another but pose several problems if read too inclusively because culture may appear to be the sum total of human activity and nothing at the same time. In the language of the theater, at once it appears as though the ongoing human drama contains an evolving script, passed down to new players from birth; having grown up on and around the stage, these players are constantly passing in between heightened and downplayed awareness of the contrivances around them. The costumes are signifiers, but they are still clothes. The script contains words, but they are borrowed and require convention. Finally, the distinction between player and audience is an illusion; the audience performs and interacts through applause and the player attends to the action when not speaking as passively as any audience member, or, in other words, the actor does not cease being an actor by remaining silent onstage and the audience members do not become actors by speaking on their cell phones during the performance. The distinctions between "I am an Actor" and "I am the Audience" fade with a separation of action from context, but reemerge when the contextual features are defined, the contextual assumptions reasserted, and the social expectations codified.

It seems more practical to view culture as another myth. As Bateson suggests, abstraction or clarity of any context is based on the nearly instantaneous process of contextual evaluation for *all signs, all at once*--a process which he calls creating psychological frames. The frame both includes material (e.g., this is an actor) at the same time that it excludes (e.g., if this is an actor, then all others are "not actors") (186-87). The process of analysis, in any context, is a matter of appropriating the right set of frames.

Kenneth Burke phrases this process a little differently in his discussion of terministic screens, but to a similar effect; the appropriation of language (a system of signification where social forces shape the acceptable and unacceptable uses of these symbols) creates a lens that limits reality. The rhetorical context of language is not only extended in its usage but in its possession, because

[e]ven if any given terminology is a *reflection* of reality, by its very nature as a terminology it must be a *selection* of reality; and to this extent it must function as a *deflection* of reality. (45)

The whole of “reality” cannot be communicated, so the use of language to differentiate one group from another, then one system of communication from another, and finally, one set of abstractions of reality from another, by definition refocuses the attention of the listener from the reality to the construct of reality.

Embedded in language is a type of mythology that neither Aristotle nor Campbell envisioned. For Aristotle, mythology was central to plot and loosely translated into a concern for the state of pre-enlightenment; for Campbell, it translated into a series of social-psychological functions that induced a series of transformations if applied toward self-actualization. In the middle is the mythology of language itself, at once implied by Aristotle’s analysis of the terms of successful poetics, rhetoric, and theatrics, and detailed in action through Campbell’s lesson of the mask. The myth is that human beings are creatures living with a series of scripts on the brain. Like a television show at the height of production, some scripts are in hand, others are in production, while others have been placed back in memory. The social practices have a script of their own, found in the “daily grind” of showing up to work, carrying on small talk, and believing *just enough* in the efficacy of action to continue

production. And the final script is the one that masks the others--the belief that acting is a profession actually disguises the fact that all human beings are actors.

Cultural Narrative as Myth

The preceding section contained an alternate route to a pre-existing scholarly end and represents the author's best attempt to retrace the steps taken toward an understanding of the relationship between narrative and myth. This is not the only path, however, and the study of narrative has been an off-again, on-again academic discipline. Similar to the path described above, Ruth Ronen explains that narratological theory was inspired by classical structuralism but has been around long enough to develop a series of theoretical revolutions of its own (817). It is worth noting because much of what this research identifies as the function of narrative is closely aligned with what Campbell generally attributes to the transformative power of myth. Classical narratology was concerned with the exact structure of narrative itself; that is, the focus of research was the breakdown of narrative into discrete units, and, like structuralism in general, was viewed as an attempt to create a unifying science (Morton 408).¹⁴

To say that human beings are creatures that employ myth as a part of daily life implies that like the perceptions of character, logic, and emotion, narrative (or "the script") is a part of the natural character. Narrative has the benefit of inculcating every action as a part

¹⁴ Donald Morton attributes this push to Roland Barthes' work in *Elements of Semiology*, and his "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives" from *Image-Music-Text*. However, this seems like an overly narrow view of the texts. For example, in his "Introduction," Barthes concludes by stating that this formulaic logic is toward the "emancipatory value" of formlessness, where "narrative does not show, does not imitate; the passion which may excite [...] is not that of a 'vision' [but] rather it is that of meaning, that of a higher order of relation which also has its emotions, its hopes, its dangers, its triumphs (124). While disdaining mysticism, he does take on a decidedly "postnarratological" viewpoint by acknowledging the power of relational models with unique properties.

of the “overall organizing principle” included in the story and has a sense of always being “goal-oriented and forward moving (Ronen 821). Briefly, there are several elements of the “postnarratological era” useful to this project. First, a traditional conception of narrative treats the universe of the story as set series of unified action (beginning, middle, and end) whereas the semantic model prefers to explain the moment-to-moment action under the auspices of *possibility* (or the “constellation of possible worlds”) (Vaina qtd. in Ronen 837). This expansiveness accounts for the feeling of suspense and anticipation that might otherwise be blocked through the assumption of static forms; within the world of the text each “narrative unit” represents a moment in a series of possibilities, each reflecting its relative position in the plot structure while creating a unique instance (or “choice”) in the text (839). Finally, “*productive conflicts*” may emerge from the analysis of any element of the plot, meaning that it is not absolutely necessary to define the discrete unit of narrative (in an absolute sense) to determine its relational value to the development of the plot.

With this in mind, the definition of a myth appeal (from the perspective of narrative) is the persuasive application of narrative form to a given situation--while retaining the sensation of the constellation of possibilities.

To elucidate, consider the problematic example that Kenneth Burke offers in “The Rhetoric of Hitler’s Battle.” Tasked with giving a literary review and critique of *Mein Kampf*, Burke attempted to explain why Hitler’s program was so successful. Using a classical structural approach, he argues that Hitler provided a kind of snake oil; he provided them with a structural form that closely resembled the religious trappings of Catholicism and swapped out the archetypes with versions from his own dogmatic disdain of minorities and fanatical version of “Aryan love.” This grand schematic included four basic elements that worked

strategically to his advantage: First, a testimonial to the inborn dignity of the German people (especially of the Aryan variety); second, a “projection device” upon which all the ills could be curatively heaped (in this case, Jews, gypsies, the mentally ill, dissidents, and other undesirables); a symbolic rebirth as the nation rises from the ashes of the Versailles treaty into an era of conquest and prosperity; and lastly, commercial uses of the scapegoat principle to assign a non-economic cause to economic ills, namely Jews and other so-called undesirables acting in concert to either sabotage finance or create an economic burden (“Hitler” 202-03). This pattern restructures the narrative of the German people not as defeated in the wake of the Versailles treaty, but at the cusp of revival pending commitment to the newly mapped course of action. In the terms of mythology, Hitler becomes a type of Prometheus, bringing a fire of secret revelation to the people, and ready to use it as the foundation for the forge of national change.

While Burke’s initial analysis is compelling, *Mein Kampf* itself is only part of the picture. Interwoven with the arguments were a social program designed to alter every level of culture in Germany to match his vision until, quite literally, the ideological landscape would be altered to match the new Nazi myth. Imbuing the narrative with a constellation of possibilities (in the sense of creating a moment-to-moment anticipation building toward a rapturous final outcome) required getting inside the cultural institutions responsible for creating programmatic legitimacy. Normally, ideology is formed through a mixture of indoctrination (through civil institutions) and normatively (through the working day-to-day functions and negotiations of presumed and assumed truths) and is so fundamental that it is rarely, if ever questioned (Althusser 127-86; Adorno 120-25; Williams 28-30). For the most part, ideology is believed to be normal and legitimate by mere practice and exposure alone

(Lukacs 46-50). The really creative tactic that Hitler employed was to use this general assumption about ideology to his advantage; knowing that ideology is constructed and not fixed, he used religion as a framework and bought himself credibility by ensuring that the transition from religious fanaticism to political fanaticism retained the same sense of unified form and forward progress. As Frederic Jameson suggests, ideology is not “false consciousness” (nor should it ever be referred to as such), it is *real* consciousness (417-22).¹⁵ With this brand of ideology, there are fewer struggles in the application of Hitler’s program because the similarity in Catholic thought. Inasmuch as a religious system is regarded as absolute truth, the faux-catholic themes in the political system paralleled enough to create a unique brand of camouflage.

Understanding the success of Hitler’s program requires more than a systematic breakdown of his rhetorical strategy into a cultural form because while it helps, it misses the multi-modal success that Hitler was able to achieve by creating a uniquely *cultural* narrative more than just his own. By the time that Hitler had assumed power, Hitler’s battle was well on its way to becoming a corporate struggle instead of an internal one. At issue is the way in which he was able to thoroughly create a *mythos* out of the symbolic forms that were available to him. The *Swastika*, the SS (*Schutzstaffel*) with their death’s head insignia displayed proudly on their uniforms, the *Swastika*, the uniformly marching troops in synchronous goose-stepping, and even the military salute, have endured a level of infamy unrivaled by any other 20th or 21st century genocide in the popular and public imagination.

¹⁵ Jameson levels this critique in direct challenge to Kenneth Burke in the pages of *Critical Inquiry* about whether or not his work addresses ideological issues. Jameson’s version of ideology is unique in that he argues against traditional Marxists conceptions of false consciousness and maintains that the “political unconscious” is a misnomer; politics are deeply ingrained and the best that the individual can hope for is a painful process of “decentering” where there is greater awareness of these influences even though separation is impossible (“Dialectic” 283-85).

Burke is right about this much; Hitler is expertly rhetorical in the sense that he gauged his available resources and turned this into a programmatic strategy.

Mythos must also be a reference to the immersive qualities of the cultural narrative once it is put into practice; literally, the individual entering Germany at the height of the Nazi regime may have felt like a participant in a coherent *living story*. Salutes and goose-stepping signified the inborn dignity and respect between the German people, while the aforementioned Star of David placed individual Jews into the role designated for them. In fact, the role of Joseph Goebbels to the Reich Ministry for Enlightenment and Propaganda (*Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda* or *Propagandaministerium*) could similarly be looked at as a kind of narrative mechanic, searching new films to make sure that they relate to the newly established overarching narrative of the Nazi party. *Triumph of the Will* (1935), was at the time considered revolutionary within the documentary genre not for the subject matter, but rather for the incorporation of music and sweeping cinematography—structures borrowed from mainstream films—to create a sense of plot.

At the individual level, this hardly seems like a rhetorical strategy worth any merit; however, applied *corporately* it takes on a greater *ethos* than the individual, creating momentum in itself. Each individual speech acted not as deliberative rhetorical persuasion, but as a kind of mythological seeding as the new story of Germany was recounted. The mythology itself slowly adopts its own simulacra and symbolic presence throughout the nation as Berlin becomes a type of Rome, the *Swastika* embodies the vision of the ongoing struggle, and Hitler himself becomes a kind of simulacra as his face and slogans are disseminated throughout the country. Once saturated, the country becomes a kind of corporation, producing the new Germany. Steven Katz elaborates that once the new

mythology was perpetuated as a kind of rational discourse, it was then applied to technology, creating a new *ethos* in Germany of expediency; where the connection between rationality and technology being an end to create a better life became an end unto itself, becoming the epitome of “a rationality taken to such extremes that it becomes madness” (266-67). At once, the danger of applied mythology takes shape, especially when couched with discourses of science and technology becoming a chain of logical propositions without a deliberative rhetor, and discrimination is applied both systematically and rationally. First, their ability to affect economic change is taken away through laws limiting Jewish people to conduct business; then they are isolated to prevent the passing on of their counter-cultural ideas by being shuffled into ghettos; finally, when it is determined that the source of Jewish-ness is *ethnicity* which is inborn *genetically*, the genes must be eliminated from the population which starts with isolation and ends when applied with technology as the ovens.

While this is a clear example of the appeal to myth in the form of shared cultural narrative, it acts as the counterpoint to the kind of transformation that Campbell and Aristotle (in their own terms) hope for; the transformation in the Nazi program is real but lamentable. The roles and play are all in operation. This leaves an unsettling tension at the heart of an appeal based on narrative: the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. The collusion of events, actions, ideas, institutions, and unity can create impressions that deflect reality, become a reality in themselves, and create a feeling of progress. As in the case of the Hindu proverb, it is not the object worshipped but rather the strength of the belief that matters.

To recapitulate, cultural narrative is loosely defined as the generation of a *mythos*. This *mythos* is the result of a multi-modal transmission of a (seemingly) unified plot structure. Because narrative is a fluid concept when applied to rhetoric, and especially so in

the broader field of mass communication, structuralist approaches to narrative, such as the ones demonstrated by Roland Barthes and Kenneth Burke can provide a starting point to deconstructing the concepts of a mythology and demonstrate how familiar form can lead to applied functions. However, the living myth, or lived story, is fluid, and so the understanding of these forms and concepts need to reflect the flexibility of the poststructuralist approaches as well. In the critiques of Ronen and Morton the concept of the constellation of choices provides with a more useful conceptualization of the ways in which narrative on a page translates into real life; with the lived narrative comprising itself as a series of choices, the individual is part of a cultural narrative without being completely confined by it. While the rules of the game *generally apply*, through the practices of performance, such as play, these concepts become flexible the alternate worlds of possibility become visible. In the language of mythology, the deep sense of play can lead to a zero point where the individual sees the infinite number of possibilities and envisions a world without boundaries or rules as the terministic screens, psychological frames, and social symbols are universally applied or denied in the realm of fantasy.

For reference, Table 1 depicts the (loose) correlation between theoretical perspectives and their key terms. Beginning with the lesson of Campbell's mask, the narrative elements are subjected to a meaning-making process; if rhetoric is the ability to see persuasiveness inherent to any situation, then any unit could potentially be subject to this kind of analysis. For the purpose of clarity, the chart depicts Campbell's illustration of the god-mask. It is worth noting that the foundational level (the bottom row) describes the literal meanings, or face-value functions of any narrative element. As the processes become more involved at the top of the chart in the metalinguistic function, the individual is processing more information

with decreased attentiveness. It is in the far right column, labeled the “myth function” that is of concern to both Aristotle’s level of persuasion for the myth appeal (inasmuch as the individual begins doing the work of dialectical investigation passively during performance) and touches the moment of epiphany and fulfillment that Campbell describes. In short, it is in this function that meaning is both made and realized so seamlessly together that they are understood to be the same thing.

Campbell’s Mask	Linguistic Function	Social Function	Myth Function
The mask and the deity it represents are one and the same	Metalinguistic	Revelation	Transformation & “Deep Play” (narrative immersion)
		Hyperreal	Masks reality; the game hides the reality that its content is played daily in “real life”
		Play	Meaning is made and there is room for signs to mean that which they do not normally mean
The man is a priest; the mask is a representation of a deity	Connotative	Ideology	Presumptions
			Actual Consciousness
			Assumptions

A man with a mask	Denotative	Social Norms	Habitus, e.g. “We have a game and we play the game.” Terministic Screens; “We don’t know where the game came from, but it is still fun”
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Table 1: A synthesis of theoretical approaches using Campbell’s “Lesson of the Mask.”

Toward a Definition of the Myth Appeal and Breakdown of the Chapters

Starting with the basic definition of myth as an object or belief that is believed as something factually true without the ability to factually verify it, the “myth appeal” is defined as: (1) a literal appeal to a specific classical myth, which uses a fictional (non-scientific) proof, e.g., “they say that...” and introducing it as specific evidence. This can take the form of a specific story or truism, such as a deference to the success of the “American dream” as the freedom for anyone, regardless of race or class, to rise to prominence through merit alone. (2) Using a symbol in the place of a formal argument by accessing shared meanings, for example, the burning of a flag in protest, which maintains its meaning through the shared construction of the object’s background narrative. A burning flag is persuasive precisely because the history and meaning of the flag itself have passed into common knowledge as a part of American heritage. (3) A carefully constructed “rhetorical situation” of the kind that Kenneth Burke describes, where familiar literary forms are applied to real life without the distinction of being fiction; human beings are assigned roles as heroes and villains in a living narrative; (4) the entirety of socio-linguistic reality being constantly applied to a physical one; at this level, ideology is a myth, since these constructs are only temporary, though

treated with special distinction as real. For example, cash money is just paper, but impressed with symbolic value, becomes a reality in itself. (5) The converse of this where the myth is recognized, but applied to reality, becomes true. A corporate vision statement is mythologized at the level of lived experience; precedents become paradigms and are anthologized, making the individual susceptible to particular biases in the experience. Canonizing literature, creating laws and protecting them under *stare decisis*, and cleaning up the history falls into this category. And finally, (6) The mental assent (or conformity) to a perception of reality, at once believed to be shared by a trustworthy majority, but if subjected to any kind of methodical testing, would be revealed as a false assumption.

The pattern that connects myth of any kind is the attention to a narrative's power, or the ability to be treated as trustworthy *enough* to be believed in the absence of factual verification; in each of the case studies that follow, the primary text has a unique cultural narrative that incorporates a myth, mythos, or mythology as an inherent part of the argument. As stated earlier, the chapters each begin with structuralist models of signification to identify the object of study, though later this analysis expands into the broader considerations of poststructuralism. In each chapter, the ethics of a myth appeal and its implications are explored as well.

Chapter 2: The *Super Powers* Collection, a Study of Myth as Ideology

Chapter 3: *The Ultimates*, a Study of Myth as Rhetoric

Chapter 4: Sokal's Hoax, a Study of Paradigm as Myth

Chapter 5: *Roe v. Wade*, a Study of Precedent as Myth

Toys, as the first experience that children have of the adult world, are possibly the single, strongest tool for ideological training; however, because of their target audience

(children) they enjoy the most amount of privileged camouflage. While widely recognized for the more recent developments in fad crazes and breakthroughs of technology for electronic toys, they are moral tools with specific rules built in. The second chapter deals with comics as a site of Rhetoric, that is, the use of a similar myth vehicle for argumentative purposes. Comics are a blend of myth (fictional characters imbued with symbolic values and ideology) and rhetoric (serious, formal interrogation of principles) in the more “serious” pieces as the characters deal with complex issues. The fourth chapter scrutinizes Alan Sokal’s success in perpetuating his academic hoax, and argues that this was due in large part to the fact that he created a work of fiction heavily reliant on myth; moreover, while he was correct in assuming that he was appealing to the ideologies of the editors of *Social Text*, he was wrong about which ones he appealed to. Rather than some vague, leftist ideology of radical change, they gave his article the benefit of the doubt because it seemed like it could be an answer to Thomas Kuhn’s paradigm-shift model. The final chapter takes a look at the role of myth as it applies to law; specifically, I study the dialectical relationship of myth and ideology both within the original *Roe v. Wade* case and the way that it has been mythologized in subsequent decisions. As a decision that originally overturned precedent and stood in stark contrast to other civil rights cases, it enjoys a strange level of protection as a case “immune” to change.

CHAPTER TWO: THE *SUPER POWERS* COLLECTION, A STUDY IN MYTH AND
IDEOLOGY

We face then two peculiarities of play: (a) that the messages or signals exchanged in play are in a certain sense untrue or not meant; and (b) that that which is denoted by these signals is nonexistent.

-Gregory Bateson

Reading myths rhetorically has additional benefits to discerning the ecology of narrative. As a function of argumentative development, there are few factors of cultivation as important as early exposure. For a myth, or any cultural narrative, to have staying power, it works best to introduce it at a young age. With this in mind, the subject of this analysis is the *Super Powers Collection*, a toy line chosen because of the dual role that mythology plays within its marketing. It is, in one respect, typical of toys from the 1980s in that the line was part of a mass marketing campaign that included advertising, a television series, and its own comic book for creating stories that corresponded to the narrative reality of the show. The first major mythological layer exists in the connection between the collection and the source material. As was common in the 1980s, the release of the collection coincided with a reinvention of itself; the toys were all based on existing comic book characters, the television show had already been changed several times (with the most serious overhaul coinciding with the release of the toys), and the action figures were created to be as high-quality as possible.¹⁶ The second layer of mythology involved the ongoing narrative conflict that the collection embodied, namely an allegorical extension of Cold War era politics. *Ultimately,*

¹⁶ This quality included using durable plastic and making the figures match their conceptual comic book art as closely as possible (Geyer).

these changes reveal (or unmask) the ways in which the existing mythology was co-opted for ideological ends; the figures became a representation of idealized democracy in order to inculcate in children the dangers of cold war era socialism in its most unrefined form: the unchecked progression of communism and socialist nations, or “the red scare.”

In terms of systemic analysis, this argument addresses the connections and confluences of myth and ideology as rhetorical processes; the reason for this level of comparison is primarily based in structural methodology; learning what a sign means requires a comparison with what it is *not*. As such, the differences in presentation for the elements that were actually included in the toys will reveal the distinguishing features of myth that the creators sought to keep as *essential*. In keeping with the theme of creating a flexible system for semiotic analysis, the collection is examined with the ecology of close reading, taking into account as many elements as possible. The deciding factor for limitation on inclusive elements is, again, Joseph Campbell’s distinctions on narrative immersion (deep play); as long as an element can be said to contribute to an understanding of the mythology enough to enhance the experience of play, the element was included here.

The Ethics of Narrative Immersion

There is an ethical tension involved with the state of play as it applies to children. On the one hand, children are psychologically more flexible when it comes to the world of forms; an object has room to take on virtually any attribute in the realm of fantasy and, as Bateson suggests at the head of this chapter, the aspects of play include a simultaneous discrimination of what is or is not meaningful. The nonexistent substance of play is the fantasy itself; children are not pirates, a cardboard box is not a ship, and sticks are not

swords--until they are. This is the mythology of play--that the story of what things *are* (a cardboard box, a stick, etc.) comes in second to what things *mean*. Unlike the conventions of the theater mentioned in the previous chapter, there is no “off” switch for fantasy as long as child is willing to engage. The dramatic tension of play (as narrative immersion) is the central conflict in learning what things mean, but more importantly *when* they mean them. As long as the field of forms remains both generative and open, the potential for indoctrination remains fairly low.

However, teaching children the “story” of the adult world in some ways requires the deadening of imagination as the function of the “real” world comes into focus. By analogy it means learning the rules of the game, and more importantly, attaching the penalties for breaking the rules. Between the freely forming aspects of play and the adult world are intermediary steps that contribute to giving children increased access to the world of adult functioning. According to Roland Barthes, toys are unique in their ability to indoctrinate with the values of the “adult reality” by conveying the social norms of professions; he even goes so far as to say, “the fact that toys *literally* prefigure the world of adult functions obviously cannot but prepare the child to accept them all” (*Mythologies* 53 italics in original). Supposedly, each individual toy embodies the partial inscription of adult conceptions of the world--but what does this mean exactly?

For the most part, his examples of toys demonstrate this notion in terms of profession and social roles; Toy soldiers, for example, are grouped into two categories, “soldiers” and “parachutists,” representing infantry and air force and ostensibly prepare the child for the conditions precluding the toy’s existence, namely warfare (53). While Barthes argues that these forms are “ready made” for the child, he never teases out the elements that contribute to

these functions. Signs may be imbued with meaning, but jumping from a toy infantrymen and plastic soldier to depictions of a world that includes nationally based, hierarchically structured combat units that engage with their counterparts from other countries to protect the interests of their leaders, peoples, and homelands is a stretch and it results in an impoverishment of meaning (Silverman 28).¹⁷ In addition, he frequently conflates his definitions of myth and ideology; by defining this as the world of adult function and linking it to social norms, this could be read either way (Silverman 30). This is less of a problem than a necessity, though. As stated in the first chapter, if myth is ingrained in cultural processes, then there is no need to try and separate the two terms, because they are complementary cultural properties.

There are, of course, other criticisms of Barthes' work. His project was ambitious enough that it was going to draw attention to itself. At the forefront of his project is (and a major concern for this analysis) is the conflation of myth and ideology. In some cases, the project that he undertakes to "demystify" the underscoring and controlling cultural values inherent to the rhetoric of mass production seems less like a deconstruction of linguistic mythology and more like a critical analysis of discursive processes. Even so, the adoption of an authoritative tone throughout his process creates a credibility issue because he must adopt a political agenda even during his attempts to be "value-free" (Kritzman 189-210). By the time that Barthes is done, his critiques have themselves undergone a kind of enlightenment myth; having achieved the means of his own analysis, his display of critique has become alienated from the very audience he would empower. In an "unconscious act of linguistic

¹⁷ Silverman argues that this is because the denotative unit can imply any number of connotative meanings. As Barthes uses the terms, a lock of hair can call into implication anything from a "Roman hair style" or a "500-page Joyce novel."

vengefulness” by which Barthes unmasks these notions in language, he “clothes the [bourgeois mythology of objects and activities] anew in the garb of bourgeois intellectualism (Soyinka 136).

With respect to these criticisms, it seems as though the key insight of Barthes’ chapter is still valid despite the occasionally contradictory conflicts of his ambitions and his methods. The middle ground between Barthes and his critics is to accept that the concept of “value-free” is outdated; instead, the goal should be to examine the values in operation in any given situation. As this applies to toys, it means accepting that as children develop the strategies and concept of play shift from being external (with cardboard boxes and stick-swords) to internal, where the symbolic functions of play are seen as real. For example, using dollars in exchange for goods and services is the adult version of “play,” because it is at all times a myth. Like the stick-sword, the paper money only has the value that is attached, but the *rules* have been so naturalized that the myth is believed to be the reality.

Rhetoric and Narrative

Returning to Silverman’s criticism of Barthes’ conflation of ideology and myth, the main issue lies in Barthes’ notion that toys are particularly insidious--inculcating the belief structures of the adult world onto children (and here is the tricky part) fooling them into believing a certain “false consciousness” as opposed to reality. If a mythology is a mystified set of social norms, then yes, it could appear to serve the same function as ideology--if the definition of ideology is to make things appear normal. In addition to these assumptive definitions is the underlying problem of most discussions of ideology, namely that this semiotic system developed (in this case around toys) invariably “spoils” a child’s perception

of the world, thereby ruining perceptions of gender, politics, and personal efficacy by having them pre-programmed. In rebuttal, this logic implies that merely having a toy implies taking ownership of the ideas that it is said to represent; instead, it makes more sense to treat this relationship as *a possibly highly influential factor* in the child's development. Using one of Barthes' examples, a person may not know why "steak and chips" are so popular in France (that they are symbolically keyed into larger cultural narratives of food and power), but it would not stop someone from *rationalizing* it once it was ("Steak" 62-64; Eagleton 51).¹⁸ In this way, ideology is not a thing, or event, but a process where the myth-as-social-norm undergoes a justification of its social interests (e.g., "we do this *because...*"). In this way, ideology is neither totally objective nor subjective; the matching of a representation to a material object is the place where these two faculties meet (Hawkes 152).¹⁹

Childhood *accoutrement* do play a role in the development of a child's self-concept and ideology, but the lasting power of any semiotic system's influence is usually aided or abated by its referential context within additional cultural semiotic systems such as TV, clothes, social interactions, and language use. In particular, it is in the interaction of semiotic systems where children begin to feel the pressure and implication of social "policing" that reinforces gender roles and modes of behavior (Blakemore 411-19). This, at least, sheds light on the suspicion against ideological forms ruining children; the increasing development and

¹⁸ This statement is made as an attempt to apply one of Eagleton's definitions of ideology, where ideology is the rationalizing of social interests instead of merely "expressing" them.

¹⁹ Here, David Hawkes is interpreting arguments from V.N. Volosinov. For Volosinov, all signs are ideological except for words, since they can carry out ideological functions of any kind. Unlike Barthes, however, Volosinov avoids the conflation of ideology and social norms by stating that the word's ideological neutrality belonged to a wider ideological context of lived experience and human behavior. It was not the word, but the "individual consciousness" as a "social ideological fact" which causes problems because it "can only harbor in the image, the word, [and] the meaningful gesture" (150-51).

complexity of the semiotic system also necessitates greater access and, in most cases, adherence to its rules.

In one example of this kind of analysis, feminist critic Wendy Varney analyzed the application of technology to male forms in television, comic books, and toys in the 1980s, using the original *Transformers* and *M.A.S.K.* toy lines in her examination.²⁰ Using a contextual approach, she studied the ways in which these patterns clustered around each other, finding that the meshing of elements included a matching of men with machines, an insertion of subjective confidence in these characters to be good leaders, and that technology (machines) were laced with rationalism and power (159).

In specific reference to the *Super Powers* collection, suffice it to say that it reproduces the sign-mediated world of adult functions in regards to gender types and social interaction norms and projects it into a child's imagination. Through this projection we see a world that in its idealized state contains incredibly powerful, effective, purposeful people (usually men), who defend beliefs against equally powerful or dangerous opponents. On the flip side, we see a world where the democratic and selfless ideals must be balanced against a world preoccupied with body image, typically predominated by men, and exists in constant conflict with a atypical hierarchy of opponents and villains. It creates an impression, but cannot immediately be linked to permanent ideological formation.

As they are presented in the nominal stage, it is more useful to separate these along narratological means and analogies; mythology is the script, whereas the act of play creates, applies, and justifies ideology. This is not intended to oversimplify the process, just highlight

²⁰ She also adds that "Dynaman, Man Tech, Robot Warriors, Robotech, and Lazer Knights," are grouped into this same category of "a heroic team of armed machines," but keeps her focus on the Transformers because they "exemplify" this technological glorification to a greater degree than their counterparts (157).

that with these toys there is a substantial script provided for each action figure. With full graphic depictions, a file, card, their own comic book, and a television show, many of these figures had an existing canon from which the play could be modified to match. Determining the “right way” or “wrong way” to play with the toys could involve an interaction with any number of “authoritative” sources, thereby solidifying the web of references that establish the rules of the game. Again, these are neither totally separate nor completely independent, but act in concert with one another reflexively so that “the meaning” is both *found* and *made*.

In defense of Barthes work, he is rigidly against any “ideological” factor influencing an individual’s ability to decide for him or herself. In his section on toys, he only endorses one kind of toy, the simple and unrefined wooden building blocks for children. This way, as children play with them, they themselves create the construction of meaning without much caring about whether the world of adult functions carries a name for the structure (55). In this case, I think that rhetorician Kenneth Burke sums it the best in his discussion of language:

Definition itself is a symbolic act, just as my proposing of this very distinction is a symbolic act. But though at this moment of beginning, the overlap is considerable, later the two roads diverge considerably, and direct our attention to quite different kinds of observation. (“Terministic” 45)

If translated into non-semiotic systems like toys, we see these sign values in a much more positive light--namely, they direct the attention toward a signified concept, but not necessarily the reality behind it. Similarly, we can see that any constructed mythology is an imperfect means of conveying ideology. Even so, if Barthes is correct in assuming that toys can be potentially harmful in the images that they convey, then it is worth examining the

general range and field of 1980s toys for approximations of the kinds of ideological effects they may have.

The Adult Function in Toys

Prior to the rhetorical criticism of the toys themselves, the foremost methodological issue from Roland Barthes' essay is the limits of what constitutes the world of "adult functioning." Barthes only offers professions (in the form of soldiers, bureaucracy, etc) and the allusion to gender roles (in his comparison of toy soldiers against dolls that wet themselves, pretend to eat, etc.). This much seems to be in near-universal agreement; sociologist Donald Ball concurs with this assessment and formally adds two more characteristics: role rehearsal and the facilitation of social interactions (450). This is mainly significant because the initial reading of Barthes makes it appear as though the children he describes live in social isolation with their toys. Ball's inclusion of "social facilitation" essentially incorporates other children back into the normative learning process. In addition to toys having the function of play, they work to promote interaction between children to learn values like sharing, playing well with others, and relational dialogue. On the negative side, Doris Wilkinson argues that the content of the toy, specifically its race or depiction of racial issues, acts as a vehicle for cultural transmission, and accurately reproduces the inequalities of representation in the process (106). What makes Wilkinson's argument even more compelling is the way in which she further clarifies the inequalities of bourgeois culture with white culture; it is not just adults, but specifically adults of the privileged elites who are in control of these representations. By way of extension, the influence of any given toy then moves beyond the direct contact with the child, but can also influence the social interactions

with other children, creating the possibility of reproducing inequalities as a matter of behavioral practice more than the dominance of a specific attitude.

In his own semiological analysis of toys, Jack Solomon modifies this critique by first agreeing with the same general principles as Barthes, Wilkinson, and Ball (in terms of the general functions of toys training children by way of interaction), but adds that adult functions serve multiple purposes. On the one hand, content transmits certain cultural values, but the action of physically passing a toy to a child to play with has meaning as well. On one level, the action is an encouragement to engage in independent thought and imagination, but it also creates a physical separation between the adult and the child, thereby perpetuating the “myth of childhood” as a closed off, imaginary place that distinguishes the world of adult play from the activities of the child (83). This barrier acts in the same way as Baudrillard’s discussion of Disneyland’s hyperreal function; the illusion cast by the child’s play (implying that the world of the adult is work) masks the childishness that motivates the production of toys and the desire to separate to begin with. Moreover, he argues that adults are increasingly buying toys (that were designed for children) for themselves (85). This desire (specifically in reference to teddy bears) most frequently indicates a desire to possess a child substitute; in this case the toy operates in reverse, inculcating the parent with the social role rehearsal of being a parent by treating the toy like a child.

The last common denominator in the study of toys is that as a cultural product, changing toys may imply a changing culture, and more specifically, that the changing shape and content of toys is indicative of changing cultural trends. For example, one such argument involves tracking the sheer volume of toys produced during a particular era as a measure of changing economic conditions, such as the increased influx of G.I Joe and Barbie toys in the

1960s (Cross 769-774). This kind of availability may also be indicative as a type of approval rating; Solomon suggests that glancing at the shelves of a toy store helps to elucidate the social status of values like war by examining the prominence of toys that openly display these values (87).

Mythology and Marketing

In contrast to this unilateral analysis of toys in isolation, the kind of cultural narrative that generates a mythos works best when it operates through a multitude of mediums. For example, most toy lines (especially the kind discussed here from the 1980s) purposefully tried generate momentum through a series of coordinated exposures. The *G.I. Joes* from the *Real American Hero* line of action figures were purposefully released to coincide with a corresponding TV show, and shortly thereafter, they coordinated each subsequent release of action figures with new episodes and comic sales. Similarly, there were several other toy lines that attempted this simultaneously: *G.I. Joe: A Real American Hero*, *The Transformers*, *The Super-Powers Team*, *He-Man*, *Thundercats*, and to lesser extents, *Rainbow Brite*, *The Care Bears*, *Voltron*, and *Strawberry Shortcake*. The last four did not have coordinated releases to the same documented extent the first group did, but were generally picked up for cross-venue marketability. It is this level of context that I hope to touch on here; the coordinated, concentrated effort of the toys themselves in addition to the TV show, comics, and other merchandising helps to expand the cultural implications of the Barthesian mythology from a sign into a system of signs, and as such, a culture. Taking cues from Varney's work, the goal here is to pull apart the relevant clusters of themes and forms that create meaning within the toys' mythology.

The *Super-Powers Collection* was produced by Kenner between 1984 and 1986, with the first series of twelve action figures were released in 1984, while the subsequent two years followed with eleven action figures apiece (Geyer). All of the action figures were based on characters from DC Comics, and the figures were a pretty close duplication of their headliners. The first eleven figures contained nine characters that had their own comic book at the time (Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, The Flash, Green Lantern Aquaman, Firestorm, Green Arrow, and Hawkman), and were released simultaneously with the *Super-Powers: Galactic Guardians* TV series that followed up various incarnations of the *Super Friends* TV show from 1974-1983 (Geyer; Ruprecht). The prior versions of the show when it was the *Super Friends* were largely in the control of Hannah-Barbera until the final two seasons from 1984-1986. During the *Super Friends* era, the main cast consisted of only Superman, Batman, Robin, Wonder Woman, and Aquaman, with occasional guest appearances by a number of poorly-received comic-relief and minority characters: Marvin and Wendy, the Wonder Twins (no relation to Wonder Woman), El Dorado, Black Lightning, and Samurai (Ruprecht). While Black Lightning was based on an actual DC Comics proprietary character, the others were created for the show itself (Geyer). In the penultimate season, the show added a rising star from DC Comics, Firestorm, a nuclear-powered superhero who became a mainstay and was the only such character to do so; in the final season, the non-canon characters were dropped almost completely, relegated to establishing shots and cameos only (Ruprecht). During the *Galactic Guardians* era, the changes in the lineup were paralleled by changes in the animation, which began to more closely reflected the toy line and the comics, and the plots featured in influx of additional DC Comics characters (“Super”).

Besides having this information as background, it amplifies the significance of the toy series as a collaborative venture. Having emerged in direct competition to Mattel's adoption of Marvel properties for their *Secret Wars* action figure line, the key factor in Kenner's acquisition of the rights were the accuracy of the figures direct representations to their comic book counterparts and the attention to detail, specifically their resistance to adding levers to the figures to provide the corresponding "super power" action.²¹ Unlike Barthes' examples, these toys retained individual identities, but created a mythos through alternate means, namely the multi-modal presentation scheme. Whereas the child playing with the toy soldier has only the soldier to reference for cues on warfare, the *Super Powers* collection toys included far more points of reference for what any given figure could do, might do, or would do if presented with any of the situations depicted on the show or in the comics. In short, there were far more narrative elements present to help construct the underlying story that comprised the toy's value system.

Idealized Bodily Forms in the Action Figure

The first, and most accessible, symbolic values are visceral, meaning that the first glimpse into adult functions necessitates an examination of the adult form and the discrimination between body types. In reference to Table 2, it is clear that most of the figures are male, but only contain slight differences in physique, which is to say that most of the heroes display about 2% body fat and all the muscle groups are visible; for the only female figure, Wonder Woman, she is also athletic and lean for a woman, with perhaps 12% body

²¹ See Geyer's "History" page for a full account of the political pressures that compounded in the toy line's creation.

fat. From a side view, the Green Lantern action figure is thicker in the torso and thighs, whereas The Flash action figure is slimmer in the chest, waist, and thigh muscles. Both exhibit full musculatures with every major grouping fully developed. For example, the abdomens of both figures show the “six-pack abs” that ripple across the front. Similarly, though The Flash action figure is perceptibly slimmer in the arms and legs than the Green Lantern action figure (probably due to his attributed superpower being super-speed), the biceps, triceps, and thighs are still etched clearly, creating an ideal physique. Both figures appear to have no more than 2% body fat and seem exceptionally athletic.

In addition, the Green Lantern action figure (number 2 on Table 2) possesses the middle-length haircut of a young man. That is, he is neither perceivably “graying” near the temples nor thinning on the top of his head. Both figures contain a contented expression, neither grimacing nor exactly smiling. Their eyes give nothing away as their brows express attentiveness, without any hint of anger or frustration. The Flash action figure looks almost slightly amused and borderline eager with the open mask that reveals his eye shapes underneath. Regardless, both figures also maintain perfectly square jaws, and of course, their body proportions are roughly equivalent to those of a full-scale human. Finally, what is not visible (though it is alluded to on the packaging) is that each figure possesses a special “super power” that can be activated by squeezing either their arms or legs. Squeezing the legs of the Green Lantern action figure, for example, raises his right hand approximately 90 degrees, while squeezing The Flash action figure’s arms toward the torso cause the legs to move back and forth in a scissor-like motion – something akin to the motion of treading water unless the knees are bent. While the mechanism is the same in virtually every toy in the line, it is adapted fairly effectively into a variety of motions. For example, the Red Tornado action

figure (number 9 on Table 2) rotates at the hip and the Hawkman action figure (number 6 on Table 2) flaps the removable plastic wings on its back.

Virtually all of the hero figures clearly display an insignia either on their chest or belt buckle. Superman displays a large “S,” while Green Lantern has a green lantern on his chest, and Batman has a large bat, etc. These insignia fall into roughly three categories: (1) a personal signature that identifies the hero’s stylized moniker, (2) a depiction of the source of the hero’s power, or (3) an idiosyncratic ceremonial symbol. Of the first type, several quick examples would be the “S” on Superman’s chest, the “R” on Robin’s, the “A” on Aquaman’s belt, and so on. On a purely denotative level, this primarily serves to identify the character; it would be difficult to identify any “bird like” features on Robin (as opposed to Hawkman who has wings), so the letter “R” mainly serves to match a name to the costumed adventurer for the outsider.²² What’s more interesting though is the second trend, namely the identification of totemic or talismanic power. Green Lantern, The Flash, Batman, Firestorm, and Captain Marvel all prominently display the source of their various powers or their totemic origin.²³

While Wonder Woman or Green Arrow cannot immediately represent their origins or source material in their costumes, these others proudly display in insignia form the very roots of their mythology. For example, The Flash received his powers after being struck by lightning, and in another example, Batman’s greatest asset is the fear instilled by keying into a mixture of cultural disdain for bats and the superstitions of criminals. Many of the insignias though are also ceremonial or idiosyncratic; Dr. Fate’s amulet is a mystic artifact that

²² One notable exception is the “S” on *Superman*’s chest. As an iconic character from DC comics, the “S” insignia has come to represent a slew of other values even when divorced from the context of being on his chest.

²³ The Flash, Firestorm, and Captain Marvel are numbers 3, 11, and 24 on Table 2.

contributes to his powers, Martian Manhunter's belt buckle corresponds to his alien origins (most Martians wear these symbols), and Lex Luthor's chest symbol has no known correspondence and was invented by George Pérez for the purposes of the action figure.

In a sense, these fantasy icons of talismanic power are extensions of consumer fashion and jewelry signification systems. These heroes, in most cases, proudly display the source of their power much in the same way that human beings sport *logos* on their clothing to signify athleticism or social status. In this way, the "S" shield on Superman's chest is not that different from a "Live Strong" bracelet on the wrist of Lance Armstrong, or (to a lesser extent) "Air Jordan's" on Michael Jordan's feet; in each case, the symbol serves as a sign on its "originator" where the character creates a sense of individuality, a sense of purpose, or a sense of individual identity.²⁴ While they are not always clearly referential, they add distinction and difference between each of the figures to visually distinguish them from one another. More importantly, the symbol, in combination with the actions and "super" qualities of the individual hero acquire talismanic status when reapplied into general circulation, as if each simulacra could tap into the source of that same power for use by the wearer.

Finally, the last innate feature of each figure is its "super power," or the physical mechanism, which allows the child to approximate one of the character's enhanced abilities during play. For the most part, the figures use a set of springs hooked into the legs so that once they are squeezed together, the arms move. The movement is then patterned after the unique properties of the character; for Superman, the action is punching, for the Green Lantern (who uses a power ring) his right hand raises into aiming position, while for Wonder

²⁴ Which in the adult world translates in consumerism to *buying* this kind of mythology.

Woman, her hands can move to “block bullets” with her bracelets or toss her lasso accessory.²⁵

There are, then, two major implications from the world of adult functions built into the figures themselves. At the individual level, body image is certainly a factor as the vast majority of the figures demonstrate that the “superhero” physique is at the peak of human conditioning. The second major feature is that regardless of moral alignment, each figure has the unique feature of the super power built into its form. This is an innate feature, which ostensibly reiterates the figure-as-individual.

Viewed as a whole, the line lacks gender diversity.²⁶ There is only one female in the entire line, and the absence of other female super heroes makes this problematic, even if it is not mysterious.²⁷ The narrative world of the *Super Powers* collection is entirely male-dominated. Any additional evaluations must keep account that the participants in this world have a 32:1 male to female ratio. The redeeming factor is that the one woman who is included in this world is on par with the male counterparts in every respect; she is just as athletic, includes just as many features, and possesses a “super power” of her own. She is outnumbered, certainly, but not undervalued. Though in the minority, the Wonder Woman action figure represents an iconic resistance to the overwhelming trend to create and market energetic, “cuddly,” or chic female traits, which were the predominant market draws at the

²⁵ Wonder Woman generally carries a lasso as her only offensive weapon. The collection included a few accessories for several of the figures and this was one of them. Others included detachable capes, wings, weapons,

²⁶ Due to the popularity of a number of female comic book characters in DC comics at the time, namely, Supergirl, Batgirl, Hawkwoman, Black Canary, Big Barda, and Zatanna, it seems unusual that there are not more female figures, even though several of these characters are admittedly based on male counterparts.

²⁷ DC Comics owns a large number of female superheroes. By stating that their absence is not mysterious, it is because it clearly shows that this line was aimed at young boys and was likely assumed that they would not buy the female action figures.

time (Varney 156). This woman, no matter how outnumbered, is at least the equal of any other of her immediate peers.²⁸

File Cards as Narrative Gateway

It is worth reiterating that while the presentation here is methodical and ordered, the actual kinds of contact that a child is likely to engage in when receiving or playing with a toy is going to be less formal. The child learns mainly through the construction and experience of narrative events, situations, and analogies, and as the play continues, the discovery is that of verisimilitude and not epiphany (Bruner 4). The figures themselves only go so far in establishing the toy's ideology; again, since they are fantasy toys and do not immediately correspond to occupations in the real world, the packaging includes some basic information behind the figure on the file card.²⁹ The Super Powers line gave a bare bones list of biographical information pertaining to each of the characters, such as their nicknames, powers, weaknesses, enemies, and secret identity--if one applied. This is one of the few interesting departures from the creation of the toy line that establishes the comics as the source material rather than the TV show; the list of enemies corresponded to the character's "actual" enemies in the fictional world of the comic rather than the show. For example, the file card for the Flash mentioned the villains he faced most frequently in his comic book and

²⁸ Again, these elements are working together in context. For a child who is completely unfamiliar with Wonder Woman, seeing her depiction in a line of series one figures on one of cardbacks is unlikely to inspire such a detailed response; rather, it is more likely to provoke a nearly unconscious recognition that somehow the exception to the rule has as much, if not more, value than the others.

²⁹ The practice of including contextual information with action figures goes back at least as far as the 1960s. Gary Cross notes that the original G.I. Joe line of action figures include military field manuals to instruct children how to increase Joe's "combat readiness" and even had sections on how to pose him for throwing grenades--thereby allowing the child to "play soldier" more convincingly (773).

none of his rogues gallery are depicted in the toy line.³⁰ Interestingly enough, the card excludes information like allies while it includes enemies. The underlying assumption here is that heroes are always allies with other heroes.

The primary function of the file card, at least in the case of the *Super Powers* collection, was the establishment of ground rules about each figure's inherent "super power" feature. For example, the Green Lantern's physical activity was to raise his right arm about fifteen degrees, which, if repeated, would eventually make an entire revolution. The mechanism also rotates independently for adjustment. The file card contextualizes this movement as an elaboration of his super power. Because the figure comes with a large, green lantern, the description explains that this works in conjunction with the ring on his hand; while Green Lantern may use his power ring in fights, its energy is limited--he needs to recharge every 24 hours. Children can simulate this by placing the battery in his left hand (formed with a suitable grip) and squeezing his legs while reciting the "Green Lantern Oath," which is part of the recharge ritual. This separates the features of each figure; Superman's arms may go up and down too, but Green Lantern's arm actually aims his weapon instead of make a punching motion. The main effect of this explanation on the file card reinforces the "unique" properties of the toy in hand. While the trigger mechanism may be generic (squeezing the legs or arms), the effect is not. The Flash's legs move to back and forth like a runner, since he does not fly, while the Red Tornado's move like a top to mimic his tornado

³⁰ The card reads as follows: The Flash: The Scarlet Speedster. Powers: Flash is the fastest man alive. Can run at super-speed. Can vibrate his body so quickly as to be immaterial so that bullets pass through him, or can go through walls. Can also move so fast that he becomes intangible. Can run on water. Weaknesses: Mortal. Enemies: Heat Wave, Captain cold, Pied Piper, Captain Boomerang, Grodd, Abra Kadabra, Mirror Master, Trickster, Golden Glider, Weather Wizard, Dr. Alchemy. Secret Identity: Barry Allen.

whirlwind. Green Lantern's arm motion levels a power ring (a primarily offensive weapon), while Wonder Woman "tosses" her lasso (a weapon of capture and restraint) and so on.

Interestingly enough, the information on the file card also begins to lay down preliminary ground rules (so to speak) of the way that the world of the toy operates. Unlike toy soldiers, which can typically be grouped together easily by insignia (e.g., US Army, Marines, etc.), the file cards of the *Super Powers* toys have to establish what the self-referential symbols mean. From just looking at the Green Lantern action figure, it might be intuited that his name could just be "Green Ring," or since his weapon is a power ring, that his name reflected this (e.g., "Power Ring," or "Ring slinger"). Instead, the file card makes this relationship explicit. In addition, his card specifies that the energy he generates with the ring cannot affect the color yellow, but it does allow him to fly, create energy shapes, pass through walls, travel through space, and he can do all this just by thinking about it—even without wearing the ring.

At this level of abstraction, the toy's referential context begins instructing the child as to *how* to play with the toy itself. Superman cannot pass through walls—he would have to break them, but the Flash can "vibrate" through one if he is running fast enough and the Green Lantern could use his ring to pass through harmlessly, so an easy toy scenario might involve the child pretending that one figure could pass through a solid object while the others would not. While not necessarily occupational, this level of context begins to separate the possible from the impossible for each particular action figure. Whereas the first level of abstraction, appearance, set the rules for how a "super" person should look (with the above average musculature and square jaw), the file card begins to define what makes a "super" person's actions different from any other. While there is no moral context yet, there is the

establishment that the figure represents something seemingly well defined: heroes and villains. That although the toy does not represent something in real life (like a living, breathing Superman), the toy does represent something that has concrete rules, structure, and defining characteristic limitations that cannot be avoided. What makes this of primary importance here is the establishment of concrete rules *even within fantasy*. The realm of the fantastic has its own limitations—rules and expectations that cannot be bent or broken even though, by definition, the fantasy world is one that does not conform to the “real” counterpart. In the broadest strokes, the file card identifies the heroes from the villains and amplifies the innate features.

Mini-Comics as Contextual Reference

Underneath each of the action figures was a short comic book produced by DC comics in conjunction with the toy company which provided a short, self-contained adventure with each hero or respective villain. All the figures in the line were released with their own comic until the third wave was released. Of the toy sets that I mentioned previously, only the *Super Powers* collection included a mini-comic as part of the toys’ initial marketing strategy. While the *G.I. Joe* and *The Transformers* toy lines were released in conjunction with their corresponding TV series, they lacked the additional cross-venue marketing found with the *Super Powers* collection. In other words, none of the other toy lines could match the raw availability of cross-marketing that the *Super Powers* collection line enjoyed. There was no single venue that acted as the artistic rudder for the series, whereas the TV show was the driving force for virtually all of the other toy production lines.

What makes the *Super Powers* collection the most interesting was that the creators reversed the standard procedure, since the TV show was secondary to the preexisting lives of the characters within comics. Of the three major toy lines, namely, *Transformers*, *GI Joe*, and the *Super Powers* collection line, the characters of *Transformers* were completely original to the series, then later picked up by the comics, while the *GI Joe* figures were essentially remakes of the earlier models from the 1940's through the 1970s—though each medium for these toys operated with creative independence: the toys, TV show, and comic series were given artistic autonomy. The *Super Powers* collection had significantly more artistic limitations due to the roughly 30 years of character history following their big names and the pre-existing TV shows starring the characters. As a result, the format of the existing show changed drastically from the last incarnation of the *Super Friends* to the *Super Powers Team: Galactic Guardians* to more closely reflect the portrayals of the main cast in DC Comics' *Justice League of America* series, which featured virtually every character in the toy line. The mainstream comics, not the show, set the pace for the direction that the toys would take; this is evidenced in the aforementioned file cards, which often included information never shown in the series, such as specific character weaknesses, secret identities, or enemies. The file card is the single most important semiotic link between the toy and the comic series; unlike the majority of the material on the packaging, which was primarily self-referential (i.e., demonstrative of the other collectable elements), the file card elaborated on how the character behind the toy existed in a much more expansive world that could be shown through either the TV show or the toy line. This further establishes the importance of the mini-comic, included within the packaging as a device for inter-medium continuity.

While the analysis of the file card demonstrates the establishment of the unique, individual powers (which is really just a fantasy version of an occupational skill set), it is the mini-comics included with the figure that begin to contextualize the appropriateness of their use; literally, the mini-comic acts as the bridge between the abstractions and somewhat isolated information about the character's powers from the file card to the visual representation of these abilities in a "real" situation. For example, the Green Lantern file card describes that he can project energy constructs with the power ring, but what does this mean exactly? In the corresponding mini-comic (number 11 on Table 4), the plot centers on the Joker trying to extort Green Lantern into giving him the power ring in exchange for several hostages. In the crucial finale, Green Lantern seems to capitulate, taking off the ring and tossing it to the Joker; however, this proves to be a feint, as he telepathically stops the ring in mid-air and causes it to capture the Joker in a green bubble. The comic firmly grounds the information of the figure and file card into a solid, narrative example. Each of Green Lantern's powers are displayed within the comic, his actions solidify him as heroic (as he fights criminals and saves other heroes), and most importantly, it establishes that the character is unique in his style, or approach, to crime fighting. In virtually each of these character-specific comics, each of the character's powers, no matter how rare or obscure, gets a moment or two for recognition. Here, the comic is essentially a densely packed hero dossier that expounds the map of the file card into actual terrain with visual cues.

Whereas the occupational role is diminished with fantasy toys, the mini-comics explicitly supplement this, demonstrating a mini-simulacrum of democratic idealism. The critical factor is the role of relationships as they are defined visually throughout the comics. While not absolute, virtually every comic shows at least one superhero bailing out a

colleague from mortal peril or rushing to his aid. One point of interest is that Superman is the most frequent “victim” on the covers, shown needing aid or rescue at least four times (on comics 1, 3, 4, and 10), and half the time it is Wonder Woman who’s protecting or rescuing him. This has, of course, several layers of potential significance (1) Superman is widely considered the most powerful hero, so for him to get knocked down into a vulnerable position by *anything* implies that the danger is unusually severe, (2) this helps to add credibility to his peers since they are able to compete within his league at the upper-echelons of power, (3) lastly, and perhaps most significantly, it visually shows that even the strongest, toughest, and most capable of people *needs help* from time to time. The undercurrent of democratic idealism buries itself in these projections: first, the hero and villain alike are uniquely empowered to make a difference (for better or worse) above the contributions of “regular” people; second, the more maliciously enabled are almost constantly on the offensive for their own gain, and will not hesitate with lethal force to achieve their objectives--even if this means endangering innocents or killing “legitimate” law enforcement; lastly, the surest and best way to defeat one of these latter types is to outmaneuver and/or *outnumber* them. The lesson is that organization, loyalty, cooperation, and teamwork can trump raw power every time--or at the very least, appears to be the more valiant course of action.

In the adventures depicted within the mini-comics, the mythology emerges as more than just a fight between good and evil; the forms for good and evil take shape as battle lines are drawn between the heroes (who fight crime and keep an alien despot bent on conquering Earth at bay) and the villains (who commit acts of force or fraud in the pursuit of self-interest). While a number of the comics focus on the heroes fighting crime and criminals, a

substantial number also depict the ongoing hostilities with the main villain of the series, Darkseid, who commands several of the characters as direct henchmen/lieutenants (Kalibak, Desaad, Steppenwolf, and Mantis) while a final figure, the Parademon, is the model for Darkseid's standard foot soldier and shock troop.³¹ The Parademon is one of the more interesting changes used in the series. Like Darkseid and his villain entourage, the Parademon has counterparts in the regular, mainstream DC Comics universe. However, they changed the appearance of the Parademons for the line. Originally, they were large, beefy-looking men in green and yellow jumpsuits, but for the toy line, they were made red, with more traditionally demonic features: sharp teeth, claws on their hands and feet, bat-like wings on their arms, narrow eyes, pointy ears, and a characteristic snarl. The figures were the only example within the collection of a character carrying weapons, as each parademon was equipped with a laser pistol. The file card explains that while the Parademon is not very bright, its real strength lies in *numbers*. Working in large, uniform hordes the comics often show visuals of massive, red armies attacking the heroes with overwhelming numbers--often requiring the other heroes to come to the main protagonist's aid.

From this, there is a tacit job description for the superhero: (1) the hero upholds the law and fights crime, focusing on the cases that fall out of the scope of traditional police forces, due to the super-powered nature of the villains; (2) the hero is an autonomous unit, individually equipped to handle these challenges for the most part by sticking to the weight-class principle³² and by teaming-up with other superheroes only when the situation is dire;

³¹ Parademons were always referred to as "Para-drones" on the show, presumably due to the negative connotations of the word "demon."

³² While not a formal principle, this refers to the technique in narrative that balances heroes and villains against each other in comparable (or evenly-matched) circumstances. The fights are not fair, per se, because it is

(3) in the case that a hero has been corrupted by mind control, or has been captured by the villains, a hero's job is to rescue these allies as quickly and carefully as possible. Restoring fallen or co-opted comrades is a prominent theme in the mini-comics, with roughly two thirds of the plots incorporating some variation of this.

In addition, knowing that the heroes and villains themselves represent a *select few* from within the society as a whole as archetypes leave open the distinction of being a *republican democracy ideal*; these are the elect and they are chosen by fate instead of by a vote. Using the phrasing of Joseph Campbell, the heroes have “answered the call to action” and made a distinguishable choice from their villain counterparts as public servants rather than opportunistic, greedy criminals. Between villains, the ones that practice street-crime are routinely defeated, even when they have the edge, by superior numbers or their own flaws.³³

There are a few “violations” of standard comic book etiquette in the mini-comic, and while they likely suggest pragmatic and consumer issues for the production line, it represents one of the few cases where children are presented with an ideologically flexible moment. To an experienced reader, that is, someone who is also familiar with the body of comics associated with the toys' background, there are several problems with the mini-comic's scenarios. For example, the Green Lantern is normally a “cosmic” character, and not normally involved in stopping street crime; also, the Joker is one of the primary villains in Batman's “rogues gallery,” and being perhaps the most famous, it is unlikely that the two would cross paths since creative teams are notoriously protective of their stock characters.

predisposed to let the hero win, but typically forces the heroes to rely on a noble characteristic (like a power, determination, or sheer force of will) to tip the scale in their favor.

³³ Street-crime refers to general acts of force or fraud like robbery, kidnapping, or wrongful impersonation. At their most ambitious, these criminals act as domestic terrorists by taking hostages, threatening to blow up major landmarks, or poisoning the populace. This starkly contrasts the role of Darkseid and his minions who reside on another planet and continuously plan a military takeover of Earth.

However, for the sake of the mini-comic, these taboos are overlooked for the sake of narrative scope; the Green Lantern (in his own series) rarely uses all of the powers mentioned on the file card (telepathically controlling the ring from a distance is especially rare), but the mini-comic makes sure to display each and every one of his powers. The “guest appearance” by Robin, Batman’s teenage partner, later lessens the somewhat taboo clashing between Green Lantern and the Joker. Similarly, an examination of the remaining mini-comics reveals that each starring character routinely has at least one guest-star, sometimes more, and that their presence is crucial to the plot.

On the one hand, this is most easily explained as part of the ongoing marketing ploy to cross-promote the figures. Even so, the image that a child sees is one of cooperation. Heroes and villains have their own communities. For heroes, these communities operate on cooperation and negotiation, but for villains, they rely on fear and intimidation.

It is worth noting though, that this level of abstraction and specificity is only available once the figure is actually *purchased*; there is an investment factor involved that cannot be ignored. While each individual comic is likely to convey some aspects of what I have outlined above, the persuasive ideological function increases with saturation, that is, the greater the investment into seeing the whole of the collection. Like the toy itself, the reward for purchase is more “direct contact” with the subject matter. Until purchase, the toy itself is more map than territory, and the same is true of the mini-comic. Once purchased though, access into more intimate knowledge is achieved and the consumer gets to buy into the mythos a little deeper with each purchase. With each subsequent purchase the consumer gets to vicariously participate in another section of the hidden fantasy world of the heroes and villains, and with each new adventure, the boundaries of the possible and impossible of that

world become more distinct. Like the file card, the comics define the nature of play by creating the fundamental boundaries of fantasy. In short, the more elements of the line are purchased, the more thorough the background narrative becomes.

While direct analyses of consumer behavior is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is worth mentioning that this represents a substantial investment on the part of the buyer to become immersed in the cultural system. Access to additional elements of the mythology, with the further addition of narrative components, requires effort. As such, the correlation between the possessiveness of the toy and the mythology that it represents becomes strengthened over time and with additional purchases because the buyer must justify whether or not the mythology was worth the cost of investment.

The Red Scare and Conclusion

In the final layer of narrative, the television show shifted the rhetoric substantially from a show about the “super friends” when they switched to the “galactic guardians” title. The creators admit that it was a three-pronged process involving matching the artwork more closely with the DC Comics’ artist George Pérez, attempting to write full half-hour stories with more emotional depth than the previous fifteen minute episodes, and conveying more of the plot elements from the comic books (“Super”). While the exact number of changes are too numerous to mention, there are four of particular interest. First, as a nod to Varney’s work, the only new character introduced to the final lineup was the character of Cyborg, and while he was not the first minority introduced to the show, he replaced the team’s previous African-American character (Black Lightning) but was far more popular because of his elaborate back story and starring role in DC Comics’ *The Teen Titans*; Cyborg, it seems,

embodied just the right mix of age, narrative *pathos*, and merged a male body with a mechanized form as the source of his superpower.

The other changes had more to do with changing the scope of the show's narrative features. They added the plots involving Darkseid as a major villain, featured more of the characters that could move through space, and finally, they added mortality to the plots with as much subtlety as possible to pass the broadcasting censorship laws. The final episode produced, "The Death of Superman," is perhaps the best example of this. The episode opens with a full-screen close-up of the American flag, which then pulls back to reveal the flag situated on top of the white house. As the ominous narration begins, the camera cuts to a collection of mourning civilians in front of the United Nations building in New York during the opening line, "It is a tragic day, indeed, for our nation as well as the entire world, for today, our planet faces the passing of its strongest, most valiant guardian," which then cuts to the funeral procession at the Hall of Justice (the headquarters of the heroes during their cooperative adventures), where the superhero pallbearers carry the casket toward a spacecraft. During a flashback, it is revealed that Superman contracted severe Kryptonite poisoning while exploring an alien planet in search of rare minerals he hoped to use (ironically) in the search for an antidote to Kryptonite.³⁴ When the villain, Darkseid hears about Superman's death, he considers that this may be an elaborate ruse to draw him into the open. Upon interrogating (and believing) the only witness to Superman's disappearance (a

³⁴ Further capturing the cosmic scope of the show, this stop was only a break on the way home from an unnamed humanitarian mission that was even further away from home; the symbolic tragedy of Superman's death is threefold: he dies accidentally (instead of heroically in the line-of-duty), on an alien planet (instead of his new adopted home), while looking for a way to beat his mortal weakness (which in this context is akin to cheating to win).

guilt-ridden, teenage superhero named Firestorm), Darkseid mounts a full invasion of Earth, swiftly incapacitating the other superheroes and forcing Earth's governments to surrender.

In keeping with the show's new theme, the episode raises the emotional and physical stakes for the characters considerably. Superman is near-death in his Kryptonite-induced coma, the young rookie, Firestorm, has only one chance to redeem himself by bringing back their greatest champion in a desperate resurrection scheme in the heart of the sun, Darkseid is moments away from total victory (which would result in the enslaving of the human race), and the governments of the world were rendered powerless until Superman makes a triumphant return--stronger than ever.

Combined with the toys and the mini-comics, the cultural narrative resembles the essence of American Cold War doctrine. From the file card, the most essential piece of Superman's history is apparent: he is an immigrant and the ultimate one at that. Beyond this, as the sole-surviving refugee of a doomed alien planet, Superman is Earth's greatest adopted son and best embodiment of the immigrant value-system; he works hard, uses his great powers (an ethnic and biological heritage) in the service of his new home, and defends the American democratic process by respectfully submitting to it (Engle 738-45). On the show, these references are enhanced. *America and the world* mourn for his passing, and it is clear that he leaves behind a significant power vacuum leaving the entire planet vulnerable to attack. The enemy is just as telling. Darkseid, who is almost always planning to conquer Earth, is so stunned by the prospect of victory that he initially rejects this as a trick. When it is confirmed, he mobilizes in full force and the screen fills with images of beachheads forming around the planet with a large battleship pulling through them and landing on the planet below. As mass panic hits the populace, people flee to get away from the lumbering

ships, all the while Darkseid's trusted interrogator, Desaad, pilots one of the ships with Parademons on either side of him laughing at the people "scurrying like ants" before his massive death machine.

Like the mini-comics, the only thing keeping the alien despot, his lieutenants, and his large, soulless, red army of Parademons from conquering Earth is the coalition of international heroes, of which, Superman is the lynchpin. In this way, the connotation of the "Super Powers" label takes on a different meaning. The Super Powers team (the Galactic Guardians) extends the idealism behind the United Nations and NATO during the 1980s, or more accurately, with the *myth* of what purpose these organizations served from the perspective of the Cold War-era United States. Darkseid and his lieutenants represent a variation on the theme of the Soviet bloc nations, a despot with a few key leaders commanding a massive military force with a large industrial base always poised to destroy the freedoms (and individuality) expressed within the democratic nations through subterfuge and/or martial power.³⁵ The enemies of Earth are, in large part, "drones" created and enslaved by Darkseid. While it may not be objectively true, this fits with a cursory conception of the power dynamics of the world behind the "iron curtain." In the most blunt version of this, President Ronald Reagan argued that the Soviet Union was an evil and oppressive empire denying the basic individuality of its people through the dominance of the state, and furthermore, that they justified their misdeeds through their belief in an omnipotent state.³⁶ Superman's disappearance, however temporary, has the same effect that Reagan identifies with a nuclear freeze: it demonstrates a weakness in American willpower and a

³⁵ Darkseid's home planet, Apokolips, had three industrial craters (that were easily visible from space) on it, and they roughly covered one-third of the surface area.

³⁶ In the comic books, Darkseid is worshiped as a god on Apokolips and is the sole source of state authority.

strategic gap that our enemies can exploit. The lesson from this contextual cooperation is that heroes preserve liberty, protect basic freedoms of speech and worship, but only as long as the evil and malevolent forces (who constantly probe for weaknesses and scheme against the freedom-loving people everywhere) are kept at bay by a show of force backed up with real power.

Going back to Barthes' initial supposition, what we see here is not the re-creation of adult functions in reference to occupation; rather, it is the *re-creation* of adult value functions. This system of signs that exists inside of fantasy creates an even more idealized world than the occupational toys that Barthes names because they transcend the learned nature of occupation. The figures themselves signify an ideal form of body type, the character interactions signify ideal relationships, the powers loosely signify individual and unique abilities, the sum total of which equates to what a child should grow up to become: a healthy/athletic, uniquely empowered participant, in an ongoing struggle between that which is good (represented by the heroes), and that which is bad (represented by the villains). What seems to be uniquely transmuted by fantasy action figures is a reproduction of social order and value--primarily consists of connotations from the adult sign systems.

In sum, toys build a set of ideological expectations and demonstrate a method of fulfilling these expectations in the real world of adult value functions. The end result of toy systems is to expose children to ideological constructs and values of the adult world, albeit abstractly, and "attune" them into tacitly accepting them. By using the *fantastic* elements of toys, we actually recreate the *normal values*. As toys embody an ideal that no child could expect to hold on to, the behaviors that try to achieve those goals nonetheless provide a baseline for what we would call normal behavior. It is the deviation from the achievement of

these expectations that typically becomes considered irrational or deviant behaviors. That being said, as Barthes concluded, there is no one message conveyed through a mythological system; they are constantly redefined, revalued, and renegotiated in particular and unique exchanges. The key is to understand that this works in a series of increasingly complex levels of abstraction that dedicate and formalize the rules of the adult world, that is, until this process becomes so routine that the distinction between play and processing are nearly indistinguishable.

CHAPTER 3: *THE ULTIMATES*, A STUDY OF MYTH AS RHETORIC

There are times when a beautiful image makes sense as good storytelling in ways that are not easily explained.

-David Mazzucchelli

Myth, as a metaphor, works best when aimed at a younger audience. The use of toys and their trappings to convey ideology cultivates a unique set of morals embedded in the narrative conflict of good and evil. In the previous chapter, this was in specific reference to Cold War era rhetoric as it generated a unique metaphor, which was then applied to the reinvention of comic book tropes for a massive marketing campaign to revive the dying television series ratings and launch a new toy line. Here, the focus will be on another use of rhetorical mythology, this time in the development of an allegory for use in critiquing ideological assumptions.

As before, the subject for analysis is a reinvention of sorts. In the wake of the 09/11 attacks, Marvel Comics was already in the midst of a company-wide revamp of a number of classic characters. At the time, the main artistic team for *The Ultimates* (a re-imagining of Marvel's classic *Avengers*), conceived of trying to reestablish the core values of each character, but they also wanted to do this with a tasteful critique and prediction of what these characters look like in a post-09/11 climate (Evans). *The cultivation of a persuasive allegory operates at the same level as a mythological omen; the connections to real life places, ideas, and events, serve the overall goal of creating a "timely" ethos for the audience.*

What is of particular interest in terms of ideology is the way in which the allegory of *The Ultimates* creates a critique (in the form of a specialized prediction) of a new dramatic tension in the narrative of American democracy. As the fictional team of characters develop

the technological resources and physical muscle to respond to any threat of superhuman terrorism, the institutions that supported them slowly erode, revealing a slowly emerging crisis of confidence. Readers are encouraged, in the course of narrative immersion, to imagine the same kind of crisis developing in the real world. While the fictional United States has the resources to tackle any threat, foreign or domestic, the crumbling moral integrity of the characters not only makes them unsympathetic in comparison to their original counterparts, it alludes to a cancerous moral bankruptcy of the post-09/11 America. Though able to save ourselves, we may not deserve to be saved.

The Audience for *The Ultimates*

Comic books are not designed solely for children. It is a continuously evolving medium and one that is becoming increasingly influenced by a broadening audience base. Children who read comics are now making comics, and there is a substantial body of adults who continue to be influential in their production as the core consumer audience; direct marketing has made smaller numbers of published issues more practical since they are not reliant on bulk purchases; and the independent comics industry continues to grow as the technology for publishing comics makes the production more efficient (Bongco, “Factors” 125-49). Moreover, there is a lot of money involved from turning even single comic book property into a successful franchise. DC Comics, for example, earned more money from their cut of *Batman Returns* than from an entire year’s profits in publishing, and, in recent years, their competitor, Marvel Comics, has made a significant effort to transform themselves into a “property farm”—a term within the business that denotes publishing houses that are actively cultivating properties for the express interest of cross-promotion and franchises (Rhoades,

“Real” 189). This has made comic books a unique rhetorical space; on the one hand, the influence has never been greater due to the increasingly long reach of comic book movies and merchandising, but at the same time the sales have rarely been as low, meaning the writers, artists, and editors have to try to balance the delicate pressures of deadlines with quality (Miller).

While the quality of any given comic published on a month-to-month basis could be debated, the focus here will be on the critically-acclaimed series *The Ultimates* launched by Marvel Comics in 2001 as part of their company-wide character reinvention program, which largely exemplified the best products that met each of the aforementioned creative criteria. The fact that comics in all varieties (comic strips, comic books, graphic novels, and editorial cartoons) occupy a unique function in the narrative immersion, namely that they are made for all ages, gives them a unique cultural place as an art form. Specifically, comic books often embody symbolic values in their characters, but are camouflaged to the passive observer--making them a kind of backdoor ideological apparatus.

It is from this understanding that a larger, more complex inductive analysis of cultural narrative can take place. Because of the symbolic nature of the 9/11 attacks against American icons of free enterprise (the World Trade Center), military strength (the Pentagon), and by extension, America's heritage of immigration (New York) and democracy itself (any part of the United States is still the United States), the concepts that define American mythology required adjustment, not in a heavy-handed way, rather as a moment of taking stock of values that really matter in the wake of a crisis. However, a response at the national level to redefine icons after a crisis (especially with iconic characters like the ones found in comic books), tends to drift immediately toward national propaganda, although with comics, the themes are

closely linked with the expression of viewpoints rather than rallying political action (Scott 325-26). This chapter examines comics as a place in which comics reinvent ideology in the popular imagination.³⁷ Here, *The Ultimates* represents a social catharsis within a “safe place,” in which the act of play coincides with the act of critique to create a cultural narrative that is openly self-critical. Specifically, Millar and Hitch’s reinvention of Marvel’s stock characters imbues itself with a single, cultural anxiety repeatedly; while the United States may possess the physical, technological, and financial resources to win any war, our moral bankruptcy denies us of a “right” to do so.

Ideological Analysis Toward a Rhetoric of the Comic Book Image

The interplay between the political unconscious and the popular imagination dialectically operates to transform an existing mythology (the sense of self and efficacy in day-to-day actions) to match the conflicts presented by material challenges. Again, it is possible to conflate mythology and ideology together, believing that any collectively held conception of what is “normal” across a group is ideology itself. Getting at these conceptions of the normal requires a more complex critique that begins with an analysis of collective self-concepts. These questions generally aim at establishing the inclusive and exclusive properties that define groups; for example,

- *Membership.* Who are we? Where do we come from? What do we look like?
Who belongs to us? Who can become a member of our group?
- *Activities.* What do we do? What is expected of us? Why are we here?

³⁷ The “political unconscious” denotes an ideology, which masks the socially symbolic nature of artifacts (Jameson 20-21). Based on this, the “popular imagination” is the mask that hides these ideological features, thus requiring their “unmasking.” This chapter argues that the two are interconnected and that a change in one will reflect a change in the other.

- *Goals.* Why do we do this? What do we want to realize?
- *Values/Norms.* What are our main values? How do we evaluate ourselves and others? What should (not) be done?
- *Position and group-relations.* What is our social position? Who are our enemies or opponents? Who is like us, and who is different?
- *Resources.* What are the essential social resources that our group has or needs to have? (Foss, 244)

From this angle, separating the myth from the ideology becomes a matter of philosophical awareness. The myth of “who we are” exists mentally in the individual, but the ideology is discovered when answering “who are we *now*.” Ideology is revealed not in the answer, but in *answering*; the mental process that determines how the old concept of myth meets with new challenges is the way in which normal values are interpreted, interpellated, and invested in the activities of social reality. In this way, the mythology exists prior to the justification, undergoes a discourse in the mind (either rhetorical, dialectical, or automatic) and elicits a new response that is, once again, immediately mythological.

A rhetoric of imagery begins then, at least from a structuralist standpoint, as the clashing between expectations generated by an image and the apparent contradictions presented can really only be reconciled either through denial or acceptance; the stronger the initial depictions of nationalist imagery, for example, the more its critical relationships are masked within it. Even so, these otherwise glossed relationships, once recognized as intuitively misleading, allude to the relationships that inspired them (Barthes, *Image* 42). The degree to which an individual feels loyalty to the symbol itself, and the values for which the symbol seems to validate, creates the basis for evaluating not only the image itself but also its

connection to actions. Under the same principle as toys, the prediction is that as identity consolidates through exposure to the medium and these connections are simplified and reduced, they form the basis of increasingly zealous ideological interpretations, such as the case with national icons. Roland Barthes, for example cites the impact of nationalist imagery with a specific example: the Algerian recruit to the French colonial military forces. At once, the soldier represents the unity of “all France’s brothers” with the common purpose of defending the French government, but the soldier also masks the assimilation of the indigenous culture and the conversion of the people as an autonomous self-governing body into one ruled by France itself (“Myth” 116, 118-20).³⁸

The comic book image is more tightly constrained than propaganda, and due to the conventions of comic book writing, the characters share a particularly formal underlying cultural narrative. Where propaganda needs to reassert the “story of the national soldier” as the defender of truth and justice, the archetypal comic book characters are already assumed to do this because of the genre. First and foremost, the comic book superhero embodies what we believe is best within ourselves; in the same way that Joseph Campbell’s monomythic hero is a stand-in for the heroic self, the hero is the metonymic representation of the reader’s idealized inner-hero (Rhoades, “Archetypes” 108-09). Moreover, due to the history of comic book publication, which incorporates a month-to-month, year-to-year schedule, the comic book is a way of addressing the continuing problems of society and the philosophical problems of mankind as they change and evolve (Inge 145). In the early years of comics (the “Golden Age”) from the 1930s through the early 1940s, the heroes and villains were

³⁸ The critiques of Barthes’ work from the previous chapter apply here as well; there are limitations as to what constitutes the narratological unit, and the way that he pins down ideological signs shrouds them with intellectualism. This is why the semiotic analysis of comics are an equalizing force; the forms wear their inner poetics on display.

seemingly straightforward: there were no gray areas in the morality of the superhero; these heroes were generally comfortable with who they were and how they went about their brands of justice; and, most importantly, it was certain that good would find a way to triumph over evil (Gravett 75). As the concept expanded through the Atomic Age, Silver Age, and Bronze Ages of comics (or the 1940s through the 1990s, respectively), the one aspect that remained unchanged was that the comic book superhero is, for all intents and purposes, a cultural metonymy for the fears and hopes associated with a core value, with the character standing in for the substance of an ideal (Gravett 76).³⁹

Nowhere is this archetypal confluence of character, form, plot, and semiotic value more prominent and influential than in the mythology of Superman, who acted as the prototype for all modern comics superheroes (Rhoades, "Archetypes" 109). The properties that are unique to Superman are now a staple in his own mythology, that is, virtually every version of the character contains these elements and it would seem wrong to the reader to omit any one of them. First, he is the iconic champion of America because he represents the fulfillment of the American dream; as the ultimate immigrant-made-good, Superman's alien refuge status is the source of his superpower, and, by extension, his morals (Engle 738-45).⁴⁰ Even his need to employ a dual-identity does not alienate him from the readers; instead, the reader is drawn into the possibilities that Clark Kent represents as an extension of their own "everyman" status--secretly hoping that they will find something powerful inside of

³⁹ For a structural argument on the functions of metonymy as metaphorical substitutions, see George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, "Metonymy."

⁴⁰ Again, as part of the mythos, Superman's ship crash-landed in the heartland of America, which is where he adopted his sense of fair play, simple justice, and sense of personal responsibility from his warm-hearted adoptive parents.

themselves that will validate and justify their average existence and transform it into a meaningful one (Eco 147).

Apart from Superman's unique features and semiotic resonance, there are parts of his mythology that have become the standard (more or less) for the superhero genre. First and foremost, the hero is an outsider, set apart from the regular society by the combination of superpowers, clarity of (optimistic) moral vision, who, upon entering the community, will find the wound and attempt to heal it (Abrahams 357). Unfortunately, this separate status creates a major problem for the hero because they can never, in the words of Joseph Campbell, complete the heroic journey and return with the ultimate boon. The hero's existence is often a never-ending struggle against crime, and because the characters never grow older, they are permanently "stuck" without finding heroic culmination in death (Abrahams 342-346). As Alan Moore argues, "the characters remain in the perpetual limbo of their mid-to-late twenties and the presence of death in their world is at best a temporary and reversible phenomenon (qtd. in Gravett 72)."⁴¹

This problem of perpetual adolescence is addressed within comics two ways: through continuity and psychological development. In the early years of the Golden Age, superheroes stuck to their own comics, rarely interacted with each other (even if more than one character property was owned by the same company), and the issues had self-contained stories to maintain the highest level of purchasing accessibility (Gravett 80). By the 1960s two transformations were underway; first, DC Comics had reinvented many of their Golden Age characters to embrace the optimism of exploration and scientific confidence coming through

⁴¹ Moore is referring here to what fans call a "Comic Book Death," which is where characters seem to die, only to be resurrected later and reveal that they used a plot device to escape death retroactively. For a description of this technique from a visual model, see Scott McCloud, "Blood in the Gutter."

the space race and post-war prosperity, but, on the other side of things, Marvel Comics began to forefront characters who were moody misfits--characters who acquired powers through mutation, exposure to radiation, or experiments gone wrong (Gravett 81). The significance in these events is that the superhero, as an archetype, was in each case an outsider, though the separation from the community could conventionally be attributed to the character's optimism, or through the character's misanthropy and distrust of the cultural zeitgeist. This leads to the second transformation; because the hero cannot "grow-up" physically or die, they instead must reach some kind of moral/psychological maturity in the course of their adventures (Bongco, "Superhero" 103).

Briefly defined, the rhetoric of the comic book image (and text) must gauge all of the persuasive features of the image, including the individual character's archetype and the way in which this archetype plays out within the convention. By metonymy, answering the question "what is this character about" is connected to answering the ideological questions of "who we are." As a genre comics rely on generic plots and the inexhaustible suspension of disbelief, but this is a necessary drawback to the trade off of continual publication (Bongco, "Superhero" 91-92). In sum, each comic book superhero mythology involves some combination of the following characteristics, though the list is neither all-inclusive nor absolute. A superhero generally displays: invulnerability (or some other superpower), aberrant or mysterious origins, man-god traits, costumed secret-identity, difficulties with personal relationships, a concern for justice, and uses super-power in politics (Bongco, "Superhero" 102).⁴² The difficulty with personal relationships is particularly compelling,

⁴² Here, political interests coincide with upholding the law.

since the hero often has trouble reconciling the need for secrecy in the dual-identity with the honesty and vulnerability required for deep commitments to a spouse or family.

Turning attention to the subject of this analysis, this central problem of the hero's disconnection with society at large and interpersonal relationships in general may have been the root cause which inspired the "team-up" and superhero group. While some heroes are perpetual loners, like Spider-Man for example, who prefer to work alone, partnership is a recurring theme throughout the genre. Ranging from dual partnerships (such as Batman & Robin) to teams (the X-Men, Justice League, etc), the grouping of heroes together is often a substitute for the participation in the civil sphere (whether personal or governmental) that the hero generally cannot contribute to. For example, Bruce Wayne is a perpetual bachelor because getting married would ruin his cover story--eventually, she would find out about his double life. However, this weakness in a lack of family finds a substitute in other characters in the hero community. The various versions of Robin have acted as surrogate sons and friends, allowing the character of Bruce Wayne to mature as a father-figure without getting married. Working alone, the hero is autocratic in all decisions, but by putting the hero into a group, the need for compromise, negotiation, and mutual respect creates a metonymic version of the democratic ideal; the individual characters represent the individual aspects of various archetypal value systems, but must set aside these differences and instead focus on acting in unison with other heroes.

This is the essential mythology of The Avengers, or the Marvel Comics collection of core superheroes, which formed to tackle challenges "no one hero could face alone" (Goulart, "Avengers" 28). Each of the foundational members of the team, like Superman, is the archetype of a set of cultural values inscribed into his or her backstory. According to the

comics, the first version of the Avengers consisted of Ant-Man, Iron Man, Thor, The Wasp, and The Hulk. Ant-Man (Dr. Henry Pym) and The Wasp (Janet Van Dyne), were a scientist and millionaire philanthropist, respectively, who channeled their significant talents of intelligence and wealth into fighting crimes. Because their powers involved shrinking down to sizes comparable to insects and they had to rely more on brains than brawn to win conflicts, they acted metaphorically as the characters of hard-work and diligence within the group. Iron Man (Tony Stark) was a billionaire industrialist who was caught in a land-mine explosion, only to be captured by Viet Cong soldiers and forced to make weapons; instead, he made a suit of armor and executed his escape only to return to the United States with a dedication to build better lives instead of better machines (Goulart, "Iron Man" 203-04). As an archetype for the military-industrial complex, Stark dually represented the ability to overcome challenges (such as building a life-saving suit of armor which effected his escape and prevented land-mine shrapnel from entering his heart) and also the reluctance to misuse this power. Thor, in the comics, represented the individual's struggle against self-doubt as the Nordic god of thunder attempted to find a place in the mortal realm while living up to Odin's expectations, and his alter-ego, Dr. Donald Blake fought against the fear that he would not be up to the task of saving lives (Goulart, "Thor" 332; Rhoades, "Archetypes" 112). The Hulk was born during the test of a gamma bomb, invented by his alter-ego, Bruce Banner; triggered by anger, the Hulk is the transformed state of Banner, a large, brutish, super-strong behemoth, strengthened by rage (Goulart, "The Hulk" 196-97). As such, he represents the struggle of the common man against his own anger (Rhoades, "Archetypes" 112).

The transformation of the Avengers into an idealized democracy did not occur until four issues after its inception. The Hulk, considered too antisocial to remain on the team for

long, left after issue two to pursue his own interests. As a stroke of “luck,” the cryogenically sustained body of Captain America (Steve Rogers, a WWII-era superhero who fought with the allies against the Nazis and domestically against anti-American criminals) was discovered; with his revival, the basic roster of the Avengers was complete through the first iteration of the team, and Captain America is generally considered to be a more part of the mythology than the Hulk (Goulart, “Captain America” 71-73). The team did not become official until Captain America arrived; when he did, the founding members drafted a charter for governing the team, where one member would serve as the team chairperson and decisions would be made like a committee: with discussion and deliberation before application. This is in stark contrast to the other comparable superhero teams at Marvel at the time, namely the X-Men and the Fantastic Four, because the X-Men were part of a school and the Fantastic Four were a family.⁴³ The Avengers were a democracy.

This unique combination within the character of Captain America, himself the archetype of patriotism and American ideals of determination, pushed the team into meaning something more than the sum of its parts. Like the United States itself, the team is an example of the corporate fears resulting from a dependence on the rule of law to govern disparate, independent states.⁴⁴ Again, the form of their democracy is “idealized” in the same

⁴³ The X-Men were part of Charles Xavier’s school, where there is a strongly implied hierarchy of leadership starting with the headmaster, Charles Xavier, that directly passes down to the field leader, Cyclops. Mr. Fantastic and the Invisible Girl had been courting for some time, and his leadership reflected the concern of the family patriarch. She, in turn, was the sister of the Human Torch and would often resolve squabbles in the team.

⁴⁴ The Avengers and ancillary characters in the Marvel Comics universe also underwent their version of a Civil War, where the heroes fought over the issue of personal autonomy. The Pro-Registration heroes (led by Iron Man) fought for an increased accountability for the actions of superheroes by mandating registration of their alter egos; conversely, the anti-Registration heroes fought to retain the independence to work outside of the law (if necessary) and were led by Captain America. This is significant mainly because it reiterates the core of the Avengers mythology as one where democracy is not only central but also essential.

way as the heroes themselves. They are an embodiment of the enhanced hopes and fears of the archetypal values, not a perfect reproduction of real-world events.

Comic mythologies are unique in that they do not get replaced, only reinvented. As various challenges occur in the real world to make meaning, they are often ideologically inserted into the comic characters as part of moments when the series “takes stock” in what the character is about. Because the characters cannot find fulfillment and completion in death, thereby releasing the ultimate boon of their journey (such as a world free from crime, and end to the war on terror, etc.), the characters instead rely on the technique of reinvention. Old myths die and new ones need to replace them (Rhoades, “Archetype” 102). However, the comics are unique in that a new character does not need to replace an old one to serve this function; the character can be “rebooted,” the origin story retold, and in doing so, set the character on a new path and modified heroic journey that defines the character’s values and ideology in the present. Discovering the ideology of the comic book image is never clearer than in these comparisons where the characters are “re-vamped” to tackle new problems.

The Narrative Mythos of Ultimate Marvel

While it was always part of the overall plan to reinvent the Avengers, the post-9/11 climate created an interesting opportunity, even in the emerging world of the Ultimate line. In 2000 Marvel Comics launched an offshoot of their main publications dubbed the “Ultimate” line. This line was primarily an effort to reinvent the headline characters from their main continuity, starting with Spider-Man, but later moving on to the X-Men, the Fantastic Four, and eventually the Avengers. The newly designed characters featured slightly altered histories and origin stories from their mainstream counterparts, and each of the

revamped features were designed to give the characters a more modern feel. For example, Peter Parker's fateful spider bite comes from a genetically reengineered and biochemically altered arachnid instead of one accidentally bombarded with radioactive isotopes; the anxiety of the 1960s nuclear arms race is replaced instead by the presence of bioengineering and designer genes produced dubiously by an unscrupulous corporation, Oscorp. What makes the development of the Ultimate line significant is its rampant popularity. In 2000, when *Ultimate Spider-Man* was released, it was voted the Comic Buyer's Fan favorite award for favorite story three straight years in a row, only to be unseated in 2003 by another ultimate title, *The Ultimates*, which was Marvel's new take on the classic Avengers. In addition, their sales have continued to proportionally keep up with the reader base (and occasionally outstrip) their mainstream counterparts (Collura).

Prior to the release of *The Ultimates*, Marvel's writers successfully launched two other titles in the Ultimate line (*Ultimate Spider-Man* and *Ultimate X-Men*) in 2000 and 2001, respectively, and incorporated into them an uncanny anticipation of real-world events. For example, in *Ultimate X-Men* the principle antagonist (the mutant called Magneto) is depicted as the fanatical leader of like-minded mutant terrorists who are responsible for numerous attacks against the United States, particularly bombings. In his speeches (i.e., the comic book text) and manifestos, his language rings of fanaticism, and he is personally responsible for a body count in the triple digits (Millar and Kubert 6-7). His presence in the comic culminates with an attack on Washington D.C. itself leaving the White House, Capitol Building, and the Washington memorial ablaze or toppled. Unlike his mainstream counterpart, this version of Magneto is exceedingly ruthless, a zealous true believer in the superiority of mutant kind at any cost--having committed his followers to numerous

indiscriminant attacks against human populations--and prone to pontification about the inevitable fall of the United States and other inferior nations.

In turn, each of these characteristics anticipates the anxieties of the post-9/11 world. Broadly speaking, these anxieties are: (1) the fear of unconventional warfare targeting civilians, (2) fighting this war against a unified, committed opposition with an unwavering devotion to the superiority of the cause, (3) the inability to separate friend from foe reliably, (4) the fear of being attacked where it is traditionally assumed to be safest, and (5) the inefficacy of common people to play a role of any significance in the outcome of these events. The themes in *Ultimate X-Men*, are the backbone foundation of the reinvention of the Avengers (due in large part to both series being written by the same author, Mark Millar), but firmly ingrained in this narrative world the necessity “genetic profiling” for mutants, the establishment of “SHIELD” (roughly analogous to a militarized Homeland Security Department), and seeing the fictional President send in troops to the fictional nation of Genosha to capture Magneto and wipe out his terrorist base (Millar and Kubert 88).

Transforming the Avengers into the Ultimates

What separates the creation of *The Ultimates* from other comic responses to 9/11, especially the ones made by Marvel Comics, is that this is the only instance of their mainstream characters being used for the purposes of critique, namely that while America may possess the financial and technical might to prevent another such tragedy from occurring, our own moral bankruptcy makes us undeserving of actually being saved. Each of the characters represents both an aspect of American idealism and an aspect of our criticism, creating an ongoing juxtaposition of conflict that emulates the political conflicts inherent to

the post-9/11 Democracy within the United States. With increasing lenience being granted to the Executive branch for the purposes of safeguarding the nation, the picture of democracy shifted from an attention to the marketplace of ideas toward the capitulation of unity. The end result was that minority opinions, while allowed, were largely dismissed, ignored, or detrimentally criticized, carrying all sides along with the popular opinion. Within the world of *The Ultimates*, each of the mainstream *Avengers* has been rewritten (sometimes drastically) to create a modicum of a super-powered democracy that becomes completely militarized; scientists are drafted as super-soldiers, billionaire industrialists offer to help but are skimming the military contracts, old veterans and secret agents take the limelight with a proactive agenda, and dissenters attempt to play the system for the benefit of the common man. In short, what makes *The Ultimates* effective as a critique is the way in which the idealized heroes embody realistic political positions, and become subject to the same political pressures as normal people.

Foremost on the revision list is the fundamental change in the concept of the independent hero or vigilante-hero because it is completely abandoned; while each character had a prior origin involving the acquisition and subsequent use of their powers where the “team” was an incidental byproduct of cooperation, the new history immediately militarizes the landscape. Every character is either directly tied to the reinvented super-soldier program or becomes indirectly tied to its activities. In the original mythology of Captain America, Steve Rogers was given peak physical endurance and stamina equivalent to the height of human tolerances; in the new version, he is clearly *super*-human as a super-soldier; he has strength, speed, stamina, and a healing factor that far outstrips a regular human being (healing from broken ribs, dislocated shoulder, and fractured collarbone in three days, for

example) and possesses a reinvigorated machismo (in one instance, his friend Bucky Barnes quotes him as stating that parachutes are for girls) (Millar and Hitch 102, 4).

The character archetypes are roughly analogous to their origins and central conflicts, and in turn, this embeds each with significant anxieties. This version of Captain America is literally, the ultimate war veteran: the survivor of the last declared war of the United States and the one that is often considered to be the last one with a clear purpose and victory. He's also in perfect health and ready to pick up arms again and serve in the next war against super-terrorism without regard to his own safety. However, this sensibility is lost in modern contexts and the character seems hopelessly lost in modern political dynamics; our technology seems decadent to him, our movies are vulgar, and liberal expressions of art, music, and television are abhorrent. In fact, it is pointed out in the third issue that his sole sense of purpose upon being revived is to rejoin the military and continue to wage war against enemies of the United States primarily because it is the only thing left of his old life that makes sense (Millar and Hitch 66). More importantly, his response to technology itself is to regress: he avoids films and television, and spends most of his free time working out, reading, or socializing with other WWII veterans. His ideology and actions reflect both the desire for the values of a purer, less complicated time, but also the lifestyle associated with it. Readers are presented with a version of Captain America who is always on the outside of popular culture, unable to have even basic conversations about television shows or cellular phones that most Americans take for granted. It is difficult to find fault with him though; his stoic confusion usually serves to contrast the gaps in age and technology with the older sensibilities that he represents.

In contrast, several of the characters embrace the hi-tech lifestyle that Captain America despises, only to reflect a real underlying mistrust of technology itself. Tony Stark is the exemplar of the American dream as its tied to technology: a lifetime of hard work and capitalizing on his own genius have made him rich, popular, and the most trusted brand name in everything from “internet software to aspartame-polluted diet soda” (Millar and Hitch 39). In general, he conveys a larger than life presence, and as a captain of industry, enjoys a level of material comfort unrivaled in the series; his stride is replaced with a swagger and he can jokingly afford to deflect criticism due to his wealth. However, there is no amount of hard work or money that can save him from an inoperable tumor “the size of a golf ball” inside of his head (Millar and Hitch 121).

The air of technological suspicion also predisposes the anxieties over the diminishing sense of security over personal privacy. In Add this to the paranoia in the representations of both SHIELD and Nick Fury, where

[e]ven having lunch with another employee becomes a minor military operation once your name’s at the top of the official notepaper. [...] half these diners are highly-decorated undercover agents and whatever we select from the menu gets tested by the company bacteriologists[.] Every article of clothing I had has been destroyed and replaced by a million dollar wardrobe laced with bugs and cameras. Every word we’re saying now is being taped, typed and analyzed by two hundred linguistics professors beneath a Starbucks in downtown Oregon. Taking this position was like volunteering for a career as a paranoid schizophrenic [...] (Millar and Hitch 30)

Fury is the exemplar of what it takes to be secure, though the cost comes at a high price, namely the complete loss of privacy and any individual agenda he might have gets subsumed for the greater good. The underlying anxiety for each is that while the technology available in the United States is top-notch, we cannot depend on our scientific advances to rescue us from suffering, but we are conversely getting better at bolstering our own security at the expense of others'. The lesson is subtle, but clear: with all of the technological capabilities of the United States' industrial machine, it is nearly impossible to say that our lives are actually improving because of it.

The picture of a working democracy within *The Ultimates* would not be complete without a picture of the political left; Thor often acts as the voice of powerful dissent and represents the centrist compromises necessary to forwarding an expansive antiterror agenda. The self-doubt in the original version of Thor is replaced by the outright critique of the status quo in the United States. While meeting Nick Fury for the first time, Fury and Banner argue that the Ultimates are a superhuman task force, not an army, to which he replies,

[It] matters not whether you are wearing capes or combat boots, little man.

You are all just thugs in uniform who will smash any threat to a corrupt status quo. Go back to your paymasters and tell them that the Son of Odin is not interested in working for a military industrial complex who engineers wars and murders innocents. Your talk might be of super-villains now, but it is only a matter of time before you are sent to kill for oil or free trade. (Millar and Hitch 87-89)

Accentuated by his long hair, trench coat, combat boots, earrings, and refusal to stand up to talk to the other characters (instead remaining seated and drinking a beer), he strikes the

image of the intelligent counter-cultural rebel, especially in the absence of certainty regarding his origin. He may be either demigod savior or a madman (Evans). Thor adamantly refuses to help SHIELD, and by extension, the policies of the new “war on super-terrorism,” going so far as to state that he will only pitch in if the President doubles the international aid budget. Clearly, he represents the social conscience.

During their first major confrontation, they do not fight a traditional supervillain; rather, they fight the Ultimate version of the Hulk, Bruce Banner. Banner’s reinvention is more clandestine than the previous version. Instead of building a gamma bomb that backfires, he is an emotionally repressed scientist and former head of the super-soldier program.⁴⁵ Still a study in controlling inner anger, this version is clearly less successful at it and is the study of the repressed politically correct, emasculated man unleashed and led to run amok. In addition to working for years on an under-funded project that had no successes, at the outset of the series he receives a demotion, watches as his ex-girlfriend (Betty Ross) takes charge as the PR rep (only to verbally berate him at every opportunity for his shortcomings publicly), and writhes under the knowledge that his successor, Dr. Henry Pym, is creating new supersoldiers every day by creating the formula for The Wasp, Giant-Man, and creating an Ant-Man helmet--though this only provokes his desire to go on another rampage as the Hulk.

In the last straw, on the night that Betty Ross goes out to dinner with Freddie Prinze, Jr. (who is ostensibly trying to get on the team to become a superhero), he accidentally walks in on the other Ultimates as they are creating a “casting call” of sorts--deciding which real-

⁴⁵ This is another significant transformation. The Ultimates universe highlights that the real arms race in the post WWII-era was not the atomic bomb but the super-soldier. Like the mainstream universe, the process that created Captain America has not been successfully duplicated. Also, in this version Banner has willingly subjected himself to prototype serums before, turning him into the Hulk and leading to several rampages.

life Hollywood actor would play them in a film. After hearing himself compared to Woody Allen and Steve Buscemi, Banner gives in to his darker emotions and injects himself with a failed super-soldier serum (which had previously caused a “Hulk” incident) and a sample of Captain America’s blood, which results in him transforming into a rampaging brute again. In his dialogue captions, he talks about finding Betty to show her how a “real man” is in bed (declaring his hatred of Freddie Prinze, Jr.), he refers to Banner as “too much woman” for Betty, and that he is “hornier than a...” before getting intercepted by the team (Millar and Hitch 107). As with the previous version, Banner and the Hulk are opposites, but what is interesting is the way in which the Hulk represents a kind of hyper-masculine, unrepentant id. The violent virility bemoans Banner’s condition as impotent, and while the character justifies giving himself the formula as a way to give the team something to fight, he also realizes that becoming the Hulk gives him a way to feel powerful (Millar and Hitch 96).⁴⁶

In this reinvention, it is questionable whether the collective cast can actually defeat the rampaging Hulk; though Captain America is impressive and possesses military training, Giant-Man and The Wasp are bookworms, and Iron Man is more of a publicity stunt than a fighter.⁴⁷ In the first major altercation for *The Ultimates*, the main team is systematically taken apart by a raging Hulk, in the moment when it seems that Captain America will be ripped limb from limb, the arrival of Thor is not only announced by thunder and lightning, but a communiqué stating that the President has indeed doubled the budget as Thor requested. The following visual depictions of the fight show that it is mainly a combination

⁴⁶ Prior to this Hulk incident, the team, SHIELD, and the revived super-soldier program were coming under scrutiny for the massive cuts made to conventional military forces in favor of a team of super-celebrities with no actual use (Millar and Hitch 82-83).

⁴⁷ One of the nearly indescribable transformations in *The Ultimates* was that it brought out a basic truth about scientists-turned superheroes: having powers does not immediately make someone combat-effective.

of Captain America (the representative of the political right), Iron Man (America's industrial and economic power) and Thor (representing the left and our social conscience) that put a stop to the rampage, until The Wasp (a closet mutant and the representative of patriotic but marginalized minority) deals the final blow to the Hulk. It is Thor who is the final component of the working democracy, acting both in concert with, and as conscience to, the overall majority. This is critically tempered by his status as a former mental patient and as the author of a self-help series; in addition, his claims to higher authority and being the servant of Odin are not only met with skepticism but outright ridicule. While physically powerful and necessary, as a representative of the left, he seems to be a loose cannon of sorts, with idiosyncratic loyalties and a grinding skepticism that continuously wears down the process of getting things done.

Overall, the picture is of a schizophrenic political system that may be undercutting itself by implementing new policies that create more problems than it solves, and that while the United States may have the technological might to protect itself against any enemy, the foremost danger to fear comes from the byproduct of our own increasing military mobilization in all sectors because of the lack of accountability that results. And this, essentially, is the message of the first battle. The core, charter members of the Avengers are called in to put a stop to a threat of their own making, not as a coalition of unique personas, but as drafted super-soldiers / celebrities in a culture that is increasingly image-oriented; hence, the final equation of the Hulk incident is chalked up by numbers; death toll in the triple digits and 500 million DVDs of the battle sold (Millar and Hitch 94-96, 134). The reason that this is problematic is because of the dark association of American consumption; even in the wake of tragedy, the consumer public is fascinated with the battle DVD. The

negative correlation is twofold: that the DVD producers are willing to capitalize on the death of private citizens for profit, and that the American public is complicit in this because death is entertaining. The lesson of *The Ultimates* as a whole is that we may not deserve to be saved; our own self-preservation is keeping our consumer ideologies and moral corruption safe from scrutiny and effective change.

This duality is depicted in the final issue of the first volume, where the action alternates between a cordial dinner between Captain America, Iron Man, and Thor, and a domestic dispute with Giant-Man and the Wasp. There is a clear dichotomy made between the two scenes and what they symbolize; if the Avengers are a democracy, the Ultimates are even more so, but as the post-9/11 version: a highly disparate group with wildly divergent histories, goals, and ideologies that is formed only out of desperate necessity. However, the dinner scene shows a glimpse of hope in the archetypal relationships. Captain America and Thor arrive at the same time, with Captain America in his full dress uniform (having been reinstated into the United States military with the rank of Captain) and Thor, dressed down in jeans and a t-shirt. Visually, the three eat together at a long table (with seats open, implying other positions waiting to be filled) in Tony's first apartment, which is being cleaned out as part of a "decluttering" exercise (which acts as another metaphor for the "taking stock" theme), and Captain America sits at Tony's right hand while Thor occupies the left. The scene creates a spectrum of sorts, representing the confluence of interests between the right and left of the corporate world. Proceeding cordially, the conversation comes to a head when they raise the question of why Tony has invented the Iron Man armor and joined the Ultimates, to which, he replies that he has an inoperable brain tumor and has decided to make good on the time he has left doing something good rather than trying to suck the world dry.

For Iron Man, this is a creative reinvention because of the nature of the change. In the previous version, Iron Man's ingenuity saved his life. He invented the Iron Man armor to stop a piece of shrapnel from entering his heart, and was able to parlay the technologies developed into a successful empire. Here, the damage is done and the technology makes no difference. There is no amount from his considerable portion that can save his life, and his technological genius is useless for tackling the one issue that really matters to him. As an archetype, his revised model poses a crisis of faith; within the industrial complex and large corporations is a cancer (which could be debt, but is more likely an ethical cancer) that has not impaired functioning yet, but is untreatable and life threatening. The confidence that was once held in America's post-war industrial might in the 1960s has been replaced by a fear that the rampant consumerism is taking its toll. Tony's attempts to refocus his life (with excursions to the Himalayas) and the "decluttering" of his worldly possessions, indicates an impending sense of mortality.

It is this somber realization that underscores the domestic scenario with Captain America and Thor, however, the idealized democracy is restored in the form of a toast between the three. After Iron Man reveals that he that he has a brain tumor, he becomes immediately embarrassed about it. Thor, on the other hand, offers compassion and reassurance; in his backstory he is a former nurse, and his sympathy is imbued with sincerity. Thor is the model of the compassionate left as well as the revolutionary left. Afterwards Iron Man reveals that he has used some of his considerable fortune to make a gesture for Captain America and recovered his original WWII helmet, which he lost on his final mission; his gesture to Captain America is that of sentiment, and the representative of the conservative

right is able to enjoy a moment where he harkens back to an earlier, less confusing time.⁴⁸

Finally, with all three having had pause for reflection, Iron Man proposes a toast, to which all three rise and raise a glass to “absent friends” (Millar and Hitch 149). While this literally is in reference to the other two Ultimates, Hank and Janet Pym, the political significance is still resonant. For now, all three characters are extreme versions of themselves, as are the politics that they represent. In time, there is still hope that other voices will be present at the table, that the lines between ideas will not be so rigid, and that this communion will eventually open up. The penultimate image of the first collection, then, is of the American veteran, the business tycoon, and the “hippie” liberal toasting together with glasses touching each other in a close-up on the glasses; were it not for the dialogue bubbles on the page, it would be impossible to distinguish one hand from the other, and the simple hope of democracy as unity of disparate positions is captured with three glasses and best wishes for absent friends and enemies--without whom they would not have united in the first place (Millar and Hitch 149).

The contrast to this scene of idyllic democracy is the slow erosion of the family. Under the seemingly normal façade of Hank and Janet Pym’s marriage, for example, is a series of lies made in the name of the American dream. As stated before, the original version of Dr. Henry Pym was a diligent scientist who embodied the values of hard work and brains over brute force, and in this version, seems to be this way as well when he is promoted to the head of the new super-soldier program. Only in the final issue of the first run does the audience see that his achievements are not the result of hard work; rather, Hank is exposed as a fraud--the comic equivalent of a cheater who used his wife’s innate superhuman abilities to

⁴⁸ This is a recurring theme. Just prior to this moment, Captain America thought that Iron Man might be joking about the tumor, another one of those “jokes [he] never seems to get” (Millar and Hitch 122).

take credit for the promotion at work and jump-start his other programs (Millar and Hitch 139). More surprisingly, he and his wife were working in collusion; Hank's lie provided a convenient cover during the mutant hysteria, so that Janet would not be "outed" as a mutant, while he got to profit from the secret. In *The Ultimates*, the characters who were most closely aligned with hard work and intelligence are changed into the representations of a conniving "anything-to-get-ahead" *ethos*. The two are in a co-dependent relationship, negatively feeding off each other's insecurities, which for Hank amounts to needing to feel "big" at work, and for Janet, to feel accepted and popular. In the limelight, the pressures become unbearable for the pair, and they descend into verbal abuse, and finally, domestic violence by trading punches with each other. It is with this image, a full-page shot of Hank sitting remorsefully in his apartment after having beaten Janet unconscious that the first collection ends.

Comic Books as "A Safe Place" for Catharsis

While the traditional concept of the rhetorical situation-- namely that situations objectively inspire specific exigencies that impel writers to respond--has been largely discarded, the post-9/11 climate that produced *The Ultimates* offers a unique opportunity to revisit the issue. The most famous conception involves an "imperfection marked by a sense of urgency" that ultimately impels a rhetorician to speak when there is a clear "wrong" in the world and amounts to an invitation to the rhetor to "produce discourse" (Bitzer 6-8). The second major account is that there is no determining situation until the rhetorician actually applies meaning to it through discourse (Vatz 154). The third case argues that both of these conceptions are correct, to a degree; the situation is impelling, but the "determining" features

are not absolute in their outcome for the rhetorician because the rhetor always has options (Consigny 58-60). Similarly, while the rhetorician is creative, this creativity is limited by real constraints of time, place, convention, etc. (Consigny 63-64). Of interest here is the way in which the symbolic nature of events prompts a kind of cultural “taking stock” that necessitates revisiting or revising original assumptions. There is no doubt that the 9/11 attack’s targets were already invested with symbolic value.⁴⁹ The result is that this nationally led to the kinds of ideological critiques alluded to earlier; the process of asking the questions of “who are we?” changed to “who are we *now*?”. Rather than act as introspection for its own sake, asking these questions after a precipitating event pulls such introspection towards catharsis when the answers are then applied to creative means. With this in mind, the question to address in regards to *The Ultimates* is, “what purposes does it serve to have a critique of the post-9/11 world as a *comic book*?”

Historically, comic books were neither introspective nor particularly cathartic, in the sense that the responses were part of the self-reflexive critique attributed to discourse in the rhetorical situation. Generally, comic books and their heroes functioned through the Golden Age as propaganda to “[show] the enemies of the United States through stereotypes, story lines, and characters” for the purpose of promoting a viewpoint that supported American policy and vilify national enemies (Scott 326). In contrast, *The Ultimates* is prone to features of both confidence and self-doubt, to trust and suspicion, to fair play and cheating; in other words, there is an underlying insecurity that separates it from this kind of historical response. The heroes are flawed, the villains sympathetic, the government’s motives are suspicious,

⁴⁹ The World Trade Center was likely chosen as the symbol of free market Capitalism, the Pentagon for its American military connections, and, to date, no one knows for certain where United Flight 93 was heading when it crashed, though it is speculated that it was *en route* to Washington, D.C. to target a third symbolic target such as the White House or Capitol building.

and our worst disasters are of our own making. In comparison the embodied patriotism of earlier wartime heroes, these characters are a dramatic juxtaposition of both confidence and anxiety inside a machine with an agenda.

What lingers is the sense that culture--any kind of culture--is essentially a toothless critique, and that any text so removed from reality that it can critique it has become too distant to be effective; like the genre of science fiction utopia, it is a perfect position to critique, but is too far removed from whom it applies to matter (Marcuse qtd. in Jameson, *Archaeologies* xv; 108-11).⁵⁰ This same sense of material weakness is part of the metonymic function of comic books to begin with. Moreover, it is a function of any kind of narrative; the truth resides in the world of the text, first and foremost, which occasionally implies that it bears no real truth outside of itself (Prince 547-48). A full extension of this involves a revisiting of Baudrillard's "progression of the image" process, in which meaning is not only isolated in the text, but ultimately meaningless within and without, when

[t]he image is "the reflection of a basic reality" (that is, representation; the sign and the real are somehow equivalent); it "masks and perverts a basic reality" (Marx's notion of ideology as false consciousness); it "masks the *absence* of a basic reality" (Nietzsche's attack on truth, metaphysics, and representation); it "bears no relation to any reality: it is its own pure simulacrum" (the image on the electronic screen). [...] but then suddenly history reenters with a vengeance by way of the death of God, the last

⁵⁰ This excerpt is from a particularly complex analysis by Frederic Jameson in his chapter on "The Unknowability Thesis" in which he critiques several works of science fiction noted for celebrating the inability of human beings to understand the alien "other." In one example, he references *Solaris*, by Stanislaw Lem, where scientists studying an alien world realize that their efforts are in vain; they are too different from the life force trying to communicate to actually do so, despite their position as scientific observers and their willingness to try. This is the version of frustrated Utopia referenced here.

judgment, and the resurrection [...] and somersaults into a kind of catastrophic theology that will leave us forever, I presume, with simulation, the hyperreal, and capital as a system of floating signifiers unchained from any referent whatsoever. (Huysen 16)

In this context, comic books are not immune to the spiraling into the “apocalyptic bliss” that Baudrillard finds dismally indicative of the modern era (Huysen 10). In a swarm of simulation and simulacra, no art form seems valid for any purpose other than the self-serving parade of inverted references.

The goal of this analysis is not to disprove Baudrillard’s arguments about the death of meaning; rather, it seems like a unique space in which catharsis can take place and create completely individual meaning. Narrative, like language, is a field of understanding first and foremost (Amiran 93). Knowing that meaning is made through a series of shifting connections, comic books are particularly useful because they display these inner poetics, a mirror reflecting back on itself, publicly. The reinvention of Captain America, for example, requires the discarding of older ideas from the mythology and the adoption of new ones; moreover, the new definition which comes into focus as a revised definitional ideology of “who we are *now*” is within the context of a transitory document. As a change itself, it is always subject to continuing changes, and thus resists the dominating versions of meaning that classical narratology, particularly Barthesian, feared so much. Instead of taking an existing form and impressing it upon a blank slate, it is the reliance on the existing knowledge base to interpret that makes this form of analysis effective for catharsis.

CHAPTER FOUR: UNDERSTANDING SOKAL'S HOAX AS A FUNCTION OF MYTH

One of the things a scientific community acquires with a paradigm is a criterion for choosing problems that, while the paradigm is taken for granted, can be assumed to have solutions. To a great extent these are the only problems that the community will admit as scientific or encourage its members to undertake.

-Thomas Kuhn

Perhaps the most devastating version of the myth appeal is the subtlest; it is not cultivated and displayed for a heavy-handed display of overt ideological indoctrination or critique, but had, at one point, been the benchmark of truth. As the oldest form of myth, it is easy to forget that some myths were not called into question at the time of their inception, and rather were considered to be the most accurate and reliable source of information in its day. One example of this is the notion of paradigm shift as it applies to academic models. When Thomas Kuhn first published on the topic, it was a persuasive document that was not fully realized until much later. Though it has since been called into question (and Kuhn himself has revised his original premises), it exists now as something of an academic legend for researchers in the sociology of science, which of course, is the root of the problem.

This chapter revisits the tension between *myth* and *ideology*, respectively, as a matter of rhetorical strategies. Whereas in previous chapters, the focus has been on the ideological side of the relationship and how material practices are fundamentally transformed into a guiding, generally unquestioned mythology, this chapter looks at how myth, or any sufficiently uncritical set of beliefs, can affect ideology at the level of material practices. Inasmuch as rhetoric is the mental faculty devoted to the attribution of meaning and

relevance, it is also the mechanism that moderates this tension between myth and ideology. Myth, in this context, not only alludes to more than the naturalized social norms discussed in Roland Barthes' *Mythologies*, but also to the classical sense of myth, that of a fundamental schema of questionable truth that naturalizes the social order. As Joseph Campbell suggests in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, the subject of myth is often the symbolic embodiment of a cultural anxiety, and the resolution of the conflict creates a pattern for the individual to follow as a set of guiding beliefs.⁵¹ The myth provides the idealized version of right and wrong, while flowing into the level of material practices and ideology as the individual applies the schema in real-life events. In this sense, myths are a reminder that the desire to harmonize our lives with reality often produces a patterned structure as we isolate and validate "basic" truths (Campbell and Moyers 2, 27-28, 65; Campbell 3-24). It is in this sense of essential truth that I believe the foundation of a rhetorical trap can develop.

In 1996 physicist Alan Sokal perpetuated an academic hoax, thereby springing this sort of rhetorical trap, by submitting a faux-postmodernist argument to the scholarly journal, *Social Text*, which was published shortly thereafter. The article, titled, "Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Theory of Quantum Gravity," was, in his own words, a "pastiche" of vague inferences from popular postmodern authors, a text filled with "dubious reasoning," and "fundamental silliness." He argues that the article is "liberally salted with nonsense" and that his main persuasive technique was flattering the preconceived notions of the editorial board, made up of distinguished scholars like Frederic Jameson and Andrew Ross (Sokal, "Revelation" 49-50). While the editorial board did issue several

⁵¹ Campbell was also a strong proponent of psychoanalysis and believed that cultural anxieties were, in fact, universal psychological anxieties.

defenses of their selection, they were not generally well received, though I will discuss the specifics of these responses later. My specific concern in revisiting the event is not to enter into the subject that it is most often identified with, namely the subset of the “culture wars,” dubbed the “science wars,” in which a heated series of exchanges between natural scientists and various members of the humanities and sociology questioned the fundamental philosophical tensions about the status of knowledge. Instead, my focus is on the acceptance of the hoax itself and the ways in which the results were culturally appropriated.⁵²

As with any rhetorical analysis, there are no easy answers when it comes to persuasion, and it needs to be clear from the outset that there are no perfect cause-and-effect answers for why the editors of *Social Text* accepted and published the hoax. Human motives can be both elusive and complex, especially when they are so entangled in the political and material practices of scholarly activity. With respect to all parties involved, the characterizations issued here are meant to provide an analytical lens with which to read the situation and, hopefully, provide another pattern with which to make sense of an otherwise troubling event. In doing so, I wish to return to the first, most fundamental question that the hoax raises, namely, how was it that so many smart people were conned by an article that was offered by an unknown author, filled with logical absurdities (presumably), and was admittedly “hokey” according to the editorial board (Robbins and Ross 55).

While Sokal suggests in his follow-up essay, “Revelation: A Physicist Experiments with Cultural Studies,” that his success was largely due to ideological biases and

⁵² While not covered here, there have been long discussions about the validity of the claims Sokal makes in perpetrating the hoax. Most recently, Gabriel Stolzenberg’s review of *The One Culture?*, an edited collection of various responses to the science wars, sparked a series of debates in the pages of *Social Studies of Science* which has a representative sample of these views. See Gabriel Stolzenberg, “Kinder, Gentler Science Wars,” and the various replies by Michael Lynch, Peter Saulson, Jay A. Labinger, and Harry Collins for the extended discussion.

irresponsible scholarly practices stemming from a desire to add a physicist's name and credentials to their list of "allies," the editorial board argues flatly that to believe anyone was asleep at the wheel is patently absurd; if anything, Sokal was eagerly courting *them* for publication (Sokal, "Revelation" 49; Robbins and Ross 54). Although this may seem naïve, I choose to believe the *intentions* of both parties and take their statements at face value.⁵³ As such, this leaves a substantive gap in explaining on what basis the hoax worked in triggering its acceptance. The editors are quick to point out that Sokal's explanation of seeking legitimacy does not fit since they blatantly mistrusted the hitherto unknown author; moreover, having discredited any other staple appeal that the hoax presented in terms of logic, emotion, and credibility, the editors of *Social Text* in their subsequent writings are somewhat reserved in pinning down *exactly* what won over their trust (Brenkman 65; Willis 136).

I argue here that there is a more direct explanation: Sokal's hoax worked because, by a mixture of accident and design, he hit upon the right rhetorical camouflage, which was a shared cultural myth.⁵⁴ Sokal's work of theoretical fiction is shrouded in layers of myth; first, his fictional persona undergoes the scholastic equivalent of the hero's journey, where he answers a call to action in research, undergoes a road of trials in research and praxis, and secures the ultimate boon in the form of a new breakthrough in quantum gravity; second, the outlandish proposition is covered in the trappings of a paradigm shift, and, when read

⁵³ It is still possible that *either* Sokal or the editors of *Social Text* are completely right or completely wrong; hence, trying to find a middle ground between the two is a choice.

⁵⁴ When I say "accident," I mean that neither the editors of *Social Text* nor Sokal proscribe to the precise reading mentioned here. Sokal never argues that he relied heavily on Kuhn's work to generate a mythological *ethos*, and the editors never described the rhetorical effects of these narrative patterns as they read. However, believing both accounts means that Sokal must have stumbled onto a secondary effect through his rhetorical strategies that, once employed, was more effective than he initially intended.

literally, looks like a scientist using postmodern theory to explain the relativistic effects measured in the laboratory; finally, and perhaps most subtly, the very assumptions inherent to belief in paradigm shifts make Sokal's fiction look like the *avant garde* of a new field of interdisciplinary study. In order to appeal to the editors of *Social Text*, Sokal inadvertently created a heroic ally for them to believe in--a fledgling intellectual champion and convert who was attempting to literally embody a transgression of disciplinary boundaries by being both a physicist and postmodern theorist. This embodiment was a unifier of opposing forces (by nature of the interdisciplinary aspect), imperfectly trying to reconcile the basis of the science wars, and while this fictional character turned out to be hollow inside, the façade (and its success) tells us a great deal about the persuasive appeal of a Trojan horse.

Even so, this may describe the nature of the hoax itself, but there is an additional layer of myth that explains the way in which the controversial aspects were downplayed afterwards. This is not to say that the matter was not surrounded in conflict--quite the opposite, in fact. What I refer to is the general sense of praise and blame assigned to the various parties involved. Sokal received little censure for his use of deception and his manipulation of the media precisely because it seemed to serve a culturally *moral* end. Among the initial respondents, the major justification for the hoax relied on "mythic" evidence that *Social Text* was somehow symbolically representative of humanities programs run amok. The analysis of this additional layer of abstraction is reserved for the final portion of this chapter.

The Problematic Nature of the Hoax / Character of the Hoax

Before discussing the symbolic features of Sokal's hoax, it is prudent to examine the actual responses from the editors of *Social Text* to see their explanations in their own words. While the same basic question remains—"why did the editors of *Social Text* admit Sokal's article?"—their responses admitted *ex post facto* that there were a number of reasons that they almost rejected the article:

From the first, we considered Sokal's unsolicited article to be a little *hokey*. It is not every day we receive a *dense philosophical tract* from a professional physicist. *Not knowing the author or his work*, we engaged in some speculation about his intentions, and concluded that the article was the *earnest attempt of a professional scientist to seek some kind of affirmation* from postmodern philosophy for developments in his field. Sokal's adventures in PostmodernLand were not really our cup of tea. [...] [H]is article would have been regarded as *somewhat outdated* if it had come from a humanist or a social scientist. As the work of a natural scientist it was *unusual*, and, we thought, plausibly symptomatic of how someone like Sokal might approach the field of postmodern epistemology, i.e., awkwardly *but assertively* trying to capture the "feel" of the professional language of the field, while relying upon *an armada of footnotes* to ease his sense of vulnerability. In other words, we read it *more as an act of good faith* [...]. (55, emphasis added)

Despite Sokal's reluctance to revise the text,⁵⁵ the editors freely admit that they took a chance despite their better instincts. These critiques immediately eliminate the simplistic assessments of persuasive argument, namely that the piece had either strong, logical argumentation,⁵⁶ an author with a clear reputation that could act as evidence in good faith, or that there was sufficient emotional motivation to give the benefit of the doubt. Their assessment implies that the overwhelming use of footnotes and excessive quotations showed a lack of philosophical confidence, and when paired with the "dense" syntactical structure, it seemed as though Sokal's fictional persona was struggling to match the language of *Social Text's* traditional discourse community, albeit badly (55). With his aggressive language (specifically in his decidedly negative appraisal of natural scientists who "reject" interdisciplinary approaches to their work and their subsequent refusal to entertain the idea that their worldview might need revising), his writing could be categorized as "over-the-top," especially when matched by his difficult interpersonal persona regarding revising before publication. Despite the litany of potential problems, the editors remarked that they had not moved the article into the reject pile, and that they only preserved his article by the narrowest of margins; provided that they could find a sufficient publication context, they might publish it as an interest piece for readers, but again, only as an afterthought piece.

What the editors are careful to avoid in any of their replies, though, is the crucial step in between their reception of his article and the inception of the call for papers on the "science wars," which was the main topic of the special issue where the article eventually appeared. In their own words,

⁵⁵ The editors considered him to be a "difficult, uncooperative author" (56).

⁵⁶ Here, logical argument refers to the kind of arguments and proof traditionally accepted by *Social Text*, and exemplified in the works of the peer texts published in the same issue. This is why the editors later made sure to point out that his hoax severely clashed in both tone and content to these peers (Robbins and Bruce 56).

Sometime after this impasse was reached, the editors did indeed decide to assemble a special issue on the topic of science studies. We wanted to gauge how science critics were responding to the attacks by Paul Gross and Norman Levitt and by other conservatives of science. (56)

Gross and Levitt had published *Higher Superstition* only two years prior in 1994 and, ironically, were the indirect inspiration for Sokal's hoax (Editors of *Lingua Franca* 1). The opening paragraphs of his fake article were a direct parody of his actual beliefs formed from these inspirations. In *Fashionable Nonsense* he elaborates on his distaste for "epistemic relativism," or the idea that "modern science is nothing more than a 'myth,' a 'narration,' or 'social construction,'" though he is admittedly more upset about the relative range of these ideas rather than their specific content (x, 50). He later elaborates that this "extremely radical" version of social constructivism was a deliberate test to provoke a response out of the editors under the assumption that a natural scientist, raising objections to the existence of an absolute, physical reality would immediately raise a red flag (260). While the editors never comment on this issue directly, it is possible that the very radicalism implied by such a stance is what prompted the renewed interest into the development of the science wars. Posing as a natural scientist challenging the nature of physical reality (no matter the status of his logic) may have been the core of what kept the hoax alive as an "interest piece"--provided that the "right" context would either soften the hardened edge of the thesis or that enough scholars would contribute and touch upon directly related matters with prompting, thereby providing clarity through association. The editors are quick to note that the piece received a lot of scrutiny-filled review as they tried to figure out the best way of publishing the piece,

but they never quite link the two events.⁵⁷ While there is no explanation by the editors of *Social Text* about the exact circumstances of the renewed interest in the science wars, the contribution of Sokal's hoax was serendipitous in that it did, if nothing else, provoke a degree of discussion and debate amongst the editors before being put on hold.

In addition, in their interactions with Sokal, they interpreted his reluctance to publishing in the "science wars" special issue as a rooted desire to be dissociated from the polemics--though he maintained an eagerness to see his work in print (56). In short, though the editors felt alienated by Sokal's techniques, their gullibility, if any, was rooted in taking all of these factors under the umbrella of "good faith" and assumed that the article and author did not represent a "set of arguments with which they agreed," so much as a figure of scholastic potential energy.⁵⁸ While rough around the edges, the interest of both the subject matter and enthusiasm of the author glossed over the initially alienating features.

However, this reinterpretation of events as an act of goodwill is also, ultimately, unsatisfying and vaguely disquieting. In their description of the article's positive points, the editors mainly argue that it was the effort, not necessarily the content, of Sokal's work that won them over, and that the lengthy pages of carefully documented footnotes inferred both his desire to draw in members of his home discipline and demonstrate academic thoroughness. The product of this effort itself, namely the logic and coherence of the argument, were given less consideration than the perceived effort involved for a physicist

⁵⁷ This could be attributed to an unconscious attraction to the piece (e.g., they "liked" it) or a retroactive dismissal of the discussion it generated. There is no current documentation to make a definitive link, though the circumstantial evidence points to the fact that the editors found the piece interesting and thought-provoking *enough* to circulate amongst themselves and include it in the special issue.

⁵⁸ Specifically the "army" of footnotes and the way it created the "offbeat contribution" to the field (56). The editors of *Social Text* are emphatic about the dubious basis of this good faith error, having extremely serious doubts about the veracity of his claims, his knowledge of cultural theory, and a lack of interpersonal experiences, at one point stating that they never talked to the "real" Sokal until after the hoax (Robbins and Ross 54-55).

making the leap to philosophy. This could be construed as a kind of double standard, namely that the editors were giving extra leeway and being more forgiving to an outsider trying hard to “fit in.” While not bearing that exact accusation, in a response letter to *Lingua Franca*, Evelyn Keller writes that either the editors of *Social Text* were unable to discern a “jargon-ridden” spoof, or “perhaps the editors were so eager to count a physicist as one of their own that they chose to publish an article they themselves regarded as ‘hokey’”(59). Whether the benefit of the doubt was assigned to Sokal’s text to “forgive” any mistakes in theory, or that there was a specific desire to acquire the physicist’s prestige for their own, the key factor is that the editors were aware of these particular problems in advance. On this same note, former editor of *Social Text* John Brenkman argues that the editors may have been too eager to add the prestige and esteem of a political convert to their ranks (65). Unlike the first implication, Brenkman’s implication of symbolic value, namely that of winning over “the convert,” to their side emphasizes the changing of standards to fulfill a self-serving agenda, which is much more insidious.

Barring being overly generous for perceived effort or overly eager for approval, a third set of explanations by critics *ex post facto* suggest that a mixture of pride and ego on the editors’ part aided Sokal’s hoax. While Sokal himself was quick to suggest that the editors should have sought out a physicist for help checking the math, he only chalks this up to carelessness or ignorance (51).⁵⁹ Franco Moretti is less forgiving, arguing that the “underlying premise is that people in the humanities have nothing to learn from the sciences;

⁵⁹ Sokal’s accusations on this point implicitly accuse the editors of outright arrogance. By suggesting that the whole incident would have been avoided if they had asked the advice of a physicist, he implies that vanity is at the root of their reluctance and that this inaction on their part constitutes proof of the inflated collective ego of postmodernists. Since the editors respond to this point by referencing Sokal’s request that the article be accessible as an interdisciplinary study, they infer that Sokal’s sincerity convinced them that such a check would be redundant.

[Sokal's fictional persona is] not interesting, but we're glad he's interested *in us*" (60-61). As he elaborates, he attributes this to a type of narcissism on the part of the editors; while no one would necessarily fault them for not being experts in physics, it is an entirely different matter not to care about physics *at all* in an argument that is so heavily laden with it, believing that "only the theory was important anyway" (60). One actual interdisciplinary studies graduate student, Teri Reynolds, paid special attention to the fact that Sokal did not specifically aim his piece as an article on postmodernist philosophy but rather as an interdisciplinary studies piece. As such, she criticized both Sokal for disparaging the real scholarly work being done in this area and also lamented that the editors of *Social Text* did not recognize that the hoax bore none of the features of good scholarship in that area, namely by providing an insight from one discipline carefully applied to another, or a translation of complicated material from one field described to members of another (61-62). These critiques are both reactionary and overly accusatory and, particularly, unfair to the editors of *Social Text*. They are, however, representative of the kind of bitter reaction that the hoax stirred up upon its publication, and they dramatically demonstrate that even within the members of the humanities, there is a very vocal faction willing to assume the worst about the editors of a postmodern journal, satisfied that the accusations leveled by Sokal and other critics are correct in assuming that the board is made up of pretentious pseudo-scholars, who were "easily" duped for a lack of sophistication in any discipline other than their own.

Very few responses actually took into account the rhetorical strategies that Sokal employed in order to perpetuate the hoax, but they are more insightful explaining the success of the hoax as a work of creative, argumentative fiction. Stanley Fish, in his defense of the editors of *Social Text*, summarizes their position that Sokal posited "his own [article] as

reliable, and he took care, as he boasts, to surround his deception with all the marks of authenticity,” and that the “carefully packaged his deception so as not to be detected except by someone who began with a deep and corrosive attitude of suspicion” (84). Former editor and co-founder for *Social Text*, John Brenkman also cites that while editors are “universally susceptible to hoaxes,” that “[Sokal] got the rhetoric just right,” while the editors read it “just wrong” (65). For the most part, each of the participants in these discussions was more concerned with the implications of the hoax rather than its specific craft. The rhetorical strategies employed by Sokal were mainly a means toward his own ends in his own account, or just camouflage according to most of the critics, and to the editors it seemed that while it was unsettling, it seemed genuine enough. If Fish and Brenkman are to be believed, then the editors of *Social Text* were at all times imbued with a kind of scholarly optimism that obscured their ability to see the flaws in the piece, or at the very least, the piece inspired a motivating sense of purpose that kept them from discarding it altogether. Even so, there is no moment where any commentary can point to a specific feature other than general impressions or a belief in the purpose of scholarship as a reason for admitting the hoax.

The Nature of a Paradigm Shift as the “Hero’s Journey”

To recapitulate up to this point: the ideological, material practices of the editors of *Social Text* in selecting an article for publication, which is a normally a very pragmatic process, was confused by the unusual tenor of Sokal’s fictional piece. Because the unusual features inspired a sense of goodwill among the editors, and may have actually inspired them to pursue a context in which to publish it, it must have played upon a fundamental, unconscious set of values held in common by the editors--namely the locus of efficacy for science studies itself. For those acquainted with science studies, there is perhaps no more

prominent name than Thomas Kuhn, whose articulation of paradigm shifts became a kind of paradigm in itself.⁶⁰ There are, at any given time, two mythologies at operation within studies in the academy; the first is the basic mythology of a validated sense of purpose, slating the academic as a kind of cultural hero and, by special extension, “the scientist” as the hero of civilized culture since the Enlightenment. The second mythology takes this concept of “Enlightenment hero” even further through the concepts in Kuhn’s work; the revised archetype defines a specific subset of “the scientist” who acts as the *avant garde* researcher spearheading a paradigm shift--or a hero of heroes. Instead of a supernatural journey into the underworld, the scientist (or academic) as cultural hero descends or traverses into the realm of the unknown, only to emerge with the ultimate boon of knowledge and technology. For Kuhn, the scientist is potentially a kind of world-redeemer--a transformative catalyst who redefines the very nature of scientific study. The “world” of scientific discipline is then further transformed as the new paradigm is established. Structurally, the expectations set up by Kuhn’s historical analysis of scientific revolutions reads like a narrative gloss of a prophetic fulfillment; specifically, that if a new paradigm shift were to occur, and if it reasonably looked like previous ones, the alert culture critic could recognize the pattern at the early stages and be involved in the process.

In specific reference to Joseph Campbell’s work, he summarizes that virtually all myths about the symbolic solving of cathartic cultural problems embodied by the hero’s journey undergoes the same basic structure: separation, initiation, and return. To sum up his argument:

⁶⁰ Sokal recognizes and admits this both in his hoax and in his later rebuttal in *Fashionable Nonsense*. In addition, within the pages of *Social Text* that his hoax appears, several peer articles cite Kuhn as the founder of the “science wars,” giving credit to his work, among others as one of the earliest, deepest roots of the philosophical debate. See Steven Fuller, George Levine, and Sharon Traweeks’ articles from the same issue.

The standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: *separation—initiation—return*: which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth. *A hero ventures forth from the world of the common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.* Prometheus ascended the heavens, stole fire from the gods and descended. (italics in original, 30)

In Campbell's later elaboration, Prometheus, like other cultural heroes, returns with boons that restore life into an otherwise dead world and that the source of their journey (in this case, fire), is connected to the source of all life. As part of the cosmogonic cycle (or the birth, death, and renewal of the world), the return from the unknown reveals the action to be one,

[n]ot of attainment but of *reattainment*, not of discovery but of *rediscovery*.

The godly powers sought and dangerously won are revealed to have been within the heart of the hero all the time. [...] From this point of view the hero is symbolical of that divine creative and redemptive image which is hidden within us all, only waiting to be known and rendered into life. (38-39)

Put into an academic setting, this is exactly what Kuhn describes happening in a natural (instead of supernatural) context during a paradigm shift. The paradigm shift is a revolutionary change, reconstructing the fundamental beliefs used to view the world. In order to “make or to assimilate such [discoveries] one must *alter the way one thinks about* and describes some range of natural phenomena” (Kuhn, *Road* 14, emphasis added). In Kuhn's conception of paradigm shift, changing ability to view the natural world is mirrored by the

change in mental perception, that there is an equal, if not greater conceptual shift that must discard the older schema in order to adopt the new. The revolutionary step is not just applied to social institutions comprised of the like-minded scientists, but first and most importantly as a matter of social change made in the mind and heart; the change of mind is revolutionary in the adoption a new perception, but the change of heart requires a revolutionary humility. This latter portion may be the most heroic function of the scientist or academic--to stay “open-minded” is often a metaphor for keeping a sense of humility and willingness to adopt a new idea rather than stay entrenched in the older system.

In keeping with this, Sokal’s hoax is steeped with this kind of language, and he does not generate a traditional *ethos* so much as make reference to this kind of paradigmatic mythos. His fictional author claims to be writing a “transgression” of traditional disciplinary boundaries, in order to counter the entrenched position of scientists resistant to the idea that their “worldview must be revised or rebuilt in the light of [social and cultural] criticism” (11). The fictional persona cites the “deep conceptual shifts” in the modern science studies, and after laying the groundwork of aggressive transformative language, reveals a tantalizing new paradigmatic purpose, to

[c]arry these deep analyses *one step further*, by taking account of *recent developments in quantum gravity*: the *emerging branch* of physics in which Heisenberg’s quantum mechanics and Einstein’s general relativity are *at once synthesized and superceded*. [...] This *conceptual revolution*, I will argue, has

profound implications for the content of a future postmodern and liberatory science. (12, emphasis added)⁶¹

This is a statement with face validity, especially in light of his later hints that there have already been signs of a “Kuhnian paradigm shift” within theoretical physics that has not quite emerged yet (18). On the surface the statements are at once dynamic, steeped in action, and highly dramatic. The fictional persona of the hoax is a scientist who seems to be spearheading the forefront of a new branch of study. Unlike Keller’s criticism that the work is a poor reflection of interdisciplinary studies, it appears instead to be the beginning of a new discipline, a merger of two sets of theories rather than a translation of information for one field to another. While Robbins and Ross both point out that the language seems dated and out of touch with the tone of the peer pieces it was eventually published with, it is likely that the sense of dating they refer to is his “revolutionary” jargon as Sokal’s persona harkens back to an earlier time in science studies by hinting at Kuhn’s study of transformative change. This is both a moment of dramatic action, but also nostalgia, giving the impression of a rebirth or revival within science studies as Sokal’s fictional persona simultaneously aligns himself with the traditions of science studies (which are long familiar to the editors of *Social Text*) but injects this sense of new research, new applications, and new implications for the formation of “liberatory science.”

Aside from the faulty mathematics and inside jokes that Sokal planted in his article, the underlying pattern of his writing adopted a particular set of narrative traits more strongly

⁶¹ While this could also be attributed to the adherence to conventional forms in academic reporting, the dynamics of the language are intended to (and clearly do) go beyond the requirements. Instead of “new” discoveries that add context and nuance to existing theory, the fictional work lists “revolutionary” and “emerging” developments that are supposed to intentionally supersede previous studies. Unlike the accidental discoveries that Kuhn discusses, where revolution is a byproduct, this persona attempts to strategically place this article at the center of a revolution.

than its peers within the same issue of *Social Text*. At issue is the very “awkward” presentation style that the editors took issue with in the first place. The fictional persona that Sokal created paints an interdisciplinary version of the classical “heroic” narrative. While he may have initially injected the inflated language to parody “postmodern jargon,” it nevertheless infuses the work with a sense of drama as the article unfolds a veritable adventure into quantum theory.

The “heroic journey” of the persona fits the basic structural archetype of heroic action laid out in reference to Joseph Campbell’s work in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Campbell relays a series of steps involved in the hero’s journey, where there are a number of staple features wherein the hero resolves portions of the cultural problem. First, the hero receives a “call to action,” usually in the form of “a blunder—apparently the merest chance—[that] reveals an unsuspected world, and the individual is drawn into a relationship with forces that are not rightly understood” (51, 49-58). Applied to Kuhn’s paradigm of scientific revolution, “normal science does not aim at novelties of fact or theory and, when successful, finds none,” but that

[t]he perception of anomaly—of a phenomenon, that is, for which his paradigm had not readied the investigator—played an essential way for preparing the way for perception of novelty. But, again in both cases, the perception that *something had gone wrong* was only the prelude to discovery.”

(*Structure* 52, 56, emphasis added)

Here novelty takes the place of the specific call to action, as the scientist more or less stumbles upon it. Unprepared by the earlier paradigm to interpret the information, the scientist as hero of knowledge must seek out a satisfactory explanation.

In Sokal's hoax this specific call to adventure is only hinted at as the fictional persona hints at novelties found by the likes of Niels Bohr and Werner Heisenberg. However, in the third section of his article, he captures the overall sense of these references in a section discussing the "uncertainty," "discontinuity," and mysterious "interconnectedness" implied by quantum mechanics. As Heisenberg and Bohr struggle with their picture of the mysterious behavior of elementary particles and light, he argues that the most unsettling of the "recent generalizations" show

[t]hat an act of observation here and now can affect not only the object being observed—as Heisenberg told us—but also an object arbitrarily far away (say, on Andromeda Galaxy). This phenomenon—which Einstein termed "spooky"—imposes a radical reevaluation of the traditional mechanistic concepts of space, object, and causality. (14)

This observation effect is both novel and mysterious, while calling the fictional researcher into the necessity for further study. Moreover, he invokes the name and reputation of Einstein in deeming it "spooky," a nonspecific but affect-laden term for the effect. Adding to the impact is that these are all true statements made by Einstein, creating a grain of truth to set up the overall mystique of Sokal's new research in quantum mechanics. Campbell notes that the call to action is often followed by the appearance of supernatural aid, in the form of "a protective figure (often a little old crone or old man) who provides the adventurer with amulets against the dragon forces he is about to pass" (69). What such a figure represents is the benign, protecting power of destiny, usually male, and that the call, in fact, was the first announcement of the approach of this "initiator priest" (*Hero* 69-73). In the form of Einstein, these criteria are embodied in the image of his disheveled, genius form, and the aid

he provides is both a validation not only that the problem is solvable but also that the supernatural aid will come. As Roland Barthes elaborates in *Mythologies*, Einstein is a mythical object, a genius machine constantly churning out equations that captured the essence of the universe in a few letters. If there was a secret to the world, it is that “the universe is a safe of which humanity seeks the combination: Einstein almost found it”; this is the most enduring part of his personal mythology (68-69). For Einstein, the greatest problem-solver, to blatantly look at any physical reality and dub it “spooky,” is clearly a source of concern. This serves a dual purpose because it first reminds Sokal’s audience of the cracks in the positivist armor; for something to scare Einstein beyond the capacity for rational thought signifies that there were still mysteries, areas of the unknown, and fringe territories as-yet-untamed. That is, until Sokal’s persona elucidates the problem and sublimates this fear back under the containment of reason, thereby fulfilling the second purpose: making Sokal’s persona just a little more heroic than Einstein. As the fictional persona encourages, the reader is told that the force once trusted in, namely the ability to encapsulate the world inside of Einstein-styled equations, is *gone*. The “imposing” of a new order is the revolutionary change from a conception of the world in numbers and letters—a static mathematical construction displayed in order and precision, to a universe of relations and force at once both uncertain yet dynamic.

Having answered the call and having accepted supernatural aid, Campbell argues that the mythical hero will, in some combination, cross the threshold into the unknown, thereby initiating the hero’s journey by entering the metaphorical belly of the whale, navigating a road of trials in a dream landscape of fluid forms, which is where both Sokal’s fictional persona and Kuhn’s predictions of a paradigm-shifting scientist must also go as well. All

three share a common threshold: the unknown. For Campbell, this is a physical location, such as a desert, jungle, or foreign nation, but this makes the adventure a “passage beyond the veil of the known into the unknown; the powers that watch at the boundary are dangerous; to deal with them is risky; yet for anyone with competence and courage the danger fades (*Hero* 79, 82). Kuhn echoes this, albeit much less dramatically. During the process of “normal science,” a scientist investigating the aforementioned anomaly⁶² will likely come into conflict with other scientists in the competition to create a new paradigm; a paradigm can, in fact, emerge as the scientist navigates the conflict between two competing schools of thought (*Structure* 12-13). As he elaborates,

Normal science can proceed without rules only so long as the relevant scientific community *accepts without question* the particular problem-solutions already achieved. Rules should therefore become important and the characteristic unconcern about them should vanish whenever paradigms or models are felt to be insecure. That is, moreover, exactly what does occur. The pre-paradigm period, in particular, is regularly marked by frequent and deep debates over legitimate methods, problems and standards of solution, though these serve rather to define schools than to produce agreement. (47-48, emphasis added)

The scientist, as hero of knowledge, is not in physical danger, but rather in danger of losing credibility, prestige, and the very access to resources that make these investigations possible.

The road of trials is paralleled by the setbacks during the course of normal science, but more

⁶² Anomalies, according to Kuhn, are discoveries within the boundaries of “normal science” that defy classification by the current system. The pursuit and reconfiguration of fundamental assumptions in the pursuit of the anomaly is the basis of the paradigm shift. I mention this again because it is in that jump from normal science to paradigm reinvention that *becomes* heroic. Within science, understanding is the ultimate boon.

importantly, by the initial disbelief of the community to the paradigm shift. In other words, if the heroic end of scientific research is the *understanding* the natural world, then in defeat the hero is *misunderstood* and without the boon, the public still wanders in ignorance. As such, the scientist who emerges as historically “heroic,” is not necessarily the one who stumbles on the new answer for old problems cut across the field of normal science, but rather the one who also pairs it with the resulting conceptual shift. The discovery of oxygen, for example, was only part of a paradigm shift once paired with a new conceptual model: the oxygen theory of combustion. Once paired, it was the keystone to a reformulation of chemistry so complete that it was dubbed the “chemical revolution” (56).⁶³ Thus, the accomplishment is twofold: the scientist not only conquers the unknown (and masters it) but then makes it known as “conquered.”

All scientific reporting has this degree of conquest, whether it is in the practice of “normal science” (in which the discovery etches out distinctions within established borders) or in the paradigm shift version in which the old maps and concepts are subsequently discarded. These narrative shades not only cast the scientist as heroic but also brings back an ultimate boon that serves the world-redeemer function in mythology; by conquering ignorance, the world itself has changed in its fundamental character. In one sense, the world has not changed at all through the discovery since the existence of atoms and genes precluded their discovery, but within the sense of the mythology of science, these ideas seem to be brought into existence by the adventure and success of the scientist himself--as if atoms and genes were not only discovered but actually created by the scientists’ discovery. In some

⁶³ Kuhn further notes that of the three scientists with the most legitimate claims of the discovery, the one most often cited is Antoine-Laurent de Lavoisier, precisely because he paired his lab experiment with the oxygen theory of combustion.

branches of science, this victory is quite literal. Consider, for example, the reception of a scientist who finds a cure for cancer. A medicine such as this would literally be a boon for mankind, changing the face of the world's political and economic climates overnight. Yet its production would be both from the painstaking years of dedicated research, and the conjuring of something from nothing because the final creation of the medicine is creative and imaginative. For someone not acquainted with the series of steps leading to its inception, this would seem to be a cure that appeared out of "thin air." The world-redeemer function of myth reconciles the imperfect nature of man to the holiness of god, but in the case of the scientist-as-hero, the reconciliation is to that of greater knowledge and physical health. The world is not only a more knowable place, but humanity itself is restored to a state of near(er)-perfection. As such, whether the boon is insight or medicine, the scientist occupies the symbolic role of heroic authority within the context of Kuhn's version. As long as the scientist is breaching ignorance, overcoming the obstacles of the "former" things, and securing truth to be made manifest in the world to make it a better place, the symbolic value of the scientist is greatly amplified through myth.

Sokal's "crossing of the threshold" and subsequent trials are pitched throughout the content of his hoax as he frequently cites the science wars themselves, as well as the competing philosophies of science within, with the same certainty that Kuhn identifies the competing factions of scientists *en route* to the creation of a new paradigm. His *modus operandi* as it were, is to begin each section with a traditional conception of the natural world according to a physical model, explain why it is insufficient in light of developments in quantum theory, and then mash together a series of otherwise unrelated theories in an attempt to explain it. In doing so, he incorporates new-age philosophies, psychoanalytic theory,

feminism, and Marxism in an attempt to explain the aforementioned quantum gravity novelties.⁶⁴ This comes to a head with his discussion of a potential “liberatory science,” where the potential model of his new paradigm is revealed, stating boldly that “quantum gravity is in this respect, *an archetypal postmodern science*” (21, emphasis added). In his summation he argues in sequence that institutions and their philosophy of science must be transformed, that scientific knowledge must be democratized and demystified, and that the content of science must also subsequently be completely reconceived (24-25). These are the earmarks of Kuhn’s paradigm-shifting scientist combined with the best version of the scientist as cultural hero according to Campbell; the scientist returns from the realm of the unknown carrying the ultimate boon--in this case a liberatory science that both reshapes the field of normal science but also eliminates the bonds of oppression within society. Embodied in this fictional persona are both the warrior and the world-redeemer; the warrior has successfully navigated the road of trials and warring schools of thought to liberate knowledge, in this case of quantum gravity, embedded with the life-giving force and potentially transforming potential of its theoretical implications.

While Sokal scoffs that his own premise sounds absurd as his fictional persona “denies” the existence of physical reality, his “nonsense” thesis actually proposes a unifying theme: that the relative condition of knowledge among human beings is shared in physical reality by the relative condition of quantum forces. Taken literally, this *is* a paradigm shift. Whereas the former conception of knowledge and the universe was that physical reality was

⁶⁴ Sokal is quick to note that many of his references, both to physics and philosophy, were laced with tongue-in-cheek references to inside jokes within physics and that the philosophical statements that he placed were picked because he found them to be maddeningly abstract. Again, I mention this here to explain why they appeared valuable on their face and echoed the dominant metaphors of myth, not for their specific content, which went largely unnoticed by the editorial board.

solid and unchangeable,⁶⁵ and that human beings layer philosophical meaning on top of this, the *new* conception is that the universe shares our ability to inscribe meaning in itself by means of quantum gravity--the mysteriously supernatural forces that are the subject of his study. At face value, the human being is no longer solely responding to the universe, but *the universe is responding to us*. Moreover, by arguing that the universe has a relativistic function in relation to itself, the universe appears to be self-referential, using aspects of physical reality relationally. In short, Sokal's fictional persona took away the *reality* of physical laws and instead gave the universe itself a *personality*. By applying this boon, mankind is united with the universe itself and actually reflects the same imperfect, self-referential nature of the universe; in this way, the imperfections of mankind are actually reflections of the universe that created it.

To Sokal, this may seem absurd, but this is, in fact, the fundamental character of any superstition or classical mythology: that human beings can affect the fundamental conditions of the universe, whether controlled by spirits or gods, in the form of communion. In effect, Sokal's new paradigm is a renewal of the oldest mythology: that the individual exists not only in relationship with other human beings but also as a member of a living, active universe with a character and personality of its own. Perhaps Sokal meant it humorously, but these fictional conclusions are the modern parallel of making sacrifices to deities in ancient times to gain their attention and affection, except now the communion is perfected as a state of *being* rather than a state of *worship*. Though Sokal's fictional persona later conflates these ideas, restating that physical reality is a social construct, and therefore not "real," the most

⁶⁵ That is, unchangeable in its nature, not in specific form; it is generally assumed that the applications of physical properties are infinitely specious, but the *laws* of physical properties are undeniable (Sokal, *Fashionable* 4-7).

fundamental, underlying impression of the article that allows it to generate goodwill and go without terrible scrutiny is that for whatever reason, this scientist, represented in Sokal's fiction, has stumbled upon an ancient truth in a new form. In this regard, the messy philosophy, abundance of footnotes, non-sequential logic, and resistance to traditional conceptions of science shows the character of an individual fundamentally changed by the heroic journey and struggling to make sense of the trip as a whole. As Campbell writes, the hero may be so addled by the journey or profoundly affected, that the return is indefinitely postponed or refused, as in the case of the Buddha, who in the face of total enlightenment, could not return; in other cases, the hero returns but simply cannot effectively communicate the experience as in the case of Rip Van Winkle, who lacked the sophistication of language and cultural context to explain what happened (*Hero* 193-228). The very outlandishness, lack of philosophical sophistication, defensiveness against revising so that he can explain fully for imaginary colleagues in science, are all covered in this mythology as the struggling hero returned, trying to effect meaningful change and bestow personal revelation.

While Sokal may have intended the experience to be overwhelmingly critical of members of the humanities, intending to shame their knowledge of the physical sciences, it may have provided evidence of the reverse. As stated earlier, the editors of *Social Text* had a vague feeling that something was wrong, but if we believe them, they extended perhaps an unusual amount of courtesy and understanding toward this persona Sokal created. The rhetorical strategies he employed did incorporate the fundamental figures in the philosophy of science studies and echoed the tones captured within the more dynamic throes of postmodern theory. But did he miss the point of those studies? For those acquainted with science studies, Kuhn is simply a cog in the development of the enlightenment project. As

the status of knowledge and fundamental constructions of knowledge are called into question, postmodern theory, in general, promotes a kind of critical awareness to the temporality of these structures. If Sokal's rhetorical strategies were effective, it may be because the ideology of the *Social Text* editors' practices were actually in tune with the overarching mythologies of the discipline. That is to say, they adopted his text specifically because they believed he filled the rare niche of "new" knowledge, even if that impression was not fully formed at the time.

The dangers addressed by postmodern conceptions of knowledge are contained within the totalizing features and tacit acceptance of scientific practices. In *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer speak at length about the dangers of "enlightenment" as a social practice. Enlightenment, they argue, is initially an event where "false clarity" gives way to a revelation; this revelation is self-reflective in nature, and there is often a temptation to repeat the methods that produces this illumination, whether it is within art, science, or technology. Their problem is that the method itself is eventually mistaken for the event, and the reproduction of these forms takes the place of the original self-reflective and enlightening moment. In doing so, enlightenment undergoes a dialectical shift, becoming a new mythology that obscures clarity. Science may bring enlightenment about the natural world, but eventually becomes an unquestioned mythology. In one of their examples, science and positivism becomes mythological when the ideology of investigation subjugates the nuance of life under the all-encompassing explanation of "reason." When the unknowns of the universe can be summarized and cleanly distilled as a mathematical representation, they cease to have a true anonymity, and have become an unknown-as-of-yet unexplained by a rigidly held philosophy. The insertion of the unknown into the system

presupposes its explanation within it. In this way, any method of reason with a claim on totalizing information is suspect as it slips once again from working ideology into a mythical reliance. Real enlightenment, therefore, is not an event, but a process of being continuously self-reflective and critical (6, 30-31). Jürgen Habermas argues the problem in slightly different terms, but still in relationship between the practice of science and mythology of science, stating that “[within] the institutionalization of scientific-technical progress, the potential of the productive forces has assumed a form owing to which men lose consciousness of the dualism of work and interaction” (61). Though Habermas is referring to ideology in this sense, it is within the same boundaries of myth, as a form of ideology that has become divorced from real practices, and as such, part of the unconscious instead of the conscious activity of material practices.

The evidence from Sokal’s hoax suggests that the editors of *Social Text* were simply acting within the boundaries of their own enlightenment myth. Jean-François Lyotard argues in *The Postmodern Condition* that prior to the legitimation crises, which are the subject of his report, the enlightenment narrative that gets drawn into problematical crosshairs is one where “the hero of knowledge [a rationally-minded individual positing truths in terms of a possible unanimity between rational minds] works toward a good ethico-political end--universal peace” (xxiii). This is the character of the enlightenment narrative as a mythology, that the hero of knowledge, whether academic or scientist, can get caught up in the unquestioning pursuit of liberating truths. Lyotard warns against this, of course, stating that the foundation of postmodernism is loosely summed up as “incredulity toward metanarratives” (xxiv). The truth of Sokal’s hoax may not be in catching the editors scholastically unaware, but rather in the midst of being hyper-aware. In the constant effort to be suspicious of metanarratives, to

constantly be questioning their own modes of discourse, their acceptance of the article in spite of their reservations may point to the underlying myth of their ideological practices. Unlike Sokal's suggestion that the myth appealed to their ideological preferences, which when tied to material practice makes little sense based on their testimony of the article being a problem throughout, it does perhaps demonstrate a belief in the underlying mythology involved, being "always aware" of a potentially new piece of research that might break an existing paradigm created the basis for Sokal's camouflage, not necessarily his stated rhetorical strategies of blandly listing famous names in the field. At the core, his most outlandish concept--that gravity is a social construct independent of any physical reality--which he regarded as an utter defiance of sound logic, really was a new idea and represented the semblance of a true paradigm shift, making the grain of untruth of the article an appeal to the real truths held by the editorial board.

Sokal as Cultural Hero

Even if the mythological undercurrent of the hoax itself and the processes of enlightenment, there was one last element of narrative abstraction: the attempted transformation of Sokal into a cultural hero. Yet I find this conclusion deeply disturbing. Perhaps it is due to my training in social and behavioral psychology. The use of deception, even for academic or research purposes, is supposed to be a controlled measure used only to keep the results from being incidentally shifted in favor of the researcher's hypothesis and only when every other recourse is exhausted. Despite how the media and respondents to the hoax characterize it (as a joke, a prank, an exposé, or a trick), Sokal himself stated that it was an experiment, though admittedly uncontrolled. However, the ethical discussion of deceiving

professional colleagues often took a backseat to the sensationalizing of the results, and as the conversation springing from the responses continued, it further polarized disciplinary lines. Even Sokal remarked (with regret) that the *event* of the hoax often eclipsed the *content* of the hoax, and the subject of his criticism (the misuse and mischaracterizations of scientific findings) were drowned out by the trappings used to sell it; rather than finding an audience receptive to a very specific critique of select academics, the public at large flaunted his project as proof of ideological corruption within the academy (Sokal, "Why" 128).

In short, there was a far greater momentum to treat the incident as a moral lesson at the expense of humanities programs, which largely displaced the notoriety attributed to Sokal himself. This indicates that there is an additional level of abstracted myth in operation dealing with the ideological "normalcy" of Sokal's initial assumptions. While the "point" of the hoax was to draw attention to the alleged misuse of scientific theories by social theorists, it was the deception that drew most of the attention. *Social Text* became a symbolic stand-in for any number of targets, including postmodernists, social scientists, and feminists (to name a few), but these were still subdued under the umbrella challenge to a single assumption: that intellectuals in the humanities were consumed with self-importance and needed to be brought down a peg--humbled, as it were--in order to restore the academic social order.

At the heart of the matter is a series of myths about higher education, the relationship between philosophies of truth, and ultimately, the archetypal myth of the con man as a cultural hero. This last myth is the most important of the three, since within this myth is a justification of the fraud--no matter how severe--as acceptable provided it is conjoined with a moral purpose. This becomes the justification most frequently applied to Sokal's hoax; the editors of *Social Text* were more than just suitable targets, they were somehow symbolically

representative of a much larger body of wayward scholars, and the hoax itself is more than just a trick, but rather a cultural lesson designed to restore order and right thinking. In general, the people most closely connected to the hoax characterized it as an exchange of philosophy and a series of editorial flubs, but the characterizations of the events and interpretations of the significance of the events were steeped in mythic tropes of trickster figures.

The root of this emerging mythology begins undoubtedly with Sokal's initial response to the hoax, which included a reference to the "Emperor's New Clothes" fable ("Revelation" 53). In a cursory analysis, Sokal plays the role of the con man, the field of humanities as the emperor, the silent adults nodding along with the emperor's foolishness are a largely ignorant public, and the outspoken child (who points out the emperor's shame) is a stand-in for objective truth. However, Sokal leaves out a crucial detail in his reference during the "Revelation," the role of the con man and the role of the child are linked to the same person--Sokal himself. In this new version, Sokal is a modern trickster archetype, playing the role of the deceiver and the truth-revealer, a kind of shape-shifter equally at home as a silver-tongued con artist, but also shrouded in the guise of innocence and plain truth.

References to Trickster Mythos

Trickster mythology is marked by a series of patterns, much like Campbell's version of the monomythic hero and tends to be a popular incarnation for moralizing "accepted" truths and social norms. In terms of method, the archetypal trickster is "at once wise and foolish, the perpetrator of tricks and the butt of his own jokes [and,] he is outrageous in his actions; yet the trickster is profoundly inventive, creative by nature, and in some ways a

helper to humanity (Leeming 163). More than anything else, the trickster mythology helps explain the responses to Sokal's hoax once it went public. As the name implies, Sokal offered his point using a ruse; not content with simply critiquing the various analyses of science, he felt that "it would be boring to write a detailed refutation" and decided to offer a parody instead (qtd. in Scott 77). As a parody, some of the more frequent responses had to do with treating the hoax with laughter and bemusement. John Terry described it as a "brilliant joke, comical in its rhetorical excess," while George Will described the hoax as "hilarious" and a piece of "intellectual cotton-candy" (Terry 101, Will 91). Moreover, Ruth Rosen echoed the same sense of the trickster as a shapeshifter stating her delight in "his ability to mimic the imponderable syntax and jargon of contemporary theoretical academic writing" (89). One respondent, John Omicinski, actually asserted that Sokal should be applauded as an "academic guerilla" who "won a crucial battle without firing a shot" (95).

What these critiques demonstrate are two underlying myths. The first is that the hoax is funny, as long as it is accepted as a moral lesson. For those in agreement with Sokal and what he represents, the hoax seems incredibly amusing. On the side of moral correctness, the deception is stripped of controversy in its characterization as a joke. Like George Will's comparison to "intellectual cotton candy," the hoax is the kind of moral lesson that is enjoyed sparingly and contains little nutritional value; however, within the context of the circus, it seems not only appropriate but, also necessary. The sheer power of treating the hoax with levity simply because of its structure is echoed by George Levine, who argues that he would laugh and enjoy "trading joke for joke" except that since the stakes were high, his "ultimate response to this prank is sadness" (*Letter* 63). Levine's doubt about the humor stems directly from the fact that his reputation is one of the ones tarnished by the hoax's revelation. In

short, if there is no moral lesson behind the prank, then the victim is simply humiliated for nothing.

The second myth is that the hoax actually does help, which is in itself a tough point to prove. If humanists are cast into the role of the vain emperor of the story, then this infers that the humanities are in a privileged position and unusually arrogant about it. The most obvious references elicit the story directly in relation to the “point” of the entire hoax, no doubt cued (in part) by Sokal’s use of the metaphor in his own “Revelation.” The following is a collection of the choicest invocations:

- But how can one show that the emperor has no clothes? Satire is by far the best weapon; and the blow that can’t be brushed off is the one that’s self-inflicted. (Sokal, “Revelation” 53)
- Many scientists believe that the emperors of cultural studies have no clothes. But Sokal captured the whole royal court parading around in naked ignorance and persuaded the palace chroniclers to publish the portrait as a centerfold. (Seebach 71)
- When I was a child, my favorite story was “The Emperor’s New Clothes.” A chorus of adults praises the Emperor’s new wardrobe, but a child blurts out the truth: The Emperor is in fact stark naked. From this tale, I learned that adults could be intimidated into endorsing all kinds of flummery. The longer I teach at the university, the more I return to this story for consolation. [...] The scandal actually began about a decade ago, when a growing cadre of Academic Emperors began empire-building within American universities. (Rosen 88)

While Linda Seebach and Ruth Rosen are exaggerating, the elements of the underlying myth are present. Foremost is the power assigned to science as opposed to the “flummery” of members of the humanities. According to all three, “science” is the incontrovertible, absolute truth that everyone knows, and the only reason to believe in anything else is because of the intimidation cast by intellectuals in the humanities. Whether or not the accusation of “empire-building” is accurate is the matter for another study, what is important here is that there is widespread agreement with the assessment. If the scientist is the metaphorical hero of knowledge, then the critic of science and its methods must invariably be the enemy, and in mythology the enemy is often part of the same systemic corruption that plagues the world as a whole, though never more dangerously than as the symbol of deeper spiritual insecurity (Campbell, *Hero* 101). Moreover, the enemy of the scientist becomes the jailor of true spiritual virtue (in this case, knowledge) and only through the destruction of the barrier is the boon released (Campbell, “Interpreting” 209). Again, this is an acceptance through inference that only works as an extended metaphor; if *Social Text* is a stand-in for all members of the humanities who are guilty of empire-building, and Sokal is a stand-in for all members of the disgruntled scientific community, then the entire event can be chalked up as a victory without harm. Rather than direct confrontation, the embarrassment seems to be localized to the “appropriate” victim. Seebach and Rosen are casting themselves in the roles of the intimidated adults who are finally finding that their suspicions are confirmed and are laughing at the “nakedness” of the emperor, which they viewed as tyrannical. What they are forgetting is that Sokal is no innocent child, and in this case, the emperor may have no empire to begin with.

Elements of this narrative structure were not limited to direct references to the “Emperor’s New Clothes” alone. There were additional references to the myth that were far more subtle, intoning the same irreverent fall of the *Social Text* editors as embodying the same characteristics of the story’s emperor. Again, since much of this information is thematic, I have preserved the original language as much as possible:

- This disciplinary narcissism, so typical of recent literary cultural studies is a mystery to me. After all, the natural sciences have been quite successful with their object of study, and we probably have a lot to learn from their methods. But no: For Stanley Aronowitz (quoted in the *New York Times*), Sokal is “ill-read and half-educated.” Well, then, how does it feel being duped by the half-educated? (Moretti 60)
- Ross said Sokal’s prank reflects the arrogance of scientists who resent anyone outside their field attempting to critique it. That, he said, was the basic point of *Social Text’s* special issue. So, in a sense, the Sokal hoax fit right in. (Landsberg 75)
- The successful joke that New York University physicist Alan Sokal was able to have at the expense of the editors of *Social Text* highlights an issue more serious than the fact that obtuse pretentiousness reigns at that particular academic journal. (McConnell 85)
- So what, beyond ignorance, explains why *Social Text’s* editors swallowed it? Arrogance, for starters, the arrogance of what Sokal calls a “self-perpetuating academic subculture.” (Will 91)

- Sokal unmasked the foolishness that masquerades as higher education in many ivy-covered corners of America [...] what Sokal did was absolutely delicious. [He] camouflaged his essay with purposely ponderous, pompous, tendentious, and prolix prose, lushly footnoted and elaborately bibliographed. He made it look like any other tangled testament to tenure, and the editors became his willing prey. (Omicinski 93)

With Franco Moretti's critique, while he would have been willing to remain moderate, he isolated a moment in which Aronowitz seemed more arrogant than critical of Sokal.⁶⁶

Mitchell Landsberg echoes this by stating a version of the "it-takes-one-to-know-one" accusation; if *Social Text* had not been so arrogant themselves, they would not have reacted so strongly from being duped by the "arrogant scientists" who resented their critiques. The other critiques echo the sense in this *Social Text* is a stand-in for the metaphorical "emperor" with "obtuse pretentiousness" and agreeable "pompous" tendencies. In short, the appeal is one of myth, assuming that these characterizations fall into the realm of what "everyone knows" to be true, and the various reactions from the editors of *Social Text* must invariably prove that this is the case. In doing so, Sokal fades into the background and his ethical culpability diminishes in the wake of the far greater moral deficiencies of his victim.

The main problem, as stated earlier, is that the situation was much more complicated than the treatment in the subsequent critiques. What began as something in between a good-faith error and a decent parody blew up into a symbolic stand-in for the entirety of the

⁶⁶ Slavoj Žižek actually clarifies this point with his own commentary. When remarking on what the Sokal hoax actually "proved," he argues that Sokal never really understood the irony inherent to his own approach. By never truly engaging the material that he set out to critique, he displaced their issues and more or less proved their point. In creating a defense for the sciences, he demonstrated the threat that the humanities posed. See Žižek, Introduction, *The Fright of Real Tears* 4.

“science wars” themselves. Far from conclusive, the respondents make it seem as though the matter *is*. From the perspective of a myth, they would be correct—provided that Sokal is fulfilling the role of trickster figure. In that case, the entire event can be wrapped up neatly and tucked away as the social order has been successfully restored.

Conclusion

If there is one thing that the hoax proves, it is that there are layers upon layers of mythical narrative structure at work in the deception and subsequent reception. Believing the editors of *Social Text* and taking them at face value means that they only barely trusted Sokal--a fact verified by their reluctance to publish his work initially and in their de-emphasis of the piece in the actual issue in which it appeared in. As a text with a number of dubious overtures, they trusted it *just enough* to publish it. While one explanation lies in their “arrogance” for not having the article checked by a physicist, I prefer to think that this is evidence of something different. Because it was initially presented as an interdisciplinary feature and Sokal seemed eager for people from a range of disciplines to see it, the error seems to be in misattribution rather than anything else. It was not a physicist that they wanted as an ally but rather the interdisciplinary persona that Sokal’s fiction projected; even deeper was perhaps a desire to believe in the basic tenants of his fictional argument: that the individual is not lost in an unfeeling and unchangeable physical world, but rather that the human spirit reflects the same relationship between body and soul that the universe has with light and gravity. The “quantum theory of gravity” that Sokal offered seems absurd by virtually all accounts, but to those ignorant of the jokes, it could easily be mistaken for a radically new interpretation of the old conceptions of the universe. Rather than thinking

about the hoax as a matter of “is this article wrong,” the lens of myth offers “what if this scientist is *right*?”

Again, the myth probably would not have worked without the widespread common currency of Thomas Kuhn’s work as the foundation. While subsequent generations of social scientists have modified the original theory (and others rejected it completely), it is the pseudo-canonical backbone of all the sociology of science.⁶⁷ At its core remains the central myth: that eventually a new paradigm emerges in the hands of something that hovers on the absurd because it invalidates earlier conceptions and models. Not only did Sokal reference this, but I also believe that this is the lynchpin of his success. Kuhn’s mythology has the benefit of being *hopeful*. It is in this regard, exploiting the single inch between faith and doubt, that the myth appeal sways the audience from one to the other. There is a small, nearly invisible distinction between the two contained in the phrase “the benefit of the doubt.” When it is so clear that they did not trust him on the lines of the major appeals and only barely approved the article, the only resort in terms of explanation that seems both fair and accurate is to make the attribution to a *nearly unconscious* process that exploited a sense of hope. The editors may deny that this is what happened, but that is precisely the level on which mythology operates. As part of the world that is “assumed to be true,” once the hoax was submitted to a practical world of deadlines, filler pages, and a special issue, the “why” gets replaced with a “why not?”

While this may explain the internal mythology operating within the sociology of science and offer a solution for the mistake made by the editors of *Social Text*, it does not

⁶⁷ Pseudo-canonical is an original term. The use here reiterates the earlier argument that Kuhn’s work is well known enough to have become a myth in its own right.

explain the external reaction once the hoax was made public. Within the politics of knowledge, the archetypal scientist has displaced the figure of the well-read intellectual as the seat of authority. I do not know if there is enough evidence within the responses of the hoax to verify that there is a widespread distaste of “intellectualism” within the United States, but the willingness to agree with the deception and humiliation of humanist intellectuals does suggest that there is a great deal of pent-up bitterness. The desire to protect absolute truth *absolutely* within the realm of myth means assigning the victim the more culturally disdained features, such as arrogance, pretentiousness, and, most of all, ignorance. Pairing the event with a known myth had the added benefit of oversimplifying the problem, creating a nutshell approach allowing for the event’s immediate consumption and subsequent dismissal as nothing more than a footnote validating the moral and factual correctness of science over the humanities. To me, this seems less like an oversimplification and more like a hyper-simplification, not just reducing the events into easily digestible bits, but reducing them so thoroughly that the information ceases to be part of a lived experience and becomes a story unto itself. This pressure to turn the event into a cautionary tale acquits Sokal, but only at the expense of his intended victim.

CHAPTER FIVE: PRECEDENT AS MYTH, OR THE PROBLEMATIC ENEMY OF
LIBERTY IN PRIVACY LAW

*I suppose it would be nice to say ... that ... I realized I was making abortion-rights history...
But the honest truth is that nothing like that even occurred to me. I was simply at the end of
my rope. At a dead end. I just didn't know what else to do.*

-Norma McCorvey (Jane Roe)

*If chivalry is not dead its viability is gravely imperiled.*⁶⁸

-David M. Lawson, re: *Dubay v. Wells*

Like the notion of a paradigm shift, the establishment of a legal precedent functions in much the same way; done well, the court's decision acts as a point of reference for the lower courts to interpret the law and to firmly establish a criterion for applying the legal principles to a benchmark case replete with full descriptions of the situation's appropriateness in this regard. While a persuasive trap can emerge from a skilled author's exploitation of an idea that passes into such common currency as to be immersed in a corporate cultural *ethos*, legal precedent offers two unique additions to the kind of myth appeal identified in the prior chapter. First, legal precedent in regard to interpreting Constitutional law is considered an evolution in the U.S. Constitution itself; unlike academia which has formal methodology and an informal canon, the field of legal interpretation sports informal (that is, prone to changes based on predilections of the bench) methodology and a formal canon. The chief document, the Constitution, is considered the starting point of a long

⁶⁸ Matthew Dubay sued his former girlfriend, Laurie Wells, for maintaining her pregnancy without his consent and then demanding child support. Dubay argued that if a woman has the right to terminate a pregnancy, and thus cleave any responsibility for a child, then a man must possess the same right under the equal protection clause. He filed to sever any responsibility to the resulting child as a "legal abortion." The case is largely considered to be the first direct challenge to existing case law of abortion as it might apply to men. The quote is a direct passage from the court's opinion, drafted by the deciding judge David Lawson.

legal narrative constantly adding new chapters. Secondly, within the larger narrative structure of evolving rights, individual narratives of plaintiffs and defendants are themselves canonized, purposefully, for the benefit of the lower courts.

Roe v. Wade did not settle the issue of abortion within the United States. Instead, it acted as a watershed moment for the court, creating a centerpiece for a controversy that has vehemently raged on. This case has particular interest in rhetoric for any number of reasons, but perhaps the most immediate was that the case was “not argued very well” by either side in the initial hearing (O’Brien 1226-27).⁶⁹ The participants returned during the court’s session a year later and argued one last time before the court rendered its decision and shifted the burden of argumentative clarity to the Justice’s opinions. Since then, however, the case has been culturally elevated to mythic proportions⁷⁰--and remains both uncontested as the watershed case of the Burger court, and the most controversial decision of the twentieth century. In the years that followed, several cases brought the constitutionality of abortion back to the court’s attention, in particular *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, *Stenberg v. Carhart*, and, more recently, *Gonzales v. Carhart*, each of which specifically challenged *Roe* directly.⁷¹ As the court remained steadfast, though sharply divided, in upholding their

⁶⁹ The case that became *Roe v. Wade* started as *Roe v. Floyd*; Sarah Weddington acted as council for Jane Roe (Norma McCorvey) in both sessions, whereas Jay Floyd was replaced by Robert Flowers in the second hearing. It is clear that Weddington opened her arguments with an either-or fallacy while Floyd opened with a sexist joke, neither of which were well received by the court. During deliberation, the Justices concluded that the arguments for Roe were too broad and the defense offered by the state of Texas was too narrowly confined to the language of the statute.

⁷⁰ By “mythic” proportions, I mean the way in which the general details of the case have become common currency, and the way in which the case remains emblematic of abortion literature as a genre.

⁷¹ *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* involved the specific restrictions on abortion put in place by the Pennsylvania state legislature. Of note was that the decision overturned the trimester ruling established in *Roe* determining the state’s interest in protecting life when weighed against a woman’s health interest in obtaining an abortion. *Gonzales v. Carhart* challenged the legality of dilation and extraction (“partial-birth” abortion) procedures. The court maintained a line of reasoning from both *Roe* and the earlier *Stenberg v. Carhart* that the medical procedure itself could not be banned outright without a triage provision.

precedent, each case served to add a degree of nuance and definition to the emerging right to privacy. Though heavily modified through the subsequent judicial review and legislation, the initial *Roe* decision remains *de facto stare decisis*,⁷² but not without particular consequences. Recent appointments to the Supreme Court have been increasingly political since Robert Bork's dismissal as a candidate due to his conservative political views, including abortion. During Chief Justice Roberts' and Justice Alito's confirmation hearings, they were both asked point blank questions regarding the *stare decisis* value of *Roe*, specifically if they would continue to uphold it regardless of the exact circumstances of the case set in front of them ("Alito"). Rather than unify, the issue continues to polarize.⁷³

My argument here is that this "engine of controversy" represents a kind of rhetorical failure due to the inherent dramatic tension involved; the cultivated arguments undercut any traditional unification device due to the universally capitalized drama of cross victimization. When everyone is a victim, the distinction between just and unjust gives way to unjust and even *more* unjust. Rather than proving the case for moral correctness, the rhetorical strategy involves proving which party is most victimized. The distinguishing features of this immersion narrative are that the dramatic tension involves the destruction of the filial bond. In the case of the state, the legalization of abortion has the effect of victimizing the unborn, in the form of the fetus, by violating the right to life. For the appellants, the criminalization of the abortion procedure is itself an attack against a woman's personal liberty in regards to procreation and her person, and without this recourse, she is the victim of economic and

⁷² Literally, "to stand by things decided." Used figuratively in law; denotes giving deference to previous interpretations of law rather than revoking it during a new, similar case ("Stare").

⁷³ I say this to reiterate the obvious: the controversy is so politicized that the justices are under scrutiny for how they *might* decide in a case regarding abortion before ever hearing evidence or taking their seat. As a matter subject to interpretation rather than fact, the current theory for maintaining the *status quo* or overturning current legal opinions is to fill as many seats as possible with sympathetic justices.

social assaults by an uncaring public. In order to contrast this more effectively, I use a contrasting example of a victim-dominated metaphor to work as the analytical equivalent of 3-D glasses; by using Euripides' *Medea* as a touchstone, the argumentative and persuasive differences should illuminate the structural differences between the two. With these differences juxtaposed, the ethics of abortion should remain secondary to the primary purpose, which is the systemic analysis of how the narrative reality of victimization is made into a tragic epiphany in language.

Because the topic of abortion is uncomfortable even in discussions about civil rights,⁷⁴ it suggests that the subject matter is perhaps as touchy a subject matter as the procedure. The reason for this, I believe, has to do with narrative issues in *Roe* itself. Unlike other judicial opinions in the civil rights canon, *Roe* displays several unique features that parallel narrative structures of classical Athenian tragedies, namely a story in which the protagonist struggles against unjust social forces, which threaten to strip the individual of human dignity. In short, there are no symbolic heroes within the controversy, only thematic variations on villains and victims. Rather than a single enemy to either act as a scapegoat or suitable target, the root of the controversy delves deeply into the value structures of life and liberty as they are pitted against each other.

This chapter revisits the cultural relevance of myth as extended metaphors, and in this instance, the use and paralleling of tragedy with legal rhetoric instead of adventure.⁷⁵ The

⁷⁴ This is part of abortion's controversial nature, and I say this in reference to the general acceptance of other civil rights by way of comparison; Americans are far more likely to speak highly of the right to free speech or the right to an attorney. Within the culture of the controversy, the "right to choose (an abortion)" is often replaced with the "right to privacy" (the umbrella term for all issues related to unwarranted government intrusions) as part of this same euphemistic distancing.

⁷⁵ By "adventure" I am referring to Joseph Campbell's journey of the monomythic hero outlined in *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*.

abortion debate remains highly charged in large part because it is not grounded in the same kind of “mythic legitimacy” that unifies people under the heroic pattern;⁷⁶ more specifically, within this controversy, rhetorical persuasiveness is focused within the ability of interlocutors to map the literary tropes of tragedy onto circumstances.⁷⁷ Behind this drama is the backdrop of the narrative quest; as the United States has grown as a nation, so has its ideals of pursuing individual freedoms against the enemies of liberty. This ongoing quest has necessitated the opposition to real and constructed enemies, whether they were nations, groups, or ideas. As such, the freedom of choice emerges only in opposition to the enemies of liberty that precluded it. In order to understand the tragedy that unfolds in *Roe*, this dramatic backstory needs some unfurling; once completed, the central myth of abortion maps the tragic elements of Euripides’ *Medea* onto *Roe* within case law. The appellant, Jane Roe, is represented in the decision as an archetype of the destitute woman, for whom the court is the last resort in finding a remedy to the numerous social injustices that have rendered her powerless and alone. Metaphorically “abandoned” by the father of her children (as he is neither mentioned in the briefs nor mentioned in the decision except as a biological parent devoid of legal responsibility) and finding no sympathy with the government (in this case, the state of Texas), Roe appeals to the highest authority she can find to rectify the situation, though even the “gods” may be against her.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ I use the phrase “mythic legitimacy” here as a purposeful oxymoron in the sense that a story has currency and the feeling of truth regardless of factual accuracy.

⁷⁷ Like Burke’s examples in *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, I am referring to the ability to map a narrative structure as an explanation of real events.

⁷⁸ The definition of a civil liberty is a protection granted to an individual against an infringement by the state. By asserting that the right to choose is covered by the right to privacy--a right attached to rulings in civil liberties--the appellants argued that the state itself is a potential enemy of liberty. If the right to choose is indeed

The Mythic Structure of “The Enemy”

The definitions and conceptual framework for elucidating the concept of “The Enemy” are largely derived initially from Joseph Campbell’s work describing the monomythic hero in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* and Vilho Harle’s sociological, political, and historical counterpoint *The Enemy with a Thousand Faces* written intently to parallel Campbell’s foundational text. I mention this now only to establish the broader intersections with my own work of this chapter, namely the examination of legal texts, because Constitutional Law is an intersecting interest between the two authors. As a student of comparative religion, Campbell’s main source of information regarding the social construction of heroism were the various worldwide mythologies recorded primarily in antiquity depicting the struggle of good and evil as an essentially moral conflict where the supernatural aspects acted as metaphors for real-world correspondence (*Hero* 3-25). It is worth noting that Campbell strove to distance the connections between myth and its political connotations--in particular what he considered to be the factual work of science as it applied to belief systems; in general, he concluded that myth gives mankind insight into human psychological needs and motivations while the comparative analysis of myth provided insight into the universal nature of god and the divine (*Hero* 249; “Impact” 3-25). Throughout his multivolume work *The Masks of God*, Campbell’s argument remains consistently devoted to separating traditional mythology as the basis for modern science and historiography outside of the persistent cultural patterns it implies; to be clear, mythology is a

protected by the Constitution without enumeration, then the government itself is acting unjustly by denying it. Like the gods in classical tragedies, the court is both potential ally and enemy to the protagonist.

system of thought that provides insight, but not necessarily a valid critique of modern academic disciplines and pursuits.

In stark contrast, Harle's pragmatic approach is much more akin to the method of analysis in this project; rather than begin with a comparative religion and deduce psychological-cultural mechanisms in operation, he begins with the material fact of warfare (particularly in Western Culture) as a basis for deconstructing the underlying philosophy of antagonism. In doing so, he argues that throughout this development spanning several thousand years, the compulsion to create "others" and to then reinterpret them as an enemy is the extension of a process of self-validation; it is the process of defining the enemy that we (in part) define ourselves, or as Harle writes, "one cannot comprehend oneself fully if one has no appreciation of *who and what one is not* (15). In short, he sums that his project is to infer that the atrocities of the twentieth century are "neither anything new nor independent of each other: they reflect the mode of thought where 'we' represent and fight for good, and our opponents, 'they,' represent and fight for evil" (187). It is this same sense of both ongoing controversy and ongoing social construction of enemies that is of importance here. Using both authors as counterpoints produces the same result: the understanding of what makes something heroic is set in contrast to that which is villainous. The same psychological need that drives the creation of monomythic heroes to resolve real-world conflicts symbolically also drives the impulse to impose symbolic attributes to real-world enemies.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ To clarify, this happens in two ways. The first is through a scapegoat, where an innocent party that has villainous attributes assigned to it (e.g., the Jewish people were "infecting" German ideology and economics). The second is by amplifying an actual enemy to superhuman proportions (e.g., Hitler was not just evil, but an incarnation of the Antichrist). Both approaches are dehumanizing, meant to deprive the target of value.

“The Enemy,”⁸⁰ in terms of mythic structure, should not be confused with a single enemy or any real animosity between parties. Like Joseph Campbell’s description of the monomythic hero in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, “The Enemy” (as I refer to it throughout) is a bracket term referring to the counter psychological concept and series of motives imbued in the creation of the hero. If the monomythic hero is one that embodies cultural values through the process of initiation, separation, and return with the ultimate boon, then “The Enemy” in this case defines the agent or agents set in opposition to this. What is unique to Campbell’s work is that within the heroic journey, the enemy is expected, implied, and typically tied to the supernatural. There are undeniable material realities of evil where human beings took on the role of villain, becoming “truly evil enemies”; according to Ofer Zur, men like Hitler, Stalin, and Pol Pot, who were directly linked to the deaths of millions, are part of an essential reality. The hope of understanding both the psychology of enmity and the social construction of enemies is “hope that this knowledge will help [...] deal more effectively with actual enemies (346). It is important to delineate between the social constructions of animosity and the realities.

Any discussion of animosity and enmity requires some common language because enemies take on particular kinds of characteristics depending on both the characteristics of conflict and on the projections of the “protagonists.” Zur himself offers seven categories of enemies, specifically, the *symbolic enemy* (tied to primitive/ritualistic warfare) where combat

⁸⁰ The capital letters here are meant to distinguish between an individual enemy embodied as a real person or group from “The Enemy,” which is symbolically the source of all evils. As I will discuss later, the appeal to myth metaphorically attempts to transform the former into the latter--changing a single enemy into the enemy of all that is good, righteous, true, holy, etc.

is largely ceremonial and is a life-affirming ritual (346).⁸¹ The *withholding enemy* (tied to warfare based on emerging economic conditions) used combat as a way of securing resources and considered enemies to be a part of a potential workforce (346-47). The *worthy enemy*, which roughly corresponds to Campbell's depiction of monomythic heroes, coexists with the second variety but adds a layer of idealized struggle to it, with themes of glory and honor inspiring poetry and literature (348).⁸² The *worthy enemy* is also exceptional because of the rugged individualistic nature of the hero involved; like Glaucus and Diomedes meeting between the battle lines of Troy, the enemy and the hero find that they may share a common ancestry and kinship, whether it is physical or ideological. The *enemy of God*, on the other hand, represents a purging of the "doers" of evil as well as "evil itself" in a holy war since their existence itself is an attack against God. In Zur's words, "It is the first time that the enemy is associated with evil. The enemy is no longer symbolic, no longer to be exploited or respected. They are to be eliminated from the face of the earth" (348). Defending the faith and defending a nation, however, are separate. This requires a different enemy, the *offensive enemy*, which retains some of the characteristics, such as psychological/ideological conditioning to believe that the "cause is just and the leaders blameless" and that engaging in the offensive war protects the nation from the threat "over there" (348-49). Perhaps the one most relevant to American history is the *oppressive/betraying enemy* who is cast as the villain in wars of liberation or revolutionary wars; according to Zur, this is part of a process when a grassroots movement actively works to destabilize a current regime on the basis that those in power not only dominate but also "betray and exploit [the people at large]" (349).

⁸¹ Zur notes that this kind of symbolic, primitive combat often ended with the shedding of first blood or by limiting the amount of killing, thus limiting the psychological enmity between parties.

⁸² In particular, I mention that this type corresponds to Campbell's work because Zur references the *Iliad* as well as the corpus of Greek and Roman heroes from antiquity in this description (348).

However, this attitude about revolutionaries has come under some scrutiny next to the *invisible enemy within*, in which revolutionaries are the enemies themselves; in modern American contexts, this is most clearly seen in the rhetoric of terrorism or guerrilla warfare in which the enemy is seen as “a covert fighter,” but to the victim, the enemy is “an insidious, virtually invisible menace that cannot be identified in advance of the attack” (349-50).

Within the framework of the last two categories of the *oppressive/betraying enemy* and the *invisible enemy within* is the clearest example of the duality of animosity. What is of concern here is not the absolute “fact” of evil so much as the psychological conditions precluding it, namely, the “need” to cast the self in the role of a hero necessitating an “other” to fill the void of the villain.

Part of this problem, explained by James Aho, is that this psychological and cultural condition of mankind, the barriers of the hero’s quest to restore the ideal virtues of “democracy, equality, peace, love, freedom [...] moral perfection,” and issues of race or class can become part of a paradoxical imperative (*Darkness* 8-20). In mythology Campbell’s monomythic villains occupy a particular metaphorical space and as such suffer no particular harm in the heroic journey; though Odysseus blinds Polyphemus for a breach in the civil contract, this is metaphorical justice since Polyphemus is “blind” to the rules of civil hospitality, returning evil for the kindnesses shown by the lost Achaens. The character is powerless unless the metaphor can be extended into the real world and combined with an agenda; it is only when members of the Achaen community are accused of sharing the same uncivil traits as Polyphemus that persecution arises. The step of social construction merges a

narrative structure with real events by overlaying them,⁸³ though Aho argues that this is just as often the quest for the “protagonist” to find meaning as much as it is a response to an “antagonist.” Identity as a warrior requires war and

[t]he warrior needs an enemy. Without one there is nothing against which to fight, nothing from which to save the world, nothing to give his life meaning. What this means, of course, is that if an enemy is not ontologically present in the nature of things, one must be manufactured. (*Darkness* 26)

To reiterate Kenneth Burke’s arguments, a manufactured enemy is a powerful unification device because unlike a “real” person, the fictitious construction can be imbued with every cultural ill, even ones that cannot be directly tied to the scapegoat’s influence (“Rhetoric” 210-13). However, this particular feature of the scapegoat or manufactured enemy creates/elucidates three paradoxes that cannot be avoided, making this kind of identification problematic: evil is inseparable from good, division creates internal unity, and the (constructed) enemy is dualistic in nature (Aho, *Darkness* 11-20; Harle 13-15).

In sum, “The Enemy” is the narratological counterpoint to the hero; where a constructed hero exists, a constructed enemy is typically present as well. The construction of a hero typically aligns the positive virtues of both psychology and culture with the self, whereas the enemy is aligned with either the exact opposites of these features or is attributed with the features assuring their erosion. The manufacturing of an enemy may arise from a “culturally deep structure” encompassing all of human history, but each iteration and

⁸³ Imagine a blank map of terrain with a transparent diagram then placed on top of it. On the transparency are borders demarcating nations, names for natural bodies of water, and labeled cities. I am arguing that narrative has a similar effect on real events. The restatement of events includes narrative mapping to give a familiar structure and form to the events. Specific applications of this narratological analysis of law have been gaining prominence, as have the conventions of treating legal decisions as literature (Brooks 1-10).

reproduction uses metaphors fixed in a particular time and place (Harle 6). Constructions of the enemy can be both useful and counterproductive based on the fixation to a particular target; while real evil exists and can be matched to individuals, the construction of the enemy is not limited to mass movements or warfare. This kind of social construction is part of human psychology and as such can be involved even in the mundane aspects of social life, branching from a vilification of an individual to a group, to a nation, or to a movement.

The American Self-Image and The Enemy of Liberty

As stated before, *Roe* represents a kind of rhetorical failure; the specific nature of this failure is in the lack of a centralized unification device from either the appellant or the defendant. Specifically defined, this unification device would either need to clearly draw a parallel to being either the hero or enemy of liberty. Herein lies the problem of abortion: there is no heroism tied to the action--abortion is the last resort when heroic action fails. Being the hero of the pro-life movement has the backlash of being the villain of women's liberty or the invader of a woman's body. Being the hero of the pro-choice movement means granting the freedom to commit filicide out of desperation. What is left as a rhetorical strategy is the byproduct of years of American patriotism, namely the ability to so thoroughly vilify the opposition as to make any deplorable act seem less terrible than "The Enemy" itself.⁸⁴

Understanding the specific character of *Roe* means understanding the unique background that it holds within the cultural values of American freedom and liberty. Up to

⁸⁴ This is not said in sordid gain, but rather as a statement of fact. The techniques of persuasion since the foundation of the United States have evolved as surely as our politics. After years of wars and their justifications, the conventions of this kind of argument have been etched into history.

this point, this discussion about the construction of the enemy has involved comparative religion, historical warfare, and twentieth-century politics, with specific reference to the social movements involved in creating modern atrocities. It is my contention that there is room for continued study in the realm of legal jurisprudence for measuring rhetorical effectiveness in these social constructions. Simply put, barring outright conflict and warfare, the legal system represents the first and foremost level of confrontation between enemies under the same jurisdiction. Rather than confront the *offensive enemy* that is “out there” somewhere, legal arguments encapsulate the controlled conflict (legal warfare) between idealistic *worthy enemies* at best, and *oppressive/betraying enemies* at worst. Returning to Harle’s initial premise, America is no different from any other organization or group--the propensity to see the collective “self” as heroic, noble, and virtuous is still present, which means that so is the desire to engage in the enemies of our values. In this case, because the United States was founded in open revolution with a Declaration of Independence, it comes as no surprise that the chief value for American heroism is the defense and expansion of liberty, generally defined as personal freedoms.

As a matter of law, the Constitutional democracy is, in effect, a mutual compromise between parties built on several assumptions of equality and equity for the purposes of granting recognition to individuals in the form of rights, whose existence and possession preclude their distribution (Habermas 203-04). By extension, the defense of a government dedicated to the protection of this distribution is symbolically a defense of the freedoms themselves. Conversely, an attack against the body of a democratic nation becomes the symbolic attack against the freedoms that it extols. In essence, the backdrop of American politics, whether foreign or domestic, has in mind these extended symbolic values of being

“in service” to the basic freedoms that the Constitution is said to protect. This also means that any adjustment to the Constitution, whether through an amendment or through judicial scrutiny, is treated with especially critical regard; an adjustment to these basic freedoms requires an additional cultural adjustment in terms of self-identity.

There is a persistent trend that once a conflict with an external enemy has been resolved, there follows a period of increased attention to domestic enemies which rises until a new external threat can be identified or manufactured. During these times of relative external peace, the process of conflict is turned to the differences existing within borders. In American history this has directly been tied to national identity in our ongoing quest to identify an “enemy number one” (Harle 86). As Harle astutely points out, the birth of the American nation is tied to the revolutionary war or the response to an *oppressive/betraying enemy* embodied in King George III, attributed by Thomas Jefferson (a leader known both for his prudence and humanity) as being the leader of a government

[t]otally without morality, insolent beyond bearing, inflated with vanity and ambition, aiming at the exclusive domination of the [world], lost in corruption, of deep-rooted hatred towards us, *hostile to liberty* wherever it endeavors to show its head, and the eternal disturber of the peace of the world.
(qtd. in Holt and Siverstein 2-3; emphasis added)

It is worth noting that this example is not an isolated incident; the inception of the United States as a place open to liberty is a, if not the, defining characteristic of the country as a whole. The Declaration of Independence could in fact be considered the simultaneous birth of a nation but also the initial creation of a national impetus: to establish liberty by fighting its enemies.

For the most part, the enemies of liberty throughout American history have been external, and the search for an “enemy number one” often brought the United States into conflict with foreign powers, largely on the basis of their contrastive ideologies regarding liberty and freedom. A full and comprehensive analysis of American foreign policy is not necessary for my analysis, but I do want to call attention to the pattern pointed out by Harle regarding the transformation of the enemy of liberty into the foundations of manifest destiny. After the revolutionary war, national attention shifted to Mexico, during which time “manifest destiny” was a term coined to justify this expansion. Because the prevailing undercurrent of manifest destiny was that America (the self) was the defender of righteous virtue (liberty and democracy) the westward expansion was an extension of a holy and sacred cause; under this idea America could play the role of the hero fighting the *enemy of God* whose followers were an extension of a particular kind of evil. More importantly, this strategy worked until President James Polk revealed to Congress that this goal was the annexing of California (86); the openness of his admission shifted the role of America as a righteous conqueror to a less sympathetic *withholding enemy*, which aligned our motives with economic use instead of moral *and* economic use. As Harle argues, the resulting backlash cost the democratic party their majority (86). What emerges is a particular kind of pattern where popular and successful American wars are posed against a clearly defined “enemy number one” of democracy and a nationalistic sense of manifest destiny, which was later extended to include not only westward expansion but the expansion of democracy itself to the world against the oppressive enemies of liberty abroad.

In particular, each major American conflict between the revolutionary war and the conflicts emerging in the twentieth century were colored by definitions of the enemy being

attackers of American liberties, and since those liberties were tied with the national adherence to manifest destiny and an image of the self as the protector of both civil virtue and of morality itself, the enemies of liberty became the *enemies of God* by extension. Roosevelt initially declared that the Spanish-American war as one of “higher moral values” to side with the opposition against an *offensive enemy* as it was the duty of the United States to defend democracy in the Philippines, Guam, and Puerto Rico from the Spanish; later, President Howard Taft argued a similar move by claiming war with Mexico in 1912 was a “duty that the United States was unable to refuse” in order to protect the lives and property of Americans while he maintained that in this conflict America was cast as the nation of Israel from the Old Testament of the Bible--ready to fulfill God’s purposes in this duty (Harle 87).

The twentieth century brought with it a series of *offensive enemies* that were marked by a shifting of focus as “enemy number one.” The Soviet Union occupied this position primarily because of the ideology put into place, graduating their revolution from a war against *oppressive/betraying enemies* into becoming an *offensive enemy* and betraying enemy themselves.⁸⁵ Only in an alliance of necessity did they shift out of this position in the wake of a much more virile *offensive enemy* found in Nazi Germany; their war of aggression literally was the embodiment of what is feared by an *offensive enemy*: a nationalistic pride coupled with an aggression turned both inward and outward through fascism so that both internal enemies (impure Aryans and the discontent) and external enemies (England and Europe at large) came under attack.⁸⁶ Even so, this attack against democracy was not enough to pull the United States into the war until the premeditated attacks on Pearl Harbor, in which Imperial

⁸⁵ Specifically, Harle notes that the new Soviet Government was unconstitutional and guilty of regicide, declaring itself the enemy of all constitutional governments around the world (88).

⁸⁶ Churchill remarked that he would make an alliance with anybody, even Satan, to stop Hitler. Harle argues that the implication of the Soviet Union in this statement is implicit (87).

Japan was brought under the same purview as an *offensive enemy* by sheer fact if not ideology. With Germany out of the picture, and Japan's surrender, the cold war emerged with the ideological conflicts of the United States largely preoccupied again with the Soviet Union, which ultimately finds form in Ronald Reagan's political declarations of the Soviet Union as the "evil empire," that free nations are the Western ones, and that in our "blessed country" an American is both protected by God and the Constitution as the heir to freedom and morality (Harle 86-90).

As the counterpoint to America's external enemies, our domestic issues are largely inflected with the same aggressiveness; instead of fighting wars against the enemies of democracy and freedom, we largely depend on fighting these enemies at home through the course of law. The notable exception is, of course, the American Civil War, but as David O'Brien argues, this military course of action was hastened by an inability to resolve the conflicts as a matter of law *first*. In terms of sheer lack of authority and questionable logic, legal professionals routinely agree that *Dred Scott v. Sanford* (argued before the court in 1857) is the most discredited case in legal history, in which the court's argument breached both its scope and authority not only by denying the previously recognized precedent of allowing a slave residing in free territory immediate emancipation but also in dictating the terms of citizenship as a matter of racial inferiority; minorities, particularly blacks, were considered an inapplicable class regarding constitutional protection, and the case had the immediate affect of hastening the Civil War. Moreover, while the issues of equal protection under the law has largely been resolved in the subsequent legal battles, inspiring the 13th-15th Amendments in the post Civil War era, as well as the dissenting opinion by Justice Harlan in

Plessy v. Ferguson and the Warren court's definitive ruling on racial segregation in *Brown v. Board of Education* (Schwartz 105-112; O'Brien 1320-21).

In broad strokes, *Dred Scott* was about the first major domestic challenge to the validity of manifest destiny as it applied to Americans themselves. During the early years of westward expansion, the mistreatment, murders, and misunderstandings on the frontier were rarely an opportunity for Judicial intervention since individual Indians and wars with Indian nations were relegated to the same categorical conflict as a war with a foreign power; the war between the states however, was a different story. The three primary "issues" of the war generally regarded by historians were (1) the legal status of slaves, (2) the authority/sovereignty of an individual state in the union, and (3) how these two issues affected ancillary issues such as interstate commerce and the relative power of a federal government to control these centrally.⁸⁷ As David O'Brien states, the main question pertaining to Scott was "whether his residence on free soil had changed his status as a slave" especially since the accommodation between northern free states and southern slave-owning states had been breaking down between the 1830s and 1840s (1337). This represented a shift in attention in regard to the enemy of liberty since it fundamentally questioned the self-identity of the nation itself. Could a nation so dedicated to the cause of freedom and invested in the righteous cause of liberty be, in fact, an *oppressive/betraying enemy* in itself?

The response of the court held shades of the later decision in *Roe v. Wade*; in it, Chief Justice Roger Taney delivered the opinion of the court in a split decision. In it, Taney argued that the Constitutional classification of citizen and its assorted protections did not include Scott; in short, he argued that the framers of the Constitution would have considered slaves to

⁸⁷ Paraphrased from David Potter's book, *The Impending Crisis*.

be ineligible. Quoting the Declaration of Independence, he states that the clause “all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain [un]alienable rights; that among them is life, liberty and pursuit of happiness” is not properly applied to slaves or their descendents since it is

[t]oo clear to dispute, that the enslaved African race were not intended to be included, and formed no part of the people who framed and adopted this Declaration; for if the language as understood in that day, would embrace them, the conduct of the distinguished men who framed the Declaration of Independence would have been utterly and flagrantly inconsistent with the principles they asserted. (1341)

Taney’s logic is sound only while working under the premise that the founders of the Constitution were completely unified in their drafting and that principles were not compromised on the page; to consider these as options would ultimately tarnish the very roots of American liberty and the establishment of the United States as the champion of freedom. To have created and instilled such a blatant hypocrisy is unjustifiable--unless it was qualified from the beginning to exclude some of its protections to a class of human beings who were non citizens. In doing so, Taney was attempting to split the difference between life and liberty; as long as certain races were discriminated against by the Constitution and implied so by the founders, then human life could be put on a scale: as a person’s race approached what the founders considered to be the epitome of citizenship (namely a white descendent of free citizens), then protection is afforded according to race and class based on this. However, the *coup de grace* was in his summary that the existing laws in northern states declaring slaves to be freed upon arriving on free soil was the were an unconstitutional

burden against the individual liberty of southern slave owners and their right to own property; in his classification Taney argued that Northern laws constituted an unjustifiable use of force by effectively stealing property from slave owners. The rights of “person” and the rights of owning property were only unified in slave owners, who could not be deprived of basic freedoms without due process.

While a number of factors contributed to the hastening of the American civil war, few have such a documented history of influence. Following the war, three additional amendments were ratified in the Constitution in order to firmly establish definitions of citizen’s rights and the qualifications of a person. Specifically, the thirteenth amendment outlawed slavery; second, the fourteenth amendment stated that “all persons born or naturalized” were entitled to citizen’s rights and could not be deprived without due process since they were granted equal protection; third, that all citizens defined in the previous two amendments regardless of race or former status as a slave possessed the right to vote. These particular amendments addressed each of Taney’s arguments in turn, and in the wake of the civil war affirmed that the enemy of liberty was no longer domestic; regardless of the cohesion of the framer’s internal politics, the amendments would certify a new internal unity and renewed vigor of American self-image as the defender of liberty.

Part of what made the American Civil War painful as a nation was that it metonymically acted as a kind of national introspection; forced to confront internal inconsistencies in the national belief in manifest destiny, the resulting self-image crises had the tacit effect of redefining the national image of the hero. James Aho goes as far as to argue that each side’s fixation with being agents of God fighting a moral battle actually exacerbated the Civil War as an inevitable necessity to decide between slavery and emancipation

(*Darkness* 96). From a rhetorical perspective, this is perhaps one reason why Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address remains one of the most poignant and memorable documents produced as a national commentary during the war, even overshadowing the Emancipation Proclamation in its protracted relevance and somewhat mythic status as the critical document of the war. Because Lincoln frames the conflict as one that is fundamental to American unity and that is rooted in the framers' intent to establish democracy only to find form and consecration in the resulting conflict, the enemies of liberty in the South transform from the *oppressive/betraying enemy* and can freely take the place of the honored *worthy enemy*. The toll of blood paid on American soil transforms the act from one of death into new life as a rebirth of freedom, and Lincoln's rhetorical persuasiveness is rooted in the way he commemorates the dead on the battlefield not as enemies, but shared partakers in the American experiment of unity.

In the language of mythology, if liberty is the religion of the United States, then patriotism is our communion. This is where the legislation and opinions on abortion start to become complicated. To an extent, the topic ceases to be about traditional morality; while the respect of life is at the core of American values (in particular the equal protection of human life under the law), the national self-concept as the protector and crusader for liberty is almost as strong. Inside of this tension is an uncomfortable position for the judicial branch: being both the protector and enemy of liberty.

The Development of Civil Liberties

The Civil War did not immediately end difficulties in race and equality within the United States; it did, however, set a powerful preference carried through the next fifty years

of case law. As Arthur Scheingold points out, the court now largely considers the justices to be blind as a matter of law, specifically, that judges regard all participants as if they were not visibly seen, ignoring race and any signs of class until the case is over and the blindfold comes off (54-55). While race problems still exist within the United States, and certainly within the legal field, as a matter of being both on the books and consistently applied in writing, the issues of equal protection met its affirmative resolution in the Warren court. *Brown v. Board of Education* addressed the last clasping protection against inequality on the basis of race by ruling the maxim “separate but equal” an invalid justification for school segregation.⁸⁸

Up to this point, these cases regarding liberty are largely referred to within case law as issues of equal protection, since the core is discrimination against individual parties on the basis of race or class in an attempt to deny such basic liberties as life, liberty, or the ownership of property defined in the fourteenth amendment. More problematical than the necessity of protection from individual parties is the broadly defined necessity for protection from the government itself, or civil liberties. While this distinction itself is tenuous, the reasoning behind decisions parallels what takes place in the equal protection corpus. This at least relates the initial problem behind the social construction of enemies within case law; the government is both arbiter and *oppressive/betraying enemy* while the appellants become the *offensive enemy*.

The hero of liberty must ostensibly wage war with the *worthy enemy*. This is a necessity in a conflict without open warfare, hence part of the overarching controversy

⁸⁸ *Brown* was presented as a direct challenge to the Court’s ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson* where the “separate but equal” doctrine was affirmed in its first challenge by a 7-1 vote (with one abstention); *Brown* was unanimous in favor of its defeat.

generation. In open warfare, the counter-political group can cast the government comfortably as the *oppressive/betraying enemy* only when the same enemy is not the ultimate arbiter of the conflict but rather fully excluded as an “other” in control of military might instead of having a tenuous grip on legitimacy. In terms of the mythic construction of the enemy, it is impossible to cast the arbiter in the role of illegitimate and legitimate at the same time since the enemy and the ally cannot occupy the same space; from Campbell’s perspective the hero’s descent into the underworld or of crossing the threshold results in a meeting with the goddess, the ultimate source of truth and knowledge from which the ultimate boon is gained (172-92). In the language of myth, the enemy possesses no truth worth having, and so, when applied to the Supreme Court, to be purely the enemy means that the decision wins no favor and elicits no world-redeeming power; however, if the enemy of liberty need not be the arbiter, then a shift in focus to a new enemy of liberty can assign the court itself as ally to the enemy without animosity or a transformation into the *worthy enemy* once again. The court must never be the enemy, but rather the gods, sometimes on the side of light and sometimes on the side of dark; not impartial arbiters, but a source of the divine truth nonetheless, able to bequeath an ultimate boon but not without an appropriate sacrifice.

In the years that followed the decision in *Brown*, the Burger court faced more cases regarding the emerging legal field of civil liberty than any other sitting court in American history; *Roe* itself is considered by legal scholars to have created an “engine of controversy” without abatement since its inception, largely due to the same questionable approach to the court’s power in reference to drafting law itself, the considerably vague arguments presented in the decision regarding the origins of a right to privacy as a part of the fifth and fourteenth amendment’s due process clauses, and finally, the problematical nature of extending the

definition of contraception to extend to eliminating the life of a fetus (Balkin 6-13). While I doubt that legal scholars would attach the same framework or explanation that I have, we are nonetheless in agreement that the legitimacy of the decision is certainly tainted. In short, if *Brown v. Board of Education* is considered the court's greatest triumph by finally repairing the breach created by *Dred Scott*, *Roe v. Wade* is its bastard child since the legitimacy of the decision has been under constant scrutiny.

The specific source of this illegitimacy (which is defined here as the lack of a clear resolution),⁸⁹ besides the confused role that the court plays between being the accused and the arbiter, is also the result of wedging the right to an abortion in the center of the "right to privacy," which is itself a kind of legal invention. Unfortunately, the particularly tangled legal framework of the *Roe* decision requires the adoption of a new vocabulary and understanding of the history of case law, which, is a legal disadvantage due to the difficulties it creates as an established precedent. New terminology and concepts can be difficult to interpret for lower courts, and the vagaries of Blackmun's opinion became the battleground for each subsequent challenge. Fully understanding the ongoing controversy requires some nuance and explanation into the genealogy of privacy.

To elaborate, the first and foremost question of legitimacy arises from the fact that the word "privacy" does not exist in the Constitution outside of jurisprudence. The foundational inception of a right to privacy was picked up by Justice Steven Douglas' decision in *NAACP v. Alabama*, stating that "the First Amendment *has a penumbra* where privacy is protected from governmental intrusion," affording enough protection to keep membership records of

⁸⁹ This refers to tenable solutions on paper. Race inequalities are still a part of life in America, but the active discussion of racial inferiority in the courts and the necessity to win victories in the courts to equate human beings regardless of race have largely disappeared. Attempting to defend slavery, for example, would be a clearly losing proposition in any current American court.

the New York organization away from the scrutiny of the Alabama attorney general (646-50). In the decision, the Court ruled that under the light of the law, there are implicit rights as well as explicit rights. This is a foundational case since the *enemy of liberty* is working in the backlash of the *Brown* decision and directly looking for ways of circumventing its protections as a matter of direct animosity; the desire to hinder the NAACP is the directly attributed motive behind the request; as such, the history of “privacy” as it is understood within case law from this point forward, is directly related to a particular kind of intrusiveness tied to malicious intent. In this case, the court was content in the majority opinion ruling to use this implication because of the clear facts showing the underlying motives. Nevertheless, the unanimous decision was marked by two particular hesitations: first, the decision itself was linked to the first amendment guarantee to freedom of association; second, the decision was heavily qualified to show that the state of Alabama had not shown why the basis of their claim (rooted in international trade law) applied to the membership lists of an organization based domestically.

The next major series of developments happened nearly on top of each other; with the definition of an implied privacy, the court repeatedly revisited this implication within the next few years. *Griswold v. Connecticut*, which is the primary precedent referred to in *Roe* itself, dealt with issues of contraception, ultimately ruling that contraception was covered by this same protection; according to the ruling, individuals had an expectation of privacy explicitly defined as a “right [...] older than the bill of rights,” though the justices disagreed about where such a right was located within the Constitution; this made the right to privacy broad enough to delimit governmental regulation of contraceptives (qtd. in Alderman and Kennedy 57). *Stanley v. Georgia* echoes this particular problem, but with a twist: the right to

privacy is considered to be a fundamental (not just implied) right. This, in turn, develops the conceptual “enemy of liberty” in regard to privacy as not only invasive and malicious but also unjustified and as an enemy in direct opposition to fundamental liberty. This has the effect (once applied in *Roe*) of raising the stakes involved for all parties; as a fundamental liberty (rather than an implied one) this ties the right to privacy into the core of American identity. The justification in the decision links the right to privacy as something foundational to American liberty.

With a tighter focus forming on privacy as a fundamental right belonging to the individual and with this increasing focus on the love-hate relationship with the state, the enemy of liberty continued to form as the enemy of individual independence. To elaborate, *Eisenstadt v. Baird*, another foundational precedent for *Roe*, determined that regardless of health issues (e.g., the spread of STDs and venereal diseases) the state could not ban contraception as a deterrent for single people to discourage sexual behavior; instead, the Court’s decision specified that if privacy “means anything” it is the right of “the individual” to have “freedom from unwarranted government intrusions” (qtd. in Alderman and Kennedy 57-58). This is a significant shift because of the addition of the term “unwarranted,” which moves the right to privacy into the realm of due process; privacy is not necessarily without regulation or limits, but the boundaries for what makes it warranted is left somewhat ambiguous.

In sum, the development of privacy as a fundamental liberty parallels the creation of its enemy; within case law the justices articulated privacy as both foundational and rooted in the spirit of American liberty and that violations of privacy were often rooted in intrusive, malicious intent. Prior to *Roe*, the enemy of liberty was somewhat protean, lacking specific

form and being applied without prejudice to a particular group and the court maintained a kind of neutral allegiance to the bill of rights, whether the rights were implied or otherwise, as the source of divine power and truth. This, in part, predetermines the rhetorical power of the “winner” in a civil rights case. The side that represents itself as the better champion of liberty has the ideological edge due to the momentum of history and national sentiment. The inherent “boons” of liberty are ingrained in American culture so thoroughly that criticism implies antagonism.⁹⁰ However, *Roe*’s specific intertwining of a second fundamental virtue, life, creates in real life the same tragic circumstances found in narrative. Becoming the champion of personal liberty (by winning the right to choose whether or not to have an abortion) finds form only by depriving the unborn of life--a pyrrhic victory. Similarly, the champion of life must deprive a woman of personal liberty, “forcing” her to suffer in the same state that precluded the judicial decision. In this, we find the mythic version of the double bind⁹¹ or, simply put, a tragedy.

Arguments of *Roe v. Wade*

Because liberty and life are so central to the sense of American spirit, the court’s opinion in *Roe* is something of a tangled mess,⁹² though the major points can be most clearly

⁹⁰ Interestingly enough, this also marked a changed perspective on the Ninth Amendment as well. In a criminal case, the burden of proof is on the state to prove defendants’ guilt since it is assumed that they are innocent until proven otherwise. *Roe* marked one of the first cases where this same burden of proof was placed on the assumed existence of the right to privacy; the state of Texas needed to prove that it *did not* exist. Because the court’s precedents validated the existence of a right to privacy only as a matter of implication, but also incorporated limitations on the scope, Blackmun’s decision that privacy was “broad enough” to cover abortion firmly wedges the court in the middle of existing ambiguity in favor of the appellant.

⁹¹ Or a no-win situation. Jack Balkin and his co-contributors in *What Roe v. Wade Should Have Said* are in agreement that the controversy is rooted in these two values (9).

⁹² By legal standards.

understood with a diagram (See Table 2).⁹³ While the presentation of case law up to this point has been focused on the developing right to privacy, it is worth reiterating that this development was still considered highly suspect at the time. Though the justices affirmed that a right to privacy existed, the danger was not necessarily in its existence but in its limits. Unlike other civil liberties explicitly pulled from the Bill of Rights, privacy was implicit, and therefore, only existed within the decisions of the court itself and the whims of *stare decisis*. It is in this highly charged climate that *Roe* emerged. The reason that this case remains a watershed is in the way it articulated a new enemy of liberty without having a specific target. In the prior cases, the enemy of liberty could be pinned amorphously on a governmental body, whether at the state or federal level, said to be overreaching a regulatory function. Here the issue could be summed up in the form of a question: is forbidding an abortion tantamount to the use of force regarding a pregnancy? This is the initial question brought about in challenge to the Texas state statute regarding abortions. In short, the state maintained that abortions were legal only in the case that the life of the mother was in jeopardy from the continuation of a pregnancy, and the procedure could only be performed with this prognosis confirmed by a medical professional. Part of the resulting confusion created by the issued opinions are directly related to the reversal of this law; the majority opinion relied heavily on a belief that the unwritten, implied right to privacy regarding liberty outweighed the state's interest in protecting life, and maintained that reading the fourteenth amendment to the letter discounted the unborn from qualifying as a "person." The dissent neither argued the reverse

⁹³ The diagram is split up according to the trimester ruling. The line at the top represents full citizen's rights, whereas the bottom represents no rights at all. As the pregnancy progresses, the mother's rights and the unborn child's begin to approach one another as the unborn becomes more person-like under the law. The right to privacy (in terms of choice) drops in importance further along the time line; this represents the degree to which the state's interest in human life allows it to regulate the procedure.

that the implied right to privacy was not all-inclusive nor should be relied on as heavily as aspects of the Constitution written with greater clarity. Instead, they argued in favor of applying the letter of the law to privacy and give the spirit of the law to the definition provided in the fourteenth amendment granting the unborn the benefit of the doubt in order to err on the side of caution. With the case literally hinging on whether or not the unborn qualified as a “person” in the language of the oral arguments and in the definitions of a citizen within the Constitution, the resulting definitions in the majority opinion had to be heavily qualified.

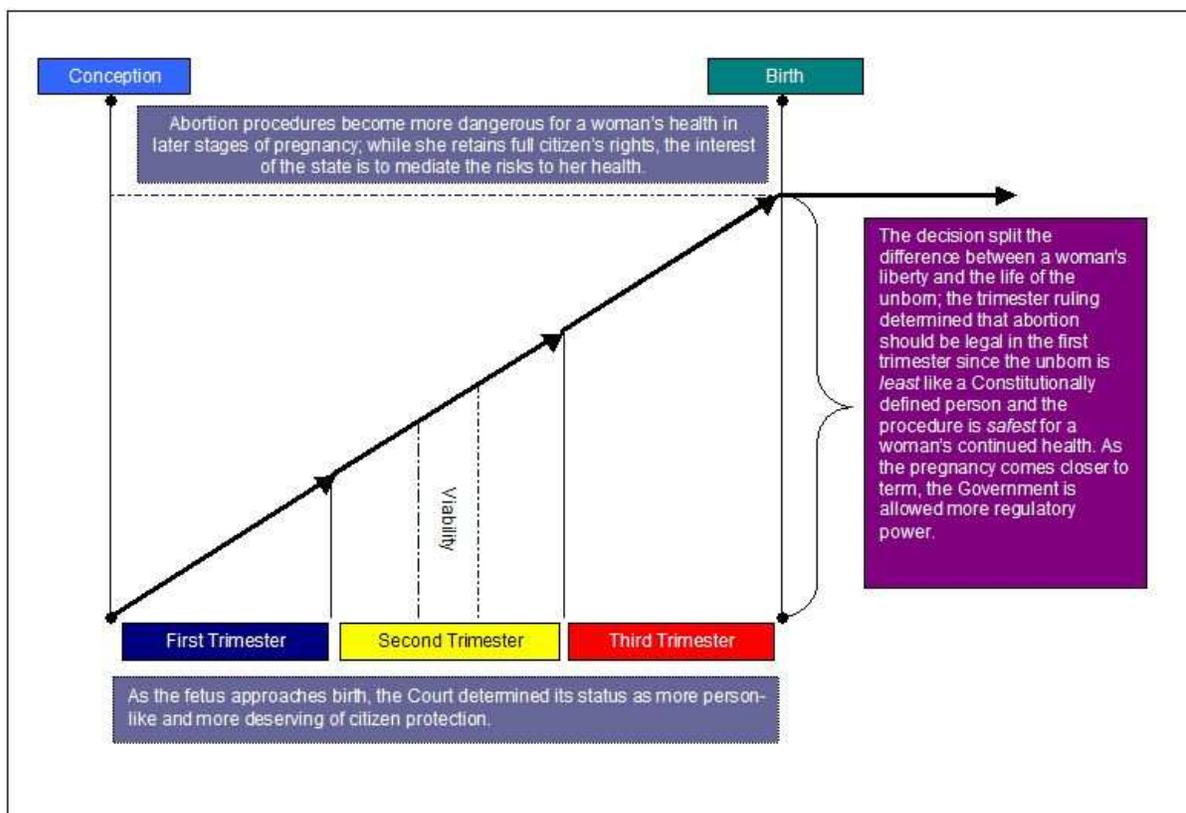


Table 2: Visual breakdown of the trimester ruling in *Roe v. Wade*

Table 2 depicts the majority opinion as issued by Justice Harry Blackmun. In brief, the court split up the term of pregnancy to balance two interests, the relative risk incurred by

an abortion for a woman's health against the progressive approach to personhood being made by the unborn as it approached birth. Regarding a woman's health, Blackmun determined that the state had a right to regulate procedures as the pregnancy came closer to term because the risks to a woman's health were greater and "the fetus" approached full entitlement to citizen's rights.⁹⁴ Since "the fetus" is least like a person at the beginning of the pregnancy and legally due to more protection near the end, the decision incorporated the separation of trimesters as places to demarcate specific regulation. Within the first trimester, the Court's opinion argued that a woman's right was absolute, but that during the second trimester, the viability of the fetus (literally its ability to survive outside the womb) compromised the totality of a decision within the second trimester, but an abortion could theoretically be performed if a doctor or health professional could determine that it was prior to viability. While "the fetus" is still not a person in the third trimester; it is most like one and the relative development increased the risk to the mother substantially; as such, the court determined that the state's interest to protecting health and life intersected here only.⁹⁵

In short, the justices were split about when to go with the letter of the law versus the spirit of the law. Blackmun believed that the letter of the law should take priority in interpreting the fourteenth amendment in regard to the legal status of the unborn, choosing the definition of citizen as one that is "born" completely literally. Conversely, he chose to use

⁹⁴ While it did not pertain to *Roe* this case, Blackmun included this rationale in the trimester format to help delineate the long-term risks associated with pregnant mothers with dangerous medical conditions. Since *Roe*, the court has constantly maintained that no law can be passed that bans abortion altogether for this reason; every law needs a caveat in the case of medical duress.

⁹⁵ While it has been raised in subsequent discussions about the abortion controversy, adoption was not considered as a viable alternative; the court's opinion is quite clear that in addition to providing medical remedy for a health problem, early trimester abortion also spares a woman from the stigma, financial cost, and changes to her body associated with pregnancy. Even as Justices White and Rehnquist condemn the practice, they offer no specific alternative to this argument, such as increased availability of maternity leave or shared financial incentives for families seeking to adopt.

the spirit of the law approach in setting up the backdrop for the right to privacy as something existing in the “penumbras” of the Constitution, since there is no explicit right to privacy mentioned, only “implied” by stipulations and case law up to that point.⁹⁶ Using this as the justification, current state laws “invade [this] right,” thus making the state itself an enemy of liberty. If the state has a responsibility to protect life, this must be the mother since she is the only party currently “born” and thus deserving of citizen protection. Whether or not the “fetus” is biologically alive or a human being is not in question; rather, it is categorized as “potential life” because of the imprecise nature of theological, medical, and philosophical perspectives on whether or not the unborn can “live” with fullness in the womb.⁹⁷

The dissenting opinion generally reversed this philosophy of interpretation, arguing that the spirit of the law should be applied to the fourteenth amendment and that the letter of the law should be applied to specific instances of “privacy” in the Constitution. Since the 13th-15th Amendments were drafted during the reconstruction era post-Civil War, these justices believed that their intent was to be inclusive, erring on the side of equal protection for life. As for the “zones of privacy,” they argued that the stipulations made in the Constitution itself did not conceptualize the kind of argument being extended to abortion as a method of contraception, with Justice Rehnquist stating that the court had “invented” a new

⁹⁶ Blackmun’s exact words were that there were “zones of privacy” protected in the Constitution, stating, “These decisions make it clear that only personal rights that can be deemed ‘fundamental’ or ‘implicit in the concept of ordered liberty’ are included in this guarantee of personal privacy. They also make it clear that the right has some extension to activities relating to marriage, [in] *Loving v. Virginia*, [...]; procreation, [in] *Skinner v. Oklahoma*, [...]; contraception, [in] *Eisenstadt v. Baird*, [...]; family relationships, [in] *Prince v. Massachusetts*, [...]; and child rearing and education, [in] *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*” (1234).

⁹⁷ It was this imprecise method of determining when the unborn is “alive enough” to warrant the state’s regulation of abortion that created the tangled knot of subsequent case law. See the specific decisions of *Colautti v. Franklin* (1970), *Akron v. Akron* (1983), *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* (1992), *Stenberg v. Carhart* (2000), *Gonzalez v. Carhart* (2007), and *Ayotte v. Planned Parenthood* (2007); each of these decisions makes specific reference to the ongoing complications of this structure.

right for unwed mothers as a matter of convenience. Their preference to err on the side of caution in favor of life is clear, since they argue that the state has an interest in preserving all life, even the life of the unborn.

The Mythic Dimension

This section is devoted to the leap of faith it takes to jump from the language of Constitutional law to the narrative structures alluded to up to this point. While the justices are careful to use the conventions associated with interpretations of case law, this instance stands out for the inclusion of a few *unconventional* aspects to emphasize both the narrative scope of the decision, as well as the desire to establish an emotional resonance beyond the facts of the case alone. Despite this, Blackmun's opinion retains a particular narrative structure within it that matches the unfolding of a drama.

To echo what Ofer Zur mentions before, my hope here is to differentiate between true villainy and the social construction of an enemy undeserving of the title. In reference again to Kenneth Burke, the first obstacle for political action is the hyperactive "Babylon" of voices. Burke notes that Hitler's main lament regarding the unification of national parties was creating a basis to either win or cajole popular opinion. The "weakness" of democracy was thus diversity, since the plethora of voices meant a widespread diffusion of opinions as hampering for political action (211-13). Here, knowing that the issues of abortion were controversial and were likely to remain that way, justice Blackmun opens his version of a dramatic prologue to fully acknowledge the vocal cacophony. Prior to opening his opinion he writes,

We forthwith acknowledge our awareness of the sensitive and emotional nature of the abortion controversy, of the vigorous opposing views, even among physicians, and of the deep and seemingly absolute convictions that the subject inspires. One's philosophy, one's experiences, one's exposure to the raw edges of human existence, one's religious training, one's attitudes toward life and family and their values, and the moral standards one establishes and seeks to observe, are all likely to influence and to color one's thinking and conclusions about abortion. (Roe v. Wade)

This overture is an attempt to stare the cultural conflict right in the face to offset the controversy and reduce the polarizing effect. The problem, though, is that it sets the stage as one in which a woman (in this case Jane Roe) exists amidst a society in turmoil and, like Helen of Troy, finds that she is at the center of the conflict with one party deciding to blame her and the other looking to appropriate her. The legal field has become an extended battlefield of the *oppressing/betraying enemy* (in the case of the pro-life groups) or the *offensive enemy* (in the case of the pro-choice movement), with one seeking to either restrain women into indolence or to attack the government in an effort to secure a basic freedom.

Blackmun follows his prologue with a short description of the Texas statutes that are coming under direct challenge in the suit. However, the symbolism here mimics the journey of Medea as well. The state of Texas begins as the location of injustice, until Roe has been transported to the seat of judicial authority to plead her case. Unlike Texas, surrounded by the symbolism of the frontier, Washington is the centralized geographical location of authority in the United States. Roe, the modern Medea, has been transported to Greece, the cultural hub, seeking refuge from her enemies that have been alienated during her exile. This

has the added benefit of establishing a solution for the second major rhetorical problem identified by Burke in the unification strategy: the lack of the geographical center. For Hitler's program, tying the political ideology to Munich was akin to Rome as the center of Catholicism (Burke 192-93). For Blackmun, this establishes that Texas and its beliefs are part of the "other" place on the fringe.

Once Medea's flight is established, her plight is soon to follow. In Blackmun's opinion he follows with a series of three sections detailing how Jane Roe has been continually isolated in her pursuit of justice. First he mentions that she is an unwed mother (implying that her child's father abandoned her), then details how the court severed the other half of her class action lawsuit,⁹⁸ and that the doctor who co-filed her complaint has been dismissed. Precluding all of this though is the biological fact that this all began with her pregnancy, and so the unborn is the first on the list of potential enemies out to take advantage of Roe's weaknesses. This also firmly establishes the boundaries of injustice that parallel Medea: her "husband" has abandoned her, the law is on "his" side, and all her allies, save one, have been separated from her. In this case, the court is cast as Aegeus, the king of Athens in Euripides' *Medea*, who offers her safe harbor after hearing about how Jason has mistreated her—even going so far as to pledge his loyalty regardless of her malicious intents (52-57).⁹⁹ Medea is betrayed in a two-fold violation; first, her marital rights are usurped as Jason reneges his pledge to make Medea his wife (and by extension, continue to provide for his two children), and, second once Creon suspects that Medea may seek revenge against

⁹⁸ A second case, *Doe v. Bolton*, challenged the same Texas statutes but was dismissed before oral arguments. The dramatic effect, on the other hand, makes it appear as though a potential ally was severed.

⁹⁹ It is implied that while Corinth is a great city, Athens is greater and that Medea will find a more enlightened sense of tolerance there (as well as appreciation) than anywhere else in the world where she is a wanted criminal and exile.

Jason and Glauce,¹⁰⁰ he reneges on his promise of safety. Both of these are symbolic invasions (and violations) of the “zone” of privacy afforded to Medea in the clearest sense of the modern meaning: the protection from unwarranted government intrusion whether familial or civil. For Roe the parallel is similar, with Blackmun stating that the Constitution affords a similar boundary, the “zone of privacy,” implied in the penumbras of the Constitution. There may be only the pledge, but Blackmun is determined to establish that the pledge exists and was “invaded” by the Texas state statutes.

The single, longest section of Blackmun’s opinion is the dramatic effect of a Shakespearean monologue or theatrical aside; in it Blackmun reveals the rising action, namely, the long and sordid history of abortion’s legality. He argues that the prohibition of abortion is a relatively new invention and that even Hippocrates was at odds with his peers about whether or not proscribing a “pessary” was a violation of the credence to “do no harm.” In terms of structure, this has the same narrative effect of the chorus in *Medea*, which interacts and echoes the shades of conflict. In the scene where Medea prepares to kill her children, the Chorus chimes in with a similar uncertainty:

Often ere now I have grappled with subtle subjects and sounded depths of argument deeper than woman may plumb. But, you see, we also have a Muse who teaches us philosophy. It is a small class--perhaps one in a thousand--the women that love the muse. / And I declare that in this world, those who have had no experience with paternity are happier than the fathers of children. Without children a man does not know whether they are a blessing or a curse, and so he does not miss a joy he has never had and he escapes a multitude of

¹⁰⁰ Glauce is Creon’s daughter, princess of Corinth.

sorrows. But them that have in their home young, growing children that they love, I see them consumed with anxiety, day in day out [...] And, after all that, whether the children for whom they toil are worth it or not, who can tell? (63-64, italics in original)

In *Roe* it is clear that the doctor and the mother will act in collusion; however, since Blackmun established that a doctor has no right to choose,¹⁰¹ and only acts as an extension of the will of the mother, this section is Blackmun's version of the chorus and the muse. It is the necessary precursor to discussing whether or not the exercise of filicide is liberating. With *Medea* the answer is yes, but only in the most tragic of ways: that the life of a child pales in comparison to the ignorance of not having one at all.

As if echoing the tragic nature of this decision, Blackmun's next section of the *Roe* argument is about protecting the quality of life for mothers by making abortion a safe, regulated procedure. If *Medea* is to kill her children, it must be quick and clean, not brutal. The twist in *Roe* is that the state, according to Blackmun, has a responsibility to protect the life of the mother as the top priority. This is one of the areas of departure between the two documents even though the themes are similar. For women to secure the right to procure an abortion, it cannot be equated to filicide. In *Medea* it would seem ridiculous in any century and culture to expect soldiers of the state to defend her if her children opted to fight back; an equivalent in the play would require the gods to command the soldiers of Corinth to provide *Medea* sharp knives and body armor in case her children mounted a defense. Again, the analogy is a stretch because the modern context protects the mother from side effects

¹⁰¹ This was due to the severance of Doctor Hallford's portion of the class action lawsuit. He argued that the Texas statute unreasonably restrained his ability to perform abortions, but was dismissed on the grounds that the procedure requires consent.

incurred from the medical procedure such as sepsis and blood loss. What matters is the prioritizing principle at work. In an unjust world of mortals, if the gods are just, then they are on the side of Medea.

And as the tensions of responsibilities and sense of injustice mounts, Blackmun brings us to the climax of the modern retelling of *Medea*, namely, the deplorable harm that would befall her if not allowed to proceed unhindered. Buried within the last 75 percent of his argument, Blackmun's thesis comes only after the long, mounting dramatic tension. While phrased as an argument, the placement has the effect of peaking action. The life of "the fetus," he argues, is unknowable, but the specific harm that piles onto women if the government continues to restrain abortions are:

Specific and direct harm medically diagnosable even in early pregnancy may be involved. Maternity, or additional offspring, may force upon the woman a distressful life and future. Psychological harm may be imminent. Mental and physical health may be taxed by childcare. There is also the distress, for all concerned, associated with the unwanted child, and there is the problem of bringing a child into a family already unable, psychologically and otherwise, to care for it. In other cases, as in this one, the additional difficulties and continuing stigma of unwed motherhood may be involved. (*Roe v. Wade*)

This is the untenable situation at the core of the drama, and the crucial moment of choice for Medea, and now Jane Roe and the women like her. To be restrained from action is to have responsibilities foisted on that potentially overwhelm the tragic victim. To be allowed to continue carries the stigma of filicide and the high cost of life.

Blackmun's ending is no more satisfying than the conflicted ending of *Medea*. While women gained the right to choose, this right is inherently tied to the underlying victim mythology of being wedged between overwhelming responsibility and the life carried in the womb. As stated before, the central problem within both stories is the greater number of enemies accumulated. For Medea and the figurative Jane Roe, abandoned by lovers, rejected by local government, facing crushing hardships of poverty and potential danger, there are enemies all around. Would it be better to have never been pregnant at all than face the circumstances of trying to live up to the responsibilities of being the parent to a live child? Unfortunately, the subsequent history of abortion in the United States shows that this question has not found a satisfactory answer yet. Part of the problem is that the figure that absorbs the brunt of the punishment for being the enemy of a woman's liberty is the party least responsible for creating the condition: the unborn. This is the heart of the matter: legalizing abortion did not actually solve the injustices that forced the decision to begin with. Even if Medea euthanizes her children, and subsequent by Jane Roe's are free to choose an abortion, there is no justice in it.¹⁰² Forcing men to own up to parenting through child support, providing a safe environment for unwed mothers, or preventing conception to begin with through self-control or birth control are not part of the solution here; like a true tragedy, the injustices of the world overwhelm the protagonist, and the meager empowerment that she may feel in taking control of a world that is otherwise out of control is lessened by the fact that it falls short of a permanent solution. The plight of the individual may be lessened, but the preexisting inequalities that perpetrated the problem to begin with are still present.

¹⁰² For Medea, the act of killing her children serves two purposes: it spares them torture and death at the hands of King Creon's soldiers, but it continues to spite Jason who loses both his potential legitimate heirs (when Glauce is murdered) and his illegitimate children through Medea. In this way, Medea finds some justice by killing Jason's fiancé and chief benefactor along with his children.

The Enemy of Liberty

In the final assessment, there is no simple, single “enemy of liberty” within this narrative structure to act as the focal point, which is part of the reason that this has remained so controversial. The single fastest way to unify is to create or articulate a common enemy to fight (Burke 193; Zur, 345-47). Psychologically, the basic necessity for creating an enemy is a single difference that can be pointed to. Typically, one and only one basis of discrimination (literally the discernment of a difference between the self and an other) is enough to create intergroup tensions.¹⁰³ What is clear from the case law, though, is that the definition of a common enemy is problematical and the women’s rights movement faces the problem of what Burke calls “too many enemies.” By defining abortion and privacy extensions of civil liberties, the primary enemy and arguably most responsible is absolved, namely men. Because the definition of civil liberty is a protection against the government, there is no protection under this jurisdiction from the irresponsibility of men who contributed to the situation in the first place. The “unwanted pregnancy” is the biological result of coupling, but in order to make the charge that civil liberty is of primary importance to privacy, men were cut out of the subsequent arguments; this is why, as a matter of case law, starting with *Roe*, men are absent from the decision in its entirety. For all intents and purposes, “the pregnancy” is the legal version of a virgin birth, with women bearing the burden both economically and physically independent of the contributing factors shared by men.

¹⁰³ See also Mouzafer Sherif, *In a Common Predicament: Social Psychology of Inter-group Conflict and Cooperation* and Jacob Rabbie, “The effect of inter-group competition and cooperation on intra-and inter-group relationships.” In J. Crzelak and v. Derlega (Eds), *Living With Other People: Theory and Research on Cooperation And Helping*.

As stated before, the government itself is named as the primary enemy, and, specifically, the *offensive enemy* that is “invading” a right held in the constitution, committing itself to an “unwarranted intrusion” into a basic freedom “older than the bill of rights” itself. There is, of course, no deeper betrayal than when the one charged with the protection of liberty becomes its violator, but in this case, the argument lacks the unifying power of its potential. While Hitler could make the argument that the Jewish influences in the economy and in the gene pool were detrimental, he used what Burke calls the metaphors of “seduction” and sexual symbolism in order to explain it:

The masses are “feminine.” As such, they desire to be led by a dominating male. This male, as orator, woos them--and, when he has won them, he commands them. The rival male, the villainous Jew, would on the contrary “seduce” them. If he succeeds, he poisons their blood by intermingling with them. Whereupon, by purely associative connections of ideas, we are moved into attacks upon syphilis, prostitution, incest, and other similar misfortunes.

(195)

Here, the women’s rights advocates adopted the reverse strategy; women take the role of militant men standing guard when they are taken unawares by an enemy on the offensive. They, in turn, argue that they are the defenders of a staunch foundational freedom and a sense of liberty inherent to the Constitution and a sense of national history. This is problematic because women must be recast as men for the metaphor of war to catch hold, and the gender reversal in the metaphor seems controversially misapplied in and of itself. The middle interpretation is to see women as female soldiers in their defense of liberty, but this creates an additional set of ugly associations; with women themselves being “invaded” by an

“intrusive” and “unwarranted” attack, the metaphor of rape starts to take shape with the sexual symbolism involved. In doing so, there is an underlying double bind: either the government is itself the perpetrator of a violation of liberty itself (equated with a kind of rape) by upholding a state statute prohibiting abortion, or it is validating the exploitation of women by men in allowing abortion.

The third enemy is couched in the term “unwanted pregnancy” and includes a new set of problems. Starting with *Griswold*, sex had been a relatively positive boon for advocates of civil liberty; if individual privacy as it applied to sex had meaning, it thus followed that the freedom to have contraceptive access was followed by the freedom to use it. However, sexual intercourse is a natural process intended for procreation, and in other words, pregnancy is the expected result--hence the resulting confusion. Contraceptives make a natural process unnatural by slamming the brakes on a process’s intended result; the “unwanted pregnancy” is a misnomer at the biological level since it was the result of a liberty resolved for having “wanted” sex. This is clearest as the court determines the exact dimensions of the “attack” on liberty in the section defining “harm” to a woman, which amounted to the generally understood normal risks of pregnancy to health, finances, and psychology. Prior to *Roe*, from a legal standpoint these risks associated with pregnancy were part of the gamble of sexual activity since the biological processes flow from cause into consequence; stating that a pregnancy is “unwanted” adds an artificial veneer to the consequences of biology, and the process itself becomes the “unnatural” state of a woman. Abortion becomes a way of separating the causes of pregnancy from its consequences.

This, in turn, leads to the underwritten enemy of liberty, namely the unborn. The “unwanted pregnancy” euphemistically is often a cover to dehumanize the source of

pregnancy. Pregnancy is the term used to describe the biological process of bringing a new human being into maturity, so the deference to the process is misdirected away from its source. The ugly truth behind the terms is that they are used to disguise what Burke calls the “devil-function” of their rhetoric. While the attack is supposed to be against pregnancy, pregnancy is not the enemy of liberty itself, just the stage of incubation. It is the changes associated with parenting that are feared, specifically the changes in health, time management, finances, and an abrupt end to perpetual adolescence.¹⁰⁴ By targeting the unborn as an enemy, this had the pragmatic result of adding a litany of additional enemies that resisted essentialization since they moved into the role of advocate for the target of the abortion procedure. Doctors, fathers, pro-life advocates, and the government itself soon became targets for the pro-choice movements as extensions of the attack against liberty, though none as quietly dangerous as “the fetus.”

Burke argues that once a common enemy is essentialized, the next crucial step is to “materialize” the enemy, or find a way of making the enemy a tangible danger. The unborn make a hard target and poor choice as the primary enemy of the movement. If the government is cast in the role of the *offensive enemy*, it is largely because it has aligned women themselves as the *oppressive/betraying enemy* of the fetus itself. The matching of the unborn as a foreign attacker against a woman’s liberty whose very existence is a threat to the “quality of life” is the basis for defining the harm caused by a government’s “forced” continuation. The dissenting opinions of *Roe* argue in favor of this interpretation; rather than

¹⁰⁴ In the language of Joseph Campbell, this refers to the psychological pressures of continuous development in psychology. Children act as an impetus to prioritize self-improvement and increase personal responsibility to others. Though they are not necessary for this, as it is possible for childless individuals to psychologically mature in this way, they remain the peerless as a social and biological motivator for finding fulfillment and individuation (*Myths* 66-8).

a woman being unnaturally invaded by the oppressive forces of the government in an attack on liberty, the government is defending the vulnerable target of an oppressive/betraying regime; like justifications provided in defending America's wars abroad, the government argues that defending the interest of the fetus is the same philosophical equivalent to fighting the oppressive ideologies of foreign regimes. Since the primary jurisdiction of the unborn rests within the mother at the individual level, the argument follows that the primary caregiver acts as a kind of sovereign nation over the human life developing there, to which abortion is a direct attack on the liberties explicitly written into the constitution to afford equal protection under the law.¹⁰⁵ Over time, this fuels the ongoing controversy since this has shades of tragedy rather than a heroic struggle, starting initially with Justice Blackmun's opinion where he characterizes the conflict as an unhappy compromise rather than a solid victory for women.

This, of course, raises the question of what a solid victory would have looked like. Since the attack on liberty begins with the protection of the unborn, when all the ancillary allies are swept away (fathers, the government, "the pregnancy"), all that remains is the source of the trouble: the unborn as the core enemy of liberty. The problem with abortion in regard to dealing with this enemy of liberty is that it is comprehensive and total; unlike conventional warfare in which violence is regulated either by convention or technology, abortion's only remedy for a woman is the cessation of life. The unborn cannot be regulated or restrained, only terminated. With only an absolute solution to the problems posed by pregnancy, the conflict between mother and unborn child takes on the form of the holy war

¹⁰⁵ In other words, the mother (as a sovereign nation) is committing an atrocity against the citizens dependent on her care. If the government "intervenes" in the affairs of a mother in this regard, it is the restraining of a regime from harming its populace. This is not a perfect analogy because the government's action only "forces" nature to run its course.

and the enemy of liberty is also the *enemy of god*. As Aho argues, it is the unique feature of wars rooted in religious symbolism that

[t]here is a significant difference between the *causes* of an act and the *responsibility* for it, between the conditions that “produce” injustice, for example, and the individual or group that is called to “respond” to it or to repent for it. In the transcendent-historical myth of holy war the crucial question is invariably “who shall *answer* for justice,” not “who *caused* it.”
 [...] Rarely is divine punishment employed merely as a utilitarian deterrent to stop further injustice. Instead it is a form of retribution, canceling out a debt allegedly incurred against God. As a rule, in Judaism, Islam, and Protestantism, responsibility for the world’s sin is projected onto minority populations, strangers, and foreigners; those with tongues, customs, and pantheons alien to God’s faithful. (*Religious* 151)

Aho goes on to state that this collective objectification of an enemy is akin to psychological transference because the individual finds cathartic remedy to personal insecurity by depositing it as the chief virtue of an enemy. Moreover, as this tension of greater objectification increases as a matter of self-purification, the holy war escalates until it can be fought on the level of mythology as a conflict between the “absolutely righteous and the equally absolute incarnation of Evil” (151). In the mythic language of American virtue, there is no higher source or calling than the defense of liberty. When matched with the process of individual, personal privacy applied to sex, and with declaration that the pregnancy and unborn are in fact, enemies of that liberty, the purging of the unborn is the equivalent to the purging of the evil powers, that “also protects, and provides a hopeful future for the faithful

believers” (Zur 348). In the case of the “holy” war, the enemy is “no longer symbolic, no longer to be exploited or respected. They are to be eliminated from the face of the earth so that our God will be safe” (Zur 348). In the case of American political mythology, this God is of course, personal liberty, held to be the most sacrosanct virtue of the national identity. Protecting it from enemies abroad means committing to wars against the *oppressive/betraying enemies* on foreign soil, but protection from the enemies of liberty domestically equates the construction of the unborn as the very *enemy of god* inasmuch as they are the attackers of a sacred virtue by sheer existence.

This is, in fact, the primary discomfort in the ongoing controversy of abortion. While the responsibility for a pregnancy is directly shared between the male and female parent, and the supervision of their sexual relationship is relegated to the state, the unborn is the only purely innocent party in the situation, sharing no responsibility for the pregnancy outside of mere existence. As Blackmun’s opinion and subsequent decisions are careful to point out, the unborn can enjoy no liberty or ownership of property as we understand it, and the only qualified right they can be said to possess is life itself. Since the unborn have no voice, no culture, and no ideology to speak of, they are the very definition of the danger posed in the mythic *enemy of god*, whose existence alone is enough to ensure a danger to basic freedoms and theoretically validate the enemy’s eradication. However, while this disassociation and dehumanizing feature creates the perfect target in the unborn, namely a victim who cannot fight back, it also speaks to the issue of the unborn’s innocence, hence a duality between being the ultimate enemy of liberty while being the recipient of the ultimate injustice.

This feature, the “silent” enemy, which is dehumanized by the inability to defend itself, is virtually the only direct comparison between the unification patterns that Burke

draws attention to. For Hitler to silence the voices Burke notes that he had to place a systematic segregation through the manipulation of the public; once the general populace believed that the isolation of Jewish business, for example, would deliver it from economic problems, the removal of the Jewish people from their businesses was the next “logical” step. This process found itself repeated in virtually every area of life, until Jewish people and other “inferiors” were segregated into ghettos, removed from cities, relocated to work camps, and eventually killed. With the unborn, removing them from the public consciousness is far easier since they are relatively invisible to begin with. Within the first trimester, it is nearly impossible without medical testing to know about a pregnancy. This feature generally works for the unification device. As a matter of sheer biology alone, the unborn is fully subjected to material sequestering, without the necessary step of removal from the public face of life. Rather than the forced and increased removal from society necessary to eliminate the minority groups from Germany, the unborn are already out of sight and unable to mount any kind of mass political counteraction. The same problem of diffusion preventing the permanent, national unification center of women to a particular geographical space also diffuses the pervasiveness or mass assembly of the unborn as well, keeping them from being a “class” of any kind.

In the language of myth, with a defined antagonism inherent to pregnancy, the enemy of liberty and the defender are united and ever present. By comparison, the “spontaneous” rise of anti-Semitism (where “the Jew” is a constant and ever present “enemy” of both race and nation) that Hitler elaborates is echoed within the oral arguments of *Roe*. Whereas the struggle that Hitler recounts is that of frustration due to debate and dialectics, his opponents only seemed to be immutable and unchanging; the unborn, on the other hand, have no ability

in themselves to alter the economic conditions that they are born into. An expectant mother cannot negotiate and talk a fetus out of being born simply to ease her struggle to provide for it, nor can a child immediately separate itself or produce an income. In the same way Hitler's frustration crystallized into a fight between reason and emotion, the struggle against the consequences of pregnancy (namely parenthood) demonstrates the crystallized struggle between a life unchanged (i.e., without the pregnancy or its consequences) and the life of a child. The love of life for the mother, namely the "quality of life" argued in *Roe* is based in the same hyper-rationality as Hitler's justification for hating impure races: love of the Aryan meant by necessity a hatred of the corrupting inferior races, whereas the love of the "quality of life" outweighs the corruption of the body that the fetus represents.

The extremes to which this area is applied within the abortion arguments are clearest in the oral presentations to the Supreme Court. When asked, the appellants argued that the fetus, though regarded as human life, should not be considered a "person" in the sense granted by the fourteenth amendment. Since citizenship is a right acquired by any "person born or naturalized," they argued that it did not make sense to grant these rights to a fetus, which by all accounts is biologically separated from them. They further argued that the term "person," when rightly applied, entitled the mother only to protections of life, liberty and the ownership of property. In most respects, this is an example of what Burke refers to as a "projection device":

[projection is a] curative process that comes with the ability to hand over one's ills to a scapegoat, thereby getting purification by dissociation. This was especially medicinal, since the sense of frustration leads to a self-questioning. Hence if one can hand over his infirmities to a vessel, or "cause," outside the

self, one can battle an external enemy instead of battling an enemy within.

And the greater one's internal inadequacies, the greater the amount of evils one can load upon the back of "the enemy." (202-03)

Some of this transference is aimed at the government, but for pregnant mothers, the actual medicine of abortion and its result are directed solely at the source of pregnancy, namely the unborn. If the unborn is only "potential life" and "not a person," then it is far easier to attribute the various frustrations brought on by pregnancy to the party most often physically present in the mother's mind and thus most deserving of blame. The mental, physical, and economic discomfort associated with pregnancy is then a "natural" antagonism as the body and mind of a woman adjust to an invader. The father and the government may have faces, a history, and a personality, but the unborn can be faceless and malicious as long as the interpreted changes are relegated to an attack on the body rather than a natural outcome.

The language of abortion thus provides what Burke calls a "symbolic rebirth" for the individual in the wake of the unborn's termination. Through the death of the enemy of liberty, the inborn dignity of the pregnant mother is restored, and "[she] can again get the feel of *moving forward*, towards a *goal* (203). Whereas Hitler's program utilized the progress of racial and cultural superiority unhindered by the "Jewish" influences in the gene pool and economy, here the language is much closer to an unrestrained practice of sex. Once the pregnancy is terminated, the mother is freed from the associated harms, free from the potential of government restriction, and reverts back to the free exercise of liberties associated with *Roe's* foundational development, namely individual liberty in sexual practices. A woman is reborn as a re-empowered sexual being with the cessation of pregnancy. In addition, with the other factors of harm then mitigated, this rebirth extends into

the areas of economics (by rejoining or continuing in the workforce) and psychology (by being unhindered from the self-doubt associated with parenthood). The symbolic rebirth is, in effect, an attempt to restore confidence proactively.

Unfortunately, the necessity of the symbolic rebirth emerges out of conditions never quite corrected by the right to choose. Norma McCorvey (Jane Roe) initially testified that she sought an abortion due to a dire financial situation; in the years since, economic situations have been at the top of the list behind the reasons for having abortions.¹⁰⁶ Like the deflection with the Jewish people, using the unborn as the enemy of liberty created a non-economic interpretation of an economic ill; in this case, the reprisal is shifted for an unwed mother's lack of support from the biological father, her family, or the state, to the fetus (Burke 203-04). As the prototypical case for abortion, the single, unwed mother is generally unable to provide both for the needs of the child postnatally and expects no aid or comfort in regards to her person as the pregnancy comes to term. The legalizing of abortion represents a shortcut without mending the roots of the problem itself; ending the pregnancy is faster, cheaper, and requires less legal regulation of behavior, but the consequence of the decision is that men can avoid financial accountability for the woman's health (despite their complicity in the condition) during the pregnancy, and the cost is paid in human life. As Justice White states, the Court invented a new right for the "convenience" of pregnant mothers, but this unique deflection away from the contributing factors of the ailment was decidedly convenient for men and for the state as well.

¹⁰⁶ Women below the poverty line are four times as likely to commit to the procedure as those above. See "Facts on Induced Abortion."

And so, while the rhetorical strategies of unification have failed in terms of developing a national program, it is not hard to see why due to the problems inherent to this particular rhetorical situation. To recapitulate the “engine of controversy” generated by *Roe* is perpetuated by a series of misattributed targets. The issue of civil liberty as a guarantee of privacy is problematical in that the government is both the enemy of liberty and the arbiter, and thus the metaphors of conflict become contradictory in their presentation between branches of government. The fledgling pro-choice movement faces an wide number of enemies since no satisfying common enemy could be found; the closest contender for the role of common enemy, the unborn, is part of the ensuing controversy due to the fact that the procedure of abortion offers no middle ground in resolving the conflict with this “enemy of liberty,” requiring that the only real option afforded to a pregnant woman is the endurance of the enemy’s prosperity or its ultimate annihilation. The symbolic rebirth and restored inborn dignity that this affords is mitigated by a lack of real address to the curative function of abortion in that the economic precursors that contributed to the “harm” associated with pregnancy remain untouched by the awarding of this liberty; and finally, that the scapegoat of the abortion procedure, the unborn contributes to the ongoing controversy as the only innocent party, since women, men, and the government are complicit in legalizing abortion as the most convenient solution at the cost of a newly classified “human, non-citizen, person in progress,” embodied in the unborn.

Toward an End to the Controversy

What then, can be done to remedy the injustices that fuel this particular controversy? So far, the history of abortion is filled with solutions that have apparently not worked; the

current attributions and causes of abortion in the United States have created a kind of “personal privacy” that is equated with a self-involved selfishness. The attempt by women to cleave themselves of the consequences of sex and the newer case laws involving men trying to avoid responsibility in parenthood are both indicative of the same root problem: liberty, without restraint, is paying a cost in life.

Returning to my initial argument, the foundational change that needs to occur rhetorically is the application of a terminology that accurately reflects both the real situation and the metaphorical meanings attached to them. The plight of women is real, but it is not that they are under a warlike attack by either the government or the unborn; when categorized as a matter of law, they are described as being in a state of dire financial means while having been abandoned by the parties most directly responsible for this condition, namely men and the government that supports them.

My alternative to the current (problematic) metaphors of abortion is to take a step back and examine the situation from the deeper mythic structures involved. Starting within *Roe*, there are no heroes to speak of, only victims. Taking the case in the full context of history, the initial tragedy of Norma McCorvey is from the backlash of prior victories. With a definition of privacy defined, defended, and established in *NAACP v. Alabama*, *Griswold v. Connecticut*, and *Eisenstadt v. Baird*, in one sense, the ultimate boon had already been secured: a zone of privacy broad enough to protect individual sexual practices from government regulation without a just cause. Within the history of abortion, this is the limit to which all parties agree, and as such, can be inferred as a kind of “ultimate boon.”

Having said that, the point of departure for both my analysis and the subsequent case law is in the construction of a new “enemy of liberty,” which is reflected both in the

underlying mythic “deep structure” of human psychology to search out a new personal meaning and reconstitution of the self as defender of liberty by finding an enemy, we pay attention to this problem at its ugly roots and address it accordingly. Stated by Aho, the problems of American identity starts with the issues of shared culture, which

[h]as always been somewhat problematic; millions remain alienated from the national economy; and the right of the state to compel citizen compliance has been perennially disputed and hence limited since its founding. What this suggests is that if the United States is to maintain its national integrity (the other factors just cited held constant), it *will* generate novel enemies to take the place of those now obsolete. (*Darkness* 86)

If the story of American liberty could be changed retroactively in regard to abortion, one priority would be to stave off such a rhetorical construction of a new enemy of liberty to replace the one conquered during the establishment of a right to privacy; in political terms one explanation for the court’s defense of the *Roe* appellants was that dealing with a new domestic enemy of liberty provided an adequate substitute for creating one abroad.

Nonetheless, veering away from this particular kind of decision is part and parcel to a reconsideration of *Roe*. The reason for this is because of the first criticism of the decision--namely that it overreached its jurisprudence in the creation of the trimester ruling and subsequent indictment of the unborn as a targeted class.

Instead, the mythic structure up to this point suggests a narrative more akin to the mythology of Medea. The parallels are not exact, by any means. Medea’s children were, of course, in early adolescence and their father, Jason, was a figure in their lives. What is consistent, and the more persistent aspect of the mythology, is the metaphor of the desperate

woman callously swept aside in the aftermath of a cultural victory. In general, the myth of Medea (as related by Ovid and Euripides, which I am generally summarizing from Robert Graves' *The Greek Myths*) is one of the classical world's great tragedies. Of particular interest are the (more or less) standard elements retained across each version. To begin, Medea's story actually begins with Jason and the quest for the Golden Fleece. After assembling the greatest heroes throughout Greece to take the adventure to Colchis and encountering numerous dangers, the Argonauts arrive to find that they are unwelcome and outnumbered; in a desperate gamble, Jason agrees to a suicide mission in order to gain the fleece through a trial of combat and courage, which involves slaying a dragon, sowing its teeth into the earth like seed, then fighting the undead soldiers that crop up from the planted teeth. Knowing that this is impossible, he implores the gods for help, who in turn, cause Medea to fall in love with him. As a powerful sorceress who joined the quest, the action shifts from the heroic abilities of the Argonauts and Jason's leadership to Medea's skills as priestess to Hecate; with her help Jason succeeds, and each subsequent barrier in the journey is deflected by Medea herself. She charms and soothes the guardian serpent of the fleece and wards off their pursuers until the ship returns to Greece.¹⁰⁷ Upon Jason's return he is still unable to overthrow his uncle (who deposed his father and stole his inheritance) until Medea tricks his daughters into doing the job for them.¹⁰⁸ However, this plan backfires since the resulting regicide leaves both Medea and Jason fugitives. Euripides creates a sympathetic version of Medea from this point on as a departure from other versions; when Jason bargains

¹⁰⁷ There are two versions of this story, each are equally tragic for Medea. In one version she flees with her brother Aspyrtus only to slay him, cut him to pieces, and drop his body parts in the ocean as a distraction for her father's pursuing fleet. In the second version, she calls her brother away from his armies for a private meeting only to betray him with Jason and murder him in front of his army (Graves 600-10).

¹⁰⁸ As before, Medea uses a trick of sorcery to effect this deception.

with the king of Corinth for a safe refuge and an ambitious marriage to gain prestige and power, Medea feels rightly betrayed; having forsaken her home, her nobility, and seduced by the promise of marriage, she is outraged at the idea that she has come this far only to have her would-be husband marry another woman—particularly since the two already have two children together. Instead of offering comfort, Jason rejects her.¹⁰⁹ Spurned, Medea enacts revenge and laments that for Jason's sake she has become "the enemy of all" (Euripides; Ovid 548).

The parallels between the mythic figure of the desperate woman identified within the narrative of abortion is fairly clear; women, along with men, fought and succeeded in securing the ultimate boon of sexual freedom, but in doing so, women paid a particularly high price. As the physical carrier for any resulting pregnancy, there is an extra burden attached to this victory. Men still enjoyed a relatively unchanged lifestyle in regard to both their earning power and social status; in fact, it could be argued that both of these were raised by the sexual liberation movement because men could use multiple sexual experiences and partners as evidence of virility or prowess. Women, on the other hand, won the same legal ability to practice sex outside of wedlock but were "exiled" from marriage's protections. If a resulting pregnancy occurred, women would certainly lose the earning power of their male counterparts and assume all of the health risks involved. Like Medea, there was also the apparent social stigma attached to becoming a mother outside of wedlock, which has lost some potency in the last fifty years, but certainly not all.

¹⁰⁹ This rejection has two parts: first, he argues that he owes her nothing since the gods made her fall in love with him; hence, he is in debt to the gods; Second, he argues that she owes him from liberating her from her homeland filled with barbarism and oppression. (Graves 615-16).

The exact definitions of “harm” that pregnancy places on the expectant mother similarly have a close fit to the described situation from *Roe*. Foremost, “specific and direct harm medically diagnosable even in early pregnancy may be involved” (O’Brien 1234). In the mythology, Medea’s life was put to risk by virtue of the relationship parallel to the way in which a woman’s immediate health is on the line. In a very literal sense, as Medea offered herself to Jason with a wife’s intimacy, she assumed the health risks associated with having his children. In addition, the mythic version enhances this danger due to the crucial role that Medea plays in Jason’s conquests; having committed multiple homicides on his behalf, their children were certainly the targets of retribution. In each act she took on his behalf, she secured her exile with increasing certainty.

Like Medea, the mythic type of the modern desperate woman is subject to intense psychological factors compounded by the resulting economic and social conditions won during the earlier cases establishing privacy. In the words of Blackmun, “maternity, or additional offspring, may force upon the woman a distressful life and future [...] Psychological harm may be imminent. Mental and physical health may be taxed by childcare” (qtd. in O’Brien 1234). In this case, Jason’s abandoning of Medea creates a situation where the newly created social status for single mothers creates a stigma embodied in the life of distress; if Medea is betrayed by Jason (or a modern woman forsaken by her lover), she has no protection for her previous “crimes,” has become “enemy to all for [his] sake,” or more commonly, the walking evidence of stigma regarding irresponsible sexual practices. In the myth, Medea’s flight to Corinth is extreme but understandable, given the culture and the severity of her crimes that makes her literally unable to find any safe haven as a homicidal exile. In the modern situation, it is not the danger of additional offspring but

rather the lack of protection from the other progenitor in the relationship that creates the danger and creates the foundational language necessary in attributing the right to privacy with the right to an abortion. Finding no refuge or safe haven, abortion becomes the only option available.

The last piece of the puzzle is determining the motivation for filicide. For both Medea and her modern counterparts, panic is a part of the mythology. Blackmun states that “there is also the distress, for all concerned, associated with the unwanted child, and there is the problem of bringing a child into a family already unable, psychologically and otherwise, to care for it” (1234), but this is tantamount to creating a defense for a mercy killing. In the most sympathetic case, the “unwanted” status is the result of hyper-love and fear in combination. Medea loves her children “too much” to watch them suffer in a world where she is unable to protect them. As with the picture of the desperate mother, killing her children (infanticide / filicide) is a form of euthanasia, a kind of warped self-protection as well as punitive act against the patriarchal conditions that forced the situation to worsen.

And lastly the court addressed the stigma of unwed motherhood itself as a continuing stigma (O’Brien 1234). The “unwed” stigma here is perhaps the clearest of all; Medea has been abandoned by Jason, the greatest heroic leader of his generation, and after having been seduced by him, is thus betrayed. As such, we see that the foundational conditions that act as precursors to seeking out an abortion are largely dependent on the mythical qualifications of a woman in desperate circumstances; having been alienated by the society at large, she in turn alienates her “self” (in terms of psychological state of mind), her body, and her unborn child in the externalization of her own guilt.

What is needed is a substitute ethic for expecting mothers, not their alienation either before or after the pregnancy.

Conclusions: Precedent vs. Paradigm

Both approaches by Campbell and Harle are somewhat limited in their usefulness for the study of rhetoric because one involves religious mythology and the other begins with political propaganda and political inferences used to justify military action.

Part of the problem, as noted before in the historical context of *Dred Scott* and issues of race, lies within the law itself as a means to settle political disputes. Unlike paradigms of science, where the burden of proof is empirical, law is governed by an estimation of value and, while lawyers would rather avoid the term, “morality.” As such, legal precedents do not quite function with the same prestige and fundamental stability as paradigms in science. Even Thomas Kuhn, when drawing the metaphors necessary for defining paradigm shift, is careful to differentiate the two. The paradigm is like a precedent in its initial stages only, acting as “an object for further articulation and specification under new or more stringent conditions,” until the regular process of science continues to fill in the knowledge gaps of the paradigm (23-24). Even so, the purpose of scientific discovery is to understand with greater degrees of certainty the “nature of things” in a nigh-absolute sense (25-28). Kuhn’s argument ultimately agrees that in the short run knowledge is imperfect, but is generally comfortable with the idea that there is an overarching progression toward greater degrees of truth. Since the basis of law is value and its evidence largely provided by rationalizing contextually specific examples, the discourse as a whole shudders under a different burden than science. Theoretically, a legal controversy can be maintained indefinitely since its claims to

legitimacy do not reside in “truth.”¹¹⁰ Instead, philosophers of law argue that traditional conceptions of truth and morality are immaterial to the concern of law; rather, the law is a constant battleground of politics (Minda 45).¹¹¹

At the root of this problem of illegitimacy is the same central question of the previous chapter, though reversed. According to Jean-François Lyotard’s prime example within *The Postmodern Condition*, the grand narrative of science is one that is legitimated by its enforcement; because science makes claims of the “absolute” variety, that is, claims intended to be irrefutable, the necessary administration of this power results in exclusion of other “ways of knowing” (17). Conversely, law faces the same principles of power and exclusion but more problematically due to the imperfect nature of its truth-claims. The law cannot address morality with the fundamental “absolute” certainty that science treats the development of fact since precedent itself acts as an impermanent truth tempered by a situational context derived at a specific time and place. Law exists within the imperfections of human experience and cannot be as easily dissociated. Science legitimates itself in the determination of what is or is not proper scientific method, fact, and truth; Law conversely legitimates itself in the determination of what is or is not the contextually appropriate adjudication of methods, facts, and truth.

¹¹⁰ It is worth noting that this is not the only possibility. The impact of the *Dred Scott* decision was largely diminished by the outbreak of the civil war and the status of freed slaves as citizens technically resolved with the reconstruction amendments (the thirteenth through fifteenth) guaranteeing equal protection. In regard to *Roe*, the matter could be resolved by the use of force or by the creation of an amendment as well, though neither seems likely given the issue’s history and tenacity.

¹¹¹ Gary Minda’s analysis actually extends much further into the mythical relevance of the law as it applies to theories of postmodernism; in sum, his major argument is that the mythic features of the law come into prominence as it is enforced, since the absolute existence of law is in question up until the moment it is enforced. This opinion is also shared with Jean-François Lyotard’s *The Postmodern Condition* in his discussion on the use of precedent.

EPILOGUE, OR THE CONCLUSION WHERE NOTHING IS “CONCLUDED”

Were it not for appearances, the world would be a perfect crime, that is, a crime without a criminal, without a victim, and without a motive. And the truth would forever have withdrawn from it and its secret would never be revealed, for want of any clues [traces] being left behind.

-Jean Beaudrillard

The goal of the myth is to dispel the need for such life ignorance by effecting a reconciliation of the individual consciousness with the universal will.

-Joseph Campbell

The world is complex enough that to make any attempt to describe it requires a form of abstraction. As such, the question is never whether or not the descriptive model is abstract; it is instead a matter of whether it is a useful abstraction. The myth appeal, as it has begun to take shape here, is as much a system of evaluation as it is a formal persuasive technique. As a useful abstraction, the term myth allows for the merger of any number of otherwise disparate theories under a unified bracket; without the term, it would be nigh-impossible to bring together Roland Barthes' brand of structural semiotics, as the analysis of social systems which have become naturalized to the unwary eye, with Joseph Campbell's theory of myth as a psychological mechanism used to cope with various stages of human development by validating the culturally appropriate benchmarks of success in narrative. The narrative functions of myth similarly allow for the patterned dissection of existing myths; by overlapping the various versions of an existing mythology against its reinvention, the dissociated elements reveal the particular cultural values that are more highly esteemed than others. Yet, not everything is so easily subsumed under the theoretical perspectives of myth

and narrative. It may require a more sophisticated hand to truly apply myth to the living evolution of legal documentation.

Real exploration eludes both analysis and discourse (McKeon 194). This insight from McKeon is daunting for anyone working in an interdisciplinary field because it doubles the difficulty of a project that is already marked by a lack of appreciation in the academy (there are few rewards for interdisciplinary studies) and a lack of understanding (it is increasingly difficult to understand the *minutiae* of a single discipline, much less many, even when these fields are closely related). Even so, the preceding was an attempt to synthesize otherwise disparate theses, theoretical backgrounds, underpinnings, and purposes and translate them into a coherent whole. In retrospect, this project would have been a lot simpler without the inclusion of such wide-ranging comparative texts as comic books, toys, and legal proceedings. However, without looking at these disparate features, it would be impossible to find the pattern that connects, even if no such pattern exists. Given Lyotard's assertion that grand narratives are destabilizing and the years of poststructuralist/postmodern research that it inspired, going backwards and looking to revive such theoretical perspectives for clues to determine an intelligible meshing of narrative theories (for the purposes of rhetoric no less) seems like a fool's errand.

There are still serious and unanswered questions regarding the relationships of myth, culture, narrative, and ideology raised during the course of this investigation that were not answered due to limitations of scope and topic. However, like a good book that continues after the pages have ceased being turned, these questions are better off without permanent answers that put them into boxes. They may be (psychologically) framed, set into pentads, or annihilated in the apocalyptic bliss of meaninglessness, but they should never end.

What has already been argued, and at least partially resolved, is that Aristotle's implication of the unity of plot suggests that a compelling force exists in narrative. This force, applied with sufficient tenure and tact, formulates the alternative to the traditional appeals of *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*, such that narrative itself becomes the appeal. As signs blend into values, become adopted into a cultural *ethos*, the expansiveness of the signs soon become a mythos, or a sense of the values that define "who 'we' are" at any given time. What makes these beliefs ideological is that the true nature of human beings and the world in which we live is to change; at any moment a belief brings efficacy by *seeming* to be solid, stable, and certain. Moreover, when challenged, the individual works upon the mythology with a series of questions that reinterprets the values ideologically (or by rationalizing the beliefs again) until what emerges is a new version of the old mythology, which the individual typically believes to be the same as the original.

This conception of self-identity is part of a larger script, and like the actor asking, "what is my motivation?" during the director's notes, people are part of an ongoing story with multiple influences. On the one hand, the individual is like the actor, playing out the mythology of a culture that has already been written. Yet, at times, the actor may realize that the distinction between the audience and the actor are contextual; the actor does not always speak and the audience has a "role" in the performance. What binds them together is the larger contextual mythos of the theater itself, a cultural construction designed to utilize these roles toward ends that ideally result in inspiration.

If Joseph Campbell can be believed in his reliance on the grand narrative of Jungian archetypes, human beings have created a story in response to each developmental circumstance. Inasmuch as mankind is the symbol-using animal, people cannot help but

endow the linguistic trappings of meaning to all activities, but these symbols engage at the level of extended metaphor, and take on a number of structures in a series as a myth. These constructions at once provide and resist their own forms due to the expansiveness of the human intellect (in the ability to infinitely abstract and define contextual information into discrete units), but they resist these structures during interpretation. The overarching problem of rhetoric as an art that begins with “seeing” persuasiveness is that it seeks to inherently put the brakes on the mythological games of abstraction that are deeply ingrained in the sense of play. Where rhetoric seeks to make sense, myth makes seeking a sense, and like kinesthesia, has the internalized qualities of a moral compass.

The narrative process creates and implies a sense of motion to the wandering and provides vision to set the journey on a path. Whereas Campbell and Bateson might argue that the form of play is transformative because it is based in a cognitive experience where the mind and soul are in a constant state of oscillation between uncertain-certainty (an induced apprehension to the reconciliation of the psyche to the its precluding conditions), the narrative defines the goal, giving shape to the rapture or the revelation.

And so, the myth appeal is initially defined as the overwhelming sense of cultural forms that surround the human being in a sense of enlightened forward progress, but with a catch: the masterful rhetorician never fully joins the game. Somewhere in between being an Aristotelian spoilsport and the hedonistic mythologist is the cultural critic who sees the mask as a mask and not as a god. Even so, it is in the alternate route that seeing the mask as a mask finds god not in the performance but in the conditions of performance--in the willing collusion of the audience to play the game and in the social forces that perpetuate the illusion. For the rhetorician who understands the myth appeal, the magic of the theater is not

in the performance, but rather in the fact of the theater's existence. The knowledge and appreciation of how such a venue works becomes the narrative, to discern the contexts that give meaning, and in doing so revel in the ambiguity of actor and audience, observer and the observed.

Setting aside the abstractions momentarily, the pattern that connects the myth appeal across this project, regardless of the cultural text chosen as the study in each chapter, the goal was always the same: to find the underlying story, examine (and then question) its structure, and determine expansiveness or limitations in the middle ground between Aristotelian formalism and Campbell's "deep play" (again referring to the individual's immersion into a narrative structure as an actor delves into a script). In this, toys can be vehicles for cold war rhetoric, a comic book can be a safe place to critique an emerging political movement, the enlightenment value-turned-myth becomes the backdrop of an elaborate con, and the stage of human legal drama can become a reenactment of *Medea*. This much has been argued, but whether or not it has been proved is another matter. The questions that remain at the end of this project call into doubt every aspect of this analysis up to this point. What if the human "story," so heavily relied upon in this dissertation is, in fact, another myth? What are the other appeals and do they function in a way that disperses this argument as another myth?

What remains across each of these rhetorical encounters is the potential foundation for a neo-structuralist mindset. If structuralism is the application of Saussurian (and throughout this project, Barthesian) linguistics to explain all forms of human life, and the poststructuralist pattern is to challenge the stability of this project, then the concept of form is largely moot. That is, unless the structure is treated as a myth itself. Another way of looking at this is to revisit Jean Lyotard's critique of grand narratives; looking to a conception of the

world that explains *everything*, including the development of epistemology and (especially) human institutions, is going to render flawed results as each structure tries to certify its legitimacy by policing alternatives.

From “The Story” to “Stories”

On the first question, the speciousness of narrative implies that even within the world of a given text, the constellation of possibilities creates instances of action, which is why the reader can enjoy (even after multiple readings) a sense of anticipation during its progress. However, if this idea emerged as the poststructural critique of structural narratology, what does the next phase necessarily entail? The first possibility is that the dissolution of the unity of plot is becoming a plot in itself. In perhaps what may become a great irony, the dissolution of the “truth” of narrative plot has become a mythologized methodology; like Adorno and Horkheimer warn in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, this relationship between the discovery of truth, its codification/application, and its concealment as a mythological system is still potent.

One response is to simply wait and see what becomes the next vogue theory, even though this conception of theories coming in and out of prominence seems less and less likely within the humanities because of the widespread attention to diversifying theoretical perspectives--unless this latter philosophy could somehow be conceded as a theoretical perspective in itself, which does not seem likely. An attention and respect for diversity does not a systematic theory make....

Dismantling any structuralist project seems dissatisfying and premature in this context, if for no reason other than to maintain a watchful eye on diversity of theory and to

act as a reminder that the structuralist theories are popular for a reason: humans are beings that generally strive to bring systems into order. Nietzsche's particular brand, "the will to truth" is imbued in any human activity where meaning-making is involved; the desire to know truth and make it known could even at the cost of false premises, or in the case of myth, self-delusion, is found in even the most fundamental of human activities--just *being* (87). At least with narrative, and more specifically, myth, the possibility is always present that change and inspiration will find those who are looking for it.

Admittedly, structuralist systems could not answer all the epistemological questions that it raised; it does not eliminate the system's usefulness as a study tool. Even if the structuralist project no longer has the ability to solve its own problems, there is still value in the myth of its efficacy. Roland Barthes' may be, strictly speaking, outdated and often self-defeating in his antibourgeois project, but the feeling of empowerment that arises out of understanding the nuanced forms in his theory, the brazen intellectualism of unpacking "social norms" for the purpose of demystification only to shroud them again in the language of the academy and of elite privilege still has value in the same function as any other myth. Following Barthes where he goes and watching his god-mask long enough will eventually empower the audience and the reader in his brand of intellectualism, and though his ability to act as the critic for the "common man" may diminish the revelation of his unmasking, by the time the clever follower realizes this, the follower now does share a commonality with Barthes from having joined in his game long enough to become fluent.

And thus, the new story is a myth of reinvigoration; the multitude of stories is the shared common experiences of the critic, not the narrative. In this way, enlightenment is not the byproduct of doing the mental work of Aristotelian reason, but, rather, Aristotelian

reasoning is the byproduct of the mental work of enlightenment, or in other words, the analysis of a given text takes on the mental work of enlightenment without its form, no longer needing the interlocution and guide toward reason, rather, reasoning itself becomes the interlocution guide.

The Multitude of Appeals

After identifying that there may be one additional appeal that Aristotle sweeps under the rug, it stands to reason that there may be more. It also stands to reason that they are just as defiant of form and resistant to content as the appeal to myth. In future projects, there are two additional appeals that merit study: the appeal to *dunamis* (power), and the appeal to *deus* (or God). This interest stems from a breakdown of the current study; if the myth appeal is an appeal “to the story” (e.g. “Things will turn out OK in the end,” “bad guys always get what’s coming to them,” or “good things come to those who wait”) where each appeal is laced with inferences not to a specific character trait of the speaker or irrefutable logic, but to a platitude that implies a narrative structure about how heroes and villains are met by the karmic conditions of the universe, then what other kinds of rhetorical properties can be imbued if we further open up the field to nonverbal communication?

Legend has it that before an important vote, Emperor Octavian strolled in to the senate with his praetorian guard in tow, calmly sat down, laid out the issue, and called for a vote. With a unanimous consensus, he rose, thanked the senators, and left. Having soldiers present during a vote that would otherwise be hotly contested and divided is certainly persuasive, but it is not easily locked down into fear or logic. A senator might be afraid of the soldiers, which could be attributed to a fear of pain, but reason dictates that the prime

function of the praetorian is to protect the emperor; as long as the senator does not lunge headfirst toward the emperor with something sharp, there should be nothing to fear. What is left then is a classical argument of probability; there yet remains the *possibility* that the contrary vote will result in reprisals. However, it is a completely *implied* appeal at that point, since no exchange between the guards and the senators (or for that matter, any direct decree from the emperor) to establish the intent of the guards at all.

This has the characteristics of an appeal; it is a structured, strategic display of the available resource aimed at changing minds. In the process of doing so, the minds of the audience are certainly changed, and all that remains is a question of the ethics behind this change. As a philosopher, Aristotle's focus was on "the good" and his treatise in some ways implies that *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* are the only "good" appeals for the art of rhetoric because it allows the audience to retain their crucial character--the rational mind--and think independently. This is not to say that bad appeals do not exist, but the best that could hope for is a compromise.

Still, an appeal that emphasized force may help explain what happens when both parties are attempting to intimidate each other. Take, for example, the doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction during the cold war. It does not bear up a productive logic ("if you use enough firepower to annihilate us, we will surely do the same to you") because this logic is self-defeating; "pulling the trigger" on the enemy guarantees death for both. Instead, the use of force is concealed under the auspices of a logic based on force. Having more bombs, the willingness to use those bombs, or even, God forbid, a *need* to use the bombs is less productive than their mere possession. The lesson of mutually assured destruction seems to be that an appeal to force requires an even matching of intentions; the force (in terms of

power) is ethically achieved when both parties in the stand-off neither want to pull the trigger nor get shot.

The *deus* appeal requires more exposition than there is room for here. If myth is the illusion of power, and *dunamis* is the explosive force of human might, *deus* describes the power that emanates from a supernatural force. This investigation stems from having spent so much time in front of various mythologies when reading the Bible, Joseph Campbell's notes on comparative religion, and the various classical mythologies encountered as a child-- whether they stemmed from popular culture or antiquity. The idea of supernatural power as a persuasive element is intriguing, and perhaps the only satisfying conclusion to Aristotelian logic. If dialectic is the realm of pure logic and reason, finding form in the syllogism and the discovery of absolute truth, and rhetoric is the articulation of the realm of possibilities, then an argumentative difference between the two disciplines is erased.

Using the classic syllogism "All men are mortal, Socrates is a man, therefore Socrates is mortal" is immediately rendered into the realm of rhetoric with the introduction of an appeal to *deus*. If we take mythology literally, then the rules that mankind use to define our world in absolutes are malleable. *Sometimes* men are mortal, Lazarus was a man, and he was mortal *the second time around*. What room is there for debate when the rules can change instantaneously? For Aristotle, the universe must be a place that can be understood with the rational mind, but if God can intervene and raise Abraham's son from the dead by changing the laws of physics rather than break a promise that the patriarch would be the father of many nations, then the universe ceases to be rational on its own. At any time, the only rationality that matters is the mind of God, and who can reason toward that? Without the extension of revelation, the effort is doomed to fail and the mind either retreats into faithful ignorance

waiting for the truth to be revealed, or asserts itself as the source of authority and makes man into god.

The sense of narrative immersion in mythology is ruined under these circumstances as well. In all of Campbell's texts, this is the one question that he cannot confront. Mythology *must* be rooted in the Jungian psychological archetypes because the existence of a supernatural element takes the sense of play that he loves and makes it dogma. With no God, the options for faith are completely open. The subjective realities of performance would have to give way to the material reality of the divine; if God is, therefore *you shall*. Play is marked by a freedom from the negative consequences of action, but worship is only acceptable to God based on rules. If there is a lesson to be learned from the veil (whether in the Tabernacle of Moses or in the disguises worn by Zeus and Hermes when they wandered the world) it is that mankind cannot handle the fullness of the divine presence in our imperfect state.

Arguing From Falsehood

While Aristotle might have smiled at the effort that this project represents, it seems more likely that this would have become the target of ridicule in his class on dialectic. *Ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*, when used responsibly are arguments based on truth. *Mythos*, by definition, is something that may or may not be objectively true. Inasmuch as argument requires certainty in objectives and purposes, the appeal is doomed to fail as a systematic method of persuasion. What might have followed this presentation in Aristotle's classroom is a long dialectical debate about knowing and understanding the epistemological value of truth, even when it applies to arguments of uncertainty, such as rhetoric. Arguing with Aristotle that the value of an appeal is not in its inherent, objective truth but in the way it *becomes true*

through the confluence of cultural and ideological factors would have been interesting, but the outcome of the conversation is impossible to predict. The importance of this kind of speculation though, is more about paying respects to the spirit of interdisciplinary dedication that he brought to the *Rhetoric* to begin with.

Still, failing to beat Aristotle in creating a systematic appeal is a bit like losing against Michael Jordan in his backyard--no one would blame the loser for getting beat, and it was an honor just to get the invitation. Conversely, from Joseph Campbell's point of view--as a good rival, not opposite--the real victory is not in challenging Aristotle to a game, it is convincing him to *play* in the first place.

To conclude this project, suffice it to say that while narrative is over, the story continues. The chief lesson of the mask is that through the suspension of disbelief, the mask becomes god in performance; however, the rhetorical lesson of the mask is that it is never the same performance twice. In this regard, myth itself can be the flexible structure of a descriptive semiotic system. Unlike the formalist structural approaches, the sign does not have an inherent meaning as a sign due to the obliteration of linguistic boundaries in the vagaries in performance. In regards to the ecology of analysis, the power of a sign is not in its factual validation as a sign, rather it is in strength of belief that the chosen boundary makes it so. The mask is just a prop until it is immersed into a narrative.

As Beaudrillard explains, the chief lesson of the place for "play" is that it masks that the distinction is an illusion. The contrivances of theatrical role-playing for the purposes of entertainment mask the elements of performance in our own lives, that we are the players, the actors in our own lives. An awareness of myth, like the awareness of illusion, should grant

just enough internal philosophical agency to know what the tricks are all about, without ruining the fun.

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